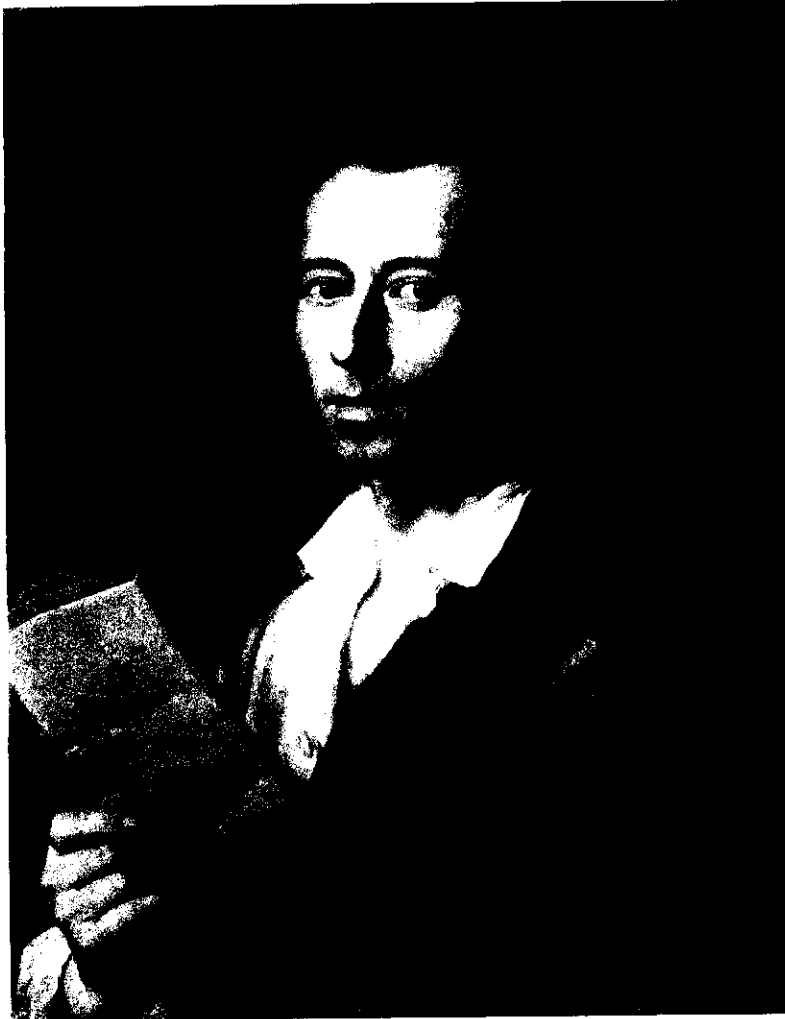


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J. A. R. Mengs, Portrait of Winckelmann, oil, c. 1758, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

# FLESH AND THE IDEAL

*Winckelmann  
and  
the Origins of Art History*

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## INTRODUCTION

The middle road is the only one that does not lead to Rome.

Arnold Schönberg<sup>1</sup>

Winckelmann's writing particularly repays a close reading now because of his unusually eloquent account of the imaginative charge of the Greek ideal in art. In his impassioned attempt to reconstitute it, he invoked not just the utopian aspirations but also the darker anxieties that made it so compelling. He showed an unusually acute awareness of the psychic and ideological tensions inherent in its image of an impossibly whole and fully embodied human subjectivity. In other words, he took the Greek ideal so seriously that he could not conceive of it as an abstraction existing beyond the disturbance of bodily desire and ideological conflict. Any moderate middle way to reconstituting the earlier, purer ideal hovering behind the extant ruins of ancient Rome would have been a blind alley for him. No less insistently than Nietzsche's, Winckelmann's image of the Apollonian composure of the antique was one wrested from extremity.

What does the name Johann Joachim Winckelmann usually conjure up? We probably think first of his famous dictum that the essence of the Greek ideal was 'a noble simplicity and a calm grandeur' (*eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Grösse*). The idea of a 'noble simplicity' seems to place him on very traditional ground. A conflation of ethical nobility with formal simplicity had been a long-standing paradigm of classical aesthetics and, partly under the impress of Winckelmann's invocation of it, was endowed with a new lease of life in the late eighteenth century. Yet if 'noble simplicity' represents the inheritance of aristocratic norms of decorum, connoting a world of patrician self-possession and calm, it could also suggest a kind of *tabula rasa* of subjectivity that was at odds with the affectations and excesses of high society, something approaching a proto-revolutionary ideal.

And what of the other words, 'calm grandeur'? If we look again at the German phrase *stille Grösse*, we notice that the conventional translation is somewhat misleadingly tilted towards ideals of poise. The word *stille* also has the idea of stillness, which could simply suggest an absence of signs of life. 'Calm grandeur' projects an image of resonant heroism, the great soul effortlessly in possession of his strength. 'Still grandeur' could be something else—the stillness of an imperturbable calm that might be inanimate or inhuman, perhaps the stillness of death.<sup>2</sup>

The association between Neoclassical aesthetic ideals and death is familiar enough nowadays. It is one of the clichés of our culture that the cold marble forms of the pure classical nude, supposedly embodying an ideal beyond the measure of time and mortal alteration, is redolent of a deathly coldness. In this

crude form, the association is too reductive to explain how and why Neo-classical ideals have cast such a compulsive spell at different moments. Winckelmann's prefiguration of a modern consciousness of the deathly stillness of the Neoclassical nude works because, in his account, the blankness identified with the ideal figure, the stilling of emotion and desire in its perfected marble forms, is coupled with an intense awareness of the kinds of erotic and at times sado-masochistic fantasy that could be woven around such representations of the body beautiful.

His is a very complex reading of the formal purity of the ideal figure, in which a deathly stillness mingles with eruptions of desire and violent conflict. A powerful dialectic is set up between beautiful bodily form and suggestions of extreme psychic and physical disquiet. The image he uses most often to evoke the apparent imperturbability of the ideal figure in repose is the calm expanse of a distant sea. The smoothly modulated surfaces of the finest Greek ideal become like a gently rolling swell, simultaneously calm and redolent of a power that might easily be stirred into raging fury.<sup>3</sup>

Take a specific example. The analysis of the aesthetic, ideological, and stylistic basis of Greek art in Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity*<sup>4</sup> is headed by the illustration of an antique gem representing a dead or fatally wounded female nude lying prone in the arms of a naked warrior (Plate 2). Right at the outset, ideal Greek beauty is associated with violence and death. In explaining the iconography of the scene, Winckelmann imparts to it a level of disturbance that is noticeably in excess of its immediate connotations. The group most likely represents Achilles holding the body of Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons, whom he has just slain, and with whom he has also fallen in love. But Winckelmann makes it refer to a much more vicious and very obscure story in Plutarch:

The wild sow of Crommyon, which went by the name of Phaea, was no ordinary beast, but a ferocious creature very hard to overcome . . . Theseus went out of his way to find and kill this animal . . . Another account, however, has it that Phaea was a robber, a murderous and depraved woman, who lived in Crommyon and was nicknamed the Sow because of her life and habits, and whom Theseus afterwards killed.<sup>5</sup>

The beautiful flowing contours of the female nude and her heroic killer, Theseus, are here charged with suggestions of violence, and even depravity, that are the very antithesis of ethical ideals of nobility and calm. The effect of beauty is produced through an entirely involuntary transfiguration, the bodily stillness that comes with the approach of death. Take another instance, the statue of Niobe (Plate 15), which Winckelmann singled out as the most important surviving example of the austere or sublime style in classic Greek art. Niobe, like Phaea, achieves a transcendent stillness through an excess of violence, in her case a terrifying suffering and fear that, according to



**Das vierte Capitel.**  
**Von der Kunst unter den Griechen.**

**Erstes Stück.**

**Von den Gründen und Ursachen des Aufnehmens und des Vorzugs der Griechischen Kunst vor andern Völkern.**

2. Engraving of an antique engraved gem from the 1764 edition of Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity*.

Winckelmann, had reached such unbearable extremity that all signs of expression on her face were obliterated, leaving her transfixed in the cool forms of a pure, austere, almost absolute beauty. Niobe was witnessing Apollo and Diana slaughtering her children and, according to the legend, her grief was so intense that she was literally frozen into stone.<sup>6</sup>

It is not entirely accidental that these deadly configurations of ideal beauty are female rather than male. They echo a gendering of extreme bodily affect widely current in Western European art. The discomfiting subtexts attributed to these images not only disturb the morally uplifting connotations clustering round eighteenth-century conceptions of antique beauty, but also bring into view anxieties surrounding sexual difference that hover insistently yet largely

hidden on the margins of Winckelmann's very male constitution of the Greek ideal.

The story is not very different when we move to the centre of Winckelmann's recreation of the Greek ideal, those still famous descriptions of the statues in Rome thought at the time to be the most important masterpieces of ancient art.<sup>7</sup> The work already singled out in his early essay *On the Imitation of the Greeks* as the epitome of a 'noble simplicity and still grandeur' is the Laocoön (Plate 16), possibly the least calmly poised of the famous antiques of the period. In his later description of the statue in the *History of the Art of Antiquity*, what comes to the fore is not the poised struggle of a noble soul against adversity so much as a violent juxtaposition of beauty and pain.<sup>8</sup> The state of calm associated with the Greek ideal in his mature writing is also a state of suspended terror. This applies not only to the Laocoön, where the apparent poise is a physical convulsion resulting from his being strangled and bitten to death by snakes, and to the Niobe, whose impassive beauty results from her being overwhelmed by the terror of witnessing the slaughter of her children. The Apollo Belvedere (Plate 19) is seen as expressing his divine authority in a gesture of violence as he advances on and kills the Pythian serpent, while the figure of Hercules that Winckelmann associates with the Belvedere Torso (Plate 36) is imagined in a state of 'transfiguration' after being ravaged by a poisoned cloak and burned alive. The immaculate image of an undisturbed plenitude, the ideal self embodied by the Greek ideal, is framed in Winckelmann's writing by vivid eruptions of physical conflict which at times border on total self-annihilation.

Winckelmann is particularly revealing as to both the political and the homoerotic sexual content of the fantasies that gave the antique male nude its larger resonance within the culture of his time. We confront in Winckelmann, more vividly than in any other writer of the eighteenth century, the question of how the Greek nude could be seen to embody the ideal of subjective and political freedom with which it came to be so closely identified. He does not simply assume, like most writers of the period, that a truly beautiful art, such as that of the ancient Greeks, must have been produced by a free society. Notions of freedom play an integral role in the ideal subjectivity he sees represented by the beautiful figures of antique statuary.

With Winckelmann, then, freedom is not just the condition that makes possible the imaginative creation of an ideal beauty. It is also the subjective state of being figured by that beauty, through its apparent embodiment of a state of unconstrained narcissistic plenitude, which he identifies most immediately with the self-absorbed, free-standing, naked male figure. Here there is an absolute freedom, but also suggestions of a kind of subjective emptiness or, to return to an image already touched upon, a stillness, a sense that such unblemished formal and subjective oneness, so entirely divested of tension and constraint, is not quite alive.

His more dramatic readings of the ideal male nude, such as the Laocoön

(Plate 16) and the Apollo Belvedere (Plate 19), on the other hand, suggest the darker aspect of this fantasy of an absolutely free subjectivity. We see the violence implicit in the idea of an ideally free self once it has to engage with the world around it. Conflict becomes the condition of its existence. Its total autonomy is asserted through a violent struggle that can come to an end only with death or withdrawal into narcissistic isolation. The violent dramas of some of his best-known readings of the Greek ideal thus echo contradictions inherent in the impossible fantasy of an absolutely free sovereign self. Winckelmann seems not unaware of the antinomies lodged in the Enlightenment desire for absolute freedom, which de Sade later wrote about with such disturbing directness.

It would be seriously to misrepresent Winckelmann's projection of the Greek ideal, however, were we to focus only on suggestions of an empty, almost deathly stillness, or his intimations of an uncontrollable violence hovering at its fringes. Then we should be missing what is undeniably the most visibly striking aspect of his writing on Greek art, the unapologetically sensuous homoeroticism of his reading of the Greek male nude. His projection of the Greek nude as an erotically desirable masculinity is both more immediate and, if anything, more richly invested than his imagining it as the symbolic embodiment of freedom. The ideal erotic figure for him is not a feminine object offered up for the delectation and domination of a male gaze. It is rather a finely formed male body. As such it becomes for the male viewer both an object of desire and an ideal subject with which to identify.

The boundary between the homoerotic and what we call the homosexual is one that has long been a subject of repressive anxiety in Western culture, and Winckelmann's intervention in this area has a decidedly double aspect. On the one hand, he voices an unusually explicit erotic enjoyment of the male nude together with a quite passionate apologia for the value of male friendship and love. If, strictly speaking, we should understand this as homosocial rather than overtly homosexual in the modern sense, it comes as close to homosexuality as was allowable in a public context in the eighteenth century. Equally, however, Winckelmann's writing could not but be inflected by his culture's prohibition on associating ideal manhood with sexual desire between men. Homosexual or what were then called sodomitical practices were subject to a taboo that made them almost unmentionable in public except by way of denial and negation.

With his foregrounding of the homoerotic quality of the ideal male nude, Winckelmann exposed a significant fault line in dominant configurations of ideal masculinity within his own culture. The Greek ideal's embodiment of desirable manhood threatened to blur the distinction between an allowable homoerotic feeling and a prohibited sexual desire between men, particularly as ancient Greek culture was widely known to have been favourably disposed to homosexuality. This boundary could not be allowed to remain fluid and open, and had to be policed by an implicit homophobia that Winckelmann himself could not but to some extent internalize. In Winckelmann's writings on the

ideal male nude, the more disturbing sado-masochistic dramas can be seen as charged by the violence of largely unspoken because rarely contested prohibitions framing male same-sex desire in the culture he inhabited. They play out largely disavowed tensions within his culture's eroticized ideal male self-images, tensions that he brought into sharp focus because they impinged so directly upon the public representation of his own sexual desires.

The richness and complexity of Winckelmann's reading of the Greek ideal may be apparent to us nowadays because of an increasing awareness on our part of the contradictions inherent in Enlightenment ideals of rationality. Winckelmann often seems to speak with disturbing directness to our modern sensibility for the darker aspects of the Enlightenment's supposedly ideal symbolic forms—its mostly unspoken homophobia, for example, or the violent ramifications of its fantasies of subjective freedom. At the same time, our understanding of the preoccupations and values that feature in Winckelmann's writing, if they are to mean very much, must have some historical grounding, some basis in what we know would be conceivable for Winckelmann and his milieu. In the case of the fantasy of an ideally desiring free self that is central to Winckelmann's conception of the Greek ideal, we are fortunate to have a body of letters from him that abound in vivid accounts of his social and erotic self, of his 'freedom' and of his desires.

The point is not to trace a causal connection between the images of his life he projected and the ideals of freedom and the dialectics of desire found in his account of Greek art. Rather it is to gain a more precise sense of what the Greek ideal would have meant for someone writing in his particular circumstances. Winckelmann's vision of an ideal political freedom forming the basis of the beauty of Greek art was clearly informed by his own experience of the aspiration for freedom, and of the blockages placed on this, while he was struggling to establish himself as an independent scholar and writer. At the same time, the connections he made between Greek art and freedom were also determined by his culture's larger conception of the antique as an imaginative and ideological construct. Similarly, his notion of the eroticism of the Greek ideal in art must relate to the ideas of male friendship and love that feature so prominently in his letters. In both his more public antiquarian and his more private autobiographical writing, he was one of the period's most impassioned and eloquent proponents of a homosocial ideal. But the image of ideal Greek manhood he conjured up in his *History of the Art of Antiquity* did not reflect in any simple way his particular erotic fantasies and desires. It was a cultural construct with its own logic, imbricated in dominant paradigms of masculinity which at some level marginalized and repressed his own desires.

In exploring the complex dynamic of fantasy in Winckelmann's writing, we are inevitably drawn towards a perspective that mingles the historical with the psychoanalytic. When we try to make sense of the representations of identity in Winckelmann's writings, formed within a social and cultural world very different from our own, we are involved in fundamental confusions between the

psychic and the historical, between ideas of the self and its 'inner' fantasies that structure our own perspective on the world, and ones that seem strange and unfamiliar. Fantasies of the kind we see Winckelmann projecting onto the Greek ideal are defined within particular historical circumstances and inflected by a particular ideology; but our understanding of them is also necessarily ahistorical, part of the very basis we have for conceiving any subjectivity or desire.

Drawing out the contradictory resonances and dialectical reversals of Winckelmann's notion of a 'noble simplicity and calm/still grandeur', as we have been doing here, touches on the most immediately engaging aspect of his writing on Greek art. At the same time, we need to recognize the importance of his activities as a historian and antiquarian scholar. To understand his notion of the Greek ideal, we shall need to involve ourselves in the self-consciously scholarly aspect of his reconstruction of Greek art. After all, technical scholarly detail forms the bulk of his major work, *The History of the Art of Antiquity*. He became an important figure in Enlightenment culture because he was seen quite literally to have invented a new kind of history of art, providing a fuller historical reconstruction of the antique ideal and its rise and decline than anyone before him. He lived on as a major figure in Western European culture as both a historical scholar and an impassioned aesthete, and our perspective on his writing must continue to encompass both terms of this duality.

At the centre of his new history of art were two key constructs, a notion of historical process that construed the larger history of Greek art as a systematic evolution through rise and decline, and a theory of artistic style or modes of visual representation that gave this abstract model a distinctively visual character. The particular pattern of stylistic development he identified in ancient Greek art had very important implications for his picture of the aesthetics of the Greek ideal and its ideological and psychic resonance.

Theoretically speaking, Greek art of the classic period, when the Greek ideal realized itself in all its fullness, should have been styleless, or at least the embodiment of the one true style of the highest reaches of art. But Winckelmann's history did not quite pan out that way. When he constructed a detailed picture of Greek art of the classic period, he saw it as taking two quite distinct, mutually incompatible forms. He opened up a disjunction between the theoretical construction of the Greek ideal as one and whole, and its materialization in history as developing through two generically different modes of visual representation, a high mode and a beautiful mode. This division, this difference introduced into the heart of the classic art of antiquity, articulated a structural tension within the artistic aesthetics of the period that the Greek ideal had to negotiate but could never quite abolish. Indeed, at times it seemed to be made all the more acutely apparent.

In the beautiful mode the Greek ideal revealed itself as sensuous and graceful, in the high mode as austere and pure. The distinction was not just a formal and stylistic one. It articulated a series of ideologically loaded dualities—

between the bodily or erotic and the immaterial or idea-like, between the sensuously pleasurable and the grand or manly, between a cultural ideal of refined hedonism on one hand and one of austere heroics and virtue on the other. In elaborating this stylistic duality between the high and the beautiful, which functioned simultaneously as a formal construct and a richly resonant ideological one, Winckelmann incorporated the sexual and the political into the very foundations of the new history of art he was creating.

The other main feature of Winckelmann's story of art, the systematic pattern of rise and decline, also had important theoretical and ideological implications for the whole conception of the Greek ideal. In defining the formation and disintegration of the art of Greek antiquity so compellingly, Winckelmann effectively made this 'timeless' model of classic excellence into a historical phenomenon. He thereby set in motion a historicizing of the Greek ideal that eventually threw into question its viability as a model for imitation and emulation in the present. At the same time, he was quite explicit that the significance of this ideal could not be recovered simply by way of empirical enquiry. A historical analysis, however painstaking, that sought to piece together the fragments that remained, could not of itself provide a vision of the true essence of the Greek ideal, of what made it so compelling in the present. His history of the Greek ideal both prefigured the more strictly historical understanding that became the norm in the nineteenth century and also undermined its positivist aspirations.

Winckelmann's history of ancient Greek art remains alive to us now precisely because of this unresolvable ambiguity of perspective. He unsettles any easy notion of historical reconstruction that does not recognize the import of the immediate resonance that the 'ideal' being reconstructed has for us in the present, without which we would never even have been motivated to study it in the first place. The sheer extent of Winckelmann's ambition in attempting to create a system that would elucidate the entire history of ancient Greek art and allow us to apprehend its surviving fragments in all their true significance brings into focus problems that are still with us today, in some form or other.

This book originated some years ago in what would now be seen as a somewhat old-fashioned intellectual historical analysis of the structural novelty of Winckelmann's conception of ancient Greek art. Initially it was Winckelmann the antiquarian scholar and historian who was my main focus of interest, the figure who effected a new synthesis of the literary and visual evidence relating to ancient Greek and Roman art, and endowed this art with a new systematic history. In puzzling over the significance of the formal paradigm that enabled him to reconceptualize the larger history of Greek art, I found that his writing on the Greek ideal was rather richer than I had anticipated, in quite unexpected ways. I was increasingly convinced that the contradictions and complexities of Winckelmann's text could not be glossed as weaknesses or lapses in his system, but required close and careful reading. They gave evidence of a charge embedded in his writing that often undermined the very theoretical and historical models it seemed to embody.

Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* was designed specifically as an archaeological or antiquarian study of Greek art, yet it was so much more than that as well. I found it impossible to make sense of even the most scholarly aspects of his reconstitution of the Greek ideal without exploring the complex ideologically and psychically charged fantasies evoked by the Greek body beautiful which keep erupting in his text. In making the move from formal structural paradigms of historical scholarship to the antinomies of subjectivity and desire, I was motivated by the internal logic of Winckelmann's writing, and also by changes operating within the modern world of Anglo-American scholarship I myself inhabit. It was important for me, however, not to let my initial priorities slip, and to continue to keep clearly in view the explicitly stated intellectual ambitions of Winckelmann's scholarly work. These frame the more highly invested and potentially subversive passages in his writing, and to insist on them is to resist and complicate too easy a deconstructive reading of his text.

I decided to begin this book with an analysis of Winckelmann's achievements as an antiquarian scholar and historian, the writer who produced the Enlightenment's classic text on the art of Greek and Roman antiquity. Then I proceed to a more symptomatic reading of his lyrical evocations of the essence of the Greek ideal. The notion of style provides a bridge between these two perspectives. His distinction between the high and beautiful styles in Greek art is simultaneously a painstaking analysis of the available verbal and visual evidence and an impassioned evocation of the very different kinds of charge that an ideal nude might have.

While exploring the partially disavowed problems and contradictions inherent in Winckelmann's conception of the Greek ideal, I hold to the dominance of two issues that feature centrally and explicitly in his account of Greek art: the ideal of political and subjective freedom and the sensual eroticism of ancient Greek images of ideal masculinity. That these issues are made problematic in Winckelmann's writings is not just the effect of our retrospective evaluation of the fissures and tensions in his text. The problems are explicit in the structure of his argument. The complexities of his writing are always in excess of the consciously articulated problems his text describes, as we would expect of any worthwhile writer. At the same time, his use of negation and contradiction is also programmatic, and shows a recognition on his part of an unmanageable 'unconscious' that could not be encompassed in a simpler, more visibly consistent presentation. In the coda at the end of my book, where I trace some later echoes of the Winckelmannian Greek ideal, I show how the compulsive interest this ideal continued to have for later writers and artists was informed by ideological tensions already traced out, consciously or unconsciously, in Winckelmann's own writing.

The best tribute I can offer Winckelmann the writer is to acknowledge how worthwhile it has been engaging again and again with his texts over the years, at times fitfully and even reluctantly, yet in the end with something of the obsessiveness I see mirrored in his project. Out of his system I have enjoyed making another system. I had moments when I felt a little uneasy about taking

over Winckelmann in this way, suspecting for one thing that the system I was erecting on the ruins of his was one of which he might radically have disapproved. In allowing myself this liberty of imagining his revisiting one further reconstitution and mutilation of his life's work, I should recall a comment he once made on the first major reprocessing of his *History of the Art of Antiquity*, the French translation that appeared in 1766:

I have to deplore the fate met by the *History of Art* in the French translation . . . Because of this dismemberment, the continuity is broken up. Each bit is detached from the next, so they are made to appear as limbs existing in their own right.<sup>9</sup>

## CHAPTER I

### Inventing a History of Art

The history of the art of antiquity that I have endeavoured to write is no mere narrative of the chronology and alterations of art. Rather I understand the word history in the larger sense that it had in the Greek language, and my aim is to attempt a system.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WINCKELMANN'S HISTORY

Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* soon acquired an international reputation after it was published in German in 1764. Initially it reached a non-German public by way of extracts and summaries in literary journals such as the *Journal Encyclopédique*,<sup>2</sup> and then by a succession of Italian and French translations, the first of which appeared in French in 1766. The book originated from and spoke eloquently to a cosmopolitan European community for which ancient Rome was a crucial point of reference—Rome being where Winckelmann settled after he left Dresden in 1755. The audience with a special interest in Winckelmann's subject, namely the sculpture and painting of antiquity, which at the time had almost all been excavated in Italy, was a broad one. It included people involved in classical antiquarian studies or the art world, as well as Enlightenment intellectuals who considered classical antiquity a testing ground for their analysis of human culture.

Winckelmann's *History* had a remarkable impact for a scholarly antiquarian publication. It presented a comprehensive synthesis of available knowledge about the visual artefacts of the ancient world, and as such was hardly an easy read. Four main sculptural traditions were discussed in detail—the ancient Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman. What particularly caught the imagination of Winckelmann's contemporaries, however, and still assures the book a place among the classics of art history, is what Winckelmann himself envisaged as its core, the eloquent and hugely ambitious attempt to redefine the history and aesthetics of the ancient Greek tradition. In developing a new historical and theoretical framework for reconstructing the antique classical ideal, he was tackling something fundamental. The antique ideal then stood unquestionably as the highest model of art. In several extended, finely wrought lyrical evocations of the beauties of the Greek ideal, which put his book into a category quite apart from the dry antiquarian compilations of his scholarly contemporaries, Winckelmann himself brought this point to the attention of his reader in no uncertain terms.

stillness the great poets formed for us the father of the gods . . . the majority of [their] images of the gods are undisturbed by feelings . . . Since, however, the highest indifference cannot be sustained when acting and doing, and divine figures can only be represented in human form, so the most sublime concept of beauty cannot always be striven for and maintained in these [images of the gods.]<sup>41</sup>

Similarly in the following passage:

As . . . in human nature there is no middle point between pain and pleasure, even according to Epicurus, and the passions are the winds that drive our ship in the sea of life, and by means of which the poet sets sail and the artist elevates himself, so pure beauty alone cannot be the sole object of our consideration, but we must also place this beauty in a state of acting and feeling, that in art we understand by the word expression.<sup>42</sup>

The most ideally beautiful figure, according to Winckelmann, had quite literally to be divested of its humanity. The very highest beauty would be the image of a god in which 'those parts of the body that are required to nourish it' were entirely absent.<sup>43</sup> The absolute 'contentedness' of a divine state would be represented by a body divested of all physical channels of sustenance and feeling, and would have no veins or nerves.<sup>44</sup> The 'hands of the (Greek) artists brought forth figures that were purged of human need'. When Winckelmann explained how the human body might be remade in the image of an abstract perfect beauty, he conceived this as a process of burning out, of annihilating any recalcitrant flesh and blood signs of its humanity: 'This concept of beauty is like a spirit extracted out of matter by fire, which seeks to create a being conforming to the model of the original rational creature traced in the mind of the god (*Gottheit*).'<sup>45</sup> It is 'matter' purged so it takes on the 'unity' and 'indivisibility' of an abstract idea. It should be so emptied of sensual particularity that it is 'like the purest water taken from the source of a spring, that the less taste it has, the more healthy it is seen to be, because it is cleansed of all foreign elements'.<sup>46</sup> Taken to its extreme, the ideally beautiful human figure is a radical negation of any bodily substance, a crystal-clear nothing, formless and transparent.

It was only then in a totally inhuman figure, from which all signs of flesh and blood existence had been purged, that the oneness of an ideal state of being could be imagined. Yet the Greek ideal was supposed to be the most perfect realization of human subjectivity. The divine figures of the ancient Greeks were seen as exemplary precisely because in them the very highest ideals had taken on a fully sensuous bodily form. We have here a radical contradiction at the heart of the humanist ideology that made the Greek ideal the model of a perfectly integrated humanity, at one with itself and the world. The Enlightenment fantasy of a self-sufficient oneness of being that would be embodied in a single model of the human subject, transcending all material difference, could only, it seems, be fully realized in an image quite divested of its humanity.

## THE BODY OF NARCISSUS

In his theoretical analysis of the characteristic forms of ideal beauty, Winckelmann for the most part kept any detailed exemplification deliberately vague. No well-known statues were singled out as perfect realizations of the very highest beauty. This beauty emerged as the imagined end-point of a process of abstraction from any actual human figure, in which all traces of particularized identity, of the disturbances of desire, would be removed. The abstract image of perfect oneness that he conjured up, which defied attachment to any particular image of an ideal nude, was complemented by a catalogue of the different types of ideal figure embodied in images of gods of different ages and genders in Greek sculpture. What mediated between these radically divergent presentations of the Greek ideal, one purely abstract and one more empirical, was the boyish male figure. This had to exist at both levels. It was the particular exemplification of an ideal masculine physique at a certain stage of life, but at the same time it also functioned as the purest imaginable realization of an absolute ideal beauty.

The boyish youth could fill this dual role because it seemed to present an image of manhood prior to its shaping by social or political circumstances, and before too insistent a formation of its sexual identity. It could intimate a subjectivity that was self-sufficient, free and unalienated, because it was as yet to a large extent unformed. It was youthful enough to be imagined in a state prior to the tensions that would result when it had to measure itself against patriarchal power and authority. It is not quite Freud's image of the pre-Oedipal child, but framed psychically and ideologically in a similar way. The image of the boy had a further logic in that it picked up Plato's erotic disquisitions that present the boy as the most worthy and intensely engaging object of (male) love.<sup>47</sup> Though ideologically quite different from Winckelmann's necessarily more problematized image, the distinctive charge of the Greek one also depended on intimating an ideal male subjectivity existing in a state of potential prior to its full formation, before the point where it would have to take on an active role as a man in the social order.

The focus on the image of the boyish youth also clearly connects with Winckelmann's own individual sexual preferences. These no doubt gave a particular impulse to the erotic charge he invested in this image in his writing, by making it both desirable and ideal in an unusually intense way. Moreover, within the cultural and artistic conventions of his time, it was as boy or youth that the male figure could most readily be seen as desirably beautiful, though obviously not in any too explicitly sexualized a way.<sup>48</sup> The force of Winckelmann's own investment in this image for the analysis he was offering lay in its shifting projection of the ideally beautiful figure as both object of desire and desirable being with which to identify. This dialectic, so central to the complexity and force of Winckelmann's investment in the ideal male nude, was one that a homocrotic reflexivity operating between image and spectator would have encouraged much more than a conventional heterosexual eroticism.



In Winckelmann's theoretical schema, the generically different formations of the ideal figure corresponding to sexual difference were secondary to those defined by different ideal types of manhood. His discussion of the female figure presented itself as an appendage to the more heavily invested catalogue of different conceptions of the ideal male nude, from the delicately sensuous youth (beloved?), to the austere and strong mature man (lover?), to the ambiguously feminized androgyne.<sup>49</sup> Even within such an exclusively masculine order of things, however, the image of the ideal could not be fixed in a stable configuration, with let us say a fully formed virile hero or god at the centre. A Zeus or a Hercules (Plate 23) could not function as the universal subject and object of desire that Winckelmann sought in his notion of the very highest ideal. The only image that came near to fulfilling this role was relatively marginal to conventional definitions of masculinity. With the boyish youth, ideal masculinity could be projected while effacing suggestions of any too categorically insistent a masculine identity.

This effacement of masculinity is given quite a literal edge by Winckelmann when he suggests that the imperatives of ideal beauty lead ineluctably to the image of the hermaphrodite or castrated figure<sup>50</sup>—in other words, either to a literal blurring of the particular forms of the male body or to its mutilation. Here we have, not just an attenuation of virility as imagined in the image of the boy, but the most radical destruction conceivable of bodily signs of manliness. The logic of such physical violence is made explicit by Winckelmann when he juxtaposes the differentiation of human types by age and gender with the notion of an all-encompassing single ideal figuration of the human body. After explaining that, on one hand, 'the youthful form of the gods of both sexes has its various stages and ages, in the representation of which art seeks to display all its beauties,' he then points to 'an ideal, partly taken from male beautiful bodies, partly from the natural forms of beautiful castrated youths, and elevated by a sublime superhuman build: for this reason Plato says that divine images are not given real proportions, but those that appear most beautiful to the imagination.'<sup>51</sup>

The perfect 'Platonic' ideal, in other words, has its imaginative and physical equivalent in a sexually ambivalent blurring of the male body with the castrated male body. This castration is not in any way a central, systematically defined feature of Winckelmann's theory of the Greek ideal, but marginal, the symptom of a rift in his system of ideal beauty that cannot be avoided but is not quite fully avowed either. Even without bringing to bear the theoretical panoply of Freud's fear of castration, we would have to admit that anxieties surrounding sexual difference played a not inconsiderable, if largely unconsciously articulated, role in Winckelmann's 'impossible' attempt to define the oneness of beauty through a single image of the ideal figure.

How, according to Winckelmann, is the viewer's subjectivity constituted on experiencing the figure of an ideal youth that is as close as imaginable to an absolute beauty? The figure may be seized upon by the viewer as a centred

image, but its palpable identity then dissolves as it becomes like an apparition in a dream or a disembodied fantasy of sexual ecstasy. The viewer's normal sense of self too is suspended in this encounter, for the divisions operating between subject and object in the 'real' world are effaced in the dream-like or mystic transport of oneness.

Winckelmann writes as follows of a relatively unknown figure that, according to him, gives an idea of 'the highest conception of ideal masculine youth':

Here I should like to be able to describe a beauty, the likes of which would be difficult to imagine as being of human descent: it is a winged genius in the Villa Borghese (Plates 34, 35), whose size is that of a well-formed youth. If the imagination, filled with the individual beauties of nature, and absorbed in the contemplation of the beauty flowing from and leading to god, conceived in its sleep the vision of an angel, its countenance illuminated by divine light and its stature appearing to emanate from the source of the highest unity—in such a form should the reader envisage this beautiful effigy.<sup>52</sup>

At another point, Winckelmann projects the experience in which such an apparition would involve the spectator as comparable to the transport of mystic ecstasy. His account is infused with a powerful sensuality that recalls the erotic tropes of prayers and hymns by early eighteenth-century Germany Pietists, which he would have known:

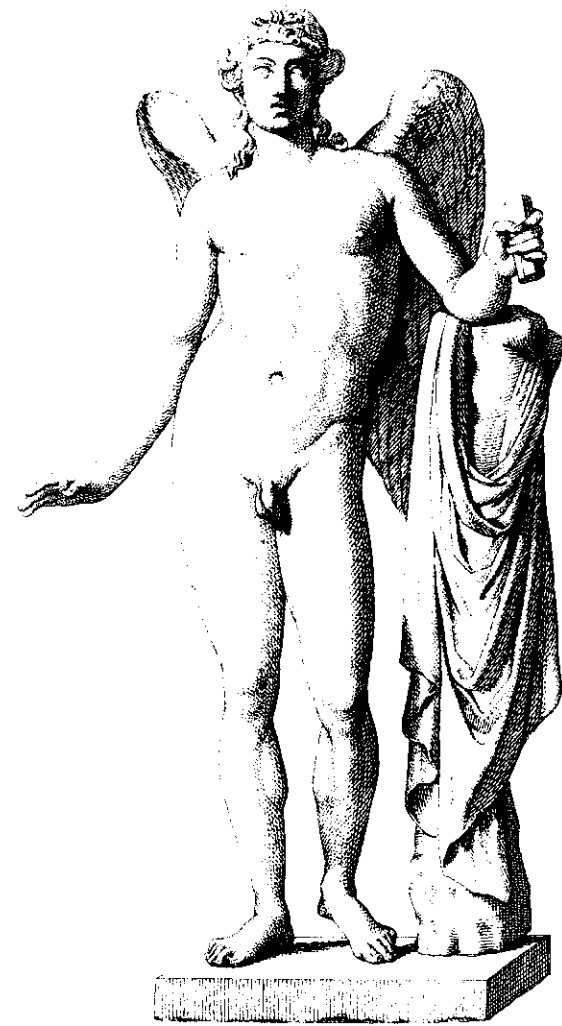
What human conception of divinity in sensuous form could be worthier and more enchanting to the imagination than the state of eternal youth and springtime of life, whose recollection even in our later years can gladden us? This corresponds to the idea of the immutability of divine being, and a beautiful youthful godly physique awakens tenderness and love that can transport the soul into a sweet dream of ecstasy, the state of bliss that is sought in all religions, whether correctly understood or not.<sup>53</sup>

This partly dematerialized experience of the absolute ideal is in an important sense structurally different from the experience Winckelmann conjures up in front of the more virile Belvedere Antinous (Plate 31). There the figure is conceived as a distinct entity, separate from the viewer, while here it is fused into the fabric of the viewer's fantasy world.

There is in Winckelmann's account of the Greek ideal another process of dissolution at work, also bound up with the imperative of ideal beauty to project a purified image of the body as a cipher of ideal oneness. It is a process that is more radically regressive than the one at work in the image of the ideal youth. When Winckelmann focuses on surface contours as the visual embodiment of a purified beauty no apprehension of any actual whole figure can quite sustain, he invites a mode of viewing in which the boundedness and centredness of the figure, the sense of it as a definable object, and of the viewing self as a coherent subject, are in effect dissolved. The image of the body as a centred totality



34. Borghese Genius or Cupid (after removal of restored arms and legs), marble, Paris, Louvre (previously Villa Borghese, Rome).



*Amore volgarmente detto il Genio.*

35. Etching of the Borghese Genius or Cupid from E. Q. Visconti, *Monumenti Scelti Borghesani* (Milan, 1837).

disappears in the polymorphous experience of flowing contours and undulating surfaces.

The absolute unity, the oneness, of the ideal beauty demands, Winckelmann explains, lack of definition (*Unbezeichnung*) of form:

From unity derives another characteristic of high beauty, its lack of definition, that is, it cannot describe either forms or points, except those alone that constitute beauty; consequently, it is an image that is peculiar neither to this nor that particular person, nor expressive of any state of mind or movement of feeling, for this would mix alien traits with beauty and disturb its unity.<sup>54</sup>

The image of the ideal thus becomes identified with an abstract flow of contour and surface:

The more unity there is in the connection between forms, and in the flowing of the one into the other, the greater is the beauty of the whole . . . A beautiful youthful figure is fashioned from forms like the uniform expanse of the sea, which from a distance appears flat and still, like a mirror, though it is also constantly in motion and rolls in waves.<sup>55</sup>

There is now nothing left but the disembodied perfection of pure line:

The forms of a youthful body are described by lines that forever change their centre, and never trace a circular path, and as a result are both simpler and more varied than those of a circle, which, however large or small it is, has the same middle point, and encloses others within itself or is itself enclosed.<sup>56</sup>

In this mode of viewing, the differentiated and variegated forms of the body have melted away in a continuously flowing curve. The demand for absolute clarity and definition associated with the highest beauty is realized in a radically contradictory image, an abstract contour that is at one level the figure of geometric precision, but at another a floating, undulating line, dissolving any sense of shape in a free play of form.

If we pursue the psychoanalytic allegories of regressive narcissistic fantasy to their logical conclusion, we would say that we have moved here beyond the kind of narcissism that fixes on the self as an ideal object of love—the fantasy of the ideal ego which, we are told, marks the birth of the ego's sense of itself as a distinct entity. This is a more archaic, polymorphous, and objectless experience that seems to exist prior to any separation between the self and the world around it, in which there is no sense of things as bounded separate entities. It would be a state described by Freud as one where 'the separate instinctual components of sexuality work independently of one another to obtain pleasure and satisfaction in the subject's own body. This stage is known as auto-eroticism and it is succeeded by one in which an object is chosen.'<sup>57</sup>

The ideal contour is fetishistic in a multiple sense—a highly charged yet apparently empty point of condensation for a number of fantasies seeking to expunge anything that might disturb an ideal self's self-sufficiency and unity.

In suspending any definition of shape that might raise questions about the particularities of the body represented, the image of the smoothly undulating contour can function as a site for the simultaneous avowal and disavowal of host of potentially unmanageable anxieties that might be elicited by any 'real' body.

The image of the contour also functions to negotiate a potentially disruptive disjunction between whole and part that exists not just for Winckelmann, but for the whole tradition of speculation on ideal beauty that he inherited. The ideal contour is somehow supposed to fuse together the apprehension of the overall form of the body and that of its individual parts. But the tension between the two can never quite be abolished. In academic theory, you have on one hand a conception of the ideally beautiful figure as a single flawlessly integrated whole. But equally it is seen as a composite figure, an assemblage of individually observed beautiful parts.<sup>58</sup>

With Winckelmann this disjunction is unusually exposed. At one level he projects the image of the ideally beautiful figure as realized in a perfect oneness of outline that in effect obliterates the particular forms of individual parts of the body. On the other hand his obsession with defining the perfect shape of each part of the body produces a contrary dismembering logic. He sets out an elaborate catalogue, almost seven pages long, spelling out the perfect formation of each bit and piece of the perfectly beautiful figure, from the curve of the eyebrow, to the shaping of the navel, to the simple arching of a perfectly formed knee.<sup>59</sup> A sort of convergence is allowed here, only in so far as all these variegated bodily fragments end up looking rather the same as they bend to his insistent delectation of exquisitely modulated contours.

Contour as Winckelmann defines it exists as the cipher for an image of the body as a simple clear bounded totality, but it also represents a floating detail of one of its parts. In effect it seeks to unite two structurally incompatible apprehensions of bodily form, making it seem as if one can blur into the other in a single image. The particularities of the body are effaced in a distanced emblematic image of its overall outline, while the close focus on any one single part also ends up dissipating particularity in a melting play of surface contour. In isolating contour as a formal motif that can stand for the ideal shape of the whole figure or any one of its parts, Winckelmann echoes the logic of Hogarth's famous line of beauty,<sup>60</sup> though his is a more hallucinatory phasing in and out between different modes of apprehension.

The ease with which he can substitute the play of contour for the conception of the figure as a whole emerges in an interesting passage where he characterizes the different formations of the body in the Laocoön, the Belvedere Torso, and the Apollo Belvedere entirely in terms of the surface modulation of their muscles. The Laocoön (Plate 29) is condensed into an image of 'muscles . . . that lie like hills, flowing into one another', the Torso (Plate 36) of ones 'that are like the surge of waves on a calm sea, rising in a flowing relief, and moving in a gently changing swell', and the Apollo (Plate 21) of ones that are 'supple, and blown like molten glass in hardly visible undulations that are more

apparent to the feeling than to the sight'.<sup>61</sup> Seen in this quasi-connoisseurial mode, these complex figures are made into fetishized objects. They are in effect each reduced to an immaculately formed inanimate surface, which shows not the least hint of disjunction or tension, but at the same time might intimate a potentially disturbing suppressed charge, as in the image of the gently swelling sea conjured up by the Belvedere Torso.

Contour as conceived by Winckelmann is not simply inanimate and abstract, but also supple and elastic, suggestive both of the literally hard surfaces of the marble forms of a statue and of the living smoothness of a body. It is through contour that Winckelmann negotiates an interplay between the literally dead materiality of the actual sculpture and the ostensibly live flesh of the body it represents. On one hand contour represents pure stilled 'inhuman' form, drained of flesh and blood. On the other the flow of the contour is a way of imagining a hard marble surface approximating to the feel of softly undulating flesh, abolishing its recalcitrant hardness. Beautiful contour is radically split — simultaneously coldly abstract and vividly sensual, inanimate and living.

This split character of contour is echoed in the viewer's apprehension of it. The imperatives of abstract form—the unity and oneness of the ideal—would seem to objectify the ideal contour and make it impervious to the free play of subjective fantasy. But equally, a focus on contour has the effect of breaking down any hard particularity of shape, the imperceptible flow of one form into the other dissolving any edges or interruptions between different parts of the figure.<sup>62</sup> As such, contour becomes a means of overcoming the material resistance of sculpture to the dematerializing projections of the mind.<sup>63</sup> The suggested dissolution of fixed form in flowing contour fosters a 'narcissistic' fantasy in which the recalcitrant externality of the sculptural object melts away and seems to be modulated to the subtlest stirrings of the viewer's desire. Immersed in the experience of undulating line, the movements of subjective fantasy seem to fuse with the objective materialized forms of the sculptural figure, as in the myth of Pygmalion.

Winckelmann's contour, the central configuration in his visualizing of ideal beauty, is the point of convergence of a number of different fetishizations of the human figure as a beautiful form. Fetishization is meant here in a post-Freudian sense, referring to a process whereby an object is fixed in psychic fantasy as both the disavowal and recognition of a deeply disturbing threat to the integrity of the self. At issue is more the structure of fantasy involved than Freud's particular insistence that such a threat is essentially a fear of castration, and the fetish a more or less literal symbolization of the penis and its threatened absence.<sup>64</sup>

In imagining the ideal body as a free flow of exquisite, but potentially empty, contours, the fantasy image of an immaculate sensuality is forged, which effaces the potential perturbations of physical desire. But the image is at the same time charged by disturbance as Winckelmann exposes the constant expunging or annihilating of flesh and blood vitality that its 'inhuman' purity and simplicity

require. There the ideal figure is poised uneasily, not by Winckelmann himself, but by the ideological imperatives of Enlightenment culture, whose fantasies of ideal oneness played out around bodily beauty he both 'deconstructed' and reanimated with a new charge.

#### NIGHTMARE AND UTOPIA

If the perfectly formed, unblemished, boyish youth was for Winckelmann the figure that came closest to embodying ideal beauty, it did so by effacing certain qualities associated with heroic manhood which were central to the ideological loading of the Greek ideal. This tension was not explicitly addressed by Winckelmann, but it is registered by default in a disparity between the theoretical precedence he gives to the youthful figure as the purest and most desirable image of beauty, and the manly identity of the masterpieces of ancient sculpture he singles out as the most important existing exemplars of the Greek ideal. The pressures produced by this disparity are evident in his reading of the Belvedere Antinous discussed earlier on, where the youthful identity he initially projects into the figure is quite visibly at odds with the actual statue. Winckelmann himself registers this tension when he gives the figure an appropriately weighty resonance in the concluding passages of the description by suggesting that the sensuous forms of the self-absorbed youth somehow already intimate the powerful physique of a manly hero.

There is, then, an unacknowledged splitting<sup>65</sup> in the ideal subjectivity embodied by the Greek ideal as Winckelmann projects it. On one hand he gives us the image of a youthful narcissistic self, existing in a state of undisturbed self-absorption and sensual plenitude, in effect isolated from any confrontation with the external world. On the other he portrays an active manly self, heroic or divinely powerful, existing in violent confrontation with or domination over what surrounds it, engaging in actions that theoretically speaking can only disturb its beauty. The negativity implied in the ideal subject's relation to its material context—to be fully free, the sovereign subject must imagine itself either as totally self-sufficient or as having to assert itself against external threats and resistances—is one that echoes Winckelmann's understanding of the role of external circumstances in the history of Greek art.

Context in the *History* was often conceived more as a constraint than as a positive stimulus to the full realization of an ideally beautiful art. According to Winckelmann, the Greek ideal was able to emerge because the privileged material circumstances enjoyed by the ancient Greeks did not present the obstacles that stopped short the evolution of art among other ancient peoples. Greek climate, for instance was neither too hot nor too cold.<sup>66</sup> And while the political context of freedom was conceived by Winckelmann as a positive animating force, its role in this respect was very ambiguous. There was a tension within the freedom fostering Greek art that echoed the one in the ideal

subjectivity he saw as embodied by the Greek ideal. On one hand it was an 'active' manly freedom realized in the violent struggles of the early phases of Greek culture, prior to the emergence of beauty in all its plenitude. On the other it was a free sensual enjoyment of things, which reached its apogee at a later time, when the first benign moments of Macedonian rule allowed the Greeks a 'passive' child-like freedom from the disturbances of political struggle.<sup>67</sup>

Winckelmann's most complexly articulated splitting between sensual youthfulness and heroic manliness occurs in his description of the Belvedere Torso, a statue that played a uniquely privileged role in his writing on antique art. It was the only description he published as an independent essay several years before incorporating it in the *History*. He also republished it later in a revised form in his treatise on allegory, where it featured as an exemplification of the allegorical reading of antique art.<sup>68</sup> Before considering in detail this description of the Torso, however, we shall return for a moment to the more obvious dramatization of a shift from the sensual to the heroic in his analysis of the Apollo Belvedere. Here, unusually, heroic domination is projected directly in the figure's action.

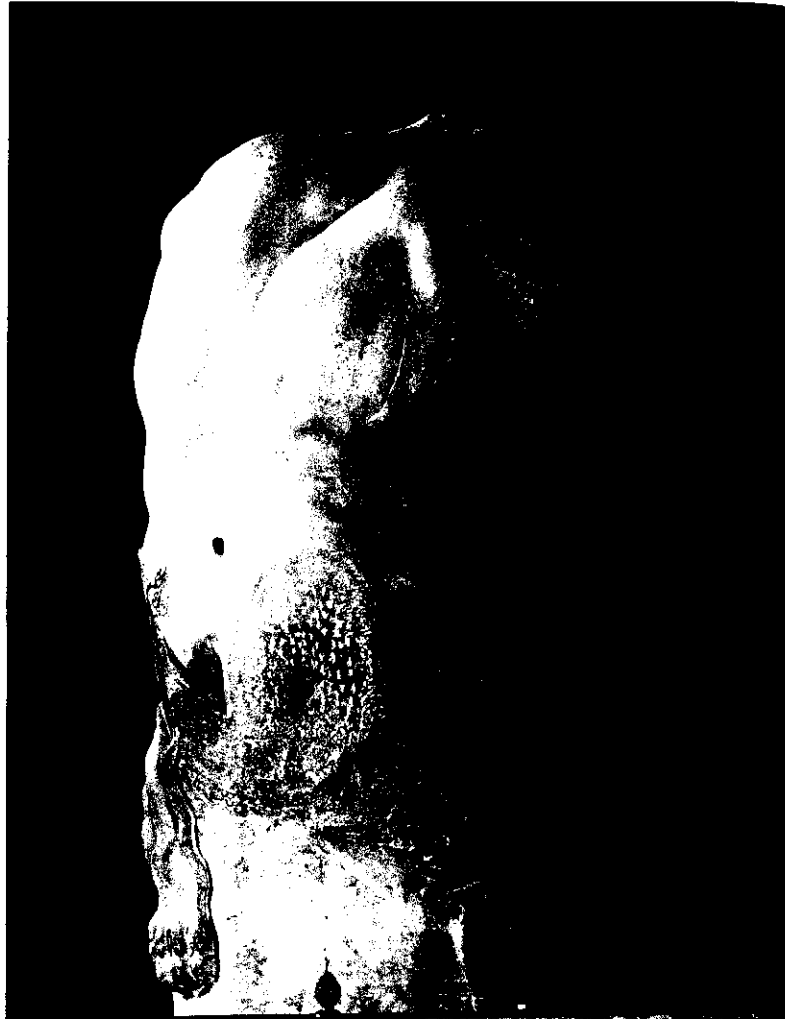
Framing Winckelmann's detailed description of the statue's forms are two very vivid images invoking the contrasting ideals of subjectivity that this 'highest ideal of art' must encompass. Winckelmann begins by invoking the all-powerful manly god effortlessly dominating and laying waste all around him (Plates 19, 20): 'From the height of his contentedness his sublime glance goes out, as into eternity, far out beyond his victory.' Towards the end of the description, however, we have a very different image of a youthful beauty existing in a state of tranquil withdrawal, away from any conflict: 'His soft hair plays around this divine head like the tender and flowing tendrils of a vine enlivened by a gentle breeze; it seems to be anointed with the oil of the gods, and bound with lovely splendour over his crown by the graces.' In between, the narrative constantly shifts between these two ideals, between a sublime self and a beautiful self, to invoke the stylistic duality discussed in a previous chapter:

disdain sits on his lips, and the displeasure, which he draws into himself, swells forth in his nostrils, and spreads up over the proud brow. But the tranquillity, which in a heavenly stillness hovers over him, remains undisturbed, and his eye is full of sweetness, as if he were among the muses, who were seeking to embrace him.<sup>69</sup>

The god Apollo striding forth victorious after slaying the Pythian serpent stands as a kind of inverted mirror image of Winckelmann's ideal, tranquil, as yet unformed youth, even while its more beautiful forms constantly suggest a shifting back to the latter's sensuous narcissism. Here, as Winckelmann imagines the ideal figure moving out of a state of solipsistic self-absorption and engaging with the external world, it projects its ideal subjectivity in total, violent domination of the objects around it. We have seen how, in his other



36. Belvedere Torso, marble, Vatican Museum, Rome.



39. Belvedere Torso.

extended readings of figures engaged in dramatic action, the Laocoön and Niobe, a negative mirror image of this logic operates. In these cases, where a less than all-powerful figure engages with the external world, its integrity as a subject is similarly projected as being in violent conflict with outside forces, but the resulting struggle is one that ends in its total annihilation.

Winckelmann's description of the Belvedere Torso (Plates 36–39) is particularly illuminating in the present context because the shifting projections of the figure's subjectivity are not, as with the Apollo Belvedere, in any way suggested by a distinctive dramatic action. Rather they have to be seen as emerging in Winckelmann's reading from a pressure to conceive the finest antique nude as the embodiment of male subjectivity in all its fullness, actively heroic and passively contented. Winckelmann takes this symbolically empty fragment and gives it meaning by presenting it as a hero sunk in contemplation of its past deeds. Like the Belvedere Antinous, it is taken literally to be in a state of narcissistic withdrawal. But its physique is more evidently manly, and more insistently suggests breaking out from these confines to the actively empowered hero.

According to Winckelmann, the statue represents Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides who is enjoying a 'divine' tranquillity after his violent death and transfiguration:

In this Hercules the artist has figured the high ideal of a body raised above nature, a nature of mature manly years, as it would appear when elevated to a state of divine contentment. He appears here as he became when he had purified himself by fire of the dross of humanity and attained immortality and a place among the gods. For he is represented as without need of human nourishment and further exercise of his strength . . . No blood vessels are visible, and the abdomen is made only to enjoy, not to take anything in, and is full, without being filled out.<sup>70</sup>

Winckelmann traces a violent history on the becalmed beautiful body. Not only are its ideal forms imagined as coming into being through the annihilation and burning of the mortal hero's flesh and blood. These same surfaces had earlier been inflamed by an excruciating pain when Hercules put on the poisoned robe, a pain that could only be stilled by his literally being burned alive. The figure's body is also seen as moulded by earlier violent deeds in which the hero annihilated a quarry or opponent. The beautifully flowing contours of the muscles, which at one level embody a state of 'divine contentment', are also modulated by acts of savage aggression. Thus the 'powerfully raised chest' evokes Hercules' crushing of the giant Geryon, and the strong thighs his pursuit and slaughtering of the iron-footed hind of Cyrenia. The apparent calm and stillness, which recall the blissful self-absorption of the ideal youth, are charged by intimations of the naked physical power of a hero laying waste all that came in his way.

The forms of a seamlessly perfect beauty suggest a fusion between two split conceptions of the ideal male figure. The more immediate suggestions of

undisturbed self-absorption alternate with projections of a state radically at odds with this, in which the figure confronts and destroys whatever resists it in the outside world. The juxtaposition of opposites has a certain fetishistic structure in which the obsessive charge of the fetishized object lies in its capacity both to deny and also to recollect or embody the fear or anxiety 'unconsciously' animating it. Such a structure of fantasy is most vividly visualized in Winckelmann's conception of the Apollo Belvedere. There the immaculately smoothed surfaces of the torso hover in the viewer's imagination beside the piercing arrow the god launches to slay the serpent.

In the conclusion to his description of the Torso, the fantasy of absolute oneness is finally realized by dissolving the formal integrity of the figure—and, by implication, of the viewing subject—in an experience of pure flowing contours. This mode of viewing is invited by the fragmentary state of the work: 'The artist will admire in the contours of this body the ever changing flowing of one form into the other, the floating forms that like waves rise and sink and are engulfed by one another.' Attention then finally comes to rest on the beautiful flesh-like surfaces of the thighs, now disassociated from the heroic deeds that Winckelmann conjured up, and from any too disconcerting suggestions of the figure's once irresistible physical power: 'The legs seem clothed by skin dissolved in oil, the muscles are plump but without superfluity, and such a balanced fleshiness is to be found in no other figure; yes, one could say that this Hercules comes closer to a higher period of art, than even the Apollo [Belvedere].'<sup>71</sup>

In its sheer physical beauty, a beauty that we might wish to admire and also identify with, the figure paradoxically appears to be closer to the very highest beauty of the lost models of Greek art from the classical period than even the Apollo. In the Apollo elevation and power are directly dramatized. In envisaging the Torso to be the fullest surviving embodiment of the Greek ideal, so it encompasses and yet at the same time suspends the violent disturbances of the sovereign subject in action, Winckelmann has to complicate its apparent calm. He has to endow its sensual plenitude with a certain ambivalence by imagining it as the transfigured after-image of a dead hero. The embodiment of an ideal masculinity is effected through the dissolution or destruction of living, acting manhood. The ideal forms of the figure are redolent of a utopian plenitude and calm, their free-flowing contours the physical correlative of a freely harmonious sense of self. Yet the calm of these same forms takes on another aspect as they conjure up a certain deathly stillness, and recall the outlines of a manly strength that has been drained away or suddenly annihilated in violent death.

The antinomies that emerge when Winckelmann imagines the Greek ideal to be the embodiment of an ideal subjectivity have such force because they register larger structural contradictions inherent in the more extreme fantasies of sovereign subjectivity that have haunted the 'bourgeois' imagination ever since his time.<sup>72</sup> We have here a model of ideal self-definition, a mythology of oneness and freedom we associate with European modernity, and 'born', if we

can use such a term, in the Enlightenment. The very real impediments to such a mythic self-projection are registered in the largely disavowed fascination with violent confrontation and self-dissolution that emerges within these fantasies of subjective integrity.<sup>73</sup> The simultaneous obsession with and deconstruction of the 'ideal' ego in modern psychoanalysis could be seen as a twentieth-century equivalent of such forms of psychic fantasy.

The utopian story of the sovereign subject promises a regeneration in which individual subjectivity would be realized as a beautiful and freely unconstrained self. This self is endowed with the harmonious unity and plenitude of a beautiful form from which all sense of internal conflict, or of conflict with other subjects and the material world, is abolished. This is the utopian image Winckelmann conjured up in his discussion of ancient Greek art, an image that had strong echoes in later, more insistently politicized projections of a revolutionary regeneration of self. The nightmare or horror story of a sovereign subject doomed to violent confrontation or solipsistic emptiness is, as it were, the unconscious of such a regenerative utopia. It is in registering the power of this unconscious that Winckelmann's writing differs from the more one-dimensional humanist celebrations of the Greek ideal by his contemporaries and followers.<sup>74</sup> Winckelmann's Greek ideal projects an ideally free sovereign subjectivity, but one surrounded by the violent reverberations of subjectivity's material unfreedom.

This is true, as we have seen, even of Winckelmann's conception of the unformed boyish youth, which was for him the purest embodiment of an autonomous unconstrained self. For the solipsism of this image, which produces an empty echo of the calm, plenitude, and freedom that should be the lot of the ideal subject, is a kind of death. The state of total narcissistic self-absorption may offer a promise of complete liberation from external constraints, but at the cost of liquidating any substantive identity. The latter nihilistic dimension of the fantasy can be seen to echo the death of Narcissus in the legend.

The structures of fantasy discussed here cast quite a spell on Enlightenment thought. Think, for example, of Rousseau's very explicitly politicized essay, the *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men*. Here the human subject's emergence from the 'narcissistic' contentment of a state of nature, where it enjoys a total but empty freedom, and its entry into civil society inevitably produce violent tension. Once the human subject ceases to be self-sufficient and starts actively projecting itself in relation to others around it, it is inevitably caught up in struggle and confrontation, and itself becomes divided and alienated. There seems to be no middle way between narcissistic solipsism, with its negative empty freedom, and a state of endemic conflict between the monadic self and the world around it. Diderot may have had a point when he compared Winckelmann's and Rousseau's fanaticism,<sup>75</sup> obsessively preoccupied as they both were with the more extreme fantasies and nightmares animating the Enlightenment ideal of an absolutely free sovereign subjectivity.