CHAPTER 1

Moving Together
Restoring Imperfection in the *Venus de' Medici* and Lady Delacour

Préambule

On July 2, 1777, *The Scots Magazine* reported that Lord Chief Justice Mansfield tried a case that was "the most extraordinary that, perhaps, ever happened in this country or any other country," one "respecting the sex of the Chevalier d'Éon" formerly Ambassador from France to the Court of England (1728–1810).[1] Surprising, and always astonishing intellectually, d'Éon lived the first half of his life as male: Baptized, dressed, and educated as a boy, he later received his Doctor of Law, led a troop of Dragoons, was secretary to the Duc de Nivernais during the formation and signing of the Treaty of Paris, stayed in London under the title "Minister Plenipotentiary," and worked as a French spy. The second half of d'Éon's life was lived as a woman. As the historian Gary Kates puts it: "Sometime during the year 1770, rumors began to surface that the Chevalier d'Éon was actually a woman."[2] By 1771, bets had been placed on their[3] sex, and one such wager ended up in Lord Mansfield's courtroom. Mr. Hayes, a surgeon, bought a £100 life insurance policy from a broker, Mr. Jacques, specifying that if the Chevalier was *une dame* then Jacques would owe Hayes £700.

Mr. Hayes won his bet since the jury ultimately decided that d'Éon was a woman, a decision that "served as a kind of legal declaration" of gender

[1] *The Scots Magazine*, 39 (Edinburgh, August 1777), p. 452. Many periodicals reported the trial.

[2] In French *chevalière* refers to a signet ring, not a female knight, but multiple scholars use the word to indicate when d'Éon identified as a woman. For d'Éon's history, see Gary Kates, *Monsieur d'Éon Is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 182. He quotes the *London Evening Post*, May 11–14, 1771.

[3] Since d'Éon switched gender identity, I will use the gender neutral "their." As pronouns are difficult to assign to d'Éon so too are they challenging to allocate to the *Venus*. Should the statue be termed "it" and "its" or "she" and "her?" Applicable here is Morton's statement that "there is no pronoun entirely suitable to describe ecological beings. . . . If I call them 'it,' I don't think they are people like me and I'm being blatantly anthropocentric." *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2017), pp. 3, 4. I refer to the *Venus* as "she" and "her."

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assignment.[4] The verdict largely emerged from the testimony of a doctor, La Goux, who claimed to have examined "parts" that revealed *him* to be a *her*. Especially important was Charles Morande, whose unchallenged and, as it turned out, perjurious statements swore that this Chevalière had "display[ed] her Bosom" to him on the "3rd Day of July, 1774," thereby making a "Disclosure of her Sex to the Witness" and that he had examined "her" wardrobe, which was filled with "Petticoats, and other Habiliments, calculated for Feminine Use."[5] Six weeks after the ruling that *legally* determined their sex, d'Éon left for France and, in men's clothing, immediately met with Foreign Minister Vergennes, expecting another ambassadorial mission. Instead, the Minister, taking what d'Eon had formerly said as true – that they were a woman – and the English verdict as fact, ordered the "mademoiselle" to take on their purportedly biological identity and dress thereafter as a woman, which they did. Evidently, d'Éon had no right to belong with more than one externally prescribed identity, though contemporaries believed that the Chevalière was "born female and had assumed a male role in order to succeed in a patriarchal society."[6] Reactions to d'Éon's body became, courtesy of gamblers, jurors, newspapers, acquaintances, and politicians, a widely publicized spectacle; d'Eon even "beseech[ed] each journalist, every hack writer, not to dress up my story in his own way";[7] in this they resembled how the *Venus de' Medici* was discussed without her consent – observers varyingly defining her as modest, immodest, human, graceful, or something of a dominatrix.

Given this jointure between the statue and d'Éon, we should not be surprised that during the trial, Lord Mansfield explicitly invokes the

[4] Kates, p. 249. [5] *Scots Magazine*, p. 452.

[6] Stephen Brogan, "A 'monster of metamorphosis': Reassessing the Chevalier/Chevalière d'Éon's Change of Gender." See *The Chevalier d'Éon and His Worlds: Gender, Espionage, and Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Simon Burrows, Jonathan Conlin, Russell Goulbourne, and Valerie Mainz (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 81. Brogan hypothesizes that d'Éon perpetuated the rumors that they were a woman – a reflection that they had fears of "kidnap, incarceration in a French prison, and even assassination" (p. 83). As Kates explains, it was not until d'Éon's death that the body "in reality proved to be the body of a male" (quoted in Kates, p. xix from an untitled newspaper obituary, May 23, 1810, Houghton Library, Harvard University, *fFC& E0563 ZZX).

[7] This quotation is found in a draft of a "Special Request by Mademoiselle d'Eon for a Small Favor from Readers, Authors and the Members of the Universal Republic of Letters." See d'Éon's *The Maiden of Tonnerre: The Vicissitudes of the Chevalier and the Chevalière d' Eon*, translated and edited by Roland Champagne, Nina Claire Ekstein, and Gary Kates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 136. Quoted in Marilyn Morris, "The Chevalière d'Eon, Transgender Autobiography and Identity," *Gender & History* 31.1 (2019): 78–90, p. 84. Morris argues that their "story remains relevant to transgender history because it illustrates the fluidity of gender expression and the impact that language and culture have on what might seem possible in an individual's life" (p. 78).

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Medici *Venus* and the touristic ritual of measuring her proportions so as to reaffirm her female perfection. The judge recalls an earlier

> dispute which once happened between two Persons, relative to the Dimensions of a Statue of the Venus de Medici. A Wager was proposed by one of the Parties. The other replied, "I will not say any thing: it would be unfair, for I have measured the Statue." The other answered, "Why, do you think I would be such a Fool as to propose a Bett, unless I had measured it also!"[8]

As I will discuss further, tourists "visiting" the Tribuna's *Venus de' Medici* (Figure 1.1) were emboldened by the Abbé, who showed the collection and distributed the statue's proportions, gleaned from physically measuring her parts. This earlier quarrel concerning whose calculations were correct, and the fact that Lord Mansfield remembered and quoted it during the trial, multifariously connects these two celebrity bodies, which were defined by the presence and size of their physical "parts" as well as other curves and bends of their frames. Morande's testimony describes d'Éon's breasts, and Joseph Spence's *Polymetis* depicts the size and "feel" of the *Venus*'s: They are "small, distinct and delicate . . . with an idea of softness . . .. And yet with all that softness, they have a firmness too."[9]

The trials, one litigating the accuracy of a statue's dimensions and the other staking money on a person's gender, spectacularize how both bets compulsively measure the degree to which humans and things obey "real" gender expectations. Manifestly, Lord Mansfield's reliance on the *Venus* dispute as a precedent for ruling on the wager over d'Éon signifies something exceeding legal process, a "something" that undergirds the relationship between the two cases: the necessity and means not only of determining "sex," but also what relationships among sexual parts constitute not just "woman" but the "perfect" woman. Such a conjoining of the *Venus* and d'Éon further radicalizes discussions of the *Venus de' Medici*, the Queen of Love, since that other queen, Marie Antoinette, who "refused to conform to certain of the strictly imposed, gendered requirements of her station" became the patron of d'Éon, who "flouted the royal authorities'

[8] *Scots Magazine*, p. 453. While I italicize the *Venus de' Medici*, not all travel accounts or scholars do. Many thanks to Deven Parker for alerting me to this trial.

[9] Spence, *Polymetis: or, An Enquiry concerning the Agreement between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Antient Artists* (London, 1755; 2nd corrected ed.), p. 66. Paintings of the "female" d'Éon emphasized breast size: For example, Kates offers an illustration of the so-called Twin portraits, which place the "male" and "female" d'Éons side by side, with one dressed as a dragoon, labeled "Dedicated to the French Dragoons," and the other outfitted in a low-cut dress emphasizing her cleavage, entitled "to the memory of French heroines" (image and quotation follow p. 228).

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Figure 1.1 *Venus de' Medici*. First-century BCE copy of a fourth-century BCE statue. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Credit: Cola Images / Alamy Stock Photo.

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attempts definitively to establish his sex."[10] The evidence and rulings brought against this figure and the *Venus* all concerned measuring who and what is certified to belong and to express their embodiment as they wish.

The *Venus de' Medici* enters multiple and interleaved storylines that all relate to questions of belonging: First, what belongs in collections? My initial focus, on the Uffizi's Tribuna Gallery, clarifies what pieces were thought to undermine the room's nobility, and specifically to detract from the *Venus*'s presence in the Tribuna. Second, how did audiences try to belong with the statue? As I show, her radiating vitality drew observers into her orbit, making them want to touch her marble flesh. Third, how does the eighteenth-century subject belong if gender models are not adhered to? Viewers observing the *Venus de' Medici* find bonds between the human and thing in their measurements of her and in their debates as to whether this perfect female form also perfectly fulfills their contemporary canons of modesty. That is, the statue became the touchstone for British female beauty, while simultaneously being judged on whether she achieved the highest standards of modesty that had been created for the English woman. Fourth, contrary to some scholars working on museum collections, I argue that once lodged in the Tribuna, the *Venus* was not exiled from history – though the room itself was arranged ahistorically – but instead she came to interconnect with the narrative of political liberty after having been exiled from Florence for safekeeping and then plundered by Napoleon. Surveying the Tribuna's environment, I scrutinize the collection's "ecology": What body parts belong on a statue and in what configuration? For example, what if there are some missing? Accordingly, the Medici *Venus* manifests a history of artistic restoration given that while she was held in Paris, the Florentines, desiring to re*possess* her, commit statuary dismemberment by breaking off and replacing the *Belvedere Venus*'s arms so that she might resemble their lost Goddess.[11]

At the end of the chapter, I move toward *belonging with* in *Belinda*, which refers twice to the *Venus de' Medici*, inclusions that scholars have yet to discuss. Reenacting the real-life activity of tourists who judged the statue's modesty and virtue, Edgeworth's characters "measure" each other; *Belinda*, however, incorporates these debates to encourage liberation from

[10] Carolyn Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (New York: Picador, 2006), p. 156.

[11] Called both the *Belvedere Venus* and the *Venus Victrix*, this ancient copy of a fourth-century BCE statue should not be confused with Canova's later sculpture of the same name, the *Venus Victrix* (1804/1808) in the Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova.

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calculating standards of perfection, ones that lead to negative consequences such as racism and gender stereotyping. Embedded in the novel, *la Vénus de Médicis* becomes a double of Lady Delacour as the novel splinters engrained perspectives on issues of artistic and moral restoration and on debates concerning perfection versus deformity. The alterations that the Chevalier-"Chevalière," Lady Delacour, and the Medici *Venus* experience render them "mixed," fragmented, and therefore irreducible to one fashion, construction, or fantasy of female or male ideality.

1.1 What Belongs in a Collection? The Tribuna's Uneasy Neighborhood

If any eighteenth-century thing were to be considered radiant matter, it would have to be the *Venus de' Medici*, which held court in the Tribuna from 1688 to 1800 and then again from 1815 to the present.[12] For over two hundred years, this chamber held Europe's most famous art collection. "The Uffizi tribuna was begun in 1585 by Bernardo Buontalenti who succeeded Vasari (d. 1574) as architect of the Uffizi for Francesco de' Medici"; the room was initially a private sanctuary that held Francesco's exquisite art objects (Figure 1.2).[13] Once open to the public, so renowned was this chamber that it was itself "collected": From 1715 through 1793, at least seven great English houses had a "Tribuna," and even more replicated its cupola.[14] Those who sought to know, and feel, and *see* such sparklers found a small world where these splendors had their own agency and relationships. Certainly, this gallery became the room in which to linger, and its glorified *Venus* – manifesting the political, aesthetic, and spiritual – circulated, experiencing what Brown would call her "'social life' through diverse cultural fields."[15] She was visited by international travelers to Florence, ubiquitously copied, invited into conduct books as a spokeswoman for modesty, introduced into philosophical tracts as the premier

[12] The *Venus* is "a copy of a post-Praxitilean" work. See Hugh Honour, "Canova's Statues of Venus," *The Burlington Magazine* 114.835 (1972): 658–671, p. 668.

[13] Sandra Millikin, "The Tribune in English Architecture," *The Burlington Magazine* 112.808 (1970): 442–446, p. 445. Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny also trace the Tribuna's history. See *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Also see Oliver Millar, *Zoffany and His Tribuna* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 10–35.

[14] For more detail, see Millikin's essay.

[15] *Other Things*, p. 221.

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Figure 1.2 Bernardo Buontalenti, *The Tribuna* (1581–1583). The Wrestlers (deep left); Venus de' Medici (center); The Listening Slave (deep right). The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Credit: dbtravel / Alamy Stock Photo.

example of proportion, taken on tours in travel guides as a standard of excellence, and insistently included in novels and poems.[16]

Tourists' reactions to the Medici *Venus* and to the Tribuna lead me to emphasize, as I do throughout *Embodied Experience*, the connections between and among things and humans. Much has been written on this statue and how it has been objectified, especially sexually: Caroline van Eck says, for example, that Edward Gibbon describes the *Venus* "as if she were a 'racehorse or cocotte.'"[17] This section, however, spotlights the varying interactions – the ecstasy, the bewilderment, the disquiet – that the Tribuna and especially the *Venus* aroused in their viewers when they hoped for connection with her. There is no doubt that "the relation between a living being and its image ... is an ambiguous, precarious relation, in which inanimate images turn out to possess the same agency

[16] J. R. Hale tracks the statue's reception history. "Art and Audience: The Medici *Venus*, c.1750–c.1850," in *Italian Studies: An Annual Review*, ed. T. G. Griffith, C. Grayson, U. Limentaini, F. Haskell, and C. P. Brand (Leeds: Maney & Son, 1976), vol. 31, pp. 37–58.

[17] *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Berlin: Walder de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015), p. 103.

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as the living beings they represent."[18] Wendy Steiner also theorizes human–thing interactions along these lines, though her topic is beauty, which she finds to be "an unstable property because it is not a property at all. It is the name of a particular interaction between two beings, a 'self' and an 'Other.'"[19] Writing about relationships with art in general, Steiner claims that

> dominant as the perceiver may appear in the act of judgment, the aesthetic object turns out to be no shrinking violet. In the course of aesthetic experience, the perceiver may be overwhelmed by his "mere object" .... The experience of beauty involves an exchange of power, and as such, it is often disorienting, a mix of humility and exaltation, subjugation and liberation, awe and mystified pleasure.[20]

While Steiner underscores the power relations between object and subject, I emphasize the perplexing "mix" of human–nonhuman engagements between the *Venus* and her perceivers – anger, ecstasy, or drunkenness – and between observers and the Tribuna, as they embrace certain pieces that they feel are singularly perfect and reject others that do not have the right to belong. These reactions arise from the coilings between witness and statue, from the persistent *need* to connect to some*thing* outside of the self. And rarely indeed are these experiences comfortable or observers complacent.

To understand reactions to the Tribuna and to the *Venus*, we must envision what the gallery looked like originally, since it has changed over time. In contrast to a modern museum's typical sterility, the room was lavishly decorated and even the floor, resembling sacred spaces of the time and earlier,[21] was gorgeously made of "polished polychrome marble" (Figure 1.2).[22] James Wilson (1816) sees "an octagonal room, lighted by eight windows, immediately under the vaulted roof. ... The crimson velvet of the walls is almost wholly concealed by pictures, and the choicest

[18] Van Eck, pp. 47–48.
[19] *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. xxi, xxiii.
[20] *Venus in Exile*, p. xxi.
[21] On sacred marble floors, see William Tronzo, "Justinian's Hagia Sophia, Angels and Restlessness," in *Radical Marble: Architectural Innovation from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. J. Nicholas Napoli, and Tronzo (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 23–42. He points to the belief that "marble in churches was like the Acheiropoietos," something so astonishing it seems "not made by human hands" (p. 31). This assessment resembles those of the *Venus de' Medici*.
[22] Haskell and Penny, p. 54.

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examples of sculpture form a magic interior circle round the saloon."[23] During the eighteenth century, the paintings of over twenty artists – including Titian, Rubens, Leonardo, Holbein, Raphael, and Rembrandt – jam-packed the gallery.

The Tribuna, a hybrid collection, was arranged ahistorically and defined *belonging with* capaciously. Including things dating from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries and from cities all over Italy and Europe, it ignored the *disegno/colore paragone*, paired Renaissance and Baroque works, and included secular and religious topics. Added to this were six classical sculptures; furniture, such as a cabinet in the form of a tabernacle, Bergeret de Grancourt (1773) described as sumptuously decorated with "*rubis, topazes, saphirs, [et] émeraudes*," and smaller items like minerals, goblets, and rock crystal vases, as well as numerous statuettes and miniatures in jasper.[24] The collection had become less varied by 1794, when Lord Palmerston, who had first seen the Tribuna in 1763, "found the Gallery much alterd, the new director having changed y^{e} Situation of most of the Pictures upon an Idea of arranging them according to the Schools."[25] What remains today are the "rich cornice of the room and the gold and mother-of-pearl arabesques on the blue lapis-lazuli of the cupola," but many of the features that gave the room its disorienting magnificence have disappeared: The paintings are reduced in number and gone is "the skirting-board with the frieze, designed by Ligozzi, of birds, fish, shells, plants, and stones, and the shelf with drawers, which ran round the room supported on carved and gilded consoles."[26] The chamber's dense visual strata from floor to ceiling would have stimulated the eye but also fragmented attempts to view the gallery as a whole.

Perhaps because of this galvanizing diversity of art objects, what objects could coexist with each other in the Tribuna emerged as a combustive topic. For some tourists, the "ambiance" Leo Spitzer defines as "an anti-Cartesian desire to penetrate '*les sombres tunnels de l'inexprimable*'"[27] simply embodied chaos; others saw there a neighborhood. To discuss this, I return to Kenneth Reinhard's theoretical musings on comparative literature. As I said in the Introduction, he coins the phrase "traumatic

[23] *A Journal of Two Successive Tours upon the Continent in the Years 1816, 1817, and 1818* (London: W. Blackwood, 1820), vol. 1, p. 432.
[24] *Voyage d'Italie, 1773–1774* (Paris: Editions Michel de Romilly, 1948), p. 128.
[25] Quoted in Millar, p. 34; he cites from manuscript. [26] Millar, pp. 10–12.
[27] "Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3.1 (September 1942): 1–42, p. 1. He quotes from Karl Michaëlsson's "Ambiance," in *Studia neophilologica* XII (1939–1940): 91–119.

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proximity," which suggests a "comparative literature otherwise than comparison . . ., a mode of reading logically and ethically prior to similitude, a reading in which texts are not so much grouped into 'families' defined by similarity and difference, as into 'neighborhoods' determined by accidental contiguity, genealogical isolation, and ethical encounter."[28] Here he energizes the discipline by rethinking how we might group varying texts. The Tribuna, I suggest, functions analogously: Though all representations of "high" Western art, each unique thing gives way to a surprisingly mixed "neighborhood."[29]

That these paratactically gathered items represented excellence but were intrinsically different, led – even after the room had been "cleaned up" – to Joseph Forsyth's crisis, when he exclaims, "[w]hat a disparity of forms in a select cabinet! There every picture is a separate unit, and bears no relation to its neighbour"; and no "authority," neither "Homer nor Virgil . . . nor Canova, nor the Venus which this Gallery has lost . . . can defend a mixture so barbarous."[30] Distinguishing something more baroque than classical, Forsyth's observation of "barbarousness" which succumbs to no "authority" recalls most positively matter's own turbulence. When Diana Coole discusses Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, and the baroque, she notes how "matter swirls and metamorphoses," forming "tiny folds that sustain their internal integrity across a continuous fabric of folds within folds."[31] This is the animation that the room holds and that Forsyth resists: For him, it does not have the right to be "mixed."

"A continuous fabric of folds within folds" in fact recalls the fantastic eclecticism found in Johann Zoffany's *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (Figure 1.3). Many have discussed this painting's "indecorous" and problematic sexual politics;[32] I introduce it here because it offers a kinesthetic

[28] "Kant with Sade, Lacan with Levinas," p. 785.

[29] Of course, some tried to organize the room, claiming an underlying structure dependent on the fact that each art object was thought to be "the best of the best," with everything in the room, as James Fenimore Cooper said, "a *chef-d'oeuvre* in its way." See *Excursions in Italy* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), vol. 1, p. 43.

[30] *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts and Letters, during an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 4th ed. (London: John Murray, 1835), pp. 39, 41. Because the French imprisoned Forsyth from 1803 to 1814, this was not published until 1814. Compare his reaction to Adolf Theodor Michaelis's later response to Soane's museum, where "[t]his labyrinth stuffed full of fragments is the most tasteless arrangement that can be seen." See *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), p. 164.

[31] "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh," in Coole and Frost, p. 111.

[32] Queen Charlotte commissioned this painting, but finding it "improper" would "not suffer the picture to be placed in any of her apartments." See Joseph Farington, *Diary* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924), vol. 3, p. 34. Quoted in Millar, p. 33. Pascoe discusses this painting in relationship to Queen Charlotte as a collector. See also Ann Bermingham, who argues that in this painting, "the

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Figure 1.3 Johann Zoffany, *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1780). Courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

composition that recreates some tourists' sense of being overwhelmed by the "folds within folds" as artistic styles and genres become close neighbors, and visiting connoisseurs crowd tightly in this aesthetic *cul-de-sac*. Millar interprets the painting as "a mixture of indefatigable industry, cupidity, self-seeking and imagination."[33] Rather than a literal depiction, Zoffany's *Tribuna* was, in Wolfgang Ernst's words, "a marvelous misreflection."[34] And yet *The Morning Chronicle* wrote in 1780 that "this

aestheticizing gaze of the connoisseur ... both masks and unmasks the work of art's commodity status and its fetishistic meaning as a sign of power and prestige." See "Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 508.

[33] *Zoffany and His Tribuna*, p. 34.

[34] "Frames at Work: Museological Imagination and Historical Discourse in Neoclassical Britain," *The Art Bulletin* 75.3 (1993): 481–498. For Ernst, Zoffany's *Tribuna* provides "a rewriting of museal space according to the contemporary museological discourse which was 'conversational' by definition" (p. 491).

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accurate picture has the same effect on the spectator which the gallery itself has on first entering it; the multitude of excellencies contained in it, dissipate our ideas, and it requires some time to arrange them before we can coolly examine the merit of any individual piece."[35] Conversely, how can one "restore" oneself after experiencing this room? Thrusting forth a shattering series of images, it forces our eyes to dart from one figure, painting, or sculpture to another, giving the modern viewer an inkling of what it was like to inhabit the eighteenth-century Tribuna.

Rather than registering chaos, some travel accounts saw the room offering neighborly, though often tense, relations. Contrasting to Forsyth's discomfort, and in one sense more in accord with Zoffany's hectically swarming humans and things, Edward Gibbon (1764) listens for encounters between community members. First characterizing the *Venus Victrix* [the *Belvedere Venus*] as a "large hussy" in contrast to the Medici *Venus*, he then notes paradoxically that although the *Venus d'Urania* "is smaller than the Venus de' Medici," she "supports" her "formidable neighborhood . . . far better than her Companion."[36] When he wonders why Titian's voluptuous *Venus of Urbino* (see painting at near center of Zoffany's canvas in Figure 1.3) has not stirred the Medici *Venus* "to feel more [intensely] the movements that [the painting] inspires,"[37] he experiences frustration that there is not more exchange and consideration of embodiment in the neighborhood.

Hester Thrale Piozzi, in *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789), also thinks of the room as a vibrant neighborhood, but for her each occupant remains sensitive to the other:

> Titian's recumbent beauty, glowing with colour and animated by the warmest expression, and the Greek statue of symmetrical perfection and fineness of form inimitable . . . seem placed near each other at once to mock all human praise and defy all future imitation. The listening slave [Arrotino] appears disturbed by the blows of the wrestlers in the same room, and hearkens with an attentive impatience, such as one has often felt when unable to distinguish the words one wishes to repeat. You really then do not seem as if you were alone in this tribune, so animated is every figure, so full of life and soul.[38]

[35] *The Morning Chronicle*, May 20, 1780. Quoted in Millar, who says that Zoffany "created a vivid impression of the original idea behind the creation of the room itself" (p. 34).
[36] *Gibbon's Journey from Geneva to Rome*, ed. Georges A. Bonnard (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), p. 181. The *Journey* is written in French. My translations.
[37] *Gibbon's Journey*, pp. 186–187. [38] (London: A. Strahan, 1789), vol. 1, pp. 302–303.

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Here, the statues broadcast their own agency as they interact: Political and physical difference unnerves the collection's residents, the wrestlers' passion and noise bully the Arrotino, and while the *Venus* and Titian's "beauty" engage in an apparent beauty "contest," still they band together to humble the humans visiting the room and taunt future artists. Piozzi's sense of these statues' agency anticipates *Corinne* when the narrator tells us that the Vatican holds "a collection of sculptured images of animals and reptiles, but, by chance, the statue of Tiberius is in the middle of this court. It was not a planned juxtaposition. These marble statues have arranged themselves around their master on their own" (*C*, p. 141). Piozzi and Staël, conscious of the rhythmic vitality in each of their respective rooms, both affirm the possibility that without any human intervention each neighbor responds to the vibrational pull of the other.

Highlighting each thing's sentience, Piozzi becomes an optimist in contrast to her future (and Futurist) opposite, F. T. Marinetti, who most dramatically claims, "[m]useums: cemeteries! . . . Identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another. Museums: public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings."[39] Rather than experiencing the alienated and paralytic loathing Marinetti identifies between things, Piozzi sees beings whose existences pulse with intense, knowing engagement and longing for belonging.[40] Because the gallery's pastiche-like nature stimulates ethical encounters in the things' varying experiences, I suggest that her gaze does not displace these art works' agency; instead, Piozzi evidently feels – and values – each thing's force.

Others reject any neighborly *belonging with* by claiming that the *Venus de' Medici* is not so much a *part* of the social goings-on but rather the most compelling figure in this Tribuna, a view that drives the community into a state of "hyper-competition."[41] De Grancourt sees six statues, but among them "*la Vénus de Médicis . . . surtout est le chef-d'œuvre de l'art*" ("the

[39] "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Let's Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint and trans. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Classics, 1972, 1991), p. 50. Quoted in Calum Storrie, *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2007), p. 13; ellipses original.

[40] In "Frames at Work," Ernst observes that Soane's museum is a "self-referential universe"; although he sees this as a unique occurrence, clearly many tourists to the Tribuna reacted similarly, and while I agree that Soane imploded "the museum frame" (p. 481), I think the Tribuna anticipated this.

[41] See James H. Mittelman, *Hyper-conflict: Globalization and Insecurity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) pp. 4, 13, who argues that hyperconflict, trying to ensure "security," actually renders global relations more insecure. I'm arguing that tourists, trying to organize and "secure" the room by rendering one thing dominant over others in fact generate more chaos and insecurity.

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Venus de Medici, above all, is the masterpiece of art").[42] Thus, the *Arrotino*, the *Wrestlers*, the *Dancing Faun*, the *Venus Belvedere*, and the *Celestial Venus* become second-rate attractions in contrast to the celebrated goddess. Indeed, it comes to pass that she, and she alone, has the right to be there, an attitude that resists multiplicity, establishes hierarchical order, emphasizes possession over belonging, and causes a backlash against the Venuses that had originally lived in the neighborhood. In so doing, these Medici *Venus* worshippers often employ a taxonomy that defines the collection in terms of this one singular object, rendering her alone the thing that defined space and time in this chamber, even when she was absent from it, as she was between 1800 and 1815. So lauded was her unique power that she inadvertently effected a traumatic violence against her neighbors. For example, Joseph Addison (1703) remarks wryly that "[t]here is another Venus in that same Circle, that would make a good Figure any where else."[43] Anna Riggs Miller (1777) notes that the *Urania* or the *Celestial* Venus "would appear to much greater advantage, had the Venus of Medici still remained undiscovered."[44] And Arthur Young (1789) exclaims that "[i]n the same apartment there are other statues, but, in the presence of Venus, who is it that can regard them?"[45] This emphasis on her singularity over either baroque "chaos" or thematic sequentiality eventually led to forced emigration – a literal depopulation and de-diversification occurred by 1782 – when the Medici goddess exerted enough supremacy to exile the other two Venuses into other museum rooms.

Tourists themselves become the collection's collectors when they "de-collect" the room by ignoring almost everything but the *Venus*. In doing so, they create another syntax, one defying the singular plural, wherein the statue dominates her environs, and her neighbors and her viewers become her minions. Gibbon himself spent a lot of time "at the feet of the Venus of Medicis"; Mary Shelley, in *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, distinguishes the *Venus* as the "matchless statue of the Queen of Beauty [who] reigns over the whole."[46] Given that in her *History of a Six*

[42] *Voyage d'Italie*, p. 127.
[43] *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, in the years 1701, 1702, and 1703*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Tonson, 1718), p. 279.
[44] *Letters from Italy* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1777), vol. 1, p. 389.
[45] *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*, 2nd ed. (London: W. Richardson, 1794), vol. 1, p. 248.
[46] *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. John Murray (John Murray: London, 1897), p. 267. Shelley, *Rambles* (London: E. Moxon, 1844), vol. 2, p. 152.

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Weeks' Tour (1817) Shelley refers to Mont Blanc as the "queen of all,"[47] naming the *Venus* as such in her *Rambles* shows the power the author accords to this statue. Belongings that had belonged with each other now belonged apart, except in contention.

1.2 The Pleasure of Measuring the "Humanness" of the *Venus de' Medici*

Observers simultaneously idealize and humanize the *Venus* by seeing her as alive, a response I chart in Chapter 2, where Corinne considers things as animate. This slippage is often seen as reductive: that confusing the two forgets a thing's representational status, or that such a response, flouting modernist doctrines of disinterest, merely reveals naiveté. Conversely, many scholars, myself included, locate complex and positive reasons for humans' desire to connect to the nonhuman. From the late seventeenth century, "anthropological and ultimately psychological theories [developed] about what makes ... art works exercise [so much] agency or excessiveness that viewers [come to] believe they possess significant characteristics of life"; this shifts in the nineteenth century, when such magical thinking "became increasingly discredited and marginalized in aesthetics, art history and the museum setting."[48] W. J. T. Mitchell explains that art's seemingly magical power leads to a "double consciousness," for viewers "behave as if pictures were alive, as if works of art had minds of their own," while they simultaneously discern that of course this cannot be true.[49] For the anthropologist Alfred Gell, the arts participate in a "vast ... technical system" which he calls "the technology of enchantment"; here an observer's knowledge of artists' potency and the materials they use inspires awe.[50] Indeed, those seeing the Medici *Venus* wonder how the sculptor – an "occult technician"[51] – could have rendered stone into breathing, pulsing matter.

I argue that it was the *Venus*'s life force that magnetized tourists. So, while agreeing with van Eck, Mitchell, and Gell that art's magically enchanting powers seduce, I am most drawn to Daniel N. Stern's ideas that, biologically, vitality arouses our attention; the "four daughters of movement," to use his phrase, galvanize our responsiveness toward

[47] (London: T. Hookam, 1817), p. 94. [48] Van Eck, pp. 17, 15. [49] Mitchell, p. 7.
[50] "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 43, 51.
[51] Gell, p. 49.

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dynamic mobility: The first "daughter" "unfolds in . . . time"; the second brings "with it the perception . . . of force(s) 'behind' or 'within' the movement"; this kinesis thirdly demarcates "a sense of 'space'"; and the fourth daughter of movement "has directionality" and "intentionality" – it has somewhere to go; it is not inert.[52] This theory of vitality as irresistible perhaps partially explains why the *Venus* thrilled so many observers, for in her composition, these "four daughters" present themselves: Her arms, legs, knee, and her head advance temporally since an action propels her; onlookers perceive the physical impetus – they notice the musculature and sense the blood flow that galvanizes her; and her command of the room establishes her in space. I would further add that among these visitors there seems to be a primal need to experience the *Venus*'s nonhuman life force, and to feel, even if momentarily, that they live with what is not human. To that end, I analyze ways tourists tried to achieve this inkling of companionship.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron's emphasis on the Medici *Venus*'s "blood" and "pulse" alerts us to her vitality. In fact, she metamorphoses before one's eyes, becoming the nonhuman turning human as "she loves in stone" and we "inhale" her "ambrosial" breath.[53] He asks, as others had before him, how a viewer's equilibrium can be restored when in her presence:

> We gaze and turn away, and know not where,
> Dazzled and drunk with beauty, till the heart
> Reels with its fulness; there—for ever there—
> Chained to the chariot of triumphal Art,
> We stand as captives, and would not depart.
> Away!—there need no words nor terms precise,
> The paltry jargon of the marble mart,
> Where Pedantry gulls Folly—we have eyes:
> Blood, pulse, and breast confirm the Dardan Shepherd's prize.[54]

Under the statue's enchantment, "captives" long to belong with – and would never "depart" from – this lively matter, for though enchained, they become more animated, her movement inspiring them: They look and

[52] *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

[53] *Poetical Works*, ed. Frederick Page and John Jump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Canto IV, XLIX, ll. 433, 434, 435. See Maureen McCue's excellent discussion of Byron's response to the *Venus de' Medici* in *British Romanticism and the Reception of Italian Old Master Art, 1793–1840* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 112–115.

[54] Canto IV, L.

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then look away, and their hearts "reel," as if dancing. Movement ensues again with "Away!" as the narrator exiles the pedants and their static "paltry jargon," but those with "eyes" feel the *Venus*'s heart pulsing beneath her marble complexion and, in response, their own blood beats faster.

Spectators wanted to interact with her skin – her marble – since it, resembling sunlight, evidently offered some living gift. Like a diamond's sparkling quivers, this material is brightly luminous – in fact, as Michael Greenhalgh explains, in Greek "*marmàiro*" means "to shine"; one is drawn to "its beauty, solidity, and longevity, its colours and polishes, and its ability to reflect light."[55] Viewed in the round, the Medici *Venus*'s radiant Parian marble, semi-translucent and glowing, stimulated caressing, another means of breaking down this human–nonhuman binary and offering an *omnium-gatherum* of meanings. Its reflective material compelled spectators to agree that the sculptor, by giving the statue's surface such shining brilliance, had fused the gap between marble and human. Here the emphasis was on *le sentiment de la chair*: "feeling" the statue's responsive flesh, not simply by looking at it but by stroking it and, as I will discuss shortly, measuring its proportions.

Perhaps no one more strikingly portrayed the *Venus* as a biotic life force, an organic mélange among marble, human, and nature than Johann Joachim Winckelmann in his famous account from 1774, where she resembles

> a rose which, after a lovely dawn, unfolds its leaves to the rising sun; resembles one who is passing from an age which is hard and somewhat harsh—like fruits before their perfect ripeness—into another, in which all the vessels of the animal system are beginning to dilate, and the breasts to enlarge, as her bosom indicates—which, in fact, is more developed than is usual in tender maidens.[56]

For Winckelmann, the sculptor has created in the *Venus* a resonating microsystem of the evolution of life in the kingdoms of flora and fauna, one that fluidly slips into an almost medical assessment of a "tender maiden's" form. The tourist Anna Miller evinces cognizance of the sculptor's power when she writes that the *Venus*'s "flesh seems flexible, and the

[55] *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Mediaeval Mediterranean* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2009), p. 7.

[56] *The History of Ancient Art among the Greeks*, trans. G. Henry Lodge (London: John Chapman, 1850), p. 123.

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softness and tenderness, yet justness of the muscles, is truly admirable."[57] Young senses that "the cold marble seems to acquire the warmth of nature, and promises to yield to the impression of one's hand."[58] Gibbon describes the act of looking at the *Venus* as "*[c]'est la sensation la plus voluptueuse que mon oeil ait jamais eprouvée. Les contours les plus moelleux, les plus elegans, une rondeur douce et pleine, la molasse de la chair communiquèe au marbre, et la fermetè qu'on desire encore dans cette chair exprimèe sans duretè*" ("the most voluptuous sensation that my eye has ever experienced. The softest, the most elegant contours, a sweet and full roundness, the softness of flesh communicated to marble and the firmness one still desires in this flesh expressed without hardness").[59] These somatosensory observations about the *Venus*'s "vessels," elegance, "flexible" flesh, "warmth," "contours," and soft, yet firm "roundness," all communicated in marble, speak to how these viewers experience her as thrillingly *alive* and *vital*.[60]

Her movements seemed so alive that the living wanted to imitate them. *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism* (1775) urges actors to study the *Venus* to acquire "all the assistances" they could "from art, compatible with the nature of [their] profession" since the *Venus* and other statues guide actors to "adopt" their "attitudes with ease, as well as to be acquainted with the justness and truth, of their principles."[61] Her *élan vital* explains why Erasmus Darwin (1796) claimed that she represented healthy womanhood: In lauding the "easy grace" of the *Venus de' Medici* and suggesting her as an archetype for British women's posture, one preferable to the "stiff erect attitude taught by some modern dancing masters," he renders the statue's vitality an exemplar of English and female national identity.[62]

Viewing, however, was apparently insufficient. One wanted the right to touch her too, and the measuring of the *Venus*'s body parts, an activity that

[57] *Letters from Italy*, vol. 1, p. 388. [58] *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*, pp. 247–248.

[59] *Geneva to Rome*, p. 179. Joseph Luzzi claims that here "Gibbon unsettles the kinds of divisions between art and experience painstakingly erected by Addison, . . . imply[ing] that a purely technical analysis of the work would cheat its riveting effect on the viewer's imagination." See *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 81.

[60] I will return on Section 1.3 to the topic of the *Venus* as sexually desirable. Drawing on Solomon-Godeau's "The Other Side of Venus," I suggest that French, post-1820 "production of engraved and lithographed nudes, pinups, images of demimondaines and other female celebrities" could be applied to reactions to the *Venus*, thereby pushing Solomon-Godeau's timeline back to the eighteenth century. The *Venus* resembles these illustrations insofar as they "are the harbingers of a visual culture in which the notion of modernity and the manufacture of desire on which commodity culture depends are jointly secured by the linchpin of a femininity explicitly put on display" ("The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display," in de Grazia and Furlough, pp. 116, 116–117).

[61] William Cooke (London: G. Kearsly and G. Robinson, 1775), pp. 199, 201.

[62] *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life* (London: J. Johnson, 1796), vol. 2, p. 91.

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affirmed her as a living woman they could intermingle pleasurably with, inspired that physical contact. This experience could be termed "haptic viewing."[63] Thomas Watkins (1794) savors "the magic sweetness of her countenance: the proportion and delicacy of her limbs [and] ... the softness and fleshy semblance of the marble."[64] In rendering contiguous the *Venus*'s "flesh" and her delicate "proportion[s]," tourists recognized that measuring the statue was part of an interactive process that positioned beholders, paradoxically, in physical, intimate contact with "perfection." Addison's *Interesting Anecdotes* (1793) asserts that "the general cause of beauty ... is a proportion, or an union and harmony, in all parts of the body"; and of course "[t]he finest example that can be seen ... is the Venus of Medici."[65] Speaking to the persistence of this statue's "perfection," Florence Courtenay (1922) included the *Venus*'s proportions (so women could check theirs against hers) and referred to her as the "Ideal Feminine Form."[66] Thus, in belonging with the *Venus*, viewers might experience glorious excess: She has exceeded art and reality in her perfection, while being approachable enough to "yield to the impression of one's hand,"[67] her flesh rousing familiarity and interdependence with the nonhuman; touching her, paradoxically, did not function as a "benchmark of cognitive reliability" or "enforc[e] ontological distinctions between the 'true' and the 'true-to-life,'"[68] but made the *Venus* seem more life-like.

Because calculating her proportions requires touching her "parts," this measuring exercise potentially inspired viewers to avoid binaries and let their senses and intellect work in enjoyable synchrony. Of course, given that the "flesh" was so lusciously appealing, measuring may have comprised a masking technique for agalmotophilia, experiencing a titillating attraction to the statue. I acknowledge that the *Venus*'s "pure harmony of proportion" could "safely neutraliz[e] [her] sensuality"[69] since such practice seems to reduce the statue to numbers, a phenomenon Gérard Audran's engraving illustrates (Figure 1.4), where lines and statistics tattoo

[63] Verity Platt and Michael Squire, "Getting to Grips with Classical Art: Rethinking the Haptics of Graeco-Roman Visual Culture," in *Touch and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Alex Purves (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 97, emphasis original. The authors note, however, that art historians generally use this phrase to describe only "a *visual* awareness of material properties such as volume, density, space and texture" (p. 97).

[64] *Travels through Switzerland, Italy, Sicily,* 2nd ed. (London: J. Owen, 1794), vol. 1, p. 304.

[65] (London, 1797), p. 41.

[66] *Physical Beauty: How to Develop and Preserve It* (New York: Social Culture Publications, 1922), p. 6.

[67] Young, *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*, vol. 1, p. 248.

[68] Platt and Squire, p. 93.

[69] Barrell, "'The Dangerous Goddess': Masculinity, Prestige, and the Aesthetic in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Cultural Critique* 12 (Spring 1989): 101–131, p. 128.

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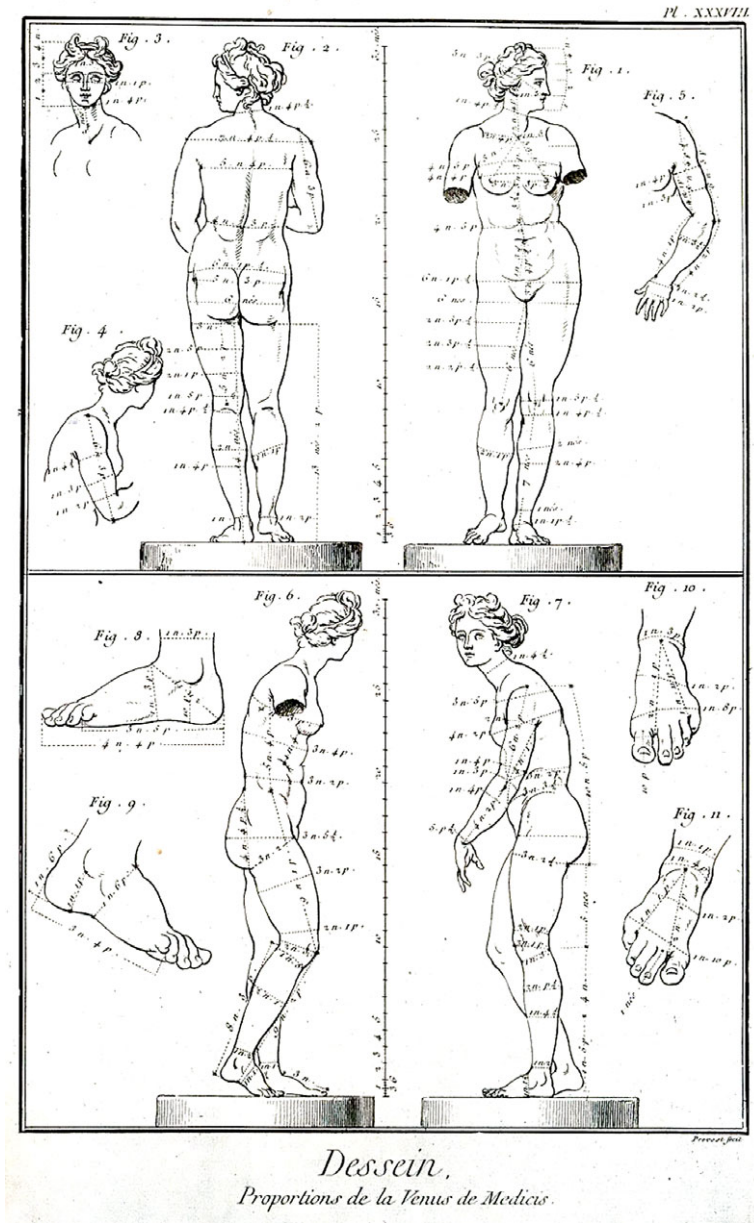


Figure 1.4 Gérard Audran, *The Venus de' Medici* (c. 1690). Engraving.
Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.

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her body. And yet, as Audran shows, these were measurements done in the round and so minutely apportioned that one could linger on the *Venus*'s most private parts. Moreover, the detachment allegedly fueling this exercise paradoxically sanctioned gallery-goers to touch the thing that seemed already so touchable as it literally brought viewers' fingers into intimate convergence with the *Venus*'s beautiful "skin," a practice which augmented the sensory quality of vision. I emphasize, though, that any of these reactions were possible (as well as many more) since there was not only one kind of tourist – a randy heterosexual male, who, in handling the *Venus*, sexually exploited her; after all, women participated in this pleasuring as well. For example, Miller, measuring the statue, efficiently reports that she turns from the "top of her hair to her heel," and then gauges the *Venus*'s other parts, such as the ankles, wrists, waist, breast, and throat.[70] In other words, there were many ways to coexperience her vitality.

Because measurers were engaging in a thing-theory practice with the *Venus*, it makes sense that they often came up with varying calculations as to her proportions (hence the trial's subject this chapter's *préambule* discusses). These deviations provide evidence that computing the "private" parts of anyone or anything might agitate or distract the measurer, who faces concrete questions about what those proportions might mean for them and for the matter they touch. Measurement can be construed as a "meeting of the 'natural' and the 'social,' . . . a potent moment in the construction of scientific knowledge – . . . an instance where matter and meaning meet in a very literal sense."[71] Of course, the "natural" here in the Tribuna already constitutes the "social," but in these "experiments," wherein differing measurements arise, collaborations between statue and measurer demonstrate how "the world" is not "populated with individual things with their own independent sets of determinate properties."[72] Thus these differences and these varying reactions to the statue underscore the drive to escape from one's tiny human orbit and approach the nonhuman.

Measuring and pleasuring; sex and spirit. Doubtless, when oglers attributed nefarious, sexually manipulative intentions lurking beneath the *Venus*'s perfect proportions, they offered, to anticipate *Corinne*, a more

[70] *Letters from Italy*, vol. 1, p. 387. Marian Hobson superbly speculates on this interest in measuring and recording one's results, asking if it constituted some kind of "intellectual graffiti" that marked "'I too was here'? Or is there some kind of anxiety about the source of the variation? And about variation in the actual measures used? – less than twenty years later, France will adopt unified decimal measures." See "Measuring Statues, or, Special Neutrality," *Paragraph* 27.1 (2004): 33–49, pp. 36–37.

[71] Barad, p. 67. [72] Barad, p. 19.

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"modern" perspective of alienation and dualism wherein form and content and sexuality and virtue battle. Conversely, humans interlacing with this statue could have sparked a way of measuring and interacting with vitality of another kind – the divine sort, given that classical architecture linked perfect proportions to the cosmic order.[73] And while one cannot easily measure a *building* designed according to such laws, running hands over a human-sized statue allows one to read, braille-like, heavenly proportions. Measuring the Venus, then, offered a potential benefit: harmonizing with her balanced ratios, which echo the equilibrium of the universe. The cult-like context of viewing and measuring this statue in fact recalls how in ancient Greece, "the ritual act of touching statues of the gods . . . provided an opportunity to make tactile contact with the divine, reinforcing an understanding of the statue as divinity."[74] One of the goals of *Embodied Experience* is to study how authors connect or disconnect sexuality and virtue, so here I suggest that these two impulses – one spiritual and one sensuous – belonging with each other and *felt* simultaneously could have generated compound pleasure.

Section 1.3 of this chapter scrutinizes responses to the statue's sexuality and gender as I examine how the *Venus* was interpreted as having intentionality – that fourth daughter of movement – as having motivations that for some fulfilled (and for others betrayed) expectations of that specifically female, and paradoxical, human performance known as modesty.

1.3 Something in the Way She Moves: The *Venus de' Medici*'s Gendered History

As I have explored, observers do more than merely project their desires and fears onto the *Venus de' Medici* – they engage in thing-theory practice when they express a need to belong with her: They ask what she "means" to say; they want to know the source of her vitality (the marble, the sculptor, her movement, her own volition); they want to touch her flesh and embrace her body; and they want to feel the balance of the universe beneath her – and consequently their own – skin. Here, and in *Embodied*

[73] For Vitruvius, nature is designed such "that its members are duly proportioned to the frame as a whole, . . . [so] that in perfect buildings, the different members must be in exact symmetrical relations to the whole general scheme," *The Ten Books of Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Humphrey Milford; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), book 1, chapter 2, para. 4. Also see Vernon Minor, *Art History's History* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), p. 37.

[74] Platt and Squire, p. 85.

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Experience as a whole, I elucidate how hoping and trying to bridge the human and nonhuman is a good thing, though viewers could never know how the statue feels about them or what her discomforting and thrilling discoveries might be. Wanting matter to matter functions as a prerequisite for eighteenth-century debates about whether the *Venus* conformed to female gender ideals. In contemplating *why* she spins the way she does, her head turning to the left and her body to the right in a chiastic rhythm, beholders also queried her "morality." Indeed, very few statues' gestures or expressions have been scrutinized as thoroughly as the *Venus*'s for their intentions, as onlookers asked, "is she modest?" or "is she coy?" Assigning such agency and self-referentiality to the statue places her within the perspectives of eighteenth-century British and French fashions in gender taxonomy. At least two factors influenced the dispute: her perfect body measurements and her movement in space.

On the one hand, her perfect proportions – the origin of her "perfect beauty," as Reynolds makes clear – evidently guarantee her morality, since, given the *Venus*'s classical origins, her physical form reflects her essence.[75] This complies with classical theories of proportion and symmetry. As Vitruvius writes (about architecture) eurythmy (visual harmony) arises from "beauty and fitness in the adjustments of the members."[76] On the other hand, something in the way she moves catapults discord as spectators respond to her. For James Beattie (1783) her visual vocabulary offers universal knowledge of morality, since her "bending, shrinking form" expresses "conscious beauty united with modesty"; such doubling arises because "our knowledge of the influence of human thoughts upon the human body . . . enables us to discern these meanings in [her] attitudes."[77] Edmund Burke, among others, offers full accolades for her morals, which

[75] *Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses*, ed. Edward Gilpin Johnson (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1891), p. 242. Polykleitos' *Kanon*, a treatise on perfect proportions in sculpture, illustrated his theory of proportion in his statue of the *Doryphoros* (c. 440 BCE), which combines "physical and spiritual beauty" achieved through a "harmony of movement and between the individual bodily members" using "a carefully thought-out system of mathematical calculations." See Dimitris Damaskos, "Free-standing and Relief Sculpture," in *A Companion to Greek Art*, vol. 1, ed. Tyler Jo Smith and Dimitris Plantzos (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 116.

[76] *Ten Books of Architecture*, book 1, chapter 2, para. 3. He continues: Proportion

> is found when the members of a work are of a height suited to their breadth, of a breadth suited to their length, and, in a word, when they all correspond symmetrically. Symmetry is a proper agreement between the members of the work itself, and relation between the different parts and the whole general scheme . . .. Thus in the human body there is a kind of symmetrical harmony between forearm, foot, palm, finger, and other small parts.

[77] *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: W. Strahan, 1783), p. 123.

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he finds her body embodies: "[T]his roundness, this delicacy of attitude and motion" in which "all the magic of grace consists, and what is called its je ne sais quoi . . . will be obvious to any observer who considers attentively the Venus de Medici."[78] Conversely, the Earl Bishop of Bristol and Derry condemned the statue in 1794 as "*détestable – l'attitude d'une Coquette ou d'une Putain*," a prostitute, no less.[79]

While it is not precisely "obvious" what the *Venus*'s movement represents, it is her spiraling – the moment when she tries to move out of her kinesphere, shifting her weight by lifting her foot – that stimulates perceivers to interact with her.[80] In order to demonstrate her refractive energies and to explore the ways her mobility in space led observers to examine her moral intentions, I begin by responding to Barrell's "'The Dangerous Goddess,'" which contends that "the extraordinary fascination the *Venus de' Medici* exerted over eighteenth-century" viewers arises from the "absence of a narrative context" associated with her; this places her in contrast to the *Venus Victrix/Belvedere*, who holds an apple "to indicate in what contest she had been victorious"[81] – she is easily deciphered since she has won Paris's beauty "pageant" and the golden apple. But since the Medici *Venus* lacks "visible signs or tokens," to quote from Aristotle, she could not be "recognized" within a specific context.[82] For Barrell, absent emblems left her vulnerable to the connoisseur's own story-crafting powers. So, while sculpture "resist[s] . . . narrative,"[83] a "standard" account was concocted: In this, the *Venus*'s dynamism itself confirms her seductive intentions toward the (male) gazer, she fails to obey canons of female modesty, and instead she concretizes the gender stereotype of the manipulative vamp, the Earl Bishop's "*putain*." This story inevitably ends with the *Venus*'s victory "over the civic spectator" – since the statue has "conquered his reason."[84] He quotes from Joseph Spence's *Polymetis* to delineate the typical narrative (the italicized lines are those Barrell omits):

> At your first approaching her . . . you see aversion or denial in her look; move on but a step or two farther, and she has compliance in it: and one

[78] *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 109.

[79] "From the Earl Bishop of Bristol and Derry to Canova, Turin 25th March 1794." Quoted in Honour, p. 668.

[80] I agree with Lake that some objects seem "capable of speaking and giving evidence for themselves, but few could agree about what they said and evinced" (*Artifacts*, p. 17), and though she would not consider the *Venus* an artifact, the statue indeed inspires multiple and conflicting storylines.

[81] pp. 121, 120. In historically tracking how a British "man" should respond to an erotically beautiful statue, Barrell's essay charts eighteenth-century changes in viewing the fine arts.

[82] *On the Art of Poetry*, p. 53. [83] Barrell, p. 122. [84] Barrell, p. 130.

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> step more to the right . . . turns it into a little insidious and insulting smile; such as any lady has, when she plainly tells you by her face, that she has made a sure conquest of you. *The moral of this may be very true and natural: but I think it is not justified by the statue itself*: for tho' I have paid, perhaps a hundred visits to the Venus de Medici in person; and have often considered her, in this very view; I could never find out the malicious sort of smile, which your antiquarians talk so much of.[85]

While agreeing with Barrell that Spence ridicules this storyline, I add that the latter's judgment can only arise because of the ways she moves and because, by willingly rotating around her, he willingly practices thing theory. That is, in carefully gazing at the *Venus* and trying to belong with her, he debates with other connoisseurs' reactions to construe his own reflections and feelings. Thus, his line, "[h]aving considered her, in this very view," refers not only to the antiquarian's view, to the view in which she allegedly seems most seductive – but in relation to other visual perspectives of her body.

This passage reveals Spence experiencing a "haptic twist, the grounding of language in embodiment."[86] In other words, this "*Venus*-in-motion" – her radiance unfolding in time and space and her movement expressing force and directionality[87] – incites variegated responses, which means that no one narrative could ever culminate in just one way or always end "in a conquest."[88] Further, in addition to questioning that prevailing account, Spence converses with the *Venus*, herself: His statement that this conquest plot "is not justified by the statue itself" suggests a dialogue with her. That is, the "statue itself" has something to say in this matter. So, although I agree that the "conquering" narrative does feature prominently in male responses to the *Venus*, I argue that this thing's movement in space provokes numerous and contradictory storylines to materialize, and that even these accounts run with each other and sometimes collide. I am not, of course, alleging that Barrell claims that the standard version he identifies is the only plot, but I will spotlight just how many there are and how, even when tourists repeat each other's observations, subtleties abound.

The *Venus*'s movement asserts the right to prismatic interpretations since gazing at her arouses stereotypes and shatters them. For example, James Thomson's description of the *Venus* changes so many directions that it recreates her shimmering movements through poetic space, and, as with

[85] *Polymetis*, p. 68; emphasis added. [86] Silver, p. 11.
[87] These are Stern's "four daughters of movement" (p. 4). [88] Barrell, p. 130.

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Spence, the statue triggers Thomson to dispute the conquest story.[89] In *Liberty* (1735), the poet's vignette might seem initially to repeat a hackneyed scenario of seductive calculations, but when he ponders what constitutes the *Venus*'s intentions, the poet punctures this storyline.[90] In presenting the Medici *Venus* as uncommonly lively – it bends, looks aside, turns, smiles, and swells – and as literally impressing herself upon the viewer's body and psyche, Thomson limns "the dangerous moment," the "moment of animation":[91]

> Bashful she bends, her well-taught look aside
> Turns in enchanting guise, where dubious mix
> Vain conscious beauty, a dissembled sense
> Of modest shame, and slippery looks of love.
> The gazer grows enamoured, and the stone,
> *As if* exalting in its conquest, smiles.
> So turn'd each limb, so smiles swell'd with fostering art
> That the deluded eye the marble *doubts*.[92]

The speaker finds himself caught in the agon between his own reaction to the statue and those he has been "taught" to hold. Thus, rather than describing merely a falsehearted marble who has been "well-taught" to flirt with and then subdue men, the compound adjective carries a double, dissenting meaning insofar as connoisseurs, too, have been "well-taught" to duplicate previous observers' sensations and accounts. This is especially pertinent given how challenging tourists find *seeing* once they become familiar with the travel descriptions preceding them.

The statue impresses her energy on his. In doing so, the narrator, "dangerously godlike," becomes both "the sculpting agent" in poetically forming the Medici *Venus* by deciding what she is thinking, as well as the "sculpting object," since the statue and the "mainstream" account of her also form him – ultimately steering him from the "well-taught" view.[93] We see him being "sculpted" when he first presents the statue's vanity and

[89] Barrell emphasizes that in Thomson's description, "the narrative is as unstable as is the statue itself" (p. 130).

[90] Barrell argues that when Thomson substitutes the *Venus* for "Public Virtue," he "feminize[s]" virtue; in "fail[ing] . . . to deliver up the official civic doctrine," the poet intimates that his poem, "whose entire subject is . . . civic freedom, has also been appropriated by a debased and effeminate discourse on the fine arts" (pp. 113, 114). I argue that Thomson challenges this narrative that the *Venus* represents an "effeminate" victory over aesthetic discourse.

[91] Mitchell, p. 246.

[92] *The Works of James Thomson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908), Part IV: ll. 177–184; emphasis added.

[93] The terms are Mitchell's, p. 246. He doesn't discuss Thomson.

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affectation as unquestionable, but then, in the phrase "*As if*," he questions whether the stone actually does subjugate the beholder. These two words refer to a predictable dialogue – "Is it/she really alive? Does it/she really have feelings?" "No of course not" – while they simultaneously question whether this *Venus* obdurately triumphs and gloats.

The statue continues to resculpt the narrator's seemingly predictable view by confusing and refining his attitude, as is evident when he declares that the statue seems to him so human that "the deluded eye the marble *doubts*." While this familiarly reiterates how artistic skill renders marble flesh human-like, the syntax also suggests that the observer doubts that the statue does subjugate her male ogler. Further, the grammar can also imply that the marble – the *Venus*, herself – is thinking, is "doubting." Perhaps she fires up misgivings, causing him to wonder if she judges his eye as "deluded," one tempted to exploit her as a pornographic image.[94] Accordingly, her gaze transforms him into the subject of her thoughts about his or the stock narrative's tendency toward sexual power mongering.[95] This "doubting" invites us to reread the earlier lines: Since it is "dubious" whether she mixes "Vain conscious beauty, a dissembled sense/ Of modest shame, and slippery looks of love," the narrator thus tests whether or not she dissimulates in order to conquer. Further suggestive, the word "mix" intimates her "mixed" – that is, complicated – character, one with prismatically propelled intentions. Readers, then, should remain "dubious" as to whether Thomson's lines respond predictably to the *Venus*'s supposedly bewitching powers. The poet's description, rendered in rapidly fluctuating "slippery" tones, provides a thing theory that defends this nonhuman thing – this statue – as an entity with the right to move toward *belonging with*, rather than surrendering to the separation endemic in the "conquest" narrative.[96]

The common storyline, as I have been suggesting, seems applicable only to a male scopophiliac; thus, what impressions might emerge when the

[94] On this pornographic "use" of the Medici *Venus*, see Olivia Ferguson's "Venus in Chains: Slavery, Connoisseurship, and Masculinity in *The Monk*," *Gothic Studies* 20.1 (2018): 29–43, p. 35.

[95] Barrell points out that Thomson's *Liberty* presents the *Venus* as "anarchic and unstable," so much so that "she seems not a woman turned to stone but a stone turning into a woman" (p. 128).

[96] The Medici *Venus* becomes, in her ambiguity, similar to what Bermingham terms the "accomplished woman," one dependent "less on notions of publicity and consumption and more on ideas of interiority and private self-expressions"; the accomplished woman "continued to problematize ideas of individuality and subjectivity," doing so, however, "within the domestic space of the home, one "reserved for the exercise of privacy and individual authenticity." Some viewers did respond to the statue as if *she* were the "accomplished woman," and some even brought her into their private homes ("Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs," p. 491).

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observer is someone else entirely, or when, for example, the observer connects emotionally to the statue's flight? For example, Jane Waldie crusades against dishonoring the *Venus* and wants, in the face of the standard narrative, to restore her to nobility. In disputing "that this modest-looking creature represents the shameless Phryne, who, at the celebration of the Eleusinian Games, exhibited herself coming out of the bath to the eyes of all Athens," Waldie fiercely upholds the statue's decency, exclaiming that she "can never have patience" with such a "conjecture."[97] Inherent in Waldie's defense and in that of others is the ability to belong with the statue, such that one slips from art degradation to the need to secure justice for the nonhuman.

I propose then that a second plot – a "Susanna and the Elders" chronicle – devolves that recognizes the statue's rights. Here beholders interpret the Medici *Venus* as having been spied rising from the water by an unknown and/or dangerous intruder and hopes to cover herself with her own hands. Keats, alluding to such a threat, depicts the *Venus* as "looking sideways in alarm."[98] William Gilpin (1798) finds the "Susanna" narrative most plausible. Conveying what he imagines as originally causing her pose, he writes, "'shrunk from herself, / With fancy blushing,'—she received the shot of the prophane eye that surprised her, as our modern heroes in dueling receive a bullet, by instantly drawing her body into a profile. In both cases nature teaches the easiest and most commodious posture."[99] Here the leering "eye," not the Medici *Venus*, is profane; and her movement, protective rather than coquettish, is one conatus – that is, striving to preserve one's life force – galvanizes.[100] Simultaneously vulnerable and powerful, she uses her hands to armor her body, a modification we will see paralleled in Chapter 5, when women employ hats to disguise their faces. Thus, even the Goddess of Love – even a *putain* – should be able to assert her right to privacy, should be able to refuse male notice, should be able to exercise the virtue of survival.

Maximilien Misson's *Nouveau Voyage* (1691) offers a storyline about the intentions behind her twists and turns that anticipates Waldie's and

[97] *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in the Years 1816 and 1817* (London: John Murray, 1820), vol. 4, p. 33.
[98] "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill," in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (London and New York: Longman and Norton, 1970), p. 96, l. 220.
[99] *Observations on the Western Parts of England* (London: T. Cadell, 1808), p. 20. Gilpin here responds to a *Venus de' Medici* copy housed at Northrup House in western England.
[100] Gilles Deleuze defines conatus as "an effort or tendency. Not a tendency to pass into existence, but to maintain and affirm existence." In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 99.

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Gilpin's perspectives, only to end with a third, one focusing on the disjunction between her hands and her naked body. *The Venus de' Medici* "places her right hand in front of her breast, but at some distance; with her other hand, she covers [her *parties génitales*] but without touching them; she softly leans down, and moves her right knee a bit forward, as if to hide herself, if that were possible."[101] Here Misson acknowledges her modest attempts to shield her defenseless body, but then finds such efforts erotically fascinating, given that she shifts her knee only "a bit forward" and distances her hand from her breasts, observations leading him to conclude that she will fail, for to conceal herself is not "possible": Ironically, her attempts render her even more a casualty of his gaze. How can we read her knee and hands' inability to cover those private parts? Insightfully evoking the *Venus*'s – or any object's – vulnerability to human domination, Barrell underscores how this gap "enabled her to be seen, engraved, and painted, from angles which frustrated her attempt to conceal her sexual parts."[102] Given the emphasis I place on her motility, I would add that her hands do not completely cover her intimate "parts" because she herself is in motion, her velocity preventing her arms from rigidly attaching to anything, while her swirling intensifies the instantaneous "alarm" she experiences.

Gilpin recognizes that the statue and the viewers' twisting and turning impact how one interprets her morality. Apparently trying to assert justice for the statue, he offers another narrative, that scrutinizing her from the "wrong" point of view sparks accusations of immodesty:

> I have sometimes heard her *attitude* called in question. Instead of that modest demeanor, which is commonly ascribed to her, I have known her reproached for prudery, and theatrical affectation. We can, in truth, say but little for her moral character. Her *attitude*, however, I think may be defended. The sculptor, I suppose, meant her to be viewed with her face towards you. In that position she makes the most elegant figure.[103]

In other words, the statue's "morality" is relative to the examiner's station as he or she appraises the *Venus*'s "attitude" – since from the frontal angle she is "chaste" while from the others she apparently throws out not an alarmed response, but a tantalizingly erotic invitation. For Gilpin, then, the responsibility falls on the spectator to observe her from the most "virtuous" angle, rather than the one showing body parts that she cannot

[101] (Holland: Henry van Bulderen, Marchand Libraire, 1702), vol. 2, p. 334. Misson expresses the bracketed material euphemistically and in Italian. My translation.
[102] "The Dangerous Goddess," p. 121. [103] *Observations on the Western Parts of England*, p. 20.

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cover. And yet this advice suggests that any woman/thing viewed in the round, from varying angles, will never *look* completely virtuous.[104]

To summarize these narratives, the *Venus*, by whirling in space, stimulates audiences' self-exploration; vanquishes them; reveals her modesty; is innocently encroached upon; and titillates with "modesty." Interpreting her kinesis, these tourists historicize the *Venus* by writing meta-narratives about gender conformity and emancipation from orthodox expectations. Assorted reactions to her reveal that viewing things is an act as unstable and volatile as things themselves. As I consider in Section 1.4, the Medici *Venus*'s Greek origins, Roman incarnation, and Italian arms and hands (seventeenth-century restorations) destabilize her in further ways: She embodies each period's fashionable gender styles, and, as I will unearth in Section 1.4, fashionable politics, for it will take a revolution and then an empire to render her an *heroic* icon.

1.4 History in the Collection: The *Venus* as Heroic

What validity do collections have? Can they themselves and their belongings be justified? How might their things' presence – albeit it in an artificial space – remind visitors to connect radiantly with the nonhuman? Susan Stewart argues that "self-enclosure" and ahistoricism characterize the collection, which "replaces history with *classification*, with order beyond the realm of temporality."[105] The museum's design, Gillen D'Arcy Wood asserts, is partly to blame: "With its open spaces and blank walls, [it] isolates ancient artefacts from their social and geographical origin, creating the … loss Schiller diagnosed in the modern subject's perception of antiquity."[106] Though applicable to some galleries, these attributions

[104] Commentary from the mid-nineteenth century, however, ignores her movement and her apparent alarm. As McCue explains, the Medici Venus "had fallen out of favour by 1830" though "it was acceptable, if only out of habit, to briefly mention the statue" (*British Romanticism and the Reception of Italian Old Master Art*, p. 151). Bruce Haley discusses Hazlitt's summation of the *Venus* as "an exquisite marble doll." See *Living Forms: Romantics and the Monumental Figure* (Albany: SUNY University Press, 2003), pp. 104–105; and *The Complete Works* [of Hazlitt], ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–1934), vol. 10, p. 222. For George Stillman Hillard (1853) she is a courteous hostess, who apparently "extend[s] a gracious welcome to all who enter." See *Six Months in Italy*, 21st ed. (Boston, MA: Riverside Press, 1881), p. 73. More recently Martin Robertson has disdained the *Venus* as "among the most charmless remnants of antiquity." See *A History of Greek Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vol. 1, p. 549.

[105] *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 151; emphasis original.

[106] *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760–1860* (New York and London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 131.

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pertain neither to the Tribuna nor to how viewers field their ripostes to its art objects. First, as I discussed in Section 1.1, the room's diversity eclipses a definition like the one Susan Pearce offers: "[C]ollections are essentially composed of objects which bear an intrinsic relationship to each other in a sequential or representative sense, rather than each being valued for its own qualities."[107] "Collection objects," she continues, have a "quality of separateness .... They are *wrenched* out of their own true contexts and become dead to their living time and space in order that they may be given an immortality within the collection."[108] The Tribuna's sculpture had indeed been "wrenched" from its Greek and then Roman origins, but in its afterlife, it was never separate or alienated from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history.

This gallery and its objects show how a collection can "concretize" and render more material our historical awareness. Certainly, Napoleon anachronistically and accidentally contradicts Stewart's claim that "[a]ll collected objects are ... *objets de lux*, objects abstracted from use value and materiality within a magic cycle of self-referential exchange,"[109] for, when he first saw – and coveted – the *Venus de' Medici* in 1796, he further incarnated her into the temporal and thus into history as a fully material and useful being. Tommaso Puccini, the gallery's director, knew that the future Emperor lusted after the *Venus*; anticipating the French conquest of Tuscany, he had her transported to Palermo for safekeeping, though by 1802 she was surrendered to the French and sent on a journey to Paris.[110] Launched by historical events, her traveling left her pedestal in the Tribuna gapingly empty until 1815, altering the Uffizi and art history. What did it mean to see the room vacant of her beauty? Conversely what did it mean to see her once again illuminating the Tribuna after Waterloo? For Jean

[107] *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 20.

[108] Pearce, p. 24; emphasis added. In contrast, Emma Peacocke makes a strong case for the inherent historicity of museums: She admirably demonstrates how "[f]rom their inception, public museums were implicated within a broader set of national, political, and cultural struggles." See *Romanticism and the Museum* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), p. 7. Sophie Thomas crucially observes that museums were "active agents in expanding fields of inquiry, shaping as well as shaped by emerging bodies of knowledge in the nineteenth century. ... [M]useums reflect the state of the nation, and more pointedly, the nation's knowledge." See "Introduction – A Tour, a Text, a Body, a Building, a Model: Some (Fore-)words for the Nineteenth-Century Museum," in *Recollecting the Nineteenth-Century Museum*, ed. Thomas, *Romanticism on the Net* 70 (2018): 1–6, p. 3. Silver shows how "[t]he standard account of the rise of the museum tells the story of [how] ... small, intensely personal and idiosyncratic spaces, filled with the quirky, the odd, and the wonderful, gave way to professionalized, organized, and organizing endeavors" (*The Mind*, p. 6).

[109] Stewart, p. 165. [110] Honour, p. 658.

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Baudrillard, "even though objects may on occasion lead into the realm of social discourse, it must be acknowledged that *it is usually not an object's presence but far more often its absence that clears the way for social intercourse*."[111] This applies trenchantly to the *Venus*, whose absence defines a new historical moment for her and for her gallery. Her presence in and then absence from her home reminds us that "the ways that people dwell in spaces and spaces respond to people" renders them "habitable to one another."[112] Though this nonhuman thing is not a "person," people treated her as such.

The sense that the *Venus de' Medici* belonged with the Tribuna and embodied the museum and Florence is borne out in the ways that perceivers felt her presence as intensely – or more – once she was removed from the gallery as they had when she lodged there. John Chetwode Eustace, traveling to Italy in 1802, claims that the "temple" which once held the *Venus* is now "abandoned by its celestial inhabitant," and the gallery, "stripped of its principal ornaments," displayed "so many vacant frames and unoccupied pedestals, that we found ourselves more disposed to regret its absent than to admire its present beauties."[113] For him, the gallery, having experienced violence, now becomes a spiritual shrine to a revenant – the "celestial" goddess – whose absence renders it impossible for sightseers to enjoy what *is* there. By 1805, Napoleon's plunders had left the collection, like a battlefield, a skeleton with empty spaces and spectral images, words which reinforce the need to reunify art objects in their original location, not to unify Europe under Napoleon. And though he did not particularly admire the statue, Kotzebue nevertheless directs our gaze to the "pedestal on which the Medicean Venus stood": It is "empty; and it is supposed that it can never be *occupied* again."[114] Duplicating Kotzebue's verb, the tourist James Wilson (1816) notes that Canova's *Venus* had "*occupied* the place of the Venus de' Medici in the Tribune, while she was in *captivity* at Paris."[115] Here, the "*social intercourse*"[116] that such absence inspires is emphatically political, as the war-imbued words "occupied" and "captivity" resonate with the capture of Florence, the *Venus*'s

[111] *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 113; emphasis original.
[112] Silver, p. 17.
[113] *A Classical Tour through Italy*, 6th ed. (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1837), vol. 2, pp. 172, 170.
[114] August von Kotzebue, *Travels through Italy in the Years 1804 and 1805* (London: T. Gillet, 1806), vol. 1, p. 160; emphasis added.
[115] *A Journal of Two Successive Tours*, p. 392; emphasis added.
[116] Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, p. 113.

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incarceration, and the imperialist ambition to conquer the civilization by emptying the museum. In the face of cultural warfare, the *Venus* anticipates Eugène Delacroix's *The 28th of July: Liberty Leading the People* (1830) as an embodiment of hope.[117]

To grasp the *Venus de' Medici*'s new historical role as incarnating emancipation it helps to contrast this symbolic status to an earlier one. J. R. Hale suggests that Robert Merry's *Laurel of Liberty: A Poem* (1790), dedicated to the National Assembly of France, makes the *Venus* "*the* symbol of Florence":[118]

> O sweet Firenze! What are all thy stores,
> Thy Parian Venus which the world adores,
> What are thy treasured gems, thy tow'ring domes,
> Whilst in thy halls the spectre Slav'ry roams?[119]

Written when the *Venus* was still residing in Florence, Merry can feel that while slavery exists, her power means very little, for injustice against humans vacates the significance of these "treasured gems." By the time she lives in Paris, however, a sense of her as an embodiment of Florence and freedom renders her a being who needs to be in residence: She *is* some*thing*, for now she represents emancipation. Forsyth also touches on the *Venus* as embodying national liberty when he invites us to contemplate her possible owners. As he bemoans the lost "treasures of the Tribuna" he catalogues the multiple claims to ownership of the statue.

> The Florentines murmured at the detention of objects so dear to them. Ferdinand claimed them in right of his family; Lewis, in right of his crown; and the King of Naples detained them till the stronger claim should prevail. Thus was this precious deposit disputed by two princes, in the hands of a

[117] Just because women are implemented to represent liberty does not mean that they themselves are free. For Lynn Hunt, "the proliferation of the female allegory was made possible, in fact, by the exclusion of women from public affairs. Women could be representative of abstract qualities and collective dreams because women were not about to vote or govern." See "The Political Psychology of Revolutionary Caricatures," in James Cuno, ed., *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789–1799* (Los Angeles: Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, 1988), p. 39. Also see Joan B. Landes, "Representing the Body Politic: The Paradox of Gender in the Graphic Politics of the French Revolution," in Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, eds., *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, University of California Humanities Research Center (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), see pp. 15–37 and p. 39.

[118] "Art and Audience," p. 42; emphasis original.

[119] (London: John Bell, 1790), p. 15. *Venus* as embodying republican Florence contrasts to earlier English attitudes toward the city and its treasures. Rosemary Sweet explains that the British took only a "muted interest in Florence's history as a republic," a posture distinct from their "widespread interest" in Venice's history. See "British Perceptions of Florence in the Long Eighteenth Century," *The Historical Journal* 50.4 (2007): 837–859, p. 852 and note 71.

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> third, and at the disposal of a fourth power, though it rightfully belonged to none of them; for Leopold, as if presaging some contention of the kind, had solemnly declared the gallery to be the property of the nation.[120]

Who possesses this thing is as unstable as what it signifies since each ruler avows the *right* to own her. Only Leopold, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, recognizes the *Venus* as a belonging, for he wants her to be multiply shared – by the nation that is. How could the *Venus* be other than a possession if claimed by such abstractions as a "family" or a "crown" or even an institution holding onto this thing until some "stronger claim should prevail"? Carol Duncan writes that "art museums constitute one of those sites in which politically organized and socially institutionalized power most avidly seeks to realize its desire to appear as beautiful, natural, and legitimate."[121] Certainly these princes' claims on the *Venus* as their property, as well as Napoleon's plundering, truly legitimize the "naturalness" of the statue's presence in the collection and in the "nation," since her removal comes to embody the spectacularly "unnatural." But to invert Duncan's point, the Emperor's ransacking made him – and not the museum – the entity that institutionalizes power.

The Medici goddess's unoccupied foundation reminds travelers of what "institutionalized power" really is when it enhances interest in one particular sculptural grouping that was still present: the *Niobe* statues (c. 330 BCE–c. 250 BCE). New appreciation for that grieving mother and her fourteen dead children rendered touristic acclaim a patriotic performance, as this parent's agony came to exemplify the conflict Napoleon propagated; preferring her became a protest against French taste, which found "fault" with the *Niobe* group, placing it "on the whole much lower in the scale of excellency" than other works of art.[122] Additionally, in 1802, *Niobe* was a statue onlookers could identify with since she offered to them, as she does to Corinne, "dignity despite extreme grief" (*C*, p. 355). Finally, these observers could connect to this mythological figure, assaulted by "the vengeance of heaven and not [by] passions born in the human heart" (*C*, p. 140), given that a God-like force – Napoleon – was also levying destruction on them.

[120] *Remarks on Antiquities*, pp. 430, 430–431. Forsyth was in Italy during the Peace of Amiens; the *Venus* was in Palermo in 1800 and in France in 1802, placed in the Musée Central des Arts (1793–1803), later renamed the Musée Napoléon (1803–1815). See Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life* (New York: Viking, 2014), pp. 87–88.

[121] *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 6.

[122] Eustace, p. 172.

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The *Venus de' Medici*'s absence from the gallery stimulated historical recall of political and aesthetic liberty – recall of their own rights. And yet, remembrance was insufficient. The Florentines required an embodied Medici *Venus* – they desired the thing – and in her absence, they sought to restore it in two ways, both of which propel the statue and her constituents into art history's history. First, they put another statue, the *Venus Victrix / Belvedere*, who had already been subject to several centuries of "plastic surgeons," back on the table to make her resemble the *Venus de' Medici*.[123] In Kotzebue's words, they broke off "the two arms of this Venus," which once held an apple, and "substitut[ed] two new ones with the bend of the Medicean. It now makes a droll appearance."[124] Changes that were "droll" to Kotzebue seem in retrospect mutilating attempts to resuscitate what was lost. For D'Arcy Wood, the arrival of the Elgin Marbles in London "interrupt[s]" the "Georgian sentimentalization of Ancient Greece";[125] however, at least for travelers to Italy, I suggest that that process started much earlier as tourists, from the eighteenth century onward, viewed the fragments of and alterations to both Venuses' bodies, reconstructions that made visible relationships between the histories of fashion and politics. Not only do the Medicean arms mar the *Venus Victrix / Belvedere*, but her immobility (no whirling or twisting here) speaks of the despair that liberty will not be restored. Simultaneously, resembling the statue of King Mitys' mighty power to right wrongs – by falling on and killing the King's murderer – the *Venus de' Medici* manifests the potency to mobilize change and restore justice. These restorations could be said to constitute what Bal has represented as a traumatic event "reenacted as drama rather than synthetically narrated by the memorizing agent who 'masters' them,"[126] since in a vain attempt to soothe the human psyche they perform a violent drama against things, disfiguring the statue in their hope that, in its metamorphosed state, it could heal, a point I return to explore further in Chapter 2.

There was another way in which the Florentines tried to belong with the exiled *Venus*, a move that further grounded her historically. They hoped to fill "*la dolente Perdita*" of the statue's absence for the sake of the homeland when, in 1803, Giovanni degli Alessandri, president of the Florentine

[123] Arnold Nesselrath discusses these restorations in "The Venus Belvedere: An Episode in Restoration," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 205–214.
[124] Kotzebue, p. 159. [125] *The Shock of the Real*, p. 132.
[126] "Introduction," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), p. viii.

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Academia delle Belle Arti, asked Canova to copy the *Venus de' Medici*.[127] Significantly Alessandri requested a simulacra, albeit one that was "corrected," that is, lacking the "excessively long"[128] Baroque arms and fingers the seventeenth-century sculptor Ercole Ferrata had added to the statue (a restoration I examine also in Section 1.5). Ultimately Canova did not send a reproduction to the Uffizi, but a sculpture of his own "*invenzione*,"[129] the *Venere Italica*. Further, he refused to position his sculpture on the Medici *Venus*'s plinth, which he wanted to remain empty. As a testimony to the necessity of having a Venus de' Medici, if not the real one, in the Uffizi, the public cheered the 1812 *Venere Italica*'s arrival in Florence, and poems were written in its honor, evidence of a civic enthusiasm which suggests it functioned metonymically as a sign that the Florentines might at some point reoccupy their own city.[130] However, Canova's "replacement" diverges so stylistically from the original that it testifies to a point I make in Chapter 4 about how adaptation redistributes the *élan vital* of any object recreated, restored, recycled, or revised.

Once the purloined original was returned to its home (1815), and Canova's *Venere Italica* was transferred to the Pitti Palace, viewers must have seen the *Venus de' Medici* with new eyes, given her travels to Palermo, her Parisian incarceration, and her victorious return to Florence. What might it mean that Napoleon touched her, potentially contaminating her with his measuring hands (since he surely did measure her), rendering her a scrap of herself? Or instead, did she seem more complete, having survived and returned from her Parisian internment? Stuart Semmel has suggestively argued that post-Waterloo tourism offered a more "tangibl[e]," a less "mediat[ed]" understanding of history, since "[v]isiting sites and handling objects that had been inscribed by Napoleon now appeared to offer a means of communing with the fallen ruler, or of understanding the recent war and its terrible slaughter."[131] Given this, how *could* she have been seen as "the same"? Simultaneously evoking a Grecian and then Roman past, a Medician moment, a Baroque refurbishment, a French displacement, and a present Florentine existence, her salmagundi of lives unfolds in historical time. The *Venus* does not become "dead to [its] living time and space in

[127] See Honour for quotations and for a detailed history of this commission (pp. 658–659).
[128] Jonathan Richardson, *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings, and Pictures in Italy*, 2nd ed. (London: D. Browne, 1754), p. 55.
[129] Quoted in Honour, p. 662.
[130] Ironically, it was Napoleon himself who paid Canova. See Honour, p. 665 and note 44.
[131] "Reading the Tangible Past: British Tourism, Collecting, and Memory after Waterloo," *Representations* 69 (2000): 9–37, p. 10.

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order that [it] may be given an immortality within the collection";[132] instead, her position in and out of the Tribuna intensifies her impact on and place in history.

In Section 1.5, I turn to Edgeworth's *Belinda*, which draws on the *Venus de' Medici*'s histories – her human–nonhuman dynamism; her restorations; and her gendered "behavior," including claims of her positive and nefarious intentions – to present the statue in another historical role: the feminist work of liberating female characters from ideals of perfection and conformity.

1.5 Lady Delacour and the *Venus de' Medici*'s Beautiful Mixtures

The *Venus de' Medici*'s celebrity status indicates Edgeworth's own interest when, in *Belinda*, she invokes the statue twice, both times in relation to Lady Delacour. Deborah Steiner explains that a statue referred to in a literary work "imports into the text all the powers, properties, and associations that it possesses in the lives of the audience."[133] The *Venus* "imports" such material tidings into *Belinda*, and via its characters explores the statue's many narratives as well as the real-life activity of tourists who judged *Venus*'s modesty, recalculated her perfect measurements, and assessed her brokenness and restorations, those injuries just on and under her body's surface.

Eighteenth-century and Romantic-era culture seek out quantitative benchmarks by which to calculate behavior as appropriate and seemly, as authentic and reliable, a point I return to in Chapter 3, where I assay *Belinda*'s repeated references to measuring diamonds. We see this echoed in the ways that the *Venus*'s presence introduces the classical canon into the novel, as when Hervey is called "a connoisseur in female grace and beauty," and when Belinda's match-making aunt offers a "course of documenting," one instructing young women in how to be favorably measured according to standards of behavior and financial worth (*B*, pp. 8, 10). The measuring of the *Venus* reflects ways that during the late eighteenth century, "sculpture bec[ame] a kind of model ... for man as species."[134] Petras Camper, an influential eighteenth-century

[132] Pearce, p. 24.
[133] Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. xiv.
[134] Hobson, p. 33.

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scientist-aesthete, claiming that Greek sculpture represented a touchstone for beauty because its proportions were perfect, calculated a geometric value for determining nationality, race, and, of course, beauty. He found it "amusing to contemplate an arrangement of [skulls], placed in a regular succession" that demonstrated the supposedly progressive teleology of perfection from an ape to the African to the Chinese to the European to the Greek (represented in sculpture).[135]

Given the *Venus*'s reception history and the novel's varying stances toward proportion, I suggest that in *Belinda*, beauty as perfect ratio reveals its own contradictions in questions of measuring and measurements. Hobson observes that "[t]he importance of ancient sculpture as a cultural value in the late eighteenth century is not news. What is perhaps more novel is its relation to the practice of measurement, and to a search for standards of measurement."[136] *Belinda* introduces the practice of measuring in kaleidoscopic ways: in regard to emotional strain, when characters are "provok[ed] ... beyond measure" (*B*, p. 67); when weighing moral issues – "the most moral ladies ... do not expect men to be as moral as themselves—so we may suit the measure of our external indignation to our real feelings" (*B*, p. 149); and when reinforcing Lady Delacour's own witty embrace of imbalance: She is, she reports, "beyond measure astonished that any thing relative to lord Delacour could so far have interested her attention" and she claims that Lady Anne "is kind, beyond measure, to Helena ... to provoke me" (*B*, pp. 189, 120). The activity arises also in instances of objective measurement, as when Hervey cuts Belinda's hair to test whether it compares to Madame de Grignan's (*B*, p. 76), or when Belinda devises an experiment with phosphorous to help Juba see that his belief that "the figure of an old woman, all in flames," which appeared to him every night is incommensurable with reality. And even when the word "measure" itself does not appear, *Belinda* incorporates the concept in its exploration of "standards" of skin color, nationality, and of gendered formations of virtue and modesty.

Certainly, what constitutes appropriate measure also impacted this novel's revisions. Edgeworth must have been made to feel she had gone "beyond measure," since, when told to do so, she excised from *Belinda*'s later editions the biracial marriage and the heroine's engagement to

[135] *The Works of the Late Professor Camper* (London: printed for C. Dilly, 1794), p. 50. Hobson discusses Camper, as does Paul Youngquist's *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[136] Hobson, p. 43.

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Mr. Vincent, a Creole gambler. In cutting the latter, Edgeworth expunged any indication that her eponymous heroine has flaws – or that she has the right to make mistakes. And that flaw was that Belinda had split feeling from reason to commit herself to Vincent: Her hyper-rational decision to marry him without love lacks proportion and thus goes "beyond measure." In letting Belinda choose the wrong suitor and listen to the wrong mentor (Lady Anne) – in short to make mistakes – and in offering her a second chance to marry, the early edition reiterates the call for an "ideal" character that is mixed and fragmented, one resembling the Lady Delacour-*Venus de' Medici* double. *Belinda*'s revised edition discards as refuse what is imperfect. Mark Canuel demonstrates that when theoreticians of beauty emphasize symmetry and proportion in their definitions, they delimit the beautiful to the normative, "restrict[ing] membership to those who symmetrically replicate and share the same heritage, looks, or attitudes."[137] As will become clear, I find that *Belinda* makes a similar argument, insofar as it criticizes definitions of beauty and reason dependent on sterile, rigid notions of *symmetria* when they are used to support gender conformity.

In a conversation alluding to the *Venus de' Medici*, the characters discuss measurement and its relation to gender, obliquely exploring how or if the classical canon establishing a statue's proportions could or should be applied to evaluate future wives. Clarence Hervey, delivering a bracelet to Belinda that she has left behind at her aunt's house, says,

> "Mrs. Stanhope promised me, that if I delivered it safely, I should be rewarded by the honour of putting it on the owner's fair arm." A conversation now took place on the nature of ladies' promises—on fashionable bracelets—on the size of the arm of the Venus de' Medicis—on lady Delacour's, and miss Portman's—on the thick legs of ancient statues—and on the various defects and absurdities of Mrs. Luttridge and her wig. (*B*, p. 14)

The bracelet works as a go-between to introduce the hero and heroine and to forecast their future marriage, as Hervey places it, like a gigantic ring, on Belinda's arm. The bangle also then ties the *Venus*'s arms to standards of proportion and then to female virtue. As tourists did when they observed and judged the statue, here the characters interrogate a thing's morality, trustworthiness, and artful style, or lack thereof. Their exchange indicates that the proportions of classical statues offered a common conversational topic and a way to adjudicate female beauty. Addison, claiming that "from

[137] *Justice, Dissent, and the Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 28.

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the Bigness of any one Part" of the *Venus de' Medici*, "it is easy to guess at all the rest, in a Figure of such nice Proportions,"[138] reveals how an arm's individual segments could be seen to calculate as a whole a body's physical percentages, especially in cultures where clothes covered so much of the physique. In this passage, the characters and the *Venus* share the same nouns, and literary muscle and tissue belong with marble, rendering contiguous the boundaries between measuring the arms, ankles, and virtues of three women and one ancient statue.

Even the apparently comic reference to the "defects and absurdities of Mrs. Luttridge's wig," which in this context implies that it lacks a proportional relationship to her body, links physical ratio and measurement to serious assessments of women and statues.[139] In this way, *Belinda* satirizes contemporary perspectives urging women to emulate these touchstones. John Bennett's *Letters to a Young Lady* (1795) advises his audience to "examine authors of all different persuasions, as the Grecian artist did women, when he wished to paint his Venus of Medici. He selected from every one he saw, the *particular* limb or feature, in which they *separately* excelled" so as to form "a perfect whole."[140] *Belinda*'s *Venus* mocks Bennett's young ladies, those who go to school with the sculptor to learn how to "[c]ollect . . . distinct charms, and work them up in the crucible of [their] heart, till they produce 'the very beauty of holiness' in their life and conversation."[141] Bennett's emphasis on collecting parts anticipates Victor Frankenstein, who creates a monster by rendering "his limbs . . . in proportion" and selecting his "features as beautiful."[142] Indeed, the company, while replicating touristic fashions, reminds us, from a feminist viewpoint, that women viewed the *Venus* as well as men, and that they forged a likeness between themselves and the statue, though not only according the standard narrative of it as an erotic tease.

Belinda connects the human and nonhuman by bringing the *Venus* "home," so to speak. Engendering a complex fantasy, Clarence associates Lady Delacour with the *Venus*, a bond fashioned when he had first seen the statue in the Tribuna, also the occasion on which he and Dr. X first met. The doctor, however, finding that Hervey still admires Lady

[138] *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, pp. 323–324.
[139] Conversely, Ferguson finds this merely a "frivolous conversation" (p. 34).
[140] John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady; on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects*, 6th American ed. (Vermont, Brattleboro: William Fessenden, 1811), p. 50; emphasis original.
[141] *Letters to a Young Lady*, p. 50.
[142] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2012), p. 83.

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Delacour years later, ascertains disproportion in the object itself and in this infatuation's longevity, valuations he finds that go "beyond measure":

> "Lady Delacour!—not the same lady Delacour whom four years ago, when we met at Florence, you compared to the Venus de Medicis—no, no, it cannot be the same, a goddess of four years standing! Incredible!"
>
> "Incredible as it seems," said Clarence, "it is true—I admire her ladyship more than ever I did."
>
> "Like a true connoisseur," said Dr X—, "you admire a fine picture, the older it grows—I hear that her ladyship's face is really one of the finest pieces of painting extant." (*B*, p. 95)

No doubt Clarence and the doctor *measured* the *Venus* when together they visited her in the Tribuna, and this is an act the doctor pursues anew, though he now twists to a painting metaphor so as to make a moral measurement – she wears too much make-up. Hervey, imperfectly seeing Lady Delacour's body, compares it to the classical statue as perfect; unbeknownst to him, however, the appraisal is apropos, given that both the art object and the character have been wounded and broken into pieces. Here Dr. X, taking on the connoisseur's and the moralist's roles, negatively binds Lady Delacour and the *Venus* by judging the ethics of both and by denying the former the right to age and yet remain beloved. As the novel interlaces perfect proportion and questions of modesty with the restoration of Lady Delacour's character, it has a rich source to draw on: the "questionable" modesty and the restorations of the Medici *Venus* herself.

Belinda's characters, to requote Gilpin, "call" Lady Delacour's "*attitude* into question" – assessing her "pose" and the angles from which she should be viewed when Clarence, unbeknownst to Lady Delacour, spurs the doctor to "count" her pulse: "Look through the door at the shadow of queen Elizabeth's ruff—observe how it vibrates; the motion as well as the figure is magnified in the shadow. Cannot you count every pulsation distinctly?" (*B*, p. 115). To reuse Gilpin's phrase, I suggest that in this action, Dr. X "measures" the fictional character with a "shot of the prophane eye."[143] Viewed from the "wrong angle," she is "shot" again, this time by eyes, rather than the butt of a gun. The act is "prophane" because the scientific method of medical diagnosis is wholly secular but also because it sacrilegiously violates her right to privacy. Yet medical practice here collides with aesthetic viewing. Reinforcing the interlacing

[143] *Observations on the Western Parts of England*, p. 20.

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between Lady Delacour and the *Venus*, Dr. X and his company's experimentation parallels a fashionable eighteenth-century viewing practice: gazing at statuary by torchlight, a method Winckelmann inspired, one which "isolated each part of each figure by turn" and whetted visitors' "alertness to minute particulars," as when he expressed "fastidious anxiety about the depth of the *Venus de' Medici*'s navel."[144] These overlapping aesthetic and therapeutic diagnostics recall the Susanna and the Elders' plotline we saw affixed to the *Venus*, since they render Lady Delacour vulnerable to the doctor's sharp watchfulness, a critique which, if she were to observe, would no doubt cause her to turn away and try to protect herself with her hands, as the *Venus* does.

In measuring Lady Delacour's blood flow as he gazes at her pulse throbbing on the wall, Dr. X reminds us that the character and statue belong together: The former's hectic palpitations remind us that she faces the literal threat of anatomical dissection in her anticipated mastectomy and that the latter comingles "[b]lood, pulse, and breast"[145] with dismemberments and "corrections." As I said previously in this section, it was commonplace when viewing the *Venus* to lament not only her physical ruptures, but even more so, the restorations she had undergone throughout history. These responses often veered toward sentimentality or a pretense toward connoisseurship, which included a rote critique of her arms and fingers, which Ferrata had added. Jonathan Richardson (1722) found her fingers to be "excessively long, and taper,"[146] rendering them as prostheses rather than organic restitutions. In *Belinda*, the *Venus*'s presence – smashed and refurbished – triggers thoughts about what kinds of restorations might be organic enough to preserve both the statue's and Lady Delacour's *zèle*.

Belinda links reclaiming Lady Delacour's modesty with the rebuilding of her body from illness to health and of her ethics from apparent rake to beloved wife – one who belongs within a circle of authentic friends. The novel maps out these alterations by registering her change in "attitude" or position: how she "places" herself in relation to her husband and daughter and her willingness to rely on Dr. X's restoration of her health. As we gaze at the *Venus* resting one hand over her breast, we also see Lady Delacour covering her own wounded breast. In a *mise en abyme* effect, the fictional character, her body mangled from the face to the waist, gothically embodies the statue's pose when she "bar[es] one half of her bosom, . . .

[144] Haskell and Penny, p. 102. [145] Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, l. 450.
[146] *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings, and Pictures in Italy*, p. 55.

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reveal[ing] a hideous spectacle" (*B*, pp. 32). Here Lady Delacour, appearing disjointed physically, belongs with the fractured statue's demonstrable "wounds."

Though written later, Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1838 description of the *Venus* seems to do double duty for the mayhem both the statue and Lady Delacour have endured: Recording that she has "suffered terribly," her arms having been "severed," her waist "broken," and her head "snapped off," he still asserts that "all these injuries do not . . . impair the effect, even when you see where the dissevered fragments have been re-united. . . . I am glad to have seen this Venus and to have found her so tender and so chaste."[147] Hawthorne wants readers and bystanders to "enter into" the statue's life,[148] to feel how "terribly" she has "suffered" in being ruptured into more than forty-two pieces, his verbs – "severed" and "snapped" – palpably recreating the movements that maimed her. For Hawthorne and for *Belinda* both the *Venus* and Lady Delacour turn out to be "chaste," and while the fictional character's restoration evidently makes her happier, as it does her friends and family, the novel never suggests that she has been rendered perfectly proportioned, that she succumbs to a regulating norm for beauty, or that such a standard is in fact relevant for women. Similarly, neither the *Venus* nor Lady Delacour operates as a "fantasized specular image of corporeal completeness";[149] rather, their "perfection" and splintering belong together.

The debates about the statue's modesty and motivations that I canvassed in Section 1.3 and the novel's endorsement of two flawed heroines disassemble the illusion that a woman should be as perfectly proportioned as a statue or that the *Venus de' Medici* represents an ideal woman – or is in fact one. The statue, functioning as Lady Delacour's doppelgänger, makes much "realer," so to speak, both of their damaged bodies. And while the perfect, marble breast contrasts to Lady Delacour's wounded one, the *Venus* – as Hawthorne reveals – is not "perfect" after all. The statue's seams and scars thus double back to italicize the fictional character's lesions. And yet, as Hawthorne says, "all these injuries do

[147] *Passages from the French and Italian Note-Books* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1883), pp. 291–292.

[148] Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations*, trans. Geraldine Carr (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1930), p. xxxvii.

[149] Susan E. Gustafson, *Absent Mothers and Orphaned Fathers: Narcissism and Abjection in Lessing's Aesthetic and Dramatic Production* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), p. 73. Gustafson, referring to Lessing's assessment of *The Laocoön*, argues that "[j]ust at the edge of the fantasy of wholeness" he finds in the statuary group, there "lies the annihilation of this ideal" (p. 105).

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not . . . impair the effect, even when you see where the dissevered fragments have been re-united."[150]

Restoring Lady Delacour, an act undertaken by Belinda, a female "sculptor," Clarence, a male connoisseur, and Dr. X, a scientist, is quite successful. But I would also highlight how *Belinda* pierces "the plane of representation through to the thing itself,"[151] insofar as the novel, via Lady Delacour's broken body, illuminates how the actual statue's restorations *show* – that is, the novel helps us discover the "joinings"[152] holding them together. Resembling the seams on the *Venus*'s arms, revealing where the classical ends and Ferrata's baroque begins, Lady Delacour, though now "restored," still "shows" her original state – her scintillating wit, intelligence, and fearless irony; and these qualities now present even more radiantly, given that they contrast to her new restorations: the domestic persona she so self-consciously takes on. My reading of Lady Delacour thus contrasts with that of one contemporary review, which negatively appraises the restored heroine, whom they see in her reformed state as one who no longer "interests" or even "commands some respect," but as a "comparatively flat and vapid creature."[153] Instead, I claim that, as the later restorations to the *Venus* do not transform her entirely into a baroque artwork, neither do Lady Delacour's restorations force her into someone entirely predictable and "vapid," a "pattern women," the type she most despises (*B*, p. 121). As she says, I am "*won*, not *tamed*!" (*B*, p. 314; emphasis original). With her keenness intact, Lady Delacour retains her right to remain mixed and to preserve her "French" wit, theatrical charisma, and intellectual powers – what we could call her "sculptural" skills. Refusing to conform passively like Lady Anne, Lady Delacour models her own ending, assembling marriages and families, when she physically choreographs the characters and "blocks" their movements on "stage": "Captain Sunderland—kneeling with Virginia, if you please, sir, at her father's feet. You in the act of giving them your blessing, Mr Hartley, Mrs Ormond clasps her hands with joy . . .. Clarence, you have a right to Belinda's hand, and may kiss it too" (*B*, p. 478). To shift back to sculpture, Lady Delacour becomes a Praxiteles, sculpting the other characters, while

[150] Hawthorne, p. 292.
[151] Barbara Johnson, "Ode on a Public Thing," in *Field Work: Sites in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Paul B. Franklin, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 141.
[152] Anna Riggs Miller's word, p. 388.
[153] Anon., *The Monthly Review; Or, Literary Journal Enlarged*, ed. Ralph Griffiths (London: A. Strahan, 1802), vol. 37, article IV, pp. 368–369.

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presiding with stature, like the King Mitys statue who decrees justice. She knows who belongs together.[154]

If the human "is both the sculpted object and the sculpting agent," and if "[i]mage-making, like thinking for yourself, is a dangerously godlike activity,"[155] Lady Delacour's "godlike activity" as sculptor, as well as her embodiment of the perfectly fragmented statue, recall how in ancient Greece, "no sculpture was erected without a function to perform. Whether apotropaic, talismanic, monitory, consolatory, votive, or commemorative in intent, statues were first and foremost regarded not as representational or aesthetic objects"; their beauty was crucial, but most important were their roles as "performative and efficacious agents, able to interact in a variety of ways with those who commissioned, venerated, and even on occasion defaced them."[156] Vested to act through her own creative powers, Lady Delacour functions in monitory and apotropaic ways, warding off an inappropriate marriage between Virginia and Hervey and directing these individuals into happy couples and family groupings, mirrored by their proper "attitudes." *Belinda*, in two turns, sculpts a monument of Lady Delacour and then brings her fully into life, making the ordinary extraordinary and the extraordinary unstable. The character's victory – and no doubt also the *Venus de' Medici*'s – is twofold: The former rearranges the wreckages on courtship's "battlefield" into attitudes of her and their own pleasing, rather than leaving the job to a "prophane" eye, and both the fictional character and the statue expose the "flaw" latent in definitions of female ideality.

Lady Delacour, however, destabilizes the perfect symmetry her sculptural grouping apparently embodies. She does this first when, after forming her friends' positions and movements, she adds a line that haunts the novel as well as the viewing of the Medici *Venus*: "What signifies being happy,

[154] Jeanne M. Britton instead interprets Virginia's plot as "resolved in a theatrical farce that underlines the illusory nature not only of her own satisfied desires but also of the marriage plot's collapse of individual desire into bourgeois morality." See "Theorizing Character in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 67.4 (2013): 433–456, p. 447. For another perspective, see Sharon Smith's "Juba's 'Black Face' / Lady Delacour's 'Mask': Plotting Domesticity in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, *The Eighteenth Century* 54.1 (2013): 71–90, p. 86: If "Edgeworth explores the positive potential inherent in [Lady Delacour's] mastery, she also configures it as a source of anxiety," since this move "simultaneously threatens to disrupt the relations upon which the existing social order depends." Closer to my argument, Marie McAllister finds a "creative and potentially destabilizing tension between *Belinda*'s praise of domesticity and its delight in excess." See "Ungovernable Propensities: Belinda and the Idea of Addiction," *The Age of Johnson* 23 (2015): 301–331, p. 331.

[155] Mitchell, p. 246. [156] Deborah Steiner, p. xii.

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unless we appear so?" (*B*, p. 478).[157] Her statement uncannily echoes Gilpin's brutal truth that moral measurement often arises from how one is viewed or how one positions oneself. Second, she deranges readers and characters by refusing to divide the human and nonhuman when she turns a human into an image by presenting a portrait of Captain Paul Sunderland: Seeing her lover embodied in this form causes Rachel-Virginia[158] to faint. But then Lady Delacour turns an image back into a human when Paul materializes as an "animated picture" – that is, as a man – in front of Virginia; this metamorphosis "accomplishe[s]" all "the fond wishes of [Virginia's] waking fancy" (*B*, p. 476). That is, it gives this young woman the right to choose. And yet Lady Delacour alone has not arranged the unlikely union between the characters Paul and Virginia. What some would call another disproportion occurs because nonhuman *things*, *themselves*, have precipitated this romantic alliance, for the couple's marriage will follow a "courtship" constituted by the interactions between a man and a telescope and a woman and a miniature. Virginia has been sensuously and ritualistically connecting to her Paul – a topic I return to in Chapter 4 – by gazing at a miniature of him and reading "their" storyline in *Paul et Virginie*, and he has fallen in love with Rachel-Virginia while watching her, "the fair woodnymph" (*B*, p. 475), through his spyglass.[159] This, then, is not one of the shoddy recognition scenes that Aristotle bemoans, wherein a "discovery" occurs "in relation to inanimate and trifling objects,"[160] but one of the surprising and satisfying recognitions that arise in a world where the human and nonhuman connect and are, indeed, interdependent.

The desire to possess the *Venus* inspires Napoleon to transform the statue into a symbol of his excellence and of French triumph, and it stimulates the Florentines to undertake statuary mutilation and incongruous acts of replacement to embody tangibly their hope for emancipation. An apt metonymy of these failed attempts can be seen in another object: a

[157] Here my interpretation of Lady Delacour's asymmetry, one allowing for ideological questioning, differs from Michael Gamer's; for him, *Belinda* is "heavily didactive," and that "it is impossible even for a few pages to misread the ideological and moral burden it inculcates." See "Maria Edgeworth and the Romance of Real Life," *Novel* 34.2 (2001): 232–266, p. 250.

[158] Hervey takes possession of Rachel Hartley, the young woman he discovers living in a remote cottage, renaming her Virginia St. Pierre, after Virginie and Bernardin de St. Pierre.

[159] Conversely, Susan C. Greenfield "ominously" sees in their marriage that "Virginia will serve as 'payment' of her 'father's debt of gratitude to Sunderland'" (*B*, p. 476). See "'Abroad and at Home': Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth's Belinda," *PMLA* 112.2 (1997): 214–228, p. 222.

[160] *On the Art of Poetry*, p. 46.

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medal Napoleon commissioned with his image on one side and the *Venus de' Medici*'s on the opposite.[161] Like the attempts to seize the statue, this medal reveals that once one gives up *belonging with* and instead embraces possession, human and thing are placed such that they can never gaze on, touch, or connect with each other. The *Venus*, her empty pedestal, and *Belinda* turn the coin's two opposing faces – one of oppression and one of liberty – back toward each other so they can engage in mutual contemplation. Pressures between an endorsement of and challenge to what might constitute a cultural "normal" and an attraction-repulsion toward the Romantic pressure to disentangle beauty from faultless proportion so as to find it in the mixed and fragmentary emerge throughout *Belinda* and in *Corinne ou l'Italie*, the subject of my next chapter.

[161] See John C. Laskey, *A Description of the Series of Medals Struck at the National Medal Mint by Order of Napoleon Bonaparte* (London: H. R. Young, 1818).

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