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## ART IS AIMING FOR THE EYE

### Gazes as Arrows in the Early Modern Era

The following, very sketchy, considerations deal with the manifold associations of gazes and arrows and the relation of this metaphorical field to discourses about the effects of art, love and sight. Hence, they contribute little to the more specific main topic of falconry, but they may provide insight into the broader context of hunting and art, of seeing as a form of hunting, of gazes, especially desiring gazes, and their goals and encounters and of related image practices and visual engagements.<sup>1</sup> Without a long preface, let us begin with a painting that thematises the connection between hunting and love, gaze and imagination, and points to the role that the art of painting might play in this context. A painting of the encounter between a hunter and a nymph from the circle of Paris Bordone, created around 1550–1560 (fig. 1), conveys quite openly erotic implications, and it is staged so as to incorporate the viewer as a voyeur whilst at the same time excluding him.<sup>2</sup> It is only by means of his imagination that the beholder can project himself into the role of the hunter in the image, who is in sufficiently close proximity to the nymph to be able to touch her shoulder. Moreover, this projection remains tied to the literary, fictional horizon of a bucolic and mythological past.

From images of this kind, it would be easy to widen our scope and consider the pastoral genre more generally, for example in its depictions of bucolic concerts. An image by Giovanni Cariani in Warsaw, dating from 1510–1520 (fig. 2), shows a reclining nymph who presents her beautiful nude body to the viewer's gaze, but who also, in her

1 — The present contribution is largely unchanged from the paper given at the Abu Dhabi conference in 2018, and reverts partially to material and arguments that I have already discussed elsewhere (see Klaus Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren. Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich 2001, esp. Ch. III. 1, pp. 205–242 and pp. 243–251). Therefore, the notes have only been updated as far as necessary.

2 — *Gemäldegalerie des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien. Verzeichnis der Gemälde*, Vienna 1991, p. 34.



1 — Paris Bordone (circle of), *Nymph and Hunter*, ca. 1550–1560, oil on canvas, 45 × 61 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.



2 — Giovanni Cariani, *Pastoral Scene*, 1510–1520, oil on canvas, 88 × 163 cm, Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe.

*gestus melancholicus*, seems to lament the loss of an irretrievable Arcadian ideal.<sup>3</sup> It is a mood that is subtly reinforced and virtually intoned by the motif of the music played on flutes. Because, like the beautiful nymph, the beautiful sound of the music remains inaccessible to the viewer, it remains irretrievably inaudible to him. The only way for him to participate in this imaginary world is through his projection and, in consequence, through the aesthetic experience of painting. Beauty, in other words, is born in the eye of the beholder and by means of his or her involvement in the painting. Hence, it is not by chance that the motif of flute-playing is linked with a piercingly sharp gaze that aims directly at the viewer and almost hits him. In addition, as we just saw, it is not uncommon that this motif of a sharply directed gaze is associated with the metaphor of the chase; more precisely with pursuit by hounds, archery and virtually hunting somebody down.

A telling example is offered by an engraving after Crispin de Passe in Charles Sorel's *Le Berger extravagant*, published in Paris in 1627, which is pointedly ironic in the spirit of anti-Petrarchism (fig. 3). The engraving presents a parody of the idealised lady, "*un portraict fait par Metaphore*", as the text explains, which takes Petrarch's metaphors literally: the mouth a piece of coral, the cheeks covered with roses and lilies, the eyebrows depicted as arches, the hair like golden chains, threads, and nets, and so on. Not least, the eyes are two burning suns, but true arrows emerge from them instead of rays, while Amor with his bow makes it clear that they are darts of love that will dangerously strike the one they meet.<sup>4</sup>

Against this background of the broad field of motifs and metaphors (only pointed out here), related to the interconnection of gazes, arrows, art and imagination, it

3 — Rodolfo Pallucchini and Francesco Rossi, *Giovanni Cariani*, Bergamo 1983, pp. 142–143, no. 79; Paul Holberton, "The 'Pastorale' or 'Fete champetre' in the early sixteenth century", in: *Titian 500*, ed. Joseph Manca (Studies in the History of Art, 45; Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts; Symposium Papers, XXV), Washington D.C. 1994, pp. 245–262, here pp. 247 f. et seq.

4 — Friedrich Wilhelm Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1450–1700*, Bd. 16, Amsterdam 1974, p. 142, no. 182. "*Anselme auoit fait vn petit tour de malice ingenieuse & suiuant ce que le Berger luy auoit dit de la beauté de sa maistresse, imitant les extrauagantes descriptions des Poetes, il auoit depeint vn visage qui au lieu d'estre de couleur de chair, auoit vn teint blanc comme neige. Il y auoit deux branches de corail à l'ouuerture de la bouche, & à chaque ioue vn lys & vne rose croisez l'vn sur l' autre [... etc.]. Cecy se doit appeler vn portraict fait par Mètaphore*", in: Charles Sorel, *Le berger extravagant*, Rouen 1629 (first ed. Paris 1627), pp. 67 f. et seq. See John Humphrey Whitfield, "La belle Charité", in: *Italian Studies 17* (1963), pp. 33–53; Leonard Forster, *Das eiskalte Feuer. Sechs Studien zum europäischen Petrarkismus*, Kronberg/Ts. 1976, pp. 4–5 and p. 45; Françoise Borin, "Judging by Images", in: *A History of Women in the West. III: Renaissance and Enlightenment paradoxes*, ed. Natalie Zemon Davies and Arlette Farges, Cambridge and London 1994, pp. 187–254, here pp. 214–215; Rosmarie Zeller, "Keine besonderen Kennzeichen. Anmerkungen zur Poetik des physischen Porträts", in: *Physiognomie und Pathognomie. Zur literarischen Darstellung von Individualität. Festschrift für Karl Pestalozzi zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfram Groddeck and Ulrich Stadler, Berlin and New York 1994, pp. 373–386, here pp. 374–375; Lucie Desjardins, "De la 'surface trompeuse' à l'agréable imposture. Le visage au XVIIe siècle", in: *Inter-médialités / Intermediality*, 8 (2006), pp. 53–66, here pp. 57–61.



3 — Van Lochem, *La belle Charité*, engraving after Crispin de Passe, in: Charles Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, Paris 1627.

becomes clear that in the examples just cited, the beholder is constantly and emphatically made aware not only of his own gaze but also of vision itself as an activity that feeds his imagination, his desires and hopes, and indeed his despair of them. These aspects of the sense of vision and the theoretical reflection about them were ubiquitous in epistemological discourse from the Middle Ages. The eyes function as organs that mediate between the visible world and the human soul (*anima*) or heart (*cor*) as the seat of the cognitive and appetitive faculties. In the warning formulation of Hrabanus Maurus, towards the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, love originates in the eyes, since the arrow of love enters the heart through the eyes: “*Per oculos intrat ad mentem sagitta amoris.*”<sup>5</sup> The erotic poetry of courtly love took up this idea in the motif of the reciprocal gaze. In a thirteenth-century chanson, Adam de la Halle declares: “[...] But there is still a better reason why I have to sing about love desire. For without threatening, I was shot in the heart and hit in my heart, by some radiant clear and bright eyes, that laugh to aim better. Against them can resist neither armour nor shield!”<sup>6</sup> The ungraspable beauty of the beloved, the charm of her gaze, becomes an arrow with which Cupid

5 — *Liber de modo bene vivendi*, in: PL 184, col. 1241; cf. Rüdiger Schnell, *Causa Amoris. Liebeskonzeption und Liebesdarstellung in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, Bern and Munich 1985, p. 245.

6 — “*Encore i a millour raison, pour ci/ Je doi canter d’amerous desitier;/ Car sans manechier/ Sui ou cuer traïs et ferus/ D’uns vairs ius ses et agus/ Rians pour mius assener!/ A chou ne puet contrestre/ Haubers ni escus!*”; Rudolf Berger, *Cançons und Partures des altfranzösischen trouvère Adan de le Hale le Bochu d’Aras*, Halle 1900, no. 16, Str. 1, pp. 3 ff.; cf. Schnell (as in note 5), p. 252.



4 — Guercino, *Venus, Cupid and Mars*, 1634, oil on canvas, 139 × 161 cm, Modena, Galleria Estense.

strikes the lover. This arrow is the “*Biaus semblanz*” (the beautiful appearance, *der schöne Schein*) praised by Provençal love poetry,<sup>7</sup> and its force remains a basic premise of courtly love poetry in the Renaissance and beyond: “*il principio d’amore nasca dagli occhi e dalla bellezza*”, as Lorenzo de’ Medici explains in his *Comento ad alcuni sonetti d’amore*.<sup>8</sup>

Guercino dramatises the very same idea in his famous painting in Modena, dated 1634, in which Cupid, following Venus’ directions, aims his arrow directly at the

7 — Karlheinz Stierle, “Bemerkungen zur Geschichte des schönen Scheins”, in: *Kolloquium Kunst und Philosophie*, ed. Willy Oelmlüller, vol. 2: *Ästhetischer Schein*, Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich 1982, pp. 208–232, esp. pp. 210–211; id., “Der Schein der Schönheit und die Schönheit des Scheins in Ariosts ‘Orlando Furioso’”, in: *Ritterepik der Renaissance*, ed. Klaus W. Hempfer (Text und Kontext 6), Stuttgart 1989, pp. 243–276, esp. p. 249.

8 — Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Comento ad alcuni sonetti d’amore*, in: id., *Opere scelte*, Novara 1969, p. 128.

beholder's eye (fig. 4, plate XXVIII).<sup>9</sup> This dramatic gesture addresses with inescapable directness the theme of the viewer's enchantment with the beauty of the image. In the earlier words of Petrarch, "love placed me as a target for his arrow (*amor m' à posto come segno a strale*)", which strikes from the eyes of the beloved, "from your eyes (*dagli occhi vostri*)" like a "mortal blow (*colpo mortale*)", "against which no time or place helps me (*contra cui non mi val tempo né loco*)". Countless other references and examples for the concept of the eye as "*sagitta amoris*" or "*sagitta cupidinis*", the arrow of love or desire, could easily be cited.<sup>10</sup> Guercino's painting served as a reminder that the nature of this arrow is such that no suit of armour can protect against it, not even the cuirass of Mars, so artistically staged with its specular reflections of light. The painting's direct addressee was, of course, Duke Francesco I of Modena, who commissioned the image. He is implied as the real and ideal viewer in front of the image, and at the same time as a viewer and player on the stage of the picture itself, in the figure of his mythological representative Mars, the god of war. In the image, Mars in full armour draws the curtain aside from the bed, where he surrenders spellbound to the sight of the beautiful Venus – a constellation that would have had its speaking correspondence in the theatrical act of drawing aside the actual curtain covering the painting to reveal the beautiful work of art.

The painting and the sense of acute unsettledness, even threat, that it creates for the viewer, through its precise aiming at him, plays with a variety of allusions and ambivalences which cannot be discussed in detail here. These concern, amongst other things, the shocking vehemence that harbours the motif of Amor's arrow directly aimed at the eye of the beholder, further reinforced by the irrefutable authority of Venus and her finger-pointing, while at the same time the goddess of beauty avoids any direct eye-contact and remains aloof and unattainable. Francesco Gonzaga alone, alias

9 — Luigi Salerno, *I dipinti del Guercino*, Rome 1988, p. 242, Cat. no. 151; David M. Stone, *Guercino. Catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence 1991, p. 158, Cat. no. 139; David Mahon, in: Exhib. Cat. *Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, Il Guercino, 1591–1666*, ed. Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 242 f. et seq., no. 43; Julian Kliemann, "Kunst als Bogenschießen. Domenichinos 'Jagd der Diana' in der Galleria Borghese", in: *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 31 (1996), pp. 273–312, esp. pp. 302 ff. et seq. Most recently, for more in detail on the painting, its context and the further implications of Cupid as a symbol of painting: Elisabeth Oy-Marra, "Vorsicht! Amor schießt auf den Betrachter. Guercinos *Mars und Venus* als handelndes Bild", in: *Das Entgegenkommende Denken*, ed. Franz Engel and Sabine Marienberg, Berlin and Boston 2016, pp. 181–200.

10 — Francesco Petrarca, *Le Rime*, ed. Giosuè Carducci and Severino Ferrari, Florence 1972, p. 211, no. CXXXIII. For numerous analogous formulations see also Hugo Friedrich, *Epochen der italienischen Lyrik*, Frankfurt am Main 1964, Register s.v. 'Auge', 'Metaphern: Pfeil, Pfeile'; as well as Tobias Eisermann, *Cavalcanti oder die Poetik der Negativität*, Tübingen 1992, passim, e.g. p. 113, p. 122, p. 140, pp. 146 ff. et seq., p. 166 and pp. 167 f. et seq. p. 174; see also the list given by Marianne Albrecht-Bott, *Die bildende Kunst in der italienischen Lyrik der Renaissance und des Barock. Studien zur Beschreibung von Portraits und anderen Bildwerken unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von G. B. Marinos 'Galleria'*, Mainzer Romanistische Arbeiten, XI, Wiesbaden 1976, p. 185 ('Auge'). For the term *sagitta cupidinis* see also Schnell (as in note 5), pp. 264–265.



5 — Anonymous German Artist, *Archer*, early 17<sup>th</sup> century, engraving.



6 — Andries Stock, *Archer with Milkmaid*, 1610, engraving after Jacques de Gheyn.

his pictorial alter ego Mars, seems to be protected from this attack on the viewer. Because, on the one hand, the targeted arrows are clearly Cupid's weapons, whilst on the other the Gonzagas' heraldic eagle appears on the quiver (at bottom right) that holds them. This testifies that the actual executive authority of the whole scenario staged here lies with the Duke himself. There is, in other words, a more powerful protection from the dangers of love, as well as those of war: namely the ruling power of art, or respectively the artful power of ruling, which is quite emblematically alluded to by the aimed, acute arrow as an indicator of the *acutezza* of painting.<sup>11</sup>

The way in which the meaning and aesthetic function of this painting are shaped by the discourse of art and love, gaze and arrow, especially as it had been developed in literature and the visual arts, could be traced further and along various routes. This

11 — The imagery of battle and war is current from Ovid onwards: "Every lover is a soldier, and Cupid has a camp of his own [...]." Ovid, *Amores*, in: *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, London 1971, vol. 1, I, 9, v. 1-2. See for e.g. Petrarch, in: *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The 'Rime Sparse' and Other Lyrics*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling, Cambridge 1979, pp. 176-177, no. CXXXIV: "Peace I do not find, and I have no wish to make war [...] (*Pace non trovo et non ò da far guerra [...]*)". See Friedrich (as in note 10), pp. 11-12. See further Kliemann (as in note 9), pp. 302 et seq. (the arrow as an indicator of the *acutezza* of painting), with additional examples, pp. 299 et seq., of the arrow metaphor.





7 — Herman tom Ring, *Triumph of Death and the Last Judgement*, ca. 1550/55, oil on canvas, Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent.

would ultimately lead well beyond Italy (fig. 5 and fig. 6). The motif of the arrow aimed at the viewer is remarkably frequent around 1600 in German and Dutch prints and paintings, most of which pretend to be didactic images that moralise on the tenuous relationship between love and delusion, passion and deceptive appearances and, ultimately truth and falsehood.<sup>12</sup> A German engraving from the early seventeenth century

12 — R. Adèr, “De boogschutter en het meisje”, in: *Boymans bijdragen. Opstellen van medewerkers en oud-medewerkers van het Museum Boymans-van Beuningen voor J. C. Ebbinge Wubben*, Rotterdam 1978,

gives an example (fig. 5). It probably refers to an iconography that was used in public town halls or public religious paintings, like that of Herman tom Ring in Utrecht from ca. 1550/55 (fig. 7), which confront the viewer with the figure of Death (here right in the centre of the painting) as the ultimate and unbribable judge of truth or falsehood, belief or unbelief. “*Schaw, rede was die Warheit is, wo nicht, so treff ich dich gewis*”, runs the inscription on the engraving, while the bowman is directly aiming at the beholder. Far more often, however, the motif of the ‘all-seeing’ archer appears in pictures that were only, if at all, outwardly moralising but in reality quite obviously erotic or filled with innuendos and titillating meanings. A rather large engraving (over 40cm high) by Andries Stock, which might have been an imposing wall decoration, is based on a virtually identical drawing by Jacques de Gheyn, which is dated around 1610 (fig. 6). The archer, who inevitably threatens the viewer, has a bulging codpiece and has allowed the milkmaid to put on his hat, a motif that implies a sort of rather loose behaviour. All the more so, indeed, since the milkmaid is actually holding both of the archer’s elbows



8 — Gerrit Claesz Bleker, *Milkmaid*, 1643, etching.

pp. 59–64; Philipp Ackermann, *Textfunktion und Bild in Genreszenen der niederländischen Graphik des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Alfter 1993, pp. 154–157 (brief remarks); further examples and references in Eddy de Jongh, *Ger Luijten, Mirror of Everyday Life. Genreprints in the Netherlands 1550–1700*, Amsterdam and Ghent 1997, pp. 129 et seq.; Exhib. Cat. *Emotions. Pain and Pleasure in Dutch Paintings of the Golden Age*, ed. Gary Schwartz and Machiel Keestra, Rotterdam 2015, pp. 45–50, and pp. 122–123, Cat. no. 40; William W. Robinson, *Drawings from the Age of Bruegel, Rubens, and Rembrandt: Highlights from the Collection of the Harvard Museum*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 145–147, Cat. no. 40. For further perspectives on De Gheyn’s motif and its combination of gaze and arrow see, amongst others, Hans Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad. Eine westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks*, Munich 2009, pp. 229–239; Yannis Hadjinicolaou, “Das allumfassende Auge. Zur Bildsukzession bei Jacques de Gheyn II”, in: *Et in imagine ego. Facetten von Bildakt und Verkörperung. Festgabe für Horst Bredekamp*, ed. Ulrike Feist and Markus Rath, Berlin 2012, pp. 93–116, esp. pp. 97 et seq. From another, rather broad, perspective on the widespread connection between art and hunting see most recently: *Hunting without weapons. On the pursuit of images*, ed. Maurice Saß, Berlin 2017.



9 — Jacques de Gheyn (circle of), *Archer with Milkmaid*, Early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Private Collection.



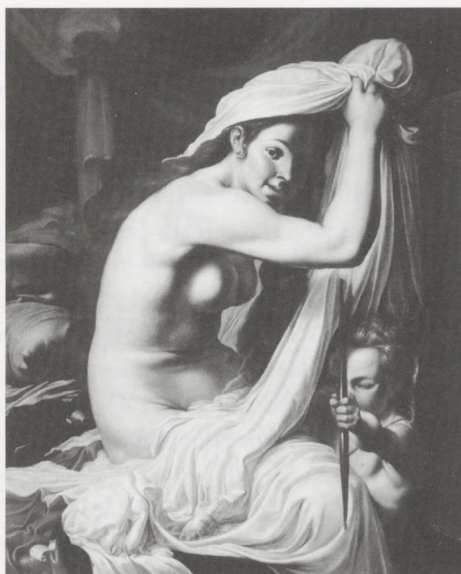
10 — Pieter Serwouters, *Archer*, ca. 1607–1608, engraving after David Vinckboons.

and guiding him, being a maiden, as the inscription confirms, that gives good advice: “*bene virgo docet*”. That this “*virgo*” here is a milkmaid, and with a tub filled with milk to the brim, is no coincidence, for this kind of woman traditionally had a rather dubious reputation in contemporary art and literature. An etching by Gerrit Claesz Bleker from 1643 sheds a clear light on this (fig. 8). It shows the milkmaid in lively, even sensuous, activity, with a visibly cheerful expression directly corresponding to that of the man watching her, obviously not without some kind of frivolous ulterior motive. What this means for Andries Stock’s engraving is shown in quite concrete terms by the quasi-pastoral scene in the background, which represents the couple’s intimate love affair by the cows around them, using quite sensual, frivolous, if not to say animalistic semantics.

I do not want to pursue the various aspects of the particular iconographic motif of the archer who aims at the observer. Numerous, rather mediocre replicas in painting could be cited, such as an example from the early seventeenth century, which replaces the milkmaid with a market woman, significantly with dead birds in her basket (fig. 9). Another, a print by Pieter Serwouters after a design of David Vinckboons (fig. 10), depicts a kneeling bowman aiming at the viewer whilst, simultaneously, an owl defecates on him from the tree above, referring to the deceptive fate of those with too self-confident, too self-righteous attitudes. These examples could be multiplied and followed up to the present day. Consider the photo of former Finnish soldier



11 — Martti Peltonen and Liina Aunola, *Performance with crossbow*, Bielefeld, Christmas 2017.



12 — Werner Jacobsz. van den Valckert, *Venus and Cupid*, ca. 1612–1614, oil on canvas, 10.4 × 75.6 cm, Haarlem, Private Collection.

Martti Peltonen's circus act, staged in different performances around Christmas, 2017, in the city of Bielefeld. In this, he aimed his crossbow at a rose in his partner Liina Aunola's hand, then fired and accurately hit it (fig. 11).

Instead, I would like to return to the argument that is connected with Guercino's painting in Modena (fig. 4), namely the turning of the acute, even threatening, constellation of gazes and arrows into a moment of aesthetic experience at the sight of the art of painting. More specifically, an art of painting that consists essentially of the dialectical tension between performance and withdrawal, representation and presence, making the medial dimension of painting the very core and fundamental meaning of this kind of aesthetic experience. Let us pursue this argument a little further, starting with a painting by Werner Jacobsz. van den Valckert from around 1620, now in Haarlem, whose subject matter is closely related to Guercino's (fig. 12).<sup>13</sup> In this, the semi-nude Venus is presented with her body half immersed in light, half concealed by darkness, and her subtle indecision between uncovering and concealing herself creates

13 — Pieter J. J. van Thiel, "Werner Jacobsz. van den Valckert", in: *Oud Holland*, 97 (1983), pp. 128–195, here p. 179, no. 6; Eric Jan Sluifjter, "Les regards dards'. Werner van den Valckert's Venus and Cupid", in: *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias*, ed. Amy Golahny, Mia M. Mochizuki and Lisa Vergara, Amsterdam 2006, pp. 423–439; Exhib. Cat. *Emotions*. (as in note 12), pp. 122–123, Cat. no. 39 (Gary Schwartz).

a seductive combination of self-presentation and withdrawal. As before, this motif can, in part, be understood as a metaphor for the image's inherently ambivalent nature and for the appeal of its oscillation between the represented and the painterly self-presence; that is to say as a metaphor for the art of painting. It is just this appealing ambivalence that generates the aesthetic experience in the viewer, who is mesmerised by Venus' reciprocating gaze, half in bright light, and half in dark shadow, visible and invisible, and by her lips – sensual, alive and, yet again, a vivid red colour; and who is aimed at by Cupid's arrow, which makes it clear to him, as exciting as it is painful, that it is with the eye and the imaginative sight alone that all of this arises, but also passes away.

The same motif or, more precisely, this same complex configuration of gaze and art, arrow and love, image and imagination, intertwined as it were in Venus' veil with its dialectic of concealing and revealing, is described a little later by Jan Vos. In an ekphrastic poem from the middle of the 17th century, Vos describes how Cupid, the stoker of love (“*de minnestoeker*”), falls prey to his own weapon, the arrow of love (“*minnepijl*”), in front of the painting that portrays Geertuidt van Maarseveen as a young beauty: “I know no other arrows than the looks that come from this high forehead [...]. Beauty, he said, is an arrow, as he reached for the figure full of loveliness: but he embraced a flat panel. These, he called out, are painted limbs. O Maarseveen! Can the artist's brush inflame hearts with cold colours? This makes my arrow useless, he said. Now the little God will learn how to make images. Painting serves as a weapon of love.”<sup>14</sup> The double function of the aesthetic experience is here, as in van den Valckert's painting, intensified to the point of producing, on the one hand, a sensual, erotic allure, and compensating, on the other, for the non-fulfilment of the promise it contains. Last but not least, the old *conchetto* of “*Omnia vincit amor*”, which goes back to Virgil, is also articulated in the painting since, as an all-seeing archer, Cupid will similarly defeat the observer in the end. Thus, all the more, the image reminds the viewer to reflect on the way he sees, and also on the ethical, moral foundations, which come into play through his imagination.

As can be understood against this background, staging the relationship between image and viewer in such seductive terms provoked art theory to raise questions about the moral qualities of the gaze and about the interplay and opposition between internal and external vision, between “chaste” and “unchaste” viewing.<sup>15</sup> As the poetry and

14 — “*Ik ken geen pylen dan de blikken/ [...] / De schoonheid, zeidt hy, is een schicht: / En greep naar't beeldt vol aartigheeden: / Maar hy omhelsd' een plat panneel. / Dit zyn, riep hy, gemaalde leeden. / O Maarseveen! kan 't Kunstpenseel / Door koude verven harten blaake? / Zoo is myn pyl, zeidt hy, onnut. / Nu leert het gootje beelden maaken. / De Maalkunst strekt de Min tot schut.*” *All de Gedichten van Jan Vos*, ed. Gerrit and Hendrik Bosch, Amsterdam 1726, I, 287. Quoted after Gregor J. M. Weber, *Der Lobtopos des 'Lebenden' Bildes. Jan Vos und sein 'Zeege der Schilderkunst' von 1654*, Hildesheim, Zurich and New York 1991, pp. 222–223.

15 — Werner Busch, “Das keusche und das unkeusche Sehen. Rembrandts 'Diana, Aktaion und Callisto'”, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 52 (1989), pp. 257–277.

moral theology of the Middle Ages had previously done,<sup>16</sup> the seventeenth century developed a particular interest in those biblical and mythological subjects that focused on the perils of an unchecked “desire of the eyes (*concupiscentia oculorum*)”: for example, *Bathsheba Bathing*, *Susanna with the two Elders*, *The Bath of Danae*, and the story of Diana and Actaeon, but also *Medusa* or *David with the Head of Goliath*.<sup>17</sup> For example, in a passage from his *Schilderconst* (the “Art of Painting”), published in 1604, to which Werner Busch has drawn attention, Karel van Mander admonishes the young painter always to remember, while painting, the tragic fate of Actaeon. Overwhelmed by sensual desire, his eyes yearned to behold Diana until he was dreadfully mauled by her hounds. Actaeon, who preferred the unbridled senses and passion to thoughtfulness and restraint, serves here as a warning to the painter, to always uphold the right and true vision of art over false and corrupting views.<sup>18</sup> Two works by the Amsterdam painter Jacob van Loo, one in Berlin (painted in 1648)<sup>19</sup>, the other in Braunschweig

16 — See Schnell (as in note 5), pp. 245 et seq., esp. pp. 265 et seq. on the literary theme of *Susanna*, *Joseph and Potiphars Weib*, *Diana*, *Achilles and Polixena*; see also pp. 396 et seq. (“disguising of sexual desire”). Gunther Bös, *Curiositas: Die Rezeption eines antiken Begriffs durch christliche Autoren bis Thomas von Aquin*, Paderborn 1995, p. 26 and pp. 81–82 (deadly curiosity in the case of Actaeon).

17 — See among others Kurt Badt, “Domenichinos ‘Caccia di Diana’ in der Galleria Borghese”, in: *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 3.F. 13 (1962), pp. 216–237; Lynne Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans. Portraits of the Renaissance*, New York 1987, esp. pp. 151 et seq.; Jacques Foucart, *Peintres rembranesques au Louvre (Les dossiers du département des peintures, 35)*, Paris 1988, pp. 88 et seq.; Busch (as in note 15); Mieke Bal, *Reading ‘Rembrandt’. Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 138 et seq.; Weber (as in note 14), pp. 212 et seq.; Exhib. Cat. *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt. Gemälde*, Munich/Paris/London 1991, pp. 167 et seq., pp. 196 et seq., pp. 233 et seq., pp. 242 et seq.; Elizabeth Cropper, “The Petrifying Art: Marino’s Poetry and Caravaggio”, in: *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 26 (1991), pp. 193–212; Steven Z. Levine, “To See or Not to See. The Myth of Diana and Actaeon in the Eighteenth Century”, in: Exhib. Cat. *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David*, New York 1992, pp. 73–95, esp. pp. 88 et seq.; Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love. Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’ and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton 1992, pp. 95 et seq., 102 et seq.; Petra Welzel, *Rembrandts ‘Bathseba’ – Metapher des Begehrens oder Sinnbild zur Selbsterkenntnis?*, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Bern 1994; Kliemann (as in note 9); Stefan Grohé, *Rembrandts mythologische Historien*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 1996, pp. 195 et seq., p. 225, pp. 277 et seq.; Klaus Krüger, „Gesichter ohne Leib. Dispositive der gewesenen Präsenz“, in: *Verklärte Körper. Ästhetiken der Transfiguration*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Nicola Suthor, Munich 2006, pp. 183–222; Caroline van Eck, “The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, Ekplexis, and the Sublime”, in: *Journal of the Historians of Netherlandish Art*, 8.2 (2016), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.3 (Available at <http://www.jhna.org/index.php/vol-8-2-2016/336-caroline-van-eck>, accessed June 8 2020); Thijs Weststeijn, “The Painting Looks Back: Reciprocal Desire in the Seventeenth Century” in: *Ut pictura amor. The Reflexive Imagery of Love in Artistic Theory and Practice, 1500–1700*, ed. Walter Melion, Michael Zell and Joanna Woodall, Leiden 2017, pp. 264–295.

18 — Karel van Mander, *Den grondt der edel vry schilderconst*, ed. Hessel Miedema, Utrecht 1973, vol. 1, pp. 90–91 (Exhortatie, Cap. I, 62); see Busch (as in note 15), p. 172.

19 — *Gemäldegalerie. Holländische und flämische Gemälde des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts im Bode-Museum*, Berlin 1976, pp. 58–59.



13 — Jacob van Loo, *Diana and her Nymphs*, 1648, oil on canvas, 136.8 × 170.6 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie.

(slightly later, around 1650–52)<sup>20</sup>, reveal the significance that this subject matter was thought to have for bringing about a dynamic and meaningful relationship between image and the viewer's imagination (fig. 13 and fig. 14). Both works show the goddess Diana surrounded by her nymphs, shown either preparing for their bath or already drying themselves off. In the Braunschweig painting, Diana's undressed companions are seen from various viewpoints and in poses that delicately exhibit their feminine forms, in ways familiar from the depiction of nymphs in pastoral painting. The goddess' threatening look seems all the more severe as she silently and solemnly stares out at the viewer. The beholder suddenly finds himself in the role of Actaeon, the discovered voyeur who is now in imminent danger. The threat is intensified by the discovery of the quiver at Diana's feet and, next to it, numerous birds and hares which she has already killed. Their fate prefigures the viewer's own in his role as an imaginary participant in the image. Openly confronted by the gaze, the viewer is drawn into the situation, but paradoxically, at the same time, he becomes aware of his secure location outside the image. His view of the naked nymphs generates a continuous renewal of both attraction and risk, of a pleurably disquieting, alert and wary sense of intrusion.

20 — Exhib. Cat. *Gods, Saints and Heroes. Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt*, Washington D.C. 1981, p. 62, Cat. no. 51.



14 — Jacob van Loo, *Diana and her Nymphs*, ca. 1650–1652, oil on canvas, 162.5 × 199 cm, Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum.

This interplay of forces results, ultimately, in the experience of an ambiguous oscillation, which lets what is presented to the eye fluctuate between reality and imagination.

In the same context, Domenichino's famous painting of the *Hunt of Diana* from 1617 could also be discussed (fig. 15, plate XXIX).<sup>21</sup> Unlike van Loo's painting, it shows the goddess' hunt in full swing and in the acute moment of the just-shot arrow, with violently excited, barely controllable hounds. The youthful, naked nymph in the very foreground is only too willing, indeed tempting and provocative, to look at the beholder and attract him. The two young men, however, who hide in the bushes on the far right and whom the beholder in fact only discovers at second glance, remind him, not without a sudden fright, of caution and restraint. If the one fixes him directly with his gaze and with a gesture that urges him to remain silent and, somehow, to stay prudently away from the scene and the painting, then the other one is completely under the spell of the ongoing action, which with the prey already taken basically prefigures the upcoming fate of Actaeon – alias that of the observer. Domenichino's painting

21 — See Badt (as in note 17) and esp. Kliemann (as in note 9); Julian Kliemann, *Il bersaglio dell'arte. la Caccia di Diana di Domenichino nella Galleria Borghese*, Rome 2001; Stefano Pierguidi, "La freccia in aria, ovvero la rappresentazione del tempo in pittura. 'La Caccia di Diana' di Domenichino e 'Le tre Parche' di Simon Vouet", in: *Les cahiers d'histoire de l'art*, 7 (2009), pp. 20–25.





15 — Domenichino, *The Hunt of Diana*, 1617, oil on canvas, 225 × 320 cm, Rome, Galleria Borghese.

focuses on the acute moment, truly an “*Augenblick*”, of the aesthetic experience as a constellation full of tension, a tension of pleasure *and* distance, immediacy *and* reflection, sensuality *and* cognition. It also clarifies that this tension is hardly a dichotomy, but rather is to be understood as a continuous, inseparable interweaving and a synthesis to be renewed again and again through the act of imaginative contemplation.

Against this background let me finally turn to a last example, even more famous than Domenichino’s, which brings out this very tension in a striking but also puzzling way, Caravaggio’s *Victorious Cupid*, painted in 1602–1603 (fig. 16).<sup>22</sup> The painting shows a youth with richly feathered wings, therefore a creature or being not found in nature, but who in the image presents himself in so natural a fashion that the eye is struck by his seemingly tangible presence. The model for the picture is a boy of eleven

22 — The literature on the painting has meanwhile grown enormously and is barely manageable. Still fundamental: Mia Cinotti, “Michelangelo Merisi detto il Caravaggio (con saggio critico di G. A. Dell’Acqua),” in: *I Pittori bergamaschi dal XIII al XIX secolo: Il Seicento*, I, Bergamo 1983, pp. 203–641, here pp. 409–411, no. 1. A more recent overview of the research can be found, among others, in Valeska von Rosen, “Caravaggios Eromenos. Der Amor für Vincenzo Giustiniani,” in: *Amor sacro e profano. Modelle und Modellierungen der Liebe in Literatur und Malerei der italienischen Renaissance*, ed. Jörn Steigerwald and id., Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 333–361; and Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio and Cupid: homage and rivalry in Rome and Florence*, Edinburgh 2017. The following remarks refer back to my earlier interpretation in Krüger (as in note 1), pp. 243–251, with more specific references and notes.



16 — Caravaggio, *Victorious Cupid*, 1602–1603, oil on canvas, 156 × 113 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie.

or twelve years, or so, posing for the painter with two large, grey-brown eagle wings that Caravaggio had presumably borrowed as a prop from the studio of his painter colleague, Orazio Gentileschi. Cupid as a poetically condensed creature of mythological fantasy presents himself as a strikingly physical, conceivably unmythological, namely all-too-human, all-too-natural boy. Or vice versa: A boy in his bare, indeed naked, existence presents himself as a fictional, deified figure of mythology. This ambivalence of the painting's relation to reality and of its semiotic determination becomes a central, indeed provocative, experience for contemplating it. This is not by chance: it is also reflected in early descriptions of the work which are torn between two ways of interpreting the picture's subject, whether as a naked boy or as the god of love.<sup>23</sup>

23 — Michael Wiemers, "Caravaggios 'Amor Vincitore' im Urteil eines Romfahrers um 1650", in: *Pantheon*, 44 (1986), pp. 59–61; Joachim von Sandrarts *Academie der edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675. Leben der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*, ed. Alfred R. Peltzer, Munich 1925, p. 276 ("Nachmalen malhte er [...] einen Cupido in Lebensgrösse nach Gestalt eines ohngefehr zwölfjährigen Jünglings [...]"). For the early sources see Herwarth Röttgen, *Caravaggio: Der irdische Amor, oder Der Sieg der fleischlichen Liebe*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, pp. 5 et seq; Walter F. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton 1955, p. 182; Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, New York 1983, pp. 155 et seq.

The objects arranged like a veritable still life at the figure's feet reveal the consistency with which this ambivalence pervades the entire image. A lute, a violin and a sheet of music with mensural notation, together with a square and a pair of compasses, a piece of metal armour, behind it a book with a quill and a laurel branch, and, finally, a crown and sceptre – all of these are depicted, like the boy himself, in an objective, concrete fashion. As real, natural objects, they stand for themselves. But at the same time, they point beyond themselves to the universal significance of music and poetry, of science and the art of war, of fame and secular power, and by this they vividly demonstrate the meaning of the traditional concept of "*Omnia vincit amor*". The only object that diverges from this semantic structure, the starry globe behind the boy, is, significantly, a later addition. It alone is not a self-contained object but has a purely symbolic function, representing "the world" as such, and resisting interpretation as a real object that would provide a – precarious – seat for the youth.

As a whole, then, the image aims simultaneously at naturalising allegory and at allegorising a pre-existing objective reality. This interplay, which confuses and complicates the difference between being and signifying, is in itself the painting's actual theme. One cannot escape the impression that the depicted scene is staged, an arranged, artificial *mise-en-scène* that makes the painting seem like the depiction of a *tableau vivant*, an image of a dummy image ("*Bild eines Scheinbildes*") and leaves the viewer continually wondering whether the painting presents Cupid in the shape of a boy or a boy in the role of Cupid.

This remarkable ambiguity of representation is expressed in a different and more direct, explicit fashion in a work by Cecco del Caravaggio, which was created only ten or fifteen years later. This painting presents Cupid drinking at a fountain as an image within the image (fig. 17, plate XXX).<sup>24</sup> The canvas that is shown leaning against a wall within the painting has been revealed to the viewer from a curtain of red brocade, which has been pulled aside. Therefore, the painting's true subject is not *Cupid at the Fountain* but *A Picture of Cupid at the Fountain*. But to which of these two images and to which of their respective realities does Cupid belong? While the surroundings in which he kneels to quench his thirst are marked by a rock face overgrown with plants and populated with animals, the background to the right, next to the curtain, is a plastered brick wall, hardly different from the back wall against which the canvas is leaning. Similarly, the light that illuminates Cupid from the left barely differs from the

24 — Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail. Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture*, Paris 1992, pp. 135 et seq.; Röttgen (note 23), pp. 55–56; Mina Gregori, "Il 'San Giovannino alla sorgente' del Caravaggio", in: *Paragone*, 44, 519–521 (1993), pp. 3–20, esp. pp. 13–14.; Gianni Papi, *Cecco del Caravaggio*, Florence 1992, pp. 23 et seq.; Gianni Papi, "Caravaggio e Cecco", in: *Come dipingeva il Caravaggio. Atti della giornata di studio*, ed. Mina Gregori, Milan 1996, pp. 123–134, esp. pp. 132 et seq.; most recently: Julian Kliemann, "Amor an der Quelle von Cecco del Caravaggio oder die Grenzen der Malerei", in: *Kunst und Eros*, ed. Christoph Wagner and Ulrike Lorenz, Regensburg 2015, pp. 8–16.



17 — Cecco del Caravaggio, *Cupid at the Fountain*, 1615–1620, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

light illuminating the canvas and the red brocade, casting their shadows on the wall behind them. Any attempt at assigning determinate modes of reality is finally called into question by the arrow at the lower right, which can be grouped with the items that Cupid has laid on the ground at the fountain, but which projects beyond the realm of reality defined by the canvas. As Cupid's arrow in the examples shown above had its reality, so to speak, in the eye of the beholder, so here, somewhat similarly, the arrow is part of the painting's reality yet simultaneously tends to emerge from this reality. The arrow alludes to *acutezza* and hence points out the artful painting of the picture, and at the same time it refers to the brush itself as the instrument of painting. It is placed with all its ambivalence – as part of the painting and part of the outer reality – exactly where we would expect the signature of the painting, and not by chance, alluding to the idea that Cupid himself painted it, with an arrow that hits us in the eye.

This visual play confuses not only the relations between the different realities within the painting, but also, through the effects of *trompe-l'oeil*, their external relation to the viewer. From the left, the image appears as though it could be directly entered, and the snail sitting on a stone in the foreground seems so tangible that one is tempted to reach out and touch it. However, to the right, it is not just the arrow but also the red cloth and, not least, the canvas itself that present themselves as no less real. The brocade curtain, whose colour contrasts so emphatically with the brown tones that prevail

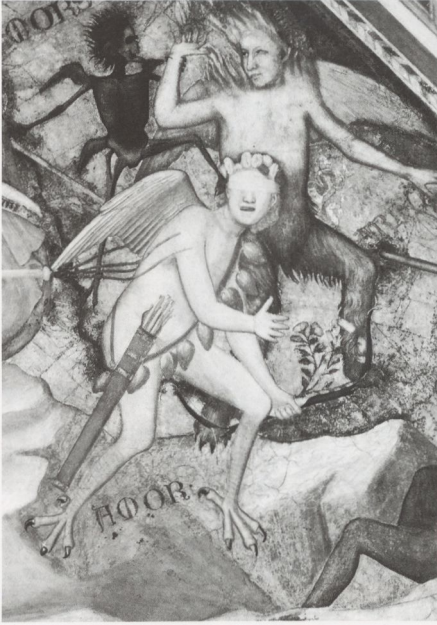
in the rest of the image, quite obviously alludes to the well-known anecdote from Pliny: Zeuxis, who had succeeded in deceiving birds with illusionistic painted grapes, was in turn deceived by Parrhasios, who had painted a curtain (*lintheum*) in front of an image, which Zeuxis tried to draw aside. More than just a learned reference, however, the motif of the curtain points to the fictional potential of painting. It is a pictorial rendering of the old *topos* of the veil of artistic invention, the *velo di finzioni*, as the cloak of artistic form. Giambattista Marino, also in the early Seicento, praised the poetic and inventive powers of classical mythology; that is to say of the imaginary universe of which Cupid is a part: “*La Grecia, di tutte le bell’arti inventrice, sotto velo di favolose finzioni soleva ricoprire la maggior parte de’ suoi misteri* (Greece, the inventor of all fine arts, under the veil of fabulous fictions used to cover most of its mysteries)”.<sup>25</sup>

Cupid’s specific manifestation as a visual fiction, especially, has played an important role in mythographic writings since Antiquity. In his elegies, Propertius explains that it was actually the art of painting that first gave the idea of Cupid a sensually concrete form and appearance. The characteristic aspects of that appearance, however, were to be understood as purely allegorical. His childish appearance, according to Propertius, symbolises the sometimes nonsensical behaviour of lovers, while his wings indicate the flirtatious inconstancy of amorous feelings. Cupid’s arrows point to the incurable wounds produced by love, and so forth.<sup>26</sup> Medieval and, later, humanist thought introduced and developed the *topos* that the youthful Cupid’s appearance was the paradigm of an allegory naturalised by painting. Consequently, and especially since the early Trecento, he was then, indeed, represented many times in painted pictures (see for example a fresco in Assisi, dated around 1325: fig. 18; and a later one, painted around 1452–1466 by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo: fig. 19). “*Alatus pingitur*,” “he is painted with wings,” as Hrabanus Maurus explained as early as the Carolingian era, because nothing more volatile and mutable can be found, “*quia nihil [...] levius, nihil mutabilius invenitur*.” He is painted as a boy, “*puer pingitur*,” because nothing is more stupid or more irrational (“*quia stultus est et irrationalis amor*”).<sup>27</sup> In the late Duecento, the poet Federico dell’Amba wrote a sonnet specifically addressing the fact that Cupid, by his nature, cannot be grasped or seen, but can be represented as tangible and visible by painting:

25 — Giambattista Marino, *Epistolario, seguito da lettere di altri scrittori del seicento*, ed. Angelo Borzelli and Fausto Nicolini, Bari 1911–1912, vol. 2, p. 16. See Anne-Marie Lecoq, “Finxit’. Le peintre comme ‘fictor’ au XVIe siècle”, in: *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 37 (1975), pp. 225–243, here p. 229.

26 — The essential, abundantly documented study remains Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York 1962 (first edition 1939), pp. 95 et seq. (“Blind Cupid”), p. 96 and p. 104 (Propertius).

27 — Panofsky (as in note 26), p. 105.



18 — Unknown Artist, *Blindfolded Cupid with wings and arrows*, ca. 1320–1330, Assisi, San Francesco, Lower Church, Fresco in the crossing.



19 — Piero della Francesca, *Blindfolded Cupid with wings and arrow*, between 1452 and 1466, fresco, Arezzo, San Francesco.

If Amor, from whom proceeds good as well as bad,  
 were a visible being of nature (*visibil cosa da natura*),  
 then he would without doubt be  
 just as he is shown in painting (*nella dipintura*):  
 A boy with a quiver tied to him,  
 shooting, blind, naked and with wings.<sup>28</sup>

The poem then continues with the customary allegorical interpretation. Many further texts of this sort could easily be cited until well into the seventeenth century and beyond, from authors such as Francesco da Barberino, Petrarch, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, or Leone Ebreo. In a treatise from 1496, the humanist Mario Equicola explains that “Cupid appears as a boy in painting, [...] naked, because he cannot hide; winged, because he is quick and fickle [...]. The bow stands for unfaithfulness, the string for

28 — “Se Amor, da cui procede bene e male, / Fusse visibil cosa da natura, / Sarebbe senza fallo appunto tale / Com’el si mostra nella dipintura: / Garzone col turcassio alla cintura / Saettando, cieco, nudo e ricco d’ale.” See Panofsky (as in note 26), p. 108.

lust, the quiver for arbitrariness [...], his hair indicates youth".<sup>29</sup> Even Emanuele Tesauro, who in his treatise on style, the 1655 *Cannocchiale Aristotelico*, praises allegory as the highest and most ingenious form of artful and elevated poetry, illustrates his point using as his paradigm the visualisation of love by the boy Cupid.<sup>30</sup> At about the same time, the French painter, poet and theoretician Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy created a painting that can be read as a comment to the same effect (fig. 20).<sup>31</sup> Probably painted around 1653 during his lengthy sojourn in Rome, the painting shows the female personification of painting (*Pictura*), sitting in front of an easel and about to begin painting a youth in the role of Cupid. As in Caravaggio's canvas, the youth has open wings and is standing in a relaxed, rather nonchalant attitude with various emblems of the arts and sciences spread out before his feet. While his gaze is directed straight at the artist in front of him and therefore implicitly at the prospective viewer (as in Caravaggio's case), his right hand points up towards the curtain gathered up by a cord, an indication that it has only just been raised specifically to reveal Cupid's appearance as mediated by the art of painting.

If the self-reflection of painting, which Cecco del Caravaggio so explicitly produces in his image, alludes to the traditional notion of Cupid as the paradigm of a figurative fiction, that connection is intensified further in this case: fiction itself is now understood as a play, actually with the viewer's expectation to be deceived. It is a play that involves a blurring of the opposition between fiction (*finto*) and truth (*vero*), which was given such importance in seventeenth-century art theory especially. Insofar as painting (*pittura*) is capable of producing deceptive images (*simulacri*) by means of its imitative capacity, it generates within the intellect the reflective pleasure of illusion, as Emanuele Tesauro knew: "*genera nell'intelletto un piacevole inganno [...] facendoci à credere che il finto sia il vero.*"<sup>32</sup>

Both works by Caravaggio's followers draw attention to the self-referential dimension of their subject matters. They focus on the conditioned nature of pictorial representation and display themselves as reflections on the idea of imitating nature.

29 — Examples in Panofsky (as in note 26), p. 117, p. 125 and, on Equicola, p. 127, who is also discussed by Röttgen (as in note 23), p. 38, but in a different context.

30 — Emanuele Tesauro, *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico, o sia dell'arguta et ingeniosa elocutione, che serve à tutta l'Arte Oratoria, Lapidaria, et Simbolica, Examinata Co' Principii del divino Aristoteles* (Reprint of the edition Turin 1670), ed. August Buck, Bad Homburg/Berlin/Zurich 1968, pp. 481 et seq. (on allegory), esp. pp. 485–486. (on Cupid).

31 — In the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon; for the roots of Dufresnoy's art theory in the academic milieu of Rome, where he has certainly also seen Caravaggio's notorious painting of the Amor Vincitore, see Jean-Claude Boyer, "Bellori e i suoi amici francesi", in: Exhib. Cat. *L'Idée del Bello. Viaggio per Roma nel Seicento con Giovan Pietro Bellori*, ed. Anna Gramiccia and Federica Piantoni, Rome 2000, vol. 1, pp. 51–54.

32 — Tesauro (as in note 30), p. 26.



20 — Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, *Allegory of Painting*, ca. 1653, oil on canvas, Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

Painting is able to play with illusion, writes Tesauro, only due to its capacity for imitation, “*per virtù della Imitation materiale.*”<sup>33</sup>

Caravaggio’s *Victorious Cupid* incorporates similar notions, although not quite so explicitly. The artist’s quarrel with Baglione, which centred on this painting but which cannot be discussed here, is evidence of its programmatic ambitions in this respect.<sup>34</sup> Against the background just considered, the figure’s brazen nakedness and the uninhibited directness of the look that he gives the viewer turn out to have a deeper, more subtle content. The reciprocal gaze confronts the viewer with the paradox that although love originates in seeing – *amore nasce nel vedere*, as Mario Equicola writes –, in the meeting of eyes, Cupid himself can be seen only in fictional images.<sup>35</sup> In a cunning paradox, his unabashed nakedness therefore becomes a symbol of the mask or covering created by painting, its veil of fiction (*velo di finzione*). From this perspective, *Victorious Cupid* proclaims the triumph of painting, as indeed it was understood to do in a distich penned in 1610 by the poet Mirzio Milesi: “By Michelangelo

33 — Tesauro (as in note 30). For the close connection between *ingere* and *imitare* in art theory since Alberti, see Lecoq (as in note 25), pp. 238 et seq.

34 — See Röttgen (as in note 23), pp. 16 et seq., pp. 23 et seq.

35 — Panofsky (as in note 26), p. 125, note 77. On this *topos*, see above, pp. 212 et seq., with notes 5 and 10.



da Caravaggio, who painted Cupid as the vanquisher of everything, – *omnia vincit Amor*, Cupid conquers everything, as you, painter, conquer everything (*tu pictor et omnia vincis*), the former the souls, you, the bodies and the souls.”<sup>36</sup> The beholder is struck by the force of the expressive gaze of Caravaggio’s Cupid, confirming the impression that Gasparo Murtola had already described in 1603: “Do not look at Cupid on this canvas, which will ignite your heart. For though he is only painted, he has his arrows with him (*che benché sia dipinto, pure ha seco gli strali*), those full of love, the others deadly. And those colours, so fresh and alive, are nothing but delusion”.<sup>37</sup>

If, after all, one can say that Caravaggio’s *Victorious Cupid* amounts to a re-naturalisation of an allegory, then it is not, of course, in the narrow sense of a proper “imitation of nature” but rather in the sense of a strategy that focuses on the nature of the image itself, on representation as such. Neither the model of nature nor a meaning behind the image referred to by its representation can account for the creation of pictorial reality. Only the image itself as a medium can be credited with making that reality appear. The arrows Amor has with him (*pure ha seco gli strali*, as Murtola emphasises) are all too real, one black, the other red; one full of love, the other deadly. Ultimately, however, their substance is that of colour alone, which exactly for that very reason is capable of beguiling and banishing the eye. The sense of puzzlement that even a modern viewer experiences in front of the painting does not result from the unbroken congruence of nature and representation, of model and copy, but stems rather from being made aware of the painting’s mediation between these two sides.

A good thirty years after the completion of the painting, it was thought necessary to conceal it with a silk curtain in its original location, the private gallery of the Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, in order, as Joachim von Sandrart retrospectively reported in 1675, to prevent it from eclipsing all other works in the collection and reducing them to insignificance by its forceful presence.<sup>38</sup> The subtle artfulness (*artificio*) of the interplay between concealed revelation and concealing revelation was thus given an extrinsic form, and the image’s inherently paradoxical character was now in a literal, quite concrete, sense covered over. The painting, in fact, had now become an image that could be beheld only voyeuristically.

36 — “De Michaele Angelo de Caravaggio qui Amorem omnia subigentem pinxit – *omnia vincit amor, tu pictor et omnia vincis scilicet ille animos, corpora tuque animos*”, quoted after M. Marini, *Caravaggio. Michelangelo Mersisi da Caravaggio, “pictor praestantissimus”*, Rome 1989, p. 461.

37 — “Non guardar, non guardare / In queste tele Amore, / Che incenderatti il core, / Che benché sia dipinto / Pure ha seco gli strali / Amorosi, e mortali, / E quei colori suoi freschi, e vivaci / Non sono altro, che faci”; Gaspare Murtola, *Madrigal 468* (1603), published in Venice in 1604, quoted after Marini (as in note 36), p. 460.

38 — Sandrart (as in note 23), pp. 276–277.