INTRODUCTION

The Claim of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy and Early Modern Artistry

Paul A. Kottman

Considering the attention paid to artists from the early modern period by philosophers working in what we now recognize as “aesthetics,” considering the extent to which artworks and practices of the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries were accompanied by an immense range of discussions about the arts and their relation to one another, and considering above all the sheer breadth and scope of the artistic achievements in the period, it is striking that so little recent effort has been made to understand the connection between early modern artistic practices and the emergence of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy over the course of the eighteenth century. It is striking, that is, how seldom nowadays specific artworks and artistic practices are seen as explaining, clarifying, requiring, or embodying the distinctive set of concerns articulated in that philosophical discipline we call aesthetics. Art is more often taken by philosophers and historians as a “stand-in” for, or reflection of, some other question, historical event, or social event of significance, rather than as being the phenomenon itself. The ten essays in this volume attempt to remedy this.

Each essay included suggests ways in which the artworks and practices of the early modern period show the essentiality of aesthetic experience
for philosophical reflection, and in particular for the rise of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, while also showing art’s need for philosophy. Each contribution teaches us by example how we might better grasp central artistic and philosophical preoccupations of the preceding centuries and our own time, by asking after both early modern art’s claim on philosophy and philosophical realizations of the claim of art.

This broad historical framing—“early modern art” and “modern aesthetics”—implies some delineations concerning, for instance, the divide that separates the cultures of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries in Venice, Florence, London, or Amsterdam from the eighteenth century in Königsberg, Weimar, or Berlin. Each essay in this volume articulates that frame in its own way. Overall, however, making sense of this framing is understood here not just as a matter of establishing or gathering facts that might help us determine whether, say, Hegel ever laid eyes on a particular painting or how well Herder may have grasped Shakespeare’s English—though gathering these facts, too, is an ineliminable part of our collective work. Rather, since we do not doubt that artworks and practices from the early modern period exist alongside works of aesthetic philosophy from the eighteenth century, what we really want to know is whether these two existences are connected in some essential way. By “essential way” I do not just mean a further fact—or a so-called “smoking gun”—but something like what Hegel might have called the Wirklichkeit, or what earlier philosophers might have called the logos (the actuality or reality) of a connection between early modern art and aesthetic philosophy. Put another way, we want to know what reasons we might have for reconsidering the stories we already tell ourselves about early modern art and philosophical aesthetics. We want to know how, whether, and why we should reconsider the intellectual histories that have prevented these two historical phenomena from being considered together as part of our collective inheritance.

As Richard Rorty once pointed out, the German way of doing intellectual history—“starting with the Greeks and working down through, for example, Cicero, Galileo and Schelling before saying anything off your own bat—is easily parodied.” But, as Rorty went on to note, this kind of approach helps us conscientiously clarify what we might otherwise take for granted, or carelessly assume. After all, we “all carry some potted intellectual history around with us, to be spooned out as needed. . . . Such stories determine our sense of what is living and what is dead in the past, and thus of when the crucial steps forward, or the crucial mistakes or ruptures, occurred.” And those of us who do not undertake the historians’ legwork
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ourselves generally borrow a story from someone else—Karl Marx, say, or Hans Blumenberg. Taking the spirit of Rorty’s remark—that we would do well to be more vigilant when it comes to the histories in view of which we understand our present—the first thing this Introduction will do is consider what, in our “potted histories,” has been blocking, or effacing, a clearer view of the connection between early modern artistic practices and aesthetic philosophy.

There are a number of these, of course. However, I think we can usefully identify four narratives—sections 1–4 below—that have arguably contributed the most to obscuring our view of the relation between early modern artworks and aesthetic philosophy. First, there is a story according to which art proper, the fine arts, or notions of aesthetic autonomy, took shape only in the eighteenth century. Second, we find aesthetic philosophy’s self-articulation over the course of the eighteenth century and its introduction of an apparently new set of issues and questions for the human sciences. Third, there is the concurrent emergence of art history as an academic discipline in the work of J. J. Winckelmann especially and its predominant focus on ancient artworks rather than on the art of the early modern period (as had been the case in the work of Giorgio Vasari, for instance). Fourth, the establishment of the “Renaissance,” the “Baroque,” or the early modern period itself, as objectively distinct, was in part predicated on scholarly methods and apparatuses that took shape in the late eighteenth century.

Let me briefly describe each of these by trying to lay bare the “potted history” implied or contained in each, in order to make clearer how they tumble into and compel questions under investigation in this volume. I then turn to a discussion of the essays included here.

I

One history that is commonly borrowed to explain the emergence of aesthetics in the eighteenth century was influentially told by Paul Oskar Kristeller, a German scholar of Renaissance humanism (who emigrated to the United States in 1939), in a two-part article he published in the Journal of the History of Ideas in 1951–52, titled “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics.” There Kristeller argued that the “system of the five major arts, which underlies all modern aesthetics and is so familiar to us all, is of comparatively recent origin and did not assume definite shape before the eighteenth century, although it has many ingredients which go back to classical, medieval and Renaissance thought.”
These five arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry—began to set themselves apart as art proper, according to Kristeller, by virtue of being distinguished from other crafts and sciences, and thus by acquiring a kind of independence from instrumental aims, ritual function, or moral-educational purposes. It is, Kristeller argued, this recognition of a provisional aesthetic autonomy, and the corresponding consolidation of a “system” of the five arts now conceived as the fine arts, or *Beaux Arts*, that made possible the kind of philosophical attention the fine arts received in the eighteenth century.

One issue in Kristeller’s story, which persists whenever a version of his story is borrowed, is whether the five-art system, or the practical autonomy of the fine arts, was achieved artistically and then subsequently recognized as a practical achievement by philosophers and art theorists, or whether the very notion of art proper (or aesthetic autonomy) is the product of a discursive recognition conferred upon certain art forms by philosophers and art theorists. At times Kristeller seems to imply the former, as when he notes that the ancients and medievals tended to treat art as “something that can be taught and learned,” whereas “modern aesthetics stresses the fact that Art cannot be learned.” In saying this, Kristeller is implying that a genuinely novel set of artistic practices (he calls them “human activities”) emerged when art ceased to be treated, by artists, as something practicable apart from its traditional modes of transmission in workshops or “schools.” However, Kristeller does not really develop this implication in his account. Instead, he devotes the bulk of his attention to the way art is discussed in literary discourses or philosophical treatises, from antiquity through the Middle Ages, into the Renaissance and through the eighteenth century: the coining of the term *Arti del disegno* by Giorgio Vasari, the contest between the arts stressed in Leonardo’s *Paragone*, and in writers from Castiglione and Francis Bacon through the emergence of academies in France, and the distinction of the arts from the sciences articulated in the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, as in Charles Perrault’s *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (1688–96). From there, Kristeller leads us to discussions of beauty that began to appear in the early decades of the eighteenth century in the work of J.-P. de Crousaz, Abbé Batteux, the earl of Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson (so important for later philosophers such as David Hume and Denis Diderot), and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who finally introduced the term “aesthetics.”

In sum—and this is the point to be emphasized here—Kristeller’s story is a descriptive history of ideas as evidenced by discourses about art from antiquity, and especially from the Renaissance, through Kant. He
indicates that thinkers in Europe, from the Renaissance onward, changed their minds and their terms when it came to discussions of the arts—as the emergent discourse around the “fine arts” or *belle arti* shows. But the connection between those discursive works and the history of the art practices is not addressed or explained by Kristeller; that is, he does not show how that change of mind might have been precipitated by, or required by, anything in the art itself—either as a practice, or in its reception.

I mention Kristeller first not only because of the broad influence of his account but also because other well-known accounts mirror his reliance on discursive reflections on the arts to explain the emergence of aesthetics as a philosophical concern. Soon after Kristeller’s essays appeared, for instance, M. H. Abrams emphasized the birth of the idea of artistic genius in the writings of the Romantics. Peter de Bolla and Andrew Ashfield have emphasized the notion of the sublime, as it supplanted traditional notions of beauty, in the work of many writers of the European Enlightenment. Luc Ferry has offered an alternative view, following a longer tradition (going back to Kant and rejuvenated by Hannah Arendt), that sees modern notions of *Individualität* and subjectivity as necessitating the emergence of aesthetic philosophy, linking issues of taste to broader social changes, especially to new emphases on consensus between individuals in modern democracy.

In another quarter, many in literary studies have followed Terry Eagleton in regarding the emergence of aesthetics as nothing but an ideology necessitated by “the middle class’s struggle to preserve its hegemony.” High culture, on this view, looks like one way the bourgeoisie reproduces itself. Although Eagleton’s concerns express a set of neo-Marxist commitments that had yet to emerge in the era under consideration, his formulations are useful for characterizing the tendency that I am quickly summarizing here—namely, that of turning to discourses about art to explain the particular attention accorded to art since the eighteenth century. Indeed, Eagleton goes out of his way to emphasize how silly he thinks it is to imagine that artistic practices themselves could have played any role in the emergence of aesthetics as a philosophical or social concern. “It is,” he writes, “on account [of the dominant ideological forms of modern class society], rather than because men and women have suddenly awoken to the supreme value of painting or poetry, that aesthetics plays so obtrusive a role in the intellectual heritage of the present.” And, as if to demonstrate in his very own approach the irrelevance of artworks and practices themselves, Eagleton elects to devote, almost exclusively, four-hundred-plus pages to discussions of works by German philosophers: Kant, Schiller,
In another sense, to turn to the second narrative, the separation of discussions about art from the history of art practices and works is often symptomatic of aesthetic philosophy’s own self-articulation—the presentation of the philosophical concerns that course through texts from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten through Kant and beyond. The issues and concerns here are notoriously complex, but some general outlines can be discerned.

As is often noted, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten was the first to refer to “aesthetics” as a subject within philosophy when he, in 1735, defined the term as “a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses.” Baumgarten accorded to what he called “sensible cognition” an authority that liberated cognition from a tradition of German scholasticism that identified cognition with logic. At the same time, as Kant observed, Baumgarten “sought to bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of science.” Although Kant was unconvinced by Baumgarten’s philosophy, the latter’s attempt to free aesthetics from the empirical—argues Paul Guyer—might be seen as “the origin of Kant’s notion of an aesthetic idea, that is, a product of the imagination which has genuine cognitive content . . . but which is at the same time so rich and indeterminate that it preserves our sense of the freedom of the imagination from constraint by the understanding.”

Before Baumgarten, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, had written Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1711), followed by Jean-Baptiste Du Bos’s Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music (1719), and Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue by Shaftesbury’s follower, Francis Hutcheson (1725). Guyer plausibly suggests that the central idea to emerge in each of these works is “the freedom of imagination,” which provided “much of the impetus behind the explosion of aesthetic theory in the period.” By introducing the idea of disinterestedness into aesthetic discourse, Shaftesbury paved the way for later thinking about the relative independence of aesthetic experience and the eventual privileging of aesthetic reason. Hutcheson, for his part, emphasized a contrast between aesthetic response and both cognition and the will—a contrast that, Guyer suggests, laid the groundwork for mental activities that Kant would gather together under the imagination. Du Bos,
too, anticipated something of Kant’s view of the imagination’s freedom by emphasizing the way in which our response to imitations is not limited by what we “know” or cognitively comprehend.\textsuperscript{23}

Further overcoming the empirical-rational divide in philosophy, Kant and Herder later transformed this early eighteenth-century inheritance by taking, respectively, a transcendental and a historicist-hermeneutic perspective. The new understanding of sensation provoked by these early aesthetic philosophies allowed Kant and Herder to develop new, decisive views on the connection between logic and epistemology, on the one hand, and anthropology, psychology, and world history, on the other. As Angelica Nuzzo has shown, this same nexus also informs Hegel’s own, quite different, account of art as part of Absolute Spirit.\textsuperscript{24} And this view appears not only in the secondary commentaries: each new aesthetic philosophy, from Kant and Herder to Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel (and, beyond, to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) explicitly offered itself as a new solution to a set of philosophical problems inherited from this nascent tradition of aesthetics, and with respect to the same issues it had attempted to address. See, for instance, Hegel’s “Historical Deduction of the True Concept of Art,” in which Hegel positions his own teaching vis-à-vis that of Kant, Schiller, Winckelmann and Schelling.\textsuperscript{25} The history of aesthetic philosophy is often told as a series of reflections on its own self-constitution in the eighteenth century, as new solutions to a set of problems inherited from the great intellectual debates in empiricism and rationalism in the seventeenth century. Even figures peripheral to the German tradition—such as Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)—position themselves with respect to this philosophical inheritance.\textsuperscript{26}

I do not wish to suggest that there is anything historically or philosophically mistaken in this self-presentation; nor is my aim here to provide a more “correct” intellectual history about the emergence of aesthetics, or a truer statement of the broad philosophical issues under discussion in any of these thinkers. It is worth pointing out, however, that the value of any blanket statement about philosophical aesthetics in this period—as in Kristeller’s identification of a “system,” or Eagleton’s claims about “ideology”—starts to look severely limited, since we are dealing not with a coherent set of “theories about art” but with a lively debate over what the issues with art or aesthetics are, exactly.

That said, by these widely cast lights, it is striking how—in these philosophical discourses and debates—inhherited artworks and practices start to look like little more than placeholders, whose newly expanded constellation of issues now ranges from theories of beauty and taste, to psychology, nature,
physiology, world history, anthropology, and the study of human culture. After all, the privileging of aesthetic reason in the eighteenth century also coincided with the emergence of a novel relation between philosophical disciplines and a host of academic fields and disciplines that are still with us—which is, of course, one reason for the difficulties in adjudicating the “history” modern aesthetic philosophy tells about its own emergence.27

Nothing I say in this context can make the difficulties that adhere to discussions of these issues any easier. Here I want, rather, to expand the list of issues under consideration by emphasizing the conception of artworks and practices at work in accounts—both secondary and primary—of the emergence of aesthetic philosophy. For, both in the primary works themselves and in secondary accounts, “art” is often presented as a stand-in for a set of extra-artistic philosophical-historical-social concerns—rather than as the issue itself. I have already hinted at how Kant’s placement of the aesthetic between theoretical and practical philosophy. For, whose heart lies the issue of freedom, represents one such moment. Schiller’s agon with Kant in his Letters on Aesthetic Education, with its attempt to reconcile the rational and the sensuous as freedom, is another. Schelling’s insistence on aesthetic intuition and artistic genius as demanding comparison to philosophical cognition is a third.28 Proposing a horizon that would situate all of these thinkers, Jay Bernstein has similarly suggested that the emergence of aesthetic thought in this tradition “turns on a conception of artworks as fusing the disparate and metaphysically incommensurable domains of autonomous subjectivity and material nature, and hence, by inference, upon a conception of artistic mediums as stand-ins or plenipotentiaries for nature as (still) a source for meaningful claims.”29 According to this view, the disenchantment of nature by scientific reason—to which Kant’s Copernican turn, Schiller’s uniting of beauty and freedom, Hölderlin’s view of modern aesthetics as provisionally ameliorating the loss of nature, and Schlegel’s romantic turn to aesthetic freedom all purportedly respond—explains the “conception” of art as a “stand-in” for crises and issues registered philosophically: freedom, nature, or the meaning of scientific rationality. Corroborations of this story also appear, of course, in other familiar “potted histories” about the modern age, from Alexandre Koyré’s story about modern science in From a Closed World to an Infinite Universe to Hannah Arendt’s story about science and nature in The Human Condition and Theodor Adorno’s critique of Enlightenment rationality and his philosophy of art.

Here I wish to draw attention only to the way in which aesthetic philosophy’s self-articulations often seem to require, for their own internal
coherence, a conception of art as some kind of “stand-in” for distinctly modern philosophical problems—for instance, (lost) nature, freedom, genius, or beauty. Bernstein’s own summary is telling: “The moment when aesthetic rationality takes on its most robust, self-authorizing articulation . . . is equally the moment when the true claim of art becomes lost.” The suggestion (which resonates with conclusions reached in different ways by Heidegger, Adorno, and Derrida) is that art’s “claim to truth” is lost—art becomes “alienated” from truth—in part by being taken up in aesthetic rationality. And this is so, even when this “taking up” is historically as well as philosophically motivated—as a response to the rise of modern sciences, to a rift between disenchanted, causally determined nature and human freedom, subjectivity, and natural matter.

But why, exactly, is the self-articulation of aesthetic reason the moment when art loses its true claim? Is it because art becomes a “stand-in” for philosophical thinking about a set of issues that go beyond the fate of art? Is art’s alienation from truth something that is “registered” by philosophy, or is it “sustained” by philosophical aesthetics? Is art’s purported alienation from truth part of aesthetic reason’s own self-constitution as philosophy (one way aesthetic philosophy distinguishes itself from art)? And what is art’s “true claim” anyway? Given the pains taken by virtually every one of these philosophers—Kant, Schiller, Schlegel, Hegel—to articulate not just a philosophical position on art, but also a view of the relationship between philosophy and art as historical activities or possibilities, and given that this task continues unabated, it is difficult to imagine that these kinds of questions could have been settled by what Bernstein refers to as aesthetic philosophy’s “robust, self-authorizing articulation.” So this potted history calls for further scrutiny, too.

One measure of how unsettled the question was in the eighteenth century lies in aesthetic philosophy’s entanglement with new, competing and increasingly sophisticated—or, at least, self-aware—attempts to furnish a history of art. Or, more especially, to furnish a history of ancient art—as if the social and aesthetic concerns of the eighteenth century were more readily considerable in view of newly excavated ruins of the classical world than in the canvases of sixteenth-century painting, the poetry of Elizabethan drama, or the music of J. S. Bach.

With this, we come to the third obstacle under consideration.
As is well known, the eighteenth century not only saw the rise of philosophical aesthetics but the concomitant emergence of what we now tend to think of as the academic discipline of art history. Although Pliny the Elder (23–79), Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72), and Giorgio Vasari (1511–74)—to name only the best known—had already sought to situate artists and works historically (albeit in different ways, to different ends), it was with the appearance of Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s *History of Ancient Art* (1764) that art was offered as a source of historical knowledge capable of teaching us about the present (about “modernity”) through a fuller understanding of past social worlds.\(^3\) Writing in the wake of the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and making use of his study of the works of Du Bos, Hume, and Batteux, Winckelmann constructs a history in which art is tied to the rise and fall of an entire nation or culture, and to specific artworks and practices, rather than (as in Vasari) to the lives and careers of practicing artists. More important, Winckelmann attempts to produce this history on the basis of an interpretative visual assessment of the art itself. His aim, as he puts it, is a historical understanding or interpretation of a past world (Greece) on the basis of visual observation of its artistic productions—taking as its “principal object the essential of art.”\(^4\) If this sounds straightforward enough as a description of what art historians do, then it is because of Winckelmann’s influence on the discipline. However, at least two aspects of Winckelmann’s work—and the broader connection between the birth of art history and the rise of aesthetic philosophy to which it belongs—further illustrate how our own understanding of any connection between aesthetic philosophy and the art of the centuries immediately preceding it has been blocked or obscured.

The first aspect has to do with the reception of Winckelmann’s work, and the abiding significance attained by Greek art and culture in subsequent German writers and philosophers, from Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, and Hegel to Heine, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. That a confrontation with, and appropriation of, ancient Greek artworks was highly significant for the literary and cultural foundations of modern Germany, and perhaps for modern German identity, has long been maintained by academics and even in the popular imagination—down to the famous Monty Python football skit.\(^5\) Without discussing this confrontation further here, I merely note that one of its effects has been to obscure discussion or consideration of the significance of early modern artistic practices for the eighteenth-century foundations of German philosophy and culture.\(^6\)

The second aspect has to do with the scope of Winckelmann’s own project. This can perhaps be most handily described by a comparison to
the other figure most often cited as the founder of modern art history, Giorgio Vasari, with respect to whose work Winckelmann positioned his own.\textsuperscript{17} Like Winckelmann, Vasari was motivated to write his \textit{Lives of the Artists} by a need to make sense of the relation between artworks of the classical past and the present: his Florentine context. Unlike Winckelmann, however—and closer to Alberti or Machiavelli—Vasari instituted a discursive framework within which the art of Florence could be seen as part of an artistic tradition that extended back, and was palpably connected to, the art of the classical world. Vasari did this, for instance, through the metaphor connecting the arts to the biological course of “life,” asserting ways in which Florentine artists contributed to the “process by which art has been reborn” (\textit{il progresso della sua rinascita}).\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, Vasari wrote—in the shadow of his mentor Michelangelo, and as a practicing artist immersed in the social world of Florence—of how the history of art up until his time should be judged and appraised by norms or ideals whose progressive realization it had been his historical privilege to bear witness to.\textsuperscript{19} The present moment of artistic achievement in Florence was, for Vasari, both the telos toward which prior art tended and the “norm” by which its progress was to be judged.\textsuperscript{20}

Like Vasari, Winckelmann was faced with the same need to connect classical art to the demands of the present, especially in light of the new excavations at the base of Vesuvius. However, unlike Vasari—and writing in the mid-eighteenth century, and at the height of neoclassical distaste for the Baroque—Winckelmann did not aim to expound a “tradition” connecting the work of (his) contemporary artists to the works of Michelangelo or Raphael.\textsuperscript{21} Although his “system,” as he called it, continued to make use of the biological metaphor of birth, maturity, and decay, the fact that it was a “systematic” account of art—and not the espousal of an ongoing tradition or \textit{rinascita}—shows the historical rift Winckelmann perceived between the concerns of his \textit{History of Ancient Art} and the artistic practices themselves, a rift that constitutes the necessary conditions for his own efforts.\textsuperscript{22}

Although Winckelmann was a practiced draftsman, he was not—in contrast to Vasari—widely seen as the practitioner of an easily identifiable traditional activity. And whereas Vasari had seen in his native Tuscany a technical progression in the arts, Winckelmann lived in Italy as a foreign observer; he saw historical discontinuity in Baroque Rome and its view of its classical past—as in the work of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78).\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, by focusing on the rise, maturity, and decay of Greece, Winckelmann was able to connect the decline he saw in Hellenistic culture to the
Baroque world he inhabited. For Winckelmann, then, understanding artworks entails understanding those who produced them—their social world, in as much detail as possible—rather than understanding something about the ahistorical procedures or norms according to which art gets produced (like “the imitation of nature,” for instance, as in Vasari or Giovanni Pietro Bellori). Winckelmann’s normative account of art, in contrast to Vasari’s account, was not to be an account of the refinement of artistic practices or techniques, but something like an account of an ideal social world (late fifth- to early fourth-century Athenian democracy). And unlike Bellori, who saw in the “norms and proportions” of Greek architecture a set of ahistorical ideals for the production of beautiful art, Winckelmann saw in Greek art the norms and ideals for the production of a historically specific (if ideal) way of life. Indeed, Winckelmann sought to explain not Greek art, but Greece as a whole—as a “nation,” as a total lifeworld, through its art; and he did so by making sociohistorical ideals seem more important than technical ideals for the adjudication of the art and society of a historical people.

The precise reasons for Winckelmann’s preference for Greece remain somewhat obscure, decisive though this preference became for subsequent generations of German philosophers. It seems to have been connected to the “contemporary political attitudes, in which what is seen as one latter-day manifestation of Roman imperial art and architecture—the Baroque style—was inferentially linked to large and in some cases despotic states and institutions to which [Winckelmann’s] own views on personal freedom were antipathetic.”

One thing is certain, however. By judging not just the art but also the social values and norms of the contemporary world by the lights of classical Greece, Winckelmann has contributed mightily to the blocking of a fuller understanding of aesthetic philosophy (and, indeed, of his own work) that might be rooted in “modern” artworks and practices from the sixteenth century onward.

A fourth potted history can be tracked in the way in which the early modern period itself—the so-called Renaissance—came to be periodized, cordoned off from later historical eras. (The “Baroque” has likewise been the topic of heated debate, and in recent years has come to represent something like a period that troubles periodization itself—especially of the
This periodization reached a culmination with the publication of Jules Michelet’s *History of France* in 1855. It was Michelet who set historical boundaries to the Renaissance, when he claimed that it “went from Columbus to Copernicus, from Copernicus to Galileo, from the discovery of the earth to that of the heavens.” Michelet’s work was then followed by Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* in 1860, arguably one of the most widely disseminated works of scholarship ever written, which further cemented the sense that the “Renaissance” names not just a historical period but a discrete object of scholarly inquiry.

However, this cordoning of the Renaissance—or what scholars now call the early modern period—was also already under way in the eighteenth century, with the establishment of a scholarly apparatus that made work like Michelet’s and Burckhardt’s possible, even necessary: the authentication of documents, of periodization, individuation, chronology, and the various tools of positivist historicism.

Because the work of William Shakespeare came to figure so prominently in the tradition of aesthetic philosophy under investigation in this volume, *The Insistence of Art*, because three of the essays included here deal directly with Shakespeare, and because the study of Shakespeare as the exemplary author of the English canon can plausibly be taken to instantiate the intellectual commitments involved in the study of early modern art and literature, let me illustrate this process with reference to the critical imperative to historicize that took shape in the study of Shakespeare over the course of the eighteenth century. I have in mind the emergence of an ostensibly “authentic” or “period” Shakespeare, through the production of scholarly editions of his work that sought, crucially—and in direct refutation of a then continuous tradition of Shakespeare publications over the intervening generations since the publication of the First Folio in 1623—to connect Shakespeare-the-man to a set of independently verifiable facts about his life, to historical accounts characterizing his era, to a reliable chronology of his works, to authoritative editions of his writings, and to other “biographical” pieces of evidence, such as his portrait, image, birthplace, and the Globe Theatre. As Margreta de Grazia has shown, the emergence of this “authentic” Shakespeare—tied through extratextual evidence (and not through a direct interpretation of the artwork) to the historical world of early modern England—can be plausibly traced to the publication of Edmond Malone’s ten-volume *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (1790, revised and expanded in 1821). (That said, in debunking one
“potted history” about Shakespeare and the Renaissance, de Grazia might be accused of merely instituting another—namely, a kind of Foucauldian story about the “rupture” between pre-Malone and post-Malone editorial practices, which belies significant continuities between Malone’s efforts and those of, say, Nicholas Rowe or Samuel Johnson.)

Although Malone’s publication was indebted to earlier editions and biographies of Shakespeare—from the 1709 edition and biography by Nicholas Rowe, through Alexander Pope, William Warburton, Edward Capell, George Steeves, and the publications of other eighteenth-century authors—Malone’s work sought to distinguish itself as relying on independently verifiable evidence in piecing together Shakespeare’s biography. Malone’s was also the first edition of Shakespeare’s work to present a chronology of the plays and an annotation of the sonnets, and it seems to have been the first to offer a linguistic analysis of the particularities of Shakespeare’s usage of English. Until Malone, previous editions and biographies of Shakespeare had presented themselves as “genuine,” “original,” “perfected,” or “corrected”—though not “authentic”—by editing texts that were closest to the editor, rather than closest to the author. For instance, the Fourth Folio of the play (1685) was based on the Third (1663–64), which had been based on the Second (1632), in turn based on the First (1623). Similarly, tales about Shakespeare’s life had been transmitted without being verified (leading to the production of “stories” about Shakespeare’s life that are still repeated today). According to de Grazia, Malone challenged this editorial tradition by introducing external “positive” evidence—gathered from documents, records, and archives dating to Shakespeare’s lifetime—in order to produce an “authentic” Shakespeare: the man and his work.

This reification of an “authentic” Shakespeare (an individual man and author reliably connected to a body of work) was part of a growing body of “critical biographies” and “studies of the life and era of an author” now seen as essential to early modern literary studies and to philological work more generally (for instance, in the wake of German positivists such as the Brothers Grimm or Karl Konrad Friedrich Wilhelm Lachmann). This work of returning to “original” evidence or documents—and, hence, of eliding the interpretations and revisions of intervening generations of artists and critiques—has deeply influenced the entrenchment of positivistic historicism as a dominant mode of humanistic inquiry. Think, for example, of the ambitious Shakespeare biographies that began to appear in the early nineteenth century (James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, especially),
as well as the New Historicism of recent generations—which itself gave rise to new critical biographies of Shakespeare (Stephen Greenblatt, Peter Holland, Katherine Duncan-Jones). The point to be emphasized here is the extent to which this scholarly tradition—and the periodization of the Renaissance to which it contributed—might be said to stem from this eighteenth-century reconfiguration of “art” (for instance, of Shakespeare’s written words) and the history of its reception and transmission through the eighteenth-century.

If we turn now to the perspective of the present volume, this trend toward “cordoning the Renaissance” can also start to look like a forceful, even allergic, reaction to the interpretive problems raised in connection with Shakespeare by the so-called Shakespeare cult in German writers of the eighteenth century. After all, Lessing, Herder, the Schlegels, Schiller, Schelling, Hegel, Goethe, and others approached Shakespeare’s work with a hermeneutic vigor that has defined the other major critical imperative in literary studies since the eighteenth century. Strikingly, the hermeneutic study of Shakespeare by figures such as Herder placed Shakespeare’s work on a historical continuum with the social world of the eighteenth century—and arises in stark contrast to the “authentic” Shakespeare reified in the post-1790, largely English and Anglo-American, tradition described above. This new philosophical-hermeneutic tradition stemmed from a new evaluation of Shakespeare’s work that began with Lessing’s commentary and, especially, with Herder’s 1773 essay on Shakespeare. This nonpositivistic approach to Shakespeare set limits in principle—not limits based on a temporary lack of independent evidence—to an empirical-positivistic grasp of Shakespeare or ourselves. As Kristin Gjesdal’s contribution to this volume shows, Herder argued not only for a novel interpretation of Shakespeare’s work, but for an interpretive methodology according to which the understanding of Shakespeare (or any past culture or writer) requires subjecting an interpreter’s own preconceptions and epistemic limitations to critique. For Herder, the task was not only to interpret Shakespeare in light of his era or life, but also to interpret our own era by the lights of Shakespeare.

If the contributions collected here share a common view, it is that artworks and practices are not examples or instantiations of theoretical insights achievable in the absence of aesthetic experience. Art is not regarded as
the embodiment of some nonartistic problem or issue that is “really” under discussion—social history, political events, or cultural facts. Art is the issue. Art is not the passive mirror for already established sociohistorical realities, but a fundamental matrix through which social reality is established, brought into being.

Victoria Kahn’s essay, “Allegory, Poetic Theology, and Enlightenment Aesthetics,” argues that this qualified autonomy of the aesthetic was not just the product of Enlightenment thought. It was also the achievement of allegory or what she calls “the history of reading.” Kahn shows how allegory as a mode of reading classical and Christian texts, in antiquity and through the Middle Ages, produced competing heritages—scriptural and classical, theological and literary—to which Renaissance writers and readers were forced to respond. Inasmuch as Christian and classical texts could no longer be read as somehow compatible with one another—the way that, for instance, Dante had managed to fit Virgil into the cosmology of the Divina commedia—the question of how to read these competing traditions became ever more pressing. Kahn argues that this produced a heightened self-awareness about the very process of reading and writing—of the position of the reader vis-à-vis texts and traditions now construed as having somewhat incompatible aims and origins, and hence as having historical, not divine, origins. As a result, “a new concept of literary reading as inseparable from the artist’s and reader’s own hermeneutical activity” took shape.

Rachel Eisendrath’s contribution, “Object Lessons: Reification and Renaissance Epitaphic Poetry,” looks at the same shift away from classical and Christian modes of interpretation in Renaissance writings. Like Kahn, she focuses on the emergent distinction between interpreting subject and interpreted object, but she does so from the perspective of the fault line between aesthetic experience and materiality, especially as taken up by Theodor Adorno’s survey of Enlightenment aesthetic thought. Eisendrath aims to show how processes of objectification and reification—in particular, the reification of the scholarly object or piece of historical evidence (as discussed in section 4 above)—are undermined by the status attained by art objects since the Renaissance. She considers different poetic and visual artworks that portray the rape of Lucrece—in particular, epitaphic poetry—as “reified objects” that “undo that reification from within.” Rather than collapse subjective experience into objects, Eisendrath argues, art creates objects through which subjectivity can emerge. In this way, she demonstrates how Renaissance poetics presages a critique of Enlightenment, akin to Adorno’s own, avant la lettre.
Andrew Cutrofello’s “How Do We Recognize Metaphysical Poetry?” likewise turns common narratives about the obsolescence of seventeenth-century poetics on its head. We tend to think that the rise of early modern natural philosophy required a whole new conception of “knowledge”—“one based not on resemblance but on the systematic representation of identities and differences” and the making of determinate judgments—and hence required the supersession of a poetic view of the world that was rooted in witty comparison, imaginative thinking, and the binding together of the most heterogeneous elements. However, building on Paul de Man’s claim for the modern importance of poetic allegory as distinct from symbolism (a claim consonant with Kahn’s essay, mentioned above), Cutrofello argues that the purported supersession of poetic humanism by modern science—or the gulf between materiality and subjective freedom—is best explained by metaphysical poets such as Shakespeare and Donne, whose work achieves a unification of aesthetic experience and truth.

The next two essays continue this examination of Shakespeare, but from the point of view of two philosophers, Herder and Hegel, whose work stems from what both recognized in Shakespeare: perhaps our fullest artistic expression of modernity as an ongoing predicament. Kristin Gjesdal’s essay, “Literature, Prejudice, Historicity: The Philosophical Importance of Herder’s Shakespeare Studies,” challenges the notion that modern hermeneutics develops out of romantic philosophy and its reaction to the ahistorical thinking of the Enlightenment. Although she locates hermeneutics in the Enlightenment tradition of German eighteenth-century philosophy, she turns not to the transcendental philosophy of Kant but to the early work of Johann Gottfried Herder on Shakespeare. And while Gjesdal’s account of the origins of modern hermeneutics contrasts with Kahn’s in virtue of this emphasis on Herder, like Kahn she also situates the beginnings of modern aesthetics and interpretation, not in the transcendental conditions of possibility for judging touted by some eighteenth-century philosophers (and the critics who follow them), but in an engagement with the historically particular artistic practices of the early modern era.

My own contribution, “Reaching Conclusions: Art and Philosophy in Hegel and Shakespeare,” departs from an observed propinquity—in formal presentation, as well as in substance—between the epilogue to Shakespeare’s The Tempest and the concluding words of Hegel’s Lectures on Fine Art. I argue that these two epilogues demonstrably achieve—rather than assert or describe—provisional conclusions to historical practices (art and philosophy) that are, in virtue of such conclusions, attempts to render these practices intelligible from within. I suggest, further, that to bring
an activity to conclusion as part of the activity itself is to stage a test of our freedom and rationality—and, as such, holds clues for understanding the philosophical ambitions that adhere in Hegel’s presentation of art and philosophy as dimensions of what he called “Absolute Spirit” (der absolute Geist), as well as for Shakespeare’s own artistic self-understanding.

Turning to broader discussions of the arts in Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the next essays consider the artistic and philosophical elaboration of concepts that would become fundamental for philosophical aesthetics in the Romantic period: paragone, beauty, and genius. In “‘All Art Constantly Aspires to the Condition of Music’—Except the Art of Music: Reviewing the Contest of the Sister Arts,” Lydia Goehr offers a genealogical reading of this statement of Walter Pater’s, the nineteenth-century art critic, against the background of an older paragone that saw a distinction between the art of music and the condition of music, such that the arts, other than music, could aspire to that condition more fully than the art of music itself. Goehr shows how, via the exemplary art of Renaissance painting—especially Titian’s Flaying of Marsyas—all the arts instrumentalized the condition of music for their own “ends” to raise their status as “Art.”

Maarten Delbeke’s essay, “The Beauty of Architecture at the End of the Seventeenth Century in Paris, Greece, and Rome,” shows how older notions of perfection in the arts—the perception of teleologies of flourishing and progress in art (as in Vasari’s account)—were thrown into crisis by the ornamental excess and stylistic liberties of seventeenth-century architecture and sculpture. Faced with the radical new works of artists such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Francesco Borromini—whose products hardly fit into the artistic telos of Vasari’s Lives—figures such as Bellori and Roland Fréart de Chambray scrambled to shore up what Bellori came to call the “idea” of architecture, a beauty whose ideality and expression of “nature” could be discerned apart from the historicity of specific art practices. Delbeke then shows how the problems and contradictions internal to Bellori’s and Chambray’s approaches compelled Claude and Charles Perrault to challenge Bellori’s “idea” of beauty and to propose instead that beauty was essentially an issue of aesthetic judgment, anticipating a line of thinking that would culminate over a century later in the work of Kant. Last, Delbeke shows how Piranesi’s response to the Perraults revealed an appreciation for the historical development of the arts as a reflection on felt changes in the claims of nature, and in this way to a new appreciation of the medium-specificity of architecture and poetry.
If Bellori recoiled from the Baroque excesses of what was beginning to be called “modern” art, then—as Jon R. Snyder shows in his essay, “Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy”—Emanuele Tesauro’s *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (1654) and Marco Boschini’s *La carta del navegar pitoresco* (1660) exalted the “shock” value in the new arts, seeking to understand the importance of their wit and ingenuity. Tesauro’s work subverts what we have come to see as the splitting of the arts and natural sciences, seeing in the procedures of both—the spontaneous *macchie* (solar flarings) that Galileo observed on the sun, and the *macchie* (drops of paint, spills, splashes) of painterly art—phenomena that should call us to see our own imaginative practices as both the source and limitation of what we objectively know or represent, and hence to see both the arts and the natural sciences as sharing the same practical conditions of possibility. Boschini, for his part, offers a defense of Venetian painting—in polemic contrast to the “imitation of nature” that Vasari saw in Florentine art—by extolling its supersession of the laws of nature in what we might see as proto-Idealist fashion. Boschini sees a negation of nature’s tyranny in Venice itself, in its republican institutions, as well as its subjection of the lagoon to ornate *palazzi* and human-made canals. If the brushstrokes of Titian and Tintoretto can show “that nature is no longer autonomous or original,” then it is also because Venice itself—as the history of art would continue to bear out—has achieved a painterly reality, an objective political and social reality brought into being artistically as if by sheer ingenuity.

The final two essays in the volume take up what might be called the aesthetic or artistic realization of secularity in the modern age. Like Snyder, Anthony J. Cascarci considers what he calls Francisco Goya’s “commitment to invention” as a hard-won achievement, fought against older traditions of religious painting, picturesque naturalism, and late Baroque illusions (as in the large-scale frescos of Tiepolo). In “Goya: Secularization and the Aesthetics of Belief,” Cascarci pursues a discussion of Goya’s religious paintings and a related body of his works that pose questions about the power of belief, both in religious matters and in aesthetic. It is, Cascarci argues, principally within the secular realm that Goya’s critical project takes root, even as Goya seems also to understand that space had to be won before it could be addressed or called into question. Cascarci claims that it was won through a process of secularization that involved, among other things, a recognition of the tensions between aesthetic plausibility and religious belief. All this, Cascarci argues, was expressed artistically in Goya’s use of perspective, composition, and the beholder’s standpoint, all
of which reveal themselves as innerworldly constructions and not as divinely ordained or the products of nature.

The last essay, Jay Bernstein’s “Remembering Isaac: On the Impossibility and Immorality of Faith,” tracks the artistic achievement of secularity through an interpretation of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio’s 1603 Sacrifice of Isaac, and two critical moments in the modern interrogation of faith: First, Descartes’s demonstration that faith is essentially an impossible effort of self-abnegation in the “evil demon doubt” and its resolution in the Cogito, ergo sum, and, second, Kierkegaard’s embrace of the effort of self-abnegation as constitutive of faith—as absurd—in his elaborate reading of the Abraham and Isaac narrative in Fear and Trembling. At the center of Kierkegaard’s account, Bernstein argues, is a logic of sacrifice—of Isaac, of love of the world—the possibility of which depends on writing Isaac out of the narrative. In modernity, according to Bernstein, religion devolves into faith, and faith has at its core a logic of sacrifice. Bernstein sees Caravaggio’s Sacrifice of Isaac as the great modern undoing of myth, religion, and sacrifice though a retelling of the narrative that makes Isaac’s terror its center, and Abraham’s act the murderous one it always was. Holding these two claims together is the relation between canvas and viewer, a relation that Caravaggio transforms from contemplative to ethical. It is this artistic transformation of art and its perception that, Bernstein concludes, vanquishes the religious worldview that depends on the logic of sacrifice and inaugurates secular modernity.

Although our volume comprises only ten entries, we hope it might spark further conversation. Consider, for instance, Rembrandt’s etchings (Figures 1, 2, and 3), along with his 1636 painting, the Sacrifice of Isaac, as part of a response to Caravaggio. In Rembrandt’s 1636 painting, located in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, the angel is depicted as having to physically intervene in order to stop Abraham. As in the 1655 etching (Figure 1), the word of God is not enough—the angel is compelled to hold back Abraham’s arms, to arrest a murderer in the act. Isaac’s face is moreover covered by Abraham’s hand (note, Isaac is blindfolded). Pressing these same issues, Rembrandt also etched the moment of the narrative in which Isaac inquires, “Where is the lamb?” (Figure 2). Here father and son are depicted in conversation, looking at each other.

And then there is Rembrandt’s haunting image of Abraham caressing Isaac (Figure 3), in which Abraham himself looks directly at the viewer. Abraham’s gaze in this last etching seems to pose a direct challenge to anyone who argues (as did the young Hegel) that Abraham does not love,
or “wanted not to love,” his son. After all, the “sacrifice” would not be a sacrifice if the ethical requirement to nurture one’s children had no force. What, then, must we see or acknowledge in order to, as Hegel put it, “leave the ideal for the reality of life,” in order to grasp genuine ethical conflict in its lived concreteness? And how do art, criticism, and philosophy respond to this question?
It is our collective hope that these essays will, both as parts and in their sum, offer programmatic possibilities that vivify early modern (and modern) art’s claims on our thinking, and hence on aesthetic philosophy as it continues today. The last word, we think, should belong neither to the art nor to the philosophy, but to their need for each other, and to the readers’ sense of the depth of that need.
Figure 3. Rembrandt, *Abraham and Isaac*. c. 1637. 116 × 89 mm. Photo credit: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York
1. In this Introduction, I use the term “early modern” as a loose designation, encompassing historical periods that might be seen by some scholars as more properly designated by the Renaissance or the Baroque. However, as I will explain momentarily, I am less concerned with establishing the precise terms or dates for the period in question than I am with signaling the difficulties we have connected to two phenomena: the artworks and practices in Europe in the centuries immediately preceding the rise of aesthetic as a philosophical discipline and the historical rise of that philosophical discipline itself.

2. Rarity does not mean absence. See, for example, M. H. Abrams, “From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and Exemplary Art,” in Doing Things with Texts (New York: Norton, 1989), and Howard Caygill, Art of Judgement (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). Notable recent contributions are John Sallis, Transfigurations: On the True Sense of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), and Sanford Buddick, Kant and Milton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). In Picturing Art History (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), Ingrid Vermeulen argues that art history in the eighteenth century (in Giovanni Bottari, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and Jean-Baptiste Séroux d’Agincourt) came to see the artistic past not in terms of “lives of the artists,” but as a “chain” of artworks in which historical progress can be discerned. Also relevant to the concerns of this volume is Rocco Rubini’s discussion of Paul Oskar Kristeller in The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). In Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Andrei Pop considers Fuseli’s paintings as exemplary of a “pluralist classicism” in dialogue with J. G. Herder, J. J. Winckelmann, and others. (I thank Andrei Pop for his helpful response to a draft of this Introduction. Thanks also to James Porter.)


4. Ibid.

5. This is not to deny that Winckelmann also paid attention to early modern art, or to the art of his period. Winckelmann discusses early modern artists in his “Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture,” in Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), for instance. And Ingrid Vermeulen has shown how Winckelmann’s ideas about Greek art and artistic progress were forged in his encounter with Bartolomeo Cavaceppi’s collections of drawings, including Italian drawings from the mid-fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. See Ingrid Vermeulen, “Wie mit einem Blicke: Cavaceppi’s Collection of
Drawings as Visual Source for Winckelmann’s History of Art,” *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 45 (2003): 77–89; see also her *Picturing Art History*.


7. Ibid., 498.

8. Although other arts—dance, theater, gardening, engraving, opera (and we could now expand the list to include, say, film and animation)—are considered by philosophers from time to time, “the basic notion that the five ‘major arts’ constitute an area all by themselves, clearly separated by common characteristics from the crafts, the sciences and other human activities, has been taken for granted by most writers on aesthetics from Kant to the present day.” Kristeller, “Modern System of the Arts,” 498.


12. “The rising social and cultural claims of the visual arts led in the sixteenth century in Italy to an important new development that occurred in other European countries somewhat later: the three visual arts, painting, sculpture and architecture, were for the first time clearly separated from the crafts with which they had been associated in the preceding period.” Ibid, 514.


17. Ibid.


22. See Guyer’s discussion of Shaftesbury in “Origins of Modern Aesthetics.”

23. Guyer’s recently published three-volume *History of Modern Aesthetics* reflects not only the chronology of the primary sources—starting in the early 1700s—it shares their sense of self-articulation and self-authorization. Guyer devotes no space in the entire three-volume set to a discussion of artworks or practices related to the philosophical work, or discussed by the philosophers, he treats.


26. In Vico’s case, Cartesian rationalism is the primary counterpoint. Of course, later histories of aesthetic thought—most notably Benedetto Croce’s, but also Donald Verene’s, Hayden White’s, and others—show Vico’s consonance with the history of German aesthetic philosophy, too. (Croce even saw Vico as the founder of modern aesthetics.) For a recent discussion of Vico’s significance, going forward, see Rubini, *Other Renaissance*. 
27. As Nuzzo observes, “After Baumgarten, aesthetics as a science of sensibility becomes a discipline that unifies a complex constellation of interests and fields of intellectual inquiry,” which are, in Kant and Herder, parcelled out into what becomes the organization of modern academic fields of inquiry. See Nuzzo, “Hegel’s ‘Aesthetics’ as Theory of Absolute Spirit,” 293–94.


29. *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), viii, my emphasis. (“Plenipotentiary” is, in this context, a term that Bernstein borrows from Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 310.) Bernstein has expounded on this perspective and its roots in Adorno in connection with the history of art since the period under discussion. See his *Against Voluptuous Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Somewhat contrary to the hypothesis motivating this volume, and perhaps in tension with his own contribution to it (see his remarks on Caravaggio in chapter 10), Bernstein’s view there seems to be that issues first articulated philosophically demanded that, next, art itself take a certain path: “If we watch carefully, the path that runs from Lessing to Jena romanticism looks uncannily like the path that runs from artistic modernism to the postmodern art scene of the present. So uncanny is the anticipation that we may feel it tells us more about our artistic and aesthetic present than the present can say for itself.” *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. viii.


34. Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*, cited in Ferris, *Silent Urns*, 21. As the art historian Donald Preziosi has argued, this assumption forms the “conceptual core” of the discipline of modern art history, since it assumes that objects of human manufacture might reveal something about its maker or source (construed, by Winckelmann, to be a society or historical world) that is “time-factored”—tied to some historical development that separates us from that world. See Donald Preziosi, introduction to *The Art of Art History*.


36. Without wading into these thickets, I note (without endorsing) one influential explanation—advanced by Butler and many others since: namely, that post-Lutheran culture instilled in the “Germans” a desire to turn away from the Italianate beauty being cultivated in other parts of Europe, in favor of the soul’s inner salvation. A fuller and more philosophically interesting account—one that deals with the importance of Lutheranism and Christian eschatology to Hegel’s philosophy, but which touches on issues relevant to this present discussion—can be found in Lawrence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially the illuminating discussion in chapter 1.


39. Jon R. Snyder’s contribution to this volume reminds us that Vasari’s history had strong detractors in the intervening years—perhaps none so vocal as Marco Boschini (1613–78) who saw in Venetian Baroque art a justification for the way of life of the Venetian Republic. That this claim anticipates, by analogy, the interpretation of Greece through its art given by Winckelmann will become apparent in the following paragraphs. Unlike Winckelmann’s modern alienation, however, Boschini saw himself as a Venetian through-and-through, as Snyder’s discussion shows.
40. Whence the way in which Vasari frames Florentine art as the conclusion of a development that runs from Gothic art through the rediscovery of classical ideals, uncovered in ruins and in ancient texts, such as those by Pliny. In this sense, Vasari’s work is closer to the sort of progressivist account of world spirit often attributed to Hegel than is Hegel’s own work.

41. As Ingrid Vermeulen has shown, Winckelmann arrived at his views on ancient art through a confrontation with early modern drawings, but the connection Winckelmann detected between the ancient and the early modern was not one of continuity or “tradition,” as in Vasari. See notes 2 and 5, above.


43. One thinks of the famous passage from Henry James’s *A Portrait of a Lady*, in which Isabel Archer contemplates Greek sculptures: “It is impossible, in Rome at least, to look long at the great company of Greek sculptures without feeling the effect of their noble quietude; which, as with a high door closed for the ceremony, slowly drops on the spirit the large white mantle of peace. . . . Isabel sat there a long time, under the charm of their motionless grace, wondering to what, of their experience, their absent eyes were open, and how, to our ears, their alien lips would sound.” Henry James, *A Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Wordsworth, 1996), 263.

44. See the discussion in Preziosi, *Art of Art History*, 4.

45. Which is of course why Winckelmann is so often associated, also, with the emergence of the modern study of classical Greek culture. He challenged himself to be acquainted with as much extra-artistic evidence from Greece as possible: For instance, “Without collecting and uniting (every remaining textual fragment mentioning the artworks) . . . no correct opinion can be formed (of the artworks).” J. J. Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*, trans. G. H. Lodge, 2 vols. (Boston, 1880), 1:300–301.

46. Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61b; see the discussion of this passage in Maarten Delbeke’s contribution to this volume, below.

47. By setting Greece as the historical standard against which art is to be measured, Winckelmann could thus see Etruscan or Egyptian art as immature expressions of what would flower only in classical Athens, and it is why he saw Roman art and society as a derivative phase of Greek art—a view of Rome that has stubbornly persisted in so many quarters.

48. There is, however, the account of the young Winckelmann’s predilection for Greece given by Butler in *Tyranny of Greece over Germany*, 10–15.


51. The way in which such “historical” work also served to institute the very historical fields or periods they set out to investigate or explain has been a topic of much discussion, at least since the publication of Hayden White’s *Metahistory*. “I believe the historian performs an essentially poetic act, in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain ‘what was really happening’ in it.” Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), x. White’s own view of the poetic constitution of historical discourse could well be another “potted history” to add to the four already under consideration here.


53. Each of these biographies, it should be said, exhibits a range of relationships to literary and anecdotal evidence—as well as interesting articulations of those relations. Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the World* (New York: Norton, 2004), for instance, is explicit about the fictional and narrative liberties it takes with respect to the historical evidence. However, these biographies understand themselves to be extending a tradition traceable to, made possible by, an established scholarly connection between Shakespeare-the-man and his historical era.

54. Their influence on major figures in Shakespeare studies in England and North America—starting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and A. C. Bradley, and extended through Northrop Frye and Stanley Cavell—is well known.

55. “Abraham wanted not to love, wanted to be free by not loving . . . even the one love he had, his love for his son, even his hope of posterity . . . could depress him, trouble his all-exclusive heart and disquiet it to such an extent that even this love he once wished to destroy; and his heart was quieted only through the certainty of the feeling that this love was not so strong as to render him unable to slay his beloved son with his own hand.” G. W. F. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate,” in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 185–87.

56. For a compelling interpretation of Kierkegaard’s account of the binding of Isaac, relevant to a reckoning with these images, see Jonathan Lear’s discussion of the “teleological suspension of the ethical,” in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), esp. 92–97.