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## Ars Naturae Imitatio: Stoa, Plotinus, Augustine

Omnis ars naturae imitatio est.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike our contemporary understanding, which expects art to produce new and surprising things or, at least, to show things in a new way, antiquity knew of a concept according to which human art is an “imitation”. It could have been used in the depreciating sense of a fruitless reproduction as in Plato,<sup>2</sup> or in a more favourable sense, as given to this wording by Aristotle: “In general, moreover, art completes what nature is unable to carry to a finish; or art imitates nature.”<sup>3</sup>

In late antiquity, too, art was the imitation of nature, e.g. for Philo of Alexandria or Seneca, who both drew from Stoic and Platonic sources. While the former author understands this sentence in a rather positive way,<sup>4</sup> the other gives a clearly negative meaning to it; nature is self-sufficient in Seneca’s eyes, and everything artificial seems superfluous.<sup>5</sup>

In both the classical and post-classical periods, the idea of art as the imitation of nature may thus cover very different concepts.<sup>6</sup> In a necessary abbreviation, I will present three late ancient variants of this idea, focusing on the question of what art imitates in each of them.

<sup>1</sup> SENECA: *Ep.* 65,3.

<sup>2</sup> PLATO: *Resp.* X, 600e–602c. See BEIERWALTES, Werner: *Plotins Theorie des Schönen und der Kunst*, in: KARFÍK, Filip/SONG, Euree (eds.): *Plato Revived. Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O’Meara*. Berlin: De Gruyter 2013, 3–26, here 17f.

<sup>3</sup> ARISTOTLE: *Phys.* 199a15–17: ὅλως δὲ ἡ τέχνη τὰ μὲν ἐπιτελεῖ ἃ ἡ φύσις ἀδυνατεῖ ἀπεργάσασθαι, τὰ δὲ μιμεῖται. English translation by HOPE, Richard: Aristotle, *Physics*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press 1961, 37. See SCHWEITZER, Bernhard: *Der bildende Künstler und der Begriff des Künstlerischen in der Antike*, in: *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, N.F. (1925), 28–132, here 76–80; BLUMENBERG, Hans: „Nachahmung der Natur“. *Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen*, in: *Studium generale* 10 (1957), 266–283, here 273–275; BEIERWALTES: *Plotins Theorie*, 18f.

<sup>4</sup> PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA: *De ebr.* 90 (COHN, Leopoldus/WENDLAND, Paulus [eds.]: *Philonis Alexandrini Opera II*. Berlin: Reimer 1897, reprinted De Gruyter 1962, 187,5f.): ... ἡ τελεία τέχνη, μίμημα καὶ ἀπεικόνισμα φύσεως οὐσα ... See SCHWEITZER: *Der bildende Künstler*, 89f.

<sup>5</sup> See above, note 1; further, e.g. *Ep.* 90,16: *Non desiderabis artifices: sequere naturam.* *Ep.* 90,19: *Sufficit ad id natura quod poscit.* See BLUMENBERG: „Nachahmung der Natur“, 275.

<sup>6</sup> On the history of this idea, see BLUMENBERG: „Nachahmung der Natur“.

## STOA: NATURE AS AN ARTEFACT AND NATURE THE ARTIST

In his presentation of Stoic doctrines in the second book of *De natura deorum*, Cicero emphasises the perfect cosmic whole, which, being ruled by flawless cosmic reason, is not only ideally useful but, at the same time, perfectly beautiful. According to Zeno of Citium, the founder of the Stoic school, nature is a faultless product of the cosmic fire which works with artistic skill (*ignis artificiosus*), i.e. aims, with a certain method, at bearing or producing new things (*ad gignendum progrediens via*).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the cosmic fire is the teacher (*magister*) of human arts, as our hands, under its guidance, make the same as nature does, just less perfectly.<sup>8</sup>

In all its parts, nature can thus be called an ingenious artefact or even working skilfully (*artificiosa*), as it follows a “way” or a rational proceeding.<sup>9</sup> As a whole, the cosmos, which encompasses and coordinates everything, is not only an artefact but actually an artist (*artifex*), as, with an intentional and free motion, it overall produces usefulness and convenience (*utilitates oportunitatesque*) and, at the same time, durability, completeness, distinguished beauty, and perfect order (*eximia pulchritudo atque omnis ornatus*).<sup>10</sup>

In their exposition, neither Zeno nor Cicero is especially interested in human art; what they wish to show is rather the soulfulness of the world, which is ruled by a cosmic mind (*mens mundi*).<sup>11</sup> This is not only the case for the world of stars, with its perfect motions,<sup>12</sup> but also for the sublunar realm, where nature holds the world in a balanced harmony according to a

<sup>7</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,22,57: *Zeno igitur naturam ita definit ut eam dicat ignem esse artificiosum ad gignendum progredientem via. Censet enim artis maxime proprium esse creare et gignere.* Cf. DIOGENES LAERTIUS: *Vitae* VII,156,5f. (Long): ... τὴν μὲν φύσιν εἶναι πῦρ τεχνικόν, ὁδῶ βαδίζον εἰς γένεσιν (= SVF I,171).

<sup>8</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,22,57: *Quodque in operibus nostrarum artium manus efficiat id multo artificiosius naturam efficere, id est ut dixi ignem artificiosum magistrum artium reliquarum.*

<sup>9</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,22,57: *Atque hac quidem ratione omnis natura artificiosa est, quod habet quasi viam quandam et sectam quam sequatur.*

<sup>10</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,22,58: *Ipsius vero mundi, qui omnia complexu suo coercet et continet, natura non artificiosa solum sed plane artifex ab eodem Zenone dicitur, consultrix et provida utilitatum oportunitatumque omnium. Atque ut ceterae naturae suis seminibus quaeque gignuntur auferuntur continentur, sic natura mundi omnis motus habet voluntarios, conatusque et adpetitiones, quas ὁρμάς Graeci vocant, et is consentaneas actiones sic adhibet ut nosmet ipsi qui animis movemur et sensibus. Talis igitur mens mundi cum sit ob eamque causam vel prudentia vel providentia appellari recte possit (Graece enim πρόνοια dicitur), haec potissimum providet et in is maxime est occupata, primum ut mundus quam aptissimus sit ad permanendum, deinde ut nulla re egeat, maxime autem ut in eo eximia pulchritudo sit atque omnis ornatus.*

<sup>11</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,22,58, quoted in the previous note.

<sup>12</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,21,54–56.

precise order and with artistic skill (*artis quaedam similitudo*).<sup>13</sup> If even human art is based on intentions and plans, then the case is much more so for the perfect work of nature.<sup>14</sup> No artist could ever imitate the precise and faultless perfection with which nature gives rise to the individual entities from their germs<sup>15</sup> or elaborates, with full details, the sensory organs,<sup>16</sup> etc.

The world as a whole thus follows a certain purpose; it is organised for everything to be kept in its own use and beauty.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the world is made for rational beings, gods and humans, to be able not only to use it but also deliberately enjoy it.<sup>18</sup>

Human art is presented as an ingenious gift of nature; it is thanks to the deftness of their hands that humans are capable of artistic production: painting, cutwork, or the fabrication of musical instruments for their own delight.<sup>19</sup> According to some Stoic authors, the ability of speech, too, depends on the work of human hands, as words can be captured by writing and, especially, because it is the deftness of human hands which frees the mouth from preparing the necessary food (as is the case with other animals) to be able to articulate the voice into words.<sup>20</sup>

Art is thus a rational, purposive production of useful, durable, and beautiful works which bring utility and delight. An artist is someone who is not only capable of performing this goal but especially of planning it as a whole. Therefore nature, in its care for the cosmic whole, is an artist, not just an artefact. Human beings are able to imitate this proceeding thanks to their part in rationality and the skilfulness of their hands.

Art is to be understood in the broad sense of craftwork and technology oriented to the usefulness of its products: "Every art (*τέχνη*) is a system of apprehensions organized together and making reference to an end useful in life," as Zeno puts it, according to Sextus Empiricus and other ancient

<sup>13</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,32,82. See the entire passage II,32,81–34,87.

<sup>14</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,34,87: *Si igitur meliora sunt ea quae natura quam illa quae arte perfecta sunt, nec ars efficit quicquam sine ratione, ne natura quidem rationis expers est habenda.*

<sup>15</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,32,81: *... cuius sollertiam nulla ars nulla manus nemo opifex consequi possit imitando.*

<sup>16</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,57,142.

<sup>17</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,53,132: *Sic undique omni ratione concluditur mente consilioque divino omnia in hoc mundo ad salutem omnium conservationemque admirabiliter administrari.*

<sup>18</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,53,133; II,61,154–62,154.

<sup>19</sup> CICERO: *De nat. deor.* II,60,150: *Quam vero aptas quamque multarum artium ministras manus natura homini dedit. Digitorum enim contractio facilis facilisque porrectio propter molles commissuras et artus nullo in motu laborat. Itaque ad pingendum fingendum, ad scalpendum, ad nervorum eliciendos sonos ad tiliarum apta manus est admotione digitorum. Atque haec oblectationis...*

<sup>20</sup> GREGORY OF NYSSA: *De hom. opif.* 8 (PG 44, 144bc; 148d–149a). On the presupposed Stoic inspiration of these ideas, see GROSS, Karl: *Lob der Hand im klassischen und christlichen Altertum*, in: *Gymnasium* 83 (1976), 423–440, here 435f.

testimonies.<sup>21</sup> Beauty, based, for Stoic philosophers, particularly in the symmetry of parts among themselves and in their relation to the whole,<sup>22</sup> seems to be rather an added value or a side effect of perfect functioning. However, in another place, Cicero also mentions art as being, in its rationality, a goal in itself, as nature, too, produces things which do not pursue “any use but are just a decoration” (*nullam ob utilitatem quasi ad quendam ornatum*), such as a peacock’s tail or a gentleman’s beard.<sup>23</sup> Even as a goal in itself, art is the imitation of nature, which, to the perfect functioning, adds beauty, sometimes even a useless one.

To our question, we thus get a clear answer from Zeno according to Cicero’s presentation: human art learns from nature in its rational and purposive production of a useful and beautiful whole. It does not imitate nature as an artefact (*natura naturata* in the medieval terminology) in the first place, but rather nature the artist (*natura naturans*).<sup>24</sup>

#### PLOTINUS: PRODUCTION AND CONTEMPLATION

In his treatise “Against the Gnostics” (*Enn.* II,9[33]), Plotinus too, defends the usefulness and beauty of the cosmic whole, which (as in Plato’s *Timaeus*) is an image of the intelligible cosmos,<sup>25</sup> its imitation (τὸ μίμημα),<sup>26</sup> and a “beautiful visible statue of the intelligible gods”.<sup>27</sup>

However, the world did not come into being thanks to deliberation and artistic skill (οὐκ ἐκ διανοίας καὶ ἐπιτεχνήσεως)<sup>28</sup> as do works of art, but,

<sup>21</sup> SEXTUS EMPIRICUS: *Adv. math.* II,10,1–3: Πᾶσα τοίνυν τέχνη σύστημά ἐστιν ἐκ καταλήψεων συγγεγυμνασμένων καὶ ἐπὶ τέλος εὐχρηστον τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ λαμβανουσῶν τὴν ἀναφορὰν. English translation by BETT, Richard: *Sextus Empiricus, Against Those in the Disciplines*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018, 130 (modified). See also SVF I, 73; II, 93–95. On the development of the notion of τέχνη from the classical to the Hellenistic and imperial periods, see SCHWEITZER: *Der bildende Künstler* (on Stoicism, 96–114).

<sup>22</sup> Chrysippus, according to GALEN: *Plac.* V,3,14,3f.; 15,6f.;17,1; 22,1–4; STOBÆUS: *Ant.* II,7,5b4,12–16 (= SVF III, 278): “Ὡσπερ τε τὸ κάλλος τοῦ σώματός ἐστι συμμετρία τῶν μελῶν καθεστώτων αὐτῶ πρὸς ἄλληλά τε καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον, οὕτω καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κάλλος ἐστὶ συμμετρία τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῶν μερῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς <τὸ> ὅλον τε αὐτῆς καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα.

<sup>23</sup> CICERO: *De fin.* III,5,18: *artis etiam ipsas propter se adsumendas putamus, cum quia sit in iis aliquid dignum adsumptione, tum quod constant ex cognitionibus et contineant quiddam in se ratione constitutum et via. a falsa autem adensione magis nos alienatos esse quam a ceteris rebus, quae sint contra naturam, arbitrantur. iam membrorum, id est partium corporis, alia videntur propter eorum usum a natura esse donata, ut manus, crura, pedes, ut ea, quae sunt intus in corpore, quorum utilitas quanta sit a medicis etiam disputatur, alia autem nullam ob utilitatem quasi ad quendam ornatum, ut cauda pavoni, plumae versicolores columbis, viris mammae atque barba.*

<sup>24</sup> BLUMENBERG: „*Nachahmung der Natur*“, 266.

<sup>25</sup> PLOTINUS: *Enn.* II,9(33),4,25f. Cf. PLATO: *Tim.* 92c5–9.

<sup>26</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),8,21.

<sup>27</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),8,15f.: ... ἄγαλμα ἐναργὲς καὶ καλὸν τῶν νοητῶν θεῶν.

<sup>28</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),8,20f.

in its beauty, it is a “natural image” (καλὴν εἰκόνα φυσικήν) of the intelligible world.<sup>29</sup> It would thus be ridiculous to compare the world with the sculptor’s artefacts, as it is not based on deliberation but on a natural productive power.<sup>30</sup> The soul which produces it imitates what it has seen and continues to see in the intelligible world.<sup>31</sup> By so doing, it grants participation in beauty to its product, as far as the bodily nature is capable of receiving it.<sup>32</sup>

The beauty of the world, as well as the beauty of art, thus makes visible its intelligible archetype and it fascinates the soul,<sup>33</sup> as seeing it, the soul recognises its own divine origin,<sup>34</sup> its intelligible home.<sup>35</sup> The soul ravished by beauty rarely realises the reason for its fascination, just as a loving soul normally does not know what it loves in the beloved (namely, according to the Platonic tradition, his or her intelligible archetype).<sup>36</sup>

The productivity of nature is analysed in greater detail in Plotinus’ treatise “On Nature and Contemplation and the One” (*Enn.* III,8[30]). Here, he explains that nature, as a certain (lower) kind of soul,<sup>37</sup> longs for contemplation and therefore it produces beings in which it could openly see the structures that lie hidden in itself. Nature is born from the (world-) soul which contemplates the forms of the divine Intellect. As a heritage of its mother, nature has reflections of these forms in it but it cannot see them otherwise than by producing them in matter and, in so doing, to observe them in silent contemplation.<sup>38</sup> In its very essence, nature is thus produc-

<sup>29</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),8,19.

<sup>30</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),4,13–17: Γελοῖον γὰρ τὸ ἵνα τιμῶτο, καὶ μεταφερόντων ἀπὸ τῶν ἀγαματοποιῶν τῶν ἐνταῦθα. Ἐπεὶ καὶ εἰ διανοία ἐποίει καὶ μὴ ἐν τῇ φύσει ἦν τὸ ποιεῖν καὶ ἡ δύναμις ἢ ποιούσα ἦν, πῶς ἂν κόσμον τόνδε ἐποίησε;

<sup>31</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),4,8f.: Πόθεν γὰρ ποιεῖ ἢ ἐξ ὧν εἶδεν ἐκεῖ;

<sup>32</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),17,18–21: ... τοσοῦτῳ διδόντας τῇ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχῇ δυνάμεως, ὅσῳ τὴν σώματος φύσιν οὐ καλὴν οὖσαν ἐποίησεν, ὅσον ἦν αὐτῇ καλλύνεσθαι, μετέχειν κάλλους.

<sup>33</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),16,39–56: Τίς γὰρ ἂν μουσικὸς ἀνὴρ εἴη, ὃς τὴν ἐν νοητῷ ἀρμονίαν ἰδὼν οὐ κινήσεται τῆς ἐν φθόγγοις αἰσθητοῖς ἀκούων; Ἡ τίς γεωμετρίας καὶ ἀριθμῶν ἔμπειρος, ὃς τὸ σύμμετρον καὶ ἀνάλογον καὶ τεταγμένον ἰδὼν δι’ ὀμμάτων οὐχ ἡσθήσεται; Εἶπερ οὐχ ὁμοίως τὰ αὐτὰ βλέπουσιν οὐδ’ ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς οἱ δι’ ὀμμάτων τὰ τῆς τέχνης βλέποντες, ἀλλ’ ἐπιγινώσκοντες μίμημα ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ τοῦ ἐν νοήσει κειμένου οἷον θορυβοῦνται καὶ εἰς ἀνάμνησιν ἔρχονται τοῦ ἀληθοῦς· ἐξ οὗ δὴ πάθους καὶ κινεῖν οἱ ἔρωτες. Ἄλλ’ ὁ μὲν ἰδὼν κάλλος ἐν προσώπῳ εὖ μεμιμημένον φέρεται ἐκεῖ, ἀργὸς δὲ τίς οὕτως ἔσται τὴν γνώμην καὶ εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο κινήσεται, ὥστε ὁρῶν σύμπαντα μὲν τὰ ἐν αἰσθητῷ κάλλη, σύμπασαν δὲ συμμετρίαν καὶ τὴν μεγάλην εὐταξίαν ταύτην καὶ τὸ ἐμφαινόμενον ἐν τοῖς ἄστροις εἶδος καὶ πόρρωθεν οὖσιν οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν ἐνθυμεῖται, καὶ σέβας αὐτὸν λαμβάνει, οἷα ἀφ’ οἶων;

<sup>34</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),17,21: ὁ καὶ αὐτὸ τὰς ψυχὰς θείας οὖσας κινεῖ. On beauty as the starting point on the way to the intelligible realm, see PLATO: *Phdr.* 250c–251c.

<sup>35</sup> *Enn.* I,6(1),8,16.21.

<sup>36</sup> *Enn.* V,8(31),8,11–15. See also PLATO: *Phdr.* 250a7f., quoted by Plotinus.

<sup>37</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),4,15f.: ... ἡ μὲν λεγομένη φύσις ψυχὴ οὖσα ...

<sup>38</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),4,5–14: Ὅτι τὸ γενόμενόν ἐστι θέαμα ἐμὸν σιωπῶσης, καὶ φύσει γενόμενον θεώρημα, καὶ μοι γενομένη ἐκ θεωρίας τῆς ὠδὶ τὴν φύσιν ἔχειν φιλοθεάμονα ὑπάρχειν. Καὶ τὸ θεωροῦν μου θεώρημα ποιεῖ, ὥσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι θεωροῦντες γράφουσιν· ἀλλ’ ἐμοῦ μὴ

tion (τὸ ποιεῖν) and it only contemplates itself in its works.<sup>39</sup> Nature produces structures, previously hidden in itself<sup>40</sup> as the last reflection of the forms which its mother, i.e. the upper part of the soul, contemplates in the Intellect while it remains in the intelligible world.<sup>41</sup> Nature thus needs production to be able to know itself.

Like the production of nature, human production, too, is a longing for contemplation in Plotinus' eyes. It also wishes to see its own product and to show it to others.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, successful production is born from contemplation, it is an accompanying effect (παρακολούθημα) of contemplation, and it thus enables something greater than its creator himself to be seen.<sup>43</sup> Only a bad creator produces ugly things,<sup>44</sup> as he does not follow what he sees in contemplation (ἐκ τοῦ θεωρητοῦ παραφορᾶ).<sup>45</sup>

The visual metaphor of seeing does not necessarily mean that Plotinus only has the visual arts in his mind; in some passages, he also mentions music, which captures the intelligible structure in the sensory medium of sound.<sup>46</sup>

In his early treatise "On Intellect, the Forms, and Being" (*Enn.* V,9[5]) too, Plotinus compares the soul which produces the cosmos with the human artist and presupposes that both of them create according to the structures (λόγοι) originating from the Intellect.<sup>47</sup> Both of them shape matter with a form<sup>48</sup> and by so doing they provide their products with a share in beauty, which, by forming activity on a higher ontological level, is always mediated to a lower one: by the soul to matter, by the Intellect to

γραφούσης, θεωρούσης δέ, ὑφίστανται αἱ τῶν σωμάτων γραμμαὶ ὥσπερ ἐκπίπτουσαι. Καί μοι τὸ τῆς μητρὸς καὶ τῶν γειναμένων ὑπάρχει πάθος· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοί εἰσιν ἐκ θεωρίας καὶ ἡ γένεσις ἢ ἐμὴ ἐκείνων οὐδὲν πραξάντων, ἀλλ' ὄντων μειζόνων λόγων καὶ θεωρούντων αὐτοὺς ἐγὼ γεγέννημαι.

<sup>39</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),3,17f.: Τὸ οὖν εἶναι αὐτῆ ὅ ἐστι τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτῆ καὶ ὅσον ἐστὶ τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ ποιοῦν.

<sup>40</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),2,28–34.

<sup>41</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),5,9–14.

<sup>42</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),4,36–39: Ὅταν γοῦν ποιῶσι, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὄρᾶν βούλονται αὐτὸ καὶ θεωρεῖν καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, ὅταν ἢ πρόθεσις αὐτοῖς ὡς οἶόν τε πράξις ᾗ.

<sup>43</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),4,41–43: ... παρακολούθημα δέ, εἰ ἔχοι ἄλλο πρὸ τούτου κρεῖττον τοῦ ποιηθέντος θεωρεῖν. On production based in contemplation, see ARNOU, René: *Πρᾶξις et θεωρία: Étude de détail sur le vocabulaire et la pensée des Ennéades de Plotin*. Paris: Alcan 1921.

<sup>44</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),7,25f.: ὁ γε κακὸς τεχνίτης ἔοικεν αἰσχροῦ εἶδη ποιοῦντι.

<sup>45</sup> *Enn.* III,8(30),7,24f.

<sup>46</sup> *Enn.* I,3(20),1,28–33; V,8(31),1,31f.; II,9(33),16,39–41 (quoted above, note 33); III,2(47),16,41–45. See DE KEYSER, Eugénie: *La signification de l'art dans les Ennéades de Plotin*. Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université 1955, 26f.; 69–78.

<sup>47</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),3,29–32: ψυχὴν δὲ αὖ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς τέτρασι τὴν κόσμου μορφήν δοῦναι· ταύτη δὲ νοῦν χορηγὸν τῶν λόγων γεγονέναι, ὥσπερ καὶ ταῖς τῶν τεχνιτῶν ψυχαῖς παρὰ τῶν τεχνῶν τοὺς εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν λόγους.

<sup>48</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),3,9–20. On beauty in art originating from the form, see also *Enn.* V,8(31),1,6–16.

the soul, by the Good to the multiplicity of the Intellect.<sup>49</sup> The Intellect, for its part, is present to the soul in a double way: as its form and as a structure which enables the forming,<sup>50</sup> i.e. the mediation, as their images, of ideas from the Intellect to matter.

Human artistic production seems to correspond to the second kind of share in the Intellect. In their symmetry, harmony, and rhythm, the “imitative arts” (τέχναι μιμητικάι), reproduce perceptible things as their model, but at the same time, they follow the art of their human creator in his rationality (λόγος ἀνθρώπου).<sup>51</sup> As a human work, art is included in the idea of a human being, and is thus part of the Intellect.<sup>52</sup> What is more, in imitating perceptible things, art does not follow these things alone but also the structures of symmetry, harmony, and rhythm in the intelligible realm, from where the perceptible things themselves are derived.<sup>53</sup>

Plotinus certainly presents art as the “imitation of nature”. What he has in mind is not only the reproduction of the visible works of nature,<sup>54</sup> but especially the imitation of its creative referring to the structures of the Intellect. In so doing, art is even able to improve on nature, as in Aristotle. As Plotinus puts it in his treatise “On the Intelligible Beauty” (*Enn.* V,8 [31]):

“But if anyone despises the arts because they produce their works by imitating nature, we must tell him, first, that natural things are imitation too. Then he must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see, but they run back up to the forming principles (λόγοι) from which nature derives; then also that they do a great deal by themselves, and, since they possess beauty, they make up what is defective in things. For Pheidias too did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses, but understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible.”<sup>55</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),2,16–27.

<sup>50</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),3,33f.: νοῦν δὲ τὸν μὲν ὡς εἶδος τῆς ψυχῆς, τὸν κατὰ τὴν μορφήν, τὸν δὲ τὸν τὴν μορφήν παρέχοντα.

<sup>51</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),11,1–6. On the part played by human art in the beauty of the artefact, see also *Enn.* V,8(31),1,11–15; 2,15,14–16.

<sup>52</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),12,1f.: Εἰ δὲ ἀνθρώπου ἐκεῖ καὶ λογικοῦ ἐκεῖ καὶ τεχνικοῦ καὶ αἱ τέχναι νοῦ γεννήματα οὔσαι. V,9(5),14,18f.: Περὶ δὲ τῶν τεχνῶν, ὅτι ἐν αὐτοανθρώπῳ περιέχονται, ὅσαι τέχναι ἀναφέρονται πρὸς τὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἀνθρώπῳ.

<sup>53</sup> *Enn.* V,9(5),11,7–10. On Plotinus’ concept of beauty as symmetry which is based on intelligible symmetry, not only the symmetry of parts, see BEIERWALTES: *Plotins Theorie*, 9–12. On his critique of the Stoic notion of beauty as the symmetry of parts, see *Enn.* I,6(1),20–25; cf. SCHMITT, Arbogast: *Symmetrie und Schönheit. Plotins Kritik an hellenistischen Proportionslehren und ihre unterschiedliche Wirkungsgeschichte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, in: OLEJNICZAK LOBSIEN, Verena/OLK, Claudia (eds.): *Neuplatonismus und Ästhetik. Zur Transformationsgeschichte des Schönen*. Berlin: De Gruyter 2007, 59–84, here 59–63 and 75.

<sup>54</sup> *Enn.* V,8(31),3,1f.

<sup>55</sup> *Enn.* V,8(31),1,32–40: Εἰ δὲ τις τὰς τέχνας ἀτιμάζει, ὅτι μιμούμεναι τὴν φύσιν ποιοῦσι, πρῶτον μὲν φατέον καὶ τὰς φύσεις μιμεῖσθαι ἄλλα. Ἐπειτα δεῖ εἶδέναι, ὡς οὐχ ἀπλῶς τὸ ὁρώμενον μιμοῦνται, ἀλλ’ ἀνατρέχουσιν ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους, ἐξ ὧν ἡ φύσις. Εἶτα καὶ ὅτι πολλὰ



Unlike Plato, Plotinus does not seem to understand artistic creation as a mere imitation of imitable things, but as an expression of something which, in itself, cannot be captured.<sup>56</sup> (In the same vein, Cicero says that the works of Pheidias do not imitate perceptible models but the idea of beauty itself.<sup>57</sup>) When it comes to reproduction through copying, Plotinus does not show more admiration than does Plato; he sees it as derivative imitation, which produces works that are the less valuable the more laborious they are.<sup>58</sup> However, art can also cope with nature if it leaves deliberative laboriousness behind and creates according to the same “wisdom” which inspires nature, namely that which, in multiplicity, is able to see unity.<sup>59</sup> Like nature, art too, is directed to a living unity: “The most beautiful statues are the most living, although others may have more symmetry,” states Plotinus in the treatise “How the Multitude of the Forms Came into Being, and on the Good” (*Enn.* VI,7[38]).<sup>60</sup>

As for the Stoics, for Plotinus too, art does not imitate only the artefact of nature but, above all, nature the artist. What is more, Plotinus probably would not say that human art imitates nature in its silent contemplation of its works produced thanks to its hidden structures. Rather, human art, enclosed in the idea of a rational human being, imitates, in a deliberative

παρ' αὐτῶν ποιούσι καὶ προστιθέασι δέ, ὅτῳ τι ἐλλείπει, ὡς ἔχουσαι τὸ κάλλος. Ἐπεὶ καὶ ὁ Φειδίας τὸν Δία πρὸς οὐδὲν αἰσθητὸν ποιήσας, ἀλλὰ λαβὼν οἶος ἂν γένοιτο, εἰ ἡμῖν ὁ Ζεὺς δι' ὀμμάτων ἐθέλοι φανῆναι. English translation by ARMSTRONG, Arthur Hilary: *Plotinus in Seven Volumes*, vol. V. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1984, 239–241. See BEIERWALTES, Werner: „Das Schöne ist der Glanz des Wahren.“ *Über klassische Paradigmen der Schönheit: Plotin – Augustinus – Schelling*, in: MAYER, Cornelius/MÜLLER, Christof/FÖRSTER, Guntram (eds.): *Das Schöne in Theologie, Philosophie und Musik. Beiträge des IX. Würzburger Augustinus-Studentages vom 16./17. Juni 2011* (= Cassiciacum 39,10; Res et signa 10). Würzburg: Augustinus bei echter 2013, 25–36.

<sup>56</sup> HALFWASSEN, Jens: *Schönheit und Bild im Neuplatonismus*, in: OLEJNICZAK LOBSIEN/OLK (eds.): *Neuplatonismus und Ästhetik*, 43–57, here 50–54.

<sup>57</sup> CICERO: *Orator* 2,9 (ed. REIS, Peter: M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia, fasc. 5. Leipzig: Teubner 1971, 3,17–22): ... *nec vero ille artifex [i.e. Phidias] cum faceret Iovis formam aut Minervae, contemplantur aliquem e quo similitudinem duceret, sed ipsius in mente insidebat species pulchritudinis eximia quaedam, quam intuens in eaque defixus ad illius similitudinem artem et manum dirigebat*. See SCHWEITZER: *Der bildende Künstler*, 105f.; DE KEYSER: *La signification de l'art*, 30f. The admiration for Pheidias' Zeus, very probably not ever seen by Plotinus, seems to be rather a literary *topos*; see IOZZIA, Daniele: *Aesthetic Themes in Pagan and Christian Neoplatonism: From Plotinus to Gregory of Nyssa*. London: Bloomsbury Academic 2015, 16f.

<sup>58</sup> *Enn.* IV,3(27),10,17–19: Τέχνη γὰρ ὑστέρᾳ αὐτῆς καὶ μιμεῖται ἀμυδρὰ καὶ ἀσθενῆ ποιούσα μιμήματα, παίγνια ἄττα καὶ οὐ πολλοῦ ἄξια, μηχαναῖς πολλαῖς εἰς εἶδωλον φύσεως προσχρωμένη. On this passage, see BEIERWALTES: *Plotinus Theorie*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> *Enn.* V,8(31),5,4–8: Ἄλλ' ὁ τεχνίτης πάλιν αὖ εἰς σοφίαν φυσικὴν ἔρχεται, καθ' ἣν γεγένηται, οὐκέτι συντεθεῖσαν ἐκ θεωρημάτων, ἀλλ' ὅλην ἐν τι, οὐ τὴν συγκεκριμένην ἐκ πολλῶν εἰς ἓν, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἀναλυομένην εἰς πλῆθος ἐξ ἐνός. According to Halfwassen (*Schönheit*, 53), nature and art are, in their production, “gleichursprünglich”.

<sup>60</sup> *Enn.* VI,7(38),22,29–31: Καὶ τῶν ἀγαλμάτων δὲ τὰ ζωτικώτερα καλλίω, κἄν συμμετρότερα τὰ ἕτερα ἤ; See DE KEYSER: *La signification de l'art*, 109–111.

way, the life of the Intellect, from which nature derives these structures in a mediated way. The deliberative character seems to handicap human art compared to nature, which creates naturally;<sup>61</sup> but on the other hand, it enables a rational view of the structures of the Intellect, which nature is not capable of.<sup>62</sup> The privileged artefact emphasised by Plotinus in both his thematic treatises, “On Beauty” and “On the Intelligible Beauty”, is the human soul itself, which, in its own beauty, can best catch sight of its intelligible archetype.<sup>63</sup>

#### AUGUSTINE: AEQUALITAS NUMEROSA

Like the Stoics and Plotinus, Augustine admires the world as a perfect artefact and highlights its anagogic function, as the world refers to its creator. In his epic of human history *The City of God*, Augustine even tries to enclose its dark features into the beauty of the world. The world is like a ravishing picture where even the colour black finds its place,<sup>64</sup> or like a beautiful song in which the dark tones sound in harmony.<sup>65</sup> The defeated bird in cockfighting or the solecisms and barbarism in poetry are certainly not beautiful in themselves; nevertheless, they can contribute to the beauty of the whole they are enclosed into. So believes Augustine from his youth in order to cope with the dualism of the Manicheans.<sup>66</sup>

Human art certainly imitates this cosmic artefact in its individual parts, e.g. music reproduces the voices of birds; it is, however (like in Plotinus), a rational imitation.<sup>67</sup> That is why the poets, in a “reasonable lie” (*rationabili mendacio*), narrate the Muses as being the daughters of Jupiter and Memory, because their art originates in both reason and imitation, as Augustine puts it in the dialogue “On Order”.<sup>68</sup> When artists imitate the works of na-

<sup>61</sup> *Enn.* II,9(33),4,13–17; 8,19; IV,3(27),10,17–19.

<sup>62</sup> *Enn.* V,8(31),3,1–3: Ἔστιν οὖν καὶ ἐν τῇ φύσει λόγος κάλλους ἀρχέτυπος τοῦ ἐν σώματι, τοῦ δ' ἐν τῇ φύσει ὁ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καλλίων, παρ' οὗ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῇ φύσει.

<sup>63</sup> *Enn.* I,6(1),8,21; V,8(31),11,20–22. In this ethical element, Plotinus comes close to the Stoics, although his concept of beauty is different from theirs; see KRAKOWSKI, Edouard: *L'esthétique de Plotin et son influence: Une philosophie de l'amour et de la beauté*. Paris: Boccard 1929, 179–184. Plotinus' impact on the Christian authors is emphasised by IOZZIA: *Aesthetic Themes*, 39–55.

<sup>64</sup> *De civ. Dei* XI,23; *De vera rel.* 40,76.

<sup>65</sup> *De civ. Dei* XI,18; *Ep.* 138,1,5.

<sup>66</sup> *De ord.* II,4,12–13. On Augustine's aesthetic reflexions on evil and the punishment for it in the order of the universe, see BOUTON-TOUBOULIC, Anne-Isabelle: *L'ordre caché. La notion d'ordre chez saint Augustin*. Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes 2004, 332–335; 442–445.

<sup>67</sup> *De mus.* I,4,6 (CSEL 102, 74f.). PIZZANI, Ubaldo: *Il primo libro*, in: Idem/MILANESE, Guido (eds.): *“De musica” di Agostino d'Ippona*. Palermo: Augustinus 1990, 13–39, here 27–30; KELLER, Adalbert: *Aurelius Augustinus und die Musik. Untersuchungen zu “De musica” im Kontext seines Schrifttums (= Cassiciacum 44)*. Würzburg: Augustinus 1993, 80f.

<sup>68</sup> *De ord.* II,14,41 (BA 4/2, 286–288); similarly *De doct. christ.* II,17,27 (CCL 32, 52).

ture, then they actually follow the art of the supreme Artist, namely the creator of the world.<sup>69</sup>

Like his predecessors, Augustine, as we can see, does not content himself with the idea of art which merely reproduces the artefact of the world. Human art rather imitates the structures of the world, which are present in the artist's soul too. The correspondence of the cosmic structures with those in the soul provokes a delight which is one of the effects of art.

This idea, repeated many times in Augustine's work, comes close to Plotinus,<sup>70</sup> but Augustine especially emphasises two motifs, namely numerical order as a connection between the world, the soul, and the work of art, and the idea of God as the Artist who creates the world by his will (*quia voluit*).<sup>71</sup>

The numerical cosmic order is an idea that is far from being unknown to Plotinus; we find it in particular in his treatise "On Numbers" (*Enn.* VI,6[34]).<sup>72</sup> Besides this treatise, Augustine could have met it in neo-Pythagorean philosophy,<sup>73</sup> probably mediated to him by Varro. He also combined it with the words of the biblical book of Wisdom 11:21, "You have set all things by measure, number and order,"<sup>74</sup> and Ecclesiastes 7:26 (LXX),

<sup>69</sup> *De div. quaest.* LXXXIII, 78 (CCL 44A, 223f.).

<sup>70</sup> On the similarities between Plotinus and Augustine in their concepts of beauty and artistic production, see KRAKOWSKI: *L'esthétique*, 187–208; BEIERWALTES, Werner: *Aequalitas numerosa. Zu Augustins Begriff des Schönen*, in: *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 38 (1975), 140–157, here 145; 155f.

<sup>71</sup> *De Gen. Manich.* I,2,4 (CSEL 91, 71). On this topic in scholasticism, see BLUMENBERG: „*Nachahmung der Natur*“, 277–280.

<sup>72</sup> *Enn.* VI,6(34), especially 9,23–42; 15,24–42; 16,37–54; 18,11–26. See also *Enn.* I,6(1),3,31–33. On the role of mathematics in art according to Plotinus, see DE KEYSER: *La signification de l'art*, 71–75; SCHMITT: *Symmetrie*, 76–81; cf. ARISTOTLE: *Metaph.* XIII,3, 1078a36–b2.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. NICOMACHUS OF GERASA: *Introd. arithm.* I,4,2, ed. Richard Hoche. Leipzig: Teubner 1866, 9). See SOLIGNAC, Aimé: *Doxographies et manuels dans la formation philosophique de saint Augustin*, in: *RechAug* 1 (1958), 113–148, here 129–137; MADEC, Goulven: *Sagesse, art de Dieu (note complémentaire 15)*, in: *BA* 6 (= *Dialogues philosophiques*). Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1976, 568. On the early Augustine's respect for Pythagorean philosophy, which he commends as *venerabilis ac prope divina*, see *De ord.* II,20,53 (CCL 29, 136,21–23).

<sup>74</sup> Wis. 11:20 (LXX): πάντα μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ καὶ σταθμῷ διέταξας. 11,21 (V): *omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti*. In this line, Augustine sometimes replaces *pondus* with *ordo*; see *De Gen. Man.* I,16,26 (CSEL 91, 93,30–94,31); *De lib. arb.* II,20,54,203 (CCL 29, 273). On Augustine's usage of this biblical line, see LA BONNARDIÈRE, Anne-Marie: *Biblia Augustiniana, A.T.: Le Livre de la Sagesse*. Paris: Études augustiniennes 1970, 35–37; 90–98; 295f.; BEIERWALTES, Werner: *Augustins Interpretation von Sapientia 11,21*, in: *REAug* 15 (1969), 51–61; ROCHE, W.J.: *Measure, Number, and Weight in St. Augustine*, in: *New Scholasticism* 15 (1941), 350–376; HARRISON, Carol: *Measure, Number and Weight in Saint Augustine's Aesthetics*, in: *Augustinianum* 28 (1988), 591–602. On the similarity of this biblical line to a Pythagorean passage in Plato's *Laws* 757b4, see DES PLACES, Édouard: *Un emprunt de la „Sagesse“ aux „Lois“ de Platon?*, in: *Biblica* 40 (1959), 1016–1017.

“I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and number”.<sup>75</sup>

In the second book of his dialogue “On Free Choice of the Will”, Augustine presupposes the *a priori* notion of wisdom to be impressed in every human soul, as everybody longs for happiness and is thus capable of searching for wisdom as the way to reach it.<sup>76</sup> In created things, thanks to their numerical structure, traces of the same wisdom can be discovered. Reminded by them, the soul can turn to itself and state that its delight in these things is enabled by their correspondence to “some laws of beauty” the soul bears in itself.<sup>77</sup>

Thanks to their numerical structure, which enables their being,<sup>78</sup> things can also be known, either through sense perception or by the reasoning of the mind.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, this structure can be imitated in works of art. Human artists imitate the numerical order which they recognise in themselves and try to reproduce it with their hands.<sup>80</sup> Even the arts which do not produce any lasting artefact, such as dance, follow, in their movement, these numbers to provoke delight (*delectatio*). Numbers do not just structure the embodied form in place but the movement in time, too. However, art itself is neither in place nor in time; it is ruled only by numbers,<sup>81</sup> even elevated above the human mind, which does not produce numbers but discovers them.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ecc. 7:26. Augustine quotes this line e.g. in *De lib. arb.* II,8,24,95 (CCL 29, 253): *Circui ego et cor meum ut scirem et considerarem et quaererem sapientiam et numerum*. This wording probably comes from the Septuagint (7:25): ἐκύκλωσα ἐγώ, καὶ ἡ καρδία μου τοῦ γνῶναι καὶ τοῦ κατασκέψασθαι καὶ ζητῆσαι σοφίαν καὶ ψῆφον (ψῆφος = the stone for calculation). The Vulgate reads: *Lustravi universa animo meo, ut scirem et considerarem, et quaererem sapientiam, et rationem*.

<sup>76</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,15,40,160 (CCL 29, 265): *Non enim, sicut iam dictum est, certus esset uelle se esse sapientem idque oportere, nisi notio sapientiae menti eius inhereret*. See also *De lib. arb.* II,9,26,103 (CCL 29, 254).

<sup>77</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,16,41,163 (CCL 29, 265): *... in teipsum redeas atque intellegas te id quod adtingis sensibus corporis probare aut inprobare non posse, nisi apud te habeas quasdam pulchritudinis leges ad quas referas quaeque pulchra sentis exterius*.

<sup>78</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,16,42,164 (CCL 29, 265f.): *Formas habent quia numeros habent; adime illis haec, nihil erunt. A quo ergo sunt nisi a quo numerus? quandoquidem in tantum illis est esse in quantum numerosa esse*.

<sup>79</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,16,44,171 (CCL 29, 267): *Si ergo, quicquid mutabile aspexeris, uel sensu corporis uel animi consideratione capere non potes, nisi aliqua numerorum forma teneatur, qua detracta in nihil recidat*.

<sup>80</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,16,42,165 (CCL 29, 266): *Et omnium quidem formarum corporearum artifices homines in arte habent numeros quibus coaptant opera sua, et tamdiu manus atque instrumenta in fabricando mouent, donec illud quod formatur foris ad eam quae intus est lucem numerorum relatum, quantum potest, impetret absolutionem placeatque per interpretem sensum interno iudici supernos numeros intuenti*.

<sup>81</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,16,42,166 (CCL 29, 266): *... inspice iam pulchritudinem formati corporis: numeri tenentur in loco; inspice pulchritudinem mobilitatis in corpore: numeri uersantur in*

The emphasis on numbers implies other elements of Augustine's concept of beauty, e.g. symmetry, congruence, and harmony, which are basically numerical relations. As we could see, the most important congruence is the correspondence between the structures of the world and the soul of the artist who imposes the same structure on his work.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the immanent numerical symmetry is crucial for the artefact as such, as Augustine emphasises with the Stoics.<sup>84</sup>

The structures of the artefact and the different kinds of their congruence with the perceiving soul are treated in the most detailed way in the sixth book of Augustine's dialogue "On Music", which deals especially with metrical poetry.

Here Augustine analyses sense perception as a process in which *numeri sonantes* (the perceptible structure of what we perceive) come out of the external source (e.g. the reciter) as *numeri progressores*, to enter the sensor of the person perceiving them.<sup>85</sup> In the soul, the *numeri occurrentes* come to meet them (*ire obviam*);<sup>86</sup> they receive the information and find it either in accord or in disaccord with themselves. In this way, delight or aversion of the soul comes about.<sup>87</sup> Augustine calls the measure of taste by which the soul judges and finds delight or aversion *numeri iudiciales*,<sup>88</sup> to specify after reflection that it has, like art itself, a rational basis that is even elevated above the soul. In judging, the soul does not impose its structure arbitrarily but follows a measure given to it.<sup>89</sup>

The accord between the numerical structure of the soul and the thing that is perceived, i.e. the delight which the soul finds in sense perception, originates in "a kind of equality and proportionate intervals" (*parilitas quaedam et aequaliter dimensa intervalla*),<sup>90</sup> says Augustine. The principle of metric poetry is actually numerical symmetry and regularity of feet, i.e. *aequalitas*.<sup>91</sup> A similar law can also be found in visually perceived beauty

*tempore; intra ad artem unde isti procedunt, quaere in ea tempus et locum: numquam erit, nusquam erit, uiuit in ea tamen numerus nec eius regio spatiorum est nec aetas dierum.*

<sup>82</sup> *De lib. arb.* II,16,42,167 (CCL 29, 266): *Transcende ergo et animum artificis, ut numerum sempiternum videas: iam tibi sapientia de ipsa interiore sede fulgebit et de ipso secretario ueritatis.*

<sup>83</sup> See also *De div. quaest.* LXXXIII, 78 (CCL 44A, 223f.).

<sup>84</sup> See above, note 22.

<sup>85</sup> *De mus.* VI,2,2–3 (CSEL 102, 194–196); for the titles of the particular kinds of *numeri*, see VI,6,16 (CSEL 102, 205).

<sup>86</sup> *De mus.* VI,9,24 (CSEL 102, 212,5).

<sup>87</sup> *De mus.* VI,5,9–12 (CSEL 102, 200–203).

<sup>88</sup> *De mus.* VI,4,5 (CSEL 102, 197).

<sup>89</sup> *De mus.* VI,9,23–24 (CSEL 102, 211f.); VI,12,34–36 (CSEL 102, 217–220).

<sup>90</sup> *De mus.* VI,10,26 (CSEL 102, 213,3f.).

<sup>91</sup> *De mus.* VI,10,26 (CSEL 102, 213,19).

as the symmetry of the parts and the balanced composition, i.e. the “numerical congruence” (*aequalitas numerosa*).<sup>92</sup>

The poets who compose metrical poetry, as well as other artists, thus follow the numerical structures in their mind (*numeri rationales*), the *aequalitas* given to them by God himself.<sup>93</sup> Nature proceeds in a similar, albeit unreflected way, unfolding the forms and dimensions implanted into it by God as the structures in place (*numeri locales*) to produce its works at the right moment according to temporal structures (*numeri temporales*).<sup>94</sup>

Another kind of numerical congruence between the object that is perceived and the soul is the level of intensity, which has to match what the soul is prepared for. Light and colours in seeing, as well as the intensity of sound in hearing, must be congruent (*congruere*) with our sensibility; it must be neither too strong nor too weak.<sup>95</sup> This congruency also provokes delight,<sup>96</sup> not only for sight and hearing but for smell, taste, and touch as well.<sup>97</sup> Wherever like meets like in an appropriate way, congruence arises, which the soul enjoys. This similarity or even equality (*aequalitas*) is always numerical, in Augustine’s eyes: *Vbi autem aequalitas aut similitudo, ibi numerositas*.<sup>98</sup>

The theological basis of Augustine’s idea of art is demonstrated in his reflections on beauty in the treatise “On True Religion”. The starting point is the immanent symmetry in architecture and the sense of congruence it arouses in the soul:

“We must indeed inquire what is the cause of our being dissatisfied if two windows are placed not one above the other but side by side, and one of them is greater or less than the other, for they ought to have been equal; while, if they are placed one directly above the other, even though they are unlike, the inequality does not offend us in the same way. Why don’t we notice very much

<sup>92</sup> *De mus.* VI,13,38 (CSEL 102, 221,16). See the entire passage VI,13,38 (CSEL 102, 221,13–18): *Haec igitur pulchra numero placent, in quo iam ostendimus aequalitatem appeti. Non enim hoc tantum in ea pulchritudine, quae ad aures pertinet atque in motu corporum est, inuenitur, sed in ipsis etiam uisibilibus formis, in quibus iam usitatius dicitur pulchritudo. An aliud quam aequalitatem numerosam esse arbitraris, quod paria paribus bina membra respondeant, quae autem singula sunt, medium locum tenent, ut ad ea ex utraque parte paria interualla seruentur?* On beauty as the numerical proportionately, see also *De ord.* II,15,42 (CCL 29, 130,2–4).

<sup>93</sup> *De mus.* VI,12,35–36 (CSEL 102, 218–220). On the name of *numeri rationales* see VI,17,57 (CSEL 102, 231,6).

<sup>94</sup> *De mus.* VI,17,57 (CSEL 102, 231f.).

<sup>95</sup> *De mus.* VI,13,38 (CSEL 102, 221,22).

<sup>96</sup> *De mus.* VI,13,38 (CSEL 102, 221,26–222,29): *In his igitur cum appetimus conuenientia pro naturae nostrae modo et inconuenientia respuimus, quae aliis tamen animalibus conuenire sentimus, nonne his etiam quodam aequalitatis iure laetamur, cum occultioribus modis paria paribus tributa esse cognoscimus?*

<sup>97</sup> *De mus.* VI,13,38 (CSEL 102, 222).

<sup>98</sup> *De mus.* VI,13,38 (CSEL 102, 222,32).

how much the one is greater or less than the other? If there are three windows, sense (*sensus*) itself seems to demand either that they should not be unequal, or that between the largest and the smallest there should be an intermediate one as much larger than the smallest as it is smaller than the largest.”<sup>99</sup>

Augustine generalises this observation in the rule according to which, in art, we always like harmony (*convenientia placet*) as the source of beauty. Harmony requires equality and unity (*aequalitatem unitatemque*), which are to be reached either by the similarity of equal parts (*similitudine parium partium*) or by the gradation of unequal ones (*gradatione disparium*).<sup>100</sup>

Perfect equality or similarity (*summam aequalitatem vel similitudinem*) is certainly not to be met by corporeal eyes, because what we can see with them is necessarily mutable, changing from one shape into the other, from one place to the other, and composed of parts located in space.<sup>101</sup> Hence Augustine deduces that the equality searched for in art must pertain to the realm of the mind or, as a “law of the truth above our mind” (*supra mentem nostram esse legem, quae veritas dicitur*), it must even transcend the mind because of its mutability.<sup>102</sup>

This law above our mind, coming close to *numeri iudiciales* from the dialogue “On Music”, is now identified with the wisdom of God, or Christ, “the unchangeable truth which is the law of all the arts and the art of the omnipotent artificer (*ars omnipotentis artificis*)”.<sup>103</sup> Unlike in Plotinus, the basis of all symmetry is not just the immanent structure of this wisdom itself but, at the same time, its perfect congruence with its origin, i.e. the equality of the Son with the Father in Christian theology.<sup>104</sup> This perfect intra-divine equality is the “rule, form and archetype” of any harmony in the realm of time and space.<sup>105</sup>

If we are to say what, in Augustine’s eyes, art imitates, it will be the entire complex architecture of numerical congruence between the works of

<sup>99</sup> *De vera rel.* 30,54 (CCL 32, 222,13–22): *Sed certe quaerendum est, cur nos offendat, si duabus fenestris non super invicem, sed iuxta invicem locatis, una earum maior minorve sit, cum aequales esse potuerint, si vero super invicem fuerint ambaeque de medio quamvis impares, non ita offendat illa inaequalitas; et cur non multum curemus, quanto sit una earum aut maior aut minor, quia duae sunt? In tribus autem sensus ipse videtur expetere, ut aut impares non sint aut inter maximam et minimam ita sit media, ut tanto praecedat minorem, quanto a maiore praecedatur.* English translation by BURLEIGH, John H.S.: *Augustine’s Earlier Writings* (= The Library of Christian Classics 6). London: SCM 1953, 252.

<sup>100</sup> *De vera rel.* 30,55 (CCL 32, 223,30–33).

<sup>101</sup> *De vera rel.* 30,55 (CCL 32, 223,33–39).

<sup>102</sup> *De vera rel.* 30,56 (CCL 32, 224,73–77).

<sup>103</sup> *De vera rel.* 31,57 (CCL 32, 224,5). English translation BURLEIGH: *Augustine’s Earlier Writings*, 254.

<sup>104</sup> *De vera rel.* 31,58 (CCL 32, 225,23f.). According to Plotinus too, the Intellect is an image of the One, but not an equal one. Cf. *Enn.* V,1(10),7,1; see HALFWASSEN: *Schönheit*, 50–52.

<sup>105</sup> *De vera rel.* 31,58 (CCL 32, 225,24–30).

nature, the structure of the soul, their eternal basis in divine Wisdom (*numeri iudiciales*), and, finally, the perfect intra-divine equality of this Wisdom with its Origin. More than his predecessors, Augustine emphasises the numerical nature of this relationship, including the immanent rhythmical and symmetrical structure of artefacts as the way to reach unity.

What all the authors treated here have in common is the anagogical role of art, which follows and thus reveals the divine origin of the world and the soul. Nevertheless, in response to the question of what art imitates, they give different answers: nature the artist according to the Stoics; the structures of the divine Intellect in Plotinus; the numerical symmetry which is based in the intra-divine equality, according to Augustine.

Although Augustine's theology knows the idea of God the Artist who creates by his will, it does not seem to be applied in his reflections on art. Human artists do not imitate the act of will as supposed for the divine creator, but the structures of his art or wisdom. For the creative man as the "second god" we must wait until Nicolaus of Cusa, the Romanticism of modernity, and, finally, the voluntarism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>106</sup> The seductive and dangerous idea of artistic creation which does not search for order but establishes it is to be found, in Augustine's thinking, rather as a hidden germ, as the *logoi* in the womb of Plotinus' nature. It is only the subsequent history of European culture that has been capable of unfolding it before our eyes as a full-fledged image. It is certainly an artefact in which the colour black or dark tones are not lacking. If we were not part of it and could view the history of our culture as an artefact, we could perhaps judge whether it is as beautiful as Augustine believed it to be.

The concept of art proposed by the authors considered above, including Augustine, is certainly very different. Human art imitates nature in its creativity but, like nature, it unfolds the structures hidden in the soul and the world. Both Plotinus and Augustine differ from the Stoics by presupposing a transcendent basis of these structures and, at the same time, by understanding art as a place of their possible visibility. Art makes the hidden structures of the world and the soul visible, hearable, palpable, and perceivable, and by so doing it leads the soul to self-knowledge and demonstrates its kinship with the numerically organised cosmos.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. BLUMENBERG: „*Nachahmung der Natur*“, 268–270; 280. On Nicolaus of Cusa, see FLASCH, Kurt: *Ars imitatur naturam. Platonischer Naturbegriff und mittelalterliche Philosophie der Kunst*, in: IDEM (ed.): *Parusia. Studien zur Philosophie Platons und zur Problemgeschichte des Platonismus*. Festgabe für Johannes Hirschberger. Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva 1965, 265–306, here 286–296.



### *Summary*

*The article presents three late ancient variants of the idea “Ars Naturae Imitatio” (Seneca, Ep. 65,3), focusing on the question of what art imitates in each of them: nature the artist according to the Stoics; the structures of the divine Intellect in Plotinus; the numerical symmetry which is based in the intra-divine equality, according to Augustine. What all the authors treated in this article have in common is the anagogical role of art, which follows and thus reveals the divine origin of the world and the soul. Human art imitates nature in its creativity but, like nature, it unfolds the structures hidden in the soul and the world. Both Plotinus and Augustine differ from the Stoics in presupposing a transcendent basis of these structures and, at the same time, in understanding art as a place of their possible visibility.*