

# AESTHETICS AND ART HISTORY WRITING IN COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## I. INVENTING ART HISTORY

Classical art historians are faced with an uneasy balancing act. On the one hand, we wish to recognize the difference of the Greek and Roman past from the modern world. On the other hand, one of our common claims as classicists for our discipline's educational value is the fact that contemporary Western concepts of art, also of philosophy or democracy, have their roots in the Greek and Roman world. Both these intellectual positions can potentially entail severe epistemological problems. Emphasizing the continuity between the classical world and our own, we run the danger of flattening the differences and simply projecting modern and inappropriate concepts—such as (arguably) art and aesthetics—onto the ancient world. An insistence on the radical alterity of the classical past might reasonably suggest that there was no concept of “art as such” in the classical world, and that the referent of the term “aesthetics” was very different in antiquity than in the modern West. Yet such a stance entails its own set of problems: if concepts of “art” and “aesthetics” are anachronistic in relation to the classical past, how exactly as classical art historians are we to identify what remains (material or textual) from the past as proper objects of “art-historical inquiry,” and what aspects of them (if not their “aesthetic” features) are proper objects of art-historical discourse?

This paper explores these issues by looking more explicitly at the similarities and differences between ancient and modern practices of art appreciation and art history writing in their institutional and cultural contexts.

In particular, it seeks to trace how classical antique practices and concepts of art history and criticism were transformed from the Italian Renaissance to the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this comparison, two arguments are developed. First, that while the specific cultural meanings attributed to practices of art collecting and art criticism are significantly different (as are certain features of their institutional settings), nevertheless, these are simply variant specifications of parallel practices marked by a range of family resemblances. These family resemblances render the ancient and modern practices mutually intelligible. Second, that notwithstanding their distinctive cultural background, such apparently specifically modern and Western concepts as art and aesthetics can be analytically defined in such a way as to be applicable to the expressive visual culture (in short, the art) of other cultural traditions without serious danger of distorting their specific character.

There is, of course, every reason why we might, as the organizers of this conference panel originally suggested, wish to be wary of the concept “art.” Classicists are extraordinarily adept at finding anticipations of modern concepts in ancient texts, particularly when they adopt a history of ideas approach, like Gerald Watson’s account of *phantasia* as a concept with a future, namely creative imagination, or William Childs’ assertion that Plato had to all intents and purposes discovered the autonomy and specific character of art, but was just unable to find the right argument to legitimate such autonomy—namely the concept of creativity developed in the Renaissance.<sup>2</sup> The danger of such approaches is two-fold. First, as explications of both ancient and modern ideas, they fail adequately to take account of the ways in which ideas are embedded in institutions and sets of practices that are partly constitutive of their meaning. Second, and as an entailment of this, rather limited parallelisms drawn purely on the basis of ideas are then used to project much broader connotations and sets of practices from the present onto the past. This is perhaps the most problematic component of our inheritance from the eighteenth century. It is well exemplified by

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1 This article represents a very succinct summary of arguments developed in Tanner 2005 and 2006, to which readers are referred for a more detailed unpacking of the issues and discussion of relevant primary and secondary sources.

I am very grateful to Verity Platt and Michael Squire for organizing the APA/AIA session, as well as for very helpful comments on drafts of my paper, as also to all the participants for an extremely stimulating morning. *Arethusa*’s reader helped me clarify key points of the argument. I am indebted to Vicky Colman for help in obtaining the pictures from D’Hancarville’s publication of Hamilton’s vase collection.

2 Watson 1988, criticized in Platt 2009 and forthcoming; Childs 1994.

the publication of Sir William Hamilton's collection of Attic pots in which D'Hancarville's text and the specially prepared engravings that accompanied it encourage us to see the images from pots as free-paintings, uncannily anticipatory of their Renaissance successors (Vickers 1987; figures 20–22). This framework has, of course, spawned a veritable industry of vase-painting studies particularly concerned with attribution and with the narrating of a history of vase-painting in terms of the discoveries and mutual influences of great masters. Perhaps the most disastrous instance of this phenomenon has occurred in relation to early bronze-age marble figurines from the Cyclades. Here the use of techniques of connoisseurship, in themselves questionable when applied to this kind of object, and the invention of named masters—the Goulandris Master and so on—has served, wittingly or unwittingly, to stimulate the market for these objects and to fuel the orgy of looting that has destroyed the very sites that might have afforded us some real contextual understanding of their original social and cultural significance (Gill and Chippindale 1993; cf. also above, pp. 140–41).

Against this background, it is difficult not to have some sympathy with those who wish to anathematize the concept of art and replace it with something apparently more objective and less evaluative like “visual culture” (Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1994, Herbert 2003; cf. Squire 2009.79–87). This seems to me a mistake, at least in the way the move has been attempted in recent art history (cf. Neer, this volume). Visual culture is, of course, one perfectly legitimate analytic cut through culture as a whole, but there is plenty of visual culture that is not “art” and that functions in certain respects in a quite different way than visual art (Kemp 2000). We do not expect our oncologists, for example, to adjust the slides made from our biopsies to suit the mood of a consultation: shades of gray and black to suggest the imminence of the grim reaper or more sunny tones, oranges and yellows, if you are to be given the all clear; the production and reading of such slides has a *cognitive* function rather than an *expressive-aesthetic* one, namely to facilitate the clearest possible vision of the character of the tissues in question, to identify the extent and nature of disease, and thus what kind and intensity of remedial therapy might be required. Conversely, there is plenty of non-visual culture that functions in strongly analogous ways to visual art, whether the verbal arts or music. The attraction of the concept of art is that it groups together these cultural practices in distinctive media that we intuitively, and I would argue correctly, group together on the basis of a certain functional relatedness.

I think the problem lies, however, not in the use of the concept

“art” per se, but in the failure to specify the concept in a sufficiently careful manner, retaining what is analytically useful, whilst dispensing with some of the connotations that we might think of as being specific to the cultural history of the modern West. In my book, I seek to do this through utilizing Talcott Parsons’s concept of art as *expressive symbolism* (Tanner 2006.20–21). An expressive symbol is any act or object that stands for the attitude or feelings of one individual towards another and thereby mediates the affective component of an interaction. In sufficiently complex systems of interaction, the expressive strands may become *differentiated* from other strands, leading to the development of actions with a purely or primarily expressive meaning, then to a specialized concern with the production of objects specifically designed for the communication of expressive meanings. What we call works of art are simply highly differentiated expressive symbols: for example, a portrait of a leader that is designed to inculcate feelings of dependence and loyalty on the part of the ruled. The production of objects with a primarily expressive function may date back to the emergence of modern humans, certainly to the Paleolithic period, although such objects, like cave paintings or “Venus” figurines, seem to have been embedded in contexts of religious practice or of social exchange related to the formation of kinship networks (Mithen 1997.171–210, Gamble 1991). Analytically speaking, the producers of such objects were in terms of our theoretical scheme “artists,” though the production of such artifacts may have been only one amongst a number of roles they performed, and they would not have thought of themselves in terms of the specific cultural values we associate with the term artist today. The emergence of the role of artist as the term is understood today represents an extremely specialized concern with the expressive culture of a highly differentiated social system, where art is perceived as a value in its own right, and the most highly esteemed forms of art are produced for consumption within the institution of art rather than bespoke to institutions—whether social or religious—whose primary functions are not expressive-aesthetic. For our purposes today, an obviously key issue is exactly where we would place classical “artists” on this spectrum between embeddedness and autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

The structure and functioning of an autonomous system of the

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3 I return to this issue in section IV of my paper in relation to Robin Osborne’s discussion of signing.

arts represents a qualitatively different level of *differentiation* than that of the production of art objects that remain embedded in other social institutions. Performing or responding to a Bach Mass in a church, in the context of a religious service, is an act of a different order than listening to it during a concert in a concert hall.<sup>4</sup> In the context of a religious service, the music serves to articulate and intensify the congregation's (believers) emotional experience of a liturgy and their attachment to the religious narratives and teachings that inform that liturgy. In the context of the concert hall, the performance of the mass is detached from a liturgical context, and the music appreciated by its audience for its more purely musical qualities quite irrespective of whether or not they have any belief in Christianity (McCormick 2006). The way in which Picasso's portrait of Kahnweiler circulated within the institutional networks of the modernist art world of the early twentieth century might be said to be comparably functionally parallel but institutionally different from the way in which portraits like that of the Tivoli general circulated in the context of the social and political frameworks of late republican Rome. Of course, the Greeks and Romans did not have a concept of expressive symbolism, any more than they did of art, but this objection seems to me a bit of a red herring. They had no concept of the economy, but we are able to recognize analytically the economic dimensions of ancient societies, and even, it can be argued, analyze certain economic processes within the ancient economy that would have been beyond the scope of contemporaries' understanding (see Osborne and Porter, this volume).

One of the major attractions of Parsons's approach is that it provides a basis for understanding the development of the specific meanings of our modern analytical vocabulary—concepts of art, economy, society, etc.—in the eighteenth century as part and parcel of the differentiation of these different domains as relatively autonomous social subsystems or cultural institutions. It also provides a measure for gauging the degree of similarity or difference of the core institutions of art in two or more societies, at least in terms of degrees of differentiation. It does not, however, pretend to offer a fully historical account of the character and development of ancient or modern art institutions.

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4 This line of argument I develop in section II of this article, with a more specific focus on visual art, in a discussion of Verity Platt's contribution.

This is where Max Weber's comparative sociology of culture, and in particular the concept of *rationalization*, seem to me to be particularly helpful (Tanner 2006.21–29). To say that a particular institutional domain is rationalized, in Weber's terms, or differentiated, in Parsons's terms, is not to claim that it is independent in a concrete way from its host society, merely that its modes of interdependence with other institutional domains are such that it maintains a high degree of autonomy, organized in terms of its own constitutive values—for example, educationally oriented values in the case of a university, as opposed to market or business oriented ones. Weber distinguishes between formal rationalization, the systematic organization of a domain of life in terms of its own inner logic, and substantive rationalization, which systematically orders action in a particular domain in accordance with certain value premises not intrinsic to it. In both cases, rationalization or its absence is not a discrete variable but a continuous one; we are always concerned with questions of the level or degree of rationalization, not its presence or absence. Furthermore, processes of substantive and formal rationalization can be interwoven in both sociologically and culturally quite complex and even contradictory ways. Although characterized by significant parallels, the scope of artistic rationalization and the character of the rationalized institutions of art in antiquity and the modern world were significantly different. These differences can be explained, first, by the differing social attributes of the groups and institutions that are the sponsors and bearers of a differentiated artistic culture, and second, by the cultural—ultimately religious—thematics that informed the construction of a differentiated artistic culture and artistic institutions (Tanner 2005).

In classical Greece, the attempts of artists, from Polykleitos to Apelles, to secure social esteem and professional autonomy through writing theoretical treatises about their art were limited both by the civic ideals of the polis and by the partly intrinsic, partly culturally specific, tensions between their investment in the rationalization of expressive-aesthetic culture and the investment of contemporary intellectuals, most notably Plato, in the emancipation of rational and philosophical thought from other strands of traditional culture in which it had been embedded (Tanner 2005.185–87, 2006.141–204). In the Renaissance, by contrast, visual artists and humanists seem to have been better able to form an alliance, in part around the shared project of the revival of antiquity. In recycling the claims that classical artists had made to status, their Renaissance counterparts subtly transformed them by refiguring the notion of the craftsman, the Platonic *demiourgos*, on the model of the Christian God, capable of infinite creativity. This lent

the role of visual artist a strong charisma, on a level with and in certain respects independent of the claims to status made by intellectuals and philosophers linked to the rational intellect. It achieved institutional recognition with the establishment, under the leadership of Vasari, of the Florentine Academy, inaugurated at the funeral of Michelangelo. In the eulogy, Vasari drew an explicit analogy between the creative powers of God and those of the great artist, claiming the “reverence and love” due to one who manifested such powers for visual artists in general (Tanner 2005.187–91, Summers 1981). The interest of states in sponsoring such institutions, a marked contrast to classical Greece, was linked to the suitability of Academies as an organizational form for increasingly absolutist states seeking to develop teams of highly trained artists capable of meeting such states’ needs for self-projection through very complex monumental allegorical narrative paintings, such as those of Raphael in the Vatican (Tanner 2005.188, Kempers 1992.251–74).

Hellenistic-Roman high culture and modern Western high culture share certain structural characteristics—the insistence on an extensive formal aesthetic vocabulary, a knowledge of artists’ names and of the history of the development of styles, as the *sine qua non* of a cultivated engagement with art—but they differ in terms of the character of the aesthetic sensibility that accompanied such cultivated viewing (Tanner 2005.190–95, 2006.1–11, 205–76). Notwithstanding the importance of A. G. Baumgarten’s articulation of the concept of “the aesthetic” and J. J. Winckelmann’s development of a more systematically historical orientation towards art, eighteenth-century developments in certain key respects are continuous with and elaborations upon those of the Renaissance. The idea of the artist and the work of art as objects of disinterested love, on the model of the love of God, facilitated the transfer into eighteenth-century aesthetic thought of Pietist salvation theology, which stressed the subjective experience of God’s grace manifested in feelings of love and sympathy for God and one’s fellow men. In a secularized form, this sensibility was characteristic of the modern aesthetic ethos developed by key eighteenth-century aesthetic thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Karl Philipp Moritz, who were educated in Pietist milieux. Feeling was placed at the center of an adequate aesthetic response rather than the intellect, *intellegere*, characteristic of Hellenistic-Roman high cultural discourses, which were shaped by a commitment to logos or reason as the paramount cultural value.

The Hellenistic and Roman periods saw the creation of spaces—picture galleries and sculpture gardens—that lent themselves to aestheticizing

and cultivated modes of viewing, distinct from the political and religious settings characteristic of the classical period (Tanner 2006.264–75).<sup>5</sup> Some sculpture and painting was expropriated from its original contexts and displayed anew in picture galleries or sculpture gardens associated with temples or theatres, dedicated from the spoils of war. Whilst they could be the object of a specifically aesthetic gaze, as exemplified by Pliny's discussion of many such objects in *Natural History* Books 34–36, the objects chosen often had a thematic political or religious relevance to their context, folding them back into more traditional embedded modes of viewing. Settings and displays that were materially structured to encourage an autonomously aesthetic gaze seem to have been largely restricted to the private sphere (Bartman 1991).

Very similar patterns of display characterize the collections of gentlemen amateurs of the eighteenth century, but from the creation of the Louvre in the late eighteenth century, states became increasingly invested in creating specialized public contexts for the display of art, namely museums, autonomous from the religious settings for which much of it had originally been created (Tanner 2005.192–95). Historical displays of the development of art, from antiquity to the modern age, helped to define the national culture that replaced the divine right of kings as the basis of the legitimacy of modern states (Duncan and Wallach 1980, McClellan 1984). The interest of the state in defining this national cultural heritage, and mediating it to its citizens, in part explains the markedly greater scope and intensity of the rationalization of art in the modern West compared with classical antiquity.

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5 Here I would take issue with Michael Squire's characterization of my account of ancient *pinacothecai* as "modernizing" (in his footnotes 8–10). My account of how such ancient settings were adapted to rhetorical modes of viewing, and the inculcation of a rationalist sensibility, specifically points to ways such settings differed from characteristically modern displays (more insistently historicizing) and the sensibility the latter are designed to inculcate (more deeply expressive)—a comparison I develop at greater length in Tanner 2005. It is worth noting that Pliny (*HN* 36.27) specifically talks about the need for quiet in looking at pictures and examining them in detail (discussed Tanner 2006.210), a characteristic of cultivated viewing that Squire seems to suggest (n. 10) is purely modern. Notwithstanding the subtlety of Squire's analysis, in classifying my approach as modernizing, he seems to me to miss the point of what the comparative sociological framework achieves. In particular by privileging "difference," he flattens the ability to talk about both similarity and difference in the analytically nuanced way that a comparative and institutional approach permits. The value of the approach based on Weber and Parsons, and their concepts of differentiation and rationalization, is to avoid the fallacies of misplaced concreteness characteristic of primitivist and modernizing accounts.



I would only half agree with the suggestion in this panel's original call for papers that the eighteenth-century notion of an autonomous aesthetic realm is fundamentally alien to ancient thought and practice. "Ancient thought and practice" is not a unity, but undergoes substantial historical development between, say, the beginning of the classical period and the end of the Hellenistic period (and indeed beyond). Certain modes of orientation to art characteristic of the Hellenistic period—art collecting, connoisseurship, the writing of histories of painting and sculpture, for example—bear a family resemblance to contemporary practices of connoisseurship and art history writing, not least for the very good reason that they are genetically related to them through the continuous process of the reappropriation of classical thought on art and painting that began in the Italian Renaissance. Equally, they are importantly different: first, by virtue of the dominant religious or cosmological orientations that inform them, and, second, by virtue of the character of the social groups and organizations that were the bearers of these orientations.<sup>6</sup>

The attraction of the kind of comparative sociological approach that I have tried to develop is that rather than simply assimilating past and present, or asserting their fundamental difference, one can try to cash out in an analytically quite systematic way the similarities and differences that characterize ancient and modern institutions, and the causes of those similarities and differences, not just as reified and closed entities—"the" ancient world and "the" modern world—but as cultural and social systems developing in time. How well does this approach hold up in the light of the alternative approaches—and in some cases the substantively different arguments—presented by other contributors to this symposium? In what follows, I have chosen to focus on these questions in relation to just three particular issues, exploring each issue thematically but also in relation to the particular contributions of this volume: the question of religion (responding especially to Verity Platt), aesthetic autonomy (in response to James Porter), and the status of the artist (in answer to Robin Osborne).

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6 This is what is meant by "interpenetration" in Parsons's terms: themes drawn from philosophical religion, specifically Stoicism (Tanner 2006.236–46), inform the thematics of elite aesthetic discourse in the Greek world just as ideas ultimately drawn from Christianity do in the secularized high cultural discourses of the modern West (concepts of creativity, the love of art, etc.). But such discourses and the practices of viewing they inform are not as such religious, and the institution of art is not subject to heteronomous religious controls.

## II. RELIGION, RATIONALIZATION, AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Both of the editors take issue with my claim that, as a result of the processes of rationalization I describe, the Hellenistic-Roman world saw “the production of art with a rather purely aesthetic and art historical orientation” (Tanner 2006.302). Such art seems to me to be well exemplified by the San Ildefonso group of the late first century B.C. This statue group puts together Polykleitos’s Westmacott Athlete (fifth century B.C.) and Praxiteles’ Sauroktonos (fourth century B.C.), retaining the distinctive period posture of each statue whilst harmonizing the modelling of their bodies, thus creating a new confection specifically designed for the art historically informed viewing of contemporary connoisseurs. More specifically, Squire and Platt question the extent to which autonomous viewing was institutionalized in ways comparable with the modern art world. In his introduction, Michael Squire invokes the example of Apelles’ *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, celebrated as an autonomous work of art in a series of ekphrastic epigrams, on the one hand, but then, after being expropriated as political booty, commodified, purchased, and reinserted in a specifically religious context, a temple dedicated to Julius Caesar, to whose divine ancestry the painting could be seen to allude. Squire infers that the range of institutional contexts through which the painting could move, and the corresponding range of discourses it could incite, indicate the “world of difference” (more fundamental?) that lies “behind” the (superficial?) resemblances between ancient and modern modes of art history (above pp. 148–52).

These are good points, and one should certainly not assume that the development of art-historical discourses and modes of viewing, completely displaced other, more socially embedded modes.<sup>7</sup> But this is also true of the

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7 In this respect, I would prefer to call my approach “developmental” rather than “evolutionary” (cf. Lidz 2005) as Michael Squire describes it—since the latter seems to imply selection and elimination of less culturally advanced practices. I am happy for my approach to be characterized as narrative and developmental for two reasons. First, any account of “change” seems to me to be necessarily narrative on some level; only if there is no change, will there be no narrative (Sewell 2005.81–123). Second, the process of change is directional and path dependent, that is to say, certain later elements of the process are shaped and conditioned by elements that went before: there would have been no art history writing had it not been preceded by the development of art theory, which laid the foundations on which the practice of art history writing was built; further, the character of ancient art theory and history writing significantly shaped the character of their modern successors.

modern world. Take, for example, the painting of *The Adoration of the Magi* in the chapel of King's College, Cambridge. For many (perhaps most) visitors to the chapel, the painting—as also the Early English architecture of the chapel—is viewed primarily as a work of art, a manifestation of the genius and technical virtuosity of Rubens; certainly this is the engagement cued by the pamphlets and guidebooks sold to visitors on entry to the chapel. The painting also circulates within relatively purely art-historical frameworks when on loan for Rubens exhibitions or reproduced in monographs on the artist. At 3.30 pm every afternoon on weekdays, however, the painting is reframed, religiously: (paying) tourists are requested to leave the chapel in order to permit the appropriate atmosphere for those who wish to participate in an act of worship (free admission). In this context, of course, the painting, as altarpiece, serves to lend dignity to and intensifies the affective experience of the rituals performed in front of it, with varying degrees of focus linked to the liturgical calendar. Perhaps the closest keying of *The Adoration of the Magi* with a specifically religious frame comes in the Christmas carol service, for which the painting has a particularly intimate relevance made use of with close shots of motifs from the painting by the BBC film crews at appropriate moments in the service broadcast all over the world to viewers engaging with variably religious and aesthetic interest depending on their own beliefs.

The development of an autonomous realm of art does not wholly displace embedded modes of viewing in either classical antiquity or the modern West; in both cases, there are interesting shifts, crossovers, and conflations between these modes of reception and framing. These are explored in a particularly illuminating fashion by Verity Platt in her contribution to this volume and more comprehensively in her forthcoming monograph on epiphany. She shows how this kind of sophisticated and knowing play at the boundaries between divine epiphany as aesthetically mediated religious experience and divine epiphany as a kind of specifically artistic genre, a component of a highly self-referential and historically self-conscious literary and painterly tradition, was a central and characteristic component of elite intellectual culture in the Hellenistic-Roman world (Platt 2002a and forthcoming). Although I do not give much attention to these boundary crossings in my account, I do not think their existence is inconsistent with my general argument, in particular insofar as I suggest that the scope of the institutionalization of autonomous art was more limited in antiquity than in the modern West.

The elements of Stoic theology that informed ancient art-historical

discourse (Tanner 2006.236–46) offered an affordance to intellectuals like Dio Chrysostom who sought to repair the contradictions between traditional religion and the kind of secular art-historical consciousness represented by the likes of Pliny.<sup>8</sup> But in repairing those contradictions and resuturing art to religion, Dio Chrysostom was operating on a much higher level of cultural generalization or abstraction than that which characterized traditional civic religion. The accomplishment of viewing Pheidian statuary in these new terms, exemplified by Dio's Olympian oration, took place in a highly literary, intellectualized space rather different from the kinds of embodied and ritualized viewings characteristic of engagement with cult statues in classical Greece. The formulation of these new kinds of syntheses between art and religion, explored in detail in Platt forthcoming, were predicated on the initial separation of art as such from traditional religion marked by the invention of art history writing and the creation of the institution of cultivated viewing that I discuss in chapter 5 of my book (2006.205–76).

Platt and I may differ a little on the degree to which we believe that ekphrastic epigrams like those of Archias or Julian of Egypt imply a serious religious engagement in their discussion of Aphrodite's (or other deities') epiphanies. For Pliny, who specifically dismisses traditional anthropomorphic conceptions of the gods as puerile fantasies (*HN* 2.13–17), one assumes his reading of such epigrams would have been pretty much purely aesthetic, the religious material simply a means for literary and aesthetic play. Where we do not know the religious commitments of an individual, the level of religious investment we should read into such poems is indeterminable. In fact, just as today, we should make allowance for the fact that in different contexts and different occasions, the same individual could engage with a statue or painting—the *Anadyomene*, the Knidia, *The Adoration of the Magi*—as the occasion for a purely aesthetic experience or as an affordance in the aesthetic mediation of religious experience, dependent upon context

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8 The notion of “cultural contradictions,” their activation, repression, and repair, I take from Margaret Archer's 1988 account of culture and agency. Archer emphasizes that while no cultural system is perfectly integrated, it requires social actors to activate potential contradictions between different components in the cultural repertoire of a society (as Stilpo does in relation to the Athena Parthenos, see below), so also to repress potential contradictions (the Areopagus versus Stilpo), repair them (like Dio Chrysostom, repairing the contradiction between religious viewing and cultivated art-historical viewing, discussed further below), or elaborate complementarities (cf. Tanner 2006.298). Archer's approach helps to further specify the character of the processes Weber discusses under the rubric “rationalization.”

and occasion. That is not to say that there is no development or change: the critical discourses and material settings that afford specifically aesthetic experience (sculpture gardens, the kinds of picture galleries we encounter in Roman paintings) did not exist prior to the Hellenistic period, so that even if such experience was in theory possible—as Porter rightly insists—there were few cultural or material resources to sustain it or facilitate its elaboration, let alone to permit its transmission or sharing as a component of a widely shared group *habitus* in Pierre Bourdieu's terms. On the contrary, incipient elaborations might be repressed as an affront to traditional religious sensibilities, as the fourth-century philosopher Stilpo discovered when he sought to attribute the paternity of the Parthenos to Pheidias rather than Zeus (Diogenes Laertius 2.116, Tanner 2006.53–54). One of the great strengths of Platt's contribution, however, lies in its exploration of the intersections between artistic and religious rationalization, and, in particular, how the apparent cultural contradictions between a rationalist concept of art as art—perhaps best exemplified by Pliny or Stilpo—and traditional religious culture were explored, negotiated, and, in some specific contexts at least, partially resolved. Platt's most telling example of the latter is the case of the cult images commissioned from Damophon of Messene in the second century B.C. (Platt forthcoming). Inscriptions encountered by the viewer on entering the sanctuary of Asclepius at Messene drew attention to the *theosebeia* of the artist, thus validating the religious character of the viewing experience in the same move as celebrating Damophon's individual artistry. That said, as Platt demonstrates, the problematic boundary between art object and cult object, between artistic fiction and religious manifestation, remains a preoccupation of ekphrastic writing until late antiquity.

There are, in fact, good sociological reasons for why this playing with boundaries might be more salient in ancient art-historical culture than modern, and, in particular, as Platt shows, why this play focuses so much on the art/religion boundary and epiphanic experience. The creation of art museums in the modern West was intimately related to the development of modern states and concepts of citizenship as part of the long-term social and cultural rationalizations tied up with the Enlightenment project. In this respect, both the states and the museums they sponsored had a radically secular character. A number of the most important museums—the Louvre, the Prado—owe much of their contents to the expropriation of the artistic wealth of the church by radically secular revolutionary states (McClellan 1984, Tomlinson 1997.162–63). Much of this art had originally functioned in similar ways, and on a similar level of cultural abstraction,

to the comparably embedded political and religious art of antiquity, intensifying the experience and commitment of the faithful in the context of church rituals through compelling representations of biblical narratives, for example. When reframed in the context of the new museum collections sponsored by the state, such images were incorporated into the narratives of the autonomous progress of artistic traditions with which we are familiar, celebrating art, the individual, and nation. Such displays, of course, operated to inculcate values consonant with those of modern bourgeois society and hence to legitimate the modern state (Duncan and Wallach 1980). But such legitimation operates on a greater level of abstraction than the specific religious and political messages embedded in the art of the *ancien régime* or Roman historical reliefs like those of the Ara Pacis or Trajan's Arch at Benevento. It presupposes a commitment and obligation to the value of art in itself as part of the nation's cultural heritage in some degree of abstraction from the specific visual messages particular works might communicate (McClellan 1984).

In classical antiquity, by contrast, traditional civic religion, and the ruler cults built on its model, remained absolutely central in legitimating the political and social hierarchies on which the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Roman state were based (see Gordon 1990 for an especially good discussion of the role of state religious art in this context). Most of the art produced was concerned to shape and intensify affective commitments to traditional religious representations (or new ones formulated on a comparable level of cultural abstraction like Mithraism) and to established forms of social and political relations, notably through the use of honorific portraiture. Such functions of art were fundamentally similar to those characteristic of the cult statues and portrait statues I analyze in chapters 2 and 3 of *The Invention of Art History*. Autonomous art—whether in the form of statues like the Ildefonso group or classical paintings that had been expropriated from their original religious context to be displayed in the *pinacotheca* of a wealthy Roman—was, of course, a phenomenon of great cultural and some social significance. But it remained a marginal phenomenon by comparison with the overwhelming preponderance of art production and consumption in the Roman world—cult statues, portraits, funeral monuments, and so on. This continued to be embedded in institutional realms that did not attribute primacy to the aesthetic, even if sometimes visual tropes informed by a specifically art-historical consciousness could cross into and inform them, for example, in some funerary monuments that quote past art in a very self-conscious way (Tanner 2006.292–97). In short, the institutional weight of

autonomous art institutions is much greater in the modern world than it was in the Hellenistic-Roman world: it is the norm against which other uses of expressive-aesthetic culture—from political monuments to advertising—are defined. By contrast, in the ancient world, the institutional weight always lay with art embedded in religious institutions, where the experience of epiphany played a central role.

Unpacking *and trying to explain* the kinds of interactions between the various distinctive types of religious culture—Stoic theology, civic religion, neo-Platonisms, etc.—that existed in the Hellenistic-Roman world, and the interactions between them and art, both in its more autonomous and its more embedded manifestations, is a formidably complex challenge. But I do not see how we can meet this challenge successfully without attention to the social bases of these phenomena—groups and institutions—since it is these that mediate and shape the interactions between different cultural systems and sets of cultural practices.

### III. THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF AN ILLUSION? INSTITUTIONALIZING THE AUTONOMY OF ART

It is also in my insistence on a focus on institutions that I would part company with James Porter, although very much sharing his belief that the categories of art and aesthetics are relevant to the analysis of classical antiquity, and also his emphasis on “the roles of the senses . . . in the production and consumption of ancient art” (above p. 170) as a key and perhaps still undeveloped focus for research. Indeed, such a focus is logically entailed by Parsons’s concept of art as expressive symbolism, emphasizing as it does the sensuous bases of affective communication.<sup>9</sup> Porter’s argument concerning autonomy seems to me to comprise three strands. First, the writers P. O. Kristeller invokes do not, when properly understood, develop any notion of the Fine Arts as separate from religion or morality. Second, the very idea of aesthetic autonomy is “logically and pragmatically incoherent” (above p. 168). Third, the notion of aesthetic autonomy is a kind of “illusion” generated in reductive academic summaries of Kant in the

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9 Cf. Tanner 2006.89–92 on cult statues, naturalism, and the manipulation of sensory experience; 116–34 on the anchoring of the aesthetic evaluative vocabulary applied to portraiture in a practical sensibility, grounded in the civic *paideia* (athletic, military) characteristic of classical Greek city-states.

period between 1790 and 1951 (the date of the publication of Kristeller's essay), which, as illusions, have no relevance to the real world and consequently "need not concern anyone who is interested in the aesthetics of Greco-Roman antiquity" (above p. 180).

Whilst Porter's 2009 criticisms of Kristeller's treatment of at least one of his sources (Batteaux) is compelling, I find his larger argument, particularly the second and third steps, unpersuasive. The logical or philosophical incoherence of ideas is no guarantee that they will not have real institutional effects. Both the concept of the Fine Arts and the norm of the autonomy of art were central components in the creation of the institutions of the modern art world in Porter's period of obscurity (1790–1951). Autonomy in these contexts does not mean that art has no relation to morality or religion.<sup>10</sup> Rather, art recognized as a sphere of value in its own right is no longer subject to moral and religious regulation, as, of course, it was in classical Athens, *ancien régime* Europe, and in societies like Nazi Germany, where the differentiated institutional arrangements that had hitherto protected artistic freedoms (academies and the like) were collapsed or co-opted to permit direct state control.

Much of the history of the development of art institutions between the late eighteenth century and today has been precisely concerned with articulating a) what counts as "fine art" and is therefore subject to protection against undue moral, religious, or political interference; and b) creating the legal and institutional frameworks that guarantee such autonomy.

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10 The key point is that autonomy does not entail a radical separation between art and religion, or morality, for example, but rather new modes of interrelationship involving self-regulation and interpenetration rather than the subordination of one cultural realm to another. Both Porter and Osborne make the argument that art is always sociologically embedded. On one level this is obviously right: the production and consumption of art always depends on specific social arrangements that significantly shape the character of the art produced and the experiences and effects entailed by its consumption. But in other respects, their formulation seems to me unhelpful. The concept "embedded" implies its counterpart, "disembedded" or "autonomous," whether we are talking about ancient art or the ancient economy. The difficulty with arguing that either the economy (including the modern economy) or art (including modern art) is always by definition embedded is that the concept "embedded" itself then loses any analytical meaning or value—since there is no state of affairs that one can imagine to contrast with it. I discuss this in more detail, and with more adequate space for exploring the key conceptual issues, in Tanner 2005. A different account of how art is (socially) sustained as an autonomous field in the modern world is offered by Bourdieu 1996, again emphasizing that autonomy, as a social construct, is real, if explaining autonomy, and interpreting its entailments in a rather different way than mine.



In both Europe and America, there was discussion of what kind of cultural production counted as fine art: when engravers were deemed, unlike painters, not to be fine artists, they lost the kinds of protections associated with membership in the Royal Academy and the very real privileges which that afforded. The engravers lost their autonomy, for example, in determining the character of the division of labor in their own work or the styles of work they might pursue, defined as they were as merely reproductive workers, not “original” creators, and therefore subordinated to the fine art painters whose works they were set to replicate (Fyfe 1985). Key moments include the pornography debates of the late nineteenth century over what kinds of pictures of naked ladies were “art” (nudes) and therefore subject to protection against moral decency legislation (Beisel 1998), and, more recently, the debates over Mapplethorpe, or Serrano’s *Piss Christ* (Dubin 1992).

Porter is surely right that it is philosophically difficult to draw these boundaries between art and non-art, between the elevating nude and corrupting pornography. But however philosophically untenable (as suggested by the periodic reopening of the debates), such distinctions are, in fact, made real discursively and practically as (often contested) social constructs. These constructs, however illusory from a philosophical point of view, are the reality in which we live. And the autonomy of art (however contested the definition of that concept) is similarly a socially constructed reality, with socially real entailments. These institutional developments from the late eighteenth century onwards are, *pace* Porter, of central concern to classical art historians because they provide the context within which the discipline of classical art history developed and significantly shaped its concepts, presuppositions, and interpretive practices (cf. Squire above, pp. 143–46 and Tanner 2006.1–19). D’Hancarville’s elevation of Attic pot-painters to fine artists, proper objects of a history of art narrated in terms of stylistic progress, was in part accomplished by quite literally reframing the images on the pots as autonomous works of art, abstracted from their material context, and rolled out flat so they could be looked at and enjoyed in the same way as contemporary prints or easel paintings (Vickers 1987, Jenkins and Sloan 1996.146–59, 176–85).

#### IV. INNOVATION AND ORIGINALITY: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE ARTIST

Robin Osborne’s account of the role of signing in archaic and classical Greece seems to me a very good example of how modern concepts and

perceptions, like those of D'Hancarville, continue to shape our understanding of ancient art, though I am not quite sure where in Osborne's case the assimilations of classical antique experience and evaluation of art to our modern experience and evaluations are deliberate, where unconscious. While I share Osborne's belief that a concept of art, appropriately defined, may be relevant to antiquity, I find persuasive neither his claim that signing practices indicate a notion of "fine art" comparable to our own but extending even to pot-painters, nor his suggestion that "there was never a question about the potential status of the artist" (above p. 248). Osborne argues that works of art, painted pots and the like—unlike furniture or buildings—do not need bodies to signify but are autonomous signs: in no place or context can they be insignificant, and it is because "those who interpret a sign need to know who gave it its significance, not just who is now employing it" (above p. 238) that pots, sculptures, and so on are signed in the Greek world. Signatures "mark an object as an original" (above p. 236), suggesting that ancient Greeks valued such objects, and their producers, in the same way as we value the "fine arts" as exemplifications of artists' originality and creativity: indeed, Osborne suggests, "All works of art [are] dependent on interaction with those who engage with them. It makes no sense for the artist to absent him- or herself from this interaction; indeed it is hard to see how the artist can be absent from this interaction" (above p. 249).

This account of signatures seems to me to owe more to the role played by signatures in the modern art world than the ancient. In accordance with laws protecting the "moral rights" of artists, for example, contracts in which artists are expected to use a pseudonym or not to sign a work at all are automatically voided in order to guarantee the artist's right to be recognized as a creator (Duboff 1984.230, Tanner 2005.189). If ancient viewers looking at pots were, as Osborne suggests, always interested in the artist's name, always concerned with the individual artist making himself richly present—as opposed to just having a vase that was different from that of one's neighbors and so fun to play with—they must often have been disappointed. So far as we can judge from the number of names Beazley has to coin—the Berlin Painter, etc.—most potters and painters did not sign their work; and even some of those who did, did so very rarely—just two of some three hundred and fifty surviving pots produced by Makron are signed for example (Hemelrijk 1991.253). The insistence that any artwork worth the name involves an interaction between the individual creative artist and a viewer who is centrally concerned with that individual artist's singularity, while central to the modern art world, seems unhelpful in

approaching ancient art, in which collective production played such a large role. Much of the collaborative work characteristic of the larger projects in Greek sculpture would fail to qualify as “art” under this criterion (Goodlett 1989), as would serial productions like votive and grave reliefs, let alone the sculpture and painting of ancient Egypt, where canonical design attributed particular importance to replication and there was an extraordinarily elaborate division of labor: abducting the agency of the individual artist would in most instances be almost meaningless, and it was above all the agency of the pharaoh that the viewer was intended to abduct (Drenkahn 1995, Davis 1989).

Osborne’s invocation of originality also blurs the distinctive differences between the roles of ancient painters and sculptors and modern fine artists. First, replication was intrinsic to ancient art production, whether through the use of pattern books in painting (Settis 2006) or the technology of bronze casting (Mattusch 1996), and the bulk of art production was either replicative or entailed minor variations on well-established and accepted models—*kouroi* are an excellent example—notwithstanding that the object was on some level unique, like any handcrafted object. Of course, the capacity for innovation was highly valued, because an innovative work drew more attention to the portrait, the funerary stele, or the votive commissioned by a patron, and thus enhanced its efficacy in drawing attention to the claim to status being made in setting up an object and the specific meaning it communicated about the relationship between the commissioner and the larger social community or the gods. But it was not originality per se that was valued, but contextually appropriate innovation (Tanner 2006.182–90). Lysippus was preferred by Alexander not as the most innovative or original artist (in fact, part of his fame seems to be owed to his perfection of techniques of replication in bronze casting), but to his ability to capture the particular characterological features Alexander wished to project (Plut. *Mor.* 335A–B). Contextually inappropriate innovation, whatever its intrinsically artistic merit, could be punished, as when Mikon’s innovative perspective effects were read as showing Greeks (smaller in the background) as being inferior to Persians (larger in the foreground) when interpreted according to the current scale conventions (Tanner 2006.150–51). The formulation of the concept of “originality” is intimately tied up with the transformation of the institutions of art and literature in the late eighteenth century (Woodmansee 1994.52–54), and to invoke it as if it were a meaningful category available to artists and viewers in antiquity simply confuses the analysis: it was, in fact, the development of the concepts of “creativity” and “originality” from

the Renaissance to the eighteenth century that played such a central role in legitimating sculptors' and painters' claims to special autonomy in their work not shared by other practitioners of crafts (Summers 1981, Kemp 1989, and Tanner 2005.187–90).

Osborne is surely right to emphasize that individual artists *could* matter in Greek vase-painting and potting, and that it was *sometimes* thought worthwhile to know the name of the potter or painter, whether to appreciate the good balance of a well-turned cup in a game of *kottabos* or a particularly engaging or amusing image, one that made the symposium go with a bang: "Euthymides is a hoot, let's get some of his pots for the next party, and how about some of those great dripper vases too, give Kimon a good wetting!"<sup>11</sup> As one elegant Siana cup addressed a customer visiting the shop: "Greetings: buy me" (Lissarrague 1987.65). But this is rather different from the way in which the individuality of an artist is at issue in modern art worlds, in which the concepts of originality, the unique creation and authorship invoked by Osborne, were developed. It was exactly the role of provider of mere appurtenances to enliven their social betters' parties that musicians, writers, and painters revolted against in the context of the formation of the concept of fine arts and the institutions characteristic of the modern art world. In refiguring the traditional role of the composer, and creating the modern role, Mozart and Beethoven specifically rejected having to produce music that functioned as a kind of accompaniment to elite drinking parties and conversation (Elias 1993, DeNora 1995). In doing so, they formulated an account of the role of art that exactly parallels that which informs Osborne's account of what art is and how it operates. Art music, as opposed to *Tafelmusik*, was designed as an object of interest in

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11 Symposium pots seem especially in tension with Osborne's claim that the work of art does not require the body of its user to signify. It was only by being handled, turned, used, that the images on Greek pots could do their cultural work at the symposium, whether momentarily distracting the viewer's attention while the pot took a leak on its holder or giving him a shock when, after enjoying images of raunchy sex with prostitutes on the exterior of the vase, the drinker drains the cup only to come face-to-face with a "respectable" woman performing a sacrifice, perhaps a reminder of his wife left at home (Beard 1991). Interestingly, when pots acquire the status "vases" as a result of D'Hancarville's publications of Hamilton's collection and Wedgwood's entrepreneurial activity, they are placed on pedestals or wall-brackets as potentially autonomous objects of aesthetic contemplation in their own right, not as functional objects to be utilized in specific mundane activities as they were in the Greek symposium: see, for example, their display in the dining room of Sir John Soane's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields (Burn 2003.147).

its own right, an expression of the composer's genius and the object of the listener's full attention, un-distracted by other activities like eating, drinking, or conversation (DeNora 2006.106–12, McCormick 2006). Similarly, with the invention of the museum, artists like David no longer saw themselves as the providers of the decoration for the settings of aristocratic or bourgeois rituals of sociability. Rather, his most important paintings were intended as autonomous works, produced specifically for a museum setting, where they would take their place as the next step forward in the story of the development of a national artistic tradition that the museum told (McClellan 1999.76–77, Tanner 2006.300–01).

Osborne's bold claim that "the artist never rose: there was never a question about the potential status" (above p. 248) of the artist in the Greek world is in a sense a logical entailment of arguing that pot-painters, like modern fine artists, were valued as individuals for their creative originality. From such a height, shared with the divine Michelangelo, there is, of course, nowhere to rise. It would be quite extraordinary if in societies undergoing as much social change as characterized Greek *poleis* from 700 B.C. (the approximate date of the first painter's signature on the Aristonothos krater), to the death of Alexander or the Roman conquest of the Greek world, there were no changes in the status of sculptors, painters, or vase-painters, no questioning of their status, as there was of almost every other social category one could care to name—orators, soldiers, generals, women, philosophers. And it is perhaps an argument that Osborne is only able to sustain by eschewing any consideration of "the broader context of social relations" (above p. 237), restricting his vision to the formal properties of signatures and their distribution in time. In so far as there is not the kind of breakthrough in the position of the artist that occurred in the development of the modern role from the Renaissance onwards, Osborne is on one level right to say that "there is no rise of the artist." But to formulate the issue in these terms is unhelpful, trading as it does on an essentialist formulation of the concept of "the artist" derived from modern experience. There is, in fact, ample evidence that the role, the agency, and the status of painters and sculptors was very much at issue in the Greek world and saw significant changes during the classical period (Tanner 2006.141–49 for the concepts, 149–204 for analysis). What is much of *Republic* Book X about if not the relative claims of different cultural specialists—poets, painters, and philosophers—to be masters of truth? Why, when Demosthenes refers to Aeschines' brother Philochares as being a lekythos-painter, is Aeschines moved to respond that he was, in fact, a panel-painter, a former general,

and an habitué of the gymnasium, if the differential status of pot-painters, panel-painters, and generals was not an issue? Why were painters like Apelles and Melanthios so keen to learn from Pamphilos about the role mathematics and geometry might play in pictorial design, if not to transform their artistic agency and secure the esteem that such rationalized design skills could procure?<sup>12</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The value of an explicitly sociological approach is that it provides a sufficiently differentiated vocabulary to bring out these issues of the role, status, and agency of artists as analytically distinguishable dimensions of the positioning of artists in societies. Furthermore, such a vocabulary facilitates adopting a genuinely comparative perspective in which our own colloquial concepts of art and the artist—entailing notions of originality, creativity, etc.—can be reflexively analyzed as one historically specific institutionalization of art and of the role of the artist, rather than uncritically extended to their ancient counterparts. As the introduction to this volume suggests, “it is only by comparing and contrasting ancient with modern modes of conceptualizing art,” and, I would add, *the ways in which such concepts are given institutional embodiment*, “that we can hope to understand either cultural system—or indeed both” (above p. 144).

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12 Tanner 2006.158, 173–75, 191–200.