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Symbiosis: a Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations

Volume 9.2

Bill Boelhower

Mnemohistory: the Archaeological Turn
in the Humanities
from Winckelmann to Calvino

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PUBLICATION DATA

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First published in SYMBIOSIS Volume 9.2, October 2005, pp. 99–116

2nd electronic edition published in 2007 by Humanities-Ebooks LLP

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

Tirril Hall, Tirril, Penrith CA10 2JE

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ISSN: 1362-7902

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Bill Boelhower

Mnemohistory: the Archaeological Turn in the Humanities from Winckelmann to Calvino

The methodological turn to archaeology by a surprisingly large number of twentieth century intellectuals, scholars, and artists across the humanities has a long foreground in the development and professionalization of archaeology itself. It is well known that Western civilization began to define itself as such by digging up other civilizations and aligning them in a progressive typological sequence.¹ As the father of scientific archaeology, Johann Joachim Winckelmann deserves pride of place;² in his major work he studied the various stages of ancient Greek sculpture—relying almost exclusively on examples found in Roman museums or recently excavated at sites such as Pompeii and Herculaneum—with the intent to establish a system which exalted the twin

An earlier version of this paper was given as a Keynote Address for the *Symbiosis* Conference, held in Thessaloniki, Greece, June 2005.

1. See for example Bruce Mazlish, 'Civilization in a Historical and Global Perspective,' in *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis*, eds. Said Amir Arjomand and Edward A. Tiryakian (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 14–20.

2. See Johann Gottfried Herder's appreciative essay 'Winckelmann,' which prefaces the English version of Winckelmann's monumental *History of Ancient Art*, 4 vols., trans. Alexander Gode (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1968), vii–xvii; Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Idea: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and Yale: Yale University Press, 1994); David Roessel, *In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21–25; Edouard Pommier, *Winckelmann, inventeur de l'histoire de l'art* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 150–74; Elisabeth Decultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelman, Enquete sur la genese de l'histoire de l'art* (Paris: PUF, 2000), 217–44.