Displays of classical sculpture and the demand for authenticity

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Authenticity and its pleasures

Marble heads of the classical period pegged into plaster busts produced c. 1500 CE, or joined to genuine classical busts belonging to different heads? Classical life-size statues mounted on altars and on the capitals of columns, or perched on the roofs of sixteenth-century buildings, or yet again balanced on top of garden walls? An ancient river god and a marble ‘Cleopatra’ “converted to fountains, the figures reclining in rustic niches above water basins”? Original sculptures from antiquity – statues, reliefs, sarcophagi, Corinthian orders – alternating with potted trees and vines growing on trellises in the ‘hanging garden’ of a cardinal’s palace? Ancient sculptures of gladiators and warriors restored so extensively as to have essentially been transformed into modern (i.e., sixteenth-century) works? Renaissance marble portraits displayed alongside genuine ancient ones?

I have been talking, of course, about practices of curation and presentation of classical (that is, Greek and Roman) sculpture in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, as specialists in the area will have at once recognized. I will have more to say about those practices below, but they are not the central subject of this paper. What concerns me in the long term is the genealogy of our own, twentieth- and twenty-first-century practices of displaying classical sculpture in museums. Now, this is a large topic, one that cannot be covered with the requisite intensity in this essay and will require a second one. I will concentrate here on the Early Modern period and the Enlightenment, and I will give in the end only a foretaste of the necessary sequel, which will be devoted to the ‘museum age’, that is, the period from c. 1800 to the present.

Renaissance displays of classical sculpture were, no doubt, a ‘turning point,’ a ‘new beginning,’ along the genealogy that concerns me, and they deserve accordingly to be given attention first. But as you will have noticed, I chose to begin with such aspects of the Renaissance practices that would be frowned upon in the context of classical sculpture exhibits mounted in our own time – ‘arbitrary’ or ‘excessive’ restorations, compilations made of ‘historically unrelated’ works, compositions made of statues and vegetation. Mine, then, seems an odd choice (after all, not every aspect of the Renaissance displays would be deemed unfit for present-day ones), a choice I must now justify.
Let me broach the issue of authenticity (and, please, excuse the pedantry). In today’s museum culture a piece of classical sculpture is authentic as long as it is not intended to deceive you, make you think that it comes straight from classical hands while in fact it has been doctored, or plainly forged, in Early Modern or Modern times. Authenticity, in other words, in contemporary museum culture pertains above all to the state of the individual object: the piece in purview of your gaze. If the piece has not been tinkered with, or just faked, some time after 1450 CE, it is authentic. Current modes of museum display implement this rather strict sense of authenticity. And so, not only are restorations (where they still exist) clearly marked and forgeries (when detected) are expunged, but the entire apparatus of display – the setting, the props, the placing and orientation of the pieces in the exhibit rooms – is so contrived as to be discreet and not to distract you but to direct your gaze instead to that which is authentic: the classical sculpture on display, each individual piece of it. Bushes and vines growing near the sculptures would here be a liability (they would divert the visitor’s gaze onto themselves and away from the ancient objects), as would the conversion of gods and nymphs into elements of water fountains; as for ‘hanging’ statues, poised on the edges of the museum’s roof, they would only strain your neck and eyes, they would by no means afford a clear view of the authentic. In short, the apparatus of display turns out to be most essential in projecting onto the viewer’s retina an authentic image of classical sculpture.

Authenticity, then, is not just a state of the piece on display. From the moment there exists a human viewer (not just divine ones) to whose gaze the classical work is meant to present itself, providing the authentic view becomes the task of a multifarious collective of agents, human and material; a collective that includes authentic pieces (in today’s strict sense as specified above), specialists of many kinds, mechanical devices, scholarship and its authority, as well as the viewer herself. Authenticity, I want to say, is produced. When you walk into a classical sculpture exhibit that was set up some time in the previous century, especially after 1945, you are likely to overlook this point; the apparatus of display, as I indicated above, is so contrived as to appear insignificant, to belittle its own role and tactfully guide your attention onto the individual sculptures. Consider, for example, the role of the label that accompanies every piece on display. The label is the trace of all scholarship that pertains to the piece; scholarship that has a considerable temporal depth and carries great authority. The label thus does more than just provide information about the piece: by stating the name of the piece, its date and perhaps a few other details, it invests that artwork with the scholarly authority that guarantees its authenticity. Yet, by virtue of its brevity, its small size and discreet placement on a different level from the artwork, the label is unobtrusive, it does not divert your attention onto itself and away from
the artwork; it thus is in line with current ideas in the matter of authenticity.

But current ideas about what constitutes authenticity in displays of classical sculpture are just that, *current* ideas.9 The peculiar aspects of Renaissance displays I highlighted in the beginning do not seem to me to result from a lack of concern with authenticity but from different ideas in this matter – and not only different ideas but, more crucially, differently constituted and configured collectives of human and material agents. I will assume, in fact, that, ever since that ‘new beginning’ about half a millennium ago, concerns with authenticity have been entwined in the fabric of every presentation of classical sculpture. More specifically, I will assume that places like the sculpture court, the sculpture garden, the cardinal’s or the duke’s antiquarium, the gallery of the aristocrat’s house, and (later) the museum hall have all been meant to engage those present in their midst in an *authentic relationship with antiquity*.

If this is right, then the peculiarities of the Renaissance displays might also be interpreted today as a cautionary advice to us: ‘do not put up too inflexible, too determined a defense of the current modes of displaying classical sculpture’, they suggest, ‘do not dismiss efforts to produce displays that promote novel conceptions of authenticity, after all the authentic is malleable, a transient thing, not a transcendent one’.10 It is for the sake of making this point that I resorted at the start to aspects of sixteenth-century displays that most clearly violate our own sense of authenticity.

As also noted, however, not every contrivance characteristic of the Renaissance displays would be deemed ill-suited for displays set up in our time. Continuities indeed obtain between then and the ensuing centuries (though few survived the purism of the twentieth-century museum). In what follows I will pay equal attention to such continuities and to radical transformations. I will begin by examining the production of authenticity in ‘sculpture gardens’ – those ensembles of classical statuary and flora (and many other features, which I will acknowledge below) that began in Renaissance Italy and rapidly spread to trans-Alpine Europe. I will follow the career of those sculpture gardens up to the eighteenth century, when that career was intercepted by the rise of the public museum.11 In a brief epilogue I will summarize significant changes that occurred in exhibits of classical sculpture in the last two hundred years (changes that will be discussed in detail in the planned second essay). My aim throughout is to show that crucial aspects of the transformations from c. 1500 CE to the present can be illuminated with reference to shifting precepts of what constitutes an authentic relationship with antiquity.
Sculptures and flora

The most interesting feature of the Della Valle court is the subservience of the ancient sculpture, despite the size and importance of the collection, to the design of the garden court. It is as if the sculpture had been made to decorate the garden and no piece of statuary was more important than a tree or vine in the garden. Whether they placed them in Mount Helicon or Mount Parnassus, Renaissance scholars agreed that antiquity’s muses were fond of woods, springs and caverns and that they loathed the affairs and life of the city. “Silva placet Musis, urbs est inimica poetis” went an oft-quoted line from Petrarch, and Mantegna in Parnassus, presented to Isabella d’Este in 1497, painted the muses in a strikingly sylvan setting. In brief, wooded, bucolic environs – so the Renaissance scholars thought – were the favored places of the nymphs that looked after learning and the arts. Visions of benign, paradisiacal nature, conducive to contemplation, were thereby associated with the precinct of the muses (literally, the museum14), with antiquity, with the arts, the cultivation of the self in both its emotive and cognitive sides, and with much else. Materialized as gardens in the present, for example, such visions mirrored the nobleness and cultivation, or magnificientia, of the patron, whereby they also became associated with conviviality, display, and competition.15 What, then, of cardinal della Valle’s ‘hanging’ garden, where “no piece of statuary was more important than a tree or a vine”? No doubt, flora and statuary were more than just decorative complements of each other, but I will further suggest that the ‘pleasant place’ (locus amoenus) they jointly helped to create was meant to preserve something of, and evoke for learned minds, that model museum, the precinct of the muses. If this is right – and David Coffin had modestly made a comparable suggestion17 – then perhaps the cardinal and the architect of his sculpture court, Lorenzo Lotti, would have to concern themselves with their design’s fidelity to the poetical image of the classical museum. I would think moreover that this anchoring in classical poetry would add an important layer of meaning to the court, and that in turn would enhance the visitor’s experience by inducing him/her to seek similitudes between antiquity and the present and contemplate their affinities. Visitors would do this with help from their hosts, their escorting guides and companions in the visiting party.19

I stress that these are tentative suggestions; I have no site-specific evidence to offer in their support. But if they hold for the Della Valle ‘hanging’ garden, it seems to me that they, or some refraction of them, should hold for sixteenth-century sculpture gardens in general. The ancient model in light of which those gardens were intended to be experienced need not always have been the poets’ grove of the muses (Parnassus or Helikon) – the garden of Hesperides and other mythological gardens also...
offered opportunities for allegorical readings connecting the present with the classical past and could thus just as well serve the purpose. So too could Plato’s Academy, which Pausanias had briefly described (I. 30.2): a sacred olive grove, adorned with shrines, including one devoted to the muses. Besides, classical figures such as Pliny the Elder, Cicero and Varro had written of ancient country villae and of gardens with statues in their grounds, and modern scholarship has frequently pointed to these as exempla that Renaissance patricians and church officials sought to emulate. Now, if you thought you owned a garden adorned with sculptures just as illustrious folks, men of learning, did in Roman antiquity, you would probably feel further justified in thinking that “Rome is reborn in its ancient form” (pristinam formam renascente). And that in turn would encourage you to seek and discover more signs, an endless chain of them, indicating that the present was homologous with the ancient past; that resemblances between the present and classical antiquity were not, in other words, accidental but meaningful, and that if you attended to them and submitted them to allegoresis, they would reveal to you important truths about the order of the world.

We might suppose that later sculpture gardens, those created after the middle of the sixteenth century in Italy or beyond, no longer needed to be seen and experienced in the light of ancient models but in the light of the earlier Renaissance gardens themselves. Yet the issue seems to me more complex – let me explain as briefly as I can.

By mid-sixteenth century sculpture gardens in some form had reached Fontainebleau and perhaps Ecouen, near Paris, and Binche in Belgium; they were also under development in Nonsuch palace near London. ‘In some form’: like many Italian villa gardens of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (cf. endnote 20), the transalpine ones were not as a rule devoted to displaying collections of ancient originals (for exceptions see below). The sculptures one encountered in them were replicas – especially bronze casts but also, as in Versailles, marble copies – of ancient works, variants of such works, and contemporary, more or less original compositions on themes drawn from classical mythology. What is more, such artworks were in every case integrated into architectural settings – fountains, cascades, grottoes, tempio and the like – and the resulting ensembles, along with the surrounding garden flora, were meant as re-creations of classical shrines, specifically of the precincts of antiquity’s muses and other nymphs. In Nonsuch, Surrey, no less than in Tivoli, Latium, in other words, those gardens acquired meaning by being ‘anchored’ in classical antiquity – at the same time as French and English noblemen missed no opportunity to assert that, in creating their gardens, they were bringing Renaissance Italy to their home countries. Moreover, allegorical readings and homologies with antiquity’s mythological and historical figures retained their force, or part of it, for a long time: Elizabeth I
was like Diana, James I was like Augustus, and, in the 1720s, in the gardens of Stowe House in Buckinghamshire, Princess Caroline of Wales was like Venus in her de Medici disposition. To give still another example, a decade and a half after Stowe, in the garden of Lord Burlington’s Chiswick House, London, an earthen exedra was added, fitted with statues of Caesar, Pompey, and Cicero (perhaps Roman originals) alternating with antique-style urns and herms crowned with portraits of Socrates, Lycurgus and Lucius Verus. The model for this statue-bearing exedra may have derived from descriptions of Pliny the Younger’s Tusculum garden, mediated by Italian seventeenth-century villa gardens; still, the iconographic program appears to have acquired meaning by relating eighteenth-century political conjunctures to classical ones and their protagonists.

Let me turn to the exceptions bracketed above, that is, to gardens beyond Italy that were in greater or lesser part devoted to displaying collections of ancient originals. Most notable among them was the garden of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, part of Arundel House on the left bank of the Thames in London. The garden, in the design of which Inigo Jones had a hand, contained a portion of the Earl’s collection of classical statuary, while the remainder was displayed in a gallery inside the house. Most of the statues were ancient works acquired, from 1612 on, from Italy and the circum-Aegean lands. There were no fountains or grottoes in Arundel’s garden, only orderly parterres, an arch, an elevated terrace, an arcade, an orchard, and the statues: those displayed in the terrace stood at some distance from one another, presenting themselves to the beholder as individual artworks and, at once, evoking the imagery of the classical garden (just as the case had been in the Vatican’s statue court a century earlier). Elsewhere in the garden, modern scholarship has guarded attempts to re-create ancient Greek shrines, but it has also acknowledged the debt of Arundel’s garden and gallery to Italian Renaissance models. Yet other sculptures were placed in a garden in Lambeth across the river, visible from the house – an arrangement echoing perhaps that at Palazzo Farnese in Rome and other Italian residences.

The pieces in Lambeth were “the refuse of the collection” – heavy, non-restorable fragments of trunks, disfigured heads, limbs and feet still attached to their plinths. When Arundel House was demolished in 1678, more such fragments from the demolition site were transferred to Lambeth, and, until 1717, the whole contributed to the attractions of an entertainment operation (music, fireworks and all) known as Cuper’s or Cupid’s Garden. On the other hand, some of the statues from Arundel’s gallery and garden were acquired in the 1690s for another garden, at Easton Neston, Northamptonshire. There they remained, first exposed to the sky, later in a greenhouse, until 1755, when they were presented by their owner, Lady Pomfret, to the University of Oxford. In the meantime, it had become clear that the climate of the British Isles was not favorable
to outdoor displays of ancient marbles from the Mediterranean. And so, the Easton Neston collection of such marbles may well have been the last one in England, and in Europe north of the Alps in general, to have been installed outdoors.\textsuperscript{41} Future sculpture gardens (and, remember, in the course of the eighteenth century such gardens spread eastward all across Europe to St. Petersburg and beyond\textsuperscript{42}) would be furnished with modern replicas and variants of ancient statues made of a variety of materials, not with marble originals derived from Rome and Greece.

**Erudition, conviviality, and the production of authenticity**

Let me summarize and, along the way, broach again the question of authenticity. In sixteenth-century Italy statuary gardens were admired as collections/displays of classical antiquity’s sculptural marvels. But they were no less admired as ensembles, that is, sceneries made of flora, statuary and other features that combined nature and artifice. Beauty, now of the serene, now of the sublime kind, was the paramount virtue by which both statuary and scenery were judged – and, remember, beauty here was the work of more than what met the eye: sounds (from bird songs to musical performances to the to crack of fireworks), aromas of the flora, and the feel of statues (one, no doubt, touched them with little inhibition\textsuperscript{43}) also contributed to it. Still, the statuary garden-scape was meant to gratify more than the senses. For one, it provided a palpable testament of the magnificientia of the patron. But it was also meant to be approached like a text or poetry, be ‘read’ and made sense of as the revived ancient precinct of the nymphs that fostered learning and the liberal arts. Its design had accordingly to harmonize itself with classical poetry’s imagery of that precinct. The peculiar thematic arrangements of flora, cascades, grottoes, statuary and the like, but also the extensive restorations of statues\textsuperscript{44} and the juxtaposition of ancient originals and modern sculptures all’antica, did not, therefore, result from a lack of concern with authenticity but from its opposite: an aspiration to restore back to life and make present ancient prototypes.

This ‘restoring back to life’ did not, however, pertain solely, and perhaps not even principally, to the external appearance of the garden-scape, its degree of resemblance to the classical precinct of the muses. What mattered more was the meaning of resemblances. More precisely, what mattered were similitudes between, on the one hand, the mythological and historical figures of classical antiquity and, on the other, the people living now, in the sixteenth century; similitudes for which the garden, its thematic arrangements of statues and flora, furnished only slight, indirect clues. Such similitudes, that is, lay hiding beneath the surface of the immediately visible and could be traced from enigmatic signs on that surface (Foucault’s “signatures” and “hieroglyphics;” see also Pierio Valeriano’s
It seems to me that establishing an authentic relationship with antiquity depended above all on deciphering those signs and discovering the similitudes that connected the present with the classical past. To put it another way, meaning—seeing classical imagery as a mirror for the here-and-now—was constitutive of the authenticity of one’s relationship to antiquity. People who were unmindful of the existence of the surface signs and who did not engage in the pursuit of similitudes could, no doubt, still find the statuary garden-scape pleasurable to their senses; meaning, however, would have eluded them and their relationship to antiquity would have been superficial.

Keep in mind that this pursuit of meaning was hardly an individual, solitary affair, a matter of silent, contemplative viewing. Vision was unquestionably the most critical sense, yet seeing unfolded in a context of conviviality, and knowledge of the similitudes was produced discursively. Visitors, that is, drew on their own erudition and skills of allegoresis, but they also engaged in exchanges with, and drew on the erudition of, fellow visitors, at the same time as they were instructed by their hosts and guides. Inscriptions placed by garden entrances, such as _procul este profani_ and the so-called _leges hortorum_ (which at once invited cultivated, well-mannered guests and discouraged others; cf. endnote 19), indicated that the conviviality of the visiting parties was not to be spoiled by intrusions of the ill-bred. In short, an authentic relationship to antiquity emerged as the product of a ‘confraternity’ of agencies: a collective that included ancient statues as well as modern ones imitating those of antiquity, fountains, flora and grottoes in thematic arrangements; abstruse signs which, upon decipherment, promised to show to you that classical antiquity had now come back to life; prescriptions, every so often carved in stone, about the proper constitution and comportment of the people entering the garden; the wisdom of guides and guidebooks; the erudite voices of hosts, visitors, and their companions; a ‘confraternity’ that included the patron, his gardeners, servants, and guests.

In Italy, collections of classical sculpture frequently changed hands through sale or as gifts. Many sixteenth-century sculpture gardens were thus progressively dismantled and disappeared. Others were refurbished (and some have been maintained to the present, e.g., the Boboli gardens in Florence), and still others were created after the sixteenth century (e.g., the _bosco delle statue_ in Villa Ludovisi, Rome). In the meantime, European monarchs and aristocrats from north of the Alps adopted the Italian sixteenth-century tradition of sculpture gardens and adapted it to local constraints, namely, the difficulty of obtaining ancient originals from Italy because of papal restrictions on their export, and a climate unfavorable to the preservation of Mediterranean marbles. But they also possessed the means to procure ancient sculptures through expeditions that reached as far as the Aegean and Asia Minor; and, by the late eighteenth-century,
the British could pay enormous sums to individual Italian collectors who were willing and – in spite of continuing papal and royal prohibitions – able to sell. Ancient originals in northern countries were as a rule committed to indoor spaces, and gardens were stocked with copies and modern works in antique style and/or subject matter, made from a variety of materials. All the same, those northern gardens became meaningful both by reference to their contemporary Italian ones and as re-creations of antiquity’s precincts of the noble nymphs. It appears that allegorical readings relating present conjunctures to classical antiquity were possible as late as the eighteenth century.

From statuary gardens to public museums and parks

The creation of sculpture gardens of a classical bent has never stopped (think, e.g., of Faulkner Farm in Brookline, Massachusetts, or Getty Villa in Malibu, California). Yet by the eighteenth century, and especially by its second half, one no longer turned to such gardens in order to relate to antiquity in an authentic way. This section will therefore be dedicated to remarks that pertain to that discontinuity.

First, scores of classical statues had by 1750 left their Mediterranean homelands and had found new homes in indoor spaces in northern countries; the trend would intensify in the last three decades of the eighteenth century. One example: in 1729 nearly two hundred pieces from Rome were acquired by the Elector of Saxony, August II, and were installed in a palace in Dresden. Even in Rome, however, important ancient statuary was now committed to two halls, the Palazzo Nuovo in the Capitol and the Pio-Clementino in the Vatican. The first of these was stocked after 1733 with a collection acquired from cardinal Albani; the second was built as a museum next to the old statue court in the 1770s. As a result of such transfers, by the late eighteenth century the number of sculptures you would find in indoor spaces was much greater than ever before.

Second, important shifts occurred in the way art, and not just classical sculpture, was experienced. Such shifts were intertwined with the formation of a bourgeois public and the emergence of public discourses on art, beauty, taste and ‘aesthetics’ (a new term at the time, though by no means a new field of intellectual inquiry). Winckelmann is of course a central figure in many of the relevant areas, but here you only need to remember his insistence on the unique importance of vision – more specifically, of the disciplined eye – for the correct appreciation of beauty in art. It is essential, Winckelmann theorized, that, in order to produce an accurate inner sense (innerer Sinn) of the artwork, the viewer’s eye be unperturbed by personal predilections. Sculptures, Winckelmann also contended, should be well lit and displayed in such ways as to offer themselves for
observation from all angles. While it took time before such wisdom was put to practice in gallery and museum displays, the implication in the 1760s was clear: the authenticity of one’s relation to classical art depended on direct, uncluttered visual contact with that art. Moreover, the diligently measured drawings prepared by Stuart and Revett for their Antiquities of Athens in the early 1750s – before, that is, Winckelmann had begun publishing – indicate that the demand for uncluttered visual contact with antiquity was not just Winckelmann’s. An audience already existed with an appetency for work such as Stuart and Revett’s: a bourgeois public, no doubt limited in its compass yet with – the leisure and means to read magazines, treatises and other literature and thus keep abreast of the lessons of the burgeoning discourses on art, taste, and aesthetics. One of these lessons was that, in art as much as in nature, the discernment and appreciation of beauty are affairs internal to the subject. The enjoyment of art thereby emerged as one’s private experience, requiring a calm, contemplative stance toward the artwork on view. This contemplative stance is memorably illustrated in Daniel Chodowiecki’s well-known pair of etchings that show the “natural” and the “affected” (read: proper and improper, tasteful and tasteless) ways of viewing sculpture. It was only through the “natural” way – a composed posture and a silent, meditative gaze, fixed onto the statue from some distance – that “an authentic connection with the work of art [could] be established.” The “affected” etching, on the other hand, censured as tasteless the ostentation of emotions while viewing sculpture but also the very conviviality of the viewers. Again, it would take time for Chodowiecki’s “natural” way to become the norm, but the point was already clear: manners that had been so characteristic of viewing sculpture in aristocratic settings during previous centuries were now deemed inappropriate for the middle class.

Third, but closely related to the previous remarks: during the eighteenth century collections of every kind, including collections of classical statuary, became accessible to broad circles of visitors, not just to aristocrats, artists and scholars. In Italy, for instance, besides the two museums in Rome mentioned above, the Uffizi was acquired by the city of Florence in 1743 and opened to a select public in the 1760s. Other examples include the Fridericianum in Kassel (built as a public museum in the 1770s), the ancient collection of Dresden (which, beside ancient originals derived from the Chigi and Albani collections, after 1783 housed a vast number, c. 800 pieces, of plaster casts), the Louvre (made a public museum in 1793 and containing Napoleon’s Italian booty in 1800) and, near the end of the eighteenth century, some of the then forming private collections of antiquities in England, e.g., the collections of Henry Blundell and Charles Townley. Visitors – perhaps not yet in great numbers – came principally from the emerging bourgeois class; they constituted a very different, more diverse crowd than the aristocratic érudits who frequented sculpture
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gardens. The sculptures they saw in the museum were not yet arranged according to Winckelmann’s historicist scheme. But they were displayed in grandiose halls, in arrangements designed to offer to the viewer nothing but a pure aesthetic experience; arrangements, that is, that no longer required the visitor’s erudition and skills of allegoresis in order to make sense but addressed instead his/her taste; arrangements, in the last instance, dispossessed of hermetic signs, those “hieroglyphics” that promised pleasure through decipherment. And, as taste was associated with morality and, ultimately, with civic virtue, the public museum – a “temple” devoted to the cultivation of taste – acquired great cultural authority. On account of that authority, I suggest, the aesthetic experience offered by the museum became constitutive of the authenticity of one’s relationship to the classical. People might still, of course, visit gardens adorned with statues, grottoes, labyrinths, and waterfalls. In fact, like art collections, many such gardens became publicly accessible in the eighteenth century, and new ones were created as public parks (Wörlitz near Dessau and Hohenheim near Stuttgart are prominent examples). But, along with replicas of classical statuary and ruined ‘Roman’ temples, such parks now contained Chinese, Gothic, Muslim and other follies – a medieval peasant’s house here, a Swiss cottage there. And so, it seems to me that your visit to the park would be a wholly distinct experience, associated more with the pleasures of exoticism than with the aesthetic experience of antiquity. Only the museum could now deliver the latter.

Epilogue (discontinuities and continuities with the present)

Let me finally give you a foretaste of the main issues that the second part of this paper will address, and thus try, in a cursory way, to bring my story up to our time. Clearly, museum exhibits of classical sculpture that were mounted in the last hundred years, and especially after 1945, have little in common with displays that were set up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For one, most of those early museum exhibits, at least those outside Italy, were dominated by plaster casts of ancient marble statues; but, come the twentieth century, the casts were deemed unworthy of display and were accordingly consigned to the warehouse. Second, in the early nineteenth century mutilated pieces still underwent substantial restoration (with some notable exceptions) before they were put on display. But the practice of restoration was progressively abandoned, and the inverse trend, de-restoration, set in; by the 1970s many of the old restorations had been removed and museum visitors had learnt to appreciate fragments. Now, both de-restoration and the removal of plaster casts from the display floor are, clearly, related to changing conceptions regarding authenticity. And just as ancient artworks were stripped of their post-antique additions, and displays were purified of modern, mechani-
cally made copies, so did “authentic” acquire among its senses a new one, the strict sense focused on in the beginning of this paper. We often refer today to this process as the emergence of the modernist aesthetic and ideology. These are useful labels, we use them all the time and we manage to communicate. They are still labels, however, and they often conceal more than they reveal. For instance, the emergence of the modernist aesthetic appears to have been an incremental and direction-less process, lacking an identifiable beginning and end; our labels make it more coherent than this, and may thus keep us from recognizing its peculiar temporality, its uneven, unpredictable rhythm.

Related to the purifying trends just noted is another. In the nineteenth-century museum, ancient statues stood amidst neoclassical decorations and architecture, ‘blending’ with them as it were, while offering the visitor an authoritative panorama of the history of classical art. In the new exhibit halls of the twentieth century neoclassical decorations and architecture receded or disappeared altogether, leaving behind rooms defined by straight lines and plain surfaces painted in unobtrusive colors. While in the nineteenth century ancient artworks were, you might say, somewhat mediated by their neoclassical surroundings (e.g., arches, niches, coffered ceilings, all of which harked back to Italian Renaissance architecture and, ultimately, to Roman palaces, baths, temples, and other public buildings), twentieth-century exhibits adopted and cultivated the principle ‘the less mediated the ancient artwork, the more authentic it is’. None of this is news, still, in the future essay I will attend closely to the process by which the twentieth-century purist aesthetic emancipated itself from its neoclassical matrix. But I also intend to complicate the story a little by asking: what alternative – rival yet, in theory, plausible – conceptions of authenticity were occluded, made unthinkable, by the cultivation of the purist principles identified above? This seems an important issue, well worth exploring. Not to do so would invite speculation, e.g., that the twentieth-century purist idea of authenticity may after all have imposed itself as an obviously virtuous choice, rather than having emerged piecemeal, as the cumulative effect of a trajectory of historical conjunctures. Besides, curators keen on negotiating the purist idea of authenticity in future exhibitions might benefit from knowing of alternatives that were made unimaginable during the past two centuries.

Two more remarks, to be taken up and modulated in the second installment: first, modern museum exhibits of classical sculpture seem to have inherited rather little from the statuary gardens of the Early Modern period. It would appear that eighteenth-century social transformations ultimately resulted in a radical discontinuity in this matter. Second, today’s exhibits of classical sculpture have inherited from the time of Winckelmann the conviction that the authenticity of our relationship with antiquity depends on clear vision; that is not the ‘naked eye’ but the educated
gaze. Knowing how to see a display – what to look for in it as much as what to overlook – is now the cornerstone of the art museum culture. That is the most significant continuity that obtains between Enlightenment times and the present age in the field of art displays.

Summary
Displays of classical sculpture and the demand for authenticity. By Michael Fotiadis. The subject of this paper is the production of authenticity in displays of classical (Greek and Roman) sculpture. Authenticity, I observe, is not a quality immanent in the piece on display but rather the work of a multifarious collective of agents, human and material. This applies equally to the modern museum and to displays of the Early Modern period, but the emphasis of the paper lies on the period 1500–1800 CE. Within these chronological limits I trace the career of sculpture gardens from their beginnings in the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, when that career was radically transformed. Early Modern sculpture gardens bear directly to the authenticity issue because, by juxtaposing ancient, often over-restored statuary with replicas, pastiches and modern works all'antica, and by placing all these in the midst of flora, fountains, grottoes and other natural and artificial features, they violate in almost every respect our sense of the authentic. The peculiarities of those Early Modern displays, I argue, were not due to a lack of concern with authenticity but to the specific configuration of the collective of agents at work in the production of authenticity. Sculpture garden compositions were above all allegories to be deciphered by the visitor. Classical statuary thus served as a mirror for the present, and played therefore an entirely different role from the one it plays in today’s museum exhibits. Sculpture garden displays had to abandon their claims to authenticity in the advanced eighteenth century as a result of the then emerging discourses on taste and aesthetics, the formation of a bourgeois public and the rise of the public museum. By the end of the century, sculptures had become objects of purely aesthetic appreciation, and the aesthetic experience offered by them was constitutive of the authenticity of the viewer’s relation to antiquity.

Notes
1. I am grateful to Johannes Siapkas for asking me to contribute to the thematic section of the Lychnos issue in hand, and for many challenging comments on drafts (including the present one) of this essay. An anonymous reviewer provided suggestions that made me think, and so did Bosse Holmqvist, the editor of Lychnos, as he worked on, and significantly improved, my prose. I also thank Ulrike Nürnberger for helping me access crucial resources in libraries in Berlin.


9. The volatile nature of such ideas was nicely demonstrated in an essay written more than two decades ago: Mark Jones: "Why fakes?” in Mark Jones (ed.): Fake? The art of deception (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1990), 11–16, esp. 14–15.

10. You expected perhaps this advice to have a different emphasis and to conclude with the recommendation ‘do not interpret and judge the practices of the past by reference to the practices of the here-and-now’ (or ‘do not be whiggish”). But, first, this would be nothing new – historians as a rule already practice this advice –, and, second, my overarching, long-term interest lies not so much in the interpretation of past practices as in possibilities for innovation in future displays of the classical.

11. Gardens were not the only kind of setting for ancient sculpture in the Early Modern period, but indoor displays in palaces and villas were far less accessible to visitors (if at all). It makes sense, therefore, to focus in this essay on garden displays alone.


13. Augustine, in Petrarch’s De secreto conflictu curarum meorum (1358).


16. In Italy, classical sculpture was appreciated as art already in the late fifteenth century: Settis: “Collecting ancient sculpture,” esp. 25–27.

17. Coffin: Gardens and gardening, 21. Inscriptions along the walls of the court announced its appropriateness for poets and artists (Christian: "The della Valle sculpture court”, 848, 850, and "Instauration and pietas”, 49–51), thus hinting to the court’s affinity with the model Museum, as Coffin observed.

18. The extent to which women participated in visiting parties and in gatherings of invited guests remains unclear. See Christian: Empire without end, 199.

19. For visitors and their guides to sixteenth-century antiquities collections in Rome, see William Stenhouse: ”Visitors, display, and reception in the antiquity collections of Late Renaissance Rome” in Renaissance quarterly 58:2 (2005), 397–434. Christ-
ian (Empire without end, 198–204) offers a useful summary for the period before the sack. For invited guests, their hosts and their convivial interactions in Villa d’Este, see Inden: “Classics in the garden.” The so-called leges hortorum, which aimed at regulating visitor access to statuary gardens, are briefly discussed in Stenhouse: “Visitors, display, and reception”, 411–412, but I have been unable to consult the main source, David Coffin: “The ‘Lex Hortorum’ and access to gardens of Latium during the Renaissance” in Journal of garden history 2 (1982), 201–232.

20. My argument has been inspired in the first place by Ron Inden’s analysis (Inden: “Classics in the garden”) of the Villa d’Este garden at Tivoli. The latter garden was created in the 1560s, c. 30 years after the Della Valle sculpture court. In contrast to my speculative suggestions, however, Inden’s analysis rests on concrete, site-specific evidence, namely, the iconographic program deployed at Tivoli. Also keep in mind that the Villa d’Este garden, like many an Italian villa garden of the sixteenth and subsequent centuries, contained some ancient originals but it had not been designed for the display of collections of antiquities (see also p. 165).


22. See, e.g., MacDougall: Fountains, statues and flowers, 26; Christian: Empire without end, 123; Liliane Châtelet-Lange: “Le ‘Museo di Vanves’” (1560). Collections de sculptures et musées au XVIIe siècle en France in Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 38:3/4 (1976), 266–285, 278, 281 & 282; and Donna Kurtz: “The concept of the classical past in Tudor and early Stuart England” in Journal of the history of collections 20:2 (2008), 189–204, 191 (quoting from recent work). Italian Renaissance gardens appear to have derived crucial aspects of their design from less distant ancestors, namely, from the medieval riyaḍ (i.e., formal gardens) of Sicily (especially, from the Genoardo, [Arabic jennat al-ard, meaning ‘earthly paradise’] of the Norman palace in Palermo) and, ultimately, from a tradition that reached back in time through Islam to antiquity and to Achaemenid Persia. This may be accepted wisdom today, but it seems to me that in the times before the rise of historicism such wisdom would have made little sense; and, in sixteenth-century Italy, this medieval heritage did not serve as a mirror for the present.


25. See, e.g., Coffin: Gardens and gardening, 21–22.


27. For Mary of Hungary’s secret garden at Binche, see Haskell & Penny: Taste and the antique, 5–6, and Walter Cupperi: “Giving away the moulds will cause no damage to his Majesty’s casts’. New documents on the Vienna jüngling and the sixteenth-century dissemination of casts after the antique in the Holy Roman Empire” in Rune Frederiksen & Eckart Marchand (eds): Plaster casts. Making, collecting and displaying from classical antiquity to the present. Transformationen der Antike, v. 18 (Berlin, 2010), 81–98, 83–84.


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38. See, e.g., the fragments illustrated by John Aubrey, in Dudley: Henrietta Louisa Jeffreys, 89, fig. 3.3.


40. Adolph Michaelis: Ancient marbles in Great Britain (Cambridge, 1882), 40–41; Dudley: Henrietta Louisa Jeffreys, Chapter 3. The pride of Arundel's collection, the statues displayed in the gallery, were bought after 1678 by Thomas Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, for his Wilton House in Wiltshire. There had been a sculpture garden at Wilton since the 1630s, designed by Isaac de Caus, and it included among its displays a bronze copy of the "Borghese gladiator" (Haskell & Penny: Taste and the antique, 221). However, virtually no ancient original derived from the Arundel, or any other collection appears to have been placed in this garden: see Kennedy: A description of the antiquities and curiosities. See also Malcolm Baker: "‘For Pembroke statues, dirty gods and coins'. The collecting, display, and uses of sculpture at Wilton House" in Penny & Schmidt (eds.): Collecting sculpture, 378–395, esp. 379–386.

41. Exceptions have been individual pieces or small groups of them. See, e.g., John H. Larson, Claire Madden & Ian Sutherland:
"Ince Blundel. The preservation of an important collection of classical sculpture" in Journal of cultural heritage 1 (2000), 579–587, for pieces that were placed outdoors c. 1800 at Ince Blundell and have been conserved in recent time; and Michaelis: Ancient marbles, 103, for “a few marbles, especially vases artistically enriched” from Italy that were installed in Stowe gardens after 1774.

42. See Haskell & Penny: Taste and the antique, 88–90.


44. The restoration of statues and the creation of sculpture gardens must, to my mind, be regarded as homologous practices: both of them were geared to mitigating the fragmentary, puzzlingly incomplete nature of antiquity as it emerged from the ground, both constituted interpretations, however unstable, of the materials unearthed, and both pertained to the production of authenticity. With regard to restoration of statues, these issues are extensively discussed in Barkan: Unearthing the past, Chapter 3; also p. 7.

45. Foucault: The order of things, 25–30. For Pierio Valeriano (1477–1558) and his allegorical interpretations of classical sculpture in his Hieroglyphica see the brief discussion provided in Christian: Empire without end, 201–204.

46. Coffin: Gardens and gardening, 27.


50. Sheehan: Museums, 5.

51. Chodowiecki’s pair of etchings on Kunst Kenntnis – Connoissante des Arts was published as part of the central article of the Goettinger Taschen Calendar vom Jahr 1780, an almanac that was widely read (and discussed) around 1780 (Link: "The social practice"). The etchings have been frequently illustrated and analyzed in recent publications (besides Link: "The social practice", 6–8, and Sheehan: Museums, see, e.g., Werner Busch: "Daniel Chodowieckis ‘Natürliche und affectirte Handlungen des Lebens’" in Ernst Hinrichs (ed.): Daniel Chodowiecki (1726–1801). Kupferstecher, Illustrator, Kaufmann, Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung, 22 (Tübingen 1997) 77–99, esp. 96–99). It is worth noting that the scene with the statue and its viewers is placed in a garden.


53. Cases are too many to enumerate. I have limited myself here to exhibits that had a significant component of classical sculpture. The Ashmolean also housed classical sculptures in the second half of the eighteenth century (see above, p. 166) but they were not properly displayed at the time. Many examples of public museums in German cities are mentioned in Sheehan: Museums, 20–22. For the Blundell and Townley collections see, respectively, Michaelis: Ancient marbles, 335, and Viccy Coltman: Fabricating the antique. Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760–1800 (Chicago 2006), 168–169.

54. See Haskell & Penny: Taste and the antique, 102.

55. The idea of the museum as temple of art was explicitly formulated near the end of the eighteenth century (see Theodore Ziolkowski: "Schinkel’s museum. The Romantic temple of art" in Proceedings of the American philosophical society 131:4 (1987), 367–377, 374) and was put to practice in Schinkel’s Royal (now Altes) Museum in the 1820s. However, the Pio-Clementino was equipped in the 1770s with a domed hall designed after the Pantheon, and Henry
Blundell built a “Garden Temple” in 1792 (and, by 1810, another Pantheon-like rotunda) to display his classical collection. Frederick the Great also housed his classical collection in an “Antikentempel” by 1769, a round structure built in the vicinity of the New Palace in Potsdam, but this was not open to the public.


58. As is the recent, post-1970s resurgence of scholarly and curatorial interest in plaster casts, and even the occasional re-restoration of sculptures that earlier had been de-restored (for the latter see, e.g., Rossi Pinelli: “From the need for completion”, 70, and the case of the “Hope Hygieia:” www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/hope_hygieia (accessed 1/9/2012).

59. For most museums providing the panorama in question meant resorting to plaster casts.