

Art as Self-Origination in Winckelmann and Hegel

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1. Introduction

Eighteenth-century art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) shared with Hegel a profound admiration for the art and culture of ancient Greece. Both viewed ancient Greece as, in some sense, an ideal to which the modern world might aspire—a pinnacle of spiritual perfection and originality that contemporary civilization might, through an understanding of ancient Greek culture, one day equal or surpass. This rather competitive form of nostalgia suggests a paradoxical demand to produce an original and higher state of culture through the imitation of another. In Hegel's writings, this paradox goes beyond the relation of the modern world to the ancient world—he exposes the same paradox in ancient Greece's relation to its own predecessors. The solution to the latter paradox—the possibility of the realization of ancient Greece as an original and self-contained civilization despite its cultural debts—would also, then, be the key to repeating the success of the ancient world in the modern, the overcoming of modern Europe's cultural debt to the ancient world. The present essay examines how this paradox is revealed and resolved in the writings of Winckelmann and Hegel, and shows how this strategy of culture production—as imputed to the ancient world and aspired to in the modern—simultaneously attempts to justify and conceal a self-deceptive practice of cultural and political conquest. My focus will be on the two writers' interpretations of ancient Greek art since, as I will suggest, their solution to the paradox of culture production turns out to be modeled upon the role of ancient Greek art in the invention and actualization of a cultural ideal of beauty, unity, and self-containment.

2. Winckelmann and the Translucent Veil

The observation that art presents its subject matter in its absence is a mundane one. At the most general level, this implies simply that the model and artwork are not equivalent. This characterization of art can be given in a spirit of generosity, if by it one means that the subject matter, as material, is given spiritual form (or idealized)—that the impermanent is given permanence, the fleeting is preserved, the imperfect is perfected, etc. Conversely, it can also, as has traditionally been the case, be a characterization of art made by way of critique—the presentation of what is absent as dishonesty, the degradation of an originally vital and spiritual presence into representation, copy, and gross materiality.

In Winckelmann's writings on the art of ancient Greece, art's ability to make the absent present can be understood in an additional sense—namely, the ability to make the invisible become visible. In other words, the question of presence becomes specifically a matter of vision or apprehension: Presence is first and foremost a matter of presence to the spectator's eye, or to consciousness generally. Winckelmann's take on the matter is even more curious because he describes artistic education and method as, in some sense, the practice of making beauty visible through concealment. He implies that it is precisely by making the subject invisible, unseen in some respect, that something else—something originally unseen and absent to the eye—is brought into view for the first time.

This is, however, only a matter of artistic method for Winckelmann, for it is only in art that invisibility has its place. When ancient Greek life and culture, rather than its art, are under consideration, he seems to lose all interest in concealment. On the contrary, everything in Greek life must be stripped bare, made visible. For example, he is positively effusive in his praise of the prevalence of nudity in Greek culture. The nude is described as being analogous to the true, to an original harmonic relationship of spirit to nature. The beautiful is a natural and apparently original form of spirit, a form exemplified in the nude—beauty unconstrained and unabashedly unveiled. Greece's public revelation of nudity—in the gymnasia, in dance, and in public bathing—signifies for Winckelmann the free accessibility of the beautiful and, so it would seem, the possession of nature and spirit in their ideal state (the ideal in actuality).

So why, when artistic method is under consideration, does Winckelmann suddenly devalue the nude? Why does he obscure it, or avert his eyes? Even more inexplicable is the very motivation to make art in such a culture. If Greece *is* the state of ideal beauty realized—the possession

of beauty as present and unconcealed—then what need is there for an artistic *representation* of the beautiful? In such ideal surroundings, to turn to artistic copies of beauty is to turn *away* from the beautiful itself. Why would such a culture be an artistic one?

Winckelmann's Greece is characterized by an overabundance of unconcealed beautiful forms. However, this does not guarantee its ability to see or appreciate beauty. As I mentioned earlier, there is a decided emphasis in his text upon presence to the eye or to consciousness, rather than upon presence simply. This returns us, once again, to Winckelmann's curious notion that the unconcealed body nonetheless possesses concealed beauty—and that this unembodied form of the beautiful is revealed precisely by an obscuration of the body. This of course implies that Greece is *not* the condition of perfect beauty and the actualized ideal. It is instead the *precondition* of perfect beauty—the ideal must be actualized through art. On this view, art is neither the duplication of original beauty nor its impoverishment. Art is either beauty improved, or it is beauty made more present, more visible as extracted in its purest form from the natural.

If we are to understand this peculiar invisible and ideal element of beauty that is the subject and model of Winckelmann's artist, we must discover just what his artist is looking at:

The schools for artists were the gymnasia, where young people . . . performed their physical exercises in the nude. . . . There one could study the movement of the muscles and body as well as the body's outlines or contours from the impressions left by the young wrestlers in the sand. The nude body in its most beautiful form was exhibited there.¹

One is almost tempted, in this passage, to imagine these students of art impatiently awaiting the departure of the young athletes so they might finally get to the real subject of study—the sand. These impressions in the sand are, after all, the nude body in “its most beautiful form.” But why do these students of the beautiful not devote their attention entirely to beauty at its source—the athletes themselves? Why turn to the “impression” for edification, to a secondary image rather than to the original?

This curious turning away from the original model of the artwork and toward a secondary model, a copy, is widespread throughout Winckelmann's text. The artist is put in the curious position of creating the beautiful as the copy of another copy—that is, assuming the original model is the *body*. Such a view of things implies that, generally, the body (or the model) is the real or original spirit of the work and that the work must faithfully express that spirit in the material, or in the copy. However, Winckelmann complicates this situation by introducing a

similar opposition of copy and original, spirit and matter, into the very model that is being used—in other words, into the “original” itself. The original model of beauty is not the body as such, for example, the gymnasium athlete. The body is itself a composite of original and copy, in which the “original” beauty (the “true” model of the artwork) is concealed. In order to be copied by the artist, this original spirit of beauty must be *extricated from* its body. In other words, in addition to the opposition of model and artwork, there is also an opposition of form and content within the model. The education of the artist requires making the form, not the content, available to the artist’s view. And this form is best brought to light not in the nudity and isolation of the body, but by bringing the body into contrast with another body—in this case the sand. This duplication of bodies brings the form into relief and emphasis.

This distinction of form and content is implicitly one of the spiritual and the material. The spirit of the artistic model is found in the formal arrangement and distribution of its content, rather than in its content as such. The revelation of formal beauty is, in effect, the veiling of the material basis of the original model. In the case of the impressions left in the sand, the form is seen precisely in the absence of the material aspect—in the empty spaces, indentations, markings, and lines left behind by the now absent body. A figure seen “in relief” is a figure seen in the absence of its body. In other examples, the artistic method of revealing form involves the veiling of content and matter, rather than its literal absence:

The vestals are draped in the grand manner . . . without concealing the beautiful contour of the nude body underneath. . . . Greek drapery was usually modeled from thin and wet clothing which, as artists well know, clings to the skin and permits the naked outlines of the body to be seen. (RI 31)

The form as distinct from its content is an invisible model of beauty. It is only implicitly visible in the predominantly material aspects of the model, its particular parts and features. Clothing, the veiling of these parts, does not reveal the *body’s* nudity; it reveals the “naked” outline or contour—i.e., the form stripped bare of its materiality. All that does not contribute to the outline distracts the artist’s eye from the essential—the formal aspect of the work. Revelation of form involves, paradoxically, concealment and duplication. Duplication in a secondary material (as in the sand and drapery) is not exact duplication, nor is it inferior to the original. In this “copy” only the formalistic element of the original is repeated, not the model as a whole. Nor is that element repeated exactly; the original’s form is highlighted as distinct from its

content, as in relief. So the formal element holds a “higher” position in the artwork than it does in the original. The formal is intensified rather than duplicated, made more visible, more pronounced, than it is found in the excessive materiality of the original model.

The impressions in the sand are, it is true, an intermediary term in the artist’s revelation of beauty. However, this is not a distancing or veiling of beauty as such. It is the extrication of the formal principle as the essential element of visual beauty, the isolation of the beautiful from the composite nature of the original model. What is distanced—the material aspect—is precisely the property of the original that is irrelevant or inessential to beauty as Winckelmann understands it. Paradoxically, the mediation of the veil enables a closer approach—the nearness to vision and emphatic delineation of the beautiful, not its separation.

This tripartite, almost dialectical, artistic procedure is exemplified in Winckelmann’s description of the method of Michelangelo, the “Phidias of modern times,” who came closer to the Greeks than any of his contemporaries (RI 49). When making a sculpture, Michelangelo began with small models. The models were submerged in water—introduced or impressed into a secondary material. The contrasting principle of the water brought the subtle delineation of the models’ forms into relief: “the water, touching even the most unobtrusive features, traced their shape with the greatest clarity and precision” (RI 55). So, rather than observe the model as matter extending itself into space, the form is observed as impressing itself into the material of the water. The form in relief is an inversion of the original model’s materiality, a kind of photographic negative that is, in its turn, inverted back into materiality in the final sculpture.

The idea of an intermediary—a secondary material—that isolates the formal element from the material, somewhat explains Winckelmann’s paradoxical notions of veiled nudity, revelation by submergence, etc. What seems to be the model for imitation in each of these cases is not the original as such (for example, the gymnasium athlete). Rather, the true model for imitation is the specifically formal element—the contour, shape, or structure. This implies that the Greeks may have, after all, been in possession of the ideal state of beauty implicitly, as well as being able to express it explicitly through art—by bringing it into closer presence to vision and consciousness than it exists in natural objects. And this could be interpreted as meaning that the so-called “natural” or “original” state of Greece is inferior to that of the ideal achieved through art. If the beauty of the artwork can bring the essence of the beautiful, the form, into predominance over the material, then it may

in some sense be “above” the merely composite, obscured beauty of the natural.

3. The Sea and the Aggregation of the Multiple

The above artistic method—isolating the formal element of a single artistic model and heightening its presence to vision in the artwork—would seem to be a progression beyond “merely” natural beauty. This is not, however, how Winckelmann views the matter. Although he does believe that art portrays “a more beautiful and more perfect nature,” this perfection is not simply the heightened presence of a form already possessed by the model (RI 17). The revelation of form has an ulterior motive—the invention of a superior form, a form not present even implicitly in any individual, natural body:

[Greek artists] began to form certain general ideas of the beauty of individual parts of the body as well as of the whole—ideas which were to rise above nature itself; their model was an ideal nature originating in the mind alone. (RI 15)

Nor does the artist shape this superior form of beauty with reference to a single natural object. The superior ideal of beauty is distilled from natural beauty as a whole, from the accumulation of multiple objects of beauty:

The imitation of beauty in nature either directs itself toward a single object or it gathers observations of various individual objects and makes of them a whole. The first method means making a similar copy . . . the second, however, is the way to general beauty and to ideal images of it. (RI 21)

The surpassing of beauty as naturally given involves the distinction of part and whole, which is analogous to that of the multiple and the unified. This can be understood in two senses: that of the part of a single object to the object as a whole, and that of the single beautiful object to beauty as a whole (in other words, to other beautiful objects). In either case, a discordant relationship of part to whole is a deficiency in beauty. This idea that one arrives at a “general” form of beauty through the gathering of “various individual objects” is highly reminiscent of Plato’s strategy—stair-stepping beautiful particulars in order to eventually fix one’s eyes upon beauty as such, in its absolute form. The resulting ideal is not to be found in any one of these particular objects. Rather, it contains “the essence of what is otherwise dispersed through all of nature” (ibid.).

A harmony of whole and part implies something shared by all parts, permeating the object in its entirety. In an individual object this is, in

one sense, simply the form that underlies, shapes, and organizes each part. However, among multiple objects of beauty, some attribute is presumably held in common by them all, enabling them all to share the appellation of “beauty.” The consequence of this generalized notion of beauty would appear to be something like an arithmetical mean of the total, a “rounding off” of the individual excesses and irregularities displayed in specific parts. Consequently, it is not entirely clear whether this general idea of beauty involves a commonizing of the beauties presented in the artwork according to the predominant characteristics of beautiful objects, or if instead this “ideal” beauty is an actual distinction or elevation above the beauty of nature. Winckelmann equivocates on the issue in his own example of the classic Greek profile. This artistic form supposedly “transcended the common shapes of matter,” yet he also suggests the possibility that this profile was, in fact, a national trait of the ancient Greeks, a common characteristic shared by most of the population (RI 15). On the whole his comments seem to support the latter interpretation. The generalization of individual parts allows for a harmonic beauty of part and whole, in which no individual feature predominates over any other. At the same time, it is “a more beautiful and more perfect nature,” (RI 17) because the individual object in nature does not contain such generalized perfection in each and every one of its parts (for example, one may possess the “common” and ideal profile, but not the ideal figure, etc.).

Winckelmann suggests the perfect metaphor for this idealization of beauty through generalization:

The general and most distinctive characteristics of the Greek masterpieces are, finally, a noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, both in posture and expression. Just as the depths of the sea always remain calm however much the surface may rage, so does the expression of the figures of the Greeks reveal a great and composed soul even in the midst of passion. (RI 33)

The formal unity of whole and part in the ideally beautiful is a principle of self-containment. The term “composure” is a fitting one. This tranquility is attained by the self-satisfied containment of content in form—the composition of parts into a whole. The sea in its depths, its inner world, is unaffected by the torrential rages of the surface and exterior. All principles of disunity and self-division are found external to the Greek spirit—they are equivalent to the outside. It is as though the sea has vomited up, like Jonah’s whale, all of its discordant elements, everything that has threatened its vast tranquility. Or perhaps it has instead simply drowned them within its gargantuan depths? (Or has it simply forgotten them? How would one know what disruptive or crudely natural currents run along its floor?)

The metaphor of the ocean, a grand body of water that dissolves all turmoil, is interesting for a number of reasons. It contains in one metaphor any number of other images running throughout the text. There is, first of all, a resonance of the sea with the inversion and relief of the representation of spirit. Recall that the form of the artist's model is made present to consciousness by means of a veil, an obscuration of the contrasting material element. This gap in vision, a veil of modesty that brings contour and outline into view, is the delineation of an empty, undifferentiated unity within the boundary of form. Behind the veil, the individual parts are occluded while bringing the whole into view. The image of the sea is likewise one of a grand delineation, a great surrounding, and an inverse contour—in other words, a hole—into which all threats to the unity of form and the harmony of the whole disappear. Also intriguing is the resonance of this image with metaphors of fluidity and solidity. Each of Winckelmann's examples of the veiled unveiling of form involves a fluid form of matter as its contrasting principle, as the secondary material through which the formal element is revealed. Drapery clings to the skin like damp clothing; Michelangelo's vessel of water touches "even the most unobtrusive features" of the model. Even the sand has characteristics of fluidity (and of malleability, as clay in the artist's model). In each case, fluid matter is characterized primarily as a counterpoint to the original, to the spiritual, and to the model of the artwork. The "spirit" of the artwork, its original, is a solid, unified body (the model, the athlete, etc.)—a well-shaped and defined whole. Likewise, the artistic product, the final sculpture, is characterized by solidity and unity. The "fluid" secondary material, on the contrary, is without form; it has no given shape and receives its form (as "impressions") from the unified and whole. Fluid material is that which passively takes form into itself. It does not resist the imposition of form. The ideal image of the sea is one of ideal spirit and form—the form that contains nothing but passive and preeminently malleable matter, a content that cannot counteract or undermine any form imposed upon it as a whole. Its whole is nothing other than the form it is given; it is a whole without parts.

This image of fluidity permeates Winckelmann's text. In one passage, he uses it to describe the visual effect of pressure upon the skin of the sculpted body: "In Greek figures . . . there is a gentle curvature of rippling folds coming one from the other in such a way that they appear as a whole and make but one noble impression" (RI 17). Gently rolling waves are formal variations that do not undermine the unity of the whole; Winckelmann goes to great lengths to condemn all skin and surface phenomena that do not fit with this image. He complains of modern sculptures' wrinkles, tensely stretched skin, even their "multi-

tude of small indentations and much too visible dimples” (RI 17-9). Against the excess and defect of such ignoble surface features, he praises contour, which “can be learned from the Greeks alone” (RI 25). Contour is the perfect metaphor for the tranquil, quiet curve of the ocean wave. It strikes the balance between inertia and passion. As Winckelmann stresses, “[t]he line which separates completeness of nature from superfluity is very narrow” (RI 25). The surface line and rounding delineation of the wave is precisely that line, the golden mean of fullness without excess.

The metaphorical imagery of the sea is consistent with the language of the text as a whole. However, there is a curious ambiguity as to how this rounded, but not overfull, contour is attained. Ideally, the material that is to fill an artistic form should be similar to that of the sea—passive, impressionable, and fluid. However sculpture, the art of the chisel, implies precisely the opposite—a content which does resist the imposed form. Consequently, the very act of self-containment, the attainment of this self-harmonic ideal, is by no means an activity of “quiet grandeur” or tranquility.

In the case of the sculptural medium, Winckelmann says that wax would be the most appropriate material for the sculptural activity of shaping and form-giving. It is malleable, smooth, and, unlike clay, “suffers no loss of mass” (RI 45). However, what happens when art turns to the human body and spirit as the medium for perfection of the natural? How does the human individual measure up as an artistic medium? Is it equally malleable? Does it, like wax, suffer no loss, residue, or waste? In Winckelmann’s description, the Greek body is a fortuitous one—one that requires some modeling, but little chiseling. Any “abuse of the body” and anything “which binds and confines” is cautiously avoided in Greek culture (RI 9). Physical exercise and a “stricter diet” are occasionally required when a youth is found “showing signs of fat” (*ibid.*). But on the whole, a happy circumstance of timing, location, and climate obviates the need for any violently ascetic measures.

The tension might be greater, however, for other peoples in other ages. The ideal of the sea, with its attendant quiet grandeur, might under different circumstances require sculptural strategies that are far less happy and economical than those used by the Greeks. And as Hegel will point out, the sea is an ominous metaphor for yet another reason. It is, on the one hand, a form of forms—the ideal of unity, composure, and self-containment. It is, on the other hand, the dissolution of all lesser forms. It achieves its ideal unity by leveling its constituent parts, by sacrificing the self-sufficient, unified form of the part to that of the whole. Might not the sea become a negative image for the Greek artist? The human body is the form on behalf of which aggregated par-

particulars are sacrificed. The sea practices this generalizing, aggregating activity on an infinite scale. Is not the Greek artist in danger of drowning at such a level? The whole that devours all disharmonic parts in its belly also threatens to devour the perfected individuals of Greek culture—the unified and self-harmonic spirit may find itself at war with itself.

4. Hegelian Matter and the Reversion to Originality

The nature of Spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite—matter. . . . [M]atter possesses gravity in virtue of its tendency toward a central point. It is essentially composite; consisting of parts that exclude each other. It seeks its unity; and therefore exhibits itself as self-destructive, as verging toward its opposite [an indivisible point]. If it could attain this, it would be matter no longer, it would have perished. It strives after the realization of its idea; for in unity it exists ideally.²

Hegel describes matter as essentially antagonistic—as a composite of multiple parts, each having its own direction and motivation. The directionality (or “gravity”) of each part is due to its lack of self-containment, its possession of a center that is located outside of itself. In seeking its center, or seeking self-identity in an indivisible point, matter seeks its own destruction. For it is essentially divided, not indivisible; it is essentially dispersion, not a “point.” Matter’s fundamental trait is that of alienation—of not being “at home” in itself.

This description of matter resonates with Winckelmann’s ideals of wholeness, unity, and self-containment as exemplified in the image of the sea. It is the representation of Hegelian matter—a composite of mutually antagonistic parts—that Winckelmann’s artist is at pains to avoid. In the case of the literal body as a model of the artistic work, the “natural” is matter and composite. Consequently, the veiling of the material parts, of the disruptive details of the original, is essential in order to bring the spiritual form into view. Again, this supports the conclusion that Winckelmann’s presentation of ancient Greece as the actualized ideal of beauty is misleading. His own description of artistic method suggests otherwise. Were the formal, unified whole of the ideal present in actual Greece, neither the veiling of the material element nor the generalization of particular beauties would be necessary. If the artistic ideal gives added perfection to the natural beauty of Greece, then the ideal is not original or “natural.”

This is, of course, the paradoxical nature of Winckelmann’s demand that “we moderns” imitate Greece. If the ideal of artistic beauty is not given in the actual state of things, then Greece is original because it

has *invented* this ideal. Put another way, this ideal is *original* (as something created), not *originary* (as preceding something). A modern imitation of Greece would be nothing more than an unoriginal repetition of the same invention—the generalization of aggregated particulars. The idea that the modern can become original by imitation implies precisely that Greece did *not* invent or originate the ideal. Rather, it implies that the ideal of beauty pre-exists the natural—that it is the original as such. In that case, the particulars are consequent to, or derived from, the general idea of beauty, rather than the reverse. If Greek art is the rediscovery or revelation of a pre-existing form of forms, of an original as such, then the imitation of Greece is likewise the rediscovery and actualization of the original—“becoming original.” This, of course, requires a highly Platonic reading of the move from particular to generalized beauty. The form of beauty as such is assumed to be the original of originals, a general paradigm that individuates itself into the particular instances of beauty found in actual nature (a true nature behind the natural). Understood in this way, the task of Greek art is to restore the particular, the secondary copy of this original ideal, to the perfection of the original. The “original” ideal has multiplied, or duplicated itself. The task of art is, consequently, to accumulate these copies and reintegrate them into their original state. In doing so, the product of art, the ideal, paradoxically pre-exists the activity of art. The ideal pre-exists and gives birth to the particulars from which it is derived. One might say that that the child gives birth to its parents, thereby becoming self-originated. In this procedure, the historical lineage of beauty (the familial sequence of parent and child) has been inverted—the aggregated particulars produce their own predecessor.

Once again, we have found a curious, tripartite process that involves an intermediary stage of inversion, a kind of photographic negative, which ultimately restores the product to the status of the original. We saw the same process in Winckelmann’s artistic method for the distillation of form, his unveiling of form through the veiling of content. The original embodied object was disembodied by being impressed into a secondary medium (an inverted form or negative), then restored (inverted once again) in the final artwork. For example, the shape and outline of Michelangelo’s model was inverted in the vessel of water (the model’s concavities are seen as the water’s convexities and vice-versa). This inverted form was then mapped onto the body of stone, where it was again inverted in the final sculpture (the indented contours of the water become projected contours in the stone, etc.).

5. The Invisible Dross and Spiritualized Matter of the Cast

The image of casting perfectly coincides with the inverted intermediary of the artistic process. The cast stands between the original and the artwork as the exact contrary of both. The underlying imagery of cast-

ing in Winckelmann's examples of the sand, the vessel of water, and drapery are manifest. However, casting also corresponds to his description of the generalization of beauty. He describes the process as a gathering of objects and the combination of their forms into a generalized whole. In light of Hegel's descriptions of matter and spirit, the correspondence of the two processes becomes clear. Casting is the aggregation of disunited or formless matter into the spiritual whole of the final sculpture. The material that fills the cast corresponds to the multiplicity of beautiful objects that presents itself to the Greek artist as primary material for the artwork. Likewise, the melting down of the material for casting corresponds to the melting of multiple forms and images into one. In both cases, incongruous elements are united into a single form. In the specific case of harmonizing part and whole—for example, the artist's view of a profile—this means little more than avoiding the contradiction of multiple parts (the relation of brow, nose, mouth, etc. to one another). Such artistic concerns are a matter of balance and organization. However, in the case of the generalization of multiples (for example, the derivation of a single and ideal Greek profile), this meltdown is, first and foremost, a matter of overcoming multiplicity, rather than one of overcoming internal disharmony. There cannot, for example, be more than one "classic Greek profile." Returning to our metaphor of the casting process: While the form of the cast itself may consist of multiple harmonic parts, the cast is filled with a single, undifferentiated matter.

The harmonically organized whole that is produced presupposes some raw material to begin with. This "filler" material recalls my earlier comments about liquidity. The medium must be malleable. However, Hegel's own description of matter seems to preclude the existence of any such material. Spirit has its center in itself; it has unity and form and cannot be the material for casting. Matter, on the other hand, is not a passive or liquid material; it does not receive form, but undermines it, destroys it. It is essentially differentiation and antagonism. It would appear that form and content, matter and spirit, are mutually exclusive. The clean, charming image of the cast giving form to the formless does not work. There is no liquid or malleable matter for the job. Matter must, consequently, be prepared beforehand. The cast presupposes a melting pot. In Hegel's description, the melting pot is the site of purification:

All the varied foreign ingredients [the Greek artists] have brought into the melting-pot, yet they have not made a brew out of them like what comes from a witches' cauldron; on the contrary, in the pure fire of the deeper spirit they have consumed everything murky, natural, impure, foreign, and extravagant; they have burnt

all this together and made the shape appear purified, with only faint traces of the material out of which it has been formed.³

The distinction between the melting pot and the witches' brew is one of consistency. The witches' brew is a *mélange* of multiple, distinct ingredients. It is poor material for the cast because it contains differentiation and heterogeneity. In other words, it is "matter." It would appear that the ingredients are puréed, so to speak, to the point of becoming one, single material.

However, the melting pot is also, presumably, the melting away of "murkiness." (Note the correspondence of this demand for clarity to the sea-image of water's translucency—as well as to the translucent drapery that reveals the body.) One might wonder how the further dissolution of matter's heterogeneity could avoid some degree of murkiness. Murkiness is a quality of mixture; it is precisely the melting together of multiple ingredients, the product of differences. In this sense, the pot is not a *melting* pot at all; it is a process of distillation. The composite material must be separated into its pure and impure components. Hegel claims that the impurity is burnt away, as if it has evaporated entirely; it is "consumed" by fire rather than incorporated. So the melting pot miraculously avoids both mixture and dross. But if the very ingredients are impure and foreign, then what is left unconsumed? And to where does the impurity disappear? Hegel tells us "their business in this connection consisted partly in stripping away the formless, symbolic, ugly, and misshapen things which confronted them." But what does it mean to strip away the formless? How does one remove the absence of form?

Hegel's description of the purification process equates the foreign, the impure, and the formless. The ingredients are foreign, yet the foreign is impurity and must be consumed. The ingredients are ugly and misshapen, yet they are formless. The process seems to leave virtually no material for the artist to work with. The melting pot is no witches' brew because it preserves none of its ingredients. And although the content is seemingly impure in its entirety, the process leaves no waste, no rejected materials—all is consumed. What and where is this invisible, purified matter? And to where have the impurities disappeared?

6. Eyes, and Other Visual Holes

Concerning this question of invisible dross (a transformative economy without waste): perhaps Hegel is mistaken in his assumption that the impurities have been consumed. He seems to share Winckelmann's tendency for conflating presence with presence to vision and conscious-

ness. If the remainder in this combustion process takes the form of dregs, not dross—if it has settled to the bottom of this all-containing but translucent sea—then perhaps the miracle of the vanishing remainder is explicable. If the murkiness is invisible then the sea remains translucent.

The image of the melting pot, like the sea, is the equivocal image of a hole. Are these holes empty or are the contents entirely translucent? Hegel uses many metaphors of containment and containers, of wholes and holes, but some of these metaphors are murkier than others. There is the hole of the convenient memory-gap—the hole in which things become forgotten—exemplified in the Greeks’ gap in memory concerning their cultural debt to their predecessors: “The foreign origin they have so to speak thanklessly forgotten . . . perhaps burying it in the darkness of the mysteries which they have kept secret from themselves” (LH 151). Consumption by fire is, in this instance, a kind of amnesia. There is as well, in the metaphor of “burying,” the equally appropriate metaphor of the tomb. This image is one of Hegel’s favorites, although it is not always used intentionally. At one point, while he is reluctantly admitting the possibility of successful modern sculpture, he remarks, as if incidentally: “But I have been attracted above all by the tomb of the Count of Nassau at Breda.”⁴ And when he describes the war of Greece and Persia, he includes an interesting, though seemingly extraneous, detail:

The Persian king sent heralds to the Greek cities to require them to give Water and Earth, i.e., to acknowledge his supremacy. The Persian envoys were contemptuously sent back, and the Lacedaemonians went so far as to throw them into a well (PH 256).

The affront made by the Persian king is not simply condemned; the Greeks hide the evidence that an affront even occurred at all. The evidence is consumed, made invisible, with the help of a well—another kind of hole, another kind of tomb.

In each of these images—the melting pot, tomb, and well—the hole at issue is one and the same. It is the hole of the eye or, put another way, a gap in vision. The question is again not one of presence simply, but of presence to vision and to consciousness. Recall that, in the generalization of the ideal, what is stripped from vision is any part not contiguous with the whole. What undermines the unity of the whole is precisely what has unity in itself—what has no need of the unity of the whole. An independent part is a disunited part, an amputation. In this sense, Hegelian matter is, after all, a proper medium for sculpture. For matter is defined as having its center outside of itself. It is not self-contained or independent; it is fundamentally a *part*. However, the use of

matter, because it is a composite of “parts that exclude each other,” requires the purification process as *separation* rather than combination. Matter is separated and recombined into its various tendencies, directionalities, or gravities. And, when combined into self-inclusive wholes (non-independent parts), it ceases to be matter at all—it is spiritualized. That is, when the part becomes *part of* a whole, it ceases to be a part. It is no longer “an indivisible point” because it is contained in an indivisible point. The construction of material is its destruction as matter.

In effect, the process is one of removing from matter its materiality. But this implies that the supposed casting process is almost indistinguishable from that of sculpture. Melting down is somehow a “stripping away,” and stripping away is somehow the bestowal, not the removal, of form. Here the metaphor of the melting pot breaks down. If formlessness is stripped away, its consequent is form. The product of the melting process is precisely the final form, rather than an intermediary fluid material with which to fill the cast. There is no melting pot, no cast, and no bronze. There is the pre-existent, formless stone and the consequent sculpture, nothing more. The Greeks did not remove the foreign from their artistic materials in order to obtain a kind of “neutral matter” which could then be reformed into an appropriately Greek shape. The foreign itself is the neutral matter—“formless” and “foreign” are equivalent. Hegel conflates the melting pot and the caste to a single stage: “they have burnt all this together and made the shape appear purified” (A 479). The burning process is the melting pot, and the shape is the final sculpture. There is no intermediary stage—to burn down *is to give shape*. So one might wonder why the metaphor of casting is needed at all. Is not sculpture itself adequate to describe this process? In sculpture, separation and removal are simultaneous with the bestowal of form—it perfectly mirrors the import of the so-called melting process as depicted by Hegel.

The imagery of the melting pot is meant to present the process of transformation as a model of efficiency:

A second advantage which the Greeks were able to achieve by their mastery in casting was the purity of the cast, which they pushed so far that their bronze statues did not need to be chiseled at all, and therefore in their finer traits there was nothing of the loss which can never be wholly avoided with chiseling. (A 775)

Hegel hides a sculptural process in the guise of casting because he wishes to disguise the loss of transformation. Chiseling produces remainder and waste. The sculptural residue of Greece is hidden behind, rather than in, the image of the melting pot. Residue is proof

that the material of the work is derivative—that the work is transformative rather than formative, an inheritance and not originality. True originality is self-creation, *ex nihilo*, out of thin air and without material. (Hence the constant spiritualization, evaporation, and making translucent of matter.) To be sure, the “matter” used for the artwork of Greek culture (Persia) preceded the Greeks. But “matter” is precisely no-thing, formlessness, the need for shape.

In some sense, one might say that Hegel’s melting pot finishes the process of sculpture, rather than begins it. The Persian element *within* Greece has been sculpted and transformed into the new Greek form. However, it has not consumed the foreign material in its entirety. Consequently, it becomes necessary—*after the fact*—to melt down the foreign. The foreign is not some internal impurity in the sculpture that is Greece; it is, instead, the continued existence of Persia itself. The foreign *outside* of Greece is dross, a remainder that serves as reminder of its derivative origins. Persia is precisely the excess material that has not been incorporated into the final product of Greece. This remainder is removed from memory in two ways. First, Greece attempts to remedy the situation by absorbing the dross into itself—by Hellenizing Persia. Second, (and this is the more ingenious method) it melts Persia down in its consciousness to the level of the formless. Through the conflation of the non-Greek with formlessness or brute matter (see Hegel’s declaration that Greece was the site of “the proper emergence, the true palingenesis of Spirit”), Greece’s borrowings from Persia cease to be a threat to its spiritual originality (PH 223). The features, form, and shape of Persia are melted down to the complete absence of shape in Greek memory. Its origination remains to its own credit if it finds only formless matter outside of itself (the chiseled-away pieces of stone at the foot of the sculpture). If, on the contrary, it finds itself surrounded by unused foreign *forms*, then it is forced to recall that another creative spirit had a hand in its beginnings. This melting pot stage follows the transformation of the Persian Greece to a self-centered and independent Greece, rather than preceding it. It is a backward projection upon Persia:

Hence they have made for themselves a history of everything which they have possessed and have been. Not only have they represented the beginning of the world . . . but also of all aspects of their existence. . . . Of all these it is pleasingly represented through tales how they have arisen in history as their own work. (LH 151)

Now, returning to the question of visual blind spots and holes in memory: Greece is definitively the culture of sculpture. That is, Greece is a *visual* form of spirit. In Winckelmann’s description of the veiled

unveiling of form, the crucial point is the method of seeing. In seeing the form of the artistic model, it was essential that the parts and petty details were overlooked in favor of the whole. The present unity of Greece as such is no longer the central issue; the transformation has already taken place. However, the unity of Greece in time, as a historical whole, is still threatened by Persia. Persia, as a challenging external sculpture of its own, as an indivisible point or a part that is a-part, threatens the unity of Greek self-containment. It has a parentage, a historical link, which betrays ancestry and predecessor, undermining its unity as a self-produced and self-contained form of spirit. Ancestry is precisely a part that has its center outside of the whole. Spirit, on the contrary, is precisely “that which has its center in itself. It has not a unity outside itself, but has already found it; it exists in and with itself” (A 17). To restore its historical unity, it is necessary for Greece to find every part of its history as having its center in Greece.

I have compared the tactic through which Greece achieves its self-origination to a gap in vision and memory—a hole, of sorts. Hegel thankfully provides a wonderful analogy for the process:

We are at one with a man’s personality in his handshake, but still more quickly in his glance. And it is just this clearest expression of a man’s soul that sculpture must lack. . . . Sculpture has as its aim the entirety of the external form over which it must disperse the soul . . . and therefore it is not allowed to bring back this variety to one simple soulful point and the momentary glance of the eye. (A 732)

The gap in vision must swallow precisely the organ of vision. It is sight that one must not, at all costs, see. The organ of sight is the well, the hole, of the soul: “the concentration of the whole man into the one simple self which appears in a glance as this ultimate point of illumination” (ibid.). Again, the point here is that a whole cannot have a whole as one of its parts. The eye as an indivisible point—as a spiritual part—destroys the unity of the entire figure. Appropriately enough, the eyes are blinded to enable us to see the sculpture. Again we find the veiled unveiling of nudity. If the eye is to see itself, and to see itself as a single, unified spirit—that is, *as* an eye—then it must not see any other eyes, any potential spiritual challengers. Or rather, it must see only *one* eye: “Now as the pulsating heart shows itself all over the surface of the human . . . body, so in the same sense it is to be asserted of art that it has to convert every shape in all points of its visible surface into an eye” (A 153).

The curious fact is that it is precisely the eye—which is doing the seeing—that is seen in every part of the sculpture. The eye sees only those things that can also see. This is why Hegel, in the same passage,

calls this the sacrifice of the “glance.” The glance is momentary; it denotes both the meeting and separation of the eyes. If there is nothing to see but eyes, then the eyes meet permanently; they are locked in each other’s gaze. It is a state of perpetual self-recognition. If we abuse his metaphor a bit, following it to the letter, then we must conclude that the spirit is *not* diffused entirely over the body. The eye is the point of the spirit, and the body must be converted to eyes. That is to say, the eyes as points of disharmony are intentionally overlooked. The trouble with eyes is that they see *outside*. They point away from the center of the self; the eyes disunite the eye, which is also to say the “I”—the self or ego:

The eye . . . should not protrude or, as it were, project itself into the external world, for this relation to the external world is remote from the ideal and is exchanged for the self’s withdrawal into itself, into the substantive inner life of the individual. (A 734)

By projecting the internal—the self’s center—upon the external, the external is made safe for viewing. Now, Hegel’s claim is that “art makes every one of its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and its spirit is seen at every point” (A 153). But he has inverted the procedure entirely in this statement. (His blind spot is showing.) On the contrary, art makes every one thing into its own “production” *precisely by* making everything into an eye. That is, the melting pot follows, rather than precedes, the act of self-transformation. It is the forgetful backward glance that enables one to become the producer of oneself.

7. Inverting Birth: Originality in the Age of Spiritual Reproduction

Greece has, in Hegel’s description, buried the dross of its self-sculpting transformation. It has forgotten the remainder in order not to be reminded that it has an origin. The method is ingenious because it makes the remainder impossible to recall. If one only sees the “I,” then all that is not-I is invisible. Because Persia is not Greece, it is nothing at all. It has no shape or form that the eye can grasp. Persia cannot be recalled, or reviewed, because it was never viewed to begin with—there is nothing to recall. As missed entirely, it cannot be missed.

This strategy has a peculiar consequence. One achieves unity and self-origination through the duplication and multiplication of eyes. Every part, if it is not to undermine the whole, must become a duplicate of the whole. The whole becomes a thousand-eyed Argus. In Winckelmann’s description of the artistic process, the generalized ideal

of beauty was derived from the imperfect multiples found in original nature. The notion that Greece's ideal is original required the presupposition that this ideal pre-exists nature—that the particular instances of natural beauty were derived from the ideal.

The ideal, as derived from the actual, is presented in the artwork *as* ideal—as not actualized. As such, it is more than clear that it does not pre-date and produce the natural beauties of Greece. As I mentioned earlier, no individual could possibly possess every generalized feature at one and the same time. But this is precisely the dross of the ideal. In each individual Greek, some part is impure and not ideal—it has gone unused in the production of the unitary ideal. Each of these discrepancies between the individual and the ideal represent the remainder, and the origin, of the ideal. If the ideal is to become originary, these discrepancies must be melted down, buried—the ideal's ancestry must be forgotten and overlooked. This is, once again, the multiplication of the eye—all parts must be seen as the center and whole. And Greece attempts this multiplication on the level of actuality; it takes up body-building as well as ideal-building:

To resemble the God-like Diagoris was the fondest wish of every young man. (RI 7)

Moreover, everything that was instilled and taught from birth to adulthood about the culture of their bodies and the preservation, development, and refinement of this culture through nature and art was done to enhance the natural beauty of the ancient Greeks. (RI 11)

The artistic model (the Greek youth) models itself upon the artistic production (the sculptures of the Gods, etc.). In doing so, the gap between the ideal and the particular is closed. The ideal is reproduced, duplicated, and proliferated into the particular. The tripartite inversion process that manufactures the ideal is followed by a final inversion. The ideal of the aggregated whole is individuated once again into the multiple—this time as the singular in the multiple, as many copies of the same ideal. This paradoxical strategy has the effect of making the ideal the actual, making it the origin and ancestor of itself. It becomes self-produced. In a similar way, the duplication of Greek culture in Persia, the Hellenization of Persia, achieves the self-origination of Greece. The ideal is now the original and actual. Each and every actual instantiation of the ideal is likewise the original. There can be no copy because what is not an instantiation of the Greek ideal is not seen; it is interpreted as formless and cannot be recalled. Nor can there be any other forms, any new ideal. Indeed, if the ideal is to preserve its own existence, then it must duplicate itself. Recall that any part that is a whole,

an indivisible point, ruptures the unity of the whole. The whole can only preserve itself by converting each of its parts into duplicates of itself. Here the ominous undertone of the sea metaphor becomes clear. The grandiose unified Spirit, that perfectly rounded whole of the ocean, is a threat to the existence of any *other* spirit. The Greek spirit, which duplicates a single body image, nonetheless preserves a diversity of individual forms of spirit. Perhaps the isolated point of spirit (the individual Greek) foresees its dissolution in the infinite form of the ocean-spirit (the state):

Between the Idea and its realization . . . no disturbing influence can intrude. But in relation to Spirit it is quite otherwise. The realization of *its* Idea is mediated by consciousness and will; these very faculties are, in the first instance, sunk in their primary *merely* natural life; the first object and goal of their striving is the realization of their merely natural destiny. . . . Thus Spirit is at war with itself; it has to overcome itself as its most formidable obstacle. (PH 55)

In the modern world, the Greek strategy of self-production through self-duplication is also evident. In religion, it takes the form of the Crusades—the self-origination of Christianity through the duplication of the kingdom of God in Asia. The move from Catholicism to Lutheranism is likewise a strategic proliferation. In Catholicism, Christ exists in the Host of the Eucharist, over and against the multiple. In Lutheranism, Christ (the ideal of reunification with the Absolute) is replicated *within* the multiple. He is multiplied and inserted, as it were, into the body of each Christian: “[Luther] maintained that the Spirit of Christ really fills the human heart—that Christ therefore is not to be regarded as merely a historical person, but that man sustains an immediate relation to him in Spirit” (PH 416). Indeed, this replication of Christ’s essence is still in effect: “Time, since that epoch, has had no other work to do than the formal imbuing of the world with this principle, in bringing the Reconciliation implicit into objective and explicit realization” (ibid.). The spread of Christianity is, essentially, the multiplication and proliferation of identical Christs. And the Christian life is likewise one of duplication. The Christian models her life upon that of Christ. The multiple is made identical to the ideal, giving the ideal its self-originality and its actuality. Christ is absolute only insofar as he is entombed in the body of every Christian and only insofar as everybody is a Christian. Without such multiplication, he retains a derivative status in relation to the “Father.” In the Christian, the particular is reunited with the whole, and Christ becomes the Father. Ironically, it would seem that the Christian saves Christ, rather than

the reverse. But then this is misleading, for they are duplicates—each and every copy is the original.

I will forgo extending the analogy to Hegel's discussion of the modern state and to philosophy. Suffice it to say, the exponential manufacture of spirit is continued there as well, eventually extending everywhere. Even nature will be found to be essentially identical to the ideal. The mind's eye sees only what sees; thinking is of thinking; and "that only passes for truth in which [man] finds himself at home" (PH 440). It is a curious discovery—that the original is not original until it goes into mass production. Insofar as anything (a single point, a single glance) presents itself as non-identical, the original becomes derivative: thus the necessity to transform, forget, or destroy what resists this proliferation. It is strangely prescient of artistic, economic, and political strategies that will develop long after Hegel is buried, in the aftermath of history's consummation. As Andy Warhol, perhaps the artistic consummation of this strategy, has put it:

You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are Good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.⁵

NOTES

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1. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (Chicago: Open Court, 1987), p. 13; henceforth RI, followed by page number.
2. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), p. 17; henceforth PH, followed by page number.
3. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances Simson (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), p. 479; henceforth LH, followed by page number.

4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 790; henceforth A, followed by page number.
5. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 101.