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Greek Bronze: Holding a Mirror to Life

Babette Babich

Abstract: To explore the ethical and political role of life-sized bronzes in ancient Greece, as Pliny and others report between 3,000 and 73,000 such statues in a city like Rhodes, this article asks what these bronzes looked like. Using the resources of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, as well as a review of the nature of bronze and casting techniques, it is argued that the ancient Greeks encountered such statues as images of themselves in agonistic tension in dynamic and political fashion. The Greek saw, and at the same time felt himself regarded by, the statue not as he believed the statue divine but because he was poised against the statue as a living exemplar.

Socrates' Ancestor

Daedalus is known to most of us because of the story of Icarus but readers of Plato know him as a sculptor as Socrates claims him as ancestor, a genealogy consistently maintained in Plato's dialogues.¹ Not only is Socrates a stone-cutter himself but he was also known for his Daedalus-like ingenuity at loosening or unhinging his opponent's arguments. When Euthyphro accuses him of shifting his opponents' words (Meletus would soon make a similar charge), Socrates emphasizes this legacy to defend himself on traditionally pious grounds: if true, the accusation would set him above his legendary ancestor. Where Daedalus 'only made his own inventions to move,' Socrates—shades of the fabulous Baron von Münchhausen—would thus be supposed to have the power to 'move those of other people as well' (*Euth.* 11d).

From Diodorus Siculus, we have an account of the sculptor's technical skills: 'Daedalus was an Athenian by birth and was known as one of the clan named Erechthids, since he was the son of Metion, the son of Eupalamus, the son of Erechtheus. ... In the sculptor's art he so far excelled all other men that later generations invented the story about him that the statues of his making were quite like their living models (μυθολογήσαι περὶ αὐτοῦ διότι τὰ κατασκευαζόμενα τῶν ἀγαλμάτων ὁμοιότατα τοῖς ἐμψύχοις ὑπάρχει); they could see, they said, and walk and, in a word, preserved so well exercised every bodily function so that his handiwork seemed to be living beings (ἐμψυχον ζῶν)' (Diod, iv. 76).²

¹ A study in this vein, although it does not concern sculpture, rewards attention: Indra Kagis McKewen, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

² Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Books IV.59-VII, C.H. Oldfather, trans.

The first-century historian is already modern or ‘enlightened’ enough, as we say, to demystify Daedalus’ achievements (demystification is the traditional earmark of the Greek historian), adverting instead to the innovative departure from the fixed poses of earlier statues, ‘with closed eyes and hands hanging down and cleaving to their sides’ (Diod, iv. 76) to the creative event of Daedalus’ statues with their ‘open eyes, and parted legs and outstretched arms’ (ibid.).³ In this allegorical sense, the so-called ‘movement’ of Daedalus’ statues is revealed as nothing more than a figure of speech (thus the Doryphoros shown in Figure 1 is in ‘motion’) and the enlightened reader understands that when the ancient Greeks suggest that a sculptor gave his statues the power of movement they did not mean (not really) that their statues moved. One has likewise assumed, given the metallic look of modern bronze, that the Greeks were similarly figurative in saying that such bronze statues had the ‘look’ of life.⁴

My argument here does not compel me to argue that Daedalus’ statues actually moved even if I will note that Pindar attests to this possibility in his seventh *Olympian Ode* (alluding to ‘works’ lining the roads: ‘like unto beings that lived and moved’).⁵ In addition, as Nietzsche liked to emphasize and as is so radically in evidence in the Antikythera mechanism,⁶ the Greeks certainly had the skills to match the mechanical

(Cambridge: Cambridge Massachusetts, 2000 [1939]). Apollodorus (*Library*, B-15.8-9) writes that ‘Daedalos is the son of Eupalmos, son of Etion and Alkippe’ and names him the ‘best builder and the first inventor of statues.’

³ See, for a discussion of modernist assumptions of the evolution in aniconic or ‘wooden’ wooden statues to representational sculpture, A.A. Donohue, *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). The presuppositions already assumed in this convention of ‘stylistic advance’ is the subject of her recent *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴ Jean Charbonneaux recalls that it ‘has been suggested that the image of a modest young girl ... was a more or less direct portrait of a living model.’ *Archaic Greek Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), p. 249. Charbonneaux’ quote is the point of departure for Mary Stieber’s study of ancient realism, *The Poetics of Appearance in the Attic Korai*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

⁵ *The Odes of Pindar*, John Sandys, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), *The Olympian Odes*, VI. 52. Sandys, on p. 71, explains Pindar’s allusion as ‘to the mythical Telchînes, the wizards of Rhodes, who worked in brass and iron and made images of the gods..’ J. Douglas Bruce suggests an alternate translation: ‘Works of art like unto living and moving creatures used to go about their streets.’ Bruce, ‘Human Automata in Classical Tradition and Medieval Romance,’ *Modern Philology*, Vol. 10, No. 4. (Apr., 1913), pp. 511-526, here p. 513, citing in support, Wilhelm Christ as adverting, in his 1896 edition of Pindar, to Homer’s description of ‘handmaidens of gold ... the semblances of living maids’ (*Iliad*, xviii) attending Hephaistos.

⁶ This is only now receiving a certain attention despite Derek de Solla Price’s early efforts on behalf of this mechanism and an illustrated article on the device ‘An

achievements of the life-sized automata that so inspired Descartes in the 17th century,⁷ mechanical achievements also immortalized in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*. For my purposes, it is enough that Plato's Socrates invokes Daedalus's achievements as illustrative accomplishments: comparing his statues to unguarded opinion, liable to 'run away and escape if you forget to tie them down; but they stay put if properly tethered.' (*Meno*, 97-98)



Fig. 1. Doryphoros of Polykleitos; modern reconstruction: bronze composite. Munich. Destroyed, 1944. Photo Credit : Foto Marburg / Art Resource, NY

Beyond the allure of wandering statues, we turn to hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the role of the statue as exemplar in ancient Greece. Heidegger explains the value of hermeneutic phenomenology in terms of its Greek etymology: '...phenomenology means ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα—to let that which shows itself from itself be seen from itself in the very way that it shows itself. ... But here we are expressing nothing else than the maxim ... "To the things themselves!"'⁸ Phenomenology, for Heidegger, as a *knowable* "science" of phenomena ... grasp[s] its object *in*

Ancient Greek Computer' published in *The Scientific American* (June 1957), pp. 60-67.

⁷ Derek de Solla Price notes that Descartes himself had 'planned to build a dancing man, a flying pigeon [like the mechanical dove attributed Archytas of Tarentum], and a spaniel that chased a pheasant. Legend has it that he did build a beautiful blonde automaton named Francine...' p. 23 in 'Automata and the Origins of Mechanism and Mechanistic Philosophy,' *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 5., No. 1 (Winter, 1964), pp. 9-23.

⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Macquarrie & Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 58, SZ, p. 34. Hereafter cited as BT/SZ followed by the page numbers.

such a way that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly' (BT 59/SZ 35). Thus, the illustrations in this essay are essential if also insufficient as I shall argue as well.⁹

For one art historian, it is 'a phenomenological fact that the image looks back, that it succeeds in instantiating the effect of a gaze.'¹⁰ For his part, Heidegger reminds us that the 'expression "phenomenology" signifies primarily a *methodological conception*. This expression does not characterize the *what* of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research' (BT 50/SZ 27). That 'how' for Heidegger is questioning and in what follows I argue that a great deal will be attained if we can begin to raise (or even to see) the question of Greek Bronze *as a question*.

The Greeks seemed to endow their statues with the capacity to engage or to address or even to interact with the passerby, the viewer, or else the sculptor himself. This is a matter of form, and, if we are to believe myth, this is also a matter of voice (Daedalus is said to have devised a quicksilver-driven mechanism to give his figures the capacity to speak), of movement, and most commonly, an erotic allure (it is this last aspect that has been most celebrated in the past few decades—or centuries, if we consider Winckelmann).¹¹ This capacity for interaction is also given explicit expression in inscriptions on the base (and sometimes on the surface of the statue itself): for even lacking Daedalus' Hermes-technique or hermeneutic device, the statue would—in an oral culture where the skill of reading can be compared to sight-reading music: reading an inscription is to read it aloud¹²—speak to a passerby.

⁹ Rights to reproduce images in this article other than the author's own were secured, at the author's expense, from Art Resource in New York.

¹⁰ Rainer Mack, 'Facing Down Medusa (An Aetiology of the Gaze),' *Art History*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (2002): 570-604, here, p. 571. Mack offers a provocatively psychological exploration of the Medusa's apotropaic force, and his emphasis not irrelevant to if it is different from the approach I am taking here. See also Jean Paul Vernant, 'Death in the Eyes: Gorgo, Figure of the Other,' in Froma Zeitlin, ed., *Mortals and Immortals*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 111-138.

¹¹ See, for one example, Andrew Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On Winckelmann, see Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) and Simon Richter, *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain: Winckelmann Lessing Herder Moritz Goethe*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). See, for importantly different emphasis, see Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description*, pp. 165 ff.

¹² This complex point exceeds the bounds of this essay. But see for a recent discussion, Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*,

There are a number of stories illustrating the interaction and relationship had (or imagined to be had) with statues. The tale of the mythic sculptor Pygmalion and Galatea is iconic as is the story of Hephaistos the craftsman god and his clay creation, Pandora, or else and seemingly more marvelous, of the bronze automaton, Talos.¹³ Importantly, no whether we turn to myth or philosophy, the statue plays an *exemplary* role. However, to qualify this exemplary ideal for the ears of his contemporary audience, ears very like our own, Nietzsche recalled Plutarch's reflection that 'no noble-born youth would himself, upon seeing Zeus in Pisa, have the desire to become a Phidias or were he to see Hera in Argos, a Polyclitus', pointing out that for 'the Greeks, artistic creativity was just as much to be subsumed under the undignified category of work as any banausic handcraft.'¹⁴ Rather than aspiring to be the artist, one is to be oneself a work of art: *like* the statue. The Stoic Epictetus takes for granted the pride and nobility of the statue as exemplifying itself (as well as its maker) to encourage and to praise, by contrast, the wonders of the human being and its divine maker.¹⁵ Such exemplary glorification also plays in Alcibiades' alluringly elliptical comparison of Socrates to a cleverly crafted statue of a satyr, the *silenoï* found in sculptors' shops. Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates to the *silenoï* functions as an object allegory for Socrates' hidden qualities, an emphasis needed given Socrates' constantly-celebrated *lack* of such excellences. And C.D.C. Reeve has recently added to a long tradition, observing that 'a common term for statue, *agalma*, is etymologically related to the verb *agallein*, meaning to glorify or to honor something.'¹⁶

(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹³ *Táλλωσ* mentioned in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes and depicted (with wings no less) on the coins of Phaestos is alternately said to have been a work of Hephaistos or else the last of the Hesiodic race of bronze: *χάλκειον γένος*.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, 'Der griechische Staat,' *Kritische Studienausgabe*, [KSA] (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), Vol. 1, p. 766.

¹⁵ 'Why, wert thou a statue of Phidias, an *Athena* or a *Zeus*, thou wouldst bethink thee both of thyself and thine artificer; and hadst thou any sense, thou wouldst strive to do no dishonour to thyself or him that fashioned thee, nor appear to beholders in unbecoming guise. But now, because God is thy Maker, is that why thou carest not of what sort thou shalt show thyself to be?' *Golden Sayings of Epictetus*, Vol 2, No. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard Loeb Classics, 1910-1914), p. LXI.

¹⁶ C.D.C. Reeve, 'A Study in Violets: Alcibiades in the Symposium' in J. Lesher et al. (eds.), *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) credits Ruth Blondell. But see Gerald L. Cohen, 'Etymology of Greek *agalma*, *agallo*, *agallomai*.' *Berkeley Linguistics Society: Proceedings of the Annual Meeting*, No. 2 (February 14-16, 1976): pp. 100-104 in addition to his *The Semitic Origins of Greek agalma, agallo, agallomai*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1975). See

Exemplifying a complex tradition of *Vergegenwärtigung*, that is, a literal re-presentation of the past less on the terms of the present moment than in terms of presence *per se*, a bringing to presence or possible experience.¹⁷ We are concerned in a phenomenological analysis with ‘that which shows itself in itself’ (BT 51/SZ 28) but because this is exactly entangled in semblance and error as well as what we fail to see, phenomenology is fundamentally a method, indeed a science, of *paying attention*. In this paying attention the focus is on ‘letting see,’ as Heidegger says, where for the most part what is to be seen is what does not manifest itself in what is manifest but ‘belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.’ (BT 59/SZ 35) Here we will need to imagine ourselves among such statues, imagination being the necessary rubric here, as an experience of the kind cannot be had today for reasons to be considered below. What would we see? Better still, what would we feel?

Greek Bronze: The Body as Comportment

Although statues play a number of different roles in a long tradition in antiquity, I am here seeking to raise a particular question about the nature and working power of so many bronze sculptures just as the elder Pliny tells us that 3000 such statues *remained* in his time at ‘Rhodes, and no smaller number are believed still to exist at Athens, Olympia and Delphi.’¹⁸ This abundance (other sources give a staggering

too Hans Jörg Bloesch, *Agalma. Kleinod, Weihgeschenk, Götterbild. Ein Beitrag zur frühgriechischen Kultur- und Religionsgeschichte*, (Bern: Bentelli, 1963).

¹⁷ Other influences include Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence, la mètis des Grecs*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1974) as well as Detienne’s ‘The Feast of Wolves or the Impossible City’ in Detienne and Vernant, eds., *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, trans Paul Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Carl Boetticher’s *Der Baumkultus der Hellenen*, (Berlin: Weidmann, 1856), a study of the Hellenic blood cult of the tree, hung with the sacrificial offering of battle and the hunt, tracing, like Vitruvius, the lineaments of pain as architectural ornament and offering. See too James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, (London: Heinemann, 1911), A. L. Evans, ‘Mycenean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations,’ *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 21 (1901): pp. 99ff., Walter Burkert, *Homo necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrifice and Ritual*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), George Hersey, *The Last Meaning of Classical Architecture*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), Vincent Scully, *The Earth, The Temple, and the Gods*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), and others, especially Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Classical Architecture*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Pliny, *Natural History. Books 33-35*, H. Rackham, trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1952]), [NH] 34: 36. Pliny writes that the art of making bronzes (*statuaria*) ‘has flourished to an extent surpassing all limit and offers a subject that would occupy many volumes if one wanted to give a rather extensive account of it—as for a completely exhaustive account who could accomplish that?’ (Ibid.)

73,000)¹⁹ reflects their popularity and this same abundance should invite our reflection. At the very least, Pliny's report would mean that one could go nowhere in the Greek world without encountering statues in bronze (this would be in addition to marble and wood, as similarly attested by Pausanias, a legacy that continues in romantic illustrations of landscapes dotted with fallen statues and Hollywood recreations of antiquity, even if these last tend to be more Roman than Greek). What would have been the effect of walking amidst such a number? Why so many?

The abundance of statues in the ancient Hellenic lifeworld contrasts with the absence of extant examples. One assumes Pliny's assessment of the number of such statues an exaggeration or else and more routinely one notes the number without remarking upon it. As a result, one has not raised the question of the effect of this abundance (a precise count of the statues is not relevant), reflecting a typically modern and overly neutral tendency to flat objectivity (the flatter or balder the description, one seemingly supposes, the more objective).²⁰ Nietzsche spent his career opposing this tendency to ignore dissonant aspects of antiquity by characterizing them as 'intrinsically irrelevant'²¹ and derides the classicist, Christian August Lobeck, for his (manifestly lame, even at this distance) contention that the 'Greeks, when they had nothing else to do, used to laugh, jump, race about, or as a human also sometimes feels a desire for this, they used to sit down and cry and moan.'²² The reductive explanatory project passed then (as it continues, especially in analytic philosophy, to pass) for objectivity. When Nietzsche attempts (along with Heidegger) to take the Greeks and what they said about their statues 'seriously' he means to leave such professional diffidence behind.

We all know public statues set in public places. Many of these are monumental and looking at a contemporary statue, perhaps in a city square, the size alone, quite apart from the material or form, can be the imposing thing, and this can inspire patriotic pride (or give the impression

¹⁹ Claude Rolley, *Greek Bronzes*, Robert Howell trans., (London: Chesterton Publications, 1989) notes that the range of huge numbers listed would be difficult to corroborate (or and indeed: to refute) just because bronze is so 'easily melted down and reused.' p. 31.

²⁰ See Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description* for David Summers hermeneutic (both Nietzsche and Heidegger make this same scholarly and reflective point) observation that 'the language we are using is not neutral but rather implicitly interpretive.' Donohue, p. 17. It is instructive that Donohue refers to neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger nor indeed Gadamer or Ricoeur for this hermeneutic point.

²¹ ". . . eigentlich habe es mit allen diesen Curiositäten nichts an sich." Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, 'Was ich den Alten verdanke' §4, KSA 6, p. 158.

²² Ibid. Nietzsche cites: 'Lobeck, *Aglaophamus* I [1829], 672.'

of power for a visitor) or else one might feel invited to clamber on a giant animal (the bronze lions in Trafalgar Square offer particularly apt opportunities for such play and I am sure the reader can think of other such). But what if we today, as in Pliny's account of Rhodes (and Athens and Olympia), walked amidst thousands of life-sized, classically human-formed statues—and I will argue that to encounter these *in bronze* would be something else again—set up into and about the public spaces of our cities? It seems clear that at a minimum we would be setting up the conditions for at least a few-double takes. This is already food for thought: one might well, at first and passing glance, take the statues to be human beings. Form alone can do this, thus duck hunters use decoys. We are not as different from ducks as we think, at least to the extent that we may be acquainted with the postmodern urban sculptors who have managed to be commissioned to place statues, say, of a man on a bench reading a newspaper as a decorative sculpture in a park amidst public benches, or a statue of a waiting patient set amidst waiting patients in a hospital waiting room (such sculpture, just as it self-quotes, means, indeed, less to evoke any kind of classical tradition than to be taken as 'postmodern'). Opportunities to 'encounter' such statues (and that can mean, and this is part of the point about decoys, *to fail to notice them at first glance*) is well under Pliny's reported frequency; however malls continue to commission such statues.



Fig. 2. Pergammon Museum: interior.
Berlin, September 2004. Author's photograph.

New accounts of mirror neurons (popular in philosophy across the analytic-continental divide), might support an elaboration on the projected echoing of sensibility inspired by human-sized statues. Yet the

effect of meeting a statue on the street or in an airport or some other everyday public space is not at all the same as encountering a department store or shop window dummy or manikin, nor is it the same as our experience of statues in a museum or at an exhibition. (Fig. 2) In the latter cases, we contemplate the object (exhibiting clothes in the first case, a manifestation of ‘art’ in the second) and in part we do so as we know in advance how we are expected to see them (and public mimes, à la Marcel Marceau, play off such expectations on our parts).

What would it have been like to live amidst a standing populace of bronze statues (or, and for the sake of my reflections here, this will be the same: stone or wood statues gilded or painted to seem or to look ‘like’ life)? Just to pose this question is difficult because a number of aspects simply cannot be established—how were they placed? All on plinths? Some on plinths? Low plinths? High plinths? Did they include some mechanism (the Archytas of Tarentum phenomenon) for movement—or is that just a myth? Ancient authors including Pliny distinguish between statues with bases and statues standing on feet, which means that there must have been a difference, and a very important one as we shall see. That they were all about, enhanced in number if we consider the structural elements of architectural design in temples and so on, only adds to the complexity. To walk amongst such bronzes, even the very idea, seems likely to the contemporary mind (and maybe this is why we have not thought much about it) a matter of aesthetic overkill. One can well imagine art historians overwhelmed by so much (and such very homoerotic—we are talking about statues of naked bronze men, after all) ‘art.’ But, following Nietzsche (in part) and Heidegger (in part), I submit that rather than a matter of all-too-Christian—and all-too-modern—‘desire,’ but and given the Greek culture of contest,²³ the Greek was not meant to desire (as we today, *pace* Stewart et al., understand ‘desire’)²⁴ the statues standing about him, perhaps with upraised hands, like the Piraeus Apollo (Fig. 3) or else, and famously, carrying spears (Fig. 1), or poised to throw a javelin or launch a discus or as in the case of the Apoxyomenos, cleaning themselves. Rather than desire, the tradition of agonistic measure (contest and not conflict as Nietzsche emphasizes) suggests that the Greek would have been literally given to himself as Greek in these statues and not only because such bronzes shone.

²³ The key reference here is Nietzsche’s rhetorically complex preface (one among five written for five unwritten books), “Homers Wettkampf,” KSA 1, pp. 783-792.

²⁴ Stewart’s *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* is a classic example.



Fig. 3. Piraeus Apollo, ca. 540-545 BCE, 75 5/8 in.
National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece
Photo Credit : Scala / Art Resource, NY

The Greek found himself against and in tension with such statues, his own bodily being highlighted against an imaginary exemplar, just as he might also find himself agonistically reflected by an opponent. Such quasi-Lacanian imagery may also shed new light on Homer's recourse to the hero's 'shining limbs' [*Iliad*, 16.805] just as the Homeric epic celebrates agonistic tension together with all its complexities and if the tradition Havelock recounts is right (as I am inclined to suppose that it is),²⁵ that same competitive Homeric tradition, gave the Greeks nothing less essential than the mirror in which they could find themselves, as Nietzsche recalls this tradition to us: the song sings of what Greeks do and so tells the Greek how to be Greek.

In this sense, the statue would have a properly ethical and that is also to say, a political function, reflecting the Greek to himself (less to *herself*—but this would truly be another paper, so that if I here use the masculine pronoun I do so in an *exclusionary sense* and not because it has not dawned on me that it is not in fact inclusive). The statue itself would serve an effectively formative function: a *formation* (in the French sense of the word) corresponding to what the Germans call *Bildung*.

The statue exemplified the 'look' of the Greek in a particularly exemplary pose—as athlete, as hero, as god—to the Greek citizen and to aliens and visitors in Athens, Rhodes, Olympia, and so on. Lacking a 'literate' populace, as we understand the term, we may thus contend that one of the means of civic formation (*in addition* to Homeric song and the contest culture of tragic and athletic festival) might have been the very

²⁵ See here Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2005).

statues themselves. The abundance of statues in antiquity is certainly not unique to Greece and particularly in Assyria and Egypt, this abundance was complemented and intensified in painting and bas-relief. Many of these sculptures, especially in the case of Egypt, were monumental in size. To be sure, Greece also had these monumental forms: in Rhodes (famously), in Samos, as recent discoveries continue to show and, of course, as cultic statues. Still, the question I am seeking to pose remains the specific nature of the political function of such a number of bronze statues. What difference would it make for a city to have, as the Greek cities so impressed the Romans as having, so very many life-sized statues? What might have been the political or formative or paedagogic (and this is very Greek) effect of the same abundance of statues?

I have already suggested that the statue holds a mirror to life and does so in two senses. This double reflection characterizes gleaming bronze though polished and painted marble and polychrome wooden statues would also serve. Passing them by, the Greek did not regard them as ‘art’²⁶ but found himself matched against the same shining aspect, a variant on what Nietzsche speaks of as an exactly politically keyed competition. As Nietzsche explains this: the ‘aim of the contest for the ancients’ was not the triumph of the *individual* triumph but rather ‘the welfare of the *entirety*, the society of cities. Every Athenian was, e.g., to develop himself as far as might in competition in order to lend the greatest advantage, and least injury, to Athens.’²⁷ Although I believe that we can get a sense of this ethical dynamic today, I also think it essential not to minimize the question of the effective aspect (the ‘look’) of such bronze, and this too is the point of a phenomenological reflection, as precisely the look of such bronzes is incorrigibly lost to us.²⁸ Given the relative paucity even of such bronzes as remain, texts turn out to be, and this was always Nietzsche’s lesson, our best means for such a

²⁶ Larry Shiner discusses this difference in ‘The Greeks Had No Word for It,’ the first chapter of his *The Invention of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

²⁷ Nietzsche, ‘Homers Wettkampf,’ KSA 1, p. 789, my emphasis.

²⁸ This look would have for its part been dependent on many things, including chemical composition and as Earle R. Caley emphasizes in his ‘Chemical Composition of Greek and Roman Statuary Bronzes,’ we know little about this. In Suzannah Doeringer, et al., eds., *Art and Technology*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), pp. 37-49. There are also questions of taste, for it can be supposed, at least on Pliny’s authority, that the look of bronze may have echoed the look of marble (or, and of course, as Pliny himself speaks from a Roman perspective, vice versa). Yet the marble in question would not have been the Winckelmannian white associated with antiquity but a polychrome statue the colour of ‘life.’ What colour would that be? For us? For the Greeks? What would it look like?

phenomenological reflection and as hermeneutic and phenomenological, this would be a philology beyond philology, a meta-philology.



Figs. 4 and 5. Bronze, early mid 5th c. B.C.E.
Riace Warriors “A” (77 5/8 in.) and “B” (77 5/8 in.)
Photo Credit : Scala / Art Resource, NY

Nigel Konstam and Herbert Hoffmann have recently advanced what I regard as the inversely related claim that the Greeks modeled their life-size sculptures on life, that is, cast not from clay models but directly from ‘plaster’ casts of living athletes.²⁹ (What were these plaster casts? Of what were they made?) Konstam, himself a sculptor in bronze, traveling to Calabria to see the Riace bronzes, ‘was immediately struck by the unusually close correspondence between the bodily forms of the two figures.’³⁰ (Figs. 4 and 5)

Others have noted that these figures boast the same physique, the same height, and so on. But for Konstam, the statues’ feet were critical. ‘The ball of the big toe and the two toes next to it are flattened by being pressed against the ground... The little toe is curled under and in, exactly as in nature.’³¹ To explain the significance of this point—we may add here that this is a telling elaboration on what it might mean to have ‘feet of clay’—Konstam clarifies the difference between casting from a clay

²⁹ See Nigel Konstam and Herbert Hoffmann, ‘Casting the Riace Bronzes (2): A Sculptor’s Discovery,’ (*Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 23 (November 2004): 397-402. Konstam brings his own sculptor’s experience to the question of reconstructing ancient technologies, see: ‘Casting the Riace Bronzes: Modern Assumptions and Ancient Facts,’ *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, Volume 21 (May 2002): pp. 153-65.

³⁰ Konstam and Hoffmann, ‘Casting the Riace Bronzes (2),’ p. 397.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

form and casting from life, noting first that ‘when cast from a clay model, the bottom of a foot supporting a body will be open, just a rim of bronze.’³² By contrast, a figure ‘employing a plaster cast taken from life’ will ‘have feet that are naturalistic in every detail—their tops as well as their bottoms. ... [S]uch details appear on the undersides of the feet of both Riace warriors. ... duplicat[ing] the footprint in the plaster mould.’³³

Although Konstam and Hoffmann do not advert to this, their claim dates back to the same Pliny already cited above, whose *Natural History* makes an appearance in the writings of nearly every art historian on the subject. For Pliny tells us that Lysistratus was ‘the first person who modeled a likeness in plaster of the human being from the living surface (*facie*) itself, and established the method of pouring wax into this plaster mould model and then making final corrections on the wax cast.’ (NH 35.153) Lysistratus thus ‘introduced’ the practice of rendering portraits with lifelike precision and ‘the same artist also invented taking casts from statues.’ (Ibid.) The word I have given here as surface, *facie*, is usually translated as face but *facie* also refers to the entire bodily surface. Given Pliny’s contention that Lysistratus made some 1,500 large-scale bronzes, it is plausible to suggest he was casting from life just because a mechanical advantage of this kind would facilitate such an output (even assuming he made less than the round number Pliny attests). For Pliny, the achievement of Praxiteles’ sculpture was in such ‘modeling’ (NH 35.158) and Lysippus was said to have contributed greatly to the art of bronze statuary by ‘representing the details of the hair’ (34.65) and in general by working the forms after casting them: therein, he says, lay the artistry.

The technique of modeling from life, as Konstam corroborates it from his own perspective, could seem the best way to understand Pliny’s descriptions as well as the very rubric of ‘portrait statues’³⁴ for three-time Olympian victors. Further philologico-hermeneutic support for the notion of casting from life is given in the report that Lysistratus’ brother, Lysippus, shifted his own profession from a smith (Pliny is fond of such emphatic reminders of context) to become himself a sculptor upon overhearing the artist, Eupompus, identify the master he had imitated: gesturing toward a crowd of men, he declared ‘nature herself and no artist was the true model [*naturam ipsam imitandam esse, non artificem*]’ (NH 34.61). This passage can be interpreted as supporting the standard story of the Greek departure from a more regimented tradition (as we noted in Diodorus), but the context (together with the kind of incidentally relevant

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “*ex membris ipsorum similitudine expressa, quas iconicas vocant.*” Pliny, NH 34: 9.

point concerning Lysippus' more subordinately banausic beginnings) permits the alternative reading that has life itself, the living human form, serve as the model for the artwork, especially given the technical inventiveness of his brother, Lysistratus.

Beyond such textual evidence, art-historical studies of medicine in ancient representations of the body highlight such empirical detail that they too lend support to the possibility of casting from living models.³⁵ There is a further debate concerning the ancient techniques for the casting of bronze statues,³⁶ and a related tradition that emphasizes this casting as effectively *mechanical* reproduction, including Margaret Bieber, Carol Mattusch, Brunilde S. Ridgeway, among others, studies which, once again, go back to ancient authors like Pliny and like Pausanias.³⁷

Setting aside the all-too-modern preoccupation with desire and the body (where it is likely that a great deal of our attention to the erotic in antiquity is tied to our own Western conventions as can be seen from a comparative review of contemporary literature with the literature, say, of Wilamowitz's day: for if the details differ, the obsession is the same),³⁸ the Nietzschean argument suggested above goes beyond Deborah Tarn Steiner's account in her *Images in Mind* to say that the Greek would have *first found* himself politically (or civically) in agonistic and active terms by

³⁵ See, for instance, Guy Métraux, *Sculptors and Physicians in Fifth-Century, Greece* (Montreal: McGill Queens, 1995).

³⁶ See Margaret Bieber, *Ancient Copies: Contributions to the History of Greek and Roman Art*, (New York, 1977) as well as Brunilde Ridgeway, *Roman Copies of Greek Sculpture: The Problem of the Originals*, (Jerome Lectures 15; Ann Arbor, 1984) and her *Hellenistic Sculpture, Volume One: The Styles of ca 331-200*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). For an overview of the question, see chapter five, 'A Greek Bronze Original?' Carol C. Mattusch, *Classical Bronzes: The Art and Craft of Greek and Roman Statuary*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 141-190.

³⁷ See also Hugo Meyer's discussion, 'A Roman Masterpiece: The Minneapolis Doryphoros' in Warren G. Moon, ed., *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros, and the Tradition* (Madison: Wisconsin, 1995), pp 65–115. Here p. 65. Meyer includes a useful comparison of copies. Where Meyer raises the question of copies 'carved centuries after the original' in order to reflect on 'tradition and its dissolution,' a very different aspect is explored in Mattusch's reflection on the absence of a canonic original.

³⁸ See, for example, Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece*. Stewart notes that the ideal of the Doryphoros 'as the epitome of Measure (*to metron*) or the Mean (*to meson*)' is anecdotally (we may modify this, after Lacan, as metonymically apparent in Stewart's account of seeing ' [the Doryphoros] used as a model in *Muscle and Fitness*, as a Berkeley tailor's dummy, and as a gay icon.' Stewart duly includes a photo by Jim French (French produces gay erotica for calendars and cards) Stewart, 'Notes on the Reception of Polykeitian Style: Diomedes to Alexander,' in: Moon, ed., *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros, and the Tradition*, pp. 246-261. Here p. 247.

‘looking in’ (and, so I here contend, back to himself) in the statue.³⁹ This same effectively reflective ‘looking in’ corresponds to the playing aspect of the shining surface of bronze.⁴⁰

Bronze

The excellence of bronze in addition to the modeling capacities of ancient bronze-casting techniques, about which we continue to learn more,⁴¹ is that it reflects the body not only figuratively (as modeling the form or colour or details of the body) but quite literally as a mirror. Beyond the shining qualities of bronze (we will have cause below to refer to the specific material of bronze mirrors) it is important to consider the difference made by colour with respect to the claims that ancient bronze could appear to have the aspect of living human flesh. As noted, it is customary to pass over this assertion without undue thought, but there is a difference between a bronze statue, as we know these today, and the ‘bronzed’ flesh of even a well-muscled youth with a perfect—Mediterranean! Aegean!—tan.

To get the look of a bronze statue today, say, if one were doing a commercial photo shoot, one would need a bit more than oil: perhaps one might add powdered metal to the makeup applied to living models. But the point here would be that we take the look of metal less to resemble flesh than we take it to ‘gild’ (or ‘bronze’) flesh. Again, it is not uncommon to conclude that the Greeks had to have been inexact in their reports. But what if they meant what they said (Nietzsche, as we recall,

³⁹ See Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Stewart articulates this for contemporary erotic sensibilities when he writes that the ‘oiled gleam of an athlete’s body, dark tanned in the sun, was well served by the tense reflectivity of burnished bronze.’ Stewart, *Greek Sculpture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 39. I have noted above that this shining surface could also have been polished and painted marble or indeed gilded and painted wood. Thus I would argue that some of this reflecting ‘gleam’ was doubtless (and manifestly for different reason and different effect) also at work in the chryselephantine statues to which Pausanias devotes special attention. The word can mystify some scholars, derived from χρυσός, gold, and ελεφάς, ivory: these would be ivory statues inlaid or entirely covered with gold. See for a discussion, Christopher Lapatin, *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). And we might rephrase the terms of the current inquiry to ask what a grand scale chryselephantine statue of a god would have looked like?

⁴¹ See, again, Rolley but also Jean Charbonneaux, *Greek Bronzes*, trans. Katherine Watson (New York: Viking Press, 1962) and others, some cited below and including the contributions to Carol Mattusch, ed., *The Fire of Hephaistos: Large Classical Bronzes from North American Collections*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 1996).

thought that one could hardly take them literally enough)? And what would that mean?



Fig. 6. Bronze Cast, note color differences. Pergamon Museum. Berlin. September 2004. Author's photograph.

The colour of bronze is essential to the question I have been seeking to raise concerning 'the look' of ancient Greek bronze, particularly with respect to the claim that a statue could taken to be a living body. But what was that colour?

The ancient tradition emphasizes that bronze could, depending on the alloy, be made in a variety of colours.⁴² Thus Pliny details a wide array of bronze types (NH 34.94-100), pointing to the difference between Roman bronzes and Greek bronzes, and indeed Etruscan bronzes and other bronzes. More significantly here, he also details some of the compositional differences and in particular the proportions of 'what is called [a blend for making molds] of bronze of a very delicate consistency, because a tenth part of black lead is added and a twentieth of silver-lead;

⁴² Modern reconstructive thought tends to dispute that, but the basis of such disputation requires in turn the presumption of modern bronze technique rather than ancient technique, which remains as we have seen open to speculation. Mattusch summarizes the metallurgical analysis of the Ugento Zeus which attests to a degree of sophistication casting individual alloys in one piece, *Lo Zeus Stilita di Ugento*, (Rome 1981), Mattusch, *Greek Bronze Statuary*, pp. 70-71. However in her essay, 'The Preferred Medium: The Many Lives of Classical Bronzes,' in Mattusch, ed., *The Fire of Hephaistos* pp XX-XX, although reporting Pliny's testimony that different alloys give different colours and refinement, contends that modern experience with bronze alloys does not confirm this (see pp 26-27). Denys Haynes argues for an inlay and overlay method, pointing out that 'copper-rich alloys' were 'cast separately' such as the 'nipples of male statues.' Haynes, *The Technique of Bronze Statuary* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1992), p. 110. And then there is the question of Pliny's meaning.

and this is the best way to give it the colour called Græcanic' (NH 34.98). Yet the problem, were we inclined to an empirical check, is that (adding to the limitations of modern metallurgical analysis) Pliny lists no main ingredient in this case: unlikely to have been copper alone, what was it?

Colour differences on Pliny's account would have been produced through the use of relevant additives: like our own sculptors today, the ancients played with patinas. He mentions salts and verdigris and even organic materials (indeed: he's big on egg white) but also alloys in the composition of the bronze as the first volume of Kurt Kluge's study of casting techniques in ancient large-scale bronzes argues as a claim routine in his day, some eighty years ago.⁴³ Where Kluge's sources detailed the additions (and significance) of tin, zinc, and nickel, in addition to lead, iron, silver, gold, and even mercury, today's more refined methods have also detected antimony, arsenic, bismuth, cobalt and manganese.⁴⁴ To this complex question of composition, add the presence (or absence) of gilding, amalgamations of other metals and stone inlays but also like polish and indeed like wax, not just as an artifact of the copying process but also to protect against corrosion and oxidation or else to add colour.

To address the question of bronze and in the process to raise the question not only of the status of Roman copies but to go beyond such considerations of originals and copies (still another theme than that of the present paper), we may consider, if only because of its familiarity, the Laocoön Group celebrated, again by Pliny, who saw it in the house of the Emperor Titus. (NH 36.37-38)⁴⁵ The Laocoön's reception echoes throughout the Renaissance and the Romantic era complete with erotic fascination (and contemporary accounts hasten to qualify this fascination as 'homoerotic,' an appellation supposed because one is also supposed, as reader or viewer, to be male).⁴⁶ Significant for me here, however, will only

⁴³ Kurt Kluge, *Die Antike Grossbronzen Vol. 1: Die Antikeerzgestaltung* (Berlin/Leipzig: Walther de Gruyter, 1927), p. 45-47. This first volume of Kluge's folio-sized, three volume study also details the characteristics of silver-copper alloys, pointing out that silver mixed with more than one third copper retains its light silvery colour, becoming red only after 40%. See p. 32. In a recent survey, Kluge's study and supporting sources dating from the 1900's and before are not cited. See Henry Lie and Carol C. Mattusch, 'Introduction to the Catalogue Entries and Technical Observations,' in Mattusch, ed., *The Fire of Hephaistos*, pp. 162-179, here, p. 171. For a reading that takes account of Kluge and earlier work, see Charbonneaux, *Greek Bronzes*, esp. pp. 19-32.

⁴⁴ Lie and Mattusch, 'Introduction to the Catalogue,' p. 173, in *The Fire of Hephaistos*, shows the advantages of modern metallurgical (such as plasma mass spectrometry and electron microprobe) analysis.

⁴⁵ Scholars note that the location of the statue found does not fit Pliny's account.

⁴⁶ The nature of this homoerotic fascination is the focus of Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal* and Richter, *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain*. See, again, Donohue, *Greek*

be the claim that the statue to which Pliny refers was originally cast in bronze rather than being carved in marble which does not, of course, preclude any number of marble or indeed bronze copies.



Fig. 7. The Laocöon group. Roman copy, perhaps after Agesander, Athenodorus, and Polydorus of Rhodes. 1st c. CE. Marble. H: 2.1 m. Vatican Museums, Vatican State. Photo Credit : Alinari / Art Resource, NY

In his discussion of the Laocoön and the founding of Rome, the late Bernard Andreae discusses what he argues to be the erroneous parsing of the generic sculpture for *statuaria ars*.⁴⁷ Continuing the now-long-standing habit of challenging Giuliano de Sangallo's immediate recognition/identification of the group of statues as they were unearthed,⁴⁸ Andreae argues that in Pliny's Latin, *statuaria ars* refers to 'bronze.'⁴⁹ Andreae's interpretation has the great advantage of clarifying Pliny's identification, often glossed over or elided in citations, of three different sculptors working from a common plan (if, and this remains a

Sculpture and the Problem of Description, pp. 165ff. for a differently weighted reading of Winckelmann's aesthetic influence with respect to sculpted or veiled outline or contour.

⁴⁷ Bernard Andreae, *Laokoon und die Gründung Roms* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1988), pp. 146-147.

⁴⁸ The architect Giuliano da Sangallo brings Michelangelo along to the excavation, adding support to the array of largely financial arguments (among others) that Lynn Catterson has assembled to support the claim that Michelangelo himself forged the Laocoön. See Catterson, 'Michelangelo's Laocoön?' *Artibus et Historiae*, 52 (2005).

⁴⁹ Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway's 2003 address to the American Philosophical Society 'The Study of Greek Sculpture in the Twentieth Century.' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* Vol 45, No. 1 (March 2005) adverts to the debate between identifying the statue as a 'late Republican original or copy of a Hellenistic bronze' (p. 67), as current, although her concern is the dating.

considerable obstacle, it does not quite resolve the question of Pliny's key, but stock, claim that the statue was made from one stone: *ex uno lapide*.⁵⁰ But *if* we are indeed talking not of a single block of marble but rather of a large scale bronze, newer discussions of the casting of such bronzes, such as Konstam and Hoffmann's, also serve to make more sense of this plurality (three sculptors, one plan).⁵¹ But to follow Andreae here: *if* the statue of Pliny's description was in fact bronze (or, and this too, to be sure, only displaces the question: *if* the *original* was a bronze), the question still remains for us: what did it look like as such a bronze (copies of the Laocoön rendered in bronze are extant but modern casts of the sort cannot answer this question for the reasons given above).



Fig. 8. Bronze Statue. Pergamon Museum, exterior; Berlin. September 2004; author's photograph.

If scholars have noted that it is significant that Winckelmann, never saw his statue by the light of day (Fig. 7), our own limitation is a different one. We have no statues today as they might have been seen in their original aspect just because an essential characteristic of bronze, precisely as a metal, entails that even the statues that have survived the passage of time or that are retrieved, as they continue to be, from the sea, can never give us the "look" of ancient bronze. Nevertheless, it will have to make all the difference in the case of the 'look' of Greek bronzes to encounter them under the open sky, met in the living light of an experience we can at best imagine at an approximate remove. (Fig. 8)

⁵⁰ The claim that the statue is of one block is problematic here (as is the comparison Pliny makes to 'any bronze') and Eichholz remarks that it 'is composed of five blocks.

⁵¹ Konstam and Hoffman offer a technical criticism of the standard interpretation based on the Berlin foundry cup in 'Casting the Riace Bronzes,' cited above.

If Heidegger will emphasize appearance as the shining forth of what shows itself from itself (both substantiality of metal or of stone or of flesh and form), we are sobered by the recognition that ancient bronzes simply cannot be brought to—much less ‘allowed’—to show themselves (from themselves) in this way. Like Heidegger’s absent tool, or like Sartre’s protractedly failed café rendezvous with his missing friend, Pierre, the irremediable lack of an original aspect turns out to highlight the importance of that very aspect as it ‘would have’ looked (and we cannot even begin to catalogue all the other assumptions we cannot know as these would have to be found in a world lost to us despite our passion for claiming it as ‘our’ past).

It has not been my claim that all we have are so many copies of romantically missing originals⁵² nor am I claiming that we have no such bronzes today. This point does not oppose the very notion of an ‘original’ as in today’s rather commercial sensibility for ‘original works of art’—one artist, one masterpiece, a handy ideal especially for today’s conception of creative copyright and intellectual property—as if that were ever true of art, even today, much less in antiquity. The phenomenological point of sensibility as I have been seeking to emphasize it here is that we are hard pressed even to reconstruct the objects we discuss and we are hardly better off than our nineteenth century counterparts even if our own efforts seem more measured.

Consider the difference made by the restorative reconstructions (and we are not even considering the sand encrusted statue as originally recovered).⁵³ We think the ‘original’ looks somehow more ‘authentic’ because, as any art historian worth his or her salt will chide us: we love the patina of age: heirs of late and post-modernity we are still, like Byron, in love with ruins. Yet and as little as the corroded first find, the ‘restored’ statue cannot give us the look of the bronze as it was first made.

We cannot know the ‘look’ of such works of art because we do not have access to the work when it was first made, first set up, or first dedicated, just as these inception correspond to different events in the life-history of a Greek statue. Nor can we reconstitute the bronze, a point

⁵² Mattusch has summarized the arguments attesting to the meaninglessness of such terms in the absence of a correspondingly singular original, a point I underscore while also emphasizing the plural character of such copies.

⁵³ For an account of such restorations in the case of the Apoxyomenos brought up in 1999 from the waters of the Adriatic between the islands of Lošinj and Orjule off the coast of Croatia, see catalogue to the exhibition in the Florence Medici Palace, Sept 2006 through January 2007. Maurizio Michelucci, ed., *Apoxyomenos: The Athlete of Croatia* (Giunti: Florence, 2006). The Croatian athlete compares to the Ephesus athlete in Vienna and so, indicating a cast, very possibly, from life.

that is important for any possible reconstruction in our day, as such efforts are sometimes made to different ends in the history of science.⁵⁴ Analyses, as noted above, of the metallurgical composition of ancient artifacts have been made, but what such analysis cannot tell us is *how* the Greeks constituted their bronze (and there were, as already indicated above, any number of kinds of Greek bronze). What we know of their methods is ‘fairytale,’ to repeat Konstam’s words with respect to the question of the technique of casting (and although a technician himself, even Konstam does not raise the question of composition). We cannot recreate the bronzes of antiquity.

I do not claim to have discovered the recipes for the varieties of Greek bronze (just as little as I mean to claim to have the secret of the cement or gum that was used to create the seal or gasket in the original air pump: Robert Boyle called it ‘diachylon’) as the details of the ingredients of the same may have been less a secret than all-too-commonplace at the time,⁵⁵ among all kinds of other reasons. What I have done is to emphasize the difference such differences from contemporary experience with contemporary bronze would have made to the Greek encountering their own variously styled and coloured bronze statues.

To offer an additional example here, the limits of our knowledge of Greek bronze bears on certain hermeneutic questions in the reading (and supposed prejudices of) none other than Aristotle, with respect to women and their effects on the world around them. These disputes, on either side of the debate, arguably ascribe an all-too modern misogyny to him which he may not in fact have shared with his contemporary commentators (this difference would not make him a feminist). Regarding the eye, Aristotle observes that

[T]he organ of sight is not only affected by, but also acts upon, its object. For in extremely clean mirrors, when women look into them during their menstrual period, the mirror surface takes on a sort of

⁵⁴ See, for example, Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer’s *Leviathan and Air Pump. Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Lawrence Principe, *The Aspiring Adept* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ Like the bronze we have been discussing, the composition of the gum in question depends on common substances, matters everyone knows, and such details go without saying. See Shapin and Schaffer’s discussion of Boyle’s ‘special cement called diachylon, a mixture ‘which ... would, by reason of the exquisite commixtion of its small parts, and closeness of its texture, deny all access to the external air.’ ... Boyle did not provide the recipe for diachylon, but it was probably a mixture of olive oil and other vegetable juices boiled together with lead oxide. He [also] described how the stopcock was affixed and made good so that it did not leak, using a mixture of ‘melted pitch, rosin, and wood ashes.’” *Leviathan and Air Pump*, p. 29.

blood-red cloud. In fact, if the mirror is a new one, it is not easy to get the stain out, although it is easier with an old one. (*Parva naturalia* II 459b23-460a23).⁵⁶

Aristotle is typically mocked for this judgment (and we take ourselves to know better) but commentators fail to attend to the contextual issue of materiality in the case of Aristotle on mirrors. Thus (and remarkably, in an empirically minded era such as our own) absolutely *nothing* is made of the historically specific matter of fact that Greek mirrors were commonly made of metal (whereas the Romans also used glass backed with gold). Made of bronze alloy (they could also be made of silver alloy), ancient Greek mirrors began to oxidize (as metals do) from the moment they were first fashioned. (For this reason, Kluge emphasizes the relevance of taking a polish and of scratch-resistance in his analysis of the composition of so-called mirror-bronze.)⁵⁷ Hence it is relevant indeed that Aristotle specifically mentions brand-new mirrors in addition to adducing the protection against subsequent oxidation provided by a preexisting tarnish. But, to my knowledge, what no scholar has done is to undertake an empirical check of Aristotle's claim. This would be difficult given (as argued above) that we cannot reproduce the particular kind of mirror-bronze to which Aristotle refers. Yet the very limitations of our understanding of ancient metallurgy should suggest restraint. For what Aristotle specifies presupposes just such details: what is in question is how such mirrors would have looked in pristine circumstances *and* how oxidation rates correspond to ambient factors, such as the person using the metal mirror, but that means holding it in hand and breathing on and around it. An empirical speculation (we cannot manage an investigation) on the scope of Aristotle's claim seems to lend at least a grain of support. And while scholars doubt the ancients' claim that experts would be able to tell the difference between ores by smell,⁵⁸ new research into the supposed qualities of metal coins (the 'smell of money', 'filthy lucre') has confirmed a very physical and very olfactory basis for just this

⁵⁶ D. Gallop, ed., *Aristotle on Sleep and Dreams*, (Ontario: Broadview, 1990), pp. 89-91.

⁵⁷ Kluge offers an analysis of the properties and composition of mirror-bronze. See Kluge, *Die Antike Grossbronzen*, pp. 46-7.

⁵⁸ D. Emanuel suggests that when 'Martial and Petronius suggest that some of their contemporaries thought they could recognize genuine Corinthian bronze by its smell' the reference at best might refer to salts crystallized in the patina but argues that 'more likely Martial (9.59, *consuluit nares an olerent area Corinthon*) and Petronius (*Sat.* 50, *ego malo mihi vitrea, certe non olunt*) meant to satirize the notion of olfactory authentication.' 'Aes Corinthium: Fact, Fiction, and Fake' *Phoenix* 43/4 (1989): pp. 347-58; here, p. 354. I note that the satire might be on the pretender to a talent. Not every one can taste wine or tell the scent of fine oil from a counterfeit.

phenomenon. The oil and sweat on our hands instantly reacts with metallic coins.⁵⁹ Menstruating women living in close proximity to (but without interacting with) one another, e.g., in college dorms, tend to synchronize their periods.⁶⁰ Most explanations advert to the role of physical influences such as the environmental milieu that is also part of our bodily being in the world including hormonal changes in perspiration and the acidity of respiration but also the microscopic abundance of bodily debris that all of us (male and female) constantly shed from the whole of our very human (and very animal) bodies everywhere we go.⁶¹

We are inclined to assume that Aristotle is voicing his own prejudices not solely because he often does so but also because this conviction happens to accord with our equally enlightened perspective on ourselves, a perspective which has thus far managed to do without sacrificing the seductive ideal that it is to be created *imago dei*. That we believe this ideal of ourselves is clear for we imagine ourselves as (somehow!) hermetically sealed beings, discrete subject-perceivers contemplating a comparably discrete and so objective world. The modern advance consists in including women (and I am far from denying that this is a very great advance indeed) together with men as sharing the same potential for ‘immaculate perception’—or observation or interaction. The very idea of the neutral observer in science (as in legal and political affairs), a ‘transcendent’ observer who has no influence or effect upon the observed, is derived from this capacity. It is to counter this presumption that we can understand not only the marvelous convention of ‘immaculate perception’ which I have just now borrowed from Nietzsche’s discussion of the same in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* but the point of Nietzsche’s teasing remonstrance, urging us to catch ourselves in our own vanity when, like the Disney cartoon imagery surrounding Snow White, we imagine that we hear Nietzsche’s bird twittering to us ‘You are other, you are higher!’

⁵⁹ We would thus be, and in Pliny’s sense of the term, our own ‘touchstones.’ See D. Glindemann, A. Dietrich, H.-J. Staerk and P. Kuschik, “The Two Smells of Touched or Pickled Iron—(Skin) Carbonyl-Hydrocarbons and Organophosphines.” *Angewandte Chemie International Edition* 45/42 (October 27, 2006): 7006-7009.

⁶⁰ The classic study here is Martha McClintock, “Menstrual Synchrony and Suppression,” *Nature*, 229 (22 January, 1971): 244-245.

⁶¹ I discuss this further in Babich, ‘From Fleck’s *Denkstil* to Kuhn’s Paradigm: Conceptual Schemes and Incommensurability.’ *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 71/1 (2003): pp. 75-92, pp. 83-84. For an important discussion of the organisms contribution to (and constitution of) its environment, see Richard Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA* (New York: Harper, 1991).

Paidea: Beauty as Formation

Like the painting that ‘spoke’ for Heidegger (*Dieses hat gesprochen* HW 20/24), the statue holds us, keeps us in its ‘hesitant stay’ to use the language Hans-Georg Gadamer borrows from Hölderlin to conclude his essay *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (a Hölderlinian echo, for Gadamer, always to be framed in terms of Plato’s *Phaedrus*).⁶² It is this uncannily metaphysical ‘hesitant stay’ that justifies Gadamer’s recollection of Rilke’s expression of the sculpture’s imperative: ‘You must change your life’ (*Du musst dein Leben ändern*)⁶³ (Fig. 5). In such a bodily encounter, one is as much regarded by the sculpture as one is also the one who sees. The sculpture neither needs a head to see you nor indeed a classical form.

If we have no opportunity today to encounter Greek bronzes in their original aspect (even without the important difference the culture that we do not share would have to make for such an encounter),⁶⁴ I have been asking throughout the above considerations of the nature and quality of Greek bronze, how we might use a hermeneutic phenomenology for the sake of learning, as Nietzsche would say in just this context, *to see?* How in particular can we deliberately own or explicitly appropriate our ‘position of looking,’ especially if we bring in Heidegger’s reflections on beauty for Nietzsche’s Greeks and indeed for Nietzsche’s own very physiological, that is to say, specifically carnal thinking of the beautiful? As Heidegger reads Nietzsche on art, such bodily thinking is expressed precisely as a matter of feeling and in terms of enhancement and plenitude, intoxication and enjoyment, corresponding to the Stendahlian ‘promise of happiness.’ In his account, Heidegger follows Nietzsche as Nietzsche takes himself to stand against Kant’s ‘disinterested interest.’ But Heidegger’s phenomenological point here is that ‘every bodily state involves some way in which the things around us and the people with us *lay a claim* on us or *do not* do so.’⁶⁵ Thus Heidegger interprets Nietzsche’s discussion of the life-enriching or life-intensifying effect of the beautiful. ‘What pleases we take to be what corresponds to us, what speaks to us. What pleases someone, what speaks to him, depends on who that someone is to whom it speaks and

⁶² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 53

⁶³ Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 34

⁶⁴ I discuss the absence of the Greek cult in Heidegger’s context in Babich, ‘From Van Gogh’s Museum to the Temple at Bassae: Heidegger’s Truth of Art and Shapiro’s Art History,’ *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 44/2 (2003), pp. 151-69.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art*, David Farrell Krell, trans. (San Francisco: Harper, 1979), p. 99. My emphasis.

corresponds.⁶⁶ Heidegger's further expression of this affective affinity echoes the beginning of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*: '...we call "beautiful" whatever corresponds to what we demand of ourselves. Furthermore, such demanding is measured by what we take ourselves to be, what we trust we are capable of, and what we dare as perhaps the most extreme challenge, one we may barely withstand.'⁶⁷ It is in this sense that Heidegger can quote Nietzsche's very erotic and very Greek, very agonistic, *Nachlaß* note: 'To pick up the scent of what would nearly finish us off if it were to confront us in the flesh, as danger, as problem, temptation—this determines even our aesthetic "yes.'" (WP §852) Thus Nietzsche takes himself to refute Kant's disinterested interest as characteristic of the aesthetic judgment. So far from such a judgment, for Nietzsche, the declaration "'That is beautiful" is an *affirmation*' (ibid.), that is, indeed, an excitement, an intoxication. As Heidegger sets Nietzsche's reflection in connection with Rilke's differently aesthetic (but similarly) erotic reflections on the beautiful, Heidegger argues that for Nietzsche, 'the beautiful is what determines us, our behaviour and our capability, just to the extent that we are claimed supremely in our essence, to the extent that we ascend beyond ourselves.'⁶⁸ Thus Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's discussion of the life-enriching or life-intensifying effect of the beautiful. 'What pleases we take to be what corresponds to us, what speaks to us. What pleases someone, what speaks to him, depends on who that someone is to whom it speaks and corresponds.'⁶⁹ Heidegger's further expression of this affective affinity echoes the beginning of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*: '...we call "beautiful" whatever corresponds to what we demand of ourselves. Furthermore, such demanding is measured by what we take ourselves to be, what we trust we are capable of, and what we dare as perhaps the most extreme challenge, one we may barely withstand.'⁷⁰ It is in this sense that Heidegger can quote Nietzsche's very erotic and very Greek, very agonistic, *Nachlaß* note: 'To pick up the scent of what would nearly finish us off if it were to confront us in the flesh, as danger, as problem, temptation—this determines even our aesthetic "yes.'" (KSA 12, p. 556) Thus Nietzsche takes himself to refute Kant's disinterested interest as characteristic of the aesthetic judgment. So far from such a judgment, for Nietzsche, the declaration "'That is beautiful" is an *affirmation*' (ibid.), that is, indeed, an excitement, an intoxication. As

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume 1*, p. 111.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 112; Heidegger explicitly refers to Rilke's *Duino Elegies* later on p. 116.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume 1*, p. 111.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 112; Heidegger explicitly refers to Rilke's *Duino Elegies* later on p. 116.

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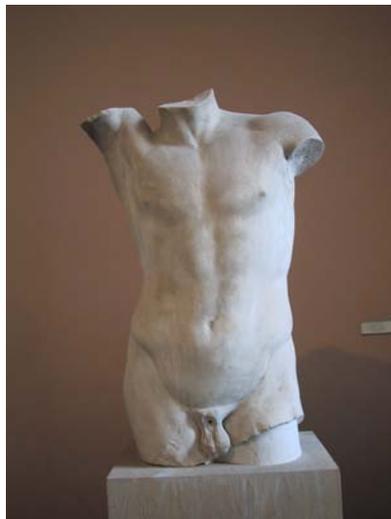


Fig. 9. Marble torso. Pergamon Museum. Berlin, September 2004; autor's photograph.

To go beyond Heidegger, I have here attempted to consider the very political difference that an abundance of statues would have made in ancient Greece. This is also Nietzsche's question as we find it in his *Birth of Tragedy* where he invokes not only Memnon's column (or statue) but Apollo, as the sculptor god, and indeed and precisely as civilizing form. What would it have been like to be surrounded by forms of excellence *and* to find oneself in them? To hold oneself in tension, as Nietzsche argued, with those same figures, arched against a literally iconic exemplar, what then shall we make of the Pindaric imperative to become the one you are and what of the ideal of measure?

What does this mean for us in raising the question of sculpture, if we can take over some of the hints of the past that remain for us using the example of human-scale Greek bronzes? Surely such sculptures may be called beautiful, uncannily so, as exemplified in the Croatian Apoxyomenos, until recently on display in Florence, or else in the balanced form of the Delphic charioteer or the Piraeus Apollo (Fig. 3) or as exemplified by the Doryphoros of Polykleitos (Fig. 1), the same sculptor, according to Pliny, who also made a statue called the 'Canon,' (NH, 34.55), distinct from the Doryphoros, as a standard for bronze art.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 113.

⁷² See Moon's collection, *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros, and the Tradition*.

But is this no more than fetishism? We are taught that the Greeks are canonic even before we turn to art history. Does not this determine what we find ‘classically’ beautiful? This is an old problem and I risk perpetuating an old prejudice. Greek sculpture’s the thing, only substitute the warmth of bronze for the cool of marble, Nietzschean color (Dionysus!) in place of Winckelmannian white (Apollo!).



Fig. 10. Apollo from pediment of the Temple of Zeus, Olympia, 5th BCE.
Archaeological Museum, Olympia, Greece
Photo Credit : Vanni / Art Resource, NY

The advantage of phenomenology for such a question is that we have modern (and modern art) examples of how such sculpture might work. Thus one can feel oneself claimed in very like the way that Heidegger suggests⁷³ by a non-anthropomorphic form like Christo’s para-modern *Gates* or Brancusi’s *Bird in Space*, a techno-futurist design that so unnerved American customs officials that they regarded it as a likely aircraft propeller when it was first brought to America.

Christo’s and Jean-Claude’s, *The Gates* (February 2005), installed in New York City’s Central Park, co-opted in a paraphrase, played off the patently ‘ready-made’ landscape art of the parks’ original designers, Frederick Olms and Calvert Vaux. But Christo and Jean-Claude also used the portals curtained with the bright orange or, as the artists insisted, the color of saffron, to give park-going New Yorkers to themselves. (Fig. 11)

By contrast, the experience of meeting Brancusi’s sculpture face to face and in person is an encounter with the modern space of flight. I remember this not only at New York’s Museum of Modern Art but also in Paris, at an exhibition of Brancusi’s sculpture including materially different realizations in marble and in wood (and part of the point here

⁷³ See for a discussion, Dieter Jähnig, ‘Die Kunst und der Raum’ in G. Neske, ed., *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1977), pp. 131-48.

has been to emphasize that such material variations make all the difference). The shape and the height of the sculpture (set as it is in its different installations on different pedestals), invites the eye and the body (this is the key point of comparison to ancient Greek, body-sized bronzes) to respond to a coming into material presence, as Heidegger speaks of this.⁷⁴ This ‘bird’—and we recall that airmen of Brancusi’s day were fond of such terms for planes and rockets—*is* space in the modern age of flight but it is also the organic power of flight as the bronze form turns it in space. The curving form and gleam of polished metal invites a range of perspectives—if not indeed flight with Daedalus’ wings. Seeing it, one is brought almost around the figure, without walking around it, as if flying. And to walking around the sculpture is to skim the world of stream-lined flight—a ‘bird’ in space.

Just as the method of phenomenology teaches us to ‘see,’ as in the case of Greek bronzes, one still needs to be in the physical presence of the work to feel the full weight and shining smoothness of the metal form, the gleam of bronze—or the white curve of marble or the polished lustre of wood (again to list Brancusi’s material variations on this one form). For the phenomenologically haptic point is that sculpture involves more than seeing, and Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology always takes care to emphasize (a touch contra Jacques Taminiaux’s reading):⁷⁵ that matter, this earth (and this was always Michel Haar’s emphasis)⁷⁶ *alters* form, working backwards on the form as informed substrate. In bronze, chrome, stone, the working power of the work of art changes as it works on us and this backwards and forwards working of the work—that is also the setting up of a world—is the *energeia* of the artwork.

One may thus reflect historically on the ‘built life’ or world of the ancient Greeks as the modeling of upright form and rectitude (in both ethical and political senses), an image of the columns to which Nietzsche has continued recourse. This is not only the sculptural figure—consider again the statue that was Memnon’s ‘column,’ highlighting Nietzsche’s early study of the intermingling of the metaphors for light and sound, as

⁷⁴ This shining through presents the substance of and from which the work is made: thus Heidegger tells us that “metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to say.” Heidegger, “On the Origin of the Work of Art” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, A. Hofstadter, trans., (New York: Harper, 1970), pp. 17-82, here p. 42.

⁷⁵ Jacques Taminiaux discusses Heidegger’s aesthetic phenomenology in ‘The Platonic Roots of Heidegger’s Political Thought,’ *European Journal of Political Theory* 6/1 (2007): 11-29.

⁷⁶ See Michel Haar, *Le Chant de la Terre. Heidegger et les Assises de L’Histoire de L’Etre* (Paris: L’Herne, 1985).

the sounding figure at the break of day⁷⁷—but it is also the columns that frame the end of his first book on tragedy, where he sets up an architectural parallel to the music of harmonious voices and rhythmic gesture: ‘Walking under lofty Ionic colonnades, looking up toward a horizon demarcated by pure and noble lines, finding reflections of his transfigured shape in the shining marble at his sides, and all around him solemnly striding or delicately moving human beings.’ (GT §25; KSA 1, p. 155) If I may be permitted to take my argument here to what Nietzsche liked to call its full consequences, these same moving ‘human beings’ in Nietzsche’s allusive conclusion might well have been so many bronze statues: upright and exemplary, and these statues in turn would have been themselves so many mirrors of sculptured columns.⁷⁸

Coda: With Mirrors

For another conclusion, consider what an applied phenomenology might ‘look’ like, in ordinary modern practice, far from the bodily mirroring of a bronze statue. Take yourself down an urban street lined with windows, such as one can find anywhere, perhaps in late- to mid-afternoon, or any time when reflective conditions are right. Or remember such an experience as you may have been taken by surprise on occasion. To ‘do’ this phenomenological experiment: watch yourself the next time (accidentally or accidentally-on purpose: i.e., phenomenologically) you catch sight of yourself in this way. Consciousness, we recall, is always consciousness of something, and it is worth reflecting on the question of what it is that takes us by surprise in such incidental mirroring encounters. For thus we can catch sight of and so almost ‘meet’ the aspect of ourselves as we might be bringing-forth our own appearance, our ‘look’ as we are in the world, as we show ourselves forth and are *given* to another’s gaze. The incidental sight of ourselves can ‘catch us up,’ bringing us as we-appear-in-the-world *to* ourselves and that also means, though exactly this is not evident, as we *might* be seen by others.

What catches us up in the sight of ourselves in a mirror is not that we recognize ourselves as ourselves in the mirror: for the mirror gives us no more than the ‘look’ of our own recollected reflected image of ourselves. Thus we can by the same token, be surprised past any first recognition, like Paul Feyerabend’s wry recollection of a motley figure he first noticed as odd, then contemplated with some contempt in the library

⁷⁷ See Babich, “Songs of the Sun: Hölderlin in Venice,” in *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 117ff.

⁷⁸ See, again, Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column*.

stacks at the University of California at Berkeley, only to realize that he was himself the same disheveled figure.

Caught up to our selves, to our look in the world, we rectify our posture, adjust clothing, touch up hair, despair of ourselves in disgust, as Feyerabend did, or feel a rush of pride, and so on. Heidegger writes of spatial perception in general, ‘This material thing in space which offers itself to possible sensations from different directions always shows itself as being-there only from a certain side and indeed in such a way that the aspect seen from one side flows over in a continuous manner into other aspects sketched out in advance in the spatial gestalt of the thing ...’⁷⁹ An everyday phenomenological reflection on reflection reminds us that when it comes to our own angles of appearance, we are aware of the keen relevance of points of view, especially as such perspectives are always already cascading to angles *unseen and in sight*, even at first glance.

And that is, but only in part, what Rilke meant when he said with uncanny and beautiful precision: ‘denn da ist keine Stelle, die dich nicht sieht’—‘there there is no place, that does not see you.’

You, that is: I—that is: we, have to change.



Fig. 11. ‘People Wash’ or strolling through Christo and Jean-Claude, *The Gates*. Central Park: New York City, February 22, 2005; author’s photograph.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, John v. Buren, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999 [c. 1923]), p. 68.