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The Birth of Artist-Authors and the *negozio dell'inestimabile*

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Abstract

Already in the fourteenth century, poets such as Dante and Petrarch were unanimously considered Authors, while visual artists still had to strive hard, in the following century, to gain such recognition. While, on the one hand, they reshaped the nature of their work by bestowing a new identity on the objects they produced, on the other, they tried to redefine their relationship with their clients and patrons. If, on paper, Vasari's monumental *Vite* codified these new attitudes for the following centuries, in everyday reality they were little appreciated. The products which artists created, furthermore, were of a particular nature, in part material and in part spiritual. This fact implied a paradox, since the spiritual dimension of the art work imposed itself in the very moment in which the work became an extraordinary market object, thanks to the rise of collecting and patronage. The idea that a work of art is priceless arose precisely when they became very expensive commercial objects, acquiring an important function in the economy of the Italian States. Starting from the writings of Benvenuto Cellini and Vasari's *Ragionamenti*, this article discusses the tensions generated by the commercial exchange of the *inestimabile*.

Keywords: Art Objects, Artist-Authors, Cellini, Vasari.

1. *Introduction*

If, already by the fourteenth century, the authoritativeness of the poets who wrote in the vernacular did not pose any problems, as we can see from the biographies of Dante and Petrarch written shortly after the death of the former and, even before that of the latter (Bartuschat 2007), that of visual artists had, on the other hand, difficulty in coming to the fore. It was only in the mid-sixteenth century, with Vasari's monumental *Vite*, that the status of authorship was officially granted to those producing works of sculpture, painting, manuscript illumination or engraving. As many critics have emphasized, the fact of trying, through writing, to immortalize the artists and their works, shows the intellectual and social promotion of this socio-professional category in the sixteenth century (among others, see Wittkover and Wittkover 1963).

If a talented painter or sculptor can become famous, the fact of also using pen and ink undoubtedly increases his or her possibility of doing so, which partially explains the increasing number of artist-writers throughout the sixteenth century.

With regard to this subject, I will examine two cases: the first deals with Cellini and his *Vita*; the second with Vasari and his dialogue *Ragionamenti di Palazzo Vecchio*.

2. Cellini

Since Cellini was afraid, among other things, of what Vasari would write about him in the second edition of the *Vite*, between 1562 and 1566 he began to relate his own life. It is significant that one of the first episodes in which the young protagonist showed his talent is a competition whose reward was remuneration for the work of art produced. The competitors were Benvenuto and a goldsmith, his colleague Lucagnolo. The task to carry out was a goldsmith's work of art that could be freely designed and produced. Lucagnolo chose to make a big gold vase, while Benvenuto produced a piece of jewellery of small dimensions. The Pope, a patron of Lucagnolo, 'restò soddisfatto benissimo, e subito lo fece pagare secondo l'uso de l'arte di tai grossi lavori'.¹ According to the author, Madonna Porzia, Benvenuto's patron, reacted in a different way:

... dicendomi che io domandassi delle fatiche mie tutto quel che mi piaceva, perché gli pareva che io meritassi tanto, che donandomi un castello, a pena gli parrebbe d'avermi sadisfatto; ma perché lei questo non poteva fare, ridendo mi disse che io domandassi quel che lei poteva fare. (Cellini 1985, vol. II, 53, 522)²

Cellini wanted to show that Lucagnolo had created an object whose monetary value is appraised according to the precious materials used in its making; Benvenuto, on the other hand, had carried out a work of art which is *inestimabile* in that it is spiritual (on this see Panovsky 1924, now considered a classic), it is a 'mental object', as Leonardo had written. We should note that *inestimabile* means a very high price and, above all, a price which is not regulated by 'l'uso de l'arte' (the usage of art dealings).

Further on in the text of his *Vita*, Benvenuto, by now an affirmed artist in France at the court of King Francis I, takes up the subject again when discussing the project of the *Perseo* with Duke Cosimo I de' Medici. He presents a model to Cosimo who, entirely satisfied with the proposal, all the same wants to discuss certain points. Cellini writes:

A questo fu non piccola contesa, perché il Duca sempre diceva che se ne intendeva benissimo e che sapeva appunto quello che si poteva fare. *A questo io gli dissi che l'opere mie deciderebbono quella quistione e quel suo dubbio*, e che certissimo io atterrei a Sua Eccellenza molto più di quel che io gli promettevo, e che mi dessi pur le comodità che io potessi fare tal cosa, perché *sanza quelle comodità io non gli potrei attenere la gran cosa che io gli promettevo*. (Vol. II, 53, 522; my italics)³

Benvenuto, therefore, claims total freedom for the planning and realization of the project, in spite of the attempt, on the part of the patron, to influence his choices.

The personification of his future achievement ('l'opere mie deciderebbono' [my works will decide]), which becomes the subject of an action, could not express more clearly the rejection, by the sculptor, of the idea that his work produced mere objects. Moreover, critics have often underlined the fact that the artist called his works his 'figliuoli' (sons). If the work of art produced is 'inestimabile', all the same it needs important investments in order to turn out to be exceptional, as the sculptor again points out talking of 'comodità' (means). Elsewhere, and after the completion of the *Perseo*, he affirms such a necessity with a witticism that probably, already then, had become a *topos*.⁴ Actually, in answer to Cellini's request for ten thousand *scudi* as payment for the *Perseo*, the Duke answered: 'le città e i gran palazzi si fanno, con dieci mila ducati' (cities and great palaces require ten thousand *ducats* for their construction). Benvenuto replied:

sua eccellenza troverebbe infiniti uomini che gli saprieno fare delle città e dei palazzi; ma che dei Persei ei non troverebbe forse uomo al mondo, che gnele sapessi fare un tale. (Vol. II, 95, 609)⁵

The priceless value of the work of art, according to Cellini and according to the artists of the period, derives from its originality and uniqueness, repeatedly illustrated by the same artists. Neoplatonic philosophy translated into the vernacular by, among others, Marsilio Ficino, contributed to the transformation of the manufactured object into a 'work of art' in the present sense of the word.⁶ According to Neoplatonism rendered into the vernacular, the work expresses the *idea* through the design (see Chastel 1996 and also Panovsky 1924). The design translates the project of the artist, intellectually conceived, which, thanks to the technical instrument, that is, to the hand, can be given a plastic form. In fact, Vasari clearly puts forward the 'mental' nature of the work of art in his Introduction to the *Vite*:

Perché il disegno, padre delle tre arti nostre architettura, scultura e pittura, procedendo dall'intelletto cava di molte cose un giudizio universale simile a una forma ovvero idea di tutte le cose della natura, la quale è singolarissima nelle sue misure, di qui è che non solo nei corpi umani e degl'animali, ma nelle piante ancora e nelle fabbriche e sculture e pitture, cognosce la proporzione che ha il tutto con le parti e che hanno le parti fra loro e col tutto insieme; e perché da questa cognizione nasce un certo concetto e giudizio, che si forma nella mente quella tal cosa che poi espressa con le mani si chiama disegno, si può conchiudere che esso disegno altro non sia che una apparente espressione e dichiarazione del concetto che si ha nell'animo, e di quello che altri si è nella mente imaginato e fabricato nell'idea. (Vasari 1966-1987, vol. I, 15, 111)⁷

As numerous episodes in the autobiography show, in the narrative web of Cellini's *Vita*, drawing seems to be the magic key able to open many doors: this was already true with Andrea Cellini, one of the ancestors of the protagonist (1985, vol. I, 3), then with Benvenuto, at that time a young man, whose

drawings attracted the attention of Piero Torrigiani who asked him to work in England (I, 12). In Rome the drawings of Benvenuto introduced the young artist into the powerful Chigi family (I, 19) as well as the circle of the Roman goldsmiths (I, 28), and the ducal family at Mantua (I, 40).⁸

To be the author of a project, that is, of the planning of a work of art, ennobles both the artist and his/her work. On this point Cellini insists many times. In particular when the cardinal of Ferrara ordered Benvenuto to make him a saltcellar (II, 2). Two men of letters, one of whom, Luigi Alamanni, is well known, proposed a project. The cardinal, not knowing which one to choose, asks Benvenuto for his advice. The artist answers:

Però io ho grande amore ai miei figliuoli, che di questa mia professione partorisco: sì che 'l primo che vi mostrerò, Monsignor reverendissimo mio padrone, sarà mia opera e mia invenzione; perché molte cose son belle da dire, che faccendole poi non s'accompagnano bene in opera. (411)⁹

Not only does Benvenuto refuse to share his own work of art with a scholar, as artists will be asked to do after the Council of Trent,¹⁰ he even challenges this principle, explaining that an iconographic project and its realization must form part of a whole.¹¹ Cellini claims his intellectual space, not only in sculpture, but also in the goldsmith's art which was considered as belonging to a lower category than the fine arts and was excluded from the triad: architecture, sculpture and painting. Furthermore, there were very few, or hardly any, texts on the goldsmith's art and this trade, even though very useful to courts, had remained entirely restricted to the guilds and the sphere of the mechanical arts. Not only does Cellini enhance the value of the goldsmith's art, deeming it fit to be included in the arts of drawing, but he also wrote and published a treatise on the subject in 1568. He also tried to raise this art to the level of the other three, by proposing a coat of arms for the Accademia del Disegno in which, under the drawing of the Goddess of Nature, a line of hieroglyphs would represent the tools used by goldsmiths in their work. This proposal (which, obviously, was not accepted) aimed to give a place of honour to the goldsmith's art, making it the symbol of the Academy of all arts. Besides, the presence of tools next to the allegory of Nature also expressed the desire for a strong link between the project and its fulfilment and between intellectual and manual work.

The dialectic relationship between 'saying' and 'doing' is omnipresent in Cellini's work. It is significant that, in his *Poesie*, Cellini represents himself, symbolically and astrologically, in the shape of a crab:

voi sapete la natura del Granchio ... quelle due che volgarmente si domandano bocche, sono due mane, e la sua bocca e' l'ha nel petto ... rizzò in punta di piedi, e con quelli sua perversi occhi pur troppo arditamente con quelle mane in alto, e con quella sua diversa bocca si messe a parlare ... (2001, 133)¹²

In this grotesque self-portrait, the inversion, a near confusion and superimposition of mouth and hands of what is said (or written) and what is done, of the spirituality of a project and the manual character of its execution is expressed.

The debate between what is said and what is done in artistic environments came to the fore, in this period, exactly because, in this context, both the arts and printing appeared to be indispensable instruments for the above principles. Some artists did not accept the fact that discourse on the arts came from those who were not 'intendenti' (experts) in the sphere of the skills under study (see, for a discussion of this issue, Lucas 1989). This is one of the reasons why artists wrote about themselves and their crafts in many biographies, autobiographies, poems, letters, treatises, dialogues, etc. Their authorial initiatives were, however, not always appreciated. It is enough to read what Vincenzo Borghini, counsellor of Cosimo I de' Medici wrote on the subject:

io mi sono un poco maravigliato di quegli uomini da bene (gli artisti), che avendo alle mani un'arte nella quale e' vagliono assai, anzi pur sono eccellenti e se ne possono maravigliosamente onorare, egli abbino cercato gloria per un'altra, nella quale egli hanno pochissima parte et hanno mal modo di onorarsene punto, hanno più presto dar cagione di ridere a chi legge quel che gli hanno scritto. (Borghini 1978, vol. III, 612)¹³

The mental reservation of certain spheres in giving voice to the artists, in particular when their writings have to do with the diverse forms of institutional authority, probably explains, in part, why many texts written by artists were not published in the authors' lifetime. The *Vita* by Cellini was printed for the first time in 1728; the *Trattato di pittura* by Leonardo in the seventeenth century; the *Rime* by Michelangelo and even the *Ragionamenti* by Vasari after the death of their authors. Cellini was able to see his *Trattati dell'oreficeria e della scultura* published, but at the price of changes and drastic cuts which we can observe when we compare the edition of the sixteenth century with the *codice marciano* of the same century, which was found and published in the nineteenth century by Carlo Milanese.¹⁴ The reasons why these works were not published when their authors were still alive obviously vary from one artist to the other, from one text to the other. Cellini tells us, in a passage from the *Trattati* which had been suppressed in the 1568 edition, that he himself had decided not to publish the *Vita* and to make it disappear, 'considerati poi quanto e' principi grandi hanno per male che un lor servo dolendosi dica la verità delle sue ragioni'.¹⁵

He found a solution for this and added: 'e tutti gli anni che io avevo servito il mio signore il duca Cosimo, quelli con gran passione, e non senza lacrime, io gli stracciai e gitta'gli al fuoco' (1857, 12, 89).¹⁶ We know that this decision was not actually put into practice, but the ellipsis with which Cellini compares the years of his life to the pages of a book is significant. He perceives himself as an author with a double role: that of artist and writer.

Indeed, Cellini the goldsmith is probably among the first not only to consider, but also to affirm vigorously, that his works are part of himself and that they are his property. In this regard, it is enough to recall one episode. One day, in 1531, Clement VII ordered a golden chalice from him. In 1532, this work of art was not ready by the date in the contract. The Pope, displeased, wanted to collect the unfinished object, but Benvenuto vehemently refused to deliver it, saying:

se io dessi l'opera a sua Santità, io darei l'opera mia e non la sua: e per tanto l'opera mia io non gnene vo' dare: perché avendola condotta molto innanzi con le mia gran fatiche, non voglio che la vada in mano di qualche bestia ignorante, che con poca fatica me la guasti. (1985, vol. I, 60, 232)¹⁷

The artist considers that a part of his work cannot belong to the patron, whatever the agreement between the two. This untransferable part can only be offered, in no way bought. Cellini, by now, wants even the generosity of the artist to correspond to that of princes, because the work of an artist is not like any other work. The social statute of the work of art is, in such a way, ennobled in the same way as the social status of the famous artist tries to raise himself to the level of the cultured gentleman and courtier.

Nevertheless, deep down, in Cellini's *Vita*, various episodes are concerned with the impossibility for the maestro to carry out his works of art without the help of competent collaborators specialized in diverse fields related to his,¹⁸ even if, on various occasions, he wants to show that, alone against everyone, only he can succeed to come out of difficult situations. It is, in fact, episodes like this that show that, in the text, a real tension existed between the Artist and the artisan-artists indispensable for the realization of a work of art.

3. *Vasari*

Other texts of famous artists try to show to what extent their visual works are not to be compared to luxurious objects and, instead, how much they are the result of a process and of intellectual reflection. Vasari is, obviously, one of these and I will foreground my main point starting from his *Ragionamenti*.

It was not unusual for a man of letters, a religious scholar, or chancellor, to act as tutor to a prince, but it was certainly very rare for an artist to assume such a function. And yet, this is the role that Vasari attributes to himself in the dialogue entitled *Ragionamenti*. We know of the existence of other antecedents: for example, the treatise on architecture by Filarete, *La Sforzinda* (1461-1464), which consists mostly of a conversation between the artist, the duke of Milan, Francesco I and Galeazzo Sforza. In the most famous section of this book, the author exposes to his prince his idea of a plan for an ideal city. Vasari, instead, offers Francesco, son of Cosimo de' Medici, a lesson on the

history of the State of Florence and Tuscany since its Roman origins, through his commentary on the frescoes painted by himself and his collaborators.

The *Ragionamenti*, the writing of which was started – if one takes into consideration some exchanges of letters – in 1558 (on this point see Tinagli Baxter 1985, 87), are a dialogue between two voices only, those of the painter-architect and Francesco, the son of Cosimo I. In 1564, the period in which the works for the rearrangement of the ‘Sala grande’ (called ‘Salone de’ Cinquecento’ in the nineteenth century) were initiated, Francesco became head of State as regent on behalf of the father whom he succeeded with the title of Grand Duke of Florence and Tuscany, at the death of the latter. Published after the death of the author, the dialogue presents itself as a guided tour of Palazzo Vecchio when Vasari was in charge of radical alterations. The artist is the guide and Francesco the visitor, which might seem paradoxical for a prince who is in his own residence. The architect, painter and decorator, who is in charge of the project for the renovation of the palace, comments on the work in progress to the future head of State. At first glance he gives an account of what he is doing.

The dialogue, divided into three *Giornate*, consists, in the first two days, of comment on the architectural plans for the Palace and frescoes that cover the walls and ceilings of the private apartments of the Medici. The third day is devoted to the walls of the public spaces, i.e. the immense Sala Grande.

The whole pictorial project of the palace, although going back to mythology and, in a lesser measure, to religious themes, favours historical themes in the Sala Grande where the decorations consist of 48 frescoes centred on the history of the State of Florence and Tuscany. Therefore, in describing his work as a painter to the young prince, Vasari also has to act as a historian as well as commentator because he offers his own interpretation of history. One can, however, object that he is not the author of the project since the work of the historical and erudite research had been entrusted to two men of letters, Vincenzo Borghini and Cosimo Bartoli. Besides, it is well known that the Duke intervened personally on various points and was helped in doing so by his counsellors, Lelio Torelli and abbé Giusti (see Muccini 1995, 85).¹⁹ In reality, the question which concerns Vasari’s exact share of responsibility in the ideological choices of the representations is much discussed, but it is universally agreed that he was far from being simply an artistic instrument; it is enough to read the exchange of letters regarding the project of this hall between the artist, the Duke and Vincenzo Borghini. Above all, the *Ragionamenti* would have had no possibility of being written if Vasari had not assumed the responsibility for the works in their integrity. For this reason, Julian Kliemann rightfully argues that one can consider Vasari as an author *à part entière* of this formidable enterprise, since the initiatives and projects came from him (1993, 71). All the same, some adjustments were imposed, in particular, by the Duke and there were, sometimes, divergencies as one can

sense from the moments of discouragement, as well as sheer impatience, on the part of the painter, which appear in his correspondence (Muccini 1995, 85).²⁰ These, however were only the usual negotiations between artists and patrons. Nevertheless, even in its very conception, the dialogue reveals a certain ambiguity as regards the part played by each of the speakers.

Given the new ceremonial function attributed to the Sala Grande, the frescoes refer, on the one hand, to the important people of this world, (emperors, monarchs, popes, cardinals, etc.) and to their subordinates (ambassadors, etc.); on the other, to a more normal local public, the Florentine oligarchy, the representatives of the great families who participated, in a subordinate position, in the audiences, ceremonies, banquets and other festivities in that official setting. The didactic role which is generally attributed to images does not concern, therefore, in this case, an undifferentiated public. Vasari himself specifies this in a passage from the 'Giornata I' of the *Ragionamenti* when he writes that one of his aims was, through his pictorial work, to carry out research about what is 'utilissimo e necessario' (very useful and necessary) and he specifies that his paintings want to be 'come uno specchio che serviranno a chi le guarda a imparare a vivere, e massime a' principi, che tali storie non hanno a essere specchio da privati' (2007, 81).²¹ The artist points out, without ambiguity, that his educational programme addresses those who govern. He confirms this by giving certain details: for example, when he states that he does his best to 'combattere co' vizi, della invidia, e della avarizia, e lussuria, e molti altri, ma ancora – he adds significantly – con le contrarietà de' giuochi della fortuna, che non son pochi'.²² 'Fortuna', as we know, is the most tireless enemy of the Great, as the destinies of Cesare Borgia, Castruccio Castracani and many others, according to Machiavelli, teach us. According to Vasari, the subject includes also Alessandro de' Medici, now dead.

Did these frescoes, through the illustrations, stand also for a version of the *Principe*? It would be difficult to answer such a question. All the same, Vasari, 'pittore d'istoria' (painter of history), reveals his ambition to be considered also a 'storico tramite la pittura' (historian through painting). The fact that the interlocutor of his dialogue – who was 23 in 1563, when the decoration of the Sala started²³ – is launched towards the regency is eloquent in this regard; and this even more so in that this text was not supposed to remain buried and forgotten in some drawer because, in his printed works, mainly in *Le Vite*, the author announces its imminent publication.

The ordinary onlookers in the frescoes mostly consisted of eminent men from the Duchy of Florence and Tuscany whose ancestors, in various roles, had been representatives of the city's past; a group, therefore, who still remembered – individually or collectively – this Sala as the high seat of Florentine republican politics, arranged in a way, at the request of Savonarola, to welcome the members of the Great Council, the essential organ of the republican government, which he supported. Vasari's frescoes, therefore, aimed

at *re-educating*, rather than educating, the above mentioned audience. Up to 1529, this hall had, in fact, been perceived by many Florentines as the real symbolic place of freedom; and, since then, the decoration of the walls of the Sala Grande with illustrations presenting the Florentine military victories, had already been foreseen, as the cartoons of the battle of Anghiari by Leonardo and the battle of Cascina by Michelangelo can testify. But the project for the rule of the Medici by Vasari obviously had a completely different aim. One can measure the importance of the political reorientation of this place when one thinks that the Sala Grande was to be inaugurated in the autumn of 1565 to celebrate the marriage of Francesco, Vasari's interlocutor in the dialogue, to Joan of Austria.

The rearrangements required by Duke Cosimo and conceived by Vasari since 1555, therefore, mainly intended to adapt this place to its new functions as a precious container of princely magnificence. They confer a visible form to the change of regime set up in Florence from 1530 onwards.²⁴

In the dialogue, Vasari, as its architect, insists many times on the fact that his reconstruction of Palazzo Vecchio consists of the exaltation of the present through important novelties, without in any way repudiating the past. His project seems to be conceived in continuity with the past rather than in contrast with it. He deplores the absence of global coherence in the old structure of the Palazzo; he recalls 'questi fondamenti e mura vecchie, fatte a caso da que' primi cittadini, che non a pompa, ma solo per comodo loro le fabricorno' (2007, 11).²⁵ In this way, he acts, in the artistic field, in the same way as Cosimo I, who declared himself Prince of the Republic, acts in the political field. Then, he defines the transformations he had conceived by emphasizing his will to introduce grandeur and harmony 'in questi sassi' and in 'quelle ossa', 'in queste muraglie, le quali per esservi tante discordanze e bruttezza di stanzaccie vecchie, et in loro disunite, che mostrano la disunione de' governi passati' (10).²⁶ In his lexical analogies between architectural and political terminology, he increases the symbiosis between the work of the architect and that of the prince. For example, he greatly exploits the polysemy of the word *order*. In its stylistic and aesthetic meaning, this word can signify a harmonious and rational disposition; but it also has a political meaning as a synonym of institutions and it is also used in military language. Vasari often turns to analogies between his task and that of the prince which, in both cases, have consisted in building something new starting from old structures (1966-1987, 8).²⁷ If Vasari has in mind Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the relationships between *new orders* and *old orders* when he defines, through the transformations of the palace, the internal situation of the Duke de' Medici regarding the State of Florence,²⁸ he also uses *Il Principe* by the same Machiavelli to define the external situation of the Prince of Florence regarding a foreign population, as that of Pisa was considered in those days.

The similarities between architecture and politics embellish the whole dialogue and allow Vasari, through the use of *topoi* of Florentine political

discourse, to raise himself to the cultural level of the Prince and to present himself as an artist who counts among the creators of the Medici regime. It is significant that, in this dialogue, Vasari, through some apparently modest descriptive work, has the leisure and the idea to appoint himself tutor to the prince as well as historian of Tuscany through images.

The formulation which, in their written works, both Cellini and Vasari give to their activity, shows how the eminent artists of that period redefine the nature of their work; how they try to give a new identity to the products which they create and how they try to impose a new type of relationship with their patrons or customers. At the same time, it is difficult for them to obtain satisfaction and the not immediate publication of the *Vita* by Cellini is probably clear proof of this.

The monumental *Vite* by Vasari condenses in it the initiatives of all the artist-writers of that time and manages to codify for centuries the promotion of the artist as Author, that is, creator; creator of goods that seem material, but that in part are not, in that they contain a spiritual dimension by now clearly affirmed. Such an affirmation of the status of these works happens at the time when the arts are becoming a phenomenal market object thanks to patronage and the collection of objects. *L'art pour l'art*, that is, the idea that a work of art is *inestimabile*, an idea so well illustrated by Cellini in his autobiography, by Vasari in his *Vite* and by many other artists of the sixteenth century in their writings, sees the light just when works of art become very expensive commercial objects. One can talk of *negozio dell'inestimabile*; and, to continue with the apparent paradox, one can also point out that the artist as author of a unique work of art came into being exactly at the moment in which the techniques of engraving and other means of reproduction allow for an industrial diffusion of their works' shadow (that is, for example, their preparatory drawings) and for their diffusion.

Cellini's *Vita* and Vasari's *Le Vite* offer a classification of artistic excellence; in a certain sense, they have contributed to creating a hierarchy in the world of artistic production. They have, for centuries, put in the limelight some artists, leaving, as a result, many others aside. It is enough to recall that the *Torrentiniana* collects together about 135 biographies, but contains the names of about 1500 secondary artists or artisans who have, they as well, contributed to the progress of the arts (see Ciampaglia 2008). Behind hundreds of famous *artefici*, rendered more famous by Vasari even after their death, stand a productive mass of people, who have remained more or less obscure, but who benefit from the economic dynamism brought about by the gigantic art market. As we can see from the works of historians like Salvatore Settis, Richard Goldthwaite or Patrick Boucheron, the new image of the modern artist, as codified in the sixteenth century, hides a part of itself: that is, its important function in the mechanisms of the economy of the Italian states.

It is enough to read the correspondence of Buonarroti to have an idea of this. At first sight, this correspondence could appear to be the other side of the biographies that were written of him by Condivi or Vasari, in that behind the divine solitary Michelangelo, face to face with his figures, painted or sculptured, there appear in his letters so many workers who busy themselves and belong, more or less directly, to the artistic crafts. The letters of Buonarroti clearly highlight the entrepreneurial management of the artistic genius (Fiorato 2010). On the other hand, in his correspondence, Michelangelo shows an obsessive relationship with time, even if this is expressed in an existential way. It is not by chance that Cellini, even in his microanalysis of the verbal tenses of the *Vita*, expresses an existential relationship with temporality, grounded in the simultaneity of various actions carried out at the same time. We know that Vasari often boasted of working rapidly. It is enough to recall that for the diligence of his artistic performance, the decoration of the hall of the Chancellery in Rome was baptized 'Sala dei cento giorni' (Hall of the Hundred days). On the contrary, Leonardo claimed the right to work according to criteria which were not temporal, but rather linked to his interior rhythm, that is, his inspiration. In short, the attention given by the artists to the question of temporality is a clue, among many others, of the tension between *creation* and *production*, between an individual and a collective approach to the arts.²⁹

¹ 'was completely satisfied and soon he provided for his payment according to custom for such important works'. This essay was originally written in Italian; all translations of passages from Italian primary sources are editorial.

² 'telling me to ask for my labour all that I desired, because it seemed to her that I deserved a lot, so much so that it seemed to her that, even giving me a castle would not be enough but, since she could not do this, laughingly, she told me to ask her what she could do'.

³ 'There was quite a discussion because the Duke was always saying that he was a great expert and that he, therefore, knew what could be done. At this I told him that my works would put to rest this question and his doubt, and that most certainly I would hand over to his Excellency more than what I was promising him; and, therefore, to give me the means for carrying out such a project, because without those means I would not be able to create the important work I was promising him'.

⁴ It is probable that Cellini adopted, for his case, a saying which was going round the artistic circles, since a different saying, but with the same meaning, concerns Titian and Charles V.

⁵ 'your excellency would find an infinite number of men who would know how to construct cities and palaces, but as for Perseo, you would perhaps not find a single man in the world who could create such a one'.

⁶ This transformation has been so powerful that nowadays we have almost forgotten that a masterpiece, in the Middle Ages, was simply a handmade article carried out by an artisan pupil or by an apprentice worker as an exam test.

⁷ 'Because design, father of our three arts, architecture, sculpture and painting, coming as it does from the mind, obtains, for many things, a universal evaluation similar to a form, that

is, an idea, of all the things in nature, which is particular in its dimensions, not only as regards human and animal bodies, but also as regards plants and, through its being manufactured by sculpture and painting, knows the proportions that the whole has as regards the parts and that which the parts have among themselves and with the whole, and, since from this knowledge, a certain concept and evaluation is born which forms, in the mind, that certain thing that, when expressed by hand, is called design, one can conclude that this design is only an apparent expression and declaration of the concept that one has in one's soul, and of what others have imagined in their mind and manufactured through an idea'.

⁸ According to M.L. Altieri Biagi (1972), Cellini has a practical, not a conceptual idea of drawing. If the plan turns out to be convincing when we consider all the works written by Cellini (*Vita, Trattati, Rime*), it would be better to tone it down when we examine exclusively his autobiography. Indeed, the sculptor and goldsmith, used to conceive his works in full relief, places more value particularly on the small models that allow him to plan a future work in a three dimensional way. On this, see Dubard de Gaillarbois (2009). See also, in the same volume, the article by T. Golsenne, that speaks about the 'pensiero volumetrico' (volumetric thought) of Cellini (2009, 9).

⁹ 'I love my children very much and I give birth to them through my profession: so, the first that I shall show you, reverend Monsignor, will be my work of art and invented by me; because many things are beautiful in words, but it does not follow that they come out well when finished'.

¹⁰ It is apt, though, to recall that Leon Battista Alberti, already in his 1435 treatise on drawing, aspired to the autonomy of the painter's invention, considering that he should be a man of culture and a man of letters.

¹¹ In Giovan Andrea Gilio's dialogue, some speakers express the need to get an artist to work under the intellectual guidance of a scholar: 'Tutto questo [l'errore] procede de l'ignoranza de' pittori, che, se fussero letterati, non errarebbono in cose così chiare e manifeste'. (All this [the mistake] is the result of the ignorance of the painters who, if they were men of letters, would not make such manifest mistakes. [1961, II, 33]).

¹² From 'Sogno fatto in nel sonnellin d'oro': 'you know the nature of the Crab ... those two that are vulgarly thought to be mouths, are two hands, and his mouth is on his chest... he raised himself up on the tip of his feet, and with his perverse bold eyes, with his hands held up high, and with his other mouth, he started to talk'.

¹³ 'I was a bit astonished by those gentlemen (the artists) who, possessing an art in which they are good, in fact they are excellent and can feel marvellously honoured, they search for glory in another art in which they play a very small part and cannot be honoured for it, but can be cause of laughter for those who read what they have written'.

¹⁴ See the comparative analysis of the *Trattati* published in 1568 and the Marciana manuscript discussed by C. Milanese (1857, XIV-XVII).

¹⁵ 'considering how important princes take badly the fact that one of their servants, regretfully, tells the truth about his motives'.

¹⁶ 'and all the years that I had served my Lord the Duke Cosimo, with great passion and not without tears, I tore up and threw into the fire'.

¹⁷ 'if I gave the work of art to his Holiness, I would give him my work, not his: and so, I do not want to give you my work of art: because, having, with great fatigue, taken it a long way forward, I do not want it to fall in the hands of some ignorant beast, who with little fatigue, ruins it'.

¹⁸ For example in recruiting in Paris competent collaborators and in the non positive exchanges with some 'vecchioni di quei maestri di Parigi' (old masters in Paris), vol. II, 18, 449, or else in the episode of the fusion of the *Perseo* (vol. II, 75, 567).

¹⁹ The main artists who collaborated with Vasari were Battista Naldini, Giovanni Stradano and Jacopo Zucchi. Their portraits can be seen, together with that of Vasari, in the foreground of the fresco called Trionfo della guerra di Siena, in the Sala Grande.

²⁰ For example, one perceives a certain impatience regarding Cosimo's needs when Vasari writes to him saying: 'L'istoria che mancava alla sala di 39 [storie] che con l'ordine che quella approvò il Poggio [Poggio a Caiano] son fatte tutte, e l'ultima manca, che per finire di abbozzarla di colori vo sollecitando ... e quantunque il Prior degli Innocenti [Borghini] abbi impazzato con M. Lelio [Torelli] e altri dotti sopra quel che V.E.I. desiderava, credo che forse avrà trovato il bisogno'. (The story that was missing in the Sala of 39 [stories] that, with the order accepted by Poggio [Poggio a Caiano] are all done, except for the last which is missing and for which I am requesting you for its colour sketching ... and although the Prior of the Innocents [Borghini] was crazy about M. Lelio [Torelli] and other scholars ignoring what your Illustrious Excellence desired, I think that perhaps he may need you).

²¹ 'Like a mirror so that they can help those who look at them to learn how to live, according to rules and principles, because such stories should not be private mirrors'. He also says: 'Io ho dipinto, Signor Principe mio, la vita d'Ercole in queste camere ... e mi sono sempre ito immaginando che questi onorati pensieri e fatiche nascano, e tutto il giorno accaggiano a' principi grandi, i quali si affaticano a ogni ora, mentre vivono, governando per combattere co' vizi della invidia e della avarizia e lussuria e molti altri, ma ancora con le contrarietà de' giuochi della fortuna, che non son pochi. Dove infinitamente sono lodati coloro che con la virtù e valore dell'animo loro gli vincono, che ciò causa a questo mio pensiero un altro intendimento, il quale in questa mia opera è utilissimo e necessario, atteso che la vita di questo dio terrestre, e i sua gran fatti e le battaglie e le avversità che egli ebbe sono in queste mie pitture come uno specchio che serviranno a chi le guarda a imparare a vivere, e massime a' principi, che tali storie non hanno a essere specchio da privati'. (My Prince, I have painted the life of Hercules in these rooms ... and I have always imagined that these honourable thoughts and hard work are born for, and all day long echo the great princes, who, at every hour, during their life, are busy governing to fight against the vices of envy, avarice, lust and many other vices, but also against the opposition of the games of fortune, which are many. Where those who with the virtue and the bravery of their hearts win over them are praised, and this gives another intention to my thought, which, in this work of mine is very useful and necessary, seeing that the life of this earthly god, as well as his great feats, battles and adversities, are present in these paintings of mine as a mirror so that they can serve who looks at them as a lesson on how to live according to maxims and principles, so that these stories do not serve only as a private mirror).

²² See also the text in the preceding note; 'fight the vices of envy, avarice, lust and many others, but again to fight also the misfortunes of the games of fortune, which are not few'.

²³ The contents of the dialogue show that the virtual visit takes place when the works of internal decoration of the palace were almost finished.

²⁴ It is, moreover, significant that, since 1542, Cosimo had ordered that the works of the architectural reorganization of the palace were to start with the 'gran salone'. The sculptor Baccio Bandinelli and the architect Battista del Tasso were the first artists chosen by the prince to renew the Palazzo. Vasari was their successor and, considering that the work already done was not grandiose enough, he had the roof done again, in particular, he had the ceiling of the Sala Grande built higher.

²⁵ 'these foundations and old walls built haphazardly by those first citizens, who built them for their own comfort and not for pomp'.

²⁶ 'These stones'; 'those bones'; 'these walls, being so discordant and having so many ugly and old rooms with no unity among them, show the lack of union of the past governments'.

²⁷ 'Anzi, si come subito che egli fu creato duca di questa repubblica conservò le leggi vecchie e sopra quelle altre ne fondò risguardanti il benessere de' suoi cittadini, così per lo medesimo rispetto queste mura vecchie sconsertate e scomposte volle ridurre con ordine e misura ponendovi, come vedete, questi vaghi ornamenti per far conoscere, anche nelle cose difficili et imperfette, che ha saputo usare la facilità e la perfezione et il buono uso dell'architettura; così come anche ha fatto nel modo del governo della città e del dominio. E merita,

Signor Principe mio, più lode chi trova un corpo d'una fabbrica disunita e da molte volontà fatto a caso e per uso di più famiglie, et alto di piani e bassi e con buona salita di scale piane per a' cavalli et a piè, e lo riduca senza rovinare molto e unito e capace alla comodità d'un principe, capo d'una repubblica, facendo un vecchio diventare giovane e un morto vivo, che sono i miracoli che fanno conoscere alle genti che cosa sia dall'impossibile al possibile e dal falso al vero, perché ogni ingegno mediocre avrebbe saputo di nuovo fare qualcosa e saria stato bene, ma il racconciar le cose guaste senza rovina, in questo consiste maggiore ingegno'. (In fact, as soon as he was given the title of Duke of this Republic, he kept the old laws and issued others which regarded the well being of his citizens; in the same way, with the same respect, he wanted to give order and proportion to these old flaking and dismantled walls, placing, as you can see, these vague ornaments to make known that, even in difficult and imperfect things, he knew how to use the facility, the perfection and put architecture to good use; as he has done in his way of governing the city and his dominion. My Prince deserves more praise he who finds the skeleton of an uncoordinated building built by many people of good will for the use of families, with low and high floors and a good flight of stairs both for horses and people to climb and turns it, without causing ruin, into an organized and capacious place fit for the commodities than a prince, head of a Republic, turning an old man into a young one and a dead person into someone alive; these are the miracles which make people know what can be changed from impossible to possible, from false to true, because any person of mediocre intelligence would be able to construct something new which would turn out to be good, but real intelligence lies in repairing something damaged without ruining it).

²⁸ Machiavelli gives the following title to chapter 1, 25 of the *Discorsi*: 'Chi vuole riformare uno stato anticato in una città libera, ritenga almeno l'ombra de' modi antichi'. (Who wants to change an old state into a free state, must retain, at least, the shadow of old ways); and in the same chapter he points out: 'E questo si debbe osservare da tutti coloro che vogliono scancellare un antico vivere in una città, e ridurla a uno vivere nuovo e libero: perché alterando le cose nuove le menti degli uomini, ti debbi ingegnare che quelle alterazioni ritenghino più dell'antico sia possibile; e se i magistrati variano e di numero e d'autorità e di tempo, degli antichi che almeno ritenghino il nome'. (And this should be observed by all those who want to cancel an old way of living in a city, and reduce it to a new and free way of life: because when altering into new things and into men's new ways of thinking, one must do one's best for these alterations to retain as much as possible the old ways; and if the magistrates vary in number, authority and time, from the old ones, at least they should retain their name). Machiavelli 1968, vol. I, 25, 192-193.

²⁹ Another element of tension that should be studied, among others, in Vasari's *Vite*, is the relationship between the artist and his work. Sometimes it is the work that defines the biographical profile of a person; at times, instead, it is the contrary: the personality of the artist has an influence on the perception that Vasari has of the work of art. In this regard, see Lucas (2008).

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