The teratological imagination: Fantasia and the creation of monsters in Renaissance art theory

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Imitation VS Imagination

'Copy nature; just copy nature. There is no greater delight, no finer triumph than an excellent copy of nature.' This doctrine (the enemy of art) was alleged to apply not only to painting but to all the arts, even to the novel and to poetry. To these doctrinaires, who were so completely satisfied by Nature, a man of imagination would certainly have had the right to reply: 'I consider it useless and tedious to represent what exists, because nothing that exists satisfies me. Nature is ugly, and I prefer the monsters of my fancy to what is positively trivial.



Charles Baudelaire, 'The Queen of the Faculties', in:The Salon of 1859

Mimesis VS Phantasia

- Bernhard Schweitzer, Der bildende Künstler und der Begriff des Künstlerischen in der Antike: eine Studie, Heidelberg: G. Koester, 1925
- Bernhard Schweitzer, 'Mimesis und Phantasia', Philologus 89 (1934), pp. 286-300
- Martin Kemp, 'From *Mimesis* To *Fantasia*: The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in The Visual Arts', *Viator*, Vol. 8, 1977, pp. 347-398.

Mimesis VS Phantasia

I. No contradiction between imitation and imagination

2. Imitation was a step of the imaginative process

A.F. Doni, Il Disegno, 1549

Painter: — In the clouds, I have seen fantastical beasts [...]

Art: – Do you think those were really in the clouds that you were looking at? [...]

Painter: – No, only in my fantasy [fantasia] and my imagination [imaginativa], in the chaos of my brain!

non seppi mai che cosa le fossino. A. Quando tu ri=
trai in pittura una macchia d'un paese, non ui uedi
tu dentro spesse uolte animali, buomini, teste, & al=
tre fantasticherie. P. Anzi piu nelle nuuole, ho gia
ueduto animalacci fantastichi, & castelli, con popoli
& sigure infinite & diuerse. A. Creditu che le sie=
no in quelle nuuole che tu uedi? P. Non mi cred'io.
A. O doue sono? P. Nella fantasia & nella mia ima=
ginatiua, nel caos del mio ceruello. A. Che nome gli
daresti tu secondo il tuo giudicio che si cosacesse a puto



Benvenuto Cellini, Autobiography

"...fanciful imaginings [immaginazioni]... as the ancients, who delighted in composing monsters out of goats, cows, and horses, called these chimerical hybrids by the name of monsters ... for these the proper name is therefore monsters, and not grotesques.





Cennino Cennini, The Carftsman's Handbook (14th c.)

'Painting calls for imagination [fantasia], and skill of hand, in order to discover things not seen [...] The painter is given freedom to compose a figure, standing, seated, half-man, half-horse, as he pleases, according to his imagination.'



Marcello Donati, De medica istoria, 1586

"...men with body parts truly resembling those of a beast, for instance with feet, or the head of a cow, of a ram, or the like; this, he writes, is conveyed in the imagination of the woman while she unites with her man, and conceives while thinking and grasping the form of the animal, which is then conveyed to the fetus.'



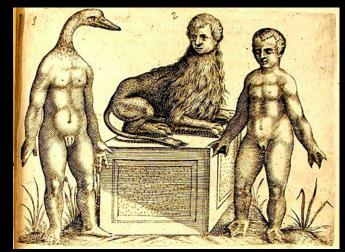


Illustration: Liceti, De mostrorum caussi, 1616

Mereological monsters



- Imaginatio retentiva
- Imaginatio compositiva

From: Ulisse Aldrovandi, Monstrorum historia, 1642

Mereological monsters

realiter

Becunda etas mundi Folium XII Ebomib* bourrfag formag biot pli.li.vij. ca. n. Et dug. h. rvi. te ci. ter. ca. vnj. Et 36 wens erbilu.m.ca.m. ola d fequinar mm dia. Cenocepbali bomineo funt canina capita babe tes cu latratu loquitur aucupto vituit, vebici (bli. qui omnes vefeurur pellibus animaliu. ecoples in India visu oculum bist in fronte fup na fum be folas feraru carnes comedur. Ideo agnofal gate vocatur fupta nafomonas confunctor diora bol mines efferemules nature inter le vicibus cocites. Callipbanco tradit Ereftonico adijor ecuram mamam que vinlem leuam multebrem effe quo benno froditas appellamus. ferunt certi ab essens pte intima effe bomines fine naribue:facie plana eqli tottue coopie planicie. Ali os fupiote labos cebas, alios fine linguis T alijo co creta cea effe modico foramine calamia auenai; poen baumenes. Frem bomines babentes labiti inferase, ita magnit et totam faciem contegant labio totinientes. Atem ala fine linguis nutu lognica fine motu yt mo pannothi in foibia aures tam magnas būt, ot con tegant totam cotpue-Emabatem ethiopia par ambulat ot perora. T ale qui viunt p atuos. rl. que unilus fupgreditur. Sann bomiciones funt admicis nanbus comus i frombus biir v caprau pedibus fimiles qualé is fo litudine fanctus Amonius abbas vidir. In erbiopia occidentali funt ynipedes yno pede la offime tam veloces of bethae infequantur. In Sarbia Ipopedes funt bumana feemasednos pedes babentes. In affrice familiae qualdă effalonății Bligorius 2 Demphodorus tradit quat laudatone interent pi bata arefeát arboses: emonátur infantes, effe emf dem generio in tribalio et illimio adijot 3fogono 4 valu quoqu effathment trans popue ocultes quod co ru matufaciline fentire puberes notabile effe co pu pillas binas in oculis lingulis babeant. from boies. v. cubutou muig infirmi vice ad mostes Dec of a ferribit pla. Aug. Hi. preterea legif i geff

idealiter

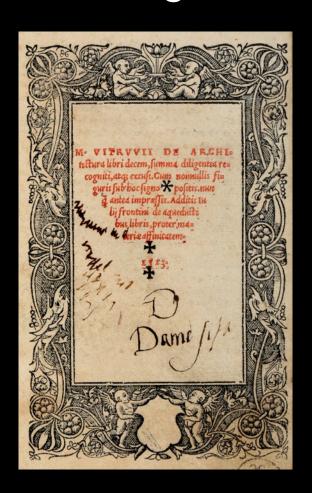


Hartmann Schedel, Nuremberg Chronicles, 1491

Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (Il Sodoma), 1505-8, Chiostro Monte Oliveto Maggiore

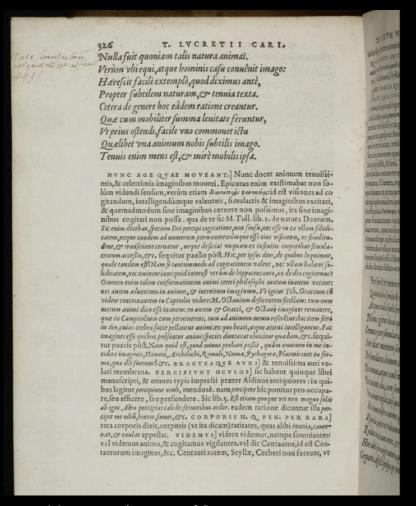
Cesare Cesariano in: Vitruvius, De architectura, traducti de latino in vulgare, 1521

'Certainly, as the Fantasia in dreams can only confusingly recall things, and often puts together things of different nature, and thus, we may say, makes the grotesques, which without a doubt we can call painting's reveries.'



Lucretius, De rerum natura

'[In the mind] many images move in all directions, and often combine [...] Thus it is we see Centaurs [...] For certainly no image of a Centaur comes from one living, since there never was a living thing of this nature; but when the images of man and horse meet by accident, they easily adhere at once [...]'



Giordano Bruno, On the Composition of Images, Signs & Ideas (1591), I, I, I 3

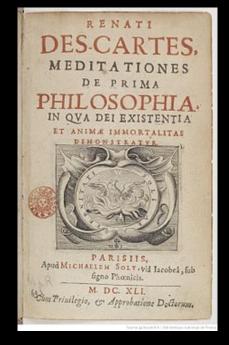
'[in the imagination,] not only are the forms of natural species preserved within this most ample inlet, but also they will be able to be multiplied there [...], just as when we figure winged centaurs from a man and a stag, [...] we can produce, by a similar mingling, the infinite from the countless, more ample than all the words which are composed by the various kinds of combination and coordination out of the numbered elements of many languages.'

IORDANI BRVNI NOLANI DE IMAGINVM, SIGNORVM, & Idearum eompositione. Ad omnia Inuencionum, Ditpositionum, & Memoriæ genera, LIBRI TRES. AD ILLUSTREM ET GENE. ROSISS. IOAN. HAINRICVM Haincellium Elcouia Do= CREDITE ET INTELLIGETIS. FRANCOFVRTI Apud IOAN. Vvechelum & PETRVM Fischerum consortes. 1591.

René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy (1641), I

"...as a matter of fact, painters, even when they study with the greatest skill to represent sirens and satyrs by forms the most strange and extraordinary, cannot give them natures which are entirely new, but merely make a certain medley of the members of different animals.'





Deus artifex

A.F. Doni, *Disegno* (1549):

'The first [drawing] was made by God [...].

From this first drawing everyone began to copy [ritrarre].'

