Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History

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

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

The history of art history, from the 1760s to the 1990s, has produced an approach in which art history is often reductively equated with the objective historicist explanation of artistic form. As is often said, this paradigm constitutes a discipline. But what it disciplines are not the ‘facts’ of the history of art, or only secondarily the facts of the history of art. What it primarily and inaugurally disciplines is itself—by means of its supposed ‘realism,’ a standard cultural determinism with an underlying appeal to supposed universals of social process, grasped ‘scientifically’; its cleaving of ‘aesthetics’ or ‘criticism’ from ‘history’ itself; its suppression of the subjective reality of the historian’s own place and taste; and its claim to comprehend history through chronological and causal analysis without simultaneously and by the same terms acknowledging its own status as narrative. I want, here, to look at this defensive splitting—this _Ichspaltung im Abwehrvorgang_—in Winckelmann’s _History_.

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

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

Indeed, the _History_ exhibits a general disjunction, as Potts has
acutely observed, between the eras of specifically political freedom in the Greco-Roman world and the period of its great or Classical art. We should add that Winckelmann defines classicism itself in relation to formal and historical precursors—Egyptian, archaic Greek, Etruscan, and late Roman (Byzantine) arts—which he cannot quite disentangle from classicism itself, supposedly the autonomous formal expression of historical factors peculiar to the fifth- and late fourth-century Greek city-states. For example, because Greece in the sixth century possessed the same climate and roughly the same militarized competitiveness of Greece in the fifth century, according to Winckelmann’s historicism its art should be classically beautiful. What archaic Greece supposedly lacked, of course, was political freedom. But if Winckelmann is willing to admit the unfree, if Hellenized, art of Hadrianic Rome or Justinian’s Ravenna as producing great classicism, on what grounds can he exclude the sixth- and late fifth-century archaic or severe phases of Greek classicism? Obviously the real point of distinction must lie in other aesthetic or ethical responses to the non- or prenaturalistic and the naturalistic works respectively, but Winckelmann does not directly produce his criteria. Instead the objective formal-historical chronology—with its statement of causes and sequences—is supposed in itself to render the distinction intelligible to us ex post facto. Despite their unfreedom, Rome or Ravenna preserve enough of a memory of Greek classicism to engender a Classical art, while preclassical Greece, although causally and chronologically closer to the zenith, did not. As Winckelmann’s reasoning implies, identifying the Classical evidently turns on the play of memory and retrospective allusion—a condition foreclosed for all forerunners of the classical Greeks, who cannot remember and allude to what has not yet happened. Thus Egyptian art remains aesthetically inert. Significantly, however, Etruscan art gives Winckelmann trouble: it is neither really a forerunner nor quite an inheritor of fifth-century Greek art but rather a parallel cultural development. A reader of Winckelmann’s book can be forgiven for not being able completely to work out these tangles, even though they might interest historians today: the general point is that the History of Ancient Art manages the erotic almost entirely off stage, a transference (Übertragung) or ‘carrying over’ in the strict sense.

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

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

Winckelmann’s active same-sex erotics were recognized by Goethe, his acutest commentator, to motivate much of his conceptual labor.\textsuperscript{13} But what those erotics actually involved still remains uncertain. Because of the History’s emphasis on androgyny and hermaphroditism, it is useful to have Casanova’s report of surprising Winckelmann relaxing with one of the young Roman castrati he favored,\textsuperscript{14} as well as Winckelmann’s own testimonies to his infatuations with noble German boys, especially a young nobleman, Friedrich von Berg, to whom he dedicated his 1763 essay ‘On the Ability to Perceive the Beautiful in Art.’ Before his murder in 1768, Winckelmann was a valued member of the Papal Court, the personal librarian to the great collector Cardinal Alessandro Albani. But he had been born to a poor family in Prussia, studying and finding his first secretarial jobs in a state with some of the most repressive laws against sodomy, harshly and somewhat hypocritically enforced for the lower classes by Frederick the Great.\textsuperscript{15} Although he seems to have had a long affair in the 1740s with his first private student, a modern psychologist might say that through early middle age he ferociously sublimated both his sexual appetite and his political views. But his self-censorship was not only in the interest of personal security. As he moved up in the world, and especially after he moved to Italy in 1755, he was freer to move in the sexually permissive world of the upper classes. He also behaved opportunistically: recognizing that nominal Catholicism was a paper creden-
tial for employment in Rome, he converted. Again, the threads are tangle: he converted in order to get to Rome, for Rome was where he could best pursue classical studies—but for many worldly Europeans ‘Rome,’ as well as ‘Greek art,’ already signified sexual freedom and available boys.  

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

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

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

But then how could they be 'beautiful', and how could he see them as the trace of a loss, when beauty is precisely the 'imitation' and thus the finding, not the 'copying' and thus the losing, of Classical art?

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

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

Now it would be easy to say that Winckelmann witnesses the 'downfall' of Greek art in writing his History of Ancient Art. As an historian, we could say, he witnesses the historical loss of the 'force' of Greek art in the stylistic transformations that he chronicles—the setting of its sun from Pericles to Justinian. And it would be easy to conclude, in parallel, that it must be in his aesthetic imagination and especially in his personal (homo)erotics that Winckelmann takes Classical Greece as his 'native land'. Thus we could say that Winckelmann, as historian, witnesses the 'downfall' of the object with which he imaginatively identifies—'my native land'—by chronicling
it, by producing an historical narrative of its transformation from Pericles to Justinian. If he were not the historian of Greek art, then he could not witness its destruction—seeing Classical Greek art as something that art has historically lost.

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

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

Again Winckelmann puts it carefully. In concluding his own History with an example of the 'downfall' of Greek art, he is, he says, 'almost like' an historian writing about a destruction he has also witnessed. Yet in assuming this position, he has, as he notes, 'already over-
stepped the boundaries of the history of art'. Strictly speaking, the history of art is the history of what has been lost in, and to, history. But one does not begin an art history unless what has been lost was once not unredeemably lost in an irreducibly past history one precisely did not witness. Rather, to begin an art history the loss must be in one's own history to be 'witnessed' there. It is only there that it is being seen to be being lost. Something happens just outside the boundary of art history, at a horizon or place of sunsetting, where the object, the history of art, is witnessed as being lost—as being evacuated of its force despite its greatness, as departing or being destroyed; and the historian, writing his art history, alludes to his witnessing of this departing of the history of art.

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

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

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

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

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

This might be the place to identify the ‘object of desire,’ as such, that Winckelmann loses. Here we would need to situate Winckelmann’s ‘beautiful young men’—the Classical Greek athletes naked in the Gymnasium whose loss ‘she’ witnesses while relaxing with Italian boys but to whom ‘he’ can allude in the History of Classical art chronicling what she has lost. The resulting divisions would require us to trace Winckelmann’s inability to reconcile the time of the ‘beautiful’ with the time of ‘freedom’; or to admit the place of ‘imitation’ within the unfolding of Classical art itself; or to conceive a Greece outside its afterimaging Rome, or its forerunning Egypt and sidetracking Etruria; or to conceive Classical art outside an imprint, copy, or fragment in the first place. In each context, the object of desire is the lost historical object toward which the historian moves in his allusions and the subjective object from which his very witness of loss proceeds—in this case, neither Classical Greek art as such, merely a cold and lifeless fossil, nor beautiful Italian boys as such, merely available embraces, but the image of their identity, an object in consciousness which neither real sculpture nor real boy can do anything but copy because they are always found only in the move away from or back to it. 19 (Of course, this object—in-consciousness or subjective object is, itself, a repetition. But I will not pursue any particular model for this relation; it is sufficient to remind ourselves that the constitution of the object is defensive and occurs in ‘defensive process’ [Abwehrvorgang].) To excavate Winckelmann’s object of desire, whatever it might be, would also be to recognize his History as a great and exemplary work, for it comes close, I think, to finding an objective subject that almost satisfies its subjective object—the bust of a faun gracing his apartment in the Villa Albani, an object which, I believe, integrates his subjective erotic and objective scholarly inquiries. But this identification, although it deserves further exploration, takes me in directions too particular, and perhaps too literal, for the final observations I want to make.

Instead I want to generalize beyond the identification of any particular historian’s particular loss. Such losses constitute the discipline of art history just because they are the objects for its subjectivity—not the artefacts in themselves, fossils with no intrinsic status, but rather the ways of their departings from art historians. Thus T. J. Clark, for example, mourns his loss—the ‘rendezvous between artistic practice and ... alternative meanings to those of capital,’ 20 here and
there or once upon a time, he imagines, actually realized—like the
tradition, community, democratic society, undiluted jouissance, truth,
or gender equality: in any case, a particular subjective loss made out to
be the objective reality of history. It is not the substance of such lost
objects I want to discover; they are plainly the result, as Winckelmann
engagingly put it, of an ‘interview with spirits.’ But they all share a
status as the motivating objects of any art history which is, itself, inter-}

ingest or interested, in the strict sense: troubled, ‘searching ... as far as
the eyes can reach,’ the ‘tearful’ witnessing of loss, that which ‘compels’
the historian’s ‘allusion’—or, as Freud put it, what establishes the
historian’s ‘conviction’ (Überzeugung) about his history-to-be-written,
that is, his ‘carrying-over’ or ‘transference’ (Übertragung) or what I
have been calling his subjective-objective ‘trans-position’, not the
transformation of one’s practice but rather the placing of it ‘across’ the
division of positions.21

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

For many there is a dilemma here. To the extent that we
acknowledge the loss of the objects, we can only have art history as a
pathological not-letting-go; but to the extent that we admit our desire
to mourn, we can only have the history of art as a pathological walking-
of-the-dead. Do we want a pageant of corpses revivified by the histor-
ian, dead things reanimated with their supposed original ideas and
passions, a ghastly puppet show—like that ‘social history of art’ on
such clairvoyant terms with the agencies and intentions, politics and
subjectivities of the departed? Or an echoing mausoleum of the van-
ished, crypts within crypts endlessly swept out by the historian forever
coming across the bones—like that ‘deconstruction’ so devoted to the
vacated? Ethics, treating the objects as subjects, or forensics, treating
the subjects as objects?22

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

Winckelmann could have had two different histories held utterly apart from one another—antiquarian and sodomite, let us say. But his division is reconciled—although not, of course, effaced—in the witness and allusion of his work, its on-going mourning. Indeed, he invents art history precisely because his two histories—she ‘witnessing’ and he ‘alluding’—are conjoined in him without closure, without a full restoration, through ‘his’ activity of alluding to what ‘she’ witnesses being lost. If this mourning were to cease either through the absolute subjective departure of the object or its total objective restoration, then art history could not begin or would come to an end—but art history lived in Winckelmann because in division he and she mourn unceasingly, because as division they are a whole.
to have succeeded in persuading him to spare Rome.
25. ‘When they see then a man so worthy and venerable, they all keep silence and listen attentively’ Virgil, Aeneid i, 151 f.
26. (W. v. Wright’s Travels.)
28. This ‘Sistine Madonna’ had been brought to Dresden in 1753.
30. Winckelmann includes in his notes an eleven-line quotation in Italian ascribed to ‘Vasari, Vite de’ Pittori, Scult. & Archit. edit. 1568, Part. III, p. 776’, which we shall omit here. The Reclam edition of Gedanken ... comments thus on W.’s description of Vasari’s report: ‘Winckelmann’s hypothesis that Michelangelo established the contours of sculptural models with the aid of a water container, could only be based on a reference in Giorgio Vasari’s Vite de’ Pittori, in which the delineation of sculptural lines by means of a water surface appears only as a figurative comparison. The procedure which Winckelmann describes in such detail is therefore probably a pure invention of Winckelmann or of his friend Adam Friedrich Oeser, as Carl Justi has conjectured’ (Carl Justi: Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen, 5. Aufl. Bd 1, Köln 1956, S. 474–481). (Reclam quotation is from Ludwig Uhlig’s edition of Winckelmann’s Gedanken ..., Universal-Bibliothek #8338 (2), 1977, p. 131, as translated by us.)
31. (W. Turnbull’s Treatise on Ancient Painting, 1740. fol.)
32. A fresco of the 1st c. AD, rediscovered in Rome in 1606.
33. The legendary Attic national hero, Theseus, killed the monster Minotaur which every year, at the behest of the Cretan king, Minos, had received seven Athenian boys and girls to devour.

Whitney Davis: Winckelmann Divided
2. For Winckelmann’s History, the only complete English translation, by G. H. Lodge (4 vols., Boston, 1880) is unsatisfactory in several respects; a new rendition is long overdue. The French translation (by M. Huber, but not credited in the publication) is worth consulting for its more subtle representation of Winckelmann’s nuanced prose (Histoire de l’art chez les anciens, par Winckelmann, avec des notes historiques et critiques de differens auteurs (Paris, 1802–3). For Winckelmann’s publications of gems and other antiquities, see his Description des pierres gravées du feu Baron de Stosch (Florence, 1760) and Monumenti inediti antichi, 2 vols. (Rome, 1767). For his treatise on allegory, see Versuch einer Allegorie, besonders für die Kunst (Dresden, 1766). A convenient but very partial English selection of Winckelmann’s writings can be found in Winckelmann: Writings on Art, ed. David Irwin (London, 1972). The standard, complete German edition is J ohann Winckelmanns sämtliche Werke, ed. Joseph Eiselein, 12 vols. (Donauweschingen, 1825–9); see also kleine Schriften, Vorrede, Entwürfe, ed. Walther Rehm (Berlin, 1968), an edition of Winckelmann’s briefer works with excellent annotations.
Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe


7. See Potts, 'Winckelmann's Construction of History'.

8. It will not quite do to say that we now describe as Greek 'Archaic' art was unknown to Winckelmann. Although he did not know the range of vota in the late 7th, 6th, and early 5th centuries, he understood, for example, that Greek sculpture sprang from 'crude stone' beginnings and that it could be taken—although he disagreed with the idea—to be related conceptually and formally to Egyptian art. Moreover, he knew preclassical Greek art in the form of small metal figures and vase paintings.


12. See Monumenti inediti antich., vol. i: 73, vol. ii: no. 59; the head is now in the Glyptothek, Munich (no. 4168). It was originally a post-Polykleitan athlete's head, reworked, at a later point, into a faun's head.


19. In an insightful study of the problematic temporality of the modern ‘imitation’ of ancient art as recommended by Winckelmann, Michael Fried approaches the issue I raise here from a different vantage point; see his ‘Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation’, *October*, 37 (1986), 87–97.


22. Versions of these debates and contrasts can be found e.g. in Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Mediations on a Cey Science* (New Haven, 1989); David Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park, Pa., 1991); Selim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds), *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge, 1991); Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Mexey (eds.), *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (New York, 1991).


**Chapter 2**


2. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin and Libau, 1790). The best recent English translation is Werner S. Pluhar, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis, 1987), with a foreword by Mary J. Gregor. The translator’s preface and introduction (pp. xix–cix) are especially valuable both in outlining the argument of this (Third) *Critique* and in elucidating its relationship to the other two *Critiques*, the First (of Pure Reason, pub. 1781) and the Second (of Practical Reason, pub. 1788).


**Immanuel Kant: What is Enlightenment?**

1. ‘Dare to be wise!’ (Horace, *Ars poetica*).

**Immanuel Kant: The Critique of Judgement**

1. Where one has reason to suppose that a relation subsists between concepts, that are used as empirical principles, and the faculty of pure cognition *a priori*, it is worthwhile attempting, in consideration of this connexion, to give them a transcendental definition—a definition, that is, by pure categories, so far as these by themselves adequately indicate the distinction of the concept in question from others. This course follows that of the mathematician, who leaves the empirical data of his problem indeterminate, and only brings their relation in pure synthesis under the concepts of pure arithmetic, and thus generalizes his solution. I have been taken to task for adopting a similar procedure (*Critique of Practical Reason*, Preface, p. 16) and fault has been found with my definition of the faculty of desire, as a faculty which by means of its representations is the cause of the actuality of the objects of those representations; for mere wishes would still be desires, and yet in their case every one is ready to abandon all claim to being able by means of them alone to call their Object into existence. But this proves no more than the presence of desires in man by which he is in contradiction with himself. For in such a case he seeks the production of the Object by means of his representation alone, without any hope of its being effectual, since

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