

Johann Herder's *Sculpture*, Somaesthetics and Everyday Aesthetics

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Richard Shusterman, originator of the sub-discipline of somaesthetics, has recently worked on making connections between his philosophy and that of Winckelmann, in a manner similar to that in which he showed connections between his work and one of the founders of aesthetics, Baumgarten.¹ One could also draw similarities between his views and those of Johann Gottfried Herder, who was strongly influenced both by Winckelmann and Baumgarten. Herder was also a student of Kant. Kant, however, was very much a dualist. Herder, although retaining some aspects of dualism, provides a counter to Kant's dualism by way of his stress on the sense of touch, which, aesthetically, was of no interest to Kant. He does this in a way that is not only supportive of somaesthetics but also of the equally new and currently vibrant sub-discipline of everyday aesthetics, a field of study which overlaps with somaesthetics at several points.² In this article I will argue for the importance of Herder as a progenitor of these two movements, the intermediary being, of course, John Dewey's anti-dualist but non-reductionist pragmatist aesthetics which Shusterman helped to revive in his early writings.³

I will begin with a few brief comments on Shusterman's article on Winckelmann. Shusterman cites Herder in the above-mentioned article in relation to Winckelmann's message that perceptive seeing is not just visual, that it includes the haptic, and that it is "transmodal" in that we see with our entire bodies. (185) In a footnote he quotes Herder on the eye going beyond mere collection to becoming a hand. (186)⁴ (We will say more about this later.) Herder was very much a student of Winckelmann in the latter's somaesthetic approach. Shusterman describes Winckelmann's response to *The Laocoön* in this way: "The acute sucking in of the abdomen [in Winckelmann's experience as a perceiver of the work] is a discomforting proprioceptive feeling that Winckelmann feels empathetically in his own body, and such severe stomach tightening...suggests further contractions of pain in Laocoön's bodily core and in his agonizing muscular efforts..." (180) Moreover, we not only feel his pain but also his "uplifting spiritual power" (181) through the expression of his face and posture. Thus, as Shusterman puts it, "Winckelmann's appreciation of the body clearly extends beyond mere physical form. It is a somaesthetic appreciation: the admiring advocacy of the soma as a sentient, purposive, intelligent, cultivated, spiritually expressive body that employs somatic self-awareness in the pursuit of improved experience, perception, and performance." (Shusterman, 181) Shusterman goes on, exhibiting his own Deweyan anti-dualism, to say that "[f]rom Winckelmann's somaesthetic perspective, body and soul are intimately connected, so that the body expresses the soul and affects its activity." (181) As we shall see, Herder's

aesthetics, particularly his approach to sculpture, is in accord with this, although he breaks with Winckelmann in not symbolizing the cognitive nature of the self through idealization of calmness and tranquility.

Herder also shares with Winckelmann a central use of the Pygmalion story, which is featured even in the subtitle of his *Sculpture* (written in 1778).⁵ Winckelmann describes his response to the *Belvedere Apollo* as one in which he feels himself transported to the sacred isle of Delos while his “figure [his own body] seems to take on life and movement, like Pygmalion’s beauty.” (quoted in Shusterman, 182) That is, Winckelmann’s own chest expands in empathetic response to the work: *he* is the sculpture come alive. Shusterman finds here two transformations: first, of the statue into a higher level of life and movement like the transformation of Pygmalion’s sculpture of Galatea, and second, Winckelmann’s own transformation in his aesthetic experience. We will return to Herder’s use of this myth later.

Two additional philosophers play a significant role in the interpretation of Herder I will give: Paul Guyer and Rachel Zuckert, both incidentally notable Kant scholars.⁶ Let us begin with Guyer’s analysis of Herder as found in his magisterial *History of Modern Aesthetics*. Herder believed that the word “beauty” has often been associated with sight: “beauty is most originally found in everything that offers itself pleasingly to the eye.” (Guyer, 391) But unlike Kant, and such contemporary followers of Kant in this regard as Allen Carlson and Glen Parsons,⁷ Herder does not privilege the eye and sight over the hand and touch. Actually, he gives beauty to the eye, but reserves other important aesthetic effects for touch. Of beauty he says. “It is properly a concept of surfaces, since we properly cognize the bodily, the well-formed, and the solidly pleasing only with the help of feeling (I believe this should be “feeling”), and with sight can see only planes, only figures, only colors, but not immediately corporeal spaces, angles, and forms....”⁸ Yet, he believes, as Guyer puts it, that only the sense of touch can put us into direct contact with reality, with “the deeper truth of physical reality.” This, Guyer argues, leaves Platonism (and, I would add, most aspects of dualism) behind.

It is worthwhile here to quote directly from Herder who believes that touch is the least examined but should perhaps be the first sense to be investigated: “We have banished it among the coarser senses; we develop it the least because of sight and hearing, lighter senses and closer to the soul, hold us back from it and spare us the effort of obtaining ideas through it. We have excluded touch or feeling from the arts of beauty and condemned it for delivering us nothing but misunderstood metaphors; yet aesthetics, in keeping with its name, ought precisely to be the philosophy of feeling.” (*Selected Writings, Critical Forests, Fourth Grove, 207*)

Herder further discusses this in *Sculpture*. There he derives the German term for “beauty” etymologically from the concept of beholding appearance: beauty is beautiful appearance. But he finds some limitations in the sense of sight: “The operation of the sense of sight is flat; it plays and glides across the surface of things with images and colors...” (quoted in Guyer, 391, Herder, 40). He goes on to deny that the sense of sight can provide the concept of form its origin and its highest judge. He imagines an art-lover sunk deep in contemplation who circles around a sculpture, and he asks “What would he not do to transform his sight into touch, to make his seeing into a form of *touching* that feels in the dark?” (quoted in Guyer 392, Herder 41)⁹ Such a lover seeks to grasp the image “that arose from the arm and the soul of the artist.” When he does this the sculpture lives and the soul of the lover feels that it lives.

We can learn from Herder the centrality of touch to sculpture. But can we learn more? Imagine, as Herder perhaps did, the experience of grasping something's inner nature through touch, as even more central to aesthetics than sight.¹⁰ As Guyer says, Herder came up with a notion of truth in aesthetics radically different from that of previous aestheticians. For Herder, the sense of touch is more radically embodied than the sense of sight. His move, therefore, can be seen as an anticipation of somaesthetics in that it emphasizes embodiment. It can also be seen as having great importance for aesthetics in general. In particular it can be seen as a historical counter to the dualism of Descartes, Kant, and ultimately, Plato.¹¹ Guyer observes that, for Herder, touch "reveals the true form of objects, while sight merely reveals or plays with their superficial appearance." (392) Whereas sight seems at first the paradigm of knowledge, touch and sculpture get us to "primary truth." (392) Moreover, as Guyer also puts it, sculpture "communicates to us the feeling of life in the sculpture and in turn arouses our own feeling of being truly live." (392-3) For Herder, these are the same passions that made Pygmalion wish his sculpture would come to life. In a fragment, Herder wrote "A statue must *live*: its flesh must come to life, its face and expression must speak. We must believe that we touch it and feel that it warms under our hands. We must see it stand before us and feel that it speaks to us."¹²

This is not to say of course that eyes and ears are not themselves also parts of the body or that seeing and hearing are not also part of the interaction of the live creature with its environment.¹³ The lesson to learn from Herder is one based on a change of perspective. To imagine touch as being *as central* to the experience of fine art as sight or hearing, and sculpture as being as central as painting and music, allows us to see both art and aesthetics in a radically different way. Herder's approach clears some space for somaesthetics, a discipline that, in part, argues that the body is the center of aesthetic experience. Although eyes and ears are part of the body, touch is associated with almost every other part of the body, and especially with the hands and their ability to make and mold. So emphasis on touch especially affirms the centrality of the body. Moreover, in so far as our everyday lives are centered in physical environments and surrounded by three-dimensional objects (which themselves are apprehended most effectively as three-dimensional through touch), especially including ourselves and other people, it offers a counter to an overly abstracted account of aesthetic experience. It puts somaesthetics and everyday aesthetics at the center of things.

We need to be careful here, however (that is in moving directly from the role of touch in experience to making inferences about the role of touch in appreciation of sculpture), since although, for the blind, touch can be enough to situate the self in a lived environment, the art of sculpture is limited in that, for the most part, it presents us with bodies independent of their surrounding contexts (although this is less true for relief sculpture, as in the Ghiberti doors). In representational painting we usually get a figure surrounded by a room or a scene in nature: and we get nothing of that in freestanding sculpture. *The Apollo Belvedere*, for example, has a human figure standing next to a tree stump, but no background of woods and sky or urban scene.

There is some question as to whether Herder thought that sculpture had primacy over painting, as can be seen in Guyer's reference to "primary truth." Before we go on I want to consider one quote from Herder which seems to give it this status. It comes at the end of the first chapter of *Sculpture*. "Finally, we may say that sculpture is truth, whereas painting is a dream. The former is all *presentation*, the latter, storytelling magic. What a

difference! How little the two stand upon a common ground! A sculpture before which I kneel can embrace me, it can become my friend and companion: it is *present*, it is *there*. The most beautiful painting is a magnificent story, the dream of a dream." (45) To make painting a dream is to make it secondary to sculpture. But there are some even more intriguing aspects of this quote. How strange it is to think that a sculpture can embrace me! This is the myth of Pygmalion, which, as mentioned earlier, plays such an important role in Herder's book. What is the meaning of this myth as used by Herder? In a sense sculpture is a symbol of the embodiment of the mind, and so, to some extent, sculpture is of more interest for somaesthetics than painting. There is also something erotic here: the sculpture as object of touch can represent the sexually embodied other. And it is, of course rejection of the sexually embodied other that rests at the bottom of most forms of dualism, including Plato's and Kant's. But we should be careful on this point since Herder sometimes explicitly denies a sexual reading of his theory. He speaks of *Sculpture* as "intended to awaken virtuous feeling for the significant forms of God's Creation and not licentiousness" and so he thinks "it is dishonored by the remarks of the dandy or the use that rogues would make of it." (90)

My purpose here is not to explicate Herder's ideas about art and aesthetics. Guyer, Zuckert and others do a good enough job of that. Rather, much like Shusterman in his article on Winckelmann, I am using Herder as a source of materials that can be adapted for an assault on some central assumptions in contemporary aesthetics, and in particular the assumption that the only legitimate aesthetic senses are sight and hearing. Herder's main point was that the beauties of sight, hearing and touch are all quite different, although each involves unity in multiplicity. My strategy however is to carry out something more of an experiment, i.e. to see Herder as deconstructing traditional dualist assumptions of aesthetics by way of privileging sculpture as opposed to painting and hence touch as opposed to sight.

In learning about Herder's aesthetics of touch and sculpture my second entry point was Rachel Zuckert's article. Zuckert informs us that "Herder argues that sculpture is addressed to the sense of touch primarily on the ground that touch provides us with distinctive concepts, that is, those that concern three-dimensional bodies as such..." (286) It is only through tactile experience that one can know mass and volume. She also notes that his idea that sculpture is primarily appreciated by touch had to be modified to include the importance of imaginative tactile experience. We do not often literally touch the sculptures we appreciate, but we do so imaginatively.¹⁴ The point is, however, that we live in a three-dimensional world, one that we move around in, and that sculpture expresses and manifests this in a way that painting does not. Herder, as Zuckert observes, recognizes that we do in fact usually appreciate sculpture not by touch but by visual experience. The resolution of this paradox is through the idea of imaginative touch. (287) But this again contributes to downgrading sight which is important only insofar as it is guided by or substitutes for touch. Herder turns specifically to the body, whose beauty, "is not a visual but tactile concept." (267)

Zuckert also observes that Herder ends up attacking aesthetic disinterestedness.¹⁵ She writes, "Insisting upon aesthetic disinterestedness, on Herder's view, renders the experience of art trivial and disconnected from lived experience and the goods to which we are committed, including sexual desire and pleasure." (294) Herder sees us, just as Dewey did, and as Shusterman does, as fundamentally embodied beings.¹⁶ (294) Zuckert concludes, "On Herder's view...by contrast to many of his predecessors, contemporaries,

and successors, sexual interest or (more generally) bodily involvement in aesthetic experience need not vitiate the aesthetic quality or moral standing of appreciation of art." (294) She goes on, in a way reminiscent of Dewey, to say: "We are embodied beings, and the aesthetic experience of sculpture provides us with a heightened, unified, invigorating experience of that embodied condition" (294) and that we are in contact with other physical bodies including other human beings, and transformed by our contact with them.

I am here roughly following the sequence of my personal discovery of Herder's relevance to both Somaesthetics and Everyday Aesthetics. After being inspired by Guyer and Zuckert I turned to the text of *Sculpture* itself. I asked myself, "Is there more here than was found by my inspirations?"

Early in the book Herder describes (based on Diderot) the experiences of man blind from birth and then asks "What do these strange experiences teach us?"¹⁷ His answer: "Something that we ourselves could experience daily if we were to acknowledge that *sight reveals merely shapes, but touch alone reveals bodies; that everything that has form is known only through the sense of touch and that sight reveals only visible surfaces* – moreover, not the surfaces of bodies but solely *surfaces exposed to light.*" (35)

In the last part of his book, Herder writes that his goal was to establish the following principle: "that the sublimity and beauty of the human body, whatever form it may take, is always an expression of health, life, strength, and well-being in every limb of" the human as artful creature. (77) This fits well with Shusterman's idea of the meliorative qualities of somaesthetics, that it is concerned with the improvement of our physical well-being. It also takes us away from just talking about the art of sculpture. Instead, it turns us to the dynamic of the relation between the aesthetics of sculpture and the aesthetics of everyday life, for example in our aesthetic responses to the physical form of other humans.

Herder further writes "Beauty... is always only the shining through of *form*, the *sensible expression of perfection* in relation to an end, the surge of life, human health." (78) (Notice the radically different way he uses "form" than we find in modern formalists like Clive Bell and Roger Fry, or Kant for that matter. Here form has to do with life and health and not just with design or the look of purpose.) He then focuses on individual body parts, writing, "[t]he more a part of the body signifies what it should signify, the more beautiful it is; inner *sympathy* alone, *feeling* and the *transposition of our entire human self* into the figure we touch, is the true teacher and instrument of beauty." (78) Here, the notion of "beauty" is explicitly tied to the living body, its specific parts, and the sympathetic relationship between the sculpture appreciator and the sculpture.

So although the main subject here is sculpture, a secondary subject is what sculpture reveals about human bodies as we experience them every day. Moreover, in the experience of bodies, there is often a center of focus, whether it be the face, the eyes, or some other feature. This part is "the first to offer itself to the hand that touches, and is the most pronounced." (78) For Herder, this is closely associated with internal events and with character traits. For example, if a figure is absorbed in thought the brow becomes the most important feature. (One can imagine here, as an example, *The Thinker* by Rodin.) In connection with this, Herder asks us to imagine before us "an emperor with a commanding gaze." (He leaves it unclear whether we are imagining a real emperor or a sculpture of one.) In this case, "the gaze gives clear and vivid utterance to the face, and the eyes become the principle feature." (78) The form of the active part of the body "declares: I am here, I am active." (78) And so form is identified not with design, or with something merely contemplated, but with activity.

Herder insists that “all of this has nothing to do with rules of art or with studied conventions.” Rather, “it is the *natural language of the soul that expresses itself through the entire body...*” (79) Analysis of sculpture (in particular ancient Greek and Roman sculpture) gives us a phenomenological understanding of the aesthetics of body perception, where bodies (of others as well as our own) are seen as ensouled. The ancient sculptors were doing phenomenology *avant la lettre*. And this is phenomenology in the Husserlian sense: the results are universal.

Here, the notion of the soul expressing itself is not detached from sexuality. The above quote, for example, is connected to analysis of the role of the belly in a Roman sculpture titled *The Resting Satyr*, which Herder calls a Bacchus. In this statue the belly is shown “at its best”¹⁸, and it turns out that this involves a posture that shows a feminized and sexualized form of male beauty. He describes the figure in this way: “He leans gracefully on his arm so that the beautiful *femininity* of his *back* and his *chest*, his *belly* and his *hips* speak a language full of meaning.” (79) It is this which makes up the “*natural language of the soul*” (79) (a point that would be surprising and/or upsetting both to Platonists and Christians).

Herder carries out this phenomenology through careful analysis, particularly in Part Three, of several elements of human anatomy. A 21st century reader gets a sense here that both the ancients and early 19th century Germans paid a lot more attention to the human body and its expressive meaning than we do. Perhaps we have lost something significant here. Herder would think so, and indeed strongly suggests that people of his own time have already lost something significant in losing connection with touch that the Greeks had. However, he also thinks that we can regain it to some extent. We will see that this recovery is by way of his unique interpretation of “the line of beauty,” an idea which he adopts from Hogarth, and modifies.

Herder talks in some detail about the expressive properties of several different body parts. Take for example hair. He observes that the ancients represented hair in many forms (67): “The natural growth of hair, the way it falls, parts, or curls, is of particular significance.” (68) Of course much of what he says about body parts, not only hair, but brow, eyes, skull and nose, reminds us of the pseudo-science of physiognomy. But it is really something quite different. Indeed, in the next part (Part 4), Herder explicitly denies that his work is intended to contribute to “physiognomics.” (77)

Consider also Herder’s discussion of the brow. He writes, “It is particularly upon the *brow* that the *light of the face* is revealed. It is the seat of light and joy, but also of dark sorrow and fear, of stupidity, ignorance, and wickedness. In a word, when we refer to a person’s *fundamental disposition* in the strictest sense, and not merely to his mind or to what will become his character, the brow acts as a luminous table of bronze.” (69) Today, although we still speak of the *eyes* as revealing a person’s character or soul, the brow seems to have lost our interest. And yet it should not, since the eyes do not exist without the frame of the brow. It is doubtful that eyes tell us anything without the surrounding context of the face. The face is an important, although neglected, region of everyday aesthetics. And yet we approach human beauty primarily through the face.¹⁹

I have discovered another point at which Herder’s ideas may be further developed. As I have mentioned, Hogarth’s “line of beauty” plays an important role, but modified by way of emphasis on touch.²⁰ He writes “[t]he line of beauty and everything that has been deduced from it tells us nothing if it does not appear on *forms* and is not thereby accessible to the *sense of touch*. Trace ten thousand lines of grace and beauty on a flat surface – if they

are not part of a form and do not acquire meaning in this way, they will not give any more pleasure to the eye than the scribbles of a child. Even if they only appear on a corset or on a saucepan, at least they appear on *something* and so are accessible to another sense, that is to say, accessible first to a sense *other* than the eye." (64) The reference to such ordinary objects as corset and saucepan takes us into the realm of the everyday. But in the same paragraph is an important qualification. Although a flame or sea surge cannot be grasped as something solid they can still be "grasped or touched by the *soul*." (64) Throughout *Sculpture* Herder closely associated touch with something deeply inner, which is called "soul." He concludes this same paragraph by saying that, "just as the plane is only an abstraction from the body and the line an abstraction from the bounded surface, so neither are possible *without bodies*." (64) Readers familiar with Kant will note how distant this is from Kant's notion of beauty in which the play of form is accessible only to the eye or ear. Herder says in summary that "[t]he lines of grace and beauty are not *self-subsistent*; they derive from living bodies and seek to return to them." (64) But as I mentioned above, the line of beauty plays another role towards the end of the book as compensatory to our not being able to become Greeks again. (83-85)

One more point about Hogarth's "line of beauty". Herder notes that, on first sight, Hogarth put little beauty into his own paintings as the figures are often caricatures and yet they are "full of character, passion, life, and truth", for these things "held the attention of his genius." (64) Thus, his very practice showed that "all contours and lines in painting depend upon *bodies* and upon *vigorous life*." (64) So although Herder generally sees painting as limited to appearances of things on flat surfaces he also holds that the art "seeks to raise the figure from the ground and to give wings to the imagination so that it no longer merely sees, but *enjoys, touches* and *feels*." (64) So painting aspires to sculpture. (This point is inconsistent with earlier claims that each medium should stick with what it alone can accomplish.) So, also, when we speak of lines of grace and beauty we must recognize that they "derive from *living bodies* and seek to return to them." (64) (I once had an unforgettable aesthetic experience when visiting the Sir John Soanes Museum in London. The tour guide opened a window revealing a set of Hogarth paintings, including several of the *Rakes Progress*, and further views into other parts of the museum. This opening up was literally a felt revelation. I do not know why, and this is purely anecdotal, but when I read this paragraph in Herder I felt in complete agreement that Hogarth can transcend superficial caricature.)

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned differences between Herder and Winckelmann, one of them being that Herder stresses less the idea of calmness. The difference is subtle and Herder is by no means making a radical break from Winckelmann's classicism. However he distinguishes himself from the earlier writer when he stresses that Nature has not given humans "the unmoved tranquility of the gods" and that she has rather "*animated* us with an eternally *mobile* current, full of energy and living spirit." (79) Thus "the human form must be animated by the *breeze of life*." (79) And this forces us even to represent the gods not as abstract configurations but as concrete entities with their own characters, each form animated by "the living spirit that blows upon and drives forward...*that* god alone." (79) This animation makes every body part "*individually significant*." (79)

Thus, to respond to sculpture, not only sculpture representing gods, but generally, "it is necessary to *exist* and to *feel*." (79) And to do this requires that "one must be human and blindly register the way in which the soul works in us in response to every character,

every situation, and every passion – and then touch.” (79) Our response to sculpture involves a harmonious alliance between sculpture animated and our existential and bodily, touch-oriented response.

Herder follows this paragraph with a discussion of the ways the heroes of the *Iliad* are seen at first as individual characters who “*are who they are*” (80) and then, afterwards, in action. He concludes that “[it] is beyond doubt that the extraordinary *determinateness* and *fidelity* that the Greeks gave to every situation, every passion, and every character helped them to achieve a level of art that” has not been seen since. (80) Again, this is through feeling: “[t]hey perceived as do blind people and through feeling, saw.” (80)

Before, we had mentioned the eroticism of Herder’s somaesthetic response. As with Winckelmann, this often had a homoerotic tendency. This can be found strikingly (although, at first in a hidden way) in his discussion of *Hermaphrodite* [figure 6 in *Sculpture*, discovered in Rome in the 17th century when Bernini added to it a mattress]. This extraordinary sculpture of what looks like a naked boy lying face down on a bed somewhat entangled in bed sheets is recognized by Herder as difficult to appreciate (but only later in Part IV).²¹ Given the implication of paedophilia there are moral difficulties with this piece which Herder addresses early in the book (Part II), speaking first of nudes in general as likenesses of God’s “beautiful creatures” and of their “innocence.” (52) He agrees with Winckelmann that only a beast would lust after a statue of virtue as did, apparently, a Spanish tourist visiting Rome: “The pure and beautiful forms of sculpture may well awaken friendship, love, and daily conversation, but only in a beast can they stimulate desire.” (52) Painting, he thinks, is different, and does open the imagination to the “colored and perfumed garden of pleasure.” (52) But a sculpture, “even of a slumbering hermaphrodite, is never *indecent*.”

Later, in Part 4, Herder returns to *Hermaphrodite*. Having already addressed the issue of indecency earlier in the book he perhaps feels free here to enter enthusiastically into a more erotic, almost mystical, appreciation of the sculpture. He imagines here someone who can see the one spirit flowing into the statue that guided the hand of the artist and gave the sculpture unity. (80) The true appreciator must feel “in every curve and turn of the body, in everything that he touches and does not touch, a Bacchic dream of hermaphroditism...” Such an appreciator must also have “been tortured by sweet thoughts and by a pleasure that courses through the entire body like a gentle fire” (80) and have felt “an involuntary resonance and echo of this same music in himself.” (80) The sculpture presents a human being, “a fully animated body” that “speaks to us as an *act*... seizes hold of us and penetrates our very being, awakening a full range of responsive human feeling.” (81)

He goes further (perhaps still speaking of the same sculpture) to describe how our soul can be transposed by the work into the same situation of the figure. (81) He speaks of the rise and fall of the breast and the knee as well as the way the body rests quietly, revealing the soul. When this happens, “we find ourselves so to speak, embodied in the nature before us.” (81) Or, alternatively, “the nature in question is enlivened by our own soul.” (81) Nothing here can be merely *observed*: 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.” (81) Herder, in short, sets up a dynamic interaction between not only perceiver and sculpture but between the context of art and our often sensuous and often sexualized perception of human beauty in everyday life.

In a strange use of Plato that will remind the reader of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* the world of the cave, the world of “shadows, paintings and fleeting groups” (81) is contrasted

not to the world of the Forms but rather to "*the truth of the physical body.*" (81) This is helped by touch in "the dark of night" rather than in the world of the Sun outside the cave. (81) It is through touch that we come to "*the presence and existence of an object.*" (81) That is, for Herder, Plato was right in his criticism of painting as superficial, but escaped the cave in *the wrong direction!*

There is yet another interesting connection between Herder and somaesthetics. For Herder, one cannot do aesthetics until one has first looked very closely at physiology. Earlier I mainly spoke of the competing powers of painting and sculpture. However, in his earlier writing, *Fourth Grove* (written in 1769), which is largely consistent with *Sculpture*, Herder discussed *three arts of beauty*: painting, music and sculpture.²² Each is lined up with a particular sense. He does not give any credit to taste or smell (this was a mistake I believe) but he gives equal importance to touch as to seeing and hearing.²³ And so he overcomes the distinction between distal and proximal senses still maintained by many contemporary aestheticians, but not by Shusterman. As Gaiger observes, the different senses reveal the world to us in different ways and aesthetics therefore should begin with "the distinctive ways in which we draw upon these capacities when considering works of art." (11)

Finally, we should note Herder's historicism, which is often associated with anti-dualism (especially after Marx.) Gaiger observes that Herder published his *Yet Another Philosophy of History for Education of Humanity* in 1774, four years before *Sculpture*, published in 1778. (21) This book was the first important argument for historicism, arguing for example that we should try to gain an internal understanding of past cultures. Herder here attacked the idea that human nature and human values are universal and unchanging and argued that artworks need to be understood in relation to context, although he rejected relativism in favor of a progressivist view of history. His progressivism led him to oppose Winckelmann we could only become great if we imitate the ancients. (24) As Gaiger notes, (and we should add that this is in anticipation of Marx and later of Marx Wartofsky) the senses themselves are subject to historical change. (25)

Herder's historicism fits nicely into his recognition that the ideal of the Greeks can seldom be achieved today. What, he asks, "is rarer in our day than for someone to grasp a man's character as it is, to capture it and develop it in a way that is faithful and complete?" (81), i.e. in the way the Greek sculptors did. We have too much of a kind of superficial knowledge and no longer possess something which we have not learned and is from our own self (81), although he allows for exceptions in Raphael and Domenichino, who are able to create paintings (even!) that are animated like the mythic statues of Daedalus. (82) But all is not lost. What we need to recognize is that children in their first drawings still are able create forms that imitate the entire living thing without light or shadow because their eyes see as their hands feel. (82)

Recovering this childlike innocence will not be easy, for "[n]ature has departed from us and is hidden from us [and] in its place we find art and social rank, mechanisms and patchwork." (82) Herder then writes: "Let someone go into our markets, our churches and our courtrooms, our houses and our salons with the intention of giving form to what he sees. What would he begin to sculpt? Chairs or human beings? Hooped skirts or gloves?" (82) Of course, that has been done, for example by Rauschenberg and other contemporary spatial artists (the descendants of sculptors). But Herder's implied answer is that we no longer have the ability to use our sense of touch to sculpt, and we no longer see that the appropriate subject matter is the human body.

This is a point in the text where the everyday aesthete pays particular attention. Herder places us in the markets, homes and other locales of everyday life to ask his question. He then asks how we would begin to sculpt in such a world, and by means of what senses? His downhearted answer is that in our world “[n]o eye recognizes the eye of a friend, nor any cheek a cheek, a mouth a mouth, or a hand a hand.” (82) The contemporary lack of awareness is an erotic lack: an inability to sensuously look at and touch another. A claim is made, then, about the aesthetics of everyday life: that we are lacking in our body awareness of others.

Like many writers of his time he was fascinated by the Greeks, but could not picture a path back to the Greek world. So he asks plaintively, “Where today are the Greek games, Greek dances, Greek festivals...” (82)? The Greek artist worked for his city and his people: but today “[i]t is remarkable how rarely a *person* appears to us, and even more rare that someone *embraces* another person and holds him in such affection that he carries the person with him and gives him eternal existence.” (83) This returns us to our somaesthetic lack as first broached on the previous page. Greek erotic perception is contrasted wittily to the consumerism of our current age where “[i]n a famous garden are to be found our national products: long wigs together, I believe, with mannequins, formed out of terracotta – here, undoubtedly, is the true image of our country.” (83)

So, if there is an ideal that Herder advocates for everyday life it is a world that is somewhat less shallow and mercenary than ours, somewhat more like the world of the Greeks, even though we cannot create a new Greece. The solution, somewhat surprisingly, is to be found in returning to the line of beauty, although even it seems to be disappearing “from the forms we can feel.” (83) As we have already seen however, Herder interprets the line of beauty somewhat differently from Hogarth.

The end of Part Four of *Sculpture* is spent elaborating the “line of beauty” which Herder understands in terms of a dialectic between the line of stability (associated with support and found absent in the crooked or twisted) and the line of perfection (associated with the circle and with roundness). Where possible, “[n]ature has entwined the line of stability with the circle of perfection,” as in the human body where arms and legs are stable but also round. Then, drawing from Plato, he argues that the line of beauty “encircles the forms of the body” (84) just as Love draws both from need and superfluity in Diotima’s description of the birth of Love in the Plato’s *Symposium*. The account is somewhat fanciful, but worth repeating: it goes like this: “The circle is too *full* for us, we cannot take it in at once or embrace it, while the straight line is too *needy* to provide the many-faceted organism that our body should be. Thus it oscillates and inclines, so that this or that aspect predominates.” (84) The human body cannot be perfect and hence must act and strive. In support of this he argues that a “round head or a round belly may display an abundance of comfort, repletion, and satisfaction, but they are all the less able to contribute to the motion of the whole” (85). Thus the human gains grace only through movement, grace being beauty in movement. Continuing with the Platonic line: “Grace distances itself from the line of need, though this must nonetheless remain its basis, and it inclines toward perfection without ever being able to reach it.” (85)

All of this, not surprisingly, is gendered: the human species hovers between these two extremes, the male closer to stability, the female to the floating beauty of grace. But the important point here, as before, is that unlike Winckelmann, both human and sculptural beauty are seen in terms of something different from stability and quiet.

But again, he does not depart very far from Winckelmann: the discussion of the idea that there is no grace without movement concludes with an example that shows that it is

not the moment of sexual intensity which distorts the eye and mouth, but the moment of sexual anticipation that is the ideal. Thus in a sculpture of Leda and the swan and in the Danae sculpture the female waits. What is shown is "not the state in which they both reveal the fruit of this encounter." It is, rather, the moment just before that "forms the lines of grace." (85)

Conclusion

In conclusion: Herder, a student of Kant's but writing a few years before the *Critique of Judgment* was published, provides a rich source of material to supplement the roots of somaesthetics already mapped out by Shusterman in his discussions of Baumgarten and Winckelmann. Indeed Herder indicates some advancement on both philosophers: unlike Baumgarten, he avoids an over-reliance on abstraction and focuses instead on particular artforms. In *Sculpture* he focuses on two artforms associated with two senses: painting and sculpture. Music was covered more extensively as a third form in his *Fourth Grove*. Unlike Winckelmann he tempers idealization of the ancient Greeks with recognition that we need to follow our own path today, and he gives us a body-centered philosophy that is also historicist. It is also not strictly materialist since it constantly stresses ensoulment and a somewhat mysterious ideal identification between artist, sculpture and appreciator. Herder in addition provides an extremely subtle analysis of differences between sculpture and painting which allows us a different way of looking at the fine arts in general. Figurative sculpture in particular has an affinity with somaesthetics. Close attention to great works of sculpture makes us more aware of our own bodies especially our sense of touch. Although sight and hearing also come from the body, it is touch which has been most neglected in the history of aesthetics. Dualism has thrived in the period of dominance of the visual. Emphasis on touch allows us not only to recognize the importance of space and volume, but also the aesthetic importance of interpersonal aspects of everyday experience. The other as object of sensual interactive experience (including, but not limited to, sexual experience) is central to our everyday aesthetic experience. Sculpture, with its emphasis on touch, highlights this. But this leads us to a great loss in our modern times, one that Herder anticipated and attempted to overcome by way not of a call for returning to the Greeks but rather for a new interpretation of the "line of beauty." Finally, in the 21st century, we have to a large extent lost the sophisticated awareness of the aesthetics of the embodied self that Winckelmann saw in the Greeks and that could be still seen in Herder. Somaesthetics, as developed by Shusterman and the many thinkers in several disciplines who have been inspired by him, attempts to rectify this loss.

Notes

- ¹ Richard Shusterman "Winckelmann on Taste: A Somaesthetic Perspective," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76: 2 (2018): 175-186. Shusterman addresses Baumgarten in his early "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57: 3 (1999): 299-313. Herder was strongly influenced both by Baumgarten and by Winckelmann.
- ² For an introduction to the everyday aesthetics see Thomas Leddy. *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Broadview: 2011.)
- ³ John Dewey. *Art as Experience*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1934).
- ⁴ See also Yaoping Gao, "Winckelmann's Haptic Gaze: A Somaesthetic Interpretation" in *Aesthetic Experience and Somaesthetics*, Richard Shusterman (ed.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018).
- ⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder. *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*. (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2002).
- ⁶ Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics: Vol. 1: The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge U. Press, 2014) Chapter 8 "Breaking with Romanticism: From Herder to Moritz." Rachel Zuckert, "Sculpture and Touch: Herder's Aesthetics of Sculpture," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67:3 (2009): 285-299. Zuckert has also published a book on the topic: *Herder's Naturalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).
- ⁷ Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford U. Press, 2009). Chap 7.
- ⁸ Guyer (391) quote from Herder, *Fourth Grove*. However it should be observed that elsewhere in *Fourth Grove* he does apply the concept of beauty to bodies and touch. For example, "The beauty of bodies, as forms, is thus tactile; all aesthetic terms that describe such beauty, regardless of the context in which they are used, derived from touch...." (*Selected Writings*, 210)
- ⁹ Jason Gaiger, translator and editor of *Sculpture*, observes in a footnote that a similar passage in *Fourth Grove* shows that Herder was thinking here of Winckelmann and his description of the *Apollo Belvedere*. (Herder, 107)
- ¹⁰ This is just a thought experiment. I am not suggesting that this is Herder's actual view which is, rather, that sight, hearing and touch are on equal footing.
- ¹¹ Gaiger in his "Introduction" to *Sculpture* observes that in a fragment titled "On the Meaning of Feeling" Herder rejects Descartes: in place of I think therefore I am he asserted "I feel! I am!" (9) which Gaiger takes to mean that "[o]ur embodied, sensuous existence provides the indispensable condition for genuine self-awareness." (9).
- ¹² Quote taken from Gaiger's "Introduction." (25).
- ¹³ I deliberately use the language of John Dewey here. Just as there is an affinity between Shusterman and Herder, so too between Dewey and Herder.
- ¹⁴ Gaiger observes that Herder is "concerned with touch only as it is incorporated into our psychological and imaginative engagement with three-dimensional objects. Literal touching of cold marble or bronze would destroy the constitutive illusion of animate life on which figurative sculpture depends." (18).
- ¹⁵ Another contemporary philosopher who shares many characteristics with Herder including his anti-dualism, his advocacy of the lesser senses, and his attack on disinterestedness, is Arnold Berleant. Berleant, one of the originators of the idea of environmental aesthetics, has also had a profound influence on everyday aesthetics.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Shusterman's defense of the importance of sexual aesthetics. "Asian Ars Erotica and the Question of Sexual Aesthetics", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65:1 (2007).
- ¹⁷ Herder was one of many philosophers who were fascinated by differences between the blind and the sighted. Sometimes this is called Molyneux's problem, after a William Molyneux who had written to John Locke a question about a blind man who learned by touch how to distinguish cubes and spheres: would he be able to recognize these things visually if he regained his sight? (Gaiger, 14-16).
- ¹⁸ "Resting Satyr (Bacchus) at the Louvre". There is also a reconstruction of the same at the Musei Capitolini. These are Figures 7 and 8 in *Sculpture*.

- ¹⁹ Roger Scruton is one of the few contemporary philosophers to address this issue which should, by all rights, be at the center of not only everyday aesthetics but aesthetics in general. *The Soul of the World* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 97.
- ²⁰ William Hogarth. *The Analysis of Beauty*. Ed. Ronald Paulson. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).
- ²¹ See Jason Gaiger. "Introduction" in *Sculpture* for a discussion of the complex history of the writing of the book.
- ²² "Critical Forests: Fourth Grove, on Riedel's Theory of the Beaux Arts" in Johann Gottfried Herder *Selected Writings on Aesthetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) tr. and ed. Gregory Moore. Although in this paper I stress the new importance Herder places on the sense of touch it should be noted that in the Fourth Grove Herder highlights hearing. He speaks of "the supremacy of hearing over the other senses." (250) It is also worth quoting here what he has to say about touch: "Touch, a strong and thorough natural philosopher among the senses, furnishes the most correct, certain, and as it were complete ideas; it is very powerful so that it can excite the passions, but, united with these, it becomes excessive; yet its feeling always remains external. The imagination must, as it were, take the place of touch in order to make it eloquent; for all the imagination's power, it cannot draw touch into its domain. Hearing alone is the most inward, most profound of the senses...though it is not as thorough as touch, neither is it as coarse..." (*Selected Writings*, 250). This stress on the superiority of imagination over touch is not to be found in *Sculpture*.
- ²³ In Fourth Grove he says of taste "What it borrows from the sweet, invigorating, intoxicating, piquant qualities of grace is either mere modifications of touch or, where taste is concerned unfruitful metaphors." (211) See also *Sculpture*, 17.