

3 Selective Imitation and Repetition

As has been discussed, the proverb *Ogni pittore dipinge sé* was frequently used in the Cinquecento. Due to its semantic flexibility, it could address many different issues, ranging from the personal style of a painter to the pictorial representation of his individual ideas, the involuntary reproduction of his own physical features in his works, or the production of self-portraits. In the following pages, its meaning is discussed in relation to debates on the recurrent features and patterns in the style or *maniera* of a painter during the Renaissance. These features were not only negatively viewed as a lack of *imitatio naturae*; they could also be seen positively, when associated with the artist's ability to choose from a great variety of objects.

As has been shown by Antonio Pinelli, the term *maniera* oscillated between two opposing meanings during the Cinquecento. On the one hand, it stood for the refined imitation of nature; on the other, it signified monotony, artificiality, and affectation – caused by the excessive use of repetitive patterns. Vasari's *Vite* provides a good source for the analysis of the ambiguity of the term in the Cinquecento. Although he employed the term *maniera* to define the style of an epoch or a region (for example the “*maniera antica*” or the “*maniera tedesca*”), it was mostly used to denote the characteristics of the style of a single artist. In fact, every painter was equipped with a unique *maniera*, by which he was distinguishable from other artists. Vasari understood these individual forms of expression to be the result of the artistic process of selection or *electio*: By choosing from the most beautiful forms of nature according to their own *ingegno*, each artist created something entirely new. *Maniera* can thus be labeled as an additive element, opposing the exact reproduction of the imperfect forms of nature. It was considered by Vasari to be a major achievement of the artists of the Cinquecento. The lack of *maniera* was equivalent to the absence of ideal beauty and *disegno*, and artists were frequently criticized when showing a “*maniera cruda e affaticata*”, typical of the artists of the *prima età*. But the process of *electio*, fundamental for the development of an individual style, had its downside too. Artists who practiced *electio* excessively abandoned the essential example of nature and lost themselves in the routine of repeatedly used patterns and prototypes. In the negative sense of the term *maniera*, they worked merely according to their memory without con-

sidering the actual origins of their art. It comes as no surprise, then, that Vasari referred to their working methods derogatorily as “tirare di pratica” and “lavorare di maniera”.¹

In the 16th century, the recognition of individual forms of artistic expression was thus closely correlated to the identification of distinct patterns and formulae. The style of a painter was not only conditioned by the use of colours, the application of light or shadow, and the composition of figures, but was also indicated by the employment of repeatedly used prototypes. Consisting of the characteristic outlines of figures, but also minor details such as the identical shapes of ears, eyes, and nostrils, these often unconsciously perceived or produced patterns were part of the individual vocabulary of an artist. Since the publication of John Shearman’s *Mannerism* in 1967, the artistic production dating from 1520 to 1600 has been labeled in accordance with these presumptions. The art of the Late Renaissance was characterized as an art that was more concerned with the refinement of aesthetic features than with the faithful representation of nature; the capricious forms and figures of such paintings were classified as *manneristic*. Derived from the Italian noun *maniera*, meaning the manner, fashion, or way in which a work is done, the adjective drew attention to the manual realization of paintings, but was also meant in the sense of *stylish style*. By demonstrating their well-bred negligence when executing their paintings, the artists of the Cinquecento gave visual expression to their *facilità* and thus adhered to the principle of *sprezzatura*, popularized by the publication of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Cortegiano* in 1528. As an aesthetic ideal that was focused on complexity rather than economy, *mannerism* or *manierismo* was characterized as a form of art that was unconfined by established rules and conventions.² The following pages try to allocate a different meaning to recurrent features in a painter’s style. Rather than being the evidence of working routines or *sprezzatura*, they can be seen as a way to demonstrate various values, ranging from a new definition of painting to a re-evaluation of the female body and to the expression of love and affection.

1 Pinelli 1993, pp. 94–105.

2 Shearman 1967, pp. 18 ff. See also Shearman 1963 and Freedberg 1965, who provided the initial arguments for the discussion of *mannerism* in the 20th century.

3.1 Art Historiography in Quattrocento Florence

Vasari's negative characterization of painters who worked routinely without considering nature was clearly indebted to the long-standing tradition of art historiography in Florence. By associating repetitive patterns with an art of the past, he evoked the old narrative of the medieval artist who was not capable of appreciating or capturing the beauty of nature. Florentine humanists and historiographers of the Quattrocento were particularly keen to differentiate between the art of the Middle Ages, pejoratively labeled as *maniera greca* or *bizantina*, and the art of their own, more cultured age, beginning with the works of Cimabue and Giotto. As has been shown by Carl Goldstein, the rhetorical strategy to increase the status of the resident artists by devaluing other forms of artistic expression was the result of a struggle for political autonomy and power.³ Following the example of ancient epideictic oratory, the Florentine humanists praised their city's artists in panegyric terms, as one way to enhance its fame, honour, and significance. Filippo Villani's historiography *De origine civitatis Florentiae* (ca. 1381–1382), as well as Cristoforo Landino's commentary to Dante's *Divina comedia* (1481), includes not only the names of famous Florentine scholars, poets, and musicians, but also the approval of its painters. Writing on the decline of the arts after the time of Zeuxis, Phidias, and Praxiteles, Villani states that Cimabue and Giotto revived the art of painting through their faithful representations of nature.⁴ Landino discussed the decline of the arts during the Middle Ages as a result of Italy's subjugation by foreign forces – a dark age brought to an end by the Florentine artists.⁵ In short, by celebrating their artists as the protagonists of a new age, the humanists of Florence methodically increased the fame and fortune of their native city and republic.

The Florentine artists from the Quattrocento and Cinquecento followed these footsteps and referred to the Middle Ages, often marked as Greek or Byzantine, as an epoch devoid of any beauty. As a means of distinctive self-assurance, they em-

3 Goldstein 1991, pp. 641 ff.

4 As cited in Baxandall 1971, p. 146: “Michi quoque eorum exemplo fas sit hoc loco, irridendum pace dixerim, egregios pictores florentinos inserere, qui artem exanguem et pene extinctam suscitaverunt. Inter quos primus Johannes, cui cognomento Cimabue dictus est, antiquatam picturam et a nature similitudine quasi lascivam et vagantem longius arte et ingenio revocavit.”

5 Landino 1481 (2001), vol. 1, p. 241: “Ma tale arte dopo sua perfectione chome molte altre nell'italica servitù quasi si spense; et erano le pitture in quegli secoli non puncto attegiate, et senza affecto alchuno d'animo. Fu adunque el primo Ioanni fiorentino cognominato Cimabue che ritrovò e liniamenti naturali, et la vera proportione, la quale e Greci chiamano symetria, et le figure ne' superiori pictori morte fece vive et di varii gesti [...].”

phasized their own accomplishments with the intention to disparage an art that was not comparable in terms of imitation and richness in detail. When writing his *Commentarii*, the first modern treatise on the art of sculpture, Lorenzo Ghiberti obeyed this narrative principle. In the introductory chapter of his treatise, he writes that Greek artists from Byzantium re-introduced the art of painting in a rudimentary form to the peninsula,⁶ whereas it was Giotto's privilege to bring the art to a first peak of perfection.⁷ The art of the Middle Ages, briskly mentioned and superficially discussed, served merely as a background for the *mise-en-scène* of the outstanding artists of the Renaissance, including Ghiberti himself.

By praising the art of Giotto, humanists and artists deliberately undermined the appreciation that was still paid to Byzantine or medieval works of art in the Quattrocento. Paintings seemingly made centuries ago were considered particularly precious because of their geographical origins in a past that was imbued with saints and apostles. As a sign of authenticity, those paintings figured as worshipped icons by the hand of Saint Luke, or as *acheiropoietà*, miraculously made by the intervention of God. Highly requested and having an auratic appearance, these works of art were often the main subject of faithful devotion and popular veneration, whereas the art of Giotto was at first merely appreciated by the social elite.⁸ An example of the *longue durée* of Greek painting in Italy can be found in the Early Christian tradition of a particular typos of representations of the Virgin Mary, who holds her child in her left arm while pointing with the index finger of her right hand to the Redeemer. A painting from the church of S. Niccolò del Carmine in Siena (Fig. 13), dating ca. 1280, was made in accordance with this iconographic tradition. Later copies demonstrate that the prototype and its stylistic features remained in vogue until far into the Quattrocento. Rather than being based on the Renaissance criteria of inventiveness and variety, the authority of the *maniera greca* was thus founded on the principle of unchangeable patterns and a limited iconographic programme.⁹

6 Ghiberti (1998), p. 83: "Cominciorono i Greci debilissimamente l'arte della pictura e con molta rozeza produssero in essa: tanto quanto gl'antichi furon periti, tanto erano in questa età grossi e rozi."

7 Ghiberti (1998), p. 84: "Arrechò l'arte nuova, lasciò la rozeza de' Greci, sormontò eccellentissimamente in Etruria.[...] Arecò l'arte naturale e la gentilezza con essa, non uscendo delle misure. Fu peritissimo in tutta l'arte, fu inventore e trovatore di tanta doctrina la quale era stata sepulta circa d'anni 600." Similarly, although somewhat briefer, Cennino Cennini made an identical observation, see Cennini (1859), p. 3: "Giotto rimutò l'arte del dipignere di greco in latino, e ridusse al moderno; ed ebbe l'arte più compiuta che avessi mai più nessuno."

8 Cfr. Lerner 1971, pp. 276 f., with a discussion of Boccaccio's *Decamerone* and Petrarch's testament as examples for the humanistic veneration of Giotto's art.

9 See Belting 1990, pp. 381 f., Reisenbichler 2006, p. 78, and Cutler 1994, 351 f.



Figure 13 Unknown artist, Virgin with Child, ca. 1280, Siena, S. Niccolò del Carmine

3.2 *Varietas* as Category of the Humanist Art Critic

The following centuries followed a different aesthetic paradigm. Because the art was grounded in the abundant forms of nature, often symbolized by personifications of Mother Nature in the vest of the multi-breasted goddess Diana Ephesia, art theorists demanded a faithful representation of its beauty, and artists were required to capture the diversity of its various manifestations. The academic foundation of this new approach was articulated according to the ancient principles of *varietas* (variety) and first re-applied to the arts by Quattrocento humanists.¹⁰

Aristotle had already stressed the utility of variety in his *Rhetoric*.¹¹ According to the philosopher, variety was an inherent principle of nature and thought to incite pleasure amongst the members of an audience. In the rhetoric of the Roman Republic, manifoldness or *varietas* became one of the central stylistic means of decorating a speech. It served to maintain the attention of the auditors and was used to enhance the persuasive power of an argument by evoking the emotions of the public. This enhancement was either achieved by a heterogenous delivery, using various means of expression, or even by modulating the tonality of the voice. An example of the latter, the so-called *variatio pronuntiando*, is given by Cicero when he writes that a speaker should adapt his voice to the different parts of his speech: A speaker has to use different emotional tonalities to produce variety, just as a painter uses colours.¹² Understood as signs of the eloquence and integrity of a speaker, variety, ornament, and abundance of expression were considered as entirely positive.¹³ Consequently, a uniform speech was criticized by the Roman orators. According to Quintilian, monotony (ὁμοειδέεια) was thus con-

10 For the concept of *varietà* in the Middle Ages see Pfisterer 2002, pp. 50 f.

11 Aristotle (1908–1952), vol. 11, p. 125: “Change also is pleasant, since change is in the order of nature; for perpetual sameness creates an excess of the normal condition; whence it was said: ‘Change in all things is sweet’. This is why what we only see at intervals, whether men or things, is pleasant; for there is a change from the present, and at the same time it is rare.” (*Rhetoric*, I, XI, 20).

12 Cicero (1942–1948), vol. 1, p. 172: “Nam voces ut chordae sunt intentae quae ad quemque tactum respondeat, acuta gravis, cita tarda, magna parva, quas tamen inter omnes est suo quaque in genere mediocris; atque etiam illa sunt ab his delapsa plura genera, lene asperum, contractum diffusum, continenti spiritu intermisso, fractum scissum, flexo sono attenuatum inflatum. Nullum est enim horum generum quod non arte ac moderatione tractetur; hi sunt actori, ut pictori, expositi ad variandum colores.” (*De oratore*, III, LVII, 216).

13 A rare exception to the rule is found in Cicero *De oratore*, III, XXV, 98, where he suggests to use rhetorical ornaments cautiously to preserve the beauty of a speech for a long period. Just as the paint of a new artwork would soon lose its luminescence, the fascination of the *ornatus* might diminish rapidly (Cicero then hastens to add that even old paintings have their own charme).

sidered the indicator of a speaker's lack of judgement and intelligence. Not only did it deprive the audience of an enjoyable stimulus, but it was also believed to be very unpleasant for the mind and ears of the public.¹⁴

Leon Battista Alberti was the first to introduce the concept of *varietas* into the art literature of the Renaissance.¹⁵ According to his *Della pittura*, *copia* and *varietà* (or “*copia et varietas rerum*”, as the Latin version of his treatise puts it) are elementary features of an *istoria*, a history painting. They ensure that a beholder feels pleasure and engages in the contemplation of pictorial representations.¹⁶ A painting disposes of *copia* (copiousness) when it features a great number of many different objects – for example, representations of the bodies of old and young men, children, girls, and women. But Alberti mentions the depiction of hens, birds, buildings, and different landscapes as well.¹⁷ By means of *varietà* (variety), the *copia* should be further diversified. It was not sufficient to represent a large number of figures; beyond that they also had to be very dissimilar. Only when the bodies are *molto dissimili*, a painting disposes of *varietà* and evokes the delight of its beholder. Alberti made this point particularly clear. He expected the painter to depict the human body in its entire diversity and demanded standing, sitting, or lying figures as well as the representation of en-face or en-profil faces. In short, no single person in a painting should ever resemble another in gesture or posture (“in niuno sia un medesimo gesto o posamento che nell’altro”).¹⁸ Of course, Alberti was aware of the excessive use of *copia* and *varietà* and tried to regulate the artist's license. To escape the risk of exuberant and confusing paint-

14 Quintilian (1920–1922), vol. 3, p. 238: “Peior hac ὁμοειδεία; quae nulla varietatis gratia levat taedium atque est tota coloris unius, qua maxime prenditur carens arte orator, eaque et in sententiis et in figuris et in compositione longe non animis solum, sed etiam auribus est ingratisissima.” (*Institutio oratoria*, VIII, III).

15 For the following cfr. Gosebruch 1957, Claudia Cieri Via 1999, and Puttfarken 2006.

16 Alberti (2002), pp. 128 f.: “Come ne’ cibi e nella musica sempre la novità e abbondanza tanto piace quanto sia differente dalle cose antiche e consuete, così l’animo si diletta d’ogni copia e varietà. Per questo in pittura la copia e varietà piace.” In the Latin version, “*copia et varietas rerum*” are also briefly discussed in § 60.

17 Alberti (2002), pp. 128 f.: “Dirò io quella istoria essere copiosissima in quale a’ suoi luoghi sieno permisti vecchi, giovani, fanciulli, donne, fanciulle, fanciullini, polli, catellini, uccellini, cavalli, pecore, edifici, province, e tutte simili cose (...).”

18 Alberti (2002), pp. 128 f.: “Ma in ogni storia la varietà sempre fu ioconda, e in prima sempre fu grata quella pittura in quale sieno i corpi con suoi posari molto dissimili. Ivi adunque stieno alcuni ritti e mostrino tutta la faccia, con le mani in alto e con le dita liete, fermi in su un piè. Agli altri sia il viso contrario e le braccia remisse, coi piedi aggiunti. E così a ciascuno sia suo atto e flessione di membra: altri segga, altri si posi su un ginocchio, altri giacciano. (...) Così adunque desidero in ogni storia servarsi quanto dissi modestia e verecundia, e così sforzarsi che in niuno sia un medesimo gesto o posamento che nell’altro.”

ings, he recommended modulating the number of figures according to the superior principles of *compositio* and *decorum*.¹⁹

When writing about “*copia et varietas rerum*” in 1435, Alberti could already rely on a vast tradition of humanist art criticism. As has been shown by Michael Baxandall, many scholars of the 14th and 15th century who were interested in rhetoric and poetry trained their verbal skills by describing works of art. Following the example of epideictic oratory, in which the principles of ekphrasis were formulated, they engaged in detailed descriptions of events, figures, and objects. The written words were meant to verbally reproduce the peculiarities of a painting as well as demonstrate the intellectual capacities of its author. This becomes clear if we look at an encomium of the painter Pisanello, written by Guarino da Verona around 1430. Praising Pisanello’s representations of varied flowers on green meadows in spring, the leafless trees in winter, or even the sweat on the brow of a labouring peasant, Guarino improved his verbal modes.²⁰ An innovative and expressive art, emancipated from the repetitive schemes of medieval painting, was thus a necessary precondition for the humanist art critic. Consequently, George of Trebizond, one of the leading humanists of Alberti’s time, considered *varietas* to be an important attribute not only of a speech, but also of paintings, buildings, and poems.²¹

Against this background, it is rather unlikely that Guarino and his literary contemporaries, such as Bartholomeo Fazio or Angelo Decembrio, were fascinated by pictures that had been imported from Constantinople. Schematic and repetitive representations of saints, typical for the *maniera greca*, were not an adequate vehicle for verbal expression. As has been shown by Rensselaer W. Lee and others, Alberti deliberately chose to introduce rhetorical terms to the art theory of his time.²² By systematically applying them to paintings, he aimed at a re-evaluation of an art that was still considered to be part of the underrated *artes mechanicae*.²³

19 In the Latin version of his treatise, Alberti limits the amount of figures to nine or ten. Similar suggestions were put forward by Pino 1548 (1960–1962), p. 116 and Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 171.

20 Baxandall 1971, pp. 92–93.

21 As cited in Baxandall 1971, p. 95: “*Nam varietas non modo pictoribus, aut poetis, aut istrionibus, sed etiam cum omni in re dum apte fiat, tum maxime in oratoria facultate, et utilitatis et suavitatis videtur habere plurimum, quippe que nam et rem muniat, et delectationes videntibus afferat.*”

22 For the influence of rhetorics on the art theory of the Quattrocento see Lee 1940 and Spencer 1957.

23 For Alberti’s strategy to enhance the painter’s social status see Zöllner 1997.

3.3 Medieval Artists and the Animal Instinct

Seen from the perspective of the 16th century, the artistic fame of the Middle Ages was even worse. The advanced techniques of Renaissance painting, including the study of anatomy, the application of linear perspective, and the accurate imitation of nature, had transformed the art of the medieval painters into naive and child-like scribbles, disappointing the critical eyes of Cinquecento humanists and resulting in the loss or destruction of a great many works of the *maniera greca*.²⁴ Even Cimabue, once venerated for his accuracy and modernity, was criticized for his outlandish and peculiar style in the bright light of the new century.²⁵

Giovanni Battista Gelli, a Florentine humanist and member of the influential Accademia degli Umidi, was particularly fascinated by the progress of the arts and had an important role in the academic construction of Cinquecento aesthetics. He followed the historical narrative of a decline of the arts after the end of the Roman empire, repeatedly underscoring the impact of Giotto and insisting on a faithful representation of nature. In a brief collection of artists' lives, presumably written in the 1540s and read by Vasari before composing his *Vite*,²⁶ Gelli criticised the medieval painters for their lack of natural imitation in remarkably harsh terms:

“Non si vedevono ancora in que' tempi altre pitture che certe fatte da alcuni Greci, le quali paion fatte tutte in sur una stampa co' piedi per lo lungho appiccati al muro et con le mani aperte e con certi visi stracicati e tondi con occhi aperti che parevono spiritati. [...] era la loro maniera più tosto un modo di coprire una tavola di colorj che di imitare le cose naturali come debbe far l'arte, e erono le loro figure quasi tutte in faccia [...] et senza dintorni che somigliassino il vero et senza rilievo alcuno, di maniera che più tosto parevano pelle d'uomini scorticati o parte di panni distesi in sur un muro, che huomini vestiti et con certi visi e occhii spalancati che parevano più tosto di mostri che di huomini.”²⁷

24 For the use of model-book drawings, one of the causes for the presumed artistic uniformity during the Middle Ages, see Scheller 1995.

25 Cfr. Gelli 1549, p. 14: “Nella Pittura si da il vanto di essere stato il primo di haverla ritrovata a Giotto cittadin nostro Fiorentino, perche se bene dipinse molti anni innanzi a lui Cimabue suo maestro, il quale fu ancora egli di Firenze; egli seguito ancora egli quella maniera la quale era allora in uso per tutta l'Italia, chiamata Greca, per esser venuta di Grecia: la quale puo veder molto bene ognuno per molte cose che ci son di que'tempi quale ella fusse, & quanto discosto da il vero: conciosia che tutte quelle figure che facevono quegli che seguirono questo modo del fare, o, almanco le piu somiglino, o habbino aria piu tosto di molte altre cose che di huomini.”

26 Cfr. Tanturli 1976, p. 297, Sohm 2001, p. 93.

27 Gelli (1896), pp. 35–37.

As was typical for the polemical attitude of a Renaissance scholar, Gelli indulged in lively and humorous descriptions of pictorial representations that had begun to appear ridiculous since the dawn of an art based on rational principles. At the same time shocked and fascinated, he described the stylistic shortcomings of Greek painting in detail, whereas his predecessors in the Quattrocento either lacked an appropriate language to characterize the peculiarities of these works, decently maintained the *decorum*, or were simply not interested in medieval art at all. Gelli was also among the first to employ the term *maniera* negatively, when he wrote about the painters of the Middle Ages. While the term indicated the use of identical patterns and prototypes, it was applied whenever the artists ignored the primacy of nature and instead turned to their internalized habits and working routines. This is made clear by an anecdote in which Gelli emphasizes Giotto's superior knowledge of the art of painting. When looking at the drawings of the young shepherd Giotto, Cimabue is said to have suddenly noted the defects of his own art:

“[...] imperò che allora quando que' maestri di que' tempi volevano dipignere o figure o animali o altro, le facevano con quel modo e con quella maniera ne la quale eglino avevano fatto l' abito senza considerare le naturali. E però, se bene voi avvertite, voi vedrete tutte le figure di que' tempi quasi un modo medesimo o co' piedi appiccati per lo lungho al muro, o le mani aperte e tutte simigliarsi nel busto, anzj aver quasi quel medesimo, la qual cosa è drittamente contra la natura come può bene osservare ciascheduno.”²⁸

It is no coincidence that Gelli introduced the discussion of “dipingere di maniera” in his biographical account of Giotto, the first artist to have rediscovered the imitation of nature. Compared to the works of Giotto, works representing identical figures, even replicating their clothes, arms, legs, and busts, were viewed as proof of an undeveloped art, an art which was more concerned with the duplication of existing prototypes than with faithful representation.²⁹

However, Gelli's criticism was not only concerned with questions regarding the imitation of objects. His observations were also stimulated by a modern understanding of the process of artistic invention, closely connected with the social position of the Renaissance artist and having matured in the course of the Cinquecento. The new appreciation of this expressive means was achieved by drawing

28 Gelli (1896), p. 40.

29 Cfr. Summers 1978, who discusses medieval patterns of representations which continued to exist in Renaissance paintings, and Loh 2004, for a positive re-interpretation of repetitive schemes in later centuries.

a distinct line between the creations of the animal kingdom, due to instinct, and the creations of man, due to reason. Whereas animals were bound to the repetitive reproduction of identical tasks or objects – for example, the construction of spiderwebs or nests, the human mind was believed to be able to create an endless amount of various objects. Benedetto Varchi was particularly aware of the differences between these two opposing ways of creating. According to his influential *Lezzioni*, written in 1547 and published in 1550, paintings and sculptures had to be done with “vera ragione”, not by relying on one’s own instincts.³⁰ Similar notions can be found in the works of Francesco di Giorgio Martini,³¹ Pietro Aretino,³² and Gregorius Reisch, who emphasized the great flexibility of the human *fantasia* when compared to the unchangeable animal instinct in his widely read *Margarita filosofica*, first published in 1503:

“Ora perche questa potenza [fantastica] nell’uomo è ornata di ragione, per questo non necessariamente opera nel medesimo modo. Percioche alcune volte dalla compositione delle specie di diverse intentioni finge mostri, simili a i quali non mai ne vide nessuno. Nelli animali poi senza ragione è retta dell’istinto della natura, la quale è simile in tutti quelli che sono della medesima specie, però in questi non sono varie le operationi della fantasia. Vediamo, che con simile ingegno la rondine fabrica il suo nido, e l’aragna tesse la sua tela.”³³

Varchi’s as well as Reisch’s observations on human reason were fundamental for the social constitution of the Renaissance artist. The painter’s inventive and intellectual capacities assured the coming into being of the great variety of pictorial

30 Varchi 1550 (1960–1962), pp. 9f.: “[...] l’arte non è altro che un abito intelletivo, che fa con certa e vera ragione. [...] Dicesi ‘con vera ragione’ per due cagioni: prima, perché tutte l’arti sono infallibili, cioè non errano mai e sempre conseguiscono l’intendimento e fine loro; poi, perché mediante quelle parole ne esclude e cava l’arte colla quale i ragnateli ordiscono le loro maravigliose tele, e le rondini et altri animali fanno il nido, e molte altre cose, le quali paiono bene fatte artificiosamente, ma nel vero non sono, perciocché, non essendo fatte per ragione ma per istinto naturale, non si possono chiamare arti veramente.”

31 Martini (1967), vol. 2, p. 505: “[...] tutti li altri animali operando naturalmente sempre ad uno modo operano, come similmente ogni i rondine nidifica e similmente ogni ape ovvero aranea domifica, ma nell’intelletto umano essendo l’arte con la forza assegnata, tutte le opare sue, le quali sono infinite, infinito varia. Onde volendo esemplificare di tutti l’istrumenti che nella mente occorano, saria uno processo infinito.”

32 As cited in Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 474: “Ché invero l’arte è una nativa considerazione de l’eccellenze de la natura, la quale se ne vien con noi da le fasce; quella poi che si impara è bene arte, ma inlegitima, ché non bastarda si può dire l’usata dai ragni ne le composizioni de le tele loro [...]”

33 Reisch 1600, p. 616.

compositions, ranging from representations of apostles and saints to the depiction of dreadful monsters. Unavoidably, artists who merely engaged in the reproduction of identical subjects were labeled as unimaginative and associated with the reduced abilities and instinctive behaviour of animals.

3.4 Perugino as Negative Example

Of course, the habit of re-using patterns and archaic prototypes was not limited to medieval artists. Whereas apprentices were trained to copy the style and artistic vocabulary of their master, necessary for the execution of coherent large-scale commissions such as fresco cycles or altarpieces, the master himself was usually encouraged to show his *ingegno* by inventing new compositions. Terms such as *idea*, *invenzione*, or *fantasia*, frequently used in the art literature of the Renaissance, underscore the importance given to these individual forms of creativity.³⁴ On the other hand, when artists recycled figures or re-used cartoons, the same principles of criticism that led to the derision of medieval painters were applied to the painters in the Cinquecento. Obviously, the effect of monotony and repetitiveness was still regarded as an artistic vice.

Pietro Perugino was probably the most prominent painter who was accused of “tirare di pratica” by art critics of the 16th century. Although he was a successful and sought-after artist who was commissioned to do a great many paintings at the turn of the century, his artistic fame began to decline in the following decades. This decline was probably the result of his style and working practice, which had begun to seem outdated and repetitive. One of the first authors to criticize Perugino for his lack of *ingenium* was the humanist Paolo Giovio, author of a short collection of artists’ biographies and a later contributor to Vasari’s *Vite*. After having praised the artist for the angelic features of his figures in the Vatican of Pope Sixtus IV, his discussion of the artist’s achievements took a different turn when Giovio compared Peruginos’s paintings to the works of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Seen in the light of these artists, Perugino’s works were criticized by Giovio as monotonous and Perugino was accused of having a sterile *ingenium* which – according to our author – resulted in the re-utilization of beautiful but identical faces, features that the artist had been painting since he was a young man.³⁵

34 Cfr. Ames-Lewis 2000, pp. 177–187, Kemp 1977, pp. 353ff., and Garrard 2010, p. 57.

35 Giovio (1971–1977), pp. 19 f.: “At postquam illa perfectae artis praeclara lumina Vincius, Michael Angelus atque Raphael, ab illis saeculi tenebris repente orta, illius famam et

Giovio's characterization of Perugino, written around 1523, continued to be in vogue during the entire Cinquecento. Whereas the latter's pupil Raphael was praised for the abundance of variety,³⁶ the works of his master were discussed as an example of a stationary and regressive art. Giorgio Vasari was well aware of these shortcomings and discussed the issue of repetitive patterns in both editions of the artist's life.³⁷ Although emphatically describing the frustration felt by Perugino when being denigrated by comparison to the works of younger artists, he did not hesitate to blame him for the use of identical figures: "Aveva Pietro tanto lavorato e tanto gli abondava sempre da lavorare, che e' metteva in opera bene spesso le medesime cose; et era talmente la dottrina dell'arte sua ridotta a maniera, ch'e' faceva a tutte le figure un'aria medesima."³⁸ As shown by his remark, Vasari identified the monotony of expression in the works of Perugino as a result of his working practice. Having been a much-requested painter, Perugino had no choice but to re-utilize drawings and cartoons already employed in previous commissions in order to conclude his works in the allotted time.

In fact, Perugino was infamous among his fellow artists for this inclination. According to Vasari's accounts, many painters disapproved of Perugino precisely because of his standardized vocabulary; even Michelangelo accused him of being *goffo*, an adjective often used to characterize dull artists. His objectionable custom became publicly known after he had finished an altarpiece for the high altar of the SS. Annunziata in Florence. Commissioned by the confraternity of the Servites of Mary in the years 1505–1507, it included a painting of the *Ascension of Mary*, in which she is venerated by saints and apostles and assisted by a group of six angels, four of which are playing musical instruments (Fig. 14). On seeing the representation of Mary and her companions, the critical observers were not only reminded of similar faces used in some of his earlier works, but also astonished by Perugino's audacity in reproducing the entire compositional scheme of one of his

nomen admirandis operibus obruerunt, frustra Perusinus, meliora aemulando atque observando, partam dignitatem retinere conatus est, quod semper ad suos bellulos vultus, quibus iuvenis haeserat, sterilitate ingenii [rediret], sic ut prae pudore vix ignominiam animo sustineret, quando illi augustarum imaginum nudatos artus et continentis naturae potestates in multiplici rerum omnium genere stupenda varietate figurarent."

36 Cfr. Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 196: "[...] in tutte le sue opere egli [Raphael] usò una varietà tanto mirabile, che non è figura che né d'aria né di movimento si somigli, tal che in ciò non appare ombra di quello che da' pittori oggi in mala parte è chiamata maniera, cioè cattiva pratica, ove si veggono forme e volti quasi sempre simili."

37 For Vasari's life of Perugino with particular attention to stylistic features see Nelson 2004 and Hiller von Gaertringen 2011.

38 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 3, p. 585.



Figure 14 Pietro Perugino, *Ascension of Mary*, 1505–1507, Florence, SS. Annunziata

previous altarpieces. Indeed, the *Ascension of Mary* was a mere re-elaboration of a painting that Perugino had completed for the high altar of S. Pietro in Perugia in 1498 (Fig. 15). Representing the *Ascension of Christ*, it contained the same group of angels and disposed a similar assemblage of saints underneath the ascending Christ. Although minor details had been changed, most obviously the replacement of Christ and the substitution of Mary with the apostle Thomas, the SS. Annunziata altarpiece was a faithful repetition of this scheme and even had nearly identical measurements (218 × 333 cm vs. 216 × 280 cm).³⁹

As has been shown by recent scholarship, Perugino was particularly trained to fulfill the demands of his commissioners, and the success of his workshop was partly based on the frequent re-employment of cartoons and compositional schemes. By merely adapting his previous compositions – slightly altering its figures by enlarging, decreasing, or inverting the cartoons – he was able to create a great number of works, characterized by a certain self-similarity.⁴⁰ Furthermore, as has been confirmed by the latest technical analysis, his workshop was acquainted to use a particular siccativo, making the oil-based pigments dry more rapidly.⁴¹ Equipped with experienced assistants accustomed to the style of their master, he was thus able to work simultaneously on several projects. As Michelle O'Malley has argued, this process was innovative and creative, giving him complete control of the design of his works while allowing them to be created relatively independent by his assistants. In a time when artists earned comparatively little for their commissions, especially when working for fraternities or religious orders, this method came in handy and saved time as well as production costs.⁴² When Vasari recounts the episode of the SS. Annunziata altarpiece, he underscores the fact that many artists censured Perugino for his re-staged work precisely because he was thought to be avaricious or believed in saving time.⁴³ Apparently, Vasari was also aware of the painter's particular artistic situation. When Perugino tried to defend himself against the accusations of the Florentine artists, he is supposed to have said that he had always used these patterns: "Io ho

39 For the dates, measures, and commissioners regarding Perugino's paintings see Garibaldi 1999, esp. pp. 121–124, 140 f.

40 Hiller von Gaertringen 1999, pp. 131–222.

41 O'Malley 2007, p. 682.

42 O'Malley 2007, pp. 684, 690.

43 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 3, p. 568: "Dicesi che quando detta opera si scoperse, fu da tutti i nuovi artefici assai biasimata, e particolarmente perché si era Pietro servito di quelle figure che altre volte era usato mettere in opera: dove tentandolo gl'amici suoi, dicevano che affaticato non s'era, e che aveva tralasciato il buon modo dell'operare o per avarizia o per non perder tempo."



Figure 15 Pietro Perugino, *Ascension of Christ*, 1495–1498, formerly Perugia, S. Pietro, today Lyon, Musée des Beaux Arts



Figure 16 Pietro Perugino, *Ascension of Christ*, 1510, Sansepolcro, S. Giovanni Evangelista

messò in opera le figure altre volte lodate da voi e che vi sono infinitamente piaciute: se ora vi dispiacciono e non le lodate, che ne posso io?”⁴⁴

Probably invented by Vasari, Perugino’s clear-sighted self-defense illuminates the specific circumstances in which the Umbrian painter was working in Florence. Surrounded by a new generation of talented and innovative artists, the works of Perugino were evaluated according to the Florentine standards of *invenzione*: Just as the medieval painters were ridiculed by the artists of the Quattrocento, Perugino became the target of mockery and derision of the ambitious artists of the Cinquecento. In fact, after he had finished the altarpiece for the confraternity of the Servites of Mary, Perugino continued to re-use his prototypes – for example, for an altarpiece that he executed for the Duomo of Sansepolcro in 1510 (Fig. 16) – but he received no more important commissions in Florence. The advanced techniques of pictorial composition and the changing taste of the public gave rise to a reconsideration of the previous artistic periods. Although even Vasari re-used cartoons in some of his works, he invited artists to conceal their recycled figures and seek the greatest *varietà*, not only within a single work (as demanded by Alberti), but also within their whole oeuvres.⁴⁵ The discussion of Perugino’s life at the end of the second part of the *Vite* thus served as a line of demarcation. He was depicted as an artist of humble origins who was obsessed with his material fortune and considered to be blasphemous in heavenly matters; his economic use of repetitive schemes and patterns was a sign of his avarice as well as being understood by Vasari as a stylistic outcome of his personality.⁴⁶

3.5 Michelangelo and the Female Body

Vasari’s discussion of “tirare di pratica” changed the standards of pictorial representation in Cinquecento Florence, obliging artists to revise if not completely redo their compositions and figures constantly. According to the practice and reputation of Renaissance painters, who were used to copying and recycling their works, this change of production patterns also led to a new understanding of artistic originality. The modern conception of an artwork as an inimitable original, closely connected with its pejorative counterpart, the copy, was partly based on the principles of *varietà*, first discussed by the humanists. In describing the life of

44 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 3, pp. 568 f.

45 For Vasari’s re-use of drawings and cartoons in his works cfr. Nova 1992.

46 For the rhetorical structure and function of the life of Perugino see also Hiller von Gaertringen 2011.

Michelangelo, the point of culmination of Vasari's teleological *Vite*, Vasari thus points to Michelangelo's extraordinary capacities as sculptor, painter, and architect in terms of variety and copiousness. In a particularly demonstrative anecdote, Vasari notes that Michelangelo's ability to escape repetition is associated with his extremely developed faculty of *memoria* (memory).⁴⁷ Capable of remembering all of his works, the artist never used the same figures twice. When asked to feign the drawing of a dabbler, he simply recalled a mediocre scribble that he had once seen on a wall and faithfully reproduced it, to the astonishment of his friends.⁴⁸ It is therefore no coincidence that Michelangelo figured prominently amongst the young artists of Florence who accused Perugino for his repetitive patterns.

Lodovico Dolce on Michelangelo's Nudes

Although praised by Vasari for their great variety, the works of his compatriot Michelangelo were soon to be blamed for their lack of originality as well: the *Ignudi* (1508–1512) on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the *Giudizio universale* (1534–1541), which replaced a previous fresco by the hand of Perugino, were harshly attacked.⁴⁹ The criticism pointed to the indecent postures and movements of his nude figures, who showed their private parts in a Papal chapel and were thus considered a breach of *decorum* and *verisimilitudo* on the eve of the Counter-

47 For the contemporary understanding of *memoria*, traditionally believed to be situated after the *imprensiva* and the *sensus communis* in the third ventricle of the human brain, see Kemp 1977, p. 379. Already Leonardo, probably equipped with an eidetic memory as well, was aware of the great potentials of the painter's *memoria* for the re-combination of pictorial elements and suggested its systematical training. Leonardo (1995), p. 59: "Ancora ho provato essere di non poca utilità, quando ti trovi allo scuro nel letto, andare colla immaginativa ripetendo i lineamenti superficiali delle forme per l'addietro studiate, o altre cose notabili da sottile speculazione comprese, ed è questo proprio un atto laudabile ed utile a confermarsi le cose nella memoria."

48 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 7, pp. 277 f.: "È stato Michelagnolo di una tenace e profonda memoria, che nel vedere le cose altrui una sol volta l'ha ritenute sì fattamente e servitosene in una maniera che nessuno se n'è mai quasi accorto; né ha mai fatto cosa nessuna delle sue che riscontri l'una con l'altra, perché si ricordava di tutto quello che aveva fatto. Nella sua gioventù, sendo con gli amici sua pittori, giucorno una cena a chi faceva una figura che non avessi niente di disegno, che fussi goffa, simile a que' fantocci che fanno coloro che non sanno et imbrattano le mura. Qui si valse della memoria, perché ricordatosi aver visto in un muro una di queste gofferie, la fece come se l'avessi avuta dinanzi di tutto punto, e superò tutti que' pittori: cosa difficile in uno uomo tanto pieno di disegno, avvezzo a cose scelte, che ne potessi uscir netto."

49 For a summary of the discussion see Boschloo 2008, pp. 34–48.

Reformation.⁵⁰ Besides the widespread nudity, partly covered with painted fabric by Daniele da Volterra after Michelangelo's death in 1564, the criticism was also concerned with questions of style. The first to condemn Michelangelo's representations of the male and female nudes in these terms was the prolific Venetian writer Lodovico Dolce. In a letter to Gasparo Ballini from 1544, he acknowledges the virtuosity of the Florentine artist, but not without noting a certain identity and resemblance among his subjects. While varying in their postures, all of his figures, regardless of their age, sex, or geographical origin, are said to display the same kind of muscles, foreshortenings, and ferociousness (cfr. Fig. 17).⁵¹

In his *Dialogo della pittura* Dolce elaborated on his criticism.⁵² Published in dialogue form in 1557, the treatise features a Florentine, Giovan Francesco Fabrini, and his counterpart, the influential poet Pietro Aretino, an old friend of Dolce's from Venice. Obviously, the latter serves as an insightful connoisseur, who introduces Fabrini to the principles of art criticism. Repeatedly rebuking the Florentine for the monotony of his arguments in favour of his compatriot (and thus accusing him of Michelangelesque behaviour),⁵³ Aretino agrees that Michelangelo is an outstanding artist, but this excellence is limited to the representation of nude muscular bodies. Compared to the variety of other artists, Michelangelo's figures were rather repetitive: "Michelagnolo è stupendo [...], ma in una maniera sola, ch'è in fare un corpo nudo muscoloso e ricercato, con iscorti e movimenti fieri, che dimostrano minutamente ogni difficoltà dell'arte. [...] Ma nelle altre maniere è non solo minore di sé stesso, ma di altri ancora; perché egli o non sa o non vuole osservar quelle diversità delle età e dei sessi. E per conchiuderla, chi vede una sola

50 The problem of nude figures was already mentioned by Alberti and later discussed in Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle figure sacre e profane* (1582), where Paleotti introduces the scientific concept of *verisimilitudo*, i.e., historical probability. For a thorough discussion of the representation of the nude in the art of the Cinquecento with special regards to Vasari's *Vite* see Lazzarini 2010.

51 As published in Bottari/Ticozzi 1822–1825, vol. 5, p. 168: "Direte voi, che la varietà è negli atti, che sono tutti diversi l'uno dall'altro. Rispondo, che in questa istessa varietà v'è una medesima somiglianza di scorti, di fierezze e di muscoli. Perché allora pare a Michel Agnolo trionfar con infinito onore di Raffaello, e di tutti gli altri dipintori, quando ei mostra di essere eccellente nelle maggiori difficoltà dell'arte. Ed è vero che queste difficoltà si contengono maggiormente nel formar l'ignudi, e nel fare iscartar le figure."

52 For Dolce's treatise and his understanding of *maniera* see Rhein 2008, esp. pp. 124–128.

53 Cfr. Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 148: "ARET: È costume da fanciullo tornare a replicar molte volte una cosa. Pure vi dirò da capo, che sono stati a' nostri di alcuni pittori eguali et eziandio in qualche parte maggiori a Michelagnolo; et ora ci è Tiziano, il quale, come ho accennato, basta per quanti ci furono. FAB: Et io tornerò sempre a dirvi che Michelangelo è solo."



Figure 17 Michelangelo Buonarroti, Last Judgement (detail), 1534–1541, Città del Vaticano, Cappella Sistina

figura di Michelagnolo, le vede tutte.”⁵⁴ Dolce’s discussion of Michelangelo’s style was not only directed against Vasari’s *campanilismo*, but also served to promote other artists as well.⁵⁵ In addition to the praise of his fellow citizen Titian, maybe an all-too-obvious example of Venetian patriotism, Dolce repeatedly mentions the works of Raphael as an exceptional example of variety: his figures never had the same faces or identical postures, and one could clearly distinguish between male and female bodies.⁵⁶

The Female Body in the Cinquecento

That Michelangelo’s figures, especially those of women, were remarkably muscular, was a phenomenon that interested contemporary beholders as well as recent scholars. His well-defined nudes were interpreted as a sign of his homosexuality⁵⁷ or a physical passion for the male body,⁵⁸ the Sistine sibyls were read as a reflection of the patriarchal culture of the Renaissance,⁵⁹ and the practice of assembling figures from male models was considered a possible reason for his masculine women.⁶⁰ In fact, the modern beholder can not help but notice a certain predilection for virile corporality in the works of Michelangelo. Although many of his early sculptures feature the traditional attributes of female beauty, i.e., delicate limbs, graceful physiognomies, and pale and soft flesh, his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel tend to represent the female body with somatic qualities conventionally used for men. Whereas the *Tondo Taddei* (Fig. 18) represents Mary according to the Christian ideals of charity, devotion, and motherhood, the figures

54 Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 193.

55 As a reaction to Dolce’s criticism, Vasari attacked Venetian painters for their lack of *varietà* as well (although they might be endowed with a better *colorito*). A good example is his characterisation of the painter Battista Franco. See Vasari 1568 (1878–1885, vol. 6, pp. 580 f.: “Egli usò in quest’opera il medesimo modo di fare che nell’altre sue, perciò che fece sempre le medesime figure, le medesime effigie, i medesimi panni e le medesime membra, oltre che il colorito fu senza vaghezza alcuna et ogni cosa fatta con difficoltà e stentata.” For a discussion of this passage see Irle 1997, pp. 188 f.

56 Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 196: “[...] in tutte le sue opere egli usò una varietà tanto mirabile, che non è figura che né d’aria né di movimento si somigli, tal che in ciò non appare ombra di quello che da’ pittori oggi in mala parte è chiamata maniera, cioè cattiva pratica, ove si veggono forme e volti quasi sempre simili.” For the comparison of Michelangelo and Raphael in the art literature of the Cinquecento see also Pinelli 1987.

57 Chapman 2006, p. 16.

58 Hibbard 1978, p. 151.

59 Even 1990, p. 31.

60 Saunders 1989, p. 20.



Figure 18 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Virgin with Child and the Infant Saint John* (Tondo Taddei), 1504–1505, London, Royal Academy

on the Sistine ceiling or the female saints of the *Giudizio universale* are partly rendered as if appertaining to a different genre. Provided with muscular arms and bodily strength, they resemble male athletes rather than reproducing the classical vocabulary of femininity. Michelangelo's depiction of the *Cumaean Sibyl* or *Saint Catherine* (Fig. 19) can serve as examples of his interest in the physique of human maleness that he repeatedly used when depicting the bodies of women. Especially if we consider their religious ranks as proto-Christian prophet and one of the important Holy Helpers, these figures seem more familiar with physically laborious duties than with the divine inspiration of their souls.

How did it come to be that Michelangelo, praised for his variety and refined imitation of nature by Vasari, repeatedly painted masculine women? As has

been shown by Yael Even and Costanza Barbieri, Michelangelo's repetitive use of muscular bodies is not only a demonstration of his individual style and interest, but should also be seen against the social background of male supremacy in a time when the female body was judged to be defective and weak.⁶¹ Following Aristotle's influential verdict of the corporeal and intellectual inferiority of women in the *Generation of animals*,⁶² many Renaissance humanists understood the coming into being of female offspring as a necessary but erroneous process.⁶³ As an incomplete version of the male's body, the female's body was considered as a procreative product which lacked perfection and maturity. In accordance with the biological assumptions of natural philosophy, Christian theology pointed not only to the corporeal defects of women, but condemned their moral shortcomings as well. The dogmatic concept of the woman as a deficient being and evil seductress was based on the biblical story of Eve and the original sin and the fall of mankind. Her disobedience served as a model to explain the moral, intellectual, and physical inferiority of the female sex. According to Isidore of Seville, the *peccatum primi hominis* transformed women into an *animal menstruale*, which ejected poisonous blood and had painful parturitions. The presumed instability of her complexion was the cause of her credulity, voluptuousness, and lack of intelligence. Berthold von Mainz, a German archbishop, argued in 1485 that they were *idiotae* or at least *indocti homines* who should never be allowed to read books.⁶⁴ Of course, representatives of the Catholic Church were also concerned with the qual-

61 Even 1990, Barbieri 2002.

62 For Aristotle's explanation of the female sex as a product of anomaly see Aristotle (1908–1952), vol. 5, 767b5–15: "For even he who does not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases Nature has in a way departed from the type. The first departure indeed is that the offspring should become female instead of male; this, however, is a natural necessity. For the class of animals divided into sexes must be preserved, and as it is possible for the male sometimes not to prevail over the female in the mixture of the two elements, either through youth or age or some other such cause, it is necessary that animals should produce female young. And the monstrosity, though not necessary in regard of a final cause and an end, yet is necessary accidentally." (*De generatione animalium*, IV, III, 767b5–15).

63 A good example is Benedetto Varchi's *Generazione dei mostri*, held at the Florentine academy in 1543. Discussing the principles of human procreation, he states that not only disabled and misfigured, but also female newborns have to be called *quasi mostri*. Varchi (1858–1859), p. 306: "Mostri si chiamano ogni volta che hanno o più membra o manco membra, o membra non proporzionate e convenevoli. Quasi mostri si chiamano le femmine, dice Aristotile, benchè nel vero sono mostri necessari; e così anco quelli che non somigliano nè il padre nè la madre, o alcuno altro del parentado, nè per linea diritta, nè per linea trasversale."

64 For the fall of mankind and its effect on the perception of women in the Early Modern period see Schreiner 1992.



Figure 19 Michelangelo Buonarroti, Last Judgement (detail), 1534–1541, Città del Vaticano, Cappella Sistina

ity of women's souls. Although both men and women were in possession of a rational soul, it was only the male body which entirely reflected the *imago Dei*, the image and likeness of God. Women, created as subordinate helpmates, possessed weak bodies, and their souls were believed to be of a similar quality.⁶⁵

When Michelangelo chose to use male attributes in the depiction of women in the Sistine Chapel, he probably referred to this religious conception of female inferiority. By representing female sibyls and saints in the shape of male bodies he acknowledged their superior knowledge of divine revelation and spiritual understanding, which was reflected by their external, virile appearance.⁶⁶ In fact, many women of the Renaissance fashioned themselves as male and tried to improve their status by adhering to masculine norms and forms. As has been underlined by Costanza Barbieri, Italian humanists appreciated learned women who had overcome the weak condition of their sex by transforming their natural identity.⁶⁷ The prevailing misogyny of Renaissance Italy can thus be seen as a dominant factor which influenced the perception of female figures and their proportions.

If we take a look at art literature, the neglect of female corporality is confirmed. Since antiquity, the female body was of no particular interest to artists; proportion theory was mainly concerned with the male physique. Polycleitos' *Canon*, a now-lost treatise on proportion, merely described the ideal symmetry of a male body, probably embodied by his statue of a Spear-bearer, the so-called *Doryphoros*.⁶⁸ Christianity gave rise to a new ideal that was modelled upon the Greek deity Apollo.⁶⁹ The body of Christ showed no birthmarks or black spots, was of a well-balanced complexion, free from original sin; his ideal proportions continued to be the ultimate example for male perfection during the Cinquecento.⁷⁰ Artists who tried to determine the mathematical laws of divine beauty during the Renaissance were therefore mainly concerned with the proportions of men. When writing about ideal measures of a body in his *Libro di pittura* around 1400, Cennino Cennini only mentions those of the male without considering female proportions.

65 Barbieri 2002, pp. 115 ff.

66 Barbieri 2002, p. 118.

67 Barbieri 2002, pp. 110 f.

68 For Polycleitos' *Canon* see Beck/Bol/Bückling 1990. Andrea Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) is a good example for a discussion of Policleitan (and Galenic) proportion theory in the Cinquecento. His ideas of an ideal male body are discussed by Siraisi 1994.

69 Cfr. Borinski 1914, p. 77.

70 For the body of Christ in the art of the Cinquecento see Helas 2000 and Groebner 2004. Wolf 2002, p. 292, provides examples for the discussion of Christ's perfect body in art literature.

“Quelle della femmina lascio stare, perchè non ha nessuna perfetta misura.”⁷¹ Correspondingly, Paolo Pino argued that the male was the most excellent creature on earth.⁷² Similarly, the various representations of Vitruvius’s canon of proportions, featured in the widely-read treatise by Cesare Cesariano (Fig. 20), were merely fo-

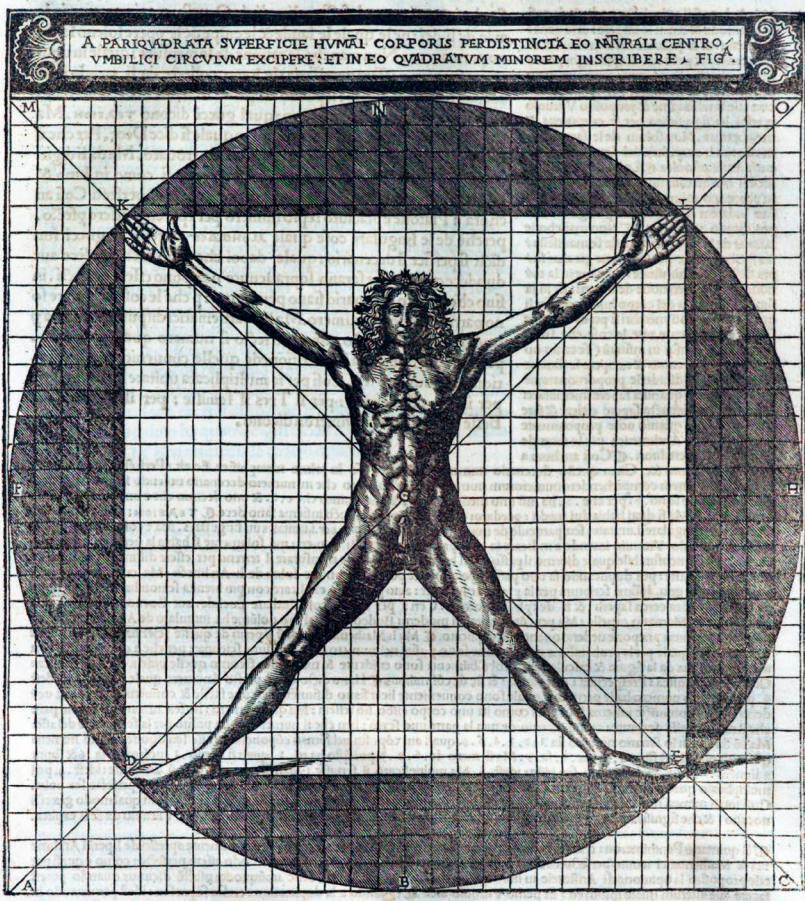


Figure 20 Illustration of the Male Body and its Proportions in the 1521 Edition of Vitruvius’ *De architectura libri decem*, edited by Cesare Cesariano

71 Cennini (1859), p. 50. For a discussion of the female body with regards to Early Modern proportion theory see Schnitzler 1992.

72 Pino 1548 (1960–1962), p. 104: “In vero l’uomo è la più eccellente creatura tra le cose prodotte, e perciò è credibile che l’uomo traessi le cose artificiali da l’uomo, come soggetto più misterioso e più nobile.”

cussed on the male body.⁷³ In fact, it was not until Albrecht Dürer's *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion*, published in 1528, that female proportions were thoroughly discussed (Fig. 21).⁷⁴

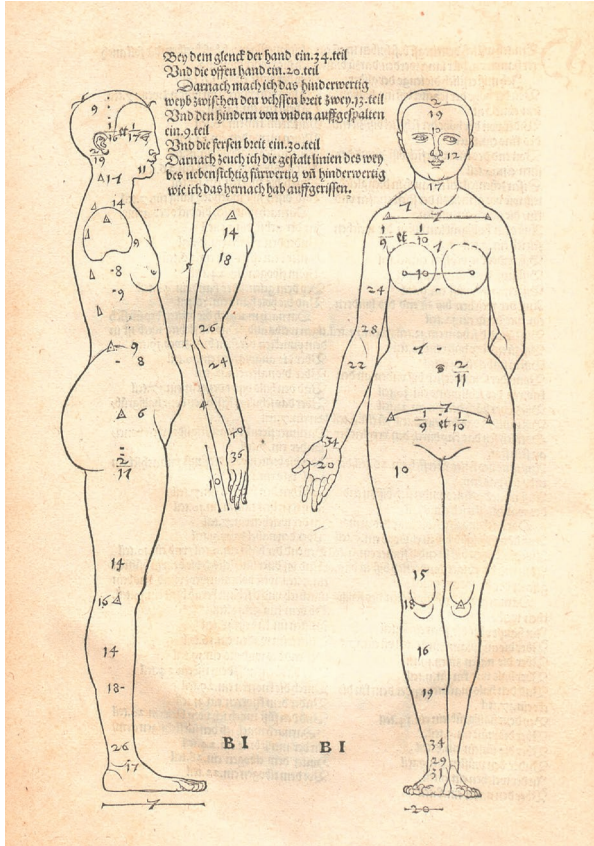


Figure 21 Illustration of the Female Body and its Proportions, from the 1528 Edition of Albrecht Dürer's *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion*

73 For the reception of Vitruvius' theory of proportion in the art literature of the Renaissance see Zöllner 1987.

74 According to Ascanio Condivi's *Vita di Michelangelo* (1553), Michelangelo criticized Dürer's proportion theory. Condivi 1553, fol. 41f.: "[Michelangelo] più volte ha avuto in animo [...] far un'opera che tratti di tutte le maniere dei moti umani e apparenze e dell'ossa, con una ingegnosa teorica per lungo uso da lui ritrovata [...]. So ben che, quando legge Alberto Duro, gli par cosa molto debole, vedendo coll'animo suo quanto questo suo concetto fusse per esser più bello e più utile in tal facultà. E, a dire il vero, Alberto non tratta se non delle misure e varietà dei corpi, di che certa regula dar non si può, formando le figure ritte come pali; quel che piu importava, degli atti e gesti umani, non ne dice parola."

Michelangelo's muscular women in the Sistine Chapel are thus not only the result of a consideration of the qualities of the female soul, but also perfectly accord with the taste for male features that was predominant in the 16th century culture of Rome and Florence. His frescoes can also be seen as a sophisticated form of self-fashioning, by which Michelangelo emulated Zeuxian principles of representation.⁷⁵ As was known in the Renaissance through the works of Quintilian, the ancient artist Zeuxis used to paint remarkably muscular bodies; in this he is believed to have been following the example of Homer, who represented even his female characters as being of a heroic mould.⁷⁶ When Alberti reported this fact, he was disparaging it, claiming that a painter should represent females in a simple and delicate way, even if Zeuxis and Homer did otherwise.⁷⁷ Benedetto Varchi discussed the issue merely with regards to the reciprocal fertilisation of poetry and painting, without being judgmental.⁷⁸ However, Vasari seems to have been of a different opinion. When comparing the artists of the *seconda età* with those of the *età moderna*, he explicitly states that the artists of the Cinquecento were able to give a superior *grassezza* (fattiness) and *carosità* (fleshiness) to their figures, especially to those of females and putti.⁷⁹ If we consider his immense appreciation for the frescoes of the Florentine artist, Vasari probably had Michelangelo's muscular women in mind when writing these lines.

75 For a similar form of self-fashioning in the Quattrocento see Gombrich 1955, who discusses Ghiberti's emulation of the ancient sculptor Lysippos.

76 Quintilian (1920–1922), vol. 4, p. 450: "Nam Zeuxis plus membris corporis dedit, id amplius atque augustius ratus atque, ut existimant, Homerum secutus, cui validissima quaeque forma etiam in feminis placet." (*Institutio oratoria*, XII, X, 5–6).

77 Alberti (2002), pp. 136 f.: "Siano alle vergini movimenti e posari ariosi, pieni di semplicità, in quali piuttosto sia dolcezza di quiete che gagliardia, bene che ad Omero, quale seguitò Zeosis, piacque la forma fatticcia persino in le femine."

78 Varchi 1550 (1960–1962), p. 57: "Sono ancora molte altre somiglianze fra i poeti et i pittori; et io per me, come non ho dubbio nessuno che l'essere pittore giovi grandissimamente alla poesia, così tengo per fermo che la poesia giovi infinitamente a' pittori, onde si racconta che Zeusi, che fu tanto eccellente, faceva le donne grandi e forzose, seguitando in ciò Omero; e Plinio racconta che Apelle dipinse in modo Diana fra un coro di vergini che sacrificavano, ch'egli vinse i versi d'Omero che scrivevano questo medesimo."

79 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 4, p. 9: "Nel disegno non v'erano gli estremi del fine suo, perché, se bene e' facevano un braccio tondo et una gamba diritta, non era ricerca con muscoli con quella facilità graziosa e dolce che apparisce fra 'l vedi e non vedi, come fanno la carne e le cose vive; ma elle erano crude e scorticate, che faceva difficoltà agli occhi e durezza nella maniera, alla quale mancava una leggiadria di fare svelte e graziose tutte le figure, e massimamente le femmine et i putti con le membra naturali come agli uomini, ma ricoperte di quelle grassesse e carosità che non siano goffe come li naturali, ma artefciate dal disegno e dal giudizio."

Vincenzio Danti's *Trattato delle perfette proporzioni*

Vasari was not the only art theorist who defended Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel against the allegations of Lodovico Dolce.⁸⁰ Giovanni Andrea Gilio praised them explicitly for their great *varietà* in the depiction of movements and postures.⁸¹ In general, his figures – even if of a particular masculinity for the modern beholder – were appreciated as the works of an artist who had surpassed the beauty of nature.⁸² His superior understanding of the generative principles of nature allowed him to work according to the principles of *aemulatio* and *superatio*. By selecting, combining, or enhancing the features of nature, he adhered to an ideal of artistic production that the art literature of the Cinquecento believed to be close to the divine idea of things.⁸³

Vincenzio Danti, a Florentine sculptor and one of Michelangelo's former disciples, discussed the principles of his master's art in a treatise that he published in 1567 in Florence. His *Trattato delle perfette proporzioni* is a thorough analysis of mimetic strategies and has been labelled as a systematic description of Michelangelo's neoplatonic poetry.⁸⁴ Danti's art theory mainly evolves from the discussion of two different means of pictorial representation. He discerns between the art of *ritrarre*, i.e., the representation of nature as it is, and the art of *imitare*, i.e., the representation of nature as it should be.⁸⁵ Whereas the former method is equivalent to the mere reproduction of nature, the latter requires the active imagination of the artist and is regarded as superior. By recognizing and amending the errors of nature, the artist demonstrates knowledge of the universal principles of generation and creates works of art that exceed the beauty of nature. This process was usually illustrated by Danti with metaphors of selection. The artist considered several beautiful models, chose their best features, and combined them

80 Cfr. Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 7, pp. 210, 214.

81 Gilio 1564 (1960–1962), p. 54: “E questa è la meraviglia: che nissuna figura, che in questo ritratto vedete, fa quello che fa l'altra, e niuna rassimiglia a l'altra [...]”

82 Before being rebuked by the artist, Pietro Aretino praised Michelangelo for his idea of a new nature in a letter dating September 16, 1537. Aretino (1957–1960), vol. 1, pp. 64 f.: “Perciò ne le man vostre vive occulta l'idea d'una nuova natura [...]. Gran miracolo che la natura, che non può locar sì alto una cosa che voi non la ritroviato con industria, non sappia imprimere ne le opre sue la maestà che tiene in se stessa l'immensa potenza del vostro stile e del vostro scarpello, onde chi vede voi non si cura di non aver visto Fidia, Apelle e Vitruvio, i cui spiriti fūr l'ombra del vostro spirito.”

83 For Michelangelo's imitation of the principles of the *natura naturans* and the *natura naturata* see Białostocki 1963, for *aemulatio* and *superatio* Pfisterer 2002, pp. 268–280. For Michelangelo's understanding of *idea* see Panofsky 1924, pp. 64 ff.

84 Cfr. von Schlosser 1913, pp. 84 ff.

85 For a similar concept in portraiture (*protrahere* vs. *ritrarre*) see Weppelmann 2011.

in one perfect image.⁸⁶ Cicero (*De inventione*, II, I, 1–5), Pliny (*Historia naturalis*, XXXV, XXXVI, 64), and other ancient authors provided the *locus classicus* for this practice of amalgamation. When the famous painter Zeuxis of Heraclea was asked to paint an image of Helena for the temple of the Goddess Juno in Croton, he was puzzled by this difficult task and turned to the Crotonians for advice. After they had shown him the most beautiful virgins of their town, he chose five of these women, determined their best parts, and finally synthesized them in a painting of Helena that was highly acclaimed for its unexcelled beauty.⁸⁷

The earliest depiction of this scene in the Cinquecento is a fresco by the hand of Domenico Beccafumi.⁸⁸ As part of a large fresco cycle, executed in the years 1519 to 1523 in the Palazzo Venturi in Siena and concerned with the representation of moral virtues, it showed the artist in front of the Crotonian virgins while depicting his image of Helena (Fig. 22).⁸⁹ As is stressed by an inscription to the right of Zeuxis,⁹⁰ his method of pictorial representation was understood as an *exemplum virtutis*. By selecting from various models, he demonstrated a superior understanding of the arts and thus of the beauty of nature.⁹¹ Alberti, who had introduced the painter into art literature almost one century earlier, addressed the topic of Zeuxis in a similar way. According to his *Della pittura*, the ancient artist should serve as an example for those painters who were merely following their *ingegno* without considering the works of nature.⁹² When Lodovico Dolce discussed the issue in 1557, he suggested the Zeuxian method as a therapy against monotony and repetition. Referring to multiple models produced by nature would ensure the painter's *varietà* and prevent him from always using the same routines.⁹³

86 For a summary of Danti's theory see Battisti 1956, pp. 102 ff.

87 For Zeuxis in Renaissance culture see Sabbatino 1997.

88 For representations of Zeuxis in the Middle Ages see Asemissen/Schweikhart 1994, pp. 14–17.

89 Cfr. Dubus 1999, pp. 88 f.

90 "XEVSIK NON FRETVS / ARTE VERAM IMAGINEM / EXHIBERE CREDIDIT SI / VIRGINVM ELETARVM / DECOREM INTVERETVR"

91 For a thorough discussion of inscription and image see Kliemann 2006.

92 Alberti (2002), pp. 156 f.: "Zeusis, prestantissimo e fra gli altri essercitatissimo pittore, per fare una tavola qual pubblico pose nel tempio di Lucina appresso de' Crotoniati, non fidandosi pazzamente, quanto oggi ciascuno pittore, del suo ingegno, ma perché pensava non potere in uno solo corpo trovare quante bellezze egli ricercava, perché dalla natura non erano ad uno solo date, pertanto di tutta la gioventù di quella terra elesse cinque fanciulle le più belle, per torre da queste qualunque bellezza lodata in una femmina." For a similar statement in Alberti's *De statua* see Grafton 2007, p. 193.

93 Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 172: "Onde abbiamo lo esempio di Zeusi, che, avendo a dipingere Elena nel tempio de' Crotoniati, elesse di vedere ignude cinque fanciulle e, to-



Figure 22 Domenico Beccafumi, *Zeuxis and the Crotonian Maidens*, 1519, Siena, Palazzo Bindi Sergardi

When Vincenzio Danti explained the art of *imitare*, he repeatedly referred to the Zeuxian method as an illustration of Michelangelo's system of pictorial invention as well. If an artist wishes to paint a perfectly beautiful and proportioned male body, he cannot expect to find it amongst the existing men. But if he considers a great quantity of men and is able to recombine their best features in one single figure as Michelangelo did, he may succeed in his task – his painting will show the body of a male in its entire beauty, which represents the unrestrained intention of nature.⁹⁴ In a later draft for an unfinished book of his treatise, Danti made a similar observation. Compared with an artist like Titian, who depicted all kinds of females, including less beautiful women, Michelangelo was exclusively interested in the representation of perfect figures: “La onde si vede che Titiano ha dipinto alle molte figure di femine bellissime, & alle volte non così belle, secondo, che ha havti corpi belli da ritrarre, come quello, che procedeva solo per la via del ritrarre. Et il Buonaroti, l’ha dipinte sempre, & sculpite tutte belle a un modo, perche procedeva per via della imitazione della intentione della Natura.”⁹⁵

Whereas Lodovico Dolce considered Michelangelo's repetitive use of patterns of pictorial representation the result of a *maniera cattiva*, Vincenzio Danti understood it as an expression of the painter's exceptional understanding of the beauty of nature. Michelangelo painted in one single manner, *a un modo*, because he had found the perfect form.⁹⁶ As has been argued by Eugenio Battisti, the use of *elec-*

gliendo quelle parti di bello dall'una, che mancavano all'altra, ridusse la sua Elena a tanta perfezzione, che ancora ne resta viva la fama. Il che può anco servire per ammonizione alla temerità di coloro che fanno tutte le lor cose di pratica.”

94 Danti 1567 (1960–1962), pp. 239 f.: “La natura per molti accidenti non conduce quasi mai il composto e massimamente dell'uomo [...] a intera perfezzione, o almeno che abbia in sé più parti di bellezze che di bruttezze. Né io so se mai si è veduta tutta la bellezza che può avere un corpo umano ridotta compiutamente in un solo uomo; ma si può ben dire che se ne veggia in quest'uomo una parte e in quell'un'altra, e che, così, in molti uomini ella si trova interamente. Di maniera che, volendosi imitare la natura nella figura dell'uomo e non essendo quasi possibile in un solo trovare la perfetta bellezza, come s'è detto; e vedendo l'arte che in un uomo solo essa bellezza potrebbe tutta capire; cerca in questa imitazione di ridurre nel composto della sua figura tutta questa bellezza, che è sparsa in più uomini, conoscendo essa arte che la natura disidera ella ancora, come s'è detto, di condurre il composto dell'uomo in tutta perfezzione, atto a conseguire il suo fine, per lo quale diviene perfettamente bello. E questo fa l'arte per fuggire l'imperfezzioni, come ho detto, et accostarsi alle cose perfette. La qual cosa non solamente da Michelagnolo è stata conosciuta, che più d'altri ha intorno a ciò specolato, ma da infiniti altri cercata d'esequirsi nelle nostre arti [...].”

95 As cited in Daly Davis 1982, p. 65.

96 After Danti's remarks, the recognition of stylized individual patterns was soon to become an appreciated feature of painters. Paraphrasing Lodovico Dolce's verdict of Michelangelo's identical figures in a positive way, the Roman painter and art historian Giovanni Battista Passeri was full of admiration for recurrent features when writ-

tio in the Cinquecento was thus an artistic feature that was judged very differently and lay at the very core of mannerist aesthetics.⁹⁷ In this assessment, the art literature of the 16th century was by no means different from antiquity. Whereas Zeuxis was praised by Cicero, Quintilian, and Pliny, Aristotle harshly criticized him for his idealized representation of figures.⁹⁸

3.6 Human Variety and the Effects of Love

As the previous chapters have shown, the artists of the Renaissance were invited to represent a great variety of figures in their works. Dissimilar and heterogeneous limbs, postures, and gestures of young and old men, women, and children were appreciated as a demonstration of artistic *difficoltà* and *varietà*.⁹⁹ Although the latter concept was derived from ancient rhetoric and meant to mirror the general diversity of nature, the attention paid to the variety of bodies was also the result of an increased interest in the depiction of human individuality. Compared to their medieval colleagues, humanists and art theorists of the Renaissance seem to have been astonished by the various manifestations of the human body.

Leon Battista Alberti's *De statua*, a short treatise probably written in the 1440s,¹⁰⁰ is a good example of this reaction. When discussing the art of sculpture as being based on likeness (*similitudo*), he points to the great variety which the human body displays. Corporeal features of an individual (for example, his voice, nose, or other parts of his body) will never be of an identical sort in another

ing his *Vite de pittori, scultori ed architetti* around 1678. Passeri 1772 (1934), p. 271: "Io non ho difficoltà, che nel vedere un opera di chi si sia pittore, si può dire d'haverle vedute tutte, perche ciascheduno fa sempre vedere se stesso nello stile, nel gusto, nel sapere, e nella risoluzione del partito che prende in esprimere quello, che rapresenta, e questo è quell'inditio, che ricevono gl'intendenti della cognitione della maniera, che di subito accusano di chi è mano quell'opera."

97 Battisti 1956, p. 104.

98 Aristotle (1908–1952), vol. 11: "The tragedies of most of the moderns are characterless – a defect common among poets of all kinds, and with its counterpart in painting in Zeuxis as compared to Polygnotus; for whereas the latter is strong in character, the work of Zeuxis is devoid of it." (*Poetics*, 1450a) For a negative discussion of Zeuxis with regards to Aristotle's *Poetics* in the art literature of the Cinquecento see also Francesco Bocchi's *Discorso sopra l'eccellenza dell'opere d'Andrea del Sarto* written in 1567 but never published. For a modern edition see Williams 1989a, esp. p. 126. Cfr. also the article by Pizzani 1998, who discusses the beginning of Horace's *Ars poetica* where selective imitation is seen very critical.

99 Cfr. Pino 1548 (1960–1962), p. 115.

100 For a discussion of the dating of *De statua* see Pfisterer 2003, p. 538.

person. The face (*vultus*) was granted particular attention, since the individual physiognomy – even if seen after many years – will always be unique and thus recognizable.¹⁰¹ Filarete,¹⁰² Giovanni Paolo Gallucci,¹⁰³ and Lodovico Dolce¹⁰⁴ discussed human variety in very similar terms: Each man possesses a different body and, even in the rare case of twins, corporeal differences are visible. Arnold Houbraken still referred to the same topos when he praised the paintings of Rembrandt for their variety in his *Groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (1718–1721).¹⁰⁵ According to natural philosophy, the different qualities of the human body were either explained by the influence of the planets, the disposition of the individual souls, or the power of God.¹⁰⁶ A different explanation was given by Giambattista della Porta in his *Miracoli e meravigliosi effetti della natura* (1560). He identified the great flexibility of the human mind as the primal cause for the great corporeal diversity. Mental images conceived during the act of procreation would alter the shape of the offspring. Compared to bodies of irrational animals, bodies of humans display therefore a greater dissimilarity.¹⁰⁷

101 Alberti (1998), p. 6: “Possem hic de similitudinum ratione disquirere quid ita sit quod ex natura videmus eam quidem in quovis animante perpetuo solitam observare, ut eorum quodque sui generis quibusque persimillimum sit. Alia ex parte, ut aiunt, vox voci, nasus naso, et eiusmodi, in toto civium numero similis reliquorum nullus invenitur. Adde ut vultus eorum quos pueros videramus, subinde factos adolescentes cognovimus [...]”

102 Filarete (1972), vol. 1, pp. 26 f.: “Tu potresti dire: io ho veduti pure uomini che s’asomigliano uno a l’altro, come furono due ch’io vidi a Milano, li quali erano bresciani, che se vedevi l’uno vedevi l’altro. Non mi meraviglio, perché erano usciti d’una stampa, ma pure v’era qualche differenza: se none in altro, era ne’ vestimenti e nell’animo.”

103 Dürer 1591, p. 2 of the foreword: “I particolari huomini nondimeno sono fra loro si differenti di corpi, che non è possibile ritrovare duoi huomini cosi simili di faccia, non che in tutti li altri membri, che in qualche parte non siano dissimili.”

104 Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 179: “Deve adunque il pittore variar teste, mani, piedi, corpi, atti e qulunque parte del corpo umano, considerando che questa è la principal meraviglia della natura: che in tante migliaia d’uomini a pena due o pochissimi si trovano, che si assomigliano tra loro in modo che non sia d’uno ad altro grandissima differenza.”

105 Houbraken 1718–1721, vol. 1, pp. 257 f.: “Hy was in opzigt van de Konst ryk van gedagten, waar om men van hem niet zelden een menigte van verschillige schetzen over een zelve voorwerp ziet verbeeld, ook vol van veranderingen; zoo ten opzigt van de wezens, en wyze van staan, als in den toestel der kleedingen; waar in hy boven anderen (inzonderheid zulken, die dezelve wezens en kleedingen, even of het al tweekingen waren, in hunne werken te pas brengen) is te pryzen. Ja hy munte daar in boven allen uit: en niemant weet ik dat zoo menige verandering in afschetzungen van een en ’tzelve voorwerp gemaakt heeft [...]”

106 Cfr. Park 2004 and Groebner 2004.

107 Della Porta 1560, fol. 89v: “È molto grande la forza della imaginatione fissa, per modo che non la possiamo in tutto sapere. Quando le donne son gravide, havendo desiderio d’una cosa, quella imaginatione altera gli spiriti interiori per modo, che quella cosa

This dissimilarity becomes especially apparent in the facial features of man.¹⁰⁸ According to physiognomic theory, the face was conceived as a direct reflection of the qualities of each individual soul and thus was believed to be an indicator of the character of the human being. The art of portraiture, focused on individual likeness, was thus especially attentive to the depiction of facial features.¹⁰⁹ The depiction of the human face was therefore of particular importance to art theorists discussing *varietà*, and they expected every physiognomy to be different. A good example is provided by Giovanni Battista Gelli. Accusing the medieval painters of identical figures, he underscores the necessity to follow the example of nature, where we cannot find two identical copies.¹¹⁰ Similarly Marcantonio Michiel, also known as Anonimo Morelliano, was displeased by two portrait paintings which closely resembled each other in the colour of the skin.¹¹¹ Other examples can be found in Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*.¹¹²

desiderata, et fissa netta imaginativa si dipinge nel parto avenga che gli spiriti muovano il sangue, il quale opera nelle carni tenerissime della creatura, e quivi le sculpi-
sce così in perpetuo vi rimane quel segno. Per questa cagione, i contemplatori delle
cose, hanno cercato in che modo l'anima s' imagini e pensi, e massimamente nelle at-
tioni principali, come è nel atto del corso, per il che havendo l'huomo molto veloce la
imaginativa, la prontezza dell'animo, e la varietà dell'ingegno, si fanno varie imagini
nella mente: e però nell'huomo sono più differente, che in tutti gli altri animali, aven-
ga che gli altri havendo l'anima immobile, a loro gli è dato generare più simile nel suo
genere." Della Porta's observations are based on Pliny's *Historia naturalis* (VII, XII, 52).
For the greater diversity of the human body cfr. also Albertus Magnus' *De animalibus*
(I,II,1).

108 In fact, recent genetic research has shown that the physiognomic diversity of human beings is greater than that of any other animal. Due to their dependance on social interactions, it proved useful to be able to identify other beings by their facial features. Cfr. Sheehan/Nachman 2014.

109 Cfr. Weppelmann 2011 and Posselt 2013.

110 Gelli (1896), p. 40: "Poichè in tanta moltitudine d'uomini che si sono veduti ai tempi nostri non se n'è ancora trovati mai due che si somiglino tanto che si scambiassino l'uno da l'altro: e se bene scrive di alcuni Plinio, sono stati si rari che non fanno caso, e il simile ancora dipoi fecion tutti que' maestri che seguitorno il dipignere di maniera, cio non cercorno di cavare le cose dal naturale."

111 Michiel (1888), p. 80: "Ambedoi questi ritratti hanno li campi neri, et sono in profilo et si giudicano padre et figlio, et si guardano l'un contra l'altro, ma in due però tavole, perchè par che si simigliino in le tinte delle carni. Ma al mio giudicio questa convenienza delle tinte proviene dalla maniera del maestro che faceva tutte le carni simili tra loro et che tiravano al color pallido. Sono però ditti ritratti molto vivaci, et sopra tutto finiti et hanno un lustro come se fussino a oglio, et sono opere lodevoli."

112 Leonardo (1995), p. 65: "Il pittore deve cercare d'essere universale, perchè gli manca assai dignità se fa una cosa bene e l'altra male: come molti che solo studiano nel nudo misurato e proporzionato, e non ricercano la sua varietà; perchè può un uomo essere proporzionato ed esser grosso e corto o lungo o sottile o mediocre, e chi di questa va-

The Use of Artificial Models

Although the above-mentioned examples explain the lack of physiognomic *varietà* due to the use of a *cattiva maniera*, the similarity of painted faces was also subject to the specific working conditions of painters. As has been shown by Julius von Schlosser, many artists referred to artificial models when making their paintings or statues.¹¹³ Whether small or life-sized, these models were made of wood, wax, plaster, or clay and had numerous benefits. They had been in use from the second half of the Quattrocento. Painters employed them to study proportions, the effects of light and shadow, or the appearance of draperies. According to Vasari, Piero della Francesca¹¹⁴ and Lorenzo di Credi¹¹⁵ were very fond of making clay models which they draped with wet or waxed cloth. In rare cases these models were also used to stage entire scenarios: before executing the final drawing, painters examined the various possibilities of a composition by moving its components to different positions.¹¹⁶ In one chapter of his *De' veri precetti della pittura* (1586), a treatise on painting mainly concerned with practical questions, Giovanni Battista Armenini describes the fabrication and purpose of such artificial models in detail.¹¹⁷ Similar advice was given by Bernardino Campi in his *Parere sopra la pittura* in 1584.¹¹⁸

rietà non tien conto fa sempre le sue figure in stampa, che pare che sieno tutte sorelle, la qual cosa merita grande riprensione.” Similar examples in the §§ 104, 179. For a different opinion see Armenini 1587, pp. 141 f.: “Ne qui si deve seguitar quella superstiziosa avvertenza, di non far mai l’un viso, se non ben differente dagli altri, e così degli atti vengano gli affetti, ne meno mi piace quella figura misteriosa e straordinaria che dicono si dovrebbe fare in ogni Istoria.”

113 von Schlosser 1913, pp. 111–118. See also Myssok 1999, Ames-Lewis 2000, pp. 46–57, Peppel 2008, pp. 112–130.

114 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol 2, pp. 498 f.: “Usò assai Piero di far modelli di terra, ed a quelli metter sopra panni molli con infinità di pieghe, per ritrarli e servirsene.”

115 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol 4, p. 564: “[...] fra [i disegni fatti da Lorenzo] sono alcuni ritratti da modegli di terra, acconci sopra con panno lino incerato e con terra liquida; con tanta diligenza imitati e con tanta pazienza finiti, che non si può a pena credere, non che fare.”

116 Cfr. von Schlosser 1913, p. 115.

117 Armenini 1587, p. 94: “Alcuni [modelli] adunque si fabricano di cera, alcuni di terra, altri grandi, altri piccoli, altri vestiti, altri ignudi, & quando in piedi, & quando à sedere, & quando distesi, secondo i bisogni, gli atti, & i soggetti delle cose che essi [pittori] dipinger vogliono.”

118 Campi 1584 (1774), p. 103: “Dopo questo gli bisogna imparare ritrarre dal naturale, come farebbe far un Ritratto in ogni modo che intravenga nella Pittura, e farlo bene: e venendogli occasione di pingere un’ Istoria, gli bisogna schizzare l’invezione al miglior modo che fa, avendo però sempre la memoria ai disegni già ritratti: Poscia faccia una figura di rilievo di cera lunga un mezzo palmo, o più o meno, secondo il suo parere, in

As a versatile and valuable tool for the study of problematic aspects of a pose, jointed lay figures were also used by artists. Often made of wood, these small figures were easy to reposition and allowed multiple postures. While models made of wax or clay were mainly used to study positions or drapery, lay figures also possessed distinctive physiognomies. A jointed lay figure from ca. 1525, kept at the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck (Fig. 23), is a good ex-

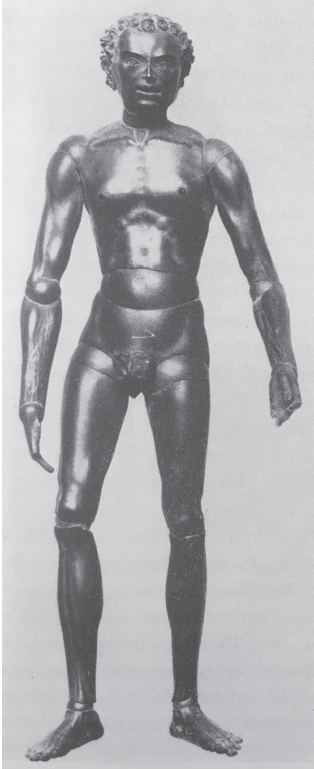


Figure 23 Monogrammist IP, Lay Figure, 1525, Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum

ample of the minuteness and precision with which these complex models were made. Containing a mechanism of intertwined catgut strings, the figure was repositionable down to the joints of the fingers; even its eyes, nose, and hair were

piedi, con le gambe alquanto aperte, e con le braccia distese, tal che facilmente si possa formare col gesso, o gittarne di cera tante quante ne farà bisogno nell'Istoria." Campi's considerations were originally published as appendix to Alessandro Lamo's *Discorso intorno alla scoltura et pittura*, Cremona 1584. Campi's treatise is discussed by Nova 1992, pp. 93 ff.

carefully executed.¹¹⁹ As can be shown by a drawing of a nude man by Albrecht Dürer (Fig. 24), painters used such lay figures not only for compositional reasons,

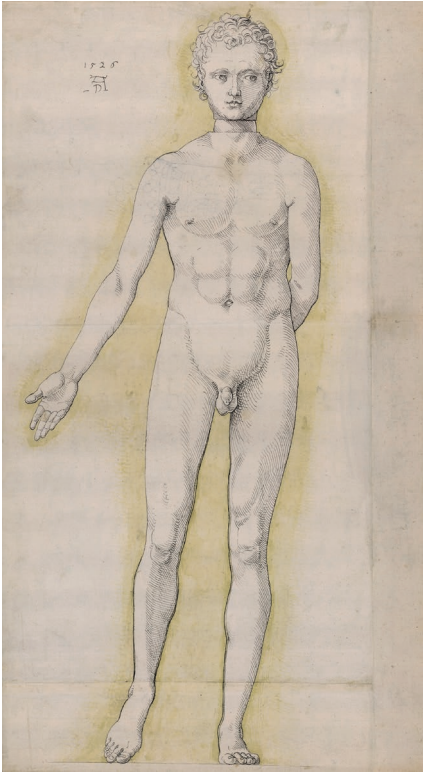


Figure 24 Albrecht Dürer, Study after a Lay Figure, 1526, London, British Museum

but were also interested in the faithful reproduction of the specific details of these anatomical models. His drawing, executed in 1526, pays close attention to the artificial neck which links the head of the figure to its body and bears strong similarities to the lay figure kept in the Museum at Innsbruck. Considering the technical nature of the work (part of a series on proportion theory), Dürer's drawing is also very cautious about the facial features of his model. It is therefore likely that these figures were conceived as universal stereotypes. As condensed reflections of his stylistic vocabulary, they provided preferred features and pictorial patterns that were frequently used by the artist.¹²⁰

119 Cfr. Steinitz/Wagner/Zaunschirn 1976, pp. 162 f.

120 For Dürer and the lay figure see Weixlgärtner 1903. For a discussion of several surviving lay figures and artificial models in European museums see Weixlgärtner 1954.

The Use of Natural Models

While the use of artificial models like lay figures could lead to a lack of physiognomic variety, the same was true for natural models. For economical and practical reasons, artists often referred to models that were close at hand – for example, themselves, workshop colleagues or family members. When exercising the depiction of eyes or ears or when studying complex postures, the models served as examples for the representation of the human body.¹²¹ According to Renaissance theories, these frequently drawn features were processed by the cognitive senses and finally stored in the painter's *memoria*, the last of the three cerebral ventricles of the human brain, where they were easily re-accessible for prospective projects.¹²² Identical faces were thus a sign of a limited number of models as well as a stylistic consequence of repetitive technique. The Jesuit and mathematician Francesco Lana Terzi discussed the issue when writing on *varietà* in his *Prodromo* in 1670. According to Lana Terzi, painters unwittingly tend to re-cycle physiognomies of their relatives or of other beloved persons, because they are impressed on their minds ("imprese nell'imaginatione").¹²³ Only rarely, for example in the case of Raphael, would one see paintings in which all of the faces are dissimilar.¹²⁴

Lana Terzi's observations were probably inspired by Vasari's life of Andrea del Sarto, in which Vasari provides a good example of the then contemporary ideas about the use of homogenous physiognomies. When describing Andrea's *Disputa*, a painting made for the Augustinian church of San Gallo in Florence around 1517 alluding to a theological debate, he pays particular attention to the figure of Mary

121 Cole/Pardo 2005, pp. 40–45.

122 For the understanding of *memoria*, traditionally believed to be situated after the *impressiva* and the *sensus communis*, see Kemp 1977, p. 379.

123 Lana Terzi 1670, pp. 136 f.: "Per tanto si deve porre gran studio in dare unione all'attione rappresentata, congiongendo con l'unità di questa la varietà de gli affetti, de gli atteggiamenti, delle posture de'scorci, e soprattutto delle fisionomie de' volti: nel che si ritrova molta difficoltà, poiche ogni pittore inclina naturalmente ad esprimere nelli personaggi quelle fisionomie, che ha piu impresse nell'imaginatione, onde è stato osservato che i volti pittoreschi tengono sempre molto della fisionomia del padre, della madre, o d'altra persona piu amata, e piu frequentemente veduta dal pittore; e rari sono que' quadri ne quali rappresentandosi molte faccie, l'una non habbia la fisionomia simile all'altra."

124 Lana Terzi 1670, p. 137: "Quindi è degno di molta lode il famosissimo Rafaello, che in tante opere ch'egli fece difficilmente si ritroverà un volto che sia simile ad un altro; per lo che gioverà tra la moltitudine della gente, andar ricercando nuove fisionomie di volti, riponendoli nell'erario della imaginatione per servirsene all'occasione, così sfuggire la somiglianza nelle sue opere; ma molto piu il sapere alterare le parti che compungono il volto umano; poiche dal variarne una sola il tutto prende una differente fisionomia."

Magdalene, depicted in the foreground on the right side of the painting (Fig. 25). According to Vasari, Andrea modelled the facial features of the saint upon his beloved wife Lucrezia del Fede. Since he had seen and drawn her many times, he carried the image of her face within his mind. Even if he were to paint other women, he could not help but to reproduce her physiognomy in every female face. “Abbasso [i.e., in the foreground of the painting] sono ginocchioni due figure: una Maddalena con bellissimi panni, il volto della quale è ritratto della moglie, perciò che non faceva aria di femine in nessun luogo che da lei non la ritraesse; se pur avveniva che da altre talora la togliesse, per l’uso del continuo vederla e per tanto averla disegnata, e, che è più, averla nell’animo impressa, veniva che quasi tutte le teste che faceva di femmine la somigliavano.”¹²⁵

Rather than being a historical fact, Vasari’s account was probably a popular explanation for the lack of physiognomic *varietà* that contemporary beholders noted in many paintings. Although Andrea’s female heads show a certain preference for round and fleshy features, most apparent in his *en face* depictions of the Virgin Mary, it is difficult to connect these resembling heads to the profile view of Mary Magdalene in the *Disputa*.¹²⁶ Considering the sinful and libidinous past of the saint, Vasari’s venomous allusion to the artist’s wife is thus more likely to complete his moral pen portrait of Andrea del Sarto. Described as a simple and timid character, who refused a promising career at the court of Francis I in France due to the manipulative pleas of his seductive wife, Andrea did not adhere to Vasari’s ideal of an autonomous and productive painter.¹²⁷ Vasari’s identification of Andrea’s wife Lucrezia del Fede in the beautiful draperies of Mary Magdalene was primarily a cunning method to allude to Andrea’s ethical and stylistic shortcomings.

125 Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 5, pp. 27f.

126 For a comparison of Andrea’s presumed portrait of his wife with several of his other figures see Di Pietro 1910, pp. 32–40.

127 Spagnolo 1998, see also the introduction to the life of Andrea del Sarto by Sabine Feser in the German edition: Giorgio Vasari, *Das Leben des Andrea del Sarto*, Berlin 2005, pp. 7–12. Of course, the divine Michelangelo did it better. When asked by a friend why he did not have a wife, the artist answered: “Io ho moglie troppa, che è questa arte, che m’ha fatto sempre tribolare, ed i miei figliuoli saranno le opere che lasserò.” (Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 7, p. 281).



Figure 25 Andrea del Sarto, *Disputation on the Trinity*, 1517, Florence, Galleria Palatina

The Effects of Love

Although probably fictitious, Vasari's account of Andrea del Sarto and his wife Lucrezia points nevertheless to the important issue of the effects of love on the art of painting. According to contemporary theories, affinity between two people was caused by a certain correspondence or *adaequatio* between their souls.¹²⁸ Similar souls tend to mingle with each other and couples were often thought to be identical either in shape or in character. Or, as Leonardo put it, "he who falls in love naturally loves things similar to himself."¹²⁹ Parallel to this view, which can be traced back to the Aristotelian principle of *like to like*¹³⁰, natural philosophical treatises of the Cinquecento developed the idea of a slow assimilation of the lovers, in which, over the course of a relationship, an already existing similarity was reinforced, leading to the transformation of one into the other.¹³¹ Such ideas were stimulated by Petrarchan poetry, in which metaphors of entwining and merging characterised the mutual desire of the sexes, but the rediscovered reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* also had considerable influence. The popular collection of myths by the Roman poet, which was widely read in the 16th century, contains several episodes that describe how love can change the physical qualities of one's body. At the same time, the biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve remained influential. Its idea of the substantial likeness of man and woman,

128 For the following see also Lampe 2021.

129 Kemp 1976, p. 313. When writing on the intimate friendship of the painters Polidoro da Caravaggio and Maturino Fiorentino, Vasari made a similar observation. Since they shared the same *animo*, the intellectual part of the soul, they disposed of a identical *maniera* and used to make similar paintings. Vasari 1568 (1878–1885), vol. 5, p. 143: "E tanto con frequentazione e voglia a tal cosa posero il pensiero, che unitamente presero la maniera antica, e tanto l'una simile all'altra che, sì come gl'animi loro erano d'uno istesso volere, così le mani ancora esprimevano il medesimo sapere. E benché Maturino non fosse quanto Polidoro aiutato dalla natura, poté tanto l'osservanza dello stile nella compagnia, che l'uno e l'altro pareva il medesimo, dove poneva ciascuno la mano, di componimenti, d'aria e di maniera."

130 Aristotle 1549, p. 63: "Et perche egli è piacevole tutto quello, che è naturale, essendo le cose dei parenti naturali inverso l'un dell'altro, però tutte le parentele, & tutte le similitudini ci dan' piacere il piu delle volte, sicome fa l'huomo all'altro huomo, & il cavallo al cavallo, & il giovane al giovane; La onde è il Proverbio Che il simile appetisce il simile. Et che al simile il simile sempre è amico."

131 Cfr. Betussi 1549, p. 29: "E ben sapete che l'amante nell'amato si trasforma. Onde diròvi che il bene dell'amato è più proprio suo che il suo, sì che, desiderando l'utile, il buono e 'l diletto dell'amico, il suo proprio appetisce, che il tutto è comune, essendo, come si preuppone che sia ad esser vero, l'amore reciproco, onde due che s'amano non sono più due."

created in the image of one flesh, provided a blueprint for the idea of a fundamental corporeal similarity between lovers.

In fact, some Renaissance portraits seem to allude to this idea. Looking at Andrea Mantegna's *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, which was painted in Padua shortly after his wedding in 1453, one notices at second glance the portraits of a woman and a man on the left and right edges of the picture, respectively (Fig. 26). Set off against a dark background, both are depicted in three-quarter

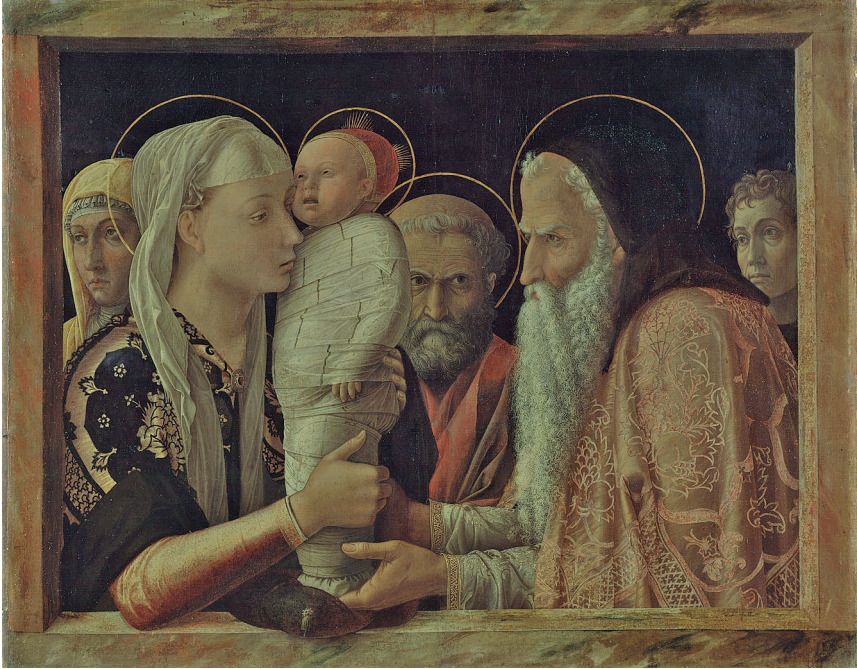


Figure 26 Andrea Mantegna, *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, ca. 1454, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

view gazing to the left, where a side altar may originally have been set up, for whose chapel the picture was possibly intended. In this way, the painting is part of the tradition of depictions of patrons, in which the benefactor was often depicted with his wife in order to ensure long-lasting religious devotion and memoria. Due to their individual features, research identified the two portraits early on as self-portraits of the painter with his wife Nicolosia Bellini.¹³² This assessment

¹³² See Prinz 1962.

is supported by the symmetrical arrangement typical of representations of patrons: due to their identical lines of vision and positioning, the portraits refer to each other, thus underlining their relationship. Mantegna seems to reinforce this correspondence all the more by emphasising their similar facial features. Comparable details such as the large eyes surrounded by dark circles, the high eyebrow arches, and the finely curved mouths emphasise the couple's physical analogies. This similarity is all the more striking because Mantegna was meticulous about varying the physiognomies of the other figures in the center of the picture, such as Simeon, Joseph, and Mary, who belong to the elevated sphere of the sacred, and about using skin tones, body positions, and gestures that were as different as possible, in accordance with the paradigm of variety.

Although these similarities have been explained through the standardizing effects of the individual style of an artist, Renaissance natural philosophy suggests another explanation. The often obvious resemblance between a husband and his wife was not only explained by the concept of *aedequatio*, but also seen as a result of love and affection, which are capable of transforming a body. A wife who constantly thinks of her husband will naturally acquire some of his corporeal features with the passing of time. During the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino's philosophy provided a widely accepted explanation for this phenomenon of transmutation. The key element of his theory is the so-called *spirito*, a rarified and invisible part of the blood which connects the body with the soul. According to his *Libro dell' amore* (1544), the *volgare* version of his famous commentary to Plato's *Symposium* from the 1470s, the *spirito* serves as an intermediate for the sensual impressions that are received through the sensory organs (for example, images, sounds, and odors). But only the soul is able to assess, reprocess, and store these data received from the *spirito*.¹³³ Due to the faculty of *imaginatio* or *fantasia*, the soul is also able to evoke reprocessed and refined parts of these data – for example, the portrait of a beloved person.¹³⁴ When this happens, for instance in a moment of

133 For Ficino's ideas on spirit and soul see Hankins 2007.

134 Cfr. Garin 1985, pp. 351 ff. The German magician and alchemist Agrippa von Nettesheim expressed ideas similar to those of Ficino in his *De occulta philosophia* (1531). For example, dreams might change the corporeal constitution of men due to their deep impact on the *imaginatio*. Agrippa von Nettesheim 1992, p. 223: "Vehemens enim cogitatio, dum species vehementer movit, in illis rei cogitatae figuram depingit quam illi in sanguine effingunt: ille nutritis a se imprimit membris cum propriis, tum aliquando etiam alienis, [...] sicut imaginatio morsi cane rabido in urinam imprimit imagines canum: sic multi subito canescunt; alius e puero unius noctis somnio in virum perfectum excrevit." With regards to the good influences of christian paintings Gabriele Paleotti expressed similar observations. Paleotti 1582 (1960–1962), p. 230: "Sostengono [i filosofi e medici] che, a seconda dei concetti che nella nostra fantasia si creano a partire dalle forme della

yearning or desire, the soul provokes a physical reaction which consists of a re-affectation of the *spirito*: The image of the lover is re-impressed on the blood, and the blood imprints this image on the body of the recalling person.¹³⁵ If this occurs habitually, the shape of the body must be necessarily altered in correspondence with the portrait of the lover, and couples will resemble each other both in the characteristics of their souls, particularly in regards to the faculty of *imaginazione*, and their bodies.¹³⁶ Ultimately, Ficino romanticised with this idea the endogamy practised in Renaissance marriage politics, according to which marriage partners were selected according to social, economic and legal equality criteria. If the origin, beauty, and status of the man and woman were comparable, a successful alliance was guaranteed. This ideal of *aequalitas* also corresponds to a piece of advice coined by Ovid (*Heroides*, 9,32), which found great favour in the marriage treatise literature of the 16th century: “Unde si vis nubere, nube pari” (If you want to marry, marry alike).

Ficino’s theory, modelled upon the scholastic principle *anima forma corporis* (the soul is the form of the body),¹³⁷ can serve as an alternative explanation for the conspicuous accumulation of portraits in which a wife resembles her husband. Although Ficino’s ideas applied to men as well, women were believed to be the principal bearers of this corporeal adaptation. Female imagination was thought to be stronger than male imagination, and their cold, humid nature as well as their pale, soft flesh made women the ideal objects for a physical metamorphosis.¹³⁸ Raphael’s portrait of *La Fornarina* (Fig. 27), a woman often believed to be identical to Margherita Luti, his preferred model and mistress, can serve as an example of

realtà, si generano in noi impressioni così forti da produrre alterazioni e segni visibili nel corpo stesso.” Similar observations had been made by Pliny with regards to the process of procreation: A thought suddenly flitting across the mind of either parent is supposed to produce likeness or to cause a combination of features in the offspring (*Historia naturalis*, VII, XII, 52).

135 Ficino 1470 (1987), pp. 123 f. See also Dietrich 2000, pp. 166 f. and p. 179.

136 Ficino 1470 (1987), p. 201: “E però nessuno di voi si maravigli se udisse alcuno innamorato avere concepito nel corpo suo alcuna similitudine della persona amata. Le donne gravide molte volte desiderando il vino, veementemente pensano al vino desiderato. Quella forte immaginazione gli spiriti interiori commuove: e commevendogli, in essi dipinge lo immagine del vino desiderato. Questi spiriti muovono similmente il sangue, e nella tenera materia del concetto la immagine del vino scolpiscono. Or’ chi è sì poco pratico, che non sappia che un Amante appetisce più ardentemente la persona amata, che le donne gravide il vino? E però più forte e fermo cogita. Sì che non è maraviglia che il volto della persona amata, scolpito nel cuore dello Amante, per tale cogitazione si dipinga nello spirito: e dallo spirito nel sangue si imprima.”

137 Kläden 2008, p. 258.

138 For maternal imagination and the corporeal qualities of women see Finucci 2001.



Figure 27 Raffaello Sanzio, *La Fornarina*, 1518–1519, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica a Palazzo Barberini



Figure 28 Raffaello Sanzio, *Self-Portrait with a Friend*, 1518–1520, Paris, Musée du Louvre

the deep and enduring impact of the faculty of *imaginazione* on the corporeal constitution of women.¹³⁹ When her portrait is compared to a self-portrait of Raphael with an unknown friend (Fig. 28) which was made during the same time from 1518–1520, she shows a nearly identical physiognomy, most prominently visible in the dark and thin eyebrows, the succulent lips, and the well-defined nose. His signature (RAPHAEL VRBINAS) on the bracelet around Margherita's left arm might be seen as an allusion to this apocryphal yet obvious self-portrait in the dress of his beloved model. If one considers the great variety of faces that he used in his history paintings, a phenomenon that astonished art theorists of the Cinquecento,¹⁴⁰ the fusion of their facial features was probably an intentional choice. Even if the model did not look like Raphael, her pictorial resemblance to the artist had a distinct meaning that was known to contemporary beholders who were familiar with Renaissance concepts of love.¹⁴¹ Rather than being a mannerist defect of the painter, a close likeness between the portrait of the artist and the portrait of his model was understood as an expression of reciprocal love and empathy. Later, this concept of an unwitting transfer of facial features was also taken up by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who was familiar with the work of Raphael. In a chapter of his *Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), he describes how a painter-architect, while decorating a chapel in the presence of a young lady named Ottilie, made the physiognomies of all of his figures look like the woman. To explain this phenomenon, Goethe resorted to the aforementioned mechanics of the soul: the image of the beautiful Ottilie, taken up by the man's soul, left such a strong impression upon him that his hands couldn't help but to execute it involuntarily in his paintings.¹⁴²

139 For a discussion of this portrait in relation to theories of artistic inspiration see Pfisterer 2012.

140 Dolce 1557 (1960–1962), p. 196: “[...] in tutte le sue opere egli usò una varietà tanto mirabile, che non è figura che né d'aria né di movimento si somigli, tal che in ciò non appare ombra di quello che da' pittori oggi in mala parte è chiamata maniera, cioè cattiva pratica, ove si veggono forme e volti quasi sempre simili.”

141 For Renaissance concepts of love with particular regard to their influence on the art of painting see Bolzoni 2010, pp. 137–150. For a general discussion of the perception of physiognomic likeness in the art of painting see Gombrich 1972.

142 von Goethe 1809, vol. 2, pp. 35 f.: “Auch die Gesichter, welche dem Architekten zu malen allein überlassen war, zeigten nach und nach eine ganz besondere Eigenschaft; sie fingen sämtlich an, Ottilien zu gleichen. Die Nähe des schönen Kindes mußte wohl in die Seele des jungen Mannes, der noch keine natürliche oder künstlerische Physiognomie vorgefaßt hatte, einen so lebhaften Eindruck machen, daß ihm nach und nach auf dem Wege vom Auge zur Hand nichts verlorenging, ja daß beyde zuletzt ganz gleichstimmig arbeiteten. Genug, eins der letzten Gesichtchen glückte vollkommen, so daß es schien, als wenn Ottilie selbst aus den himmlischen Räumen heruntersähe.”