This book deals with the same topic in fourteen scenes. This topic is announced by its very title: Aisthesis. For two centuries in the West, 'aesthetics' has been the name for the category designating the sensible fabric and intelligible form of what we call 'Art'. In my other works, I have already had the opportunity to argue that, even if histories of art begin their narratives with cave paintings at the dawn of time, Art as a notion designating a form of specific experience has only existed in the West since the end of the eighteenth century. All kinds of arts and practices existed before then, to be sure, among which a small number benefited from a privileged status, due not to their intrinsic excellence but to their place in the division of social conditions. Fine arts were the progeny of the so-called liberal arts. The latter were distinguished from the mechanical arts because they were the pastime of free men, men of leisure whose very quality was meant to deter them from seeking too much perfection in material performances that an artisan or a slave could accomplish. Art as such began to exist in the West when this hierarchy of forms of life began to vacillate. The conditions of this emergence cannot be deduced from a general concept of art or beauty founded on a global theory of man or the world, of the subject or being. Such concepts themselves depend upon a transformation of the forms of sensible experience, of ways of perceiving and being affected. They formulate a mode of intelligibility out of these reconfigurations of experience.
The term Aisthesis has designated the mode of experience according to which, for two centuries, we perceive very diverse things, whether in their techniques of production or their destination, as all belonging to art. This is not a matter of the 'reception' of works of art. Rather, it concerns the sensible fabric of experience within which they are produced. These are entirely material conditions—performance and exhibition spaces, forms of circulation and reproduction—but also modes of perception and regimes of emotion, categories that identify them, thought patterns that categorize and interpret them. These conditions make it possible for words, shapes, movements and rhythms to be felt and thought as art.

No matter how emphatically some may oppose the event of art and the creative work of artists to this fabric of institutions, practices, affective modes and thought patterns, the latter allow for a form, a burst of colour, an acceleration of rhythm, a pause between words, a movement, or a glimmering surface to be experienced as events and associated with the idea of artistic creation. No matter the insistence with which others oppose the ethereal idealities of art and aesthetics to the very prosaic conditions of their existence, these idealities still provide the markers for the work with which they try to demystify them. Finally, no matter the bitterness others still express at seeing our venerable museums welcome the works of the darlings of the market, this is merely a distant effect of the revolution constituted by the very birth of museums, when the royal galleries open to the public made visible popular scenes that German princes taken with exoticism had bought from dealers in the Netherlands, or when the republican Louvre was stacked with princely portraits and pious paintings looted by the revolutionary armies from Italian palaces or Dutch museums. Art exists as a separate world since anything whatsoever can belong to it. This is precisely one of the arguments of this book. It shows how a regime of perception, sensation and interpretation of art is constituted and transformed by welcoming images, objects and performances that seemed most opposed to the idea of fine art: vulgar figures of genre painting, the exaltation of the most prosaic activities in verse freed from meter, music-hall stunts and gags, industrial buildings and machine rhythms, smoke from trains and ships reproduced mechanically, extravagant inventories of accessories from the lives of the poor. It shows how art, far from foundering upon these intrusions of the prose of the world, ceaselessly redefined itself—exchanging, for example, the idealities of plot, form and painting for those of movement, light and the gaze, building its own domain by blurring the specificities that define the arts and the boundaries that separate them from the prosaic world.

Art is given to us through these transformations of the sensible fabric, at the cost of constantly merging its own reasons with those belonging to other spheres of experience. I have chosen to study these transformations in a certain number of specific scenes. In this sense, a distant model guides Aisthesis. Its title echoes Erich Auerbach's Mimesis, which focused on a series of short extracts, from Homer to Virginia Woolf, to study the transformations in the representation of reality in western literature. Mimesis and Aisthesis undoubtedly take on different meanings here, since they no longer designate categories internal to art, but rather regimes of the identification of art. My scenes are not only taken from the art of writing, but also from the visual and performance arts, and those of mechanical reproduction. They do not show the transformations belonging to any given art. Instead, they show the way in which a given artistic appearance requires changes in the paradigms of art. Each one of these scenes thus presents a singular event, and explores the interpretive network that gives it meaning around an emblematic text. The event can be a performance, a lecture, an exhibition, a visit to a museum or to a studio, a book, or a film release. The network built around it shows how a performance or an object is felt and thought not only as art, but also as a singular artistic proposition and a source of artistic emotion, as novelty and revolution in art— even as a means for art to find a way out of itself. Thus it inscribes them into a moving constellation in which modes of perception and affect, and forms of interpretation defining a paradigm of art, take shape. The scene is not the illustration of an idea. It is a little optical machine that shows us thought busy weaving together perceptions, affects, names and ideas, constituting the sensible community that these links create, and the intellectual community that makes such weaving thinkable. The scene captures concepts at work, in their relation to the new objects they seek to appropriate, old objects that they try to reconsider, and the patterns they build or transform to this end. For thinking is always firstly thinking the thinkable—thinking that modifies what is thinkable by welcoming what was unthinkable. The scenes of thought collected here show how a mutilated statue
can become a perfect work, an image of lousy children the representation of the Ideal, somersaulting clowns a flight in the poetic sky, a piece of furniture a temple, a staircase a character, patched overalls a princely garb, the convolutions of a veil a cosmogony, and an accelerated montage of gestures the sensible reality of communism. These metamorphoses are not individual fantasies but the logic of the regime of perception, affection and thought that I have proposed to call the ‘aesthetic regime of art.’

The fourteen episodes that follow are so many microcosms in which we see the logic of this regime being formed, transformed, incorporating unexplored territories and forming new patterns in order to do so. Their selection might give rise to some surprise; the reader will seek in vain for landmarks that have become unavoidable in the history of artistic modernity: no Olympia, no Suprematist Composition: White on White, no Fountain, nor Igitur or The Painter of Modern Life. Instead there are reviews of Funambules and the Folies Bergère written by poets who have fallen into the purgatory of literary anthologies, talks by thinkers or critics who have fallen from grace, sketchbooks for stagings rarely performed ... There are surely reasons for this choice, even if, like all good reasons, they are discovered belatedly. Influential histories and philosophies of artistic modernity identify it with the conquest of autonomy by each art, which is expressed in exemplary works that break with the course of history, separating themselves both from the art of the past and the ‘aesthetic’ forms of prosaic life. Fifteen years of work have brought me to the exact opposite conclusions: the movement belonging to the aesthetic regime, which supported the dream of artistic novelty and fusion between art and life subsumed under the idea of modernity, tends to erase the specificities of the arts and to blur the boundaries that separate them from each other and from ordinary experience. These works only create ruptures by condensing features of regimes of perception and thought that precede them, and are formed elsewhere. The degrees of importance retrospectively granted to artistic events erase the genealogy of forms of perception and thought that were able to make them events in the first place. The scenographic revolutions of the twentieth century are difficult to understand without mentioning the evenings spent at the Funambules or the Folies Bergère by poets that no one reads any more: Théophile Gautier and Théodore de Banville. One would be hard pressed to perceive the paradoxical ‘spirituality’ of functionalist architecture without referring to Ruskin’s ‘gothic’ reveries — or even write a somewhat precise history of the modernist paradigm while forgetting that Loïe Fuller and Charlie Chaplin contributed to it far more than Mondrian or Kandinsky, or that the legacy of Whitman is as influential as that of Mallarmé.

One could thus consider these episodes, if so inclined, as a counter-history of ‘artistic modernity’. However, this book has no encyclopaedic goals. It is not concerned with surveying the field of the arts during two centuries, but only aims to capture the occurrences of certain displacements in the perception of what art signifies. It does follow chronological order from 1764 to 1941. Its point of departure is the historical moment, in Winckelmann’s Germany, when Art begins to be named as such, not by closing itself off in some celestial autonomy, but on the contrary by giving itself a new subject, the people, and a new place, history. It follows a few adventures of the relations between these terms. But it has not linked these adventures together; instead it develops a number of overlapping points and elaborations. Nor has it sought to lead them towards some apotheosis or end point. It could surely have come closer to our present. It could also include other episodes, and perhaps it will some day. For now, it seemed possible to me to end it at a significant crossroads: a time when, in James Agee’s America, the modernist dream of art, capable of lending its infinite resonance to the most minute instant of the most ordinary life, was shedding its last light, the brightest yet, while this very era had just been declared over by the young Marxist critic Clement Greenberg and the monument of retrospective modernism was raised. Failing to found any important art, the latter would however succeed in imposing the golden legend of the avant-gardes and rewrite the history of a century of artistic upheavals to its advantage.

This book is thus both finished and incomplete. It is open to future development, but also allows for the construction of different narratives, which could link these isolated episodes together. By following the path that leads from the Belvedere Torso, the expression of a free people, to sharecroppers’ barracks in Alabama, stopping by Murillo’s beggar boys, the oil lamps of the Funambules, the urban wanderings of a hungry vagrant, or the nomads filmed by the Kinos on the frontiers of Soviet Asia, readers will be able to
recognize so many short voyages to the land of the people, to which I have devoted another book.¹ From the mutilated Belvedere statue to the broken china rabbit belonging to the sharecropper’s daughter, via the distorted bodies of the Hanlon Lees brothers, Loie Fuller’s unlocatable body, Rodin’s limbs without bodies and bodies without limbs, and the extreme fragmentation of gestures assembled by Dziga Vertov, they will be able to construct the history of a regime of art like that of a large fragmented body, and of a multiplicity of unknown bodies born from this very fragmentation. They can also follow the multiple metamorphoses of the ancient that the modern feeds upon: how the Olympian gods transform into children of the people, the antique temple into a piece of salon furniture, or into a practicable theatre prop, the painting of a Greek vase becoming a dance celebrating American nature — and still more metamorphoses.

Among these stories, one always imposed itself with greater insistence as the book progressed: the history of the paradoxical links between the aesthetic paradigm and political community. By making the mutilated statue of Hercules the highest expression of the liberty of the Greek people, Winckelmann established an original link between political freedom, the withdrawal of action, and defection from the communitarian body. The aesthetic paradigm was constructed against the representative order, which defined discourse as a body with well-articulated parts, the poem as a plot, and a plot as an order of actions. This order clearly situated the poem — and the artistic productions for which it functioned as a norm — on a hierarchical model: a well-ordered body where the upper part commands the lower, the privilege of action, that is to say of the free man, capable of acting according to ends, over the repetitive lives of men without quality. The aesthetic revolution developed as an unending break with the hierarchical model of the body, the story, and action. The free people, says Schiller, is the people that plays, the people embodied in this activity that suspends the very opposition between active and passive, the little Sevillian beggars are the embodiment of the ideal, says Hegel, because they do nothing; the novel dethroned drama as the exemplary art of speech, bearing witness to the capacity of men and women without quality to feel


all kinds of ideal aspirations and sensual frenzies. But it did so at the cost of ruining the model of the story with causes and effects, and of action with means and ends. The theatre itself, the ancient stage of ‘active men’, in order to draw itself closer to art and life, comes to repudiate action and its agents by considering itself a choir, a pictorial fresco, or architecture in movement. Photography consecrates the triumph of the gaze over the hand, and the exemplary cinematic body turns out to be the one that is constantly bombarded by events, none of which are the result of its intentions. The aesthetic paradigm of the new community, of men free and equal in their sensible life itself, tends to cut this community off from all the paths that are normally used to reach a goal. No doubt this tendency towards suspended action is constantly resisted. But this very struggle incessantly reproduces the inertia against which it rises up. In their search for an active theatre or ballet, Diderot and Noverre had to find models in pictorial composition. The same Rousseau who opposed the activity of the civic celebration to the passivity of the spectator in the theatre celebrated the *farniente* of reverie, and with *The New Heloise* inaugurated the long series of novels without action, devoted to what Borges later called the ‘insipid and idle everyday’. Wagner wanted a living poem that acted instead of describing, but this living poem, made to welcome the figure of the free hero, instead gave way to the figure of the god who turns away from action. The renovators of dance and theatre freed bodily movements from the shackles of a plot, but the emancipation of movement also distanced it from rational, intentional action directed towards an end. Vertov’s film, which sought to replace the plots and characters of yesterday with the living links of activities that formed the sensible fabric of communism, begins and ends in a cinema where the evening’s spectators seem to play with images that present them to themselves as the daytime actors of communism. Emancipated movement does not succeed in re-integrating the strategic patterns of causes and effects, ends and means.

Hasty minds will undoubtedly see this as the sign of an irremediable breach between aesthetic utopia and real political and revolutionary action. Instead, I recognized the same paradox in it as the one I encountered in the practices and theories of social emancipation. Emancipated workers could not repudiate the hierarchical model governing the distribution of activities without
taking distance from the capacity to act that subjected them to it, and from the action plans of the engineers of the future. All these workers could easily have opposed the militants of the Saint-Simonian religion reinstating work, who came to recruit soldiers for the new industrial army, with the ingenuous words spoken by one of them: 'When I think of the beauties of Saint-Simonism, my hand stops.' The fullest expression of the fighting workers' collective was called the general strike, an exemplary equivalence of strategic action and radical inaction. The scientific Marxist revolution certainly wanted to put an end to the workers' reveries, along with utopian programmes. But by opposing them to the effects of real social development, it kept subordinating the end and means of action to the movement of life, at the risk of discovering that this movement does not want anything and does not allow any strategy to lay claim to it. Soviet critics responded to the filmmaker, who presented them with a vision of communism realized as the symphony of linked movements, that his so-called communism was doomed to an endless oscillation between pantheistic adoration of the irrational flux of things and pure formalist voluntarism. But what else could they oppose to this double defect except the return of artists to the old functions of moral illustration, whose inanity Rousseau and Schiller had exposed a century and a half earlier? Was the filmmaker effectively doing anything other than giving his judges a mirror in which they could recognize the dilemma of their science? Social revolution is the daughter of aesthetic revolution, and was only able to deny this relation by transforming a strategic will that had lost its world into a policy of exception.

Abused and mutilated to the utmost, and without head, arms, or legs, as this statue is, it shows itself even now to those who have the power to look deeply into the secrets of art with all the splendor of its former beauty. The artist has presented in this Hercules a lofty ideal of a body elevated above nature, and a shape at the full development of manhood, such as it might be if exalted to the degree of divine sufficiency. He appears here purified from the dross of humanity, and after having attained immortality and a seat among the gods; for he is represented without need of human nourishment, or further use of his powers. No veins are visible, and the belly is made only to enjoy, not to receive, and to be full without being filled ... In this position, with the head turned upwards his face probably had a pleased expression as he meditated with satisfaction on the great deeds which he had achieved; this feeling even the back seems to indicate, which is bent, as if the hero was absorbed in lofty reflections. In that powerfully developed chest we behold in imagination the breast against which the giant Geryon was squeezed, and in the length and strength of the thighs we recognize the unwearied hero who pursued and overtook the brazen-footed stag, and travelled through countless lands even to the very confines of the world. The artist may admire in the outlines of this body the perpetual flowing of one form into another, and the undulating lines which rise and fall like waves, and become swallowed up in one another. He will find that no copyist can be sure of correctness, since the undulating movement which he thinks he is following turns imperceptibly away, and leads both the hand and the eye astray by taking another direction. The bones
appear covered with a fatty skin, and the muscles are full without superfluity, and no other statue can be found which shows so well balanced a plumpness; we might indeed say that this Hercules seems to be the production of an earlier period of art even more than the Apollo.¹

This description of the Belvedere Torso figures, alongside ones about Laocoon and the Belvedere Apollo, among the memorable passages in The History of Ancient Art published in 1764 by Johann Joachim Winckelmann. He was certainly not the first to praise a statue that belonged to the Roman pantheon of Greek sculpture and whose perfection Michelangelo had extolled two centuries earlier. This admiration however was not free of paradox. Here is a statue of Hercules, the victor of the Twelve Labours, the athlete and wrestler par excellence, the one whom another illustrious sculpture, the Farnese Hercules, represents as a colossus leaning on his club and carrying the pelt of the slain Nemean lion. Now, what this one shows is a seated body deprived of every limb capable of performing any action requiring force or skill. Hence different artists tried to complete the figure by imagining the action accomplished by the hero: a reduction added a club, another a bow; a drawing by Hans Baldung Grien had placed Omphale's distaff in its hands.² Winckelmann took this tradition backwards. Instead of compensating for the lack, he transformed it into a virtue: there is no action to imagine. The mutilated statue represents the hero welcomed by the gods at the end of his labours, when they are nothing but a subject of joyful recollection and meditation. Yet you still need a head to recall and meditate. This Hercules is lacking that too: he is nothing but pure thought, but this concentration is only indicated by the curve of a back that assumes the weight of this thought, by a stomach that seems unfit for any digestive functions, and by muscles that do not tighten for any action, but whose outlines flow over each other like the waves of the sea.

Winckelmann thus carries the paradox to its extreme point. The accidental lack of the statue manifests its essential virtue. The apex of art is the mutilated statue that represents the greatest active hero miscast in the total inactivity of pure thought. Moreover, this pure thought only stands out as its exact opposite: the radical impersonality of a material movement very similar to immobility: the perpetual oscillation of waves on a calm sea.

The meaning of this radicalization remains to be understood. For there is a way of understanding this praise of calm a little too simply. Winckelmann had a polemical intention in publishing his History. He wanted to remind his contemporaries of the true models of beauty, drawing them away from the excesses of modern sculpture—that is to say, in his time, baroque sculpture: excessively extended or twisted bodies, faces distorted by the will to express extreme pleasure or pain. For him one sculptor embodied this perversion of art that our age, on the contrary, celebrates as the embodiment of baroque genius: Bernini. No more is needed to relegate Winckelmann to a certain role: he is made the retrograde guardian of a classical ideal of divine impassibility and beauty residing in pure lines and harmonious proportions. He would thus be the father of the neoclassical sculpture triumphant during the Napoleonic era, embodied by Canova's frigid marble figures. Above all, he would be the father of the academic Greece of 'calm grandeur' and 'noble simplicity', frozen far from its own soil in Roman museums and in the minds of German philosophers. It was against this Greece that Nietzsche's disciples, like Aby Warburg, raised a savage and tragic Hellas, making art, contrary to all glyptothque Apollonianism, the manifestation of obscure energies that support and convulse the rituals and monuments of civilization at the same time.

But in order to oppose Dionysian energy to Apollonian calm, a certain Greece must already be constituted, far from all simple adoration of serene perfection. Winckelmann himself constituted its singularity by placing this torso, part of a body whose entire figure we will never be able to appreciate, above the divine form and proportion of the Belvedere Apollo. A mutilated statue is not only a statue lacking parts. It is a representation of a body that cannot be appreciated any longer according to two main criteria used by the

representative order: firstly, the harmony of proportions — that is to say, the congruence between parts and the whole; secondly, the expressivity — that is, the relation between a visible form and a character — an identity, a feeling, a thought — that this visible form makes recognizable in unequivocal traits. It will be forever impossible to judge whether the arms and legs of the Belvedere Hercules are in material harmony with the torso of the hero, forever impossible to know whether his face and his limbs are in spiritual harmony with the traits with which the myths represent him. More radically, it will be forever impossible to know whether it is indeed Hercules who is shown by this statue lacking all the attributes that would make him recognizable. Yet Winckelmann nonetheless confirmed the opinion that the statue represents the hero of the Twelve Labours, and does so in optimal form, translating the highest degree of perfection of Greek art. Posterity did not miss the chance to take him to task for this: his successors made this ideal Greek statue into a late Roman reproduction, and one of them even transformed his Hercules seated among the gods into a suffering Philoctetes. But assuming there was an error about the identity of the person, it was not the result of naivety, but a coup. The exceptional fate reserved for this mutilated body does not betray a naive allegiance to an outdated ideal of perfection. Rather, it signifies the revocation of the principle that linked the appearance of beauty to the realization of a science of proportion and expression. Here the whole is lacking just as much as expression. This accidental loss corresponds to the structural breakdown of a paradigm of artistic perfection. Attacking baroque excess does not amount to defending the classical representative ideal. On the contrary, it shatters its coherence by marking the gap between two optima that it claimed to match together: the harmony of forms and their expressive power.

No doubt the declaration of this gap is not absolutely new. It is also the assessment of a long history. For nearly a century, artists, critics and academicians were confronted with the problem of how to match the ideal of the noble harmony of forms, formulated in the seventeenth century by theorists like Bellori or Félibien, with the expression of passion notably illustrated, at the end of the same century, by Le Brun's physiognomic models. This was primarily a technical problem for students: How was it possible to imitate both the forms of studio models and the passions felt by characters to whom they lent their features, but which they had no reason to feel themselves? One must leave the studio to study the way passions are inscribed on bodies elsewhere. This elsewhere, for some, was the privileged artistic stage for expressing the passions — the theatre. But others objected that, in the best acting, painters would only find 'grimaces, forced attitudes, and artfully arranged expressive features, from which feelings are excluded'. On the contrary, the street or the workshop allowed one to better observe the common man, not yet moulded to expressive conformity by worldly conventions. But how was one to reach bodies expressing the nobility of forms corresponding to beauty? The academicians responsible for establishing 'the prize for expressive heads', founded in 1759 by the Comte de Caylus, determined that one could not find models among men whose 'baseness in outside habits and in their facial character made them incompatible with the study of beautiful forms that must remain inseparable from expression in this contest'. And the very Diderot who urged students to abandon the academies to observe real movements of the body at work, or praised the expressive attitudes of Greuze's domestic tragedies, denounced the 'ignoble' faces the same Greuze gave his Septimus Severus and Caracalla in his 1765 Salon. Grand painting could not tolerate the living expression of a sly prince and an irascible emperor. Some had already solved the dilemma: the knowledge that neither theatrical convention nor the 'naturalness' of the common man could provide should be sought instead in the Ancients. For, like the sculptor of the Laocoon, they knew how to endow the same face with contradictory expressions never present in reality, except by unpredictable accidents, which the hand always arrives too late to copy. Winckelmann established the superiority of ancient models over 'natural' models, but he did not find it in the capacity to put the


4 Article du réglement du prix', quoted in Kirchner, L’Expression des passions, p. 199.
The maximum amount of different emotions on the same face. *Laocoon*’s beauty does not come from the multiplicity of passions it expresses; it comes, instead, from their neutralization in the sole tension of two opposite movements: one that welcomes the pain and the other that rejects it. *Laocoon* offers the complex form of the formula, which takes its simplest form in the radical insufficiency of the *Belvedere Torso*: beauty is defined by indeterminacy and the absence of expressivity.

Such a response deserves attention. It effectively seems to go against the current of watchwords developed in the same era by innovators of theatre and dance. They wanted to elevate the truthful expression of thoughts and passions above formal principles of harmony and proportion. Four years earlier, the *Letters on Dancing and Ballet* by Jean-Georges Noverre had appeared in another German capital, Stuttgart. They targeted the tradition of court ballet, which, according to Noverre, was meant only for the demonstration of aristocratic elegance and the mechanical skill of the artist. This art of steps and entrechats was opposed to an art of physiognomy and gesture fit to tell a story and express emotions. At the time, the model for this art was provided by ancient pantomime, in which another theorist of dance, Cahusac, had recently saluted a language of gestures capable of expressing all tragic and comic situations. Two years earlier, Diderot’s *Conversations on the Natural Son* had also pleaded for the resurrection of pantomime, and opposed the emotional potential of the tableau vivant to the artifice of the *coup de théâtre*. What Noverre and Diderot proposed—and end of the century reformist dramatists, musicians, and actors, from Calzabigi and Gluck to Talma, would take up once again—was a revolution in representative logic, playing upon its internal contradiction. They opposed the organic model of action as body, ideal proportion, and the entire system of conventions linking subjects to genres and modes of expression, with the bare principle of *mimesis* as the direct expression of emotions and thoughts. To the conventions of the theatre and elegance of the ballet, it opposed an idea of art in which every bodily gesture and every grouping of bodies tells a story and expresses a thought. Noverre’s dancer-turned-actor and Diderot’s actor-turned-mime must display an art of total expression on stage, identical to the manifestation of an entirely motivated language of signs and gestures:

When dancers are animated by their feelings, they will assume a thousand different attitudes, according to the varied symptoms of their passions; when, Proteus-like, their features and glances betray the conflicts in their breast ... stories will become useless, everything will speak, each movement will be expressive, each attitude will depict a particular situation, each gesture will reveal a thought, each glance will convey a new sentiment; everything will be captivating, because it will all be a true and faithful imitation of nature.\(^6\)

The analysis of the *Torso* seems to go precisely against the current by setting a counter-revolution of suspended expression against a total revolution in expression. However, these two opposite revolutions share a common principle: the destruction of what lies at the heart of representative logic—namely the organic model of the whole, with its proportions and its symmetries. It is already significant that the art Cahusac, Noverre and Diderot considered to be a model of finally living theatrical action was painting. ‘Any truly theatrical situation is nothing other than a tableau vivant’, Cahusac declared.\(^7\) Diderot opposed such composition of theatrical tableaus to the *coup de théâtre*. For Noverre, ballet masters must learn from painters to give each figure its own expression and to break the conventional symmetry that makes them place six fauns on one side and six nymphs on the other. This individualization of expressive figures and the natural way bodies are grouped together, according to the demands of each situation, provides the model for *vivacity*, which counts more than the effective mobility of bodies. The multiplicity of gestural and physiognomic events, which they demand,

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5 Louis de Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne* ou *Traité historique de la danse* (Paris: Desjonquères, 2004 [1754]). The essentially pantomimic character of ancient dance had already been affirmed by the Abbé Dubos in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poëtie et la peinture*, but for him it was a matter of opposing this rudimentary art to the perfection of modern dance. Cahusac and his heirs reversed the perspective by opposing the expressive perfection of a language of gesture to the formal conventions of courtly art. The first example of such reversals, which continued to feed the discourse on artistic modernism.


7 Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne*, p. 234.
shares at least one common point with the radical inexpressivity of the *Torsos*, which is meant to gather an entire series of actions and a whole world of thought within itself. Both models undo the supposed conjunction of formal beauty and living expression. Both offer a form of inscription of life on bodies in rupture with the old organic paradigm that dominated the way discourse and the work were thought.

Discourse, according to Plato, must take the image of a living being, given all the elements that make up an organism, and only those; beautiful architecture, Vitruvius taught, took its norms from the proportions of the human body. Dürer’s texts and drawings had renewed this principle of the mathematical proportions of the ideal body. This mathematics of beauty was strongly contested at the time. Artists like Hogarth and philosophers like Burke opposed its rigidity with the charm of the curved and sinuous line that also emulated the new design of English gardens. Winckelmann was a stranger to their polemic, but he, too, opposed the continuous curved line to sharp angles. And the image that he used to characterize the *Torsos*’ perfection is not accidental: muscles melt into one another like waves in the sea. This is the image of highest beauty, which the mutilated *Torsos* embodies, like the Apollo with its head and all its limbs intact, but also mute, petrified Niobe, represented in a state such as this, in which sensation and reflection cease, and which resembles apathy’ that ‘does not disturb a limb or a feature’.

The beautiful statue is one whose muscles are not stretched by any action, but melt into one another like waves whose perpetual movement evokes the smooth and calm surface of a mirror. When Europe discovered the Parthenon in the eighteenth century, critics opposed their living movement to the poses of statues that Winckelmann admired. But they did so in the name of a criterion of perfection, which he had fixed himself: ‘...a principle of fusion, of motion, so that the marble flows like a wave’.

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made the sublime the secret of the superiority of the old masters and the keystone of the representative system. Genius, the power of the sublime, was the supplement of nature that sent art's rules and savoir-faire back to their living source, and thus allowed them to verify their agreement with the affects of sensible being in general. The sublime supplement sanctified the supreme principle of representative logic: harmony, at the heart of one and the same nature, between the abilities implemented in the productions of the arts and the affects of those for whom they were destined. This presumed harmony between poiesis and aisthesis gave mimesis the space necessary for its deployment, and the mimetic operation guaranteed it in return. The Kantian theorization of beauty without a concept breaks with the idea of the supplement because it first breaks with the idea of this correspondence. But with the mutilated statue, petrified Niobe or idle Apollo that Winckelmann celebrated, it is no longer a matter of addition, but of subtraction. It is less a question of adding an expressive flame to the rules of art. The less learnedly expression is reproduced, the more beauty there is. This calls for division, not completion: the sensorium belonging to the appreciation of the beautiful is no longer calibrated following any rules to the sensorium of making art. To bridge the gulf between the two, Kant would say, requires the power of genius and aesthetic ideas. But this genius is no longer the supplement checking the agreement between the rules of art and the affects of sensible beings. Henceforth it is a hazardous bridge thrown between two heterogeneous kinds of logic – the concepts that art implements, and the beautiful without a concept. It is the power, which remains obscure to the artist, of doing something other than what he does, of producing something other than what he wants to produce, and thus giving the reader, the spectator or the listener the opportunity to recognize and differently combine many surfaces in one, many languages in one sentence, and many bodies in a simple movement.

But the violence of the paradox does not stop here. For one must add that this very separation between the reasons of art and those of beauty make art exist as such, as its own world, and not simply as the skill of the painter, sculptor, architect or poet. The singularity of the analysis of the Torso cannot be dissociated from the singularity of the genre to which Winckelmann's book lays claim: not a history of the sculpture, monuments or paintings of antiquity, but

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a History of Art in Antiquity. A 'history of art' assumes that art exists in the singular and without any qualifiers. For us this is obvious. But Winckelmann was one of the first, if not the first, to invent the notion of art as we understand it: no longer as the skill of those who made paintings, statues or poems, but as the sensible milieu of the coexistence of their works. Before him, the possibility of a history of art was barred because its elements belonged to two separate histories: the history of artists and the history of antiquities. On the one hand, there were the lives of artists whose genre had been created by Vasari, modelled on Plutarch's Parallel Lives. These Lives took on meaning within a universe where the arts - forms of savoir-faire - were divided into 'liberal' arts practised and enjoyed by men of the elite, and mechanical arts, devoted to useful tasks practised by men in need. In this context, they were destined to justify the entry of painters and sculptors into the world of liberal arts. Hence anecdotal tales and moral lessons were given as much room as the analysis of works. The genre had been elevated since then, notably by the Vite de pittori, scultori et architetti moderni (Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects), published in 1672 by Bellori. These were situated within a polemic concerning the principles of the art of painting. Bellori sought to show how these principles, brought to perfection by Raphael, then corrupted by Michelangelo's mannerist heirs, had been restored in the seventeenth century by Carracci and the Bolognese, and developed by the Roman school and Poussin. This argument required the genre of lives to be displaced towards the analysis of works. Yet Bellori and his French emulators did not attach these artists' lives to the general concept of a history, nor did they associate the art of any given painter or sculptor to the idea of Art as a proper sphere of experience. Such an idea was equally foreign to the work of those who used to be called 'antiquarians'. They brought fragments of antiquities from Italy and published detailed catalogues of medals, cameos, busts and other sculpted stones thus collected. For them these objects were 'monuments' - that is to say, testimonies of ancient life in addition to those found in texts. The Benedictine monk Bernard de Montfaucon formulated the principle: the monuments of arts 'like a painting' represented a good part of what the ancient authors had described, and moreover taught 'an infinite number of things that the Authors did not' about the uses and ceremonies of ancient peoples. No doubt this kind of history had been displaced, by the passion of artist-collectors, from simply functioning as a textual supplement to the consideration of objects themselves, their materials, and their modes of production. The Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines ('Catalogue of Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities'), published in Paris in 1752 by the Comte de Caylus, shows the detailed attention to materials and techniques that makes historians of archaeology pay homage to 'antiquarians' of his kind. But Caylus' inventory went against any will to 'art history': in his passion for antiquity, Caylus primarily took interest in the testamentary value of objects, stronger in the 'tatters' of useful objects than in the cold statues of Apollo or Venus; he described these objects one after another, refusing to constitute their collection into an autonomous totality, just as he refrained from any extrapolation from these fragments 'that would fail to indicate the totality from which they are taken'.

In order to provide a history of art in antiquity, it was not enough simply to unite the divergent interests of theorists of ideal Beauty and collectors of antiquities. Above all, it was necessary to extract the concept of Art from the dual limitations of those who studied the art - that is, the conception and the savoir-faire - of any one artist, and of those who studied the arts, that is to say, the knowledge and the techniques that produce objects and draw the portrait of a civilization. It was necessary to break down the separation between the singularity of 'the life of the artist' and the anonymity of the development of the arts, by revoking the social separation between the liberal and mechanical arts. A concept carried out this work - history. History does not come to take the constituted reality of art as its object. It constitutes this reality itself. In order for there to be a history of art, art must exist as a reality in itself, distinct from the lives of artists and the histories of monuments, freed from the old

division between mechanical and liberal arts. Yet reciprocally, for art to exist as the sensible environment of works, history must exist as the form of intelligence of collective life. This story must emerge from the narrative of individual lives modelled on the exemplary lives of antiquity. This story must therefore involve a temporal and causal scheme, inscribing the description of works into a process of progress, perfection and decline. But this scheme itself implies that the history of art should be the history of a collective form of life, the story of a homogenous milieu of life and of the diverse forms it brings about, following the model Montesquieu developed for political regimes. History thus signifies a form of coexistence between those who inhabit a place together, those who draw the blueprints for collective buildings, those who cut the stones for these buildings, those who preside over ceremonies, and those who participate in them. Art thus becomes an autonomous reality, with the idea of history as the relation between a milieu, a collective form of life, and possibilities of individual invention.

The historicist concern is surely shared by all those who want to break with the conventions of the representative order. Ballet, according to Noverre, and theatrical performance, according to Talma, must teach the life and the mores of the peoples that make history far more than the glorious acts of a few individuals. But there is something more radical about the history of art as practised by Winckelmann. It is not merely a matter of accurately representing the ways of life and expression of people from the past. What matters instead is to think about the co-belonging of an artist's art and the principles that govern the life of his people and his time. A concept captures this knot in his work: the concept of 'style'. The style manifested in the work of a sculptor belongs to a people, to a moment of its life, and to the deployment of a potential for collective freedom. Art exists when one can make a people, a society, an age, taken at a certain moment in the development of its collective life, its subject. The 'natural' harmony between poiesis and aisthesis that governed the representative order is opposed to a new relation between individuality and collectivity: between the artist's personality and the shared world that gives rise to it and that it expresses. The progress of primitive sculpture up to its classical apogee, then its decline, thus follows the progress and the loss of Greek freedom. The first age of a collectivity massively subjected to the power of aristocrats and priests corresponds to the rigidity of forms, due both to the awkwardness of art in its infancy and the obligation of following codified models. The golden age of Greek freedom corresponds to great and noble art with 'flowing lines'. The retreat of this freedom translates into the passage to an art of grace, where style gives way to manner – that is to say, to the particular gesture of an artist working for the particular taste of a narrow circle of art-lovers. This history of art, understood as a voyage between the two poles of collective absorption and individualistic dissolution, was destined for a very long future. During the revolutionary period, it would nourish dreams of the regeneration of art, recast in the antique model of the expression of collective freedom. Yet, more discreetly and more durably, it would also organize the historical arrangement according to which museums still present works of art today. It would also dominate all the thinking about art in the romantic period, and be systematized by Hegel as the passage from symbolic art to classical art, and from classical form to its romantic dissolution. Many of our contemporaries still see this as an historicist 'derealising' of art. But this 'derealising' is nothing other than the route through which the concept of Art as its own world came to light. Art exists as an autonomous sphere of production and experience since History exists as a concept for collective life. And the person who formulated this conjunction was no sociologist spitefully trying to cut down the sublimities of art to the prosaic conditions of their production. He was a hopeless lover of ancient sculpture, hoping to provide it with the most suitable sanctuary for its veneration.

It is true that this love itself is suspicious, and the argument is easily reversed. If Winckelmann is easily exonerated for having codified neoclassical rigidity, it is only to accuse him, on the contrary, of giving rise to the mad fervour of romanticism and German idealism. According to this accusation, his History invented a German Greece, an ideal land where art was born from the soil and expressed the very life of the people. This German Greece, sister to the Rome dreamt of by French revolutionaries, nourished the utopia of art's destiny, which destined it to negate itself in order to become what it used to be once again: the fabric of sensible forms of a people's life. It would feed the 'totalitarian' dream of identification between the life of art and of a people celebrating its unity.
However, how can one ignore the paradox that places the supreme embodiment of this Greece in a statue lacking its head and limbs? How can one ignore the mode of adoration it excites? It is in the past, Hegel would teach, that art will have been the manifestation of the life of a people. But Winckelmann already claimed he had followed the destiny of Greek art 'just as a maiden, standing on the shore of the ocean, follows with tearful eyes her departing lover with no hope of ever seeing him again, and fancies that in the distant sail she sees the image of her beloved'. A torso for a body, the uniform movement of the waves for every action, a sail for the lover whom the ship carries away: the Greek body Winckelmann bequeathed to posterity is a definably fragmented body, separated from itself and from every reactivation. Quite a different body, then, from the chorus of Spartan warriors, old men, and ephesians that Rousseau invoked during the same period in his Letter to d’Alembert on the Theatre. Rousseau’s polemic attacked the coherence of representational logic differently. Winckelmann ruined the presupposition of a harmony between expressive capacity and formal perfection. Rousseau displaced the question onto ethical territory, in the proper sense of the term. Ethos means ‘way of being’, and Rousseau’s polemic can be summed up as follows: theatre’s way of being, comprising actions and emotions fictively experienced on stage, is contradictory with its pretention to positively educate the population’s way of being. For theatre gathers crowds only to dispose of them of the virtues that form a community. It takes the form of ‘these exclusive entertainments which sadly close up a small number of people in a gloomy cavern, which keep them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction’. Separation and passivity are the proper, antisocial features of the performance stage. Rousseau opposes this to the festival in which everyone participates, where all become actors and communicate emotions to each other, which the stage transformed into its simulacra. This was what continuous Spartan festivals were like, according to him. And this is what the civic festivals of modern

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relying on their reading of the Stoics, invent such freedom, symbolized by a god or a hero who does not do or control anything. And Greece thus restaged is only present in the form of a lack. The impulse that leads to its embodiment in the new ceremonies of the republican people is strictly opposed to the metonymy of the sail that disappears from the lover's eyes. This sail takes the place of both the loved object and the ship carrying him away. It makes antique marble a figure in the double meaning of the word: a sensible presence that embodies the power that forged it, but also a deferral of this presence. The force of the whole is no longer in the gathering of a functional and expressive body. It is in the contours that melt into one another. It is everywhere and nowhere on the surface that withdraws what it offers. Figure is presence and deferral of presence, a substitute for lost presence. Winckelmann's statue has the perfection of a collectivity which is no longer there, of a body that cannot be actualized. The beautiful inactivity of the god of stone was the product of the free activity of a people. From now on, the indifference of the statue alone lends a figure to this free activity.

Indifference means two things: first, it is the rupture of all specific relations between a sensible form and the expression of an exact meaning; but it is also the rupture of every specific link between a sensible presence and a public that would be its public, the sensible milieu that would nourish it, or its natural addressee. Rousseau wanted the people to regain control of its sensible potential for action, emotion and communication, alienated in the distance of representation. But Winckelmann's Greek freedom is entirely enclosed in a block of stone. If the latter represents this for us, it is in its distance from its nurturing milieu, in its indifference towards any particular expectation from any specific public. The head of the Juno Ludovisi Schiller praised thirty years later was as follows: a head separated from any body, but also from everything a head is normally supposed to express: a will pursuing an end and commanding an action, a concern altering pure features. For him this expressionless head embodied free appearance presented for the enjoyment of pure aesthetic play, separated from any cognitive appropriation as well as any sensual appetite. But it did so as a thing of the past, a product of an exemplary art that can no longer be recreated. Moreover, he characterizes this art as 'naive' poetry: poetry that does not try to be poetic, but expresses an immediate agreement between a collective, lived universe and singular forms of invention; an art that is not an art, not a separate world, but a manifestation of collective life. This is indeed what the mutilated Torso, the indifferent Niobe, or the willless head of the Juno Ludovisi bear witness to. But they only bear witness by establishing an exactly opposed sensible configuration: by becoming works of art, lent to a 'disinterested' gaze, enclosed in the separate universe of museums. Art and History in the singular are born together by repudiating the division of the arts and the empirical dispersal of histories in the same movement. But they are born together in the form of this contradictory relation. History makes Art exist as a singular reality; but it makes it exist within a temporal disjunction: museum works are art, they are the basis of the unprecedented reality called Art because they were nothing like that for those who made them. And reciprocally, these works come to us as the product of a collective life, but on the condition of keeping us away from it. The Hegelian history of art forms would be the long demonstration of this constitutive divide. Art exists in the very difference between the common form of life that it was for those who made the works and the object of free contemplation and free appreciation that it is for us. It exists for us in the divide between the power of art and the power of beauty, between the rules of its production and the modes of its sensible appreciation, between the figures that regulate it and the ones it produces. History is not the dreadful totality to which art was surrendered as a result of its break with classical harmony. It is a two-faced force itself; for it separates as much as it joins together. It is the potential of community that unites the sculptor's act with the practice of craftsmen, the lives of households, the military service of the hoplites, and the gods of the city. But it is also the power of separation that provides the enjoyment of ancient art — and the enjoyment of art in general — to those who can only contemplate the blocks of stone where the potential of community was saved and lost simultaneously. It is because it is divided itself, because it excludes at the same time as it gathers, that it lends itself to being the place of Art — that is, the place of productions that figure the division between the artist's concepts and beauty without concept. The mutilated and perfect statue of the inactive hero thus gives way to the complementarity of two figures. The head without will or worry of
the Juno Ludovisi emblematises the existence of art, in the singular, as a specific mode of experience with its own sensible milieu. The Toro's inexpressive back reveals new potentials of the body for the art of tomorrow: potentials that are freed when expressive codes and the will to express are revoked, when the opposition between an active and a passive body, or between an expressive body and an automaton, are refuted. The future of the Toro is within museums that make art exist as such, including and above all for their detractors; but it is also in the inventions of artists that will now strive to do the equivalent of what can no longer be done, by exploring the differences within bodies themselves and awakening the hidden sensible potential in inexpressivity, indifference, or immobility. The very dreams of a total work of art, of a language of all the senses, a theatre given over to collective mobilization, art forms identical to the new forms of life – all these dreams of ethical fusion following representative distance are possible only on the basis of a more intimate separation. The history of the aesthetic regime of art could be thought similarly to the history of the metamorphoses of this mutilated and perfect statue, perfect because it is mutilated, forced, by its missing head and limbs, to proliferate into a multiplicity of unknown bodies.

2. The Little Gods of the Street

Munich–Berlin, 1828

In the like sense, the beggar boys of Murillo (in the Central Gallery at Munich) are excellent too. Abstractly considered, the subject-matter here too is drawn from 'vulgar nature': the mother picks lice out of the head of one of the two boys, while he quietly mimes his bread; in a similar picture two other boys, ragged and poor, are eating melon and grapes. But in this poverty and semi-nakedness, what precisely shines forth within and without is nothing but complete absence of care and concern, which a dervish could not surpass, in the full feeling of their well-being and delight in life. This freedom from care for the external, this inner freedom in the external is what the concept of the Ideal requires. In Paris there is a portrait of a boy by Raphael: his head lies at rest, leaning on an arm, and he gazes out into the wide and open distance with such bliss of carefree satisfaction that one can scarcely tear oneself away from gazing at this picture of spiritual and joyous well-being. The same satisfaction is afforded by those boys of Murillo. We see that they have no wider interests and aims, yet not at all out of stupidity do they squat on the ground, rather content and serene, almost like the gods of Olympus; they do nothing, they say nothing; but they are people all of one piece without any surliness or discontent; and since they possess this foundation of all capacity, we have the idea that anything may come of these youths.¹