audience member to a masque at James I's court, could not find direct evidence of Pocahontas's reaction to the masque, though I did find in the writings of the colonists moments when their discursive certainties hesitated and an alternative perspective entered the text. This work began to allow me to understand some of the discursive processes that constructed the codes that led to the destruction of Powhatan language and culture and that activated an American boy to spit at the statue of an Indian woman.

GABRIELE PALEOTTI ON THE GROTESQUE IN PAINTING: STRETCHING OLD CULTURAL HORIZONS TO FIT A BRAVE NEW WORLD

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The following short essay is included in this newsletter as a result of a conversation I had with Beth Robertson about the role of the grotesque in defining cultural boundaries in Western art. It is a fragment—or maybe just a figment—of a longer study of the modern status of the visual arts. *Grotteschi*—the word refers literally to a kind of pictorial embellishment composed of playful, monstrous figures in ancient painting and architectural ornament—had long been associated with the active powers of the imagination when they became emblematic of the process of artistic invention in mid sixteenth-century Italy. *Grotteschi* signified in a doublehanded way: on one hand, *grotteschi* stood for the artist's freedom and capacity to invent anything out of his imagination; on the other hand, and for the same reason, *grotteschi* were associated with irrational mental activity, unrestrained by human reason. Depending upon one's critical stance, grotesque inventions can be the occasion for admiration or repulsion. The category of the grotesque is one of the most significant and loaded categories in the history of Western art criticism.

In the late sixteenth century, nearly three decades after the Council of Trent issued its famous decree banning all "seductive charm" in sacred images, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, then Bishop of Bologna, wrote his treatise to correct the abuses of contemporary artists.[1] Paleotti's greatest challenge lay in defining the limits of artistic license, based on the premise that capricious fantasies which have no counterpart in the real world are inadmissable. To exclude certain pictorial ornaments, he had to justify his exclusions, which led him to seek universal rules. In the end, Paleotti constructed new cultural boundaries that favored painting in the scientific style of optical naturalism—indeed, the reform of devotional painting began with the Caracci Academy in Bologna, founded in 1582, the year of Paleotti's publication.[2]

Paleotti tried to make room for representations that *could* be capricious fantasies, but should *not* be considered as such because they actually *do* exist in nature. Western critical language for evaluating pictorial embellishment had been couched in optical metaphors since Antiquity, and terms of praise and blame such as "brilliant," "vivid" and "obscure," were never a transparent code; rather, they refer to a complex system of figuration, based on the assumption that abstract content can be communicated in images presented to the senses. In sixteenth-century Italy the practice of painting and sculpture was the site of a complex discourse about figuration. The work of artifice was most often judged as part of contest between nature and art but, whatever the framework, the artist's invention was always conjoined with the needs of both the subject and the particular viewing audience—in other words, the intentions of the artificer were considered manifest in the "decorum" of the work of art.[3] Ornament, conceived in these terms, is a historical, culturally-specific category for assessing the epistemological status of a work of art as well as its maker. The centrality of ornament as a critical issue is suggested by the circumstance that in 1563 the Council of Trent adopted a theory of images which effectively censured all unnecessary embellishments in sacred paintings.[4] In line with this decree of the Council, Paleotti tried to define just what kinds of ornament interfered with religious decorum. In his critique, Paleotti redistributed the burden of responsibility between the artist, who had a right to depict *grotteschi* as long as these vivid representations were not capricious figments of the imagination, and the spectator, who did *not* have the right to condemn pictorial artifice as seductive if it had a counterpart in nature. Paleotti's discussion put reins on the decorum decreed by the Church.

There is no opportunity in this short note to examine the other side of the coin, namely the effect that post-Tridentine ideas about the value of pictorial artifice exerted on the creation of cultural boundaries outside of Europe, but it can at least be noted in closing that devotional art continued to revolve around the epistemological value of visible artifice, based on values that Paleotti and his contemporaries established. An enormous cultural gap existed between the statesmanship of a prelate and the circumstances faced by priests in their mission to evangelize the planet. Nonetheless, their understanding of what constitutes an acceptable sacred image was grounded in limits endorsed by their counterparts in Europe. Whether the forms of artifice are highly visible or not, images constructed on the model of perception were certainly encoded differently for Europeans than for indigenous artists who approached their work on the basis of entirely different artistic conventions. Surely, these artists and their audiences who never had access to the European context of embellishment at its richest site of discourse, could not have been aware that Europeans judged the mental capacity of the artificer on the basis of skill, ingenuity, and propriety in handling the conventions of optical naturalism.

Paleotti's text attests to the critical values that the Church of Rome actively endorsed. His treatise is also a remarkable, early attempt to devise a general theory of art. Paleotti believed that painting, because it represents the similitudes of things just as the eye experiences nature in direct vision, is a universal language and thus potentially makes Christian sacred stories the history of all peoples in the world. The contrast between reasoned imagination and capricious, unbridled fantasy that he invoked has been central to the Western history of pictorial embellishment since Plato and Vitruvius, but standard authorities Paleotti summoned to define inappropriate ornament—Plato, Horace, Vitruvius, St. Bernard of Clairvaux—could not have imagined the world that the prelate faced at the end of the sixteenth century. What if the capricious fictions of poets and painters actually existed?

In the process of working out his ideas, Paleotti consulted his friend Ulisse Aldrovandi, the renowned naturalist and collector of New World materials, a professor at the University of Bologna.[5] Aldrovandi, himself the author of a book on ancient sculpture and an unpublished treatise on painting, in 1581 addressed a letter to Paleotti about his friend's treatise in which he reports that he has looked everywhere to satisfy Paleotti's request, but cannot locate the source of a story about the painter Pausone who is said to have painted a panel depicting a running horse wearing a bridle.[6] For Paleotti, who ended up using the story anyway—it appears in Book 2, chapter 33, still without a footnote—Pausone served as an exhortatory reminder for artists to exercise restraint in *disegno.* Pausone's little painting had initially displeased its patron on account of the horse's bridle, which the patron had not ordered. The artist, however, defended his invention, explaining that in such a restricted space it was necessary to "put a bit on the beast" (*metter il morso alla bestia*), to keep the animal from running away—*traboccare,* overflow, is the word Aldrovandi used, alluding perhaps to the artist's imagination as well as the painting on the surface.[7]

There is of course nothing remarkable about Paleotti's advice, a key ingredient in Alberti's classicizing formula for pictorial *perspicuitas*. What *is* unusual is that neither artistic restraint nor the merits of optical naturalism *per se* are the subject in Aldrovandi's telling of the story. In Aldrovandi's version, this story is about the artist's license to invent his own pictorial embellishments, a right that Aldrovandi defended at length in the same letter. He writes, for example, that vivid color is *necessary* to accurately document objects, like those in his own collection of natural and artificial artifacts, thus painting contributes to human knowledge, sometimes it even revises written authority.[8] The principles guiding artistic invention was the issue at stake. Aldrovandi's point in praising vivid artifice that agrees with nature was to distinguish it sharply from the fantasized *grotteschi.*

Paleotti accommodated Aldrovandi's views on artistic license in a number of passages, for example, when he praises items Aldrovandi had specifically mentioned, such as representations of "leaves, branches, and festoons," and—remarkably for an ecclesiastic of this period—when Paleotti admits that painters *should* be allowed to represent novel things that seem to lie outside the order of nature (*se bene fuori dell'ordine suo*), as long as they actually do exist. These include "monsters of the sea and land and other places."[9] The difference is that ornaments which have counterparts in nature are "proportioned to reason" (*proporzionati alla ragione*), while "grotteschi" refer to fantasms, things "that have never been, that could not exist in the manner in which they are represented."[10] They are the *capricci* of painters, products of their irrational imaginations (*irragionevoli imaginazioni*).

Paleotti's discussion points to a crisis in representation that led to the creation of new cultural boundaries and hierarchical categories of art. The painter out of the scientific necessity to record strange, new objects sometimes employs vivid colors and other forms of artifice that the Council of Trent had explicitly rejected for their "sensuous charm," which distracts the worshiper from the purpose of his religious practice. But how is one to distinguish between inappropriate fantastic *grotteschi* and such virtuous naturalistic representations, visually or ontologically? The Thomistic distinction between two kinds of figured language, divine truths and the fictions feigned by poets, gained an unprecedented number of auxiliary qualifications in Paleotti's discussion.[11] He condemns the representation of monstrous races, of infernal rites and demonic gods, idol worship and human sacrifice; he traces the origin of grotteschi to paintings in caves and to Egyptian hieroglyphs and many other things. But the threat of *grotteschi* that Paleotti perceived *also* made him sensitive to the problem of exoticism. Paleotti condemned in Horatian tones the artistic practice of incorporating foreign elements, comparing painters to poets who cite verses without knowing their significance, because they fantasize without fruit: such artists portray the places of their fictions and dreams without examining what they have at hand (*per le mani*).[12] As the next four hundred years of cultural interaction attest, the value of pictorial ornament—of all kinds of artifice, including figurative language—proved to be far from simple to decide.

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[1] G. Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane, diviso in cinque libri* (Bologna, 1582); cited here from the reprint of books 1-2 in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma*, ed. Paola Barocchi, 3 vols. (Bari, 1960-1962), II: 117-509.

[2] While it would oversimplify a complex historical situation involving ecclesiastics, scientists, and artists, to describe this exchange in terms of a cause and effect relationship, both Paleotti and Aldrovandi spoke to the artists at the Academy, who took great interest in Aldrovandi's collection; see now, Giuseppe Olmi, *Inventario del mondo* (Bologna, 1992).

[3] On the Renaissance concept of decorum as applied to painting, see R.W. Lee, "*Ut pictura poesis*: The Humanist Theory of Painting," *Art Bulletin* 22 (1940): 197-269 (reissued New York, 1967).

[4] December, 5, 1563, see *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation*, ed. and tr. Rev. H.J. Schroeder, O.P. (St. Louis-London, 1941), 216.

[5] On Aldrovandi's collection, see Laura Laurencich-Minelli, "Museography and Ethnographical Collections in Bologna during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford, 1985), 17-23.

[6] *Trattati d'arte del cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma*, ed. Paola Barocchi, 3 vols. (Bari, 1960), II: 512-517. I have consulted the original documents in the Library of the University of Bologna.

[7] *Trattati* II: 515: "rispose [Pausone] che in slangusto spazio era stato necessario di metter il morso alla bestia, perché non traboccasse. . . ." The most famous unrestrained horse—bridled, but still uncontrolled by a driver—is of course Plato's metaphor for bestial appetite in the *Phaedrus* 250C, the charioteer.

[8] *Trattati* II: 513.

[9] *Trattati* II: 425; see also 382-89. The central point in these considerations was the distinction between the delusions of a dissolute person and the true visions of a prophet, as Thomas Aquinas addressed the question by differentiating between the eternal substance of an object and its accidental, external appearance (*Summa theologica* 3.76.8).

[10] *Trattati* II: 425 (Book 2, chapter 37).

[11] *Trattati* II: 421 (Book 2, chapter 36), cites the quotation Aldrovandi himself cited from Plato, in the same connection: Paleotti contrasts the false fictions of human imagination with the allegories and mysteries of divine revelation.

[12] *Trattati* II: 439 (Book 2, chapter 39).