

Animal Art/Human Art: Imagined Borderlines in the Renaissance

ULRICH PFISTERER

Only very rarely do apes do us the favour of adapting their behaviour to human cultural fantasies. This seemed to be the case in 1942 when a gorilla at the London Zoological Society traced the outline of his shadow with his finger not once but three times. It was as if he were re-enacting the classical myth of the origin of painting in which the daughter of the Greek potter Dibutades paints the silhouette of her departing lover on a wall as a remembrance. Even more astonishingly, the gorilla seemed to know the idiosyncratic alternative version of this myth on the fresco in Giorgio Vasari's house in Florence (c. 1572) showing not the lovesick girl but the narcissistic King Gyges tracing his own shadow!¹

The fact that the gorilla's behaviour was remarked and reported at all bears witness to an abiding interest in the origin of art. Is art a genuinely human quality, a human universal, or are there suggestions of artistic behaviour in animals? What is, in fact, as one famous publication put it, the "picture-making behaviour of the great apes and its relationship to human art"?² In 1913 the Russian scientist Nadjeta Koths, most probably the first, started to explore systematically, using comparisons with her own small child, the capabilities of non-human primates in the perception and production of images-capabilities which seemingly equalled only those of a two-year-old infant (fig. 1). A second peak in animal art research was reached in the United States in the early 1950s when Congo, a chimpanzee, produced the impressive oeuvre of 384 paintings in several series of tests.³

1 On the gorilla see Huxley 1942, 637; cf. Lenain 1997, 176. For the mythical origin of drawing and painting see Rosenblum 1958, 329 ff.; cf. Stoichita 1997; Keenan 2006, 17–28; cf. Brüder 2006.

2 Cf. Morris 1962. Earlier publications include Schiller 1951, 101–111; Goja 1959, 369–373; Rensch 1961, 347–364; Levy 1961, 83 ff.

3 The results of this study were not published until decades later as Koths 1935. A detailed history of the scientific study of ape drawings and paintings is given by Lenain 1997.

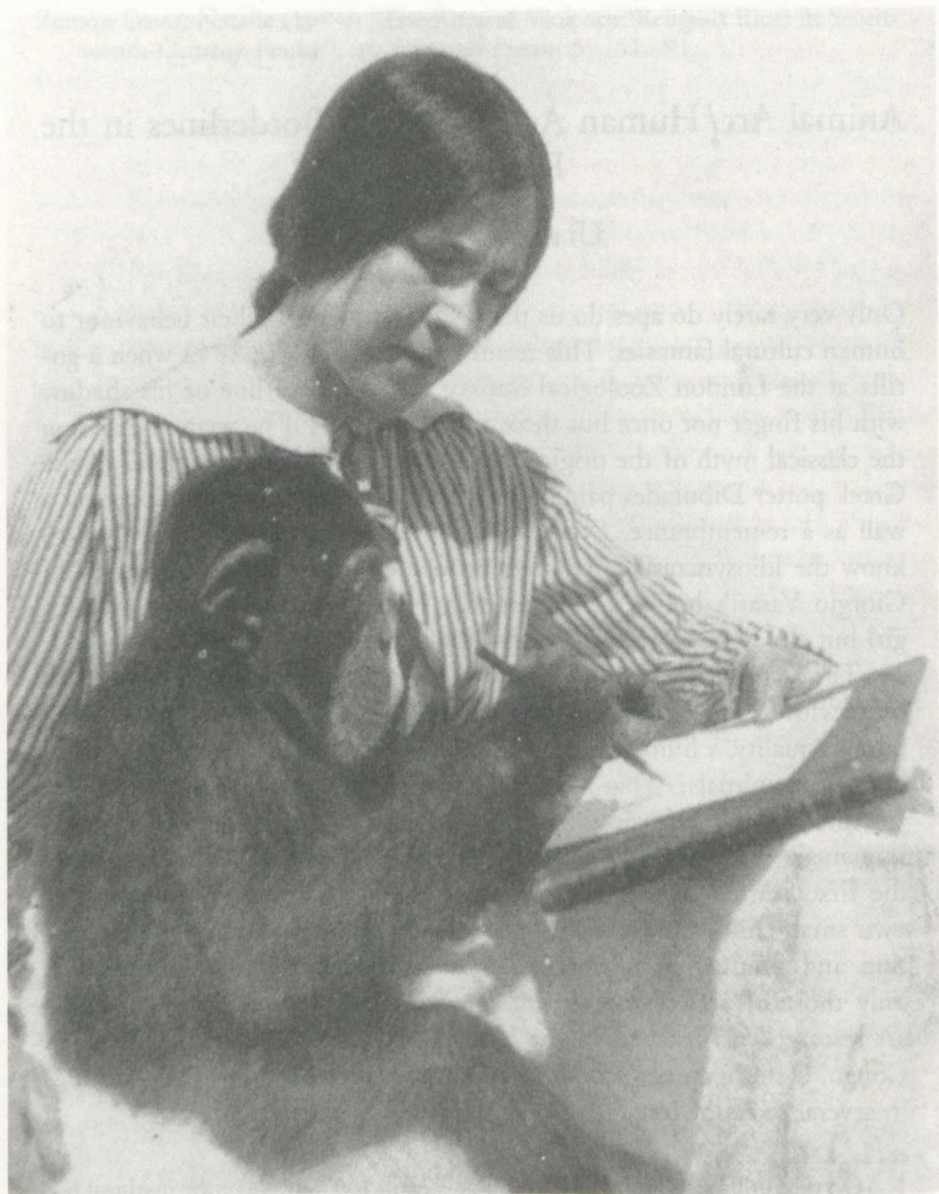


Fig. 1

Nadjeta Kohts and her chimpanzee Joni in Moscow (1913),
(after Lenain 1997, fig. 12).

Animal art research must be seen against the backdrop and in the larger context of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selec-

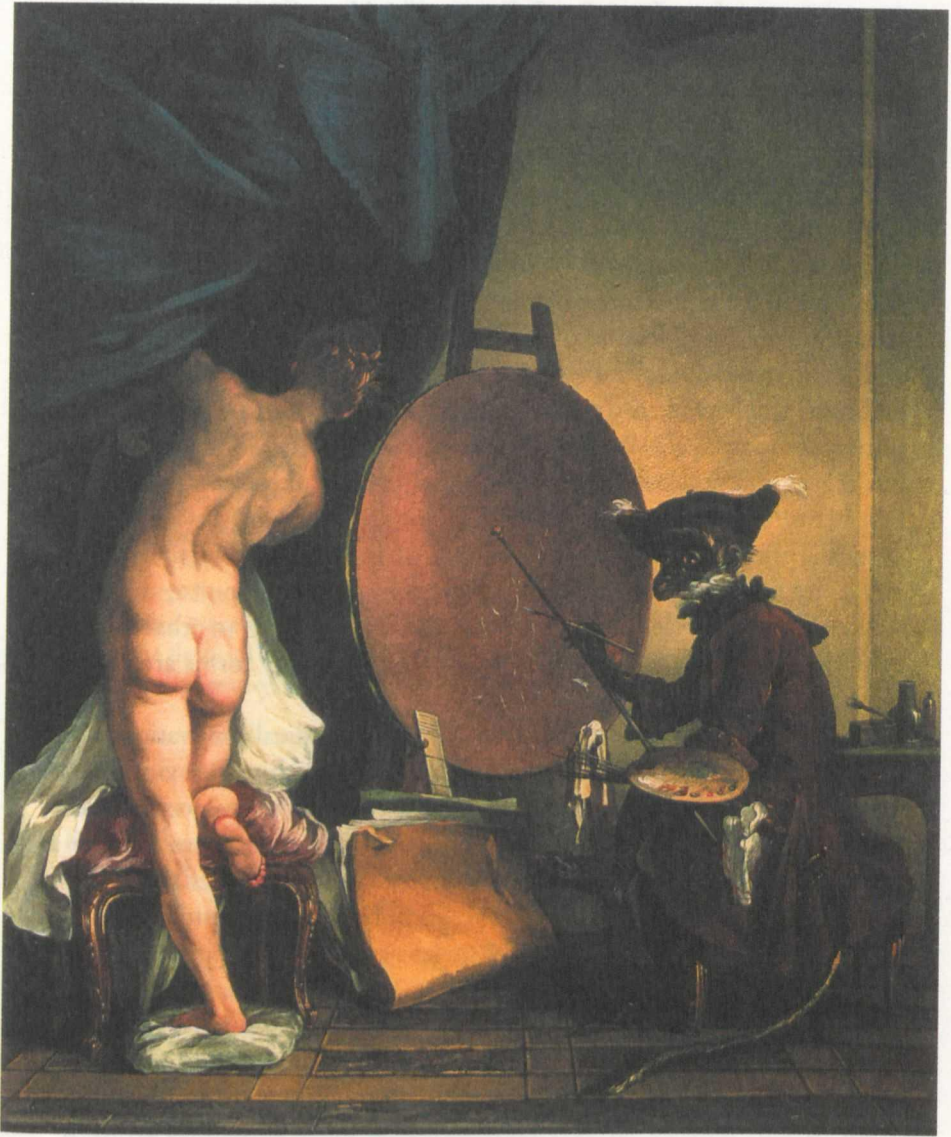


Fig. 2

Jean-Baptiste Deshayes: *The Monkey-Painter* (c 1760), Rouen: Musée des Beaux-Arts.

tion, for which the criteria of beauty, the development of an aesthetic sense and (body-) decoration are of central importance.⁴ Darwin not only placed man firmly in the animal family (in particular in that of

⁴ For the reception and influence of Darwin's ideas see Menninghaus 2003.

the great apes) but also one of the most highly prized human abilities. The production and appreciation of art now seemed originally the biologically determined result of survival of the fittest and natural selection with at least nascent forms in animals as well.⁵ Opponents of this view placed all the more importance on defining 'art' as something beyond the basal "picture-making behaviour of the great apes" that was found only in humans.

Such an art would serve nicely as the decisive distinction between man and animals. As opposed to language, which had long been discussed as a defining feature of the human, pictorial art had the major advantage that art objects are long-lasting.⁶ Ever more prehistoric art objects had been discovered in the latter part of the 19th century whose making went back to the very dawn of humanity, seemingly proof of the hypothesis that homo sapiens and art went together.⁷ Art, then, was the dividing line between man and animal. And so we are secure in the belief that—even if "[b]iologists have found evidence of an aesthetic sensitivity in several animal species, i.e., a capacity for appropriate response to formal structures, and behavioral patterns directly related to that capacity"—"[t]he creation and appreciation of art in its many forms are uniquely human activities."⁸

Darwin's theories clearly represent the most radical innovation in the scientific investigation of humankind and animal. But Darwin did not suspend the traditional antagonism between ζῷον and ἄνθρωπος. Either the borderline between the human and animal worlds was to be seen as permeable, or there were categorical differences which defined what is specifically human. In particular, the question as to the intelligence and artfulness of animals was of central importance.⁹

5 To cite just three vintage publications that develop this thesis: Scott 1895–1896, 153–226; Schroeter 1914; Clay 1917, 172.

6 See Cummings 2004, 164–185; Senior 1997, 61–84; and cf. Neis 2003; Kirchner 1907. Cf. also Romanes 1882, esp. 328–338.

7 For a more detailed discussion (with further bibliography) see Pfisterer 2006, 13–80; and Pfisterer 2009, 121–160.

8 The first quotation is from Lenain 1999, 239–251, here 240; the second from Alland 1977, 21. Cf. recently Dissanayake 2000; cf. Eibl-Eibesfeldt/Sütterlin 2007.

9 The central importance of reason and virtue in the conception of humans and animals in the early modern period has been stressed in recent studies, but 'artifice' and 'fantasy' neglected. See Sorabji 1993; Steiner 2005, 1–150; Fudge 2006. For an overview of Renaissance ideas on animals see Bohrer 2007.

When in the 16th century European intellectuals went about deciding whether the indigenous peoples of the newly discovered Americas were human or not, the question of their artfulness was promptly deployed for and against. In 1550 Juan Ginés Sepúlveda pointed out that:

even though some of them show a talent for certain handicrafts, this is not an argument in favor of a more human skill, since we see that some small animals, both birds and spiders, make things which no human industry can imitate completely [...]. [W]hat do these [capabilities] prove except that they are not bears or monkeys and that they are not completely devoid of reason?¹⁰

In his defence of the native Americans, Bartolomé de Las Casas replied that “not all barbarians are irrational or natural slaves or unfit for government”. Some of his further arguments are not too different from what ethnologists and anthropologists were saying around 1900:

Furthermore, they are so skilled in every mechanical art that with every right they should be set ahead of all the nations of the known world on this score, so very beautiful in their skill and artistry are the things this people produces in the grace of its architecture, its painting, and its needle-work. But Sepúlveda despises these mechanical arts as if these things do not reflect inventiveness, ingenuity, industry, and right reason.¹¹

Art history has heretofore largely ignored these discussions about the borderlines between human art and animal art. The criteria of the still valid modern concept of art having been cemented in the Renaissance, the defining feature of human art became fantasy and genius. The best-researched area of animal art is that of apes as painters or as otherwise active in the arts—ultimately in the tradition of Aesop’s fables (fig. 2).¹² In contrast, I am more interested in the question as to how the ‘real’ artistic abilities and artistic production of animals—the spiders’ webs, birds’ nests, image perception, etc.—are to be seen in relation to human artfulness and art appreciation.

My first two sections below focus on the continuity theories put forward by numerous Renaissance authors, initially the idea that all human art is only a continuation and improvement of animal art, then the idea

10 Hanke 1974, 85. For a similar argumentation concerning other distinctive human characteristics see Cummings 1999, 26–50.

11 Hanke 1974, 74 ff. Cf. Koepping 2005.

12 The fundamental study Janson 1952, esp. 287–325. For more recent literature cf. Roscoe 1981, 96–103; Georgel/Lecoq 1987; Gerigk 1989; Lenain 1997; Marret 2001.

that animals and animal sensory perception are only different in degree from the art appreciation of humans and that some may even be better suited. The third section summarizes finally the opposing, seemingly more plausible arguments of the proponents of a radical differentiation between man and animal. We will see that in the Renaissance subtle shifts in thinking which lead in the direction of the modern concept of art take place exactly in this context. Unhappily, I cannot elaborate here on the fact that the differentiation of human art and artistry from the animal sphere 'below' it has always been complemented by differentiation of human art and artistry from the art and artistry 'above' it, i.e., God and the art of the divine.¹³

1. A Zoology of Art

"Behold! I have brought you a man," the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope is supposed to have declared, showing a plucked chicken in mockery of Plato's (and Socrates') famous definition of man as a "featherless biped". The episode, recorded by Diogenes Laertius, was well-known in the Renaissance; a drawing by Parmigianino was in wide circulation (fig. 3).¹⁴ The question of man-animal comparisons in Antiquity and the Renaissance is nicely illustrated by the episode. On the one hand, the story points up the uniqueness of man in creation while, on the other hand, opening our eyes to the many similarities between man and animal, such as in physiognomical analogies—the most famous being those of Giambattista della Porta and Charles Le Brun.¹⁵

Animals were granted not only inherent qualities of character, morality and feeling, but intelligence too. The same Diogenes of Sinope who made fun of Plato for his "featherless biped" remark is supposed to have said that the more an animal resembles man, the more intelligence it has. Aristotle, Galen, Plutarch and the Bible give us further observations on the intellect of animals.¹⁶ There were even those who said that animals had more intelligence and greater morality than human beings

13 Cf. for the Renaissance Emison 2004.

14 Diogenes Laertius, VI, 40. Karpinski 2000, 121 ff.

15 Cf. Kemp 2007.

16 Cf. Newmyer 2008, 151–174.



Fig. 3

Ugo da Carpi after Parmigianino: *Diogenes* (c 1526/30),
Genève: Cabinet des Estampes.

and were happier to boot. In 1933 George Boas analysed this complex of ancient ideas and dubbed it “theriophily”.¹⁷

Two arguments are important in our connection, both of which go back to pre-Socratic philosophers. In a radical experiment in thought, Xenophanes exposed the dubiousness of anthropocentrism and the relativity of human beauty ideals: “[I]f cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that

17 Boas 1933; and Wiener 1973, 384–389; cf. also Harrison 1998, 463–484.

men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.”¹⁸ Democritus claimed, according to Plutarch, that ultimately humans had learned all their arts and sciences from the animals or from the example of nature: “[W]e have been their pupils in matters of fundamental importance: of the spider in weaving and mending, of the swallow in home-building, of the sweet-voiced swan and nightingale in our imitation of their song.”¹⁹

Such ideas were actively discussed in the 15th century, for example in a disputation supposedly having taken place in Tunis in the year 1417 between the monk Antonio Turmeda and a donkey. Going back to a 10th-century Arab animal fable, this originally Catalanian satire, the original version of which is lost, was published in 1544 in French translation as *Disputation de l'Asne contre frere Anselme Turmeda, sur la nature & noblesse des Animaux, faicte, & ordonnée par lediczt frere Anselme, en la Cité de Tunicz, l'an 1417*, Lyon 1544.²⁰ In the eleventh argument the monk mentions the impressive buildings of human beings and that they can be erected in various styles as the builder pleases. The donkey points out that animals also build dwellings and, using the example of bees, refutes the suggestion that animals build by instinct and always in the same way: “comme elles font et édifient joliment leurs maisons par compas, les une à six quarres, les aultres à huit, aultres à triangles, aultres quarrées [...]; et les édifient d'une seule matière comme est de cyre.”²¹

Such ideas recur in subsequent years. I shall mention only four examples from the 16th century. In the ten dialogues of Giovanni Battista Gelli's very successful *Circe*, first published in 1549 in Florence and remaining in print for almost two centuries, translated into English, German and French, Odysseus questions his comrades, who have been transformed into animals, as to the advantages and disadvantages of being an animal. The first nine vehemently defend the advantages of animal existence—only the elephant concedes the superiority of the human intel-

18 Diels/Kranz 1960, 21. B15. See similar statements by Epicharm (*Diogenes Laertius, Vitae philosophorum* iii, 16) and Cicero, *De natura deorum*, i, 18–27; discussed by Montaigne, cf. Genetelli 2006, 139 f.

19 Plutarch 974 A; cf. Aelianus 2009, XII, 16. On Montaigne's responses to this passage, see Maspoli Genetelli 2006, 115–123.

20 Turmeda 1984. There has also been a German translation: *Des Esels Streitrede. Eine altkatalanische Satire*, ed. Robert Beier, Berlin/Münster 2009.

21 Turmeda 1984, 81. For the complexity of early modern discussions about certain animals, Woolfson 2009, 281–300.

lect. The human arts are presented as the children of necessity, invented to compensate for human weakness, and the suggestion is pooh-poohed that there is a meaningful distinction to be made between the nest-building instinct of animals and the—likewise at least partly instinctual—human urge to build houses.²² Antonio Persio's treatise on human genius (1576) and Ambroise Paré's *Des animaux et de l'excellence de l'homme* (1585) do not question human superiority for a moment but nevertheless agree that the example of nature (and competition among human beings) were the impetus for the invention and perfection of the arts. Notwithstanding silkworms, spiders, birds, dogs and other animals as creative examples in nature, especially Persio sees the origin of painting in shadows and of architecture in cave dwellings.²³ Montaigne proves to be the perhaps most thoroughgoing early modern theriophilist. Montaigne undertakes a defence of animal art in several of his *Essais*, believing it superior to that of humankind: "Our utmost endeavours cannot arrive at so much as to imitate the nest of the least of birds, its contexture, beauty, and convenience: not so much as the web of a poor spider."²⁴ Of particular interest here is Montaigne's reference to animals in his essay "Of Cannibals" in the New World. His argument is that God's creation is so incomprehensibly abundant and diverse that we should refrain from judging any of it as barbarian. The cultural deformation and false artifice of Europe is contrasted with a natural state of joyful human activity close to that of the animal.

In 1628, climaxing this debate, Giovanni Bonifacio published a summary of the arguments for and against the human arts being dependent on animal examples: *The Liberal and Mechanic Arts: How they have been demonstrated by the irrational animals to man*.²⁵ Bonifacio finds animal antecedents for a surprising number of intellectual and artistic endeavours: agriculture, arithmetic, astronomy/astrology, dialectics, economics, ethics, geometry, grammar, history, house-building, the hunt, medicine, metaphysics, music, navigation, rhetoric, physics, poetry, politics, textiles and warfare—only the pictorial arts seeming not to be attributable to animals. There is a theological assumption behind this panoply of arts and

22 Gelli 1549, 36 f. (2nd Dialogue), 162 and 165–172 (8th Dialogue); the basic model is Plutarch's dialogue *Gryllus, or: That Brute Beasts Have Use of Reason*.

23 Persio 1999, 45; Paré 1990.

24 Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, IV; cf. Thierry Gontier (1998): *De l'homme à l'animal. Montaigne et Descartes ou les paradoxes de la philosophie moderne sur la nature des animaux*, Paris; Wild 2006; Maspoli Genetelli 2006.

25 Bonifacio 1628, 130–133.

skills. Animals not having run awry of original sin, they possess all God-given abilities. Fallen man, on the other hand, must seek insight into the original arts and skills by observation and imitation of the animal world.²⁶

The opposition of human and animal artistic productiveness made itself felt in the pictorial arts in particular, although less as a philosophical, theological or moral problem than as a metaphor for the mystery of artistic creativity. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* connect several *artes* with animals. For example, Athena punishes the weaver Arachne (*Met.* 6, 1) for her *superbia* by transforming her into a spider, as seen on the title-page of the partial English translation of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's 1598 treatise on painting (fig. 4).²⁷

Another striking example of this kind of metaphorical adaption is the personal device of Titian (fig. 5) published in Battista Pittoni's *Imprese di diversi principi* (1568).²⁸ The central image, flanked by personifications of Time and Fame, shows a mother bear licking her newborn cub into shape. The personal motto of the artist floating above in a scroll reads *Natura potentior ars* (More powerful than nature is art). The combination of image and inscription alludes to an ancient belief in the bear as an example of natural artistry. Ovid and Pliny both describe the procedure: "Bears when first born are shapeless masses of white flesh a little larger than mice [...] Their mother then licks them gradually into proper shape."²⁹ Suetonius (*Vita Vergili*) and Donatus (*Vita Donati*) were probably the first to connect the mother bear's practice with art, illuminating the writer's work on a literary text with this simile. In 1537 Sperone Speroni compares the shaping of the cub more generally with the power of "the artifice of reason" as opposed to the formal forces of nature.³⁰ This would identify Titian with the mother bear: The painter's art, his rational ability to lick his own creation into shape, is uniquely more powerful than Nature's. However, Mary D. Garrard points out that an alternative translation of the motto would be "Nature is a more powerful art". This reading provides a better conceptual match with the she-bear simile:

26 Bonifacio 1628, 12 f.

27 A 'Tracte' Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge & Buildinge. Oxford 1598. The iconography of the title-page is analysed by Margery Corbett and Ronald W. Lightbown (1979): *The Comely Frontispiece. The Emblematic Title-Page in England 1550–1660*. London, 67–79.

28 Pardo 1993, 55–89; Suthor 2004, 15–20; Garrard 2004, 241–261.

29 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xv, v; Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, viii, 126.

30 Speroni 1978, 538.

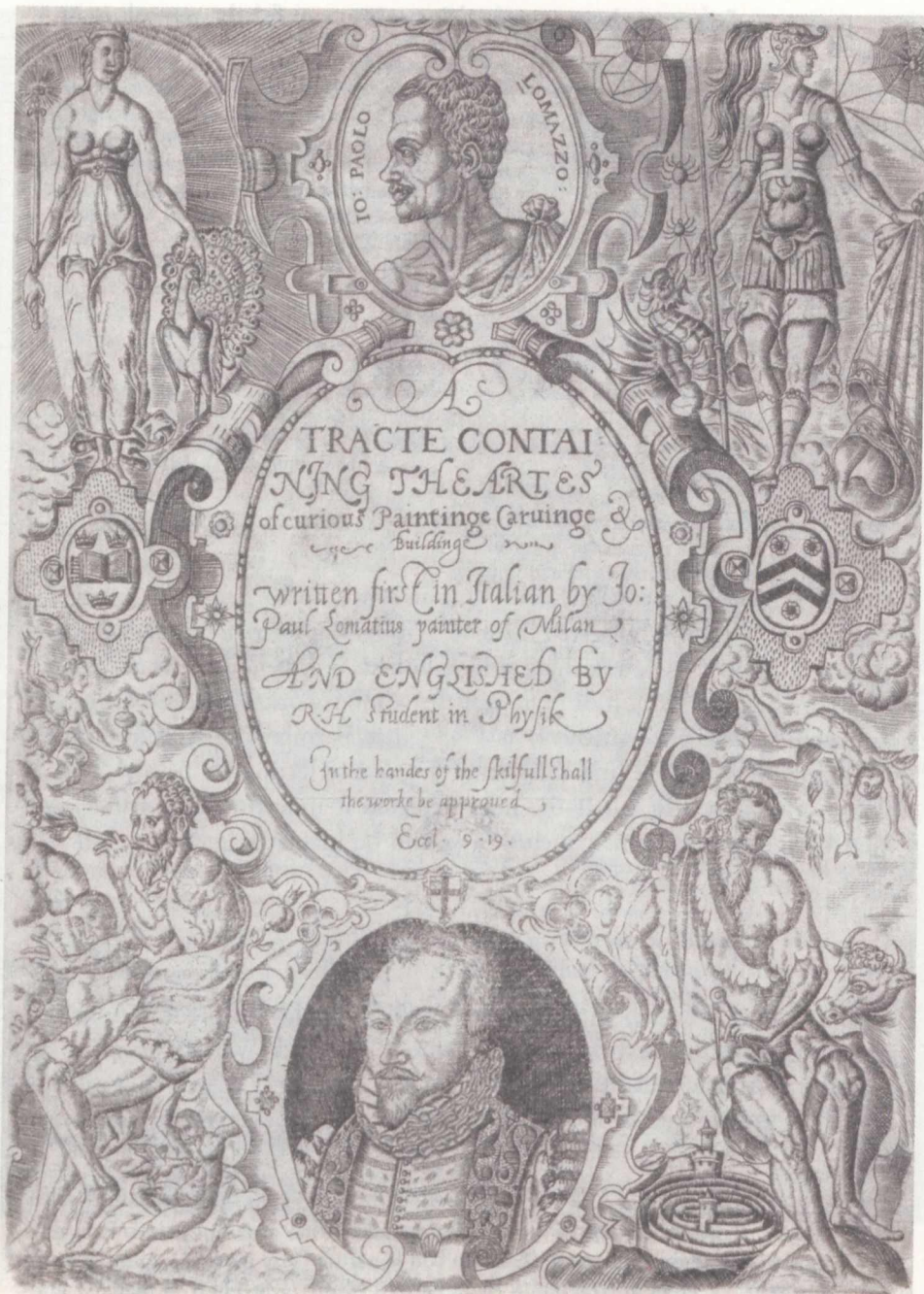


Fig. 4

Titlepage of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo: *A Tracte Containing the Artes of curious Paintinge Carvinge & Buildinge [...]*.

Englised by Richard Haydocke, Oxford 1598.

an creature of nature whose own 'art' is more powerful than any human art.³¹

The accompanying poem under Titian's *impresa*, by his friend Lodovico Dolce, documents a third understanding of the art of painting as transcending the longstanding competition of art with nature altogether, a reading which makes it all the more probable that the motto is intentionally ambiguous.

Learned painters' of diverse eras,
Continuing into our own time,
Designs and images have shown
How art jousts with nature.
Gathered at the glorious peak,
They are deemed heavenly prodigies,
But TITIAN, by the grace of divine fortune,
Has bested art, genius and nature.³²

Since Antiquity parallels have been drawn between the purely biological procreativity of animals and man's intellectual production. In his preface to the *Natural History*, Pliny compares his work to the *fetura*, the litter of an animal, Pliny having given birth to 37 books at once, a number of offspring produced by few animals if any. The idea of the artist's works as his children and the notion of giving birth to an artwork has been common since the mid-15th century. It is likely that Parmigianino's exceptional drawing of a man holding a gestating dog is a reflection of his own artistic productivity (fig. 6). If the man depicted is indeed a self-portrait, as has been suggested, this conclusion would be inescapable.³³

2. The Innocent Eye Test

Mark Tansey, whose paintings almost exclusively play on the traditions of art and art history and test the sophisticated eye of the viewer, points to a similar conclusion in his 1981 *Innocent Eye Test* (fig. 7). Animals—a cow in this case—cannot perceive images, their realm being reality and not

31 Garrard 2004.

32 "Molti in diverse età dotti Pittori/Continuando infino ai tempi nostri/Han dimostro in disegni e bei colori/Quanto con la natura l'arte giostri/E giunti furno al sommo de gli honori/E tenuti fra noi celesti Mostri/Ma TITIAN merce d'alta ventura/Vinto ha l'arte, l'ingegno, e la Natura"; my translation.

33 Ruvoldt 2004 and Pfisterer 2005, 41–72.



Fig. 5

Titian's *impresa* from Battista Pittoni (1568): *Imprese di diversi prencipi*, Venice.



Fig. 6

Parmigianino: *Selfportrait (?) with bitch* (c 1535/40); London: British Museum.

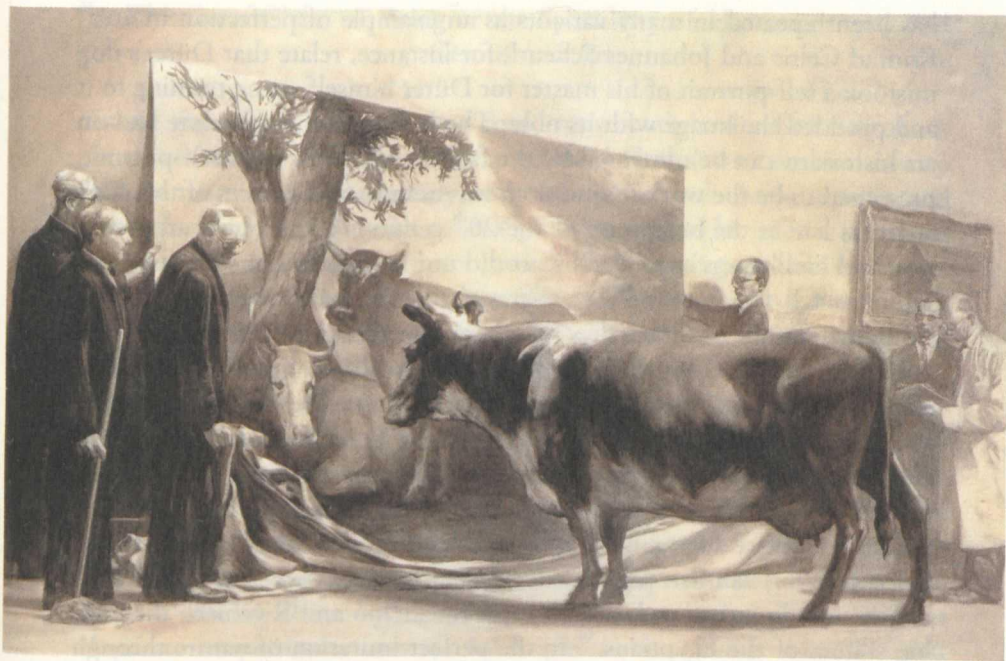


Fig. 7

Mark Tansey: *The Innocent Eye Test* (1981),
New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (after Danto 1992, p. 35).

representation.³⁴ The subtlety and complexity of Tansey's painting is a phenomenon that art historians like Georges Didi-Huberman and James Elkins have called "the object staring back".³⁵ Equally significant is the fact that Tansey's painting is a grisaille, thereby alluding to black-and-white photography as the medium of supposedly 'true' documentation of nature.

Tansey's painting seizes upon a central art-historical theorem from Antiquity into at least the nineteenth century, that the perfection of a work of art can be measured by its mimetic realism and sensory deception—a deception that can be demonstrated particularly well in regard to animals. Thus Plinius, Seneca and Valerius Maximus reported of the grapes painted by the Greek painter Zeuxis that they had been depicted so beguilingly that birds flew to the image and picked at them. This anecdote

34 See Kellein 1990; Wolf 1990, 178–185; Danto 1992a, 16 ff. and 1992b, 15–31; Taylor 1999, 16.

35 Cf. Didi-Huberman 1990; Elkins 1996.

has been repeated in many variants as an example of perfection in art.³⁶ Konrad Celtis and Johannes Scheurl, for instance, relate that Dürer's dog mistook a self-portrait of his master for Dürer himself, came running to it and prodded the image with its nose. The influence this anecdote had on art historians can be measured by the fact that Dürer's 1500 self-portrait, presumed to be the work in question, was examined for traces of the dog's snout as late as the beginning of the 20th century.³⁷ The power of deception and lifelikeness conveyed by art did not remain restricted to animals. Humans fell for it too. Pliny relates the erotic seductiveness radiating from the statues of Praxiteles.³⁸ Perhaps not the production of art but rather the reaction to it, then, is the litmus test showing both the connections and the categorical differences between man and animal.

Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* and Ludovico Ricchieri's encyclopaedic *Lectionum Antiquarum libri XXX*, for example, both widely read 15th-century works, list examples of artistic approximation of reality: Zeuxis' grapes, a dog painted by Apelles and the Knidian Venus of Praxiteles, a flying wooden pigeon constructed by Archytas crossing the borderline to animation and, the ultimate for Ficino and Ricchieri, the talking statues of the Egyptians.³⁹ In the perfect imitation of nature through artistic deception, man shows himself as rivalling nature, even as being in competition with God: "*Hominem esse dei aemulum*."⁴⁰

To be sure, one could draw the opposite conclusion: The sensory organs of animals being more acute than man's, animals respond more viscerally to representations. Thus the peak of artistic skill is reached when animals are fooled. This was the conclusion drawn by Jan Vos in his *Zeege der Schilderkunst* of 1654.⁴¹

36 Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, 35, 65 and Seneca, *Controversiae*, 10, 34, 27. Cf. Bann 1989; also Kliemann 1996, 430–452.

37 Cf. Goldberg/Heimberg/Schawe 1998, 314–353.

38 Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, xxxvi, 20; see Hinz 1989, 135–142; Hersey 2009.

39 Marsilio Ficino (1576): *Opera Omnia*, Basel, vol. 1, fol. 295 f. (*Theologia Platonica* XIII, 3); Ricchieri 1516, fol. 38 (II, 38). On automatons see Bredekamp 1993.

40 Ricchieri 1516, fol. 38. Cf. Alberti 1972, here *De pictura*, §25 and 27. Other authors stress the incommensurability of divine creation, see Dati 1503, fol. III'.

41 Weber 1991, 308, note 17. The superiority of animals' senses is already discussed by Turmeda 1984. Cf. also Bonifacio 1628, 61.

3. The Great Chain of Being or the Specificity of Human Fantasy and Genius and Art

In the great chain of being, man could move both in the direction of animals and in the direction of the angels and God. Man consisted of two components, the animal body and the divine soul (*homo exterior* and *homo interior*), with animals generally understood to be inferior to man—the ‘animal-supremacist’ authors cited in the foregoing sections representing minority positions. At least the Bible leaves no doubt about the fact that man has been created in the image of God possessing an immortal soul and as master of the animal world. Ancient philosophers had debated whether animals possessed rudiments of reason and morality. Important Christian thinkers after Augustine agreed that animals occupied the two lowest levels of spiritual existence (*anima vegetativa* and *sensitiva / spiriti vitali* and *animali*), the third and highest being the sole mark of the human, namely reason and free will. In medieval German literature the perfection and elaboration of this highest spiritual existence was seen as coming about by immersion in the *artes liberales*.⁴² St. Thomas Aquinas in particular was so forthright in expressing this Christian view of animal existence that he was cited by Catholic opponents of Darwinism as late as 1900.⁴³

Thomas looked to the realm of art to demonstrate the rationality of the human intellect: Swallows’ nests and spiders’ webs, he declared, are all alike because animals follow the natural instinct implanted in them by God. Man alone rationally judges the differing forms of habitations and augments and varies the design as needed—a comparison that was frequently cited in later years.⁴⁴ Antonio Turmeda, Giovanni Battista Gelli, Juan Ginés Sepúlveda and Giovanni Bonifacio alluded to it. One could also mention Giannozzo Manetti’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (c. 1452), Marsilio Ficino’s *Platonic Theology* (1482) and Benedetto Varchi’s lecture on the *paragone* of the arts (1547/1549) in which the human *ars rationalis* are contrasted with the *instinctus* or *habitus naturalis* of animals.⁴⁵ Girolamo Cardano calls the elephant and the camel the most in-

42 Schumacher 1999, 376–390. For this view in the Renaissance, cf. Primaudye 1586, 170–179.

43 Sobol 1993, 109–128; Leemans/Klemm 2007, 153–177; cf. Wasmann 1897.

44 St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Libros Physicorum*, lb2 lc13 n5.

45 Manetti 1975, I, 37. Ficino 1576, *Theologia Platonica*, II, 223. Doel 2008. Varchi 1960, vol. 1, 10. Cf. Roggenkamp 1996, 844–860. See also the summary of

telligent animals after man but accepts a categorical difference between man and animal.⁴⁶

This would seem to lead directly to the dawn of modern animal psychology and the first book-length treatment of the subject, Hermann Samuel Reimarus' *Allgemeine Betrachtungen über die Triebe der Thiere, hauptsächlich über ihre Kunsttriebe* (Thoughts on the motives of animals, primarily their artistic motives), published in 1760, whereby the term "artistic motive" had no relation whatever to human art but rather designated the productive natural instincts of animals.⁴⁷ Not until Darwin was the distinction between man and animal, between animal art and human art, seriously challenged.

Early in the 15th century an alternative interpretation came to the fore which ultimately changed the concept of human art. Giovanni Gherardi's *Paradiso degli Alberti* of 1410/1420 is a work in the mode of Boccaccio's *Decamerone* but discusses primarily questions of philosophy and morality. At one point the fictive conversationalists turn to the question of whether some animals possess more "art and genius" than others. At first Gherardi mocks the idea that a firefly might be considered a better painter than Giotto because it is able to 'paint' in the dark. Then he cites the canonical truth that all creatures, like the swallow, follow the same natural instinct when building their nests. Not so mankind, all of whose individually built houses are different. This results from differing art and—this being Gherardi's crucial new addition—from different inborn talent, i. e., "because there is different art and genius in each of them."⁴⁸

'common knowledge' in Primaudaye 1594, chap. 87 "Of those powers and properties, which the soule of man hath common with the soule of beast & of those powers and vertues which are proper and peculiar to it selfe [...]."

46 Cardano 1560, 691, 717 (against the musical sense of a camel); cf. for the idea of 'intelligent' and 'artistically talented' animals Lubin 1998, 157–173 and Fudge 2006, 115–146.

47 Cf. Reimarus 1982. For the larger context of the discussion of instinct, mood and aesthetics in the 18th century see Frey 2008, 391–398.

48 Prato 1975, 236–243, lib. IV, §112–145, §143 paraphrasing Thomas: "Noi sapiamo quanta è la fama di Giotto nell'arte della pittura; diremo noi ch'una lumacal'avanzi nell'arte ché dipinge al buio, e Giotto non saprebbe menare pennello senza lume? [...] Raguardarsi le rondine, le quali senza maestri fanno i loro nidi, e così di molti uccelli, a una forma e a uno modo seguitando la natura loro senza arte o ingegno. La qual cosa non si vede dove sia arte o ingegno, imperò che, prendendo al presente mille uomini e facendo a cciascuno di quelli fare una casa, e che l'uno non sapesse dell'altro, fatte tutte le case, quelle si vedrebbono

Filarete's *Treatise on Architecture* of 1460 at the latest cemented this view. Distinctions in human buildings result from differing imaginations and individually differing talents and styles alone. The *stile di ciascheduno* is recognisable in every work of art as well as in every written text and fundamentally distinguishes the creations of mankind from those of animals and God:

You never see any building, or better: house or habitation, that is totally like another either in structure, form, or beauty. [...] You may say, however, I have seen many habitations that are very much alike, even though they are not noble edifices, as the cottages of poor men, huts, and so forth. I reply to you that they are of such a nature that they will have some similarities, but if you consider carefully you will also understand the great differences. [...] You know well that God could make things totally alike [...] but if man wished to build a hundred houses all in the same mode, he could never make them all alike in every part, even if it were possible for them all to be built by one man alone. [...] But the architect as well as the painter is known by the manner of their products, and in every discipline one is known by his distinct style.⁴⁹

tutte isariate l'una dell'altra; e questo averrebbe ché diversa arte e ingeno si vedrebbe in ciascuno di loro."

- 49 Antonio Averlino, il Filarete (1972): *Trattato di Architettura*, ed. Anna M. Finoli and Liliana Grassi, Milan, vol. 1, 27 f.: "Tu potresti dire: l'uomo, se volesse, potrebbe fare molte case che si asomigliassero tutte in una forma e in una similitudine, in modo che saria proprio l'una come l'altra. Ben sai che Idio potrebbe fare che tutti gli uomini si somigliassero, pure non lo fa; ma l'uomo non potrebbe già fare questo lui, se già Idio non glie le concedesse; ma se [...] uno uomo [...] volesse fare cento o mille case a modo medesimo e ad una somiglianza, non mai farebbe che totalmente fusse l'una come l'altra in tutte le sue parti, se ben possibile fusse che uno tutte le fabbricasse. Qui ci sarebbe da dire alcune cose le quali lascerò a li speculativi. Che se uno tutte le fabbricasse, come colui che scrive o uno che dipinge, fa che le sue lettere si conoscono, e così colui che dipinge, la sua maniera delle figure si cognosce, e così d'ogni facultà si cognosce lo stile di ciascheduno. Ma questa è altra pratica, nonostante: che ognuno pure divaria, o tanto o quanto, benchè si conosca essere fatta per una mano. Ho veduto io dipintore e intagliatore ritrarre teste, e massime dell'antidetto illustrissimo Signore Duca Francesco Sforza, del quale varie teste furono ritratte, perchè era degna e formosa più d'una da ciascheduno, bene l'appropriarono alla sua e assomigliarono, e nientedimeno c'era differenza. E così ho veduto scrittori, nelle loro lettere essere qualche differenza. Donde questa sottilità e proprietà e similitudine si venga, lasceremo alli sopradetti speculativi dichiarare." An English translation is Filarete 1965. See also Tigler 1963, 82–85.

Human and especially artistic powers of fantasy came to be discussed increasingly often after the second third of the 15th century.⁵⁰ Animals played a part here too—as hybrids or as *monstra* serving to prove the inexhaustible procreative power of nature as well as of artistic daring and inventiveness.⁵¹ In particular, comparisons of the creations of man and animals established individual imagination and fantasy as one of the prime distinguishing characteristics of humankind—equalling and even partially outstripping the significance of rational aspects. A further aspect was praise of the hand as endowing man with creative powers unmatched by any animal.⁵²

It took another hundred years for these thoughts to gel into a thoroughgoing theory of human mental powers and gifts. Not until Giovanni Imperiali's *Musaeum Physicum* of 1639 was the special importance of fantasy for the artistic *ingenium* clearly emphasized, along with various forms of talent and their dependence on the universalist intellect and the specialist fantasy.⁵³ Thus it became clear for the first time why great painters

50 Cf. Kemp 1977, 347–398; Pfisterer 2002. Wels 2005, 199–226 sees the concept of fantasy as a product of the 18th century.

51 Gelli 1550, 206, grants animals a form of fantasy à la Horace: “se ben la fantasia vostra, può ancora ella comporre, & dividere come sarebbe far d'un cavallo, & d'un huomo, un Centauro: & fingere l'huomo senza piedi, & senza mani, ella non può dividere la materia, de la forma, ne gl' accidenti da la sustanza; o comporgli insieme come fa l'intelletto nostro. [...] Oltre di questo, non può imaginare mai cosa alcuna: che ella non l'abbia veduta: & se non tutta insieme, almanco le sue parti.” Cf. for the broader context Daston/Park 1998, 1150–1750, Pfisterer 1996, 107–148.

52 See Kemp 2000, 22–27.

53 Imperiali 1639–1640, part II, 30 ff. and 38 (Cap. XI & XII): “Ex his tria colliguntur, quibus natura ingenij aptissime definitur. Primum est, ingenium non esse potentiam animae remotam, sed proximam. Secundum, ingenium esse potentiam animae intellectivae, ac sensitivae, nimirum phantasiae communem. Tertium, non esse potentiam solius animae intellectivae, nec solius phantasiae separatim, sed utriusque simul complicatae, ita tamen ut ex earum nexu resurgat cognitionis facilitas, in qua formalis ingenij ratio constituitur. [...] concurrit ergo ad ingenium phantasia, ut eius materia, ratione huius organicae dispositionis, sed concurrit etiam ut agens, ac efficiens proprium & adaequatum ingenij, quia sicut in intellectus actionibus notatur excellentia quaedam, ob quam ingenij actiones vocantur; ita in actionibus phantasiae, puta in imaginando, talis adnotatur habilitas, ac perfectio, ut eas liceat appellare actiones ab ingenij vigore prodeuntes, quod optime in pictura, statuaria, & machinarum tum bellicarum, tum civilium artificio, alijsque mechanicis deprehendi potest operibus; fiunt enim haec singula a phantasiae virtute, quia sunt particularia, circa quae parum occupatur intellectus, qui sola universalia discursu, & ratione contempla-

or sculptors or musicians are not at the same time necessarily great thinkers or scientists or inventors and vice versa. Discussion of melancholia from Ficino to Robert Burton included the human mind and psyche in the total equation and attributed a special measure of fantasy to the artist, but there does not seem to have been any theory of the artistic gift as subtle as Imperiali's.⁵⁴

It is in any case this idea about the connection of fantasy and genius with art which moved John Gregory, in his very successful 1766 *Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with Those of the Animal World*, to elevate genius and taste to crucial, genuinely human characteristics alongside reason, social principle and religion.⁵⁵ And it is this idea on which Friedrich Schiller based his 1798 poem "*Die Künstler*" (Artists), art appearing as the criterion that separates man even from angels:

Im Fleiß kann dich die Biene meistern
In der Geschicklichkeit ein Wurm dein Lehrer seyn
Dein Wissen theilest du mit vorgezogenen Geistern
Die Kunst, o Mensch, hast du allein.

tur: [...] Caeterum dubitet aliquis an phantasia tanquam efficiens in omni concurrat ingenio: nam multos quidem in intellectivis advertere licet ingeniosissimos, puta vel in Theologia, vel Philosophia, vel Theorica Medicinae, atque Astrologiae, quorum tamen nullam in activis, sive in phantasiae operibus, conspicimus excellentiam, quae cum in harmonia, figura, & proportionem quadam consistant, ut Eloquentia, Musica, Geometria, ars Militaris, Politica, Pictura, Urbanitas, & huiusmodi aliae, nonnullos alioquin perdoctos in scientijs, eis penitus exutos animadvertimus, quos propterea velut abstractos a sensibus, ac eruditos quosdam asinos solemus nuncupare [...] Porro phantasiae objectum est materiale, ac singulare, quo igitur ipsum perfectius cognoscet phantasia, eo magis conditionum materialium eiusdem obiecti species in eadem imprimuntur. Sed sic erit difficilioris abstractionis penes intellectum, qui circa universale obiectum duntaxat occupatur. Experientia praeterea docet, pictores, qui ad vivum hominum imagines expriment, id una praestare phantasiae perfectione nullo fere, vel praecedente, vel subsequente intellectus discursu, quia eiusmodi excellentia solum consistit in unius particularis inspectione, quae intellectus functio non est. Datur ergo phantasiae bonitas absque bonitate intellectus. Hoc idem argumentum videtur militare de practica medicinae, in qua multi excellunt absque magna Theoricae notitia: Item de alijs artibus, ut statuaria, poetica, oratoria, mechanica, in quibus excellens videtur vigere phantasia, absque excellentia intellectus." – Imperiali goes even further than Juan Huartes in his *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* of 1575. – Cf. Boenke 2005; and Fudge 2006.

54 Cf. Klibansky/Panofsky/Saxl 1964; Schleiner 1991; and – very focussed on Ficino – Brann 2001.

55 I quote the seventh edition, London 1777, esp. 84 ff., 130–135.

Harder-working than bees you are not
 And worms can teach you what you ought
 Superior beings have knowledge too
 But art, o man, belongs to you!⁵⁶

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56 My translation.

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