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Herder's Aesthetics of Sculpture  
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Among the art forms identified in the eighteenth century as central – painting, music, sculpture, architecture, literature -- sculpture has perhaps received the least focused attention from aestheticians as having its own standards of excellence, or as affording a distinctive kind of aesthetic experience. Unlike music or architecture, traditional sculpture does not pose obvious questions about common claims concerning the nature of art or of aesthetic experience (such as imitation or disinterestedness). It has often been treated, then and now, as one of the visual arts, together with painting, and thus implicitly as requiring no distinct treatment of its own, for painting generally has dominated discussion of the visual arts.

In this paper, I propose to discuss a little known treatment of sculpture in the history of aesthetics, which attempts precisely to argue that sculpture has its own norms and provides its own type of aesthetic experience, by contrast to painting: that of Johann Gottfried Herder, in his work, “Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion’s Creative Dream.”<sup>1</sup> Herder argues that sculpture is a distinctive artform because it is directed towards, and appreciated by, the sense of touch, rather than vision. I shall suggest that Herder’s attempt to *define* sculpture as an artform by reference to the sense of touch is not successful, but that his arguments are useful for making salient distinctive aspects of (some) experience of sculpture, making connections between

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<sup>1</sup> All citations to “Sculpture” will be to the Jason Geiger translation (University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 2002). I will also draw from Herder’s earlier, briefer, but consonant treatment of sculpture in his Fourth Critical Forest; citations to this work are from Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Gregory Moore, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2006.

aesthetic theory and art critical discourse, and providing grounds for the articulation of an “embodied” aesthetics. I shall begin by outlining Herder’s proposed systematic aesthetic theory, of which his essay on sculpture was to be the first part, before turning to his arguments concerning sculpture, and shall conclude with some broader remarks concerning their interest and implications.

### I. Herder’s Aesthetics in General

Herder engages in detailed criticism of other eighteenth century aesthetic theory, but in general terms, he endorses its project: to understand the beautiful (and the sublime and other aesthetic qualities), which is, in turn, to be understood as an investigation into properties of objects that are pleasureable to human beings, and the “underlying causes” of this phenomenon, i.e., why and how they are thus pleasureable.<sup>2</sup> Like the majority of his contemporaries, too, Herder holds that aesthetics concerns *sensible* representation or experience of objects: it is the sensible qualities of objects that are aesthetically pleasing, aesthetic appreciation engages our sensible faculties or powers – the senses, as well as imagination.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Herder endorses (with some caveats) Baumgarten’s definition of the beautiful as “sensuous perfection.”<sup>4</sup> Sensuous perfection – the unity of

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<sup>2</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 188. Herder rejects, however, a dominant component of this project: the attempt to establish a “standard of taste.”

<sup>3</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 193. As is clear from the following pages (and elsewhere), Herder is distinct from most of his contemporaries in emphasizing that our sensuous powers are important for us precisely as embodied beings, as organisms within an environment, as infants developing cognition on the basis of external stimuli.

<sup>4</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 195.

multiplicity in the object, and in our appreciative experience of it – *explains* our pleasure in the object: *it* is such a unity of multiplicity, and thus ontologically and epistemically valuable, and we, in experiencing this object, correspondingly best exert our sensible powers, uniting them in a rich, fully active way.<sup>5</sup>

Herder finds this definition rather abstract, however, insufficiently descriptive of actual aesthetic experience of beautiful objects, insufficiently articulated to describe concretely which objects of which kinds are connected to which feelings (of which kinds). To understand the *meaning* of “beauty” so defined, Herder claims, we must trace this definition back to the sense experience upon which it is grounded, and which it purports to describe. Like the classical empiricists, Herder believes that all concepts are both formed from sense experience and ultimately meaningful by reference to the concrete character of such sense experience; this reference to sense experience is particularly necessary in a theoretical aesthetics, which is after all an attempt to account for (valuable) sense experience.<sup>6</sup>

Herder’s innovation is to propose that this concreteness can be obtained only if one attends to the character of the *different* senses (and their corresponding objects): though beauty is to be understood in every case as the unified appreciation of the unity of multiplicity in an object, the beauties for sight, for hearing, and for touch are substantively different from one another.<sup>7</sup> For each sense receives information about different properties of objects, generates different concepts (of those properties), and is

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<sup>5</sup> Herder does not gloss the Baumgartenian definition explicitly in this way (as elaborated by Moses Mendelssohn in his “Letters on Sentiments”) but Herder’s statements (e.g., Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 197-8) concerning both the beauty of objects and our responses to it seem to fit this description.

<sup>6</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 211-214.

<sup>7</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 211-2. Herder dismisses taste and smell as senses that can provide experience of the beautiful because they are mere modifications of the sense of touch. (Fourth Critical Forest, p. 210)

unified, ordered, in its own operation in a different manner; each provides a different (specified) concept of beauty. This sense-differentiated account of aesthetic experience will also, Herder claims, provide a differentiated account of the nature of the arts, i.e., as objects aimed to be beautiful for their respective senses: painting, music, and sculpture. (Like beauty, “fine art” may be generally defined as an object designed to be beautiful, but again this definition is too general to provide an ontology of the different arts.)<sup>8</sup>

As grounds for a systematic account of the arts, Herder’s approach seems problematic: as for Hegel, who later similarly attempts to use different means of sensible representation (or media) as a means systematically to differentiate the arts, both literature and architecture cause difficulties for Herder, as neither appears to be directed towards a single sense. (And this is only to mention two other very central, recognized arts in the (eighteenth century) “system of the arts.”) I shall not, however, be concerned with these overarching systematic concerns, however. Herder’s systematic approach does lead him to propose a distinctive, innovative aesthetics of sculpture – of touch – and it is to this that I shall now turn.

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<sup>8</sup> Herder’s differentiations among art forms, as addressed to different senses, bears some resemblance to Lessing’s better known attempt in the *Laocoön* to differentiate literature from visual art – on the grounds that the signs or elements of representation in literature (like music) are successive, whereas the parts of visual art are spatially distributed, and (as Herder notes) to suggestions in Scottish aesthetics (by Kames and Gerard) that “beauty” properly applies only to visual objects of aesthetic experience, and only metaphorically to musical works. As against Lessing, however, Herder is not most interested in establishing rules of correct, mimetic representation (or appropriate subject matter), but rather in articulating the distinctive character of aesthetic experience of different objects (by different senses). And unlike the Scots, who appear largely to be reflecting ordinary linguistic usage in their claims, Herder attempts to give a reason for the primacy of visual experience in our use and understanding of “beauty” and a reason not to rest with a visually derived concept of beauty alone (because sight is the most distinct sense, Herder argues, it most easily affords recognizable experience of unity amid diversity, and thus is the first example or paradigm to come to mind; this does not mean, however, that the other senses do not also – and differently – afford an experience of unity amid diversity).

## II. Herder's Aesthetics of Touch

Herder argues that sculpture is addressed to the sense of touch in several ways. First, and most extensively, Herder argues that touch provides us with distinctive concepts – those that concern three-dimensional bodies as such: mass, weight, solidity, three dimensional space (depth and volume), three dimensional form. (One might add here concepts concerning texture and temperature – it is through touch that we learn smooth, rough, warm, cold.) In support of this claim, Herder adduces the Molyneux problem – the question whether one can, automatically or immediately, recognize a sphere as known by touch visually or whether one must learn to correlate the three dimensional shape with its visual appearance, and empirical evidence concerning the experience of the blind, particularly those who regain their sight (e.g., through cataract operations). Formerly blind people must learn to correlate their visual experience with their prior, tactile understanding of shape,<sup>9</sup> learn to recognize color and understand two dimensional images, and to interpret their visual experience more generally, which appears to them, first, simply as a “vast painted panel,” an array of colors alongside one another.<sup>10</sup>

Such considerations more obviously support claims concerning the distinctive contribution of vision to cognition: the blind do not have color concepts, cannot conceive of two dimensional images (in mirrors or pictures), etc. But they also suggest something, as Herder claims, concerning the distinctive cognitive contribution of touch (we cannot

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<sup>9</sup> Sculpture, p. 33f; Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 207-9. Herder refers to Locke implicitly in quoting Locke's famous claim that a blind person does not understand the meaning of “scarlet” in comparing it to the sound of a trumpet (Sculpture, p. 40, Fourth Critical Forest, p. 210), but he is more directly influenced by Diderot's “Lettre sur les aveugles” (also influenced by Locke).

<sup>10</sup> Sculpture, p. 34.

adduce cases of people who lack the sense of touch to support such claims): the blind *do* have concepts of three-dimensional forms, mass, volume, solidity, gained through their touch experience. These cases – and evidence from childrens’ development as well (the child’s need to reach for, grasp objects in order to understand them, their shapes and sizes, their distance or spatial depth more generally) -- show, Herder suggests, that we do not originally learn or comprehend three dimensional shape, weight, depth, or solidity through sight, but rather through touch.<sup>11</sup> And because sculptures are three dimensional forms, with mass, volume, and solidity, Herder concludes, they are directed towards, and appreciated by, the sense of touch.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Herder also proposes a thought experiment – Fourth Critical Forest, p. 217: if we were to encounter an object that we could not touch, and had to find out about it only by vision, he argues, we would never come to obtain a “true concept” of it as a body, with solidity, volume, mass. This seems wrong: astronomical observations have generated concepts of the planets (e.g.) as to their solidity, mass, etc. without, of course, any touch-experience of the planets (other than Earth). However, it remains plausible that these conceptions are inferentially gained (from indications given in vision) and would not be comprehensible or available to us without *some* touch experience to gain the concepts of solidity, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Herder also frequently claims that touch provides us experience of bodies as “real” or in their “truth,” whereas sight gives us the mere “appearance” of bodies (or of their surfaces). This claim too plays a large role in Herder’s aesthetics of sculpture: our experience of sculpture is, putatively, the experience of the “living embodied truth” of a real body – whereas painting is mere representation, with aesthetic connotations of “dream”-likeness and appearance (which connotations are not, however, meant to be derogatory – the dreamlikeness of painting is a source of intense pleasure as well; it is also “true” of the world that light can provide unified vistas of surfaces, appearances – so Herder argues, for example, about the “bent stick” illusion: it is not an illusion at all, but a correct vision of light reflected on the surface of water [Fourth Critical Forest, p. 209]). I relegate this line of argument to a footnote, however, because a discussion of its merits (or lack thereof) would take us too far afield here. I will note briefly, however, several problems with this claim. Though vision does provide the standard examples of mere appearance and perceptual illusion (e.g., the moon illusion, mirages), it would seem that we can be deceived by touch as well. Herder himself provides a (somewhat grisly) example: he argues that veins should not be represented prominently in human figural statues because to the sense of touch, these would appear to be “worms,” not integrated with the represented human body. (Sculpture, p. 54) Moreover, though Herder’s claim that sculptures are “realities” – present real objects to us – has significant resonance in critical writing about sculpture, it seems (particularly for Herder’s core case, viz., classical Greek sculpture) obviously false. A statue of a Greek hero is not a real human body; just like a painting of a hero, it is a *representation* of a human body. The impetus to present something that is “exactly what it is” may well be the motivation for later sculpture, particularly Minimalism, but here Danto’s analysis of abstract, non-representational art in *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* seems apt: insofar as a Robert Morris sculpture (as it were) proclaims, “I am precisely what you see,” it is not precisely, only, what one sees.

As it stands, this argument is problematic or at least incomplete: some (though I think not all) of these properties might be learned through sight *as well as* touch.<sup>13</sup> As Herder recognizes, moreover, ordinary individuals integrate the experiences and concepts derived from touch and sight into one, global sense experience; we may have had to learn to do so, but as adults we interpret visual experience to be of three dimensional objects, with weight and solidity, quite easily.<sup>14</sup> And, as Herder recognizes, we do not in fact appreciate sculptures by touching them, but rather by seeing them.<sup>15</sup> (It confirms something of Herder's view, however, that we are often very tempted to touch them – and prevented from doing so only because of museum regulations.)

Herder therefore (in more careful moments) modifies his claim that we appreciate sculpture by touch: in aesthetic experience of sculpture, we employ the sense of sight as “guided” by touch or as a substitute for touch; “[one’s] eye becomes [one’s] hand.”<sup>16</sup> But then we must ask: how, exactly is vision “guided” by touch in these cases? how is such guided vision different from visual experience in general? why must touch be invoked at all – if actually this is visual experience?

Herder's answers to these questions are not entirely clear – he tends towards enthusiastic evocation of the “eye that feels.” He does suggest that in such “guided” visual experience, we must employ *concepts* derived from the sense of touch, but this

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<sup>13</sup> The experience of blind people may not, that is, be determinative for the character of sensing of the non-blind; Herder recognizes this possibility – see, e.g., *Fourth Critical Forest*, p. 206: the blind can hear subtleties that the sighted cannot, because they rely more heavily on vision – but perhaps insufficiently.

<sup>14</sup> *Sculpture*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>15</sup> *Sculpture*, p. 40; *Fourth Critical Forest*, pp. 217-8. Herder is less clear than he might be on this point, but he explicitly does not – as Herbert Read, who propounds a similarly touch-based aesthetics of sculpture in the twentieth century – argue that we ought actually to be allowed to touch sculpture, and that we cannot appreciate it properly without actually touching it. Herbert Read, *The Art of Sculpture* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1956).

<sup>16</sup> *Sculpture*, p. 41.



seems insufficient to identify a specific function for touch in aesthetic experience of sculpture. On Herder's view, in nearly all visual experience, we employ such concepts (i.e., experience things as solid, three dimensional forms etc.), and Herder suggests too that the experience of painting – as representing objects that are three dimensional -- requires us to employ such concepts as well.<sup>17</sup>

Herder's chief answers are, I think, not cognitive but aesthetic, concerning our ability to have vivid, directly meaningful, and (importantly) unified, pleasurable sensible experience: “the *beauty* of a form, of a body,” Herder, writes, “is not a visual but tactile concept”.<sup>18</sup> That is, first, Herder takes vision to provide us with “abbreviations”<sup>19</sup> of properties of bodies that we more directly know of and understand through touch – shadowing, for example, to indicate three dimensionality of shape, or indentation of supporting surface to indicate weight. Our direct, sensible and *vivid* experience of these properties arises, however, from touch – one might think here of the difference between feeling the weight of something, and seeing it weighed on a scale. In both cases, we understand the object to have weight, but in the second case, this understanding is inferential and (one might say) merely cognitive, or propositional, not a direct, sensible experience of the object's weight (we don't, I think, actually see the object's weight<sup>20</sup>). For practical and cognitive purposes, these two ways of understanding the weight of an object may be interchangeable (or the inferential one may provide us with more exact

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<sup>17</sup> In quoting a description of Chelshenden's blind patient who recovered his sight: this patient at first saw paintings as panels of different colors in two dimensional shapes, and had to learn to “read” these paintings as representing three dimensional objects (with which he was familiar from touch). (Sculpture, pp. 34-5) On Herder's own line of argument, this case would mean that all of us employ concepts gained originally from touch (of three dimensional forms) in interpreting/experiencing (most, representational) paintings. And Herder claims occasionally that touch and its concepts inform nearly all of visual experience, providing a “foundation” for the play of light and color in its concepts of real, independent physical objects.

<sup>18</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 210, emphasis altered.

<sup>19</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 209.

<sup>20</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 217.

information). But for aesthetic purposes – for vivid, heightened, and pleasureable sense experience -- they may not be. As Herder writes, the “*aesthetic* terms that describe [the beauty of bodies] ...derive from touch: rough, gentle, soft, tender, full, in motion.”<sup>21</sup>

Such aesthetic qualities not only depend upon touch-derived qualities of objects but are, arguably, such qualities *as* pleasureable (striking, interesting) specifically for touch. In experiencing sculpture we do not (at least usually) in fact feel the weight of the sculpture – but we might use our visual experience in order imaginatively invoke the *felt* (not visually “abbreviated”) concept or experience of weight in appreciating it as massive, threatening, balanced, etc.

Second, Herder argues that through vision (unguided by touch) we cannot attain a *unified* experience of a statue – and this, given his understanding of beauty, is crucial to aesthetic experience and appreciation. He writes:

“The eye can approach a statue from whichever side it chooses, but it has only one point of view from which to inspect one part of the statue, as a surface, and so it must change that point of view as often as it desires to look on a different part of the statue, a different surface....Painting is directed towards a single point of view...;for sculpture, however, there are as many points of view as there are radii in the circle that I can draw around the statue and from each of which I can behold it. From no single point do I survey the work in its entirety; I must walk around it in order to have seen it; each point shows me only a tiny surface, and when I have described the whole circumcircle, I have perceived nothing more than a polygon composed of many small sides and angles. All these small sides must first be assembled by the imagination before we can conceive of the totality as a

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<sup>21</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 210, emphasis added.

body. And this bodily whole, is it then a product of my eye? Or of my soul? Is the effect, which it shall achieve only as a whole, a visual sensation? or a sensation of my soul? In this art, therefore, the effect of the whole is completely lost on the unmediated eye. So there is definitely no sculpture for the eye! Not physically, not aesthetically. Not physically because the eye cannot see a body as a body; not aesthetically, because when the bodily whole vanishes from sculpture, the very essence of its art and its characteristic effect disappears with it.” (Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 217-8)

This “essence” and “characteristic effect,” Herder describes as its

“*beautiful* form and *beautiful* shape.... The beautiful line that constantly varies its course is never forcefully broken or contorted, but rolls over the body with beauty and splendor; it is never at rest but always moving forward, creating the flow and fullness of that delightful, gently softened *corporeality* that knows nothing of surfaces, or of angles and corners. This line can no more be made into a mere visible surface than it can be made into a painting or an engraving, for then it loses everything that is proper to it.”<sup>22</sup>

These quotations contain a number of different points, including the frequently made claim about sculpture that we tend to appreciate it by moving around it, and also Herder’s presupposition (hinted at here) that sculpture is, paradigmatically, of human forms (the “gentle corporeality” of the sculpture). I will return to these issues (somewhat) shortly. In the meantime, however, I wish to call attention to the central argument in both passages: through vision, we do not attain experience of the sculpture as a whole, as

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<sup>22</sup> Sculpture, p. 40.

unified – but rather obtain only experience of a series of surfaces from different viewpoints, which only inferentially and partially comprise the representation of the work as a whole. Likewise, Herder suggests that the “beautiful line” that is continuous, in three dimensions, a “unity in diversity, with a gentle flow”<sup>23</sup> of the statue is not representable visually, or in a two dimensional image.

Both passages claim that the (imaginative) guide of touch is necessary to recognize the statue as a “body” with solidity and mass, and so on, but more importantly, that it is so necessary in order to appreciate it *as unified* body, with three dimensional, continuous form. That is, Herder claims that in order to attain a grasp of the *continuity*, the softness, gentleness, roundness, of the “line” of the sculpture, we must imagine (in our “souls”) touching that line, following it around the figure; we must “destroy”<sup>24</sup> the separateness of the different visual angles or viewpoints, must invoke touch experience of grasping a solid, feeling it from all sides at once, or in one continuous motion. Only thus can we grasp and appreciate its unity in diversity, its wholeness of form – not simply piece together a conception of it as three dimensional form.<sup>25</sup> Here again visual

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<sup>23</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 218.

<sup>24</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 218-9.

<sup>25</sup> Herder also, apparently inconsistently, suggests that the “slowness” and “obscurity” of touch *prevents* grasping an object as unified. (Sculpture, pp. 93-4; this aspect of Herder’s view is emphasized by Alex Potts in *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2000, pp. 30-1.) This apparent inconsistency might perhaps be explained and mitigated by suggesting that in this context (where he is discussing “colossal” statues), Herder intends to be characterizing the sublime, rather than the beautiful, for touch. Nonetheless, one might propose that the modalities of touch are (more generally) possibly threatening both to the experience of an object as unified, and to our sense of ourselves as unified: because touch involves direct contact with the object, it can undermine our sense of our own bodily integrity, or of the independence of the object. Herder suggests briefly something of this sort in explaining why the representation of corpses in sculpture is not pleasing – as it can be in painting: “The sculptor who offers to our sense of touch the revolting form of a corpse, the food of worms, so that we become one with it and are annoyed by its repellent and suppurating fluids – for such a hangman of our pleasures I can find no fitting name. I can turn my eyes from a painting and recover by looking at other things. But a sculpture requires that I slowly and blindly feel my way forward, until I register a gnawing at my flesh and bones and the shudder of death along my nerves.” (Sculpture, 56-7)

experience – and its “restless shifting” around the statue – is guided by and directed towards generating the kind of experience afforded by touch, and a value – fullness or roundness of form – appreciated by touch.<sup>26</sup>

Herder provides two further arguments for the necessity of (imaginative) touch in experience of sculpture, which are not just aesthetic, but artistic, reasons. First, Herder at various points suggests that touch is important in appreciating sculptures because it replicates the artist’s experience (and the communication of experience from artist to audience is one function of art, on Herder’s view). That is, artists *make* sculptures by employing the sense of touch, feeling the contours of the object, shaping these through physical, touch-engagement with the materials.<sup>27</sup> Though Herder does not describe artistic making in detail, Henry Moore’s description of sculptural making is (I believe) almost exactly what Herder would say: a sculptor “must strive continually to think of, and use, form in all its spatial completeness. He gets the solid shape, as it were, inside his head – he thinks of it, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely enclosed in the hollow of his hand. He mentally visualizes a complex form *from all around itself*; he knows while he looks at one side what the other side is like; he identifies himself with its centre of gravity, its mass, its weight; he realizes its volume, as the space that the shape displaces in air.”<sup>28</sup> If we are to replicate the experience of the sculptor, as expressed and communicated in the sculpture, we too must (imaginatively) employ the sense of touch, of three dimensional form.

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<sup>26</sup> Here one might also add (though Herder does not) a contrast between the way in which one might attend to light in appreciation of sculpture – as opposed to the direct appreciation of light effects as such – color, brilliance, shadowing, contrast, reflections, etc. In appreciating sculpture, we might see light by contrast as (itself) *touching* the statue, delineating its form and contours.

<sup>27</sup> Sculpture, pp. 41, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Alex Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, p. 146.

Second, Herder suggests that we grasp the unity *and* the expressive meaning of sculpture through *identifying* with sculpted human form – again through (imaginative employment) of the sense of touch.<sup>29</sup> (As is suggested by Moore in the above quotation as well.) Herder writes:

“because [a sculpture] presents a human being, a fully animated body,...it seizes hold of us and penetrates our very being, awakening the full range of responsive human feeling....it possesses the power virtually to *transpose* our soul into the same sympathetic *situation*. The rise and fall of the breast and the knee, the way the body rests quietly, revealing the soul – all this passes silently and incomprehensibly over into us: we find ourselves, so to speak, embodied in the nature before us, or the nature in question is enlivened by our own soul....Nothing must be merely *observed* and treated as if it were a surface; it must be touched by the gentle fingers of our inner sense and by our harmonious feeling of sympathy, as if it came from the hands of the Creator.” (Sculpture, p. 81)

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Vance, in “Sculpture,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35:3 1995, 217-226 also suggests (though not in terms of “proprioception”) that our primary response to sculpture is “feeling into” its form; he does not appear to be familiar with Herder’s aesthetics. Prior discussions of Herder’s aesthetics of sculpture have not attended to this proprioceptive meaning of touch in Herder’s treatment. See, e.g., Potts, *op. cit.*; Robert Hopkins, “Painting, Sculpture, Sight and Touch” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44:2, April 2004, 149-166; Robert Norton, *Herder’s Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1991), chapter six; Jason Gaiger, “Introduction” to *Sculpture*. Gaiger, for example, takes the later parts of Plastik to concern expressiveness as distinct from (and not grounded in) his first “theoretical” part concerning the concepts of touch. I would argue that Herder rather is developing his conception of the contribution of touch to sculptural aesthetics over the course of “Sculpture” as a whole.

Proprioceptive identification might also allow Herder to resist an argument raised by Hopkins against the Herderian proposal that sculptural appreciation is an appreciation guided by the sense of touch (and its concepts): that touch is a sense with “multiple” points of contact with its object (or “content” in Hopkins’ terms), whereas (Hopkins argues) we do not experience sculpture as being in contact, at multiple points, with some other body. If we experience sculpture by imaginative proprioception, however, we do “touch” the sculptural figure at every point – from the inside, in contact with its surface as our “outer skin.” (Herder’s suggestion that we are enjoined to trace the lines of the statues, in a continuous, temporally extended motion – imaginatively – also might comprise an enjoined “contact” with multiple points of the statue, though not precisely “all at once.”)

In claiming that we “transpose” ourselves into the stance of the sculpted form, I suggest, Herder means that we imaginatively, projectively engage (what we would call) proprioception – our feeling of the comportment of our own bodies – to experience the sculpture, again as a whole, this time specifically human, body, and (in turn) are affected, sympathetically, in our feeling of our own bodies. Though we do not tend to class proprioception as a form of “touch,” it is, too, a sense of a solid body with volume, in contact with other bodies – a sense of touch, one might say, of and from the inside. Imaginative proprioceptive identification allows us, Herder suggests here and elsewhere, to understand the expressiveness of the sculpture, the way in which the comportment of the sculpture can express fitness, health, strength, well-being, emotional states, or tendencies to action – the way in which this body is “ensouled,” “alive,” represents a “living” human being, as active.<sup>30</sup> We do not, that is, simply “read” visual cues – a frown “means” sadness or anger, say – in accord with conventions of representation, but rather “feel our way” into the stances and expression of the body represented, and thus feel the strength, sadness, or anger of a living body with such a stance.<sup>31</sup> This projective

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<sup>30</sup> Probably (like Hegel after him) following Winkelmann’s enthusiastic descriptions of Greek statues, Herder provides an extensive discussion of the meanings of facial features and bodily comportment in sculpture (described, somewhat indiscriminately, as if these apply to our perception of real human beings as well as of statues) in Part III of “Sculpture.” At the opening of Part IV, he sums up the purport of that discussion as follows: “my goal was to establish the following elementary principle: ‘that the sublimity and beauty of the human body, whatever form it may take, is always the expression of health, life, strength, and well-being in every limb of this artful creature, whereas everything ugly is always stunted, an oppression of the spirit, an imperfection of the form in relation to its end.’ The well-proportioned human being is not an abstraction derived from the clouds or composed from learned rules or arbitrary conventions. It is something that can be grasped and felt by all who are able to recognize *in themselves* or in others the form of life, the expression of force in the human vessel.” (Sculpture, p. 77, emphases altered) On the next page, he again glosses this perception of a statue as “transposition of our entire self” into the statue.

<sup>31</sup> Herder’s discussion in the quoted passage articulates a causal order in the “other direction” from what I suggest here, i.e., *because* the sculpture presents an animated body – because of the skill of its maker, its own characteristics – it prompts us to “transpose” ourselves. This may be so, but such experience likewise

identification too grounds a sense of the sculpture as a whole – this time not simply of the form itself, its “rounded contours,” but also of the significance, lived meaning, of human bodies in these shapes, and again visual experience would be instrumental to such an imaginative grasp of expression.

### III. Discussion

Herder uses this analysis to ground rather “essentialist” ontological and aesthetic claims concerning the norms of sculptural making and of sculptural appreciation. Sculpture is, as he writes above, in “essence” beautiful form (as made by human beings to be so, and to communicate experience thereof). Sculpture is, therefore, defined as three dimensional shape (with mass, solidity, volume), and specifically – in accord with an evaluative definition – form characterized by rounded, full, continuous “line” and expression. As a result, Herder believes that one can derive various “rules” concerning sculpture: it should not be colored beyond the color belonging to its medium (for color is irrelevant to the sculptural essence); it is, at its best, sculpture of human forms; it should avoid detailed representation of veins, locks of hair, and other items that might disrupt the “slow” and “obscure” sense of touch in its grasp of that form; it should be of single figures, not of groups (for the essence of sculpture is to portray – or be – one, single form).<sup>32</sup>

Correspondingly, one ought to attend to sculpture through imaginative “touch,” attending

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does call upon our proprioceptive sense, and an ability imaginatively to project such proprioception. As I suggest in the text, moreover, this is the best sense I can make of Herder’s suggestions that a sculpture *is* (or presents) an “animated” or living form; thus my suggestion of an opposite causal order.

<sup>32</sup> Herder announces these aims – to generate “rules” and “subjective laws” of appreciation at Sculpture, pp. 42-3; he articulates these various laws in Sculpture Parts II and IV.



to its contours as “felt” or projectively proprioceived, but not to its color, context (beyond its singleness of form), etc.<sup>33</sup>

These ontological and prescriptive consequences of Herder’s analysis seem (at least) overstated. The three dimensionality (and weight and solidity) of sculpture does not, ontologically, distinguish sculpture from most paintings and architectural works, which are also three dimensional objects, with weight, solidity, etc. We might follow Kendall Walton in arguing that for sculpture, and not for painting, these qualities are “variable” rather than “standard” properties – properties that are, that is, not merely preconditions for the properly artistic or aesthetic enterprise (e.g., presenting a two dimensional image), but ones the variation or specific character of which inform our judgments and experience of the work.<sup>34</sup> And, as Robert Hopkins has argued, Herder identifies a distinction between (much) painting and sculpture: paintings have and enjoin a single viewpoint, whereas sculptures do not.<sup>35</sup> Still, the judgment and appreciation of architectural works are likely, too, to invoke (variable) properties of weight and solidity – and may too be understood as presenting single forms, to be appreciated from many (or no particular) viewpoints.

Herder’s negative claim that color (or light) is irrelevant to sculptural appreciation seems, too, problematic (particularly given Herder’s immediate purpose – to explain and

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<sup>33</sup> Herder often frames these claims as explanatory – of the greatness of Greek sculpture in particular – rather than prescriptive. Even if they were to explain the greatness of Greek sculpture, they would still have the prescriptive consequences I suggest in the text. (If one wishes to make sculpture, i.e., to accord with the essence of (successful) sculpture, one ought to....If one aims to appreciate sculpture for what it (normatively, evaluatively) is, one ought to....)

<sup>34</sup> “Categories of Art, *The Philosophical Review* 79 1970, 334-367.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. Hopkins does not identify this claim as Herder’s (though he does cite Herder in other contexts), but this overarching claim of his article is, indeed, stated by Herder: “painting...depicts everything from a *single* viewpoint...[while] sculpture does not possess a viewpoint.” (Sculpture, p. 93) I would qualify Hopkins’ and Herder’s claim concerning the perspective enjoined in paintings (as I do in the text) because some paintings – particularly Cubist painting – aim to present (and enjoin) different viewpoints at once. Cubist painting might, however, itself support Herder’s suggestions concerning the “angularity” of the combination of multiple visual perspectives.

vindicate the colorlessness of Greek sculpture, which has since Herder's time been shown to be historically false). It seems also to be based on fallacious reasoning: even if sculptures essentially appeal to the sense of touch, there is no reason why they could not *in addition* appeal to the sense of sight (not merely as guided by touch) as well. (Similar things could be said about sculptural groups; the Laocoon already causes Herder some difficulty on this count.)

It seems, moreover, unlikely that our appreciation of sculpture is ever, solely, imaginative touch (or "eyes that become the hand"): for most sculptures, a darting visual, cognitive view of the form – e.g., to recognize that it represents a human being – seems crucial for our appreciation. I am not, in other words, convinced, as Herder is, that a blind person's appreciation of sculpture (through actual touch) is an identical (or extremely similar) experience to a (fully appreciative, imaginative-touch-informed) appreciation of sculpture by the sighted. Nor, on the other hand, it is obvious that paintings (the paradigmatically visual, not tactile, artform) could not appeal to the sense of touch (in addition to calling upon concepts therefrom derived) – whether of solidity, replication of the artist's physical motion in making, or proprioceptive identification.<sup>36</sup>

All of these claims, as well as Herder's suggestion that sculptural beauty is to be found in "rounded" contours of the human figure, also seem called into question by later sculpture, whether the elongated, unrounded figures of Giacometti, the defiantly geometrical, angular, non-human forms of Minimalism, or the importance of light and color for sculptors such as Dan Flavin. These queries and doubts call into question, I think however, only a rather strong reading (endorsed, indeed by Herder) of the

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Merleau-Ponty's analyses of Cezanne's paintings as portraying the physicality, the encountered solidity of art objects; much abstract Expressionism, similarly, engages the viewer through its gestural evocation of the artist's physical motions in making.

consequences of Herder's account. On a weaker reading, Herder identifies *possible* modes of appreciation of (some) sculpture (as well as possibly works from other forms) – an aesthetics of touch – an identification which is, strikingly, innovative in light of the aesthetics orthodoxy of his time.

On the standard eighteenth century view, that is, touch cannot provide aesthetic experience because it does not provide representations of sufficient cognitive complexity. Though it is more frequently assumed than argued that only vision and hearing can provide aesthetic experience (and not touch), it appears that this claim is grounded upon the view that these two senses allow us to represent objects as distinct from us, as complex, as representational – and thus only visually or aurally experienced objects can afford pleasures arising from the representation of perfection (a complex order among parts or properties of the object), recognition of artistic skill, mimetic accuracy, or (more broadly) pleasures distinct from those of satisfying “mere” bodily desires, practical needs.<sup>37</sup> Touch, by contrast, is seen as brutish, with little to no “objective content” or

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<sup>37</sup> For a representative statement from the history of aesthetics concerning the non-aesthetic character of touch, see Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 38. The distinction between the “higher” senses (hearing and vision) and “lower” senses (touch, smell, gustatory taste) – and the claim that only the former can afford experience of beautiful objects – is, however, shared by nearly all eighteenth and nineteenth century aestheticians. Current analytic aestheticians have, for some time, been engaged in resisting this distinction and claims – and the disinterestedness criterion more generally. See, e.g., Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1999); Larry Shiner and Yulia Kriskovets, “The Aesthetics of Smelly Art” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 2007, 273-286. Closer to Herder's concerns (with touch, and embodied appreciation) are Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 1999, 299-313; Barbara Montero, “Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 2006, 231-242; and, most recently, Sherri Irvin, “Scratching an Itch,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66:1 2008, 25-35. Though Herder shares certain aims with these (varying) approaches – to recognize the fundamentally embodied character of human beings and/or resist the mind over body valuation of traditional philosophy, to encourage a broadened aesthetic appreciation of more objects, qualities, and types of forms, and thereby (if possible) to promote a heightened sensible engagement with everyday life – his aims are nonetheless somewhat different. He aims indeed to vindicate “lower” sensibility, but by doing so also to provide a substantive, richly descriptive set of concepts and concerns that would engage with critical attention to the arts, and that would guide and enrich audience appreciation. (Here he is perhaps closest to Montero's essay, which aims too to provide an approach that might help in understanding another art – dance – that has received less attention in philosophical aesthetics than it

complexity thereof, insensible to mimetic representation, its operation and pleasures tied strongly to the satisfaction of bodily needs and desires.

As Herder writes, his analysis of sculpture is meant to show that “touch may not be that crude a sense after all, since it is properly *the organ of all sensation of other bodies*, and hence has a world of fine, rich concepts subject to it.”<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Herder identifies a number of different concepts (or sensory qualities) accessible to touch, as we have seen, and also (though not explicitly) a number of different types of touch itself. On Herder’s account, there appear to be (at least) four varieties of touch<sup>39</sup>: a) tactile: our access to the “feel” of surfaces, apprehension of qualities such as rough, smooth, cold, warm; b) “haptic”: our apprehension of solids as single objects, possessing a certain three dimensional shape, through grasping them; c) proprioceptive “touch.” And d) “kinaesthetic” perception -- perhaps a combination of b) and c) -- namely, our feelings of motion, orientation of ourselves (our bodies) in space, as confronted by other spatial objects (this is the source not only of ability to trace the “line” of a sculpture, but also of our comprehension of depth, on Herder’s view).<sup>40</sup> Thus his account suggests that touch-

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deserves.) Herder also, as noted above, endorses a quite traditional, normative conception of aesthetic value (beauty) and wishes systematically to specify that value (via touch, here); I suspect that he would consider these current discussions in fact to widen, and thereby weaken and render yet more abstract, our basic definition of aesthetic experience, rather than providing the more substantive “thick” specified description that he aims to provide.

<sup>38</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 209.

<sup>39</sup> These four meanings of “touch” are not inconsistent, though one might like an account of why they together constitute a natural class (which I will not provide here).

<sup>40</sup> Herder also suggests a connection between “touch” and “feelings” or emotions; in German, as in English, “touch” or “feel” terms (primarily Gefühl) – as well as usages of “motion” terms (as in “moving” or indeed “emotion”) -- refer to emotional states as well as to tactile, haptic, proprioceptive, or kinaesthetic perception. There are reasons, beyond linguistic association, for Herder’s assimilation of emotions to proprioceptive touch in particular: emotional states are (at least in part) states of the body – heat, lassitude, stomach ache are experienced in anger, depression, and anxiety, and thus apprehended, in part, through proprioceptive awareness broadly understood. As was a predominant theme in Herder’s time (particularly in the work of Lavater), facial expressions – i.e., configurations of one’s body – are also associated with emotional states; we do not, moreover, merely “read” others’ emotions from their facial expressions –

experience might be of an object as complex – both as having different parts in relation, and as having a complex of (more or less nuanced) properties, such as cold, hard, bumpy, narrow, flat, heavy, vertical irregular cylinder with an ovoid base. It seems possible that we could be aware of an object, as having all such properties and parts, through touch – and in principle, therefore, also for those properties to appear coherent (or not) with one another, again to the sense of touch. If one adds proprioceptive and kinaesthetic perception (and identification) to this list – which I meant to describe a Giacometti figure – then one might add rigidity, loneliness, slenderness, and a sharpness, a slicingness of its presence in surrounding space. (The object of proprioception – and thus of projective, identificatory proprioception, is in general complex, as it is a grasp of the various parts of the body in relation to one another.) Aesthetic pleasure is likely to arise here not primarily from the tactile and haptic (imagined) “grasp” of the figure, but from its expressiveness as gleaned from proprioceptive identification – but in the case of classical and neoclassical figures (or indeed of a Brancusi), the (imagined) tactile and haptic qualities of smoothness and rounded form must contribute to aesthetic appreciation – and perhaps too to an appreciation of the artist’s skill in making. (I should note here that Herder does not, unlike the classical empiricists, think either of sense experience, or of aesthetic sense experience, as fundamentally composed of distinct, atomic sensations, “simple ideas,” or simple responses of pleasure. On his view, sense experience is

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though we do do this – but also can induce emotional states in ourselves through assuming the corresponding facial expression. (See Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed* Times Books, Henry Holt and Co: NY, 2003 for a contemporary psychological research on these points.) Emotions (as “being touched”) also have, at least metaphorically, something like the same structure as tactile touch: they are both an orientation towards an object or world, with cognitive content, and also are a case of being “touched by” the world, that content. Such reciprocity is characteristic of touch – in all of the manifestations of it invoked by Herder (including, if oddly, proprioception, in which one is both object and subject of touch) – as it is not of other senses (one is not heard or seen in hearing or seeing something). Touch is, in brief, “contact.”

pervaded by judgment – of recognizing similarity, connection, and distinction --<sup>41</sup> and characterized by order and relations; he lists for vision, the relation of “side by side,” for touch, of depth and inner/outer, and for hearing, succession.<sup>42</sup>)

Somewhat hesitantly, I will suggest too that these modalities of touch could represent something like mimetic accuracy or representation (though I think both are likely to be aided by visual information). In the case of representation of human figures, there is – on Herder’s account, but in terms borrowed from Wollheim – a twofoldness, an oscillation between the recognition of the statue as formed *stone* (or bronze or wood) – as it is of course recognized to be visually, but also (could be) recognized to be on tactile and haptic grounds (as cold, hard, rigid, etc.) -- and the projected proprioceptive sense of the statue as “living,” expressive, active. (Herder obsessively and to my ear oddly refers to statues as “living” forms, but here he does not differ from art critical description of figurative sculpture.<sup>43</sup>) Insofar as the statue achieves expressiveness – insofar as one can “transpose” oneself into the statue’s stance, its muscularity or weakness, its strength or lassitude, feel its emotional and active states by “inner sense” – one can, too, appreciate (if not explicitly or as such) something like mimetic accuracy (by “touch”), namely success at portraying bodily expression, and through this, the states of the “soul.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 177-8.

<sup>42</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 216.

<sup>43</sup> See Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, for many instances (including Potts himself) of critical use of “life” and “living” as aesthetic categories for sculpture. Potts suggests that the “living” character of sculpture as experienced is gained through “close” attention – we attend closely, deeply to the surfaces of the sculpture, as well as move around it, and oscillate between detailed and distanced (overall) perception. Though Potts is no doubt right that such close attention is a component of sculptural appreciation, it is surely just as relevant for the appreciation of painting. Thus, I would suggest, this suggestion cannot explain the prevalence of the terms “living,” “moving,” etc. in critical descriptions of *sculpture* in particular.

<sup>44</sup> Herder himself suggests that sculpture may, in one sense, be understood as “allegory,” as an embodied soul, or (that is) a body representing a soul. (Sculpture, p. 96) As Herder recognizes, such representation is not a standard type of allegory (usually understood to be both conventional representation and representation of an abstraction, such as virtue), but for my purposes here, it could count as representation more broadly. More needs to be said than Herder does about how this expressive and (thus) “allegorical”

In the case of non-figurative sculpture (or sculpture representing non-human objects), neither of these representational/mimetic experiences will be, as such, forthcoming. Such sculptures might, on the one hand, be understood as self-conscious refusals of proprioceptive identification, of the “direct, tacit, and idealized self-recognition that [might be taken to be] at the heart of a problematic anthropomorphism deeply embedded in the sculptural tradition.”<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, such sculptures may offer a somewhat similarly bifurcated experience to (imaginative) “touch” – of “inside” and “outside,” proprioceptive identification and external tactile grasp. As the Moore quotation above suggests, one may “feel” the shape of a sculpture “from inside” and from “outside” -- grasping its surface, inhabiting its volume – even if it is not a human form. One might, then, find these imaginative touch-experiences to “mesh” easily or not, the “inside” to be easily imaginable from experience of the exterior surface, or not.<sup>46</sup> Such attempts to “match” inner and outer are no longer, indeed, representational or mimetic

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representation of human figures is different from actual, ensouled human beings and our experience of them (which distinction, as noted above, is somewhat blurred in Herder’s discussion of sculptural expression in Parts III and IV – he occasionally refers to the expressive bodies he is discussing as made by the “Creator”, for example). Herder claims (plausibly, I think) that we do interpret bodily and facial configurations of others as expressive (in various ways), and that we use similar methods of interpretation to understand sculptural representations of human figures. However, in attending to the sculpture as a representation, we would seem to have a larger warrant to interpret such expression both as meant, and as “veridical” -- it does not seem to make much sense to say that this sculpted form merely “appears” to be a healthy, strong, calm, and foresighted person – whereas we can and do make such appearance/reality distinctions concerning our “readings” of actual human beings and their expressive features (e.g., she looks unreliable, he looks cowardly, but these appearances are inaccurate). Contra Vance *op. cit.*, then, I believe that there is both room and need for an account of representation (perhaps in terms of “two-foldness”) in sculpture.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Melville, “Richard Serra: Taking the Measure of the Impossible” *Res* 46 Autumn, 2004, 185-201, p. 185. Melville is speaking here specifically of Serra’s aims, but this statement seems at least potentially applicable to a wide range of modernist and minimalist sculpture. Melville also suggests, however, that Serra’s use of (relatively) thin solid planes is meant to refuse such identification more successfully, less teasingly, than the inscrutable boxes of Minimalism, which – Melville suggests nicely – are like people who wear sunglasses inside: we do not take them to *have* no “inside” (no mental states, no expression), but rather understand them to be purposefully withdrawing such an “inside” from our attention. Serra’s planes, by contrast, have no “inside” whatsoever. (Insofar as Serra’s planes are impressive to us as weighty and forceful, however, on a Herderian view, they might well be taken to have an “inside” in the sense of inner force.)

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Potts’ analysis of Hepworth’s sculptures, which employs such terms. (*Sculptural Imagination*, pp. 151-8.)

(even in an extended sense), but they might be taken to mirror the structure of expression – the manifestation of the “inner” in the “outer” – and might therein provide an experience pleasurable to and unificatory of touch.

Thus, against the consensus of his time, Herder suggests that touch (or imagined touch) can afford pleasures concerning the complexity, order of an object, and even from apprehension of the artistic skill and (to some degree) mimetic accuracy manifested in the object. And thus, though Herder’s analysis does not generate a successful definition of sculpture, or an exclusive account of sculptural value/appreciation as utterly distinct from all other art forms, it may indicate that the value of genre- or form- analysis might not lie primarily in such definitional, classificatory results, but rather in making salient different, substantive “thick” critical and aesthetic concepts relevant to different sorts of objects, and perhaps in explaining and mitigating some apparent conflicts in aesthetic value – as differences, reflecting different sources and sorts of valuation. As I have suggested in my use of some critical quotations, this account has the merit of suggesting the origin for the “thick” concepts – of mass, volume, inside/outside, anthropomorphism, etc. – used in actual, art critical discourse concerning sculpture (as opposed to resting with the somewhat abstract, general concepts proposed by his contemporaries). Similarly, the theoretical differentiation of modalities of aesthetic experience – and “thick” description of these different forms of aesthetic experience -- can also guide the appreciator (or perhaps artist) in identifying that which is of value, that which is salient, important, to be appreciated, in different types of objects: “through [philosophy] I can form judgments of taste with a certainty and distinguish beauties in a light in which they had not appeared to



me before”<sup>47</sup>. Correspondingly, if one is influenced by a one-sided theory, one can fail to appreciate objects of other kinds that do not have the characteristics and types of unity identified by that theory as beautiful (or, more broadly, one’s favored form of aesthetic value).<sup>48</sup> Thus, for example, Herder remarks at various points that the sense of touch is “obscure” and concentrates on the given, physical reality before it. As a result, he argues, “wit”, “allegory,” (and one might add irony, though Herder does not), ornament and complexity more generally are alien to sculpture, distract from its primary aim of direct presentation of a single form, comprehensible to and appreciable by (imaginative) touch.<sup>49</sup> Again, taken as exclusionary and prescriptive, these claims seem too strong: Claes Oldenberg’s gigantic hamburgers and clothespins may well be both witty and (in some sense) allegorical, appreciable not (I think) through any sort of proprioceptive identification, but rather as ironic “comments” upon modern materialist, consumerist culture and the intrusiveness of trivial, trashy, manufactured objects upon ordinary life in late capitalist society (say). But Herder’s suggestions concerning the “obscurity” and “literalness” of touch might (as Herder also suggests) explain why simplicity – lack of complexity, lack of irony, etc. – may nonetheless (in sculpture, perhaps also in architecture) be deeply pleasing as they may not be in works of other art forms – in providing the “slow,” “obscure” (imaginative) touch with its “grasp” of an object as a

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<sup>47</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 182. Similarly, Herder suggests that the richness and order of Baumgarten’s psychological works encourages “the inquirer himself to descend...to the depths of his heart, to seek new experiences, and to trace them back to those same depths.” (ibid, p. 184)

<sup>48</sup> Herder claims explicitly that (his) aesthetics is a theoretical enterprise, aimed to *understand* aesthetic experience and value, not to inculcate correct taste or promote appreciation, much less (and this is against Baumgarten in particular) to teach its readers to be successful artists. (Fourth Critical Forest, pp. 189, 191) But here we see that this theoretical enterprise can – and perhaps necessarily does – have critical and evaluative consequences. As is frequently the case in Herder, these consequences are less prescriptive than “exhortative”: these theoretical distinctions can lead one to take more and different pleasures in different kinds of values.

<sup>49</sup> Sculpture, p. 97f.

unified, definite form, with “inhabitable” volume, smooth surface, and follow-able contour. The values of simplicity and immediacy may not, that is, be in conflict with other values – of complexity, ironic or allegorical distance – but be applicable to, and derive from, different sources of valuation – and they might be unappreciated and unappreciable with a single, universal or abstract theoretical conception of aesthetic value.<sup>50</sup>

Herder’s elaboration of an aesthetics of touch has broader implications, as well, for a reconception of aesthetic experience – as embodied experience. As noted above, eighteenth century aestheticians tend (implicitly or explicitly) to dismiss touch as a source of aesthetic experience precisely because it is embodied, the sense most connected to bodily pleasures and desires. After the eighteenth century, this conception of aesthetic experience has come under considerable criticism, both on descriptive and normative grounds. In general, it is alleged, such a view (falsely) treats the human being as (essentially) un-located, disembodied mind – whereas we *are*, in fact, embodied beings; in the context of aesthetics – where such views are frequently associated with the claim that aesthetic pleasure is “disinterested” – such a view seems particularly questionable concerning the appreciation of Greek nude sculpture. Sexual attraction seems to be a paradigmatic form of interest, and it is not obvious that such attraction is not, in some way, responsible for our pleasure in the representation of ideal, nude human form in such sculpture. These denials of embodiment and sexuality have, moreover, seemed morally

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<sup>50</sup> Herder suggests such benefits of his in-principle pluralism about aesthetic value in the Fourth Critical Forest (p. 200) in contrasting a “genius” of vision to a “soul made entirely for music”: each values different things in objects (distinctness as opposed to depth of expression, say), and this is to be explained by their different orientations, development, cognitive skills, etc. It does not mean that there are no “rules” of taste or of beauty, nor that taste is merely in the eye of the beholder, merely and abstractly to be identified as pleasureable response (because there is nothing else in common). Rather, for these different sorts of objects, there will be different, but nonetheless substantive “rules.”

and politically questionable: they obscure the material conditions (social and physical) that make possible such putative disembodied knowing and being, a “disinterested” regard, possible, and they devalue the goods, pleasures, and reality of our embodied condition.<sup>51</sup>

Herder – quite remarkably – anticipates many of these criticisms in his aesthetic theory. Like some twentieth century critics, Herder suggests that philosophers (and particularly aestheticians) overemphasize vision, the “coldest” and “most philosophical” sense.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Herder suggests, philosophers are inclined – because of their own characteristic preferences and interests (in abstraction, in universality, in an “overview” of the multiple particulars of the world) -- to emphasize this sense, occluding the character of sense experience other than that of sight, and, as his language suggests, implicitly thereby downplaying (if not devaluing) emotive response and immediacy of impact. Herder also generally resists distinguishing aesthetic experience and pleasure strongly from other sorts of pleasure, and is, in particular, opposed to “disinterestedness” as a criterion of the aesthetic – this, on Herder’s view, renders the experience of art trivial and disconnected from lived experience and the goods to which we are committed, which include sexual desire and pleasure.<sup>53</sup> On Herder’s view as well, we are, fundamentally embodied beings, which is a precondition for all other, including intellectual activities – just as the concepts of touch are, he argues, a precondition for visual experience of physical objects. Such embodiment should not only be recognized, moreover, but valued.

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<sup>51</sup> I obviously cover a great deal of ground in this paragraph; a full discussion of the various lines of criticism of claims to disembodiment and disinterestedness in aesthetics would require far more discussion than I provide here.

<sup>52</sup> Fourth Critical Forest, p. 205.

<sup>53</sup> Herder criticizes the concept of “disinterestedness” and the distinction of aesthetic from other pleasures most forcefully in his late *Kalligone*, an in-depth criticism of Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgment.

Unlike many later critics, however, Herder attempts to provide substantive descriptions of what an embodied aesthetics would be like, in his aesthetics of sculpture.<sup>54</sup> The aesthetic experience of sculpture is, on Herder's view, preeminently an experience of, by, and for humans as embodied creatures. The paradigm sculpture is the expressive representation of human form. Likewise, aesthetic appreciation of sculpture presupposes, in a strong sense, that the appreciator is embodied: she must not only employ concepts that necessarily and perhaps solely arise from her own embodiment (her use of the sense of touch), but she must also move around the sculpture in order to gain a full understanding of the work, and its presence (depth) in space; she must proprioceive her own bodily comportment in order to understand the sculpture's expressiveness (or lack thereof). And Herder also acknowledges the presence of sexual interest and desire in appreciating (some) nude sculpture. Herder treads carefully and speaks somewhat ambiguously here, probably because of his cultural context – he states several times that he is not meaning to corrupt “morals” – but does suggest the viewer's sex (or, we might say, sexual orientation) influences his or her appreciation: “alongside our universal feeling as human beings there is also a specific feeling proper to our sex” and “where it is armed by passion rather than blinded by it, the judgment of one sex upon the other is extraordinarily precise.”<sup>55</sup> Sexual attraction need not “blind one” but sharpens and

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<sup>54</sup> Many critics appear, in a way, to endorse the definition of aesthetics that they attribute to their opponents, viz.: aesthetics as such – the study of the beautiful, of our experience of it, the pleasures and typical representational states we have in appreciating or recognizing the beautiful, the characteristic qualities of objects that prompt or are the intentional objects of those responses – is itself premised on a “disembodied” conception of the aesthetic subject. Thus in rejecting this premise, they appear to reject the project of aesthetics altogether: critics like Bourdieu, for example, seem to endorse *replacing* such analysis by a sociological analysis of the circulation of objects within class and social status structures. Any focus on the individual's response to a particular object thus drops out of the picture.

<sup>55</sup> Sculpture, p. 86. Herder is, as noted, ambiguous on this point: he also states that sculpture should not arouse sexual interest -- only a “beast” would be so attracted – and that painting, more than sculpture, arouses the erotic imagination. (Sculpture, p. 52) Herder's frequent description of artistic, enthusiastic

heightens one's attention to the perfection of the human body, the smoothness and tactile appeal of its surface and contours.<sup>56</sup> Such sexual interest or (more generally) bodily involvement in aesthetic experience need not vitiate the aesthetic quality or moral standing of appreciation of art, on Herder's view. Thus – like other 18<sup>th</sup> c. aestheticians, but to different conclusions – Herder thinks that aesthetic experience is connected both to morality and to self-knowledge.<sup>57</sup> We are embodied beings – and the aesthetic experience of sculpture provides us with a heightened, unified, invigorating experience of that embodied condition. We are, and should recognize that we are, in “contact” with other physical bodies, including other human beings, in the world; we are and should be, touched and transformed by that contact with others. It falsifies not only the experience of sculpture, but also our mode of existence itself, to understand us solely, in the first instance, or even at our most valuable, as “cold” philosophical, detached, disinterested spectators.

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creation as based on (real or imagined) “embrace” of human bodies, and his praise of the (purported) healthiness of Greek relations among the sexes (as healthy, honest attraction) suggests to me that the view I state in the text is the core of his view, despite his hesitations about expressing it. (For his comments on the Greeks and sexuality, see *Sculpture*, pp. 53, 74-5.)

<sup>56</sup> The nature and role of such sexual attraction in appreciation of figurative nude sculpture, on Herder's account, and in general, would bear more considerably more discussion than I can provide here. In general, such attraction must in some sense be imaginary, simulated, sublimated: no one wishes, literally, to have sex with a formed piece of stone. For Herder in particular such attraction would, therefore, seem oddly narcissistic in some sense: in order to experience the sculpture as “living” (and thus sexually attractive), we must projectively identify with the sculptural body. But this, if we proprioceive as sexed bodies, would seem difficult at least in the heterosexual case, as a prompting of sexual desire, which presupposes difference in sex. Sexual desire also, of course, entails a desire – in this case, in some sense imaginative – not to identify, but to caress, to engage in tactile, haptic or kinaesthetic touch.

<sup>57</sup> Herder suggests this connection in criticizing Riedel for denying it (Fourth Critical Forest, p. 181-2). It is suggested in “Sculpture” most clearly in the Parts II and III discussions of expression, in which Herder suggests that we take pleasure in human bodily perfection (which is connected to moral perfection, and is a form of self-knowledge or recognition, at least, of the character of the species).