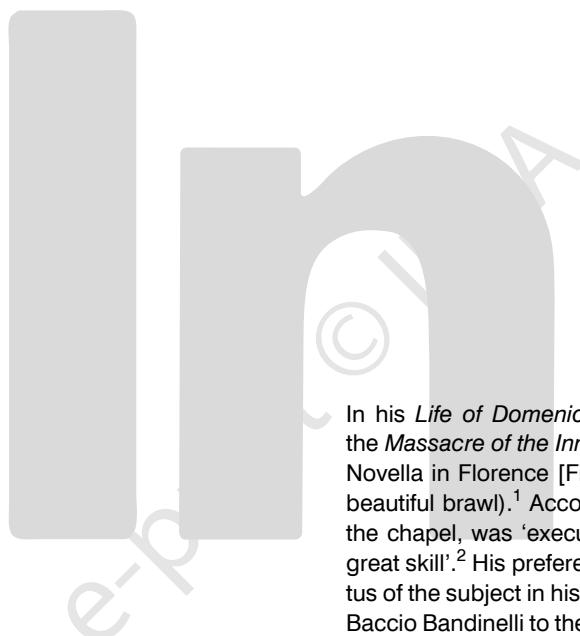


Diana Bullen Presciutti

'A Most Beautiful Brawl':
Beholding Splendor and Carnage
in Renaissance Italy



In his *Life of Domenico Ghirlandaio*, Giorgio Vasari describes the *Massacre of the Innocents* in the high chapel of Santa Maria Novella in Florence [Fig. 1] as 'una baruffa bellissima' (a most beautiful brawl).¹ According to Vasari, the fresco, his favorite in the chapel, was 'executed with good judgment, ingenuity, and great skill'.² His preference is not surprising considering the status of the subject in his time, elevated by artists like Raphael and Baccio Bandinelli to the level of demonstration piece.³ No longer just a pivotal moment in the Infancy narrative or a prefiguration of the Crucifixion, the Massacre became in the sixteenth century a vehicle for demonstrating artistic virtuosity, particularly with regards to the range of *affetti* and the difficulty of poses.⁴ According to the Vasarian system of merit, therefore, Ghirlandaio's fresco, a dynamic and variegated *istoria*, would have been judged most successful.

Modern assessments of the *Massacre* (painted, along with the rest of the chapel, between 1485 and 1490) have not been as generous. Art historians have found the chaotic fresco, which is in damaged condition, difficult to assimilate into the œuvre of Ghirlandaio, a painter known for his meticulous technique and decorous, even sedate, compositions.⁵ While the nearby birth scenes of the Virgin and John the Baptist, rich as they are in finely observed anecdotal detail, have proved to be a treasure trove of evidence for scholars interested in the world of Quattrocento Florentine merchants and their families, the *Massacre* yields no



1. Domenico Ghirlandaio, «Massacre of the Innocents», 1485–1490, fresco, Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Tornabuoni Chapel. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

such insights.⁶ There are no portraits of illustrious individuals to identify, no confinement chamber practices to scrutinize, no jewelry to connect to inventory records.⁷ Instead, the *Massacre* has been interpreted primarily in terms of its relationship to classical antiquity. Aby Warburg and others have analyzed the inclusion in the background of a close approximation of the Arch of Constantine; the poses of the dynamic combatants have, in turn, been connected to similar figures carved on ancient sarcophagi.⁸ Thus reoriented by both Vasari's *affetti* and Warburg's *Pathosformeln*, scholars have since opted to discuss the painting largely outside of its devotional context.

In order to arrive at how the fresco might have constructed meaning in the context of the high chapel of Santa Maria Novella, I would like to return first to Vasari. In his extended description of the painting, he isolates 'tre effetti bellissimi' that are, he writes, highlighted by the arched back of the soldier to the right in the foreground. One of these he describes as 'la morte del putto che si vede crepare'.⁹ Judging from his use of the word elsewhere in the *Lives*, 'crepare' could signify for Vasari both 'bursting' and 'cracking', in the context of both animate bodies and inanimate materials.¹⁰ With that in mind, I suggest that Vasari's selection of the word 'crepare' was inspired both by the 'bursting' (or, perhaps more accurately, *crushing*) of the child in the arms of the soldier, and by the sight (or memory) of the severed heads and arms that litter the foreground of the fresco [Fig. 2]. Indeed, Ghirlandaio gives us bodies *broken apart*.

This inclusion of pieces of the Holy Innocents may appear logical given the subject represented, but it was a marked divergence from the established iconography of the scene. Using Vasari's description as a point of departure, this article considers how the depiction of body parts in the Ghirlandaio fresco – and in a related painting by Matteo di Giovanni – shaped the viewing experience. I argue that in their original devotional context, these paintings would have fostered a 'reliquary mode of seeing' by juxtaposing formal features characteristic of reliquaries with the representation of relic-like body fragments. Furthermore, the relationship between Ghirlandaio's *Massacre* and reliquary devotion was made exceptionally palpable and immediate by the presence of a relic of the Holy Innocents in the same church.



2. Domenico Ghirlandaio, «Massacre of the Innocents» (detail). Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

Picturing the *Massacre of the Innocents* in Renaissance Tuscany

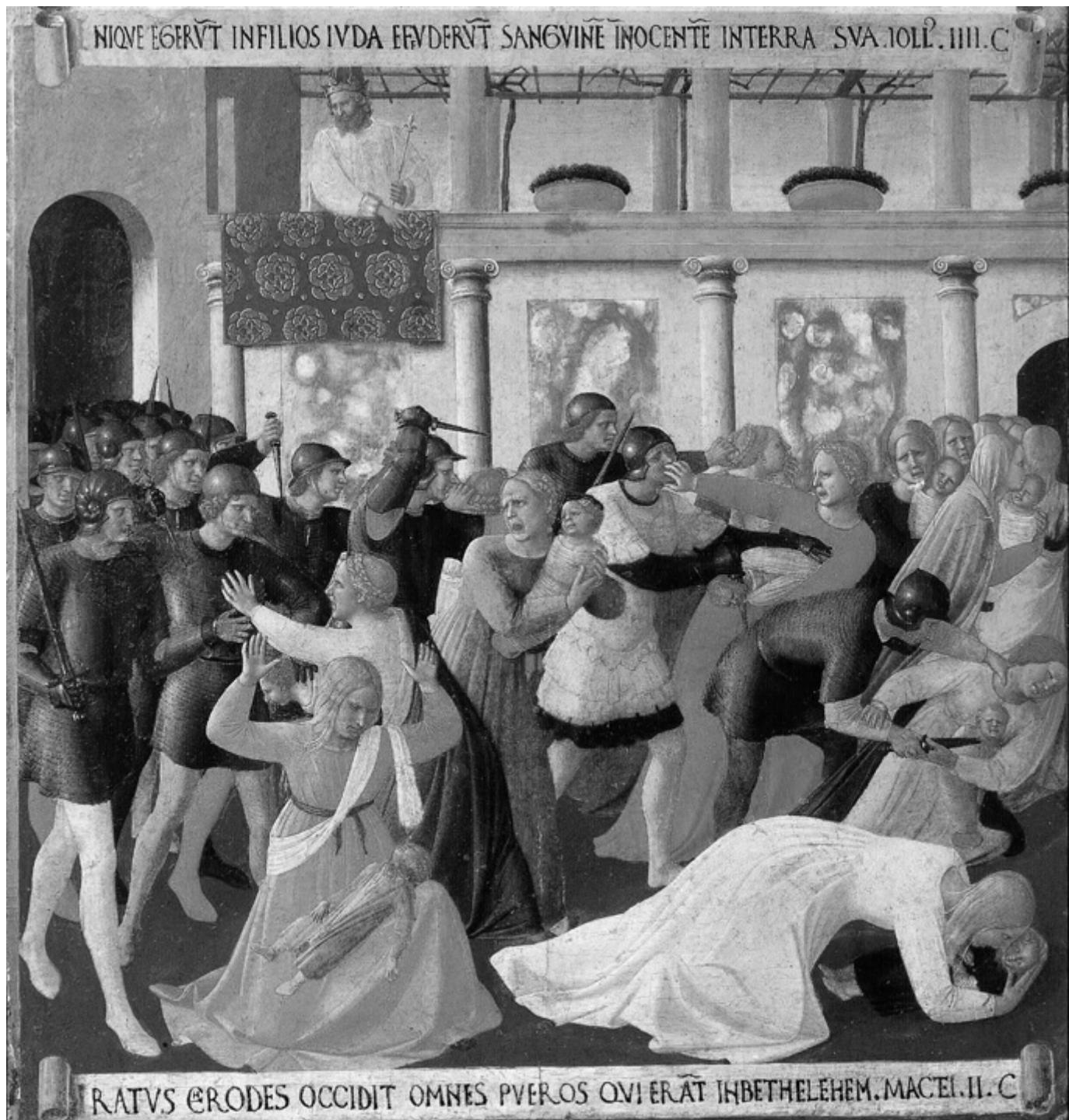
In contrast to Ghirlandaio's *Massacre*, which forms part of a cycle of the Life of the Virgin, representations of Herod's slaughter of Bethlehem's male children typically appeared in narrative cycles of the Infancy of Christ.¹¹ In those representations, the bodies of the Innocents are subjected to all manner of violence. Many fourteenth-century Tuscan painted depictions of the scene share a set of representational conventions, such as the prominent placement of the pile of corpses. The pile, typically situated close to the picture plane and at the bottom of the compositional space, communicates the scale of the killing in economical fashion. For example, in the Arena Chapel, Giotto, a master of judicious editing, conveys the enormity of the massacre by juxtaposing soldiers attacking two children with a substantial heap of mangled (albeit unbloodied) infant bodies [Fig. 3]. In his Siena *Maestà*, Duccio opted instead for a more gory and detailed version of the scene, framing the conventional mound of bodies with red paint and depicting a pair of soldiers extracting blood-soaked blades from their infant victims [Fig. 4].



3. Giotto, «Massacre of the Innocents», c. 1305, fresco, Padua, Arena Chapel. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY



4. Duccio, «Massacre of the Innocents», c. 1308–1311, tempera on panel, from the predella of the *Maestà* altarpiece, Siena, Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY



5. Fra Angelico, «Massacre of the Innocents», c. 1451–1452, tempera on panel, from the Armadio degli Argenti, Florence, Museo San Marco.
Photo: Alfredo Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY



6. Sano di Pietro, «Massacre of the Innocents», c. 1470, tempera on panel, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art

While the bodies presented by Giotto and Duccio are stabbed, pulled, and stacked up indifferently, they are, importantly, not broken apart: there are no severed limbs, no disembodied heads. This aversion to the dismemberment of the Holy Innocents continues in fifteenth-century representations of the subject in Tuscany. In his version for the Armadio degli Argenti [Fig. 5], Fra Angelico eliminates the pile motif in favor of bright colors and anecdotal violence; Herod is represented peering down upon the massacre from above, distinguished by an exotic woven carpet that hangs below him. In his *Massacre* [Fig. 6], dated 1470, Sienese painter Sano di Pietro shows bloodied, but undivided, infants wrapped tightly in swaddling bands, mourned by mothers dressed in vibrant shades of red, blue, yellow, and pink.¹² Thus, depictions of the Holy Innocents in

the fifteenth century became more decorative and colorful, but there remained no obvious precedent for Ghirlandaio's body parts.¹³

In an effort to understand how the unusual inclusion of fragmented bodies might have worked in tandem with the composition as a whole to condition the viewing experience, I would like to compare the Ghirlandaio with another *Massacre of the Innocents* painted in 1482, just a few years before work began in the high chapel of Santa Maria Novella [Fig. 7]. This altarpiece, created by Matteo di Giovanni for the church of Sant'Agostino in Siena, may well have served as a source of inspiration for Ghirlandaio's fresco.¹⁴ Like the Ghirlandaio, Matteo's *Massacre* places the bodies of dead infants at the bottom of the compositional space, closest to the viewer. Both paintings are dynamic and chaotic, filled with



7. Matteo di Giovanni, «Massacre of the Innocents», 1482, tempera on panel, Siena, Santa Maria della Scala (formerly Sant'Agostino). Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY



8. Matteo di Giovanni, «Massacre of the Innocents» (detail), 1482. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY



9. Domenico Ghirlandaio, «Massacre of the Innocents» (detail), 1485–1490. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

swirling draperies, flying swords, and dramatic and variegated expressions of horror, anguish, ferocity, and suffering. Yet for all its violence, Matteo's painting only features one dismembered corpse: an infant's body severed at the torso. The detached heads and arms of Ghirlandaio's fresco are not in evidence.¹⁵

Both the Ghirlandaio and the Matteo di Giovanni are characterized by an unsettling mixture of dazzling beauty and graphic violence, confronting the viewer with a riot of sumptuous fabric, gleaming metal, and bloodied and broken infant bodies. Matteo

exploits the possibilities of tempera on panel, incorporating a greater range of coloristic effects: saturated yellows, blues, pinks; diaphanous fabrics overlaying richly patterned brocades; light reflecting off polished armor, whirling drapery, glittering swords [Fig. 8]. Despite being constrained by the chromatic limitations of fresco, Ghirlandaio too includes shimmering blue and bronze armor, fluttering pink and yellow cloths, and shining gold and silver details [Fig. 9]. The sunburst halos of the newly beatified Innocents in the Ghirlandaio are picked out in gold.

Some of the gold details on the clothing of both the mothers and the soldiers are even given three-dimensional tactility by being executed in wax covered with gold leaf.¹⁶ While this level of sumptuousness might be expected in a depiction of the *Adoration of the Magi*, like Gentile da Fabriano's altarpiece now in the Uffizi, it is atypical of a *Massacre of the Innocents*.

What are we to make of so much beauty in a scene of such manifest ugliness? How might viewers have reconciled the plush textiles, swirling dresses, and lustrous surfaces with the compositional emphasis placed on the fragmented bodies of the Holy Innocents in the foreground? One possible answer can be found, I believe, in the context of reliquary devotion. Unlike most renderings of the *Massacre*, which functioned exclusively as episodes in the narrative context of the Life of Christ, both Ghirlandaio and Matteo's paintings were located in churches that functioned as nodes of particular devotion to the Holy Innocents. In fact, relics of the Biblical child martyrs were found in both Santa Maria Novella and Sant'Agostino.

Relics, Relic Images, and Reliquaries

In the case of the Matteo *Massacre*, the connection with the relic is direct and unambiguous: the altarpiece was installed on an altar dedicated to the Holy Innocents that contained a relic of the child martyrs.¹⁷ The relationship between the painting and the relic is made explicit by the subject of the *Massacre* itself, which was unusual for an altarpiece. Indeed, the scholarship on Matteo's various iterations of the subject has focused on their exceptional status; all three were executed as independent altarpieces unconnected to broader narrative cycles.¹⁸ The two *Massacres* found in Sienese churches were both placed above altars that were dedicated to the Holy Innocents; both sites featured relics of the child martyrs.¹⁹ The paintings thus functioned as 'relic altarpieces', working in tandem with the relics to advertise and give identifiable form to the saints that were made present through belief in 'pars pro toto' or 'the part embodying the whole'.²⁰

A more conventional form of relic embodiment was that found in the reliquary, the container that housed the object itself. Although reliquaries in active use during the period assume a range of different forms, some generalizations have been made. 'Speaking' or 'body-part' reliquaries took the shape of the relic itself, for example a head or arm.²¹ Another category of reliquary was the small coffin or casket. Monstrance reliquaries, in turn, served as elaborate display settings for relics, often taking the form of micro-architecture.²² In terms of material, gilded silver or copper was the most traditional for a reliquary.²³ They were often bejeweled, enameled, filigreed, or otherwise decorated. In the ambit of the candlelit church, the surfaces of these luxurious objects glisten and sparkle. When processed



10. Reliquary of Mary Magdalene, Tuscan, 14th and 15th c., gilded copper, gilded silver, rock crystal, *verre églomisé*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

through the streets of the city, sunlight and candles would also have reflected off their shimmering exteriors, creating a sense of otherworldly splendor.

While reliquaries often completely hide the relic from sight, in many cases, particularly from the end of the middle ages onward, openings or crystal vials allow the onlooker visual access to the sacred object [Fig. 10].²⁴ This shift served to condition the viewer's engagement with the relic, making the viewing of relics a process of juxtaposition between objects rich in sacrality

but often humble in appearance (the relics) and materials rich in appearance but, on their own, empty of sacrality (the reliquary itself). As part of the viewing process, the relic and the opulent materiality of the reliquary become fused, the luminous surfaces and gemstones assuming the status of earthly sheathing for the heavenly object. It is precisely this mental (or ocular) fusion, something akin to Michael Baxandall's 'culturally relative pressures on perception', that I would like to suggest is encouraged by both the Ghirlandaio and Matteo di Giovanni *Massacres*.²⁵

Relics acted as a spiritual link between life and death. The paintings, by extension, forge a tie between worshipper and relic. Importantly, the Holy Innocents were different from other saints. They were martyrs of endurance but not of will. As they were unbaptized and unable to choose to die for Christ, their standing as saints had often been controversial.²⁶ By the fifteenth century, however, their status as protomartyrs was widely accepted. Yet, with some exceptions, they did not assume an active role as intercessor in visual representation. More typically, it was the massacre *itself* which served this function. The Innocents were made 'visible' not in iconic form but instead in their suffering; the visual emphasis on the act of passive endurance (rather than active sacrifice and triumph) thus engages with age-old controversies about the sanctity of the child martyrs.

The Holy Innocents at Santa Maria Novella

Veneration of the Holy Innocents at Santa Maria Novella dated back at least to 1415, the year the Confraternity of the Holy Innocents (also called the Compagnia del Nocentino) relocated to the Dominican convent from the nearby church of Santa Maria Maggiore.²⁷ Four years later, in March of 1419, the confraternity entered into a contract with the friars of Santa Maria Novella to fund the decoration of a reliquary for a body fragment of one of the Holy Innocents (described as a 'membro dun santo Inocente').²⁸ The contract established that the members of the confraternity would be 'obliged to embellish the said relic at entirely their own expense in such a way that...will please them'.²⁹ The 'emblem of the said company' had to remain carved in the reliquary, and 'cannot be carved out of it nor another emblem placed there'.³⁰ Thus while the reliquary was considered the property of the Nocentino, the relic, it would seem, belonged to the friars of Santa Maria Novella; both relic and reliquary were housed in the church sacristy.³¹ The *confratelli* were authorized to retain the relic temporarily in their meeting space under certain conditions; they were also allowed to incorporate the reliquary into their processions on the feast day of the Holy Innocents.³²

The extant fifteenth-century documentation does not characterize the relic beyond 'un membro'. While later sources disagree about the nature of the body part preserved and how it came to Santa Maria Novella, they concur that there was a relic

of the Holy Innocents in the church. Several also make specific mention of the Compagnia del Nocentino and the role of the relic in processions.³³ Thus it is clear that the church, along with perhaps the Innocenti foundling hospital, was the principal site of devotion to the child martyrs in Renaissance Florence.³⁴ The relic held by the church was tended to by a long-established confraternity. The feast of the Holy Innocents – centered around the procession of a relic of the Holy Innocents in its reliquary – was celebrated on site.³⁵ Therefore the representation of the Massacre of the Innocents in the high chapel would have operated on two levels: one, as part of the Life of the Virgin, and two, as a 'relic altarpiece' (or, more accurately, 'relic painting'), connected inextricably with the unseen relic. The prominent inclusion of the fragmented bodies – *relics enfleshed* – would have served to link the image directly to the relic.

This connection would have been further reinforced by the painting itself, particularly the contiguity between body parts and luxurious fabrics and metals. The *Massacres* of both Ghirlandaio and Matteo – in their guise as 'relic paintings' – worked like reliquaries by framing the body parts with polished metals and other visual indices of splendor. Relics, 'more precious than costly stones and more valuable than gold', had long merited containers of commensurate opulence.³⁶ Thus viewers of the two *Massacre* paintings would have been accustomed to the visual juxtaposition of relics with material signs of magnificence; the atypical sumptuousness of the images can therefore be seen as engaging what I am describing here as a 'reliquary mode of seeing'.

A Reliquary Mode of Seeing

The 'reliquary mode of seeing' is a way of understanding how the representation of graphic violence in certain paintings could have created meaning for viewers in their original context. While the presence of relics shaped the manner in which the viewer would have interpreted the pictorial interpenetration of body parts and material splendor, the specific motivations for the inclusion of fragmented Holy Innocents in the Ghirlandaio and Matteo *Massacres* must remain elusive. Rather than attribute a causal link between the presence of a relic and the adoption of a particular compositional tactic, my goal here is instead to reconstruct how contemporary viewers might have engaged with these 'beautiful brawls' in ways very different from our own.³⁷ In other words, what we have here is a kind of visual intertextuality, one that encourages the viewer to form associations based on his or her 'cognitive style'.³⁸

The compositional structures of both paintings reinforce this notion of a reliquary mode of seeing by constructing a viewing experience centered around *seeing in*. Instead of a gilded container, the *Massacres* take the form of Albertian *istorie*. While the

perspectival structure of both scenes gives us a sense of legible space beyond the picture plane, Ghirlandaio and Matteo use various pictorial strategies – including architectural boundaries, the frieze-like positioning of the figures, and the placement of the onlookers – to circumscribe the illusionistic space, forcing the viewer to see *in* to the spatial box rather than being able to look *through* a fictive window. In both paintings, the area occupied by the combatants, while a convincing illusion, is presented as a different order of space from that of the viewer. In Matteo's *Massacre*, for instance, the mysterious youthful observers are out of proportion with the other figures in the scene, a pictorial strategy that calls attention to the place of the viewer as fundamentally separate from the action taking place before them. In the Ghirlandaio, in turn, the *all'antica* arch and the surrounding buildings serve as a screen that redirects the viewer's attention back to the action of the slaughter.³⁹ The shadow cast by the column at the right further suggests the division between the space of the chapel and the spatial box containing the 'enfleshed relics' [Fig. 9]. Viewers of the *Massacre* would also be able to consider the compositional space of Masaccio's nearby *Trinity*, long seen as a fictive tabernacle, in relation to Ghirlandaio's illusionistic 'reliquary'.⁴⁰

In addition to the structure of the composition, the inclusion of audience figures in the Santa Maria Novella *Massacre* affects the viewing experience, as does the position of the fresco halfway up the chapel wall. While the viewer looks up at Ghirlandaio's fresco from below, loosely sketched-in figures – Herod and his coterie – look down and in from the upper left of the fresco [Fig. 11]. Whereas fourteenth- and fifteenth-century representations of the *Massacre* typically accord Herod a prominent place in the composition, Ghirlandaio makes him almost invisible. Importantly, however, his presence is clearly signaled to the viewer by the readily identifiable red carpet of honor beneath him.

While Matteo places significant pictorial emphasis on the person of Herod, with his face distorted in bloodlust and fury, Ghirlandaio thus relegates the king to the far reaches of the compositional space. Without a face – furious or otherwise – Herod ceases to play a substantial role in the drama presented. The king and his companions look at the massacre from one side of the illusionistic courtyard, the viewer looks from the other; as 'faceless' observers, the witnesses are ideal surrogates for the viewer's act of beholding.⁴¹ Looking thus becomes the dominant interpretive mode for engaging with the painted violence; without a clearly defined antagonist, the drama becomes

less about the narrative itself – or the relationship between the scene and the Infancy of Christ – and more about the act of viewing the spectacle of martyrdom. The inclusion of the body fragments underscores this distinction: the viewer sees the Innocents transform from living children to holy relics. This shift from innocent victims to triumphant vessels of sanctity is fundamentally a cause for celebration, making the visual pleasures of the fresco – the glittering metals, the riot of colors – more apposite than dissonant.

Viewers of the *Massacres* of both Ghirlandaio and Matteo would have been accustomed to witnessing violence, specifically martyrdom, as spectacle through their exposure to religious drama.⁴² In the case of the Matteo altarpiece, the eager faces of the mysterious young observers call the viewer's attention to the massacre as a form of theatrical performance, a painted version of the popular *sacre rappresentazioni*.⁴³ This sense of theatricality, of performance, can be aligned with the idea of a reliquary mode of seeing. The reliquary – whether it assumes the shape of a body-part, a monstrance, a casket or some other type – 'shows' us the relic in a performative way, framing the object and conditioning the viewer's response to it. When the reliquary is processed or held aloft in the church, viewers look up at it, perhaps visualizing, in the case of martyrs, the moment of martyrdom. At other times the reliquary might be placed on an altar or on another surface that invites a viewer to look down at it,



11. Domenico Ghirlandaio, «Massacre of the Innocents» (detail), 1485–1490.
Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

to peer into it from above like Matteo's curious observers. While the children in Matteo's painting – indifferent to the point of callousness – cannot be construed as devotional exemplars, they do make us aware that we are viewing a carefully presented (and lavishly decorated) spectacle.⁴⁴

The pictorial staging of Matteo and Ghirlandaio's broken bodies can be seen as simultaneously performative and immersive. In a discussion of 'horror' in the context of early modern art, Maria Loh recently advocated 'a somaesthetic model that collapses the hierarchical binary between absorption and theatricality'.⁴⁵ Such a somaesthetic model can help us to understand the divergent – yet complementary – modes of viewing prompted by these exceptionally graphic depictions of the *Massacre of the Innocents*. Unaccustomed to seeing fragmented bodies in representations of the *Massacre*, viewers of the paintings would likely have experienced surprise (or perhaps revulsion) at the sight of the severed arms and heads; this response positions the observer as passive witness, as receiver of the theatricality of the horrifying spectacle. Yet simultaneously the formal qualities of the images – particularly the confrontation of body parts with signs of material beauty – would foster another kind of viewing experience, one that was much more active, participatory, and enduring.⁴⁶ This fusion, between the absorptive and the theatrical, is a defining feature of the reliquary mode of seeing.

Beholding Splendor and Carnage

The Ghirlandaio and Matteo *Massacres* were not unique in encouraging a reliquary mode of seeing. Another subject that seems to have provided a vehicle for this kind of beholding was the head of St. John the Baptist. Most often seen in representations of the *Feast of Herod*, such as that found opposite the *Massacre of the Innocents* in the *cappella maggiore* of Santa Maria Novella, the severed head of the Baptist sometimes appeared in paintings unaccompanied, almost like a still life.⁴⁷ While Ghirlandaio's rendition of the *Feast of Herod* would likely have reminded viewers of the cult of the Baptist, Florence's patron saint, paintings such as Francesco Manieri's *Head of the Baptist* (c. 1500, Pinacoteca di Brera) and Andrea Solario's *Head of Saint John the Baptist* (1507, Louvre) would have gone further; by juxtaposing the body fragment with the lustrous metal of the shallow bowl, Manieri and Solario condition the viewer to engage with the painting as he or she might a reliquary.

A related argument could be made for the viewing experience shaped by paintings, like Solario's *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* [Fig. 12], that frame the head of the Baptist – still dripping blood – with a seemingly disjunctive cornucopia of resplendence: alabaster skin, shimmering silver, luxurious fabrics, lavish jewels, veined polychrome marble. Rather than considering this pictorial strategy to be jarring and peculiar, we

might more productively see it as contributing positively to the devotional experience of the viewer; by engendering a reliquary mode of seeing, Solario's painting, and others like it, provides a vehicle for visual communion with the divine.

In contrast to paintings, like those of John the Baptist by Solario and others, that encourage a reliquary mode of seeing outside the ecclesiastical context of reliquary devotion, the *Massacres* of Ghirlandaio and Matteo di Giovanni would have drawn additional potency from the proximity of the relics of the Holy Innocents. The body parts in the Ghirlandaio – and, to a lesser extent, the Matteo *Massacre* – would have served as metonyms for the relics themselves: the painted heads and limbs framed with frescoed signs of material splendor, the actual relics encased in precious materials.

Furthermore, as the John the Baptist paintings of Manieri and Solario demonstrate, the presence of a relic is not required to engage this form of beholding. Similarly, relics do not demand 'relic paintings' that operate in the same manner as the *Massacre of the Innocents* in the *cappella maggiore* of Santa Maria Novella. In Florence, for example, the church of the Innocenti foundling hospital also possessed a relic of one of the Holy Innocents, and the altarpiece for the high altar of the church [Fig. 13] featured a depiction of the *Massacre of the Innocents* [Fig. 14] in the background.⁴⁸ Yet we see no fragmentation of the bodies of the Holy Innocents in the Innocenti altarpiece *Massacre*. Rather than fostering a reliquary mode of seeing, this painting forges instead a conflation of the Biblical child martyrs with the foundlings cared for by the hospital.⁴⁹ The *Massacre* is, importantly, relegated to the background of the compositional space, with pride of place instead given to the two kneeling Holy Innocents in the foreground – alive, intact, and devout.

The example of the Innocenti high altarpiece highlights another important aspect of the reliquary mode of seeing: it is not an inevitable consequence of beholding a painting with resplendent surface qualities. Like the *Massacres* painted by Ghirlandaio at Santa Maria Novella and Matteo di Giovanni in Siena, the Innocenti *Adoration of the Magi* is a painting replete with vibrant colors and meticulously rendered textures. Similarly, the other frescoes in the *cappella maggiore* of Santa Maria Novella – especially the much-studied birth scenes – are filled with sparkling jewels and luxurious fabrics; indeed, such painterly effects were part and parcel of Ghirlandaio's signature style. Without the representation of saintly body parts, however, these displays of material splendor do not construct a reliquary mode of seeing; it is in the concatenation of elements – compositional format, pictorial effects, subject matter, depicted body parts, and, in the case of the Ghirlandaio and Matteo *Massacres*, present relics – that such a manner of beholding is encouraged.

Raphael's design for the *Massacre of the Innocents*, engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi in the second decade of the sixteenth century and distributed widely throughout Europe,



12. Andrea Solario, «Salome with the Head of John the Baptist», c. 1506–1507, oil on wood, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



13. Domenico Ghirlandaio, «Adoration of the Magi», c. 1486–1489, tempera on panel, Florence, Museo degli Innocenti.
Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY



14. Domenico Ghirlandaio, «Massacre of the Innocents» (detail of Fig. 13). Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

transformed the Biblical narrative into a Christian version of the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs – an effective vehicle for artists to demonstrate their skills. Recognizing these qualities on display already in Ghirlandaio's fresco, Vasari wrote that the *affetti* 'will oblige those who see them to recognize without doubt this *maestro* to be in his time excellent'.⁵⁰ Yet his use of the word 'crepare' to describe the death of the infant testifies to the atypical – even in Vasari's time – level of graphic violence found in this otherwise 'beautiful brawl'. I have argued here that in its original viewing context, Ghirlandaio's *Massacre*, as well

as Matteo's related altarpiece, presents the viewer with the opportunity to *look into* the compositional space as stage for the slaughter. More than Herod, we are the audience for the bloody spectacle of the Massacre, constructed as witnesses to the creation of martyrs and, by extension, of relics. By juxtaposing splendor with blood and gleaming metal with severed limbs, the fresco thus conditions the viewer to identify the 'broken apart' bodies with the relics venerated in the same ecclesiastical space – in other words, to see Vasari's 'baruffa bellissima' as cultivating a reliquary mode of seeing.

I would like to thank Angela Ho, Kirsten Olds, Ivano Presciutti, Heather Vinson, and the anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions. The research for this article was first presented in a session organized by John Decker and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, held on 22–24 March 2012 in Washington, DC.

¹ G. Vasari and G. Milanesi, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architetti scritte da Giorgio Vasari*, vol. 3, Florence, 1878, p. 264. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are my own.

² Vasari and Milanesi, *Le vite*, vol. 3, p. 264: 'questa è la migliore, perché ella è condotta con giudizio, con ingegno et arte grande'.

³ On Raphael's *Massacre*, engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi, see P. Emerson, 'Marcantonio's *Massacre of the Innocents*', *Print Quarterly*, vol. I, 1984, pp. 257–267; R. H. Getscher, 'The "Massacre of the Innocents", an Early Work Engraved by Marcantonio', *Artibus et Historiae*, no. 39, 1999, pp. 95–111; L. Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print*, New Haven, 2004, pp. 118–136.

⁴ The Ghirlandaio *Massacre*, along with Pollaiuolo's earlier battle engravings, can be seen as an early stage in this development. John Pope-Hennessy made a related argument about the marble *Massacre of the Innocents* floor pavement in Siena Cathedral, writing that '[t]here is abundant evidence in Florence from the 1460s on of a concern with the depiction of figures in extremes of movement [...] it is with this class of representation that the *Massacre of the Innocents* properly belongs', J. Pope-Hennessy, 'A Shocking Scene', *Apollo* CXV, no. 241, 1982, p. 150. On this issue, see also L. Jacobus, 'Massacre and Motherhood: the Massacre of the Innocents in Late Medieval Art and Drama', in *The Massacre in History*, ed. by M. Levine and P. Roberts, New York, 1999, pp. 48–49. For the significance of the subject of the *Massacre of the Innocents* in early modern art literature, see E. Kepetzis, 'Der Bethlehemische Kindermord in der Kunstschriftenliteratur: Vasari, van Mander und die Darstellungen des Rubens', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, no. 69, 2006, pp. 169–193.

⁵ For the contrast between the *Massacre* and the other frescoes in the chapel, see P. Simons, 'Portraiture and Patronage in Quattrocento Florence with Special Reference to the Tornabuoni and their Chapel in S. Maria Novella', PhD diss, University of Melbourne, 1985, pp. 129 and 149; S. Roettgen, *Italian Frescoes: The Flowering of the Renaissance*, New York, 1997, pp. 173–174; Jacobus, 'Massacre and Motherhood', pp. 51–52.

⁶ On the *cappella maggiore* as a whole, see Simons, 'Portraiture and Patronage'; R. Hatfield, 'Giovanni Tornabuoni, i fratelli Ghirlandaio e la cappella maggiore di Santa Maria Novella', in Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1449–1494. *Atti del convegno internazionale*, Firenze, 16–18 ottobre 1994, ed. by W. Prinz and M. Seidel, Florence, 1996, pp. 112–117; Roettgen, *Italian Frescoes*, pp. 164–201; J. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan*, New Haven, 2000, pp. 236–243.

⁷ Examples include P. Simons, 'Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture', *History Workshop*, 25, 1988, pp. 9–10; J. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven, 1999, pp. 42–43; R. Duits, 'Figured Riches: The Value of Gold Brocades in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 62, 1999, pp. 76–81; C. Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes and Fine Clothing*, Baltimore, 2002.

⁸ See A. Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. by D. Britt, Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 247–249; R. Kecks, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Catalogo Completo*, Florence, 1995, pp. 131–132.

⁹ Vasari and Milanesi, *Le vite*, vol. 3, Florence, 1878, p. 265.

¹⁰ The entry in John Florio's English-Italian dictionary of 1598 defines *crepare* as 'to burst, to crack, to rive asunder' – in other words, to break apart: J. Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, Or Most copious, and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English, collected by John Florio*, London, 1598, p. 91. The *Vocabolario della Crusca* (1612) defines *crepare* as 'spaccarsi, e fendersi da per se': <http://vocabolario.sns.it/html/_s_index2.html> (accessed on 1 July 2012). Vasari's use of *crepare* here seems to suggest, first and foremost, that the soldier is in the process of 'crushing' or 'bursting' the child in his arms, as he uses the same word to describe a lost painting of Hercules crushing Antaeus in his *Life of Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*: 'nella quale propriamente si vede la forza d'Ercole nello stringere, che i muscoli della figura ed i nervi di quella sono tutti raccolti per far crepare Anteo'. See G. Vasari and G. Milanesi, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, vol. 3, Florence, 1906, p. 294. Indeed, the figure group evokes Pollaiuolo's surviving versions of the subject, suggesting that Vasari's visual engagement with the fresco was not as superficial as Svetlana Alpers and others have argued: S. Alpers, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes in Vasari's Lives', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23, 1960, pp. 202–203. Vasari also uses *crepare* to discuss the making of clay models: 'E finito ciò, volendo fare di quelli che siano di terra, si lavora a similitudine della cera, ma senza armatura di sotto, o di legno o di ferro, perchè li farebbe fendere e crepare; a mente che quella si lavora, perchè non fenda, con un panno bagnato si tien coperta, fino che resta fatta': G. Vasari and G. Milanesi, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, vol. 1, Florence, 1906, p. 153. Regarding the manufacture of stained glass, he warns: 'ed a questo cuocere bisogna usare grandissima diligenza, perchè il troppo fuoco violento li farebbe crepare, ed il poco non li cocerebbe': Vasari and Milanesi, *Le vite*, vol. 1, Florence, 1906, p. 207.

¹¹ The *Massacre* is one of seven scenes from the Life of the Virgin on the west wall of the chapel: in addition to the *Massacre*, we see the *Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple*, the *Birth of the Virgin*, the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, the *Marriage of the Virgin*, the *Adoration of the Magi*, and the *Death and Assumption of the Virgin*. The inclusion of both the *Massacre* and the *Adoration of the Magi* constituted a departure from the original contract between the patron, Giovanni Tornabuoni, and Domenico (and Davide) Ghirlandaio: Simons, 'Portraiture and Patronage', pp. 320–321. In place of those two scenes, both more typically considered to be episodes in the Infancy narrative, there would have been the *Annunciation*, the *Purification of the Virgin*, and *Christ in the Temple*; the *Annunciation* and the *Purification* appear in the finished chapel as stained glass windows, whereas the *Christ in the Temple* was eliminated. The addition of the *Massacre of the Innocents* has been associated with the birth of Giovanni Tornabuoni's grandson and the death of his wife Francesca. See Simons, 'Portraiture and Patronage', pp. 129, 321, 322; Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, p. 240.

¹² The panel, which likely formed part of the predella of an altarpiece originally in Massa Marittima, is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

¹³ I am aware of only one fifteenth-century Italian painting with a similar fragmentation of infant bodies: the Lombard painter Bernardino Butinone's *Massacre of the Innocents* (Detroit Institute of Arts), dated to the same years as the Ghirlandaio fresco. It seems unlikely that Ghirlandaio

- would have seen the Butinone, which, though undocumented, is thought to be from Milan: A. M. Ferrari: 'Butinone, Bernardino', *Grove Art Online/Oxford Art Online* (accessed 31 January 2014).
- ¹⁴ On Matteo's *Sant'Agostino Massacre*, see, most recently, D. Sallay, 'La Strage degli Innocenti di Sant'Agostino', in *Matteo di Giovanni: cronaca di una strage dipinta*, ed. by C. Alessi and A. Bagnoli, Asciano, 2006, pp. 157–163. To my knowledge, there is no evidence that Ghirlandaio saw the *Sant'Agostino Massacre*, but the proximity of Siena makes it possible, perhaps even probable; he might also have received knowledge of Matteo's innovative approach to the subject from others.
- ¹⁵ In Matteo's other versions of the scene, including one painted after the *Sant'Agostino Massacre*, all of the infant bodies are intact. The later version, painted for the Sienese church of Santa Maria dei Servi in 1491, remains in situ. An earlier altarpiece, likely made between 1478 and 1480 for the church of Santa Caterina a Formello in Naples, is now in the Museo di Capodimonte. On the *Servi Massacre*, see, most recently, A. Pezzo, 'La Strage degli Innocenti dei Servi', in *Matteo di Giovanni*, ed. by Alessi and Bagnoli, pp. 164–170. On the Neapolitan painting, see I. di Majo, 'Qualche considerazione su un dipinto napoletano di Matteo di Giovanni: la Strage degli Innocenti di Santa Caterina a Formello', in *Matteo di Giovanni*, ed. by Alessi and Bagnoli, pp. 130–145.
- ¹⁶ On Ghirlandaio's technique, see Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, p. 241.
- ¹⁷ The altar in *Sant'Agostino*, which was established by Donna Andreoccia di Bandino di ser Luca in 1463, was originally dedicated to St Francis of Assisi. In 1482, when Matteo's painting was installed, the altar was rededicated to the Holy Innocents (either in place of or in addition to Francis): P. Riedl and M. Seidel, *Die Kirchen von Siena*, vol. 1, part 1, Munich, 1985, p. 222. See also Sallay, 'La Strage', pp. 161–162.
- ¹⁸ The interest in the subject in late fifteenth-century Siena has been the source of longstanding scholarly debate. Paul Schubring and Gustav Hartlaub saw Matteo's altarpieces (and the Siena cathedral marble pavement, of contested authorship) as a response to the horrors of the Otranto massacre of 1480: P. Schubring, 'Das Blutbad von Otranto in der Malerei des Quattrocento', *Monatshefte für Kunsthissenschaft*, I, no. 7/8, 1908, pp. 593–601, and G. F. Hartlaub, *Matteo da Siena und seine Zeit*, Strassburg, 1910. John Pope-Hennessy found 'no true parallel between the two events', Pope-Hennessy, 'A Shocking Scene', p. 152. See also H. Silberger, 'The Iconology of the Innocents in Late Quattrocento Sienese Art', PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1999, pp. 319–344; F. Cardini, 'Una crociata per gli Innocenti', in *Matteo di Giovanni*, ed. by Alessi and Bagnoli, pp. 64–93.
- ¹⁹ The church of *Sant'Agostino* possessed a foot of a Holy Innocent and the church of Santa Maria dei Servi boasted a hand. An inventory of the relics of *Sant'Agostino* conducted in September 1491 recorded 'uno tabernaculo di rame con lo pié deli Innocenti': Riedl and Seidel, *Die Kirchen*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 239. On the *Sant'Agostino* relic, see also Silberger, 'The Iconology of the Innocents', pp. 194–197. On the *Servi* relic, see Pope-Hennessy, 'A Shocking Scene', p. 157, n. 23; Silberger, 'The Iconology of the Innocents', p. 194.
- ²⁰ On 'pars pro toto' in the context of reliquary devotion, see, among others, H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: a History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. by E. Jephcott, Chicago, 1994, p. 299 and S. Montgomery, *St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne: Relics, Reliquaries and the Visual Culture of Group Sanctity in Late Medieval Europe*, Oxford and New York, 2010, esp. pp. 59–60. On relic altarpieces, see *ibidem*, p. 60.
- ²¹ On body-part reliquaries, see B. D. Boehm, 'Body-Part Reliquaries: The State of Research', *Gesta*, 36, no. 1, 1997, pp. 8–19 and, most recently, C. Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400 – circa 1204*, University Park, PA, 2012, esp. pp. 117–143.
- ²² See S. Cornelison, 'Art Imitates Architecture: The Saint Philip Reliquary in Renaissance Florence', *Art Bulletin*, 86, no. 4, 2004, pp. 642–658.
- ²³ On the meanings of the materials used for reliquaries (especially gold and gemstones), see Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, pp. 38–44, 93.
- ²⁴ B. D. Boehm, 'Relics and Reliquaries in Medieval Christianity', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd_relc_hd_relc.htm> (accessed 5 January 2012).
- ²⁵ M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed., Oxford and New York, 1988, p. 36.
- ²⁶ The Holy Innocents are sometimes classed as saints, while at other times they are referred to as *beati*. On their controversial status, see P. Hayward, 'Suffering and Innocence in Latin Sermons for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, c. 400–800', in *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. by D. Wood, Oxford, 1994, pp. 67–80.
- ²⁷ Santa Maria Maggiore is documented as the meeting place of the Compagnia del Nocentino from 1388 until 1415: Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Capitoli delle Compagnie Religiose Soppresse, 719, fol. 3^r: 'Questa compagnia ebbe persino fondamento e per suo titolo e pretiosissimi sancti martiri Innocenti nostri padroni da primo suo principio corrette gli anni in della incarnatione del nostro signore gesu cristo M CCC L XXXVIII adi primo di magio'. After moving to Santa Maria Novella, the confraternity met in the Popoleschi Chapel until 1467, when it relocated to the Ubriachi Chapel in the Chiostro Grande: ASF, Capitoli delle Compagnie Religiose Soppresse, 719, fols. 3^r–3^v: '[...] tornamo in sancta maria novella nella cappella de popoleschi sotto le volte di decta chiesa. [...] et dipoi ci partimo adi XXIIII di gennaio M CCCCLXVI et andamo ad habitare dove al presente siamo cioè nel capitolo del chiostro maggiore di detta chiesa'. Though she did not explore the issues I address here, Simons suggested the possibility of a link between the addition of the *Massacre* to the *cappella maggiore* and the Compagnia del Nocentino: Simons, 'Portraiture and Patronage', p. 321. On the confraternity, see R. Trexler, 'The Magi Enter Florence: The Ubriachi of Florence and Venice', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, ed. by J. A. S. Evans, Vancouver, 1978, p. 153 and A. Padoa Rizzo, 'Cosimo Rosselli e la tavola per la Compagnia dei SS. Innocenti', *Antichità viva*, 30, no. 6, 1991, pp. 12–16. On the Ubriachi Chapel, see also R. Lunardi, *Arte e storia in Santa Maria Novella*, Florence, 1984, pp. 96–99.
- ²⁸ ASF, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 1270 (Compagnia delli Innocenti), n.p.: 'Al nome di dio ad XXIIII di marzo anno MCCCCXVIII [...] della chompagnia de gloriosi martiri inocenti siamo rimasi dachordo chol venerabile e discreto huomo Maestro lionardo stagi al presente signiore e gionerale delordine del san domenicho dun adornamento di un membro dun santo Inocente'.
- ²⁹ ASF, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 1270 (Compagnia delli Innocenti), n.p.: 'In prima che la detta chompagnia sia tenuta dadornare la detta reliquia a tutte loro ipse in quel modo che parra e piacerà aloro'.

³⁰ ASF, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 1270 (Compagnia delli Innocenti), n.p.: 'Anchora che nel fornimento della detta reliquia debbe stare el sengnio della detta chompagnia...sene possa chavare nie altra sengnio mettervi'.

³¹ The contract does not specify whether the presence of the relic at Santa Maria Novella predated the relocation of the confraternity or if the *confratelli* brought it with them from Santa Maria Maggiore. Further, if the company was ever obliged to leave the convent, the friars were required 'to return the said furnishing' or to restitute to the *confratelli* its monetary equivalent. See ASF, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 1270 (Compagnia delli Innocenti), n.p.: 'in quel chaso sia tenuto el chonvento di santa maria novella rendere el detto fornimento o veramente questo che fusse chostato alla detta chompagnia e chapitani della detta chompagnia lo possano adomandare In Nome della chompagnia'. This shared custody agreement seems to have still been in effect when the confraternity was suppressed in 1784, as an inventory taken at the time records 'a reliquary within which [is held] the relic of the Holy Innocents, which exists in the hands of the *padri* of S. Maria Novella'. See ASF, Patrimonio Ecclesiastico, 44, n. 74, n.p.: 'un reliquario entrovi la reliquia dei SS.ti Innocenti, che esiste nelle mani dei Padri di S. Maria Novella'. I have been unable to locate any evidence to suggest that the relic (or reliquary) survived the Napoleonic period. In his nineteenth-century updating of the compendia of holy celebrations published by Giamboni (1700) and Francesconi (1739), Luigi Santoni makes no mention of celebrations at Santa Maria Novella for the feast of the Holy Innocents, noting only the 'festa titolare solenne nella Chiesa degl'Innocenti': L. Santoni, *Diaro sacro delle feste principali che si celebrano nelle chiese di Firenze*, Florence, 1850, p. 60. This shift likely accompanied the suppression of the Compagnia del Nocentino in 1784.

³² The relic was to 'remain under the care of the friars of Santa Maria Novella', who were in turn 'obliged and must give and show the said relic to the captains of the said company'. See ASF, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 1270 (Compagnia delli Innocenti), n.p.: '[...] la detta reliquia debba stare alla guardia de frati di santa maria novella si veramente che detti frati sieno tenuti e debba dare e mostrare la detta reliquia achapitani della detta chompagnia'. In particular, the friars were to release the relic to the captains on 'the day of the Feast of the Innocents and at every entrance of the captains and when they go in procession with [the relic]'. See ASF, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 1270 (Compagnia delli Innocenti), n.p.: 'In questo modo cioè il Di della festa degli Inocenti e a ongni entrata de chapitani e quando andasse a processione chon questo che la detta reliquia'.

³³ In 1586, Modesto Biliotti noted that Fra Tommaso da Rieti, prior of Santa Maria Novella in the Savonarolan era, received 'a foot [of a Holy Innocent] with shinbone attached' as a gift in Venice; Tommaso brought the relic to Santa Maria Novella, leading Biliotti to speculate, mistakenly, that this event, rather than the earlier relocation of the Compagnia del Nocentino, initiated the special veneration of the Holy Innocents at the church: M. Biliotti, *Chronica pulcherrimae aedis magnique coenobii S. Mariae cogomento Novellae florentinae civitatis*, Florence: Analecta Sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1586, pp. 183–184. Later sources tend to confuse or conflate the relic of the Compagnia del Nocentino with the one bequeathed, if Biliotti is to be believed, by Tommaso da Rieti. Ludovico Antonio Giamboni, in his *Diaro sacro* of 1700, wrote that 'the major part of the body' of a Holy Innocent was in the possession of the church of Santa Maria Novella. See L. A. Giamboni, *Diaro sacro*

e guida perpetua per visitare le Chiese della Citta di Firenze, Florence, 1700, p. 285: 'dove stà esposta la maggior parte del Corpo d'uno di detti Santi Bambini'. Giamboni specifies that this relic is the same as that borne in procession by the brothers of the Compagnia del Nocentino on the Feast of the Holy Innocents: '[they] go in procession with the aforementioned relic of part of the body of one of the saints'. See Giamboni, *Diaro sacro*, p. 285: 'vi fanno la processione con la detta Reliquia di parte del Corpo di uno di detti Santi'. In his eighteenth-century account of the relics held in the church sacristy, Giuseppe Richa instead noted what seems to have been a smaller relic, describing it as a 'little foot with shin of one of the Holy Innocents'. See Richa, *Notizie istoriche*, vol. III, p. 46: 'un piedino con instinco di uno de' SS. Innocenti'. A few decades later, Vincenzio Fineschi similarly identified 'a thigh of one of the Holy Innocents' among the relics held in the sacristy: V. Fineschi, *Il forestiero istruito S. Maria Novella di Firenze*, Florence, 1790, p. 35: 'una coscia di uno de' SS. Innocenti'.

³⁴ The Ospedale degli Innocenti possessed at least one relic of a Holy Innocent, given to the hospital church by Archbishop Antoninus on the occasion of its dedication in 1451: Archivio dell'Ospedale degli Innocenti (hereafter AOIF), Serie V, 1, fols 52^v–54^v. The feast of the Holy Innocents was observed at the hospital, although the scattered documentary evidence does not make the scale of the celebration clear. An agreement, dated August 31, 1485, between the Company of San Lorenzo, a confraternity that rented a space underneath the Innocenti hospital church as a meeting area, and hospital prior Francesco Tesori stipulated that members of the confraternity make an offering 'alla nostra chiesa il die del Innocenti': AOIF, Serie XIII, 8 (Giornale), fol. 51^v. On 29 December 1488 Antonio di Antino de Rosso, *pollaio uolo*, was paid for game birds 'per la festa degli innocenti': AOIF, Serie XIII, 8 (Giornale), fol. 385^v. By the year 1700, the hospital church was the site of the principal feast of the child martyrs in Florence: Giamboni, *Diaro sacro*, p. 285.

³⁵ Beyond the confraternity, scattered evidence suggests that the citywide celebration of the feast of the Innocents took place at Santa Maria Novella from the early fifteenth century onward. For example, in his *Diaro*, Bartolomeo di Michele del Corazza described the celebration of the feast of the Innocents held at the church on 28 December 1419: 'A' di 28 di detto, el delli Nocenti, detta la Messa usata nella sala, disseno la Messa delli morti per l'anima di detto Baldassar Coscia', G. O. Corazzini, 'Diaro Fiorentino di Bartolomeo di Michele del Corazza. Anni 1405–1438', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, XIV, 1894, p. 265.

³⁶ The earliest recorded version of this trope about the value of relics comes from the account of St Polycarp's martyrdom: G. Wainwright and K. W. Tucker, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Oxford and New York, 2006, p. 66.

³⁷ While the *Massacre* would have been visible to viewers on the nave side of the *ponte*, or rood screen, at such a distance it would be difficult to distinguish the pieces of the Holy Innocents in the foreground. As such, the mode of beholding I chart here applies most to those able to view the fresco at closer range. While the issue of access to the *cappella maggiore* is still being debated, we can assume that such viewers would include the Dominican friars, members of the Tornabuoni family and their guests, and visitors to the other chapels in the transept. On the *ponte* of Santa Maria Novella, see M. Hall, 'The Ponte in S. Maria Novella: The Problem of the Rood Screen in Italy', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37, 1974, pp. 157–173. On the permeability of rood screens in Northern Europe, see J. Jung, 'Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches', *Art Bulletin*, 82, no. 4, 2000, pp. 622–657.

- ³⁸ For Baxandall's discussion of 'cognitive style', which he defines as 'habits of inference and analogy', see Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, p. 30.
- ³⁹ In contrast, many of the other frescoes in the high chapel offer the viewer clear pathways *through* the space, often via wide openings in the architecture or the landscape that lead to distant vistas.
- ⁴⁰ See, among others, C. De Tolnay, 'Renaissance d'une fresque', *L'Oeil*, 1958, pp. 37–41; U. Schlegel, 'Observations on Masaccio's Trinity Fresco in Santa Maria Novella', *Art Bulletin*, 45, no. 1, 1963, pp. 19–33.
- ⁴¹ Simons noted their 'faceless' status: Simons, 'Portraiture and Patronage', p. 322.
- ⁴² The literature on the role of theater in the devotional life of Renaissance Italians is vast. For a corpus of *sacre rappresentazioni*, see A. d'Ancona, *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV e XVI*, 3 vols, Florence, 1872. More recently, see the research of Nerida Newbiggin, e.g. N. Newbiggin, 'The Word Made Flesh: The *Rappresentazioni* of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-Century Florence', in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. by T. Verdon and J. Henderson, Syracuse, NY, 1990, pp. 361–375.
- ⁴³ A possible connection between Matteo's *Massacres* and *sacre rappresentazioni* has been suggested by, among others, Hartlaub, *Matteo da Siena*, pp. 96–97, and Pope-Hennessy, 'A Shocking Scene', pp. 156–157. For *sacre rappresentazioni* involving the Holy Innocents in Siena, see also Silberger, 'The Iconology of the Innocents', pp. 197–214. In Florence, viewers would have been accustomed to seeing the *Massacre of the Innocents* staged – with faux infants – as part of the popular *Festa de' Magi*. On the *Festa de' Magi*, see R. Hatfield, 'The Compagnia de' Magi', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 33, 1970, pp. 107–161; Jacobus, 'Massacre and Motherhood', p. 50.
- ⁴⁴ The youthful observers in Matteo's *Massacres* have not been conclusively identified.
- ⁴⁵ M. Loh, 'Introduction: Early Modern Horror', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34, no. 3, 2011, pp. 326–327. The binary to which Loh refers was established by Michael Fried; see, in particular, M. Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Chicago, 1988.
- ⁴⁶ Loh similarly calls for a 'history of the immediate shock of endogenous, time-bound experiences as well as the lingering affect triggered by the spectator's immersive confrontation with the image': Loh, 'Introduction: Early Modern Horror', p. 326.
- ⁴⁷ On representations, in a variety of media, of the severed head of John the Baptist, see, most recently, B. Baert, *Caput Joannis in disco (1200–1500): Essay on the History of a Man's Head*, Leiden, 2012. On the related subject of Herodias with the head of the Baptist, see B. Wilson, 'The Appeal of Horror: Francesco Cairo's *Herodias and the Head of John the Baptist*', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34, no. 3, 2011, pp. 355–372. On the subject of decollation, see also R. Janes, *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture*, New York, 2005; J. Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, trans. by J. Gladding, New York, 2011.
- ⁴⁸ The Innocenti *Adoration of the Magi* was painted at the same time as the high chapel of Santa Maria Novella, and by the same workshop (that of Ghirlandaio). On the painting, see Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, pp. 259–261.
- ⁴⁹ See D. B. Presciutti, *Visual Cultures of Foundling Care in Renaissance Italy*, Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT, 2015, pp. 151–186.
- ⁵⁰ Vasari and Milanesi, *Le vite*, vol. 3, Florence, 1878, p. 265: 'Sonvi espressi molti altri affetti, che chi li guarda conoscerà senza dubbio questo maestro esser stato in quel tempo eccellente'.

