EMBODIMENT AND INTERACTION

A DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN SCULPTURE AND INSTALLATION ART

Hegel argues in his *Aesthetics* that the medium of sculpture reaches its pinnacle through the representation of the human form. Rather than focusing on the restrictions of the human form, I support Torsen's argument that viewing sculptures as bodies in the abstract can provide a more productive account of the development of sculpture. Furthermore, the embodiment of sculpture—an example of how subjects come to interact with a bodied other—raises questions about what it means to be a body and interact with other bodies. This paper focuses on how sculptures can be understood as an external other with a subjectivity of their own as well as how subject-object interactions can form the basis of a division between sculpture and installation.

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1. Form and Content in Classical Sculpture

Hegel's definition of sculpture comes down to a combination of content and material. The form that sculptures can possibly take is restricted to "the three universal spatial dimensions and the elementary spatial forms which those dimensions are capable of receiving" (Hegel 1975, 710). In addition to this, a sculpture is formed out of some material—typically bronze or marble in the period in which Hegel was writing. This criterion helps delineate sculpture from other forms of art such as murals, painting, and ironwork which present two-dimensonal representations.

The content of sculpture is spirit, something which Hegel finds to be essential to art in general. Spirit is related to self-consciousness in that it "is self-aware as something inner" (Hegel 1975, 154). In other words, spirit is the capacity to analyze one's own actions and exercise freedom of choice. In trying to express spirit, artists are then faced with the challenge of portraying a quality which is abstract and internalized to some extent. As a subject for sculpture, artists thus turn to the primary example of spirit expressed in three-dimensional space: the human being. According to Hegel, the essential form of sculpture is the human body due to the body's capability of expressing spirit. For this reason, he rejects the idea that other animals are suitable subjects for sculpture because they are unable to express spirit. Other animals may have an understanding that they are bodied—they feel pain and pursue the fulfillment of hedonistic desires—but they do not have the self-awareness required to reflect on those desires. This self-consciousness is what Hegel refers to when he speaks about spirit in individuals.

In any case, given that sculpture is a necessarily physical artistic medium, the "whole sphere of subjective life is *eo ipso* excluded from sculpture which belongs solely to the objective side of spirit" (Hegel 1975, 711). The aim of the sculptor should be to capture the elements of spirit which are eternal in a human being. This is because a sculpture is only able to capture a single moment in time; any subjective quality would be lacking the surrounding moments necessary for contextualization. For this reason, Hegel also advocates for the removal of the particular in the ideal sculpture. The particular includes fleeting facial expressions and accidental gestures. Misguided by an incomplete archaeology of Greek sculpture, he goes so far as to argue that sculptures should not even use color.

As a result of these requirements, Hegel's ideal sculpture emerges as a three-dimensional monochromatic representation of the human body, sculpted from a single material and stripped of any distracting facial expressions or gestures. You would not be mistaken if the first image which comes to mind is that of an ancient Greek statue. Besides the fact that Greek statues were in fact multi-colored—a fact unknown to Hegel due to his historical po-

sition—they match this description of an ideal sculpture: large marble bodies with serene facial expressions, commanding an air of authority. This is not a mistaken interpretation. Hegel argues that the classical period of Greek art was in fact the ideal time period for sculpture. This is based on Hegel's theory that art is necessarily connected to historical context. According to Hegel, the Greeks were able to perfect sculpture because they were the first to clarify the concepts of freedom and morality, but still associated these qualities with the form of the human body. This clarification translated into the polytheism of Greek mythology, as different gods represented the different aspects of moral and political life. For example, Zeus personified the state through his rule over the other gods and thus represented "the bond of the substance of human, practical, and ethical life" (Hegel 1975, 489). This representation of moral qualities as physical beings is one of the reasons why sculpture has declined with the advent of Christianity; it is a difficult undertaking to represent the god "of absolute religion which apprehends God as spiritual and purely inner personality" in three dimensions while following Hegel's other prescriptions for an ideal sculpture (Hegel 1975, 487). Certain forms of art will be more powerful to a group of people who hold certain values and conceptions of what art can do. This can also prevent certain genres of art from taking hold in certain periods; despite their exceptional sculptures, the Greeks would not have created Pollock paintings, for example.

As is clear to anyone who has experienced modern art, Hegel's idea of sculpture contains many limitations. For example, most modern sculpture falls outside of the scope of his strict adherence to the form of the human body. And yet, most people would still consider modern sculptures to be art. Another limitation which is harder to overcome is that due to their immobile nature, sculptures cannot portray "the subjective inner life in its own private depth of feeling and passion" (Hegel 1975, 703). This includes thoughts, motivations, desires, and fears. Above all, it seems at first glance that sculptures have difficulty expressing action. After all, sculptures can only capture a single moment in time, and their subjects must be entirely corporeal. The Norwegian philosopher Ingvild Torsen is a professor at the University of Oslo, and she has done extensive research on the nature of sculpture and the development of modern art. Through Torsen's analysis of the body in sculpture and additional comparisons with modern sculpture, I want to demonstrate how Hegel's theory can be reevaluated and overcome these limitations.

2. Sculpture as a Bodied Other

In the article "The Persistence of the Body in Sculpture after Abstraction," Torsen makes the case that being embodied is a quality that is central to modern sculpture despite the fact that they may not look like typical bodies. Rather than being objects imbued with some kind of meaning which is evaluated by spectators, they "are a special kind of body, and we, as bodies, come to know them through our bodies" (Torsen 2020, 117). In this way, Torsen provides an account of how we, as subjects, treat sculptures as bodied "others" which we may come to know as bodies as opposed to simple objects. The concept of being a body is taken from the phenomenological works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and relates to the abilities which are inherent to bodies, such as perception and action—the ways in which a subject relates to their environment. To relate this back to Hegel's argument, bodies are able to represent spirit; in artwork, sculpture is a method which society uses in order to make sense of their environment and express their values. As a result, I would argue that spirit is closely related to Torsen's account of the ontology of sculpture. Torsen defends her claim by making three parallel arguments: one historical, one conceptual, and one ontological.

First of all, Torsen uses Hegel's emphasis on historical context to support an interpretation of modern sculpture which emphasizes bodily representation. The fact that sculpture has historically represented the human form means that the choice not to represent a body derives meaning "from the fact that it makes us question our previous assumptions about sculpture and from being an opposite to, and thereby directly invoking, representing a body" (Torsen 2020, 119). To illustrate this point with an example, Henry Spencer Moore's *Two-piece Sculpture No. 10: Interlocking* from 1968 reflects a deliberate choice not to represent the typical human form. Much of Moore's earlier work has a closer resemblance to the human body, so analyzing this work in conjunction with the rest of Moore's work raises the question of why he decided on this abstract form. Moore's previous focus on the body implies that he is still representing spirit, only through a different lens. The changing nature of sculptural form goes hand in hand with the development of our understanding of spirit. A representation of the human form is one way to represent spirit, but as we seek a more nuanced understanding of spirit, we discover that there is much more to spirit than the human body. The historical development of abstract art represents the attempt to portray different aspects of spirit in a physical form.

Torsen's second argument is based on the idea that being a body is more than just having certain physical characteristics. Being a body involves having certain senses which extend beyond the physical confines of our body. At the same time, emotions do not seem to have a simple analogue in the outside world, and yet they form an integral part of how we relate to others and our environment—a central aspect of both spirit and being a bodied subject. An analysis of these ideas has provided artists with "an alternative way for sculptures to relate to bodies" (Torsen 2020, 120). I would argue that by moving away from the limitations of the human body, more abstract representations of the body are able to strip away more particulars and are thus doing a better job of focusing on the objective characteristics of spirit than Greek sculpture. One interpretation of minimalism is that they represent bodies with every particular stripped away, leaving only the bare essence of being a body. As Hegel would agree, there is more to spirit than the twitch of a smile and the shaking of a fist. An investigation of what that "more" includes allows artists to broaden the conception of what it means to be a body and reevaluate the ontology of sculpture. Part of what imbues artwork with spirit is the picking and choosing that an artist has to do when they decide which qualities to emphasize or remove. In this way, even though a landscape painting may not include representations of humans, it contains spirit because the artistic choices imply the spirit of the artist. In a similar vein, I would argue that Hegel's restrictive definition of a statue—in which a statue's essential form is the human body—is misguided because the concept of spirit is such a wide one that even an artist's depiction of an animal would still embody spirit due to the artistic choices which reflect the artist's individual freedom.

Furthermore, given Hegel's claims that history represents the development of the idea of freedom and that artistic value is dependent upon historical context, I believe that our traditional idea of freedom is expanding to include animals and that modern art reflects this expansion. As we come to better understand the psychologies and behaviors of animals and even some plants, our social consciousness shifts. Instead of an anthropocentric view where plants and animals deserve to be protected due to the benefit they provide to humans, modern ecological movements emphasize the inherent value of plant and animal life regardless of their relationship to humans. This inherent value which we are starting to recognize translates to Hegel's concept of spirit, providing legitimacy to representations of animals in a Hegelian conception of art. I would like to cite Rosa Bonheur's *The Horse Fair* from 1855 as one example of how an artist can represent spirit in animals. In this painting, the horses rather than the men who guide them provide all the action and emotive force. All of the men have similar expressions of serenity—almost like blank slates. Meanwhile, the horses express the characteristics of spirit. Their actions and expressions reflect an inner world of emotion which ranges from resignation to anger and fear. Purely in the analysis of this painting, it would be unreasonable to conclude that humans are the sole possessors of spirit.

Torsen's third argument builds on the ideas of phenomenology in order to provide a new ontology for sculpture. In phenomenology, "the ontology of a work of art is thought of as an event, as the happening of sense or expressivity" (Torsen 2020, 122). Note here how the ideas of action and perception are central to this conception of artwork, in contrast to Hegel's belief that the subjective sphere is excluded from sculpture. Torsen goes further to argue that a representation of the body should move beyond its physical form because "body-subjects are beings who always stand in an intentional relationship to their surroundings, expressively extending beyond the outer border of bodies, their skin" (Torsen 2020, 122). For this reason, bodies are more than their physical form, allowing sculpture to continue to capture aspects of the body despite not resembling the human body. These three arguments—in addition to supporting the belief that the body persists in abstract sculpture—help liberate Hegel's definition of sculpture from the confines of the physical human body.

With Torsen's article in mind, I want to turn to some examples of modern sculpture and explore how they represent bodies and capture actions. Returning to Moore's *Two-piece Sculpture No. 10: Interlocking*, the appearance of two blobs enveloping one another, and the use of the word "interlocking" in the title, suggest an action. The two segments of the sculpture appear to be fluid, but also seem to press up against invisible boundaries. The unity of the sculpture comes from the relationship between the two segments. In support of the ontological argument, we appear to be witnessing an event in the sculpture: the interlocking of two forms. This event, combined with the rest of Moore's work, suggests that this sculpture represents two subjects engaged with one another; perhaps it is an expression of love or a violent struggle, but in either case, the sculpture evokes an active relationship. Aase Texmon Rygh's *Piruett* is more direct in its representation of action. Named after a dance technique, the sculpture draws a

loop divided in three parts. By representing a body purely through the motions that it performs rather than its physical form, *Piruett* supports Torsen's conceptual argument for the embodiment of modern sculpture. It is also a particularly forceful depiction of action as it implies a fourth dimension: a dancer must have already described each arc of the sculpture and now the motion is being presented in its entirety. A spectator's eyes cannot help but wander along the loops, tracing the movement of the dancer.

The requirement that sculpture should only be three-dimensional has also been questioned by works of art which undergo transformations within a noticeable period of time. Zoe Leonard's 1992–1997 *Strange Fruit* contains fruit peels which actually degraded over the course of the exhibition, making the passage of time a core aspect of this work. *Strange Fruit* thus literally incorporates the fourth dimension whereas *Piruett* only implies it. Even if one questions the ability for a three-dimensional sculpture to represent action, there is a fourth dimension which can be utilized by artists to produce a literal action such as degradation. It is the fact that sculptures are physically embodied in the same world as us which makes their depiction of action so potent compared to art forms such as painting and poetry. By using fruits as a stand-in for human life, this piece invokes a real quality of living bodies: their death and decay. Oftentimes, an artist will be motivated to create in order to immortalize themselves in words or structures which will last long after they are gone, even if their meanings change as society develops. But as Leonard demonstrates, artworks that are more than two dimensions (as paintings and novels are) can incorporate elements which are specifically intended not to last, thus invoking the horizon of life much better than an "immortal" poem ever could and allowing the audience to relate to them on a more fundamental level. When it comes to defining sculpture, however, Leonard's piece raises the question about whether this incorporation of bodily processes and interactions demands its own artistic category.

3. Subject-Object Relationships in Sculpture and Installation

The sculptures of Moore and Rygh are examples of sculptures which support Torsen's claim that the body persists in abstract sculpture, and they clearly demonstrate conceptual and historical reasons for accepting her claim. However, there is much of modern art which does not fit neatly into this narrative. In order to test some of these claims and tease out a more precise definition of sculpture, I will look at three challenge cases: Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Image and Body*, Gardar Eide Einarsson's *Untitled (Picnic Table)*, and Toril Johannessen's *In Search of Iceland Spar*.

At first glance, Pistoletto's *Image and Body* from 1991 appears to be just an open closet and some upturned tables. But when you move closer to the artwork, you discover that Pistoletto has installed mirrors to the doors of the closet and the undersides of the tables. The viewer is reflected back at themselves in these mirrors. In addition, the environment in which these pieces of repurposed furniture are placed will affect the viewer's experience. For instance, placing this piece in an open-air environment gives the viewer a sense of staring into an infinite void when they lean over the upturned tables. As its title suggests, the idea of the body is eminently present in this work. Tables are in an unnatural position, implying action. The open closet calls to mind the decisions we make every morning when we decide what to wear and how we present ourselves. And, of course, the mirrors reflect our own bodies. Is this piece a sculpture, however? Besides the installation of mirrors, these pieces of furniture still maintain their original, mundane forms. The physical appearance of the body is in the reflection of the mirrors—something the artist has no control over. Besides that, body is evoked in an implicit way by asking us to question how we interact with these pieces of furniture on a daily basis.

Einarsson's *Untitled (Picnic Table)* from 2004 is a similar case, except the artist has apparently not modified the object at all; he only copied it from a US prison and brought it into a new setting. The piece is a monochromatic table like the ones you would see in an elementary school dining hall. Its edges have been blunted in order to prevent prisoners from being able to use the table to harm others. As a result, it reflects the ways in which we treat prisoners, modifying their environment in an attempt to modify their behavior. The concept of the body is preserved in the contemplation of behavioral change, but there is no trace of a physical body. This artwork also supports a key point that Hegel makes about the relationship between architecture and sculpture, namely that "a sculpture does nevertheless remain essentially connected with its surroundings" (Hegel 1975, 702). The name, "Picnic Table," and its location in a museum completely change the violent connotation of the original purpose of the table. In its new context, the table evokes the serenity of a family outing—whether to a museum or into nature for a picnic. The contrast between prison and picnic also generates an investigation of the idea of freedom. Besides a monochrome color palette of which Hegel would be proud, this piece again defies the traditional idea of sculpture,

instead appearing more like a found object rather than a piece of art that was deliberately created.

Out of my three examples, Johannessen's *In Search of Iceland Spar* from 2008 is the only multimedia project. This piece consists of dozens of photographs of Iceland spar and its applications along with a pile of papers about a foot tall which documents all the communications Johannessen sent in order to get the pictures. Although this stack of paper is an unlikely candidate for being a sculpture, it exists on the borderline; I would argue that the primary purpose of the stack of paper is not to be read (although that is a possibility), but to represent the sheer amount of work that went into obtaining all the photographs. This means that unlike other artistic forms of writing, this is a three-dimensional object meant to be viewed—placing it within the realm of sculpture. The only suggestion of a body in this piece is the implication of human activity behind the mining of Iceland spar and the construction of scientific instruments. In this way, it raises questions about our relationship to nature and how far we are willing to go in the pursuit of knowledge.

My intention in bringing up these three examples is to examine two potential difficulties in defining sculpture as bodies. The first is the potential for non-sculptures which evoke the body, and the second is the potential for sculptures which do not evoke the body. My three examples exist on this scale with Pistoletto's work being a potential bodied non-sculpture, Johannessen's work being a potential non-bodied sculpture, and Einarsson's work existing somewhere in between these two. The existence of either side of this spectrum would challenge a definition of sculpture which relies on the human form or the body.

In order to avoid this difficulty and maintain the validity of Torsen's argument, I want to introduce the category of installation. Both installations and sculptures are differentiated from other forms of art in that they are non-human objects which exist in the three spatial dimensions. I would propose that the division between these two categories lies in the fact that sculpture tries to unravel what it means to *be* a body whereas installation focuses on how bodies *interact*. In other words, unlike sculpture, we don't relate to installations as if they were bodies, but they make us question how we behave as bodies in different contexts. In this way, an installation is not required to have a component which can be interpreted as a body—although they often do—but can instead encourage the viewer to acknowledge their role as a body by inviting us, the audience, to interact with them. The development of this distinction also fits in well with Hegel's historical development of art; as the concept of spirit develops and becomes identified with freedom, we as individuals begin to investigate how our freedom manifests itself in our interactions with one another and the environment.

To return to the three examples, I would argue that all three are installations rather than sculptures because of their focus on interactions and relationships. *Image and Body* invites the audience to gaze into the mirrors and look at their own reflections, highlighting our own relationships with ourselves. We change our own positions—leaning over the overturned tables—in order to catch glimpses of ourselves. *Untitled (Picnic Table)* focuses on how furniture has been modified in order to bring about certain behavioral changes. In this way, it explores how we interact with others depending on which environment we find ourselves in—whether that would be prisoners sitting in a mess hall, a family having a picnic in nature together, or patrons observing an installation in a museum. As a result, this piece also raises questions about how we are modified by our environment. For example, it investigates whether violence can be reduced in prisons by changing the furniture. *In Search of Iceland Spar* does the best at representing how we relate to our environment, in my opinion. Besides the fact that viewers are allowed to physically flip the pages of the stack of paper, it also captures how governments have extracted and exhausted resources and documents how we use those resources.

Given that installations focus on relationships, it is not surprising to note that these three installations have sociological or documentary aspects. *Image and Body* implies daily activities that we perform every morning relating to how we present ourselves to others, *Untitled (Picnic Table)* deals with how governments treat prisoners along with how environments can affect behavior, and *In Search of Iceland Spar* documents a particular mining campaign and its effects on the environment and knowledge. One of the strengths of installations over sculptures is that they tend to bring the effects of our own activity before our eyes in a more vivid way. Part of the reason for this is that installations present themselves as environments which we as the audience are invited to live in or interact with. In this way, our own behavior becomes a part of the art. The sociological and documentary aspects of installation could also provide a new lens through which to evaluate some earlier forms of art which Hegel glances over. Although ancient epics and monoliths did not present a clear idea of spirit in Hegel's eyes, they provide sociological and documentary value in that they serve community-based functions and record events. This does nothing to detract from the

value of these objects as art, but instead suggests that the boundary between art and sociology is far more permeable than it appears at first.

Art provides benefits to society in the form of education and entertainment, but because artists are imperfect people, they often bring their own biases into their art. In this way, certain pieces of art can be a detriment to a free society when they emphasize the otherness of certain groups of people, for example when governments employ propaganda during wartime to demonize opposing nations. This kind of "othering" has its ultimate basis in the development of a subject's conception of "self," as described in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, a key moment in spirit's development is when the subject encounters another subject which it struggles to sublimate as an object. In this paper, I explored how sculptures—ostensibly inanimate objects—possess some of the same qualities as our own bodies and express some form of spirit. Perhaps an investigation of how we come to know sculptures as a bodied "other" in its most basic sense can provide the basis for future discussions of how we come to "otherize" human beings.

The purpose of this paper is not to provide an all-encompassing definition of sculpture and installation, but to propose a productive dividing line between these two art forms as well as evaluate to what extent Hegel was correct about the nature of sculpture. Although Hegel's insistence on the human form seems limiting at first glance, by broadening this idea to include more aspects of spirit—such as action and environment—we can reach a definition of sculpture which is better suited toward understanding modern art. In addition, historical and physical context play a large role in shaping the meaning of individual artworks as well as how art has developed over time. A division between sculpture and installation based on interaction allows sculpture to keep its bodied connotation while delineating a category of art that investigates action—something that three dimensional pieces of art are great at depicting.

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