

S C U L P T U R E

*Some Observations on Shape and Form  
from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*

JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER

*Edited and translated by*

JASON GAIGER

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JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER (1744–1803) was the leading figure of the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement and an innovator in the philosophy of history and culture.

JASON GAIGER is a lecturer in the Department of Art History at the Open University.

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Largely written in the years 1768–70

An incomplete beginning to similar attempts at an anaglyphics,  
optics, acoustics, and so forth

—en! ille in nubibus arcus  
mille trahit varios adverso sole colores

Virgil



## 1

The person blind from birth whom *Diderot* observed<sup>1</sup> imagined the sense of sight to be like an organ upon which the air makes an impression, just as the hand feels the impression of a stick. A mirror he conceived as a device for projecting bodies in relief, but he could not understand how the relief could be felt, and he believed that there would have to be a second device that could uncover the deception caused by the first.<sup>2</sup> He held his keen and accurate sense of touch to be a fully adequate replacement for the sense of sight. He could distinguish the hardness or smoothness of a body no less subtly than a voice by its tone, or than we who can see distinguish colors. He did not therefore envy us our sense of sight, which he could not imagine to himself. If he wished for an increase of his senses, then it would be for longer arms to be able to feel the moon's surface with greater clarity and certainty, and not for eyes to be able to look upon it.

As romantic and overly philosophical as this account may seem, it has been confirmed by others who did not look through *Diderot's* eyes. The blind *Saunderson*,<sup>3</sup> despite his knowledge of mathematics, could not grasp the idea of images upon a surface, which he could only represent to himself by means of devices. He used these rather than numbers to count, replacing the lines and figures of

geometry with tangible bodies. Even the rays of the sun became in his optics fine tangible rods. The image which they produced upon a visible surface meant nothing to him; he considered it an ancillary concept derived from a foreign sense, from another world. The most difficult problem in geometry, the construction of bodies as a whole, was easy for him to demonstrate; but the easiest and most intuitive task for the sighted, the representation of figures upon a surface, was for him the most difficult. Here he had to build upon concepts that were foreign and intangible for him, and he had to speak to the sighted as if they were blind. It was easy for him to conceive a die as composed of six pyramids, but he could represent to himself an octagon upon a surface only by means of a physical octahedron.

The distinction between the sense of sight and the sense of touch—between concepts belonging to surfaces and concepts belonging to physical bodies—is clearest in the case of the blind man to whom *Cheselden*<sup>4</sup> gave back his sight. Even when the man's cataracts were at their worst, he could still distinguish light from dark, and, in strong light, black, white, and scarlet.<sup>5</sup> But his sense of sight was still only a sense of touch. What moved upon his closed eyes were bodies rather than properties of surfaces or colors. Accordingly, after his eyes had been operated on, his sense of sight did not allow him to recognize any of the things that he had previously known through touch. He did not see space, nor could he distinguish even the most diverse objects from one other. Before him, or rather, around him, he saw only a vast painted panel. He was taught to distinguish, to recognize visually, what he had previously known through touch, to transform figures into bodies and bodies into figures. He would learn only to forget again. "That is a cat! That is a dog!" he said. "Now I recognize you and you will not elude me again." But often they did elude him until finally his eye was able to see figures in space as the same letters that had earlier constituted his tactile knowledge of bodies. By confronting rapidly the one with the other he was finally able to *read* the objects around him.

We thought he soon knew what pictures represented, which were shewed to him, but we found afterwards we were mistaken: for about two months after he was couched, he discovered at once, they represented solid bodies; when to that time he considered them only as party-coloured planes, or surfaces diversified with variety of paint; but even then he was no less surprized, expecting the pictures would feel like the things they represented, and was amazed when he found those parts, which by their light and shadow appeared now round and

uneven, felt only flat like the rest: and asked which was the lying sense, feeling or seeing? Being shewn his father's picture in a locket at his mother's watch, and told what it was, he acknowledged a likeness, but was vastly surprized; asking, how it could be, that a large face could be expressed in so little room; saying it should have seemed as impossible to him, as to put a bushel of anything into a pint. At first, he could bear but very little light, and the things he saw, he thought extremely large; but upon seeing things larger, those first seen he conceived less, never being able to imagine any lines beyond the bounds he saw: the room he was in, he said, he knew to be but part of the house, yet he could not conceive that the whole house could look bigger. He knew not the shape of any thing, nor any one thing from another, however different in shape, or magnitude, but upon being told what things were, whose form he before knew from feeling, he would carefully observe, that he might know them again; but having too many to learn at once, he forgot many of them: and (as he said) at first he learned to know, and again forgot a thousand things a day.\*

## 2

What do these strange experiences teach us? 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*. This will appear paradoxical to some, a mere commonplace to others. Howsoever it is received, it is nonetheless true, and important consequences can be shown to follow from it.

What is light able to paint upon our eyes? That which can be painted: *pictures*. As upon the white wall of a camera obscura, pencils of light fall upon the retina of the eye from everything that stands in front of it. But they can only draw what is there—a surface, the most diverse visible objects ranged *alongside one another*. Things lying *behind* one other, solid, heavy objects, can no more be given to the eye than the lover concealed behind a hanging or the miller singing away in his windmill can be painted on a canvas.

\* Smith's *Opticks*. [See editor's note 6.]

The spacious prospect I see before me, with all its various aspects, what is it other than a picture, a surface? The sky that lowers to the ground and the wood that merges into it, the broad expanse of the field and the water close by, the bank of the river, the motif that dominates the entire picture—these are but an image, a panel, a *continuum of things placed alongside one another*. Every object reveals just so much of itself to me as the mirror before me reveals of myself, that is, the figure, the frontal aspect. In order to know that I am more than this I must employ my other senses, or deduce that there is more by means of ideas.

Why should it be a source of astonishment, then, that blind people whose sight is restored see before them nothing but a house of pictures, a colored surface? For none of us would see any more than this were we not able to use other means. A child sees the sky and his cradle, the moon and his wet nurse, as if they were alongside one another, and he reaches out to grasp the moon just as he reaches out to grasp his nurse. To the child everything is a picture upon a panel. Awakening from sleep in the nocturnal twilight, before we fully come to consciousness, a forest and a tree, like proximity and distance, occupy a single ground: we see them as giants close by or as distant dwarves, as phantoms that move toward us, until finally we awake and come to ourselves. Only then do we understand that we have actually *learned* how to see through force of *habit* and by using our *other* senses, above all, by using our sense of touch. A body that we have never recognized as a body by touching it, or the corporeality of which we have not been able to establish by means of its similarity to other objects, would remain to us forever like the rings of Saturn or Jupiter, that is to say, a mere phenomenon, an *appearance*.<sup>7</sup> An ophthalmite<sup>7</sup> with a thousand eyes but without a hand to touch would remain his entire life in Plato's cave<sup>8</sup> and would never have any *concept* of the properties of a physical body.

For what are properties of bodies if not relations to our own body, to our sense of touch? The light that strikes my eye can no more give me access to concepts such as solidity, hardness, softness, smoothness, form, shape, or volume than my mind can generate embodied, living concepts by independent thinking. Birds, horses, and fish do not possess these concepts. Only human beings have them, because alongside reason we possess a hand that can feel and grasp. If we did not have this, if we had no means by which we could confirm the existence of a body for ourselves through our own bodily feeling, we could only infer and guess and dream and fabricate, and we would know nothing for certain. The more we are able to take hold of a body as a body,

rather than staring at it and dreaming of it, the more vital is our feeling for the object, or, as it is expressed in the word itself, our *concept*<sup>9</sup> of the thing.

Go into a nursery and see how the young child who is constantly gathering experience reaches out, grasping, lifting, weighing, touching, and measuring things with both hand and foot, thereby acquiring securely and confidently the most difficult but also the most primary and necessary concepts, such as body, shape, size, space, and distance. These concepts cannot be acquired by teaching or explanation, but only through experience, through exploring and trying things out for oneself. In a few moments the child learns more, and learns it more vividly, more truly and more powerfully, than ten thousand years of mere gaping and verbal explanations could provide. By continually combining his sense of sight with his sense of touch, allowing each to test, extend, enhance, and strengthen the other, he forms his first *judgments*. Mistakes and false conclusions allow him to arrive at the truth, and the more *solidly* he thinks, and learns to think, at this stage, the better foundation he will lay for what perhaps will be the most complex judgments of his life. Here, truly, we have the first school of the mathematical and physical sciences.

It is a tried and tested truth that a blind person who uses his sense of touch to explore the world around him is free of distractions and is able to develop concepts of the properties of bodies that are far more complete than those acquired by the sighted, who must glide across on a beam of light. With his limited, obscure, but infinitely practiced sense of touch and his method of slowly but surely making out concepts, he is able to judge the form and living presence of things far more subtly than the sighted, from whom everything flees like a shadow. There are blind people who model in wax who are far more accomplished than their sighted counterparts,<sup>10</sup> and I have yet to encounter a single example of someone who was deprived of one sense who was not able to replace it by means of another. *Sight* is replaced through *touch*, luminous color by clearly modeled and enduring *forms*. Thus it is true that "the body seen by the eye remains but a surface, whereas the surface that is touched by the hand is grasped as a body."<sup>11</sup>

Since, however, from childhood on we employ our senses in close union and cooperation with one another, they quickly become entwined and fused together. This is particularly true of the most fundamental and the clearest of our senses: *touch* and *sight*. The difficult *concepts*, which at first we make out only gradually and with great effort, begin to be accompanied by *ideas* derived from sight. These ideas then illuminate what previously we had understood only obscurely. We become

accustomed to taking in with a single glance what originally we *had to* make out gradually by touch. When our hand encounters a body, its image is at the same time projected onto our eye; our mind connects the two together and the swift idea proper to seeing runs ahead of the slow concept proper to touching. We believe we see something when in fact we touch it and where only touch is appropriate. Eventually, we see so much and with such rapidity that we no longer feel things, even though our sense of touch remains the solid foundation and guarantor of seeing. In all of these cases *sight* is but an *abbreviated form of touch*. The rounded *form* becomes a mere *figure*, the *statue* a flat *engraving*. Sight gives us *dreams*, touch gives us *truth*.

That this is so we can see from cases in which the two senses have been separated from one other and have had to start all over again in a new medium in which they must learn anew how to work together. If a stick appears broken in water and I reach for it in the wrong place, we cannot speak of a deception of the senses. For I cannot seek to *grasp* a *ray of light*. What I saw was true, a real image upon a real surface. It is only that what I sought to grasp was not true, for who would seek to grasp a picture upon a surface? From their earliest youth, our senses of sight and touch have been educated together as sisters, helping each other with their chores and often taking over completely the other's work. The same is the case here except that one of the sisters has led the other into error. Previously they had worked together on land, but now they must operate in water, a different element in which they are not practiced and which alters the refraction of light. A water sprite would have grasped the stick more accurately.

A further example from the case we recounted earlier: "The blind person cured by Cheselden saw a painting at first only as a colored surface; but as the figures separated out and he came to recognize them, he reached out to touch them as if they were bodies." This seems strange, but it is a frequent and wholly natural occurrence. A child, with his unpracticed eye, sees a painting as a mere colored surface more often than one would imagine. As long as the figures remain attached to the surface, he cannot explain the shadow here, the stripe there. He stares intently. Then, however, the figures start to come to life. Is it not as if they *emerge* from the surface and become *shapes*? The child becomes aware of their *presence* and tries to *grasp hold of them*: the dream becomes *truth*. The greatest passion and delight brings about that which ignorance had earlier achieved. Here is the triumph of the painter! Through the painter's magical deception, what is seen can now be touched, just as the painter transforms what is touched into something seen.

I do not think it is necessary to amass yet further examples in order to demonstrate something that is so self-evident: "the sense of sight has access only to surfaces, images, and figures on a plane, whereas bodies and the forms of bodies depend upon our sense of touch."<sup>12</sup> Let us see why we have followed this line of speculation for so long. What do we hope to gain from this distinction?

It seems to me we stand to gain a great deal. For the establishment of a *fundamental law* and the *distinction of two separate realms* proper to two different yet confused senses cannot be considered a matter of empty speculation. Were all the concepts we employ in the sciences and the arts to be traced back to their *origin*, or were we able to do so, we would be able to separate what has become fused together and to unify what has become separated, things which, in that great confusion we term *life*, cannot be ordered. Since all our concepts either begin with Man or tend toward him, it is close to this center, and to the way in which Man thinks and acts, that we will discover the source of the greatest errors and the most visible truth. We must find it here or we shall not find it anywhere! I shall restrict my discussion to just two of the senses and to a single concept—the concept of *beauty*.

The term *Schönheit* (beauty) derives from the words *Schauen* (to behold) and *Schein* (appearance). Beauty can most easily be understood and appreciated in terms of *Schauen*, that is, through *schöner Schein* (beautiful appearance).<sup>13</sup> Nothing is faster, clearer, more dazzlingly brilliant than the light of the sun and our eyes carried upon its wing. A world of external things ranged alongside one another is revealed in an instant. Since this world does not disappear as do sounds, but endures and invites *contemplation*, and since the fine rays of the sun color everything so beautifully and reveal it so distinctly, is it any wonder that our doctrine of psychology chooses to borrow many of its terms from this sense? For psychology, to know is to *see*, and its greatest pleasure is *beauty*.

It cannot be denied that we see a great deal from these heights and that many things are rendered clear, luminous, and distinct. Sight is the most artificial, the most philosophical of the senses. Polished and corrected through the most refined exercises, inferences, and comparisons, it cuts with the ray of the sun. If we succeeded in "deriving" from this sense alone a true *phenomenology* of the *beautiful* and the *true*, we should already have achieved a great deal.

Nonetheless, we would not thereby have achieved everything and certainly not what is most fundamental, simple, and primary. The oper-

ation of the sense of sight is flat; it plays and glides across the surface of things with images and color. So much is compressed together and arrayed before it that it can never be used to arrive at the ground of things. It borrows from and builds upon the other senses, taking over from them the *ancillary concepts*<sup>14</sup> that provide it with its *foundation* and then simply bathing them in light. If we do not seek to understand the concepts it borrows from the other senses, if we do not seek to grasp shape and form in their originary mode instead of merely *envisaging* them, the theory of the beautiful and the true that we have based on the sense of sight will be left floating in the air and drift off like a soap bubble. A theory of beautiful *forms* derived from a theory of *optics* is like a theory of *music* derived from our sense of *taste*. "Now I understand the color scarlet," declared the blind person. "It is like the sound of a trumpet."<sup>15</sup> In just the same way, many treatises of aesthetics glide from one sense to another, so that in the end the reader loses all sense of orientation.

The fine arts are generally classified in accordance with our two principal senses: *sight* and *hearing*.<sup>16</sup> The first of these protagonists provides everything that is wanted, even if it is not asked for: *surfaces, forms, colors, shapes, statues, paintings, reliefs, apparel, costumes*. That statues can be seen no one doubts. But we are entitled to ask whether the originary determination of the notion of beautiful form can in fact be derived from the sense of sight. Does the concept of form recognize sight as its origin and as its highest judge? This should not merely be doubted, but vehemently denied. A creature that is nothing but an eye, indeed, an Argus with a hundred eyes,<sup>17</sup> may look upon a statue for a hundred years and examine it from every side; but if it is without a hand with which to touch, or at least able to sense its own touching, if it possesses only the eye of a bird and is all beak, gaze, pinion, and claw, it will never have anything more than a bird's-eye view. The living, embodied truth of the three-dimensional space of angles, of form and volume, is not something we can learn through *sight*. This is all the more true of the essence of sculpture, *beautiful form* and *beautiful shape*, for this is not a matter of color, or of the play of proportion and symmetry, or of light and shadow, but of *physically present, tangible truth*. 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. Sight destroys beautiful sculpture rather than creating it; it transforms it into planes and surfaces, and rarely does it not transform the beautiful fullness, depth, and volume of sculpture into a mere play of mirrors. It is impossible, then, that sight can be the *mother of this art*.

Consider the lover of art sunk deep in contemplation who circles restlessly around a sculpture.<sup>18</sup> 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? He moves from one spot to another, seeking rest but finding none. He cannot locate a single viewpoint from which to view the work, such as a painting provides, for a thousand points of view are not sufficient. As soon as a single rooted *viewpoint* takes precedence, the living work becomes a mere canvas and the beautiful rounded form is dismembered into a pitiful *polygon*. For this reason, he shifts from place to place: his eye becomes his hand and the ray of light his finger, or rather, his soul has a finger that is yet finer than his hand or the ray of light. With his soul he seeks to *grasp* the image that arose from the arm and the soul of the artist. Now he has it! The illusion has worked; the sculpture lives and his soul *feels* that it lives. His soul speaks to it, not as if his soul sees, but as if it touches, as if it feels. A cold description of a statue no more offers us appropriate ideas than would a pictorial representation of music; better to leave it be and pass by.

If there are those whose enthusiasm I forgive, then they are the lover of art and the artist; for without this enthusiasm there would be no art lover and no artist. The wretched fool who sits in front of his model and sees everything smooth and flat, the poor idiot who stands before a living person and is aware of only a colored surface, these are mere daubers, not artists. If the figures are to emerge from the canvas, if they are to grow, to come alive, to speak, and to act, they must first appear as such to the artist and be felt by him to be so. *Phidias* was inspired to paint the God of Thunder by what he read in Homer.<sup>19</sup> From Jupiter's head and from his tumbling locks of hair came the power to approach the gods and to embrace them in love and majesty. The sculptor of Hercules, *Apollonius Nestorides*, felt the conqueror of giants, felt his breast, his flanks, his arms, his entire body.<sup>20</sup> In creating his gladiator *Agasias* likewise felt his every tendon and sinew and abandoned himself to all his force and power.<sup>21</sup> If artists such as these may not speak with enthusiasm, who else can dare to do so? They spoke fully through their work and then withdrew in silence: the lover of art responds and creates after their example. Submerged in the expanse and sea of life, he stammers out what has overcome him. In general,

the *closer* we approach an object, the more *alive* our language becomes. The more vital our feeling for an object *from afar*, the more we sense the weight of the space that intervenes and the more everything in us surges forward to meet it. Pity the lover who gazes upon his beloved from a distance as if she were an image on a surface and for whom this suffices! Pity the sculptor of an Apollo or a Hercules who has never embraced the body of an Apollo, who has never touched, even in a dream, the breast or the back of a Hercules. Truly from *nothing*, there can arise only *nothing*: the ray of light, touching nothing, can never become the warm, creative hand.

#### 4

If we are to allow ourselves to speak about *works of art* and to *philosophize about art*, then our philosophy must at least be exact and, where possible, reach to the *simplest concepts*. When it was still fashionable to philosophize about the fine arts, I sought to discover the *specific concept* by which *beautiful forms* and *beautiful colors*, that is to say, *sculpture* and *painting*, could be *distinguished* from one another—but I could not find it.\* Sculpture and painting are always confused with one another; they are placed under a *single sense*, under a *single organ* of the soul, which is supposed to respond to and to create the same beauty in both. A *single type* of beauty is recognized, which *operates* through the *same natural signs*,<sup>23</sup> placed alongside one another in the same physical space, the one on surfaces, the other in forms. I confess that I understand but little of this. If two art forms belong to the domain of a *single sense*, they must be bound by the *same subjective laws* of truth and beauty, for they enter through the same portal, just as they both must leave by it, both existing only for a *single sense*. Painting should be able to sculpt, and sculpture to paint, as much as each will, and the result must be *beautiful!* Both are supposed to serve a single sense and to raise a single aspect of our soul! Nothing can be falsier than this! I have closely considered both art forms and have found that no *single law*, no observation, no effect of the one fits the other without some difference or delimitation. I have discovered that the more something is *proper* to a particular art form, and the more *native* it is to the

\* Falconet's *Reflections on Sculpture* (translated in the Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste, vol. 1, pt. 1) is an excellent discussion of this problem by an artist whose goal is not at all to draw the boundaries of these two arts in a way that is appropriate to philosophy. [See editor's note 22.]

most powerful effects of that art, the less it can be simply carried over and applied to a different art form without the most dreadful consequences. I have found wretched examples of this in the execution of art works, but it is incomparably worse in the theory and philosophy of the arts in question, which is often written by those who know nothing about either art or science. Here everything is mixed up in a curious way. The two art forms are regarded not as sisters or half-sisters but simply as a *doubled unity*, and no nonsense is said about the one that is not also imposed upon the other. From this arises that miserable criticism, that wretched attempt to impose *ensorious* and *restrictive* rules, that bittersweet nonsense about *universal* beauty that corrupts the young and appalls the master craftsman, but which is taken up in the mouths of the discriminating masses as if it were true wisdom. Finally, I arrived at my own idea of the matter, which seemed to me so true and to conform so accurately to the nature of our senses and to these two art forms, and to a hundred other aspects of our experience, that I was able to use it like a subjective boundary stone to distinguish in the most subtle way between these two *arts* and their corresponding *rules* and *effects*. I discovered a point from which I could identify what was proper and what was foreign to each of them, what was a source of potential and what a hindrance, what was a dream and what the truth. It was as if I had acquired a *sense* that could allow me, fearfully and from a distance, to glimpse the nature of beauty, where . . . but I say too much and too soon. Here is the bare outline of how, in my opinion, the different *arts of beauty* are related to one another.

We have one sense that perceives *external* things *alongside one another*, a second that perceives things *in succession*, and a third that perceives things *in depth*. These senses are *sight, hearing, and touch*.<sup>24</sup>

Things *alongside one another* constitute a *surface*. Things *in succession* in their purest and simplest form constitute *sounds*. Things *in depth* are *bodies* or *forms*. Thus we have distinct senses for surfaces, sounds, and forms; and when it comes to beauty, we have three senses relating to three different *genres of beauty* that must be distinguished from one another just as we distinguish *surfaces, sounds, and bodies*. If there exist forms of art for which the proper domain is to be found in one of these species of beauty, then we know both their internal and external fields of application: on the one hand, *surfaces, sounds, and bodies*; on the other, *sight, hearing, and touch*. These limits or boundaries are imposed by *Nature* herself. They are not a matter of convention or agreement, and no decision can be made to alter them without *Nature* taking her revenge. Music which would paint, painting which would create sound, a sculptor who would employ color, a painter who

would carve stone—all these are monstrosities irrespective of whatever effects they produce. All three arts are related to one another as *surface, sound, and body*, or as *space, time, and force*, the three great media of all-embracing Creation itself, through which they encompass and delimit everything there is.

Let us now consider a second consequence, which concerns the way in which *sculpture* and *painting* are related to each other in general.

If painting is the art that is directed to the eye, and if it is true that the eye can only perceive *surfaces*, that it sees *everything* as a plane or a picture, then a painting is indeed a *tabula*, a *tavola*, a *tableau*,<sup>25</sup> an image on a panel on which the artist's creation appears like a dream, in which everything depends upon *appearance*, upon things placed *alongside one another*. It is here that invention and composition, unity and multiplicity begin and here that they return, together with the further litany of artistic terms. No matter how many volumes and chapters may be written on the subject, the artist can see easily that this follows from a *very simple principle*, that is, from the *nature of his art*. Here is the artist's royal command, beyond which he need acknowledge no other, the divine goddess to whom he pays homage. Once engaged in the faithful execution of his work, all philosophy on this subject must appear to him as something so *elementary* and so *simple* that it does not merit so much discussion.

Sculpture creates *in depth*. It creates *one* living thing, an animate *work* that *stands there* and endures. Sculpture cannot imitate shadows or the light of dawn, it cannot imitate lightning or thunder, rivers or flames any more than the feeling hand can grasp them. But why on this account should these subjects be denied to the painter? The painter follows another law, possesses different powers and a different vocation; why should he not be able to paint the *great panel of nature* in all its different *aspects*, in its *vast, beautiful visibility*? And with what magic he does so! Those who hold landscape painting, the depiction of the great *unity* of created nature, in low esteem, belittling its achievements and even, with ludicrous pretensions, forbidding its practice, lack wit. A painter who is forbidden to be a painter? A descriptive artist who is forbidden to describe? The painter is required to turn out sculptures with his brush and to embellish them with color as the true taste for antiquity would have it. It is considered ignoble to depict the panel of Creation, as if the sky and the earth were something worse and of less importance than the cripple who drags himself between them, whose effigy is, by force, to be made the *sole* subject worthy of painting.

Sculpture creates *beautiful forms*. It forms *shapes in depth* and *places* the object *there before us*. Of necessity, it must create that which

merits such presentation and which possesses *independent existence*. It cannot gain anything by placing objects *alongside one another*, so that one object assists another and the *whole* profits thereby. For in sculpture the *one object* is the whole and the whole is *one object*. If this object is unworthy, lifeless, ill-chosen, irrelevant, all the worse for the marble and chisel! Nothing is gained from sculpting toads and frogs or rocks and mattresses if they do not serve some higher work as accessories without raising any *claim* to be the principal subject. What sculpture should create, and what it has succeeded in creating, are forms in which the living soul animates the entire body, forms in which art can compete in the task of representing the *embodied soul*—that is to say, gods, human beings, and noble animals. But whoever, driven by the high idealistic rigor of this law, seeks to impose it on *depiction*, on the *painter of the great panel of nature*, such a person is obliged to ask himself how he would go about fulfilling his own command.

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. It can transport me, making other moments present, and, like an angel robed in light, lead me away with it. But the impression made by the one is quite different from that made by the other. The ray of light wanes; it is *brilliance, image, thought, color*. I can think of no theorist, no humanly responsive one, who can believe that these two things derive from a *single ground*.

Let us now consider some other questions that are often presented as a form of altercation between these two arts. They have in general been poorly answered, but from the viewpoint we have established they become as clear as the light of day.



## TITLE AND EPIGRAPHS

• “Pygmalion’s Creative Dream.” The story of Pygmalion is best known through the version told by Ovid (43 BC–AD 17) in his *Metamorphoses* (10.243–97). Pygmalion, a legendary king of Cyprus, carved a figure out of ivory and then fell in love with his own work. In response to his prayers, the goddess Venus allowed the statue to come to life under his touch. The myth enjoyed great popularity in the eighteenth century and was the subject of numerous retellings, including paintings, engravings, and an opera by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) that received its first performance in Paris in 1770. As Oskar Bätschmann has shown, this upsurge of popularity took place at a time when a new concept of art was beginning to take hold, one that emphasized the importance of the viewer’s emotional response as a means of animating the work, or “bringing it to life.” In contrast to the distanced contemplation of the antiquarian or the connoisseur, the appropriately responsive art lover was enjoined to enter into a more intimate relation to the object of his or her admiration. The myth of Pygmalion, who falls in love with and then succeeds in bringing to life the statue he so fervently admires, was represented as a paradigm of the ideal relation between viewer and work. See Bätschmann, “Pygmalion als Betrachter.” In the course of the eighteenth century the Pygmalion myth took on a further significance through its incorporation into philosophical discussions concerning the relation of matter and spirit. In 1742, the French philosopher Boureau-Deslandes (1690–1757) published his *Pygmalion ou la statue animée*, in which he interpreted the myth in anti-Cartesian terms as revealing the co-emergence of thought and sensibility. Materialist and sensualist philos-

ophers such as La Mettrie (1709–51) and Condillac (1715–80) continued this practice and drew on the story of Pygmalion in order to oppose dualistic conceptions of the relation between the mind and the body. For a detailed discussion of the reception of the Pygmalion myth, see Blühhm, *Pygmalion*.

- “Τί καλλος; ἐρώτησα τυφλοῦ.” Greek: “What is the beautiful? The question of a blind man,” adapted from Diogenes Laertius (active first half of the third century AD), *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 5.20. In answer to the question, “Why do we devote so much time to the beautiful?” Aristotle replies, “That is the question of a blind man.” The sensory experiences of the blind form the starting point for Herder’s own reflections on art and beauty. The implication is that we stand to learn a great deal about beauty by asking someone who is blind.

- “anaglyphics.” An anaglyph is an ornament in low relief; anaglyphics is thus the science or study of low reliefs. Herder had already begun to investigate the senses as the basis for understanding the arts in the fourth of his *Kritische Wälder* [Critical Groves], written in 1769 but published only posthumously, in 1846.

- “en! ille in nubibus arcus/mille trahit varios adverso sole colores.” Latin: “Look! an arc in the sky that darts a thousand shifting tints athwart the sun,” Virgil (70–19 BC), *Aeneid*, 5:88–89.—Herder added the first three words.

## PART ONE

1. Denis Diderot (1713–84) published his *Lettre sur les aveugles, à l’usage de ceux qui voient* [Letter on the blind, for the use of those who can see] in London in 1749. There he gives an account of his visit to a congenitally blind man in the town of Puisseaux, some forty miles from Paris. See Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 1:139–85, especially pp. 140–47. A partial English translation of this essay appears in Morgan, *Molyneux’s Question*.

2. The blind man Diderot questioned describes a mirror as a “device that puts things into relief at a distance, as long as they are placed in the appropriate position. It is like my hand, which does not need to touch an object in order to feel it” (Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 1:141). When the blind man is unable to feel the “relief copy” made by the mirror, however, he declares: “Here is a device that brings the two senses into conflict; a more perfect device would perhaps bring them into agreement, except that, even then, the objects would not be any more real; perhaps a third device that was even more perfect and less deceiving would make them disappear and would make us realise the error” (*ibid.*, 1:141–42).

3. Nicholas Saunderson (1682–1739) became Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge and a Fellow of the Royal Society despite being blind since infancy. His *Elements of Algebra in ten Books* (1740) contains a theory of “palpable arithmetic” based on tactile experience of space and number. Herder’s information on Saunderson is largely taken from Diderot’s *Lettre sur les aveugles*, where Saunderson’s ideas are discussed at length. According to Diderot, Saunderson used the same device both for calculations and for drawing rectilinear figures. His calculating machine employed a system by which digits could be represented by placing one or more pegs in a matrix of holes.

In order to represent geometrical figures, Saunderson linked pegs together with silk thread so as to construct “palpable or tangible symbols.” See Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 1:152–72.

4. William Cheselden (1688–1752) was an English surgeon and the author of *The Anatomy of the Human Body* (1713). He was the first to carry out an iridectomy (removal of part of the iris). In 1728 he published a report of an operation to remove a cataract from the eye of a thirteen-year-old boy in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* entitled “An account of some observations made by a young gentleman, who was born blind, or lost his sight so early, that he had no remembrance of ever having seen, and was couch’d between 13 and 14 years of age.” Herder’s account of the case is taken from Robert Smith’s *A Compleat System of Opticks* (1738), where Cheselden’s report is cited verbatim.

5. Cf. the following passage of Cheselden’s report: “Though we say of this gentleman that he was blind, as we do of all people who have ripe cataracts, yet they are never so blind from that cause, but that they can discern day from night; and for the most part in a strong light, distinguish, black, white, and scarlet, but they cannot perceive the shape of any thing: for the light by which these perceptions are made, being let in obliquely through the aqueous humour, or the anterior surface of the crystalline (by which the rays cannot be brought into a focus upon the retina) they can discern in no other manner, than a sound eye can through a glass of broken jelly, where a great variety of surfaces so differently refract the light, that the several distinct pencils of rays cannot be collected by the eye into their proper foci; wherefore the shape of an object in such a case, cannot be at all discerned, though the colour may” (Smith, *A Compleat System of Opticks*, vol. 1, bk. 1, pp. 42–43).

6. Herder takes this lengthy citation from Cheselden’s report from the German edition of Smith’s *A Compleat System of Opticks*, translated by Abraham Gotthelf Kästner (*Vollständiger Lehrbegriff der Optick* [Altenburg, 1755]). I have given the corresponding passages from Smith’s work, which the German translation faithfully follows. The passages in Smith, the order of which Herder has changed somewhat, are in vol. 1, bk. 1, pp. 42–43.

7. “Ophthalmite” is Herder’s coinage, based on the Greek word for “eye”: *ophthalmos*.

8. Plato’s analogy of the cave appears in the *Republic* (7:514a–18b). The cave dwellers have fetters on their necks and legs that constrain them to look forward. All they can see are the shadows of objects cast on the wall in front of them.

9. Herder plays on the sense of seizing or taking hold of something carried by the German word *Begriff* [concept]. Together with the cognate verb *begreifen* [to understand], *Begriff* is etymologically related to *greifen* [to grip or take hold of something] and *Griff* [the grip, grasp]. The English word “concept” enjoys a similar relation to the Latin verb *concipio*, which means both (1) to take hold of something and (2) to comprehend or think. The substantive *conceptus* describes both (1) a catching or taking hold of something and (2) a thought or idea in the mind.

10. The most celebrated example of a blind person who modeled in wax was the sculptor Giovanni Francesco Gonnelli (1603–64). Born in the town of

Gambassi, in Tuscany, he is sometimes referred to as “Gambassi the Blind.” Despite losing his sight during the Austrian siege of Mantua in 1632, Gonnelli returned to sculpture, working in malleable materials such as wax and clay. He was particularly admired for his portrait busts, including a bust of Urban VIII, and his work excited considerable interest among his contemporaries. The French art theorist Roger de Piles (1635–1709) discussed his work in *Dialogue sur les coloris* (Paris, 1673, 19–23). One of the participants in the dialogue reports asking Gambassi “if he did not see a little, to copy so exactly as he did? He reply’d that he saw nothing at all, and that his Eyes were at his Fingers Ends. . . . My way is this; I feel my Original again and again; I attentively examine the Dimensions, the Risings and the Fallings; I imprint them on my Memory; then I take my Wax and by the Comparison which I make of one and the other by carrying my Hand [back and forth] several times, I finish my Work in the best manner I can” (*Dialogue upon Colouring*, trans. John Ozell [London: Daniel Brown, 1711], 13).

11. This is not a quotation from another author. Herder employs quotation marks to emphasize his own formulation.

12. Again, Herder employs quotation marks to emphasize his own formulation.

13. Herder’s attempt to establish the etymology of the German term for beauty (*Schönheit*) in the words for “beholding” (*Schauen*) and “appearance” (*Schein*) is generally thought to be incorrect. It does not find any correlation in English.

14. The term Herder employs is *Hilfsbegriffe*. This appears to be his own coinage. Translated literally, it means “help-concepts.” It is employed here to refer to concepts that are taken over from the other senses and that are no longer used in their primary context.

15. See John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 4, chap. 1, sect. 11. Locke argues that the “simple idea” of an object can only be gained through the appropriate sense, or “inlet,” of the body. In order to know the taste of a pineapple, we must actually taste it; mere words or definitions cannot substitute for experience. Nor can ideas specific to any one sense be known through any another. This is demonstrated by the story of a blind man who claimed to know what scarlet was, but declared it to be “like the Sound of a Trumpet.”

16. In his *Laokoön: oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* [Laocoön: or on the limits of poetry and painting], published in Berlin in 1766, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81) sought to identify the different laws governing painting and poetry by relating these two arts to the senses of sight and hearing, respectively. In what follows, Herder takes up Lessing’s distinction between poetry as the art of “things that follow each other in time” and painting as the art of “things that coexist in space,” but adds to it a third, “things that exist in depth.” In doing so, he criticizes Lessing’s assumption that the generic term “painting” can be used to describe the visual arts in general. For Herder, what is needed is not a two-fold distinction between poetry and painting, but a three-fold distinction between poetry, painting, and sculpture.

17. In Greek mythology, Argus is said to have possessed one hundred eyes. He was charged by Juno with watching over the mortal Io, whom Jupiter had transformed into a heifer. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1:622–723.

18. A corresponding passage in the fourth of Herder's *Critical Groves* reveals that he is primarily thinking here of the German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) and his celebrated description of the statue of the Apollo Belvedere (fig. 1) in Rome. See Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, 4:65–66. Winckelmann's sensual and imaginative engagement with works of art, expressed in highly poeticized language, did much to stimulate the new enthusiasm for Greek art and culture. His description of the Apollo Belvedere was published in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (Dresden, 1764), 2:392–94). It appears in English in the translation of the second edition of 1776 by G. Henry Lodge, *History of Ancient Art*, 2:312–14.

19. Phidias (active c. 490–430 BC) is the most highly regarded sculptor of the Attic school. He is generally held to be responsible for supervising the design of the sculptures on the Parthenon, though this is now a subject of dispute. Herder refers to his late masterpiece, the colossal cult statue of Zeus (Jupiter), made for the god's temple at Olympia. Incorporating gold, ivory, glass, ebony, and hardstones, it was held to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Today it is known only through pictures on coins and the written testament of Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, 5.11.1–11), who describes a figure made of gold and ivory, seated on an ebony throne, wearing a mantle and an olive wreath; Zeus carries a figure of Nike (victory) in his right hand and a scepter topped by an eagle in his left. The source for Herder's claim that Phidias was inspired by Homer is the *Geographica* of Strabo (c. 60 BC–AD 20), 8.3.30. Strabo maintains that Phidias created his likeness of Zeus after the description in Homer's *Iliad*: "He spoke, the son of Kronos, and nodded his head with the dark brows, / and the immortally anointed hair of the great god / swept from his divine head, and all Olympus was shaken" (1.528–30). The same argument is taken up by Lessing in chapter 22 of *Laocöon*: "Phidias confessed that the lines [from Homer] served him as a model for his Olympian Jupiter, and that it was only through Homer's help that he succeeded in producing a divine countenance, *propemodum ex ipso coelo petitum* (almost brought down from heaven itself)" (p. 118).

20. An inscription on the base of the Belvedere Torso (fig. 2) in the Vatican Museum in Rome identifies it as the work of Apollonius, an Attic sculptor active in the first century BC. The massiveness of the figure and the fact that it is seated on an animal skin (thought to be that of a lion) led many experts, including Winckelmann, to interpret it as a Hercules. The Torso was particularly admired by Michelangelo, and for this reason is sometimes known as "the school of Michelangelo." Winckelmann published *Beschreibung des Torso im Belvedere zu Rom* [Description of the Torso in the Belvedere in Rome] in 1759, parts of which were subsequently incorporated into his *History of Ancient Art*. Herder's description of Hercules as a "giant conqueror" follows Winckelmann: "In that powerfully developed chest we behold in imagination the breast against which the giant Geryon was squeezed" (pp. 264–65). For the reception history of the statue, see Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, no. 80, pp. 311–14.

21. Agasias of Ephesos signed the marble statue of the so-called Borghese Gladiator (fig. 3), now in the Louvre in Paris. The statue was particularly admired for its truthful rendering of anatomy. Winckelmann praised its “truth to nature” in the “Erläuterungen” appended to the second edition of his *Gedanken von der Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* [Reflections on the imitation of Greek works in painting and sculpture], published in Dresden in 1756 (reprinted in Winckelmann, *Kleine Schriften*, 108). In the notes incorporated into the second edition of his *History of Ancient Art*, he argued that the statue was wrongly thought to depict a gladiator and that it was more likely to be of a warrior who had specially distinguished himself (see 2:312). This issue was taken up once again by Lessing in chapter 28 of *Laocoön*. The statue is now thought to be a Roman copy of a Greek original of c.100–75 BC. For the reception of the work, see Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, no. 43, pp. 221–24.

22. Étienne Maurice Falconet (1716–91) was one of the foremost French sculptors of the mid-eighteenth century. He is best known for his small-scale pieces in marble and for the models he produced for the Sèvres porcelain factory. However, he is also renowned for his monumental equestrian monument to Peter the Great in St. Petersburg, executed during his long stay in Russia between 1766 and 1778. His *Réflexions sur la sculpture* was presented as a lecture to the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1760. It was published in Paris in 1761 and was subsequently incorporated into Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* as the article “Sculpture.” Herder’s footnote refers the reader to the German translation, which appeared in 1765. Falconet identifies a series of differences between sculpture and painting: first, sculpture does not have “the advantage of shades, of backgrounds, of rounding, and of foreshortenings”; second, it has “as many points of view as there are points of space around it”; third, the sculptor must use his imagination to overcome “the disgust which the mechanism, the fatigue and the slowness of his operations must necessarily occasion”; finally, the sculptor is “deprived of the seducing charm of colours.” See Falconet, “Reflexions on Sculpture,” 14. Herder himself first sought to distinguish between the different arts on the basis of the contribution of the senses in the fourth of his *Critical Groves*, written in 1769 but not published until 1846.

23. The distinction between “natural signs,” which possess an iconic resemblance to that which they represent, and “arbitrary signs,” which possess a merely conventional connection, was first introduced by the Abbé Du Bos (1670–1742) in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, published in Paris in 1719. Du Bos observes that “the signs with which painters address us, are not arbitrary or instituted, such as words employed in poetry. Painting makes use of natural signs, the energy of which does not depend on education. They draw their force from the relation which nature herself has fixed between our organs and external objects in order to attend to our preservation” (Du Bos, *Critical Reflections*, vol.1, sect. 40, p. 322). In Germany, the distinction between natural and artificial signs was taken up by Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), who used it as the basis for a taxonomy of the arts in his “Betrachtungen über die Quellen und Verbindungen der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften” [Observations on the sources and interconnections of the fine

arts and sciences], first published in 1757 (reprinted in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1). Lessing also employs this distinction in chapter 17 of *Laocoön*.

24. Again, Herder is drawing on and taking issue with Lessing's *Laocoön* (see note 16 above). In chapter 16, the theoretical heart of the treatise, Lessing outlines his position as follows: "I reason thus: if it is true that in its imitations painting uses completely different means or signs than does poetry, namely figures and colours in space rather than articulated sounds in time, and if these signs must indisputably bear a suitable relation to the thing signified, then signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive./Objects or parts of objects which exist in space are called bodies. Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting./Objects or parts of objects which follow one another are called actions. Accordingly, actions are the true subject of poetry" (p. 78).

25. Herder gives the Latin, Italian, and French terms for "painting" in order to make clear the connection between the painted image and the surface or "table." The German term, translated here as "image on a panel," is *Bildertafel*.

## PART TWO

1. In *History of Ancient Art*, Winckelmann interpreted the statue of the Apollo Belvedere (fig. 1) as showing the god in the moment after his victory over the giant serpent, Python (2:313). Ovid describes Apollo's slaying of the serpent "with a thousand arrows" (*Metamorphoses*, 1.438–51). The statue was termed the Apollo Belvedere after it was installed in the Vatican's Belvedere Courtyard early in the sixteenth century. It is now thought to be a Roman copy of a Greek original of c. 330 BC. For its reception history, see Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, no. 8, pp. 148–51.

2. A statue of Laocoön and his sons wrestling with a serpent (fig. 4) was discovered in Rome in 1506 and was quickly identified as the work Pliny the Elder (23–79) describes in *Natural History* (36.37). Pope Julius II bought the statue and displayed it in the Vatican's Belvedere Courtyard. Pliny attributes the sculpture to the artists Hagesandrus, Polidorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes. It is now thought to be a Roman copy of c. 20 BC to AD 20, after a Greek original of the mid-second century BC. Virgil tells the story of Laocoön (*Aeneid*, 2.199–24): While officiating at the sacrifice of a bull on the altar of Neptune to mark the apparent withdrawal of the Greeks from their siege of Troy, Laocoön and both his sons are killed by two huge serpents that emerge from the sea. The differences between the statue and Virgil's account were the source of much speculation in the eighteenth century. The expression of emotion in the two works of art received particular attention: whereas Virgil's Laocoön "lifts to heaven hideous cries," the statue was praised for its dignified restraint. In his book *Laocoön*, Lessing took these differences as the starting point for a sustained meditation on the respective limits imposed by the different media of poetry and painting. For the reception of the sculpture, see Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, no. 52, pp. 243–47.