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“Ogni Pittore Dipinge Sé”

Leonardo da Vinci and “Automimesis”¹

Frank Zöllner

You can run,
but you can't hide.

Clint Eastwood

“Ogni pittore dipinge sé”, “Every painter paints himself”, is a Tuscan proverb which can be found for the first time in Italian literature between 1477 and 1479. Similar notions are known from antiquity, particularly from the discussion of personal style in rhetoric.² The proverb, however, does not seem to have existed in the Middle Ages.³

In the 15th century “Every painter paints himself” or “automimesis”, as it has been labeled recently⁴, addresses two basic problems which I shall discuss in the

1 This contribution was delivered as a 25 minute-lecture and I have not tried to modify or disguise the informality of the spoken argument. References and a brief summary of some points of the discussion can be found in the notes.

I would like to thank Georg Kamp, Elisabeth Sladek and Stephan S. Wolohojian for their helpful suggestions.

2 Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, V, 16 (47); Seneca, *Epistolae*, 75, 4; 114; Philo Alexandrinus, *De specialibus legibus* (De monarchia), I, 6, pp. 32–35 (216M), ed. Cohn, Berlin 1906, V, pp. 8–9; cf. also K. Borinski, *Die Antike in Poetik und Kunsttheorie*, 2 vols., Leipzig 1914–1924, I, p. 25; E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, Darmstadt 1958, p. 11; B. Schweitzer, *Der bildende Künstler und der Begriff des Künstlerischen in der Antike* (Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher 25), in: B. Schweitzer, *Zur Kunst der Antike*, 2 vols., Tübingen 1963, I, pp. 11–104, 77.

A revival of the arguments taken from antique rhetoric can be found in Angelo Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, Bale 1553, p. 113 (Epist. VIII).

3 However, in the Middle Ages there existed the similar notion that every agent performs its acts in its own image; cf. for example Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, 43; cf. M. Kemp, Leonardo da Vinci. Science and the Poetic Impulse, *The Royal Society of the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce Journal* 123, 1983, fasc. 5343, pp. 196–213; P. Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher*, Cambridge etc. 1981, pp. 224–229, 256–257; Dante, *Il convivio*, IV, canz. 3.52–53.; for Dante see also J. v. Schlosser, *Die Kunstliteratur*, Vienna 1924, pp. 74–75. Another similar notion, “Natura pazza scaglia pazzi efetti”, can be found in a sonett, attributed to Filippo Brunelleschi; cf. A. Pellizzari, *I trattati attorno le arti figurative*, Rome–Naples etc. [1942], II, p. 130; see also A. Parronchi, *Le “misure dell’occhio” secondo il Ghiberti*, *Paragone (Arte)* 12, 1961, no. 133, pp. 18–48, 47, footnote 28.

4 M. Kemp, “Ogni dipintore dipinge sé”: A Neoplatonic Echo in Leonardo’s Art Theory?, in: *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance. Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. C. H.

following paper, firstly, the changing attitude towards the value of personal expression in artistic creation, and secondly the question of whether "automimesis" has to do with the use of types and stereotypes in 15th century painting.

In art historical writing the proverb "Every painter paints himself" refers to an artist who creates himself involuntarily in his work. At least from the middle of the 16th century onwards this proverb has been understood as a concept of artistic creation with implications that are almost entirely positive. Vasari in the life of Michelangelo⁵ and Baldinucci in the life of Caravaggio⁶ emphasize that artists have their own way and that even eccentric features of an artist's character which can be found in his works of art should be accepted. However, in the 15th century and particularly in the writings of Leonardo da Vinci "Every painter paints himself" had a different and not at all positive meaning.⁷ The notion of "automimesis" was understood by Leonardo as a major defect of contemporary painting and in 15th-century literature the Tuscan proverb meant some inevitable compulsion in the human character. As an example I could quote from a collection of Florentine droll stories, once attributed to Angelo Poliziano and written between 1477 and 1479:

"Cosimo said, that one would rather forget a hundred charities than one insult and that the offender never forgives and that every painter paints himself."⁸

Clough, New York 1976, pp. 311–323. For a neoplatonic understanding of "automimesis" see Marsilio Ficino, *Theologica Platonica* X, 4 (ed. 1576, I, p. 229); A. Chastel, *Art e humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris 1959, pp. 102–105; further aspects are discussed by E. H. Gombrich, *Botticelli's Mythologies. A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8, 1945, pp. 7–60, 60; R. and M. Wittkower, *Born under Saturn*, New York – London 1963, pp. 93–94, 281–283; R. Klein, *La forme et l'intelligible*, Paris 1970, pp. 341–342. D. Rosand, *The Meaning of the Mark: Leonardo and Titian*, *The Franklin D. Murphy Lectures VII*, Kansas City 1988.

5 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. Milanesi, VII (1906), pp. 279–280.

6 Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, ed. Ranalli, III, p. 690.

7 The meaning of "Ogni pittore dipinge sé" between the 15th and the end of the 16th century changed significantly. In the examples quoted below and in other sources, e.g. in a poem by Matteo Franco (cf. L. Pulci/M. Franco, *Il "Libro dei Sonetti"*, ed. G. Dolci, Milan 1933, p. 24), in a comedy by Giovan Maria Cecchi (cf. Giovan Maria Cecchi, *Commedie inedite*, ed. G. Tortoli, Florence 1855, p. 167; Cecchi died in 1587) and Anton Francesco Doni, *La seconda libreria*, Venice 1551, c. 30v, it is simply said that the painter paints himself whereas in a later source we read that the good painter paints himself: "Ogni buon pittore dipinge sé" (cf. Orlando Pescetti, *Proverbi italiani*, Venice 1603, c. 283r).

8 Diceva Cosimo che si dimenticano prima cento benefici che una ingiuria, e chi ingiuria non perdona mai, e che ogni dipintore dipinge sé. Quoted from S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, IV (1966), 512, No. 20; the attribution to Poliziano, doubted by Battaglia, is by A. Wesselski (ed.), *Angelo Polizianos Tagebuch (1477–1479) mit vierhundert Schwänken und*

In this instance the Tuscan proverb elucidates the general human inclination always to remember the bad and to forget the good. Moreover, bad habits are rooted so deeply that the offender by his evil and unchangeable nature is unable to forgive. The one who cannot avoid offending is unable to forgive. This inevitable human weakness is again demonstrated by the proverb that every painter paints himself.

In Italian literature of the 15th and early 16th centuries most references to "automimesis" illustrate the psychological commonplace that there are unchangeable and inevitable compulsions in man. A connection to any particular painting of those days seems not to have been intended and in only one instance a particular painter, Leonardo da Vinci, is accused of "automimesis" (see below). Thus generally the proverb "Every painter paints himself" was not at all personalized and therefore one could infer that in the 15th century "automimesis" was a literary topos which had a different association to the psychology of individual paintings than it had in later centuries. That is, "automimesis" in those days had fewer or different psychological implications than it has today.

In discussing "automimesis" it has been argued that in the 15th century a large number of painters involuntarily depicted themselves in their works. Particularly Fra Filippo Lippi and Sandro Botticelli often repeated their own physiognomy in almost any face on their paintings because they simply could not avoid painting themselves.⁹ Our concept of physiological likeness may be different from corresponding concepts of the Renaissance beholder but the visual evidence seems to confirm that in fact both Filippo Lippi and Sandro Botticelli painted themselves. Filippo in some of his paintings liked to produce square heads and his self-portraits which have been identified in his paintings are of a similar shape. Thus for instance in the "Coronation of the Virgin" (Fig. 1) square heads are common to some figures as well as to a bald-headed individual looking at the beholder from the lower left corner of the painting.¹⁰

Another example is Botticelli who in the "Adoration of the Magi" (Fig. 2) – if we agree with the current reading of this painting – depicted almost half a dozen faces very much like the young man to the right which is believed to be a

Schnurren aus den Tagen Lorenzos des Großmächtigen und seiner Vorfahren, Jena 1929, p. 72, no. 150.

For further references see also S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario [...]*, XIII (1986), p. 590, and above, note 7.

9 Cf. G. F. Hartlaub, *Das Selbstbildnerische in der Kunstgeschichte*, *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft* 9, 1955, pp. 97–124.

10 Cf. J. Ruda, *Filippo Lippi Studies*, New York–London 1982, pp. 100–103; for a different view see M. Carmichael, *Fra Filippo's Portrait*, *Burlington Magazine* 21, 1912, pp. 194–200; for further reference see M. Pittaluga, *Filippo Lippi*, Florence 1949, pp. 27–34; G. Fossi, *Filippo Lippi*, Florence 1989.

self-portrait.¹¹ Thus both Botticelli and Fra Filippo seem to have reproduced their own likeness involuntarily in other persons or figures they depicted.¹²

Taking into account our incomplete knowledge about artist's self-portraiture in Quattrocento painting one could have some doubts whether Fra Filippo and Botticelli really painted themselves physically. At this point I suggest that we should at least ask if "automimesis" involves yet more complex problems of 15th century painting as well. For instance, accusing Fra Filippo of constantly depicting himself is not entirely justified because there is a portrait bust on Filippo's tomb in Spoleto that does not exactly confirm his having had a stout head (Fig. 3). Only the rather large ears are easily recognizable both in Fra Filippo's supposed self-portraits and in the Spoleto monument. However, the bust was done in 1492, 13 years after Fra Filippo's death when square heads might have become unfashionable, and the bust may just be the idealized type of a portrait. Similarly, it has been argued that Botticelli in the Uffizi "Adoration" idealized both his own self-portrait and other faces depicted in this picture¹³, thus leading the 20th-century beholder to believe that the 15th-century painter had painted himself.

Relying only on the visual evidence it is almost impossible to decide whether Fra Filippo involuntarily painted himself or whether he frequently used the type of a square head, or if his esthetic ideal was a square head. At this point one

11 R. Hatfield, *Botticelli's Uffizi "Adoration". A Study in Pictorial Content*, Princeton 1976, pp. 81-83. For further references see R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2 vols., London 1978, II, pp. 35-37, B23.

12 In the discussion of this paper Prof. C. L. Frommel pointed out that Fra Filippo Lippi and Sandro Botticelli might be inadequate examples for the analysis of "automimesis" because it still remains quite unclear if indeed self-portraits can be found in the paintings mentioned above. I agree with Prof. Frommel's view on the uncertainty of self-portraiture in Fra Filippo and Botticelli and with his further suggestion that for "automimesis" one should discuss painters of which we have more reliable self-portraits in their paintings such as Pietro Perugino (Vatican, Sistine Chapel, "Delivery of the Keys", c. 1490), Luca Signorelli (Orvieto, Duomo, "Anti-Christ", c. 1500) or Raffael (Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura, "School of Athens", c. 1509-1511). However, with my choice of examples I tried to get as close as possible to Leonardo's point of view who had left Florence in 1482 and thus could not have known the "better" examples of Signorelli, Perugino and Raffael when he started to write about "automimesis" in 1490.

In considering the problem of self-portraiture of Quattrocento artists one should remember that only with the second edition of Vasari's "Lives" the identification of an individual artist's likeness became as important as it is today and that earlier sources before Vasari only mention three artist's self-portraits: Giotto, Taddeo Gaddi (both Florence, S. Croce) and Orcagna (Florence, Orsanmichele). For this problem see W. Prinz, *Vasari's Sammlung von Künstlerbildnissen*, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 12, 1966, Beiheft; for a more critical view see C. Hope, *Historical Portraits in the "Lives"* and in the Frescoes of Giorgio Vasari, in: *Giorgio Vasari. Tra decorazione ambientale e storiografia artistica* (1981), ed. G. C. Garfagnini, Florence 1985, pp. 321-338; for a general view see E. Castelnuovo, *Il significato del ritratto pittorico nella*

13 Cf. Hatfield (see note 11), pp. 81-83.

should accept that a combination of these explanations is possible and that an idealized understanding of physiognomical likeness existed for 15th-century painters. Therefore the facial features repeatedly occurring in the works of Fra Filippo and Botticelli need not have been accurate or lifelike representations of their master's individual physiognomy. Rather, Fra Filippo's square heads and Botticelli's stereotype faces should remind us of the simple fact that painters used and still use favourite types. These types, of course, could have been automimetical reproductions of their master's features¹⁴ but also they could have been handy workshop patterns or esthetic ideals used for various reasons.

Generally, the use of ideals, patterns and types in painting¹⁵ had to do with the requirements of a commission and, to a varying extent, with a painter's particular skills and with his individual choice. The point I would like to make is that exactly this choice links the use of patterns with "automimesis", or in other words: every painter paints himself also insofar as his own psychology forces his choice of a particular type. For example, Fra Filippo may have chosen a square type because his head was square or because, as Vasari would have put it, he had a square mind.¹⁶ However, Filippo's personal choice of square types may also be the result of his training as a young artist when he had learnt to use this type.

Other examples may clarify this point. It has been said that Leonardo had favourite male types, either the boy with female features – which we will see later – or the old man with a slightly hooked nose (Fig. 4).¹⁷ Following the current theories about "automimesis" it could be argued that one of those types may have resembled Leonardo's physiognomy. Yet for instance this version of the older type, also known from antique coins and used by his teacher Verrocchio, was

14 Cf. Hartlaub (see note 9); E. H. Gombrich, *The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and Art*, in: E. H. G., *The Image and the Eye. Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Oxford 1982, pp. 105–136, 132–133.

15 Cf. J. Meder, *Die Handzeichnung*, Vienna 1919, pp. 194–203; P. Meller, *Two Drawings of the Quattrocento in the Uffizi: A Study in Stylistic Change*, *Master Drawings* 12, 1974, pp. 261–279; C. L. Ragghianti/G. Dalli Regoli, *Disegni dal modello, Firenze 1470–1480*, Pisa 1975; D. Summers, *Figure come fratelli: A Transformation of Symmetrie in Renaissance Painting*, *Art Quarterly* 1, 1977, pp. 59–88; L. Fusco, *The Use of Sculptural Models by Painters in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, *Art Bulletin* 64, 1982, pp. 175–194; E. H. Gombrich, *Ideal and Type in Italian Renaissance Painting*, in: E. H. G., *New Light on Old Masters*, Oxford 1986, pp. 89–124; F. Ames-Lewis, *Modelbook Drawings and the Florentine Quattrocento Artist*, *Art History* 10, 1987, pp. 1–11.

16 Vasari, *Le vite*, ed. Milanese, II, 395, footnote (life of Donatello): In the first edition of the "Lives" he criticizes medieval sculptors for always producing round figures because they had round minds (*spiriti tonidi*).

17 Cf. E. H. Gombrich, *Leonardo's Grottesque Heads*, in: *Leonardo. Saggi e Ricerche*, Rome 1954, pp. 197–219 (reprinted in E. H. G., *The Heritage of Apelles*, Oxford 1976, pp. 57–75).

more likely a manifestation of Leonardo's artistic training than a reflection of his mind.¹⁸

Leonardo's use of types is confirmed by other examples, for instance by the chubby faced child common to the earlier version of the "Virgin of the Rocks" (Fig. 5) and to the Burlington House Cartoon (Fig. 6). Similarly, Leonardo used a particular female type for the "Virgin of the Rocks" for "St Anne" (Fig. 7) and a drawing of the "Leda" (Fig. 8).¹⁹

A painter's choice which can be labeled with the Tuscan proverb "Every painter paints himself" is a phenomenon that we would call personal style.²⁰ However, it was not my purpose to discuss here the notion of personal style nor the roots of Giovanni Morelli's method. Instead I would like to analyse a sermon by Gerolamo Savonarola (1497) where the connection between "automimesis" and the use of types in 15th-century art is confirmed:

"And one says that every painter paints himself. He does not indeed paint himself as man because he produces images of lions, horses, men and women which are not identical with himself, but he paints himself as painter, that is according to his concept (concetto). And although there are different fantasies and figures of the painters who are painting, they are nevertheless all [done] according to his concept."²¹

18 Cf. P. Meller, Physiognomical Theory in Renaissance Heroic Portraits, in: *Studies in Western Art II. The Renaissance and Mannerism. Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art*, Princeton 1963, pp. 53-69.

For a more general discussion of the relationship between artistic training, artistic creation and an artist's mind see E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London - New York 1960, pp. 63-97.

19 No. 12516 at The Royal Library, Windsor Castle. For other kinds of types, such as reversal of composition, see K. H. Veltman, *Studies on Leonardo da Vinci I. Linear Perspective and the Visual Dimensions of Science and Art*, Munich 1986, pp. 350-354.

20 A serious discussion of "style" in the fine arts seems not to have started before the 16th century (cf. W. Sauerländer, From stilus to Style. Reflections on the Fate of a Notion, *Art History* 6, 1983, pp. 253-270). However, Filarete in the middle of the 15th c. was the first artist to use the word "lo stile" for a phenomenon we would call "style" today (Antonio Averlino Detto Il Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, book I, ed. Finoli/Grassi, I, pp. 27-28), and already Cennini must have meant a similar thing when he advised the artist to stay with "una maniera propria per te" (Cennino Cennini, *Libro dell'arte*, chap. 27). On the other hand, the "maniera" had something to do with the "propria-manu-stipulation" in artist's contracts obliging the artist to finish a particular commission with his own hands and in particular not to leave difficult parts to either pupils or to less skilled artists (cf. H. Glasser, *Artist's Contracts of the Early Renaissance*, Ann Arbor [1968], pp. 73-78). Furthermore, it can be assumed that personal style as a positive notion of individual creation was not common among Florentine artists of the first half of the 15th century (cf. M. Warnke, Praxisfelder der Kunsttheorie, *Idea* 1, 1982, pp. 54-71). Only in literature and poetry the discussion of style was a fairly common phenomenon.

21 E' si dice che ogni dipintore dipinge se medesimo. Non dipinge già sè in quanto uomo, perchè fa delle immagine di leoni, cavalli, uomini e donne che non sono sè, ma dipinge sè in quanto dipintore, idest secondo il suo concetto; e benchè siano diverse fantasie e figure de' dipintori che

Savonarola emphasizes that a painter does not paint himself physically but produces figures and fantasies according to his own personal "conchetto". In this context the words "figure" and "fantasie" characterize the varied things in a painting whereas "conchetto" refers to an unvariable phenomenon, to some innate quality of a painter's choice that never or at least hardly ever changes. The innate quality described by the word "conchetto" must have been a compulsion because "conchetto" indicates a feature in painting that an artist cannot avoid producing. At this point we should remember that in Renaissance poetry the proverb "Every painter paints himself" characterized something by all means inevitable and unchangeable in the human character. Thus the 15th-century beholder like Savonarola links two different levels of his experience: the inevitable features of the human character expressed in the proverb "Every painter paints himself" and the widespread, seemingly inevitable habit of contemporary painters to use types, patterns and ideals.

This connection between "automimesis" and the habit of 15th-century painter's to repeat particular types has been discussed also by Leonardo da Vinci.²² Moreover, in Leonardo's writings the psychological background of the Tuscan proverb that every painter paints himself becomes more urgent. Indeed, Leonardo stigmatizes "automimesis" as the worst fault of 15th-century artists and he seems to have had an almost neurotic fear of its evil impact on contemporary painting.

Leonardo's opinion about "automimesis" may be summarized briefly: "It is a common defect of Italian painters that one recognizes the expression and figure of the artist throughout the many figures painted by him."²³ "This happens because it is our judgement which guides the hand in the creation of the outlines of figures until they prove satisfactory." Judgement, according to Leonardo, is part of our soul which rules both the formation and the movements of our body.²⁴

dipingono, tamen sono tutte secondo il conchetto suo. Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, ed. Ridolfi, 2 vols., Rome 1955, I, pp. 337-352, 343 (Predica XXVI; in the edition of Venice 1517, fol. 71v). For Savonarola's attitude towards the fine arts see J. Schnitzer, *Savonarola. Ein Kulturbild aus der Zeit der Renaissance*, 2 vols., Munich 1928, II, pp. 801-847.

22 Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, ed. Ludwig, § 108 (ed. McMahon no. 86); see also L. M. Batkin, *Leonardo da Vinci*, Rome-Bari 1988, pp. 103-110.

23 Comune diffetto è ne' dipintori ittalici il ricognossersi l'aria e figura del hoperatore mediante le molte figure da lui depinte. Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 186 (translation after ed. McMahon, no. 273).

24 Questo accade, che il giudicio nostro è quello, che moue la mano alle creationi de lineamenti d'esse figure per diuersi aspetti, in sino à tanto ch'esso si satisfaccia. e perche esso giudicio è una delle potentie de l'anima noutra, con quale essa compose la forma del corpo, dou'essa abita, secondo il suo uolere, onde, hauendo co'le mani à rifare un corpo humano, uolontieri rifa quel corpo, di ch'essa fu prima inuentrice. Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 499 (ed. McMahon no. 437).

I have omitted here Leonardo's theory of love which is closely related to his criticism of "automimesis". Leonardo argues (§§ 105, 108, 109, 137 and 499 of Ludwig's edition) that "automimesis" follows the same mechanism as the process of falling in love since a lover always

Because of its link to the soul "this judgement is so powerful that it moves the painter's arm and makes him copy himself, since it seems to that soul that this is the true way to construct a man, and whoever does not do so, commits an error."²⁵ Furthermore, the painter's arm can be moved almost directly by the soul because the soul transmits its impulses by means of various bearers of transmission, such as the Common Sense, tendons, muscles, nerves and joints of the bones: "The joint of the bones obeys the nerve, and the nerve the muscle, and the muscle the tendon and the tendon the Common Sense. And the Common Sense is the seat of the soul [...]."²⁶

The physiological explanation of automimesis is easier to comprehend if one considers Leonardo's understanding of the intimate relationship between body and soul. The soul governs the body and determines its physical shape because the soul existed before the body.²⁷

Since the inevitable impact of the governing soul on every kind of physical action, painting included, was the underlying cause of "automimesis", Leonardo had to adjust this very impact of the governing soul. He saw the possibility of doing so because the soul resides within two other mental faculties, judgement and the Common Sense which are both open to adjustments for the following reason: Judgement is only in the beginning of man's life under the spell of the pre-existing soul.²⁸ It resides in the Common Sense where all the senses meet²⁹ and where it therefore receives sensations from the outer world. These sensations

develops an appetite for a being very similar to himself or herself. This notion, as far as I am aware, derives from Dante's (Purg. XXIV, 52-60) discussion of scholastic and aristotelian ideas about the relationship between a lover and his beloved: Love is the principle of every "appetitus" but it is only brought into being by "similitudo" between lover and beloved (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.* 1.2.26.1-4.; K. Voszler, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen zum "süßen neuen Stil"*, Heidelberg 1904; Schlosser, see note 3, pp. 71-72). Originally, this argument had a theological background but in connection with "automimesis" it seems to have become a common place. See for example Doni, *Seconda libreria*, c. 30v: "E si suol dire che ogni pittor dipinge sé, & che ogni simile apetisce il suo simile [...]." Starting from this point, Leonardo argues that love or hate require a profound knowledge of the things loved or hated (Cod. Atl., fol. 226v-b); cf. J. P. Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2 vols., London-New York 1970, §§ 1172, 1202. For similar notions see the *Trattato* (ed. Ludwig, § 77) and C. Pedretti, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci. Commentary*, 2 vols., Oxford 1977, II, pp. 242-243.

- 25 [...] è di tanta potentia questo tal giuditio, ch'egli moue le braccia al pittore e fa gli replicare se medesimo, parendo à essa anima, che quella sia il uero modo di figurare l' homo, e chi non fa come lei, faccia errore. Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 108 (ed. McMahon no. 86).
- 26 la giuntura delli ossi obbedisce al neruo, e 'l neruo al muscolo e 'l muscolo alla corda, e la corda al senso comune, e 'l senso comune è sedia dell'anima [...]. Leonardo, W. 19019r, quoted after Richter (see note 24), § 38.
- 27 Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 108 (ed. McMahon no. 86); W. 19115r (Richter, see note 24, § 837); for the physiological arguments see M. Kemp, "Il concetto dell'anima" in Leonardo's Early Skull Studies, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34, 1971, pp. 115-134.
- 28 Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 108 (ed. McMahon no. 86).
- 29 Codex Atlanticus, fol. 90r; W. 19019r (Richter, see note 24, §§ 836, 838).

are transmitted through the senses and they establish experience. Experience is "the common mother of all the sciences and arts" and has as its daughters sound rules. Furthermore, sound rules based on experience grant a "free and sound understanding" and this sound understanding grants a good judgement.³⁰ Thus in the beginning judgement is entirely determined by the soul but it can be trained and manipulated by rules deduced from experience. Therefore "automimesis", dependent on both the soul and on judgement, can be avoided by acquiring experience, that is, by the study of nature. In other words: the study of nature adjusts the personal shortcomings of the soul's judgement and thus helps the scientifically trained artist to avoid automimesis.³¹

The issue of sound judgement and sound experience, achieved by the study of nature, holds the most important place in Leonardo's art theory. He argues, that nothing can be worse than a work of art's being superior to judgement. Judgement is the absolutely indispensable guideline for the artist and therefore judgement has to be superior to the work of art itself.³² Consequently, the artist withdraws his personality from the process of artistic creation in order to achieve a judgement independent from personal feelings. He should thus be able to obtain objective criteria for his art.

Leonardo's extremely hostile rejection of "automimesis" and its physiological determination of artistic creation suggests that for him there was more at stake than just the scientific foundation of the fine arts. His almost neurotic attitude towards automimesis may tempt us to assume that Leonardo for personal as well as psychological reasons tried to avoid self-expression. And indeed, his psychological profile supports such an interpretation since Leonardo in his own writings praises solitude and self-control.³³ This, of course, is a point close to 20th-century psychology and therefore arguable. However, in light of the more general point that Leonardo – for whatever reason – tried to avoid "automimesis" or self-expression, I would like to discuss some of his paintings in more detail.

The "Adoration of the Magi" (Fig. 9), begun in 1481 and left unfinished in 1482, has always been regarded as a revolutionary treatment of this subject. Nevertheless, it is in conflict with Leonardo's precepts for narrative painting developed about 10 years later. In his art theory, as we have seen, Leonardo criticizes the repetition of types but in the "Adoration of the Magi" the use of two different types can clearly be distinguished. One is the old man with a beard,

30 Codex Atlanticus, fol. 221v–d (Richter, see note 24, § 18).

31 See also C. Luporini, *La mente di Leonardo*, Florence 1953, pp. 133–134; Kemp (see note 4); Batkin (see note 22), pp. 103–110.

32 Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 406 (ed. McMahon no. 439).

33 Leonardo, *Trattato*, ed. Ludwig § 50 (ed. McMahon no. 74; Richter (see note 24), § 494; Ash, fol. 27v); Institut de France, Ms. H. III, fol. 119r.

strong eyebrows, a sharp nose, high cheek-bones and deeply embedded eyes. This elderly type forms a group of four around Mary, two of them being Magi, the one behind the Virgin probably Joseph. The other type, occurring more prominently in the middle of the picture around the tree, is a male youth with a face of female features.

More than ten years later, in the "Last Supper" (Fig. 10), Leonardo seems to have made a stronger effort to avoid stereotypes and to achieve the variety propagated in his art theory. Leonardo's effort, confirmed by reports of his slow and diligent working procedure³⁴, becomes evident in the picture itself. The extraordinary movements of hands and arms, or as Kenneth Clark puts it, the "abundance and variety of gesture", is almost excessive or at least irritating because it tells of the enormous amount of slow, unspontaneous labour involved in its creation.³⁵ This almost frozen variety of gesture makes clear that variety was achieved by a strong effort.

Because of the bad condition of the fresco the variety of faces has almost disappeared and is therefore much more difficult to judge. However, a few preparatory drawings associated with the "Last Supper" have come down to us. There is for example a study from around 1495, probably a first idea for St Peter (Fig. 11), that reminds us of the elderly type from the "Adoration of the Magi". Similarly, a preparatory drawing for St Philip (Fig. 12) shows a boy of almost female features who resembles the young types of the Adoration. Considering these few examples one is tempted to argue that there may be less variety in the expression of faces than we are taught to perceive.

For the 20th-century beholder the "Last Supper" constitutes a supreme example of variety in narrative painting and it is therefore hardly conceivable that Leonardo in this instance repeated his favourite types. However, variety need not have excluded stereotypes and stereotypes need not exclude variety. It all depends on our understanding of variety and individual likeness. But the one thing we can perceive in the "Last Supper" is Leonardo's extraordinary striving for variety even if we cannot be certain of how much of this variety he finally achieved.

Between January 1497 and March 1499, when Leonardo stopped working on the "Last Supper", at least one person expressed serious doubts as to whether Leonardo achieved any variety at all. This person, Gaspare Visconti, a poet at the Milanese Court, wrote a sonnet that has as its target Leonardo da Vinci, accusing him of "automimesis":

³⁴ Cf. Matteo Bandello, *Le novelle*, parte 1, nov. 58, ed. Brognoligo, II (1928), pp. 283-288.

³⁵ K. Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci*, Cambridge 1939, p. 100.

“Formerly there was a painter
who could draw nothing but a cypress tree,
According to what Horace tells us
where he teaches us to understand poetry.

There is one nowadays who has so fixed
in his conception the image of himself
that when he wishes to paint someone else
he often paints not the subject but himself.

And not only his face, which is beautifully fair
according to himself, but in his supreme art
he forms with his brush his manners and his customs.

[...] ³⁶

Visconti's relationships to artists like Bramante³⁷ suggest that he had some understanding of the fine arts, however, his polemical accusation should not be taken only at face value. This kind of mockery, particularly if linked both with a contemporary proverb and antique rhetoric, represented most probably a rather exaggerated point of literary criticism. Nevertheless, Visconti's polemic against Leonardo is very much to the heart of the problems discussed above. If we agree upon the main point that "automimesis" refers to something inevitable in painting, including both an artists's reproduction of his own likeness and his use of types, then Visconti's negative account of Leonardo's artistic achievements makes more sense. Moreover, Visconti's reference to Horace's "Ars poetica" gives

36 Un depentor fu già che non sapea
desegnare altra cosa che un cupresso,
per quel che Orazio nei suoi versi ha messo
dove insegnar poetica intendea.

Un n'hanno questi tempi che in la idea
tien ferma si la effigie di se stesso,
che'altrui pinger volendo, accade spesso
che non colui ma se medesimo crea.

E non solo il suo volto, ch'è pur bello
secondo lui, ma in l'arte sua suprema
gli acti e' suoi modi forma col penello.

[...]

Gasparo Visconti, *I canzonieri per Beatrice d'Este e per Bianca Maria Sforza*, ed. P. Bongrani, Milan 1979, CLXVIII, pp. 117-118.

The date of this sonnet can be established by the following facts: Beatrice d'Este died in January 1497, Visconti in March 1499, and since the sonnet is part of the "Canzoniere" not for Beatrice d'Este but for Bianca Maria Sforza, it must have been composed between January 1497 and March 1499; cf. R. Renier, Gaspare Visconti, *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 13, 1886, pp. 509-562, 777-824. The first nine lines of the translation are taken from Kemp (see note 3).

37 Cf. Renier (see note 36), pp. 806-808.

another important clue to the kind of criticism intended. Horace argues that it may be quite easy to draw a cypress tree, however, he goes on to ask, how much more difficult it would be to paint "a sailor swimming from his wrecked vessel in despair".³⁸

With this reference to Horace Visconti's mockery aims at the problem of a painter who is asked to paint situations not easily accessible, like a wrecked vessel on the open sea, or unfamiliar emotions like the panic of a drowning sailor.³⁹ If Visconti's criticism was indeed pointed at Leonardo's "Last Supper" than it translates something like this: "Leonardo, you tried hard to achieve variation and to avoid expressing yourself, but in vain, it is still you that I perceive in your painting, your way to paint will always be recognized."

We cannot tell if Visconti was right or not because the "Last Supper" is a ruin. However, one major point of his mockery could be accepted if we consider that Leonardo tried to achieve more variety and that he tried to avoid automimesis in a painting like the Last Supper. This point is the following: Visconti may well have had first hand evidence of Leonardo's strong efforts to avoid expressing himself and to achieve as much variety as possible, and he may well have had at least some reason to criticize Leonardo for not fully having achieved his aims.

A last picture, Rubens's version of Leonardo's "Battle of Anghiari" (Fig. 13)⁴⁰, may help to illustrate this point. The central motive is the fight for the

38 Horace, *Ars poetica*, I, 31.

39 In fact, to paint the "Last supper" requires to paint emotions not easily accessible and therefore Visconti's mockery has almost certainly as its target Leonardo's "Last Supper" in Milan. In the discussion Prof. M. Winner pointed out that Leonardo's striving for variety and his attempts to reveal emotions by depicting adequate movements in his paintings derives ultimately from Leon Battista Alberti, *Della pittura libri tre* (ed. Janitschek, pp. 112, 120, 126). There are, in fact, in Leonardo's *Trattato* (ed. Ludwig §§ 113, 115, 376) some parallels to Alberti's precepts for painters.

40 Cf. J. S. Held, *Rubens. Selected Drawings*, 2 vols, London 1959, I, pp. 157-159 (cat. no. 161; in the 2nd edition 1986, cat. no. 49, pp. 85-88); for further references see P. Joannides, Leonardo da Vinci, Peter-Paul Rubens, Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret and the "Fight for the Standard", *Achademia Leonardi Vinci, Journal of Leonardo Studies & Bibliography of Vinciana* 1, 1988, pp. 76-86; for a correct view on the Bergeret drawing see M. Lessing, *Die Anghiari-Schlacht des Leonardo da Vinci*, Quakenbrück 1935, pp. 30-31.

In the discussion Prof. J. Müller Hofstede pointed out that this drawing is not by Rubens but by an unknown sixteenth century artist. Rubens only restored and reworked the drawing (cf. J. Müller Hofstede, An Early Rubens Conversion of St. Paul. The Beginning of his Preoccupation with Leonardo's Battle Anghiari, *Burlington Magazine* 106, 1964, pp. 95-106, 98-102; A.-M. Logan, Rubens Exhibitions 1977-1978, *Master Drawings* 15, 1977, pp. 403-417, 408-409, and *Master Drawings* 16, 1978, pp. 419-450, 433).

The fact that the drawing is by an artist of the sixteenth century confirms my point that the faces of the warriors, reworked by Rubens, derive from Leonardo's favourite type of an old man. However, what I had labeled as Rubens's supreme understanding of Leonardo should now more correctly be credited to the accuracy of the anonymous 16th-century draftsman who actually did

banner, held by the horse-man on the left, defended by the one in the middle and under attack by the helmeted warrior to the right. Owing to the subject of this fight the battle is not really one warrior against another. The fierce expression of the slightly oversized faces of the fighters is more leonardesque than rubenesque, and in fact these faces are close to Leonardo's old warrior with the hooked nose which he so often favoured during his career. I wonder if this type, lurking from Rubens's version of the "Battle for the Standard", illustrates Leonardo's own battle against his use of types and against expressing himself. Just as in the gesture of the "Last Supper", there is almost excessive variety and movement but in the facial expression we recognize the old type of 30 years earlier (Fig. 4). The variety and movement of the figures, achieved by the scientific study of nature, fights against Leonardo's favourite type of an old man. Perhaps we can trust Rubens's understanding of Leonardo and may be Visconti was right: despite all this variety and movement, Leonardo did not altogether avoid "automimesis", Leonardo did not avoid expressing himself. But, and I may finish with this question, is there a more impressive way to express oneself than the desperate attempt not to do so?



Fig. 1. Filippo Lippi, Coronation of the Virgin, Florence, Uffizi



Fig. 2. Sandro Botticelli, Adoration of the Magi, Florence, Uffizi



Fig. 3. Anonymous artist, Bust of Filippo Lippi, Spoleto, Duomo



Fig. 4. Leonardo da Vinci, Old Warrior, London, British Museum, 1895-9-15-471



Fig. 5. Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, Paris, Louvre



Fig. 6. Leonardo da Vinci, Burlington House Cartoon, London, National Gallery



Fig. 7. Leonardo da Vincit St Anne, Paris, Louvre



Fig. 8. Leonardo da Vinci, Drawing for "Leda", Windsor Castle, 12516



Fig. 9. Leonardo da Vinci, Adoration of the Magi, Florence, Uffizi

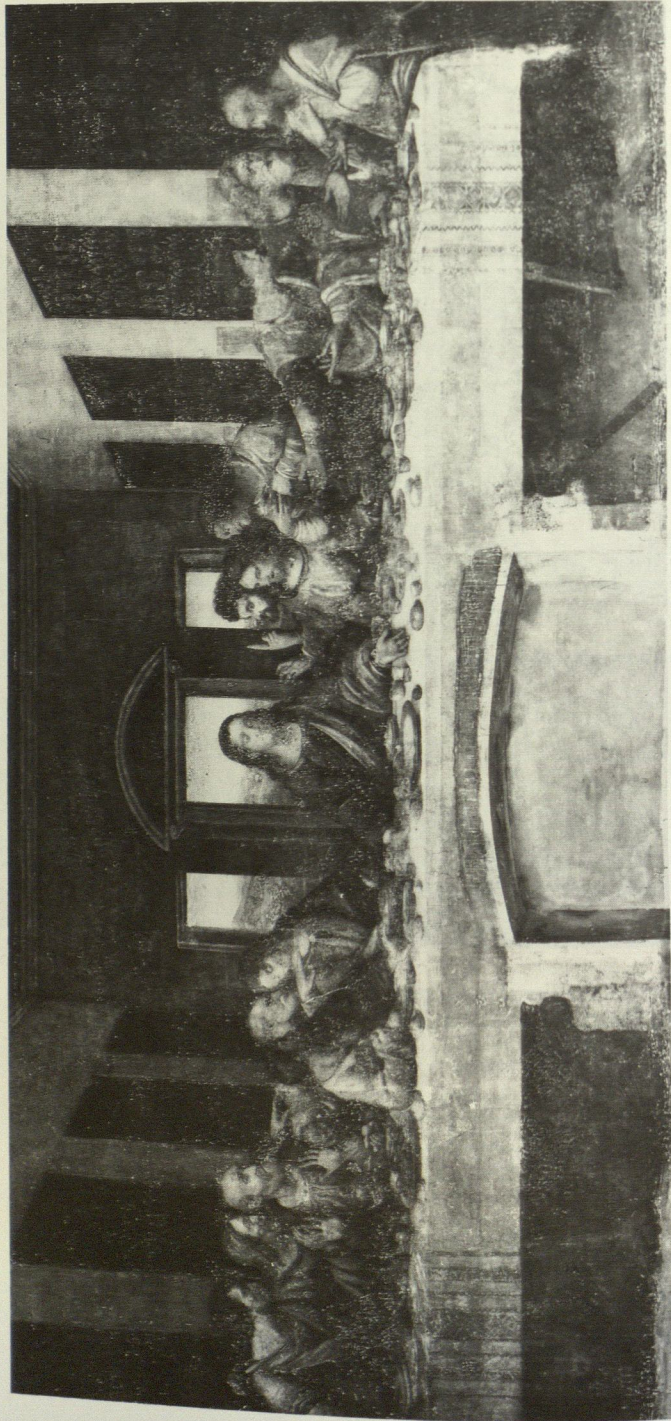


Fig. 10. Leonardo da Vinci, Last Supper, Milan, S. Maria della Grazie



*Fig. 11. Leonardo da Vinci,
Drawing for St Peter, Vienna,
Albertina*



*Fig. 12. Leonardo da Vinci,
Drawing for St Philip,
Windsor Castle, 12551*



Fig. 13. Anon. Artist/Rubens, Battle of Anghiari, Paris, Louvre