

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MODALITIES OF THE IDEA: STYLISTIC CHANGE &
L'IDEA DELLA BELLEZZA IN EARLY MODERN
ITALY

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In the careers of many prominent seventeenth-century painters such as Annibale Carracci, Guercino, Domenichino and even Caravaggio there is a familiar stylistic progression: each began their careers with a *chiaroscuro* manner rooted in Venetian and Emilian naturalism and then later shift to a markedly classicizing manner characterized by a brightening or lightening of the palette, a tendency to idealize the human form, and an insistence on composing in a series of parallel planes.

The art-theoretical concept known as *L'Idea della bellezza* was the touchstone in cases where this stylistic phenomenon manifested itself. Developed and modified in antiquity to maintain its relevance to art theory, the Platonic Idea went through many variations and interpretative models until it was reintroduced to art theory in the Renaissance. At the same time, expectations of artists increased as the *arti di disegno* sought to be included among the liberal arts. Artists' primary and secondary phases of education ensured a reading knowledge of Latin and equipped them with the ability to engage with the theoretical material of their day. This intellectual interest was reinforced by the foundations of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno, and later the Bolognese Accademia degl'Incamminati. As the number of publications by artists seemingly dwindled in the period following Mannerism, it was assumed that artists were increasingly disinterested with the complex theoretical discourse taken up by a growing number of critics and theorists. However, artists of the early modern period did participate in the debates of their day, which in turn reveals their sensibilities. A number of treatises and writings on art have survived from Pietro Testa, Orfeo Boselli and Nicholas Poussin that demonstrate a sustained interest in theory. Within these writings we find that art-theoretical concepts such as *L'Idea* elucidate each artist's conceptual process and metaphysical understanding of art. In the Seicento the dominant position taken by artists and theorists alike was the reemerging Nominalist formulation for art production, which explains the move from a carefully observed naturalism in an artist's early career to a more abstracted later style.

MODALITIES OF THE IDEA:
STYLISTIC CHANGE & *L'IDEA DELLA BELLEZZA* IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

by

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Nevertheless, I must also express my appreciation for the support of my advisor prior to my matriculation at Maryland. In his time at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Professor Giles Knox originally incited my interest in and passion for artist's biographies of the early modern period. The Thesis that was produced under his guidance offered the opportunity to unveil many of the structural devices of historiography. It was also at that time that I developed an interest in the different types of stylistic change

exhibited in various artists' careers in the seventeenth century in Italy. This interest was the impetus behind my decision to move to the Washington, D.C. area to study with the scholar, whose works I had become increasingly familiar, and was highly recommended by Knox.

Once I had begun my studies here at the University of Maryland, I met a variety of knowledgeable and helpful faculty and staff. Two would become integral to my Ph.D. work here and are now members of my dissertation committee: Professor Meredith Gill and Professor Marjorie Venit. Though Professor Gill joined the faculty in the Department of Art History and Archeology at a time when I had already begun work on the dissertation, I should like to state how indebted I am for her constant encouragement, advice and availability. She saw me through the process of studying for and passing my comprehensive examinations in May, 2005. All that make her acquaintance are struck by her pleasant demeanor and extensive knowledge in her field. I should like to repeat such evaluations and give my thanks for the countless hours that she has put into editing the document at hand and offering helpful advice.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Problems of stylistic development have been much ignored if not altogether credited in the recent literature on seventeenth-century Italian art. As such, it is difficult to deny that major problems of pictorial stylistics remain to be explained or set in their proper historical contexts.¹ Not least among these is the peculiar pattern that repeatedly surfaces in the maturation of the major seicento masters: why did such a diverse range of artists begin their careers with a *chiaroscuro* manner rooted in Venetian and Emilian naturalism and then later shift to a markedly classicizing manner characterized by a brightening or lightening of the palette, a tendency to idealize the human form, and an insistence on composing in a series of parallel planes?

Initially this pattern of stylistic change emerged in the oeuvre of the Bolognese painter and co-founder of the Accademia degl'Incamminati, Annibale Carracci (1560-1609).² The early training of the artist found him traveling throughout Northern Italy, where he encountered a number of pictorial conventions that would later be incorporated into his own works. Upon returning to his native Bologna, Annibale combined the eclectic range of artistic models encountered during his sojourn and produced works that were heavily influenced by the Venetian sensibility for naturalism, color and lighting.³ One of the first major commissions awarded the painter attest to this burgeoning interest.

¹ A recent publication by Sohm has placed the philological complexities of stylistic terminology within the critical milieu of the Seicento. However, the treatment insists upon the fluid nature and inconsistency of the contemporary usage and understanding of art-critical terms. As Sohm began his lexical investigation: "Style is a term of convenience with no stable meaning beyond the one that a writer wants to give it for some strategic purpose." Philip Sohm. *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

² The pattern was noted in the 1672 biography of the painter by Giovan Pietro Bellori, who used Annibale, his favored artist, as a model for others in the treatment's series. Giovan Pietro Bellori. *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. Helmut Wohl and Alice Sedgwick Wohl trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71-114. For the Accademia degl'Incamminati see: Charles Dempsey. "The Carracci Academy" in: A.W.A. Boschloo, ed. *Academies of Art between Renaissance and Romanticism*. (s'Gravenhage: SDU Uitgeverij, 1989), 33-41.

³ Donald Posner. *Annibale Carracci; a study in the reform of Italian painting around 1590*. (London: Phaidon, 1971), 1: 44-52.

The *San Ludovico Altarpiece* of 1587-88 (**figure 1**) for the Franciscan Church of Santi Ludovico e Alessio, embodies many Venetian compositional devices; including a Venetian-pyramidal design, with the Virgin and Child at the apex, allowing for the convergence of the two-dimensional, X-shaped composition and the three-dimensional diagonals that plunge into the distant landscape in the background.⁴ The figures emerge from the darkened haze of the mid-ground through a rhythm of modulated *chiaroscuro* effects. Such an approach, favored in Lombard and Emilian painting, carves out negative space with a regimented patchwork of highlights that in turn accent the warm hues commonly found in the well-observed garments, hands and faces of figures.⁵

The style present in the Franciscan altarpiece gradually transformed, slowly shedding naturalistic characteristics in favor of more classical ones. The trajectory was affirmatively altered when Annibale was summoned along with his brother and co-founder of the Carracci Academy, Agostino to Rome by Cardinal Odoardo Farnese to decorate his recently finished palace.⁶ The first, more modest project, given the painter was the decoration of the Camerino, or study, (1595-97). In the center panel of this Herculean program, *Hercules at the Crossroads* (**figure 2**), a new stylistic vocabulary can be seen to emerge.⁷ The dynamic, interpenetrating spatial arrangements of Annibale's Bolognese period have given way to a stable, symmetrical arrangement of the principle figures on a shallow, stage-like space. In a parallel arrangement to the foreground, the

⁴ The example most often cited for this type of composition is Titian's so-called *Pesaro Altarpiece* (1519-26) in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, though its usage was widespread in Northern Italian painting.

⁵ Boschloo also has related the didactic approach of Emilian naturalism used in works like the *Crucifixion* to the writings of reform-minded clerics, such as the Archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotti, see: A.W.A. Boschloo. *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*. vol. 1 (New York: The Hague, 1974).

⁶ Charles Dempsey. *Annibale Carracci: the Farnese Palace, Rome*. (New York : George Braziller, 1995).

⁷ The highly classicizing manner referred to by Posner primarily surfaces during discussions of the later Roman style of Annibale, particularly that seen in the Palazzo Farnese. Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 93-112.

two paths that demarcate the struggle between virtue and vice in this *exemplum virtutis* are presented as a backdrop to the main scene. Complementing the clearer spatial relationships afforded by the reduction of multiple planes, tonal modulations are more evenly distributed, though the previous palette is not entirely abandoned. The greater clarity and structure is further attended by a renewed interest in classical statuary. In the body of Hercules we find a heroic and idealized physiology, reminiscent of the famous statue in his patron's collection, the Farnese Hercules (**figure 3**). The controlled representation is animated through the use of rhetorical gestures, or *affetti*, that make visibly manifest the inner thoughts and passions of the figures in a prescribed academic manner.⁸

As is unanimously agreed, the classical style of Annibale Carracci is fully developed in the second program commissioned by the Farnese, the Sala Grande, later known as the Farnese Gallery (**figure 4**) (1597-1604).⁹ The program was to embrace the family's collection of antique statuary and center around the loves of the gods, demonstrating the aphorism *omnia vincit amor*. In demonstrating his mastery of technique and complexity of design, Annibale produced a multi-layered series of *trompe l'oeil* fictive panel paintings, statuary, metalwork and architecture in his "hyper-idealized" style. As Donald Posner noted, the figures in this series are "densely massed on a narrow stage close to the picture plane...[and] forced to twist their bodies sharply and to express themselves with short, intense movements. Colour is bright and loud. The drawing is harsh and angular. Draperies have become stiff, almost metallic. Heads and

⁸ As Karen Barzman noted, the learning of these *affetti* were codified by the Florentine Academy in the later sixteenth century, becoming central to classical art in the early seventeenth. Their significance derives from the art-theoretical treatises of both Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci. Karen Barzman. "The Florentine Accademia del Disegno: Liberal Education and the Renaissance Artist" in: A.W.A. Boschloo, ed. *Academies of Art between Renaissance and Romanticism*. (s'Gravenhage: SDU Uitgeverij, 1989), 15.

⁹ See: John Rupert Martin. *The Farnese Gallery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Silvia Ginzburg Carignani. *Annibale Carracci a Roma: gli affreschi di Palazzo Farnese* (Roma : Donzelli, 2000).

hands...are rendered in broad, faceted planes, as if carved from stone.”¹⁰ The classically distilled nature of the program is evident in scenes such as *Jupiter and Juno* (**figure 5**) where the space inhabited by the figures has been simplified to two parallel planes: foreground and background. The shallow foreground space on which the two protagonists interact impresses upon the viewer the monumentality of the figures and the significance of their actions, clearly presented through *affetti*. The solid, encompassing background is merely a bromidic motif that reduces the distraction afforded by its presence, further reinforcing the importance of the foreground action. Modulations in tone are reduced to the prosaic or pragmatic, while physiology has been schematized to more readily portray the heroic and ideal; whether that be the hypertrophied musculature of Jupiter, or the feminine ideal of Juno.¹¹

Several artists in the early seventeenth century experienced the stylistic change exhibited by Annibale Carracci that would become regarded as a move toward a lighter, more classical manner, or *un modo più chiaro*.¹² Perhaps the best known, and oft-cited example after Annibale is Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called ‘il Guercino’ (1591-1666).¹³ The virtually “self-taught” Emilian painter began his career in Cento producing works inspired by those of Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619), Annibale’s older cousin and

¹⁰ Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 126.

¹¹ The lightening of the palette cannot be dismissed because of the requirements of the fresco medium, for even Annibale’s works in oil, such as the *Domine Quo Vadis?* of ca.1602, have a uniformly brighter palette.

¹² The phrase that encapsulated the change exhibited by artists became common and was used by Francesco Scannelli to describe the phenomenon exhibited in a series of painter’s *opere*. Francesco Scannelli. *Microcosmo della Pittura*. (Cesena, 1657). Giovanni Giubbini, ed. (Milan: Peril Neri,1966), 115-116.

¹³ In the 1930s Denis Mahon began research into the stylistic change evident in Guercino’s oeuvre. In his famous essay that resulted, Mahon first called attention to this phenomenon in two works by the Emilian painter: the *Elijah fed by Ravens* (1620) and *St. Francis* (1645). Denis Mahon. *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1947).

co-founder of the Academy.¹⁴ Early works such as the *Elijah Fed by Ravens* of 1620 (**figure 6**) attest to the careful study of Bolognese and Emilian pictorial conventions. The compositional arrangement of the scene is reminiscent of that found in Annibale's Bolognese phase in that the prophet is posed diagonally, twisting his body to the left. In reacting to the raven that enters the scene at the top right corner, the aged man interpenetrates different spatial planes and emphasizes the diagonal orientation of the narrative action. The worn facial features, and the hands and feet of Elijah attest to careful life study and the preparatory procedures observed by Guercino.¹⁵ This naturalistic presentation of age is enlivened by an intense *chiaroscuro* that dramatically illuminates sections of the prophet in a raking light. Such an uneven distribution of light confuses the spatial relationships between the principle protagonists and the landscape in which they dwell, largely disintegrating the contours and linear patterns that would describe the physical limitations of objects.

A year after producing the *Elijah*, Guercino was called to Rome by the Ludovisi Pope Gregory XV. In the two years the Emilian artist enjoyed papal patronage afforded by *campanilismo*, or local patriotism, he received the commission for an altarpiece to decorate a chapel in St. Peter's itself. Although it is no longer displayed in its intended location, *The Burial and Reception into Heaven of St. Petronilla* (1621-22) (**figure 7**) finds Guercino successfully transitioning to a more structured and restrained style and incorporating many classical elements. Organized around strong axes afforded by a grand

¹⁴ Though Mahon wished to emphasize the self-dependency demonstrated by Guercino, he did in fact have a traditional workshop apprenticeship, while Ludovico's *Holy Francis with Saint Francis* (1591) in Cento offered the artist with an attractive model. Rudolf Wittkower. *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600-1750*. 6th ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 1:30, 57-58. Also see: Denis Mahon. "Notes on the Young Guercino: II. Cento and Ferrara." *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 70 no. 409 (April 1937), 176-179, 182-185, 189.

¹⁵ The observance and emphasis placed on study from life has traditionally been cited as a hallmark of the Emilian tradition and in the development of the Early Baroque style, as a move away from the highly "artificial" approach of 'mannerist' artists. Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 35-43.

column and steps, the action of lowering the saint's body to rest in the terrestrial sphere of the altarpiece is clearly presented nearest the viewer. The tectonic arrangement of the scene further defines the geometrical relationships of the human and celestial figures. Nevertheless, many of Guercino's stylistic preoccupations remain unfettered, as can be seen in the retention of a dual-diagonal movement through the burial and ascension of Petronilla. In fact, the general palette used in the *Elijah* resurfaces, though the colors employed are local and brighter. The lightening of the palette is accompanied by a similar modification in that the light source is once again located at the top right of the work, but instead of breaking up the mass of the figures with a raking light it bathes them in an even warm glow.

After the death of the Carracci pupil Guido Reni in 1642, Guercino left Cento and took over Reni's workshop in Bologna. While fulfilling the numerous commissions left at Reni's untimely death, Guercino further developed his later classical manner.¹⁶ This manner, which would become fairly standardized in the last thirty-two years of the painter's career, has several characteristics in common with Annibale's later works for the Farnese.¹⁷ Nearly four decades after producing the *Elijah*, the maturation of this pictorial convention can be seen in the *St. Paul Hermit (figure 8)* of ca. 1652-55, a work of comparable iconography and composition. The similar composition in each work locates the subject in the foreground with an organic formation in the middle-ground, which finally gives way to a landscape in the distant background. The similarities end

¹⁶ Mahon would later further divide Guercino's stylistic development into six phases: 'Early' (to 1617), 'Early Maturity' (1617-18), and 'Full Maturity' (1619-21), 'Roman Period' (1621-3), 'Transitional Period' (to 1634), and 'Late Period' (1634-66). Michael Kitson. "Sir Denis Mahon: Art Historian and Collector" in: Gabriele Finaldi and Michael Kitson eds. *Discovering the Italian Baroque: The Denis Mahon Collection*, (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997),18.

¹⁷ Recent treatments of Guercino identify works produced after 1634 as belonging to his 'Late Period'; such as in: Denis Mahon ed. *Giovanni Francesco Barbieri: il Guercino, 1591-1666*. ex. cat. (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1991).

with these motifs, however, as the painter has markedly altered his approach to spatial construction, brushwork and palette. The atectonic arrangement of the multiple planes of the *Elijah*, and the more structured, tectonic *Petronilla*, has been further refined to include only two parallel planes, demarcating the position of the saint and winged courier in the foreground and the relegation of the backdrop of the landscape to its platitudinous status. The clarity of the event is also due to the use of a brighter palette and local colors, which have been meticulously blended to more evenly illuminate the scene. The idealism found in the bodies of the gods on the Farnese Gallery ceiling find a counterpart, as well, in the muscled physique of Paul that consciously betrays his advanced age, which is evident from his long beard and bald head.¹⁸

The stylistic development exhibited in the careers of Annibale and Guercino extended to foreign-born artists who traveled to Italy after gaining fundamental workshop training outside the peninsula. One such example is the French painter, and founding member of the French Academy, Simon Vouet (1590-1649), who traveled throughout Italy from 1613-27, visiting Venice, Genoa and Naples, and finally settling in Rome. Once settled, the early Roman style of the painter was heavily influenced by *caravaggismo* that permeated the eternal city after Caravaggio's death in 1610, which spawned numerous imitators. However, Vouet was also indebted to the Venetian prototypes that he had experienced during his travels, which is clearly evident in *The Last Supper* of 1615-20 (**figure 9**).¹⁹ As in Annibale's early Venetian-inspired works, the carefully observed scene is organized around a dramatic diagonal that forces an

¹⁸ The stylistic trajectory of Guercino, which increasingly moved towards the classical, continued until his death in 1666.

¹⁹ Crelly has noted that although his biographers say little of his stay in Venice (ca.1612-13) it was the first among his destinations in Italy when he left France. Titian offered an obvious model for those artists traveling throughout Northern Italy. However, in the case of Vouet, the more contemporary influence of Veronese was impressed upon his stylistic vocabulary. William Crelly. *The Painting of Simon Vouet*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 6, 20-21.

immediate recession into the space. The raking light that streams in from the upper left highlights only two figures and the red garment of Christ. Throughout his Italian phase, Vouet consistently developed this pictorial formulation that sought to capture the dramatic nature of a narrative using atectonic compositions to arrange naturalistically observed physiologies and physiognomies lit in a *tenebroso* fashion.²⁰

However, after returning to France in 1627 and being named First Painter to the Court, Vouet gradually developed an increasingly artificial manner. In works like *Saturn Conquered by Amor, Venus and Hope* of 1646 (**figure 10**), which is part of an allegorical series, the carefully observed, and portrait-like qualities of the painter's Roman works dissipated.²¹ In their place is an approach that favors reducing figures to schematized physiognomies and abstracted physiologies, while simultaneously reducing the multiplicity and interpenetrating nature of space to an essential narrow band. As Saturn falls on a shallow stage prepared for him, the three other allegorical personifications follow suit, some flying through the air; but as in Guercino's *St. Paul Hermit* the principle figures all occupy the same frontal plane and do not engage the backdrop. The tightly controlled brushwork that delimits the actors also reins in the dramatic oscillations between light and shadow, which have been disregarded and replaced with an even illumination. Far removed from his earlier technique based on the *pittoresco*, or painterly style, of Veronese and caravaggesque *chiaroscuro* modeling, Vouet has regressed to using the "mannerist" technique of desaturation modeling as seen in the diaphanous pink robe worn by the trumpeting angel above the group. The resultant reductive classicism presented by Vouet would share much with the tenants of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture that would be established only two years later by Louis XIV.

²⁰ Ibid, 20-25.

²¹ Jacques Thuillier ed. *Vouet*. (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1990), 346.

Another French painter would travel to Italy and be equally as affected as Simon Vouet, only this painter did so at the behest of the poet Giambattista Marino (1569-1625). It was when Vouet was still studying in Italy in 1623 that his younger and better-known compatriot, Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), left Paris to travel to Rome. But before Poussin would arrive at the *caput mundi*, he journeyed first to Venice, prompting an interest that would develop into a Venetian and specifically Titianesque style during his early Roman phase.²² Such interests, Blunt noted, are expressed in the Chatsworth *Arcadian Shepherds* (*Et in Arcadia Ego*) of ca.1627 (**figure 11**) in which the broad and luminous treatment of the figures recall works by Titian housed in Roman collections, while the blonde tones of the rich palette also reference Veronese.²³ The asymmetrical arrangement of the scene finds the figures rushing diagonally to the right, a sensation that is amplified by the steep foreshortening of the sarcophagus. In the later version of the theme of ca.1655, however (**figure 12**), the dramatic Titianesque composition, which plunges the viewer diagonally into space, has given way to an architectonic one. All the figures now occupy the same shallow plane in a frieze-like composition, while the Arcadian landscape is relegated to a separate plane behind the foreground. The broad brushwork that defined the play of light over the shepherds has been redirected and refined to carefully delineate the sculptural quality of the classically fashioned later figural group.²⁴

²² Denis Mahon. "Nicholas Poussin and Venetian Painting," *Burlington Magazine* 88 (1946), 15, 37. Poussin's interest in Venetian painting did not subside when he returned to Rome for he made copies of the Bacchanals by Titian, which were executed for the Este family and were preserved in the Villa Ludovisi in Rome. Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*. (London: Pallas Athene, 1995), 81.

²³ The poetic mood utilized in these early Venetian works can be directly connected to work such as Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*. Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 114. André Félibien and Gianlorenzo Bernini both noted the connection between Poussin's early style and that of Titian. Maria H. Loh. "New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Italian Baroque Practice and Theory." *The Art Bulletin* 86 no. 3 (September, 2004), 480.

²⁴ Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 304.

The specific phenomenon exhibited in the Emilian examples of Annibale and Guercino, as well as the French Vouet and Poussin, can be seen in the oeuvres of many of the leading artists of the early Seicento. In addition, even the artists whose careers did not progress from an early phase of North Italian naturalism still developed an increased classicism later in their careers. One of the most conspicuous examples is Domenico Zampieri, called 'Domenichino' (1581-1641). The most faithful follower and favorite pupil of Annibale and attendee of the Academy in Bologna, Domenichino never seems to have passed through a naturalistic phase as noted in the artists cited above. The painter began, instead, with a classical manner and ended his career painting in a style that is so abstract from nature and "hyper-idealized" that it borders on the "cartoonish."²⁵ Such a constant trajectory can be demonstrated through Domenichino's first large-scale history painting produced while in Rome in a subcontracted work headed by Guido Reni. As Posner noted of the *Flagellation of St. Andrew* of 1609 (**figure 13**) in the chapel of St. Andrew at San Gregorio al Celio, the favored pupil carried on much of the classical tenants of later works of Annibale.²⁶ Through a deliberate and didactic subjugation of all figures to the actions undertaken in the right foreground of the representation, an order is imposed on the narrative. Structuring this order is an austere, perspectival set that, Richard Spear observed, geometrically locates each figure with a plan that has the deliberateness of "pieces laid out for chess."²⁷ The lighting of the carefully composed drama is also subject to the underlying *raison d'être* as geometry dictates that the strong diagonal shadow must intersect the vanishing point precisely at the base of the axial column. The prosaic brushwork describes the characters engaged in the flagellation of the

²⁵ Richard Spear. *Domenichino*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 11.

²⁶ Donald Posner. "The Early Development of Baroque Painting in Rome" in: Walter Cahn, ed. *Essays in Honor of Walter Friedlaender*. (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1965), 137.

²⁷ Spear, *Domenichino*, 11-12, 55.

saint, actively and passively, while the cool palette relays the solemn clarity of the event transpiring, as much to the viewer as to the onlookers behind the balustrade.²⁸

After finding limited success in Rome despite his influential connections, Domenichino was offered several lucrative contracts in Naples.²⁹ It was during the last decade of his career in southern Italy that the classical nature of the painter increased so exponentially that his compositions became almost reductive with the “hyper-classic” distillation of ideal forms. He accepted the contract to decorate the Cathedral of Naples with frescoes and altarpieces, which occupied him from 1631-41.³⁰ Throughout the program the new approach to figural imagery is announced in grand fashion. In the pedentive fresco like that of *San Gennaro Received by Christ* of ca.1640 (**figure 14**), the later formulation of the “ideal” has become highly abstracted. There is an intensification of the familiar stiffness of gestures and robes, impassivity of expressions, and lightness of colors. Nature has become a remote formulation.³¹ Even as the scene is suspended aloft in the clouds, the figures remain defined through contours and sculptural solidity heralded in Annibale’s Farnese frescoes. But unlike Annibale, Domenichino has further reduced the tonal variations in the scene to a uniformly light modeling. The shadows themselves act to reinforce the outlines of the figures in lieu of providing a naturalistic atmosphere in which the vision of the saint embraced by Christ transpires.

Perhaps such a trajectory as demonstrated by the classical Domenichino can be viewed as a rational progression. But the phenomenon extended to the Bolognese

²⁸ The immediate legibility of the painting and its content was noted by seicento authors such as Bellori, who related the story of the *vecchiarella*, or old women who could more readily explain to her child all of the action of Domenichino’s scene. Bellori goes on to note how Annibale believed Domenichino had passed all others in his circle in mastery of the *affetti* and efficacy of the *attione*. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects Lives*, 302-4.

²⁹ Posner, “The Early Development of Baroque Painting in Rome,” 135-146.

³⁰ The termination of the project was premature due to suspected poisoning on the part of Domenichino’s competitors in Naples, the painter claimed. Spear, *Domenichino*, 18.

³¹ *Ibid*, 69.

painter's stylistic antithesis as well, for even the renowned master of Lombard naturalism, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1610), began adopting classical pictorial conventions later in his career. Caravaggio was heavily ensconced in the northern tradition of naturalism through his training with Simone Peterzano (c.1540-c.1596) from 1584-88, who proudly signed his works "pupil of Titian."³² In an estimation of Caravaggio's legacy, through knowledge of his Roman works, Giovan Pietro Bellori lamented that he "recognized no other master than the model" and "without selecting the best forms of nature" reproduced the vulgarities present in the natural world that art should rectify.³³ The estimation shared by seicento critics and biographers is demonstrable in Caravaggio's first public commission to decorate the Contarelli Chapel in S. Luigi dei Francesi (1599-1600). In the first in the series of these oil paintings, the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (**figure 15**), there is a straightforward approach in the frank naturalism and dramatic lighting. The highly-individualized and plebian figures that inhabit the martyrdom scene are arranged in a circular manner around the executioner and the saint, who has fallen to the ground. The severe *tenebroso* rakes across the left portions of the figures in the scene and picks out the executioners torso in the center. There are no architectural markers that geometrically relate the positioning of the figures in relation to one another, as they seem to be piled on top of one another, as seen particularly the five figures on the far left. The characteristics share much in common with the pre-Roman works of Guercino and to a lesser extent those of the Bolognese period of Annibale.

³² Catherine Puglisi. *Caravaggio*. (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 3. Bellori also noted the connection with Venetian painting, though through an improper evaluation of the Lombard's connection to Giorgione. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 177.

³³ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 177.

The gradual appropriation of classical motifs throughout Carravaggio's career is hesitantly remarked upon; nevertheless in his later works, produced while in exile in Sicily, Naples and Malta, we find an increased understanding of the underlying order of painting.³⁴ Though the psychological component and mindset of the artist has been emphasized in treatments of these later works, it cannot be denied that the Lombard painter began adopting more of the classical vocabulary than has been admitted. In one of the more prominent examples, his *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* of 1608 (**figure 16**) in Malta, for instance, the composition is laid out as an expansive stage-like space on which the drama of the beheading unfolds outside of a prison.³⁵ The main participants at the left form a semi-circle around the main narrative action, while a classical motif in the form of a triumphal arch frames them. The centrality of the event, where all the figures respond to the action unfolding, and the narrative organization can be compared to Domenichino's early works like the *Flagellation of St. Andrew* (**figure 13**). It is possible that had his life not been cut short by fever in 1610, Caravaggio would have continued on this stylistic trajectory.

The phenomenon of gradually adopting classical conventions later in all of the *oeuvres* of seicento artists cited has hitherto received little critical attention. This is not surprising, given one would find it difficult to demonstrate other aspects of their biographies and art that unite them. In the case of Guercino, the meager extent information of the artist's early education in the small town of Cento conceived of him as

³⁴ Caravaggio increasingly adopted High Renaissance compositional devices as well throughout his career. The pyramidal composition, first used by Leonardo da Vinci, and later adopted by Titian, can be found as early as c.1602-4 in Caravaggio's *Entombment*. Also, during his exile in c.1606-7 he produced the *Madonna of the Rosary*, which can be more firmly connected in composition and structure to Titian's *Pesaro Madonna*. Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 175, 275.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 299-306.

parochial and “self-taught.”³⁶ On the other hand, Annibale Carracci was a co-founder of an art academy, friends with many academicians, and would be praised by Bellori as the inheritor of academic tradition of Raphael.³⁷ Of the non-native Italian artists that have been mentioned, Simon Vouet was born and had his formative training in France, and traveled to briefly study in Italy and then return to enjoy royal patronage as a court painter.³⁸ In contrast, during the early training in France of Poussin, the artist developed connections with the literati that, once he had traveled to Italy, allowed him to remain there as an ex-patriot virtually uninterrupted until his death due to the private, aristocratic patronage offered.³⁹ Even the consistent factor of traveling and exposure to the art-theoretical milieu of Rome did not dictate the style under discussion; since it was not until Caravaggio and Domenichino had left the *caput mundi* for southern Italy that their styles developed further along these lines. In fact, the only formal touchstone that unites these varied painters is an irregular affinity for Venetian naturalism and the painting of Titian and Veronese. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that this affinity was responsible for the later classical works of these artists.

As such, one of the first treatments to contend with this pattern of change considered the unifying force of art theory on pictorial stylistics. In his 1947 consideration of this phenomenon, Denis Mahon set forth that the particular stylistic change evident in these artists’ careers was related to the motivations for such a formal modification. In the case of Guercino, Mahon believed there were two influences, which

³⁶ Mahon used the early education of painter, or lack thereof, to demonstrate how Guercino’s stylistic formulation could be undermined by the classical theories he encountered during his trip to Rome. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 11-27.

³⁷ For a defense of the intellectual nature of the Carracci Academy and Annibale in particular, see: Charles Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci and the Beginnings of the Baroque Style*. 2nd ed. (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2000). Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 71-72.

³⁸ Crelly, *The Painting of Simon Vouet*, 6, 20-21. Thuillier, ed. *Vouet*, 346.

³⁹ Blunt, *Poussin*, 54, 56, 158.

intellectually undermined the essentially “self-taught” painter. First, the theoretical aspects of the superior mode of painting derived from Monsignor Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570-1623), papal secretary to Gregory XV, and his *Idea della Bellezza*, were laid out in the *Trattato*, probably written between 1607 and 1615 (that was later published in 1646 in Giovanni Massani’s *Diverse figure*).⁴⁰ And second, the artistic model that demonstrated how the precepts of the *Idea* were to be applied was derived from the proposed co-author of Agucchi’s treatise, Domenichino.⁴¹ The Wölfflinian binary used by Mahon to divide the early Seicento into “classical” and “baroque” styles, restricted Guercino’s career to primarily two distinct formulations. Furthermore, the specific classic-idealist model espoused for art production by theorists like Agucchi set itself at odds with the trend of naturalism early in the century, forcing painters such as the young Centese to adopt a manner similar to “classical” painters such as Domenichino. The artist, in other words, did not participate in the formulation of these art-theoretical concepts that subsequently dictated the appearance of his works. As in the case study presented by Mahon, the artist is not actively engaged in internalizing classical concepts; quite to the contrary, they are imposed upon him externally.⁴² The role that the art-theoretical concept of the *Idea* had in shaping an artist’s style is admitted, but simultaneously restricted to an understanding of only the formal antecedent (i.e. other classically oriented works of art). As such, Mahon found the trend common to Guercino

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Cropper. “L’Idea del Bellori” in: *L’Idea del Bello: viaggio per Roma nel Seicento con Giovan Pietro Bellori*. ex. cat. (Rome, 2000), 1: 83. Agucchi’s biography was written by the Paduan scholar Giacomo Filippo Tomasini (1597-1654), *Un’ Orazione di Nerone per la Colonia Bolognese abbrugiata*, and printed post-humously in 1640 in Bologna under the pseudonym ‘Gratiadio Machati.’ It would also not be an overstatement to claim that Agucchi set the “official artistic atmosphere” in Rome. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 45.

⁴¹ Just before Guercino’s arrival at Rome, Mancini gathered a short list of paintings by Domenichino around Rome. The *Communion of St. Jerome* (1614), *St. William*, and the *Martyrdom of St. Peter* were some of the paintings that Guercino could have come in contact with, influencing his view of classicism. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 48, 84.

⁴² In the British Marxist scholarly milieu of the 1930s in which Mahon was trained, it was understood that the “base” was the natural manner, and the “superstructure” was Agucchi’s classicism.

and Annibale Carracci to be a negative development, as natural genius, expressed in their early styles, was repressed by the superficial veneer of classicism in their later works.

Subsequent treatments of the phenomenon evidenced in the career of Guercino have attempted to distance art production from the influence of art theory. It was with such an intention that David Stone and Daniel Unger proposed alternative stylistic categorizations for the development of this classical style to deemphasize the perceived negative influence.⁴³ For instance, Stone concluded that the painter's stylistic change was a natural progression that would have occurred whether or not the artist had traveled to Rome. It was instead accelerated by the artists return to the provincial setting of Cento and used as a marketing stratagem to set himself apart from his rivals. Therefore, the distillation and "rigidification" of form that is present in Guercino's works made after 1630 would have occurred even if he had remained in Rome.⁴⁴ However, such attempts to wrest control of personal style from the perceived ethereal grasp of theory and place it firmly back in the hands of seicento artists are but one voice in modern discourse on stylistic change.⁴⁵ In fact, since Mahon's hallmark publication, an increasing awareness that theory played a crucial role in tempering the appearance of art and its criticism has permeated treatments of seventeenth-century art.⁴⁶ On the other hand scholars remain reluctant to entertain the idea that reform-minded artists throughout the century actively

⁴³ Daniel Unger. *The Catholic Renewal in Seventeenth Century Art: Religious-Political Propaganda in Guercino's Paintings*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (Hebrew University, 2001). David Stone. *Theory and Practice in Seicento Art: The Example of Guercino*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (Harvard University, 1989).

⁴⁴ Stone, *Theory and Practice in Seicento Art*, 26.

⁴⁵ See: G.C. Argan. "Guercino and Art Theory." *The Burlington Magazine* 92 no. 564 (March, 1950), 86-87.

⁴⁶ See: Posner, *Annibale Carracci*. Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci and the Beginnings of the Baroque Style*. Carl Goldstein. *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction: A Study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory and Practice of Art in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988). As these diverse approaches to the same artist have demonstrated, the belief that theory influenced art production is not highly debated; but rather in what manner and to what extent such an influence manifested itself.

engaged with the complex art-theoretical matters discussed by contemporary critics and theorists. In each treatment, theory is repeatedly and almost unanimously divorced from the practical aspects of producing art. Hence even as Stone attempted to dislodge the dominant model established by Mahon for understanding such phenomena, he nevertheless acquiesced to the anti-theoretical evaluation: “In general, theory may be properly characterized as largely retrospective, descriptive, and prescriptive with regard to artistic practice. It rationalizes practice and schematizes aesthetic judgments on the basis of ideas; unlike painting, it does not create styles.”⁴⁷

As I will argue, the artists noted above were not merely grappling with the superstructure of classicism imposed on them by patrons and dictated by the taste of theorists such as Agucchi.⁴⁸ In fact, the very nature of the artist’s profession, including workshop training, education and literary expectations, necessitated an internalization and adoption of certain guiding art-theoretical principles. Early modern artists actively governed the development of their own styles, and, furthermore, could modify them as the situation required (a point that will be returned to later). This artistic tradition that began in the Quattrocento and continued evolving until its maturation in the Seicento came to espouse very specific guidelines for the practice of the *arti di disegno* (painting, sculpture and architecture) after they had been raised to the status of the *ars liberalis*, or liberal arts.⁴⁹ Drawing from the rigorous training in anatomy, perspective, geometry, literary conceits, natural philosophy and several other related disciplines, the artist was empowered with the requisite tools to produce an improved version of the perceptible

⁴⁷ Stone, *Theory and Practice in Seicento Art*, 12.

⁴⁸ Nor was the theoretical discourse merely a retroactively imposed set of criteria for judging art.

⁴⁹ In the history of education, the seven liberal arts comprised two groups of studies: the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. Studies in the *trivium* involved grammar, dialect (logic), and rhetoric; and studies in the *quadrivium* involved arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy.

world around him. The governing principle informing his judgment in this matter was *L'Idée della Bellezza*, or the “Idea of Beauty.” Nevertheless, the influence that the Idea exerted on stylistic change has been admitted only reluctantly by scholars since Erwin Panofsky’s 1924 publication on the art-theoretical concept.⁵⁰ Due largely to the belief that it was a philosophical and poetical construct, patently divorced from the practical concerns of artists, the concept remains an oft-referenced formulation, but not substantially responsible for the formal appearance of artworks. As noted, Denis Mahon believed that the young Guercino was not fully cognizant of the precepts of Agucchi’s Idea, and as such relied on the formal example of Domenichino. More recently, scholars such as Maria Loh have re-affirmed the connection between the Idea as a process of selection and the Renaissance and Baroque conceptions of imitation, or *imitatio*. However, even Loh is hesitant to state that the concept was the basis of stylistic formulation, restricting it instead to the role of a mitigating factor.⁵¹

Although previous investigations of this art-theoretical concept have been reluctant to admit its direct impact on the practice of painting, I contend that the gradual transition in style from naturalism to classicism, evident in the artists cited above, was inextricably linked to the underlying Idea that informed them. In fact it is demonstrable that after artists were exposed to the governing principles of the concept, either through their workshop training or instruction at an art academy, the understanding of it incrementally tempered the appearance of their works. The internalization of *L'Idée della Bellezza* allowed the mature artist later in life to move more quickly to the ideal that he sought in each figure and composition, in effect by-passing normal preparatory

⁵⁰ Erwin Panofsky. *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*. (Columbia: South Carolina Press, 1968).

⁵¹ Loh, “New and Improved: repetition as originality in Italian Baroque Practice and Theory,” 477-504.

procedures established in the fifteenth century, while being simultaneously facilitated by the mastery of the more technical aspects of his craft. Moreover, the multifarious manifestations of the concept, and its interpretation by different artistic temperaments, directly contributed to the varying personal, and regional styles in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Chapter Two

Liberal Education of Artists in the Cinquecento and Seicento:

Perceptions of the “Learned Artist”

At the dawning of the seventeenth century in Italy a dramatic shift occurred in both religion and art. In response to the Protestant Reformation, which had resulted in the loss of influence over certain Northern European countries, several actions were taken by the Church as recommended by the Tridentine Council (1545-1563).⁵² Along with the inception of new educational and missionary orders, such as the Jesuits, the propagandistic and didactic values of art were also reaffirmed. Reform-minded clerics, such as Archbishops Carlo Borromeo and Gabriele Paleotti demanded clarity and simplicity in artworks that would, above all, inspire their viewers to piety through

⁵² Regina Pörtner. *The Counter-Reformation in Central Europe: Styria 1580-1630*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

contemplation and reflection.⁵³ The highly intellectual, inter pictorial and erudite art of the late-sixteenth century was to be abandoned. This new popular, or so-called “anti-intellectual,” approach to art in the early seventeenth century has been considered devoid of any preoccupation with complex art-theoretical principles as demanded by post-Tridentine Catholicism. While the impact of these religious reform concerns is perhaps less ubiquitous than previously assumed, it is only part of the larger mosaic that informs the scholarly sensibility of the “Baroque artist.” The persona of the seventeenth-century artist that has been bequeathed to posterity is polemically opposed to that of the *maniera*-one that is single-minded in reforming the workshop tradition and ignoring the erudite aspects of art theory.⁵⁴

Such was the estimation of Walter Friedlaender in his essays *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism*, where he noted that it was the reliance on purely theoretical concepts that gave rise to the phenomenon of “Mannerism,” which was practiced by the more literary-minded artists of the late-sixteenth century, such as Federico Zuccaro (1542-1609). Consequently, the originators of the anti-mannerist style, Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio, lacked a theoretical side:

They did not theorize nearly so much as the *maniera* people who, insofar as they were not merely superior house painters, arranged and delivered lectures, wrote treatises, concocted theories of art, and were, in general, literary minded. All of this was done away with as far as possible in the healing process. After Lomazzo and Zuccaro (who belonged to an older generation), scribbling on the theory of art stopped for a while, and so did

⁵³ The specific impact these publications had on art *en fin du siècle* has been difficult to determine. Boschloo attempted to connect the writings of Gabriele Paleotti to the reform of painting in the Carracci Academy in the early 1580s, but was only able to present a hypothetical connection between the two parties. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna*. For another example of reformatory decrees on art production see: Carlo Borromeo. “Instructiones fabricate et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae” in: Paola Barocchi, ed. *Trattati d’arte del cinquecento, fra manierismo e controriforma*. Scrittori d’Italia no.221. (Bari: Laterza, 1961), vol. 3.

⁵⁴ The notion of a unified art theory for the seventeenth century has yet to be fully realized, and has led many scholars to assume there was no homogeneity. See: Magda Vasillov. “Rhetoric and Fragments of a High Baroque Theory.” *Marsyas* 20 (1979-80), 17-29.

the academy lectures, which Zuccaro had founded. Only with the increasing classicism of the second half of the seventeenth century does art theory begin to come alive again, based this time on a firmer foundation. The generation of which we are now speaking had too much to do in the way of practical accomplishments to permit itself the luxury of theorizing. Its strength was not created from this, and just as little from increased academic activity, except insofar as the academy encouraged the grasping of reality and the training of the eye on the model.⁵⁵

It was only in returning to the more practical aspects of workshop procedure that allowed the reform of Italian painting to begin and the “Baroque” to be born. For, “it was not a literary or a theoretical opposition, but was carried on simply by means of objectivity and practical work, which best demonstrates the transformation of artistic feeling.”⁵⁶

The fifty-year period delineated by Friedlaender between the turn of the century and its mid-point still carries an anti-intellectual stigma. The literary erudition of the *maniera* artist’s character is generally demonstrated by the numerous critical, theoretical or biographical works that the artists themselves produced in the second half of the Cinquecento. In attempting to find a corollary in the Seicento however, one is tempted to agree with the assessment of contemporary critics. For instance, as the physician and amateur-connoisseur Giulio Mancini observed in the introduction to his *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (published in 1628), artists of the Seicento no longer concerned themselves with the literary discourse of art. In a rhetorically posed question, Mancini questioned why someone who could not paint would write about art, and conversely, why painters themselves could no longer write about art. He concluded with the commonly held belief among *litterati* that painters are concerned with imagination and the superficial appearances of things, whereas the writers are capable of discovering inner truths through

⁵⁵ Walter Friedlaender. *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting*. (New York, 1965), 53.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

intellect, understanding and intelligence.⁵⁷ Taking such an evaluation at face value, scholars have concluded that artists had abandoned their literary endeavors at the dawning of the new century.

The correlation between a lack of extant literature authored by artists and a general dismissal of theoretical inquiry has remained a salient feature in seventeenth-century studies. As Anthony Blunt obliquely estimated, “Generally speaking, indeed, seventeenth-century artists were not given to speculation on philosophical subjects- even on aesthetics, for it is a well-known fact that far fewer treatises on the arts were produced in this century than in either the sixteenth or the eighteenth.”⁵⁸ In such an evaluation, artists, whose production could be seen as enacting post-Tridentine decrees, were ignoring philosophical concerns- the most successful example being Gianlorenzo Bernini, the Catholic painter *par excellence*. In fact, the only seventeenth-century artists credited by Blunt as exhibiting intellectual concerns were Peter Paul Rubens and Nicholas Poussin, both notably non-Italian painters.⁵⁹ The disjuncture, which is inherent in the predominant epistemological approach of seventeenth-century scholarship, does not easily lend itself to the idea of an intellectual seicento artist. The terms themselves are almost antithetical as, according to Denis Mahon and Donald Posner, there was no

⁵⁷ Giulio Mancini. *Considerazioni sulla Pittura*. Adriana Marucchi and Luigi Salerno, eds. (Rome, 1957), 1: 7-9. The idea is expressed again by Adriano Banchieri in criticizing his fellow art critic-theorist Furietti. As Banchieri wrote, “I’ll have you know that here today in Bologna pens that write have become brushes that paint, and brushes that paint have become pens that write. Could you want anything more upside down? That writers write with brushes and painters with pens-could you desire anything stranger?” Camillo Scaligero [i.e. Adriano Banchieri]. *Lettera nell’idioma natio di Bologna. Scritta al Sig. Gio. Battista Viola a Roma sopra il Ratto d’Elena del Pittore Guido Reni*. (Bologna, 1633), 300.

⁵⁸ Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 6-7.

seventeenth-century equivalent to the type of artist-biographer that Giorgio Vasari was or art-theoretician that Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo had been.⁶⁰

This belief is not only unfounded, but ultimately hinders seventeenth-century scholarship. Investigations into the period continue to uncover critical and theoretical works that were produced by artists themselves. Philip Sohm has noted that there were over two-hundred treatises published by artists on criticism and theory throughout the century, such as those by Matteo Zaccolini, Orfeo Boselli and Pietro da Cortona, as well as artists who wrote but did not publish their own works like Nicolas Poussin and Pietro Testa.⁶¹ Though many of the works have been dismissed due to their lack of a unified theory of pictorial stylistics, their very existence refutes the belief that artists were no longer engaged in the dialogue on art, its merits, purpose and theories.⁶² As David Stone noted, the sixteenth-century artist would have rejected the persona of the “artisan” due to the “refurbishing of the temple of Practice by the architects of Theory” that occurred in the second half of the Cinquecento.⁶³ It is unfounded to assert that the artists of the Seicento would have felt differently about infusing their own practice with theory, as it was the primary argument behind raising painting to the level of liberal art. The momentum behind the education of artists that began in the early-fifteenth century steadily increased, reaching an astonishing level of sophistication by the end of the sixteenth. It is demonstrable that the perceived stifling effects of the reformatory education of artists did not hinder this momentum, but rather enhanced it.

⁶⁰ Both Mahon and Posner have extrapolated from the case of Annibale Carracci that seicento artists were primarily concerned with their craft and not the complex theoretical models that surround it. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*. Posner, *Annibale Carracci*.

⁶¹ Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy*.

⁶² The dismissal of these discovered texts can be demonstrated by Anthony Blunt’s treatment of Poussin’s *Osservazioni* and Donald Posner’s of the Carracci *Postille*. Anthony Blunt. “Poussin’s Notes on Painting.” *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1 no. 4 (April, 1938), 344-351. Donald Posner. “Marginal Notes by Annibale Carracci.” *The Burlington Magazine* 124 no.949 (April, 1982), 239.

⁶³ Stone, *Theory and Practice*, 14.

Renaissance Literacy and Grammar Curricula

The view of the artist's position in society in the Italian Renaissance has fluctuated between a glorified craftsman and a theoretical practitioner of a liberal art. In a rather dubious evaluation of the persona of the Renaissance "artist," Rensselaer Lee posed: "As fashioned by the Italian critics of the Cinquecento the learned painter is a highly theoretical personage who, if he cannot actually be called a figment of the imagination has never had more than a partial basis in reality; and much of the time he has had no basis there at all."⁶⁴ The essential factor that would ultimately decide whether the manual arts of painting and sculpture would be elevated to share in the prestige of the *ars liberalis* was education; and in that decision it was necessary to determine what type of education, of what it consisted, for what it was intended, and how it was to be used. The most fruitful source of information on the subject of the education of artists in the Renaissance has been bequeathed to us in the form of biography. These biographers, along with theorists, agreed that the purpose of the artist's education was to improve the resultant works and to raise the standards of the profession as a whole. Theorists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries substantiated their assertions as to the nobility of the arts and artists by demonstrating that painting and sculpture were upheld as noble arts by the ancients. However, in order to maintain that these arts were deserving to be included at the level of the seven liberal arts, as the theoreticians insisted, the artist had to be

⁶⁴ Evonne Levy. "Ideal and Reality of the Learned Artist: The Schooling of Italian and Netherlandish Artists" in: *Children of Mercury: the education of artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*. (Providence, Rhode Island: Department of Art, Brown University, 1984), 20. Similar contradictory statements emerged in Lee's seminal treatment of *Ut Pictura Poesis* in which he sets forth how the Horatian adage influenced art production, then stated that it was doubtful artists could have understood the complex Humanist theories involved in producing "painted poetry." Rensselaer Lee. "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting." *The Art Bulletin* 22 no.4 (December, 1940), 197-269.

educated not only in the technical aspects of his craft, but in those humanistic disciplines most crucial to its exercise: history, literature and theology.⁶⁵

The curriculum of such a liberal education was codified in the sixteenth century in Italy and was only slightly modified in the seventeenth. It began with education in elementary and then grammar schools; first gaining a command of the vernacular, and then developing a working knowledge of Latin.⁶⁶ The time spent in such grammar schools increased relative to the social prominence of the artist in the sixteenth century. The value placed on a proficiency in Latin required more time spent to complete grammar school. After the desired level of literacy had been achieved, usually between twelve and fourteen years of age, the artist would then be apprenticed to a local master, usually with connections to the family.⁶⁷ During this apprenticeship period, lasting approximately two to six years, the young artist would learn the practical and some theoretical aspects of his craft.⁶⁸ Often simultaneous to this stage of training, workshop studies could be augmented by lectures and interchanges in formal art academies as well. The formal tutelage usually lasted until the artist was prepared to become a master himself, gaining patronage through his own virtues, usually by the age of eighteen or twenty (and sometimes later).

⁶⁵ On the efforts by artists to include the *arti di disegno* among the liberal arts see: Anthony Blunt. *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 48ff.

⁶⁶ See: Charles E. Little. "The Italians and Their Schools." *Peabody Journal of Education* 10 no. 4 (January, 1933), 206-244.

⁶⁷ Apprentice painters came above all from families of painters and artisans in the allied crafts, although the sons of men in unrelated trades became painters as well. Additionally painting offered a socially and economically respectable alternative for the sons of upper class families which had come down in the world, such as Michelangelo, Titian and Rubens. Gabriele Bleek-Bryne. "The Education of the Painter in the Workshop" in: *Children of Mercury*, 28.

⁶⁸ In the case of Michelangelo Buonarroti it was three years, and Caravaggio four years. Giorgio Vasari. *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori : nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*. Paola Barocchi ed. (Firenze : Sansoni, 1967), 3: 1834. Nikolaus Pevsner. *Academies of Art, Past and Present*. (New York: De Capo Press, 1973), 278ff. Bleek-Bryne, "The Education of the Painter in the Workshop," 28. Apprentices in allied crafts started at approximately the same age, since these crafts demanded an education equivalent to that of a painter and since they were of similar prestige. The age of apprentices in crafts of lesser prestige, such as bakers, shoemakers, or butchers was somewhat lower. See also: Hans Rupprich. *Humanismus und Renaissance in den deutschen Städten und an den Universitäten*. (Leipzig: P. Reclam, jun., 1935), 2: 88.

Nevertheless, even after leaving a master's workshop, successful artists continued to cultivate their education with ancillary theoretical, critical and other related texts and interchanges throughout their career.⁶⁹ As is self-evident, the stages of an artist's education and the time spent in each stage logically reflected the perceived requisite knowledge for producing laudable art at different stages in early modern history.

The keystone to a liberal education was literacy, both in the vernacular and Latin idioms. Early in the fourteenth century, literacy in the vernacular was sufficient to accomplish an artisan's daily tasks.⁷⁰ However by the mid-sixteenth century, the ability not only to read, but to correspond in Latin, was the hallmark of the liberal artist and gentlemen. The difference in the level of education of the Trecento artisan and the Cinquecento artist had been gradually increased during the intervening centuries until the medieval conception of the craftsman had been supplanted by the Renaissance notion of the "learned artist."⁷¹ The essence of "learning" for both the theorist of art and the definition of a gentleman was the knowledge of Latin, which was necessary for this new personage. For centuries Latin had been spoken among the nobility, while at the popular level, documents were generally written and Catholic Church services performed in the language of the learned. Most importantly, it was the language of scholarly discourse. In practice, secondary schooling focused on the instruction of Latin grammar, hence the

⁶⁹ Individual experiences, education and training could vary dramatically from artist to artist. However, through the education curricula in place and the biographical sources, it is possible to estimate the most common experiences these artists would have had throughout their careers.

⁷⁰ As Cipolla points out, by 1313 an artisan in Florence was required to know how to read, write and compute. Carlo Cipolla. *Literacy and Development in the West*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 46. Meder also states that the ability to read and write was required of a beginning apprentice, although his source is not cited. Joseph Meder. *The Mastery of Drawing*. (New York: Abaris Books, 1978), 1: 175.

⁷¹ For instance, nine of ten sculptors employed during the construction of the Duomo in Milan between 1586 and 1595 signed their names, while the majority of the numerous stonemasons signed only with the telltale sign of illiteracy, the mark. *Archivio Fabbrica Duomo*, Milan, Mandati di Pagamento, 1586-1595 cited in: Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West*, 57. On the controversial practice of judging literacy from signatures see: Gerald Strauss. *Luther's House of Learning: indoctrination of the young in the German Reformation*. (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1978), 362, n.166.

appellation “Latin” or “Grammar” school; and as seen in a woodcut from the *Margarita Philosophica* (1517), Grammar (**figure 17**) was the sole gatekeeper that held the key to the other liberal arts.⁷²

The development and refinement of the curricula of these grammar schools was fostered by the development and spread of humanism beginning in the fourteenth century.⁷³ Inextricably linked to a “liberal” education, humanism as a term was revived by the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca, or Petrarch (1304-1374), Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) and others. Beginning in the early fifteenth century, these humanists actively reformed late medieval education based on the model of the Greco-Roman classics. However, the programmatic definition came with the treatise of Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370-ca.1445) *On liberal studies*. Though Vergerio’s influential treatise would not be published after his death in 1472, its assertions were already well established and defined by a sequence of studies, called the *studia humanitatis*. This included *grammatica*, *retorica*, *poetica*, *historia* and *philosophia moralis*, as these terms were then understood.⁷⁴ As Paul Grendler set forth, further refinement resulted in a normative syllabus that divided education in grammar into two schools. The lower or elementary school utilized grammar manuals such as the *Disticha Catonis* and *Vives’ Colloquia*,

⁷² Gregor Reisch. *Margarita Philosophica*. (Basel, 1517) (Providence: John Hay Library, Brown University).

⁷³ The term “humanism” has become increasingly problematic. As Benjamin Kohl has noted, earlier formulations of the term used by scholars such as Kristeller have limited its scope as to largely exclude the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture. It would be in the fifteenth century that there would be a gradual inclusion of these “ars.” Benjamin Kohl. *Renaissance Humanism, 1300-1550*. (New York: Garland, 1985).

⁷⁴ Pier Paolo Vergerio. *De ingenuis moribus ac liberalibus studiis*. (Venice, 1472). Unlike the liberal arts of the earlier Middle Ages, the humanities did not include logic or the *quadrivium* (*arithmetica*, *geometria*, *astronomia* and *musica*). Paul Oskar Kristeller. “Humanism” in: Charles Schmitt and Quentin Skinner eds. *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 113.

which also included repetitive drills in basic grammatical structure.⁷⁵ The upper school built upon basic grammar by teaching Cicero's letters for an introduction to rhetoric and Virgil for poetry. It often added another poet, such as Terence, Horace or Ovid, along with an historian, such as Caesar, Sallust or Valerius Maximus. A few pedagogues even augmented the core curriculum with some Greek, logic, or excerpts from Aristotle. In an educational model that would be followed for the next two centuries, Battista Guarini laid out the comprehensive syllabus for this study in his *De ordine docendi et discendi* of 1459.⁷⁶ Upon leaving such a grammar school, one would have achieved a firm foundation for reading and writing in Latin, as well as an extensive repertoire of ancient rhetoricians and poets.

The primary *raison d'être* for such institutions was to teach schoolboys a sufficient amount of Latin to enable them to attend a university or to pursue professional careers. In essence, as Grendler estimated, Latin schools taught Latin that enabled students to go on to university studies and prepared them for careers in the civil service, the Church or the highest ranks of society, where a knowledge of Latin was expected. On the other hand, vernacular schools, such as the Florentine Scuola d'Abaco, taught the essential commercial skills of reading, writing, *abaco*, and bookkeeping; which were basic skills necessary for artisans of all varieties. The two educational systems were thus fairly separated to reinforce the social order that they were designed to support. However,

⁷⁵ Humanist education was established in the 1430s, 1440s and 1450s in towns within the circle of Guarino and Vittorino, who had placed their former pupils in teaching positions in universities. Paul Grendler. *Schooling in Renaissance Italy; Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*. (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1989), 133.

⁷⁶ Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 203.

as the existing biographical information concerning artists of the Renaissance attests, it was increasingly common for artists to attend these Latin grammar schools as well.⁷⁷

The scattered references to elementary school education of artists illustrate the growing importance of fifteenth-century educational mores. Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) records that artists such as Timoteo della Vita (b.1469) were given their elementary education in the home, and in his case by his “prudent mother,” who schooled him in the first arts.⁷⁸ Likewise, Jacopo Pontormo (1494-1557) was taught by his grandmother to read and write in the vernacular, as well as the “first principles of Latin grammar.”⁷⁹ Toward the end of the century we also find that aspiring artists were sent off to formal educational institutions. Of these that went to public schools were Benvenuto Garofalo (1481-1559) who attended the “reading school,”⁸⁰ and Andrea del Sarto (1486-1531) who attended the “reading and writing school” until the age of seven.⁸¹ In the case of Niccolò Tribolo (ca.1500-1550), Vasari informs us that he was sent to receive his primary education in a formal setting as the natural consequence of the child’s demonstration of a “quick and vivacious” intelligence.⁸²

Many of the artists who attended Latin school did so in hopes of pursuing lucrative careers in letters, law or even in the clergy. In many instances, their talents and/or desire to become artists often interfered with their schooling, and thus the length of their attendance at school, and their consequent level of proficiency in Latin were variable. Among the least assiduous Latin scholars were Giovan Francesco Gessi (b. 1588) and Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570). The former was the son of a silk merchant

⁷⁷ Ibid, 409.

⁷⁸ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 4: 179.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 6:143.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 6: 322.

⁸¹ Ibid, 4 :290.

⁸² Ibid, 5 :443.

who attended the grammar school but with “little profit.”⁸³ Sansovino, the son of a mattress-maker, discovered his inclination toward drawing as a child. It was around that time that he was taken from the Latin school and “put into business,” at the behest of his father; a decision that would prove to be even less fruitful than letters.⁸⁴ Artists such as Giovan’ Agnolo Montorsoli (c.1507-1563) and Fra Filippo Lippi (c.1406-1469) who joined religious orders surely received instruction in Latin. But whereas Montorsoli made the choice to enter the Church as an adult, and might therefore have willingly benefited from a humanist education as a child, Fra Filippo resisted his parochial schooling and was allowed by the master to slip by because of his artistic talents.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, other artists did do justice to their newly acquired social prominence deriving from Latin studies, as did Bartolommeo Genga (1518-1558), “more than a mediocre profit.” Rather than enter his father’s profession in art, Bartolommeo studied Latin until he was uncommonly old. It can be assumed that he was considering a career in the Church, government or letters, as he was already eighteen when his father allowed him to leave school in order to follow his inherited inclinations.⁸⁶ It is possible that Genga’s father, Girolamo, resisted his son’s desire to follow him in a career in art, but it is more likely that Girolamo’s own experience instructed him to allow his son’s inclination to direct his career; Girolamo had been allowed to leave the wool business in order to pursue painting.⁸⁷

Further acknowledgement of the necessity of Latin can be found in artist’s letters and anecdotes recorded about them. In the case of Michelangelo, we find an artist that attended grammar school, beginning when he was seven years old, in the hopes that he

⁸³ Carlo Cesare Malvasia. *Felsina Pittrice*. (Bologna, 1678) (Bologna: V.G. Zanotti, 1841), 2: 245f.

⁸⁴ Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 7: 401.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 6 :473ff; 2 :469.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 6 :221.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 6 :211.

might make a career in letters.⁸⁸ As Ascanio Condivi wrote, “As the boy grew and reached the right age, his father, recognizing his intelligence and anxious that he study letters, sent him to the school of one Maestro Francesco da Urbino, who taught grammar at that time in Florence.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, in spite of this specific educational experience, the artist continually lamented his perceived inexperience with the Latin idiom later in his life. In a letter of 1545 to Luigi del Riccio, Michelangelo apologizes for not writing in Latin by stating, “A non parlar qualche volta, sebbene scorretto in *gramatica*, mi sarebbe vergogna, sendo tanto pratico con voi.”⁹⁰ The humble appellation was of course false, but it underscores the palpable need for a learned artist to know and correspond “in *gramatica*.”

Another example of the guilty unlettered is Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) due to the discrepancy between his desire to be the ideal learned artist and his actual level of education. His numerous expressions of admiration for his acquaintances and relatives who knew Latin, and his almost supernatural encounter with a necromancer, attest to his overwhelming desire justify his mingling at the papal and royal courts.⁹¹ In one such testament, Cellini is asked by a necromancer to help him consecrate a book to the devil. The magician argues for obtaining the wealth of the world over intellectual riches; possibly referring to Neoplatonic love in humanist circles, he encourages the goldsmith:

⁸⁸ Michelangelo’s father is also presented as unintellectual. When he was fifteen or sixteen years old, Michelangelo went to live in the house of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and stayed there until the latter’s death in 1492. During this time, Michelangelo’s father Lodovico would approach Lorenzo whenever there was a position to be filled. On one such occasion, hoping to obtain a position in the customs office in Florence, Lodovico stated: “Lorenzo, I don’t know how to do anything but read and write. Now, as Marco Pucci’s colleague in the customs is dead, I would like to take his place, as it seems to me that I could serve suitably in that office.” Ascanio Condivi. *The Life of Michelangelo*. Alice Sedgwick Wohl trans. (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁹⁰ Gaetano Milanesi. *Le lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti*. (Florence, 1875), 504.

⁹¹ Cellini’s father, brother, friend, the son of a Spanish coppersmith, and Luigi Pulci all earn his respect for knowing Latin. Giuseppe Guido Ferrero. *Opere di Benvenuto Cellini*. (Turin: Grafica Moderna, 1971), 80, 77, 124, 132.

“all that business about love was vanity and folly, and revealed nothing.” When Cellini confesses his handicap of not knowing Latin, the necromancer assures him that plenty of people know Latin (a knowledge of which is “not worth having”), but no one is quite as “steadfast” as Benvenuto.⁹² The artist is thus forced to justify his ignorance of the language in a supernatural fashion.

These examples make clear the diversity of experience artists had regarding literacy in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. The relative scarcity of information in these biographies regarding the school education of the artists has been interpreted as being related to their ambitions. However, the mere fact that the information is recorded, testifies to its perceived importance. Though the value of elementary education can be judged variable in each case cited above, the underlying importance given to literacy at the early stages of education is constant. It is not surprising to find that biographers, such as Vasari and Carel van Mander (1548-1606) in particular, are more attentive to the grown man’s demonstration of literary knowledge, his rhetorical abilities, or composition of poetry than his formal schooling.⁹³ In effect, one’s attendance of school as a young child, in some cases, may have had less influence on one’s erudition garnered later in life. Nevertheless without the key of Grammatica, the gate would remain closed to the other liberal arts; hence literacy was necessary to progress one’s studies, not only of rhetoric and poetry, but the theoretical aspects of the newly elevated profession.

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⁹² Ibid, 214.

⁹³ Giambattista Bellucci is cited by Vasari as one who was particularly knowledgeable about or took great pleasure in reading literature. Michelangelo, Bartolomeo Genga, Danese Cataneo, Bronzino, Alessandro Allori, and Vincenzo Danti Perugino are mentioned by Vasari as having composed poetry. Levy, “Ideal and Reality of the Learned Artist,” 25. For a discussion of Netherlandish education see: Carel van Mander. *The lives of the illustrious Netherlandish and German painters*. (1603-4) (Doornspijk : Davaco, 1994).

Seicento Grammar Curricula and Literacy

Building on the *studia humanitatis* established in the fifteenth century, grammar curricula were systematized and extended at the dawn of the seventeenth century. The educational reform was part of the bilateral effort of the Catholic Church in Counter-Reformation Italy. On a popular level it aimed to inculcate the masses, while on a more pragmatic level it sought to create educational institutions which would ensure a steady supply of *intelligentsia* to manage the complex ecclesiastical machinery. A highly successful byproduct of the latter goal was the secondary school designed by the Jesuit order.⁹⁴ These Jesuit schools established a model of systematized secondary education for other schools to follow in the Grammatica, or Latin grammar school. The curriculum, as established in 1599, consisted of *Lower, Middle* and *Upper Grammar*. In *Lower Grammar*, a knowledge of the rudiments of Latin grammar and some syntax using facile selections from Cicero's letters, as well as beginning Greek grammar would be learned. *Middle Grammar* introduced the student to more advanced Latin and Greek grammar, such as Cicero's *Ad Familiares*, poems by Ovid, the catechism in Greek, and the *Tabula* of Cebes. Finally the student would proceed to *Upper Grammar*, where advanced Latin grammar, including figures of speech, prosody, more advanced Greek grammar, Cicero's *Ad Familiares, Ad Atticum, Ad Quintum Fratrem*, selections from Ovid's elegies and epistles, Cicero's *De Amicitia, De Senectute*, the *Paradoxa*, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, Virgil's *Eclogues*, and or *Georgics, Aeneid*, and Aesop and Agapetus in

⁹⁴ Jesuit colleges numbered eleven in Italy during the 1550s, while ten were added by 1581. Allan Farrell. *The Jesuit Code of Liberal Education; development and scope of the Ratio studiorum*. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938), 92, 104.

Greek would be common selections. In addition to these three levels, “Humanities” and Rhetoric” classes also had specific readings.⁹⁵

Reading at the Grammatica included both classical texts and works in the vernacular, as well as texts of both classical and religious subject matter. The goal of these schools was the teaching of eloquence, elegance in speech, and copiousness in writing, and the basic curriculum was constructed around constant drilling in grammar throughout the time the student was in school. An adolescent’s career in school commonly began with elementary grammar, followed by advanced grammar, then humanities, culminating with rhetoric. The grammar text was generically referred to as the *Donato*, which could refer to Guarino’s grammar, Ionnes Despauterius’ *Grammatica Latina* and *Syntaxis* or Donatus’ *Ars Minor*, called the *Janua*. Indeed, more than one grammar was quite certainly used, students typically began with the *Janua*, learning the elements of reading, pronunciation, declining, and conjugating. Then they would move on to Guarino’s *Regola* or Despauterius’ *Syntaxis* for irregular morphology and the elements of syntax. Prosody and metrics would then follow as the student moved to the reading of the authors, and then finally to rhetoric. The speed at which one progressed was due primarily to the aptitude for the material demonstrated.⁹⁶

At the elementary level, works that were typically read together with continuous training in grammar were some easier selections from Cicero’s letters, such as *Epistolae Familiares*, as well as Cato’s *Disticha de Moribus*, and selections from the Psalter, moving thence to the more difficult of Cicero’s letters and such moral essays as the *De Amicitia* or the *De Senectute*. Reading in poetry would commence with Ovid, often his

⁹⁵ Farrell, *The Jesuit Code of Liberal Education*, 344f. It should also be noted that the Jesuit curriculum, like other humanist school curricula, was an adaptation of Guarino’s. Charles Dempsey. “Some Observations on the Education of Artists in Florence and Bologna in the Later Sixteenth Century.” *Art Bulletin* vol. 62 (1980), 561.

⁹⁶ Dempsey, “Some Observations on the Education of Artists,” 561.

Tristia or *De Ponto*, the easier books of the *Aeneid*, the *Georgics*, and Horace or Martial. Sallust, Valerius Maximus, and Justinus were especially widely used, as were Statius, Terence, Plautus, Seneca, Juvenal, Persius, and Mantuan. Among the humanist texts read, Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae* was especially popular. The foundations for rhetoric, which was often started while reading in humanities, were laid with Quintilian's *Ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De Oratore* and *De Inventione*, read together with Cicero's orations and the principles of Aristotle and Plato. Significantly, this course of study was widespread throughout Italy, as recommended by Guarino and adopted in the humanist and Jesuit schools.⁹⁷

The impact that these grammar schools had specifically on artists and their education was significant, though often variable, despite the more regimented curricula of the Scuola di Grammatica. As the study of artists' education in Bologna by Charles Dempsey attests, the levels of education for seventeenth-century artists were similar to that of the earlier generation. In the case of Annibale and Agostino Carracci (1557-1602), the biographical sources are silent on their earliest phase of education, but it is possible they could have learned to read and write their native tongue at home, taught by their parents, as seen in the case of Timoteo della Vita and Pontormo. This was also the case with both Francesco Brizio (1574-1623) and Girolamo Curti (il Dentone) (1575-1632), the latter's father being so poor that he was unable to send him to school or apprentice him.⁹⁸ However, given that their father Antonio Carracci was a prosperous professional tailor, it is more probable that Agostino and Annibale attended the infants' school, called the Scuola di Leggere e Scrivere, which is what Malvasia also reports concerning

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 1: 378f., 2:105.

Domenichino's older brother Gabrielle.⁹⁹ This school for reading and writing in the vernacular has already been cited in Florence in the cases of Benvenuto Garofalo, who attended the "reading school," and Andrea del Sarto, who attended the "reading and writing school" until the age of seven.¹⁰⁰

Accordingly, if assumed that the Carracci followed the normal pattern of progression, they would have then entered the Scuola di Grammatica sometime between the ages of five and seven. The choice to enroll them in the institution infers that their father probably had aspirations of them going on to a profession such as letters or law. Otherwise, they might have been immediately drafted into Antonio's shop (as happened with Domenichino's brother), apprenticed them, or sent them to the Scuola di Arithmetica in preparation for a career in business. This is what happened to Francesco Albani (1578-1660), whose father sent him first to the Grammatica in the hopes that he would make a beginning there for a career in letters; accordingly, he was transferred to the Arithmetica so that he could follow his father in the silk trade. The Scuola di Arithmetica was a school for learning commercial arithmetic, and corresponds in curriculum and function to the Florentine Scuola d'Abaco. Nevertheless, Albani profited little there as well, and was finally sent to study painting in the workshop of Denys Calvaert (1540-1619).¹⁰¹

As was true in preceding centuries, the future careers of children were decided upon as early as six or seven years old, and they would be committed to those career paths by their early teens. Guido Reni (1575-1642) was destined by his father for a career

⁹⁹ Ibid, 2: 219. Financial concerns played an integral role in which educational institutions artists attended, as well as the length of time that they spent in each. As Malvasia records, Francesco Brizio was one such artist that was forced to withdraw from school early, due to financial necessity. Ibid, 1 :379.

¹⁰⁰ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 6:322; 4 :290.

¹⁰¹ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2: 150.

in music, while Albani's brother Domenico was set early for a career in law.¹⁰² Reni also resisted his secondary schooling and began his study of art at the age of ten after a brief foray into musical studies.¹⁰³ Alessandro Tiarini, after attending the *Leggere e Scrivere*, was sent to a convent school in preparation for the priesthood, necessitating further training in Latin.¹⁰⁴ Domenichino was sent to the *Grammatica*, where he stayed well beyond the common age due to serious consideration of continuing for the doctorate or the priesthood.¹⁰⁵ As Malvasia noted, though Annibale and Agostino Carracci attended the *Scuola di Grammatica* in Bologna, they both would cover the margins of their books with drawings instead of diligently pursuing their studies.¹⁰⁶ Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619), their older cousin, perceived their respective talents and urged them to withdraw from school to prepare themselves for careers as painters, which they then did. Agostino must have been about fourteen, the normal age for leaving school, while Annibale was three years younger. Malvasia therefore writes of Annibale that he left school virtually as soon as he had learned to read and write, or when he had only just learned to read and write, was taken into his father's tailoring shop as an assistant, and there set himself with his characteristic singleness of purpose to learn painting.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, Annibale had left his schooling when he had only just learned to read and write Latin at the *Scuola di Grammatica*.¹⁰⁸ The trend seen in Annibale's case is fairly common, for the secondary education of artists was often abbreviated to begin workshop training, as in the case of

¹⁰² Ibid, 2: 92.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 2 : 6. After leaving the Latin school Reni seems to have left behind any literary interests. His writing skills were so bad that Malvasia refused to quote from his letters, preferring instead to "cull the nectar from them" rather than print them. Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2:55.

¹⁰⁴ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2:149.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 2:119.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 1:265.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 1:266.

¹⁰⁸ See: Giuseppe Manacorda. *Storia della scuola italiana*. (Naples: Remo Sandron, 1912).

Guercino who was taken out of the “school of letters” after exhibiting his inclination toward design at an early age¹⁰⁹

As these particular cases attest, the length which these artists attended their respective educational institutions varied. Nevertheless, many artists gained much from their early education, which would yield an increased fluency in Latin in their adult lives. Agostino Carracci certainly received an excellent foundation in Latin, which he continued to read on his own and in the company of his close friend, the poet Cesare Rinaldi (who would later instruct Malvasia at the University of Bologna), until in Bellori’s words, he came to understand it perfectly.¹¹⁰ The level of Latin achieved not only by Agostino, but by Giovanni Battista Ruggieri, Antonio Maria Panico and Agostino Metelli, was very high, and based on the firm foundation laid at the Grammatica.¹¹¹ In the case of Leonello Spada (1576-1622), a prototype of the self-consciously learned artist, we learn of his attendance of a Latin school from a practical joke he performed while in Malta. Professing ignorance of the simplest prayers among the townspeople, Spada roused the Gran Maestro of Malta to come to question him in person on his religious education.¹¹² Once he had gained the Maestro’s attention, Spada could no longer contain himself, and thus recited the *Pater Noster* and *Credo* in Latin, Greek and the vernacular.¹¹³ Even in instances where such virtuoso mastery of linguistics is not prevalent, the necessity of Latin for the artist’s trade is still underscored. Francesco Albani (1578-1660), son of a silk merchant, studied unsuccessfully at the Latin and

¹⁰⁹ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2:257.

¹¹⁰ Giovanni Pietro Bellori. *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*. (Rome, 1672) Evelina Borea and Giovanni Previtali eds. (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 105.

¹¹¹ Among the most prominent artists praised for their rhetorical abilities are Agostino Carracci, Andrea Sacchi, and Poussin, all cited by Bellori. Prospero Fontana, Domenichino, and Guercino are cited by Malvasia, Federico Barrocci by Bellori, were particularly knowledgeable about or took great pleasure in reading literature. Leonello Spada and Agostino Metelli are mentioned by Malvasia as having composed poetry. Dempsey, “Some Observations on the Education of Artists,” 562.

¹¹² Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2:82.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 2:80.

arithmetic schools in preparation for his entrance into his father's trade.¹¹⁴ Albani's lamentation of his ignorance of Latin and self-conscious process of beginning a painting by reading to derive a foundation of the subject, contemplation, speculation over ordering and placement, and refinement through discussion indicate that he was an intellectually oriented individual whose ability to reason demanded a compatible level of knowledge.¹¹⁵ In the most pragmatic of approaches, artists were expected to understand the complex mythological, biblical and other narratives so that they might accurately represent them. Preferably the text referenced would be in the original language of its author (i.e. Greek or Latin); otherwise an accurate translation would be sought out. However, as will be addressed in the next section, literacy in this area was merely the beginning of a humanist curriculum that sought to further develop an artist's exposure to the different branches of human knowledge, as they were then understood.

* * *

Renaissance Humanism, Rhetoric and Poetry in Art Theory

The relative merits of literacy in both the vernacular and Latin were invaluable for an artist to foster a successful career. As mentioned, the increasing necessity of fluency in Latin began in the fifteenth century, synchronically when education in a wide range of theoretical matters were also added to training of the artist's craft.¹¹⁶ Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) in his *Commentarii* (1447) was among the first theorists to extend Vitruvius' instructions for the education of the architect to the painter and sculptor.¹¹⁷ In *De*

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 2: 149f.

¹¹⁵ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2: 156.

¹¹⁶ *Children of Mercury: the education of artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*. ex. cat. (Providence, Rhode Island: Department of Art, Brown University, 1984), 9.

¹¹⁷ Julius von Schlosser. *Lorenzo Ghiberti's Denkwürdigkeiten (I Commentarii)*. (1912), 1: 102.

architectura Vitruvius specified the disciplines in which an architect should be knowledgeable by stating:

Let him be educated, skillful with the pencil, instructed in geometry, know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurists, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens.¹¹⁸

The painter and sculptor of the Quattrocento were to aspire to gain the knowledge that the ancients saw as necessary to carry out their trades, encompassing the branches of the quadrivium: music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. Ironically it was Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), whose primary educational concern was that artists should learn geometry, who bundled Vitruvius' specifications into one general recommendation that artists be as knowledgeable as possible in all of the liberal arts. Unwittingly Alberti would add the trivium and complete a mastery of all seven branches with the addition of grammar, logic and most importantly rhetoric by suggesting that an artist cultivate associations with poets and orators who "are full of information about many subjects," and could aid the painter in "preparing the composition of an '*historia*.'" ¹¹⁹ As the first theorist of the Renaissance to demonstrate a pragmatic understanding of art education, Alberti advised "the studious painter to make himself familiar with poets, orators and other men of letters, for he will not only obtain excellent ornaments from such learned minds, but he will also be assisted in those very inventions which in painting may gain him the greatest possible praise." ¹²⁰ Added to the basis of Alberti's perspective system,

¹¹⁸ Marcus Pollio Vitruvius. *I dieci libri dell'architettura di Marcus Vitruvio*. Daniel Barbaro trans. (Venice: Francesco de' Franceschi Senese & Giovanni Chrieger Alemanno Compagni, 1567), 1:1. Quoted in: Vitruvius. *The Ten Books on Architecture*. M. H. Morgan trans. (New York: Dover, 1960), 5f.

¹¹⁹ Cecil Grayson ed. *Leon Battista Alberti on Painting and Sculpture: The Latin Texts of 'De Pictura' and 'De Statua.'* (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), 95. Pomponio Guarico's ideal sculptor (*De sculptora*, 1504) would be "very instructed in all of the arts and also cultured in literature." Also see Guarico's debate with sculptors on the necessity of the study of literature as opposed to art in: Paola Barocchi ed. *Scritti d'arte del cinquecento*. (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1971), 2: 130, 1315ff.

¹²⁰ Grayson, *Leon Battista Alberti on Painting and Sculpture*, 97.

the precision and clarity of rhetorical method helped to secure a place for painting and sculpture among the liberal arts.

The paralleling of the aims of poetry and rhetoric with painting and sculpture found the two inextricably intertwined toward the end of the Quattrocento with the Horatian creed of *ut pictura poesis*, firmly establishing painting as mute poetry.¹²¹ The interrelationship of painting and poetry further elevated the status of the artist while simultaneously placing greater demands on him. The Venetian theorist and dramatist Lodovico Dolce (1508-1568) argued in his dialogue *L’Aretino* (1557) that: “painters have always been appreciated for it appears that they surpass the rest of humanity in intellect and spirit.”¹²² For Dolce, “well-developed intelligence” and knowledge of historical narrative and poetry were essential for the facility in *invenzione*, mastery of one’s subject, and adherence to the laws of propriety.¹²³ However, similar to Alberti, Dolce did not find it necessary for the artist to be a man of letters. He suggests instead that the artist merely “keep in close touch with poets and men of letters.”¹²⁴ Nevertheless, as Rensselaer Lee observed, in his *L’Aretino* Dolce is “the first critic to use the threefold division which corresponds almost exactly to the first three divisions of the art of rhetoric”; that is invention (*inventio*), disposition (*dispositio*), and elocution (*elocutio*).¹²⁵ Dolce equates the process of inventing the *istoria* in painting with the first of the three-part method of

¹²¹ Rensselaer Lee. *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967). Also see: Elizabeth Hazelton Haight. “Horace on Art: Ut pictura poesis.” *The Classical Journal* 47 no. 5 (February, 1952), 157-162, 201-202.

¹²² Mark Roskill. *Dolce’s ‘L’Aretino’ and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*. (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 11.

¹²³ Roskill, *Dolce’s ‘L’Aretino’ and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecent*, 11, 129.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 129.

¹²⁵ Lee, *Ut pictura poesis*, 70. Also see: Carl Goldstein. “Rhetoric and Art History in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque.” *The Art Bulletin* 73 no.4 (December, 1991), 641-652. Jerrold E. Seigel. *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968).

the rhetorician, also called invention.¹²⁶ Completing the equation, Dolce transforms disposition into *disegno* and elocution into *colore*, so as to adapt the entire discursive structure of rhetoric for the use of the visual artist. In this scheme, invention is to be understood as both the selection of the *topos* as well as the overall compositional design.¹²⁷ Soon, invention came to be regarded as an index of sophistication and refinement and was cultivated with the same assiduity as the practical and technical aspects of the artist's training.

Similar to the formulation of Alberti's *Della pittura*, Giovanni Battista Armenini (1540-1609) published his *Dei veri precetti della pittura* (1586) as a practical manual for art education. In the treatise we find that Armenini pays close attention to the selection of children that are to study painting. The selection was based not on the display of a "natural inclination," but rather on the evidence of intellectual capability. As Armenini writes, "Let fathers then, first of all gauge the subtlety of their children's minds, their judgment, and how capable, sharp and alert they are in understanding the arduous, difficult matters which art entails."¹²⁸ He was particularly concerned that the painter be intellectually self-reliant. Significantly, unlike Alberti and Dolce before him, Armenini did not recommend the association of artists with men of letters in order to glean knowledge and ideas from them. The beginning student, Armenini states, should know how to read and write well. Skill in writing, especially in being able to imitate other people's letters, is an indication of the student's capacity for design (*disegno*) as well as good training for learning to draw. Furthermore, "no less necessary than writing is a good

¹²⁶ Roskill, *Dolce's 'L'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, 117, 123ff.

¹²⁷ Lee, *Ut pictura poesis*, 70.

¹²⁸ Giovanni Battista Armenini. *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*. (1586) Robert Baldick trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 117.

knowledge of letters, so that in time the student will have a thorough understanding of those things which are necessary for beginning his work, that is design.”¹²⁹

The Lombard painter and theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo (1538-1600) in his *Idea del tempio della pittura* of 1584 occupies a middle ground between Armenini’s pragmatism and Dolce’s sense of Counter-Reformation propriety.¹³⁰ The continuous study of history, he argued, would provide the artist with “abundance and copiousness” in his inventions. If poetry, which is “almost the same thing as painting,” accompanies the painter, he will know how to portray his conceptions vividly. Sacred history and theology should be known to the painter at least through conversations with theologians. Lastly, Lomazzo’s ideal painter, or “il vero pittore”, is also a philosopher capable of penetrating the appearance of his subjects to their real natures.¹³¹ His recommendation that artists learn about other disciplines from specialists in those fields was perhaps a concession to reality, based on the experiences of generations of artists since the ideal was originally stated by Alberti.

Additionally Lomazzo took Alberti’s theories one step further in the consolidation of invention and at least indirectly, iconographic conventions. In the seven books which comprise the whole of his *Trattato* of 1584, Lomazzo sets out with painstaking rigor an encyclopedic account of the proper elements of painting, intended for neophyte and connoisseur alike. The first five books are devoted to lengthy discussions on proportion, perspective, actions/gestures (or *moti*), color, and light. These books comprise the practical component of the craft, and document with a clinical attention the properties he

¹²⁹ Ibid, 122.

¹³⁰ Lomazzo is the only theorist among those discussed to have articulated an objection to, and thus confirmed the occurrence of illiteracy among artists of the day: “E però pazzo è quello che pensa di poter esser pittore senza saper pur leggere e scrivere, essendo questo il fondamento di tutte le scienze, poi con tal mezzo si vengono a sapere le cose fatte e dette.” Roberto Paolo Ciardi, ed. *Gian Paolo Lomazzo: Scritti sulle arti*. (Florence: Marchi and Bertolli, 1973-74), 1:272.

¹³¹ Ibid, 1: 275f.

deemed significant for painting. For instance, in his book on the passions, Lomazzo equates the colors of the body with different emotions: “A desire for revenge brings warmth, redness in the face, a bitter spittle and abdominal spasms; fear brings coldness, palpitations, an incapacity for speech and paleness. Sadness induces sweating and cerulean whiteness.”¹³²

In the last two books of the *Trattato* Lomazzo devotes his attention solely to theory. The sheer disproportion in length of these two books to the previous five, well over one and a half pages of theory to every one of practical concern, announces the author’s intent. The sixth book, surprisingly called ‘Practice,’ offers a comprehensive survey of the ancient and modern literature he considered most appropriate to pictorial treatment. With this anthology, he made available to artists the invaluable insights of their peers in poetry. It was Lomazzo’s belief that literary images, coupled with knowledge of theology, were to be the basis upon which the discipline of painting should grow. It is in the final book, ‘History Painting,’ that Lomazzo set out the factors involved in this translation, as a veritable universal iconography. The book is divided into thirty-three chapters which, taken together, establish the formulas for the pictorial representation of some fifty major ideas and entities. These range from pagan and Christian deities to subsidiary mythological and hagiological figures, from horses to selected types of architecture, and even the depiction of monsters; all of which Lomazzo appropriated from Vincenzo Cartari’s mythographical handbook, published over a decade earlier.¹³³

In the efforts of Dolce and Lomazzo we find a unified effort to increase the effectiveness of the *istoria* in two fundamental ways. First, and especially evident in

¹³² Ibid, 2:103.

¹³³ Vincenzo Cartari. *Le imagini degli Dei degli antichi*. (1571) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976).

Dolce, the work of the painter is linked by method to that of the rhetorician. In establishing a framework for the inception, elaboration, and execution of a pictorial theme along the lines of rhetorical practice, the artist's enterprise achieved the self-conscious rigor of a liberal art *sui generis*. Secondly, Lomazzo localizes and describes narrative invention by systematizing homeopathic formulas for representing significant human emotions and gestures in his second hand iconographic atlas.¹³⁴ Finally, several of these pedagogically-minded theorists set out curricula for the artist's literary education. Armenini's list of specific works that artists should read superficially sets him apart as the only true pedagogue among these theorists.¹³⁵ Lomazzo also found that direct knowledge of literature was necessary. However, the publication of actual literature by artist-theorists and biographers such as van Mander and Lomazzo did not lessen the painter's responsibility to educate himself. These texts were intended as supplements to the artist's learning, not substitutes by virtue of sheer accessibility; nor did these poetic considerations elevate these treatises to a level beyond all practicality. It should be noted that the recommendations of Alberti and Dolce for an artist's education, and resultantly his advancement in social status, were generic. It was only with Armenini that educational practice was actually taken into account when he recognizes that the process of education takes place during youth.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ In rhetoric, homeopathy refers to the balance between inner and outer states of being. James H. Jensen. *The Muses' Concord: Literature, Music and the Visual Arts in the Baroque Age*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 66.

¹³⁵ He entreats artists to read "the Bible, the New Testament, the life of Christ, that of the Madonna and of the holy virgins and martyrs, the legends of the saints, the lives of the holy fathers, and the Apocalypse of Saint John," among religious works. "As for secular materials, books that deal with Roman history are very good since they recount true things and are filled with excellent and profitable examples, particularly those described by Plutarch. Then there is Titus Livius, *Appian* of Alexandria, Valerius Maximus, the *Illustrious Men* of Petrarch, the *Illustrious Women* of Boccaccio. For fables we have the *Genealogy of the Gods* of Boccaccio, the *Images* of Albercicus and those of the gods of Cartari, the *Officiana* of Testore, the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, or that of Antonio Apuleius, and the *Amadis of Gaul*, together with some other works of more modern writers..." Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 276f.

¹³⁶ Levy, "Ideal and Reality of the Learned Artist," 22

Accademia del Disegno

The recommendations for an artist's education by theorists such as Alberti, Dolce, Lomazzo and Armenini were formally realized with the establishment of the Florentine Academy, or the Accademia del Disegno in 1563.¹³⁷ As the foundation of the Academy attests, the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture (*arti di disegno*) ought to be considered among the liberal arts, and that they constituted a profession. As a profession, like letters or law, design required training by professors of design in its theory and practice. Once perfection in the knowledge of theory and practice had been attained, the native genius of the young artist, whether of a high or low order, would be liberated, free to work to the limits of its "God-given" capacity.¹³⁸ It is evident that artists of the later sixteenth century began to think of themselves as practicing a discipline, and teaching it, firmly based on the pattern of other intellectual disciplines. The ways in which artists thought about their profession and proceeded in the teaching, criticism, and practice of it followed upon the patterns of thought that characterize the related professional disciplines, and most especially the arts of letters. Moreover, these habits of thought, common to both the arts of letters and design, are directly the consequence of the educational programs of the grammar schools, which were becoming increasingly diffused by the middle of the sixteenth century. It is significant that Benedetto Varchi, in his funeral oration for Michelangelo in 1564, found it necessary to explain to his audience how Michelangelo had attained the rank of philosopher- which was the

¹³⁷ See: Karen-edis Barzman. *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹³⁸ Barzman, "The Florentine Accademia del Disegno," 14.

hallmark of artistic greatness, founded on the example of the philosopher-poet Homer—even though he had not extensively studied grammar.¹³⁹ Vasari, an artist of the next generation and more than anyone else responsible for the establishment of the first true Academy of art, had on the other hand learned grammar from Pierio Valeriano when the famous student of hieroglyphs was tutor to the nephews of Clement VII.¹⁴⁰

The Florentine Accademia del Disegno was founded as an instrument of liberal education that codified existing principles of theory and practice in a formal program for artists of all ages. The Florentine Compagnia ed Accademia del Disegno was conceived in the early 1560s with two distinct yet interrelated branches: a religious confraternity and a teaching association for the arts of *disegno*—painting, sculpture, and architecture. *Disegno*, the theoretical principle uniting the three arts of painting, sculpture and architecture, was embraced as the guiding principle of the new, dual organization. In the Introduction to the second edition of *The Lives* (1568), Giorgio Vasari, one of the founders of the organization, defined *disegno* as the realization of the *idea*, which is born in the intellect.¹⁴¹ Through endless study and practice, and the application of measured judgment, the hand could be trained to reproduce the inventions of the intellect. This notion of *disegno* called for the union of theory and practice; the mind had to be exercised as well as the hand in order to lead to perfection in art. The idea is reflected in the Academy's founders championing the three arts as liberal activities of the intellect and thus promoting the union of sound theory and good practice (by contrast, purely mechanical arts were learnt through practice alone). A group of artists, humanists, and

¹³⁹ Benedetto Varchi. *Orazione funerale di M. Benedetto Varchi fatta, e recitata da lui pubblicamente nell'essequi di Michelangelo Buonarotti in Firenze, nella Chiesa di San Lorenzo*. (Florence, 1564), 41.

¹⁴⁰ Wolfgang Kallab. *Vasaristudien (Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttechnik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit, XV)*. (Vienna and Leipzig, 1908), 13, 21-24.

¹⁴¹ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 1: 168-69.

ecclesiastics drafted statutory guidelines for this unprecedented dual organization, which was incorporated as an official organ of the Medici state in 1563.¹⁴²

The curriculum of the Academy was a progressive sequence of study, beginning with foundation sciences and exercises, and then advancing to related disciplines and activities. It joined theory with practice in an ideal union for the liberal artist. In the sixteenth century, mathematics was recognized as the foundation of knowledge, as a means for rationalizing the external world. Study thus began with mathematics, to provide the artist with the conceptual key for comprehending the world around him. Since Florentine art was primarily concerned with the human figure, anatomy followed mathematics and was complemented by drawing the figure from life. Natural philosophy came next, along with the study of inanimate forms like drapery; all of which intended to aid the artist in the composition of *istoria*, or history painting. Knowledge of one subject conditioned comprehension of the next and together they constituted a coherent theory of art. The codification of this curriculum was drawn directly from Renaissance traditions and earlier theorists, such as that of Alberti, and towards the end of the century, unpublished manuscripts of Leonardo's art theory began to circulate in Florence.¹⁴³

In a letter of 1591 to his brother in Genoa, the painter Giovanni Battista Paggi (1554-1627) summarized the curriculum of the Academy and began by affirming the Albertian dictum that theory begins with first principles which, for the arts of *disegno*, meant the mathematical sciences.¹⁴⁴ He asserted that contemporary artistic theory was

¹⁴² Barzman, "The Florentine Accademia del Disegno," 14.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 15.

¹⁴⁴ Carroll William Westfall. "Painting and the Liberal Arts: Alberti's View," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1967), 487-506.

grounded partly in arithmetic and partly in geometry.¹⁴⁵ From these sciences the artist would gain a knowledge of perspective and symmetry. The rigorous drafting of three-dimensional forms, like regular and irregular polyhedra according to the rules of geometry, provided fundamental exercises necessary for developing a facility of the hand. In addition to this, the study of mathematics was thought to develop measured judgment in both action and intellect, and measured judgment was a quality to be cultivated by artists in their new liberal and hence nobler status.¹⁴⁶ Hence the Academy's teachings were modeled on the universities, where one would read and comment on authoritative texts, such as Euclid and Vitruvius.

The next part of the curriculum was anatomy and life drawing, particularly for the painter and sculptor. Based initially on Alberti's recommendations and then reinforced by the prescripts of Leonardo, the artist was trained to have their works communicate mutely, with their inner thoughts and passions (*affetti dell'animo*) made visibly manifest. Alberti had enjoined artists to study human anatomy in a systematic fashion, concentrating on those parts of the body responsible for mobilization. The study of bone structure, musculature, and the flesh stripped of skin would follow each other sequentially. Of course these internal anatomical components had to be mastered in addition to those external features studied in life drawing classes. They had to be understood in their individual appearances and functions, and in their proportional relationships to one another, in order for the artist to comprehend fully the mechanics of mobility. The interest in anatomical dissection accelerated in the wake of Michelangelo. There was a pervasive notion that the perfection of the "divine" Michelangelo's art,

¹⁴⁵ Giovanni Bottari and Stefano Ticozzi. *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura scritte da' più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI, e XVII*. (Milan 1822), 6: 83.

¹⁴⁶ Barzman, "The Florentine Accademia del Disegno," 15.

which celebrated and ennobled human form, lay in his profound knowledge of anatomy, and Academy members sought to perfect their own art by way of a solid grounding in this science.¹⁴⁷ In order to discern the mathematical relationships of the parts of the body, one studied mathematics first and then anatomy in great detail, followed by life drawing. This would enable the artist to recognize and then produce ideal human forms whose beauty was the result of harmonious proportions. After anatomy, the artist turned to the study of the human figure from life. According to Alberti, although the beauty of the body's planes and surfaces could be grasped from ancient sculpture, it was best mastered from nature directly.¹⁴⁸

The mind and eye had been trained to discover the mathematical relationships of the parts of the body one to another, which would enable the artist to depict ideal human forms of perfect proportions. With an understanding of the mechanics of the body, the artist could animate his ideal forms and set them convincingly in motion. However, external movements of the body were but visible manifestations of the internal movements of the soul: pose, gesture, and facial expression, all aspects of physiognomy including hair color, skin tone and texture, were dictated by the various humors and emotional states to which men were subject. According to these principles, men of sanguine, melancholic, choleric and phlegmatic temperaments had their own pathological traits and idiosyncrasies. The artist would have to be able to distinguish among men of different humors when subject to various emotional states (*affetti dell'animo*), which also

¹⁴⁷ Although dissections were held only annually in the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, the corpse was probably viewed for longer than the medical professionals would have advised in order to have the maximum number of students view it. Ibid, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Leon Battista Alberti. *Della pittura*. John R. Spencer, trans. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), Bk. 3, Ch. 55-60.

condition the external movements of the body.¹⁴⁹ Thus natural philosophy, which encompassed such branches of knowledge as physiognomy, became part of the curriculum. It was promoted more vigorously by the Academy's second generation of members, as it was not until 1590 that natural philosophy assumed a prominent placement in the regimen. A general knowledge of the discipline broadly defined was assumed as a context for narrower discussions of physiognomy, because certain correspondences existed among all natural things. It was thus that the humors corresponded to the four elements of the sublunary world, which in turn corresponded to the four ages of man as well as to the twelve zodiacal figures divided into four groups of three. These twelve zodiacal figures were each associated with one of the twelve gods and goddesses of the ancient world, and so the correspondences continued.¹⁵⁰

In many ways, the Florentine Academy formalized existing proscribed notions of theory and practice into a regimented curriculum. Taking as its model the related professions of letters and law, the founding members of the institution sought to regularize the training of their discipline and thus ennoble it. The curriculum evolved in the three decades that followed its foundation; and it was not until around 1590 that all of the specific levels of training would be included. By that time however, the educational model of the academy had spread to Bologna (1582) and would shortly arrive in Rome (1593). Importantly the proliferation of these art academies coincided with the period commonly known for its reform-minded approach to education and rejection of highly-

¹⁴⁹ Barzman, "The Florentine Accademia del Disegno," 23.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 23. Of the last two specific parts of the curriculum, notably the study of inanimate forms and the teaching of architectural principles, Barzman found little record listing specifics. Ibid, 24-25.

theoretical notions.¹⁵¹ It is in fact evident that this period in early modern Italy marks a surge in theoretical discourse that commonly is ignored.

* * *

Accademia degl’Incamminati

Simultaneous to the evolution of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno, there was another educational institution founded in Bologna that would become central to an understanding of the training- practical and theoretical- of seicento artists. As discussed by Charles Dempsey, the Academy founded by the three Carracci (Ludovico, Agostino and Annibale) followed the model established by the Florentine Academy; and shared with Vasari the ideal that the next steps, *incamminando* upwards on the path of virtue, should take place in the professional setting of the Academy.¹⁵² Almost certainly established in 1582, not long after the return of Annibale and Agostino Carracci from Venice, the institution was initially called the Accademia dei Desiderosi, but in 1590 was renamed Accademia degl’Incamminati – the two terms deriving from university parlance, referring respectively to students who were beginning their studies, and to students who had commenced upon a *corso di perfezionamento*.¹⁵³

Malvasia records that the new Academy had a remarkable success and grew quickly.¹⁵⁴ While Ludovico, the eldest of the three Carracci, was nominally the head of the Academy from the beginning due to his age and that he was the only one to belong to the local painter’s guild, all three worked closely together in both teaching and the

¹⁵¹ As noted, the distinction between the “theory-ridden” art of Mannerism, and the reform-minded pragmatism of “early-Baroque” art has persisted in treatments and characterization of the period under discussion. See: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*. Also see: Friedlander, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting*.

¹⁵² Dempsey, “The Carracci Academy,” 33.

¹⁵³ Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: 276. Dempsey, “The Carracci Academy,” 34.

¹⁵⁴ Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: 276.

various commissions that begin flowing in around 1585. Throughout his *Lives of the Artists*, Bellori extolled the virtues of the Carracci Academy. “There [Carracci Academy], as the erudition of the three brothers, Annibale, Agostino, and Ludovico, was communicated jointly, many of the city’s worthy youths and rare talents congregated for the various disciplines that were taught, in addition to study from life: proportion, anatomy, perspective, and architecture.”¹⁵⁵ Unlike the earlier official and semi-official academies that had been established in Florence, Perugia, and Rome; it combined under one roof the activities of an organization devoted to teaching and to critical speculation, together with activities of an active workshop or business.¹⁵⁶ The theoretical concerns of the Academy were never distinguished from the practical concerns of the workshop. When Annibale and Agostino left for Rome, Ludovico attempted to find a permanent home for the Academy based upon the precedents of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence (founded in 1563) and the Accademia di San Luca in Rome (incorporated in 1593). He sought to join the Academy as an institution to the guild of painters in Bologna, and thereby to establish it as an officially sanctioned protectorate of the city government.¹⁵⁷

Despite the compelling contemporary documentation and later assertions of biographers such as Bellori and Malvasia, the nature and existence of the Carracci Academy has been questioned in relation to the character of its founders. Denis Mahon did much in his 1947 publication to attack the “false idea” that the Carracci were learned painters, together with its consequent that they were “pedantically theory-ridden,” adding in a footnote his view that Annibale in particular was “an intuitive painter who pretty

¹⁵⁵ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 73.

¹⁵⁶ Dempsey, “The Carracci Academy,” 34.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

clearly regarded rationalized theory as silly nonsense and a waste of time.”¹⁵⁸ The sentiment was later echoed by Donald Posner in his treatment of Annibale of 1971 and with Goldstein in 1988.¹⁵⁹ As has been pointed out, the anti-intellectual characterization of these painters stems largely from preconceptions of the period in question in general. The level and quality of education available to the generation of the Carracci, as well as the painters of the Florentine reform, was in fact at the pinnacle at the end of the century with regards to grammar school curricula and professional training.¹⁶⁰ The effects of such education being most evident in the case of Agostino Carracci, where in his funeral oration of 1602, Lucio Faberio noted that: “He studied mathematics and philosophy, and from these he turned to rhetoric, poetry, music, and every other liberal art, in all of which his rare intellect was evident.”¹⁶¹

The advances made by the Florentine Academy in systematizing art education helped shape the curriculum taught by the Carracci. As Bellori noted, after studying in northern Italy, Agostino and Annibale returned to Bologna with an “excellent style,” which was brought back “like the Golden Fleece to their native land.”¹⁶²

To this end he applied himself to tireless study, and he organized the opening of the Academy of *disegno* in Bologna, where many outstanding men of talent in various sciences as well as gentlemen of the city enrolled

¹⁵⁸ Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 218.

¹⁵⁹ Posner, *Annibale Carracci*. Goldstein, *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction*.

¹⁶⁰ For the nature of the Florentine reform movement see: Jack Spalding. *Santi di Tito*. (Garland Publishing: New York, 1982).

¹⁶¹ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 117. At the outset of his biography, Bellori wrote of the literary erudition attained by Agostino Carracci as well: “Amid these occupations of drawing and engraving, Agostino did not abandon his other very worthy inclinations; for all the time that he had left from his labors he spent on literary erudition: by himself he attained a perfect understanding of the Latin language, and from reading the finest books he acquired elegance in the vernacular idiom, not being content merely with its usage but becoming erudite in the rules of language, rhetoric, and poetry. Thus he wrote discourses and orations and with the inspiration of the muses he composed songs and verses, which he set to music and played sweetly on the lute, viola, and cittern, and he was in transports when he sang.” Ibid, 118.

¹⁶² Ibid, 118.

and congregated there the principal focus of study was on drawing human bodies; symmetry, perspective, with the principles of light and shadow, anatomy, and architecture were taught; and there were lectures on histories and fables, and on inventions for depicting these and the good manner of painting them.¹⁶³

The curriculum of the Academy was a progressive sequence of study, beginning with foundation sciences and exercises, and then advancing to related disciplines and activities; with a tripartite division in study similar to the Florentine Academy. A firm foundation in life drawing –which saturates all treatments of the Carracci Academy– would permeate a student’s studies, following a rigorous introduction to the underlying mathematical principles and geometry in systems such as perspective. Anatomical studies were to then be carried out, emphasizing elements of *chiaroscuro* regarding the composition of figures. Finally, once the student had mastered the underlying mathematical principles necessary for figure studies, he would continue on with the “histories and fables” that would dictate how to compose a particular *istoria*.¹⁶⁴

The primary difference between the Florentine and Carracci academies lay in the emphasis given to oration and rhetoric when constructing the *concetto*, or conceit of the finished work of art. The purpose of painting, like that of oration, is persuasion, and it employs the techniques of rhetoric, such as the use of example and enthymematic argument.¹⁶⁵ The model for such a relationship had existed since the Quattrocento, and was fully developed by the time of Lodovico Dolce and Giorgio Vasari. The painter as a

¹⁶³ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 118.

¹⁶⁴ Notably, Lucio Faberio also related the same sequence of study in his funeral oration of Agostino Carracci, stating the three Carracci “...in which you will discern a graceful compendium of all the fine arts that they are learning, for not only do they show that they have ability in drawing, their principal study, but also they reveal that they are more than moderately knowledgeable about both architecture and sculpture; and they give proof of having knowledge of histories and fables.” Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 126.

¹⁶⁵ Deriving in large part from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, an enthymematic argument is informally stated as a syllogism in which a three-part deductive argument is based on an unstated assumption.

rhetorician necessitated a humanistically devised education, whose purpose was eloquence, and its basis grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and the *exempla* of history and moral philosophy. The latter two provided painters with their subjects, the former three with the techniques for arranging and presenting those subjects.¹⁶⁶ The Carracci, “academicians of disegno of Bologna” as they were described by Faberio, emphatically embraced the requirements for producing laudable art. They not only developed a similar tripartite sequence of study as other academies for their students to progress from “principal studies” to advanced natural philosophy and knowledge of obscure narratives; but they also equipped them with the necessary skills culled from rhetoric and poetry; “ indeed, with new ideas that are not merely poetical but philosophical, they show that they are not without knowledge of the most noble and rare sciences and disciplines, always coupling it all with marvelous judgment in its application and rare sagacity in its disposition and ordering...¹⁶⁷ The particular inculcation provided for a subsequent generation of artists as skilled in the arts of painting and sculpture as those of poetry and rhetoric, which were – for the seicento artist- inextricably intertwined formulations; and would be continued in other venues even after the Accademia degl’Incamminati was subsumed under the protectorate of the painter’s guild in Bologna.

Chapter Three

The Inception and Evolution of the Idea:

Ancient Formulations, Polemics and Dichotomies

¹⁶⁶ Dempsey, “The Carracci Academy,” 43.

¹⁶⁷ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 126.

The Renaissance conception and resurrection of the art-theoretical concept of the Idea originated in antiquity as a purely philosophical manifestation. Through a series of transmogrifications, both conceptual and philological, the Idea metamorphosed into a multifarious concept, emphatically altering modalities throughout the early modern period in Italy until, as Panofsky asserted, the establishment of “normative aesthetics.”¹⁶⁸ As will be argued in the next chapters, the different manifestations and understanding of the theoretical concept directly impacted the types of art produced under its issuance. The radically different appearances of works subsumed under the influence of different art-theoretical approaches can in fact be distilled into two polemically opposed formulations derived from ancient Greek philosophy: Realism and Nominalism.¹⁶⁹ Derived from the philosophy of Plato, Realism is the doctrine that states that abstract concepts, or universals, do in fact exist; whereas Nominalism, associated with the philosophy of Aristotle, holds that such abstractions and universals have no independent existence but exist only as names.¹⁷⁰ Through later ancient revisions of the original philosophies of these Greek thinkers, the strict positions of Platonism and Aristotelianism were relaxed to more easily address issues of art and its relative value.

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The Platonic Realist Idea

¹⁶⁸ The *terminus ante quem* given for this establishment is noted by Panofsky as coinciding with Bellori's lecture on the *Idea* in the Accademia di San Luca in 1664, and more widely diffused in his *Lives of the Artists* of 1672. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 105-107.

¹⁶⁹ Meyrick H. Carre. *Realists and Nominalists*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

¹⁷⁰ There are several permutations of these two opposing philosophical systems, such as Moderate Nominalism, which will be discussed at length in chapters four, five and six.

It is somewhat incongruous that Plato (427-347 BCE) established the metaphysical meaning and value for beauty, and doctrine concerning the Idea, for he was hostile towards the representational arts. The dour disposition derives from the manner in which Plato divides the metaphysical world into two distinct domains: the intelligible world of "forms," and the perceivable world surrounding us. The perceptual world consists of imperfect copies of the intelligible forms or ideas. These forms are unchangeable and perfect, and are only comprehensible by the use of the intellect or understanding. It is crucial that this capacity of the mind does not include sense-perception or imagination. As Plato distinguished between genuine and false and legitimate and illegitimate practices in every area of life, he would occasionally speak of the representational arts. Dividing artists into two separate categories, Plato expressed his disdain for the practitioners of "imitative representation," who only render the sensory appearances of the material world.

In Book 10 of the *Republic* (ca.360 BCE), Plato elaborated on his theory of forms as they related to mimesis, referring to imitation without artistic intervention or conceptualization. "What is the object of painting?" Plato asks his interlocutor Glaucon. "Does it aim to imitate what is, as it is? Or imitate what appears, as it appears? Is it imitation of appearance or truth?" When Glaucon answers, "Of appearance," Plato is provided a springboard for his condemnation of the imitative arts:

Then the mimetic art is far removed from truth, and the reason for its being able to produce everything is that it lays hold of a small part of each thing, and that an image. As, for example, a painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no understanding of their crafts; but nevertheless he might deceive children and foolish people, if he were a good painter, by painting a carpenter and exhibiting at a distance, so that they thought it was truly a carpenter.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Plato. *The Republic*. Tom Griffith trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 317, 10: 598b-c. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 3-4.

Direct imitation of the sense-perceptible world threatens to distort or undermine “truth,” as it were, and hence the exclusion of poets and painters from Plato’s ideal city.

On the other hand, Plato praised those artists who, insofar as possible in activities limited to empirical reality, attempt to move beyond the perceivable world to capture the elusive Idea in their works.¹⁷² This type of artist is such that his labors may even serve as a paradigm for those of a lawgiver, and expounding upon this idea in the *Republic*, Plato wrote of these “poietic” or “heuretic” painters, stating that:

When they finally commence the execution of their work [that is, after having carefully prepared the panel and sketched the principal lines], they let the eye, frequently alternating, dwell now on this, now on that side, once on that which is truly beautiful, just, rational, and otherwise pertinent in this context, and then again on that which merely passes for all this among men; and by blending and mixing they produce from their materials that human image in the conception of which they let themselves be guided by what Homer described as divine and godlike when met with among mankind.¹⁷³

The validity of the works produced by these painters who moved beyond the material world by means of “divine” inspiration is relative to the degree that they deny that world. Moreover, in spite of all attempts on the part of the artist to perceive the immutable and universal forms of the Idea, he is ultimately doomed to failure, as these forms are metaphysically separate, and largely inaccessible to him. The inherent hostility toward the visual arts was understood by later philosophers, especially Plotinus, as an attack on the “mimetic” arts, and the wholesale condemnation of representational art as such. Epistemologically this position was necessitated because Plato applied the concept of

¹⁷² On Plato’s doctrine of the beautiful in art see: Ernst Cassirer. “Eidos und Eidolon: Das Problem des Schönen und der Kunst in Platos Dialogen,” *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* vol.2 no.1 (1922-23), 1-27.

¹⁷³ Plato. *The Republic*. R.E. Allen trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 6: 501. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 3-4.

cognitive truth to painting and sculpture, and accordingly used their correspondence to the Ideas that they were to express as a qualitative measure. His philosophical system as such allowed no room for aesthetics of representational art as an intellectual realm *sui generis*.¹⁷⁴

The value of art from this Realist position was then intertwined with the perceived goal of art. Art could in fact have a qualified value if it sought to be “true,” or would compete with rational cognition. In this formulation, the goal of art would be to reduce the visible world to unalterable, universally and eternally valid forms, thus renouncing the artist’s individuality and originality as a factor in the production of “good” art. Therefore it is understandable that in his *Laws* (348 BCE), Plato contrasted the “undisciplined” Greek art with the “law bound” art of the Egyptians; in the former a variety of styles evolved, whereas in the latter stylistic homogeneity was seemingly paramount.¹⁷⁵ As such Plato determined the qualitative value of a work of art by measuring the amount of theoretical and mathematical insight invested in it.¹⁷⁶

A further revelation of Plato’s condemnation of the visual arts can be found in the *Republic* and the *Sophist*, both from around 360 BCE. In these treatments, Plato sets forth that no matter the manner that the artist utilizes to reproduce the world, it will ultimately be far removed from “truth.” The most conscientious of artists, for instance, will only be able to reproduce the components of sense-perceptible reality if he is “copying exactly” what he sees. However, this would amount to a pointless duplication of the world of

¹⁷⁴ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Plato. *The Laws of Plato*. Thomas L. Pangle trans. (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 2: 656. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 4.

¹⁷⁶ It is apparent that the Platonic concept of _____ is an exact inversion of that which is usually understood by the word “invention”: the Platonic _____ is not so much an “invention” of new and individual forms as it is a “discovery” of eternal and universally valid principles, particularly as they are revealed in mathematics. Quite logically, therefore, the highest rank in a Platonic hierarchy of the arts would have to be given to architecture and music. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 4.

appearances, which in turn only imitates the world of Ideas. On the other hand, the artist will beget unreliable and deceptive illusions if he attempts “copying imaginatively,” thereby making the large small and the small large in order to mislead our imperfect eyes. The product of this latter example increases confusion in the viewer’s soul for its value as “truth” is even less than that of the world of appearances, which is to say it is a “third removed from truth.”¹⁷⁷ Within this epistemological framework it is understandable that the works of certain Egyptian painters and sculptors met Plato’s ideal as they seemed to consistently adhere to firmly established formulas and abhorred any concession to visual perception. Nevertheless it was not the persona of the artist which Plato entrusted with the task of revealing the world of Ideas, but rather the dialectician.¹⁷⁸

The Realist formulation of the Idea was furthered by the Roman philosopher and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43BCE), who made the concept applicable to oration and rhetoric, as well as the visual arts. In his *De Oratore* (46BCE), Cicero compared the perfect speaker with an “idea” that could only be imagined. This Idea resembles the object of artistic representation, and as such, cannot be seen with the eyes in its full perfection as it exists in the artist’s consciousness as a mere image:

And in imagining the perfect orator I shall depict him as such a man as has perhaps never existed. For I do not ask who he was, but what is that quality which is superior to everything else, which does not always and perhaps never shines out unremittingly in his speeches but sometimes in some part, more frequently with some, more seldom perhaps with others. But I do believe that there is nothing in any genre so beautiful that that from which it was copied, like a portrait of a face, may not be more beautiful; this we cannot perceive either with eyes or ears or any other sense, but we comprehend it without mind and with our thoughts; thus we can imagine things more beautiful than Phidias’ sculptures, which are the

¹⁷⁷ Plato. *Sophist*. Nicholas P. White trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 233 ff. Plato, *The Republic*, 10: 602. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ The rare exception to this formulation arose when the “anti-artistic” Plato compared his paragon for the perfect state- which can never actually exist- to the procedure of a painter that presents a paradigm of the most beautiful human being. In such a comparison, Plato asserts that such a painter should be considered an excellent artist precisely because he is unable to prove the empirical existence of such a perfect creature.

most beautiful we have seen in their genre, and those pictures which I have spoken about; and indeed that artist, when he produced his Zeus or his Athena, did not look at a human being whom he could imitate, but in his own mind there lived a sublime notion of beauty; this he beheld, on this he fixed his attention, and according to its likeness he directed his art and hand. As there is in the world of shapes and figures something perfect and sublime, to which imagined form those objects not accessible to sensory perception can be related by way of imitation, so do we see the image of perfect eloquence in the mind and only seek to comprehend its copy with ears. Plato, that mighty master and teacher not only of thought but also of speech, calls these forms of things “ideas”; he denies that they come into being and asserts that they exist eternally, being contained in our reason and our intellect: all else is born and dies, remains in a state of flux, glides down and does not long remain in one and the same state. Thus whatever is to be discussed with regard to principles and method must be reduced to the final form and species of its class.¹⁷⁹

In this rhetorical description of artistic creation the Platonic concept of the “idea” serves to belie the Platonic conception of art. The artist here is neither an imitator of common and deceptive appearances, nor is he a “pathfinder” for a metaphysical substance, who is bound to rigid norms and whose exertions are doomed to failure. Instead, the “sublime notion of beauty,” a glorious prototype, originates and exists within the mind, which is projected in the inner eye. The “idea of beauty” can then be transferred from the mind “according to its likeness” by directing the hand to capture its elusiveness. The resultant work will of course not capture the absolute perfection of this inner model, but it will reveal a beauty that is more than a mere copy of “reality,” and something other than a mere reflection of “truth” that is only accessible through the intellect.¹⁸⁰ Hence an understanding of the nature of “true” beauty as a universal can be obtained as its existence in the mind connects the hitherto immutably separate metaphysical realms of sense-perception and the Ideas.

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¹⁷⁹ Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 12-13.

¹⁸⁰ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 13.

The Aristotelian-Nominalist Idea

It was the Nominalist epistemology of Aristotle (384-322BCE) that permitted the Idea to descend into the mind of man. In preparation for this notion, the student of Plato replaced the antithetic dualism between the world of Ideas and the world of appearances with the synthetic interaction between the general concept and the particular notion. Also, in the domain of natural philosophy and aesthetics, Aristotle supplanted Platonic dualism with the synthetic interaction between form and matter. No longer were the things formed by nature or the hands of man an imitation of an immutable Idea. They were the product of the entrance of a definite form into a definite substance; while individual man became “this particular form in this particular flesh and blood.”¹⁸¹

With regards to works of art, the new formulation allowed for a more positive evaluation. In separating Plato’s theory of forms from art, Aristotle was thus able to distinguish artistic mimesis from truth. The foremost Nominalist philosopher achieves this distinction, as Terry L. Givens points out, through recourse to “aesthetic distance.”¹⁸² The presumption allowed Aristotle to observe, “Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity.”¹⁸³ The separation of subject and object in this formulation was followed upon by Aristotle’s “distinctions underlying artistic mimesis.” These are “media, objects, and mode.”¹⁸⁴ In other words, artistic mimesis cannot be considered apart from the stuff from which an artwork is made, the subject matter it addresses, and the manner in which it is produced.

¹⁸¹ Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. 7: 8, 7. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 13.

¹⁸² Terry L. Givens. “Aristotle’s Critique of Mimesis: The Romantic Prelude.” *Comparative Literature Studies* 28 (1991), 121-136.

¹⁸³ Aristotle. *Poetics*. Kenneth Telford trans. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1985), 1448b.

¹⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5: 1448a.25.

The last implicates style in artistic creation, thereby distinguishing it from mere copying of reality. Aristotle explains further what he means when he invites poets to learn from visual artists: “Poets should emulate good portrait painters, who render personal appearance and produce likeness, yet enhance people’s beauty.”¹⁸⁵ The author neither expects nor desires artistic representation to conform to observed reality. An artist’s or poet’s ability to improve upon his or her subjects underlies the success or failure of the work of art. The point is illustrated with Aristotle’s declaration: “Not to know that a hind has no horns is a less serious matter than to paint it inartistically.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, aesthetic success supersedes truth to nature in the evaluation of the visual arts.¹⁸⁷

Art was thus distinguished from the creations of nature only in that its form, prior to entering matter, exists *a priori* in the mind of man. The nonpareil notion prompted an elevation of the object of representation in art criticism from the level of external, perceivable reality to the level of an internal, “spiritual image.” This logically coincided in philosophy with the increasing inclination to wrest the principle of knowledge, “truth,” and beauty, which is the Idea, from the level of a metaphysical essence to that of a mere thought. Therefore, simultaneous to the artistic object rising from the sphere of empirical reality, the philosophic Idea had been “plucked from the heavens and brought to earth.”¹⁸⁸ The Idea and reality had come to be located in the human consciousness, within which they could blend into a unity.

The Aristotelian definition of art included all *artes*, even medicine and agriculture. Within the parameters of this inclusive definition ancient authors were able to

¹⁸⁵ Aristotle. *Poetics*. Stephen Halliwell trans. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1454b.10.

¹⁸⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1460b.30. Quoted in: Givens, “Aristotle’s Critique of Mimesis,” 131.

¹⁸⁷ Elizabeth C. Mansfield. *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). 10-11.

¹⁸⁸ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 16-17.

equate “artistic conception” with the Idea, because Aristotle had retained the Platonic designation for form, both in a general and particular sense. The “inner form,” which is present in the soul of the artist, is thus accordingly transferred by the artist’s activity to the matter which he produces. Therefore Cicero’s formulation, noted in his account of the perfect orator, amounts to a Realist concession to certain Nominalist ideas, or a temporary compromise between the two streams of thought.¹⁸⁹

The existence of this compromising position developed three centuries after Plato and coincided with a shift away from a strictly Platonic-Realist conception of art production and the rise of the Nominalist. It was at this time in the Hellenistic-Roman milieu that the sculptor and painter gained greater social prominence in their respective professions. As Pliny the Elder (23-79CE) asserted in his *Natural History* (77CE), painting was received into the ranks of the liberal arts.¹⁹⁰ The sentiment is reinforced by Philostratus (b.190CE), who in the introduction to his *Eikones* stated, “He who does not love painting, does an injustice to truth and does an injustice to wisdom.”¹⁹¹ The position of Pliny and Philostratus was one of two opposing motives in antiquity, which existed simultaneously when discussing art. There was the notion that the work of art is inferior to nature, as it merely imitates nature- at best achieving mimicking a subject to the point of deception. On the other hand, there was the notion that the work of art was superior to nature because it improved upon its deficiencies and independently confronts it with a newly fashioned image of beauty.

The discourse on the mimetic position encompassed an endless variety of anecdotes about painted grapes that attract sparrows, painted horses that real ones neigh

¹⁸⁹ As will be discussed in the next chapter, the Ciceronian formulation was one of Moderate Realism, which concedes to the accessibility of universals by the human mind.

¹⁹⁰ Pliny the Elder. *Natural History*. John F. Healy trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 323.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 14.

at, and the countless epigrams about the deceptive lifelikeness of Myron's sculpted cow.¹⁹² Perhaps the most impressive of these legends is recorded by Pliny in his *Natural History*, and recounts the story in which Zeuxis and Parrhasius sought to determine who the superior artist was. Zeuxis presented his wall painting first which was so lifelike in its depiction of a bunch of grapes that birds attempted to dine on the luscious-seeming fruit. Assuming that he had triumphed by his skillfulness, Zeuxis asked Parrhasius to remove the drape and show his painting. Parrhasius explained that the drape was, in fact, his painting. Zeuxis immediately acknowledged his defeat, and Pliny noted: "Whereas he had deceived birds Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist."¹⁹³

Simultaneously there was disapproval for this mimetic trend in literature, as is illustrated in the case of Demetrius, who went too far in being faithful to nature, preferring verisimilitude to beauty. The idealist position touched on art that had gone beyond nature, for better or worse. For instance, there is the admission that the works of Polycleetus (ca.232BCE) had lent the human figure "a grace surpassing truth," and there are the numerous poetic passages in which the almost supernatural beauty of a human being is extolled by a comparison with statues or paintings.¹⁹⁴ Quintilian, writing late in the first century, noted the hostility that existed with regards to strict mimesis, albeit obliquely. As he ponders,

Shall we follow the example of those painters whose sole aim is to be able to copy pictures by using the ruler and the measuring rod? It is a positive disgrace to be content to owe all our achievement to imitation. For what, I ask again, would have been the result if no one had done more than his

¹⁹² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoriae*. H.E. Butler trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953-60), 93.

¹⁹³ Pliny, *Natural History*, 330. Pliny records a similar incident involving Apelles: "There is, or was, a picture of a horse by him, painted in a competition, by which he carried his appeal for judgment from mankind to the dumb quadrupeds; for perceiving that his rivals were getting the better of him by intrigue, he had some horses brought and showed them their pictures one by one; and the horses only began to neigh when they saw the horse painted by Apelles; and this always happened subsequently, showing it to be a sound test of artistic skill." Ibid, 331-332.

¹⁹⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoriae*, 9. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 14.

predecessors?...We should still be sailing on rafts, and the art of painting would be restricted to tracing a line round a shadow thrown in the sunlight.¹⁹⁵

The contrast found here would later develop into the difference between the “theory of Ideas” and the “theory of imitation” in art theory, which may be compared to the contrast between “representationism” and “conceptualism” in epistemology. In both fields the relation of the “subject” to the “object” is explained, either in terms of a purely reproductive portrayal, in terms of a free construction that works from “innate ideas,” or in terms of an abstraction that chooses from that which is “given” and then combines the things chosen.¹⁹⁶ And as such the differing views on the relative merits of art, as either valued for its mimetic and deceptive qualities by reflecting nature, or as surpassing nature and presenting a non-natural, ideal beauty, paralleled the polemical fluxuations in philosophy.

* * *

The Nominalist Evolution of the Idea

The compromising position of Cicero, which reconciled artistic value and the Platonic Idea by utilizing aspects from two streams of thought, caused a dichotomy. The peculiar problem created a demand for a solution with two possible choices that would rationally solve it: on one hand, the existence of the Idea could be denied, as it would then be synonymous with “artistic notion;” on the other, the perfection attained in such a way could be legitimized on metaphysical grounds. The two choices represented the ancient

¹⁹⁵ Marcus Fabius Quintilianus. *Institutio oratoria* (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1922), 77-79. Quoted in: Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture*, 6.

¹⁹⁶ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 126.

maturation of the two streams of thought: the Aristotelian, choosing the former position, is represented by Seneca, while the latter was developed by the Neoplatonists.¹⁹⁷

Seneca the Younger (4BCE-65CE), in fact, took much from Cicero's conception of the Idea. In relation to the orator's conceptualization, he admits that the artist is capable of imitating a notion that is conceived in the mind in lieu of a visible object. However, moving beyond the rhetorical conception, Seneca does not find a considerable value difference in the natures of either method of creation. The question of whether the artist works according to a real or an ideal model (whether his object be an outward appearance in front of the eyes, or an inner notion existing in the mind) is not a question of value or ethical conviction for Seneca. In this newly formed value system, the existence of both modes is accepted as mere fact. In his *Letter Number 65*, Seneca begins by enumerating four "original causes" of the work of art, the first three quoted from Aristotle himself, while the fourth derives from Plato. As he states, "there are two principles in nature from which all things are made- cause and matter." Matter by itself will "lie inert" unless cause, which is to be understood as "reason," "shapes matter and turns it wherever it wishes."¹⁹⁸ The specific manner in which the will of an artist imposes itself on the substance that he wishes to shape is discussed as such:

All art is imitation of nature. Therefore transfer what I have said of things in general to those things which must be made by man. A statue has had both matter, which had to submit to the artist, and the artist, who had to give shape to the matter. Therefore in the statue the matter was bronze, the cause the artisan. The same applies to all things: they consist of that which is made, and of that which makes. The Stoics believe that there is one cause- that which makes. Aristotle thinks cause can be taken to mean three things. "The first cause," he says, "is matter itself, without which nothing can be made; the second is the artisan. The third is form, which is imposed on every work, such as a statue"; for this is what Aristotle calls *idos*. "A fourth also," he says, "is added to these- the purpose of the whole work."

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 18.

¹⁹⁸ Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 21-22.

What this may be, I will reveal. Bronze is the first cause of the statue. For it could never have been made, had there not been that from which it could be cast or chased. The second cause is the artist. For that bronze could not have been formed into the appearance of the statue, had not expert hands come near it. The third cause is the form. For this statue could not be called either Doryphoros or Diadumenos, had not this shape been impressed upon it. The fourth cause is the purpose of what is to be made. For had this not existed, it would not have been made. What is the purpose? That which lured the artist, that which he pursued as he worked; either this is money, if he made it to sell, or glory, if he worked for fame, or religion, if he prepared a gift for a temple.¹⁹⁹

In summarizing Aristotle's position on artistic creation, Seneca recounts the "four causes" that will result in the formation of a work of art. Beginning with "matter itself," the "first cause" enables the second, the artist, to impose his will on the work of art and shape its "form," or *idos*, which is the "third cause." Finally, the "fourth cause" establishes that an object would not be formed by an artist without a "purpose" for which the work was intended (e.g. money, glory or religion). The pragmatic assimilation of the Nominalist view of art production allows the author to break the creative process down into the subsets of motivation and ability. However it does not elucidate the manner in which the artist derives the *idos* to be infused in the forms.

To correct the perceived shortcoming in the model presented by Aristotle, Seneca includes Plato in his discussion. Adding to the "four causes" discussed in his previous paragraph, he then enumerates and reinterprets the five causes as quoted from Plato:

To these causes Plato added a fifth- the model, which he himself calls "idea"; this is that at which the artist looked when he made the thing he intended. But it does not matter whether this model was an external one, to which he directed his eyes, or one within himself, which he himself conceived and installed there. God has within himself these models of all things, and he comprises in his mind the numbers and measures of all things which are to be made; he is full of these forms, which Plato calls "ideas"- immortal, immutable, inexhaustible. Thus men perish, but humanity itself, according to which a man is created, persists; and while men suffer and die, it undergoes nothing. Therefore there are five causes,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

as Plato says: the *e quo* [the matter], the *a quo* [the maker], the *in quo* [the shape], the *ad quod* [the model], and the *propter quod* [the purpose]. Lastly, there is the thing, which results from these. As in the statue- because we began to talk about this- the matter is bronze, the maker is the artist, the shape is the form which is made to fit it, the model is the exemplar which the maker copies, the purpose is the reason for which it was made, the thing which results from all these is the statue itself. The world too, as Plato says, has all these things. The maker is God. The material is matter. The shape is the appearance and order of the world which we see. The model is of course that according to which God made this great quantity of most beautiful things. The purpose is the reason for which he made it. You ask what is God's purpose? Goodness.²⁰⁰

As Seneca references Plato, his conception of the artistic Idea coincides in a general fashion with the concept of object of representation, as opposed to form of representation. The addition of "the model" to the progression of creation is then a formulation that is made at the expense of a strict Platonic interpretation. The object, in other words, is designated by Seneca with complete disregard for the Platonic usage of *idos*, opting instead for the Aristotelian usage that precedes it in the letter. In fact, in this treatment the inner notion of an object does not assume precedence over the outward inspection of an object for the term "idea" is applied to both. Therefore, as Cicero had relocated the Platonic Idea in the mind of its creator, Seneca has redefined that "idea," shaping it into a "cause" of creation compatible with Aristotle's *idos*. Even in relating the divine-creative act of the artist to that of God, who "has within himself the model of all things" beautiful, the artist's accessing of these "beautiful models" is arrived at in an empirical, rather than ethereal manner.

The modified Nominalist approach of Seneca developed alongside a technique for art production that would carry through to the end of the early modern period. As noted, the competition between notions of artistic value centered on mimesis and ideal beauty. The former, so criticized by early Platonic writers, needed little more than sense-

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

perception to achieve a desired replication of perceivable phenomena. However, the latter required a method by which such beauty could be attained. The seed for the model derived from Socrates, and was recorded in Xenophon's (ca.427-355BCE) *Memorabilia* of 371 BCE. In Book 3, the author records a purported exchange between Socrates and the painter Parrhasius in which the philosopher asks, "Does the art of painting consist in making likenesses of what is seen?" After Parrhasius responds affirmatively, Socrates continues: "Moreover, in making as likenesses the beautiful forms, you bring together from many what is most beautiful in each, and in this way you make whole bodies appear beautiful, since it is not easy to chance upon a single human being all of whose parts are blameless."²⁰¹ Therefore, the painter should be obliged and enabled to combine the most beautiful parts from a number of human bodies in order to make the represented figure appear beautiful, even though painting in itself is an imitative art. The sentiment was shared by Aristotle who expounded this basic view of selection in his *Politics* (350BCE). As he stated, "Great men are distinguished from ordinary men in the same way as beautiful people from plain ones, or as an artfully painted object from a real one, namely, in that that which is dispersed has been gathered into one."²⁰²

The idea that an artist should choose the most beautiful aspects of several different models was formalized in the story relating the activities of the fifth-century BCE painter Zeuxis. In the accomplishments of the artist, we find the twinned pursuit of realism and idealism. Although also credited with an unparalleled skill in mimesis, related by the story of the sparrow-deceiving grapes, Zeuxis was associated with ideal beauty. The legend dates from the fourth century BCE and was recorded in succeeding centuries by Cicero and Pliny in slightly modified forms. In his *De Inventione* (84BCE),

²⁰¹ Quoted in: Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture*, 8.

²⁰² Aristotle. *Politics*. Carnes Lord trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 101.

Cicero noted an early version in which Zeuxis, in order “to embody the surpassing beauty of womanhood” in painting Helen for the temple of Juno in the city of Croton, chose five of the most beautiful girls of the city, “because he did not think that all the qualities he sought to combine in a portrayal of beauty could be found in one person, because in no single case has Nature made anything perfect and finished in every part.”²⁰³ Likewise, Pliny later wrote in Book 35 of his *Natural History* (77 CE), “he [Zeuxis] made an inspection of the virgins of the city, who were nude, and selected five in order that he might represent in the picture that which was the most laudable feature of each.”²⁰⁴

In each account, the artist was said to have requested the five most beautiful maidens from the city of Croton in southern Italy so that he might copy the most beautiful parts of each. The resultant picture of Helen (or Venus) would have then recombined the scattered beauty found in nature, correcting the deficiencies of a mere mortal woman, and creating an ideal of feminine beauty.²⁰⁵ As the process required the observation and “copying” of actual women, beautiful though they may be, the eclectic appropriation model was firmly rooted in the Nominalist conception of art production. The recombination of the scattered beauty found by Zeuxis would then be recombined using the *idos* (in the Aristotelian usage reintroduced by Seneca) to create the work of art, in this instance a female figure.²⁰⁶ Importantly, upon concluding his account of the Zeuxis

²⁰³ In the prosperous Greek settlement of Croton on the southeastern coast of Italy there was a major sanctuary to Hera. Cicero explains that Zeuxis came from Heraclea to decorate the temple. During his stay in Croton, the artist was asked to include a portrait (simulacrum) of Helen of Troy among his paintings. The townspeople agreed to compensate the artist for this, and Zeuxis set to work, requesting “maidens of surpassing beauty” from whom he might choose a model. Curiously, the Crotonians responded by taking the painter to the gymnasium, where a group of young men were exercising. “There are in our city the sisters of these men; you may get an idea of their beauty from these youths.” Marcus Tullius Cicero. *De Inventione*. H.M. Hubbell trans. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), 168-169.

²⁰⁴ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 146.

²⁰⁵ Pliny, *Natural History*, 325.

²⁰⁶ The belief that the Idea would be the governing concept of judgment when appropriating these models would not surface until the Renaissance.

legend, Cicero himself noted how the selection of models in such a manner illustrated his own approach to teaching rhetoric.²⁰⁷

* * *

The Neoplatonic Revival of the Realist Idea

Toward the end of the great Realist/Nominalist debate, there was a resurgence of Platonic idioms. The philosopher considered the father of this new branch of philosophy known as Neoplatonism was Plotinus (205-270CE). In his writings, contrary to Seneca, Plotinus ventured to secure for the artist a metaphysical claim to the rank of “perfect and sublime archetype.”²⁰⁸ He consciously opposed the attacks on the Platonic mode of classification in his *Ennead* (250CE), edited and compiled by his student Porphyry in 270. In the work Plotinus reorganizes the metaphysical relationships of the artist, the work of art and the Idea; as he asserts:

When someone looks down upon the arts because they are concerned with imitating nature, it must first be replied that also the things of nature, too, imitate other things; then you must know that artists do not simply reproduce the visible, but they go back to the principles in which nature itself had found its origin; and further, that they on their own part achieve and add much, whenever something is missing, for they are in possession of beauty. Phidias produced his *Zeus* according to nothing visible, but he made him such as Zeus himself would appear should he wish to reveal himself to our eyes.²⁰⁹

Thus the artistic Idea is assigned a new position in relation to the metaphysical plane of universals. It is divested of the rigid immobility that restricts it in Platonic modes, and is subsequently born of the artist’s mind as a living “vision” of the other, true world.

Nevertheless, above and beyond its existence as part of human consciousness, it has the

²⁰⁷ Cicero, *De inventione*, 169. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 18.

²⁰⁸ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 25-6.

²⁰⁹ Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 26.

capacity to claim the rank of metaphysical validity and objectivity, as Cicero's *cogitata species* certainly cannot. The inner notions of the artist have the right to confront reality as fully autonomous and surpass reality itself in beauty. It is able to achieve this because these inner notions are identical to the very principles by which nature itself originated. Furthermore they are revealed to the artist in an act of intellectual contemplation, locating them firmly within the realm of cognition. More importantly, these notions are more than those in the sense of the Ciceronian *species* or *formae*. To the contrary, they possess a supernatural and superindividual existence when looked at from the point of view of the metaphysics of art. It was far more than a mere figure of speech when Plotinus said that Phidias represented his *Zeus* in such a way as he would have appeared should he have chosen to reveal himself to the eyes of man. Thus according to Plotinian metaphysics the "picture" that Phidias carried in his inner self was not only the notion, but the very essence of *Zeus*.²¹⁰

According to the "mimesis" theory formulated by Plato, works of art produced by men are mere copies of sensory deceptions, which under the aspect of "heuresis" are mere hints of an unrealized, and unrealizable, intelligible beauty. Ironically, the final analysis of such a formulation is identical with the "greatest good," according to Plotinus. As he asserted, the path to contemplation of this "intelligible beauty, that resides, as it were, in a hidden temple" leads ever onward; even beyond the work of art itself.²¹¹ "What, then, does this inner eye perceive? For just awakened, it will not immediately be able to bear the highest brilliance. The soul must become accustomed first to the sight of beautiful deeds, then to the sight of beautiful works, not so much those brought forth by art as those achieved by good men, and finally it must look at the souls of those who

²¹⁰ Ibid, 26-27.

²¹¹ Plotinus. *Ennead*. Stephen Mackenna trans. (London, 1917), 68.

make the beautiful works.”²¹² In one of the most pertinent passages in his book on the beautiful, Plotinus states:

For he who contemplates physical beauty must not lose himself therein, but he must recognize that it is an image and a vestige and a shadow, and he must flee to that of which it is a likeness. For if one were to rush forth and to grasp for truth that which is only a beautiful reflection in the water, then the same thing will happen to him that happened to the one about whom a meaningful myth tells how he, wanting to grasp a mirrored reflection, vanished in the depths of the waters; in the same way, he who holds on to physical beauty and will not let go of it, will sink, not with his body but with his soul, into the dark abysses, horrible for the mind to behold, where he will languish blindly in Orcus, consorting with shadows there as he did here.²¹³

Thus the Platonic attack accuses the arts of continually arresting man’s inner vision within the realm of sensory images, otherwise prohibiting contemplation of the world of Ideas. The Plotinian defense condemns the arts to the tragic fate of eternally driving man’s inner eye beyond these sensory images. Simultaneously this interpretation opens the world of the eternal Ideas to humankind and veils a view of it. In works of art, which are understood as mere copies of the sensory world, there is a denial of the elevated spiritual or symbolic meaning that previous authors found. As revelations of the eternal Ideas, art works are divested of the timeless validity and self-sufficiency that properly belongs to them. It seems that unless the theory of Ideas gives up its own metaphysical standpoint, it must perforce deny to the work of art either the one or the other.²¹⁴

Therefore the original dichotomy that plagued a positive evaluation of art in Plato returned in Neoplatonism. Since the acceptance of art as a valid representation of beauty with the Realist-Ciceronian model, the philosophical modes that attempted to account for such beauty had to acquiesce to certain concessions and compromises. The compromise

²¹² Ibid, 69.

²¹³ Ibid, 68.

²¹⁴ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 31-2.

of the rhetorical, Ciceronian model itself forced reconciliations with opposing schools of thought that favored Nominalist approaches. Seneca attempted to counter-balance this by tempering his Aristotelian formulation with Plato. Regardless, it becomes clear that neither philosophical understanding of the Idea is applicable to art production and beneficial to artists without such concessions. As such when the first art theorists of the Renaissance began to seriously attempt to integrate the Idea into art theory and education, and as a guiding principle for producing laudable art, they were not operating under strict interpretations of either Realist or Nominalist formulations, but rather modes of thought that were primarily one or the other that had been culled from ancient texts and interpreted within a new cultural context.

Chapter Four

The Renaissance Re-Invention of the Idea:

The Dualism of Beauty in the Early Quattrocento

The dualism of ancient theories of art was bequeathed to the Early Renaissance in the form of the two opposing values of mimesis and idealization that simultaneously informed a general unified theory for art. The intervening centuries between the fall of Rome and the birth of humanism saw numerous manifestations of the art-theoretical concept of the Idea. As was true for other ancient inquiries, humanists approached both Aristotle and Plato as equally valid sources of knowledge due to the general authority allotted ancient sources. The shared validity between the two opposing philosophical

schools resulted in the parallel development of the two trends that shared similarities in their formulations, thus resulting in an oscillation between both.²¹⁵

The survival of the Nominalist position was fostered and then modified by the Scholastic-Aristotelian trend in figures such as St. Thomas Aquinas (ca.1225-ca.1274) in his *Summa Theologiae* of 1274. In a discussion of the Idea that was intended as a philosophical model for posterity, Aquinas ironically revived the Aristotelian example of the “architect” that had been used by Plotinus:

...except in so far as a likeness of the form must be in him. This happens in a twofold manner: in some effective agents there pre-exists the form of the thing to be produced by way of natural existence, as when...man engenders man, or fire engenders fire. But in others it pre-exists by way of intelligible existence, as in those beings which operate by the mind; thus the house pre-existed in the mind of the architect: and this can be designated as the Idea of the house, because the artist intends to assimilate the house to the same form that he has conceived in his mind. Now since the world has not come about by accident but was created by God by an act of His intellect, there must necessarily be present in the divine mind a form according to whose pattern the world was made. And herein consists the conceptual nature of Idea.²¹⁶

The predominant Nominalist view of art, set forth here by Aquinas, acknowledged a relationship between “inner form” and matter, but denied the relationship between such an internalized conception and external objects. In other words, the artist does not imitate nature, but instead works in a similar manner as nature by realizing definite forms in definite materials. The process is thus fostered by a preemptive conception that rises from the intellect. Writing shortly after Aquinas in his *Divina Commedia*, the poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), who himself intentionally avoided the Platonic term “idea,” summarized this Scholastic position in a single lapidary sentence: “Art is found on three

²¹⁵ Henry Veatch. *Realism and Nominalism Revisited*. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1954).

²¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. 1:15.1. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 40-41.

levels: in the mind of the artist, in the tool, and in the material that receives its form from art.”²¹⁷ Carrying on the position of Seneca noted in the last chapter, Aquinas and Dante denied that the models used by artists are inaccessible, or separate from the mind.

As such, the dominant position of the Scholastic conception of artistic creation placed an emphasis on replicating the perceivable world, or nature, and became a pervasive facet of art theory. In fact, throughout the Italian Renaissance the belief was perpetuated that the task of art was the direct imitation of the natural world. For instance, Cennino Cennini (ca.1370-1440)- whose *Libro dell’arte* (ca.1400) is otherwise firmly rooted in the previous century’s workshop traditions- advised the artist who wished to depict a mountain landscape to take some rough rocks and copy them in appropriate size and lighting. As Cennini wrote, “If you want to acquire a good style for mountains, and to have them look natural, get some large stones, rugged, and not cleaned up; and copy them from nature, applying the lights and dark as your system requires.”²¹⁸ The notion presented was novel in its insistence on using a natural model to produce a work of art that is a faithful reproduction of the natural world. And as such it was this notion that would be consciously elevated by art theory to the status of an artistic program as the Quattrocento century progressed.²¹⁹ The grand return to the faithful reproduction of nature would later be evaluated by the artist-biographer Vasari as the definitive break with the older tradition that, in his estimation, was founded merely on a usage handed down by

²¹⁷ Dante Alighieri. *Divina Commedia, Paradiso*. 13: 52-69. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 43.

²¹⁸ Cennino D’Andrea Cennini. *The Craftsman’s Handbook “Il Libro dell’Arte.”* Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. trans. (New York: Dover, 1960), 57.

²¹⁹ David Summers. *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

tradition, back to “verisimilitude.”²²⁰ Therefore, when Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) stated that “that painting is most praiseworthy that has the most similarity to the thing reproduced, and I say this to refute such painters as want to improve upon the things of nature,” he was expressing a shared opinion that favored the classical tradition of mimesis.²²¹

The singular assertion of the value of “imitation,” however, was paralleled in art theory and criticism with the notion of “rising above nature,” which included a requisite formal and objective “correctness” to be observed in art production. The contradictory notions presented were evident in the literature on art in antiquity, as noted. On the one hand, nature could be overcome by the freely creative *fantasia*, or imagination of the artist, which is capable of altering appearances beyond the possibilities of natural variation. Simultaneously, nature could be overcome by the artistic intellect, which should make visible a beauty that could never be completely realized in the objective world. The constantly repeated admonitions to be faithful to nature were matched in these early treatments by exhortations to choose the most beautiful from the multiplicity of natural objects in order to avoid the misshapen, misshapen and vulgar. The resulting formulation led the historian Jacob Burckhardt to assert that the Italians were “the first among modern peoples by whom the outward world was seen and felt as something beautiful.”²²²

²²⁰ “La qual maniera scabrosa, goffa ed ordinaria avevano, non mediante lo studio, ma per una cotal usanza, insegnata l’uno a l’altro per’ molti e molti anni i pittori di quei tempi.” Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 1: 250.

²²¹ Leonardo da Vinci. *On Painting*. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker trans. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 13.

²²² Jacob Burckhardt. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 2: 293. Although modern scholarly treatments of historiography and aesthetics have since reevaluated the Burckhardtian view of the Renaissance, the preoccupation with beauty underlying his analysis occupied many early modern thinkers and artificers, and would, furthermore, develop into a highly complex program foreshadowing the birth of aesthetics in the eighteenth century.

The balance between imitation and idealization in the early requirements of art theorists was found in treatments of the appropriation of models, where in general the artist was to strive for a beauty that surpasses mere replication of naturally occurring appearances. Largely predetermining the principle positions of art theory for more than a century, Alberti asserted in his *Della pittura* of 1435 that “No one would deny that the painter has nothing to do with things that are not visible.”²²³ The restriction of the artist’s profession to the visible and demanded adherence to nature did not, however, mean that an artist should merely copy what is seen. As beauty is the artist’s ultimate goal, Alberti asserts that the traditions of mimesis and improving upon nature were both necessary for producing laudable art; and, as significant, that such a process could be “mastered by study and application.” As he asserts,

And of all the parts [the painter should] not only render a true likeness but also add beauty to them; for in painting, loveliness is not so much pleasing as it is required. Demetrius, the ancient painter, failed to gain the highest praise because he strove to make things similar to nature rather than lovely.

For this it will help to take from all beautiful bodies each praiseworthy part, and one must always exert himself with study and skill to learn great loveliness; this may well be difficult, for perfect beauty is not in one body alone, but [beautiful parts] are dispersed and rare in many bodies, yet one must give all his labor to investigate and learn it. It will happen that one who is accustomed to aim at and undertake great things will be easily capable of lesser things. And nothing is so difficult that it cannot be mastered by study and application.²²⁴

Nature thus must be improved upon, and Alberti recounts the manner in which Zeuxis took from many beautiful models to illustrate his point. The postulate of beauty follows immediately on the censure of the ancient realist Demetrius, who had ignored beauty in his representation of unfiltered nature. The comparison of the failed Demetrius and the *exemplum* of Zeuxis, “the most excellent and most skilled painter of all,” underscores

²²³ Alberti, *On Painting*, 43.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 92-93.

Alberti's particular formulation of the balance of extremes, represented by each painter. Hence a cautionary statement follows the discussion of each, where the theorist levels an attack against those artists who believe that they can produce something beautiful without any study of nature:

But in order not to lose time and effort, one should avoid the custom of some fools who, boasting their own talent, seek to win a painter's fame by their own resources alone, completely without a natural model which they would follow with eye and mind. These never learn to paint well, but they habituate themselves to their own errors. That idea of beauty, which even the most experienced mind can hardly perceive, escapes the inexperienced one.

Zeuxis, a most excellent...painter, when he was going to make a painting to set up in public in the Temple of Lucina among the Crotonians, did not trust foolishly his own native talent, as every painter does today; but because he did not think he could find in a single body all the beauties he sought...²²⁵

The Florentine theorist sets forth the delicate balancing of style that an artist must attempt in remaining faithful to nature through rigorous study, while simultaneously improving upon it. The dual understanding decidedly encouraged the same enthusiasm in the circulation of both mimetic anecdotes concerning sparrows and horses, as well as the anecdote about Zeuxis' selective rendering of the Crotonian maidens. For Alberti, the story that had been recounted by Cicero- evidently his main source- and Pliny, clearly illustrated the manner by which one could achieve such a balance in natural beauty.²²⁶ The ubiquitous nature of the anecdote in art and poetical theory attests to its importance for early conceptions of the eclectic theory; for even the poet Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533) in his *Orlando Furioso* (1532) espouses its merits to his readers.²²⁷

Hence, throughout much of the Renaissance, art theory demanded that artists seek a truth to nature and a beauty that is beyond nature at the same time. During the early

²²⁵ Ibid, 93.

²²⁶ Alberti, like Cicero, places the scene of Zeuxis' selection in Croton rather than Pliny's Agrigentum.

²²⁷ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 11: 71. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 49.

development of the theoretical standpoints that would become the hallmarks of sixteenth-century thought, there was no perceived contradiction in these two goals. As Panofsky pointed out, the idea of *imitatio*, linked with the imitation of nature, was an inheritance of antiquity, as was the idea of *electio*, relating the need to surpass the mere imitation of sense perception.²²⁸ Additionally, Martin Kemp has noted the interrelationship of the two opposing concepts of mimesis and invention, or *invenzione*, in his definitive analysis of fifteenth-century Italian aesthetic discourse.²²⁹ Linked to the processes of empirical discovery, as well as to artistic originality, invention requires both knowledge and creativity. The dual character of the process was noted by Kemp in the writings of Leonardo da Vinci, who privileged nature and human invention alternately. Although seemingly contradictory, without a complete understanding of nature, representation would be faulty; while subsequently, invention transforms nature into art. As Leonardo explained: “Nature is concerned only with the production of elementary things but man from these elementary things produces an infinite number of compounds, though he has no power to create any elementary thing except another like himself, that is his children.”²³⁰ While the twin concerns that demanded the representation of nature and improvement of it would seem incompatible in the later sixteenth century, they were components of a singular postulate.²³¹ As noted in Chapter Two, fifteenth-century art theory was surprisingly practical in its pedagogy, given that it aimed to legitimize

²²⁸ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 49.

²²⁹ Martin Kemp. “From ‘Mimesis’ to ‘Fantasia’: The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration, and Genius in the Visual Arts.” *Viator* 8 (1977), 347.

²³⁰ Quoted in: Kemp, “From ‘Mimesis’ to ‘Fantasia,’” 378.

²³¹ As early as ca. 1375 Giovanni Dondi told in a letter of a sculptor infatuated with antique statues, who said “that if those works did not lack life, they would be better than living beings, as though he wished to say that nature is not only imitated by the genius of the great artists, but has been surpassed.” Julius Schlosser. *Jahrbuch der Kunstsammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 26 (1903), 157. Conversely Boccaccio told how Giotto had so deceived men’s eyes by his works that that which was merely painted was considered to be real. Giovanni Boccaccio. *The Decameron*. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella trans. (New York: Penguin Books), 458.

contemporary art as the genuine heir of Greco-Roman antiquity, and to wrest a place for it among the *ars liberalis* by enumerating its dignity and merits. On the other hand, it attempted to provide artists with firm and scientifically grounded rules for their creative activity.

The new discipline posed two demands of correctness and beauty, and believed in its ability to pave and indicate the way to their fulfillment. Formal and objective correctness seemed to be guaranteed if the artist observed the laws of perspective and anatomy, as well as the doctrine of psychological and physiological movements (*affetti*) and of physiognomy. He would achieve beauty if he chose a *bella invenzione*, or “beautiful invention,” as Alberti called it, credited less to the talent of a painter than to his erudition, avoided “indecorousness” and “contradictions,” and lent to the appearance that harmony that was considered to be a rationally ascertainable *concinnitas* of colors, qualities, and especially proportions.²³² The premises on which such a system was built oscillated, at first, between the mimetic tradition of Nominalism and the immutable forms of beauty of Realism.

* * *

Beauty, Harmony and Human Proportions

But as in all the arts, what pleases is harmony, through which alone all things are wholesome and beautiful.

St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, 30, 55

The development and evolution of the understanding of proper human proportions and how to compose them mirrored the changing nature of the Idea and its role in the production of art. The scientific inquiry into all branches of human knowledge, prompted

²³² Alberti, *On Painting*, 145, 139.

by humanism and fostered by antiquity, sought also to quantitatively and qualitatively determine the nature of beauty with regards to the three *arti di disegno* which occupy our inquiry. For Renaissance theorists, as with Plato, Plotinus and Aristotle, the singular nature of “beauty” was, conceptually, as immutable a concept as “truth.” As such, it is understandable that these thinkers would have developed an accord with ancient sources with regards to the constituents of *bellezza*.

Along with his contributions to the curriculum of art education, noted in chapter two, Lorenzo Ghiberti also related in his *Commentarii* (ca.1450) that “only proportionality creates beauty.”²³³ The assertion was more clearly enumerated by Alberti, as he attempted to oppose the metaphysical interpretation of beauty:

...thus we may say that beauty is a certain agreement and harmony of parts within that to which they belong with regard to a definite number, proportionality, and order, such as concinnity demands.²³⁴

These three interrelated aspects of harmonious congruity described by Alberti (number, proportion and order) were further discussed in his *Della pittura*, as he laid out the specific order in which an artist should proceed: “First one must observe that the single members fit together well, and they will fit together well if in relation to the size and measure, character, color, and other similar things they harmonize and form one unified beauty.”²³⁵ The harmonious arrangement of the parts of a particular work of art, or “the consonance and mutual integration of the parts,” were central to the nature of beauty

²³³ “la proporzionalità solamente fa pulchritudine.” Lorenzo Ghiberti. *I Commentarii*. Ottavio Morisani ed. (Naples, 1947), 2: 96.

²³⁴ “...statuisse sic possumus pulchritudinem esse quondam consensum et conspirationem partium in eo, cuius sunt, ad certum numerum, finitionem collocationemque habitam, ita uti concinnitas, hoc est absoluta primariaque ratio naturae postularit.” Alberti, *De re aedificio*, 9: 5. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 54.

²³⁵ Alberti, *On Painting*, 111.

itself, and as such was defined by harmony and proper proportion.²³⁶ In the sixteenth century, the idea that beauty lay in moderation had its classical expression in Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), who related the precepts of Aristotle's 'Golden Mean.' As the German artist posited, "Too much and too little spoil all things."²³⁷ In his books on human proportion, Dürer stated that "without fit proportion, no figure can be perfect."²³⁸ In Italy, the earlier writings of Alberti were developed and combined with the "obscure" nature of beauty, as the "hidden harmony that results from the composition of more members."²³⁹ The idea was carried to the end of the century, when in 1584 Lomazzo noted "if something pleases, it is because it has order and proportion."²⁴⁰

The belief that beauty was related to a harmonious arrangement was derived from ancient treatments of music and architecture, particularly by Pythagoreans, in which such arrangements could be quantified in their value resulting from certain mathematical relationships.²⁴¹ These early formulations declared that beauty consisted in the proportions of the parts, or more precisely in the proportions and arrangement of the parts; or, still more precisely, in the size, equality, and number of the parts and their

²³⁶ Alberti used various Latin and Italian words to describe the concept: *concinnitas, consensus, conspiratio partium, consonantia, concordanza*. Alberti, *De re aedificio*, 9: 5. Quoted in: Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz. "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 no.2 (Winter, 1972), 168.

²³⁷ "Zu viel und zu wenig verderben alle Ding." Albrecht Dürer. *Von der Malerei*. MS. London, ed. Heidrich, 301. Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz. "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," 173.

²³⁸ Albrecht Dürer. *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion Kommentar zum Faksimiledruck nach der Urausgabe von 1528*. Max Steck ed. (Zürich: Verlag Bibliophile Drucke von Josef Stocker, 1969), 2: 244.

²³⁹ "...armonia occultamente risultante della compositione di più membri." Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz, "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," 168. Cardinal Bembo proposed that "Beauty is grace born of proportion, correspondence and harmony." Pietro Bembo. *Gli Asolani*. (1525), 129. Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz, "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," 168.

²⁴⁰ Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo. *Trattato della Pittura, Scultura ed Architettura*. (1584), Ch.3, 50:1. Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz, "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," 168.

²⁴¹ The terms *harmonia* and *symmetria* were connected to the theory after it was initiated by the Pythagoreans. Tatarkiewicz, "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," 167. See: Christopher Celenza. *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence*. The Symbolum Nesianum. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001).

interrelationships.²⁴² The detailed exposition for this valuation comes to us from the first-century BCE Roman architect Vitruvius in his *De architectura*, where he maintained that beauty in a building is achieved when all its parts have the appropriate proportions.²⁴³ The same was true in sculpture, painting, and in nature which is illustrated in that it “has created the human body in such a way that the skull from the chin to the upper brow and hairline makes up one tenth of the entire length of the body.”²⁴⁴ As Vitruvius continued, he presented the proportions for a well-formed human figure:²⁴⁵

Then again, in the human body the central point is naturally the navel. For if a man be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centered at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described therefrom. And just as the human body yields a circular outline, so too a square figure may be found from it. For if we measure the distance from the soles of the feet to the top of the head, and then apply that measure to the outstretched arms, the breadth will be found to be the same as the height, as in the case of plane surfaces which are perfectly square.²⁴⁶

In this view, it is possible to present the proper canon of proportions of human bodies in numerical terms, thus resulting in mathematical harmony. Throughout the sixteenth century, several artists and theorists had attempted to extrapolate from Roman authors the ideal proportions for the human figure. The conception was given visual form in Leonardo’s *Drawing of the Vitruvian Man* of 1492 (**figure 18**) in the Academy of Venice. The belief that man is geometrically perfect, reflected by the creation of a perfect square and a perfect circle through the extension of the limbs, illustrates the Vitruvian

²⁴² Ibid, 169.

²⁴³ The treatise on architecture, also known as the *Ten Books on Architecture*, was rediscovered in 1414 by the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini. However, it would not be until ca.1450 that Leon Battista Alberti would finish his seminal treatise based on Vitruvius, *De re aedificatoria*.

²⁴⁴ Vitruvius, *De architettura*. 3:1. Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz, “The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline,” 169.

²⁴⁵ Vitruvius. *The Ten Books on Architecture*. Morris Hicky Morgan trans. (Cambridge, 1926), 73-75.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 73.

belief that man, being created in God's image, is a microcosmic reflection of the entire universe. Nevertheless, the canon of proportions that was developed out of the Vitruvian formulation was, oddly enough, not entirely based on the architect's own beliefs. As Alice Wolf noted, Vitruvius gave measurements for the ideal proportioned human figure as: the length of the head being equal to one-eighth of the total length of the body; the length of the face being equal to one-tenth of the total length of the body. However, in the "emended measurements of Vitruvius" (used by Leonardo da Vinci) we find that the proportions have been changed to one-fourth of the total length of the body being equal to the middle of the breast to the crown of the head; as well as from the pit of the throat to the crown of the head being equal to one-sixth of the total length. Early in his studies of proportion (**figure 19**), Dürer further modified the proportions to one-sixth of the total length being equal to the pit of the throat to the middle of the waist; and the middle of the waist to the crotch equaling one-sixth of the total length.²⁴⁷ Consequently, the measurement for the distance from the crown, and again from the ground to the crotch equaled half of the total length of the body.²⁴⁸

The proportion studies by Leonardo and Dürer represent an increasing interest at the outset of the century to systematize a doctrine of proportion. While Leonardo's proportion illustrations were published in Luca Pacioli's *De Divina Proportione* of 1509, the relationship of *l'idea della bellezza* to a canon of proportions was illustrated in the

²⁴⁷ Studies preserved from the early sixteenth century were later codified in the proportion studies in: Dürer, *Vier Bücher von Menschlicher Proportion*, np. Also see: Walter L. Strauss. *The Human Figure by Albrecht Dürer: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*. (New York: Dover, 1972).

²⁴⁸ Alice Wolf. "Jacopo de' Barbari's Apollo and Dürer's Early Male Proportion Figures." *The Art Bulletin* 25 no.4 (December, 1943), .363-365. See also: Jeffery Scott Coombs. "The Truth and Falsity of Modal Proportions in Renaissance Nominalism." Ph.D. Dissertation. (The University Texas at Austin, 1990).

Vier Bücher von Menschlicher Proportion published by Dürer in 1528.²⁴⁹ It was through his contact with Italian art theory that Dürer initially developed an understanding of the developing conception of the artistic Idea. Even though he repeatedly made reference to individual “genius,” and the suprasubjective interpretation of beauty, Dürer attempted, through half his career, to develop a basis or system to unerringly produce “the idea of beauty” in perfectly proportioned human figures. It was through representing countless figures that the artist was able to develop his own *Augenmass*, or “intuitive sense of proportion,” which allowed him to pull from a great reservoir of images and figures in his mind. The understanding of this process related Dürer to contemporary Italian theorists, and their conceptions of the artistic Idea.²⁵⁰ As Panofsky has noted, the German artist used the term himself as early as 1512,

The great art of painting has been in great esteem with the powerful kings many hundred years ago, for they made the outstanding artists rich and honored them, considering such talent to be a creative thing like unto God. For a good painter is inwardly full of figures, and if it were possible that he live forever, he would have from the inner ideas, of which Plato writes, always something new to pour out in his works.²⁵¹

Therefore in Dürer’s conception of the “idea,” the early fifteenth-century view that the concept signifies the final result of external experience is abandoned for one that is more closely aligned with Neoplatonism that would later be adopted in Italy. Instead of

²⁴⁹ Luca Pacioli. *De Divina Proportione*. (Venice, 1509). While Pacioli used Leonardo’s proportion studies to illustrate his text, he also published widely on mathematics in works such as *Summa de arithmetica, geometrica, proportioni et proportionalita* (Venice, 1494) and *De viribus quantitatis*. The three books that would be published under the title *De Divina Proportione*, often related to the ‘golden ratio,’ utilized much of Euclid’s work including the theorem $a:b=b:(a+b)$. G.M. Biggiogero. “Luca Pacioli e la sua ‘Divina proportione,’ *Rendiconti dell’Istituto lombardo di scienze e lettere*, 94 (1960), 3-30. Dürer, *Vier Bücher von Menschlicher Proportion*.

²⁵⁰ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 123.

²⁵¹ “Die gross Kunst der Molerei ist vor viel hundert Jöhren bei den mächtigen Königen in grosser Achtbarkeit gewesen, dann sie machten die fürtrefflichen Künstner reich, hieltens würdig, dann sie achteten solche Sinnreichigkeit ein gleichformig Geschopf noch Gott. Dan nein gutter Maler ist inwendig voller Figur, und obs müglich wär, das ser ewiglich lebte, so hätt era us den inneren Ideen, dovan Plato schreibt, allweg etwas Neus durch die Werk auszugiessen.” Konrad Lange and Franz Fuhse. *Dürers schriftlicher Nachlass*. (Halle: a.S., 1893), 297.

conceding to a relationship between the artist's conceptualization and the resultant art work, it designates a completely inner notion, such as the soul's "inner image" spoken of by the German theologian Johannes Eckhart (ca.1260-ca.1328).²⁵² Moreover, as formulated by early theorists such as Alberti, Ideas would normally guarantee an objective validity and beauty in works of art; but with Dürer, their proper function is to ensure originality and inexhaustibility in that they enable the artist to pour forth "always something new" from his mind.²⁵³

The specific phrasing of Dürer's statement "For a good painter is inwardly full of figures, and if it were possible that he live forever, he would have from the inner ideas, of which Plato writes, always something new to pour out in his works" reveals that he is the inheritor of two traditions. The first, mentioned in the last chapter, is related by Seneca in his oft-cited assertion: "God has within himself these models of all things...He is full of these figures, which Plato calls 'ideas'."²⁵⁴ While on the other hand, it is reminiscent of a remark made by the Neoplatonic Marsilio Ficino, in which he states: "Wherefore, filled with divine influences and oracles from on high, he [the Saturnian melancholic] always devises something new and unusual and foretells the future."²⁵⁵ The blending of the two somewhat unrelated formulations resulted in an original moderate-Realist model. Dürer modified Seneca's formulation by extending the belief that God is "inwardly full of

²⁵² Bernard McGinn. *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001).

²⁵³ The theory of Ideas, which here almost take on the character of artistic "inspirations," can be seen as supporting that romantic conception of genius that recognizes the mark of true artistry not in correctness and beauty but in an unending plenitude that always creates things unique and things that never existed before.

²⁵⁴ "Haec exemplaria rerum omnium dues intra se habet...plenus his figures est, quas Plato ideas appellat." Seneca, *Epistolae*, 65:7; 19ff. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 20-22.

²⁵⁵ "Unde divinis influxibus oraculisque ex alto repletus nova quaedam inusitatque semper excogitat et future praedicat." Marsilio Ficino, *Opera*, 1: 498. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 124-125.

figures” to the capacity of man, as well. Additionally, Ficino’s statement concerning *divinis influxibus*, which was the almost mantic ecstasy of philosophers, was transferred by Dürer to painters. Thus he combined the concept of the “idea” with the concept of artistic inspiration, and gave an incomparably deep foundation to his statement that artistic activity is a “creative thing like unto God.”²⁵⁶

The understanding that Dürer’s work in the books on proportion was attempting to capture the “fleeting” *Idea della bellezza* was in keeping with Italian studies along the same lines. Moreover, the knowledge of that fact (which has eluded art historical treatments) was clearly demonstrated in 1591 when the astronomer and theorist Giovanni Paolo Gallucci (1538-ca.1621) published an Italian translation of the proportion study, *Della simmetria dei corpi humani, libri quattro*.²⁵⁷ In the Preface for the new edition, demonstrating the similarities between painting and poetry, Gallucci noted that it was in fact the Idea that informed Dürer’s studies and that it was to that end that an artist was to utilize those studies. He set forth to capture the beauty of proportions by his judgment, natural sciences and mathematics.²⁵⁸ Gallucci states of this endeavor:

For not only has he established the precepts of well-proportioned bodies, but also rules, and conferred an order on these precepts, and discovered proportions in all the bodies with disproportions. For he knew very well that indebted painters...display in painting every kind of person, and form every idea of natural inclinations, because they all have diverse bodies, which are proportionally transferred to nature, they wished to form still diverse precepts that would desire the manner of changing all bodies and their parts, like those that are wished for in the individual when representing the most desired in such manner. Although, in deviating somewhat in some body from that true proportion that one finds in perfect bodies, which no one would dismiss, however, so much, that in all would

²⁵⁶ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 125.

²⁵⁷ Giovanni Paolo Gallucci. *Della simmetria dei corpi humani, libri quattro*. (Venice, 1591).

²⁵⁸ *Nella quale si mostra la similitudine c’ha la pittura con la poesia...* *Ibid*, 1: 7.

lose the human form, and would make a thing in all monstrous and ridiculous.²⁵⁹

Even the misshapen and disproportioned in the natural world have some type of order; and therefore when artists deviate from the “true proportion” and precepts that have been laid down, the beauty of the human form is lost to the monstrous. Underlying the operation of nature is a guiding and unifying force, an Idea, which brings together all of the disparate elements in the sense-perceptible world.

The doctrine of proportion, espoused by Dürer, raised the questions of how to ascertain what is harmonious and therefore pleasing, and what constitutes the basis of this pleasingness. The answers to this inquiry, which were expressed in individual cases, all agreed that the subjective and individual judgment of a single artist does not suffice to legitimize correct proportions as “good,” Gallucci suggests. In order to qualify the value of proper proportions, theorists demanded referencing the basic laws of mathematics or music, while judgment would be tempered by study of antique statues and venerable ancient authorities. The resultant system developed could then be defended as objectively reputable. However, this ideal universal system for valuing art was not to go unchallenged; and concomitantly, as Giulia Bartrum has noted recently, Dürer’s ideas on proportion were to move through many changes over the course of his career.²⁶⁰ The proportion studies that were produced around 1500 indicated the primary interest in

²⁵⁹ “Percioche non solo ha dato i precetti dei corpi bene proportionate; ma gli ha dato regole, & insignato i precetti, & ritrovato proportione nei corpi in tutto sproportionati. Percioche sapeva egli molto bene, che dovendo il Pittore (come habbiamo ditto disopra) spiegare in Pittura ogni sorte di gente, & formare ogni idea di naturali inclinazioni, le quali tutte hanno corpi diversi, & che proportionatamente corn’ spandavo alla sua natura, li fù bisogno formar ancora diversi precetti, che dessero il modo di variare tutti i corpi, & parti sue, come ricercasse il bisogno della persona, che volessimo rappresentare in tal modo però, che quantunque deviasa alquanto alcuno corper da quella vera proportione, che si ritrova ne i perfetti corpi, nò si allontanassero però tanto, che in tutto perdessero l’humana forma, & facessero cosa intutto mostruosa, e ridicolosa.” Ibid, 1: 9.

²⁶⁰ Giulia Bartrum ed. *Albrecht Dürer and His Legacy: the graphic work of a Renaissance artist*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 172.

creating a single, ideal type from a mathematical construction to be used directly in art. On the other hand, after his second trip to Italy in 1505- where he stayed in Venice for nearly two years- he gradually came to realize that no single canon of beauty could be achieved. In pursuing the principles behind this realization, Dürer began assembling alternate sets of proportions that accorded the different shapes and sizes of human figures, for which he took measurements from several hundred individuals.²⁶¹ The modification in approach to a canon of proportions that related to universal beauty was not unique to Northern writers. Even theorists who criticized such orderings, like Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci, attempted to abstract some kind of norm from material culled from the judgment of public opinion, or by the opinion of “experts” and to contrast this norm with judgments based merely on individual taste.²⁶²

In fact, the development of a canon of proportions based on arithmetic ratios was the result of the original relationships of beauty and harmony espoused by theorists such as Alberti in the Early Renaissance. However, after such a system had been established and well-circulated, another movement sought to question the premise that purely through harmony, symmetry and mathematics could beauty be attained. In the mid-sixteenth century, this can be illustrated in the figure of the sculptor-theorist Vincenzo Danti (1530-1576). Only the first book of Danti’s essentially Albertian treatise on *disegno* was ever published (1567), but we know that eight of the remaining thirteen books were devoted to the subject of anatomy. Danti’s telling title, *Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*, indicates that he was centrally concerned with the perfect proportions of the human form, which is to say, with mathematical relationships of the parts of the body one

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Leonardo da Vinci, *On Painting*, 200-205. Alberti, *De statua*, 199-201. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 51.

to another. Nevertheless, he writes explicitly of a *misura intellettuale*, or “intellectual measure.” The perceived interrelationships of forms in Danti’s conception were not to be measured with instruments. On the contrary, they could be discerned by the eye of a trained intellect, the greatest instrument of all.²⁶³ The understanding and dissemination of such an ability was well known after the apotheosis of Michelangelo in 1564. In his biography of the “divine” artist (1553), Condivi noted that Michelangelo intended to write a treatise on proportion himself, drawing upon the years of anatomical study and the dissection of corpses, “with a brilliant theory which he arrived at through long experience.” Extending the critique of Dürer’s rigid, mathematical conception of human proportions, Condivi reassures that:

I know very well that, when he reads Albrecht Dürer, he finds his work very weak, seeing in his mind how much more beautiful and useful in the study of this subject his own conception would have been. And, to tell the truth, Albrecht discusses only the measurements and varieties of human bodies, for which no fixed rule can be given, and he forms his figures straight upright like poles; as to what was more important, the movements and gestures of human beings, he says not a word.²⁶⁴

The understanding that “no fixed rule can be given” for proper proportions is consistent with Danti’s concept of the *misura intellettuale*, a belief that Michelangelo’s biographers considered the universal artist to possess. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the capacity for “intellectual measure” informed the interpretation of another ability, the *giudizio dell’occhio*, which also did away with “material compasses” in favor of the “judgment of the eye.”²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Margaret Davis. “Beyond the ‘Primo Libro’ of Vincenzo Danti’s ‘*Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*,” *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*. 26 no. 1 (1982), 63-84, 68.

²⁶⁴ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 98-99.

²⁶⁵ Vincenzo Danti. *Primo libro del Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*. (Perugia, 1830), 44, 52.

The idea that more was needed to produce beauty in works of art than merely observable harmonious relationships developed alongside the revival of certain Realist tenants in art theory. Along with artists who sought to distill a formula to represent well-proportioned human figures were authors such as Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) who stressed the same concern. Ficino translated Plato's dialogues into Latin in 1482, which arguably had the most lasting effect on Neoplatonic thought in the following century, as will be discussed shortly. In Speech V Chapter III entitled *Beauty is something incorporeal* in his *Commentary on the Symposium of Plato*, Ficino notes the necessity in holistic proportion for the infusion of beauty into a figure:

There are some who think that beauty consists in a certain arrangement of all the parts, or, to use their own terms, in symmetry and proportion, together with a certain agreeableness of colors. The opinion of these people, however, we do not accept, because since such an arrangement of parts exists only in composite things, no simple things would be beautiful...

In addition to this is the fact that that "proportion" includes all of the parts of a composite body, and does not exist in individual parts, but in all of them. And so, the individual parts in themselves will not be beautiful. But the "proportion" of the whole construction arises out of all the parts. Whence something very absurd follows...²⁶⁶

It is appropriate that Plato, in the *Timaeus*, sets forth that the ideal of beauty, one form of truth itself, is governed by reason evident in its system of measurement and proportion.²⁶⁷

As such, the emphasis on considering all the parts taken together as a single, unified representation of beauty, might not at first reveal the differing approach of Ficino to ideal human proportion; but it does highlight a criticism that would gain acceptance in the following century. The need for a unifying "idea" to relate all of the proportioned parts to one another is central to this early conception that would be developed later.

²⁶⁶ Marsilio Ficino. *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*. Sears Jayne trans. (Spring: Dallas, 1985),88.

²⁶⁷ Plato. *Timaeus*. Benjamin Jowett trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1985), 87a-92c.

Furthermore, the resultant “absurdity” that Ficino cites, springs not only from a disunity of parts, but from focusing solely upon the harmony of proportions, color and qualities. These “corporeal attractions” are to be ignored as superfluous, for it is ridiculous to believe “that things which are not beautiful of their own nature give birth to beauty;” as early art theorists such as Alberti understood the nature of beauty, as well.²⁶⁸ Referring back to Plotinus, this definition of beauty is vapid because it seizes only the external characteristics of appearance, rather than the inner essence and true meaning of beauty.

The belief is elaborated upon by Ficino in Speech V Chapter VI, *How many things are required that a thing be beautiful and that beauty is a spiritual gift*. In continuing his discussion of the importance of proportion, Ficino notes that *bellezza* is “a certain grace shining in itself through the influence of its own Idea.”²⁶⁹ The entrance of this “Idea” into matter is contingent upon the specific steps in preparation for it. As he writes:

But the preparation of the living body consists of these three things: Arrangement, Proportion, and Aspect [order, mode and form]. The order is the distance of the parts, the mode is the quantity, and the form is lines and color. In order that all parts of the body have their natural place, the ears, the eyes, the nose and the other parts must first be in their proper positions, the eyes at an equal distance from the nose and both ears equally spaced from the eyes. And this proportion of distances, which is part of the order, is still not enough if the mode of the parts is not added, attributing to each limb its proper length in accordance with the proportion of the whole body. . . . Furthermore, we consider the form necessary so that a graceful disposition of the line and curves, and the splendor of the eyes, will adorn the order and mode of the parts. Although these three particulars are in the matter, they nonetheless may not be any part of the body. The order of the limbs is not a limb by itself, because the order is in all of the limbs and in no one limb are all of the limbs present. In addition, the order is nothing more than a proper spacing of the parts, and the spacing is either nothing, a void or a linear characteristic. But who will say that the lines are the body? They lack the length and the depth necessary to

²⁶⁸ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 88.

²⁶⁹ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 93.

the body. Moreover, the mode is not quantity, but the limit of quantity. The limits are the surfaces, lines and points which, not having depth, cannot be called bodies. We also do not put shapeliness into the matter but into the joyful harmony of the lights, shadows and lines. For this reason Beauty is so distant from corporeal matter that matter does not communicate with it unless the matter is prepared according to the three incorporeal conditions that we have mentioned. The basis of these three conditions is the harmonious constitution of the four elements in such a way that our body most resembles heaven, the substance of which is harmonious, and does not rebel against the formation of the soul due to an excess of some humor. In such a way the splendor of heaven easily appears in the body as similar to heaven. And this perfect form of man, which the spirit possesses, will be more integral in peaceful and obedient matter....²⁷⁰

Thus the necessary preparation of the “three incorporeal conditions,” which are “order, mode and form,” determines acceptance or rejection of beauty into matter. Whereas Alberti merely listed an indeterminate number of characteristics necessary for proper harmony and beauty (i.e. “...size and measure, character, color, and other similar things”), Ficino enumerates three specific steps to be taken, including the distance and arrangement of the various parts to be shown; second the number, or quantity of those parts; and third the “form” that will embody the Idea in “lines and color.”²⁷¹ At one time Ficino defined beauty in close accord with Plotinus as a “clearer similarity of the bodies with the Ideas” or as a “victory of divine reason over matter.”²⁷² The body measurements given by Ficino are derived partly from the well-known canon of Vitruvius- relating the length of the whole body as eight lengths of the head, the division of the face into three lengths of the nose, and the outspread arms equaling the length of the body.²⁷³ However, Ficino also relates in a more universal manner to the Roman architect in his inclusion of

²⁷⁰ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 93-94.

²⁷¹ Alberti *On Painting*, 111. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 93.

²⁷² “Pulchritudo in corporibus est expressio ideae similitudo,” Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 210. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 53.

²⁷³ Luca Pacioli utilized Realist theory in his treatment *Divina proporzione* of 1509, following upon the wake of Neoplatonism brought about by Ficino.

the theory of the four elements and humors. The body and the universe from microcosm to macrocosm are here related, not by geometrical relationships, but rather metaphysical balance. As the world, and subsequently the universe, is balanced by the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water), so to is the human body, and subsequently the soul, balanced by the four humors (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood).²⁷⁴

The beginnings of this idea can be traced to a statement by the Greek philosopher Empedocles around 430 B.C.: “Out of water and earth, and air and fire mingled together arose the forms and colours of all mortal things.”²⁷⁵ The same elements that made up the physical universe also constituted the human body. When present within human bodies the four elements were known as the four humors and identified as blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Formulated in classical antiquity, humoral theory survived through the Middle Ages, invigorated by several developments. In the late twelfth-century several Greek texts on the subject became far more accessible by being translated into Latin.²⁷⁶ Leading physicians in Greece and Rome, foremost among them Hippocrates (469-399 B.C.) and then Galen (A.D. 129-199), began the practice of explaining illness in terms of imbalanced humors. The Hippocratic text *The Nature of Man* states that,

The human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. These are the things that make up its constitution and cause its pains and health. Health is primarily the state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportions to each other. Pain occurs when one of these substances presents either a deficiency or an excess.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ See: Allen G. Debus. *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine*. (New York: Science History Publications, 1977). Walter Pagel. *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*. (Basel: S. Karger, 1958).

²⁷⁵ Empedocles, *Poem on Nature*. Quoted in: Zirka Z. Filipczak, ed. *Hot Dry Men Cold Wet Women: The Theories of Humors in Western European Art 1575-1700*. ex. cat. (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1997), 8.

²⁷⁶ The invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century helped to circulate humoral ideas to a wider audience than ever before. On the Latin translation of key Greek texts see: A.C. Crombie. *Medieval and Early Modern Science*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 1: 42-3, 45-6.

²⁷⁷ Hippocrates, *The Nature of Man*, 3-4. Quoted in: Filipczak, ed. *Hot Dry Men Cold Wet Women*, 15.

Restoring health meant reducing the excesses through the introduction of opposites. The processes that were popular at the time included blood letting. Balance and harmony, in the universe, human body and art, resulted in order, health and beauty. Thus, according to Ficino, the proper preparation for beauty, which includes these concerns, will result in the “splendor of heaven easily appears in the body as similar to heaven.”²⁷⁸

The development of this tripartite, rhetorical conception for artistic creation was carried on over a century later in the writings of Lomazzo. In his *Idea del Tempio della Pittura* (1590), the Milanese theorist set out a highly complex and interrelated system for understanding the artistic Idea through the metaphorical construct of a temple. The idea that proper proportion directly influences beauty is discussed in Chapter XXVI, *On the Method of Knowing and Establishing the Proportions in Accordance with Beauty*. In an almost verbatim summarization of Ficino’s quotation above, Lomazzo reiterates that:

...Finally, the beauty of the body is nothing more than a certain demeanor, vivacity and grace, which radiate within it from the infusion of its Idea; and the latter does not descend into matter unless it is most properly prepared. This preparation of the living body is accomplished in three particulars, which are order, mode and form. The order signifies the differences of the parts, the mode the quantity, and the form the lines and colors...Although these three particulars reside in the matter, they nevertheless cannot be any part of the body [as Ficino states in speaking of Plato’s Symposium], saying that the order of the limbs is not any one limb, since the order is in all the limbs, and no limb is present in all the limbs together...Thus beauty is so removed from corporeal matter that it does not take shape out of this matter unless prepared according to these three incorporeal conditions. The basis of these is the harmonious constitution of the four elements in such a way that our body is very similar to heaven, whose substance is harmonious. And when the body does not rebel against the formation of the soul from some excess of humor, the celestial splendors easily appear in the body as similar to heaven and to that perfect form of man, which the spirit possesses in peaceful and obedient matter...²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, 94.

²⁷⁹ Quoted in: Panofsky *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 141-153.

At the end of the sixteenth century, we find that the “Idea of Beauty” had metamorphosed from a general “notion” in the artist’s mind, and related to “harmonious arrangements,” to a regularized concept that is formed and infused in matter through a specific stratagem. The emphasis on quantifying and, subsequently, qualifying mathematical interrelationships between objects, resulted in a continued effort to distill a universally valid set of harmonious relationships in the parts of human anatomy. The resultant canon of proportions that derived from study of Vitruvius met with criticism, as arithmetic ratios alone could not suffice to produce beauty. In the figures of Dürer, Ficino and Lomazzo, we find the slow maturation of art theory, and the codification of the “Idea” as the sole wellspring of beauty as well as the arbitrator of its value. A parallel analysis of this evolution was set forth by Robert Williams as he discussed the transition from art as a technique to an “all-comprehending form of knowledge” in itself. As he wrote, “From the artist’s point of view, art ceases to be a well-defined technique or set of techniques, a *techne*, and becomes instead a master technique, a *metatechne*...”²⁸⁰

* * *

The Revival of Realism

The belief in a universally valid system of representation, borrowed from the quantifiable disciplines of mathematics and music, paralleled the revival of certain Realist formulations of the Idea. Out of this revival developed two largely distinct interpretations of the concept first framed by “Plotinus and later Idealists”²⁸¹: the moderate-Realist position, which stressed the compromise between the mind and the world of perfect forms; and the tradition of the *furor poeticus* in which a purer Platonic interpretation was

²⁸⁰ Robert Williams. *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22.

²⁸¹ Alberti, *De re aedificio*, 9:5. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 116.

sought where the creator would access the supraterrrestrial world of immutable beauty by way of a connection of the mind with that sphere through a separation from the body. In Renaissance literary theory, Platonism and the concept of “Ideas” had been radically transformed, as Panofsky noted, from “metaphysical substances existing outside the world of sensory appearances as well as outside the human intellect” into “notions or conceptions residing in the mind of man.”²⁸² The transition of the Platonic concept from its negative role as a judgment on the inferiority of artistic activity to an affirmation of the artist’s possession of “a glorious prototype of beauty” in his own mind was, as discussed, made possible by the rhetorical-Ciceronian model.²⁸³ The importance that this concept came to have in later sixteenth- and seventh-century art and literary theory is due in great part to Florentine Neoplatonism.²⁸⁴

The school of thought that gave birth to Neoplatonism was in fact inspired by the early humanists, who had seen no conflict between the newly rediscovered wisdom of the ancient world and the authority of the Church. Yet however successful such a reconciliation might have been between philosophy and religion, the reintroduction of Realist theories to art theory was delayed. Quattrocento art theorists considered the nature of the conception and transmission of Ideas to be determined by definite rules that could be demonstrated empirically. As such, the discipline of art theory was at first almost completely independent of the revival of Neoplatonic philosophy taking place at the same time and within the same Florentine cultural circle. The metaphysical, and oftentimes mystical, philosophy that was central to Early Renaissance Neoplatonism combined

²⁸² Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 6.

²⁸³ Cicero, *Orator*, 2: 7ff. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 111-113.

²⁸⁴ See: Christine Raffini. *Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione: Philosophical, Aesthetic, and Political Approaches in Renaissance Platonism, Renaissance and Baroque Studies and Texts*. vol. 21. (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

various traditions that were not applicable to the Nominalist positions of Ghiberti and Alberti.²⁸⁵ The orientation was thus resistant to a theory that asserted that the human soul contains a notion of all perfect forms that had been impressed upon it by the divine mind, and according to which the soul is able to judge the products of nature. Or as Alberti noted in *De re aedificio*, “what is in the entire body, and yet is not localized, but is in itself, that we call ideal with Plotinus and later Idealists.”²⁸⁶ Art theorists were able to gain access to Euclid, Vitruvius, and Alhazen, on the one side, and to Quintilian and Cicero, on the other; but they could not gain access to Plotinus or Plato, whom Alberti still referred to only as a painter.²⁸⁷ In fact, Plato’s influence became effective on a larger scale for the first time with the publication of the *Divina proporzione* in 1509 by Pacioli, who was not so much an art theorist in the strict sense of the term as a mathematician and cosmologist.²⁸⁸

Therefore it was only at the dawn of the High Renaissance that the newly formulated Realist positions gained prominence in literary and art theory, filtered through the traditions of Augustinian and Pythagorean Platonism.²⁸⁹ The institution of the Academia Platonica, which was a loose association of poets, philosophers and intellectuals, was largely responsible for the creation and dissemination of ideas that would contend with, and in many instances supplant, the Nominalist-Scholastic position

²⁸⁵ As Panofsky noted, the Florentine circle utilized aspects of the Platonic and the Plotinian, as well as late Greek cosmology, Christian mysticism, Homeric myth and Jewish cabala, of Arabic natural science and medieval Scholasticism. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 53.

²⁸⁶ “ex his patere arbitror pulchritudinem quasi suum atque innatum toto esse perfusum corpore quod pulchrum sit.” Alberti, *De re aedificio*, 9:5. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 116.

²⁸⁶ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 6.

²⁸⁷ Alberti, *On Painting*, 95.

²⁸⁸ Pacioli, *Divina proporzione*.

²⁸⁹ See: Meredith Gill. *Augustine in the Renaissance: art and philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Christopher Celenza. “Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino.” *Renaissance Quarterly* .52 no.3 (Autumn, 1999), 667-711.

taken by earlier art theorists.²⁹⁰ The predominant “Neoplatonic” position of the Academy was conclusively formulated by Marsilio Ficino, who asserted that Ideas are in fact metaphysical realities. Although Ficino was personally acquainted with Alberti, and a patron of the arts himself, he radically departed from the Albertian conception of art production. In accordance with his goal of defining Plato’s conception of love, Ficino asserted that Ideas existed as “true substances,” while earthly things are only *imagines* of them, or only the essence of actual being.²⁹¹ Also, aside from their substantiality, Ideas were regarded as “simple, immovable, and without conflicting admixtures.” They are immanent in the mind of God (and occasionally the minds of angels), and in accordance with Plotinus and the patristic writers they were called *exempla rerum in mente divina*, or “ideas born in the divine mind.” Human consciousness is capable of cognition only because *formulae*, or “impressions,” of the Ideas are inherent to the human soul from its supraterritorial pre-existence.²⁹² Like unto “sparks from the divine primordial light,” these impressions “are almost extinguished” as a result of long inactivity, but they can be revived by “instruction” and can be caused to flash up again in the light of the Ideas, “as visual rays are by starlight”:

Finally he [Plato] adds that in the mind thus affected the light of truth is lit not slowly in the manner of human love, but suddenly. But from where? From the fire, i.e. from God, which shoots forth and emits sparks. By sparks he designates the Ideas...and he also thus designates the impressions of these Ideas innate in us, which, formerly benumbed by lack

²⁹⁰ Alberti, *De re aedificio*, 9:5. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 116.

²⁹⁰ Disagreement continues over the nature and dating of the Platonic Academy of Florence. See: Arthur Field. *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²⁹¹ Gill, *Augustine in the Renaissance*, 24-25.

²⁹² “Et Plato in Timaeo septimoque de Republica manifeste declarat substantias quidem versa existere, res vero nostras rerum verarum, id est idearum, imagines esse.” Ficino, *Opera*, 2:1142. “Docetque interea ideam a reliquis longe differre quatuor praecipue modis: quia scilicet idea substantia est, simplex, immobilis, contrario non permixta.” Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1535. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 56-57.

of use, are rekindled by the breeze of teaching, and they are brightened by the Ideas just as the rays emitted by the eyes are by starlight.²⁹³

The organization of cognition, and the individual's relationship to the divine was thus extended to an understanding and transmission of beauty as well. The Idea of the beautiful is also impressed on the human mind as a formula; and it is only by means of this inborn notion that we are capable of perceiving visible beauty. Such is the process whereby the truly beautiful is only revealed when the imperfect forms of the sense-perceptible world are connected to their immutable "types" that exist in a metaphysically separate realm by referring the sensory appearance back to the original formula preserved within. In effect, earthly objects that are beautiful are those that most nearly agree with the Idea of beauty.

Although the dissemination of Ficino's philosophy is often seen to be delayed, the author's main philosophical works were in circulation well before they were published in 1484, and his commentary on the *Symposium* was even available in an Italian translation, further expanding influence in the vernacular tradition.²⁹⁴ Thus around the turn of the century, another Platonic concept that originated from the Florentine school, the *furor poeticus*, was entering into the lexicon of art theory. The reformulation of the concept, which was expounded in Plato's *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, was again championed as a legitimate avenue to beauty by Ficino. It is in Book XIII of his *Theologia platonica*, that we find asserted that poets are second only to philosophers "among those who separate themselves from the body during life," acting as vehicles for God to speak through,

²⁹³ "Addit in mentem denique sic affectam non paulatim quidem humano quodam amore, sed subito lumen veritatis accendi. Sed unde nam? Ab igne, id est a Deo, prosiliente sive scintillante. Per scintillas designat ideas...designat et formulas idearum nobis ingenitas, quae per desiderium olim concopitae excitantur ventilante doctrina, atque velut oculorum radii emicantes ideis velut stellarum radiis collustrantur." Ficino, *Opera*, 1: 241. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 56-57.

²⁹⁴ David Hemsoll. "Beauty as an aesthetic and artistic ideal in late fifteenth-century Florence." in: *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds. (Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 67.

singing in their madness “many admirable things which afterwards, when their fury has lessened, they do not well understand themselves.”²⁹⁵ More closely approximating the original Platonic conception, Ficino relates the process by which poets are able to access the divine, while still living, and pull down the supraterrrestrial “idea” to the sublunar realm. The process is also rarely understood by the recipient of such “divine” inspiration.

The dissemination, and acceptance, of such a model for attaining inspiration was due to another poetic intermediary. It is in Horace’s *Ars poetica* that we find accounts of the mantic Orpheus, who was described as “the holy prophet of the gods;” as well as descriptions of ancient poets as inspired teachers of morality, where “honour and fame fell to bards and their songs, as divine.”²⁹⁶ The relationship between the Platonic “idea” and poetic furor was clearly illustrated in poetic criticism later in the Cinquecento by such authors as Bernardino Tomitano and Francesco Lovisini.²⁹⁷ Taking as his starting point Plato’s general concept of the Ideas, Tomitano had stated in his *Ragionamenti della lingua toscana* of 1545, that like the painter, the poet and the orator attempt to represent in the medium of their arts some perfect concept or Idea, which he defines as “those simple and spiritual forms...which mean nothing else but examples and norms of those things which are born naturally or made artificially, which are absolutely eternal and durable just as all others are born perishable and mortal and may be said to be subject to constant mutation.”²⁹⁸ If the poet was to succeed as a poet, he must therefore be

²⁹⁵ Plato, *Ion*, 533-4. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244ff. Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 203. Quoted in: Brian Vickers. “Rhetoric and Poetics.” in: *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Charles B. Schmitt, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 738.

²⁹⁶ Horace, *Ars poetica*, 391-401. Quoted in: Vickers, “Rhetoric and Poetics,” 738.

²⁹⁷ Bernard Weinberg. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:130-134, 264-265.

²⁹⁸ “quelle semplici & spirituali forme,...che altro non importano che essempli & norme di quelle cose, che nascono naturalmente, ò artificiosamente si fanno: lequali sempiterno del tutto & dureuoli sono, si come tutte l’altre cose nascenti mancheuoli & mortali, & a mutatione di continuo soggiacenti si possono addomandare.” Bernardino Tomitano. *Ragionamenti della lingua toscana*. (1545), 8. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 264-265.

something of a philosopher in that he be privied to the truths which he is going to imitate. In like fashion, Lovisini quoted from Ficino's *Symposium* in his commentary on Horace's *Arte poetica* of 1554, suggesting that all artisans and artificers are poets in a sense. In the *Apology* on the divine furor, he identifies Horace's "exemplar vitae" with the "Idea which, as Plato says in the *Parmenides*, contains all particular things and is separate from them."²⁹⁹ The conception would later develop into a topos as demonstrated by Cesare Ripa's treatment and illustration of *Furor Poetico* in the *Iconologia* of 1602 (**figure 20**).³⁰⁰ As the iconographer references Plato, he states that poets and artists "form many times in the idea images of supernatural things..." The supernatural origin of the "great many things" derived allows the recipients of the furor to "inflare the work of art" with their *ingegno*, while simultaneously being ignorant to the source of the light they are infusing.³⁰¹

Although highly influential in poetical theory, there was an inherent pedagogical resistance to the *furor poeticus* that delayed its incorporation into art theory. The problem that the concept poses is its contradiction between a theory of divine inspiration and one of rhetorical invention; the former requiring a supernatural epiphany, while the latter stresses planning and craftsmanship. For this reason, while the prophetic "idea" had some influence, as in the treatises of Pontus de Tyard (1562) and Girolamo Fraccheta (1581), which have the full Neoplatonic theory of divine fury as the means by which the soul can regain its place in heaven, it was also opposed by critics who held to a belief in poetry as

²⁹⁹ "Idaea, quae, ut ait Plato in Parmenide, singularia Omnia continent, & ab ijs seiuncta est." Francesco Lovisini. *In librum Q. Horatii Flacci de arte poetica commentarius*. (1554), 63v. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 264-265.

³⁰⁰ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim: New York, 1970), 178.

³⁰¹ "formano molte volte nell'idea imagini di cose sopraturali..." "Accennando l'opera dell'arte col non potere, & quella delingegno con l'ignoranza." Ibid, 179.

an art, with techniques to be mastered, and as a form of knowledge.³⁰² Hence we might assert that throughout Early Renaissance art theory, there is a built in resistance to the conceptualization of beauty purely from the artist's "fantasy," while poetical-literary theory began to demand it. For instance, whereas the provenance of the Ficilian tradition can be traced to Petrarch, who understood the ability to visualize beauty only by means of color and line in terms of a divine vision; we find that Alberti believed that the mental ability to perceive beauty could be attained only by experience and practice. Furthermore, even though the empirical tradition, represented by Cennini and after him Leonardo, granted the artist the ability to emancipate himself from reality through variation and *invenzione*, there were strict limitations. Art theorists of the fifteenth century, no matter how entrenched in poetical theory, would certainly not concede that beauty is purely the product of the artist's "fantasy," as Dion and Cicero had set forth for poets.³⁰³ In fact, it would not be until the mid-sixteenth century that the idea of poetic furor gained serious currency in art-theoretical treatments.

* * *

The Vasarian Idea and *Disegno*

The two strains of Realist and Moderate-Realist thought concerning the concept of the Idea heavily influenced, perhaps the most affecting sixteenth-century author on art for posterity, Giorgio Vasari. In the same year that the German theologian, Philipp

³⁰² Pontus de Tyard, *Solitaire premier, ou, prose des muses, et de la fueur poëtique* (1562), Girolamo Fraccheta, *Dialogo del fuore poetico* (1581). Vickers, "Rhetoric and poetics," 738.

³⁰³ Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, 1-2. "Et in questo supera [l'occhio] la natura, che li semplici naturali sono finiti, e le opere che l'occhio comanda alle mani, sono infinite, come dimostra il pittore nelle finitioni d'infinite forme di animali et erbe, pianti e siti." Leonardo, *Trattato della pittura*, no.28. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 59.

Melanchthon (1497-1560) was modifying the strict Platonic interpretation of the Idea, Vasari published the first edition of his *Lives of the Artists* in 1550 (Torrentino).³⁰⁴ The format chosen by Vasari combined biography and historiography, taking as his models Plutarch's *Oratory of Praise*, Aristotle's *Rhetorica* and Cicero's *Brutus*. Furthermore, to underscore the relationship between artists and philosophers, Diogenes Laertius' *Book of Philosopher's Lives* was chosen as a literary parallel to reinforce the rhetorical construct.³⁰⁵ After a brief prologue on the "summit of perfection" of ancient Roman art, Vasari demarcates the division of "modern" painting, and thus the rebirth of that perfection, into three periods. As he noted, in the first period, which is dominated by the Giotto, art moved away from the *maniera greca*, or "Greek manner," and once again sought to reproduce Nature. The second period, dominated by Masaccio, Donatello and Brunelleschi, developed the mathematical and scientific methods (i.e. linear perspective) that enabled the third age of painting to once again reach perfection. It would be Michelangelo, the only sixteenth-century artist included in the third period, "who transcends and surpasses them all, who reigns supreme not merely in one of these arts but in all three at once [painting, sculpture, and architecture]."³⁰⁶ With the carefully constructed literary conceit that paralleled the development of Florentine art to the lifecycle of man, Vasari introduced to early modern biographies of artists the tripartite

³⁰⁴ As Melanchthon wrote in his *Ennaratio* of 1550, "It is certain that Plato everywhere calls Ideas a perfect and lucid notion, as Apelles carries in his mind the most beautiful image of the human body." Melanchthon consciously refused to interpret the Ideas as metaphysical objects, in order to equate them with the *definitiones* or *denotationes* of Aristotle. The change from Plato's denial of the visual arts for embodying the Ideas to the realm of the visual arts discussed by Melanchthon was, once more, mediated by Cicero. "Certum est, Platonem ubique vocare Ideas perfectam et illustrem notitiam, ut Apelles habet in animo inclusam pulcherrimam imaginem humani corporis." Melanchthon, *Ennaratio libri I. Ethicor. Arist.*, Ch.6. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: a concept in Art Theory*, 6. The 1550 edition of *The Lives* consisted of one hundred and forty-two biographies. The first two eras consisted of one hundred and forty-one biographies, with Michelangelo Buonarroti the only living artist to be treated in the third section.

³⁰⁵ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 45.

³⁰⁶ Giorgio Vasari. *The Lives of the Artists*. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella trans. (New York: Oxford Press, 1991), 282.

division of *early*, *mature* and *late*; which was likewise applied to the stylistic evolution of artists.³⁰⁷ Or as he wrote in the 1550 version of *The Lives*, “The arts, like men themselves, are born, grow up, become old and die.”³⁰⁸

However, it would be the definitive edition of *The Lives* (Giunta) published in 1568 that would inform the art-theoretical contributions of the author. Through the urging of Florentine philologist Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580) in 1566, Vasari expanded the different Italian schools discussed in the treatment as well as the theoretical construct; thus acquiescing to the demand that the second edition be a “universal history,” encompassing “topographical, temporal and technical” treatments.³⁰⁹ The overriding art-theoretical concept that dominated the technical excursus was *disegno*. For Vasari the aim of art was the imitation of nature, and good style resulted from the imitation of nature and of the best masters. It would be *disegno* that provided the technical and conceptual means to express the forms thus apprehended. In the preface to the third part, Vasari

³⁰⁷ The special license of age- a license Vasari had accorded Michelangelo’s mishandling of the classical orders and the established rules of architecture- permits the artist a certain liberty with his medium, a freedom of operation that leads to a transcendence of the material.

³⁰⁸ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 2:31. Discussions of the aphorism of biological development has led scholars to search out the possible ancient sources. Wolfgang Kallab identified Plutarch, Pnybius, Paolo Diacono, and Matteo Villani as sources for Vasari. Julius Schlosser cited Lucius Annaeus Florus and Velleius Paterculus; Erwin Panofsky discussed Florus; Ernst Gombrich cited Cicero, Quintilian, and Pliny; and Zygmunt Wazbinski introduced Lucretius and Livy for consideration. Kallab, *Vasaristudien*, 182-84. Julius von Schlosser. *La Letteratura artistica*. Otto Kurz, ed. (Florence, 1977), 315-16. Erwin Panofsky. “The First Page of Giorgio Vasari’s ‘Libro.’” in: *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 173-175.

³⁰⁹ Although almost finished revising the second edition, Borghini urged Vasari to include more artists outside of central Italy and to conduct more field research. In a letter to Vasari in 1566, Borghini outlines this: “I would like you to have seen Genoa, Venice, Naples, Milan, and altogether as many things in each of these principal cities as possible and to adorn your work with them that it may be a universal history of all paintings and sculptures of Italy, for this is the aim of your work.” Karl Frey, ed. *Giorgio Vasari: Der literarische Nachlass*. (Munich, 1923-30), 2:101-2. Quoted in: Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 31. Vasari’s traveling research for the second *Vite* took him from Arrezzo, Perugia, Cortona, Assisi, Foligno, Spoleto, Rome, Narni, Terni, Spoleto again, Val di Varchiana, Tolentino, Macerata, Recanati, Loreto, Ancona, Fano, Pesaro, Rimini, Ravenna, Bologna, Modena, Reggio-Emilia, Parma, Piacenza, Pavia, Milan, Monza (?), Lodi, Cremona, Brescia, Mantua, San Benedetto Po, Verona, Vincenza, Padua, Venice, Bologna and Ferrara. The result was that the third section of the biographies was enlarged to twice the length of the first two combined. Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 7, 31.

listed five principal additions made by the artists of the second period to the achievements of the first so that the artists of the modern age had the means to arrive at perfection: they were “rule, order, proportion, *disegno* and style” (*regola, ordine, misura, disegno e maniera*).³¹⁰ Building upon the treatments discussed, Vasari listed the progressive steps that would be taken in producing perfection in style and beauty; and the concept that governed judgment and ability in producing such beauty was *disegno*.

The multivalent term *disegno*, often erroneously translated simply as “drawing,” is a conception in which theory and practice combine, hand and intellect meet. The preface to *The Lives* opens with a history of the arts that attaches this notion of *disegno* to Creation, defining *disegno* (the “foundation” of the arts) as “the very soul that conceives and nourishes within itself all the parts of man’s intellect- already most perfect before the creation of all other things, when the Almighty God...shaping man, discovered, together with the lovely creation of all things, the first form of sculpture and painting.”³¹¹ Vasari elaborated his definition of *disegno* in the technical introduction:

“*disegno*, father of our three arts...proceeding from the intellect, draws from many things a universal judgment similar to a form or idea of all things in nature, which is most singular in its measures...[it] is cognizant of the proportion of the whole to the parts and of the parts to each other and to the whole...from this knowledge there is born a certain conception and judgment, so that there is formed in the mind that something which when expressed by the hands is called *disegno*, we may conclude that *disegno* is none other than a visible expression and declaration of the inner concept, and of that which others have imagined and given form to in their idea...what *disegno* requires, when it has derived from the judgment an image of something, is that the hand, through the study and practice of many years, may be free and apt to draw and to express correctly...

³¹⁰ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 4: 3. Williams has noted that the usage of the term *disegno*, as well as the other four qualities necessary in producing perfect art are not logical and consistent. Their definitions keep changing with the discipline they belong to and subjects in which they are most prominent. Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 43. Sohm has also commented on the inconsistent manner in which Vasari applied these terms. Sohm, *Style*, 2-4.

³¹¹ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 2:3. Quoted in: Patricia Rubin. *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 241.

whatever nature has created. For when the intellect puts forth with judgment concepts purged [of the accidents of nature], the hand that has practiced drawing for many years makes known the perfection and excellence of arts as well as the knowledge of the artist.³¹²

The relationship of the Neoplatonic “idea” to the Florentine conception of *disegno* cannot be overlooked. As Liana De Girolami Cheney noted, “Thus, Vasari’s aesthetic derives jointly from the classical conception of physical beauty and from the Neoplatonic notion of spiritual beauty.”³¹³ Following on the quotation of Dürer’s conception of the Idea, Vasari utilizes the “divine” aspects of creating beauty that were in turn inherited from Seneca; and all filtered through an understanding of Ficino. Additionally, a precedent was offered when Antonfrancesco Doni stated that the first *disegno* had been an idea of the whole of creation in the mind of God in his *Disegno del Doni* of 1549.³¹⁴

In the highly influential conception of Vasari, the “idea of beauty” originates in the “intellect” where it then informs a “universal judgment” - derived from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* - as to what should be represented from nature.³¹⁵ The *guidizio*, or “judgment,” relates that proper proportion is to be attained, and thus beauty, through careful observation of nature and dexterous practice until the artist is able to correct those “accidents of nature” using this proper “judgment” as a compass. Thus *disegno* was the intellectual ability to perceive and the manual ability to transcribe the most beautiful parts of nature. Related to earlier theorists such as Alberti, Vasari thus finds that beautiful style resulted from copying and assembling those beautiful elements. Or as Antonio Minturno

³¹² Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 2:111. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 241.

³¹³ Liana De Girolami Cheney. “Vasari’s Interpretation of Female Beauty.” in: *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds. (Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 181.

³¹⁴ Anton Francesco Doni. *Disegno del Doni* (Venice, 1549), f.7v-8. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 266.

³¹⁵ Karen Barzman. “Perception, Knowledge and the Theory of Disegno in Sixteenth-Century Florence,” in: *From Studio to Studiolo*. Feinberg ed. (Seattle, 1992), 37-48. As noted by Williams, the phrase “universal judgment” helps to distinguish the kind of knowledge represented by “art” (*techne*). Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 34.

set forth in *L'arte poetica* of 1564: “just as nature in her operations follows always a constant and eternal Idea, so art follows always an unchanging Form.”³¹⁶ Of course it is necessary to note that even though Vasari’s conception of the Idea, though philologically subsumed under the art-theoretical conception of *disegno*, is related to Neoplatonic notions of the “divine” Creator, and originates in the “intellect,” it is nonetheless situated within a pragmatic Aristotelian framework that justified and recounted the interdependence of sense and intellect.³¹⁷ Williams has noted that this kind of syncretism was by no means unusual in Florence in this period, particularly in Borghini’s circle.³¹⁸

The first of the Cinquecento commentaries on Horace’s *Ars poetica*, for instance, Francesco Filippi Pedemonte’s *Ecphrasis in Horatii Flacci Artem poeticam*, published by his pupil Puresius in 1546, made extensive use of Plato as well as Aristotle.³¹⁹ In lines 1-13 of Horace’s text, Pedemonte sees an expression of Plato’s theory that Ideas precede forms; from this theory he derives Horace’s contention that “it is necessary that the artist have a preconceived notion of the things which are made by him before putting his hand to them, and that he see in advance in his mind’s eye the Form according to the model of which he may give form to every work.” This is the procedure, he goes on to say, in all the arts, and “especially in the arts of painting, molding and sculpturing, which indeed seem to Aristotle to proceed in the same way of imitation as does poetry.” Thus Aristotle’s theory of imitation is made equivalent to Plato’s theory of the imitation of

³¹⁶ The form of the poetic genre noted by Minturno is to be taken from the theorists of Greece and Rome, much as it was with art theory. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 755-758.

³¹⁷ The antecedent that Plato represented for Aristotle’s own works was discussed in Maggi and Lombardi’s *In Aristotelis librum de poetica communes explanationes*, as well as in Giacompo Grifoli’s *Artem poeticam Horatii interpretation*, both published in 1550. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 270-271; 1:418-420.

³¹⁸ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 34.

³¹⁹ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:111-112.

Forms and to Horace's initial statements in the *Ars poetica*.³²⁰ The ideas presented by Pedemonte were not unique and were certainly available in Florence, while Vasari was conducting research in the 1560s.³²¹

Therefore, with the conflation of different traditions it is more proper to discuss the Vasarian notion of *disegno* (Idea), philosophically impure as it might be, as a moderate-Realist position.³²² However, Vasari required more from the artist to produce beauty. The perfection of *disegno*, and with it the realization of beauty, in fact, depended upon *imitatio*, or "imitation." First formulated in antiquity by rhetoricians such as Cicero, the process required the selection of the best models, masters, and the most beautiful elements of nature, while being qualifiably judged by *disegno*. Vasari's most extensive treatment of the meaning of *imitatio* with regards to the practice of the arts is in the opening of the Life of Mino da Fiesole:

When our fellow artists try to do no more in their works than to imitate the styles of their teacher or another man of excellence whose method of working pleases them...with time and study they might make their works similar, but they can never attain perfection in their art with this alone, in

³²⁰ "necesse enim est artificem earum rerum, quae à se fiunt, priusquam manum admoueat, pr *cognitam* habere notitiam; animoque praeuidere formam, cuius exemplo opus quodque informet. Sic itaque in omni arte, pingendi maxime, fingendi, atque sculpendi; quae quidem eodem imitationis tramite cum poesi Aristoteli incidere uidentur." Francesco Filippi Pedemonte. *Ecphrasis in Horatii Flacci Artem poeticam*. (1546), 3v. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:112.

³²¹ In the commentary in Italian on the *Opere* of Horace by Giovanni Fabrini of 1566, such interrelated systems of interpretation were brought to bear. In lines 309-22, where Horace is speaking of the poet's wisdom, Fabrini develops the thesis that this wisdom will consist in a knowledge of Ideas rather than in a knowledge of realities: "For example, if one wishes to write about the duties of a prince, he should not set before his eyes any individual prince as the example from which he would derive the precepts that a prince should observe; for no single prince is so good that he does not have some fault. But Horace wishes that he should have in mind the example or the Idea of the true prince, and that he should write how a prince ought to be according to that Idea or rather that example...his end is to write how a prince should be, even though it is found that no real prince has ever been that way." [Uno uerbigratia uouole Scrivere de l'uffitio d'un Principe. Questo tale non si dee proporre innanzi a gli occhi per esempio, donde egli caui I precetti, che dee osservare un principe: perche nessun principe è tanto buono, che non habbia qualche mancamento: ma uouole, che egli si proponga l'esempio, ouero la idea del uero principe: e scriva, come dee essere un principe, secondo quella idea, ouero quello esempio...il fin suo è di scrivere, come principe dee essere, se bene non si trova, che nessuno mai sia stato tale.] Giovanni Fabrini. *L'Opere d'Oratio*. (1566), 384v. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:179-181.

³²² See: D.W. Mertz. *Moderate Realism and Its Logic*. (London: Yale University Press, 1996).

as much as it is clearly evident that one who always walks behind rarely comes to the front...for imitation is the sure art of copying what you do exactly after [the model of] the most beautiful things in nature...Thus one has seen many of our fellow artists who have refused to study anything but the works of their teachers and left nature aside; to these it has happened that they failed to gain any real knowledge of them or to surpass their masters, and have done enormous injury to their talent; because they had studied the style [of their masters] and objects of nature together, they would have produced much better works.³²³

Extending the Zeuxinian tradition to rhetoric, Vasari is relating an idea first introduced by Cicero. In *De Oratore* Cicero advised that the student be shown a good model and then “strive with all possible care to attain the most excellent qualities of the model.”³²⁴

Likewise, in 1560, Bernardino Parthenio related the Horatian notion of imitation in his lengthy dialogue, *Della imitazione poetica*.³²⁵ While asserting the preeminence of Aristotle in Horace’s *Ars poetica*, Parthenio held that the imitation of a poet in representing the Ideas and the Forms of others is superior to that other Platonic mode that represents “that certain force, or faculty, that we bear in our soul, that they call Idea.”³²⁶ In other words, Parthenio is arguing for imitating a venerable model instead of creating one *ex nihilo*.

The formulation was followed upon by Quintilian, who had a contrasting view in that he believed “imitation alone is not sufficient.”³²⁷ He argued that discovery and advance came from the natural force of imagination and he cited the case of painters:

Shall we follow the example of those painters whose sole aim is to be able to copy pictures by using the measuring rod? It is a positive disgrace to be content to owe all our achievement to imitation. For what, I ask again,

³²³ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 3:405-406. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 247.

³²⁴ Cicero, *De Oratore*, 1: 264-65. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 247.

³²⁵ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 145-146.

³²⁶ “quella certa forza, o uero facultà, la quale portiamo nell’animo, che chiamano idea.” Parthenio, *Della imitazione poetica*, (1560), 3. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 145-146.

³²⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, H.E. Butler trans. (London: Loeb, 1959-68), 4:76-77.

would have been the result if no one had done more than his predecessors?...And even those who do not aim at supreme excellence, ought to press toward the mark rather than be content to follow in the tracks of others. For the man whose aim is to prove himself better than another, even if he does not surpass him, may hope to equal him. But he can never hope to equal him, if he thinks it is his duty merely to tread in his footsteps: for the mere follower must always lag behind.³²⁸

The artist could not hope to surpass those that went before him, those who he was “imitating,” if he did no more than merely reproduce what they had done, even in a piecemeal manner. For Quintilian “the greatest qualities of the orator are beyond all imitation, by which I mean talent, invention, force, facility and all the qualities which are independent of art.”³²⁹ Notions derived from Quintilian’s association of individual talent and progress were paralleled in Vasari’s advocacy of a model that explained how each artist could realize his talent, not walking behind or following the tracks of others but studying to develop a personal style. The belief is reinforced by the author’s own list of five qualities essential to a successful work of art: *regola* (rule), *ordine* (order), *misura* (proportion), *disegno*, and *maniera* (style). The attainment of proper *maniera*, or style, is contingent upon the other four qualities and is defined by Vasari as “that beauty which comes from having frequently copied the most beautiful things, and from those most beautiful hands and heads and bodies and legs to join together and make a figure of as many beauties as possible, and to put it into all one’s works and in each figure.”³³⁰ The achievement of perfection in one’s own personal style depended upon a proper use of these rhetorical conceptions and the art-theoretical concept of *disegno*.

The model for producing laudable art presented by Vasari, though somewhat novel, was confirmed independently of the author as early as Alberti. However, the

³²⁸ Ibid, 4:76-79.

³²⁹ Ibid, 4:80-81.

³³⁰ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 43.

ubiquitous nature of the publication permeated a broader artistic audience than previous treatments.³³¹ One aspect of artistic creation discussed by Vasari that received wide acceptance in the later sixteenth century was the stylistic evolution of artists, which, as discussed, paralleled the author's framing of history as life-cycle. In such an understanding, and the arguable merits of painting, sculpture and architecture as liberal arts *sui generis*, the evolution of an artist's personal style from early, mature and late was discussed as resulting from the artist's own internal drive toward perfection. The notion that patronage affected such modifications of style, for instance, is largely passed over in silence. The artist himself was responsible for such a change, whether bringing him closer to perfection, or diverting him from the proper path. As such, there were artists who used the art-theoretical and rhetorical model presented by *disegno*, and were thus enabled to reach perfection in their own style; while simultaneously there were artists who denied the precepts of *disegno*. Even though this latter category of artist had admirable styles, they were, nonetheless, unable to reach perfection because of a flawed understanding of theory and practice.

Perhaps the best illustration of the proper rhetorical approach to eclectic appropriation can be found in Vasari's Life of Raphael (1483-1520). As he noted, the young painter from Urbino began his career by imitating the style of his master Perugino, "and made it much better in terms of design, colouring, and invention (*disegno, colorito, e invenzione*), but when he was older, although he thought he had accomplished a great deal, he recognized that this style was too far from the truth."³³² The self-realization of his

³³¹ For even those painters who lived in Naples, Venice or outside of Italy and could not visit the Academia del Disegno, could access the technical material presented by *The Lives*.

³³² Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 330-331. When Raphael was studying under Perugino in Umbria, this early style is evident in such works as his *Coronation of the Virgin* of 1503. This is especially pronounced in the physiognomic types that Raphael chooses here to illustrate the different reactions the apostles have to the *Coronation* occurring above their heads. Konrad Oberhuber, for example, notes the same occurrence of a

style's shortcomings prompted the artist to move to Florence, where "after having seen so many works in Florence, Raphael changed and enhanced his style so much that it had nothing whatsoever to do with his early style, which looks like the work of a different and less proficient painter."³³³ The change in style by Raphael paralleled his imitation and elaboration of specific stylistic characteristics of different painter's styles. Beginning with the works of artists from the second age of art, the artist then proceeded by studying the styles of the current masters; for as Vasari noted: "This exceptional painter studied the old works of Masaccio in the city of Florence, while the things he saw in the works of Leonardo and Michelangelo made him apply himself with great intensity to his studies, and, as a result, make extraordinary improvements in his art and style."³³⁴

Moving from the Ciceronian understanding of imitation cited above to Quintilian's notion of moving beyond artistic models, Raphael then combined the *terribilità* of Michelangelo with the *sfumato* of Leonardo and the solidity of Masaccio, thus creating "a middleway both in design and in colours; and mixing this style with some other details chosen from the best works of other masters, he created a single style out of many that was later always considered his own, for which he was and always will be endlessly admired by artisans."³³⁵ The development of his painting style, as discussed by Vasari, moved from the *grazia* of his early manner through the *manier gentile* and *bellissima* of his early Roman years to the later *grandezza e maestà* fostered by intelligent study of Michelangelo and the antique.³³⁶

change from Raphael's early, Perugino focused career, to his later encounter with Florentine artists. Konrad Oberhuber. *Raphael, the Paintings*. (New York: Prestel, 1999), 45-50.

³³³ Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 310.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 1: 311.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 1:334.

³³⁶ Vasari, *Le vite Vasari, Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 4: 160, 175. Mary Rogers. "The Artist as Beauty" in: *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds. (Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 96.

In his famous letter to Castiglione written in 1516, Raphael himself noted the manner in which he would approach his work. As he stated of the role the Idea concept:

In order to paint a beautiful woman I should have to see many beautiful women, and this under the condition that you were to help me with making a choice; but since there are so few beautiful women and so few sound judges, I make use of a certain idea that comes into my head. Whether it has any artistic value I am unable to say; I try very hard just to have it [the idea].³³⁷

Extrapolating from this statement, the models chosen by the artist, whether from nature or other masters, were guided by the judgment of the Idea. It was not merely through imitating these models that Raphael was able to arrive at his personal style, but rather by building upon them and combining the best from each. Along the same lines, Condivi reports on a comment Michelangelo made late in his life, where he stated that “Raphael did not come by his art naturally, but through long study.”³³⁸ As Vasari noted, and the artist confirmed, it was with *disegno* (Idea), as a guiding principle, that the artist able to perceive the most appreciable aspects of those chosen models, and was thus able to perfect his style in the fashion of the rhetorician. As Robert Williams explains, “Raphael creates a personal style by selecting elements from others, a procedure that resembles Pico’s preferred method of poetic imitation.”³³⁹ And Cicero illustrates this point with the example of Zeuxis selecting models.

While Raphael and Michelangelo were presented as artists who utilized the theoretical precepts of *disegno*, other schools of art were chosen to represent ignorance of the superior mode for producing beauty. For instance, Vasari praised Giorgione because

³³⁷ “Il Platonici dicono esser necessario la cognitione e conuenientia dell’Idea, del Genio e della stella al principio d’amore. Per l’Idea intendiamo la forma, secondo Tullio: questa non è altro che similitudine. Non Raphael Di natura d’amore.” Johann David Passavant. *Raphael von Urbino und seiner Vater Giovanni Santi*. (Leipzig, 1839), 1:533.

³³⁸ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 106.

³³⁹ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 83.

“the best artists of the time confessed that he had been born to give life to figures and to re-create the freshness of living flesh more successfully than anyone who painted not only in Venice but anywhere.”³⁴⁰ However northern Italian artists, such as Giorgione, were at a disadvantage as they did not have the best models, or the best training, particularly in *disegno*. Vasari chose Titian’s *Life* to express his regret for what he felt to be characteristic of North Italian inadequacy in *disegno*. The scene described takes place in the Belvedere of the Vatican, where the author and Michelangelo went to look at Titian’s recently completed painting of *Danaë* (1553-54) (**figure 21**). As each observer noted,

His coloring and style pleased him greatly, but it was a pity that in Venice one did not learn to draw well from the beginning and that those painters did not have a better method of study: “Because,” he said, “if this man had been helped at all by art and by *disegno*, as he has been by nature, especially with respect to imitating life, one could not do anything more or better, since he has a most beautiful spirit and a very charming and lively style.” This is indeed the case, because those who have not drawn enough and studied excellent works, ancient or modern, cannot do well by skill alone or improve on things copied from nature, in order to give them that grace and perfection that art adds to nature, which usually produces some parts that are not beautiful.”³⁴¹

The characteristic criticism leveled against Venetian painting focuses on the lack of selection when choosing appropriate models. As Michelangelo noted, the artist’s style would have been greatly improved had he used the proper judgment of *disegno*, because in reproducing nature too closely, one is bound to record some “parts that are not beautiful.” Therefore the division between those that utilize proper theory and practice and those that ignore it demarcates those with a perfect style and those without. The lack of discussion regarding art theory in the specific cases of stylistic change merely

³⁴⁰ Vasari, *Le Vite Vasari, Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 4:42-3. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 244.

³⁴¹ Vasari, *Le Vite Vasari, Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, 6:164. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 244-45.

illustrates the permeating effect of this belief that would soon spread throughout Europe in translations. Vasari's Florentine and Roman readers would have well understood the fundamental impact of *disegno* (*l'idea della bellezza*), as it was central to art education, especially in central Italy. The very discussion of the concept in the technical introduction lays out the importance of it for art education and its central position to practice.

* * *

Michelangelo and Platonic Love-Theory

It was the artist who had represented perfection in the third age of painting, Michelangelo, who serves to illustrate the increasingly complex and interwoven disciplines of art theory, rhetoric and poetry. As noted, the stages of the evolution of painting summarized by Giorgio Vasari demarcated the passage from childhood to old age and represented a model for understanding the progression of an artist's career and their style as well. As each artist was trained in a workshop, or academic setting, their education would progress their understanding of the precepts that underlay artistic practice and theory. And just as the artist himself would age and mature, so too would his understanding and use of the conception for producing art he had learned as well.

In the biographies of both Vasari and Condivi, Michelangelo is held as divinely blessed with a predisposition to perfection in all media of art production- including painting, sculpture, and architecture. The early training of the artist began with an apprenticeship in the Florentine workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494), when Michelangelo was thirteen years old.³⁴² In the three years in that shop, he would have learned the rudiments of fresco and panel painting; and, as his biographers tell us, he

³⁴² The artist's earlier training in the vernacular and Latin were noted in Chapter Two.

excelled rapidly in mastering his craft.³⁴³ Noted by Vasari, Ghirlandaio was recorded as saying after viewing a sketch the young Michelangelo was producing in his workshop, “This boy knows more about it than I do.”³⁴⁴ Through an “inborn sense of judgment” and “instinctive grace,” the sculptor soon surpassed his master.³⁴⁵ The drive to perfect one’s personal style in the model for the ideal artist presented by Vasari, finds embodiment in the career of Michelangelo. The rhetorical model of perfecting style with *disegno*, and utilizing the precepts of the five qualities set forth by the author, is demonstrated by several passages concerning the stylistic change of Michelangelo, or the lack thereof. In one such instance of appropriating a proper model and improving upon it, Vasari noted that Leonardo had kept a marble Madonna bas-relief in his home: “This was executed by Michelangelo when he was still a young man after the style of Donatello, and he acquitted himself so well that it seems to be by Donatello himself, save that it possess more grace and design.”³⁴⁶ He improved upon the *exemplum* with “più grazia e disegno.” The model was continued when Michelangelo formalized his working method later in his career to utilize the same principles Raphael had in the Zeuxinian model. As Condivi wrote, Michelangelo admired “everything beautiful in general”:

...admiring them all with marveling love and selecting beauty from nature as the bees gather honey from flowers, to use it later in his works. All those who have achieved some fame in painting have always done the same. In order to create a *Venus*, the ancient master was not content to consider a single maiden, but he wanted to contemplate many, and from each he took her most beautiful and perfect feature to use in his *Venus*. And in truth, anyone who thinks to arrive at some level in this art without

³⁴³ At the age of fifteen, Michelangelo came to the attention of Lorenzo de’Medici and was invited to his household, where he stayed for two years, until 1492. James M. Saslow. *The Poetry of Michelangelo*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 9.

³⁴⁴ Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 329.

³⁴⁵ Vasari goes so far as to remind us of his 1550 edition in which Michelangelo’s father stated that the apprentice had learned nothing from his master, excelling instead on his own. Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 331.

this means (whereby true knowledge of theory can be required) is greatly deceiving himself.³⁴⁷

The knowledge and ability to discern the best models is unattainable without a “true knowledge of theory.” In referencing ancient artists, Condivi combines the Zeuxinian model with the metaphor of a bee that collects honey from diverse flowers. The metaphor, which Anne Summerscale explains is derived from Horace’s famous bees, would become central to seventeenth-century discussions of such appropriation.³⁴⁸

However, Michelangelo also warned against mere replication of models, beautiful though they might be, without a unifying *concetto* to amalgamate them. As Vasari notes,

A painter had painted a scene and had copied many of the details from various drawings and pictures, and there was nothing original in the work, and it was shown to Michelangelo, who, after having examined it, was asked by one of the painter’s close friends what he thought of it, and he replied:

‘He has done very well, but when the Day of Judgment arrives and all the bodies take back their own parts, what will become of this scene when nothing is left?’

This was a warning that those who work in the arts should learn to do their own work.³⁴⁹

The warning against the combination of disparate models was once again previously established in poetical criticism and theory. In Pedemonte’s commentary on the *Ars poetica* (1546), the author warns of such misappropriations. In speaking of the impossibility of unity when disparate elements are combined, Pedemonte quotes Aristotle in setting forth that “the first parts of the poem will not fit with the last, and the poem as a whole, which (as Aristotle says) consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end, will in no

³⁴⁷ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 105.

³⁴⁸ Anne Summerscale. *Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 212.

³⁴⁹ Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 478.

way be complete.”³⁵⁰ Here, Aristotle’s principle of unity is identified with Horace’s principle of appropriateness; an association that doubtless Vasari was unaware.³⁵¹

Moreover, the emphasis on such a moderated method for appropriation, and the seeming absence of discussion of the specific manner in which the style of Michelangelo changed throughout the course of his career, can be explained by the model of Vasari- and through wider acceptance, the Cinquecento- for attaining a perfect personal style. In addition to the technical discussion noted above, in the third section of *The Lives*, Vasari associated greatness and perfection of style with *ingegno* (genius), *furore* (furor), and the adjective *divino* (divine). This emphasis on creative freedom, moving beyond mere *imitatio*, had been made possible due to the achievements of the second age of painting in the fifteenth century. As Patricia Rubin noted, “In the third era craftsmanlike artistry was superseded by creative artifice.”³⁵² As Vasari noted of the limitations of the second age of art:

In *disegno* there was not that perfection of finish because, though they could make an arm appear round and a leg straight, the muscles were not revealed with that sweet and pleasing facility which appears when things are both seen and unseen, as in the case of living flesh; rather, they were crude and as if flayed, which made them unpleasant to the eye and resulted in a hardness of style. This last [age] was wanting in that delicacy that comes from making all figures light and graceful, particularly those of women and children, with the limbs true to nature, as in the case of men, but veiled with a plumpness and fleshiness that should not be awkward, as they are in nature, but refined by *disegno* and *guidizio*.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ “poematis prime partes cum postremis non conuenient; minieue totum ipsum, quod (ut inquit Aristoteles) ex principio, medio ac fine constat, absoluetur.” Pedemonte, *Ecphrasis* (1546), 4. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:112.

³⁵¹ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:112.

³⁵² Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 241.

³⁵³ Vasari, *Le Vite Vasari, Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Gaetano Milanesi, ed. (Firenze: Sansoni, 1878-1885), 9. Quoted in: Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 44-45.

Especially significant is the reminder that *bellezza* is more closely associated with *grazia* than with simple proportion or symmetry earlier in the century.³⁵⁴ The emphasis on these imaginative aspects of creation resulted in criticism for artists of the Quattrocento. For instance, in the biography of Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), Vasari stated that an artist should only work when inflamed by a “divine furor.”³⁵⁵ Alternatively, Condivi noted that Michelangelo “...has the most powerful faculty of imagination, which gives rise in the first place to the fact that he has not been very satisfied with his works and has always belittled them, feeling that his hand did not approach the idea which he formed in his mind.”³⁵⁶ It was common, as Vasari noted, for the artist that he “follow his own fantasy,” rather than merely copying a model.³⁵⁷

The school of Neoplatonic thought that supported such methods for attaining beauty originated in poetic and literary theory, noted above. The relationship between the poet-philosopher and the artist-philosopher had been well established in treatments by the mid-sixteenth century. Once again, originating in the poetry of Dante (1265-1321) and Petrarch (1304-1374), artists found a common goal (beauty) with poets, and a shared rhetorical method for achieving that goal.³⁵⁸ It is certain that Michelangelo himself

³⁵⁴ This is especially evident in the commentaries on Vitruvius as Elizabeth Cropper noted. Elizabeth Cropper. “Introduction” in: *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds. (Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 7. Furthermore, in cinquecento treatises on love and beauty such as *Dialoghi d’amore* (Rome, 1535), Leone Ebreo defines beauty in terms of delighting the spirit; while Benedetto Varchi commented on the concept of beauty and grace in relation to love in his *Lezioni sull’Amore* (1540). In paraphrasing the poet Leone Orsino, Varchi continues his definition of beauty (*bellezza*) and grace (*grazia*) in this manner: “che cosa sia bellezza e che cosa sia grazia; e questo non si puo sapere con miglior modo e più sicuro e certo mezzo, che mediante la definizione loro.” Cheney, “Vasari’s Interpretation of Female Beauty,” 181.

³⁵⁵ And as Uccello did not, his work suffered. Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Milanese, ed., 2:204.

³⁵⁶ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 107.

³⁵⁷ One of the first sculptures Michelangelo created, Vasari tells us, was a work after an antique head of an old laughing faun. The work was such a success, impressing Lorenzo de’ Medici, due to the artist’s departure from the model through his own “fantasy.” Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 419.

³⁵⁸ Karl A. E. Emenkel and Jan Papy, eds. *Petrarch and His Readers in the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

understood this relationship and the importance of poetry and poetic theory; for as Condivi informs, he “especially admired Dante... whose work he knows almost entirely by heart, although perhaps he knows the work of Petrarch no less well.”³⁵⁹ He was also familiar with the *Commentary* by Cristoforo Landino in which every line of Dante’s *Divina Commedia* is interpreted in Neoplatonic terms.³⁶⁰ The knowledge of these sources was not limited to prose and content, but also the theories underlying them that were reexamined and reinterpreted by Neoplatonism. It should not be forgotten, as Baxter noted, that ardent Petrarchists of the sixteenth century considered the poet to be a philosopher and a Platonist himself.³⁶¹ As such his works were approached with such an understanding as to their philosophic and Platonic nature. Hence, it was through an understanding of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of beauty that Michelangelo’s art was influenced, both directly and indirectly. The artist’s fascination with Dante and Petrarch indirectly influenced him with regards to subject matter and content, while his exposure to Florentine and Roman humanists directly affected him by their interpretation of that content.³⁶²

In his biography of the artist, Condivi stated that he had heard many competent judges remark that what Michelangelo set forth concerning love was nothing other than what was written in Plato.³⁶³ The poet Francesco Berni (1497-1536) also wrote of Michelangelo’s own poetry, “I have seen some of his compositions; I am not learned,

³⁵⁹ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 103.

³⁶⁰ Joanne Snow-Smith. “Michelangelo’s Christian neoplatonic aesthetic of beauty in his early *oeuvre* the *nuditas virtualis* image” in: *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds. (Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 148.

³⁶¹ Baxter Hathaway. *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), 342.

³⁶² Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 115-119.

³⁶³ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 105.

nonetheless I would say that I have Read them all in Plato's works."³⁶⁴ It is in fact in the artist's poetry that the clearest references to a highly influential Neoplatonic conception can be found. Platonic love-theory, as it came to be known, was primarily interpreted through Ficino's widely read *Commentary*, where the idea is expounded in the *Symposium*; and came to have such an important impact on Renaissance thought.³⁶⁵ Ficino defined love as the desire for beauty, and described beauty as a ray which emanated from God and progressively penetrated the created world, moving downwards from the angelic mind to the material substance of bodies. As Jill Kraye noted, all beauty in the universe was therefore the radiance of the divine countenance.³⁶⁶ In outlining the theory of love, in Chapter VII Speech II, *On the two origins of love and the double Venus*, Ficino took as his key mythological symbol Venus, the goddess of love and passion. He wrote, allegorizing the two variant myths of Venus' birth, "Let there be two Venuses in the soul, the one heavenly, the other earthly."³⁶⁷ That is, there are two forms of love, in hierarchical relation to one another: the worldly and the spiritual. In Christianizing the lower term, the principle of *anagogy*, which was derived from Greek for "leading upward," held that earthly goodness and beauty are reflections of the greater beauty and perfection of their heavenly creator, and that enraptured contemplation of such perfection can lead the observer upward to a perception of divine love.

The theory was summarized and put into poetic language by Girolamo Benivieni (1453-1542) in his *canzone Amor dalle cui*, modeled on the late thirteenth-century Aristotelian *canzone* of Guido Cavalcanti (ca.1255-1300) *Donna me prega*. In 1486

³⁶⁴ "Ho visto qualche sua composizione, Sono ignorante, e pur direi d'havelle Lette tutte nel mezzo di Platone." Karl Frey. *Die Dichtungen des Michelangelo Buonarroti*. 177 (1897), 291. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A concept in Art Theory*, 115.

³⁶⁵ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*.

³⁶⁶ Jill Kraye. "Moral Philosophy" in: *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Charles B. Schmitt, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 354.

³⁶⁷ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 53-54.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) wrote a *Commento* on Benivieni's poem distinguishing six stages by which we ascend from the desire to unite corporeally with sensual beauty to the desire to unite spiritually with intelligible beauty.³⁶⁸ The sequence begins with the visual perception of the corporeal beauty of a particular individual and ends with the soul's union with the universal and first mind.³⁶⁹

The step-by-step ascent of the lover's desire from the merely physical beauty of an individual body to the purely intellectual and divine beauty of God became a standard feature in Renaissance discussions of Platonic love, and, unsurprisingly, was often mingled with Petrarchan motifs.³⁷⁰ This is found in literary works, such as *Gli Asolani* of Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) first published in 1505. In book III of this dialogue, the speaker Lavinello recounts his conversation with a hermit, modeled on Socrates' Diotima, who tells him that our souls can never be satisfied by earthly beauty, for being themselves immortal they cannot be content with a mortal thing. We are therefore, as Kraye noted, continually desirous of true, divine and eternal beauty, to which the false and transient beauties of this life can nonetheless elevate us; provided we do not linger with them, but recognize them for the vain and deceitful shadows they are.³⁷¹ In Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*, Bembo himself appears as the interlocutor and gives an account of Platonic love to the noble men and women at the court of Urbino.

Expressing the same notion of desirous elevation, Bembo set forth: "By the ladder whose

³⁶⁸ Allen noted that the treatise was originally intended as a commentary on Plato's *Symposium* that was to attack his "brother Platonist," Marsiglio Ficino, for his faults in logic and acuity, as well as his understanding of the metaphysical status of beauty. Alternatively, Ficino administered his own rebuke of Pico in the forty-ninth chapter of his *Parmenides* Commentary where he chastises the poet's decision in the *De Ente et Uno* of 1491 to adopt the Aristotelian error of predicating being of the One. M.J.B. Allen. "Review: *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni* by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola; Sears Jayne." *Italica* 63 no. 2 (Summer, 1986), 189. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*. Sears Jayne trans. American University Studies, Series II, Romance Languages and Literature, 19. (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 289.

³⁶⁹ Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," 355. Pico, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*, 288.

³⁷⁰ Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," 355.

³⁷¹ Bembo, *Gli Asolani*, 491-3. Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," 355.

lowest rung bears the image of sensual beauty, let us ascend to the sublime abode where heavenly, gracious and true beauty dwells, hidden in the secret recesses of God so that profane eyes may not see it.”³⁷²

The relationship between the poet/artist and the beauty of the resplendent lover was further demonstrated in another passage of Castiglione’s highly influential treatise on court etiquette, which defines and celebrates love in a thoroughly Platonic panegyric. In one debate concerning the relative superiority of painting versus sculpture in his treatment, Castiglione demonstrates this.³⁷³ Count Lodovico Canossa asserts that painting surpasses sculpture, and goes on to state that only careful study of art, especially painting, can endow someone with the sensitivity necessary to appreciate true beauty. Cesare Gonzaga expresses some doubt, however, believing that nobody- not even the artist- can appreciate the beauty of a “certain lady” better than he. Unwilling to accept the count’s suggestion that his opinion is influenced as much by affection as by discernment, Cesare argues that beauty generates affection: “When Apelles contemplated the beauty of Campaspe he must have enjoyed himself far more than did Alexander, since...both men’s love for her was prompted solely by her beauty, and ...this was why Alexander decided to give her to someone who, he believed, would understand it more perfectly.”³⁷⁴ Cesare’s point emphasizes that affection derives from beauty, and to think otherwise would call into question the unparalleled beauty of his beloved. Cesare continues his point by citing the legend of Zeuxis selecting models:

³⁷² Baldassare Castiglione. *The Book of the Courtier*. Singleton trans. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), 496-7.

³⁷³ Known as the paragone, the debate about which medium was superior- painting or sculpture- frequently arose in early modern treatises. In *The Courtier* the paragone is taken up by Count Lodovico Canossa and the sculptor Giovan Cristoforo Romano. Cesare Gonzaga has been listening, then chimes in with his own opinion.

³⁷⁴ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 102.

Have you not read that those five girls of Crotona, whom the painter Zeuxis chose from among all the others of that city for the purpose of forming from all five a single figure of consummate beauty, were celebrated by many poets because their beauty had won the approbation of one who must have been the most perfect judge?³⁷⁵

Beauty alone stimulates the poet as well as the lover, Cesare suggests. Interestingly the discussion of art and aesthetics ends just as Cesare completes his retelling of the Zeuxis myth, when new guests arrive, disrupting the conversation. And as such the desire an artist or poet has for their subject allows them to further uncover the beauty that is innate, which in the Platonic love-theory is further understood as the love is transcendent.

The metamorphosis that occurs in the desired object of beauty was ultimately derived from Petrarch's account of Laura changing from a physical woman into the Virgin Mary; as well as Dante's excursions on Beatrice. The Neoplatonic understanding of this transformation emphasized the change from an object of unfulfilled sexual desire to an unfulfilled spiritual longing- paralleled in Renaissance sources by the ideas surrounding the courtly-love tradition.³⁷⁶ In the prosimetrum *La vita nuova* of ca. 1293, Dante related this transformation.³⁷⁷ The treatment begins when the poet met his life-long love, Beatrice Portinari, at nine-years old, "when the woman whom my mind beholds in glory first appeared before my eyes."³⁷⁸ The conception of romantic love and desire for the mortal woman occupies Dante throughout the series of *canzoni*. As he wrote,

Love says of her: 'How can a mortal thing
Have purity and beauty such as hers'?
Then looks again and to himself he swears
A marvel she must be which God intends.
Pearl-like, not to excess, her colouring,
As suited to a lady's face, appears.
She is the sum of nature's universe.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ See: Lewis Freeman Mott. *The System of Courtly Love*. (New York: Haskell House, 1965).

³⁷⁷ Dante Alighieri. *La vita nuova (poems of youth)*. Barbara Reynolds trans. (New York: Penguin, 2004).

³⁷⁸ Ibid, Canzone 2, 3.

To her perfection all of beauty tends.
 Forth from her eyes, where'er her gaze she bends,
 Come spirits flaming with the power of love.
 Whoever sees her then, his eyes they prove,
 Passing within until the heart each finds.
 You will see Love depicted in her smile,
 Where none may gaze save for a little while.³⁷⁹

The excurses on the essence of beauty relating to the face and skin of Beatrice, and on the quasi-metaphysical relationship between such physical beauty and God, gives way in the series of *canzoni* that follow upon her death. The motifs of romantic love, existing as the initial step, are abandoned as we see the spiritual development that results in the capacity for divine love.³⁸⁰ The concluding *canzone* reveals the final transformation that has occurred, following upon the poet's grief. Reflecting upon the metaphysical nature of beauty that can only exist within the context of the supraterrrestrial world, Dante writes:

Beyond the widest of the circling spheres
 A sigh which leaves my heart aspires to move.
 A new celestial influence which Love
 Bestows on it by virtue of his tears
 Impels it ever upwards. As it nears
 Its goal of longing in the realms above
 The pilgrim spirit sees a vision of
 A soul in glory whom the host reveres.
 Gazing at her, it speaks of what it sees
 In subtle words I do not comprehend
 Within my heart forlorn which bids it tell.
 That noble one is named, I apprehend,
 For frequently it mentions Beatrice;
 This much, beloved ladies, I know well.³⁸¹

The notion of the pilgrim is related to Dante himself, who shall make a pilgrimage to retrieve a vision of Beatrice in her place of destination. Noted by Robert Klein, *La vita*

³⁷⁹ Ibid, Canzone 19, 26-27.

³⁸⁰ In the prosimetrum, Dante continually alludes to the importance of receiving inspiration in dream-like states, relating his conception of poetic invention to "poetic furor." As he noted after a profound vision, "After the vision which I have described, when I had composed the rhymes which Love had commanded me, a number of conflicting thoughts began to contend and strive one with the other, all of them, it seemed, unanswerably." Ibid, Canzone 13, 17.

³⁸¹ Ibid, Canzone 41, 63-64.

nuova engages Neoplatonic theories of the pneumatological return of the spirit from the erotic to its own proper domicile.³⁸² The knowledge of the sense-perceptible aspects of the mortal woman were superseded following her death by a metaphysically valid understanding of her “true” beauty once the “mortal veil” had been pulled back.³⁸³

The transformation of Beatrice was reinterpreted later in the Trecento by Petrarch in terms of the Christian’s “pilgrimage through the world.” Later adopted by Pico, Petrarch outlines in his epic six successive *all’antica* triumphal processions, each celebrating a personification of a fundamental human ideal or divine principle, which in turn is superseded by a higher or more powerful principle. The six stages are: Love, which is overcome by Chastity, which yields to Death, which is outlived by Fame, which is subdued by the pernicious gnawing of Time, which is annihilated by the cosmic scale of Divine Eternity, whose triumph is complete and ultimate.³⁸⁴ The sequential ascendance from corporeal beauty to divine understanding paved the way for the Neoplatonic interpretation of art. As Elizabeth Cropper has noted, in preparation for Renaissance critics, the poet made the portrayal of a beautiful woman into a synecdoche of painting itself.³⁸⁵ Invoking a special relationship between Love and imagination, Petrarch conceives of the idea itself as a painter whose many colours paint the “bel viso leggiadro” on his heart.³⁸⁶ In his *Canzoniere*, or the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, the poet relates

³⁸² Robert Klein. *Form and Meaning*. Madeline Jay and Leon Wieseltier trans. (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 62-88. Harrison has warned against a strict interpretation of the return of the spirit, as Dante’s definition of the pilgrim does utilize a strictly platonic understanding of the metaphysical relationship between the two realms. Robert Pogue Harrison. *The Body of Beatrice*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 125-126.

³⁸³ Harrison devotes much attention to the relationship of the pilgrim, on pilgrimage to view the Holy Veil of Veronica in Florence and the journey that the poet himself takes, ushered along by Love. *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 25.

³⁸⁵ Cropper, “Introduction,” 3-4.

³⁸⁶ Petrarch, *Rime sparse*, 71, 96. Quoted in: Cropper, “Introduction,” 4.

his unrequited passion for Laura.³⁸⁷ After having first seen her in the church of Saint Clare in Avignon on April 6, 1327, the poet was struck by her unsurpassed beauty:³⁸⁸

When Love within her lovely face appears
Now and again among the other ladies,
as much as each is less lovely than she,
the more the wish I love within me grows.

I bless the place, the time and hour of the day
that my eyes aimed their sights at such a height
and say: "My soul, you must be very grateful
that you were found worthy of such great honor.

"From her to you comes loving thought that leads,
as long as you pursue, to highest good,
esteeming little what all men desire:

"there comes from her all joyous honesty
that leads you by the straight path up to Heaven-
already I fly high upon my hope."³⁸⁹

The eyes of the poet themselves are quoted as being aware of the way in which Laura elevates one to Heaven. The elevating light which draws the poet to Laura would later affect the metamorphosis of the mortal love-interest into the Virgin after her death in 1348.³⁹⁰ Simultaneously, the poet realizes that in being compelled to see Laura's lost beauty, he is deprived of his freedom, for as he writes, "it is bad to follow what is pleasing to the eyes."³⁹¹ In the final verse, which is the longest in the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch fully realizes the error of loving the beauty of the "mortal veil" and praises the newly discovered spiritual beauty. As he wrote,

Virgin, so lovely, clothed in the sun's light

³⁸⁷ As with Dante's *La vita nuova*, the division of the poems relates the time before and after the death of the poet's love interest. Francesco Petrarca. *For Love of Laura: Poetry of Petrarch*. Marion Shore trans. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987). Petrarch. *The Canzoniere or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. Mark Musa trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

³⁸⁸ Petrarca, *For Love of Laura*, 2.

³⁸⁹ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, Canzone 13, 15.

³⁹⁰ Petrarca, *For Love of Laura*, 2.

³⁹¹ Petrarch, *Rime sparse*, 96. Quoted in: Cropper, "Introduction," 4.

and crowned with stars, so please the highest Sun
that inside you He chose to hide his light:
love urges me to speak of you in verse,
but I cannot begin without your help
and His who loving placed himself in you.
I call upon the one who always answered
Whoever called with faith.
Virgin, if toward mercy
For extreme misery of worldly things
You ever turned, then bend now to my prayer,
And help me in my war,
Though I am dust and you are queen of Heaven.³⁹²

The transformation from corporeal body to spiritual body found in the examples of Dante and Petrarch were central to the Platonic love-theory that was developed by Ficino and Pico in the later Quattrocento. The internal contemplation of the desire for the fruition of beauty, as defined by Ficino in his *De amore*, ultimately results in the luminous and all-embracing beauty reached at the state of divine love. In Speech VI, he states that “the beauty of the body ought to be a road by which we begin to ascend to higher beauty.”³⁹³ He expands on the theme in Chapter XVIII entitled, *How the soul is raised from the beauty of the body to the beauty of God*. Furthermore, in an explication of a Petrarchan sonnet to the Florentine Academy in 1548, Pompeo de la Barba searched for shadowings of Platonic thought. He concluded that Love finds its beginnings in us when the Image of beauty passes before our eyes. The image does not, however, remain a sense image, for the mind reconstitutes it and renews it by approximating it to its Idea, which by being closer to godhead and reality is “much more beautiful than the body which is seen by our eyes.”³⁹⁴ According to Barba, both the eye and the spirit, which carries the sense impression to the soul, quickly lose the image, and for this reason the lover wishes

³⁹² The final *canzone* continues eleven *stanze*.

³⁹³ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 124.

³⁹⁴ Pompeo de la Barba. *Spositione d'un sonetto platonico*. (Firenze, 1554), 10-11. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 342.

to see the beautiful body repeatedly to revivify the image even though the soul has conserved it. The influence of this Neoplatonic conception on Michelangelo is clearly evident in his extent writings, especially in the form of poetry. It was through Bertoldo di Giovanni that Michelangelo came to know Lorenzo de' Medici and the philosophers of the Platonic Academy of Florence which had been founded there in 1463 by Cosimo de' Medici. Here the young artist came under the influence of the Neoplatonic philosophy of the humanists and poets Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano.³⁹⁵

Aside from poets such as Castiglione, Angelo Poliziano and Pietro Bembo, the Accademia Fiorentina, founded in 1540, adhered to the models for love and divine beauty of Dante and Petrarch, in the forms of Laura and Beatrice, and assimilated the poets into Neoplatonic aesthetics.³⁹⁶ The beautiful female image reflected the “celestial beauty which leads the poet or philosopher upward to the experience of divine or heavenly beauty.”³⁹⁷ Correspondingly, Agnolo Firenzuola (1493-1545), in his book *Dialogo della bellezza delle donne*, or *On the Beauty of Women* of 1548 declares:

A beautiful woman is the most beautiful object one can admire, and beauty is the greatest gift God bestowed on His human creatures. And so, through her virtue we direct our souls to contemplation, and through contemplation to the desire for heavenly things.³⁹⁸

The motif became commonplace among poetical treatises mid-century. Hence even though Giovanni Pietro Capriano's *De vera poetica* of 1555 argued for moral utility in poetry through Aristotle, the universality of “perfect” examples in the tradition of the

³⁹⁵ Snow-Smith, “Michelangelo's Christian neoplatonic aesthetic of beauty in his early *oeuvre*,” 147.

³⁹⁶ Cheney, “Vasari's Interpretation of Female Beauty,” 182. Luigi Baldacci. *Il Petrarchismo italiano nel Cinquecento*. (Padua, 1974), 50-51.

³⁹⁷ Philip P. Wiener. *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. (New York: 1974), 3: 508.

³⁹⁸ Agnolo Firenzuola. *On the Beauty of Women*. Eisenbichler and Murray trans. (Philadelphia, 1992). Quoted in: Cheney, “Vasari's Interpretation of Female Beauty,” 182.

Phaedrus dominates. For, as Capriano argued, mankind being cut off from perfection by the conditions of bodily existence, strives always to approach the perfect and relies on intimations of moral beauty, or other manifestations of transcendental perfection, to lead him onward in his eternal quest for beatitude.³⁹⁹

The imitation and interpretation of poetry, especially Petrarchan, is evident in Michelangelo's own writings. Vasari noted, "He took particular delight in reading the vernacular poets, especially Dante, whom he loved and imitated in his conceits and inventions, as he did Petrarch, enjoying the composition of madrigals and very serious sonnets upon which commentaries have been written."⁴⁰⁰ As Saslow has noted, the six tiered ascendance of the pilgrim found in Petrarch is mimicked in his own work; as well as the manner in which Petrarch discussed the light shining forth from Laura's eyes, showing the poet the way to Heaven.⁴⁰¹ The sentiment was reiterated by Michelangelo as he felt himself carried up toward God by the sight of his beloved.⁴⁰² The metaphorical and metaphysical importance of light in these treatments derives, once again, from Ficino, who two years before his death in 1499, made a new translation of the works of the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite. The Augustinian *Celestial Hierarchy*, written in ca.500, thus entered into the lexicon of Renaissance philosophy.⁴⁰³ The Renaissance belief in the concept of light metaphysics took form with the guidance of this seminal work. As Dionysius the Areopagite wrote, Radiant light emanates from God, is imparted

³⁹⁹ Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 138-139.

⁴⁰⁰ Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 474.

⁴⁰¹ In fact, many of Michelangelo's poems take entire conceits, situations, or quotations directly from specific poems by Petrarch. Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 25, 46.

⁴⁰² "Gentil mia Donna, io veggio/ Nel mover de' vostr'occhi un dolce lume,/ Che mi mostra la via, ch'al Ciel conduce..." Petrarch, *The Canzoniere*, Canzone 9. "Veggio co'bei vostr'occhi un dolce lume..." Frey, *Die Dichtungen des Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 109, 19.

⁴⁰³ Paul Oskar Kristeller. *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 92.

to the heavenly angels, who in turn impart intelligible light one to another in descending order, that is, through the celestial hierarchy, to the mind of man. With the aid of angels, man is able successfully to ascend to the hierarchy to the divine light, which is God. The action might come from, what the author called “divine madness;” an ecstatic motion in which the divinity leads and conserves all in every manner while it enraptures the soul. He wrote that “the motion of the divinity is spiral (winding) in its steadfast procession and fecund rest.”⁴⁰⁴ The incremental ascendance of man to the divine light of God also offered an additional interpretation of the ascendancy of the lover in Platonic love-theory.

Also, in Michelangelo’s *canzone*, *Dimmi di gratia Amor, se gli ochi mei*, he asks Love whether the beauty he contemplates on his lady’s countenance is the true beauty to which he aspires. Love replies that beauty seen through the eye is indeed true and inherent beauty, but that when it passes through the eye to the soul it becomes something divine. It is this transfigured beauty which constitutes the real attraction and motivation for those who appreciate beauty most. As the artist inquires:

Tell me as a kindness, Love, if my eyes
see the true nature of the beauty for which I long,
or if I possess it within me when, gazing on the face of my lady,
I see it sculptured.⁴⁰⁵

Love replies:

The beauty which you see comes truly from your lady;
but this beauty grows, since it ascends to a better place
when through mortal eyes it passes on to the soul.
There it is made into something divine, worthy, and beautiful,
since any immortal thing wishes other things similarly immortal.
It is this divine beauty, and not the other, which guides your eyes onward.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*. J.D. Jones, trans. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1980), 68-69.

⁴⁰⁵ Frey, *Die Dichtungen des Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 22. Quoted in: Robert J. Clements. “Eye, Mind, and Hand in Michelangelo’s Poetry.” *PMLA* 69 no.1 (March, 1954), 325.

⁴⁰⁶ Clements, “Eye, Mind, and Hand in Michelangelo’s Poetry,” 325.

The divine transformation of beauty for Michelangelo references the Petrarchan motif, where beauty carries the soul to heaven. Therefore it is not surprising that the artist also repeatedly proclaimed that terrestrial beauty was nothing more than a “mortal veil” through which we recognize divine grace; that we love this beauty only because it reflects the divine, and that the contemplation of bodily perfection leads the “healthy eye” up to heavenly heights.⁴⁰⁷

An example close to Michelangelo, Lorenzo de’Medici (1449-1492), provides a courtly, Platonizing definition of beauty. According to the Platonists, he wrote, there are three kinds of beauty, the first beauty of soul, which “only the mind may know and desire;” the second kind is beauty of body, which delights the eye; the third is beauty of voice which delights the ear. The first beauty is virtue, and the last is harmony, and the second is corporeal beauty and grace, which “seems to proceed from being well proportioned, of gracious aspect, and in effect proceeds from a certain *venustà e leggiadria*, which sometimes pleases not so much because of the perfection and good proportion of the body, as because of a certain conformity that it has with the eye to which it is pleasing, that proceeds from heaven and from nature; and all this is the object and indication of the eye.”⁴⁰⁸ The belief set forth in the poetic invention of Petrarchan vernacular poetry was echoed by Vincenzo Danti, who stated, “all things that are beautiful are pleasing, all those that please are desired and loved, and the purpose of our

⁴⁰⁷ Frey, *Die Dichtungen des Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 105, 99, 104. Petrarch as well emphasizes the metaphor of the veil in disguising beauty: “In sun or shade I’ve never seen you, lady,/ remove that veil of yours...” Petrarch, *The Canzoniere*, Canzone 11, 13.

⁴⁰⁸ Lorenzo de’Medici. *Opere*. A. Simioni ed. (Bari, 1913-1914), 2: 46. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 371.

working is nothing if not that the things we make should have the ability to please, and consequently to be loved and desired.”⁴⁰⁹

Therefore it was only appropriate that it was Michelangelo who restored to the non-specific Neoplatonic notion that the work of sculpture comes into being through a “removal of the superfluous,” the allegorical meaning that it had for Plotinus and later Neoplatonists. The emergence of pure form from a crude mass became a symbol, through the sculptor, of rebirth. The same return, or rebirth, can be found in Dante’s pilgrimage to retrieve a glimpse of Beatrice in her new form.⁴¹⁰ True beauty, revealed when the “mortal veil” is lifted had an important influence on Michelangelo’s understanding of his working method. In addressing the notion that the figure a sculptor is to carve is hidden within the block of marble, he said:

Just as, by taking away, lady, one puts
into hard and alpine stone
a figure that’s alive
and that grows larger wherever the stone decreases,
so too are any good deeds
of the soul that still trembles
concealed by the excess mass of its own flesh,
which forms a husk that’s coarse and crude and hard.
You alone can still take them out
from within my outer shell,
for I haven’t the will or strength within myself.⁴¹¹

In keeping with the notion that true beauty is beyond sense-perceptible reality, the sculptor is to discover the “living figure” that “pre-exists” within “hard, alpine stone,” and thereby liberate it. Following upon Dante’s understanding of the Idea noted above, Ficino, thinking chiefly of sculpture, noted the creative act of the artist and likened it to the divine act of creation through the analogy of a “form” that exists “firstly in the artist’s

⁴⁰⁹ Barocchi, ed. *Trattati d’arte del cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma*, 1:253. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 371.

⁴¹⁰ Dante, *La vita nuova*, Canzone 41, 63-64.

⁴¹¹ Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, nos.152, 305.

mind, secondly in the tools that he wields, and thirdly in the material thus formed.”⁴¹² On other occasions, when he discussed “forms” with reference to both bronze and marble statuary, and even entertained the notion that the form of a sculpture was potentially present within a stone block. In fact, Ficino may have regarded sculpture as the most effective means of representing the most beautiful of all earthly creations, the body of man.⁴¹³

However, Michelangelo did not use the term “idea” in his poems to designate what the artist has in his mind before he approaches a block of marble. Instead he prefers the term *concetto*, which, importantly, is used interchangeably in other places with the Idea. For Michelangelo, the *concetto* is the preexisting image of an artistic project, which is formulated in the mind of the artist through a process of inspiration that is quasi-divine and which the artist then attempts to “realize” in a less than perfect tractable medium of the physical world.

Not even the best of artists has any *concetto*
that a single marble block does not contain
within its excess, and that is only attained
by the hand that obeys the intellect.

The pain I flee from and the joy I hope for
are similarly hidden in you, lovely lady,
lofty and divine; but, to my mortal harm,
my art gives results the reverse of what I wish.

Love, therefore, cannot be blamed for my pain,
nor can your beauty, your hardness, or your scorn,
nor fortune, nor my destiny, nor chance,

if you hold both death and mercy in your heart
at the same time, and my lowly wits, though burning,
cannot draw from it anything but death.⁴¹⁴

Furthermore, works of art, as well as the countenances of beautiful human beings, are referred to by Michelangelo as *divin concetti*, or “divine conceits.”⁴¹⁵ The association

⁴¹² Ficino, *Theologiae platonicae*, 10: 4. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 116-117.

⁴¹³ Ficino, *Theologiae platonicae*, 5: 13. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 116-117.
See also: Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 34-35.

⁴¹⁴ Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, nos. 151, 302.

of the imaginative aspects of creation with *divino* emphasized by Vasari was in keeping with the Neoplatonic conception of creation noted by Ficino.⁴¹⁶ The further difference between the Platonic Idea and Michelangelo's own understanding of the term *concetto* can be elucidated with the commentary on the sonnet, *Non ha l'ottimo artista in se alcun concetto*, which was explicitly approved by the artist himself. The lecture that was written by Benedetto Varchi (1502-1565), a member of the Accademia Fiorentina, and delivered in 1547, at first seems to confirm a Realist reading of the term:⁴¹⁷

In this place our Poet's Concetto denotes that which, as we said above, is called in Greek idea, in Latin exemplar, us "model"; that is, that form or image, called by some people the intention, that we have within our imagination, of everything that we intend to will or to make or to say; which [form or image], although spiritual...is for that reason the efficient cause of everything that can be said or made. Wherefore the Philosopher [Aristotle] said in the Seventh Book of the First Philosophy [Metaphysics]: "The active form, as regards the bed, is in the soul of the artisan."⁴¹⁸

The striking juxtaposition of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought was common to the commentaries on the *Canonziere* sponsored by the literary academy, and noted in Vasari. However, as François Quiviger has pointed out, this coexistence of different philosophical traditions was possible due to the academy's belief that each explained

⁴¹⁵ Alvaro Bizzicari. "L'idea della bellezza nelle poesie di Michelangelo." *Italica* 41 no.3 (September, 1964), 252-265.

⁴¹⁶ The idea that the providentially endowed artist has a visual acuity for the forms or *concetti* in the world, which he then reduces from immateriality to materiality is reminiscent of Ficino's statement: "Idque munus similiter divinae providentiae nobis est amore concessum." Ficino, *Commentarium in Convivium*, 5:13. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 119.

⁴¹⁷ The Accademia Fiorentina was devoted to literature *della lingua Toscana*. It was founded in 1540 as the Accademia degli Umidi, and renewed the language debate, arguing for the contemporary Florentine model. Michael Sherberg. "The Accademia Fiorentina and the Question of the Language: The Politics of Theory in Ducal Florence." *Renaissance Quarterly* 56. no.1 (Spring, 2003), 26-55.

⁴¹⁸ Benedetto Varchi. *Due lezioni di M. Benedetto Varchi nella prima delle quali si dichiara un sonetto di M. MICHELAGNOLO Buonarroti. Nella seconda si disputa quale sia più nobile arte la Scultura, o la Pittura, con una lettera d'esso Michelangelo, & piu altri Eccellentiss. Pittori, et Scultori, sopra la Quistione sopradetta* (Florence, 1549). Varchi delivered the text on 6 and 13 March 1547. See: *Annali del'Accademia fiorentina*, Florence, Biblioteca Marcelliana, MS B, III, 52, fol.40. 94.

different activities of the mind.⁴¹⁹ Williams has also noted that Varchi used the specifically Aristotelian interpretation of the task of the sculptor as an inducing of “form” into “matter,” as a drawing forth of “real” from “potential” existence.⁴²⁰ However, even with these Nominalist preconceptions, Varchi’s example illustrates that Michelangelo thought it obvious that the work of art is created not by imitating an externally given object but by realizing an inner Idea. He constantly separated the conception of internal and external beauty; heavenly and earthly beauty. The two faculties that allowed the artist to perceive these parallel the *anima prima* (higher vision) and *anima secunda* (lower vision), which are faculties of the higher and lower soul described by Plotinus and developed by Ficino.⁴²¹

* * *

Giudizio dell’occhio and Concetto della bellezza

As Burckhardt noted in his treatment of the period under discussion as early as 1860, it was “that universal education of the eye which rendered the judgment of the Italians as to bodily beauty or ugliness perfect and final.”⁴²² The particular philosophical notion that the *anima prima*, or the “higher vision,” could penetrate into the true nature of things was also carried over into Michelangelo’s working method. As discussed by Clements and Summers, the artist repeatedly asserted that he had no use for tools for he had internalized his instruments, being able to directly perceive the *concetto della bellezza*; which, as

⁴¹⁹ Quiviger also emphasizes that these lectures stressed the difference between poetry and painting, as well as demonstrating that Neoplatonism influenced Varchi’s art theory in the sphere of the descriptive rhetoric of beauty more than in the conception of art and artistic creation. François Quiviger. “Benedetto Varchi and the Visual Arts.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987), 220.

⁴²⁰ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 36.

⁴²¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 6:9. Quoted in: Clements, “Eye, Mind and Hand in Michelangelo’s Poetry,” 331.

⁴²² Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 2: 338.

discussed, is the philological equivalent of *L' Idea della bellezza*.⁴²³ Although Michelangelo did not possess the post-Kantian belief that true art springs from sensory intuition and not from an active virtue of the intellect, as Charles Dempsey noted, he did possess *Le seste del giudizio*, or more commonly, *giudizio dell'occhio*, “judgment of the eye.”⁴²⁴ The term itself would come to refer to the judgments of a trained intellect upon the objects of sense, perceived by an eye regulated by an understanding of ration and no longer dependent on instrumental measurements. However, as it was used by Michelangelo’s contemporaries and the artist himself, *giudizio dell'occhio* shares many qualities beyond mere sense perception found in the *concetto della bellezza*. Or as Williams related, Vasari often contrasted *giudizio* with *disegno* as aptitude with experience or practice.⁴²⁵

The concept was the prime example of the exercise of the virtue of discretion, and was closely bound to practice. A Master Simon was described at the end of the twelfth century as “so learned in geometrical work” and as “proceeding in magistral manner with his rod, and here and there setting out the work already conceived in his mind, not so much by his measuring-rod as by the yard-stick of the eyes.”⁴²⁶ As such the original conception of *giudizio dell'occhio* was intimately tied to problems of adjustment of proportion to point of view, the optical correction of forms seen *di sotto in su*. The practice can be traced to the Trecento, and generally was opposed to fixed canons of proportions.⁴²⁷ In the sixteenth century an emphasis on *grazia*, or grace, was added to the

⁴²³ Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. Clements, *Michelangelo's Theory of Art*. (New York: New York University Press, 1961).

⁴²⁴ Charles Dempsey. “Review: Michelangelo and the Language of Art.” *The Burlington Magazine* 125 no.967 (October, 1983), 624-627.

⁴²⁵ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 45.

⁴²⁶ John Harvey. *The Gothic World, 1100-1600*. (London, 1950), 28.

⁴²⁷ Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 368.

conception of the chosen eye and began to supplant the purely geometrical adjustments and focus on numerical proportion. Moreover, as Michelangelo and other theorists believed, the ability could be sharpened with study and practice but was a quality that must be inborn.⁴²⁸ The Venetian art theorist Paolo Pino noted the belief in his *Dialogo di pittura* of 1548, where the character Fabio remarks that *giudizio* is the first part of *disegno*, for which one needs the blessings of both nature and circumstances of birth: “one must be born with such a disposition, like the poets; otherwise I do not know how it is possible to learn this judgment.”⁴²⁹

In Vasari’s letter to the Milanese architect Martino Bassi, written six years after Michelangelo’s death, in 1570, the notion and importance of such *giudizio* is set forth:

All things in our art, that by nature are unpleasant to the eye, which all things are done to please, even if one should have the measure in hand and be approved by many of the skilled, and should have worked with rule and reason, always when the sight of the eye is offended and is unhappy, it will never approve what has been done for its benefit, be it endowed with whatever goodness or perfection. The less it approves, the more a thing will be outside rule and measure. Whence the great Michelangelo said that it was necessary to have the compasses in the eyes and not in the hand, that is, to have judgment; and for this reason he sometimes made his figures of 12 or 13 heads, according as they made groups sitting or standing and according to attitude; and so with columns and members and other components, he always went after *grazia* rather than *misura*.⁴³⁰

The weight given by Vasari to the pleasure of the eye over numerical measurement is echoed by Michelangelo at the end of the letter as he preferred the quality of *grazia* that pleased the eye over *misura*. In a similar fashion, Vasari noted in the 1568 *Lives* that Michelangelo “sought nothing else than that, in putting everything together, there should

⁴²⁸ Ibid, 370.

⁴²⁹ Martin Kemp. “Il Concetto dell’anima’ in Leonardo’s Early Skull Studies.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 34 (1971), 113.

⁴³⁰ Paola Barocchi, ed. *Scritti d’arte del cinquecento*, 2: 1824. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 370-71.

be a certain harmony of grace in the whole, that nature does not make, saying that it is necessary to have the compasses in the eyes and not in the hand, because the hand works and the eye judges: he also held to this way in architecture.”⁴³¹ The conception of *grazia* is not simply a characteristic of the work produced; it is also clearly an aspect of invention and license, intimately related to *fantasia* and *disegno*. The concept was further elucidated by Lomazzo in his *Trattato della pittura* of 1584:

Michelangelo, that greatest of sculptors, painters and architects, used to say that all the reasons- of geometry, or arithmetic, or proofs of perspective- were no use to men without the training of the eye in knowing how to see and in making the hand to do. And this he said, adding that, however much the eye may be trained in these reasons, it is only in its seeing- never mind angles or lines or distances- that one may render properly and make the hand show everything he wishes in the figure, and not differently from what he might expect to see with perspective. So by the habit of training, founded on [the study of] perfect art, one shows in the figure what ever so many deep perspectives may not show. But whoever is trained neither in geometry or drawing, may not reach, or penetrate, or express with his speculations, divisions, proofs, segments and similar things. Because this whole art, to say it in a word, and its whole end, is to know to draw all that is seen with the same reasons that one sees.⁴³²

The contradictory notions of the judgment of sense (*disegno*) and the judgment of reason (geometry) are reconciled in a familiar manner by Lomazzo. Echoing the Academia Platonica, the theorist demands that one must know geometry and drawing; while simultaneously the final position is close to that taken by Ptolemy between the opposing ideas of the Aristotelians and the Pythagoreans.⁴³³ That is to say, if the judgments of sense and reason are both valid, then there should be no conflict between them. The same

⁴³¹ Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle radazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Milan-Naples, 1962), 1:117. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 371.

⁴³² Lomazzo, *Trattato della pittura*, 262-263. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 372.

⁴³³ Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 372.

conclusion had been drawn by early humanists and art theorists regarding ancient authorities.

In the Augustinian tradition, Ficino argues in his commentary on the *Symposium*:

The eye does not see else but the light of the sun, because the shapes and colors of the bodies are never seen unless illuminated by light, and they do not appear with their matter to the eye. Yet it seems necessary to have them in the eye, so that they may be seen by the eye. Yet it seems necessary to have them in the eye, so that they may be seen by the eye. Hence one and the same light of the sun, painted with the colors and shapes of all the bodies it strikes, presents itself to the eyes. The eyes through their own natural rays receive the light of the sun so painted, and once they have received it, they see the light and all the paintings that are in it. That is why the entire order of the world, which is visible, is perceived with the eyes, not in the matter of the bodies, but in the light which flows into the eyes.⁴³⁴

The light of the eye is the judgment of the eye, its *potere vedere*, higher than sense, in consonance with the world of natural light, in partnership with a skilled hand. Again there is little distinction between what pleases the eye (*grazia e varietà*) and what seems correct to the eye (*misura*), so that optical correction also fell under the category of *giudizio dell'occhio*. There was after all no necessary conflict between numerical proportion and the pleasure of the eye; as Alberti wrote, “The numbers that cause the consonance of voices to seem most pleasant to the human ear are the same that fill the eye and mind with marvelous pleasure.”⁴³⁵ However, Alberti was concerned in this passage with architecture, and as Vincenzo Danti explained in the introduction to his treatise, numerical values were of much less use to painters and sculptors, and in the arts of *disegno* as a whole were of limited value. As Danti wrote, “We in painting and sculpture avail ourselves more of qualitative than of quantitative proportions; because I

⁴³⁴ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 130-133.

⁴³⁵ Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, 9, 5. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 373.

consider it certain that in the shapes of things a better understanding of quality than of quantity is necessary.”⁴³⁶

The emphasis on the qualifiable elements of beauty, rather than the quantifiable, paved the way for the sixteenth-century metaphor of the compass, whereby, as Vincenzo Danti related, *la misura intellettuale* would be used to guide the hand. In his treatise on proportion, Danti claimed that Michelangelo had attained perfection in human proportion through long study of anatomy, but, more importantly, he also used an “intellectual vision.” He even went so far as to posit the replacement of “material compasses” by “compasses of judgment” as the ultimate purpose of striving for perfect proportions.⁴³⁷ Michelangelo’s aversion to canons of proportion has already been noted in the artist’s criticism of Dürer’s treatise. We know that Michelangelo despised mechanical instruments, “material compasses,” and insisted on following the measurements of the *seste del giudizio*, or the *giudizio dell’occhio*. For Michelangelo, the manipulation of instruments such as the measuring stick, squares, and compasses, was a mechanical act employing material things to measure the sensible and accidental appearances of other material things.⁴³⁸ Though such activities are a preliminary step that leads the artist to an understanding of mathematical ratios, nevertheless compasses do not think. As Vasari twice asserted, the “judgment of the eye” is more reliable than compasses or instruments.⁴³⁹ The metaphor of the compasses became famous, and was even institutionalized as a topos in Ripa’s *Iconologia* of 1602, where *Bellezza* (**figure 22**) herself is personified as a radiant nude holding a sphere and a compass in one hand, while

⁴³⁶ Barocchi, ed. *Trattati d’arte del cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma*, 1: 234.

⁴³⁷ Danti, *Primo libro del Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*, 44, 52.

⁴³⁸ On Michelangelo’s views on the *intelletto* see: Robert J. Clements. “Michelangelo on Effort and Rapidity in Art.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17 no.3/4 (1954), 301-310.

⁴³⁹ Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 1: 148, 151.

the other counterbalances the notion of *misura* with a flower.⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, the allegorical personification of *Giuditio* (*Giudizio*) (**figure 23**), a nude male sitting atop an arch, holds a ruler and square in his left hand, while in his right he holds a compass.⁴⁴¹ Finally, the art-theoretical concept of *Dissegno* (**figure 24**) elaborated on by Vasari is represented as a young and richly dressed nobleman holding a mirror in his left hand and a compass with his right.⁴⁴²

The notion of a “compass of intellect” derives from the early sixth century musical treatise *De institutione musica* by Boethius (ca.480-525). As he wrote, “Each art has its particular instruments, some of which inform rather confusedly, like the adze, and others, like the compass, which disclose the truth; thus also the faculty of harmony has two parts of judgment: the first part grasps the differences of given sound through the senses, and the other part considers the true quantity and measure of these same differences.”⁴⁴³ Boethius refers to two aspects of the art of architecture: the tool of the adze, which relates to material and execution, and the compass that presents the true numbers of architecture. As Vasari cited, Michelangelo stated “that it was necessary to keep one’s compass in one’s eyes and not in the hand, for the hands execute, but the eye judges.”⁴⁴⁴ The specific value given to the metaphor of the compasses, has from this statement, been reversed by Michelangelo from the original meaning of Boethius’ text, giving the judgment of sense the absolute status reserved for measure by the earlier

⁴⁴⁰ The first edition of the *Iconologia* was published in 1593, whereas the second edition of 1602 included extended discussions of each allegorical subject. Ripa, *Iconologia*, 40-42.

⁴⁴¹ Ripa, *Iconologia*, 185-186. Charles Dempsey noted that in Ripa’s treatment, ‘Theory’ is personified with compasses pointing upwards on her head in order to show that her judgments derive from an understanding of universal principles, while ‘Practice’ holds compasses in her hands and mechanically measures earthly particulars. Dempsey, “Review: Michelangelo and the Language of Art,” 625.

⁴⁴² The emphasis given in the description of the allegorical representation to the social status of the male figure relates the treatment given artists in general in Vasari’s *Lives*. Cesare Ripa. *Iconologia*. (Fogola Editore: Torino, 1988), 1: 127.

⁴⁴³ Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 5, 1. Quoted in: Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 373.

⁴⁴⁴ Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 7: 270.

writer. The metaphor of *seste dell'occhio*, or the *giudizio dell'occhio*, appealing to the principle that judgment is higher than what is judged- so that the judgment of sense is higher and more spiritual than sense itself- is thus made an integral part of the notion of the absoluteness of artistic vision. The insistence upon the opposition of quality and quantity, and upon judgment, is an insistence upon the spiritual nature of art.

The insistence brings into accord the two major contemporary sources for Michelangelo's thought, Vincenzo Danti and Francisco de Hollanda. Danti's distinction between quality and quantity disguises the precedence of the *concetto*. The *concetto* is superior to the *composto* as cause to effect, and it is superior to the determinateness of matter (with which Danti associates quantitative proportion). When Danti says that order is the "cause" or necessary condition of proportion, he means once again that the *concetto* is the necessary condition of art, as Benedetto Varchi argued was the meaning of Michelangelo's *canzone*, *Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto*. This theme is given definition by one of Michelangelo's close friends, the Portuguese Francisco de Hollanda.⁴⁴⁵ In chapter XVI of his *Da pintura antigua (On Ancient Painting)* published in 1548, Hollanda sets forth the *idea y invencion* (elsewhere also called *order* and *election*) is set down in a sketch or a model, which is associated with *disegno*, the "force and science" from which the arts originate. In the "imperfect and indeterminate" lines of a sketch (also bearing the *furia* of the *idea*) the *idea* begins its descent, and it is assisted in its realization by "proportion and geometry, decorum and decency, grace and modesty, the compartition and beauty which form this science," a list to which anatomy should

⁴⁴⁵ Robert J. Clements. "The Authenticity of de Hollanda's Dialogos em Roma." *PMLA* 61 no.4 (December, 1946), 1018-1028.

also be added.⁴⁴⁶ As quality, free of the taint of matter, is prior for Vincenzo Danti to quantity, so the artist's conception stands beyond proportion, which is only applied to it as it becomes apparent to the external eyes. We are afforded another glimpse of the *concetto*; as invention it is *una cosa nuova*; as election it is the honey gathered from the continual experience of the beautiful; and as both order and idea it is absolutely opposed to matter, and dwells in the soul of the artist.⁴⁴⁷

The ability to utilize an internalized judgment for discerning *bellezza* allows the artist to arrive at the Idea more quickly. The importance of disregarding the superficial visions of the *anima secunda*, described by Ficino, allowed the true nature of objects to be beheld. Writing later in the century, Armenini echoed Michelangelo's concerns in instructing a young *garzone* in the art of painting. As he wrote, "For one must not follow only the judgment of the exterior eye, since the eye can easily be dazzled by the charm of these various hues; yet were it not so, it would be easy indeed to judge the works of this art. One must, however, turn to the eye of the intellect, which, enlightened by the correct rules, knows the truth in all things."⁴⁴⁸ The transcendental nature of the Intellect was discussed by Pico and Ficino as seeing "with an incorporeal eye" and "calls itself away not only from the body, but also from the senses and the imagination;" it thus transcends and becomes a "tool of the divine."⁴⁴⁹

* * *

Apotheosis of the Idea in the *ultima maniera*

⁴⁴⁶ Francisco de Hollanda. *De la pintura antigua por Francisco de Hollanda, versión castellana de Manuel Denis*. (1563) E. Tormo ed. (Madrid, 1921), 62.

⁴⁴⁷ Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 374.

⁴⁴⁸ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 96.

⁴⁴⁹ Erwin Panofsky. *Studies in Iconology*. (New York, 1939), 140.

The change in the representation of nature that occurred around 1500 is the starting point for David Hemsoll's assessment of the role of the Neoplatonic theories of Ficino in promoting a new ideal of beauty; one associated with "forms" and "ideas" rather than observation.⁴⁵⁰ Such a universal observation should be tempered by the realization that the art-theoretical and metaphysical systems that artists such as Michelangelo were becoming accustomed to mid-century were in fact actually of a Moderate-Realist orientation, or as Kristeller denoted, 'Middle Platonist.'⁴⁵¹ Nevertheless, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, there was an ever increasing permeation of these Realist ideas in art theory and criticism. In fact, the model proposed by the artist-biographer Giorgio Vasari for the progression of the ages of art, as well as an artist's style, can be understood in Ficino terms as "a process of ascent from sensual cognition of earthly beauty to the apprehension of the immortal ideal of beauty itself."⁴⁵² In a similar fashion, Petrarch lamented in a *canzone* preceding the final transformation of Laura into the Virgin that:

I go my way lamenting those past times
I spent in loving something which was mortal
Instead of soaring high, since I had wings
That might have taken me to higher levels.⁴⁵³

The regret felt by the aged poet for focusing on the sense-perceptible nature of beauty in his youth could only be made possible through the wisdom gained in living; while the divine beauty glimpsed with the apotheosis of his Love is made possible through the successive steps of its ascendancy. Likewise, Michelangelo stated that people of perception (*persone accorte*) are able to glimpse through their senses the higher beauty which comes into visible presence from its upper sphere:

⁴⁵⁰ Hemsoll, "Beauty as an aesthetic and artistic ideal in late fifteenth-century Florence," 66-79.

⁴⁵¹ Paul Oskar Kristeller. *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 50-65.

⁴⁵² Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 90.

⁴⁵³ Petrarch, *The Canzoniere*, Canzone 365, 509.

Every beauty which is seen here below
by persons of perception resembles more than anything else
that celestial source from which we are all come,
Nor can we on earth have any other foretaste
of its beauty or other fruits of heaven; and he who loves you loyally
transcends to God and his death is made sweet.⁴⁵⁴

In the biological model proposed by Vasari for understanding stylistic change, as well as the Petrarchan, poetical model, the youthful artist/poet sees the corporal beauty of things he wishes to discuss or depict; while it is only in old age that wisdom affords him a glimpse of true beauty as the metaphysical veil is removed from his mind's eye.

It was within such a context that in viewing the art produced by the aged artist, early modern viewers noted that the Idea could be more easily glimpsed. In speaking of Michelangelo's "poetical style," the Jesuit priest Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli (1584-1620), along with his collaborator Pietro Berrettini da Cortona (1596-1669), noted that in the artist's shift to his *ultima maniera*, or "old-age style," he did away with the corporeal body to show the transcendent spirit of his subjects. In their *Trattato della Pittura e Scultura*, published in 1652, late works such as the *Palestrina* and *Rodanini Pietà* groups (**figures 25, 26**) are discussed in terms of their *non-finito* character:⁴⁵⁵

I do not want to leave out reporting what a great professor said to me concerning the most famous Michelangelo, who many times left unfinished (*abbozzate*) works in Rome; because they were so good that they serve as examples to other masters, nevertheless for him they did not succeed by most perfect satisfaction. Such are the two *Pietà* groups (i.e. in the garden of Sig. Cardinal Bandino at Monte Cavallo)... And these two rough drafts (*Bozze*), beyond the others, which I have omitted, are so beautiful that Taddeo Zuccaro esteemed the well spent difficulty in the design, coloring, and reduction of the work: such as those seen in Rome like the *Madonna de' Monti*, and the *Pietà* of the Florentine Consulate. And by this argument it is possible that it is not an unusual nor indecent thing to abandon a consummate artifice, or spoil an

⁴⁵⁴ Frey, *Die Dichtungen des Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 53. Quoted in: Clements, "Eye, Mind, and Hand in Michelangelo's Poetry," 327.

⁴⁵⁵ Philipp Fehl. "Michelangelo's Tomb in Rome: Observations on the "Pietà" in Florence and the "Rodanini Pietà"." *Artibus et Historiae* 23 no.45 (2002), 9-27. John T. Paoletti, "The Rodanini 'Pietà': Ambiguity Maintained through the Palimpsest." *Artibus et Historiae* 21 no.42 (2000), 53-80.

unfinished work, and to remake it according to the fullness of his total satisfaction: because this demonstrates that there is not much fault in the work, but instead much perfection, and very excellent is the Idea that guides it, which has formed in the mind of the master.⁴⁵⁶

Arguing that the unfinished quality of these works are not to be judged negatively, as the technique itself lends the viewer access to the artist's internal conception, Ottonelli and Berrettini weighed in on a subject that had occupied historians, poets, philosophers and art critics and theorists alike since antiquity: the nature and valuation of old age.

The phenomenon noted by the co-authors was already known in antiquity. It was Pliny, in his *Natural History*, that established the manner in which old-age style would be discussed in the Cinquecento and Seicento, for as he set forth: "the latest works of artists and the pictures left unfinished at their death are valued more than their finished pictures... The reason is that in these we see traces of the design and the original conception of the artists, while sorrow for the hand that perished at its work beguiles us into the bestowal of praise."⁴⁵⁷ The value of these last works produced are discussed in relation to the manner in which remains visible "traces of the design," as well as "the original conception," thereby laying bare not only the working methods of the artist, but their Idea. The physiological aspects of aging are also touched upon by the historian, for

⁴⁵⁶ "Non voglio lasciar di riferire ciò, che mi disse un gran Professore intorno al famosissimo Michel' Angelo, cioè che più volte lasciò in Roma l'opere abbozzate; perchè se bene erano tali, che potevano servir d'esemplari ad altri Maestri, non dimeno à lui non riuscivano di perfettissima sodisfattione. Tali sono i due Gruppi di Pietà, de' quali uno fù trovato seppellito in una stanza à terreno, & hora si vede pubblicamente in una Officina di Roma: e l'altro stà nel giardino, che fù del Sig. Cardinal Bandino à Monte Cavallo. E queste due Bozze, oltre l'altre, che si veggono tralasciate, sono di tanta bellezza, che Tadeo Zuccherò stimò bene impiegata la sua fatica in disegnarle, colorirle, e ridurle in opera: come vedesi in Roma nella Madonna de' Monti, e nella Pietà del Consolato de' Fiorentini. E da questo argomentar si può, che non è cosa insolita, ne indecente ad un consumato Artefice lasciar, ò guastar un' opera, non finita, e rifarla secondo la pienezza della sua totale sodisfattione: imperoche questo dimostra, non che l'opera sia in se molto difettola, mà che molto perfetta, e molto eccellente sia l'Idea, che nell'animo hà formato il Maestro per condurla." Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli and Pietro Berrettini. *Trattato della Pittura e Scultura* (1652). (Roma: Libreria Editrice Canova, 1973), 210.

⁴⁵⁷ Pliny, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*. K. Jex-Blake trans. (London, 1896), 169.

as he believes, it is a degrading control over the “hand” that forces these concessions in finish.⁴⁵⁸

The understanding of aging in the Renaissance derived much from ancient sources. The very meaning of the term “old” was somewhat disagreed upon, but always referenced these traditions. For instance, according to Creighton Gilbert, who drew on anecdotal evidence from a variety of Renaissance sources, noted that old age begins at forty.⁴⁵⁹ However, Catherine Soussloff set forth that by the age of forty a man was considered to be in full maturity, and that after sixty he was in his old age.⁴⁶⁰ In either treatment, the importance of the age forty corresponds to the division of life into two phases, youth and old age (*iuventus* and *senectus*). Dante, for example, placed this middle point at about the age of thirty five, also in agreement with opinions of his time.⁴⁶¹ Additionally, authors developed different refinements of the sequential phases of aging.⁴⁶² Aristotle and Galen divided human life into three periods: youth (*iuventus*), maturity (*virilitas*), and old age (*senium*). The tripartite division became a topos for the pictorial theme seen in Titian’s *Three Ages of Man* of 1513-14 (**figure 27**). In antiquity this division would be further modified to comprise four periods corresponding to the four seasons. The third phase of the Aristotelian system was further subdivided into ‘old age’

⁴⁵⁸ See: Thomas Dormandy. *Old Masters: Great Artists in Old Age*. (Hambleton & London: London & New York, 2000).

⁴⁵⁹ Creighton Gilbert. “When Did a Man in the Renaissance Grow Old?” *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967), 7-32.

⁴⁶⁰ Catherine M. Soussloff. “Old Age & Old Age Style in the ‘Lives’ of Artists: Gianlorenzo Bernini.” *Art Journal* (Summer, 1987), 117.

⁴⁶¹ Dante, *Convivio*, 4:25. Gilbert, “When Did a Man in the Renaissance Grow Old?”, 8-9.

⁴⁶² See: Zagreb Grmek. “On Aging and Old Age: Basic Problems and Historic Aspects of Gerontology and Geriatrics.” *Monographiae Biologicae* 5 (1957-1962), 60-65. Tim Parkin. “Aging in Antiquity: Status and Participation” in: *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*. Paul Johnson, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 19-42. Shulamith Shahar. “Who were the Old in the Middle Ages?” *The Social History of Medicine* 6 (1993), 313-342. Shulamith Shahar. “Old Age in the High and Late Middle Ages: image, expectation and status” in: *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*. Paul Johnson, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 43-63. Shulamith Shahar. *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

(*senectus*) and ‘very old age’ (*senium*). In the analogy of the seasons, old age is still fruitful while very old age is marked by decay and decline.⁴⁶³

All of these ideas coexisted in the Renaissance, bequeathed from antiquity via the middle ages, and were applied according to the specific individual.⁴⁶⁴ Petrarch, in his *Letters of Old Age*, preferred subjective criteria for the onset of old age that allowed for personal differences based on productivity, health, and virility.⁴⁶⁵ The poet sees a contrast in man’s behavior in the different periods of life, which he groups into two parts, ‘active’ and ‘contemplative,’ based on a mental attitude corresponding to the phases of life. In his later writings, Petrarch was preoccupied with overcoming sinful passions; and in turn his old-age period takes on certain introspective aspects. In emphasizing, in his *Secretum*, that one should focus on God’s judgment late in life, he is clearly correlating spirituality and old age in his view of life as a journey.⁴⁶⁶ Accordingly, Dante agrees with the evaluation of the last part of life’s journey in his *Convivio*, which discusses the soul’s preparation for returning to God.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶³ The medical treatises describe old age as cold and dry due to the loss of innate heat and moisture. Galen, *De sanititate tuenda*, 5: 9, 19. In the Middle Ages, old age was connected with Jupiter, while ‘wintry,’ very old age was ruled by melancholic Saturn. Zbynek Zmetana. “Thematic Reflections on Old Age in Titian’s Late Works” in: *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe*. Erin Campbell, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 121-122.

⁴⁶⁴ Elizabeth Sears. *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁴⁶⁵ James D. Folts. “Senescence and Renascence: Petrarch’s Thoughts on Growing Old.” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. 10 (1980), 207-237. Petrarch. *Letters on Old Age*. (New York: Italica, 2005), 1: 265.

⁴⁶⁶ James D. Folts. “Senescence and Renascence: Petrarch’s Thoughts on Growing Old” in: *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe*. Erin Campbell, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 232. Petrarch. *The Triumphs of Petrarch*. E.H. Wilkins trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 481-559. See also: Morris Bishop. *Petrarch and His World*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963). Charles E. Trinkaus. *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979). *Studi Petrarqueschi*, Accademia Petrarca di Lettere, Arti e Scienza di Arezzo, n.s. 1 (1948).

⁴⁶⁷ Quoted in: Georges Minois. *History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Sarah Hanbury Tenison trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 240.

In the sixteenth century, these beliefs were expanded with numerous publications on the subject of aging derived from classical literature, which Soussloff has divided into the philosophical and the physiological. The philosophical tradition relied on Cicero's views of aging set forth in his dialogue *Cato Maior de Senectute*, published in at least thirty-seven separate editions in Italy before 1600.⁴⁶⁸ The view presented of old age in the dialogue is essentially optimistic, as Cicero argued that the benefits of intellectual reason and spiritual virtue far outweighed physical decrepitude. By the same token, the recipient of a long life was regarded as having been rewarded for living a virtuous and learned life.⁴⁶⁹ However, Cicero's dialogue rarely touches upon the physiological aspects of aging that are present in Cinquecento literature. These specifically physical symptoms of age were generally discussed in antiquity in medical literature relating to diet.⁴⁷⁰ In the second century, earlier Hellenistic conceptions of health and aging that had been established by Aristotle, Hippocrates, and others were combined in the writings of the physician Galen (129-216). Although the physician's thoughts on the benefits of diet in prolonging life were important aspects of his writing, it would be his *De sanitate tuenda* that would be the most influential regarding ideas of aging.⁴⁷¹ The numerous editions and translations of Galen published in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries attest to his influence in all areas of medicine.⁴⁷²

The two traditions were rarely discussed in the same treatment on aging; for instance only the influence of the Ciceronian model can be felt in Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* of 1528. In the last part of Book IV, which is the summation of the

⁴⁶⁸ Soussloff, "Old Age and Old-Age Style in the 'Lives' of Artists," 116.

⁴⁶⁹ Cicero, *De Senectute*, 3: 9. Quoted in: Cicero. *Cicero on the Art of Growing Old*. Herbert Newell Couch trans. (Providence, Rhode Island, 1959), 10.

⁴⁷⁰ Grmek, "On Aging and Old Age," 59-64.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, 116.

⁴⁷² Richard Durling, "A Chronological Census of Renaissance Editions and Translations of Galen." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 24 (1961), 230-35.

purpose of a courtier's life, Pietro Bembo discourses in the Ciceronian mode on celestial love and the virtue that enhances and is available to the aged man.⁴⁷³ And whereas in Cicero's *De Senectute*, Cato the Elder had served the author as the ideal spokesman for old age, in *The Courtier*, Bembo, who was fifty-eight at the time of its publication, served as Castiglione's ideal. Pietro states that "I say, then, that, according to the definition of the ancient sages, love is nothing but a certain desire to enjoy beauty..."⁴⁷⁴ It is the cognitive ability to perceive such beauty that is afforded to the aged man, while the corporeal beauty enjoyed by the young courtier is perceivable in a limited fashion:

But to speak of the beauty we have in mind, namely, that only which is seen in the human person and especially in the face, and which prompts the ardent desire we call love, we will say that it is an effluence of the divine goodness, which (although it is shed, like the sun's light, upon all created things), when it finds a face well proportioned and composed of a certain radiant harmony of various colors set off by light and shadow and by measured distance and limited outline, infuses itself therein and shines, like a sunbeam striking upon a beautiful vase of polished gold set with precious gems. Thus, it agreeably attracts the eyes of men to itself, and, entering through them, impresses itself upon the soul, and moves and delights it throughout with a new sweetness; and, by kindling it, inspires it with a desire of itself.⁴⁷⁵

The "vigor of the flesh and the blood" experienced by the young inspire within them "a desire to enjoy this beauty as something good, if the soul allows itself to be guided by the judgment of sense." However, the desire to possess that beautiful body is deceptive and one who does so "is moved, not by true knowledge through rational choice, but by false opinion through sensual appetite."⁴⁷⁶ It is only with the wisdom of age that one "can love without blame, and more happily than the young," because "when the soul is already less oppressed by the weight of the body, and when the natural heat begins to diminish" those

⁴⁷³ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 339-57.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 336.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 337.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 337.

of a “maturer age” are “guided by rational choice” when confronted by beauty, and are not “duped,” “but come into perfect possession of beauty.”⁴⁷⁷

The wisdom gained by the aged artist in relation to a perceived beauty indicating divine grace was discussed by biographers such as Vasari. However, a major artist did not necessarily need to be endowed with the outward beauty emphasized as a requisite for the courtier as Castiglione described. In fact, Michelangelo was described by Vasari in great detail as far from good-looking.⁴⁷⁸ The notion that an artist who was not as beautiful in appearance as Raphael would bequeath beauty to his works nonetheless emphasizes that the physiognomic relationship of an artist and his work had an additional level of interpretation. In her discussion of the treatment of old age in Castiglione, Maria Ricci largely passed over the counterbalancing effect that the wisdom and countenance of the aged had when compared to the beauty and youth enjoyed by the young courtier.⁴⁷⁹ The fact remains that dignity and poise of bearing, tasteful dress and courtly manners could achieve a great deal in the absence of a young or superior physiology. To reflect on this point, several distinguished older artists appear in the pages of Vasari’s biography. As Mary Rogers noted, Signorelli was one such artist, as was Jacopo Sansovino, who was “most healthy and vivacious” at the age of seventy-eight. Francesco Melzi, also, was “a handsome and courteous old man.”⁴⁸⁰

The positive evaluation of age in the last stage of the courtier’s life- and effectively an artist’s- was derived from Cicero, who in his *De Senectute*, analyzes the

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, 338-339.

⁴⁷⁸ Vasari, *Le vite Vasari, Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 4: 121-122. Barolsky has also dedicated a study to the significance of such image making in Renaissance historiography. Paul Barolsky. *Michelangelo’s Nose: A Myth and Its Maker*. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania state University Press, 1990).

⁴⁷⁹ Maria Teresa Ricci. “Old Age in Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*” in: *Growing old in Early Modern Europe*. Erin Campbell, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 57-74.

⁴⁸⁰ “sanissimo e gagliardo.” Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 3:639, 4:178, 4, 28. Mary Rogers, “The Artist as Beauty,” 99.

four major prejudices commonly held against the aged: it compels one to inaction, it diminishes one's strength, it bars one from most pleasures, it brings one closer to the Final Moment. He then continues by dismissing each belief as totally unfounded. The Roman author presents old age as the moment of spiritual elevation, as the time draws nearer for the soul to detach from the body. As the body is weakened by age, the corporal vessel lends itself perfectly to the work of the spirit.⁴⁸¹ So too do we find an uncovering of the mortal veil in Bembo's description, which occurs with the process of maturation. Therefore the wisdom and spiritual virtue that corresponded with old age in the Ciceronian tradition was carried on in Castiglione.

Alvise Cornaro synthesized the two traditions, represented by Cicero and Galen, in his *Discorsi intorno alla vita sobria* (*The Art of Living Long* or *The Temperate Life*), which was first published in Padua between 1558 and 1565, and then in numerous subsequent editions.⁴⁸² The popularity of Cornaro's autobiographical treatment, and its focus on the old age of the learned man, relates its significance for biographies of artists. The author himself, a *litterato*, and an amateur architect, wrote the third part of his book in the form of a letter addressed to Daniele Barbaro, the translator of Vitruvius.⁴⁸³ The previous views on old age noted above, expressed by Cicero, Galen and Bembo were certainly known to Cornaro as he mentions them in his treatise.⁴⁸⁴ In *La vita sobria*, Cornaro repeatedly states that the old age of a learned man is the best period of his life, as

⁴⁸¹ Ricci, "Old Age in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*," 66.

⁴⁸² Loris Premuda. "La filosofia macrobiotica del galenista Alvise Cornaro" in: *Alvise Cornaro e il suo tempo*. Lionello Puppi, ed. ex. cat. (Padua, 1980).

⁴⁸³ It has been suggested that Cornaro was at the center of a learned group of artists and writers in Padua, among them Falconetto, Palladio, Trissino, Barbaro, and Vesalius. Soussloff, "Old Age and Old-Age Style in the 'Lives' of Artists," 117.

⁴⁸⁴ He also had contact with the important medical faculty at the University of Padua, where Galen's theories were taught. Soussloff, "Old Age and Old-Age Style in the 'Lives' of Artists," 117.

it represented the culmination of knowledge and temperance.⁴⁸⁵ Until the age of forty the author followed his “naturally fiery temperament” by leading a profligate life in which he indulged his appetites for the pleasures of food, drink, and physical passion.⁴⁸⁶ He was then struck with what appeared to be a fatal illness, but he was almost miraculously cured when he changed both his diet and his way of life, marrying and then devoting himself to his family, his studies and faith.⁴⁸⁷ The learned man then progresses from appreciating the inconsequential, transitory things of this world, to setting himself toward education and the spiritual realm beyond. Far more than a mere autobiographical exercise, Cornaro’s treatise promised to increase one’s *virtù*, a long life, and an easy death if the reader would follow his elaborate prescriptions.⁴⁸⁸

The transition underscored in Cornaro’s treatment of the aged man surrendering the earlier carnal pursuits of his youth in favor of the spiritual was reflected by contemporary examples. In the case of Michelangelo, the artist’s failing health and age were emphasized by commentators to explain the changes manifested in his work and personality. From 1544-1546, the artist was in poor health, falling very ill twice and being nursed back to health.⁴⁸⁹ It is around this time, when the artist turned seventy-years

⁴⁸⁵ Alvise Cornaro. *The Art of Living Long*. William F. Butler ed. (Milwaukee, 1903), 59. Furthermore, *La vita Sobria* was the basis for the discussion of old age in Francis Bacon’s *Historia vitae et mortis*, and Santorio Santorio’s *De medicina statica* in the seventeenth century.

⁴⁸⁶ Cornaro’s “fiery temperament” as a youth was based on the idea that the youthful temperament was considered hot and dry, whereas, as stated, old age was considered cold and moist. The Aristotelian system of classifying the body fluids by the relationship of temperature, degree and moisture, and the age of the individual can be found in Galen and in Renaissance works on aging. Grmek, “On Aging and Old Age,” 60-65. Gerald J. Gruman. “A History of Ideas About the Prolongation of Life: The Evolution of the Prolongevity Hypotheses to 1800.” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. 56 no.9 (1966), 15.

⁴⁸⁷ Cornaro, *The Art of Living Long*, 43-60.

⁴⁸⁸ Soussloff has noted that the treatise became popular for treating a variety of ailments, and was even observed by Gianlorenzo Bernini. Soussloff, “Old Age and Old-Age Style in the ‘Lives’ of the Artists,” 117.

⁴⁸⁹ Almost without exception, commentators underscore Michelangelo’s postlapsarian state and his ill health after 1550 as contributing to an increased isolation and irritability. Howard Hibbard referred to Michelangelo’s testy annoyances at his difficulty urinating and his kidney stones, expressed in letters to his nephew Lionardo. See: Howard Hibbard. *Michelangelo*. (New York: The Vendam Press, 1974), 280.

old and crossed the threshold to protracted old age, or *senium* in the Aristotelian tradition, that scholars note a change in his spiritual life like the one described by Cornaro, which reverberated in his poetry and art.⁴⁹⁰ Returning to the last works by the artist, Saslow noted that the transcendence of materials reflected Michelangelo's newly found belief that: "Art was no longer to represent earthly beauty in the present, but a spiritual perfection that was possible in the future."⁴⁹¹ The poetry and letters by the artist, noted above, have further fueled the overromantic interpretations of these later *non finito* sculptures, such as the *Pietàs*.⁴⁹² For instance, when William Wallace discussed the *Florentine Pietà* (ca.1550) (**figure 28**), which was intended as Michelangelo's funerary marker, he linked the oppressive psychological foreshadowing of one's own death to the characteristics of the style. As Wallace wrote, "To carve one's tomb is to confront one's mortality. To finish the sculpture was to bring the marble to life and to resign oneself to death."⁴⁹³ As such, the resonance of psychological interpretations of the old-age style can be felt in recent treatments of the *Pietàs* of Michelangelo.⁴⁹⁴ Origins of such overromantic formulations can be found in earlier criticism by Brinckmann, where an appurtenant social isolation is indicated as influencing a kind of "rugged, reductionist aesthetic."⁴⁹⁵

The "psycho-stylistic phenomenon" of the so-called *Alterstil*, as Rosand discusses, gives

⁴⁹⁰ Saslow emphasizes the common place psychological interpretation of an increased sense of fragility and sense of impending death. The physical infirmities suffered by Michelangelo, graphically described with black humor in his poetry (no.267 in Saslow), ran the gamut from kidney stones to ear trouble. Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 21.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 21.

⁴⁹² Rosand noted the effect on art historiography and criticism when the psychological dimensions are read into the late works, such as those by Titian and Michelangelo, which were worked on up until the death of their creator. David Rosand. "Style and the Aging Artist." *Art Journal* 46 no.2 (Summer, 1987), 91.

⁴⁹³ William Wallace. "Michelangelo, Tiberio Calcagni, and the Florentine "Pietà"." *Artibus et Historiae* 21 no.42 (2000), 87.

⁴⁹⁴ Maria Teresa Fiorio. *La Pietà Rondanini*. (Electa: Milan, 2004). Antonio Paolucci. *Michelangelo: The Pietàs*. (Milan: Skira, 1997).

⁴⁹⁵ Brinckmann delves into the theory of isolation. A.E. Brinckmann. *Spätwerke grosser Meister*. (Frankfurt: a/M, 1925). See also: Hans Tietze. "Earliest & Latest Works of Great Artists." *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 26, (1944), 273-284. Hugo Munsterberg. *The Crown of Life: Artistic Creativity in Old Age*. (New York, 1983).

greater emphasis to the relationship between psychology and style, rather than physiology and style.⁴⁹⁶

Although such evaluations are largely anachronistic, evidence of this stylistic evolution and different approach later in the careers of artists is undeniable. In the case of Michelangelo, for instance, the formal differences in the exquisite finish of the early Roman *Pietà* (**figure 29**) and the starkly rugged, *non-finito* character of the later *Rondanini Pietà* (**figure 26**) display not only a different working method and level of finish, but a varying conception of the theme. The two works are iconographically related in subject matter, employing a two figure composition with the Virgin holding Christ in each presentation. The only compositional difference between the two works is the physical arrangement of the two participants: in the Roman version, an enlarged Virgin cradles her dead son in her lap, forming a stable pyramidal composition; while in the later she holds his lifeless body in a semi-erect position, emphasizing the graceful curvature and sweeping verticality of the arrangement. The striking differences of these works, contrasting the early artist with his aged counterpart, are the level and type of execution and the conception. In the early work, finished in 1499 when the sculptor was only twenty-four, a polished beauty effectively relates the well-proportioned, ideal physiognomies of the figures, thereby masking the disproportionate scale of the Virgin to Christ. In the latter version, which was worked on up to Michelangelo's death in 1564 at eighty-nine, the working method of the sculptor is laid bare, as each roughly-hewn chisel mark is retained in the elongated and seemingly abstracted physiologies of the figures. In other words, it is not only the degree of completion that differs in these works, but the original conception, or the *bell' idea*, as well.

⁴⁹⁶ Rosand, "Style and the Aging Artist," 91.

The striking difference in appearance of the early and late versions of the subject by Michelangelo fell within a tradition that was born in the mid-sixteenth century. In fact, the modern critical vocabulary for discussing the stylistic change of artists later in their careers was inherited in the form of biography. With the carefully constructed literary conceit that paralleled the development of art to the lifecycle of man, Vasari introduced to early modern biographies of artists the tripartite division of *early*, *mature* and *late*; which was likewise applied to the stylistic evolution of artists. In his Giunta edition of 1568, the physiological understanding of the “life-cycle of style” was expanded and most directly articulated in the distinction between the early and late styles of Titian; between the diligent finish of the former and the bold brushwork of the latter.⁴⁹⁷ As Vasari wrote of a group of mythological works for Philip II, between 1551 and 1562, including the *Rape of Europa* (**figure 30**) of 1559-62, which he identified as in the artist’s *seconda maniera*, or “second manner”:

But it is true that his method of painting in these late works is very different from the technique he had used as a young man. For the early works are executed with a certain finesse and an incredible diligence, so that they can be seen from close to as well as from a distance; while these last pictures are executed with broad and bold strokes and smudges, so that from nearby nothing can be seen whereas from a distance they seem perfect. This method of painting has caused many artists, who have wished to imitate him and thus display their skill, to produce clumsy pictures. For although many people have thought that they are painted without effort this is not the case, and they deceive themselves, because it is known that these works are much revised and that he went over them so many times with his colors that one can appreciate how much labor is involved. And this method of working, used in this way, is judicious, beautiful, and stupendous, because it makes the pictures appear alive and painted with great art, concealing the labor.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 92.

⁴⁹⁸ Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 458.

The style noted by Vasari, which began to manifest itself in the 1550s, escalated, and became freer until the artist's death in 1576.⁴⁹⁹ The technique that Vasari describes reveals a control of the various mimetic possibilities of the artist's medium made possible through decades of experience. After celebrating the vigorous strokes and patches of Titian's late *pittura di macchia* (or "painting with splotches"), Vasari warns against believing such painting to be easy.⁵⁰⁰ He notes how repeatedly Titian returned to those canvases: "...for it is obvious that his paintings are reworked and that he has gone back over them with colours many times, making his effort evident."⁵⁰¹ The deceptive easiness of those richly worked and open-structured surfaces attests to the painter's *sprezzatura*, his skill in concealing the effort, "the ability of his art to hide art."⁵⁰² However, considering the critical relationship between Venetian and central Italian art (discussed in Vasari's understanding of *disegno*) the biographer is unable to reconcile his admiration for the virtuoso manner of painting and the art-theoretical principles which underlay an evaluation of good art. After the favorable comments on the second manner of Titian, Vasari remarks that the artist would have done better to refrain from painting in his later years, to save his reputation.⁵⁰³

In the biography and discussion of the *ultima maniera* of Titian, we find those aspects familiar to art historiography and criticism that define how to identify and

⁴⁹⁹ The 1550 *Vite* does not contain the description of Titian's late painting style, as in the 1540s he had yet to develop it; while the treatment also did not include artists outside of Tuscany.

⁵⁰⁰ For a discussion of the impact on the critical lexicon of the *pittoresco* see: Philip Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, his critics, and their critiques of painterly brushwork in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵⁰¹ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*. Bull trans. (England: Penguin Books, 1965), 2: 504. The notion that an artist would become interested in the "expressive" qualities of his medium were noted by Munsterberg, who wrote: "This late style of the artist is marked by a new sense of drama, looser brush work, and, above all, a softer and more brilliant use of color, which becomes the main medium of artistic expression." Munsterberg, *The Crown of Life*, 45.

⁵⁰² See: David Rosand. "Titian and the Critical Tradition" in: *Titian: His World and His Legacy*. David Rosand, ed. (New York, 1982), 1-39.

⁵⁰³ Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, Bull trans. 2:504.

interpret such a style. Later in an artist's career, we find him becoming impatient with the rules of craft. This is exaggerated in the later preparatory methods of Titian, which rarely included compositional or figure studies.⁵⁰⁴ Instead of a meticulously planned and thoughtfully executed preemptive conception, the artist bypasses these requirements of a younger master and directly relates his ideation directly to the canvas.⁵⁰⁵ A byproduct of such dismissal of preparation is a kind of rugged freedom of execution, an "unembarrassed reductiveness," that is transferred to the work, and is made possible by the long years of practice that internalized a total familiarity with the medium.⁵⁰⁶ The process, which appears laid bare before the viewer's eyes, suggests a simplicity in technique that, as Vasari so clearly emphasizes, is quite misleading.⁵⁰⁷

Nevertheless, when approaching the summit of perfection in the *opere* of Michelangelo, the biographer who first identified the *ultima maniera* phenomenon is decidedly ambivalent. The trajectory of the artist's style was, as noted, ushered ever closer to perfection, beginning with his workshop training. When dealing with the works now understood as in Michelangelo's old-age style, Vasari did not note the move to a "second manner" as in the case of Titian. The formal qualities that defined the "unembarrassed reductiveness" in the later work of the Venetian painter are entirely absent in the discussion of such later works by Michelangelo as the *Pietàs* (**figures 25, 26, 28**). In fact, it is specifically the *non finito*, or unfinished quality of the sculptural groups that Vasari chooses to address. It was the perfectionism, or desire to fully realize

⁵⁰⁴ For a discussion of preparatory procedure established in the Quattrocento and formalized in the Cinquecento see: Francis Ames-Lewis. *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰⁵ Earlier, Tietze had connected this freedom with the dismissal for social conventions that the aged artist would have, as in the case of Rembrandt. Tietze, "Earliest & Latest Works of Great Artists," 284.

⁵⁰⁶ Rosand, "Style and the Aging Artist," 92.

⁵⁰⁷ Philip Sohm has sought in his recent work to connect the late style of Titian with greed and a socially constructed notion of age to which the aged artist was playing. See: Philip Sohm. *The Artist Grows Old: The Aging of Art and Artists in Italy, 1500-1800*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 83-104.

the “idea,” that the biographer suggested was at the root of so many of the sculptor’s unfinished works: “because his judgment was so severe that he was never content with anything he did.”⁵⁰⁸ On the other hand, in a section describing Michelangelo’s work on the *Florentine Pietà* (**figure 28**), he attributed the very existence of such later works to physiology. As Vasari wrote,

The active spirit of Michelangelo could not endure to continue unoccupied; and not being able to paint any longer, he set himself to work on a piece of marble, whence he proposed to extract a *Pietà*, consisting of four figures larger than life; doing this for his amusement and pastime as he said, and because the use of the hammer kept him in health.⁵⁰⁹

The very act of sculpting ensured the artist’s continued “health,” much as study and spiritual contemplation had in the evaluation and recommendations of Cornaro. Therefore the evaluation by Vasari of the “divine” sculptor’s later works as a mere “pastime” cannot be understood simply as such. After all, we do not find the same searing criticism following the descriptions of these later works, as Vasari had retained in the evaluation of Titian. Moreover, the physiological interpretation of such works, dating back to Pliny, emphasized the deterioration of an artist’s faculties; including eyesight and dexterity. These concerns certainly are applicable to Michelangelo and Titian.⁵¹⁰ For as Cesare Ripa wrote, “We know that Michelangelo, light and splendor of sculpture, becoming practically blind in old age from constant study, was used to handling (*palpeggiando*) statues, both ancient and modern, and determine by touch what they were, rendering

⁵⁰⁸ Vasari, *Le Vite Vasari, Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 7:243. The issue of the large number of unfinished works in Michelangelo’s *oeuvre* has been treated by Schulz, and attributed to a “continuous self-criticism and a constant readiness to discard working solutions.” Juergen Schultz. “Michelangelo’s Unfinished Works.” *The Art Bulletin* 57 no.3 (1975), 373.

⁵⁰⁹ Vasari, *La Vita di Michelangelo nelle radazione del 1550 e del 1568*, Barocchi ed., 1: 83. Also see: Ascanio Condivi. *Vita di Michelangelo*. (Florence, 1930), 126.

⁵¹⁰ As Vasari noted, it was the later manner in which Titian employed a technique more suited to old age; and as well, Saslow noted that Michelangelo’s eyesight was deteriorating, as his later letters were merely dictated and then signed by the artist. Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 22.

judgment about their price and value.”⁵¹¹ But how are we to reconcile the concerns of the intention of the artist and the constraints of an aged physique?

The answer lies in the misinterpretation of the late style in modern critical treatments. The emphasis on the ascendancy of the spirit in Michelangelo’s poetry has led to an evaluation of his *ultima maniera* by Hibbard and Freedberg as an approach that largely denies the “forms” of beauty and abandons the “earthen shell” of the human body for a decidedly anticlassical system of representation. In discussing the formal characteristics of the Pauline Chapel frescoes of the *Conversion of Paul* (1542-45) and the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* (1546-1550), (**figures 31, 32**) Freedberg noted:

The earlier fresco, the Conversion of St. Paul, displays clearly what the Crucifixion of St. Peter shows still more: a stage of unconcern with *grazia* and the ideas of beauty of form that are associated with it...Figures are described as blunt, dense shapes, heavily direct in pose, and there is no trace in them of a virtuoso display of anatomy...The human body is the earthen shell, the *carcer terreno* of a spirit that seems not to possess a private will or even specified identity. This is an abjuring of a whole life’s history, and of the aspirations of the time in which it had been made: in the deepest possible sense an anticlassicism, and a negation of the Renaissance.⁵¹²

Also the denial of the physical can be found in David Rosand’s treatment of the later graphic techniques of the artist in works like *Christ on the Cross between the Virgin and St. John* (**figure 33**), where he diagnosed an intimate spirituality and corporeal denial:

The graphic complexity of the surface, its essential tactility, suggests a reluctance to let go, to lose touch with that body [of Christ]. The act of drawing has become an act of devotion. And the compulsive application of the one becomes the urgency of the other. The materiality of this experience is what we feel in the physicality of image in Michelangelo’s late religious poetry, in which we hear the anguished yet always powerful

⁵¹¹ “sappiamo, che Michel Angelo Buonaruota, lume & splendore di essa [la scultura], essendogli in vecchiezza per lo continuo studio mancata quasi affatto la luce, soleva col tattoo palpeggiando le statue, antiche, o moderne che si fossero, dar giuditio, & del pezzo, & del valore.” Ripa, *Iconologia*, 473.

⁵¹² Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, 277-278.

voice of a penitent in longing search of his God. Both the poetry and the drawings are heard as private meditations, prayers of a deeply felt, desperate piety. Yet even as Michelangelo denies his art of the body, desiring to free his own soul from material bondage, the poetry itself returns us to the physical; even as he remains grounded in the flesh, the artist reaches toward heaven with the same aspiring energy that informs his own creatures.⁵¹³

The interpretation that solely emphasizes the abandonment of corporeal material considers Michelangelo's poetry in a literal sense. There are repeated allusions to the Neoplatonic metaphor of the human body as a "husk" or "shell" that the spirit will escape upon death of that earthly prison. Taking as his model the Petrarchan-Dantesque metaphor of the body as a veil, Michelangelo repeatedly discussed flesh as being a fragile and temporary wrapper for the soul. As he wrote in a later sonnet,

In order to return to where it came from,
the immortal form came down to your earthly prison
like an angel so full of compassion
that it heals every mind and honors the world.
This alone makes me burn and fall in love,
and not your mere external, tranquil face;
for surely a love in which virtue dwells
pins no strong hope on something that will fade.
For nought else happens to new and lofty things
over which nature labors, and at whose birth
heaven prepares its generosity;
Nor does God, in his grace, show himself to me
anywhere more than in some fair mortal veil;
and that alone I love, since he's mirrored in it.⁵¹⁴

The direct application of the metaphor of the body as a flimsy shell discussed in the artist's poetry to those unfinished later works is highly problematic, but nonetheless central to the artist's own views.

⁵¹³ David Rosand. *Drawing Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 214.

⁵¹⁴ Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, no.106, 238. See also: nos. 209, 215, 227 and 265.

It is with an understanding of the poetical and theoretical beliefs that Michelangelo possessed (which were discussed in the last section) that one may integrate the multifaceted levels of meaning that style- its construction, perfection and purpose- had for the “divine creator.” While it has certainly been demonstrated that his writings and art follow an ascendant pattern established by the poetical theory of the Trecento, the Cinquecento understanding of old age must be included as a formative and interpretative component. Jean-Pierre Barricelli noted that through the four *Pietàs* produced through the artist’s career an evolution emerges, not only in stylistic terms, but in a sense the works can be read as a “spiritual autobiography.”⁵¹⁵ The biographical model for interpreting arts derives from the Vasarian tradition. But the increased ascendancy from corporeal beauty to divine beauty is expressly of Michelangelo’s own belief system; one that combined the art-theoretical and physiological concerns that Vasari noted in an uncommitted fashion. It was, according to the artist, only possible later in the life of an artist to attain a close approximation of the “divine idea.” Exclusively through the wisdom of age could one reproduce faithfully that *concetto*. As he wrote,

After many years of seeking and many attempts,
the wise artist only attains a living image
faithful to his fine *concetto*,
in hard and alpine stone, when he’s near death;
for at novel and lofty things
one arrives late, and then lasts but a short time...⁵¹⁶

Therefore the ambivalence shown towards the late works of Michelangelo reflect the artist’s own assertion. In juxtaposing the decline of faculties with the new paths of knowledge open to those that have lived long, he effectively noted the same transcendent

⁵¹⁵ Jean-Pierre Barricelli. “Michelangelo’s Finito: In Self, the Later Sonnets and the Last Pietà.” *New Literary History* 24 no.3 (Summer, 1993), 597.

⁵¹⁶ Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, no.241, 407.

characteristics that Castiglione's Bembo had in discoursing on the benefits of the aged courtier. While Vasari pointed to perfectionism as the factor that caused the artist to abandon his works that would not achieve what he had "conceived in his mind," he also acknowledged the importance of the "physiology of style." Though Vasari appears to treat the *ultima maniera* of artists in an openly contradictory fashion, it was the special license of age- a license Vasari had accorded Michelangelo's mishandling of the classical orders and the established rules of architecture- that permits the artist a certain liberty with his medium, a freedom of operation that leads to a transcendence of the material.

Therefore, we may note that while the ancient historian Pliny had advanced the notion that unfinished works were valued after an artist's death due to their bare recording of the artist's "original conception," (or *lineamenta reliqua* [preliminary drawings]), sixteenth-century poets, biographers and theorists had a much more ambivalent attitude. Such multifaceted concerns escape recent treatments, such as Barricelli's, where he asserted that Michelangelo's contemporaries would have understood the *non-finito* works as "indeed finished in the sense that the concept had been satisfactorily translated..."⁵¹⁷ This assertion should be amended to account for Michelangelo's own belief that it was not only possible for the aged artist to achieve and then transcribe his "idea," but that the wisdom garnered in age was a requisite for such a transmission of beauty that would be infused into a material prepared for it. The later sonnet above can be compared to the artist's own conception of the *guidizio dell'occhio* as the trained intellect can see through those sense-perceptible, and thus measurable, qualities that inform an eternal and unalterable *idea della bellezza*. The formal qualities

⁵¹⁷ Linda Murray. *Michelangelo: His Life, Work, and Times*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 84. Barricelli, "Michelangelo's Finito: In the Self, the Later Sonnets, and the Last Pietà," 607.

of these late works, especially their lack of finish, exaggerations of anatomy, expressive color usage, and emphatically non-naturalistic approach, relate that the Idea that is clearly visible in the artist's "original conception" is one that is largely divorced from sense-perceptible reality: that is to say, a Moderate-Realist formulation.

Chapter Five

The Idea after Vasari:

Style and Theory in the Later Cinquecento

The style that came to be associated with later Mannerism, or the *maniera*, was largely derived from the late works of Michelangelo.⁵¹⁸ While the artists practicing this style placed Michelangelo at the summit of perfection in their writings, as Vasari had, and borrowed figures, groups, and compositional patterns from his works, their art is characterized by standardization, artificiality, and elaboration.⁵¹⁹ Although many of the propagators of this style were about thirty-five years younger than Michelangelo, we find its tenets expressed in the aged Bronzino's (1503-1572) fresco *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* of 1569 (**figure 34**) in San Lorenzo. The multitude of nude and semi-nude

⁵¹⁸ For Shearman's discussion of the definition of the term 'Mannerism' see: John Shearman. *Mannerism*. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), 15-22. Also see Hall, 'A Note on Style Labels,' where a disagreement is noted in the use of the term 'Early Mannerism' to describe the works produced in the 1520s and 1530s. Marcia Hall. *After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xii-xv.

⁵¹⁹ Francis Ames-Lewis and Paul Johannides eds. *Reactions to the Master: Michelangelo's Effect on Art and Artists in the Sixteenth Century*. (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003).

figures that crowd the foreground and close off the background reference those in the Medici Chapel in the same church, as well as Sistine Chapel in their complex elaborations on the original poses; with St. Lawrence himself mimicking the pose of Adam in the *Creation of Adam* (**figure 35**).⁵²⁰

Concurrently with the rise of formal characteristics that differentiate later central Italian art from those of the High Renaissance was the further refinement of the Platonic Idea. The theories associated with the continued development and evolution emerged in the wake of the definitive role of *disegno* Vasari set forth for producing beauty in the Giunta edition of the *Lives*. The artist-biographer himself was heavily indebted to the emerging Florentine *maniera*; nevertheless, as has been noted, the interest in practical concerns of art production dominated the first edition of the *Lives*.⁵²¹ It was only through his contact with Vincenzo Borghini that Vasari attempted to provide a rigorous definition for that underlying organizing principle of art, *disegno*.⁵²² As such, the interest in *teorica* in the biographies is adequately balanced with *practica*, relating the inclusion of Aristotelian themes in the predominantly Moderate-Realist formulation. However, following upon Vasari's highly influential definition of artistic creation, several art theorists and critics presented increasingly erudite volumes that have been evaluated by art historians as increasingly distant from the practical concerns demonstrated in the 1568 *Lives*. The view has been furthered by the dearth of biographical information available for the period, and as such there is little in the way of contextualizing information to understand the interchange between the highly "theoretical" texts of the later sixteenth

⁵²⁰ The commission was intended as an homage to the late Buonarroti. Nevertheless, the reuse of Michelangesque figures and compositions was common to many late Florentine *maniera* artists. See: Maurice Brock. *Bronzino*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

⁵²¹ Along with his enumerations on the primacy of Michelangelo in art, Vasari made extensive use of the "divine" artist's figures and compositions, such as in his contribution for the Studiolo in the Palazzo dei Priori for Francesco I de' Medici. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 19.

⁵²² Williams *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy*, 7, 31.

century and workshop practice.⁵²³ The lack of confluence led Panofsky to write in his treatment of the Idea's evolution, "The more influence the Idea concept had and the closer it approached its inherent, metaphysical meaning, which first happened in the 'mannerist' period, the further art theory retreated from its originally practical goals and its originally unproblematic premises."⁵²⁴ The belief that this period ignored the pragmatic goals of art in favor of theoretical matters has been difficult to disprove and is evidenced by the lack of scholarly treatments concerning the last three decades of the Cinquecento.⁵²⁵

Of interest to the intellectual history of the period, and the organization of art in terms of periods, is the "decline" perceived by contemporary writers, and modern art historians. As Sohm has recently concluded, artists that lived in the wake of the High Renaissance were discussed as living in the "the age of senescence and decrepitude" (*l'età della senettù e decrepidità*).⁵²⁶ The notion of art as a biological organism was an aphorism applied by Vasari to illustrate the continual march towards perfection in his *Lives*: "The arts, like men themselves, are born, grow up, become old and die."⁵²⁷ Vasari could have learned about the biological principles of historical change from any number of ancient or modern historians, but it is likely that theories of recurrence were garnered through contact with Florentine linguists and literary critics, especially his literary advisers Vincenzo Borghini, Giovan Battista Gelli, and Benedetto Varchi. Lorenzo de' Medici identified three stages of the Tuscan language: *gioventù*, *adolescenza*, and

⁵²³ Art publications spiked in the 1580s and 1590s with more being produced each year than would be again until the mid-seventeenth century. Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 140.

⁵²⁴ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 55.

⁵²⁵ Whereas late Mannerist art is poorly represented in scholarship, there is a considerable amount regarding Early Baroque art, especially the Bolognese school of the Carracci.

⁵²⁶ Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 137. Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, 1:105.

⁵²⁷ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 2:31.

adulta.⁵²⁸ Gelli divided linguistic evolution into three stages (growth, perfection, and decay); Sperone Speroni divided it into four.⁵²⁹ Varchi, applying a theory of *generatio* and looking to ancient Latin as a model for linguistic evolution, compared the life of languages to the four ages of man.⁵³⁰ And Borghini thought the development of Latin could help to predict the changes in Italian since all language must “be born, grow and age” (*nasce, cresce e invecchia*).⁵³¹

The necessity in such a model of eventual decline, decay and death was largely untouched in Vasari’s treatment. However, the more that he emphasized the accomplishments of Michelangelo, the more firmly he established a case for the eventual decline. Underlying his exhortations for hard work, for an invigorating competition among artists, for the artist’s acquisition of knowledge, and for the generous support of patrons is a belief in the efficacy and hope of self-improvement. The hope was, however, tinged with doubt:

Pondering over this matter many a time in my own mind, and recognizing, from the example not only of the ancients but of the moderns as well, that the names of very many architects, sculptors, and painters, both old and modern, together with innumerable most beautiful works wrought by them, are going on being forgotten and destroyed little by little, and in such wise, in truth, that nothing can be foretold for them but a certain and imminent death; and wishing to defend them as much as in me lies from this second death, and to preserve them as long as may be possible in the memory of the living.⁵³²

⁵²⁸ Lorenzo de’ Medici. *Opere*. Attilio Simioni, ed. (Bari, 1914), 1:21. Quoted in: McLaughlin, Martin L. “Humanist concepts of renaissance and middle ages in the tre- and quattrocento.” *Renaissance Studies* 2 (1988), 140.

⁵²⁹ Giovan Battista Gelli. *Ragionamento sopra le difficoltà di mettere in regole la nostra lingua*. (Florence, 1551). edition cited: *Opere*. I. Sanesi, ed. (Turin, 1952), 1:469-72. Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 134.

⁵³⁰ Varchi. *Ercolano*. (written before 1565).

⁵³¹ Vincenzo Borghini. “Lingue perché si variino o mutino.” *Scritti inediti o rari sulla lingua*. J.R. Woodhouse, ed. (Bologna, 1971), 79-125.

⁵³² Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi ed., 1:9-10. Quoted in: Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 135.

The knowledge of an approaching, or even imminent, “second death,” did not prevent a certain amount of optimism on Vasari’s part. He knew for certain that death would eventually overtake the arts once again, since the first death in late antiquity predicated the second, but still he believed that it could be postponed by human effort.⁵³³

Despite this enthusiasm and optimism on the part of Vasari and other mid-century authors, the decline was soon agreed upon to have occurred.⁵³⁴ Nevertheless, such a “decline” in the arts did not prevent one of the greatest periods of publication on art of the early modern period.⁵³⁵ One explanation for the spike in literary interest, ironically, was the belief in art academies, such as the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, that art had sunk into *pratica* and needed reform through a thorough reintroduction and reinforcement of theory.⁵³⁶ But even with such an abundance of primary sources at the disposal of art historians, the seeming lack of unity among the often ponderous treatises that were published has rendered an analysis quite difficult. As such, it has not been possible to denote a single approach, or unified ‘Mannerist theory’ for art production that explains the variety of forms that existed at the time. However, it is possible to delimit the strains of thought to two overriding philosophical and theoretical camps. The first announced its arrival in the highly literate era that followed upon the Council of Trent, which concluded in 1563, whereby a general Platonic perspective is preserved and developed to its logical conclusion in the treatments of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo and Gregorio Comanini. The second emerged at the closing of the century with a return to the Peripatetic and newly reformulated Neo-Scholastic positions in the treatises of Giovanni Battista Armenini and

⁵³³ Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 135.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵³⁵ Sohm has points out that there was a spike in publications in the 1560s and then later in the 1580s and 1590s. *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

Federico Zuccaro, respectively.⁵³⁷ Corresponding to these areas of inquiry are the careers of those Mannerist artists Bronzino, Francesco Salviati, Alessandro Allori, Giambologna, Mirabello Cavalori, and Girolamo Macchietti. Often working at the same time in the last two decades of the century were members of the Florentine Reform movement, such as Santi di Tito and il Cigoli, as well as the proto-baroque Federico Barocci, and the founders of the Carracci Academy, Annibale, Agostino and Ludovico.⁵³⁸ Although in theory and practice both trends had their roots in the previous critical periods discussed, the manner in which they approached the artist's relationship to the world of Ideas varied considerably in many instances, and prepared the metaphysical groundwork for seicento theorists.

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The Duality of Universals: Away from the Canon

In his mnemonic work of 1580 Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) stated that there are only as many true rules as there are true artists.⁵³⁹ The statement reflected a larger inherent mistrust of formal rules for the production of art, especially mathematical ones, that was central to Platonic arguments later in the century. The epistemological system early in the century that had demanded canons for proportions be determined gave way later to a philosophical reevaluation that moved away from the careful, and often numerical, study of nature and the human form. However, it was not restricted to Platonic theorists. It was

⁵³⁷ It should be noted that the division roughly corresponds to Friedlaender's evaluation of 'anti-classical' and 'anti-mannerist' stylistic trends. Friedlaender, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Art*.

⁵³⁸ For a discussion of the critical and theoretical environment in Florence, in particular, see: Edward L. Goldberg. *After Vasari: History, Art, and Patronage in Late Medici Florence*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

⁵³⁹ Following the Ficinian tradition, Bruno pictured nature in all its multiplicity descending from divine unity to matter and darkness. Giordano Bruno. *De umbris idearum*. (1580). Frances Yates. *The Art of Memory*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-5, 28.

adopted by each side in the debate, to a greater or lesser extent, for differing reasons. The formal result of such a rejection, which was discussed in Chapter Four, distorted and twisted the balanced and universally valid forms of the classical style of the High Renaissance in order to achieve a more intense expressivity, so that figures of ten or more head-lengths were common, enabling them to writhe and bend as if the internal muscular and skeletal structures had dissipated. Aside from the figures chosen by Bronzino cited in his fresco, even those bathers of the semi-reform minded Girolamo Macchietti in his *Baths at Pozzuoli* (1570-72) (**figure 36**) for the Studiolo of the Palazzo dei Priori exhibit such exaggerated proportions. The style also abandoned the classical style's clarity in spatial construction, which was based on rational, linear perspective in favor of that peculiar, almost medieval manner of composition that pressed shapes into a single, often unbearably crowded plane as seen in Bronzino's *Martyrdom* (**figure 34**).

As noted, the evolution of the art theoretical concept of the Idea was paralleled by the movement away from the universal validity of mathematical systems for human proportions. Proceeding from Michelangelo's disparaging judgment of Dürer's theory of proportions, recorded by Condivi, art theory after the middle of the century vigorously and consciously criticized the earlier attempts to place artistic representation on a scientific, especially mathematical basis.⁵⁴⁰ Leonardo had taken pains to determine the motions of the body according to the laws of strength and weight, even to fix numerically the changes of measurement induced by these movements.⁵⁴¹ He also contributed anatomical studies to Pacioli's proportion treatise, while Dürer sought to master "foreshortening" through geometrical construction. All these theoreticians agreed that the proportions of the human body at rest could be ascertained and fixed within an agreed

⁵⁴⁰ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 98-99.

⁵⁴¹ Leonardo, *On Painting*, 117-143.

upon mathematical canon of human proportion.⁵⁴² The goal of such investigations, as noted by Gallucci, was to develop a universally valid, and fixed canon that would cajole the resistant artistic “idea” into the harmonious and balanced forms that had been prepared for it.⁵⁴³

Nevertheless, even with these proscriptions for producing beauty, we find that later in the century the S-shaped *figura serpentinata*, which was proportioned and flexed gracefully, became the ideal. David Summers has noted that “serpentine” figural type developed out of an interest in classical statuary, such as Myron’s *Diskobolos* (**figure 37**).⁵⁴⁴ Through such exaggerations of classical *contrapposto*, the figural type, which finds its formal antecedent in Michelangelo’s *Victory* (**figure 38**) for the tomb of Julius II, was not conceived in terms of geometrical relationships and a canon of proportions.⁵⁴⁵ On the contrary, the rhetorically conceived positioning of such figures, often compared to an upward-licking flame, sought a *grazia* that, seemingly, could not be expressed through descriptive formulae.⁵⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, such an approach was accompanied by repeated warnings against overvaluing the theory of proportions. And even though the artist was admonished to be familiar with established canons, he was instructed to disregard them, especially if attempting to reproduce the effects of movement in the human body, as

⁵⁴² Pacioli, *De Divina Proportione*. Dürer, *Vier Bücher von Menschlicher Proportion*.

⁵⁴³ Gallucci, *Della simmetria dei corpi umani*, 1:2.

⁵⁴⁴ David Summers. “Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art.” *Art Bulletin* 59 no. 3 (September, 1977), 336-61. See also: David Summers. “Maniera and Movement: The ‘Figura Serpentinata’,” *Art Quarterly* 35 (1972), 269-301.

⁵⁴⁵ Shearman, *Mannerism*, 15-22.

⁵⁴⁶ Lomazzo, *Trattato della pittura*, 1:23; Michael Cole has also recently argued that the contortions and bending that occur in Mannerist sculpture relates to the creative force of the artist himself, as well as that of contemporary rhetorical and poetic constructs. Michael Cole. “The *Figura Sforzata*: Modeling, Power and the Mannerist Body.” *Art History* 24 (2001), 520-51.

Condivi noted.⁵⁴⁷ Such was the recommendation of Raffaello Borghini in his *Il Riposo* of 1584, for he noted that:

As for measurements..., it is necessary to know them; but one must bear in mind that it is not always advisable to observe them. For often we make that bend, rise, or turn, in which attitudes the arms are now stretched out and now contracted; so that, in order to give the figures gracefulness, it is necessary to extend the measurements in some part and to shorten them in some other part. This cannot be taught; but the artist must judiciously learn it from nature.⁵⁴⁸

To achieve the desired effect of “gracefulness” in figures to be produced for a given composition, the artist was required to alter the canon, which was important to internalize, for just this reason. If a particular pose or gesture was desired, the canon would offer a conceptual starting point for the artist, which would then be tempered by “nature,” and improved upon by *invenzione*.

It is the understanding of what the universally valid systems of mathematics, and subsequently nature, could perceivably offer the artist that explains the adoption of such a hostile position by Platonists, as well as Peripatetic authors. Mathematics represented for Neoplatonic theorists, such as Ficino and Dürer, a way in which to more directly relate to the world of immutable forms, the world of Ideas. Therefore, the underlying Realist assumption present in such proportion studies was vigorously resisted by Neo-Scholastic art theorists such as Federico Zuccaro. The hatred for mathematics present in his *L’Idea di pittori, scultori et architetti* of 1607 attests to this, for as he set forth “the art of painting does not derive its principles from the mathematical sciences...” as “painting is

⁵⁴⁷ Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, 98-99.

⁵⁴⁸ “Le misure...è cosa necessaria à sapere; but considerar si dee, che non sempre fa luogo l’osseruarle. Conciosiacosa che spesso si facciamo figure in atto di chinarsi, d’alzarsi, e di volgersi, nelle cui attitudini hora si distndono ed hora si raccolgono le braccie di maniera, che à voler dar gratia alle figure bisogna in qualche parte allungare ed in qualche altra parte restringere le misure. La qual cosa non si può insegnare; ma bisogna che l’artefice con giudicio del naturale la imprenda.” Raffaello Borghini. *Il Riposo*. (Florence, 1584), 150.

not their daughter, but the daughter of Nature and Disegno.”⁵⁴⁹ In response to those “mathematical rules” established by Dürer, Zuccaro notes that “such rules neither serve nor suit our actions.”⁵⁵⁰ In fact, he states that the German artist produced the studies “as a joke, a pastime, and to give diversion to those minds that are inclined to contemplation rather than to action...”⁵⁵¹ Such pursuits should be “left to those sciences and speculative professions of geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, and the like...” as they require “proofs.”⁵⁵²

Much as Borghini had stressed, the artist need only be familiar with “the basic principles and instructions acquired from his predecessors, or also from nature itself, becomes a skillful man through mere natural judgment with proper care and observation of the beautiful...without any aid from or need for mathematics.”⁵⁵³ Relating the quality cited by Hollanda and Condivi, Zuccaro calls instead for the quality discussed as *giudizio dell’occhio*; as “you make yourself so familiar with these rules and measures in working, that you have the compass and the square in your eyes, and judgment and practice in your hands.”⁵⁵⁴ Zuccaro then returns to the Nominalist tradition cited in Aquinas that the

⁵⁴⁹ “Ma dico bene e so, che dico il vero, che l’arte della pittura non piglia I suoi principi, nè ha necessità alcuna di ricorrere alle matematiche Scienze, ad imparare regole e modi alcuni per l’arte sua, nè anco per poterne ragionare in speculazione; però non è di essa figliuola, ma bensì della Natura e del Disegno.” Federico Zuccaro. *L’Idea de’ pittori, scultori, et architetti* (1607). Quoted in: Detlef Heikamp ed. *Scritti d’Arte di Federico Zuccaro*. (Florence, 1961), 249-250.

⁵⁵⁰ “perchè oltre gli scorci e forma del corpo sempre sferico, cotali regole non servono ne convengono alle nostre operazioni...” Ibid, 250.

⁵⁵¹ “Sicchè il Durero per quella fatica, che non fu poca, credo, che egli a scherzo, a passatempo e per dar trattenimento a quelli intelletti, che stanno più su la contemplazione, che su le operazioni, ciò facesse, e per mostrare, che il Disegno e lo spirito del pittore sa e può tutto ciò, che si presuppone fare.” Ibid, 251.

⁵⁵² “Dirò bene, che queste regole matematiche si devono lasciare a quelle scienze e professioni speculative della geometria, astronomia, arimmetica, e simili, che con le prove loro acquietano l’intelletto.” Ibid.

⁵⁵³ “Sicchè il pittore, oltre i primi principi ed ammaestramenti avuti da’ suoi predecessori, oppure dalla Natura stessa, dal giudizio stesso naturale con buona diligenza ed osservazione del bello e buono divento valent’ uomo senz’ altro ajuto o bisogno della matematica.” Ibid, 250.

⁵⁵⁴ “Ma conviene, disse egli, che tu ti facci sì familiari queste regole e misure nell’ operare, che tu abbi nelli occhi il compasso e la squadra: e il giudizio e la pratica nelle mani.” Ibid.

artist's goal should be that of mimesis, a truth to nature: "But we, professors of Disegno, have no need of other rules than those which Nature herself gives for imitating her."⁵⁵⁵

While Zuccaro noted the importance in compromise that must be achieved by artists regarding the rules of mathematics and observation of nature, other theorists, such as Lomazzo, were emphasizing the need for control over that which is produced. Such a willful manner of composition sought a rather stringent control over the whole image; therefore contours of the figures are not loosened and blurred in a "painterly" manner, but firmly outlined and anatomically defined. The emphasis on the firm control over one's style is derived from Vasari's estimation of the importance of *disegno* in producing laudable art. The concept was, after all, central to all the visual arts as the fundamental creative process that gained primary importance in later academies of art. Vasari explained "that the practice that is acquired by many years of study in drawing...is the true light of *disegno* and that which makes men really proficient."⁵⁵⁶ A knowledge and proficiency of draughtsmanship had been central to Tuscan painting since Vasari had published his *Lives*, and its importance only intensified as the century progressed, especially emphasizing the contours of objects. Such an emphasis can be traced to ancient treatments such as in Pliny's account (later quoted by Agucchi) which notes that drawing was invented with the outlining of a man's shadow.⁵⁵⁷ The connection between the act of drawing and the recording of contours was carried on in the sixteenth century. Prior to Vasari, for instance, Agnolo Firenzuola had noted in his *Dialogo delle bellezze delle*

⁵⁵⁵ "Ma noi altri professori del Disegno non abbiamo bisogno d'altre regole, che quelle, che la Natura stessa ne dà, per quella imitare." Ibid, 251.

⁵⁵⁶ Giorgio Vasari. *Vasari on Technique*. (Dover: New York, 1960), 208.

⁵⁵⁷ Pliny, *Natural History*, 16, 56. "e si può dire, che (secondo afferma Plinio) la prima sorte di Pittura fusse la lineare..." Agucchi, Giovanni Battista Agucchi. *Trattato della pittura in Diverse figure...da Annibale Carracci intagliate in rame...* Rome, Ludovico Grignani, 1646 in: Denis Mahon. *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1947), 241. Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt. *Leonardo and Central Italian Art, 1515-1550*. (New York University Press: New York, 1974), 247.

donne (1542) that the profiles of antique vases were thought to be ideal models for the graceful proportions and contours of an ideally beautiful woman.⁵⁵⁸ Furthermore, while Vasari himself had reinforced the importance of contours and lines in his definition of *disegno*, the notion was carried on at the end of the century by Borghini in his *Il Riposo* of 1584. As Borghini emphasized, *disegno* was merely the *concetto* formed in the imagination and given form through chalk, pencil or pen in the form of lines and contours.⁵⁵⁹ It should also be noted, not surprisingly, that after the death of Michelangelo, artists often emulated antiquity and its works more faithfully than had the classical artists of the High Renaissance.

Thus, ironically, the same period that so vigorously defended artistic freedom against the oppression of *teorica matematica* also attempted to systematically organize art, with ancient and modern theories, in such a way that even the most talented had to learn and even the most untalented could learn.⁵⁶⁰ Therefore, even though Zuccaro denied that an artist must observe the laws of proportion, he nonetheless admitted that they must be known. The same can be said of Vincenzo Danti, who wrote in his proportion study that an artist should reject the mathematical schematization of the form and movement of the body, nevertheless admitted that the anatomical method was unconditionally valid, since somehow a “scientific” approach to art had to be found. He stated expressly that his *vera regola*, or “true rule,” would be useful to those “born to art,” as well as to those not born to it, thus supporting the notion that art could be learned.⁵⁶¹ Although a single

⁵⁵⁸ Elizabeth Cropper. “On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style.” *Art Bulletin* 58 no.3 (September, 1976), 374.

⁵⁵⁹ “Il disegno non estimo io che sia altro che una apparente dimostrazione con line di quello, che prima nell’animo l’huomo si havea concetto, e nell’Idea imaginato, il quale à voler co’debiti mezi far apparire bisogna che con lunga pratica sia avezza la mano con la penna, col carbone or con la matita ad ubidire quanto commanda l’intelletto.” Borghini, *Il Riposo*, 137.

⁵⁶⁰ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*.

⁵⁶¹ Danti, *Il primo libro del Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*, Preface, Ch.16.

proportion and canon was not championed as the norm of beauty, which had been customary earlier in the century, even Lomazzo, who championed the idea of the *figura serpentinata*, nevertheless recounted Dürer's detailed proportions. As will be discussed, the doctrine of expressive movement espoused by the theorist attempted to rationalize that which could not be, and this could not be attained without a Platonic notion of universally valid forms expressed in systems such as Dürer's.⁵⁶²

What was true of the problem of "genius and rule" was also true of the problem of "mind and nature": both antitheses expressing the one great contrast between Idea and form. Danti explicitly distinguished between two methods: *ritrarre*, which reproduces reality as it is perceived, and *imitare*, which reproduces reality as it ought to be seen; he even tried to separate their respective areas of application, thereby stressing the opposition of both attitudes. In his opinion, *ritrarre* sufficed for representing things perfect in themselves; but when representing things in some way faulty, the painter had to call upon *imitare*.⁵⁶³ Thus the balance that had existed for Vasari between an artist's conception and how it was portrayed in ink, paint, or stone, was irreparably destroyed. The same problem had preoccupied literary critics throughout the Cinquecento, as the relative merits of poetry in relation to other disciplines were debated. Of repeated interest was the manner in which each discipline, or genre, approached their material (either inductively or deductively). On this point, Tasso noted in his *Apologia* of 1585 that poets and historians are differentiated in their pursuit of either the universal or particular truth:⁵⁶⁴

The historian considers the truth of particulars and the philosopher that of universals; the latter considers also verisimilitude in a universal way,

⁵⁶² Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo. *Trattato della pittura*. (Milano, 1584), Book I, Chapters 5-8.

⁵⁶³ Danti, *Il primo libro del Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*, Ch. 16.

⁵⁶⁴ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 1009-1012.

because it belongs to the art itself...Therefore the poet does not spoil truth, but he seeks it in a perfect form, supposing in place of the truth of particulars that of universals, which are Ideas...so for poets, who in their consideration of Ideas are philosophers.⁵⁶⁵

In poetical theory, the dissatisfaction with particular truths, with their vulgarities and imperfections, distanced the practitioner of the craft of poetry from history. Likewise, the same dissatisfaction and understanding of the requirements of the discipline lead artists, critics, and theorists to increasingly adopt a Realist position that would account and correct such deficiencies, as it did in poetry. Armenini would write on this subject: “I laugh at those who consider everything natural to be good;” while Lomazzo reiterated in his treatise that nature was filled with accidental “errors” that required correction.⁵⁶⁶ The new dissatisfaction and distrust of natural beauty found in nature can be illustrated by comparing these sentiments with the Renaissance prescription for beauty enumerated in Zeuxinian terms by Dolce in his dialogue *L’Aretino* (1557). As Pietro Aretino states to Giovan Francesco Fabrini, “The painter must strive not only to copy nature, but also to surpass it. I say surpass nature in one part, because on the whole it is miraculous, not only if he succeeds, but also when he succeeds, that is to say, to show...in a single body all that perfection of beauty, that nature hardly chooses to reveal in a thousand.”⁵⁶⁷ In fact, nature itself had been redefined as its metaphysical relationship to the realm of universals

⁵⁶⁵ “Quella de i particolari considera l’Historico, & quella de gli universali il Filosofo, il qual considera anchora il uerisimile in universale, perch’appartiene all’arte medesima...Dunque il Poeta non guasta la uerità, ma la ricerca perfetta supponendo in luogo della uerità de i particolari quella de gli universali, i quali sono Idee...de’Poeti parimente, i quali nella consideratione dell’Idee sono Filosofi.” Torquato Tasso. *Apologia*. (1585), 50. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 1011-1012.

⁵⁶⁶ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 88. Lomazzo, *Trattato della pittura*, 434.

⁵⁶⁷ “Deve il pittore procacciare non solo di imitare, ma di superare la natura. Dico superare la natura in una parte, che nel resto è miracoloso, non pur se si arriva, ma quando vi s’arriva. Questo è in dimostrare... in un corpo solo tutta quella perfezione di bellezza, che la natura non vuol dimostrare a pena in mille.” Ludovico Dolce. *L’Aretino: Dialogo della pittura*. (Venice, 1557), 43. Roskill, *Dolce’s “Aretino” and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, 131.

was questioned. Around the time Vasari formulated his conception of *disegno*, Minturno (1563) stated:

Moreover, Art directs all its effort toward imitating Nature, and the more closely it approaches her, the better it does its work. But in every kind of things, it is she who holds the rule by which it governs itself in its operation and to which it directs everything. One, again, is the Idea in which Nature mirrors herself when she works, and one is the form in which art gazes in its functioning.⁵⁶⁸

Minturno prepared the intellectual position of the later art-theoretical view; for while Vasari had defined *disegno* as a visible expression of the *concetto* formed in the mind, he also said that the *concetto* itself arose from observing the visually “given.” Later writers, such as Borghini, however, would develop this view into a more conceptualistic one, where *disegno* was praised as the “living light” and the “inner eye” of the mind, and the task of architecture, sculpture, and even painting was limited to an external, technical realization of the *disegno* directly engendered by the mind. Even a portrait, whose very name expresses direct imitation (*ritratto-ritrarre*), was noted by Lomazzo as arising from an intellectual and universally valid *idea e forma*.⁵⁶⁹

* * *

Neoplatonism and Platonism in Poetic Theory

During the course of the sixteenth century, the Realist position, introduced by way of Florentine Neoplatonism, increasingly permeated treatments of art; as demonstrated in works as varied as Holland's and Lomazzo's, and ran throughout those that came between. In

⁵⁶⁸ “Oltre à ciò l'Arte pone tutto il suo studio ad imitare la Natura, e tanto fà bene l'opera sua, quanto à lei s'appressa. Ma in ciascun genere di cose, quella tiene una regola, con laqual si regge nel suo operare, & allaqual tutto dirizza. Un'anco è l'Idea, nella qual si specchia, quando opera, la natura: & una è la forma, in cui l'arte rimira nel suo magistero.” Minturno, *Arte poetica* (1563), 32-33. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 971-972.

⁵⁶⁹ Lomazzo, *Trattato della pittura, Proemio*, 8.

fact, even in poetic theory, the use of Plato as a defense became increasingly commonplace as the Cinquecento progressed.⁵⁷⁰ As the visual arts, particularly painting, were increasingly related with poetry, publications and lectures on the sister art were very influential on art critics and theorists, not surprisingly, often paralleling one another. Such a parallel can be found in the general move away from the Nominalist Aristotelian defense of poetry. The notions generated from the anti-Aristotelian wave of published criticism is represented in Francesco Patrizi's *Parere in Difesa dell'Ariosto* (1585), who concluded that Aristotle could not have based his generalizations on practice, thus making his conclusions flawed.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, even in the Aristotelian treatments such as the *Discorsi del poema heroico* (1594), Torquato Tasso related that behind every poem, or every part of a poem, there is an Idea which the poet seeks to imitate through the happy combination of matter and form.⁵⁷²

The reversal in Aristotelian treatments, which largely ignored Nominalist precepts, can be found as early as 1540, with the writing of *Naugerius sive de poetica dialogus* by Girolamo Fracastoro.⁵⁷³ The dialogue concentrated on the ends of poetry, while proposing strange philosophical shifts. Aristotle, speaking of the universal and particular, was referring to the objects imitated, to "subject matter," to what Fracastoro himself would call *materia* or *res*. His distinction was in the other term of the dichotomy, *discendi modus*; the universal is an idea of absolute beauty or perfection in expression. This meant that what is imitated is now not an object, but an ideal of expression, a way of writing; the whole concept of imitation has been altered and in a very important respect

⁵⁷⁰ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:282-283.

⁵⁷¹ Francesco Patrizi, *Parere in Difesa dell'Ariosto* (Ferrara, 1585). Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:600-601.

⁵⁷² Torquato Tasso. *Poema heroico*. (1594), 6-7. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2: 339-341.

⁵⁷³ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 725-727.

Platonized, to the degree that the object is now an Idea (not a material thing, such as a human action), which the poet tries to represent in its most perfect and absolute form.⁵⁷⁴

It was then through Plato that Renaissance critics and theorists would attempt to discredit the imitative process, and reinforce the necessity of the poet to represent the universal rather than the particular as a more relevant form of “truth.” In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato had developed the argument that the poet, as an imitator of appearances rather than of those realities which he calls Ideas, is at several removes from the truth, that he has neither knowledge nor right opinion of the object which he imitates, that hence his imitation is “merely a kind of play or sport.”⁵⁷⁵

It was then that in Francesco Robertelli’s *De arte poetica explicatio* (1548), the first modern commentary on the *Poetics*, the author had pointed out that Plato had shown in the *Sophist* that a painter should always aim at “the Idea...and paint things more beautiful than they are.”⁵⁷⁶ In the same fashion as the artist, he identified the poet’s method of production as that used by Xenophon in the *Cryopaedia*, and pointed out that Cicero in his *Orator ad Brutum* also embraced the method that called for the resulting perfect representations of Ideas.⁵⁷⁷ Almost a decade later, Dionigi Atanagi would expand on this understanding in his *Ragionamento* (1559) by further differentiating the disciplines of history and poetry by the approach of their treatments. As Atanagi noted, while history treats the particular, as things are, poetry treats the universal, the pure Idea

⁵⁷⁴ Giralmo Fracastoro. *Opera omnia*. (1555), fol. 160A, B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 725-727.

⁵⁷⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 595ff, 602. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 251.

⁵⁷⁶ Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 142.

⁵⁷⁷ To reinforce his point, Robertelli presented a collection of citations from Athenaeus, Theopompus, and Hermogenes to demonstrate that defined Plato’s ideas in this manner. *Ibid*, 145.

of things.⁵⁷⁸ The aim, and moreover the duty of poets and artists was to forgo representing the particular flaws inherent in their subjects, and penetrate to the pure Idea or universal beauty that exists.

The notion of “going beyond nature” was certainly not a recent development in poetic or art theory. The philosophers and theorists who first formulated the precepts upon which later art theory would arise, from Aristotle to Pliny and Plotinus, all agreed, though for different metaphysical reasons, that the misshapen in nature is not to be reproduced in art. Nature very seldom, or never, brings forth anything perfectly beautiful. But Neoplatonically oriented thinkers, such as Lomazzo, considered such selection from the beauty already present in the natural world to be increasingly difficult, if not metaphysically impossible due to the “resistance of matter” in receiving *bellezza*. Henceforth, it was the *prava disposizione della materia* that causes the faults or errors in a natural phenomenon, and the artist, who according to the earlier view had only to choose and extract the beautiful from given appearances, now had the thoroughly metaphysical task of reestablishing and reaffirming the principles buried beneath the given appearance.⁵⁷⁹ As Carlo Ridolfi would later state, the artist is a “steward of divine grace” who has to restore the things of nature to the original state intended for them by their eternal Creator; he himself is to give them a perfection and a beauty unattained by themselves, creating in his mind the *perfetta forma intenzionale della natura*, or “the perfect form *intended* by nature.”⁵⁸⁰

Thus the beautiful in art no longer resulted from a mere synthesis of a scattered, “given” multiplicity of beauty, but rather from an intellectual grasp of it that cannot be

⁵⁷⁸ Dionigi Atanagi. *Ragionamento de la eccellentia et perfettione de la historia*. (1559), 3v-6. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 40-42.

⁵⁷⁹ Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie dell'arte, ovvero le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti*. (Venice, 1648). D. von Hadeln, ed. (Padua, 1887), 1: 3.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

found in reality at all. The belief, as might be expected, found its proponents in poetic theory, who continued the debate over mimesis and the poet's purpose. Francesco Buonamici's *Discorsi poetici* of 1597, for example, set forth that the process of imitation of a particular person may be taken as typical:

I say, then he [the poet] supposes an individual, but that he considers in him the idea, which is universal, so that he does not describe exactly what he is and what he did, but he raises the actions and the character to the highest level of which human nature is capable, and which can be attributed to him no less than to any other man...he considers him according to his idea abstracted from matter, and universally; in this way he considers the particular universally.⁵⁸¹

Imitation abstracts from the object in nature its most universal aspects and presents them in the work of art. Particulars to appearance and character are not to be entirely disregarded, but they cannot be reproduced either, due to the goal of the poet. Moreover, the capacity to imitate is itself natural: the artist's genius and judgment are natural qualities, and he uses them for the purpose of making the imitation. Around the same time, Pomponio Torelli regaled the Accademia degl'Innominati of Parma with a series of lectures on Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁵⁸² Arguing against such evaluations as Mazzoni's belief that the subject matter of a work is what is true; Torelli asserts that poets invent what is false by transforming reality into something more essentially "true":

Poetry and the poet follow the true because they follow the idea by imitating that which is fitting, which frequently comes about [in reality] otherwise. But if we consider what actually does happen (frequently beyond what is fitting), because the poet departs from the particular and the individual itself...For the poet always either abstracts from what has

⁵⁸¹ "Io dico adunque, che egli suppone un particolare, ma che in lui considera l'idea, che è universale, perioche egli non descrive a punto come egli è, & quello che egli fece, ma innalza le attioni e' costumi a quel grado di che può esser' capace la natura humana, & non meno si possono attribuir' a lui, che ad un'altro ...lo viene a considerare secondo l'idea sua astratta dalla materia, & universalmente; così considera il particular' universalmente." Francesco Buonamici. *Discorsi poetici nella Accademia fiorentina in difesa d'Aristotile*. (1597), 48-49. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 693.

⁵⁸² The lectures were given by Pomponio Torelli around 1597. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 699-703.

been done, considering it universally, as it might be done verisimilarly and according to what is proper; or else he will invent something that has not happened. And hence, as he considers what has been done not as really such, he renders it “fantastic.”⁵⁸³

The debate concerning the goals of the poet and how the art itself can be classified had developed in many ways into polarities. Nearly two decades earlier, the duality of representation had been developed in the poet’s craft by Agnolo Segni in his *Ragionamento* (written in 1576 and published in 1581). Segni related that the Platonic Idea, in fact, associated philosophy and history.⁵⁸⁴ As Segni wrote, “For since there are two extreme species of objects, one, the things in our world with their imperfections, the other, their perfect forms which we call Ideas, the latter make up philosophy and the former history, each of the two being separate from the other; but the one and the other conjoined generate poetry.”⁵⁸⁵ However, he continues to develop the conception of beauty and why it is necessary for poets by stating that:

Human affairs and those of nature are never entirely what they ought to be, or perfect; but all have defects, one here and another there, some more and some less: this is the fault of matter and of our corrupt nature and the contraries of which we are composed. So perfection is never found among us but is understood and perceived by the intellect. And this, among other things, gave occasion to Plato to posit his Ideas, since with the power of his mind he searched in things for perfection and, not finding it there, he determined and declared the existence of Ideas, that is, the most perfect nature of things existing outside of things and outside of the human mind, so that the human intellect could find an object or be able to come to rest

⁵⁸³ “la Poesia, et il Poeta seguono il uero, perche seguono l’idea imitando ciò, che si conuiene, che spesso altrimenti auiene, ma considerato quello stesso che auiene molte uolte fuori di quello che si conuiene, ch’è il particolare, e indiuiduo, si puo dire, che seguiti il falso, perche il Poeta dall’istesso particolare et indiuiduo si parte...Perche il Poeta sempre, ó fa l’astrattione da quello che è fatto, considerandolo in universale, come uerisimilmente, et secondo il conueneuole far si possi; ò fingerà quello che non è fatto; et però considerando quello che è fatto non come tale, fantastico lo rende.” MS Parmense 1304, fol. 149. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 699-703.

⁵⁸⁴ Angolo Segni. *Ragionamento sopra le cose pertinenti alla Poetica*. (1581). Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 31.

⁵⁸⁵ “che essendo due spezie estreme, una le cose tra noi co’ loro difetti, l’altra le loro perfezioni, che noi chiamiamo Idee, queste fanno la filosofia, & quelle l’historia, ciascuna delle due parti da se: ma l’una parte & l’altra congiunte insieme generano la poesia.” Agnolo Segni, *Ragionamento*, 65-66. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 31.

in an object conforming to its perfection. The Ideas outside of things are therefore their most perfect nature, intelligible and certain in intellect, either in the human or, according to Plato, in another intellect that is superhuman, divine, and eternal, like those eternal substances that in his opinion exist in the divine mind. This perfecting of things, we say, is the cause and first principle of poetry, when materials are narrated in terms of the all-perfect, and each item in its highest and most sovereign form, for such speech must necessarily be false and fabulous, not history, since among us there is no perfection, or any semblance of what ought to be; but when a fable imitates that perfection and its truth, it is poetry.⁵⁸⁶

Thus the poet's charge is to enumerate those "superhuman, divine, and eternal" substances that exist outside of the imperfections of nature. Therefore, while it is the conflation of the historian and philosopher that creates the poet, it is, nonetheless, required as the "first principle of poetry" to forgo the specifics that when listed account for "history," and seek that "most perfect nature" that is "outside of things."

The method by which a poet, and by extension an artist, was to attain such "superhuman" revelations varied, as it did early in the century. Certainly the Ciceronian method of extracting the most beautiful examples from sense-perceptible reality had fallen from favor in many circles. The obvious flaw in such a Nominalist formulation, according to later poetic and artistic theorists, was that the creator would be unable to escape the inevitability of reproducing the vulgarities of nature, refined nature though it might be. In the face of such speculative criticism, poetic furor was further developed as a way in which to bypass material nature and preceded directly to the immutable world of Ideas. The maturation and eventual apotheosis of this epistemological method can be traced to several critics, not least of which being Bernardo Tasso, who authored the *Ragionamento della poesia*. Delivered as a lecture before the Accademia Veneziana in 1560, and published in 1562, the *Ragionamento* explained that the poet excels all other

⁵⁸⁶ Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 139-140.

men through two qualities: the divine furor and the universality of his knowledge. The first, Tasso explains, is indispensable and is the sign of the poet's dependence upon God:

...without this extraordinary gift of nature, even though a man may have knowledge of all doctrines; even though through long study he may have learned the law and the art of perfect writing; even though he may have long experience of the things of the world; still it will be impossible that he should turn out to be a good poet. There is no doubt whatsoever but that the perfection of this science has something divine about it, and that for this same reason it should be placed before all others.⁵⁸⁷

The notion that mere study or *practica* could not produce a laudable poet is in keeping with the suppositions behind poetic furor. The beauty produced by the universality of knowledge, discussed by Tasso, is not accessed through extensive study, but rather the divine revelation of the world of universal forms accorded to the poet.

The notion became so intimately intertwined with the discipline of poetry that in a series of lectures delivered by Agnolo Segni to the Accademia Fiorentina in 1576, poetry itself is defined as: "An imitation of human and divine things, by means of fable-making discourse, in verse, according to the divine furor."⁵⁸⁸ The mastery of prose and verse, subject and form, are all subjugated to the primary cause that enables the "imitation" of things. Furthermore, much like the Ficilian descent of beauty into form, Segni curtails the mystical manner in which the poet receives his inspiration through divine furor with a series of relationships for imitation in a familiar tripartite hierarchy. For Segni, to "imitate" is to make one thing resemble another, to fabricate one thing- an "idolo", an "imagine," a "fantasma"- in the likeness of another, which is its "esempio," or object.

⁵⁸⁷ "senza questo singular dono di natura, ancor che altri di tutte le dottrine habbia cognitione; ancor che con lungo studio habbia de le cose del mondo; impossibil tuttavia sarà, che riesca buon poeta. Non è dubbio alcuno, che la perfettione di questa scienza non partecipi di divinità: e che per questo anco non sia da essere antiposta a tutte l'altre." Bernardo Tasso. *Ragionamento*. (1562), 12v. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 300-301.

⁵⁸⁸ "Immatazione de le cose humane, et de le divine con orazione favolosa in versi secondo il furor divino." Agnolo Segni, MS Laur. Ashb. 531, fol.74v. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 300-301.

The general process of imitation is found everywhere in the world: God imitates himself in man, nature imitates the world of ideas, art imitates nature, men imitate each other. In a word, the whole Platonic chain of relationships- from universal Ideas to particular concepts or objects to representations of those concepts or objects- is constituted by a series of imitations.⁵⁸⁹ Of course, the only method by which man is capable of moving beyond mere imitation of the observable world is poetic furor.

For Segni, poetic furor is divinely inspired and reflects the imitative process of creation. An alternative understanding of the concept was enumerated in Lorenzo Giacomini's oration *Del furor poetico*. Delivered before the Accademia degli Alterati in 1587, the treatment was dedicated to the problem of poetic inspiration in that if the conception of poetic furor did exist, then art, principles and practice would be useless; and if it does not, then the poet must address himself to his art with greater seriousness and application. Attempting to separate the conception from "divinity," Giacomini points instead to the theory of the humors:

The man who wishes to rise to the heights of poetry or of eloquence or of philosophy has need of temperate spirits, inclining rather towards the cold ones, in order to think, investigate, discourse, and judge...; to continue in such operations, he seeks an abundance of humors neither weak nor easily dissipated, but stable and firm, which move through vigorous and powerful imaginations; but in order to execute well in conformity with the idea conceived within himself, he needs warmth so that the expression may be effective.⁵⁹⁰

These latter "heated" spirits are the ones that give the effect of "estasi, rapimento, fuore, mania"; it is because of them that the soul, "fixed and intent upon an operation, forgets

⁵⁸⁹ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 300-301.

⁵⁹⁰ "l'huomo che al altezza de la Poesia o del Eloquenza, o de la Filosofia dee salire, per pensare, investigare, discorrere, e giudicare, ha bisogno di spiriti temperate, che inclinino nel freddo...; per continuare in queste operationi, ricerca copia di spiriti non deboli, ne facili a risolversi, ma stabili, e Fermi, che muouon con vigorosi, e potenti fantasma, ma per bene eseguire secondo l'idea in se conceptual, ha bisogno di calore, accioche con efficacia esprima." Lorenzo Giacomini. *Orationi e discorsi*. (1597), 59-60. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 322-323.

every other object, and does not even remember itself or what it is doing.”⁵⁹¹ Such concentration by the poet may in a sense be called a furor and divine:

...if by furor we mean that fixation of the soul upon the Idea, or if we denote that internal incitement and movement, born not of individual reasoning and judgment but of the natural disposition of the instrument to which it is united, then there will be furor in the poet, and it will be called divine not without reason since it proceeds from Nature, which is the daughter of God, and from an excellent Nature: I mean the human soul combined with a subject having that temperament.⁵⁹²

Such biological understandings of artistic temperament and creative potential became increasingly common at the turn of the century, and would culminate in treatments such as Giulio Mancini’s *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (1628). Yet whether Segni and Tasso are cited in their understanding of poetic furor as a divine occurrence offered to the “imitator,” or Giacomini’s biological explanation, calling upon an understanding of the humors, the notion was indisputably separate from “reasoning and judgment.” Since the more purely Platonic understanding of divine inspiration was formulated by the Neoplatonics in the later Quattrocento, divine furor was one such Realist supposition that was called on to explain the ability to access the world of Ideas. In the later Cinquecento, poetic critics and theorists increasingly called upon such understandings of poetic creation. It is not surprising to find that the practitioners of the sister discipline of art and its critics and theorists were utilizing similar philosophical and epistemological systems of interpretation to approach their subjects.

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⁵⁹¹ “affisata & intenta ad una operatione di ogni altro oggetto si scorda, ne pure si ricorda di se stessa, nel quello che faccia.” Giacomini, *Orationi e discorsi*, 60. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 322-323.

⁵⁹² “se per furore intendiamo quel affisamento del anima del Idea, o vero se denotiamo quel incitamento, e movimento interno, nato non da proprio discorso, e giudizio ma da naturale proprietà del instrumento al quale è unita, harà luogo il furore nel poeta, e sarà non senza ragione detto Divino, poiche procede da la Natura, che è figliuola di Dio, e da Natura eccellente dico dal anima humana a soggetto di tal temperamento congiunta.” Giacomini, *Orationi e discorsi*, 61. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 322-323.

Realism Rethought: Neoplatonism in the *Metatechne* of Lomazzo

While the Realist position was increasingly adopted by the theorists of the sister discipline of poetry, art theory underwent a similar development. It is interesting to note from the perspective of intellectual history that it was the stylistic period in the history of art that so mindfully retreated from the precepts of the Renaissance, which would develop the most comprehensive treatments of the artistic Idea. In fact, the prior examples cited, modest excerpts as they have been, touch upon the “subject/object” dilemma in a cursory fashion. The rhetorical structure of the arguments of writers such as Castiglione, Alberti and Vasari has led to the belief that the Idea itself is demonstrably a philosophically and/or metaphysically oriented proof attempting to reinforce or codify the theoretical constructs of each author. And whereas the art theoretical concept does reflect the larger argument of these critics, theorists and biographers, it is not merely an argumentative device; it is the revealing keystone for the metaphysical construct, or even the *Weltanschauung*, of the author, and subsequently his readers. Such an understanding is necessary when approaching the texts produced by Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo. For nowhere prior do we find a similar attempt to codify a system that explains the epistemology of art theory than in his two publications of *Trattato dell’arte de la pittura* of 1584, and especially his subsequent *L’Idea del tempio della pittura* of 1590. It was this very insistence on explication that led Robert Williams to cite the purpose of the dual treatises as an attempt to articulate a single theoretical system that would encompass all *ars*, or a *Metatechne*.⁵⁹³ The original treatise was to be encyclopedic in scope, dividing the

⁵⁹³ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 123. The early version was probably completed before 1572. Gerald Ackerman. *The Structure of Lomazzo’s Treatise on Painting*. (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1964), 22-23, 26-49.

art of painting, and thus the Books, into seven elements: proportion, motion, color, light, perspective, composition, and “form.” Lomazzo rewrote certain sections, particularly the prefaces to the seven Books of the *Trattato*. These unused prefaces were combined to form the later publication of the *Idea*, and were intended as a preface or prolegomenon to the *Trattato* in that it does not summarize the contents of the larger treatment, but rather clarifies and elaborates on the premises on which it is based.⁵⁹⁴ The approach built upon earlier authors attempts to explain the metaphysical validity and purpose of the *Idea* concept, but Lomazzo further developed an all-inclusive system of epistemology that demanded a text all its own.

Before discussing the texts themselves, it is necessary to note why the *L’Idea del tempio* itself has met with such resistance among modern scholars. First, the ponderous text is often dismissed by art historians due to its attempt to demonstrate that the painter’s primary purpose in producing art was intellectual, and that his manual activity was in all cases simply an execution of ideas mentally conceived.⁵⁹⁵ The insistence on the intellectual processes of the artist over the practical application of the theories to be presented seems to place Lomazzo, at least epistemologically, opposite the pedagogically minded Armenini. While the inherently practical Armenini is often cited in conjunction with preferred workshop practice, Lomazzo is considered too cerebral to have impacted the daily life and work of the artist. Furthermore, the elaboration of Ficilian metaphysics within the complex framework of cosmology, astrology, and other seemingly “occult” traditions, has furthered the conception that Lomazzo’s treatises were irrelevant to the practice of art in any practical terms. Yet these related fields of inquiry would be used to

⁵⁹⁴ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 123.

⁵⁹⁵ Ackerman has suggested that the misunderstanding of Lomazzo’s treatises derives from the writing process of the author, coupled with the arrangement of the actual texts after his blindness. Gerald M. Ackerman. “Lomazzo’s Treatise on Painting.” *The Art Bulletin* 49 no.4 (December, 1967), 317.

classify painting in Seicento treatments. Rather than dismissing Lomazzo as a “speculative” theorist, as Panofsky did, he should be considered the progenitor of multiple types of art theory and criticism. His astrological system was derived from the well-established occult tradition, where Lomazzo took some material directly from Henricus Cornelius Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia*.⁵⁹⁶ Along with this numerological tradition of Agrippa, the architectural metaphor of the Idea as a “temple” was derived from Giulio Camillo’s description of his famous memory theater.⁵⁹⁷ Derived from mnemonic techniques developed in ancient rhetoric, Camillo developed a system to offer the orator a classification of all knowledge, an ideal ordering of all possible topics, by which the human mind might be made a perfect reflection of the macrocosm.⁵⁹⁸ Importantly, schemata for ordering knowledge were not only already common for rhetoric and poetry, but would become standard to Seicento art critics and theorists.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Ackerman, *The Structure of Lomazzo’s Treatise on Painting*, 50-53. The configuration of the heavens at the moment of birth- namely, “stars”- also inclined the newborn to one of the four temperaments of life. A revival of astrological interest that had begun in the twelfth century had, by the fourteenth century, resulted in the popularity of a subject new to Western Europe: children of the planets. Visual dominance conveyed a particular planet’s power over its “children,” making them cold-wet (Luna), changeable (Mercury), hot-wet (Venus, Jupiter), moderately dry-hot (Apollo), hot-dry (Mars), or cold-dry (Saturn). The same tactic connected each of the four temperaments with a different planet’s influence. Choleric, for instance, derive their hot dryness from Mars, a god so fiery that flames rise from his body or helmet. Since choleric’s “passion is like Tinder, soon set on Fire,” they favor such professions as being blacksmiths at a burning forge or soldiers with firearms. By contrast, “those whose mistress is the Moon pass their lives as if in water, due to their innate wateriness, working either in ships or in fishing.” This inscription appears under an engraving by H.J. Muller after Maarten van Heemskerck’s *Luna*. See: Ilja M. Veldman. “Seasons, Planets, and Temperaments in the Work of Maarten van Heemskerck: Cosmo-Astrological Allegory in Sixteenth-Century Netherlandish Prints.” *Simiolus II* (1980), 149. For translation see: Crombie, *Medieval and Early Modern Science*, 1: 42-3, 45-6.

⁵⁹⁷ Lomazzo compared the “temple” of art with the structure of the heavens; he installed seven painters as regents and treated art theory throughout according to the principle of the number seven.

⁵⁹⁸ Giulio Camillo. *Tutte l’Opere di M. Giulio Camillo Delminio*. Tommaso Porcacchi, ed. (Venice, 1567), 56-149.

⁵⁹⁹ The corporeal metaphor would be adopted by Francesco Scannelli in his *Microcosmo della pittura* (1657), and to a lesser extent Giulio Mancini’s *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (1628); while Marco Boschini would adopt a nautical metaphor, as well as minerological, in his *La carta del navegar pitoresco* (1660) and *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, (1674).

On the importance of proportion to beauty, Lomazzo certainly utilized many of the concepts central to Ficino metaphysics, as well as Ficino himself.⁶⁰⁰ In summarizing the *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, he concluded that: “the beauty of the body is nothing more than a certain demeanor, vivacity and grace, which radiate within it from the infusion of its Idea; and the latter does not descend into matter unless it is most properly prepared.”⁶⁰¹ The celestial hierarchy that dictates the descent of the Idea is, once again, conditioned by the preparation of “order, mode and form.” *Order* differentiates the different parts of the artwork, *mode* specifies the quantity, and, lastly, *form* is the lines and colors that demarcate and give definition to the other two. Beauty appears in many forms in nature and must thus be expressed in many forms in art; but according to its essence it is only one single thing: the living, spiritual *grazia* that radiates from the countenance of God and is reflected as though by three more or less pure mirrors. In the Ficino excurses, the divine radiance streams first into the angels, in whose consciousness it engenders perception of the heavenly bodies as pure archetypes or Ideas; next into the soul, where it produces reason and thought; and finally into the corporeal world, in which it appears as image and form. Thus even in corporeal things, the divine beauty comes into being by the influence of their Idea, but only under the condition and degree that the material of those things is unresistant and ready to receive this influence.

Once again the material is made unresistant and ready by adapting itself, according to order, measure, and form (*ordine, modo, specie*), to the nature of the Idea to be expressed, all of which depends on the “complexion” of the individual concerned. However, contrary to previous treatments that attempt to distill Lomazzo’s argument to a

⁶⁰⁰ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 132.

⁶⁰¹ *Dal modo di conoscere e costituire le proporzioni secondo la bellezza*, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Idea del Tempio della Pittura*, Ch.26. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 141-153.

purely derivative rehashing of Ficino a century prior, the Neoplatonic position of Lomazzo does reflect the metaphysical structuring of art theory late in the century. The definition of beauty most often repeated at this time was in complete agreement with the analogy of light in the Pseudo-Dionysius' metaphysics that had been revised by Ficino: beauty is a "reflection" or "ray" of the splendor radiating from the countenance of God. But it had been modified by the passionate endorsements of critics like Giordano Bruno and Francesco Patrizzi (1529-1597), where by the end of the century, it had developed into an even more complex conception.⁶⁰² For while the splendid divine light traveled to earth, the radiance of the divine countenance would now pass through the consciousness of the angels, where it is differentiated according to the nature of the heavenly bodies- there is a jovial, a saturnine, and a martial beauty- each being of greater or lesser perfection than the others, but all in their totality reflecting the one, absolute beauty. The artist who wishes to recognize these multiple forms and stages of beauty and even to reveal them in works of art needs other than corporeal organs. For since beauty, which is comparable to the light by which we perceive it, is itself essentially incorporeal (indeed so widely separated from the material world that it can be adequately expressed only under especially favorable conditions), it can be recognized only by means of an inner, intellectual sense and recreated only on the basis of an inner, intellectual image. This inner sense is reason, and this inner image is the imprint left on it by the eternal and divine archetypes: the *formulae idearum*. By virtue of such endowments the painter can perceive the beauty of natural objects and, observing their exterior characteristics and conditions, reveal it in his works.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰² Francesco Patrizzi. *Della historia*. (1560). Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 414-420.

⁶⁰³ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 96-7.

While the Milanese theorist certainly appropriated much from Ficilian metaphysics for his treatise, the critical and theoretical debates surrounding art production were not ignored by Lomazzo. For instance, as he related, one of the most significant qualities in painting is *disegno*, or as he prefers, *euritmia*, or “eurhythmy.” The close association of the art-theoretical concept of *disegno* to the artistic Idea had been established by Vasari in his biographies over three decades prior. The artist-biographer had set forth that the first encapsulates the second, and is, in a sense, only a part of the overall notion. As noted, for Vasari *disegno* was “cognizant of the proportion of the whole to the parts,” and with such a knowledge “a certain conception and judgment...is formed in the mind” and finally expressed by the hands.⁶⁰⁴ *Disegno*, in other words, encapsulated the cognition, formulation and expression of the Idea of beauty; while at the same time not being entirely defined by it. However, in Lomazzo’s evaluation, it involves an underlying unity in nature based on numerical relationships, otherwise not stressed by Vasari. In his description of the temple, Lomazzo refers to *euritmia* as the “foundation” upon which everything else is built, “as on a very firm base, and from which all beauty derives.”⁶⁰⁵ The concept itself, as in the modern denotation, relates to the harmony in the proportion of parts, especially in architecture. Because it is dependent on number, it is closely associated with proportion, the first of Lomazzo’s five theoretical parts of painting, and the lowest part of the wall of his temple. However, *euritmia* is more than proportion, because it pervades all parts of painting. Proportion is what makes *disegno overo*

⁶⁰⁴ Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barrochi, ed. ‘Technical Introduction,’ 2:111. Quoted in: Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 241.

⁶⁰⁵ “Ma prima abbiamo da sapere che il fondamento di tutto, cioè delle parti principali e dei suoi generi, sopra il quale ogni cosa come sopra saldissima base si riposa, et onde deriva tutta la bellezza, è quello che i Greci chiamano euritmia e noi nominiamo disegno.” Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo. *Idea del tempio della pittura*. (Milan, 1590) Robert Klein, ed. (Florence, 1974), 109.

euritmia “shine in all bodies.”⁶⁰⁶ Proportion “generates” harmony of design in all bodies, “which is nothing more than that consummate beauty and loveliness that one finds in any body to which it belongs.”⁶⁰⁷ Thus Lomazzo’s system relies heavily on the Neoplatonic notion that beauty is spiritual in nature; thus matter, in order to receive beauty, must be prepared by being fashioned proportionally. Nevertheless, proportionality is not beauty itself. It is rather what “introduces” beauty into all natural and artificial forms.⁶⁰⁸ Unlike the critique leveled by Zuccaro, Lomazzo states that the study of mathematics is necessary for the artist; and he repeats the proportion studies from earlier in the century, validating their usefulness.⁶⁰⁹

In the process of introducing beauty to form, mathematics was not the sole gatekeeper. With this in mind, Lomazzo emphasized that it was not the only subject that artists should concern themselves with, should they wish to produce laudable art. Although the Neoplatonic understanding of beauty as universal, and thus immutable, is prominent in Lomazzo’s treatise, he also emphasized the need for interdisciplinary knowledge much in the same way that Alberti, Dolce, and Vasari had earlier. In the second part of practice, *forma*, for instance, Lomazzo demonstrates what it takes to make things visible. In order to complete the transformation from cerebral conception to creation, he notes:

All these species of forms come to generate in painting the universal representation of things divine, heavenly, worldly, imagined, thought, made, infernal and marvelous; which things cannot be known or thought about without very great study in the books of sacred scripture, of mathematics, of poetry, of hieroglyphs, of history, of architecture, of anatomy, and of many sciences and arts, which implant in the idea of he whom nature has made a painter, the invention proper to painting and

⁶⁰⁶ “in tutti I corpi fa risplendere il disegno, ovvero euritmia.” Lomazzo, *Idea del tempio della pittura*, 169.

⁶⁰⁷ “il quale non è altro che quella soma bellezza e venustà che procede in qualunque corpo conveniente a lei.” Ibid, 171.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 171, 213-217.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, 175.

proper to the explanation of all things that can be conceived in the imagination and represented under the aforesaid forms.⁶¹⁰

In a truly Neoplatonic understanding of “form,” Lomazzo sets forth that every conceivable (or inconceivable) thing has a universal and immutable existence. All of these can be known only through conscious appropriation methods. Without a great many texts that elucidate the manner and variety of all “things,” the expression of their *forma* would be impossible. In essence, as Williams noted, “Form is the principle of painting that becomes a language able to express all conceivable things; a system of signs with access to all higher generalizations.”⁶¹¹ Therefore, even though Lomazzo was indebted to the Ficino tradition, he did not relinquish the understanding of metaphysical transmission, or descent of beauty, to the “mystical.” There is no allusion to a kind of poetic furor that instills within an artist an unexplainable glimpse of the immutable world of beauty.⁶¹² Instead, it was through the cognitive study of different disciplines that an artist was able to capture and reproduce said beauty.

With knowledge of *forma* made possible through the study of texts, the artist could then better understand nature. However, the relationship of art to nature for Lomazzo was conditioned by a very particular conception of “Nature”:

The ancients, seeing that nature was the demonstratrix of the forms of all created things, and that each thing demonstrated by itself all that which one could wish to see regarding its qualities, imagined that by means of art they could imitate it, so that to the wonder of men one might see that with intellect and industry they could do what nature itself does.⁶¹³

⁶¹⁰ “Tutte queste spezie di forme vengono a genrare nella pittura la rappresentatione universale delle cose divine, celesti, mondane, imaginate, pensate, fatte, infernali e meravigliose. Le quali non si possono sapere e speculare senza grandissimo studio che si faccia nei libri di sacra scrittura, di matematica, di poesia, di ieroglifici, d’istoreie, d’architettura, d’anatomia, e di molte altre scienze et arti, le quali infondono nell’idea di quello che la natura ha fatto pittore l’invenzione, che nella pittura è proprio la esplicatione di tutte le cose che possono cadere sotto l’imaginazione e rappresentatione de le forme sopradette.” Ibid, 209.

⁶¹¹ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 130-131.

⁶¹² Ficino, *Opera*, 2:203. Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 131.

⁶¹³ “Vendono gl’antichi che la natura era dimostratrice di tutte le forme delle cose create, e che ciascuna cosa da sé dimostrava tutto quello che si poteva desiderare di vedere, secondo la qualita sua, s’imaginarono

More than the metaphysical things themselves, nature is the intelligibility of things, and art imitates nature to the extent that it makes that intelligibility more manifest. The universal forms are concordantly placed in their proper context through the “demonstratrix” of nature: it is like “another nature...that makes us to know, in the most beautiful and delightful way, the diversity of forms.”⁶¹⁴ The evaluation is compatible with the Aristotelian notion of nature as an inward principle; and in fact Lomazzo cited Aristotle’s *Politics* when stating that paintings help us learn to recognize things.⁶¹⁵ However, Lomazzo’s Realist tendencies are revealed in his belief that the truest form of things is their most beautiful. As he asserts, “from art we learn that beauty of all things,” or in other words, art assists in the understanding of Truth:

Neither without it [art] can the horseman perfectly know what a well-formed horse is, neither any other beauty whatever which man may see and enjoy, nor pleasant spot, nor beauty of swords, of arms, of clothes, of ornaments, of jewels, of fountains, of cities, of fortresses, and those things which above all nourish and delight our intellect; nor can it know ever by its causes what the true beauty in a woman is, or in a man, which is the image of God Himself, and which contains in itself, as in a compendium, all the proportion and harmony of the world...Neither without it can one ever discern the beautiful from the deformed, but would be in the condition of brute beasts, being led with one eye and guided only by sense...⁶¹⁶

di voler con l’arte imitarla, sì che con meraviglia de gl’uomini si vedesse che tanto eglino con l’ingegno et industria loro potevan fare, quanto fa l’istessa natura.” Lomazzo, *Idea del tempio della pittura*, 55.

⁶¹⁴ “Periochè, rappresentando agli occhi nostril tutte le forme delle cose, di che è ripieno et adorno questo mondo, a guisa d’un altra natura, o almeno come imitatrice con ragione et emula di lei, viene con tante parti a farci conoscere col più bello e dilettevol modo, la diversità di esse forme, c’insegna come ella ne meglio si convengono insieme...” Ibid, 77.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 79.

⁶¹⁶ “Né senza lei conoscerà perfettamente il cavagliero qual sia il ben formato cavallo, né altri il bello di qual si voglia cosa che l’uomo veda e goda, non amenità di lochi, non bellezza di spade, d’armi, di vestiti, d’ornamenti, di gioie, di fonti, di città, di fortezze; e quello di cui sopra tutte le cose si pasce e diletta l’intelletto nostro non conoscerà mai per le sue cause, quale sia la vera bellezza in una donna et in un uomo, ch’è ritratta da quella dell’istesso Iddio e contiene in sè, come compendio, tutta la proporzione e l’armonia del mondo...Né senza lei saprà mai alcuno discernere e separar il bello dal diforme, ma sarà alla condizione degli istessi animali irragionevoli, veggendo con un medesimo occhio, scorto e guidato dal solo senso...” Ibid, 81.

The understanding of *bellezza* is then the understanding of Truth; and thus the power of art is that of being able to define the immutable “ideas” of each form in Nature itself and make them visible to human eyes. Such “truth,” however, should not include the vulgar or misshapen. Appealing to “reason,” artists should represent everything better than it appears in nature, *superar la natura*:

The aim of painting is nothing other than to represent on a plane surface all things in the best and most beautiful way there is; [the painter] must always have as his aim to represent them thus, and to do so he must perceive with his judgment...that quality which in each thing shines above all others, and represent it, so that he comes to show with paints that which he had perfectly thought to express in figures.⁶¹⁷

In so abstracting from each thing its metaphysical essence, the painter is able to demonstrate their eternal perfection (i.e. Truth). The artist is able to produce things “in the best and most beautiful way there is” by way of “his judgment.” The internalization of such a skill was, for Lomazzo, much like that encountered in Michelangelo’s biographies in the *giudizio dell’occhio*. An artist was able to “judge” because of the extensive experience that he had, and the learning he had undertaken. In making the essence of things manifest, the artist does what nature does, but also goes further than nature. The ability to give shape to the invisible, purely intelligible realities is the highest expression of the painter’s insight into the non-perceptible realm which they inhabit:

But what am I to say of representation, by means of which one makes things that do not occur except to the imagination of him who understands their nature and significance? Whence is born great material to exercise the mind and the force of intellect in subtly penetrating such considerations, which are better understood the more learned the artist is

⁶¹⁷ “non essendo il fine della pittura altro che rappresentare in piano tutte le cose nel miglior e più bel modo che sia, hà sempre d’haver questo scopo inanzi agl’occhi, di rappresentarle tali; per il che fare è bisogno che in tutti i corpoi che vuole dipingere scorga col suo giudicio...quello che principalmente sopra tutte le altre sue qualità in ciascun risplende, e così lo rappresenti, accioché venga a mostrar coi colori ciò che perfettamente ha pensato di esprimere in figura.” Ibid, 227-229.

in his understanding of those disciplines which I have said, and will say again, are necessary to him.⁶¹⁸

Important to an understanding of the treatise as a whole is that for Lomazzo, theory is a direct extension of art, not a purely cerebral enterprise. Just as the proper preparation of the material allows a higher beauty to enter into things, just as all the parts of painting find their ideal integration in the lantern of *forma* that allows a higher light to enter the temple, so the temple itself offers to our mind's eye "the true form of painting," *la vera forma della pittura*.⁶¹⁹

* * *

Reformatory Platonism in Comanini's *Figino*

Although other Realist treatments at the end of the century do not reflect Lomazzo's academic zeal, they are nonetheless invaluable for understanding the state of discourse on the Idea as it moved closer to informing a new era in art and artists. The manner in which art theory influenced art's production is multifaceted as well as complex. Often the issues that one encounters in these later treatments reflect not only the concerns of the art community, but reference larger social and religious issues as well. One such familiar literary genre, specially suited for introducing multiple viewpoints, is the dialogue. As discussed when treating Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) and Dolce's *L'Aretino* (1557), dialogues present multiple arguments simultaneously. Therefore, it is only appropriate that we find in Gregorio Comanini's dialogue *Il Figino overo del fine della Pittura* of 1591 a comprehensive overview of art theory in this era that Baxter Hathaway

⁶¹⁸ "Ma dove lascio il rappresentare, che col mezzo di lei si fa, delle cose che non si veggono se non per imaginatione di chi le intende in sua natura et significato? Onde ne nasce sì gran materia d'essercitar la mente e la forza del ingegno, per penetrar sottilmente cotali considerazioni, le quali tanto più vengono intese, quanto che l'artefice si trova più dotato della cognizion di quelle discipline le quali ho detto e son per dir altrove essergli necessarie." Ibid, 81-83.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 153.

aptly described as ‘The Age of Criticism.’⁶²⁰ The work is often passed over in silence when discussing the canon of Cinquecento art theory as the overriding themes of the dialogue seem to lack a dominant position. However, the very inclusion of multiple positions reflects the complex nature of art theory itself with the decline of *Maniera* and the emergence of the Early Baroque style. While there is evidence to support Panofsky’s claim that Comanini’s text is a shift away from Neoplatonic treatments, it is in keeping with Lomazzo, Varchi and Mazzoni on many issues.⁶²¹ Moreover, the shift evident in the dialogue relates two polemical positions that existed simultaneously in art theory and criticism: a more truly Platonic conception of the Idea and the subject/object dilemma, as well as an increasing interest in reformatory notions of art as didactic.

As Doyle-Anderson and Maiorino noted in their recent translation, the two painters in the dialogue, Ambrogio Figino and the Milanese fantasist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-1593), represent the debate between two aesthetic stances- art is to teach and art is to please, respectively.⁶²² The interlocutors of the ensuing debate are the priest, Father Ascanio Martinegno, and the poet, Stefano Guazzo. With this varied group of speakers and viewpoints, and the overriding polemic of pleasing/didactic, it is not surprising to find that Comanini is unclear as to the triumph of one position over another as to the purpose of art. Nevertheless, he is closely aligned with Lomazzo in many respects given his familiarity with the Milanese theorists work.⁶²³ The guise in which Comanini couches his investigation into the nature of imitation, the Idea and beauty are, nevertheless, unique. For instance, Stefano Guazzo, the poet in the dialogue, discusses

⁶²⁰ Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*.

⁶²¹ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 212-213.

⁶²² Gregorio Comanini. *The Figino, or on the purpose of painting: Art Theory in the Late Renaissance*. Ann Doyle-Anderson and Giancarlo Maiorino trans. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), ix.

⁶²³ A poem of Comanini’s even appears at the end of Lomazzo’s *Idea del Tempio della pittura*, attesting to Comanini’s familiarity with the work and the author. *Ibid*, x.

two Platonic terms: the icastic and the fantastic. As Guazzo defines them, icastic imitation (*l'imitazione icastica*) deals with things that exist in nature, while its fantastic counterpart (*l'imitazione fantastica*) invents things that exist only in the mind of the artist. The discussion centers on the Milanese painter Arcimboldo, an *ingegnosissimo pittore fantastico*, who produces forms that “do not exist outside the mind.”⁶²⁴ The poet Guazzo continues that Arcimboldo’s “portrait,” *Vertumnus* of 1591 (**figure 39**) where vegetable forms are composed to resemble a human face, offers an example of both icastic and fantastic imitation. The fruits and flowers are treated realistically, but their use in creating grotesque portraits serves to categorize Arcimboldo as a *pittore fantastico*. The notion of combining utilizing both forms of imitation resembles Giovanni Andrea Gilio’s *pittore misto*, or “mixed painter,” described in *Degli errori de’ pittori* (1564). Gilio describes such a painter as one that may combine “true and false things and at the same time add the fabulous to increase the appeal of the work.”⁶²⁵ *Capricci*, *ghiribizzi* and *grottesche* were thus endorsed by the argument, which borrowed heavily from Dolce’s dialogue, and corresponds to the goal of art as pleasure that Comanini presents.

However, the opposite position of art’s didactic purpose is evenly emphasized in the dialogue by Martinegno, who champions the cause of the moral in art. The sources called into service for the argument were as varied as Plato, Aristotle, Pliny, Mazzoni, and Tasso, Chrysostom, the Bible, the Council of Trent, the Lives of the saints, and contemporary ecclesiastical sources, Cardinal Paleotti and Johannes Molanus.⁶²⁶ The

⁶²⁴ “cose che non hanno l’essere fuor della mente.” Gregorio Comanini. *Il Figino* in: *Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e Contriforma*. Paola Barocchi, ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 3: 257. Such an evaluation was connected to Pythagoreanism by Caswell. Austin B. Caswell. “The Pythagoreanism of Arcimboldo.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39 no. 2 (Winter, 1980), 155-161.

⁶²⁵ “cose vere e finte et a le volte per vaghezza de l’opera v’aggiunge le favolose.” Giovanni Andrea Gilio. *Degli errori de’ pittori* (1564) in: *Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e Contriforma*. Paola Barocchi, ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 2: 89.

⁶²⁶ Comanini, *The Figino or On the Purpose of Painting*, xiii.

Catholic-Reformatory position represented by the priest Martinegno serves to illustrate the growing awareness in art-theoretical circles of the precepts that were circulating in the wake of the Council of Trent. The Archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotti himself is cited as a source in the defense of one position on purpose of art- and certainly his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582) would have been the familiar text to which the priest refers.⁶²⁷ As Boschloo relates, in the treatise Paleotti calls for the didactic functions of art to be the primary purpose for its production and existence. An artist should strive for clarity and accuracy of subject to achieve a desired effect on the viewer, and to stimulate them to piety.⁶²⁸ The same goal is highlighted in the dialogue relating to the value of imitatio, where Figino and the priest Martinegno continue the debate over the nature and metaphysical station of the Idea in relation to mimesis. While the poet Guazzo argues that the concepts of religion can be dressed with conceits and that the poetic art equals the artifice of the most noble poets “among the infidels,” Martinegno argues for the didactic over the pleasurable, in his reformatory stance. Whereas the priest admits that “all sublunary things are shadows, fleeting and impermanent,” he does not yield to the notion that representing their perfection is the greatest aim. To reinforce his point, Martinegno cites Plato:

The *Timaeus* concludes that above these soiled and imperfect forms of matter there are others, pure and separate and whole, which are the ideas. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates speaks of these forms, of which the natural ones are only images and simulacra. Now, Guazzo, join me in considering the nature and effect of these shadows and these images; and, since they were created because of men, let’s see what service they perform. The sky is always mobile, always rapid, revolving around us. Now it illuminates the whole world with a single flash, now it flames with thousands and thousands of lights. Doesn’t the sky delight us and fill us with the greatest pleasure, however many times we look attentively at it and contemplate its

⁶²⁷ Gabriele Paleotti. “Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane, divisio in cinque libri” in: *Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e Contriforma*. Paola Barocchi, ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 2: 177-509.

⁶²⁸ Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna*.

[visual] appeal? Nevertheless, its usefulness surpasses its beauty, benefiting us much more with its light and motion than it delights us with its displays.⁶²⁹

The concept that something's usefulness should surpass its beauty relates the priest's argument to poetical theory. For in Giacomo Mazzoni's (1548-1598) *Della Difesa della Comedia di Dante* (1587), the necessity of proper imitation is noted with regards to Plato's poetic theory. In his defense of Dante, he related the correlative principle to Plato in that imitation is correct and proper when it represents things exactly as they are, and it is an error of the poetic art to imitate them in any other way or with dissimilarity.⁶³⁰

However, such didactic concerns were not necessarily given primacy throughout Comanini's dialogue; for while he announces his awareness of the reformatory stance, he does not denounce current artistic practice. On the contrary, his Martinegno encourages the use of sophisticated (literary) metaphors and elaborate allegories in art to increase the viewer's pleasure in experiencing them. The assumption that the aesthetic principles for literature and painting are identical appears early in the dialogue and remains consistent throughout. In keeping with this association, Comanini structures a step-by-step comparison of poetry and painting around Aristotle's discussion of the parts of tragedy, presenting specific elements of one art as exact equivalents of another: metre in poetry, for example, corresponds to (calculated) proportion in painting; the use of antonyms in diction corresponds to the use of contrasting figures in painting,

⁶²⁹ Comanini, *The Figino or On the Purpose of Painting*, 81.

⁶³⁰ A further restriction upon the imitative arts is introduced at a later point in the discussion, and this is the unity of the object that leads to the unity of the work: "...the proper nature and the excellence of the Image [idolo] which is the object of the imitative arts is that it should be of one thing and only one thing; this is not true either of the Work or of the Idea...The Image which is their object will be all the more worthy and excellent as it represents better that one thing in imitation of which it is made...They limit themselves only to the representation of the unity of the thing which they wish to resemble." "la propria natura, e l'eccellenza dell'idolo oggetto dell'arti imitanti è ch'egli sia d'una cosa sola d'uno, il che non auuiene dell'opera, ne dell'idea...l'Idolo oggetto loro sia tanto più degno, e più eccellente, quanto che rappresenterà meglio quella cosa sola a imitatione della quale è fatto...si restringono solamente a rappresentare l'unità della cosa, che vogliono rassomigliare." Mazzoni, *Della Difesa*, 644-645. Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 51.

and so on.⁶³¹ As he writes, discussing the foreshortening of the figures in Michelangelo's

Last Judgment:

Here then is how symmetry in the art of painting corresponds to the measure of feet in the art of versification. The formation of figures of nine, of eight, of seven face lengths, and of five and of four as well in the representation of children, is nothing other than a game that painting plays along with poetry, which augments and diminishes the number and metre of the feet in the verses, according to the loftiness or lowness of the subjects of which it sings...⁶³²

The appropriate proportions of each figure represented in the fresco that so influenced the later *Maniera* are determined, not by their veristic equivalents in nature, but by their station- in poetical terms, their genre. The capricious manner in which the human form is approached is thus validated by the critical theory of another discipline: poetry. Critics such as Gabriele Zinano in his *Discorso della tragedia* of 1590 argued that poets should use invented plots for tragedies to increase the emotional effect on the reader. For in the evaluation the "art" inherent in anything produced was primarily the result of invention: "If art cannot move by itself, it is imperfect, but if it is perfect and can move by itself, why search further for history and truth? If they would say that the effect should come from both, we would answer that even if this were true the movement coming from art should be the one more highly praised, and that of the feigned should be the one more praised because it comes more from art."⁶³³ Thus what is valued by Comanini, as well as the Platonic theorists noted above, in such a system is not a representation/subject's veracity, but rather its ability to please, which often necessitates the use of the artificial.

⁶³¹ Comanini, *The Figino or On the Purpose of Painting*, xvi.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶³³ Gabriele Zinano. *Discorso della tragedia*. (1590), 164. Quoted in: Baxter, *The Age of Criticism*, 186. The conception found several critical supporters at the turn of the century. In Faustino Summo's *Discorsi poetici* of 1600, the critic related that poetry is more philosophic than history in that: "the former being more concerned with universals and the latter with particulars...By universal we mean only saying or doing that which is suitable to each thing." Faustino Summo. *Discorsi poetici*. (Padua, 1600), 41-42. Quoted in: Baxter, *The Age of Criticism*, 188.

The admiration accorded to the artificial in painting and literature is highlighted by the slight alteration Comanini makes to Castiglione's well-known term *sprezzatura*. In discussing the use of antithesis in poetry, Comanini advocates a certain *sprezzatura artificiosa*, the stylistic consequences he then applies to painting as well.⁶³⁴ In *The Courtier*, *sprezzatura* is the quality that allows the Courtier "to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it."⁶³⁵ Castiglione's neologism representing a "graceful nonchalance" incorporates an array of different qualities ranging from grace to virtue to excellence of conduct and uniqueness of style, all expressed in such a way as to appear utterly spontaneous. In all its manifestations, *sprezzatura* contrasts with the mannered or the obviously artificial. By adding the qualifying *artificiosa*, Comanini shifts the emphasis of Castiglione's term away from the concealment of art to a celebration of "artfulness" itself. It should be noted that he is quick to add that a "noble negligence" should always be preferable to the manifestly forced; necessitating that even artfulness should appear "natural," as suggested by Castiglione's original use of the term. But Comanini's combination of *sprezzatura* with the seemingly contradictory *artificiosa* underscores the extent to which the obviously artful and the capricious have become part of a changing social and artistic aesthetic.⁶³⁶

It is not surprising then to find Comanini noting the quality of *giudizio dell'occhio* possessed by Michelangelo when discussing proportion, denying the necessity of rules in art to achieve the requisite artfulness: "It is true that quite often it is necessary for the painter at work to have (as Michelangelo said) a compass within his eyes, since he cannot

⁶³⁴ In discussing poetry, Comanini notes how to attain a desired *contrapposto*, the poet often employs a type of "artful carelessness." Comanini, *The Figino or On the Purpose of Painting*, 97.

⁶³⁵ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Singleton trans., 43.

⁶³⁶ Comanini, *The Figino or On the Purpose of Painting*, xvi.

easily observe the proper measure with the compass when he makes a foreshortened figure. Albrecht Dürer has shown how to foreshorten with lines, but this rule of his is not employed very often and is of little or no use to the working artist.”⁶³⁷ Like Zuccaro, Comanini dismisses the necessity of mathematics for an artist’s repertoire, but for entirely different reasons. The universal and quantifying capacity was noted as a necessity for attaining universal Neoplatonic beauty; and accordingly, Vincenzo Danti, who rejected the schematization of the human form, noted the validity of the “scientific” approach, as well as Lomazzo, who had repeated the importance of Dürer’s proportions and mathematical ratios. On the other hand, Comanini’s Realist position required an artistic flexibility in creation that would be hampered by such stringent restrictions imposed by a universal *vera regola*. If, for instance, Michelangelo had retained a canon of proportions when painting the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, the poetic relationship of each form to their station in the overall composition and metaphysical hierarchy would have been compromised. Only through artistic license and capriciousness can the truly “pleasing” be brought to bear.

Furthermore, the rejection of mathematical precepts in art in the dialogue relate to the understanding of the order of transmission of the Platonic Idea of its author. In Comanini we find that his evaluation of metaphysical hierarchies is largely derived from Mazzoni’s defense of Dante (1587). In the treatise there is an important precedent for Comanini as Mazzoni argued that the purpose of poetic mimesis and invention was not to reproduce an actual object, but the creation of an ideal.⁶³⁸ The purpose of poetry, and thus the ideal, is to “move the reader to pleasure and delight in the perception of the believable

⁶³⁷ Ibid, 96-97.

⁶³⁸ Vincent Leicht, ed. “Giacopo Mazzoni.” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 300.

images.”⁶³⁹ The notion that what is beautiful and persuasive is more valid and sought after than what is “true” forms the foundation of Comanini’s purpose of painting as well. On the creation of such an ideal persuasion, and the manner in which the universe is organized, Mazzoni writes: “And since on this topic I find no doctrine more extensive or sound than that of Plato in the tenth book of the *Republic*...I say that there are three types of objects that can be executed in three different ways; consequently, they constitute three kinds of art in the first category. The objects are idea, work, and image...Therefore there are three modes of execution for the objects of the arts: that is, the conceptual, the practical, and the imitative.”⁶⁴⁰ At the same time, Comanini summarizes in his dialogue where Guazzo the poet explains the order of ascendance of the Idea: “That is, the object of the first will be the idea, of the second, the product; and of the third, what Plato calls the *idolo*, that is, the image and simulacrum that originates in the skill, fantasy, and intellect of man, which his will and choice put into operation. Mazzoni treats the matter at length in the introduction to his defence of Dante.”⁶⁴¹ Contrary to the tripartite Moderate-Nominalist supposition summarized by Dante in his *Divina Commedia*, whereby “Art is found on three levels: in the mind of the artist, in the tool, and in the material that receives its form from art,” the more purely Platonic Comanini argues for the separation of the Idea from the *idolo*, and thus the origination of it in the artist’s *fantasia*.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ “E perchè in questo soggetto io non trovo dottrina più soda di quella, che ci ha insegnato Platone nel X. Della Republica...dico che tre sono gli oggetti c’hanno differente maniera d’artificiabile, le quali per conseguente costituiscono tre specie d’arti nella prima divisione. Sono gli oggetti idea, opera, et idolo...I modi adunque degli oggetti dell’arti, in quanto che sono diversamente artificiabili, saranno tre, cioè il considerabile, il fattibile e l’imitabile.” Allan H. Gilbert, ed. *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*. (New York: American Book Co., 1940), 358-403. Also see: Giacompo Mazzoni. *On the Defense of the Comedy of Dante*. Robert L. Montgomery trans. (Tallahassee: University of Florida, 1983).

⁶⁴¹ Comanini, *The Figino or On the Purpose of Painting*, 13. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 324-325.

⁶⁴² Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia, Paradisio*, 13:52-69.

Return to the Peripatetic Idea and Armenini

The critical and theoretical positions of the Idea took a bold *volte-face* in the closing decades of the Cinquecento. While multiple examples in poetic theory served to illustrate the overwhelming preference for Platonic and Neoplatonic schemata, often contradictory treatments served to illustrate the simultaneous utilization of the Aristotle.⁶⁴³ For instance, in Francesco Patrizi's *Parere in Difesa dell'Ariosto* (1585)- already noted for its violent anti-Aristotelian stance- we find that while Nominalist precepts are adamantly opposed, the author still holds up to scorn the doctrine of the "perfect exemplar." Although he was usually a Platonist, Patrizi believed that the conceiving of model characters as Ideas of moral behavior was precisely what Aristotle had intended.⁶⁴⁴ A similar, but more radical transition can be found in the views of Torquato Tasso (1546-1595), which metamorphosed from Neoplatonic to Neo-Scholastic, or as Jonathan Unglaub noted, Neo-Aristotelian.⁶⁴⁵ In the *Discorsi del Poema Eroico* (1594), Tasso replaces the preference for invention apparent in his earlier *Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica* (1561-2) with a greater emphasis on historical truthfulness, a shift that also characterizes his most admired work, *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581). On the point of icastic/fantastic imitation, Tasso took issue with contemporary theorists like Comanini, stating: "Thus the poet as maker of images is

⁶⁴³ Aristotle had, in fact, remained the keystone for Renaissance educational institutions. Charles B. Schmitt. *Aristotle and the Renaissance*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). Also see: Charles B. Schmitt. *The Aristotelian Tradition and Renaissance Universities*. (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984).

⁶⁴⁴ Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 150.

⁶⁴⁵ Richard B. Cody. *The Landscape of the Mind: pastoralism and platonic theory in Tasso's Aminta and Shakespeare's early comedies*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Jonathan Unglaub. *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

not a phantastic imitator, as Mazzoni held, and after him Don Gregorio Comanini...⁶⁴⁶

After disagreeing with Mazzoni and Comanini, Tasso insisted that poetic imitation must be icastic rather than fantastic: “To prove that the poet’s subject is rather the true than the false we can offer yet another argument...”⁶⁴⁷

A similar reinterpretation can be found among Nominalist art theorists contemporaneous to the many Neoplatonic cited. Just as the Scholastic influence of Thomism had shaped the understanding of the Idea in the art theory of the Quattrocento in figures such as Alberti, the complex relationships between conception, cognition and transference were to be answered by consulting that same tradition; though not the same interpretation of that tradition *en fin de siècle*. The oscillation between Neoplatonism and Platonism found in Lomazzo and Comanini’s treatises found their counterpart in the Peripatetic and Neo-Scholastic traditions, represented here by Armenini and Zuccaro. Both men were associated with the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, and thus were well-informed on current artistic discourse in Rome. The city itself had re-emerged as the *caput mundi* for art in patronage and academics following the renewal by Sixtus V begun in 1585. It was in this highly academic environment that Giovanni Battista Armenini garnered much of his theoretical information. Nevertheless, it was he who had the more tenuous association with the Accademia, being less academically minded than Zuccaro. His *De’ veri precetti della pittura* of 1586 is likewise often cited as a manual for beginners written by a failed painter.⁶⁴⁸ The pragmatic Armenini, as such, has generally

⁶⁴⁶ “Dunque il poeta factor dell’imagini non è fantastico imitatore, come parve al Mazzone, e dopo lui don Gregorio Comanino...” Tasso, *Discorsi*, 103. Quoted in: Torquato Tasso. *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*. Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 32.

⁶⁴⁷ “Con un’altra ragione possiam provare ch’l sogetto del poeta sia più tosto il vero ch’l falso...” Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, 33.

⁶⁴⁸ As in the case of Sohm’s evaluation, many scholars have used the critical fortunes of authors to evaluate their motivations and veracity. Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 8.

been passed over in silence regarding the complex art-theoretical debates, which are seemingly better represented in the ponderous treatises of Lomazzo and Zuccaro. Nevertheless- and important for intellectual history and art history- Armenini's peripatetic approach reflected a larger shift in art theory and art. In fact, the proximity of the publication date of Armenini's treatise to the founding of the Carracci Academy (1583) not only illustrates the adoption of Nominalist precepts by artists and theorists alike, but also points to a larger shift in the movement that was taking place in facilitating the emergence and appreciation of the newly formed Baroque style.

The evaluation of Armenini's treatise as primarily interested in practical aspects of the artist's craft ensures that it is referenced (as it is in Chapter Two) when discussions of education and of preferred practice are in question. But the theoretical positions taken in the work are intimately related to Armenini's views on ideal practice; and thus illustrate the exhortations to sensitivity to both in art, which are central to the anti-*Maniera* movement. The notion and centrality of *disegno* to art production, as Armenini relates it underlines a knowledge of and sensitivity to past treatments. In defining the term, he writes:

Hence, some have said that *disegno* must be speculation born in the mind and an artful intellectual zeal put into action in accordance with the beautiful *Idea*. Others say instead that *disegno* is the science of the fine and regular proportions of everything seen, with an orderly composition in which gracefulness is created by appropriate measures, which may be attained through study and through the divine grace of good reasoning born of and nourished by study.⁶⁴⁹

The polemical approach to *disegno* as either "speculative," born in the mind, and through its Neoplatonic origination, *L'Idea della Bellezza* intangibly results (Lomazzo-Comanini), or as the result of quantifiable proportions (Dürer) arrived at through years of

⁶⁴⁹ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 109-110.

careful study and good judgment (Vasari), is carefully weighed against other considerations.

We grant all of these opinions and considerations and take them as matters of little importance in regard to the subject under discussion, for the following only will suffice for us: that *disegno* be as a living light of a fine mind and that it be of such strength and so universally necessary that he who is wholly lacking in it would be like a blind man, in that it is the visual eye that causes our minds to know what is decent and graceful in the world.⁶⁵⁰

The primacy of one position over the other is seemingly avoided, as Armenini stresses the “guiding” potential of *disegno*, instead of its inseparable connection to the Idea itself.

As a guiding principle, Armenini continues later in his discussion to expand on the relationship of *disegno* to the art-theoretical concept of the Idea in defining it as:

Idea, among painters, is nothing else but the apparent form of the created objects, conceived in the mind of the painter, whereby the *idea* of man is that of the universal man in whose image all men are made. Others have called *ideas* the similitudes of the things made by God, since before He created, He sculpted in His mind the things He wished to create, and depicted them. Thus, one can say the *idea* of the painter is that image which he first forms and sculpts in his mind of that thing which he wishes either to draw or paint and which, immediately upon being given the subject, is born.⁶⁵¹

The order of transmission of the concept, which is later informed by *disegno*, is reminiscent of the Nominalist position set forth by Dante, and especially Aquinas, who used the metaphor of the architect to describe the manner in which God created the universe.⁶⁵² The conception that is formulated in the mind is not necessarily that of the world of universal beauty, or even that which will form the “object.” The concept for Armenini is conceived tentative and incomplete. Just as God had in creating the world, once conceived in the mind, the “idea” must be “sculpted,” rearranged, modified. It is

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid, 203-204.

⁶⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1:15.1. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 40-41.

intimately connected and guided by *disegno*, and thus emerges gradually and empirically from repeated sketches. Armenini illustrates the radical difference in understanding from the immutable form that can be discovered by the poet-artist in Neoplatonic conceptions, in a passage that discusses the fundamental principles of painting. Here he instructs that:

For your use, *disegno* will be a prearrangement considered for all those things which first have to be known in order to conduct the work satisfactorily to its end. This prearrangement, imagined first in the mind and conceived by the intellect and by judgment, is finally expressed in various ways on small areas of paper with lines, lights and shadows. All the artifices first fabricated in the *Idea* are revealed while the artist is composing and are expressed well; these are the attempted and necessary inventions and subjects serving as an almost infallible guide. We shall say, then, that *disegno* is all that which is expressed in similar ways, whether on small or large papers, with lines or shaded in whatever color or material, provided there is no variety of colors other than the aforesaid light and shadow.⁶⁵³

The Idea comes to fruition when filtered through discourse and judgment. It must be patiently sought and consciously rationalized. In fact, young painters that rely solely on their Idea without practice will fail. “None of you must ever presume to possess sufficiently all these difficult skills and techniques through genius alone. You must always compare your work either with the natural model or with a model in relief. You must never rely on your ability alone...”⁶⁵⁴ The forceful exhortation returns to Early Renaissance theorists like Alberti who warned against the pursuit of beauty at the expense of study from nature.

But in order not to lose time and effort, one should avoid the custom of some fools who, boasting their own talent, seek to win a painter’s fame by their own resources alone, completely without a natural model which they would follow with eye and mind. These never learn to paint well, but they habituate themselves to their own errors. That idea of beauty, which even the most experienced mind can hardly perceive, escapes the inexperienced one.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵³ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 15.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 292.

⁶⁵⁵ Alberti, *On Painting*, 93.

With such an emphasis on the study involved in preparing for a painting, Armenini distances himself from such concepts as the *furor poeticus*. In fact the rhetorical method proposed by Cicero is noted as he sets out the “excellent modern painters” that a student should study and benefit from; including Raphael, Michelangelo, Giulio Romano, and Polidoro. Nevertheless, the first painter listed, “Among the best was the very excellent Leonardo da Vinci.” For as Armenini encourages: “...one can say that he alone devoted himself more to the way of Zeuxis and Apelles than any other man of his time. Before setting himself to create for any work he had to undertake, Leonardo investigated by himself all the appropriate and natural effects of every figure and other thing in conformity with his idea.”⁶⁵⁶ Leonardo worked in the manner described and championed by Vasari’s definition of *disegno*, Armenini intimates, as careful study of nature and preparatory studies were to be made, which will only secondarily be guided by the Idea the artist has formed in his mind. It is not surprising to find once again that Armenini is relating art-theoretical precepts that were familiar to theorists in the Quattrocento, for Alberti had advocated the Ciceronian method for rhetorical invention encapsulated in the story of Zeuxis.⁶⁵⁷ In fact, a year before Armenini published his treatise we find the passage in Pliny quoted with a few alterations by Romano Alberti in his *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura*, reinforcing the importance of particular observations over universal abstractions.⁶⁵⁸ The ideal process for creating a work of art for Armenini was then a return to the classical mimetic, and Zeuxinian models. An artist was to spend much time preparing a work after close study of nature, and use the artistic Idea to guide, rather than

⁶⁵⁶ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 146-148.

⁶⁵⁷ Alberti, *On Painting*, 93.

⁶⁵⁸ Romano Alberti. *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura*. (Rome, 1585), 18.

dictate an artificial aesthetic. As Armenini wrote, “This is truly an excellent procedure for doing one’s works, but it is no longer used in our times.”⁶⁵⁹ The practice of making careful preparatory studies from life, so ubiquitous in the High Renaissance, had been replaced by the artificial elaborations of the *Maniera*. Its recommendation to practicing artists in the 1580s was already being followed in Bologna Reform movement in the Carracci Academy, and soon the Zeuxinian model in a Nominalist formulation would affect the stylistic evolution of several generations of painters.

* * *

The Neo-Scholastic Idea and Zuccaro

In a lecture presented to the Accademia di San Luca in Rome on January 17, 1594, Federico Zuccaro (ca.1542-1609) criticized Armenini and his definition of *disegno*. The condemnation of the definition set forth by the Peripatetic author in his 1586 treatise centered on the lack of distinction in the processes involved in the formation and execution of the Idea in *disegno*.⁶⁶⁰ Whereas Armenini conceived of the conception and transmission of the Idea in a generically Peripatetic manner, Zuccaro would thoroughly and critically hold up the process to scrutiny utilizing the Thomism of a Neo-Scholastic approach. Such an approach yielded much more complex, hierarchical distinctions in the process of transmission than is found in Armenini. Nevertheless, Armenini’s belief that *disegno* was speculation born in the mind and put into a material act according to *la buona Idea*, corresponded with Zuccaro’s more theoretical divisions in the transmission of the concept from the mind to the hand that would be the organizing principle in his own

⁶⁵⁹ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 146.

⁶⁶⁰ Zuccaro had little regard for him, referring to him as a certain *Armelino*: “ch’ha voluto anch’esso Scrivere della pittura.” Romano Alberti. *Origine, et progresso dell’Accademia del disegno de pittori, scultori e architetti di Roma*. (Pavia, 1604), 78. Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 303.

treatment, *Idea dei Pittori, scultori ed architetti*. Though it was not to be published until 1607, while he was on an extended trip through Northern Italy, the theoretical ideas presented in Zuccaro's *Idea* were formed in the later Cinquecento.⁶⁶¹ He had spent time in Florence in 1565, and again in the mid-1570s, where he was active in the Accademia del Disegno.⁶⁶² The theoretical debates witnessed at the Academy would influence his later work with Vasari providing the necessary theoretical starting place for his discussion on *disegno*.⁶⁶³ The lessons learned early on in Florence would prove useful as Zuccaro would later serve as the first *Principe* of the Accademia di San Luca for two years after its founding in 1593, where lectures demonstrate that his academic notions were already highly developed.⁶⁶⁴

The *Idea dei Pittori, scultori ed architetti* is often discussed as the last truly 'Mannerist' treatise to be published. Panofsky, accordingly, referred to it as the "swan song" of Italian Mannerism. The highly Scholastic manner in which Zuccaro approached the *Idea* concept is largely responsible for such an evaluation; as well as the nature of the author's artistic production. But complexity alone does not associate Zuccaro with Lomazzo's brand of Neoplatonism. In fact, the rigorous investigation into the order of transmission of the *Idea*, as it is located in *disegno*, utilizes many of the Nominalist principles established by Thomas Aquinas. Such ideas that espoused the necessity and validity of the senses in the formation of the art-theoretical concept were central to the theories that inspired and responded to the newly formed style that was being practiced at

⁶⁶¹ Sergio Rossi. "Idea e accademia: Studio sulle teorie artistiche di Federico Zuccaro." *Storia dell'arte* 20 (1974), 37-56.

⁶⁶² Zuccaro received his early artistic training in Marches, near Urbino, where he was born. He followed his older brother Taddeo to Rome at an early age. Detlef Heikamp. "Federico Zuccari a Firenze, 1575-1579." *Paragone* no.205 (1966), 44-68; no.207 (1967), 3-34. Zygmunt Wazbinski. "Lo Studio: La scuola fiorentina di Federico Zuccari." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes Florenz* 29 (1985), 275-346.

⁶⁶³ Wolfgang Kemp. "Disegno: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Begriffs zwischen 1547 und 1607." *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 19 (1974), 219-40.

⁶⁶⁴ Romano Alberti and Federico Zuccaro. *Origine e progresso dell'Accademia del Disegno di Roma* (Pavia, 1604). Reprinted in: Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d'Arte di Federico Zuccaro*.

the turn of the century, though not as intently in the author's own artistic production. To investigate the origin and validity of this Idea, Zuccaro first distinguished between the two varieties of creation manifested in the separate notions of *disegno interno* and *disegno esterno*. On this basis, the whole treatise is divided into two books: the first discusses the Idea as a *forma spirituale* created and used by the intellect to understand and categorize all things in nature clearly and distinctly; the second discusses the expression of this *forma spirituale* in the various manifestations in art, whether that be painting, sculpture or architecture.⁶⁶⁵

Zuccaro proceeds from the premise that what is to be manifested in a work of art must first be present in the mind of the artist. This mental notion is designated as *disegno interno* for it is nothing other than “a concept formed in our mind, that enables us explicitly and clearly to recognize any thing, whatever it may be, and to operate practically in conformance with the thing intended.”⁶⁶⁶ The concept is described by a variety of terms throughout the treatise, such as *concetto*, *idea*, *esemplare*, and *intentione*.⁶⁶⁷ The choice to utilize the term *disegno* as the all-inclusive term is derived from Vasari, who also understood it as multifaceted in its inception and application. In fact, Zuccaro frames his argument as an artist in that he “speaks as a painter to painters, sculptors and architects,” just as Vasari had in his ‘Technical Introduction’ to the *Lives*. As such, he deliberately avoids the “theological” expression “idea” throughout, believing instead that *disegno* is philologically and theoretically more applicable to the formation and transmission of artistic ideas.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁵ Federico Zuccaro, *Idea dei Pittori, scultori ed architetti*, (1607), Bk 1, Ch. 3. 38ff. Reprinted in: Deflef Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d'arte di Federico Zuccaro*. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1961).

⁶⁶⁶ Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d'Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 152.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 152.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 152.

The internally formed *disegno interno* is further separated by Zuccaro into three kinds that correspond to a threefold hierarchy of metaphysical being established by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*. The most perfect and complete is God's *disegno*, which is a single, all-encompassing Idea of the whole of creation; the product of a single act of introspection, which is at the same time an act of creation.⁶⁶⁹ Therefore, God also creates both internally and externally. When the sense-perceptible world was formed, there was also created simultaneously "many other immaterial forms representing all those things, both generally and particularly." These "ideas" were infused into the minds of the angels, who, having no capacity for sense perception themselves, required a knowledge of earthly objects which they were to interact with.⁶⁷⁰ Conversely, God bequeathed the power of *disegno* to humanity so that we could be like Him, and would then have the capacity to create in ourselves a "new world." We would then resemble God when we exercise this capacity for immaterial cognition.⁶⁷¹ In fact, as Elizabeth Cropper noted, at the end of the treatise, Zuccaro interprets the term *disegno interno* itself as an etymological symbol of man's similarity to God.⁶⁷² The same notion was quoted earlier in Aquinas' understanding of the process of transmission. Of course, human *disegno* is less perfect than God's, because it is not unitary and self-generated but instead is derived from the multiplicity of sense experience. Nevertheless, *disegno* is God's "divine spark" in humanity, a *scintilla della divinità* (a part of God's own

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, 156-158, 161-162.

⁶⁷⁰ "così concreò tant'altre forme forme spiritulai rappresentanti tutte queste cose in generale, & in particolare; & queste poi infuse, & quasi inestò ne gli'intelletti angelici..." Ibid, 159.

⁶⁷¹ "Così havendo per sua bontà...create l'huomo ad imagine, & similitudine sua ...volle anco dargli facultà di formare in se medesimo un Disegno interno intellettivo, accioche col mezo di questo conoscesse tutte le creature, & formasse in se stesso un nuovo Mondo, & internamente in essere spirituale havesse, & godesse quello, ch'esternamente in essere naturale gode, & d'òmina; & in oltre accioche con questo Disegno quasi imitando Dio, & emulando la Natura potesse produrre infinite cose artificiali simili alle naturali, & col mezo della Pittura, & della Scoltura, farci vedere in terra novi Paradisi." Ibid, 162.

⁶⁷² Elizabeth Cropper. "L'Idea di Bellori," 1: 82.

substance); and it is evidence of the Godlike nature of man, since it enables him “to bring forth a new intelligible cosmos” and “to compete with Nature.”⁶⁷³ As Zuccari wrote,

I say, therefore, that God, all-bountiful and almighty, and first cause of everything, in order to act externally necessarily looks at and regards the internal Design in which He perceives all things that He has made, is making, will make, and can make with a single glance; and that this concept by which He internally purposes, is of the same substance as He, because in Him there is not nor can there be any accident, He being the purest act. In a similar way, because of His goodness and to show in a small replica the excellence of His divine art, having created man in His image and likeness with respect to the soul, endowing it with an immaterial, incorruptible substance and the powers of thinking and willing, with which man could rise above and command all the other creatures of the World except the Angel and be almost a second God, He wished to grant him the ability to form in himself an inner intellectual Design; so that by means of it he could know all the creatures and could form in himself a new world, and internally could have and enjoy in a spiritual state that which externally he enjoys and commands in a natural state; and, moreover, so that with this Design, almost imitating God and vying with Nature, he could produce an infinite number of artificial things resembling natural ones, and by means of painting and sculpture make new Paradises visible on Earth. But in forming this internal Design man is very different from God: God has one single Design, most perfect in substance, containing all things, which is not different from Him, because all that which is in God is God; man, however, forms within himself various designs corresponding to the different things he conceives. Therefore his Design is an accident, and moreover it has a lower origin, namely in the senses, as we shall discuss in the following.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷³ “Questo Disegno interno humano si chiama....Scintilla della Divinità, cioè parte della sustanza Divina...” Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d'Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 162.

⁶⁷⁴ “Dico adunque, che siccome Iddio ottimo, massimo e suprema causa d’ogni cosa per operare al di fuori necessariamente mira e risguarda l’interno Disegno, nel quale conosce tutte le cose fatte, che fa, che farà, e che può fare con un solo sguardo, e questo concetto, entro al quale intende, è l’istesso in sostanza con lui, posciachè in lui non è, nè può essere accidente, essendo atto purissimo; così avendo per sua bontà, e per mostrare in picciolo ritratto l’eccellenza dell’arte sua divina, creato l’uomo ad imagine e similtudine sua, quanto all’anima, dandogli sostanza immateriale, incorruttibile, e le potenze dell’intelletto e della volontà, con le quali superasse e signoreggiasse tutte le altre creature del Mondo eccetto l’Angelo e fosse quasi un secondo Dio, volle anco darli facoltà di formare in se medesimo un Disegno interno intellettivo, acciocchè col mezzo di questo conoscesse tutte le creature e formasse in se stesso un nuovo Mondo, e internamente in essere spirituale avesse e godesse quello che esternamente in essere naturale gode e domina; ed inoltre acciocchè con questo Disegno, quasi imitando Dio ed emulando la Natura, potesse produrre infinite cose artificiali simili alle naturali, e col mezzo della pittura e della Scultura farci vedere in Terra nuovi Paradisi. Ma l’uomo nel formare questo Disegno interno è molto differente da Dio, perchè ove Iddio ha un sol Disegno, quanto alla sostanza compitissimo, comprensivo di tutte le cose, il quale non è differente da lui, perchè tutto ciò, che è in Dio è Dio, l’uomo in se stesso forma varî disegni, secondo che sono distinte le cose da lui intese, e però il suo Disegno è accidente; oltre il che ha l’origine sua bassa, cioè dai sensi, come diremo poi.” Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d'Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 162-163.

The basis for this argument and tripartite hierarchy was the conception, most closely associated with Aristotle, that all thought depends on mental images, or “phantasms,” and that because these inward representations form the raw material of all higher mental processes. Furthermore, these “images” condition all aspects of human thought and action. As had been noted by earlier commentaries in the Peripatetic tradition, such as Girolamo Fracastoro’s *Turrius, sive de intellectione* of 1555, it was the active intellect that created universals. “They allow the faculty to abstract from the sensible simulacra of things (which they call *phantasmata*) the simple universal itself and the pure idea, which represents neither the one nor the other but essential nature itself, denuded of all those things that had had connections with singularities, and this they now call intelligible which formerly would have been sensible.”⁶⁷⁵ Humans are incapable of perceiving abstract phantasms in an abstract intellect, but rather only the particular ideas in the minds. As such, mankind is capable of forming a mental representation, or *disegno interno*, but it must be distinguished from the object in the world to which it refers:

I say that, if a large mirror of very fine crystal is put in a room adorned with excellent pictures and marvelous statues, and I fix my eye on it, [this mirror] forms the limit of my gaze, but also an object representing clearly and distinctly all those paintings and statues, in which is represented to my eyes not those paintings and sculptures in their materials and substances, but only their immaterial forms. Those who wish to understand what *disegno* in general is, must philosophize in this way, that is, imagine how the mirror is at once the limit and the object of the gaze and something in which things appear. *Disegno* is the limit and object known, within which the intellect knows the things represented to it.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁵ Girolamo Fracastoro. *Turrius, sive de intellectione*, in *Opera omnia*. (Venice, 1555), 175v. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 322.

⁶⁷⁶ “Io dico, che se si pone uno specchio di finissimo cristallo, che sia grande in una sala ornata di pitture eccellenti, & di statue maravigliose, chiara cosa è, che fissando io l’occhio in quello non pure egli è termine del mio vedere; ma anco oggetto rappresentante chiaramente, & distintamente tutte quelle pitture, e statue a gli occhi miei; & pure in quello non sono quelle pitture, e quelle statue secondo la materia, & sostanza loro; ma solo in lui rilucono col mezo delle lor forme spirituali. Così devono filosofar quelli, che vogliono intendere che cosa sia Disegno in generale; ciò è immaginarsi che si come lo specchio è termine et oggetto del vedere, è in lui si veggon le cose risplendere. Così il disegno è termine et oggetto conosciuto, entro al quale conosce l’intelletto le cose in lui rappresentate.” Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d’Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 154-155.

In another Peripatetic explanation of the metaphysical mirror, Pompeo de la Barba in his *Spositione d'un sonetto platonico* published in 1554, set forth that sense-perception must be filtered through the eye and the spirit. The spirit is the mirror in which the soul sees the reflection of bodily forms. In turn the soul has access to spirit, “in which, as in looking in a mirror, it receives the image the spirit presents to it and passes judgments on the exterior bodies which shine in spirit as in a mirror and represent their images; in this manner the soul creates in itself and alters these images and, what is more, deals with those that do not exist in the spirit.”⁶⁷⁷

The way in which Zuccaro and other Neo-Scholastic and Peripatetic theorists discuss how humans are capable of perceiving these phantasms- as the metaphysical mirror attests- was, ironically, paved by a Platonist. In Francesco de’Vieri’s *In qual parte del cielo, in qual idea* of 1580- another lecture delivered in Florence on the subject of a Petrarchan sonnet- the understanding of the term “fantasy” was enrolled exclusively in the area of sense particularity. The doctrine of the passage is taken from the *Republic*, but deviates from Realist evaluations:

It is indeed true that the artificer’s models, or the Ideas, which Plato and Aristotle concede to God and in some degree to the Heavens, also differ among themselves, for the idea of the artificer is first taken from things well made by others, as also are the idea and the image reflected in the mirror furnished by things, and they are the cause of the things that are made; consequently, the idea which exists in the artificer is not sempiternal since the artificer does not last forever, but that truly which exists in God in the Heavens, the incorruptible and eternal substances. Finally, the idea or cognizance that the artificer has of the thing has two modes of being, one that is universal in the possible intellect and the other particular in the internal sense. The painter, for example, has in his intellect the idea in universal form of a most gracious woman, and in his fantasy one of Helen, of Laura, or of some similar individual.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁷ Pompeo de la Barba. *Spositione d'un sonetto platonico*, 11. Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 343.

⁶⁷⁸ Francesco de’ Vieri. “Lezione sopra il sonetto del Petrarca ‘In qual parte del cielo, in qual idea’ dove si ragiona delle Idee e delle bellezza.” *Prose fiorentine*. Carlo Dati ed. (Florence, 1751), 1:86. Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 344.

There are two fantasies, one in universal form in intellect, one in particular form in the sense; but by definition the universal form is not called a “fantasy.” Also notable is the reference to the Idea of Helen, which recalls the selection process of Zeuxis, necessitating universalizing from particulars.⁶⁷⁹ A similar view was presented by Girolamo Frachetta in the *Spositione* of 1585, in which the nature of imagination is dealt with in the identity of the “possible intellect” and the “fantastic potency.” In reconciling Plato and Aristotle, Frachetta implied that the existence of two kinds of imagination were evident in the artificer, one in the realm of universal intellect and the other in the realm of sense particulars.⁶⁸⁰

The concession to the importance of senses is repeated throughout the treatise and reinforces the idea that the human mind is reliant on and in need of them. To explain this process, Zuccaro appropriates Aristotelian faculty psychology, as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas. When sense impressions are received by the body, they are passed to the *sensus communis*, or “common sense,” which receives them as “immaterial species representing physical things.”⁶⁸¹ The *sensus communis* “knows by means of the species acquired by the five external senses all the things known by those senses, and what is more, knows the differences between those senses and their objects and their operations around those objects.” Recalling the judicious interpretation of *giudizio* by Vasari that was central to the role of *disegno* in informing the artist, Zuccaro likens the *sensus communis* to a

⁶⁷⁹ Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 345.

⁶⁸⁰ Frachetta found his evidence in Books I and II of *De anima*. Girolamo Frachetta. *La spositione sopra la canzone di Guido Cavalcanti Donna mi prega*. (Venice, 1585), 33-37. Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 345.

⁶⁸¹ “specie spirituali rappresentanti le cose corporali.” Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d’Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 172.

“rector” or “judge” of these impressions, which would classify and categorize them.⁶⁸²

The second internal sense, *fantasia*, takes in the *specie* received from the external senses by the *sensus communis* as well as “others formed by the *sensus communis* in the cognition, judgment, and comparison of those *specie*,” and keeps them, “as in the treasure chest of a prince in which precious things are stored.” In addition, it “composes them, forming new species representing new things,” for as we experience in dreams, Zuccaro states, when, having seen both mountains and gold, we dream of mountains of gold.⁶⁸³

The notion is similar to the conception of Dürer’s storehouse of forms, whereby a painter should be filled with a variety of images for later use.⁶⁸⁴

Zuccaro’s emphasis on the dependency of the human intellect on the sense underlines a basic refutation of the Platonic notion that there are innate ideas in the mind. He cites Aristotle to support his belief that at birth the human soul is a *tabula rasa*, or a kind of blank canvas, which acquires knowledge only through the assistance of sense experience.⁶⁸⁵ Furthermore, the Roman academician rejects Plato in favor of Aristotle in his insistence that the universals we know do not exist outside of our minds and are not independent of the particulars in which they are found:

The things which our intellect knows naturally and directly are the natures of material things- the nature of the heavens, that of the elements and that of things made up of elements [such as] stones, grasses, trees, animals, and men- which natures are not found separate from their individuals, as those would have it who hold Plato divine for his position on the Ideas, but are

⁶⁸² “Questo conosce per le specie acquistate delli cinque sensi esterni tutte le cose conosciute da questi sensi, e di più conosce le differenze di questi sensi, de i loro oggetti, e delle loro operationi intorno à gli oggetti, come Rettore e Giudice loro.” Ibid, 174.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, 174.

⁶⁸⁴ Lange and Fuhse, *Dürers schriftlicher Nachlass*, 297.

⁶⁸⁵ “Però Aristotele conoscendo questa verità, disse, che l’anima nostra non tutta, cioè secondo tutte le sue parti, ò virtù; mà che però ella nella sua creatione non hà presso di se queste forme; mà per mezzo de’ sensi l’acquista, e la rassomiglia ad un’ ampio, e polito quadro di noi altri Pittori preparato per ricevere tutte quelle figure, che gli saranno dipinte; ma da se stessa niuna forma, od ombra di forma ritiene...” Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d’Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 172-173.

in reality only in those singular suppositions; the nature of the lion is not if not in these and those lions...⁶⁸⁶

The transcendental existence of the Ideas is then denied access to the human mind, and instead is privy only by God and the angels; while man understands and judges by means of senses- and the senses are merely “corporal instruments.”⁶⁸⁷ In the act of perception, recognition, and understanding, the human soul creates forms, and in doing so it realizes or actualizes itself. *Disegno* is thus not just a passive perception, but an active “formative virtue,” an “expression” of something inward: *forma espressiva dell’anima nostra*.⁶⁸⁸

However, primacy is given to the intellect, as it influences the soul from above downward, from the higher, more spiritual faculties through the interior to the exterior senses.⁶⁸⁹ All human functions are “illuminated and guided” by *disegno*, for it is “the singular form of the soul, and the virtue that makes it more fully in the divine image impressed in us...it is idea...a concept of all concepts, form of all forms, idea of all thoughts, by means of which all things are in our soul.”⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁶ “le cose, le quali conosce naturalmente, e direttamente l’intelletto nostro sono le nature delle cose materiali, la natura de’ Cieli, quella de gli elementi, e quella delle cose elementate, Pietre, Herbe, Arbori, Animali, e Huomini, le quali nature non si trovano separate da suoi individui, come vogliono alcuni, che tenesse Platone il divino in quelle sue positioni dell’Idee; mà sono in realtà solamente in questi suppositi singolari, perche non è l’umanità se non in questi, & in quelli singolari, & non è la natura del Leone se non in questi, & quelli Leoni...” Ibid, 178.

⁶⁸⁷ “Cosi diciamo, che questo concetto infuso nell’Anima rationale, dotato di tanta facoltà, di luce generale all’intelletto, primo motore interno humano, e general causa d’ogni concetto, e prima facoltà di concetti sopra humani, discorre, compone, ordina, e dichiara, intende, e dispone ogni materia atta, e disposta alle proprie, e particolare operationi sue, e si come generale Rettore, e govenatore di tutte le altre, ben conviene, & è ragionevole che lo sia si se stesso, e delle proprie sue operationi.” Ibid, 172.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, 182.

⁶⁸⁹ “Et se questo Disegno non movesse, & ammaestrasse l’intelletto nostro in particolare il pratico, e questo non movesse, cioè non guidasse la volontà nostra, e questa poi non commandasse alle nostre virtù, e potenze inferiori, & alle parti del corpo, in particolare alle mani, non si troverebbe ordine, nè modo di operare rettamente entro di noi, nè fuori di noi si vedrebbero opere sì belle, & meravigliose, come si veggono.” Ibid, 163.

⁶⁹⁰ “può vedere, sentire, parlare, & operare tutte le cose, le quali sono però allumate, & guidate dal concetto del Disegno intellettivo, forma singolare dell’anima, & virtù che la fa discorrere, & intendere compitamente, & col quale maggiormente partecipa dell’immagine divina in noi impressa; poiche è Idea, spirito impressivo, e formativo di tutte le cose in noi, come concetto di tutti concetti, forma di tutte le forme, Idea di tutti i pensieri, per lo quale tutte le cose sono nell’anima nostra...” Ibid, 183-184.

Accordingly, human *disegno* is of two varieties, “speculative” and “practical.” But whereas Zuccaro concedes the superiority of the higher type, that is the “speculative,” he emphasizes that it is through action that humans have contact with the divine. In turn, *disegno interno pratico* is of two varieties: “moral” and “artificial.” We form “designs” of what we wish to do, and thus the importance of practice is intimately associated with moral conduct. It is in practice that art is most like virtue: “for this reason, the moral philosophers say that practical moral knowledge is much more perfect the more it actively pursues its desires, and consequently, when in this knowledge *disegno* is more particular, limited, and confined, the more perfect it is for virtuous acts.”⁶⁹¹ The notion was foreign to authors aligned with Aristotle, for, as Williams has noted, the emphasis on the relationship between art and virtuous conduct, reversed the rigid separation insisted upon by Aristotelians like Varchi.⁶⁹² Here we find yet another shift in philosophical structuring that illustrates the active importance of virtuous conduct and sense experience in Zuccaro’s formulation.

The active quality of *disegno*, however, is better illustrated in the processes by which the “internal idea” is put into material with *disegno esterno*. Zuccaro does not restrict the concept merely to artistic creation. Instead, *disegno esterno* is virtually any type of manifest order or arrangement, of which there are three varieties: the first called “natural,” because it is present in nature, is that order implanted in the world by God which we then are capable of perceiving. Intellect becomes learned through the senses as it observes this grand outward and external design.⁶⁹³ The two remaining types are called *artificiale*, because they are produced by human beings: the first, *artificiale perfetto*, is

⁶⁹¹ “Per questo dicono i Filosofi morali, che la scienza pratica morale è tanto più perfetta quanto più intorno à quello che si desidera si pratica, & conseguentemente quanto in questa scienza il Disegno è più particolare, limitato, & ristretto, tanto più è perfetto à congionere l’opere virtuose.” Ibid, 167.

⁶⁹² Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 138.

⁶⁹³ Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d’Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 226-227.

taken from *forme sostanziali della natura*, and is that which is based on the study of nature, or on other artists' studies of nature.⁶⁹⁴ The second type, *prodottivo, discorsivo, fantastico*, represents "everything the mind or fantasy or caprice can imagine."⁶⁹⁵ When the latter two are utilized to produce art, Zuccaro is careful to clarify the relation of it to *disegno*, demonstrating that art as a principle is "generated" from *disegno*. *Disegno* is what he refers to as a "primary" cause; art is merely a "secondary" cause. Taking up, in an Aristotelian manner, the concept that art imitates nature, he emphasizes that it imitates- not just in sense-appearances- but also the process of nature, in its mode of creating. Nature is imitable because it is ordered by principle and thus proceeds toward its end in a constant fashion. Human art can imitate this constancy, but cannot equal nature in that it cannot create something living that has the ability to reproduce itself.⁶⁹⁶

And although artists could not equal nature, they were exhorted to act as nature acts in its productive process. In the classical mimetic tradition of Cicero and Pliny, we find that Zuccaro sets forth that the most essential aim of artistic representation is that *imitatio* should be carried as far as possible. However, like the Ciceronian-rhetorical method, art should still strive for beauty in its veracity: it must be in accordance with the composition of man in terms of his *corpo, spirito, and anima*, while the artist must strive for a painstaking definition of external forms, a bold, lively movement, and a certain grace and delicacy in line and color. After telling numerous anecdotes about *trompe-l'oeil*, he writes:

Here is the true, proper, and universal aim of painting: to be the imitator of Nature and of all artifacts, so that it deludes and tricks the eyes of men,

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 231-237.

⁶⁹⁵ "Questa terza specie è quella, che rappresenta tutto quello, che la mente humana, la fantasia, & il capriccio di qual si voglia arte può inventare. E se bene è men perfetta delle sudette, nondimeno è necessario, e gustoso, e porge grandissimo aiuto, augumento, e perfezione a tutte le nostre operationi, & a quelle ancora di tutte l'altre arti, scienze, e pratiche..." Ibid, 237.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, 169-171.

even the greatest experts. In addition it expresses in gestures, motions, the movements of life, eyes, mouth, and hands, so much of life and truth that it discloses the inner passions: love, hate, desire, flight, delight, joy, sadness, grief, hope, despair, fear, boldness, anger, meditation, teaching, argument, willing, commanding, obeying- in sum all human actions and emotions.⁶⁹⁷

How similar this exhortation is to Reformatory authors such as Paleotti and Borromeo, who emphasized the necessity of veracity in art, as well as appropriate affectations. Far removed from the Platonic forms of the second generation *maniera* artists, Zuccaro calls for the careful study of “nature”- in that it represents a form of *disegno* itself. With this in mind, it might seem counter intuitive to remember that further on in the treatise Zuccaro shall state that artists need some understanding of proportion, while simultaneously discouraging spending too much time on the study of anatomy or mathematics. The definition given by Zuccaro for *disegno esterno naturale* is, strangely, like Vasari’s *disegno*, and like Lomazzo’s *euritmia*; though it avoids an overt emphasis on mathematics. Such a seeming antinomy is another form of opposition to Platonism, for, as discussed, the Realist theorists who wished to establish a universal canon of human proportions, sought the guidance of mathematics to reach an immutable and eternally valid form of the Idea.⁶⁹⁸ Such is the difference in approach between the Neoplatonic Lomazzo and the Neo-Scholastic Zuccaro at the dawn of the Seicento, as Williams summarized: “For Lomazzo, the artist has access to transcendent ideas and can give material realization to them in his work; Zuccaro consciously avoids this kind of idealism, but for him, *disegno* itself is a transcendent principle- the self-actualization of

⁶⁹⁷ “Ecco il vero, il proprio ed universale fine della pittura, cioè l’essere imitatrice della Natura e di tutte le cose artificiali, che illude e inganna gli occhi de’ viventi e di più saputi. Inoltre esprime nei gesti, nei moti, nei movimenti della vita, nelli occhi, nella bocca, nelle mani tanto al vivo e al vero, che scuopre le passioni interne, l’amore, l’odio, il desiderio, la fuga, il diletto, il gaudio, la tristezza, il dolore, la speranza, la disperazione, il timore, l’audacia, l’ira, lo speculare, l’insegnare, il disputare, il volere, il comandare, l’obbedire e insomma tutte le operazioni e effetti umani.” Ibid, 132.

⁶⁹⁸ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 144.

the soul, the realization of the potential, the making visible of the invisible.”⁶⁹⁹

Furthermore, the Nominalist form of art theory that was being espoused in the dominant academic establishment in Rome, the renewed center for art patronage, would remain the primary approach for artists and theorists alike.

Chapter Six

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, 150.

Maturation of the Idea in the Seicento:

Art, Art Theory, Poetics and the Crosscurrents of Reform

Giulio Mancini was the first seicento critic to outline and define Mannerism as an integral period in the development of art with a defined chronology. As he stated, the movement that had begun around 1550 reached its terminus in 1605.⁷⁰⁰ The decline that had been projected by the biological model of Vasari and elaborated on by Armenini had been “corrected”- according to Mancini and many other critics- in the judicious manner of a new series of artists practicing around the turn of the century. The relation of this new style- which would later be termed ‘Baroque’ - to Mannerism was understood in the critical tradition in the same way that the Renaissance had been to the Middle Ages. Humanists, poets and art critics and theorists alike- from Dante and Petrarch, to Villani, Ghiberti, Manetti, and Vasari- espoused the belief that perfection in the arts of antiquity had been displaced by the decadence of Gothic and Byzantine art. The return to verisimilitude in art and beauty were in turn “revived” in the beginning of their own era, resulting from a new relationship with antiquity and renewed approach to nature. Likewise, seicento historiographers and critics discussed the developments after the deaths of the great masters, such as Michelangelo, but especially the idolized Raphael, as a terrible decline from which only the Carracci had been able to elevate art to the heights that it had once enjoyed. This second phase of degeneracy retained many of the same traits, which were agreed upon by critics: the lack of a thorough study of nature, seemingly caused by the imitation of other artists as opposed to the direct study of sense-

⁷⁰⁰ Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*. See: Frances Gage. “Giulio Mancini’s *Considerazioni sulla pittura*: Recreation, Manners and Decorum in Seventeenth Century Roman Picture Galleries,” PhD. Dissertation, (John’s Hopkins University, 2000).

perceptive reality; unrealistic production on the basis of mere “practice” instead of diligent study; and the reliance on mere *fantasia* instead of concrete observation. Therefore, the approach of the modern style which displaced Mannerism was repeatedly described as a return to the study of nature facilitated by diligent study based on observation.

At the same time these stylistic traits began to manifest themselves, the Realist approaches that sought an almost mystical appropriation of ideal models presented by Lomazzo and Comanini began to give way to those that considered verisimilitude the greatest goal of art. The concessions given to the importance of sense perception for art production by theorists like Zuccaro relate the academic-metaphysical reformulation occurring at the turn of the century. Such admissions had been foreshadowed by the abandonment of Platonic beliefs by Francesco Patrizzi, Torquato Tasso and other critics. However, the specific concern of mimesis had been discussed by Minturno in *L'arte poetica* where he had stated that “art puts all its study on imitating nature” because nature “maintains a rule by means of which it is governed in its operations and to which it is entirely directed.”⁷⁰¹ Minturno brought the “operations” of nature into harmony with the Platonic Idea so prevalent mid-century by setting forth that the sense-perceptible world was in fact merely a mirrored reflection of a single, unified Idea. Thus if art imitates nature, it could only take one form that followed on the universal nature of its schema; and so painting and sculpture are restrained to a single principle as a result. Whatever variation takes place occurs not in the essential but in the accidental parts or in the mode of imitating or in the ornamentation used by the poet or artist.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰¹ Antonio Minturno. *L'arte poetica*. (Venice, 1564), 32. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 447.

⁷⁰² Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 447.

The reconciliatory nature of Minturno's postulation was carried on by Lionardo Salviati, who also illustrates the general move away from Plato demonstrable at the end of the Cinquecento. In his commentary and translation *Poetica d'Aristotile parafrasata e comentata* of 1586, Salviati denies the inaccessibility of the immutable world of Ideas. In discussing the notions of the "probable," he noted: "It cannot be denied that the probable is found either in nature, or in the sempiternal Idea, or in the mind of the poet, or in the universal, and being found there it is clear that it can be imitated."⁷⁰³ The hierarchy upheld by Salviati demonstrates the persistence of Ficilian metaphysics and its organization and dissemination of beauty. It also illustrates the inherent metaphysical struggle to free the Idea from the celestial realm and reconcile it with beauty manufactured by the human mind and hand.

The transitory nature of this dilemma is evident in Ripa's *Iconologia* (1603) where conservatism meets current scholastic opinion. In it the iconographer described the allegorical personification of *Bellezza* (**figure 22**) as a:

Woman whose head is concealed among the clouds, and the rest of her being barely visible due to the brightness that surrounds her; while she reaches out her hands away from the brightness with a lily in one and a ball and compass in the other. One depicts beauty with her head concealed among the clouds because she is not matter, thus it is more difficult for one speak [of her] with a mortal tongue; and with a human intellect it is very difficult to know how much beauty there is in the things created as it is not in any one thing (metaphysically speaking), but a brightness that derives from the light of the face of God. Like the Platonics say, the first beauty is a thing within himself [i.e. God], which communicates itself in some manner of idea to his creation due to his kindness; it is this cause that enables one to understand beauty, in some part: but like one that looks at himself in the same mirror and immediately forgets himself...we thus observe beauty in mortal things; we are not able to rise to see that pure and simple brightness from which all brightness originates...

⁷⁰³ "negar non si puo, che'l uerisimile, o uogliam dir nella natura, o nell'Idea sempiterna, o nella mente del ppoeta, o nell'universale non si ritrouoj, e ritrouandosi è manifesto, che si puo imitare." Lionardo Salviati. *Poetica d'Aristotile parafrasata e comentata*. (1586), fol. 76v. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 614-615.

Consequently, one depicts her [beauty] in the abovementioned manner, signifying her by the hand that extends with the lily; the beauty of outlines and of colors of the feminine body, which adorns that largely hidden part of which small measure of beauty that is shared and enjoyed on earth...

In the other hand [she holds] the ball of the earth with a compass to demonstrate that all beauty consists in measure and proportions, which arranges itself with time and with place. The place determines beauty in the disposition of the Provinces, Cities, Temples, Piazze, Man and of all the things subject to the eye, like good different colors; and with proportioned quantity, and measure, and with other similar things, with time itself determining the harmonies, sounds, voices, orations, fellingings, and other things, which with measure arranges delights and they deservedly call beautiful.⁷⁰⁴

The nude woman that represents beauty cannot be fully seen, as she is obscured, hidden and scattered; existing “not in any one thing,” but is instead a “brightness that derives from the light of the face of God.” The objects that she holds in her hands- a compass and ball in one and a lily in the other- relate to the two-fold nature of beauty: “measure and proportion” gained through effort and study, as well as the elusive, “largely hidden part” that is accessible by divine perception accorded to God’s creations.⁷⁰⁵ The description of

⁷⁰⁴ “Donna che habbia ascosa la testa fra le nuvole, & il resto sia poco visibile, per lo splendore, che la circonda, porga una mano fuor dello splendore, con la quale terrà un giglio sporgendo con l’altra mano una palla, & un compasso. Si dipinge la Bellezza con la testa ascosa frà le nuuole, perchè non è cosa, della quale più difficilmente si possa parlare con mortal lingua, & che meno si possa conoscere con l’intelletto humano, quanto la bellezza, la quale, nelle cose create, non è altro, metaforicamente parlando, che un splendore che deriva della luce della faccia di Dio, come dissiniscono i Platonici, essendo la prima bellezza una cosa con esso, la quale poi comunicandosi in qualche modo d’idea per benignità di lui alle sue creature, è caggione, che esse intendano in qualche parte la bellezza: ma come quelli, che guardano se stessi nello specchio, subito si scordano, come disse S. Giacomo nell’Epistola Canonica così noi guardando la bellezza nelle cose mortali, non molto potiamo alzarci à vedere quella pura, & semplice chiarezza, dalla quale tutte le chiarezze hanno origine...

Si dipingerà dunque nella sudetta maniera, significandosi per la mano, che si estende col giglio, la bellezza de’lineamenti, & de’colori del corpo femminile, nel quale pare, che sia riposta gran parte di quella piccola misura di bellezza, che è partecipata, & goduta in terra, come habbiamo già detto di sopra.

Nell’altra mano terrà la palla, col compasso, per dimonstrare che ogni bellezza consiste in misure, & proporzioni, le quali s’aggiustano col tempo, & col luogo. Il luogo determina la bellezza nella disposizione delle le Prouincie, delle Città, de’Tempii, delle Piazze, dell’huomo, e di tutte le cose soggette all’occhio, come colori ben distinti, & con proportionata quantità, & misura, & con altre cose simili, col tempo si determinano l’armonie, i suoni, le voci, l’orationi, gli abbattimenti, & altre cose, le quali con misura aggiustandosi, diletmano, & sono meritamente chiamate belle.” Cesare Ripa. *Iconologia*. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1970),40-42.

⁷⁰⁵ Lorenzo Giacomini also noted that the Idea vied with God as a creator of forms. Lorenzo Giacomini. *Oratione in lode di Torquato Tasso*. (1596), 9-10. Quoted in: Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1058-1059.

the transmission of divine light and beauty through a series of mirrors is in accord with the academic notions discussed in the Academia di San Luca in Rome, which would shortly be published by Zuccaro. Moreover, Ripa often relies on ancient and modern authorities when defining a term, and is hesitant to offer information that is not well-accepted by the scholarly community. As such, it is not surprising to find the academic notions of beauty related here after quoting from the *Paradisio*; nor is his estimation and manner of transmission of the Idea unique.⁷⁰⁶ Instead, the definition can be viewed as a formative or rudimentary model for the Idea concept that emphasized its dual and often polemical nature. The necessity for careful observation and study of nature, represented by the “compass of intellect” and assisted by the judgment that it implies became increasingly pivotal as the counterpart to the scattered nature of beauty that is beyond human sight.

Developing alongside the admonishments for direct study of nature was the idea that art and poetry should have as their highest goal the inculcation of virtues. The belief was by no means restricted to one philosophical *Weltanschauung*. The Neoplatonic critic Agnolo Segni, who had defined poetry as “imitation...according to divine furor,” nonetheless stressed the importance of edification over delight.⁷⁰⁷ In the series of lectures given to the Accademia Fiorentina already cited Segni borrowed the notion that poetry is superior to history because it is more universal from Aristotle; while he retained the Platonic judgment that it is inferior to philosophy because of its very particularity. And even though the general structure of ideas and the framework of reference in Segni are

⁷⁰⁶ “...like Dante said in Book 13 of the *Paradisio*: That that not stir, and that that is able to die / It is not itself not brightness of that idea, / That gives birth to the love of our Lord.” “come disse Dante nel 13. del Par. / Ciò che non muore, & ciò che può morire / Non è se non splendor di quella idea, / Che partorisce amando il nostro Sire.” Ripa, *Iconologia*, 41.

⁷⁰⁷ “Immatazione de le cose humane, et de le divine con orazione favolosa in versi secondo il furor divino.” Agnolo Segni, MS Laur. Ashb. 531, fol.74v. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 406-407.

Platonic (i.e. poetry exists in a Platonic world of imitations), and it is made possible by the presence of the divine furor, it nevertheless pursues as its goal moral betterment for the spectator.⁷⁰⁸ Segni was not the only critic to set forth the belief. Bartolomeo Maranta, in a series of lectures for the Accademia Napoletana (1563-4) also noted that the greatest end of poetry was the inculcation of virtues.⁷⁰⁹ And Lorenzo Giacomini, who had, like Segni, argued for the central notion of poetic furor in an earlier oration, made a similar point. While reciting his *Oratione in lode di Torquato Tasso* before the Accademia degli Alterati in 1595, Giacomini emphasized the relationship of poetry to philosophy and rhetoric in his defense of art. The aegis focused on the rhetorical powers of art and its powers for delight, but more importantly for instruction and moral betterment.⁷¹⁰

The emphatic appellations for the didactic and instructional in poetry and art coincided with a series of publications that were ideologically derived from the Council of Trent. In publications such as the *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae* of 1577 by Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584), the precepts of the reformatory council are set out along with a brief discussion of painting.⁷¹¹ In Chapter XVII ‘De sacris imaginibus picturisve,’ Borromeo refers his readers to the decisions of the Council of Trent, stating that painters should produce works which are “appropriate and seemingly according to the attitude and decorum of the Church,” and “according to historical truth, the usage of the Church and the precepts of the Fathers.” He openly criticizes profane, obscure, immoral and unusual paintings. At the same time the cleric admonishes the painter to

⁷⁰⁸ Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 304.

⁷⁰⁹ Bartolomeo Maranta, MS Ambr. R.118. Sup., fol. 126v. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 486-487.

⁷¹⁰ Lorenzo Giacomini. *Oratione in lode di Torquato Tasso*. (1596), 9-10. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 1058-1059.

⁷¹¹ Carlo Borromeo. “Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae” in *Trattati d’arte del cinquecento, fra manierismo e controriforma, Scrittori d’Italia* no.221. Paola Barocchi, ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 3: 218.

avoid putting living persons in altarpieces, as well as fish, asses, dogs “or of others being without reason.”⁷¹² Such frivolous additions could result in confusion on the part of the viewer. To ensure the clarity of a given subject, the painter should also portray saints with their appropriate attributes and write their names below in more obscure or esoteric scenes. Overall perspicuity is imperative to the decorous nature of a painted image.

Following upon the publication of Borromeo, Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597) the archbishop of Bologna set forth in his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* of 1582 (coinciding with the foundation of the Accademia degli Incamminati) that art, and particularly religious art had a mandatory function of service.⁷¹³ Like Giacomini, the archbishop relates that the artist is tasked with giving pleasure to his audiences with the goal of instruction; and to illustrate the point calls upon Cicero’s understanding of rhetoric: “For he is the best orator who, when he speaks, instructs the minds of his listeners, gives delight and stirs the emotions. It is a duty to teach, an honour to delight, an obligation to stir the emotions.”⁷¹⁴ The declaration is echoed in Chapter XXI of Book I, as he writes that the “office and aim of the Christian painter” should be the same as that of the orator.⁷¹⁵ The rhetorical nature of the artist’s production is further reinforced by careful adherence to visible reality and/or to the reality of the historical fact based upon authentic documentation. As Paleotti sets forth, without *imitazione* there can be no

⁷¹² “ex Ecclesiae instituto apte decoreque”; “ex historiae veritate, Ecclesiae usu et partum praescripta ratione”; “aliorumve brutorum animantium.” Carlo Borromeo, *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae*, 3: 42-45.

⁷¹³ Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagine sacre e profane* (Bologna, 1582), (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002).

⁷¹⁴ “Optimus est enim orator qui dicendo animas audientium et docet et delectate et permovet. Docere debitum est, delectare honorarium, permovere necessarium.” Quoted in: Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna*, 2:227.

⁷¹⁵ “Dell’officio e fine del pittore cristiano, a similitudine degli oratori.” Ibid, 1:123.

pleasure, or *diletto*.⁷¹⁶ Calling on the authority of Aristotle, Paleotti cites that imitation is inborn in man; and as such paintings that are closer to sense-perceptible reality are more persuasive: “Whence those paintings that imitate the live and true more in such a manner that deceives animals, and sometimes even men, like those Pliny relates like Zeuxis and Parrhasius, are always more worthy of status and commendation as they have delighted onlookers so much more.”⁷¹⁷ The rhetorical nature of the artist’s charge is aided by the mimetic properties of his medium. The closer he approximates the visible world, the more compelling his art will be to the viewer.

* * *

The Bolognese Reform: the Carracci and Tasso

In his *Life of Annibale Carracci* of 1672, the arch-classicist Giovan Pietro Bellori noted that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, artists were divided between those that directly imitated nature and those that used only their imagination:

During this long unsettled time art was contested by two opposite extremes, one dependent entirely on nature, the other on the imagination: the exponents in Rome were Michelangelo da Caravaggio and Giuseppe d’Arpino; the former copied bodies purely as they appear to the eye, without selection; the latter looked at nature not at all but followed the freedom of instinct; and each of the two, favored with the most brilliant fame, had come to be an object of admiration and an example before the world.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁶ “essendo ditto de’ savvi [Aristotle] che, sì come l’uomo fra tutti gli altri animali nasce attissimo ad imitare, così egli per naturale istinto sente grandissimo diletto e gusto della imitazione...” Barocchi. ed. *Trattati d’arte del cinquecento, fra manierismo e controriforma*, 3: 218.

⁷¹⁷ “onde quelle pitture che più imitando il vivo e vero, per modo che ingannano gli animali e tal volta gli uomini, come racconta Plinio di Zeusi e di Parasio, tanto più sempre sono state degne di commendazione e maggiormente hanno diletto i riguardanti.”Ibid, 3:220.

⁷¹⁸ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 72. The division between schools of naturalism and classicism follows closely on the model set forth by Giulio Mancini in his *Considerazioni sulla pittura* of 1628, as he divided the schools of painting in the early years of the seventeenth century in Rome into the followers of Caravaggio (who practiced *caravaggismo*) and those of Annibale Carracci (who practiced *carraccismo*).

The polemic explored by Bellori in his opening biography clearly differentiates the styles now associated with Lombard naturalism and the fading remnants of Mannerism. On the one hand, the *Caravaggisti* were condemned for reproducing all of the flaws inherent in nature, and not attempting to improve upon them. On the other, Mannerists relied solely upon their *fantasia* to produce figures that were far removed from nature. According to theorists like Bellori, it was only with Annibale Carracci and the recombination of “nature and art in consummate excellence” that art was lifted again to the celestial heights it had previously enjoyed in the figure of Raphael in the Cinquecento.⁷¹⁹

The balance that was struck by Annibale and the other Carracci between the need for direct observation of nature and its improvement facilitated by good judgment was the result of their position (and realization of that position) in the critical history of art. In fact, the best example of the Carracci and their positions on art production derive from an annotated copy of Vasari’s 1568 *Vite*.⁷²⁰ The margins of the text are filled with commentary on the positions of the Carracci, and in general respond to comments made by the Florentine author. In these notes, the hostility felt by the Carracci towards Vasari is evident. For instance, at the beginning of his *Life of Titian*, Vasari stated that Giovanni Bellini and other Venetian painters living during his time, copied whatever they painted from life in a hard, crude, and labored manner because they did not have the opportunity to study ancient works of art.⁷²¹ In the margin of the Carracci copy of the biography, Annibale wrote: “The ignorant Vasari doesn’t realize that the good ancient masters based

⁷¹⁹ Ibid, 72.

⁷²⁰ The original volume containing the Carracci annotations is now in the Biblioteca Comunale dell’ Archiginnasio, Bologna. The *postille*, together with the passages of Vasari’s Lives to which they relate, are reprinted in Fanti. See: Mario Fanti. “Le postille carraccesche alle ‘Vite’ del Vasari: il testo originale.” *Il Carrobbio* 5 (1979), 148-64. An addendum to this article (*Il Carrobbio* 6 (1980), 135-141) establishes that Annibale rather than Agostino was responsible for the majority of the notes.

⁷²¹ Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori* (Florence, 1568), part 3, 805-806.

their works on life, and he would have it rather that it is better to draw things at one remove, which antiquities are, than it is the first and most fundamental things, which are living, and which one must always imitate. But this fellow didn't understand this art."⁷²²

In fact, the biographer himself is attacked for his artificial style. In the *postilla* 'On the *Vita di Giovanni Antonio Lappoli*,' the Carracci state that they "have seen the works of Giorgio Vasari" and even though they might have been produced in at a very rapid pace are "not similar in any part to life...but are filled by affectations and destiny without judgment."⁷²³ This *postilla* (and in fact most of them) was most likely written prior to Annibale's 1594 Roman sojourn.⁷²⁴ Thus we find that the statements included represent the theoretical positions of the Carracci around the time of the foundation of their academy.

The appellations for a direct approach to the subject relate the interest shared with Counter-Reformatory authors like Paleotti. However, such criticism of artificiality in art should not suggest that the Carracci were advocating a mere replication of nature in the

⁷²² "L'ignorante Vasari non s'accorage che gli antiche buoni maestri hanno cavate le cose loro dal vivo, et vuol più costo che sia buono ritrar dalle seconde cose che son l'antiche, che da le prime e principalissime che sono le vive, le quali si debbono sempre imitare. Ma costui non intese quest'arte." Giovanni Antonio and Giovanna Perini, eds. *Gli Scritti dei Carracci: Ludovico, Annibale, Agostino*. (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990), 161. Quoted in: Aidan Weston Lewis. "Annibale Carracci and the Antique." *Master Drawings* 30 no.3 (Autumn, 1992), 287-313.

⁷²³ "[Ho] veduto io l'opere [d]i Giorgio Vasari e son [a]nch'io pittore e mi mera[v]iglio che penasse 42 [g]iorni a far la pittura [di] che si vanta il chiaro[n]e percioché le sue pitture [s]ono gofferie da farne [m]olte in pochi giorni, [n]é simigliano in nisuna [p]arte al vivo, ma sono [p]iene d'affettationi, e [f]ate senza giuditio." Antonio and Perini, eds., *Gli Scritti dei Carracci*, 158. Further on in the *postilla* 'On the *Vita di Tiziano*', we find that though Michelangelo was a great master, "Titian was more of a painter than Michelangelo." The difference not being a direct comparison for in relating the two it is like comparing Dante and Petrarch. And if a comparison be made between Raphael and Titian, the author concedes that the Florentine was superior in certain things. "Sia ditto con pa[ce] de Michelangiolis[ti]: Titiano fu più p[ittore] di Michelagnolo et a quella guisa vi fu differenza qu[al] fu infra Dante e[t] il Petrarca [...] non derogando però all'eccelle[nza] del divin Mich[elagnolo]: [e se bene Raffaello fu da preporre in qualche parte a Titiano, avanzò non meno anche Titiano in molte cose Raffaello]." Ibid, 161.

⁷²⁴ The dating of the marginal notes is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. However, those attributable to Annibale Carracci must postdate the death of Jacopo Bassano in 1592, since the artist is referred to in the past tense. Ludovico's one-time ownership of the annotated volume suggests that Annibale left it behind in Bologna when he moved to Rome in 1595. See: Charles Dempsey. "The Carracci *Postille* to Vasari's Lives." *Art Bulletin* 68 (1986), 72-76.

fashion that would later be criticized by theorists such as Bellori. Instead what distinguished the truly creative imitative practices of the Carracci from Mannerism and the followers of Caravaggio was their rationalization of a broad range of judiciously selected abstract stylistic possibilities.⁷²⁵ After the careful study of nature and sense-perceptible reality, these carefully chosen models would offer the judgment needed to confer upon them beauty. The process is then a reversal of Vasari in that the tempering model is referenced only after a thorough evaluation of the subject in nature had been carried out. Nevertheless, the model for rhetorical imitation was famously related by Vasari in the case of Raphael, who had arrived at his own personal style through the process of discovery through the imitation of several models.⁷²⁶ As Vasari wrote: “From many manners, he made a single one, which was then always held to be his own, and which was and always will be infinitely prized by artists.”⁷²⁷ The method was espoused in ancient rhetorical theory by Quintilian, who claimed that imitation must be based on a combination of diligent work and the artist’s recognition of his own talents. Thus Vasari had pointed out that after the failure of many artists of his own generation to slavishly copy the art of Michelangelo, and failing even to imitate the “divine” master, that it is superior to imitate more than a single model, as his contemporary literary critics had.⁷²⁸

In the Carracci Academy, which was founded on the principle that art had a history and

⁷²⁵ Elizabeth Cropper. *The Domenichino Affair: novelty, imitation, and theft in seventeenth-century Rome*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 109.

⁷²⁶ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Milanesi, ed., 4: 373-379. Also see: Kim E. Butler. “Full of Grace: Raphael’s *Madonnas* and the Rhetoric of Devotion.” Ph.D. Dissertation. (The Johns Hopkins University, 2003), Ch. 2-3.

⁷²⁷ “e mescolando col ditto modo alcuni altri scelti delle cose migliori d’altri maestri, fece di molte maniere una sola, che fu poi sempre tenuta sua propria, la quale fu e sarà sempre stimata dagli artefici infinitamente.” Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Milanesi, ed., 4: 377.

⁷²⁸ Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Milanesi, ed., 4: 376. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 186-199.

that it could be taught, the imitation of multiple masters was a key element. Lucio Faberio, in his funeral oration of Agostino Carracci, stated:

But the judicious daring of this inspired painter encompassed more than this, for he entertained the bold aim of adding to the most famous styles of all the past masters anything further that might be desired as the ultimate perfection of the miracles they had already achieved- that is, to add the lovely color of Correggio to the perfect measure and proportion of Raphael, and the great draftsmanship of Raphael to the lovely color of Correggio, to add the tenderness of Titian to the well-founded mastery of Michelangelo, and the deep knowledge of Michelangelo to the tenderness of Titian- in short by mixing all the particular gifts of these and every other great painter to re-create and form out of them all taken together the Helen of his deeply considered idea.⁷²⁹

The parts of painting - invention, disposition, drawing, *chiaroscuro*, color, perspective, and nature herself- were all techniques that could be learned by imitation and communicated by the eclectic notion of style.

However, it was not the artist-biographer Giorgio Vasari that offered the seminal precedent for the Carracci notion of perfecting a style through eclectic appropriation. As Elizabeth Cropper noted, the literary wars that were being waged in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries over poetic imitation had formed a groundwork for the Carracci by their prominent contemporary and hero Torquato Tasso, “whose approach to the relationship between novelty and imitation was as indebted to considerations of history as theirs.”⁷³⁰ Although poetic criticism and theory had been influential in determining the tenor of art treatments prior to the Carracci, the relationship between poetry and art was central to the tenets of their academy: as noted, the curriculum centered on the construction of conceits and other poetic devices given visual form. Furthermore, Agostino Carracci was a well-known *letterato* and poet himself. In

⁷²⁹ Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 212.

⁷³⁰ Cropper, *The Domenichino Affair*, 117.

Faberio's funeral oration, the personal association of the Horatian adage *ut pictura poesis* to the Carracci is elucidated: "And is one then to say that painting is mute poetry? No, rather it is clear to me that the only way to describe the brush and painting of Agostino Carracci is as eloquent brush and speaking painting."⁷³¹ As such, it is not surprising to find that Tasso's well-circulated treatise on epic poetry was highly influential for the Carracci notion of rhetorical imitation.

A year before his death in 1594, Torquato Tasso published his efficacious exposition under the title *Discorsi del poema eroico*.⁷³² The poet opened the discourse by stating that the treatise is his attempt to define the "idea" of a perfect poem. In this task several authorities are called on for the characterization, which evokes Plato, Xenophon, Cicero and Castiglione. Nevertheless, it is above all to the authority of Aristotle that Tasso appeals as he wrote:

To begin with then, I say that in all things one must consider the end, as Aristotle declares in his *Topics*. But the end, being single, cannot be found in many particulars. Still, by considering the good in various particular goodnesses, we form the idea of the good, just as Zeuxis formed the idea of the beautiful when he wished to paint Helen in Croton... And since I have to show the idea of the most excellent kind of poem, the heroic, I must not only offer one poem, even the most beautiful, as example, but, collecting the beauties and perfections of many, I must explain how the most perfect and most beautiful can be fashioned. But first we must find out what the heroic poem is, or rather what genre it is, and then examine the idea, as from the idea, as Aristotle says, again in the *Topics*, one knows if the definition is right. Although in some things this principle does not in fact work well, in the matter of which we are speaking we may certainly consider idea and definition together.⁷³³

⁷³¹ 'Oration of Lucio Faberio, Member of the Academy of the Gelati, Upon the Death of Agostino Carracci,' Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 204.

⁷³² Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* may have been begun as early as 1561-62, when he was fifteen or sixteen, and a student at Padua. And just as *Gerusalemme liberata*, finished by 1575 and published in 1581, was painstakingly revised and was finally reissued as *Gerusalemme conquistata* in 1593, so a greatly expanded and refined version of his treatise appeared in 1594. Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*.

⁷³³ "Dico adunque che in tutte le cose si dee riguardare a l'ultimo, come dice Aristotile ne la Topica; ma l'ultimo è uno, laonde non si può ritrovare unitamente in molti particolari; ma considerando le bontà ne l'eccellenze che sono divise fra molti, si forma l'idea de la bontà e de l'eccellenza, come formò Zeusi

According to Tasso, the poet's main function is selecting and assembling beauties: "Beautiful things are suitable to the heroic poem."⁷³⁴ Therefore, "Among beautiful things let him [the heroic poet] choose the most beautiful, among great things the greatest, among marvels the most marvelous; and in the most marvelous let him still try to increase the novelty and grandeur."⁷³⁵ Calling upon the Aristotelian definition of the beautiful idea given in the *Topics*, Tasso reiterates the importance of the Ciceronian-rhetorical selection process; and the notion that Vasari borrowed from Quintilian by which only the best models should be imitated. In this manner, the epic poem should make use of all styles, as the Ferrarese Girolamo Muzio summarized in his *Dell'Arte poetica* of 1551, which Tasso would have been familiar with:

The epic poem is a picture
Of the Universe and contains in itself
All styles, all forms, all likenesses.⁷³⁶

The eclectic inclusiveness of the epic and heroic facilitates the purpose of the form of the heroic poem as well. For as Tasso relates, the heroic poem represents the highest form of poetry due to its function and subject matter being the most exalted; and because it requires the mastery of all aspects of the poet's craft. As poetry can "teach us how to

quella de la bellezza quando volle dipingere Elena in Crotone...Dovendo dunque io mostrar l'idea de l'eccellentissimo poema eroico, non debbo proporre per esempio un poema solo, benché egli fosse più bello de gli altri; ma, raccogliendo le bellezze e le perfezioni di ciascuno, insegnare come egli si possa fare bellissimo e perfettissimo insieme. Ma prima debbiamo peravventura ricercare quel che sia il poeta eroico, o pur quel che sia il poema che è il suo genere; e dopo considerate l'idea, perché da l'idea si conosce, come dice Aristotile nel medesimo libro de la Topica, se la definizione sia vera e propria, e benché in alcune cose non convenga a fatto, in questa di cui parliamo sicuramente possiamo considerare l'una e l'altra insieme." Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, 6-7. Also see: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 151.

⁷³⁴ Torquato Tasso. *Scritti sull'arte poetica*. Einaudi Mazzali, ed. (Torino, 1977), 155.

⁷³⁵ "Elegga, fra le cose belle, le bellissime; fra le grandi, le grandissime; fra le maravigliose, le maravigliosissime; ed alle maravigliosissime ancora cerchi d'accrescere novità e grandezza." Ibid, 211.

⁷³⁶ "Il poema sovrano è una pittura / De l'universo, e però in se comprende / Ogni stile, ogni forma, ogni ritratto." Torquato Tasso. "Dell'Arte poetica" in: *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*. Bernard Weinberg, ed. (Bari, 1970), 2:185.

live,” Tasso identifies such models as absolutes, and the essence of our experience of art as contact with them.⁷³⁷ Thus in reading an epic poem, the process of philosophical illumination is carried out in that the mind of the reader “itself becomes a painter who, following its pattern, inwardly paints the forms of courage, temperance, prudence, justice, faith, piety, religion, and every other virtue that may be acquired through long practice or infused by divine grace.”⁷³⁸ The process involved in experiencing the composition creates in the reader’s mind the universal notions of creation that the poet himself possessed to create it, which would have been impossible without the mastery of all these different aspects of poetry.

In contrast to other critics like Ludovico Castelvetro, who placed poetry in the realm of fiction and marvelous invention, and who saw the purpose of poetry as the “delighting and recreating of the spirits of the coarse multitude and the common people,” Tasso defined the true character of the epic as the imitation of human action, and its purpose as the production of delight as a way of gaining mastery over life.⁷³⁹ Moreover, he placed poetry, along with rhetoric, under the general rubric of dialectic: in Aristotelian terms, poetry belongs to the second category of dialectic, which deals with the probable rather than the false. In a passage that conveys Tasso’s tremendous relevance for painters of his generation, he distinguishes the idols made by sophists, which are images of things that do not exist, from the idols made by poets. These he compares with images made by painters. The poet is a sort of “speaking painter,” comparable even with the “divine Word

⁷³⁷“La poesia è dunque imitazione de l’azioni umane, fatta per ammaestramento de la vita.” Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, 151.

⁷³⁸ “e l’intelletto loro medesimo è il pittore che va dipingendo ne l’anima a quella similitudine le forme de la fortezza, de la temperanza, de la prudenza, de la giustizia, de la fede, de la pietà, e de la religione, e d’ogni altro virtù, la quale o sia acquistata per lunga esercitazione o infusa per grazia divine.” Ibid, 5.

⁷³⁹ “per dilettere e per ricreare gli animi della rozza moltitudine e del commune popolo.” Ludovico Castelvetro. *Poetica d’Aristotele vulgarizzata, et sposta*. Werther Romani, ed. (Rome and Bari, 1978-79), 1:46.

of God, who also forms images and commands them to be made.”⁷⁴⁰ The form of poetry, like painting, transforms the truth of a subject into the verisimilar, or the probable.

Tasso’s position was comparable to Girolamo Fracastoro’s dialogue *Naugerius* (1555), where he had argued that the aim of poetry is to delight.⁷⁴¹ Nevertheless, this delight is a consequence of beauty, and the most beautiful forms of things are the truest. Invoking both the Platonic distinction between icastic and fantastic imitation and the Aristotelian notion of universals, he insists that, alone among writers, the poet has access to higher truth, imitating “not the particular but the simple idea clothed in its own beauties, which Aristotle calls the universal.”⁷⁴² Although Tasso had rebuked Mazzoni and Comanini for their fantastic imitations, he conceded that poetry’s evident idealizations actually enhance virtue:

Because the poet seeks the noblest and most beautiful elements in each subject, it follows that poetry will display more of those qualities which pertain to wisdom and the other virtues. For the same reason, if the poet imitates the things that belong to the intellect he will teach more because he omits no beauty that can be attributed to things, while all the others are limited, inasmuch as they seek not all, but only some of the beauties.⁷⁴³

The perfection of things is latent in nature, and true knowledge of nature involves the capacity to perceive that perfection. However, according to Fracastoro, poetry is not a technique but a faculty of mind that all humanity shares; ultimately, it is not even eloquence in its broadest sense, but a simple, profound responsiveness to the world.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴⁰ “ma dobbiam dir più tosto che sia facitore de l’imagini a guisa d’un parlante pittore, ed in ciò simile al divino teologo che forma l’imagini e comanda che si facciano.” Tasso, *Scritti sull’arte poetica*, 1:182.

⁷⁴¹ Ruth Kelso, ed. *Girolamo Fracastoro’s Naugerius, sive de poetica dialogus*. (Urbana, Illinois, 1924).

⁷⁴² “sed simplicem ideam pulchritudinibus suis vestitam, quod universale Aristoteles vocat.” *Ibid*, n.135.

⁷⁴³ “quam igitur maxima in uno quoque & pulcherrima sectatur, hinc sit, ut plura in iis quae ad prudentiam, & alias virtutes pertinent, demostret genus dicendi poetarum propter eandem causam & si ea imitetur, quae ad intellectum attinent, plura quoque, docet: quam pulchritudinem nullam omittit quae attribui rebus possit: cum alii omnes in angusto valde versentur, utpote qui non omnes, sed quasdam solum pulchritudines sectentur.” *Ibid*, 68.

⁷⁴⁴ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 155.

Tasso commented on this notion in Book II, where he defined the material that is proper to the epic poet. Above all, he stated that the epic poet must concern himself with three things: the choice of material, or argument, capable of being given the best form; giving that form to the material chosen; and dressing that form with the appropriate ornament. Importantly, Tasso stated, the material should be based in history, for poetry must imitate, and only that which has happened or can happen can be imitated. On the other hand, fictions cannot be imitated.⁷⁴⁵ In response to the widespread praise for the novelty of Ariosto's fictions in *Orlando Furioso* (1516), which always implied criticism of his own *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), Tasso invokes Aristotle to the effect that "the novelty of a poem does not consist principally in the fictitiousness of a subject unheard of before, but in the beautiful complication of plot and the resolution of its fable."⁷⁴⁶

Thus we find that the imitation of a subject must derive from history as a set of specifics, instead of philosophy which deals with universals; equating in the visual arts to sense-perceptible reality, as opposed to imagination or fantasy. Tasso had established in his opening section to the *Discorso* that the Idea of a perfect poem, heroic or epic, required the assembling of the best models; and that the poet's charge was the judicious selection of these. But it is later in the dialogue between Marsilio Ficino and Cristoforo Landino that he reveals the nature of the best models and their derivation. The repeated appeals to the authority of Aristotle continue in the conversation when, in answer to the question "What is art?" both interlocutors agree that it is "certain reason" (*certa ragione*), which is to say a consistent process. The Nominalist understanding is validated in that they also agree that nature is also *certa ragione*. To reconcile the uncertain or haphazard

⁷⁴⁵ Cropper, *The Domenichino Affair*, 120.

⁷⁴⁶ "La novità del poema non consista principalmente ne la falsità del soggetto non udito, ma nel bel nodo e ne lo scioglimento de la favola." Torquato Tasso, *Scritti sull'arte poetica*, 1:177.

in nature with this process, the speakers relate that that effect is due to the influence of matter on form; that is to say, *mala natura* on *buona natura*. This distinction is also justified with reference to Aristotle; forms, the cause of “un’ordine certo e costante” in the operations of nature, are associated with Platonic ideas as well.⁷⁴⁷ The difference between art and nature is explained in conventionally Aristotelian terms: Nature is *certo ordine* in the thing itself, whereas art is order imposed upon it from without.⁷⁴⁸

Therefore, Tasso presented a reconciliation of the Aristotelian definition of art as an intellectual habit with the validity of the tradition of the imitation of works of art in the production of the verisimilar.⁷⁴⁹ Aside from the very literal allusions to poets and their productions as painters or like painters, the *Discorso* offered artists a conceptual framework for art production. Through the rhetorical method of imitation, the poet and artist construct beauty “by considering the good in various particular goodnesses, we form the idea of the good, just as Zeuxis formed the idea of the beautiful when he wished to paint Helen in Croton”⁷⁵⁰ Individual examples in history and nature were sought out for their “various particular goodnesses,” which required direct observation of objective elements. In order to construct a perfect Idea from these excellent models, the artist/poet was required to master all facets of their craft, making them “universal.” Only when such skills had been learned, and not acquired through mystical means, could the product of the epic poem achieve its goal of moral betterment for the reader. In the visual arts, the Carracci appropriated the notions set forth by Tasso in his treatise and sought to produce works of art that were arrived at through the careful study of individual models,

⁷⁴⁷ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 157-158.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Cropper, *The Domenichino Affair*, 120.

⁷⁵⁰ Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, 6-7. Also see: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 151.

facilitated by a mastery of various disciplines, and informed by an Idea that was tempered by Aristotelian Nominalism.

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The Idea in Rome in the Early Seicento and Agucchi

Evidence of the integration of Tasso's *Discorso* and method for stylistic formation into art theory can be found in the misrepresented treatise of Monsignor Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570-1623). The *Trattato della pittura* (written 1607-1615), which was published as the Preface to Giovanni Massani's *Diverse figure* in 1646, was co-authored by the Carracci pupil Domenichino. As an indispensable document for understanding art theory in the early seventeenth century in Rome, the *Trattato* illustrates the value of eclectic appropriation in the realm of art as it was applicable to poetry. The familiarity of Agucchi with the theorists and critics already cited can be illustrated in the very title of his treatise which is derived from Alberti's formulation of *Idea della Bellezza*. In his *Della pittura*, the Florentine theorist had attempted to balance the need for natural observation and idealization in his text, and to reinforce the classical mimetic model of rhetorical appropriation as exemplified by Zeuxis and codified by Cicero. The same value of a harmonious balance between the two is reiterated in the *Trattato della pittura*.

Again, as in the example of Tasso and other writers who had Nominalism as their metaphysical basis, Aristotle is cited as an authority. What was subsequently transferred to painting from poetic theory was that the highest form of art should be an idealized imitation, or classical mimesis: "an art which imitates anything and everything without discrimination is less good than one which appeals to the better public."⁷⁵¹ In his

⁷⁵¹ Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 128.

treatment, Mahon interpreted this notion within the strict polemical structure of naturalism and idealism, believing that Agucchi was forging the Aristotelian notion of proper appropriation. As he noted, the function of art was understood as showing the universal, and not the particulars of material existence. Thus this classical theory, which Mahon related to Panofsky's understanding of the *Klassisch*, in the early Seicento was "above all literary and interpretative rather than artistic and creative"; or rather, reacting to styles which had already been formed, rather than as influential in its own right.⁷⁵² Furthermore, the fact that Agucchi's treatise touched on the poetic criticism of his day is used to discredit the validity of the proposed art theoretical model: "Since Agucchi was a learned *letterato*, we should expect to find in his views some reflection of contemporary literary criticism, or rather, more accurately, criticism of poetry."⁷⁵³ The supposition does not account for the overwhelming number of treatises on art that took their cues from poetic criticism and theory. The two fields were intimately intertwined. Therefore, Agucchi's *letterato* status does not negate the applicability of his model for the art produced by artists such as Annibale Carracci, whom Bellori claimed the befriended.⁷⁵⁴ On the contrary, it is a reliable record of the very process used by the artist, as well as those that succeeded him such as Domenichino, the co-author of the text.

The fact that Agucchi and Domenichino derived the basis for their model from Aristotle is in keeping with the evolution of art theory as a field of inquiry. Earlier in the Cinquecento, Girolamo Fracastoro referred to Aristotle's *Poetics* in his *Naugerius* when he described two varieties of painters: imitators of nature, and those that are like poets who do not "wish to represent this or that particular man as he is with many defects, but

⁷⁵² Ibid, 6.

⁷⁵³ Ibid, 125.

⁷⁵⁴ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 77.

who, having contemplated the universal and supremely beautiful idea of this creator, make things as they ought to be.”⁷⁵⁵ Fracastoro had many Platonizing tendencies, as mentioned, but the notion of going beyond the “given” in nature is central to beauty in Nominalism and had been espoused by Aristotle in antiquity; and the use of Aristotle as the singular authority on poetry was accepted since the second half of the Cinquecento. Agucchi refers to Aristotle directly on two occasions; and in one instance is an actual quotation from the *Poetics*.⁷⁵⁶ In the same manner as Aristotle and Fracastoro, Agucchi divided artists into two classes: those whose work is characterized by an ennoblement of nature and who focus on the “affairs of the vulgar.”⁷⁵⁷ In poetry the division concentrated on those that focused on epic themes and those that treated “vulgar” subject matter. With the apportionment Aristotle was attempting to demonstrate whether or not tragic poetry was of a higher form than epic. The differentiation revolved around the replication of the imperfections inherent in nature on the one hand and the careful selection of the best models on the other. The aspects of the tragic genre were discussed as to whether or not they should be considered “vulgar.” Therefore, the second Aristotelian proposition which we find reflected in Agucchi is the opinion that the highest form of art involves selective and idealized imitation; in other words, the ennoblement of the actual.⁷⁵⁸ As he wrote:

Considering Aristotle, which necessarily one must agree that poetry imitates persons of quality, either as better, worse, or the same as those of his own time: this is proven by the example of painting; because Polygnotus imitated that which was better, Pausias the worst, and Dionysius the same. And there is no doubt that among the ancients many others did not use the same styles: since the Apelles, Zeuxises, Timaretes, Parrhasius, and diverse others imitated the better. And Pliny tells that Peiraeikos achieved total glory in imitating low things; like the studio of [Guercino]... And that path also imitated small things: and Calare paints

⁷⁵⁵ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 130.

⁷⁵⁶ Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 255-256.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷⁵⁸ The appellation is common for commentaries on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, as is illustrated in Robortello’s. Francesco Robortello. *Librum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes*. (1548)

tablets of ludicrous arguments: & Amulio Romano was esteemed for painting humble things. But Antipholus imitated equally the better and the worst: and Quintilian affirms that Demetrios...did not go beyond similitude to the beauty that is not seen. But in our time, Raphael and the Roman School... followed the manner of ancient statues, over the other better imitators...and between these [moderns] Caravaggio, who is most excellent in coloring, one would compare to Demetrios, because he has abandoned the Idea of beauty, inclined to follow all the similitude.⁷⁵⁹

Those ancient and modern artists who sought out the “beauty that is not seen” in nature are superior to those that merely reproduce the minutia of the world, having “abandoned the Idea of beauty.” The exhortation to imitating the best does not immediately relate Agucchi with Neoplatonism. The same evaluation had been made by Alberti in his *Della pittura* where he noted that “Demetrius, the ancient painter, failed to gain the highest praise because he strove to make things similar to nature rather than lovely.”⁷⁶⁰ Alberti had also discouraged the mere copying of nature, and on the other hand warned against too much freedom from it. The balance that is struck is informed by “That idea of beauty, which even the most experienced mind can hardly perceive, escapes the inexperienced one.”⁷⁶¹ Agucchi set forth the same belief as he stated that the mere imitation of nature was not adequate and he made a comparison between Demetrios and Caravaggio, an ancient painter and his modern counterpart, to illustrate his point.

⁷⁵⁹ “Considerando Aristotile, che necessariamente si dovevanodalla Poesia imitare persone di qualità, ò migliori di quelle del suo tempo, ò peggiori, ò simiglianti: lo provò con l’esempio della Pittura; perche Polignoto imitò i migliori, Pausone i peggiori, e Dionisio i simiglianti. E non è dubbio, che frà gli antiche, altri molti non usassero gli stili medesimi: poiche gli Apelli, i Zeusi, i Timanti, i Parrasii, & altri diversi imitarono i migliori. E Plinio racconta, che Pierico conseguì somma Gloria nell’imitare cose basse; come delle botteghe de’ Barbieri, e de’ Calzolari, e degli asinelli, e delle robbe da mangiare, e simili. E callicle pure imitò cose piccolo: e Calare dipinse tavolette d’argomenti comici: & Amulio Romano fù stimato Nella Pittura di cose humili. Ma Antifolo imitò egualmente i migliori, e i peggiori: e Quintiliano afferma, che Demetrio, benchè questi fosse Scultore, andò tanto dietro alla simiglianza, che alla bellezza non hebbe riguardo. Ma a’ nostri tempi Rafele, e la Scuola Romana di quel secolo, come di sopra si è ditto, seguendo le maniere delle Statue antiche, hanno sopra gli altri imitati i migliori: & il Bassano è stato un Pierico nel rassomigliare i peggiori: & una gran parte de’ moderni, hà figurati gli eguali; e fra questi il Caravaggio eccellentissimo nel colorire si dee comparare à Demetrio, perche hà lasciato indietro l’Idea della bellezza, disposto di seguire del tutto la similitudine.” Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 256-257.

⁷⁶⁰ Alberti, *On Painting*, 92.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid*, 93.

The emphasis placed on the guiding principle of the Idea to correct the errors in merely replicating sense-perceptible reality reflects Agucchi's evaluation of the art world in Rome at the turn of the century. Instead of focusing solely on the remnants of Mannerism and the penchant for over idealization, the critic discusses the different styles that were emerging as being based more on "appearance" than "substance." Notions of nature and mimesis are discussed here in a unique fashion; that is to say that even though an artist might reproduce how something appears, it does not mean that a knowledge of what it *is* has been adequately demonstrated:

Then [after the deaths of Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio, Leonardo, Sarto, and other early and mid-sixteenth-century artists] there came about the decline in painting from the peak it had gained. If it did not again fall into the dark shadows of the early barbarianism, it was rendered at least in an altered and corrupt manner and mistook the true path and, in fact, almost lost a knowledge of what was good. New and diverse styles came into being, styles far from the real and the lifelike based more on appearance than on substance. The artists were satisfied to feed the eyes of the people with the loveliness of colors and rich vestments.⁷⁶²

The criticism of replication of appearances also applies to an over ornamented style in poetry. A judicious presentation of nature first requires a knowledge of the subject; and that knowledge is impossible without a guiding principle for imitation. Therefore, the "true path" that was deviated from by later sixteenth-century artists was that of judicious imitation given form in the art of the "great" Raphael.

The judicious imitation of nature was already well-associated with the Carracci and their approach to art production by the time Agucchi and Domenichino collaborated on the *Trattato*. In the funeral oration of Agostino Carracci, Lucio Faberio, himself a *letterato* and member of the Bolognese Academy of the Gelati, had set forth that:

⁷⁶² Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 247. Quoted in: Robert Enggass and Johnathan Brown, eds. *Italy and Spain 1600-1750: Sources and Documents*. (New Jersey: Eaglewood Cliffs, 1970), 29.

...I shall rest my argument on one single thing concerning the great mind of Carracci, and this is that in his honored profession he was a judicious imitator of natural and artificial things and thus merited his fame as a great and admirable painter. Not without reason do I call him a judicious imitator: for since he considered that the object of painting is to bring delight, he always aimed at imitation of the best, guarding against the error of the many people who prefer simple resemblance, even when it concerns the worst or ugliest things, to a beauty that is free of every defect. When he painted someone from life, he would take into account rank, age, sex, setting and occasion. He would study those parts of the physiognomy that were most particular to the face of the person whose portrait he was to make, also considering the affections and the passions, and would then produce a portrait that was so lifelike, and made with such facility and success that nothing better could be imagined. Not only the physical aspects of the model seem lifelike, but even the spiritual qualities were portrayed, these being of a vividness that even the eloquence of a famous rhetorician might not be able to match. He would give variety to his work with a constant and praiseworthy eye to the particular occasion by studying the variations in rank, clothing, movement, colors, poses and other similar matters. He would disguise, and hide, through the subtle means of art, the imperfections and defects of nature, always augmenting the qualities of beauty, so that nothing better could be desired.⁷⁶³

In the Zeuxinian tradition, Agostino did not merely replicate “simple resemblance,” but “aimed at an imitation of the best.” The process did not devalue nature as such. Quite to the contrary, the existing details of a given subject were all considered in producing a “lifelike” image. Particularities of physiognomy, rank and *affetti* are scrutinized as a “rhetorician might not be able to match” in an attempt to augment “the qualities of beauty.” The idea is illustrated in a sonnet that was recorded in the same oration by Melchiorre Zoppio in honor of the portrait Agostino had produced of his wife, stating: “You are the rival of nature, Carracci, not just its imitator, for nature revealed its defects in bringing devastation to her who had brought so much joy to my sight while alive.”⁷⁶⁴

The same approach was carried out by Annibale and was first thoroughly documented by Agucchi with the direction of Domenichino in their *Trattato*. In

⁷⁶³ Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 203-204.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 205.

discussing the ‘Accademia del Disegno’ of the Carracci, Agucchi noted that great pains were taken to ensure the continued and direct study of nature. For in the Academy: “In which they studied to move beyond nature, they studied not only from life, but often times from cadavers...”⁷⁶⁵ In fact, the whole of the Preface (as it was printed) aims to account for the perfection of style arrived at by Annibale Carracci, especially in the frescoes of the Farnese Gallery (**figure 4**) in Rome. As Agucchi expounded:

Now we have arrived at speaking of the School of the Carracci, and of Annibale more in particular... Whence we say that... upon first arriving in Rome he proposed to join together the exquisiteness of Design of the Roman School with the charm of color of the Lombard; he was able to assert that in this manner of working the more supreme beauty is sought, and arrived at a most eminent rank. Because in each all of his works, and especially in that [Farnese] Gallery named above, one observes the dispositions of all; the rare inventions of every body part, component, design, and exquisiteness of contours, the grace, and softness of color, proportions, beauty, and majesty of gravity and grace, prettiness, nobility of subjects, decorum, vivacity, and the spirit of the figures, the nudes, draperies, foreshortenings, lively expressions of the affections, and all of the other accompaniments, and qualities, and circumstances that in the subjects are visible for one to see, or to imagine; made possible by an elevated intellect and the beautiful arts, finds within it [the Gallery] that Idea of the perfect painter, like Aristotle spoke of one form of the best poet, and Cicero of the orator.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ “Nella quale studiando del continuo sopra il naturale non solo vivo, ma spesse volte de’ Cadaveri havuti dalla Giustitia, per apprendere quel vero rilassamento, che fanno i corpi; essi si alzarono sempre più à gradi di maggior eccellenza; e furon cagione, che molti della gioventù s’inuaghirono di così bell’arte, e bella maniera di que’ Maestri; e dandosi alla medesima professione, ne sono poi riusciti li soggetti, che parimente con gran valore si sono resi al mondo famosi.” Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 248-249.

⁷⁶⁶ “Hor havendoci portato il proposito à parlare della Scuola de’ Carracci, e di Annibale più in particolare; rimane, che alcuna comparatione di lui si faccia con li sopranominati Pittori, così antiche, come moderni. Onde diremo, che quanto all’esser egli stato imitatore di coloro, che la più rara bellezza di esprimere si studiarono, havendo egli conseguito quel fine, che nel suo primo arrivar a Roma si propose, di congiungere insieme la finezza del Disegno della Scuola Romana, con la vaghezza del colorito di quelle di Lombardia; si può affermare, che in questo genere di operare, che la più sourana bellezza ricerca, egli sia arrivato ad un grado eminentissimo. Poiche se più all’individuo in tutte le sue opere, e specialmente in quella Galleria di sopra nominate, si mira alla dispositione del tutto, alla rara inventione di ciascuno parte, al componimento, al disegno, & isquisitezza de’ contorni, alla vaghezza, e morbidezza del colorito, alle proporzioni, alla bellezza, alla maestà alla gravità alla gratia, alla leggiadria, alla nobiltà de’ soggetti, al decoro, alla viucità, & allo spirito delle Figure, à gl’ignudi, a’ panneggiamenti, à gli scorci, alla viva espressione degli affetti, & à tutti gli altri accompagnamenti, e qualità, e circostanze, che negli oggetti visibili si ponno vedere, ò immaginare; può certamente un’intelletto elevato, e delle belle arti ben capace, rinuenirui per entro quell’Idea del perfetto Pittore, che si forma Aristotile dell’ottimo Poeta, e Cicerone dell’Oratore.” Ibid, 256-257.

The exquisiteness of the program lay not with its style, content or manner of depiction but in the consummate combination and mastery of all these. The Idea of the perfect painter, poet and orator lay within the universal nature of the artist, an “elevated intellect” that makes use of “All styles, all forms, all likenesses.”⁷⁶⁷ However, Annibale needed exposure to several exemplary models worthy of imitation to achieve such a gift bestowed by “the beautiful arts.” For as Tasso noted, “Among beautiful things let him choose the most beautiful, among great things the greatest, among marvels the most marvelous; and in the most marvelous let him still try to increase the novelty and grandeur.”⁷⁶⁸ In the example cited by Agucchi, the study of the “most beautiful” models would be incomplete if it did not include those found in Rome in the form of antiquities and the masters from the Cinquecento, especially Raphael.

The manner in which Rome affected Annibale remains a point of contention.⁷⁶⁹ In the contemporary treatments, we find the overwhelming appraisal of Annibale’s reaction to the art he encountered while working for the Farnese as being profoundly affected. For instance Bellori states that: “Finding himself in Rome, Annibale was overcome by the great knowledge of the ancients, and applied himself to the contemplation and the solitary silence of art.”⁷⁷⁰ However, Aidan Weston-Lewis noted that the straightforward analysis of some sixteenth century authors that the artist was merely overcome by antiquity when he arrived in Rome is overly simplistic. Instead, he maintains that “while certain compositions and individual poses can be shown to derive from specific ancient models,

⁷⁶⁷ Girolamo Muzio. “Dell’Arte poetica, Trattati di poetica” in: *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*. Bernard Weinberg, ed. (Bari, 1970), 2:185.

⁷⁶⁸ Tasso, *Scritti sull’arte poetica*, 155.

⁷⁶⁹ Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 93-112. Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci*.

⁷⁷⁰ “Trovanosi Annibale in Roma, restò sopraffatto dal gran sapere degli Antichi, e si diede alla contemplazione, e al silenzio solitario dell’arte.” Bellori, *Le Vite de’ pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni*, 51.

the classicism of his *maniera romana* as a whole reflects a more fundamental mastery and absorption of the vocabulary of antique sculpture.”⁷⁷¹ The absorption of the works encountered was necessary, as Agucchi notes, as Annibale’s Roman sojourn offered those exemplary models necessary to perfect his style and bring together Roman *disegno* and Lombard *colore*; or the clarity of design and intellectual process of central Italian art and the techniques and color theory of the north. As Bellori would later comment, Agucchi stated that when Annibale arrived in Rome at the behest of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese:

Immediately he could see the statues of Rome, and the paintings of Raphael and Michelangelo, and contemplate especially that of Raphael; they...have greater grace of design, than in the works of Lombardy: and they guide to constitute a manner of a supreme perfection that would bring together and unite the most exquisite design of Rome with the beauty of Lombard color. And since shortly one would note through study that Raphael has made [works] above the antique things because he had formed knowledge of the Idea of that beauty, which is not found in nature... Carracci studied the more celebrated and famous statues of Rome; and like that would make great masters, and in little time give a sign of what would be greatly profited from.⁷⁷²

The “manner of a supreme perfection” is not gained by Annibale due to his exposure to the formal examples of the great ancients and moderns. It is in the realization that these works were produced, and thereby Raphael was able to surpass the ancients, with the Idea of beauty that “is not found in nature.” However, this does not mean that nature can be

⁷⁷¹ Weston-Lewis, “Annibale Carracci and the Antique,” 287. As Wittkower observed, even his drawings from life “often take on something of the quality of ancient statuary.” Rudolf Wittkower. *The Drawings of the Carracci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), 12.

⁷⁷² “Subito che videro le Statue di Roma, e le Pitture di Rafaele, e Michelangelo, e contemplando specialmente quelle di Rafaele; confessarono ritrovarsi per entro più alto intendimento, e maggior finezza di disegno, che nell’opere di Lombardia: e giudicarono, che per costituire una maniera d’una sourana perfettione, converrebbe col disegno finissimo di Roma unire la bellezza del colorito Lombardo. E poiche ben presto si avvidero, quale studio haveva Rafaele fatto sopra le cose antiche, donde havea Saputo formar l’Idea di quella bellezza, che Nella natura non si trova, se non nel modo, che di sopra si diceva; si misero li Carracci à fare studio sopra le più celebri, e famose Statue di Roma; e come che fosser già gran maestri, in breve tempo dieder segno di essersene grandemente approfittati.” Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 252.

dismissed for a purely fantastic *imago*; nor does it mean that the exemplary models (i.e. Raphael, Michelangelo and ancient statuary) should be imitated without rhetorical digestion. In further defining *Idea della bellezza*, the critic elucidated the conception used by Annibale Carracci and illustrates the difference from the Neoplatonic formulation:

Another more important thing that is always different among painters concerns the investigation, more or less, into the perfection of beauty: since some imitate one or more kinds of things, only to imitate that which is ordinary in appearance to the visual faculty, they place last imitating the perfectly natural the same as it appears to the eyes, without seeking anything more. But others rise above with understanding, and comprehend in their Idea the excellence of beauty, and of the perfect, which nature would want to make, though she does not produce it in a single subject because of the many circumstances which hinder it, [including] time, material, and other dispositions: and as courageous artificers knew, perfection is not all found in an individual, but makes its plans and one, therefore, studies many...they are not content imitating that which they see in a single subject, but go gather the disparate beauty in many and combine it together with grace of judgment, and make the things not like they are, but like they ought to be, most perfectly transmitted to the final work. By that understanding the painters that imitate things only as they are found in nature are not worthy of praise, and they imitate the vulgar: because they do not arrive at knowing that beauty that would be expressed in nature, they stop at what they see expressed, though it is found to be exceedingly imperfect. The things painted that only imitate the natural please people because they are ordinary and are used to seeing these kinds... of imitation that delight. But the expert man raises his thought to the Idea of beauty that nature shows that it wishes to create... and like a divine thing it is beheld.⁷⁷³

⁷⁷³ “In un'altra cosa più importante sono stati sempre differenti tra di loro li Pittori, cioè intorno all'investigare più o meno la perfezione del bello: poiche alcuni, imitando uno, o più generi di cose, datisi solamente ad imitare quel che alla facoltà visiva è solito di apparire, hanno posto il fine loro nell'imitare il naturale perfettamente, come all'occhio appare, senza cercar niente di più. Ma altri s'inalzano più in alto con l'intendimento, e comprendono Nella loro Idea l'eccellenza del bello, e del perfetto, che vorrebbe fare la natura, ancorche ella non l'eseguisca in un sol soggetto, per le molte circostanze, che impediscono, del tempo, della materia, e d'altre disposizioni: e come valorosi artefici, conoscendo, che se essa non perfezione del tutto un'individuo, si studia almeno di farlo divisamente in molti, facendo una parte perfetta in questo, un'altra in quello separatamente; eglino non contenti d'imitare quel che veggono in un sol soggetto, vanno raccogliendo le bellezze sparse in molti, e l'uniscono insieme con finezza di giudizio, e fanno le cose non come sono, ma come esser dovrebbero per essere perfettissimamente mandate ad effetto. Da che intenderassi agevolmente quanto meritino di lodo li Pittori, che imitando solamente le cose, come Nella natura le trovano, e si debba farne la stima, che ne fa il volgo: perche essi non arrivando a conoscere quella bellezza, che esprimere vorrebbe la natura, si fermano su quel che veggono espresso, ancorche lo trovino oltremodo imperfetto. Da questo ancora nasce, che le cose dipinte, & imitate dal naturale piacciono al Popolo, perche egli è solito a vederne di si fatte, e l'imitazione di quel che a pieno conosce, li diletta. Ma l'huomo intendente, sollevando il pensiero all'Idea del bello, che la natura mostra di voler fare,

The rhetorical-critical method espoused throughout the treatment exhorts the use of classical mimesis as the governing principle in producing a “divine” beauty. Again we find that creators who have knowledge of the Idea of beauty, and therefore the true beauty underlying the vulgarities of nature, “are not content imitating that which they see in a single subject, but go gather the disparate beauty in many and combine it together with grace of judgment.” Where Tasso had extolled the virtuous approach “by considering the good in various particular goodnesses, we form the idea of the good,” Agucchi also relates the necessity of selecting from particulars and examples that exist in nature (though they be only the best examples).

The process of combining disparate beauty has often been misinterpreted by the term ‘eclecticism.’⁷⁷⁴ However, the process discussed by Tasso and Agucchi, and practiced by the Carracci, was not merely a formal appropriation of certain qualities inherent in individual works that were taken as exemplars. As Agucchi makes quite clear, it is also the theoretical combination of different approaches taken from varying sources and disciplines. It was with such an understanding that he had noted Annibale’s intent: “upon first arriving in Rome he proposed to join together the exquisiteness of Design of the Roman School with the charm of color of the Lombard.”⁷⁷⁵ The division of the schools into Roman, Venetian and Lombard by Agucchi relates to their assumed stylistic characteristics and theoretical approaches: the *Scuola Romana* was represented by Raphael and Michelangelo, who “followed the beauty of statues” and antiquity in their works and favored *disegno*; *i Pittori Vinitiani* was headed by Titian and were known for

da quello vien rapito, e come cosa divina la contempla.” Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 242-243.

⁷⁷⁴ Denis Mahon. “Eclecticism and the Carracci: further reflections on the validity of a label.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953), 303-41. Also see: “Art Theory and Artistic Practice in the Early Seicento: Some Clarification.” *Art Bulletin* 35 (1953): 226-232.

⁷⁷⁵ Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 256.

their imitation of *la bellezza della natura*; and finally, *il primo de' Lombardi* was Correggio, who was known for his sweet and facile manner.⁷⁷⁶ Throughout the Preface the author relates that the Bolognese works of Annibale and the other Carracci had absorbed the approaches of the Venetian and Lombard schools, and especially the work of Correggio and Titian.⁷⁷⁷ The Roman sojourn completed the theoretical models required to create a perfect, universal style by introducing the central Italian notion of *disegno*.

The integration of multiple models relates to the belief in art, as in rhetoric and poetry, that the imitation of only one will result in an imperfect style. Vasari had noted the failure of artists of his own generation to copy the art of Michelangelo, and set forth the importance of imitating more than a single model.⁷⁷⁸ As well, Lucio Faberio noted that artists such as Giulio Romano had “fell short of the goal they had set themselves” in their imitation of Raphael.⁷⁷⁹ The criticism can be understood as ironic for Vasari had discussed Raphael’s method of taking from many artists to create a new personal style: “and mixing this style with some other details chosen from the best works of other masters, he created a single style out of many that was later always considered his own, for which he was and always will be endlessly admired by artisans.”⁷⁸⁰ Therefore, in copying from an artist who arrived at his style through eclectic appropriation, Romano was illustrating his ignorance and denial of that very process. On the other hand, Faberio wrote that in the case of the Carracci: “The aim of our Carracci was to gather together the perfections found in many artists, and to reduce these to one harmonious entity that left

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid, 246.

⁷⁷⁷ “E ben considerando con quanto intendimento, e buon gusto havessero que’ due gran Maestri imitate la natura, si posero con esattissima diligenza à studiare sopra il naturale con quella stessa intentione, che da quell’opere si raccoglieva haver havuto gli stessi Correggio, e Titiano.” Ibid, 250.

⁷⁷⁸ Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Milanese, ed., 4: 376. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 186-199.

⁷⁷⁹ Summerscale, *Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci*, 206.

⁷⁸⁰ Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Bondanella trans., 334.

nothing to be desired... Yet in the works that he left us, one clearly sees the boldness and sureness of Michelangelo, the softness and delicacy of Titian, the grace and majesty of Raphael, the loveliness and facility of Correggio, to whose perfections he added his rare and unusual inventions and compositional ideas, and with these works he was to give and will continue to give other painters the norm and example of everything that is needed by an exceptional and perfect painter.”⁷⁸¹ The reductive process that Faberio notes of the Carracci does not merely attempt to take the overt characteristics of style from other great masters, but instead “digests” the models, breaking them down and recombining them in a new fashion.

As they would be by many seicento writers, the Carracci are presented in Agucchi as having rescued art from the artifices of Mannerism through a return to nature, and it is on this foundation that the new Idea is possible. However, the natural world need be tempered by careful selection; artists such as Caravaggio, and those that replicate everything that is perceptible with the human eye, fall short of the goal of art. In response to those that praised the manner of Caravaggio, Annibale stated: “Everything he sees in nature, he puts it all down, instead of skimming off what is good and what is better. I would like to choose the most perfect parts and modify them a bit, thus giving to the figures the nobility and harmony that is lacking in the original.”⁷⁸² Beauty, as Ripa defined, is scattered throughout the natural world and is comprehensible only in parts.⁷⁸³ It is therefore the select painters who strive to go beyond mere naturalism that “comprehend in their excellent Idea of beauty and perfection what nature would want to produce.”⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸¹ Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 206.

⁷⁸² Carlo Cesare Malvasia. *The Life of Guido Reni*. Catherine Enggass and Robert Enggass trans. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 44.

⁷⁸³ Ripa, *Iconologia*, 40-42.

⁷⁸⁴ “comprendono nella loro Idea l'eccellenza del bello, e del perfetto, che vorrebbe fare la natura.” Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 139.

Therefore, as Agucchi sets forth, with the direction of the Carracci pupil Domenichino, that the process requires first a thorough study of nature and selection of the best, then its ennoblement by elimination of faults, and finally a synthesis of these disparate elements *con finezza di giudizio*; thus “the more talented painters, without taking away the resemblance, have aided nature with art.”⁷⁸⁵ The more empirical conception of the Idea is vastly different from that Neoplatonic notion so prevalent only a few decades earlier, and relates the growing dominance of a moderate-Nominalist approach in Tuscany and Emilia in the early Seicento.

* * *

The Physiology of Style and Scannelli

Writers such as Agucchi, who proposed the phenomenal-Nominalist approach for stylistic formulation present the manner of the Carracci, are indispensable sources for understanding the processes of artists. But rhetoric and poetry were not the only disciplines that affected art and its criticism in the Seicento. Moreover, even though the superior evaluation of the Roman works of Annibale was prevalent among theorists and critics throughout the first half of the century, there were a select number of authors that were critical of classical elements. It is in these few instances that the best insight into the development of style later in artist’s careers can be found. One of the writers that were openly critical of the model for art production defended by Agucchi was Francesco Scannelli (1616-1663).⁷⁸⁶ Born in Forlì in the Romagna, Scannelli was a physician by profession like Giulio Mancini and attended the University of Perugia. In his capacity as

⁷⁸⁵ “i più valenti pittori, senza leuare alla somiglianza, hanno aiutata la natura con l’arte.” Ibid, 140.

⁷⁸⁶ Elizabeth Cropper. “Ancients and Moderns: Alessandro Tassoni, Francesco Scannelli, and the Experience of Modern Art” in: *Perspectives on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History*. Joseph Marino and Melinda Schlitt, eds. (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 303-324.

an amateur-connoisseur, he was particularly familiar with the Bolognese school of painting, being personally acquainted with Guido Reni, Francesco Albani (1578-1660) and Guercino; though he had also traveled widely in Italy in order to familiarize himself with other schools. Later in his career, Scannelli was employed by Francesco d'Este I, Duke of Modena, as the protégé of Geminiano Poggi, the Duke's secretary.⁷⁸⁷ Poggi was responsible for the Duke's collection of paintings and on occasion Scannelli acted as the secretary's representative in acquiring works and as an art consultant for the Duke.⁷⁸⁸ Most of the information concerning Scannelli is derived from his only work *Il Microcosmo della Pittura* published in 1657, and dedicated to Duke Francesco.

The title of the work references the Vitruvian conception that the human body, being created in God's image, is a microcosmic reflection of the entire universe.⁷⁸⁹ Renaissance theorists like Ficino had used the metaphysical schema to assist in explaining the descent of beauty into matter, and clarify man's relationship to his creator and the immutable world of Ideas.⁷⁹⁰ Scannelli, on the other hand, extends the conceit to the allegorical corpus of painting as a diagnostic map, which he represented as a human body of which Michelangelo is the backbone, Titian the heart, Correggio the brain, Raphael the liver, the Carracci and their followers the skin, and Veronese the organs of generation.⁷⁹¹ The particular artists chosen, and their corresponding biological functions, relate Scannelli's divisions of different schools and reveal his North Italian orientation. The first half of his treatise is concerned with describing three of these schools, corresponding to different regions: the Tuscan school is noted for its reliance on *disegno*;

⁷⁸⁷ Janet Southorn. *Power and Display in the Seventeenth Century: The Arts and Their Patrons in Modena and Ferrara*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 28-71.

⁷⁸⁸ Mahon, "Eclecticism and the Carracci," 322.

⁷⁸⁹ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, 72-74.

⁷⁹⁰ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 94.

⁷⁹¹ Enggass and Enggass eds., *Italy and Spain: 1600-1750*, 99.

the Venetian school is praised for its *spiritosa naturalezza*, or “vigorous naturalism”, and spontaneity of technique; and the Lombard school, which combines the most laudable aspects of the Tuscan and Venetian, is embodied in the art of Correggio. Later in his treatment, the Bolognese school is also added, represented by the Carracci as the derma of the body.⁷⁹² The manner in which the amateur-connoisseur divided the schools was fairly universal and is attested to in Agucchi where one finds similar defining characteristics of each.⁷⁹³

Scannelli’s work was not unique in its psychosomatic methodology. The amateur astronomer, sculptor, inventor and academician Pietro Francavilla (1548-1615), the famous pupil of Giambologna, had a good deal of personal experience in anatomical dissection and wrote a treatise on the human body entitled *Il microcosmo*, which was accompanied by his own illustrations. According to Baldinucci, the text was comprehensive and discussed those related branches of natural philosophy that dealt with physiognomy and the various humors and temperaments.⁷⁹⁴ Psychosomatic methodologies such as humoral theory and physiognomy took the body as a diagnostic map for the soul, psyche, and emotions. The physician and critic Giulio Mancini, for example, used physiology and humoral theory to explain the aesthetic inclination of different nations.⁷⁹⁵ Blue-eyed northerners have a cooler cranial temperature and cooler temperaments, and hence he adduces that they prefer cool colors and weak tonal contrasts. Dark-eyed Italians are hot-tempered and consequently prefer strong contrasts

⁷⁹² Howard Hibbard. *Caravaggio*. (New York: Random House Publishing, 1983), 364. The Lombard perspective also comes from Agucchi, Malvasia, and Gherardi. These authors saw the “pure” style to derive its roots from the North, and the Tuscan style as defined by “artificiality,” evidenced in its spawning of Mannerism. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 143.

⁷⁹³ Agucchi, *Trattato della pittura* in: Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 256.

⁷⁹⁴ Filippo Baldinucci. *Notizie de’ Professori del disegno*. (1681) (Florence: Eurografica S.p.A, 1974), 3: 56-71. Also see: Owsei Temkin. *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973.

⁷⁹⁵ Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, 1: 128-30.

of light and dark.⁷⁹⁶ By the time Scannelli would publish his work, such psychosomatic and physiological methodologies had been well represented in art theory and criticism.

Although at the outset of the work, Scannelli claims that he will deal with theory, his interest in individual artists and works necessitates a critical approach. In fact, the *Microcosmo* can be classified as anti-theoretical, as it attempts to refute the position that painting should be an intellectual process, laboriously acquired.⁷⁹⁷ Responding to such classical theorists as Zuccaro, Agucchi, and the biographer Giovanni Baglione, who espoused the necessity for eclectic appropriation of ideal models; Scannelli emphasized the “non-intellectual,” or intuitive aspects of style. The untaught and instinctual elements of the creative process were important for the critical approach that was not intellectually based, and which bordered on notions of artistic genius.⁷⁹⁸ The reluctance to concede to the superiority of intellectual process, which was most notably captured in the central Italian idea of *disegno*, is seminal to the attempt made by the author to establish aesthetic qualifications that favored art of the North. In like fashion, we find Scannelli turning to Ripa and Lomazzo for the following way of defining *bellezza*, which is: “...not...so much desired beauty, that is a reflection of supreme light, and like a divine ray of light, which appears to me composed with good symmetry of parts and reconciled with sweetness of

⁷⁹⁶ Especially in Italy, the humoral view lasted in humanist and popular culture well into the eighteenth century. The humors fell out of favor, mainly in England, where the “mechanical philosopher,” Robert Boyle held that far more “elements” made up the physical world than the four accepted by Aristotle. And in the 1600s the “chymical phisitian” Johannes B. van Helmont, who attributed health and illness to causes more specific than the relationship of the four elements within human bodies, challenged the views of the Royal College of Physicians of London, which still endorsed Galenist humoral theory. Filipczak, ed. *Hot Dry Men Cold Wet Women*, 16.

⁷⁹⁷ The source for such an approach could be derived from the anti-classicist Marco Boschini (who may have been involved with advising the Duke’s agents about the purchase of paintings), since Scannelli shows in the *Microcosmo* that he is aware of the existence of Boschini’s *Carta*, although the latter was not published until three years later.

⁷⁹⁸ Mahon, “Eclecticism and the Carracci,” 322.

colors, abandoned as a remnant in earth and cloaked in the immortal and celestial life.”⁷⁹⁹

The definition recalls the same hesitation found in Ripa, where the Platonic notion of divine light exists alongside the phenomenal need for measure and proportion.⁸⁰⁰

This duality, and the process by which an artist extracts beauty, is evinced through the praise of Scannelli’s favored painter, Correggio.⁸⁰¹ In stressing the diversity of individual natural genius, the author finds that although the painter did not consciously seek out idealization, his mode of painting was superior as it expressed *naturalezza*, “naturalism.” The term, as Scannelli applies it, does not refer to an exact transcription of nature, but rather the utilization of the best aspects of nature. It is a process of selection itself, but not a conscious search for idealization. As such, Scannelli distances himself from the Neoplatonic remnants in his definition of beauty since he stresses appropriation directly from nature: Ficino had stated it was ridiculous “that things which are not beautiful of their own nature give birth to beauty.”⁸⁰² Instead, we find that *La vera e bella naturalezza*, or “the true and beautiful naturalism”, is the sort of expression that the Forlian critic would employ to describe the painter’s goal. In *naturalezza* an important part is played by *uniformità*, or “uniformity,” which is expressive of the fluid and integrating characteristics of Veneto-Lombard painting. By contrast, the great vice of the Florentines, who were appreciated in Agucchi’s estimation for their use of *disegno*, are criticized by Scannelli for their *snaturata seccaggine*, or “shallow perversion of nature.”⁸⁰³ Therefore artists outside the influence of the Tuscan school did not benefit by

⁷⁹⁹ “...non...la tanto desiderata bellezza, che riflesso di supreme lume, e come raggio della divinità, la quale m’appare composta con buona Simetria di parti e concordata con la soauità de’ colori, lasciata in terra per reliquia e Caparra della vita Celeste ed immortale.” Francesco Scannelli, *Il Microcosmo della Pittura*, 107.

⁸⁰⁰ Ripa, *Iconologia*, 40-42.

⁸⁰¹ For a discussion of Duke Francesco’s interest in Corregesque art see: R. Lightbrown. “Princely Pressures: 2. Francesco I d’Este and Correggio.” *Apollo* (1963), 193-9.

⁸⁰² Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, 88.

⁸⁰³ Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 1-88.

traveling to Rome to study. In fact, the experience generally ruined them by poisoning their styles. To illustrate the point, Scannelli poses the question: what if Correggio had traveled to Rome? It would have, Scannelli believes, “taken him from the proper path. And in corroboration of this position they present as a bad example the highly talented Annibale Carracci and other good artists of more than ordinary ability, endowed with a fine manner, who after they had seen and studied the works of the *prima scuola*, rather than improving, found in part that their exceptional skills had diminished.”⁸⁰⁴

The anti-classical critic believed that the deliberate combination of different perfections resulted in a “superfluous artifice,” and was an unnatural growth on the corpus of painting.⁸⁰⁵ He expands on this metaphor when discussing the Carracci and their followers, who formed the skin of the corpus, the “external order of this composite body.” As he relates,

And when these would so desire, that similar subjects would still come together for the formation of the Microcosm of Painting, with strong reasoning and determination, that the most excellent Carracci make, as esteemed and laudable reformers, had procured in their days, when their exercises of the profession came with the decline of beauty, and good naturalism of participation through an industrious study of the effects of works that are more excellent of better masters, corresponds to the principle parts of the Microcosm, and in a manner they are able to compose a particular excellent style that is mitigated by beauty and the natural, that was afterwards the safe guide of future Professors, where they with other principles of their school were able to say, that they have served, as mitigated, and universal membrane for uncovering, and ending, the then well-formed Microcosm of Painting, and in the manner, that of the same membrane does not derive from the successive one that is the more ignoble part, and less necessary of the composite human, similarly in our great body of painting, they are able to serve as a membrane for other good subjects, but less of the principles that accord to the School, which, all united, form the external order of this composite body, next to these integral and necessary parts of this body we should finally add those which appear by accident and which sometimes form hard and callous growths and sometimes are filth applied to the skin, like superfluous

⁸⁰⁴ Enggass and Enggass eds., *Italy and Spain: 1600-1750*, 100.

⁸⁰⁵ Mahon, “Eclecticism and the Carracci,” 322.

clothing. The first are the product of excessive labor, the latter are added to the surface by those depraved individuals who seek thus to add a foolish beauty to a noble body which is already perfectly finished by Mother Nature.⁸⁰⁶

The excesses of employing unnecessary artifice are the equivalent, in the biological metaphor, to smearing excrement on skin, or a cancerous growth in the modern understanding. In other words, once an artist moved beyond the limitations of natural beauty by idealizing his art, it produced grotesqueries. In the model for judging good art re-invented by Scannelli, it is not surprising that the early works of Annibale are praised while the later Roman works are criticized.

* * *

Guido Reni and Realism Later in an Artist's Career

The next generation of artists that succeeded the Carracci, including Domenichino, Guercino, Lanfranco and Guido Reni (1575-1642), inherited their role as the skin of the body of painting. Reni in particular would embody, for Scannelli, the abnormal growth that could occur on the dermis if nature is shunned in the creative process. Although generally considered a prominent member of the Carracci Succession, Reni began his

⁸⁰⁶ “E quando pure questi tali bramassero, che simili soggetti ancor’essi conuenissero per la formatione del MICROCOSMO DI PITTURA, saria forse ragionevole il determinare, che gli eccellentissimi Carracci furono stimati laudabili riformatori, havendo procurato a loro giorni, quando veniva esercitata la Professione con maniera declinanti dalla bella, e buona naturalezza di partecipare mediante uno studio industrioso gli effetti dell’opere più eccellenti de’ migliori Maestri, corrispondenti alle principali parti d’un tanto MICROCOSMO, & in un tal modo poterono comporre particular maniera in eccellenza temperate, bella, e naturale, che fu poscia sicura norma de’ futuri Professori, ond’eglino con altar principali della loro Scuola si può dire, che habbiano servito, come temperate cute, e membrana universale per ricorprire, e terminare, il già ben formato MICROCOSMO DELLA PITTURA, e nella guisa, che dalla stessa cute ne deriva la successive cuticula parte piu’ ignobile, e meno necessaria dell’humano composto, similmente nel nostro GRAN CORPO DI PITTURA possono servire per cuticula altri buoni soggetti, mà però meno principali di detta Scuola, I quali tutti unitamente concorrono in ordine all’esterno compimento di un tal composto, e così non restrandò in oltre, che aggiungere in riguardo delle parti integranti, e necessarie se non quelle, le quali solo hora appariscono per accidente, che sono alle volte nelle parti esteem l’escrescéze callose, e dure, ed altre escrementitie dell’ultima cuticula, come diversi fuchi, e somaglianti superflui abbigliamenti; le prime prodotte dall’ecedéti fatiche, e gli altri sóministrati alla superficie da persone vitiose p apportare sciocca bellezza a quell nobile composto, che fù già perfettamente compito nel suo essere dalla Madre Natura.” Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 109-110.

training with the Flemish painter Denys Calvaert around 1590 in Bologna, who continued to practice in a Mannerist idiom. Even after joining the Carracci Academy and studying under Ludovico Carracci (1595), remnants of his early training persisted even after he moved to Rome. His professional rivals even commented on the regression apparent in Reni's manner.⁸⁰⁷ Malvasia records that: "They set about to criticize his style, which reverted, so they said, to the same weak languid manner of Zuccheri and Vasari in Rome, of Samacchini, Fontana, and Procaccini in Bologna, from which the Carracci, with great effort, redeemed art and exalted the true style."⁸⁰⁸ The approach, which was obvious to his contemporaries had fostered Realist tendencies, would be one such complaint that Scannelli found with the artist later in his career. In Book I, Chapter XVII⁸⁰⁹ Scannelli sets forth his understanding for a change from a naturalistic style to a brighter, more abstract one. This stylistic trajectory he notes in the careers of several artists, but in the examples of Guido Reni and Annibale Carracci in Bologna we find the originations of such a desire to change their method of working. The impetus was "born from studious artifice" and caused accidents that resulted in the "excessively bright manner," which was mediocre in the estimation of the critic who favored Lombard naturalism.⁸¹⁰ As Scannelli writes,

⁸⁰⁷ Richard Spear. *The "Divine" Guido: Religion, Sex, Money, and Art in the World of Guido Reni*. (Connecticut: New Haven, 1997), 275.

⁸⁰⁸ Malvasia, *The Life of Guido Reni*, 44. Spear, *The "Divine" Guido*, 277.

⁸⁰⁹ Mahon translated the title, 'Investigations of the reasons why many [painters] today have changed their individual style to the lighter manner.' *DELLA PITTURA LIB.I. CAP. XVII. Dal buono intelligente essere riconosciute le qualità necessarie alla degna Pittura, ed insieme l'inganno de' volgari. Ricercandosi la cagione, perche I migliori hodierni vengano a mutare in più chiara la propria maniera, e si discorre per riconoscere la migliore*. Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 107.

⁸¹⁰ "D'onde poi nasca, che lo studioso Artefice; il quale non intende, se nó operare mai sempre in ordine all'avantaggiata perfezione, venga in fine per lo più ad esprimere con la successive eccedente chiarezza anco più debili i fuoi dipinti fuori del proprio intento; dira, che dopo haver più volte considerato, ritrovo finalmente, che varj possono essere gli accidenti, che vengono a causare una così fatta mutatione nell'operare, e la prima causa, ed anco più commune, la quale raccolti sino da primi anni, che io mi ritrovai in Bologna in occasione di simil discorso, era l'havere osservato lo stesso Guido Reni l'opere de'primi Professori, ed in particolare quelle de gli studiosissimi Carracci, ancorche fossero poco avanti dipinte, ritrovarsi non poco oscurate, e guaste, e però havea in tanto pensato di supplier a simili accidenti

And turning to more universal and adequate reasons; we can observe similar changes not only in the works of the second manner of the same Guido Reni and Peter Paul Ruben, but also today in the works of Giovanni Francesco Barbieri [Guercino], of Francesco Albani, and similarly, in the last works by Pietro da Cortona. All of these men, who are the most capable and famous masters of our time, have afterwards, during the period of their greatest acclaim, changed over in their manner of working to the lighter colors.⁸¹¹

The change in style noted in the career of Guido Reni was evident to many seicento authors, though they differed on its primary defining characteristics. Whereas an overall lightening of the artist's palette is commonly noted in contemporary treatments, the emphasis and negative evaluation of the artifice is largely confined to author's favoring art produced outside the *prima scuola*. Malvasia, for instance, elucidates the new manner of paint application and degree of finish present in Reni's later work. Relating the Bolognese artist to Titian later in their careers, Malvasia discusses works like the *St. Matthew and the Angel* of 1635-40 (**figure 40**) as incorporating an increasingly painterly technique. As he wrote,

Also those old men Guido painted were not left smooth and unified like those by other artists, but with masterful strokes, full of thousands of subtleties, he depicted their sagging skin...Nor did he use a sketchy technique in the manner of Cavedoni to indicate their sagging beards with quick loose strokes and their hair like softest feathers. On the contrary, he made use of the ground paint almost as if it were a space to play on, rapidly sketching in with great brio and equal skill in a manner never before practiced by anyone else (if not perhaps by Titian at times, although not with so much daring) the locks turned in various directions, toned down and highlighted in relation to the relative position, giving then the finishing touches at the top with the principal highlights.⁸¹²

coll'estremo del chiaro alla successiva mancanza a fine, che il tempo co la maggior durata riducesse l'opera alla conueneuole mediocrita." Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 114.

⁸¹¹ "E discendendo a ragioni più universali, ed adequate; osservandosi simili mutationi non solamente nell'opere della seconda maniera del medesimo Guido Reni, di Pietro Paolo Rubens, mà anco alla giornata in quelle di Gio. Francesco Barbieri, di Francesco Albani, e similmente ne gli ultimi operati di Pietro da Cortona, i quali tutti essendo a nostri giorni i più sufficienti, e famosi Maestri, hanno poscia nel tempo del maggior grido inclinato il proprio modo di operare alla maggior chiarezza." Ibid, 114-5.

⁸¹² Malvasia, *The Life of Guido Reni*, 134.

The hallmarks of the working method and effect of Titian's late paintings (**figure 21**) by Vasari are present in Malvasia's analysis: the appearance of rapid execution, and the order of paint application producing an effective subject at a distance. However, the vocabulary and technical description of Malvasia can be situated within a dialogue that had been developing since Vasari published his analysis of Titian's late style. The subsequent publications of *Maraviglie dell'Arte* in 1642 by Carlo Ridolfi (1594-1658), and *Carta del navegar pittoresco* of 1660 by Marco Boschini (1605-1681), had championed the idea that *pittura di macchia*, or "painting with splotches," was not the end result of working without *disegno*, but instead a viable, and even superior alternative.⁸¹³ Reni's painterly evolution was not similar to that of Titian, and as such, necessitated these alternative understandings of *pittoresco* in order to apply it to the Life of the Bolognese artist.

Malvasia, of course, did not view Reni's *seconda maniera* as an adoption of alternative painterly precepts. He emphasizes the speed of execution throughout his description of the later technique to segue into the economic motivation for the change. As Malvasia makes evident throughout the end of the Life, it was Reni's gambling debts that prompted the utilization of such a rash technique.⁸¹⁴ A similar reason is given by Scannelli in his evaluation of the style produced by Reni late in his career, as he quotes the Centese Guercino:

Evidently the more convincing reason is that which the painter from Cento [Guercino] gave in response to this question when he explained to me that

⁸¹³ David Rosand. *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. (New Haven, 1969), 34-6. Marco Boschini. *La carta del navegar pittoresco*, ed. A. Pallucchini. (Venice-Rome, 1966).

⁸¹⁴ The particular neutral colors (mainly white, brown, black) that Reni chose as his palette for these later works were the cheapest of the pigments available at the time, and therefore substantiate Malvasia's account. Malvasia, *The Life of Guido Reni*, 134-6.

it was the taste of the majority, and above all of those who ordered works; and he had often heard complaints from those who possessed works of his first manner that in these the eyes, the mouth, and other members were hidden (so they said) in dark shadows and that as a result they could not consider certain parts as fully executed; very often they assured him that they could not recognize the faces or occasionally the actions of the figures. And so, in order to satisfy the majority as far as possible, and especially those who paid money for the requested work, he had executed the paintings in a lighter manner.⁸¹⁵

The overriding concern of patronage pressure would become a reoccurring theme in the later treatments of Passeri and, as mentioned, Malvasia. The specific complaint of figures being hidden in darkness became commonplace in later criticism as well: fifteen years after Guercino's testimony, Bellori criticized Caravaggio and his followers for hiding their deficiencies in shadows, instead of following the precepts of art and learning proper anatomy and clear spatial construction.⁸¹⁶ However, in his recent treatment on old-age style, Sohm charted the earnings of different seicento artists in relation to their age and determined that they actually earned less later in their careers.⁸¹⁷ In the cases of Reni and Guercino the economic pressures of patron's demands does not account for their adoptions.

An alternate reason Scannelli noted that Reni tended late in his career toward an "extreme lightness" was due to the phenomenon of the paint darkening as it dries.⁸¹⁸ This

⁸¹⁵ "pare, che sia anco più valeuole ragione quella, che già in tal proposito mi significò il medesimo Pittore da Cento, venédomi a dimostrare ciò succedere per ritrovarsi di tal forma il gusto della maggior parte, e di quelli in particolare, che vengono a richiedere l'opere loro, e l'haver' egli sentito più volte dolsersi coloro, che possedono i dipinti della propria sua prima maniera, per ascondere (come essi dicono) gli occhi, bocca, ed altre membra nella soverchia oscurita, e per ciò non havere stimato compite Alcune parti, coll'asserire bene spesso non conoscere la faccia, e tal volta anco l'attioni particolari delle figure, e così per sodisfare a tutto potere alla maggior parte, massime quelli, che col danaro richiedevano l'opera, havea con modo più chiaro manifestato il dipinto." Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 114-5.

⁸¹⁶ Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni*, 112.

⁸¹⁷ For instance, Guercino's income peaked when he was fifty-years old when he was making 2,750 ducats annually, and then began to decline dramatically once he hit sixty-years old. Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 14.

⁸¹⁸ "It was observed by Guido Reni himself, who noticed in the works of great masters, and particularly in those by the very thorough Carracci, that, even soon after they were painted, they became more than a little dark and ruined." Scannelli, *Il Micocorsmo della pittura*, 1: 107. Quoted in: Spear, *The "Divine" Guido*,

can be seen in the *St. Sebastian* (**figure 41**), a late finished altarpiece. Contemporary painters adopted Reni's style, as Scannelli saw it, not so much with his technical motivations but simply because the public enjoyed it. These painters, even distinguished ones, "find themselves to be a long way away from the necessary competencies of good painting." Not only are they incompetent, they, like Narcissus, do not even "recognize their inabilities" and are generally too self-absorbed to notice. Some contemporary painters, Scannelli wrote:

...either do not want to recognize, or do not know how to recognize, how the charming brightness of colors should be used...Most painters today may be somewhat stylish and even learned, but one still finds them to be missing an essential and true life-likeness and to be by far inferior to the first modern and most perfect masters [Raphael, etc.] and not even the equal of their first followers and sounder inheritors. One can say without dispute of these kinds of characters, however, that they do not breed such mistaken opinions except by the intensity of their feelings, which, in turn, obfuscate their learning. In time, this also corrupts the imagination of similarly inclined individuals...who are endowed much more with good luck than good understanding, come to be deceived by a too great affection for themselves...⁸¹⁹

Scannelli describes this in terms of physiology as contemporary painters are only interested in the skin. Again, this is partly a consequence of their Carracci inheritance as the skin of the corpus of painting, but by mid-century the follower's skin had turned into "hard and calloused excrescences."⁸²⁰ He blamed Guido Reni's late style for introducing the vulgar to this seductive style:

Whence the judgment of those proficient in painting will reveal how every day the vulgar are dazzled when they see distorted paintings that satisfy superficially. These painters indiscriminately represented painted beauties that satisfy at first glance...They only praise as the final goal of painting a mere representation of appearances with bright colors that reveal lascivious charms deprived of proportion and perspective...They

294, 275-320. Also, Reni's dimming eyesight needed more light. Scannelli, *Il Micocosmo della pittura*, 115.

⁸¹⁹ Scannelli, *Il microcosmo della pittura*, 108-09. Quoted in: Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 162-163.

⁸²⁰ Scannelli, *Il microcosmo della pittura*, 110.

immediately cite in their defense the example of the famous Guido Reni who, they assert, was heaped with lofty praise, and through his extraordinary charm, attracted to himself as if by magic the eyes of the greatest rulers...But I adhere much more to the foundation of good intellects than to the appearances and opinions of the vulgar when I say that the use of more white and less black should not be considered in painting except by chance and only for the proper external finish of natural objects...⁸²¹

The laudatory praise that Reni's defenders offered as reason for his later change in style, and their own, should be considered within the context of the term Scannelli uses to identify the *seconda maniera*. When discussing the "excessive brightness" in the later works of Guercino, Albani and Reni, he chooses to use the term *Chiarezza*. More than a common noun describing the relative amount of light in a work of art, the term was illustrated in Ripa's *Iconologia* (**figure 42**) as a nude woman radiating light from an oval mandorla, who holds a smaller sun in her right hand. Ripa describes the allegorical concept as such:

A nude young woman, encircled by the splendor of all the bands, who holds in her hand the Sun.

One says that if one is better able to see the middle of the light, that illuminates and makes the brightness, demands he the fame that man himself gains by nobility or virtue; as demonstrated by Pierio Valeriano in Book 44, and which Saint Ambrogio called the brightest, whose conditions to the world illustrates Holiness and doctrine. He says again that brightness is one of the four qualities of the Blessed in Heaven, and in every one of these meanings.

One depicts a youth because in the blossoming of her merits, he says, everyone is light for the likeness of the Sun, which makes everything visible.⁸²²

⁸²¹ Scannelli, *Il microcosmo della pittura*, 110-111. Quoted in: Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 163.

⁸²² "Una Giovane ignuda, circondata di molto splendore da tutte le bande, & che tenga in mano il Sole.

Chiaro si dice quello che si può ben vedere per mezzo della luce, che l'illumina, & fa la Chiarezza, dimandaremo quella fama che l'huomo, ò con la nobiltà, ò con la virtù s'acquista, come dimostra Pierio Valeriano nel lib.44. & S.Ambrogio chiama chiarissimi quelli, i quali son stati al mondo illustri di Santità, & di dottrina, si dice ancora Chiarezza una delle quattro doti de' Beati in Cielo, & in ciascuno di questi significati.

Si dipinge Giovane, perche nel fiorire de' suoi meriti, ciascuno si dice essere chiaro per la similitudine del Sole, che fa visibile il tutto."

Ripa, *Iconologia*, 68-69.

The specific term employed by the critic not only describes the tonal value of a work of art, but also the desired honored its production and style might bring its creator. The desire for praise, like that received by the angelic Reni, has in turn blinded painters to the “poison” that pure white brings to art in Scannelli’s estimation. However, the amount of illumination present in a painting does not take into account the change in brushwork cited by Malvasia.

The understanding of Michelangelo’s later style as expressing his preconceived “idea” that is more clearly revealed by an unfinished technique was documented by Berrettini and Ottonelli in their treatise. They also found that the inability to complete a work, as evinced in the career of Leonardo da Vinci, was related to the artist’s inability to capture the perfection that existed in his mind:

And as far as Painting [is concerned], there is no lack of examples, also by the foremost, skillful men; but I omit them for brevity, contenting myself only to remember those, such as Leonardo da Vinci, about which Vasari has written.

He [Vasari] said that because of his knowledge of art, Leonardo found himself beginning many things and not finishing them, as it appeared the hand could not reach the perfections of artifice that he imagined: because they were formed in the Idea with some difficulty and many marvels, rather than with the hands, they [Ideas] were still more excellent than ever could have been expressed.”⁸²³

Such impotence in the face of translating what could not be captured on canvas resulted, philosophically, from the nature of the Idea to be transferred. Reni’s stylistic development paralleled in many ways those of Michelangelo and Titian, where both can be seen as having a stylistic trajectory guided by a moderate-Realist approach. In fact,

⁸²³ “E quanto alla Pittura non mancano esempi, anche de’ primi Valent’huomini; mà io li tralascio per brevità, contentandomi di ricordar solamente quel, che di Lionardo da Vinci hà scritto il Vasari.

Trovasi, dice, che Lionardo per l’intelligenza dell’Arte cominciò molte cose, e non le finì, parendoli, che la mano giungere non potesse alla perfezione dell’artificio, che egli s’immaginava: conciosia che formavasi nell’Idea alcune difficoltà tanto maravigliose, che con le mani, ancorche elle fussero eccellentissime, non si sarebbero mai espresse.” Ottonelli and Berrettini, *Trattato della Pittura e Scultura*, 210.

Malvasia continues in his biography to insist on the intentional method of Reni's late painting style after commenting on Correggio, he wrote:

The same thing can be seen in our day in the case of Guido Reni, who, as I mentioned earlier, also composed with studious and time-consuming effort, in accordance with his own extraordinary talent, in his own individual manner, and with the unique concepts that he extracted from examples of the rarest beauty. But often, especially toward the end of his life, not being able to satisfy himself with his concept, he would more than once paint out what he had begun, so that only with great effort was he able to finish the work in the way that he wished.⁸²⁴

Like the difficulty Leonardo faced in his compositions, Reni was seen to be unable to “satisfy himself with his concept.” It could not be approximated on earth in physical form. The impossibility of resolving the subject/object dilemma by the Bolognese artist derived from his working methods, which illuminate his art-theoretical predisposition. As Bellori noted in his biography of the artist, even though he would make drawings from life, they would be used to “stimulate his beautiful idea, albeit he kept loveliness and beauty in the concept in his mind...”⁸²⁵ In his *Considerazioni*, Giulio Mancini made a similar observation concerning Reni's working method and approach to drapery, “which depend more on the imagination and the fantasy of the master than on the actual appearance of the object.”⁸²⁶ Although Malvasia and Bellori would insist on Reni's preference for only the most beautiful models, sublunar examples were insufficient for his conceptual process. The most direct insight into the formative process of the artist comes down to us in the form of a letter to Monsignor Massani, chamberlain of Urban VIII, concerning *The Archangel Michael* of 1635 (**figure 43**). In the letter, Reni states that: “I should like to have had the brush of an angel and forms of paradise, to form the

⁸²⁴ Carlo Cesare Malvasia. *Felsina Pittrice*. Adriana Arfelli, ed. (Bologna, 1961), 2:57. Quoted in: Spear, *The “Divine” Guido*, 299-300.

⁸²⁵ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 367.

⁸²⁶ Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, 1: 134-135.

archangel, and to see him in heaven, but I was unable to ascend so high, and on earth I sought them in vain, so I looked at the form that I established for myself in my idea. The idea of ugliness is also to be found, but this I set forth in the devil and leave it there.”⁸²⁷

Although the case in point is an extreme example, whereby an artist wished to portray an angelic, non-earthly form, it reinforces the numerous accounts of the artist’s intentions and how he set about transferring his spiritual *grazia* to his paintings.⁸²⁸

The criticism received by the artist from various critics, connoisseurs and artists underline the fact that Reni’s approach was not the dominant one in the century. In fact, it seemed to those around him, that the artist had regressed from the model of the Carracci that was established to bring art from the grasp of decay, which the later Cinquecento found it. However, it is important to note that, although unpopular- Reni’s approach was blamed for a whole generation of stylistic degeneracy, according to Scannelli- such a style found an audience and was emulated. The same can be said of the sister discipline of poetry, for although a minority position by the time proponents of Aristotle had established their dominance, there existed a similar defense proposed for poetic theory. Offering a view that is a summation of literary criticism of the Cinquecento, Paolo Beni, in his *Comparazione di Omero, Virgilio, e Torquato in Opere di Torquato Tasso* of 1607, wrote: “And surely, just as poetry was first invented for the edification of life through the encouragement of good traits of character by means of imitation and delight, similarly and particularly the heroic poem forms the idea of the perfect captain and hero, especially through the example of those who rule and govern people in either peace or war.”⁸²⁹ Beni estimated Tasso to be superior to both Homer and Virgil insofar as he found him able to

⁸²⁷ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 367.

⁸²⁸ Spear, *The “Divine” Guido*, 102-127.

⁸²⁹ Paolo Beni. *Comparazione di Omero, Virgilio, e Torquato in Opere di Torquato Tasso*. (Padua, 1828), 199. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 156.

produce a more noble and perfect idea in his characters. Beni continued in his *In Aristotelis poeticam commentarii* of 1613: “Thence it cannot be readily conceded that a poet imitates things which have happened, since he either invents everything, as in comedy, or varies, changes, and makes additions, as in epic poetry or tragedy.” And he later added that: “For if he borrows some things from the monuments of history, he does not represent them as they have been done but as they should have been done. He refers everything back as if to Ideas.”⁸³⁰

At the same time Reni had regressed to aspects of his Mannerist training, there existed strains of thought that supported, and even glorified, such an approach. The approach is one of the rarely celebrated examples of Realism in the Seicento and offers an insight into the evolution of the artist’s career. Old age and old-age style, as treated with Michelangelo and Titian, varied in its interpretation. The two notions outlined by Sohm in his recent treatment on old-age style divide interpretative accounts roughly between the Aristotelian view, which focused on physical deterioration, and the Neoplatonic view that emphasized transcendence.⁸³¹ In the Renaissance, paralleling poetry, the stylistic trajectory of an artist brought him closer to expressing that perfect Idea in his own work. The realization of such an approach and its appearance relate Reni to the later works produced by Michelangelo and Titian. However, spiritual transcendence in the late works does not negate an Aristotelian approach. Sohm has stated that, “Old age has a history, one that revolves around two incompatible views: one of physical, mental, and psychological decline; the other of a spiritual liberation from our

⁸³⁰ Paolo Beni. *In Aristotelis poeticam Commentarii*. (Padua, 1613), 24, 28. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 185.

⁸³¹ Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old*, 7.

corporeal limitations.”⁸³² The strict polemic suggested cannot be verified in these cases. In fact, contrary to Sohm, the Nominalist position prompted in an evolution that resulted in a style that was not defined by physical deterioration.⁸³³

* * *

Old-Age Style, Practice and Guercino

The physiological understanding of style led critics to be able to deduce what stage of an artist’s career a work was produced based on the relationship between the artist’s body and the artist’s corpus of work: it was read as a dependent form of the artist’s mind and soul. Early modern critics deduced the creative characteristics of artists by corporeal autopsy: physiognomy, pathognomy, and physiology. Thus they were able to engage metaphoric parallels to explain how the artist’s life is manifested pictorially. The diagnostic training received by physicians, allowing them to determine an ailment by its visual symptoms, prepared them for the analysis of the pictorial arts as well. Todd Olson has demonstrated that such training led to Giulio Mancini’s estimation that a corpse had been used as the model for Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin* (**figure 44**).⁸³⁴ As he noted, “For the physician and his intellectual community, aesthetic theory relied on contemporary knowledge of medicine.”⁸³⁵

⁸³² Adele Seefe and Edward Anselmo, eds. *Aging and the Life Cycle in the Renaissance: The Interaction between Representations and Experience*. (Delaware: Newark, 2000). Monica Chojnacka, ed. *Ages of Woman, Ages of Man: Sources in European Social History, 1400-1700*. (London: 2002). Pat Thane, ed. *A History of Old Age*. (Los Angeles, 2005).

⁸³³ As noted, it would be Reni whose eyesight would begin to fail him later in life, and ironically not the cross-eyed Guercino until the age of seventy four. He complained of the restraints of old age later to Don Antonio Ruffo, suggesting that he be allowed to paint something on a larger scale because of it. Guercino, letters to Antonio Ruffo, 6 May, 11 July, and 22 September 1665 in: Vincenzo Ruffo. “La Galleria Ruffo nel secolo XVII in Messina.” *Bolletino d’arte* 10 (1916), 112-115.

⁸³⁴ Todd Olson. “Caravaggio’s Coroner: Forensic Medicine in Giulio Mancini’s Art Criticism.” *Oxford Art Journal* 28.1 (Oxford University Press, 2005), 83-98.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid*, 89.

With a similar training and background, it is not surprising to find Scannelli's explanation, which directly follows that given by Guercino reflecting concerns of patronage, focusing on the physiology of those artists under review. The physician-critic, however, does not elaborate on the stylistic influence of the *prima scuola* on these painters; nor does he argue for the influence of patrons' demands in a workshop setting. Instead, he relates that, as in the case of Francesco Albani (1578-1660), another member of the Carracci Succession, the later change to a lighter manner was due to the artist's age. As Scannelli writes,

Although I believe such a cause [patronage] is sufficient in part, it is more safe to state the more common [factor] of age; Because a change was shown in a drawing of many subjects by Francesco Albani, Master of the Academy of Bologna, which for lack of sufficient view appeared too bright, and having satisfied every other part...was so excessively white that it seems to have snowed out of season; so it is more probable to believe that the winter of an era...is the cause of a similar snow...⁸³⁶

As in the case of Guido Reni, Guercino and Albani modified their later styles as a consequence of old age: having entered "the winter of his life" they resultantly painted "so excessively white that it seems to have snowed out of season." Quoting the physician Girolamo Cardano (*Libro delle sottigliezze*), he concluded that painters should treat white as a poison.⁸³⁷ In other words, as the artist's hair grows white and his skin pale from age, so does the lightening of tone carry over in his painting. Following a system of correlations developed by Galen, medieval scholars had developed elaborate diagrams that grouped the four elements, humors, seasons, and ages of men into a quadripartite

⁸³⁶ "Mà io quantunque mi dia à credere, che una tal causa sia in parte sufficiente, ardirei però dire non essere la più sicura, che la maggiormente commune dell'età; Perche sicome una volta essendo mostrato un disegno a Francesco Albani Maestro soprastante all'Accademia di Bologna da soggetti, che per mancanza di sufficiente vista pareva col troppo chiaro haver sodisfatto ad ogni altre parte, li disse al primo incontro con la sua solita prudente argutia, per dar'ad intendere la bianchezza superflusa, che era neuato fuor di stagione; così potrassi ancor versimilmente credere, che l'inverno dell'età, sia la principale, e più potente causa di simil neue..." Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 115-116.

⁸³⁷ Scannelli, *Microcosmo della pittura*, 117-118. For the section cited by Scannelli see: Girolamo Cardano. *De subtilitate*. (Basel, 1560) Elio Nenci, ed. (Milan, 2004), Bk 4, chapter on "luce e lume."

schema, noted in the old age of Titian and Michelangelo. In this system, the defining characteristics of cold-wet, water, phlegmatics and winter were related with old age.⁸³⁸

The relationship between the two would have been obvious for physicians and art critics alike and explain the analysis of Scannelli.

Moreover, the belief that physiognomy effects style had a long literary and medical tradition by the time Scannelli composed his work.⁸³⁹ In the fourteenth century, we find an anecdote in which Dante asks Giotto how it is that his own children are so hideous, when those that he paints are quite beautiful. Always quick with a witty retort, the painter replied that it was because he created his paintings by daylight, but his children at night.⁸⁴⁰ Later in the sixteenth century, we find Giorgio Vasari recording a conversation had with Michelangelo:

A priest, a friend of his, said: 'It's a pity you haven't taken a wife, for you would have had many children and bequeathed to them many honourable works.'

Michelangelo answered: 'I have too much of a wife in this art that has always afflicted me, and the works I shall leave behind will be my children, and even if they are nothing, they will live for a long while. And woe to Lorenzo di Bartoluccio Ghiberti if he had not created the doors of San Giovanni, for his sons and nephews sold and spoiled everything he left them while the doors are still standing.'⁸⁴¹

The anecdote reveals a physiological belief that lasted to varying degrees well into the eighteenth century; which is that physiognomy is transferred to one's offspring as well as

⁸³⁸ The hot-dry group contained fire, choleric, summer and maturity. Filipczak, *Hot Dry Men Cold Wet Women*, 17. Also see: Stanley H. Jackson. "Melancholia and the Waning of Humoral Theory," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science* 33 (1978), 367-76. G.E.R. Lloyd. "The Hot and the Cold, the Dry and the Wet in Greek Philosophy." *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 84 (1964): 92-106.

⁸³⁹ Elizabeth Cornelia Evans. *Physiognomics in the Ancient World. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 5, pt.5. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society: 17-29. Also see: David Freedberg. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁸⁴⁰ Julius Schlosser. *Le Letturata artistica; manuale delle fonti della storia dell'arte moderna*. 3rd ed. (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1964), 348.

⁸⁴¹ Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, Bondanella trans. 479.

one's art.⁸⁴² In one of his letters, Petrarch cites it again when he speaks of his incomprehension that many great artists have such deficient physiognomies.

Like Petrarch, Marsilio Ficino attempted to discuss the connection between physical and spiritual beauty. The relationship of the two he discussed in a letter addressed to his friends and titled 'A picture of a beautiful body and a beautiful mind.' In it Ficino referred to the "beautiful form" of a young woman and remarked that it was more effective than words at "calling forth love." As he explains:

Now, in order to reflect more easily upon the divine aspect of the mind from the corresponding likeness of the beautiful body, refer each aspect of the body to an aspect of the mind. For the body is the shadow of the soul; the form of the body, as best it can, represents the form of the soul; thus liveliness and acuteness of perception in the body represent, in a measure, the wisdom and far-sightedness of the mind; strength of body represents strength of mind; health of body, which consists in the tempering of the humours, signifies a temperate mind. Beauty, which is determined by the proportions of the body and a becoming complexion, shows us the harmony and splendour of justice; also, size shows us liberality and nobility; and stature magnanimity...⁸⁴³

The belief that the body is merely a reflection of the soul sat at the center of humoral and physiognomic theory. Giorgio Vasari had referenced this belief in several of his biographies. As Vasari notes, when Michelangelo had made the acquaintance of the handsome son of Francesco Francia, "And on this same subject, when Michelangelo encountered Il Francia's son, who was a very handsome boy, Michelangelo said to him: 'Your father makes more handsome figures in life than he does in painting.'"⁸⁴⁴

Furthering the notion, in the *Life* that opens his discussion on the third and final stage in the development of the arts, Giorgio Vasari introduced a new type of artist: the artist as

⁸⁴² The anecdote related here, actually derives from a classical source, the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, where it is attributed to the Roman painter Lucius Mallius. Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius. *Saturnalia* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1970), 2:2.10

⁸⁴³ Marsilio Ficino, *Letters*, Book 7. Quoted in: Hemsoll, "Beauty as an aesthetic and artistic ideal in late fifteenth-century Florence," 71.

⁸⁴⁴ Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, Bondanella trans., 438.

beauty, noted by Mary Rogers.⁸⁴⁵ Not only could this genius endow his figures with a superhuman grace, his actual person possessed an angelic beauty suggesting divine favour. Among Leonardo's abundant heaven-sent gifts, the author notes:

...beauty, grace, and ability, so that, whatever he turns himself to, each action is so divine that he surpasses all other men, thus making it evident that it is a gift from God, and not acquired through human skill. This men saw in Leonardo da Vinci, who apart from physical beauty, which could not be praised enough, displayed infinite grace in every action...⁸⁴⁶

In the first sentence of his *Life of Leonardo*, Vasari uses the phrase *celesti influssi* to explain Leonardo's physical grace, revealing a Neoplatonic origin for his belief that exterior beauty signals God's favour and thus an elevated interior.⁸⁴⁷ Likewise, the German humanist Joachim Camerarius linked Dürer's fine person and intellect: "Nature bestowed on him a body remarkable in build and structure, and not unworthy of the noble mind it contained."⁸⁴⁸

In the Seicento, the interpretative method was utilized by Bellori, as he included physiognomic readings for the twelve artists he chose for his *Lives* of 1672.⁸⁴⁹ Bellori believed that the individual styles of artists could be understood by examining their physical appearance. For example, he noted that Caravaggio's physiognomy was directly related to his "dark manner," which "always used a black ground or background, and used black also in painting the flesh, restricting the force of the lights to only a few parts

⁸⁴⁵ Rogers, "The Artist as Beauty," 93.

⁸⁴⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite Vasari, Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, Barocchi, ed., 4: 15. Quoted in: Rogers, "The Artist as Beauty," 93.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 94.

⁸⁴⁸ Joseph Leo Koerner. *The Moment of Self-portraiture in German Renaissance Art*. (Chicago, 1993), 143.

⁸⁴⁹ Passeri on the other hand, working in the 1670s also in the Accademia di San Luca with Bellori, begins his *Vita* with an astrological reading of each artist. Giovanni Battista Passeri. *Vite de' Pittori, Scultori ed Architetetti che Anno Lavorato in Roma, morti dal 1641 al 1673*. (Rome, 1772).

of the body.”⁸⁵⁰ According to Bellori, this particular use of color was related to the artist’s appearance, as seen in the frontispiece to his Life (**figure 45**). As Bellori wrote,

These ways of Caravaggio were in keeping with his physiognomy and appearance: he was dark, and he had dark eyes and black eyebrows and hair; and he naturally proved to be the same in his painting as well. His first sweet, pure style of coloring was his best, and in it he attained supreme merit and showed himself to be an excellent Lombard colorist, to great acclaim. But then he shifted to that other dark style, attracted to it by his own temperament, just as he was troubled and quarrelsome in his conduct as well.⁸⁵¹

The order of transference that Bellori recorded here was that the artist’s temperament, his humoral balance, or rather imbalance, in turn affected his physical appearance and behavior. The physiognomy of the artist in turn affected his style and appearance of the work that he produced. Mancini had turned to Galen to reconcile Alberti’s influential model for art production with a medical definition of the virtuous body.⁸⁵² Galen had linked beauty to the perfect proportion of members, as in the Canon of Polykleitos, while health was the correct proportion of the elements and humors.⁸⁵³ Brushwork, colors and humors were understood as inextricably linked. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, writers used the words “humor” and “temperament” as synonyms because they explained disposition by the dominant element in the body. If the hot wetness of fire predominated, a person was choleric, quick to fierce action and emotion; if the hot wetness of air was prevalent, that person was sanguine, cheerful and pleasure-loving; if the cold wetness of water abounded, the individual was phlegmatic, slow in both mind and body; and if the cold dryness of earth was most common, the subject was

⁸⁵⁰ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 181.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.* 185.

⁸⁵² Galen. *Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*. Phillip de Lacy trans. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980), 1: 303.

⁸⁵³ Olson, “Caravaggio’s Coroner,” 89.

melancholic, solitary and depressed.⁸⁵⁴ The Roman sculptor Orfeo Boselli (1597-1667) had discussed the necessity for balance in art in Book I, chapter XXXVI of his treatise *Osservazioni della scoltura antica* entitled ‘On the Necessity for Expressions.’ Boselli observed that:

Now, when these [humors] are in equilibrium, the soul is the perfect master of the natural powers, and according to the external forces is angered, perturbed, or rejoices. Because in the composition of the body, the elemental humors most often have one that has the upper hand, one face thus has a naturally melancholic physiognomy, another glad and another majestic, for which reason one can conclude that in the face one of these powers will be expressed either naturally, or through external causes. Therefore, in making the face, one should first think of which of these affects is underlying, and to throw oneself into expressing that one.⁸⁵⁵

Because humors also determined skin color, “complexions” became an alternative term when discussing style and humoral balance. When Lomazzo became blind and abandoned painting for writing, he advised his fellow artists to mix their colors to make the skin of sanguine figures rosier, melancholics swarthier, choleric yellow, and phlegmatics paler.⁸⁵⁶ The engraved portrait of Caravaggio illustrates many of these beliefs. The engraver, following Bellori’s instructions, has represented the painter with unkempt and disheveled hair, along with black, bushy eyebrows, mustache and goatee. Even the banner, on which the painter’s name is inscribed, seems to be battered and worn. He also grasps the handle of his rapier and wears the Maltese cross around his neck. The presentation not only emphasizes the painter’s behavior, but his approach to art.

⁸⁵⁴ Filipczak, *Hot Dry Men Cold Wet Women*, 17.

⁸⁵⁵ “...hora quando queste sono in equilibrio, è l’anima perfetta signora delle potenze naturali, e secondo li accidenti si altera, si turba, si ralegra: ma perche nella compositione del corpo li elementary humori per il più sempre, una parte prevale più dell’altra in loro, quindi è che un Volto è di fisionomia naturale mesto, l’altro lieto, l’altro Maestoso, onde si può concludere, che sempre nel Viso una di queste potenze, o naturalmente; o accidentalmente sia da esprimersi. Però nel far la faccia si deve prima pensare a quale di questi affetti soggiaccia, et alla espressione di quello che dimostra totalmente buttarsi.” Orfeo Boselli. *Osservazioni della scoltura antica dai Manoscritti Corsini e Doria e altri scritti*. Phoebe Dent Weil ed. (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1978), fol 23v-24r.

⁸⁵⁶ Gian Paolo Lomazzo. *Scritti sulle arti*. (1584) (Florence: Centro Di, 1973), 2: 262-69.

Alternatively, when discussing artists producing a vastly different style, such as the angelic Guido Reni, Bellori states that the grace and elegance of his style derived from his appearance and comporment:

Now, together with this master's noble and worthy inner qualities of heart and mind, of which we shall proceed to speak next, by God's will he was adorned externally with the properties of a well-formed and proportioned body, not at all exceeding average stature and size. He had a sound and robust figure and carried himself with dignity and decorum; a broad and magnanimous brow, lively sky-blue eyes, and a nose with a nice profile; his cheeks were rosy, which made them all the more pleasing against the very light coloring of his complexion. The same elegance informed the other parts of his body; he was so beautiful as a boy that Ludovico, his master, used him as a model when forming angels, for he was modest and shy as well.⁸⁵⁷

Whether it be the swarthy Caravaggio or angelic Reni, Bellori offers a popular estimation of their styles development based on their own bodies' natural components. And as the taxonomic approach to art theory of Scannelli was antithetical to Bellori it is clear that the belief that physiognomy affected style was not confined to poets, such as Petrarch, or physicians, such as Scannelli and Mancini.

Nevertheless, physiognomy was not the only factor that in his treatment Scannelli related to the later change in style of painters. Along with the affectation of coloring and tone, he noted that the physical aspects of aging affect the working procedure and motivation of the painter as well. As he stated:

For it is appropriate that at the outset of old age, the body and the spirit are equally debilitated; which is ordinarily true for the same good Masters, find themselves in the youthful age accustomed to the study of the rarer beauty of subjects, and to the affectedly better naturalism, like those that find themselves with a robust body, and more pure spirits...with the major types ready in their minds, through which they want afterwards to further search for natural bodies... in order to appropriate the operations, not only of extreme light and dark, but also... a diversity of half tones in various

⁸⁵⁷ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 364.

forms, that they distinguish with different reflections the parts between them, and they represent to the eye a most exact imitation of the truth.⁸⁵⁸

The emphasis placed on the study of “natural bodies” that is common in youth produces a variety of colors and tones, from extreme light to deep shadow. *Naturalezza*, as it is championed, cannot be achieved with an overly bright local palette. According to Scannelli, the painters that best represent a proper usage of color scheme were Titian and Paolo Veronese. In their “marvelous works,” Scannelli notes that the painters demonstrated “a knowledge of different lights, including most delicate half-shades and various reflections, in order to produce the more beautiful and true naturalism...”⁸⁵⁹ Scannelli then references the physician and mathematician Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576) to make his point on colors, stating that a painter must use “well-set out colors,” for “the use of extreme white should be regarded as a poison...because it takes away the beauty of a work with too much brightness, and with less dark colors, that offends the contrast of shadows.”⁸⁶⁰ Alberti is also quoted, as noting a “similar abuse” in colors, whereby “those painters deserve much disapproval if they use white excessively, and

⁸⁵⁸ “per esser il proprio anco della prima vechiezza il debilitare parimente in parte col corpo gli stessi spiriti; sendo che per l’ordinario i medesimi buoni Maestri, che si ritrovano nella loro verde età, sono assuefatti allo studio delle più rare bellezza d’oggetti artificciati, & al ricercamento de’ migliori naturali, come quelli, che si ritrovano col robusto del corpo, Ancora gli spiriti più puri, e velocissimi, e le specie maggiormente pronte nella mente, mediante le quali vengono poscia al buon ricercamento de’corpi naturali, ed a palesare con più adequate puntualità in ordine alle proprie operationi non solo l’estremo del chiaro, ed oscuro, mà anco framezzate ad un tempo diversità di meze tinte in varie forme, le quali distinguono con differenti riflessi le parti frà di loro, e rappresentano all’occhio un’estissima imitaione del vero.” Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 115-116.

⁸⁵⁹ “...che fabricate coll’artificio didetta mischianza de’colori, e non altrimenti di pura bianchezza, come procurano dimostrare diversi Artefici alla giornata di gusto depravato, operando assai più in ordine al compiacimento del volgo, che per sodisfare al debito di buon Pittore...”Ibid, 117.

⁸⁶⁰ “...dove tratta del’ordine, che il Pittore deve tenere per ben disporre i colori, e sentiranno *convenire all’opera la necessaria varietà de’contrij per ornamento, e decoro della Professione, e finalmete, che si debba guardare il Pittore, come dal veleno dall’uso dell’estremo bianco, apportando ad un tempo la ragione col dire, perche leva col troppo di chiarezza a la bella gravità dell’opera, & insieme non meno oscura I colori, che ossenda il contrario dell’ombre.*” Ibid.

black without any diligence, but should desire that white be dearer to the painter than the most precious gems.”⁸⁶¹

As in the case of Guido Reni, Scannelli finds that the misuse of color palettes results from a change in working method later in an artist’s career. If an artist followed the proper working method that included the study from nature and the proper attention given to natural bodies, such an artificial approach would be avoided.⁸⁶² Reni is cited as the source for such a method that was also given undue praise by “ignorant spectators” that view these works, who are “dazzled by the unnecessary brightness of pure colors.” The unnecessary and undue praise must, Scannelli warns, be stopped by the learned, to prevent “artifice” from dominating painting, as “they are not capable of distinguishing the artifice of the colors.”⁸⁶³ However, affected by age, the artist is also predisposed to the effects of aging, whereby he is “weakened by age and the extraordinary toil of his study.” The preparatory procedures that were learned early in a career are bypassed, as “the types learned in the past are toned down in the memory”; resulting in, as the physical condition of the artist dictates, “weakened sentiments and spirits.”⁸⁶⁴ Therefore memory also

⁸⁶¹ “*che sono degni di molto biasmo quei Pittori, che si servono del bianco intemperatamente, e del nero senza veruna diligenza, che però desiderava, che fosse il color bianco assai più caro al Pittore delle pretiosissime gemme.*” Ibid, 118.

⁸⁶² “E se per avventura nelle Pitture di questi, e d’altri ancorche di gran fama, ed eccellenza incontrerarsi di quelle, che in effetto facciano assai più pompa con la chiara vaghezza de’ colori, che col mezzo di conveniente studio, e debita naturalezza, a guisa di scoglj nonciui dovrà in ogni tempo fuggire non solo ch’opera, mà quello Ancora, che viene ad applicare coll’osservatione della Pittura solamente per sodisfare al genio connaturale.” Ibid., 117.

⁸⁶³ “direi in fine, che a simili spettatori dall’ignoranza confusi, ed abbagliati dalla chiarezza superflua de’puri colori dovessero essere tralasciati dall’erudito senza veruna osservatione, perche ritrovandosi ciechi insieme co la fortuna de’ loro partiali Artefici, come tali, ed affatto priui d’intelligenza non possono, ne tampoco devono distinguere l’artificio de’ colori.” Ibid, 119.

⁸⁶⁴ “Dove venendo poscia successivamente a delibitarsi l’humano composto non riesce, che insufficiente per le straordinarie fatiche dello studio, e le specie del passato insieme col tempo si sfumano nella memoria, in modo che restano per l’ordinario con la vista mancanti; e sicome riescono più tardi, e debili i sentimenti, e gli spiriti, così del pari già diminuite le cause, non possono per conseguenza gli effetti della successive operatione no dimostrarsi laguidi, e vitiarti Oltre ciò si potrà anco dire, che soggetti di tal sorte hano già acquistato mediante il passato loro studio laudabile la proportione, e coll’età grave la più sicura pratica, nella quale vengono poi sempre maggiormente a prevalere altrettanto, quanto a mancare nella diligenza de’ necessarj ricercamenti.” Francesco Scannelli *Microcosmo della Pittura*, author’s trans. 116.

becomes blurred, which is transferred to the figures of a work, painted as languid and vitiated. Therefore, Scannelli finds, that in this late period “customary study” is ignored, in favor of demonstrating “the adulterated and distant truth with the strength of severe brightness, which is well concealed by the dense mastery of coloring that good studies would simply desire by their advantage.”⁸⁶⁵ This is born out, for both Homer and Reni produced imaginative works liberated from nature more than their early work. However, Guercino’s stylistic development was quite different from Reni’s; as was their art-theoretical basis for style. The Centese painter began his career drinking in the style of Ludovico Carracci and Venetian naturalism (**figure 6**). In 1616 he had inaugurated a drawing academy that focused on the study from life, the Accademia del Nudo, which attracted students from as far away as France.⁸⁶⁶ The early drawings that we have from the artist illustrate a close observation of nature, often in the form of nude studies (**figure 46**), which would be used for such works as his *Erminia Finds the Wounded Tancred* (1618-19) (**figure 47**).⁸⁶⁷ It would only be later in his career that we find such an Aristotelian approach altering his preparatory methods, which is further demonstrated by the extent drawings. Nicholas Turner has noted that although Guercino was a notoriously proficient and prolific draftsman, preparatory studies are poorly represented from the last period of his life (1650-66).⁸⁶⁸ Those that do survive, such as the study for the 1661 altarpiece *St. Theresa receiving a necklace from the Virgin in the presence of St. Joseph*,

⁸⁶⁵ “...adulterato, celando bene spesso la maestria del colorire quello, che i buoni studiosi potriano facilmente desiderare di vantaggio.” Ibid, 116.

⁸⁶⁶ Shilpa Prasad. *Guercino: Stylistic Evolution in Focus*. (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2007), 2.

⁸⁶⁷ Mahon ed., *Il Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591-1666)*, 220.

⁸⁶⁸ Nicholas Turner. *Guercino: Drawings from Windsor Castle* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 86-87.

her patron, exhibit the same insistence of geometric clarity and spatial organization that is found in the finished work (**figures 48, 49**).⁸⁶⁹

The most recent treatments of the artist still contend with such a shift in style. Responding to Mahon, for instance, Shilpa Prasad has estimated that the change in style evident in the career of Guercino parallels the new aims of theatre and music in the 1650s in Emilia.⁸⁷⁰ However, she does not address why preparatory studies become more infrequent with these later, highly-finished works; or why the insistence on composing in a sequence of parallel planes on a stage-like space begins in the later 1620s (**figure 7**). Scannelli had, in fact, concluded his section ‘on why artists had changed to the lighter manner later in their careers’ by bringing together physiology, style, working method and motivation in the primary cause for such a change: *L’Idea*. The initiative taken by the younger artist to carefully study nature and desire close observation of sense-perceptible form, including mathematics, proportions and symmetry, gives way in the “winter of life” to “the ease of working with the more vague, and beautiful idea.”⁸⁷¹ The cause of such a change is physiological, physiognomic and economic for Scannelli. Contrary to modern treatments of Guido Reni and Guercino, contemporary critics saw the deviation from nature in both artists’ later works. In the case of Scannelli, who favored a naturalism that is primarily found in Veneto-Lombard art, the lament is foreseeable. However, as is demonstrated by the stylistic characteristics favored by the arch-classicist Bellori, it is

⁸⁶⁹ Massimo Pulini, ed. *Nel segno di Guercino: disegni dalle collezioni Mahon, Oxford e Cento (Guercino as master draughtsman: drawings from the Mahon collection, the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and the city of Cento)*. (Cento: Comune di Cento, 2005), 138-139.

⁸⁷⁰ Prasad, *Guercino: Stylistic Evolution in Focus*, 4.

⁸⁷¹ “Vagliano però anco tal volta queste seconde operationi di simili Maestri per dimostrare sopra le solite buone proportioni l’eccesso di più qualificate prerogative, nelle quali pare, che vengano osservati assai riguardevoli, sicome Guido Reni, oltre la conservata simetria, si stima Ancora venisse a palesare in opere di tal sorte la maggior pratica, e facilità d’operare insieme con la più vaga, e bella idea; e Gio.Francesco Barbieri uniformandosi ad un somigliante gusto, vogliono i buoni intelligenti, che nella mutatione habbia facilmente perfettionato la simetria con più decoro, e gratia, come il maggiore studio, e naturalezza de’ panni.” Scannelli, *Microcosmo della Pittura*, 116.

clear that the trajectory traced by the Idea in Guercino's career was not Realist in formulation. It began with a careful and thoughtful study of nature and, once internalized and matured, was capable of achieving more quickly (as Scannelli himself noted) the conception that was sought through abstraction, both in terms of color and form.

* * *

The *Pittura ideale*, Practice and Theory Mid-Century: Testa and Boselli

Although we do not have extant writings on art by Guercino, another artist who has been discussed by modern scholars as having a similar stylistic progression can be found in the pupil of Domenichino and Pietro da Cortona, Pietro Testa (1612-1650). As Mahon had seen Guercino's change in style to be marked by influence from the classic-idealist theories of Agucchi, as Cropper has noted: "With regards to Testa, it was the fact of his own dedication to the study of theory, and of the same kind that Mahon argued was inflicted upon Guercino, that has been interpreted as leading to a similar denial of his own natural instincts."⁸⁷² But we find in Testa's so-called *Trattato di Pittura*, whose main source is the Düsseldorf notebook, that the art-theoretical precepts of Agucchi had been internalized by the artist.⁸⁷³ His own opinion had been formed through study of a number of sources. The preliminary treatise we find influenced by Domenichino, who in turn had assisted Agucchi with his *Trattato*.⁸⁷⁴ He also thoroughly studied Daniele Barbaro's translation and commentary of Vitruvius, inspiring his program for an artist's

⁸⁷² Elizabeth Cropper. *The Ideal of Painting: Pietro Testa's Düsseldorf Notebook*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 5.

⁸⁷³ Elizabeth Cropper. "Bound Theory and Blind Practice: Pietro Testa's Notes on Painting and the Liceo della Pittura." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971), 262-296. Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*.

⁸⁷⁴ Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 18-19.

education.⁸⁷⁵ And Testa had read and cited ancient sources (Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon and Euclid) as well as modern ones (Alberti, Firenzuola, Guidiccione, Ripa, Marino, and Aleandro), illustrating the diverse erudition common for an artist who was much less successful and less well-known than Guercino, though they lived at the same time.⁸⁷⁶

The notion of the *Pittura ideale*, or ideal painter, referenced in Testa's writings is illustrated in his complex etching *Il Liceo della Pittura* (**figure 50**) of 1637-38 and offers a summation of the learned goals of painting. Through theoretical allegory, Testa emphasized the interrelationship of theory and practice and the necessity of both to reach a consummate perfection. This focus is announced in the motto *Intelligenza et Uso* displayed prominently in the central cartouche of the print. Elizabeth Cropper contended that the *Liceo* represents Testa's vision of the Temple of Philosophy as a school for painters.⁸⁷⁷ The aspirations for such a school are in part through its similarities to Raphael's *School of Athens* (**figure 51**). In order to enter the precincts of the Temple, synonymous with attaining a mastery of painting, the artist must unite Theory and Practice by following the correct course. If the artist does not achieve this union, he remains as ineffective as the personifications of these two concepts, who stand in isolated exile in the foreground. Practice, on the right, is helpless in her poverty, old age, and blindness. On the left stands Theory, who can neither grasp divine inspiration nor open the books at her feet because her hands are bound. The path to uniting "bound theory" and "blind practice" is illustrated by the students climbing the stairs to the Temple. With the aid of Testa's inscription and the preparatory drawing, Cropper has determined that the development from infancy to manhood parallels an educational course beginning with

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid, 174.

⁸⁷⁷ Cropper, "Bound Theory and Blind Practice," 262-296.

simple imitation and progressing to analytical mathematical study. At the top of the steps the painter is welcomed into the Temple by Judgment where Theory and Practice are united. The figure of Minerva as Wisdom in the central background alludes to knowledge of “things divine.”⁸⁷⁸ The numerous references to mathematical sciences within the *Liceo* bear witness to Testa’s belief that a mastery of painting can be achieved through the rules of mathematics. This concept conforms with the conviction held by many academic theorists that art could be taught by precept. As explained by Armenini, who devotes pages of his *De’veri precetti della pittura* to detailed accounts of an artist’s training, the “eye of the intellect” could be enlightened by proper rules.⁸⁷⁹ However, this is only true for an artist born with a natural genius.⁸⁸⁰

The “idea” and its orientation are discussed throughout the *Trattato*, reinforcing the underlying themes of his etching that Cropper has carefully described.⁸⁸¹ As he wrote, “it is inferior only to purely imitate a certain habit under one master; it is more perfect [to follow] the election of an idea that is beauty in every kind.”⁸⁸² Testa is making a distinction between the two manners in which an artist’s style is formed; in which he can either imitate a single master (which he argues resulted in Mannerism), or he can select the best in everything. The two methods are described by Armenini in his treatise.⁸⁸³ Unlike Armenini, however, Testa perceived a parallel between the artist trained only in a certain practice by a master and the pure imitation of nature, and the artist trained by

⁸⁷⁸ Elizabeth Cropper. “Disegno as the Foundation of Art: Some Drawings by Pietro Testa.” *Burlington Magazine* 116 (1974), 377.

⁸⁷⁹ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 43.

⁸⁸⁰ Cynthia E. Roman “Academic Ideals of Art Education” in: *Children of Mercury: the education of artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*. ex. cat. (Providence, Rhode Island: Department of Art, Brown University, 1984), 92.

⁸⁸¹ Cropper, “Bound Theory and Blind Practice,” 262-296.

⁸⁸² “Divisione per più chiarezza in pittura che inimita puramente in un certo habito fatto sotto maestro, e questo è l’inferiore, e un’idea, cioè l’elezione del bello in ogni genere, e questo è il più perfetto.” Pietro Testa, *Düsseldorf Notebook*, fol 13r in: Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 222.

⁸⁸³ Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, 59-69.

selecting the best from all types of things and the painting of an idea (i.e. *Pittura ideale*).⁸⁸⁴ The exhortations to the Ciceronian-rhetorical model for eclectic appropriation from the best exemplars are reiterated here.

Like Guercino, Testa's art, and thus art theory, rely heavily on the dominant moderate-Nominalist positions of those art critics and theorists to which he makes reference. The very conception of the Idea as it is garnered through the study of the best models found in "every kind" reflects the authors understanding of the association of beauty and nature: "That in all forms we find his [God's] idea, that is to say of his perfection, and this to the good painter finds to be manifested by reason, and if neglected he himself makes the idea ugly."⁸⁸⁵ He characterizes the Idea as the intentional forms of nature, revealed to the true painter by reason, rather than as the result of judicious imitation, which is implied by the last quote.⁸⁸⁶ The notion is later reinforced as Testa criticizes poetic *furor* (which again is related by the artist to Mannerism) in that it is only through diligent practice, not *furia*, that an artist can develop facility in his hand that will make his drawings correct from the start, avoiding constant reworking.⁸⁸⁷ Therefore we find a correlation between the art theory that was produced by the literati and amateur-connoisseur community that existed mid-century. Artist's themselves shared the illustrious goals for art production and set forth in their art, and writing, to disseminate

⁸⁸⁴ Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 222.

⁸⁸⁵ "Che in tutte le forme ci debbe essere la sua idea, cioè il suo perfetto, e questo al buon pittore debbe essere manifesto dalla ragione, etiandio del brutto si fa l'idea." Testa, *Düsseldorf Notebook*, fol 13 v in: Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 224.

⁸⁸⁶ Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 224.

⁸⁸⁷ "Che il disegno è intorno alla quantità et in specie di ciò che ha forma e proportione con la ragione del'otica e ciò s'eseguisce con sottilissime linere per circoscrivere i siti dei colori per i quali si vedono le cose; e con essi si scancelano i detti segni, il che solo i bravis[s]imi sanno fare, servando quella esatta simetria che dà l'eccellen[sa] alle forme; e qui non importa se i detti segni siano fatti con più ho [sic] meno franchezza, dovendo, come ho detto, essere del tutto tolti via. Ben è vero che diletta una certa franchezza, ma per il più è nimicha del'esattezza, la qual sempre deve haversi a cuore, e fuggire del tutto quella fuoria [furia] pazza che tanto da li huomi[ni] grossi è usata e commendata talmente che par che in non altro habino riposto l'eccellensa. Qui fuggo d'accennare l'esempi, potendo io però essere inteso." Testa, *Düsseldorf Notebook*, fol 14r in: Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 226-7.

the dominant approach whereby nature is carefully observed and purified of the misshapen through diligent study and proper practice.

Around the time Pietro Testa's body was pulled from the Tiber from an apparent suicide, the Roman sculptor Orfeo Boselli was writing a treatise on antique sculpture that was also a practical manual for sculptors and painters. In Book IV of his *Osservazioni della Scoltura Antica* of ca.1650, Boselli discussed human proportions and mathematics taking as his foundation Albrecht Dürer, Ficino and Lomazzo. Reiterating the need for a system of proportions based on observation and symmetry, Boselli argues that true beauty is not the Platonic Idea itself, but rather the reflection of that radiance in natural bodies. As Boselli wrote, "I am amazed by the Platonics, and how they cannot see something that they always have right in front of them, putting Beauty in ideas and incomprehensible being the subject that everyday the good sculptor and painter actually represents in the marble and colors with ease: it shows it and teaches it."⁸⁸⁸ He then notes that Ficino had presented the unattainable conception in his *Convivio* and that Ripa, in his *Iconologia*, "describes her [beauty] with her head in the clouds and almost invisible." Aristotle is the grounding force behind the Nominalist conception here, as Boselli cites his *Rhetoric*.⁸⁸⁹

The rejection of the Neoplatonic descent of beauty is further illustrated in the treatise in Chapter II of Book IV, where Boselli discusses 'That human Beauty is corporeal.' Arguing that beauty is not "incomprehensible being" but rather something that exists in nature, he elaborates that:

⁸⁸⁸ "Resto meravigliato dei Platonici, che una cosa la quale habbiano sempre innazi a gli occhi non la vedessero, ponendo la Bellezza nelle idée, et incomprendibile, essendo sogetto che ogni giorno il bravo scultore et pittore con li marmi et colori la rapresenta anzi con facilità la mostra et insegna." Boselli, *Osservazioni della scoltura antica*, fol 106r.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

I cannot see how beauty cannot be corporeal since it is composed by corporeal parts, which are nose, eyes, mouth, chin, ears, eyelashes, forehead cheeks, throat, breast and other parts that constitute man in his human form. Aside from this subject made, as I said by God in his image, where could we possibly take the example of beauty from the ugly? From that sovereign creator of everything that we are not worthy of mentioning, or seeing? From the Angels that are invisible? Perhaps from the soul, which one cannot see as it is the spirit, and many know, how much moves this body abused by the Platonic, that for feeling the circumstance is the more supreme creation that could be created in the world by the almighty Creator?⁸⁹⁰

Although the reference to the divine countenance of the Idea and its power to create in God's image belie the Neoplatonic sources for Boselli, he does not agree that the Ficinian descending of beauty is inaccessible to artists. The notion is again Aristotelian in origin, and reflects Zuccaro's division of *disegno interno* and *esterno*, as the supreme Idea exists first in the mind of God.⁸⁹¹ In fact, as he continues, Ficino and the incorporeal are criticized: "Others more universally say that beauty is a harmonious agreement of parts with proportion of limbs, and liveliness of humors and good moods. Marsilio Ficino in the *Convivio of Plato* says 'What is then the beauty of the body? It is liveliness of gesture, and a certain grace that shines in the influence itself of its likeness and Idea.' ...it is enough to say that many are very vivacious of gesture, and deformed; and that the grace that shines is the effect of beauty that triumphs in the corporeal, and not beauty itself."⁸⁹² Beauty, Boselli argues, is found in natural bodies; and it is the learned artist that

⁸⁹⁰ "Non so per me vedere come le Bellezza non sia corporea mentre è tutta composta di parti corporee come sono naso, occhi, bocca, mento, orecchie, ciglia, fronte guancie, Gola petto e altre parti le quali costituiscono, l'Homo in humana figura. Tolto questo soggetto fatto, come dissi da Dio, a sua similitudine, dove pigliaremo l'esemplare della bellezza da i bruti forse? Da quel soprano creator del tutto che non siano degni di nominare, non che di vedere? Da gli Angeli li quali sono invisibili? Dal Anima forse, che per essere spirito non si vede, e tanti ne sappiamo, quanto move questo corpo da Platonic vilipeso, che per tutte le circostanze è la più suprema fattura che nel mondo il divino et onipotente Artefice formasse?" Ibid, fol 108r.

⁸⁹¹ Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d'Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 156-158.

⁸⁹² "Altri più in universale dicono la bellezza essere un armoniosa concordanza de parti con proportionone di membra, et vivezza di humori ben disposto. Marsilio Ficino nel Convivio di Platone dice Che cosa è in soma la bellezza del Corpo? È vivacità de gesti, et una certa grazia che risplende nel influssi istesso della sua somiglianza et Idea. A questo si è risposto abastanza nel capitolo antecedente; et basta dire che molti

is able to perceive it. Through rigorous study, proportions and mathematical measurements, what is most pleasing in form can be sussed out and regularized in a programmatic fashion that was known to artists living in sixteenth-century Rome; and undeniably those associated with the Accademia di San Luca. In the examples of Testa and Boselli, we have an indispensable record of the intellectual history of practicing painters and sculptors. Through their writings it is evident that the predominant theoretical approach, with regards to the formative process of ideation, relied heavily on Aristotle, and more specifically Neo-Scholasticism. But the integration of the Idea into rigorous academic curricula is generally accepted as being embodied in the work of an antiquarian.

* * *

The Emergence of “Normative Aesthetics” in the Bellorian Idea

In his treatment of the Idea, Panofsky had noted that the antiquarian, art theorist and biographer Giovan Pietro Bellori (1616-1690) demanded a balance between imitating nature and surpassing nature, which though was not alien to Renaissance art theory, was nevertheless “erected it into a consistent program.”⁸⁹³ Bellori formulated the Idea explicitly and attempted to demonstrate its validity by means of historical as well as philosophical reasoning, which was elaborated on in his biographies. Late sixteenth-century metaphysics, which tried to find a solution for the opposition between “subject” and “object” in God (as noted in the work of Lomazzo and Zuccaro), was again replaced by an interpretation that tried to harmonize the subject with the object and the mind with nature directly, re-emphasizing the perceptive faculty of man as opposed to divine omnipotence. Similar to earlier writers, Bellori maintained that the Idea was nothing else

sono vivacissimi de gesti, et deformati; e che la grazia che risplende è effetto della bellezza che nel corporeo molto trionfa, et non istessa bellezza.” Boselli, *Osservazioni della scoltura antica*, fol 109r.

⁸⁹³ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 108.

than the experience of nature “purified” by the human mind. But while Renaissance theorists had found the solution for the “subject-object problem” even before the problem as such had been explicitly posed, seicento theorists had to face the problem as it had become acute in the recent past. They had to bring the old solution *ex post facto* into a new and programmatic formula to establish it systematically.⁸⁹⁴ Thus the history of the theory of Ideas, expressed by Alberti, Raphael and Vasari, was elevated to a “system” in the mid-Seicento. In such a fashion Bellori summarizes the views of a number of artists, critics and theorists in his writing that is proclaimed as a programmatic manifesto (if we are to apply the intent of the term) through its philosophical and historical apparatus and gave this concept the form in which it entered into French and German art criticism and theory and survived to the beginning of the modern era.⁸⁹⁵

The discourse with which Bellori sought to bring together earlier treatments of the art-theoretical concept, and simultaneously address the various stylistic strains in the later Cinquecento and early Seicento in Tuscany, Emilia and Lombardy, was delivered in the form of a lecture entitled *L’Idea del Pittore, dello Scultore, e dell’Architetto scelta dalla bellezza naturali superiore alla Natura* to the Accademia di San Luca on the third Sunday in May 1664. Bellori began the lecture by stating that the *Idea della bellezza* was first formed as an idea of all creation, formulated by God, perfect and unchanging:

That supreme and eternal intellect, the author of nature, looking deeply within himself as he fashioned his marvelous works, established the first forms, called Ideas, in such a way that each species was an expression of that first Idea, thereby forming the wondrous context of created things. But the celestial bodies above the moon, not being subject to change, remained forever beautiful and ordered, so that by their measured spheres and by the splendor of their aspects we come to know them as eternally perfect and most beautiful. The opposite happens with the sublunar bodies, which are subject to change and to ugliness; and even though nature

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid, 109.

intends always to make its effects excellent, nevertheless, owing to the inequality of matter, forms are altered, and human beauty in particular is confounded, as we see in the innumerable deformities and disproportions that there are in us. For this reason noble painters and sculptors, imitating the first maker, also form in their minds an example of higher beauty, and by contemplating that, they emend nature without fault of color or of line.⁸⁹⁶

The Jesuit priest Ottonelli and Pietro da Cortona had defined the Idea in their *Trattato* of 1652 as “The divine and eternal Ideas are images made by God; because before the things are created, they are sculpted and painted in the mind.”⁸⁹⁷ The notion originates both in the mind of God and that of the artist as well. Bellori understood this duality and sought to reconcile the “subject-object” dilemma as it is reflected in the dual origination of beauty. In his Neo-Scholastic treatment, Zuccaro had already investigated the origin and validity of the concept whereby it is manifested in the separate notions of *disegno interno* and *disegno esterno*.⁸⁹⁸ The internally formed, mental notion is “a concept formed in our mind, that enables us explicitly and clearly to recognize any thing, whatever it may be, and to operate practically in conformance with the thing intended.”⁸⁹⁹ This is further separated by Zuccaro into three kinds that correspond to a threefold hierarchy of metaphysical being established by Aquinas. As in the Bellorian conception, whereby God “established the first forms, called Ideas, in such a way that each species was an expression of that first Idea, thereby forming the wondrous context of created things,” Zuccaro had noted that the most perfect and complete Idea is God’s *disegno*, which is a single, all-encompassing Idea of the whole of creation.⁹⁰⁰ When the sense-perceptible world was formed, there was also created simultaneously “many other immaterial forms

⁸⁹⁶ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 57.

⁸⁹⁷ “Le divine, & eterne Idee sono immagini fatte da Dio; perche avanti di crear le cose, le scolpì nella mente, e le dipinse.” Ottonelli and Berrettini, *Trattato della Pittura e Scultura*, 31.

⁸⁹⁸ Heikamp, ed. *Scritti d’Arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 156-158.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 152.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 156-158, 161-162.

representing all those things, both generally and particularly.” These “ideas” were infused into the minds of the angels, who, having no capacity for sense perception themselves, required a knowledge of earthly objects which they were to interact with.⁹⁰¹ Finally, Bellori found that the resulting “sublunar ideas” were then subject to deformity, given the manner of descent and their proximity to that original perfect notion, and therefore:

This Idea reveals itself to us and descends upon marbles and canvases; originating in nature, it transcends its origins and becomes the original of art; measured by the compass of the intellect, it becomes the measure of the hand; and animated by the imagination it gives life to the image. In the opinion of the greatest philosophers, there are certainly exemplary causes in the minds of artists, abiding without uncertainty perpetually most beautiful and most perfect. The Idea of the painter and of the sculptor is that perfect and excellent example in the mind whose imagined form, when imitated, the things that appear before our eyes resemble.⁹⁰²

That first supreme and perfect Idea originated in the mind of God, but is also found as “originating,” according to Bellori, in nature. There it “transcends its origins” guided by the “compass of intellect”; a common metaphor since Michelangelo’s commentators, and had been re-evaluated by Ripa in his definition of *Bellezza*. As the inheritor of the Neo-Scholastic and Peripatetic tradition of the Cinquecento, Bellori was not only indebted to Zuccaro, but other proponents like Fracastoro, whose *Turrius, sive de intellectione*, had stated that the active intellect, in fact, created universals: “They allow the faculty to abstract from the sensible simulacra of things...the simple universal itself and the pure idea, which represents neither the one nor the other but essential nature itself, denuded of all those things that had had connections with singularities, and this they now call intelligible which formerly would have been sensible.”⁹⁰³

⁹⁰¹ “così concreò tant’altre forme forme spiritulai rappresentanti tutte queste cose in generale, & in particolare; & queste poi infuse, & quasi inestò ne gli’intelletti angelici...” Ibid, 159.

⁹⁰² Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 57.

⁹⁰³ Fracastoro. *Turrius, sive de intellectione*, in *Opera omnia*. (Venice, 1555), 175v. Quoted in: Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism*, 322.

But while the heavenly bodies, not subject to change, express these Ideas in eternal purity and beauty, terrestrial objects, because of the inequality of matter, appear only as clouded and distorted reflections of them. In fact, the beauty of human beings is especially prone to be transformed into ugliness and deformity.⁹⁰⁴ Unlike Lomazzo, the Idea residing in the mind of the artist is not given a metaphysical origin or a metaphysical validity, for this would open the door to that disastrous opinion according to which the artist need look at sensory reality either not at all, or only in order to clarify and to enliven his inner images. Instead, the artistic Idea itself is said to originate from sensory perception, except that in it sensory perception seems brought to a purer and higher form. ‘Superior to nature by selection from natural beauties,’ as the very title of the lecture suggests, the Idea is reality in a higher and purer form: “born from nature, it overcomes its origin and becomes the model of art.”⁹⁰⁵ Even one of Plato’s statements was borrowed (though in a modified form) in order to testify to the fact that the Idea is nothing more than “a perfect notion of all things, starting with the observation of nature.”⁹⁰⁶ It is apparent that the Bellorian theory of Ideas reverts to that interpretation according to which the Idea is not inherent *a priori* in man, but instead must be won *a posteriori* from the observation of nature and diligent study.

Further on, Bellori validates his claims by quoting from a variety of ancient sources. From Cicero’s *Orator*, he reiterates the rhetorical model for formulating beauty that had been the basis for numerous theories in the past: “Thus the Idea constitutes the perfection of natural beauty and unites the truth with verisimilitude of things that appear before the eye, always aspiring to the best and to the marvelous, so that it not only rivals

⁹⁰⁴ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 105-6.

⁹⁰⁵ ‘*originata dalla natura supera l’origine e fassi originale dell’arte.*’ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 57.

⁹⁰⁶ Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 106.

but becomes superior to nature, revealing its works to us elegant and finished, whereas nature is not wont to display them to us perfect in every part.”⁹⁰⁷ It is important to note that Bellori did not merely quote directly from Cicero’s own text. As Panofsky elucidated, he had to fit Cicero’s well-known statement in the *Orator* into his altered interpretation of the formulation of beauty by means of a few significant modifications. Where Cicero had stated (in Bellori’s source, which was Victorius’ version of the text) that visible “works of art” are referred to a “mentally” conceived inner image, Bellori’s translation of this passage states that the visible “natural objects assimilate themselves” to their “imagined” inner image.⁹⁰⁸ For Cicero the Idea largely can be interpreted as excluding sensory perception, while Bellori found that the one merged with the other. In other words, Cicero suggests that the visible “work of art” referred to the Idea as something superior, and Bellori argued that the visible “natural object” was able to assimilate itself to the Idea, as though it existed on the same metaphysical plane.⁹⁰⁹

To continue the argument, Bellori cites the Ciceronian model by recounting the working method of Zeuxis as he created his famed statue of Helen: “For he did not believe that he would be able to find in a single body all those perfections that he sought for the beauty of Helen, since nature does not make any particular thing perfect in all its parts.”⁹¹⁰ The necessary balance between observation of natural phenomena and the “purification” of it is repeated throughout the treatment and reinforce the Aristotelian ‘Golden Mean.’ For instance, while discussing the ancient artist Demetrius, who “was accused of being too naturalistic,” Bellori notes that “Instead nature is for this reason so

⁹⁰⁷ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 57-58.

⁹⁰⁸ “cuius ad excogitatam speciem referuntur ea, quae sub oculos cadunt”; “alla cui immaginata forma imitando si rassomigliano le cose, che cadono sotto la vista.” Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 107.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁹¹⁰ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 58.

inferior to art that artists pursuing likeness and the complete imitation of bodies, without selection or choice of the Idea, were criticized for it.”⁹¹¹ Shortly thereafter, he quotes from Raphael’s letter to Castiglione, as well as Reni’s letter to the Massani in their insistence on the Idea as the sole source of beauty.⁹¹² The two, seemingly contradictory admonishments are brought together with a warning:

Hence those who do everything on the basis of practice, without knowing the truth, depict specters instead of figures; and those others are not dissimilar, who borrow talent and copy the ideas of others, creating works that are not daughters but bastards of nature, and who appear to have taken an oath to the brushstrokes of their masters. This evil is compounded by the fact that through poverty of talent, not knowing how to choose the best parts, these artists choose the defects of their teachers and form the Idea of the worst.⁹¹³

The repeated exhortations to a pure, ideal beauty balanced by study of nature should recall Alberti’s recommendations in his *Della pittura*. The Florentine theorist had asserted that beauty is the artist’s ultimate goal and that the traditions of mimesis and improving upon nature were both necessary for producing laudable art: “And of all the parts [the painter should] not only render a true likeness but also add beauty to them; for in painting, loveliness is not so much pleasing as it is required.”⁹¹⁴ He also warned against those artists who believed that they could produce something beautiful without any study of nature: “But in order not to lose time and effort, one should avoid the custom of some fools who, boasting their own talent, seek to win a painter’s fame by their own resources alone, completely without a natural model which they would follow with eye and mind.”⁹¹⁵

⁹¹¹ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 58. Alberti had recorded the same sentiment in his *Della pittura*. Alberti, *On Painting*, 92-93.

⁹¹² Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 59.

⁹¹³ *Ibid*, 61.

⁹¹⁴ Alberti, *On Painting*, 92-93.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 93.

Yet unlike Alberti, who set forth the delicate balancing of style that an artist must attempt in remaining faithful to nature through rigorous study, while simultaneously improving upon it, Bellori sets forth both ancient and modern examples to illustrate the state of affairs, especially in Rome, in the early Seicento; and illustrated the applicability of the Idea later in his twelve biographies of 1672. We find that the duality of beauty and of working method in art present in the *Idea* lecture is carried on, where Bellori cites specific examples. Therefore the view of art presented by Bellori was involved in a battle on two fronts (against Neoplatonic metaphysics and empiricism), while the double opposition explains the peculiarly invective and normative character of his theory. As he records in the Life of Annibale Carracci- which might have been conceived as an extension of the *Idea* later published as an introduction to his *Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*- the decadence of the style in the later sixteenth century found: “artists, abandoning the study of nature, corrupted art with the *maniera*, by which we mean the fantastic idea, based on artistic practice and not on imitation.”⁹¹⁶ At the same time: “During this long unsettled time art was contested by two opposite extremes, one dependent entirely on nature, the other on the imagination: the exponents in Rome were Michelangelo da Caravaggio and Giuseppe d’Arpino; the former copied bodies purely as they appear to the eye, without selection; the latter looked at nature not at all but followed the freedom of instinct...”⁹¹⁷ Each artist represents either an approach based solely upon a fantastic conception, disregarding nature entirely, or one that solely reproduces nature without a guiding faculty at all. This explains the conviction that art, though in need of nature as the substratum or material for the process of “purification”

⁹¹⁶ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 71. See: Charles Dempsey. “Le vite de’ pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni’ di Giovan Pietro Bellori” in: *L’Idea del Bello: viaggio per Roma nel Seicento con Giovan Pietro Bellori*. Evelina Borea and Carlo Gasparri, eds. (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 2000), 1: 96-101.

⁹¹⁷ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 72.

that it is to complete, is absolutely superior to a “vulgar” nature which has yet to be subjected to “purification”; and that the simple imitation of nature as she is must be considered inferior. Bellori had to prove that neither the Mannerists, nor those who “glorified themselves with the name of Naturalists,” as Bellori wrote, were on the right path. The true salvation of art had to be sought midway between these two equally ruinous extremes.⁹¹⁸ The infallible measure of this *juste milieu* was obviously the art of antiquity, which was honored not as a “naturalistic” art, but (because of its limitation to a “purified” or “ennobled” vision of nature) as a truly “natural” art.⁹¹⁹

In Bellorian art theory, it became clear for the first time that idealism and naturalism, the study of antiquity and the study of models, are logically incompatible. For the first time the phrase “aping of nature” was systematically applied to art, and assumed the absolutely derogatory meaning which it implied.⁹²⁰ Bellori set forth several proofs for the fact that a human being represented in a painting or sculpture is more perfect than a natural one. He cited the statements of all artists who claimed that in the world of reality they could find no example of the perfect beauty, and he quoted several literary passages in which the highest beauty of a living being is expressed by a comparison to a picture or a statue. It was in this evaluation that Bellori contested Homer’s explanation of the origin of the Trojan War by pointing out that Helen, as a mere natural person, could not possibly have been beautiful enough to be the object of a ten-year struggle of nations:

...she never did sail to Troy but that her statue was taken there in her place, and for its beauty the war was fought for ten years. Thus it is believed that Homer in his poems worshiped a woman who was not divine in order to gratify the Greeks and to render his subject of the Trojan War more renowned...Therefore Helen in her natural beauty did not equal the forms of Zeuxis and Homer...For this reason the best poets and orators,

⁹¹⁸ Ibid, 72.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid, 59-61.

⁹²⁰ Bellori, “Life of Caravaggio,” “Life of van Dyck,” *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 177-190, 213-224.

when they wish to celebrate some superhuman beauty, sort to comparison with statues and paintings.⁹²¹

Homer assigned this part to the actual Helen only to ennoble the *soggetto* of the Trojan War, and at the same time to flatter the Greeks with the alleged possession of a perfectly beautiful woman. According to Bellori, the war was actually not waged because of the imperfect beauty of an actual woman, but because of the perfect beauty of a statue abducted by Paris and brought to Troy.⁹²²

Early Renaissance writers, given their own historical position, had found it necessary to combat artistic “degeneracy” in the form of a failure to study and observe nature, as Cennini and Leonardo da Vinci evinced.⁹²³ Seicento art theory, however, had to protest with the same vigor against both the *dipingere di maniera*, and the artistic movement that seemed to be the opposite and equally ruinous extreme: Caravaggesque “naturalism.” Several writers, including Bellori, had attempted to comprehend the historical necessity of Caravaggio’s art (in which the anti-naturalistic elements were for the most part completely overlooked (**figure 16**)) for as Bellori wrote, “And it is true that painters, having deviated from the imitation of nature, needed someone to put them back on the right path; but just as it is easy, in order to flee one extreme, to go to the other, so in their effort to distance themselves from the maniera, by following nature too closely they strayed from art altogether and remained in error and darkness, until Annibale Carracci came to enlighten their minds and restore beauty to imitation.”⁹²⁴ But the man who evaluated his fellow artists only according to their ability to reproduce natural

⁹²¹ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 59.

⁹²² In antiquity, too, the myth of the Abduction of Helen was occasionally doubted; Dion Chrysostom, for example, said that she had been given to Paris for his legitimate wife. But antique writers could hardly have dreamed that a time would come when this myth would be attacked on the ground that only a work of art, not an actual woman, could justify a ten-year struggle. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 109-10.

⁹²³ Cennini. *The Craftsman’s Handbook*, 57. Leonardo, *On Painting*, 13-14, 197-199.

⁹²⁴ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 185.

objects, and who declared the execution of a good flower painting to be just as difficult and worthwhile as the execution of a good *istoria*, seemed to have swayed even more unforgivably in the opposite direction. Caravaggio was said to be uninventive, unintellectual, completely subject to the natural model and satisfied with the unselective reproduction of things as they appeared to the senses, no matter how faulty this appearance might be; or as Luigi Scaramuccia would phrase it in his *Le finezze de'Pennelli Italiani: un gran soggetti, ma non ideale*.⁹²⁵ Contemptible are the “Naturalists,” who form themselves no Idea at all and by “swearing by the model” copy uncritically the deficiencies of natural objects. While conversely, equally contemptible are those who, “without knowing the truth,” pursue art on the strength of mere practice and, disdain the study of nature try to work *di maniera* or, as Bellori says, from a mere “fantastical Idea.”⁹²⁶

The notion of such a valued and balanced theory for the conception was not entirely invented by Bellori. In fact, as Elizabeth Cropper has noted, *The Idea* deliberately underscored connections with earlier treatments and with the Accademia di San Luca where Bellori’s lecture was delivered.⁹²⁷ Federico Zuccaro, who had published his *L’Idea* in 1607, founded the Academy and was its first *Principe* in 1593. For his treatment of the concept, he had written a proper sonnet, which preceded it in published form, and signed it with the academic pseudonym ‘Il Sonnacchioso.’ The sonnet was also accompanied by a distinctive engraved emblem (**figure 52**): a circular form

⁹²⁵ Luigi Pellegrino Scaramuccia. *Le finezze dei pennelli italiani ammirate e studiate dal Girupeno sotto la scrota e la disciplina del genio di Raffaello d’Urbino*. (Padua, 1674), 76. Bellori, “Life of Caravaggio,” *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 177-190.

⁹²⁶ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 57, 72.

⁹²⁷ Cropper, “L’Idea del Bellori,” 81-86. Also see: Rodinò, Simonetta Prosperi Valenti. “Il disegno per Bellori” in: *L’Idea del Bello: viaggio per Roma nel Seicento con Giovan Pietro Bellori*. Evelina Borea and Carlo Gasparri, eds. (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 2000).

encompassing a square which enclosed a pen and inkwell and a compass; and a paper banner running over the poetic conceit reading ‘HINC OMNIA’ (“from here, everything,” or “everything derives from here”) The two devices, representing the two methods by which *disegno* is formed and expressed (with the compass of the intellect and given form by the pen) are the figurative and literal method by which everything, including the natural world, is created. The notion is further expressed next to the emblem in the accompanying motto: *Da un solo divino, e un solo human concetto/ Tutto deriva, & è tutto perfetto*, or “Of only a divine, and only a human conceit/ All derives, and is all perfect.”⁹²⁸ Just as God creates with both *disegno interno* and *esterno*, so the human mind expresses itself in imitation of the divine mind in a similar fashion. A sonnet followed the engraving:

Humble Nature was formed by the highest God
 For he makes it if worthy subjects
 The Soul in that infuses, and the intellect
 Capable of reason of other fortune.
 And of giving it perception had again diligence
 To go through the doors of all living subjects
 And that principle again and other conceit,
 That it is of all the rule, and the measure.
 Who either the rule after, is that President
 Ray of divine light in the human seat
 Which living image of the divine God.
 Intellect, that all perceives, and all purifies,
 You by God nearly pass, and near his foot,
 Lovely Disegno, divine spark.⁹²⁹

The sonnet reinforces the visual conceit that it accompanies in its poetic imagery. Again, the notion that *disegno* (as Zuccaro prefers the term) is the “divine spark” in humans that

⁹²⁸ Heikamp ed., *Scritti d’arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 145-146.

⁹²⁹ “Formando il sommo Dio l’humil Natura/ Per farla à se di se degno soggetti/ L’Anima in quella infuse, e l’intelletto/ Capace di raggion d’alta ventura. / E di donarlo i sensi hebbe ancor cura/ Uscieri, e porte d’ogni vivo oggetto,/ E quell primiero ancor alto concetto,/ Che è del tutto la norma, e la misura./ Chi sia la norma poscia, è quel Rettore / Raggio divino nell’humana sede/ Qual viva imago del divin Fattore./ Mente, che il tutto scorge, e ‘l tutto affina,/ Tu di Dio quasi passo, e quasi piede./ Vago Disegno, scintilla divina.” Heikamp ed., *Scritti d’arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 146.

allows a creative potential on par, or likened to, God is set forth as the human soul is infused with “intellect” and is “capable of reason.” Bellori’s discourse, which was bound to the same Academy and academic principles, is conceived with similar imagery found in his definition whereby, *Quel sommo ed eterno intelletto autore della natura*.⁹³⁰ Painters and sculptors imitate the first creator when they form in their minds an example of beauty. Based on the mental notion, they were to take from nature, whose creations do not always result in a perfect form, caused by imperfections of the material existence. For Zuccaro, these imperfections are perceptible through the *porte*, or “doors” of the senses, manifested by *logos*; and for Bellori it coincides with the Idea of beauty. Expectantly, many of these elements are taken up by Bellori from Zuccaro and are inspired by Aquinas where all forms of creation are derived by original *disegno* from God and are transferred by analogue through divine to natural creation.⁹³¹

Zuccaro’s publication was reintroduced into the dialogue on the concept as it was reprinted mid-century. The intertextual relationship between the two academicians associated with the Accademia di San Luca had already been established in the 1664 lecture by Bellori. The association was further developed and clarified through interpictureality in the allegorical engravings that were produced to accompany the 1672 publication of the *Lives*. The execution of the engravings was overseen by Charles Errard, the director of the Académie de France in Rome, and involved the participation of Albert Clouwet, as well as other French engravers living in Rome.⁹³² In the example printed with the introduction of the *Idea* (**figure 53**), the concept itself is represented as a

⁹³⁰ Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, 13.

⁹³¹ Cropper, “L’Idea del Bellori,” 81-82.

⁹³² Claire Pace and Janis Bell, “The Allegorical Engravings in Bellori’s *Lives*” in: *Art History in the Age of Bellori*. Janis Bell and Thomas Willette eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192.

beautiful nude woman sitting on geometric blocks with a compass in one hand and a brush in the other.⁹³³ Inscribed on the stone on which she rests is the word *IDEA*. While the woman looks to the heavens, pointing to the origination of the divine conception, her hands connect the image with that emblem of Zuccaro. In both, the dual notions of internal formulation and external execution are referenced with similar instruments. Quite literally, in the sophisticated interpretation of Bellori, the dual nature of beauty is understood as a process whereby the concept is formed in the artist's mind, guided by that perfect heavenly one, and judged according to the "compass of intellect" and finally translated to canvas. The form chosen to represent the concept itself is free of deformity and embodies the choice from the best examples in nature, "purified" as it were. The allegorical personification of *Bellezza* (**figure 22**) in Ripa's *Iconologia*, where a nude woman holds a compass, certainly must be cited here as offering a model for the engraver.⁹³⁴ Artists and theorists alike related the representation to the personification of Beauty (as is evinced by Boselli's quotation of Ripa).⁹³⁵ But Ripa and Boselli note the obscure nature of the woman who embodies *bellezza* as hidden and scattered. The engraving in the Bellorian conception, on the other hand, is clearly visible and illustrates the departure from Neoplatonic imagery.

The careful associations with the past, and the Nominalist, Neo-Scholastic interpretation of Zuccaro, is illustrated in the definition of the *Idea* given to the engraver as to the subject of the image. In his treatise Zuccaro had included a chapter entitled *Dichiaratione del nome del Disegno, e sua Etimologia*. In the etymology of the word, he wrote that *Disegno* was like the *segno del nome di Dio*, or "symbol of the name of God";

⁹³³ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 57.

⁹³⁴ Ripa, *Iconologia*, 40-42.

⁹³⁵ Boselli, *Osservazioni della scoltura antica*, fol 106r.

and that it is *segno di Dio in noi*, or “the symbol of God in us.” He also subtracted the word *Dio*, or “God,” so that what remains is the complete term *segn*, or “symbol.” Then Zuccaro revealed the association of the other “O”, interpreted like *il verbo sostantivo di Dio*, “the verb substituted of God,” and *il circolo di tutte le gratie*, “the circle of all graces.” The “E” at the center of the word- which is composed of seven letters and is thus numerically perfect- corresponds to the verb “to be” and related the significance as that of *disegno* actually “being” reality.⁹³⁶ Turning to Bellori’s lecture, it is clear that, in the original Italian definition of the Idea, such etymological interest is continued:

Questa idea, ovvero dea della pittura e della Scoltura, aperte le sacre cortine de gl’altri ingegni de i Dedali e de gli Apelli, si svela a noi e discende sopra i marmi e sopra le tele; originata dalla natura supera l’origine e fassi originale dell’arte, misurata dal compasso dell’intelletto, diviene misura della mano, ed animata dall’immaginativa dà vita all’immagine.⁹³⁷

The series of homophonic antitheses desired by Bellori, seen in the association between the terms *Idea/dea*, *originate/origine/originale*, and the construction, precedes the fusion of *anima/vita/immagine*, which creates *immaginativa*. Therefore, like Zuccaro, Bellori confers to the words a metaphysical validity, which uses a similar type of word play as recorded by Zuccari.⁹³⁸ Again, the cryptic symbolism is illustrated by Errand in the accompanying engraving as the compasses of intellect divulge the measure of the hand to the work. The nude woman, who is a controlled beauty that is imagined, is a form of that

⁹³⁶ Heikamp ed., *Scritti d’arte di Federico Zuccaro*, 80-85; Cropper, “L’Idea del Bellori,” 81. See also: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 88.

⁹³⁷ “This Idea, God of painting and of sculpture, opens the sacred curtains of the genius altars of the ingenious and of Apelles, it is revealed to us and descends above the marbles and above the canvases; originated of the superior nature the origin and original phases of art, measured by the compass of the intellect, divine measure of the hand, and animated by the imagination of life to the image.” Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, 14.

⁹³⁸ Cropper, “L’Idea di Bellori,” 82.

origin in nature and is in turn the “goddess of the Idea” (quite literally taken from *Idea* as *dea*) that illuminates the proper form.⁹³⁹

The discourse between Bellori and Zuccaro is significant, for even though much of the metaphysical framework for the conception derived from his predecessor Bellori still preferred the term *Idea* to *Disegno*. As such the understanding of the art-theoretical concept is not understood in the transference as theological in material. The affirmation of the artistic value of the *Bello* of Bellori confers to the work a position of creation that is not completely divine, nor natural. As Cropper noted, it instead “co-exists in the same realm of admirable gratification.”⁹⁴⁰ This, Cropper believes, is what Bellori and other critics bequeathed to seicento criticism and theory: a move away from divine creation, toward poetic creation; a move, as it were, from the religious to the secular. Bellori’s artistic values- or as we now understand them, aesthetics- were in part derived from the influential publications of Torquato Tasso. David Quint, in his study of poetic originality in the late Renaissance, posed that the poetics of Tasso had opened up a certain door of poetic imagination that mediated between subjective fantasy and Christian virtue. Quint believes that it was in literature, not theory, that the Renaissance achieved an autonomous secular identity and new freedom for human creation. Thus Tasso opened up a new “aesthetic universe” for the visual arts.⁹⁴¹

The new definition of artistic creation formulated by Bellori had, Cropper argues, helped form this new identity of the autonomous creator.⁹⁴² The notion is especially prevalent in the process of *imitatio*, including both the selection of artistic models for

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁴¹ David Quint. *Origin and Originality: Version of the Source*. (New Haven: London, 1983), 105-107, 131-32, 218-220.

⁹⁴² Cropper, “L’Idea del Bellori,” 82.

rhetorical principles, and a judicious selection from nature. The literary theory of *imitatio* and the story of Zeuxis regained momentum and was reiterated by numerous writers from the fifteenth century onward, remaining a staple for producing laudable art.⁹⁴³ While Bellori certainly cites Zeuxis and alludes to the rhetorical process of selective imitation, his most conspicuous contribution was to make the Idea originate not solely in nature or the mind of God, but in the artist (thus resulting in the dual formulation that sought to combine the separate originations). The role of Tasso in this new notion of artistic creation was that of imagination in creating beauty, which was central for the Bellorian formulation.⁹⁴⁴ The dialogue between Landino and Ficino in his *Discorso* was seminal for such an understanding, where the two philosophers discuss the conceit of art in conforming to the Aristotelian association of its production with prudence, and the concomitant definition of these mental “habits” like the faculty of the practical intellect.⁹⁴⁵ In attempting to stabilize, and thus devalue, the importance of the divine origin of art, the dialogue cites the description of Basilio il Grande of the deliberate process for the creation of man by God. It follows a debate on the eventuality of Ideas of all artificial or natural things that are sought in the mind or by the senses. In an officious discussion, and interesting for intellectual history, Ficino concludes that the form contained in the spirit does not reside *ab aeterno*; but is instead born of the senses. Furthermore he states that works of art exist in matter, and that the art of creating exists to precede that of an effective realization of the form of a statue or a poem. In other

⁹⁴³ Alberti, Raphael, Giorgio Vasari and many other examples cited attest to the universality of the creative formulation.

⁹⁴⁴ Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting*, 153-55.

⁹⁴⁵ Tasso, *Scritti sull'arte poetica*, 1:177.

words, nature is *certo ordine* in the thing itself, whereas art is order imposed upon it from without.⁹⁴⁶

Tasso continues with the separation laid out by Plato between icastic and fantastic imitation where the latter is unfaithfully associated with the pretense of the poem.⁹⁴⁷ The poet had laid out a solution for a similar problem earlier in the *Discorso* where he produced a new definition of intellectual fantasy, unknown to Plato, using Dante as an example. The imitation of Dantesque poetry, he wrote, is more icastic than fantastic. Tasso reconciled the difference between the Aristotelian definition of art as an intellectual “habit” and the validity of the mimetic tradition in the work of art itself. He insists on the priority of “reason” in art with respect to its creations, and on the capacity of intellectual fantasy to mediate between truth and fiction in the process of *imitatio*. In the same fashion, Bellori attempted to explain the mediating capacity of the artist’s mind to reunite the two spheres of existence with the judicious quality of the Idea.⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴⁶ Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 157-158.

⁹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Cropper. “La più bella antichità che sappiate desiderare”: History and Style in Giovan Pietro Bellori’s ‘Lives’.” *Kunst und Kunsttheorie 1400-1900. Wolfenbütteler Forschungen* 48 (Wiesbaden 1991), 145-173.

⁹⁴⁸ Cropper, “L’Idea del Bellori,” 82.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion:

Poussin, the Bellorian Idea, and the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture

In 1648 Louis XIV received an official request concerning the establishment of an art academy in Paris. The primary reasons cited for such an institution was that the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture ought to be considered among the liberal arts, and that they constituted a profession. There was also a need to separate the “arts nobles” from “arts mécaniques.” The same arguments were presented for the establishment of the Accademia del Disegno. However, the Florentine Academy did not inspire the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. It would be instead the connections with the Accademia di San Luca in Rome and that institution’s organization and curriculum that shaped the program of art education that was drawn up most likely by Charles Le Brun (1619-1690) at the end of the memorandum to the “sun king.” In the program, emphasis was laid on the necessity of a thorough knowledge of architecture, geometry, perspective, arithmetic, anatomy, astronomy and history.⁹⁴⁹ The manner in which information would be disseminated was again modeled on the lectures of the same academy in Rome that Giovan Pietro Bellori was made secretary of in 1671.

⁹⁴⁹ Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present*, 84.

In his position, Bellori fostered debate on art theory and strengthened the connections with another art academy established by Louis XIV, this time in Rome: the Académie de France. Founded in 1666 under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), Charles Le Brun and Gianlorenzo Bernini, the “academy of all these professions was opened in Rome for studious French youth, which His majesty supports liberally for the purpose of their erudition.”⁹⁵⁰ By the time Bellori published his *Lives* in 1672, his relationships with the leading administrators of the French Academy in Rome were already fully formed: the biographies are dedicated to Jean-Baptiste Colbert, founder and superintendent of the academy; and the allegorical engravings were designed by Charles Errard, who was the director of the institution when they were published. As Olivier Bonfait notes, the affiliations Bellori fostered with such influential artists, critics and theorists ensured a lasting relationship with France.⁹⁵¹ In fact, Bellori was made an honorary member of the Académie in Paris in 1689 with the status of *Conseiller-Amateur*. While Rome had begun to lose its position as the capital of the art world toward the end of the century, the French Academy in Paris, under the directorship of Charles Le Brun, took on the leading role in the arts.⁹⁵²

The artistic values that began dominating the publications of theorists and critics in France were closely aligned with the classical tastes of Bellori and Roman academicians. For instance, André Félibien (1619 -1695) edited the published *Conférences de l'Académie de France en Rome* and codified Bellori's hierarchy of genres for posterity in his *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres*

⁹⁵⁰ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 320.

⁹⁵¹ Olivier Bonfait, ed. *L'idéal classique: Les échanges artistiques entre Rome et Paris au temps de Bellori (1640-1700)*. (Paris: Somogy, 2002), 2-6.

⁹⁵² The institution reached its greatest power after 1683. The economic situation that existed in the wake of the Barberini papacy had given the financial upper hand to France. Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present*, 84.

anciens et modernes (1666-88).⁹⁵³ The art and architectural theorist Roland Fréart de Chambray (1606-1676) had carried on the defense of Raphael against Boschini and Salvator Rosa in his *Idée de la perfection de la peinture* published in Paris, 1662. The text illustrates the receptive nature of ancient and modern classical conventions in France. With the understanding that the Carracci, and those artists that succeeded them, had been the modern inheritors of Raphael's style, Chambray wrote: "Poor Domenichino, the most learned of the Carracci pupils and possibly the only one deserving the name of painter today, has suffered this disgrace for a long time; almost all of his rivals are very inferior to him... One will have to say of the blindness of painters of our day that they prefer to Domenichino the Giuseppini, the Lanfranchi and other similar mannerists (*manieristi*) whose paintings have only the false splendor of an "I don't know what" novelty which moderns call a fury of drawing and a boldness of the brush...⁹⁵⁴ While Raphael was considered by Bellori above all others of the moderns that artists should follow, the interpretation of a style that deviated from Domenichino's, such as the "baroque" Giovanni Lanfranco(1582-1647), explains the peculiar usage of the term "mannerist."

⁹⁵³ André Félibien. *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellens peintres anciens et modernes*. 5 vols. (Paris, 1666-88).

⁹⁵⁴ "Le pauvre Dominquin, le plus sçavant de tous les Eleves des Caraces, et peut etre le seul digne du nome de Peintre, a esprouvé fort long-temps cette disgrace; quoy que presque tous ses Competiteurs luy fusent extremement inferieurs, et tres-indignes de venire en concurrence avec luy: car si nous en exceptions le Guide, qui fut veritablement plus favorite que luy de la Nature pour le Talent de la Grace qui la rendu singulier dans tout son siecle, mais qui ne luy estroit aussi aucunement comparable dans celuy de l'Expression, et moins encore dans l'intelligence de la regularité perspective; que pourra on dire de l'aveuglement des Peintres de nostre temps qui luy prefererent des Iosepins, Des Lanfrancs, et d'autres semblables manieristes, don't les Ouvrages n'ayant que le faux escalt d'une je ne sçay quelle nouveauté que ceux d'aujourdhy appellant une furie de Dessen, et une franchise de pinceau, que l'ignorance des veritables beautez et des principes de l'Art leur fait admirer, n'ont eu aussi de reputation qu'autant qu'a duré cette faveur passagere de la Fortune." Roland Fréart de Chambray. *Idée de la perfection de la peinture démontrée par les principes de l'art et par des exemples conformes aux observations que Plin et Quintilien ont fait sur les plus célèbres tableaux des anciens peintres mis en parallèle à quelques ouvrages de nos meilleurs peintres modernes, Léonard de Vinci, Raphael, Jules Romain et le Poussin*. (Paris, 1662), 119-120: Also see: Paola Barocchi. "Ricorsi Italiani nei trattatisti d'arte Francesi del Seicento" in: *Il mito del classicismo nel seicento*. Luciano Anceschi ed. (Florence: G. D'Anna, 1964), 129-147.

It is therefore appropriate to find that the culmination of modern art in Bellori's biographies to be of a painter with a similarly classical style. In the Life of Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) the series of biographies that began with art's triumphant renewal with Annibale Carracci found their zenith. Though much of his career was spent in Rome, Poussin was still deeply affected by the values and attitudes of French art;⁹⁵⁵ as Bellori wrote, "one nation was the fortunate mother, the other his teacher and second homeland."⁹⁵⁶ He remained in touch with important patrons in Paris while living in Rome, assuring that what was valued in his native land was communicated to him.⁹⁵⁷ Though the painter primarily worked for private patrons, affording him the luxury of time and freedom of subject matter, he was invited and commanded to return to Paris several times by Louis XIV. The high esteem accorded to Poussin in his native France is illustrated in the correspondence between the king and painter recorded by Bellori: "...owing to his particular recognition of the high degree of excellence that he has attained in the art of painting, not only through the lengthy studies he has made of all the branches of knowledge requisite for perfection, but also because of his natural abilities and talents that God has given him for the arts, His Majesty has appointed and retained him as his first painter-in-ordinary..."⁹⁵⁸ In fact, Judith Bernstock has estimated that much of the iconography of the artist's works can be directly connected to the dynastic ideology of the French monarchy.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁵ See: Todd Olson. *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁹⁵⁶ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 309.

⁹⁵⁷ Olson, *Poussin and France*, 37-56.

⁹⁵⁸ The title of *Peintre Ordinaire du Roi* did not require the artist to live at court, and assured that the honor that accompanied it would not interfere with other commissions. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 318.

⁹⁵⁹ Judith Bernstock. *Poussin and French Dynastic Ideology*. (Lang: Wien, 2000).

The career of this illustrious painter followed a similar trajectory as many sixteenth-century artists in this study, moving from a style based on Northern naturalism to one of a more rigorously observed classicism. The change in style had been presented by Agucchi and Bellori as the model for attaining a perfect style and Annibale Carracci had offered the example that artists should follow in attaining that style by way of diligent study and following the proper masters in order to attain the Idea. The course of Annibale's career—studying in Bologna, Emilia and Venice, before moving to Rome—was understood as necessary for the rhetorical appropriation of models. No less than the most celebrated poet of the early sixteenth century, Giambattista Marino most likely informed Poussin that he should follow the model of Annibale in his studies as well. The poet had moved to Rome and encouraged the painter to travel to Italy. After finishing his Parisian commissions, Poussin finally set out on his journey, and traveled to Venice, where he developed an affinity for Titian (**figure 11**), and finally arrived in Rome in 1624.⁹⁶⁰ But even though Poussin was thirty years of age when he had arrived in the eternal city, Bellori stressed that he was well aware that his style was lacking, especially when confronted with the ancient and modern works in the eternal city. Along with his devoted study “to ancient things,” the artist “applied himself to geometry and to perspective or optics, as regards both the position and diminution of objects and the principles of light and shadow; in which study he was guided by the writings of the Theatine father Fra’Matteo Zaccolini, who was Domenichino’s master in this science...”⁹⁶¹ Poussin studied many of these

⁹⁶⁰ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 310-311. Denis Mahon was one of the first to propose the extent of the theoretical impact Venice would have had on Poussin. While there he could have seen a copy of Giulio Mancini's *Trattato*. However, Venetian naturalism appears to have had a much greater impact on the painter than the amateur-connoisseur's ideas. Denis Mahon. “Nicolas Poussin and Venetian Painting: A New Connexion I.” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 88 no. 514 (January, 1946), 15-20.

⁹⁶¹ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 311.

“manuscripts that treat light and shadow” like the extensive four-volume treatise by Matteo Zaccolini (1574-1630) on perspective and color.⁹⁶²

The centrality of geometric precision and lighting effects in Poussin’s *Life* is attested to by the accompanying allegorical engraving (**figure 54**). In it, a female personification points to a perspectival painting of the objects in her space and invites the viewer to admire the skillful invention.⁹⁶³ More geometric shapes lie behind her where the words *LUMEN ET UMBRA*, ‘Light and Shadow’ are carved into the stone behind her: the artistic science by which three-dimensional illusion of objects in space is made possible. A similar idea is expressed by Abbè Nicaise on Poussin’s use of light and color: “Through his mastery of optics and aerial perspective, he [Poussin] has revealed numerous hidden mysteries concerning various tints, the degradation of figures, chiaroscuro and all the other secrets of that science which was not known to the ancients, and for which our time is especially beholden him.”⁹⁶⁴ The importance of geometry to artists was further elucidated by Chambray, who had noted in his *Idée* that *Œuvres*, or real experts on art, are only those who “examinant et jugent les choses à la maniera des Géomètres.”⁹⁶⁵ Claire Pace and Janis Bell have since argued that the pairing of engravings (**figures 54, 55**) in Poussin’s *Life*, including the portrait frontispiece and allegory, in fact illustrate the conceit of Bellori’s own poem entitled *Alla Pittura*, in which Painting says at the close:

⁹⁶² Matteo Zaccolini. *De colore, Della descrizione dell’ombra, Prospettiva e colore, Prospettiva lineale*. Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Florence (MS Ashburnham 1212, 1-4). See also: Bell, “Zaccolin’s Theory of Color Perspective,” 91-112. Poussin would have had access to the manuscript through his patron Cassiano dal Pozzo. See: Janis C. Bell. “Cassiano dal Pozzo’s copy of the Zaccolini Manuscripts.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988), 103-125.

⁹⁶³ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 309.

⁹⁶⁴ Claude Nicaise. *L’École d’Athènes et le Parnasse de Raphaël d’Urbino. Tableaux du Vatican expliqués en français sur l’italien de Mr. Bellori*. MS 180. Bibliothèque Municipale di Beaune (Côte d’Or, 1698), 18.

⁹⁶⁵ Wilhelm Fraenger. *Die Bildanalysen des Roland Fréart de Chambray*. (Heidelberg, 1917). Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present*, 94.

I am shadow and by tradition,
I temper the rays on the canvas and I form the light.⁹⁶⁶

The notion that Painting itself is light and shadow or *chiaroscuro* relates to the mimetic qualities inherent in the medium, and thus comment on the superiority of painting to sculpture.

While Poussin set about mastering the mathematical qualities necessary for a praiseworthy painter, he continued his studies in anatomy. As Bellori noted, he also “studied anatomy in the hospital in Paris, he took up the study again from Vesalius, and afterward, through association with Larchée, the distinguished surgeon, practicing on cadavers and skeletons, he became very well instructed in it. For study from life he frequented the academy of Domenichino...”⁹⁶⁷ The clarity and geometric precision, and finally abstraction, found in Domenichino’s figures (**figure 13**) is certainly the source for such repeated connection between the artists. Poussin’s studies were then both from life, as well as texts. As the dominant anatomical treatise, that sought to supplant Galen in the Cinquecento, Andrea Vesalius’ (1514-1564) *De humani corporis fabrica* was an indispensable tool for artists as it included detailed engravings of skeletal and muscular structure in various states of complexity.⁹⁶⁸ Taken together, the education would have been familiar to artists since the Early Renaissance: local training by a master, producing figure studies from prints or drawings and then from life, and moving onto mathematical construction and geometry. However, in describing the artist’s preparatory methods, Bellori records a model that is the culmination of modern art. As he noted, Poussin was also well versed in the other “liberal arts and of philosophy,” and knew Latin and

⁹⁶⁶ “Son ombra e per costume/ Tempro i rai su le tele, e formo il lume” Pace and Bell, “The Allegorical Engravings in Bellori’s *Lives*,” 221-222.

⁹⁶⁷ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 311.

⁹⁶⁸ Andrea Vesalius. *De humani corporis fabrica*. (Basel, 1543).

Italian.⁹⁶⁹ When given a subject to paint, he would research what was to be depicted in the appropriate “Greek and Latin histories, he used to make notes on the subjects and then avail himself to them as needed.”⁹⁷⁰ Then, as Bellori enumerates:

When he prepared to execute his compositions, once he had conceived the invention he would make a rough sketch of it, enough to be comprehensible; then he fashioned small models in wax of all the figures in their attitudes, in *bozzette* of half a *palmo*, and composed the history or fable in the round in order to see the natural effects of light and shadow on the bodies. Following this, he made other, larger models, and clothed them in order to see separately the arrangements and folds of the drapery over the nude, and for this purpose he used fine linen or wet chambray, a few scraps of fabric sufficing him for the variety of colors. Similarly, he would draw the nude figure separately from life; and the drawings that he made of these inventions of his were not worked out precisely with their contours but rather formed with simple lines and simple chiaroscuro in water color, which, however, possessed all the effectiveness of the movements and the expression.⁹⁷¹

The thoughtful preparation involved from inception to execution involved several stages.⁹⁷² The process required at least a reading knowledge of Greek and Latin to best achieve an understanding of the *istoria* to be rendered. Subjects were then modeled and drawn in several positions on a stage with a moveable light source to best capture *LUMEN ET UMBRA*. The quick pen and ink washes that the artist set to paper at first seem to reveal a rapidity in setting out compositional motifs, such as that found in the study for *The Marriage of the Virgin* (ca.1639-40) of the first set of the *Seven Sacraments* (**figures 56-57**).⁹⁷³ The haste that the works seem to illustrate belies the care taken in the

⁹⁶⁹ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 323.

⁹⁷⁰ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 323. For a discussion of the use of wax models in the preparatory process see: Avigdor Arikha. “De la boîte, des figurines et du mannequin.” *Paris* (1994).

⁹⁷¹ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 323.

⁹⁷² See: Anthony Blunt. *The Drawings of Poussin*. (London: Yale University Press, 1979). Also see: Pierre Rosenberg. *From Drawing to Painting: Poussin, Watteau, Fragonard, David, and Ingres*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁹⁷³ Martin Clayton. *Poussin Works on Paper: Drawings from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*. (Merrell Holberton: London, 1995), 139-141

number of sketches produced. Poussin seems to have agonized over each contour, fold of drapery and shadow cast to such a degree that was not recorded in the other biographies of Bellori. Nevertheless, modern scholars, such as Martin Clayton, have been resistant to the notion that Poussin was in fact a thoughtful and talented draughtsman.⁹⁷⁴

To understand the impetus for such thorough, yet focused preparatory methods, one must turn to the appendix of the artist's biography, where Bellori includes twelve short paragraphs on the theoretical principles of Poussin under the title: *Osservazione di Nocolò Pussino sopra la Pittura*. We know from Bellori that Poussin planned to compose a book on the theory of painting, and that this book was abandoned in 1650 at an advanced stage: "He always had in mind to compile a book about painting, and made notes on various subjects and records of what he read or pondered on his own, with the aim of putting them in order when he could no longer work with his brush because of age...."⁹⁷⁵ These *Observations* were understood to be part of Poussin's art-theoretical book until Blunt dismissed them as mere "notes" in 1938.⁹⁷⁶ The short paragraphs are composed entirely of phrases, even whole sentences which were taken verbatim from earlier authors, most without citations. Many are composed of several different authors conflated into a single paragraph.⁹⁷⁷ Anthony Colantuono has noted, however, that Poussin's ideas were written in an aphoristic literary style that simulated that of Leonardo

⁹⁷⁴ Martin Clayton opened his treatment of Poussin's drawings by stating that "Poussin was not a naturally gifted draftsman." This, he believes, accounts for their unusual nature. Clayton, *Poussin Works on Paper*, 8.

⁹⁷⁵ The abandonment of the book project is recorded in a letter to Poussin's Parisian friend and patron, Paul Fréart de Chantelou. *Nicolas Poussin Correspondance*, ed. Charles Jouanny (Archives de l'Art Français n.s.V) Paris, Nobelet, 1911, 419. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 325.

⁹⁷⁶ Blunt, "Poussin's Notes on Painting," 344-51.

⁹⁷⁷ These authors quoted from included: Tasso's *Discorsi del poema eroico* (1594); Agostino Mascardi's rhetorical treatise *Dell'arte historica* (1636); Paolo Aresi's *L'Arte di predicar bene* (1611); and Ludovico Castelvetro's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* (1570), as well as art-theoretical publications, such as Giovanni Paolo Gallucci's expanded Italian translation of Albrecht Dürer's *Della Simmentria dei Corpi Humani Libri Quattro* (1591). Anthony Colantuono. "Poussin's *Osservazioni Sopra la Pittura*: Notes or Aphorisms?" *Studi Secenteschi* 16 (Florence, 2000), 286.

da Vinci. The style coincided with the literary genre of the aphorism that flourished in Poussin's time, which frequently involved the appropriation of conceits from earlier authors. Poussin took these aphorisms and transformed them through rhetorical *imitatio*; as Colantuono wrote, "the process by which literary models were 'digested' and transformed into something new." These were then condensed into a single paragraph, each being typographically independent, and often not consisting of more than two sentences. Additionally, the newly formed aphorisms did not join together to form a text, as each fragment was individually titled. The literary precedent for the *Observations* was Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*, which consisted of some short paragraphs that were also each separate and individually titled. Poussin was familiar with the format as he had access to the Leonardo manuscript owned by his friend Cassiano dal Pozzo as early as the 1630s.⁹⁷⁸

Even though the *Observations* are independent in form, they do not contradict one another and, if taken together, elaborate on a system that would be central for the theoretical curriculum of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.⁹⁷⁹ The necessary balance of theory and practice, so vital to the precepts found in Poussin's aphorisms, is set out in the first aphorism Bellori records, *Of the Example of Good Masters*.

Even if, after theory, teachings regarding practice are given in addition, nevertheless, so long as the precepts are not seen to be validated they do not leave in the mind that habit of working which must result from practical knowledge; on the contrary leading the young man down long and roundabout paths, they seldom take him to the end of his journey,

⁹⁷⁸ Colantuono, "Poussin's *Osservazioni Sopra la Pittura*: Notes or Aphorisms?", 293.

⁹⁷⁹ Peter H. Brieger. "Principles of French Classic Painting." *The Art Bulletin* 20 no.4 (December, 1938), 339-358.

unless the effective guidance of good examples directs the studios to shorter ways and less complicated ends.⁹⁸⁰

The Aristotelian understanding of the association of art and nature is addressed in *How Art Surpasses Nature*: “Art is not something different from nature, nor can it transcend her limits; for the light of knowledge, which by gift of nature is scattered here and there and appears in diverse men in diverse places and times, is combined together by art, and this light is never found entirely or in large part in one single man.”⁹⁸¹ The notion, Blunt has pointed out, corresponds to a passage in Quintilian’s *Institutione oratoria*.⁹⁸² Aristotle is again cited, via Castelvetro’s *Poetica d’Aristotele* of 1576, in *How Impossibility is Perfection in Painting and in Poetry*: “Aristotle seeks to demonstrate with the example of Zeuxis that the poet has license to say things that are impossible provided they are better, just as it is impossible in nature for one woman to possess in herself all beauties collected together, such as the figure of Helen possessed, who was most beautiful and consequently better than the possible.”⁹⁸³ The Ciceronian model of gathering scattered beauty is emphasized in a Peripatetic reading.

However, the Nominalist formulation has been lost on earlier authors due to the lengthy aphorism entitled, *Of the Idea of Beauty*. In the excurses on preparatory categories Poussin relates that in order for the Idea to “descend into matter,” order, mode, and form must be considered before hand. As he wrote,

The idea of beauty does not descend into matter unless it has been prepared as much as possible, this preparation comprises three things: the order concerns the interval of the parts, the mode relates to quantity, the form has to do with lines and colors. Neither the order nor the interval of

⁹⁸⁰ Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 338.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 338.

⁹⁸² Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 362. Poussin also uses Quintilian again in his ‘Observation’ *Of Action*.

⁹⁸³ Castelvetro. *Poetica d’Aristotele*. (Basel, 1576), 668. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 338.

the parts is sufficient, nor is it sufficient that all the limbs of the bodies be in their natural place unless, besides this, according to the mode, each limb be proportioned to the size of the body and, according to the species, all the lines be handled gracefully and with a suave harmony of lights adjacent to shadows. From all these considerations it is apparent that beauty is entirely removed from the physical aspects of the body and only comes close to these when it is prepared by these insubstantial preparations. And thus we conclude that painting is nothing but an idea of incorporeal things even though it shows bodies, for it only represents the order and the mode of the species of things and it is more intent upon the idea of beauty than on another thing, so much so that there are those who have maintained that this only was the mark and the goal of all good painters, and that painting, looking on beauty with an enamored eye, was the Queen of the arts.⁹⁸⁴

The metaphysical interpretation of beauty as “incorporeal” and the specific mention of the three things of which proper preparation is comprised, “the order concerns the interval of the parts, the mode relates to quantity, the form has to do with lines and colors,” immediately calls to mind the earlier Realist treatments of Ficino and Lomazzo. In his discussion of the importance of proportion, Ficino noted that beauty is “a certain grace shining in itself through the influence of its own Idea.”⁹⁸⁵ The entrance of this conceptualization into matter was contingent upon the specific steps in preparation for it:

⁹⁸⁴ *Della Idea della Bellezza*. Anthony Blunt. *Nicolas Poussin*. (Pallas Athene: London, 1967), 364. “L’idea della Bellezza non discende nella materia che non sia preparata il più che sia possibile; questa preparazione consiste in trè cose, nell’ordine, nel modo, e nella specie o vero forma- L’ordine significa l’intervallo delle parti, il modo hà rispetto alla quantità, la forma consiste nelle linee, e ne’ colori. Non basta l’ordine, e l’intervallo delle parti, e che tutti li membri del corpo habbiano il loro sito naturale, se non si aggiunge il modo, che dia a ciascun membro la debita grandezza proportionate al corpo, e se non vi concorre la specie, accioche le linee sieno fatte con gratia, e con soave Concordia di lumi vicino all’ombre. E da tutte queste cose si vede manifestamente che la bellezza è in tutto lontana dalla materia del corpo, la quale ad esso mai s’auuicina se non farà disposta con queste preparazioni incorporee. Et qui si conclude che la Pittura altro non è che una idea delle cose incorporee, quantunque dimonstri li corpi, rappresentando solo l’ordine, e l’modo delle specie delle cose, e la medesima è più intenta all’idea del bello che a tutte l’altre onde alcuni hanno voluto che questa sola fosse il segno, e quasi la meta di tutti I buoni Pittori, e la pittura vagheggiatrice della Bellezza e Regina dell’arte.” Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, 461-2. Also see: Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 339.

⁹⁸⁵ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, 93.

“But the preparation of the living body consists of these three things: Arrangement, Proportion, and Aspect [order, mode and form].”⁹⁸⁶ The three specific steps to be taken, including the distance and arrangement of the various parts to be shown; the number, or quantity of those parts; and the “form” that will embody the Idea in “lines and color,” were again taken up by Lomazzo.⁹⁸⁷ In summarizing Ficino when pointing out that proper proportion influences beauty directly, Lomazzo wrote: “...Finally, the beauty of the body is nothing more than a certain demeanor, vivacity and grace, which radiate within it from the infusion of its Idea; and the latter does not descend into matter unless it is most properly prepared. This preparation of the living body is accomplished in three particulars, which are order, mode and form.”⁹⁸⁸ In Neoplatonic treatments, then, the Idea had metamorphosed to a regularized concept that was formed and infused in matter through a specific stratagem. The emphasis on quantifying and, subsequently, qualifying mathematical interrelationships between objects, resulted in a continued effort to distill a universally valid set of harmonious relationships in the parts of human anatomy.

But as Panofsky and Blunt pointed out, Poussin did not quote from either author’s text. Instead, the *Observation* on beauty corresponds closely to a passage in the Italian translation of Dürer’s treatise made by Gallucci, *Della simmetria dei corpi humani libri Quattro*.⁹⁸⁹ In Chapter LVII entitled *In what thing beauty consists, & proportions of bodies according to Marsilio Ficino, and painters*, Gallucci related the importance of proportions in cajoling beauty into matter and form. Though the premise on which he

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid, 93-94.

⁹⁸⁷ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, 93.

⁹⁸⁸ Lomazzo, *Idea del Tempio della Pittura*, Ch.26. Quoted in: Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, 141-153.

⁹⁸⁹ The text contains one sentence which is missing in both Marsilio Ficino’s *Sopra lo amore over’convito di Platone* (Florence, 1544) and Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo’s *Idea del tempio della pittura* (Milan, 1590) and which corresponds to Poussin’s sentence beginning: “Et qui si conclude...” Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 364-5.

bases the beauty of human bodies is the authority of Aristotle, he expands on Ficino's doctrine in the *Convivio*:⁹⁹⁰

What thing consists of the beauty of the body? A certain liveliness of action, and a certain grace, that shines in the same beautiful thing for the influence of its own idea. This splendor does not descend into matter if the material is not properly prepared...now this preparation of the body that lives consists in three things: order, mode, and species; the significant order being the intervals of the parts, the quantity the mode, the species of lines, and colors.⁹⁹¹

The specified number and order of preparation, as well as the definition of the *Idea della bellezza* as “a certain grace, that shines in the same beautiful thing for the influence of its own idea,” relate to Ficinian metaphysics. Gallucci openly admits the debt to Ficino in his writings on proportion and continues to treat each preparatory thing: “The species then assures a sweet agreement of lights, shadows and lines, which is not in the material. Of all these things that are manifest, that beauty in all distance of the material of the body, is never communicated the same to the body, if it is not to be disposed with these incorporeal preparations, which I have recounted.”⁹⁹² The insistence on the incorporeal nature of beauty in these preparations, pointing to the existence of it in the preparations and not the forms themselves, was elaborated on by Poussin in another *Observation*

⁹⁹⁰ Chapter LVII, *In qual cosa consiste la bellezza, & proportione de i corpi secondo Marsilio Ficino, & i pittori* “Quantunque, nel principio di questo libro habbiamo ditto in qual cosa consiste la bellezza de i corpi humani con l'auttorita di Aristot & de i Poeti in questo luogo, nondimeno habbiamo dettornato di parlare della bellezza de i corpi humani, secondo la dottrina di Platone spiegata da Marsilio Ficino sopra il convivo dell'istesso, & insieme narrare, quale siano quelle misure, che i moderni pittori usano, si perche il nostro libro sia concluso nella bellezza, la quale deono servire i pittori havere per scopo nelle loro tavole, si perche li studiosi non habbiamo da ricercer altrove queste misure, che volgarmente si usano. Hora i pittori ascoltino il Ficino, chea cosi dice.” Gallucci, *Della simmetria dei corpi humani libri quattro*, 142-144.

⁹⁹¹ Che cosa è finalmente la bellezza del corpo? Una certa vivacita di attione, & una certa gratia, che risplende nella istessa cosa bella per l'influsso della sua idea. Questo fulgore non scende in quello, fin che la materia non sia preparata più, che sia possibile, ora questa preparatione del corpo, che vive consiste in tre cose, nell'ordine, nel modo, & nella specie, l'ordine significa l'intervalli delle parti, il modo la quantita, la specie le linee, & i colori.” Ibid, 144.

⁹⁹² “Percioche bisogna, che tuti i membri del corpo habbiano il suo sito naturale: La specie poi metiamo noi in una soave concordia di lumi, di ombre, di linee, non nella materia. Da tutte queste cose è manifesto, che la bellezza in tutto lontana dalla materia del corpo, non mai comunichi se stessa al corpo, se non sara disposta con queste preparationi incorporee, le quali ho io raccontato.” Ibid, 144.

entitled *Of the Bounding of Lines of Drawing and Color*. As he wrote, “A painting will appear elegant when its extreme elements join the nearest by means of indeterminate ones in such a fashion that they do not flow into one another too feebly nor yet with harshness of line and colors; and this leads one to speak of the harmony of discord of colors and of their bounding lines.”⁹⁹³ The arrangement of the lines and colors, used to create form, in other words, had to be such that they invited the proper amount of harmony into them and did not “flow into one another too feebly.”

To this point, the information presented in the aphorisms could be dismissed as derivative of Neoplatonic metaphysics and a reiteration of Renaissance workshop practice. The belief that the preparatory process necessitated the specific arrangement of forms, refined over a period of time, was commonplace since the Quattrocento; as was the belief in the importance of proper proportions- “each limb be proportioned to the size of the body”- disseminated in theoretical and drawing manuals.⁹⁹⁴ As Gallucci relates, taking from Ficino, the art of painting is nothing more than an “incorporeal idea”: “They know that painting is nothing other, than an idea of the things in everything incorporeal, which although represents bodies, represented only the order, and mode, and species of things, that are in all incorporeal things.”⁹⁹⁵ Likewise in Poussin’s aphorism on the descent of beauty we find that: “And thus we conclude that painting is nothing but an idea of incorporeal things even though it shows bodies, for it only represents the order

⁹⁹³ *Determini del Disegno, e del Colore*. Blunt, *Nicholas Poussin*, 362. “La pittura a sarà elegante quando gli ultimi termini con li primi per via delli mezzi, saranno cogiunti in maniera che non concorrino troppo fiaccamente, ò con asprezza di linee, e di colori, e qui si può parlare dell’amicitia, e nimicitia de’ colori, e de’ loro termini.” Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, 460.

⁹⁹⁴ Blunt, *Nicholas Poussin*, 364.

⁹⁹⁵ “Queste cose sono dal Ficino, dalle quali non poco ne traranno gli studio si della pittura se spesse volte le volgeranno nell’animo suo specialmente, che conosceranno di qui, che la pittura altro non è, che una idea delle cose in tutto incorporea, quantunque rappresenti i corpi, rappresentando solo l’ordine, & modo, & specie delle cose, che sono in tutto cose incorporee.” Gallucci, *Della simmetria dei corpi humani libri quattro*, 144.

and the mode of the species of things and it is more intent upon the idea of beauty than on another thing.”⁹⁹⁶

Poussin also connected the canon of proportions with the *Idea della Bellezza* stating that: “the idea of beauty descends into matter if it has order, measure and form.”⁹⁹⁷ The belief that a canon of proportions was necessary for producing beauty had been actively sought since Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer had attempted such a systematization. The notion of a universal system of proportion had been held up as encapsulating a universal beauty that is unchanging by Neoplatonic authors like Ficino. Gallucci’s chapter relates that notion late in the Cinquecento as he found that Dürer sought through “every kind of body, that one power” that would unveil those primary and principle members in their truest fashion: “And this is the universal measure, that the modern painters use, which they say, having comprised, one with nature, one with the antique statues must be chosen.”⁹⁹⁸ At the same time, writers from various philosophical camps like Borghini and Zuccaro began to denounce the necessity for a codified system, and mathematics in general when attempting to rein beauty from its metaphysical existence.⁹⁹⁹ Nominalist precepts rejected the notion of one unified and universal system for all human forms, as it did not rely on the verifiable senses. But by the mid-Seicento writers like Boselli, who took a Peripatetic stance on theory, found the need for a system evident once again and included the proper measurements for all human forms and types

⁹⁹⁶ Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 364.

⁹⁹⁷ Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, 495.

⁹⁹⁸ “Et questa sono le misure universali, che si usano da i moderni pittori, le quali dicono essi, havere comprobate, si col natuale, si con le statue antiche più scelte. Veddino non dime no come le misure del nostro Durero, sono più esquisite, & più certe, che queste misurando quelle ciascheduna particella, quantunque piccola, & queste solo i membri principali, oltre acciò dando quelle misure ad ogni sorte di corpi, che si possa ritrovare fra gli huomini, & queste solo a quelli che costano di nove, & dieci teste. Non rincresca dunque alli studiosi l’affaticarsi nelle misure del Durero, come più certe, & in questi discorsi, c’hanno forza di spiegare le nature de gli huomini, accioche imitado bene la natura come deono, ne portino quel frutto, che meritano le loro fatiche. Gallucci, *Della simmetria dei corpi humani libri quattro*, 144.

⁹⁹⁹ Borghini, *Il Riposo*, 150. Zuccaro, *L’Idea de’ pittori, scultori, et architetti*, 249-250.

(putti, young men, old men, women, etc.) in his *Observations*. Poussin as well, writing in the 1640s, found it necessary to collect the measurements of antique statues in Rome like the Antinous (**figures 52, 53**), which as Bellori notes, he intended to publish along with his other *Observations*.¹⁰⁰⁰ In these measurements, Poussin validates the statement made by Gallucci concerning the “universal measure” in that it is derived from nature and tempered by the antique. Here we find yet another example of a practice that would be codified as a curriculum in the French Academy, whereby such ratios and measurements of human form can be conceived by the “compass of intellect” to better prepare form for the reception of the Idea.

The necessity for a universal system of proportion was given license in the Seicento and could exist with sense-perceptive analysis in the moderate-Nominalist positions of authors like Testa, Boselli and Bellori due to the dual nature of the Idea. In the refined, “normative” evaluation of the art-theoretical concept deriving from the divine and natural filtered through artist’s mind and imagination, and simultaneously originating there, aspects from both philosophical camps were accommodated. Poussin would have developed such an understanding through his contacts with his friend and benefactor Giambattista Marino. In Bellori’s conception, the manner in which to free the Idea from the confines of divine creation and of divine origination, the notion of artistic imagination in the creative process existed in the form of Tasso’s writing.¹⁰⁰¹ It is only appropriate that the individual to introduce such an understanding to Poussin be a poet as well. The connection between Tasso and Marino was strong, for while living in Naples late in his

¹⁰⁰⁰ Boselli, *Osservazioni della scoltura antica*. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 334-337.

¹⁰⁰¹ However, both Giovanni Careri and Jonathan Unglaub have directly related Poussin to Tasso in the approach to affectation in works of art and the organization of the artist’s theories. Giovanni Careri. “Mutazioni d’affetti: Poussin interprete del Tasso” in: *Poussin et Rome*. Olivier Bonfait, ed. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), 353-367. Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting*.

life, Tasso had extended contact with the young poet and encouraged his talents.¹⁰⁰² Just as Tasso had commented on the Aristotelian conception of mental “habits” like the faculty of the practical intellect, Marino emphasizes imagination as the key to artistic creativity in his *La Pittura, Diceria prima, sopra la Santa Sindone* of 1614.¹⁰⁰³ As Ackerman discussed, the “anti-Platonic” sentiments throughout the treatise relate Marino’s conception of *fantasia* to be close to that of Tasso.¹⁰⁰⁴ Given the close association of Marino and Poussin, the understanding of the Idea as originating in the artist’s mind, and the faculty of imagination guiding it, would have highly influenced the painter’s own theoretical framework.¹⁰⁰⁵

In the end, the *Life of Poussin* offered a practical and theoretical model or template for artists and writers on art for posterity.¹⁰⁰⁶ The methods by which an artist trains, prepares works and researches them, and is related to the Idea are carefully elaborated. Importantly, the treatise in which these aphorisms were to be published was abandoned over a decade before Bellori would give his lecture at the Accademia di San Luca on the Idea. Therefore, like Boselli, or less successful artists like Pietro Testa, Poussin was not merely deriving his theoretical ideas from academics and literati, but was himself active in the conception and formulation of beauty as the numerous sources for his *Observations* attest. Though considered by scholars to be a rare example of an “artist-philosopher,” the rigorous training and academic erudition of the painter had been sought as the ideal since Ghiberti and Alberti had suggested that artists: “be educated, skillful

¹⁰⁰² Gerald Ackerman. “Gian Battista Marino’s Contribution to Seicento Art Theory.” *The Art Bulletin* 43 no. 4 (December, 1961), 327.

¹⁰⁰³ Tasso, *Scritti sull’arte poetica*, 1:177. Bellori, *The Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 451.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ackerman, “Gian Battista Marino’s Contribution to Seicento Art Theory,” 331.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Konrad Oberhuber. *Poussin, the Early Years in Rome: The Origins of French Classicism*. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1988).

with the pencil, instructed in geometry, know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurists, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens.”¹⁰⁰⁷ The schooling received in the vernacular (Italian and French) as well as Grammar school enabled the artist more effective access to the often esoteric stories to be portrayed from antiquity, thus assisting in his *invenzione*. Careful study of the arts of *disegno* and the mathematical sciences ensured that the artist had a firm grounding in arithmetic and geometry. And finally, study of anatomy, the *affetti dell’animo* and natural philosophy, including physiognomy, refined the manner in which *istoria* were to be most effectively carried out to best exemplify the conceit.¹⁰⁰⁸

Guiding the artist through this carefully regimented training was the *Idea della bellezza*, which had metamorphosed since its inception by Plato from a universal ideal separate from, and unreachable by the practitioner of the visual arts to a concept existing within Aristotelian metaphysics. The specific formulation of the art-theoretical concept has- as this study has attempted to demonstrate- directly impacted the “subject-object” transmission in works of art, largely dictating the characteristics of an artist’s style. Through the course of an artistic career the metaphysical groundwork on which each style is based compels an evolution, a stylistic trajectory, which brings the pictorial manifestation of the inner conception to the forefront. In the Renaissance, such an evolution can be viewed in the careers of Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian, who were

¹⁰⁰⁷ Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 6. Schlosser, *Lorenzo Ghilberti's Denkwürdigkeiten (I Commentarii)*, 1: 102. Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, 5-6. Recently, even Poussin has come under increased scrutiny in an attempt to distance the artist from the notion of literary erudition. See: Hans Raben. “‘An Oracle of Painting:’ Re-Reading Poussin’s Letters.” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for Art History* 30 no ½ (2003), 34-53.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Physiognomic theory would be fully developed in the French Academy by Charles Le Brun, thus codifying Alberti’s suggestions two centuries earlier. Jennifer Montagu. *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun’s Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

largely affected by a moderate-Realist formulation of the Idea; while in the Seicento, artists like Annibale Carracci, Guercino and Nicolas Poussin changed over their working style to one that is more rigidly composed and classical, relating to the influence of a moderate-Nominalist formulation. In each case, the careful reflection on and influence of current art and poetic theory helped to form the *Idea della bellezza* in the artist's mind early in their career and dictate the metaphysical origin of that notion for them.

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