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Subject to Mood Swings:

Michelangelo, Titian and Adrian Willaert on Creativity

Were Michelangelo, Titian and all the other exceptional artists, writers and musicians of the Renaissance ever not in the mood to work? And, if so, how did they overcome this? More importantly: did momentary periods of good or bad humor relating to their desire to work play a role when it came to the evaluation of the artistic process, i.e. their creativity, by their contemporaries?

The German adage "*Lust und Liebe zu einem Ding macht alle Müh und Arbeit gering*," roughly translated into English as "Lust and love for a particular thing, make all effort and work on it less tiring," has been around since the seventeenth century and can help to formulate the focus of this essay more precisely.¹ "Love" here refers to a steady attraction to something, i.e. a mental, or even physical disposition. This idea played a decisive role in the understanding of artistic works even in the Renaissance: taking into account an artist's talent (*ingenio*), love and inclination (*amore / inclinatione*), labor and study (*labore / studium*), but also the artist's sense of melancholy and inertia (*acedia*). All of these characteristics were seen as driven primarily by an artist's (inborn) nature and temperament.² The second term

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¹ See *Deutsche Sprichwörter mit Erläuterungen*. Nuremberg, 1790, 41–2 (no. 74); however, the entry does not explain the specific meanings of "Lust" and "Liebe"; nor does the comment for the Latin counterpart "*Nihil difficile amanti*" from Cicero *De oratore*, 10, 22.

² On the topic of melancholy, see the literature in note 7; on the other mentioned aspects, see Brann, N. L. "Is Acedia Melancholy? A Re-Examination of This Question in the Light of Fra Battista da Crema's *Della cognitione e vittoria di se stesso* (1531)." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*. 34. (1979): 180–99; Jonietz, F. "*Labor vincit omnia?* Fragmente einer kunsttheoretischen Kategorie." Müller, J.-D. et al. Eds. *Aemulatio. Kulturen des Wettstreits in Text und Bild (1450–1650)*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2011, 573–681; Thimann, M. "Trägheit, die Negation künstlerischer Kreativität. Anmerkungen zu Rubens' Brief über Adam Elsheimer." von Rosen, V. et al. Eds. *Poesis. Praktiken der Kreativität in den Künsten der Frühen Neuzeit*. Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2013, 273–306;

is “lust,” which, although it could be understood in the sense of “capriciousness,” should, in the context of this proverb, rather be read to pertain to temporarily opposing periods of stronger and weaker inclination to undertake productive work. The argument seems to be that everyone – regardless whether of a sanguine, choleric, melancholic or apathetic disposition – can equally experience moments of particularly intense enthusiasm, and to be in the mood for work, but also quite the opposite. This individual relationship to good humor/enthusiasm and/or the lack thereof does not simply relate to theories of inspiration in the early modern period, which required a higher being as the source of influence and motivation.³

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the perception of an artist’s *Lust* and *Laune* rose to become a “poetic/psycho-physiological principle of the highest degree.”⁴ At the same time, the closely related perception of (artistic) occupational illness began to come to life. It became ever more closely associated with the impact of the so-called “*Nervenbau*” caused by the demands of that profession.⁵ However, it was in the nineteenth century that extreme perceptions of artistic creativity started to appear, divided between the negative realm of pathology – the paired keywords here being “Genius” and “Insanity” – and a positive attitude towards life: “Art in all its forms requires that feeling of healthy, full vitality which, through the inclusion of fantasy, is given wings of gold. Art demands those steady nerves and that firm

Pfisterer, U. *Kunst-Geburten. Kreativität, Erotik, Körper in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Berlin: Wagenbach, 2014.

³ Moffitt, J. F. *Inspiration. Bacchus and the Cultural History of a Creation Myth*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005; Quinlan-McGrath, M. *Influences. Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 2013.

⁴ Frey, C. “Wissen um Trieb und Laune. Zu einem Widerspruch in Anthropologie und Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts.” Schneider, U. J. Ed. *Kulturen des Wissens im 18. Jahrhundert*. Berlin/New York: 2008, 391–8.

⁵ On the topic of “*Nervenbau*” see Campers Drostens von Eyndhoven und der freyen Herrlichkeit Kranendonk, A. G. *Abhandlung ... von den Krankheiten der Armen, der Reichen, der Künstler, der Gelehrten und der Geistlichen*. Lingen: 1794, 98–102, § 3; see also Heinroth, J. C. A. *Lehrbuch der Seelengesundheitskunde*. Leipzig, 1823–4. vol. 2, 154–5 (§209). The founding work of this genre is Ramazzini, B. *De morbis artificum diatribe*. Utrecht, 1703; see also the adaptation by Patissier, P. *Traite des maladies des artistes*. Paris, 1822. 58 (Peintres), 98 (Sculpteurs). – Summarised by Gadebusch Bondio, M. “Berufskrankheiten.” Ed. Jaeger, F. *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit (1450–1850)*. vol. 2. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2005, 61–4 and ead. “Gewerbepathologie.” *ibid.* 2006. vol. 4, 832–6; from the perspective of art history, the only applicable text is, so far as I know, Moffitt, J. F. “Painters ‘Born Under Saturn’: The physiological explanation.” *Art History*. 11 (1988): 195–216.

pulse which does not let us waver in the face of difficulty, but rather gives us a warm feeling in our souls and tells us: the more difficult it is, the more glorious."⁶

In light of this background, it is surprising that an entire book on artists', authors' and musicians' temporary disenchantment with work and/or periods of "writer's-block," using examples from the lives of Michelangelo, Titian and Adrian Willaert, had already appeared by the middle of the sixteenth century, a book which also included suggestions for remedies.

The text presented in the following, is the first instance of a detailed discussion of the topic, and it allows us to ask a number of questions anew. Once again, it is clear that within the world of research, the concept of "melancholy" is particularly prone to being used exclusively as the linchpin when imagining exceptional artists and the creativity of the early modern period.⁷ In addition, it is plain to see that even at this point, the creative process of artists, writers and musicians was understood as being a talent different from other professional realms, and that this category led to what later generations have understood under the term *Fine Arts*. But this aside, the text also contains statements from Michelangelo and Titian themselves that suggest an element of authenticity, especially in that the

⁶ Gollmann, W. *Ueber Künstler-Krankheiten*. Vienna: self-published by author 1875, preface; Cesare Lombroso's *Genio e follia* first appeared in 1872 – see Gockel, B. *Die Pathologisierung des Künstlers. Künstlerlegenden der Moderne*. Berlin: Akademie, 2010.

⁷ In addition to Klibansky, R., Panofsky, E. and Saxl, F. *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*. New York, 1964; see also Tanfani, G. "Il concetto di melancholia nel Cinquecento." *Rivista di Storia delle Scienze mediche e naturali* 39 (1948): 145–68; Starobinski, J. *Geschichte der Melancholiebehandlung von den Anfängen bis 1900*. Ed. and transl. by Cornelia Wild. Berlin/Cologne, 2011 [originally 1960]; Stoichita, V. I. "Melancholia II. Eșeu despre Georges de La Tour și migrația simbolurilor in secolul al XVII-lea." *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Seria artă plastică. Academia de Științe Sociale și Politice a Republicii Socialiste România* 27 (1980): 95–131; Schleiner, W. *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991; Brann, N. L. *The Debate over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance. The theories of supernatural frenzy and natural melancholy in accord and in conflict on the threshold of the scientific revolution*. Leiden: Brill, 2002; Wipfler, E. "Die Erfindung der schönen Melancholie im 16. Jahrhundert." Eds. Augustyn, W. and Lauterbach, I. *Rondo*: Munich, 2010, 59–66; Clair, J. Ed. *Mélancolie. Génie et folie en Occident*. Paris, 2005; Dixon, L. S. *The Dark Side of Genius. The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500–1700*. University Park (PA): Pennsylvania University Press, 2013; a summary in Landrus, M. "Creative Inwardness in Early Modern Italian Thought." Ed. Tymieniecka, A.T. *Imaginatio Creatrix*. Dordrecht, 2004, 393–404.

text was published during their lifetimes. At least from the perspective of literature on Michelangelo, these statements seem never to have been cited since.

At the beginning of the 1550s, Filippo di Niccolò Capponi from Florence (1505–1563) attempted to understand empirically the changing nature of both enthusiasm for and disenchantment with work amongst writers and artists by means of an unconventional survey. In doing so, Capponi was able to produce not only a new psycho-psychological explanation for the conditions pertaining to artistic creation, but he also suggested new “body techniques,” exercises and behavioural patterns with which phases of apathy and “writers-block” could most effectively be combated by artists, writers and musicians.⁸

What made this survey so radical, however, is that it was able to refer to self-observations and statements from some of the most distinguished and prominent representatives of the worlds of painting, sculpture and music at that time: amongst others, from Titian, Michelangelo und Adrian Willaert. Capponi publicised the result of the survey on 11 August 1556 in Venice in the form of a book, covering 257 pages, with an appendix. Although the print run was very small with the result that only a minimal number of examples of the book survive: *Libro intitolato Facile est inventis addere. Nelquale si trattano molte cose utili a gli huomini nelle lor operationi, & moti*. The fact that a treatise on the early Christian author John Cassian’s *De acedia* was included as an addendum to the work shows that Capponi himself was very familiar with the benefits and difficult constraints of *Lust* and *Laune*, as well as of lethargy and melancholy. Despite its publication in print, the inclusion of such exalted names and an extraordinary subject-matter, Capponi’s work received very little attention and is to this day almost entirely unknown.⁹

⁸ Capponi Nobile Fiorentino, F. di Niccolò. *Libro intitolato Facile est inventis addere. Nelquale si trattano molte cose utili a gli huomini nelle lor operationi, & moti*. Venice: Domenico de’ Farri, 1556, fol. 6v–8r: “goderanno tanto beneficio.”

⁹ Capponi 1556 (see note 8); the colophon dates the printing to the 11th August. – The earliest mention of the *Libro intitolato Facile est inventis addere* seems to be in Cicogna, E.A. *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*. 6 vols. Venice, 1824–1853, here vol. 6, 805 (‘Correzioni e Giunte’, additions to vol. 1, 114, col. 2, focusing on the doctor Niccolò Massa) with a short synopsis, references to pp. 45, 46, 47, 48, and 126 of the original text and a paraphrase incorrectly designated as a citation of pp. 80–81. The summary of Cicogna references – seemingly without personal knowledge of Capponi’s book – latterly Fletcher, J. “Titian as a Painter of Portraits.” Ed. Jaffé, D. *Titian*. London,

The author Filippo Capponi, one of eight children of Niccolò from the noble Capponi family in Florence, survived an unsuccessful conspiracy during his youth against Medici on 30 August 1530, but never returned to the world of politics. He subsequently appears to have remained for long periods in Rome, Venice and Ferrara and was intensely occupied with literary and medical studies. In addition to the aforementioned participants in his survey, namely Michelangelo, Titian und Adrian Willaert, he seems to have had close relationships with a number of doctors: Vincenzo Maggi, Niccolò Massa, Domenico Redditi und Pietro Cotorneo. And already in the opening passages of the *Libro intitolato Facile est inventis addere*, it is written how Capponi travelled to Ferrara in order to discuss his ideas with the famous doctor Antonio Musa Brasavola. Unfortunately, before his arrival, Brasavola had died, meaning that Capponi spent more time with his son, Enea, who also happened to be a doctor.¹⁰ The author additionally claims to already have shown Diego (Hurtado?) de Mendoza, Monsignore de Lansac and the French ambassador di Mirapois in Rome an earlier, possibly handwritten version of the *Libro*. Almost all of the information surrounding the life of Capponi is to be found in his *Libro*. The fact that the book is dedicated to an otherwise completely unknown "Cavalier Bernieri Parmigiano" provides just as little in the way of intellectual illumination, as do the references in the text to a supposed multitude of other works by Capponi that were either never written or have been lost. Against this background, it is hard to ignore the suggestion that the marginal success of his book has more to do with Capponi's status as "dilettant between disciplines," which neither the medical community nor the literati or artists of the day took seriously.

The title of the work: *Libro intitolato Facile est inventis addere* refers to a proverbial saying which seems to have first appeared at the end of Aristotle's *De sophisticis elenchis* (183 b 25), subsequently

2003, 31–42 and 187–189, here 39 and 188, footnote 79, in which she claims that the doctor Niccolò Massa is the author. The same confusion in Pavey, D. A. *Colour and Humanism. Colour Expression Over History*. Parkland/Florida: Universal Publishers, 2003 [originally 1956], 93; a recent mention being in Hale, S. *Titian. His Life*. London, 2012, 613. The most penetrating analysis thus far appears to be that of Gliozzi, G. "Capponi, Filippo." *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. vol. 19, Rome, 1976, 20–1.

¹⁰ Entries about some of these persons can be found in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. vol. 14, 1972, 51–2 ("Brasavola, Antonio," by G. Gliozzi); vol. 67, 2006, 365–9 ("Maggi, Vincenzo" by E. Selmi); vol. 71, 2008, 674–7 (Massa, Niccolò' by L. Roscioni).

translated by Boethius into Latin: "It is easy to improve something that has already been invented, far harder however to invent something entirely new."¹¹ Through this statement, Aristotle both claimed and simultaneously relativised the concept of originality, both generally and of his own work. As such, Capponi was also able to proudly present the insights and "inventions" set forth in his book through his choice of title along with a gesture of humility towards the great medical traditions of the day. This link came from the fact that Aristotle's statement appeared frequently in the sixteenth century within the context of medical writings and discussions. In 1546, Musa Brasavola made reference to this on the first page of his commentary on Hippocrates and Galen.¹² And even at the end of the century, one of the most radical and sceptical voices on supposedly assured medical knowledge – Francisco Sanchez – made reference to Aristotle's adage.¹³ Those in the medical profession seem to have had a particular awareness of the difficulty and value of new discoveries, theories and inventions, most likely due to their controversial discussions about the behaviour and importance of authorities during antiquity, local traditions for the treatment of various ailments, as well as new observations and insights (whose advocates often described them as *neoterici* or *empirici*).¹⁴ Capponi's survey can be seen as part of this

¹¹ *Aristoteles secundum translationem quam fecit Boetius: De sophisticis elenchis*. Ed. Dod, B. G. Leiden/Brussels, 1975, 59, lines 6–8: "Hoc autem invento facile est addere et augere reliquum; [...]" See the interpretation with commentary, of Boetius in Migne, J. P. Ed. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 64, 1040 (II, ix).

¹² Brasavola, A. Musa *In libros de ratione victus in morbis acutis Hippocratis et Galeni commentaria et annotationes*. Venice, 1546, 8 (col. 2, lines 21–22). An earlier example of this proverb in close connection to Galen and praise for its "novità" by A. de Ferrariis detto il Galateo, *La Giapigia e varii opuscoli*. Lecce, 1868., vol. 2, 125–6 (De Neophytis).

¹³ Sanchez, F. "In libros tres de causis symptomatum Galeni commentarii." Id. *Opera medica*. Toulouse, 1636, 756: "Neque vero audiendus est Argentarius dum Galeni methodum improbat, facile enim est inventis addere, difficile autem invenire, et [...] arduum erat totam artem a fundamentis constituentem, omnia exquisitissime persequi, [...]" In addition, Siraisi, N.G. "Theory, Experience, and Customary Practice in the Medical Writings of Francisco Sanchez." Eds. Glaze, F.E. and Nance, B.K. *Between Text and Patient. The Medical Enterprise in Medieval & Early Modern Europe*. Florence, 2011, 441–63.

¹⁴ Pomata, G. "Praxis Historialis: The Uses of *Historia* in Early Modern Medicine." Eds. Pomata, G. and Siraisi, N.G. *Historia. Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge (MA)/London, 2005, 105–46; Maclean, I. "The 'Sceptical Crisis' Reconsidered: Galen, Rational Medicine and the *libertas philosophandi*." *Early Science and Medicine*. 11 (2006): 247–274.

tradition of empirical data-extraction and “sensitivity surveys,” rather less to do with the surveys amongst artists on topics concerning aesthetics or art theory, which up until that point were quite rare.¹⁵

Capponi’s initial question in his *Libro* considered why there are more writers in Ferrara than in Florence. In his subsequent commentary, he does not try to explain this situation primarily through any particular “positive effect,” which in the case of Ferrara was perhaps quite strong: particularly favourable constellations, geographic conditions, sources of inspiration or similar things. Rather, he seems much more interested in the negative factors that could hinder the cognitive activity of artists, writers and musicians.¹⁶

The problem of different talents – not only in terms of individuals but also collectively amongst people in different locations, of different ages, living in different epochs, etc. – became topical at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was around this time that people’s differing levels of mental capacity and sense of imagination began to be used as a distinctive factor separating humans and animals.¹⁷ A whole host of possible factors were discussed, commonly grouped into the three categories of the divine, the human and the natural: the status as a divine being, the influence of the stars both at birth and, subsequently, the relevance of geographic conditions, but also the time in which we live: norms of humorism and temperament, inheritance, education, customs and environmental influences, but also the individually varying shapes of the body and mind.¹⁸ In his *Forcianae Quaestiones*, in

¹⁵ The principle of the survey, in relation to the arts, was put to the test for the extension of the Milan cathedral in 1400, by which recommendations and opinions were collected. In 1442, the doctor Michele Savonarola developed an empirical canon of human proportions for the first time, which he said was only applicable to Ferrara, as people in other places would have different bodily shapes. Furthermore, Savonarola seems also to have occupied his time in the period preceding his formal studies by undertaking a systematic enquiry with local artists and their admirers to determine their opinions on the topic of proportion. It was then in 1547 that Benedetto Varchi carried out his famous survey amongst painters and sculptors on the topic of *maggioranza delle arti*, in which Michelangelo was also involved. The combined results of this were published in 1550 with the individual responses as an appendix.

¹⁶ Capponi 1556 (see note 8), preface. It speaks of “disputa donde nascesse una difficulta, o una alteratione che era in noi nelle operationi nostre, le quali perturbavan nel corpo nostro la parte del cervello.”

¹⁷ See Pfisterer, U. “Animal Art/Human Art: Imagined Borderlines in the Renaissance.” Höfele, A. and Laqué, S. Eds. *The Renaissance and Its Anthropologies*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011, 217–46.

¹⁸ See Caelius Rhodiginus, L. *Lectionum antiquarum libri triginta* [1518], cited as in the edition Frankfurt a.M./Leipzig, 1666, 128–9 and 536–9: “Ingeniorum diversitas

quibus varia Italarum ingenia explicantur (1535), Ortensio Landi concentrates on the role of the places in which each lives. He lists the different types of persons, their characteristics and conventions, inventions and, within the Italian provinces, the preferred literary genre, amongst other factors. The visual arts, however, play no role in his view.¹⁹ In Pedro Mexia's popular *Selva di varia lettione* – published first in Spanish in 1540, then in 1547 in Italian – an additional chapter was added in the 1556 Venetian edition, which strives to link different regional talents through diverse astrological influences.²⁰ Meanwhile Sebastiano Erizzo argued against the opinion that greater minds had lived during antiquity. In his opinion, this belief could only come about when one ignores both the fact that, in the time in which he lived, the ability to invent is restricted by the sheer number of languages, which need to be arduously learnt, and that the methodology used to learn from the knowledge and examples of others was of poor quality. Having stated this at the outset, Erizzo then discusses the correct method for invention.²¹

At the end of the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino had revived the teachings on melancholy from antiquity and designated them as the basic requirement for the emergence of exceptional talent. On the other hand, he defined apparent idleness as merely a phase of particularly intensive mental conceptualisation: "All those who have invented anything great in any of the nobler arts did so especially when they took refuge in the citadel of the soul, withdrawn from the body."²² Theories about those with exceptional talents and their "melancholy" were indeed very quickly differentiated and quantified. In particular, none was convinced that there was one overarching type of melancholic talent that would apply equally to lawyers, physicians, artists or writers. Rather, people began to investigate the

unde sit." Pellegrini, A. *I segni de la natura ne l'huomo*, Venice 1545, mentions fol. 38v Donatello, Titian and Bellini, fol. 60r Michelangelo, Titian, Sansovino and Porde none. See also the detailed differentiation between 'Minds' bei Garzoni, T. *Il theatro de vari e diversi cervelli mondani*. Venice, 1585.

¹⁹ Landi, O. *Forciana Quæstiones, in quibus varia Italarum ingenia explicantur*. Naples, 1535.

²⁰ Cited as in the edition Venice 1600, fol. 330v–332v.

²¹ Erizzo, S. *Trattato dell'Istrumento et via inventrice degli antichi*. Venice, 1554, 4–5, discusses both obstacles.

²² Ficino, M. *Opera Omnia*. Basel, 1576, 286–87, also cited by Summers, D. *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1981, 489.

identifying features and conditions of particular talents.²³ With Pietro Pomponazzi and Girolamo Fracastoro's *Naugerius, sive de poetica dialogus* (1555) concepts and arguments about inspiration start to shift from divine powers to "natural," inborn constellations.²⁴ In 1575, Juan Huarte published his revolutionary investigation in relation to the physiology and psychology of genius. Antonio Zara then presented his classification system on the same topic in 1615 in a particularly "systematic" way. This work later differentiated those areas of the brain which talents made most use of: *imaginativa/phantasia*, *ratio* and *memoria*.²⁵ And in Giovanni Imperiali's *Musaeum Physicum* of 1639, not only was the particular role of fantasy for the *genius* laid out in detail, but also different types of talent and their relation to either universal intellect or to an object-specific fantasy.²⁶ This intended to explain why painters, sculptors, musicians or inventors etc. were not talented thinkers and scientists, and vice versa.

Even within one particular discipline, there were now understood to be differently talented "types": roughly divided between those who had gained their genius as a result of study and diligence, and those who had gained it through inspiration and an unusual measure of fantasy. As a result, Girolamo Cardano is able to characterise various professional groups. He includes examples such as the blacksmith ("simple and melancholic"), the painter ("erratic, of different talents, melancholic and wide-ranging in his behaviour"), and the sculptor, whom he describes as being very much like the painter but "more industrious, and thus less ingenious."²⁷ Notably,

²³ On Leonardo Bruni's 1441 statement about isolated art-creation such as painting or music, that does not automatically constitute comprehensive *virtus*, see Baxandall, M. *Giotto and the Orators*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, 122–3.

²⁴ See further Wels, V. *Der Begriff der Dichtung in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, 222–228.

²⁵ The first English translation is Huarte, J. *The examination of mens wits*. London, 1594; Zara, A. *Anatomia ingeniorum et scientiarum*. Venice, 1615; also Persio, A. *Trattato dell'ingegno dell'huomo*. Ed. Artese, L. Pisa/Rome, 1999 [first published 1576].

²⁶ Imperiali, G. *Musaeum Historicum et Physicum*. Venice, 1639–40, here part II, 30–32 and 38 (chap. XI & XII) – See Boenke, M. *Körper, Spiritus, Geist. Psychologie vor Descartes*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2005 and Fudge, E. *Brutal Reasoning. Animals, rationality, and humanity in early modern England*. Ithaca, 2006.

²⁷ Cardano, G. *De utilitate ex adversis capienda* Basel, 1561, 502–6 (III, 22); on the different forms of composition: "Differt autem toto genere [poesia] quae à studio, & quae à lymphatico impetu fit." And on different professional talents: "Fabrilis ferri industriosos, mediocriter laboriosos, simplices et melancholicos. Pictura inconstantes, varij ingenij, melancholicos circa mores valde inaequales. Paedago-

Cardano does not identify melancholy and other characteristics as prerequisites for particular activities, but rather the opposite. Ultimately, it is through certain activities that these characteristics are produced or intensified: a transplantation of the humanistic theme of deprivation, unpleasantness and danger of academic life, with its long periods of sitting without moving leading to a deformation of the body and soul. Soon thereafter there came a statement from Romano Alberti precisely to this effect: that, due to the exertion of constantly having to store the objects of nature and their designs in their heads, painters tend toward melancholy.²⁸

The belief that the head, body, heart and spirit of the intellectual need a particular form of care appears to originate with Marsilio Ficino, and the first (1482) of the three texts entitled *De triplici Vita*, which were first printed in 1489. There had been men who advised about matters of health and the *regimina sanitatis* for a good and 'balanced' living since antiquity,²⁹ but it was Ficino who first declared in detail that not only an athlete needs to care for his arm, but a singer for his voice and a painter for his brushes. Because the "instrument" of the intellectual is his brain, it is in his best interests to keep his body and mind in the best possible condition through a par-

gium insaniam parit & ambitionem stultam, facitque ira avidos. Sculpturae similis est picturae, sed laboriosos magis facit, minus ingeniosos. Utraeque harum exercent vim qua imaginamur valde, & ad libidinem puerorum plus caeteris artibus hominem inclinat." On the topic of the architect, see p. 502. Previously cited by Zinsel, E. *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffs*. Tübingen, 1926, 269, footnote 110; see Kanz, R. *Die Kunst des Capriccio. Kreativer Eigensinn in Renaissance und Barock*. München/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2002, 56.

²⁸ Alberti, R. *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura*. Rome 1585, 17: "Et queste fatigue dell'animo tanto piu son gravi nel Pittore, quanto e maggior l'oggetto suo di molte altre Arti, come quello che, come diceva Socrate, comprende sotto di se ciascheduna cosa, che si possi vedere: Et a confirmation di cio vediamo, che li Pittori divengono malencolici, perche volendo loro imitare bisogna, che ritenghino li fantasmari fissi nell'Intelletto: accio dipoi li esprimeno in in quel modo, che prima li havean visti in presentia: Et questo no[n] solo una volta, ma continuamente, essendo questo il loro essercitio; per il che talmente tengono la mente astratte & separata dalla materia, che consequentemente ne vien la Malencolia; la quale pero dice Aristotile, che significa ingegno & prudentia, [...]" Previously cited by Wittkower, M. and R. *Born under Saturn. The character and conduct of artists: a documented history from antiquity to the French Revolution*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963. See the explanation in Cardano 1561 (see note 26): 501–2, that geometry and arithmetic can result in melancholy due to the requirement for intensive thought.

²⁹ See Bergdolt, K. *Leib und Seele. Eine Kulturgeschichte des gesunden Lebens*. Munich: Beck, 1999.

ticular style of life, behavioural rules and the aforementioned “body technique.” As part of this, he identifies five main obstacles for mentally creative people: phlegm, black bile, frequent coitus, gluttony and late-morning awakening.³⁰

The opinion that also painters and other artists belong to this group of people, thus that they need to care for their heads and not only their brushes and other tools of work (as Ficino wrote), gained more wide-spread acceptance at the turn of the sixteenth century. Of course, this opinion also opened up the possibility that artists could fall prey to the dangers of lethargy and a “creativity-block.” As early as 1501, Leonardo’s ever-changing series of moods was described as one of his decisive features.³¹ The mention of Leonardo’s apparent idleness in Vasari’s *Lives*, and another description within a novella by Matteo Bandello, seem to elaborate on this fact.³² Vasari

³⁰ Especially in the second chapter “Quam diligens habenda cura sit cerebri, cordis, stomachi, spiritus”: “Principio quantam cursores crurium, athletae brachiorum, musici vocis curam habere solent, tantam saltem litterarum studiosus cerebri et cordis iecorisque et stomachi oportet habere. Immo vero tanto maiorem, quanto et membra haec praestantiora quam illa sunt, et ii frequentius atque ad potiora his membris quam illi illis, utunur. Praeterea solers quilibet artifex instrumenta sua diligentissime curat, penicillos pictor, maleos incudesque faber aerarius, miles equos et arma, venator canes et aves, citharam citharoedus et sua quisque similiter. [...] Instrumentum eiusmodi [of the ‘musarum sacerdos’] spiritus est, qui apud medicos vapor quidam sanguinis purus, subtilis, calidus et lucidus definitur.” Citation as per Kahl, W. “Die älteste Hygiene der geistigen Arbeit. Die Schrift des Marsilius Ficinus ‘De vita sana sive de cura vultudinis eorum, qui incumbunt studio litterarum (1482).’” *Neue Jahrbücher für das Klassische Altertum* 18 (1906): 482–491, 525–546 and 599–619. – On the north-alpine reception of Ficino’s writings, Wittstock, A. *Melancholia translata. Marsilio Ficanos Melancholie-Begriff im deutschsprachigen Raum des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2011.

³¹ Beltrami, L. *Documenti e memorie riguardanti la vita e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci*. Milan, 1919, 65–7 (no. 107–108: Pietro de Nuvoletta in 1501 to Isabella d’Este): “la vita di Leonardo è varia et indeterminata forte, si che pare vivere a giornata [...] da opra forte ad la geometria, impacientissimo al pennello” and “li suoi esperimenti matematici l’hanno distratto tanto dal dipingere che non può patire il pennello.”

³² Vasari, G. *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*. Ed. Barocchi, P. and Bettarini, R. Florence: Sansoni, 1966–1997, vol. 4, 1976, 26, regarding Leonardo’s slow working process in executing the *Last Supper*: “Lionardo [...] discorrere col Duca largamente sopra di questo: gli ragionò assai de l’arte, e lo fece capace che gl’ingegni elevati, talor che manco lavorano, più adoperano, cercando con la mente l’invenzioni e formandosi quelle perfette idee che poi esprimono e ritraggono le mani da quelle già conceputre ne l’intelletto; [...]” – For the novella of Bandello and Leonardo’s own advice for working well see Land, N.E. “Leonardo da Vinci in a Tale by Matteo Bandello.” *Discoveries* 23/1 (2006) [<http://cstl-cla.semo.edu/reinheimer/discoveries/archives/231/land231pf.htm>].

also reported of other artists having various “mood-dependent” working methods, and in each case used an either positively or negatively shaded term for the melancholy felt.³³

Paolo Pino had already published his summarised recommendations on how artists could control their melancholy inducing mental processes through physical exercises in his 1548 book *Dialogo di pittura*, printed in Venice.³⁴ The fact that both Pontormo and Francesco da Sangallo spoke of the different bodily conditions and psycho-physical effects of painting and sculpting in their responses to Benedetto Varchi’s *paragone* survey of 1546 certainly implies that this topic was very much alive for most artists of the mid-century.³⁵ Michelangelo in particular seems to have been tortured by periods of inactivity, which seem to have affected him on a frequent basis. In a letter to Sebastiano del Piombo in 1525, he describes this feeling as a form of madness, as “*mio malinconicho, o vero del mio pazzo.*”³⁶

Nevertheless, before Capponi’s *Libro*, there does not seem to be any written testimonies that suggest that Titian occasionally did not have the desire to work. The problem of the aging master with ever weakening sight, body and creative energy were not mentioned in print until the 1560s.³⁷ Another argument had to be found at the end of 1521 when the Ambassador of Ferrara attempted to explain Titian’s

³³ See the remarks about Paolo Uccello in Vasari 1966–1997 (see note 32): vol. 3, 1971, 61–62: “quando l’intelletto ha voglia di operare, e che ’l furore è acceso.” On Vasari see Briton, P. “‘Mio malinconico, o vero ... mio pazzo’: Michelangelo, Vasari, and the Problem of Artists’ Melancholy in Sixteenth-Century Italy.” *Sixteenth-Century Journal*. 34 (2003): 653–675; Pozzo, M. and Mattioda, E. *Giorgio Vasari storico e critic*. Florence, 2006, 137–138; Gründler, H. “Die Wege des Saturn. Vasari und die Melancholie.” Burzer, K. et al. Eds. *Le Vite del Vasari. Genesi, topoi, ricezione*. Venice, 2010, 71–82.

³⁴ Pino, P. *Dialogo di Pittura*. Ed. Falabella, S. Rome, 2000, 131–2.

³⁵ *Trattati d’Arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma*. Ed Barocchi, P. Bari, 1960, vol. 1, 68 and 72; for a comment about the effect on Vasari, see 380–381.

³⁶ *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*. Ed. Barocchi, P. and Ristori, R. vol. 3, Florence 1973, 156 (Letter from May 1525); in addition – and as accompaniment to the literature in the preceding notes – Girardi, E. N. “‘La mi’ allegrezza’ è la malinconia’ (Michelangiolo, Rime, 267, v. 25).” Rotondi Secchi Tarugi, L. Ed. *Malinconia ed allegrezza nel Rinascimento*. Milan, 1999, 97–108.

³⁷ The art dealer Niccolò Stoppio expresses himself most clearly in a letter from February 1568, see Hope, Ch. *Titian*. London, 1980, 151 (and also 161); Tizian’s waning capabilities are discussed in many places within the correspondence of the court of Habsburg, see Mancini, M. *Tiziano e le corti d’Asburgo nei documenti degli archivi spagnoli*. Venice, 1998, 405f. (no. 285–286) and 411 (no. 291).

lessened enthusiasm for work to his superior. Believing that the painter had up until that point been in his prime, he could only assume that Titian was suffering from exhaustion owing to his ardent sexual exploits with his models.³⁸

Finally, it should be noted that little is known concerning the topic of Adrian Willaert's life, or about his relationship to Capponi, even though they spent much time in the same places, Ferrara, Rome and Venice.³⁹ That Willaert was involved in the survey likely has more to do with the fact that his music appealed to the masses and did justice to the concept of melancholy. In any event, it would appear that Willaert was also in contact with Titian: the inclusion of a piece of paper showing musical notation in Titian's painting *The Bacchanal of the Andrians* might be one of Willaert's compositions.⁴⁰

In Capponi's world, the enthusiasm for work, or the lack thereof (*tristezza*) is the combined result of many factors which are not exclusively humoral, as Galen supposedly believed, i.e. they do not result specifically from a natural given factor, but rather from individual circumstances such as education, influences, bodily health. All of these contribute to momentary enthusiasm (*piacere*) and disposition (*dispositione*).⁴¹ The result of these spirits, deviating from a "tempered mediocrity," applies equally to all people in all lands –

³⁸ Hope 1980 (see note 37): 57–58; for a broader interpretative horizon Pfisterer, U. "Alternde Künstler als Liebhaber – Inspiration, (Pro-)Kreativität und Verfall: Anthonis van Dyck, Tizian und die Tradition der Renaissance." Graf Kielmansegg, P. and Häfner, H. Eds. *Alter und Altern. Wirklichkeiten und Deutungen*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2012, 55–71.

³⁹ His fame is attested to – amongst others – by Landi, O. *Sette libri de cathaloghi a varie cose apparenenti*. Venice, 1552, 510, who figuratively gives him silver medal amongst modern musician: "Adriano Fiamengo musico in S. Marco di Vinegia." See for possible relations of Willaert and the Capponi family Feldman, M. *City Culture and the Madrigal at Venice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

⁴⁰ Bonicatti, M. "Tiziano e la cultura musicale del suo tempo." *Tiziano e Venezia*. Vicenza, 1980, 461–77; Lowinsky, E.E. "Music in Titian's *Bacchanal of the Andrians*: The Origin and History of the Canon per Tonos." Rosand, D. Ed. *Titian: His World and His Legacy*. New York, 1982, 191–282.

⁴¹ Capponi 1556 (see note 8): fol. 4v–5v: "tali accidenti si truovano [...] non solo nel Cantore, ma nel Pittore e Scultore che alsì ne li ho domandati, il Pittore qui in Venetia, & a Roma lo Scultore, tutti a dua eccellentissimi, chi sara che dica che non vi sia dispiacere, se adunque havra dispiacere, come operera con piacere, e quello che io ho detto de i tre artieri di sopra, dico anchora del sonatore, e di chi si serve in far qual si voglia cosa, che con le mani si faccino, e ne nascie tal tristezza che si levano da l'operare, perche in tal difficultà venghino a fare male ciò che fanno, se questa mutatione e difficultà in loro si vede, [...]."

Capponi suggests to have surveyed a much greater number of artists on this topic than just Michelangelo, Titian and Willaert.⁴² It should be noted, however, that the answers provided by these three artists on the topic of their changeable mood for work – whether of brief duration or longer – were at times dismissed by Capponi out of hand. For example, Michelangelo's careful detailing of the possible influence of the stars, as was told to him by an astrologer, was derided by Capponi as nothing short of nonsense.⁴³

It is however decisive that Capponi distinguishes between the lack of enthusiasm on the part of painters, sculptors and singers etc.,

⁴² Capponi 1556 (see note 8): fol. 45r–v: "Havendo io dato intentione nel prohemio di volere mostrare la facilità dell'operationi manuali, & che le siano fatte con il caldo nostro innato temperato, e spiriti nostri temperati, & sieno vitali, o naturali, o animali tali spiriti, perche se io non riducessi la facilità, e il piacere nell'operationi nostre dette da me di sopra, e nel mio prohemio, & simile se dette operationi dette di sopra e nel mio prohemio non fussino fatte con il caldo nostro innato e naturale temperamento, e con li spiriti nostri vitali naturali & animali temperati, invano sarebbe la mia intentione, e tutta l'opera mia, perche la difficultà che mi disse Adriano cantore, Titiano pittore, e Michel'Angelo scultore, & altri di simile professione, che fanno mentre cantano, dipingono, sculpiscono, suonano, nasce in loro una certa difficultà o alteratione, o indispositione, che non lascia loro operare quello sarebbe la intentione loro in detti loro essercitii, e ne nasce in loro la difficultà sanno loro, & che li hanno detto a me non è altro in loro, & in tutti gli huomini così Italiani, come Alamanni, Pollacchi, Francesi, Spagnuoli, & in tutte le altre nationi che sono in questo mondo che li spiriti nostri, i quali come dicono questi medici, che concorrono alle operationi nostre insieme con il caldo nostro innato, ilquale pare sia mosso dalli spiriti, o che pure che esso caldo innato muova li spiriti lui, questo non lo risolvo hora."

⁴³ Capponi 1556 (see note 8): fol. 80v–81v: "molti di loro me hanno detto che non tanto nasce questa variatione da un di a un' altro, ma che nasce da una hora a un'altra havuto questo da loro gli ho dimandato li sopradetti di tutte le professioni, la causa donde nasce tal variationi doperare con difficultà o con piacere ne lo operar nostro Adriano cantore qui in Venetia mi dice non lo sapere, & che non tanto gli dava noia tal difficultà nel cantare, ma nel comporre anchora e che tal difficultà chi pensassi di levarla lo terrebbe un miracolo, Titiano pittore qui in Venetia mi confessò nel dipingere, avere tal difficultà, che dipingeva un di con piacere, l'altro con dispiacere la causa donde si naschi, non mi seppe dire, e li pareva bene trovandosi modo, per ilquale si levasse quella difficultà nel dipingere che veniva piu un di che l'altro fussi cosa sopra humana, Michel'Angelo nostro Fiorentino in Roma gli domandai de la medesima cosa, mi ripose ne lo sculpire avere anchor lui questa difficultà, donde la si nascessi, non lo sapere, non so se peravventura si disse de i pianeti, ma che chi dara rimedio a tal difficultà sarà il primo che habbia havut'animo a scrivere di tal materia, non che levarla, dicendo io che tal difficultà di quella parlavo, si potessi levare, li Astrologi domandandoli ti tal difficultà lo confessono esser in noi ne le operationi nostre, ma dicano tal difficultà nascere da pianeti, [...], lequali per non creder io lor nulla che dicono, e parendomi contrarie al libero arbitrio nostro, [...]."

and the ill temper experienced when one realises the loss of an object – the focus is exclusively on the concept of what might be called “creativity-block.”⁴⁴ Capponi claims to have discovered three main indicators, upon which his therapy focused: an uneven pulse,⁴⁵ which can be caused both by an “excessive inner-warmth” as well as an untoward geographical location; an incorrect use of the hand, particularly the third and fifth fingers; and finally an inner angst and resentment – although ultimately the latter two indicators lead to a hardening of the heart and therefore reduced circulation. On the topic of pulse and finger-sensitivity, Capponi claims to have carried out extensive tests. As a result, he was able to show that the pulse of residents of Ferrara was better than that of those in Florence – one reason for the higher proportion of writers living in the former city. Furthermore, the systematic touching of the thumb against the four fingertips of the same hand showed that the sense of touch on the third and fifth fingers is notably more sensitive than that of the second and fourth fingers. It is for this reason that Capponi advises against the use of the third and fifth fingers, and in particular not to place a paint brush on the third finger. If one avoids this, uses a particular breathing-technique instead, is moderate in eating and in having sexual intercourse, and makes sure that one diversifies daily activities, then no resentment, bodily damage or apathy should ensue. Of course, it cannot be expected that diversifying one’s activities will ultimately lead to becoming an exceptional painter, sculptor, musician or architect. But should one take heed of Apelles who, in contrast to Protogenes, supposedly knew the right moment to stop working on his canvas, and who used *sprezzatura*, in the sense of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Libro del Cortegiano*, to lend a certain effortlessness to all he did, then it can be guaranteed, or so Capponi wishes us to believe, that his recommendations will lead to unceasing artistic creativity.⁴⁶

As with advice on matters of health, this was somewhat controversial and it would appear that none took it very seriously. As

⁴⁴ Capponi 1556 (see note 8): fol. 84r–v.

⁴⁵ On the intense discussion in this period surrounding the circulatory system and pulse, see Bylebyl, J. J. “Disputation and description in the Renaissance pulse controversy.” Wear, A. et. al. Eds. *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge, 1985, 223–45.

⁴⁶ Capponi 1556 (see note 8): fol. 156r–v: undertaking diverse activities is far better than doing only one thing for the entire day, though one should not expect that one will become a perfect musician, painter, sculptor, architect etc. overnight; fol. 159r–163r on “una certa sprezzatura”; fol. 166r–167r on the artists of antiquity.

such, Capponi's findings on the *Lust* and *Laune* of work retreated to a dusty bookshelf. However, it should not be forgotten that, much more than Ficino's complicated and scientifically-oriented contributions, Capponi's recommendations and "body techniques" can happily lay claim to be the origin of all modern how-to books on the topic of creativity and creative techniques for artists.