Published by the Getty Museum, *Masaccio: Saint Andrew and the Pisa Altarpiece*, by Elliot R. Rowlands (Senior Researcher, Wildenstein and Company, New York), is a compact monograph that embeds Masaccio’s overall accomplishments into its analysis of the multi-paneled painting of which the Getty’s *Saint Andrew* panel once formed a part. Rowlands explains that this altarpiece is one of the truly great polyptychs in the history of Italian Renaissance art. Produced in 1426 for a chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Pisa, the work offers a particularly effective vantage point on Masaccio, being one of two works by the artist we can date precisely, and the only painting of his that was documented. Rowland’s focus on the commission for the multi-paneled altarpiece includes details on its patron and program. These are alongside speculations about its original location and the role the church friars played in the actual commission. In sum, each existing panel offers some perspective, and the composite presents a sense of context as well as a sense of how the community contributed to historical works we look at today. Appreciably enhancing the mix is the compelling information detailing all we have learned through conservation efforts and a section on the life of the *Pisa Altarpiece* after it was dismantled.

*Saint Andrew* (like other known panels) illustrates that artists of this time aspired increasingly to transform the 2D surface into the naturalism of a 3D reality. Notations to this effect in the Getty piece include the use of light to create the appearance of space and perspectival cues in modeling the cross and the book the saint holds. Other surviving panels that are examined include the central panel of *The Virgin and Child*, which has been slightly cropped, three predellas, six of the 12 saints and four side panels. All are considered in light of speculation on unknown sections of the altarpiece. In this way Rowlands conveys that our knowledge of their original setting and arrangement is quite limited. Indeed, there are nine competing opinions today on the correct overall arrangement for the one-third of the painted area of which we have no trace. Interestingly, in light of Vasari’s role in forming later views of Masaccio, the only eyewitness account of the piece in situ is found in Vasari’s revised edition (1568) of *Lives*. Vasari’s detailed description, published in the year that the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine underwent reconstruction, suggests he examined the work firsthand before the renovation, which lasted until 1574. The new construction totally altered the location, lining the walls with altarpieces by the then-contemporary Tuscan painters. Most of these remain in the church to this day.

The overall appeal of *Masaccio: Saint Andrew and the Pisa Altarpiece* stems from this author’s ability to give the reader a sense of an artistic community that included Masaccio. Rowlands conveys this by juxtaposing this master’s work with that of his influential contemporaries. For example, *The Tribute Money*, a work that shows how observation has heightened the mimetic illusionism power of paintings, is said to be one on which Masaccio and Masolino collaborated. Historical studies generally attribute the main action to Masaccio, while the head of Jesus is widely considered to be the work of his senior partner, Masolino. Although Masolino was 17 years older, the painters, according to Rowlands, worked simultaneously rather than sequentially. In fact, however, there is no evidence of their true relationship, and it seems quite likely that Masolino gave Masaccio benefit of his extensive artistic experience with altarpieces, perspective and the depiction of artistic space. Equally fascinating are the sections outlining Donatello’s influences. Donatello’s inspiration is convincingly presented through the referenced pieces (e.g., Masaccio’s evocative *Virgin and Child*, 1426, suggests a debt to a piece attributed to Donatello, *The Madonna and Child with Four Angels*, 1420–1425). Indeed, throughout Masaccio’s oeuvre, the sculpture of Donatello had a profound effect that brings a sense of humanism to Masaccio’s work. We can easily imagine these artists in their studios exchanging ideas, since the works compared were completed over several years.

One aspect worthy of note is the care that was taken in printing the book. As a person who is attracted to the visual language of art, I always appreciate materials that acknowledge the degree to which art history is enhanced by visual documentation. This book succeeds admirably in its visual presentation. For example, in many art books, handsome foldouts are tucked within the pages and, while useful to some degree, impede the flow of the reading process. Here, instead, the author’s view of the altarpiece reconstruction is carefully folded into the back cover. When unfolded, the map lies next to the printed pages for easy reference. Although it was a bit small, I truly appreciated how easy it was to keep turning the pages without having to fumble for the foldout.

In summary, this book serves its purpose well. Included in the Getty’s Museum Studies on Art series, it is a wonderful resource on this exceptional artist. Rowlands brings a great deal of expertise to his examination as he recounts the paintings’ religious themes, their histories, Masaccio’s commissions, the subsequent history of the panels, and how art historians came to identify them. Numerous footnotes offer the reader abundant leads to more comprehensive literature, such as contributions by Beck, Joannides and Strehlke. Readers will also appreciate the range of visual documentation used to illustrate the work of Masaccio and his contemporaries. Finally, reading through the book brings to mind that popular views of art history are often limited to generalizations that lose track of important historical figures. This monograph gives Masaccio his due. Still, certain devices would have been helpful. In particular it is unfortunate that the book does not have an index. This omission makes it difficult to return to a particular section when it comes to mind later. Still, all in all, Rowlands conveys why many scholars rank Masaccio as the greatest master of early Italian Renaissance painting. The achievements of Masaccio, quite revolutionary in his day, are clearly worth considering in light of others (e.g., Alberti, Brunelleschi and Donatello) that come to mind when we reflect on the founding fathers of the Renaissance.

**Bibliography**


**Hacker Culture**


Reviewed by Eugene Thacker, School of Literature, Communication, and Culture,
The concept and practice of hacking—and perhaps the issue is the distinction between concept and practice—has become one of those ubiquitous components of cyberculture. Hacking has surfaced not just as a way to use code, but as a cultural force as well. Hacking has become more a style, or a lifestyle, or at least an attitude. You can hack your wetware, hack a social scene, hack a city and so on. At some point, the term will become so all-encompassing that, in the network society, it will become metaphysical, a synonym for “doing” rather than “being.”

It is this gap between the practice of hacking and the concept of hacking that Douglas Thomas’s book, Hacker Culture, addresses. Between the gory details of computer code and the abstract, cultural attitude of hacking, we find government legislation, the economic interests of software industry and the development of new technologies. It is particularly this last phenomenon that is the focus of Thomas’s book, though his concentration on the socially shaping force of infotech certainly implies the interests of government and industry.

Thomas’s book is divided roughly into three parts. The first part provides an excellent overview of Thomas’s theoretical orientation and the culture of hacking. It not only mentions key moments in the timeline of hacking, but also spends some time meditating on the philosophy of hacking. The second part undertakes some more detailed analyses of hacking culture, from hardcore phreaking to the mainstreaming of hacking in science fiction films. Finally, the third part considers the relationships between hacking, the computer industry and law, taking a kind of Foucauldian approach to the construction of the criminal-hacker figure. The strongest argument in Thomas’s book is to show how ambiguous politics engages with emerging technologies to produce a set of social practices. Thomas shows how hackers are often positioned between being antipathetic to the corporatism of the software industry and being security experts and systems administrators for those same companies. The suggestion put forth is that hackers are defined by this tension—at once against the privatization of information and yet a product of the very thing they oppose.

The one thing I missed from Thomas’s otherwise sophisticated handling of the subject was an analysis of the concept and the practice of hacking. I am not a programmer but I would still like to know exactly what different computer hacking practices involve. It seems that, if there is what Thomas calls a “performance of technology” in hacking, it would be at this level, in terms of run-time, time-to-live or compiling. After all, gaining access into a secure database is a different practice than port-scanning, and there are probably hackers who do not consider either to be “true” hacking. I would like to see Thomas carry his analysis of hacker culture to the material level of code, run-time and protocols. There is, arguably, a lot to be gained by refusing this gap between concept and practice, and an analysis of hacking techniques or code from a cultural standpoint is worth considering.

The advantage of such an analysis would be to further illustrate something that is arguably at the root of all hacking approaches: that the system only fails when it works. Internet viruses are an example (and I am borrowing here from Alex Galloway’s work on Internet protocols). A virus or worm can only be successful if the Internet is functioning optimally. Otherwise, the virus cannot disseminate itself and will ostensibly be cut off from being able to function as a virus. As Thomas points out, the main insight of hacking—as both a practice and a concept—is that any system, when working “properly,” has by definition a series of flaws, fissures and loopholes. Hackers are a paradoxical kind of developer, since they work almost exclusively at this level, at the points at which the system shows forth its glitches, idiosyncrasies and aberrations.

I would recommend this book alongside one of the more traditional accounts of hacking—the kind of names, dates and events accounts given by Steven Levy or Bruce Sterling. Together, they provide a comprehensive overview of hacking as both practice and concept. Thomas’s book is also suitable for an upper-level undergraduate or graduate course on cyberpunk or cyberculture.

THE TROUBLE WITH NATURE: SEX IN SCIENCE AND POPULAR CULTURE

If there is any “trouble” with nature, it must be a cultural phenomenon conceptualized only by human beings. In this vivid, sharp and fun-to-read study, anthropologist Roger Lancaster describes his “trouble” from the perspective of social constructionism. His criticism points out that the popularized pseudoscientific claims about nature and laws of evolution applied to social life sustain identity politics that tend to be conservative, and even harmful, when they ought to be “as radical as reality.” Lancaster is concerned about what he calls “genomania”—the rise of naturalizing tendencies in society, shaped by sociobiology and evolutionary psychology and put forward by short-sighted media. These tendencies nest reactionary attitudes, giving “natural” explanations to unjust institutions, e.g. gender inequalities, racism, class stratification, war, even genocide. According to Lancaster, these “natural” explanations ultimately derive from the maximalist logic of “genetic competition” and heteronormativity, thus undermining the progress in acknowledging the rights of sexually marginal groups, as well as squeezing a range of other real-life diversities to the edge of socio-political “normalcy.”

The book includes a wide range of examples from popular culture, carefully analyzed and exposed with witty irony by Lancaster. During the process of reading, I started to pay attention to how such views of socio-biology and evolutionary psychology invade my everyday communication channels. In one of the cases mentioned in the book, a personal e-mail within a group of female friends casually cites at length the research by Laura C. Klein et al. [1], which suggests that in stressful situations, instead of the male fight-or-flight response, the hormone oxytocin is released in women, encouraging them to tend children and gather with other women instead. In another case, columnist Dave Barry celebrates in the International Herald Tribune the fact that a particular scientific book supports his intuition about the difference between the male and female brains: “Men—because of a