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PART I

INHABITING HISTORY

SELF-DEFINITION

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1

IMITATION

James Ackerman

The concept of imitation informs and connects almost all of the studies in this volume; it was a concept that preoccupied makers in all disciplines during the Renaissance – writers, historians, artists and others concerned with invention. More than an issue of orienting the maker to his natural and cultural milieu, it was a way of grasping history and the difference of the past from the present, a way of formulating a structure for explaining cultural evolution, a foundation for education, and finally a way of defining the limits and the opportunities of invention; it is central to understanding the arts and letters in antiquity and the Renaissance. Though developed mainly by writers on poetics and rhetoric, it could be applied to invention in a wide spectrum of disciplines – as these essays attest. I shall review the major contributors to the dialogue on imitation in the ancient world and in the Renaissance up to 1550, emphasizing the principal differences of opinion, and shall conclude with a commentary on the implications of its merging in the modern era into the concept of influence.[1]

Imitation was understood in two senses during antiquity and the Renaissance: (1) the imitation of Nature or human behavior and (2) the imitation of preceding writers and artists. The latter was the most common concern in antiquity, especially in Rome; and among Renaissance humanists it was addressed in the context of rhetoric, in particular in discussions of style, structure, and exposition. Aristotle was the principal source of the idea of imitation as mimesis; in his *Poetics*, which dealt primarily with drama, art is the mirror of Nature in the sense of human behavior. In this sphere, Plato did not generate nearly as much discussion, because he had proposed the imitation of ideas, which was not open to extended interpretation and debate. Aristotelian imitation dominated discourse on the subject throughout antiquity and extended, for example in the Elder Pliny's history of the fine arts, to the representation of the visible world in general. Renaissance humanists and theorists followed this path, reiterating that art copies Nature, both in the Aristotelian sense of human action and in the sense of representing the ambient world. Both natures were to be represented, not exactly as they are, but as they ought to be, but the rationale for this was almost never made explicit. Jan Bialostocki, in a brilliant essay of 1963, discussed this in terms of the duality of imitation of *natura naturata* (created Nature) and of *natura naturans* (Nature as creator).[2]

The imitation of preceding makers, however, which did not fit the category of mimesis, was the subject of a vast literature in both periods. That is to be expected, because if Nature was to be bettered by the maker, the work of predecessors would be the only external guide to how to better it. For this reason rhetorical texts advised would-be Roman orators to ingest the written records of their predecessors' speeches, and Renaissance artists and humanists to absorb the remains of antiquity and the best moderns. So the two imitations were inextricably linked. Modern commentators, especially on the fine arts, have segregated the two meanings of *imitation* as if working from Nature and working from preceding artists and writers were unrelated.[3] But even in the visual sphere, the double meaning is ambiguous only to us; critical commentary throughout the Renaissance took it for granted that one learns and practices verisimilitude from art as well as from Nature.

The bond between Roman and humanist writers – as we have neglected to stress sufficiently – was cemented by the similarity of their historical position. Both were engaged in a renaissance, the Romans responding to their Greek predecessors in almost the same ways as humanists did to the Romans.[4] In his early writing, Cicero, whose texts and style dominated

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the discussion of imitation, focused on the lessons of Greek oratory and only later dealt with those of his Latin predecessors. Cicero was inconsistent in his answer to the question of whether to imitate many orators or to focus on one model. In the early *De inventione*[5] he wrote that in composing the work he "had culled the flower of many minds." He prefaced this discussion in the introduction to Book II by an example from painting, a story, repeated by Alberti and incessantly through the Renaissance, of the painter Zeuxis who, when commissioned to do a painting for the Temple of Juno in Croton, chose to depict Helen of Troy. Because Croton was famed for its beautiful women, he decided to seek as a model, not the most beautiful one, but several, from each of whom he would select the most beautiful feature. Cicero commented that even the best in Nature – or presumably in oratory – would have some flaw.[6] Cicero's pairing of rhetorical and figural imitation was at least as important for practice as the more frequently cited Horatian *ut pictura poesis*.

In Cicero's *De oratore*, however, Greek oratory is seen as a sequence of masters who formed schools based on their special styles. Referring to the Greeks of the period between Pericles and Isocrates, he wrote: "their uniformity of style could never have come about had they not kept before them some single model for imitation: . . . they all still retained the peculiar vigor of Pericles, but their texture was a little more luxuriant."[7] Cicero refers to each successive style as an *aetas* (age, era), which Vasari appropriated in his three *età* marking the historical evolution of Renaissance art. In this way, Cicero's review of imitation in Greece served also as the model for Vasarian art history and, in a sense, for the art history of succeeding centuries.

Even Cicero's two last rhetorical texts, which are contemporary, differ on the issue of one or many models: in the *Brutus*, Demosthenes and Attic style in general is the recommended model,[8] while in *Orator* the argument becomes Platonic, and the orator imitates an image (*species*) presented in the mind.[9]

Horace provides a more personal reflection on the issue, closer to praxis, when replying to the criticism that he had leaned too heavily on his predecessors. "I was the first to plant free footsteps on virgin soil; I walked not where others trod; who trusts himself will lead and rule the swarm. I was the first to show to Latium the iambics of Paros, following the rhythms and spirit of Archilocus. . . . "[10]

This implies first that the reading public did not approve of borrowings that were too close (Horace himself was derisive of his imitators), and second that borrowings from great Greek predecessors would have been more acceptable than from Roman, as in the Renaissance borrowings from Rome were always considered acceptable.

Because Cicero had left a mixed message, Quintilian's work on rhetorical education, the *Institutione oratoria,* was to become the principal source for those Renaissance writers – a majority – who favored combining the most admirable features of the finest predecessors, though he emphasized that the best qualities of any maker – *ingenium, inventio, vis, facilitas* – are inimitable.[11] What is imitable seems to be style: he speaks of the brevity of Sallust, the fullness of Livy.[12] But mere imitation is too easy, the path of lazy people; one must above all be inventive.

A view of imitation as the motivator of artistic evolution came readily to the Roman writers of the Augustan age and their immediate followers, but already in the course of the first century before our era a sense of decline from that peak crept into the discussion and undermined its rationale. Cicero observed of Greek oratory after Isocrates: "After these men had disappeared, the memory of all of them gradually was obscured and vanished and another mode of oratory came into being that was softer and more lax."[13]

Pliny was even more severe in assessing late Hellenistic sculpture, though, when he wrote bluntly, "art stopped" (in the third century B.C.), he was using "art" in the sense of technique, and was referring to the capacity to realize large-scale bronze casting.[14]

The elder Seneca, who was born during Cicero's lifetime, wrote in his *Controversiae:* "You should not imitate one man, however distinguished, for an imitator never comes up to the level of his model. Moreover, you can by these means judge how sharply standards are falling every day, how far some grudge on Nature's part has sent eloquence downhill. Everything . . . reached its peak in Cicero's day. . . . "[15]

The better-known son of this despondent gentleman, Lucius Seneca, following Horace and Virgil, advised the maker to imitate bees,[16] gathering pollen from many flowers. But he was the first to ask in this context whether pollen is itself sweet or whether it is transformed to sweetness by the bee's breath – the breath being, of course, the inventiveness of the maker.

Despite the variety with which ancient authors approached their discussions of imitation, all agreed that it was inevitable, and desirable, that the imitator recast his source and appropriate it to his own inventive capacity; only in this way could the art evolve and avoid decline. The discussion of imitation became a major enterprise of the humanists from the fourteenth century on, starting with Petrarch's review of the Ciceronian arguments. After Petrarch, the theme was addressed by most of the major humanists, sometimes in the framework of a particular genre of dialogue, an

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exchange of letters in which one writer argues for imitation of a single model and one for selecting from many. The earliest of the exchanges was between Lorenzo Valla, who had discovered Quintilian's work before 1428, and Poggio Bracciolini,[17] followed before 1490 by Angelo Poliziano and Paolo Cortesi. Cortesi was a young man at the time and articulated an academic "Ciceronian" (single model) position. As one would expect, the proponents of imitating many sources favored innovation and the autonomy of the maker, and the proponents of the single source were more authoritarian and disposed to establish rules. The latter were referred to as "Ciceronians," not because they followed Cicero's views (which we have seen to be ambiguous), but because they chose him as the single model for imitation.[18] Poliziano annihilates his correspondent with vigor and humor:

> there is one question of style on which I take issue with you. If I understand you, you approve only those who copy the features of Cicero. To me the form of a bull or a lion seems more respectable than that of an ape, even if an ape looks more like a man. Nor, as Seneca remarked, do those most highly regarded for eloquence resemble each other. Quintilian ridicules those who think themselves Cicero's brothers because they end their sentences *esse videatur*. Horace scolds those who are imitators and nothing else. Those who compose only on the basis of imitation strike me as parrots or magpies bringing out things that they do not understand. Such writers lack strength and life; they lack energy, feeling, character; they stretch out, go to sleep, and snore. . . . And they have the temerity to pass judgment on the learned, whose style has been enriched by abstruse erudition, broad reading and prolonged practice.[19]

The most detailed and extensive exchange, written in about 1512, was that of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo.[20] Pico was the first to answer the question of how those who picked from many sources ever arrived at a consistent style; he adapted the Neoplatonic principle of the Idea, proposing that every inventive maker innately has an idea of personal expression (this idea, however, was not truly Neoplatonic, because it is individual and has no transcendental reference); it is the essence of the maker's *ingegno* and gives a focus to his various borrowings and to his power of invention. What Michelangelo had to say about imitation was in harmony with Pico, though the Neoplatonic aspect was stronger.[21] Bembo had no confidence in individual gifts and was convinced that to buzz about like a bee was a formula for chaos. He demanded concentration on one model because he believed that style in a given genre could not be compounded from many sources; one must, rather, go to Cicero for expository prose, to Virgil for dramatic poetry, and, in the vernacular, to Petrarch for the lyric. Bembo was the first to identify style (*stilus*), in the sense of tone or voice, as the essential trait to be sought and emulated, whereas his predecessors – Pico included – had focused on content and structure.[22] Indeed, the bees gathering pollen and the painter choosing individual features from the maidens of Croton concerned quantities, not qualities or, to put it more simply, the raw materials of imitation. *Stilus*, incidentally, did not take root in discourse on the visual arts until after the Renaissance; its role was assumed by the vaguer term *maniera,* probably because the original meaning of *stilus* was the instrument of writing.[23]

Bembo's position was moral as well as critical; he saw in the authority of tradition and its great figures a civilizing force and a framework for education. Bembo was in the main a conservative, though he left room for innovation and personal character, as many Ciceronians did not; his precepts were more restrictive than those of his adversary Pico. Yet he was the only individual in the sixteenth century to anticipate aspects of the definition of the classic that was to be formulated in the mid-1600s – the focus on formal style, the establishment of permanent principles.[24] We can find in the Pico–Bembo dialogue the roots of the major cultural issues of the ensuing centuries – the battle of the ancients and the moderns, the psychological awareness that led to the birth of aesthetics, even the Classic–Romantic duel of the nineteenth century.

It is paradoxical that if Bembo was the harbinger of classicism, the art academies, especially that of the Carracci at Bologna, which did most to promote a classical style, instituted a curriculum based on the imitation of many ancient and modern models. I am not prepared to resolve the paradox now, but I would like to see more investigation of the relationship of art education to the dialogue on imitation.[25]

Preoccupation with imitation was not limited to oratory and literature; it was central in discussions of the writing of history.[26] Poliziano in 1490 gave a series of lectures on Suetonius and published the introductory one in which he recommended establishing laws of history. His preferred models, besides Suetonius, were Herodotus, Thucydides, Sallust, and Livy. The major text of the period on history writing, Pontano's *Actius* of 1499, recommends the imitation of different authors according to the subject and to the writer's taste.

In the new century, historical theory began to focus more on method – particularly the choice and use of sources. Machiavelli proudly used Livy as a framework, and in *The Prince* referred to another kind of mimesis: "walking in the paths beaten by great

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men and those who were most excellent to imitate."[27] Thus, the actions portrayed by ancient historians could be used as exempla for modern readers; early Renaissance historians claimed that history is philosophy taught through example.[28]

In one field, architecture, three types of imitation were pursued. The imitation of preceding architectural literature was simplified by the fact that only one model was available, Vitruvius, as in painting there was only Pliny. Alberti's treatise on building exemplifies the creative imitation of Vitruvius' text. But this discipline focused on the imitation of ancient structures and ornament, incessantly recording and reconstructing the remains. The case of the five orders is paradigmatic of creative imitation; they were studied from Vitruvius' enigmatic text and from a vast array of surviving and inconsistent examples, but the canons devised by Serlio, Vignola, and Palladio in the mid-sixteenth century revised the models to conform with individual disposition and their need for rationalized order.[29] The third kind of imitation, that of the forms and functions of Nature – an example from Alberti is the imaging of vaults sustained by bones (piers) that are bound by ligaments (ribs) – is unique to architecture.[30]

Leonardo da Vinci was the only Renaissance writer who disapproved of *all* imitation in the classical sense. He wrote of it: "No one should ever imitate the *maniera* of another because he will be called a nephew and not a child of nature with regard to art. Because things in nature exist in such abundance, we need and we ought rather to have recourse to nature than to those masters who have learned from her."[31]

As a corollary to this, he adds: "That painting is most praiseworthy which conforms most with the thing imitated, and I propose this to confound those painters who want to improve [*raconciare*] natural things."[32] But who would claim that Leonardo's painted figures and landscapes are mere reproductions of visual percepts?

Lodovico Dolce, writing in the mid-sixteenth century, no longer felt the need to sound like a naturalist: "In part also one should imitate the lovely marble or bronze works by the ancient masters. Indeed, the man who savors their incredible perfection and fully makes it his own will confidently be able to correct many defects in nature itself . . . For antique objects embody complete artistic perfection and may serve as exemplars for the whole of beauty."[33]

Even if idealizing is not one's goal, one can approach Nature only through the formulas one has learned, what Gombrich called matching.[34] Nature and earlier representations of Nature are in practice inseparable.

Baldassare Castiglione's dialogue *The Courtier*, published in 1528, offers a bridge between literary theory and the figural arts. The dialogue rejects Bembo's position. Its major protagonist, Count Lodovico Canossa, expresses an unexpected coolness toward imitation.[35] Borrowing certain features from great predecessors, as Virgil did from Homer, is acceptable, but every artist has his own character and gift that imitation should not be allowed to compromise, lest he risk being diverted from the path that would have brought him profit – certainly not a classical position.

Castiglione himself may well have been the author of the famous letter, supposedly written *to* him by Raphael, on the imitation of Nature:[36] it updates the story of the maidens of Croton to conform with the demand that Nature be improved by a unified vision, as well as indicating that determination of what is beautiful in Nature is individualized, as in Pico's letter:

> In order to paint a beautiful woman I should have to see many beautiful women, and this under the condition that you were to help me with making a choice; but since there are so few beautiful women and so few sound judges, I make use of a certain idea that comes into my head. Whether it has any artistic value I am unable to say. I try very hard just to have it.

Vasari, the outstanding critic of sixteenth-century art, while agreeing that Raphael used a variety of models in Nature, focused more on what the painter had learned from artists before him. He effectively transformed the imitation theory of Quintilian, Poliziano, and the Younger Pico to apply to painting. Painters learned by imitating previous painting and thereby developed their unique style. "Studying the works of the old [ancient] masters," he says of Raphael,[37] "and those of the moderns, he took the best features from all and made a collection of them. . . . Thus Nature was vanquished by his colors; and invention came easily to him and he made it his own."

Following Cicero's early injunction that the students of great orators imitate their masters, Vasari tells how Raphael, "Having in his youth imitated the *maniera* of Pietro Perugino his master, and having made it much better in design, color and invention . . . recognized as he got older that he was too far from the truth."[38] He then, by Vasari's account, began to study Michelangelo's work, and from being almost a master, became again a student.[39]

Whereas Raphael had to work hard on his imitation to achieve autonomy, Michelangelo did not, because he got his artistic individuality direct from God.

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Nonetheless, Vasari recounted with admiration how a couple of his early works were such skillful imitations of Roman sculptures that they were mistaken for antiques.

What was meant by imitation in Vasari's time was described by Vincenzo Danti in his *Primo libro del trattato delle perfette proporzioni . . .* (Florence, 1567): "The difference . . . between imitation and *il ritrarre*, will be that the latter presents things perfectly as they are seen and the other perfectly as they ought to be seen. . . ."[40] In the practice of the early sixteenth century this difference is illustrated by drawings from living models that are employed in finished compositions in a form mediated by the artist's conception of the "ought."

But Lodovico Dolce, the theorist who defended the painterly qualities of the Venetians as opposed to the Florentine *disegno* promoted by Vasari, seemed to endorse the depiction of unimproved, raw Nature when he wrote: "The task of the painter is to represent with his technique whatever there is, so like the various works of nature that it appears true. And the Painter who fails to achieve that likeness is no painter; and in contrast the best and most excellent painter is one whose paintings most fully resemble natural things."[41]

I quoted Dolce above, however, as recommending the imitation of ancient sculpture because it was already idealized. There was no Italian Renaissance writer apart from Leonardo who did not state that imitation involved improving on the visual percept.

One way of interpreting the critical relevance of the ancient and Renaissance fixation on imitation is to see it as the equivalent in those times to the modern critic's and historian's preocoupation with *influence*. Both concepts explain the relationship of an artist or writer to the antecedents whose work figured in his or her development. The main difference is that imitation was, in premodern times, an explicit principle of creative formation and procedure, while influence is part of a relationship that has oppressed the modern maker. Michelangelo was probably the first artist who contrived to eradicate his debt to his teacher (Ghirlandaio) and others from whom he borrowed, but he was exceptional among Renaissance and Baroque artists. Harold Bloom, in his subtle book *The Anxiety of Influence*, attributes the abandonment of imitation to "the post-Enlightenment passion for Genius and the Sublime [when] there came anxiety too."[42] In fact, Sir Joshua Reynolds was probably the last champion of imitation. Emerson spoke for a new generation's view of his precursors in his essay "Self Reliance": "They *engross* our attention, and so prevent a due inspection of ourselves; they *prejudice* our judgment in favor of their abilities, and so lessen the sense of our own; and they *intimidate* us with this splendor of their renown."[43]

Everything changes when Nature includes not only the outer world but the inner; if one is presenting one's self, then the imitation of others seems less important, though it may provide models.

Imitation produced sustenance and security; influence, competition and anxiety. But while modern makers did not think of their dependence on predecessors as raising their stature, critics and historians embraced influence as a primary tool of interpretation, and the search for influences became all the more intriguing because they usually had to be ferreted out without the aid of the artist under discussion.

Imitation as the premoderns saw it operated forward; while the student was expected to copy one or more canonical masters of the past, the mature artist moved ahead from this experience into new and individualized expression. The curriculum at the classical academies, which was based on drawing from ancient and modern models, was seen as the necessary preparation for emulation, the step forward into creative self-realization, as if in competition with one's antecedents.[44] *Influence*, in a way, moves backward. It did not affect art training after the decline of the classical academies – the modern educational ideal has been to encourage self-determination from the start – and this encouraged even the student to think of imitation as shameful. Interest in influence begins *after* a work has been completed and made accessible. Then the interpreters start to work backward from it and from preparatory notes and sketches to discover which earlier and contemporary works are relevant to the discussion of it. Indeed, it is hard not to tire of the often mindless search for artistic ancestry that supposedly validates many books and dissertations.[45] Undoubtedly the change in attitude in modern times has made more difficult our understanding of imitation and our capacity to perceive its benefits and its ties to Renaissance inventiveness.

For the ancients, imitation also provided the structure for articulating the history of an art or technique; imitation was what kept an art or technique moving on. This approach must not be confused with a principle of continuous progress such as was articulated in the Elder Pliny's chapters on the history of art, or in Cicero's brief account of Greek sculpture, and generally in modern histories of technology or science. In discussions of imitation the model of the great antecedents is always represented as exemplary; if those who follow alter the model, they are not necessarily surpassing it but translating it into their own voice.

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The possibility of decline is always on the horizon, particularly in the wake of a brilliant period such as was identified by Cicero with Isocrates or Demosthenes, and later by Vasari with Raphael and Michelangelo.[46]

This posed a problem for an ongoing historical theory. Influence, needless to say, does not offer an adequate historical framework as it is reflexive; there is nothing about being influenced by one's predecessors that gives structure to an artistic evolution, *pace* Clement Greenberg,[47] particularly as the typical artist prior to postmodernism rarely admitted to having been influenced.

Some postmodern artists have introduced, by appropriation, objects which re-present preceding works of art, dissolving the authority in authorship; and deconstructive criticism has proposed an "intertextual" relationship of the maker to his/her forebears in which the similarly dissolved "author" serves as a vehicle for the processing of all prior and present verbal acts. In one sense this view of making bears a greater affinity to imitation than to influence, because both propose a community of past and present and give the maker a pursuit beyond the expression of his/her individual identity. The affinity is limited, but contemporary artistic and critical innovations and controversies help us to overcome barriers to an understanding of ancient and Renaissance concepts of imitation.

In trying to explain why the imitation of predecessors should have so preoccupied the artists, writers, and critics of the Renaissance, I have asked myself whether the incessant dialogue on the subject, which – Leonardo apart – never entertained the possiblity of *not* imitating, might have come from a presentiment of the failure of the capacity to match or to surpass the ancients.[48] If the dominance of Petrarch over cinquecento lyric poetry held out the hope that the moderns could compete with the ancients, it also raised the spectre that even early moderns could oppress the present, a spectre that Vasari invoked when he mused on what possible progress could be anticipated after the age of Michelangelo and Raphael: "I feel I can say with confidence that Art has done what it is proper for an imitator of nature to do and that it has risen so high that one might more readily fear for its fall to the bottom than to hope at this point for greater achievement."[49]

Imitation stressed community, the feeling of solidarity that the maker of the present has with his ancestors and teachers – ancestors whom he engages in a contest of skill and imagination. No major writer of the ancient or Renaissance worlds meant it to promote the sort of frozen authority we call "academic." The studies in this volume do much to rehabilitate imitation.

NOTES

I am grateful for the support of the John Solomon Guggenheim Foundation in preparing this essay.

1. There is a large bibliography on the subject of imitation, primarily focused on literature; I have found most useful T. M. Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982); Ferruccio Ulivi, *L'imitazione nella poetica del Rinascimento* (Milan: C. Marzorati, 1959); Giorgio Santangelo, *Il Bembo critico e il principio d'imitazione* (Florence: Marzorati, 1950). For the visual arts, the basic reference is E. Battisti, "Il concetto d'imitazione nel Cinquecento," *Commentari* 7 (1956): 86–104, 249–62 (republished in *Rinascimento e Barocco* [Turin: Einaudi 1960]), and for the later period, not covered in this discussion, R. W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting," *AB* 22 (1940): 197–269 (reissued as a book [New York: W. W. Norton, 1967]), esp. part 1; and, for the eighteenth century, the overview of R. Wittkower, "Imitation, Eclecticism and Genius," in E. R. Wasserman, ed., *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 143ff.
2. J. Bialostocki, "The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity," in *The Renaissance and Mannerism*, Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art (1963), 19–30. Republished in idem, *The Message of Images. Studies in the History of Art* (Vienna: Irsa, 1988), 64–68. The terms themselves, which had medieval roots, were rarely used in Renaissance writing.
3. This separation may have had its origin in Pliny (*Natural History* 34.19.62), who wrote, for example, that when Lysippos was asked which of his predecessors he followed, "indicated a crowd of men, saying that it was nature itself and not an artist that should be imitated." The discussion of Lysippos also records him as having said that, while others made men as they are, he made them as they seem to be.
4. See Salvatore Settis, "Did the Ancients Have an Antiquity? The Idea of Renaissance in the History of Classical Art," in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 27–50; Settis cites Gerhard Rodenwaldt, "Uber das Problem der Renaissancen," *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1931): 318–38.
5. Cicero, *De inventione* 2.2.4: "non unum aliquod proposuimus exemplum cuius omnes partes, quocumque essent in genere, exprimendae nobis necessarie viderentur, sed omnibus unum in locum coactis scriptores, quod quisque comodissime praecipere viderentur, excerpsimus et ex variis ingenias excellentissima quaeque libavamus."
6. Chapter 8 in this volume is devoted to this story. It was told a generation later by Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 35.64), who located it in Agrigentum and identified the portrait as

that of Hera, so we may assume that Cicero was the main source for Renaissance writers, e.g., Alberti, *De pictura* 56 (and briefly in *De statua* 12). In this work of the mid-1430s Alberti was not yet prepared to explain how the artist determined what was more or less beautiful; by mid-century, in his architectural treatise (*De re aedificatoria* 9.5), he had an articulated aesthetic system.

7. *De oratore* 2.22: "Non potuisset accidere ut unum genus esset omnium, nisi aliquem sibi proponerent ad imitandum. Consecuti sunt hos Critias, Theramenes, Lysias. Multa Lysiae scripta sunt, nonnulla Critiae, de Teramene audimus; omnes etiam tum retin ebant illum Periclis sucum; sed erant paulo uberiore."
8. E.g., *Brutus* 7.35.
9. *Orator* 2.8–9: "we can imagine things more beautiful (than Phidias' sculptures), which are the most beautiful we have seen in their genre, and similarly those pictures which I have spoken about; and indeed that artist, when he produced his Zeus or his Athena, did not look at a human being whom he could imitate, but in his own mind there lived an exceptional image (*species*) of beauty; this he beheld, on this he fixed his attention, and according to its likeness he directed his art and hand."
10. Horace, *Epistles* 1. 19, 19ff. Cited by Greene, *Light in Troy*, pp. 68–69.
11. Ibid.10.2.12.
12. Ibid.10.1.32: "illa Sallustiana brevitas; . . . Livii lactea ubertas."
13. *De oratore* 2.95: "Postquam, extinctis his, omnis eorum memoria sensim obscurata est et evanuit, alia quaedam dicendi molliora ac remissiora genere viguerunt." See also Cicero, *Tusculans* 2.6: "atque oratorum quidem laus ita ducta ab humilii venit ad summum, ut iam quod natura fert in omnibus fererebus, senescat, brevique tempore ad nihilum ventura videatur."
14. Pliny, *Natural History* 24.19. 52: "cessavit deinde (after the 121st Olympiade, 295–292 B.C. ars ac rursus Olympiade CLVI [156–153 B.C.] revixit, cum fuere longe quidem infra praedictos probati tamen: Antaeus, Callistratus," etc.
15. *Controversiae* 7.8, cited by Greene, *Light in Troy*, 72.
16. *Letters*, 84.3.4: "Apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos diende quicquid attulere, disponunt ac per favos digerunt et, ut Vergilius noster ait 'liquentia mella.' Stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas. . . . De illis non satis constat, utrum sucum ex folibus ducunt, qui protinus mel sit sit, an quae collegerunt in hunc saporem mixitura quadam et proprietate spiritus sui mutent." See Horace, *Carmina* 4.2.27–32 (23 B.C.).
17. This discussion was brought to my attention in an unpublished paper by Salvatore Camporeale, who kindly sent me a copy. It came to a climax at mid-century with Valla's *Elegantiae, Antidota*, and *Apologus*, and in Poggio's *Orationes in Vallam*.
18. See R. Sabbadini, *Storia del ciceronismo e di altre questioni letterarie* (Turin: Loescher, 1885).
19. Translation by Greene, *Light in Troy,* 150, from E. Garin, ed., *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1953), 902–4.
20. Edited by G. Santangelo, *Le epistole De imitatione di Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola e di Pietro Bembo* (Florence: Olschki, 1954). Bembo's letter is discussed, in relation to his *Prose della volgar lingua*, by Santangelo, in *Il Bembo critico e il principio d'imitazione* (Florence: Sansoni, 1950). Excellent brief assessments of the exchange are given by Greene, *Light in Troy*, 171–76; Ulivi, *L'imitazione*, chap. 2; and Battisti, "Il concetto d'imitazione" (1956), 175–90.
21. See, e.g., poem no. 9 in *Rime*, ed. E. Girardi (Bari: Laterza, 1960), 6.
22. Santangelo, *Il Bembo critico*, 70ff.; 82ff. See also P. Bembo, *Prose della volgar lingua*, ed. C. Dionisotti-Casalone (Turin: Unione Tipografica Editrice, 1931), 72.
23. See W. Sauerlander, "From 'Stilus' to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion," *Art History* 6 (1988): 257–59.
24. See, e.g., Henri Peyre, *Qu'est'ce que c'est que le classicisme?* (Paris: Droz, 1942).
25. See Charles Dempsey, "Some Observations on the Education of Artists in Florence and Bologna during the Later Sixteenth Century," *AB* 62 (1980): esp. 564ff. R. Wittkower, "Imitation, Eclecticism, and Genius," 143ff.
26. R. Black, "The New Laws of History," *Renaissance Studies* 1 (1987): 126–56
27. Nicolò Machiavelli, *Il principe*, chap. 6, para 1: "Non si maravigli alcuno se, nel parlare che io farò de' principati al tutto nuovi e de principe e di stato, io addurò grandissimi esempli; perchè, camminando li uomini quasi sempre per le vie battute da altri, e procedendo nelle azioni loro con le imitazioni, né si potendo le vie d'altri al tutto tenere . . . debbe uno uomo prudente intrare sempre per vie battute da uomini grandi, e quelli che sono stati eccelentissimi imitare, acciò che, se la sua virtù non vi arriva, almeno ne renda qualche odore."
28. A position opposed by Guicciardini and Montaigne; see G. W. Pigman III, "Limping Examples: Exemplarity, the New Historicism, and Psychoanalysis," in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint et al. (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 281–85.
29. Hubertus Günther and Christof Thoenes, "Gli ordini architettonici: Rinascità o invenzione?" in M. Fagiolo, ed., *Roma e l'antico nell'arte e nella cultura del Cinquecento* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1985); *L'Emploi des ordres dans l'architecture de la Renaissance, Colloques de Tours*, ed. Jean Guillaume (Paris: Picard, 1992); J. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); Ch. Thoenes, "Vignolas 'Regola delli cinque ordini,' " *Römische Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 20 (1983): 345–76. In the past fifteen years there has been an unprecedented amount of publication on the orders during the Renaissance.
30. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* 3.14.
31. Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato* (Vatican, Cod. Urb. Lat. 1270), fol. 39v. Translation from M. Kemp, ed., *Leonardo on Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 193.
32. Leonardo, *Trattato*, fol. 133r; *Traktat von der Malerei*, ed. Heinrich Ludwig (Jena: Diederichs, 1909; opt. 1925), para. 411; *Treatise on Painting*, vol. 2, ed. A. Philip McMahon (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956), 433.
33. (Venice 1557), translated by Mark Roskill in *Dolce's "Aretino" and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 138 (ms. p. 28).
34. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* 186–89, 356–58, and passim.
35. Nicolò Machiavelli, *Il Cortegiano*, I.xxxvii, xxxviii: "*. . . credo, se l'uomo da sè non ha convenienza con qualsivoglia autore, non sia ben sforzarlo a quella imitazione; perchè la virtù di quell'ingegno s'ammorza e resta impedita, per esser deviata dalla strada nella quale avrebbe fatto profitto, se non gli fosse stata precisa. . . .*" See also D. Summers, *The Judgement of Sense*, 317–20.
36. The attribution to Raphael has been questioned by a number of scholars, among them Wilhelm Wanscher, *Rafaello Santi*

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da Urbino: His Life and Works (London: Benn, 1926), 148; David Brown and Konrad Oberhuber, "Leonardo and Raphael in Rome," *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1983), 2: 84n; and, most recently, by John Shearman, who has kindly lent me the manuscript of a study of the letter, which in my view decisively demonstrates that Raphael was not the author and offers convincing evidence that it was written by Castiglione himself.

37. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, "Proemio" to the third *età*, vol. 4, p. 11 in the edition of Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, 9 vols. (Florence: Studio per edizioni scelte, 1976–79).
38. Ibid., 4:204.
39. Ibid., 4:205: "e levatosi da dosso quella maniera di Pietro per apprender quella di Michelagnolo, piena di difficultà in tutte le parti, diventò quasi di maestro nuovo discepolo. . . ."
40. P. Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento* (Milan and Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1971–77), 1574. Vasari also offered a midway position; represent things just as they are: Also, "*Il disegno fu lo imitare il più bello della natura. . . . La maniera venne poi la più bella dall'aver messo in uso il frequente ritrarre le cose più belle; e da quel più bello o mani o teste o corpi o gambe aggiungnerle insieme*" *Vite*, 3:377.
41. Dolce, "*Aretino*," 12.
42. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 27.
43. The sentiment is more extensively expressed in Emerson's essay "The American Scholar" (1837): "Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. . . . The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years. . . . Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. . . . when he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Works* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1883), 1:92.
44. I decided that I could not deal adequately with the history of the concept of emulation – already an issue in antiquity – in an essay of this length.
45. See the critique, "Excursus Against influence," by Michael Baxandall in *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 58–62.
46. See the quotation from Vasari at the close of this essay. Vasari's problem of evaluating his contemporaries without admitting that they represented a decline from the age of these great masters is discussed by Hans Belting, "Vasari and His Legacy," in his *The End of the History of Art?* trans, Wood (1987), 65–94.
47. I refer to the thesis that American painters of the 1940s and 1950s were propelled forward by the impetus and destiny of Cubism.
48. That fear was perhaps more haunting for writers and architects than for painters and sculptors, because the ancient models were so formidable – Cicero, Virgil, and the Pantheon were surely more daunting competitors than the Apollo Belvedere.
49. Vasari, *Vite*, 3:6–7 (*Proemio* to the second età): "alla terza età nella quale mi par potere dir sicuramente che l'arte abbia fatto quello che ad una imitatrice della natura è lecito poter fare, e che ella sia salita tanto alto, che più presto si abbia a temere del calare a basso, che sperare oggimai più augumento." Vasari's fear of decline may have derived in part from Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* 12.11,28: "quod optimum sit idem ultimum esset." The theme appears also in Tacitus, *De oratoribus*.

A useful addition to the literature on imitation published since this essay was written is that of Alfons Reckermann, "Das Konzept kreativer 'imitatio' im Kontext der Renaissance Kunsttheorie," in W. Haug and B. Wachinger, eds., *Innovation und Originalität*, (Tubingen, 1993), 98–132.