Universal orders in collections of 16th and 17th century Italy¹

ANNE AURASMAA

Anne Aurasmaa's article will discuss beauty, harmony and order as expressions of a belief in a living universe and in the connection between the material and the spiritual. This is approached through an examination of 16th and 17th century Italian collections, with help of Marsilio Ficino's Book of Life. According to Aurasmaa's interpretation, the sensuous pleasure derived from the study of objects was believed to be a way to relate to, and be in contact with the surrounding world and the heavenly spheres. The symmetrical arrangements of the collections, on the other hand, were visualizations of a belief in the harmonious nature of the ideal universe. The article discusses how principles of universality were represented, how the collecting and organization of things were spiritualized, and, as a consequence, how collecting practices came to be approved by society.

One of the most famous representatives of Renaissance Neo-Platonism and a 'father' of Renaissance occultism because of his deep interest in the world and in man was Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who was employed by the Medici family in the late 15th century. As a doctor and a philosopher he linked together physical and mental well-being. In Ficino's *De vita libri tres*, (1480) it is advised that diseases be treated by balancing causes with contrasting remedies. Developing this old tradition further, Ficino gives advice on how to make one's life longer and nobler, thus better than it was predestined to be. His aim can be defined as the intentional development of one's mind, personality or self, along the lines of medieval heal-

ing but transformed to a spiritual stage. I understand this shift from the material to a combination of the material and spiritual to have been one of the main characteristics of Renaissance occultism. The interest of the occultists was in the blend of the mental and the physical and their influence on each other.

Ficino's explanation of how the universe works was close to its medieval counterpart in many ways, but there were also differences. He writes: "Through the stars, as if they were its [nature's] eyes, it diffuses rays that are not only visible, but visual. With these, it sees the lower things, and seeing them nourishes them, and even generates them with its touch, forming and moving everything."² On other occasions

54 Ficino writes about magic qualities and the effects of material things such as sculptures, and supposes that the influences (engendering emotions) are caused by “natural spirits” animating the materials.³ According to Ficino there was a flow of spirits, a string of life running throughout the universe, and everything was infused or “blessed” with its sparkle. His explanation of the effects of natural materials was thus based on a concept of a living universe⁴ where everything was interconnected.⁵

Ficino’s concept of the universe made healing different from medieval practice. Along with the lengthening of earthly life, mental (spiritual) growth and changes was also seen being possible.⁶ In the Christian universe, on the other hand, although the spiritual was able to affect the material, the material had no influence over the spiritual, and the order was static and strictly hierarchical: the spiritual and material spheres were separate and each thing had its fixed place. Ficino’s idea was similar to Paracelsus (1493–1541) who stated that unisonous principles governed the human body and the universe. According to him, the *spiritus mundi* combined the worlds above and below the moon. Paracelsus’ idea was based on the traditionally approved Aristotelian theory of the elements and the qualities⁷ attributed to them.⁸ Ficino describes the connection between forms of existence (Aristotelian elements) as follows: “The sublimer gifts will [...] descend, to the extent that their reasons in the soul of the world are joined to the intellectual forms of the same soul, and through these to ideas in the divine mind.”⁹ All natural bodies were composed of various combinations of all elements in a way that the heavenly *fifth element* was the *spiritus mundi*, or the life and effective healing force, in all *materia* in the universe, which was always material and always spiritu-

al no matter how light and spiritual or heavy and immovable some of the things were considered to be.¹⁰

Both Ficino and Paracelsus most likely used the Platonist concept of *Atomism*¹¹ to introduce the idea of living *materia* to describe the structure of the universe. In a living universe good and bad spirits,¹² because they were everywhere, were able to enter a person through all senses. Thus, it was important to control the ‘inflow’ by controlling one’s environment. Ficino puts it as follows: “our spirit is put forth by Graces through things that contain the properties of these Graces, [...] this is done not only through qualities which are seen, heard, smelled, or tasted, but even through those that are touched.”¹³ He also especially advises that “deep in your house you might set up a little room, one with an arch, and mark it all up with these [universal] figures and colours” as if writing about the room Francesco de’Medici (1541–1587) would build nearly a century later, although he was actually referring to Lorenzo de’Medici’s (1449–1492) scholastic activities.¹⁴ I am convinced that ideas formulated by Ficino and later occult thinkers can be seen as a basis of the collecting habits of the 16th and early 17th century princes, and that they had a rather wide influence on early modern collecting. Reading Ficino, I would say that for a Renaissance prince in particular, a reason to collect was to be able to sense nature and artefacts, to physically connect with them and their believed inanimate magical powers – to feel their meanings rather than understand them rationally.

SUBLIME BEAUTY

Ficino’s advice on how to use the handling and observing of materials and artefacts in con-

templation show that he was not attempting to turn his readers into traditional natural philosophers. As stated earlier, the main reason for him to 'study' (observe nature and artefacts) was not to categorize the world. Still, there were some very practical reasons for collecting, studying, handling and carrying about all sorts of things that were interesting, rare, or made of 'beautiful' materials, such as colourful stones and metals. The most well-known reason to collect 'oddities' was probably based on common knowledge of the art of memory. As Ficino says, "variety prevents boredom, which is the enemy of spirits."¹⁵ The other reasons were most likely related to the medical effects of materials caused by planetary imprinting, as he explains. According to Ficino, particularly hard and long-lasting materials carried more and stronger effects than soft ones, and making images on them (that were in agreement with stars of their materials) made the effects even stronger: "art, [...] arouses the inchoate power there, and while it renders this into a figure, similar to its own heavenly figure, it exposes further the Idea of itself [...]"¹⁶ These affective artefacts were good to have around all of the time, which meant carrying gems and jewels, and having 'high-quality' (well-thought and well-made) art in public places and private living quarters, and also collecting these in the special place one kept for oneself. The beneficial properties of attractive, expensive materials and beautifully made art-works were a good reason to accept accumulation of property which was otherwise sinful.

The above-mentioned gathering activities can be seen as consequences of the concept of the living universe and the Platonic idea of original unity of all (as in *Atomism*) found in the direct effects of things – especially through contemplation. To benefit from things, Ficino

advises looking for the spiritual (*fifth element*) in material, and the "colours and the shape of the universe" instead of the "spectacle of individual things".¹⁷ This means that for Ficino, the purpose of meditation on objects was to figure out universal classes and relations rather than circumscribing material things in predetermined classes in the scholastic manner, and suggests that there were – if not actual rules – some sort of conventions concerning what was good to keep in a 'microcosmic collection'.¹⁸

Ficino advises studying pleasant things.¹⁹ Following the "tunes"²⁰ or lines that are the relations and connections between objects, things and ideas will lead to both a rational and intuitional understanding of the universe (which are opposite but equally important approaches to the material and spiritual reality according to the Cabala²¹). For a modern reader, Ficino's advice seems to conflict with the idea of combining all aspects of the world in one place to be grasped. 'Oddities' or 'curiosities' can only rarely be seen as pleasurable according to our standards. This is not so if we understand what 'pleasant' or 'beauty' mean to Ficino. He combines the ideas of delight, meditation and study to describe an experience that could be called 'aesthetic' in terms of offering both delight for the senses and labour for the mind. I think this is due to the fact that in Ficino's philosophy – and in occult thought of the 16th century in general – beauty was understood as having moral and metaphysical qualities rather than merely sensual values, and that these qualities were perceived through the senses (including the inner eye, which was able, according to a common understanding of human physiology, to recall memories).

Main source of the Renaissance occultists' (including Ficino) in formulating the concept of beauty must have been Thomas Aquinas

56 (1225–1274), who defined beauty as being related to knowledge. For Thomas becoming aware of beauty was a mental process induced by sense experience. Understanding – concerning the nature of the universe, and resulting from the analysis of objects – was an assurance of the existence of good (God) in the world.²² Beauty was not therefore a property of objects, but was created by them in personal experience and in rational contemplation. Obviously, there were no ugly objects for those who adhered to this concept of beauty, only un-inspirational ones. Thomas' concept is easily adaptable to a world filled with spirits. Only slightly differently, in Ficino's writings the concept of beauty was (more or less) related to the intuitional side of man, since it was in its wordless sensuousness a non-rational way to relate to and become aware of the world. For him, understanding the observed was pleasing in mentally healing and spiritually revealing ways: the more the objects were able to unravel of the *Ideas*, the more interesting, inspirational, and consequently, beautiful they were. This mentally developing pleasure did not mean familiarity but rather new, the unexpected and the surprising, paralleling the rare physically healing remedies. These kept the observer mentally alert enough to sense and choose the 'good spirits' and sharpened his mind to become aware of the non-obvious.

The pleasure and understanding experienced in meditation, was seen (as in physical healing) to be caused by spirits transferring from materials and objects to mix with spirits already embodied in the observer. Trusting objects to be able to deliver heavenly spirits, Ficino developed a more complex (and rather magical) concept of beauty than that of Thomas. According to Ficino, materials and objects actually had real, material beauty in them. Benefi-

cial spirits explained their appealing (beautiful) appearance. He believed that this kind of beauty emerged in things after a long exposure to heavenly forces, hence their uncommon appearance.²³ As in his concept of the universe, Ficino's concept of beauty combined the contemplative and spiritual with the material, working together, and making all interesting objects worthy of collecting. I would say that this idea of 'medical' beauty was important in choosing objects in 16th and early 17th century collections. The sensuous pleasure they provided was not only seen as helping the mind to evolve but was also believed to keep one's body in shape to facilitate this.

AN OCCULT COLLECTOR

Francesco de' Medici is well known for his interest in alchemy and mysticism. The allegorical paintings on the cupboard doors of his collection and meditation room – the *stanzino del prinzipe* in the Palazzo Vecchio (1572) – express this interest. The entire of the interior decoration of this *studiolo* depicts the universe around man, the spectator. In Francesco's tiny, windowless *studiolo* the collections were hidden in narrow closets behind paintings representing arts, human life and nature with the help of classical myths. Aerial and celestial entities are above and more earthly things are below. Paintings representing a man and woman at each end of the room are placed under the arch of heaven and above the earthly things as if on the "horizon of the material and spiritual", as Ficino described man's unique position in the universe.²⁴ The ceiling and walls can be considered as an interlacing net of universal connections with layered meanings in combinations of living persons, mythical creatures, numerous human activities, and literal

Francesco de' Medici's studiolo, build 1572

references, not to mention colours, forms and a rich variety of materials used in the decoration.²⁵

As I see it, this Saturnian meditative space

was created to balance the busy daily life of the prince, who by his social position was an Apollonian person²⁶ and was regularly dealing with political (Mars) and martial (Venus) affairs.²⁷

58 The noble birth and busy activities of all princes allowed them their Saturnian meditation without too much risk of 'drying out'²⁸. This, on the other hand, made possible the mental and spiritual self-improvement only available to those who could spend time in 'study' (or meditation). Birth, profession and scholarly activities defined what a person would be, and the princes were advantaged in being able to develop their 'souls' due to the first two conditions being the best possible.²⁹

Physically healing and spiritually developing occult princely collections can be considered especially effective places for perception. Ficino mentions several requirements that a place for study and good health should fulfil. Much of his advice applies to the whole many palaces including their sculpture gardens with water themes and varieties of flowers and plants (and even zoos).³⁰ This kind of 'entirety' enabled the idea of the sensible world studied in one place. However, sensuous pleasure was more important for Ficino than deep study. He stresses that "boxing oneself into narrow studies and tiny matters is dangerous" to one's mental growth, and that, "pondering heavily on exact matters wastes away lives".³¹ He believes "if we live in heaven [in spirit] and in time [in *materia*], the more widely we absorb the one, the more we live", meaning that by perceiving spirits from objects and ambient things, one becomes more alive because spirits are the living force in the universe (the vital *fifth element*).³² As carriers of spirits objects cannot be understood merely as material signs, although they are that as well. They are actual, materialized presences of universal forces for Ficino. They have both an inspirational and healing nature due to their inner 'lives'. Ficino's concept of 'study' (enjoyment of nature and artefacts) is inseparable from the physical

world. A studying person becomes part of the universe in his 'sensuous contemplation'. With this concept I emphasize the essential presence of natural things and artefacts in the close surroundings (reachable by the senses) of one who contemplates and perceives materiality with all the senses, to attain the fullest possible connection to the reality and the ideas that the collected things represent.

Despite the unity of the universe Ficino saw a gap between understanding or wisdom, rational judgement, and their material basis. He filled the void with intuition (or *fantasia*) and divine illumination. Intuition united seemingly separate and less than fully known ideas into wholes, which were understood as truths despite their non-logical character.³³ In a sense Ficino's picture of the universe was similar to that of the Christian cabalists of the 16th century. For both there was, above rational argumentation, the mystery of God which was to be reached rarely if ever, and only when the inner eye saw more than separate bits and pieces when recalling the material world. This meant mysterious, illuminative experience and an understanding of all, which was reached grade by grade following the hints (signs) that the stars were believed to imprint in things.

To achieve universal understanding and wisdom, which were needed for personal illumination, Ficino advises contemplating a colourful wall map of the universe or an armillary sphere, for example³⁴. He also discusses the "form of the universe", because according to him the place for meditation should imitate the structure and the colours of the universe.³⁵ According to Ficino a person had to refine his genius by observing the order and regularity of the heavens.³⁶ Ficino wonders, whether the shape of the universe was round or that of a cross³⁷, when discussing making a model of it.

Universal man. The direct link between the earth and the moon represent the sub-lunar material world that was believed to be separate from the spiritual during the Middle Ages. On this grade the feminine and the masculine are completely separate as represented by the legs. On the mental grade, on the other hand, they became closer (hands) and may join in the Sun. Above that grade are the first extensions and the seeds of multiplicity. It is the grade of Paradise, Adam and Platonic Ideas. That grade is reachable through contemplation.

A room filled with things gathered from all corners of the world spread from floor to ceiling pretty much covered this 'sympathetic' idea.³⁸ It was a place uniting all things, and formed a useful and a powerful tool when considered from the point of view of someone sitting or standing in the centre of the room from where one could observe and control everything. Here one united these things in one's mind. It was one's working model of the world and an active (living) link to the living universe.

Peace of mind and control over personal destiny were realized in the pleasurable study of the sensual world, and by the mental effects of sensuous contemplation. When one was believing in progressive personal nobility, and at the same time in the interrelatedness of all creation (as the occultists of the Renaissance did), all actions towards good, and all experience of sensuous pleasure, would be seen to help not just one person but the whole world become better as if a manifestation of God's eternal beauty. The 'healing properties' of the inspirationally beautiful, symmetrically arranged (princely) collections were thus supposed to transform – in alchemical terms – the *materia prima* of the collected objects and the world into the *ultima materia* of their *ideas*.

CONTEMPLATING ON "SIGNS" AND ORDER

Ficino's idea of a universal collection room brings to mind the memory theatre of Giulio Camillo and his explanation of its meaning: "This high and incomparable placing not only

60 performs the office of conserving for us the things, words, and arts which we confide to it, so that we may find them at once whenever we need them, but also gives us true wisdom from whose founts we come to the knowledge of things from their causes and not from their effects.”³⁹ Here Camillo describes how collected things (such as objects and texts) work as organizing tools for understanding the world when kept in their appointed places in the universal chart. This use of mnemonics is based on seeing the collected things as signs referring to the phenomena of the surrounding world. When this traditional idea was realized within a living universe, Camillo was able to write about a collection giving “true wisdom”. His “true wisdom” meant changes in a person’s *genius* caused by a changing understanding of the world, and on beliefs concerning the nature of things. He most likely believed it possible to mentally transcend the grades of sensuous knowledge and rational judgement, and in the possibility of holding the universe inside the mind’s faculties, and thus becoming micro-cosmic.

A collection allowed a lofty, one-gaze view over the universe, and there seems to have been some recurring structuring principles to help this happen. Laura Laurencich-Minelli was probably the first to point out the nature of collection mounting when discussing the symmetry in plans for the Giganti collection, in late 16th century Bologna. She names the arranging principles *alternate microsymmetry* and *repeating macrosymmetry*. By the first she means that items of similar appearance are never displayed next to one another but rather in alternation with others. The second means that components in microsymmetry form thematic groups which are repeated around the space. She deduces from the symmetry of the ar-

angement that the Giganti collection was planned to display a *theatrum naturae*, and writes: “We may say that in his museum Giganti sought to generate a harmonious vision which enabled a simultaneous evocation, or *ars memoriae*, of the whole of art and nature.”⁴⁰

It seems that the collection displays brought their own addition to the universality of the collections. As I see it, the complex and most often harmoniously symmetrical but non-mirrored arrangements were employed to help viewers discover by way of analogy (in the case of the living universe these were actual relations), the ordered nature of the seemingly chaotic universe around them. Order, because it was related to God and the ideal, eternal universe, was by definition beautiful.⁴¹ Ficino reinforces this by stating that “Harmony [...] is full of spirit and sense”, and stresses the importance of the continuous sensing of heavenly harmony: “[...] just as we expose the body through its daily harmony (that is, through its habits and customs), and its image, to the light and heat of the Sun, we also acquire the spirit that is hidden in the powers of the stars through a similar kind of harmony”.⁴² Harmony most obviously is an expression of God’s nature as a vital and wise entity.

I shall next look at a print that represents an Italian collection called the *Musæum Calceolarium* (1622). The collection belonged to a family of pharmacists and was used in teaching and in their daily practise. Unlike Francesco’s *studiolo*, this collection can be considered as an example of a rational, natural philosophical attitude towards the world. As Giuseppe Olmi has explained, the symmetrical arrangement could be interpreted as having no meanings except to please the non-naturalist visitors. According to him, the ‘aesthetic criteria’ of the collection arrangements were not believed to

A print depicting the Musæum Calceolarium, 1622

exist in nature itself, and thus had nothing to do with the collections as pictures of the world. He argues that the criteria for the arrangement of objects are purely functional in collections like the *Musæum Calceolarium* in comparison to the princely collections. Olmi states that this kind of “museum is[...] not a symbolic space where all reality is reconstituted, but rather[...] an instrument for comprehension and explo-

ration of the natural world”.⁴³ When analyzed in the framework of the world-view, examined above, it seems that although the space is not quite a complex map of the universe with hidden meanings in the manner of Francesco’s *studiolo*, there was a certain universality to it because of its symmetry and order. I think the purpose of this is to show the divine origin of the effects of medicines: according to medie-

Detail of the print of the Calceolari Collection.

val healing beliefs, all remedies had acquired their effects at Creation.

The arrangement of the Calceolari collection can be read to represent how the Christian world was believed to have been stratified at Creation. It can be seen as a realization of the harmony and stability of the perfect God-created and thus incorruptible universe, which, of course, was an ideal (or the state of the Garden of Eden), not the universe we live in. This argument is based especially on the nature of the dissimilarities between the basically symmetric halves of the collection chamber and the system found on the shelves.

The architectural structure of the *Musæum Calceolarium* is simple, as if showing the main character of the hierarchical and layered universe known from medieval visualizations of the world and the heavens. Moist things are at

the bottom in containers as if depicting the element water, and especially the heavenly waters at the beginning of *Genesis* (thus also resembling Camillo's theatre). Above them are drawers of fossils, minerals and most likely insects suspended in amber denoting (the miracles of) the dry land that appeared when the waters were "gathered into one place". Next follow plants and molluscs, as *Genesis* describes: "The earth brought forth vegetation, [...] God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed". Above these are winged creatures, the birds. The superior position, the ceiling, is reserved for mammals and other highly valued creatures and includes what looks like the head of a human.

These creatures represent the cattle and beasts of earth, which *Genesis* states were the last created animals.⁴⁴ The human head appears to have a horn; it can represent an anomaly or refer to Moses in the *Vulgate*⁴⁵ of the Bible. It may also suggest to a man in Paradise among all creatures. Moses and paradisiacal Adam are both rulers. Moses, as the leader of Israelites to the Promised Land, and as a named writer of *Genesis*, is a personification of the hope of a return of better times, especially those described to have existed when Adam was the master of all God-created beings.⁴⁶ The objects at the altar-like back wall are unclear, but the structure and decorative obelisks are evocative of ancient Greece and Egypt, important sources of medical and cosmological knowledge.

The ordering represents things grade by grade such that entities 'belonging to the Sun' (the most noble of their classes) were placed on the ceiling as were those that were created last according to the Bible. This means that aquatic animals such as globe-fish and crocodiles were presented on the ceiling. Everyone and every-

*Detail of the
print of the
Calceolari
Collection.*

hing had a place and status depending on the order in which they were created and according to the stars, planets, and other spheres of the heavens they were related to, to mention but a few examples of the network of relations.⁴⁷ It thus seems that the hierarchy of medieval natural philosophy, which explained the effects of medicines, was expressed in the mounting.

Many of the things represented are not placed as mirror images but rather as if completing each other. For example, the bird and the bat on the back wall can be interpreted as attributes of night and day. They can be described as signs of phenomena in the real world which suggested of the non-collectable qualities of the universe. Thus they direct the mind towards things that cannot be put in bottles or boxes, but which are still as essential as material beings to what the world is like, and recall of the non-present or non-collectable qualities of the universe, especially if considered as tools of the art of memory, or as signs. Such are meant to help the onlooker think about the larger totality.⁴⁸ As Ficino writes, the connec-

tions between things were strengthened when wondered about, pondered, kept and turned over in the mind.⁴⁹

Statues representing a man and a woman on the sides of the Calceolari collection polarize the duality which was to lead to a holistic idea of the universe. The characters are most likely Hercules and Athene. Half-human Hercules was, at the time of the Renaissance, well known as a symbol of a personal struggle for deification.⁵⁰ The goddess is expressed as a warrior to make a matching pair. As a personification of wisdom, Athene represents the best female qualities that balance the earthly but desirous of godliness male characteristics of Hercules. (See next page.)

Athene and Hercules create a revealing couple. They seem to represent a non-Aristotelian, non-Galenian gendering. The closest comparison can be found in such imaginary philosophical discussions as *The Courtier* (1561) by Baldesar Castiglione (1478–1529), where female characters have an important role in opening and closing discussions, and where they are also essential in keeping track of the

Hercules (left) and Athene (right). Detail of the print of the Calceolari Collection.

conversation, which was, in the end, supposed to enlighten the male participants. The cabalist gendering of the cosmos (especially in relation to the living universe) is also comparable here. According to the Cabala, in the highest grade of the material universe, before rejoining that which was divided at Creation, the masculine was considered to present itself as rational

judgement. Its feminine counterpart was the (intuitive) wisdom. These two basic qualities of the universe had many features: the feminine was more warlike than the masculine, for example. The main idea of the Renaissance Christian cabala seems to have been that the most advanced earthly spirits longed back to their original pure state. This obtained its ex-

pression in the spiritual yearnings of bodily males.⁵¹ (See page 59.)

Ficino, too, wrote to some extent in a rather cabalist manner on the ontology of the dualism of nature. He states that the material world is mixed in terms of the sexes, and is both masculine and feminine and everywhere copulating with itself. According to him, the masculine leads, although things ultimately work together. He continues to say that “the planets are in accord with this, too, part of them being masculine, part of them... being feminine, and Mercury, in particular is both masculine and feminine, as the father of Hermaphroditus”.⁵² Masculine leadership seems to have meant for Ficino the setting of an objective and working consciously towards it in a way that the feminine characteristics of a person’s personality were developed accordingly as well.

Mercury was the guiding star of philosophers and of those spending their time in study. Ficino, emphasizing duality brought together in the nature of Mercury, expresses the ideal of equal development of all faculties, and seems in an alchemical and cabalist manner to keep androgyny as a metaphor of the fulfilment of self-improvement. This form of being would close the circle of life of the universe and return it close to its originally unified state, as was possible to interpret in light of Plato and the Bible. *Genesis* states that in the beginning God created man in his own image, “he created man male and female” after the metaphysical, divine and androgynous Adam of the first stage of human creation.⁵³ In the Calceolari collection the statuettes lead the onlooker to think of this essential duality of the world and universe, its consequences, and the harmonious unity that was supposed to have existed before the creation of Eve. If the display in the Calceolari collection does not show the upco-

ming result of revolving time - the return of unity – it most certainly expresses the paradisiacal state of the earth when all was near to God.

The main difference between Francesco’s *studiolo* and the Calceolari collection seems to be that the first was built to help contemplation and progression towards the ideal, and the second was mounted to visualize the material universe as its best and thus most unchangeable state. Francesco’s *studiolo* had a real metaphysical dimension as part of the universe it represented, which was able to work with it to effect changes in the observer and surrounding world without actually having direct contact on more than on the ‘spiritual’ level. The *Museum Calceolarium*, on the other hand, represented the world as an image or a gathering of signs. It was a kind of a mnemonic tool for

66 seeing and helping to understand what the signs of medical plants or other remedies referred to, and how these things were related to each other. The organization of the collection helped in finding and remembering correct remedies for diseases believed to be caused by the wrong balance of elements. Although the spectator was placed similarly in both collections, his status was not the same due to the different uses of the collection space and differences in the roles of the objects. It seems that the purpose of sensuous meditation in Francesco's *studiolo* was to help the contemplating person imagine a godlike position at the centre of all things.⁵⁴ In the Calceolari collection, the placing of the viewer was strictly Biblical: man was a master of the material world.

Despite the essential differences, there also seem to have been many similarities between these two collections. First and foremost, the organizers and users of the collections recognized that to understand the working mechanisms of the universe they had to 'reduce' or 'simplify' (using the mathematical terms) the perceived sense experience. I think that dualism (as in *the Museum Calceolarium*) and oddities (especially in the princely collections) were facets of the same thinking: a belief in the confined nature of the multitude in the decaying world as opposed to God's unity and infinity. Mapping the borders of phenomena with the help of rare representatives of categories in the different grades of the universe was most probably relied upon to help reach abstract grades close to God because the uncommon examples were easy to keep in mind, and to compare and connect with things and phenomena not present in the collection. The connections found lead from grade to grade to substantially vaster but numerically smaller groups of things. Whether the connection was

trusted to be real or imaginary did not matter. 'Curiosity collecting' (as a form of seeking knowledge), in particular, with its expeditions into the unknown, helped both scholars and princes by mapping the boundaries of the classes, to find balanced centres and all-inclusive *Ideas*, as well as effective forces, depending on the universal relations.

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NOTES

1. This article is based on papers presented at NORDIC, Århus 15.8.2003 and at BCLA, Leeds 15.7.2004, called *Forms of Knowledge and Aesthetics in Practice: Beauty as Healing*.
2. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11. "Seeing as nourishment" refers here to a belief in rays leaving and entering the eyes while watching. Ficino *The Book of Life*, III:23. Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, III:XLIII. Ficino translations are by Charles Boer.
3. For example, see Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:18.
4. The living universe is a concept we consider as

- magical. It was believed that the image or any part of an object was associated to the whole, and that the desired results were obtained from rituals, providing they resembled the objectives. Even a brief contact was thought to have created a bond between things after which they continued to influence each other once the contact had ceased. Cf. Mauss 2001, 14–15, 25–26, 79.
5. In medical matters Ficino trusted herbal medicine most, but he also discussed other medically effective agents such as metals, minerals, odours and things visual. These were not only digested; he advised that they be perceived through all the senses. He considered the use of all senses as important, but held seeing as the most sublime and hearing the highest. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11. Ficino explains the reason for effects of the material objects as follows: “our spirit,[...] can receive from the spirits of worldly life a great deal through the rays of the stars. Since the life of the world is based on everything, it is propagated plainly in herbs and trees, as if they were hair of its body. It is propagated in stones and metals, as if they were its teeth and bones. It is produced in living shells, adhering to rocks and earth”. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11. Ficino thinks that (masculine) heaven and (feminine) earth were not in direct contact but that the stars mediated and brought down (to earth) living forces. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, “The Apology of Marsilio Ficino”.
 6. In Ficino’s case this happened mentally by personal choice. Some other, slightly later occult thinkers were more radical.
 7. Fire: hot and dry; Air: hot and moist; Water: cold and moist; Earth: cold and dry.
 8. Read 1947, 6–8.
 9. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:26.
 10. For more on the role of alchemy in Renaissance thinking, see Aurasmaa 2004, 201–207.
 11. Everything was made from small (abstract) particles such as numbers. During the Renaissance letters were also considered to be such abstract particles. This belief was reinforced by a cabalist reading of the Bible.
 12. “Spirits” in Ficino can be understood as blocks of reason and wisdom. Microbes, which cause disease (and were unknown at the time), were also considered spirits, as were the healing properties of healthy food and the environment. See, for example, Ficino, *The Book of Life*, I:10, 24, II:4, 6–7, III:11.
 13. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:12.
 14. The examples for Francesco, and other later collectors, can be considered to have been philosophical writings, discussions, and the example of earlier collectors. Ficino mentions Lorenzo de’Medici as an exemplary person who contemplated over “a sphere with motions” His other example is the planetarium of Archimedes, hinting that the role of mathematics was essential to him, as it was to Plato, in understanding the structure of the universe. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:17, 19.
 15. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11. The classic Roman text *Ad Herennium* explains how to use mental pictures in order to remember vast amounts of information. To achieve this, *Ad Herennium* recommends arranging a visual base on which to put information that must be committed to memory: a series of *logi* or places, for example a large building with a row of rooms, will do. Surviving classical sources (the most important being *Ad Herennium*) as well as medieval and Renaissance sources stress that a person is likely to remember for a long period things which are exceptional or unusual. Thus they advise the colouring of memories with feeling-awakening qualities. When the scene is re-examined, it reawakens the related feelings and information. See Yates 1996, 20–31.
 16. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:13, 16. The aim was

not to rationally understand what is, but to see what was, and what one can become when the differences of the material world were united.

17. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:19.
18. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, "What is Necessary For Composure In Life And For Tranquility Of The Soul".
19. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, I:18, III:11. According to Ficino, some aspects of pleasantness are not good for the spirit but can still be necessary to "weaken an excess of the spirit's sharpness". Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11.
20. Ficino, like Plato, uses musical concepts to describe the structure of the universe.
21. Cabalist texts were approved reading of the Church at time of Ficino and became rather popular during the 16th and 17th centuries. In connection with the contemplation of universal matters, Ficino indirectly mentions Pico della Mirandola's cabalist interests. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:19.
22. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I 5, 4 ad 1; Ia, IIae, q. 27 a1 ad 3.
23. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:13.
24. Lohr 1988, 537–638.
25. There is not much knowledge on the objects that were kept in Francesco's *studiolo* while it was in use. The programme of the paintings, on the other hand, is known due to the correspondence of the artists involved. Scheicher 1986, 31. Compare also to the description of the structure of the memory theatre of Giulio Camillo. Camillo 1990.
26. This type were considered to be solar persons, highest on the hierarchy of their country and also the most mentally advanced among human beings. Ordinarily the best people to study and improve themselves would have been the aerial Mercurial personalities, but since the princes were considered nearly flawless, they were able to stand more "solar heat" (effects of their guiding star) than others. On social roles, see Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:15.
27. Ficino writes considerably on how to balance the various aspects of life to reach the best possible state of being. Other occult writers also discuss the matter. See Aurasmaa 2003A, 308–328.
28. "Drying" was considered an actual danger at learning, leading to an early death. Cf. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, I:2–7.
29. Princes were trusted to be able to help their subjects to progress in all fields of life. They were even responsible for such things as their health. For example, Louis XIV, the Sun King, (1638–1715) was believed to heal subjects by a touch. Tyson (commenting on Agrippa 1998), 577 note 13; see also Ficino, *The Book of Life*, II:1, III:23; Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, III:XXII, XXXV, XLIV; Aurasmaa 2003A, 313–317.
30. Gardens were to be enjoyed regularly. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11.
31. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, "What is Necessary For Composure In Life And For Tranquility Of The Soul".
32. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, "What is Necessary For Composure In Life And For Tranquility Of The Soul". The kind of progress discussed here will end up in pure spirituality and indestructible eternal life.
33. The role of intuition and *fantasia* seem to be of utmost importance in defining the differences between medieval and Renaissance world-views (i.e. in defining the mentality of persons). Although I cannot discuss these here in detail, any more than many other philosophical concepts, I would like to point to their essential role in combining unique objects and universal concepts in a non-Aristotelian, non-syllogistic way. See Aurasmaa 2003A, 319; Cf. Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, III:XLIII, XLIX.
34. See note 14.
35. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:19. There are many different types of grades in the universe; see for

- example Ficino, *The Book of Life*, II:15, III:1, 15, 21, 24. The grades as well as the “form of the universe” were differently mixed combinations of the elements.
36. Ficino believed that a person could evolve to the extent that eventually he might possess qualities that come close to those of the Creator, and, given the necessary materials, would be able to bring a forth similar universe. Lohr 1988, 574.
 37. On imprinting and the use of images, Ficino states: “The authors of such images claim that their universal form, taken from a likeness to the heavens, is round. Older authors, however, especially the ones we read from the Arab group, always made the shape of theirs into a cross, because the power was worked through a more diffused surface then. The surface on the cross is first marked off. It thus has longitude and latitude. This is the first figure and is the straightest of all; it contains four straight angles”. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:18.
 38. Cf. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, 13, 15, 18. “Sympathetic” refers to general definitions of magic. Frances A. Yates describes Ficino’s ideas of universal images as talismanic. Yates 1994, 156–157.
 39. Translated in Yates 1994, 143. Yates sees strong Ficinian and cabalist influences in Camillo’s theatre. She also depicts both Ficino and Camillo as Christian hermetic writers. Yates 1994, 152, 156–157. Some aspects of Camillo’s theatre are discussed in Aurasmaa 2002 228–265; Aurasmaa 2003B, 51–69.
 40. Laurenchich-Minelli 1986, 17–23.
 41. On universal order Ficino writes: “Nothing is more orderly than the heavens”. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:19.
 42. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:21–22.
 43. Olmi 1986, 2–3. Olmi among others has shown the collections to be more complex than first thought in this early text. See for example Olmi 2001, 20–50; Olmi 1994, 169–190.
 44. *Genesis* 1:6–25.
 45. The *editio vulgata* was translated by St. Jerome from 382 to 405. It gradually became the most used Latin version and was declared the canonical text of the Catholic Church in the Council of Trent (1546).
 46. A severed head can naturally suggest numerous things. Here presented is only one sketch to present how a thought can lead to another. We could even continue this line and think that the missing body represents the spirituality of the paradisiacal man.
 47. The globe-fish was appreciated most likely because of its round form. Ficino lists some ratings of things and states, for example that crocodiles were at the top of the universal hierarchy (i.e. sun animals). Both globe-fish and crocodiles were usually presented on the ceilings of the collections. See Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:14–15, 19.
 48. Compare this to the ideas Krzysztof Pomian has put forward. Pomian 1996, 160–174. Pomian’s thinking is discussed in detail in Aurasmaa 2002, 141–162.
 49. Cf. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:11.
 50. The positioning of man between the material and spiritual in Renaissance philosophy is discussed, for example, in Lohr 1988, 537–638; see also Aurasmaa 2002, 192–198.
 51. Scholem 1987, 26–28; see also Aurasmaa 2002, 192–198.
 52. Ficino, *The Book of Life*, III:26. Alchemist beliefs are also interesting reference material. See Aurasmaa 2004, 201–207.
 53. Cf. *Genesis* 1: 26–27, 2: 20–23.
 54. See note 50.
- Dr. Anne Aurasmaa, curator, Department of Art History, University of Helsinki. Aurasmaa is a specialist in the history of museums and collecting, and their role in Western intellectual history.*
E-mail: anne.aurasmaa@helsinki.fi