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Melanchthon and Dürer: the search for the simple style

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I

The intensity of the living tie between Albrecht Dürer and Philipp Melanchthon must have reached its climax in 1525–26, when Melanchthon was resident in Nuremberg and Dürer portrayed him,[1] but at the time Melanchthon had little to say that we know of about Dürer's significance for him. Even at Dürer's death (1528), apart from expressing shock,[2] he had little response to Dürer's art or person. Instead of issuing encomiums, as Dürer's friend Willibald Pirckheimer and the humanist poet Helius Eobanus Hessus did,[3] or participating with Joachim Camerarius in the translation of Dürer's works into Latin,[4] Melanchthon remains peculiarly silent about Dürer; peculiarly, because it was the custom of the day to mark the death of a great man with eulogies, but more particularly because of Melanchthon's known enthusiasm for Dürer as a great German.[5] It was only in mid-career, in the 1540's that Melanchthon, under the pressure of his own purposes, praised Dürer specifically in his capacity as an artist rather than for the reflected glory he gave his surroundings. Towards the end of his career, Melanchthon again lapsed into seeming indifference towards Dürer, taking up the conventional conception of him as a famous person and exemplary humanist.[6] This last image of Dürer, still glowing with the embers of Melanchthon's enthusiasm, is tinged

1. Melanchthon seems to have known Dürer from 1518, having met him on a visit to Pirckheimer, en route from Tübingen to Wittenberg. See Heinz Lüdecke and Susanne Heiland, *Dürer und die Nachwelt* (Berlin, 1955), p. 268. For an account of the relationship between Dürer and Melanchthon see William Martin Conway, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer* (London, 1958), p. 135.

2. In, among other places, a letter to Camerarius dated May 1528. See Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlass* (Berlin, 1956), I, 281.

3. See Dürer, I, 303–7 for Pirckheimer's elegy and epitaphs for Dürer, and pp. 298–303 for Hessus' elegy and sundry poems for Dürer.

4. See Dürer, I, 307–15 for the biographical introduction and technical excursuses accompanying Camerarius' translations.

5. Dürer, I, 280–81, in a number of letters written at the time of Dürer's death.

6. Dürer, I, 325–28, collects Melanchthon's remarks on Dürer, all made during the last decade of Melanchthon's life. Some record the relationship of Dürer and Maximilian; others discuss Dürer's involvement in religious matters. The last group praises Dürer for his virtue and competence, compares him to Apelles, and in one instance compares Dürer's depiction of the nude with Cranach's depiction of Venus. The comparison with Cranach recurs and is apparently vital to Melanchthon's conception of German Renaissance art. Dürer and Cranach represent its antithetical possibilities to Melanchthon.

with nostalgia. Melanchthon, in a retrospective glance at a world that was lost, if not altogether faded from living memory, viewed it as an uncomplicated period of peace and unequivocal glory. It was the world of Melanchthon's youth—Melanchthon was thirty-one at the time of Dürer's death—and Dürer was the vital symbol of its unity of purpose.

The dissolution of this world, which Melanchthon experienced in the first decade of his maturity and the last decade of Dürer's life—a dissolution one of whose symptoms can be said to be Melanchthon himself—gathered momentum through the sectarianism of the times. Melanchthon's failure to make Protestantism whole, into an integral religion, seems transparent in Cranach's portrait of him (Fig. 1) in old age (*c.* 1560) vividly contrasting with the Melanchthon Dürer knew in 1526 (Fig. 2): "The clear and noble spirit in Dürer's representation has become tired and wizened at the prospect of a permanent break between Protestantism and Humanism."[7] Melanchthon grew weary of the divisiveness of Protestantism, of which the separation from humanism was another symptom, and was forced to acknowledge that its fragmentation into sects of extreme individuality was not prevented by his efforts as Praeceptor Germaniae.[8] It is this failure, perhaps that of humanism, to give a common culture to the Protestant countries, and the weariness with his task that Melanchthon becomes oblivious to in his last reminiscences of Dürer. Melanchthon's anecdotes about Dürer convey a warmth of feeling for him, an intensity of belief in his greatness, that obscure the inner conflict and mellow the bitterness of Melanchthon's last years. It is as if, unconsciously, Melanchthon contrasted Dürer's durable achievements and unqualified fame late in the artist's

7. Craig Harbison, "Introduction to the Exhibition," in *Symbols in Transformation: Iconographic Themes at the Time of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J., 1969), p. 22. Wilhelm Waetzoldt, *Dürer* (London, 1950), p. 118, remarks that "Dürer gave Melanchthon for all time a quality which he lacked in life—firmness." This seems to be missing from Dürer's preparatory drawing (L. 869) for the print. Cranach shows the real Melanchthon, Dürer the ideal Melanchthon. In a comparison of himself with Melanchthon, Luther further confirms his "delicacy": "I must root up the stumps and stems, hew away the thorns and hedges, fill in the swamps, and thus be a rough forester—but Philippus works cleanly and quietly, he tills and plants, sows and waters, doing all this gladly, for God has given him richly of his gifts." Quoted by Waetzoldt, p. 118. Luther's praise seems ironical, for it implies that Melanchthon does not attend to fundamentals, but modifies the scene only after it has been essentially changed. Luther gets to the roots of the matter, Melanchthon trims the branches. However, Wendell Glen Mathews, "Albrecht Dürer as a Reformation Figure" (Ph.D. diss., Department of Religion, Univ. of Iowa, 1968), p. 55, thinks that Luther is alluding to Melanchthon's "conciliating manner," which in fact Dürer has captured.

8. Karl Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon als Praeceptor Germaniae*, Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica, Vol. VIII (Berlin, 1889). See also Adolph Sperl, *Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation* (Munich, 1959).

life with his own weariness and the ambiguity of his own career despite its accomplishments. Melanchthon admired Dürer for a harmony between inner and outer life, a harmony greater than his own, for Dürer more directly and decisively synthesized humanism and Protestantism. Where Dürer is the climax of the simultaneity and finally unity of the two great movements, Melanchthon is an anticlimax, a symbol of the fitfulness of their unity and their slow sundering.

This study deals with the Melanchthon of mid-career rather than with the youthful, naively enthusiastic Melanchthon or the weary, aged Melanchthon. It deals with the man who, while accepting the conventional conception of Dürer as a man of learning as well as art, used this conception for his own original purpose. Melanchthon came to conceive of Dürer as the artist who created the most perfect embodiment of religious truth—more precisely, the style which was inherently appropriate for religious communication. In general, Melanchthon understood German Renaissance art to have developed a religious rhetoric. What this study offers is an account of Melanchthon's consciousness of art understood in terms of his belief that the "simplicity" of Dürer's art conveyed religious truth, had the power or revelation. It is thus an account of the Protestant conception of art, insofar as there is any ultimate value that Protestantism puts in art.

II

Melanchthon's conception of the value of Dürer's art amounts to a new solution to the old problem of the religious attitude to art. Art was traditionally a means of moral propaganda or was treated iconoclastically.[9] Melanchthon took upon himself the task of sailing between the Scylla and the Charybdis here. While he unequivocally respected art's independence and uniqueness, and in general was sensible of visual values, he initially had no means of articulating his intimation of its value, aside from traditional belief in art's nobility. Moreover, he originally did not know how to express his pleasure in pictures apart

9. Lüdecke and Heiland, pp. 268–69, note that initially Melanchthon, like Luther, regarded art in general and graphic art in particular as essentially propagandistic and didactic. Lüdecke thinks that Dürer's fear for the future of art was caused by the increasing iconoclasm of the period. For a discussion of this issue, and Melanchthon's role in the new iconoclasm, see Hans Rupprich, "Dürer's Stellung zu den agnoëtischen und kunstfeindlichen Strömungen seiner Zeit," *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften Sitzungsberichte, philosophisch-historische Klasse*, Heft 1 (1959), pp. 1–32.

from his interest in their truthfulness. Initially, his view of art was sustained by a classical-humanist scaffolding. But by attempting to use art itself as the framework for a Protestant rhetoric, he unexpectedly conceived an original definition of it, and of Dürer.

In Melanchthon the difficulties implicit in the conception of Dürer as a man of learning come to a head. What was initially a naive view of Dürer as a master technician or applied mathematician[10] developed into the conception of Dürer as a genius of world-historical significance.[11] Melanchthon overcame the discrepancy between these views by restoring to the sixteenth-century attempt to evaluate Dürer a proper emphasis on Dürer as an artist, an approach ignored since Erasmus' evaluation of Dürer in the *Dialogus de recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronunciatione* (1528).[12] Like Erasmus, Melanchthon held a relatively sophisticated view of what it meant to be both man of learning and artist, in part because his approach was not reductive. He did not blend them into the technician, degrading both to craftsmen. Nor did he blend them into the genius, obscuring each in an abstract potential. He did not reduce Dürer's art either to pure technique or raw genius, but conceived it to be grounded on a particular style.

Melanchthon did not come to this view of art as essentially style through the study of specific works of art. He never alludes to Dürer's works, although he seems to be aware of their general content, at least to the extent of assuming that like all other artists of the time religion

10. This view is due to the fact that Dürer was not only an artist but a writer, i.e., learned. The view is already recorded in the Hofer Chronicle entry of Dürer's death, as noted by Edgar Schindler, "Albrecht Dürer in der Hofer Chronik," *Kulturwarte*, 12 (1966), 100, as well as in a poem by Hans Sachs celebrating Dürer (Dürer, I, 305). Some years after Dürer's death, Domenicus Lampsonius, the humanist secretary of the Bishop of Liège, emphasizes the same view in correspondence with Vasari, dated 30 Oct. 1564 and 25 April 1565. See Lüdecke and Heiland, p. 291, and Karl Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris* (Munich, 1930), II, 158–67. For an examination of Lampsonius' career see Jean Puraye, *Dominique Lampson, humaniste, 1532–1599* (Brouwen, 1950), and particularly pp. 102–8 for an examination of his views on art. The artist who perhaps most decisively held it was Nicholas Hilliard. See Horst Vey, "Nicholas Hilliard und Albrecht Dürer," *Mouseion: Studien aus Kunst und Geschichte für Otto H. Förster* (Cologne, 1957), pp. 155–68. Traces of it also occur in Francis Bacon's essay "On Beauty," *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral* (New York, 1955), p. 112, where Apelles is linked to Dürer.

11. It is particularly Camerarius and Hessus who cultivate this view.

12. Dürer, I, 297. Erasmus' attitude to Dürer is examined by Erwin Panofsky, "'Nebulae in pariete': Notes on Erasmus' Eulogy on Dürer," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14 (1951), 34–41. For discussions of Erasmus' attitude to the visual arts in general see William Norton Howe, "The Eye of Erasmus: A Scholar's Outlook Upon Contemporary Art," *Charlton Lectures on Art* (Oxford, 1925), p. 87; Rachel Giese, "Erasmus and the Fine Arts," *Journal of Modern History*, 7 (1935), pp. 257–79; and Erwin Panofsky, "Erasmus and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32 (1969), 220–27.

was his main theme. It is in fact Melanchthon's own religious needs which lead him to conceive of style as a phenomenon in itself. This in no way lessens the value of his conception for art, although it is meant to convey his sense of the importance of consistent style in any area. During the 1540's Melanchthon came to think that Protestantism's failure was in part due to a lack of style. Its inadequacy in this respect was pointed up sharply by humanism's revival of classical style, antiquity seemingly offering the perfect style—clear and succinct, i.e., to the point—for Protestantism. However, Melanchthon came to recognize that the new style and the new faith would never harmonize, for implicit in humanist style was a faith of its own. Each faith had to find its own style, for any other style would eventually appear to be alien and stilted as the vehicle of its outlook. Nonetheless, for a time Melanchthon was certain that German Renaissance art could be the only secure source of style for the German Reformation. Accordingly, he studied Dürer and other German artists. Melanchthon's differentiation of German styles is as important as Giorgio Vasari's differentiation of Italian styles, particularly in view of the fact that it was the first retrospective attempt to give a pattern to German Renaissance art, to view it as a historical and systematic unity.

III

Melanchthon's view of the artist as well as of the man of learning is conditioned by his sense of the role of learning in the Reformation, the nuance of meaning added to humanistic learning by reformation intentions.[13] Inevitably, for Melanchthon the man of learning is the Protestant intellectual, so that to think of Dürer as an intellectual was to presuppose his Protestantism. For example, Melanchthon remarks, perhaps in surprise, that Dürer was able to hold his own in religious debate with Pirckheimer.[14] In general, Dürer's art is implicitly viewed

13. Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Revival of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 5–10, argues that religious reform was as essential to humanism as classical revival. See also Paul Mestwerdt, "Die religiösen und theologischen Tendenzen im italienischen Humanismus," *Die Anfänge des Erasmus: Humanismus und Devotio Moderna* (Leipzig, 1917). H. A. Enno van Gelder, *The Two Reformations in the 16th Century* (The Hague, 1961), p. 7, argues that the humanists, although devout, "gave an entirely individual interpretation to the dogmas and rites of Christianity."

14. The debate concerned the interpretation of the Last Supper. Caspar Peucer, Melanchthon's son-in-law, regards it (Dürer, I, 306–7) as a major proof of Dürer's intellectual competence. Johannes Manlius also reports the debate in his collection of anecdotes (Dürer, I, 328). For a discussion of Melanchthon's interpretation of the Last Supper

as having a critical relationship to Christian truth. It carries out the most important function of the Protestant intellectual, viz., to criticize in the name of a truer Christianity. In contrast to dogmatic Catholicism, Protestantism is inherently critical. It is simultaneously destructive and constructive, cultivating an atmosphere of questioning rather than one of blind obedience to the presumably indisputable truth, and emphasizing the inward freedom and vitality indispensable to critical thought. While Protestantism acknowledges the reality of primary biblical revelation, it understands the Catholic position to be simply one more, by no means conclusive, interpretation of that revelation. It is simply another secondary conception of a primary truth. In effect, Protestantism begins with criticism of institutional Christianity, in the hope of arriving at a more adequate and so more fundamental Christian truth.

Such fundamentalism inevitably leads to sectarianism, since it self-critically aspires to an ever more fundamental grasp of the truth. What Panofsky calls Protestantism's "introspectiveness"[15] is essentially the sustained effort to intuit the primary deity under the crust of institutional consciousness. It implies an existence caught up by a constant state of critical consciousness, continually re-conceiving the divine and re-vitalizing one's relationship to it. Such introspectiveness is a constant reminder of the basic inadequacy of human consciousness and the shortcomings of all conceptions of the divine. Protestantism suffers from an intense sense of frustration in relation to God, one sect claiming possession of His truth at another's expense, but all acknowledging foregone failure. It was consciousness of this peculiarly existential situation that made Melanchthon increasingly distraught and sent him on a desperate search for an ultimate style of revelation, if not a final statement of Christian truth. Such a style would become the medium of relationship to the Christianly divine, controlling the character of its revelation. In the end, such style was what moved to faith, or

see Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Die Abendmahlslehre Melanchthons in ihre geschichtlichen Entwicklung (1519–1530)* (Neukirchen, 1968). Paul Drews, *Pirckheimers Stellung zur Reformation* (Leipzig, 1887), summarizes Pirckheimer's position.

15. Erwin Panofsky, "Comments on Art and Reformation," in *Symbols in Transformation: Iconographic Themes at the Time of the Reformation*, pp. 12–13: "Among the chief characteristics of the hyperborean outlook are, first—as already observed by Dürer—an independent individualism in artistic, intellectual and spiritual matters which is complementary to, rather than at variance with, a tendency to submit to regimentation in the political spheres; and, second, a kind of quietism or introspectiveness based on an insurmountable feeling that the soul is not really at home in the body and lives a life of its own instead of being integrated with the body into that comfortable organic unity which was established by Aristotle and sanctioned by Thomas Aquinas."

obscured the presence of the divine. Where Catholicism could tolerate a variety of styles of access to the divine, since its truth was presupposed to be privileged and constant, Protestantism in part depended on its style to make it convincing, since it conceived of no privileged access to God. Such a Protestant style had to strike a balance between criticism and faith, since criticism repeatedly undermined faith however much it existed in its name. Ultimately, Protestant criticism had to be rendered in a classically simple style, both to systematize its attempt at clarification of the nature of religious truth, and to stabilize its relationship, growing progressively intense and closer, to the divine. Fundamentalism, Melanchthon came to see, requires simplicity, and he found this style of simplicity in Dürer's art.

Melanchthon grappled with the complexity of Protestant revelation through the categories of classical style. In his eyes, style was a form of rhetoric, conceived not conventionally as the persuasive use of speech, but more deeply as the science of presenting thought. It was thus, as in antiquity, complementary to logic, logic as it were in a public art form, not an unlearned craft requiring a few set methods. It required knowledge and purpose, not simply technique and convention. Melanchthon's theological purpose required him to develop a rhetoric for presenting the logic of the divine. He demanded a critical yet lively presentation, balanced between faith and reason.[16] For Melanchthon, the paradox of religion was that it had no rhetoric inherently its own and thus was forced to borrow one from secular life, or from such sources as antiquity. However, Melanchthon felt that the familiar rhetoric of language was no longer fit to undertake a religious mission. Melanchthon came to believe, at least for a time, that the only source of religious rhetoric was the language of art. This use of art gives it more status than anything Erasmus had written.

German Renaissance art satisfied both the humanistic ideals of clarity and brevity,[17] and the Protestant ideal of simplicity. It showed a remarkable power of articulation, simultaneously clarifying and final-

16. Lüdecke and Heiland, pp. 267–68, summarize Melanchthon's position as a Protestant theorist. At a certain moment in his life Melanchthon seems to have valued Dürer because his art, in a way Melanchthon could not fathom, combined faith and reason, vitality and intellect in a single, dense unity. Martin Weinberger, *Nürnberger Malerei an der Wende zur Renaissance und die Anfänge der Dürerschule* (Strassburg, 1921), p. 27, remarks that "erst Dürer wagt derartig Profanes und Heiliges zu vermischen."

17. Georg Weise, *Dürer und die Ideale der Humanisten* (Tübingen, 1953), pp. 15–25, demonstrates the central position of these qualities for Renaissance style in general and Dürer's style in particular.

izing. Erasmus had already been aware of this power in Dürer's treatment of nature; Melanchthon became aware of its advantages for the depiction of the divine. He accepted the general validity of German Renaissance style, not only taking its artists as exemplary stylists or rhetoricians but comparing writers unfavorably to them. Thus, novelly comparing Camerarius' style to Dürer's, he finds the former lacking. Not only does such a comparison make the tacit assumption that the literary and visual arts are of equal significance, but it ultimately implies that visual style is sufficiently superior to literary style to be its model: "Propemodum ut Dureri picturas, ita scripta tua discerno. Durerianæ grandes et splendidæ omnes, sed posteriores minus rigidæ, et quasi blandiores fuerunt. Ita cum nunc copiam et splendorem ames et sonum grandiorem, efficies postea, ut, quasi, nonnihil remissis fidibus, oratio sit etiam hilarior, qualis est oratio tua fere in familiaribus, epistolis."[18]

Melanchthon in fact appropriated classical categories of literary rhetoric to explain German Renaissance style. Admittedly shopworn, they were all Melanchthon had in undertaking to deal with the new phenomenon of an independent and advanced visual style. He was groping for a language with which to classify style, much as a new species of plant could be given an old Latin name. Thus, while the distinction between *genus grande*, *genus humile*, and *genus mediocre* in the quotation below is essentially logical, in Melanchthon's new usage these terms define pictorial styles. He means them to be full-blown concepts for the analysis of art, functioning to differentiate between the possible approaches to visual values. He conceived them in a relationship to one another resembling that of musical tones in the same scale, because, for his classical point of view, this was the strictest, most coherent relationship possible, conveying harmony and unity in diversity and variety. Melanchthon thus means to offer a "scientific" analysis of German Renaissance style, stating its principles and their most significant exemplifications, i.e., the artists who most precisely realize them:

> Plurimum etiam conducit ad iudicandum, agnoscere diversa genera dicendi. Nam ingeniorum dissimilitudo, diversas formas, seu ut

18. 10 June 1538: "I judge your writings almost the way I do Dürer's paintings. The Dürer pictures were all splendid and brilliant, but his later works were less strict and to some extent ingratiating. So the way you now love fullness, brilliance, and solemn language, you will bring it about that your language, like the soft playing of string music, as it were, will again become cheerful, like your way of expressing yourself in intimate letters." Dürer, I, 288–89.

FIG. 1. Lucas Cranach the Younger, *Portrait of Philipp Melanchthon.* Woodcut, c. 1560. After the painted portrait by Cranach the Elder. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Art Collection.

FIG 2. Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of Philipp Melanchthon*, 1526. Engraving B. 105. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Art Collection.

> Græci nominant *charakteras* operum, non solum in hac arte, sed in plærisque aliis peperit. Et tamen certi quasi gradus animadversi sunt, intra quos hæ formæ consistunt, videlicet humile genus, et ille oppositum grande. Tertium est mediocre, quod primo genere plenius est, et tamen aliquantulum a summo abest, in picturis facile deprehendi hæ differentiæ possunt. Durerus enim pingebat omnia grandiora, et frequentissimis lineis variata. Lucæ picturæ graciles sunt, quæ et si blandæ sunt, tamen quantum distent a Dureri operibus, collatio ostendit. Matthias quasi mediocritatem servabat. Miscentur autem hæc genera inter se, sicut musici tono miscent. Nam et illi qui sunt tenuiores, interdum aliquid efficiunt plenius. Et in eodem tempore alii loci grandes sunt, alii exiles, iuxta rerum varietatem, de quibus dicitur.[19]

Melanchthon analyzed art in terms of rhetoric because he conceived it in a general way as logical discourse.[20] Such a conception is in itself revolutionary, apart from any attempt to justify art in literary terms. But it is less a justification for art that Melanchthon is after than a means

19. "It is also very useful, in forming a judgment, to distinguish the various styles of speaking, for the variation in personal talents has given rise, in speaking as in many other arts, to various types of works, or, as the Greeks say, to different "characters" of works. And yet certain gradations, so to speak, have been distinguished, within which these types are contained: there is the Simple style, and its opposite the Grand. The third is the Middle, which is fuller than the first, but yet lacks something of the Grand style. These differences may be readily discerned in paintings. For example, Dürer painted everything in the Grand manner, variegated with innumerable lines. The paintings of Lucas are Simple; although they are charming, a comparison will show how far removed they are from the works of Dürer. Matthias remained more or less in the Middle style. These styles, moreover, intermingle with one another, just as musicians mix their notes: even those which are rather thin occasionally give rise to something which is quite full. Then too, at the same time, some *loci* (topics) are full, others thin, according to the variety of matter which one is discussing." Dürer, I, 306. Translated by Dr. George Houston, Department of Classics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

20. See Hartfelder, pp. 226–29. The last quotation is taken from Melanchthon's *Elementa Rhetorices* (1531). See also Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *Renaissance Essays* (New York, 1968), pp. 199–216. On p. 211 Gray discusses Melanchthon's search for style, and on p. 216 she observes that while rhetorical form is generally regarded "as the chaff which can be separated from the wheat of humanist thought," Melanchthon noted there was no "subject [that] can possibly be richer than that of the dignity and utility of eloquence." Gray, p. 212, remarks that Melanchthon regarded "rhetoric as the highest philosophy, while maintaining that eloquence, to be worthy of the name, must be wise." It is noteworthy that Conrad Celtis, the German arch-humanist, makes a similar connection between eloquence and philosophy in his Inaugural Address at the *gymnasium* in Ingolstadt (1492): "... it is well to give much attention to true philosophy and above all to those things by which one may acquire eloquence, which you will agree to be very necessary for this purpose." Quoted from *Selections from Conrad Celtis 1459–1508*, ed. Leonard Forster (Cambridge, 1948), p. 49. For a general account of Celtis see Lewis W. Spitz, *Conrad Celtis, the German Arch-Humanist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957).

of understanding its peculiar eloquence. Thus, even more than Erasmus, he was able to abstract form from content, style from theme, yet at the same time to understand their unity and how the former vitalized the latter. However much Melanchthon's terminology was borrowed from literature, the form he found was more than literary. His method of formulation was weaker than his perception. He could distinguish between different pictorial modes, but could not articulate the kind of order each represented. Such a difficulty seems inherent, for pictorial style can neither be reconstructed nor translated exactly into language. Melanchthon implicitly recognizes this fact and finds it of use in his search for a non-linguistic mode of presenting the divine; the divine also cannot be completely articulated in the world's usual terms. The literary and the visual are no longer competitive, as for Erasmus, but seem to be incommensurate realms.

IV

In effect, Melanchthon is trying to make clear, at least to himself, that the end of art is intuitive rather than descriptive. It implies a vision of the whole rather than a detailing of given particulars. Words, which were being turned to purposes of scientific description, and which had failed to reach religious fundamentals, seemed no longer to reveal the divine. The picture seemed a more direct means of intuition, much as to conceive of style as rhetoric seemed a clear means of bringing out the purpose of style. The aesthetic effect that emerged from German Renaissance style seemed to serve the purpose of religious enlightenment, in part the consequence of the German Renaissance picture's ability to condense discourse into pointed clarity. Ultimately, for Melanchthon, the picture's logic was stronger than the word's logic because its impact was direct and immediate, almost revelatory—more miraculous in its effect than the effect aroused by the word's reflectiveness. In essence, the picture conveyed more of a sense of novel discovery than discourse.

Melanchthon seemed aware of the fact that Erasmus' stylistic powers had failed to reconcile Protestant and Catholic and, like the words of the Bible itself, had failed to stem dissension and had perhaps even accelerated it by ambiguity. The picture was unambiguous, and thus more explicit in its truthfulness and its powers of convincing. What it might lose in discursive rationality it would make up for in freshness and vitality, qualities which words, so long bandied about, could no

longer convey. In a sense, reason had argued itself into a corner where fundamentals were lost. For religion was not really debate, but a faith grounding life itself, and the picture could recover that sense of urgency about life which underlies faith by showing the object of faith in vital, simple "terms." The picture could restore the sense of religion's direct relevance to life which words had so mismanaged in religious debate.

In a sense, Melanchthon's respect for German Renaissance art was a last effort to use humanism for Reformation purposes. Dürer's art was preeminently suitable for these purposes, for not only was it intellectual and strongly humanistic but its humanism was controlled by deeply religious attitudes. Its humanism was sacramental in import, not naively classicizing. For Melanchthon, Dürer did not simply convey the living presence of natural phenomena (the essence of the style of Apelles)[21] nor more deeply discover the uniform intelligibility of nature, as humanism conceived the purpose of style,[22] but revealed, in a radical intuition, the profound gracefulness of nature, its God-given beauty, the essence of the divine style.[23] In Dürer's art, nature was divinely ordained, not indiscriminately given, a sublime rather than mundane phenomenon. One is reminded of Sebastian Franck's speculation that the familiar Albertina *Great Piece of Turf* of Dürer was formed on the first day of the creation of life.[24] Dürer's style, transforming sensuous appearances into graceful realities by means of intellectual simplification—by the subtle strength of his power of visual general-

21. Dürer's style was customarily compared to that of Apelles, as recorded by Pliny. For Pliny's discussion of Apelles see K. Jex-Blake and E. Sellers, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 121–25. The humanists, including Celtis and Erasmus, regularly alluded to Dürer as the German Apelles. While such allusions were commonplace during the Renaissance, as is made clear by R. W. Kennedy, "Apelles Redivivus," in *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann* (New York, 1964), pp. 160–77, they recurred regularly and with special intensity in the case of Dürer. The first public mention of the allusion, in Jacob Wimpfeling's *Epithoma Germanorum* (1505), is recorded in Dürer, I, 290.

22. Particularly in Erasmus' analysis of Dürer's style.

23. The divine style is described, and attributed in particular to Michelangelo, in the Preface to Part III of the *Lives*. The style emerges from but supersedes naturalism, conveying a consummate gracefulness, as if its object were created by divine rather than human power. Life is, as it were, conveyed spontaneously from the inside, rather than only through an exterior formal perfection. The divine style also implies the artist's ability to render the most subtle states of being dynamically, as though they were shaped in their intensity by the will of God. Thus, Vasari speaks, also in the Preface to Part III of the *Lives*, of Leonardo's "smile" as divine.

24. Will-Erich Peuckert, *Sebastian Franck, ein deutscher Sucher* (Munich, 1943), p. 242. Franck, a German mystic and pantheist, is discussed by Alexandre Koyré, *Mystiques, spirituels, alchimistes du XVI^e siècle allemand* (Paris, 1971), pp. 39–74.

ization or formalization—seemed eminently suitable to serve as the supreme Protestant rhetoric.

Since, for Melanchthon, revelatory rhetoric was the core of style, a single style of art was impossible, for style will depend on what is revealed. Dürer's "grand manner," as Melanchthon conceived it, was not simply the consequence of subtle techniques, but of a type of vision, in Dürer's case an intuition of the divine character of nature. His style is the rhetoric for expressing this experienced revelation, rather than an arbitrary form applied indifferently to all subject matter. The point is that for Melanchthon style was not a clear window through which one could see whatever was passing. It was a lens polished by the artist for his special vision. The lens of Protestant—Dürer's—style created a clarity in which the divine could exist without displacing the natural. It is as if Dürer's effort to make visible the invisible intelligibility of nature, as understood by Erasmus, became in Melanchthon's hands propaedeutic to the more difficult task of making visible the invisible force of the divine. Where Erasmus saw Dürer as a master of natural form, Melanchthon saw him as a master of divine force, but with the same "simplicity," the same harmony of means and end, the same direct relation between technique and vision. In a sense, revelatory style and divine vitality together constitute the grand simplicity of the creation, which is self-evidently there but self-evidently divine only in art. Dürer's art firmly grounds faith in a revelation of the vital simplicity of things:

> Memini virum excellentem ingenio et virtute Albertum Durerum pictorem dicere, se iuvenem floridas et maxime varias picturas amasse, seque admiratorem suorum operum valde lætatum esse, contemplantem hanc varietatem in sua aliqua pictura. Postea se senem cœpisse intueri naturam, et illius nativam faciem intueri conatum esse, eamque simplicitatem tunc intellexisse summum artis decus esse. Quam cum non prorsus adsequi posset, dicebat se iam non esse admiratorem operum suorum ut olim, sed sæpe gemere intuentem suas tabulas, ac cogitantem de infirmitate sua. Tantum cum fuerit illius viri studium in arte non summa, sæpe doleo et indignor, non esse similem diligentiam nostri ordinis in quærenda simplicissima explicatione doctrinæ coelestis.[25]

25. In a letter to Prince Georg von Anhalt, 17 Dec. 1546: "I remember that the painter Albrecht Dürer, a man of prominent talent and ability, once said, in his youth he loved paintings with lively and variegated colors and as an admirer of his own works, he had

Again:

> Memini Durerus pictorem, qui dicebat se adolescentem in pingendo amasse monstrosas et inusitatas figuras: Nunc senem intueri naturam, et conari quantum omnino posset eam proxime imitari, sed experiendo se cognoscere, quam difficile sit non aberrare a natura! Fit hoc etiam in dicendo.[26]

Such simplicity was ultimately symbolic of the radical consciousness—the end of Protestant introspectiveness—necessary for a revelation of the divine. Much as style made such simplicity self-evident, so introspectiveness brought the divine into focus as an indisputable reality. Both simplification and introspection are methods of critical consciousness, abstracting what is of import to its own continued existence. They are capsulated in Dürer's introspective style, without which nature would appear monstrous and colorful, an ambiguous complexity or a formless surface. Nature is given "destiny" by introspective style, revelatory rhetoric, as life is given destiny by introspective consciousness, critical attention to the divine. For Melanchthon, only style can conceive form, and the simplicity of Dürer's style becomes a revelation of ultimate form. Melanchthon would like the same decisive simplicity for religious discourse. He would like to align artistic style, Protestant introspectiveness, and religious discourse on the same course, with introspectiveness and discourse guided by style. Much as Dürer's style can be said to turn from visible efficient causes to invisible formal causes, so introspection withdraws from the world to its creator, and rhetoric clarifies discourse so that it readily reveals thought. In each case existence is shown to be coherent and resonant, formed and significant.

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often taken great delight in contemplating this variegation in some picture of his. Later, as an older man, he had begun to look at nature and attempted to consider its original appearance; at that time he understood that just its simplicity was the highest ornament of art. When he was not altogether able to reach it, he had, as he said, no longer admired his works as formerly, but often sighed when he contemplated his paintings, and thought of his weaknesses. When I consider how thorough was the occupation of this man with an art which is not the most important, it often causes me grief and arouses my indignation that our position in the simplest scientific explication of the divine teaching is not undertaken with the same care." Dürer, I, 289.

26. In a letter to Albert Hardenberg, 25 Sept. 1556: "I recall the painter Dürer saying that when he was young he loved to paint monstrous and unusual figures, but now that he was old, he studied nature and tried to imitate it as closely as possible; but from experience he was learning how hard it is not to depart from nature. And the same thing happens in speaking." Dürer, I, 289.

In a sense, Melanchthon sees in Dürer a revived Eyckian naturalism, or at least the continuity between the two.[27] The Eyckian ideal was to charge ordinary phenomena with invisible, symbolic significance, implying an invisible divine presence in visible reality. Dürer's stylistic rhetoric dispenses with symbolism, but attributes divine coherence to the visible world as a whole, not simply to its specific details. Dürer does not locate the divine in an item or two, displaying it in piecemeal fashion in such privileged objects as apples and lilies and enclosed gardens, but more subtly demonstrates that the progressive clarification, towards ultimate simplicity, of the visible as a whole is revelatory of the divine because of the unity of purpose conveyed. It is doubtful whether Melanchthon knew Jan van Eyck's works, but nonetheless he valued Dürer for, like Jan, demonstrating the simple and direct presence of the divine in a way impossible to religious tracts, whether overtly propagandistic or elaborately and learnedly theological. The vituperation and the obviousness of the learning—disguised by Dürer's facility—inhibited the presence of the divine.

The above quotations also show that Melanchthon had, however rudimentary, a Renaissance sense of development. Distinguishing between the early and the mature Dürer, he ties artistic weaknesses and strengths to stages of development—as does Giorgio Vasari. And as in Vasari, the idea of the development of art serves to establish critical distinctions between styles, separating them as stages on the way to perfection.

V

Not only does this idea bring order into the history of art, but for Melanchthon it has repercussions for the Protestant revelation. Protestantism does not dogmatically ground itself on the word of God, but acknowledges its critical relationship to religious history. Since Protestantism does not conceive itself to be an eternal religion like Catholicism, its historical development almost becomes its essence, simultaneously justifying and demonstrating its humanity. For it was in the name of humanity as well as God that Protestantism rejected such institutional practices as the selling of indulgences, and it is in the name of humanity

27. Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 4th ed. (Princeton, 1955), p. 81, notes the "Eyckian quality of scenery" in Dürer's *St. Eustace* (c. 1501, B. 57), implying a general resemblance to Eyckian naturalism.

that it makes the most sense and can justify the radical step of a fresh beginning for Christianity.

However, by falling into sectarianism, Protestantism threatens the universality of Christianity and hints at a certain inhumanity—a certain aggressive disruptiveness leading to conflict. Repeatedly fragmented in the name of new "fundamentals," Christianity becomes a set of competing minority beliefs. However, the concept of developing revelation rescues Protestantism from its potential conflicts, or at least can counteract and perhaps counterbalance them. For instead of each new grounding of faith becoming cause for conflict, it is understood as a deeper introspection of the divine. No longer self-contradictory, and so without direction, Protestantism shows itself to be an ever-increasing intensification of the effort to reach the divine, to have profounder revelation of God. Each belief becomes a stage in the rhetoric of revelation, another style, as it were, in the developing revelation of the truth.

Attention to artistic style gave Melanchthon the notion of a developing revelation, of a constant approximation to absolute simplicity of belief. Each belief, like each style, made sense in its own formal terms, but also made sense as a step on the way to a goal it had in common with all other beliefs. Melanchthon's conception of a plurality of styles with a unity of purpose saved him from sectarianism, preventing critical consciousness from arbitrarily striking out at other beliefs and introspection from becoming dogmatically secure with its object. Faith is refined into a developing process—Melanchthon introduces the notion of the growth of faith rather than the miracle of faith. Each sect becomes a step on the way to a perfect religious style of life, as each step in the history of Renaissance art becomes a step toward simple perfection of style, and each step in Dürer's development moved towards ultimate simplicity, the revelation of the vital clarity of his subject matter. Each sect conveys a Protestant style, as the styles of Dürer, Cranach, and Grünewald were conceived by Melanchthon to be the tributaries of German Renaissance style.

In practice, rather than in theory, Melanchthon found greater harmony between artistic styles than between religious sects. The depth of his frustration is shown by his clear contrast between the maturity of German art and the immaturity of Protestantism, the splendid unfolding of the former and the abortive blossoming of the latter. Thus, in the letter to Georg von Anhalt quoted above, Melanchthon expresses

his frustration at the difficulty of rendering articulate even the simplest religious matters. Melanchthon notes that with the same effort he makes, Dürer produces a powerful, knowledgeable art, clarifying fundamentals. Not only was Dürer's art revelatory, but all agreed it was, seeing what Dürer wanted them to see. Dürer's art was self-evidently fundamental, but Melanchthon's may add to confusion. Melanchthon seems conscious of the possibility that his works may be another source of sectarianism, causing further misunderstanding. The universal respect accorded Dürer, establishing him as the rallying point of unity in a multitude of manners, was a position Melanchthon desired for himself in religious matters. He hoped that his work would become a rallying point for Christianity, but it never did, and he knew it.

Just how good Melanchthon's characterization of Dürer's mature style—as one of grand simplicity—is becomes clear when one trusts his preference for Dürer to Lucas Cranach the Elder and Matthias Grünewald. If we accept the assumption that any significant style is a criticism of previous styles, then we must agree with Melanchthon that Dürer stood in critical relationship to his early style and to the styles of other masters as neither Cranach nor Grünewald did. Not only did Dürer come to grips with Italian style, specifically in such masters as Andreas Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini,[28] and perhaps Leonardo da Vinci,[29] but he synthesized it with Flemish influences.[30] His consciousness of art was international, where Cranach and Grünewald were essentially provincial masters. Whatever "simplicity" their styles possessed was the result of ignorance, not the symbol of their learned mastery of new artistic possibilities. Their art is also more sensuous than intellectual. For Melanchthon, this meant it was immature, indifferent to perfection, and naively single minded from the start because little development could be expected from it. However articulate a revelation the rhetoric of their styles implied, it remained artistically naive.

28. Conway, pp. 137–39. It was Bellini who praised Dürer "vor vill czentillomen," as he told Pirckheimer in a letter dated 5 Feb. 1506. Dürer, I, 45.

29. It seems likely that Dürer was influenced by Leonardo's treatment of the horse (Panofsky, p. 88), and it has also been argued that Dürer's knowledge of "heimlicher perspectiua" (Dürer, I, 59) was derived from Leonardo through Pacioli, since the person—artist, mathematician, or both—who taught it to him on his 1506 visit from Venice to Bologna (Dürer, I, 290, 294) was a disciple of Pacioli.

30. Panofsky, Chap. 2, discusses the grounding of Dürer's early style on Flemish influences, and in Chap. 6 discusses the effect on his style of his trip to the Netherlands in 1520–21.

In contrast, Melanchthon repeatedly mentioned the "grand" quality of Dürer's style, emphasizing the depth of its revelation and thrust of its aspiration as well as its artistic maturity. Melanchthon saw more of a unity in Dürer's art than in Cranach's or Grünewald's. Like Joachim Camerarius and Helius Eobanus Hessus before him, he praised Dürer as Vasari praised Michelangelo. Each offered the deepest revelation of the human and the divine, a revelation so direct and simple that it seemed inevitable and indisputable. Cranach and Grünewald lacked their sense of the simple dignity of man and God, their ultimate simplicity of being. Cranach's sense of the divine was controlled by his obsession with surface sensuousness, limiting his reach to the skin rather than the intelligible body beneath it, as in the familiar *Venus* of 1532. Grünewald's sense of the divine was influenced by his obsession with suffering, precluding the revelation of Christ in His calm majesty, for example, in the 1510 *Crucifixion* now in Washington. They were inadvertently simple; neither understood simplicity in Melanchthon's sense as a statement of the fundamental, an unequivocal presentation of the ultimate.

Melanchthon's desirable simplicity of style, in its deepest meaning, was sacramental. The nature that the mature Dürer depicted, splendid in its simplicity, was essentially consecrated. The distinction Melanchthon makes between Dürer's earlier "monstrous" nature and his mature vision of an intelligible nature is a contrast between a daemonic and a divine nature, a nature superstitiously regarded and a nature divinely consecrated. The distinction between the limbo of color in which the immature Dürer was lost and the linear clarity which later conveyed intelligibility implies a complete change of attitude towards nature. In this context, it is interesting to remember that one of Protestantism's great achievements was to reconsecrate the sacraments by reducing their number and deepening the meaning of those that remained; or to put it more pointedly, by concentrating them towards unity. The Catholic multitude of sacraments was replaced by a constellation of an essential few sacraments and by a simpler yet stronger meaning for the holy.

Dürer's change from youthful color to mature line, implying a change in consciousness of nature, is comparable to the Protestant change of attitude to the holy. Both supervened in the name of simplicity and greater truthfulness, and both designed to clarify and concentrate meaning. The reductionism of both was radical and critical, eliminating

colorful detail and obvious variety to uncover root simplicity. The variability in Dürer's line does not betray this essential simplicity, if only because line implies control of objectivity in a way impossible to color. Color's variability militates against formal simplicity because its appearance is contingent on subjective conditions of perception. Much as Dürer's style conveyed the sanctity of nature, so Melanchthon desired a simplicity of style which would convey the dignity of the divine. In turning to Dürer's simplicity as his model, Melanchthon acknowledged that the first evidence for divinity exists in nature. Dürer's genius could create natural form which would simultaneously transcend and structure nature, symbolize sanctity and vitalize intelligibility.

In this view of Dürer, Melanchthon emerges with what might be called the Protestant view of genius. The genius was not only a Protestant intellectual—a critic clarifying fundamentals—but a visionary or prophet who foretold the sacramental nature of simplicity. He had, by the very fact of his seeing the rationality of the real, reverence for it. Again, a comparison with Cranach and Grünewald makes the point more incisive. Neither had a rhetoric of simplicity which could realize the rationality of the real. Rather, they explored the irrational, Cranach attending to the erotic when he was not propagandizing or painting court life, and Grünewald an ecstatic mystic in his attitude. However, neither tended towards a treatment which might be valid, as Dürer's simplicity of nature was, for the individual as well as the universal. Moreover, Cranach's line tends to function as a complex arabesque, independent of his form, and Grünewald's line becomes unbalanced by his color. Neither had simplicity, and unity in simplicity. Only Dürer, among German artists, was able to reconcile individuality with universality, line with form, and make line function as color. The "varied line" Melanchthon attributes to Dürer functions much like Conrad Celtis' "colored outline,"[31] the single means having a double effect, thereby creating greater unity of style.

VI

Dürer's ability to unite the individual with the universal, achieving a sense of the broader destiny of the individual, is evident in his portrait

31. Celtis speaks of Dürer's "colored outline" in one of a group of four early poems of praise to Dürer. See Dieter Wuttke, "Unbekannte Celtis-Epigramme zum Lobe Dürers," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 30 (1967), 321–25. The allusion is made in the opening lines of the second epigram: "Tantus peniculo est, sic lineamente colorat / Albertus miro praeditus ingenio. . . ." Dürer, I, 289.

of Melanchthon (Fig. 2), compared earlier with the Cranach portrait (Fig. 1). In the Dürer portrait, Melanchthon is a contemplative turned activist by the Reformation. In the Cranach portrait, Melanchthon is a weary activist who has lost his contemplative powers. Dürer sees both the individual and the larger cause which molded him, his theme being the interaction of the two rather than simply the obvious "individual" appearance of the figure. It is interesting to note in contrast that Melanchthon saw Dürer less as an individual than as a representative German, grouped with Cranach and Grünewald as a creator of German Renaissance style, or taken alone as a kind of totemic figure, the archetypal genius. Melanchthon's nationalism shows how far he was from Dürer's humanism. Erasmus, e.g., had no loyalty to any country, conceiving himself to be an international figure.[32] Yet Melanchthon's nationalism seems incidental in contrast, e.g., to Ulrich von Hutten's fierce pride in the Germanic.[33] Hutten's nationalism was based on more than the Renaissance conception of the state's as well as the individual's possession of intelligible form. He also had a sense of manifest destiny, carrying Renaissance self-consciousness to an absurd extreme. Melanchthon held back from this ultimate irrationality—thus his preference for the international, classicizing Dürer to the nativist Cranach and Grünewald. However, Melanchthon's distance from an authentic or pure humanism can be measured by the extent to which he treats Dürer as a type.

On the whole, Melanchthon's attitude to Dürer blended the humanist feeling of kinship typical of Celtis and Erasmus with the enthusiastic adulation of his friends Camerarius and Hessus. Melanchthon synthesized the two, which dignified Dürer's profession and raised his status in society, into a secure sense of Dürer's inherent greatness ("grandes et splendidae omnes").[34] This is not empty language, for as

32. Willehad Paul Eckert, *Erasmus von Rotterdam, Werk und Wirkung* (Cologne, 1967), I, 10–11.

33. Lüdecke, pp. 24, 251–52.

34. Dürer, I, 288. For Melanchthon, a style "genus grande," such as Dürer's, has a general effect of grandeur (*Elementa Rhetorices*) and conveys a sense of ultimate simplicity useful to reason and religion (the letters to Georg von Anhalt and Albert Hardenberg), and, in contrast to the styles of Cranach and Grünewald, uses a line which seems infinitely varied as a basic method. Sustaining Melanchthon's appreciation of Dürer's style was his awareness of his own lack of eloquence. At times his style showed clarity and vehemence—the two qualities often went together—but often it was stilted or dull. Examining more closely what style means for Melanchthon, it becomes evident that it is conventionally contrasted with craft. If craft is the fundamental means of giving form, then style means the sophisticated use of created form to imply a content and spirit beyond that called for by the subject. Style, then, is an eloquence beyond the form established by craft, a means

has been shown, Melanchthon spoke of Cranach and Grünewald in quite different terms. Two decades after Dürer's death—two decades after Erasmus, Camerarius, and Hessus had written of him, and four decades after Celtis had sung his praise—he loomed as the most outstanding figure of the German Renaissance. That is why his standards were applied to Camerarius' writing, his casual wit was taken as wisdom,[35] and his art held to be of indisputable and lasting value. Melanchthon was less concerned than Camerarius and Hessus to justify Dürer's greatness, to prove that he was a great man, and less concerned than Celtis and Erasmus to measure his worth, to evaluate the novelty of his accomplishment. Dürer for him suddenly emerged as self-evidently great, and he drew what lessons he could from Dürer's greatness and particular achievements. Thus, as noted, Melanchthon tempered his praise with a determination to place Dürer in history. If

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of giving resonance to the subject which is often designated "enhancement," but which, for Melanchthon, implies intuitive power, i.e., a deep understanding of the subject.

Eloquence is not a decorative ornament on thought, but, for Melanchthon, essential to the thinker's grasp of fundamentals, his consciousness of their complexity, and his root recognition of their significance. In art, style is the artist's means of reflection on the significance of his subject matter, his way of demonstrating consciousness of it and transforming it, however conventional it might seem, into a meaningful theme. It is Dürer's style that makes nature not simply a backdrop for human affairs, a familiar, and irrelevant, phenomenon, but a divinely ordered creation. Analogously, Melanchthon desired style to demonstrate that religion was not simply one more mundane, institutional activity, but a concern with the first and last things of life.

Melanchthon's conception of the eloquence of Dürer's style changes the meaning of the elements in the conception of Dürer as a man of learning. Dürer's technical precision becomes a basic means of clarification of nature, of penetrating to its essential intelligibility and structure. Dürer's genius becomes his consciousness of the divine as a condition for the actuality of nature. Thus, the precision and genius of Dürer's style embody, in formal terms, an ultimate intuition of the character of nature. Dürer's style can be said to be "grand" because it harmonizes precision and genius, means and end—the intuition and its incarnation. Melanchthon seems to be troubled by the correlation between genius and art, the reciprocity between having the intuition and creating a style to convey it, as though, because he did not have a style, he did not truly have the intuition of the divine, and thus was not adequately religious. In a sense, Melanchthon's conception of Dürer's style shows the triumph of Protestantism over Humanism in his make-up, for Humanism did not preach its relationship to antiquity. But Protestantism, because of its compulsion to bring its teaching to the people—the whole issue of style arose in the context of a discussion of preaching and how to make it effective—may have wondered, in the person of Melanchthon, whether it was at all possible to have a style that was universally effective. At the time, Dürer's style seemed to have this universality, but it was Melanchthon's mistake to think that it was a preaching style.

35. This belief is epitomized in the following remark by Veit Örtel (Dürer, I, 326), successor to Melanchthon in the chair of Greek at Wittenberg: "Albertus Durerus dicebat: Homo ingeniosus sine eruditione est quasi speculum impolitum. Excellebat Durerus sapientia et virtute in omni genere, non tantum in arte pingendi." ("Albrecht Dürer said: 'An ingenious man without learning is like an unpolished mirror.' Dürer excelled in wisdom and virtue of every kind, not just the art of painting.")

he had any subjective reaction to Dürer it was surprise, not at Dürer's greatness and achievement, but at their continued relevance. Melanchthon certainly did not expect them to be relevant to his own religious interests when, in his own youth and the last years of Dürer's life, he casually sent greetings to Dürer through Camerarius.[36]

One can overplay Melanchthon's sense of gratitude to Dürer and Melanchthon's experience of the decline of humanism. Unlike his friends Camerarius and Hessus, Melanchthon conceived himself first and foremost to be a religious reformer rather than a traditional humanist. He valued the religious potential of Dürer's style, reconceiving its humanistic clarity and brevity as a religious simplicity. He had little respect for Dürer's nature as a concrete phenomenon, less respect for Dürer's expressionistic side, and still less respect for art apart from its formal power. However much he desired to model religious discourse on art, making it as obvious and as bold as a picture, he never granted art equality with religion. Melanchthon's interest in painting was probably on the order of his interest in school reform,[37] the practice of theory but not its foundation. This should not be altogether unexpected in a former iconoclast,[38] but it is disturbing in a thinker who analyzed German Renaissance art so well.

Yet Melanchthon's "practical" relationship with art should not be misconceived. Introspection was also practical, establishing vital contact with the divine, much as artistic style established vital contact with its subject matter. Introspection generated faith, a practical psychological effect important to Melanchthon. Similarly, style's power of persuasion was at stake, whatever its theoretical foundation. Melanchthon in part rejected Cranach and Grünewald, or at least thought of

36. For Melanchthon's general attitude to Dürer see Hartfelder, p. 395. Melanchthon sent greetings to Dürer, via Camerarius, in letters dated 2 July 1526 (Dürer, I, 275), 4 July 1526 (p. 276), and 12 July 1526 (p. 276). Dürer also seems to have been working with Melanchthon and Camerarius on measuring the foot of a statue of Augustus (pp. 276–77). Shortly before Dürer's death Melanchthon sent him greetings by way of Pirckheimer (p. 279). After Dürer's death, Melanchthon wrote to Pirckheimer in shocked disbelief (p. 281): "De Dureri morte fama citius huc a Francofordia, quam e Noriberga perlata est, sed ego, ut fit, nolebam tantum rem temere credere. Doleo tali et viro et artifice Germaniam orbatam esse." ("The rumor of Dürer's death arrived here (Wittenberg) faster from Frankfurt than from Nuremberg, but as it happens, I was unwilling to believe a thing like that without confirmation. It pains me that Germany has lost so great a man and artist.") This statement has become famous for its nationalistic as well as personal sentiment, and for its unequivocal acceptance of Dürer as the greatest German artist. See also Otto Clemen, "Melanchthon und Dürer," *Beiträge zur Bayerischen Kirchengeschichte*, 26 (1920), 29–38.

37. Lüdecke and Heiland, p. 268. 38. Lüdecke and Heiland, p. 269.

them as less "grand" than Dürer, because they were "impractical." That is, their styles were not conducive to introspection that sustained faith, did not persuade to faith in their subject matter, whatever else they might convey about it. Their pictures did not lead the spectator to believe in the literalness of their subject matter, its vital and intelligible lifelikeness, but instead conveyed only sensuous or symbolic significance in unintegrated form. Dürer's art led you to believe because it convinced you that what you saw was the case. In this context, the familiar concern for lifelikeness takes on the import of a radical revelation of reality, much as introspection leads to a radical revelation of divinity, present to the introspecting person in all the intensity of its existence, much as the subject matter of a Dürer picture is present to the spectator. In a sense, the only difference between the spectator and introspecting person is the direction in which they turn their gaze, and its object.

Thus, Melanchthon had deep faith in the power of Dürer's style to suggest at a glance what it was ultimately about. The end of vision was inherent in its first focusing, as in all good art. This was also the case for writing, as Melanchthon has Dürer remark of Luther's works: "Albertus Durerus, pictor Norinbergensis, sapiens vir, dixit: hoc interesse inter Lutheri et aliorum theologorum scripta, quod ipse legens in prima pagina tres vel quatuor periodos scriptorum Lutheri, scire posset, quid esset expectandum in toto opere. Et hanc esse laudem scriptorum Lutheri, videlicet illam perspicuitatem et ordinem orationis. De aliis vero dicebat, quod, postquam perlegisset totum librum, oporteret attente cogitare, quid voluisset autor dicere, vel, de qua re disserat."[39] If Luther had been a great stylist, Melanchthon would have taken him rather than Dürer as a model. Instead, Melanchthon has Dürer praise Luther for what could only have been his own art. The point is for a master of style to praise a master of religion in the hope that the religion might become more convincing because of its stylistic excellence. Further, the idea of the end implicit in the beginning is another developmental concept. Putting this concept in the context of

39. Dürer, I, 328, and Conway, p. 157. Conway's translation runs: "Albrecht Dürer, painter of Nuremberg, a shrewd man, once said that there was this difference between the writings of Luther and those of other theologians. After reading three or four paragraphs of the first page of one of Luther's works he could grasp the problem to be worked out in the whole. This clearness and order of arrangement was, he observed, the glory of Luther's writings. He used, on the contrary, to say of other writers that, after reading a whole book through, he had to consider attentively what idea it was that the author intended to convey."

religious writing indicates ultimately less the brilliance of Luther's religious style than the religious element in Dürer's style. Moreover, it implies Dürer's great learning, his knowledge of theology, elsewhere recognized by Melanchthon. The quotation is another example of Melanchthon's sensitivity to Dürer's style, with a deeper import because of the presence of the developmental concept of the final vision hidden in the immediate image. In part the unity of style attributed to Luther is no more than a statement of the classical belief in moving from a beginning through a middle to an end, with each stage understood as implying the other. But in terms of Dürer's art, such unity of style results from working through appearances to their essential reality. Also, in terms of introspection, it can serve to give direction, bringing under control the chaos of ideas which is a danger to introspection.

VII

For religious revelation, as well as art, to have a style, a method of unfolding, is to give it a means of crystallizing its results, of displaying them systematically, so that they seem more than a fragile illusion which might disintegrate at its first encounter—its comparison—with ordinary reality. Style allows faith to sediment and become permanent, so that it can face ordinary reality, confronting it with a deeper reality. Similarly, it allows the image to become stable, so that it can be successfully compared with reality. In effect, Dürer's sense of style as a control on discourse kept Protestantism from becoming bogged down in isolated insights, much as it kept the "discourse" of the image from dividing into sensuous surface and symbolic meaning. The pitfall of the pursuit of an intuition of the divine is that it becomes an abstraction in a void, incomprehensible except to the initiate, much as the pitfall of the pursuit of lifelikeness in art is that it becomes a mere appearance, unintelligible and lifeless except to other artists. But when the intuition of the vital form unfolds through style, it can be focused for all to see. It is not simply naively there, but the consequence of a sustained consciousness, increasingly closing in on its object.

It is not clear what the status of the invisible is in painting, for art always has to offer something visible, which can become all-absorbing in its indisputability. It may be that Melanchthon wanted a similar fate

for theology, a similar obviousness. But it also may be that for Melanchthon art was less a model for theology than its teething ring. As with Erasmus, Melanchthon's discussion of Dürer was almost entirely in the context of a discussion of education. Melanchthon's rhetoric texts were meant for *gymnasium* pupils. Painting had already been accepted as a liberal art, but it may have been an art that students learned from rather than learned for itself. Much as writing was education's difficult end and painting its easy start for Erasmus, so for Melanchthon painting permitted an obvious mastery of style which was almost impossible for theology, inherently more difficult and "noble." Religion required a greater effort to have a meaningful style, which was only as it should be, the higher always requiring more aspiration than the lower. Melanchthon thought painting to be more difficult than Erasmus did, but it was still not the most difficult kind of learning. Once again we see the honor given art by making it the model for religious style negated by a sense of its purely "practical" value. Nonetheless, Melanchthon could not escape his obsession with artistic style. He desired that learned writing be as "natural" as letter writing, to make its arguments more convincing.

In conclusion, one might note that even when Melanchthon becomes personal about Dürer, his interest circles back to style. Thus, he was conscious of Dürer's melancholy.[40] He did not give him a heroic physique as Camerarius did,[41] nor did he abstract him into flawless piety and virtue as later became the custom. But taking Melanchthon's observation of Dürer's melancholy in conjunction with his letter, cited above, to Albert Hardenberg, it can be seen that Melanchthon turned Dürer's melancholy into a quality of his style as well as of his person.

40. Melanchthon, *Commentarius de anima* (1548) notes (Dürer, I, 319): "De Melancholicis ante dictum est, horum est mirifica varietas. Primum illa heroica Scipionis, vel Augusti, vel Pomponii Attici, aut Dureri generosissima est, et virtutibus excellit omnis generis, regitur enim crasi temperata, et oritur a fausto positu syderum." ("We have already said something about melancholics and their extraordinary variety of types. First, there is the heroic type of Scipio, Augustus, Pomponius Atticus—or Dürer. It is the noblest type and outstanding in excellences of every kind, since what controls it is a moderated mixture [of humors] and it arises from an auspicious astral configuration.") While it is not clear whether Melanchthon knew Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514, B. 74), Panofsky, p. 171, argues for a connection between it and Melanchthon's words. In a letter to Camerarius dated 16 March 1533 (Dürer, I, 288), Melanchthon wrote that he owned all of Dürer's German works—meaning the writings, not the prints. Nowhere does Melanchthon offer anything resembling Camerarius' description of the *Melencolia I* in his *Elementa Rhetorices* (Dürer, I, 319). This description is Camerarius' only departure from his evaluation of Dürer's works in terms of their precision. However, Camerarius neither dismisses nor praises the work, but treats it as a curiosity.

41. Conway, p. 136.

Melancholy and intellectuality are associated in the usual manner,[42] but more deeply, because for Melanchthon temperament in general determines style. Thus, in the Hardenberg letter, Dürer's change of style implies a change in temperament. Dürer moves from a *Sturm und Drang* to an Olympian attitude when he turns from depicting a colorful, "monstrous" nature to its simplicity. This turn to the normative implies the stabilization of temperament in a fixed attitude. At stake in it is a concern to establish a seriousness of purpose able to sustain art's ambition to reveal essentials through style. Dürer's change of style instituted a rather self-conscious seriousness—so self-conscious it could write about itself—able to sustain interest in the intelligible in and for itself. Thus, the change can be said to be from irrationality to rationality, from frivolity to seriousness, from the sanguine to the melancholy, from the spirited to the philosophical. Consciousness of the completeness of the change is part of the persuasiveness of Dürer's art. It gained in value through consciousness of what it had renounced. In a sense, the simplicity of style the mature Dürer achieved can be said to be the result of a new introspective seriousness in his temperament. It was basically a religious seriousness; and in fact, by melancholy Melanchthon seems to mean Protestant introspectiveness. On the other hand, it was also the source of Dürer's interest in the intelligibility which grounded nature, and his particular interest in mathematics. Much as his seriousness made him intelligible to himself, so it made nature mathematically intelligible, gave it an identity. Thus, melancholy seriousness was another "practical" prerequisite for a rhetoric of the divine, for the grand manner of simplicity. Ultimately, Dürer was greater than Cranach and Grünewald because he was more serious or melancholy than they.

Typically, temperament functioned as a form of humanistic self-consciousness. It was the subjective adjustment that permitted the humanist to meet the objective requirement. Much as simplicity can be said to afford a measure of control over the difficult essence of nature and the divine, so melancholy concentration of seriousness can be said to give a measure of control over the difficult task of "taking to" the divine or intelligible in style. Without the self-control of melancholy, its implicit stoical patience, regression to frivolous fancy was possible and a return to easy simplicity was probable, as well as a general loss of the sense of nature's profound significance. That Melanchthon

42. Panofsky, pp. 158–62.

associated, in the same catalogue of noble spirits, Scipio, Augustus, Pomponius Atticus, and Dürer, regarding them all as melancholics, does less to make Dürer a Roman hero and man of virtue than to identify him with men of similar seriousness of purpose. It also more firmly roots him in classicism than the familiar identification with Apelles, for it shows that melancholia was regarded as a classical virtue.