Kenneth Clark’s ‘The Nude. A Study of Ideal Art’, 1956

by JOHN-PAUL STONARD

few art historians can claim to have defined the shape and direction of their subject as a specialist discipline yet also to have spoken to an audience numbering millions. In his The Nude. A Study of Ideal Art, Kenneth Clark wrote the first book on a subject central to the history of art that was both accessible to a broad audience and made a serious contribution to scholarship. Although it was not until the television series Civilisation that Clark could claim to have the same mass audience as his only rival in this respect, Ernst Gombrich, The Nude remains his most important contribution to scholarship—and, so it happens, also his most controversial.

The traditional view that the nude was not strictly a ‘picture category’, that it was timeless, natural and above all God-given, was noted by Max Friedländer in 1942. Although drawing and modelling from the nude were components of academic training, representations of the nude were not traditionally presented as a genre, or as the basis for a system of classification. Clark could therefore rightfully claim that, with a couple of minor exceptions, his book was the first survey of a subject that was central to the history of art. But in retrospect this hardly seems belated: it was only at a moment of transition, of the easing of distinctions between disciplines, that such a volume was possible. Soon, however, categories were being dissolved altogether, and Clark’s breakthrough volume was itself being attacked as emblematic of an older way of seeing the world. It is not difficult to see how Clark appeared to the 1960s generation as the quintessence of an older, restrictive order. Yet, in the case of The Nude the criticisms were aimed not at his humanism, by which the perfected depiction of the human body was the highest achievement of Western art; nor his interpretation of the bountiful nudes of Rubens as a form of Christian praise, or descriptions of ‘Our Lord’ on the Cross; nor at his ‘undisguised admiration for the girls’, as he put it in a letter to Bernard Berenson. It was rather the well-known epithet with which the book opened, the famous distinction between the naked and the nude, which the new politicised art history latched on to. The ‘huddled and defenceless’ naked body is contrasted with the ‘balanced, prosperous and confident’ mien of the nude (p.1). If the nude is ‘the body reformed’, the naked body is by implication deformed, impoverished and subjugated. Yet none of those who, to the present day, cite this distinction, note that Clark subsequently observes that it was ‘forced’ into the English language in the early eighteenth century by critics intent on proving the value of the beautiful human body as a subject of art. Nor do they note that Clark does not subsequently refer to the distinction, using the terms interchangeably, for example in his discussion of Manet’s Olympia (p.153), and also freely deploys semi-robed figures as examples without feeling the need to question his basic premise. In fact the distinction between naked and nude is nothing more than a decoy; a device to focus the attention of his audience.

The real story told in The Nude is that of the survival of the human body as the central subject for art since classical antiquity. Clark considers the history of art from antiquity to Renoir as a diaspora of classical prototypes, against which an ‘alternative convention’ swarmed like the barbarian cultures hemming in the old European empires. This theme was readily grasped by early reviewers. L.D. Ettlinger described in this Magazine the ‘brilliantly revitalized account of the classical tradition’ presented by Clark who, importantly, recognised ‘no departmental boundary between classical archaeology and art history’. Clark’s mission was to show a general readership not only the continued relevance of the human figure as a form of artistic expression—at a time, it should be remembered, when figurative art was strongly identified with repressive political regimes—but also to revivify interest in antiquity in the face of a modern attitude that had ‘discarded the antique armour, forgotten the subjects of mythology and disputed the doctrine of imitation’ (p.2).

The Nude was thus the first book for a general readership that dealt with the survival of pagan antiquity in the motif of the human body, tracing the ‘migrations of the image’, and taking in ‘the whole perspective of European art’. It was also the first book to address this theme not from the perspective of dry scholarship, but on a level of human empathy that necessarily included erotic identification and sexual desire. The limits of Clark’s ability to account for this, it must be said, have been set into relief by more recent academic work. His freely stated admiration for the unclothed female form, not untouched by galantry, and expressed unguardedly in a later book on the subject, that the Greeks were not nasty homosexuals, and the homosexuals to say that I was not sufficiently conscious of the beauty of the male body—which I think is true. My undisguised admiration for the girls has given some mild offence’. Berenson Archive, Villa I Tatti. The author thanks William Mostyn-Owen for drawing his attention to Clark’s unpublished correspondence with Berenson.


4 Clark cites two previous attempts to treat the subject, both published in German before 1914, but neither can have influenced his own volume, nor are they read today. J. Lange: Die menschliche Gestalt in der Geschichte der Kunst, Strasbourg 1903; and W. Hausenstein: Der nackte Mensch, Munich 1913.

5 Clark wrote to Berenson on 19th June 1957: ‘...the Catholics have written to me
Venus, whose genealogy is traced in line with two types, the ‘schematic austerity’ of Polyclitus, and achieved its zenith in ‘Phidias’s belief in the rectangular proportions and the rhythm of our functioning are the basis for all judgments and systems of knowledge.’

This idealism is exemplified by Clark’s opening example: Apollo, the ‘god of light’, but also the ‘vanquisher of darkness’, (p.36) whose genealogy is traced from early Kouroi, through to the Hermes of Praxiteles, presented as the ‘climax of [a] passion’ that had first appeared in the ‘schematic austerity’ of Polyclitus, and achieved its zenith in ‘Phidias’s belief in the rectangular majesty of Apollo’ (p.39). The tradition of Apollo is thus whittled down to a few moments of perfect achievement, from which latecomers such as the feeble Apollo Belvedere, with its ‘weak structure and slack surfaces’ is excluded (p.45). ‘How pleasure in the human body once more became a permissible subject for art is the unexplained miracle of the Italian Renaissance’, Clark writes, with direct reference to Donatello’s David, who looks back over meagre Christian depictions of Adam to the beauty of the classical Apollo. Yet the perfection of the nude in quattrocento painting (Pollaiuolo, Botticelli, Piero della Francesca and Perugino), was once again diluted by the rediscovery of the second-rate Apollo Belvedere. Whereas Dürer’s response was his drawing of Apollo, a ‘construction’ of classicism showing his conviction ‘that the body was a curious and rather alarming organism’ (p.53), Raphael was able to detect the true classical ethos of Apollo: ‘Not only the grace of movement, but the sense of epiphany and the glance towards a more radiant world […] reappear in the saints, poets and philosophers of the Stance’ (p.54). Clark’s real concern, however, is with the ‘heroic humanism’ that was first disinterred by Donatello, and it is thus in Michelangelo that the Apollonian ideal finds its ‘greatest embodiment’ in the marble David, ‘a hero rather than a god’ (p.58).

A more complex ideal is discerned in Apollo’s counterpart, Venus, whose genealogy is traced in line with two types, the ‘vegetable’ and the ‘crystalline’ – the Venus of the flesh (Naturalis) and of the spirit (Coelestis). Clark elevates the latter, and traces her back to the Cnidian Venus of Praxiteles, the matrix of all beautiful nudes in art, known only, however, through second-rate copies, like less-fortunate family relations. Clark praises the ‘heroic naturalness’ of the Venus of Milo, who ‘makes us think of an elm tree in a field of corn’, witness to a vitality lost in Hellenistic and Roman depictions of Venus (p.83). Vitality returns in the paintings of Botticelli, ‘one of the greatest poets of Venus’, who could look ‘beyond the Hellenistic replica to the impulse from which it derives’ (pp.92–94). His Primavera is yet dissociated from antiquity by her ‘human quality’ and quotient of pathos, most evident in her face, which ‘reveals no thought beyond the present’, and thus underlines her individuality. Raphael is of course the ‘supreme master of Venus, the Praxiteles of the post-classical world’ (p.103), but it was left to Giorgione to create a nude that would rival the Cnidian Venus as a model for centuries to come in the form of the Sleeping Venus at Dresden. Clark ends his account of Venus Coelestis with the most memorable paragraph of the book, in which he compares Giorgione’s Venus, ‘like a bud, wrapped in its sheath, each petal folded so firmly as to give us the feeling of inflexible purpose’, with Titian’s Venus of Urbino, where ‘the bud has opened’ (p.112).

From here it is a history of the flesh rather than the spirit. Venus Naturalis finds her first great embodiment in the courting nude at the centre of Titian’s Diana and Actaeon, ‘one of the most seductive nudes in all painting’ (p.124). Titian is ‘one of the two supreme masters of Natural Venus’ (p.119). The other is Rubens, who moves Clark to his most personal and, for the contemporary reader, most problematic writing. He suggests that we bring to mind the ‘golden hair and swelling bosoms of his [Rubens’s] Graces’ as we sing harvest hymns ‘on a bright Sunday in September’. After completing the passage on Rubens, he later recalled, Clark ‘began to tremble, and had to leave my hotel bedroom and walk along the sea front’. In the absence of the heroic ideal, or Cnidian virtue, the perils of the flesh are never far away. Of Boucher’s Miss Murphy, lying sprawled and naked on a silken couch, Clark warns that ‘Boucher has enabled us to enjoy her with as little shame as she is enjoying herself. One false note and we should be embarrassingly back in the world of sin’ (p.140). The eighteenth century was thus to the female nude what the post-Roman world was to the heroic male, and it was only with the arrival of Ingres, whose ‘nuggets of obsessive form’ (p.143) managed somehow to convey a feeling of idealised classical beauty, that some sense of decorum returns. Courbet remains a ‘heroic figure in the history of the nude’, for the corporeality of his figures: ‘his eye embraced the female body with the same enthusiasm that it stroked a deer, grasped an apple or slapped the side of an enormous trout’ (p.151). The Cnidian Venus returns also with Renoir, whose picture of his wife, La Baigneuse blonde (1881), which Clark himself owned, ‘gives us the illusion that we are looking through some magical glass at one of the last masterpieces extolled by Pliny’ (p.150).

The three central chapters concerned with the expressive categories of energy, pathos and ecstasy were, for Ettlinger, ‘the most original section of the book’.13 The ‘energetic’ nude is traced from antiquity through to Michelangelo, by way of a new protagonist, Hercules. Heroism as a theme unites the account of the energetic body with the pathetic body, ‘defeated by pain’. Christian artists were obliged to search hard for antique models of bodily pathos, and in many cases had simply to invent, although the ‘ideal character of the antique nude’ is shown nowhere more decisively than in the fact that, ‘in spite of the Christian horror of nakedness, it was the undraped figure of

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11 The phrase is taken from Clark’s report to the Longford Committee on pornography: ‘The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is entirely unburdened by any notion of the politics of vision. But this is hardly surprising. Descriptions such as that of ‘the small, full, manageable body, which has always appealed to the average sensualist’, however, are irredeemable, yet to criticise Clark for separating the nude ‘from discourses about power and, ironically, the politics governing differences of class, gender and race’,10 is to be guilty of the ‘immense condescension of posterity’, as E.P. Thompson once put it.
12 Clark, op. cit. (note 6), p.187.
13 Ettlinger, op. cit. (note 7), p.149.

318 MAY 2010 • CEH • THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE
Christ which was finally accepted as canonical in representations of the Crucifixion' (p.221). The importance of the rediscovered Laocoön for Michelangelo’s depictions of the body locked in spiritual struggle returns the narrative from a discussion of Christian pathos to antique heroism. Even with the pathetic nude of nineteenth-century art, it is the classical tradition that wins through. Gericauld studied antique reliefs for his famous raft; Delacroix employed ‘19th century daughters of Niobe’ to add pathos to his historical set-pieces; and Rodin, whose overwrought figuration was saturated with ‘man’s tragic struggle with destiny’, redeemed himself by looking at the Lapiths of Olympia and at Marsyas.

Ecstasy is the third category and leads the argument into the final part of the book, concerned with the ‘alternative convention’ of the Gothic nude, and of the fate of the human body in modern art. Clark examines the ‘Dionysian motives’ of the Thiasos, those ecstatic dancing figures, in particular the Maenads and the Nereids, carefree sea-nymphs, for which he had a particular fascination. Yet ecstatic figures may also serve a deeper purpose, and ‘symbolise through the body some change or translation of the soul’, which in the hands of an artist such as Bernini ‘must be like one of those great ecstatic moments, love, levitation, or the sudden lift of a wave’ (p.288). One might have thought that such an expressive figure would have opened some discussion of twentieth-century representations of the unclothed human body, but only Matisse’s The dance is briefly mentioned. Instead, Clark uses the corollary of ecstasy, rebirth, to return to Michelangelo’s drawings of the Resurrection. Indeed, embedded in the pages of The Nude is a book about Michelangelo which suggests that Clark would have sacrificed every single page of the book to ‘revitalising’ aspect of his approach. Clark uses the corollary of ecstasy, rebirth, to return to Michelangelo’s drawings of the Resurrection. Indeed, embedded in the pages of The Nude is a book about Michelangelo which suggests that Clark would have sacrificed every single page of the book to ‘revitalising’ aspect of his approach. Clark wrote to his former mentor in November 1956: ‘Before I see you again you will have received a copy of my book on the Nude which you kindly allowed me to dedicate to you. You will see how much of it is due to you on every page. It was conceived on walks on the hills behind I Tatti during one of those blissful periods when you let me stay there’. Berenson replied that Clark had surpassed himself, illuminating the subject with ‘precious epithets’, and an admirably assimilated scholarship.

The most startling of these epithets is that which introduces the chapter on the ‘alternative convention’: ‘Roots and bulbs, pulled up into the light, give us for a moment a feeling of shame’ (p.300). The ‘alternative convention’ is the anti–classical tradition of Gothic art, and the Christian art of northern Europe. Clark sketches a few moments when the ‘alternative convention’ appeared faintly to echo the glories of antiquity, and the naked figure of Eve took on the same depth of feeling as the classical nude. In the Très Riches Heures Eve is ‘naked as a shrimp’ (p.310) and unaware of her own shame, but later depictions by Van Eyck and by Hugo van der Goes show the underlying realism of the ‘alternative convention’, and, in the latter case, show ‘the unfortunate condition to which the female body was reduced in the mediaeval mind’ (p.313). For only when this realism was synthesised into a new convention in the late paintings of Cranach, who ‘evolved a decorative convention for the nude equal to that of 16th-century India’ (p.321), was this northern eroticism comparable with the beauty of antique nudes. In one of the most dubious connections of the book, Clark moves from here directly to Rembrandt, whose defiance of classicism in the creation of often ugly, fleshy bodies was motivated, he writes, by ‘Christian pity’ (p.327). Pity becomes ‘scrupulous honesty’ in the case of his Bathsheba, ‘a naked body permeated with thought’ (p.330). The ‘alternative convention’ is traced cursorily through to German Expressionism, a movement dismissed, however, by Clark as an imaginative failure. Courbet is preferred to Cézanne for his ability to ‘see the female body through memories of the antique’. Yet it is in Rouault’s images of prostitutes, ‘monsters of brutal depravity’ (p.333), that the anti–classical tradition found its culmination, based on a religious attitude that found redemption in fear and degradation. One can only conjecture what Clark would have made of Willem de Kooning’s Women paintings, the first exhibition of which opened at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, on 16th March 1953, the day after Clark gave his second Mellon lecture on the subject of the nude in Washington DC.

Clark would certainly have made no bones about his opposition to such works and was clear, at least in public, about his attitude to most of the art of his own century. By 1900 the heroism of the classical nude has disappeared. Venus vanishes after Renoir, just as the perfection of Apollo was superseded by the ‘communal frenzy’ of Dionysus; and with Rodin ended a tradition of the pathos and divinity of the body in art, thanks to the ‘death wish’ of modernity that ‘the poets of Romanticism had foreseen, and the technicians of the present century have so brilliantly accomplished’ (p.263). At best one can detect an academic tradition of ‘the nude as an end in itself’, as Clark titles his final chapter, which favours formal perfection over intuition, and considers the nude as a ‘source of independent plastic construction’. Matisse’s Le nu bleu is taken as the most recent manifestation of this tradition, which although anti–academic, was still concerned with ‘significant form’. Picasso’s Les demoiselles d’Avignon, by contrast, is a ‘triumph of hate’, and aimed entirely against the classical tradition. The only twentieth–century artist who appears to have answered antiquity in creating ‘significant form’ imbued with genuine emotion was, according to Clark, Henry Moore, who worked with a more intuitive relation to the

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17 Clark, op. cit. (note 6), p.106.
18 Clark to Berenson, 2nd November 1956, Villa I Tatti, Berenson Archive.
19 Berenson to Clark, 9th December 1956, Villa I Tatti, Berenson Archive.
female form. Clark’s own reassessment of classical art, and his realisation that something ought to be done about the dwindling appreciation of antique sculpture, was in part motivated by his own response to Henry Moore’s work, Nicholas Penny has suggested.20 Clark ends his book (without being able to think of a final, pithy sentence, as he later confessed) by admitting his limited understanding of twentieth-century art, merely pointing to the ‘far greater complexities’ of the analogies on which were based the representations of modern man.

The Nude was met at first with unanimous praise, reflecting Clark’s unassailable public standing. ‘He more than any other single man during the last quarter of a century has been responsible for weaving visual art into the texture of English life. This he has achieved without any surrender of intellectual integrity’, wrote Benedict Nicolson in the New Statesman.21 It was, however, the great public success of Civilization, broadcast in 1969, that precipitated the first wave of reaction. John Berger opened the fray with an assault on the ‘privileged minority’ of art historians and their appropriation of the past in Ways of Seeing, first shown on television and published as a book of the same title in 1972.22 ‘Men act and women appear’ was Berger’s formulation of the way women were made the objects of vision, and his implicit criticism of Clark is that he does not examine the political conventions of the ‘way of seeing’ – a phrase he in fact takes from Clark’s book – implied by the nude in art.

The ‘unrelenting moralism’ of Berger’s text, and its simplistic reversal of the distinction between naked and nude, lauding the ‘sexual image of the naked’ as an emblem of commonality and solidarity, has been roundly criticised from a feminist perspective.23 Discussions of the ‘gaze’ frame the senses in which ‘ways of seeing’ are never politically innocent, even when it comes to looking at Niobids and Kouros.24 Laura Mulvey in particular has provided a much more subtle basis on which a politically oriented psychoanalytic approach could be used to analyse the ‘determining male gaze’ within a patriarchal, phallocentric order – for which Clark was a prominent envoy.25 His disavowal of all politico of vision or public, codified context in which representation is embedded, is certainly the basis on which criticism can and has been mounted. Yet it is largely through a misreading, privileging the distinction between naked and nude as a key to The Nude, through which this has occurred.26

In an article first published in 1980, and revised in a longer version that appeared ten years later, T.J. Clark addresses directly the social identity of Manet’s Olympia as a prostitute, and thus offers a classic formulation of the way in which the unclothed body is politicised.27 Without explicitly referring to The Nude, T.J. Clark uses the term ‘naked’ to suggest the way in which Manet was destabilising the concept of the courtesan in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, showing the real link to capital and the commodification of the body.28 His discussion of the ‘general theory of the nude’, which emerged faltering in art criticism in the 1860s, shows that the genre of the nude had at least been discussed, in the writing of Camille Lemonnier, for example, who juxtaposed the nude with the more common spectacle of the ‘unclothed’.

The nakedness of Olympia reveals her social class origins, and leads T.J. Clark to a significant redefinition of nakedness and nudity: ‘By nakedness I mean those signs – that broken, interminable circuit – which say that we are nowhere but in a body, constructed by it, by the way it incorporates the signs of other people. (Nudity, on the contrary, is a set of signs for the belief that the body is ours, a great generality which we make our own, or leave in art in the abstract.)’.29 When the attempt is made to engage directly with The Nude on this issue, however, the target is generally missed. In 1992 Lynda Nead lamented the lack of any ‘critical framework for discussing representations of the female body’, and ascribed the ‘astonishing’ longevity of Clark’s The Nude to this lack of resistance.30 Nead argues that the goal of the female nude throughout history has been that of regulation and containment of the female body, and that all theories of the nude are implicated in such repressive aesthetics. She is doubtless right, and Clark’s movement from descriptions of female abundance to formal constraint occur throughout The Nude, in particular during his discussion of Rubens. Yet still her argument relies on a partisan reading of The Nude – she quotes Clark’s description of the ‘sheathed’ Gorgon to signal his investment in the processes of repression, but not his comparison with the ‘liberated’ Titian. Her characterisation inevitably extends to framing Clark as a figurehead of the patriarchal establishment and repeats the most common error of putting him forward as an aloof conservative, which may be read in his manner but not in his politics, or his democratising approach to scholarship.

If there is a politics of vision at work in The Nude, it may be better situated in those aspects of the text that are internal, but not disclosed as guiding themes. Despite Clark’s disavowal of the art of his own century, in fact his approach to the history of the nude as a heroic form, using the tools of connoisseurship, is thoroughly of its time. The struggle to define a heroic figurative art was central to the cultural politics of the twentieth century. For Fascism, the artist was a hero who would create perfect heroic bodies exemplary for national citizens. At the time Clark was writing, a similar attention to the exemplary role of the human figure was being demanded by Socialist Realism in the Soviet Bloc. Against this background one might think of Clark’s revitalising of a popular understanding of antiquity not just in the face of fashionable disregard, but also as a counter to extreme political appropriation of the heroic classical body.

This raises furthermore the question of connoisseurship, and of the virtuosity of vision that is so much in evidence in The Nude. The importance of the heroic body for Fascism was its ability not to embody perfection, but racial purity, and this

23 In particular, Pointon, op. cit. (note 3), pp.13–16.
28 Ibid., esp. p.117.
30 Ibid., p.146.
message was one that should appear as a direct connection between viewer and work of art, like a flash of revelation based on bodily empathy. Boris Groys has defined heroism as the moment when the body manifests itself directly, when it is transformed by the heroic act from medium to message. It may be said that a similar type of immediacy is at work in the ‘virtuosity of vision’ exercised by connoisseurship. Virtuoso vision is called on to see the lost original behind a poor Roman copy, discovering, for example, the Lysippic bronze of masterly complexity and condensation behind the replica of The wrestlers in the Uffizi (p.169). As a theory of vision, connoisseurship is a doctrine of the moment, the flash of intuition that reveals deep truth; and, by its virtuosity, is ranged against the mundane bourgeois experience of history. Groys has suggested that a belief in direct, unmediated contact with works of art must always be based on a faith in the body, and on a bodily identification between viewer and painted subject. The notion of an immediate, corporeal response to a work of art, and the belief that questions of art ultimately come down to questions of the body is, therefore, a ‘thoroughly modern faith’.

By the time he came to write Civilisation Clark had realised that any account of heroism in the arts of the modern age must take into account the question of technology, and of the changed relations between man and nature in the wake of industrialisation. The heroic body of modern art cannot be considered aside from the impact of technology, from machine metaphors to prosthetics. At the time The Nude was first published, a new ‘post-human’ understanding of the human body was emerging, as a ‘cybernetic organism’. From today’s perspective, the absence of any account of technology is the most troublesome blind spot of The Nude. It might have figured in a discussion of anatomy, but the subject is dealt with only briefly, as if Clark was reluctant to go beneath beautiful surfaces – for inside was an ideal rather than a structure to be understood by science. Yet the faith that Clark kept in the human body, at a time when political appropriation and technological intervention appeared to have destroyed any vestige of classical unity, has been answered by more recent art, wherein the body remains central. Scholars today may take inspiration from the authority of expertise that Clark brings to his subject, and his tact in deploying this to create a vivid and compelling argument for the continued importance of the legacy of antiquity. And, like the tradition of English criticism to which Clark belonged, that of Reynolds, Hazlitt, Ruskin, Pater and Fry, The Nude may be read simply for the pleasure of its sentences – however much of their innocence they may since have lost.

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Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill

by SIMON SWYNFEN JERVIS

In 2001–02 the Bard Graduate Center in New York mounted a major exhibition on William Beckford, later shown at the Dulwich Picture Gallery; in 2008 it followed this with another, devoted to Thomas Hope, later shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill, mounted by the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (closed 3rd January), and now at the Victoria and Albert Museum (to 4th July; the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, is a third partner), completes a remarkable triad. There were many differences between Horace Walpole (1717–97; Fig.31), William Beckford (1760–1844) and Thomas Hope (1769–1831) but, apart from the circumstance that all three published successful novels, initially anonymous, viz. The Castle of Otranto (1764), Vathek (1786) and Anastasius (1839), it is surely noteworthy that all three opened their houses, each a personal and idiosyncratic creation, to visitors, with printed tickets. Those for Strawberry Hill were printed in 1774, and rules for obtaining them in 1784; Hope’s Duchess Street house had ticketed admission from 1804; and Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey was open in 1822 and 1823 – for sales, admittedly, but occasions for characteristically cynical glee on Beckford’s part, and for the production of a fine Gothic and heraldic ticket, designed by Thomas Stedman Whitwell. Another common factor was the criticism they received for exposing – or vaunting – their taste in collecting and decoration far beyond the paintings and sculpture recognised as legitimate markers of virtù. Thus William Hazlitt on Fonthill: ‘a glittering waste of laborious idleness, a cathedral turned into a toyshop’; thus the literary and antiquarian physician John Ferriar on Hope in 1809, after the publication of his Household Furniture (1807): ‘HOPE, whom Upholsterers tye with mute despair,/The doughty pedant of an elbow-chair’; and thus in 1828 Sir Walter Scott on Walpole:

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2 Groys, op. cit. (note 32).

33 Groys, op. cit. (note 32).


35 For example, with the paintings of Lucian Freud and John Currin (who has identified The Nude as required reading) to the direct, unsettling presentation of nude bodies by Vanessa Beecroft; yet also to the unsettling cult of mass-nudity in the photographs of Spencer Tunick. ‘A mass of naked figures does not move us to empathy, but to disillusion and dismay’, wrote Clark with some prescience (p.4). For Currin, see J. Saltz, ed.: An ideal syllabus. Artists, critics and curators choose the books we need to read, London 1998.