

Oxford
History of
Art

The Art of Art History



Donald Preziosi

NEW EDITION

The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology

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Oxford History of Art

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The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology

Donald Preziosi (ed.)

Oxford History of Art

The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology

NEW EDITION

Edited by Donald Preziosi

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Introduction

The Art of Art History is a collection of resources for constructing a critical history of art history. It is not organized as a conventional 'history of art history' in its own right, nor is it a historical novel with a beginning, middle, and end. It is rather more of an assemblage, or a cabinet of provocative things to think with, each of which has multiple connections to others, both within this anthology and elsewhere. It is also an 'anthology' in the older sense of the word—an accounting of things which in their variety and allure might resemble a garden of flowers; a collection of texts that, in some cases, have been appreciated as fine works of art in their own right.

The volume is made up of essays and excerpts from books written on a number of interrelated themes over the past four centuries. Each of these in its own time (and differently at other times) has either sparked, engaged with, or been used by other writers for their own engagements with a wide variety of intensive and in many cases ongoing debates. The arguments of some directly address those of essays juxtaposed with them. There are several alternate perspectives on the same issue or artwork. All of them deal with the nature and fate of the phenomenon of 'art' in modern times, with differing articulations of artistic 'histories', with different visions on the social roles of art history and criticism, and with the enterprises of modernity more broadly.

The collected texts are treated not as isolated monuments, however persistently influential some of them have been—in some cases seeming to have lives of their own. Nor are they arranged to simulate a single mainstream evolutionary path. They are not assembled here disingenuously to 'speak for themselves', as if they were paintings hung on the bare walls of a modernist art gallery. There are few blank walls in *The Art of Art History*. Its walls are covered with writing, signposts, an occasional bit of graffiti, and punctuated by openings onto other spaces, with invitations and provocations guiding the visitor towards more specimens, different resources, and other possible worlds.

All of the texts in this collection were originally produced within often highly charged environments of controversy and debate in various places around the world over the past two hundred years, having themselves often sparked such controversies. They are deployed here within a series of discussions, commentaries, and critiques whose aim is to foster an understanding of important aspects of their critical and historical situations, and to allow the reader to engage with them in a dialogic and interrogative manner. The texts, in short, are embedded in a dense series of overwritings or palimpsests. The

collection may thus be walked through from a variety of directions, and along several intersecting paths, and issues or themes elicited through and around one text will often re-emerge elsewhere in a similar or transformed manner. The accompanying commentaries both link and mark differences between texts, and serve as catalysts and workpoints for discussion. They also indicate alternative paths through this thicket of texts and overwritings.

Organization

In format, *The Art of Art History* is organized around groups of major debates and themes that have characterized the literature of the discipline since the eighteenth century's articulation of the 'aesthetic' as a distinct object of study connected with the production of knowledge about human nature and cognition. The volume attends to the diverse ways in which art history may be seen as constituting a *social and epistemological technology* which has been essential to the conception, fabrication, and maintenance of (originally European, subsequently all) modern nation-states, and of the individual and collective identities that are staged as the supports and justifications for these political entities.

The readings deal with many familiar subjects of art, aesthetics, history, style, meaning, protocols of explanation, perception, identity, gender, and ethnicity. The selections are organized according to these themes, and the texts included follow a roughly chronological order from the late eighteenth to late twentieth centuries. Included in each chapter is a bibliography of related readings recommended for further study. In each section, the texts presented as well as those recommended are pertinent to an understanding of the history of art history *and* to the complementary development of museums and museological practice. Their aim is to foreground some of the fundamental issues that lie deeper than recent academic debates over competing theories and methodologies.

As already noted, the selections and the trajectory of readings are not meant to chart an imaginary singular narrative history of art history. It will become clear that any such narrative is not a little problematical given the diversity of the field, its disparate missions and motivations, as well as the often contrary social, political, or ideological uses to which such singular genealogies and narrative stories have been put in the past and at present. *The Art of Art History* has an explicitly different aim: to provide the reader with what in the writer's experience have proven to be productive and useful resources and points of departure in the continuing debates about the state—and possible fate—of the art of art history, in both senses of the phrase.

Two framing essays by the editor are included. The first, 'Art History: Making the Visible Legible', is intended as a general overview of the subject—and the objectives—of art history, and may be imagined as a belvedere, providing an overview or synopsis of the issues taken up in the collection. A second, the Epilogue 'The Art of Art History', is a hindsight meditation on the preceding texts and discussions, including the first essay itself: a palimpsest on the whole, and a crossroads leading to other journeys and other worlds.

Both essays might function as *anamorphic* patches in the overall collection, like the odd shape in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), the slantwise focus upon which reveals otherwise hidden perspectives on, and different readings of, a larger assemblage [1]. In this case, the two texts 'read' the overall



1 Hans Holbein the Younger
 The Ambassadors, 1533.

collection *otherwise*. Relative to each other, and seen in the same frame, the first and last essays comprise the alternating co-present faces or fronts of an ‘optical illusion’; an oscillating and enigmatic double image—a simulation (as it may become clear) of the *artifice* that historically set art history in play, and of the tensions that have kept it in motion.

The new edition

Since its first appearance in 1998, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* has remained one of the most widely used English-language introductions to the historiography of the academic discipline of art history. Its extensive international distribution and use was a catalyst for what has since become a veritable industry of art historical and visual studies readers, anthologies, and guides published and widely marketed in many countries, many aimed at specialized readerships. This second edition introduces some strategic changes both to the original collection of texts as well as to the editor-

ial introductions and critical commentaries. It consequently rethinks the methods and goals of the entire project, engaging with ongoing disciplinary and extra-disciplinary changes and turns our attention to issues and problems both new and newly rethought. It continues the book's original concern with promoting active engagement with understanding the artifice, political and social mediatedness, and the historical and regional specificities of the institutions and professions of art history and visual culture studies.

As with the first edition, this is not a 'history of art history' nor a historiography of 'visual culture studies'; rather, it is a critical interrogation of the artifice itself of those histories. It maintains its original pragmatic commitment to affording and encouraging critique rather than promoting hagiography or celebrating one or another sectarian academic consensus, thereby necessarily working against the grain of disciplinary commodification. Rather than articulating a singular historiography, *The Art of Art History* continues to afford multiple opportunities for understanding what has made disciplinary beliefs about the humanly made and appropriated visual environment and its modes of analysis possible or persuasive. Its basic aim is to foster the critical study of the production of art historical knowledge from different and not necessarily compatible perspectives.

As with the first edition, the book juxtaposes diverse and divergent perspectives on similar and common critical issues, foregrounding the fabricatedness of what the academic discipline has both naturalized and marginalized in the course of its historical evolution. It continues to be concerned with the exposure from within of what is frequently concealed in institutional and professional practice: an ambivalence and amnesia about what has produced and maintained institutional beliefs about art and artistry in the first place. It offers some of the means to give body to the ghosts in the machinery of disciplinary theories, methods, dogmas, and doctrines.

Working as a historian, critic, or museologist of artistry in the contemporary world demands increasingly explicit attention to the ethical dimension of one's practice and its inescapable political and economic resonances, along with an acknowledgement that one's intellectual and professional labour implicates and fosters enterprises devoted to the fabrication, maintenance, and political transformation of social life. The close but often easily masked connection between ethics and aesthetics in disciplinary education, both within and outside the professional boundaries of art history, art criticism, art practice, and museology, has itself come under increasing scrutiny, as some of the texts in this second edition attest.

All of the aforementioned marks a situation rather different from the period of 'disciplinary crisis' of a generation ago, the latter characterized by premature and perfunctory announcements of an 'end' of art history and by coincident attempts to assimilate art history into warmed-over versions of post-war visual anthropology or formalist semiology. There is today a newly re-emergent acknowledgement of art history's debt to earlier discursive practices which the nineteenth century institutionalization of art history suppressed or rendered illegible—namely, the fundamentally *religious* nature of European (and many other) artistic practices, and the markedly different pre-modern and early modern distinctions amongst what came to be professionally compartmentalized in Europe in the post-Enlightenment era as



2

Yoshio Taniguchi: Museum of Modern Art, New York: Rockefeller Annex.

art, religion, science, and philosophy. There is a growing awareness reflected in the readings below of what art history as a ‘coy science’ had repressed or rendered invisible. In the first edition of *The Art of Art History* and elsewhere, I discussed the discipline’s uneasy and ambivalent relation to religion as art history’s largely covert ‘secular theologism’, arguing that the discipline as such is defined precisely *as* this ambivalence in its epistemological investments. The field’s coy scientism has long been coeval with its coy spiritualism, a point explicitly addressed in the new Coda to this volume.

This second edition furthers the critical explication of that ambivalence, emblemized in the earlier edition by attention to the anamorphism of Holbein’s *Ambassadors*. As that cover image [1] was an emblem of the first edition’s attentiveness to the manufacture of disciplinary artifice, the image here [2] is a hauntingly poignant reminder—continuing the first edition’s attentiveness to artifice—of the sacral centrality of art in the contemporary world. The secular theologism of the discipline of art history is rarely so powerfully epitomized as it is here, in the cut-away façade of Yoshio Taniguchi’s Rockefeller annexe to New York’s Museum of Modern Art, seen from the late modernist sculpture garden behind the museum’s original building. Virtually a re-enactment of the European medieval cathedral’s stained glass window, with resonances of high-end multistorey shop windows, Taniguchi’s MOMA façade offers a tableau illuminating the sacred hierarchies of modern aesthetic

fetishism, idolatry, and hagiography. Seen here in its actual urban context, the building stages a dialogic interaction with all that is hidden and presumed to reside in all the buildings around it. And all that is obscured in that wider view—the street-level world of commerce and commodification, hidden by the museum's own walls—is here hidden in full view in the museum itself. The fundamental entailment of what are distinguished in modernity as art and religion is discussed in some detail in the framing commentaries of this new edition of *The Art of Art History*.

The very *fact* of art (however defined) has long been seen as a fundamental challenge to our most cherished beliefs about the nature of reality; indeed to our very *being* as human. Despite the largely modernity-specific reification and fetishization of fine art, the world created by artistry is not some marginal 'second (aesthetic) world' alongside the everyday world in which we live; the world of art or artifice *is* that very world. If what we may still wish to term 'art history' is to have not only academic but broader critical relevance and social force at the present time, it will be in its capacity to reckon with the challenge and promise of art in all that it does, in all the ways it does so in human societies around the world now and the past. To do anything less today would be to ignore the brilliantly rich diversity of art's histories, the poignancy of art's ironies and paradoxes, and the inherent strength of art's *promise* to being: a promise that exists and changes in our dialogic interactions and recreations of the world we weave around ourselves, with art.

Oxford, 2008

Art History: Making the Visible Legible

Art history is one of a network of interrelated institutions and professions whose overall function has been to fabricate a historical past that could be placed under systematic observation for use in the present. As with its allied fields—art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, art practice, connoisseurship, the art market, museology, tourism, commodity fashion systems, and the heritage industry—the art historical discipline incorporated an amalgam of analytic methods, theoretical perspectives, rhetorical or discursive protocols, and epistemological technologies, of diverse ages and origins.

Although the formal incorporation of art history into university curricula began in Germany in the 1840s,¹ by the end of the nineteenth century the greatest number of academic programmes, professorships, students, and advanced degrees conferred were in the United States rather than in Europe, a situation even more marked a century later. There were differing circumstances and justifications for its academic institutionalization in Europe and its former colonies, and the early profession was variously allied with or patterned after the methods of philosophy, philology, literature, archaeology, various physical sciences, connoisseurship, or art criticism.²

Nevertheless, wherever art history was professionalized, it took the problem of *causality* as its general area of concern, construing its objects of study—individual works of art, however defined—as *evidential* in nature. It was routinely guided by the hypothesis that an artwork is reflective, emblematic, or generally *representative* of its original time, place, and circumstances of production. Art objects of all kinds came to have the status of historical documents in the dual sense that (1) each was presumed to provide significant, often unique and, on occasion, profoundly revealing evidence for the character of an age, nation, person, or people; and that (2) their appearance was the resultant *product* of a historical milieu, however narrowly or broadly framed.

The latter sense has regularly included the various social, cultural, political, economic, philosophical, or religious forces arguably in play at a particular time and place. Characteristically, disciplinary practice was devoted to reconstructing the elusive ‘realities’ of such ambient forces—from the intentions that might be ascribed to an individual maker, to more general historical forces or circumstances. In short, the principal aim of all art historical study has been to make artworks more fully *legible* in and to the present.

Since the institutional beginnings of art history there has been only loose and transitory consensus about the efficacy of various paradigms or analytic

methods for rendering artworks adequately legible, the key issue being the quantity and quality of historical or background information sufficient to a convincing interpretation of a given object. As criteria of explanatory adequacy have changed over time, and the purposes to which any such understandings might be put in the present have varied widely over the past two centuries, there has been considerable disagreement regarding the extent to which an art object can be taken, legitimately, as indicative or symptomatic of its historical milieu.

For some, art historical interpretation was complete and sufficient with the explication of a work's relationship to an evolving stylistic system manifested either by an individual artist (a particular corpus of work or *œuvre*) or by a broader aesthetic school or movement. For others, interpretation involved the articulation of interrelationships between stylistic development and the unfolding of an artist's biography, or (as in the case of the sixteenth-century artist and historian Giorgio Vasari) a regional and national style culminating in the synthetic work of a great artist (like Michelangelo) in the present.³ For some, explication approached adequacy only with the articulation of an object's larger historical 'contexts', foregrounding the work's documentary or representational status and its circumstances of production and reception.⁴

There has also been no abiding consensus about the limits or boundaries of art history's object-domain. For some, that domain was properly the corpus of traditional luxury items comprising the 'fine arts' of painting and sculpture, and the architecture of ruling classes or hegemonic institutions. Such a domain of attention was normally justified by reference either to shared criteria of demonstrable skill in execution or to what was documented (or postulated) as self-conscious aesthetic intent. Characteristically, this excluded the greater mass of images, objects, and buildings produced by human societies. For others, the purview of disciplinary attention ideally incorporated the latter, the conventional fine arts occasionally forming a distinguishable subset or idealized *canon* of historical artefacts. The situation is further compounded by the modern museological attention given to virtually any item of material culture, conflating current exhibitionary value (its originality or poignancy within the formal logic of an unfolding system of stylistic or intellectual fashion) with social, cultural, or historical importance.

The fuller network of associated discourses and professions of which art history is an integral and co-constructed facet has only begun to be examined by art historians and others, often under the discursive umbrella of cultural history or visual culture studies. Critical historiographic accounts of the discipline of art history are continually beset by (1) unresolved questions about the field's proper purview or object-domain of study; (2) the fragmentation and dispersion of professional attention to art historical objects across different fields of study with conflicting aims and theoretical assumptions; and (3) markedly different criteria of adequacy in paradigms of explanation and interpretation within each profession or institution.

Existing histories of art history have either been biographical and genealogical accounts of influential professionals, narrative accounts charting the evolution of theories of art (either in a vacuum or as unproblematic reflections of some broader spirit of an age, people, or place), or accounts of the development of various interpretative methodologies. Nevertheless, the fol-

lowing observations may be applicable to a broad spectrum of this network of practices.

In addition to a shared concern with questions of causality and evidence, the most fundamental principle underlying all these interrelated fields has been the assumption that changes in artistic *form* signal changes in individual or collective *mentality* or *intention*. Most commonly, the artefact or object is taken as a specific inflection of some personal or shared perspective on certain ideas, themes, or values—whether the object is construed as reflective or constructive (or both) of such ideas.

A corollary of this set of assumptions is that changes in form (and attitude) are themselves indicative of a *trajectory* of development; an *evolution* or overall direction in mentality which might be materially charted in stylistic changes over time and space. Such a figure (or ‘shape’) in time has often been interpreted as evidence for a shape *of* time itself; a ‘spiritual’ teleology or evolution. For some, artistic phenomena have been construed as providing key documentary evidence for such spiritual or social evolutions.

The most pervasive theory of the art object in art history as well as in conventional aesthetic philosophies was its conception as a *medium* of communication or expression. The object was construed within this communicational or linguistic paradigm as a ‘vehicle’ by means of which the intentions, values, attitudes, ideas, political or other messages, or the emotional state(s) of the maker—or by extension the maker’s social and historical contexts—were conveyed, by design or chance, to targeted (or circumstantial) beholders.

This was linked to the widespread presumption in art history and elsewhere that formal changes exist *in order to* effect changes in an audience’s understanding of what was formerly conveyed before the in(ter)vention of the new object. For some art historians, artworks were seen as catalysts for social and cultural change; for others they were the products of such changes. In either case, the analytical object was commonly sited within a predicative or propositional framework so as to be pertinent to a particular family of questions, the most basic of which was: in what way is this object a representation, expression, reflection, or embodiment of its particular time and place—that is, a trace or effect of the peculiar mentality of the person, people, or society that produced it?

In the history of art history, there were elaborated a variety of criteria for classifying objects of study according to their ability to convey such information. For some, the presumptive semantic ‘carrying capacity’ of certain kinds of objects was a function of traditional hierarchical distinctions between ‘fine’ and ‘applied’ arts, although notions regarding the semantic densities of all kinds of objects have varied widely among historians over time.

Common to these hypotheses was a facet of art historical practice shared with its allied discourses and institutions—namely, a fundamental concern with siting its objects of study within a discursive field, rhetorical framework, or analytic stage such that the work’s specifiable relationship to pertinent aspects of its original environment may be construed *causally* in some sense. Art history was closely allied with (indeed has been ancillary to) museology in this fixing-in-place of individual objects within the ideal horizons of a (potentially universal) history of artistic form—with the assignment, in short, of a locus or ‘address’ to the work within a finely calibrated system of chronological or geographic relationships of causality or influence.

From the sequential juxtaposition of objects in museum space to the formatting of photo or slide collections (material or virtual) to the curricular composition of university departments, disciplinary practice has been characteristically motivated by a desire to construe the significance of works as a function of their *relative position* in an unfolding historical or genealogical scheme of development, evolution, progress, or accountable change. Such schemata have framed objects within broad sectors of social and intellectual history, and within the evolving careers of single artists, in essentially similar ways. In this regard, the given object is a marker of difference, in a massive differential and relational system, from other objects—a situation clearly reflected in the very language of description, evaluation, and criticism of art.

Crucial to the articulation of art history as a systematic or even ‘scientific’ historical discipline in the nineteenth century was the construction of a centralized *data mass* to which the work of generations of scholars have contributed. This consisted of a universally extendable archive (potentially coterminous, by the late twentieth century, with the material culture of all human societies) within which every possible object of study might find its unique and proper place relative to all others. Every item might thereby be sited (and cited) as referencing or indexing another or others. A principal motivation for this massive labour over the past two centuries has been the assembly of material evidence for the construction of historical narratives of social, cultural, or cognitive development.

Grounded upon the associations of similarity or contiguity (or metaphor and metonymy) among its incorporated specimens or examples, this disciplinary archive became a critical artefact in its own right; itself a systematic, panoptic *instrument* for the calibrating and accounting for variation in continuity, and for continuity in variation and difference. Such an epistemological technology was clearly central to, and a paradigmatic instance of, the social and political formation of the modern nation-state and its various legitimizing paradigms of ethnic uniqueness and autochthony, or evolutionary progress or decline in ethics, aesthetics, hegemony, or technology.

Art history shared with its allied fields, and especially with museums, the fabrication of elaborate typological orders of ‘specimens’ of artistic activity linked by multiple chains of causality and influence over time and space and across the kaleidoscope of cultures (which could thereby be interlinked in evolutionary and diffusionist ways). This immense labour on the part of generations of historians, critics, and connoisseurs was in the service of assigning to objects a distinct place and moment in the historical ‘evolution’ of what thereby became validated as the pan-human phenomenon of *art* as a natural and legitimate subject in its own right; as cultural matter of deep significance because of what it arguably *revealed* about individuals, nations, or races.

From the beginning, the principal concern of historians and critics of the visual arts was the linkage of objects to patterns of causality assumed to exist between objects and makers, objects and objects, and between all of them and their various contemporary contexts. Underlying this was a family of organic metaphors linked to certain common theories of race in the early modern period: in particular, the presumption of a certain demonstrable kin-

ship, sameness, or homogeneity among objects produced or appearing at a given time and in a particular place. It was claimed that the products of an individual, studio, nation, ethnic group, class, gender, or race could—if read carefully and deeply enough—be shown to share certain common, consistent, and unique properties or principles of formation. Corresponding to this was a temporal notion of the art historical ‘period’ marked by similar homogeneities of style, thematic preoccupation, or technical approach to formal construction or composition.

Art history and museology traditionally fabricated histories of form as surrogates for or parallels to histories of persons or peoples: narrative stagings which served (on the model of forensic laboratory science) to illustrate, demonstrate, and delineate significant aspects of the character, level of civilization, or degree of social or cognitive advancement or decline of an individual or nation. Art objects were of documentary importance in so far as they might have evidential value relative to the past’s causal relations to the present, and thus the relationship of ourselves to others. The academic discourse of art history thereby served as a powerful modern *concordance* for systematically linking together aesthetics, ethics, and social history, providing essential validating instruments for the modern heritage industry and associated modes of the public consumption of objects and images.

From its beginnings, and in concert with its allied professions, art history worked to make the past synoptically visible so that it might function in and upon the present; so that the present might be seen as the demonstrable *product* of a particular past; and so that the past so staged might be framed as an *object of historical desire*: figured as that from which a modern citizen might desire descent.

The broad amalgam of complementary fields in which the modern discipline of art history is positioned never achieved fixed or uniform institutional integration. Nevertheless, in the long run its looseness, and the opportunistic adaptability of its component institutions and professions, proved particularly effective in naturalizing and validating the very *idea* of art as a ‘universal’ human phenomenon. Thus framed as an *object* of study, the art of art history simultaneously became a powerful *instrument* for imagining and scripting the social, cognitive, and ethical histories of all peoples.

As a keystone enterprise in making the visible legible, art history made of its legibilities a uniquely powerful medium for fabricating, sustaining, and transforming the identity and history of individuals and nations.

The principal product of art history has thus been modernity itself.

1

Art as History

Introduction

Do works of art provide us with knowledge that is significantly different from that offered elsewhere?

The modern discipline of art history is founded upon a series of assumptions regarding the meaning or significance of objects of human manufacture. Of these, two principal hypotheses have informed the field from its beginnings, constituting its conceptual core. The *first* is that not all objects are equal in the amount of information they might reveal about their sources or maker, some conveying more information about their sources than others. The *second* is that all such objects are time-factored: that is, they contain legible marks of the artefact's historical genealogy, either of a formal or thematic nature. A corollary of this is that any such marks exist within the genealogical time-frame of a particular people or culture. The first assumption lies behind varying justifications for delimiting art history's field of enquiry, while the second links that defined subject-domain to particular visions of individual and collective history and development.

The history of art historical practice may be understood as the development of many variations, transformations, and consequences of these fundamental assumptions. Linking all forms of practice over the past several centuries has been a virtually universal agreement that its objects of study—works of 'art'—are uniquely privileged in the degree to which they are able to communicate, symbolize, express, or embody certain deep or fundamental truths about their makers or sources, whether that be a single person or an entire culture or people.

The two individuals whom later art historians commonly regarded as the intellectual founders of the discipline—the Arezzo-born artist-historiographer of Renaissance Florence, Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), and the Prussian antiquarian-aesthete and resident of Rome, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68)—were motivated in their writing by a need to resolve dilemmas which had arisen in their time as a result of following out the consequences of contemporary perspectives on the aforementioned assumptions about works of 'art'. In each case, the problems they addressed were in no small measure the product of their own positions on the nature of historical causality and on what objects of art could actually mean, and how they might signify.

These two extraordinary figures, however, occupied very different positions in relation to their historical contexts. Vasari worked to establish what was to become the dominant art historical and critical tradition in which the

heritage of Florentine art was seen as paradigmatic of a revived antique glory. The progressive evolution of Florentine art was depicted as recapitulating the artistic processes that led to the glories of antique art because, as he saw it, Florentine and ancient artists were grappling with similar *artistic problems* concerning representation and the imitation of nature. The paradigm of artistic progress was articulated through metaphors of biological growth, the art of his time corresponding to a period of full maturity.

Up to the present, I have discoursed upon the origin of sculpture and painting...because I wish to be of service to the artists of our own day, by showing them how a small beginning leads to the highest elevation, and how from so noble a situation it is possible to fall to the uttermost ruin, and consequently, how these arts resemble nature as shown in our human bodies; and have their birth, growth, age and death, and I hope by this means they will be enabled more easily to recognise the progress of the renaissance of the arts, and the perfection to which they have attained in our own time.¹

Winckelmann was working exactly two centuries later, when the history of art that Vasari argued had reached its plateau of perfection in Michelangelo and his generation seemed to some to have been buried beneath two centuries of uncreative imitation and 'baroque' excess. One of Winckelmann's pragmatic motivations for re-establishing the *history* of art on a sound historical footing was the transformation and elevation of contemporary *art*. Rather than imitating the glories of the art of Michelangelo and Raphael, Winckelmann's contemporaries were exhorted to reach back to a 'true antiquity'—that of classical Greece—to thoroughly rebuild and transform the art of modern times; to create a *new* (or Neo-) classicism appropriate to the modern world.

At the same time, Winckelmann was working in reaction to two centuries of post-Vasarian imitators whose writings he characterized (not without some hyperbole) as 'mere narrative[s] of the chronology and alterations of art'; fragmented imitations of Vasarian art history applied to increasingly diverse and alien contexts. He envisioned and attempted to delineate a 'systematic' history of art in his remarkable 1764 book *The History of the Art of Antiquity*.² Like Vasari, he was concerned with articulating what he perceived to be the *historicity* of artworks: the idea that an object bore within its very form certain identifiable traces of its temporal position in a unilinear and developmental historical *system* (his word)—a coherent evolutionary sequence of artistic styles modelled (as all histories of art had been for some time) upon an organic metaphor of birth, maturity, and decline. His work was a progenitor of what came to be formalized in mid-nineteenth-century Europe as the academic discipline of art history. It instituted categories and paradigms which today remain deeply embedded in the structural framework and the pragmatic working assumptions of both classical archaeology (which also took Winckelmann as its chief progenitor) and modern art historical practice.

Winckelmann's *History* grappled with two principal problems. First, he aimed to highlight the specific, concrete historical *causes*—the climatic, biological, political, and social conditions—responsible for the appearance and evolution of a given artistic style. Understanding such conditions would be a way of comprehending the nature of style as such. Secondly, his work sought to articulate a viable analytic, explanatory position or role for the historian of art as a viewer of works. He was concerned here with elucidating the relations between the historian as subject and the historian's object of study in such a

way as to be productive of knowledge about the individual object, and about the nature of art itself more universally (art as uniquely revelatory about individuals and peoples). He was equally concerned with understanding what the encounter between subject and object might reveal about the nature of the viewing subject.

In point of fact, Winckelmann invented a new *version* of artistic history that was already present (both in general scope and in some of its particulars) in the work of Vasari two centuries earlier. The importance of Winckelmann's revolutionary contributions to the development of the modern discipline of art history cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the Vasarian tradition within which he was working, and against whose corruptions (as he saw it) he was working. Nevertheless, his writings were at the same time the principal catalyst of what may reasonably be understood as a revolution in art historical thinking which made possible the professional discipline as we know it today.

The differences in Vasari's and Winckelmann's projects and motivations are notable. Vasari's 1550 work (and its much-enlarged 1568 edition) *The Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors from Cimabue to Our Times* was written from the perspective of a practising artist actively engaged in the artistic and political life of his time. He was deeply concerned with understanding the history of art both internally and externally: as an account of the technical progress made by individual artists in successive generations towards an ideal representation of nature, and as documentary evidence of the superiority of Florentine art as itself emblematic of more general contrasts between the Florentine city-state and other cities and peoples. But much of this process was past for Vasari; it was already, in his view, at its apex and fulfilment, as embodied most closely in the work of his own artistic mentor, Michelangelo.

More broadly, his writing constituted a systematic attempt to account for the apparent contradictions in the *relativity* of artistic reputation—the fact that artists could be considered *justly* great at a particular time and place even though their accomplishments might be seen by later generations, and with equal justification, as less great or as artistically incomplete. His solution to the problem of reconciling sharply divergent historical perceptions was to reduce all such differences to episodes of a single, progressive, linear narrative wherein the accomplishments of any artist responded to and built upon what by hindsight could be seen as the foundations laid down by predecessors involved with a similar *mission*—in this case, with the commonly shared problem of representing nature. In Vasari's words:

As the men of the age were not accustomed to see any excellence or greater perfection than the things thus produced, they greatly admired them, and considered them to be the type of perfection, barbarous as they were. Yet some rising spirits, aided by some quality in the air of certain places, so far purged themselves of this crude style that in 1250 Heaven took compassion on the fine minds that the Tuscan soil was producing every day, and directed them to the original forms.³

Vasari's history of art, then, was above all a *history of precedents* in the progressive approximation to a norm or ideal manifested in its fulfilment by the work of his own time. That present moment of artistic perfection was articulated as the implicit goal of all previous practice *and* as the norm or standard

with which to assess all such practice. It was framed, very specifically, as the conclusion of an upward movement from the Gothic barbarisms of what subsequently came to be characterized as the 'Middle' Ages and the contemporary reconstitution (or Renaissance) of the artistic ideals of a once-lost Graeco-Roman antiquity being doubly reborn in uncovered Roman ruins and in the (Florentine) art inspired both by those ruins and by contemporary readings of various ancient texts on art by Cicero and Pliny. For Vasari, what had been lost was now regained by artists following the *example* of ancient works' imitation of nature's inner truths.

Winckelmann had generally similar motivations in composing his systematic history of art. The art of ancient Greece (which he and his generation knew only indirectly in what we now know to be mostly later Roman copies) represented for him an ideal perfection of style that in certain respects was lost for ever in its full particularities—that is, in its specific expressions of a(n equally idealized) social, political, and erotic world—but which none the less might find echoes in other times and places. It might even serve as an inspiration for a new classicism to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the past. It is important to note that Vasari's *history of artistic precedent* was grounded in an understanding of a still-living tradition of artistic practice in which he himself was a very active participant; Winckelmann's *history of art* was founded upon the articulation of patterns of growth and change revealed to antiquarian eyes and taste in fragmentary relics and copies of the art of a culture dead for two millennia. Vasari was part of the (Renaissance) tradition he elucidated, while Winckelmann was alienated from his own (Baroque) times.

For both Vasari and Winckelmann, there existed unresolvable tensions and contradictions in their attempts to deal with the relativities of historical thinking as such. For Vasari, this entailed the seemingly simultaneous completeness *and* incompleteness of a given work of art at a particular historical moment. In other words, a work may be incomplete in its approximation to an ideal norm of representation, yet complete or true in terms of its mission within a specific historical milieu. This was in large part an artefact of the vision of history as a linked series of solutions to what was characterized by hindsight as a common problem (in this case the imitation of nature). The difficulty was that the norm or ideal was itself historical and already incorporated into the momentum of history, changing over time and with each redefinition of artistic 'problems' of representation. The norm, in short, was *both* historical *and* outside history; both part of the historical process and its goal or fulfilment.

Vasari's most famous work—his *Lives*—was but an initial synthesis in a broader and ongoing project of monumentalizing and institutionalizing his aesthetic doctrines, and documenting the canonical examples of the rise to full realization of these doctrines. The encyclopaedic nature of his life's work itself became more pronounced with the second, more fully illustrated 1568 edition of the *Lives* (which also included new portrait images of the artists discussed), and with a series of related works such as an album of drawings of the artists studied, his *Libro del disegno*.⁴ In 1563, Vasari was instrumental in founding the first artists' Academy in Florence, which, under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, and with Michelangelo as its head, became the paradigm of artistic academies throughout Europe and its colonial extensions for

several centuries. As a virtual temple-museum of Vasari's aesthetic doctrines, the Academy combined the functions of an archive or *libreria* for the study of the designs, models, and plans of the artists of the *Lives* and *Libro*, a hall of exhibition, and a collection of portraits of members and old master artists. The Florentine Academy was the *cumulative* expression of (and monument to) Vasari's own professional engagement with modelling the history of artistic practice in a comprehensive and systematic fashion.

Winckelmann's notion of historical change was also based upon the idea of artistic history as a linked series of solutions to common artistic problems. The scale and ambition of his work, however, was broader than that of Vasari in a number of respects.

For one thing, he attempted to depict an entire national artistic tradition—that of ancient Greece—from its birth through to its historical decline and demise. He sought to fully account historically (as well as formally or technically) for how and why that tradition developed the way it did when and where it did. Winckelmann's interest in the visual arts also extended beyond what was then customary in that he envisioned the history of a people's art as providing a deeper and more lucid understanding of a people and its general historical development than any other history, or any merely political account. Art, in other words, was made to bear the burden of being an emblem of the *totality* of a people's culture: its quintessential expression. To understand a people's art was thus to understand that people in the deepest possible way.

Winckelmann's systematic history also extended and refined the general organic model common to histories of all kinds during his time in that it postulated a sequence of more clearly delineated steps or periods in the development of ancient art. These stages—still today implicitly canonical in most art historical practice—went from an early stylized ('archaic') origin to a phase characterized by an ideal mastery of naturalistic representation (coinciding with the period of Athenian democracy from the early fifth to the late fourth century BC) to a time of long decline, characterized by excessive decoration and the stale imitation of earlier precedents (the 'Hellenistic' period). In this regard, Winckelmann not only transformed the idea of the history of art into a notion that art is the emblem of the spirit of an entire culture, but he also argued that it achieves an ideal moment—what later came to be referred to as 'classical'—in which the *essential* qualities of a people are most fully and truly revealed: in this case, with the nude male *kouros* statue. In his eyes, the history of Greek art not only mirrored the rise, maturity, and decline of the free Greek city-state, but it was also its allegory; its classical moments constituted the epitome of all that culture had striven towards. His historical paradigm also permitted a patent analogy between the time of ancient 'decline'—the 'Hellenistic' period—and the later Baroque period in which he himself lived.

His genealogical system of Greek art was elaborated as an allegory of *all* artistic history at all times: the norm or standard against which the art of any people might be measured. This allowed him to compose the history of antiquity as a grand transcultural narrative with a mainstream and marginal side-tracks. He could thus evaluate Etruscan or Egyptian art as stunted in growth or side-tracked before a full 'classical' maturity could be achieved. It also enabled him *not* to see Roman art at all—except as a late, 'derivative'

phase of the art of Greece. Such views ran contrary to the reigning sentiment of the time, in which the vision of ancient Rome dominated the historical imagination (and whose monumental grandeur, decorum, and *gravitas* were being praised in the engravings of Winckelmann's contemporary, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, as being not at all 'dependent' upon Greek influence). The motivations for Winckelmann's unorthodox preferences remain obscure, although it seems likely that they were tied to contemporary political attitudes in which what was seen as one latter-day manifestation of Roman imperial art and architecture—the Baroque style—was inferentially linked to large and in some cases despotic states and institutions to which his own views on personal freedom were antipathetic.

While Winckelmann was instrumental in furthering excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum in southern Italy, within a generation the empirical supports for his theory of the history of art began to dissolve as a result of an exponential increase in knowledge due to discovery and excavation not only in Italy, but in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, which Winckelmann never saw. Nevertheless, the paradigmatic structure or conceptual system of Winckelmann's art history remained largely in place—both in its particulars and as one or another version of organicist metaphors for historical change—in the subsequent development of the modern discipline in the nineteenth century, both as its implicit ideal and as a historiographic straitjacket of unresolvable dilemmas.

Central to his notion of the ideal ('classical') moment of Greek art was a fantasy of a free, desiring self, both reflecting and reflected in Athenian approximations of democratic self-rule. Such a moment in art would paradoxically also be *styleless*; having to be a pure unadorned mirror or expression of individual free agency. Herein lay one of the contradictions of Winckelmann's systematic history. In trying to comprehend the Greek ideal in a more fully historical manner he effectively *relativized* it, thereby making it a rather problematic model for the contemporary practice which he simultaneously wished to inspire. In his work, then, there is an oscillation between two senses of the ideal in art: as that which was the organic, historical expression of one particular society and culture—Greece (i.e. Athens) in the ('classical') fifth century BC, after the 'Archaic' age and before the 'Hellenistic' period, *and* as that which transcended style *per se*: as a (n ahistorical) quality of 'the best' in all free artistic expression.

Despite many refinements and transformations, a not inconsiderable amount of the conceptual structure of Winckelmann's art history has remained in play through most of the two hundred years since his death. Many of the deeper (and less visible) assumptions about art and its history common to our own contemporary practices echo and refract the questions, problems, and theses that Winckelmann so eloquently articulated in the eighteenth century in his own transformation and reinvention of the Vasarian tradition. Many of these remain unresolved, and may in fact be unresolvable in the terms habitually used to grapple with them.

Although Winckelmann's *History* provided the master blueprint for much of the stage machinery with which the discipline of art history was to operate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is an important sense in which his work differs significantly from its progeny. This has to do with the

second of the major problems that his work sought to address: his conception of the relationship between the historian as subject and the historian's object of study. It is here that we may begin to appreciate not only what may have been at stake for him in the late eighteenth century, but also, and equally importantly, how art history may have changed, during its nineteenth-century professionalization and academic institutionalization, in articulating the relationships between viewing subjects and the objects of their attention.

As Whitney Davis demonstrates quite lucidly in the second reading in this chapter, for Winckelmann, such a relationship was not simple and straightforward, and not at all an unproblematic or directly revelatory confrontation of a viewer and an object. His particular involvement in attempting to articulate this position—or these positions, since they are multiple and shifting—brought to the surface (a surface more visible after Freud) a set of dilemmas which remains central to the problem of what it means to conceive of being a 'historian' of art, and what it means to conceive of something called art history, in the most general sense.

If Vasari saw himself as a witness who was part of an unfolding tradition that successfully reconstituted the achievements of ancient art, Winckelmann saw himself as a witness to something that had *doubly* departed—both the ancient tradition, and its Renaissance or rebirth, now itself over and gone: the latter demise being part of his own history. In what position would the art historian find him- or herself with respect to all these losses? Particularly if it were the case that the process of restoring the object of the historian's desire in the fullness of its *own* history is to result in its alienation from the historian's own place and time: its irrevocable *loss*. The art historical act of investigating the nature of the interesting or desirable object, the attempt to understand and to come ever closer to it, would inevitably result in a recognition of its real *otherness*; its being of and for another (lost) time: its speaking to others in terms they would have always already understood more fully than the contemporary historian. At the same time, this loss would seem to undercut the possibility of restoring or reviving those ideals as a model for artistic practice in the present.

In no small measure, as Davis's essay suggests, these dilemmas and contradictions underlay Winckelmann's attempt to reconcile his own homoerotic fetishization of the beauty represented doubly by the youthful Greek male nude statue, and by the (present) living objects of his own personal desires, with his scholarly historical investigations in which the former objects were staged as the (departed) classical epitome of the totality of Greek culture. The problem of the position of the historian-observer is cast in his writings in such a way as to foreground the ambiguities and ambivalences both of gender-relations and, more generally, of distinctions between 'subjects' and 'objects' *per se*. Such ambiguities are those upon the repression of which modern society depends for its boundaries, laws, and social organization.⁵

In the systematic project of understanding the circumstances that made Greek art possible, the *History* historicized the Greek ideal, relativizing its accomplishments, and placing it irrevocably beyond his own grasp. What is in the historian's possession are copies (even if they be 'originals') which serve as catalysts for an unquenchable desire for the elusive realities of the beauty they represent. The pursuit of such a desire is unending; the dead objects can

never be brought to life; the beauty possessed (either in objects of art or in living subjects) always leaves something more to be desired.

There is another aspect of this problem which is pertinent to our understanding of the subsequent evolution of art history. It is important to appreciate that Winckelmann lived before the great nineteenth-century efflorescence of European public museums and the massive civic staging of works of art composed in museological space as continuous narrative histories or genealogies of individuals, regions, nations, and peoples. Within such new, intensely art-saturated environments, many of the complexities and ambiguities of viewing and understanding historical objects to which Winckelmann was sensitive came to be buried beneath the stage machinery of more dichotomous subject-object relations, which institutionalized art objects by the thousands as commodities to be vicariously consumed or unproblematically 'read' (in novelistic fashion) as relics not only of their makers but of national patrimony.

None the less, the underlying structure or system of many such stagings was (and still is) Winckelmannian in origin, if not in ostensible motivation. The nature of subject-object relations formatted by the nineteenth-century civic museum was integral to the larger enterprise of the modern nation-state and the fashioning of disciplined populations, an enterprise into which the nineteenth-century discipline of art history was integrated, albeit at times uneasily and ambivalently, as both handmaid and guiding light.

As many of the texts later in this book will reveal, the dilemmas and paradoxes that were central to the European project of constructing histories of art in the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries are no less powerful or poignant at the end of the twentieth century—and for reasons which, as we shall see, may be complementary to those with which Vasari and Winckelmann contended.

The readings making up this chapter include selections from Winckelmann's 1755 book *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*,⁶ and two contemporary texts: a 1994 essay on Winckelmann by Whitney Davis, and an excerpt from Michael Baxandall's 1985 book *Patterns of Intention*. The first includes sections dealing with beauty and the notion of 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur'—for Winckelmann, the quintessential quality of Greek art. The next two readings are important elucidations of the essential problems of art historical practice. The Baxandall selection is one of the most lucid discussions in recent literature on art historical description and explanation, and in its broad implications addresses fundamental problems faced by Winckelmann himself.

The essay by Davis, a provocative discussion both of Winckelmann's position in the history of the discipline and of the problems facing art historical practice in the most general sense, is one of the most interesting analyses on both subjects to have appeared in recent years; it is also a good illustration of the ways in which contemporary research on questions of gender-construction and of subject-object relations may usefully elucidate aspects of the life and work of a historical figure. (For a penetrating view of the subject of death and 'loss' for the historian more generally, see also Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*.)⁷

The bibliography of work pertaining to Winckelmann is extensive, and only a few pertinent titles are given here; additional references may be found in the cited works, as well as in the notes to the Davis essay below. The most comprehensive and insightful studies of Winckelmann may be found in the writings of Alex Potts, whose volume *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London, 1994) is the most important study of Winckelmann's work to date, and an excellent source of references to the Winckelmann literature in various languages.

In addition to the primary and secondary works on Winckelmann and Vasari listed in the Notes, the following texts are recommended: Svetlana Alpers, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitude in Vasari's *Lives*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23 (1960), 190–215; Hans Belting, 'Vasari and his Legacy: The History of Art as a Process?', in Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago, 1987), 67–94; Ernst Gombrich, 'The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences', in id., *Norm and Form: The Stylistic Categories of Art History and their Origins in the Renaissance* (London, 1978), 1–10; and Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven and London, 1981).

Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects

Preface to the Third Part

Truly great was the advancement conferred on the arts of architecture, painting, and sculpture by those excellent masters of whom we have written hitherto, in the Second Part of these Lives, for to the achievements of the early masters they added rule, order, proportion, draughtsmanship, and manner; not, indeed, in complete perfection, but with so near an approach to the truth that the masters of the third age, of whom we are henceforward to speak, were enabled, by means of their light, to aspire still higher and attain to that supreme perfection which we see in the most highly prized and most celebrated of our modern works. But to the end that the nature of the improvement brought about by the aforesaid craftsmen may be even more clearly understood, it will certainly not be out of place to explain in a few words the five additions that I have named, and to give a succinct account of the origin of that true excellence which, having surpassed the age of the ancients, makes the modern so glorious.

Rule, then, in architecture, was the process of taking measurements from antiquities and studying the ground-plans of ancient edifices for the construction of modern buildings. Order was the separating of one style from another, so that each body should receive its proper members, with no more interchanging between Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Tuscan. Proportion was the universal law applying both to architecture and to sculpture, that all bodies should be made correct and true, with the members in proper harmony; and so, also, in painting. Draughtsmanship was the imitation of the most beautiful parts of nature in all figures, whether in sculpture or in painting; and for this it is necessary to have a hand and a brain able to reproduce with absolute accuracy and precision, on a level surface—whether by drawing on paper, or on panel, or on some other level surface—everything that the eye sees; and the same is true of relief in sculpture. Manner then attained to the greatest beauty from the practice which arose of constantly copying the most beautiful objects, and joining together these most beautiful things, hands, heads, bodies, and legs, so as to make a figure of the greatest possible beauty. This practice was carried out in every work for all figures, and for that reason it is called the beautiful manner.

These things had not been done by Giotto or by the other early craftsmen, although they had discovered the rudiments of all these difficulties, and had touched them on the surface; as in their drawing, which was sounder and more true to nature than it had been before, and likewise in harmony of colouring and in the grouping of figures in scenes, and in many other respects

of which enough has been said. Now although the masters of the second age improved our arts greatly with regard to all the qualities mentioned above, yet these were not made by them so perfect as to succeed in attaining to complete perfection, for there was wanting in their rule a certain freedom which, without being of the rule, might be directed by the rule and might be able to exist without causing confusion or spoiling the order; which order had need of an invention abundant in every respect, and of a certain beauty maintained in every least detail, so as to reveal all that order with more adornment. In proportion there was wanting a certain correctness of judgment, by means of which their figures, without having been measured, might have, in due relation to their dimensions, a grace exceeding measurement. In their drawing there was not the perfection of finish, because, although they made an arm round and a leg straight, the muscles in these were not revealed with that sweet and facile grace which hovers midway between the seen and the unseen, as is the case with the flesh of living figures; nay, they were crude and excoriated, which made them displeasing to the eye and gave hardness to the manner. This last was wanting in the delicacy that comes from making all figures light and graceful, particularly those of women and children, with the limbs true to nature, as in the case of men, but veiled with a plumpness and fleshiness that should not be awkward, as they are in nature, but refined by draughtsmanship and judgment. They also lacked our abundance of beautiful costumes, our great number and variety of bizarre fancies, loveliness of colouring, wide knowledge of buildings, and distance and variety in landscapes. And although many of them, such as Andrea Verrocchio and Antonio del Pollaiuolo, and many others more modern, began to seek to make their figures with more study, so as to reveal in them better draughtsmanship, with a degree of imitation more correct and truer to nature, nevertheless the whole was not yet there, even though they had one very certain assurance—namely, that they were advancing towards the good, and their figures were thus approved according to the standard of the works of the ancients, as was seen when Andrea Verrocchio restored in marble the legs and arms of the Marsyas in the house of the Medici in Florence. But they lacked a certain finish and finality of perfection in the feet, hands, hair, and beards, although the limbs as a whole are in accordance with the antique and have a certain correct harmony in the proportions. Now if they had had that minuteness of finish which is the perfection and bloom of art, they would also have had a resolute boldness in their works; and from this there would have followed delicacy, refinement, and supreme grace, which are the qualities produced by the perfection of art in beautiful figures, whether in relief or in painting; but these qualities they did not have, although they give proof of diligent striving. That finish, and that certain something that they lacked, they could not achieve so readily, seeing that study, when it is used in that way to obtain finish, gives dryness to the manner.

After them, indeed, their successors were enabled to attain to it through seeing excavated out of the earth certain antiquities cited by Pliny as amongst the most famous, such as the Laocoon, the Hercules, the Great Torso of the Belvedere, and likewise the Venus, the Cleopatra, the Apollo, and an endless number of others, which, both with their sweetness and their severity, with their fleshy roundness copied from the greatest beauties of nature,

and with certain attitudes which involve no distortion of the whole figure but only a movement of certain parts, and are revealed with a most perfect grace, brought about the disappearance of a certain dryness, hardness, and sharpness of manner, which had been left to our art by the excessive study of Piero della Francesca, Lazzaro Vasari, Alesso Baldovinetti, Andrea dal Castagno, Pesello, Ercole Ferrarese, Giovanni Bellini, Cosimo Rosselli, the Abbot of S. Clemente, Domenico del Ghirlandajo, Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna, Filippo, and Luca Signorelli. These masters sought with great efforts to do the impossible in art by means of labour, particularly in foreshortenings and in things unpleasant to the eye, which were as painful to see as they were difficult for them to execute. And although their works were for the most part well drawn and free from errors, yet there was wanting a certain resolute spirit which was never seen in them, and that sweet harmony of colouring which the Bolognese Francia and Pietro Perugino first began to show in their works; at the sight of which people ran like madmen to this new and more lifelike beauty, for it seemed to them quite certain that nothing better could ever be done. But their error was afterwards clearly proved by the works of Leonardo da Vinci, who, giving a beginning to that third manner which we propose to call the modern—besides the force and boldness of his drawing, and the extreme subtlety wherewith he counterfeited all the minutenesses of nature exactly as they are—with good rule, better order, right proportion, perfect drawing, and divine grace, abounding in resources and having a most profound knowledge of art, may be truly said to have endowed his figures with motion and breath.

There followed after him, although at some distance, Giorgione da Castelfranco, who obtained a beautiful gradation of colour in his pictures, and gave a sublime movement to his works by means of a certain darkness of shadow, very well conceived; and not inferior to him in giving force, relief, sweetness, and grace to his pictures, with his colouring, was Fra Bartolommeo di San Marco. But more than all did the most gracious Raffaello da Urbino, who, studying the labours of the old masters and those of the modern, took the best from them, and, having gathered it together, enriched the art of painting with that complete perfection which was shown in ancient times by the figures of Apelles and Zeuxis; nay, even more, if we may make bold to say it, as might be proved if we could compare their works with his. Wherefore nature was left vanquished by his colours; and his invention was facile and peculiar to himself, as may be perceived by all who see his painted stories, which are as vivid as writings, for in them he showed us places and buildings true to reality, and the features and costumes both of our own people and of strangers, according to his pleasure; not to mention his gift of imparting grace to the heads of young men, old men, and women, reserving modesty for the modest, wantonness for the wanton, and for children now mischief in their eyes, now playfulness in their attitudes; and the folds of his draperies, also, are neither too simple nor too intricate, but of such a kind that they appear real.

In the same manner, but sweeter in colouring and not so bold, there followed Andrea del Sarto, who may be called a rare painter, for his works are free from errors. Nor is it possible to describe the charming vivacity seen in the works of Antonio da Correggio, who painted hair in detail, not in the precise manner used by the masters before him, which was constrained, sharp,

and dry, but soft and feathery, with each single hair visible, such was his facility in making them; and they seemed like gold and more beautiful than real hair, which is surpassed by that which he painted.

The same did Francesco Mazzuoli of Parma, who excelled him in many respects in grace, adornment, and beauty of manner, as may be seen in many of his pictures, which smile on whoever beholds them; and even as there is a perfect illusion of sight in the eyes, so there is perceived the beating of the pulse, according as it best pleased his brush. But whosoever shall consider the mural paintings of Polidoro and Maturino, will see figures in attitudes that seem beyond the bounds of possibility, and he will wonder with amazement how it can be possible, not to describe with the tongue, which is easy, but to express with the brush the tremendous conceptions which they put into execution with such mastery and dexterity, in representing the deeds of the Romans exactly as they were.

And how many there are who, having given life to their figures with their colours, are now dead, such as Il Rosso, Fra Sebastiano, Giulio Romano, and Perino del Vaga! For of the living, who are known to all through their own efforts, there is no need to speak here. But what most concerns the whole world of art is that they have now brought it to such perfection, and made it so easy for him who possesses draughtsmanship, invention, and colouring, that, whereas those early masters took six years to paint one panel, our modern masters can paint six in one year, as I can testify with the greatest confidence both from seeing and from doing; and our pictures are clearly much more highly finished and perfect than those executed in former times by masters of account.

But he who bears the palm from both the living and the dead, transcending and eclipsing all others, is the divine Michelagnolo Buonarroti, who holds the sovereignty not merely of one of these arts, but of all three together. This master surpasses and excels not only all those moderns who have almost vanquished nature, but even those most famous ancients who without a doubt did so gloriously surpass her; and in his own self he triumphs over moderns, ancients, and nature, who could scarcely conceive anything so strange and so difficult that he would not be able, by the force of his most divine intellect and by means of his industry, draughtsmanship, art, judgment, and grace, to excel it by a great measure; and that not only in painting and in the use of colour, under which title are comprised all forms, and all bodies upright or not upright, palpable or impalpable, visible or invisible, but also in the highest perfection of bodies in the round, with the point of his chisel. And from a plant so beautiful and so fruitful, through his labours, there have already spread branches so many and so noble, that, besides having filled the world in such unwonted profusion with the most luscious fruits, they have also given the final form to these three most noble arts. And so great and so marvellous is his perfection, that it may be safely and surely said that his statues are in all their parts much more beautiful than the ancient; for if we compare the heads, hands, arms, and feet shaped by the one with those of the others, we see in his a greater depth and solidity, a grace more completely graceful, and a much more absolute perfection, accomplished with a manner so facile in the overcoming of difficulties, that it is not possible ever to see anything better. And the same may be believed of his pictures, which, if we chanced to have

some by the most famous Greeks and Romans, so that we might compare them face to face, would prove to be as much higher in value and more noble as his sculptures are clearly superior to all those of the ancients.

But if we admire so greatly those most famous masters who, spurred by such extraordinary rewards and by such good-fortune, gave life to their works, how much more should we not celebrate and exalt to the heavens those rare intellects who, not only without reward, but in miserable poverty, bring forth fruits so precious? We must believe and declare, then, that if, in this our age, there were a due meed of remuneration, there would be without a doubt works greater and much better than were ever wrought by the ancients. But the fact that they have to grapple more with famine than with fame, keeps our hapless intellects submerged, and, to the shame and disgrace of those who could raise them up but give no thought to it, prevents them from becoming known.

And let this be enough to have said on this subject; for it is now time to re-turn to the Lives, and to treat in detail of all those who have executed famous works in this third manner, the creator of which was Leonardo da Vinci, with whom we will now begin.

Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture

I. Natural Beauty

Good taste, which is becoming more prevalent throughout the world, had its origins under the skies of Greece. Every invention of foreign nations which was brought to Greece was, as it were, only a first seed that assumed new form and character here. We are told¹ that Minerva chose this land, with its mild seasons, above all others for the Greeks in the knowledge that it would be productive of genius.

The taste which the Greeks exhibited in their works of art was unique and has seldom been taken far from its source without loss. Under more distant skies it found tardy recognition and without a doubt was completely unknown in the northern zones during a time when painting and sculpture, of which the Greeks are the greatest teachers, found few admirers. This was a time when the most valuable works of Correggio were used to cover the windows of the royal stables in Stockholm.²

One has to admit that the reign of the great August³ was the happy period during which the arts were introduced into Saxony as a foreign element. Under his successor, the German Titus, they became firmly established in this country, and with their help good taste is now becoming common.

An eternal monument to the greatness of this monarch is that he furthered good taste by collecting and publicly displaying the greatest treasures from Italy and the very best paintings that other countries have produced. His eagerness to perpetuate the arts did not diminish until authentic works of Greek masters and indeed those of the highest quality were available for artists to imitate. The purest sources of art have been opened, and fortunate is the person who discovers and partakes of them. This search means going to Athens; and Dresden will from now on be an Athens for artists.

The only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients. What someone once said of Homer—that to understand him well means to admire him—is also true for the art works of the ancients, especially the Greeks. One must become as familiar with them as with a friend in order to find their statue of Laocoon⁴ just as inimitable as Homer. In such close acquaintance one learns to judge as Nicomachus judged Zeuxis' Helena: 'Behold her with my eyes', he said to an ignorant person who found fault with this work of art, 'and she will appear a goddess to you.'

With such eyes did Michelangelo, Raphael, and Poussin see the works of the ancients. They partook of good taste at its source, and Raphael did this in the very land where it had begun. We know that he sent young artists to Greece in order to sketch for him the relics of antiquity.

The relationship between an ancient Roman statue and a Greek original will generally be similar to that seen in Virgil's imitation of Homer's *Nausicaa*, in which he compares Dido and her followers to Diana in the midst of her *Oreads*.⁵

Laocoon was for the artist of old Rome just what he is for us—the demonstration of Polyclitus' rules, the perfect rules of art.⁶

I need not remind the reader that certain negligences can be discovered in even the most famous works of Greek artists. Examples are the dolphin which was added to the Medicean Venus⁷ together with the playing children; and the work of Dioscorides, except the main figure, in his cameo of Diomedes⁸ with the Palladium. It is well known that the workmanship on the reverse of the finest coins of the kings of Syria and Egypt rarely equals that of the heads of these kings portrayed on the obverse. But great artists are wise even in their faults. They cannot err without teaching. One should observe their works as Lucian would have us observe the Jupiter of Phidias: as Jupiter himself, not his footstool.

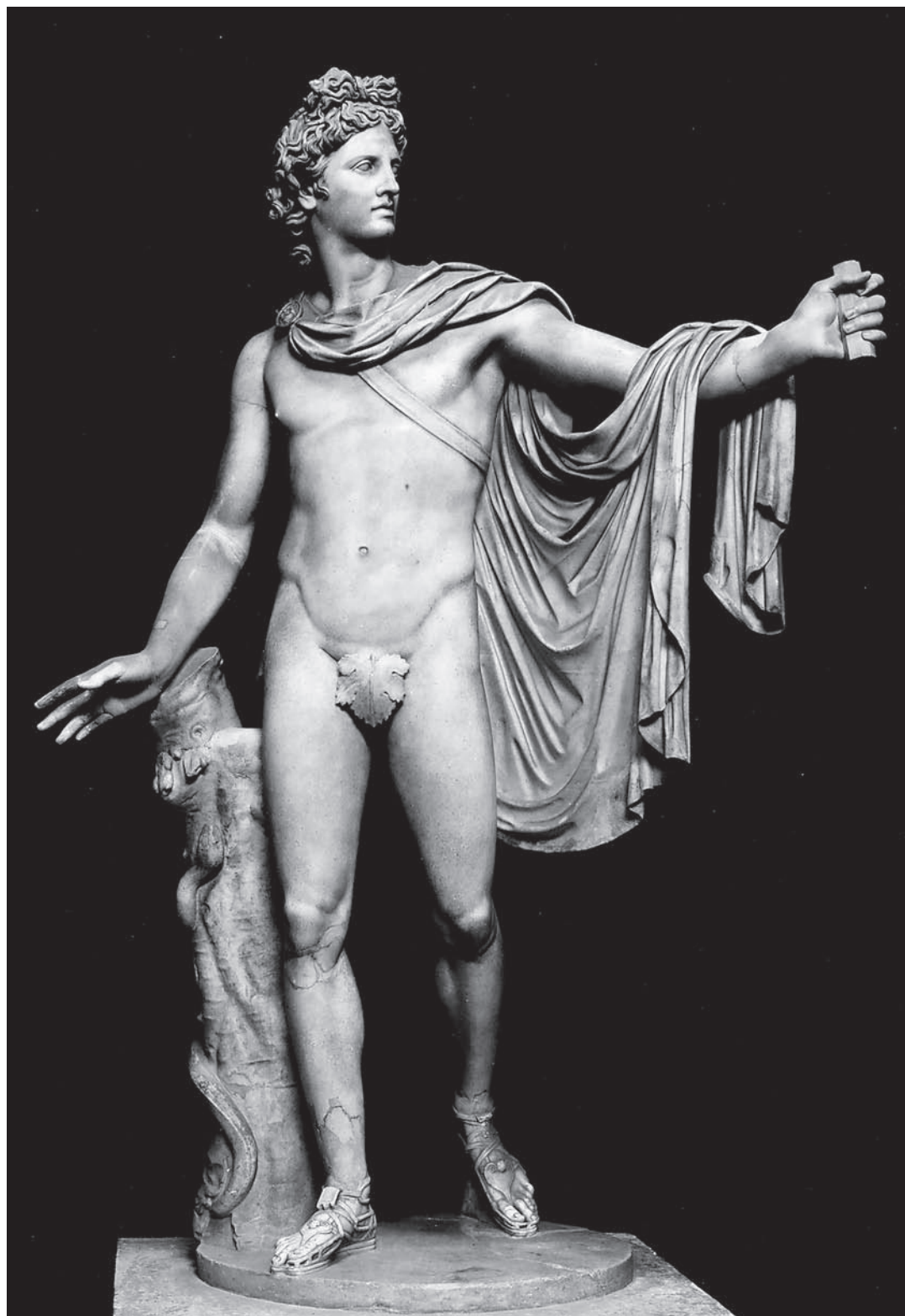
In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty, which, as an ancient interpreter of Plato⁹ teaches us, come from images created by the mind alone.

The most beautiful body of one of us would probably no more resemble the most beautiful Greek body than Iphicles resembled his brother, Hercules.¹⁰ The first development of the Greeks was influenced by a mild and clear sky; but the practice of physical exercises from an early age gave this development its noble forms. Consider, for example, a young Spartan conceived by a hero and heroine and never confined in swaddling clothes, sleeping on the ground from the seventh year on and trained from infancy in wrestling and swimming. Compare this Spartan with a young Sybarite¹¹ of our time and then decide which of the two would be chosen by the artist as a model for young Theseus, Achilles, or even Bacchus. Modelled from the latter it would be a Theseus fed on roses, while from the former would come a Theseus fed on flesh, to borrow the terms used by a Greek painter to characterize two different conceptions of this hero [3].

The grand games gave every Greek youth a strong incentive for physical exercise, and the laws demanded a ten month preparation period for the Olympic Games, in Elis,¹² at the very place where they were held. The highest prizes were not always won by adults but often by youths, as told in Pindar's odes. To resemble the god-like Diagoras was the fondest wish of every young man.¹³

Behold the swift Indian who pursues a deer on foot—how briskly his juices must flow, how flexible and quick his nerves and muscles must be, how light the whole structure of his body! Thus did Homer portray his heroes, and his Achilles he chiefly noted as being 'swift of foot'.

These exercises gave the bodies of the Greeks the strong and manly contours which the masters then imparted to their statues without any exaggeration or excess. [...]



IV. Noble Simplicity and Quiet Grandeur

The general and most distinctive characteristics of the Greek masterpieces are, finally, a noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, both in posture and expression. Just as the depths of the sea always remain calm however much the surface may rage, so does the expression of the figures of the Greeks reveal a great and composed soul even in the midst of passion.

Such a soul is reflected in the face of Laocoon¹⁴—and not in the face alone—despite his violent suffering [4]. The pain is revealed in all the muscles and sinews of his body, and we ourselves can almost feel it as we observe the painful contraction of the abdomen alone without regarding the face and other parts of the body. This pain, however, expresses itself with no sign of rage in his face or in his entire bearing. He emits no terrible screams such as Virgil's Laocoon, for the opening of his mouth does not permit it; it is rather an anxious and troubled sighing as described by Sadoletto.¹⁵ The physical pain and the nobility of soul are distributed with equal strength over the entire body and are, as it were, held in balance with one another. Laocoon suffers, but he suffers like Sophocles' Philoctetes;¹⁶ his pain touches our very souls, but we wish that we could bear misery like this great man.

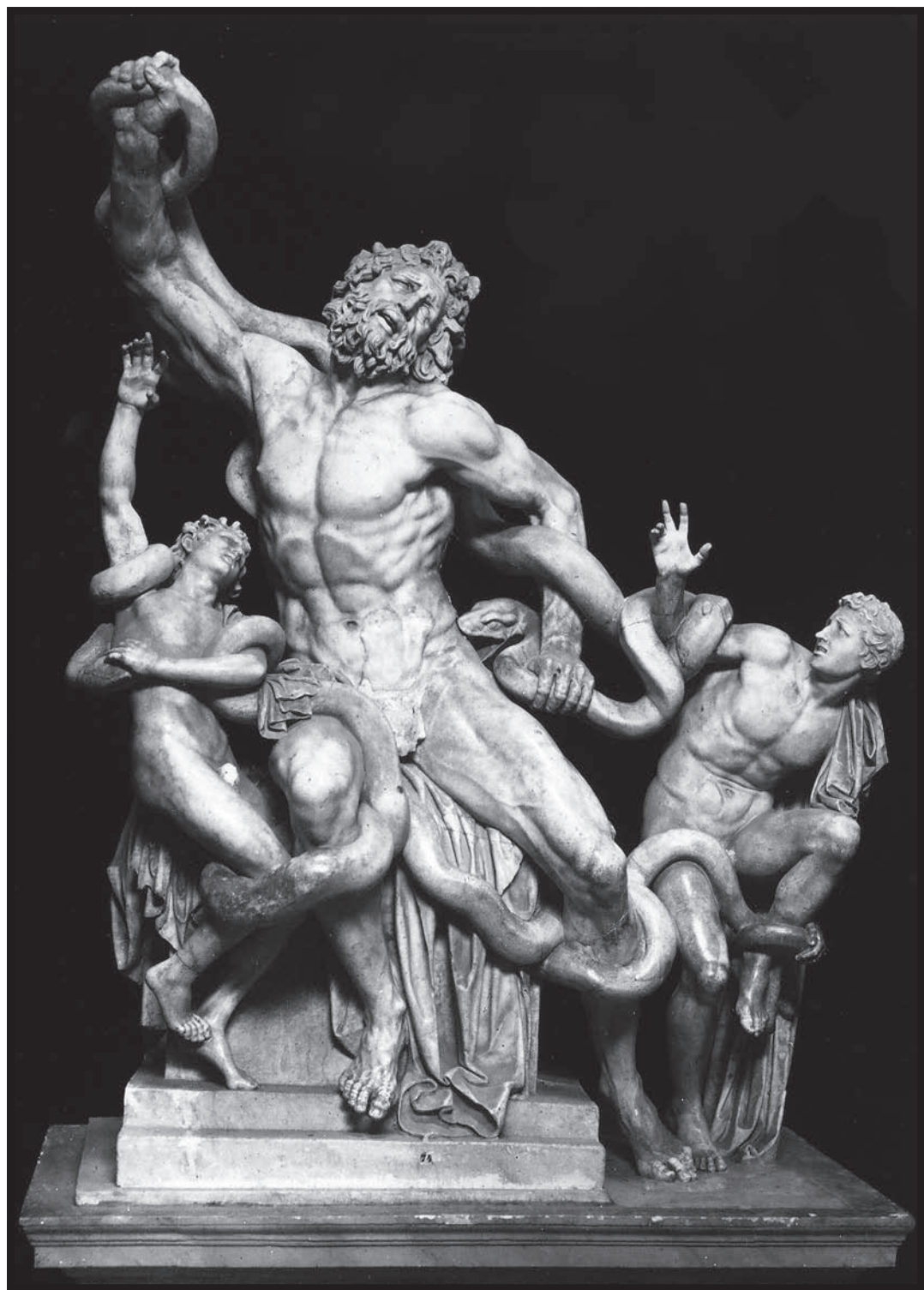
The expression of such nobility of soul goes far beyond the depiction of beautiful nature. The artist had to feel the strength of this spirit in himself and then impart it to his marble. Greece had artists who were at once philosophers, and there was more than one Metrodorus.¹⁷ Wisdom extended its hand to art and imbued its figures with more than common souls.

If the artist had clothed him, as would indeed befit his station as a priest, Laocoon's pain would have lost half its expression. Bernini even claimed to detect in the rigidity of one of Laocoon's thighs the first effects of the snake's venom.

All movements and poses of Greek figures not marked by such traits of wisdom, but instead by passion and violence, were the result of an error of conception which the ancient artists called *parenthyrsos*.¹⁸

The more tranquil the state of the body the more capable it is of portraying the true character of the soul. In all positions too removed from this tranquillity, the soul is not in its most essential condition, but in one that is agitated and forced. A soul is more apparent and distinctive when seen in violent passion, but it is great and noble when seen in a state of unity and calm. The portrayal of suffering alone in Laocoon would have been *parenthyrsos*; therefore the artist, in order to unite the distinctive and the noble qualities of soul, showed him in an action that was closest to a state of tranquillity for one in such pain. But in this tranquillity the soul must be distinguished by traits that are uniquely its own and give it a form that is calm and active at the same time, quiet but not indifferent or sluggish.

The common taste of artists of today, especially the younger ones, is in complete opposition to this. Nothing gains their approbation but contorted postures and actions in which bold passion prevails. This they call art executed with spirit, or *franchezza*.¹⁹ Their favorite term is *contrapposto*,²⁰ which represents for them the essence of a perfect work of art. In their figures they demand a soul which shoots like a comet out of their midst; they would like every figure to be an Ajax or a Capaneus.²¹



The arts themselves have their infancy as do human beings, and they begin as do youthful artists with a preference for amazement and bombast. Such was the tragic muse of Aeschylus; his hyperbole²² makes his Agamemnon in part far more obscure than anything that Heraclitus wrote. Perhaps the first Greek painters painted in the same manner that their first good tragedian wrote.

Rashness and volatility lead the way in all human actions; steadiness and composure follow last. The latter, however, take time to be discovered and are found only in great matters; strong passions can be of advantage to their students. The wise artist knows how difficult these qualities are to imitate.

ut sibi quivis
Speret idem, sudet multum frustra laboret
Ausus idem.

(Horace)²³

La Fage, the great draughtsman, was unable to match the taste of the ancients. His works are so full of movement that the observer's attention is at the same time attracted and distracted, as at a social gathering where everyone tries to talk at once.

The noble simplicity and quiet grandeur of the Greek statues is also the true hallmark of Greek writings from their best period, the writings of the Socratic school. And these are the best characteristics of Raphael's greatness, which he attained through imitation of the Greeks.

So great a soul in so handsome a body as Raphael's was needed to first feel and to discover in modern times the true character of the ancients. He had, furthermore, the great good fortune to achieve this at an age when ordinary and undeveloped souls are still insensitive to true greatness.

We must approach his works with the true taste of antiquity and with eyes that have learned to sense these beauties. Then the calm serenity of the main figures in Raphael's 'Attila', which seem lifeless to many, will be for us most significant and noble. The Roman bishop here,²⁴ who dissuaded the king of the Huns from attacking Rome, does not make the gestures and movements of an orator but is shown rather as a man of dignity whose mere presence calms a violent spirit, as in Virgil's description:

Tum pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem
Conspexere, silent arrectisque auribus adstant.

(Aen. I)²⁵

Full of confidence he faces the raging tyrant, while the two apostles hovering in the clouds are not like avenging angels but, if I may compare the sacred with the profane, like Homer's Jupiter, who makes Mount Olympus quiver with a blink of his eyes.

Algardi, in his famous representation of this same story in bas-relief on an altar of St Peter's in Rome, did not give or know how to give the figures of his two apostles the active tranquillity of his great predecessor. There they appeared like messengers of the lord of hosts, but here they are like mortal warriors with human weapons.

How few experts have been able to understand the grandeur of expression which Guido Reni gave his beautiful painting of Archangel Michael in the Church of the Capuchins in Rome. Concha's St Michael²⁶ is preferred

because his face shows anger and revenge, whereas Guido's archangel, after casting down the enemy of God and man, hovers over him without bitterness, his expression calm and serene.

Just as calm and serene is the avenging hovering angel with whom the English poet compares the victorious commander at Blenheim as protector of Britannia.²⁷

The Royal Gallery of Paintings in Dresden now contains among its treasures one of Raphael's best works, as Vasari and others have noted. It is a Madonna and Child with St Sixtus and St Barbara kneeling on each side, and two angels in the foreground.²⁸ This picture was the central altar-piece at the monastery of St Sixtus in Piacenza. Art lovers and connoisseurs went to see this Raphael just as people traveled to Thespieae²⁹ solely to see Praxiteles' beautiful statue of Cupid.

Behold this Madonna, her face filled with innocence and extraordinary greatness, in a posture of blissful serenity! It is the same serenity with which the ancients imbued the depictions of their deities. How awesome and noble is her entire contour! The child in her arms is a child elevated above ordinary children; in its face a divine radiance illuminates the innocence of childhood. St Barbara kneels in worshipful stillness at her side, but far beneath the majesty of the main figure—in a humility for which the great master found compensation in the gentle charm of her expression. St Sixtus, kneeling opposite her, is a venerable old man whose features bear witness to his youth devoted to God.

St Barbara's reverence for the Madonna, which is made more vivid and moving by the manner in which she presses her beautiful hands to her breast, helps to support the gesture which St Sixtus makes with his hand. This gesture of ecstasy was chosen by the artist to add variety to his composition and is more appropriate to masculine strength than to feminine modesty.

Time has, to be sure, robbed this painting of much of its glory, and its color has partially faded, but the soul which the artist breathed into the work of his hands still makes it live.

All those who approach this and other works of Raphael in the hope of finding there the trifling beauties that make the works of Dutch painters so popular: the painstaking diligence of a Netscher or a Dou, the ivory flesh tones of a van der Werff, or the tidy manner of some of Raphael's countrymen in our times—those, I say, will never find in Raphael the great Raphael. [...]

VI. Painting

Everything that can be said in praise of Greek sculpture should in all likelihood also hold true for Greek painting. But time and human barbarity have robbed us of the means to make sure judgments.

It is conceded only that Greek painters had knowledge of contour and expression; they are given no credit for perspective, composition, or coloring. This judgment is based partly on bas-reliefs, partly on the paintings of antiquity (one cannot say that they are Greek) discovered in and near Rome, in subterranean vaults of the palaces of Maecenas, of Titus, Trajan, and the Antonini. Of these, barely thirty have been preserved intact, and some only in the form of mosaics.

Turnbull included in his work on ancient paintings³⁰ a collection of the best-known items, drawn by Camillo Paderni and engraved by Mynde, which give the magnificent but misused paper of his book its only value. Among them are two copies from originals in the collection of the famous physician Richard Mead of London.

Others have already noted that Poussin made studies of the so-called 'Aldobrandini Marriage',³¹ that there are drawings by Annibale Carracci of a presumed 'Marcus Coriolanus', and that there is a great similarity between the heads of Guido Reni's figures and those of the well-known mosaic 'The Abduction of Europa'.

If such remnants of frescos provided the only basis for judging the ancient paintings, one might be inclined even to deny that their artists knew contour and expression. We are informed that the paintings with life-sized figures taken, together with the walls, from the theater in Herculaneum give a poor impression of their skills: Theseus as the conqueror of the Minotaur,³² with the young Athenians embracing his knees and kissing his hands; Flora with Hercules and a faun; an alleged 'Judgment of the Decemvir Appius Claudius'—all are, according to the testimony of an artist, either mediocre or poor. Not only do most of the faces lack expression but those in the 'Appius Claudius' lack even character. But this very fact proves that they are paintings by very mediocre artists; for the knowledge of beautiful proportion, of bodily contour, and expression found in Greek sculptors must also have been possessed by their good painters.

Although the ancient painters deserve recognition of their accomplishments, much credit is also due the moderns. In the science of perspective modern painters are clearly superior despite all learned defense of the ancients. The laws of composition and arrangement were imperfectly known to antiquity as evidenced by bas-reliefs dating from the times when Greek art flourished in Rome. As for the use of color, both the accounts of ancient writers and the remains of ancient paintings testify in favor of the moderns.

Various other objects of painting have likewise been raised to a higher degree of perfection in more modern times, for example, landscapes and animal species. The ancient painters seem not to have been acquainted with more handsome species of animals in other regions, if one may judge from individual cases such as the horse of Marcus Aurelius, the two horses in Monte Cavallo, the horses above the portal of San Marco's Church in Venice, presumably by Lysippus, or the Farnesian Bull and the other animals of this group.

It should be mentioned in passing that in the portrayal of horses the ancients did not observe the diametrical movements of the legs as seen in the Venetian horses and those depicted on old coins. Some modern artists have, in their ignorance, followed their example and have even been defended for doing so.

Our landscapes, especially those of the Dutch, owe their beauty mainly to the fact that they are painted in oil; their colors are stronger, more lively and vivid. Nature itself, under a thicker and moister atmosphere, has contributed not a little to the growth of this type of art. These and other advantages of modern painters over the ancients deserve to be better demonstrated, with more thorough proof than heretofore. [...]

Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History

J.J. Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*, first published in Dresden in 1764, is often taken to be the first true 'history of art.'¹ Winckelmann raised art history from the chronicle of artists' lives and commissions to a higher level: he attempted systematic stylistic analysis, historical contextualization, and even iconographical analysis, especially if we include his publications of gems and other antiquities and his treatise on visual allegory.² Of course, Winckelmann also helped to forge one of the essential tools of general criticism: in his 1759 essays on the Belvedere *Torso* and *Apollo* and on the *Laocoon* [see 3, 4], included in the *History*, he produced what were for his time lengthy focused descriptions of the individual artwork as it appears to us, an apparition that can be turned either to aesthetic-ethical-evaluation or to historical-critical analysis. Winckelmann's enormous—undeniably formative—contribution to the establishment of art history as an intellectual enterprise and a scholarly discipline has been considered at length from a number of points of view.³ Put most succinctly, Winckelmann's *History* inaugurally integrated the twin methods of what later became the professional discipline of art history—namely, 'formalism' and 'historicism'. Winckelmann explored the forms of Greco-Roman art and all the facts, going back to the role of climate, that he took to be relevant to explaining form historically.

It is well known, however, that major aspects of the content of Classical art—its inherence in the social practices of ancient Greek homoeroticism—were not usually acknowledged by Winckelmann. He employed an elaborate euphemism: for him, Greek art is formally about and historically depends on 'freedom'—although the 'freedom' to be or to do exactly what is left vague. It would be a misreading of German Enlightenment discourse to suppose that Winckelmann's *Freiheit* means political freedom alone; freedom is a cognitive condition.⁴ Some recent commentators, chiefly Alex Potts, have explored Winckelmann's own republicanism and anticlericalism and the later critical and political reception of his 'historicism' determination of the form of Greek art in the civic freedom of the Greek *polis*.⁵ But this aspect of Winckelmann's account hardly exhausts the matter. It is precisely the manifest formal-historical analysis Winckelmann offers—determining artistic production, somewhat uneasily, in the political structures of civil society—that we should now attempt to go beyond.

The history of art history, from the 1760s to the 1990s, has produced an approach in which art history is often reductively equated with the objective

historicism explanation of artistic form. As is often said, this paradigm constitutes a discipline. But what it disciplines are not the 'facts' of the history of art, or only secondarily the facts of the history of art. What it primarily and inaugurally disciplines is itself—by means of its supposed 'realism,' a standard cultural determinism with an underlying appeal to supposed universals of social process, grasped 'scientifically'; its cleaving of 'aesthetics' or 'criticism' from 'history' itself; its suppression of the subjective reality of the historian's own place and taste; and its claim to comprehend history through chronological and causal analysis without simultaneously and by the same terms acknowledging its own status as narrative. I want, here, to look at this defensive splitting—this *Ichspaltung im Abwehrvorgang*—in Winckelmann's *History*.⁶

At points in the text of the *History* and other writings, Winckelmann's understanding of the 'freedom' of Greek art does shine forth—but always in code. For example, the naturalistic beauty of Greek statues derived, he says, from the Greek sculptors' close observation of inherently beautiful boys naked in the gymnasium. But why the boys are beautiful is not represented as an hallucination of the historian-observer himself, who cannot actually see them. Instead it is said to result from the 'favorable' Greek climate (another hallucination) and practice of training men for war—facts which must somehow determine particular forms of natural beauty and of art. In general, throughout Winckelmann's account of ancient art such objective 'historicism' explanation overrides the 'subjective' aesthetic, political-sexual response that motivated it in the first place.

Many contradictions derive from this systematic transposition of subjective erotics—the idea or memory of what is subjectively beautiful and desirable in sexual, ethical, and political terms—into objectivizing formalist and historicist analysis. For example, according to the explicit standards of Winckelmann's analysis, the Hellenistic hermaphrodites, let alone works like the portraits of Hadrian's young lover Antinous, were contemporary with the total decline of political 'freedom' in Greece (that is, with the Roman conquest)—and thus could not embody the essence of Greek art. But none the less they are cited as great Classical works—indicating that the real denotation of 'freedom,' for Winckelmann, is not (or not only) in civic politics at all but rather in species of social-sexual organization possible in both democratic and authoritarian society.

Indeed, the *History* exhibits a general disjunction, as Potts has acutely observed, between the eras of specifically political freedom in the Greco-Roman world and the period of its great or Classical art.⁷ We should add that Winckelmann defines classicism itself in relation to formal and historical precursors—Egyptian, archaic Greek, Etruscan, and late Roman (Byzantine) arts—which he cannot quite disentangle from classicism itself, supposedly the autonomous formal expression of historical factors peculiar to the fifth- and late fourth-century Greek city-states. For example, because Greece in the sixth century possessed the same climate and roughly the same militarized competitiveness of Greece in the fifth century, according to Winckelmann's historicism its art should be classically beautiful. What archaic Greece supposedly lacked, of course, was political freedom. But if Winckelmann is willing to admit the unfree, if Hellenized, art of Hadrianic Rome or Justinian's

Ravenna as producing great classicism, on what grounds can he exclude the sixth- and late fifth-century archaic or severe phases of Greek classicism?⁸ Obviously the real point of distinction must lie in other aesthetic or ethical responses to the non- or prenaturalistic and the naturalistic works respectively, but Winckelmann does not directly produce his criteria. Instead the objective formal-historical chronology—with its statement of causes and sequences—is supposed in itself to render the distinction intelligible to us *ex post facto*. Despite their unfreedom, Rome or Ravenna preserve enough of a memory of Greek classicism to engender a Classical art, while preclassical Greece, although causally and chronologically closer to the zenith, did not. As Winckelmann's reasoning implies, identifying the Classical evidently turns on the play of memory and retrospective allusion—a condition foreclosed for all forerunners of the classical Greeks, who cannot remember and allude to what has not yet happened. Thus Egyptian art remains aesthetically inert. Significantly, however, Etruscan art gives Winckelmann trouble: it is neither really a forerunner nor quite an inheritor of fifth-century Greek art but rather a parallel cultural development. A reader of Winckelmann's book can be forgiven for not being able completely to work out these tangles, even though they might interest historians today: the general point is that the *History of Ancient Art* manages the erotic almost entirely off stage, a transference (*Übertragung*) or 'carrying over' in the strict sense.⁹

'Off stage,' that is, from the point of view of the reader. From the point of view of Winckelmann himself, however, it is possible that he was having things both ways. Exploring his sexual and ethical attractions—actively filling them out with images, information, and a social and historical reality, both through and in the very doing of his research—he finally transposes them all into another narrative for others.

Winckelmann is an enigmatic figure; and here I am not claiming fully to link my reading of his writings with historical analysis of his own life and work in their social-sexual and social-political context, although such a link could ultimately be made.¹⁰ I will presume, however, that Winckelmann, both socially and personally defined as a sodomite (a role that he took little pains to disguise), participated in the male-male sodomitical subculture of his day—a subculture that revolved, like some modern urban homosexual subcultures, around certain cafes, theaters, and drinking establishments as well as open-air strolling in various quarters of the city and suburbs.¹¹ Thus it is entirely relevant to remember that one of Winckelmann's chief employments as papal antiquarian was to guide British, German, and other northern gentlemen on their tour through the ruins of Rome—an activity that by the late eighteenth century already clearly signified, at least for many participants, the availability of sex with local working boys, liaisons that tended to be frustrated or proscribed in the northern nations. That Winckelmann's apartment in Rome was graced with a bust of a beautiful young faun, which he published and described in the *History* and elsewhere, was not, then, merely a manifestation of his antiquarian scholarship in the questions of Greco-Roman art history.¹² It also was fully consistent with, and probably functioned partly as, his self-definition and representation in the contemporary culture to which he belonged.

Winckelmann's active same-sex erotics were recognized by Goethe, his acutest commentator, to motivate much of his conceptual labor.¹³ But what

those erotics actually involved still remains uncertain. Because of the *History*'s emphasis on androgyny and hermaphroditism, it is useful to have Casanova's report of surprising Winckelmann relaxing with one of the young Roman castrati he favored,¹⁴ as well as Winckelmann's own testimonies to his infatuations with noble German boys, especially a young nobleman, Friedrich von Berg, to whom he dedicated his 1763 essay 'On the Ability to Perceive the Beautiful in Art.' Before his murder in 1768, Winckelmann was a valued member of the Papal Court, the personal librarian to the great collector Cardinal Alessandro Albani. But he had been born to a poor family in Prussia, studying and finding his first secretarial jobs in a state with some of the most repressive laws against sodomy, harshly and somewhat hypocritically enforced for the lower classes by Frederick the Great.¹⁵ Although he seems to have had a long affair in the 1740s with his first private student, a modern psychologist might say that through early middle age he ferociously sublimated both his sexual appetite and his political views. But his self-censorship was not only in the interest of personal security. As he moved up in the world, and especially after he moved to Italy in 1755, he was freer to move in the sexually permissive world of the upper classes. He also behaved opportunistically: recognizing that nominal Catholicism was a paper credential for employment in Rome, he converted. Again, the threads are tangled: he converted in order to get to Rome, for Rome was where he could best pursue classical studies—but for many worldly Europeans 'Rome,' as well as 'Greek art,' already signified sexual freedom and available boys.¹⁶

Without attempting to realize—some would say to literalize or reduce—a textual reading in terms of Winckelmann's own personal and professional history, it is striking to see how division between subject and object, and between subjective and objective, figures in Winckelmann's writing about the art-historical endeavor he himself invents. This division is not just a transposition of the subjective into the objective, or of the erotic-ethical into the formal-historical, as I have so far described it, for this might imply that the one can be replaced by the other without any loss—the treatise on beautiful Greek statues perfectly translating its author's desiring of naked Italian boys. Because Winckelmann imagines an interminable oscillation between the two positions, art history is not invented *through* division; it is invented *as* division and what we might call an endless acknowledgement of loss, an interminable mourning.

In a famous passage at the very end of the *History*, Winckelmann meditates on what he calls the 'downfall' of Greek art in the late Roman empire. In the final paragraph but one, he briefly describes the last work of art to be cited in his enormous work—an illuminated manuscript page thought to date from the reign of Justinian depicting 'in front of the throne of King David two female dancers with tucked-up dresses, who hold over their heads with both hands a floating drapery.' The two dancers are 'so beautiful,' Winckelmann writes, 'that we are compelled to believe that they have been copied from an ancient picture'—that is, from a lost Classical Greek painting. Thus, he says, to the end of art history—that is, to the end of Greek art—'may be applied the remark made by Longinus of the *Odyssey*, that in it we see Homer as the setting sun; its greatness is there, but not its force.' Examining these beautiful figures—the copy of a more 'forceful' original, they are the trace of its loss—

Winckelmann says, in the last paragraph of his history, that he feels 'almost like the historian who, in narrating the history of his native land, is compelled to allude to its destruction, of which he was a witness.'

But Winckelmann does not actually indicate any specific work that the manuscript has 'copied,' although he has earlier given many examples of the relation between prototype and copy. We are, he says, just 'compelled to believe' that the page is a 'copy', and thus the trace of a loss, only because it is itself so 'beautiful'. Its 'beauty', for us, is what compels us to see a loss in it. But why should the beautiful dancers' being a 'copy' imply that something has been lost or destroyed, when Winckelmann recommends the imitation of Classical art precisely as a *finding* or *restoration* of the beautiful? Of course, the late Roman copy may lose something because it merely copies rather than 'imitates' in more synthetic fashion. Although Winckelmann does not directly say so, perhaps he thinks the dancers do not attain the *Nachahmung* recommended in 'Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works of Art in Painting and Sculpture' (1755).¹⁷ But then how could they be 'beautiful', and how could he see them as the trace of a loss, when beauty is precisely the 'imitation' and thus the finding, not the 'copying' and thus the losing, of Classical art?

Furthermore, in meditating upon the loss that explains the beauty before him, in what sense can Winckelmann be a 'witness' to the destruction of Greek art? Its 'downfall' occurred between the age of Pericles and the age of Justinian—that is, between the time of the unspecified lost prototype and the manuscript. It did not actually occur in his own time. By the same token, in what sense could Greek art—from the age of Pericles to the age of Justinian—be Winckelmann's 'native land', the 'destruction' of which he witnesses? He was born in Prussia and came no closer to Greece than the collection of antiquities in Dresden—which were badly housed in a shed constructed for the king, who had purchased many of them from Italy in the first half of the century—or the Villa Albani, with its large but eclectic assemblage of ancient sculptures of varying quality, and the temple sites of southern Italy, which he described in an essay of 1759.

Indeed, in the terms of his own metaphor what Winckelmann witnesses does not obviously amount to a loss, a 'downfall', at all. Although the sun may set, it always rises again. And although 'Odysseus'—Greek art in the age of Justinian—may have wandered far from his native land, he *does* return home: it was other heroes of the *Iliad*, in all their 'force', who left their native land of Greece to perish at Troy. It must be, then, that the late Roman manuscript is like a sun endlessly setting, without going down and without rising, or like Odysseus endlessly returning home without getting there. But what kind of a 'downfall' is it that is always such a down-falling without full presence or complete absence—as Longinus says, a 'greatness' without 'force'?

Now it would be easy to say that Winckelmann witnesses the 'downfall' of Greek art in writing his *History of Ancient Art*. As an historian, we could say, he witnesses the historical loss of the 'force' of Greek art in the stylistic transformations that he chronicles—the setting of its sun from Pericles to Justinian. And it would be easy to conclude, in parallel, that it must be in his aesthetic imagination and especially in his personal (homo)erotics that Winckelmann takes Classical Greece as his 'native land'. Thus we could say that Winckelmann, as historian, witnesses the 'downfall' of the object with

which he imaginatively identifies—‘my native land’—by chronicling it, by producing an historical narrative of its transformation from Pericles to Justinian. If he were not the *historian* of Greek art, then he could not witness its destruction—seeing Classical Greek art as something that art has historically lost.

But the matter is not so simple. In his self-conscious, supremely nuanced German, Winckelmann carefully says that as an historian he is ‘compelled to allude’ to a destruction he has *already* witnessed—just as he has been ‘compelled to believe’ that the beauty before his eyes is a copy of something that has already been lost. Therefore it is not as an historian of art that he witnesses the destruction of Greek art: rather, it is as an historian that he writes about a loss he has already witnessed. Thus it may be his witnessing of the downfall of Greek art that constitutes him as its historian, rather than the other way around. The difference is between living through the loss to become its historian, and becoming the historian of the loss to live through it. In the former case, the loss is already part of one’s own history, a loss for oneself—although as an historian one writes about the loss as having taken place in history outside and before oneself, a loss for art; the subjective loss of the object becomes the objective loss of the object. In the latter case, however, the loss is *not* part of one’s own history, for it is only a loss for art, although as an historian one makes it so, a loss for oneself: objective loss becomes subjective. If Winckelmann acknowledges two losses—a loss within art history and a loss for oneself—as well as their complementary histories, the history one witnesses and the history within which one is witnessing history, the task is to relate the two—to separate, conjoin, reduce, or transcend them.

Most modern art history can be seen as an ‘objective’ account of the history of art using Winckelmann’s instruments of periodization, stylistic criticism, iconography, historicism, and ethical valuation. This practice is founded on radically distinguishing the two fields I have identified. Within the discipline, or, more accurately, with discipline, the loss—of the sexually, ethically, and politically beautiful or desirable—is always *outside* the art historian in the history of art as such; the art historian only ‘alludes’ to what takes place in a ‘native land’ in which he does not now and probably never did reside. None the less, as Winckelmann’s nuance implies, we must identify a necessary reflexive moment in which the loss must be *within* the art historian and his history in order for him to witness the history of art as any kind of loss—for if the loss were absolute, utterly unwitnessed by the art historian in his own history, then there would be nothing of the history of art to which he could possibly ‘allude’ in the first place.

Again Winckelmann puts it carefully. In concluding his own *History* with an example of the ‘downfall’ of Greek art, he is, he says, ‘almost like’ an historian writing about a destruction he has also witnessed. Yet in assuming this position, he has, as he notes, ‘already overstepped the boundaries of the history of art’. Strictly speaking, the history of art is the history of what has been lost in, and to, history. But one does not begin an art history unless what has been lost was once not unredeemably lost in an irreducibly past history one precisely did not witness. Rather, to begin an art history the loss must be in one’s own history to be ‘witnessed’ there. It is only there that it is *being seen to be being lost*. Something happens just outside the boundary of art history,

at a horizon or place of sunset, where the object, the history of art, is witnessed as being lost—as being evacuated of its force despite its greatness, as departing or being destroyed; and the historian, writing his art history, alludes to his witnessing of this departing of the history of art.

Winckelmann depicts this condition in the final lines of the *History* in what I take to be the founding image of the discipline—or, more precisely, what founds the ‘objective’ need for (a) discipline. ‘Compelled to believe’ that what is before him, however beautiful, is just a ‘copy’ of what has been lost, precisely because he takes it as beautiful, and ‘compelled to allude’ to his ‘native land’ being destroyed, finally he ‘cannot refrain from searching into the fate of works of art as far as my eye could reach’—and he adds, ‘just as a maiden, standing on the shore of the ocean, follows with tearful eyes her departing lover with no hope of ever seeing him again, and fancies that in the distant sail she sees the image of her beloved’. The metaphor is intricate, but Winckelmann glosses himself: ‘Like that loving maiden we too have, as it were, nothing but a shadowy outline left of the object of our wishes, but that very indistinctness awakens only a more earnest longing for what we have lost, and we study the copies of the originals more attentively than we should have done the originals themselves if we had been in full possession of them.’

According to the logic I examined a moment ago, the ‘maiden’ is not the art historian *as* art historian, the one who has just presented a history of the development of Greek art and just ended it with this metaphor about the loss he has chronicled. Rather, she is that art historian *before* beginning an art history—witnessing the loss the history of which he will then chronicle. We should notice the shift here: before beginning the art history, witnessing the loss ‘she’ is female; after writing the art history, ‘he’ is a male ‘alluding’ to the loss ‘she’ witnessed. Although it is not my main topic here, one begins to see why androgyny, hermaphroditism, and the amalgamation of gender might play an absolutely central role in Winckelmann’s objective chronicle of the history of art:¹⁸ they animate Winckelmann’s own history—as a ‘she’ witnessing the downfall and loss of Classical Greek art, the sailing of ‘her’ lover, the departing to which ‘he’ will allude—in the very suspension of decision between them. Indeed, the dynamic of subjective, feminized ‘witness’ and objective, masculinized ‘allusion’ is the very mode of Winckelmann’s homosexuality (or homotextuality)—to be specific, a delayed activation and partial transposition of loss from one register to the other, a fault-line across which the observing, objective subject, male for the moment, never quite refinds the object that subjectively she never wholly lost.

If ‘she’ is Penelope, then her ‘native land’ will be destroyed because Odysseus has left it. She will be beset with false suitors like the modern arts Winckelmann deplored. But in weeping at the shore she cannot know this yet. She mourns not the destruction of her native land, which she will only be able to see as the *historian* of the loss she also witnesses, but rather the departure of her lover, whom she has ‘no hope of ever seeing again.’ The art historian—and what she desires, of course, is a man—weeps not because he is an historian but because she is a lover; indeed, he becomes an historian because she was such a lover.

As a lover, she has lost the ‘object of desire.’ The loss occurred, however, not without having seen the beloved depart and not without him seeming

to appear to her, if only as an 'image' in the 'distant sail.' That is to say, the loss preserves the possibility of writing its history as he 'searches...as far as my eye could reach,' looking out to rediscover what she saw departing. But once become an historian, the maiden finds that the beloved has been destroyed. The image of the departing beloved—returned by the 'distant sail' to the lover-historian standing on the shore of his native land—must be the image of the death of the beautiful beloved, the black sail of the ships announcing the deaths of the Athenian boys and girls. Thus the 'maiden' on the shore is not only a Penelope mourning her loss, being constituted as the one who will write the history of her native land as it is destroyed. He is *also* the lover Theseus, who cannot accept the loss and sails off into history itself to save his native land from being destroyed. The historian begins his history in order to *prevent* the loss she has already witnessed: 'he' is Theseus, sailing off from his native land in heroic rescue, because 'she' is already Penelope, expecting never again to see Odysseus, who kept her native land alive. But if he sails off, Theseus must become just like the Odysseus mourned by Penelope—one who leaves his native land and who is only endlessly returning to it without getting there. Another maiden, of course, will guide Theseus out of his labyrinth and back to love: there is the barest hint that the widening circle of division might close, although even Ariadne must finally watch her Theseus depart.

In sum, the historian, to become a historian, remains partly behind himself, standing on the shore in his 'native land,' precisely in order to witness the departing that sets him off in the first place—at the same time as he goes partly ahead of himself, sailing away to his 'native land' from destruction, the loss she himself (if I can put it this way) will witness. What is the loss, then, but a loss of part of the self, a part that once was (and still might be) real? She witnesses his departing and thus experiences the destruction of her native land; he alludes to her witnessing, and by chronicling the destruction thus partly prevents it. But although he sails off into the chronicle to prevent the destruction, he never actually returns to her except as an image or copy, and the loss is never fully made up: her subjective 'witness' always exceeds his objective 'allusion' coming behind, too late and merely as allusion.

This might be the place to identify the 'object of desire,' as such, that Winckelmann loses. Here we would need to situate Winckelmann's 'beautiful young men'—the Classical Greek athletes naked in the Gymnasium whose loss 'she' witnesses while relaxing with Italian boys but to whom 'he' can allude in the *History* of Classical art chronicling what she has lost. The resulting divisions would require us to trace Winckelmann's inability to reconcile the time of the 'beautiful' with the time of 'freedom'; or to admit the place of 'imitation' within the unfolding of Classical art itself; or to conceive a Greece outside its afterimagining Rome, or its forerunning Egypt and sidetracking Etruria; or to conceive Classical art outside an imprint, copy, or fragment in the first place. In each context, the object of desire is the lost historical object toward which the historian moves in his allusions and the subjective object from which his very witness of loss proceeds—in this case, neither Classical Greek art as such, merely a cold and lifeless fossil, nor beautiful Italian boys as such, merely available embraces, but the image of their identity, an object in consciousness which neither real sculpture nor real boy can do anything but copy because they are always found only in the move away from or back to it.¹⁹ (Of

course, this object-in-consciousness or subjective object is, itself, a repetition. But I will not pursue any particular model for this relation; it is sufficient to remind ourselves that the constitution of the object is defensive and occurs in 'defensive process' [*Abwehrvorgang*].) To excavate Winckelmann's object of desire, whatever it might be, would also be to recognize his *History* as a great and exemplary work, for it comes close, I think, to finding an objective subject that almost satisfies its subjective object—the bust of a faun gracing his apartment in the Villa Albani, an object which, I believe, integrates his subjective erotic and objective scholarly inquiries. But this identification, although it deserves further exploration, takes me in directions too particular, and perhaps too literal, for the final observations I want to make.

Instead I want to generalize beyond the identification of any particular historian's particular loss. Such losses constitute the discipline of art history just because they are the objects for its subjectivity—not the artefacts in themselves, fossils with no intrinsic status, but rather the ways of their departings from art historians. Thus T. J. Clark, for example, mourns his loss—the 'rendezvous between artistic practice and ... alternative meanings to those of capital,'²⁰ here and there or once upon a time, he imagines, actually realized—like the tradition, community, democratic society, undiluted *jouissance*, truth, or gender equality: in any case, a particular subjective loss made out to be the objective reality of history. It is not the substance of such lost objects I want to discover; they are plainly the result, as Winckelmann engagingly put it, of an 'interview with spirits.' But they all share a status as the motivating objects of any art history which is, itself, interesting or *interested*, in the strict sense: troubled, 'searching ... as far as the eyes can reach,' the 'tearful' witnessing of loss, that which 'compels' the historian's 'allusion'—or, as Freud put it, what establishes the historian's 'conviction' (*Überzeugung*) about his history-to-be-written, that is, his 'carrying-over' or 'transference' (*Übertragung*) or what I have been calling his subjective-objective 'trans-position', not the transformation of one's practice but rather the placing of it 'across' the division of positions.²¹

As Winckelmann's practice implies, the life of art history is the mourning of the loss of the history of art. Therefore the *death* of art history would be the loss of its life-in-mourning. But art history could not be due to loss alone. Art history requires not only the loss of its objects but also, and much more important, its witnessing of that loss—that is, our witnessing not of the loss itself, since it took place long ago, but of the fact that what has been lost is, in fact, being-lost for us. The history of art is lost, but art history is still with us; and although art history often attempts to bring the object back to life, finally it is our means of laying it to rest, of putting it in its history and taking it out of our own, where we have witnessed its departure. To have the history of art as *history*—acknowledging the irreparable loss of the objects—we must give up art history as a bringing-to-life, as denial of departure. If it is not to be pathological, art history must take its leave of its objects, for they have already departed anyway.

For many there is a dilemma here. To the extent that we acknowledge the loss of the objects, we can only have art history as a pathological not-letting-go; but to the extent that we admit our desire to mourn, we can only have the history of art as a pathological walking-of-the-dead. Do we want a

pageant of corpses revived by the historian, dead things reanimated with their supposed original ideas and passions, a ghastly puppet show—like that ‘social history of art’ on such clairvoyant terms with the agencies and intentions, politics and subjectivities of the departed? Or an echoing mausoleum of the vanished, crypts within crypts endlessly swept out by the historian forever coming across the bones—like that ‘deconstruction’ so devoted to the vacated? Ethics, treating the objects as subjects, or forensics, treating the subjects as objects?²²

But the supposed dilemma is a false one. Just as the departure is not an original, irreducible one—not a departure existing before our witnessing but always a departing for us—neither is the leave-taking completely outside the departure. It is always a taking-leave of what we witness departing. Put another way, although the departing, the history of art, and the leave-taking, art history, take place at different times and in different places, they are not two different histories—the histories of art and of the art historian—but inextricably *one* history. Art history is produced under ‘the shadow of the object,’ no matter how long ago or far away, by she who witnesses its retreat within him—an on-going taking-leave of a departing.²³ It will not be pathological precisely so long as it does not entirely divide into two different histories, subject and object, subjective and objective. The ‘shadow of the object’ is not only the field of death for and in the subject; the object ‘also offers the ego the inducement to live’²⁴—if I can put it paradoxically but accurately, to live *as* death.

Winckelmann could have had two different histories held utterly apart from one another—antiquarian and sodomite, let us say. But his division is reconciled—although not, of course, effaced—in the witness and allusion of his work, its on-going mourning. Indeed, he invents art history precisely because his two histories—she ‘witnessing’ and he ‘alluding’—are conjoined in him without closure, without a full restoration, through ‘his’ activity of alluding to what ‘she’ witnesses being lost. If this mourning were to cease either through the absolute subjective departure of the object or its total objective restoration, then art history could not begin or would come to an end—but art history lived in Winckelmann because in division he and she mourn unceasingly, because as division *they* are a whole.

Patterns of Intention

Introduction: Language and Explanation

I. The objects of explanation: pictures considered under descriptions

We do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures—or rather, we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification. For instance, if I think or say about Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* [5] something quite primitive like 'The firm design of this picture is partly due to Piero della Francesca's recent training in Florence', I am first proposing 'firm design' as a description of one aspect of the *Baptism of Christ's* interest. Then, secondly, I am proposing a Florentine training as a cause of that kind of interest. The first phase can hardly be avoided. If I simply applied 'Florentine training' to the picture it would be unclear what I was proposing to explain; it might be attached to angels in high-waisted gowns or to tactile values or whatever you wished.

Every evolved explanation of a picture includes or implies an elaborate description of that picture. The explanation of the picture then in its turn becomes part of the larger description of the picture, a way of describing things about it that would be difficult to describe in another way. But though 'description' and 'explanation' interpenetrate each other, this should not distract us from the fact that description is the mediating object of explanation. The description consists of words and concepts in a relation with the picture, and this relation is complex and sometimes problematic. I shall limit myself to pointing—with a quite shaky finger, since this is intricate ground beyond my competence—to three kinds of problem explanatory art criticism seems to meet.

2. Descriptions of pictures as representations of thought about having seen pictures

There is a problem about quite what the description is of. 'Description' covers various kinds of verbal account of a thing, and while 'firm design' is a description in one sense—as, for that matter, is 'picture'—it may be considered untypically analytical and abstract. A more straightforward and very different sort of description of a picture might seem to be this:

There was a countryside and houses of a kind appropriate to peasant country-people—some larger, some smaller. Near the cottages were straight-standing cypress trees. It was not possible to see the whole of these trees, for the houses got in the way, but their tops could be seen rising above the roofs. These trees, I dare say, offered the peasant a resting-place, with the shade of their boughs and the voices of the birds joyfully perched



in them. Four men were running out of the houses, one of them calling to a lad standing near—for his right hand showed this, as if giving some instructions. Another man was turned towards the first one, as if listening to the voice of a chief. A fourth, coming a little forward from the door, holding his right hand out and carrying a stick in the other, appeared to shout something to other men toiling about a wagon. For just at that moment a wagon, fully-loaded, I cannot say whether with straw or some other burden, had left the field and was in the middle of a lane. It seemed the load had not been properly tied down. But two men were trying rather carelessly to keep it in place—one on this side, one on the other: the first was naked except for a cloth round his loins and was propping up the load with a staff; of the second one saw only the head and part of his chest, but it looked from his face as if he was holding on to the load with his hands, even though the rest of him was hidden by the cart. And as for the cart, it was not a four-wheeled one of the kind Homer spoke of, but had only two wheels: and for that reason the load was jolting about and the two dark red oxen, well-nourished and thick-necked, were much in need of helpers. A belt girded the drover's tunic to the knee and he grasped the reins in his right hand, pulling at them, and in his left hand he held a switch or stick. But he had no need to use it to make the oxen willing. He raised his voice, though, saying something encouraging to the oxen, something of a kind an ox would understand. The drover had a dog too, so as to be able to sleep himself and yet still have a sentinel. And there the dog was, running beside the oxen. This approaching wagon was near a temple: for columns indicated this, peeping over the trees...

This—the greater part of a description written by the fourth-century Greek Libanius of a picture in the Council House at Antioch—works by retailing the subject-matter of the picture's representation as if it were real. It is a natural and unstrained way of describing a representational picture, apparently less analytical and abstract than 'firm design', and one we still use. It seems calculated to enable us to visualize the picture clearly and vividly: that was the function of the literary genre of description, *ekphrasis*, in which it is a virtuoso essay. But what really is the description to be considered as representing?

It would not enable us to reproduce the picture. In spite of the lucidity with which Libanius progressively lays out its narrative elements, we could not reconstruct the picture from his description. Colour sequences, spatial relations, proportions, often left and right, and other things are lacking. What happens as we read it is surely that out of our memories, our past experience of nature and of pictures, we construct something—it is hard to say what—in our minds, and this something he stimulates us to produce feels a little like having seen a picture consistent with his description. If we all now drew our visualizations—if that is what they are—of what Libanius has described, they would differ according to our different prior experience, particularly according to which painters it made us think of, and according to our individual constructive dispositions. In fact, language is not very well equipped to offer a notation of a particular picture. It is a generalizing tool. Again, the repertory of concepts it offers for describing a plane surface bearing an array of subtly differentiated and ordered shapes and colours is rather crude and remote. Again, there is an awkwardness, at least, about dealing with a simultaneously available field—which is what a picture is—in a medium as temporally linear as language: for instance, it is difficult to avoid tendentious reordering of the picture simply by mentioning one thing before another.

But if a picture is simultaneously available in its entirety, *looking* at a picture is as temporally linear as language. Does or might a description of a picture

reproduce the act of looking at a picture? The lack of fit here is formally obvious in an incompatibility between the gait of scanning a picture and the gait of ordered words and concepts. (It may help to be clear about how our optical act is paced. When addressing a picture we get a first general sense of a whole very quickly, but this is imprecise; and, since vision is clearest and sharpest on the foveal axis of vision, we move the eye over the picture, scanning it with a succession of rapid fixations. The gait of the eye, in fact, changes in the course of inspecting an object. At first, while we are getting our bearings, it moves not only more quickly but more widely; presently it settles down to movements at a rate of something like four or five a second and shifts of something like three to five degrees—this offering the overlap of effective vision that enables coherence of registration.) Suppose the picture in Antioch were present to us as Libanius delivered his *ekphrasis*, how would the description and our optical act get along together? The description would surely be an elephantine nuisance, lumbering along at a rate of something less than a syllable an eye-movement, coming first, sometimes after half a minute, to things we had roughly registered in the first couple of seconds and made a number of more attentive visits to since. Obviously the optical act of scanning is not all there is to looking: we use our minds and our minds use concepts. But the fact remains that the progression involved in perceiving a picture is not like the progression involved in Libanius's verbal description. Within the first second or so of looking we have a sort of impression of the whole field of a picture. What follows is sharpening of detail, noting of relations, perception of orders, and so on, the sequence of optical scanning being influenced both by general scanning habits and by particular cues in the picture acting on our attention.

It would be tedious to go on in this fussy way to the other things the description cannot primarily be about, because it will be clear by now what I am trying to suggest this is best considered as representing. In fact, there are two peculiarities in Libanius's *ekphrasis* which sensitively register what I have in mind. The first is that it is written in the past tense—an acute critical move that has unfortunately fallen out of use. The second is that Libanius is freely and openly using his mind: 'These trees, *I dare say*, offered...'; '*It seemed* the load had not been properly tied down...'; 'only two wheels: and *for that reason* ...'; 'one saw only the head and part of the chest, but *it looked* from his face *as if* he was...'; 'columns *indicated* this, peeping over the trees....' Past tense and cerebration: what a description will tend to represent best is thought after seeing a picture.

In fact, Libanius's description of subject-matter is not the sort of description one is typically involved with when explaining pictures: I used it partly to avoid a charge of taking 'description' in a tendentiously technical sense, partly to let a point or two emerge. The sort of description I shall be concerned with is much more like 'The design is firm', and it too can be linearly quite long. Here is an excellent passage from Kenneth Clark's account of Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ*, in which he develops an analysis of a quality which might be one constituent of 'firm design':

... we are at once conscious of a geometric framework; and a few seconds' analysis shows us that it is divided into thirds horizontally, and into quarters vertically. The horizontal divisions come, of course, on the line of the Dove's wings and the line of angels' hands, Christ's loin-cloth and the Baptist's left hand; the vertical divisions are the pink angel's

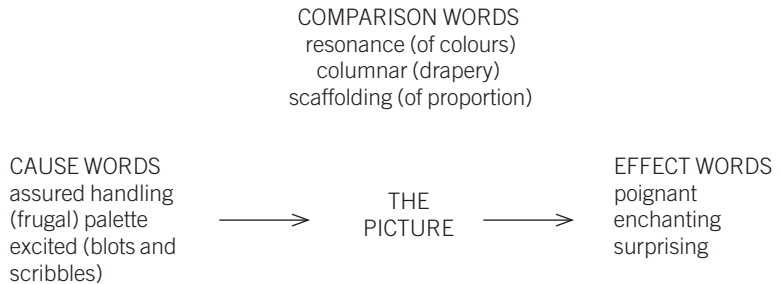
columnar drapery, the central line of the Christ and the back of St. John. These divisions form a central square, which is again divided into thirds and quarters, and a triangle drawn within this square, having its apex at the Dove and its base at the lower horizontal, gives the central motive of the design.

Here it is clearer than with Libanius's description that the words are representing less the picture than thought after seeing the picture.

There is much to be said, if one wants to match words and concepts with the visual interest of pictures, for both being and making clear—as Libanius and Kenneth Clark make clear—that what one offers in a description is a representation of thinking about a picture more than a representation of a picture. And to say we 'explain a picture as covered by a description' can conveniently be seen as another way of saying that we explain, first, thoughts we have had about the picture, and only secondarily the picture.

3. Three kinds of descriptive word

'...*about* the picture' is the proper way to put it. The second area of problem is that so many of the thoughts we will want to explain are indirect, in the sense that they are not pointed quite directly at the picture—considered, at least, as a physical object (which is not how, in the end, we will consider it). Most of the better things we can think or say about pictures stand in a slightly peripheral relation to the picture itself. This can be illustrated by taking and sorting a few words from Kenneth Clark's pages on Piero's *Baptism of Christ*:



One type of term, those on the right, refers to the effect of the picture on the beholder: *poignant* and so on. And indeed it is usually precisely the effect of the picture we are really concerned with: it has to be. But terms of this type tend to be a little soft and we sometimes frame our sense of the effect in secondarily indirect ways. One way is by making a comparison, often by metaphor, as in the type at the top: *resonance* of colour and so on. (One especially bulky sort of comparison, which we tend to work very hard with representational paintings, is to refer to the colours and patterns on the picture surface as if they were the things they are representing, as in Libanius.) And then there is a third type, that on the left. Here we describe the effect of the picture on us by telling of inferences we have made about the action or process that might have led to the picture being as it is: assured *handling*, of a frugal *palette*, *excited* blots and scribbles. Awareness that the picture's having an effect on us is the product of human action seems to lie deep in our thinking and talking

about pictures—so the arrows in the diagram—and what we are doing when we attempt a historical explanation of a picture is to try developing this kind of thought.

We have to use concepts of these indirect or peripheral kinds. If we confined ourselves to terms that referred directly or centrally to the physical object we would be confined to concepts like *large, flat, pigments on a panel, red and yellow and blue* (though there are complications about these), perhaps *image*. We would find it hard to locate the sort of interest the picture really has for us. We talk and think ‘off’ the object rather as an astronomer looks ‘off’ a star, because acuity or sharpness are greater away from the centre. And the three principal indirect moods of our language—speaking directly of the effect on us, making comparisons with things whose effect on us is of a similar quality, making inferences about the process which would produce an object having such an effect on us—seem to correspond to three modes of thinking about a picture, which we treat as something more than a physical object. Implicitly we treat it as something with a history of making by a painter and a reality of reception by beholders.

Of course, as soon as such concepts become part of a larger pattern, sustained thinking or sustained discourse—over a couple of pages in a book in this case—things become more complicated and less crisp. One type of thinking is subordinated to another in the hierarchy of syntax. Ambiguities or confluences of type develop, between the inferential and the comparative, in particular. There are shifts in the actual reference of terms.... But an indirectness of mood and thought remains in a complex weave. And when I applied the thought ‘firm design’ to the *Baptism of Christ* it was a thought that involved an inference about cause. It described the picture by speculating about the quality of the process that led to it being an object of a kind to make that impression on me that it does. ‘Firm design’ would go on the left-hand side of the diagram. In fact, I was deriving one cause of the picture, ‘firm design’, from another less proximate cause, ‘Florentine training’.

But it may be objected that to say that a concept like ‘design’ involves an element of inference about cause begs various questions about the actual operation of words. In particular, is one perhaps confusing the sense of the word, the range of its possible meanings, with its reference or denotation in the particular case? ‘Design’ has a rich gamut of sense:

Mental plan; scheme of attack; purpose; end in view; adaptation of means to ends; preliminary sketch for picture etc.; delineation, pattern; artistic or literary groundwork, general idea, construction, plot, faculty of evolving these, invention.

If I use the concept ‘design’ I do not normally use it in all these senses at once. If I used it of a picture in a more unqualified way—as in ‘I do like the design of this picture’—surely I would be shedding for the moment that part of its sense that lies in the process of making the picture and referring to a quality more intrinsic to the marks on the panel—‘pattern’ rather than ‘drawing’ or ‘purposing’ or ‘planning’? In its finished reference this may be so: I would be entitled to expect you to take it, for the purpose of criticism, in that more limited sense. But in arriving at it, I and you and the word would have been coming from the left of the field, so to speak: there are leftist and centrist uses of ‘design’ in current and frequent use, but if we pick on the centrist

denotation we have been active on the left at least to the extent of shelving its meanings. In semantics the colouring of a word used in one sense by other current senses is sometimes called 'reflected' meaning; in normal language it is not powerful. A better term for what happens with words and concepts matched with pictures—not at all a normal use of language—might be 'rejected' meaning, and one reason for its importance brings us to the third area of problem.

4. The ostensivity of critical description

Absolutely 'design' and indeed 'firm' are very broad concepts. I could plausibly say either of Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* [4] or of Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*—'The design is firm'. The terms are general enough to embrace a quality in two very different objects; and, supposing you had no idea what the pictures looked like, they would tell you little that would enable you to visualize the pictures. 'Design' is not a geometrical entity like 'cube' or a precise chemical entity like 'water', and 'firm' is not a quantity expressible numerically. But in an art-critical description one is using the terms not absolutely; one is using them in tandem with the object, the instance. Moreover one is using them not informatively but demonstratively. In fact, the words and concepts one may wish to handle as a mediating 'description' of the picture are not in any normal sense descriptive. What is determining for them is that, in art criticism or art history, the object is present or available—really, or in reproduction, or in memory, or (more remotely) as a rough visualization derived from knowledge of other objects of the same class.

This has not always been so to the degree it now is so: the history of art criticism in the last five hundred years has seen an accelerating shift from discourse designed to work with the object unavailable, to discourse assuming at least a reproduced presence of the object. In the sixteenth century Vasari assumes no more than a generic acquaintance with most of the pictures he deals with; in particular, his celebrated and strange descriptions are often calculated to evoke the character of works not known to the reader. By the eighteenth century an almost disabling ambivalence had developed on this point. Lessing cannily worked with an object, the Laocoon group, that most of his readers would have known, as he only did himself, from engravings or replicas. Diderot, on the other hand, nominally writing for someone not in Paris, actually seems never to be clear whether or not his reader has been to the Salon he is discussing, and this is one reason for the difficulty of his criticism. By 1800 the great Fiorillo was adding footnotes to his books specifying the makers of the best engravings after the pictures he is discussing and he tends to concentrate on what can be seen in them. In the nineteenth century books were increasingly illustrated with engravings and eventually half-tones, and with Wölfflin, notoriously, art-critical discourse begins to be directed at a pair of black-and-white diapositive projections. We now assume the presence or availability of the object, and this has great consequences for the workings of our language.

In everyday life if I offer a remark like 'The dog is big', the intention and effect will depend a great deal on whether or not that dog is present or known to my hearers. If it is not, the 'big'—which, in the context of dogs, has a lim-