Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3

Franco Cirulli

The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism

The Beauty of God and Man in German Aesthetics of Painting and Sculpture (1754–1828)

Springer

Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life

Volume 3

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ISSN 2352-8206 ISSN 2352-8214 (electronic)
Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life
ISBN 978-3-319-09999-6 ISBN 978-3-319-10000-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015930264

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Cover illustration: The “Free at Last” sculpture stands in the midst of Boston University’s Marsh Plaza, and is a memorial to the life and work of BU’s most famous students of philosophy and religion, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

For Julie, Francesco, and Lucia

Preface

The force of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* was in their provocative question: what is art, really? This question succeeded only too much: for decades, many philosophers were obsessed over abstruse questions of ontology of art and neglected the phenomenology of aesthetic experience. But in recent years, the tide has changed. Books like Dominic McIver Lopes *Beyond Art* (2014) claim that it is time for philosophers to set aside the search for the essence of "art" and to linger on the way an individual artwork offers us a unique microworld of aesthetic properties. Quite significantly, Lopes' book ends with a quick look at Vermeer's enchanted interiors and Sugimoto's *Seascapes* series. He rightly claims that if we face these artworks armed merely with the "what is art?" (and its related "but is *this* art?") question, we have already made impossible a philosophical reflection attuned to media specificity and to the type of appreciation that a given medium calls for. Jean-Marie Schaeffer's *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (2000), Larry Shiner's *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (2001), and Paolo D'Angelo's *Estetica* (2011) offer further compelling arguments for freeing aesthetics from the stranglehold of the "what is art" question. There is no doubt about it, the tide has turned: even the late philosopher Arthur Danto, who rejected aesthetics for theory of art his whole career, had some kind things to say about aesthetics in his last book, *What Art Is* (2013). This paradigm shift to a "from below" approach is also visible in the (very) diverse offerings to be had in aesthetic conferences (the following is a representative sample of topics from the "Upcoming Meetings" section of the *American Society for Aesthetics* website: aesthetics and mathematics, the philosophy of computer games, the aesthetics of football, the aesthetics of rhythm, varieties of aesthetic politics).

But, if this is the prevailing theoretical tide, and if I see it (as I do) as a positive turn of events, why did I write a book on German Romantic-Idealist aesthetics of figurative art? After all, this tradition has been charged with initiating (or at least giving a seminal theoretical foundation to) that pernicious obsession with "art," at the expense of an attention to the idiosyncratic beauty of specific artworks. It is undeniable that the respective ontologies of art we find in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel,

and G. W. F. Hegel seem, in hindsight, to have aged not altogether well. To pick a particularly problematic example, consider these lines by Schelling: "Nothing of that which a baser sensibility calls art can concern the philosopher. For him it is a necessary phenomenon emanating directly from the absolute, and only to the extent it can be presented and proved as such does it possess reality for the philosopher" (PA 4). Can one even *imagine* an academic today expressing these views as his or her own with a perfectly straight face? Where should one even begin pointing an accusatory finger? The implied elitist distinction between a noble and "a baser sensitivity"? The dogmatic certainty that art emanates directly from the "absolute"? Or the requirement that the divinely infused artwork subject itself to the certifying procedures of the philosopher? That the artwork is not a gift-like event, but a "necessary phenomenon"? Or, finally, Schelling's talk of "art" as a universal cutting across various media?

However, this universal, abstract perspective, which Jean-Marie Schaeffer damns by the label of "Speculative Theory of Art," is only *half* of the story concerning these German authors. The other neglected half is their highly nuanced attention to the phenomena of aesthetic experience. Take, for instance, aesthetic pleasure. Jean-Marie Schaeffer is wrong when he claims that "The notion of (aesthetic) pleasure, which is still central in Kant, is almost wholly absent from the various versions of the tradition of the speculative theory of Art" (Schaeffer 298). Consider Friedrich Schlegel and G. W. F. Hegel, two of Schaeffer's targets. Now, it is true that in his *Gemäldebeschreibungen* Schlegel moves from the essentialist idea that painting is essentially *Gottensdienst*, i.e., divine service. But when it comes to encountering individual paintings, he abandons himself without reserve to the sensuous grace of Raphael's *Jardinière*; he is enchanted by the volcanic, playful energy of Altdörfer's *Battle at Issus*; he is fascinated by the animal heroism of Giulio Romano's *Bestioni*. Or take Hegel's obvious pleasure in Correggio: "There is nothing more attractive than the naivetè, in Correggio, of a grace not natural but religious and spiritual, nothing sweeter than his smiling unselfconscious beauty and innocence" (LFA II, 882). Schaeffer can speak of an unduly ascetic "Speculative Theory of Art" also because he arbitrarily selects the characters of his narrative. Had he included in his story Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Gottfried Herder, and Wilhelm Friedrich Wackenroder, he would have discovered—along with the speculative side—also incredibly rich phenomenologies of aesthetic pleasure.

Now, the purpose of my book is to recover for present discussion the second, untold half of the story: Romantic Idealism as a constellation of aesthetics "from below," i.e., an aesthetic discourse attuned to media specificity and to the correlative types of appreciation at play. My aim is not simply philological. I think that the current resurgence of aesthetics can benefit from a reassessment of the legacy of what I call "Figurative Theo-humanism." As I see it, the current renaissance of aesthetics is so bent on recovering an experience of the unique specificity of the artwork (be it a painting, a videogame, a flash mob) that it pushes into the background the way in which the aesthetic object can be a source of epiphany, in which it can shake up the way we see the world and our place in it. As we will see, this is where Figurative Theo-humanism comes onto its own.

I should also note that this tradition's emphasis on beauty might make it seem hopelessly dated. I would begin by noticing that we should distinguish between artists and spectators. To be sure, most painters and sculptors today consider the representation of the human figure to be hopelessly dated, even more so if we speak of beautiful representation of humans. But the fact remains that the untutored spectator still loves the Old Masters—every year, big museums register record-breaking numbers of crowds. At least for these spectators, the insights of Figurative Theo-humanism might be of living relevance: why does the beauty of Raphael, Leonardo, or Matisse still speak to us, today? And does it say something relevant for our lives?

But my main point is not a recovery of descriptive beauty. Again, my main point is the recovery of a broad conception of aesthetic experience, where I do not rule out of hand the possibility that the aesthetic object is also addressing me individually, on the very sense and direction of my life. In this respect, the insights of Figurative Theo-humanism should be fruitful also when we approach the ugly, jarring work of Francis Bacon, the Dionysian brushwork of Cy Twombly.

* * *

I would like to thank Allen Speight, the series chief editor, for his unstinting help and encouragement. Without him, this book would never have seen the light of day. I also blame his wonderful seminaries on aesthetics, which I attended through the years, for providing me with an important source of intellectual stimulation. I also would like to thank my mentor Alfredo Ferrarin for reading the manuscript with great care and for his always dead-on, felicitous tips, *Grazie Maestro*. My gratitude goes also to Larry Shiner: my work has improved a lot because of his intelligent suggestions. Thanks also to Casey Haskins, my undergraduate teacher, for reading the final draft. I would like to thank Sarah Lippert: her *Paragone Society* gave me the opportunity to discuss with a wonderfully varied audience many of the ideas that are in this work. I should thank Sarah for her wonderful editorial job in Chap. 3. Thank you also to James Elkins and David Morgan, who have read Chap. 2 and offered precious tips for the overall orchestration of the work. Finally, thanks to my wife Julie Hassel for revising the proofs. I am grateful to Peter Lang for graciously allowing me to use a great deal of material from an article I published with them ("Friedrich Schlegel on Painting and Transcendence", in *Contemplations of the Spiritual*, ed. Rina Arya; Berlin: Peter Lang, 2013).

Last but not least thank you Julie, Francesco, and Lucia for your patience in putting up for so many years with a cranky writer and for the love you never stopped giving him. This book is dedicated to all of you.

Boston, MA, USA Franco Cirulli

Primary Texts

Alexander Baumgarten

RPT = Reflections on Poetry. Translated by Karl Aschenbrenner and William Benjamin Holter. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1954.

MP = Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus, in *Riflessioni sul testo poetico*, translation Francesco Piselli (bilingual latin-italian edition). Palermo: Aesthetica 1994.

Jean-Baptiste Dubos

RC = Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture. Sixiéme edition. Paris: Pissot, 1755.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

LFA = Lectures on Fine Art, 2 voll. Translated by Bernard Knox. Oxford, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1975.

PhG = Phenomenology of Spirit. tr. A. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Frans Hemsterhuis

OP = Oeuvres Philosophiques par François Hemsterhuis. En Trois Volumes. Ed. L.S.P. Meyboom. Leeuwarden: W. Eckoff, 1846.

Johann Gottfried Herder

FG = First Grove, in *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, translated by Gregory Moore. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

FTG = Fourth Grove, in *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, translated by Gregory Moore. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

S = Sculpture. Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream. Translation by Jason Geiger. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

HSW = Herders Sämmtliche Werke. Hrsg. Bernard Suphan.

William Hogarth

AB = An Analysis of Beauty (1753). Pittsfield, MA: Silver Lotus Shop, 1909 (reprint).

Immanuel Kant

CJ = Critique of Judgment (1791). Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Gotthold Ephrahim Lessing

L = Laocoön. An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry. Translated by Edward Allen McCormic. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Karl Philipp Moritz

MW = Karl Philipp Moritz Werke. Im zwei Bände. Hrsg. Heide Hallmer & Albert Meier. Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1997.

AR = Anton Reiser: *A Psychological Novel*. Translation by Ritchie Robertson. London: Penguin Classics, 1997.

August Wilhelm Schlegel

DG = Die Gemälde. In *Athenaeum. Eine Zeitschrift Von August Wilhelm Schlegel und Friedrich Schlegel. Zweiten Bandes, Erstes Stück*. Berlin: Heinrich Frölich 1799.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling

PA = The Philosophy of Art. Edited, translated, and introduced by Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

RFN = An Oration on the Relation Between the Plastic Arts and Nature. tr. A. Johnson. London: John Chapman (1845).

SW = Sämmtliche Werke. hrsg. K.F.A. Schelling. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–1861.

Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel

GB = Gemäldebeschreibungen, in *Kritisch Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. IV; hrsg. Hans Eichner. München: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1959.

PL I = Philosophische Lehrjahre I. 1796–1806, in Friedrich Schlegel, Kritische Werkausgabe Band XVIII, hrsg. Hans Eichner; München: Verlag Ferdinand Schöning 1963

PL II = Philosophische Lehrjahre II. 1796–1806, in Friedrich Schlegel, Kritische Werkausgabe Band XIX, hrsg. Hans Eichner; München: Verlag Ferdinand Schöning

Karl Ferdinand Solger

E = Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst (1815). Berlin: Verlag von Wiegant und Grieben, 1907 (reprint)

L = *Solgers Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, hrsg. K.W.L. Hense. Leipzing: F.A. Brockhaus, 1829.

Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder

WGW = *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Historisch-kritisch Ausgabe. Im zwei Bände*. Hrsg. Silvio Vietta. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1991.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann

RI = *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*. Translated by Elfriede Heyder and Roger Norton. La Salle: Open Court, 1987

AKG = *Anmerkungen über die Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*. Dresden: Walterischen Hofbuchhandlung, 1767.

DT = *Description of the Belvedere Torso*. Translated by Thos. Davidson, in *The Journal for Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 2, n.3 (1868), pp. 187–9.

KS = *Kleine Schriften und Briefen*. Hrsg. Wilhelm Senff. Weimar: Herman Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1960.

HAA = *History of Art of Antiquity*. Translated by Harry Francis Malgrave. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Reassessing the Legacy of Romantic-Idealist Art Theory

1.1.1 Rediscovering Romantic/Idealist Figurative Aesthetics

> [Paintings] are not hanging there, so that our eye can see them; rather, so that one can penetrate them (*in sie hineingehe*) with a sympathetic heart, and live and breathe in them. A precious painting is not a paragraph of a textbook that I can discard as a useless husk after having easily extracted the meaning of the words. Rather, by exceptional artworks the pleasure continues always, without interruption. We believe we can penetrate in them ever more deeply, and yet they stimulate our senses always afresh, nor do we see any limit to the enjoyment of our soul. An eternal life-oil (*Ein ewiges brennendes Lebensöhl*) burns in them, which never extinguishes itself before our eyes.
>
> (Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder, 1795)

> Stendhal syndrome, Angel says, is a medical term. It's when a painting, or any work of art, is so beautiful it overwhelms the viewer. It's a form of shock. When Stendhal toured the Church of Santa Croce in Florence in 1817, he reported almost fainting from joy. People feel rapid heart palpitations. They get dizzy. Looking at great art makes you forget your own name, forget even where you're at. It can bring on depression and physical exhaustion. Amnesia. Panic. Heart attack. Collapse.
>
> Just for the record, Misty thinks Angel Delaporte is a little full of shit.
>
> (Chuck Palahniuk, *Diary*)

This book explores the largely forgotten, remarkable efflorescence of a German aesthetics of figurative art, which unfolded between 1754 and 1828. The most significant stars in this romantic and idealist textual constellation are: Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Reflections on Imitations of Greek Art* (1754) and his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), Frans Hemsterhuis' *Letter on Sculpture* (1765), Johann Gottfried Herder's *Sculpture* (1778), Karl Philipp Moritz's *On the Figurative Imitation of the Beautiful* (1788), Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder's *Heart-Outpourings of an Art-Loving Monk* (1798), August Schlegel's dialogue

F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5_1

The Paintings (1798), Friedrich Schlegel's *Descriptions of Paintings* (1802–1805), Friedrich Schelling's *On the Relationship between the Figurative Arts and Nature* (1807), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* (1817–1828). With the exception of Hans Hemsterhuis (who was Dutch), all of these thinkers are German.

Despite often considerable differences in substance and style, these writings are–in varying degrees–remarkably open to the possibility that *precisely as an object of aesthetic contemplation, the figurative artwork can address the spectator as an individual, about the very meaning and direction of his or her existence (Paskow 9).*[1]

These writers share also a considerable interest into artworks that were once religiously significant, whether they may be Greek torsos or Christian altarpieces. Such attention should not be confused with a reactionary 'sacralization' of art. In varying degrees, these thinkers acknowledge that their engagement of images took place *from a position of mourning and loss.* As Hegel pointed out, the age of the 'religion of art' is gone forever (PhG sec. 720). By religion of art, Hegel meant a culture (such as that of Ancient Greece and of Medieval Christianity) where the ritual fruition of sacred art is the most powerful way in which a community becomes conscious of its specific identity; such fruition is also the place where a community gets its deepest experience of the divine. But for us moderns, Hegel continues, the figurative art of the past has lost the power to catalyze such epiphanies: "the statues are only stones from which the living soul has flown" (PhG sec. 753). If in its original setting the artwork was a fruit connected to the living tree of social self-consciousness, nowadays it is "beautiful fruit already plucked from a tree" without "the actual life in which they existed, nor the tree that bore them" (sec. 753). But the other members of this critical tradition, from Winckelmann all the way to Friedrich Schlegel, were open to the possibility that our modern engagement of the art of the past be more than "the wiping off of some drops of rain or specks of dust from these fruits..." (sec. 753). Writing in an age that witnessed the rise of the museum, these intellectuals knew first-hand how many paintings and statues had been deracinated from their original matrix. Gone was the cultic or civic rituals that had formed the original matrix of artworks and influenced their original meaning. Nevertheless, these thinkers believed that religious artworks were not just objects of refined connoisseurship, even when they were serially arranged in galleries.

These thinkers had at their fingertips the language of the connoisseur, certainly, and made use of the accustomed vocabulary, such as, *serpentinato, contrapposto, chiaroscuro, morbidezza,* and *disegno.* But they engaged aesthetic properties not merely as a formal affair. Rather they are interested in how beauty, grace, dignity, and sublimity stand vis-à-vis pictorial *content* in a relationship of mutual enrichment and/or complication. They are also mindful of how such an interplay of form and matter can *intimately engage the spectator* in radical questions of theology,

[1] Here I am making my own a definition by Paskow 43.

ontology and ethics. It is this interdisciplinary feature that lead me to label this theoretical constellation as 'Theo-humanist Figurative Aesthetics', or (more mercifully) 'Figurative Theo-humanism'.

As I will show next, Figurative Theo-humanism's idea of aesthetic experience offers precious resources to the contemporary renaissance of aesthetic discourse.

1.2 The Current Resurgence of Aesthetics I: The Promising

After roughly five decades of punitive discourse (from so-called Critical Theory) and neglect (on the part of analytic philosophers), aesthetics is enjoying a revival.[2] Proclamations that aesthetics is dead or moribund are by no means the exclusive appurtenance of our age. One heard them periodically already in the nineteenth century, when figures like Alois Riegl or Julius Schlosser sought to disengage art history from the musty idealism of the right Hegelians (Gadamer 2004, 52). At the close of the nineteenth century, Alois Riegl claims that while Idealist "aesthetics has been long dead", his *Kunstwissenschaft* offered a *new* aesthetics, a "heiress" who "recognizes that her very right to exist lies rooted in the history of art" (quoted from Woodfield 2009, 31). In the 1920s, Julius von Schlosser—in an implicit break from Riegl—announced that treatises of art-historical aesthetics "have long been consigned to one of the darkest corners of my library"; on the other hand, aesthetics came back with a vengeance in Schlosser's idea of the artist as "insular creative monad", and of the work of art as self-standing unity of form and content (ibid). The point was to free aesthetics from an extraneous concern with *content*, and—with an emphatic nod to Kant—to let it be above all a matter of *form*.

It seemed that Critical Theory had finally given the decisive *côup the grace*. Aesthetics have been indicted of funding the eighteenth century dream of an impossibly free, disembodied self, whose 'taste' escapes historical determination; Jacques Derrida has offered what is arguably the most trenchant critique of aesthetics as disguised ideology (see Derrida and Klein 1981, Derrida 1987). Aesthetics stood accused of authorizing, via its normative idea of a timeless work of 'art', invidious exclusions: the 'canon' is closed to the crafts, the 'minor' arts, non-Western artifacts (for an altogether engaging account of this exclusionary discourse, see Shiner 2001). By the 1990s, these theoretical charges seemed confirmed by an unprecedented commodification of the 'fine arts'—a glaring refutation of that central aesthetic tenet, the absolute value of the artwork. The fate of aesthetics seemed definitely sealed once and for all. Writing in 1994, a confident, cheerful art-historian announced that "we are in the last stage of the era of the aesthetic" (Rodwick 107).

And yet, once more, mortuary bells are followed by baptismal ones; philosophers and art historians are again insisting on the importance of the aesthetic. Analytic philosophers like Dominique Lopes are reclaiming space for aesthetics

[2]The history of aesthetics as a discipline is one of cycles of birth, death, and rebirth.

(Lopes 2014). Quite remarkably, even a postmodern philosopher like Jacques Rancière has offered recently what amounts to a palinodic retraction of his previous assaults on *all* aesthetics as a sterile approach that divides art from life (Rancière 2013, *ix*). Finally, art historian Richard Neer has written an engaging history of Greek Classical Sculpture, explicitly aimed at recovering the 'magic' of ancient art, and at asking broader questions of ideology *from within* the aesthetic engagement of sculpture (Neer 2010, 10–2).

By 'aesthetics', I mean a branch of philosophy that tries to articulate what is at play in our encounters with whatever strikes us as beautiful—be it the beauty of a painting, a poem, a flower, a plow.

Beauty can be understood in a *descriptive* or an *evaluative* sense (D'Angelo 2011, 125–7). Aesthetic revivalists can be divided into two camps, depending on whether they champion descriptive or evaluative beauty.

Beauty is *descriptive* when we see it as the harmoniousness of a specific *content*: a human body, a flower, a landscape. When we restrict our focus on artworks, we say that the represented content of the artwork is descriptively beautiful. Descriptive beauty is also a harmony that is pleasant, lovable (though the reverse is not necessarily the case—something can be lovable and/or pleasant without being descriptively beautiful; e.g. a bulldog).

This understanding of beauty has a long and venerable tradition behind it (Plato, Plotinus, Aquinas), but for the last two centuries it has lost its artistic and theoretical hegemony. From the nineteenth century onwards, artists have given aesthetic dignity to disharmony, be it that of the *sublime*, of the *ugly,* the *grotesque*, the *surreal*, the *uncanny*. In the last two decades there has been an attempt to champion anew descriptive beauty (Alexander Nehemas, Marcia Mulder Eaton, Nicholas Zangwill, Elaine Scarry, Stefano Zecchi). By way of shorthand, I will call this the 'traditionalist' wing of aesthetic revival.

Conversely, *evaluative* beauty has to do with the 'how' of representation, and abstracts from the represented 'what'. We ascribe it to an object when we feel that it 'hangs well together', independently of its specific contents, which may leave us indifferent, or be even jarringly disharmonious (*e.g.* the painting *Figure with Meat*, by Francis Bacon).

The theoretical foundation for this understanding of beauty is in Kant's seminal idea of 'free beauty': the idea of a beauty *without concept*, i.e. a form that pleases us by itself, not because we see it as a perfect instance of a specific content. Kant's example: tropical birds and shells, whose fanciful patterns seem completely unrelated to the respective biologies they supervene upon. When we find beautiful—say—the elegant spiral of a Nautilus shell, we do not think "this is what a Nautilus should look like!". In this case we do not value that spiral because it complies with a preexistent yardstick, our idea of a perfect Nautilus (whatever that may turn out to be). Rather, we appreciate and value that configuration in and for itself. Among the modern advocates of this notion are Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Thierry Duve, Paolo D'Angelo. I will refer to them as the *formal* wing of aesthetic revivalism.

In one crucial, central respect, the basic intuition of the 'formalists' is to be preferred over that of the 'traditionalists'. Evaluative beauty is better equipped to

capture the idea that the aesthetic object is an *original* domain of meaning, where original simply means that we experience the beautiful object as valuable in itself. Conversely, descriptive beauty (the beauty of a *content*) can (and often has been!) more easily be construed as a *derivative* domain, depending upon a *prior, higher* sphere of meaning. This prior sphere could be ethical, as when the ancient Greeks took physical beauty as an index of moral goodness. It could be theological, as when medieval philosophers took natural beauty as an index of an intelligent, benevolent Creator. Finally, the aesthetic object can construed as a pointer to a higher, prior metaphysical plane, as in Polycletus' famed 'canon', where the beautiful body is a mere *token* of a type, a reflection of a pre-existing eidetic *content* (in this case, Polyclitus' system of proportions).

Against such reductions, the 'formalists' rightly insist on the idea that the aesthetic object 'hangs together' in virtue of *its own rule*. That is, the exceptional inner cohesion of any aesthetic *experience* is never the token of a type—each aesthetic experience 'hangs together' in its own unique way. This emphasis on the uniqueness of each and every aesthetic experience prevents the latter from being itself reduced to a non-originary experience. That is, it forestalls the reductive claim that aesthetic experience is validated only as a derivative presentment of ethical and/or religious universals.

No less crucial is another facet of the 'formalist' position: the highly specific inner cohesion of any aesthetic experience can be validated (or questioned) *within that experience*. This is what makes aesthetics a specifically *modern* discipline: the idea that aesthetic experience is irreducibly first-personal. The 'formalists' rightly emphasize that to dispose of this idea is undermine one of the last sites where autonomous, first-personal judgment remains unassailable. *Aesthetics*—and its insistence on the *aesthetic* (i.e. on the irreducibility of the first-personal sensuous and affective engagement of the artwork)—was born also as a response to the hegemonic claims of scientific discourse. In the wake of the scientific revolution, traditional ways of self-understanding started to fray under the pressure of new explanatory paradigms: if human animals are subject to the same determinism that rules the physical world, are they anything more than machines? The emergence of bureaucracy in the modern state compounded the problem: administrative logic abstracts from the individuality of single citizens.[3] In the face of such institutionalized leveling-down of individual differences, aesthetic experience offered a last site where what *I* feel, ask, explore has still its rights—as Kant avers in one of his most famous passages:

> If someone reads me his poem or takes me to a play that in the end fails to please my taste, then he can adduce Batteux or Lessing, or even older and more famous critics of taste, and adduce all the rules they established as proofs that his poem is beautiful; certain passages,

[3]Andrew Bowie notices how aesthetics (and its core belief in the irreducibility of *feeling*) was a response to an eighteenth century problem that is still with us today: the rise to dominance of a "scientific method and bureaucratic rationalisation . . . [which] actually attempt to exclude the individual subject in the name of 'objectivity', of what Thomas Nagel has called 'the view from nowhere'" (Bowie 2000, 12–3).

> which are the very ones that displease me, may even agree with rules of beauty (as they have been given there and have been universally recognized): I will stop my ears, listen to no reasons and arguments, and would rather believe that those rules of the critics are false or at least that this is not a case for their application than allow that my judgment should be determined by means of *a priori* grounds of proof" (CJ 165).

Kant speaks for a whole tradition when he says that if we find something beautiful (or ugly) we will (and should!) resist any theoretical attempt to overrule our judgment. To be sure, theory could help by trying to illuminate particular features of our experience of art—and traditional aesthetics sought to do precisely that. But it never sought to *overrule* or *deconstruct* our first-personal experience of art.[4]

It bears repeating: an aesthetics of *descriptive* beauty is less capable of doing justice to the irreducibility of the first-personal. Why? As we have seen, descriptive beauty is the perfection of a specific *content*, such as a human being a tree, a building. Now, if this specific content is constrained by any or more prior domains of meaning (ethics, theology, metaphysics), the risk is that what ever beauty it may possess be construed as an 'objective' reflection of universals—something whose value can be assessed *outside* and *beyond* first-personal experience. Consider this example: leafing through a fashion magazine (or watching a soap opera) we are initally titillated, but soon bored by its obligatory parade of photo-shopped beauties. It is easy to feel that these models reflect serially a pre-determined stencil; that the editors or producers have already decided for me in advance what is to count as beautiful. Here the (descriptive) beauty on display soon comes across as an external imposition on my capacity to judge aesthetically. This is sometimes true also in an Old Master like Goya. His *Parasol* (Prado) is a masterpiece of light, but the faces of the young girl and the page behind her are cloyingly idealized. Here one feels that Goya has repressed his extraordinary powers for realistic portraiture, to cater to contemporary neoclassical fashion.

However, descriptive beauty need not necessarily be always the tired repetition of a type. It can strike us with the force of the genuinely new. It can even unsettle us. Consider Correggio's *Leda and the Swan* (Berlin), where the face of the titular

[4] Alan Paskow gives an extremely helpful conceptual breakdown of the quarrel between traditional aesthetics and art-historical discourses that take their bearings by Critical Theory. As he points out, traditional aesthetics and Theory agree on one thing: there are two levels of consciouness engaged in the perception of external objects, including artworks. The first level is consciousness$_1$: here I unreflectively, naively take the world (and whatever populates it) to be exactly as it appears to my senses and feelings. The second level is consciousness$_2$: the reflective, disengaged perspective that takes a critical stance vis-à-vis consciousness$_1$ and its world. Their disagreement begins, crucially, in spelling out the relationship between the two levels. For Theory, consciousness$_1$ is intrinsically, systematically deceived in its naïve belief that the world really is as it appears to it. The truth is that biology, culture, psychology, personal narrative create the specific texture of the world that consciousness$_1$ naively believes to simply find before itself. Consciousness$_2$ can take a detached stance, from which the immediate world of consciousness$_1$ can be exposed as non-immediate, i.e. as constructed. But for classical aesthetics, while the world of consciousness$_1$ is certainly open to the suggestions of consciousness$_2$, it reserves itself the right to decide *by itself* whether or not to *accept* the input of consciousness$_2$ (see Paskow 63–71).

nymph was irreparably savaged by Louis D'Angelo (Ekserdjan 288; Freedberg 410); Rembrandt's *Danaë* (St. Petersburg), sprayed with sulphuric acid by a visitor– an assault that damaged her face, hair and legs (Slujter 221). Rembrandt's *Danaë* was "not only one of the greatest paintings ever made of a female nude, but also a painting of almost palpable lifelikness, exhuding great sensuality, more so than any other nude painted in the modern period. In the nineteenth century Danaë was banned from the main gallery of the Hermitage for that very reason" (221). Horrible as they are, incidents like these reveal that descriptive beauty can speak to us very powerfully. I am not sure the formal revivalists of aesthetics are equipped to do justice to phenomena like these. Or so I shall argue next.

1.3 The Current Resurgence of Aesthetics II: The Problematic

As I see it, the 'formal revivalists' are making an exceedingly purist case for aesthetics. In their laudable wish to restore aesthetics as an independent domain of meaning, they push into the background its existential reverberations. How? In a clear reprise of Kant, aesthetic revivalists like Dominic Lopes, Paolo D'Angelo, Jean-Marie Schaefer claim that the heart of aesthetic experience is the judgment that the object has aesthetic value (Lopes 179; D'Angelo 102–3; Schaeffer 25). But judgment here is not a bi-directional affair: the self is the judge, and the artwork is judged, suggesting that the artwork has pre-emptively been deprived of its capacity to turn the tables on us, to stir up fundamental questions about ourselves. To be sure, these theorists recognize that sometimes an artwork can open up troubling and/or exciting vistas on the sense and direction of our lives. But – and this is the crucial point – they do not think that the artwork does this qua aesthetic object. Consider, for instance, these lines by Nöel Carrol: "we derive more from artworks than only aesthetic experience, including knowledge, moral insight and transformation, a sense of allegiance, an emotional workout and other things as well" (Carroll 1996, 202). Carrol is to be praised for his broad construction of our experience of art, certainly. But note how he 'quarantines' aesthetic experience from the other possible spheres of reception (ethical, epistemic, emotional). Consider also Jean-Marie Schaeffer's claim that "an aesthetic reception of an object can very well accompany the most utilitarian use of it: I can address my prayers to a painting representing a saint while at the same time appreciating the aesthetic qualities of the work . . . If it is sometimes difficult to engage in both activities at the same time, one can in any case easily move from one to the other, which would no doubt not be the case if the practical function were incompatible with the aesthetic experience" (Schaeffer 298). For Schaeffer, aesthetics and spirituality are compatible at best, mutually exclusive at worst. But does it always have to be that way? Can't they be intimately related sometimes? Can't the sweet beauty of a painted Madonna catalyze a particularly intimate prayer? As many pages of lyrical poetry attest, the (descriptive) beauty of one's beloved can burn like a coal. Sappho writes: "He appears to me, that one, equal to the gods, the

man who, facing you, is seated . . . my tongue has a breakdown and a delicate fire suddenly rushes under my skin . . . paler than grass I am and almost dead I appear to me". Sappho's imagination and desire is exercised by the enfleshed beauty of her beloved, by the grace of her presence. Of course, we could say that Sappho's poem transfigures cathartically into evaluative beauty the troubling descriptive beauty of a young woman; deliciously vexing content is distilled into pure form. But is such distillation complete? Is it right to say that our enjoyment of Sappho's verses is an appreciation of mere form? Consider these phenomena: the bloom of youth, the erotically charged image of a subcutaneous sweet fire, the frightening grip of eros on the desiring self ("almost dead I appear to me"). Are these contents completely transmogrified into the formal beauty of verse? Were this the case, the poem could not trouble us as it does. Rather, I would argue that Sappho's verse is so powerful because it imaginatively *ignites* a vexing physical beauty just as much as it tames it in the music of its verse. That is, Sappho gives us a poignant oscillation between palpitating descriptive beauty, and the more rarified evaluative (i.e. formal) beauty of meter. Consider also Velasquez' *Rokeby Venus*. Most assuredly, her beauty is not merely descriptive: she is also fascinating evaluatively, i.e. qua ensemble of elegant lines and creamy complexion.-values. And yet, can we deny that her beauty is no less also the beauty of a human body? Even here, the aesthetic object is a gripping oscillation between living content and pure form. Now, when a 'formalist' like Paolo D'Angelo claims that aesthetics deals with descriptive beauty only if it is completely transfigured into evaluative beauty (D'Angelo 2011, 129), he cannot do full justice to Sappho or Velazquez's *Venus*. Nor is D'Angelo right when he claims that descriptive beauty as such is the interchangeable token of a type (130) He rightly notes that the winners of beauty contests all tend to resemble one another (130). But sometimes descriptive beauty can grip us with the force of something absolutely unique and new. A case in point is Marcel Proust's fleeting glimpse of a beautiful milkmaid: "Flushed with the glow of morning, her face was rosier than the sky. I felt on seeing her that desire to live which is reborn in us whenever we become conscious anew of beauty and of happiness. We invariably forget that these are individual qualities, and, mentally substituting for them a conventional type at which we arrive by striking a sort of mean among the different faces that have taken our fancy, among the pleasures we have known, we are left with mere abstract images which are lifeless and insipid because they lack precisely that element of novelty, different from anything we have known, that element which is peculiar to beauty and to happiness. So, completely unrelated to the models of beauty which I was wont to conjure up in my mind when I was by myself, this handsome girl gave me at once the taste for a certain happiness (the sole form, always different, in which we may acquire a taste for happiness), for a happiness that would be realised by my staying and living there by her side." (Proust 706). I hasten to add that this is a point that (unlike D'Angelo and Schaeffer) Dominique Lopes is well aware of. His revivalist plea for aesthetics goes hand in hand with an attack on the supposedly 'disinterested' nature of aesthetic experience (Lopes 165–6).

When it insists on the complete primacy of form, the 'formalist' revival of aesthetics is vulnerable to the objections of the so-called 'iconic turn'. What

is the 'iconic turn', or, more briefly, *IT*? It is an umbrella term for a cluster of discourses which—since circa 1990—has emphatically attacked the dominant, contextualist art-historical paradigm. Some of its most prominent advocates are: David Freedberg, T.J. Mitchell, Georges Didì-Hubermann, James Elkins, David Morgan. *IT*'s driving claim: images have the power to grip us viscerally, and to hold us captive—to implicate us in the construction of their own meaning. These figures see the traditional discipline of aesthetics as a 'sanitization' of images, i.e. an (ultimately self-defeating) purging of images of troublesome *descriptive* contents, and a correlative, cowardly retreat into an (essentially illusory) domain of pure form. One of the founding fathers of the 'iconic turn', David Freedberg, advises us to reject "the pleasures of a formalist aesthetics [which] deny both the fears and the pleasures that otherwise sustain us-because it springs from an alienation that both clouds analysis and denies our natures" (Freedberg 1989, 282). Some other notable members of the Iconic Turn are Georges Didi-Hubermann, J.T. Mitchell, James Elkins (for a valuable overall account of this current, see Moxey 2008).

A central insight of the 'iconic turn' is its broader idea of *experience* of images, an experience that is twofold: (*a*) the experience of the image as a *quasi-living* individual addressing the spectator; (*b*) a correlative, heightened surge of *lively* (sometimes disturbingly so) emotional/cognitive forces in the spectator himself or herself.

For 'iconic turn' theorists, one way in which the experience of the image can disrupt ordinary experience is by 'breaking time': fascinatingly (and/or disturbingly) the image seems to break out of its *pastness* by the very fact that it is felt to address in a quasi-living way the *lived present* of the spectator. We are familiar with this experience: an ancient portrait seems to gaze at us with eyes that intrude into our present.

But the 'iconic turn' too suffers from its own blind spots: its emphasis on the experience of images refuses (on principle) to acknowledge cases in which that experience is inflected *aesthetically*.

That is, it refuses to acknowledge that in some cases the object rivets our attention and emotions also because it comes across as an exceptionally cohesive, self-standing totality. Here are some examples of the disruptive power of formal closure. (A) Consider Sophocles' tragedies, where the hero grips powerfully our imagination precisely through the ruthless consistency of his words and deeds. Here the unity of ethos is far from being just the source of a remarkably integrated spectatorial existence. To be sure, one can follow David Hume on this score, and say that taste (the faculty whereby we recognize aesthetic unity) decides on the worth of a tragedy. But Hume's position seems inadequate to me. Antigone or Ajax go to their own demise by their beautiful, uncompromising self-integrity. Certainly, such consistency is a source of aesthetic pleasure. But, *pace* Hume, it is also deeply unsettling for the spectator, which can itself be profoundly valuable. (B) Friedrich Schelling remarked that a good portrait is truer to a person than the person itself (*PA* 146). In real life, the true character of a person shows itself only partially. But a good portrait is capable of going beyond this temporally scattered existence of the self, and intimating the concentrated presence of ethos (146). It does

so through an intensified integration between the various parts of the face. Eyes, eyebrows, lips, jaw, etc.: they all seem emanations of one and the same character. Again, the Iconic Turn's reluctance to take seriously the aesthetic dimension is rooted in the belief that it is a cop-out, a formalization of the image that neuters both *(a)* and *(b)*: the felt, quasi-living *agency* of the image, and the correlative *lively* surge of spectatorial emotion. By way of illustration, consider Georges Didì-Hubermann's discussion of Vermeer's *Lacemaker* (Louvre). As he sees it, what makes this painting so riveting is the way one detail undermines the descriptive coherence of the whole. Didì-Hubermann asks us to focus on the cluster of red threads dangling from the pillow at lacemaker's right. Here the vivid vermillion of the threads takes on a life of its own, it breaks its subordination from ordinary mimesis (i.e. the representation of a bundle of threads), and compels attention in its own right. What is more, this intense speck of red haunts us also by disrupting the overall representation: the green carpet below seems to liquify, and "the tassel on the left becomes diaphanous" (Didì-Hubermann 2005, 256). In short, here overall form (the realistic orchestration of details) is subverted by a bit of a perceptually elusive matter (the fleck of red). To be sure, Didì-Hubermann's emphasis on the disruptive power of the "the sovereign accident" (here, the unruly red) over the pictorial whole is not a complete rejection of aesthetics. After all, he implies that the *Lacemaker* is *evaluatively* beautiful: precisely by its unruliness, the fleck of red transforms the *entire* picture into something fascinatingly uncanny. And so, by valuing the picture for its consistent, overall uncanniness, Didì-Hubermann is certainly speaking as a practitioner of aesthetics (as much as he would loathe to see himself as one). However, his idea of aesthetics is one-sided: it focuses only on the moment of implosion, of the collapse of order into disorder. But an artwork like the *Lacemaker* haunts also by its *positive* overall unity. Consider the milky warmth of the light, the lovely curls of the girl, the soft oval of her face, the almost visible silence of the scene. All these details hang together in an ecstatic, yet warmly intimate microcosm.

Furthermore, the Iconic Turn's one-sided insistence on image-agency implies a *deterministic* model of spectatorship, in which—unbeknownst to ourselves—we are essentially carrying out the image's own hermeneutical agenda, we are completely in the grips of the power of the image. But there are clearly cases in which our response to an image is felt as a genuinely, deeply *personal* gesture—not as a merely *passive* response.

'Formalist' aesthetics does justice to this intimate element: when we find something beautiful, we are consulting our own *first-personal* feelings about that object—we feel that in the choice of that object as beautiful we relying on our own capacity for autonomous discrimination. In this respect, the Iconic Turn is oblivious of the difference between pathos and sentiment (*Gefühl*). In pathos we are completely passive, while sentiment includes also an actively self-reflexive dimension. The notion of sentiment is part and parcel of aesthetics as a distinctively modern discipline—the ancients do not know *Gefühl* but only pathos (D'Angelo 2011, 109). That being said, I think formalist aesthetics needs a more expansive sense of the self-discovery at issue in aesthetic judgment. That is, when I judge

something to be beautiful, I may become privy to something more than my capacity for autonomous discrimination. Artworks that really matter to me have the power to address the totality of my being, not only my aesthetic discernement. Against its own formalist premises, the wonderful conclusion of Paolo D'Angelo's *Estetica* concedes precisely this point: "In the end, if the type of philosophy one choses depends on the type of person one is, even the art we choose depends in a strong measure from who we are" (208).

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As I see it, some cross-pollination between 'formalist' aesthetics and iconic theory is called for, in order to account for cases in which *both* (*a*) an object is *felt* to 'hang together' in a way that makes it intrinsically, non-reductively valuable; *and* (*b*) we feel that this object addresses us individually, raising questions in which we feel that the sense and direction of our lives is at stake.

We can label (*a*) and (*b*) as, respectively, the *original* and the *originary.* We are already acquainted with the *original*: the affective/cognitive recognition of an individual form as something non-derivatively, i.e. *originally* valuable (beauty not a mere token for ethical, theological, political principles). But the encounter with this original domain of meaning can also be *originary*: it can be a site that can prod or occasion fundamental reorganizations of the way we relate to ourselves and the world.

Again, aesthetics and Iconic Turn would agree on rejecting (wrongly, in my view) the possibility of such a middle ground. Their respective agendas turn on a *separation* of the original from the originary.

To purge the original of the originary is the mistake of 'formalist' aesthetics. The practitioner of 'formalist' aesthetics fears that the experience of the artwork as a splendid self-contained world would be tainted by the admission that such a world can occasion an upsetting/reorganization of our *Weltanschauung*—it would sacrifice the wondrous independence of the aesthetic object by reducing it to a tool of ethical and/or religious rhetoric. Again, aesthetic 'formalists' do allow that the artwork may also be a source of religious and/or philosophical insight. But even within the artwork, the original and the originary are mutually insulated. That is, the 'formalists' deny that the artwork can trigger personal insight *qua* evaluatively beautiful. For them, an artwork's aesthetic properties are *not* involved in the artwork's possible disruption our world-view. As an example, consider Paolo D'Angelo's remarks on Matthias Grünewald's *Crucifixion* (*Issenheim Altarpiece*). He notes that this Christ "is such a powerful image of suffering that we cannot contemplate it without feeling in our own limbs the same pain that distorts the features of the Crucified, and that expands itself into almost monstrously bloated limbs" (D'Angelo 2011, 136). But he is not valuing aesthetic form for its capacity to trigger emotional insight. It is rather the opposite: my intensely visceral, harrowingly corporeal imaginative engagement of Grünewald's battered Christ is primarily an index of the formal excellence (evaluative beauty) of the *Crucifixion*. But sometimes the aesthetic object can work also because it refuses to sublimate

spectatorial pain into a satisfying, seamless aesthetic experience. Could not the formal orchestration of Grünewald's Christ function as an *epiphanic site* in which we see the tragically suffering nature of the human animal, in which we see an intensity we could never bring to word? Do we react to this work in the same way we react to a good horror movie, in which "despite the fact that we died of fear, we leave the theater calm and satisfied . . . and even happy to have paid the ticket" (137)?

To purge the originary of the original is the mistake of the Iconic Turn. The practitioner of iconic turn fears that power of images to grip and unsettle our emotions is unfortunately elided once we foreground the artwork's inner cohesion, its being a *Welt im Kleinem* (i.e. a microcosm). That is why the Iconic Turn speaks of 'images' rather than 'Art'—it fears that such evaluative language foregrounds that formalist and (in the eyes of Iconic Theory) desiccating view of artworks.

But—I repeat—neither 'formalist' aesthetics nor the iconic turn can do full justice to the experience of artworks where the *original* and the *originary are felt to be deeply co-implicated*—experiences where the perception of an intrinsically valuable aesthetic microcosm is *of a piece* with feeling inexorably drawn into its force-field, with feeling torn from my customary, well-worn existential orbit; and—last but not least—with feeling invited to explore/consider other existential possibilities.[5]

[5]Figurative Theo-humanism's insistence on the *responsibility* of aesthetic response makes it crucially different from today's popular "iconic-turn", or *IT* (T.J. Mitchell, David Freedberg, Georges Didì-Hubermann). It is important to stress this difference, because in many other respects *IT* resurrects Figurative Theo-humanism. The two approaches share, point for point, the following agenda:

1. the idea that the artwork's *phsyical* presence and its visual properties anchor an *intrinsic power* to generate meaning
2. that this meaning is liberated phenomenologically, i.e. within an intimate, first-personal experience of the artwork
3. that the actualization of the artwork's immanent meaning requires the active participation of the spectator (his or her many-leveled imaginative transfiguration of a raw visual immediacy)
4. that—despite the crucial input of the spectator—the artwork seems endowed with a life of its own
5. that this presence 'bends time', by making the past alive in the present.

Nevertheless (unlike Figurative Theo-humanism) *IT* does not do justice to what I have called 'the responsibility of aesthetic response', i.e. the way in which the artwork's meaning depends on the hermeneutical decisions of the spectator. To be sure, *IT* places much stock by the 'beholder's share', by the idea that the artwork's strategic indeterminacy *requires the spectator's co-operation in the construction of its own meaning*. But *IT*'s description of that co-operation foregrounds the image's *'pull'*, i.e. its power to *seduce* us, *hook* us: its areas of indeterminacy are an irrestistible 'bait' for our imagination, that feels compelled to 'fill in' the dots, i.e. imaginatively transfigure mimetically uncertain *Gestalt*. 'Beholder's share' here means essentially *our role in carrying the image's own hermeneutical agenda.* If *IT* recognizes (as it does) the strategic role of *felt semantic absences* within the artwork, it is only to redescribe them as the artwork's *enigmatic power* over the spectator. By its overwhelming emphasis on 'object agency', *IT* flattens the sense of aesthetics as *originary* experience: in *IT*, reception originates *causally* from the artwork; conversely, in Figurative Theo-humanism a specific reception is *occasioned* (not caused!) by the

1.4 Figurative Theo-humanist Aesthetics: The Original, the Originary, and Beauty's Temporality

This is where my reassessment of the legacy of German Romantic/Idealist aesthetic tradition from Winckelmann to Hegel—such as the one carried out in this book—extends current debates about the scope and nature of aesthetic experience. As I shall argue, despite all the internal variety of this theoretical constellation, its brightest stars never lost sight of aesthetic experience as a co-implication of original

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artwork. By its insistence on the image's *immediate* power of address, and on the subject's likewise *immediate* capacity (i.e. bypassing cultural conditioning) to be affected, *IT* eliminates those all-important, irreducible pockets of hermeneutical uncertainty that make possible a genuinely *liberating* engagement of the image.

As an example of *IT*'s rather one-sided emphasis on object-agency, consider David Freedberg. He recommends that we learn more "about the cognitive potential that arises from *the relations between looking and . . . the material object*" (Freedberg 1989, 432). But Freedberg foregrounds a *causal reading* of such 'relations': "I choose to suggest the centrality of the relation between the formal quality and the *efficacity* of objects" (285, italics mine). Now, it would be unfair to Freedberg to ascribe him a coarse reductionism—he makes it clear that "the neural mechanisms that underpin the empathetic 'power of images" do not rule out the importance of "historical, cultural, and other contextual factors" (Freedberg and Gallese 2007, 197). Nor can one accuse him of being insensitive to the *redeeming* power of images: if he criticizes formalist aesthetics, it is because its "pleasures . . . *deny both the fears and the pleasures that otherwise sustain us* . . . it [formalist aesthetics] *springs from an alienation* that both clouds analysis and *denies our natures*" (282, italics mine). Nevertheless, these lines suggest a focus on the image's *therapeutical* redemption of the spectator, not a more demanding *ethical* one: "we need not embark on . . . suggestions of how images or art might better lives and enhance feeling" (1989, 432).

Georges Didì-Hubermann (a philosopher by training) stands out alone in *IT* discourse for his willingness to consider the ethically emancipatory force of the image. But I hasten to add that Hubermann—in a anti-humanist sense—sees the artwork as *emancipating us from moral discourse as such*. Blending Sigmund Freud, George Bataille, and Gilles Deleuze, Didì-Hubermann claims that free rational agency is an Enlightenment invention—which loses its grip on us once we realize that it hinges on a tacit 'logocentric' repression of primordial psychic energies. That is why he focuses on images which (as he sees it) have the power to liberate long-repressed protean forces, and to inspire the spectator to liberate herself to the Dyonisian dormant within her. It would be unfair to Didì-Hubermann to charge him with moral irresponsibility: after all, he thinks that 'civilization' is an *evil,* since it allegedly enforces a stifling construction of selfhood. And Didì-Hubermann suggests that the 'disintegration of the self' wrought by the anarchic power of the image can be *politically* no less than *therapeutically good*—it can breed a Levinasian respect for the *different other*: "the capacity to tolerate and deal with an absence of differentiable periods and episteme" (to live with an oceanic, unanalyzable unity, lacking beginning, end, and formulable meaning) is to say the least a rare power" (Didì-Hubermann 2003, 46). But it is clear that this protean, amorphous self-image can be equally pressed into the service of irresponsibility (cf. Goya's sleep of reason breeding monsters (*Caprichos*, plate 43), Luckasz's study of the Romantic roots of fascism). *Isn't a genuinely emancipatory artwork one that presents the spectator with the liberating potential of Dyonisian* pathos*, but makes him/her also aware of its problematic tension with* the principles of ethos? Doesn't genuine responsibility require us to negotiate between the two? Aby Warburg (Didì-Hubermann's cynosure) knew that much art staged precisely such a problematic confrontation. And so—to finish—isn't Didì-Hubermann's one-sided emphasis solely on the *explosive* power of the image itself irresponsible?

and originary. To foreground conceptually this tradition's co-implication of the aesthetical and the existential, I have coined the expression "Figurative Theo-humanist aesthetics". 'Aesthetics' encapsulates this tradition's commitment to the irreducible, first-personal experience of something as beautiful. 'Theo-humanist' seeks to distill the existential pole of that experience, the way in which the experience of beauty can prod fundamental re-alignments of the way we look at ourselves and the world—while all along preserving beauty as a self-standing domain of meaning.

Finally, it is not by chance that this Theo-humanism has a figurative slant. This interplay between aesthetics and existentialism, between form and messy, open-

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Against Didì-Hubermann's overwhelming Dyonisian aesthetics, consider the more balanced example of Rilke's *Archaic Torso of Apollo*. The battered fragment leaves the spectator in an irreducible uncertainty—does the stone embody Dyonisian chaos or Apollinean clarity? Both? But this hermeneutical hesitation is not the delicious doubt of the connoisseur—it is ethically relevant, as the peremptory close of the ekphrasis testifies: "*You must change your life*", the torso seems to say. Is the viewer summoned to a divine folly, or a divine rage for order? Both? What would that mean? And is this ethical summons genuine, or is it the poet's wishful ventriloquism? Once more, the Apollo leaves the spectator with the burden of answering. If the archaic Apollo *has the power to compel* its own interpretation, it does so in a crucially open-ended way.

It is also important to disengage Figurative Theo-humanism from the 'anachronic' theory of Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood. In their fascinating work on medieval and Renaissance painting (Nagel and Wood 2010), these art-historians argue, against the grain of their own poststructuralist premises, that it is time to retrieve artwork's uncanny capacity to merge multiple temporalities. They reproach the dominant, 'reconstructive' art-historical paradigm for failing to see "the possibility of the artwork's symbolic reach *beyond* the historical art-world that created it—its ability to symbolize realities unknown to its makers . . . 'Art' is the name of the possibility of a conversation across time, a conversation more meaningful than the present's merely forensic reconstruction of the past" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 17–8).

Building upon Didì-Hubermann's talk of the artwork's plural temporality, Nagel and Wood give us eyes for the many ways in which an artwork's representational *content* can collapse multiple historical points into one (*e.g.* staging the birth of Jesus amidst the ruins of the Roman Empire). In so doing, the artwork refuses the logic of linear temporality, and hesitates (or, in Nagel's and Wood's coinage, 'anachronizes', 13) between various points in time.

However, Nagel and Wood reject the possibility that *classical form can itself be anachronic*. As they see it, classical form dispenses with the poignant task of cobbling together different points of history. Instead, classical form is the invention of a "timeless formal norm", and through this fabricated aura "the normative image disguises its own historical origins" (355). And so, by painting the *School of Athens* with classical form, Raphael wants to produce nothing less than spectatorial amnesia: the perfection of shape should make us forget the human (and hence finite) nature of the painter (356); philosophers with such noble limbs surely inhabit an ideal temporality where strife is impossible (whereas the history of ancient philosophy is marked by profound internal disagreeements, 359–61).

I would argue that such a view of classic form seems unduly reductive. One merit of Figurative Theo-humanism is recognizing how the appeal of classical beauty depends on the interplay between ideal spatiotemporality and historicity. Winckelmann saw classic form as intimating eternity *and* as the *historical* embodiment of a certain construction of the self. He saw that historical corrosion could make an artwork hover between timeless appeal and a hopelessly vestigial status. Isn't this a way of saying that plastic beauty, too, could be anachronic?

ended existence explains also why theo-humanist aesthetics has a peculiarly strong eye and feeling for figurative art. The temporal fixity a painting or a sculpture (as opposed to the successive unfolding of poetry), no less than their capacity to concentrate in one moment what ordinarily unfolds in successive time, can evoke an ecstatic self-plenitude—a view that can be as liberating as it can be troublesome (the same is true of the feeling of 'visual necessity' holding together the parts of a painting or sculpture).

The *silence* of figurative art (both in respect of content and form) can evoke a peculiar feeling of the artwork's *silent questioning* of the spectator. And the enigmatic, fragmentary nature of that implied question can make us acutely aware of our own finitude. It also matters here that (and here I lean upon Nelson Goodman's classic distinction) figurative art is *autographic*, not *allographic*. Here I rely on Nelson Goodman's well-known distinction: a piece of figurative art is autographic, i.e. an irreplaceable individual, as opposed to a literary artifact, which allographic, i.e. a replaceable token of a type. The autographic nature of a given painting or sculpture plays a crucial role in a peculiar, 'Pygmalionic' construction of aesthetics where we meet (and are met by) the artwork as two individuals encountering each other. And, because of its autographic nature, a piece of figurative art comes across as a *corporeally vulnerable individual*, open to the ravages of chronological and historical time.

But though the work can challenge us on ontological or ethical issues—precisely because we experience it as a unique individual—it nevertheless cannot be taken as a token of an ethical/religious universal (here we address the reductionist anxieties of formal aesthetics). This is why (as we will see) the idea of *friendship* is such an important part of theo-humanist aesthetics. Aristotle understands friendship at its best as a relationship in which we see the friend as an intrinsically excellent individual. We also see the excellence of this friend as something that might be a benchmark for ourselves. Nevertheless, the good friend in Aristotle is never the token of a type—he is always a unique individual.

Figurative Theo-humanism charts the interplay between the artwork and the life of the spectator also via its remarkable sensitivity to the *multiple spatiotemporalities of the artwork itself*. I hasten to add that these various spatiotemporalities are embedded in this discourse, and rarely (if ever) thematized. To give clarity to these implicit dimensions, I have coined categories which do bring to light the tacit key concepts of this tradition. Here are the four main spatiotemporalities of the artwork:

1. the spatiotemporality of the artifact qua *thing*: here the vulnerable embodied being of the artifact mirrors back to the spectator his or her own fragile existence

   (i) the ravages of chronological time upon a sculpture or a canvas can remind us of our own inescapable mortality
   (ii) the deracination of a sculpture or a painting from its original cultic or civic context into the foreign context of the 'fine arts museum'—the exilic condition of the artwork, its indifferent being-there alongside other entities (other paintings, lights, curtains) can evoke in the viewer a symmetrical, poignant feeling of existential displacement.

2. *The spatial representation of concentrated narrative temporality*—i.e. the figurative representation of a single moment that implies the 'before' and 'after' of an overall narrative. This implication can be experienced as an exhilarating 'containment': the represented moment is felt to *contain* the past and the future it implies (hence the influential idea of the 'pregnant moment' of figurative art). Here the temporally saturated representation allows an ecstatic, exhilarating gaze—we feel as if liberated from the sequential dispersal of ordinary temporality.

   (i) *Concentrated temporality as concentrated representation of pathos and/or ethos and/or eros.* This follows from *(i)*: the narratively concentrated aura of the image can also evoke an extraordinary concentration of emotions—a plenitude impossible in ordinary experience, where emotions can only unfold in a temporally scattered progression.
   Such a condensed representation of pathos or eros can also come across as *descriptively ugly* or as *descriptively beautiful.*

      (a) Example of descriptive ugliness: the enormous pathos of the Christ of Mathias Grünewald's *Crucifixion*, which bodies itself forth through extremely unpleasant distortions and lacerations.
      (b) Example of descriptive beauty: the soft grace of Raphael's *Jardiniere* Madonna—intense loveliness of the body as an objectification of the erotic gaze.
      The concentrated characters of descriptive beauty and descriptive ugliness can catalyze a revelatory *'rush'* from within, where deep-seated, heretofore latent emotions suddenly surprise, thrill, disturb the spectator.

3. The spatiotemporality of the artifact qua *aesthetic object*. Here an ecstatic, 'perfect' spatio-temporality is evoked by the *Gestalt* of the artwork (as opposed to *2*, where ecstatic spatiotemporality is grounded by representational *content*). *One* (by no means the only one) construction of such aesthetic spatiotemporality is through a peculiar inflection of the feeling of *visual necessity* that one associates with a figurative aesthetic object. For our tradition, the seminal instance of aesthetic spatiotemporality is, as we shall see, Winckelmann's reworking of Hogarth's line of beauty: a quasi-hallucinatory quivering that seems to unfold *in no time*, where the overall contours come across as a space liberated from the temporal dispersion of lived, embodied existence.

   (i) The feeling of this paradoxical (because timeless) motion can be inflected in two importantly different ways

      (a) If the *unity* of the *Gestalt* seems to dominate over its quasi-hallucinatory motion, then (leaning upon Cesare Brandi) we are experiencing *'temporalized space'*: i.e. a spatial configuration that seems to contain all of its temporal parts (as opposed to being *one* of many temporal parts, as is the case in ordinary experience).
      (b) If the *unity* of the *Gestalt* seems to be 'swallowed', dissolved in its own oscillatory matrix, then we speak (leaning upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gianni Carchia) of *'mythic time'*. In the 'fissure' that compromises

formal closure, one *feels* suggestions of an 'untamable', primordial (hence 'mythic') energy. (Cesare Brandi (1906–1988) was an italian art-critic and historian. Gianni Carchia (1947–2000) was an italian philosopher. A more detailed discussion of 'temporalized space' and 'mythic time' can be found in Chapter Two).

4. The *historical* spatiotemporality of the artwork. The object can oscillate between 'time-breaking' presence, and poignant absence. That is, its beauty may be felt as a *living address*, across the sands of history, to a spectator. Or it may be felt as a poignant, essentially *dead* trace of an irretrievably lost space and time.

   (i) We can call these two extremes (following Helmuth Plessner) the 'monumental' and the 'documental'.
   Note that the artwork's concentrated narrative spatiotemporality (#2 above) and its aesthetic spatiotemporality (#3 above) can be sites of descriptive beauty (level 2); and *evaluative beauty* (level 3).

   (ii) descriptive beauty (or ugliness) is a function of the lovability (or disturbing unpleasantness) of the represented content. As we have seen, the concentrated narrative spatiotemporality of the figurative artwork (level 2) allows a correlative concentration of visual and emotional lovability (or unpleasantness)

   (iii) Conversely, evaluative beauty abstracts from representational content: we ascribe it to an artwork's overall form, when we value what strikes us as its exceptional inner cohesion. As we have seen, level 3 is predicated on an elision of narrative content, and a focus on the overall *Gestalt*—that is why this level can be a privileged vantage point for the experience of evaluative (formal) beauty.

The particular strength of Figurative Theo-humanist aesthetics is also in its capacity to appreciate the interplay of evaluative *and* descriptive beauty—it does not see the two dimensions as mutually exclusive.

Formal aesthetics does not allow a role for descriptive beauty *as such*, which it takes to be essentially an *extraesthetic* value. The formalist's allergy toward the pleasant and lovable stems from his fear of a loss of the *axiologically originary*—it fears that if (say) a sculpted biceps or breast is appreciated as an imagined sexual object, the artwork's perceived value becomes simply *accidental*—a mere reflection of our biological drives. To be sure, Formal aesthetics does not rule out descriptive beauty, provided it is completely transfigured into something *evaluatively beautiful*. That is, sublimated into a configuration that pleases us *intrinsically*, *not extrinsically*; that is, the configuration does not please because we find alluring the *content* it represents (i.e. the *descriptive* beauty of the artwork).

This refusal to allow *descriptive* beauty *as such* within the precincts of aesthetic experience should be questioned. We need not agree with Stendhal's claim that beauty is a *promesse de bonheur*, a promise of happiness. But that claim presupposed a valuable point: Stendhal was implying that aesthetic experience should not be severed from one's own *living* self-experience.

Conversely, while the Iconic Turn is programmatically open to descriptive beauty and ugliness, especially when it is erotically/affectively charged, it has a jaundiced view of 'evaluative beauty', which it sees as a desiccating, cowardly elision of the rich affective potential of the artwork. In so doing, Iconic Theory does injustice to the 'aesthetic' character of some encounters with art—to the fact that some artworks enthrall us in no small measure because of what we feel to be their extraordinary degree of inner cohesion.

Finally, Theo-humanist aesthetic is remarkably open to the role that *physical* and *historical* dimensions of the artwork play *within* our first-personal engagement of the artwork itself. This is not the case with both formal aesthetics and iconic theory: both speak as if the artwork addressed us unproblematically across the sands of time and space, as if it its powers of living address were not vulnerable to physical and historical corrosion. To be sure, Iconic theory (unlike formal aesthetics) is alive to the excitement of a distant artifact 'breaking time'. But—consistent with its rejection of *evaluative beauty*—it does not recognize how pure aesthetic form can itself have a multiple temporality.

* * *

In short: Figurative Theo-humanism recovers a broader understanding of aesthetic experience, one open to the interplay of evaluative beauty *and* descriptive beauty. This aesthetics is also sensitive to how the experience of beauty can be *complicated* and/or *enriched* by its precarious position between time-breaking 'monumentality' and poignant 'documentality'.

This generous understanding of aesthetics rests upon three premises.

First, 'aesthetics' in the narrow sense of the word (the first-personal engagement of the artwork's formal values) is not severed from ontological questions. Far from being an occasion of narcissist escapism, the affective response to the artwork's interplay between form and content catalyzes also a potentially troubling self-hermeneutical effort. The artwork, then, functions as a site of an *originary* experience, in the sense that it is the locus where a certain self-hermeneutical questioning can *originate*. Since our authors focus so much of their attention to religious art (be it a *Belvedere Apollo* or a Memling altarpiece), it was only natural that this aesthetics-as-hermeneutics would also involve theological questions.[6] That is why I have chosen to label this discourse as 'figurative theo-humanist aesthetics' If we left it at this, however, Figurative Theo-humanism would simply amount to yet another reinvention of the Platonic-Neoplatonic wheel. Before Winckelmann,

[6]The theological dimension of Figurative Theo-humanism is not a mere accident, I would argue. It indicates *a)* an awareness that aesthetics emerges out of the disenchantment that stripped religious images of their numinous aura; *b)* a willingness to see if—even deracinated from their original cultic context—these images could still be sites where the real and the transcendent intersected. In this respect, Figurative Theo-humanism shows that not *all aesthetics* is the return of a *ghost theology* disguised as a *secular* re-enchantment of images (see Preziosi and Farago 2012).

Socrates already spoke of beauty's seismic power to shatter ordinary experience, and to prod potentially life-transforming changes.

To disengage Figurative Theo-humanism from Platonist reductions, we should consider its second premise: the idea that beauty is a reconciliation of two separate domains, and that the imagination has a key role to play as the mediating third. For Plotinus, no less than for Plato, what makes sensuous beauty beautiful is not sensuous at all—beauty is essentially supersensuous. He would have no truck with a beauty that *mixes* form and matter, which are intrinsically immiscible.[7] A pendant of Plotinus' rigorously intellectual, immaterial construction of the beautiful is his diffidence toward the artwork's address to the spectator, which he sees as a potentially ruinous, siren-like call.[8]

Hegel himself believed that Winckelmann had initiated a new, seminal discourse. The author of the *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*

> has powerfully encouraged the discovery of the Idea of art in works of art and the history of art. For Winckelmann is to be regarded as one of the men who, in the field of art, have opened up for the spirit a new organ and totally new modes of treatment (LFA I, 63).

Winckelmann's pathbreaking achievement, then, is that he engaged specific artworks through the lenses of what Hegel calls 'the Idea of art', which is the notion

[7] Let us consider this point in reference to Plotinus. For Plotinus, whenever an object strikes us as beautiful, its unity and simplicity *alone* command our attention, suddenly 'blanching out' sensuous manifoldness. It is through this instantaneous marginalization of sensuous difference that visible beauty seems a sudden flash of transcendence in the empirical world; with Plotinus, we say that sensible beauties seem to 'sally out' (*ekdramousai*) into matter (*Enneads* I.6.3, 36). But he uses this insight also emphatically to reject the notion that sensible beauty is the *immanence* of the form in physical reality. After all, the beauty of the rose does not seem grounded in the sensuous specificity of any of its features. Undoubtedly, the brilliant red of the petals, their velveteen texture, are beautiful—however, this beauty does not reside in redness or smoothness as such, but in their aura of unalloyed simplicity. While simplicity *enables* intense redness and smoothness, it *is per se neither* red *nor* smooth—it transcends both. In short, simplicity (whose ultimate source is the One, I.6.7, 9–10) is implicated in sensible beauty, but it never 'mixes' with the sensible fabric of the object.

[8] 'Visible beauty' (*to pros ten opsin kallos*, I.6.1, 23) is the beauty that hovers auratically *around* the visible, not a beauty that *is* visible: Plotinus' insistence on this point reflects also a soteriological anxiety. Echoing Plato's Diotima, Plotinus sees visible beauty as the all-important disturbance of everyday experience, through which we start to dimly recollect our archetypal experience of the Supreme Good. On the other hand, visible beauty is intrinsically 'bipolar': although its unity points essentially *away from* empirical diversity, it can also make us fall in love with it. In this respect, Plotinus' claim that Pheidias' *Zeus* seemed the product of a divine will to visibility becomes suddenly ambiguous. To the discerning lover of beauty, its chrysoelephantine splendor works as an invitation to the soul's introspective, anamnestic recovery of itself and the One. But it can seduce the uninitiated into a narcissistic idolization of corporeality (hence the ominous allusions to Narcissus, and Homer's *femmes fatales* Circe and Calipso, I.6.8, 6–20). Even before being a memorable trope of spiritual self-discipline, Plotinus' claim that the most beautiful statue is the one that each of us must tirelessly sculpt inside oneself (I.6.9, 9–20) is a silent jab at figurative beauty.

of the beautiful artwork as a *reconciling middle* between key polarities, namely the visible and the invisible, and sense and mind:

> The sensuous aspect of a work of art, in comparison with the immediate existence of things in nature, is elevated to a pure appearance, and the work of art stands *in the middle* between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought. It is *not yet* pure thought, but, despite its sensuousness, is *no longer* a purely material existent either, like stones, plants, and organic life; on the contrary, the sensuous in the work of art is itself something ideal, but which, not being ideal as thought is ideal, is still at the same time there externally as a thing (38).

This insistence on beauty's reconciliatory liminality is what makes Winckelmann's discourse genuinely new, as opposed to its being a late Plotinian hiccup.

What prevents the language of aesthetic reconciliation (premise *2*) from degenerating into a narcissistic (if temporary) evasion of existential bifurcation? It is the is *third,* final premise of Figurative Theo-humanism: the *historicity* of both artwork and spectator are *part and parcel* of aesthetic experience. For Winckelmann, Herder, Wackenroder, August Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling, and Hegel, classic beauty's power to challenge the self is troubled by the perception of its ancientness. The poignant historicity of beauty is what allows it to function as an *origin* of responsible (and risky) choice. As Gianni Carchia has claimed, (Carchia 2003, 253–9), appropriating the lesson of Renee Koselleck (2010), in ancient beauty Winckelmann saw a *past both authoritative and powerless, something whose normative aura seems paradoxically both alive and dead*. The perception of beauty is bound-up with the perception of an historical *crisis*, where the *past speaks authoritatively to the present, yet it has lost the power to determine the horizon of future expectation*. This means that it is up to the present to decide to what extent (if at all) the past should have normative force for the present itself. This is what I have called the 'responsibility of aesthetic response', the feeling that one has to *decide for oneself* to what extent the beautiful artwork is just a *document* of a vanished age, or a *monument*, i.e. something that 'breaks time' and punctures one's lived present with its normative aura.

Winckelmann inaugurates an understanding of aesthetic experience in which the perception of beauty's *living* address to the spectator is complicated/enriched by its *historicity.* To varying degrees, Herder, Hemsterhuis, Moritz, Wackenroder, Schlegel all follow Winckelmann on this score. With Hegel, this understanding comes to an end- as he sees it, for us art has *lost its capacity to address us in an originary fashion—it is only a* document *of an age in which art could indeed concentrate the joint self-intuition of an individual and his or her own society*. In this respect, the narrative path that begins with Winckelmann does indeed find an ultimate terminus in Hegel.

Figurative Theo-humanism's reluctance to divide aesthetics from *lived, historical* self-consciousness explains two important features of my story:

I. The striking, gradual paradigm shift (which we will follow closely) from *sculpture* as *the* figurative art, to *painting* as the quintessentially *modern* figurative art. Hemsterhuis, Herder, Moritz all share Winckelmann's enthusiasm for ancient sculpture. In varying ways and degrees, Wackenroder, Friedrich Schlegel, and

G.W.F. Hegel essentially see ancient plastic beauty as the fascinating document of an irretrievably lost past. Conversely, they see painting as the art that addresses *livingly* a modern spectator. Hegel's endorsement of painting as more 'modern' should not be read as a recanting of his notorious thesis about the 'death of art'. Yes, he grants that an Old Master can address us in ways that a Greek sculpture cannot. But he denies that such address can be *originary*, i.e. have an impact on the way we construct the sense and direction of our lives.

II. The (by no means uncritical) fascination that all these figures have for the revival of ancient plastic beauty *within* Christian painting (esp in the religious painting of Perugino, Raphael, Leonardo, Correggio, Michelangelo).

These figures saw High Renaissance Religious painting as a place where the tension between *descriptive* beauty and *descriptive* ugliness works *at once* as a question about possible continuities between ancient and modern self-understandings: the ancient view of the self as *integrated* with nature and the *modern* view of the self as a freedom that must *transcend* nature. Example: the descriptive beauty of the Madonna in Mantegna's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (New York) suggests itself as embodied *moral grace*, i.e. a moral goodness that is *innate*, and hence natural. But the devout shepherds that pay their respects to the Child are descriptively ugly. Hence they seem to embody a rich world of inwardness that manages to shine despite the meagre allotments of a stepmotherly nature. In this respect, the noble ugliness of the shepherds embodies a fractured, essentially modern conception of the self. Here the self is constitutively split into free will and its necessary other, the nature it needs to assert itself against. Nevertheless, here (descriptive) beauty and ugliness are felt to 'hang together' well in the overall pictorial subworld. That is to say, the *evaluative* beauty of Mantegna's *Adoration of the Shepherds* is the matrix that—one feels—holds together two constructions of the self.

1.5 Descriptive Beauty: What Is Dead, What Is Living

Does this tradition's preoccupation with *descriptive* beauty make it hopelessly dated? No, although it is true that, from the nineteenth century onwards, artists have progressively turned away from the Neoclassical descriptive beauty, embracing a variety of different aesthetic values: the ugly, the disharmonious, the grotesque, the sublime, the surreal.

My agenda is *not* that of a reactionary, wishfully turning back the clock, an attempt to restore the hegemony of descriptive beauty, as if the last two hundred years of art history and art criticism had never happened. My goal is making a case for an understanding of aesthetics in which both evaluative and descriptive beauty are not pre-emptively deprived from their capacity to cast a new light (even if the light of a question) upon the entire being of the spectator. That Winckelmann or Hegel would have recoiled in horror in front of a Cy Twombly canvas does not mean that their insights are not fruitful for our thinking about the experience of contemporary art.

That being said, another of my aims is also that of sparking a re-appraisal of the ways in which we speak of descriptive beauty. As I see it, it still suffers from an excessively ascetic interpretation, derived from Kant's idea of the disinterested nature of aesthetic experience. I do not wish to deny that, for something descriptively beautiful to count as aesthetically valuable, it is necessary that it be transfigured into something *evaluatively* beautiful: i.e. into a *form* that we appreciate *in and for itself*—not *just* because of the *content* upon which aesthetic form supervenes.

But it is a mistake to think that such transfiguration needs to be *total*, that an aesthetic object as such should completely sublate the world of eros/pathos into a merely *formal* affair. Those who claim this are in the grips of a 'purist' picture of aesthetics, which places one-sided emphasis on the feeling of overall cohesion, at the expense of the *emotional/desiderative life* of the observer, which ends up being unfortunately separated from his or her engagement of art. The tradition I consider in this book understood that the beauty of an artwork resides also in its provocative (and troublesome!) dialectic between pure beauty, and the beauty of palpitating, living flesh—in its awareness of a beauty equipoised between Apollinean and Dionisian.

1.6 My Narrative Trajectory

Here is a quick look ahead at my narrative trajectory.

Chapter 2 (Winckelmann: The Responsibility of Aesthetic Response) takes its lead from a statement by Hegel: "Winckelmann is to be regarded as one of the men who, in the field of art, have opened up for the spirit a new organ and totally new modes of treatment" (LFA I, 63). Winckelmann inaugurated, for Hegel, a new, seminal way of looking at art, where the beautiful artwork, thanks also to the transfiguring gaze of the observer, becomes a site liminally poised between visible and invisible, a "*middle* between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought" (38). I discuss, here, how for Winckelmann aesthetics is constitutively bound up with art history: our encounter with classical beauty has a temporally plural nature. Classical beauty oscillates between two extremes: it can strike us as a 'monument', the miracle of a living address across the sands of time, but also as a 'document', the beautiful as a sad vestige of a vanished past.[9] This oscillation is part and parcel of beauty and includes its impact on the spectator. I discuss Winckelmann's argument against the foil of Lessing's aesthetics. For Lessing, visual beauty was essentially decorative, and shorn of metaphysical or epistemic resonances.

Chapter 3 (Hemsterhuis and Herder: Sculptural Theo-humanism) focuses on the attempts of Frans Hemsterhuis and Johann Gottfried Herder to raise to philosophical clarity Winckelmann's deliberately lyrical utterances. In a Platonic vein, Winckelmann emphasized how beauty can intimate eternity. Hemsterhuis tries to

[9]I owe the monument/document distinction to Carchia 2003, 399–400.

account for this by an ingenious theory: the seamlessly unitary contours of classical sculpture allow for an extraordinarily fast apprehension of the sculpture itself; so fast, indeed, that the viewer feels ecstatically projected outside of temporality. I also note how Hemsterhuis' thumbnail art-history can be seen as an explanation of Winckelmann's poignantly plural temporality of the beautiful. Hemsterhuis claims modernity is characterized by a parcelizing *esprit géométrique*. Conversely, the ancients were defined by *esprit de finesse*, a perception that seeks or responds to concentrated unities. A modern spectator, with his or her analytical (and hence divisive) cast of mind, may be less attuned than an ancient spectator to the immediacy of classical beauty.

The second half of Chap. 3 is devoted to Johann Gottfried Herder's sculptural theory. Against Hemsterhuis' 'fast' aesthetics, Herder claims that sculpture requires a slower, quasi-tactile gaze. Herder tries to spell out (sometimes in a rather scattered, grandiose way) the ontology and theology embedded in Winckelmann's aesthetics. Herder says that a blind man, at the mercy of his fingertips, is best placed to experience the beauty of a statue. Herder aims, here, to recover a sense of the numinous that had been eroded by the Enlightenment. A sighted spectator, whereby sight is a metaphor for Enlightenment rationality, can grasp the overall *Gestalt* only at the cost of severe abridgments. The sculptural *Gestalt* overdetermines the groping, guessing hand of the blind; yet, precisely this constantly deferred perceptual fulfilment gives the blind man a sense of the infinite complexity of sculptural beauty—and indirectly, the beauty of God.

Chapter 4 (Moritz, Wackenroder, Schelling: Tragic Theo–Aesthetics) focuses on Karl Philipp Moritz, Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder, and Friedrich Schelling. Like those of Hemsterhuis and Herder, Moritz's aesthetic theory is a thoughtful response and amplification of Winckelmann. Moritz is unique, however, for his unflinching will to develop the tragic dimension of classic beauty. The seamless contours of sculpture can feel like a crushing refutation of our constitutionally imperfect finitude. Moritz seeks an aesthetics where redemption does not come at the cost of self-serving amnesia. For Moritz, such aesthetics are paradigmatically embedded in the Vatican *Laocoön*. Here the spectator is offered an intensely bittersweet delight: the hulking shape of the dying titular figure shows that we attain the most beautiful nobility at the moment when we are defeated by an essentially cruel, mindless fate.

The central section of Chap. 4 elucidates Wackenroder's seminal 1798 *Heart-Outpourings of an Art-Loving Monk*. Wackenroder is clearly won over by Winckelmann's intimate construction of aesthetic experience. But he realizes that the self-absorbed narcissism of sculpted Greek gods is ill-suited to such an intimate approach. Consequently, he turns to painting, which he sees as more permeable to imaginative and affective penetration. Anticipating by more than two centuries the current discourse on the 'power of Images' (David Freedberg, T.J. Mitchell, Georges Didì-Hubermann), Wackenroder underscores how a painting can determine and catalyze a strong response, even when separated from its original cultic or civic context. But Wackenroder is also remarkably sensitive to the perils of aesthetic narcissism; the pictorial subworld may offer, by a kind of narcissism, an invitation to dwell in a sealed-off environment. Equally important, he experiences a divided

allegiance towards classical beauty, on the one hand, and towards the naïve, gnarly beauty of primitive religious painting, on the other hand.

The final section of Chap. 4 follows the evolution of Schelling's aesthetics, from his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, through his 1803–1804 *Philosophy of Art*, to his 1807 *Relationship of the Figurative Arts to Nature*. Two themes stand out. The first is Schelling's dramatic expansion (*circa* 1800) of Winckelmann's idea that the beautiful artwork straddles the visible and invisible. The modern self is painfully bifurcated, torn between the conviction of his free agency, and an indifference (if not hostility) towards natural necessity. This opposition is not ultimate, however. At the most fundamental level, human freedom and nature intersect harmoniously. Unfortunately, this level is inaccessible to human thought or perception. The artwork is the only place where we receive an oblique revelation of the original unity of nature and spirit: "each splendid painting owes, as it were, its genesis to a removal of the invisible barrier dividing the real from the ideal world, and is no more than the gateway, through which come forth completely the shapes and scenes of that world of fantasy which gleams but imperfectly through the real" (STI 232).

The second important motif in Schelling is a reprise (between 1803 and 1807) of Moritz's tragic aesthetics. But whereas Moritz saw the Vatican *Laocoön* as the epitome of tragic beauty, Schelling turns to the statue of *Niobe* (Uffizi, Florence), the mythical mother who turns to stone, as her children are all killed by Artemis and Apollo for her proud boasts. In her beauty Schelling sees again—but this time with a tragic note missing in 1800—an epiphanic intersection of two apparently separate planes. Her austere grace has the fixity of an incipient *rigor mortis* (and in this sense, the divine imprints itself on the human). But through the same fixity, the expression of a mother's infinite love is given a lasting shape (in this respect, the human asserts itself over divine caprice).

Chapter 5 (The Jena Circle and Hegel: The Modernity of Painting, and the Return of the Classical) begins with the paradigm-shift that took place in the last decade of the eighteenth century: the break with Winckelmann's sculptural aesthetics, and the turn to painting, which is touted as the quintessentially 'modern' art. The important figures here are August and Friedrich Schlegel, and G.W.F. Hegel. In his 1799 dialogue *The Paintings*, August Schlegel dramatizes the shift to a new sensitivity. The drama opens with three friends who meet in a wing of Dresden's *Antikensammlung*. Despite their admiration for ancient sculpture, the trio feels somewhat repulsed by it. In a symbolically freighted gesture, they exit the museum, and spend the rest of the day in a freewheeling discussion of various paintings.

I then move to Friedrich Schlegel's *Descriptions of Paintings* (1802–1805). Here, taking to heart Wackenroder's turn to Christian painting, and in opposition to Weimar classicism, Friedrich Schlegel develops an aesthetics of "angular, even skinny figures." Gorgeousness of *ekphrastic* prose aside, what makes the *Descriptions* so compelling is their willingness to explore the time-bending cross-pollination between classical form and Christian motifs (in Raphael, Andrea Del Sarto, Correggio). Schlegel offers incisive remarks both about the potentials and the limits of such hybridization.

The final section of Chap. 5 is devoted to a highly succinct discussion of Hegel's aesthetics of Christian painting. In many ways, Hegel simply deepens and gives philosophical clarity to insights that were at work in Schlegel. Even more than his (incidentally, much-detested) predecessor, Hegel is fascinated by a beauty that is temporally plural. In the Madonnas of Raphael, Perugino, and Correggio, Hegel sees a palingenesis-cum-metamorphosis of the classical line of grace. Here, rounded contours (melting, in the case of Correggio) express both an innate delicacy, and innocence, and a love for God ecstatically catapulted above temporality. Hegel here enriches Winckelmann's and Schelling's notion of the 'middleness' of beauty. For his predecessors, beauty was liminally poised between the visible and invisible. But in the Christianized classical line of grace, Hegel recognizes, too, a beauty that unfolds in historical time.

In another sense, however, Hegel denies to classical beauty the power to speak across the sands of time. For Winckelmann, it was not impossible for classical beauty to catalyze change in a modern spectator. For Hegel, classical beauty has become largely a matter of aesthetic delight and of historical insight. Furthermore, Hegel declares that with Christian Art (Crucifixions, martyrdoms), the *ugly* has become a recognized denizen of the philosophy of art. Two claims, thus, are at stake: the definitive *pastness* of classical beauty, and the new, positive role of deformed corporeality. With these two themes, the parable of Figurative Theo-humanism (and my narrative thereof) comes to an end.

Finally, the Chap. 6 (Conclusion) will take stock of the story, drawing some further insights about what is living (or more accurately, what *should be resurrected*) and what is dead (and should deservedly remain so) in Figurative Theo-humanism.

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Chapter 2
Winckelmann: The Responsibility of Aesthetic Response

What can I do, if the Medici Venus seems to me like a lovely chambermaid surprised in her toilette by her young master?

(August Friedrich Kotzebue)

2.1 The Purpose of This Chapter

The idea that a *beautiful* painting or sculpture can be encountered as a *quasi-individual* that seduces us (and troubles us!) with the promise of a self-plenitude impossible in ordinary experience is as old at least as the legend of the young man who attempted to have sexual intercourse with the beautiful statue of Aphrodite of Cnidus. But this idea becomes the kernel of an aesthetics of figurative art only with Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Plato's Socrates had made this point, but only about living human bodies: in the *Phaedrus*, he noticed how gazing upon the beauty of the beloved, the lover recollects his pre-embodied existence in a heavenly realm. And Orthodox theologians claimed that icons could indeed be experienced as divine traces—but images did not do so *qua* beautiful.[1] Mannerist Italian art theorists did claim that the beauty of some figurative artworks could indeed strike us as a sensible presentation of the Idea. But these writers saw beautiful works as interchangeable *tokens* of a single, transcendent perfection: the immutable genius of the artist.

[1] Orthodox theologians like John of Damascus and Theodore Studite had already claimed that icons of Christ could be taken as traces of the divine, and (because of the anthropomorphic nature of Christ) hint at the communion between divine and human nature. But icons did not do this *qua* beautiful. These iconophile writers had taken for granted that icons complemented, *and were complemented by*, a doctrinal, cultic and liturgical framework. The reliance on that framework is most clear in their specific defense of the icon: against the Iconoclasts, they argued that it is impious to deny that God can transfer his force to his pictorial representation—God and icon are numerically different only in matter, not in form. Theodor Studite proclaims: "Anyone who says that the divinity is present in the image, is not in error"; from *Antirrheticus* I, 12, in *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XCIX, c. 344; quote taken from Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz's discussion of Bizantine Aesthetics (Tatarkiewicz, vol. 2, 53–54). In this 'top down' approach, it is dogma that gives authority to the icon, not the other way around. This explains also why the Iconophilic theology can dispense with aesthetic considerations—on the assumption of an omnipotent archetype, pictorial beauty is no longer a tool of divine self-disclosure.

F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5_2

The idea that a specific artwork is a quasi-individual that can address us *personally*—this notion, as we will see, begins with Winckelmann.

For that idea to assert itself, Winckelmann needed first to challenge the primacy that poetry enjoyed over figurative art. As I shall argue, that primacy was based on the claim that poetry could represent the intrinsically dynamic phenomenon of inner life far better than figurative art could. In this respect, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was Winckelmann's crucial intellectual antagonist. Indeed, despite his pretended neutrality, in his *Laocoön* Lessing was trying to assert the primacy of poetry over painting. This assertion took the shape of an assault on the ancient idea that poetry is like painting, or—to say it with Horace—*ut pictura poesis*. Against the partisans of *ut pictura poesis*, Lessing countered that because of crucial differences in the respective media (figurative art is static, poetry is temporally successive), poetry was *not* like figurative art—and could do what was impossible for the latter. Language could re-present a temporal flow, whereas figurative art had to confine itself to a single instant. And figurative art could represent only bounded figures and hence could not represent (if not through dry allegories) sublime infinites like the soul and the divine.

Behind Lessing's attack on the *ut pictura poesis* tradition was his anxiety at the enthusiasm for antique sculpture sparked by Winckelmann's writings, where the spectator experienced a quasi-mystical trance in front of antiques like the *Belvedere Apollo* (Fig. 2.1). Unlike Winckelmann, Lessing thought that statues were there to 'look pretty' (i.e. offer us beautiful surfaces) but were inadequate to represent invisibles like the soul and god, which could only be tapped into by poetry; quite consistently, Lessing feared that the rise of a culture of surfaces would invite a superficial ethos, and turn the public away from the sublime ethos and pathos of which drama and poetry were capable.

Winckelmann's read Lessing's *Laocoön* only in 1767, three years after the appearance of his magisterial *History of Art of Antiquity* (incidentally, Winckelmann's judgment of the *Laocoön* is withering: so deep are the art-historical lacunae of the book, that a reply to its author would be useless; see KS 348). Nevertheless, Winckelmann's writings turn on a prescient, tacit rejection of Lessing's reductive theory of images. Lessing's case stood or fell with his claim that figurative art had only *two* spatiotemporalities: the recursive, unchanging 'now' of its rigid material support (be it canvas or marble); the represented 'now', the slice of implied narrative embodied in the represented figures. I have already outlined these two temporalities in the Introduction, calling them—respectively—'the spatiotemporality of the artifact *qua* thing', and 'the spatial representation of concentrated narrative temporality'. We should again note that Lessing believed that—for the sake of verisimilitude—figurative art could offer only an instant *constrained by the laws of possible experience*: a painted or sculpted body should not be transparent, nor should it float. Ponderous mass and the laws of gravity tether the representation of human bodies, which as a result had to be rendered as completely worldly entities. Given these premises, Lessing had to look with deep mistrust at Winckelmann's Neoplatonizing aesthetics, where a beautiful statue can be a site which challenges us forcefully to imagine the infinite within and beyond us.

Fig. 2.1 *Belvedere Apollo* (Pius-Clementine Museum) (Author of photography: Mary-Lan Nguyen)

In this respect, Lessing followed in the wake of German Rationalists like Christian Wolff, Alexander Baumgarten, and Moses Mendelssohn: these thinkers thought that the enmattered nature of figurative art impaired its capacity to gesture beyond the realm of the visible (Wellbery 89).

To go beyond the rationalist aesthetics of the German Enlightenment (of which Lessing was the latest, and most forceful voice), Winckelmann keyed into an *additional temporality* within figurative art, which I labeled "the spatiotemporality of the artifact qua *aesthetic object*". For Winckelmann, if we dwell on the *beauty* of a sculpture, we will discover it as a site of a unique, utopian temporality; a time of ecstatic plenitude where the 'now' is pregnant with both past and future. As we will see, already Lessing had pointed out that figurative art could legitimately help itself to a 'pregnant moment' that implied the before and after of a narrative. But where Lessing's 'pregnant moment' remained largely anchored to that overarching narrative, the 'now' of Winckelmann's line of beauty was felt to go beyond narrative as such—a transcendent 'now', above the constraints of ordinary temporality. A

Fig. 2.2 *Laocoön Group* (Pius-Clementine Museum) (Author of photography: Xiquino Silva)

case in point is Winckelmann's ode to adolescent beauty, which is not just poised between childhood and adulthood, but appears to magically contain them both (HAA 197).

In the next section, I will discuss how Winckelmann's gaze brought to light what Lessing glossed over: the transcendent temporality of beauty. Such temporality is best understood against the foil of Lessing. Why? Because it involved a revision of what Lessing confined visual art to: the enmattered level (canvas or marble) and the narrative level (the artifact's implied *story*). What Winckelmann saw as quasi-hallucinatory quivering of the line of beauty turned on a transfiguring *animation* of the otherwise static physical artifact. And these oscillating contours were felt to usher in a supernaturally perfect temporality that superimposed itself (in a manner at once exciting and troubling) upon the implied sublunary narrative. In Section 3, I give flesh to the main categories of Wincklemann's aesthetics via an analysis of his celebrated lyrical description of the *Belvedere Torso*. Finally, in section 4 I consider how for Wincklemann history is part and parcel of aesthetic experience—the beauty of an artwork can arrest us also because we feel it is 'breaking time', i.e. addressing us across the sands of centuries. And—no less importantly—a statue's beauty can grip us also by the compelling feeling that it is a trace of an irretrievably vanished past (Fig. 2.2).

2.2 Winckelmann *Contra* Lessing, I: Beyond Narrative Temporality

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's insistence upon expunging temporality from the province of the visual arts was designed, in part, as a critique of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the historian, theorist and art critic.[2] Winckelmann had rightly claimed noble simplicity and calm grandeur as sculptural *desiderata*, but the reasons for this had allegedly eluded him. Overt expressive intensity is to be avoided only in a static medium like stone, where repeated emotional stimuli would be cloying. But in a quintessentially temporal medium like poetry, moments of intense pathos can have their place, precisely because it is possible to counterbalance them with calmer tones. A sculpted Laocoön must only sigh, but the Laocoön of the *Aeneid* fascinates us all the more when he jolts us with the occasional blood-curdling scream (L 23–4).[3]

Lessing's charge was false: even for Winckelmann emotional understatement in sculpture depended on medium-specific constraints. Such has been conclusively shown (Rudowsky 237–8).[4] Nevertheless, it is still valuable to read Winckelmann

[2]For a comprehensive, authoritative, and up-to-date biography of Lessing, see Nisbet 2013. For Winckelmann, Leppman 1970 remains the standard biography in English. For a critical account of Lessing's critique of Winckelmann, see Rudowsky 1986; Dècoultot 2003.

[3]Lessing's quarrel with Winckelmann took as its starting point the famous sculptural group of the *Laocoon*, generally ascribed (following Pliny) to the Hellenistic artists Agesander, Athenodorus, and Polydorus. The *Laocoon* depicts the Trojan priest Laocoon and his two sons, as they vainly oppose the deathly grip of a monstruous snake. Excavated in 1506, its grandeur immediately sparked the imagination of artists like Michelangelo, who even sculpted a replacement for the missing right arm of the central, titular figure (today, the right arm of the Laocoon consists of a readapted fragment found in 1905 by Ludwig Pollack).

[4]In the 1764 *History of the Art of Antiquity*, we read that "in representing heroes, the artist is allowed less latitude than the poet. The latter can portray them as they were in their own time, when the passions were as yet unrestrained by authority or by the artificial decorum of life, because the attributes represented in poetry have a necessary relation to the age and the condition of man but not to his figure. The artist, however, because he must select the most beautiful parts of the most beautiful appearances, is limited as to the level of expression of the passions, which must not become detrimental to the appearance." (HAA, 205). Astonishingly, Lessing knew of this principle two years *before* Easter 1766, when the *Laocoon* was published (Rudowsky 237–8); the smoking gun is in the 1763/4 draft of the *Laocoon*, where Lessing admits: "Herr Winckelmann himself has come, in his history of art, to the realization that the sculptor is obliged to depict his subjects in a state of tranquility, so as to preserve the beauty of form, and that this is no law for the poet . . . On this matter we [i.e. Lessing and Winckelmann] are in agreement" (quoted from Rudowski 237). Why, then, does Lessing's *Laocoon* charge Winckelmann of being fatally ignorant of media-specific constraints upon expression? Rudowski suggests that Lessing's argumentative style required the foil of intellectual opponents, be they real or imaginary (Rudowski 235). But, in order to hide from the reader that he was fighting a straw man, it was necessary to establish the fiction that the author of the *Laocoön* had *not* read the *Geschichte* yet. That is why, after having clinched his overall argument, Lessing declares (falsely) that he has finally received his copy of Winckelmann's magisterial treatise, and that he will not "venture another step without having read it" (*L* 138).

against the backdrop of the *Laocoön*, because Winckelmann's revolutionary re-interpretation of the *ut pictura poesis* convention—and what was ultimately at stake in it—stands out more clearly against the foil of Lessing's brilliant attack on that tradition. As is known, Lessing claimed that temporality was not the business of the figurative arts: because of their irreducibly corporeal nature, they are limited to the depiction of bodies; furthermore, the static nature of the figurative arts make them less-than-ideal for depicting bodies *in action* (to the extent that action unfolds in time). Conversely, because poetry allows a progressive and unfolding temporality, poetry shines in depicting embodied action. But Lessing's bifurcations applied only to artwork and its immediate representational content, and not to the aesthetic object itself: i.e., the artwork qua world of self-contained form, i.e. the artwork qua beautiful. Conversely, Winckelmann believed that the artwork qua beautiful was shot through with an ecstatic temporality of its own—a temporality that was 'activated' by the spectator. As we will see, some of the *History's* most celebrated descriptions of sculpture hinge on a quasi-hallucinatory encounter, where the marble is animated and set into motion by the spectator's transfiguring gaze. The imagination of the spectator is, of course, key, though not in the sense that the imagination may give rise to a gratuitous, arbitrary projection. Rather, the assumption is that the spectator brings to fruition a capacity for *apparent* movement that the statue already contains, albeit only as mere *potential*. Winckelmann's *ekphrases* sets up an influential prototype for aesthetic experience, where the spectator (not the artist) becomes a Pygmalion-like figure, imaginatively quickening stone into life.[5] But the animation that Winckelmann sought was profoundly different from that wrought by the mythical sculptor. Pygmalion wanted (and through divine intervention secured) the transformation of his statue from aesthetic object into living being. Conversely,

[5]The most famous version of the story of Pygmalion is provided by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, book X. This myth functioned also as the trope of a unique late eighteenth-century aesthetics of reception, which was seminal for the age, as it expressed a typically Romantic desire to animate the past in order to draw from it a meaning that seemed to be absent in the present. A 1766 letter by Swiss artist Hans Heinrich Füssli provides an astonishing testimony of the quickness and power with which Winckelmann's aesthetics captured the European imagination. In the letter, Füssli remembers his encounter with the *Niobe*, a sculpture of a mother embracing her daughter, in the vain attempt to save her from murderous gods. The account reaches a climax in the imaginative transfiguration of the mother and the young maiden: "Be quiet, wanderer! Young man eager to know, keep a silence of amazement! She is no Venus casting amorous glances. Fear not, she does not want to perturb your senses, but fill your soul with veneration, and edify your mind. Look at the honest grace on her face, the unimitable simplicity (*Einfalt*) in the sharp forms of the daughter's head. No part of her is heightened or deepened by any excessive passion. Her eyes do not display the squinting of drunk desire, her gaze is not languorous, but open with innocent serenity. Her virginal breasts rise softly, swollen only by a child's love. This has been granted to you, young man! Breathe deeper at this sight, enjoy a pure pleasure, and crown your delight with the quiet wish that you may find a bride just like her" (quoted from Bätschmann, 238–9). Oskar Bätschmann explores this style of spectatorial engagement in detail, although he reductively concludes that this *Pygmalion-Ästhetik* was essentially one of therapeutic mourning (once the spectator realized that the statue was only a vestige of an irretrievably lost past, there would be a catharsis from pathological nostalgia). For a more balanced conclusion, see Mülder-Bach.

Winckelmann's gaze is attuned to an animation that belongs to the aesthetic object as such. As Sartre has forcefully shown, aesthetic properties are *existentially absent* (*irreèl*), i.e. they do not regard the artwork as a thing; they arise in the meeting of the spectator's transfiguring imagination with the artwork itself.[6]

Winckelmann believed that, among the possible properties activated in the artwork by the spectator's imagination, there was also a unique, extraordinary temporality, where the 'now' was felt as a whole, not as a fragment of a larger, external totality. Such temporality was intimated by the feeling of a motion that, paradoxically, did not scatter itself into a series of different moments. Here I rely on Cesare Brandi, who calls '*plastica*' the transfiguration of a statue into an object shot through with 'motionless motion'. Through an illuminating example, he points out how such a paradoxical aesthetic object supervenes upon natural forms

> The natural object's various features, besides shape, color, the specific spatial, aerial, and luminous situation, we can consider the object in its inner unfolding, in the uninterrupted reciprocal grafting and fusion of the volumes . . . the anatomic individuality of the object will tend to disappear vis-à-vis this new dynamic continuity which fuses, activates, drags, inflates, depresses . . . In front of how many ancient trees, dragged by the solid and motionless current of their own fibers, contorted and agitated, didn't we have the sense of a vortex-like motion, similar to that of a river's current? This motion did not exist in the present, but our consciousness constructed it, feeling it still in action through the visual inspection of motionless traces of an ancient growth. Such a *motionless motion* that represents the possible formal structure that consciousness constitutes for itself—we can call it the plastic structure of the object (Brandi 1956, 30–1).[7]

And so, when our gaze turns a gnarly oak trunk into an aesthetic object, there is a tension between two temporalities: the chronological one (in which the oak is still) and the idealized one (in which the oak seems to liquify into its own internal motion). It is this tension between the real and the aesthetic that accounts for the quasi-hallucinatory character of aesthetic experience, as Brandi and Winckelmann understand it. This example also nicely brings out the difference between their sculptural aesthetics and that which is embedded in the ancient Daedalus-myth. According to the myth, Daedalus' statues were so life-like that they needed to be

[6]To my knowledge, Jean-Paul Sartre offers the most compelling, nuanced account as to how aesthetic properties derive from the imaginative 'nihilation' of the artwork's sensuous immediacy. Here is a particularly pregnant passage: "Certain of Matisse's reds, for example, provoke a sensual enjoyment in those that see them. But we must understand that this sensual enjoyment, if considered in isolation—for example, if it is provoked by a red actually given in nature—has nothing of the aesthetic. It is purely and simply a pleasure of the senses. But *when, on the other hand, one grasps the red on the painting, one grasps it, despite everything, as making up part of an irreal whole, and it is in this whole that it is beautiful*. For example, it is the red of a rug near a table. Besides, there is never pure colour. Even if the artist is concerned solely with the sensible relations between forms and colours, that artist will choose a rug precisely in order to increase the sensory value of the red: tactile elements, for example, must be intended through that red, it is a woollen red, because the rug is of woollen material. Without this 'woollen' characteristic of the colour, something would be lost. And certainly the rug is painted for the red that it justifies, and not the red for the rug. But if Matisse had chosen a rug rather than a dry and glossy sheet of paper, this is because of the voluptuous mixture that is constituted by the colour, the density, and the tactile qualities of the wool (Sartre 2004, 190; italics mine).

[7]Translation mine.

tied down, lest they escape. But this illustration implies that the statues were on the verge of a motion that would unfold in successive, chronological time. Conversely, for Winckelmann and Brandi, the aesthetically salient feature of a statue is rather its evocation of a paradoxical, non-successive temporality. Being a sober Kantian, Cesare Brandi refused to ascribe any epistemic or ontological resonance to what he called 'plastica'. Conversely, this 'motionless motion' had crucially broader resonances for Winckelmann. Why? Because—by evoking a living principle that was not dispersed into temporal parts—this special motion invited the spectator to feel himself or herself as a whole exceptionally raised above the fragmenting power of ordinary time. As we will see, this ecstatic temporality did not function as a facile site of self-plenitude. It was also the place where the self could (and did) get also a painful sense of its limitations—of its biological, ethical, historical finitude. It was no less the place where beauty summoned the self to a heady (but also troubling) call to embody the unity it merely felt in aesthetic experience.

* * *

To grasp more fully Winckelmann's *aesthetic* temporality, let us consider further how it emerged via a partial break with the traditional constraints upon painting and sculpture. Before Winckelmann, whatever animation a sculptural or pictorial representation seemed to have was subservient to narrative temporality: the former was supposed to bring to life the latter, but not alter its nature. Here is an example. In 1719, the Abbé Dubos remarked that "the eye, bewitched by the work of a great painter, believes sometimes to perceive even some movement in the figures." (RC 417). To understand this principle, DuBos refers us to the example of Peter Paul Rubens' *Crucifixion*, where the crucified thief on the right, upon receiving a blow on the leg by a soldier, violently arches his body in pain, and—thanks to the magic of *chiaroscuro*—seems to leap out of the picture's corner (RC 235). Here *pictura* contains temporality, yet in a way that remains faithful to the temporal flow of the pre-existing story of Christ's passion.

Even Lessing, who took it upon himself to deliver a fatal blow to the *ut pictura poesis* theory, remained significantly bound to it. True, he did recommend the choice of a 'pregnant moment' (L 78), such that—thanks to our imaginative transfiguration—a representation is no longer a frozen temporal snapshot, but seems instead (if I may use an anachronism) something like the moving image of cinema. But Lessing's imagination-time remains subservient to the time of the poet, as we can infer from his claim that the pregnant moment is the one that best allows us to grasp what happened before and after. The point is to jolt into life the petrified narrative of the poet, but *not* to rewrite it.

> [If] the works of both painter and sculptor are created not merely to be given a glance (*erblickt*) but to be contemplated (*betrachtet*)—contemplated repeatedly and at length—then it is evident that this single moment and the point from which it is viewed cannot be chosen with too great a regard for its effect. But only that which gives free rein to the imagination is effective. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine. And the more we add in our imaginations, the more we must think we see. In the full course of an emotion, no point is less suitable for this than its climax. There is nothing beyond this,

> and to present the utmost to the eye is to bind the wings of fancy and compel it, since it cannot soar above the impression made on the senses, to concern itself with weaker images, shunning the visible fullness already represented as a limit beyond which it cannot go. Thus if Laocoön sighs, the imagination can hear him cry out (L 19–20).

It is undeniable that here Lessing seems to look at the artwork through Winckelmann's lingering Pygmalionic gaze. For one, Lessing distinguishes between what is immediately visible in the artwork, and what is perceptible to the viewer's projective imagination. If the first is a temporal fragment, then the second is something that is gradually revealed in an attentive perusal. The more the viewer sees, the more he or she must be able to imagine: notice that the intentionally-understated image (sighing Laocoön) is—and this is Lessing's Dubosian side—a trampoline for imagining a *maximum* of emotion, (such as the screaming Laocoön). Nevertheless, the image itself becomes transformed. The more we add by our imaginative response, the more we must think that we see. Is Lessing implying a virtuous circle of sorts, where the image acts upon the imagination and is acted upon in return? To be sure, the artwork's theme should be instantaneously intelligible, (and here the artist is urged to eschew the arcane, and draw upon a stock of familiar themes); Lessing says that "the greatest effect depends on the first glance." (L 64). But—again—the artwork is not "to be given merely a glance;" the function of this *Blick* ('glance') is that it "induces us to linger" before the work, and start a transformative process of *Betrachtung* ('contemplation', 64).

And yet, in all this, again, the temporal sequence of the poet remains authoritative. The expressive understatement which Lessing urges on the sculptor is aimed at recreating the emotional crescendo which (so Lessing believes) only the poet can express in its most fitting way.

I note that Lessing too could distinguish between the flagrant and the aesthetic presence of the artwork, as is clear from his claim that physical beauty is never taken in by the eyes alone: it is the imagination that sees through the eyes (L 41).[8] And Lessing's praise of idealization in the visual arts shows that—just like Winckelmann—he endorses a one-out-of many construal of beauty. Artwork is beautiful when it displays itself as a visual maximal unity-within-multiplicity.[9] But, unlike Winckelmann, Lessing does not grant visual beauty an ecstatic, *sui generis* temporality. Thus, he also disallows Winckelmann's manner of ontologizing plastic beauty, reserving such beauty instead for poetry. This is where Lessing's rationalist credentials come to the fore—for him figurative beauty is shorn of any serious epistemic content. The corporeal nature of painting and sculpture make them inadequate tokens of the intelligible, while linguistic signs have a greater capacity

[8]By 'flagrant', I mean (with Cesare Brandi) the artwork *qua* raw cluster of physical properties. Maurice Denis' famous warning called our attention precisely to the aspect of flagrancy: "Remember that a painting - before it is a battle horse, a nude model, or some anecdote - is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order".

[9]Cf. L 13, for Lessing's implicit praise of the ancient Theban law that commanded the figurative artist to idealize his representation, and that sanctioned correspondingly the pursuit of the ugly.

to become 'transparent', and thereby to avoid obfuscating the immaterial essences they evoke (cf. Wellbery 119–123). And so, since visual beauty supervenes upon an irreducibly material basis, its cognitive worth is superficial at best: "if the range of my physical sight must be the measure of my inner vision, I should value the loss of the former in order to gain freedom from the limitations on the latter" (L 74).

In sum, Lessing thinks that a beautiful artwork *could also* have truth-bearing values, but artistic beauty *per se* does not. Its *raison d'être* is that of giving the spectator pleasure, rather than truth. Consider, for instance, Lessing's surprising concession: the painter is infinitely better suited than Homer to depict a banquet of the Olympians (L 72), since the painter is more capable of a nuanced play of light, shadow, and a variety of expressions (72). But notice that these aesthetic features are shorn of any ontological reverberation. Lessing sees them simply as entertaining chromatic and expressive variations.

* * *

There are two moments in the *Laocoön* where Lessing gets rather close to the idea of extraordinary temporality in figurative art. The first is Lessing's praise of Raphael's (1483–1520) handling of drapery, whereby he notices how its position is sometimes artfully unrealistic, suggesting a motion that the limbs have not yet undertaken (L 92). The old tradition insisted on verisimilitude as a constraint upon mimesis: the imagination could only be taken in by simulacra that did not trespass the boundaries of the possible. Yet, despite the fact that Raphael's drapery implies an impossible conflation of two different points in time, Lessing praises Raphael for having had "the courage to commit such a minor error for the sake of obtaining greater perfection of expression" (92). Here, the perceptual simultaneity of the painting is no longer a shorthand for the sequential nature of narration, but the site of an expressive concentration that is beyond the means of the verbal. Here, Lessing is almost anticipating Aby Warburg's idea of moving drapery as a window into a Dyonisian energy, which cannot be captured by the orderly sequence of linear narrative.

The other passage where Lessing flirts with ideas of extraordinary time is in his critical assessment of Timomachus (first century BCE), a painter who

> [W]as able to combine two things: that point or moment which the beholder not so much sees as adds in his imagination, and that appearance which does not seem so transitory as to become displeasing through its perpetuation in art. Timomachus did not represent Medea at the moment when she was actually murdering her children, but a few moments before, when a mother's love was still struggling with her vengefulness. We can foresee the outcome of this struggle; we tremble in anticipation of seeing Medea as simply cruel, and our imagination takes us far beyond what the painter could have shown us in this terrible moment. But for this very reason, we are not offended at Medea's perpetual indecision, as it is represented in art, but wish it could have remained that way in reality. We wish that the duel of passions had never been decided, or at least had continued long enough for time and reflection to overcome rage, and secure the victory for maternal feelings (L 20–21)

This passage is a great example of how Lessing straddles an older and newer critical tradition. On the one hand, he is the DuBosian spectator, who wants to get the greatest emotional mileage out of the encounter with the picture; he likes the emotionally-restrained face of Medea, precisely because it enables the imagination to soar into the future of Medea's full-blown rage. On the other hand, the under-determination of the immediately visible becomes important *per se*, by crystallizing the moment in which Medea is suspended in existential doubt; the image stages some sort of symbolic victory over time. The imagination no longer wishes to soar beyond the immediately-visible Medea and picture her incipient bestial madness; the humane, conflicted mother, painted by Timomachus, is the real Medea, and it is on her that our gaze tarries. The viewer no longer appreciates her understatement because it enables his or her free flights of fancy, but rather because he or she is mindful that a painted rage would have endowed "her brief instant of madness with a permanence that is an affront to all nature" (L 21). Here Lessing strays significantly from his official position, which is that painted figures must show emotional restraint for the sake of beauty. In this case, the viewer no longer reconstructs the embedded nature of the painted moment in the preceding and successive actions; rather, Medea's emotional restraint is re-imagined as a fragment of *another* narrative, one where Medea successfully vanquishes her murderous instincts.

But, unlike Winckelmann, Lessing does not see the image as a window into extraordinary time. He does not imagine Timomachus' Medea as an amphibious creature with one foot planted in the time of narrative, the other foot tentatively raised in ecstatic, non-narrative temporality.

2.3 The *Belvedere Torso*: A Closer Look at the Time of Beauty

Lest my discussion of the idea of the ecstatic temporality of sculpture remain abstruse, we should see—by way of illustration—how that idea itself is *at work* in Winckelmann's passionate engagement of the famous *Torso Belvedere* (Fig. 2.3). As we follow Winckelmann's description of his own experience of the *Torso*, I will continue to lean upon the visual artwork's four spatiotemporal categories, as outlined in the Introduction. I have already dwelt extensively on the first two (physical and narrative spatiotemporality) in the previous section. In this section, the aesthetic spatiotemporality of sculpture will take center stage. I hasten to add that these categories are implied by Winckelmann's aesthetics, and are nowhere made thematic as such—that is why I have tried to pry them loose (not without trepidation) from the descriptions in which they are embedded.[10]

[10]Winckelmann's poetic style is not the sign of conceptual laxity, but strength. Only a metaphorical use of language could do justice to the paradoxical dimensions of Winckelmann's thought; Michele Cometa aptly refers to Winckelmann's "aesthetic of duplicity . . . which articulates contradiction and makes it significative and epistemically efficacious" (Cometa 18). Peter Szondi offers a helpful

Fig. 2.3 *Belvedere Torso* (Pius-Clementine Museum) (Author of photography: Yair Haklay)

Given that the Vatican *Laocoön* is the site of Lessing's assault on Winckelmann's aesthetics, my engagement with Winckelmann's *ekphrasis* of the *Belvedere Torso* might seem an unwarranted detour. But the *Laocoön* is not a paradigmatic sculpture within Winckelmann's mature aesthetics. To be sure, even in his 1764 *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Winckelmann saw the Vatican *Laocoön* as a paradigm of beautiful heroic composure.[11] But the fact remains that the heroes of the *Geschichte* are all deities: the *Belvedere Apollo*, the *Medici Niobe*, the *Genius Borghese*, the

example of this duplex aesthetic. With his well-known praise of the 'quiet grandeur' (*Stille Grosse*) of the best Greek sculpture, Winckelmann is exploiting the oxymoronic force of the expression. '*Stille Grosse'* suggests a tensile unity of measuredness ('quiet') and sublime transcendence of measure ('grandeur'), which is at the heart of Winckelmann's aesthetic experience (Szondi 58).

[11] As Winckelmann saw it, the emotional *and* ethical climax of the whole statue resides in the mouth, nose, and brow of the priest: each of them made *visible* a tension-filled unity of terror and noble self-control: "The mouth is full of sorrow, and the lowered bottom lip is heavy with it; in the upwardly drawn top lip, this sorrow is mixed with pain, which in a stirring of discontent, as at an undeserved and unworthy suffering, runs up to the nose, swelling it and manifesting itself in the dilated and upwardly drawn nostrils. Beneath the brow, the battle between pain and resistance, as if concentrated in this one place, is composed with great wisdom, for just as pain drives the eyebrows

Belvedere Torso. Winckelmann praises the anatomical learnedness of the *Laocoön*, but immediately adds that it lacks the sublimity of the *Apollo Belvedere* (HAA 198). The muscles of the Laocoon, though endowed with extraordinary flexibility, are still organs subordinate to a biological function, but those of the *Torso* and the *Apollo* have ceased to do the office of human muscles; they seem transmuted into hills or waves (HAA 203). It is in *these* statues that Winckelmann sees a line where divine and human, eternal and temporal, are felt liminally to overlap. This overlapping quality is a clue that Winckelmann's humanist aesthetics constitute also a theo-aesthetics—and it needs to be assessed as such, whatever its ultimate merits.[12]

* * *

With this in mind, let us consider Winckelmann's famous *ekphrasis* of the *Belvedere Torso* (1758). While Dubos and Lessing do not disturb the traditionalist subservience of figurative image to narrative time, Winckelmann detaches contour from strict mimetic subservience. Thus, Winckelmann permits a phenomenology of ideal time and space.

> Ask those who know all that is most beautiful in the nature of mortals, whether they have seen a side to be compared with the left side of this torso. The action and reaction of its muscles are equated with a skillful measure of alternating movement and swift strength, and the body, on account of them, was ready for everything which he wished to accomplish. As in a swelling movement of the sea, the previously smooth surface sprouts with a vague unrest into rippling waves, whereof one swallows another and again throws it out and rolls it forward, so, with the same soft swell and quivering (*Schweben*), does the one muscle pass into the other, and a third, which rises between them and seems to strengthen their movement, loses itself in the first, and our gaze is, as it were, swallowed up with it (DT 188; partially amended translation).

As a physical object, the *Torso* is a static mass: nothing other than mere contiguity connects each of its parts to the others. Here we have space as the mutual indifference of neighboring elements: space as a fact. This changes when—upon prolonged observation—sculptural representation (of the left *serratus anterior*, a muscle-group partially covering the ribs) morphs into aesthetic object, an ensemble of perceptually unstable parts that seem to both coalesce into one another and to remain separate. As a merely perceptual phenomenon, this oscillation would seem to fall within the purview of *Gestalt*-psychology, less so of aesthetics. But for Winckelmann, this formal oscillation matters also because it is experienced as

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upward, so resistance to pain pushes the flesh above the eye down and against the upper eyelid, so that it is almost completely covered by the overlying flesh" (HAA 313–4).

[12]Michele Cometa speaks of two sides of Winckelmann: the Baroque Stoicism of German *Aufklärung*, which speaks through Winckelmann's 1754 praise of the *Laocoön*; a Neoplatonic side, which inspires the superior religious-ethical vision that is behind the celebration of the *Belvedere Apollo,* the *Torso*, and the *Niobe* (Cometa 11–2). As I see it, the second side gradually claimed pre-eminence over the first. Ernst Busch suggests that the quarrel between Lessing and Winckelmann was essentially a clash between the two dimensions: the latinate, Stoic humanism of the *Aufklärung*, and a philellenic theo-aesthetics (Busch 26–7).

a pendularity between two images of the self: one of individual autonomy, and one of mystical dissolution of the individual into the divine. The first seems to prevail when the quivering is felt to intimate monadic self-sufficiency: aesthetic object as 'temporalized space'. The second is affectively preponderant when the oscillation is felt as the reduction of form into an overarching formation process: aesthetic object as steeped in 'mythic time'. Again, I have adumbrated the ideas of temporalized space (Cesare Brandi) and mythic time (Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gianni Carchia) in the Introduction. In what follows, I will be at pains to make them less abstruse.

2.3.1 The Belvedere Torso *as Temporalized Space*

> The action and reaction of its muscles are equated with a skillful measure of alternating movement and swift strength, and *the body, on account of them, was ready for everything which he wished to accomplish* (DT 188, italics mine).

These are not muscles through which the self negotiates the recalcitrant otherness of the external world. They simply relate to each other, in a pattern of action and reaction. This specific praise is immediately paired with a transfiguring reverie, where muscles turned waves engage in essentially self-relating motion: one wave ejects another wave, only to reabsorb it into itself. While in any moment of narrative time a character has to engage in *this* as opposed to *that* action, Hercules' rib muscles transcend this limitation. They contain simultaneously the most diverse *possibilities* for action.[13]

This aura of atemporal unity of the body reaches a climax at the end of the ekphrasis. After prolonged inspection, the *Torso*

> is no longer a body which has still to fight with monsters and destroyers of peace, it is that which has been purified upon Mount Eta from the dross of humanity, now smelted away from the original source of likeness to the father of the gods. Neither the loved Hyllus nor the tender Iole ever saw Hercules so perfect. Thus he lay in the arms of Hebe, of everlasting youth, and inhaled an undying influence. His body is nourished by no mortal food or coarse particles; he lives on the food of the gods, and he seems only to taste, not to eat, and altogether without being filled (DT 189).

We begin with what is supposedly an image of Hercules the mortal hero. His powerful play of muscles evokes an heroic sequence of labors. Those muscles made him "ready for everything he wished to accomplish" (188). Under the devoted gaze of the art-lover, these contours become suddenly imitations of an aquatic surface. Hence, in the course of reverie, the muscles are freed from their original

[13] Ingrid Kreuzer points out how Winckelmann's aesthetic theo-humanism turns on an almost gnostic prioritization of potency over actuality: "For Winckelmann . . . this is the most essential task of sculpture in the metaphysical realm: . . . to free pure 'being' from 'appearance', the 'uncreated' from the 'created'—and to lead it back to its divine origin" (Kreuzer 43).

biological office—for instance, the abdominal muscles appear emancipated from the mundane task of digestion (living on ambrosia, "he seems only to taste, not to eat").[14] All teleologically driven processes (such as digestion) turn on a disjunction between the deficient 'now' and an aimed-for future fulfillment. The same is arguably true of narrative temporality: only at its end does a story offer some resolution of the conflicts it articulated earlier. Hence, by claiming that Hercules' muscles have ceased any purpose-driven action, Winckelmann is also suggesting that narrative time (which moves from a deficient past to a hoped-for future fulfillment) has been replaced by the circular time of Olympus, where every moment is as perfect as the previous one and the next. In terms of my framework of 'levels of spatiotemporality', we have moved from level 2 (sculpture as mimesis) to level 3 (sculpture as aesthetic object). But Winckelmann is not a formalist: level 3 does not supplant level 2, it *transforms it*. That is, temporalized space does not obliterate the antropomorphic content, but allows us instead to imagine humanity *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Now, what prevents the spectator's *reverie* from degenerating into smug self-divinization is the dialectical interplay between temporalized space and mythic temporality, to which we now turn.

2.3.2 The Mythic Temporality of the Belvedere Torso

We should not forget another essential moment of Winckelmann's visionary engagement. The feeling of simultaneous coalescing and separation can put vision in crisis: "our gaze is, as it were, swallowed along with it". Here the undulatory movement of the *Torso* evokes the undoing of the self, as opposed to the *reverie* of its perfect autonomy. Although Winckelmann is silent about this, even the sense of somatic integrity of the observer could feel threatened. This disintegration becomes clear through Karl Philipp Moritz's experience of the *Apollo Belvedere* by torchlight, an *ekphrasis* that is heavily indebted to the author of the *Geschichte:*

> The finest elevations become visible to the eye, and in whatever appeared uniform, an infinite multiplicity shows itself. Because now all this manifold constitutes only of one complete totality, so one here sees *at once* (*auf einmal*) all the beauty there is to see, the concept of time vanishes, and all collapses in a moment that could last forever, if we were purely contemplating beings (MW II, 753).

[14] It is worth noticing the withering criticism that Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896) and Jules de Goncourt (1830–1870) leveled at Winckelmann on precisely this point: "The only work of art in the world to have given us the complete and absolute sensation of a masterpiece [is] . . . the *Torso*—Yes, here in this *Torso*, so admirably human, is the divine sublimity of art; it draws its beauty from the representation of life: this breathing fragment of chest, these muscles at work, these palpitating entrails in a stomach that is digesting. For its beauty is that it is digesting, despite Winckelmann's imbecilic encomium; he thinks he is honoring the masterpiece by saying that it does no such thing." Quoted from Lichtenstein, 156.

Here the instantaneous saturation of space with contrary motions appears to undo not only the overall perceptual stability of the statue, but the very integrity of the spectating self.

The question now becomes: what is at stake in the affective oscillation between self-constitution and self-dissolution? Alex Potts has acutely claimed that the latter follows dialectically from the first. A dream of complete autonomy, of freedom from all external interference is semantically unstable. It can intimate unalloyed liveliness, but also the calm of death (Potts 146). As I see it, Potts is right: it is entirely plausible that Winckelmann's *Schweben* plays out the implicit fears attaching to one's *reverie* of narcissist self-plenitude. It would be wrong, however, to reduce it to that. In particular, the pole of self-obliteration may be—from Winckelmann's pietist perspective—also one of joyful mystical unity. Consider this point from Madame Guyon's Quietist description of the culminating moment of mystical encounter:

> My prayer was, in the moment of which I speak, empty of all form, species, and images. Nothing happened in my prayer in my head. But it was a prayer of joy (*jouissance*) and of (self)possession through the will, in which the taste (*goût*) of God was so great, so pure, and so simple, that it attracted and absorbed the other two powers of the soul [desire and reason] in a profound retreat without action nor discourse . . . it was a prayer of faith which excluded all distinction, because I had no view of Christ, nor of divine attributes; and everything was absorbed in a flavorful faith (*foi savoureuse*) where all distinctions were lost, so that love could love with a greater scope, without motives nor reasons for loving (Quoted from Gusdorf 72).

As these words (so surprisingly Winckelmannian *avant la lettre*!) suggest, one cannot account adequately for Winckelmann's water-tropes only by reference to his marine metaphors. One needs to consider also the famous spring-metaphor, according to which beauty has the indeterminacy of a pure, tasteless, salubrious water. Winckelmann's sea water has the property of swallowing the observer, but need this image describe an ultimately nihilist nightmare? It does if (again, following Potts) we ascribe to Winckelmann an Enlightenment construction of the self, where what matters is the sovereign autonomy of the self. Within that framework, any reverie of fusion with an overarching ground is simply a concealed dream of subjective omnipotence—a dream whose pendant is the nightmare of solipsism. Conversely, Madame de Guyon (one thinks here also of the souls of Dante's Paradiso) put into play an alternative model of the self, where the highest form of desire is truly agapeic; where the highest self-realization is found in the loving self-surrender to the object of one's love.

As I see it, Gianni Carchia's idea of 'mythic time' does the most justice to those moments in which stable form suddenly shows itself 'checked' by, if not resolved into, indeterminate chaos. For Carchia, these fissures of aesthetic form can be felt as windows into a primordial, Dyonisian nature (Carchia 2003, 297). This nature is the site of what Carchia calls 'mythic time': i.e. the temporality of a raw plenitude of a dyonisian matrix of all Being, a matrix that we usually veil over by the orderly matrix of scientific discourse. By his own admission (Carchia 1995,

119–124), Carchia here leans upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's cursory, yet intriguing remarks on the 'mythic time of nature' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 267). Merleau-Ponty was so fascinated by Cèzanne, because in his paintings he saw the fusion of an apparently self-standing world into a dynamic matrix which is prior to the world of human purposes. Consider these lines on Cèzanne, where Merleau-Ponty' leans upon Winckelmann's ontology of quivering contours: "The outline should therefore be a result of the colors that would be given to the world in its true density. For the world is a mass without gaps, a system of colors across which the receding perspective, the outlines, angles, and curves are inscribed like lines of force; the spatial structure vibrates as it is formed... If the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must bear within this indivisible whole, or else his painting will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real" (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 65).

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Let us now take stock of the previous pages in light of Lessing's confrontation with Winckelmann. From a semiotic standpoint, Lessing would say that Winckelmann's imagination engages in the wrong sort of projection. Instead of supplementing the inadequate iconicity of the material sign, it violates it, grafting onto it a foreign element. And proper signification rests also on the necessary condition of verisimilitude. The illusory power of the image rests on its being a picture of possible experience. However, we could never perceive a real human body whose contours quiver just like the surface of the sea. But again, Lessing would be able to say this only by presupposing, as indeed he does, a thoroughly instrumentalist view of the artistic sign, whose sole purpose is to evoke a cluster of interconnected properties that forcefully evoke a quasi-visual intuition of an object of possible experience. It is within this framework that the quasi-hallucinatory experience of the sea-like motion of the Torso's muscles must come across as delirious enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*). However, Winckelmann operates with different assumptions, the most important of which is that the artwork should disclose a realm that transcends possible experience. In this different context, the partial violation of the laws of verisimilitude becomes essential. The fact that the muscles of the Torso seem to morph into a gently troubled watery surface works as a sort of meaningful spectatorial estrangement in which the fictive object cannot be completely situated within the co-ordinates of possible experience.

In other words, Lessing operates with a merely *descriptive* idea of beauty (beauty as a feature of represented corporeality: human bodies, trees, vases). Winckelmann's aesthetics does not reject descriptive beauty, but complicates it with evaluative beauty. The pulchritude of a line freed from the task of a mimesis of *possible* experience—precisely via its tension with the (descriptive) beauty of noses, brows, muscles—invites a re-evaluation of the ordinary in light of the extraordinary.

2.4 Winckelmann *Contra* Lessing, II: Visual Beauty as *Original* and *Originary*

I have argued that Lessing's differences with Winckelmann about temporality of the visual arts were a proxy for a more fundamental, covert disagreement on the ontological resonances of visual beauty. As we have seen, Lessing took visual beauty as an essentially *superficial* phenomenon. Far from evoking sublime vistas to the imagination, visual beauty tended rather to anchor it to specific particulars, making it thereby harder to grasp universals. His deeply revealing aside on the matter bears repeating: "if the range of my physical sight must be the measure of my inner vision, I should value the loss of the former in order to gain freedom from the limitations on the latter" (L 74). And so, when Winckelmann had claimed (in 1754) that to the discerning art-lover, the ideal beauty of the *Laocoön* makes it as inimitable as Homer (RI 5); it was this claim, I feel, that was most offensive to Lessing's ears. Even if not explicitly, the *Laocoön* is the *cri de coeur* of a pedagogue who passionately believes in the life-transforming potential of poetry (a traditional humanist position), and who fears that the recent craze for the 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' of ancient sculpture may bring about the rise of a shallow *visual* culture. This preference for the ear over the eye explains why Lessing could write an entire book on the *Laocoön* without having ever seen it, and why—when he finally got to visit Rome—Lessing felt no immediate urge to dash off to the *Belvedere* and see the statue with his own eyes (Cometa 1992, 15). Finally, it also explains why he reduces the *Laocoön*'s emotional *sotto voce* to a matter of cosmetic convenience, whereas Winckelmann saw it *also* as a sign of superhuman virtue. Lessing's implicit point is that statues are there to 'look pretty', and can therefore offer only a subpar mimesis of an heroic *ethos* (whose raw sublimity cannot be importuned with petty decorative anxieties).

Winckelmann too shared Lessing's view that art, at its best, should be more than polite *divertissement*. But—unlike Lessing, who saw drama as *the* art capable of—he thought that beautiful visual art could be profoundly meaningful in its own right. In this respect, Winckelmann breaks not only with German rationalism, but also with the French aesthetic tradition. If we look at the respective aesthetic theories of Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750), *Abbè* Jean-Baptiste DuBos (1670–1742), and Denis Diderot (1713–1784), we note one important commonality: the point of figurative art is to titillate an erudite connoisseur, offering him or her an evasive entertainment that will prevent him or her from experiencing a dreadful *ennui.*[15]

[15] "The human spirit is essentially drawn toward variety . . . it [the human spirit] is made for variety, which animates it and prevents it from falling into boredom and inertia (*dans l'ennui et dans la langueur*)" (Crousaz 1715, 12); "The soul has its needs, just as the body. One of the greatest human needs is to have one's soul occupied. The boredom (*ennui*) which soon follows upon the inactivity of the soul is so painful, that one often engages in the most laborious tasks, so as to spare oneself its [*ennui's*] torments" (RC 6). Diderot makes the same point indirectly, through a revealing analogy: "everyone who walks through a picture gallery is really unconsciously acting

Strikingly, even one of Winckelmann's major influences, William Hogarth, condemned any Neoplatonizing inflection of sculptural aesthetics—visual beauty could only be corrupted by any attempt to envision in it an ethical dimension. In his 1753 *The Analysis of Beauty*, Hogarth famously distilled the essence of visual beauty into two formal properties: the bidimensional, wavering 'line of beauty', and the tridimensional, serpentine 'line of grace': "For as among the vast variety of waving-lines that may be conceived, there is but one that truly deserves the name of the line of beauty, so there is only one precise serpentine-line that I call the line of grace" (AB 52). Winckelmann's enchanted attention to quivering contours would have been unthinkable without Hogarth's groundbreaking discourse.[16] But Hogarth pre-emptively criticized any attempt (such as Winckelmann's) to load the formal lines of beauty and grace with ethical resonances. He saw such hybridization of discourses as a reproachable evasion of labor of critical judgment, i.e. of searching the specific aesthetic merits of an artwork. Many treatises on figurative art have lamentably done just that: faced with a seemingly ineffable *je ne sais quoi* of beauty, many authors found themselves

> obliged so suddenly to turn into the broad, and more beaten path of moral beauty; in order to extricate themselves out of the difficulties they seem to have met with in this: and withal forced for the same reasons to amuse their readers with amazing (but often misapplied) encomiums on deceased painters and their performances; wherein they are continually discoursing of effects instead of developing causes (AB iv).

Now, I hasten to add that Winckelmann too deplored viewers who remained at the level of inchoate aesthetic approval, without bothering to ferret out *why* the artwork seems beautiful. In a letter to a friend, Winckelmann complains *apropos* of the *Belvedere Torso* that

> Artists grope this Torso, letting their hand wander over the wonderful muscular serpentines with a: 'Oh que ça est beau!' I never heard them say *why* (*dire il perché*) (Winckelmann, letter to L. Bianconi, July 1758. Quoted from Bosshard 179).

But, although Hogarth and Winckelmann agree on the necessity of maturing aesthetic appreciation into critical judgment, they part company when it comes to delineate more clearly the latter. For Hogarth, critical judgment is an essentially pleasant, if fussy, exercise, in which we forget our own existence. Conversely, Winckelmann shows that, as he engages in critical judgment, the spectator finds—to

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the part of a deaf man who is amusing himself by examining the dumb who are conversing on subjects familiar to him. This is one of the points of view with which I always look at the pictures" (Diderot 1916, 173). Note Diderot's essentially *ludic* construction of the gaze: the point is to be amused by pictorial inventiveness (analogous to the curious gesticulation of the dumb), not to discover any truth. The sophisticated *Salon* spectator already knows all the stock topics by heart (just as the subjects discussed by the dumb are already familiar to the deaf man who ogles at them). On the idea of art as an antidote to *ennui,* and its central role in French aesthetics, see Migliorini 11; 84; 106; 156. Also, Bätschmann 245–50.

[16]In respect of the 'line of beauty', Winckelmann's debt to Hogarth is clear, as already Carl Justi had pointed out in his monumental biography of the German scholar (quoted from Morrison 32).

his troubled astonishment—that even his own self can be unsettled, perhaps shaken to the core. To my mind, this difference emerges most vividly in the way in which Winckelmann re-interprets Hogarth's aquatic imagery. For Hogarth, to follow with our eye the ins-and-outs of beautiful muscles is like a delightful nautical romp through playful waves "as pleasantly as the lightest skiff dances over the gentlest wave" (AB 61). Against this, consider again what happens in Winckelmann as we gaze upon the marine contours of the *Belvedere* Torso: "*our gaze is, as it were, swallowed up at the same time*". Formal perfection, *pace* Hogarth, is not just a source of refined, harmless visual pleasure; it can also overwhelm us with the force of the sublime.

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But it would be wrong to read these words as evidence of a belated Neoplatonism. Wincklemann does not take sculptural beauty as a cipher for a prior, superior sphere of meaning. He makes a clean break with a well-entrenched eighteenth-century tradition (epitomized by Shaftesbury) that saw visual beauty as a *symbol* of morality. Here the point was to subject the artwork to a "moral decoding exercise" (Morrison 29), through which proportion and grace become diaphanous vehicles of moral ideas—and where sensuous beauty is but a reflection of a higher, intelligible beauty. It is in this light that we must read Shaftesbury's claim that "thus are the Arts and Virtues mutually friends; and thus the science of virtuosi [*i.e. of artists and art-connoisseurs*] and that of virtue become, in a manner, one and the same,"[17] (Shaftesbury 217) because they are both reflections of a moral source (Morrison 24–5). Clearly, Shaftesbury's position cannot count as aesthetics, if by that word we mean an experience of something that is *eo ipso* irreducible to another, pre-existing domain of meaning.[18]

As the late Italian philosopher Gianni Carchia has argued, Winckelmann's beauty is less a sensible prefiguration of the supersensible than it is a re-evocation of a mythic co-presence of sensible and supersensible (where 'copresence' means a coincidence in which the respective identities of the opposites are not cancelled; cf. Carchia 2003, 258–9).[19] Understood as this co-presence of visible and invisible,

[17] Shaftesbury 1900, 207–8.

[18] Cf. Sergio Givone's illuminating assessment of Shaftesbury's discourse on the arts: "It is clear that on this basis [beauty as prefiguration of moral ideas], aesthetic experience must continue to appear subordinated to a plenitude of sense that one can reach only by leaving behind that [beauty] which essentially remains a prefiguration, a symbolic (or utopic) anticipation. But the typically modern realization that this experience is original and originary (i.e. what is at stake in it is the sense we ascribe to our actions, to the relationship with our own tradition, etc.) is due to other authors, for instance, Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder" (Givone 2003, 28).

[19] I owe to Gianni Carchia the thesis that Winckelmann's beauty evokes an original unity of *aisthetá* and *noetá*: "Winckelmann's ideal is entirely and exclusively an attempt to seize this limit line, this boundary point in which there is an ideal co-presence of sensible and intelligible" (Carchia 2003, 258–9).

beauty is also *original*: i.e. a whole that is prior to the separation of the parts, and therefore *eo ipso* irreducible to morality. Indeed, morality presupposes a *split* in human nature between sense and reason: hence—from the vantage point of this mythical anamnesis—moral discourse is *posterior*. For Winckelmann, our experience of such beauty is also *originary*: i.e. it has a unique power to catalyze fundamental shifts in the way that the self interprets itself and its place in the world.[20]

How is this the case? First of all, visual beauty prods us to exercise a whole slew of intellectual virtues. Gazing at the beauty of an artwork, sustaining the often prolonged, difficult effort to account *critically* for that beauty: such gestures are at once also *ethical* responses. For Winckelmann, visual beauty both sparks and requires patience of observation, a willingness to defer gratification, a capacity to catch small details, a powerful imagination to amplify the affective power of a fictional object: "this inner sense of which I speak must be quick, delicate, and imaginative" (KS 160).

But it would be wrong to say that sustained aesthetic experience is thereby reduced as an ethically edifying event. In the experience of the artwork ethical and aesthetical overlap *originally*; 'originally', in the sense that neither is subordinated to the other. Beauty is not the cognitive 'bait' that lures us to the apprehension of a moral pattern, nor are the virtues of contemplation mere props to aesthetic delight. One seeks to account *for* one's perception of beauty: to increase one's own pleasure by bringing into greater focus the specific points of aesthetic delight. But—in one and the same stroke—one seeks to account *to* one's perception of the beautiful: it's as if autonomous analysis were a response to an ethical obligation laid upon us by the beautiful.

Here we should return to Winckelmann's dialectic between *evaluative* and *descriptive* beauty. Its point is to account for both beauty as extraordinarily concentrated phenomenon *and* for the implications that this phenomenon has for one's lived existence. Seen from this angle, Winckelmann's minute (and sometimes admittedly tiresome) descriptions of the beauty of sculpted chins, foreheads, and noses, appears in a different light. It is an attempt to see if and how the ineffable overarching unity of beauty can be made flesh. In this respect, Winckelmann inverts Platonic aesthetics. In *Symposium* 210e, Diotima speaks of a gradual (*hephexes*) initiation to beauty which would then—hopefully—be crowned by the sudden (*hexaiphnes*) radiant appearance of the beautiful itself.[21] Winckelmann reverses this relationship: the *hexaiphnes* precedes, grounds, and drives the *hephexes.* The initial flash-like apprehension of the beautiful (the enthralling concentrated unity of the aesthetic object) lures an ocular tarrying-on, in which specific graces become slowly discernible: "after repeated contemplation, the soul becomes more still and the eye

[20]Givone pinpoints Hamann and Herder as the pioneers of an *originary* understanding of aesthetic experience. As I will argue, the honor should go to Winckelmann.

[21]On the Platonic dialectic of *hexaiphnes* and *hephexes*, cf. Bodei 1995, 58 (n. 18).

quieter and moves from the whole to the particular" (HAA 264).[22] Anticipating the Romantic idea of the semantic inexhaustibility of the artwork, Winckelmann avers that such accounting must be always partial. In the case of visual art "there is always something to find [even] in what is best known, because art is not exhaustible (*denn Kunst ist nicht erschöpft*)" (HAA 263).

But it is crucial that the critical judgment be always rooted in the arresting phenomenon of aesthetic unity that motivated it in the first place: "here anyone who proceeds from the parts to the whole would show a grammatical brain, and hardly awaken in himself a rapturous feeling for the whole" (KS 160). Otherwise, it is easy to turn criticism into an exercise for its own sake, which loses sight of the fact that an artwork gripped our mind *and* senses.

By focusing only on the moment of analysis, Walter Benjamin could read Winckelmann's *ekphrasis* of the *Belvedere Torso* as the product of a Baroque gaze, where analysis relishes the irreversible decomposition of the whole:

> Such a penetrating gaze is still at work in Winckelmann's "Description of the Torso of Hercules in the Belvedere in Rome" —in the unclassical manner in which he goes through it piece by piece, limb by limb. It is no accident that he does this on a torso. In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is fragment, rune. Its symbolic beauty evaporates when the light of divine erudition falls upon it. The falsely lustrous appearance [*Schein*] of totality is extinguished. For the eidos is extinguished, the simile perishes, the cosmos within it is desiccated. The dried-out rebuses that remain contain insight that is still graspable by the confused brooder. By its very nature, classicism was forbidden to contemplate the lack of freedom, the imperfection, and brokenness of the sensuous, of the beautiful physis. But this is precisely what Baroque allegory, beneath its mad pomp, proclaims with unprecedented force (Benjamin 2008, 176–7).

For all its suggestiveness, I think that Benjamin's reading is not on target, since it elides the erotic logic of Winckelmann's gaze: the lover obsesses over details of the beloved's body, but such enraptured lingering over the part, far from detracting from the power of the whole, instead adds to it. Far from seeing the part as a mere fragment of a latent totality, the lover's gaze sees the whole in each of the features of the beloved. For Winckelmann, each of the parts of the *Torso* have the power to evoke the whole: "in each portion of the body is manifested, as in a picture, the *whole hero* engaged in a particular deed" (DT 188, emphasis mine). For example: "I cannot look at the small portion of the left shoulder which is still visible, without calling to mind that upon its outstretched strength, as upon two mountains, the whole burden of the circles of the heavens has rested" (188). The *Torso*'s shoulders bring

[22] Winckelmann is committed to a phenomenology of aesthetic experience that seeks to illuminate, but not *dissolve*, the original feeling that we are *enthralled by something beautiful*. In this respect, his method is fully congruent with Alan Paskow's description of aesthetic experience as a non-reductive dialectic between what he calls *consciousness*$_1$ (the immediate affective response) and *consciousness*$_2$ (the reflective evaluation/analysis of first-personal response) (Paskow 63–71). Walter Bosshard makes the same point, when he labels Winckelmann's fastidious phenomenology of beauty as a "grasping what grasps us" (*ergriffenes Begreifen*), i.e. a desire to understand aesthetic unity which is also *eros* for that unity (Bosshard 180).

out so vividly the herculean nature of a single task (supporting the celestial vault), that we feel we are contemplating 'the whole hero', not just a single episode of his career.

* * *

Winckelmann's construction of the aesthetic as the revelation of a primordial unity of beauty and goodness shaped anew the European perception of antiques. Artworks like the *Laocoon,* and *Apollo Belvedere* had already been celebrated for centuries, but merely as models of artistic excellence.[23] But from the mid-eighteenth century forward, these classics were seen also as something like a genomic repository of the exemplary ethical and religious values of the *Anciens*—a role previously reserved for the *writings* of the ancients, and now taken over by figurative art.[24] This shift explains also why painters like Jacques Louis David (1748–1825) show an unprecedented attention to ancient sculpture, and why Napoleon filled the Louvre with looted sculpture (including the *Laocoon* and the *Apollo*): because it was believed that this ancient beauty had the power to *preserve* and possibly *recover* for the present the *ethos* of the ancients.[25] It remains open to question, of course, how much of this discourse was ideological (especially in the case of Napoleon) and how much was not. But for better or worse, without Winckelmann's seminal theory, this discourse could never have taken place.

But, to his credit, Winckelmann never forgot that the statues he loved so much came from an irretrievably lost past, and hence that their capacity to address the present in a living way was highly problematic, though not necessarily impossible. It is to this aspect of Winckelmann's thought that we now turn.

2.5 Document vs Monument: Between Mourning and Aesthetic Presence

> Alas, if I only could see this image in the sublimity (*Größe*) and beauty with which it appeared to the mind of the artist, so that from the vestiges I could tell how he thought and how I should think! It would give me great happiness to describe this work with

[23]The *Acadèmie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture* touted the *Laocoon* as a paradigm of technical excellence, as we can see in Gèrard van Opstal's 1667 seminar on the *Laocoon* group (CAR 19–27).

[24]On this paradigm-shift (from the ethical exemplarity of ancient writing to that of ancient sculpture), see the classic Busch 1940.

[25]Pierre-Jean Cabanis (1757–1808) and Pierre-Charles Levesque (1736–1812) offer striking illustrations of this belief. Both were convinced that certain human gestures had the capacity to condense and make visible ethical values, and that Greek sculpture provided the most compelling examples of this significant corporeality. Along the same lines, Antoine Mongez (1747–1845) claimed that an ancient cameo called *Ajax Meditating on the death of Achilles* could offer to the illiterate Parisian masses a compelling glimpse at ancient warrior virtue (quoted from Settis 2012, 51–2).

> [fitting] dignity! But I remain full of sadness. Just as Psyche wept for her love after she had come to know him, I finally understand the beauty of this Hercules, only to weep for the irreplaceable damage it has sustained. Art weeps with me, because the work . . . through which still today it could have raised its head—as in the golden times—to the highest peak of human consideration . . . .[art] has to see [this work] half-destroyed and cruelly mishandled. And how can one here not remember also the loss of so many other hundreds of artistic masterpieces! (KS 147).

Admittedly, the closing of the *Torso* essay seem to justify Benjamin's claim that Winckelmann peddles an aesthetics of mourning. After all, Winckelmann laments the inadequacy of his imaginative reconstruction of the fragment's original beauty. It would be wrong to dismiss this as an artful profession of modesty, where one seeks to enhance the force of one's description by protesting its impossibility. Although it certainly is that as well, it is also a genuine moment of grief, in which the mutilated statue appears as a *document*, i.e. as a trace of an absence. What is irretrievably gone is the ancient artist's original conception, which surely must have been a miracle of *kalokagathia*, i.e. of an *ethos* that is at once *kalos,* beautiful ("sublimity and beauty" yokes together *ethos* and *kalos*). And nostalgia over one battered fragment turns into overwhelming grief over the many masterpieces surviving only in the descriptions of Pliny, Pausanias, or Philostratus.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that this aching awareness of a loss to history is *decisive*, that the art historian is essentially called to register the loss of the history he reconstructs. The very final lines of the essay register a different mood:

> But art, which wants to instruct us further, calls us back from these sad considerations, and shows us how much there is to learn from what has remained, and with what eye the artists must look at it (147).

Here the temporal coordinates change. What counts is the *presence*, albeit fragmentary, of ancient artworks, and their potentially living address for the present.

Rather recently, art historian Whitney Davis has (in my view) somewhat flattened the monument/document dialectic in Winckelmann, ascribing to him an art-history-as-mourning approach. Davis leans above the well-known ending of the *History*:

> I could not keep myself from gazing after the fate of works of art as far as my eye could see. Just as a beloved stands on the seashore and follows with tearful eyes her departing sweetheart, with no hope of seeing him again, and believes she can glimpse even in the distant sail the image of her lover—so we, like the lover, have as it were only a shadowy outline of the subject of our desires remaining. But this arouses so much the greater longing for what is lost, and we examine the copies we have with greater attention than we would if we were in full possession of the originals. In this, we often are like individuals who wish to converse with spirits and believe they can see something where nothing exists (HAA 351).

By itself, this paragraph legitimates Whitney Davis' reading. The *History* is a dialectic between an historian *he*, who reconstructs the lost history of beloved antiques, and a despairing *she*, who witnesses the irretrievable loss of their original

cultural context.[26] It equally legitimates the conclusion that the *healthy* resolution of this dialectic is that art history must—in a cathartic gesture—lay its irreversibly orphaned objects to rest.[27]

But Davis's reading is a witness to another fateful parting of ways, concerning the nineteenth century divorce between aesthetics and art history. Once the artwork's capacity to appear as an aesthetic object is bracketed as 'unscientific', the artwork itself is deprived of its power to speak to us with a living, present voice. It becomes a mute foundling whose voice can only be situated in the past, whose story can only be a matter of forensics. If Winckelmann writes a *history* of ancient art, it is not out of antiquarian nostalgia, but because he wants to understand it better qua *art*. And by 'art', Winckelmann did not understand an abstract universal. For him, it referred to those artworks which stood out for a beauty that stubbornly *refuses* to leave, and which importunes our present with pressing questions. The business of art-history is to get to the heart of a *presence* that appears to speak with a suprahistorical voice:

> Some err . . . out of caution, when they wish to set aside all prejudices in favor of ancient works while contemplating them. Rather, they should approach them with a much more positive bias, for in the conviction that much beauty is to be found, they will seek it, and some of it will reveal itself to them. One must return again and again until it is found: for it is present (HAA 214).

* * *

There is further evidence for the claim that Winckelmann's art history is *intimately connected to the present of aesthetic experience*. Consider these lines from the Introduction of his *Geschichte*:

> The history of the art of antiquity that I have endeavored to write is no mere narrative of the chronology and alterations of art, for I take the word *history* in the wider sense that it has in the Greek language and my intention is to provide a system . . . Some writings with the title *History of Art* have appeared, but art has played only a negligible part in them. Their authors were insufficiently conversant with art and could communicate only what they had gleaned from books or hearsay. Almost no one has guided us into the essence or interior of art, and those who have dealt with antiquities have only raised points on which they could display their learning (HAA 71).

[26] "Winckelmann's practice implies that 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, a witness to another loss. The witness concerns not the loss itself, since it took place long ago, but 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 art history is our means of laying the object to rest, of situating it within its history and of taking it out of our own, where we have witnessed its departure. Since the history of art is a history of acknowledging the irreparable loss of objects, we must give up the idea of art history as a bringing-to-life, as a denial of departure (Davis 1994, 154).

[27] If it is not to be pathological, art history must take its leave of its objects, for they have already departed anyway" (Davis 1994, 154).

Winckelmann here is borrowing from Herodotus: *historia* is a narrative of that whereof one has been an ocular witness.[28] What does it mean, then, to be an historian of *art*? To be sure, it means to have seen and studied carefully the pieces or vestiges whose history one is reconstructing. But if one does just *that*, one is an historian of *antiquities*, not an historian of *art*. There is a difference, after all, between an ancient artifact qua sensuous object ('antique') and qua aesthetic object ('art'). Wisely, Winckelmann steers clear of a definition of art. But for him, a *necessary* condition for something to qualify as *Kunst* is its capacity to 'break time' as an aesthetic object that troubles the present of the spectator. Only when one moves from his or her own *aesthetic experience* of artworks, and writes a history that *illuminates* that experience—only then one is an art-historian in Winckelmann's sense of the word. Winckelmann saw himself as the *first* art-historian in that sense:

> In the large and costly works describing ancient statuary that have so far appeared, we search in vain for investigations into or knowledge of art. The description of a statue should show us the reason for its beauty and indicate something specific about its artistic style (71).

If Winckelmann is right, it is from *within* our first-hand aesthetic experience of ancient artworks that the need for historical reconstruction makes itself felt. As we have seen, that experience presses toward an enhancing self-clarification—that is, to be genuinely seized by the beauty of something is one with wanting to know its beauty more specifically. "With regard to the excellence of a statue, it is not enough to do as Bernini did, perhaps out of unthinking impudence, and dub the *Pasquino* the most excellent of all statues. One needs to give one's reasons as well" (HAA 72) (the Pasquino (Rome, Piazza Pasquino) is a battered torso currently believed to be a portrait of Alexander the Great and a soldier; see Haskell and Penny 262).

But can one not find those reasons on the terrain of a *formalist* aesthetics, both general (e.g. Crousaz's *Traité du Beau*) and specifically sculptural (Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*)? Why does a search for the grounds of beauty need to take on also the form of a *historical* reconstruction?

For Winckelmann, this question is ill-posed, because it presupposes that perception (aesthetics) and reconstructive narration (history) are separated to begin with. As we have seen, he takes his bearings by the ancient Greek conception of *historia*, where narration and perception are inextricably joined. This co-implication of storytelling and perception is rooted in aesthetic experience, when the aesthetic object itself is a paradoxical *presence of the past*, where seeing and remembering seem to coalesce. Here Winckelmann complicates and deepens a Platonic insight. One of the most peculiar traits of beauty is that it baffles us with its oscillation between the novel and the familiar. As is well known, Plato accounted for that phenomenon by construing sensuous beauty as an intimation of the Idea. It was novel for being a *sensuous* intimation of the Idea, while familiar for being a sensuous intimation of

[28] Here I lean upon Henrich Dilly: "Winckelmann's concept of history and theory of artistic description culminate in the construction of a two-part treatise, and in the declaration that he takes the word 'history' in its Greek sense. For him, retrieving the Greek meaning of the word means above all *to report that which one has seen for oneself*" (Dilly 96).

the *Idea* (which the soul knew in its pre-embodied state). But for Plato, the only past that beauty evokes is the soul's 'transcendental', suprahistorical past. There is no sense of a beauty in which one feels the affective presence of a *historical* past. For Winckelmann, instead, beauty stages the folding of idealized time and historical past into the present.

The *ekphrasis* of the *Torso* provides a good example of this. Its beauty seems a resuscitated fragment of ideal temporality: beauty as expression of a preternaturally integrated temporality. Beauty is felt also as a resurrected fragment of lost history: plastic beauty as the expression of the ancient artist's *kalokagathia*, itself an indifference of sense (*kalos*) and logos (*agathos*).[29] (I hasten to add that Winckelmann here is not reducing aesthetics to ethics, the beautiful body to the virtuous self. Ethics presupposes a nature that needs to be re-aligned with a norm. But the beautiful statue is an imaginative embodiment of a mythical state prior to those fissures).

Now, if the art-historian turns away from an ancient sculpture to enter the archives of ancient literature, history, numismatics, it must be—Winckelmann is adamant about this—with the intention of increasing the *thereness* of the aesthetic object. Narrative reconstruction must in the end turn into a *perception* that 'breaks time': i.e. the artwork's beauty must come across as the affective *living presence* of what—from a narrow historical standpoint—is merely the past.[30] By way of illustration, consider this surprising aside on the *Torso*, which Winckelmann chose to omit from his celebrated 1758 *ekphrasis,* and which he published only in 1767.

> It was much harder for me to discover the beautiful, when it exceeded my cognitions. I did not look at artworks like someone who, upon first seeing the sea, [merely] remarked that it was beautiful to look at. *Athaumasia*, i.e. immunity to surprise is something I value in morality only, not in art: here indifference is detrimental. In this endeavor, I have sometimes benefited from the universal fame [hardened into prejudice] that some artworks enjoy—I forced myself to recognize in them at least some persuasively beautiful [feature]. As an example, [consider] the torso of Hercules . . . which I described. Upon first sight,

[29]Gianni Carchia has incisively underscored the tension between mythic and historic past in Winckelmann, although—as I see it—he mistakenly takes the latter as a mere trope of the former. For Carchia, the felt *antiqueness* of beauty is merely a schema that allows us to conceive the gap between a mythical *arché* and the 'fallen' time of embodied existence: "Antiquity in Winckelmann is precisely this world of the soul, the space of a recollecting inwardness; in this past lives the unpronounceable. Therein lies the connection (which has seemed absurd to most interpreters) between Platonism and history, reason and concrete experience" (Carchia 2003, 262). As I see it, Carchia's reading of Winckelmann's historical distance as a cypher of lost mythical time is unduly reductive. To be sure, the *ekphrases* of the *Torso,* of the *Belvedere Apollo*, of the *Medici Niobe* are all inflected by what we could call a 'pathos of religious distance': their felt *historical* distance may work as a trope of the ontological gap between god and the human animal. But—as we have seen in the end of his *Torso* reading—Winckelmann's nostalgia is also for lost history *as such*, for what he saw as the age of *kalokagathia*.

[30]Here I radicalize Dilly's thesis. For him, Winckelmann simply requires art history to be *based* upon actual, first-hand knowledge of artworks. Winckelmann, claimed to have a knowledge of things garnered through perception, which had to be the foundation of any art-historical writing"(Dilly 96). As I see it, this acquaintance is only the first step. The artwork must sublate into a living *present* the historical reconstruction of its reconstructed *past*.

> I remained unimpressed by this work. I could not reconcile its most delicately traced parts with its strongly accented counterparts in other statues of Hercules, especially the *Farnese.* I remembered vividly the great esteem for this piece felt by Michaelangelo and other artists—an esteem that should have been like an article of faith to me. And yet I [still] could not give groundless applause to this piece. I was plagued by doubt because of the interpretation that Bernini and the whole tribe of artists had given to this fragment: they saw it as [a representation] of Hercules spinning.[31] Finally, after prolonged, detailed contemplation; after I became convinced that the current interpretation was mistaken, and that what was really portrayed was rather a quiescent Hercules, with his right arm resting on his head, as if engaged in the contemplation of his finished labors; [after all this], I thought I had found the reason for the difference between this Hercules and the other statues. Its posture and build showed me a Hercules become one of the gods, resting from his previous labors . . . no human Hercules appears in the famous torso, but the divine one (*der Göttliche*) (AGK v-vi).

In this example, we see how Winckelmann's art-historical reconstruction begins and ends with aesthetic experience. It starts with a perception of beauty that seems incomplete, even self-contradictory. The proof of the validity of historical reconstruction is in the pudding of aesthetic experience. The conjecture that the torso is a fragment of the statue of the divinized (as opposed to laboring). Hercules is confirmed in an intensified aesthetic perception, in a greater affective *presence* of ecstatic temporality. Now, it could very well be that Winckelmann's 'discovery' might be a philological fiasco. Indeed, according to the most recent interpretation, the *Torso* is a fragment of a sculpture of Ajax contemplating suicide (Rigdway 84). But if we have to choose between dry philological accuracy and an experience of the artwork that invests us more deeply, then I would claim that Wincklemann's possible error is the lesser of two evils.

This is not to deny that Winckelmann's aesthetic experience is not also inflected by the *absence* of mythic and historical pasts. But lucid grief is only a part, not the whole of Winckelmann's aesthetics. His celebrated *ekphrases* testify that even in their fragmentary state, the sublime beauty of ancient sculpture could still speak powerfully to us—and not simply as a dead *document* of a lost culture, but as a *monument*, that is, an artefact that addresses us with a living voice, asking us questions about the sense and direction of our lives. In this respect, the acknowledgment of loss is a necessary condition for a non-trivial engagement with the past, where the study of antiquity is part and parcel of our taking a responsible stand towards our present and future. Once the viewer realizes the irretrievable loss of a past that nonetheless does not cease to inspire him or her, he or she will shun attempts (both futile and impossible) to clone the past, and strive instead for a palingenesis of past values that is at once a substantial metamorphosis.[32]

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[31] According to a myth found in Horace (*Fasti 2.305*), the Delphic oracle enjoined Hercules—as a penance for his murder of Iphitus—to spend a year as a slave of Omphale, daughter of the King of Lydia. Spinning was one of the typically female tasks taken up by Hercules under Omphale's rule.

[32] Here I lean upon Henrich Dilly : "Posthumously, Winckelmann was understood and celebrated as the Greek amidst barbarians, as the resurrector of antiquity. [But] he was far removed from praising ancient artworks as something eternally paradigmatic. It was absolutely clear that this epoch and

In this respect, Winckelmann himself proudly presents his *History* as a token of such repetition-as-renewal:

> After the firstborn of my Roman labors in the German language . . . I appear with riper fruits of art, which, as the first of their kind, sprang from the womb of antiquities and the arts and were nurtured and completed under an auspicious sky (HAA 70).

This is art-history as a discourse that is itself *artistic,* i.e. itself motivated by ancient beauty. Its discourse "sprang from the womb of antiquity". At the same time, the *Geschichte* is no mere clone of ancient beauty: its pages are "fruits of art which [are] the first of their kind".

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its art were gone, and that history had become irreversible. Only when one had recognized its pastness, could it [history] become paradigmatic . . . A new art could not rise from the immediate imitation of single works, but had to instead think through the totality [of historical development]" (Dilly 104).

Marc Fumaroli is right to point out how Winckelmann's love for the *Anciens* was also motivated by his hope that they could spark a regeneration of his own present. But the problem with Fumaroli's reading is that it ignores the dialectic between palingenesis and metamorphosis: it is neither possible nor desirable to transplant unalloyed ancient values into modern soil. "The time came in which . . . the moral and political revolution of Rousseau coincided with the antiquarian battle for the regeneration of taste. Winckelmann, a brilliant and eloquent heir of eighteenth-century antiquarians, is—in his own way—a Rousseauian when he builds the edifice of his *History of Art of Antiquity* according to the pathetic schema of Longinus' *On the Sublime.* [In that work, Winckelmann] opposes the grandeur and heroic freedom of ancient republics to the physical and moral weakening of the 'inhuman' eighteenth-century world" (Fumaroli 2005, 225–6). Winckelmann's moments of mourning strongly suggest that he was not the all-out sanguine *antiquarien* that Fumaroli takes him to be.

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Chapter 3
Hemsterhuis and Herder: Sculptural Theo-humanism

3.1 Frans Hemsterhuis and 'Fast' Visual Beauty

In 1765, a year after Winckelmann's magisterial *Geschichte*, the Dutch philosopher and polymath Frans Hemsterhuis penned his *Letter on Sculpture*. Together with its necessary pendant, the *Letter on Desires* (written in 1768), Hemsterhuis' writings about sculpture continue the theo-aesthetical discourse initiated by Winckelmann.[1] These writings are sympathetically responsive to Platonic eros of the kind that inflected Winckelmann's experience of sculpture, where visual beauty seems to address the human desire for transcendence. In this respect, Hemsterhuis may be regarded as a thinker who endeavors to help Winckelmann to raise his own compelling poetic insights to the level of philosophically cogent theory. This effort meant that he also provided a metaphysical framework for the peculiar stylistic elements that Winckelmann took to be normative. Already in his 1756 *debut,* the German author had famously praised Greek sculpture's "noble simplicity and quiet greatness", *Edle Einfalt und Stille Grosse* (RI 32-3), but without explaining how these could be part and parcel of the *aesthetic* worth of a statue—as opposed to being mere edifying tokens of Stoic self-control. One can read Hemsterhuis' *Letter on*

[1]The *Letter on Sculpture* was published, however, only in 1769. Likewise, the *Letter on Desires* was published in 1770 in 's Gravehage (The Hague), though Paris is indicated as the place of publication—in my view, to elude the possible wrath of censorship, since this work could be construed as gesturing toward a Spinozistic pantheism. Both Elio Matassi and Michele Cometa claim that the *Letter on Sculpture* bears unmistakable traces of a stimulating encounter with Winckelmann (Matassi 1994, 49; Cometa 1994, 72). As far as the intentionally complementary relationship between the *Letter on Sculpture* and the *Letter on Desires* is concerned, Hemsterhuis declared that the latter "without *On Sculpture* is a tail without a head" (*Letter to the Princess Gallitzin*, 12.28.1781; quoted from Matassi 1983, 55). The standard English Hemsterhuis biography is Moenkenmeyer 1970. For Winckelmann's influence on Hemsterhuis, cf. Cometa 1994. For a contextualization of Hemsterhuis within eighteenth century aesthetics, Funder 1913 is still extremely valuable.

F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5_3

Sculpture as a sustained aesthetic justification of the visual logic of *Edle Einfalt und Stille Grosse*. As we will see, Hemsterhuis develops a theory whereby visual beauty is inversely proportional to the time required to apprehend an object. In this respect, the richly varied yet simple contour of Greek sculpture makes for an instantaneous apprehension of a sensory manifold—hence, its exceptional beauty (OP I, 45). In turn, such a quick apprehension gives pleasure because it symbolically prefigures a deeper satisfaction, the fulfillment of the soul's ultimate desire. This ultimate desire of the soul is to apprehend God's essence, a timeless unity-within-difference (OP I,72).

* * *

To do justice to Hemsterhuis' theory of visual beauty, we must succinctly foreground its frame, a complex interplay of metaphysics of the self and of theology, whose essential points are that: (a) the embodied soul is defined by a desire to experience itself as infinite; (b) this self-reflexivity can only happen via the mediating knowledge of an other which is one *and* infinite; (c) the fullest self-reflexivity is one in which the other is also experienced *as one's own self*; (d) the soul sees God as its most homogeneous object.[2]

How to interpret these single claims, and their relations to one another, has always been strikingly problematic, primarily because—at junctures where his conception of God may appear to flirt with some dangerous heterodoxy—Hemsterhuis

[2]Claims *(a)* and *(b)* entail that the soul naturally wants to make somehow an indeterminate infinity its own. Hemsterhuis' most compelling statement of this point is in his dialogue *Alexis, Or the Golden Age*, where we are referred to a mythical 'happy fall' from a state of animal contentment, and to the 'bad infinity' of a desire that seeks—unbeknownst to itself—the infinite in the finite: "Hence the natural insatiability of his desires, since no sooner did his pleasure intimate to him the limits of those naturally finite objects, he went further in the vain and foolish hope to find something analogous to the infinite principle that moved him in the sheer quantity of such finite, determinate objects" (OP II, 193).

(C) does not necessarily claim that the finite soul ought to completely destroy its numerical distinctness in order to participate in the infinite. Rather, *it could* implicitly refer us to the expansive dynamic of spiritual love. Aristeus, a character in Hemsterhuis' *Aristeus, or On The Divinity*, describes the experience of love in this way: "After meeting Philaretes, the rest of the universe ceased to have any importance. I saw the universe through a veil, except those parts that had some relationship with her. When I got close to her, my heart was beating, my knees were trembling, my blood—now hot, now cold—no longer had an assured course in my veins . . . .in her presence I was and I felt invincible, all that I did had only her for a purpose. My will acted as if it was her own; her happiness, her pleasure, her desires were mine, and I had no others" (OP II, 41). To be sure, here the two lovers are numerically different in body. But on the other hand, each lover joyfully makes the other's will his or her own, and in so doing experiences a paradoxical infinite expansion of his or her own individuality.

Claim *(d)* is made in the *Letter on Desires*: "in the intellectual contemplation of the Sublime Being, no disgust [such as that ultimately aroused by finite beings, NDA] could possibly arise, because we do not perceive an absolute impossibility of the desired union. Homogeneity *seems* perfect" (OP I, 55; italics mine). This is an ambiguous statement: is God's perfect homogeneity the result of the soul's correct (if obscure) divination, or its wishful ignorance?

takes shelter behind the screen of a deliberately less-than-pellucid style. Most vexing for many readers is how to ferret out whether Hemsterhuis endorses the personal God of Christian revelation, or whether he is tacitly committed, instead, to a non-personal, fully immanent Spinozistic God. This ambiguity about God is important, because it bears decisively on our specific interpretation of *(a)-(d)*. Taken collectively, these propositions entail that the soul's ultimate happiness consists in an exceptional access to God's infinite consciousness, which results in the soul's ecstatic self-identification with God. Now, if God is personal and transcendent, this self-identification does not destroy the individuality of the soul. If, conversely, God is non-personal and pantheistically immanent, then to behold God's essence is of a piece with the dissolution of the soul's individuality.

Why is it, then, that no embodied soul is ever fully happy? Hemsterhuis refers us to the mediation of our sense organs, which allow us to perceive neither infinity nor unity in a physical object. In a Spinozistic vein, Hemsterhuis suggests that *if* we could apprehend *in its entirety* the essence of matter, it would epiphanically yield an absolutely infinite number of ideas.[3] Consider, say, a tree. Our limitation to only five ways of sensory access to the tree (we can see it, touch it, smell it, etc.) should not blind us to the possibility that, were we equipped with a correspondingly infinite number of sensory channels, the tree would display itself as a non-gappy, infinite continuum of different sensory appearances.[4] As far as *unity* is concerned, our access to the external world is mediated by the senses of sight and touch, which, since they can access only a limited region of space at any given instant, must break the object into temporal parts: the tree disintegrates into a temporal sequence of ocular movements (roots, trunk, branches, foliage).[5] It is only an archetypal divine intelligence that, freed from the mediation of the organs, can seize *in a timeless act* the unity of the tree.

[3]Hemsterhuis guardedly offers this Spinozist point as a hypothetical, noticing that there is no contradiction in the idea "that matter possesses an infinite amount of properties that are unknown to us" because we lack the relevant organs (*Letter on Man*, OP I, 101).

[4]A soul which disposed of infinite organs would experience in a physical object an epiphanic synaesthesia of infinitely different sensory planes. Ever the cautious writer, Hemsterhuis leaves the point to Diotima (in the dialogue *Simon, or the Faculties of the Soul*), in the guise of a utopic prophecy: "When the soul is totally liberated, it becomes completely an organ (*elle devient toute organe*). The interval that separates the visible from the audible is filled by other sensations. All sensations bind themselves into a body, and the soul sees the universe not in God, but in the way of the Gods (*non en dieu, mais a la façon des dieux*)" (OP II, 138).

[5]Hemsterhuis brings to bear here his optical studies: "From the application of optical laws to the structure of our eye, [it follows] that in a single moment a distinct idea of only a single visible point impresses itself on our retina. If I want to have a distinct idea of an entire object, I must move the eye's axis along the contours of this object, so that all the points that compose this contour fix themselves on the eye's screen with all the necessary clarity; successively the soul connects all these elementary points, and acquires in the end the idea of the entire contour" (*Letter on Sculpture,* OP I, 17).

Though my very concise summary makes no pretense of doing justice to the complexities of Hemsterhuis' view of the soul-God relation, it should enable us to make sense of what would otherwise appear to be an extremely idiosyncratic aesthetics. Let us turn to it without further ado.

Why is it that visual beauty has the power to arrest us in our tracks? Hemsterhuis' answer runs as follows. We have seen that, although the unity we crave is atemporal, our senses cause the object to disintegrate into bits sequentially enchained in empirical time. Visual beauty works by suggesting a timeless apprehension of a whole. The way in which it manages to do this is through a spatial outline which, despite its variety, presents an exceptionally seamless unity of contours, enabling an extraordinarily short time of apprehension. It is this almost instantaneous apprehension that gives the spectator the ecstatic (though deceptive) feeling that she has perceived the object in *no* time. The content is crucial as well: the spectator is—though not necessarily in a conscious fashion—perceiving an ostensibly timeless synthesis of unity *and* multiplicity with respect to sense-data. Visual beauty compels us by offering itself as a disguised simulacrum of the transcendent object of desire.

However, it is clear that, subjected as it is to the strictures of sense-perception, visual beauty cannot present an *actual* sensory infinity. Rather, visual beauty strikes us by offering a *maximum* of sensory difference in a *minimal* amount of time. Following this logic, Hemsterhuis can argue that the paradigmatic site of visual beauty is not painting, but rather sculpture, precisely because here the element of sensuous multiplicity can be optimally intensified into a *maximum*. Painting can only suggest (via *chiaroscuro*) the spatial articulation of a three-dimensional view, but sculpture presents it directly to our sensory inspection (OP I, 16). In this respect, sculpture is superior even to nature: although even a natural object presents the sensory richness of three dimensions, it is not capable (except in rare accidental cases) of the ruthlessly idealizing procedure of the sculptor, who always integrates sensuous difference into that exceptional unity required by aesthetic apprehension (ibid, 31). In particular, it is the ancient Greek sculptor who is paradigmatic. In the interest of that temporal *minimum*, he judiciously restrains expressive values to "quiet and majesty" (*repos et majesté*) (ibid, 45), a striking reprise of Winckelmann's *Edle Einfalt und Stille Grosse*.

In a curious attempt to give scientific backing to his aesthetics, Hemsterhuis refers us to the following experiment, which required an observer to decide which of these two vases was more beautiful (Fig. 3.1). The two vases are roughly equivalent in terms of contour length, but everyone who was asked to deliver an aesthetic judgment upon them, so Hemsterhuis reports, found vase A to be more beautiful. For Hemsterhuis, the reason for this lies in the fact that the smoother contours of A allow it to be perceived more quickly than B (which has a far less seamless profile). This explanation provides a clue for evaluating the claim that perceived beauty is inversely proportional to the time required to apprehend the object as a totality (OP I, 17–18).

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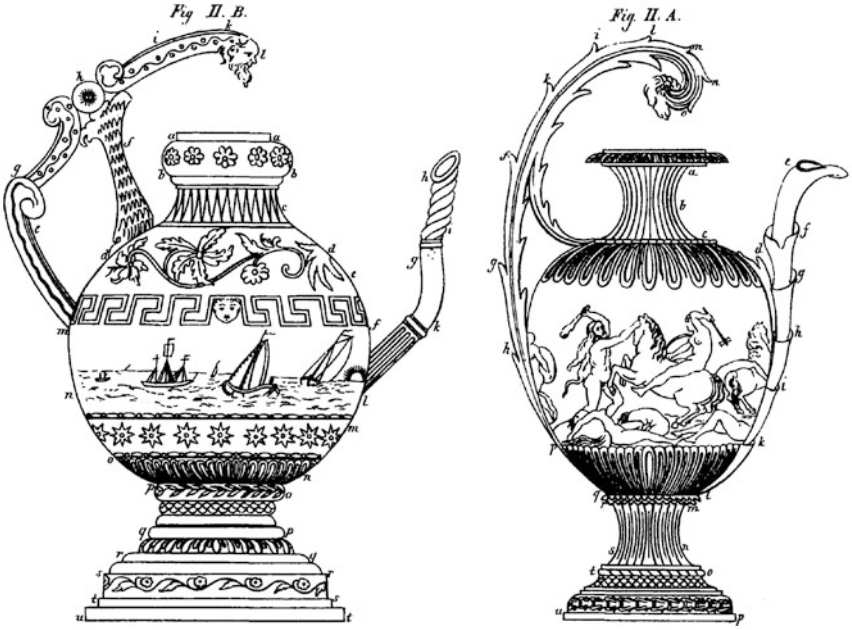

Fig. 3.1 Hemsterhuis' two-vase experiment (Source: pp. 312–3 of Œvres Philosophiques de M.F. Hemsterhuis. Tome Premier. Paris 1792: Imprimerie de H. J. Jansen)

And yet, although Hemsterhuis makes Winckelmann's stylistic vocabulary his own, he resists the latter's glorification of sculpture as a privileged way of accessing the divine. For Hemsterhuis, sculpture is part of a Platonic 'ladder of love' terminating in the highest good, but situated at its lowest rung: "one will love a beautiful statue less than one's friend, one's friend less than one's lover, and one's lover less than the Supreme Being" (OP I, 54). The principle of ascent is determined by the ever-increasing homogeneity between the desiring soul and its object, and its empirical touchstones are the respective enthusiasms that each of these objects can provoke (*ibid*).

Possible objections aside, what I find particularly instructive in Hemsterhuis' erotic ladder is the fact that the *sheer spatial materiality* of the beautiful statue is seen as a fateful, recalcitrant residue that cannot be absorbed by the soul's erotic impulse.[6] We have seen that in Winckelmann the spiritualization of the artwork correlated *pari passu* with the amount of time one gazed at it. Not so in Hemsterhuis. Only in the initial aesthetic shock, when I am seduced by the immediate visual

[6]Just to mention one inconsistency in Hemsterhuis' ladder: by his own lights, given the direct correlation between desire-intensity and a perceived object-homogeneity, it necessarily follows that a man should love his male friend more than his female lover—whereas Hemsterhuis claims the opposite.

'digestibility' of the object, do I "seek to unite my being, my essence, to such a hetereogeneous being" (OP I, 54). But familiarity breeds aesthetic contempt. The more I become familiar with a statue, the more I am cognizant of nooks and crannies (*des coins et des recoins*) that no longer allow themselves to be instantaneously integrated into a whole (OP I, 32). With these heretofore docile bits of space acting now as recalcitrant speed bumps, the aesthetic exorcism of empirical time is shattered; perception is no longer felt to be instantaneous, and the spectator is disgusted by the sudden exhibition of the statue's hetereogeneity (*ibid*, 34). The beautiful line's initial subordination of various spatial regions to the requirements of a quasi-instantaneous perception makes all the more noticeable the later phenomenology in which mutinous parts refuse the logic of the whole. For Hemsterhuis, this experience is a decisive proof that "beauty has no reality in itself" (OP I, 31), by which he means that it never was in the first place a property of the artwork, but merely a feature of the subject's experience.

Be that as it may, Hemsterhuis brings to conceptual expression Winckelmann's tacit revolution: the 'spiritualization' of aesthetic properties, i.e. beauty of pure form as a site of possible epiphany. Thus, his aesthetics has been hailed as a Prometheic anticipation of Modernist formalism.[7] However, seen as a 'transcendental deduction' of the visual logic of noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, the *Letter* clearly succeeds only at the cost of killing the spirit of Winckelmann's enterprise. By abstracting a sculpture's beauty from its specific anthropomorphic/theological content, Hemsterhuis could not do justice to the affective and cognitive impact that Greek sculpture can have upon the spectator. Arguably, a spectator feels that more of himself or herself is called into question by a beauty that supervenes on an anthropomorphic shape, than by wholly disembodied pulchritude. Conversely, Winckelmann's aesthetics are wonderfully attuned to the interplay between *level 2* (*representation*) and *level 3* (*aesthetic object*).[8]

Hemsterhuis' negative ontology of visual beauty is instructive, however, as it exemplifies a rationalist dichotomy between matter and spirit, one that may stand in the way of an aesthetics of reconciliation. We have already seen this rationalist dualism at work in Lessing, in his claim that spatially extended media can—as a general principle—signify only visible realities. But note that Lessing's stricture concerns the representational *content* of the visual artwork, whereas Hemsterhuis, who is much more attuned to Winckelmann's new sensibility, is concerned with the semantic scope of its *aesthetic properties*. But in the end, Hemsterhuis' aesthetics do drive a rationalist wedge between matter and spirit. The incapacity of contour to anchor an enduring experience of wonder reveals that even the initial aesthetic shock has been a subjective projection; when aesthetic thrill turns into boredom, the artwork becomes a *thing*, the other of spirit.[9] But the dualist premise

[7] See Sonderen 2005, p. 212.

[8] *Cf.* my discussion of 'levels of spatiotemporality' in Winckelmann, Chap. 1

[9] Peter Sonderen rightly remarks that visual art in Hemsterhuis "is instrumental in studying the human soul" in that "it makes our desire for unity immediately visible" (ibid, 213). But I think that his statement that visual art "gets an important, not to say decisive place because of its position

underpinning his 'thin' reading of visual beauty acted as a fecund intellectual irritant for sympathetic readers of Winckelmann, such as Herder. As we will see shortly, Herder's 1778 *Sculpture* makes a sustained case for the imagination as the third, mediating link between the visible and the invisible—in my view, because he was dissatisfied with Hemsterhuis' ultimately 'thin' view of the beautiful.[10]

Nevertheless, hemsterhuis does presciently expose a genuine problem in Winckelmann: that of the historicity of sculptural aesthetics. As we have seen in chapter two, in Winckelmann there are important signs that the classical sculptural ideal may no longer (a) be an option for the modern artist, and (b) speak compellingly to the modern spectator. Nor can it be denied that Winckelmann does appeal to the unique cultural circumstances that favored the development of Greek sensibility, where the ideal beauty of the young human body was taken to be an appropriate symbolical vessel of the divine. For a *paideia* that saw culture as the fulfillment (not the repression) of nature, it was axiomatic that inner completeness had to find a necessary expression in physical beauty (RI 9). In art, this basic drive to seek the unity of sensible and supersensible was reflected even in the sculptural treatment of the gods: one owed them a sensuously perfect representation. But Winckelmann is comparatively silent as to why this ideal could be problematic for modernity.

Given this problem, here Hemsterhuis may be of assistance. In the second half of his *Letter on Sculpture* (OP I, 34–43), he offers a synthetic history of sculpture that begins, just as Winckelmann's, with the Egyptians; but, whereas Winckelmann wraps up his treatment with Hellenism, Hemsterhuis adds a pregnant (if succinct) coda on Christian art, all the way up to Michelangelo (*ibid*, 41–43). It is from the vantage point of this synoptic view of the ancients and moderns, that Hemsterhuis can notice a decisive discrepancy between them. The delicate simplicity of classical contour was more congenial to the Greek sculptor (and viewer), who was defined by 'moral sentiment' (*sentiment morale*, OP I, 37), which is essentially Pascal's *esprit de finesse*: the capacity intuitively to seize an object as an undivided whole.[11] Conversely, the modern self is defined by a Pascalian 'geometrical spirit' (*esprit de geometrie*), i.e. a cast of mind whose privileged mode of cognitive access is abstractive; it tries to comprehend phenomena by resolving them into constitutive

between the strict material world and the world of the mind" (*ibid*) needs to be strongly qualified. In Hemsterhuis's view, the aesthetic force of a beautiful statue resides in eliciting a (short-lived) delusion of subjective omnipotence. Here, the material world is not reconciled to the mind, but one-sidedly bent to the soul's will to power. Even Sonderen implicitly recognizes this point when he nicely distills the message of Hemsterhuisian beauty: "devour me with your eyes—in no time—and you'll like it" (*ibid*).

[10]Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis rightly laments that Hemsterhuis' aesthetics cannot account "for the 'invisible' substrata of art". This is a serious flaw, considering that "artistic essence has an exemplary essence which is the expression of the invisible, an aspect eighteenth century philosophers were certainly aware of" (Mazzocut-Mis, 228–9). She concludes, with Winckelmannian pathos: "How is it possible to deny remorselessly that art is the presence of that which cannot be present, that it bears witness to something that cannot be proved?" (*ibid*).

[11]For a discussion of perceptual immediacy in Hemsterhuis, see Hammacher 1971.

parts (*ibid* 43). The implicit point is that moderns may be constitutively incapable not only of replicating the beauty of Greek sculpture, but also of being spectators properly attuned to whatever of it has survived.

Having historicized ancient beauty, Hemsterhuis had important reservations about modern attempts to resurrect it. The Greek sculptural presentation of the gods as ideally beautiful human bodies was of a piece with the holistic nature of their *esprit de finesse*. This being the case, the High Renaissance's turn to ancient models was bound to have ambiguous results. From a purely formalistic aesthetical standpoint, it was a clear gain: Michelangelo's imitation of the ancients restored sculpture almost to the level of the ancient Greeks (*ibid* 42). From a theo-aesthetical standpoint, this restoration was a travesty. When High Renaissance Christian sculpture took its bearings from Greek gods in the portrayal of its saints, "Apollo . . . was worshiped again under another name" (*ibid*); here we have Neopaganism masking itself as Christianity. This logic of visual completeness is incompatible with Christianity, the religion of a fragmenting *esprit geometrique*—a pedigree evinced by Christianity's radical diremption between God and nature. Its idea of God is "so abstracted and so free from the sensuous" that the Christian artist consistently refrains from idealizing the body Jesus, choosing to represent his mere humanity (*ibid* 41). And, aesthetically unpalatable as this is to a classical humanist, Hemsterhuis claims that this idea of a nature infinitely below God justifies an unflinching realism, which is open to nature's imperfection, even its ugliness (*ibid*, 41–2).

In the end, Hemsterhuis' historical *prècis* of sculpture calls into question the 18th century's passion for ancient Greek sculpture. If the self desires always what it perceives to be most akin to itself, modernity's constitutively fragmented self may not possibly recognize itself in the concentrated visual unity of classical beauty. The narcissistic self-absorption of an *Apollo Belvedere* would not work. Now, if we consider that this age considered classical beauty to be normative for sculpture, the humbling upshot was that, as an agent of aesthetic reconciliation, sculpture *as such* might be a thing of the past. As Herder would realize, this objection to Winckelmann's project was to prove far less tractable than the others.

3.2 Johann Gottfried Herder's Recovery of a 'Slow' Sculptural Aesthetics

Herder was a careful and passionate reader of Hemsterhuis. In particular, in 1770 he had translated into German Hemsterhuis' *Letter on Desires,* and in 1778 he even wrote a commentary on it, titled *Love and Selfhood* (*Liebe und Selbstheit*).[12] Herder

[12]The translation and the commentary were published together in 1781 in *Der Teutsche Merkur*, pp. 211–235 (now in SW 15, 304–326). Herder never met Hemsterhuis personally, nor did they ever entertain any correspondence with each other. Nevertheless, Herder thought of Hemsterhuis as a congenial ally, as is also evinced by two letters. The first one is to H. Ch. Boie, dated October 6, 1772, in which he expresses an interest for the *Letter on Sculpture*: "Please help me find

liked Hemsterhuis' cosmic/theological inflection of aesthetics, but he thought that such inflection hinged on an unrealistic dream of human omnipotence. It cannot be denied that Hemsterhuis' sculptural beauty does, to use a Hegelian metaphor, shoot us into the Absolute as from a cannon. By short-circuiting (if briefly) the feeling of existential time, it collapses the difference between the human spectator and a divine archetype intellect that intuits everything at once. The same identification is implied by Hemsterhuis' conspicuous suppression of even an *ideal* movement in the statue. As we will see, Herder's *Sculpture* is an aesthetics of mediation, in self-conscious opposition to Hemsterhuis aesthetics of immediacy. A sign of this opposition is its systematic (and occasionally heavy-handed) emphasis on tactility, and its corresponding excoriation of a sight-centered approach to sculpture. Both of these features are—I suggest—an implicit polemic with Hemsterhuis, whose sculptural aesthetics are thoroughgoingly ocular.[13] The slowness of tactile fruition functions as a critique of Hemsterhuis's 'fast' sculptural beauty.

Let us consider some details of Herder's complex stance vis-à-vis Hemsterhuis, as they will allow a better grasp of Herder's mature sculptural aesthetics, formulated in his 1778 *Plastik* ('sculpture'). He felt a deep kinship with Hemsterhuis' Platonizing metaphysics of love and friendship, in which God is the ultimate erotic terminus (HW II, 408). The problem in Hemsterhuis, as Herder saw it, is that desire's tendency is toward an undifferentiated unity. The self either completely assimilates the object (egoistic desire) or it extinguishes itself in the Object (selfless religious desire). In each case, the goal is self-defeating. The self would, respectively, either have its desire re-kindled afresh by the destruction of the object (HW 409), or vanish altogether in a monistic Oneness:

Hemsterhuis' *Essai sur l'homme et ses rapports*, and his *Lettre sur la Sculpture*. Everyone tells me that I have much in common with this man. This book has still hundreds of my favorite ideas—in the antechamber of life, we must have sat at the desk of the same master!" (in J. G. Herder, *Briefe*. Gesamtausgabe, Zweiter Band Mai 177 1-AprıI 1773, bearbeitet von W. Dobbek und G. Arnold, Weimar, Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1977, p. 240). The second letter is to Hamann, dated January 2, 1773, in which the formulation is slightly changed: "it is as if in the Platonic hyperuranium we have shared the same desk (ibid, p. 287). I owe the reference to these letters to Michele Cometa 1994, 88).

[13] In a passage of the *Lettre sur la Sculpture*, Hemsterhuis avers that sculpture addresses two senses, those of touch and sight (OP I, 43). But this remains an isolated claim within a quintessentially ocular aesthetics. It had to remain an isolated claim, because tactility's effective inclusion in the doctrine would have been destructive: the sense of touch requires time to do its job, whereas for Hemsterhuis the aesthetic power of a statue rests on the feeling that its apprehension requires no time.

In the later 1779 dialogue *Simon, or The Faculties of the Soul*, the character of Socrates chastises his interlocutor, the sculptor Mnesarchus, for associating sculpture with the sense of sight and of touch. For Socrates, sculpture addresses sight alone. He reminds his audience of the old saying that—in the eyes of the statue of Polyxena carved by Polyclitus—one could see the entire Trojan war. He then wrily notices that Mnesarchus could hardly see it by laying his fingertips on Polyxena's eyes (OP II, 96). Naturally, Socrates' elenchus is question-begging, as it presupposes premises that Hemsterhuis does not share (sculptural form as the expression of the invisible). Nevertheless, Hemsterhuis may here be—in a spirit of playful palinody—implicitly retracting his earlier association of sculpture with tactility.

> We are singular entities, and must be so, if we do not wish to lose to pleasure the ground of all pleasure, our own consciousness, and if we do not wish to lose ourselves in order to find ourselves in another being which we never are and never can be. Even when, as desires, I lose myself in God and I do so without any further feeling and consciousness of myself: I thereby have no more pleasure, the deity has swallowed me and the deity alone enjoys (HW 419).

Though not altogether charitable in the context of Hemsterhuis' later production, Herder's objections do touch a problematic nerve in the philosophical *debut* of the 'Batavian Plato' (Hemsterhuis' traditional nickname) which occurred precisely in the field of aesthetics (the epistulary dyad on sculpture and desire was composed between 1765 and 1768). Clearly, in the later dialogue *Aristeus* (1766), we find an emphatic distinction between a lower, physical eros in which the elimination of duality is indeed the unconfessed wish of the lovers, and a higher, spiritual eros, in which each self is infinitely expanded by adoringly letting the other be ('in *her* presence *I* felt invincible..', *supra* 2, n. 2). But the situation is different in the *Letter on Desires*. Here, spiritual eros, as well, aspires to total unity: "the soul tends for a perfect and total unity with anything that is outside it" (OP I, 56). Significantly, Hemsterhuis immediately footnotes this axiom with a word-for-word quotation from the Aristophanes of Plato's *Symposium*.[14]

Hemsterhuis' laudable *caveat*, indicating that this unity is only a regulative ideal, is unfortunately not adequately mirrored in his aesthetics. In a formula that will deeply impress itself on the imagination of early German Romanticism, Hemsterhuis postulated that "it is clear that the soul in its desires tends naturally toward this union, or desires a continuous approximation. This is the hyperbole and its asymptote" (OP I, 72). But *Frühromantiker*, like Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, thought that any aesthetics worth its salt could not ignore this constitutive rolling ever closer to the *x*-axis of perfect unity: the poignant force of beauty consists in intimating at once the presence of the absolute *and* its withdrawing from us. We will see this pattern at work also in Herder's sculptural aesthetics. Conversely, Hemsterhuis' theory of sculptural beauty does—to use again the striking Hegelian metaphor—shoot us into the Absolute as from a cannon. By short-circuiting (if briefly) the feeling of existential time, it collapses the difference between the human spectator and a divine archetype intellect that intuits everything at once. The same identification is implied by Hemsterhuis' conspicuous suppression of even an *ideal* movement in the statue.

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Despite his early reservations about Hemsterhuis' metaphysics (which he charged with an elision of the distance between divine and human), Herder's break with Hemsterhuis' aesthetics matured later, in the years between 1770 and 1778—a period devoted to the composition of his *Sculpture*.

[14] "The desire and pursuit of the whole is called Love", (OP I, 56). The *Symposium* was Hemsterhuis' favorite Platonic dialogue.

But in 1769, Herder was still a committed Hemsterhuisian, as we can see from a work he penned that year, the *First Critical Grove*. This work is particularly relevant for our purposes, since here Herder builds upon Winckelmann's discourse on the idealized time and space of the aesthetic object. Equally important, Herder brings out how an emphasis on 'Pygmalionic' spatiotemporality turned on a break with rationalist aesthetics. Consider the following passage, which is a rather direct criticism of Lessing: figurative art's presentation of a temporal moment is not just a token of its intrinsic semiotic limits, it is also a sign of its unique capacity to present a supernaturally saturated temporality:

> Every work of plastic art is, if we accept the classification of Aristotle, a *work* and not an energy: it is all there at once in all of its parts; its essence consists not in change or succession but in coexistence. If an artist has made it perfectly so as to be grasped entirely and exactly in the first glance, which has to deliver a complete idea, then its purpose has been achieved, the effect endures forever: it is a *work*. It is there all at once, and that is how it shall be viewed; the first glance shall be permanent, exhaustive, eternal, and only human frailty, the carelessness of our senses, and the disagreeableness of prolonged effort make necessary, where *works* demand to be examined more deeply, perhaps the second, perhaps the hundredth viewing. Yet each occasion is but a single glance . . . these works must therefore make their moment so agreeable, so beautiful, that nothing exceeds it, that *the soul, sunk in contemplation of the same, as it were, comes to a rest and loses the sense of time passing* [italics mine]. Those beaux arts and belles lettres, however, which produce their effect through time and change, which have energy [i.e. force] as their essence, are not obliged to deliver a single moment; they need never *devour our soul in this momentary climax* [italics mine] (FG 99–100).

Like the author of the *Lettre*, Herder embraces the idea that the figurative arts work precisely by giving the illusion of arrested time, and that this illusion rests on the ease with which the visual media may be instantaneously comprehended: the apparent negation of perceptual time entails the liberating feeling that existential time itself has come to a standstill. To experience a suspension of existential time involves the dialectic of the sublime; figurative artworks devour our soul and elevate it at the same time; they destroy the very conditions of experience, but this destruction is also emancipating. This is because existential time, as Hemsterhuis pointed out, parcels objects into temporal parts, and therefore systematically frustrates the self's desire for unity.

Still, when it comes to the temporal dimension of expressive values, Herder manages to go deeper than Hemsterhuis. To be sure, both thinkers toe a Winckelmannian line, according to which a marble figure should not be in the throes of unbridled passion.[15] But for Hemsterhuis, the aura of grand simplicity is prized

[15]This is how Herder puts the point: "A ravaged, ugly, or distorted form, Itys torn to pieces, Hippolytus in Euripides' play, Medea contorted with rage, Philoctetes in the worst convulsions of his illness, someone in the throes of death, or a decomposing corpse struggling against the worms-all these are repugnant when encountered by the feeling hand as it advances. Instead of encountering ideas, it encounters horror, and instead of the imitation of the things that are, it encounters the terrible degeneration of that which is no more. Atrocious art that bestows form upon deformity!" (S 57).

simply because it enables quick comprehension, ("any passion expressed in any figure must diminish a little this loose quality of contour that makes it so easy to run along it with one's gaze"; OP I, 29). Herder, as well, believes that such emotional balance allows a symbolic victory over temporality, but for an additional reason that Hemsterhuis neglects to consider:

> This tranquility [which] lies midway between lifeless activity and passionate, exaggerated movement; the imagination can continue to hover between both extremes and therefore derives the longest pleasure from this glance of the soul . . . [painting or sculpture can give us] the first stirring of a movement, the dawning of the day, which allows us to see across both extremes and thus alone grant us an eternal glance (FG 100-101).

Although an individual's emotional range is vast, he/she can never fully actualize all of it at once; a person cannot be simultaneously angry, joyful, and serene. It is as if time imposes its sequential nature on the different parts of an emotional orchestra, preventing them from resonating in a symphonic *tutti*. Yet, exposure to the noble restraint of classical sculpture can afford a liberation from this sequential nature, by suggesting an experience in which all of the emotional palette is engaged at once. The imagination can take the poised face of the Greek *Apollo Belvedere* (date) as the median point of an invisible emotional spectrum, and project upon it all the emotional states between the two extremes—as Winckelmann had already claimed, the *Apollo* betrays anger and scorn for the enemy he has just slain, but also infinite serenity. Herder then is clearly re-thinking Lessing's discourse on the transformative engagement of the imagination, but with an attentiveness to temporality that is Hemsterhuisian.

3.3 Herder's Mature Philosophy of Sculpture: The 1778 *Plastik*

We can now turn to Herder's 1778 *Sculpture*. Herder's mature thought on sculpture is crucial to our overall argument, insofar as its argumentative strategy reveals how by Lessing's premises more seriously than Lessing did, one could go beyond Lessing's conclusions. In the *First Grove*, Herder followed the letter of Lessing's medium-based discussion of phenomenological time: sequential for poetry, instantaneous for visual media. In *Sculpture,* Herder realizes that, had Lessing really been faithful to his principle of medium-specificity, he would not have lumped together painting and sculpture: the tridimensional physicality of the latter imposes on the spectator a specific time, that of careful, fastidious perambulation. This slow time is something that Hemsterhuis had completely ignored in his sculptural aesthetics, but upon which Winckelmann insisted emphatically. Just as Winckelmann, Herder thinks that the ecstatic, ideal temporality of sculpture cannot hinge on a denial of the plodding, lived temporality time of the spectator. As we will see, *Sculpture* offers two different constructions of the relation between lived and ideal time in sculpture. According to the first, the slow time of the embodied observer time is simply the *precondition* for the epiphany of the latter. According to the second, lived time is

the *medium* of that epiphany: it is in one's failure to reach an overall grasp of a sculpture's *Gestalt*, that one thinks of a perfection that does not let itself be grasped in existential time. We could say that the first model is Theo-*humanist*, whereas the second is *Theo*-humanist, because it does not allow a complete imaginative overlap between human and divine.

* * *

Before we consider these two models in detail, let us consider what they have in common. They both share an emphatic 'haptic' (tactile) approach, which is—in one stroke—a critique of Lessing's and Hemsterhuis' *visual* aesthetics, and a strong clue to Herder's affiliations with Winckelmann.

> Consider the lover of art sunk deep in contemplation who circles restlessly around a sculpture. What would he not do to transform his sight into touch, to make his seeing into a form of touching that feels in the dark? He moves from one spot to another, seeking rest but finding none. He cannot locate a single viewpoint from which to view the work, such as a painting provides, for a thousand points of view are not sufficient. As soon as a single rooted viewpoint takes precedence, the living work becomes a mere canvas and the beautiful rounded form is dismembered into a pitiful polygon. For this reason, he shifts from place to place: his eye becomes his hand and the ray of light his finger, or rather, his soul has a finger that is yet finer than his hand or the ray of light (S 42).

This passage is an answer to an implied question: just what counts as an *aesthetic* experience of sculpture? The answer exploits in three fundamental ways the rich connotations of the idea of touch. First, the emphasis on touch's *immediate* contact with the statue (against the eye's feeding on 'mere appearance') deliberately suggests an aesthetic holism in which beauty is connected with (tangible) truth. Significantly, Herder speaks of "a phenomenology of the *beautiful* and the *true*", although as a worthwhile project that has not yet been undertaken (S 39). His *Sculpture* is supposed to fill that gap.[16] Furthermore, the emphasis on touch's 'slowness' and 'darkness' seeks to restore to the artwork the spirituality that is lost to a 'hurried' ocular aesthetics. Here Herder seeks to criticize the materialism of the *philosophes*, but without relapsing into naive attempts at re-enchantment: his insistence on touching is also a Baconian call to experience, and a criticism of abstract metaphysics. Finally, when Herder expatiates on the sense of touch, he is also seeking to give some theoretical depth to Winckelmann's aesthetics of quivering lines. By itself, the eye is blind to the perceptual instability of beautiful contours, because it tends to oversimplify them into a relatively stable *Gestalt*. But the imagination can offer a synaesthetic supplement to vision, which then can become alive to (and hence deliciously overwhelmed) by minute nuance.

Let us consider first Herder's use of touch as a site of aesthetic holism. The yoking of beauty with truth (which Herder finds in the *tactile* engagement of sculpture) betrays an enmity toward what we could call a Swiss Army Knife

[16] Schweitzer reads *Sculpture* as providing that phenomenology (Schweitzer 112).

construction of the artwork. The army knife has many functions: cutting, sawing, screwing. But it can perform only one function at the time. One could see an artwork in the same way: as a document of a culture, as aesthetic object, as a piece of matter. When we say that the artwork's beauty is independent of its truth-value (and viceversa), we are—by analogy—seeing the artwork as a Swiss Army knife. Arguably, this view of the artwork is the counterpart of a similar construction of the self: Lacan's idea of the self as onion—a plurality of roles without true unity. Quite consistently, Herder is also against the pendant of the Swiss Army idea of the artwork: the self as onion (many faculties, no genuine center). If the experience of artistic beauty seems to seize *all* of our being, and if theory is to account not only *for*, but *to* that experience; if that is the case, theory should not pry apart affective responses from cognitive ones. Consider this highly enlightening passage from Herder's *Fourth Grove*:

> When, like a second Aristotle, I analyze the work of a great artist, can I not at the same time attend, with Homean intensity, to the sensation it arouses in me and then go on to gather, with Baumgarten's precision, differentiation, and logicalness, the terms with which to formulate a definition? Is it not the same soul and the same operation of the soul that assumes a masterwork and then perceives its artistry, assumes a sensation of the beautiful that it awakens, and now analyzes that very sensation, assumes—no, does not assume but rather gathers a definition of beauty objectively from the work of art and subjectively from sensation? Is this not all a single function of a single soul? So why then mischievously separate these paths and then mischievously slander them? For without all three together an aesthetics can never come into being. (FTG 186).[17]

If my experience of beauty is also an encounter with the *wholeness* of my humanity, then an account of that experience should show how beauty 'energizes' not only sensation and emotion, but my rationality as well. Beauty does, *somehow*, manage to spark the rational eros for trans-individual formal structures. Here Herder owes much to Winckelmann's holistic pathos; as Goethe famously remarked: "everything he wrote is alive and meant for the living" (Goethe 1994, 114). As I see it, *Plastik* is a sympathetic attempt to help Winckelmann to realize what Herder thought was a more self-consistent holism. Absolutely compelling in its groundbreaking interrelation of emotional response and stylistic analysis, Winckelmann's theory prefers to gesture toward first principles (time, space, eternity, beauty, the sublime, God) through the emotionally-laden language of poetic metaphor.

Winckelmann's reticence, however, was based on very legitimate concerns, which Herder fully shares with his mentor. Herder was well aware that a prosaic distillation of the first principles implicated in the artwork could fatally corrupt the sensuous *thisness* of the artwork, and the emotional response bound up with it.[18] Such a distillation, of course, is the circle that aesthetics is always called upon to

[17]By 'Homean', Herder is referring to Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782), a Scottish polymath remembered also for his contributions to aesthetics.

[18]In his *Fragments of a Treatise on the Ode*, Herder claims: "the undivisibility of aesthetic first principles seems to increase the more they [those principles] leave behind the perception of the beautiful" (SW XXXII, 61). Quoted from Irmscher, p. 52.

square: thinking the artistic particular without expending its immediacy. Herder's way of negotiating this obstacle transpires from his rhetoric of tactility. When he is praising the blind man for building an ontology out of the slow but reliable deliverances of his fingertips (S 37), he is metaphorically adumbrating his own hermeneutical strategy. The method is that of arriving at the fundamental concepts as they reveal themselves to careful investigation of aesthetic experience, while eschewing a 'top-down' approach. Admittedly, the specifics of Herder's 'haptic' approach might seem to go against the spirit of Winckelmann's enterprise. Herder's discussion of tactility borrows extensively from the discussions of the *Sensualistes*, whose materialism was profoundly repugnant to Winckelmann's Shaftesburean sensibility.

Upon closer inspection, however, Herder's haptic approach is clearly of a piece with Winckelmann's desire to restore to the artwork the spirituality which the *philosophes* had all but elided. We can begin by noticing that Herder's handling of tactility has only a partial kinship with the philosophical agenda of French Sensism. As we just saw, Herder was sympathetic with the *philosophes*' wish to save philosophy from generalizing abstractions through an approach 'from below' that—mindful of Locke's lesson—begins with a phenomenology of the different sensory channels. However, while thinkers like Condillac thought this phenomenology could be the foundation of a materialist anthropology, Herder sees the senses 'aesthesiologically': i.e., as delivering a sensuous content which has 'always already' a knowable side, and is not Condillac's brute, essentially meaningless empirical datum.[19]

And so, while Herder shares with Condillac the methodical derivation of basic ontological categories from a 'slow, obscure' sense of touch, their motivations for doing so are opposite. Condillac's thoroughly materialist and (*sub rosa*) atheistic

[19] 'Aesthesiology' is a coinage of Helmut Plessner, aimed at capturing the specifically non-reductivist nature of Herder's and Goethe's view of sense-perception. Irmschler (a student of Plessner) gives a helpful elucidation of the concept (Irmschler, 59–60).

Inka Mülder-Bach is right when she claims that Herder's genetic derivation of basic metaphysical concepts is inspired by Condillac's 1744 *Traité des Sensations*, which methodically traces metaphysical concepts to the deliverances of the sense of touch (Mülder-Bach 1998, 62, n.). But I have reservations about her claim that Herder's *Plastik* is a continuation and theoretical elaboration of French sensualism (*ibid*). That tradition does not share Herder's aesthesiological perspective: Condillac's sense-data are not injected with a spiritual content, and as a result, one can only derive a strictly materialist world-picture from them. Conversely, Herder's theo-aesthetics of sculpture require an idea of matter that can bear the traces of a spiritual reality. As a *pendant*, Herder's sense of touch always operates jointly with an inner sense that can perceive what raw tactility *per se* cannot. *Malgrè lui,* even Mülder-Bach implicitly acknowledges this point, when she claims that Herder's sense of touch "constructs its experiences in a 'obscure' indifference-point of sign and signified" (*ibid*, 86).

It is true, however, that Herder's extensive borrowings from the Sensists in Chapter One tends to hide that he is operating with two-tiered concepts of matter and of touch. As Rudolph Haym had noticed, it is only later that "almost unnoticeably, the touching soul is insinuated in the touching finger, and, instead of the body as the immediate object of touch (*Gefühl*), there is talk of a 'living body'" (Haym 70). On the role of touch in Herder's aesthetics, cf. Gessinger 1990.

agenda justified the appeal to a—so to speak—congenitally skeptic sense-organ: touch responds only to immediate physical proximity. Herder's choice, on the other hand, was motivated by a theo-humanism mindful of human finitude. He shares Leibniz's assumption that all human cognition begins inescapably with a fund of obscure perceptions. The whole of the universe, God included, is archetypally present in our consciousness as an obscure fund of representations. The Augustinian-Cartesian epistemology of the *lumen Dei naturalis*, with its ideal of instantaneous clarity, ignored the fact that such obscurity was part and parcel of the way in which the highest reality manifested itself in us.[20] Herder's haptic epistemology is meant to do justice to such 'pregnant obscurity', since touch is a paradoxical unity of immediate certainty *and* uncertainty. Its object is immediately present to it, but its specific nature can only emerge—and only partially at that—in the context of a laborious groping.

In this crucial respect, touch is isomorphic with feeling, whose intentional states are always a mixture of immediate certainty and obscurity. This isomorphism is neatly captured by the ambiguity of the German '*Gefühl*' and the English '*feeling*': each of these words can denote either the literal act of touching or an emotional state. For Herder, this isomorphism is a clue to synergic relation. There is no such thing as a raw tactile deliverance, for the message of our fingertips is always laden with the interpretive work of feeling; engaged in the hermeneutics of touch, feeling is nothing other than the imagination: "The imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) must, as it were, take the place of touch in order to make it eloquent; for all the imagination's power, it cannot draw touch into its domain" (FG 250).[21]

Let us now consider the third (and final) point of Herder's haptic approach, which is that of building upon Winckelmann's Pygmalionic transfiguration of the artwork. In ordinary perception, it is tactile, not visual data, that require the imagination's most extensive interpretive projections. Visual data are bi-dimensional and require the (unconscious) imaginative addition of depth alone. A substantially heavier imaginative investment is required to interpret a dimensionless phenomenon, i.e..,

[20] I am leaning here on Adler's discussion of 'pregnant obscurity' in Leibniz and his intellectual progeny, the German *Schulphilosophen* of the first half of the eighteenth-century, namely Wolff, Meier, and Baumgarten (Adler 90–101).

[21] As Ulrike Zeuch notices, "in terms of their function, feeling and imagination are interchangeable for Herder" (Zeuch 158). However, Zeuch denies (incorrectly, in my view) that Herder's *Gefühl/Einbildungskraft* can successfully tap into the spiritual content of the statue, because—so she argues—"just like the sense of touch, this inner feeling is subordinated to the dimension of perception . . . it can know only the material conditions of the individual soul or of the soul's essence . . . [i.e.] only the property of extensionality" (162). As a result, Herder cannot successfully distinguish between the perception of a slab of stone and that of an *Apollo Belvedere*—i.e. he cannot sustain the distinction between theoretical and aesthetic perception. But Zeuch glosses over the *mode* of this perception. Far from being subordinated to the static extensionality of the statue, it nihilates it. The animated spatiality of the statue is already beyond the sensuous flagrancy of a mere slab of stone.

pressure on my fingertip. And so, when Herder urges a 'hands-on' approach in the sculptural wing of the museum, he is really urging its spiritual *pendant*: a massive imaginative investment in the statue, which comes to a head in the quasi-hallucinatory perception of motion. Note how the following passage seeks to give (with a rather uninformative, grandiose curtness) theoretical depth to Winckelmann's *Schweben*-discourse:

> We have one sense that perceives external things alongside one another, a second that perceives things in succession, and a third that perceives things inside one another [in *einander*]. These senses are sight, hearing, and touch. Things alongside one another constitute a surface. Things in succession in their purest and simplest form constitute sounds. Things at once inside-alongside one another [*auf einmal in-neben-bei einander*] are bodies or forms (S 43–4).[22]

Here Herder's endorsement of Winckelmann is at once a revision of Lessing. By pushing Lessing's semiotic approach to its extreme, Herder focuses on the specific differences between marble and canvas, which enables him to go beyond the *Laocoön's* discussion of the nature and scope of the "visual arts in general." (L 6). Lessing failed to focus on the specific differences between painting and sculpture, and hence remained in the dark about the peculiar magic of sculpture. It is with that magic in mind that Herder offers the deliberately-paradoxical one of things 'being-at-once-inside-alongside-one-another.' This is Herder's way of spelling out Winckelmann's aesthetics of the quivering line, where the spectator is baffled with spatial juxtaposition and its simultaneous vanishing (*spatial juxtaposition of neighboring line-bits that at the same time seem to melt into each other)*. Here, perceptual unity (*unity of neighboring contour-bits)* is something that is more felt than seen. Winckelmann underscored this by referring us to the sense of touch. For example, in the *Apollo Belvedere*, the "muscles are subtle, blown like molten glass into scarcely visible undulations and more apparent to the touch than to sight." (HAA 203). In *Sculpture*, Herder appropriates this idea, by declaring that sculpture addresses primarily touch, or better, a sight operating haptically.[23]

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[22]I am amending Jason Geiger's translation of '*ineinander*,' which he renders as 'in depth,' and his translation of '*auf einmal in-neben-bei einander*,' which he renders as 'in space.' What Herder has in mind is the Winckelmannian quasi-hallucinatory phenomenology of contours seeming simultaneously distinct *and* collapsing into each other. Geiger's translation flattens this point, missing the force of sculpture's specific impact on the spectator.

[23]I note in passing that the nineteenth-century *Kunstwissenschäftlers* (Fiedler, Riegl, Hildebrand, Wölfflin) will upend Herder's association of tactile values with temporality; in their view, time is the province of the so-called 'optic' values. When these theorists of 'pure visibility' spoke of optic elements, they thought of fuzzy contours, *sfumato*, aerial perspective—in a word, of rather indeterminate perceptual values whose '*glissando'* cannot be a matter of an instantaneous apprehension. Conversely, crisply-delineated forms were taken to be within the immediate purview of a sight operating 'haptically.'

3.4 Between Anthropocentrism and Theocentrism: The Conflicted Discourse of *Plastik*

Out of the trunk of these haptic premises, *Sculpture* branches out in two differently-accented philosophies of sculpture, which themselves reflect a change in Herder's humanistic sensibilities. In the first three chapters, (penned in 1770), Herder plied a middle way between anthropocentrism and theo-centrism, but in chapters four and five, (written in 1778), his balance tilts toward the divine. This shift has aesthetic resonances; circa 1770, Herder emphasizes the gentle flow of the line of beauty, as symbolic of a 'user-friendly' divine that makes itself completely at home in a sensible medium. In 1778, there is an increased expressive burden: the agile contour is to express "indeterminacy . . . power . . . mighty will that resides in the structure as a whole" (S 96). Here the closure of the line of beauty is in part disturbed by sublime excess, intimating a partly retreating god. I will argue that Herder's paradigm-shift can be construed as a shift from a musical to poetic understanding of sculpture's spatio-temporality.

3.4.1 Herder's Anthropocentric Aesthetics of Sculpture

Let us return to Herder's art-lover, circa 1770. This is how his engagement of the statue comes to a decisive head:

> With his soul he seeks to grasp the image that arose from the arm and the soul of the artist. *Now he has it*! The illusion (*Tauschung*) has worked; the sculpture lives and his soul feels that it lives. His soul speaks to it, not as if his soul sees, but as if it touches, as if it feels. A cold description of a statue no more offers us appropriate ideas than would a pictorial representation of music; better to leave it be and pass by (S 42).

This climax is at once a clarifying reprise of, and a departure from, Winckelmann. His *ekphrasis* exemplified a crucial relationship between local and overall transfiguration; for example, the *Torso* can be envisioned as a living Hercules only via the imaginative animation of parts like the back muscles. We should see Herder's *Liebhaber* movement, from parts to whole, as an expansive footnote to Winckelmann.[24] However, there is a new accent. Winckelmann relied upon

[24]I disagree with Mülder-Bach's claim that Herder, not Winckelmann, is the inaugurator of "a new logic for the Art-lover" which breaks with the classical understanding of the Pygmalion-myth (Mülder-Bach 71). As Mülder-Bach notices, the classical Pygmalionic tradition (which dates back to Ovid) hinged on the idea that the animation of the statue was only a *re*presentation of real life. In the *Metamorphoses*, Galatea's prodigious transformation into a real human suggests the inescapably derivative nature of sculptural mimesis. According to her, Winckelmann and Lessing are the last apostles of this view, where the Pygmalionic animation of the statue is a mere (if fascinating) illusion. It is—she continues—Herder who first, in a revisionary reading of

the vivifying powers of the spectator's imagination, but he did not thematize them. Astonishment concentrated only on the statue's extraordinary animation. Conversely, it is hard not see Herder's spectator as some sort of liberator. His *eureka* moment is also that in which "the sculpture lives".

This added emphasis on the spectator's role explains why Herder, unlike Winckelmann, can see a reciprocal, emancipatory recognition between statue and spectator. There is no analogue in Winckelmann for passages like these: "a sculpture before which I kneel can embrace me, it can become my companion: it is *present*, *it is there*" (S 45). For Winckelmann, the sculpted god rivets us through his sublime aura of blissful self-adsorption, which would be undermined by any sign that our presence is being acknowledged. This being the case, aesthetic catharsis must involve the ecstatic, self-effacing identification of the spectator with that divine presence. Conversely, Herder *circa* 1770 embraces a confident humanism, in which the spectator enables god to manifest himself in (ideal) space and time, and in which god reciprocates by admitting the spectator into that ideal sphere. This is how Herder captures this dynamic: "we find ourselves, so to speak, embodied in the nature before us, or the nature in question is enlivened by our own soul" (S 81).[25]

Let us now look a little more closely at how this mutual recognition unfolds in the artwork's ideal spatiotemporality. Winckelmann's rapt focus on the latter made him suppress the *empirical* time and space of the *Liebhaber*'s perambulations. Conversely, in the name of an aesthetic reconciliation inclusive of the spectator's humanity, Herder sees the statue as *intrinsically* implicated in the temporal and spatial distension of the circumnavigating gaze. If the spectator moves, it is under the gentle prodding of perceptually unstable contours that invite him to move along with them. The existential time and space of perambulation does not glide indifferently over the statue, but—in a reciprocal relationship—both responds to and activates the ideal dimension of the statue.[26] Nevertheless, the involvement of the empirical in aesthetic experience comes finally to a grinding halt: *(a)* the parcelization of empirical temporality disappears once the spectator suddenly grasps *uno intuito* the statue's overall *Gestalt* ("now he has it!"); *(b)* the full intuitive

Winckelmann, sees sculptural animation as "truth in the mode of illusion", i.e. as a symbolic *presentation* of reality (*ibid*, 71–2; also, 76–83). But, as we have seen, for Winckelmann the imagined animation can also be an epiphanic experience of an original, an experience in which the contours of Apollo cease to be mere representations of a lost past, and are felt to acquire the time-bending force of a presentation (which is not to deny that the epiphany is always precarious, always open to a retrospective revision that may expose revelation as hysterical wish-fulfillment).

[25] Admittedly, this passage was written in 1778. But its presence in chapter four depends, I think, on the fact that Herder had not yet brought to bear his new historicist consciousness on the possibility of a mutual, aesthetic recognition between man and god. That would happen in chapter five.

[26] To appreciate the originality of this position, we can contrast it with Benvenuto Cellini's invitation to walk around a statue, implied by his famous remark that a statue (unlike a painting) has to be beautiful from eight vantage points. For Cellini, the eight-fold beauty of a statue is a given, our motion around does not touch its essence (Cellini 2003).

presence of that *Gestalt* signals that a 'view from nowhere' has supplanted the perspectival constraints of empirical space. It is this sudden bracketing of the empirical that evokes the feeling that one has been admitted onto a transcendent plane (as we will see, the later Herder will call into question the possibility of such an abrupt elision).

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To appreciate more fully the robust humanism of Herder's sculptural aesthetics *circa* 1770, it helps to consider how they are underpinned by a specific musical aesthetics. Winckelmann had already developed, as a metaphorical key to his visual theory, an *ad hoc* musical aesthetics, where the single, sustained melodic line of a homogeneous timbre is claimed to be more beautiful than the more complex dimensions of chords.[27] Herder develops further Winckelmann's analogy between sculpture and music. In the following remarks, recorded in 1770 (the same year in which he wrote the first three chapters of *Plastik*), he gives us a musical aesthetics that, inflected as it is with tactile values, works very well as a counterpoint to a philosophy of sculpture. He writes that

> Sound *Schall*—i.e. a plurality of simultaneous tones, as body, or its element, tone, as line, therefore strikes its string as the ear plays . . . That tone is agreeable which touches and flows through the nervous fibers homogeneously and thus harmoniously; obviously, there are thus two main varieties of agreeableness. Either a homogeneous tension is produced in the nerve and the fibers are at once braced more tightly, or the nerve is relaxed and the fibers gradually melt as if in gentle languor. The former is identical to the feeling that in the soul we call the sublime; the latter is the feeling of the beautiful, or pleasure. Behold: hence issues the main division in music between hard and soft sounds, tones, and keys; this demonstrates the analogy between the entire sensibility of body and soul, in the way that all inclinations and passions are revealed therein (FTG 244).

The key to this thumbnail tonal aesthetics is a tactility that—by its thematic mastery of its auditory objects—is a metaphor for Herder's pre-1778 robustly anthropocentric aesthetics. First, tones are said to 'touch' the auditory hairs lodged in the cochlea. The single tone, whose simplicity makes it analogous to a line, is more congenial to these fibers than a mass of tones, whose complexity gives it a quasi-corporeality. The more the tone is homogeneous, the more it can be compared

[27] Winckelmann's correlation of sculpture with music offered clear rhetorical payoffs. One of was the celebration of the visual economy of Classical sculpture over what, to Winckelmann's eyes, were the unacceptable excesses of Baroque sculpture. Another, though less obvious, point of this analogy was to place sculpture above painting. A canvas, by presenting us with a simultaneous ensemble of spatial relationships that are available to an instantaneous gaze, stands as a visual translation of a musical chord; but the Pygmalionic spectator, by extracting the statue's simple element of a line that deploys itself in time, gives a visual trope of an unmixed tone, (such as a flute's), which remains unmistakably itself, even as it goes up and down a scale in a single melodic line. On the role of music in Winckelmann's aesthetics, cf. Beschi 1993.

to a continuous line, whereas comparatively alloyed tones "might be expressed through irregular lines." (244). It should come as no surprise that the first are said to be agreeable, and the second disagreeable. It is true that Herder comments that 'hard tones,' (such as the deep texture of a bassoon as opposed to the sweet color of a violin), evoke a sublime feeling. But, this is not the somewhat disquieting and quantitative Burkean sublime, where the spectator's imagination is checked with the frisson of an insurmountable limit.

Rather, Herder's musical sublime has much in common with what Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) will call 'tensing beauty,' which is an austere line, whose effect on the self is positively bracing and unambiguously fortifying. (Schiller has a merely 'therapeutic' idea of the sublime. While the numinously-inflected romantic sublime undoes the spectator as much as it elevates him or her, Schiller sees sublime friction as unambiguously empowering—like being ruthlessly massaged on the back with a wiry brush: we squirm, but we leap from bed energized. That being said, in the first three sections of *Plastik* the fingertips of an art-lover are almost always compared to the melting tones of a beautiful line; it is the "flow and fullness of that delightful, gently-softened corporeality that knows nothing of surfaces, or of angles and corners." (S 40).

There is also another way in which music is the master metaphor of Herder's philosophy of sculpture, circa 1770. The eighteenth-century thinkers firmly stood by an idea of music as mimesis of human passion. This affected also the view of music's specific temporality: what gave unity to the various moments of a musical piece was above all the unity of a mood. To be sure, the listener had to respect a piece's temporality and let it deploy uninterrupted until its end. Nonetheless, once the piece was over, it was possible to get some sort of instantaneous glimpse of the musical whole, to the extent that one reflected on its all-permeating mood. As an example of a similar logic, consider this passage from chapter one, where the art lover is said to

> [S]hift from place to place: his eye becomes his hand and the ray of light his finger, or rather, his soul has a finger that is yet finer than his hand or the ray of light. With his soul he seeks to grasp the image that arose from the arm and soul of the artist. Now he has it! The illusion has worked; the sculpture lives and his soul feels that it lives. His soul speaks to it, not as if his soul sees, but as if it touches, as if it feels. A cold description of a statue no more offers us appropriate ideas than would a pictorial representation of music; better to leave it be and pass by (S 41).

The closing association between the experience of a statue and that of a musical piece is telling. In both cases, one has to experience first hand the temporality of the artwork. A thorough perambulation around the *Apollo Belvedere* is as crucial as listening to a violin sonata in its entirety. But in both cases, one reaches a point at which one can go beyond the preparatory, temporally-diluted process of comprehension, and engage the artwork as a totality. What allows for these eureka moments in which the viewer is 'done with' the temporality of the artwork? At least in part, it may be that, in both cases, the artwork is seen not as a temporal expression of divine infinity, but of the human soul.

3.4.2 Herder's Theocentric Aesthetics of Sculpture

As an example of a very different perspective, consider this passage written by Herder in 1778:

> With articulated forms, the work of the hand is never complete: it goes on feeling, so to speak, infinitely. This is true above all of the form of the human body, even when it appears on the smallest crucifix. The colossus is thus as familiar and natural to the sense of touch as the colored panel with its single viewpoint is foreign . . . Further, we should take into consideration the obscurity and night in which this sense feels, the gradually discovered unity and indeterminacy that such a form provides, the idea of power and plenitude, and the gradual and mighty will that resides in the structure as a whole: every great and strong god, every goddess of sublimity and awe, not merely can but must appear colossal to our imagination, as more than human in comparison to our own, dwarf-like stature. Sculpture occupies the middle ground between poetry and painting . . . The poet has no other limits than those dictated by the range of his imagination and the creative powers that dwell within him (S 95–5; italics mine).

Here, the consummation of the aesthetic experience is no longer a Hemsterhuisian imaginative fusion between the soul of the spectator and that of the statue. In an inversion of the previous Pygmalion logic, the statue responds to the viewer's prolonged perceptual engagement by holding him/her at an ever-increasing distance. It is true that sculpture's salient aesthetic property remains the same: *Unbezeichnung* (indeterminacy), may be understood as a regularity that refuses to be distilled into any mathematical formula. Still, this is no longer the salubrious lack of definability of Winckelmann's *Unbezeichnung*, which was like "purest water drawn from the source of a spring: the less taste it has, the healthier it is seen to be, because it is clear of all foreign particles." (HAA 196) Rather, watery clarity becomes "obscurity and night," as a token of an ultimate lack of rules of a divine intimating itself as i.e. the indeterminacy of a divine force that resists our attempts to comprehend it; we *feel as if* a "power . . . plenitude . . . mighty will" (S 95) is foiling our desire for perceptual closure.

One should not be misled into thinking that this breakdown occurs only in the case of *colossal* sculpture. Granted, the immediate context of Herder's discussion is the topic of the *kolossos*, of marbles whose objectively enormous size was required by the majesty of the deity they represented. But Herder immediately goes on to add that the decisive spatial dimension is not the immediately physical one: even the "smallest crucifix", when rendered with the ever-elusive line of beauty, can give us the feeling of a sublime perceptual crisis.

It is not clear, here, whether or not the empathetic spectator may reach a comprehensive apprehension of the *Gestalt*. On the one hand, the work of the metaphorical finger of the imagination "is never complete: it goes on, so to speak, infinitely;" the suggestion here is that the imagination never quite manages to synthesize into a whole the sequentially transfigured bits of contour. It is through this defeat of the synthetic imagination that spectator does seem to get an intimation of a "gradual and mighty will that resides *in the structure as a whole*". But even on this interpretation, the imagination registers a defeat. The *Gestalt* is not a self-

constituting space with which we, as its Pygmalionic enablers, may, liberatingly, identify. The overall image is no longer the full unity of form and the animating principle celebrated in *Sculpture* I-III; rather, since now the animating principle is explicitly recognized as divine ("every great god, every goddess of sublimity and awe"), there is a double dynamic in which the line appears both saturated and infinitely transcended by the divine. As a result, instead of the imagined emancipatory fusion of the observer's space with the statue's, we have an explicit opening up of a fissure. The overall divine *Gestalt* is a space that is crushingly incommensurable with the spatial imagination of the observer (it "must appear colossal to our imagination, more than human").

> Colossal figures are not foreign and unnatural to sculpture, but proper to it; they are its origin and its essence. A statue does not stand in light, it creates its own light; a statue is not placed in space, it creates its own space (S 93).

The colossal is *proper* to sculpture: quite possibly, this view of sculpture *eo ipso* reverberating with daimonic, troubling signs of the divine is itself a fruit of Herder's historical 'turn' in the mid 1770's. Clear evidence of this new sensibility can be found in his *Monument to Winckelmann* (1778), where he notices that the rigidly aligned step of the Egyptian statues of the Gods is an expression of respect: these divine beings did not so much walk, as glide (SW VIII, 50). The spectator's imagination was expected to translate this inorganically precise step into a spatial movement that was *not* his own. *Circa* 1778, Herder believed that this awe-inspiring transcendence was at work also in Greek sculpture, even more than Winckelmann might have been ready to admit.[28]

It is for this reason that, by 1788, Herder fittingly discards his earlier conception, where sculpture mediated between music and painting.[29] As a pendant to sculpture's sublime theophany, Herder now notes that "sculpture occupies the middle ground between poetry and painting" (S 95). The disappearance of music is quite consistent. As we have seen, the eighteenth century firmly stood by an idea of music as mimesis of human passion. This affected also the view of music's specific temporality. What gave unity to the various moments of a musical piece was above all the unity of a *mood*. To be sure, the listener had to respect the temporality of a piece and let it be deployed, without interruption, until its end. But once the piece was over, it was

[28] Consider the disdainful quiver on *Apollo Belvedere*'s lips and nostrils: for Winckelmann, it was for the serpent that Python Apollo had just slain (HAA 333). Even in the context of a panegyric of Winckelmann, Herder cannot resist correcting him on this point. Python is a "worm" unworthy of a god's attention (SW VIII, 25). It is much more likely that the scorn on his face is reserved for the impudent humans he had just laid low with pestilent arrows. The sculptor drew inspiration from the Apollo of Homer's *Iliad* (ibid, 26). Could we say that the Pygmalionic ideal of sculpture's happy intersection of theophany and full-blooded humanism was itself laid low by the ruthless perfection of Classical beauty?

[29] "All three arts [painting, music, sculpture] are related to one another as *surface, sound, and body*, or as *space, time, and force,* the three great media of all-embracing Creation itself" (S. 43–44). On the role of 'force' in Herder's aesthetics, cf.. Norton, R.E. (1990);

possible to get some sort of instantaneous glimpse of the musical whole, to the extent that one reflected on its all-permeating mood. In this second, theocentric aesthetics, plastic power is rooted in a new, intimidating spatiality that refuses to coalesce into a stable overall *Gestalt*.

As a key to this new idea of space, Herder closes the excerpt by placing sculpture between painting and poetry. In what sense is sculpture's spatiality amphibious? *Qua* antropomorphic representation, sculpture's space is akin to that of painting: it has to offer figures that lend themselves to perceptual grasp. *Qua* aesthetic object with its own ideal space, sculpture is like poetry. Why? Herder claims that the poet is the type of artist best suited to represent an infinite space, because he/she is not held to those standards of spatial consistency that are rightfully imposed on the painter.[30] We might add that poetry's power to move the reader resides also in the huge discrepancy between the small actual spatiality of a printed poetic line, and the imagined infinite space that it can evoke. In sum, poetry can provide a feeling for the infinite, but it can be gloriously disrespectful of the imagination's capacity to visualize that space—and in so doing, it thumbs its nose at an individual's finitude. Developing the analogy with poetry, Herder remarks that "The sculptor remains indifferent to the space in which this feeling is to be expressed and given shape. Let Jupiter be the height of one measure or six, as long as his majesty and dignity are grasped by the senses of the artist and by those who look upon him; this will give him his space and his limits."[31]

I hasten to add that Herder's previous, anthropocentric aesthetics rely on poetry as well. But the poetry at play in that model was *lyrical,* not *epic*. That is, the spectator's piecemeal 'activation' of the statue into a dynamic aesthetic object did not sacrifice the unity of the statue itself, because the different regions of the artworks were unified by the charged erotic energy of the 'haptic' gaze.[32] But it is clear that Herder's later theocentric aesthetics operate along the lines of religious poetry like Pindar's. If the spectator is to tap into the infinite spatiality of

[30]This is a point that Burke stressed well in advance of Lessing. See ESB, 55–6.

[31]*S* 95.

[32]If we want to see the idea of poetry that animates Herder's anthropocentric aesthetics, we should turn to his *First Grove*, where (essentially thinking of lyric) he views poetry as a hybrid of painting and music. Like painting, poetry "operates in space," because, and here Herder sticks to the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, its task is "to lead the object before the eyes of the imagination, and to deceive the latter with the spectacle." Herder knows that Lessing had claimed that (because of its sequential nature) poetry could only dismember physical beauty. Herder resolves the issue through a redescription of the specific nature of poetic beauty. He claims that "if the poet imbues physical objects with energy, he can also describe them—what more do we want?" It is true that all descriptive poetry dismembers the object, but good descriptive poetry can transfigure the parts, so that they appear as irradiations of a unitary force. As case in point, when Lessing criticizes Ariosto's enumeration of the beauties of his ravishing Alcina, he fails to see that the poet is not a drawing master who is asking his pupils to envision Alcina's parts as a visible whole; rather, Ariosto is showing us the temporal unity of the erotic charge that transmutes teeth into pearls, neck into snow, and breasts into waves. It is here that poetry operates like music: temporal dispersion is overcome by the unity of mood.

sculpture, he or she must transfigure it with a 'Pindaric' imagination, which asserts the transcendence of the numinous in the very act of celebrating it.[33]

* * *

I hasten to add that—shrugging off of the rich ambiguities of *Sculpture*, Chapter Five—the late Herder will return to the idea of a harmonious aesthetic overlap of divine and human. In his 1795 *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (*supra*, 19), and in his 1800 *Kalligone*, he will see Greek sculpture as *the* sensible presentation of a humanity which is simultaneously an image of God. Yet, despite Herder's change of heart, the disquieting beauty explored in *Plastik* V stands out on its own, as an important challenge to a robustly humanist theo-aesthetics, and as an unwitting anticipation of the crisis of the sculptural ideal in the late 1790s.[34]

3.5 Looking Beyond Herder

With Herder's *Sculpture*, the brief, but extraordinarily intense, heyday of sculptural aesthetics in Germany reached its zenith. In the years following, there would be a gradual shift toward a distinctively pictorial sensibility, whereas sculpture was increasingly perceived as a medium that could not speak to modernity. In his 1801 lectures, the influential Romantic literary critic August Schlegel (1767–1845) officially registers this historicist change of critical attitude, calling the modern age pictoresque, and, by contrast, designating the ancients as the 'plastic' (meaning 'sculptural') age.[35]

What is remarkable is that, in my view, this shift from one paradigm to the other was prepared by the very nature of the discourse on sculpture that Winckelmann had initiated. His discourse was remarkably unconcerned about the values of sculptural mass and gravity. Instead, Winckelmann focuses above all on the surface, and on how it seems to dissolve under the gaze of the spectator.[36]

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[33]This is how Bruno Snell distills the fundamental premise of Pindar's poetry: "The beauty and order of the world certainly do not depend upon song for their immortality, but they do depend on the wise singer to have their meaning made clear to men (Snell 79).

[34]In this respect, I partially disagree with Gunter Grimm, who claims that "Herder empathizes only with the group of Apollinean beauties; the vitalistic-Dyonisian view of a Wilhelm Heinse remains completely closed to him" (Grimm 357). It is true that Herder's imagination is fired up only by Apollinean beauty. But, at least in 1778, Herder was perfectly capable of detecting troubling Dyonisian resonances within the Apollinean.

[35]August Schlegel, p. 15.

[36]The classic statement of this view is by Barbara Maria Stafford, *Beauty of the Invisible: Winckelmann and the Aesthetics of Imperceptibility*, in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 43Bd., H. 1. (1980), pp. 65–78.

It is true that Herder emphasizes more than does Winckelmann the tactile aspect of sculpture, but not as a tool whereby mass can reveal itself by the resistance that it opposes to our fingertips; instead, it is used to bring out even more clearly the elusiveness of contour! And, though Herder defines sculpture as the objectification of the feeling of force, (against painting as the medium of space), it is a force that displays itself as surface movement, and not, again, as the sentiment of a ponderous mass..

However, such a sensitivity to mobile contours was later fruitfully transplanted onto the territory of the aesthetics of painting. It was fruitful, because it allowed painting's critique to free itself from the stranglehold of the *ut pictura poesis* principle, and to pay attention to how there was more to a painting than the temporality and space of the *fabula* (story)—there could be also the transfigured spatio-temporality of the painted signifier. In this respect, Herder himself got the ball rolling, with this 'kinetic' reading of the ostensibly-static medium of painting:

> It is light alone that gives painting unity, a vast, unutterable, miraculous unity that brings together everything new and diverse. A statue does not have its own light: it exists constantly in light and is designed for another, more comprehensive sense. By contrast, an enchanted ocean flows in every direction from a single point of light on a flat canvas, binding together every object into a new and unique creation [. . .] *Chiaroscuro*, as long as it is not made to depend on the fixity of sculpture, borrowing from what is dead, creates a magic panel of transformation, a sea of waves, stories, and figures, each of which dissolves into the other.[37]

It is true that what is being dealt with here is light, and values as opposed to the serpentine sculptural line; yet, the principle of the illusion of movement that was at the heart of the latter has been retained in the former. Under the transfiguring gaze of the spectator, a painted landscape (through aerial perspective and *chiaroscuro*) melts spatial difference into a quasi-hallucinatory unity. As we will see in Chapter Five, this principle has an important role in the pictorial writings of F. Schlegel, F. Schelling, and G.W.F. Hegel.

But before we engage the 'pictorial turn' of the late 1790s, we turn to the writings of Karl Philipp Moritz, Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder, and Friedrich Schelling. Their remarkable achievement consists in thinking through the *tragic* dimension of Winckelmann's aesthetics.

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[37] *S* 62.

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Chapter 4
Moritz, Wackenroder, Schelling: Tragic Theo–Aesthetics

4.1 Karl Philipp Moritz and Tragic Aesthetic Theodicy

A common historicist charge against German Pre-Romantic and Romantic thinkers is that their sacralization of figurative art was an imaginative flight from political, social, religious, and economic alienation (Schaeffer 11). By the extravagant invention of an infinitely dense yet unitary aesthetic object, the bourgeois self created a mirror in which one (so one believed) could grasp one's own supraempirical unity and achieve a notional healing of internal divisions. Admittedly, Herder himself is not above these suspicions. His insightful articulation of Winckelmann's tactile aesthetics is achieved at the cost of flattening the latter's thought, so that it becomes a facile theo-humanism. If Winckelmann's aesthetics attempted a risky marriage between theology and humanism, it also charted the intrinsic difficulties that threatened to explode that union. This paradox becomes clear in his *ekphrasis* of the *Medici Niobe*: with their (comparatively) stern linearity, works like the *Niobe* hinge precisely on obliterating that feeling of animation that is so crucial to the beautiful style (Fig. 4.1). In the sculptural group, Niobe and her daughters

> are represented in this indescribable fear, when feeling is numbed and stifled and the presence of death takes from the mind all capacity to think. The fable provides an image of this lifeless fear by the metamorphosis of Niobe into stone: for this reason, Aeschylus has Niobe appear silent in his tragedy. Such a state, in which feeling and thought cease, and which is akin to indifference, changes no aspect of shape and appearance, and the great artist could fashion here, as he did, the very highest beauty—for Niobe and her daughters are and remain the most exalted ideas of it (HAA 206).

From a formal standpoint, the beauty of Niobe lies in the comparatively schematic tracing of her face which, in the interest of not conceding too much to sensuous variety, looks very much like that of her daughters (HAA 235). This facial uniformity is rooted in the fact that only one concept of the highest beauty could be imagined (HAA 235). For his part, Winckelmann notices that through the stylistic devices of high beauty, "the master of Niobe ventured into the realm of incorporeal

F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5_4

Fig. 4.1 *Niobe with her youngest daughter* (Uffizi) (Source: Artres)

ideas and attained the secret of joining mortal agony with the highest beauty" (HAA 236). But—and this is something Friedrich Schelling will notice[1]—are we

[1]Essentially reiterating Schelling's discussion of *Niobe* in his Philosophy of Art, Alex Potts avers that in the *Niobe*, we see "the living sign obliterated and stilled by the unmediated presence of an immaterial idea" (Potts 108). As Potts suggests, Winckelmann's duality between the austere high style and the more sensuous beautiful points to an irresolvable tension within theo-humanism itself. The high style brings out the *Theo*-humanist dimension, the 'softer' beautiful style articulates Theo-*humanism*; that there are two styles suggests that the Idea (the divine) and the human (sensuousness) are not reconcilable: "In his [Winckelmann's] scheme Greek art, as an art that seeks to convey abstract ideas by way of 'beautiful' figurations of the human body, does so in two complementary modes, each of their very essence incomplete: a high mode that suggests the presence of an immaterial idea through a comparative absence of sensual refinement of form, and a beautiful mode, characterized by a fullness of sensuality and grace, which is more immediately attractive, but can only evoke such an idea at one remove. The fundamental duality thus opened

to deduce that the lifelessness of the figure is directly correlated to the exceptional proximity to the divine? In terms of our study, concerning the theology of visual beauty and its temporality, what does the severity of Niobe's face mean? It can signify a sudden arrest of temporality, the destructive intrusion of the divine on the sensuous level.

To be sure, Chap. 5 of Herder's *Plastik* briefly explored an aesthetics of reception in which the beautiful line opens disconcerting gaps between human and divine. However, that remained an isolated, if highly significative, exception within Herder's aesthetics. Writing in 1943, Ernst Busch praised Herder's optimistic fusion of divine and human, which overcame, in his view, a duality that plagued Winckelmann's aesthetic intuition (Busch 31).[2] But after Auschwitz, we have grown justifiably wary of any theory that seeks an onto-theologization of the human. With Peter Szondi, we have become sensitive to how Herder's theologization of nature could have ultimately pernicious political consequences (Szondi 54).[3]

In this chapter we will explore three authors who—each in his own way—takes to heart Winckelmann's lesson on the possibly tragic resonances of a visual beauty, where the human is problematized just as much as it is celebrated. These three authors are Karl Philipp Moritz, Wilhelm Friedrich Wackenroder, and Friedrich Schelling. We begin with Moritz, whose life (prematurely ended by tubercolosis at the age of 39) was one of suffering, physical no less than psychological. The

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up within classic Greek art throws into question the utopian identity between immaterial idea and beautiful bodily form, which the art theory of the period saw as epitomized by the antique or Greek ideal" (68).

[2]"There was no unitary foundation for the aesthetic premises on which Winckelmann's picture of the ancients rested. On the one hand, he was receptive to the old Aristotelian view that art imitates nature. It was from this angle that he investigated the nature-given milieu of the Greek artist, through whose sensibility arose the masterpieces of ancient art. On the other hand, Winckelmann's aesthetics pledged themselves to a doctrine of genius: the artwork is shaped according to the Idea in the mind of the artist. But this idea was not . . . drawn from the perception; rather, it stood in the human spirit as the divine idea of beauty become active. And so, insofar as the ancient art was at once the expression of God's Idea and imitation of nature, the overall picture was not unitary" (31).

[3]"The appeal to nature that we find in the new conception which Herder inaugurates, a nature in whose name one soon believes oneself to speak, seems to legitimate any sort of intransigence. This begins with the condemnation of French classicism as an art removed from nature, leads to Goethe's judgment of Kleist's poetry as a symptom of hypocondriacal illness, and culminates in the barbarism which persecutes as degenerate whatever does not adapt to its idea of health. Both art and artist are struck: the former is publicly burned at the stake, the latter (if he is lucky) prohibited from acceding to public services" (Szondi 54).

Bruno Snell (himself occupied with the task of rethinking the Greeks and Weimar classicism after Nazi Germany) claims that Herder shared Winckelmann's refusal to divinize human nature: "Winckelmann and Herder, however, had a different approach, for . . . . they are not primarily concerned with this man-centred *humanitas*; and even in the age of the so-call German idealism, the speculations upon man were still rooted in the belief in an absolute order transcending all men" (Snell 257). Snell's judgment may be true of Herder's writings in theology and the philosophy of history. But it is not borne out by Herder's aesthetic writings, where the divine is incorporated into 'man-centred *humanitas*'.

prodigious vastness of his oeuvre is a witness to both his intellectual brilliance and to his chronic, often desperate, poverty. Hence his output offers a mix (sometimes even within a single work) of great philosophical acumen with moments of hack-like triviality, and of shameless self-plagiarism (Boulby 118). We will dwell only on a scattering of his writings on aesthetics, picking out only those moments that allow us to continue our overall narrative: the development and deepening of Winckelmann's aesthetics of linear oscillation.

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> His tone was that of a teacher, simple and unadorned. Unfortunately, his external appearance and, even more, the unpleasant ways in which he was wont to carry his body partially ruined the impression that his words had made. "He preached beautifully and touchingly"—a worthy old man told me once—"but one had to avoid looking at him at the pulpit, lest one burst into involuntary laughter". (*Karl Friedrich Klischnig*, apropos *of his late friend Karl Philipp Moritz*; Klischnig 53).

> It is becoming clearer to me that the form of the human body is everything; and that as long as I live I shall have to contend with my nose; but also that I shall triumph. (*Letter of Karl Philipp Moritz to Goethe*, *7 June 1788*; quoted from Boulby 168).

These descriptions let the aesthetics of Karl Philipp Moritz (1754–1793) come into their own: unlike Herder, Moritz never averts his gaze from the possibly tragic character of aesthetic theo-humanism. Even more than Winckelmann, Moritz was open to the possibility that an encounter with the idealized shape of classical sculpture can trigger a frightening epiphany: the ontological nullity of individuality. To be sure, Moritz did not see such an experience of individual dissolution as an unmitigated tragedy. For one, his unbearably sad infancy and boyhood, which made him detest his own existence, may have imparted a yearning for some freedom from his own individuality. The harrowing details of that childhood experience make up the content of his autobiographical novel *Anton Reiser*. Furthermore, his Quietist upbringing—itself duly recorded in *Reiser*—exposed him to an idea of a redeeming mystical dissolution of the self in the experience of the divine. If the Enlightenment saw as the self as the infinitely worthy citadel of autonomy, Quietism saw it as a prison. Finally, Moritz's ungainly, sickly body gave him further reason to resent the his own embodied existence. Unlike Mayor Kovalyov (the main character in Gogol's satirical short story, *The Nose*), he would not have grieved over the (real or notional) loss of his own nose, whose trumpet-like shape contributed to his ludicrous appearance.

And yet, unlike Schopenhauer after him, Moritz is far from presenting the aesthetic escape from individual existence as an unalloyed boon. As his autobiographical novel *Anton Reiser* attests, if Moritz loathed his own individual existence, at moments he was deeply in love with it.[4] As we will see, one finds this same

[4]"The air was cold and damp, with a mixture of rain and snow falling. All his clothes were wet through. Suddenly there arose in him the feeling *that he could not escape from himself*. And with this idea he felt as though a mountain were weighing on him. He tried to struggle free by force, but it was as though *the burden if his existenc*e were crushing him. That he had to *get up with*

tension within his figurative aesthetics, which offer something like an oxymoronic *tragic salvation*: a rescue from individuality that amounts, simultaneously, to a dirge over its loss. This avoidance of nirvanic flight saves Moritz's aesthetics from the charge of facile escapism.

* * *

Moritz's most mature statement of his figurative aesthetics is his pamphlet *On the Figurative Imitation of the Beautiful* (*Über die Bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*), penned in Rome between 1787 and 1788. In this later work, Moritz formulates what we could call a 'Spinozist aesthetics', where the beautiful figurative artwork is taken to be the site where the cosmic whole makes itself visible to human beings. Moritz arrived at such a grand construction of the artwork through a series of stages. (Saine 125). In his 1785 open letter to Moses Mendelssohn, entitled *An Attempt at a Unification of All the Fine Arts and Sciences* (1785), Moritz strove to reverse the rationalist aesthetics of reception which took pleasure to be the aim of the artwork. Instead, he emphasized the intrinsic worth of the artwork itself (Boulby 165; Saine 127). But at this stage, he praised the inwardly self–contained nature of the artwork from a merely formalist standpoint, without saddling it with an additional metaphysical content. In other words, he does not yet see the artwork as a site of cosmic epiphany. In the later *The Metaphysical Line of Beauty*, the beautiful figurative artwork is no longer just a perfect form: now it is seen as an *analogon* of the great cosmic whole.[5] But in the *Figurative Imitation of the Beautiful*, the beautiful artwork becomes a mirror in which the absolute reflects its own image back to itself. In the first case, the artwork is an allegorical *re*presentation of the

himself, *go to bed with himself*, every single day, had to drag his detested self along at every step. His consciousness, with the feeling of being *contemptible* and *discarded*, was just as burdensome to him as his body with its feeling of wet and cold; and at that moment he would have taken off his body as willingly as his wet clothes, if a longed-for death had smiled at him from some corner" (AR, 184).

As a witness of Moritz's love for individual existence, consider this passage: "The solemn silence that prevailed in this meadow at mid-day; the occasional lofty oak-trees, which, standing alone, cast their shadows on the green of the meadow amid the sunshine, a small clump of bushes, within which one could sit concealed and listen to the waterfall splashing nearby, on the far bank of the river, the pleasant wood in which he had gone walking with [his friend Philip] Reiser in the early morning, herds of cattle grazing in the distance; and the town with its four towers, and the rampart around it, planted with trees, like a picture in a camera obscura. All this together gave him that wondrous sensation that you have whenever you become vividly conscious that at this moment you are in this place and nowhere else; that this is our actual world, though we often think of it as a mere ideal construction" (203).

[5]The dating of *On the Metaphysical Line of Beauty* is a vexed point for Moritz scholars. In Moritz, the prevalent *doxa* is that it was written after *On the Figurative Imitation of the Beautiful*, i.e. sometime after 1787. The minority opinion (which I find more persuasive) is that the *Line of Beauty* was penned earlier. In defense of the earlier dating, Thomas P. Saine claims that the genius-theory of the *Line of Beauty* is "incomparably more primitive" than the one at work in the *Figurative*

natural Whole, in the second (far more ambitiously) the beautiful artwork is Nature's *self-presentation*—an idea that would become a *topos* of Romantic thought:

> This great totality of things is actually the only, single whole; each individual whole within it is (because of the indivisible interconnection of [all] things) only *imagined*. But seen as whole, even this imagined [thing] must constitute itself in our representation as similar to that great whole—and according to the same eternal, stable rules through which this [great whole] sends us back from all sides to its mid-point [*Mittelpunkt*], and rests upon its own existence [*aufs einem eignen Dasein ruht*]. Each beautiful whole from the hand of the formative artist is therefore a miniaturized imprint of the highest beauty in the great whole of nature [*im Kleinen ein Abdruck des höchsten Schönheit im grossen Ganzen der Natur*]. This [great whole of nature] creates mediately, through the hand of the artist, what does not fit immediately in its grand plan (MW II, 969).

These lines show how the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn acted as an important intellectual irritant on Moritz's own thinking. In his dialogue *On Sentiments*, Mendelssohn warned—speaking through the persona of Theocles—against the possibility of an aesthetic comprehension of the universe. Since the beautiful can be only an object of sensible perception, it does not make sense to say that the universe—which infinitely exceeds our sensory powers—is a cosmos (Mendelssohn 15). Moritz circumvents this objection by relying on the figure of the artistic genius. Although the (limited) human eye can never offer to the imagination an instance of measureless beauty, the genius is above this biological stricture, because that cosmic pattern was innately imprinted in him (MW II, 972). This is why the genius can produce an artwork whose aesthetic completeness is a symbolical presentation of its archetype, the seamlessly unified universe. Mark Boulby has aptly summarized such an aesthetic experience as a "cosmoplastic intuition" (Boulby 138): the idea that the aesthetic object is a microcosm that symbolizes the macrocosmic whole. This idea implies that the artwork is constituted by an infinity of parts bound together by necessity. But so is the cosmos as Spinoza had conceived it. And indeed, Moritz's artwork is the window into a Spinozist totality. One reason for this emphasis is that Moritz developed the idea of cosmoplastic intuition *circa* 1787–88, the same time span in which he and his friend Goethe were discussing Spinoza through the stimulus of Herder's recently published treatise *Gott* (Bowlby 168).

As we will see, Moritz's aesthetics betray the will to take an unflinching look at human misery. Are not certain existential experiences constitutive for us, as human beings?—experiences, such as old age, illness, physical decay, injustice (private or political), and dramatic reversals of fortune? Moritz's body and soul had been seared by such phenomena. If aesthetics is to be an epiphany, as opposed to mere self-delusion, its redemptive possibilities should not simply dodge the problem of human finitude. Spinoza's impersonal God offered one way to embrace human finitude: by equating God with immanent natural necessity, beauty could no longer be found in an imaginative flight away from suffering; somehow, it had to be found *within*

Imitation (140). As I see it, what is decisive is that only in the *Figurative Imitation* does Moritz formulate an aesthetics that takes into account the problem of evil and suffering, an issue that had always been close to his heart. In this sense, this work represents a clear advance over (what I take to be) the previous work.

afflictive human experiences. And so, if beauty was the self-presentation of the divine, it could not be just untroubled harmony: it had somehow to incorporate, too, destruction and decay.

Moritz is all too aware that beauty and suffering seem to exist in mutual indifference; to a heartbroken man, even the gorgeous light of a spring afternoon can seem as Nature's frivolous lack of empathy. So had the joy of beautiful youths appear to a cripple such as Moritz. His first step is to argue that, appearances to the contrary, suffering imperfection and beauty are necessary parts of one and the same overarching narrative. The visible external world is Nature's attempt to mirror itself in a series of productions. But there is a structural problem: each of nature's productions involves the destruction of other natural elements (as Woody Allen quipped, nature is one big restaurant). Human history is an extension of the same natural process: humans assert their creative powers by exploiting other humans. From the perspective of Nature's drive to self-consciousness, this is a serious problem. Why? If Nature as such is a synthesis of formative (i.e. creative) and destructive powers, neither biology nor history reflect that synthesis. In both realms, nature divides itself into active vs passive beings (flowers vs minerals, tigers vs sheep, Greeks vs Trojans). Is there a realm where Nature finally manages to grasp itself as a unity of active and passive forces?

Moritz answer is: beauty. The beauty of the epic poem is one of the highest examples of this:

> As soon as Homer has an Achilles, his battles, his heroes, his great and noble characters also order themselves at once. All his [Homer's] great and noble representations wrench themselves, with some difficulty, from the whole of his thinking and (as it were) out of his *I*—and they tend toward themselves, to be self-subsistent and intrinsically complete outside him. He forgets for some time the obscure pleasure [of anticipating his completed work], and directs his attention only toward his Achilles. It is for Achilles' sake that the Greeks must fall, it is for Achilles' sake that the remaining heroes must remain in the dark, and Hector be illuminated with a light weaker than Achilles' own—so that through his fall, the hero can be raised even higher. The hero becomes at every moment more important through the events [*Begebenheiten*], and the events through the hero (MW II, 951).

In this passage, heavily indebted to Baumgarten's aesthetics (see note 8 below), Moritz regards the exceptionally tight unity of the aesthetic object as a revelatory window into Nature's concealed unity. One particularly harrowing aspect of wars is the unanswerable 'why?' that comes to our lips, when we are confronted with the loss of young lives. When the epic poet transfigures history, however, even the fate of the dead undergoes some redemption. Now, contrastive enhancement is no longer monodirectional. If the Greek and Trojan fallen enhance Achilles's heroism, the artwork's focal point, they are precisely therein aesthetically validated: "the hero becomes at every moment more important through the events, *and the events through the hero*". The fall of Hector at the hands of Achilles only increases his stature in the imagination of the reader. The poetic world of the *Iliad* is the overarching unity that justifies aesthetically both the triumphant activity of the hero, and the destruction of a constellation of minor characters. But this aesthetic *Welt in Kleinem* intimates also the *original* ontological unity of these three dimensions (unity-formation-destruction) at the macrocosmic level.

Nevertheless, the beauty of figurative art has an even greater epiphanic power. The beauty of epic poetry is in the *symbolic tending-toward-unity* of the elements of destruction and formation, not in the *symbolic presentation of their effective unity*.[6]

> In this point [i.e. in the beauty of figurative art] destruction and formation become one—because the highest beauty in the figurative arts grasps this sum of destructions inside itself *at once*, in such a way that each individual destruction is contained by the others (*faßt dieselbe Summe der Zerstörung*, *in einander gehüllt*, *auf einmal in sich*). [Conversely,] The most sublime poetry presents—in accordance with the measure of beauty—this sum of destructions outside one another before our eyes, in a terrifying sequence (*die erhabenste Dichtkunst*, *nach dem Maß des Schönen*, *auseinander gehüllt*, *in furchtbarer Folge uns vor Augen legt*).

The *Iliad* may display a reciprocal internal connection between active forces and destruction, but it still keeps the two numerically distinct. Achilles and Hector are two different characters. It also breaks destruction down into a sequence of events. From a traditionalist understanding of mimesis, this temporal succession is a poetic virtue, not a flaw. Even real wars present us with a "terrifying sequence" of deaths. But Moritz upends that tradition. The goal of mimesis is the activity of *natura naturans*, not its reified end result (*natura naturata*). In this respect, the artist is no longer an artisan that replicates the ordinary, but a priest that pierces through the inmost recesses of nature. And these recesses are beyond time-temporality has to do with the realm of visible appearance, but the primordial unity of nature is atemporal. From this ontological perspective, temporal sequence *as such* is a distortion of the essentially atemporal character of *natura naturans*. True, the temporality of epic narrative has an internal coherence that is absent in ordinary time: the sequence of slaughters at Troy makes sense in a way that would be impossible in a real-world battle. But again, the primordial *vis activa* has a supratemporal unity. This where beautiful sculpture has clearly an advantage over beautiful poetry. Moritz refers us to Winckelmann's quivering line of beauty, and sees it as an *atemporal* unity of construction (Moritz says 'formation') and destruction.

> Nothing in the realm of the visible is so capable of immediately infusing love and tenderness in us, as the purest relationships in the complete [i.e. beautiful] form (*Gestalt*) of the seer [i.e. the human body]. And so it appears that we must somehow recognize these relationships in us or outside us, each time we feel compelled to exhalt the beautiful. And where can also the countless contrasts that we perceive in the great and in the small; the

[6]It was Alexander Baumgarten who identified poetic beauty as a *tendential* unity of the parts: "a perfect poem is one in which the various parts tend to the [single] cognition of sense-representations" (ORATIO SENSITIVA PERFECTA est, cuius varia *tendunt* ad cognitionem repraesentationum sensitivarum, MP §6). Arguably, Moritz owes to Baumgarten also the idea of the analogy between the artwork and the universe. Baumgarten claims that creation is like a beautiful poem where the succession of the parts increases (instead of diluting) the thematic unity of the whole. Cf. MP § 71, which refers us to "the order with which things unfold in the world so that the glory of the Creator may be revealed. [this glory] is, if we can dare say it, the ultimate, supreme theme of that immense poem [i.e. of creation]". Moritz is clearly influenced by these claims, but—unlike Baumgarten—he takes the temporal saturatedness of figurative art to be the most concentrated instance of that 'single cognition'.

> burden of inequality, the conflict among equals; the theft of the assailant, and the envy of those who exclude; the torment of the oppressors, and the desire for vengeance of the oppressed; the outrage of the lowly, the fall of the exalted; and all the forces that fight against each other—how could they all lose themselves in a softer harmony, if not in the purest relations of the formative process (*Bildung*), which ultimately dissolves in itself all these contrasts, and unifies them? (MW II, 1000–1)

It is as if Nature were a writer whose botched first autobiography (history) failed to reveal the harmonious nature of the author; this failure is redeemed later by Nature's ghost-writing through the sculptor, whose beautiful statues not only finally bear out the soul of the Artist, but also retrospectively transfigure Nature's unfortunate *debut*: we finally realize that history is (so to speak) a 'slip of the tongue' of a raw talent that did not yet know how to say what it wanted to say. If we left it at this, however, Moritz would seem to tout aesthetics as anaesthetics, i.e. beauty as an imaginative flight from human finitude. But Moritz does not shy away from the crushing intimation that sculptural beauty delivers to the spectator:

> Is it not the incessant destruction of the individual, that whereby the genus maintains itself in eternal youth and beauty? And is it not youth and beauty itself, embodied by the purest imagination in a god, who kills men with a gentle blow? Who appears with bow and arrows, furious and frightening like a night terror, and lays low the Greeks in the camp with his pestilential arrow . . . .Through the appearance of individual beauty the cumulative destruction of the individual becomes visible in a shorter time; the same destruction that progresses almost unnoticeably through aging and illness, to preserve perennial youth and beauty in the genus (MW II, 988–90).

Granted, Moritz refers us here to Homer's Apollo. But he does so in the context of a disquisition concerning the beauty of ancient sculpture. So that Moritz's brief foray into literature may bear fruit, we could refer it to *Apollo Belvedere*, although Moritz does not explicitly do so himself in these pages. On this assumption, Moritz (unlike Winckelmann) would see the *Belvedere* as representing the deity in the act of killing scores of human beings. But the extraordinary claim, here, is that the *Apollo* 'kills' the viewer not through its implied Homeric gesture, but through its beauty. For one, this artwork gives a frightening temporal concentration to the experience of age-related physical decay. In ordinary experience, aging is a tolerable piecemeal process, of whose slow incremental unfolding the mirror informs us every morning. But vis-à-vis the youthful look of the god, we can no longer avail ourselves of the 'gradualist' eye that makes aging less painful—it's as if the ontological losses, painlessly scattered through thousands of days, were consolidated into one terrifying lump amount. The net result of encountering Apollo Belvedere through Moritz's eyes is not only a feeling of annihilation. Winckelmann had spoken of beauty as a sea that remains calm in spite of the turbulent waves that dance on its surface. By that image, he was poetically referring to the perceptual divergence of contours that seemed to magically resolve itself into unity. Such harmonious resolution of visual difference into unity is felt a cathartic resolution of the various lacerations that mark ordinary existence. Here beauty's perceptual unity also an epiphany of the cosmos as ultimately harmonious.

> And so the beautiful, in which destruction itself dissolves itself, gives us as it were an anticipatory feeling of that great harmony in which formation and destruction proceed together, hand in hand (MW II, 988–90).

The mutual divergence of bits of beautiful contour is redeemed by their coalescence: symbolically, this destruction dissolves itself. Here, the artwork gestures toward the originary unity of formation and destruction in the cosmic totality; a unity that can only be affectively divined and that is not visible. It is clear that such a formalist bliss can hinge only on the imaginative suppression of our own embodied humanity. The highly idealized beauty that brings this epiphany is also a ruthless elimination of whatever does not fit into a logic of seamless visual necessity. This should make us uncomfortable. Not only Moritz's trumpet nose is at issue, but even our own. No mortal nose has the concentrated perfection of the Apollo's (or so Moritz would have it). Fittingly, Moritz closes his own obligatory *ekphrasis* of the *Belvedere Apollo* with an imagined immolation of the body: the aesthetic subject becomes pure vision.

> The finest elevations become visible to the eye, and in whatever appeared uniform, an infinity multiplicity shows itself. Because now all this manifold constitutes only one complete totality, so one here sees *at once* (*auf einmal*) all the beauty there is to see, the concept of time vanishes, and all collapses in a moment that could last forever, *if we were purely contemplating beings* (MW II, 753, italics mine).

* * *

But, as I see it, this rather frightening aesthetic theodicy is not Moritz's last word on the issue. In the final pages of the *Figurative Imitation of the Beautiful*, Moritz suddenly shifts gears, and gestures in the direction of a less inhuman aesthetics. These awkwardly lyrical, notoriously obscure pages have always been treated with embarrassment by Moritz's readers, when not simply ignored (Saine 162; Boulby 176). This reception is unfortunate, because in this coda Moritz gestures toward an aesthetic theodicy that does not ask us to forget our humanity for the sake of cosmic beauty. If anything, this aesthetic 'anthropodicy' is a conscious step back from the Spinozist embrace of necessity, which Moritz had espoused for most of his essay. A key part of my case is that this final aesthetics is based on Moritz's encounter with the Vatican Laocoon. As I see it, ultimately this sculptural group holds the greatest grip on Moritz's imagination. Clues to this effect can be found in Moritz's records of his actual encounters with these statues, published in his A German's Italian Journeys (*Reisen eines Deutschen in Italien*). The difference between Moritz's ekphrasis of the *Apollo* (MW II, 753–4) and that of the *Laocoön* (711–2) is remarkable. The first one opens by rehashing the Winckelmannian topos of temporalized space, and closes with an uncharitable attack on Winckelmann himself, who is charged with dismembering the beauty of the Apollo with his detailed ekphrasis. Conversely, the two pages Moritz devotes to the *Laocoön* are a tour de force, as genuinely insightful as they are emotionally authentic. Let us now see how the Vatican *Laocoön* is very much in Moritz's mind as he brings to a close his essay on figurative beauty.

In the penultimate page of the *Figurative Imitation* we read:

> When the destruction of a creature like us is most directly effected by the beautiful relationships of the whole, and grounded in the noblest development of this creature; then, in the representation of his sufferings, we seem to become instantaneously (*auf einige Augenblicke*) privy to the continuous disintegration of our own being (MW II, 990).

Moritz is talking about a sculptural representation that is not simply antropomorphic (like the *Apollo*) but anthropic (a "creature like us"). This represented human body should also be an expression of sublime *pathos* and *ethos*: ("representations of his sufferings", "noblest development of this creature"). Spectatorial compassion is further heightened when the sculpture represents also cosmic necessity as the destroyer: "the destruction of a creature like us" should appear "most directly inflicted by the beautiful relationships of the whole". This claim needs unpacking: natural necessity *per se* is hardly beautiful; what Moritz means is that the artwork has the capacity to transfigure the horrific into a beautiful appearance.[7] The highest beauty is to be found in the transfiguration of the terrible: an appearance "is beautiful only in the measure in which it would have been pernicious in actuality" (MW II 986). And so, while Moritz anticipates Rilke's feeling that 'beauty is but the beginning of terror', he also asserts its converse: the terrible is that which awaits aesthetic transfiguration. But if—again—figurative beauty is directly proportional to its quota of transfigured terror, it makes sense that an artwork where impersonal cosmic destruction is personified ("most directly inflicted"), has a greater aesthetic impact than one that presents us with the mere effects of destruction. The *Laocoön* succeeds in such a personification, while works like the Medici *Niobe* do not: in the sculptural drama of the Trojan Priest

> the noble and cultured (*Edle und Gebildete*) succumbs to the power of the enormous, man succumbs to a worm . . . from this labyrinth there is no way out: the opposing nature destroys. For this reason, this artwork—already by the choice of its subject—is (and could only be) one of a kind. The *Niobe*-group does not come close to it: one sees there only the effect of destruction, but not destruction itself. (MW I, 711).

If we look at the *Niobe*, we can see her undoing, but we do not see the divine undoer; the statue needs an imaginative supplement. That is, we need to imagine the avenging gods shooting at her from above. Again, the Laocoön needs no such imaginative supplement, since we can see the supernatural destroyer (the snake). Now, in the *Apollo Belvedere*, the god's symbolical dismissal of individuality was made comparatively more palatable by the beautiful lines of the wrathful divine body. But in the *Laocoön* curvilinearity is the attribute of a gigantic snake: its all-encompassing nature makes it a fitting symbol of natural necessity, but without any prettifying apology; here the crushing power of nature is read in all of its unthinking stupidity. Man succumbs to worm. By contrast, father and sons have a noble, intelligent mien.

[7] Kant will later echo this sentiment: "Furies, diseases, devastations of war . . . can be described, or even presented in a painting, very beautifully" (CJ 180).

> The misery of the entire suffering humanity is concentrated here. The most intense physical suffering is united with the suffering of the soul . . . Here the greatest helplessness and impotent plight is united with the most vehement attempts to help. The pointless pushing and fighting-against makes visible in every muscle the complete lack of assistance from any direction. One sees in this group the old and the young surrounded by the all-powerful destruction. The father with the sons, clasped by an uncoiling monster into a miserable configuration. Instead of the snake in this group, one should try to imagine a dismembering tiger, a wounding arrow, a mortal dagger. Nothing comes even close to the horror of this fearful ensnaring, where the powerful monsters chain the entire body with dreadful curves (*Krummungen*) (MW I, 711).

In the *Laocoon*, Winckelmann had highlighted moments of *ethos* and of *pathos*. Noble character intimates the agonizing suffering it sublimely strives to master. Moritz follows suit, reading "the most intense physical suffering . . . united with the suffering of the soul" no less than "the noble and cultured" in the bodies of the Trojan priest and his sons. But there are important differences. Winckelmann saw the *Laocoön* as an *aristocratic* tragedy: the demise of an exceptionally good man, thereby implying that not all human suffering deserves our compassion—as evinced also by Winckelmann's silence about the dismayed children. Conversely, Moritz focuses on the suffering of the entire trio, which now becomes emblematic of "the misery of the entire suffering humanity", not that of the chosen few. And where Winckelmann praised Laocoön's sublimely restrained *self-concern*, Moritz sees the true emotional center of the sculpture in the children. On their faces and postures one reads compassion for the other:

> It is only through Laocoön's two children that the group becomes beautiful and tender: because the expression of sublime, more tender compassion (*Mitleid*) takes on a physical expression, thereby intensifying and ennobling the whole (MW I, 712).

The role of compassion (*Mitleid*) is key in these closing pages, whereas in Moritz's earlier essays, the Quietist concept of love (*Liebe*) had a pivotal role: self-forgetting in the ravished contemplation of a supernatural perfection. Admittedly, there remained something eminently self-interested in the apparently selfless feeling of *Liebe*: the will to escape imaginatively one's own existential despair. Before 1788–9, Moritz admitted this dimension, but did not see it as problematic. Consider these lines from *An Attempt at a Unification of All the Fine Arts and Sciences* (1785):

> Even the sweet astonishment, the pleasant forgetting of ourselves (*das angenehme Vergessen unsrer selbst*) in the contemplation of a beautiful artwork is a proof that our pleasure here is something subordinate, that we willingly let ourselves be determined by the beautiful alone (MW II, 945).

Here the pleasures of self-forgetfulness are still taken positively, as a sign of a noble letting go of the self for the sake of aesthetic perfection. But in his *Signature of Beauty* (1788), Moritz reverses his earlier position, claiming that *love* for the beautiful is also motivated by the temporary self-amnesia it regales us with:

> The enjoyment of beauty is based on love and tenderness (*Liebe und Zartlichkeit*), insofar as it always takes us out of ourselves, and makes it so that—in contemplating it—we forget about ourselves (1000).

To be sure, even in his mature pamphlet *On the Figurative Imitation*, love has a crucial role to play within aesthetic experience. But now Moritz no longer allows for an aesthetic pleasure that rests upon a short-circuiting of knowledge. If pleasure there must be, it must be tempered by the constant awareness of one's own finitude, which happens through the pivotal concept of compassion. *Mitleid*'s *pathei mathos* (learning through pain) neutralizes love's self-serving amnesia, endowing it with a poignant nobility

> So love completes our being. But the more sublime compassion (*das erhabnere Mitleid*) casts down its weeping gaze at destruction itself, because it grasps the unity of dying and becoming, destruction and formation (990).

It is one thing simply to forget the painful burden of individuality, it is another to destroy it in the purifying fire of compassion. Here Moritz clearly leans upon the Aristotelian *topos* of catharsis, while giving it an ontological depth absent in the aesthetics of the Stagirite. When we empathize with the tragic hero, we not only empathize with the eternal plight of the human condition. In the absence of a compassionate God, we become the place where the cosmos can grieve over its own unthinking, systematic destruction of the individual beings that populate it:

> Humanity cannot go higher than the point in which—by noble action or by the contemplation of the beautiful—it pushes the individual himself beyond his individuality. Humanity thus completes itself in the beautiful souls, which are capable of losing themselves in the genus, going beyond their limited 'I' in the interest of humanity (MW II, 986).

Ever the insightful psychologist, Moritz had once observed that "there is no misery on earth, which does not bring its own secret consolation and compensation to the sufferer" (MW I, 245). His own description of the aesthetic subject as a 'beautiful soul' would confirm that earlier intuition. If, as Schlegel put it, the *Schöne Seele* (beautiful soul) is at once actor and its own spectator, does not the aesthetic subject *enjoy* his or her own sublime grief over the fate of the tragic hero, a grief purportedly carried out only 'in the interest of humanity'?[8] Perhaps. But it is important to notice that Moritz never lets theatrical pleasure suppress the awareness of our own mortality. If anything, the thought of death is at the very heart of aesthetic experience:

> And if ever a feeble flicker of the beautiful is raised above destruction and formation, it can only be at the point where it smiles at us from the destruction that hovers over our own heads. (MW II 990–1).

These lines too, I feel, were prompted by Moritz's *Erlebnis* (experience) of the Vatican *Laocoön*. The two children gaze not only at the suffering head of their father, but also at the serpentine spires that the priest raises above their heads. Now, the sculptural group invites us to situate ourselves in the place of these young

[8]Friedrich Schlegel claimed that the beautiful soul "fundamentally also lives theatrically . . . She stands continually before the mirror of conscience and is busy washing and decorating (*putzen und schmucken*) her disposition. In her the most external measure of inwardness is reached"; quoted from Speight 109.

spectators. Once we do that, we too are gazing at the destruction hovering above our heads. Now, this does not necessarily entail a relapse in the Pietistic aesthetics of self-annihilation that underpinned Moritz's experience of the Belvedere Apollo. What do I mean? Remember how Moritz thought the compassionate children the most beautiful part of the group: to gaze *at* them is to gaze at our own noble compassion. Now, to gaze *with* them at the ominous spires above is to realize that we are (as Moritz puts it) being crushed like worms. This realization of one's utter finitude (looking *with* the children) does not cancel out the empathetic identification with a noble spectator (looking *at* the children)-rather, it rescues us from easy self-celebration. Montaigne famously claimed that no matter how high a throne is, we always sit upon it with our *dèrriere*. For Moritz, the highest (notional) throne we can occupy is the beautiful compassion of the noble soul ("humanity cannot go higher", MW II, 986). But, by making our own the dumb terror of the children, we realize that our all-too-human existence cannot be sublimated without residue into a safe aesthetics of god-like compassion.

4.2 Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder

> Letters are only there so that our eye can recognize their form. Teachings and facts are the object of our effort only as long as the eye of the spirit strives to grasp and recognize them. Once we have appropriated them, the activity of our spirit is finished, and we are then content to cast a lazy and fruitless glance at our treasure, whenever we feel so inclined. This is not the case with the work of supreme artists. They are not there so that our eye can see them, but so that with an open heart one can enter them, and live and breathe in them. A precious painting is not a textbook paragraph, which I can toss aside as a useless husk after having extracted with little effort the meaning of the words. Rather, in great artworks the pleasure continues always without interruption. We believe to penetrate in them ever more deeply, and they animate our senses always afresh, and we see in them no limit to the enjoyment of our soul. An eternally burning life-oil is in them, which never fades away from our eyes. I always impatiently move beyond the first glance—the surprise of the new . . . has always seemed to me a necessary evil of the first impression (from *How And In Which Way One Must Contemplate The Works of Great Artists, And How One Must Use Them For The Good Of One's Soul*).[9]

[9]Buchstaben sind nur dazu da, daß das Auge ihre Form erkenne; und Lehrsätze und Begebenheiten sind nur so lange ein Gegenstand unsrer Beschäftigung, als das Auge des Geistes daran arbeitet, sie zu fassen und zu erkennen; sobald sie unser eigen sind, ist die Thätigkeit unsers Geistes zu Ende, und wir weiden uns dann nur, so oft es uns behagt, an einem trägen und unfruchtbaren Überblick unsrer Schätze. Nicht also bey den Werken herrlicher Künstler. Sie sind nicht darum da, daß das Auge sie sehe; sondern darum, daß man mit entgegenkommendem Herzen in sie hineingehe, und in ihnen lebe und athme. Ein köstliches Gemählde ist nicht ein Paragraph eines Lehrbuchs, den ich, wenn ich mit kurzer Mühe die Bedeutung der Worte herausgenommen habe, als eine unnütze Hülse liegen lasse: vielmehr währt bey vortrefflichen Kunstwerken der Genuß immer, ohne Aufhören, fort. Wir glauben immer tiefer in sie einzudringen, und dennoch regen sie unsere Sinne immer von neuem auf und wir sehen keine Gränze ab, da unsre Seele sie erschöpft hätte. Es flammt in ihnen ein ewig brennendes Lebensöhl, welches nie vor unsern Augen verlischt. Mit Ungeduld fliege ich

This astonishing statement, penned *circa* 1794, is culled from Wackenroder's *Herzenergiessungen eines Kunstliebendes Klosterbruder* (Heart-Outpourings of an Art-Loving Monk), a book that marks a turning point in the history of figurative Theo-humanism.[10] Wackenroder was a shy, almost pathologically introverted young man who did not live past his twenty-fifth year. Moritz (whose Berlin lectures on fine art Wackenroder attended with his friend, the poet Ludwig Tieck) had a crucial influence on the thinking of young Wilhelm (Bussa 28). From Moritz, Wackenroder a inherited a love for Italian art (28). Even Wackenroder's view of the artwork clearly leans upon Moritz: artistic beauty is a microcosm that gives us a powerful, if obscure, presentment of the absolute (WGW I, 97). But while Moritz's absolute was Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature), Wackenroder's God is personal—and Nature and Art are "two wonderful languages" He benevolently addresses to us (97). In what sense, then, is Wackenroder a turning point in our story? Because he takes up again a theme that Moritz had pushed into the background: aesthetic experience as a quasi-friendship with the artwork. As we have seen, this is central theme in Winckelmann and Herder. Wackenroder's invitation to enter imaginatively into artworks with loving care and dedication would be unthinkable without Winckelmann's aesthetics of animation and friendship. When the author of the *Geschichte* claimed that one had to become familiar with the *Laocoön* as with a friend (*RI* 5), he was sounding a polemical note against the leisurely man of taste, who searches for artistic delicacies to judge. The artwork is not a visual *object* whose salient properties are available to an immediate apprehension, but a quasi-person whose being is disclosed only to those who take the time to become intimate with it. Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder had clearly internalized much of Winckelmann's lesson.[11] Nevertheless, his spectatorial *I* no longer sees sculpture as its privileged *Thou*. That role is now reserved for painting. What accounts for this shift?

In an important sense, Winckelmann himself. Arguably, the real hero of his 1755 *Gedanken* was not the Vatican *Laocoön*, but Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (Fig. 4.2). Ironically, Winckelmann had not even *seen* Hagesander's famous sculptural group in 1755, while he had ample opportunity to linger in front of Raphael's altarpiece,

über den ersten Anblick hinweg; denn die Überraschung des Neuen, welche manche nach immer abwechselnden Vergnügungen haschende Geister wohl zum Hauptverdienste der Kunst erklären wollen, hat mir von jeher ein nothwendiges Übel des ersten Anschauens geschienen. (WGW I, 107–8).

[10]The *Herzenergiessungen* published anonymously in Berlin, for the Unger press. As Federico Vercellone suggests, it can be considered a prefiguration of the Jena Circle's (the circle was composed of August and Wilhelm Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel, the poet Novalis, and Friedrich Schelling) *synpoetizieren*, i.e. poetizing with others (Vercellone, XIX). Although most of the anonymous essays were by Wackenroder himself, his friend Ludwig Tieck contributed some as well. The odd title was first suggested by Johann Friedrich Riechardt, to whom the spirit of the book evoked the character of the monk in Lessing's *Nathan* (Haym, 125).

[11]The "*Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke* . . . [are a work] that Wackenroder certainly studied in a profound way" (Mittner 123).

which had joined Dresden's royal collection earlier that year (Gazzola, 81–2). Equally striking is the fact that he seems to have hardly spent any time looking at the sculptures in the *Antikensammlung*, spending most of his time in the painting galleries (Marvin, 104). The fact remains that Winckelmann arrived in Dresden in 1754 thinking he would be a teacher of Greek, and he left Dresden for Rome in 1755, knowing that he would devote the rest of his life to the study of ancient figurative art (Leppmann, 103). Could it be that this transformation "of this Saul among the classicists into the St. Paul of art historians" (103) was catalyzed by the encounter with the *Sistine Madonna*? Could it be that Raphael's work gave Winckelmann crucial hints toward the construction of an *intimate* aesthetics of the *classical*? As Hegel perceptively noticed, the modern viewer cannot quite mirror herself in the self-absorbed god of Greek sculpture. Painting, however, can give body to the emotional life of the self. In Christian painting, the viewer can see a mirror held up to her own inwardness (LFA II, 797). And in Moritz's sculptural aesthetics, we have seen that a seemingly perfect beauty could have a potentially devastating impact upon the viewer. But the *Sistine Madonna* staged the transfiguration of classical beauty into something that was not sealed-off from the life of emotion. Winckelmann's *ekphrasis* of the *Sistine Madonna* explicitly links the two dimensions: the Juno-like Mary has the "same serenity (*Stille*) with which the ancients imbued the depictions of their deities. How awesome and noble (*groß und edel*) is her entire contour!" (RI 41); "Saint Barbara kneels in worshipful stillness (*in eine anbetende Stille ihrer Seelen*) . . . Barbara's reverence for the Madonna..is made more vivid and moving by the manner in which she presses her beautiful hands to her breast . . . a gesture of ecstasy" (41). Classical beauty making itself available to us on the one hand (Mary), human observers (Sistus and Barbara) engaging her in an intimate way -a reciprocal intimacy unthinkable in Moritz. But Wackenroder will resume Winckelmannian aesthetic intimacy-this time, however, on the terrain of painting.

* * *

> Art is a language of a completely different type than Nature; but art too has, through similarly obscure and secret ways, a wonderful power upon the human heart. It speaks through human figures, and avails itself of hieroglyphs, whose signs we apprehend and recognize from the exterior [appearance]. But it [art] fuses the spiritual and supersensible in such a touching and amazing way into visible shapes, however, that our entire being and all that is in us is shaken from the ground up. Some paintings from the passion of Christ, or from our holy Virgin, or from the history of saints have—I can venture to say—cleansed my feelings and injected more virtuous dispositions than systems of morality and spiritual consideration. The teachings of the wise set in motion only our brain, only half of ourselves; but the two wonderful languages [i.e. nature and art], whose force I here proclaim, move our senses as well as our spirit. Or rather they appear—I cannot express it in any other way—to fuse together all the parts of our being ([a being] incomprehensible to us) into a singular, new organ, which in this twofold way grasps and comprehends celestial wonders. One language, spoken by the Highest Himself from eternity to eternity, the perennially living, infinite nature, draws us immediately upward through the wide atmospheric expanses to the divinity itself. But art, through meaningful (*sinnreiche*) combinations of pigmented

> earth and some humidity, imitates the human figure in a small, limited space—striving after internal completeness. [In so doing], it discloses to us the treasures in the human breast, it directs our gaze into our inwardness, and shows us the invisible—I mean all that is noble, grand, and divine, in a human shape.[12]

As one might already suspect from their mystical tone, these lines are written by a religious figure, a monk. Or rather, Wackenroder writes his *Herzenergiessungen* hiding behind the mask of a *Klosterbruder*, i.e., literally, a cloister-monk. We will ample occasion to return on the ironic significance of this literary persona. For the moment let us dwell on the immediate content of these words. The first thing to do is to read them in light of the 'two wonderful languages' that are Nature and Art. In that section, as I noted, the monk spoke of a direct, sustained, intimate engagement of particular artworks as the heart of aesthetic experience. This implies that the grand celebration of figurative art that occurs in the 'two wonderful languages' is not the worship of *Kunst*, i.e. 'Art', as an abstract universal. Rather, it is a retrospective, after-the-fact meditation on the power of individual artworks. And indeed, the monk speaks of the grip that "some paintings from the passion of Christ, or from our holy Virgin, or from the history of saints" have on his affects. Second, the monk is arguing for an aesthetic experience that is both original and originary. Originary, because it has the power to cast in question the whole of one's existence: "our entire being and all that is in us is shaken from the ground up". Original, because the artwork is not a mere mouthpiece for ethics–far from it! 'Systems of morals' have impacted the soul of the monk than some of his most cherished paintings. This is because moral theory as such "sets in motion only half of ourselves", i.e. only the rational part. But the beautiful artwork shows itself to be prior (and irreducible to) morality

[12] "Die Kunst ist eine Sprache ganz anderer Art, als die Natur; aber auch ihr ist, durch ähnliche dunkle und geheime Wege, eine wunderbare Kraft auf das Herz des Menschen eigen. Sie redet durch Bilder der Menschen, und bedienet sich also einer Hieroglyphenschrift, deren Zeichen wir dem Äußern nach, kennen und verstehen. Aber sie schmelzt das Geistige und Unsinnliche, auf eine so rührende und bewundernswürdige Weise, in die sichtbaren Gestalten hinein, daß wiederum unser ganzes Wesen, und alles, was an uns ist, von Grund auf bewegt und erschüttert wird. Manche Gemählde aus der Leidensgeschichte Christi, oder von unsrer heiligen Jungfrau, oder aus der Geschichte der Heiligen, haben, ich darf es wohl sagen, mein Gemüth mehr gesäubert, und meinem inneren Sinne tugendseligere Gesinnungen eingeflößet, als Systeme der Moral und geistliche Betrachtungen. Die Lehren der Weisen setzen nur unser Gehirn, nur die eine Hälfte unseres Selbst, in Bewegung; aber die zwey wunderbaren Sprachen, deren Kraft ich hier verkündige, rühren unsre Sinne sowohl als unsern Geist; oder vielmehr scheinen dabey, (wie ich es nicht anders ausdrücken karm,) alle Theile unsers (uns unbegreiflichen) Wesens zu einem einzigen, neuen Organ zusammenzuschmelzen, welches die himmlischen Wunder, auf diesem zwiefachen Wege, faßt und begreift. Die eine der Sprachen, welche der Höchste selber von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit fortredet, die ewig lebendige, unendliche Natur, ziehet uns durch die weiten Räume der Lüfte unmittelbar zu der Gottheit hinauf. Die Kunst aber, die, durch sinnreiche Zusammensetzungen von gefärbter Erde und etwas Feuchtigkeit, die menschliche Gestalt in einem engen, begränzten Raume, nach innerer Vollendung strebend, nachahmt, (eine Art von Schöpfung, wie sie sterblichen Wesen hervorzubringen vergönnt ward,)—sie schließt uns die Schätze in der menschlichen Brust auf, richtet unsern Blick in unser Inneres, und zeigt uns das Unsichtbare, ich meyne alles was edel, groß und göttlich ist, in menschlicher Gestalt" (WGW I 98–9).

precisely because it is felt to restore our splintered faculties into "a singular, new organ". How does a painting that enthralls us with its beauty manage to do that? By fusing "spiritual and supersensible in such a touching and amazing way into visible shapes". Granted, left by itself, this claim about painting ("meaningful combinations of pigmented earth and some humidity") is grandiosely vacuous. What does it mean to say that figurative beauty fuses visible and invisible? Even here, Winckelmann's lesson is crucial. For the monk, a painter can inflect the human figure with an ecstatic temporality, one of plenitude–or so I shall argue.

In what follows, I will try to flesh out the monk's implied aesthetics by leaning upon other passages from Wackenroder's corpus. We will see that the ecstatic temporality at issue is one of a body taken over by, and happily surrendered to, religious ecstasy. Consider, for instance, the monk's *ekphrasis* of an unspecified *Holy Virgin with the Baby Jesus and the small St. John* (whose description seems to retrace the composition of Raphael's *Jardinière*, a copy of which is to be found in Dresden's *Gemäldegallerie*, a place well known to Wackenroder[13]):

> Why am I so overjoyed,/and chosen for the highest happiness,/that the earth can ever allow?/I lose confidence in this great happiness,/and do not know how to say thank you for this,/ not even with tears, nor with sheer joy./Only with a smile and with deep melancholy/can I rest upon the God-child./And my gaze cannot rise to heaven/and to the Good Father./Never will my eyes tire to look with deep joy in my heart at/this child who plays in my lap./Ah, and which strange, great things/which the innocent child does not suspect/shine from the clever blue eyes/and from all the silly little games!/Ah! I know not what to say./Yet it seems to me that I am no longer on this earth/When I think with great liveliness:/"I, I am the mother of this child".[14]

By its statuesque fixity, the body can signal an exceptional interruption of the usual manifold negotiations with the surrounding environment: Mary can just *stare* at her child. In such a manifest deferral of its activities, the body is a *hieroglyph*, i.e. a sensuous screen that hints at an incommensurable, invisible inwardness. In no small measure, this incommensurable interiority is hinted by the body's patent frustration of its will to language. The holy figure would *like* to articulate in language her

[13] So does Silvio Vietta suggest, WGW I, 329. But Richard Littlejohns has also correctly pointed out that these lines have many points of contact with Wackenroder's description of Cornelius van Cleve's *Pommersfelden Madonna*, in WGW II, 243–4 (Littlejohns 50).

[14] Warum bin ich doch so überselig,/Und zum allerhöchsten Glück erlesen,/Das die Erde jemals tragen mag?/Ich verzage bey dem großen Glücke,/Und ich weiß nicht Dank dafür zu sagen,/Nicht mit Thränen, nicht mit lauter Freude./Nur mit Lächeln und mit tiefer Wehmuth/Kann ich auf dem Götterkinde ruhen,/Und mein Blick vermag es nicht, zum Himmel,/Und zum güt'gen Vater aufzusteigen./ Nimmer werden meine Augen müde,/Dieses Kind, das mir im Schooße spielet,/Anzusehn mit tiefer Herzensfreude./Ach! und welche fremde, große Dinge,/Die das unschuldvolle Kind nicht ahndet,/ Leuchten aus den klugen blauen Augen,/Und aus all' den kleinen Gaukeleyen!/ Ach! ich weiß nicht was ich sagen soll!/Dünkt michs doch, ich sey nicht mehr auf dieser Erde,/Wenn ich in mir recht lebendig denke:/ Ich, ich bin die Mutter dieses Kindes. (WGW I, 82–3).

feelings, but it is equally clear that she cannot ("I do not know how to say thank you . . . I know not what to say").[15]

But it is no less true—and this is the *symbolical* (as opposed to the hieroglyphic) moment—that the saintly body *embraces* the radical crisis of agency that *happened* to it. Such embrace is evinced by its adoring gaze (itself an embodied act) on the object that commands it. Riveted as it is upon Jesus, Mary's gaze "cannot rise to heaven, and to the Good Father." It is the feeling that the beloved object perfects the present, so that—even if infinitely repeated—the 'now' could never give rise to boredom ("Never will my eyes tire to look . . . "). Here the body (through its riveted, artless posture) seems happily *fused* with the ineffable sphere of its affects, in the sense that it fulfills them. Here Mary's body is not a dispensable husk; her loving gaze (itself a somatic gesture) and her welcoming lap are *entelechies* of her feeling, not mere *windows* into it. Her love would be incomplete if it did not body itself forth and situate itself in the encircling frame of the eyes and lap.

Seen from this angle, Mary exemplifies that state which "fuse[s] together all the parts of our being . . . into a singular, new organ," an indifference of sense and spirit. The monk has tacitly taken to heart Winckelmann's aesthetics of *Unbezeichnung*, although here the uncertain wavering of the line of beauty has been replaced by the hesitation of a discursivity, of a saying that must remain liminally poised between silence and speech. But, just as in Winckelmann, this oscillation is due to the impossibility of translating ontological plenitude into determinate being.

If we were to leave it at this, however, the monk's pronouncements, celebrating as they do the infinite semantic saturation of religious images, would seem to betray a naïve, reactionary metaphysics of plenitude. Many interpreters have chosen precisely this path. For instance, Bengt Algot Sørensen says that the main idea of the *Herzenergiessungen* is "the canonization of art, and the correlated transposition of religious categories to art" (Sørensen, 204). Artists are called "priests," aesthetic experience is relabeled as "prayer," museums become "temples" (205). Such statements rely on an unfortunate suppression of the many-leveled ironic dimensions of Wackenroder's text. Most glaring is Sørensen's straightaway ascription of the monk's aesthetics to Wackenroder. But if we are to do justice to the poetical nature of the *Herzenergiessungen*, we must be open to the possibility that *how* the text says something (adoption of the mask of the *Klosterbruder*) can complicate or reshape *what* it says. This is not to deny that Wackenroder's adoption of a *nom de plume* had also a utilitarian reason: a fear of his authoritarian father, who had planned a law career for his son, and who would have resented his son's book (essentially

[15]This is how Ladislao Mittner memorably puts the point: "That for Wackenroder painting expresses the ineffable through facial contours results from the essay *Two Descriptions of Paintings* [which contains the above quoted *Holy Virgin with the baby Jesus and the infant St. John*, NDA] . . . Wackenroder puts it the mouth of his saints' very awkward poetic words, through which they manage to say only one thing: that they do not know how to say what they feel, that they cannot render with human words the ineffable flood of the heart" (Mittner 132).

a passionate love letter to Christian painting) as a frivolous, immoral statement (Schubert, 26; Behler, 222).[16]

But what if the *Klosterbruder*-mask had also the purpose of highlighting an *internal* complication of Wackenroder's aesthetics? Many pages of the *Herzenergiessungen* foreground a viscerally immediate engagement of painting, but the voice that articulates that experience is spatiotemporally dislocated. First, the monk is a "south German baroque monastic" (Schubert, 28), a figure which, from the perspective of the Berlin *Aufklärung* in which Wackenroder had been raised, had to seem like a living fossil. The deliberate baroque turgidness of some chapter-titles seems designed to reinforce the impression that we are listening to a voice from the past (41). Consider, for instance: "The Model of a creative and, moreover, highly learned artist, exemplified in the life of Leonardo da Vinci, renowned founder of the Florentine school." In the preface to the *Herzenergiessungen*, it is the monk himself who warns that the following pages "are not written in the tone of the contemporary world" (WGW I, 53), as if to underscore the untimeliness of a text that is out of tune with its own epoch (Bussa 60).[17]

Federico Vercellone has noticed that the slippage between the untimely, ancient voice of the monk and the present is not meant as a mere regressive retrieval of the past (Vercellone, *xi–ii*). Rather, it might suggest that for modernity the experience of plenitude seems only possible, paradoxically, when this appears to be irretrievably lost, eroded by the flux of time (*x*). This is a theme that Friedrich Schlegel had already sounded in his *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (1795–7). When the ancient ideal of beauty glimmers in modern poetry, it is shot through with absence: "if a faint hint of perfect beauty is found, it is experienced not so much in serene enjoyment as in unsatisfied longing. The more vigorously one strives after it, the more one

[16]Christoph Benjamin Wackenroder, an energetic, high-level state official, embodied that rigid Prussian Protestantism that valued a single-minded pursuit of its own ends—in 1769, he even published a treatise on morality and etiquette, *Betrachtungen über Geschäfte und Vergnügen* (Bussa 21). He gave his son Wilhelm a well-rounded education, in which literature played a central role; this was in accordance with the then nascent idea of a *klassische Bildung* (Vercellone xiii). He granted even music a central role in his son's *paideia*, and had him trained by one of the best teachers of the time: Kurt Friedrich Falsch (1736–1800), the director and founder of Berlin's *Singakademie* (Bussa 23). But Cristoph Wackenroder's appreciation for the arts was unflinchingly instrumental: they had to be pursued only for their recreational purposes, and not as ends in themselves; and so—as he declared to Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm's bosom friend—it was permissible for Wilhelm to study music, as long as he did not become a professional musician, which would have been utterly immoral! (Kahnt 21). He had decided that his son would become a jurist, and the naturally shy Wilhelm complied, studying law at the universities of Halle and Göttingen. Around 1797, Tieck made a last, unsuccessful attempt to persuade the father to let his son follow his own passion for the arts. At the end of the same year, the *Herzenergiessungen* were published anonymously in Berlin by the editor Unger. Wackenroder died of a 'nervous fever' a few months later, February 13 1798, precisely on his twenty-fifth birthday (Bussa 35).

[17]The preface to the *HE*, entitled "To The Reader Of These Pages", was penned by Ludwig Tieck, as the latter informs us in the Appendix of his own *Franz Sternbald Wanderungen*. For this reason most translations of the *HE* leave it out. But I agree with Roberta Bussa that here Tieck is a faithful mouthpiece of the ideas of his friend Wilhelm (Bussa 59).

distances oneself from the beautiful" (GP 18). Around the same time (1795–6), Friedrich Schiller gave an even more incisive articulation of the complementary nature of the *naïve* (the ancient, classical ideal of beauty) and the *sentimental* (the modern yearning for that ideal). To a modern reader, the beautiful simplicity of Homer oscillates between the modes of timeless presence and vanished past.

The same is true of Wackenroder. On the one hand, his imagination is very much exercised by classically beautiful madonnas, especially those of the "heavenly Raphael" (WGW I, 65). But—again—it is significant that he decides to voice his fascination for the classical through a monk, clearly a figure of the past. In this way, Wackenroder could be externalizing his own sentimental attitude vis-à-vis classical beauty, enabling a self-consciously aporetic extension of Winckelmann's thought to Christian painting. We should then think twice before taking the monk-mask as an attempt at a retheologization of the arts no less naïve than reactionary, as if modern disenchantment could be disposed of with a robustly sentimental (Empfindlich) aesthetics. To be sure, this is how many critics since Goethe have seen Wackenroder. Ever the staunch advocate of Greek plastic values, Goethe famously despised what he called Wackenroder's 'cloistermonking' (Klosterbrudisieren) i.e. an infatuation with the 'primitive', i.e. the angular, even disharmonious aesthetics of Christian painting; by ignoring Greek art's supreme unity of idea and sensuousness, Wackenroder showed himself to be a "sick young man" (kranken jungen Manne) with a pathological preference for 'innatural' disjunction (Bollacher 46).

* * *

It is time now to engage more closely Wackenroder's attitude vis-à-vis the ancient plastic ideal. On the one hand, his Raphael-worship clearly owes much to Winckelmann's reading of the *Sistine Madonna*, as an artwork where the theophanic potential of the beautiful line is at play in an explicitly Christian story. On the other hand, Wackenroder is much more aware than Winckelmann was about the opportunities and (no less important) the *aporiai* that such hybridization could open-up for aesthetic experience (Fig. 4.2).

One of the most fruitful sites for exploring that question is Wackenroder's description of the *Pommersfelden Madonna*, a work which was at the time erroneously ascribed to Raphael, but which current scholarship ascribes almost unanimously to Cornelius van Cleve (Fig. 4.3 1520–67).[18] The description is long, but well worth quoting in full:

[18]Cf. Vietta's remarks in WGW II, 605; Littlejohns 40–57. Wackenroder saw the painting in the Schönborn ducal collection in Pommersfelden, on August 21, 1793 (Lippuner 2). Auctioned off in Paris in 1867, the painting has been ever since in Munich's *Alte Pinakotek* (Littlejohns 53). Wackenroder penned the *Pommersfelden Madonna* description *circa* October 1793 (WGW II, 600), as an expansive recollection of his encounter with the painting a few months earlier. It was only in the summer of 1794, after an intense study of figurative art at Göttingen under the guidance of the leading art-historian Johann Dominicus Fiorillo (1748–1821), that Wackenroder started working on the *HE* manuscript (Bussa 33).

Fig. 4.2 *Sistine Madonna*, by Raffaello Sanzio (Dresden) (Source: Artres)

Raphael. Mary with infant Jesus. Mary sits left, with erect posture, and with the most blissful calm. In her visage is the supraterrestrial, general form, Greek ideal beauty; [this is] most happily united with the most expressive, attractive individuality. And the goddess [*sic*] oscillates between heaven and earth, and her iridescent earthly being allows the mortal to claim her for humanity. This fusion goes all the way down to the most delicate details, where the brush ridiculizes the stammering voice of the enchanted spectator. The forehead is straight, and somewhat dented above the nose; [it is] the mirror of heavenly serenity, united with reflection. The eyes are cast downwards, but without a rigid, fixed gaze. They are gentle and lovely like the blue of the sky, and they rest partly on the child, partly on her lap. The nose is straight, without grandeur, and a little long; below it has an element of individuality. But who can imitate the mouth in words, the closed, beautiful mouth that speaks deep feeling! Who [can represent in words] this visage full of gentle sublimity, full of blissful melancholy, and full of presentiment for the future years of the child. This is a presentiment that tenses ecstatically the mother-form, but in the way that a demi-goddess can be tensed. The mortal [mother] would succumb to feeling, all her traits would unravel, and a torrent of tears would tell her joy to the world with loud sobs. Not so the mother of god: she thinks more, where the other feels more; her higher spirit, which absorbs thought upon thought,

magically conjures upon her external form that heavenly repose, against whose boundaries the emotional tide strikes, without being able to break them; a calm that does not allow the facial muscles to unravel and melt into each other. Here is a singular example of the principle that Lessing applies to the suffering visage of Laocoön. this is [the point] where art shows perception the first step, and in this way the imagination of the astonished spectator feels her [i.e. art's] power all the more deeply. The contour of Mary's face is a beautiful oval, but not quite the purely aetereal one that shines on the head of a *Niobe* (WGW II, 243–4). The shiny, golden-brown hair flows down from both sides of the skull [*sic*!]; behind it is held together by a bonnet. The underdress gleams with red and yellow, the dress is of a beautiful blue. The left hand drops down in charming indolence; the index hangs straight, the three fingers behind are somewhat retracted. With the right [hand] the mother embraces the naked child, who plays on her lap, turns toward the mother, and with the left arm points at a vase that lies upon a table. I do not know how to praise adequately the speaking contour of all the limbs of this child; nature herself has led the hand of the painter. The face of the child is noble (*edel*), [but] just as much is the character compatible with the childlike; indeed, it promises a more than ordinary spirit, and lets itself be recognized as the husk of a creature of a higher plane. What proclaims to us more clearly that we are gazing at a child of the gods [*Götterkind*] are his sparkling eyes, which burn like the flashy Gemini, and which confer to the child an astonishing look of supplication. But whoever can see this picture of the gods [*Götterbild*] should tear my words to pieces, and melt in bliss when he sees it (WGW II, 243–4).[19]

[19]"*Raphael*. Maria mit dem Jesuskinde. Maria sitzt links, in grader Stellung, in der seligsten Ruhe. In ihrem Antlitz ist die überirdische, allgemeine Form, Griechischer Idealschönheit, mit sprechendster, / anziehender Individualität, aufs glücklichste vereinigt: u die Göttinn schwebt zwisehen Himmel u Erde, u ihr durchschimmerndes Gepräge des Irdischen Wesens an ihr, vergönnt dem Sterblichen, sie der Menschheit zueignen zu dürfen. Bis in die feinsten Züge geht diese Vereinigung, wo der Pinsel über die erlahmende Sprache des entzückten Anschauers spottet. Die Stirn ist grade, u über der Nase etwas gesenkt: der Spiegel himmlischer Heiterkeit, mit Nachdenken verknüpft. Die Augen sind heruntergeschlagen; aber ohne starren, gehefteten Blick: sie sind milde u lieblich wie das Blau des Himmels, u ruhen halb auf den Knaben, halb auf ihren Schoß. Die Nase ist grade, ohne Erhabenheit, u ein wenig lang; unten hat sie einen Zug der Individualität. Aber wer ahmt den Mund in Worten nach, den geschloßenen, schönen, Rührung sprechenden Mund! Wer das Ganze dieses Antlitzes voll milder Erhabenheit, voll seliger Wehmuth, u voll Ahndung der künftigen Jahre des Knaben, eine Ahndung, die die Form der Mutter zum Entzücken spannt, aber so, wie eine Halbgottheit, u eine weibliche, gespannt werden kann. Die Sterbliche erläge dem Gefühl, alle ihre Züge würden sich weit entfalten, u ein Gießbach v. Thränen würde ihr Glück der Welt mit lautem Schluchzen erzählen. Nicht so die Göttermutter: sie denkt mehr, wo jene mehr empfindet; ihr hoher Geist, der Gedanken auf Gedanken einsaugt, zaubert auf ihre äußere Form jene himmlische Ruhe, die das fluthende Gefühl an seine Dämme zwar anschlagen, aber sie nicht durchbrechen,—nicht alle Muskeln des Gesichts aufgelöst zerschmelzen läßt. Hier ist ein merkwürdiges Beyspiel des Grundsatzes, den Lessing auf Laokoons schmerzerfülltes Antlitz anwendet: hier ist's, wo die Kunst den Anfang, den ersten Schritt der Empfindung zeigt, u eben dadurch die Phantasie des Bewunderers ihre Kraft tiefer fühlen läßt.—Der Umriß des Mariengesichts ist ein schönes Oval, / aber nicht ganz das reine ätherische, mit welchem der Kopf einer Niobe prangt. Das Goldbraune, glänzende Haar, fließt von der Scheitel zu beyden Seiten herab; hinten wird es durch eine netzförmige Haube gehalten. Das Unterkleid ist schimmernd rothgelb; das Obergewand ist ein schönes Blau. Die linke Hand sinkt in reizender Nachläßigkeit herunter; der Zeigefinger hängt grade, die hintern Finger sind etwas eingezogen. Mit der Rechten urnfaßt die Mutter den nackten Knaben, der auf ihrem Schoße spielt, sich nach der Mutter umsieht, u mit dem linken Arm nach einer Vase zeigt, die auf einem Tische steht. Ich vermag es nicht, den sprechenden Umriß aller Glieder dieses Kindes, würdig zu erheben; die Natur selbst hat dem Künstler hier die Hand gefuhrt. Das Gesicht des Jesuskindes ist edel, so weit

What is unmistakable, of course, is that Wackenroder is looking at the painting through Winckelmannian eyes—above all, what comes to mind here is Winckelmann's enthusiastic description of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*. As we have seen, the author of the *Thought on the Imitation of Greek Art* saw in the *Sistine* Mary that "same serenity (*Stille*) with which the ancients imbued the depictions of their deities" (TI 41). He even recognized in the *Sistine* Mary that an aesthetics of *megalopsuchia* (magnanimity), for Winckelmann, was the hallmark of the best ancient sculpture: "How awesome and noble (*groß und edel*) is her entire contour!" (41).

But it is also clear that Wackenroder is at the same time moving beyond Winckelmann. For the latter, individual beauty was ultimately inferior to ideal beauty (HAA 198).[20] Conversely, Wackenroder is enthralled by the *Pommersfelden* Madonna because he sees in her a miraculous fusion of "the most expressive, happy individuality" with "supraterrestrial, general form, Greek ideal beauty."[21] For instance, while Mary's nose has the ideal straightness praised by Winckelmann (210), it has additional *idiosyncratic* beauties. It is "a little long." Furthermore, Winckelmann had ventured that at the flare of the nostrils, the ideal nose had to be half the width of the mouth (211); this proportionality is clearly not the case for the *Pommersfelden* Virgin, whose nose "has an element of individuality below," i.e., it appears somewhat pinched, although in a precious, lovable way. Finally, when Winckelmann claimed that the ideal Greek profile in young women consisted of a "gently concave line," he sought for that mild curvature in the nose (210). And so, when Wackenroder dwells on Mary's slightly sunken forehead right above the nose, he is arguably again deviating from Winckelmann's *doxa* and celebrating an individual beauty (Fig. 4.3).

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sich dieser Charakter nur immer mit dem kindlichen verträgt; ja, es verspricht einen mehr als gewöhnlichen Geist, u giebt sich als die Hülle eines Wesens höherer Regionen zu erkennen. / Was aber ruft uns deutlicher zu, daß wir ein Götterkind erblicken, als sein funkelndes Augenpaar, das einem blitzenden Zwillingsgestirne gleich brennt, u dem zarten Kinde einen staunenden Blick der Anbetung zuwendet.—Aber, zerreiße meine Worte, wer das Götterbild sehen kann; u zerschmälze in Wonne, wer es sieht".

[20] "the nature and build of the most beautiful bodies is rarely without fault, and they have forms or parts that can be found or imagined more perfectly in other bodies. Accordingly, this experience led these wise artists to proceed like a skilled gardener, who grafts different shoots of a noble species onto one stem. And as a bee gathers from many flowers, so their concept of beauty was not limited to the individual attributes of a single beauty—as are at times the conceptions of ancient and modern poets, and of most artists of the present day. Rather, these artists sought to combine beauty from many beautiful bodies" (HAA 198).

[21] Richard Littlejohns is right in claiming that these lines—sensitive to the ideal but unwilling to rank it above individuality—betray Wackenroder's liminal position between Winckelmann's classicism and romantic sentimentality (Littlejohns 45). He also aptly remarks that the *Pommersfelden* Madonna articulates that 'aesthetics of fusion' which Wackenroder (behind the *Klosterbruder*-mask) was to distill a few years later in the *HE* essay *Of Two Wonderful Languages and Their Secret Power*.

Fig. 4.3 *Madonna of Count Schönborn at Pommersfelden* by Albrecht Cristoph Reindel (Harvard, Fogg Museum) (etching of Cornelius Van Cleve's *Pommersfelden Madonna*)

Another revealing difference emerges in the praise Wackenroder lavishes on Mary's mouth, the "closed, beautiful mouth that speaks deep feeling (*Rührung sprechende Mund*)," thereby saliently connoting the mouth as an organ of *communicative* expression. The deliberate piling-up of paradoxes is significant: a mouth synaesthetically bound up with speech, and *a closed* mouth at that. And the lips are at once an embodiment of activity (speech) and of passivity (since what is expressed is the state of being affectively touched). Such tensile unities of a "beautiful mouth" exemplify, of course, Winckelmann's aesthetics of symbolic indifference. A body that concentrates in one instant what ordinary experience necessarily extends into a plurality of instants.

But herein lies an important step beyond Winckelmann. The latter's imagination is sparked above all by statues that embody a state of blissful self-forgetfulness, in which the very capacity for expression seems altogether dormant. This is true also of sculpted lips. His remarks about the beauty of pillowy lips betray a sensuous

desire that completely elides the mouth's function as an organ of expression.[22] The only place where beauty and expression could be reconciled was in the tragic mode. Herein Winckelmann shows himself a true child of the *Ancièns*. Consider his description of Laocoön's mouth: it is "full of sorrow, and the lowered bottom lip is heavy with it; in the upwardly drawn top lip, this sorrow is mixed with pain, which in a stirring of discontent, as at an undeserved and unworthy suffering, runs up to the nose, swelling it and manifesting itself in the dilated and upwardly drawn nostrils" (HAA 313). Here the fleshy lower lip is both sensuously desirable *and* an expression of an *ethos* that can *contain* its great grief; the *retroussè* upper-lip manifests noble indignation. But arguably grief and indignation here are not of the other-regarding sort. The great man is lamenting (in a noble *sotto voce*) his own tragic end, his gaze averted from the despairing sons that frame his hulking persona.

Conversely, Wackenroder saw Mary's lips as staging an ecstatic communicative breakdown. A hint to this effect is given by the narrator's own discursive impasse: "who can imitate the mouth in words!" Let us remember that a crucial facet of the monk's *Verschmelzung-ästhetik* was that the beautiful pictorial rendition of ecstatic silence could catalyze the same state in a properly attuned viewer. Here painting "fuse[s] together all the parts of our being . . . into a singular, new organ," a state of plenitude that the monk-spectator wants to share with the external world, but which he can only hint at. Now, on the assumption that the explanatory flow is reversible, the ecstatic interruption of *ekphrasis* is a response to a perceived representation of silent rapture. The narrator's protestations of mimetic inadequacy tell that Mary's lips remain sealed also because of the (unavoidable) frustration of *her desire to communicate* her feelings.

For Wackenroder the *Pommersfeldner* Virgin has a trait of *Stille*, the divine self-plenitude that *has no desire whatsoever to communicate itself*, a desire that would be incompatible with (and a severe disturbance of) that state of narcissistic self-absorption so typical of Greek gods. This visual logic is at work in the *Pommersfeldner* Madonna. If her mouth remains closed, it is because of her divine aura. To Wackenroder, she appears as a "goddess" (*Göttin*), and Greek gods (in sculpture, certainly not in epic!) have a defining imperturbability, a *Heiterkeit* that refuses to degrade into excitement. Mary's serene face contains idealized, relaxed features that body forth sovereign self-control vis-à-vis her sublimely intense, presentiment of the bittersweet future of her own infant ("the mortal mother . . . would tell her joy to the world with loud sobs. Not so the mother of God").

Nevertheless, Mary's silence exhibits the happy discursive *impotence* of rapture. And so, her unmoving lips oscillate between the grand solipsism of the *megalopsychos*, and the self-effacing *kenosis* of the religious mystic. Winckelmann had always kept the two separated. self-sufficiency was a hallmark of the beautiful god, lyrical stammering was the appropriate response of the enamoured viewer; this division

[22] "The lips should be sufficient to display enough beautiful ruddiness, and the lower lip should be fuller than the upper, which fullness at the same time produces the indented curvature on the chin below the lower lip, creating an appearance of variety" (HAA 211–2).

seemed motivated by a desire not to infect divine *Heiterkeit* with human finitude. Against this, Wackenroder's *Pommersfeldner* Madonna unites divine and human: she is a "demi-goddess" (*halbgöttin*).

* * *

Wackenroder's engagement of the *Pommersfeldner Madonna* is surely theohumanist. He construes this aesthetic object as a privileged site for the exploration of his own relationship to transcendence. But it would be wrong to take such a transcendent dimension as a fall into what Jacques Rancière calls eucharistic dream', i.e. the idea that the artwork has become identical with its transcendent referent. Nor does this transcendent dimension aim to ontotheologize the spectator. Several features militate against such a conclusion.

Wackenroder radicalizes, first, Winckelmann's aesthetics of oscillation (*schweben*). As we have seen, Winckelmann's imaginative transfiguration set in motion only the contours of the statue, but the overall *Gestalt* itself remained unmoved, surely a token of divine or heroical status. But note what Wackenroder says of Mary: "And the goddess [*sic*] oscillates (*schwebt*) between heaven and earth, and her iridescent earthly being allows the mortal to claim her for humanity." We have seen that Mary's nose and lips enthrall Wackenroder through their perceptual instability: are they ideal or individual? That undecidability problematizes Mary herself. She does not have the stable fusion of divine and human qualities, such as are possessed by (say) a Cnidian Aphrodite. One moment she appears reassuringly (if exaltedly) human, only to appear wholly other the next. And note Wackenroder's phrasing: when her individuality stands out, this "allows the mortal to claim her for humanity." The spectator does not claim her for himself, but for humanity as a whole. If there is soteriology at work, it is a kind that reminds us of Moritz, a beauty that asks us to dispense with our own individuality.

Rich ambiguity inflects also Wackenroder's reading of the tender mother-child drama. He simply revisits a Winckelmannian *topos* when he praises the baby Jesus for his mixture of childlike innocence with hints of preternatural grandeur.[23] But in the *Pommersfelden* child, Wackenroder could also recognize a more specific, touching form of that interpenetration. As Wackenroder duly notes, the child is pointing at a vase tucked away in the left background. As he does so, he gazes at his mother with eyes that have a sublime gleam *yet* seem also fervently to supplicate: "sparkling eyes, which burn like the flashy Gemini, and which confer to the child an astonishing look of supplication"—eyes beseeching mommy that the child be allowed to play with the vase. In the previously considered *HE ekphrasis* of an unspecified *Virgin with her Child*, Mary is made to say: "strange, great things/which the innocent child does not suspect/shine from the clever blue eyes/and from all the

[23]This is Winckelmann's description of the baby-Jesus held by the *Sistine Madonna*: "The child in her arms is a child elevated above ordinary children; in its face a divine radiance illuminates the innocence of childhood" (*TI* 41).

silly little games (*Gaukeleyen*)." What "strange, great things" hide behind the eyes engaged in the silly request to play with the vase? Perhaps the fact that vessels can be broken, but also rebuilt, a rather obvious trope for Jesus' future death and resurrection.

But in the silly little games between child and mother, Wackenroder could also engage in an unconscious exploration of his own attitude vis-à-vis the aesthetic. What if the vase stood for the arts that Wackenroder loved so intensely? We know that his father Christoph allowed them, as long as they did not go beyond a merely decorative role. The baby wants to engage that vase more directly, hold it, and perhaps embrace it as lovingly as his mother embraces him. And the sweet gaze of the mother told Wackenroder that the request would be granted—or at least heard with sympathetic affection. Vases are hollow, however, and—if broken—the shards of a vase can injure an incautious child. The tail end of the *HE* is taken up by the monk's recollection of the unhappy life of the musician Joseph Berglinger. Berglinger experienced a painful bifurcation between the purity of his art and the comparatively messy, philistine prose of everyday life. He alternated between moments of aesthetic delight and moments of deep guilt. His guilt concerned how music, in a self–referential way, could function as an irresponsible evasion of the practical world. As many have remarked, Berglingler is an *à la clef* character that maps onto Wackenroder's own anguished dilemma. He desired, intensely, to devote his life to music, while he suffered from the internalized voice of his rigorist father, who scathingly rejected this vocation as immoral. In short, the painting stages a reassuringly utopian projection, whereby the arts become a wholesome, central part of one's life. The painting intimates that such a project could go very wrong.

* * *

Let us for a moment go back to Winckelmann. I suggested earlier that in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, Winckelmann found the affective key that he needed, in order to engage a classical sculpture that had heretofore engaged only his head but not his heart. By framing a Juno-like Madonna with the two fervently adoring figures of Sixtus and Barbara, Raphael breached the ostensibly monadic, insular perfection of classical form. Seeming immiscibles are reconciled through the multi-leveled visual unity of the altarpiece. On the one hand, an airy pictorial matrix embeds the quartet of Madonna, Infant, and Saints. On the other hand, a tight connection obtains between the figures, by means of a pyramidal composition, the trademark of the High Renaissance. Through its overall visual coherence, the *Sistine Madonna* stages a meaningful connection between monadic form and feeling, thereby working as a *visual ekphrasis* of the classical inflected with the infinite affect of *Sehnsucht*.

The *Sistine Madonna* imagines a reconciliation between the boundlessness of the modern self and the perfect self-limitation of classic form. Nevertheless, this tension is also problematized. True, the Olympian Mary and child share the same pictorial space with the saints; as the apex of a visual triangle, they seem to offer closure (and thereby sense) to the human base constituted by the bodies of Sixtus and Barbara. Nevertheless, the altarpiece stages a *division* between classical *Heiterkeit* and

modern longing. The former is concentrated in the sublimely inexpressive gazes of the Virgin and Child, the latter in the enamoured gaze of Sixtu, and in the downcast eyes of Barbara, which by their self-concealment hint at a feeling beyond all telling. Through her idealized features (no less than the sculptural ponderousness of her limbs), Barbara offers herself as a synthesis of Idea and *Sehnsucht*. But, visibly scarred by the ravages of time, Sixtus' face is *ugly* from a classical standpoint. That we *do*, nevertheless, find it beautiful suggests that a different, more spiritual aesthetic idea is at work here: the invisible beauty of an ardent, self-effacing love. Set as they are within folds of receding flesh, Sixtus' sparkling eyes evoke the invisible beauty of a love that time cannot corrode. Winckelmann is sensitive to the wizened features of Sixtus, but—quite revealingly—less as a touching record of human finitude than as a vestige of a passionate youth: "Saint Sixtus, ... is a venerable old man whose features bear witness to his youth devoted to God" (TI 41). Here Sixtus's deep wrinkles become a diaphanous window into the imagined youthful body, saintly *yet* beautiful, the perfect counterpart of Barbara. For the sake of his own aesthetic holism, Winckelmann must see through the discontinuity of old skin, which does not lend itself to seamless perceptual unification: "in the aged, nature has begun to take apart her creation" as can be gleaned from "the visible connection between the parts" (HAA 197). As we have seen, it was the wrinkle-less unity of the adolescent body that could catalyze best a reverie of ontological plenitude.

Such a convenient elision is no longer possible for Wackenroder's *Klosterbruder*. He embraces a pictorial paradigm as an *immersive site*, which we imaginatively *enter*, which "are not there so that our eye can see them, but so that with an open heart one can enter them, and live and breathe in them" (WGW I, 107). Here the monk breaks with an ocular aesthetics that refuses to put the spectating body at risk. He breaks with a view of the picture plane that (like reinforced plexiglass at a zoo) shields us from that which it nevertheless allows us to see. Because of a thematically *somatic* engagement of the picture, the *Klosterbruder* is not only alive to aesthetic *aporiai* like the one presented by the *Sistine Madonna*, but also experiences their unsettling force:

> Human personalities are so infinitely manifold as the configuration of their faces. Do we not call the venerable, wrinkled, wise face of the old man just as beautiful as the unself-conscious, sensitive, enchanting face of the Virgin?
>
> But one could immediately reply: when the catch-word 'beauty' sounds in your ear, does not the latter image crop up from your inmost soul, the image of the Venus Urania [*sic*]?
>
> And here I admit that I do not know how to answer.
>
> Some may find much to ponder about my double portrait (*zwiefachen Bilde*) of that ... old man [i.e. Leonardo's] spirit, and of the one I use to call 'the divine' [i.e. Raphael] (WGW II, 81).[24]

[24] "Die Geister der Menschen sind eben so unendlich-mannigfaltig, als es ihre Gesichtsbildungen sind. Und nennen wir nicht das ehrwürdige, faltenreiche, weisheitsvolle Antlitz des Greises eben so wohl s c h ö n, als das unbefangene, Empfmdung- athmende, zauberhafte Gesicht der Jungfrau? Allein bey dieser bildlichen Vorstellung möchte mir jemand sagen: Wenn aber das Losungswort S c h ö n h e i t ertönt, drängt sich dir da nicht unwillkührlich aus innerer Seele das letztere Bild, das

Granted, the immediate context of this excerpt is not the *Sistine Madonna*, but the monk's self-conscious questioning of his own Raphael-worship, by way of a selective retelling of Vasari's Leonardo-narrative. Here the monk revisits Winckelmann's idea of figurative art as an indexical imprint of a specific *ethos*. Winckelmann had claimed that "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" (TI 39). So much does Wackenroder feel the pull of Winckelmann's thesis, that he prefaces the text of the *HE* with an idealized (and frankly, rather fulsome) portrait of the Urbinate, bearing the caption "*das göttliche Raphael*." But in his *Life of Leonardo da Vinci*, the monk (most likely, musing over a reproduction of the memorably furrowed, bearded face widely believed to be Leonardo's mature self-portrait) pits the venerable old face of the Florentine artist against the beauty of the '*gottliche Raphael*'. In the monk's frank, unabashedly aporetic response ("here I admit that I do not know what to answer"), we can sense an irreducible vacillation—between an aesthetic holism that breaks with temporality (youthful body as a trope for eternity) and one that refuses to do so (the poignant beauty of time-ravaged skin). But the same problem is posed, as we have seen, by the staged drama of the *Sistine Madonna*.

* * *

The troubling confrontation with two rival conceptions of the self, in the fictional subworld of the *Sistine Madonna*, came to a concentrated, tragic unity in a painting of Saint Sebastian:

> I still think ardently about an image of our holy Sebastian, most exquisitely painted: he stands there, bound to a tree, and an angel pulls an arrow from his chest, and another angel from heaven brings a crown of flowers for his head. I owe this painting very penetrating Christian impressions, and I cannot picture it in front of myself without tears coming into my eyes (WGW I, 99).[25]

Precious little, of course, is shown here, especially since the monk does not even bother to tell us which *specific* painting of Saint Sebastian moved him so powerfully (Fig. 4.4). Such reticence is the norm in the *HE*, as the monk expends little energy in the engagement of pictorial detail, and devotes most of his energy in describing the *effect* that the painting has upon his affect. Many readers of Wackenroder have noted this pattern, and have charged him with a naïve blindness to the specifically

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Bild der Venus Urania in deinem Busen hervor? Und hierauf weiß ich freylich nichts zu antworten. Wer bey meinem zwiefachen Bilde, wie ich, an den Geist des Mannes, den wir eben geschildert haben, und an den Geist desjenigen, den ich den Göttlichen zu nennen pflege, gedenkt, wird in dieser Gleichrlißrede vielleicht Stoff zum Nachsinnen finden".

[25] "Ich denke unter andern noch mit Inbrunst an ein über alles herrlich gemahltes Bild unsers heiligen Sebastian, wie er nackt an einen Baum gebunden steht, ein Engel ihm die pfeile aus der Brust zieht, und ein anderer Engel vom Himmel einen Blumenkranz für sein Haupt bringt. Diesem Gemählde verdanke ich sehr eindringliche und haftende christliche Gesinnungen, und ich kann mir jetzt kaum dasselbe lebhaft vorstellen, ohne daß mir die Thränen in die Augen kommen."

Fig. 4.4 *Saint Sebastian Succoured by Angels*, by Giulio Cesare Procaccini (Bruxelles) (Source: Antoine Motte)

pictorial nature of images (Kahnt 93; Wölfflin 208), or of vaporizing pictorial detail by the projection of subjective experience, effectively turning "the work into a chameleon" (Belting 2001, 53). But as I see it, this reticence is not evidence of an unschooled or lazy gaze—For one, Wackenroder devoted himself passionately to

the study of images. While in Göttingen, he attended the courses of the famous art-historian Dominic Fiorillo (1748–1821; cf. Lippuner 88). And, as Fiorillo himself tells us, "Wackenroder could not cram his paper with enough notes, and visited me at home after my lectures, to see etchings, books, and other beautiful works—and to take further notes" (quoted from Lippuner 207). So why does Wackenroder's monk speak far more of aesthetic feeling than aesthetic perception? Such a bias, I think, depends on Wackenroder's essentially polemical aims. A speech that seeks to challenge a well-entrenched practice must turn on a mono-dimensional, even obsessive insistence on what is (from its own perspective) unjustly repressed. For Wackenroder, contemporary discourses on art did not emphasize enough the intimate, first-personal side of aesthetic experience. Even here, unfortunately, the *ironic* dimension of the mask escapes the readers of Wackenroder, even an otherwise very sympathetic reader like Lionello Venturi. Ignoring that Wackenroder is not speaking *propria persona* in the *HE*, Venturi can charge him with confusing "mystical art . . . with mystical criticism (which is a self-contradiction)" (Venturi 144). But is it the very idea of *criticism* that Wackenroder wants to call into question? To the extent that it assumes a one-sided stance, where the spectator-examiner evaluates the artwork—instead of the artwork inviting the spectator to some profound self-questioning? To make that point, again, involved exploiting what—in itself—is a no less questionable attitude: the sentimental, soteriological aesthetics of the monk.

The monk's lapidary descriptions show also, by their inarticulateness, that artwork may be the place where we are compelled to imagine the inarticulable. In so doing, the *Klosterbruder* could also be consciously dramatizing the central aporia of any aesthetics that explores the artwork as a site of transcendent experience: how can one speak adequately about the ineffable?[26]

Let us go back to the image of Sebastian. Admittedly, even if the echo of the refectory can still be heard ("our holy Sebastian"), here the mask of the monk becomes rather diaphanous. One can hardly resist the suspicion that Wackenroder is speaking *propria persona*.[27] There are several ways in which his tormented self must have strongly identified with the body of Saint Sebastian. For one, just as the world antagonized Sebastian's love for an otherworldy God, the entire Prussian *Arbeit*-ethics (embodied in the stern authority of his father) was at loggerheads with Wilhelm's *Kunstliebe*. Nor should we ignore the fact that a young, strongly introverted gay man like Wackenroder might have identified with Sebastian, an established gay icon since the nineteenth century.[28] One need not be a trained Freudian to detect the obvious homoerotic resonances in the image of a beautiful male body passively offering itself to the invasion of arrows.

[26] On this aporia, cf. Vercellone xiv, n. 14.

[27] As Ladislao Mittner points out, the allusion to Sebastian does not fit completely in the context; it seems a sudden laceration of the monk-mask, a place where the author Wackenroder unguardedly lets out his own *Herzenergiessung* (Mittner 137).

[28] On Sebastian's place in the male homosexual imagination, see Kiely 119.

For our purposes, what matters is to articulate the horizon framing these various levels of spectatorial self-identification. That horizon fuses the Romantic, modern idea of the self, as the essentially boundless realm of feeling, with the ancient plastic notion of a self wholly at home in its own body. The pictorial representation of Saint Sebastian's martyrdom could embody that unity in a peculiarly tragic shape—or so I shall argue, by leaning upon Cesare Procaccini's *Saint Sebastian* (Bruxelles) (Fig. 4.4).

As a preliminary, let us turn to Ladislao Mittner's distillation of Ludwig Tieck's *The Dream* (WGW I, 247–52), a poetic apotheosis of his late friend Wackenroder. In this vision, Tieck and Wackenroder wander in a dark forest, and soon they fall upon an enchanted flower whose petals emanate light, sparks, and melodious sounds. Then, as a surprised Tieck turns toward his friend, he discovers that Wilhelm, drunk with ecstasy, offers his chest to a shower of golden arrows rained upon him by a crowd of cherubs. A voice reassures them: "Fear not, these arrows are only sounds." Then, Tieck suddenly awakes, only to discover that his friend is no more (Mittner, 136–7). The image of Wackenroder offering his breast to a shower of musical arrows not only recalls the image of Sebastian (137), but complicates it. In Sebastian, Wackenroder could see himself also as Cecilia, the saint who—spurning audible melody—consigned her soul to the piercing notes of inaudible, celestial harmonies (138). As a result, Sebastian mirrored back to Wackenroder his own willing (but troublesome) surrender to the force of music. Arrows evoke music's capacity to access immediately the remotest parts of the soul, but also the disruptive potential of this invasion. For Wackenroder, it was above all the symphony that epitomized the ambiguous force of music. Consider these lines, in which Wackenroder thinks of the symphony's overwhelming diversity of voices, its utter thematic freedom (since it is liberated from the purposes of accompanying words):

> In the dark silence [of the symphonic hall] . . . it is as if I envisioned in a dream all the various human passions. Without a precise shape, these passions—just as if to amuse themselves—celebrate together a strange dance, yes, even a demented pantomime; and then, similar to unknown, enigmatic deities of magic, bold and criminal, they abandon themselves to an unruly license. This crazy freedom, in which joy and pain, nature and artifice, innocence and violence, amusement and terror join in friendship, and often they all suddenly join hands; which art can represent this better than music, and can express these unknown places of the soul with deeper, more mysteriously efficacious meanings? Yes, our heart oscillates every moment between the same sounds—be it if our sonorous soul boldly sneers at all wordly vanities, and strives to nobly ascend to heaven; be it if it scorns heaven and the gods, and with noble pride it seeks a merely earthly happiness. And it is precisely this frivolous innocence, this frightening obscurity with its oracular ambiguity, that turns music into a divinity for human hearts. But why do I try, foolish me, to fuse words into sounds? It [the word] never matches what I feel. Come, ye sounds, come closer, and liberate me from this painful terrestrial effort toward words, let your thousandfold rays wrap me into your resplendent clouds, and lift me upwards, into the old embrace of the heaven that loves everything![29]

[29] "Dann, wenn ich in finsterer Stille noch lange horchend da sitze, dann ist mir, als hätt' ich ein Traumgesicht gehabt von allen mannigfaltigen menschlichen Affekten, wie sie, gestaltlos, zu eigner Lust, einen seltsamen, ja fast wahnsinnigen pantominischen Tanz zusammen feyern, wie sie mit einer furchtbaren Willkür, gleich den unbekannten, räthselhaften Zaubergöttinnen des

In these last lines, from the posthumous 1798 *Fantasies on Art* (*Phantasien über die KunstDPK*) Wackenroder invokes the genius of music, and asks for an (impossible) evaporation of his embodied existence into sound. This request is symptomatic of a decisive shift away from an earlier paradigm. As we have seen, in the *Herzenergiessungen* the monk saw painting as the most powerful art, in virtue of its capacity to infuse the (represented) body with the invisible. Now, no longer speaking through the monk-mask, Wackenroder consecrates himself (albeit not without important traces of reservation) to music, an art that may seem to dissolve the body into an orgiastic or demonic world of feeling.

But perhaps the *Fantasies* does not seek to overcome the standpoint of the *Herzenergiessungen*, but to *deepen problematically its historicity*. As we have seen, the monk's voice is a self-consciously precarious attempt to retrieve for the present the *ethos* embodied in pictorial masterpieces of the past. Now, the *Fantasies* breaks this attempt to set *Anciens et Modernes* in dialogue, through its enthusiasm for the declaredly *modern* genre of symphonic music: "the music of today, the newest of all the arts..in its current perfection. No other art can melt in such a profound way significant depth, sensuous energy, and dark, fantastic meaning."[30] This apothesis of the symphony is, again, also the foregrounding of a Romantic, modern idea of the self as the site of infinite affect. But the obverse of this celebration of music is the awareness of a lurking nihilism; of a sterile narcissism that turns—through music—the chaotic contents of the self into an aesthetic object (music as "unruly license", "frivolous innocence", "crazy freedom", "demented pantomime").

In sum: the *Herzenergiessungen* and the *Fantasies* presents a dialectic between a precarious retrieval of the past, on the one hand, and the dismissal of history, on the other hand. The retrieval of the past for the present is exhibited by the monk's nostalgic gaze at Renaissance paint. Conversely, Wackenroder's thoughts on symphony may suggest a musical deconstruction of linear history. After all, Wackenroder speaks of a music that haunts us with an uncanny *revenant*, a suprahis-

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Schicksals, frech und frevelhaft durch einander tanzen. Jene wahnsinnige Willkühr, womit in der Seele des Menschen Freude und Schmerz, Natur und Erzwungenheit, Unschuld und Wildheit, Scherz und Schauder sich befreudet und oft plötzlich die Hände bieten:—welche Kunst führt auf ihrer Bühne jene Seelenmysterien mit so dunkler, geheimnißreicher, ergreifender Bedeutsarnkeit auf?—Ja, jeden Augenblick schwankt unser Herz bey denselben Tönen, ob die tönende Seele kühn alle Eitelkeiten der Welt verachtet, und mit edlem Stolz zum Himmel hinaufs trebt, oder ob sie alle Himmel und Götter verachtet, und mit frechem Streben nur einer einzigen irdischen Seligkeit entgegendringt. Und eben diese frevelhafte Unschuld, diese furchtbare, orakelmäßig-zweydeutige Dunkelheit, macht die Tonkunst recht eigentlich zu einer Gottheit für menschliche Herzen. –Aber was streb' ich Thörichter, die Worte zu Tönen zu zerschmelzen? Es ist immer nicht, wie ich's fühle. Kommt ihr Töne, ziehet daher und errettet mich aus diesem schmerzlichen irrdischen Streben nach Worten, wickelt mich ein mit Euren tausendfachen Strahlen in Eure glänzende Wolken, und hebt mich hinauf in die alte Umarmung des allliebenden Himmels!" (WGW I, 222–3).

[30] "So hat sich das eigenthümliche Wesen der heutigen Musik, welche, in ihrer jetzigen Vollendung, die jüngste unter allen Künsten ist, gebildet. Keine andre vermag diese Eigenschaften der Tiefsinnigkeit, der sinnlichen Kraft, und der dunkeln, phantastischen Bedeutsamkeit, auf eine so räthselhafte Weise zu verschmelzen" (WGW I, 217).

torical primordial chaos. Wackenroder is also troubled by how the mercurial, volatile palette of a symphony can suggest a nihilistic deconstruction of human agency, which is-arguably-the stuff of which history is made.

As I see it, Saint Sebastian is the pictorial embodiment of a dialectical relationship between the Neoplatonizing pictorial paradigm at work in the *Herzenergiessungen* and the musical paradigm that governs the *Fantasies*. Renaissance painters gave their naked Sebastians the young beauty of Apollo: the idealized body as a site where the visible is infused with the invisible. This is especially so when this idealization is inflected *heroically*: here the beautiful body stands proudly erect, its defined muscles as virile marks of noble self-discipline—Mantegna's late Quattrocento *Saint Sebastian* (Louvre) is a perfect example of this. But by inflecting the idealization of the body *ecstatically*, the flow of *Verschmelzungsästhetik* is inverted: languid posture, soft skin, barely visible muscles suggest a corporeality *en route* to dissolving into pure feeling—as exemplified by Giovanni Baglione's fulsome, boneless *Saint Sebastian Healed by an Angel* (private collection). By evoking the incipient sublimation of the body into affect, painting trespasses into musical territory. The story of Wackenroder's intellectual parable dramatizes this shift. In *Fantasies* he apotheosizes music as *the* ineffable art, and denies discursive inexhaustibility to painting, in a stunning rejection of the untranslatability of the figurative viscerally asserted by the monk in the *Herzenergiessungen*.[31] But Procaccini's *Sebastian* (as is appropriate for a Mannerist work) occupies a liminal position between the classicizing heroic and baroquely ecstatic nude. Heroic nude, because muscular and standing (as opposed to Baglione's unathletic, limp Sebastian). Ecstatically nude, because the flamelike, *serpentinato* posture and the obligatory upward gaze suggest spiritual sublimation, though the upward spiral is counterbalanced by the strong, muscular legs (note the toes of the left foot, which seem almost to *grip* the earth they rest upon).

As is well known, from the Renaissance onwards Sebastian is no longer depicted as a middle-aged man covered in arrows like a porcupine (as the *Legenda Aurea* would have it), but he takes on the semblance of Apollo. As we have seen, Moritz's sculptural aesthetics made much of Apollo, the beautiful youth that slaugthers humans with his arrows, a trope for an aesthetics that stages a tragic immiscibility of flesh and ideal. But in Moritz Apollo remains conveniently immune to his own pestiferous arrows. If formal perfection is impossible for us, at least it can be the stable object of our mortal gaze. Qua saint, Sebastian is *like* Jesus (this mimetic relationship is the essence of sainthood). Many paintings of Sebastian suggest this connection, by evoking the flagellation of Christ. Sebastian embodies, however, also a *vulnerable* Apollo, one pierced by pestiferous arrows (in the Middle Ages, Sebastian was—together with Saint Roch—*the* saint to invoke against the plage; see Le Targat xii). Hans Belting famously declared that artistic beauty killed the

[31] "Was wollen sie, die zaghaften und zweifelnden Vernünftler, die jedes der hundert und hundert Tonstücke in Worten erklärt verlangen, und sich nicht darin finden können, daß nicht jedes *eine nennbare Bedeutung hat*, *wie ein Gemählde*?" (WGW I, 219; italics mine).

immediacy of the icon, as a result of which visual objects became tokens of human *bravura*, and no longer loci of divine presence (Belting 1994, 470–90). Could it be that, for Wackenroder, Sebastian as dying Christ/Apollo staged both the allure *and* the impossibility of imagining a Christian God in a classical shape?

4.3 Friedrich Schelling: Niobe vs Mary

4.3.1 Schelling's Figurative Aesthetics Circa 1800

In the late summer of 1798, Friedrich Schelling visited daily Dresden's *Gemäldegallerie* and its *Antikensammlung* in the company of August and Friedrich Schlegel.[32] In a letter to his parents (dated September 20, 1798), Schelling declares that the figurative *and* natural beauties of Dresden have made a deep impression upon him:

> I have seen all that is wonderful in Dresden. The gallery, where the divine paintings of Raphael and Correggio are preserved; the *Antikensammlung*, where the ancient world still survives in living statues. I have visited the whole broad and glorious region around Dresden: the countless fertile valleys, the rocky terrain that goes all the way to the Bohemian boundary. I have seen all this and still many other things; yet I have also worked so much, that I will arrive in Jena well-prepared [for my task].[33]

Ancient sculpted gods include Raphael and Correggio, on one side, and gently rolling Saxonian orchards and craggy fields, on the other. This letter shows how important the connection between art and nature was for Schelling (Zerbst, 60). It also adumbrates, by its reference to the intellectual labor that he carried during (and after) his intense artistic and naturalistic jaunts, that nature and art were in the process of being transfigured into a grand unitary narrative. And indeed, Schelling offered that story in his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* (henceforth, *STI*). The narrative responds to the self's constitutive feeling of a split between mind and world, and seeks to reveal a bridge across a seemingly unsurmountable dualism.

Already Fichte had spelled out the nature of this bifurcation in his 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. The self feels limited by an external nature that seems indifferent, when not directly opposed to its agency. Yet, the self has the unsuppressible feeling that it is an essentially free, self-determining creature. The only way to justify this feeling in the face of external necessity was to postulate some sort of originary unity between nature and freedom. As is well-known, Kant had done precisely that in his 1791 *Critique of Judgment*. Kant took the feeling of spontaneous harmony between sense and understanding, which defines aesthetic experience, as a sign of

[32] Schelling was about to assume his post in Jena, an extraordinary professorship which he had attained through Goethe's offices. In the interim, he stayed in Dresden from August 18th to October 1st. There, in the company of August and Friedrich Schlegel, and of his future wife Caroline, he would visit daily Dresden's *Gemäldegallerie* (Zerbst 64).

[33] Quoted from Zerbst 59.

a problematic, merely postulated unity of nature and freedom. Inspired by Kant, Schelling's *STI* not only *seeks* a ground of pre-established harmony between world and mind; it also claims to have *found* this point of indifference; unlike Kant, who saw this ground as a merely regulative idea. Nonetheless, the 1800 Schelling does not yet relapse into a straightforward classical rationalism. He grants the philosopher only a divinatory certainty of this identity, not knowledge thereof. In order for that certainty to turn into knowledge, the subjective construct of the philosopher needed an objective, i.e. intersubjectively accessible, sensuous presentation (in this respect, Schelling is still a Kantian, in that he stands by the claim that knowledge *eo ipso* needs an element of empirical).[34]

The only site where such a sensuous objectification is possible is the artwork, which allows an exclusive peek into the unitary ground of our empirically bifurcated self:

> The view of nature that the philosopher constitutes for himself is artificial, but for art it is a natural and original one. What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself; for through the world of sense there glimmers, as if through words the meaning, as if through dissolving mists the land of fantasy, of which we are in search. Each splendid painting owes, as it were, its genesis to a removal of the invisible barrier dividing the real from the ideal world, and is no more than the gateway, through which come forth completely the shapes and scenes of that world of fantasy which gleams but imperfectly through the real (STI 232).[35]

Paul Klee declared that the role of art is not to replicate the visible, but to make visible (*sichtbar machen*) what otherwise remains invisible. Schelling anticipates

[34]This is how Schelling puts the point in *STI*: "The self is nothing else but a producing that becomes an object to itself, that is, an intellectual intuition. But now this latter is itself an absolutely free action, and so cannot be demonstrated, but only demanded; so if the self is itself this intuition merely, it too, as principle of philosophy, is itself merely something that is postulated" (*STI* 28). In Manfred Frank's enlightening explanation: in *STI*, "intellectual intuition . . . is the highest *certainty* our spirit is capable of, but it is not yet *knowledge*. In knowledge I relate to an object or state of affairs in the world via a concept. Conversely, in intellectual intuition I do not relate to an object, because in intellectual intuition the subject of knowledge is at once and immediately—i.e. without any conceptual mediation—its own object; differently put, here there is not that minimal distance between subject and object which is constitutive for knowledge. For this reason, what intellectual intuition secures cannot be knowledge; it is the anticipation of a knowledge to be attained at some future point, and initially only a desideratum" (Frank 1989, 150–1).

[35]Die Ansicht, welche der Philosoph von der Natur künstlich sich macht, ist für die Kunst die ursprüngliche und natürliche. Was wir Natur nennen, ist ein Gedicht, das in geheimer wunderbarer Schrift verschlossen liegt. Doch könnte das Räthsel sich enthüllen, würden wir die Odyssee des Geistes darin erkennen, der wunderbar getäuscht, sich selber suchend, sich selber flieht; denn durch die Sinnenwelt blickt nur wie durch Worte der Sinn, nur wie durch halbdurchsichtigen Nebel das Land der Phantasie, nach dem wir trachten. Jedes herrliche Gemälde entsteht dadurch gleichsam, daß die unsichtbare Scheidewand aufgehoben wird, welche die wirkliche und idealische Welt trennt, und ist nur die Oeffnung, durch welche jene Gestalten und Gegenden der Phantasiewelt, welche durch die wirkliche nur unvollkommen hindurchschimmert, völlig hervortreten (SW I, 3, 628).

precisely this idea when he says that a beautiful painting stems from "a removal of the invisible barrier separating the real from the ideal world." By "real," Schelling means the external, sensible world, whereas "ideal" means the sphere of the self's free agency. How can "each splendid painting" show us that—ordinary appearances to the contrary—the two spheres are essentially united? After all, it is the *tension* (not the unity!) between the two that drives forth the process of artistic creation: "Every aesthetic production proceeds from an intrinsically infinite separation of the two activities, which in every free act of producing are divided" (*STI* 225). The artist feels an imperious urge to create, an urge whose ground and specific nature remains unaccessible to him. It is this powerful, *unconscious* drive that impels him to a sustained *conscious* deployment of his craft. But these two dimensions are "infinitely separated": the artist does not *see in* his artistic gestures the unconscious, the submerged tip of the iceberg that is nevertheless incessantly prodding him to create.

Yet, although always separated in the *process* of artistic creation, the two dimensions come to unity in the finished *product*. Both as an overall *Gestalt* and at the minute level of detail, "each splendid painting" is clearly the result of conscious artistry and yet—in one stroke—it embodies a semantic infinity that (apparently overdetermining the scope of conscious thought) seems to have surged forth from the unconscious. In Schelling's own words:

> every true work of art . . . is capable of being expounded *ad infinitum*, as though it contained an infinity of purposes, while yet one is never able to say whether this infinity has lain within the artist himself or resides only in the work of art (STI 225).

It is important to notice, however, that although the artwork embodies a unity of conscious and unconscious, it is the unconscious that predominates. A telltale sign of this is the artist's own surprise as he looks upon his own finished product: he recognizes the canvas as his own, yet he also realizes that he has "depict[ed] things which he does not fully understand himself, and whose meaning is infinite" (223).[36] The unconscious becomes visible on canvas, but as something that (paradoxically) exceeds visibility—as Manfred Frank remarks, lines like these clearly anticipate Heidegger's dialectic aesthetics of 'uncovering' (*Enthüllung*) and 'hiding' (*Verbergung*) (Frank 1995, 169).

Let us note that the *STI* chooses painting as the paradigmatic illustration of artistic epiphany. In this respect, Schelling places himself in the constellation of aesthetic theo-humanism, where the *silence* of painting or sculpture became central, as a token that the artwork was genuinely coming to grips with the unspeakable.

[36]Titian's *Rape of Europa* is a good example of how the image seems to contain more than could have possibly been put there by conscious brushwork. Raw *eros* seeps from an infinity of particulars: the wide-pupiled, bloodshot eyes of the bull; the cold predatory indifference to the fate of the victim in the vitreous eyes of the fish; the tender exposed pink flesh of the right foot offering itself; the turbid darkness of the waters; the list could go on indefinitely, in that semantic inexhaustibility which makes us ask whether all is to be chalked up to Titian's deliberate, lucid gestures.

Admittedly, decades later Schelling would distill his earlier argument in different terms, claiming that in the *STI* poetry is prior vis-à-vis figurative art because of its comparative incorporeality, a sign of a Spirit that had the power to work upon a stuff consubstantial with Itself.[37] This essentially Hegelian inversion, turning on an implicit de-evaluation of sense vis-à-vis thinking, clearly goes against the grain of *STI*, and stems from the fact that the later Schelling no longer granted aesthetics the epistemic powers he ascribed to it earlier (Frank 1995, 166).

Nevertheless, *circa* 1800, figurative art was central in Schelling's aesthetics. Why? We have seen that his dominant philosophical concern was the reconciliation of the conflict between mind and world. Writing many years later, Hegel pointed out that painting was uniquely suited to reconcile inner and outer, in virtue of its retention-cum-idealization of space.[38] Did the long late-summer days in the *Gemäldegallerie* drive home to Schelling too that painting is signally well-placed to embody an epiphanic overlap of corporeality and mind?

Equally salient is the sculptural element of the *STI*-aesthetics: the text's specific construction of the creation and reception of the artwork helps itself freely to *topoi* from Winckelmann:

> [aesthetic] intuition . . . loves to sink itself in what it contemplates, and finds no resting place short of the infinite . . . Every aesthetic production proceeds from the feeling of an infinite contradiction, and hence also the feeling which accompanies completion of the art-product must be one of an infinite fulfillment (*Befriedigung*); and this latter, in turn, must also pass over into the work of art itself. Hence the outward expression of the work of art is one of calm and silent grandeur (*ruhe*, *und stille Grosse*) even where the aim is to give expression to the utmost intensity of pain or joy . . . Every aesthetic production proceeds from an intrinsically infinite separation of the two activities, which in every free act of producing are divided. But now since these two activities are to be depicted in the product as united, what this latter presents is an infinite finitely displayed. But the infinite finitely displayed is beauty (STI 225).[39]

[37] "As that which brings forth, it [God] will now manifest itself in man by a bringing forth, by real production; it will show itself (1) as that which has the power over material, over matter to overcome it and compel it to be the expression of spirit, indeed of the highest ideas themselves—fine art just *as* fine art goes this far, but (2) in Poetry (*Poesie*), which is presupposed by fine art and to which the former itself only relates as a tool, in Poetry it will manifest itself as spirit itself which has the power to bring forth or create the material as well" (HMP 128).

[38] "Painting places its figures in nature or an architectural environment which is external to them and which it has invented in the same sense as it has invented the figures; and by the heart and soul of its treatment it can make this external background at the same time a reflection of what is subjective, and no less can it set the background in relation and harmony with the spirit of the figures that are moving against it" (LFA II, 798).

[39] "die Anschauung . . . im Angeschauten sich zu vertiefen liebt, und nur auf dem Unendlichen zu ruhen vermag. Jede ästhetische Produktion geht aus vom Gefühl eines unendlichen Widerspruchs, also muß auch das Gefühl, was die Vollendung des Kunstprodukts begleitet, das Gefühl einer solchen Befriedigung seyn, und dieses Gefühl muß auch wiederum in das Kunstwerk selbst übergehen. Der äußere Ausdruck des Kunstwerks ist also der Ausdruck der Ruhe und der stillen Größe, selbst da, wo die höchste Spannung des Schmerzes oder der Freude ausgedrückt werden soll . . . Jede ästhetische Produktion geht aus von einer an sich unendlichen Trennung der beiden Thätigkeiten, welche in jedem freien Produciren getrennt sind. Da nun aber diese

Schelling's talk of the artwork's *outward* expression, which intimates the affects through the representation of the *external* carapace of the body, suggests that he is envisioning the entire concept of art according to an essentially figurative paradigm. The modalities of such envisioning are decidedly Winckelmannian. For one, Schelling's mention of an aesthetic intuition that loves to sink itself in its infinite object is a clear reprise of Winckelmann's mystical theo-humanism, and an energetic gesture against an aesthetics of taste where only the quality of the artwork is at issue, but not that of the observer. Of course, the most glaring debt to Winckelmann is in Schelling's emphasis on the artwork's *Stille Grosse*. But here Schelling is not merely recycling the work of another: in his hands, the artwork's noble grandeur becomes a symbolic window into a transcendental, supraempirical unity. To be sure, Winckelmann's *edle Einfalt und Stille Grosse* expressed not only a god's affective indifference vis-à-vis the incidents of human life—they evoked also, as we have seen in Chap. 2, an imagined state of undivided wholeness, an integrity impossible to realize in ordinary temporality. But Winckelmann did not specify *why* these beautiful images could speak so powerfully to a spectator, a fact which (as we have seen in Chap. 3) prodded Hemsterhuis and Herder to integrate Winckelmann's aesthetics with an ontology of the self. Schelling adds a new facet to this intellectual elaboration, by its construction of an ontology of artistic *creation*, which the *Geschichte* had rather neglected for the sake of its aesthetics of *reception*. Schelling sees the quiet grandeur of ancient masterpieces as both a clue to an ontological fissure within the artist, and as a happy resolution thereof.

Despite the religious imagery that accompanies it, however, Schelling's revisionary reprise of Winckelmann lacks the latter's theological dimension

> Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart (STI 231).

Here Schelling—ever the brilliant intellectual predator—helps himself to the language of Wackenroder's *Klosterbruder*, who declared that a painting contains "an eternally burning life-oil . . . which never fades away from our eyes" (WGW I, 108). But such eucharistic imagery should not deceive us. For the *STI*-Schelling, the unity that stares back at us from figurative beauty is not what it was for Winckelmann, i.e. a Neoplatonic echo of the One.[40] Schelling means, less portentously, that

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beiden Thätigkeiten im Produkt als vereinigt dargestellt werden sollen, so wird durch dasselbe ein Unendliches endlich dargestellt. Aber das Unendliche endlich dargestellt ist Schönheit" (SW I, 3, 620–1).

[40] "The highest beauty is in God, and the concept of human beauty will approach perfection the more it can be conceived in accordance and in harmony with the highest being who differentiates for us the concept of unity and indivisibility apart from matter" (HAA 195).

in the aesthetic unity of the figurative artwork one can *feel* the unity of one's transcendental self, a unity that must escape discursivity (which always splits its object into a subject-predicate pattern).[41]

4.3.2 Schelling's Figurative Aesthetics in the 'Philosophy of Identity' (1801–1806)

The aesthetics of *STI* have an essentially comedic slant, where 'comedic' has the broad sense of a reconciliation of differences. True, this reconciliation also asserts in one stroke an unsurmountable difference, as we have seen. The sensuous appearance keeps surprising us with new displays of hitherto concealed bits of meaning (and in this sense it reconciles eye and word, silent corporeality and speaking selfhood). But precisely this unceasing sequence of partial uncoverings makes us feel that we are looking at an appearance whose infinite semantic saturation thumbs its nose at our discursive powers. But the fact remains that in *STI* this infinitely saturated appearance appears to the viewer as *his or her own transcendental core*. Both theory and praxis are attempts to recapture *empirically* the transcendental unity, even if they must necessarily fail: "the single flame" of the pre-conscious self "in action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart." The fact that this transcendental core can never appear in ordinary, lived spatiotemporality (with the exception of its *liminal* appearance in the artwork) does not make it any less part and parcel of oneself. Quiet grandeur is a tensile identity of self-contained repose (*Stille*) and sublime striving (*Grosse*), and hence a cipher for a state in which the self's activity does not come at the cost of a division within the self. Hence Schelling's casting of the figurative artwork as the happy terminus of an "odyssey of spirit," a site whose quiet grandeur affords an "infinite fulfillment" (*unendliche Befriedigung*) for artist and spectator alike.

When, between 1801 and 1806, Schelling takes a bold Neoplatonic step, his figurative aesthetics acquired a new, unmistakably *tragic* inflection. Now, beauty becomes the (elusive) sensuous appearance of the Absolute, not that of the self's original unity. The classically beautiful representation of the human body now stands for an awesome, but also troubling, interpenetration of divine and human. It stands to reason, then, that the iconic sculpture in Schelling's *Philosophy of Art* (1803–4; henceforth = *PA*) becomes *Niobe*, an artwork that stages a tragical encounter between the human and the divine.

[41] Luigi Pareyson points out the merely metaphorical role of religious imagery in the aesthetics of *STI*; That was to change in just a few years, after Schelling broke free from the transcendental standpoint, and took a bold Neoplatonic step. In the 1802 *Bruno*, the claim that the artist and the philosopher are essentially concerned with God means exactly what it says (Pareyson 49–50).

It is impossible, in the short compass of this book, to do justice to the riches of Schelling's figurative aesthetics, as articulated in his *PA* lectures (1803–4).[42] Instead, I will continue to be irresponsibly brief, and cull from the *PA* only those fragments that allow me to contextualize Schelling in the wide narrative arc of theo-humanism. Again, I would like to focus on the *tragic* dimension of his figurative aesthetics, a trajectory we have already followed in Karl Philipp Moritz and Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder. As we will see, Schelling's celebration of *Niobe* as *the* plastic epitome of the highest beauty continues Moritz's emphasis on the tragic nature of beauty (PA 197–8). Through his reasoned choice of *Niobe* as the paradigmatic sculpture, Schelling alters significantly Moritz's aesthetics (for whom the *Laocoön*, not *Niobe*, was the sculpture *kat'exochen*).

Before we discuss the details of Schelling's *Niobe* in *PA*, we should briefly engage the sweeping theoretical presuppositions it rests upon—assumptions that define a new stage of Schelling's thought (the so-called 'identity-philosophy', *circa* 1801–1806), and which supersede the more cautious transcendental standpoint of 1800. Again, the 'transcendental' Schelling denied objectivity to intellectual intuition, whose claims were merely anticipatory, and in need of the intersubjectively accessible evidence provided by the beautiful artwork. Conversely, for the new, unabashedly Spinozist Schelling, intellectual intuition is said to fasten upon pre-existing Platonic Ideas, and hence to enter into direct contact with eternity.[43] As an unavoidable pendant of the new primacy of philosophical speculation, aesthetics lost the position of absolute supremacy it enjoyed in *STI*—in *PA*, art is not the ground upon which philosophical insight rests, but philosophy's equal *other*. Philosophical intuition offers a monistic One through the modality of *truth*, while the artwork presents the One through its own *beauty*:

> Just as for philosophy in general the absolute is the archetype of truth, so also for art is it the archetype of beauty. We must therefore show that truth and beauty are merely two different ways of viewing the one absolute (PA 17).

More specifically, the beauty of the artwork as a *whole* makes it a sensuous presentation of the One (PA 10)—in a microcosm-macrocosm connection clearly borrowing from Moritz's aesthetics. Arguably, here the post-transcendental Schelling revamps Baumgarten's co-ordination of beauty and truth: each of them is a specific, irreducible window upon an entity. Truth as *claritas intensiva* is the logical definition containing the predicative differentiae that allow us to class an entity with others of the same species—but through an abstractive procedure that leaves out manifold

[42] Schelling taught a course in aesthetics in Jena, in the winter semester of 1802–03. These lectures were repeated at Wurzburg in the years 1804–5. Bound in a manuscript, these lectures were published only posthumously by Schelling's son, with the title *Philosophy of Art* (Pareyson 59). For an in-depth discussion of the theory of figurative art *PA*, see Zerbst, who stands out for his meticulous philological reconstruction of Schelling's museological experience and of his specific art-historical textual sources.

[43] "In the intuition of every idea, for example, the idea of the circle, we are also intuiting eternity. This is the positive intuition of eternity. The negative concept of eternity is not only independence from time but also complete disconnection from time. If the absolute were not utterly eternal, it would have a relationship to time" (PA 25).

sensuous individuality. Beauty as *claritas estensiva* is the artwork's saturation with a cluster of concentrated, interconnected sensuous traits: here the image evokes a specific individual, but at the cost of logical clarity.

Let us now move to Schelling's definition of the task of sculpture: "The highest law of all plastic renderings is indifference, absolute balance of possibility and reality" (PA 196). Here Schelling shows anew his talent for brilliant appropriation. He takes Winckelmann's praise of emotional indifference in sculpture as a symbolic representation of a *metaphysical* indifference, the point where the One and finite being coincide. The One has no split between possibility and reality. All that it *can be*, the One *is*. Conversely, finite beings as such are always striving toward an impossible coincidence of *energeia* and *dunamis*. But despite its constitutive *ontic* slippage between potency and act, *ontologically* each finite being partakes in the absolute's fusion of different modal horizons. The finite is simply a mode of the infinite, and hence not really other from it. In *PA* Schelling claims that the primary grasp of that identity is as an *idea*—the eidetic archetype that is specific (and hence finite) but whose being is always already, and unceasingly, a fulfillment of its potency (in this respect, the idea is infinite). In *PA*, the artwork is said to offer a *derivative* presentation of the idea—and Schelling sees Greek mythology as the artist's privileged point of departure. Each Greek god or goddess has a specific character (and is thus finite), but at any moment he or she is supremely at home with himself or herself—hence the gods' beautiful amorality, their irresponsible *Heiterkeit* (PA 39).

Quite consistently with his new metaphysical turn, in the *PA* Schelling offers an unabashedly Platonic construction of painting and sculpture. Their goal is not to engage in a servile mimesis of the real, but to make visible the supraempirical unity which finite being strives toward. To be sure, even in *ST* Schelling argued for an 'epiphanic' construction of figurative art, but—more guardedly—the intuition of the infinite ground was temporally subsumed by an infinite hermeneutical effort. But in *PA* the figurative artwork is said to present *at once* a plenitude of being which is always dispersed in ordinary experience, as we can see in a memorable illustration:

> The true art of portraiture would consist in embracing the idea of a person that has dispersed into the individual gestures and moments of life, to collect the composite of this idea into one moment and in this way make the portrait itself, which on the one hand is ennobled by art, on the other more like the person himself, that is, the idea of the person, than he himself is in any one of the individual moments (PA 146).

Such concentrated presence is achieved through an unnatural beauty that confuses multiple temporal planes, as Schelling makes clear in the 1807 *Relationship of the Figurative Arts with Nature* (henceforth, *RFN*): When art

> detains the fleeting course of years, when it unites the energy of full-developed manhood with the grace of early youth, or presents a mother, grown-up sons, and daughters, in the full possession of energetic beauty, what does it but dissolve than that which is unessential-time? (RFN 11)

But Schelling does not let the epiphanic force of the artwork degrade into a deceptive evasion from the real. The artwork underscores the split between real and ideal at the same moment that it hints at their supersensible unity. Poststructuralism

claims that art offers an hysterical replacement of a defective reality through an ostensibly 'naturalistic' plenitude. As if anticipating such claims, Schelling foregrounds forcefully the utter *artificiality* of painting and sculpture:

> Does art ever give to its works sensuous, actual life? This statue breathes not, is animated by no pulsation, is warmed by no blood . . . The *works of art are only in appearance and on the surface animated*; in nature, the vital principle seems to penetrate more deeply, and entirely to unite itself with the material; but are we not taught by the constant change of matter, and by the universal fate of ultimate dissolution, the unessential character of this union, and that it is no perfect intermixture? Thus *art presents*, *indeed*, *in its merely superficial animation of its works*, the non-essential as the non-essential (RFN 10).

* * *

In *ST*, Schelling chose painting as an illustration of the artwork's epiphanic force, as if to suggest a primacy of painting over sculpture. This is no longer the case in PA, where sculpture, not painting, is the highest figurative presentation of the idea:

> Painting in no way offers its objects as being real, but rather expressly wishes that they be viewed as ideal. Sculpture, by portraying its objects as ideas, nonetheless simultaneously offers them as things, and vice versa. Thus it really does portray the absolutely ideal simultaneously as the absolutely real; this is doubtlessly the pinnacle of the formative arts, whereby they turn back into the source of all art and of all ideas, of all truth and of all beauty: namely, into the deity . . . Sculpture can do justice to its own highest requirements only through the portrayal of the gods (PA 195).

Writing a few decades later, Hegel famously declared that painting stood for a higher stage of spirit than the one corresponding to sculpture. Through its rejection of the third dimension, painting shifts the emphasis from empirical reality to the inwardness of the spectator—as if to recognize modernity's constitutive emphasis on the self, and its break with antiquity's more immediate relationship to the world. But (*circa* 1802–4) Schelling saw the matter otherwise. Through its idealized rendition of the human figure, painting presents the self *sub specie aeternitatis*, but its bidimensionality (evoking as it does a private act of vision) betrays its unwillingness to let go of the finite perspective of the self, and to let the infinite deploy itself in its fullness. Furthermore, painting makes the figure framed by (and hence dependent upon) an independent pictorial space: yet another way of reinforcing the gap between finite and infinite. This is no longer the case in sculpture: through its flagrant, tangible tridimensionality, sculpture is significantly irreducible to (private) vision; and the perfect, residue-less coincidence between sculpted figure and sculptural space seems to eliminate the gap between finite and infinite.

If we were to leave it at this, however, the *PA*'s architectonic subordination of painting to sculpture would seem to rest upon a naïve ontotheologization of human beings. But Schelling's discussion of *Niobe* as the sculpture *par excellence* provides a forceful counter to that impression:

> In our presentation of painting we already spoke about the most eminent examples of tempered expression in the portrayal of human action and suffering: Laocoon and Niobe. Concerning Niobe, however, I want to remark additionally that it already belongs to the

> highest works by virtue of the subject itself. In a sense, sculpture portrays itself in her, and she is the archetype of sculpture, perhaps in the same way Prometheus is that of tragedy. All life is based on the joining of something infinite in itself with something finite, and life as such appears only in the juxtaposition or opposition of these two. Wherever its highest or absolute unity is, we also find, viewed relatively, death, and yet for just that reason also the highest degree of life. Since it is indeed the task of sculpture to portray that highest unity, then the absolute life of which it shows reflections already appears in and for itself—also compared with the appearance itself—as death. In Niobe, however, art itself has uttered this mystery by portraying the highest beauty in death. Furthermore, it allows that particular peace—the one inhering only within the divine nature itself and completely unattainable to mortals—to be gained in death itself, as if to suggest that the transition to the highest life of beauty, at least as far as that which is mortal is concerned, must appear as death. Art is thus doubly symbolic here: it becomes additionally the interpreter of itself such that that which all art seeks stands before our very eyes here, expressed in Niobe (PA 197–198).[44]

We can now return to our question: what is implied by Schelling's choice of *Niobe* as *the* paradigmatic sculpture? As we have seen in Winckelmann, the idealized beauty of sculpture is of a piece with an emotional indeterminacy that has the aura of self-absorbed reverie. But as the myth of Narcissus suggests, to elide the potentially troublesome other is also to eliminate a necessary condition of life. And so, Schelling notes, the "absolute life" of contour, i.e. the plastic semblance of atemporal animation, must also appear "*as* death." The *Belvedere Apollo* is a case in point: its restrained beauty goes hand in hand with a death-like emotional equipoise. In this sense, the wavering of contour appears as death. But the *Apollo* is still the representation of a living anthropomorphic being (the god himself): in this sense, the *Apollo* is not a beauty *in* death. But this mixture of living human shape and harmonious contour is deceptive, because it conceals from the viewer the fact that "particular peace—the one inhering only within the divine nature itself . . . [is] completely unattainable to mortals." *Niobe* is exceptional, thus, in that its idealized beauty is that of a dying individual: here beauty is not only *as*, but *in* death. It is *qua aesthetic object* that *Niobe* reminds us that the divine *Heiterkeit* we crave is impos-

[44] "Von den vornehmsten Beispielen des gemäßigten Ausdrucks in Darstellung menschlichen Handelns und Leidens, dem Laokoon und der Niobe, ist schon bei der Malerei die Rede gewesen. Aber über die Niobe will ich noch bemerken, daß sie schon dem Gegenstand nach zu den höchsten Werken gehört. Die Plastik stellt sich in ihr gleichsam selbst dar, und sie ist das Urbild der Plastik, vielleicht eben so, wie Prometheus das der Tragödie. Alles Leben beruht auf der Verbindung eines an sich Unendlichen mit einem Endlichen, und das Leben als solches erscheint nur in der Entgegensetzung dieser beiden. Wo ihre höchste oder absolute Einheit ist, ist, relativ betrachtet, der Tod, aber eben deßwegen wieder das höchste Leben. Da es nun überhaupt Werk der plastischen Kunst ist, jene höchste Einheit darzustellen, so erscheint das absolute Leben, von dem sie die Abbilder zeigt, an und für sich schon, und verglichen mit der Erscheinung, als Tod. Aber in der Niobe hat die Kunst dieses Geheimniß selbst ausgesprochen, dadurch, daß sie die höchste Schönheit in dem Tode darstellt, und die nur der göttlichen Natur eigne, der sterblichen aber unerreichbare Ruhe—diese im Tod gewinnen läßt, gleichsam um anzudeuten, daß der Uebergang zum höchsten Leben der Schönheit in der Beziehung auf das Sterbliche als Tod erscheinen müsse. Die Kunst ist also hier auf gedoppelte Weise symbolisch; sie wird nämlich wieder zur Auslegerin von ihr selbst, so daß, was alle Kunst wolle, hier in der Niobe ausgesprochen vor Augen liegt" (SW I, 5, 625).

sible to actualize. In one stroke, then, *Niobe* self-reflexively brings out the limits of the aesthetic, and unmasks the pretensions of any artwork to offer itself as a fulfilling 'here and now'. In Schelling's own words: in *Niobe*, art becomes additionally the interpreter of itself such that that which all art seeks stands before our very eyes here.

* * *

By preferring *Niobe* to the *Laocoön*, Schelling overturned the verdict that Karl Philipp Moritz gave on the pages of his *Italienische Reise*. This reversal testifies to more than a mere difference in aesthetic sensibilities—it is an attempt to preserve a distinctly humanist register for classical beauty. Let me explain.

Moritz's claim about the necessary unicity of the *Laocoön* rested on a rejection of the ultimacy of the *beau ideale*, in favor of an aesthetics of semantic saturation. Moritz praised the *Laocoön* because its portrayal of human tragedy (the death of the Trojan priest and his children) does not shy away from a depiction of crushing necessity (the snake). Such completeness was not to be found in *Niobe*, whose expressive force relied on the spectator's supplementary imagination of the destructive deeds of Apollo and Artemis. But Moritz's praise of the *Laocoön* as "one of a kind, and necessarily so" is open to one important criticism: the middle-aged Trojan priest does not (nor could he, for the sake of verisimilitude) embody that idealized youthful beauty that exercised so intensely Moritz's imagination, and which he saw epitomized in the *Apollo Belvedere*. As Winckelmann himself noticed, although the *Laocoön* is more of a technical *tour de force* than the *Apollo Belvedere*, it lacks the idealized beauty of the latter.[45] Moritz's hesitation between two sculptures, each iconic in its own specific way, is instructive: it shows (not necessarily for the worse) an unresolved tension within his own theo-humanism. When he wishes he could turn into a disembodied eye, so as to enjoying forever the torchlight-induced oscillations of the *Belvedere*'s contours, Moritz is giving voice to a Quietist will to mystical self-annihilation. When, in the *Laocoön*, he is touched by human tragedy ("the noble and cultured," *Edle und Gebildet*, succumbs to the power of the enormous, man succumbs to a worm"), he gives voice to his *alter ego*; the sublime Stoic humanist, child of the *Aufklärung*. And so, Moritz's vacillation between a quietist, *Theo*-humanist reading of the *Belvedere Apollo*, and his enlightened, Theo-*humanist* exaltation of the *Laocoön*, is a hesitation between two different understandings of 'beauty': the beauty of the idealized human body versus the aesthetic worth of a sublimely concentrated, and ostensibly complete presentation of meaning. If the first is paradigmatically exemplified by the *Apollo*,

[45] "I speak here merely of the perception and appearance of beauty in a strict sense, not of the science of drawing and execution. For with regard to the latter, more science can reside in and be applied to strong rather than tender figures, and the Laokoon is a much more learned work than the Apollo [Belvedere]. Hagesandros, the master of the principal figure of the Laokoon, must have been a far more skillful and accomplished artist than the master of the Apollo. Nevertheless, the latter must have been gifted with a more elevated spirit and a more tender soul: the Apollo has a sublimity that the Laokoon does not" (HAA 198).

the *Laocoön* epitomizes the second type of beauty: "the misery of the entire suffering humanity concentrates itself here," along with the element of spectatorial compassion embodied by the children, and the representation of crushing necessity. In virtue of the interconnected presence of all these elements, the *Laocoön* is "one of a kind, and must necessarily remain so" (MW I, 712). Here Moritz is unwittingly moving beyond Winckelmann, toward a more generous sense of aesthetics. Where to be counted as supremely beautiful, a sculpture or painting need not offer us an ideally beautiful human figure. The artwork's visual orchestration of meaning into a totality can be itself beautiful. But the fact remains that Moritz does waver between an aesthetics of the *beau ideale*, and one (at least in part) emancipated from idealized corporeality; where the first imagines the divine, the second, the heroism of a suffering humanity.

When Schelling, in a reversal of Moritz, prefers *Niobe* over *Laocoön*, he offers an aesthetics that thinks *together* theology and heroic humanism. But this becomes clear only in his 1807 discussion of *Niobe*, to which we now turn.

4.3.3 *Niobe as the Triumph of Divine Love: Schelling's Figurative Aesthetics Circa 1807*

Although Schelling's 1807 *Relationship of the Figurative Arts to Nature* helps itself to the categories of the *Identitätsphilosophie*, it also adds a new inflection to it: the quasi-personalization of a heretofore impersonal Absolute. Even at the height of his Spinozistic phase, Schelling construed finite being as an image (*Sinnbild*) that produced (literally, 'imaged': *Einbildung*) the Absolute itself, in what we could call a conflation of aesthetics and theology.[46] But from 1807 onwards, Schelling sees this artist-God as moved by self-sacrificing *agape*—the point is spelled out more clearly in his 1810 *Stuttgart Lectures*:

> There are two principles in God: The first principle or the first primordial force is that whereby He exists as a particular, unique, and individual essence. We may call this force the selfhood (or) the egoism in God. If only this force existed, God would be only as a unique, isolated, and particular essence, [and] there would not be any creation. There would be nothing but an eternal seclusion and contemplation of this self, and by virtue of being an eternal and infinite force, this proper force of God would be a consuming fire that no creature could endure. However, this principle is eternally opposed by another one, which is that of *love*, and it is by virtue of this latter one that God is properly the essence of all essences . . . These principles [egoism and love] . . . are merely the human expressions for

[46] Alessandro Klein notices that Schelling might have found in Origen the idea that the imagination is *the* faculty through which God creates a world. "In John Scotus Origen one finds the term *imaginatio* with the same identical significance of Schelling's *Einbildung*, which is the literal German translation of *imaginatio. Imaginationes* (*Einbildungen*) are images or self-figurations (theophanies) . . . which the One or God produces in His participating Himself to the finite—and precisely qua images of him, *imaginationes* function anagogically, converting the human being, and orienting him/her toward Him" (Klein 52).

> the abstract notions of the Ideal and the Real. Love is the Ideal and the egoism is the Real [dimension] in God . . . These principles we can also conceive of as existing initially in a certain state of indifference in God; however, if they persist in this indifference neither God nor anything else can develop (SL 210–1).[47]

The gist of these lines is that finite being is the result of a loving gesture, whereby God limits and contracts His own infinity, so that self-standing, finite beings can be. But there is more: in an agapic spirit, God wants finite beings to partake of His own essence, which is an indifference of centripetal egoism and centrifugal, other-directed love—where the highest self-fulfillment coincides with the highest self-denial. This is why the more complex a natural entity is, the more its individuality will *let* manifold difference *be*. Schelling thus reinterprets the old *topos* of the Great Chain of Being as a sequence of increasingly more 'generous' beings. In this perspective, the curvilinearity of plants is ontologically more bountiful than the angular linearity of crystals, since (against the latter's elementary, leap-like articulation) botanical contours unfold in an infinitely dense array of different directions. The culmination of this sequence is *grace*, where a being seems emancipated from pursuit of its own ends, and even appears to work *playfully* against its own stable identity—via the ostensibly *gratuitous* motion of its contours and/or colors:

> At first, therefore, the creative spirit appears lost in the form, unapproachably locked up, and, even in the great, still austere; the more, however, it succeeds in uniting in one creature its whole fulness, the more it parts with its austerity; and where it has fully developed the form, so that it rests in and is satisfied with it, the more it contains itself within it, and seems in a manner to rejoice, and begins to move in soft lines.
>
> This is the state of the most beautiful flowers and fruits, where the pure vehicle stands perfect, the spirit of nature becomes free from its bonds, and feels its relation to the soul.
>
> As by a faint blush rising over the whole countenance, the approaching soul announces itself; as yet it is not there, but all things prepare themselves, by the soft play of tender movement, for its reception; the rigid outlines melt, and moderate themselves into soft ones; a lovely essence, that is neither sensuous nor spiritual, but yet incomprehensible, spreads itself over the form, and enfolds all the outlines and tortuosities of the parts.
>
> This essence, incomprehensible, as we have said, and yet appreciable by all, is what the Greeks called *charis* and we grace . . . The pure image of beauty, arrested at this stage of development, is the goddess of love (RFN 19–20).

In these mesmerizingly beautiful lines, Schelling shows himself—yet again—a talented intellectual freebooter. Kant had already noticed how the intricate beauty of exotic plants and creatures seemed *useless* within the economy of (botanical or animal) survival, appearing *as if* a gratuitous *gift* of aesthetic delectation for human viewers.[48] There is much of this at work in Schelling's reference to "the most

[47] *RFN* hinge upon a metaphysics and aesthetics that Schelling explicitly articulated in his *Stuttgart Lectures*, as Giulio Preti helpfully remarks (Preti 99).

[48] "The flowers, the blossoms, indeed the shapes of whole plants; the delicacy of animal formations of all sorts of species, which is unnecessary for their own use but as if selected for our own taste; above all the manifold and harmonious composition of colors (in the pheasant, in crustaceans, insects, right down to the commonest flowers), which are so pleasant and charming to our eyes,

beautiful flowers and fruits," where—via a free play of chromatic combination—an organism ostensibly "parts with its austerity," i.e. with the unflinching functional subordination of the parts to the individual whole. But, unlike Kant, Schelling does not consider natural beauty as just a gift to human perceivers—it is also that through which nature displays a spark of the divine. How? In the beauty of flowers and plants, "the spirit of nature becomes free from its bonds, and feels its relation to the soul." For Schelling, the soul is (quite Neoplatonically) that part of the human self through which the self can realize that there the world is more than 'one damn thing after another', and realize that the *ontos on* (the 'really real') is just One; and the self's intuition of the nullity of its own separate individuality is of a piece with the self's feeling of an ecstatic homecoming to the lost Father:

> The soul, then, is not the individualizing principle in man, but that by which he elevates himself above all selfness; it is that by which he is capable of self-sacrifice and disinterested love, and, what is highest still, of the contemplation and perception of the being of things, and thus of art (RFN 20).[49]

Kant famously noted that the man who exits the museum to enjoy natural beauties is worthy of our respect. More sensitive to art than the sage of Konigsberg, Schelling takes the idea of the oscillations of plastic contour as another privileged site of beauty: "the rigid outlines melt, and moderate themselves into soft ones; a lovely essence, that is neither sensuous nor spiritual, but yet incomprehensible, spreads itself over the form, and enfolds all the outlines and tortuosities of the parts." Here Schelling looks beyond Kant by standing on his shoulders. For one, he exploits Kant's idea that beauty is neither sensible nor intelligible, but something that unfolds in the interstitial realm of the imagination.[50] And Schelling's reference to the ineffability of sculptural *Schweben* is clearly molded by the Kantian doctrine of 'aesthetic ideas', but with an important difference: where Kant's aesthetic idea overdetermines discourse by its inexhaustible polysemy, Schelling's grace does so also through its perceptual indeterminacy. If Schelling insists on the *je ne sais quoi* of grace, it is not to shunt the labor of semiotic decoding: it is to do justice to the equally ineffabile transcendence that seems to reveal itself in the experience of beauty.

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which seem to have been aimed entirely at outer contemplation, since they concern merely the surface, and even in this do not concern the figure of the creature, which could still be requisite for its inner ends: all of these give great weight to the kind of explanation that involves the assumption of real ends of nature for our power of aesthetic judgment" (CJ 222).

[49]The theory of the soul at work in *RFN* is echoed in *SL*: "the soul constitutes the properly divine in man; hence it is something *impersonal*, the proper Being, to which personality an intrinsic nonbeing shall remain subordinate . . . the spirit *possesses knowledge*, whereas the soul does not know but is science itself. The spirit has knowledge because it also contains the possibility of evil; it can only be *good*, i.e. partake of goodness, whereas the soul is not good, but is this goodness [*die Güte*] itself" (*SL* 232).

[50]Here I am relying upon Manfred Frank's reading of Kant's discussion of the "judgment of taste according to quantity" (Frank 1989, 56–63).

Schelling hastens to add that natural or artistic grace does not display soul *literally*:

> Here already soul and body are in perfect harmony; body is the form, and grace the soul; *not the soul in itself*, *but the soul of form*, *the soul of nature*. Art may linger on this point, nay, stand on it; for already from one side is its whole task accomplished. The pure image of beauty, arrested at this stage of development, is the goddess of love. But the beauty of the soul itself, incorporated in bodily grace, this is the highest deification of nature (RFN 19–20, italics mine).

In the functionally groundless beautiful profusion of colors and/or curves, a flower offers only an *analogical* surrender of its own individual purposes; here selflessness is only 'skin deep', as it were—far from agapeically denying its own biological existence, the beautiful flower is still very much absorbed in business of sustaining it. This entails the possibility of a higher beauty: one where the *superficial* surrender of sensuous grace is united with a *real* agapic self-immolation of individuality—and a concomitant theophany. Such a radical sacrifice of individuality involves a manifestation of the soul *strictu sensu*, i.e. the supraindividual spark of the divine inherent in every human being. Schelling develops the point by turning again to an old favorite of his, the *Niobe*:

> Still more is pain sanctified by grace. It is necessary to the being of grace that it should be unconscious of itself; but as it cannot be arbitrarily acquired, so neither can it be arbitrarily lost; when an insufferable torment, when madness, inflicted by the avenging gods, hurries away consciousness and thought, it still stands by, as the protecting spirit, and prevents the suffering form from enacting anything ungraceful or unworthy of humanity; so that if it falls, it falls as a pure and unspotted sacrifice. Not yet the soul itself, but a presentiment of it, it produces, by natural means, what that does by a divine energy, in that it changes rigidity, nay, death itself, into beauty. Still this grace, though preserved in circumstances of the greatest difficulty, would be dead without its glorification by the soul. But what expression can it have in this state? It delivers itself from pain, and steps forth victorious, not conquered, in dissolving its connexion with sensuous existence. The spirit of nature may call forth all its powers for its support; the soul enters not upon this conflict, but its presence softens the storm of even the painfully struggling life. Every external force can deprive of external goods only, but cannot reach the soul; can destroy a temporal connexion, but not dissolve the eternal one of a truly divine love. Not hard or feelingless, nor relinquishing love itself, it rather displays it in pain, as the sense which outlives sensuous existence, and thus elevates itself above the ruins of external life or fortune in divine glory.
>
> This is the expression of the soul, which the sculptor of the Niobe has shown us in his statue. Every means of art, by which the terrible can be softened, are brought into action; grandeur of form, sensuous grace; even the nature of the subject softens the expression, in that the grief, surpassing all expression, neutralises itself; and the beauty, which it seemed almost impossible vitally to preserve, is saved from injury by the commencing torpor. Yet what would all this be without the soul, and how does this manifest itself? We see upon the countenance of the mother, not the grief alone for the flower of her children, already stretched upon the ground; not the mortal agony on account of the still surviving youngest daughter, who has flown to her bosom; not anger against the cruel deities; much less, as has been pretended, a cold defiance. We see all this, but not for itself, but through the grief, the anger, and the anguish, streams the divine light, the everlasting love, as the last remaining feeling; in this is presented not one who *was*, but one who *is* the mother, and who remains united by an eternal link with her beloved ones. (RFN 22–3).[51]

[51] Partially amended translation.

A key facet of this *ekphrasis* is the interplay between sensuous and *moral* grace. Moral grace is the visceral, unreflective, constitutive identification of an individual with an ethical purpose. Niobe's love for her children is a case in point: prior to any ethical deliberation, it is an instinctive, immediate embrace of a universal. This embrace is self-effacing, such that one lives *for* the beloved other. These twin features of unconscious immediacy and individual self-effacement make moral grace structurally similar to sensuous grace—although in the former these two dimensions are more than a matter of surfaces. We now need to ask: how can Schelling take Niobe's moral grace as a sign of "a truly divine love . . . a divine light"? In what sense is the instinctive love of a mother a manifestation of the divine? The implied answer would have to be: because of the ostensibly *boundless* intensity of motherly love, its *infinite* satisfaction in forgetting itself in the beloved object. This affective infinity is also a manifestation of soul, Neoplatonically understood as the element wherein a human being can feel a timeless bond of unity with another.

But it would be a mistake to read *Niobe* as a triumph of moral over sensuous grace. What makes her unique to Schelling is that she embodies a *unity* of the two. Sensuous grace has a crucial role to play in *Niobe*. Despite her matronly ponderousness, and the rather linear cut of the eyebrows (a throwback to the severity of the 'High Style'), she displays also the curvy softness of the 'beautiful style', and (crucially) the gentleness it evokes. *Niobe*'s face expresses a malice-less sorrow, betraying a childlike innocence incapable of any machination or duplicitiousness—in this respect she scores a victory against fate, which could not dehumanize her into a bestial, vindictive rage. In Schelling's own words: sensuous grace "prevents the suffering form from enacting anything ungraceful or unworthy of humanity; so that if it falls, it falls as a pure and unspotted sacrifice." Admittedly (and here Schelling leans upon Winckelmann's reading of *Niobe*), her elegant composure is also due to a slackening of her dying body: "beauty, which it seemed almost impossible vitally to preserve, is saved from injury by the commencing torpor." In this respect, Schelling's 1807 *Niobe* is continuous with his 1803 *Niobe*: in both cases, the graceful cadaverousness stands for the impossibility of divine *Heiterkeit* for living humans. But in Schelling's 'second sailing' (the 1807 RFN), *Niobe* shows herself more divine than "the cruel gods" themselves. Through their private vendetta against Niobe as a retribution for her earlier proud boasts, Apollo and Artemis are not really sites of *das Göttliches*, the all-encompassing principle that realizes itself in the selfless love of the other. Against this, the sensuous grace of Schelling's 1807 *Niobe* becomes—in one stroke—also display of moral grace, i.e. the "divine light" of her "everlasting love . . . the last remaining feeling; in this is presented the mother as such, who, not being one, still is, and by an eternal link remains, united with the beloved ones".

It is instructive to contrast Schelling' reading of *Niobe* with Hegel's. The element of novelty is Hegel's historicization of Niobe, whose tragic beauty reflects an essentially *ancient* construction of the self, where the self cannot survive the destruction of its own ethical connections. Conversely, Mary is not destroyed by her infinite grief over the crucifixion of her Son—and in this respect, Hegel sees

her as an icon of the *modern* self's autarchy, its capacity to survive the loss of its concrete, meaningful ethical attachments.

> Mary sees Christ carry his cross, she sees him suffer and die on the cross, taken down from the cross and buried, and no grief of others is so profound as hers. Yet, even in such suffering, its real burden is not the unyieldingness of grief or of loss only, nor the weight of a necessary imposition, nor complaint about the injustice of fate, and so a comparison with the characteristic grief of Niobe is especially appropriate. Niobe too has lost all her children, and now confronts us in pure sublimity and unimpaired beauty. What is kept here is the aspect of her existence as an unfortunate woman, the beauty that has become her nature and makes up the whole of her existence in reality; her actual individuality remains what it is in her beauty. But her inner life, her heart, has lost the whole burden of its love and its soul; her individuality and beauty can only turn into stone. Mary's grief is of a totally different kind. She is emotional, she feels the thrust of the dagger into the centre of her soul, her heart breaks, but she does not turn into stone. She did not only have love; on the contrary, her whole inner life is love, the free concrete spiritual depth of feeling which preserves the absolute essence of what she has lost, and even in the loss of the loved one she ever retains the peace of love. Her heart breaks; but the very substance and burden of her heart and mind which shines through her soul's suffering with a vividness never to be lost is something infinitely higher. This is the living beauty of soul in contrast to the abstract substance which, when its ideal existence in the body perishes, remains imperishable, but in stone (LFA II, 825–6).

For Hegel, the *look* of dignity ("pure sublimity") and sensuous grace ("unimpaired beauty") is all that is left to *Niobe*, as the outer husk of a once living, noble *ethos*: "her actual individuality remains what it is in her beauty . . . but her inner life . . . can only turn to stone." Hegel does not think that Niobe's soul "steps forth victorious, not conquered, in dissolving its connexion with sensuous existence," as Schelling had claimed (RFN 22). Victory, as Hegel sees it, is when the self survives the tragic loss of the objects it was soulfully invested in—which happens when the self finds life-sustaining meaning *in its own loving affects*. This is the case of Mary, for whom Jesus *survives* in her affection for him—and in turn Mary *herself survives* because of her transmutation of her son into the stuff of fond recollection. To make the same point in Hegelese, Mary's "substance and burden of her heart and mind" (Jesus) has not vanished, because "it shines through her soul's suffering with a vividness never to be lost" (i.e. Jesus survives as cherished internal image).

Schelling did, however, appreciate that paintings of Mary could speak just as powerfully as *Niobe* to a modern spectator. Consider his discussion of Guido Reni's *Assumption of the Virgin* (Munich, Fig. 4.5):

> Guido Reni . . . became in a peculiar manner the painter of the soul; thus, it appears to us, must be interpreted his entire endeavour, so often uncertain, and which in many of his works loses itself in vagueness. The key to this may be found, and perhaps in but few other of his works, in his masterpiece, in the gallery of our king, there open to the wonder of us all. In the form of the ascending virgin is every plastic harshness and severity, to the last trace, destroyed; indeed, in her, painting itself appears, like the liberated Psyche, emancipated from hard forms to flutter its own pinions in glory.
>
> Here is no being that, with a decided natural power, works externally on nature; everything in her expresses receptivity and quiet patience, even to that perishable flesh, whose peculiarity the Italian language expresses by *morbidezza*, different from that with which Raphael endows his descending Queen of Heaven, as she appears to the adoring pope and saint.

Fig. 4.5 *The Assumption of the Virgin*, by Guido Reni (Munich) (Source: Artres)

> If, indeed, there is any ground for the assertion that the original of the female heads in Guido is the antique *Niobe*, the reason of the similarity lies, certainly not in a merely capricious imitation; it may be that similar inspirations may have led to similar results. If the Florentine *Niobe* is the extreme of plastic, and the expression of passion therein, so our well-known picture is the extreme of painting, which here seems to lay aside the very want of shadow and obscurity, and ventures to work almost in pure light (RFN 28–9).

Here Schelling offers a fascinating reading of Guido's *Assumption* Mary as a modern *Niobe*. What makes her *modern*? For one, the fact that she is painted, not sculpted. Rehearsing a fortunate Romantic *topos*, Schelling sees "the predominance of sculpture in the ancient, and of painting in the modern world" as a reflection of the fact that "the mode of thought in the former was thoroughly plastic, while that of the latter makes the soul the passive organ of higher revelations" (26). That is, the ancient view of the good life holistically integrated Idea and flesh (hence

the 'plastic' outlook of the *anciens*); conversely, the modern idea of the *summum bonum* concentrates on the infinite interiority of the self, which can soar above the spatiotemporal finitude of its own embodied being (hence the modern emphasis on the ecstatic faculty of the soul) (Fig. 4.5).

If the ecstatic infinity of inwardness of the self is 'modern', the specific pictorial strategies that Guido deploys in his *Assumption* show him to be modern in the extreme. As we noted, *Niobe* was characterized by an austere linearity (a deliberate throwback to the severity of the 'High Style'); such schematic traits could be read as *dignity*, i.e. of a calm, self-possessed assertion of reason *in* a suffering body.[52] But Guido expurgates the language of dignity from Mary's body: "in the form of the ascending virgin is every plastic harshness and severity, to the last trace, destroyed." Note, for instance, her theatrically billowy *panneggiamento*, which, along with her upturned eyes and hairtips, seems to obey an inverse, heavenly gravitation—so much so, that the angels seem less concerned to sustain her than to temporarily anchor her down, delaying her ascent for the benefit of our gaze. All this, of course, does not in the least mean that Mary is undignified; rather, it means that she embodies a mystical renunciation of corporeality itself, whereas dignity manifests itself as mastery over the body. But the decisive moment in this economy is found in Guido's orchestration of light-values: the *Assumption* "seems to lay aside the very want of shadow and obscurity, and ventures to work almost in pure light." And indeed, here *chiaroscuro* seems more a veneer than a visual indicator of mass. It is the luminosity of color that causes the thinning of the contrast of light and shadow into a patina—yet, the almost LED-like coolness of light suggests that the vitality erupting on the scene is *not* that of the body. This is especially true of her carnation, whose frail delicacy embodies "receptivity and quiet patience", as if, by softening its margins the body were trying to dilute its own corporeality, for the sake of the self's ecstatic projection.[53]

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[52] As I see it, Schelling's praise of *Niobe*'s own "grandeur of form" as something through which "the terrible can be softened" (RFN 22) is a praise of her *dignity* (*Würde*)—in Friedrich Schiller's sense of that word: "In respect of dignity, therefore, the mind conducts itself in the body as *master*, for it is here that it must maintain its independence against imperious impulse, which without it strikes to action, and would gladly cast off its yoke. In respect of grace, on the other hand, the mind governs *liberally*, for here it is the mind which sets nature into action, and finds no resistance to vanquish. But, only obedience deserves forbearance, and only *insubordination* can justly deserve sternness. Hence, grace lies in the *freedom of willful movements*; *dignity* in *mastery over unwillful movements*. Grace inclines toward nature, where she carries out the commands of the mind, a semblance of the willful; where nature wants to rule, dignity subjugates her to the mind" (GD 376–7).

[53] Guido's tendency toward an increasing "divinization of forms" had been noted already by his contemporary biographer Cesare Malvasia (Gnudi 19). Cesare Gnudi notes how Guido can envelop objects "in a halo of whitest light, of an unreal coldness. An atmosphere that seems abstract and unbreathable, but then becomes gradually warmed by the light breath that animates the figures, and that makes them live in that reality. A reality where everything is light, crisp and rarified air, vitreous transparency, without shadow nor fissure" (Gnudi 41). On Guido's ambivalent relationship toward classical form, see Emiliani 1988a, b; Ebert-Schifferer 1988.

Schelling's *Assumption-ekphrasis* seems to build upon and expand Georg Foster's 1791 reading of the same painting (which at the time was in Düsseldorf): "Here is a new world! Only possible,

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circumfused in light, and itself consisting of pure light! Nothing earthly, nothing impure can be seen in it! Even the great blue cloak of the Transfigured is of pure, solidified heavenly ether, when we compare it with garments of worldy fabric [. . .] In the visage of the fully dressed Virgin, slim and hovering (*schwebend*) there are traces of the artist's recollection of Niobe's daughter. She appears to partake already of a heavenly, indestructible light-nature. The beauty of the angels and their grace (*Grazie*) beggar description, and their expression is of celestial innocence and seraphic love. They need not knowledge of good and evil; the world that we divine in them embraces and exhausts all forms of light and truth. There are ideals of beauty that are different from that of Greek gods—in these angels, I see them for the first time. I did not think it possible to give sensuous form to the wonders of Empyreum, to take angelic purity combined with the gentle fire of blessed souls . . . .and to magically give it the shape of divine youth and grace. O Guido, sweet enthusiast (*Schwärmer*), how tempting (*verführerisch*) does fanatic enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) become through your fantasy!" (Forster 246–7).

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Chapter 5
The Jena Circle and Hegel: The Modernity of Painting, and the Return of the Classical

5.1 Bonaventura's Night at the Museum: The Crisis of Winckelmann's Plastic Aesthetics

Eugène Delacroix declared, "One can say of painting as of music, that it is essentially a modern art . . . Paganism gave sculpture a satisfactory career . . . Christianity, on the contrary, summons the life within: the aspirations of the soul, the renunciation of the senses, are difficult to express in marble and stone. It is, on the contrary, the role of painting to give expression to almost everything (Hall, 168)." Writing in 1857, Delacroix was simply voicing what had long before become a cliché of nineteenth century art discourse.

But clichès are by definition one-sided truths, and the *topos* of the modernity of painting vis-à-vis the obsolescence of ancient sculpture, is no exception. For one, Victorians like Alma-Tadema, and twentieth century artists like Picasso, have offered compelling reprises classical sculpture in the medium of painting.[1] Second, the *topos* glosses over the fact that ancient plastic motifs haunt the work of Quattrocento and Cinquento painters. It won't do to object that Mantegna, Raphael, or Dürer are not modern. If we accept the Romantic and Idealist notions, that modernity begins with the Christian idea of the infinity of subjective inwardness, then those painters are modern.

Even here, the study of Figurative Theo-humanism is rewarding. On the one hand, Friedrich Schelling, August and Friedrich Schlegel, and G.W.F. Hegel do indeed inaugurate a contrast, according to which painting is deemed to be modern and sculpture ancient. But they are equally sensitive to, and fascinated by, the time-bending cross-pollination between *ancièns et modernes* that one finds in High Renaissance painters. And—in keeping with the overall thrust of this book—they are intrigued with the endeavor to gauge the extent to which classical forms might

[1] Cf. Prettejohn 2013.

F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5_5

have continued relevance for a modern spectator. In the following pages, we will be considering how the Schlegel brothers and Hegel see Christian painting as a site where the ancient sculptural ideal can undergo a palingenesis-cum-metamorphosis: a rebirth, but in a genuinely new guise—not as a tired replica of the same.

As an *entrée* to the figurative aesthetics of the Schlegel brothers and of Hegel, let us briefly explore Ernst August Friedrich (1777–1831) *Bonaventura's Night-Watches*. Written in 1804, this work offers precious clues to the disenchantment that progressively corroded Winckelmann's sculptural ideal from the 1790s onward. Equally important, it shows how this *Entzauberung* was by no means painless.

* * *

Bonaventura is a fictional character: a curmudgeonly nomad, detesting humans yet obsessed by them. He ignores them by day, but cannot help following them at night, to observe them closely and—if necessary—to harangue them. *Bonaventuras Nacht-Wachen* is the ribald, often hilarious chronicle of sixteen such nocturnal expeditions. In the thirteenth night, Bonaventura decides to find out more about the late eighteenth-century craze. Observing ancient sculptures at night, under the quivering light of torches, he follows a group of connoisseurs in a nocturnal visit to the sculpture gallery of the museum.[2]

> Now a small amateur in the crowd clambered with difficulty up an armless Medici Venus. Almost in tears, his lips puckered, he ostensibly sought to kiss her buttocks, universally known as the most artistical part of this goddess. This exasperated me, because the mask of enthusiasm that some faces permit themselves to put on is what I can least endure in this heartless age. Enraged, I climbed on top of an empty pedestal, to squander a few words.
>
> "Young art-brother (*Kunstbruder*)!" I addressed him, "the divine posterior is too high for you, and your short figure cannot reach it without breaking its neck! I speak out of philanthropy, because it pains me that you want to climb at the risk of your life. Since the Fall (before which Adam—so the rabbis assure us—measured a hundred cubits) we have become considerably smaller, and we keep diminishing. So in our century one must earnestly discourage such neckbreaking pursuits such as this one. And what do you want after all from the stony maiden, which would in this very moment turn into an iron one for you, had she not lacked the appropriate arms for an embrace? After all, she does not need artificial ones, which fall short even of Von Berlichingen's fist… Art-friend, how did we come to this, that we dare disturb these divine mass-graves, and we bring to light the immortal dead? And yet we know, how hard the Romans punished the mere damaging of human tombs. Of course, the enlightened ones (*die Aufgeklärte*) consider these extinct ones fitting for curious looks (*für Götzen*), and art is a pagan sect that has secretly insinuated itself, to idolize and worship them. But is this true of you too, art-friend? What are you doing, art-lover (*Kunstlieber*)? The Ancients sang hymns and Aeschylus and Sophocles wrote their choruses to praise the gods; our modern art-religion (*Kunstreligion*) prays in criticism, and worships in the head, while true religion does so in the heart".
>
> Ah, one must bury again the old gods! Kiss her buttocks, young man, kiss them—and be done with it! (Klingemann 108–110)

[2]For a historical account of this fashion, see Bätschmann 1992, 250–1.

As an adoring connoisseur gets closer to the famous posterior of *Venus de Medici* (a *de rigoeur* gesture, as we can see in Johann Zoffany's *Tribuna degli Uffizi*), Bonaventura catches immediately the theological nostalgia that drives the whole business. A Pygmalionic intent prompts the puckered mouth of the connoisseur: to give life to the dead goddess. In this respect, the same yearning gives rise to the tremulous lips that seek contact with the Olympian *derriere* and to the contours of the stony gods that are set aquiver by artificial light. This yearning is to restore for modernity the ancient sense of the divine, which, however, is irretrievably lost. Bonaventure sees the art-lover's enthusiasm as a 'mask', i.e. as an essentially inauthentic posture, inauthentic because *feigned*. Or so it would seem at first. But as his rant against the *Kunstbruder* makes clear, Bonaventura attacks, above all, the historical amnesia that enables that enthusiasm.

First of all, the connoisseur is forgetting his own Judeo-Christian background: the transcendent glutei of the Old Testament God are in principle inaccessible to human lips; the short stature of the connoisseur vis-à-vis the taller Medicean Aphrodite is a funny trope of this point. Second, this stodgy enthusiast forgets that the ancient identification of sign and signified is no longer possible. Consider the old legend, in which a young devotee tries to consummate his passion with the statue of Aphrodite at Cnidos, and even stains her buttocks in the attempt: the myth invites us to wonder at the daring of the youth, and precisely because it assumes that Aphrodite is somehow present *in* the statue.[3] If the statue of Cnydian Aphrodite does not kill the young man for his insolence, it is because the goddess of love dwelling within admires bold initiative in erotic matters. But for us, children of modern disenchantment, the *Medici Venus* is an empty dwelling. Were it indeed to be set into some miraculous Pygmalionic motion, it would not lose its stoniness, and it would therefore seal the ardent suitor with the deadly grip of an iron maiden—which it would *not* have done, had amorous Venus still inhabited the artwork.

Bonaventura criticizes also the obligatory aesthetic vocabulary through which—it can be safely assumed—the connoisseur gazes adoringly at his Venus. Such aesthetics constitute an unwitting 'art-religion' (*Kunstreligion*) that strives towards a *reverse* disenchantment. Concepts of aesthetic wonder (*contrapposto*, *line of beauty*, *serpentina*) are used in such a way as to smuggle religious wonder back into artifacts that are essentially devoid of enchantment (and in fact, un-re-enchantable). In this respect, the language of 18th-century aesthetics is exposed as the surprising double of ancient art, which was explicitly attuned to the sacred. But the former is the bloodless ghost of the latter. The art-critic prays in the head, the ancients prayed in the heart. Aesthetics is not necessarily aware, however, of its crypto-religiosity: Bonaventura suggests that through 'art' (one of the main categories of aesthetics-talk) an invisible religiosity ventriloquizes. The ventriloquist becomes an ancient guest that has 'secretly insinuated itself' into a seemingly autonomous language.

Bonaventura's words contain interesting ambiguities. Could it be that he resents the spectator's attempts to get up close and personal with Venus because of their

[3]For a discussion of this story, see Spivey 1997, 181.

impiety? If so, aesthetics is not so much charged with theological nostalgia, but with a hubristic, underhanded attempt to onto-theologize human beings. As I see it, Bonaventuras' final recommendation hints at such a subtext: a valedictory osculation as a release of the goddess from her museum prison (kiss her buttocks, and then bury her!)—from a place where man can be conveniently catapulted into an all-too-flattering (and delusional) proximity to the divine. Even Bonaventura's rage at the archeological digs may be a token of the same vacillation. Is he excoriating an aesthetic nostalgia for the infinite for hankering after an impossible object, or rather for erecting an hubristic simulacra of the divine? To the extent that he lashes out against the *hubris* of the museum and of its rituals, Bonaventura himself betrays nostalgia for the lost sacred world. But he never lets a nostalgia for the absent god authorize golden calves.

The riotous farce of the finale, however, seems to drive a decisive nail in the coffin of the Pygmalionic aesthetic of sculptural animation.

> I became terrified: under the deceptive torch-flickering, the entire crippled Olympus appeared to suddenly enliven (*beleben*) itself. The angry Jupiter wanted to rise from his throne, the severe Apollo grasped his bow and his musical lyre, the snakes reared themselves up together with the battling Laocoon and the drowning children, Prometheus shaped men with his arm stumps, the mute Niobe protected her youngest daughter from the rain of sun-arrows; the handless, armless, lipless Muses roused each other into action, just like they did when they prepared to sing and play out the ancient hymns. But silence reigned through all of this, there was only vehement, convulsive movement on a battlefield… Deeply recessed in the background, an unilluminated choir of Furies stood in rigid petrification, and looked in fearful malevolence at the general mayhem (NW 111).

5.2 Silent Statues, Speaking Paintings: August Schlegel's *Die Gemälde*

The so-called Jena Circle (1798–1804) is mostly famous for the literary theory and poetry of its members (Ludwig Tieck, August and Friedrich Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel, Novalis). But their art theories receive far less attention. And yet, as Xavier Tilliette suggests, the birth of the Jena Romantic circle was sparked by passionate discussion about (and in front of) figurative art: "the encounter in Dresden in the summer of 1798… has, as it were, been the consecration of the young romantic school. Schelling was about to join his post in Jena, which he had attained through Goethe's offices. [Schelling, August and Friedrich Schlegel, and August's wife Caroline] would visit the gallery in the morning, either briefly or for a long time—all along engaging in far-ranging discussion about painting and poetry. August Schlegel's dialogue *Die Gemälde* (*The Paintings*) is the faithful echo of those free-flowing conversations" (Tilliette 1995, 124). Astonishingly, even the austere idealist Fichte occasionally joined the company. In a letter to Schiller (dated October 24, 1798), Dora Stock offered an amusing recollection of those days in the *Gemäldegallerie*, where, for a couple of days, the Schlegel brothers enthusiastically dragged Fichte through the collections, bombarding him with their artistic theories.

She writes, tongue in cheek, that "they [the Schlegel brothers] occupied the whole gallery, and they passed almost every morning in the company of Schelling and Gries . . . they took notes and developed their theories. It was marvelous to see them . . . they initiated even Fichte to the mysteries of art. You would have laughed to see the Schlegels drag him everywhere, and assail him with their convictions" (quoted from Tilliette 1992, 334; cf. also Zerbst 67).

Die Gemälde is an important part of my narrative, as it is marks a point of transition from a sculptural to pictorial humanism. Already the title implies a new foregrounding: painting, not sculpture. The plot itself dramatizes that shift. The action begins with three separate individuals (Louise, Waller, and Reinhold) engaged in a solitary, frustrating encounter with sculpture, but then it shifts to a freewheeling, exuberant discussion of painting. Indeed, soon Louise suggests that they exit the museum, and that they sit in the countryside, so that they can listen to and discuss her descriptions of choice paintings from Dresden *Gemäldegallerie* (DG 50). And, after the morning brief stint in the sculpture gallery, that is how the three friends spend the rest of the afternoon.

This is how the drama opens:

> LOUISE. How come you wander so broodingly among the ancients, Waller? Are you perhaps composing a hymn to the old gods?
>
> WALLER. I do not know why, but every time I enter in this room I feel invited to retreat into my interior; and despite the young artists that work here, and even amidst the confusion of gaping spectators, it is as if I have found myself in a profound solitude.
>
> LOUISE. It's the imitation-drive, my dear friend: you would like to become a statue yourself.
>
> WALLER. Irreverent, aren't we? You make fun of me, but your barbs hit closer to home than you think. Even you would have to concede that many of those who think the world of themselves would cut a decidedly ugly figure as statues.
>
> LOUISE. Very true. And often I have imagined what a disaster it would be if a Perseus, equipped with Medea's head and her petrifying gaze, would enter into our theaters or our dance parties.
>
> WALLER. That would give us Bernini's sculptural groups, or even worse. For certain gestures and movements, a moment is already too long. Permanently fixed, they would appear in all their empty triviality. Life conceals also formal imperfections, but sculpture is truth, and is superior to all illusion (*Tauschung*). Its creations are like spirits that have suffused everywhere their external husks, assigning to them boundaries that harmonize with their essence. And so these [sculptures] can exist in this self-constituted world with a serene and self-sufficient presence. It is a visible, eternal beatitude.
>
> LOUISE. A beatitude, that I grant you, for the moment. You almost call out like that prophet in the desert: "I tell you, God can raise children to Abraham from these rocks." But what you say is true only for the Olympians, who have already their own paradise. Is there place, in your paradise, for fauns cavorting with nymphs, for duelers engaged in a lunge, for heroes fighting the mortal grip of serpentine coils? (DG 39–40).

Two young friends, Louise and Waller (a poet) meet unexpectedly in one of the rooms of Dresden's *Antikensammlung*. The ensuing dialogue between them reveals an allegiance to Winckelmann and Herder's sculptural theo-humanism, but an allegiance they both complicate and call into question. Let us start from the strong element of allegiance. Since 1782, the *Antikensammlung* had been enriched by a group of ancient sculpture casts taken (under the supervision of

Anton Raphael Mengs) from the most important European collections; this cast assemblage included also all those pieces which Winckelmann had proclaimed to be absolute paragons of perfection (Mazza, 387). It is intriguing to think that Louise meets Waller in the cast-collection room, where one could actually *see* clones of the artworks that one had only imagined on the strength of Winckelmann's *ekphrases*. By playfully asking whether Waller is composing a hymn to the marble gods, Louise is also suggesting that her poet-friend is trying to replicate Winckelmann's lyrical response. And Waller's reluctant admission that he may be trying (if vainly) to recreate in himself the beauty of the ancient marbles strongly echoes Winckelmann's aesthetics, where perceived beauty invites also some re-organization of the self. He is beholden even to Winckelmann's prejudices on Bernini (KS 37), accused of straying from the ideal into a base, vulgar naturalism. Finally, rehearsing a central motif from Herder's *Plastik* (Mazza, 387), Waller proclaims that "sculpture is truth," in the sense of an artwork that reconciles a formal archetype with its sensuous embodiment. The silent pendant of this claim is the demotion of painting to an art of 'mere appearance'.

On the other hand, it is clear that Waller's Winckelmannian sensibility has been filtered through Wackenroder: the old casts invite him to an inward retreat ("*fühle ich mich zur Rückkehr in mein Innres eingeladen*", DG 39). To be sure, there already was a strong Pietist, subjective facet to Winckelmann's aesthetics, but, there, affects were more a gateway to the beauty of the artwork than something worth cultivating or tending for its own sake. As we have seen, this objectivity changes with Wackenroder's *Klosterbruder*. The latter is strikingly less attentive to the specific merits of an artwork than he is to the internal emotional landscape of the spectator. And so, Waller is a hybrid: he is a Winckelmannian by preferring the *Antikensammlung* over the *Gemäldegallerie*, but—and here he follows in the monk's footsteps—he sees the aesthetic object as inviting an encounter with one's intimate self.

The payoff of such hybridization is uncertain. The statue might invite Waller to a healing inward retreat, but at the cost of social alienation, as attested by his feeling of deep loneliness vis-à-vis the other visitors. Why is this the case? Louise ventures an explanation, touching upon (by now) well-familiar themes. The classically beautiful body may sensuously embody an archetype, while leaving little, if any, room for a *lived* temporality. The *beau ideale* suits the Olympians, who "have already their paradise," since they live in ideal time, where embodied existence never falls short of essence. But the *ataraxic* calm of ideal beauty is harder to reconcile with *narrative* time, where every 'now' is marked by at least *some* emotional imbalance, as a result of a slippage between existence and *telos*. "Duelers engaged in a lunge" have yet to hit their mark, while "heroes fighting the mortal grip of serpentine coils" are (tragically) removed from the escape they so desperately seek; hence the deeply furrowed brow of the lunging *Borghese Gladiator*, the agonizing (if elegantly restrained) grimace of the *Laocoön*. Waller replies that sculptures like these still count as masterpieces, because each of them emancipates the moment from a narrative matrix in which it has been embedded. And so, as representation of a bit of frozen narrative, the *Gladiator* will never quite finish his business of inflicting a blow to his mounted opponent. But as an aesthetic object, the *Gladiator*

lives in its own ideal, plenitudinous 'now' (That the ideal time of the Gladiator is a function of its quivering line of beauty is borne out, incidentally, also by Joseph Wright of Derby's 1765 *Three People Viewing the Gladiator by Candlelight* (private collection) (DG 41). But to acknowledge the aesthetic and metaphysical sweep of an artwork does not necessarily entail that the artwork itself should be relevant to one's own life. Waller clearly *wants* classical sculpture to matter to his own life. By his own admission, he seeks, at some level, to be a living mimesis of the marble gods upon which he gazes. But he also realizes that (unlike the *Laocoön* or the *Gladiator*) he cannot purify his own temporality, freighted as it is with accidentality. That is why Luise's playful thought-experiment strikes a chord with him. Were he suddenly to be turned into a statue by the sight of Medusa's head, he would be frozen in a thoroughly forgettable *Gestalt* (and perhaps an embarrassing one).

Louise touches upon another problem. Should one even *want* to embody the noble grandeur of ancient sculpture? If life could imitate art (*per impossibile*), would it be an alienated life? Listen to how Louise reacts to Waller's praise of the *Vestal* (currently catalogued as a *Demetra*; Mazza 388), one of the most celebrated pieces of the *Antikensammlung*:

> WALLER. The ancient artists may have deliberately foregrounded the superior part of her [the *Vestal*] face, both through her posture and the excellent handling of her profile.
> LOUISE. Giving statues a contemplative aspect. With their example they guide the observer toward the enjoyment they expect of him. But today I am not at all contemplatively inclined. I am in a sociable, chatty mood. Come, let us greet our Reinhold: there he is, intent on drawing the stupendous torso of the *Wrestler*. He just got on his feet. How are you, dear Reinhold? You seem peeved.
> REINHOLD. This drawing refuses to come out as I wish.

As we have seen in Chap. 3, Herder claimed for classical sculpture a rather prodigious metaphysical meaning: the epiphany of a space saturated with its own temporality. Louise acknowledges the point, if only to criticize it immediately thereafter. The typically vacant gaze of classical sculpture is supposed to model for the spectator the essentially solitary, detached pleasure of *theoria*. If the *Vestal*'s silent invitation to a lofty self-removal leaves Louise cold, it is not because on that day she happens to be "in a sociable, chatty mood." Rather, Louise thinks that:

a) aesthetic experience must entail an intellectual and affective *appropriation* of the artwork. Like Wackenroder, she seeks "to rejoyce in the beautiful presentation (*Darstellung*), to satiate myself with it, to absorb it completely into me" (DG 45).

b) this appropriation involves nothing short of a translation of one medium into the other:

> one should try to bring the arts closer to one another, and seek communication points between them. That way, statues would be animated into paintings . . . paintings would transform themselves into poetry, poetry into music, and—who knows!—perhaps suddenly a sacred music would soar in the air like a temple (DG 49–50).

Here Louise's implicit target is Lessing's medium-specific discrimination between figurative art and poetry, and his warning that each of them should be wary of encroaching on the neighbour's territory. For Louise, this exclusionary discourse goes against the subject's meaningful metabolism and transmogrification of the aesthetic object across media-boundaries.

c) such internalization-via-transmutation is an essentially communal, dialogical activity: "one must talk! Talk!" (50).

Louise offers an immediate dramatization of all these points. Instead of just quietly gazing at the famous torso of the *Wrestler*, Louise is intrigued by Reinhold's attempt to transmogrify it by drawing and engages him in a conversation about the nature of that experience.

Not only this detail, but the whole dialogue dramatizes the point that, at its best, aesthetic experience is an essentially *convivial* activity, in the literal sense of a 'living-together' (*cum-vivere*). Through Winckelmann, Herder, and Wackenroder, we have become more than familiar with one dimension of aesthetic conviviality: the intersection between the life of the spectator and the life of the artwork, a life which the spectator herself has 'Pygmalionically' activated in the artwork. The second convivial dimension is aesthetic experience as a shared, dialogical pursuit among friends. This aspect was absolutely crucial for Winckelmann, who (strongly influenced by Plato's *Phaedrus*) conceived of it as an eroticized friendship, where an older mentor initiates a younger student to the beauty of art.[4] Muted in Herder, this second dimension resurfaced in many of Wackenroder's letters to his bosom friend Ludwig Tieck, which testify to a shared love for the arts that was to culminate in the co-operative writing of *Franz Sternbald*, a project that Tieck had to carry out alone, due to his friend's premature death.

These two levels of aesthetic conviviality are dynamically interrelated, as the plot of *Die Gemälde* shows. Each of the three friends shares with the others his or her own encounters with artworks, but this lively exchange gets going only on the turf of painting.

The shift is due in no small measure to the fact that painting seems, more than sculpture, open to the imaginative engagement of the spectator. At any rate, Louise see it in such a way:

> LOUISE. It may be that creation is difficult in both arts. But you must agree that of the two sisters, sculpture is the least friendly to the observer. Painting offers an easier enjoyment, speaking more immediately to the world of our senses.
> REINHOLD. What do you mean by enjoyment?
> LOUISE. Rejoycing in the beautiful presentation (*Darstellung*), to satiate myself with it, to absorb it completely into me (DG 45).

Louise's point is that sculpture is less imaginatively penetrable than painting because of its greater abstraction from how objects *appear* to us, and how specific appearances embody affect. In this spirit, she revisits the obligatory chestnut of Lorraine's light, which, in his *Acis and Galatea*, transfigures its landscape warmly, so that the air becomes almost palpable. Everything is, thus, infused with sweetness (59). Reservations notwithstanding, Reinhold is essentially in agreement with Louise. He does fear that Louise's 'intimistic' approach may abut into a crude impressionism, shirking careful engagement with the artwork's own form:

[4]Winckelmann's clearest, most sustained presentation of his 'aesthetics-as-friendship' is his work: *Discussion of the capacity for the feeling of the beautiful in art, and its cultivation* (*Abhandlung von der Fähigkeit der Empfindung des Schönen in der Kunst, und dem Unterrichte in derselben,* KS 152–176).

"an impression (*Eindruck*) is only the shadow of a painting or a statue" (47). (This fear is not altogether unreasonable, if we think of Wackenroder). Reinhold does agree, however, that it is painting, not sculpture, that teaches us to pay attention to infinitely diverse ways in which the real can offer itself to our senses:

> We are not interested in how things appear, but how they are, that is: how we can grasp them and handle them . . . From the earliest infancy we overlay upon ocular deliverances the perceptions of other senses, and a quantity of inferences that become so habitual as to make us believe that we are seeing everything directly. But ultimately, as far as daily life is concerned, we are aware of our surroundings more because we know them than because we actually see them . . . If my observations are right, we know also what to think of the judgment of those who reduce color and light (and so the means by which a body becomes visible) to subordinate parts of painting, or even to charms without true importance. In truth, painting is the art of appearance, just as sculpture is the art of forms. And if I did not fear to get stuck in your bottomless philosophical questions, Waller, I would say that painting should idealize appearance. In everyday life we accustom ourselves to see beyond or through appearance. In a sense, we destroy it continuously. The painter gives appearance a body, an autonomous existence, beyond our organs. It turns the medium of the visible into an object for us. We should thus linger on appearance; and how could it be worthy of it, if it were not chosen and represented in the most significative and satisfying way? (DG 62–4).

Here Reinhold is appealing to Herder's word, while simultaneously upending its spirit. As we read in *Sculpture*, "we may say that sculpture is *truth*, whereas painting is a *dream*. The former is all *presentation*, the latter, storytelling *magic*" (S 45). Reinhold repeats, "painting is the art of appearance, just as sculpture is the art of forms." There is, of course, one important difference. Herder sees painting as the representation of a dream, Reinhold sees painting, instead, as the representation of appearance. At bottom, however, there is no discrepancy. When Herder says 'dream', he means 'visual appearance'. But his word-choice is nevertheless revealing, as it shows that his discussion of sculpture and painting, respectively, is less than neutral; he harbors a Platonic suspicion that the inherently multifarious nature of visual data is a distortion of a simpler formal archetype. Reinhold reverses the charge. We always "see beyond or through appearance: in a sense, we destroy it continuously." We see 'a cup', 'a tree', and so on, unmindful that these perceptions result from a superimposition of universals upon a far richer sensuous reality.

To be sure, Reinhold's praise of pictorial appearances does not entail a correlative demotion of classical sculpture. After all, the first thing we learn about him is that he toiled for hours in front of the *Wrestler*, seeking (vainly, as it turns out) to fix on paper its contours. Was Reinhold, like so many Old Masters before him, simply quarrying classical sculpture for motifs to graft into his paintings? Or could his attempt at transposition also hint at his feeling that, for all its beauty, sculpture was emotionally and imaginatively remote?

Be that as it may, Reinhold remains ultimately wary of a humanist approach to figurative art, which he perceives as a wooly-headed (if not dishonest) evasion of the main point, a connoisseurial judgment about the artwork's technical orchestration. Louise's desire affectively to internalize the picture "is not at all sufficient to exhaustively appraise a picture, let alone to learn oneself how to make something"

(45). When Waller says that language is capable of "grasping and exposing the living spirit of a work of figurative art," Reinhold replies that "this so-called spirit is never the thing [i.e. the artwork] itself" (48).

The dialectic between Reinhold's 'objective', dispassionate art-historical perspective and the first-personal aesthetics of his two friends is one of the features that makes *DG* so enjoyably thought-provoking. But—quite ironically—one could say that what draws so intimately Louise and Waller to painting is something underscored by Reinhold himself. He had claimed that "painting should idealize appearance;" that if pictorial appearance "ought to be worthy" of our lingering, it should be "chosen and represented in the most significative and satisfying way" (64). However, Reinhold's words, including 'idealize', 'worthy', and 'significative', are not references to that 'spirit' he abhors, but rather simply ways to designate the artwork's formal integrity. Quite instructively, he considers landscape the highest genre within painting, precisely because "pure appearances have such an important role within it." Here, idealization turns on the expurgation of the human figure from the picture (65).

By her own admission, Louise operates with a less formal, more traditional understanding of the 'idealized appearance':

> I do not want to boast that, out of a love for abstraction, I have not cultivated a preference for the nobler (*edler*) object, and that I have sought with pleasure the poetry of the representation of the commonplace. I had the possibility of choosing. You will not resent it, then, if I will lead you mainly through the Italian Room (DG 53–4).

The very layout of the *Gemäldegallerie* was designed to encourage responses like Louise's. The *Italienische Saal* was at the time a separate section, which enshrined the "true jewels of the collection" (Mazza, 389). However, Louise's preference is not the acritical acquiescence of the unschooled. After all, she shares Reinhold's Romantic sensibility for landscape painting, and takes Waller to task for his stiff conservativism: "Waller resents landscape painting because the ancients did not make much of it, and because he abhors descriptive poetry" (DG 56). Now, Waller's rejection of descriptive verse (i.e. poetry that describes objects, not actions) shows that he has internalized Lessing's point: poetry should focus on *action*. But in the end, even Louise's imagination is exercised more intensely by so-called *historical* painting (i.e. painting that turns on the depiction of human action) in the so-called 'grand manner' (where the classically rendered body has also the aura of *ethos*). With a nod to Weimar classicism, she shuns the light-poetry of Dutch genre painting in favor of the 'nobler' object.

Die Gemälde's break with sculpture, consequently, is not as radical as it might seem at first blush. As we will see anon, Louise's descriptions of Andrea del Sarto's *Sacrifice of Abraham*, and Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, show an enduring fascination with classical plastic values. But crucially, they betray also the tacit conviction that, for a variety of reasons, if classically beautiful human form is to address compellingly a *modern* spectator, it must be absorbed into a pictorial form.

Fig. 5.1 *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, by Andrea del Sarto (Dresden) (Source: Artres)

Let us start with Andrea del Sarto's *Sacrifice of Abraham* (Fig. 5.1):

> Among the many noteworthy paintings, no one seems more pictoresque (*piktoresk*) and so noble (*edle*) as the *Abraham* of Andrea del Sarto . . . The boy is naked. Kneeling on the altar with his left leg, he stands on his right leg. His face turned on the observer, he looks ahead of himself with eyes full of terror. Since the entire action (*Handlung*) unfolds at his back, he suspects rather than knows. Despite the fact that his mouth is open in fear, and the eyebrows are excessively raised toward the nose, the nobility (*edle*) of the features remains fully recognizable. The abdomen is contracted in fear, but without convulsive spasms. Since his hands are behind his back, the softly shaded beautiful body becomes entirely visible. Compressed forward, the shoulders have an indescribably lovely, melancholy expression. The back projects slightly above the arm in the foreground, and this perfects, as it were, [the presentation of] mortal fear. Far from being coldly perfect, the design has turned into

> warm life. Pain and sweetness are balanced in a touching way. If the celestial boy does not break our heart, it is because right in that moment his father's eye and ear have caught the messenger that hovers above, a younger brother arrived to announce salvation.
>
> Abraham has not comprehended the words of the angel. He looks above as if interrupted in the work he was accomplishing with force and despair. His desire to escape the task transpires from his face, ennobling it. He has gray hair, but he is not an old man. A remarkable virile energy expresses itself in his figure, in the tendons of the hand that hold the knife, and in all the right part of the body . . . .the body of the boy is somewhat pale, as if the innocent blood about to be spilt had retreated in the veins; but he is not depicted in a petrified way. The angel fills the scarce space between Abraham's head and the superior corner of the painting: it is a winged child, bearer of good tidings. One could imagine him grander and more serious, but the diversity of the figures helps the pictoresque contrast. The landscape in the background is simply a color woodprint. Andrea del Sarto has represented Abraham as the Laocoön of Christianity. Not only because in drawing Isaac he might have had Laocoön's children in mind, but because of the idea and spirit. His Abraham is no longer the pious man that sacrifices obediently to the God of love what he holds dearest. Faith is great in him, because he is great. Strength has forged that which obeys in him (DG 83–6).

Let us start from Louise's initial compliment: Del Sarto's *Sacrifice of Abraham* is a unique synthesis of the 'picturesque' (*piktoresk*) and the 'noble' (*edle*). The term 'picturesque' had made its first important appearance in eighteenth century aesthetics through the writings of William Gilpin (1724–1804). For Gilpin, the word captured above all the subject's aestheticization of natural landscape, i.e., the pleasure of looking at the landscape as a virtual painted one ("not merely describing; but . . . adapting the description of natural scenery to the principles of artificial landscape; and opening the sources of those pleasures, which are derived from the comparison").[5] The Jena Group expanded and historicized Gilpin's idea, taking '*piktoresk*' to indicate a distinctively modern penchant for turning the visible into a reflection of invisible inwardness. In August Schlegel's words, "not only in painting, but even in sculpture, one could call modernity 'pictoresque', in contrast with antiquity, which could be called 'plastic' . . . in Christianity the soul folds into itself, and wants to see reflected the interior world inside the world of its visible productions. Painting, a more eloquent interpreter of such sentiments, was cultivated with more love, and attained a higher perfection than sculpture" (LBA 278–9).

Thus, when Louise praises the *Sacrifice* as picturesque *and* noble, she is claiming that this painting makes an ancient ideal more meaningful to a modern spectator. Is she right? Could such a painting finally allow that conversation with ancient sculpture that Louise and her friends had vainly sought within the precincts of the *Antikensammlung*? Her detailed analysis does not completely confirm her opening proclamation. She is rather convincing in her remarks about Isaac. She points our attention to the unmistakable sculptural beauty of his body, whose poise she takes as an embodiment of *ethos*: the stomach contracts, but with the dignified measure typical of a Stoic sage. The picturesque comes from the abnormal deformation of

[5]From Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye, and several parts of South Wales, Ec. relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (1782). The quote and my discussion of Gilpin are drawn from *Storia dell'Arte Einaudi*.

the shoulders: a powerful, touching visible clue to the inner trauma of Isaac. Another picturesque element (*we* might add) comes from scalar economy: Abraham's gigantic size vis-à-vis his son could be another token of the boy's inner world, of his feeling hopelessly dwarfed by his father. It stands to reason, then, that Isaac seems almost to descend from the altar-pedestal, as if a sculpture should become accessible by being inflected with an un-Stoical, desperate *pathos* (again the Pygmalionic trope: "a design become life"). Admittedly, one might object to Louise that Del Sarto's transmogrification of sculpture into painting is redundant, because sculpture (think of *Niobe*) *can* be saturated with *pathos*. But if to be a self is also to see one's present as part of a larger narrative, then sculpture loses traction vis-à-vis painting. Why? By situating a figure in a larger pictorial framework, we feel that we can see the past and the present of that figure. It is one thing to sculpt, say, a penitent Magdalene than to paint her. In the latter case, we can insert her in a landscape that implies much about her life narrative. The cosmetics scattered around her tell us about her past, the mirror she gazes into makes us see her concern for the future. Consider how much we gain by inserting a classically beautiful Isaac into a pictorial framework. "The entire action unfolds at his [Isaac's] back, who suspects rather than knows": the placement of Abraham behind Isaac makes us *see* how tradition (the *past*) has suddenly become incomprehensible to the young boy. "He looks ahead of himself, eyes full of terror." Here the unknowing anticipatory projection into the *future* is spatialized by a gaze that pierces through the pictorial frame.

Louise is less than persuasive in her remarks about Abraham, whom she strikingly labels a "Laocoön of Christianity." She focuses on how his solidly planted, weighty body has both nobility and force. A look at that body, and we realize that Abraham's compliance with God's atrocious injunction was a sign not of weakness, but of courageous trust; a figure with that noble brow and strong sinews is genetically incapable of cowering. But herein lies also a problem for a modern spectator. Two elements constitute the modern self: (1) the irreducible uniqueness of any subjective inwardness; (2) the centrality of self-determination. As Georg Simmel acutely noticed, both elements are missing from the classical ideal (Simmel 121).[6] Individuality is downplayed: the noble body comes across as a *type*, an instance of the universal. Freedom, too, recedes into the background. Grandeur becomes second nature and *gravitas* is indistinguishable from the body's

[6]"Perhaps that characteristic classical conception of human beings is tied to the feeling that only peers can acknowledge each other. For this can have the consequence that the individual has to be reduced to a general human in order to affect the viewer and mediate an understanding . . . Here, individual objects represent something general; they are not simply themselves . . . in Greek sculpture the figures know that they are being viewed, and therefore have to represent something . . . They acquire their whole meaning from the idea that they represent. The touch of play-acting that one can feel in Greek culture and which determines the form of dialogue of Platonic writings, is connected to this structure. There exists a deep connection between the representation-for-each-other and the typification of one's own image that understandably enters into the ideal constructions of human beings in general, and whose domination within classical art led to the proposition that the portrayer has to elevate and restylize the model into a 'type'" (Simmel 121).

massive physical *gravity*; Abraham could not have responded otherwise than with courageous faith. As Louise notices, elements of regret characterize Abraham's face, but, strikingly, she understands those hints of regret, as offering a kind of relief, and as points of contrast to his unshakeable resolve, rather than as windows upon the troubled interior of an individual.

These problems are compounded, not resolved, by Louise's passionate, enamoured description of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*:

> LOUISE: I cannot define Mary as a goddess. The infant she holds in her arms is a god, because no infant was ever similar to this one. She, instead, is only the maximal expression of the human figure, and her transfiguration comes from her quietly holding the infant in her arms, without visible emotions of *ecstasis* or self-importance, without pride and without humility. There is nothing etheral in her, every part is straight and solid. She does not wander among us, and yet she treads the clouds, without swaying in the glory that frames her grand figure. Her head is erect, direct her gazes… her garment covers her completely, except the head, neck, hands, and feet. But one cannot separate her dress from the stupendous body which—though covered—remains visible, especially from the shoulders to the waist… a presence like this needs only itself, the simple figure is enough to fill the entire soul. There is no representation of motherly love, not even with the aim of winning us over. Mary does not hold the infant with an affectionate gesture, the child does not show awareness of her mother's presence. She is there to hold him, God has placed him in her arms. In this sacred duty she appears to the world adoring and grand, as in the heavens in which she rules, and from which she has descended anew. She has no passions, and her clear eye signifies the silence of passion. When I moved closer to inspect her face closely, I cannot deny that a gentle shudder ran my body, and my eyes grew moist.
>
> WALLER: You run the risk of becoming catholic.
>
> LOUISE: Just as, occasionally, of becoming pagan. This is not dangerous, if Raphael is the priest. Reinhold, tell me: isn't the entire painting build like a temple? The genuflected figures left and right constitute with the central lines a true architectonic symmetry (DG 126–131).

In one rather obvious way, paintings like the *Sistine Madonna* overcome the poignant separation between man and God that Louise and Waller experience amidst the splendidly solitary statues of the *Antikensammlung*. Here, the human worshiper is literally in the picture and her relationship with the deity becomes a theme, because of her inclusion within the pictorial frame. With a playful flourish, Raphael manages thematically to include also *us*, the living spectators. The lifted curtains that frame the painting suggest that Mary and child are making themselves available to our gaze. Louise herself notices how St. Sixtus, St. Barbara, and the Madonna seem, in spite of their respective quasi-sculptural isolation, to be so intimately related to one another that one might well join Sixtus and Barbara in their adoration (DG 126). Is she praising Raphael for making the antique figures affectively accessible? One would think so, as her praise of Mary singles out systematically her plastic corporeality. Louise points out the splendid body of the Madonna, which is completely solid (no attempt to diaphanize it with *sfumato*) and refuses to be swayed by the curling spires of surrounding light.

If Mary's solid corporeality ("there is nothing ethereal in her") seems to make her less elusive, what are we to make of her *ataraxic* calm? Why is Louise moved to

tears by her complete *Heiterkeit*? Half-playfully, Louise volunteers that her reaction to the *Sistine Madonna* is pagan. She is right. She is a pagan, in the sense that she celebrates an image of sheer presence. Just like Del Sarto's Abraham, Mary is not divided between inner and outer. In the 'what you see is what you get' of plastic beauty, her *ethos* has become flesh, curvature, a ponderous mass: "a presence like this needs only itself, the simple figure is enough to fill the entire soul." There are no invisible worlds of affects within that exceeds the outer husk: "without visible emotions of *ecstasis* or self-importance, without pride and without humility." Louise herself notices how Mary is a *type*, "the maximal expression of the human figure".

Louise is inescapably modern, however, which is why she must integrate the *Sistine Madonna* with the supplementary cult of the unique artist genius, Raphael. Mary may be the token of a universal type, but she comes from the hands of the "priest" Raphael, who transubstantiates Platonic form with the unrepeatable life of individual genius. To her merit, Louise herself is not altogether unaware of the perils of subjective projection; she confesses that "sometimes I wished I ignored that this painting is by Raphael" (DG 125).

The negotiation between classical form and subjective inwardness is taken up again by Waller's *The Legend of St. Luke*, a poetical response to the *Sistine Madonna*. Waller celebrates Luke as the founding father of pictorial realism—as opposed to sculpture's abstractive idealization (146). According to a famous legend, Luke was the first and only painter to depict the *real* semblances of Jesus and Mary. In Waller's poem, however, Luke's portrait of the Virgin remained unfinished, due to Mary's sudden death (150). After Luke, Western art did not manage to go beyond the Byzantine icon-painters, who simply repeated the incomplete pattern bequeathed to them by Luke. Things changed only when heaven tasked saint [*sic*] Raphael Sanzio, to finish the job that Luke could not complete. As an angel, Raphael had seen Mary enthroned in heaven, and was thus able to offer the world the *Sistine Madonna*. Soon after discharging this task, he departed this world, to rejoin the angelic choirs (151).

As I see it, Waller's poem is a different answer to the same problem confronted by Louise, that of making the classical possible for modernity. In the *Legend of St. Luke*, Mary is a creature of emotion. She greets Luke joyfully, she feels genuinely unworthy of having her picture taken. Only when Luke tells her that he has been tasked by heaven to portray her does she give in. The point of this fanciful pedigree (Raphael completes Luke's task) is to mollify the cold perfection of the *Sistine Madonna* by an injection of feeling. This poem urges us not to take the utter poise of this Virgin at face value. After all, unlike Luke, Raphael did not have the benefit of portraying his subject from life; he was painting a celestial Mary. Waller (admittedly, rather fulsomely) encourages us to see in Mary the feeling that Raphael had to omit.

* * *

Today *Die Gemälde* is a largely forgotten work, known at best only by a few experts in German Studies. But, quite recently (2001), it has received sustained attention by no less a figure than the art historian Hans Belting. Unfortunately, the dialogue

has not benefited from his attention. Belting is at pains to use this work as decisive evidence for his overarching thesis, namely, that romanticism initiated a fateful, extravagant worship of "Art," conceived as a universal, in whose name the sensuous and historical specificity of single artworks could be all but forgotten. Consider this excerpt, worthy of extensive quotation:

> In 1799 . . . the Schlegel brothers published the Dresden '*Gemäldegespräche*' [sic] in their literary periodical *Das Athenäum*. The Schlegels were deeply conscious of the conflict between art and religion, but saw it resolved in the picture as if by a healing hand. Once again art offered a refuge from that freedom, newly won and yet already feared, which offered no firm foothold. 'We gladly share in your devotion', one of the participants in the conversation assures another, 'for we can each experience it in our own way'. The object of this devotion [Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*] is a miracle of art that is quickly imbued with sanctity. This is why (as one of the speakers declares) the work fascinates connoisseurs and untutored minds alike. Raphael is revered as a saint by those who have no belief in saints, and the perfection of his *Madonna* is seen as proof of a perfection that transcends all human limits.
>
> Countless visitors to the museum marvelled at the fact that such a work existed before their eyes and yet did not belong to their time, so that it was simultaneously present and absent. It was not the mere material product of a transient act of painting, but had 'a sublime existence of its own' that transcended any individual person's subjective impression. Yet, in the conversation, 'Louise' (in reality Caroline Schlegel) acknowledges that, as she visualizes the Madonna of the painting in her memory, the image changes into one of her own making. In this way, then, the beholder also plays a meaningful rôle. He or she embodies the artwork in their imagination—an enigma that no one at the time attempted to investigate. The finite nature of the actual work dissolved in its boundless contemplation, whereby individuals experienced the painting, despite its historicity, as a kind of 'heaven of art' (Belting 2001, 54).

By now, I hope, the uncharitably one-sided nature of Belting's remarks should be clear. It would be petty to take him to task for not even getting the name of the dialogue right (*Die Gemälde*, not *Gemäldegespräche*!), or of its author (August Schlegel, not Friedrich, as Belting had claimed in his earlier *Likeness and Presence*; see Belting 1994, 480). However, such shoddiness is a symptom of a far more significant problem: Belting's arbitrary plum-picking, which self-servingly ignores many details that problematize his argument. Let us consider a few crucial cases.

Do Louise, Waller, and Reinhold really see the conflict between art and religion "solved in the picture as if by a healing hand"? True, Louise is not troubled by the theological instability of the *Sistine Madonna*, whose wavering between Christianity and Paganism is redeemed by the stabilizing force of Raphael's genius. But, as we have seen, she is also aware that the aura of the artist may unduly color her response ("sometimes I wish I ignored that this painting is by Raphael"). Waller is so far from seeing the *Sistine Madonna* as a miraculous reconciliation of classical art and Christian religion that he develops an *ad hoc* mythology, a fabricated Christian pedigree aimed at bringing this Juno-like Virgin closer to him. To his credit, Waller is aware that his poetry is a response to an *unresolved* conflict between art and religion: "the themes of modern painting in its highest moments, and also afterwards, have become so foreign to us, that painting itself needs poetry as an interpreter" (DG 134). For all its power, the *Sistine*'s beauty is disturbed by its relative semantic opacity. And, equally striking, Waller is aware that, for

all its earnestness, his poetic response has also an uneradicable element of playful artificiality: "we must be conscious that we are also creating something in ourselves, before we venture to decorate it with a poetic play" (135). For his own part, Reinhold tempers Louise's aesthetic enthusiasm with the salutary counterweight of skepticism. When Louise extols the darkened patina of the painting as an index of its remarkable journey through the ages, he wryly suggests that the veneer could be due to the liberal use of frankincense lit under it by the monks of Piacenza, where the painting once hung (130). And Reinhold takes Louise to task for thinking that the painting is perfect as it is, just because Raphael made it (130); as he sees it, the painting is *not* perfect. The figure of Saint Barbara is not as felicitously rendered as the others (132). Finally, it is Reinhold, the enemy of enthusiastic, pindaric *ekphrasis*, who reassures Louise, "we gladly share in your devotion" (126)—an element of dialogic irony lost on Belting.

Nor does the minute, highly detailed discussion of the *Sistine Madonna* by Louise and Reinhold, lasting eight pages (by far the longest description in the dialogue; *DG* 126–33), bear out Belting's claim that "the finite nature of the artwork is dissolved in boundless contemplation." Nowhere does Louise, *pace* Belting, declare that "as she visualizes the madonna of the image in her memory, the image turns into one of her own making." Rather, Louise claims that "often it is only in recollection that I find that which produces an effect" (*Ich finde es oft erst in der Erinnerung*, *was denn eigentlich die Wirkung hervorbringt*, DG 128). As I see it, Louise is claiming that one cannot divide the analysis of a painting from one's subjective response to it, which differs *toto caelo* from the claim that analysis *is* subjective response. What would be the point, anyway, of an analysis that left out the artwork's address to *our present*? Can we rest content with an antiquarian approach?

Diderot lampooned *antiquariens* like Montfauçon and Caylus, for their momentous discovery that the Romans used forks and plates.[7] In the end, Belting's animus toward *DG* is itself instructive, as it reveals a problematic bent toward a 'scientific, objective' art-historical approach, where the chief aim is scrupulous reconstruction of the original context of an artwork.

5.3 Friedrich Schlegel at the Louvre (1802–04)

Die Gemälde is a reconstructive distillation of the shared, convivial aesthetic experiences of the Jena-Circle: August Schlegel, his (at the time) wife Caroline, his brother Friedrich Schlegel, the taciturn *enfant prodige* Friedrich Schelling, and (on occasion) Novalis, Gries, Fichte. In the words of Caroline Schlegel, *DG* is "a monument of our sojourn in Dresden." (Mazza 385).[8] But the actual writing of the

[7]Quoted from Franzoni 2008, XXV.

[8]Letter of 10/24/1798; from *Caroline, Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, hrsg. E. Schmidt, Leipzig, 1913. vol. 1, p. 467 (citation from Mazza, 385).

dialogue was done only by two of the members of group: Caroline Schlegel, responsible for Louise's painting descriptions, including the closing, climactic description of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*; and August Schlegel, who penned the rapid-fire dialogic exchanges, Waller's descriptions and poems.[9] To what extent were August and Caroline including the voices of their friends in their reconstruction, rather than articulating their own? One would love to be able to read *DG* as a dialogue *à la clef*, where we could unhesitatingly trace (say) one certain statement to Schelling and another to Friedrich Schlegel. That we cannot do so is, of course, not accidental. The animating spirit of the Jena group was 'symphilosophy', where philosophical investigation was conceived as an essentially choral affair. This conviction was at work also in the group's short-lived *Athenaeum* journal, which often pooled into a single collection several fragments from individual members of the group. Their interest was to preserve the choral nature of their discussion, without indications of specific authorships. *DG* toes the same line. It deliberately leaves us in the dark about who is actually speaking through the dialogue's mouthpieces.

In the case of Friedrich Schlegel, however, the question of the nature and extent of his actual contribution to *DG* is more than a matter of philological curiosity. Between 1802 and 1805, Friedrich Schlegel wrote his *Gemäldebeschreibungen* ('Painting Descriptions'; henceforth, *GB*). This work's enthusiastic embrace of the Italian, German, and Flemish Primitives made a silent break from the sculptural classicism at work in *Die Gemälde*. Louise's choices are instructive, as they engage paintings that appropriate in various ways classical sculptural motifs: Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, Correggio's *Madgalene*,[10] Del Sarto's *Abraham*. Nor does Louise gloss over the neoclassical rediscovery of the ancients, as we can see in her praise of the noble corporeality of Joseph in Carlo Cignani's *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* or the graceful curves of the *fair penitent* in Pompeo Batoni's *Magdalen*. And so, despite her romantic forays into the genre of landscape and realistic portraiture, Louise remains essentially beholden to that classicist understanding of painting which had been voiced that same year (1798) by Goethe, in his famous introduction to the art-journal *Die Propylaen*.[11]

[9] August Schlegel explicitly acknowledged Caroline's role in the writing of *DG*, as we can see from the handwritten note that accompanied the copy he sent to Goethe: "Since in all likelihood you will recognize a woman's hand, I will confess without hesitation that my wife took part in it. The majority of the painting descriptions are hers, including the part on Raphael. She thus hopes for your indulgence, should you find the whole thing to be too poetic and not artistic enough . . . the conversational parts, Waller's descriptions, and the most catholic [*sic*] poems come from me" (March 8, 1799; from *A.W. Schlegel und Fr. Schlegel im* Briefwechsel *mit Schiller und Goethe*, Leipzig, 1926, p. 84; I took the citation from Mazza, 385).

[10] Correggio's *Magdalene* is no longer extant, and survives only in copies, the most notable of which is found in the Galleria Borghese, Rome.

[11] "What modern nation does not owe its artistic heritage to the Greeks, and, in certain respects, who owes more than the Germans? If justification should be deemed necessary for our symbolic title [*Die Propylaen*] this should suffice. May it serve to remind us to stray as little as possible from classical ground, and may its brevity and significance attract those art lovers to whom we, a

Against this, consider Friedrich Schlegel's programmatic confession at the beginning of *GB*, which reads almost as a line-per-line refutation of Weimar pictorial aesthetics. Waving off the classicistic idealization of the Cinquecento, Schlegel turns to the Primitives, where he finds

> No intricate piles of human beings; instead, a few isolated figures, but painted with that diligence connaturate to the feeling for the dignity and sacredness of the highest of all hieroglyphs, i.e. the human body. Hard, even skinny forms in sharp contours that stand out distinctly; no painting in muddy chiaroscuro and intense night-shadows. Instead, clear relationships between pure masses of color, as in plain chords. Clothing and costumes that appear as one with the figure who wears them, and as simple and naïve as they. In the face (the site where the light of the divine pictorial spirit shines through most brightly), despite variety of expression or individuality of feature, that child-like, good-natured simplicity (*Einfalt*) that I am inclined to see as the original character of human beings. This is the style of ancient painting, the style that (I here acknowledge my one-sidedness) alone pleases me. Unless, that is, an important reason justifies the exception, as in Correggio, Raphael, or the other great masters, who have inaugurated and initiated the new style (GB 14).[12]

This passage recalls *Klosterbrudisieren* (Goethe's derisive condensation of Wackenroder's mystical aesthetics) with a vengeance! One hears Wackenroder's *Mönch* in Schlegel's nostalgia for the 'old style', and his belief that the consummate artistry of the 'new style' (roughly, from the High Renaissance to the Baroque) spoiled the humanist vocation of painting. Think of the sophisticated figure-groupings ("intricate piles of human beings") in—say—Veronese, Tintoretto, or Rubens, where the body's shape (and that of its garments) is largely a function of overall compositional choreography. Even the wizardry of *chiaroscuro* and tenebrism (both features of the 'new style') offend the body by dissolving it in light-play. Echoing again the *Herzenergiessungen*, Schlegel enthuses over the primitive representation of the childlike *Einfalt* of holy fools, which works as a tacit dismissal of the heroic nudity of great-souled men, even if in the guise of a 'Laocoön of Christianity', like Del Sarto's *Sacrifice of Abraham*. Aesthetics as imaginative evocation of an original integrity is also implied in Schlegel's praise of the primitives' masses of pure color. This color gets lost in the Baroque mastery of carnation, whose magic hinges on

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like-minded group of friends, hope to communicate our remarks and observations on nature and art" (Goethe, AA 79).

[12]"Keine verworrene Haufen von Menschen, sondern wenige und einzelne Figuren, aber mit dem Fleiß vollendet, der dem Gefühl von der Würde und Heiligkeit der höchsten aller Hieroglyphen, des menschlichen Leibes, natürlich ist ; strenge, ja magre Formen in scharfen Umrissen, die bestimmt heraustreten, keine Malerei aus Helldunkel und Schmutz in Nacht und Schlagschatten, sondern reine Verhältnisse und Massen von Farben, wie in deutlichen Akkorden ; Gewänder und Costume, die mit zu dem Menschen zu gehören scheinen, so schlicht und naivals diese ; in den Gesichtern (der Stelle, wo das Licht des göttlichen Malergeistes am hellsten durchscheint) aber, bei aller Mannichfaltigkeit des Ausdrucks oder Individualität der Züge durchaus und überall jene kindliche, gutmütige Einfalt und Beschränktheit, die ich geneigt bin, für den ursprünglichen Charakter der Menschen zu halten; das ist der Styl der alten Malerei, der Styl, der mir, ich bekenne hierin meine Einseitigkeit, ausschließend gefällt, wenn nicht irgend ein großes Prinzips, wie beim Correggio oder Raffael [oder den andern großen Meistern, welche den neuen Styl zuerst begründet und veranlaßt haben; *added by Schlegel in the second edition of GB, 1821*], die Ausnahme rechtfertigt."

an artfully 'dirty', mixed color palette. If Goethe kept silent about *Die Gemälde* (not even deigning to reply to August Schlegel's accompanying kind note), the unabashedly anticlassical streak of the *Gemäldebeschreibungen* must have struck him as detestable philistinism.

As the last lines of the excerpt suggest, however, Friedrich Schlegel was too sensitive a viewer to let his taste for the primitives predetermine all of his responses. He is enchanted by Correggio, a master of sensuous contours made diaphanous by melting *chiaroscuro* and has the highest praise for the tenebrism of his *Night* (one of the gems of the *Gemäldegallerie*). He is equally enthralled by the artful carnation of Raphael's *Jardinière*, which he declares to be indescribably beautiful (GB 52). Through which unspecified "important reason" did Schlegel justify his ravished response to works where (to say it with Hans Belting) there is an undeniable presence of *Kunst*, i.e. self-conscious, sophisticated artistry; where the classically beautiful body reasserts itself after the meager angularity of the primitives? The short answer is that in Raphael and Correggio, art history offered (for an all-too-brief moment) a synergic unity of incompossibles: a sophisticated evocation of the classical *beau ideale* through which shone the distinctly non-corporeal beauty of the soul's affective connection to the divine:

> When art rose to its technical perfection [in the High Renaissance] its consummate execution reached the fullness of grace in sensuous appearance together with the inner, spiritual beauty. [But] when this point was reached, secondary aims progressively obfuscated the idea of painting … one wanted to astonish by flaunting one's art and skill (GB 81).

But to engage more adequately both the collusions and tensions between Jerusalem and Athens in Friedrich Schlegel's pictorial theo-humanism, we need to consider his own break from his previous classicist perspective on figurative art.

* * *

In the 1823 Preface to the revised edition of his *Gemäldebeschreibungen*, Friedrich Schlegel reminisced over his memorable initiation to figurative art, which happened in a place we are already familiar with:

> It was Dresden *Antikensammlung* that offered me the initial *entrée* into the world of visual art … I was a young boy of seventeen, and my spiritual world and life-environment was shaped by Plato's writings, the Greek tragic poets, and Winckelmann's inspired works. In this world, inflected with the introspective, poetic loneliness of a boy, I tried to recreate the ideas and shapes of old gods and heroes in my soul. I was both happy and astonished to really see in front of me the long pined-for ancient statues of Gods. Among them I often lingered and wandered for hours, especially in the incomparable collection of Meng's plaster casts, which at the time was, in a somewhat disorganized fashion, arranged in Brühl's garden. I often let myself be closed inside it, so as be completely undisturbed. But it was not the high beauty of form alone that fulfilled and exceeded the expectations I had cherished in silence. Much more astonishing was the life and movement (*das Leben und Bewegung*) on these Olympian marble images. Because in my solitary imagination I could not imagine them so, nor think it possible. These unforgettable first impressions remained the solid, enduring foundation for my studies of classical antiquity in the following years (GB 4).

Yet another instance of the Pygmalionic *topos*, equipped even with the obligatory erotic undertones: the privacy of aesthetic encounter here evokes the warm intimacy of a tryst! But if Schlegel offers us this memory (at once poignant and gauche) it is not to become the easy fodder of nihilistic hermits like Klingemann's Bonaventura. Rather, it is because he thinks that we cannot fully grasp his pictorial aesthetics without being mindful of the affective or cognitive trajectory that finally took him there. There is something about his initial love affair with sculpture which persists even after sculpture loses its original grip on his imagination, namely, the idea that the beautiful artwork is not the target of a detached, leisurely aesthetic interest. Rather, it can powerfully address the spectator about the meaning and direction of his life. Most likely, the story of young Schlegel letting himself be locked up inside the museum is fabricated. Yet, this *ad hoc* mythology makes a genuine point. Letting oneself be physically detained by the artwork is a trope for the power of the artwork to hold captive our imagination and affects by posing questions.

Second, the re-evocation of this youthful passion for sculpture is also important because it contrastively marks out what—as Schlegel sees it—is the specifically distinctive way in which painting manages to tunnel its way into the spectator's emotions. He candidly admits that, as a boy of 17, he was impermeable to the specific force of painting—he responded only to pictures which evoked Winckelmann's *Stille Grosse und Edle Einfalt*

> At the time, the only paintings of the Dresden *Galerie* which spoke to me were those which—through a grand composition and simple majesty of form and expression—resembled the Ancients the most (GB 4).

But this began to change in those long summer days spent

> in 1798, after the deeply spiritual love-sense (*tiefe geistige Liebessinn*) of the romantic poets of the Middle Ages had become clearer to me, I started to perceive the distinctively pictorial beauty in the paintings of the great masters, (and) the more hidden grace of the soul, just as much as the magic spell of colors, which one learns to understand only through love (*Liebe*) (*ibid*).

Admittedly, this is one of those passages in which even a sympathetic reader of Friedrich Schlegel (like this one) feels frustrated. On the one hand, its brutal concision leaves us in the dark about much. Just what is 'distinctively pictorial beauty'? What is the 'grace of the soul'? And what does medieval love poetry have to do with "the magic spell of colors"? But on the other hand, one cannot just shrug off this passage, and move on. Because it is here that Schlegel tells us about the decisive moment of his epiphany, when he realized that the force of painting depends (much more than sculpture) on what is *not* immediately visible—or better: on how the visible appears to be inflected by an *x* that exceeds visibility.

Happily, there are ways of unpacking this precious, yet impossibly compressed passage. First, there is what we could call an embedded aesthetics in the *Gemäldebeschreibungen*. We can extract something like a philosophy of painting from Schlegel's intimate (and often astonishingly beautiful) records of his personal encounters with pictures. Second, these embedded fragments of pictorial aesthetics can be integrated with Friedrich Schlegel's literary theory (he himself points in

that direction by connecting medieval poetry with Christian painting). Third, in *GB* Schlegel periodically catches his breath, and tries to take theoretical stock of his own aesthetic experiences.

I recommend that we retrace Schlegel's steps. Since it was his exposure to medieval poetry that first opened his eyes to painting, we should briefly consider what Schlegel understands by "the deeply spiritual love-sense" of that poetry. Then, we will follow Friedrich Schlegel into the museum, and share some of his reactions to individual pictures. Then, we will try to see (in a case-by-case fashion) how his experience of an individual painting seems to gesture towards more general issues. When necessary, we will also lean upon Schlegel's literary theory.

But first, let us set the stage for the *Gemäldebeschreibungen*: it is not, as one would expect, Dresden's *Gemäldegallerie*, but that of the Louvre.[13] Friedrich Schlegel had repaired to Paris in 1802, in the hope of finding greater financial security. The *Athenaeum* review had to close shop in 1800 and he had failed to secure a stable teaching position at a German university. But before his arrival in Paris, he managed to secure some funds in Leipzig for a new journal, which he baptized *Europa*. And so, upon his arrival in Paris at the end of June 1802, it was incumbent on him to send back home material for the journal. As luck would have it, the Louvre, thanks to Napoleon's policy of military plunder, displayed at the time the vastest selection of Old Masters ever assembled (many of them have since been returned). Here was a great opportunity: to let the German public know about this unbelievable concentration of pictorial treasures. Hence, Schlegel set to work on his *Gemäldebeschreibungen*, which was published in irregularly spaced installments between 1802 and 1805 in the journal *Europa*.

This biographical framework is important, because it sheds light on an important *exilic* streak in Schlegel's aesthetic discourse. His epistolary *reportage* begins in this way:

> TO A FRIEND IN DRESDEN- Fall 1802
>
> I first want to make you acquainted—as precisely as possible—with the place [i.e. the Louvre palace], and then to give you an overview of the paintings currently on show here. The Louvre is an old and, at least from the side entrance, no less imposing building. It is a rather shapeless and sad home, of the sort that despots without genius and education would grant themselves in past centuries, a time of obscure confusion. This is how it is known also in the records of history, and in no way organized to be a temple of the most splendid figurative arts. Through a side door, one accedes to a collection of the most beautiful paintings, which just a short time ago still adorned the motherly Italian soil (GB 9).

To be sure, Schlegel's wish for "a temple of the most splendid figurative arts" seems to prefigure the 19th century's attempt to re-enchant its cultural heritage through a divinization of the artwork. But Schlegel may also be implying that the museum *as such* goes against re-enchantment strategies, as evinced by his talk of a shapeless home holding captives forcibly deracinated from their original setting. Their recent inclusion in the canon of 'fine art' deprived them of a whole range

[13] In this paragraph, I am relying on Eichner XIX–XX.

of somatic engagement: they were no longer something to pray to, meet under, celebrate in front of—they had become something new—something to be just looked at. For Schlegel, this new situation was not necessarily the graveyard of pictorial meaning: he was willing to explore the possibility that—precisely because of its aesthetic excellence—a painting could speak powerfully about the meaning and possibilities of human existence. But his attempt at a "de-absencing of absence" was not necessarily self-serving, nor conveniently amnesiac. First, it was not a self-absorbed, narcissist aesthetics. His discourse on paintings takes the form of an intimate address to a distant friend (Ludwig Tieck); pictorial beauty prompted at once a concern for the other. Second, Schlegel's discourse is thematically *exilic*: shot through with notes of a wanderer abroad. In a poignant "de-presencing of presence," the exiled status of the paintings reminds him of his own, and vice versa.

Schegel's choice of the necessarily episodic, *staccato* form of epistulary utterance reflects also the episodic, contingent nature of his actual encounters with paintings. In a prefiguration of Hausmann's relentless change of the Parisian landscape that deprived the self of stable points of reference, Schlegel finds out how the Louvre's curators would suddenly whisk away familiar paintings to provincial museums, in order to accommodate the latest stream of foreign artistic confiscations. He hopes poignantly that after some months of separation, some of his beloved works would reappear:

> I described things as they were in July and August of 1802. Everything here is in constant movement, and even artworks share in the general moveability. And so, things are no longer the same now. In the round halls, antiquity had to give room to the essays of modern French. Artworks are ferried away, so as to set up in their place what we call an exhibition (*Aufstellung*). Several months will pass, before we will see the beloved images in their old places, or others of the same worth (GB 54).

* * *

As a key to Schlegel's idea of medieval love poetry, let us turn to his thoughts on Petrarch, whom he sees as the true founder of the genre:

> Petrarch gave the *canzone* and the sonnet completeness and beauty. His songs are the spirit of his life, and a breath *animates* (*beseelt*) and shapes them into an indivisible work. They give sensuous shape to eternal Rome on Earth and the heavenly Madonna, as reflections of the one and only Laura in his heart—and they thereby maintain in beautiful freedom the *spiritual unity* (*geistige Einheit*) of the whole poem. His sentiment has invented, as it were, the language of Love, which even after centuries speaks to noble sensibilities (A IV, 77–8, emphasis mine).

What is it that Petrarch's 'language of Love' does? For one, it transmogrifies the beloved into an *inner* image. Petrarch does not celebrate Laura *überhaupt*, but "the one and only Laura in his heart." Furthermore, if this internal Laura has a "sensuous shape," it is a distinctly *pictorial* one. Consider this excerpt from sonnet 192: "see how much sweetness rains in her/see the pure light of heaven on earth revealed/see the great art that decks with scarlet, pearl, and gold/the chosen habit never seen anywhere,/that moves sweetly feet and eyes/ through this dim cloister which the hills enfold./Blooms of a thousand colours, grasses green,/under the ancient blackened oak now pray/her beautiful foot may press or touch them."

These lines confirm a famous *aperçu* of the Italian critic Francesco de Sanctis: Petrarch *paints* Laura. She is constituted by colors: the scarlet/pearl/gold of her dress; she is enveloped by a landscape, which is itself made up of colors: the variously pigmented flowers, the green of the grass, the dark oak. At the same time, this Laura, vividly painted in Petrarch's heart, is infused with the invisible: her beauty evokes "the heavenly Madonna." There is yet another pictorial dimension. Think again of Paul Klee's dictum that the goal of painting is *sichtbar machen*: the image is not a mere copy of the visible, but it makes visible the invisible. And one of the invisible things that this inner Laura makes visible is that she and Petrarch are one. In this respect, Laura is *not* sculptural. Winckelmann's *Edle Einfalt und Stille Grosse* holds us at arm's length. To be sure, the living Laura is indeed a separate individual. But distilled in the pure sonnet verse, Laura is *at once* a snapshot of another self *and* the very stuff of Petrarch's feeling.

Let us corroborate the connection between Petrarch and painting by leaning upon Hegel, who makes exactly the same point in his *Lectures*: in

> Petrarch's sonnets, sestets, canzone . . . the expression itself is the satisfaction. It is the self-enjoyment of love which seeks its happiness in its mourning, its laments, descriptions, memories, and fancies; it is a longing satisfied as longing, and with the picture and the spirit of the loved one it is already in full possession of the soul with which it longs to be at one . . . When you have grasped this trait of blissful independence and freedom of soul in love, you understand the character of Italy's greatest painters. In this freedom they are masters of the details of expression and situation; on the wings of this inner freedom they have at their command figure, beauty, and colour (LFA II, 874).

* * *

Equipped with these preliminary considerations, let us actually follow Friedrich Schlegel in one of his Louvre jaunts. This is what he has to say *apropos* of Andrea del Sarto's *Carità* (Fig. 5.2).

> The main value of the painting consists—besides the naïve cheerfulness and serenity of the beautiful expression—eminently in the colors: so light, tender, airy, and clear are this blue and red, and the complexion of the naked infant in between. And yet despite this, not at all garish: so tenderly softened, so truly interfused, that one sees it with tender allure, it as if through Love's serene, open eye. I never saw a picture from this master in this manner, and of such gracefulness (GB 82).

Schlegel begins by noticing the respective purity of the great masses of red and blue that make up Mary's garments. Such an observation confirms the radical unalloyed nature of primary colors: red and blue are absolutely irreducible to each other. The suggestion of chromatic purity is further underscored by the particularly crisp (though by no means harsh) lines of the drapery. And yet, Schlegel notices that these solid masses, which are mutually irreducible, seem "remarkably interfused." The ground of chromatic unity, however, is not itself visible. So what explains this beautiful harmony of colors? Schlegel gives us an important clue: the *Carità* gives us a picture of the world seen through "love's open eye." Let us clarify the point by leaning upon the love-metaphysics that Schlegel articulates in his *Philosophische Lehrjahre*. There, we find that love is the self's foundational yearning for infinity,

Fig. 5.2 *Carità*, by Andrea del Sarto (Louvre) (Source: Artres)

which is awakened by the encounter with other finite beings. Love divines that—despite its discrete appearance—each finite being is (just like the self), a fragment of an *Ur-Ich*, the archetypal divine unity (PL II, 351). For Schlegel, the perception of beauty is nothing else than *Liebe*'s spiritual intuition of an invisible kinship between self and other (as two fragments of the same divine *Ur-Ich*) (355). And so, Del Sarto's Carità is beautiful because it comes across as a loving transfiguration of difference: it gives us chromatic masses that—in the face of their vivid mutual distinction—seem strongly drawn to one another. The invisibility of the ground of chromatic unity is also crucial. Love is the capacity to recognize the transcendent bond under the carapace of empirical difference (351).

Furthermore, the invisibility of this common ground is also what *saves* chromatic difference. Precisely by remaining invisible, the link between the various colors preserves their own respective individualities; it's as if we saw a divine love that does not hegemonize the individuals it embraces. How different is this from the love that Schelling saw in Niobe! It is only when an overwhelming grief turns her individuality to stone, that we can read the divine love of a mother in her face.

* * *

> Here is Schlegel engaging Vincenzo Catena's *Holy Family* (Fig. 5.3). A wonderful *Holy Family* by Bellini. A work in life-size, painted on a clear back-ground with serene light. On the right of the observer, a holy woman, lovingly turned toward the child. On the left Joseph, a wonderful old man. In the middle sits the mother, who—while holding the child toward the old man and St. John—looks at the latter, who gazes up devoutly. A celestially beautiful tiny figure: the arms piously folded on his chest, frizzy black hair, and deep-dark eyes. So beautiful and so child-like pious, completely natural and true . . . . The child Jesus is even more singular. Those who seek in art only the compelling imitation of the pleasant will hardly praise him, preferring young John over him. But this serenity and silence (*Stille*), the grape-like curls which really seem to crown his head, these pure (*rein*) and proportionate curvatures, contours and forms—which are nevertheless childlike and chubby—awaken the thought that this child is more than a child, that it is a divine (*göttliches*) child. And what else but this should the goal of the painter be, when he deals with his object, or—better—with this ideal? Because the unification of the ostensibly incompatible, the indirect representation of the intrinsically unrepresentable—only this can lawfully claim the name of ideal, at least in painting. And nevertheless, although his nature has been deliberately modified in the points I mentioned, he is entirely a child (*ganz Kind*). This is not the case with other painters who seek to reach the divine through an exaggerated, frantic seriousness which is not childlike (GB 68–9).

One remarkable aspect of *GB* is that Schlegel does not turn his avowed love of the primitives into purist dogma. He has eyes and feeling for paintings whose allure depends on their temporally plural nature, on their representation of the body which hybridizes Byzantine fixity with classicizing idealization. This *Holy Family* by Vincenzo Catena[14] (Fig. 5.3) (which at Schlegel's time was taken as a Bellini) is a case in point. Notice the Bellinian *staccato* configuration of the group, the hieratic fixity of the figures, the contour that refuses to be softened by chiaroscuro: clear primitivist elements. But there is also a classicist inflection: the profiles of Magdalen and Mary, and—as Schlegel notices approvingly—the body of the child, marked by "(*Stille*), the grape-like curls . . . pure (*rein*) and proportionate curvatures, contours and forms." A rather puzzling endorsement. Isn't Schlegel relapsing into his pre-1798, blinkered 'Winckelmannization' of painting? But let us remember that Schlegel is not rejecting *en bloc* plastic values in Christian painting. Such values have a place, if "fullness of grace in sensuous appearance" works as a trace of "inner, spiritual beauty" (GB 81).

[14]The painting is now in the Galeria Anranazcgo Raczynskiego, Poznan (Poland).

Fig. 5.3 *Holy Family*, by Vincenzo Catena (Poznan) (formerly ascribed to Giovanni Bellini)

Lest this become abstruse, let us ask: what is the relevance (if any) of the peculiar beauty of Catena's child to the life of the spectator? It offers him or her a way of imagining and feeling a relationship to transcendence that does *not* obliterate him or her. As we have seen, a thorny problem, in Moritz and Schelling, concerned the affective engagement of a classically beautiful god, for whom there seemed to be no place for our finitude. Schlegel both restates this problem that he inherits from Schelling and Moritz and points beyond it:

> The light of hope is what is missing from pagan art, whose *ersatz* is only that noble sadness and tragic beauty. And this light of divine hope . . . is what meets and addresses us (*uns entgegenkommt und anspricht*) from Christian painting, even if such light breaks through below only in the painful rays of longing (*Sehnsucht*) (150).

Taken by itself, this statement only seems to compound the problem: how can the classical beauty of Catena's child be a vehicle of hope? But Schlegel experiences the plastic beauty of this infant as importantly *sui generis*. Despite his Greek beauty, he remains "entirely a child;" his beautiful looks betray the vulnerability and the highly inchoate development naturally associated with childhood. In short, he looks *finite*. His beauty does not, however, lack superhuman resonances. The same visual elements that arouse the feeling of transcendence *deny* it as well: now he seems more than human, now he appears "entirely a child." Here, Schlegel takes Winckelmann's dialectic of hallucinatory oscillation, and presses it into the service of a Christian aesthetics of hope. Hope for what? The painting suggests *directly* that this baby's divinity does not vaporize finite fragility. By this immediate suggestion, the painting *indirectly* evokes a more general scenario, in which humans will be one with God, but *without surrendering their humanity*.

By way of an instructive contrast, let us compare Catena's child with what (for Schlegel) are two less-than successful babies: those—respectively—in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and the *Madonna of the Chair*. It is their near-complete erasure of vulnerability and contingency that makes them fall short of an aesthetics of hope. With his sublime countenance, the *Sistine* child "resembles a tiny Jupiter, more than the divine Jesus-child," while his muscular counterpart in the *Madonna of the Chair* "is more a hero-child [than a human one], although as such it is wonderfully beautiful, joyfully enjoying his own strength" (33, n. 4). In each case, the divine has taken complete possession of the infantile form, expurgating the element of human finitude.

Schlegel ventures a generalization on the basis of this experience: religious painting works through "the unification of the ostensibly incompatible, the indirect representation of the intrinsically unrepresentable."

* * *

Here is Schlegel's encounter with Correggio's *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* (Fig. 5.4):

> It represents the marriage of Catherine with the Christ-child. Behind Catherine stands Saint Sebastian, who looks on joyfully. I really do not know what else more to tell you, than this: the smiling grace (*lächelnde Anmut*) of Correggio is here almost completely transfigured and ennobled to pure beauty. In the most distant horizon, the death of Saint Sebastian is more hinted at than represented, and also another history of martyrdom—presumably, that of Catherine, but I do not know how to decipher it. If one draws closer, one no longer sees these tiny figures, especially because the background has darkened a lot. It is only a private devotional piece or something like it, the figures are visible only down to torso and hands. But surely it is one of the most excellent works of this master, of a luminous beauty (*klaren Schönheit*), which appears even to those that usually 'do not get' Correggio (GB 27).

Schlegel is struck by the trademark *grazia* of Correggio: the warm sensuousness of the lips of the saints, their creamily soft complexion (especially Catherine's) achieved through *sfumato*, the elegant movement of Mary's right hand, the luscious sheen of Catherine's hair, the sweet golden afternoon light that envelops the group, the consistent curvilinearity of draping. But, if we left it at that, we would only capture grace's element of pleasant sensuousness, making the *Marriage* indistinguishable from—say—voluptuous works like Boucher's *Toilet of Venus*. Schlegel discourages this association, by pointing out that here Correggio's "smiling grace is turned to pure beauty"—by this, he means that the sensuality of flesh, light, and contour expresses an *eros* transfigured into selfless *agape*. Unfortunately, he does not explain *why*.

But Schlegel's laconic point is illuminated if we lean upon Karl Philipp Ferdinand Solger (1780–1819), whose work can be read as a systematization and elaboration of Schlegel's often undigested, brilliant insights.[15] For our purposes,

[15]In *Erwin. Four Dialogues on Beauty and Art* (1815), and in his posthumous *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1829), Solger not only subjects Schlegel's signature ideas (irony, allegory, *witz*, fantasy)

Fig. 5.4 *Mystic Marriage of st. Catherine*, Correggio (Louvre)

Solger's conceptual distinction between beauty (*Schönheit*) and 'grace' (*Anmut*) particularly helpful.

> If we contemplate a finite being, [noticing] how its own completely particular being is completely penetrated by divine unity, so it is precisely this divine (*dieses Göttliche*) that discloses itself through individual things as their own essence—and through this they are beautiful (*schön*) in the narrow sense . . . But what pleasure, what lighter yet more complete enjoyment of the present is prepared for us, when we finally see that beauty fills and sanctifies each particle of particular things, and saturates even their lowliest relations. Precisely this is the essence of what we usually call with the foreign word *Grazie*, but which in German is best rendered as grace (*Anmut*). Indeed, 'charm' (*Reiz*), which designates the titillation of desire (or maybe even a higher longing), is here wholly insufficient to capture the serene metamorphosis (*heitere Wervandlung*) of essence in all the multiplicity of the real and the flow of time. Only here the beautiful is truly enjoyable in every moment of its existence, and is offered to us in a parcelized, almost unconscious enjoyment. The great Lessing was not amiss, then, when he explained charm (by which he meant grace, *Anmut*) as beauty in motion, because grace certainly reveals itself in the most surprising way through temporality and its transitoriness (E 171–2).

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to an illuminating, exhaustive investigation; he also uses them as the foundation of a theologically-minded system of fine arts.

In its generous sense, 'beautiful' can designate a variety of aesthetic properties: pretty, precious, elegant. In its narrow sense, however, it designates an appearance that has an extraordinary degree of internal unity. It is precisely this 'beauty' that Winckelmann, Hemsterhuis, Herder, Moritz, and Schelling saw exemplified by Greek sculpture at its best. But—as Solger notices—so understood, beauty idealizes the thing, and thus cuts it off from the living, palpitating a temporality of the finite.[16] Such is not the case with *Anmut*, where the chaotic, trivial seems perfect *as it is*, without the need for idealization. Furthermore, what is graceful is not simply lovable and/or titillating, although it certainly can be that too. If Solger is right, *Anmut* comes across, also, as the kenotic self-effacement of unity into the temporal flux. Grace is "the serene *metamorphosis* of essence in all the multiplicity of the real, and the flow of time."

Isn't this indeed the case with Correggios' *Mystic Marriage*? Correggio's child is a remarkable expression of such dynamics. Casting aside all grandeur, God has become a toddler trying to put a ring on a grown-up finger, exhibiting his digital dexterity with the proud excitement of a child (Ekserdjan 151). Far more than Catena's child, this Jesus is *ganz Kind*, completely a child. The three saints join in this movement. First, their sensuously expressed, delighted attention is riveted upon divine *kenosis*. The tender silliness of a baby God is exhibited. Second, the warmth of their tender carnality expresses human *kenosis*: their ardent, grateful self-effacement vis-à-vis such a touching gift. Here physical grace is the subjective response to divine grace. This is not to deny the persistence of the meltingly sensuous. For instance, we need not be Freudians to notice the intrinsic ambiguity of a gesture of ring-insertion, which Correggio has placed right the center. But notice how Catherine's hand accepts the offer with a tender relaxation verging on the boneless. Is this just sensuous delight, or the higher self-sacrifice of *agape*? Both? In a deliberately disturbing matter, Correggio may be inviting us to rethink just what is involved in the theology of grace (Fig. 5.5).

* * *

Schlegel invites us to see Correggio's *Pietà* (Fig. 5.5) as the *pendant* of his *Mystic Marriage*.

> Several painters reproach this work, because all the crying figures around Christ are all decidedly ugly, or at least with an ugly attitude (even if their form, abstracted from such ugliness, is by no means ignoble). Such screamingly loud pain, erupting from the deepest core of being with a truth that grips and unsettles, cannot but deform those it possesses. But what other pain would be here more more appropriate to its subject? The painter took away the beauty from the crying ones, which he could very well have done, had he not

[16] Although Cesare Brandi has no truck with Neoplatonism or metaphysics, some of his remarks on beauty do resonate with Solger: "We know that beauty is contemplation, and that beauty immobilizes the contemplated object, it 'does it in', to use a vulgar expression, [lifting it out of] the incessant beating of its existence, because it extraniates it from becoming; beauty does not become, it simply prolongs itself in the present" (Brandi 1956, 49).

Fig. 5.5 *Deposition*, by Correggio (Parma)

> (with his deep instinct) poured all the beauty all over the corpse of the Savior. I have led several persons before this painting, who—after being initially repulsed by it—all had to admit that the body of the Savior is unspeakably beautiful, and that it could not be any more beautiful. And yet [they had to admit that] it is a corpse, a corpse in every lineament—but still ensouled by beauty and painful nostalgia (*Wehmut*), a living picture of the loveliest death. How truer this is . . . [than to represent] Christ's cadaver in a disgusting and repelling way, and—by way of compensation—to prop next to it a Magdalene with a vain beauty and equally vain tears (KA IV, 27–8).

Schlegel's deliberately oxymoronic lines ("a living picture of the loveliest death") are intended to alert us to the ambiguous significance of Christ's beautiful corpse. Unlike the grace of the *Marriage*, beauty in this painting thematizes the *skandalon*. Every inch is both cadaverous *and* "unspeakably beautiful." But, precisely through this coincidence, the painting is potentially more terrifying than it would seem at first. If beauty is the *vestige* of God's immersion in the temporal, it is as such already a sign of divine annihilation. If so, why should the beauty of Christ's corpse make his death any less devastating for us? Could it be, however, that this beauty supervened *after* or *at* Christ's death? If so, could it not signal that the ultimate *kenosis* has produced the ultimate reconciliation between man and God? Of course, Correggio leaves us in the dark about this. The white light emanating from the body reinforces the ambiguity. Is the skin, taut due to the onset of *rigor mortis*, simply reflecting the light falling upon it from the right? Or is the luminosity originating *within* the body itself?

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Fig. 5.6 *The Adoration of the Magi*, by Stephan Lochner (Cologne)

From Schlegel's perspective, there was no doubt that figurative beauty had theophanic potential. The question, rather, was this: was the naïve beauty of 'primitives' like Beato Angelico more religiously compelling? Or was it the case that—at its best—the classically inflected religious painting of Raphael and Correggio could speak most powerfully about God? By celebrating both, Schlegel's *GB* seems to suggest that there is no real tension—until, that is, 1804. In that year, Schlegel ventures out of Paris, and in the cathedral of Cologne undergoes what we could call an aesthetic equivalent of St. Paul's conversion on the way to Damascus.

The hieratic beauty of the Magi Altarpiece by Stephan Lochner (Fig. 5.6) moved him so deeply, that he declared this piece to be the most complete, beautiful religious painting ever wrought by human hands. Here was a different type of beauty, one in which humanistic meaning coexisted with a mysterious, arcane element—a human beauty that does not tempt us to feel that mankind is the measure of all things. In *Die Gemälde*, the character of Louise had noticed that the ideal beauty of Raphael's Sistine Madonna could convert one to paganism, understood as an aesthetic ontotheologization of humanity. I suspect that Friedrich Schlegel's 1805 discovery of the Gothic, unclassical Madonna of Stephan Lochner was also the discovery of a beauty that kept an important gap between God and man. This Virgin was the product of a German Raphael, one that preserved an element of hieratic rigidity:

> Just as Raphael, the painter of loveliness, is unique among the Italians, so is this painter unique among the Germans. The mother of God enthroned in the middle, cloaked in an ermin, must remind anyone who sees her of Raphael's Madonna in Dresden: the majestic grandeur of her slightly greater-then-life figure, the wholly otherworldy ideal beauty of her face. Yet, the tilt of the head and the eye is closer to the old Idea [. . .] human hands cannot make anything more complete than this painting. (GB 59)

Sensuous beauty becomes complete by its vicinity to the old idea—but which idea? Schlegel gives us an important hint in the 1805 preface to his Cologne travelogue:

> In the West, we see the dawn of ancient art with the statues of Aegina. In the same way, with Giotto in Italy and with the forerunners of van Eyck in Germany, there was a new dawn for Christian painting (GB 115, note).

The enigmatic smile of the archaic Greek style is then the important precursor to Lochner's Madonna. In his *Archaic Torso of Apollo*, Rilke decided to seek God in the disturbing, risky encounter with the archaic Torso, waving off the more licked contours of Greek high classicism. In 1821, Friedrich Schlegel made retrospective sense of his aesthetic conversion by an appeal to the same sculptural style: the Lochner Madonna spoke to him because—just as the Archaic Greek deities—it smiled a *promesse de bonheur* which did not collapse the sacred into the profane.

5.4 Hegel on Christian Beauty

Hegel's lectures on painting take up again August Schlegel's motif of painting's 'modernity' vs. the 'ancient' nature of sculpture. We should not resent it, he declares, if museum visitors shy away from the sculptural wing, repairing instead to paintings (was he thinking of *Die Gemälde*, one asks). It is in painting, not ancient sculpture, that a modern self can achieve self-reconciliation:

> we are at once more at home in painting. Painting, that is to say, opens the way for the first time to the principle of finite and inherently infinite subjectivity, the principle of our own life and existence, and in paintings we see what is effective and active in ourselves (LFA II, 797).

The selves of Hegel's 'we' are those of modernity—defined by a self-image in which a finite subject is an absolutely (infinitely) autonomous agent. In ordinary experience we can only *feel* this, but in painting we can actually *see* it. Indeed, while external things are so many limitations upon our feeling of infinite freedom, they cease to be so in painting, where—transfigured into images infused with subjective meaning—they become extensions of our freedom.

Since Hegel does not give us concrete examples of how painting manages to display the amphibiousness of the self, at once finite and infinite, let us turn to Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of Andrea Odoni* (Royal Collection, London). Andrea is positioned in the spatial framework of his study, which is populated with *other* finite entities, i.e. some of the choicest antiques of this well-off Venetian collector. Not only through being external to him, but also by the inert stuff that makes them up

(marble), each of these antiques *shows* us that Andrea's inwardness is delimited, i.e. finite. But in several ways, these statues *are* also the stuff of Andrea's inner life. For one, "against the whitewashed walls, the statues seem to have developed a fantastic life of their own, especially on the right where the shadows are deeper" (Schneider 100). Through their suggestion of a transmutation of stone into life, these marbles embody the way Andrea transforms them in his *rèveries*. Consider also the 'Hercules mingens' (urinating Hercules) on the extreme right, urinating in a trough over which a Venus is leaning (100). Here Andrea (and we, the viewers) can *see* what otherwise would remain invisible; namely, that he is not a pretentious "culture vulture," that he can also look ironically at his own infatuation with the ancient world. As Hegel would put it, Andrea's "inwardness is collected together in itself out of its detailed existence" (LFA II, 802). Andrea himself encourages the connection between inner and outer by holding one statuette in his right hand and placing his left hand over his heart.

Let us go back to Hegel's claim that "we are once more at home in painting." It suggests that our self-recognition in pictures is mediated by our not-feeling-at home in the domain of ancient sculpture. One might readily object that Lotto's portrait is a proof of the contrary, giving us a humanist happily ensconced amidst his classical marbles. A Hegelian answer would run as follows. Although Andrea clearly feels at home amidst his sculptures, his sculptures do not make him *see* his emotional bond with them. In order for that to happen, sculptural rigidity needs to be 'softened' by the warm light of painting, which works as a trope of Andrea's affective investment in his statues.

Another important element through which painting can be the site of self-recognition is its capacity for vivid realism, where a unique face becomes a reflection of a unique individual. Hegel celebrates Dutch portraiture, likewise, whose "freedom and fidelity of treatment, [its] love for what is evidently momentary and trifling" (LFA II, 886) allows it to capture all the nuances of subjective *haecceitas*. It is here that we find

> the vision of what man is as man, what the human spirit and character is, what man and *this* man is… In their paintings we can study and get to know men and human nature (887).

Hegel's point can be brought out by a contrast with Egyptian painting, where schematization is *de rigueur*: consider any Egyptian tomb-painting depicting long processions of slaves. The stencil-like sameness of these figures is deliberate. Their virtual indistinguishability makes it hard to imagine that any one of them can *distinguish* himself through autonomous agency. Because of this programmatic denial of corporeal and facial *thisness*, the modern viewer cannot see any of these figures as a site of redemptive self-recognition.

Since Hegel does not offer us an illustration of how Dutch portraiture can give us an individual self *in* and *through* an individual look, let us turn to Rembrant's *Portrait of Saskia* (Dresden). There is no mistaking the painter's beloved first wife with any other woman in the history of Western portraiture. Like Petrarch's Laura, Saskia has been crystallized into an image reverberating with the deep affection of the artist. Unlike Laura, Saskia is not invested with Neoplatonic idealization. Her

less-than-sculptural features become themselves the object of loving attention: the slight strabismus, the pudgy cheeks. Here Rembrandt is much closer to Shakespeare than to Petrarch. Think of sonnet 130, where—from the very first line—the adoring enumeration of the less-than-perfect is also a celebration of its being less-than-Laura: "my mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun".

* * *

Let us, yet again, take up Hegel's proclamation that "we are once more at home in painting." Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to claim that this 'once more' implies a lost, earlier being-at-home in sculpture, evoking Winckelmann's theoaesthetics which mediated powerfully the spectator's engagement of antiques. If so, the 'once more' offered by painting hints also at a *recovery* of that which was lost in the 1790s. The crisis of the sculptural ideal involved also the demise of the theo-aesthetics that was bound up with it. Wackenroder broke the impasse, by seeking in Christian painting a Theo-aesthetics where the individual observer does not feel annihilated by transcendence. Schlegel's *Gemäldebeschreibungen*, which are essentially an aesthetics of Christian painting, would have been unthinkable without Wackenroder. Now, Hegel makes no mention of Wackenroder in his lectures on painting, and he reserves only a few oblique, withering remarks against Friedrich Schlegel. In one way, the silence is comprehensible. Given Hegel's strong sympathy for Weimar Classicism, he must have resented Wackenroder's and Schlegel's effusive *Klosterbrüdisieren*.

Yet, *roughly half* of Hegel's lectures on painting are about Christian painting, a choice that goes strikingly against the *credo* of the *Propylaen*, Weimar's official fine arts bulletin. Through the pages of that journal, Henrich Meyer (acting as a mouthpiece for Goethe) claimed that Christian motifs are an indifferent subject for a painter, and he positively lambasted Crucifixion and martyrdom scenes as unacceptable lapses in taste.[17] Against such a narrow-minded fixation on classical art, Hegel proclaims that

> In sculpture the god confronts our vision as a mere object. But in painting, on the other hand, God appears in himself as a spiritual and living person who enters the Church and gives to every individual the possibility of placing himself in spiritual community and reconciliation with him (797–8).

Painting allows also a reconciliation with the divine that is beyond the reach of sculpture. Indeed, while sculpture presents an isolated deity, painting's inclusion of Christ and man within the same pictorial frame makes us *see* man's reconciliation with God. What is remarkable is not only that painting places God and man in the same frame, but that he is depicted as one of us. In his humanity, Jesus is a finite, free self interacting with other similarly finite, autonomous selves.

[17] Quoted from Eichner XXVIII–IX.

But Hegel knows that the task of explanation is ahead of him, not behind. He still owes us an explanation of how this religious content is intimately bound up with pictorial aesthetics. For him (as for his predecessors), semantics and aesthetic properties are intimately involved with each other. If we look at the history of art, which specific stylistic devices are involved, where painting has *made visible* the self's ineffable feeling of the divine? Hegel identifies three different visual strategies: the aesthetics of gnarly piety, the aesthetics of graceful piety, and the aesthetics of dignified piety. I hasten to add that these are my labels, not Hegel's. But they do conveniently map onto distinctions that Hegel himself makes in the text, as we shall see. Each of these visual strategies, is a specific answer to a single problem: how can painting's distinctive vocation realistically to depict empirical reality be reconciled with the task of pointing to transcendence? This question is at once an aesthetical one, as we will see; what is at issue here is nothing less than the possibility of ancient beauty to be relevant for a modern self.

* * *

1. *Aesthetics of gnarly piety*. The first pictorial strategy is at work in the religious painting of Flemish and Italian primitives, and it turns upon the transfiguration of unidealized, even ugly, appearance; on the representation of a face at once rapturously devout and plain (when not distinctly coarse). Hegel speaks of

> faces of this kind [i.e. expressing ecstatic devotion], usually of old men who have gone through much in life and suffering: the faces have been treated as if they were portraits, yet they are those of worshipful souls. The result is that this worship is not their occupation at this moment only, but on the contrary they become priests, as it were, or saints whose whole life, thought, desire, and will is worship, and their expression, despite all portraiture, has in it nothing but this assurance and this peace of love. (LFA II, 827–8).

Sincel Hegel offers no concrete illustration of the point, let us turn to Andrea Mantegna's *Adoration* (New York), a terrific example of the Quattrocento's ecstatic transfiguration of the homely. The expression and posture of each shepard shows us a holistic convergence of the parts of the soul (thought, desire, will) into loving worship. Equally—if not more—important, the body is made to contain past and future. So intense is their love, that it is impossible to think that these sheperds could have ever felt otherwise, nor could they ever feel differently in the future. As Hegel puts it, they look like "priests, as it were, or saints, whose whole life… has nothing in it but this appearance of peace and love."

This intersection of eternity and temporality is, nevertheless, deliberately incomplete. Ravished expression does not cancel the objective ugliness of the human faces. The two sheperds are a great example of this. This unredeemed realism has the highest importance, because—with a vertical movement—it suggests that the divine ground is not fully present in the world. Or in Hegelese: "because individual characterization is the non-essential element which is not absolutely fused with love's spiritual kingdom of heaven, it acquires here a greater determinacy" than it does in the classical ideal (819). Such unvarnished realism, however, testifies also to the force of theophany. It suggests that this all-consuming love for God is not the manifestation of a naturally loving nature, but a graceful gift—the beauty of the

transfigured gaze works as a Christianized Platonic *hexaiphnes*, a redeeming instant discontinuous with the past personal narrative implied by the gnarly visage:

> So far as concerns the particular human individual personality in this depth of feeling, the unique love which affords bliss and an enjoyment of heaven rises above time and the *particular individuality of that character which becomes a matter of indifference* . . . . in the pure ray of bliss which has just been described, *particular individuality is superseded* : in the sight of God all men are equal, or piety, rather, makes them all actually equal so that the only thing of importance is the expression of that concentration of love which needs neither happiness nor any particular single object. It is true that religious love too cannot exist without specific individuals who have some other sphere of existence apart from this feeling. But here the strictly ideal content is provided by the soulful depth of spiritual feeling which *does not have its expression and actuality in the particular difference of a character with its talent*, *relationships*, *and fates*, *but is rather raised above these* (LFA II, 818–9, italics mine).

In short: here we can *see* a love for God *that does not grow organically from one's own individual life-story*, *but appears rather as a radical caesura from it*. Clearly, this is not the case with Rembrant's Saskia. Especially in her pert gaze, one can see that Saskia is very much her own person, and that her obvious love for Rembrandt is by no means the obliteration of her own character. If anything, in those complicitous, conniving eyes we feel that an originally playful, adventurous, mischievous character has now become more confidently daring. Contrast her with the shepherds in Mantegna's *Adoration*: here the enraptured gaze is also the self's joyous epiphany of the *irrelevance* of itself and of its manifold entanglements in the world (Fig. 5.7).[18]

Compare also these shepherds with *Niobe*. In her case, as Schelling showed us, the spark of maternal love was made indelible by the destruction of her individual life—it was *rigor mortis* that allowed her to sustain indefinitely that infinitely loving expression. However, in Mantegna's shepherds love *transfigures* individuality, instead of destroying it.

* * *

2. *Aesthetics of graceful piety*. According to Hegel, the second route religious painting exploits is the classical line of grace, whose delicacy can seem to embody a selfless love for God—its supreme representants are Perugino, Raphael, and Correggio. If it is true that the sensuousness of the classical is hard to reconcile with the mystical vocation of Christian painting,

> this is not at all to say that there cannot appear in them [i.e. in religious paintings] something analogous to what constitutes the plastic ideal. In religious paintings the chief thing is the fundamental trait of pure love (*reinen Liebe*), especially in Mary whose whole being lies in

[18] One thinks here of a famous anecdote about Giorgio La Pira (1904–1977), a beloved Florentine mayor, and a man of exemplary faith and generosity. He was often seen barefoot, having given away his shoes and salary to the needy. During a public speech, he was interrupted by a heckler, who shouted "*La Pira, sei un fallito!*" (La Pira, you are a failure!). And he fired back, in a genuinely friendly tone: "*E che importa, dato che Cristo è risorto?*" (should it matter, when Christ was resurrected?).

Fig. 5.7 *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, by Andrea Mantegna (New York)

> this love, but also in the women who accompany Christ and, amongst the Disciples, John, the loving Disciple. But with the expression of this there can also be closely associated the sensuous beauty of the figures (*sinnliche Schönheit der Formen*), as in Raphael's pictures for example. Only there may not be any attempt to assert this beauty as mere beauty of form; on the contrary, it must be spiritually animated and transfigured by the inmost soul of the expression (*durch die innigste Seele des Ausdrucks geistig belebt*), and this spiritual inmost depth of feeling must be made to evince itself as the real aim and subject of the painting (LFA II, 864–5).

The 'softness' and lack of angularity of the line of grace are a trope for the melting of the Ego in its ecstatic transport. Hegel here is merely recycling Friedrich Schlegel's insights. Think of Schlegel's description of Raphael's *Jardinière* Madonna, striking for her unmistakable, though by no means vulgar, carnality: the fleshy lips, eyelids, her "tenderly blossoming carnation… that cannot be described" (GB 52). She is "like one's beloved, painted completely and exclusively with an earthly lovability (*ganz nur in irdischer Lieblichkeit*)" (*ibid*). And yet, such tender features seem also to be the manifestation of a joyously selfless love for the baby Jesus.

But unlike Schlegel, Hegel is fascinated by how the *dolce stile* of the Umbrian school "breaks time" by achieving an extraordinary synthesis of classical *and* Christian ideals. In the depiction of the Virgin and saints,

> The fundamental principle for this life is, on the side of the spirit, that natural serenity (*jene natürliche Heiterkeit*), on the side of the body, that beautiful correspondence with the visible form which in itself, as beautiful form, proclaims innocence, cheerfulness, virginity, natural grace of disposition (*natürliche Grazie des Gemüts*), nobility, imagination (*phantasie*), and a richly loving soul. Now if there is added to this natural endowment the elevation and

> adornment of the inner life by the deep feeling of religion, by that spiritual trait of a more profound piety which soulfully animates an innately strong self-assurance and well-rounded worldly existence (*die von Hause aus entschiedenere Sicherheit und Fertigkeit des Daseins in dieser Sphäre des Heils*), then we have before us an original harmony between a figure and its expression (*so haben wir dadurch eine ursprüngliche Harmonie der Gestalt und ihres Ausdrucks vor uns*) which, when - it reaches perfection, gives us a vivid reminder, in this sphere of romantic and Christian art, of the pure ideal of art (LFA II, 873).

And so, the beautiful saints of the Umbrian school are a sign of a *natural* grace and goodness, which does not need the loving dispensation of God. However, this intrinsic *kalokagathia* is also illuminated by a self-effacing love for God: a piety which "soulfully animates an innately strong self-assurance and well-rounded worldly existence." And so, through a gentle aura of bittersweet melancholia, these beautiful saints let us know that they have implicitly already left this world in which they nevertheless seem to thrive so well.

> But isn't there a theological problem in a grace at once classical and Christian?
>
> The great italian painters … seem to give us portraits; [but] the pictures they produce in the most exact portrayal of reality and in the most exact portrayal of reality and character are pictures of another sun, another spring; they are roses blossoming at the same time in heaven (LFA II, 875).

Let us grant that the *Jardiniere* Madonna is ecstatically indifferent to her own physical beauty. Her individualized beauty is an ephemeral rose, which her ecstatic love for the Child seems to lift above temporal fragmentation. But can we sure that it is not the other way around? If her beauty is a sign of natural goodness, isn't her agapeic *Liebe* itself a natural expression of that? Even granting that her piety is a divine gift, should we suspect that, in a Pelagian fashion, the gift of supernatural virtue is a reward for her natural virtue? Is the temporal blossoming of the rose prior to its heavenly one? Although Hegel does not say so directly, he may very well be implying it, when he claims that Raphael's saints are far more beautiful than those of the early Renaissance, but also far less spiritual.[19]

* * *

3. *Aesthetics of dignified piety*. Just as the second, the third (and final) moment in Hegel's highly selective *prècis* of the history of Christian painting involves the palingenesis-cum-metamorphosis of classical motifs, here what is resurrected is not the line of grace, but something very close to the austere severity of classical 'high style'. This choice is called for by the specific object of representation, i.e. the apostles, (male) saints, sages:

> In the case of the other figures, Apostles, saints, Disciples, sages of antiquity, etc., that expression of intensified depth of feeling is as it were rather a matter of specific and more fleeting situations. This apart, these men appear as more independent, as characters present

[19] "In depth, power, and deep feeling of expression Raphael is just as inferior to them [the earlier Italian masters] as he soars above them in a painter's skill, in the beauty of vivid grouping, in design, etc" (LFA II, 812).

> in the world, equipped with the power and constancy of courage, faith, and action, so that here the fundamental trait, despite all differences of character, is serious and dignified manliness (*ernste*, *würgide Männlichkeit*). These are not ideal divinities but entirely human ideals; not simply men as they should be, but ideal men as they actually live and exist, men lacking neither particularity of character nor a connection between particularity and that universal which fills their individual lives. Figures of this kind have been transmitted to us by Michelangelo and Raphael, and by Leonardo da Vinci in his famous Last Supper, and they possess a dignity, grandeur, and nobility (*Würde*, *Grossartigkeit*, *und Adel*) totally different from that in the figures of other painters. This is the point at which painting meets antiquity on the same ground, without abandoning the character of its own sphere (LFA II, 865).

Quite exceptionally, Hegel this time illustrates his point with at least the name of a specific painting, Leonardo's *Last Supper*. Still, I would like to turn to Raphael's *Saint Cecilia*, because it not only gives us figures of ancient dignity (three saints: Paul, John, Augustine), but it also juxtaposes them to figures marked by a more sensuous beauty (Cecilia and Magdalene). Both Cecilia (at the center) and Mary Magdalene (on the right) have a sensuous beauty that hints at their quintessentially loving nature. Although Mary cannot join in Cecilia's sudden ecstatic perception of divine harmony, she—by calmly looking at us—has in her own way projected herself out of the pictorial frame. The same is not true of Saint Paul, Saint John, and Saint Augustine (from left to right). Paul is immersed in a somewhat troubled meditation, as he ponders the sudden interruption of the earthly concert (testified by the heap of abandoned instruments). The Saint John of this picture is not the disciple that fell asleep during the Last Supper. Here he lacks Love's ecstatic indifference to earthly incidents, and gazes questioningly at Augustine, who replies with a happy smile (Fig. 5.8).

What this trio has in common, however, is sculptural *gravitas*—they may be perplexed, but with an aplomb that betrays moral grandeur. Naturally, their heroic corporeality involves an unavoidable diminution of spiritual intensity. They are of course open to ecstatic rapture, but a kind that occasionally punctuates their ordinary life—and even then, individual character asserts its rights. This is the case in Leonardo's *Last Supper*, where general outrage (an index of the disciples' love for Christ) is nevertheless modulated through various character-types. Even each of male saints in *Saint Cecilia* embodies a specific individuality that is enervated, not thinned-out, by a palpable heroic faith. It is naturally harder to *read off* specific character traits from their bodies, though one could certainly try. Paul's somewhat wild black curls and beard, his averted gaze suggest a tendency to solitary introspection. John and Augustine's poises suggest more communicative natures—although Augustine's mature, gentle smile could indicate a broad understanding for human frailty that the more impetuous John may not have (there is a faint trace of impatience in his look).

* * *

Let us catch our breath, and take stock of Hegel's philosophical distillation of three slices of art-history. Although they are about painting, they are distinctive variations upon Winckelmann's interplay of narrative (lived) and mythical (supernatural) time.

Fig. 5.8 *The Ecstasis of Saint Cecilia*, by Raffaello Sanzio (Bologna)

What I called 'gnarly piety' saturates the lived moment and gives it the look of eternity. The rapture of Mantegna's shepherds might very well be as short-lived as it was sudden: their oafish features (especially those of the shepherd on the right) tell us that they are usually taken by far more prosaic affairs. Yet, so intense is their *ecstasis*, that even their slack-jawed fixity seems to morph into the constant astonishment of the holy: "this worship is not their occupation at this moment only, but on the contrary they become priests, as it were, or saints whose whole life, thought, desire, and will is worship, and their expression, despite all portraiture, has in it nothing but this assurance and this peace of love." 'Graceful piety' as well exploits Winckelmann's quasi-hallucinatory unification of opposites. Mary,

the Baby Jesus, and holy women like Saint Magdalene can be depicted with a delicate beauty that suggest "innocence, cheerfulness, virginity, natural grace of disposition, nobility, imagination, and a richly loving soul." These are all virtues that shine forth in the sublunary, temporal world. Nevertheless, these same features can simultaneously embody a mystical, delightful projection outside temporality. It is this duplex character of beauty, at once a sign of temporality and eternity, that Hegel refers us to with his gorgeous image of earthly roses "blossoming at the same time in heaven." Finally, even the severe beauty of 'Dignified piety' is an appearance of tensile unity: Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo create apostles whose sculptural austerity embodies a type (the grandeur of Aristotle's great-souled man), *yet* manages to come across also as deeply individual.

5.5 Hegel: The End of Aesthetics as *Originary* Experience

With Hegel, we reach the end of my narrative parable. This is not an arbitrary caesura. From Winckelmann to Friedrich Schlegel, the aesthetic experience of sculpture and/or painting was existentially open-ended. These thinkers took it for granted that aesthetics was also a realm of *choice*, a sphere in which not only the evaluation of the artwork was at issue, but also the question of the sense and direction of the spectator's life (Sergio Givone's construction of aesthetics as an *originary* experience emphasizes precisely this point). To be sure, Hegel's predecessors did not take it for granted that artworks from the past would have the force to trigger that sort of experience—in varying degrees, the artwork was taken to oscillate poignantly between time-bending presence, and the absence of the ruin.

But in Hegel, aesthetics has been stripped of much of its power to catalyze changes in the lived present of the spectator. Consider these lines:

> no matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer (LFA I, 103).

To be sure, Hegel allows that the perception that an ancient artwork is wonderfully saturated with a (lost) religiosity can be a source of intense aesthetic pleasure. He is highly fascinated by how the colors and shapes of Beato Angelico are infused with "the fervour of a religious love remote from the world, with a conventual purity of disposition, elevation and sanctity of soul" (LFA II, 878).[20] But it is the accomplished fusion between sense and feeling that pleases, not the *religious content* of that feeling—in this respect, Hegel is a formalist.

There is also another important reason why Hegel is a fitting terminus to my story. From Winckelmann to Schelling, figurative aesthetics took it for granted that beauty was absolutely fundamental (by 'beauty', it should be noticed, these thinkers

[20]Hegel is quoting from the art historian von Rumhor.

meant an essentially *classical* idealization of the body). This purist commitment to beauty starts to show some fissures with Friedrich Schlegel, who already in his 1796 *On the Study of Greek Poetry* had claimed that the presence of the *ugly* is what chiefly distinguishes modern from ancient poetry. But in 1796, Schlegel still hoped that a poetry of the future could somehow return to ancient beauty. In his *Gemäldebeschreibungen*, Schlegel ends up embracing the ugly, as shown by his unabashed preference for "hard, even skinny forms in sharp contours that stand out distinctly" (GB 14). For his part, Hegel declares that "for the expression of spiritual beauty the artist will avoid what is absolutely ugly in external forms, or he can subdue and transfigure it through the power of the soul that breaks through it, but *nevertheless he cannot entirely dispense with the ugly*" (LFA II, 864, emphasis mine). Since my study has focused on the vicissitudes of the classical ideal in the figurative aesthetics, it is appropriate that my narrative should end with Hegel's announcement of the final crisis of that ideal.

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Chapter 6
Conclusion

> Yes, I say, El Greco, fine, but the good man did not know how to paint a hand!, and I say Veronese, fine, but the good man of course did not know how to paint a natural face. And what I said to you about the fugue today, he was saying yesterday, not one of all the composers, even the greatest, composed a perfect one, not even Bach, who surely was tranquillity itself and pure compositional clarity. There is no perfect picture and there is no perfect book and there is no perfect piece of music, Reger said, that is the truth, and this truth makes it possible for a mind like mine, which all of its life was nothing but a desperate mind, to go on existing. (*Thomas Bernhard*, 'Old Masters')

6.1 Final Considerations I: An Aesthetics of Critical Holism

In her *The Melancholy Art* (2012), Michael Ann Holly points out how rare it is for the art historian to pause and ask herself *why* she plies her trade, and *what* she seeks to accomplish by it. She suggests that the work of the art historian is an exercise in melancholy, in the Freudian sense of a systematic denial of actual loss. By encasing the mute vestige within an historical narrative, the art-historian seeks (almost always unconsciously) to rescue it from the enigmatic silence of the dead—in a pathological denial of the artwork's unmedicable forfeiture of its past.

Could it be that the historian of aesthetics is impelled by similar motivations? In writing this book—a philosophical reconstruction of Romantic-Idealist aesthetics of sculpture and painting—I never lost sight of the possibility of necrophilia, all the more alluring when the corpses are lovely: Winckelmann, Herder, Friedrich Schlegel all wrote intoxicatingly beautiful pages on the aesthetics of figurative art.

It is clear that many aspects of Figurative Theo-humanism just cannot (nor should they!) be revived. Some of its claims appear shockingly blinkered today. Consider, for instance, Winckelmann's contempt for Medieval and Baroque Art, his dismissal of Dutch genre painting (Spengler 14), his embarrassing enthusiasm for the vapid Neoclassical painting of Mengs; or consider the theo-humanist insistence on Classical Greek sculpture as *the* sculptural paradigm. This entailed, quite

F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5_6

unfairly, that *modern* sculpture (where 'modern' meant *the deliberate disturbance of classical calm and balance by individual values*) could only strive for secondary greatness. But what makes Michelangelo's *David* so great is also its deliberate perturbation of *Edle Einfalt and Stille Grosse* (think of its disproportionately huge hands, a sign of a unique, titanically nervous individuality!) Or think of Giacometti's disproportionately elongated figures, a powerful distillation of anguished solitude.

However, the scholarly dilemma between melancholy and mourning applies only to items which are irretrievably lost to the present. If often the specific *letter* of Figurative Theo-humanism can seem irretrievably dated, its basic intuition and goal need not be so. Its basic intuition was that, precisely by appearing as self-contained worlds, some artworks have the power to seize and to address *all of our being*, and thus surprise us with an extraordinary (though by no means unproblematic) feeling of completeness—as if we reconnected with long-forgotten parts of our own self. Theo-humanism's aim was to account for this complex interplay: the dialectic between the concentrated unity of the artwork and the surprising feeling that one's whole being is being called into question.

Now, this does not mean—*pace* Critical theory—that aesthetics has to be a vapid escape into a dream of subjective plenitude. As Andrew Bowie aptly notes, while Romantic-Idealist aesthetics operated with "an account of subjectivity that also acknowledges the desperately fragile and divided nature of individual human subjects" (Bowie 1990, 13). In this respect, we could say that Figurative Theo-humanism turns upon a *critical* holism. Critical, because it turns on an aesthetic experience which refuses to purge *subject* and *object* from the contingencies of time, history, culture, biology. But—no less importantly—it is also critical because of its refusal of any dogmatic reduction of subject and object to those contingencies. It is as so many variations upon the theme of *critical holism* that we should envision the three fundamental premises of Figurative Theo-humanism. These premises are, again: 1) the refusal to sever completely aesthetics from ontology; 2) the construction of the artwork as an *imagined* middle between visible and invisible; 3) the artwork's oscillation between time-breaking presence and poignant absence. While the first two premises are specific efforts to think non-divisively about the self, the last premise (the artwork's hesitation between 'monument' and 'document') makes such holism inescapably precarious and explorative—yet all the more meaningful for that.

6.2 Final Considerations II: On Bees vs Spiders

In his delightful *The Battle of the Books*, Jonathan Swift reconfigured the battle between ancients and moderns as one between bees and spiders. The spider is modern because its self-image is one of utter autonomy; he proudly dependent only on its own viscera for the stuff of its webs. Conversely, the bee shamelessly helps itself to external sources (flowers) in order to produce its own sweet creation (honey). An ancient poet proceeded analogously: he culled freely from the poetic

productions of his predecessors, which he then transfigured into his very own verse. And so, the bee is ancient because it never lets go of a dialogue with tradition, while the Enlightenment spider defines itself by a break with history. What to the ancient bee is an exalting (or heartbreaking) conversation with predecessors, is for the spider an unacceptable, degrading heteronomy.

I suspect that my attempt to revive some of the central insights of Figurative Theo-humanism might be taken as a bee's reactionary, hopeless attempt to reverse the hegemony of arachnids. How so? With playful exaggeration, we could say that the Kant-inspired current revival of aesthetics betrays a spidery emphasis on unalloyed autonomy. The act of judging something to be beautiful must be insulated from one's own highly specific hopes, fears, anxieties, values; in sum, when we take *X* to be beautiful, we are supposed to attend only to the completeness of the artwork, and forget how that completeness calls into question poignantly our own *desire for personal integrity*. But if we forget that, do we forget our own humanity? After all, Kant himself argued that angels have no need for art—only creatures like us, amphibiously split between sense and intellect, can respond with poignant intensity to the concentrated unity of the artwork.

It seems to me that what I have called the 'time-breaking' force of the artwork invites a bee-like response: an attempt to reckon with the paradoxical unity of past and present that the artwork surprises us with; an attempt to labor, to shuttle imaginatively back and forth between ancients and moderns, to see if indeed what Matthew Arnold called the artwork's sweetness and light is a document of an absence, or a time-folding, vital connection between past and present. In this respect, the bee's is not immune from doubting the genuinity of its own aesthetic response.

Conversely, when (like Kant) we immunize the workings of the faculty of taste from the bifurcated (and hence incomplete) nature of the spectator, we imply an aesthetic spider. How? Real spiders build their webs autonomously, out of their own viscera ('spinnerets' are such silk-spinning organs)—in this respect, spiders are a metaphor for an aesthetic experience that is fully self-sufficient, in the sense that it hangs wonderfully together (D'Angelo 2011, 103). Here the aesthetic spider mirrors itself self-contentedly in the formal cohesion of its web. But is this always the case? What about aesthetic experiences where beauty sears us, where it makes us aware of our finitude? Think of the sublime perceptual snags in Winckelmann, where the unity of aesthetic experience is cracked – and where the bee-like spectator shuttles uncertainly between time and eternity.

Now, I hope it is clear that my engagement of Figurative Theo-humanism is not an attempt to conjure back into existence Plato's metaphysical bees. In his *Ion*, Plato claimed that artistic beauty is the result of the *vertical flight* of the poet-bee, who gathers nectar from the garden of the muses, and transforms into the honey of beautiful poetry.[1] When the listener partakes of this supernaturally delicious honey,

[1]"Just as the Corybantian worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession—as the bacchants are possessed, and not in their

he or she experiences a *vertical* caesura of lived temporality, and the recollection of a lost archetypal plenitude.

But the bees of Figurative Theo-humanism are different from Plato's. First of all, their business is the reception of artworks, not their production. Second, while Plato's bees shuttled only vertically (between the eternity of Mount Himettus and the temporality of the human city), Figurative Theo-humanism's bees complicate that vertical projection outside history with a *horizontal* one between two different points in history. For us, the beautiful nymphs dancing on Greek or Roman vases are a reminder of the traumatic loss of *ancient civilizations*—this awareness complicates (although it does not rule out) the experience of the nymphs as an eerie intrusion of the eternally carefree world of the gods into our own.[2]

Questionable as it might have been otherwise, Figurative Theo-humanism's distinction between the 'ancientness' of sculpture and the 'modernity' of painting is still relevant because of its underlying *spirit.* The spirit is the insight that 'aesthetic properties' and 'history' (including, most crucially one's own personal history) cannot insulated from one another; that aesthetic value that really matters to me may at once trigger a reflection on the limited, historically situated nature of my existence; that the artwork itself might come off the worse for its incapacity to address my own historical present. The paradigm-shift from sculpture to painting (charted in Chaps. 4 and 5) is significant precisely as a witness to an aesthetics that is meritoriously aware of its situated nature. If aesthetics seeks to think through, as

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senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers—that the soul of the lyric poets does the same thing, by their own report. For the poets tell us, I believe, that the songs they bring us are the sweets they cull from honey-dropping founts in certain gardens and glades of the Muses—like the bees, and winging the air as these do. And what they tell is true. For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him" (*534a-b*; translated by Harold North Fowler).

[2]By its openness to the possible 'vertical', *suprahistorical* temporality of the artwork, Figurative Theo-humanism differs importantly from the aesthetics of Hans-Robert Jauss. Jauss' principle of "the open structure and the perceptually incomplete interpretation of artworks" (Jauss 1982, 74) emphasizes the *horizontal*, *gradual unfolding of the artwork's meaning in the cumulative history of its reception*. That is, for Jauss, what is key is the survival of the artwork in the unending stream of interpretations, in which one sees the "constant reenactment of the enduring features of works that long since have been committed to the past" (75). And so, for Jauss the artwork is felt to be eternal insofar as we feel that its past comes alive in our present. Or in other words, Jauss's bee flies only horizontally. But is this the only way in which an artwork gestures toward eternity? What about the ecstatic temporalities funded by the artwork's own ontology? As we know, just by presenting us with an unchanging, endlessly recursive 'now', figurative art can intimate a state above all temporality. Same considerations apply to the artwork qua aesthetic object: idealized space (in its two varieties of 'temporalized space' and mythic time') can by itself evoke a time above all history. This is the vertical flight of the spectatorial bee. To be sure, even Jauss concedes that artworks have an aura "directed against the course of time, against transience and disappearance . . . because they seek to immortalize, i.e. to confer on the objects of life the dignity of immortalization" (74). But, in the end, for Jauss what is decisive is the immortality that an artwork achieves by triggering a continuous, cumulative discourse about itself. Figurative Theo-humanism is certainly attuned to this dimension, but (unlike Jauss) it is also open to the ways in which an artwork can project us altogether beyond history.

it should, the timeless world of a song, a poem, or a painting, it should not bracket out the ways in which that timelessness intersects (or fails to intersect) with our own embodied existence. We should then distinguish the fundamental openness to the plural temporality of aesthetics from the specific terrain in which we look for it. Figurative Theo-humanism, as we know, chose to seek it in Graeco-Roman sculpture, and in the Renaissance revival of classical beauty. I am not sure that classical beauty has had its day for good.[3] Granted, our story closes with Hegel's declaration of the irreversible pastness of classical beauty. In claiming this, Hegel was speaking as the philosopher-owl that flies at dusk, looking at artworks with piercing clarity only after the sun of their original meaning has set. But we need not take Hegel's word as the last. As Hegel himself taught us, the mole might upend the work of the owl. Its foundations corroded by the clandestine, tireless tunneling of the mole, the landscape suddenly collapses, to reveal a new configuration (PhG, preface, sec. 11). What the aesthetic owl believed to be a settled panorama is no longer so.[4]

It is from the standpoint of the mole-owl dialectic that we should consider Figurative Theo-humanism's apparently out-of-date emphasis on descriptive *beauty*. Admittedly, the historical trajectory of nineteenth and twentieth century went in a progressively divergent direction, stretching the idea of the 'aesthetic' to include other values: the quantitative sublime (e.g. K.D. Friedrich, B. Newmann, M. Rothko), the grotesque (e.g. Victor Hugo's Hunchback of Notre Dame), the unvarnished, immediate liveliness of the present (French Impressionism), the

[3]While Steven Halliwell's is certainly right in claiming that 18th century aesthetics is in many ways a rekindling of ancient ideas about art, he misses the element of deep originality of Romantic-Idealist aesthetics. As Halliwell justly remarks, when August Schlegel and Schelling ask that the artwork be a reflection of 'ideas', not 'mere reality', they show themselves to be "Romantic Platonists" (Halliwell 362–3). But Plato's beauty was simply an irruption of a mythical time into history, not also an evocation of a lost *nonmythical* history. When August Schlegel referred to the 'ancientness' of Greek sculpture, he was referring us to classical beauty as a site of aching *historical* absence, of modern *polis envy*. This is how Federico Vercellone puts the point: "One can start a history of aesthetics, especially in the 19th century, from the idea of beauty . . . [but a beauty] seen as that which is not, which is no longer, which has disappeared" (1999, 55). As a case in point, consider Schelling's *Relationship of the Figurative Arts with Nature*, from which Halliwell picks selectively to make his case for Schelling's 'Romantic Platonism'. In that work, Schelling makes it clear that, compelling as it is, ancient beauty is no longer an option for modern artists: "To grope among the ashes of expired fires, and from them to wish again to kindle an universal flame, is a vain endeavour. A change alone, which shall take place in ideas themselves, is capable of elevating art from its exhausted state; a new knowledge, making possible a new faith, is alone capable of inspiring it to the work, by which in a new life it may reveal a glory like that of old. An art, indeed, which should be in all respects the same as that of former centuries, will never recur, for nature never repeats herself. Such a Raphael will never be again; but another, who, in a like individual manner, will arrive at the highest in art. What is essential in all this is, again, the feeling that ancient beauty has been poignantly been corroded by history. This is the all-important difference between Plato's disquisitions on the beautiful and aesthetics as a truly modern discipline.

[4]On the dialectical relationship between owl and mole in Hegel, see Bodei 1975.

reproposition of the 'primitive' (e.g. P. Gaugin, P. Klee), the intimation of dark subconscious recesses (e.g. S. Dalì, R. Magritte).

But what if we were to consider a more generous *longue durèe*? As Salvatore Settis has recently argued (echoing Aby Warburg's talk of the *Nachleben der Antike*, the survival of the ancients), classical beauty has known a cyclical history of sudden reappearances—where every reappearance (and successive disappearance) of the ancient mole involved also a rethinking and renegotiation about the very idea and import of the 'classical'.[5] Be that as it may, my story has a more general aim: freeing conceptual resources for an aesthetics open to existential resonances. Here we leave behind the specific terrain (classical beauty) of Figurative Theo-humanism, and we focus on its more fundamental openness to the multiple time of evaluative beauty. Again, evaluative beauty abstracts from the content of an artwork, and is rather a matter of how the artwork itself 'hangs together'. Can philosophy chart the existential resonances of the evaluative beauty of Mark Rothko, Barret Newman, Giorgio Morandi, or Alberto Giacometti? Can the legacy of Figurative Theo-humanism be of some assistance here?

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[5]For Warburg, it was "essential to understand how that *depôt* of cultural memory ("the classical") could now close like a sepulchre, now open itself to a new life; how every new incarnation could vary profoundly, according to a dynamical process intimately tied with historical becoming; how the very fundamental co-ordinates of the 'classical' could be altered in the process; how every time the position of classical, poised between death and new life, was nevertheless reasserted. This is what in the language of his time, he called *Nachleben der Antike*" (Settis 2004, 94).

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F. Cirulli, *The Age of Figurative Theo-humanism*, Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life 3, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-10000-5