[Plate 10. Wenderholm – Fig. 4, p. 201]

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THE PRESIDENT AS A READER: SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS AND BOOKS

Iris Wenderholm

By reading the thoughts of others
We learn to think (Sixth Discourse).

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) owned an extensive collection of books in his library. It is known to us today at least in part through the auction that took place after his death, and numerous volumes are now kept in Sir John Soane's Museum.[1] Furthermore, we can reconstruct which books Reynolds owned as well as what further literature he studied by the references in his *Discourses on Art* and the surviving manuscript notes he made while reading.[2] Despite the comprehensive research on the important role books played in Reynolds' life and despite this being a well-known fact, until now no one has focused their studies primarily on the role that reading ultimately played for this artist. Especially the value of reading in artists' education is significant in this regard as well as how Reynolds made this a theoretical issue in his *Discourses* and, not to forget, how he put what he read into practice in his artistic work. Also the extent of Reynolds' usage of books as instruments for acquiring knowledge within the framework of fashioning himself as an educated humanist artist, a *pictor doctus*, still remains to be explored.

Reynolds' early career was definitely not that of a gifted child. His first attempts to illustrate objects from 'the book of nature' are modest. The study of a perch he made as a boy appears two-dimensional and, without any background context, seems arbitrarily transfixed on the sheet of paper like an arbitrary object [Fig. 1]. However, the minute detail with which

[1] Phillips H., *A catalogue of all the great and valuable collection of ancient drawings, scarce prints, and books of prints, which belonged to Sir Joshua Reynolds* (London, Lloyd: 1798); see also Perini G., "Sir Joshua Reynolds and Italian Art and Art Literature. A Study of the Sketchbooks in the British Museum", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988) 141–168, 159, n. 95.

[2] Hilles F.W., *The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Cambridge: 1936) Appendix I.

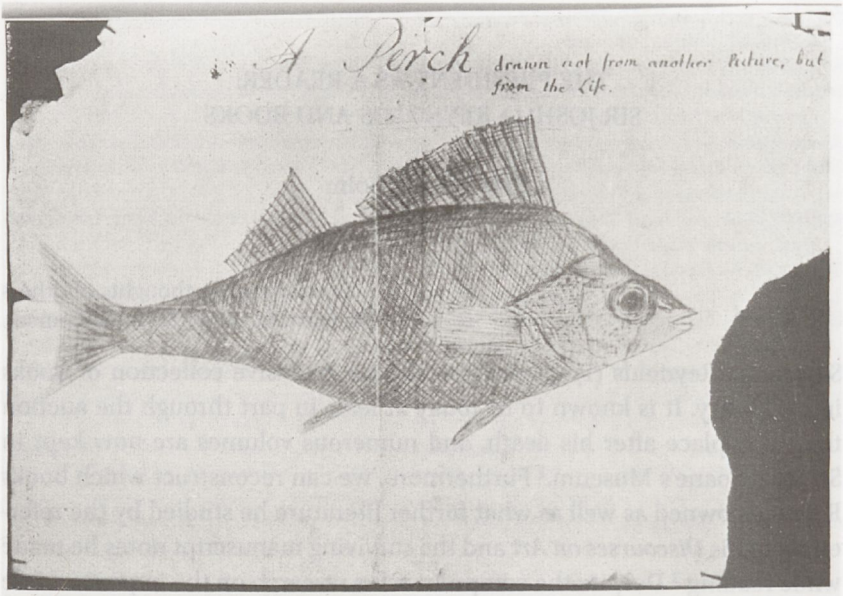

Fig. 1. Joshua Reynolds, *Study of a Perch*. Whereabouts unknown.

the young draftsman captured the form, texture, and proportions of the fish is surprising. The inscription added by Sir Joshua's father, Reverend Samuel Reynolds, reveals high aspirations and also ennobles the drawing: 'A Perch drawn not from another Picture, but from the Life'.[3] During his career as a portrait painter, Reynolds often painted from life, but a shift became increasingly apparent from working 'from the Life' to 'from another Picture': He did not, however, copy, but instead enhanced his portraits by quoting motifs from other artworks. Predominantly in Reynolds' later portraits of children and young ladies, his *borrowing* method reveals many insights into the idealizing concept in portraiture during his further career. As a portrait artist he was compelled to follow the aspirations of depicting his clients true to nature. They did not, however, remind him of a perch, but he humorously compared them to a piece of ham, as he

[3] A plate of the drawing can be found in Gower R.S., *Sir Joshua Reynolds. His Life and Art* (London: 1902) 4–5 (formerly owned by Lady Colomb, present whereabouts unknown). The drawing is also mentioned in the reprint of the 1872 London edition as belonging to the Palmer family: Timbs J., *Anecdote Lives of William Hogarth, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Henry Fuseli, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and J. M. W. Turner* (Portsmouth: 1997) 103.

allegedly put it himself: The expression or attitude of a particularly highly praised male portrait by his hand was neither more nor less than 'copying a ham or any object of still life'.[4]

When we examine the young Reynolds, we find a youth who, in his erudition and interests, not only studied from the 'book of nature' but also consulted the books he had direct access to in his father's library. Besides Jacob Cats' book of emblems (1627),[5] from which he copied the engravings, and the Bible, which he read under his father's guidance, Reynolds also had access in Plympton, the hometown of his youth, to Dryden's translation of Plutarch's *Vitae*, which later probably found its way into his own library.[6] I would like to especially point out, however, that already at the age of eight he gathered knowledge – presumably rather superficially – from Jean Dubreuil's standard work on perspective for artists and dilettantes, the anonymously published *Perspectiva Practica*, presumably the English translation by Ephraim Chambers of the 1726 London edition.[7] We can deduce this from a drawing he illustrated as a youth on the back of a page containing a Latin exercise [Fig. 2]. The perspectival construction according to Dubreuil's model – with its vanishing point marked as the 'point of sight' – shows a window in a wall in exact compliance with the vanishing lines. It can be described as a hand copy of folio 54 of the *Perspectiva Practica*, whose perspectival constructions in the first edition were adopted by all subsequent ones [Fig. 3]. His father also added a note to this illustration by Joshua Reynolds as a boy, giving us insight into the status of the drawing: 'this is drawn by Joshua in school out of pure

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[4] Quoted from Nicholas Penny in Reynolds Joshua, *Reynolds*, ed. N. Penny with contributions by D. Donald et al., exhibition catalogue London (London: 1986) 17.

[5] Cats Jacob, *Proteus ofte minne-beelden verandert in Sinne-Beelden* (Rotterdam, Pieter van Waesberge: 1627). According to Timbs (Timbs, *Anecdote Lives* 103), Reynolds told Edmond Malone that Cats' book, which belonged to his grandmother before it found its way into his father's library, was an initiatory work and trigger for his later career.

[6] Hilles, *The Literary Career* 115; see his paraphrase from Plutarch in Reynolds Joshua, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R.R. Wark (New Haven-London: 1975) VI, 473–475.

[7] [Dubreuil J.,] *The Practice of Perspective, or An Easy Method of representing Natural Objects According to the Rules of Art. Applied and Exemplified in all the Variety of Cases; as Landskips, Gardens, Buildings of divers Kinds* [...] *A Work highly necessary for Painters, Engravers, Architects* [...] *And others concerned in Designing, Written in French by a Jesuit of Paris* [...] (London, Thomas Bowles: 1726). Initially the book was published anonymously with the title *Perspective practique* [...] (Paris, Melchior Tavernier: 1642, with illustrations, which were also used for the German translation by Johann Christoph Rembold, *Perspectiva practica* (Augsburg, Jeremias Wolff: 1710) and the English translations by Robert Pricke, *Perspective practical* (London, Robert Pricke: 1698), as well as the many subsequent editions. Presumably Samuel Reynolds had the new English edition of 1726 in his library because his mother tongue was English and also because of the publication date.

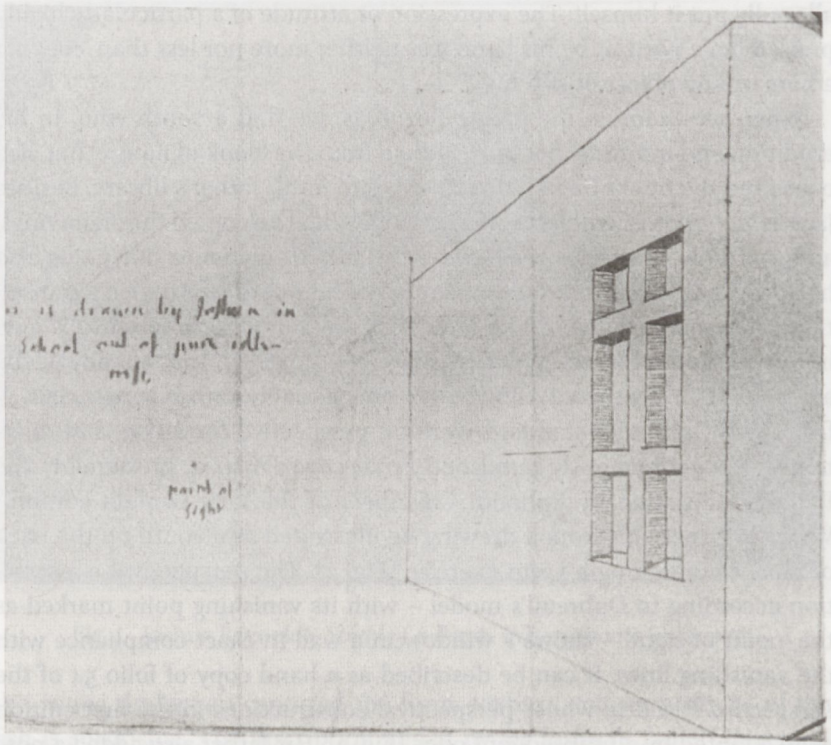

Fig. 2. Joshua Reynolds, *Study on Perspective*, before 1733. Whereabouts unknown.

idleness'. The assertion that Joshua illustrated a perspectival construction in school purely out of boredom highlights a technical proficiency and understanding far surpassing that of a mere boy not yet aged ten.[8] The significance of perspectival illustration for the young Reynolds finds little echo in his later works, and it has only been possible to verify the existence of one treatise on perspective in his library: Thomas Malton's rare volume *Compleat Treatise on Perspective* (London, Thomas Malton: 1776), which was printed for only 300 subscribers.[9]

An overview of what Reynolds confirmedly read at an early date, to which we can include school textbooks and also several classics of antiquity and early modern times, sufficiently substantiates that since early

[8] Timbs, *Anecdote Lives* 103, conjectured that Reynolds' perspective illustration was based on Jonathan Richardson's advice in his *Treatise on Painting* to 'make private drawings rather than public exercises in school'.

[9] The evidence for this was discovered by Hilles, *The Literary Career* 119.

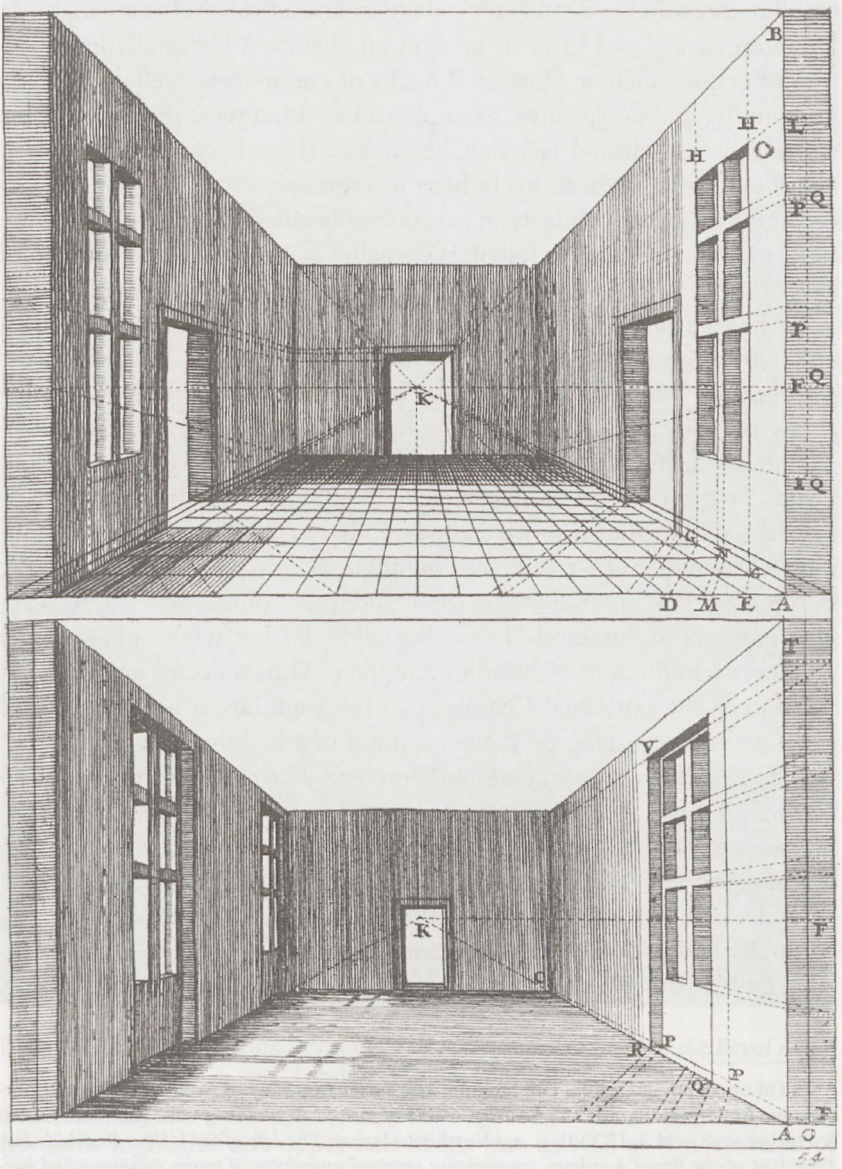

Fig. 3. Jean Dubreuil, *Perspectival Construction*, in [Dubreuil J.,] *The Practice of Perspective, or An Easy Method of representing Natural Objects According to the Rules of Art. Applied and Exemplified in all the Variety of Cases; as Landskips, Gardens, Buildings of divers Kinds* [...] *A Work highly necessary for Painters, Engravers, Architects* [...] *And others concerned in Designing, Written in French by a Jesuit of Paris* [...] (London, Thomas Bowles: 1726), fol. 54.

childhood reading and study played an important role in his life and that his interests inclined towards art and art theory. Additionally his selection of genres, such as illustrated books of emblems as well as treatises on painting and perspective, exemplifies his visual reception of complex works. The established fact that he studied these books is intriguing if considered in relation to his father's inscriptions, in which he strived to evoke the image of Joshua as an exceptionally gifted child by adopting the topoi of unassuming early talent: His teacher was nature alone, and out of sheer boredom he conceived complicated spatial constructions.

Fifty years later, the meanwhile knighted Sir Joshua Reynolds presents himself in his *Self-Portrait as President of the Royal Academy* in the garments of a doctor of civil law of Oxford University [Fig. 4].[10] Leaning gently on his left hand in which he holds a roll of paper he stands self-confidently in front of a table on which we can view a version of Daniele da Volterra's bust of Michelangelo. Executed shortly before or during 1780, the self-portrait was originally intended as a pendant to the portrait Reynolds painted of Sir William Chambers. Both paintings were to hang in the Assembly Room flanking the mantelpiece of the new Royal Academy quarters in Somerset House. Reynolds did not depict himself as a painter but in the pictorial tradition of the erudite collector and courtier. In contrast, he portrayed Chambers in the tradition of artists' portraits as an architect working on the conception of a building, despite the fact that he was the author of several theoretical writings.[11] The painting can be analyzed as a programmatic statement by the artist because of the representative function his self-portrait had within the academy quarters. Alluding to the debates and theoretical comments on artists' intellectuality and social standing, Reynolds painted himself in his official role in the culturally and politically pivotal position of president of the Royal Academy, embodying the classically educated humanist painter. Significantly,

[10] Oil on wood, 127 × 101.6 cm, London, The Royal Academy of Arts. – On this self-portrait see Malone Edmond, *The Literary Works of Joshua Reynolds*, 3 vols. (London, Cadell & Davies: 1798) vol. I, LXXVII, n. 45; Northcote James, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds late President of the Royal Academy, comprising original anecdotes of many distinguished persons, his contemporaries; and a brief analysis of his discourses*, 2 vols. (London: 1818) vol. II, 89; Graves A. – Cronin W.V., *A History of the Works of Joshua Reynolds*, 4 vols. (London: 1899–1901) vol. II, 803–804; Waterhouse E.K., *Reynolds* (London: 1941) 64; Reynolds Joshua, *Reynolds* cat. 116, 287–288; Mannings D., *Sir Joshua Reynolds. A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven-London: 2000) text volume, cat. 21, 51, Fig. 1330.

[11] It was a matter of course that also Chambers' most important work, *A Treatise on Civil Architecture* (London, Johann Christoph Haberkorn: 1759), was in Reynolds' library (according to Hilles, *The Literary Career* 120).

Fig. 4. [Col. Pl. 10] Joshua Reynolds, *Self-Portrait as President of the Royal Academy*, c. 1780, London, The Royal Academy of Arts.

Reynolds highlights the upper half of his face as well as the forehead of Michelangelo's bust, thereby emphasizing the intellect – according to the academy president's views – as the prerequisite for artistic creation. The lighting in the painting also underscores the artist's hand, so that the gaze of the beholder is conveyed to the roll of paper that Reynolds holds. While this paper roll has not been written on and is therefore free for all kinds of associative speculation, he inscribed such a roll in another self-portrait,

which he executed only shortly beforehand for the Uffizi Gallery, with the words 'Disegni del Divino Michelangelo' [Fig. 5]. This not only suggests an analogous meaning for the roll in the academy portrait, but also suggests an interpretation of the portrait that embraces the wide range of notions linked to the term *disegno* – as illustration on the material level and as conception from an intellectual viewpoint. His interpretation of himself as a *pictor doctus* and *doctor pictus* gleams through in the highly compressed staging.

What we see visually represented in the painting we also find again in Reynolds' written comments on the status of painting and its impact on the standing of the artist. In his *Discourses on Art*, which he originally delivered as the president to an audience of students and members of the Royal Academy and which were later published, Reynolds supported the view that the success of an artist is not dependent on the 'industry of the hands, but of the mind'.[12] With this comment he alluded to the centuries-old debate on the status of the pictorial arts by underscoring their intellectuality and intensifies this by opposing the motifs of hand and intellect. The strongest argument for the social advancement of painters accordingly involved linking artistic proficiency with intellectual capacity. Leonardo da Vinci's emphasis on the power of the artist's imagination was for Reynolds, as 'industry of the mind', the prerequisite for the creation of a demanding artwork. Reynolds, however, embedded it more solidly within the context of appropriation of knowledge[13] through intensive study and excluded the authority of ingenious inspiration of antiquity and early modern times. The profoundly enlightened idea that the human intellect is fundamentally malleable and can be improved is in Reynolds' eyes the condition and the actual reason for reading and study: 'The great business of study is, to form a *mind*, [...]'.[14] The implications of Reynolds' remarks on imagination and improving the intellectual faculty can best be judged in conjunction with his role as a disseminator of knowledge: he was responsible for the strategic goals of the Royal Academy as its president and also for the education of artists as an academic instructor.

For Reynolds, education in the Royal Academy meant forming the intellect because he seriously doubted that genius lacking erudition sufficed

[12] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VII, 5.

[13] This is also stated in Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, VII, 540: '[...] the knowledge of these causes is acquired by a laborious and diligent investigation of nature, and by the same slow progress as wisdom or knowledge of every kind [...]'.

[14] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* XI, 423–424.

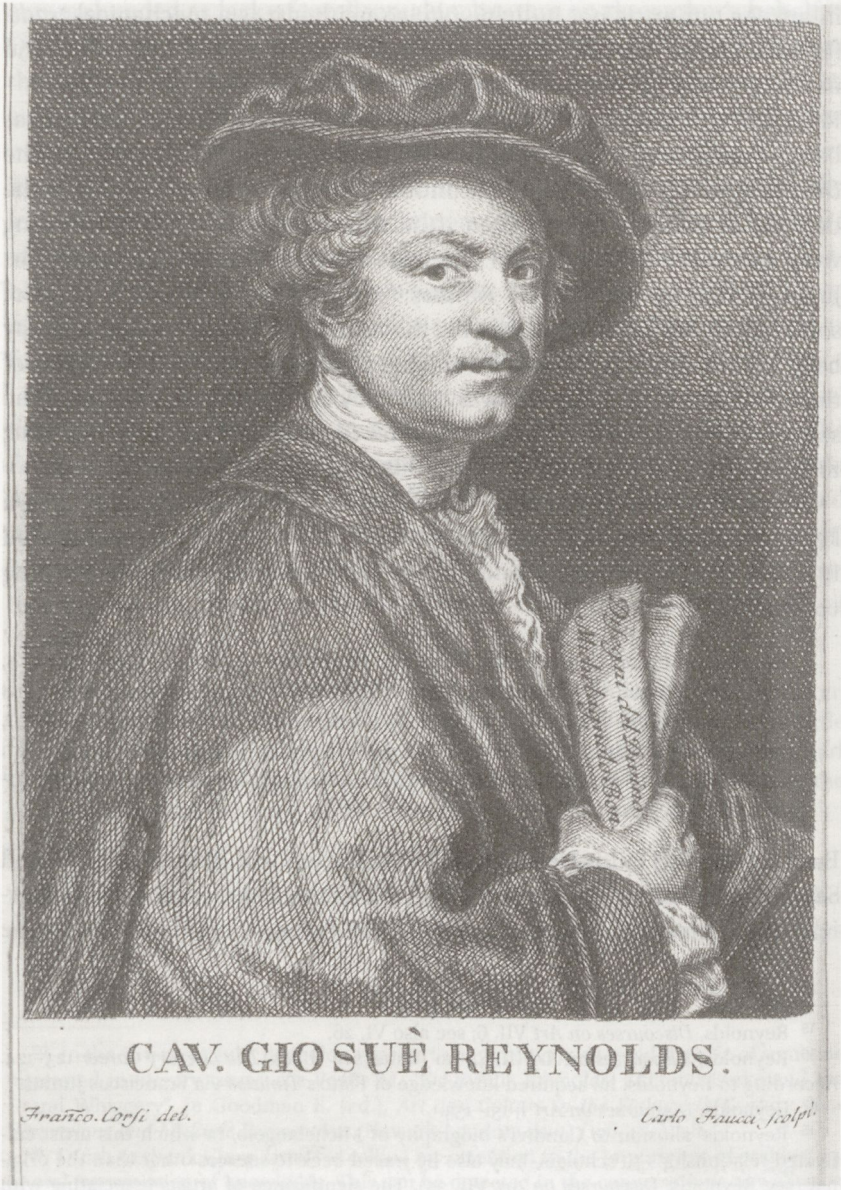

Fig. 5. Frontispiece and title page of *Delle arti del disegno discorsi del cav. Giosuè Reynolds*. Trasportati dall'Inglese nel Toscano idioma (Florence: 1778).

in art. 'As our art is not a divine *gift*, so neither it is a mechanical *trade*. Its foundations are laid in solid science [...]'.[15] In his *Discourses* and in his writings in other documents – which will also be considered – Reynolds' reflections on art and artists' education revolve around art as being mechanical, a gift, or science. Reynolds remained skeptical in the *Discourses* towards the essential condition for artistic creation lying in the concept of Platonic *furore*, even if he was acquainted with the leading work on theory of imagination – at least as mediated through Franciscus Junius – that is, with Plato's *Timaios*:[16] '[...] labour is the only price of solid fame, and whatever their [i.e. the artists', I.W.] force of genius may be, there is no easy method of becoming a good Painter'.[17] As president of the Royal Academy, Reynolds was especially concerned with elevating the status of painting to the level of the *artes liberales* and, at the same time, to bring the innate artistic talents of his students to perfection.

Reynolds considered erudite conversation with kindred spirits to be a key element in forming the intellect of young artists. He recommended it in his *Discourses* with a reference to Michelangelo's habit of keeping company with scholars:[18]

> Reading, if it can be made the favourite recreation of his [the young artist's, I.W.] leisure hours, will improve and enlarge his mind, without retarding his actual industry. What such a partial and desultory reading cannot afford, may be supplied by the conversation of learned and ingenious men, which is the best of all substitutes for those who have not the means or opportunities of deep study.[19]

Even if Reynolds cultivated learned conversation with Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson in the 'Literary Club', which he founded in 1764, Frederick Hilles rightly pointed out that Reynolds' famous comment is not to be

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[15] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VII, 6; see also VI, 26.

[16] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* III, 41; on Junius see Hilles, *The Literary Career* 123–124. According to Reynolds, he acquired knowledge of Plato's *Timaios* via Franciscus Junius.

[17] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* I, 151–153.

[18] Reynolds' allusion to Condivi's biography of Michelangelo, in which this artist cultivated relationships to scholars, may also be traced back to sources other than the original (see Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VII, 35). The significance of artists associating with poets and scholars as a substitute for learning develops into a literary topos in the eighteenth century. On Velázquez we can, for example, read in Palomino de Castro Antonio, *El museo pictórico y escala óptica* (Madrid, Lucas Antonio de Bedmar: 1715–1724): 'He was also attached to, and friend of, poets and orators because from such minds he received great adornments for his compositions'. (Translation quoted from Bialostocki J., "Doctus Artifex and the Library of the Artist in XVIth and XVIIth Century", in Horodisch A. (ed.), *De arte et libris, Festschrift Erasmus 1934–1984* (Amsterdam: 1984) (11–22) 15).

[19] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VII, 31–37; see Hilles, *The Literary Career* 113.

comprehended as lack of intellectual inclination on the author's behalf.[20] Quite the opposite was true: On the one hand, Reynolds made it clear that the actual work of artists is aesthetic production. For this reason he enhanced the value of leisure time as profitable and not wasted when utilized for reading in order to shape and improve the intellectual capacity of artists. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that especially learned conversation played an important role in the Royal Society's scholarly programme in connection with enlightened theories on sociability.[21] Conversation with scholars and erudite men did not exclude 'deep study' as part of reading in Reynolds' eyes. He found the necessary means for extensive study in his library with its multifarious range of volumes.

Reynolds presented himself as a productive reader and scholar in art-theoretical and philological matters in the annotations he wrote for the English edition of Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy's *De arte graphica* (York, Ann Ward: 1783).[22] Therein he vividly illustrated the meaning he attached to knowledge transmitted by books. In regard to the practical side of art, he voiced his skepticism toward learnable general rules for the conception of artworks, but generally he regarded an artist's education to be of utmost importance:

> What relates to the mind or imagination, such as invention, character, expression, grace or grandeur, certainly cannot be taught by rules; little more can be done than pointing out where they are to be found; it is a part which belongs to general education and will operate in proportion to the cultivation of the mind of the artist.[23]

In his *Discourses on Art*, Reynolds undertook the duty of pointing out *loci*, references where the key stocks of knowledge were to be found. In this epoch-making publication for English art theory he referred to sources

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[20] In the 'Literary Club', Reynolds appears to have initially adopted the role of someone interested in literary issues; see Postle M., "Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke and the Grand Whiggery", in Goodman E. (ed.), *Art and Culture in the Eighteenth Century. New Dimensions and Multiple Perspectives* (Newark-London: 2001) (106–124) 108.

[21] I wish to thank Claus Zittel for calling my attention to the importance of oral history or oral transmission of knowledge. This can be detected in the conversations as well as in the term he chose for the title of his theoretical work – *Discourses*.

[22] Dufresnoy Charles-Alphonse, *The Art of Painting* (York, Ann Ward: 1783). On the great impact of Dufresnoy's treatise on Reynolds' *Discourses*, see Frances Muecke in Dufresnoy Charles-Alphonse, *De Arte Graphica* (Paris, Nicolas L'Anglois – Claude Barbin: 1668], ed. Ch. Allen – Y. Haskell – F. Muecke (Geneva: 2005) 168. Muecke also points out the great value Reynolds attached to his annotations of Dufresnoy's text as a further development of his own reflections in the *Discourses*.

[23] Reynolds, *The Literary Works*, ed. H.W. Beechey, 2 vols. (London: 1835) vol. II, 353.

directly as well as only alluded to them. Furthermore, in his handwritten footnotes references to the sources of quotes or content can be extracted from the *Discourses*.

Besides Francis Bacon's "Of Beauty" in the *Essays* and his *Advancement of Learning*,[24] the dominant sources of reference that Reynolds with certainty drew on and criticized for the *Discourses* are Horace, Leonardo da Vinci, Edmund Burke, and Roger de Piles. Additionally, Reynolds extensively consulted Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*, Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*,[25] and especially Franciscus Junius's *De pictura veterum* to support and substantiate his argumentation. He owned the latter in both the Latin (1637) and the English (1638) editions.[26] Through Junius he was also acquainted with the standard literature of the ancients such as Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* and Cicero's *De oratore*.[27] In contrast, he appears to have read actual editions of Horace's *Ars Poetica* as well as Vitruvius' *De architectura*. It is even documented that Reynolds owned William Smith's English translation of Longinus' reflections *On the Sublime* (London, W. Innys: 1739). Additionally, Reynolds often referred to Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*, which he seems to have owned in the French translation with annotations by Etienne Falconet, as we may deduce from the *Discourses*.[28]

Shakespeare played a special role, whose dramatic works Reynolds often quoted in his writings.[29] In doing so he relied on the general fame of the author. The academy president often included a well-known quote from the poet as a moral or allegorical conclusory vignette to his reflections. From a mnemotechnical viewpoint, they either poignantly summarize an

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[24] See Reynolds Joshua, *Discourses on Art* III, 155; XII, 72–80; XII, 250–252; XII, 323–324. Bacon's *Essays* were first published in 1597 in London. Reynolds used the edition Francis Lo. Verulam, *The essayes or counsels, ciuill and morall* (London, Iohn Haviland: 1625) for his studies, as he states himself in the *Discourses* III, 155. On Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* see Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* XII, 242–244; XIII, 353. *The Advancement of Learning* was first published in London in 1605, Reynolds used either the London 1629 edition or the Oxford 1633 edition; see Hilles, *The Literary Career* 214, n. 3.

[25] According to Hilles, *The Literary Career* 120, n. 2, Reynolds had the three-volume edition that was published in Bologna in 1647 in his library; he probably used this edition.

[26] Hilles, *The Literary Career* 123–124.

[27] Hilles, *The Literary Career* 125.

[28] After 1772, Reynolds obviously used the translation *Traduction du 34., 35. et 36. livres de Pline l'Ancien*, annot. by Étienne Falconet (Amsterdam, Marc-Michel Rey: 1772) (cf. Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VIII 619–620); prior to this (1769) he presumably acquired his knowledge of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* via Franciscus Junius, see Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* I, 231–232, n. and VIII, 619.

[29] See Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* V, 393 (Henry IV, III.ii.45); VII, 307–311; XIII, 298; XV, 130–131 (Hamlet, III.ii, III.ii.24, I.iii.65 und II.ii.465); VIII, 110; XIII, 224 (Macbeth, I.vi, I.v.57); XII, 418–419 (Othello, V.ii.345).

antecedent paragraph or provide an introductory link to a following one. The popularity of his quotes must be viewed in conjunction with the Shakespeare renaissance of the eighteenth century;[30] Reynolds himself executed three paintings for the Shakespeare Gallery, an exhibition which was intended to document the national significance of the poet and the quality of English history painting.[31] Very probably Reynolds owned the new edition of Shakespeare's work that was published on the tide of the renewed interest in the poet.

Particularly valuable for evaluating Reynolds as a reader are his abovementioned annotations, which have, in part, survived as manuscripts.[32] For example, in this context it is relevant that Reynolds excerpted from William Melmoth's translation of the younger Pliny's letters, especially those passages focusing on the duties of the rhetorician or on the significance of rhetoric in general.[33] In doing so he reflected his own profession as a Royal Academy lecturer and instructor in the field of art theory. On how significant background knowledge was for the attitude of an audience in reception he quoted: 'Every man naturally favours his own discoveries, and when he hears an argument made use of which had before occurred to himself, will certainly embrace it as extremely convincing'.[34] By asserting that the spoken word, compared to reading, had a greater impact on the recipient, Pliny the Younger was a fitting model for Reynolds in regard to delivering his lectures to academy members. 'We are infinitely more affected with what we hear than what we read, Pliny. Let. 3d. B.2d'. But Reynolds promptly corrected Pliny and introduced his view of the hierarchy of the senses by adding the sense of sight, the one he valued most as a painter: 'And what we see than what we hear! meus [= Reynolds, I.W.]'. After noting down his opinion spontaneously as it occurred to him, the last part of the comment – his insertion of 'meus' as the reading subject marking his own opinion – gives us an impression of Reynolds as a reader: He reads and comments according to his current

[30] On Shakespeare's relevance in the eighteenth century see Baumgärtel B., "Die Shakespeare-Renaissance", in Baumgärtel B. (ed.), *Angelika Kauffmann Retrospektive* (Ostfildern: 1998) 216–223.

[31] On this topic see Prochno R., *Joshua Reynolds* (Weinheim: 1990) 193.

[32] Printed in Hilles, *The Literary Career* Appendix I.

[33] 'The pleasures of the senses are so far from wanting the oratorical arts to recommend them that we stand in need of all the powers of eloquence to moderate and restrain their influence. Lett. 8th', quoted after Hilles, *The Literary Career* 202. The translation annotated by Melmoth has survived in many editions printed after 1747.

[34] Quoted from Hilles, *The Literary Career* 202.

inclinations while searching for arguments he can utilize for his own literary productions. Even though he was and is accused of being eclectic in his work, he remains an independent intellect who sets his own course in cultural and political matters as well as in art theory. In another case in his exploits as a reader and commentator, he expanded the excerpts he had taken from his edition of Alexander Pope's translation of Homer. He added to Pope's footnotes in Homer's *Iliad* that carrying *varietas* (*variety*) to excess in the Georgian poet's sense would not only extinguish poetic fire but also quite the opposite: It could actually lead to recapturing the digressing attention of the beholder. When Pope wrote: 'Nothing so much cools the warmth of a piece, or puts out the poetical fire of poetry as that perpetual care to vary incessantly even in the smallest circumstances', Reynolds responded with: 'or recalls the spectators wandring enthusiastical senses – meus'.[35]

At the same time, Reynolds' excerpts reveal that he was under no illusions in regard to the impact his lectures and writings had on their audience and readers, as we are given to understand in the following quote he took from La Bruyères *Caractères*: 'Un auteur cherche vainement à se faire admirer par son ouvrage. Les sots admirent quelque fois, mais ce sont des sots. Les personnes d'esprit [...] admirent peu; ils approuvent'.[36] The hopelessness of reaping admiration for one's own work from witty and clever personages, as discerned by La Bruyère, does not, however, hinder Reynolds from persevering in his literary pursuits and continuing to study books. One of the motivations behind his study and the excerpts he made was obviously to convey the contents of his reading material in his *Discourses on Art* to his readers. He articulated this, for example, in a note – added directly under the heading for his excerpts 'From Bacon's Essays. Study' – stating 'used', indicating they had been taken up in the *Discourses*.[37] As mentioned above, Bacon was one of the authors who Reynolds critically and intensively studied. He repeatedly quoted from Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* or from his "Of Beauty", adapting the excerpts to his own notions by correcting and expanding their content. For example, Reynolds criticized Bacon's statement on the difficulties of representing the right moment, for which the latter could see no rules and attributed

[35] Quoted from Hilles, *The Literary Career* 212, n. 2.
[36] Quoted from Hilles, *The Literary Career* 211.
[37] Quoted from Hilles *The Literary Career* 214, n. 2.

the fortunate choice of moment to 'felicity' alone.[38] In Reynolds's eyes, art certainly followed rules and, for the creation of beauty, artistic principles had to be complied with that were neither the result of arbitrary success nor the product of innate genius. In a similar context while discussing invention, Reynolds criticized Bacon's comment that it could be found 'much in experience but little in books'. The academy president argued that even Bacon could not have written his works blindly without learning from others:

> [...] we may suspect that even the genius of Bacon, great as it was, would never have been enabled to have made those observations, if his mind had not been trained and disciplined by reading the observations of others. Nor could he without such reading have known that those opinions were not to be found in other books.[39]

Reynolds also studied the fundamental literature on art, many of the treatises were part of his library in the original language or in translation. To name a few, he owned Joachim von Sandrart's *Academia nobilissimae artis pictoriae* (Lat. edition of the *Teutsche Academie*, Frankfurt/Nuremberg, Joachim von Sandrart: 1683), Charles Alphonse Dufresnoys' *De arte graphica* (transl. by John Dryden, London, William Taylor: 1716), Roger de Piles' *Cours de Peinture par Principes* (Engl. translation, London, J. Osborn: 1743), Jonathan Richardson's *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, John Churchill: 1715) and *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings, and Pictures in Italy* (London, J. Knapton: 1722), as well as Alexander Cozens' *The Principles of Beauty* (London, James Dixwell: 1778) (Reynolds also subscribed for this edition).[40]

Samuel Reynolds owned a copy of André Félibien's description of the image of the Queen of Persia kneeing at the feet of Alexander in William Parson's English translation. It is highly probable that Sir Joshua acquired this publication for his library from his father's collection of books.[41]

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[38] 'It is not safe to question any opinion of so great a writer, and so profound a thinker, as undoubtedly Bacon was. [...] If by felicity is meant any thing of chance or hazard, or something born with the man, and not earned, I cannot agree with this great philosopher', Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* III, 156.

[39] Bacon's comment stemmed from a dedication he wrote to Prince Henry in a volume of his *Essays*. Although the dedication was never printed, knowledge of it became widespread through correspondence, see Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* XII, 250–252; the quote is taken from Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* XII, 253–257.

[40] Hilles, *The Literary Career* 120–121.

[41] Félibien André, *The tent of Darius explain'd: or the queens of Persia at the feet of Alexander* (London, W. R.: 1703). See Hilles, *The Literary Career* 122–123; Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* V, 66–73, n.; VIII, 362–366, n.

Félibien's text is seen as a pivotal point of reference in Reynolds's art-theoretical thought.[42] He was quite critical, however, in his study of it. A comment he added to a passage in the *Tent of Darius explain'd* reveals his thorough examination of Félibien's description: 'Félibien is here certainly mistaken [...].'[43]

Testimonies to Sir Joshua Reynolds' intellectual profile as an important English painter, a leading art theoretician of the eighteenth century, and the first president of the Royal Academy can be found in both text and images. The texts he read were very diverse, and his study also comprised the reading and reception of artworks. Indeed, the distinctive character of this artist's work can be best described as the productive appropriation of knowledge transmitted by artworks; this modus operandi is pivotal for his creative work as a theoretically reflected method of generating images by means of 'borrowings' or transposing a motif as a citation into a new context. As an example for his study of Italian art theory, I wish to scrutinize Reynolds' personification of *Theory* a little closer. The work in question is his only ceiling painting, which he executed for the library of the Royal Academy's new domicile in Somerset House [Fig. 6]. *Theory* dominates the key personifications from Cipriani's invention, that is, *Nature, History, Allegory*, and *Fable*, which were likewise pivotal for an academy.[44] Sitting on a cloud in a contemplative attitude and originally crowned with a pair of compasses, Reynolds' female personification holds a scroll in her hands inscribed with the words: 'THEORY is the knowledge of what is truly NATURE'.[45] His representation of *Theory* essentially follows the image conceived by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia* and is thereby our first visual testimony to Reynolds' art-theoretical studies.[46] He did in fact own a copy of George Richardson's revised English edition, *Iconology, or A Collection of Emblematical Figures* [...] (London, G. Richardson: 1779).[47] The importance Reynolds attached to the publication of an English edition can be seen in the fact that his name can be found among the subscribers

[42] Prochno, *Joshua Reynolds* 192–193.

[43] Hilles, *The Literary Career* Appendix II, 232 (VIII, 7).

[44] Reynolds, *Reynolds* cat. 2168.

[45] On Reynolds' usage of the term 'nature' see Hipple W., "General and Particular in the Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11 (1953) 231–247.

[46] The legs of *Theory* formally resemble those of the angel that Raphael designed for the mosaic in the dome of the Cappella Chigi in S. Maria del Popolo in Rome; see Reynolds, *Reynolds* cat. 112.

[47] Phillips, *A catalogue* 955.

Fig. 6. Joshua Reynolds, *Theory*, c. 1779. London, The Royal Academy of Arts.

for the edition. And he painted the ceiling fresco of *Theory* for Somerset House in the very year in which the *Iconology* with its exacting theoretical introduction was published. According to Richardson's outline:

> Theory,
> Is the study of any art or science, and is represented by the figure of a young woman, dressed in azure coloured drapery, in an attitude of contemplation, descending a staircase, with a pair of compasses on her head, having the points upwards. [...] The compasses are the most proper instrument for her operations, for measuring objects both linear and circular. The attitude, azure dress, and descending the staircase signify eminence, sublimity, and progressive motion [cf. Fig. 7].

Even if Reynolds faithfully follows Richardson's description, we can see that the artist incorporated several nuances from the Italian original, which he must have been acquainted with for the conception of his ceiling painting.

Fig. 7. George Richardson, *Theory*, in idem, *Iconology; or, A Collection of Emblematical Figures; containing four hundred and twenty-four remarkable Subjects, moral and instructive; in which are displayed the Beauty of Virtue and Deformity of Vice*, 4 vols. (London, G. Scott: 1779), vol. I.

> Teoria, voce a i Greci significative di contemplatione, & visione è venuta à noi per significare ogni deduttione di ragione, [...] la Teoria si possa convenientemente rappresentare in forma di Donna giovane che miri in alto, [...] con un compasso aperto con le punte rivolte al Cielo, che sia nobilmente vestita ad azurro, in atto di scendere dalla sommità d'una scala con tutte queste circostanze significandosi eminenza, nobiltà, e sublimità.[48]

Reynolds adopted Ripa's description of *Teoria* by painting the personification in a slightly rotating attitude that wavers between 'contemplazione' and 'visione'. The figure's gaze is directed towards loftier horizons (*visione*), emphasizing rationality or *ratio* and thereby the intellectual side of an artist's education. The fact that *Theory* focuses her perception upwards is mentioned only in the Italian original ('Donna giovane che miri in alto'). Reynolds went beyond this viewpoint however by underscoring intellectual achievement through exertion by having *Theory* actively twist out of the (creative) pose of melancholy (*contemplazione*) in order to peer upwards. In its cloud-like colour, her light-blue garment matches the blue apparel of Ripa's *Teoria* as well as that of Richardson's *Theory*. It is significant that Reynolds did not include the staircase mentioned in both the Italian and the English texts, and that he has the personification seated on clouds as a reference in her presumed abode in lofty spheres. This detail happens to link the figure to Richardson's description of the personification of *Idea*: 'It is allegorically characterised by the figure of a very fine woman, elevated on the clouds, [...]'.Through these details Reynolds disclosed that he had read Ripa and also revealed his artistic method: He created a new allegory by means of assemblage while intervening on a conceptional level in the way that was advised by art theoreticians, here specifically by George Richardson ('ingenious modification').[49] Reynolds selected attributes from the varying personifications in the Italian and

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[48] Quoted from Ripa Cesare, *Iconologia*, ed. P. Buscaroli, 2 vols. (Milan: 1992) vol. II, 530–531.

[49] Richardson George, *Iconology; or, A Collection of Emblematical Figures; containing four hundred and twenty-four remarkable Subjects, moral and instructive; in which are displayed the Beauty of Virtue and Deformity of Vice*, 4 vols. (London, G. Scott: 1779) vol. I, Preface (unpaginated): 'The artists, whose genius leads them to the allegorical species of painting, would require a repertory, or work, in which all the *sensible* figures and symbols, under which, in different ages, abstract ideas and qualities have been poetically represented, were carefully collected. [...] A collection of this nature, might be divided into various classes, and the artist might draw from this magazine, representations and symbols, which by an ingenious modification, he might happily apply to the subjects he should have occasion to treat'.

English editions in order to find the appropriate form for his pictorial conception.

Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* in the English translation is by no means the only volume of Italian art literature read by Reynolds.[50] Unlike his French, Reynolds spoke Italian fluently and was adept at reading it.[51] He even had a copy of the *Vocabulario della Crusca* in his library. His own Italian translation of a section of *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1707) by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, irrefutably proves his proficiency in the Italian language.[52] Reynolds had read Shaftesbury already in 1752 while staying in Italy.[53] We have no idea what he ultimately aimed at by attempting this translation. Presumably it was an exercise for his personal pleasure only, even if no contemporary Italian translation of the essay existed at the time. However, we can also interpret it to be an unfulfilled desire to make Shaftesbury's reflections, which were pivotal for the revaluation of English art, known in Italy and a manifestation of wanting to underscore the significance that English artistic reflection and aesthetics had for contemporaries. This would be very much in keeping with the culturo-political lines Reynolds outlined in his *Discourses*: that eighteenth-century English painting surpasses contemporary Italian art.

Among the Italian art literature that Reynolds studied particularly intensively was Carlo Cesare Malvasia's *Felsina Pittrice* (1678) and his *Pitture di Bologna* (1686). This explains, to an extent, the importance Reynolds attached to Bolognese painting in his *Discourses*. Whereas we can only presume that Reynolds possessed a copy of the *Felsina pittrice* because he directly quoted from it in his *Discourses*, *Pitture di Bologna* was listed twice in the auction of his library at Phillips'.[54] Francesco Algarotti's *Essay on Painting Written in Italian* (1764) provided a rich fund of ideas for Reynolds in his critical observations on Italian art theory in the *Discourses*.[55] Additionally he mentioned Raffaello Borghini's *Il riposo*

[50] For a detailed study on this topic see Perini, "Sir Joshua Reynolds".

[51] Phillips, *A catalogue* cited by Perini, "Sir Joshua Reynolds" 158, n. 89.

[52] Cooper Anthony Ashley, *Letter concerning Enthusiasm to Lord Somers*, written 1707, published anonymously (London, John Morphew: 1708), republished in Idem, *Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times*, 3 vols. (London: 1711), Reynolds' partial translation is printed in: Hilles, *The Literary Career* 204–206.

[53] Hilles, *The Literary Career* 118.

[54] Perini, "Sir Joshua Reynolds" 159.

[55] See Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* I, 231–232; VI, 622–23; X, 120–123; XI, 291–298; see also Hilles, *The Literary Career* 121.

(1584) at least once.[56] Crucial for Reynolds' reception of Italian art theory was his appraisal of Leonardo da Vinci's treatise on painting, which was published in English language in 1721.[57] However, he may have been acquainted with its contents through Roger de Piles.[58] Reynolds took recourse to Leonardo's famous passage on random patterns and images, where the Italian wrote on nature as a source for invention – even stained walls could be sources of inspiration. In his *Discourse 8*, delivered ten years later, Reynolds criticized Leonardo's advice on producing contrasts by means of light and shade. But he also admitted that Leonardo would have come to the same conclusion himself if he had only lived longer and experienced the technical advances of painting.[59] According to Reynolds, what is advisable for a student of painting does not necessarily apply for an experienced artist. 'But when students are more advanced, they will find that the greatest beauties of character and expression are produced without contrast [...]'.[60]

Reading books was always a key point of reference in Reynolds' reasoning because he considered it to be the basic condition for all artistic creation and every intellectual statement. In this belief, he placed himself in a tradition that he would have, at the very latest, become aware of during his study and annotations of Dufresnoy's *De arte graphica*. Roger de Piles stated in his commentary on Dufresnoy, which Reynolds' was intended to replace, the following: '[...] les lettres sont nécessaires pour échauffer le génie, et pour le perfectionner'. De Piles pithily recommends that artists read using terms related to the flame of the *furor poetico*: 'qui par leur lecture rechauffent l'imagination'.[61] Reynolds was so taken by this that he adopted this imagery from de Piles in his *Discourses*:

[56] See his own footnote, in Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* X, 210, which, however, does not reveal if he used the Florence 1584 or 1730 edition.

[57] Leonardo da Vinci, *A treatise of painting, translated from the original Italian, and adorn'd with a great number of cuts, to which is prefix'd, the author's life, done from the last edition of the* (London, John Senex: 1721).

[58] Piles Roger de, *The Art of Painting and the Lives of the Painters* (London, John Nutt: 1706) 13 (quoted from Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VIII, 373–375).

[59] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VIII, 295–301: 'If Lionardo had lived to see the superior splendour and effect which has been since produced by the exactly contrary conduct, – by joining light to light, and shadow to shadow, – though without doubt he would have admired it, yet, as it ought not, so probably it would not be the first rule with which he would have begun his instructions'.

[60] Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VIII, 314–315.

[61] Quoted from Bialostocki, "Doctus Artifex and the Library of the Artist in XVIth and XVIIth Century" 21.

> There is a nobleness of conception, [...]; there is an art of animating and dignifying the figures with intellectual grandeur, of impressing the appearance of philosophick wisdom, or heroic virtue. This can be acquired by him that enlarges the sphere of his understanding by a variety of knowledge, and warms his imagination with the best productions of ancient and modern poetry.[62]

Reynolds was fundamentally convinced that the quality of an artwork lay in the intellectual force behind its creation as well as in the intellectual pleasure it brought because of this: 'The value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it'.[63]

Joshua Reynolds' collection of books was obviously not a book collector's library. In the hitherto most comprehensive study on Reynolds's library, Frederick Hilles suspects that the academy president did not actually read all of the books he cited in the *Discourses*; among the ones he did read were Jonathan Richardson, Vasari, and Félibien. Many of his books were on the subject of philosophy or literature and had nothing to do with painting.[64] His library reflected the intellectual ambitions and academic plan of study that Reynolds expected of himself, his art students, and the members of the Royal Academy.[65] In this sense Reynolds's relationship to books was a utilitarian and not an aesthetic one. No comments on the beauty of a rare book have survived. Reynolds was much more interested in transmitting their contents to others. The academy president was not a bibliophile and by all appearances did not love books as objects in themselves. Instead he adopted the role of an intermediary, whose task it was to pass specific knowledge from sources on to the members of the Royal Academy, to educate them, and to stimulate their imaginations, even if he himself, at times, gained his erudition by reading superficially or compiled it from a variety of sources or obtained it second hand.

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62 Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* III, 274–280.

63 Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* IV, 1–2.

64 Hilles, *The Literary Career* 116. Reynolds displayed a preference for volumes on mythology: It has been established that he owned three copies of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, one of which contained his annotations, as well as a sixteenth-century copy of Apuleius and Otto van Veen's *Emblemata Horatiana* (Hilles, *The Literary Career* 115, 119–120).

65 As Reynolds put it in the *Discourses*, his concern was, besides developing technical and practical art skills, to acquire knowledge, which especially meant attaining an intimate knowledge of natural and moral philosophy, the doctrine of affections, and anatomy: 'Every man whose business is description, [...] ought not to be wholly unacquainted with that part of philosophy which gives an insight into human nature, and relates to the manners, characters, passions, and affections. He ought to know *something* concerning the mind, as well as *a great deal* concerning the body of man'. (Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* VII, 21–28).

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