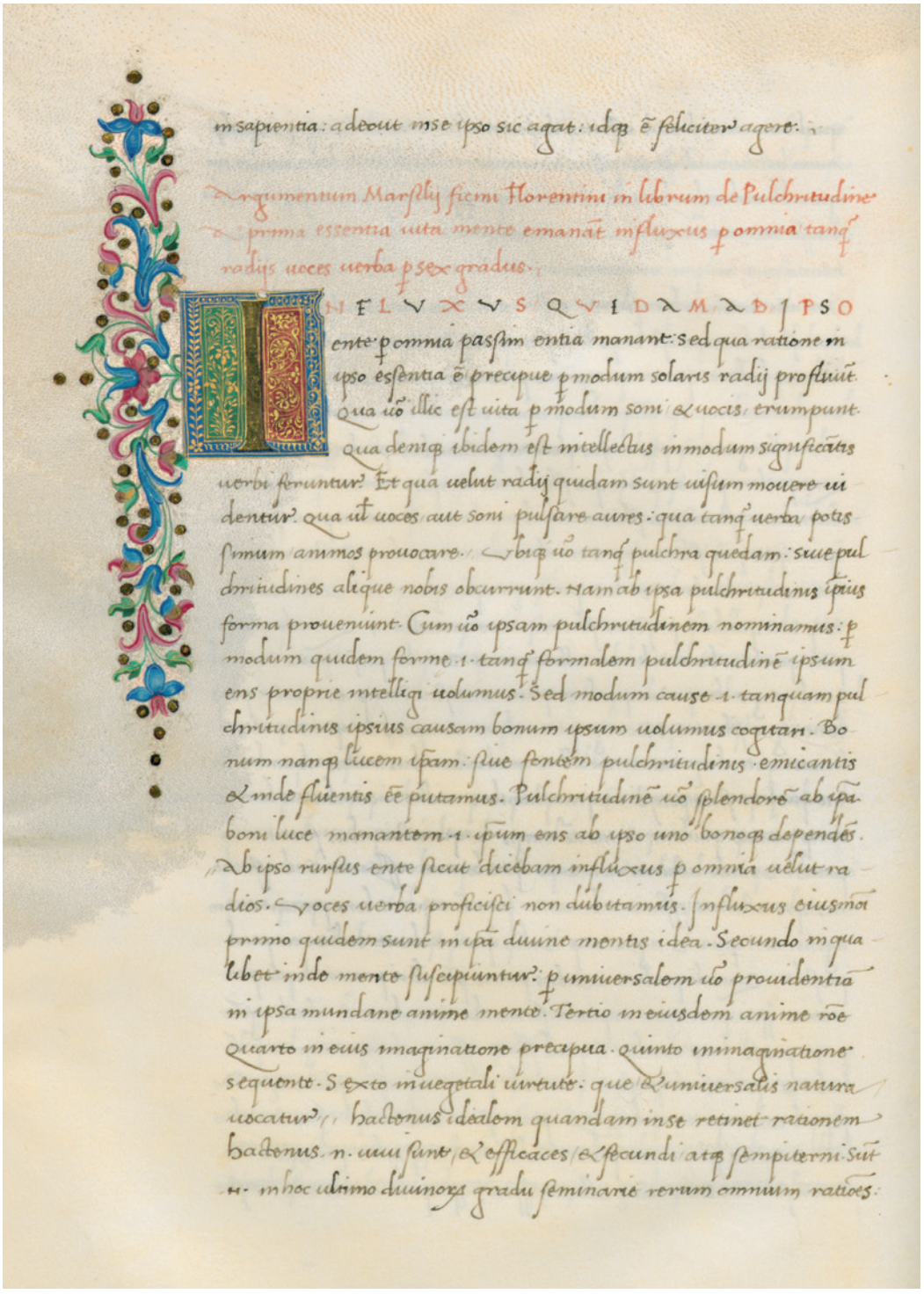

1 Marsilio Ficino, *Argumentum in librum de pulchritudine* (= Plotinus, *Ennead* I, 6), title page. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Laur. Plut. 82.10, fol. 79v

"MY FRIEND FICINO" ART HISTORY AND NEOPLATONISM: FROM INTELLECTUAL TO MATERIAL BEAUTY

Stéphane Toussaint

For Philippe Morel

"My Friend Ficino": Panofsky, Chastel and Kristeller

> I quite agree that your friend Petrarch is, as always, the prime mover in this development [of perspective], and one of the most significant cases of perspective in a metaphorical sense is my friend Ficino, so acutely conscious of what separates his own period from Classical Antiquity, yet attempting to coordinate everything he knows, from Zarathustra and Orpheus to the medieval scholastics, into one unified image, the "vanishing point" of which is determined by what he thought was Plato.[1]

This telling excerpt is taken from Erwin Panofsky's letter to the historian of Italian humanism Theodor Mommsen, dated 2 July 1953. It shows, beyond the parallelism found between Petrarca (Mommsen's "friend") and Ficino (Panofsky's "friend"), how Ficino was understood by possibly the most philosophical mind among the art historians of his time. As it appears, Panofsky transfered the philosophical figure of Ficino into the field of Renaissance perspective. For him Ficino had been "in a metaphorical sense" a 'perspectivist' on his own: he was a humanist able to distantiate himself from the past, Classical Antiquity, and also, in the historical distance he had so created, a thinker capable of reorganizing a new space of reflection around a "vanishing point", that is, Plato and Platonism newly interpreted. Ficino brought forth the evidence that what we call Renaissance humanism was a mental rather than chronological event.[2] This is why a comparison was made possible between time per-

[1] Erwin Panofsky, *Korrespondenz 1910 bis 1968*, ed. by Dieter Wuttke, Wiesbaden 2001–2014, III, pp. 459f.

[2] According to Panofsky's statement: "The intervening period [Renaissance] had changed the mind of men […]" (Erwin Panofsky, *Studies*

ception and space perception, and between Ficinian thought and Renaissance art.

Panofsky's 'friendship' with Ficino was not ultimately motivated by his insatiable quest for sources and for iconological programs; it was legitimated, on a much deeper level, by a striking analogy in mid-Quattrocento Florence between the artistic mind and the philosophical mind. Much of the controversy about Neoplatonism in the fine arts derives, firstly, from the oblivion of this deeper layer of Panofsky's thesis, and, secondly, from antagonistic views about Ficino's thought and impact.[3] While historians of Renaissance philosophy have, usually, little doubt about the cultural influence of Ficino, such is not, or no more, the *doxa* among many historians of Renaissance art. The contemporary reaction against a much-abused iconological model, frequently associated with Panofsky, Ernst Gombrich, and Edgar Wind, would not be an unhealthy one if only the fertile dialogue between philosophy and art history, consequently, had not been well-nigh interrupted. Here we enter a somewhat complex historiographical topic which requires some initial warnings and *mise en garde*.

The relationship between art historians and the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino has been, and continues to be, biased by misunderstandings and this is so, paradoxically, for quite understandable reasons. Ficino was not an art theorician *stricto sensu*. Hence he left nothing comparable to Alberti's, Zuccari's, or Lomazzo's treatises. His philosophy was not meant primarily for artists, and the ideal of Plotinian beauty it conveyed outshone other more material concerns with its radiance. As a matter of fact, the otherworldliness of Ficino was long an ordinary assumption during the twentieth century. Even so, for the reason that many Ficinian texts (known by a few specialists) do not convey abstractness when properly interpreted, this kind of assumption has become increasingly untenable in the twenty-first century.

Panofsky, who is currently associated with the Neoplatonic hypothesis, saw the diffracted influence of Ficino in the artistic environment of the Renaissance in terms of the metaliteral diffusion of his Platonism and Plotinism as a "vanishing point". As one could expect from a keen scholar of perspective, Panofsky expressed through a geometric metaphor his intimation that Ficino was himself a fleeting figure, more like a central spot in the distance of Renaissance art than an actor in the forefront of the picture. For instance, it was Panofsky's old conviction in *Idea* (1924) that Alberti's naturalism could have well hampered the penetration of Ficinian idealism into the artistic milieu.[4] That said, Panofsky's observation, thirty years later, that the conflation between Alberti and Ficino, impossible in Quattrocento Italy, was made possible in Northern Europe should be remembered.[5]

On the contrary, in his book *Marsile Ficin et l'art* André Chastel neither nurtured doubts about the compatibility of Alberti's program with Ficino's Neoplatonism[6] nor about the importance of art in Ficino's

in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance, New York 1972, p. 30).

[3] See for instance Francis Ames-Lewis, "Neoplatonism and the Visual Arts at the Time of Marsilio Ficino", in: *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. by Michael J. B. Allen/Valery Rees/Martin Davis, Leiden 2002, pp. 327–338.

[4] See on this Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Leipzig *et al.* 1924, p. 28; Michael Jäger, *Die Theorie des Schönen in der italienischen Renaissance*, Cologne 1990, pp. 44-47 (Alberti), 48-53 (Ficino); Pierre Caye, "Alberti et Ficin: de la question métaphysique de l'art", in: *Marsile Ficin: les platonismes à la Renaissance*, ed. by Pierre Magnard, Paris 2001, pp. 125–138; Stéphane Toussaint, "L'*ars* de Marsile Ficin entre esthétique et magie", in: *L'art de la Renaissance entre science et magie*, conference proceedings Paris 2002, ed. by Philippe Morel, Paris 2006, pp. 453–467. For further discussion of Panofsky's *Idea* see Maurizio Ghelardi, "Recondite armonie: *Idea* di Erwin Panofsky", in: Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: contributo alla storia dell'estetica*, Florence 1998, pp. VII–XXIV: XVIIIf.; John Michael Krois, "Nachwort: Neuplatonismus und Symboltheorie bei Cassirer und Panofsky", in: Ernst Cassirer, *Eidos und Eidolon* & Erwin Panofsky, *Idea*, ed. by John Michael Krois, Hamburg 2008, pp. 302–315.

[5] Panofsky (note 1), p. 387, letter to Theodor E. Mommsen, 6 April 1953: "[…] the northerners received Ficino's Neoplatonism simultaneously with Albertian rationalism and synthesized the two ideas without delay […]."

[6] André Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, Geneva ^{3}1996 (^{1}1954), pp. 36,

prose and philosophy. All through his analysis Chastel inverted the Panofskyan picture: for him, art tended to be the vanishing point in Ficino's Platonism; a thesis frankly rejected by the major Ficinian scholar of the twentieth century, Paul Oskar Kristeller. In Kristeller's opinion the focus of Ficino's contemplative philosophy was essentially metaphysical and not artistical. Thus, two general trends of interpretation were, and still are, latently in conflict, concerning not only Alberti and Ficino but, ultimately, the possibility of transgressing the limits of what critics deemed expedient to define Ficinian Neoplatonism: metaphysical and idealistic.

Incontrovertibly, when one looks into the artistic features of Ficino's highly visual mind,[7] his Neoplatonic philosophy is fraught with symbols and images, while his thinking is focused on mythological and emblematical metaphors. On the one hand, a prose packed with eminently aesthetical qualities, as is Ficino's *De amore* or *De vita* for instance, is also to be characterized in itself as a work of art, regardless of any immediate contact with the surrounding artistic world of his time; on the other hand, there is no doubt that the *De amore* and the *De vita* exerted an influence on artists. To evidence one single yet significant case during the classical period or golden age of Dutch painting, Samuel van Hoogstraten's *Introduction to the Academy of Painting* (1678) was influenced by Ficinian tenets.[8]

Yet historians have searched recurrently for an elusive transitivity between Ficino and the fine arts of his days, without finding more than a transcendental theory of beauty remote from the plasticity of art. In retrospect, an excellent introduction to this inherently aporetic question could be the unheeded controversy occasioned by *Marsile Ficin et l'art* between Chastel and Kristeller in 1958, when the latter argued that:

> There is one basic point of doctrine on which I must disagree with Professor Chastel's interpretation. It concerns Ficino's theory of contemplation. This notion, which is central in Ficino, has for him strong metaphysical and 'mystical' connotations, and it is rooted in the Neoplatonic and mediaeval Augustinian tradition. Contemplation is for Ficino the source of spiritual experience and of our knowledge of the invisible, which includes God and Ideas. It has no artistic connotations for him whatsoever […]. Hence I cannot follow Professor Chastel where he tends to ascribe to Ficino a theory of artistic contemplation.[9]

To be exact and true to Chastel's thesis, *Marsile Ficin et l'art* did not essentially promote a Ficinian "theory of artistic contemplation". It defined, quite on the contrary, Ficino's positive appraisal of the active "homo artifex" as a true "coup d'état" within Neoplatonism,[10] a claim adopted by Gustav René Hocke in his influential book *Die Welt als Labyrinth*

117–120: "[…] l'enseignement de l'Académie [de Careggi] tient compte des acquisitions du Quattrocento, déjà énoncées par Alberti." For a different view on Alberti's idea of beauty see now Elisabetta Di Stefano, "Leon Battista Alberti e l'"Idea' della bellezza", in: *Leon Battista Alberti teorico delle arti e gli impegni civili del "De re aedificatoria"*, conference proceedings Mantua 2002/03, ed. by Arturo Calzona *et al.*, Florence 2007, I, pp. 33–45, esp. 35–40 (on the "stravolgimento semantico" of the Platonic idea in Alberti).

[7] Michael J. B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's* Sophist, Berkeley 1989, esp. pp. 117–167, for one of the few available thorough analyses of Ficino's theory of perception.

[8] Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 55f., 64, 151, and 269. It is noteworthy that Ficino's *De vita* served as an overall philosophical and moral model to Hoogstraten in the composition of his own treatise.

[9] Paul Oskar Kristeller, [review] "André Chastel, Marsile Ficin et l'art", in: *The Art Bulletin*, XL (1958), pp. 78f.: 79.

[10] As exemplified by the following considerations: "[…] c'est précisément vers les fulgurations de la vision supérieure et ses symboles qu'inclinent les curiosités de Ficin. C'est là qu'il pourrait développer la doctrine de Plotin: mais tout au contraire, il souligne dans les arts plastiques […] le fait que la personnalité de l'artiste s'y exprime vigoureusement […]" (Chastel [note 6], pp. 74f.). On all this see my essay "Ars Platonica: le Ficin de Chastel entre Kristeller et Garin", in: *André Chastel: méthodes et combats d'un historien d'art*, conference proceedings Paris 2012, ed. by Sabine Frommel/Michel Hochmann/Philippe Sénéchal, Paris 2015, pp. 209–227.

(1957),[11] yet neglected by Kristeller and subtly at variance with Panofsky's own idealistic reading of Plotinus and Ficino. According to Chastel:

> We should consider the problem of art on the level of the creative power [*puissance créatrice*], which by vocation dominates the order of natural things […]. The artefact is here represented as mirroring an individual thought and not a supernal idea […]. The analogy with the divine artifex […] glorifying the function of art and showing it at the apex of human order, puts it above analysis, beyond any possible justification by a putsch [*coup d'état*] inside Platonism, which was to meet a broad recognition during the Renaissance due to the Academy [of Careggi].[12]

The very idea of an individualistic justification of artistic creation was certainly a new way of approaching Ficino and his concept of art.

Quite differently from Chastel's theory of the "coup d'état", Erwin Panofsky and Paul Oskar Kristeller had their own reasons to believe that during the Quattrocento Ficinian beauty and art were barely in synchrony, since art, in the medieval sense of *ars* (a category common to craft and learning) did not correspond to any *aesthetica*, a modern term coined much later.[13] Furthermore, Ficino, they said, could well have theorized about beauty without having any actual concern for art, since his thought was not aimed at producing buildings, paintings or sculpture.[14] As for a "système des Beaux Arts", it is all the more evident that Ficino could never have theorized it during the Quattrocento, when aesthetics, as an academic discipline, was still to be invented. So Marsilio was doomed to remain outside the history of art in the restricted sense. As early as 1924 Panofsky had formulated a law of reciprocity that seemed inescapable: insofar as Ficino did not care about art and artefacts, art theory did not care about him.

As early as 1949, with his sincere admiration for Panofsky's method of "decompartmentalization", Chastel followed the alternative intuition that it was possible to study Florentine Neoplatonism "sub specie aestheticae". In the footsteps of Chastel, David Hemsoll has also developed sensible postulates in favour of Ficino's own aesthetic "outlook".[15] And with a different historiographical scope, revealing new aspects in the genesis of *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, Ginevra de Majo has

[11] Gustav René Hocke, *Die Welt als Labyrinth: Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst. Von 1520 bis 1650 und in der Gegenwart*, Hamburg 1957, pp. 37–44.

[12] My translation of Chastel (note 6), pp. 74f.: "On doit donc poser le problème de l'art sur le plan de la puissance créatrice, qui domine par vocation les données naturelles […]. L'œuvre d'art est donc représentée ici comme un miroir d'une pensée individuelle et non d'une idée supérieure […]. L'analogie avec l'artifex divin […] en glorifiant la fonction de l'art, en le montrant au sommet de l'ordre humain, le place au-dessus de l'analyse, au delà de toute justification, par une sorte de coup d'état à l'intérieur du Platonisme, que l'Académie fera largement accepter à la Renaissance." See similar views in Thomas Leinkauf, "Kunst als 'proprium humanitatis': Zum philosophischen Verständnis künstlerischer Gestaltung in der Renaissance", in: *Erzählende Vernunft*, ed. by Günter Frank/Anja Hallacker/Sebastian Lalla, Berlin 2006, pp. 221–235.

[13] Panofsky (note 4), pp. 28 and 55; Paul O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII (1951), pp. 496–527, esp. p. 518, and XIII (1952), pp. 17–46. On this well-known problematic see now the criticism of James I. Porter, "Is Art Modern? Kristeller's 'Modern System of the Arts' Reconsidered", in: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, XLIX (2009), pp. 1–24. On Kristeller and fine arts see Patricia H. Labalme, *Paul Oskar Kristeller and the Fine Arts: Vivid Recollections*, in: *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on His Life and Scholarship*, ed. by John Monfasani, New York 2006, pp. 153–161, where the exclamation, p. 160, "Woe to this scholar [Chastel] who had failed to read Kristeller's earlier essay on 'The Modern System of the Arts'!" could unintentionally be somewhat misleading, because in his letter to Kristeller, dated 17 May 1958, Chastel explains that Kristeller's thesis in *The Modern System of the Arts* on "the absence of aesthetics before the XVIIIth century" was precisely the initial point of his own study (see my "Ars Platonica" [note 10], p. 221).

[14] In Panofsky's often repeated formula: "Ficino hatte sich in seinen Schriften wohl um die Schönheit, nicht aber um die Kunst gekümmert, und die Kunsttheorie hatte sich bisher nicht um Ficino gekümmert […]" (Panofsky [note 4], p. 55).

[15] David Hemsoll, "Beauty as an Aesthetic and Artistic Ideal in Late Fifteenth-Century Florence", in: *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, ed. by Francis Ames-Lewis/Mary Rogers, Aldershot 1998, pp. 70–73. For another different approach of the problem see now Thibaut Gress, *L'œil et l'intelligible: essai sur le sens philosophique de la forme en peinture*, Paris 2015, I, pp. 13–48.

stressed the intersecting influences of Renaissance art and Neoplatonism in Chastel's thought.[16]

One of Chastel's great merits was his understanding of Ficino as a sort of 'Neoplatonic artist' *sui generis*. After all, does not Ficino place Eros – a Platonic demon – as the starting point of all artistic activities? As Chastel observed, reading the *De amore* – a text also available to non-Latin readers during the Quattrocento because it circulated in Ficino's own Italian translation – and particularly chapter III, 3, "Amor est magister artium et gubernator" or "Che l'Amore è maestro di tutte le arti",[17] it becomes apparent that Ficino's Neoplatonic idea of the artist as an *artifex* never reproduces Plato's alleged disparagement of technical activities.[18] Here Ficino exalts the conjunction of *ars* and *eros* in a way that, for instance, according to Stefan Albl, may have well influenced the Lucchese painter Pietro Testa.[19] Indeed Ficino's notion of *ars* as a human activity inspired by a demonic Eros is not only applied to medicine, music, astrology, and prophecy but possibly to all *artes*: "Questo medesimo nel'altre arti si può coniecturare, e insomma conchiudere l'Amore in tutte le cose essere, inverso tutte factore e conservatore di tutte, a signore e maestro d'ogn'arte."[20]

We should be aware that art for Ficino, as is the case here above, is intended in its concrete meaning of *technē*. It is true that Marsilio, elsewhere in his work, borrowed the notion of intellectual beauty from Plotinus' *Ennead* I, 6;[21] however, it is also central to our argument that, combining *technē* with *eros* and *magia*,[22] Ficino gave birth to a specific form of *Kunstwollen*,[23] or rather to what could be termed as a Platonic *Kunstliebe*,[24] where the human arts and their *artificia* are the very practical consequence of *amor*.[25] As the first effect of art, in the Ficinian meaning, is to create harmony by matching opposites, gaining *concordia* through universal attraction, then cosmical love clearly has artistic implications. Reciprocally, mundane art depends on love with its almost magical attraction for specific materials, shapes, and colours.[26]

[16] Ginevra de Majo, "Le *Marsile Ficin et l'art* d'André Chastel", in: *Accademia*, IX (2007), pp. 57–85.

[17] Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur* Le Banquet *de Platon, De l'amour – Commentarium in* Convivium *Platonis, De amore*, ed. and trans. by Pierre Laurens, Paris 2002, pp. 56–61.

[18] Marsilio Ficino, *El libro dell'amore*, ed. and trans. by Sandra Niccoli, Florence 1987, p. 51: "Resta dopo questo a dichiarare come l'Amore è maestro e signore di tutte l'arti. Noi intenderemo lui essere maestro dell'arti […]. Chiamasi ancora signore e governatore dell'arti, perché colui conduce a perfectione l'opere dell'arti, el quale ama l'opere dette e le persone a chi fa l'opere. Aggiugnesi che gli artefici in qualunque arte non cercano altro che l'amore." This passage clearly derives from Plato's *Symposium*, 197a: "And who, let me ask, will gainsay that the composing of all forms of life is Love's own craft, whereby all creatures are begotten and produced? Again, in artificial manufacture, do we not know that a man who has this god for teacher turns out a brilliant success […]" (*Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. by Harold N. Fowler, Cambridge/London 1925, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DSym.%3Asection%3D197a [accessed 11 August 2017). On Eros, see Chastel (note 6), pp. 133–141. Needless to recall that Michelangelo and Leonardo had access to *Dell'amore* in the Italian language. For Leonardo see Stéphane Toussaint, "Leonardo filosofo dei contrari: appunti sul Chaos", in: *Leonardo e Pico: analogie, contatti, confronti*, conference proceedings Mirandola 2003, ed. by Fabio Frosini, Florence 2005, pp. 13–35.

[19] Stefan Albl/Angiola Canevari, "Pietro Testa e Socrate", in: *I pittori del dissenso: Giovanni Benedetti Castiglione, Andrea de Leone, Pier Francesco Mola, Pietro Testa, Salvator Rosa*, ed. by Stefan Albl/Anita Viola Sganzerla/Giulia Martina Weston, Rome 2014, pp. 185–201: 192, 200.

[20] Ficino (note 18), p. 51.

[21] See below, notes 106, 107, 111.

[22] On this aspect, see Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, *Umbra naturae: l'immaginazione da Ficino a Bruno*, Rome 2000, pp. 65–86.

[23] On the concept of *Kunstwollen* see for example Audrey Rieber, "Des présupposés philosophiques de l'iconologie: rapport de Panofsky à Kant et à Hegel", in: *Astérion*, 6 (2009), http://asterion.revues.org/1524 (accessed 7 February 2017).

[24] In her Ph.D. thesis *Figures d'endormis & théories du sommeil de la fin du Moyen Âge à l'aube de l'époque moderne: le sommeil profond et ses métaphores dans l'art de la Renaissance*, dir. Jacqueline Lichtenstein/Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, Université Paris-Sorbonne 2015, pp. 295–297, Marina Seretti has convincingly demonstrated that Ficino's erotic vocabulary, especially in his *De amore* VI, is fraught with metaphorical expressions related to painting and sculpting.

[25] Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, vol. 4, books XII–XIV, ed. by James Hankins/Michael J. B. Allen, Cambridge, Mass./London 2004, p. 188, XIII, 4: "[…] your reason is concerned both with your body and with other bodies, and it fashions artefacts in external matter. This reason, since it is equally adept in handling all material, also sets about handling different materials at different times, in whatever way love takes it. When the love that moved it to carve stone ceases, it instantly sets the statue aside. When love attracts it to earthenware, it takes up the potter's art."

[26] As in the case of Ficino's colourful "figura mundi": Stéphane Tous-

In this context, Ficino's visual mind relies on a series of powerful symbols, like the eye and the mirror,[27] in close connection with the *spiritus phantasticus* and the *phantasia*, fertile notions for Renaissance humanists like Fabio Paolini, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, Niccolò Leonico Tomeo (to quote just a few) who were well introduced into artistic circles and 'accademie'.[28] As a matter of fact, Ficino's overall theory of imagination was taken up by Renaissance followers of peculiar forms of dionysiac, orphic, hermetic, or demonic arts, grouped under the imprecise appellation of Neoplatonism.[29]

For all this, a specious argument would be that Ficino is of no interest to art historians, only because his thought never generated an art theory or could not inspire Botticelli (or the Pollaiuolo brothers,[30] with whom he was well acquainted). Before attempting to qualify this difficulty in my next chapter, "The 'Besieged Fortress'", a short survey may help us to understand a heterogeneous situation.

First of all, the so-called Neoplatonic model is no exclusive invention of the Warburgian school. As early as 1879 Hermann Hettner had introduced the notion of a Platonic rebirth in the study of Renaissance painting.[31] And since 1907 the French scholar Émile Gebhart had underscored in his book on Botticelli the influence of Plato and of the Academia Platonica on the new artistic mood of the Florentine Quattrocento.[32] Years later, in a memorable and often quoted book, Nesca Adeline Robb[33] emphasized the social and artistic role of Ficino. Finally, because the Warburgian moment received (too) much attention from art historiography,[34] it seems useless to remember how, with Warburg and his school, between the 1920s and the 1960s a neoplatonically oriented scholarship produced extremely influential books. Nonetheless, a history of the waxing and waning of Neoplatonism inside the Warburg circle still appears to be a *desideratum*.

Turning now to contemporary scholarship, one should acknowledge that the Neoplatonic paradigm

saint, "Ficino, Archimedes and the Celestial Arts", in: *Marsilio Ficino* (note 3), pp. 307–326.

[27] On this see Sergius Kodera, "Narcissus, Divine Gazes and Bloody Mirrors: The Concept of Matter in Ficino", *ibidem*, pp. 285–306; *idem*, *Disreputable Bodies: Magic, Medicine and Gender in Renaissance Natural Philosophy*, Toronto 2010, esp. Ch. 2. For the Platonic and Plotinian mirror: A. Hilary Armstrong, "Platonic Mirrors", in: *Spiegelung in Mensch und Kosmos*, ed. by Rudolf Ritsema, Frankfurt on the Main 1988 (= *Eranos Yearbook*, LV), pp. 147–181; Cristina D'Ancona, "Le rapport modèle-image dans la pensée de Plotin", in: *Miroir et savoir: la transmission d'un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane*, conference proceedings Leuven 2005, ed. by Daniel De Smet/Meryem Sebti/Godefroid de Callataÿ, Leuven 2008, pp. 1–48.

[28] See recently Grantley McDonald, "Music, Magic, and Humanism in Late Sixteenth-Century Venice: Fabio Paolini and the Heritage of Ficino, Vicentini, and Zarlino", in: *Journal of the Alamire Foundation*, 4 (2012), pp. 222–248 (on Paolini and the Accademia degli Uranici); Tommaso Mozzati, *Giovanfrancesco Rustici: le Compagnie del Paiuolo e della Cazzuola. Arte, letteratura, festa nell'età della maniera*, Florence 2008, pp. 96–100 (on Cattani da Diacceto); and Rebekah Anne Carson's memoir, *Andrea Riccio's Della Torre Tomb Monument: Humanism and Antiquarianism in Padua and Verona*, University of Toronto 2010, pp. 101–141 (Ch. IV on Niccolò Leonico Tomeo).

[29] See Patrizia Castelli, "La metafora della pittura nell'opera di Marsilio Ficino", in: *Marsilio Ficino: fonti, testi, fortuna*, conference proceedings Florence 1999, ed. by Sebastiano Gentile/Stéphane Toussaint, Rome 2006, pp. 215–239: 229f.; Philippe Morel, "Manilius et Marsile Ficin à Schifanoia", in: *Marsile Ficin ou les mystères platoniciens*, conference proceedings Tours 1999, ed. by Stéphane Toussaint, Paris 2002, pp. 123–135; *idem*, "Le règne de Pan de Signorelli", in: *Images of the Pagan Gods: Papers of a Conference in Memory of Jean Seznec*, conference proceedings London 2004, ed. by Rembrandt Duits/François Quiviger, London 2009, pp. 309–328; *idem*, *Mélissa: magie, astres et démons dans l'art italien de la Renaissance*, Paris 2008; *idem*, *Renaissance dionysiaque: inspiration bachique, imaginaire du vin et de la vigne dans l'art européen (1430–1630)*, Paris 2015, esp. pp. 297–326; Steffen Schneider, *Kosmos, Seele, Text: Formen der Partizipation und ihre literarische Vermittlung. Marsilio Ficino, Pierre de Ronsard, Giordano Bruno*, Heidelberg 2012, pp. 164–174 (on *spiritus*); Michael Cole, "The Demonic Arts and the Origin of the Medium", in: *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXIV (2002), pp. 621–640.

[30] Chastel (note 6), p. 36. But for a possible influence of Ficino on Bramante: Albert Blankert, "Heraclitus en Democritus bij Marsilio Ficino", in: *Simiolus*, I (1966/67), pp. 128–135.

[31] Hermann Hettner, *Italienische Studien: Zur Geschichte der Renaissance*, Braunschweig 1879, pp. 165–189. On Hettner, see Michael Schlott, *Hermann Hettner: Idealistisches Bildungsprinzip versus Forschungsimperativ. Zur Karriere eines "undisziplinierten" Gelehrten im 19. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 1993.

[32] Émile Gebhart, *Sandro Botticelli*, Paris 1907, pp. 75–78, and, for a balanced appreciation of Poliziano's influence on the *Primavera*, pp. 81 and 119.

[33] Nesca A. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, London 1935, esp. Chs. III and VII, on Marsilio Ficino, Neoplatonism and the arts.

[34] See these few titles: Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1984; Carlo Ginzburg, "From Aby Warburg to E. H. Gombrich: A Problem of Method", in: *idem*, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Meth-*

never completely collapsed, as we can judge (quoting here just few cases of a very different nature) from essays by Liana Cheney and John Hendrix,[35] Alexander Nagel,[36] Damian Dombrowski,[37] Berthold Hub,[38] Maria-Christine Leitgeb,[39] and recently Marieke van den Doel[40] and Marina Seretti.[41] It is obvious that, by reason of their universal legibility beyond metaphysics, the Neoplatonic texts continue to exert an everlasting attraction after various anti-Ficinian disputes that we must now evaluate.

The "Besieged Fortress": "Abstract Neoplatonism" under Attack

In her very instructive conference on "The metaphor of painting in Ficino's works", Patrizia Castelli remarked that the thesis of Ficino's centrality in the Florentine artistic milieu has become a "besieged fortress".[42] A rapid history of the siege appears even more illuminating.

1968 was the year of a double funeral: Panofsky died and the Neoplatonic thesis was buried with him. That very year Charles Dempsey published a thought-provoking paper entitled "Mercurius Ver". Its claim was very simple: the time had come to abandon the Neoplatonic reading:

> Mercury has been the basis by which, in Panofsky's words […], "we may infer the presence and import of a 'metaliteral' significance in Botticelli's composition". The source in which recent attempts to explain this "metaliteral significance" have been founded is the Neoplatonism of Ficino; and at the heart of Neoplatonic exegesis of the *Primavera* lie two assumptions: that Mercury cannot otherwise be accounted for, and that the *Primavera* bears a programmatic relationship to the *Birth of Venus*. Both assumptions are questioned in this paper.[43]

Dempsey mentioned the name of Ficino once and never repeated it in his article. Apparently, Marsilio had become a superfluous reference in as much as the

od, Baltimore 1989, pp. 17–59; Claudia Cieri Via, *Nei dettagli nascosto: per una storia del pensiero iconologico*, Rome 1994; Katia Mazzucco, "The Work of Ernst Gombrich on the Aby M. Warburg Fragments", in: *Journal of Art Historiography*, 5 (December 2011), pp. 1–26; Adi Efal, *Figural Philology: Panofsky and the Science of Things*, London *et al.* 2016, pp. 49–90.

[35] Liana De Gerolami Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli's Mythological Paintings*, Lanham, N.Y., 1985; *eadem*, *Botticelli's Neoplatonic Images*, Potomac 1993. See also *Neoplatonism and the Arts*, ed. by *eadem*/John Hendrix, Lewiston, N.Y., 2002; *Neoplatonic Aesthetics: Music, Literature & the Visual Arts*, ed. by *eidem*, New York 2004; John S. Hendrix, "Perception as a Function of Desire in the Renaissance", in: *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, ed. by *idem*/Charles C. Carman, Ashgate 2010, pp. 99–115 (on Ficino, the *De amore*, Plotinus and the "vanishing point").

[36] Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, Chicago 2011, esp. pp. 121–123 (on Ficino's *De Vita*), p. 178 (on Tomeo), pp. 268–280 (on Zorzi).

[37] Damian Dombrowski, *Die religiösen Gemälde Sandro Botticellis: Malerei als 'pia philosophia'*, Berlin 2010, esp. pp. 67–88. See also Stanley Meltzoff, *Botticelli, Signorelli and Savonarola: Theologia Poetica and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziano*, Florence 1987; Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, "Amore e Attis", in: *Il ritorno d'Amore: l'Attis di Donatello restaurato*, exh. cat. Florence 2005/06, ed. by *eadem*, Florence 2005, pp. 10–30: 11–16; Patrizia Zambrano/Jonathan Katz Nelson, *Filippino Lippi*, Milan 2004, esp. pp. 120, 122, 287, and note 51 (on Ficino's *De christiana religione* and Botticelli, quoted in Wlodzimierz Olszaniec, "The Latin Inscriptions in Sandro Botticelli's and Filippino Lippi's Five Sibyls", in: *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch*, XIV [2012], pp. 233–240: 238).

[38] Berthold Hub, "*… e fa dolce la morte*: Love, Death, and Salvation in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*", in: *Artibus et historiae*, XXVI (2005), 51, pp. 103–130; and *idem*, "Material Gazes and Flying Images in Marsilio Ficino and Michelangelo", in: *Spirits Unseen: The Representation of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern European Culture*, ed. by Christine Göttler/Wolfgang Neuber, Leiden 2008, pp. 93–120. See also Roberto Leporatti, "Venere, Cupido e i poeti d'amore", in: *Venere e Amore: Michelangelo e la nuova bellezza ideale*, exh. cat., ed. by Franca Falletti/Jonathan Katz Nelson, Florence 2002, pp. 64–89.

[39] Maria-Christine Leitgeb, *Tochter des Lichts: Kunst und Propaganda im Florenz der Medici*, Berlin 2006.

[40] Marieke van den Doel, *Ficino en het voorstellingsvermogen: "phantasia" en "imaginatio" in kunst en theorie van de Renaissance*, Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam 2008; *eadem*, "Ficino, Diacceto and Michelangelo's *Presentation Drawings*", in: *The Making of the Humanities*, I: *Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Rens Bod/Jaap Maat/Thijs Weststeijn, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 107–131.

[41] Marina Seretti, "Le sommeil et la nuit: la Sagrestia Nuova de Michel-Ange", in: *Accademia*, XVII (2015), pp. 93–115. See also her Ph.D. diss. quoted in note 24.

[42] Castelli (note 29), p. 223: "[…] un certo tipo di indagine storico-critica, a partire dagli scritti di Panofsky del '39 […] si era orientata a trattare della centralità del pensiero ficiniano nell'universo artistico fiorentino della seconda metà del '400; tesi questa, per citare solo i capofila, avallata, con diverse sfumature, da Chastel, Wind, Klein, e recentemente ridotta a una fortezza assediata dalle opinioni di altrettanti illustri studiosi".

[43] Charles Dempsey, "Mercurius Ver: The Sources of Botticelli's Primave-

Primavera was motivated by an agrarian calendar and by Poliziano's poetry for a rural retreat, the Villa di Castello near Florence, in contrast with Gombrich's thesis that Neoplatonism inspired Botticelli at the time the *Primavera* was painted. Since Dempsey's article, the Castello hypothesis has been invalidated; nevertheless, the claim that a coherent historical reading of Botticelli's mythologies can be obtained in light of Neoplatonic imagery, as Gombrich once asserted, has been a favourite target for generations of historians.[44]

As Dempsey himself explained in 1992 in his book *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Warburg had long ago demonstrated the predominant influence of Poliziano on Botticelli's representations of the ancient gods. This demonstration was adopted in an almost sociological sense by Pierre Francastel, whose influence on Dempsey's thesis is evident:

> There are at present [1992] two dominant hypotheses claiming to explain the phenomena appearing in Botticelli's picture. The first hypothesis, maintained with varying emphases by Warburg, Francastel, and me, holds that the appearances of the ancient gods shown by Botticelli may be explained by recourse to the characterization of them given in ancient poetry known by humanists […], Politian in particular, and imitated by them in their poetry […]. Moreover, all serious scholars of the *Primavera* (by whom I mean those who are fully cognizant of the philological issues), with the single and notable exception of Gombrich, have taken Warburg's remarkable demonstration of this hypothesis as their own point of departure. As Pierre Francastel, for example, observed, "La comparaison fondamentale est celle des *Sylves* et des *Stances* de Politien avec le fameux *Printemps* de Botticelli".

Once the philological legitimacy of Poliziano's model had been established as the only hypothesis for 'serious' scholars, the Neoplatonic model came under fire:

> The second hypothesis, championed with varying emphases by Gombrich, Wind, and Panofsky, is the Neoplatonic model. […] It might be suggested at once that there is a prima facie case for regarding this second, Neoplatonic hypothesis with caution, in part because of the unexamined assumption that a painting such as the *Primavera* must have been conceived on the basis of some "programme" (Wind) or "basic text" (Panofsky). […] On a more fundamental level, however, the Neoplatonic model as it has thus far been conceived has not been sufficiently integrated with the poetic traditions that its proponents acknowledge to be the starting point for Botticelli's invention. Rather than growing naturally out of the poetry, Neoplatonic readings instead have been artificially superimposed on it […].[45]

Notwithstanding the wish to harmonize Neoplatonism and agrarian poetry,[46] such reading dwelt insistently on Ficino's Neoplatonism as an intellectual and

ra", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXI (1968), pp. 251–273: 255, note 20.

[44] Ernst H. Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VIII (1945), pp. 7–60: 13. The bibliography on Botticelli's *Primavera* is endless. For a first orientation see Frank Zöllner, "Zu den Quellen und zur Ikonographie von Sandro Botticellis 'Primavera'", in: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, L (1997), pp. 131–158; Tobias Leuker, *Bausteine eines Mythos: Die Medici in Dichtung und Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2007, esp. ch. XV (I wish to thank Jacques Heinrich Toussaint for pointing me to this book); Rab Hatfield, "Some Misidentifications in and of Works by Botticelli", in: *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, ed. by *idem*, Florence 2009, pp. 7–61; Charles Dempsey, "A Hypothesis Concerning the *Castello Nativity* and a Scruple about the Date of Botticelli's *Primavera*", in: *Opere e giorni: studi su mille anni di arte europea dedicati a Max Seidel*, ed. by Klaus Bergoldt/Giorgio Bonsanti, Venice 2001, pp. 349–354: 352–354. The Castello hypothesis, first formulated by Herbert Horne, was refuted in 1975 by the publication of the 1499 inventory by Smith and Shearman: John Shearman, "The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CXVII (1975), 862, pp. 12-27; Webster Smith, "On the Original Location of the *Primavera*", in: *The Art Bulletin*, LVII (1975), pp. 31–40.

[45] Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's* Primavera *and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton 1992, pp. 5f.

[46] *Ibidem*, p. 65: "[…] in order to reintroduce a Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Primavera*, in a way that is neither in conflict with the appearances so far

esoteric doctrine centered on the "aulic" Venus. Understandably the author blamed Wind and Panofsky for adopting Ficino as "a philosophical model artificially grafted onto a poetic one".[47] Dempsey insisted further that their "Neoplatonic interpretation had also been mistaken […] because the concept that Botticelli's invention arose from an *intellectually abstract Neoplatonism, remote and aulic*, rested on the same misconception of Florentine culture".[48] It was the strongest critique addressed to the Panofskyan thesis: not wrong in its arguments, but in its very understanding of Florentine culture! What undermined Panofsky's Neoplatonism was not its iconological statement, but the historical syllogism lying behind it, because a vernacular image could not derive from a metaphysical concept. Thus the Neoplatonism to be banished was vitiated by an erroneous assimilation between a disembodied idea and the poetic *Primavera*.[49] Underlying these subtle arguments, the tendential dualism concerning "abstract Neoplatonism" *versus* "Florentine culture" is to be weighed for the great impact it had on successive scholarship.

Dempsey's posture, which altogether eluded the living tradition of the 'Ficino volgare'[50] and of the 'amore volgare'[51], is fairly understandable when we come to realize the core of his thesis: Warburg was the scholar whose "compelling demonstration of the closeness of Botticelli's imagery to […] the general aesthetic of Poliziano's famous poem" was unattended, while "scholarly energies instead concentrated on attempts to establish the Neoplatonic hypothesis".[52]

The betrayal of Warburg's thesis was vindicated by the new Dempseyan interpretation, where many of the Ficinian 'notations', *pulchritudo*, *voluptas*, *humanitas*, currently associated with Venus, were adopted only in subsidiary terms, *in absentia* of a real philosophical program expressed by Botticelli's painting. In his conception of love Ficino had fused *amor* and *caritas*, antiquity and Christianity, in the "melting pot of present-day experience", so that Botticelli's invention finally bore a loose resemblance to Neoplatonism.[53] The evasive connection with Ficino's Neoplatonism was never causative but always derivative, from *fabula* to *philosophia* and not vice versa.

As we know, the Ficinian hypothesis suffered more radical assaults during the late 1980s. Let us continue with a resolutive deconstruction of it. So spoke Horst Bredekamp in his pamphlet *Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus:*

observed, nor in conflict with the hypothesis that explains those phenomena on the model of ancient and humanist poetry".

[47] *Ibidem*.

[48] *Ibidem*, p. 77 (my italics). In his *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., 2012, pp. 87f., Dempsey stressed again the anomaly of "a purely abstract conception of Florentine classicism […]" in association with Panofsky and Ficino.

[49] See in this regard the discerning annotation in the conclusion by Dempsey (note 45), p. 162: "Ficino, however, as a lover simultaneously of poetry and philosophy, understood the differences between enthymematic and syllogistic forms of representing an argument."

[50] For the 'Ficino volgare' see now Giuliano Tanturli, "Marsilio Ficino e il volgare", in: *Marsilio Ficino* (note 29), pp. 183–214; Stéphane Toussaint, "Volgarizzare il segreto e divulgare l'esoterismo: il Ficino e il Benci", in: *Platonismus und Esoterik in byzantinischem Mittelalter und italienischer Renaissance*, ed. by Helmut Seng, Heidelberg 2013, pp. 263–280. For the relationship between Tuscan Platonism and Ficinian Platonism see also Christina Storey, "The Philosopher, the Poet and the Fragment: Ficino, Poliziano and *Le Stanze per la giostra*", in: *Modern Language Review*, XCVIII (2003), pp. 602–619.

[51] For the recent reappraisal of the Ficinian *amor humanus* (intermediary between bestiality and divinity) and for the reassessment of the 'amore volgare' (in balance between humanity and bestiality): Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, "Die Blicke der Liebenden – Zur Theorie, Magie und Metaphorik des Sehens in *De amore* von Marsilio Ficino", in: *Blick und Bild im Spannungsfeld von Sehen, Metaphern und Versehen*, ed. by Tilman Borsche/Johanna Kreuzer/Christian Strub, Munich 1998, pp. 197–211: 210f.; Laurence Boulègue, "L'*amor humanus* chez Marsile Ficin: entre ideal platonicien et morale stoïcienne", in: *Dictynna*, 4 (2007), http://dictynna.revues.org/144; Peter Lüdemann, *Virtus und Voluptas: Beobachtungen zur Ikonographie weiblicher Aktfiguren in der venezianischen Malerei des frühen Cinquecento*, Berlin 2008, pp. 132f.; Achim Wurm, *Platonicus amor: Lesarten der Liebe bei Platon, Plotin und Ficino*, Berlin 2008, pp. 203–219; Maria-Christine Leitgeb, *Concordia mundi: Platons Symposion und Marsilio Ficinos Philosophie der Liebe*, Holzhausen 2010. And for more bibliography: Thomas Gilbhard/Stéphane Toussaint, "Bibliographie Ficinienne – Mise à jour 2007–2009", in: *Accademia*, XI (2009), pp. 9–26; *eidem*, "Bibliographie Ficinienne – Mise à jour 2010", in: *Accademia*, XII (2010), pp. 7–12.

[52] Dempsey (note 45), p. 17.

[53] *Ibidem*, p. 161. Skepticism about philosophical programs is determinant in Dempsey's as well as Bredekamp's essays. On the notion of program and system in Renaissance art and decor, see Michel Hochmann, "À propos

> What was deemed for a long time as a signum of the [Renaissance] period nowadays produces a peculiar estrangement: though Neoplatonism may be still present, it has lost its leading role for the interpretation of Renaissance art. […] Its importance [for the history of art] is less a problem related to art-historical reality than to the history of scholarship.
>
> Considering this background [the political condition of Nazi Germany] it is a pity to acknowledge that the aforenamed iconologists [Panofsky, Gombrich, Wind], by their escape [from the contemporary nationalism of the Nazis] to Neoplatonism had chosen the wrong fortress.
>
> With their compulsorily Neoplatonistic manner, the magic moments of iconology proved unwillingly to be signposts into a dead-end.[54]

In the above three excerpts Bredekamp's critique of the 'Neoplatonic model' is thus summarized: Neoplatonism is unessential to the understanding of Renaissance art because its art-historical relevance only pertains to the history of scholarship; Neoplatonizing art history was a political reaction of Jewish iconologists in 1933; Neoplatonism was a dead-end in history of art. These claims bear something in common: Neoplatonism had been a wrong "fortress", in a derogatory sense obviously contrary to Patrizia Castelli's later metaphor of the "besieged fortress". The "Zauberwort", the magic word of Neoplatonism, had been disconnected from historical realities and from artistic documents:

> Neoplatonism became the magic word of the erudite art historian. One seemed to have reached the supreme goal, the summit of interpretation when one succeeded in representing a work of art shining with the aura of Neoplatonism […].[55]

There is the rub: the Neoplatonic "system" fossilized works of art into mere "Denkformen". Bredekamp yearned for freedom from Ficino's idealistic spell. His mission was to set free the energy of the forms in an almost vitalistic gesture – power *versus* signification and form *versus* interpretation – somewhere between Nietzsche's criticism of Platonism and Warburg's "Pathosformeln". At the end of his short manifesto, Bredekamp knowingly encouraged a "farewell to the obsession with Neoplatonic Florence" ("Abschied von der Fixierung auf das neuplatonische Florenz") in the hope of liberating the works of art from the fate of intellectual formulas.[56]

In this large *mouvement de libération* from Ficino's grip, another influential author was Ronald Lightbown, who published a second edition of his *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work* in 1989, three years before Dempsey's *Portrayal of Love*. For Lightbown – as for Bredekamp – any interpretation resting on Ficinian speculation did not depend on strict philology but on some sort of entrancing intoxication: "But it must be said that no one has yet been able to produce any firm

de la cohérence des programmes iconographiques de la Renaissance", in: *Programme et invention dans l'art de la Renaissance*, conference proceedings Rome 2005, ed. by *idem et al.*, Rome 2008, pp. 83–94.

[54] "Was für lange Zeit als Signum dieses Zeitalters galt, wirkt heute eigenartig fremd: Obzwar noch immer spürbar, scheint der *Neuplatonismus* seine Leitfunktion für die Deutung der Renaissancekunst verloren zu haben. […] Seine Geltung ist weniger ein Problem der kunstgeschichtlichen Wirklichkeit als vielmehr der Wissenschaftsgeschichte. […] Angesichts dieses Hintergrundes schmerzt die Erkenntnis, dass die genannten Ikonologen mit ihrer Flucht in den Neuplatonismus die falsche Burg gewählt haben. […] In ihrem neuplatonischen Zwangscharakter waren die Sternstunden der Ikonologie unfreiwillig die Wegweiser in eine Sackgasse" (Horst Bredekamp, "Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus", in: *kritische berichte*, XIV [1986], 4, pp. 39–48: 39, 40, 44; reprinted in: *Die Lesbarkeit der Kunst: Zur Geistes-Gegenwart der Ikonologie*, ed. by Andreas Beyer, Berlin 1992, pp. 75–83; my translation). For criticism of Bredekamp's thesis see Leuker (note 44).

[55] "Neuplatonismus geriet zum Zauberwort des gebildeten Kunsthistorikers. Das höchste Ziel, der Himmel der Interpretation schien erreicht, wenn es gelungen war, das Kunstwerk mit der Aura des Neuplatonismus aufscheinen zu lassen […]" (Bredekamp [note 54], p. 41; my translation).

[56] *Ibidem*, p. 43. For an alternative political interpretation of Botticelli's

historical evidence of any kind from fifteenth-century Florence, that the current of Neoplatonic philosophy and the current of painting were ever made to interflow, even by the most philosophically minded patron."[57] The issues of Lightbown's almost harsh judgement consisted, firstly, in the alleged iconological incommunicability between Neoplatonism and painting, and secondly in specific opposition between Botticelli's carnality and Ficino's didactic *humanitas* displayed in the famous letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.[58]

Dempsey sometimes used to see in Ficino's myth of Venus a lesson of astrology, not fully compatible with Botticelli's earthly imagery. For Lightbown the problem with Ficino's Venusian myth was quite another: it rested on the disembodied symbol of human duty imposed by "propugnators" of Neoplatonic allegories. So that "the great argument against interpreting the *Primavera* in too lofty and didactic a mode" would be "the sensuality, discreet but inequivocal, that pervades it". Consequently "the frank if restrained carnality of the picture" would seem "so strange if we see it as an *exemplum* of *humanitas*" as it was illustrated by Ficino's "grave Neoplatonic allegory".[59]

In developing stylistic objections Lightbown extended, considerably more than Dempsey, the range of his critics: Neoplatonism was now confined to metaphysics, and since metaphysics is unrepresentable its aniconic character was transferred onto Ficino's philosophy. After Lightbown, we can trace back the commonplace of the 'aniconic Ficino' among the best opponents to Ficino's influence on painting. The following statement by Francis Ames-Lewis in 2002 appears symptomatic: "'Ficino's own visual sensibility was slight' as Wind tactfully put it; […] Ficino's philosophical ideas are not generally susceptible of visual representation because of their abstract character."[60]

Successively, in 2005, Frank Zöllner observed in his illuminating paper on "The 'Motions of the Mind' in Renaissance Portraits":

> […] there is another widespread literary topos which discloses substantial doubts about the mimetic abilities of the fine arts in the realm of mentality and which, in fact, bears witness to a long lasting antagonism between the inferior image of the body (eventually created by art) and the better image of the mind […]. In the 15th century, Marsilio Ficino voices similar opinions, judging the material representation of the essentially immaterial soul to be impossible [cf. *De amore*, 5, 3].[61]

The representation of the soul through the body is the intricate Ficinian problem I shall turn to further on in the chapter "Ficino on Plotinian Beauty". Let me here observe retrospectively that Dempsey proved judicious when, in his *Portrayal of Love*, he evoked Pico della Mirandola and Cortesi on poetry *versus* the inferiority of painting. Revisiting rhetorical categories used by Elizabeth Cropper in two famous papers,[62] Dempsey observed that Botticelli had reached a sort

painting, see also Horst Bredekamp, *Sandro Botticelli – La Primavera: Florenz als Garten der Venus*, Frankfurt on the Main [1]1988, Berlin [2]2002, [3]2009.

[57] Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, London [2]1989, pp. 142f.

[58] This letter has also recently been translated and studied by Leitgeb (note 39), pp. 14–23, 81–92.

[59] Lightbown (note 57), p. 143.

[60] Ames-Lewis (note 3), p. 333. However, the author also observes how Ficino's Phaedran charioteer "works admirably visually" in some possible examples of Quattrocento sculptures.

[61] Frank Zöllner, "The 'Motions of the Mind' in Renaissance Portraits: The Spiritual Dimension of Portraiture", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LXVIII (2005), pp. 23–40: 24.

[62] Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style", in: *The Art Bulletin*, LVIII (1976), pp. 374–394, where Ficino is mentioned briefly on p. 388 (in relation to Neoplatonism and the *Dolce Stil Novo*), p. 390 (in relation to Leonardo), and also on p. 394, note 108; *eadem*, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture", in: *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret W. Ferguson/Maureen Quilligan/Nancy J. Vickers, Chicago 1986, pp. 175–190 (no mention of Ficino). See also Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's *The Toilet of Venus*: Neoplatonic Notion of Female Beauty", in: *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, ed. by Aphrodite Alexandrakis/Nicholas J. Moutafakis, Albany 2000, pp. 99–113.

of balance between *effictio*, the description of outer appearance, and *notatio*, the connotation of inner character pertaining to moral philosophy.[63] If understood correctly, Dempsey's discerning comment implied that pictorial balance between form and idea offered the only hermeneutical, yet unexplored, possibility to reintroduce *in fine* Ficino's visible lesson.

An essential remark should be made here: critics were unable to address a long-lasting contradiction, or at least a revealing discrepancy, between two possible Ficinos, the 'aniconic'[64] and the 'iconic', hence the Ficino 'excludible' from art history and the 'includible' one. This is certainly why, with such ambivalence, the visual implications of Ficino's philosophy could neither be totally erased, nor precisely identified, while the towering genius of Poliziano, so representative of the art of his century,[65] was overexposed. Meanwhile, nobody noticed how much the stereotype of 'abstractness' turned out to become an obstacle to scholars with a genuine interest in Ficino's work.

Due to space constraints, it is not possible to observe in detail how far from their initial domain of application (*id est* Botticelli's paintings) the arguments *pro* Poliziano and *contra* Ficino are widespread. To give just one telling example: in her three studies on Niccolò Fiorentino's medals for Giovanna Tornabuoni, Maria DePrano acknowledges the failure of the Neoplatonic model in the numismatic field.[66] Arguing against Edgar Wind, the author opposes Poliziano's non-Platonic humanism after 1480 to Ficino's Neoplatonism.[67] Already by 1982 Paul Holberton had placed the iconological change under the influence of Poliziano almost in syllogistic form:

> Both Wind and Panofsky point out that Ficino had no interest in art. By contrast Politian's description of the reliefs in the palace in the Realm of Love in the *Stanze* make interesting art criticism. Warburg's proposition that Politian provided the programme for the *Primavera* is surely correct.[68]

But had Aby Warburg always and exclusively insisted on the centrality of Poliziano's poetry, leaving Ficino completely outside of his concerns? Is this historiographic simplification totally convincing?

Warburg on Ficino

In fact, Warburg seldom alluded to Ficino in his studies. As we know, in the 1932 edition of Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften*, in two volumes, Ficino is quoted only with reference to Francesco Sassetti and the concept of *fortuna* (1907) and to astrology in Luther's time (1920), but nowhere does Warburg deal properly with Ficino and the visual arts.[69] However, some

[63] "[…] *effictio* is one of the two species of *descriptio personarum* and refers to the outer physical appearance or *superficiales* of a person. The second species of *descriptio personarum* is *notatio*, which refers to the qualities making up a person's inner character, his or her *intrinsicae*" (Dempsey [note 45], p. 63).

[64] See for example Di Stefano (note 6), p. 35 (on Ficinian "astratte speculazioni filosofiche" opposed to Alberti's visual concreteness).

[65] After Dempsey, Poliziano's patronage has been reasserted by Nicolai Rubinstein, "Youth and Spring in Botticelli's Primavera", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LX (1997), pp. 248–251: 251. For an attempt to harmonize Ficino and Poliziano, Arnolfo B. Ferruolo, "Botticelli's Mythologies: Ficino's *De amore*, Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra*. Their Circle of Love", in: *The Art Bulletin*, XXXVII (1955), pp. 17–25.

[66] Maria Kathleen DePrano, *The Art Works Honoring Giovanna degli Albizzi: Lorenzo Tornabuoni, the Humanism of Poliziano and the Art of Niccolò Fiorentino and Domenico Ghirlandaio*, Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles 2004, esp. pp. 72–118; *eadem*, "'Castitas, Pulchritudo, Amor': The Three Graces on Niccolò Fiorentino's Medal of Giovanna degli Albizzi", in: *The Medal*, LIII (2008), pp. 21–31; *eadem*, "'To the Exaltation of His Family': Niccolò Fiorentino's Medal for Giovanni Tornabuoni and his Family", in: *The Medal*, LVI (2010), pp. 14–25. On the intellectual milieu of the Tornabuoni see Gert Jan van der Sman, *Lorenzo e Giovanna: vita e arte nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, Florence ²2010 and Agata Anna Chrzanowska, "Ghirlandaio, Ficino and Hermes Trismegistus: the *Prisca Theologia* in the Tornabuoni Frescoes", in: *Laboratorio dell'ISPF*, XIII (2016), pp. 1–28, http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/2016_CHG.pdf (accessed 7 February 2017).

[67] DePrano 2010 (note 66), p. 21.

[68] Paul Holberton, "Botticelli's '*Primavera*': che volea s'intendesse", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLV (1982), pp. 202–210: 208, note 32.

[69] Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften: Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike: Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance. Mit einem Anhang unveröffentlichter Zusätze*, ed. by Gertrude Bing, Leipzig 1932, I, pp. 139 and

penetrating allusions to Florentine Neoplatonism and to Ficino may be found in the *Anhang* or addendum at the end of each of the two volumes. We notice that well after 1893 Warburg had read Della Torre's *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze* (1902). Therefore, Warburg could explicitely parallel Botticelli's paintings, Ficino's Platonism and Orphic magic under the sign of Venus, since Ficino and Pico had been both involved in the revival of the *Orphica theologia* between 1462 and 1486:

> Both *Birth* and *Realm of Venus* can be more firmly drawn into the sphere of Platonic and magical practices. Marsilio Ficino's first translations from the Greek were the Homeric and Orphic Hymns, which he sang in 1462 *all'antica*. (See Arnaldo della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, 1902, 537, 789.) And Pico della Mirandola, in his *Conclusiones*, on the Orphic Hymns, refers to Venus and the Graces in the *arcana* of Orphic Theology. […] Not to speak of his [Pico's] commentary on Benivieni's *Canzone d'amore*, where Venus and the Graces also appear (bk. 2, ch. 15) […].[70]

Perhaps for the first time Warburg insisted on Venus and the Graces in connection with magical Neoplatonism: a philological hint not taken into account by a simplified reading of his work. Warburg also quotes Pico's thesis "secundum magiam" on the secret meaning of Venusian trinity, from a clearly deeper intellectual perspective ("als Arcanum") than Poliziano's charming courtly poems. Had Warburg's late intimation that Poliziano's poetry did not represent a unique option in the intricate culture of Quattrocento Florence perhaps predisposed him to seek more esoteric meanings behind Botticelli's imagery? Regardless, it is certain that Warburg had some reading of Ficino's *De vita* after Giehlow's pioneeristic study of Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1903/04). He made use of it in his famous essay "Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten" (1920), so that Ficinian magic quite easily came to his mind:

> Against this, the Florentine philosopher and physician Marsilio Ficino advocated a combination of therapies: psychological, scientific or medical, and magical. On the one hand, his remedies included mental concentration to enable the melancholic to transmute his sterile gloom into human genius; on the other – aside from purely medical treatment to counter excessive mucus formation ('sniffles') and thus facilitate the transformation of the bile – the benefic planet Jupiter must be enlisted to counter the dangerous influence of Saturn.[71]

In the latter text, the "innere geistige Konzentration" is the key to understanding Warburg's appreciation of Ficino. The next quotation immediately following the precedent passage (in Warburg's essay on Luther) stresses Ficino's "symbolic way of conceiving melancholy" ("Denksymbol der Melancholie") by the geometry of the centre, the circle and the sphere:

147f. ("Francesco Sassettis letztwillige Verfügung", 1907); and II, pp. 527–531 ("Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten", 1920).

[70] *Idem*, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of European Renaissance*, Los Angeles 1999, pp. 426f.; *idem* (note 69), I, p. 327 (addendum to *Der "Frühling"*, 1893, p. 55): "'Geburt' und 'Reich der Venus' können entschlossener in die Sphäre der platonisch-magischen Praktiken einbezogen werden. Marsilio Ficino's erstes aus dem Griechischen übersetztes Werk waren die Homerischen und Orphischen Hymnen, die er 1462 all'antica sang. (Cf. Arnaldo Della Torre, Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze, 1902, p. 537 und 789.) Und Pico della Mirandola verweist in seinen Konklusionen zu den Orphischen Hymnen auf die Venus und Grazien, als Arcanum der orphischen Theologie. […] Ganz abgesehen von seinem Kommentar zu Benivienis Canzone d'amore, wo sie ebenfalls vorkommen (Libro II, Cap. XV) […]."

[71] Warburg (note 70), p. 641; *idem* (note 69), II, pp. 526f.: "Der florentinische Philosoph und Arzt Marsiglio Ficino schlug gegen sie [schwere Melancholie] ein gemischtes Verfahren von seelischer, wissenschaftlich-medizinischer und von magischer Behandlung vor: Seine Mittel sind innere geistige Konzentration auf der einen Seite; durch diese kann der Melancholische seinen unfruchtbaren Trübsinn umgestalten zum menschlichen Genie. Andererseits ist, abgesehen von rein medizinischen Massregeln gegen die Verschleimung, den 'Pfnüsell' [= *De vita*, I, 3], zu dieser Gallenumwandlung erforderlich, dass der gütige Planet Jupiter dem gefährlichen Saturn entgegenwirkt."

> According to Ficino, in the old German version, the compasses and circle (and thus also the sphere) are emblems of melancholy: "But the natural cause is that to attain and achieve wisdom and learning, especially of the difficult Art, the soul must be drawn inward, away from outward things, as it might be from the circumference of the circle to the center, and adapt itself accordingly."[72]

Here again, intellectual concentration is at its height. What is difficult to assess is whether Warburg reckoned with a Ficinian intellectual melancholy psychologically neutralized by the sight of cosmic harmony, the smile of Venus, the gifts of Mercury, and the colours of the world. In fact, in Ficino's medicine, contemplative operations and circular inwardness are the cause of, as well as the remedy against, monstrous melancholy[73] according to the very object of contemplation itself, be it Saturnine or Jovian, Mercurian or Venusian.

It is all the more striking to observe, on a historiographical level, how the very treatment of the mental metamorphosis of the barbaric demons, so important for Warburg in his essay on the iconographic program of the frescoes of Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, runs parallel to Ficino's aesthetic sublimation of melancholy. While insisting so interestingly on the intellectual traits of Ficino's thought – which was distortedly interpreted as an abstract philosophy by some of his 'orthodox' followers – Warburg ignored many passages of the *De vita* dedicated to the luminous and bodily qualities of the universe.[74] Indeed, Warburg says nothing about the paramount attention Ficino dedicated to the very colours of nature and of grace: blue, green, red, yellow or gold.[75] Not to mention the celestial qualities of the *figura mundi* in *De vita*, book III, chapter 19 ("De fabricanda universi figura") and of mechanical devices like the planetary clock by Lorenzo della Volpaia.[76] Noticing, *en passant*, the Neoplatonic properties of Botticelli's painting, Warburg did not quote Ficino explicitely: "The chthonian element becomes aetherial; for Botticelli's ideal sphere is pervaded by the πνεῦμα of Plato and Plotinus."[77]

Warburg's silence on Ficino is all the more astonishing when, with regard to the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes, Warburg spoke of celestial contemplation – a specific tenet in Ficino's *De vita* – as a means of defending humanity against the evil and conflicting demons of barbaric astrology:

[72] Warburg (note 70), p. 645; *idem* (note 69), II, p. 530: "Zirkel und Kreis (und also die Kugel) sind nach den alten Übersetzungen des Ficino das Denksymbol der Melancholie." The Latin text of *De vita libri tres*, I, 4, says: "Naturalis autem causa esse videtur, quod ad scientias praesertim difficiles consequendas necesse est animum ab externis ad interna tamquam a circumferentia quadam ad centrum sese recipere, atque dum speculatur in ipso (ut ita dixerim) hominis centro stabilissime permanere. Ad centrum vero a circumferentia se colligere figique in centro maxime terrae ipsius est proprium, cui quidem atrabilis persimilis est" (Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. by Carol V. Kaske/John R. Clark, Tempe ^{3}2002, p. 112). On melancholy in Ficino and the *De vita*, see recently Antje Wittstock, *Melancholia translata: Marsilio Ficinos Melancholie-Begriff im deutschsprachigen Raum des 16. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 56–76.

[73] On the physiological causes of melancholy see now James Hankins, "Monstrous Melancholy: Ficino and the Physiological Causes of Atheism", in: *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, conference proceedings London 2004, ed. by Stephen Clucas/Peter J. Forshaw/Valery Rees, Brill 2011, pp. 25–43. On the topos "ad centrum a circumferentia" see Erwin Panofsky/Fritz Saxl, *Dürers 'Melencolia I': Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Leipzig/Berlin 1923, p. 51, note 2.

[74] Ficino (note 72), pp. 345–347.

[75] "Laudamus frequentem aspectum aquae nitidae, viridis rubeive coloris […]" (*ibidem*, p. 134, line 55); "Post oraculum nobis cogitandum mandat rerum viridium naturam, quatenus virent, non solum esse vivam, sed etiam iuvenilem, humoreque prorsus salubri et vivido quodam spiritu redundantem. […]" (p. 204, lines 16–45); "Sunt vero tres universales simul et singulares mundi colores: viridis, aureus, sapphyrinus, tribus coeli Gratiis dedicati" (p. 344, lines 30–32).

[76] *Ibidem*, pp. 343–349: 346, lines 44–49. For the planetary clock: Chastel (note 6), pp. 105 and 107, note 16; Toussaint (note 26); Hanns-Peter Neumann, "Machina Machinarum: Die Uhr als Begriff und Metapher zwischen 1450 und 1750", in: *Transitions and Borders between Animals, Humans and Machines 1600–1800*, ed. by Tobias Cheung, Leiden/Boston 2010, pp. 122–192: 150–155; Oliver Götze, *Der öffentliche Kosmos: Kunst und wissenschaftliches Ambiente in italienischen Städten des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, Munich 2010, p. 133.

[77] Warburg (note 70), p. 758; *idem* (note 69), II, p. 644 (addendum to "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara", 1912, p. 478): "Das chthonische Element wird ätherisch, *denn* Botticellis Idealsphäre durchweht das πνεῦμα Platons und Plotins."

> Catharsis of the belief in omens through astral 'contemplation' (sc. circumscription); the metamorphosis from self-defense against a monstrous portent (*placatio*) to the contemplation of divinatory hieroglyphs of fate: from the omen to idea.[78]

Although Ficino is not acknowledged here, his cosmic idea would have perfectly fit as the missing link in the process leading "vom Monstrum zur Idee".

Beyond and after Warburg, Ficino's loss of visibility in various fields of art history is easy to ascertain in other authors, as demonstrated by the following two quotes from Panofsky's *Idea* (1924) and from *Saturn and Melancholy*, published together with Raymond Klibansky and Fritz Saxl in 1964:

> In his writings Ficino was dealing with beauty and not with art, and art theory almost never interested him, but we face this notable fact in intellectual history, that the mystical and psychic beauty of Florentine Neoplatonism, a century later, newly emerged with Mannerism as a metaphysic of art.[79]

> This Florentine [Ficino], who lived at such close quarters with the art of the Renaissance, and with its theory of art based on mathematics, seems to have taken no part either emotionally or intellectually in the rebuilding of this sphere of culture. His Platonist doctrine of beauty completely ignored the works of human hands, and it was not until a good century later that the doctrine was transformed from a philosophy of beauty in nature to a philosophy of art.[80]

The first of the two quotations is telling because, according to Panofsky, Ficino had prepared Mannerism and the artistic trend of the Cinquecento, all the while secluding his thought from the art of his own time. Turning now to the second quote, forty years after the publication of *Idea* nothing had changed in the way iconologists represented Ficino's mentality. If *Saturn and Melancholy* is a masterpiece of scholarship, as it is, then its huge legacy all the more conveyed a misleading commonplace: Ficino's aloofness from the arts and craftsmanship. Unfortunately, moreover, André Chastel's French alternative masterpiece, *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (1954), with its emphasis on Ficino's artistic fascination with geometry, optics, talismans, and magic, never became a bestseller in Anglo-American universities.[81] Who remembered that one of Ficino's favourite models had been Archimedes?[82] Who remembered Ficino's eulogy of the mechanical arts, of the "figura mundi", and his familiarity with Della Volpaia's clock?

Certainly, it would be unfair not to recognize that, with his *Studies in Iconology* of 1939 and 1962, Panofsky himself had significantly changed his mind about Ficino's aesthetic. But contrary to Gombrich, who was receptive to the dialogue between art and magic,[83] Panofsky limited the area of Ficino's sensibility.[84] For

[78] Warburg (note 70), p. 733; *idem* (note 69), II, p. 628 (addendum to "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara", 1912, p. 465): "Katharsis der monströsen Weltanschauung durch astrische 'Kontemplation' (= *Umzirkung*); die Metamorphose vom Kampf mit dem opferheischenden Monstrum (Placatio) zur Kontemplation zukunftsoffenbarender Schicksalshieroglyphen; vom Monstrum zur Idee."

[79] See Panofsky (note 4), p. 55 (my translation). See note 14 for the original text.

[80] Raymond Klibansky/Erwin Panofsky/Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, London 1964, p. 346.

[81] For some exceptions see Hemsoll (note 15) and Michael J. B. Allen, "Paul Oskar Kristeller and Marsilio Ficino: *E tenebris revocaverunt*", in: *Kristeller Reconsidered* (note 13), pp. 1–18: 6.

[82] Toussaint (note 26), p. 315.

[83] Ernst Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XI (1948), pp. 163–192, 179: "There is no weirder aspect of our problem than the evidence which suggests that […] allegory and demonology had indeed a common frontier." See also *ibidem*, pp. 170–176 on Ficino's *De vita* and the *vis figurae*. Morel 2008 (note 29) pp. 69f., has convincingly insisted on the validity of Gombrich's reading.

[84] However, Panofsky was very receptive to Chastel on Platonic humanism, particularly in *Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique* (1959): "There is practically no page in your book with which I do not violently agree, so to speak […]" (Letter to André Chastel), in: Panofsky (note 1), IV, p. 600, and see now my "Ars Platonica" (note 10), p. 212.

him "in spite of his positive attitude towards sculpture and painting, Ficino's personal aesthetic interests were largely limited to music and, next to music, poetry".[85]

Ficino on Plotinian Beauty: Towards a "Corporeal Intellectuality"

To be sure, I would not dare to deny that Ficino may be strongly idealistic in the Panofskyan meaning of the term, as evidenced by the following letter, addressed to Gismondo della Stufa on the occasion of his wife's death:

> Marsilio Ficino gives consolation to Gismondo della Stufa. If each of us, above all, is that which is greatest within us, which always remains the same and by which we understand ourselves, then certainly the soul is the man himself and the body but his shadow. Whoever is so mad as to think that the shadow of man is man, is a wretch doomed to mourn and cry like Narcissus. You will only cease to weep, Gismondo, when you cease looking for your Albiera degli Albizzi in her dark shadow and begin to follow her by her own clear light. For the further she is from that misshapen shadow, the more beautiful will you find her, past all you have ever known. Withdraw into your soul, I beg you, where you will possess her soul which is so beautiful and dear to you; or rather, from your soul withdraw to God. There you will contemplate the most beautiful idea through which the Divine Creator fashioned your Albiera; and as she is far more lovely in her Creator's form than in her own, so you will embrace her there with far more joy. Farewell. 1st August 1473, Florence.[86]

This could be a perfect illustration that Ficino only had in mind an idea of Plotinian beauty located in the afterlife, beyond all artistic appearance. But the context reveals it could not be otherwise: the supernatural tone of a consolatory letter, mourning one of the most beautiful ladies of Florence, Albiera degli Albizzi, whose husband was Ficino's friend and potential patron, perfectly fits its purpose. It would have been improper to evoke the carnal presence of Albiera after her death.

Therefore, such evidence does not compromise the powerful iconic nature of Ficino's thought in many other cases, especially in another and most famous piece, letter V, 46, written to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco. Its essential message is encapsulated thus:

> Men can be taken by no other bait whatsoever than their own nature. Beware that you never despise it, perhaps thinking that human nature is born of earth, for human nature itself is a nymph with an incomparable body. She was born of a heavenly origin and was beloved above others by an ethereal god. For indeed, her soul and spirit are love and kinship; her eyes are majesty and magnanimity; her hands are liberality and greatness in action; her feet, gentleness and restraint. Finally, her whole is harmony and dignity, beauty and radiance. O excellent form, O beautiful sight![87]

[85] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Stockholm 1960, p. 188.

[86] Marsilio Ficino, *Lettere*, I: *Epistolarum familiarum liber I*, ed. by Sebastiano Gentile, Florence 1990, letter 14, p. 38: "Marsilius Ficinus Sismundo Stufe consolationem dicit. / Si quisque nostrum id maxime est, quod in nobis est maximum, quod permanet semper idem, quo nos ipsi capimus, certe animus homo ipse est; corpus autem est hominis umbra. Quisquis igitur usque adeo delirat ut hominis umbram hominem esse putet, hic miser in lachrimas instar Narcissi resolvitur. Tunc desines, Sismunde, flere, cum desiveris Alberiam tuam Albitiam in nigra eius umbra querere atque ceperis eam in alba sui luce sectari; tunc enim illam tanto reperies pulchriorem quam consueveris, quanto ab umbra deformi remotiorem. Secede in animum tuum, precor: ibi animam illius speciosissimam tibique carissimam possidebis; immo ex animo tuo in Deum te recipe: illic ideam pulcherimam, per quam divinus artifex Alberiam tuam creaverat, contemplabere; et quanto formosior illa in opificis forma est quam in se ipsa, tanto eam ibi beatius amplecteris. Vale. Primo Augusti 1473, Florentie." English translation, slightly modified, from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London 1975–2015, I, pp. 54f.

[87] Marsilio Ficino, *Epistolarum familiarum liber V*, letter 46, in: *idem*, *Epistole*, with introd. by Stéphane Toussaint, Lucca 2011 (reprint of the ed. Venice 1495), cc. CXv–CXIr [pp. 234f.]: "Homines autem non alia prorsus esca quam humanitate capi. Eam cave ne quando contemnas forte existimans humanitatem humi natam. *Est enim humanitas ipsa praestanti corpore nympha.* Coelesti

This letter needs no comment, because it has been discussed by Gombrich and recently received the mindful attention of Ursula Tröger.[88] The sentence applied to the *nympha humanitas* remains unequivocal: her body, not her idea, is of incomparable humane beauty. "Ipsa praestanti corpore nympha". The expression of humanity spectacularly results in excellent form and beautiful sight.

The complete transposition of an idea into a *spectaculum* can be perfectly observed in the much lesser-quoted letter V, 51, to Bembo and Lorenzo de' Medici, probably dating from 1478, where the picture of a beautiful body ("pictura pulchri corporis") is created through the imagination and where, above all, it is Ficino's explicit intention to invert the priority of *verba* over *species* ("nihil […] tibi opus est verbis"), thus to celebrate the triumph of *formositas* over *laudatio*, the implicite superiority of *evidentia* and *efficitio*[89] over *notatio*:

> A picture of a beautiful body and of a beautiful mind. Marsilio Ficino of Florence to his friends. Also to Lorenzo il Magnifico and to Bernardo Bembo. Philosophers debate, orators declaime and poets sing at great length to exhort men to true love of virtue. I praise and admire all this. Indeed, if I did not praise good things, I would not be a good man. But I consider that if virtue itself was ever to be displayed openly she would encourage everyone to take hold of her far more easily and effectively than would the words of men. It is pointless for you to praise a maiden to the ears of a young man and describe her in words in order to inflict upon him pangs of love, when you can bring her beautiful form before his eyes. Point, if you can, to her beautiful form, then you have no further need of words. For it is impossible to say how much more easily and impetuously beauty herself calls forth love than do words. Therefore, if we bring into the view of men the marvellous sight of Virtue herself, there will be no further need for our persuading words: the vision itself will persuade more quickly than can be conceived. Picture a man endowed with the most vigorous and acute faculties, a strong body, good health, a handsome form, well-proportioned limbs and a noble stature. Picture this man moving with alacrity and skill, speaking elegantly, singing sweetly, laughing graciously: you will love no one anywhere, you will admire no one, if you do not love and admire such man as soon as you see him.[90]

origine nata. Aethereo ante alias dilecto deo. Siquidem eius anima spiritusque sunt amor et charitas. Oculi eiusdem gravitas et magnanimitas. Manus praeterea liberalitas atque magnificentia. Pedes quoque comitas et modestia. Totum denique temperantia et honestas, decus et splendor. *O egregiam formam, o pulchrum spectaculum*" (my italics). English translation, slightly modified, from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (note 86), IV, p. 63.

88 See Ursula Tröger, *Marsilio Ficinos Selbstdarstellung: Untersuchungen zu seinem Epistolarium*, Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 218–226, for penetrating remarks (on this and other *Ficini epistolae*) in convergence with my past and present inquiries on *Humanitas* and Ficinian beauty (for instance: Stéphane Toussaint, *Humanismes, antihumanismes: de Ficin à Heidegger*, Paris 2008, pp. 53–57 and 293–296).

89 "Or *descriptio* of physical qualities", Cropper 1976 (note 62), p. 388. See also below, note 101.

90 Marsilio Ficino, *Epistolarum familiarum liber V*, letter 51, in: *idem* (note 87), c. CXIv [p. 236]: "Pictura pulchri corporis et pulchrae mentis. Marsilius Ficinus Florentinus familiaribus suis. Rursus Laurentio Medici. Item Bernardo Bembo. / Multa philosophi disputant, oratores declamant, poetae canunt, quibus homines exhortentur ad verum virtutis amorem. Haec laudo equidem et admiror. Alioquin (nisi bona laudarem) essem ipse non bonus. Sed puto virtutem ipsam si quando producatur in medium multo facilius meliusque quam verba hominum ad se capessendam cunctos adhortaturam. Frustra puellam adolescentis auribus laudas verbisque describis, quo stimulos illi amoris incutias, ubi ipsam pulchrae puellae formam adolescentis oculis queas offere. Monstra (si potes) formosam digito, nihil amplius hic tibi opus est verbis. Dici enim non potest quanto facilius vehementiusque pulchritudo ipsa, quam verba provocet ad amandum. Ergo si mirabile virtutis ipsius speciem in conspectum hominum proferamus haud opus erit suasionibus nostris ulterius. Ipsamet citius quam cogitari possit persuadebit. Finge hominem vegetissimis perspicacissimique sensibus praeditum, robusto corpore, prospera valetudine, forma decora, congrua membrorum amplitudine, proceritate decenti. Finge hunc prompte sese moventem et dextere, ornate loquentem, dulce canentem, gratiose ridentem, neminem amabis usque neminem admiraberis si virum eiusmodi (cum primum videris) non ames, non admireris." English translation, slightly modified, from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (note 86), IV, p. 66. This should be read in close connection with *Dell'amore*, V, 6: "Certamente [la bellezza] è uno certo acto, vivacità e gratia risplendente nel corpo per lo influxo della sua idea. Questo splendore non discende nella materia, s'ella non è prima aptissimamente preparata. E la preparatione del corpo vivente in tre cose s'adempie: ordine, modo e spetie; l'ordine significa le distantie delle parti, el modo significa la quantità, la spetie significa lineamenti e colori. Perché im-

All this accounts for the celebration of the beautiful human figure "sese movens", in action, far beyond an idealistic eulogy of virtue. The extent to which Ficino could distantiate himself, when necessary, from the Plotinian ideal of invisible "bonum" is quite evident in this excerpt, where the philosopher is ready to favour the superiority of images over words and ideas. In the same way, the letter to Lorenzo il Magnifico, as already noted by Baldini[91] – whose perceptive comments were unfortunately not acknowledged by later scholarship –, makes Zöllner's and Lightbown's assertions on the absolute Ficinian primacy of the immaterial soul over bodily forms more fragile.[92] Indeed, in this letter, Ficino does not trust disembodied concepts and asks for human sight and shape. For him, as already remarked by Chastel and Castelli in their studies, the soul can always be expressed visually and, conversely, the human body can speak eloquently for the invisible.[93] As expected from a physician, the number of biological metaphors in Ficino, extending into all areas of his philosophy, is impressive.[94]

In perfect harmony with the androgynous attributes of his own thought, Ficino depicted a portrayal of *humanitas* through feminine beauty in letter V, 46, and then, in letter V, 51, a portrayal of *virtus* through masculine beauty.[95] To shape a moral idea into a bodily form was for him the equivalent of painting a portrait. It is done in order to bring mankind to admire "the divine aspect of the mind from the corresponding likeness of the beautiful body".[96]

Should we perhaps take for granted that portraying a virtue in the guise of a beautiful body was for Ficino an ordinary act of "philosophical painting",[97] comparable *mutatis mutandis* to the unidentified "femmine ignude" painted in Botticelli's bottega around 1482[98] and to the standard "uomini esemplari" or "virtuosi" in Desiderio's atelier?[99] The *Platonic Youth*[100] attributed to Donatello, or, more convincingly, to Bertoldo,

prima bisogna che ciascuni membri del corpo abbino el sito naturale, e questo è che gli orecchi, gli occhi e 'l naso e gli altri membri sieno nel luogo loro; e che gli occhi amenduni equalmente sieno propinqui al naso, e che gli orecchi amenduni equalmente sieno discosti dagli occhi. E questa parità di distantie che s'appartiene all'ordine ancora non basta se non vi si aggiugne el modo delle parti, el quale attribuisca a qualunque membro la grandezza debita, attendendo alla proportione di tutto el corpo […]" (Ficino [note 18], pp. 91f.).

91 Umberto Baldini, *Botticelli*, Florence 1988, p. 46: "Lo stesso Ficino aveva del resto altra volta asserito che la visione diretta della virtù avrebbe persuaso a seguirla più di ogni altra esaltazione verbale. *Si apriva quindi la possibilità che allo stesso fondatore della nuova filosofia fosse da ricondurre il tema figurativo del Botticelli. La Venere della Primavera non era solo la dea dell'idillio polizianesco. Personificava il principio stesso del sistema filosofico ficiniano: l'Amore* […]" (my italics).

92 Ficino's letter is also quoted by Frank Zöllner, *Botticelli: Toskanischer Frühling*, Munich 1998, p. 11.

93 On this see Hemsoll (note 15), pp. 67f., who refers to Chastel (note 6), pp. 87–114, to André Chastel, *Art et Humanisme au temps de Laurent le Magnifique: études sur la Renaissance et l'Humanisme platonicien*, Paris 1959, pp. 279–288, 299–319, and to Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Chicago 1970, II, pp. 461–504.

94 For a recognition limited to music see Brenno Boccadoro, "Musique des éléments, éléments de musique: métaphores biologiques dans le pythagorisme de Ficin", in: *Medicina e Storia*, 1/2 (2012), pp. 247–263.

95 On Ficino's possible influence on portraying ideal (young) men, see Marianne Koos, "Amore dolce-amaro: Giorgione und das Ideale Knabenbildnis der venezianischen Renaissancemalerei", in: *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, XXXIII (2006), pp. 113–174: 120.

96 *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (note 86), IV, p. 67; Ficino, *Epistolarum familiarum liber V*, letter 51, in: *idem* (note 87), c. CXIv [p. 236]: "Age igitur ut facilius divinam animi speciem ex congrua pulchri corporis similitudine cogites redde singula singulis."

97 For the concept of "philosophical painting" see Thomas Leinkauf, "Ut philosophia pictura – Beobachtungen zum Verhältnis von Denken und Fiktion", in: *Kann das Denken malen? Philosophie und Malerei in der Renaissance*, ed. by Inigo Bocken/Tilman Borsche, Munich 2010, pp. 45–69; on Ficino see esp. pp. 56–61.

98 See, for example, *Denaro e bellezza: i banchieri, Botticelli e il rogo delle vanità*, exhib. cat. Florence 2011/12, ed. by Ludovica Sebregondi/Tim Parks, Florence 2011, pp. 228f., no. 7.20. Cropper's remark fits well with our context: "Many portraits of unknown beautiful women are now characterized as representations of ideal beauty in which the question of identity is immaterial" (Cropper 1986 [note 62], p. 178).

99 See Francesco Caglioti, "Desiderio da Settignano: i profili di eroi ed eroine del mondo antico", in: *Desiderio da Settignano: la scoperta della grazia nella scultura del Rinascimento*, exh. cat. Paris *et al.* 2006/07, ed. by Marc Bormand/Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi/Nicholas Penny, Milan 2007, pp. 87–101.

100 See Jeanette Kohl, *Sublime Love: The Bust of a* Platonic Youth, in: *Renaissance Love: Eros, Passion and Friendship in Italian Art around 1500*, ed. by *eadem*/Marianne Koos/Adrian W. B. Randolph, Berlin/Münster 2014, pp. 133–148; Zöllner (note 61) is in favour of a late execution (1470s) of the bust under the direct influence of Ficino's *Commentary* on Plato's *Phaedrus*. On the hypothetical influence of Ficino's thought on the bust see Luba Freedman, "Donatello's Bust of Youth and the Ficino Canon of Proportions", in: *Il ritratto e la memoria: materiali*, ed. by Augusto Gentili, Rome 1989–1993, I, pp. 113–132.

would also fit into this convention. At any rate, it is hard not to apply to Ficino and his portraying of the "animi species" Leonardo's own determination to express, in Cropper's words, "the beauty of the soul through the representation of the graceful movements of the body".[101] And it seems out of discussion that, in a few letters addressed to his patrons, Ficino clearly conceived the *spectaculum* of visual beauty susceptible of embodying a spiritual *virtus* through physical *proportio* and *splendor*. As Gombrich once observed about Ficino's theory of image and its "expressive function":

> He [Ficino] thought that the numbers and proportions preserved in the image reflect the idea in the divine intellect, and therefore impart to the image something of the power of the spiritual essence which it embodies. Moreover the effect of images on our minds can be considered a valid proof of this type of magic effect.[102]

To be more precise, in a passage of his *Dell'amore*, probably reminiscent of Leon Battista Alberti, Ficino enumerated three basic elements composing the beauty of a figure: distance, quantity and colour.[103]

Nonetheless, an aesthetically subtle, but philosophically profound, difference subsists between well 'identified' portraits, like Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* or Ghirlandaio's *Giovanna Tornabuoni*, and more 'unidentified' portraits, like Ficino's *Humanitas* or Botticelli's series of Venus. Beneath the reciprocity of all these feminine figures, a delicate antinomy operates in the existing stylistic gap between a model (Ginevra) and a prototype (Venus). On this elusive point, art historians could adopt a conceited but striking definition by Roberto Longhi in his article on Mattia Preti: "l'intellettualismo corporeo fiorentino".[104] Longhi's "corporeal intellectuality" is the right oxymoron for our problem: the physical individuation of impersonal beauty.

An adequate definition of Ficinian art, at this stage, would correspond to a 'prototypical' portrait, in the measure of its success in expressing the light and the charm of an un-individual beauty; a beauty otherwise impossible to represent once it is shining in the physiognomy of a precise sitter, when the individual soul and its mysterious moral qualities are constantly defying their own portrayal by the artist. Invincible grace or *pulchritudo* irradiates from this calculated ambiguity.

How far from our modern sensibility this problem appears to be, is easy to figure out; but one could venture to observe that the Renaissance portraits under study are always painted on the verge of this iconic debate: are they representing pre- or post-individual beauty?

In some way Ficino re-directed the rays of divine beauty onto humanity, and his attitude stands in contradiction with outdated dualities like soul *versus* body. Here again, what appeared to be evidence for precedent scholars, namely Ficino's dualism, had been partly historiographically constructed. We should remember that Panofsky too insisted on the "immobility" of Ficino's ideal and on the "inferiority" of material beauty with respect to the *eidos* or Platonic idea. His thesis left the reader with the persuasion that Ficino never transgressed a law of Platonic transcendency: harmonious forms were measured by the degree to which they recalled intelligible realities. In its frame,

[101] Cropper 1986 (note 62), p. 189. See also Dempsey (note 45), pp. 147f.: "Elizabeth Cropper has shown how the paradoxical problems of representing the beauties, not of a particular woman per se, but of the beloved, derive from the ancient rhetorical tradition of *descriptio personarum* […]." It seems Ficino too was well aware of these "paradoxical problems".

[102] Gombrich (note 83), p. 178.

[103] "[…] ordine, modo e spetie; l'ordine significa le distantie delle parti, el modo significa la quantità, la spetie significa lineamenti e colori" (Ficino [note 18], p. 91). Compare with Alberti's canon in *De pictura*, II, § 36: "Conviensi in prima dare opera che tutti i membri bene convengano. Converranno quando e di grandezza e d'offizio e di spezie e di colore e d'altre simil cose corrisponderanno ad una bellezza" (Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura*, ed. by Cecil Grayson, Rome/Bari 1980, p. 62).

[104] Roberto Longhi, "Mattia Preti", in: *La Voce*, V (1913), 41, pp. 1171–1175; republished in *idem*, *Scritti giovanili, 1912–1922*, I, Florence 1980, pp. 29–45: 29f.

Panofsky's book *Idea* conveyed the impression that Ficino's philosophy, with its disdain for matter and body, was extensively indebted to the first Plotinian treatise *On Beauty* (*Ennead* I, 6). Was not Ficinian beauty retrograde to the extent that it always proceeded backwards from phenomenon to idea and from body to disincarnated soul?

Indeed, expanding on Panofsky's famous remarks in chapter I of his *Idea*, one could claim that portraying beauty would probably sound absurd for Plotinus. Plotinian beauty stands before individuation and matter and cannot be portrayed in the pictorial sense of the term: Porphyry informs us that Plotinus abhorred portraits. The only admitted case is the divine Zeus sculpted by Phidias according to his own mental model, in the first paragraph of *Ennead* V, 8, *On Intelligible Beauty*, not commented by Ficino.

In his insightful survey of the *Enneads*[105] Panofsky observed how Plotinus, with his 'poietic' and thus anti-mimetic attitude, had manifested the more 'dangerous' aspects of his metaphysic of beauty: it is against imitation, against proportion, and against symmetry. Do we have to insist that such was not Ficino's appreciation of the "congrua amplitudo membrorum" in his own human model of letter V, 51?

Since Plotinus deals with a superior ascetic beauty of an invisible kind, it is solely through mere reflection, as in a mirror, that a manifested beauty is made visible in an imperfect matter. Only then and only by similitude can Plotinus answer this initial question: "What is it which makes us imagine that bodies are beautiful?"[106] In his reply Plotinus sharply distinguishes bodiness from beauty; what makes the body beautiful is always the haunting presence of some imperscrutable intelligible form.[107]

A more explicit statement for the depreciation of incarnated beauty recurs in the mythological allusion made by Plotinus in *Ennead* I, 6, 8, where the handsome man, implicitly Narcissus, is exposed to falling into the lethal abyss of watery matter, Hades, by pursuing the exterior image of himself.[108] As is well known, while Leon Battista Alberti exalted the myth of Narcissus,[109] Ficino followed the Plotinian interpretation of the myth,[110] for it is true that he frequently associated Narcissus with the umbratile nature of the body. However, Marsilio diverges from Plotinus on one important point: his own conception tended to distinguish between narcissism as an aesthetic experience and narcissism as an ethic failure. Alluding to the myth of Narcissus, Plotinus wanted to symbolize the inherent opposition between interiority and exteriority: a man cannot love the inner beauty of his soul while he is also captured by the superficial harmony of the body; therefore human passion for visible beauty is doomed, and this is what happens

[105] Erwin Panofsky, *Idea*, in: Cassirer & Panofsky (note 4), pp. 74–81.

[106] *Ennead* I, 6: *On Beauty*, in: Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. by Arthur H. Armstrong, London/Cambridge, Mass., 1966–1988, I, p. 233.

[107] Epitomizing the well-known section of *Ennead* I, 6, 1–7 is beyond the scope of this essay. Ficino's Latin version, on the ascending process from "pulchritudo in corporibus" to "intellectualis pulchritudo", is now available in: *Plotini Opera omnia, cum latina Marsilii Ficini interpretatione et commentatione*, with an introd. by Stéphane Toussaint, Lucca 2010 [reprint of the ed. Basel 1580], pp. 50–55. For an insighful edition of Ficino's translation and commentary of *Ennead* I, 6: Silvia Maspoli Genetelli/Dominic O'Meara, "Le commentaire de Marsile Ficin sur le traité du Beau de Plotin: notes et traduction de l'*argumentum*", in: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, XLIX (2002), pp. 1–32.

[108] On Plotinus and the myth of Narcissus see Pierre Hadot, "Le mythe de Narcisse et son interprétation par Plotin", in: *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 13 (1976), pp. 81–108.

[109] See Ulrich Pfisterer, "Künstlerliebe: Der *Narcissus*-Mythos bei Leon Battista Alberti und die Aristoteles-Lektüre der Frührenaissance", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LXIV (2001), pp. 305–330, and most recently Seretti (note 24), pp. 298–300.

[110] On Narcissus and Ficino: Sibylle Glanzmann, *Der Einsame Eros: Eine Untersuchung des Symposion-Kommentar "De amore" von Marsilio Ficino*, Tübingen 2006, pp. 82–86, with this essential remark: "Narziss macht nach Ficino nicht die Fehler sich selbst zu sehr zu lieben, sondern sich selbst nicht richtig zu lieben" (see Ficino's letter to Bembo: "Alas foolish Narcissus, what are you losing? Unhappy man, you are totally losing your own self […]", in: *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* [note 86], VI, p. 8); Marion Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance*, Stanford 2007, pp. 53–58. See also the analysis by Kodera 2010 (note 27), pp. 65–73, esp. 67f.; and Charles H. Carman, "Vision in Ficino and the Basis of Artistic Self Conception and Expression: Narcissus and Anti-Narcissus", in: *Studi rinascimentali*, X (2012), pp. 21–30: 21f.

in *Ennead* I, 6, 8.[111] Deftly distinguishing himself from Plotinus, Ficino in his *De amore* VI, 17, hiding behind an anonymous source, explains that Narcissus does *not* properly fall in love with his own image. Rather, he does not see it: "he does not see his own face" and "he escapes his own aspect", Ficino repeatedly says.[112] Hades is not even mentioned by Ficino, who prefers the Ovidian version of death by tears and exhaustion. A possible philosophical justification for this subtle variation is that, in retrospect, Ficinian beauty continuously bridges different ontological orders, from the individual body to the universal soul, and suffers no cosmical hiatus. Therefore the harmonious aspect of a human being is nothing but the expression of the secret radiance of the soul, the hidden beauty concealed in each of us.

If Ficino ascribes positive harmonious beauty to the human figure,[113] in contrast with the Plotinian antithesis between the soul and body, how then could he claim to intermediate between the two?[114] As he reveals in his own commentary, Ficino takes some liberty with his Plotinian model: "satis sit hactenus pulcherrimum Plotini de pulchritudine librum liberioribus (ut ita dixerim) pedibus percurisse."[115] The core of his reinterpretation, in the first two chapters of his *Argumentum*, is the vivification of the forms. Through a remarkable series of statements, Ficino proceeds by degrees and by concentric circles from intellectual beauty to physical beauty: step by step beauty is essence, life, movement, seduction, and light. Firstly, essence ("essentia prima") and formal beauty ("pulchritudo formalis") are equivalent. Secondly, the true form of beauty corresponds to the true form of life ("Vera enim pulchritudinis ipsius forma est ipsa vita"). Thirdly, beauty is akin to an innate seduction in constant evidence everywhere in the cosmos ("Pulchritudo vero ubicunque nobis occurrat"), comparable to a flow of light ("sicut et splendor ad lumen").[116] In plain words, we find in Ficino's commentary on *Ennead* I, 6, what we frankly do not expect from a Plotinian ascetic vision connotated by bodily impurity: beauty, dynamically enhanced, is fecundating the world.

It is remarkable how Marsilio imperceptibly extends his thought beyond the separate exemplarity of beauty: beauty, as experienced by mankind, is positively (but negatively for Plotinus) anchored in "admiratio", "vis", "voluptas" and "provocatio". His revisitation of Plotinus concurs to increasingly humanize a detached ideal into an attractive force, whose seduction essentially works, here again, by "congruentia", that is, through the perfect proportion existing between our physical and our intellectual sense of beauty.

Moving from the same *Argumentum* on *Ennead* I, 6, Panofsky instead emphasized the hierarchical subordination of beauty to the "divina mens". Thus he involuntarily accredited in art history the leitmotiv of Ficinian subordinationism, in which invisible good remains steadily above visible beauty. For some mysterious reason, Panofsky did not want to exploit the parallel insistence of Ficino on "voluptas" and "congruentia". Nevertheless, from Ficino's viewpoint, the unilateral idea of a hierarchically subordinated beauty could only be misleading as he typically resorts to a circular geometry where beauty voluptuously irradiates from centre to periphery beyond inflexible hierarchical structures.[117]

[111] "Εἰ γάρ τις ἐπιδράμοι λαβεῖν βουλόμενος ὡς ἀληθινόν, οἷα εἰδώλου καλοῦ ἐφ΄ ὕδατος ὀχουμένου […]", thus translated by Ficino: "Si quis enim ad haec [simulachra] proruat, quasi vera capescens, quae tamen velut formosae imagines apparent in aqua […]" (*Plotini Opera omnia* [note 107], p. 56).

[112] Ficino (note 17), pp. 194f.

[113] For a synthetic approach to Ficino's concept of human beauty, see Jäger (note 4), pp. 75–78, where the author is aware that "andererseits schien sich Ficino nicht für eine platte Leibfeindlichkeit einzusetzen". See also Ute Oehlig, *Die Philosophische Begründung der Kunst bei Ficino*, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 70–77.

[114] As Dombrowski (note 37), p. 436f., has it: "Bei Ficino wird ein Grundakt der Natur selbst als *mimesis* verstanden, insofern sie die ihr inwohnenden 'rationes' selbst abbildet; der Künstler wird also nicht die sichtbare Natur 'verdoppeln', sondern versuchen, die ihr zugrundeliegenden Ideen gleichsam an die Oberfläche zu holen."

[115] "We walked around enough in Plotinus' very beautiful book on beauty, and with great freedom" (*Plotini Opera omnia* [note 107], p. 47; my translation).

[116] *Ibidem*, pp. 46f.

[117] Panofsky (note 4), p. 94, note 133, neither reports the sentence "acce-

Thus, the seminal concepts of life and proportion converging in the first two chapters of Ficino's commentary on Plotinus' *De pulchro* – a treatise translated by Ficino for his *De amore* quite early on in his career[118] – prepare for the flowing of "splendor" into the perfectly harmonious body of humankind. It is in agreement with this intrinsic dynamism that Marsilio channeled his interest into "congruous" human figures of beauty.

On account of what has been said so far, portraying *humanitas* was highly specific of Renaissance culture: Neoplatonism and the ideal painting of humanity were linked. This is precisely the case with the Platonist Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo in his commentary (1533) on Petrarca's famous sonnet 77, *Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso*,[119] where the Tuscan poet alluded to Laura's now lost portrait painted by his friend, the great Simone Martini. Gesualdo remarks how the beauty of Laura mirrored Simone Martini's vision of an ideal humanity, transposed in her portrait: "Nondimeno la mente di Simone havendo il concetto de la più bella figura de l'huomo quando vide M(adonna) L(aura) in terra, si ricordò tal esser la più bella forma humana, la quale quando egli era in cielo inteso avea."[120] Sixteen years later, the Florentine *accademico* Giovan Battista Gelli, also a careful reader of Gesualdo and Ficino, would have enhanced the latent Ficinian trait of such "bella forma humana" in his own commentary (1549):

> Dalla quale opinione pare anchora che fusse il poeta nostro, avendo scritto in uno sonetto:
> In qual parte del cielo, in qual idea
> era l'esempio onde natura tolse
> quel bel viso leggiadro, in che ella volse
> mostrar quaggiù, quanto lassù poteva.
> Quasi dicendo se nella mente di Dio non sono le idee di ciascheduna cosa particulare, donde cavò natura lo esemplo della bellezza di M. Laura? alla quale dubitazione risponde dottissimamente il Giesualdo, il quale è il primo che io abbia trovato fino a qui, che mi paia che habbia inteso prefettamente questo sonetto, dicendo che *se bene maestro Simon non vide una idea e una forma particulare di M. Laura, non si dando come si è detto le idee degli individui particulari*, egli vide *la idea e lo esemplare della natura umana in universale*, la quale conviene che sia la più bella figura umana che si possa ritrovare [...].[121]

That a painter could produce a specimen of ideal humanity imagined before its individuation would be in complete accordance with Ficino's ideal. Thus, according to Gelli, the prototype of "human universal nature" also inspired Simone Martini's portrayal of

dit ut congruens" on the universal influence of beauty upon our soul, nor the precedent sentence "Voluptate animum affici compertum habemus quando re quadam sibi congrua tangitur, duciturque ad bonum" on the voluptuous experience of "congruous" beauty. Dominic O'Meara (note 107), pp. 4f., rightly sees Ficino expanding on Plotinus in two opposite directions: "la subordination qu'opère Ficin du Beau au Bien s'écarte du traité plotinien" and "Ficin souligne, dans l'expérience de la beauté [...] sa force, sa violence, sa volupté [...] qui n'ont pas autant d'importance dans le traité". For Ficino's epitomizing strategy based on concentric circles in the ms. Riccardiano, 92, containing a collection of excerpts from Plotinus' *De pulchro*, see Rocco Di Dio, "'Selecta colligere': Marsilio Ficino and Renaissance Reading Practices", in: *History of European Ideas*, XLII (2016), 5, pp. 595–606: 600f. And for Ficino's obsession with circular geometry see my paper "Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy? A Note on Spiritus, the *Three Books on Life*, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza", in: *Accademia*, II (2000), pp. 19–31.

[118] A Latin summary of the *De pulchro*, prepared for the redaction of the *De amore* (1469), is found in the ms. Riccardiano, 92, fol. 109r–113v; see Di Dio (note 117) and *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, exhib. cat., ed. by Sebastiano Gentile/Sandra Niccoli/Paolo Viti, Florence 1984, p. 59, no. 45.

[119] *Petrarca: profilo e antologia critica*, ed. by Loredana Chines/Marta Guerra, Milan 2005, pp. 72–74 ("Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso [...]"); Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, trans. by J. G. Nichols, New York 2002, p. 77.

[120] *Il Petrarcha, colla spositione di misser Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo*, Venice 1533, p. CX. Gesualdo's long commentary gives no less than 24 explicit references to Plato, and many implicit quotes of Ficino and Bembo. On Gesualdo's Platonism see: Gino Belloni, "Les commentaires de Pétrarque", in: *Les Commentaires et la naissance de la critique littéraire: France/Italie (XV–XVI siècles)*, ed. by Gisèle Matthieu-Castellani/Michel Plaisance, Paris 1990, pp. 147–155: 152; Giancarlo Alfano, "'Una filosofia numerosa et ornata': filosofia naturale e scienza della retorica nelle letture cinquecentesche delle 'Canzoni Sorelle'", in: *Quaderns d'Italià*, XI (2006), pp. 147–179: 155–158.

[121] *Il Gello accademico fiorentino, sopra que' due sonetti del Petrarca, che lodano il ritratto della sua M. Laura*, Florence 1549, p. 38 (my italics).

Madonna Laura; and unsurprisingly the author also quotes Ficino, together with Alcinous and Bessarion, at the very beginning of this exposition.[122]

It is tempting to check whether Marsilio ever theorized the idea of universal human nature: as a matter of fact, he did so in his *Epitome in Rempublicam* (or *De iusto*) on "humanitas idealis".[123] Hence, following the perception of some influent Renaissance authors, who were also readers of Ficino and Plato, there was no aesthetically motivated incompatibility between "ideal humankind" and pictorial representation. Ficino believed that the convertibility of ideal humanity, or humankind, into human beauty was not only possible but real. His claim since 1469 was that "we fall in love with a human being who is a member of the universal order, especially if a sparkle of divine beauty is shining [on his face] […] because the figure and aspect of a handsome man perfectly coincide with the idea of humankind".[124]

Ficino and the "Works of Human Hands"

Lastly, in response to the capital question of Ficino's ignorance of "the works of human hands", postulated by Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, we should now consider a fourth letter (X, 14), dated 10 April 1490. It describes a decorated box offered to Ficino by his friend, the German jurist Martin Prenninger, alias Martinus Uranius, after the publication of the *De vita.* In his letter, Ficino depicts himself as fascinated by gemstones, especially by polished jaspers and chalcedonies, two kinds of semi-precious gems whose magical-medical properties, associated with Saturn and Venus, were celebrated in the *De vita coelitus comparanda*:[125]

> I received recently on your behalf a box set with gems and gold containing knives with decorated handles (or hafts): a gift which is fit not only for a philosopher but for a king; a gift fully worthy of your kingly soul. Above all, it gratified me to the full, especially when I realized, as is obvious from this gift, that we were, you and I, under the same demon. In fact, while I had considered that a chalcedony is under the influence of Aquarius in mid-heaven and a jasper under that of Saturn dominating Aquarius – Saturn was in my ascendant in this degree – I had been longing for these two gems. So that my wish, being perceived by my demon, then immediately perceived by yourself, proves that we are governed by the same demon. And what about the fact that I started fancying those gems last Autumn? In the meantime and at the same moment, as I suppose, you had in mind to send me your gift […].[126]

[122] *Ibidem*, p. 28: "[…] secondo che riferisce Alcinoo Platonico tradotto di greco in latino da il nostro dottissimo Marsilio Ficino cittadino e canonico fiorentino in quel libro che egli fa de *Dogmate Platonis*, tenne che i principi delle cose naturali fussino solamente Idio la materia e le idee". The text is republished in: *Lezioni sul Petrarca: Die* Rerum vulgarium fragmenta *in Akademievorträgen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Bernhard Huss/Florian Neumann/Gerhard Regn, Münster 2002, pp. 105 and 183f.

[123] Marsilio Ficino, *Opera*, with an introduction by Stéphane Toussaint, Lucca ²2014 (reprint of the ed. Basel 1576), II, p. 1429: "Nota rursus Deum naturalis unius speciei unam tantum specie expressisse ideam, in ipso intelligibili mundo, *puta speciei humanae idealem humanitatem* […]" (my italics).

[124] Ficino (note 17), p. 103 (*De amore*, V, 5) : "Sic et ad hominem aliquem ordinis mundani membrum afficimur, presertim cum in illo perspicue divini decoris scintilla est […] *quia hominis apte compositi speties et figura cum ea humani generis ratione* […] *aptissime congruit*" (my translation; my italics).

[125] Ficino (note 72), Bk. III, Ch. 2, p. 252 (Saturnian jasper and chalcedony); Bk. III, Ch. 8, p. 278 (jasper, chalcedony and the Fixed Stars); Bk. III, Ch. 12, p. 300 (chalcedony associated with Venus is used "against the delusions of black bile"); Bk. III, Ch. 12, p. 302 (jasper associated with Saturn can "stop blood"). For a good introduction to magic in the *De vita* see Brian Copenhaver, "Iamblichus, Synesius and the 'Chaldean Oracles' in Marsilio Ficino's *De vita libri tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?", in: *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by James Hankins/John Monfasani/Frederick Purnell, Binghamton, N.Y., 1987, pp. 441–455. For a careful inquiry and balanced report on Ficino's sources see Denis Robichaud, "Ficino, on Force, Magic and Prayer: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino's *Three Books on Life*", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, LXX (2017), pp. 44–87.

[126] Ficino, *Epistolarum familiarum liber X*, letter 14, in: *idem* (note 87), c. CLXVr [p. 345]: "Accepi nuper tuo nomine thecam cultellariam manubriis gemmeis et aureis exornatam, munus non philosophicum tantum sed et regium, regio nimirum animo tuo dignum. Mihi praeterea quam gratissimum, praesertim quoniam hoc dono eundem mihi tibique preesse genium plane perspexi. Nam cum compertum haberem calcedonium quidem subesse

With this letter, we enter further into the realm of Ficino's concreteness, where the philosopher deals precisely with the "works of human hands". Above all, the letter provides a glimpse into an artefact proceeding from demonic astrology. Ficino describes an astrological (and perhaps talismanic)[127] golden box set with jewels. On it, he sees projected the horoscopic portrayal of his good demon (not a threatening demon) which he happens to have in common with his dear friend Uranius. The astrological box is also the expression of the supernatural attraction of his 'demonic' soul for fine arts. Moreover, considering the psychology expressed in this text, it would be difficult to distinguish between Ficino's and Ghirlandaio's sensitivity for precious stones.[128]

At this point we are confronted with a rare case of preternatural thinking, in which the true patron of an artistic product is not considered a single man but a demon, common to Ficino and Uranius. Unexpectedly and contrarily to current opinion about Ficino and his circle, a tight link between materiality and spirituality, craftsmanship and Neoplatonism emerges here before our eyes. As already stated in 1999 in my study *Ficino, Archimedes and the Celestial Arts* with reference to the planetary clock – the technological marvel praised around 1480–1490 simultaneously by Ficino and Poliziano, two protagonists of Florentine culture frequently seen to be in opposition by art historians! – the Renaissance Platonists and their associates praised the work of goldsmiths and clockmakers.[129] Until now Ficino's appreciation has not been sufficiently recognized because scholars preferred to focus on the masterworks of Renaissance painters instead of considering that the craftsmen from the medieval tradition were themselves praiseworthy *artifices* working in a milieu of humanists and philosophers.

To summarize and conclude, Ficinian doctrine looks quite different from how humanist 'classicism' was seen in past decades, partly because Ficino never considered himself *stricto sensu* an antiquarian fascinated by the revival of Olympian beauty (as the Warburgian tradition sometimes conceived Florentine humanism[130]), partly because his unorthodox Plotinism rested on the diffusion of ideal beauty through human art.

Aquario praesertim medio, iaspidem vero Saturno Aquarii domino, mihi autem eo gradu Saturnus ascenderit, utrumque lapidem ardenter optabam. Votum ergo meum genio meo notum, tibi subito notum, declarat eodem nos genio gubernari. Quid vero quod Autumno superiore affectare talia coepi [?] Tu interim, ut conjicio, eodem tempore de mittendo ad nos dono deliberare […]" (my translation). See *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (note 86), IX, p. 16.

[127] As Luisa Capodieci rightly pointed out in *Medicæa Medæa: art, astres et pouvoir à la cour de Catherine de Médicis*, Geneva 2012, a talisman responds to exact astrological configurations and precise rituals. Nonetheless, artefacts could be considered magical by their owners without necessarily being conceived as talismans. For a good example see Maurice Sass, "Gemalte Korallenamulette: Zur Vorstellung eigenwirksamer Bilder bei Piero della Francesca, Andrea Mantegna und Camillo Leonardi", in: *kunsttexte.de*, I (2012), pp. 1–53. In our case, the box is not devoid of an "addressative" scope, to use the terminology of Nicolas Weill-Parot, who defines a "magical 'addressative' act […] as an act by means of which the magician addresses a sign to a separate intelligence (a demon, an angel or some other spirit or intelligence)" (Nicolas Weill-Parot, "Astral Magic and Intellectual Changes [Twelfth-Fifteenth Centuries]: 'Astrological Images' and the Concept of 'Addressative' Magic", in: *The Metamorphosis of Magic: From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Jan N. Bremmer/Jan R. Veenstra, Leuven 2002, pp. 167–188: 169). It is probable that Marsilio considered the box as a demonic *medium* of communication with Uranius.

[128] On gems in Early Renaissance culture, see Patrizia Castelli, "Le virtù delle gemme: il loro significato simbolico e astrologico nella cultura umanistica e nelle credenze popolari del Quattrocento. Il 'recupero' delle gemme antiche", in*: L'oreficeria nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, ed. by Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré dal Poggetto, Florence 1977, pp. 307–364. On Ghirlandaio and gems, see Till Busse, *Madonna con Santi – Studien zu Domenico Ghirlandaio's mariologischen Altarretabeln: Auftraggeber, Kontext und Ikonographie*, Diss. Köln, 1999, http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/volltexte/2003/486/, pp. 320f.; Serenella Sessin, *Gems in Renaissance Material Culture*, master's thesis, University of London, 2014, pp. 16f.

[129] Toussaint (note 26). To this I should add the case of Giovan Paolo Gallucci (1538–1621), analyzed by Massimiliano Rossi, "Mente, libro e cosmo nel tardo Cinquecento: il ruolo mnemonico dell'illustrazione nella produzione editoriale di Giovan Paolo Gallucci", in: *Memory and Invention: Medieval and Renaissance Literature, Art and Music*, conference proceedings Florence 2006, ed. by Anna Maria Busse Berger/Massimiliano Rossi, Florence 2009, pp. 37–57, esp. 49f. (on Ficino and Archimedes). Gallucci re-edited Ficino's *De vita* in his own *De cognoscendis et medendis morbis ex corporum coelestium positione libri IIII*, Venice 1584. See my article "Magie und Humanismus (Ficino, Pico, Paolini und Gallucci)", in: *Marsilio Ficino in Deutschland und Italien: Renaissance-Magie zwischen Wissenschaft und Literatur*, conference proceedings Berlin 2015, ed. by Jutta Eming/Michael Dallapiazza, Wiesbaden 2017, pp. 19–34.

[130] Cf. the letter by Fritz Saxl to Giovanni Gentile of 13 April 1932: "Per

Moreover, as a "disturbingly innovative theologian" (in Michael J. B. Allen's words),[131] Ficino found hints in topics that were close to his concerns. Since the 1470s he aimed to introduce in Italy a new type of Christian spirituality, in which piety, hermetism, and magic were of equal importance.[132] This is why the theological facets of Florentine and Venetian Neoplatonism should be taken into greater consideration, as Dombrowski observed in his innovative book *Die religiösen Gemälde Sandro Botticellis*.[133] We could reasonably hold that Ficino's *Kunstliebe* also has theological and metaphysical roots, conveying aesthetical impulses which are fully compatible with the artistic production of his time. This is at least what a final document suggests: Ficino's depiction of an *automaton* produced by a German craftsman. The work was visible in Florence before 1482, the very year of the publication of the *Theologia platonica*, in which this passage (II, 13) is to be found:

> We saw recently in Florence a small cabinet made by a German craftsman in which statues of different animals were all connected to, and kept in balance by, a single ball. When the ball moved, they moved too, but in different ways; some ran to the right, others to the left, upwards or downwards, some that were sitting stood up, others that were standing fell down, some crowned others, and they in turn wounded others. There was heard too the blare of trumpets and horns and the songs of birds; and other things happened there simultaneously and a host of similar events occurred, and merely from one movement of one ball. Thus God through His own being […] moves everything which depends on Him with one easy nod.[134]

In all the documents we have scrutinized, passive contemplation of immaterial beauty is simply absent. In depth, Ficinian artistic taste is all but a nostalgic recollection of immobile archetypes. It admits human characterizations and bodily representations. Its intrinsic dynamism is related to the cycle of life and to the pregnancy of matter, *materia*, because Ficino's philosophy has to do with the many-faceted question of embodiment.[135] It is conditioned not only by ideas, but by the expansive role of *phantasia*, of *simulacra*,[136] of

esempio, il Platonismo del Rinascimento […] si comprend<e> sufficientemente soltanto sotto l'aspetto del problema più vasto e, per così dire, comprensivo Firenze e l'antichità [*sic*]" (cit. from: Riccardo di Donato, "Dopo Warburg: la 'Scienza della Cultura' e l'Italia 1929–1933", in: *Aby Warburg e la cultura italiana: fra sopravvivenze e prospettive di ricerca*, conference proceedings Rome 2006, ed. by Claudia Cieri Via/Micol Forti, Milan 2009, pp. 149–167: 162f.).

131 Michael J. B. Allen, "Marsilio Ficino, Levitation, and the Ascent to Capricorn", in: *idem*, *Studies in the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico*, London/New York 2017, pp. 117–134: 117.

132 *Idem*, *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's* Republic, Berkeley 1999, esp. pp. 107–144 (on Platonic and Jovian prophecy); Maude Vanhaelen, "L'entreprise de traduction et d'exégèse de Ficin dans les années 1486–1489: démons et prophétie à l'aube de l'ère savonarolienne", in: *Humanistica*, V (2010), pp. 125–136.

133 Dombrowski (note 37), pp. 9 and 26–30.

134 "Vidimus Florentiae Germani opificis tabernaculum, in quo diversorum animalium statuae ad pilam unam connexae atque libratae, pilae ipsius motu simul diversis motibus agebantur: aliae ad dextram currebant, aliae ad sinistram, sursum atque deorsum, aliae sedentes assurgebant, aliae stantes inclinabantur, hae illas coronabant, illae alias vulnerabant. Tubarum quoque et cornuum sonitus et avium cantus audiebantur, aliaque illic simul fiebant et similia succedebant quam plurima, uno tantum unius pilae momento. Sic Deus per ipsum esse suum […] facillimo nutu vibrat quicquid inde dependet" (Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia platonica*: *Platonic Theology*, ed. and trans. by Michael J. B. Allen/James Hankins, Cambridge, Mass., 2001–2006, I, pp. 200f.; English translation slightly modified). See also Chastel (note 6), p. 67, and Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West*, Cambridge, Mass./London 2009, pp. 91f.

135 On this theme of utmost importance see James Snyder, "Pregnant Matter: Ficino's Theory of Natural Change 'From Within' Matter", in: *Rinascimento*, LI (2011), pp. 139–155, and also Janine Larmon Peterson/James G. Snyder, "The Galenic Roots of Marsilio Ficino's Theory of Natural Changes", in: *Viator*, XLVI (2015), 3, pp. 301–316 (esp. p. 301 on "a growing body of scholarship that tempers an other-worldly reading of Ficino according to which the Florentine Platonist was not engaged with questions concerning the soul's embodiment and the difficulties it produces"). I thank the two authors for sending me their papers.

136 See Sergius Kodera, "Schattenhafte Körper, erotische Bilder: Zur Zeichentheorie im Renaissance-Neuplatonismus bei Marsilio Ficino", in: *Kunst, Zeichen, Technik: Philosophie am Grund der Medien*, ed. by Marianne Kubaczek/Wolfgang Pircher/Eva Waniek, Münster 2004, pp. 63–86: 79. On Ficino and imagination see now: Guido Giglioni, "The Matter of the Imagination: The Renaissance Debate over Icastic and Fantastic Imitation", in: *Camenae*, 8 (December 2010), pp. 1–21: 1–5, 17–20; Anna Corrias, "Imagination and Memory in Marsilio Ficino's Theory of the Vehicles of the Soul", in:

physical and ethereal bodies.[137] Accordingly, for Ficino images as well as artefacts are not mere illusions in the Plotinian meaning, but products of their own kind that offer useful psychological instruments: acting on memory, on will, on dreams and on melancholy[138] they are the vehicles of the intentions of their makers. It is surprising, in a final conclusion, to observe how our "vanishing point" has changed and how our initial perspective has been transformed: Ficino's fascination for the 'materiality'[139] of art exerted on himself an influence more tangible, and far more captivating, than his conjectural influence on Botticelli.

With this background in mind, we have come closer to the core of a Ficinian *ars*, not as a vague otherwordly Neoplatonism but as a consistent concern attested by the texts. This is why, posing a multiform intellectual challenge to scholars in his unexpected complexity, "my friend Ficino" will always require careful learning and erudite knowledge in the future.

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The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition, VI (2012), pp. 81–114; Tanja Klemm, *Bildphysiologie: Wahrnehmung und Körper in Mittelalter und Renaissance*, Berlin 2013, pp. 178–181; Saverio Ansaldi, *L'imagination fantastique: images, ombres et miroirs à la Renaissance*, Paris 2013, pp. 61–118.

[137] See, as a point of interest, Brenno Boccadoro, "Marsilio Ficino: The Soul and the Body of Counterpoint", in: *Number to Sound: The Musical Way to the Scientific Revolution*, ed. by Paolo Gozza, Dordrecht 2000, pp. 99–134. The question of visual perception, *simulacra*, *idolum animae* or *vehiculum animae* cannot be treated adequately here. See at least: Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker, "Marsile Ficin et le Commentaire de Pléthon sur les Oracles Chaldaïques", in: *Accademia*, I (1999), pp. 9–48; Stéphane Toussaint, "Zoroaster and the Flying Egg: New Sources in Ficino's *De Vita* and *Theologia platonica*: Gerson and Psellos", in: *Laus Platonici Philosophi* (note 73), pp. 105–116: 107f., with further bibliography. On a more philosophical level (Ficino's conception of images and of the kind of truths they are informed with) chapters 4 and 5 of Allen's *Icastes* (note 7) have demonstrated that the Platonic foundation of Ficino's visual theory rested on some arresting commentaries linked to Plato's *Sophist* (see esp. pp. 168–204).

[138] See the classic study by Maria Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dreams*, Cambridge 2004, *passim*.

[139] On the multilayered notion of materiality in art history, see the essential paper by Vanessa Badagliacca, "On Matters, Materiality, and Materialism: Entanglements with Art History", in: *North Street Review* (15 April 2016), https://northstreetreview.com/2016/04/15/on-matters-materiality-and-materialism-entanglements-with-art-history/ (accessed 14 August 2017).

Abstract

This paper aims to provide an understanding of how, in art history, the otherworldliness of Ficino's Neoplatonism was historiographically constructed during the twentieth century and how, in the twenty-first century, it is possible to once again hear Ficino's original voice on beauty through his texts.

Since Erwin Panofsky's *Idea* (1924) the relationship between art history, Neoplatonism and the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino has been, and continues to be, quite problematic. Ficino's 'abstractness' and his intellectual beauty mainly inspired by Plotinus were for a long time ordinary assumptions: consequently, for many art historians, it was impossible to compare Ficino's feeble interaction with art with the much greater influence of Alberti or Poliziano on Quattrocento artists like Botticelli, only to quote a much discussed example. Yet, thirty years after Panofsky's *Idea*, André Chastel in his *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (1954) also considered Ficino to be a Neoplatonic 'artist' in his own right, highly receptive to the human figure, life, *eros*, and their aesthetic qualities. Therefore, it was as if Ficino could be situated alternatively inside and outside of the history of art.

The first part of the following paper discerns underlying links between this long-lasting contradiction and the complexity of Ficino's reception from the time of Aby Warburg to the present day. In the second part, turning to Ficino's very prose, the reader is conveyed from 'intellectual' to 'material' beauty from the Ficinian perspective, in order to show that the modern judgement on his alleged abstractness appears fairly inadequate.

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