discussions, including the first essay itself: a palimpsest on the whole, and a crossroads leading to other journeys and other worlds.

Both essays might function as *anamorphic* patches in the overall collection, like the odd shape in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), the slantwise focus upon which reveals otherwise hidden perspectives on, and different readings of, a larger assemblage [1]. In this case, the two texts 'read' the overall collection *otherwise*. Relative to each other, and seen in the same frame, the first and last essays comprise the alternating co-present faces or fronts of an 'optical illusion'; an oscillating and enigmatic double image—a simulation (as it may become clear) of the *artifice* that historically set art history in play, and of the tensions that have kept it in motion.

Donald Preziosi 1998

Art History: Making the Visible Legible

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

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

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

The latter sense has regularly included the various social, cultural, political, economic, philosophical, or religious forces arguably in play at a particular time and place. Characteristically, disciplinary practice was devoted to reconstructing the elusive 'realities' of such ambient forces—from the intentions that might be ascribed to an individual

maker, to more general historical forces or circumstances. In short, the principal aim of all art historical study has been to make artworks more fully *legible* in and to the present.

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

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

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

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

Existing histories of art history have either been biographical and genealogical accounts of influential professionals, narrative accounts charting the evolution of theories of art (either in a vacuum or as unproblematic reflections of some broader spirit of an age, people, or place), or accounts of the development of various interpretative methodologies. Nevertheless, the following observations may be applicable to a broad spectrum of this network of practices.

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

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

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

This was linked to the widespread presumption in art history and elsewhere that formal changes exist *in order to* effect changes in an audience's understanding of what was formerly conveyed before the in(ter)vention of the new object. For some art historians, artworks

were seen as catalysts for social and cultural change; for others they were the products of such changes. In either case, the analytical object was commonly sited within a predicative or propositional framework so as to be pertinent to a particular family of questions, the most basic of which was: in what way is this object a representation, expression, reflection, or embodiment of its particular time and place—that is, a trace or effect of the peculiar mentality of the person, people, or society that produced it?

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

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

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

Crucial to the articulation of art history as a systematic or even 'scientific' historical discipline in the nineteenth century was the construction of a centralized *data mass* to which the work of generations of scholars have contributed. This consisted of a universally extendable archive (potentially coterminous, by the late twentieth century, with the material culture of all human societies) within which

every possible object of study might find its unique and proper place relative to all others. Every item might thereby be sited (and cited) as referencing or indexing another or others. A principal motivation for this massive labour over the past two centuries has been the assembly of material evidence for the construction of historical narratives of social, cultural, or cognitive development.

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

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

From the beginning, the principal concern of historians and critics of the visual arts was the linkage of objects to patterns of causality assumed to exist between objects and makers, objects and objects, and between all of them and their various contemporary contexts. Underlying this was a family of organic metaphors linked to certain common theories of race in the early modern period: in particular, the presumption of a certain demonstrable kinship, sameness, or homogeneity among objects produced or appearing at a given time and in a particular place. It was claimed that the products of an individual, studio, nation, ethnic group, class, gender, or race could—if read carefully and deeply enough—be shown to share certain common, consistent, and unique properties or principles of formation. Corresponding to this was a temporal notion of the art historical 'period' marked by similar homogeneities of style, thematic preoccupation, or technical approach to formal construction or composition.

Art history and museology traditionally fabricated histories of form as surrogates for or parallels to histories of persons or peoples: narrative

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

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

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

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

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

1

Art as History

Introduction

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

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

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

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

own positions on the nature of historical causality and on what objects of art could actually mean, and how they might signify.

These two extraordinary figures, however, occupied very different positions in relation to their historical contexts. Vasari worked to establish what was to become the dominant art historical and critical tradition in which the heritage of Florentine art was seen as paradigmatic of a revived antique glory. The progressive evolution of Florentine art was depicted as recapitulating the artistic processes that led to the glories of antique art because, as he saw it, Florentine and ancient artists were grappling with similar *artistic problems* concerning representation and the imitation of nature. The paradigm of artistic progress was articulated through metaphors of biological growth, the art of his time corresponding to a period of full maturity.

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

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

At the same time, Winckelmann was working in reaction to two centuries of post-Vasarian imitators whose writings he characterized (not without some hyperbole) as 'mere narrative[s] of the chronology and alterations of art'; fragmented imitations of Vasarian art history applied to increasingly diverse and alien contexts. He envisioned and attempted to delineate a 'systematic' history of art in his remarkable 1764 book *The History of the Art of Antiquity*.[2] Like Vasari, he was concerned with articulating what he perceived to be the *historicity* of artworks: the idea that an object bore within its very form certain identifiable traces of its temporal position in a unilinear and developmental historical *system* (his word)—a coherent evolutionary sequence of artistic styles modelled (as all histories of art had been for some

time) upon an organic metaphor of birth, maturity, and decline. His work was a progenitor of what came to be formalized in mid-nineteenth-century Europe as the academic discipline of art history. It instituted categories and paradigms which today remain deeply embedded in the structural framework and the pragmatic working assumptions of both classical archaeology (which also took Winckelmann as its chief progenitor) and modern art historical practice.

Winckelmann's *History* grappled with two principal problems. First, he aimed to highlight the specific, concrete historical *causes*—the climatic, biological, political, and social conditions—responsible for the appearance and evolution of a given artistic style. Understanding such conditions would be a way of comprehending the nature of style as such. Secondly, his work sought to articulate a viable analytic, explanatory position or role for the historian of art as a viewer of works. He was concerned here with elucidating the relations between the historian as subject and the historian's object of study in such a way as to be productive of knowledge about the individual object, and about the nature of art itself more universally (art as uniquely revelatory about individuals and peoples). He was equally concerned with understanding what the encounter between subject and object might reveal about the nature of the viewing subject.

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

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

own artistic mentor, Michelangelo.

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

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

Vasari's history of art, then, was above all a *history of precedents* in the progressive approximation to a norm or ideal manifested in its fulfilment by the work of his own time. That present moment of artistic perfection was articulated as the implicit goal of all previous practice *and* as the norm or standard with which to assess all such practice. It was framed, very specifically, as the conclusion of an upward movement from the Gothic barbarisms of what subsequently came to be characterized as the 'Middle' Ages and the contemporary reconstitution (or Renaissance) of the artistic ideals of a once-lost Graeco-Roman antiquity being doubly reborn in uncovered Roman ruins and in the (Florentine) art inspired both by those ruins and by contemporary readings of various ancient texts on art by Cicero and Pliny. For Vasari, what had been lost was now regained by artists following the *example* of ancient works' imitation of nature's inner truths.

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

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

Vasari's most famous work—his *Lives*—was but an initial synthesis in a broader and ongoing project of monumentalizing and institutionalizing his aesthetic doctrines, and documenting the canonical examples of the rise to full realization of these doctrines. The encyclopaedic nature of his life's work itself became more pronounced with the second, more fully illustrated 1568 edition of the *Lives* (which also included new portrait images of the artists discussed), and with a series of related works such as an album of drawings of the artists studied, his *Libro del disegno*.[4] In 1563, Vasari was instrumental in founding the first artists' Academy in Florence, which, under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, and with Michelangelo as its head, became the paradigm of artistic academies throughout Europe and its colonial extensions for several centuries. As a virtual temple-museum of Vasari's aesthetic doctrines, the Academy combined the functions of an archive or *libreria* for the study of the designs, models, and plans of the artists of the *Lives* and *Libro*, a hall of exhibition, and a collection of portraits of members and old master artists. The Florentine Academy was the *cumulative* expression of (and monument to) Vasari's own professional engagement with modelling the history of artistic practice in a comprehensive and systematic fashion.

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

than that of Vasari in a number of respects.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

habitually used to grapple with them.

Although Winckelmann's *History* provided the master blueprint for much of the stage machinery with which the discipline of art history was to operate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is an important sense in which his work differs significantly from its progeny. This has to do with the *second* of the major problems that his work sought to address: his conception of the relationship between the historian as subject and the historian's object of study. It is here that we may begin to appreciate not only what may have been at stake for him in the late eighteenth century, but also, and equally importantly, how art history may have changed, during its nineteenth-century professionalization and academic institutionalization, in articulating the relationships between viewing subjects and the objects of their attention.

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

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

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

In the systematic project of understanding the circumstances that made Greek art possible, the *History* historicized the Greek ideal, relativizing its accomplishments, and placing it irrevocably beyond his own grasp. What is in the historian's possession are copies (even if they be 'originals') which serve as catalysts for an unquenchable desire for the elusive realities of the beauty they represent. The pursuit of such a desire is unending; the dead objects can never be brought to life; the beauty possessed (either in objects of art or in living subjects) always leaves something more to be desired.

There is another aspect of this problem which is pertinent to our understanding of the subsequent evolution of art history. It is important to appreciate that Winckelmann lived before the great nineteenth-century efflorescence of European public museums and the massive civic staging of works of art composed in museological space as continuous narrative histories or genealogies of individuals, regions, nations, and peoples. Within such new, intensely art-saturated environments, many of the complexities and ambiguities of viewing and understanding historical objects to which Winckelmann was sensitive came to be buried beneath the stage machinery of more dichotomous subject–object relations, which institutionalized art objects by the thousands as commodities to be vicariously consumed or unproblematically 'read' (in novelistic fashion) as relics not only of their makers but of national patrimony (see Chapter 9).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Johann Joachim Winckelmann 1755

Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture

I. Natural Beauty

Good taste, which is becoming more prevalent throughout the world, had its origins under the skies of Greece. Every invention of foreign nations which was brought to Greece was, as it were, only a first seed that assumed new form and character here. We are told[1] that Minerva chose this land, with its mild seasons, above all others for the Greeks in the knowledge that it would be productive of genius.

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

One has to admit that the reign of the great August[3] was the happy period during which the arts were introduced into Saxony as a foreign element. Under his successor, the German Titus, they became firmly established in this country, and with their help good taste is now becoming common.

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

The only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients. What someone once said of Homer—that to understand him well means to admire him—is also true for the art works of the ancients, especially the Greeks. One must become as familiar with them as with a friend in order to find their statue of Laocoon[4] just as inimitable as Homer. In such close acquaintance one

Notes

Donald Preziosi: Making the Visible Legible

1. The following books may provide useful overviews of the historical development of the modern discipline; many of these are discussed in the chapters of the text below: Oskar Baetschmann, *Einfuehrung in die Kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt, 1984); Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art*, 1: *From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (New York, 1990); Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, 1985); Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago, 1987); Heinrich Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin* (Frankfurt, 1979); Paul Duro and Michael Greenhalgh, *Essential Art History* (London, 1992); Eric Fernie (ed.), *Art History and Its Methods* (London, 1995); Ernst Gombrich, *Reflections on the History of Art: Views and Reviews* (Princeton, 1987); Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (New York, 1959); A. L. Lees and F. Borzello, (eds.), *The New Art History* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988); W. E. K. Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* (New York, 1971); Vernon Minor, *Art History's History* (New York, 1994); Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (New York, 1955); Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven, 1982); Marcia Pointon (ed.), *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America* (Manchester, 1994); Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London, 1994); Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven and London, 1989); Mark Roskill, *What is Art History?* (2nd edn., Amherst, 1989); Hans Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit: Zur Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte* (Hamburg, 1978); Herbert Spencer (ed.), *Readings in Art History*, vols. i and ii (New York, 1969, 1972, 1983).
2. These issues are discussed in some detail in D. Preziosi, 'The Question of Art History', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Winter 1992), 363–86.
3. On the Vasari legacy in Art History, see the discussion in Ch. 1.
4. A fuller examination of these approaches to explanation, demonstation, and proof may be found in Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*.

Chapter 1

1. G. Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti architteti, pittori, et scultori italiani da Cimabue insino a tempi nostri* (Florence, 1550; 2nd edn., 1568). English trans. A. B. Hinds, ed. William Gaunt, Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (rev. edn., London, 1963), vol. i, preface, p. 18.
2. J. J. Winckelmann, *Geschichte des Kunst des Alterthums* (Dresden, 1764). The only complete English translation is that of G. H.Lodge: Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art* (Boston, 1880), in 4 vols.
3. Vasari, *Le vite*, 17.
4. See Licio Collobi, *Il libro del disegno del Vasari* (Florence, 1974).
5. See Marjorie Garber, *Vice-Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York, 1995), for an elaboration of this theme.
6. An excellent contemporary translation by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton, pub. 1987 (La Salle, Ill.), includes the complete German text. The selections reprinted here are taken from this edition.
7. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York, 1988), trans. by Tom Conley of *L'Ecriture de l'histoire* (Paris, 1975), esp. part I, pp. 17–112.

Johann Winckelmann: Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works

Winckelmann's own notes have been included, exactly as they appear in the original German edition; they are placed within parentheses and are preceded, for purposes of identification, by '*W*':

1. (*W*: Plato in Timaeo, edit. Francof. p. 1004.) Plato wrote in *Timaios* that the goddess Athena (Minerva) founded the Athenian state in the Grecian landscape because 'the happy combination of seasons there was best suited for the breeding of wise people.'
2. A reference to paintings from the collection of Rudolph II, which were taken from Prague to Dresden by the conquering Swedes in 1648.
3. 'The great August' is the Electoral Prince August I of Saxony, who also ruled Poland under the title of August II (August the Strong). His son and successor was Friedrich August, to whom Winckelmann dedicates this work. Winckelmann flatters him here by comparing him with the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus, who was known as a particularly beneficent ruler.
4. A famous marble group representing Laocoon and his two sons in the coils of two snakes (see n. 14).
5. Dido was the legendary founder of Carthage and a figure in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Odyssey*.
6. Polyclitus was a Greek sculptor of the 5th c. BC, who was the first to develop universally valid laws of proportion, with the help of which he wanted to create the ideal form of the human body.
7. The Medicean Venus was a copy of an Aphrodite (Venus) statue, made during the time of the Roman Imperium, later in possession of the Medici family.
8. A mythical hero of the Trojan War.
9. (*W*: Proclus in Timaeum Platonis.)
10. Hercules was the son of Zeus and Alcmene, Iphicles, the son of Amphitryon and Alcmene. According to Hesiod's account they were born as twins.
11. A person dedicated to luxurious living, an epicure. The name is derived from the inhabitants of Sybaris in southern Italy.
12. An area on the west coast of the Peloponnesian peninsula. The most famous games of antiquity took place there in the valley of Olympia.
13. Diagoras was the hero of an ode by Pindar. (*W*: v. Pindar. Olymp. Od. VII. Arg. & Schol.)
14. Laocoon: this marble group, which represents Laocoon, priest of Apollo at Troy, and his two sons in the coils of two snakes, was created apparently in the 1st c. BC by Agesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes. It was rediscovered in Rome in 1506 and transferred to the Vatican. Since Virgil in his Aeneid describes the death throes of Laocoon in similar fashion (Aeneid II, 213–24) it is assumed that he knew this sculpture. In Virgil, to be sure, Laocoon's 'terrible screaming' during the struggle is described, and Lessing's disagreement with Winckelmann's interpretation of the statue and what it depicted provided the initial impulse for Lessing's critical work, *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (*Laocoon or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*).
15. Jacopo Sadoleto dedicated his Latin poem 'De Laocoontis statua' to this marble group, which had just been rediscovered.
16. Philoctetes, who inherited the bow and arrows of his friend Hercules, was bitten by a snake during the journey of the Greeks against Troy and had to be left on the island of Lemmos because of the unbearable odour of his wound. He lived there in needy circumstances until Ulysses and Diomedes (in Sophocles: Neoptolemus) brought him to Troy where his skill with the bow was needed and where he killed Paris with one of his poisoned arrows. Sophocles' tragedy *Philoctetes* was discussed in detail by Lessing in his *Laocoon*.
17. Metrodorus of Athens, painter and Epicurean philosopher, went to Rome in 168 BC in order to tutor the children of L. Aemilius Paulus and to produce paintings glorifying the military triumphs of Paulus.
18. Parenthyrsos was originally a term used in rhetoric, signifying exaggerated, out-of-place pathos.
19. An Italian term for 'openness', 'sincerity', 'frankness'.
20. Italian for 'contrast'. In sculpture it signifies an assymetrical pose involving a strong contrast between the position of the leg carrying the body weight and the other leg.
21. Ajax was the strongest and wildest Greek hero of the Trojan War, a rival of Ulysses, who in his madness killed a herd of sheep and then himself. Capaneus was a figure in the cycle of legends concerning Thebes, known for his arrogance. He was one of the 'Seven against Thebes'; as he was storming the wall during the siege of the city, he boasted that not even Zeus could keep him out, and the angry Zeus struck him down with a lightning bolt.
22. Hyperbole: poetical or rhetorical exaggeration.
23. 'So that everyone thinks he can do it too; yet, however hard he sweats and strives, his attempt is in vain' Horace, *Ars poetica*, 240–3.
24. Raphael portrays the legendary encounter between the king of the Huns and Pope Leo I, who is referred to here in his capacity as Bishop of Rome. When Attila and his army attacked Italy in the year 452, the Pope is said