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Imagining the Naked Body

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QUINTUS IMMISCH (Tübingen/Aix-Marseille):
Imagining the Naked Body. Winckelmann, the Origin of Art, and the
Cultural History of Nudity in Eighteenth Century

I. Nakedness and Culture

From Genesis to pornography, the naked body is one of the most productive elements in cultural history: in numerous figures, formulas, tropes, myths, and narratives, nudity¹ is connected with concepts of truth and authenticity, immediacy, beauty, and desire but also illusion, the grotesque, fear, disgust, and madness.²

These concepts derive from an idea of ‘nature’ as it is embodied in the naked human form, while, in contrast, clothing symbolizes culture.³ Nudity, and therefore nature, is direct, real, visible; culture is hidden, concealed, secret.⁴ The particular productivity of such an epistemic figure, founded in the opposition of nudity and clothing, stems from its double signification: it can symbolize both material and immaterial culture. According to this logic, humans gain access to a universe of cultural meaningfulness by using garments, while nudity is associated with the idea of a privation not only of garments but also of identity and even cognitive abilities. This connection is depicted, for example, in Genesis where Adam and Eve mentally awakened by eating from the tree of knowledge and, knowing too much, can no longer bear their nakedness and need to cover it.

Contrary to what this lapsarian narrative suggests, nudity is by no means an innocent figure. As the European tradition elevated the dichotomy of nudity and clothing into a reference system for progress, civilization, and culture,⁵ it not only created universalized concepts of the body, but also made covering practices a general index of culture.⁶ At the same time, it assigned divergent bodily practices, such as those of indigenous cultures, to naked nature.⁷ However, the nature–culture divide and its

¹ With Barcan I use “nudity” and “nakedness” as synonyms, see Ruth Barcan. *Nudity. A Cultural Anatomy*. New York: Berg Publishers, 2004, p. 46.

² Gilles Boëtsch and Jérôme Thomas. “Les corps de l’‘autre’. Les représentations des Africains et des Amérindiens”. *Sexualités, identités & corps colonisés. XV^e siècle – XXI^e siècle*, edited by Gilles Boëtsch et al., Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019, pp. 31-43 (39); Pierre Ragon and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. “L’iconographie sexuelle des ‘sauvages’ et la passion exotique et érotique”. *Sexualités, identités & corps colonisés, op. cit.*, pp. 45-55 (45).

³ Hans Blumenberg. *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*. 1960. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2015, pp. 61-62.

⁴ Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann. “Das Geheimnis und die Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation. Einführende Bemerkungen”. *Schleier und Schwelle 1: Geheimnis und Öffentlichkeit (Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 5/3)*, edited by Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, München: Fink, 1997, pp. 7-16 (7).

⁵ Susanna Burghartz. “The Fabric of Early Globalization. Skin, fur and cloth in the de Bry’s travel accounts, 1590–1630”. *Dressing Global Bodies. The Political Power of Dress in World History*, edited by Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 15-40 (32); Adeline Masquelier. “Dirt, Undress, and Difference. An Introduction”. *Dirt, Undress, and Difference*, edited by Adeline Masquelier, Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 1-33 (3).

⁶ See Mario Perniola. “Between Clothing and Nudity”. *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 4, edited by Michel Feher, New York: Zone, 1989, pp. 237-265.

⁷ Misty F. Bastian. “The Naked and the Nude. Historically Multiple Meanings of Oto (Undress) in Southeastern Nigeria”. *Dirt, Undress, and Difference*, edited by Adeline Masquelier, Bloomington:

epistemology is by no means universal but—as Philippe Descola shows—characteristic only of Western modernity from the Renaissance onwards.⁸ The same holds true with regard to practices of covering and uncovering the body with *clothing* and their association with concepts of culture: They must be complemented by anthropologies of ornamentation, tattoos and body painting. Finally, not all cultures share the same concept of ‘body’ or even possess one at all.⁹

In the Western literary tradition, however, the antonymic relation between nudity and clothing (with all its unfair logic and discriminations) becomes productive for the reflection on culture and its assumed counterpart: nature.

Within these narratives of nature and culture, we can find a powerful poetological tradition according to which nudity enters into a special relationship with the imagination. This tradition wants us to mentally complete what is veiled from our eyes: We imagine through fictions what we cannot see as it remains covered. The imagination, in response to the unavailability of nudity in culture, would like to ‘return’ to that very nudity, to mentally restore it. Aesthetic creation is incited by the correlation of covering up and the desire for what is underneath. Consequently, in psychoanalytic theory the imaginary originates in the covering of the human body.¹⁰

Therefore, this tradition addresses central issues of art, aesthetics, and poetry. In this essay, I will show the poetic productivity of this narrative correlation but also its complex manifestations and unfoldings: First, we will see how for the Roman poet Ovid the desire for nudity is systematically inscribed in poetic discourse. Secondly, we will survey its epistemic structures and contexts, colonial entanglements, and contrary dynamics in the eighteenth century. In particular, I will refer to Winckelmann and his imagination of ancient nakedness as a paradoxical twofold occupation with origins.

II. Nudity and Poetic Discourse in Ovid

The close connection between nudity and imagination becomes manifest in the episode of Apollo and Daphne in the first book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Apollo is in love with Daphne, but she runs away from him, wanting to preserve her virginity. In order to prevent the rape, she is finally transformed into a laurel tree at her own request, which Apollo then adopts as one of his symbols.

In the scene in which Apollo pursues Daphne, she is semantically linked to nature: Her hair is artlessly combed (“positos [...] sine lege capillos”, I 477; “inornatos [...] capillos”, I 497), she hurries through the forests associated with wilderness (“nemorum aua lustrat”, I 479).¹¹ She is described as ignorant (“expersque”, I 479), does not care

Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 34-60 (34-35); for tattoos, see e.g. Victor I. Stoichita. *Des corps. Anatomies, défenses, fantasmes*. Geneva: Droz, 2019, pp. 209-211.

⁸ Philippe Descola. *Par-delà nature et culture*. 2005. Paris: Gallimard, 2018, p. 16.

⁹ David Le Breton. *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*. 1990. Paris: PUF, 2020, pp. 30-31; Frances E. Mascia- Lees. “Introduction”. *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment (Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 13)*, edited by Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 1-2 (2).

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud. “Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie”. *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, edited by Anna Freud et al., Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1968, pp. 27-145 (55-56); Winfried Menninghaus. *Das Versprechen der Schönheit*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2003, p. 203.

¹¹ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, edited by R. J. Tarrant, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 19, 20, 19.

for forms of socialization such as love and marriage (“nec quid Hymen, quid Amor, quid sint conubia, curat”, I 480), and, at the same time, her body is increasingly uncovered (“nudos [...] lacertos”, I 501; “nudabant corpora uenti”, I 527).¹² The sight of her partially naked skin triggers Apollo’s imagination: “siqua latent, meliora putat” (I 502).¹³ This supplementation—and amelioration—of her half-covered body by his imagination entails narratives about the past, the present and the future (“per me, quod eritque fuitque / estque, patet”, I 517–518).¹⁴

The chase scene embraces a constitutive relationship between poetry and nudity; the unavailability of the naked body turns it into a surface for the projections of the Apollonian imaginary. The narrative textualization, prompted by the momentary and limited appearance of naked skin, however, is marked by intermittence: Apollo, pursuing Daphne, does not reach her, and his search for the real origin of the literary imaginary thus takes the form of *différance*.¹⁵ The coveted meaning, the pure naked body, is always one step ahead and out of reach, just as language itself, through which this narration of origin is formulated, can never reach the time and place of ultimate signification. It is, with Roland Barthes, the “mise en scène d’une apparition-disparition”.¹⁶ Nakedness becomes imaginable but not attainable, and, thus endlessly perpetuated, the failure of appropriation produces narratives. Nakedness is—in the terminology of deconstruction—the empty center of poetry, and this emptiness therefore persists even when Apollo finally succeeds in reaching Daphne: She turns into a laurel tree because she no longer wants to be a *figure* (“mutando perde figuram” I 547) or simply a surface for literary projections. Daphne’s inaccessibility to Apollo, and that of nudity to poetry, is prominently articulated in the stick that now stands between the two and covers her breasts: “mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro” (I 549).¹⁷ The hunt for nudity hence gives way to narratives and finally to a book: a “libro.” And the productive relationship between poetry and nudity ultimately materializes in the laurel which as a fetish recalls the (vain) search for nudity and subsequently crowns the *poetae laureati*.

III. Nakedness and Imagination in Rousseau and the *Encyclopédie*

(D’Alembert/Diderot)

The mythological pattern of Apollo and Daphne exemplifies the importance of the relationship between nudity and imagination for poetic production in cultural history. This relationship gains further relevance in the aesthetics of the eighteenth century where—especially in its second half—it plays a central role. Indeed, the widespread emergence of nudity in art and literature has been seen as a ‘mark of distinction’ of this century.¹⁸ This aesthetic proliferation finds its counterpart in the omnipresent philosophical claim to reveal the truth in its bare form, characteristic of the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19, 19, 20, 21

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida. “La différence”. *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, pp. 1-29.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes. *Le plaisir du texte*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973, p. 19.

¹⁷ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁸ Helmut Puff. “Nacktheit”. *Der Neue Pauly*, supplementary vol. 13 (*Das 18. Jahrhundert. Lexikon zu Antikerezeption in Aufklärung und Klassizismus*), edited by Joachim Jacob and Johannes Süßmann, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2018, pp. 613-619 (617).

Enlightenment century.¹⁹ The frontispiece of Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* is representative of this trope:



Figure 1: Benoît Louis Prévost – Frontispiece of the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Encyclopedie_frontispice_full.jpg (accessed 5 August 2021)

Enlightenment is here personified by an assembly of allegories depicting various sciences and disciplines collaborating in the unveiling of the truth. For the editors Diderot and D’Alembert, Enlightenment’s endeavor is to “remonter jusqu’à l’origine”.²⁰

¹⁹ Hans Blumenberg. *Die nackte Wahrheit*, edited by Rüdiger Zill, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019, pp. 71, 90-91, 147-153.

²⁰ Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond D’Alembert: “Discours préliminaire des éditeurs”. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, edited by Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond D’Alembert, vol. 1, Paris, 1751, pp. III–XLV (III).

On closer inspection, Reason, wearing the crown, tears away the veil of Truth while Theology kneels besides and must be guided by a blind man's ring. At the same time, however, Imagination rushes in from the left to adorn naked Truth with a garland. And in fact, the final revelation is yet to come: For the spectator, the ultimate unveiling of Truth is not depicted but rather displaced and left to the imagination. Here, too, nudity seems unavailable within culture and emerges as something attainable only *through* and *in* imagination while, at the same time, culture is embodied in the veil. Similar to the Ovidian myth, nakedness appears here as the 'beyond' of the text which dominates imagination. It is an epistemic figure centered on a teleological idea of knowledge which involves at once a desire for the origin of texts.

This connection becomes even clearer when we see the extent to which the Enlightenment doctrine of truth is entangled with colonial discourse: Jean-Jacques Rousseau addresses nakedness and imagination in his conception of the human in the state of nature. Indeed, in his *Discours sur l'inégalité* (1755; *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*) his project is to undress man: "[e]n dépouillant cet Etre, ainsi constitué, de tous les dons surnaturels qu'il a pu recevoir, et de toutes les facultés artificielles, qu'il n'a pu acquerir que par de longs progrès ; En le considerant, en un mot, tel qu'il a dû sortir des mains de la Nature [...]." ²¹ The naked nature lacks art and social integration: With the fabric disappears the social bond, too. Again, clothing symbolizes material as well as immaterial culture. However, Rousseau's conception of nudity differs from that of the *Encyclopédie* in that he does not displace nudity into the imagination but, on the contrary, describes the absence of imaginative faculties in the state of nature. Nakedness and a rich imagination are not compatible in Rousseau as the human in the colonially conceived state of nature imagines nothing: „Son imagination ne lui peint rien ; son cœur ne lui demande rien.” ²² Rousseau—convinced that “toutes ces Nations Barbares supportent sans peine leur nudité”, ²³ but at the same time have no imagination—subsequently demonstrates this with the example of the “Caraybe” who, living without foresight, sells his bed in the morning in which he wants to sleep in the evening. ²⁴ While in European cultural history imagination was preferably associated with the faculty of memory, Rousseau here already follows the eighteenth century tendencies which now allow the imagination to look into the future, and he ascribes this competence to the artistic genius in particular. ²⁵ This temporal extension makes imagination an integral part of the cognitive abilities from remembering to the envisioning of the future; and Rousseau's concept of nakedness is thus at the same time an expanded theory of imagination in which the two concepts remain mutually exclusive.

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Diskurs über die Ungleichheit. Discours sur l'inégalité. Kritische Ausgabe des integralen Textes*, edited by Heinrich Meier, Paderborn: Schöningh, 1984, p. 78.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110: “Tel est encore aujourd'hui le degré de prévoyance du Caraybe : Il vend le matin son lit de Coton, et vient pleurer le soir pour le racheter [...].”

²⁵ Jochen Schulte-Sasse. “Einbildungskraft/Imagination”. *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, edited by Karlheinz Barck et al., Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001, pp. 88-120 (102).

IV. Winckelmann's Nudes

Johann Joachim Winckelmann's aesthetics can be read in this context as a further example for the correlation of (inaccessible) nudity and imagination in the cultural history of the second half of the eighteenth century. Beginning with the 1750s, the reception of antiquity, ethnography, and theories of imagination flourish in scholarly writing.²⁶ Within this intellectual context, Winckelmann's writings produce a concept of imagination which is unleashed at the vision of the seemingly naked body.

Winckelmann attributes the invention of art to the Greeks.²⁷ In fact, in his *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst* (1755; *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*) he assumes that "[d]er gute Geschmack" began to form "zuerst unter dem Griechischen Himmel" and that, accordingly, the "reinsten Quellen der Kunst" were to be found in Greece.²⁸ This idea of the origin of art converges with an image of classical Greece as a naked epoch: While Winckelmann complains that in contemporary culture the body disappears under exuberant baroque garments,²⁹ Greek clothing was "so beschaffen, daß er [der Anzug] der bildenden Natur nicht den geringsten Zwang anthat. Der Wachsthum der schönen Form litte nichts durch die verschiedenen Arten und Theile unserer heutigen pressenden und klemmenden Kleidung [...]."³⁰ But the clothing practices of the Greeks seemed not only more natural to him, their relationship to nudity, Winckelmann continues, was also more innocuous. Besides the theater,³¹ it is above all the gymnasium that becomes the setting of the undressed body for Winckelmann: a highly inspiring place, "wo die jungen Leute, welche die öffentliche Schamhaftigkeit bedeckte, ganz nackend ihre Leibes-Uebungen trieben."³² For Winckelmann, it is precisely this gaze at nudity which is at the beginning of Greek art

²⁶ On Winckelmann in the ethnographic context, see e. g. Élisabeth Décultot. *Untersuchungen zu Winckelmanns Exzerptheften. Ein Beitrag zur Genealogie der Kunstgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert*. Trans. by Wolfgang von Wangenheim and René Mathias Hofer. Ruppolding: Rutzen, 2004, pp. 123-134; Robert Leucht. "Griechische Wilde. Vergleiche zwischen Antike und Neuer Welt, 1752-1821 (Lafitau, Böttiger, Winckelmann, Bougainville, Forster, Chamisso)". *Euphorion*, vol. 109, no. 4, 2015, pp. 375-399; Élisabeth Décultot. "Anthropologie et ethnologie de l'histoire de l'art au XVIIIe siècle." *Études germaniques*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2009, pp. 821-839; Jörg Robert. "Ethnofiktion und Klassizismus. Poetik des Wilden und Ästhetik der 'Sattelzeit'". *Poetik des Wilden. Festschrift für Wolfgang Riedel*, edited by Jörg Robert and Friederike F. Günther, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012, pp. 3-39; Sebastian Kaufmann. *Ästhetik des 'Wilden'. Zur Verschränkung von Ethno-Anthropologie und ästhetischer Theorie 1750-1850*. Basel: Schwabe, 2020, pp. 102-107, 125-154.

²⁷ Eric Michaud. "Was die moderne Anthropologie und Ethnologie von Winckelmann lernten. Eine kritische Sichtung". *Winckelmann. Moderne Antike*, edited by Élisabeth Décultot, Martin Dönike, Wolfgang Holler, Claudia Keller, Thorsten Valk and Bettina Werche, München: Hirmer, 2017, pp. 115-126 (115). In general, Winckelmann associated with Greece those values associated with well-balanced civilization, and therefore his reference to antiquity has been called the 'invention of Greece', see Jan Blanc. "Winckelmann et l'invention de la Grèce". *Cahiers "Mondes anciens"*, vol. 11, 2018, pp. 1-24.

²⁸ Johann Joachim Winckelmann. "Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst". *Schriften und Nachlaß*, edited by Adolf H. Borbein, Max Kunze and Axel Rügler, vol. 9/1, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2016, pp. 51-77 (56).

²⁹ In this context, he speaks of "schwere Gewänder" (*ibid.*, p. 65).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³¹ "Die schönsten jungen Leute tanzten unbekleidet auf dem Theater, und Sophocles, der große Sophocles, war der erste, der in seiner Jugend dieses Schauspiel seinen Bürgern machte." (*ibid.*, p. 59)

³² *Ibid.*

as he states in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1763; *The History of Art in Antiquity*): “[D]urch die tägliche Gelegenheit das schönste Nackende zu sehen, wurde ihre Einbildung erhitzt, und die Schönheit der Formen wurde ihnen eigen und gegenwärtig. In Sparta übeten sich so gar junge Mädgen entkleidet, oder fast ganz entblößt, im Ringen.”³³ In his outline of a history of art, in which he wants to treat “den Ursprung, das Wachsthum, die Veränderung und den Fall”³⁴ of art, the imagination excited by nudity is at the origin of art.

This may, at first glance, seem contradictory to previous logics of nudity. Winckelmann, however, draws a distinction between antiquity and contemporary culture. While in antiquity nature was accessible and the body was uncovered,³⁵ the present is characterized by a fundamental unavailability of nature and nudity (as for example, the body appears plagued by civilization and disease). Therefore, if Greek art could mimetically depict nature and the naked body, modernity must rely on Greek works and not directly on nature: “Der einzige Weg für uns, groß, ja, wenn es möglich ist, unnachahmlich zu werden, ist die Nachahmung der Alten [...]”³⁶ Nonetheless, there is a crucial difference between the way nudity was supposedly regarded in antiquity and the way Winckelmann relates to it in his historical context. The nudity modern spectators find in Greek works of art is a ‘second-level’ nudity that has undergone a process of idealization³⁷ in which

“blieben die Begriffe der Schönheit nicht auf das Individuelle einzelne Schöne eingeschränkt, wie es zuweilen die Begriffe der alten und neuern Dichter, und der mehresten heutigen Künstler sind, sondern sie suchten das Schöne aus vielen schönen Körpern zu vereinigen. Sie reinigten ihre Bilder von aller persönlichen Neigung, welche unsern Geist von dem wahren Schönen abziehet.”³⁸

In an eclectic process, the best parts of the most beautiful bodies are supposed to be assembled in an abstract ideal body. At first glance, Winckelmann seems to correspond to the tradition of the nude as described by Kenneth Clark (though in a rather one-sided way): He distinguishes the naked from the nude, and while the former describes the

³³ Johann Joachim Winckelmann. *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums. Schriften und Nachlaß*, edited by Adolf H. Borbein, Thomas W. Gaethgens, Johannes Irmscher and Max Kunze, vol. 4/2, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006, pp. 252-254. For the question of reading vs. seeing, i.e., studying text or object, see Élisabeth Décultot. “Reading versus Seeing? Winckelmann’s Excerpting Practice and the Genealogy of Art History”. *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2020, p. 239-261.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 838.

³⁵ Indeed Bindman argues, that in fourth to fifth century BC there was “the momentary collapse of the philosophically unbridgeable gap between the world of reality and the ideal world beyond experience. In this unrepeated, and perhaps unrepeatable, moment, the artist’s guiding image of ideal and transcendent perfection, and the real human bodies he studied, were as one.” (David Bindmann. *Ape to Apollo. Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 81)

³⁶ Winckelmann, “Gedancken”, *op. cit.*, p. 56. It is therefore plausible that Tobin, drawing on queer theory, proposes a reading of the passage oriented towards desire and gender roles, see Robert Deam Tobin. “Winckelmann – Homosexualität, schwule Kultur, Queer Theory”. *Winckelmann-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, edited by Martin Disselkamp and Fausto Testa, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017, pp. 65-72 (69). If, according to Winckelmann, queer desire was possible in antiquity (just like nudity), then the present, which has lost nature, would have to align itself with Greek sexual freedom (see *ibid.*, p. 71).

³⁷ See Mauro Ponzi. “Le Forme del Bello”. *Winckelmann und die Mythologie der Klassik. Narrative Tendenzen in der Ekphrase der Kunstperiode*, edited by Heinz Georg Held, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2009, pp. 119-139 (121).

³⁸ Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst, op. cit.*, p. 256.

state of raw undress, the latter represents an idealizing form of art.³⁹ The nude does not aim at “direct transcription” but at “harmonious simplification”, through which a “middle form” emerges, composed out of the ordinary.⁴⁰ Far from any creatureliness,⁴¹ these bodies Winckelmann dreams of are not only slender, white, healthy, male, and athletic but also without “Adern noch Sehnen”,⁴² muscles are “gelinde”,⁴³ nipples must not be visible,⁴⁴ and, above all, no “Schwulst” is allowed: neither exuberant garments nor excessive layers of fat nor—in an utterly racist statement by Winckelmann—the “aufgeworfene schwülstige Mund, welchen die Mohren mit den Affen in ihrem Lande gemein haben”.⁴⁵ Imagination and modern aesthetics, according to Winckelmann, are accessible only to the healthy male European body.

With regard to this idealization, Winckelmann takes recourse to metaphors of “Hüllen und Einkleidungen”.⁴⁶ Paradoxically, the nude is not naked. Instead, the veiling idealization is a ‘purification’: “Sie reinigten ihre Bilder von aller persönlichen Neigung, welche unsern Geist von dem wahren Schönen abziehet”⁴⁷ and the anthropomorphic art was “von der Menschlichen Nothdurft gereinigt”.⁴⁸ Thus, this devisualization of individual body parts has a similar function as Daphne’s light robes or the veil of Truth: They act like a garment behind which the sexual body can be discovered. In this way, Winckelmann initially seems to follow the iconographic tradition of the naked body since the Renaissance, which—according to Georges Didi-Huberman⁴⁹—wants to release it from desire, to separate affect and representation: the figurative medium with its cold, idealized skin elevates the body from the sphere of sexuality, dissociates the nude from nudity (“séparer le nu de sa propre nudité”⁵⁰),

³⁹ Kenneth Clark. *The Nude. A Study in Ideal Form* (Bollingen Series XXXV/2). New York: Pantheon Books, 1956, p. 3. Clark’s distinction has been criticized for ultimately only raising the nature–culture divide to a new level, see Susanne von Falkenhausen. “Maja und Olympia. Der Streit um den weiblichen Akt”. *Etablierte Wissenschaft und feministische Theorie im Dialog*, edited by Claudia von Braunmühl, Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003, pp. 125-133 (125). Barcan argues that the terminological distinction between ‘naked’ and ‘nude’ generally reproduces the nature–culture divide, see Barcan, *Nudity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5, 7.

⁴¹ See Jonathan Kassner. *Ästhetik der Kreatur. Hunde in der Literatur der Goethezeit und Moderne*. Paderborn: Fink, 2020, p. 18.

The repudiation of both animality and foreign cultures is at play when Winckelmann compares the eyes of the “Sinesen und Japonesen” to cat eyes and claims they have “Stirn und Nase aus einem geraden Knochen, wie an Thieren” (Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, *op. cit.*, p. 246).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 780.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276: “Mit solchen Begriffen wurde die Natur vom Sinnlichen bis zum Unerschaffenen erhoben, und die Hand der Künstler brachte Geschöpfe hervor, die von der Menschlichen Nothdurft gereinigt waren; Figuren, welche die Menschheit in einer höheren Würdigkeit vorstellen, die Hüllen und Einkleidungen bloß denkender Geister und himmlischer Kräfte zu seyn scheinen.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256-258.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276. For a psychoanalytic reading, see Winfried Menninghaus. *Ekel. Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1999, p. 76-159.

⁴⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman. *Ouvrir Vénus. Nudité, rêve, cruauté*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999, pp. 11-25, 22, 26, 40. Didi-Huberman criticizes these dissociations and instead confronts it with the impure, the guilty, cruel and open nakedness. Tendencies of idealization were famously described by Clark, *The Nude*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

reducing it to nothing but a masking of the taboo of touch.⁵¹ But Winckelmann breaks through this conception of desireless nudity, of the sterile nude. Indeed, it is remarkable that through the veiling, which appeals to the imagination, Winckelmann's prose becomes poetic. We can see this in the description of the *Apollo Belvedere* of whom Winckelmann writes that nothing could "für die Einbildung reizender seyn, als der Zustand einer ewigen Jugend, und des Frühlings des Lebens".⁵² The idealized naked body of eternal youth stimulates the imagination. His ekphrasis of the Apollo sculpture therefore describes only to a very small extent what is visually perceptible but rather the imagination of the gazing subject. Along those lines, pornographic fantasies are articulated: The mouth, "der Wollüste eingeflöbet",⁵³ does not only stand for Apollonian song but also for eroticism, and the sexual coding continues in the "Oel der Götter"⁵⁴ which liquefies the bodies as lubricants and sends Apollo back from Olympus to the realm of the gymnasium with its real bodies. This erotic foreplay results in heavy breathing ("Mit Verehrung scheint sich meine Brust zu erweitern und zu erheben [...]").⁵⁵ The subject becomes enraptured and is transported into a kind of copresence with the idealized past: "[U]nd ich fühle mich weggerückt nach Delos und in die Lycischen Hayne, Orte, welche Apollo mit seiner Gegenwart beehrte [...]"⁵⁶ And finally, the erotic pleasure of looking at the naked body entails oblivion of the present: "Ich vergesse alles andere über dem Anblicke dieses Wunderwerkes der Kunst [...]"⁵⁷ Out of this oblivion emerges the poetic discourse of the ekphrasis. The presence of the naked body is therefore a key to understanding Winckelmann's poetic discourse which has been noted and discussed repeatedly by commentators.⁵⁸ The question of the poetic and thus imaginary parts of Winckelmann's historical project was thereby also seen in critical contrast to strict historiography, Winckelmann himself dismissed as unhistorical; but as Flavell has shown, he defies antiquarian conceptions of history. Rather, "he provides his contemporaries with a myth".⁵⁹

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26. Starting from the ekphrasis of the torso, Pommier emphasizes the role of imagination in Winckelmann, see Édouard Pommier. *Winckelmann, inventeur de l'histoire de l'art*. Paris: Gallimard, 2003, p. 111.

⁵² Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst, op. cit.*, p. 780.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 780.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Gabriella Catalano. "Winckelmanns Kunstbeschreibungen und die Traditionen der Beschreibungsliteratur". *Winckelmann-Handbuch, op. cit.*, pp. 140-145 (esp. 134-144); Gabriella Catalano. "Beschreibungen des Torso und des Apollo im Belvedere". *Winckelmann-Handbuch, op. cit.*, pp. 145-151 (148-149); Élisabeth Décultot. "'Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums' und 'Anmerkungen über die Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums'". *Winckelmann-Handbuch, op. cit.*, pp. 224-241 (232-233); Stefano Ferrari. "Winckelmanns Schreibweisen". *Winckelmann-Handbuch, op. cit.*, pp. 58-64 (62-63); Thomas Franke. "Fiktionalität in der Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums: Zur Bedeutung der Hypothesenbildung für Winckelmanns Kunstgeschichtssystem und ihre wissenschaftshistorischen Voraussetzungen". *Die Winckelmann-Rezeption in Italien und Europa. Zirkulation, Adaption, Transformation*, edited by Élisabeth Décultot, Martin Dönike, Serena Feloj and Fabrizio Slavazzi, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 227-239; Heinz Georg Held (ed.). *Winckelmann und die Mythologie der Klassik. Narrative Tendenzen in der Ekphrase der Kunstperiode (Reihe der Villa Vigoni 22)*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2009.

⁵⁹ M. Kay Flavell. "Winckelmann and the German Enlightenment: On the Recovery and Uses of the Past". *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 76, no. 1, pp. 79- 96 (96). Pommier argues similarly, who quite explicitly considers Winckelmann a "poète" and sees in the *Geschichte der Kunst* above all a project

However, it is striking that this poetic discourse is evoked precisely by way of the 'Hüllen' surrounding the naked body.⁶⁰ Here, too, we can see how the imagination is stimulated by unavailability and the desire to restore the naked body as an imaginary origin. For Winckelmann, this means that at the very moment in which he writes about the naked body he shifts from the erudite prose of the art historian to a poetic discourse. And indeed his contemporaries such as Nicolai already emphasized his "lebhaft[e] und angenehm[e]" "Schreibart".⁶¹ That is no surprise since for Winckelmann the (erotic) passions are "die Winde [...], die in dem Meere des Lebens unser Schiff treiben, mit welchen der Dichter seegelt, und der Künstler sich erhebt".⁶²

Winckelmann's writing is paradigmatic of the poetic vivification of the unattainable bare origin in the eighteenth century and exemplifies the tension between nakedness and imagination. As a figuration of a natural but lost origin, antiquity is construed in a twofold way: While antiquity transformed the naked, natural, concrete and individual body of the gymnasium into an aesthetic, idealized, abstract and thus metaphorically 'veiled' one, the goal of the moderns is to take the idealized nakedness as their point of departure at the beginning of modern imagination in order to ultimately reconstitute the original naked body. In temporal terms, nakedness thus stretches from an imagined origin into a coveted future, and aesthetic imagination hinges on the figure of the naked body which can be at once concealed and revealed, repressed and experienced, seen, hidden from view, and imagined. At the same time and in terms of distribution, the complex of nudity and imagination becomes a mechanism of unfair exclusion in the eighteenth century insofar as this narrative about the origin of aesthetics and its idealizations implies the foreclosure of the 'other.'

to thematize beauty: Historiography and poetic expression belong together. See Pommier, *Winckelmann*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁶⁰ Pommier argues that for Winckelmann the sensation of beauty happens only on the basis of the naked body; precisely for this reason he had to refer to Greek art, Pommier, *Winckelmann*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁶¹ Quoted after Martin Dönike. "'Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst' und zugehörige Schriften". *Winckelmann-Handbuch*, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-136 (129).

⁶² Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst*, *op. cit.*, p. 252.