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Herder's Sculptural Thinking

Rowan Bailey

If it was a philosopher who named our century the age of philosophy, perhaps he understood thereby the century of cold Schwärmerei and Schwärmender coldness. [...] The Schwärmer wants to be the greatest philosopher, and the greatest philosopher is the greatest Schwärmer [...] Schwärmerei in abstractions of the head fights the abstractions of sensibility (Empfindung). A human being who wants to be only head is a monster, as is one who wants to be only heart.[1](#)

The language of philosophy, in its written form, can appear cold and abstract to the untrained reader. For Herder, the manifestations of thinking activity should, as a shared common sense, be accessible to everyone. The 'healthy understanding' of a sense-in-common has the potential to serve all humanity. In his 1776 essay 'Philosophie und Schwärmerei', Herder discusses how thought and sensation, the head and the heart, are codependent. As soon as one thinks, one participates in the practical activity of making 'abstractions of sensibility'. Enthusiasm gives philosophical thinking, its compulsion to produce concepts. But, whereas warm enthusiasm engages with matter, whereby the sensory qualities of formation (*Bildung*) - colour, sounds, smells, shape, sensations of heat and cold - give material properties to the things we name, cold enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) manifests itself in an unthinking attitude or behaviour, detached from the heart. We must work hard to maintain a healthy balance between warm and cold enthusiasms. As a form of philosophical practice, thinking is a 'whole way of life'[2](#) but a 'difficult art of living'.[3](#)

Sculptural formations are never far from Herder's philosophy of thinking communities. With his call for a practical doctrine of reason in the pages of *Plastik*, existing cultural forms are reworked by the mediating activity of bodily thinking.[4](#) What we receive we also reinterpret; there is no distinction between what we do and how we think. A physical and material engagement with the world encapsulates his ideal of the beautiful:

The well-proportioned human being is not an abstraction derived from the clouds or composed from learned rules or arbitrary conventions. It is something that can be grasped and felt by all who are able to recognize in themselves or in others the form of life (*Form des Lebens*), the expression of force (*Ausdruck der Kraft*) in the human vessel. Beauty is nothing but the meaning of inner perfection.[5](#)

Does this not make enthusiasm an indeterminate and complex cultural phenomenon? Touching the heat and cold of matter is Herder's approach to the feeling of form. We warm up cold materials but also encounter the dead lifeless matter of stone. These primal experiences are emotive. The stimulation or irritation (*Reiz*) of matter is both pleasurable and painful. If language has the power to transmit feelings, and culture is made with the expressive formations of these experiential encounters, then 'characteristic marks' of the sculptural are not simply inherited descriptors or classificatory signifiers for certain objects; they are the material effects of ongoing thinking activity:

The human being demonstrates reflection when the force of his soul operates so freely that in the whole ocean of sensations (*Ozean von Empfindungen*) which floods the soul through all the senses it can, so to speak, separate off, stop, and pay attention to a single wave (*eine Welle*), and be conscious of its own attentiveness. The human being demonstrates reflection when, out of the whole hovering dream of images which proceed before the senses, he can collect himself into a moment of alertness, freely dwell on a single image, pay it clear, more leisurely heed, and separate off characteristic marks for the fact that it is that object and no

other. Thus he demonstrates reflection when he can not only recognize all the properties in a vivid and clear way, but can in his own mind acknowledge one or several as distinguishing properties.⁶

The act of distinguishing, of undertaking the activity of reflection, of separating off features or properties of the sculptural has to be a harmonious balance between the head and the heart. To take note of all the single waves within a 'whole ocean of sensations' is as a lived experience, part of the process of reflection or 'taking awareness' (*Besinnung*). Language, human thought and culture is a collective process of communication. Herder's use of *Besinnung* as a form of thinking dependent on the senses expands the more restrictive concept of Reflexion. The organic development of historical change from the ground of lived exchanges with others, embodies a philosophical practice of the senses. The 'whole ocean of sensations' is the sensuous commune of the world. When cries are instituted into language, the line of beauty calls forth the muted. In an age of cold *Schwärmerei*, thinking runs the risk of losing touch with sensibility, and with it, a warm enthusiasm derived from our sensorial encounters with matter. So, how does Herder propose to shape a sculptural language for philosophy and with what effects?

Communities of sense

Whereas Kant's structuring of the synthetic a priori shapes a conception of sensus communis (*Gemeinsinn*)⁷, Herder prefers to consider the human being as a 'single thinking sensorium commune' (*ein denkendes sensorium commune*).⁸ by which he means that language, and with it a capacity to reason, is derived from the interconnected relation between all the senses. Feeling (*Gefühl*) is the connective that links sensations together in a chain. Through learning, we come to disassociate the senses; we partition them through our thinking activity and develop a language of 'names' for differentiating our experiences. To become more aware of the 'sensuous sensations in us' (*sinnliche Empfindungen in uns*)⁹ can guide us towards feeling the 'thinking sensorium commune' of our being. The self must never stand abstracted, unreflective and dissociated from others.

In 'On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul', first published in 1778,¹⁰ Herder reinforces the argument laid out in his earlier 1772 text 'Treatise on the Origin of Language'. Thinking, in the form of reason, is a total disposition within all human beings, and language is the medium through which thought and the senses are shaped. Language informs thoughts. Thoughts inform language. We use words to solidify our sensations. We become conscious or aware of ourselves by thinking with and through distinguishing marks. The act of 'taking awareness' (*Besinnung*) is a mode of making that uses language as a tool for the creative processes of thinking; the expressive and emotional character of words stands opposed to the view that distinguishing marks are mere supplements or replacements for pre-existing sensations. As an empiricist, Herder does not think that language is borne out of abstract philosophizing. Rather, concepts are the outcome of the productive activity of translating our perceptual and affective sensations. Feeling is a mode of interpretative activity, which imaginatively shapes sensations into the material imagery of concepts. We not only inherit the tools of language, we also use them, and through usage, participate in the productive activities of shaping and making the

language that we use. 'Abstractions of the head' and 'abstractions of sensibility' are modes of making with the tools of language.

In *The Long Revolution*, first published in 1961, Raymond Williams defines the 'structure of feeling' as the 'culture of the period: it is the particular living results of all the elements in the general organization'.¹¹ More importantly, the 'structure of feeling' is not a universally imposed structure, but experienced uniquely. 'I do not mean' writes Williams, 'that the structure of feeling, anymore than social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities, precisely because it is on it that communication depends'.¹² Communication is an expressive tool for sharing the lived experiences of material culture. The 'structure of feeling' is a particular and unique way of feeding language with the material and social practices of cultural life. Cultural formations undergo transformation through language practice. For Williams then, historical change informs the shifting nature of language and its usage by a given community. Each specific culture is self-contained and develops on its own terms, but from the ground of the communally shared self-expression of the group as a whole. The interdependent relation of part to whole is at the heart of a consideration of the ways in which we give form and shape to our experiences and how existing material forms and shapes in the world, informs what we inherit and how we interpret these inheritances. Thoughts are part of the chain of interrelations between human beings past, present and future. Thinking and inheritance are interrelated. Tracking shifts in the meaning and use of language appeals to the 'structure of feeling' as a mode of knowing distinct from 'social character' or 'pattern of culture'.

Williams discusses Herder in depth in his 1976 dictionary *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*.¹³ Within the entry 'Culture' and following an account of the emergence of the meaning of culture as 'cultivation' and 'civilization' brought about by the European Enlightenment, he introduces Herder as a little-known eighteenth century philosopher who has nevertheless contributed to a radical shift in thinking about *Cultur*, with an attack on the 'civilising' tendencies of State control. For Herder, Enlightenment philosophy's attempts to abstract the world adheres to a rigid method of system building; a deferment from the realm of particulars and the material stuff of life. He stood against the rift of mind from body famously articulated by Descartes' cogito, preferring instead to argue that material relations of the world serve as the foundation for thinking. 'Taking-awareness' (*Besinnung*), is made possible through sensory bodily experience and stands opposed to the abstract forces of metaphysical logic. Herder's attempts to get inside 'feeling' and to experience the past more intimately, shapes his idea of culture and this directs his consideration of history as a process of organic cultural development, rather than as a fixed and static structure with determined ends. Thinking is cultivated, shaped, and informed by customs and rituals, as well as providing new ways of interpreting and making cultural life. Sculptural thinking, as a mode of making, is at the core of both Williams' and Herder's readings of culture as a communally 'lived experience'.

Lexemes of the sculptural - Abstractions of sensibility

Will a practical doctrine of reason ever be written, a philosophical lexicon of language, the senses, and the fine arts that traces each word and each concept back to its origin and uncovers the processes whereby a word or concept is carried over from one sense to another, and from the senses to the mind? Without inquiries of this sort to serve as a guide, everything will remain as it currently is, a labyrinth and chatter of reason.[14](#)

Herder's consideration of the diversity of cultural specificities that constitute world history informs his aesthetic ideal of the art of sculpture. *Plastik* is an ambitious project. Published in 1778, the same year as 'In Cognition and Sensation in the Human Soul', it is a text that offers philosophical practice up as a branch of thinking with and through the cultural and historical transmutations of form. The drive or impulse to shift, adapt, and alter the languages of inheritance is underpinned by the development of sculptural lexemes in Herder's writing and evidences a distinctly different way of thinking from that of his contemporaries.[15](#) A community of the senses that lends itself to a language of the sculptural requires the reflective activity of the senses. Herder's call for 'a philosophical lexicon of language, the senses, and the fine arts',[16](#) is a call to make 'abstractions of sensibility' out of the body's reception, digestion and response to the world. It is the thinking body, enthused by sentiment that allows the 'healthy understanding' of the soul to receive feeling and produce a different kind of language. Approaching language as a tool for creative production, transforms how we come to think, feel and articulate with the body. This hermeneutical engagement with sculpture provides some insights into the practical lexicography of the sculptural. The rhetoric of enthusiasm illustrates those 'abstractions of sensibility' derived from a human striving to achieve a harmonious balance between sensation and intellect. The precariousness of this balance is also Herder's rigorous engagement with *sensus communis*.

Begreifen

The inventory of sculptural lexemes within Herder's writing are primarily oriented around sensory touch encounters with shape, size, volume and material substances. Feeling is a capacity to reflect upon experience to make sense of it. The register of words as signs for things involves the activity of naming things into the space of the world, which in turn communicate back to the senses. Whereas sight-based encounters supplement the three-dimensionality of sculpture with surface impressions, touch helps philosophy to think 'solidly'. It is the touch encounter with works of sculpture that enable concepts of three-dimensionality, form, mass and volume, to take shape in the mind. How we take hold of objects and make sense of them begins in childhood with a desire to grasp and handle material things.

Early on in *Plastik* touch is positioned as the foundation for the development of tactile concepts. What we learn through touch can inform how we see with the eye. We need to touch the properties of bodies to become bodies that think:

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. [...] Only human beings have them, because alongside reason we possess a hand that can feel and grasp.[17](#)

Contained in the word *Begriff*, the German word for concept, is the activity of touching. *Begriff* is linked to the verbs *Begreifen*, 'to understand', *Greifen*, 'to take hold of something', and *Griff*, 'the grip or grasp'. The interrelation between 'taking hold' and the manifestation of a thought or idea conveys how expression is a way to communicate thoughts and feelings in and through the material gestures of the body.¹⁸ The etymology of 'expression' evokes a physical contact with the body in an attempt to impress a meaningful content onto bodily gestures. 'Expression' both presses out a gestural language from the body as well as imprinting around the body the line of language.¹⁹ Herder's use of the word expression (*Ausdruck*) appeals to the communicability of the body itself: 'Beauty, then, is always only the shining through of form, the sensible expression of perfection (*Sinnlicher Ausdruck der Vollkommenheit*) in relation to an end, the surge of life, human health'.²⁰ The power of touch to generate concepts of solidity reveals the experiential dimension that informs and shapes the sculptural lexemes of Herder's philosophy.

The line of touch that weaves its way around the body establishes connections between body parts. Using our imagination, at a distance, we trace with our fingertips an uninterrupted line around a material formation. Forming and feeling is an interconnected activity. The line of beauty as a seamless and continuous flow between parts appears on the surface of three-dimensional forms, and as a way of thinking, it helps us to grasp the concept of a thing, its material life and diverse particularity. Feeling and forming, appeals to the word *Begreifen* as an expression of the ideal of unity in diversity:

If we did not have this [a capacity to reason and a capacity to touch with our bodies], 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 of the thing.²¹

To grasp the concept of a thing is to encounter a fundamental feeling for the life of an object and this register affirms the existence of a body through our own bodily feeling, or responses to other bodies. 'Taking hold' can produce an uplifting enthusiasm for the properties of a thing. Moreover, the sensory ground from which these concepts of materiality develop, allows them to take on a life force of their own. Solid concepts derived from touch encounters with material properties - tactile properties (rough, smooth, hot, cold), haptic properties (solids, three-dimensional shapes, and our grasping of them) and kinaesthetic perceptions (the orientation of our bodies in space and our engagement with spatial objects) - are in Herder's sense of the word, concepts of things. Because we are capable of touching, of engaging in touching activity, we are also capable of participating in a touching community.

Einfühlung

This ideal of community brings *Einfühlung* into contact with the structuring of analogy. The imaginative power of touch activates different forms of life expressed through the human body and is experienced as a flow of energies. For example, *Einfühlung*, the German word for 'empathy', literally translates as 'feeling one's way inside' and underpins Herder's unique approach to empiricism. 'Feeling one's way inside' is a hermeneutic mode of interpretative activity. A text's use of language, including the researcher's own interpretative thinking about texts is inseparable from the materiality of the

imaginative touch encounter. This kind of thinking pushes the analogical drive to treat the eye as if it were a hand:

Consider the lover of art sunk deep in contemplation who circles restlessly around a sculpture. 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 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.²²

The aesthetic encounter that gives place to the analogical process of *Einfühlung* requires the sculptural register of material. Touch encounters with sculpture enables the concept of 'feeling inside' to be activated in the mind, but this is only possible from the ground of thinking analogically. Herder uses the structure of as if to situate oneself inside the space of the 'other', whether that is the mind of another person or a material formation. *Einfühlung* thus carries an energy and motivation for dialogical exchange. Adopting modes of making in the very writing of philosophy marks a shift in thinking about sculpture as a mere object and towards engagements with processes of sculptural production. This shift in register helps us to recognize not only how we are constituted and shaped but also how we in turn constitute, shape and form the world in response. For us to feel empathically, we must participate in the activities of thinking analogically, of considering the imagination as if it were a touching faculty, training the mind to see as if it were touching materials. Empathic understanding is a form of sharing that plays an important role in the process of concretizing concepts. Solid concepts are bound to the objects of material culture; the production of concepts out of material encounters is a way of entering into modes of experience. *Einfühlung* is not simply restricted to the individual aesthetic encounter we have with works of sculpture. It should be a whole way of life, a driving force within a community.

It is with Herder's consideration of sculpture as a tool to assist in the formation and development of an ideal, that Johann Joachim Winckelmann's comments on expression and the ideal of beauty in the *History of Ancient Art* (1764) carry weight. Winckelmann sets out to question the abstract philosophising of beauty on the grounds that it neglects and marginalises the subject matter of artistic production. The ideal of the beautiful is a unification of particulars; a creative production in the mind of a whole, not to be found in nature. Winckelmann writes:

By the Ideal is to be understood merely the highest possible beauty of the whole figure, which can hardly exist in nature in the same high degree in which it appears in some statues.²³

Greek artists for example generate ideal images that bring together forms with a 'nobler progeny, not of this world'.²⁴ The beautiful is thus bound to the ideal produced by the human mind from out of the assimilation and synthesis of particulars. Winckelmann's approach to beauty through the model of classical antiquity, like Herder's, seeks to engage with the expression of the beautiful in actual artistic/cultural productions. Expression brings together mind and body, comprehends action in and through the features of the body. This shows how far an idea of beauty can never have a clear identity as such. It is rather that abstract conceptions of beauty now represented in bodily shape comment on the ways in which human life cannot be objectified as an abstraction of the head and must be played out through expressive actions. In this respect, the ideal is determinate, that is, it has a specific relationship to the realm of particulars.

Herder's attempts to bridge the gap between art and life promotes aesthetics as the key to the development of a theory of knowledge grounded in the psychological-physiological forces of human experience. Formation (*Bildung*) as an activity of making conveys the theme of expression, to the representation, mediation and transformation involved in the process of giving 'shape' to feeling. The interconnected relationship between impression and expression is a life-giving activity; a way of breathing in and expelling out the sentiments of our encounters with the world. Statues, in particular, serve as a primary tool for thinking sculpturally and aids in the development of a deeper understanding of a world received through the senses. As representations of the human form, they serve as examples of thinking about the body as an aggregate of interconnected expressive and readable features: 'Imagine a sculpture of a philosopher with a brow that does not think; a Hercules without strength between his eyebrows, or in his neck or chest, or in his body as a whole'.²⁵ How do the expressive features of the body lend themselves to the sentiments of human countenance? With a language that can aid the development of a healthy understanding, sculpture serves as the tool through which a different kind of thinking of humanity may be shaped:

The 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.²⁶

Lexemes of the sculptural are thus aesthetic readings of sentiment, rather than the outcome of a philosophical drive to take hold of sculpture and make it serve the structural system of the fine arts it inherits and to some extent continues to reproduce. The language of the sculptural, its conceptual themes and processes, is a departure from the confines of a classificatory system for naming the arts. Sculptural thinking is an 'indisciplinary' encounter that reshapes experience by opening up new spaces for exchange.²⁷

Bildung

Bildung (self-formation/self-cultivation/self-moulding) is an important figuration in Herder's philosophical lexicon of the sculptural. Formations of the self are shaped by expressive activity, such as the making of sculpture or the writing of the sculptural. Herder's social ideal, *Sensus Humanitatis* directs this approach to *Bildung*. *Sensus Humanitatis* is an inborn disposition to want to organise ourselves for freedom. It is an active process not a simple 'love of humankind' (humanity, *Menschlichkeit*), and is only ever encountered through tangible expressions; this disposition is always subject to translation. Expressions are responses to the social environment within which we find ourselves. Our consciousness is informed and shaped by how, what, and who, we are responding to, and with. Thinking is a process of interaction and formation. *Sensus Humanitatis* triggers how we think and respond to the spaces we inhabit. Each community has its own image of Humanität that develops and takes shape in accordance with prevailing conditions (historical and geographical). Herder stands opposed to the idea of a universal language, but understands that each community has the 'right to form themselves to that type of *Humanität* which they envisaged'.²⁸ Self-determination will always assume different forms of creative expression in different contexts. Each community interprets this social ideal in its own specific way. Although humankind's orientation for freedom is a universal disposition in

everyone, regardless of differences of class, nationality, race, gender or sexuality its interpretation and application is subject to time and place. Context is mass and variety. *Sensus Humanitatis* is always disseminated and translated by the material manifestations of our expressive activity.

In his 1765 essay 'How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People',²⁹ Herder accuses abstract philosophy of failing to be part of the life of a community. He proposes that we work to produce another kind of philosophy, an ideal kind, which when removed from the metaphysical underpinnings in logic and moral theory can show itself in and through the expressive languages of different cultures. When philosophy abstracts the world and allows its abstractions to 'remain unattacked, unmutated', it renders itself useless for the people. 'The people' are 'citizens of the state' and not trained philosophers.³⁰ *Volk*, Herder's concept for the ever-changing character of a community, relies on the interrelationships between members. Interrelationships shape and reshape communities over time. Social collectives (*Völker*) are geographically determined. 'Das Volk' is a pluralistic concept, which conveys the existence of a multitude of individuated groups of people, marked out by languages, ethnicities, climates, geographies, and cultures. These differences call for 'transnational empathy'³¹ whereby each country should feel the pain of another country disturbed or troubled by unethical actions.

In this respect, philosophy must be reformed and made applicable and accessible within cultural life.

Herder writes:

I must talk to the people in its language, in its manner of thought, in its sphere. Its language is things and not words; its manner of thought lively, not clear - certain, not proving; its sphere real advantage in daily affairs, foundations for advantage, or lively pleasure. Behold!, that is what philosophy must do in order to be a philosophy of the common people. Who recognizes our philosophy in this picture?³²

The experiential dimension to this account of philosophy brings the function and purpose of education into direct contact with the multitude. The art of sculpture is one kind of response to this social ideal. Rather than study the human from the abstract principles of philosophy, Herder uses the verb *Bilden* through the sculptural ('to form' or 'to mould') and applies this to the practices of educating. The essay is structured along the lines of a series of different philosophical formations (*Bildung*) within the areas of logic, morality and politics. *Bildung* is thus a tool of self-development that stays faithful to the etymological ground of the word as a tool of formation. The shift from the abstract theorizing of enlightenment philosophy to a practical, anthropologically oriented and popular philosophy is a key feature of Herder's approach to what philosophy could be. This ideal philosophy is a philosophy of sculptural practice. This is why Herder is so keen to promote a philosophy shaped out of the stuff of life. The inward and outward expressions of people as both embodiments and bearers of culture, underpins any writing of history.

Forming the university

The nineteenth century reception of Herder's practical philosophy is a distinct pedagogical remodelling of *Bildung*; a reformation of knowledge within the context of the University. The popularity of the concept *Bildung* (as 'self-cultivation' or 'self-formation') appears also within the educational reforms of

the University of Berlin, which Wilhelm von Humboldt helped to administer. Founded in 1810, the University of Berlin was to be an exemplary model for teaching and research in Prussia. The educational reforms that Humboldt as Director for the Department of Public Education from 1809-1810 promoted, allowed the study of ancient Greek culture to play a crucial role in a new program of scholarship. By generating an idea of antiquity, as moral high ground for the 'self-cultivation' or 'self-formation' of the individual, Humboldt makes *Bildung* a practical touchstone for philosophical thinking.[33](#)

The architectural structure of the University of Berlin was originally a palace, close to the State Opera House at the east end of Unter den Linden. In 1809, the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II transferred ownership of the palace to the University. The State Opera House, designed by the architect Georg Wenzeslaus Von Knobelsdorff, could be viewed from the lecture halls, along with the hustle and bustle of city life. Heinrich Heine's description of the University in his letters from Berlin, dated 1822, captures both the sense of disappointment with the interior teaching spaces, particularly with regard to the cramped conditions and distracting views from the windows. The interiority of the University paled in comparison with the awe-inspiring architectural façade of the palace and the crowds negotiating the spaces of the city. Heine writes:

How does the University please you? A truly magnificent edifice! It is a pity that so few of the lecture-rooms are spacious. For the most part they are gloomy and comfortless; and, what is worse, in many of them the windows front the street, and afford, at an oblique angle, a view of the Opera House. How the luckless students must sit upon hot coals when the leathern wit - indeed not even Morocco leather but pig's leather wit - of a dry-as-dust professor drones in his ears, while his eyes stray towards the street, fascinated by the picturesque spectacle of the brilliant equipages, the marching soldiers, the nymphs who skip past, and the gay crowd which streams towards the Opera House.[34](#)

The structural organisation inside the University centred on four faculties: Law, Medicine, Philosophy, and Theology. Both Fichte, who was the first Vice-Chancellor at the University, and Schleiermacher, contributed to the ideas behind Humboldt's system, and the study of classical antiquity became tied to the reforming process associated with the name *Bildung*. Within the establishment of higher learning, the production of the self was considered to be shaped by rigorous thinking.

Humboldt's *The Limits of State Action* (also translated as *The Sphere and Duties of Government*) written in 1791-2 and not published as a full manuscript until seventeen years after his death in 1835, is an examination of Enlightenment ideals and their re-expression through educational reform. For Humboldt, the cultivation of the individual freed from the fetters of State control would radically alter relations of citizen to State. 'State interference' he suggests, hinders the development of individuality and the role of education should provide the individual with the skills and initiative to interact with the State rather than remain pacified by its authority.[35](#) *Bildung*, when put into practice, offers an alternative to the image of State control, dwelling instead on the individual's relation to the environments they inhabit and the cultures they create. Education and the individual are seen as co-dependent. The individual must believe that the structure of education provides a place for the development of their autonomy and in turn, education requires the autonomous thinking of the

individual to realise the ideal of *Bildung*. For Humboldt, education needs 'free activity on the part of the individual'³⁶ in order to fulfil its objective; to 'develop the individual'.³⁷ Furthermore, with such training an active engagement between citizen and State is formed, creating conditions for social change. Such change occurs when 'the citizen becomes spontaneously active in the State itself',³⁸ that is, when a conflict or contradiction arises 'between the position pointed out to him by the State, and that which he has spontaneously chosen, he is in part himself changed, and the State constitution also experiences some modification'.³⁹

Humboldt's account of the self-governing person appeals to the famous motto in Kant's 1784 essay 'Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?' 'Sapere Aude!' ('Dare to know!').⁴⁰ Humboldt, Schiller, Herder, and eventually Hegel all negotiate with the legacy of the enlightenment, and the translation of *Bildung* into the educational reforms of the early nineteenth century is testament to the desire to return to questions posed by enlightenment thinking and to reconfigure them within a new state of affairs. Situated at the height of this reform in Berlin, the turn to fifth century Greece to situate the classical ideal, as an ideal of antiquity, reshapes the narrative formation of sculpture set out in Herder's *Plastik*. Herder's philosophical lexicon, now housed within the structural organisation of the modern University, takes on a different formation. A practical philosophy for the people has no place within this context. Warm enthusiasm cannot be implemented into the system, for the system requires that the individual alone must react as a motivating force, in the future emergence and development of the thinking philosopher. The 'thinking sensorium commune' of our being as a philosophy which acknowledges the presence of a plurality of co-existing thinking communities across time and space ('the sensuous commune of the world'), is replaced by a self-in-abstraction. *Bildung* becomes a solitary aspiration on the part of everyone, to achieve the speculative reconciliation between the particular and universal features of the human subject. This ideology paves the way for Hegel's delivery of the lectures on fine art at the University of Berlin in 1823, 1826, and 1828-9. Hegel's systematization of the fine arts is an example of the transposition of abstractions of sensibility into the space of an abstracting head. We know that the outcome of this philosophical pursuit manifests itself in a pure speculative and rather chilling abstraction, dissociated from sensibility. The teleological endpoint of Hegel's history of art is a disassociation from matter; pure abstraction is the diremption of a mind from a body that thinks. As a particular formation of fanaticism, Hegel's philosophical abstraction suits the bureaucratization of the University. The administration of *Bildung* through Humboldt's educational reforms shows us the practical implications of disseminating an ideal within the framework of a system. Herder's reception within this context is indeed a fight between the head and the heart.

The written language of thought is often difficult and inaccessible. Herder's formation and use of sculptural lexemes shows how we can be rigorous and creative with our thinking. Philosophical writing should be read in an inventive manner. Herder triggers, provokes and enthuses, because he treats philosophy as if it were sculptural, that is, he allows a space to be generated for the reader to imagine philosophy as a sculptural practice, and through this process present new ways to read and write with the tools of formation. Perhaps this is the complexity and struggle of a philosophical lexicon of the

sculptural; we have the potential to become a community of sculptors in this cold climate, but as a 'whole way of life' it will be a 'difficult art of living'.

'A human being who wants to be only head is a monster, as is one who wants to be only heart'.[41](#)

Rowan Bailey is an Academic Skills Tutor in the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield. She is currently writing a dictionary on keywords of the sculptural in philosophy and culture.

Notes

1. Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Philosophie und Schwärmerei' in Herder's *Sammtliche Werke*, 33 Vols., ed. Bernard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1913), Vol. 9, pp.501-502.
2. This is a reference to Raymond Williams' 1958 essay 'Culture is Ordinary'. See Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary' in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (London: Routledge, 2002), p.93.
3. This is a reference to Friedrich Schiller's fifteenth letter in *Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, first published in 1795. See Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.131. Herder's critique of the aesthetics of play can be found in his later work *Kalligone* (1830). See Paul Guyer, 'Free Play and True Well-Being: Herder's Critique of Kant's Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol.65, Issue 4 (Autumn, 2007), pp.353-368. For the purposes of this article however, the sentiments of Schiller's message will inform Herder's approach to the relationship between art and life.
4. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. trans. Jason Gaiger (Chicago, Ill; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002). I will be referring to this text as *Plastik*, the German name for Herder's treatise on sculpture.
5. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.77.
6. Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Treatise on the Origin of Language' in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.87.
7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), [238-239], pp.87-88.
8. Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.106.
9. Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, p.106.
10. Johann Gottfried Herder, 'On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul' in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.178-246.
11. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Encore Edition, 2001), p.64.
12. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.65.
13. Raymond Williams, 'Culture' in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Hammersmith, London: Fontana Press, HarperCollins Publishers, 1976), p.89.
14. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.90.

15. See both Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, trans. Hans Arsleff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Languages' in *On the Origin of Languages: Two Essays*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp.87-176. The history of the development of language as set forth in the eighteenth century often accredits gesture as the precondition for speech. Both Rousseau and Herder appear here as figures informing Kant's reading of the structure of language as made up of interrelated parts (word, gesture, tone). Kant's reading of universal communicability is structured through an historical approach to the development of language. See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, [306], p.173.
16. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.90.
17. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.36.
18. For an account of gesture in relation to the development of language and the visual arts, particularly in relation to physiognomic expression as received in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Dorothy Johnson, 'Corporeality and Communication: The Gestural Revolution of Diderot, David and the Oath of Horatii', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.71 (March, 1989), pp.92-113.
19. William Hogarth describes this motif as the serpentine line or line of grace. See William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: Printed, J. Reeves, 1753), pp.50-67. Herder takes up this reading in Plastik. Laocoön is the example that serves his reading of the serpentine line of beauty in relation to pain and pleasure. See Herder, Plastik, p.90-131. On Herder and Lessing's engagements with this sculpture, see Simon Richter, *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain: Winckelmann, Herder, Moritz, Goethe* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992).
20. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.78.
21. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.37.
22. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.41.
23. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*, Vol. I & II, trans. Alexander Gode (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.) p.205.
24. Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*, p.205.
25. Herder, *Sculpture*, pp.77-78.
26. Herder, *Sculpture*, p.78.
27. 'Indisciplinary' refers to Ranciere's neologism 'in-disciplinaire' and his attempts to question the theme of disciplinarity in the contexts of philosophy. See Jacques Ranciere, 'Thinking Between Disciplines: An Aesthetics of Knowledge' trans. Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia*, No.1 (2006), pp.9-10.
28. Herder, *Sammlichte Werke*, Vo.14, p.210.
29. Johann Gottfried Herder, 'How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People' in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.3-32.
30. Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, p.19.
31. On the use of the term 'transnational empathy' as distinct from the perpetual peace of Kant's essay of the same name see John Pizer, 'The German Response to Kant's Essay on Perpetual Peace: Herder Contra the Romantics' *The Germanic Review*, 82.4 (Fall 2007), pp.343-367.
32. Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, p.19.

33. For details of Humboldt's educational reforms and professional career, see Paul Sweet, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography*, Vols. I & II (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).
34. Heinrich Heine, *Heine in Art and Letters*, trans. Elizabeth A. Sharp (London: The Scott Library, Walter Scott Ltd, 1895), pp.104-5 [digitalised - Microsoft Corporation, University of California Libraries, 2007].
35. For Humboldt's reading of the effects of State interference, see Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, trans. J. W. Burrow (Oxford: Alden Press, 1969), p.24.
36. Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, p.51.
37. Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, p.51.
38. Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, p.51.
39. Humboldt recognises that 'although such influences are not of course immediately evident, they are still distinctly traceable in the history of all States, in the modifications of their national character'. Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, p.51.
40. See Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), p.41.
41. Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Philosophei und Schwärmerei', p. 502.