

## **Herminio: Sculpture, physics and motion**

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This article sets out to demonstrate that the sculpture of Herminio Álvarez (b.1945) presents in an immediate way major philosophical problems.<sup>1</sup> In the first place, they take on the discussion regarding the minimal, essential components in sculpture, and the relationship between sculpture and other arts. Secondly, they touch on the undeniable challenge of representing motion in abstract and stationary sculpture. Finally, they ineluctably find themselves face to face with the role physics plays therein.

With their centre of gravity manipulated by counterweights, some of Herminio's sculpture stands in an apparently unstable, and surely unexpected equilibrium.

Examples of these large, geometric bodies include the *F25* installed in the lobby of the Prince Felipe Auditorium in Oviedo, the *F26* in the Museum of Fine Arts of Asturias, and the 5.75 ft., 660 lb. *Leaning Wheel* in the Swiss Collection Dove Art, New York (figs 1-3). Such pieces oblige any observer to wonder about the mechanism responsible for keeping these large solids in this strange balance. Others make use of powerful neodymium magnets, as displayed in the piece in El Rinconín Park, Gijón (fig. 4). Still others combine magnets and heavy counterweights, such as the large, balanced parallel pipes, *I30* and *I64* (figs 5 and 6), and some of his most recent works displayed in 2012 at the Niemeyer Center in Avilés (fig.7)

Anticipating possible antipathy to a philosophical approach to analysing these works, it must be stressed that they raise many questions of a philosophical nature. They elicit questioning whether they should be considered 'substantial' or 'pure' sculpture? And

when does a sculpture become an 'artifact'. Further questions abound: What role do magnetic fields play in Herminio's work? How does Herminio's work relate to motion? What is the relationship between Herminio's sculpture and physics? Could they be understood as 'self-referential', as 'absolute', 'independent' or 'sovereign'?

Wittgenstein's famous aphorism 'Don't think, but look!', is often taken as the most mature, elaborate insight on the topic.<sup>2</sup> The present writer criticises such a stance, basing his critique on two aspects: first, Wittgenstein posits a sort of fideism against rationalism or idealism; second and more importantly, he advocates a highly questionable, dualistic structure by formulating an exclusive disjunction. His antagonism between 'looking' and 'thinking' parallels other current ideological dualisms such as that of feeling versus reason or 'understanding'. When each of the terms in this dualism is defined as an independently existing substance, then these schemes frequently adopt a metaphysical format. Humans, however, are incapable of 'looking' and 'thinking' independently: looking cannot be removed from any given language and its lexical categories. For while we are looking we are also joining and separating parts, and thus using and developing concepts. Accordingly, the intelligible world cannot be separated from the sensible world, since the intelligible world participates in the language-mediated process of connecting and disconnecting parts of the sensible world. With this in mind, there is no 'seeing' without 'thinking', without categorisation and conceptualisation.

If this is the case, how is it even possible to have access to the artwork in a direct, pure way, untainted by concepts or ideas? The view taken here rejects such a clean, direct and unprejudiced stance as just as invalid as a pure conceptualised one. For the present

writer, the true opposition occurs between, on the one hand, a mythological way of looking organised around primary structures and confused concepts and, on the other, a looking which reflects the scientific, technological and philosophical ideas relevant to each case. Hence, the decision to analyse Herminio's sculpture (or any other part of reality, for that matter) based on scientific and technological concepts, and on relevant philosophical ideas is not a direct, spontaneous, non-conceptualized looking (which is impossible), but rather a pre-scientific, pre-philosophical, mythological, magical looking, irrespective of the fact that some may take this mythological stance to be sufficient for their needs or purposes.

Following Richard Wollheim's 'physical-object hypothesis', this paper takes sculpture to be one of the oldest classical art forms.<sup>3</sup> With regard to sculpture, artwork can be identified *prima facie* with a physical object: performance, as Nelson Goodman states, is not an essential component of sculpture, as it is in music and dance.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, sculpture is solid, possessing a certain mass, volume and shape. Finally, it is assumed here that sculpture, considered as one of the fine arts, focuses on the visible surfaces of an opaque solid: It is nonsense to speak of the insides of sculpture by Michelangelo or Rodin. While some, such as Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty, do indeed have an accessible inside, this inside lacks, in the writer's view, a sculptural meaning, although it may have some architectural significance. Sculpture is, in principle, a 'superficial' art form.

Lessing expounded his theory on the differences between sculpture, poetry and music in his *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*.<sup>5</sup> In it, bodies and their visible properties provide painting's subject matter while in poetry action provides the object, since signs express successive objects in literature. Lessing admitted that

painting can imitate actions in an allusive, indirect way by using bodies: Rafael, by painting the folds of his characters' clothes, intends to suggest the actions they perform. Painting, though, can only refer to a single moment of action and must choose the most significant of all. Reciprocally, poetry can refer to bodies only allusively and must remain prudent in describing them, thereby choosing a body's most representative aspect in order to evoke it in the most effective possible way. Thus, as Lessing stated, each of these arts ought to focus on its own objects (bodies and actions for painting and poetry, respectively) since failure to do so renders perfection impossible in artwork. The criterion he employed to differentiate painting from poetry is also used to characterise sculpture, which falls on the side of painting, as evidenced by his account of the *Laocoön*. Furthermore, poetry and music remain undeniably close, since the temporal sequence in both arts is an essential part of the artistic composition. Lessing knew nothing of film, the 'seventh art', as coined by Ricciotto Canudo in his *Manifesto of the Seven Arts*.<sup>6</sup> The painter and the sculptor must stop motion or, at most, indirectly suggest it, for they cannot represent the duration of actions; they must content themselves with capturing a single frozen moment. On the contrary, the poet and the musician exercise control over the successive sequences in their work, since depicting the duration of actions is a central feature of their artistic technique.

Painting and sculpture share some constituent features. Both attempt to build objects which are separable from their author's performance, and both must settle for seizing a single frozen moment. They diverge, however, in their approach to that built object. In the painter's focus on a frontal plane surface (colour, form, line, and the like), the lateral and reverse sides of the painting lack pictorial significance. Taking an opaque solid's volume, mass, shape and form into consideration, the sculptor focuses on all external

surfaces of a given object. Unlike an engraving or relief, a sculpture is an object designed to be surrounded by a 'kinetic' spectator.

In Herminio's work, sculpture reaches a particular inflection bordering, however minimally, on engineering. They are not restricted to their outer surfaces, but also implicitly make reference to their interior, since their inner configuration makes their paradoxical equilibrium possible. Generally, engineers are praised for their inventions and sculptors for the results of their work. In Herminio's work, understanding both practices is essential, as his pieces are not fully intelligible without a consideration of their internal structure. Hidden magnets and counterweights provide for the unseen, 'engineered' sides of the work, and are complemented by the great, simulated heaviness afforded by the morphology and arrangement of the visible, cleanly-finished surfaces.

Sculpture, in principle, lacks direct motion. Kinetic art, which gained some force in the 1950s, can be considered a sort of mixed art, a 'degenerate' sculpture, since it ends up transforming mobile sculptures into motorized machines or automata. 'Degenerate' here must not be understood axiologically. It is used in an abstract and purely taxonomic sense, in the same way that an empty set is a 'degenerate' set for a mathematician, given that it lacks elements, or a zero radius circle is a 'degenerate' circle for a geometer.

Following the criteria advocated here, Jean Tinguely's 'machine that draws automatically', *Metamatics No. 13* (1959), powered by an electric motor, is more an artifact of engineering than a sculpture, if sculpture is to be understood in its strictest sense as an autonomous art form. When sculpture follows this path of electric motors, it ends up becoming mechanics or automatics.

That said, sculpture, while stationary, can also account for motion by using different techniques. Studying the relationship between sculpture and motion is a requisite for any philosophy of this art, and is a central issue when discussing some of Herminio's most relevant sculpture. As stated above, the direct use of moving parts in motorized sculpture draws us away from sculpture in its strictest sense; this, however, does not mean that motion cannot be indirectly suggested by means of a stationary body. For instance, Polykleitos, in his famous *Doryphoros*, employed several resources to evoke the warrior's movement: the weight put on his right leg, and the delay and release of his left, the bending and turning of the spine, the effortless drop of his right hand and movement of his left, the turning of his head, and so forth. Following in the footsteps of the inventor of *contrapposto* are the artists Agesander, Polydorus and Athenodoros. Their statue of *Laocoön and His Sons* uses a number of resources to achieve a sense of motion: the posture and balance of the characters, the tension in their muscles, the contortions of their bodies, and the expressions of pain. In his famous *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, Benvenuto Cellini also managed to evoke motion through blood flowing in torrents from the monster's freshly decapitated head. Further examples abound.

The next question to ask, then, is the following: Is it possible to sculpt motion using abstract bodies lacking any reference to living beings or other moving bodies? In geometry, time and motion are irrelevant: When a translation or rotation is performed, it is geometrically meaningless to wonder how long it takes or how fast the movement was given. Hence the challenge of representing motion by means of a geometric, abstract sculpture. Nonetheless, motion has been suggested in many cases by more or less abstract sculpture. Consider, for example, Alexander Calder's *La Grande Vitesse*

(1969, Civic Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan). Here, the feeling of movement is achieved because the sculpture is not completely abstract: its morphology forges some kind of organic, polytope monster. Some organic morphology witnessed in its 'body' and 'legs' helps induce the feeling of motion. Some of Constantin Brâncuși's works provide similar considerations. In Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913, Museu de Arte Contemporânea, São Paulo) the anthropic reference is explicit. The mobility of some other inorganic forms, such as a flame, has also been used to evoke motion in stationary sculpture.

Vidal Peña, in a lecture in 1983, compared certain metaphysical problems in Aristotle's system with the metaphysics implicitly acting in John Keat's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1819).<sup>7</sup> Truth be told, Vidal Peña made the comparison as a pure exercise in textual analysis, as an example among myriad others of the relationship between philosophy and literature. This however, does not limit his analysis, which is, in part, an ontological reworking of some of the central issues in Lessing's *Laocoön*, particularly that of the relationship between time and the arts; poetry and sculpture being the arts discussed in Keats' *Ode*.

The situation of painting and sculpture in relation to motion may be likened in large part to the problem any philosophical system must face in its attempt to conceptualize the changing world abstractly. Facing this problem, Aristotle came to the conclusion that any conceptualization implies some kind of rest. To quote his *Physics*: 'For the terms "knowing" and "understanding" imply that the intellect has reached a state of rest and come to a standstill'.<sup>8</sup> Geometric theorems, which are given without regard to time, were the standard of such knowledge for Aristotle. If, though, in the process of

conceptualization the flow of phenomena is paralysed, then knowledge of motion too must come to a stop, must be transformed into certain kind of rest. Therefore, when attempting to define motion, we are actually distancing ourselves from a definition, since the conceptualization needs to think of motion as if it were some kind of rest, as if it were seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. To complicate things further, knowledge, despite preferring rest and stillness, also requires the composition of certain parts in speech, and this composition also implies motion. The convoluted formula contained in Aristotle's *Physics* to define motion (*kinesis*: 'the fulfillment of what exists potentially, insofar as it exists potentially'<sup>9</sup>) tries to respect the paradoxical nature of any attempt to capture its essence. It, though, is less a solution to the problem of defining motion, and largely a reproduction of the question, a recognition that motion can never be completely conceptualized. As Vidal Peña says, there is a 'threat hanging over reason: the suspicion that a mobile world, despite much effort, can never be completely thought out'.<sup>10</sup> This issue is of paramount importance to Aristotle's philosophical system, because motion is not just what today's physicists would understand by it; rather, it is a much wider concept touching on change in the world, from the regular motion of stars to biological generation and corruption.

John Keats deals with this same Aristotelian paradox of capturing motion in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Keats recreates the decoration of an ancient marble urn whose sides exhibit relief figures: Gods, lovers, maidens, musicians, pipes, timbrels, priests, heifers. The carving remains stationary, perennial, and will endure the pain of many generations:

[printer's indent: When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain. ]



This contrasts with the transience of the recollected moment. A fleeting moment has been frozen: the panting lover (whose love is pure potentiality) never gets to kiss the beloved (he never reaches the actuality of his love):

[printer's indent: Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal-yet, Do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! ]

Regret will never reach this unsatisfied love praised as more beautiful than the satisfied passion 'that leaves a heart high-sorrowfull and cloy'd'. Longing for love is more precious than actually satisfying it. A sad and weary heart is one which has already achieved its purpose and fulfilled all its potentiality, and thus reached actuality.

Both Keats and Aristotle understand this actuality differently, however. For Keats, it is the epitome of tedium, while for Aristotle it is contemplation, the supreme expression of God's happiness. In the *Ode*, Keats used poetry to deal with a paradox Aristotle had tackled philosophically. In Keats, the stillness of sculpture captures a moment of motion; as such, the durability of the urn's eternal form evokes motion. In Aristotle, the knowledge of the flow of phenomena also requires rest and stillness. Accordingly, both Aristotle's definition of motion and Keats's reflections on the urn's carved figures express an awareness of the tension between motion and rest.

Even though they deal with the same issue, Aristotle and Keats are driven by different ideals. *Metaphysics* bases itself on the mobility of the world and aims to reach the immobility of conceptualisation. Ultimately, such immobility is only given in Pure

Actuality, that is, in God, who is both Truth and Beauty. Absolute immobility, though, renders the concept impossible as it prevents the trial, the division and the composition, and only allows the mere contemplation, which can only be attained by God. For his part, Keats turns the aesthetic contemplation of the unfinished moment, the lack of consummation and the forever unfinished potentiality into the ideal. The poet praises and delights in eternal incompleteness because, as a poet, the lack of knowledge is nothing uncomfortable. Beauty is embodied in the eternally unfinished, in the potentiality expressed in the motionless figures of the urn. Vidal Peña's analysis takes us up to here.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, Herminio's ideal of Beauty is taken to be the same as Keats's, as the sculptor too seeks to capture the single, unfinished moment, the tension of a frozen, eternal motion. Now to return to Herminio's large, hollow, wooden sculptures, their strange balances and apparent instability offset by heavy steel parts inside *F25* (2000), *F26* (2000) and *Leaning Wheel* (figs 1-3). What draws attention to these works are our habits of perception related to balance and motion. Consider, for example, *F79* (fig. 8): it is a wooden, five-foot high cylinder, seemingly solid, with a two-foot radius, which remains suspended horizontally a short distance above the ground, by a ring near the end of its main axis. Given the ring's position removed from the centre, the viewer expects the cylinder to break from its horizontal position until its unsuspended end hits the ground, but this does not happen. The cylinder is actually hollow, hiding a counterweight in its shorter arm (*vis-à-vis* the ring) which holds the whole piece in a horizontal position, like a balanced scale. This is where motion comes into play, since it seems as if Herminio had halted the cylinder in its imminent, predictable, inevitable fall. It is as if abstract motion had been caught in a bare cylinder: there are neither folds, nor

muscles, nor gestures to evoke, through action, a lack of rest. A more elaborate version of this effect is seen in *N42* (2012), recently exhibited at the Niemeyer Center in Avilés (fig. 9). A further example is the cylinder which, instead of resting upright, leans at an angle without falling (*F26*, fig. 2). The large wooden *Leaning Wheel* provides yet another example: while leaning, the wheel does not fall and remains static. Its equilibrium cannot be explained in terms of gyroscopic rigidity, since there is no rotation (fig. 3).

Stillness, a snapshot of the moment in the course of movement, is not something surprising in photography or painting, since the observer assumes that motion will continue. Nor is it particularly novel in current figurative sculpture, although it can be as evocative in the way Keats saw it: the *Doryphoros*, *Laocoön* and *Perseus* provide ample testimony. The novelty of Herminio's sculpture lies precisely in his capacity to suggest the imminence of motion through non-representative works which themselves are pure, geometric shapes. As such, although the morphology is purely geometrical, motion appears 'arrested' while the viewer is expected to resolve what seems like a precarious balance. All reference to moving bodies (humans, animals, flames) is avoided, thus placing the focus of the work squarely on motion itself. However, given that it is impossible to dispense with absolutely all content, Herminio has chosen these simple geometric shapes (cylinders, blocks) in order to reduce morphologies to a minimum, so that nothing hinders the central theme of motion and the transience of the moment.

Looking at this group of sculpture, an observer constantly wavers between perceiving the moment of the phenomena, the paradox of arrested motion, and the moment when

he or she discovers the device responsible for this unusual balance. After Aristotle and Keats, we once again find ourselves amidst the tension between the moment of expected motion (linked to our perception of phenomena) and the moment when rest appears necessary. Again, the ‘eternal fall’ of Herminio's sizeable *Wheel* (fig. 10) or cylinder reminds us of the ‘eternal lovers’ potentiality’ in Keats's *Ode*, the stopped motion, the ‘immortalized possibility’ which is the ‘eternally unrealized potentiality’ never converted into actuality (a sort of ‘actuality of potentiality’) in Aristotle.

However, even after learning of the sculpture’s hidden balance, after locating its centre of gravity, and after understanding the conditions of its static equilibrium, our habits of perception force us back to the phenomenal world where our stereoscopic view of the solid’s outer surface binds us time and again to our immediate impression of the sculpture. In *An Apology for Raymond Sabunde* Montaigne refers to the ‘stubbornness of phenomena’, to the impossibility of completely eliminating the subjective aspects of perception, as when vertigo causes us to lose stability in the face of no real danger.<sup>12</sup> Take a beam, Montaigne wrote, one thick enough to walk on comfortably, and place it in between the two towers of the Notre Dame Cathedral. No philosophical wisdom, he claims, no theoretical or intellectual knowledge would encourage us to walk up there as if we were walking on the ground. With Herminio's sculpture, while our safety is never compromised, our perplexity regarding the strange phenomena proves unavoidable, and is continually renewed. Observers must therefore oscillate endlessly from the ‘visible outside’ to the ‘unseen yet acting internal device’, from appearances to the rectification of these appearances, and back again. It is worth noting that this tension cannot be definitively resolved in the still moment at which we intellectually grasp the piece’s hidden parts. Our condition as animals, and our subsequent biological and behavioural

assessments inhibit us from dwelling in pure intellectual contemplation, for that can only be afforded by Aristotle's God, who is 'pure actuality', 'thought of thought'. In Aristotle's philosophy, men can reach some imperfect knowledge, but they always need to return to the continuous flow of the sublunary world. In Keats's poem, there is delight in the contemplation of the stationary reliefs on the Grecian urn, with the ideal for beauty placed on the unfinished instantaneity, on the permanent incompleteness of the scene. Herminio's sculptures, in similar fashion, express the incessant tension between the perceptual impression of impending movement and the rational understanding of the paradoxical staticness. Keats's words in the poem's final stanza could well be applied to any of these sculptures:

[printer's indent: Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity. ]

As has been said, it is the author's contention that Herminio, in his exaltation of unfinished immediacy, sides with Keats's ideal of beauty and understanding of art. One of these sculptures' aspects, however, does indeed border on the ideal in Aristotle's metaphysics. In the Aristotelian definition of motion, accidents are reduced to a minimum in order to highlight the essence of the tension between actuality and potentiality itself understood as characteristic of 'being in motion' ('the fulfillment of what exists potentially, in so far as it exists potentially'<sup>13</sup>). As Aristotle stated in his *Metaphysics*, there is no science of accidents.<sup>14</sup> In Herminio's sculpture, the very simple forms and materials and the neutral, impeccable textures and finishes, their minimalism, in short, could be interpreted as following similar lines as the severity of the metaphysical method. This seeks to minimise accidents in order to capture the essence

of that tension, thus revealing the subject of his sculpture removed from all irrelevant phenomenological aspects, clearer and unblemished. 'Less is more', as Mies put it.

Another of Herminio's groups embodies a different abstract subject. In these, magnetic fields incorporated in the works achieve a very unique equilibrium, as seen in *I-30*, *I-64*, *I-26*, *L-101* and other similar works (figs 5-7, 11, 12). They too are very simple geometric bodies whose composition is frequently dominated by a basic geometrical relation of parallelism. Viewing them, the spectator wonders what they have in common, while acknowledging that each sculpture has its own (*idiographic*) unit. This unit is also governed by the requirements of minimalism: the viewer has the impression that only essential components are present, much in the way of scientific theorems, which always avoid unnecessary 'epicycles'. No excess or missing parts can be justified and everything must be done with the greatest economy of means. A sculpture, though, cannot be 'true' as scientific theorems are, so the impression of completeness and perfection has to be achieved at the expense of its thematic unity, that is, the work's unity of meaning.

These works may be likened to ingenious devices which capture our attention and cause us to question. They contain that appealing, exacting function of art. They are works to be investigated and understood both externally and internally, since properly contemplating them requires questioning their structure. Part of their interest lies in their size, forms, volumes, textures, materials, angles and their organization of space, but another part, perhaps the most original part, is not readily seen. At this level, these works challenge our habits of perceiving balance and movement. While trying to respond to this provocation, we undertake a search for two invisible but essential points:

the Earth's centre of gravity and the piece's itself. They are two points united by one, incorporeal yet fully real line measuring more than 3,700 miles. The structure of the telluric mantle, though, is not enough to reveal the enigma and so it becomes necessary to account for the action of certain hidden magnetic fields.

In the world of physical objects constructed on a human scale, Herminio's sculpture brings to the foreground an anomaly which physicists have been trying to resolve for over a century: the incommensurability between the gravitational field and the magnetic field, the two fields which high energy physics has not yet managed to unify. Using geometrical bodies and deftly weaving forms, sizes, positions and balances, the artist achieves a heightening of the tension between these two, invisible yet active fields. While mutually irreducible, they nonetheless are involved one with the other in confrontation, in *symploké*.

First introduced by Plato in his *Sophist*, the idea of *symploké* proposes that nothing can be considered isolated from everything else but, at the same time, not everything is connected to everything else, because knowledge would be impossible otherwise. In Plato's words:

[printer's indent: Stranger: And certainly one of these three must be true; either all things will mingle with one another, or none will do so, or some will and others will not.

Theaetetus: Of course.

Stranger: And certainly the first two were found to be impossible.

Theaetetus: Yes.

Stranger: Then everybody who wishes to answer correctly will adopt the remaining one of the three possibilities.<sup>15</sup> ]

To illustrate the idea of *symploké*, Plato refers to discourse: on one hand, not every idea may be combined with any other one; but on the other hand, no idea can remain isolated. To quote:

[printer's indent: Stranger: The complete separation of each thing from all is the utterly final obliteration of all discourse. For our power of discourse is derived from the interweaving of the classes or ideas with one another.

Theaetetus: True.<sup>16</sup> ]

*Symploké* can be understood as a space-like structure in which many things are intertwined, each following different principles and operating according to different laws. It is the idea of interweaving, interlacing, connection and struggle, comparable to swords crossing in combat. It is the antithesis of metaphysical monism. It is the assumption of a multiplicity of different, opposed principles which rule the world. This idea entails some sort of ontological pluralism, as it implies disconnection among different regions of the world. In current philosophy, this stands particularly true with regard to the sciences, which sometimes appear connected and other times in conflict. An illustration of this *symploké* is the impossibility of reducing the principles of biology to the principles of physics. Another example is provided by physics itself: quantum discontinuity principles governing subatomic phenomena versus the principles of general relativity governing gravity. From this example, the return to the sculpture of Herminio is but a short road.



Herminio's sculpture plays on the lack of theoretical unity between the principles of Einstein's gravitational physics and Schrödinger's atomic physics, entwining the two (somewhat ironically, indeed), as if art were reminding science of its internal limits. Using a metaphysical formula, one might say that these "tensions" which Herminio promotes draw from the 'dialectic of Nature'. In these sculptures, observers can contemplate the simultaneous action of the electromagnetic field and the gravitational field, whereby both follow their own principles while still remaining woven in *symploké*, as 'the swords of two armies in combat'. Gravity plays an essential and unavoidable role in any sculpture, including, potentially, sculpture in orbit, as in Martin Sjardijn's project.<sup>17</sup> Gravity establishes asymmetry between the three dimensions of space faced by every sculptor. In the sculpture discussed here, however, gravity appears composed in *symploké* with the electromagnetic field, in such a way that the tension between the parts is, at the same time, the tension between the two most fundamental fields in physics. The mystery of the incompatibility and composition of scientific categories takes shape as a challenge before our eyes. We perceive this tension with our senses, but we cannot understand it from certain unified principles: a wonderful paradox and a central theme presented here by Herminio's sculpture. It is the sculptor who governs these fields which physics cannot unify.

Once more, the simple forms, the materials, and the neutral, impeccable finishes seem to serve those other intangible aspects which are only 'seen' in action. The challenge of sculpting these abstract constituents of reality makes these works so singular and so notable. A minimalist geometric abstraction is necessary to focus attention on those intangible aspects, thereby avoiding any other distracting morphology; 'less, but better'. Once we have found the central theme of this group of sculpture, we are then able to

understand their unity, and are able to rebuild the 'inner economy' inherent to their structure (as in the economy of parts of scientific theorems 'without epicycles'). The bodies are simple geometric bodies, and the parallel relationship between them is also a simple geometrical relationship, since the *symploké* between the two basic fields of physics (something invisible, *un-sculptable*) must stand out in the foreground.

The issues discussed above enable comparing Herminio's sculpture to certain relevant philosophical problems, as they seem to share a common project. First, the problem of change and motion is a challenge for both sculpture and philosophy. It seems impossible for pure motion, stripped of any ethological or organic reference, to be sculpture. Regardless, Herminio's abstract minimalism comes as close as possible to that ideal, for his sculpture takes motion as its main subject without any further reference. Motion is also difficult to think of in an abstract, philosophical way, for its conceptualization implies a certain form of rest, which thus betrays the essence of motion when one tries to understand it: Zeno, Heraclitus, Aristotle. Furthermore, some of Herminio's sculpture and certain pluralistic philosophies also share the desire to highlight the incommensurability between different structures composed in reality. Both attempt to synthesize perplexities and problems, exploring these problems and showing the bare limits of rationality. Adjusted to our perception and composed before us, certain pieces of Herminio's sculpture present a threat to the unity of reason, itself broken up into immeasurable categories. The idea of reason fractured into several irreducible and conflicting categories intertwined in *symploké* proves another distinctive constituent of certain philosophies dating from Plato to the present day. These philosophies, like Herminio's sculpture, try to account for those fracture lines, those discontinuities of reality. Both philosophy and sculpture remind us that our plural and

mobile reality imposes some limits to reason in our task of conceptualising and thinking of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Information in English regarding his work and its international scope is available at

<<http://www.herminioalvarez.com/en/herminio.php> >

<sup>2</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> R. Wollheim, *Arts and Its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Indianapolis, Hackett, 1968, p.113.

<sup>5</sup> G. Lessing, *Laocoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766). Translated by William Ross: *Laocoön: or The Limits of Poetry and Painting*, London, Ridgeway, 1836, especially chapter XVI.

<sup>6</sup> In the last paragraph of the Preface to *Laocoön*, Lessing states:

[printer's indent Finally, it is proper to mention that under the general term "Painting", I desire to be understood the arts of design in all their departments, in the same way as I would employ, if it were necessary, the name "Poetry", to designate those arts in general whose imitation consist in the progressive principle [Lessing is referring here to Dance and Music]. ]

<sup>7</sup> For more on this see Vidal Peña, "Algunos problemas metafísicos de Aristóteles y "metafísica" de la *Oda a una urna griega* de John Keats: un ensayo ucrónico" ("Problems in Aristotle's metaphysics and the 'metaphysics' of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by John Keats: A uchronic essay") *ER, Revista de Filosofía*, vol.3 (1985), pp. 23-48. URL: <<http://www.filosofia.org/hem/198/er030023.htm>>

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, VII, 3, 247 b 10.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1, 201a 10: *Hê touî dynámei óntos enteléchia hêi toioûton*.

<sup>10</sup> Vidal Peña, as note 7, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> M. Montaigne, 'Apology for Raymond Sabunde' (1580), in *The Complete Essays*, London, Penguin, 2003, Book 2, Ch.12.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, as note 9.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E, 1026 b 6, K, 8, 1064 b 9.

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 252e.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 259e.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Sgardijn's Weightless Sculpture Project can be accessed on <http://sjardijn.com/>.