RENAISSANCE RESEARCH TODAY : FORMS AND STYLES

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Just fifty years ago, a group of distinguished American and European scholars assembled at the Metropolitan Museum in New York to discuss the problem of the Renaissance. Several members of the group are still live presences in Renaissance scholarship – notably Wallace Ferguson, Roberto Lopez and Erwin Panofsky. In their elegant essays, they confronted questions of interpretation, most of them still clearly inspired by the great book of Jacob Burckhardt and the criticisms to which it had been subjected in recent decades by medievalists. Did the Renaissance represent a coherent expansion of human consciousness on all fronts ? Roberto Lopez held that it did not : the great expansion of the European economy, he pointed out, had actually taken place during the Middle Ages. In fact, a period of sustained economic depression and political collapse, ushered in by the Black Death and accompanied by doomed peasant revolts and popular risings in the cities, provided the stage on which the cultural drama of the Renaissance was acted. Perhaps, he suggested, the high investment in architecture and art that the Renaissance witnessed resulted not from prosperity but from the reverse : as Europe's Asian trade routes were cut off, its population fell, and the traditionally leading sector of cloth manufacture contracted, European entrepreneurs invested in culture[1].

More startlingly, George Sarton thought that the Renaissance did represent a coherent transformation of thought and culture. Medievalists had once argued that medieval natural philosophers at Paris and Oxford, less bound by tradition than the humanists, were the real creators of a new science. In the past, Sarton had shown sympathy for these views. Now, however, he recognized the innovations that came with the revival of the classics of Hellenistic and Imperial astronomy, mathematics and medicine, the rise of a new technology, and the challenge Copernicus and others posed to traditional intellectual authorities[2].

Erwin Panofsky even found a way to update Burckhardt with characteristic subtlety and learning. The Renaissance, he argued, did not represent the formation of a new kind of human being, as Burckhardt suggested. Rather, it consisted in large part of the rise of new forms of work that were simultaneously intellectual and practical. Renaisssance artists, for example, combined bookish and technical interests that had been kept apart in the Middle Ages, and to revolutionary effect : they transformed both art and silence. Lopez's reconfiguration of Renaissance economics, Sarton's reconstruction of Renaissance science and Panofsky's microsociology of Renaissance man, though often challenged and revised by recent scholarship, remain fascinating and productive. The range of questions debated was wide, and the quality of the discussion dedicated to them strikingly high[3].

Yet no one – in that symposium or in the other excellent ones that celebrated the centenary of Burckhardt's book, ten years later – anticipated the questions posed by this session[4]. It was characteristic of the fifties to pose historical questions as debates about large theses and their heuristic value. It is equally characteristic of our millennial time to pose them as questions about evidence, method, modalities of publication, and problems of finance. We take less interest in the broad-gauged debates that once defined the goals of historical knowledge than in finer, narrowly focused questions about the production of knowledge itself. It is not easy to identify the forces in our larger culture or the smaller world of scholarship that have produced this tendency : but it is evident everywhere. And it does have one fortunate connection with the period itself. The scholars of Renaissance Europe constantly posed the question of how intellectual work is done. They were, as Paul Grendler has shown in classic books, deeply engaged in the question of how to create schools, and even university faculties, that would produce a certain type of young man, equipped with particular skills[5]. They analyzed the act of reading, as Ann Blair has taught us, and composed formal methods for textual analysis, as practiced respectively by theologians, jurists, and readers of history[6]. They tried to construct tools, which Frank Lestringant has reconstructed in detail, for the difficult task of describing foreign societies and cultures[7]. And, as Professor Nova makes clear in his essay, they also attempted to construct – for the first time in western history – written manifestos on how to create visual images and sculptures (and, of course, wrote voluminous tomes on the decoding of visual symbols of every kind, from Egyptian hieroglyphs to emblems)[8]. In asking questions of method, in other words, we raise problems that our subjects themselves would have found full of meaning.

If a Renaissance methodologist – a Jean Bodin or a Theodor Zwinger – could come back to life, and survey our field – if he could have attended the session at FISIER that produced the papers to which this essay represents a response – what observations might he make as he compiled a *Methodus ad facilem litterarum renascentium cognitionem* ? I suspect he would start, as humanists often did, by raising two basic questions : asking what sources were available and what sort of training prepares scholars to interpret them. And here, as M. Lestringant has explained in more detail, the results he would obtain would be paradoxical in the extreme. The condition of the Renaissance scholar seeking material to work on nowadays is basically that of Midas, after his curse made him transform everything he touched into gold. Three factors come into play. In the first place, the cataloguing of materials available in European and non-European libraries has undergone a transformation that would have been unimaginable, not just a half-century ago, when Panofsky and Lopez used their hard-won tacit knowledge of particular archives, libraries and texts to forge their theses, but even in the 1980s.

The revolution began – as intellectual revolutions so often do – in the mind of a single scholar, Paul Oskar Kristeller. His massive inventory of uncatalogued and poorly catalogued humanistic manuscripts, the *Iter Italicum*,

revolutionized the entire field, not at a single blow but after decades of unremitting effort. Suddenly, any student could walk into any major collection and have access, both to a neatly printed and well indexed finding list of manuscripts not fully described in the library's own catalogues, and to a vast range of information about the handwritten, partial, often uncatalogued finding aids that European librarians like to conceal from unskilled foreign visitors. Any reader of Kristeller's who enters the Bodleian Library in search of printed books annotated by scholars of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, for example, will now learn at once that a partial catalogue of these – in the form of an ancient blankbook with handwritten slips pasted into it – gives basic guidance to these treasures. Not since the decades around 1700, perhaps, when Mabillon and Montfaucon transformed the study of documents and manuscripts with their massive masterpieces, *De re diplomatica* and *Palaeographia graeca*, has a single feat of technical scholarship so revolutionized the conditions of research. Other enterprises connected with or inspired by *Iter* – like the *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum* organized by F. Edward Cranz, in association with Kristeller, and now continued by Virginia Brown – have continued this process. The work of illumination begun by one German exile – admittedly a giant of cosmopolitan scholarship – has lit the dark recesses of libraries around the world, granting access to lost treasures.

This individual enterprise was accompanied, moreover, by dozens of others, usually rather different in form – above all by the rise of data banks compiled by collective effort over generations, and now suddenly transformed by the presence of the computer. Collective bibliographical enterprises like the *ISTC*, or international short-title catalogue of incunabula, have made vast realms of primary documentation available. Catalogues like these – as well as the catalogues of the great European and North American libraries – are now routinely accessible over the World Wide Web or on CD-ROMs, and vast collective enterprises like the Karlsruhe virtual catalogue and WorldCat collate and assemble information from them. Anywhere in the world, a Renaissance scholar now has only to turn on a computer to be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of bibliographical information, very little of which existed in printed form half a century ago. Ten years ago, anyone working on incunabula at the Vatican Library had to rely on a battered copy of Hain's early 19th-century *Repertorium*, in which shelf-marks had been entered by hand. Now, Vatican readers can not only find local incunabula immediately, but also compare the imprints available in all Roman libraries, immediately, with listings from around the world of some 28,000 known incunabula.

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In the second place, as Ann Blair, Frank Lestringant and Alessandro Nova all point out in their essays, old and new techniques of reproduction have transformed the conditions of accessibility for much of this material. Critical editions multiply : the Amsterdam and Toronto editions of Erasmus have been joined by – to cite only a few current examples – two collaborative projects for complete editions of the works of Alberti, two more for complete editions of the works of Bruno, a vast Oxford edition of the works and correspondence of Francis Bacon, even complete microfilm reproductions of entire libraries of annotated books – like that of the mathematician and astrologer John Dee. These projects run the gamut, from the most revolutionary texts produced in the Renaissance – like Bruno's attacks on *asinità* and Christianity – to the most extravagantly erudite – like the collaborative, multi-volume edition of the *Cornucopiae* of Niccolo Perotti – an encyclopedia in the form of a commentary of one book of Martial, which has been edited with admirable skill and learning by scholars from Italy, France and Copenhagen[9]. Les Belles Lettres in Paris long ago began to make neo-Latin texts available, both in the form of critical editions with an elaborate apparatus, like that of Guillaume Budé carried out by Marie-Madeleine de la Garanderie, and in the elegantly printed translations supervised by Pierre Laurens ; now James Hankins has initiated a similar project at the Harvard University Press, the magnificent I Tatti Renaissance Library of Neo-Latin texts with excellent English translations and introductions. The classics of English, Italian and French literature continue to pour from the presses in new editions : a single series, the luxurious Italian series « cento libri per mille anni », includes erudite, commented collections of works by Petrarch, Boccaccio, Alberti, Boiardo, Pulci, Ariosto, Berni, Burchiello, Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Folengo, Aretino, Tasso, Bruno, Campanella and Galileo – each of them a thousand pages in large quarto format. Frank Lestringant shows that the editing of French Renaissance texts has entered a similarly lively phase – even if the criteria by which editions have been selected for editing are not always clear.

The great literary historian Carlo Dionisotti – who spent decades reading the Italian and Latin holdings of the British Library – used regularly to complain that too many editions were being produced, especially of texts that were not published in the Renaissance. He argued that one should concentrate on the books actually printed in the period, which, he thought, reflected the matters of central interest at the time. For most of Dionisotti's career, this path was difficult to follow – unless, like him, one worked near one of the five or six great repositories of early books. Nowadays, however, we live in a new bibliographical world. To look for a moment from the parochial standpoint of the North American scholar : at any university library and in any university office in the United States or Canada, one can now read on screen or download and print thousands of early printed books fully reproduced and made accessible through such data bases as the Early English Texts on Line and Gallica, a remarkable project of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Manuscript collections will certainly follow – though questions remain about rights to intellectual property, which the World Wide Web seems to subvert. As Professor Nova shows, images have undergone the same metamorphosis. On line data bases have made thousands of works of art from the Renaissance immediately accessible on screen.

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These developments exact a price : reading texts and images on screen or printed out in our offices will never provide the sensual pleasures of working with originals – surely a part of what enticed many of those here to enter this field in the first place. The microfilm revolution gave us access to thousands of books – 90 % of the books printed

in England through the 18th century have been available in microfilm for a generation. But it did so in the muted, subfusc form of images swimming, slightly blurred, on a screen. The computer revolution gives us access to texts and images in full color – but colors, often, transformed by a series of Ovidian metamorphoses in their passage from painting to photograph to book to scanned image to electronic reconstitution of the latter. Students, as well as scholars, can now work on screen with documents and images – but the quality of these is, to say the least, highly varied. Still, the results are clear : anyone working on the literature of the Renaissance who has a fast internet connection can now also gain access to a range of texts that would have been available, 50 years ago, only in segments, and even those only in Paris, London, Oxford, Rome or Wolfenbüttel. Bodin – who claimed that « printing on its own can rightly be compared to all the discoveries of the ancients » – would have been the first to appreciate this transformation, and would no doubt have discussed it in his imaginary *Methodus* for Renaissance studies.

In the third place, as all of our authors recognize, research in many fields of cultural history has entered a new phase of intense specialization. When Eugenio Garin renewed the study of renaissance education in the 1940s and 50s, for example, he published an astonishing range of texts. Almost all of them were written by humanists of recognized importance and dealt with the theory, rather than the practice, of classroom teaching. At the end of the century, students of the same field have leapt down smaller and smaller rabbit holes – and had wonderful experiences p. 62
in doing so. We now have editions, for example – excellent critical editions – of virtually all of the notes that survive from the famous lectures on classical authors that Angelo Poliziano held at Florence in the 1480s and 90s. These notes include both materials Poliziano himself assembled for his classes, like the notes on Persius magisterially edited by Lucia Cesarini Martinelli and those on Ovid's Fasti, edited by Francesco lo Monaco, and transcripts made by students, like the notes on Poliziano's course on Suetonius edited by Vincenzo Fera[10]. That mysterious, lost process by which information was actually transmitted from teacher to student – the process which earlier historians could evoke, but not reconstruct – has become, suddenly, accessible. A similar process has affected the study of the history of classical scholarship. Fifty years ago, most of those interested in the development of philology studied what the most famous renaissance humanists said about editing texts. Now we have detailed analyses and editions, not only of the work of great men like Poliziano, Erasmus, and Justus Lipsius, but also of lesser figures like Niccolo Perotti and Beatus Rhenanus[11].

Ann Blair's essay shows that the history of science has undergone a similar process of differentiation. Fifty years ago, Sarton could tell a relatively simple story of rapid advance on all fronts, from technology to the larger challenge to intellectual authority. Now we know that this neat, teleological story has only its elegance to recommend it. Plato and the Neoplatonists did provide – as historians of philosophy had long argued – an alternative to Aristotelianism. But Aristotelianism itself – as the late Charles Schmitt, whose erudite and innovative work was cited by both Grendler and Blair, showed in detail – not only survived, but flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries[12]. The Renaissance in fact produced more Aristotelian literature than the Middle Ages had. The new methods of the humanists yielded editions – eventually, critical editions in Greek and precise, up-to-date translations in Latin – of the Aristotelian corpus, as well as the vast mass of Aristotelian commentators. And Aristotelian philosophers proved capable both of innovating within Aristotle's system – as the scholastics had done in their own way – and of combining it with materials from ancient systems that had been largely unknown in the Middle Ages, like skepticism and Stoicism. Texts like the enormous Coimbra commentaries, which are now being studied by historians of philosophy like Christia Mercer and Denis Du Chene, have turned out to reflect not the mindless opposition to modernity that Galileo flagellated in his remarks on and parodies of contemporary Aristotelians, but an immense, glacial sorting of accounts. p. 63
Charles Schmitt showed that Renaissance scholars devised many different Aristotelianisms, from the radical naturalism of Paduans like Pietro Pomponazzi to the Jesuits'Christian version. Yet the period also saw the rise of other schools of thought whose work seems even farther from Renaissance ideals – like that of the pious philosophers, like Lambert Daneau, who tried, throughout the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to create systems of nature on the sole basis of Scripture. At the same time, it saw the proliferation of new sites for the study of nature – like the naturalist's museum, the courtly *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*, and the shops of ambitious artisans like Palissy. No wonder that no one has recently tried to produce a synthetic treatment of Renaissance science : it seems possible, in fact, that no one could.

If Bodin could come back to life and survey this scene, he would no doubt be vividly reminded of the information revolution of the sixteenth century, which he experienced – and which left such clear marks on the structure and content of his encyclopedic works on history, politics and nature. I suspect that he would sigh quietly, sit down, and begin to draw up the bibliographies that were another of his intellectual specialties, as he did in the tenth chapter of his *Methodus ad facilem historiae cognitionem*. Yet another aspect of the scene would also have attracted his education – and appealed to that pessimism which characterized his temperament, even though he struggled to combat it. Educational systems are in transformation around the Western World, and the changes now in course have troubling implications for studies in all fields of Renaissance studies. After World War II – to go no farther back – education in the West provided, in many complementary ways, a natural initiation to Renaissance studies. Elite schools – the liceo classico, the lycée, the Gymnasium, even the better American high schools – urged or required students selected for their aptitude for higher studies to master Greek, Latin and at least some modern languages. They also prepared students for literary scholarship, marching them through at least an abbreviated version of their own and others'literary histories and training them to produce appreciations of major texts. Even at a good American public high school, a student marked for higher education in the humanities and social sciences was likely to spend

four or five years learning Latin and as many learning French – which required the production of *explications du texte* in the classical style. At private high schools – especially the fine seminaries run by many Catholic dioceses – standards were higher, and students also studied formal philosophy and theology. In Western Europe, where university intake was far lower, standards remained much higher. Through the first postwar decades, European professors found dozens of disciples who could be schooled rapidly in philological techniques, and provided Americans with an ideal that they could at least try to live up to.

Since the deluge came in the 1960s, conditions have mutated. If Bodin or Zwinger could survey secondary education in Europe and North America now, he would note that conditions have become shocking – and shockingly similar. Professors Blair and Lestringant – scholars of very different intellectual styles and practitioners of very p. 64
different disciplines – pointed out a shared difficulty. University admission has grown, explosively. Secondary schools now prepare not 4 %, as in the 1960s, but 20 to 50 % of the population for some form of university study. Few of them, accordingly, even in Europe, can offer the sort of elite formation once available in any French, German or Italian city, or any prosperous American town. Students now arrive at university – whether in France or in America – with little experience ot formal training in the sorts of textual analysis on which literary and historical training depend. This story has been well told a number of time – most recently by Francoise Waquet, in her *Le latin, ou l'empire d'un signe*. Here Dr Waquet argues that the decline of Latin has reached such proportions as to break the secular connection between modern Europe and the past. « It really is all over, what the Goncourts coarsely called `going to bed with Latin books,' the fruitful commerce that Western civilization maintained with the classical tongue for centuries. Latin no longer says anything, or hides anything. »[13]

At this point, I think, a time traveler from the sixteenth century – when humanistic schools popped up like mushrooms across Europe, thanks to city magistrates, reforming monarchs, and religious orders – might rub his eyes, paralyzed by disbelief. On the one hand, we witness an explosion in the information available ; on the other, a radical degradation of the tools needed to process it. This situation – which Lestringant rightly describes as paradoxical – is also clearly unstable. Students who lack the foundations that their predecessors of a generation ago could build on will find it depressingly hard to devise structures to contain more information far richer than that accessible to their teachers.

In a larger sense, as well, this situation seems critical to the health of our studies. Paul Grendler cogently explained that the educational system has a powerful impact on the subjects pursued within it. The tremendous expansion of interest in Renaissance humanism and education after World War II reflected a world in which the war and its aftermath had given humanistic subjects a new urgency and the expansion of universities made them seem an attractive, even dramatic subject for study. A similar process had occurred in the later decades of the nineteenth century, when efforts to reform secondary schools and universities not only excited widespread political and cultural debate, but inspired the creation of such remarkable, still classic works as Friedrich Paulsen's history of German education and Remigio Sabbadini's studies of the teaching of Guarino of Verona. The vast expansion of history of literature and history of science in the same period had, presumably similar roots. The latter field, in particular, clearly responded to the explosive growth of university-based laboratories and the dramatic discoveries they announced. It seems hard to imagine that the downsizing universities and homogenized secondary schools of the present – or the privatized laboratories which have grown up so widely in the west – will inspire similar bursts of scholarly energy.

Bodin – and other contemporaries like Loys LeRoy – would have known exactly what to make of this situation. They p. 65
believed that the progress of knowledge and civilization is always interrupted, periodically, by periods of stasis and decline – often, in their view, brought about by barbarian invasions, of the sort that had destroyed the Roman empire and severed medieval Europe from Asia. Sometimes we too are tempted to see our situation in the same way, to envisage the students who come to us knowing no language but their own and unskilled in reading texts as a kind of barbarian invasion. Professor Lestringant even invoked the blond hair of unprepared students, and Americans – the architecture of whose campuses is always described, curiously, as Gothic – may feel tempted to think that their Gothic buildings are inhabited by real Goths. Yet counsels of despair – however justified – will not enable us to deal with the situation in a creative way. Somehow, we must find ways of winning students to our studies and encouraging them to master the skills they lack – even in the face of discouragement from the official bodies responsible for our institutional lives. Bodin – who firmly disapproved of all forms of legal education available in his time – responded to the problem by devising a reform program, which proved very influential. We must do the same now.

The imaginary time traveler would, of course, raise other questions as well. Bodin and Zwinger both believed that the essential step in any form of inquiry lay in posing the right questions : in formulating, as they would have said, the loci or headings under which a reader should classify what he found in his texts, or a traveler what he saw in the streets, piazzas and castle of a new city. And here, it seems to me, they would have had much of interest to note about the condition of our studies. As polyhistors – men of universal erudition – they found it natural to bring disciplines together and crossbreed them. Bodin, for example, fused geography and astrology with law and history, in order to explain the characteristics of nations. If we compare the Renaissance scholarship of fifty years ago with that of today, one of the most striking differences lies in the lowering of disciplinary boundaries – not, certainly, to the point of disappearance, but to an extent unheard of a generation ago. True, renaissance studies have been interdisciplinary since Burckhardt – student of late antiquity and early modernity, historian of architecture, art critic and intellectual history – gave them their canonical form. But nowadays, it has actually become difficult to tell many fields of scholarship apart. Literary historians, art historians, and historians all analyze works of literature, philosophy, and

visual. All seek to ground them in social systems of production, to understand the role of patronage and the transformations brought about, for example, by mechanical reproduction of both books and works of art. And all try to understand the fundamental intellectual systems that underpinned them. Anyone working on Renaissance science now will find himself or herself using the work of historians, historians of literature, and historians of art – all of whom have examined some of the same sources, set them into the same long-term traditions, and tried to understand the challenges they posed to existing systems of power.

In some areas, moreover, the eroding of these disciplinary borders has had powerful effects, making possible p. 66
scholarly enterprises on a scale and of a depth previously impossible to conceive. The history of books and readers, for example, which rose to prominence first in France and then in the Englishspeaking world, has sparked the creation of massive collaborative histories of publishing, in which historians, literary scholars and art historians are revolutionizing our knowledge of how texts were produced, formatted, distributed and consumed.

The history of cartography affords an even more salient example. Cartography, by its nature, is embedded in virtually all the disciplines of Renaissance studies. It is at once a branch of the exact sciences, a literary genre and a form of high visual art, as one can see by examining any single edition of Ptolemy, atlas or cosmography produced in the fifteenth or sixteenth century – to say nothing of the great painted galleries in the Vatican and the Farnese palace in Caprarola. For decades, it remained the preserve of bibliographers and antiquaries. But in the last twenty years, the field has burst into a new flower. Historians of literature like professors Lestringant and Conley, historians of science like Noel Swerdlow and W. G. Randles, and historians of art like Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann and Martin Kemp – to name only a few of the most famous – have produced their own chorographies, or partial maps, of this great field. And a magnificent project based at the University of Wisconsin, and directed by David Woodward, has assembled representatives of all these fields, from many countries, to produce a comprehensive history of Renaissance cartography, which itself forms part of a much larger world history of the subject, magnificently printed by the University of Chicago press[14]. Works like this – as well as the recent collective histories of Renaissance philosophy published in Cambridge and in Germany – illustrate the convergence of disciplines in a direct and powerful way.

In another respect, however, Bodin or Zwinger might find himself more puzzled by the way we now pose our questions. When they collected vast amounts of information, from books or from experience, they did so for a purpose : in order to produce a powerful thesis about, for example, the nature of fundamental law or the idea of sovereignty. They wanted firm definitions, sharp statements, and powerful theories. In the current landscape of Renaissance studies, these are as hard to locate as common subjects of interest are obvious. Was there a renaissance at all ? Is there a distinctive method, old or new, which is vital to its study ? Here, it seems to me, disarray reigns. Consensus seems to exist on some points : that a new European civilization took shape in the period after the middle of the fourteenth century, first in Italy and then, at varying paces in other European countries. Some forms of evidence – like that of the rise of humanistic education, surveyed by Professor Grendler – strongly support this view and its chronology. But others as strongly oppose it. It does not seem possible, for example, to show p. 67
definitively that any single new view of nature took shape in the period normally called the Renaissance – though it does seem clear that ideas and methods that crystallized in the Renaissance did help to create a new view in the seventeenth century.

Are there – to raise a connected question – particular new methods and questions that support or challenge the idea of the Renaissance ? In art history, as Professor Nova has indicated, a whole range of new questions, psychological, anthropological, and comparative, attend the analysis of images. Indeed, something like a visual turn has taken place – an effort, influentially supported by brilliant scholars like Hans Belting and David Freedberg and now institutionalized at the Getty research institute, which plans to create a kind of independent, visual form of scholarship – one that speaks more directly to modern students, expert in decoding icons if not in reading texts, than more traditional methods. From this standpoint it seems more urgent to compare the effects produced by images – and even the violence used against them – across time and space, rather than to assume that all the images produced in Europe between 1400 and 1600 can most illuminatingly be studied in the context of their immediate production.

In intellectual history, the most dramatic and influential new direction of research clearly lies in the study of the production and consumption of books. In recent years, we have been given detailed studies of the way in which some of the most prominent Renaissance intellectuals – notably Erasmus and Montaigne – read their texts ; rich monographs on publishers ; intellectual biographies of renaissance thinkers – notably John Dee – cast in terms of their experiences as readers ; a new collective history of science, early modern and modern, which concentrates on the ways in which natural knowledge was given bookish form, and a powerful polemical history of early modern science as the creation of the printing house. Yet this frenetic activity may distract historians and students from other tasks, of equally great value – like the vital effort of actually analyzing texts as well as reconstructing the conditions of their production and consumption.

Our time traveler would probably find confusion most rampant when it comes to what was – fifty years ago – unequivocally the core of renaissance studies : working out, as Burckhardt and his critics had in their different ways, what the period actually meant, for those who lived through it and for the larger development of the west. Anyone trained in the 1950s or 60s was exposed to – and very likely entered the field of Renaissance studies because of – powerful new theses. In this period Hans Baron formulated, between 1955 and 1966, his argument that a particular civic humanism formed the truly modern side of Renaissance culture ; Erwin Panofsky redefined the relationship between medieval and renaissance forms of classicism ; Mikhail Bakhtin invoked the powers of folk culture and the

human body ; Michael Baxandall reconfigured Renaissance art as the expression of social relationships ; Michel Foucault imprisoned all Renaissance thinkers in an épistemé, hard, impermeable, multiply ramified ; and Frances Yates liberated all of them by invoking the revolutionary powers of what she saw as a new Renaissance magic. These great theses and their authors have undergone, in subsequent years, more or less the fate that awaited Gulliver. Scholars of newer generations have taken these giants prisoner, tied them up, and swarmed all over them, often practicing a painful form of therapeutic revisionism. In some cases, like Foucault's, little remains of the original argument. George Huppert and Ian Maclean have left hardly one stone of the Renaissance épistemé standing on another[15]. The very existence Baron's civic humanism has also been seriously challenged, and its original formulation can no longer be sustained – though his work continues to find powerful and well-informed defenders.

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Responses to this situation seem to vary widely. Historians, as is their wont, function amiably, making compromises. But literary historians seem to lament the disappearance from the earth of the great bold intellectual dinosaurs that once stalked it. Art historians still seem to be searching for large-order hypotheses that can replace the old ones, but they have started looking for these – as Professor Nova indicated – in part in the earlier literature of their own discipline, such as the pioneering articles and monographs of Aby Warburg. In the course of what began as methodological self-scrutiny they have done historical work of great value and stimulated colleagues across the disciplinary map. Bodin – who learned from Josephus and Annius of Viterbo how to think about the criticism of sources – would have been delighted by this productive recourse to tradition. Yet once again, the question arises how younger scholars can be won to study our field. Total fragmentation, however intellectually respectable, will not win the interest of large numbers.

In the end, then, I suspect that Bodin or Zwinger would have acknowledged that here is no easy way to gain knowledge of the Renaissance, no royal road, within the terms of the disciplines surveyed in this session. The more closely one inspects their situation, the more complex, problematic and paradoxical it seems. Yet these men might well have found this result satisfactory, and would certainly not have allowed it to discourage them. They too, after all, devised their methods for managing information precisely because they found that old systems of classification – like the four Empires of Daniel and the geography of Ptolemy – not longer served to impose order on history on history, and knew that they lacked fully elaborated new schemes with which to replace them. And they worked on energetically even though they suffered often from the harsh intellectual climate and the even harsher economic, political and religious environment. Perhaps we can find a model in their unflagging energy, openness to new ideas and disciplines and willingness to function even when they found themselves entertaining contradictory theses.

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1 Roberto Lopez, « Hard Times and Investment in Culture », *The Renaissance : A Symposium* (New York, 1953).

2 George Sarton, « The Search for Truth », *ibid*.

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3 Erwin Panofsky, « Artist, Scientist, Genius : Notes on the Renaissance-Dämmerung », *ibid*.

4 *The Renaissance : A Reconsideration of the Theories and Interpretations of the Age*, ed. Tinsley Helton (Madison, Wisconsin, 1961).

5 Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy : Literacy and Learning*, 1300-1600 (Baltimore, 1989) ; *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2002).

6 Ann Blair, *The Theater of Nature : Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton, 1997).

7 Frank Lestringant, *L'atelier du cosmographe : ou l'image du monde à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1991) ; *Le cannibal : grandeur et decadence* (Paris, 1994).

8 Cf. Alessandro Nova and Klaus Krüger, edd., *Imagination und Wirklichkeit : zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bildern in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit* (Mainz, 2000).

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9 Niccolô Perotti, *Cornucopiae seu linguae Latinate commentarii*, ed. Jean-Louis Charlet and Martine Furno (Sassoferrato, 1989 –).

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10 Angelo Poliziano, *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio*, ed. Lucia Cesarini Martinelli (Florence, 1978) ; *Commento inedito ai Fasti di Ovidio* (Florence, 1991) ; Vincenzo Fera, *una ignota expositio Suetoni del Poliziano* (Messina, 1983).

11 John D'Amico, *Theory and Practice in Renaissance Textual Criticism : Beatus Rhenanus Between Conjecture and History* (Berkeley, 1988) : Martine Furno, *Le cornucopiae de NiccolòPerotti : culture et méthode d'un humaniste qui aimait les mots* (Genevam 1995).

12 See esp. Charles Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

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13 Françoise Waquet, *Le latin, ou l'empire d'un signe, XVI^e^-XX^e^ siècles* (Paris, 1998) ; *Latin, or the Empire of the Sign, from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London, 2001).

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