

Disegno versus *Disegno stampato*: printmaking theory in Vasari's *Vite* (1550-1568) in the context of the theory of *disegno* and the *Libro de' Disegni*

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On the back of a letter he had received from Cosimo Bartoli in 1564, Giorgio Vasari compiled a list of ten enhancements to be made to the second edition of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, which was published four years later by Giunti.¹ Most of these intentions were not brought to realization, for instance a project to write about Michelangelo's unfinished marble sculptures. However, the theory of *disegno*, which is included in the list with the phrase 'Find out what drawing means', was incorporated into the well-known revised version of *Introduction to Painting*. Again, under point eight Vasari wrote: 'The names of masters of copperplate, German, Italian, and French. The life of Marcantonio must be revised in order to put in all these masters'.² Vasari fulfilled this aim literally: the chapter *Life of Marcantonio Bolognese* (Marcantonio Raimondi) basically presents a history of European prints from their beginning until the second half of the 16th century. This text is therefore considered the first historical and theoretical study of printmaking in the history of art. In it, Vasari discusses about four hundred and fifty engravings and about fifty engravers over three generations, from Italy, The Netherlands, Germany and Flanders.³

The topic of Vasari and prints has been examined by a vast corpus of research literature. One should mention for example the well-researched articles by Evelina Borea and David Landau and the contributions to the standard books on Renaissance printmaking by Landau/Parshall, Frank Büttner and of course Michael Bury.⁴ Robert Getscher has recently published all the texts about prints from both editions of Vasari's *Vite*, together with illustrations of all the engravings mentioned

¹ See *Giorgio Vasari*, Exh.cat, Arezzo, Florence: Edam, 1981, 233; and: Karl Frey (ed.), *Giorgio Vasari. Der literarische Nachlass*, Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1982 (reprint, Munich 1923), 3 vols., vol. 2, 77-79. (CDXLV, 29 April 1564). For another annotation, again on a letter from Bartoli, see idem, vol.1, 613-622 (CCCXL, 17 April 1561).

² It is difficult to say what Vasari meant to 'revise'. Either he was referring to the few lines about Marcantonio Raimondi in the *Life of Raphael* in the first edition, or to a text for the second edition that he had already prepared and that he had decided to enhance.

³ See Edward J. Olschewski, *Introduction*, in: Robert H. Getscher, *An Annotated and Illustrated Version of Giorgio Vasari's History of Italian and Northern Prints from his Lives of the Artists* (1550 & 1568), Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003, 2 vols., vol.1, XVI.

⁴ Evelina Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe', in: *Scritti in ricordo di Giovanni Previtali*, special print, *Prospettiva*, 57/60 1989/1990, 18-38; David Landau, 'Vasari, Prints and Prejudice', in: *The Oxford Art Journal*, 6,1, 1983, 3-10; David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print. 1470-1550*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994; Frank Büttner, 'Thesen zur Bedeutung der Druckgraphik in der italienischen Renaissance', in: Robert Stalla (ed), *Druckgraphik: Funktion und Form*, symposium, Kunsthistorisches Institut München, München/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2001, 9-15; Michael Bury, *The print in Italy. 1550-1620*, London: British Museum Press, 2001.

which can be identified.⁵ Although Vasari's work is generally recognized as one of the most important sources for understanding the art of printmaking in the Renaissance, the research literature also focuses on the defects in Vasari's texts: no part of the *Vite* shows such a huge amount of historical mistakes, contradictions, lack of information or technical inexperience as the text about printmaking. For instance, Vasari wrongly attributed Marten van Cleef's monogram "MC" to Martin Schongauer. One should also mention the notorious confusion between Germany and Flanders, since Vasari alternately refers to Albrecht Dürer as German and Flemish. Borea harshly mentions that in some cases Vasari did not know the difference between *sculpsit* und *invenit*.⁶

Why these mistakes occurred, whether Vasari knew the facts about the prints and whether he ignored them are methodological questions about how Vasari used his sources. This problem, of course, concerns the whole compilation of the *Vite* and both its editions, still representing a research desideratum.⁷ For instance, the philological heterogeneity of the *Vite*, especially in the second edition, continues to be discussed. This is an issue which falls together with the problem of errors and incongruities. This heterogeneity was not only caused by the different reviewers of the *Vite*, such as Vincenzo Borghini (second edition) and Paolo Giovio (first edition), but also depends on the fact that Vasari incorporated received information about artists as entire texts or even entire chapters. In fact Charles Hope has proved that Vasari was a multiple author.⁸ These aspects of the compilation of the *Vite* are indubitably relevant to the question of Vasari's view on printmaking. In fact, in this article the subject of 'Vasari and prints' is approached in full consciousness of the problem of heterogeneity in Vasari's *Vite*. Nevertheless, Vasari must be assumed to be the chief editor of his *Vite*, and all its texts must be viewed as they were definitively presented with all their contradictions, fully intentionally, to the contemporary reader. This is particularly a question of examining Vasari's thoughts about printmaking beyond a negative list of omissions and errors.⁹

And this is also the point from which this paper starts. The main question is what Vasari actually wrote about prints and how he included printmaking issues within his *Vite* texts. Therefore, the paper begins by examining the first edition of *Vite* (A. *Torrentiniana*) and then moves on to the second edition (B. *Giuntina*). In addition, the paper discusses the narrative techniques Vasari uses in his texts,¹⁰ particularly in the texts about prints, in order to examine his attitude to the art of printmaking. Finally, to understand Vasari's view on the subject entirely, in particular his definition of the printed image, a comparison between his theory of prints and his theory of *disegno* is inevitable. Therefore, the paper views Vasari's

⁵ Getscher, *Annotated and Illustrated Version of Giorgio Vasari's History of Italian and Northern Prints*.

⁶ Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe', 28.

⁷ See: Katja Burzer [et al.] (eds.), *Le Vite del Vasari. Genesi, topoi, ricezione/ Die Vite Vasaris. Entstehung, Topoi, Rezeption*, symposium, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Florence: Marsilio, 2010.

⁸ See Charles Hope, 'Le Vite Vasariane: Un esempio di autore multiplo', in: *L'autore multiplo*, ed. by Anna Santoni, Pisa: Scuola Normale di Pisa, 2005, 59–74. For deep studies of both editions of *Vite*, see for instance: Wolfgang Kallab, *Vasaristudien*, Vienna: Graeser, 1908. See also Carlo Maria Simonetti: *La Vita delle 'Vite' Vasariane. Profilo storico di due edizioni*, Florence: Olschki, 2005.

⁹ Compare the whole article, Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe'.

¹⁰ On the narrative technique in Vasari's *Vite* see Paul Barolsky, 'Vasari's Lives and the art of storytelling', in: Burzer, *Le Vite del Vasari. Genesi, topoi, ricezione*, 49–52.

theory of *disegno* as found in his remarks about his *Libro de' disegni* (C. *Libro de' disegni*) and of course in his main text about *disegno* in the above-mentioned *Introduction to Painting*, which will then be discussed together with his thoughts about the printed image. However, to completely answer the question of his definition of the printed image Vasari's general thoughts about painting have to also be briefly discussed, as it is essential to get a precise view of the problem of where Vasari collocates the printed image within the arts. (D. *Disegno-disegno stampato*).

The main aim of this article is to understand the quintessence of Vasari's theory of printmaking: the questions are what kind of theory and theoretical principles Vasari created about prints, and what kind of definition Vasari basically gives to the printed image. So far, this main issue has not been clearly analyzed in the literature about 'Vasari and prints'. As mentioned above, discussions about Vasari's texts about printmaking concentrate on their errors and historical shortcomings (Borea and Getscher).¹¹ Generally, three aspects emerge in the literature: Vasari judged the print to be reproductive, he assigned an inferior position to printmaking within the hierarchy of arts, and finally he defined the function of the printed image as being that of an instrument of communication, which indeed makes it a part of 'visual culture' rather than an autonomous art. Landau/ Parshall and Büttner in particular discuss Vasari as an art historian who held that the main aim of printmaking is the reproduction of master paintings or drawings.¹² It is Landau who points out that Vasari considers printmaking as inferior to painting.¹³ Borea also draws attention to the fact that Vasari deals more with the printed image than with the printmakers, and for Büttner the printed image is already defined as an instrument of communication.¹⁴ However, in the most recent literature it is Thomas Ketelsen who has been the first to ask about Vasari's definition of the printed image and the results from his article will be discussed in this paper.¹⁵

A. Torrentiniana (1550)

Discussion about Vasari's theory on prints should begin with the first edition of the *Vite* from 1550, published by Lorenzo Torrentino, where an essential theoretical approach is already present. Especially in the last three chapters (XXXIII–XXXV) of the *Introduction to Painting* of the *Teoriche*, Vasari discusses techniques in metal and wood. Chapter XXXIII begins with the technique of *niello*.

Niello, which may be described as design traced and painted on silver, as one paints and traces delicately with the pen, was discovered by the

¹¹ Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe'. Getscher, *Annotated and Illustrated Version of Giorgio Vasari's History of Italian and Northern Prints*, 1-25.

¹² See Landau/Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 284-285. Büttner, 'Thesen zur Bedeutung der Druckgraphik', 10-11.

¹³ Landau, 'Vasari, Prints and Prejudice', 3.

¹⁴ Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe', 29-31. Büttner, 'Thesen zur Bedeutung der Druckgraphik', 11.

¹⁵ See Thomas Ketelsen, 'Der Widerstreit der Linien. Zum Status der Zeichnung und Stich(el) bei Vasari und van Mander', in: Markus A. Castor (et al. eds.), *Druckgraphik zwischen Reproduktion und Invention*, Berlin/ München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010, 205-221.

goldsmiths as far back as the time of the ancients, there having been seen in their gold and silver plates incisions made by tools and filled up with some mixture. In niello the design is traced with the stylus on silver which has a smooth surface, and is engraved with the burin, a square tool cut on the slant like a spur from one of its angles to the other; for sloping thus towards one of the corners makes it very sharp and cutting on the two edges, and its point glides over the metal and graves extremely finely. With this tool is executed all graving on metal, whether the lines are to be filled or are to be left open, according to the pleasure of the artificer. (vol.1, 110) ¹⁶

Vasari defines the *niello* as a drawing on silver, and he meticulously describes the burin ('bulino'), which he portrays as the fundamental instrument for the execution of a drawing on metal. Subsequently, after describing the remaining steps of the *niello* technique, Vasari introduces some lines on copper engraving:

From this graving by the burin are derived the copper plates from which we see today so many impressions throughout all Italy of both Italian and German origin. Just as impressions in clay were taken from silver plaques before they were filled with niello, and casts pulled from these in sulphur, in the same manner the printers found out the method of striking off the sheets from copper plates with the press, as we have seen printing done in our own days. (vol.1, 111) ¹⁷

In the subsequent lines and in chapter XXXIV, Vasari continues to discuss other techniques in metal, for instance enamel over bas-relief and *tausia*. Then, in the last chapter, XXXV, Vasari discusses the *chiaroscuro* woodcut, emphasizing that it is an imitation of copper engraving. Subsequently, he describes extensively how to cut the wood plate three times and how to press it on the paper three times in order to obtain outlines, lights, shadows and different tones. At the very beginning of the chapter Vasari stresses the derivation of the *chiaroscuro* woodcut from copperplate engraving: 'The first inventor of engraving on wood in three pieces for showing not only design but the shadows, half-tints, and lights was also Ugo da Carpi. He

¹⁶ Citations from Vasari's *Vite* in English, if not differently marked, are from Getscher, *Annotated and Illustrated Version of Giorgio Vasari's History of Italian and Northern Prints*.

'Il niello, il quale non è altro che un disegno tratteggiato e dipinto su lo argento come si dipinge e tratteggia sottilmente con la penna, fu trovato dagli orefici fino al tempo degli antichi, essendosi veduti cavi co' ferri ripieni di mistura negli ori et argenti loro. Questo si disegna con lo stile su lo argento che sia piano e si intaglia col bulino, ch'è un ferro quadro tagliato a unghia da l'uno degli angoli a l'altro per isbieco, che così calando verso uno de' canti lo fa più acuto e tagliente da' due lati e la punta di esso scorre e sottilissimamente intaglia. Con questo si fanno tutte le cose che sono intagliate ne' metalli per riempierle o per lasciarle vòte, secondo la volontà dell'artefice.' Citations from Vasari's *Vite* in the original language are always from: Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (eds.), *Giorgio Vasari. Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, Florence: Sansoni, 1966-1997, 6 vols., vol. 1, 165.

¹⁷ 'Da questo intaglio di bulino son derivate le stampe di rame, onde tante carte e italiane e tedesche veggiamo oggi per tutta Italia; che sì come negli argenti s'improntava, anzi che fussero ripieni di niello, di terra e si buttava di zolfo, così gli stampatori trovarono il modo del fare le carte su le stampe di rame col torculo, come oggi abbiam veduto da essi imprimersi.' (vol. 1, 166).

invented the method of wood engraving in imitation of the engravings on copper (...). (111–112)¹⁸

To sum up, the essential points of these three chapters are, first of all, the sequential structure of the texts and their subordinated context: in *Teoriche*, Vasari discusses the problem of how to classify single arts and art techniques within the main groups of sculpture and painting, which begs the questions ‘What is painting?’ and ‘What is sculpture?’. For instance, Vasari allocates glass-painting mosaic, enamel, *graffito*, inlay, the art of engraving and copperplate engraving to *pittura*. But following Vasari’s principle that *scultura* is the ‘art of removing the superfluous’ some of the arts mentioned also belong to sculpture. Vasari is conscious that it is not possible to set strict limits between *pittura* and *scultura* and for that reason he allocates the art of graving to both sculpture and painting.¹⁹ Consequently, in the above-mentioned chapters of *Introduction to Painting* – which are also the last chapters of the whole *Teoriche* – Vasari discusses mixed forms between sculpture and painting: all techniques on metal plates, copper engraving included, and the *chiaroscuro* woodcut. In fact he defines *tausia* and *smalto* specifically as ‘*scultura e pittura*’.²⁰ However, all these arts mentioned in chapters XXXIII–XXXV – despite Vasari’s attribution of them to a mixed form of *scultura* and *pittura* – have an important common peculiarity which actually makes them nearer to the art of *pittura*: they are all formed as two-dimensional art,²¹ like drawings – executed on a metal or copper or wooden plate – and their gain is the impact of a painted picture (‘showing not only design but the shadows, half-tints, and lights’).

Another essential aspect of chapters XXXIII to XXXV consists in the creation of a line of evolution from *niello* to copperplate engraving to the *chiaroscuro* woodcut: copperplate engraving derives from the *niello* technique, and again the *chiaroscuro* woodcut emerges as an imitation of copperplate engraving. It is known that both these derivations are historically incorrect²², but this seems to be of no significance to Vasari at all, as he is concentrating rather on creating a plausible line of development in which artistic phenomena are set in a chain of cause and effect. But this artificial line of development itself expresses essential principles about the art of printmaking. The link between *niello* and copperplate engraving, for instance, serves to associate copper engraving with the *arte del bulino*. As a consequence, copperplate engraving is not only elevated in its value as deriving from the prestigious art of the goldsmith²³, but moreover the notion that copperplate engraving follows the principles of graving is emphasized. Therefore, when Vasari describes the burin and how it is used in *niello*, he explains at the same time how a copperplate is created for a copper print (‘with this tool is executed all graving on

¹⁸ ‘Il primo inventore delle stampe di legno di tre pezzi, per mostrare, oltre il disegno, l’ombre, i mez[z]i et i lumi ancora, fu Ugo da Carpi, il quale ad imitazione delle stampe di rame ritrovò il modo (...)’ (vol. 1,170)

¹⁹ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol.1, 11, 15–16, 82. Vasari also refers to burin as an act of graving, not designing, even though he defines *niello* and so on as *disegno*. See the citations above.

²⁰ Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 1, 166 & 170.

²¹ On Vasari and his definition of painting as a two-dimensional art, see Matteo Burioni (ed.), *Giorgio Vasari. Einführung in die Künste der Architektur, Bildhauerei und Malerei. Die künstlerischen Techniken der Renaissance als Medien des disegno*, Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2006, 19–20.

²² See for instance Borea, ‘Vasari e le stampe’, 18.

²³ See Borea, ‘Vasari e le stampe’, 18.

metal'). In addition, the link between *niello* and copper engraving emphasizes the importance of the procedure of printing: Vasari writes that it was the technique of printing an image from the *niello* plate during the process of *niello* which helped to find a method to print a drawing from a metal plate onto paper generally. This aspect is also relevant to the link between the *chiaroscuro* woodcut and the copper engraving: it is the procedure of printing that makes it possible to achieve a specific tonality. Vasari stresses that the artist has to be careful to orientate all the plates in the same direction during printing in order to achieve the finest impression of lights and shadows.²⁴ To sum up, the chain from *niello* to copperplate engraving to the *chiaroscuro* woodcut – which Vasari will repeat again and again in the *Vite*²⁵ – completes the definition of printmaking in chapters XXXIII-XXXV: the printed picture is based on a drawing on a printing plate; the aim is to achieve an optimal light and shadow effect, which is possible thanks to good execution of the drawing on the plate, and also thanks to careful performance of the printing procedure.

In the *Giunti* edition, chapters XXXIII-XXXV do not present any enhancements or changes compared to the first edition, probably because – as Vasari himself explains – the author decided to continue discussing the print issue mainly in the *Life of Marcantonio*. However, it is also possible that Vasari believed he had said enough about the principles of printmaking in this theoretical part of his book and did not see any necessity to enlarge on this basic information.

In the index of the book from 1550, at the end of the column 'locations of the works described', under another small heading, 'printed images', there are references to the *Lives* of Raphael, Mantegna, Pierin del Vaga and Rosso Fiorentino.²⁶ In all these fragmental anecdotes or descriptions of prints, Vasari already knows how to demonstrate the fundamental characteristics and problems of printmaking. For instance, the chapter *Life of Mantegna* addresses an important issue:

He bequeathed to painters the difficult foreshortening of figures from below upwards, a difficult and ingenious invention; and the way of engraving figures on copper for printing, a singularly true convenience, by which the world has been able to see not only the Bacchanalia, the Battle of Marine Monsters, The Deposition from the Cross, the Burial of Christ, and His Resurrection, with Longinus and St. Andrew, works by Mantegna himself, but also the manners of all the craftsmen who have ever lived. (120–121)²⁷

It might appear that Vasari is speaking about prints as reproductive printing, in the sense of the multiplication of an image taken from a certain work of art. In fact, in the passage cited above Vasari says that copper engraving would facilitate the

²⁴ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 1, 171.

²⁵ See *Life of Raphael (Torrentiniana and Giuntina)* and *Life of Marcantonio*.

²⁶ A few other texts about prints in the 1550 edition are not mentioned in the index. Of course, overall, there is still relatively little information about prints in the first edition compared to the edition from 1568.

²⁷ 'Lasciò costui alla pittura la difficoltà degli scórti delle figure al di sotto in su, invenzione difficile e capricciosa, et il modo dello intagliare in rame le stampe delle figure: comodità singularissima veramente, per la quale ha potuto vedere il mondo non solamente la Bacchanaria, la Battaglia de' mostri marini, il Deposto di croce, il Sepelimento di Cristo, la Resurressione con Longino e con Santo Andrea – opere di esso Mantegna –, ma le maniere ancora di tutti gli artefici che sono stati.' (vol. 3, 555–556).

circulation of an image of a masterpiece. Nevertheless, the print is seen not only in its function of multiplying and circulating an image, but firstly as a public act of making an invention. In fact the concept of *invenzione* presents the main aspect here along these lines (the technique of foreshortening and the picture themes *Bacchanalia* etc.).²⁸ Vasari defines the printed image as a medium through which an artist can publish his inventions, through which he can offer his intellectual good to the public, as a writer does with the publication of a printed book. Indeed Vasari emphasizes that Mantegna's ideas and themes, like *Bacchanalia*, are only known thanks to the prints.

In a similar way, Vasari defines the printed image in the *Life of Raphael*, which had already been included in the *Torrentiniana*:²⁹ After he had seen the prints by Dürer, Raphael also decided to show his art to the public. Therefore he ordered Marcantonio to learn the art of copper engraving. Marcantonio learned it so well that Raphael let him print his 'first works'. Here Vasari focuses on two aspects which he will consider throughout the *Giunti* edition: the print is a medium of publication of an image invention³⁰ but at the same time it is an object in which it is possible to perceive artistic ability. Both aspects are considered variable dimensions and this is already emphasized in the episode mentioned about Raphael and Dürer in the *Torrentiniana*, where Vasari narrates that Marcantonio had first to demonstrate his ability before Raphael would let him do copper engravings after his works.

Already in the 1550 edition, Vasari pays attention to the practical reality of the production of prints. He reports some of the particularities of the print market, for instance the fact that the *stampatore* could himself commission drawings for the prints and hire engravers, and that he usually owned the print plates. In the same way as in the last chapters of the *Teoriche* Vasari puts all this information into a chain of development, where one event implies another: here, in Raphael's *Life* this 'historical' line runs smoothly between the protagonists Dürer, Raphael, Raimondi, Baviera and Ugo da Carpi: Dürer's prints led Raphael to order Marcantonio to learn the art of copper engraving. Marcantonio made some excellent plates, which Raphael gave as a gift to his *garzone* Baviera, who became a *stampatore*. Consequently, this gift caused an enormous production of prints and the emergence of various engravers, such as Marco da Ravenna, who could show their artistic ability, bringing about the beginning of a print market. But the demand for printed

²⁸ In the Italian sixteenth century, *invenzione* means a technical invention, a specific picture subject or the modus of its interpretation, as well as the composition, presentation of landscape, figures and so on. See for example Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura, intitolato l'Aretino*, Venice 1557, 28r.

²⁹ See Corinna Höper, "'Mein Lieber Freund und Kupferstecher'. Raffael in der Druckgraphik des 16. bis 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Raffael und die Folgen. Das Kunstwerk in Zeitaltern seiner graphischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Exh.cat, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, ed. by Corinna Höper, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001, 51.

³⁰ The print presents a medium which lets the artist extend his inventions, and by doing this the print becomes an essential instrument that allows *invenzione* to develop to an artistic norm, because it is during the flowering of the print in the sixteenth century that *invenzione* becomes ever more influential in the theory of arts and this is what Vasari's texts about printmaking express so well. See also Landau/Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 165.

images was so great that it could only be satisfied with the invention of the *chiaroscuro* woodcut by Ugo da Carpi.³¹

According to the texts considered here, it would seem incorrect to argue that Vasari discussed the print only in a marginal way in the *Torrentiniana*, or – in Kallab's words – that he discovered the print only in the second edition.³² The exact opposite has been shown, that Vasari was clearly aware of the art of printmaking in the *Torrentiniana* and discussed its fundamental aspects. In the *Giunti* edition the topic is only enriched: questions about the function and relevance of the print are enhanced, 'historical' lines are refined, corrected and bounded, following the principle of Vasari's *Vite*, which is the general principle of a continuous progression of the arts.³³ In addition, Vasari does not change his approach towards the print in the second edition; neither in the method of reporting events regarding prints, nor in his definition of printmaking. What is new is the huge amount of information on engravers and their works.

B. Giuntina (1568)

In the *Giuntina*, almost all the chapters are enhanced with texts about prints, and all of these amplifications serve to create a history of the development of printmaking more coherently. For instance, Vasari now defines clearly that Mantegna follows Pollaiuolo and surpasses him. Moreover, Mantegna loses his albeit weakly expressed role as originator of the print,³⁴ which now passes to the *niello* artist Maso da Finiguerra.³⁵ Thus, in the *Giunti* version Vasari changed the text in the *Life of Mantegna*:

Andrea, ... like Pollaiuolo, delighted in engraving on copper; and among other things, he made engravings of his own Triumphs, which were then held in great account, since nothing better had been seen. (...) and he also took delight, as has been said, in engraving figures on copper for printing, a method of truly rare value, by means of which the world has been able to see (...) the Bacchanalia (...). (120).³⁶

Compared to the reports about prints in the single *Lives* of the *Giuntina*, the main chapter about printmaking, *Life of Marcantonio*, represents on the one hand a summary and an enlargement of the information given in the single chapters of the

³¹ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 4, 190–191. For research about the print market, especially in Rome, see: Christopher L.C.E Witcombe: *Print Publishing in Sixteenth-Century-Rome. Growth and Expansion, Rivalry and Murder*, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2008. Also see the discussion about Baviera regarding Vasari's *Vite* in the same work, 19-51.

³² See Kallab, *Vasaristudien*, 303.

³³ And the decade after each climax. See Proemio, Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 1, 9-10

³⁴ Vasari said in the *Torrentiniana* that Mantegna invented a way of engraving on copper but not actually the copper engraving itself. Compare Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe', 19.

³⁵ See *Life of Marcantonio*, Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 3.

³⁶ 'Si diletto il medesimo, sì come fece il Pollaiuolo, di far stampe di rame, e fra l'altre cose fece i suoi Trionfi, e ne fu allora tenuto conto perché non si era veduto meglio. (...) e si diletto ancora, come si è detto, d'intagliare in rame le stampe delle figure, che è commodità veramente singularissima, e mediante la quale ha potuto vedere il mondo (...) la Baccaneria (...)' (vol. 3, S. 554/556, *Giuntina*).

Lives, which are linked together with phrases like ‘as already said in the life of ...’³⁷. On the other hand, the *Life of Marcantonio* stresses the history of the development of printmaking: Maso Finiguerra invented the art of copper engraving and was followed by Baccio Baldini. Later Mantegna took up the art of copper engraving, and subsequently this art reached Flanders, where its masters became Schongauer followed by Dürer, who in turn influenced Italian printmaking. The process which Vasari creates here (copper engraving is invented in Italy, reaches Flanders and then ‘comes back’ to Italy) – again with no historical truth – is essential, as Vasari on the one hand has to explain the omnipresence of transalpine prints in Italy, and on the other hand wants to preserve the Italian predominance in the invention of printmaking.³⁸ Vasari lets Marcantonio become a follower of Dürer and connects both engravers with the well-known plagiarism anecdote: Marcantonio imitates the prints of Dürer so successfully that his imitations are sold as works by Dürer. This episode belongs to the narrative about Dürer – in Borea’s words it is he that is the real protagonist of the first part of the *Life of Marcantonio*.³⁹ Indeed, Vasari subsequently writes about Dürer and his follower and competitor Lucas van Leyden. It is only after several paragraphs that Vasari starts the actual narrative about Marcantonio, or rather about his works, which deviates to an account of the print market. Again, the link to Bavaria and to Ugo da Carpi is repeated,⁴⁰ and subsequently Vasari lists engravings, where in addition to Marcantonio others artists are involved, for instance Giulio Romano, Marco Dente da Ravenna and Agostino Veneziano. With Enea Vico, Vasari closes his descriptions of the works of single engravers and changes his narrative method. He dedicates the next lines to *stampatori* and the publishers, in particular to Antonio Lafreri, Antonio Labacco and Thomaso Barlacchi. Successively, he reports on some centres of print production, such as Rome and Venice, in order to again speak about transalpine prints, the protagonist of which he chooses to be Hieronymus Cock.⁴¹ He marks the change from narratives about single engravers to the print as a ‘market-object’ with the following statement:

Many others have occupied themselves with copper-plate engraving, who, although they have not attained to such perfection, have none the less benefited the world with their labours, by bringing many scenes and other works of excellent masters in to the light of day, and by thus giving the means of seeing various inventions and manners of the painters to those who are not able to go to the places where the principal works are, and conveying to the ultramontanes a knowledge of many things that they did not know. And although many plates have been badly executed through the avarice of the printers, eager more for gain than for honour, yet in certain others,

³⁷ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 3.

³⁸ See Borea, ‘Vasari e le stampe’, 19–20.

³⁹ See Borea, ‘Vasari e le stampe’, 20.

⁴⁰ The story of the ‘gift’ is not repeated and Vasari enhances the description about the *chiaroscuro* woodcut by emphasizing more the relationship of this technique to painting. See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 10 a. 14–15.

⁴¹ For a critical overview of Vasari’s description of Hieronymus Cock, see Borea, ‘Vasari e le stampe’, 32–33.

besides those that have been mentioned, there may be seen something of the good (...). (194 – 195)⁴²

The citation gives us an idea of how Vasari's project to report a complete story of printmaking was confronted with the enormous number of works and artists. Borea has pointed out – concerning the countless numbers of anonymous prints in the 15th century and, for instance, the existence of so many versions of any one image – that Vasari must have been aware of the danger of getting confused.⁴³ Indeed the last lines of the chapter *Life of Marcantonio Bolognese* give an impression of confusion. Here, Vasari tries to include all the remaining facts and events about prints, but eventually he stops abruptly and goes back to writing about Raimondi by narrating his death, because otherwise he would not have been able to title this chapter *Life of Marcantonio* at all. Nevertheless, generally speaking, Vasari is able to deal with this mass of information about printmaking exactly because he constructs a story of development and because he puts the facts into a chain of anecdotes, which sometimes appear as fables, such as the episode mentioned concerning the *garzone* Baviera and the gift of copper plates, which makes him become a successful *stampatore*. It is precisely these anecdotes – and this is true of both editions, *Torrentiniana* and *Giuntina* – which serve Vasari to classify the works and the artists, and to place them in a 'historical', terminological and linear order. In particular, the anecdotes also help to particularize definitions and classifications formulated on printmaking. Therefore, Vasari assigns a specific role to some artists, in which they represent a specific artistic problem. This can be seen, for instance, in the question of invention and execution in printmaking.

As already said, Vasari understands the print as both an instrument for publishing an invention and as an object demonstrating artistic ability. Both aspects are considered variable dimensions. In fact, in the *Giuntina* Vasari shows all the different possibilities of these two aspects, ranging from the perfect inventor to the inferior engraver. Vasari notes, for instance, that Sandro Botticelli was an excellent *disegnatore* but that it is not possible to record any good prints after his works.⁴⁴ Andrea del Sarto even became the victim of a bad engraver: having been convinced by his colleagues, he commissioned an engraving of one of his excellent paintings, but he was so disappointed by the execution of this print that he decided that no more of his works should be engraved.⁴⁵ Titian, instead, is not considered by Vasari to be excellent at drawing, but the author of the *Vite* notices that Titian brought out marvellous prints.⁴⁶ Of course, Raphael and Marcantonio Raimondi are equal

⁴² 'Si sono adoperati intorno agl'intagli di rame molti altri, i quali, se bene non hanno avuto tanta perfezione, hanno nondimeno con le loro fatiche giovato al mondo, e mandato in luce molte storie et opere di maestri eccellenti, e dato commodità di vedere le diverse invenzioni e maniere de' pittori a coloro che non possono andare in que' luoghi dove sono l'opere principali, e fatto avere cognizione agl'oltramontani di molte cose che non sapevano: et ancorché molte carte siano state mal condotte dall'ingordigia degli stampatori, tirati più dal guadagno che dall'onore, pur si vede, oltre quelle che si son dette, in qualcun'altra essere del buono (...)' (vol. 5, 19).

⁴³ See Borea, 'Vasari e le stampe', 18.

⁴⁴ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 3, 516–517.

⁴⁵ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 4, 361.

⁴⁶ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 6, 157–159.

partners as excellent inventor and excellent engraver.⁴⁷ Then again, Giulio Romano is chosen as a successful *disegnatore* for having made a 'vast number' of drawings for architectural projects, frescos, carpets and of course prints all over Europe, in Italy, Flanders and France.⁴⁸ Pierin del Vaga represents a negative pendant to Romano, as he had lost all of his works during the sack of Roma. Feeling sorry for him, Baviera commissioned some drawings from him, which were then engraved by Jacopo Caraglio.⁴⁹ But finally, with Baccio Bandinelli, Vasari creates a figure that represents at one and the same time an excellent draughtsman but also an artist, whose drawing was corrected and enhanced by an engraving executed by Marcantonio Raimondi. Both of Bandinelli's roles concern the same episode narrated in two different versions. The altered endings of the episode are of course due to the goal of praising the artist in his own *Life* chapter. In the *Life of Bandinelli* Vasari narrates that he had executed an excellent drawing, the *Martyrdom of Saint Laurent*. The drawing was highly appreciated by the pope, who granted Bandinelli the nomination of cavalier of San Pietro and called Marcantonio Raimondi to engrave the image.⁵⁰ Conversely, in the *Life of Marcantonio* a different ending of this episode is presented.⁵¹ In this version, Bandinelli complained to the pope that Marcantonio's print of his drawing was full of errors. But Marcantonio was able to prove in the presence of the pope – by showing him both his engraving and the 'original' by Bandinelli – that not only had he made no error, but also that on the contrary he had corrected errors in Bandinelli's drawing, demonstrating more ability in his engraving than Bandinelli had in the drawing.⁵²

The printed image surpasses the drawing? It is exactly the way that Vasari deals with the printed image compared to the drawing that makes the nucleus of

⁴⁷ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 10–11: '(...) le quali stampe furono tanto belle per l'invenzione di Raffaello, per la grazia del disegno, e per la diligenza et intaglio di Marcantonio, che non era possibile veder meglio.'

⁴⁸ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, S. 76–77.

⁴⁹ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 135–136.

⁵⁰ 'Così con questa storia satisfece tanto Baccio al Papa, che egli operò che Marcantonio Bolognese la 'ntagliasse in rame: il che da Marcantonio fu fatto con molta diligenza, et il Papa donò a Baccio per ornamento della sua virtù un cavalier di San Piero'. (vol. 5, 247).

⁵¹ For Schorn there is no contradiction between the two versions of the episode. According to him, the episode in the *Life of Marcantonio* continues the episode from the *Life of Bandinelli*. The whole narration should consequently be read as follows: first Bandinelli draw the *Saint Laurent* scene and was praised by the pope, who commissioned the engraving by Marcantonio (*Life of Bandinelli*). Then Bandinelli saw the engraving and began to complain, but afterwards Marcantonio was able to show that Bandinelli had made errors in his drawing and that the engraving improved it (*Life of Marcantonio*). However, Hope has noticed that the first two volumes, where the *Life of Marcantonio* is included, were already printed before 1565, while the third volume, which includes the *Life of Bandinelli* was printed later around 1568 (this is demonstrated by some historical facts reported in the *Life of Bandinelli*). For this reason it is also possible that Vasari did not remember the exact version of this story in the *Life of Marcantonio*. See Hope, 'Le Vite Vasariane. Un esempio di autore multiplo', 67–68, and Ludwig Schorn and Ernst Förster (eds.), *Giorgio Vasari. Leben der ausgezeichneten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*, reprint (Tübingen/Stuttgart 1832–1849) ed. by Julian Kliemann, Worms: Werner'sche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1983, 6 vols., vol. 4, 131, note 21.

⁵² '(...) Bandinello, dolendosi col Papa a torto di Marcantonio, dicesse (...) ch'egli faceva molti errori. (...) Marcantonio (...) andò (...) al Papa (...) e gli mostrò l'originale stato disegnato dal Bandinello, e poi la carta stampata; onde il Papa conobbe che Marcantonio con molto giudizio avea non solo non fatto errori, ma corrette molti fatti dal Bandinello e di non piccola importanza, e che più avea saputo et operato egli coll'intaglio che Baccio col disegno.' (vol. 5, 13–14).

Vasari's view on printmaking emerge. Therefore, a comparison with the well-known theory of drawing will help our understanding of Vasari's theory on the printed image or engraved drawing, and consequently it will also be relevant to look at one of the most important themes, or rather motifs, of the second edition of the *Vite*, the *Libro de' disegni*.

C. *Libro de' disegni*

In the second edition, in which Vasari elaborates on his commentary on printmaking, he also introduces the theory of drawing and adds annotations to his graphic collection, the so-called *Libro de' disegni*. Thanks particularly to Raghianti Collobi, it is known that Vasari's *Libro* contained a vast collection, consisting of at least seven large-format volumes. Small-format drawings were arranged with several to a page and were surrounded by frames – probably executed by Vasari himself. Large-format drawings were folded. After the *Libro* was sold by Vasari's heirs and then dispersed, some large groups of drawings were preserved, mainly in the Uffizi and in the Louvre.⁵³

Charles Fischer explains that the *Libro de' disegni* is an illustrative appendix to the *Giunti* edition.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly Vasari developed the *Libro* with a literary purpose, to communicate with the reader. All the annotations on the drawings from his collection function as examples within his description and evaluation of the oeuvre of the artist presented and they demonstrate the artist's position on the 'progressive line' of the arts. For instance, Vasari describes the quality of Stefano Fiorentino's drawing, noticing that in the art of drawing he exceeded Giotto:

And in truth Stefano had great facility in draughtsmanship, as can be seen in our said book in a drawing by his hand, wherein is drawn the Transfiguration (which he painted in the cloister of Santo Spirito), in such a manner that in my judgement he drew much better than Giotto.⁵⁵

In the *Introduction to Painting* Vasari explains the meaning of 'drawing': drawing is the foundation of any sort of art, but also a work of art in itself. A drawing is primarily a visible expression of a thought, concept or inner image. This is the precise definition of the term *disegno*: 'drawing is none other than a visible expression and declaration of the inner concept and of that which one has imagined

⁵³ According to the collector Mariette (1694-1774) the format of these volumes was 64.5 x 48.5 cm. Without identifying all of them, Vasari mentions a total of about 800 drawings in the *Vite*. It is possible to identify 300 of them. He is also known to have possessed a further 200 drawings which are not mentioned. It is considered that Vasari owned more than 800 drawings in his collection. For general information on the *Libro* see *Giorgio Vasari, Exh.cat, Arezzo, 246-254*. Licia Raghianti Collobi, *Il libro de' Disegni del Vasari*, Florence: Vallecchi, 1974, 2. vols., vol. 1, 3-23.

⁵⁴ *Giorgio Vasari, Exh.cat, Arezzo, 246-247*.

⁵⁵ Cited from: Gaston Du C. De Vere (ed.), *Giorgio Vasari. Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors and architects*, reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1976, 10 vols., vol. 1, 111.

'E nel vero aveva Stefano gran facilità nel disegno, come si può vedere nel detto nostro libro in una carta di sua mano nella quale è disegnata la Trasfigurazione ch'e' fece nel chiostro di Santo Spirito, in modo che, per mio giudizio, disegnò molto meglio che Giotto.' (vol. 2, 136).

and fabricated in the mind.⁵⁶ But Vasari does not only think of the *disegno* as a direct expression of the artistic intellect. He also emphasizes that this expression needs the ability of the hand, which has to be practised:

(...) what design [drawing] needs, when it has derived from the judgement the mental image of anything, is that the hand, through the study and practice of many years, may be free and apt to draw and to express correctly, with the pen, the silver-point, the charcoal, the chalk, or other instrument, whatever nature has created. For when the intellect puts forth refined and judicious conceptions, the hand which has practised design [drawing] for many years exhibits the perfection and excellence of the arts as well as the knowledge of the artist.⁵⁷

Vasari points out that the quality of the expression of an invention is due to artistic ability. Again – similar to the invention and execution problem in printmaking – Vasari defines intellectual achievement and manual ability as variable dimensions. Therefore, he cites drawings of differing quality from his *Libro de' disegni* which demonstrate different levels of manual or of intellectual faculty. For instance, in the *Life of Leon Battista Alberti* Vasari declares that Alberti was not an excellent painter at all because he spent less time on the exercise of drawing and dedicated more effort to the *studio*. Nonetheless, Vasari subsequently notices that Alberti was capable of presenting his concepts in a drawing, and the author of the *Vite* is able to prove it by means of some of Alberti's drawings that he owns in the *Libro*.⁵⁸

In general, the definition of drawing as a direct expression of the artist's intellect and hand becomes an important issue in the annotations regarding the *Libro*. Vasari emphasizes that the beholder experiences a kind of closeness to the artist's ability when admiring his drawings. For instance, in the *Life of Giulio Romano* Vasari meticulously describes an image from Romano's fresco cycle in Mantua, *Icaro*, describing the visual impact on the beholder and praising the value of the invention of this image, and subsequently emphasizing that he owns the drawing of this image.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ (...) disegno altro non sia che una apparente espressione e dichiarazione del concetto che si ha nell'animo, e di quello che altri si è nella mente imaginato e fabbricato nell'idea. (vol. 1, 111).

⁵⁷ Cited from Louisa S. Maclehorse (ed.), *Vasari on technique*, reprint, ed. by Baldwin Brown, New York: Dover Publications, 1960, 206.

'(...) questo disegno ha bisogno, quando cava l'invenzione d'una qualche cosa dal giudizio, che la mano sia mediante lo studio et essercizio di molti anni spedita et atta a disegnare et esprimere bene qualunque cosa ha la natura creato, con penna, con stile, con carbone, con matita o con altra cosa; perché, quando l'intelletto manda fuori i concetti purgati e con giudizio, fanno quelle mani che hanno molti anni essercitato il disegno conoscere la perfezzione e eccellenza dell'arti et il sapere dell'artefice insieme.' (vol. 1, 111).

⁵⁸ 'Nella pittura non fece Leon Battista opere grandi né molto belle, con ciò sia che quelle che si veggiono di sua mano, che sono pochissime, non hanno molta perfezzione; né è gran fatto, perché egli attese più agli studi che al disegno. Pur mostrava assai bene, disegnando, il suo concetto, come si può vedere in alcune carte di sua mano che sono nel nostro libro (...) ' (vol. 3, 288).

⁵⁹ (...) la quale invenzione fu tanto bene considerata et immaginata da Giulio, ch'ella par proprio vera, perciò che vi si vede il calore del sole friggendo abruciar l'ali del misero giovane, il fuoco acceso far fumo, e quasi si sente lo scoppiare delle penne che abruciano, mentre si vede scolpita la morte nel volto d'Icaro, et in Dedalo la passione et il dolore vivissimo. E nel nostro Libro de' disegni di diversi pittori è

However, it is in the *Life of Giotto* where Vasari explains and clearly defines the relevance of the drawing as an immediate expression of the artist's hand and mind, also emphasizing the significance of the collection of drawings as an object through which it is possible to study intellectual and artistic ability: '(...) those who come after may be able to see drawings by the very hand of Giotto, and from these to recognize all the more the excellence of so great a man, in our aforesaid book there are some that are marvellous, sought out by me with no less diligence than labour and expense'.⁶⁰

D. *disegno* – *disegno stampato*

From the above citation about Giotto and from a statement in the *Life of Marcantonio*, which will be discussed here, it is possible to understand Vasari's view on printmaking. In the *Life of Marcantonio* he says that many medium-value prints had been produced, but they were still useful because they show inventions by masters to people who are unable to visit the sites where the pieces are located.

Consequently, Vasari defines three hierarchic levels of the perception of art, or of the way a beholder can approach a work of art and have an intellectual gain. He can view prints that represent pieces by masters, but it is better to admire the pieces directly where they are sited. At best, however, he should study the drawings from which these works emerged. Vasari explicitly discusses the importance of the immediate experience of artistic and intellectual ability in the chapter about Flemish artists. He reports that Frans Floris is called the Flemish Raphael, noticing, however, the impossibility of judging how ingenious Floris's art actually is, as in Italy only prints after his works are known. Vasari concludes with the statement that even the best engraver is unable to exactly render the style and the *disegno* of a picture by another artist: 'It is true that this is not demonstrated to us fully by the printed sheets, for the reason that the engraver, be he ever so able, never by a great measure equals the original or the design and manner of him who has drawn them' (264).⁶¹

While the drawing directly reproduces the intellectual and artistic qualities of an artist, the print can falsify them. Does Vasari contradict himself? On the one hand he declares that a print which presents a picture or a drawing by another artist can never reach the artistic truth of the work. On the other hand he narrates how Marcantonio's print exceeded its model, the drawing by Bandinelli. In addition, in the narrative about Pierin del Vaga and Caraglio mentioned above, Vasari roundly declares how excellently Caraglio presented the drawing by Pierin del Vaga in an

il proprio disegno di questa bellissima storia di mano di esso Giulio.' (vol. 5, 68-69). The Icarus scene, of which Vasari said he had the model drawing was not realized in the Palazzo Té in Mantua. Maybe a model painting of this scene existed, which Vasari had seen in the Palazzo Té. For some critical points about this, see Ragghianti Collobi, *Il libro de' Disegni*, vol. 1, 129-130.

⁶⁰ Cited from De Vere, *Lives*, vol. 1, 94.

'(...) possino coloro che verranno vedere dei disegni di man propria di Giotto e da quelli conoscere maggiormente l'ecc[ellenza] di tanto uomo, nel nostro già detto libro ne sono alcuni maravigliosi, stati da me trovati con non minore diligenza che fatica e spesa.' (vol. 2, 123).

⁶¹ '(...) vero è che ciò a noi non dimostrano interamente le carte stampate, perciò che chi intaglia, sia quanto vuole valent'uomo, non mai arriva a gran pezza all'opere et al disegno di chi ha disegnato.' (vol. 6, 225-226).

engraving, noticing that Caraglio was able to preserve Pierino's style, his way of drawing and the general effect of the image.

(...) he [Baviera] commissioned him [Pierin del Vaga] to draw some of the stories of the Gods transforming themselves in order to achieve the consummation of their loves. These were engraved on copper by Jacopo Caraglio, an excellent engraver of prints, who acquitted himself so well in the matter of these designs, that, preserving the outlines and manner of Perino, and hatching the work with beautiful facility, he sought also to impart to the engraving that grace and that delicacy which Perino had given to the drawings. (233) ⁶²

Reviewing all these statements about the relationship between a print and the work by another artist that the print represents, three possibilities emerge: the print can exceed the model; it will never reach the magnificence of the model; or, finally, it is able to present the image in a way that the style and the artistic features of the model are preserved, which is the major gain of a print. However, Vasari not only introduces scales of beholding art and of the relationship between the print and its model; he also differentiates between levels of the execution of the print itself. Bad quality prints are produced for commercial profit; middle-value prints are at least useful for cultural education; but excellent prints can not only represent an invention in the finest way, but they are also able to express the virtuosity of the drawing of the engraver. In addition – and this is the highest potential of *disegno* for Vasari – an excellent print can demonstrate the 'knowledge of the artist' – again that of the engraver himself. This is what Vasari says about a print by Lucas van Leyden, commenting that his prints even teach the painter how to achieve a fine tonality and how to deal with the presentation of distant objects within the depiction of a landscape:

Besides this, it is evident that he used a wise discretion in the engraving of his works, for the reason that all those parts which recede little by little into the distance are less strongly defined in proportion as they are lost to view, even as natural objects become less clear to the eye when seen from afar. Indeed, he executed them with such thoughtful care, and made them so soft and well blended, that they would not be better in colour; and his judicious methods have opened the eyes of many painters. (vol. 1, 160) ⁶³

⁶² '(...) [Baviera] gli [Pierin del Vaga] fece disegnare una parte d'istorie, quando gli Dei si trasformano per conseguire i fini de' loro amori; i quali furono intagliati in rame da Iacopo Caraglio, eccellente intagliatore di stampe. Et invero in questi disegni si portò tanto bene, che riservando i dintorni e la maniera di Perino, e tratteggiando quegli con un modo facilissimo, cercò ancora dar loro quella leggiadria e quella grazia che aveva dato Perino a' suoi disegni.' (vol. 5, 136).

⁶³ 'Oltre ciò si vede che egli usò una discrezione ingegnosa nell'intagliare le sue cose, con ciò sia che tutte l'opere che di mano in mano si vanno allontanando, sono manco tocche, perché elle si perdono di veduta, come si perdono dall'occhio le naturali, che vede da lontano; e però le fece con queste considerazioni e sfumate e tanto dolci, che col colore non si farebbe altrimenti: le quali avvertenze hanno aperti gl'occhi a molti pittori.' (vol. 5, 9).

To sum up, it is possible to reconcile Vasari's contradictory statements about the print because he views printmaking along different dimensions: in terms of its relation to the beholder, its relation to the model and finally as an artistic object itself. Another anecdote demonstrates that Vasari discusses the print even in its quality of 'originality'. In the *Life of Marcantonio* Vasari narrates the previously mentioned well-known plagiarism case, the protagonists of which are Marcantonio Raimondi and Albrecht Dürer. According to the research literature, it is very probable that this plagiarism case is not authentic, or that it has only a limited historical factual base.⁶⁴ However, on this occasion too, historical correctness was probably unimportant to Vasari as he wanted to make a statement about the print by means of this 'fable'. Therefore the deciding factor here is again the narrative construction. At the beginning of the description of Dürer's life, Vasari emphasizes that the master already engraved with his own hand as a young artist and that he used to sign his prints.⁶⁵ In the following lines Vasari discusses some prints bearing Dürer's monogram and decides that they cannot be executed by Dürer himself because of their inferior quality.⁶⁶ A few paragraphs later comes the narrative of the plagiarism case. During his sojourn in Venice, Marcantonio saw Dürer's *Passion* woodcuts and decided to imitate them, especially their engraving technique, in order to afterwards show them everywhere in Italy. He fully succeeded. The imitations were so well done that they were even sold as prints executed by Dürer himself.⁶⁷ When Dürer was informed about the imitation he took Marcantonio to court at the Venetian *Signoria*, but only achieved a ruling that imitations of his prints could no longer carry his monogram.

The point about the plagiarism case is not the imitation itself but the use of Dürer's monogram.⁶⁸ This is why this anecdote demonstrates how Vasari defines the 'authenticity' of a work of art, namely that he differentiates sharply between the invention and the original. The invention, ergo the picture's subject, the composition or technical form, refers to and always belongs to the person who thought of it, but once it is executed and published it becomes a public good that can, and has to be, studied. Vasari emphasizes this in the plagiarism anecdote by saying that

⁶⁴ See Christine Vogt, *Das druckgraphische Bild nach Vorlagen Albrechts Dürers (1471–1528)*, München/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2008, 81–85.

⁶⁵ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 4: 'E così essendo giovanetto, fece molte cose (...) e le intagliava di sua man propria, segnandole col suo nome.'

⁶⁶ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 5. The prints were actually executed by the young Dürer. See Borea, *Vasari e le stampe*, 21.

⁶⁷ On the other hand, Marcantonio had engraved his imitation in copper engraving, a technique which Vasari considers more difficult than the woodcut. Marcantonio therefore exceeded Dürer. See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 7.

⁶⁸ Some facts about the 'plagiarism' are sure: in 1511 Dürer introduced to his editions, for example the *Apocalypse* edition, an annotation that prohibits any copying of the prints presented. In 1512 the government of Nürnberg publically announced the copyright for Dürer's monogram. Raimondi imitated a vast number of Dürer's prints, for instance the *Life of Mary* – one folio is also signed 'MAF, Marcantonio fecit', but in the imitations of the *Small Passion* Raimondi left an empty space where in the original version Dürer had placed his monogram AD. Vasari probably saw the annotation, maybe in the *Apocalypse* edition, and viewed Raimondi's *Small Passion* without signatures. He therefore assumed an official plagiarism case. It may also be that he had some oral information about the plagiarism case or about a copyright conflict in Venice, but no documentation is preserved. For a full discussion of the problem of copyright around the period of Dürer and of the historical errors in Vasari's episode, see Vogt, *Das druckgraphische Bild nach Vorlagen Dürers*, 77–107.

Marcantonio wanted to imitate the 'new' and the 'beauty' in Dürer's *Passion* woodcuts.⁶⁹ The original, on the contrary, is an object that directly individuates the hand and the intellect of an artist, and this is of course the drawing. For instance, when Vasari talks about Luca Penni's drawing *Bath of naked women* as the original of a print, he does not mean the original as the source of the invention, the subject and the composition of bathing women, but he refers to the drawing as an object that directly gives evidence of Penni's artistic ability.⁷⁰ In the context of the plagiarism case and of the narration of Dürer's life as a young artist, the signature also characterizes ownership: in fact Raimondi can copy Dürer's invention but after the judgment by the *Signoria* he cannot copy his signature. That is, he cannot present his imitations as if they were actually made by Dürer himself. The print therefore is here allocated to the category 'original', like a drawing.

But how equivalent is the print to the drawing in Vasari's theory? In the *Life of Marcantonio* Vasari gives an explicit definition of the print: the printed image is a 'printed drawing', 'disegno stampato'. Thanks to the technique of printing it is possible to produce a picture that looks as if it were drawn with the pen.⁷¹ Vasari does not only consider the print a picture which looks like a drawing, however. He is conscious of the fact that the drawing actually exists on the engraved plate, while printing transmits its image to the beholder. Vasari knows that the print is a two-sided art: on the one hand there is the drawing on the plate; on the other hand the printed image of it. This means that the printed image is only an appearance of the image that exists physically on the engraved plate. In fact, in some descriptions of prints Vasari refers either to the drawing on the plate, in phrases such as '[Marcantonio] couldn't handle better his burin', or to the printed image, mainly when he describes the whole appearance of a picture, the light and shadow effects, or the *maniera*. Therefore, when Vasari considers a print an 'original', he means the engraved drawing on the plate. The printed image is only the appearance of the original.

If the printed image is a printed drawing it nevertheless has different functions as a drawing according to Vasari. In terms of the *Teoriche* discussed, the printed image belongs to *pittura*. Indeed, Vasari expects the same norms for the printed image as he does for painting. This can be seen, for example, in the citation about Lucas van Leyden and his printmaking or from the discussion about the *chiaroscuro* woodcut, and from the demand generally for the printed image to have optimal light and shadow tonality. Thus, in reality, print is not exactly equivalent to drawing, even when Vasari defines it as *disegno stampato*. Ketelsen points out that Vasari's definition of *disegno* as "synthesis of the intellectual concept" can be transferred to the engraving:⁷² Ketelsen argues especially in terms of the way the engraving is actually made, that is by always tracing the burin forwards by turning

⁶⁹ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 7.

⁷⁰ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 4, 334. Vasari also talks about the drawing as 'originale' in the episode of the *Saint Laurent* engraving by Marcantonio after Bandinelli. See the citation in note 52.

⁷¹ See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 3: '(...) non solo le faceva apparire stampate, ma venivano come disegnate di penna.'

⁷² Ketelsen, 'Der Widerstreit der Linien', 213-214.

the plate. Moreover, the engraving always needs a preliminary drawing.⁷³ Therefore, according to Ketelsen, Vasari thinks about the printed image as a result of efforts, *dilligenza*, more than as a medium for the “expression of the idea” as he has defined the drawing in the *Introduction to Painting*.⁷⁴

Ketelsen correctly demonstrates that it is not possible to view *disegno* and engraving as equivalences within Vasari’s theory. But if one takes into account the entire definition of *disegno* it is possible to understand why Vasari sees parallels between drawing and engraving: *disegno* is not only an outcome of an *concetto*, but above all an expression of mental and artistic ability with lines, and this is what engraving is also. Moreover, *disegno* is not only a first sketch, but also a complete expression of an image with lines and outlines. This is what Vasari writes throughout his text on *disegno*. For this reason it is possible for Vasari to assign the same principles to engraving as to drawing.

Conclusion

The issue of printmaking is not a marginal subject in Vasari’s *Vite*, neither in the first, nor certainly in the second edition. Vasari formulates a theory of printmaking in the first edition and enhances it in the second edition. This is bound to his theory of *disegno* in the *Giuntina*. The purpose of this article has been to emphasize the parallels between the principles of drawing and printing in Vasari’s theory. According to him, drawing is an immediate expression of intellectual and artistic ability. The execution, the autograph, is something unique and original, while the invention can become a public and an imitable good within the artistic world. Both, invention and execution are variable dimensions. These are exactly the same principles that Vasari establishes for the print with only one, but significant, difference: the twofold character of the print. Therefore, while the actually drawing exists on the plate, and can be seen as an original, having all the characteristics that Vasari gives to *disegno* (intellectual and artistic expression), the beholder can only see the appearance of this drawing when it is realised by printing. In fact, Vasari emphasizes the importance of the drawing on the plate (in the chapter about *niello*). Now, while *disegno* unifies both aspects of an artistic act, execution and invention, with the print the invention and the execution can be assigned to different artists. This circumstance causes Vasari problems, which is the reason why his statements oscillate between explaining that the print is inferior to its model and vice versa. Nevertheless, he differentiates between the problem of the relationship between the print and its model and the print as an artistic object itself. This means that he

⁷³ Ketelsen, ‘Der Widerstreit der Linien’, 215-216.

⁷⁴ Ketelsen also reminds us of the following quotation from Vasari: ‘woodcutters, who are without *disegno*.’ Vasari wrote this sentence in the *Proemio delle Vite* of the second edition, where he excuses the bad quality of the portraits of the artists included in the biographies. I doubt that Vasari means here that engravers or woodcutters do not have *disegno* in general. In fact, Vasari commends these same woodcut portraits at the very end of the *Vita of Marcantonio*. And again in the *Vita of Marcantonio* Vasari praises the ability of the woodcuts, saying that artists who have more *disegno* can show their ability with their woodcuts, like Dürer. See Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol.2, 32, vol. 5, 5 & 25. Compare Ketelsen, ‘Der Widerstreit der Linien’, 215-216 and note 37.

makes a distinction between the artistic ability of the engraver and the artistic ability of the inventor that is present in the printed image. Finally, however, it is essential to emphasize that Vasari never distinguishes clearly and in a hierarchic way between prints invented and executed by the same artist and those invented by one and executed by another. Only a few decades later, would Baglione in his *Lives of Engraves* clearly formulate that a print executed by the inventor – like the copper engravings by the Caracci brothers – is to be valued more highly than a print after another's invention.⁷⁵ It is only at this point that the way is opened for a clear distinction between the *peintre graveur*, or the author engraver, and the reproductive engraver. It was certainly not Vasari who created the characterization of the print as a reproductive art.

The art of printmaking is presented by Vasari in its full ambivalence, as split between the drawing on the plate and the printed image, which is actually a *disegno stampato* but also has the aim of appearing like a painting. Nevertheless, Vasari was the first art historian to try to define what a printed image actually is. This is the most crucial point about 'Vasari and printmaking': in the history of arts the moment of building a theory is generally considered as a moment in which an art achieves major appraisal. Therefore it is wrong to analyse phrases in which Vasari seems to evaluate printmaking or collocate it within the hierarchy of arts. The fact that Vasari creates a theory of printmaking gives the proof that he perceived the importance of printmaking for the arts. This is also notable in his narrative techniques. His method of reporting on printmaking in general shadows the methodological approach in the *Vite*. He creates here, as in the whole book, a line of development according to his general belief in the progression of the arts by building his anecdotes about arts and artists into a chain of cause and effect. But what is most important is that Vasari includes variations and differentiations in his anecdotes, which does not allow for a general valuation of printmaking. Above all, Vasari gives beholders and scholars instruments for a critical view of prints and this is what he finally declares in the last sentence of the *Life of Marcantonio*: '(...) I have thought it right to give this long but necessary account, in order to satisfy not only the scholars of our arts, but also all those who delight in works of that kind'. (222)⁷⁶

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⁷⁵ See Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti. Dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572 in fino a' tempi di Papa urbano Ottavo nel 1642*, Rom 1642, 387-400.

⁷⁶ Getscher and De Vere wrongly translate 'studiosi' as students, which is indeed 'scholars'. Compare De Vere, *Lives*, vol. 6, 120.

'(...) ho voluto fare questo lungo sì, ma necessario discorso, per sodisfare non solo agli studiosi delle nostre arti, ma tutti coloro ancora che di così fatte opere si diletmano.' Bettarini/Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari. Le Vite*, vol. 5, 25.

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Disegno versus Disegno stampato: ...

printmaking in the Renaissance. The article presents some of the results of this project.

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