

WALTER PICHLER:
THE MODERN PROMETHEUS



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THESIS ABSTRACT

WALTER PICHLER: THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

The ritualistic aspect of Walter Pichler's work greatly problematizes the traditional view of the art object as the locus of aesthetic contemplation. Yet how are we to approach such art in our secularized world? For it to maintain its meaningfulness, does not ritual require a shared symbolic system?

Indirectly guided by Pichler's work, this thesis is an exploration of the contemporary status of the work of art. An investigation into the myth of Prometheus reveals that art and ritual share the same origin. Further inquiries into early Greek sculpture, as well as the concepts of *techne* and *mimesis*, expand this origin into the relationship between the art object and the viewer, shifting the customary focus away from the resemblance between the model and the copy. In this space of *looking*, art no longer presents itself as an aestheticized object—presence and absence, the visible and the invisible, recognition and anamnesis come into play as possible ways of participation in the work of art.

RÉSUMÉ DE THÈSE

WALTER PICHLER: PROMÉTHÉE MODERNE

L'aspect ritualiste de l'œuvre de Walter Pichler vient bousculer la conception classique de l'objet d'art comme point de mire de la contemplation esthétique. Comment devons-nous aborder ce type d'art dans notre monde sécularisé? Pour avoir un sens, le rituel ne doit-il pas être fondé sur un système symbolique partagé?

Articulée indirectement autour de l'œuvre de Pichler, la présente thèse se veut une exploration du statut contemporain de l'objet d'art. Une étude du mythe de Prométhée révèle que l'art et le rituel ont la même origine. Par ailleurs, une analyse approfondie de la sculpture hellénique ancienne ainsi que des concepts de *techne* et de *mimesis* permet de faire remonter cette origine jusqu'à la relation entre l'objet d'art et l'observateur et de s'intéresser à d'autres aspects que celui qui retient ordinairement l'attention – la ressemblance entre modèle et copie. Dans cet espace du *regard*, l'art ne se présente plus comme un objet esthétisé; la présence et l'absence, le visible et l'invisible, la reconnaissance et le souvenir entrent en jeu comme moyens de participation possibles à l'œuvre d'art.

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PREFACE

Walter Pichler is a relatively obscure figure in the English-speaking artworld. He has been exhibiting since the 1960s yet only a handful of in-depth studies on his work exist. Given his wide influence among some circles of architects, we are left to wonder about the reasons for this ironic obscurity. There are certainly practical reasons, for instance the limited access to his work. Nonetheless, it seems that the real problem is that we have no way of approaching his work in a systematic fashion.

Pichler's oeuvre is multi-faceted; he creates drawings populated with fragile, dreamy figures and childhood memories. Whether drafted or sketched, he also makes drawings of huts and graves, of sculptures and buildings. Besides the drawings he makes sculptures and constructs houses or shrines for them in his farm complex at St. Martin, a town on the southeastern corner of Austria. In the early 1960s, collaborating with Hans Hollein, he produced a series of drawings and models of labyrinthine underground cities and machine-like structures. During the mid 1960s, he was interested in technology and industrial design creating a series of pseudo-technological sculptures, called the *Prototypes* (figures 27, 28 & 29), as well as furniture pieces. As a result he was even invited to work as a consultant for Art and Technology for Bell, at the time one of the largest telecommunications companies in the USA. The variety of his works—which even include book designs—already makes it difficult to speak about him in generalities.

Even if we were to only concentrate on his work at St. Martin, we are faced with problems of access. Financing his work through the sale of his drawings, Pichler refuses to part from his sculptures: he likes to stay close to his work. The sculptural pieces have public and private lives and behave accordingly; sometimes they reluctantly travel to different museums or galleries for shows, but they always come back home. While one realizes that the exhibition environment is the only reasonable way of accessing his works first hand, knowing Pichler's mode of working, it remains inadequate. The pieces are rich enough to forge new relationships in these neutral environments, and gain new meanings. Coming face-to-face with the work, one no doubt has a better understanding of the use of materials, the sense of scale and a better appreciation of the craftsmanship involved, the obsessively worked out details, etc. Yet this hardly means that we get to know the work in any satisfying manner: the sculptural pieces resist aesthetization as singular self-contained objects. Pichler's work does not operate within a language of form alone.

It seems impossible to think of Pichler's work without him being an integral part of it; his interaction with the work, through repairing, making, building, drawing, and overall caring, obliterates any clear separation between life and art. There is a strong sense of belonging: as much as the sculptures are dependent on him for their care, Pichler is dependent on them, he needs them. And everything is interrelated, a house is built for a specific sculpture, while at the same time it responds to other buildings in its surroundings; in fact, we can argue that the whole St. Martin complex is the work of art: not as a collection made of individual pieces of sculptures and houses but as a whole construct with each piece intimately related to one another. Nothing is ever 'finished', work is not done with an end in mind. In this continuous process, the whole complex becomes the project, with Pichler in its midst. One has to wonder: how will the work react when Pichler is no longer there?

Few people have the chance to see the sculptures in their homes, for St. Martin is not a museum—it is Pichler's home as well as his workspace. One way we can participate in his St. Martin project is remotely, through photographs. And as if to make us even more self-conscious about this, Pichler uses the same photographs in all of his catalogs. One never gets the sense of having been there, Pichler refuses to entertain us with any illusions: the experience cannot be replaced with reproductions. This makes perfect sense, of course, since Pichler is so insistent on how his work deals with space rather than just objects; he says "since I began working, I never understood how sculptors could pay so little attention to the space that surrounds their work, why space should be treated so carelessly."¹ If the space surrounding the work is an integral part of it, how can we claim to have seen the work through a photograph? Additionally, Pichler has made series of drawings with a lone viewer looking at the sculpture; it is not clear whether this viewer is Pichler himself. Regardless, "looking"—sometimes shown as lines coming out of the viewer—is also an intimate part of the work; one has to be in the room, looking at the sculpture for the work to be complete.

When we suggest that Pichler is integral to the work itself, we don't mean to psychologize his art in any way. Surely a great deal of childhood motifs haunt the drawings; but they in no way explain the work; the memories are immediately infused with mythological themes as well as existential angst. It is not possible to view his work biographically—and it is for this reason that biographical information on Walter Pichler has been excluded from the body of this thesis and attached as Appendix A. In any case, his own silence already makes

¹ Walter Pichler and Rudi Fuchs, *Tekeningen: Beelden: Gebouwen; Drawings: Sculptures: Buildings*, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1998, 20.

it difficult to gauge exactly where his references come from. And when Pichler does write about his work, he gives us few clues.

The question remains: given the problems of access, how are we expected to participate in Pichler's work? This is, in fact, the underlying query throughout this thesis—and our text is a partial answer, in that, meditating on Pichler's mode of working is a mode of participation in itself. The intention in this thesis is not one of demystifying or explaining Pichler's work away. Additionally, it is by no means a complete study on his work since a lot of important issues have been left out for the sake of clarity and comprehensibility. Taking into account that we are merely scratching the surface, instead, we will limit ourselves to addressing some general issues raised by Pichler's art. And when his work is not the direct subject of our investigations, Pichler's specter will be haunting the text.

INTRODUCTION

“As a sculptor, and I have been practicing this profession for over 35 years now—I knew from the beginning that I had chosen a field for which no one has a real need; but, of course, such a realization was the last thing that would prevent me from loving what I do. When one stops and reflects, one soon becomes aware that the art of sculpture has lost its place in today’s world. The church has become secularized and thus lacks orientation. Society seems not really to know how to deal with this kind of art—or can one seriously imagine installing works of art, such as I make, in a public building such as a bank? They would be completely out of place.”²

Walter Pichler, 1997

An artist who creates drawings, makes sculptures and constructs houses for these sculptures; all the while living amongst his creations, making it his life’s work to take care of them. Where does sculpture end and architecture begin? Where does life end and art begin? Could Pichler’s work be interpreted as a kind of total work of art, a personal *Gesamtkunstwerk*? In order to find an appropriate way to understand Pichler’s work, we have to first address our presumptions. We are not only assuming clear boundaries between various types of media (drawing, sculpture, architecture) but also conceiving of art as a domain outside of life.

When we look at the origins of Western art, we realize that the clear distinctions we take for granted (between art and life, between the different domains of art) did not exist from the beginning—in fact, such boundaries did not become prevalent until the eighteenth century. The Greeks, who also constructed houses for their sculptures in the form of temples for divine idols, did not have a name for the so-called ‘fine arts’; in fact, what we refer to as ‘art’ today did not have a direct correlation in the Greek language. *Techne* was both art and skill; besides sculpture and architecture, it even included agriculture. And, if we are to take Plato seriously, *techne* as art was not defined by skill or composition or beauty alone—the real criteria was that it disclosed truth [*alêtheia*] and helped us recognize our own selves through *anamnesis*. Art was not a domain outside of life, the Greek theater was

² Walter Pichler *Tekeningen* 20.

not a place of pure entertainment; art provided a direction as to the appropriate way to live, *techne* was not differentiated from ethics or philosophy.

Most of all, *techne* was never defined through *aisthesis*, sense perception, the root of aesthetics. Surely art was perceived through the senses, but the mode of its reception was not seen as its essence, as its defining quality. The replacement of the 'philosophy of art' with 'aesthetics' is relatively recent, it is a phenomenon attributed to modernity. Heidegger interprets aesthetics as 'metaphysics applied to art': "aesthetics is the way in which the essence of the beautiful and of art is delimited in terms of . . . metaphysics."³ By metaphysics, Heidegger is referring to the positivist view that the "knowledge of the truth about the world is the exclusive province of reason"⁴ and that anything outside of scientific knowledge has to do with feelings, a domain outside of reason. In this way, art loses its license to reveal truth and is no longer expected to provide us with any guidance in our lives; instead it is assigned to the realm of feelings.

How does this specifically lead to the aesthetization of art? "A great medieval altarpiece possessed, for its original receivers, at least two aspects: most importantly, it disclosed the 'truth' of the Christian cosmos but, in the second place, it did so in a formally beautiful way. If, then, thinking about art in a climate of positivism, one cancels its truth-bearing function, all one is left with is its 'aesthetic' role."⁵ And the aesthetic role becomes related to the objective qualities of the work of art, mainly its beauty. Eighteenth century vocabulary even builds this into the definition of art; fine arts stands in opposition to craft—art becomes the beautiful arts, *die schönen Künste*. Art, through its beauty, is to provide us with aesthetic experiences, sensations and feelings. To complete the removal of art from life, another factor enters: Kant's idea of disinterestedness. Erwin Panofsky explains:

"It is possible to experience every object, natural or man-made, aesthetically. We do this when we just look at it (or listen to it) without relating it, intellectually or emotionally, to anything outside of itself. When a man looks at a tree from the point of view of a carpenter, he will associate it with various uses to which he might put the wood; and when he looks at it from the point of view of an ornithologist, he will associate it with the birds that might nest in it . . . Only he who simply

³ Martin Heidegger as quoted in Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 13.

⁴ Young 13.

⁵ Young 14.

abandons himself to the object of his perception will experience is aesthetically.”⁶

The aesthetic experience thus requires a decontextualization so that we only perceive the physical qualities of what we are looking at (art and nature alike) dissociated with any use we might have: this is what we mean by the objectification of art. And this is what lies behind the idea of the museum: to provide a neutral space in which one can look at the work of art, decontextualized, removed from ‘life’, in order to experience its beauty, its formal qualities, to have a genuine non-conceptual aesthetic experience. (It should come as no surprise that the museum became thoroughly established in the eighteenth century.) To be fair to Kant, we must point out that he never intended his idea of disinterestedness to be applied to art; he was mainly referring to natural beauty. Gadamer points out the distinction that for Kant “the beautiful in art is not a pure example of the aesthetic problem, since art is produced in order to please. It is also true that a work of art always presents itself in an intellectual manner . . . [it] contains a potentially conceptual element.”⁷ In other words, for Kant, art presents itself through its function that is precisely to produce an aesthetic experience for its viewer, and therefore cannot be genuinely viewed in a disinterested manner.

What is it that creates pleasure in a disinterested state? “Since objects, in such experience, are removed from all relation to our practical interests, they are removed, too, from all relation to care, to fear and hope . . . we become free of pain, anxiety and stress . . . [and] achieve a moment of stillness, a unique kind of peace.”⁸ This, for Heidegger, is exactly what allows art to die.

“Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of aisthesis [sensation], of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is taken to provide information as to its essence. Experience is the source that is the standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment but also for artistic creation. Yet perhaps experience is the element in

⁶ As quoted in Young 9.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *the Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi. (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 97.

⁸ Young 10-11.

which art dies. The dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.”⁹

If the way we experience art through our senses becomes its definition, then art as an experience or, worse, as some sort of a stress relief, can easily be replaced by other activities that provide comparable relaxation. Removed from the domain of truth and ethics, art no longer answers to an absolute need; it becomes a commodity for the consumers of art, existing for a group of connoisseurs, no longer providing a collective, unifying experience for an entire culture as it did for the Greeks. This gives Hegel the opportunity to pronounce the death of art: “Art no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for itself . . . The magnificent days of Greek art, like the golden era of the later Middle Ages, are gone.”¹⁰

In this context, Pichler's position becomes clearer and presents itself on many levels as a challenge to the aesthetic conception of art. His insistence on living among his sculptures rather than letting them be displayed as objects in a museum already makes it difficult for us to view his work from an aesthetic perspective. In fact, everything is closely interrelated; a majority of the drawings are of his sculptures and buildings, and in turn the sculptures and the architecture are dependent on one another—making it impossible to judge any of his works as autonomous objects, to interpret them only through their form, use of materials, etc. Objectification is further made impossible because of the relationship of care that is built between Pichler and his works.

Far from a relationship of disinterestedness, Pichler's work is at times explicitly about function. This is most evident in the *Watchwoman on the Table Saw* (figures 1 & 2). No doubt a vital apparatus for Pichler, the table saw in his workshop also spells out danger—just as it can hurt its user, its user can hurt the machine if used incorrectly. The *Watchwoman* stands over the blade as a shield when the machine is not in use; protecting

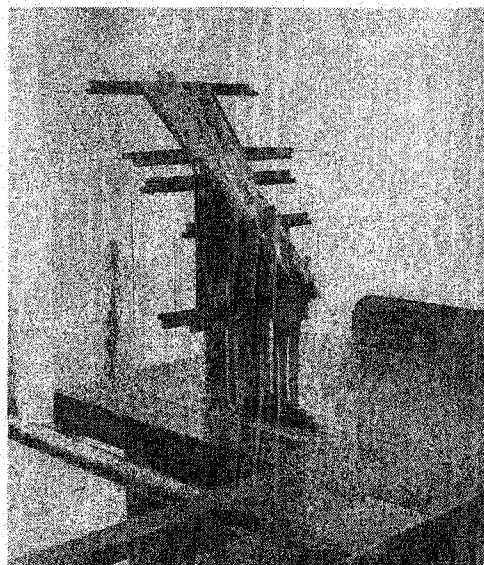


Figure 1: the *Watchwoman* guarding the table saw, 1987.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971) 79.

¹⁰ As quoted in Young 8.

both the user and the machine, all the while accentuating yet another danger: that of transforming materials, changing the natural order of things, the ambiguous hazards of *techne*.

This approach towards function—function as something inherent to the work, defining its meaning—is also extended as a ritualistic involvement with the work. A homeless sculpture, the *Old Figure* (figures 9, 11 & 13) is one of Pichler's earliest three-dimensional works. Marked by odd anthropomorphic features, it is infused with an aura of primitiveness. Here is an 'old' figure that needs to be laid to rest at night and woken up in the morning; taking on the basic human gestures of lying and standing.

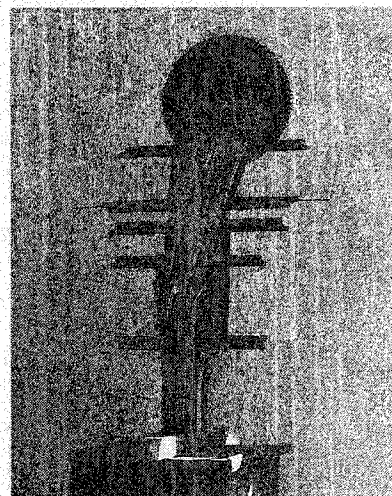


Figure 2: the *Watchwoman* waiting while the table saw is in use.

We can, in fact, perceive a general mythological dimension in Pichler's work—crosses, altars, skulls and other ritualistic icons permeate his work, giving it a mysterious aura. This quality that permeates the work is especially powerful due to the impoverished and secularized world we find ourselves in.

For us, this mythological aspect is perhaps the most ambiguous one. Greek art (or even Christian art) existed within a symbolic order created by mythology, which facilitated its reception as meaningful. Is such collective reception of art still possible? Our demythologized world is no doubt the legacy of the great metaphysical project, which—we now accept—has finally achieved its natural conclusion. We thus find ourselves in a rather precarious position: if we have come to doubt the truths offered by rational thought, where does that doubt leave us? Does the answer to the end of metaphysics lie in a recuperation of myth? Is it possible to recover what we have lost via a return to origins? These are serious questions; the short answer is that as spiritually seductive as it may sound, a return as such is not possible.

Gianni Vattimo demonstrates the problems involved with the post-modern positions on myth, which have emerged since the rejection of the metaphysics of history, which had in turn defined myth as ancient and infantile, as a knowledge prior to that of science. One of the views, which he describes as *archaism*, proposes that “not only is myth not a primitive phase superseded by our own cultural history, it is in fact a more authentic form of knowledge, untouched by the devastating fanaticism for quantification and objectification

characteristic of modern science.”¹¹ This may sound innocent enough, the early avant-garde of the last century looked at myth and the art of primitive cultures to explore alternatives to the western artistic tradition that had degenerated into irrelevance. And while we accept the premise that scientific and rational truths are no longer satisfactory, a call to myth as the only authentic way to reach truth can be fraught with danger. Based on a “utopian criticism of techno-scientific civilization and capitalism” it fails to propose a philosophical position. The only explicit return to myth invariably comes from the political right, presenting itself as religious fundamentalism or, even worse, fascism.¹² The call for a restoration of tradition, the typical mantra of the far right, merely reverses the myth of progress into the myth of origins. “To idealize the time of origins as perfect is as vacuous as idealizing the future (which is what the secular ideal of progress and development has done and continues to do so). Moreover, we are in touch with the origins via the procession of events leading from them right down to ourselves. Archaism wishes simply to lay aside the problems this process presents; above all, if the origins have led to the very condition of unease, alienation, etc., in which we find ourselves, why should we ever go back to them?”¹³

What is the ‘appropriate’ way to address the mythological and ritualistic dimensions in Pichler’s work? How should we, at this time, approach mythology in general—and with what expectations? To be able to answer these questions, we will take a closer look at the Greeks, to find out just where exactly mythology stood in relation to art, and whether a return to mythology for us is at all an issue. The myth of Prometheus will reveal that *techne* and ritual share the same origins. Further, studies revealing the evolution of the ‘image’ among the Greeks will illuminate the relationship between that concept and the spectator. This, in turn, we hope will reveal the validity that these concepts hold for the production and reception of art today.

¹¹ Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 32.

¹² We can think of one example close to this view. The Ahnenerbe, the Society for Research into the Spiritual Roots of Germany’s Ancestral Heritage, was founded by Heinrich Himmler in 1935. Its task was “to restore the German people to the everlasting godly cycle of ancestors, the living and the descendants.” They used mythology and pseudo-history (selective and distorted) to prove the superiority of the Germans and to justify the ideology of the SS. Archaeological expeditions were organized in search of the Holy Grail, fantasies about the lost city of Atlantis, which they believed was the home of the Aryan race, were developed. Himmler was also a member of the Thule Society, named after one of the mythical homes of the German race. This is, no doubt, an extreme example, and rather than reject rational scientific thought, the Nazis used science (skull measurements, and horrific experiments) to rationalize mythology. Nevertheless, it still shows us just how far this view can go.

¹³ Vattimo 37.

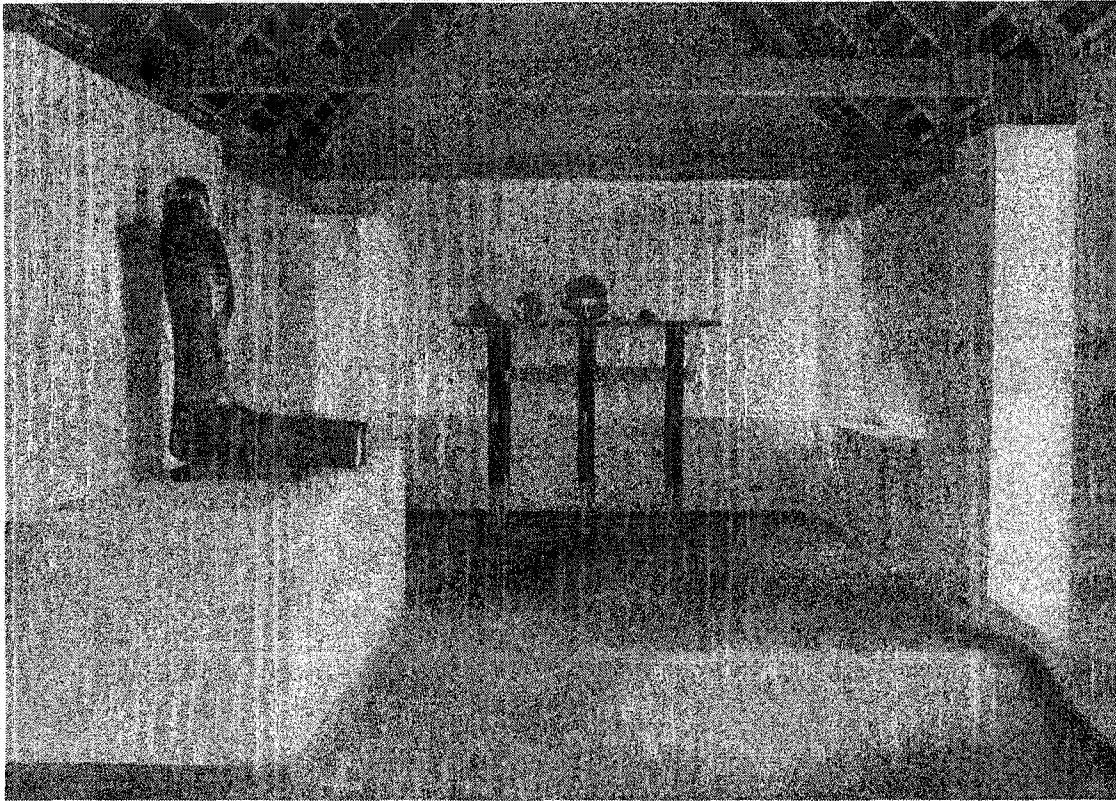


Figure 3: Interior view of the *House for the Torso and the Skullcaps*, 1979-81. The Torso (left) is constructed out of wood, straw, clay with its chest, skull and penis made of bronze. The bronze Skullcaps (back) are supported on a wooden Altar.

PROMETHEUS

in case any region should be without its living things,
the stars and the forms of the gods took heaven's floor,
the waves were granted to the shimmering fish to live in,
the earth took the wild beasts, and the mobile air the birds.
A holier living thing than these, with more capacity for a high
mind,
one that could rule over the rest, was still required;
man was born; perhaps he was made from divine seed
by the universal Craftsman, the source of a better world;
perhaps the new earth freshly separated from the high
ether retained the seeds of the kindred sky,
which the son of Iapetus [Prometheus] mixed with rain water
and shaped into the likeness of the all-controlling gods.
And while all other animals are prone and look upon the earth,

he gave to man an upright face, told him to look upon
the sky and raise his face aloft towards the stars.
So earth, which had just been rough and formless,
was changed and wore the unknown shapes of men.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*¹⁴

i

Late ancient Greek mythology appoints Prometheus (*forethought*) as the first creator of mankind. As the sky and the earth separate when Uranus is castrated, drops of his blood are spilled onto the earth.¹⁵ It is with clay made from this earth—thus seeded with divinity—that Prometheus fashions the whole race of mankind. Pausanias claims that he has actually seen two clay-colored masses that were believed to be the remains of the clay that Prometheus used to mold man; these masses “have the color of clay, not earthy clay, but such as would be found in a ravine or sandy torrent, and they smell very like the skin of a man.”¹⁶

During Cronos’ reign, in the Golden Age,¹⁷ Prometheus’ creations live alongside the gods: mankind and gods are united

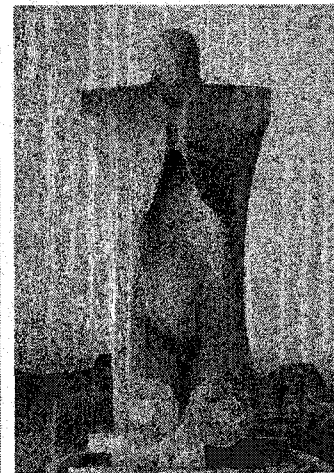


Figure 4: *Torso*, 1976-81,
fresh clay construction

¹⁴ From Ovid, *Metamorphoses I-IV*, ed. and trans. D. E. Hill (Wiltshire, England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1985) 1.72-1.88. Please note that all references to classical works will be to line numbers rather than page numbers.

¹⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, in *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homerica*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) see 180-185 regarding the castration of Uranus. Also while many writers contest that Prometheus had anything to do with the actual creation of mortals, all agree that in one way or another Prometheus has been the chief champion of mankind.

¹⁶ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), *the Perseus Project*, ed. Gregory R. Crane, Tufts University, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Paus.+toc>> last accessed July 2001, 10.4.4.

¹⁷ References to the Golden Age can be found in Hesiod (*Theogony*) and Ovid. Both discuss the Four Ages of Man and both equate the Golden Age to the reign of Cronos. Zeus triumphs against his father and thus begins the era of the Olympians, who either separate the mortals from the gods or create a brand new second generation of the Silver Age. For some reason, these mortals turn out to be a miserable lot; primitive in their skills, they fail to serve the gods and duly get erased. The next generation is a violent bunch; these men of the Bronze Age, though very skillful, use their techniques to create weapons until eventually they destroy themselves. The Heroic Age is made up of demi-gods, heroic men, some of whom are killed off in Troy and Thebes, the rest are taken to live in the Islands of the Blest, far away from both the mortals and gods. The final generation of

and the only defining difference between them is mortality. During this eternal spring, mankind lacks nothing, they need no clothing or protection from the elements, nor do they have to labor for their food. The fruits of the earth are readily available as wheat grows on its own, rivers of milk and nectar flow freely, honey distills from oak trees, and celestial fires burn continuously on the ash trees. Cities and boundaries are nonexistent; while law and punishment are deemed unnecessary. Mankind knows nothing of technology, there being no need for tools, agricultural or otherwise. They are happy, no worries, nor strife, nor any need for hope, for who would hope for anything better than what they already have? "Secure, a happy multitude enjoyed repose."¹⁸ A life quite comparable in comfort to the Garden of Eden, but without Eve; the race of women is yet to be created. Men of the Golden Age are spontaneously born out of the earth, and when they die, it is as if a sweet sleep overcomes them. Some even believe that man is born old and becomes younger and younger until death. But this era soon ends when Zeus replaces his father, Cronos.

Having just defeated the Titans in revolt and banished them to the depths of the earth, Zeus is eager to strengthen the power of his recently established kingdom on Olympus.¹⁹ He is rather irritated with the mortals who are the remnants of Cronos' reign; he wants them to wither away so that he can create a new race. Prometheus, on the other hand, recognizes the seeds of divinity in mankind and wants them to survive. One day the tension escalates; the gods and men have sat down for a meal at Mecone when a dispute ensues. A decision has to be made as to which part of this meal mankind gets, and which part should be given to the gods. It is left to Prometheus to divide the meal.²⁰

A hiding game begins: Prometheus, using his *dolie techne* (skill in trickery) sacrifices an ox, and creates two piles: one with the white bones hidden under an appetizing layer of fat, the other with all the edible parts covered with the paunch (stomach) of the ox.

mortals then created is of the Iron Age, which is filled with evil, strife and sorrow. Disappointed, Zeus eventually drowns most of them off in the Deluge. Refer to Ovid 1.89-1.150.

¹⁸ Ovid 1.100.

¹⁹ Prometheus, with the help of his foresight and prudence has escaped the fate of the other Titans but is nevertheless bitter at his cousin, Zeus.

²⁰ The interpretation of the Promethean myth is based on a number of sources. It is described at length in Hesiod, *Theogony* as well as *Works and Days* in Hesiod, *Homeric Hymns*, *Epic Cycle*, *Homeric*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Jean-Pierre Vernant points out the slight differences in the myth in Hesiod's *Works and Days* and *Theogony*. In *Theogony*, this feast occurs while the gods and men still united, while in *Works and Days*, they have already been separated and the nature of the decision is which parts of the animal man will have to sacrifice to the gods. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod," in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Sussex, GB: Harvester Press, 1980) 169-185.

Choosing the pile of white bones and realizing Prometheus' trickery, Zeus is enraged; in return, he hides the celestial fire, the thunderbolt, preventing mankind from cooking their meat. But Prometheus is determined, he sneaks in and steals the flame of fire, hiding it in a hollow fennel stalk: it is as such that mankind receives the gift of Promethean fire. At this point, Zeus is enraged beyond recovery and promises that he "will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction."²¹

God of the smiths, Hephaestus, is given two commissions. As punishment, he is to chain Prometheus to Mount Caucasus where every day for thirty thousand years an eagle will eat his liver, which will regenerate at night. He is also called upon to mix earth and water to create a beautiful bride with the face of a goddess. All the gods are to give her gifts: Hephaestus gives a crown of gold, Athena clothes her from head to toe in beautiful garments, teaches her needlework and the weaving of webs. Aphrodite sheds grace upon her head and "cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs."²² Hermes gives her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature as well as lies and crafty speech. "They name her Pandora, all gifts, since each of the Olympians had given her a gift."²³ Hermes delivers this creature, a strange combination of evil and deceit hidden behind beauty and grace, to "scatter-brained"²⁴ Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. He gullibly accepts the gift despite Prometheus' warning not to accept anything from Zeus. Typical of Epimetheus, by the time he realizes his mistake (thus his name, *afterthought*), the lid is already lifted off the jar and all sorts of evils—strife, disease, jealousy, deceit, etc.—have been scattered amongst mankind. Only Hope stays in the jar, at home with the beautiful Pandora.

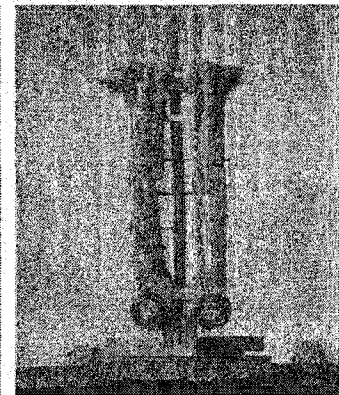


Figure 5: Torso, support construction, wooden nucleus with straw sheathing.

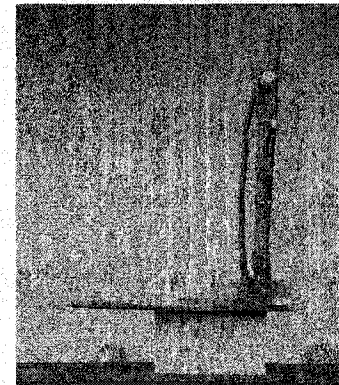


Figure 6: Torso support construction, wooden nucleus made out of the rectangular knot of a fallen tree which continued to grow.

²¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 55.

²² Hesiod, *Works and Days* 65.

²³ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 80.

²⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony* 510.

ii

And when to these [mortal creatures] also came their destined time to be created, the gods moulded their forms within the earth, of a mixture made of earth and fire and all substances that are compounded with fire and earth. When they were about to bring these creatures to light, they charged Prometheus and Epimetheus to deal to each the equipment of his proper faculty. Epimetheus besought Prometheus that he might do the dealing himself; "And when I have dealt," he said, "you shall examine."²⁵

Prometheus' original act of separation, the sacrifice of the ox, brings about the end of the Golden Age. Mankind itself is now separated from the gods; their definition becomes their *difference* from the latter. From the start they were distinguished by their mortality: men are mortal (*thanatoi*), gods are immortal (*athanatoi*); but now it is no longer a simple matter of whether one dies and the other lives forever. Man's mortality starts to haunt him throughout his life, differentiating him from the gods through his lacks, no matter how much of the seeds of the divine he retains.

Man's mortality is now spread over his entire lifespan, his everyday existence, in many shapes and forms. No longer a sweet sleep overcoming man, death now not only awaits him as the ultimate boundary of his existence but



Figure 7: Skullcaps (human and animal), 1975-81, bronze

also accompanies him from birth. "Death, Thanatos, might borrow the mask of his twin brother Sleep, Hupnos, or assume the appearance of some of his sinister associates—Ponos, Limos, Gēras—who incarnate the human ills of fatigue, hunger and old age."²⁶ The

²⁵ Plato, *Pratogoras* 320d, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), *the Perseus Project*, ed. Gregory R. Crane, Tufts University. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plat.+Prot.+320d>> last accessed July 2001.

²⁶ Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) 33.

ever-present mortality of man is integrated into their imperfect bodies and presents itself as the diminishment of all powers. Gods have in abundance that which humans only experience in small amounts; they have infinite energy, vitality, power. Even the most glorious mortal hero needs to eat and rest at the end of the day: this diminishing vitality – fatigue, hunger and old age – reminds man constantly of his ephemeral nature, carrying mortality like a stigma on his body. Anything signifying life will carry with it the shadow of death.

Likewise, the gods need no nutrition, feel no hunger; they dine on immortal food, ambrosia, and drink nectar, not because they want to satisfy any need but to enjoy the celebration. On the other hand, Prometheus' "trick of hiding all the edible pieces of the animal inside the *gastēr* condemned the human race to being unable henceforth to live without eating, without filling this 'paunch' [stomach] which has been used to disguise their share of food."²⁷ Finding the bare bones hidden under the layer of fat, Zeus cried: "how unfairly you have divided the portions [*moiras*]!"²⁸ Mankind's portion, *moiras*, will in turn become his Fate, *moiras*, and his continuous hunger will determine his day-to-day laborious existence. Now, mankind not only has to make sacrifices to the gods and consume food to satisfy continuous hunger, but his food will be far from immortal and pure like ambrosia. At the altar of a blood sacrifice, the moment the animal has been killed, the meat is already corrupt and in a state of decay.

In retaliation for Prometheus' theft of fire, Zeus has also hidden *Bios*. No longer having access to readily growing wheat, man now has to tend to the earth and plough and sow in order to produce it; life now involves constant labor and care. Even the Promethean fire, unlike the ever-burning celestial fire of Zeus, has to be constantly fuelled to be kept alive. In order to keep their race from extinction, men would have to procreate with the beautiful evil, the race of women, which will bring them sorrow and drain them of all their resources and livelihood. Palladas of Alexandria comments "As a ransom for fire Zeus made us the gift of another fire, woman . . . Fire can at least be extinguished but woman is an inextinguishable fire, full of ardor and ever kindled . . . She burns a man up with worries, she consumes him and changes his youth into premature old age."²⁹ For women are like drones, Hesiod explains, while the bees are out all day, busy laying white combs, the drones

²⁷ Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod" 179.

²⁸ Hesiod, *Theogony* 540-5.

²⁹ As quoted by Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod" 180.

"stay home in the covered hives and reap the toil of others into their own bellies."³⁰

Thus this myth becomes more than the origin of sacrifice; man's social institutions "sacrificial procedures, the use of fire, marriage rituals and agricultural practices appear interconnected in a variety of ways."³¹ These will also contribute to the separation of mankind from the beasts. Greek sacrifice almost invariably involves domesticated animals; wild beasts are only hunted. The incorporation of wine and barley, products of human cultivation, in the sacrificial rites shows that only products of human labor (including the domestication of animals) can be offered to the gods. Sacrifice will sanction and civilize the killing of animals, and unlike beasts, the meat will always be cooked before eating. The same Promethean fire will also be seen as a technical fire that will give mankind skills, *techne*, to bring him out of his primitive state. And finally marriage will draw "a clear-cut line between man and the beasts that unite at random, crudely, with the first comer."³²

iii

There are four legends concerning Prometheus:

According to the first he was clamped to a rock in the Caucasus for betraying the secrets of the gods to men, and the gods sent eagles to feed on his liver, which was perpetually renewed.

According to the second Prometheus, goaded by the pain of the tearing beaks, pressed himself deeper and deeper into the rock until he became one with it.

According to the third his treachery was forgotten in the course of thousands of years, forgotten by the gods, the eagles, forgotten by himself.

According to the fourth everyone grew weary of the meaningless affair. The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily.

³⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony* 590-600.

³¹ Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod" 182.

³² Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod" 183.

There remained the inexplicable mass of rock. The legend tried to explain the inexplicable. As it came out of a substratum of truth it had in turn to end in the inexplicable.³³

Franz Kafka

That Prometheus, *forethought* incarnate, could not foresee mankind's demise is questionable. We are, therefore, bound to wonder what exactly lies behind the disguise of

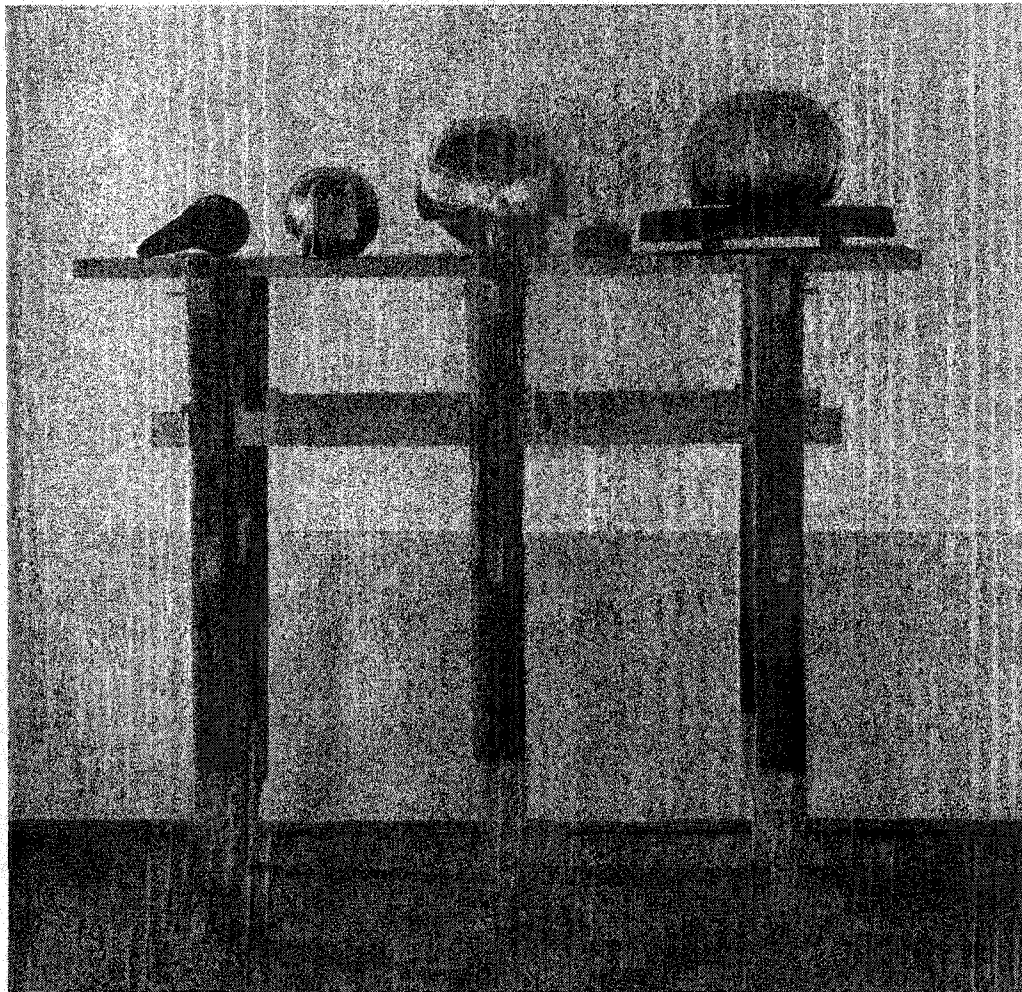


Figure 8: *Structure to Support the Skullcaps* (Altar), 1975-81, wood construction

his benevolent gestures. Hesiod claims that Zeus from the start knows the trick Prometheus is playing, but acts as if he does not notice it; in return, Prometheus knows the outcome of

³³ Franz Kafka, "Prometheus," In *the Complete Stories and Parables*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1983) 432.

his actions (severe punishment) but does not hold back. It is fate, Prometheus explains, for even Zeus is ruled by Necessity (*Anake*), who in turn steers the “three-shaped Fates [*moirai trimorphoi*] and mindful Furies.”³⁴ “Skill [*techne*] is weaker by far than Necessity”³⁵ thus no amount of cunning can change fate. Gods, too, have to live out their fate but unlike the mortals, no one cuts their thread of life. Doom, in one form or another, awaits mortals: total annihilation or lifelong struggle.

Lacking necessity the men of the Golden Age have the potential to see (*blepontes*), but they do not see (*eblepon*); have the potential to hear (*kluontes*), but they do not hear (*ouk êkuoun*). Their existence is faint “just as shapes in dreams, throughout their length of days, without purpose they wrought all things in confusion.”³⁶ Dwelling underground like ants, they have no use for *techne* and do not alter nature for their use: they do not know carpentry, nor brick-working. Prometheus offers a polysemic *moirai*, both as the portion of the ox and as mankind's fate: for the seeds of divinity to surface, for them to realize their full potential, mankind too, has to be ruled by Necessity. Mankind's fate would be the transition from a perfect adaptation to nature into the constant reconstruction and remaking of their circumstance for their survival.

No more hiding in the caves and simply gathering fruits from the trees: with the advent of Promethean fire, mankind will learn many arts (*techne*)³⁷. Prometheus will personally invent and teach mankind all the things that will allow them to come out of their caves and live under the sun. He will first teach them how to see, hear, in fact how to use their sensory organs. Then he will give them numbers (*arithmon*) and “the mother of all Muses' arts:”³⁸ the knowledge of composing letters (*grammaton*) to help them put down their memories. He will help them distinguish the stars to recognize the seasons, tame animals, sail ships, and make medicines to ward off all their disorders. He also, however, gives them magic:

“And I marked out many ways by which they might read the future, and among dreams I first discerned which are destined to come true; and voices baffling interpretation I explained to

³⁴ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. Herbert Weir Smyth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), *The Perseus Project*, ed. Gregory R. Crane, Tufts University. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Aesch.+PB+toc>> last accessed July 2001, 516

³⁵ Aeschylus 514.

³⁶ Aeschylus 449-450.

³⁷ Aeschylus 256.

³⁸ In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne (Memory) is the mother of all nine Muses.

them, and signs from chance meetings. The flight of crook-taloned birds I distinguished clearly-- which by nature are auspicious, which sinister--their various modes of life, their mutual feuds and loves, and their consortings; and the smoothness of their entrails, and what color the gall must have to please the gods, also the speckled symmetry of the liver-lobe; and the thigh-bones, wrapped in fat, and the long chine I burned and initiated mankind into an occult art [*dustekmarton es technên*]. Also I cleared their vision to discern signs from flames, which were obscure before this... Hear the sum of the whole matter in the compass of one brief word--every art possessed by man comes from Prometheus."³⁹

Why are such occult arts deemed necessary? The man of the Golden Age did not know—they had no need of knowledge. Once separated from the gods and given the potential for knowing through the use of their senses, mankind is also irredeemably distanced from any transparent source of knowledge. Since Prometheus' gift of fate, the gods constantly hide things from mankind: hiding of the fire and bios was only the beginning. Zeus's gift, which will make mankind gladly embrace destruction, is Pandora. Hers is the beautiful face behind which the gods have *hidden* all things evil; but Pandora, *all gifts*, can also mean *giver of all things*. She is not an evil that can be avoided; "whoever avoids marriage and the sorrows that women cause, and will not wed, reaches deadly old age without anyone to tend his years, and though he at least has no lack of livelihood while he lives, yet, when he is dead, his kinsfolk divide his possessions amongst them. And as for the man who chooses the lot of marriage and takes a good wife suited to his mind, evil continually contends with good; for whoever happens to have mischievous children, lives always with unceasing grief in his spirit and heart within him; and this evil cannot be healed."⁴⁰ Hope, after all, stays in the jar, at home with Pandora.

Pandora's double nature becomes the "symbol of ambiguity of human existence."⁴¹ Good and evil are no longer clearly distinguishable, agricultural toil and reproduction not only lead to 'weary limbs' but also pleasure in the form of feasts and eroticism. *Dustekmartos*, means "hard to make out from the given signs, hard to trace, inexplicable",

³⁹ Aeschylus 475-508.

⁴⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony* 602-613.

⁴¹ Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod" 183.

thus *dustekmarton es technên*, the occult arts, allows for seeking out and isolating the masks behind which the gods have hidden knowledge, *the inexplicable*; they allow mankind to 'read' nature and dispel some of the opacity that now exists between them and the gods. The gods will forever hide themselves from the mortals; every communication of, and any access to divine knowledge will have to be mediated through human action and labor. The gods will only appear in rituals and sacrifices, and even then never in their original form: a transparent communion with the gods, is forever lost. In some rituals, man will have to reconstruct the sacrificial victim for the god to occupy it,⁴² to hide behind it. In others the gods will speak through oracles that need deciphering, nature will become signs through which knowledge and truth can be recovered. *Techne*, in all its forms, will be directly related to the struggle with the daily ambiguities of human existence; man will have to constantly remake nature (in the form of agriculture, building, etc.), and in that process, reach knowledge through their making.

A lifetime of struggle, labor, disease, strife, and an existence haunted by an inevitable end: all in order to *perhaps* enjoy a few things in life? Prometheus has one last gift for mankind, that mysterious last gift left in Pandora's jar: he prevents mankind from foreseeing their doom, causing "blind hopes to dwell within their breasts."⁴³ While mankind is irredeemably sentenced by Zeus to embrace their doom, they will have no foreknowledge of their fate since the unavoidability of fate leaves no room for hope. They will dwell in that place between the animals who are completely ignorant of their mortality and the gods who know and foresee all, or as Vernant points out, they will be "caught between the lucid forethought of Prometheus and the thoughtless blindness of Epimetheus . . . they know in advance that suffering, sickness and death is bound to be their lot and, being ignorant of the form their misfortune will take, they only recognize it too late when it has already struck them."⁴⁴ Thus, with blind hope, mankind would be unable to face mortality directly, but have a mediated contemplation of it through their everyday existence—through their lack, their struggles, their *techne*. And in the end, the Promethean myth that tries to explain the inexplicable, in turn points to an inexplicable ambiguity of life.

⁴² On the remaking of the sacrifice, see George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988). 18-19.

⁴³ Aeschylus 250-2.

⁴⁴ Vernant, "the Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod" 184.

THE OLD FIGURE

Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective and goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that this is appearance and will-o'-the-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing more—that among all these dreamers, I, too, who "know," am dancing my dance; that the knower is a means for prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence; and that the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to preserve the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers and thus also *the continuation of the dream*.

Friedrich Nietzsche⁴⁵

It is certain that the making of images and objects by no means started with the Greeks alone. Although the Western tradition of art and architecture find their origins here these origins are anything but simple. To understand the beginning of image making and its evolution within ancient Greece, we need to first address the concept of the image in that culture.

Jean-Pierre Vernant points out that between the twelfth and eighth centuries B.C., Greek culture has no knowledge of writing or of figural representation: "the same word 'graphein' . . . is used for writing, drawing, and painting."⁴⁶ Emile Benveniste claims "the people who fixed the most refined canons and models of plastic art for the Western world [have] to borrow from others the notion itself of figural representation."⁴⁷ What we mean by the words image, representation, and even statue were not established from the beginning. To show both the diversity and lack of a unified concept of an image, Vernant lists some fifteen expressions in Greek that mean 'divine idol', none of which have a relation to the idea of imitation, resemblance or figural representation in the strict sense.⁴⁸ The early aniconic idols were described as *baĩtulos* (a brute stone), *dokana* (beams), *kiōn* (a pillar), and *herma* (a stele), while the theriomorphic (or monstrous) kinds were Gorgon, Sphinx and Harpies. Those that took on more or less anthropomorphic shapes also varied in terminology: the early roughly shaped pieces were described as *bretas*, *xoanon*, *palladion*; and there were

⁴⁵ From *the Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) #54.

⁴⁶ Vernant, *Mortals* 151.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Vernant, *Mortals* 151.

⁴⁸ Vernant, *Mortals* 152. The Greek expressions in this paragraph are taken from Vernant's research.

the static archaic Kouroi and Korai. The large cult statues were called *hedos* or *agalma*, and after around fifth century B.C. *eikōn* and *mimēma* were added to the vocabulary. In fact it was not until the fifth century B.C., with the Socratic dialogues of Xenophon and Plato that the Greek theories of mimesis emerged. Thus the beginning of Western aesthetics itself appears as the culmination of an internal evolution within Greek culture.

i

Some of the first statuary objects were referred to as *xoana*;⁴⁹ most scholarship on the subject, as well as the Greek and Roman classical texts that mention them, place them somewhere at the beginning of Greek art. Benveniste goes so far as to consider *xoanon* to be the oldest word for statue, closely followed by the pre-Greek *bretas*. It is generally agreed that the word is closely related to the verb *xēō*, which means to scrape or to carve.⁵⁰ Clement of Alexandria comments in his *Protrepticus*:

"In ancient times, then, the Scythians used to worship the dagger, the Arabians their stone, the Persians their river. Other people still more ancient erected conspicuous wooden poles and set up pillars of stone, to which they gave the name *xoana* because the rough surface of the material had been scraped off. Certainly the *agalma* of Artemis in Icarus was an unwrought stock and that of Cithaeronian Hera in Thespia was a felled tree-trunk. That of Samian Hera, as Aethlius says, was at first a *sanis* but afterwards, when Procles was ruler, it was made into human form. When the *xoana* began to be represented as men, they acquired the additional name *brete*, from *brotoi* [mortals] . . . "⁵¹

We can deduce from Clement that *xoana* could be made of stone or wood and, indeed, some scholars point out that the verb has no etymological connotations to associate

⁴⁹ Greek spelling is ξόανον; *xoanon* is the singular form, *xoana* the plural. There are many sources that study these idols at length: see A. A. Donohue, *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, and Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

At this point, we must emphasize that we have no archaeological evidence to prove the existence of *xoana*; they are believed to have been made out of wood, making their survival near impossible. Most of the information regarding their existence comes from antiquarian texts, which skeptical scholars consider to be unreliable and at times exaggerated.

⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion regarding the etymology of *xoanon*, see Donohue 13.

⁵¹ Quoted in Donohue 5.

it with any specific material. The most common view, that they were roughly carved wooden images, is inherited from Pausanias who consistently uses the term throughout his *Description of Greece*.⁵² In clearly setting them apart from other cult objects, Pausanias describes *xoana* as wooden idols of gods and goddesses.⁵³ His reports describe them as infused with an aura of difference, of not belonging: several times the words *atopos* and *xenos* are used. They are either out of time (ancient, primitive) or out of place (foreign, strange, barbaric), moreover they are "distinguished by a kind of inspiration."⁵⁴ So what are the factors that contribute to this aura of strangeness, this uncanniness?

Most of the *xoana*, or at least the famous ones, are not even products of human making. For instance, the Palladium at Troy is believed to have been made by Athena herself. Triton assumes the responsibility of bringing up Athena along with his own daughter, Pallas. One day, the two girls are practicing the art of war when the friendly competition takes a serious turn. Seeing that Pallas is about to strike Athena, Zeus interposes the aegis. Startled, Pallas looks up and is accidentally wounded and killed by Athena. The grief-stricken goddess makes a *xoanon* of her friend with its breast wrapped in the same aegis that had startled her, and sets it up next to Zeus. Later Zeus throws the Palladium down from heaven when Electra tries to escape his embraces by clinging to the statue. It lands in Troy, and a temple is built for it.⁵⁵

While the idol does not need to *look* like a god in any mimetic sense, it still needs some physical qualities that will make it recognizable. In fact, these objects are often *recognized as strange*, "uncouth to look at."⁵⁶ This suggests that while the specific form does not need be familiar, nevertheless something about it points to a deliberate alteration of the original material: the form at least shows intent. The material is worked upon; the wood is scraped, and perhaps even has the rough outline of an anthropomorphic figure.

⁵² In fact he uses it 93 times throughout. Since his *Description of Greece* dates back to the second century A.D. we cannot be absolutely sure about the accuracy of his use of the word.

⁵³ Although Pausanias also mentions some *xoana* of Orpheus, Trophonius, and Heracles, they are treated almost as if they are gods. For more on Pausanias' mention of *xoana*, see Donohue 140-150.

⁵⁴ The Greek word being used here is *entheos*, meaning "full of the god", "inspired", or "possessed." See 2.4.5 in Pausanias.

⁵⁵ 3.12.3 in Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome*, trans. James George Frazer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), *The Perseus Project*, ed. Gregory R. Crane, Tufts University, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Apollod.+toc>> last accessed July 2001. Later on, this Palladium ends up in Greece.

⁵⁶ Pausanias 2.4.5. The Greek word translated as "uncouth" is *atopôtera*, a variation of *atopos*, meaning 'out of place'.

This is clearly different from the earlier practice of veneration of un-worked pieces of stone.⁵⁷ Yet, at the same time, we are not at the stage of a mimesis that can be said to depend entirely on familiarity. An example from Pausanias might assist us in our explanation:

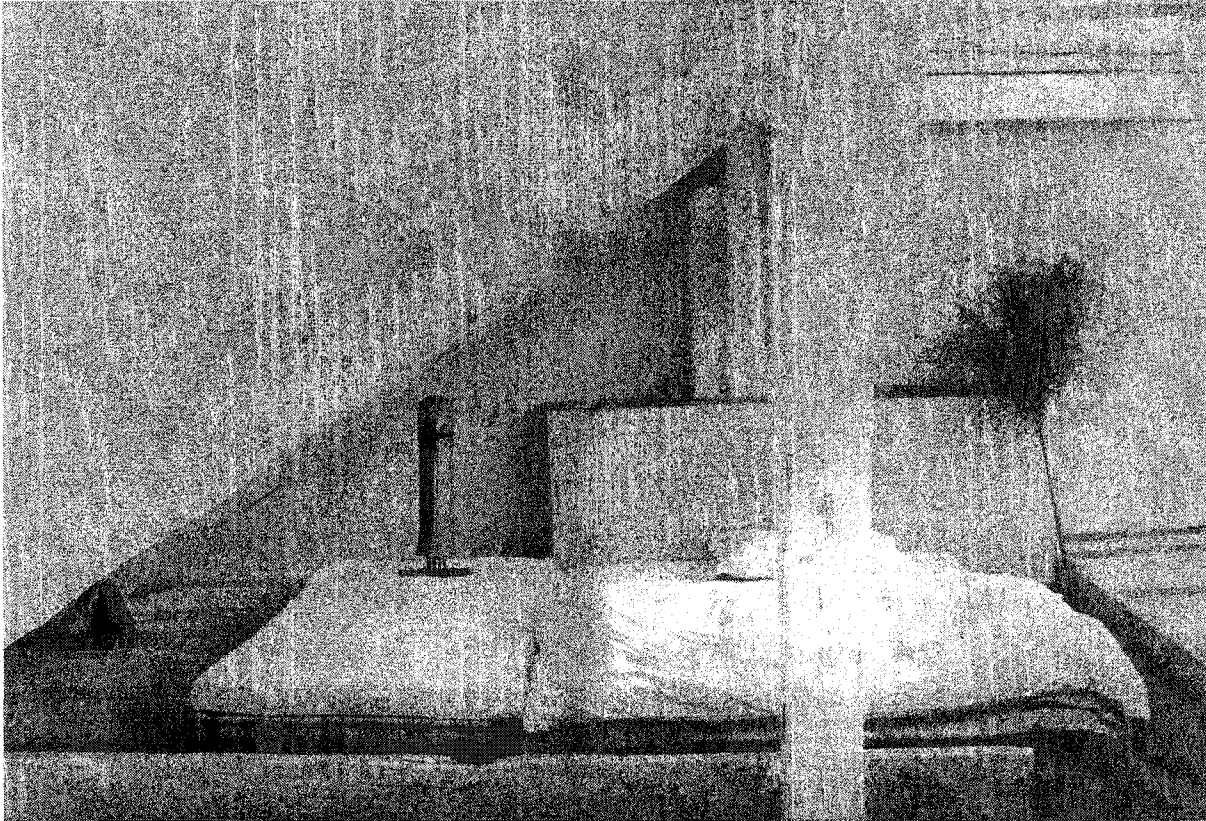


Figure 9: the *Old Figure*, 1960-1963.

Here is an old figure, which needs to be laid to rest at night and woken up in the morning. The bed is suggestive of privacy and for an artist who is obsessed with how a sculpture is presented (i.e. its base), its use here is significant. As a recurrent theme in Pichler's work, the bed is sometimes integrated into the artwork, whilst other times it becomes the art piece itself. The setting here is extremely intimate because the viewer is not only looking at the sculpture, but seeing it at its most private moment: in its bed. The modern theories regarding the viewer's private relationship to the art object in the hygienically pure environment of the museum fails us here. Although the viewer cannot interact with the figure, there is a certain reality attached to it that creates a tension. It needs Pichler to complete the artwork, it needs him to lay it down at night and wake it up in the morning.

⁵⁷ There is the danger of creating a linear evolution here; *xoana* were present, even copied, at the same time that anthropomorphic sculptures were being produced. *Xoana*, however, were venerated often, especially because they were considered ancient. (The black stone of Cybele at Pessinus was still venerated and was moved to Rome in 204 B.C). What sets *xoana* apart (at least formally) is that they contain elements from both the early practices of pillar cults and incorporate elements of mimesis simultaneously. For a discussion of the theories regarding the transition from aniconic to iconic imagery, see Donohue, especially 218-231.

"Certain fishermen of Methymna found that their nets dragged up to the surface of the sea a face [*prosôpon*] made of olive-wood. Its appearance suggested a touch of divinity, but it was outlandish [*xenên*], and unlike the normal features of Greek gods. So the people of Methymna asked the Pythian priestess of what god or hero the figure was a likeness, and she bade them worship Dionysus Phallen. Whereupon the people of Methymna kept for themselves the wooden image out of the sea, worshipping it with sacrifices and prayers, but sent a bronze copy to Delphi."⁵⁸

What the fishermen drag up is at first a *prosôpon*, which literally means the face, countenance. The face is what makes a person recognizable, it is the first thing one sees in a human being. "More than any other part of the body, the face [*prosôpon*], like a mirror, reveals what an individual is and what he stands for."⁵⁹ For the Greeks, death is not only the loss of one's life, but also of one's face. The dead, no longer under the light of the sun, are shrouded in darkness; as faceless heads, they are unrecognizable and are banished out of the realm of the living. In Pausanias' report, the initial un-recognition of this *prosôpon* suggests that it belongs to another realm, that it is *xenên*, foreign. Nevertheless, it is *recognized as a face*, clearly setting it apart from any old piece of wood that might have made it into their fishing nets. Thus recognition and resemblance are not immediately related, the image does not need to be recognized as the likeness of a god from the start, it does not require a total mimetic resemblance. Being a face, the *prosôpon* is guaranteed proper identification. Once it is named, only then can it be described as a *xoanon* and as an *eikôn*, a likeness, image, or portrait of a god.

We have already mentioned the popular view that *xoana* were made of wood; Pausanias lists some of the types as ebony, cypress, cedar, oak, yew, lotus, juniper and olive wood.⁶⁰ It is a logical assumption that, being far easier to work with compared to stone, wood would be the material of choice for these early idols. It is a well-known archaeological fact that the early Greek temples were constructed out of wood; according to Pausanias, the most ancient temple of Apollo at Delphi was a hut made of laurel trees.⁶¹ Yet a purely practical explanation is hardly satisfying. Pausanias does mention a *xoanon* of

⁵⁸ Pausanias 10.19.3.

⁵⁹ Vernant, *Mortals* 45.

⁶⁰ Pausanias 8.17.2; olive wood mentioned in 10.19.3.

⁶¹ As mentioned in George Hersey 14.

Athena that has its face, feet and hands made from white marble while the torso remains wood.⁶² And the fishermen of Methymna sent a bronze copy to Delphi rather than simply carve another. Wood, then, retains significance.

Walter Burkert, in his study of the prehistory and the Minoan-Mycenaean Age of ancient Greece, identifies 'tree sanctuaries' as one of the early cult sites. The distinctive feature of these sanctuaries is "a large, imposing tree, almost always enclosed by a wall, and set apart as sacred."⁶⁴ Away from large towns, these sanctuaries are often in the open countryside: "an important part



Figure 10: Head of the *Movable Figure*, the crown of a real human skull imbedded in clay. "I intend the head as an autonomous sculpture, almost an architecture on which the human crown is set as a dome."⁶³

of religious life was enacted out of doors, far from the everyday existence of the settlements; processions would make their way to those places where the deity could appear in dance beneath the tree."⁶⁵ Burkert points out that it is not the specific tree that is worshipped, since in some cases it is cut down and finally destroyed: in itself the tree is not divine but acts more as a vessel.⁶⁶ Later on, we find such sacred trees associated with specific sanctuaries. In Didyma, Apollo is associated with the laurel tree. In Athens, an olive tree stands in the sanctuary of the Dew Goddess, Pandrosos; after the Persians burn down the temple in 480, the tree leafs again signifying the "unbroken vital force of Athens." A willow tree is incorporated into the altar of the Hera sanctuary on Samos. In Olympia, the twigs of a wild olive tree are used to wreath the victors. And it is through the rustling of its branches that the sacred oak of Dodona communicates the oracle.⁶⁷ Already having the ritualistic and mythological background in place, the tree, therefore, creates the perfect medium for a cult idol: the wood that is capable of retaining the sacred.

The Greek word for the sacred, *heiros*, emerges as an uncanny sense of the presence of supernatural forces, the more-than-human; it can be felt in specific locations like

⁶² Pausanias 2.4.1.

⁶³ Walter Pichler, *Austria* (Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1982) 11.

⁶⁴ Burkert, *Greek Religion* 28.

⁶⁵ Burkert, *Greek Religion* 28.

⁶⁶ Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979) 136.

⁶⁷ Burkert, *Greek Religion* 85-86.

the mountains and forests, and can present itself as unexplained phenomena such as lightning or even birth and death. Where the sacred is attached to a specific place it is contained and defined by marking precise boundaries around it. Once these are turned into sanctuaries, anything within the boundaries becomes sacred; including the altar, the sacrificial victim and the votive offerings. Hence we see an initial transformation of the sacred from a metaphysical experience into physical objects. We may consider the *xoana* to be a further transformation; in the few instances where the actual making of *xoana* by mortals is mentioned, they are carved out of sacred trees; the trees either exist within the sacred boundaries of a sanctuary or they are indicated as sacred by the gods through various signs. Pausanias reports that, for instance, in Boeotia boiled meat is placed in a sacred grove of oaks: "They keep a strict watch on the crows which flock to them, but they are not troubled at all about the other birds. They mark carefully the tree on which a crow settles with the meat he has seized. They cut down the trunk of the tree on which the crow has settled,"⁶⁸ and carve the *xoanon* out of this tree. In Corinth, two *xoana* of Dionysus, named Lysios and Baccheios, are exhibited in the agora: Pentheus climbs a tree in order to spy on the women carrying out a Dionysian ritual, he is promptly detected and torn into pieces. An oracle deems the tree as sacred and the two *xoana* are carved out of it.⁶⁹ The initial transformation of the notion of the sacred—from abstract experience into physical or natural objects—is taken a step further: idols, fashioned out of sacred materials, molded into shape, are able to contain the sacred.

Epic poetry (Homer's *Iliad* as well as Hesiod's *Theogony*) also plays an important role in molding early Greek beliefs about the sacred into the system of Greek mythology. The complex and confused abstractions are anthropomorphised: the divinities become characters in an organized narrative form. They actively participate in actions in specific places, directly interacting with the mortals. In fact, through the epics' narratives, the deities even acquire bodies, though very different in quality compared to the bodies of the mortals. Vernant describes the Greeks' conception of the body of the gods as a kind of *super-body*. The gods possess all the values that mortals—or actually heroes—have but in magnified and limitless amounts. Their bodies are larger and stronger: like a child playing with sand, Apollo can cause the collapse of the embankment of the Achaeans with a simple playful kick. They have infinite beauty, glory, intelligence, and also possess the ability to choose the way they manifest themselves to mortals: the divinity can "make himself visible in the

⁶⁸ Pausanias 9.3.4.

⁶⁹ Pausanias 2.2.7.

form of a body, rather than *his* or *her* body.”⁷⁰ While the physical form that the god chooses allows him to become visible and accessible to mortals, a direct relationship is impossible and has to be mediated through other forms. “To see a god face to face, as he or she is authentically in his (or her) uncovered body, is far more than human strength can bear . . . The body of the gods shines with such an intense brilliance that no human eye can bear it.”⁷¹ To see the face of a god can result in madness or blindness; to see Zeus is the same as being struck by lightning, and thus instant death.

Similarly, the *xoanon* appears as a physical manifestation of the sacred, the form of a divinity, which can cause as much damage as the authentic body of the god. A *xoanon* is not a representation (or symbol) of a physical reality, i.e. an image of a human figure; neither is it the mere representation of an invisible reality. It lacks that safe distance that exists between the original and the copy. The boundaries are blurred. Being the manifestation of the god, it concretizes an invisible realm; as something of a mask, it harbors the divinity behind it. Even though it is not *the* body of the god, its proximity to the divinity makes it dangerous: a direct look at a *xoanon* can cause madness, the victim becoming possessed. Unlike regular cult idols, they are not made to be seen; far from being on permanent public display, *xoana* are hidden away in a chest placed in a private area closed to the public. Although dangerous, the magical quality of a *xoanon* makes owning them a jealously guarded privilege. In the early instances, the *xoanon*, far from belonging to a whole community and marking a sacred area, is a talisman that gives exclusive powers to whoever possesses it, circulating in royal families through inheritance. They are kept

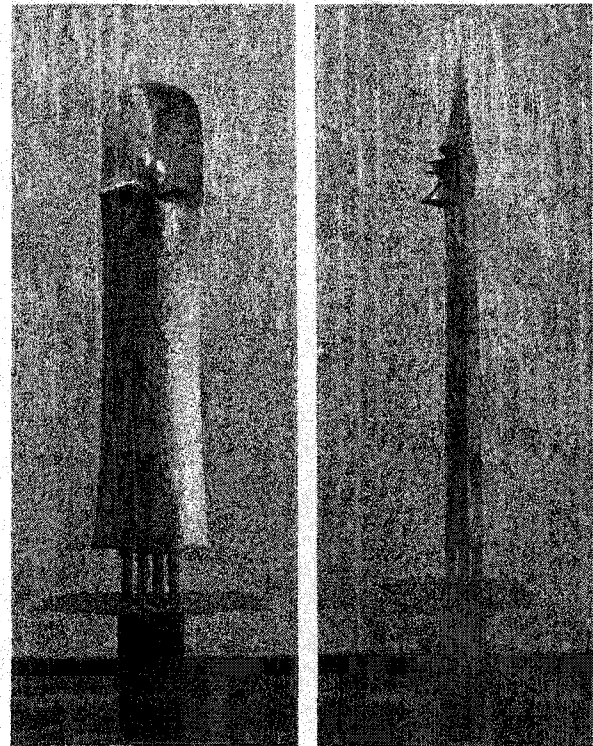


Figure 11: the *Old Figure*

One has to be Pichler to be able to ‘fully’ interact with this piece. The traditional view of the art object as a locus of visual contemplation is problematized here—the work, instead, directs us to reflect on its relationship to otherness, representation, and invocation.

⁷⁰ Vernant, *Mortals* 43.

⁷¹ Vernant, *Mortals* 44.

in private dwellings, rather than temples or even sanctuaries. In later cases, though belonging to the public, they are still sometimes kept by the priests in their own homes.

They are not always locked up, either. The hazards involved in handling them not only limit their visibility but, all the more, elevate those moments when the idol actually can be seen. The sight of the *xoanon* becomes something of an initiation; "the contemplation of the divine idol seems like an "unveiling" of a mysterious and fearful reality . . . the visible becomes qualified as a revelation, both precious and precarious, of an invisible realm that constitutes the true and fundamental reality."⁷² Such a direct relationship with the divine requires a safe mediation between the mortals and the immortals, a symbolic order is established, special rituals and festivals are organized. There is a certain ambiguity in terms of the function of the *xoanon* during these rituals. A typical cult idol, being on public display, enjoys a continuous presence. Like a pillar or even a herm planted in the ground, it becomes a religious center, defining a sacred space around it where the ritual can take place: an altar is placed in front of it, the sanctuary it occupies is deemed sacred along with everything in it, etc. On the other hand, while a

xoanon contains the sacred, it fails to infuse the space surrounding it with a sacred aura. Its effectiveness is proportional to its existence *during* the ritual, in which it is taken out of its hiding place, dressed, undressed, bathed, embellished with oils, moved around—overall, taking a very active role. It is sacred insofar as it can *mimic* the divine: "Still incapable in its immobile and fixed form of expressing any movement other than being turned and led about, it nevertheless conveys the god's action by symbolic gestures of animation and simulation."⁷³ Additionally, far from localizing a

divine power, the *xoanon* is mobile. "Even if the *xoanon* has no feet or its legs are sealed together, it is always believed to be on the point of escaping, of deserting one place to go off elsewhere, to haunt another dwelling into which it will import the privileges and powers



Figure 12: the Red Coat, 1982
third garment for the Movable Figure

⁷² Vernant, *Mortals* 155. The term *mysteria* is derived from *mystēs*, meaning the 'initiated', for more on mysteries in Greek culture, see Mario Vegetti, "The Greeks and Their Gods," in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Charles Lambert and Teresa Lavendar Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 271-277.

⁷³ Vernant, *Mortals* 155

attached to its possession.”⁷⁴ Of course this mobility is partly due to its being made of wood and, therefore, light enough to be carried (or stolen). But having arrived from elsewhere—whether fallen from the sky, washed off shore, pulled from the sea or brought by a stranger—it does not arrive *belonging* to a specific place. Being *xenos*, it is eager to leave again, and therefore has to be bound with golden chains or woolen ropes to prevent its escape.

ii

There is some logic behind this strangeness or foreignness, of the *xoana*. They were in fact associated with foreign cultures and exotic places, either the objects themselves or the practice of making them is believed have come from the East, especially the archaic Greek East, Persia and Egypt.⁷⁶ There is little doubt about the influence of other cultures on the Greeks, but their originality lies in the way they assimilated these influences.⁷⁷ Yet we should not be so quick to interpret *xenos*, meaning both foreign and strange, as also barbarian. As Marcel Detienne explains, *xenos* is defined by the distance between two cities, it refers not to the barbarian who speaks with an unintelligible language

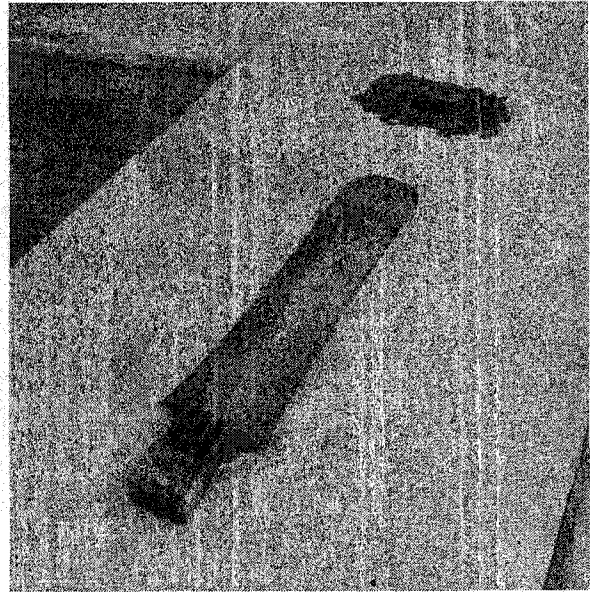


Figure 13: “the sculpture which Pichler had laid down on a bed next to mine struck me as the most natural thing in the world. When I woke up the next morning in the ice cold studio and saw the Old Figure lying on the bed, covered by a shroud, I suddenly realized what for Pichler the relationship between art and life means.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Vernant, *Mortals* 155.

⁷⁵ Carl Haenlein recalling his visit to Pichler's studio in Vienna in 1976. In Carl Haenlein, “A World Apart,” trans. John Sailer, in *Journal of Art* v. 3, no. 3 (Dec. 1990) 29. The original essay by Haenlein appears in German as “Hütten wie Tempel—und Skulpturen” in Peter Handke, Klaus Gallwitz, and Carl Haenlein, *Walter Pichler: Skulpturen, Zeichnungen, Modelle* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1987), 18.

⁷⁶ See Donohue 29-32.

⁷⁷ It can be said that this is what attracted Nietzsche's admiration most: “The Germans alternate between complete devotion to the foreign and a revengeful craving for originality . . . The Germans—to prove that their originality is not a matter of their nature but of their ambition—think it lies in the complete and over-obvious *difference*: but the Greeks did not think thus about the Orient . . . and they *became* original (for one is not original to begin with, but one is raw!).” Quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974) 154.

but to the citizen of another community, another Greek.⁷⁸ Although a stranger, any *xenos* in Greece would be treated as a guest; the *proxenos* was a "private citizen, an ordinary individual [who] takes it upon himself to receive and protect a stranger on his travels,"⁷⁹ the stranger is not rejected, but welcomed and hosted. For such hospitality—accommodation of the foreign, acceptance of the strange—is the sign of civilization; only the barbarians are *axenon* (inhospitable) and *amikton* (refusing to mingle with others).

Dionysus, the stranger par excellence, is always referred to as a *xenos*, no matter what his disguise. Since the discovery of the Mycenaean culture, Dionysus is fully accepted as an original Greek god, but the Greeks themselves attributed to him an Eastern origin: some sources refer to him as a god native to Phrygia and Thrace. Regardless, it is generally agreed that he has absorbed many other cults from the East, explaining his extensive travels all the way to India and Egypt. Another strange Olympian is Artemis, twin sister of Apollo, secure in her place in the Greek pantheon since at least the twelfth century B.C. It was, again, the Greeks themselves who doubted her origins: she is Nordic or Lydian or Aegean or Tauric, from the north of the Black Sea: she is *xenos* perhaps even a barbarian (*barbarôn*). At least, this is the explanation given as to why in Ephesus she is depicted with many breasts—a clear sign of fertility—since she is supposed to be a *virgin* huntress. One thing is for certain: she is strange. Artemis is the goddess of "the untamed world on all levels: wild beasts, noncultivated plants and lands, and the young insofar as they are not yet integrated into society, not yet civilized."⁸⁰ Not only does she rule the areas outside the city, the mountains and the woods, but she also resides in the places that the Greeks refer to as *agros*, the noncultivated borderlands of the territory. She is also found on the coastal areas, those blurry boundaries that both separate and bring together the sea and the land; her realm is in the "boundaries, border zones, and frontiers where the Other is manifested in the regular contacts that are made with it, where the wild and the cultivated exist side by side—in opposition, of course, but where they may also interpenetrate one with another."⁸¹

The two strange divinities, Artemis and Dionysus, come together in the story of the Artemis Triklaria at Patras.⁸² A priestess of Artemis falls in love with a young man, but parents on both sides will not allow the marriage. The couple elopes and gives in to their

⁷⁸ Marcel Detienne, *Dionysos at Large*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) 8-10.

⁷⁹ Detienne, *Dionysos at Large* 10.

⁸⁰ Vernant, *Mortals* 197.

⁸¹ Vernant, *Mortals* 197-198.

⁸² Pausanias 7.19.1-7.20.2. See also Vernant, *Mortals* 209-213.

passions at the sanctuary of Artemis, using it as a 'bridal-chamber'. This sacrilege, especially great since Artemis is the 'virgin' goddess, causes the crops to fail and many people to die of strange diseases. Eventually, a Delphic oracle reveals the guilt of the couple, and they are sacrificed at the altar of Artemis. Following their death the goddess demands that every year the most beautiful girl and boy are offered to her along with the first fruits of the harvest: a terrible, barbaric practice of human sacrifice begins. The Delphic oracle also reveals that this will end when a *foreign* (*xenos*) king arrives bringing with him a *foreign* divinity. Meanwhile, upon the capture of Troy, Eurypylos receives as his share of the spoils a chest containing an *agalma*, a statue, of Dionysus made by Hephaestus, the god of the smiths. Upon opening the chest and looking at the idol Eurypylos goes mad. During a rare moment of lucidity, he consults a Delphic oracle that tells him he is going to encounter a people who offer a strange ritual, *thusian xenên*. His sanity will be restored when he settles in the land of these people and sets up the *agalma* of Dionysus. While sailing, Eurypylos' ships are carried off course and he lands at Patras, immediately encountering a youth and a maiden who have been brought to the altar: he recognizes the strange sacrifice, and the people in return recognize him as the foreign king with the foreign divinity.

The strangeness of the ritual, the foreignness of the king as well as the divinity he has brought all cancel each other out: the other is thus assimilated. A new civilized order is established, the city absorbs "what is not itself, its other—or at least one of the forms of its other—without having itself to become other. It does so, even in assimilating the other to the self (foreign gods, barbarian rites, youth gone wild) by maintaining the boundary between a type of alterity conceived as barbarism or savagery and a condition presented from the outset as defining culture, sociability, Greekness, and the adult norm."⁸³ Eurypylos is healed, and with the joining of Artemis and Dionysus, a new peaceful rite is devised, one that transforms the strange and barbarous into the civilized. In this new nocturnal festival in honor of both divinities, the *agalma* of Dionysus is taken out of its chest. The danger of madness is not eliminated, but it is acted out, *mimed*, and thus controlled and kept at bay. Human sacrifice has ended: local children wear garlands of *stachus*—which means both 'newly-matured wheat' and 'young human offspring'—and leave them at the sanctuary of Artemis in lieu of the beautiful girl and boy who would have been sacrificed. After bathing in

⁸³ Vernant, *Mortals* 211.

the river as purification from the sacrilege of the young couple; the children visit the temple of Dionysus wearing garlands of ivy in a gesture of controlled orgy.⁸⁴

The strange and the civilized, the Other and the Same: these are no longer incompatible opposites; the boundaries are blurred. Artemis demonstrates that civilization is endangered when the rules are broken (when her sanctuary is used as a bridal-chamber) and barbarity enters in the form of human sacrifice. And it takes the integration of the Other—in the form of a foreign king carrying a foreign deity—for the restoration of culture; taking up residence in this land of the strange ritual, they are absorbed into the Same. What is more, the Other is not eliminated; the human sacrifice, the madness remain but are simulated, mimed or acted out.

We already mentioned the two *xoana* of Dionysus in Corinth; they are absolutely identical in appearance, both are covered in gold, both have the faces painted crimson. One is called Baccheios, the other Lysios; the first infects people with bacchic delirium, the latter purifies and cures them: a reconciliation of madness and order. A very short version of the myth: overpowered by Hera, Dionysus is stricken with *mania*, the same illness he will later be inflicting on others. Wandering, he arrives at Phrygia and is welcomed by Rhea, his grandmother and the Mother of the gods. She not only cures him of his madness but teaches him his own ceremonies, *teletai*, and gives him his costume, *stole*. From there on, Dionysus is endowed with his double-nature. He causes as much *mania* (madness) as *katharsis* (purification and healing); the “more insanity is unleashed, the more room there is for catharsis.”⁸⁵ He is the goat, the least tame amongst the domestic animals. He is also the goat who consumes the vine-shoots, pruning the wild plant with his jaw: the Dionysus of the cultivated vine. His gift, the wine, is *pharmakon*: both remedy and poison. It can give pleasure and help man forget his troubles, or make him miserable and mad. It can help man stand upright, or stumble. Two identical *xoana*, same god, same drink. Dionysus says:

“For sensible people I prepare only three kraters: one for health (*hugieia*), which they drink first; another for love and pleasure; and a third for sleep. After draining the third, those said to be wise go to lie down. The fourth I know not. It

⁸⁴ In another example, at Mounychia, a lost she-bear finds her way into the sanctuary of Artemis, causes some damage, and is consequently killed. Plague follows: Artemis is angry and demands a human sacrifice: a father must offer his own daughter. Baros volunteers; he hides his daughter in the sanctuary, dresses a goat in feminine clothing and sacrifices the animal instead: the girl mimes the bear in the sanctuary, the goat mimes the girl at the altar. No one notices the trickery and the goddess is content; she demands that all sacrifices from now on are done in the same way.

⁸⁵ Detienne, *Dionysus at Large* 21.

belongs to insolence. The fifth is full of cries. The sixth brims with insults and jests. The seventh has black eyes. The eighth is the bailiff, the ninth, bile. The tenth is madness (*mania*). It is this one that causes stumbling (*sphallein*)..."⁸⁶

iii

The "Lenaia vases", a series of Attic vases from the fifth-century often associated with the development of iconic sculpture, consistently show a cult image of Dionysus: a crude indication of a limbless body composed of a tree trunk draped in a real himation with a bearded mask of Dionysus placed on the top.⁸⁷

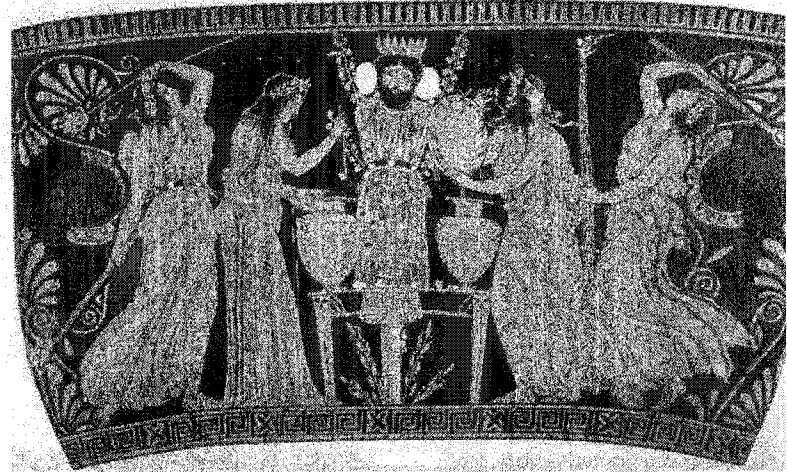


Figure 14: a Lenaia vase

An altar placed in front of or nearby the pillar, offerings of food, *stamnoi* (jugs of wine), the women drinking wine and dancing leave little doubt that this is the setting of a ritual (figure 14). Unfortunately almost nothing is known of the Lenaia, and consequently there is little consensus regarding the character of the ritual pictured. Most interpretations suggest a link between the regenerative powers of Dionysus and the creation of these cult figures depicted on the vases.

What exactly is the source of these regenerative powers? It is well known that Dionysus is 'twice-born': tricked by Hera, his mother Semele asks to see Zeus in his real form and is struck dead at the sight of the thunder bolt. Zeus snatches the unharmed child from her womb and sews him up in his thigh: in a few months Dionysus is reborn. Another version of the story (which sounds distantly familiar) is offered by the Orphic Mysteries: Zagreus is born out of the union of Zeus and Persephone. Soon Hera finds out and, in a typical jealous rage, sends the Titans to get rid of the child. They first lure him with

⁸⁶ From a fourth century B.C. comedy by Euboulos entitled *Dionysus* or *Semele*, as quoted in Detienne, *Dionysus at Large* 50.

⁸⁷ See Hersey 16-8; Donohue 227-231; Burkert, *Greek Religion* 235-238. Regarding these images of Dionysus, George Hersey points out that the "likeness to a column with flutes and capital is striking" (page 18) implying links between the Greek sacrificial practices and the evolution of the Greek architectural column.

marvelous toys: "articulated dolls, golden apples, rhombus, top, and finally a mirror in which the child finds his own image and loses himself in its contemplation."⁸⁸ It is during this last moment of distraction that the Titans strike Zagreus down with a knife. They cut him into seven pieces, which are cooked in a cauldron then roasted over the fire before being eaten. By the time Zeus finds out, all that is left of the child is the heart saved by Athena. Zagreus is eventually reborn as Dionysus: Zeus swallows the heart or feeds it to Semele or Athena implants it in a clay figure and breathes life into it.⁸⁹

It is possible that the Lenaia rituals are a reenactment of Dionysus's rebirth. "We recognize here too the enduring elements of those prehistoric restitution rituals. Just as the animal's bones—most importantly, its skull—had been deposited at a specific site—or, rather, raised and consecrated—so here the mask, the equivalent of the skull, was set up after the sacred wine had been consumed: the deity was present."⁹⁰ Lest we forget, Dionysus *is* wine, hence through the consumption of this sacred drink, the votaries repeat the act of the Titans: he has to be absent before he can be present. Simultaneously a communion with the god is achieved: through the drunken frenzy caused by the wine in their bodies the votaries are 'filled' with the god, they are possessed. The god is both absent (consumed) and present (in the veins of his votaries); he is finally externalized as the cult image is assembled. The god is reborn, order is restored, life continues. However our interpretation is incomplete: the image of Dionysus does not have a face, but a mask. Herein lies the paradoxical nature of this god.

Most nomadic of the gods, Dionysus always arrives from elsewhere: he has to be absent before he can be present. Perpetually changing his form, when he does reveal himself, he invariably does so wearing a mask: specifically the mask of a stranger, the Other, only recognizable



Figure 15: Dionysus carrying a jug of wine on the François vase

⁸⁸ Detienne, *Dionysus Slain*, trans. Mireille and Leonard Muellner (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 73.

⁸⁹ Meanwhile Zeus's thunderbolts reduce the Titans into ashes (in fact quicklime, *títanos*), out of which the human race is born.

⁹⁰ Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, translated by Peter Bing (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983) 237.

through his un-recognizability. "By way of the mask that confers upon him his figurative identity, Dionysos affirms his epiphanic nature as a god who continually alternates between presence and absence. He is always a stranger, a form to identify, a face to uncover, a mask that hides as much as it reveals."⁹¹ The mask implies hiding rather than revealing: in that, when we see a mask we are aware that what we see is what it *is not*, its Other, the absence of the self, a disguise. It is also nothing but surface, in being two-dimensional one cannot look around it, it has no sides, no back, it presents itself as a limit, a pure *confrontation*. On the François vase (figure 15) all the gods in the procession are shown in profile, except for Dionysus: the god of the face-to-face encounter is turned to the viewer wearing a terrible mask with piercing eyes. Earlier we commented on the significance of the *prosôpon*, the face, for the Greeks. The dead are shrouded in the darkness of the Night, losing their visibility, lacking a face allowing them to see and be seen. The face differentiates man from animal because "man is the only animal who stands upright, he is also the only one who looks you in the face and who speaks to you face to face."⁹² In Athens, an altar stands for Dionysus Orthos, the god of Uprightness, because it was by "drinking properly mixed wine that men ceased to stand in a bent posture"⁹³—Dionysus Orthos demands an upright posture, one that will allow for a face-to-face encounter.

It is significant that the Greeks used the same word, *prosôpon*, for face and mask. Could the mask of Dionysus be that two-dimensional image he saw in the mirror right before his terrible death? An encounter with the self in a mirror can in many ways seem an uncanny experience. There in the mirror, an objectified double gazes back, a circular act of seeing and being seen at the same time is played out. One not only catches oneself in the act of seeing, but also is able to view oneself as others do, as an Other.⁹⁴ What Dionysus saw in the mirror was a stranger, the Other, the face right before his death, his absence. Therefore after the image in the mirror is death, beyond the mask is absence, complete loss of self and loss of one's face (*prosôpon*). But unlike the monstrous mask of Gorgo—that terrifying image of pure chaos and horror—the mask of Dionysus is not a direct encounter with death itself. It is telling that in the Dionysian rituals the climax is reached when the god shows himself at the height of the frenzy; the votaries being 'lost' in drunkenness, are replaced by the Other: one has to be lost for Dionysus to appear. The Bacchant says "He

⁹¹ Detienne, *Dionysus at Large* 10.

⁹² Aristotle, *De part. anim.* 3.2.662b19 as quoted in Vernant, *Mortals* 142.

⁹³ Detienne, *Dionysus at Large* 37, see also 48-49.

⁹⁴ Vernant, *Mortals* 142.

saw me, I saw him; he bestowed upon me his *orgia*,"⁹⁵ the simultaneity of the vision suggests that one is in fact looking in the mirror, recognizing not his/her face but a stranger instead. To see the god means one has reached the limit beyond which one can go no further, at least not without losing one's face:

"At the heart itself of life on this earth, alterity is a sudden intrusion of that which alienates us from daily existence, from the normal course of things, from ourselves: disguise, masquerade, drunkenness, play, theater, and finally, trance and ecstatic delirium. Dionysos teaches or compels us to become other than what we already are, to experience in this life here below the sensation of escape towards a disconcerting strangeness."⁹⁶

Whether as xoanon or the mask, the image reveals itself as a border between the visible and the invisible; separating them as well as bringing them together. As a visible incarnation of an otherwise invisible god, the image has a dubious existence. Though it gives the divinity a visible (and physical) dimension, in its materiality, it is only a cover. It is not the body of the god, neither is it the god himself. Yet the image also does not entirely reside in the limited world of pure visibility; the mortals recognize the divinity in the image, it is *entheon* (full of the god, possessed) and retains the powers of the sacred. It is magical, always more than what it seems. Allowing the visible and the invisible to infiltrate one another, the image allows for a communication between the mortals and the immortals: the god physically participates in the rituals. The ritual emerges as a sort of performance, an ordering of experience and establishing of a relationship with the gods. Whether it is the reenactment of an originating event (the death and rebirth of Dionysus), or the assimilation of the Other (acting out madness), the ritual emerges as a mode of remaking the world according to human experience. Mimicry—which will later emerge as the making of images—, through its modes of seeming, allows for the ordering of a chaotic existence, which when left to its wild nature, can pull civilization back into barbarity.

⁹⁵ From Euripides, *Bacchae*, as quoted in Detienne, *Dionysus at Large* 22.

⁹⁶ Vernant, *Mortals* 196.

THE DOUBLE

In Homeric Greece, the *eidōlon* seems to be the closest word in meaning to 'image'.⁹⁷ But it should be immediately pointed out that this is still far from what we consider as an image today. In the archaic period, an *eidōlon* is more of a double, a phantom, and invariably contains a dimension of the world beyond. The double is not merely an image, like the imitation of a real object, nor is it a product of the imagination or an illusion of the mind. By 'standing in' for someone, it brings the person into presence; at the same time its intangibility points to the absence of the person. "The double plays on two contrasting levels at the same time: at the moment when it shows itself to be present, it also reveals itself as not being of this world but rather as belonging to an inaccessible elsewhere."⁹⁸ *Eidōla*, as the double, comes in three different forms: *phasma*, *oneiros* and *psuchē*. A *phasma*—being the closest thing to a phantom—is the semblance of a living person created by a god. For instance it is the *phasma* of Aeneas, created by Apollo, who fights in the battle of Troy while the real Aeneas is sheltered in the citadel. An *oneiros* is a dream image, a sleep apparition of a ghostly double sent by the gods: it is an *oneiros* of Nestor that Zeus sends to Agamemnon to convince him to call the Achaean warriors to arms. Finally, a *psuchē* is the ghost of a dead person.



Figure 16: Double Figure, 1985

i

For the ancient Greeks, death brings a new level of existence for the deceased. Among the living, it is existence through remembrance: first, depending on social status, the dead person's name is celebrated through epics and remains in the memory of those who knew him as well as that of future generations: second, a *mnēma* (memorial) guarantees a more permanent place. The dead person remains visible in the form of a stele erected over the tomb. But a *mnēma* is also a paradox. Remembering involves an active distancing from

⁹⁷ For more on *psuchē* and *mnēma*, see Vernant, *Mortals* 186-192.

⁹⁸ Vernant, *Mortals* 187.

the past experience: the moment of remembering is accompanied by the realization that what is being remembered belongs to the past, which is now gone. Simultaneously one realizes that one has actually *forgotten*: the memory points to the isolation of the moment from presence. Thus the act of remembering reveals the absence of what is being recalled in the present moment. Similarly, a funerary stele stands as a reminder of a person who is now absent: at best, it is “a paradoxical inscription of absence in presence.”⁹⁹

After the end of seventh century B.C., representational steles replace

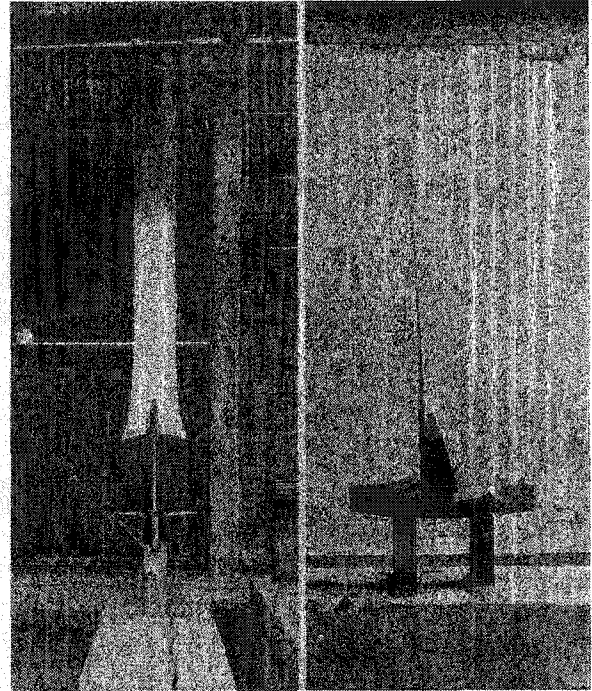


Figure 17: Stele I, 1962

roughly squared off tombstones. The dead person is given an image along with a name and the aid of an inscription. The figure not only marks the location of the earthly remains of the deceased, but stands ‘in place’ of the person like a double, continuing to do the “same” things the living person used to do. A funerary inscription of Amorgos (middle of fifth century B.C.) reads: “I am set up here in Parian marble, in place of a woman . . . in memory of Bitte, but for her mother, tears of mourning.”¹⁰⁰ Another inscription, from the stele of Ampharete (late fifth century B.C.), explains: “This is the dear child of my daughter whom I hold here, the one I held on my knees when we were alive and looked upon the light of the sun; and I still hold him now that we are both dead.”¹⁰¹ As the double of the deceased person, the stele embodies the same qualities that the living person had—beauty, noble character, youth, wisdom—expressed through the beauty of the sculptural form.

Thus the first double, in the form of a *mnēma*, stands permanent and material among the living. The other double is the *psuchē*, ungraspable, phantom-like and is exiled to the world beyond. After a day of lamentation, Achilles sees the *psuchē* of his dead friend Patroklos, it has the same appearance as his friend—the body, voice, and clothing are the same. But when Achilles tries to hold him, he is ungraspable: “it is a thin vapor that

⁹⁹ Vernant, *Mortals* 189.

¹⁰⁰ Vernant, *Mortals* 162.

¹⁰¹ Vernant, *Mortals* 162.

disappears beneath the earth with a tiny, bat-like cry."¹⁰² Therefore *psuchē* also conveys an absence: as the ghostly double of a vanished body, it has the same form of the dead person, but it is an absence, a void. Although it *appears to be the same* as the dead person, it also shows itself as an absolute *other*, immaterial, not of this world. A memory, a song, a stele, a *psuchē*: all partake in this play of absence and presence.

We find that in archaic Greece, no oppositions exist between *eidōlon* (double), *eikōn* (image) and *phantasma* (appearance); the image of an appearance creates a double that allows for an existence beyond death.¹⁰³ The Pythagoreans and the Orphics are the first to problematize the concept of the *eidōlon*: *psuchē* is no longer the ghostly simulation of the body of a dead person after death, but is now present within the living person: it becomes the soul. It is still a double but its status changes: the *psuchē*—being of divine origin—survives the death of the body.

Plato, by introducing his ontological system, completely inverts the values previously attributed to the body and soul. Now it is the *psuchē*, the immortal soul that constitutes one's real being: "For each of us the body is only the image of resemblance which accompanies the soul. It is correct to say that the corpses of those who are dead are the *eidōla* of the deceased."¹⁰⁴ The visible, presenting itself as an *eidōlon* or an *eikōn* or a *phantasma*, enters the realm of the unreal. In its constant becoming, the living body is insubstantial and fleeting. It is little more than the semblance of the soul, a simple appearance, an illusion: the *eidōlon* of the *psuchē*. Plato has reversed the relationship so that we have "passed from the soul, ghostly double of the body, to the body as a ghostly reflection of the soul."¹⁰⁵ To be sure, the body still incarnates the invisible soul—but insofar as the body is a mere image of the soul, it remains in the realm of the nonbeing. As an *eidōlon*, it is no longer a double but an illusion. Further, the sculptural form is now twice removed from the real, it is the imitation or copy of an appearance, which is itself a copy of an invisible reality. Thus through an ontological transformation, the relationship between the body and the *psuchē* is no longer one of absence and presence but real versus unreal, seeming versus being. Remembrance also changes its status. It is the body that makes us forget our divine origins. The soul being ever-present is never absent and can be recovered

¹⁰² Vernant, *Mortals* 188.

¹⁰³ Also, as in the case of the *xoana*, the *eidōlon* (which is also translated as idol) allows for the material manifestation of the invisible.

¹⁰⁴ Plato, *Laws* 959b1-3, as quoted in Vernant, *Mortals* 190.

¹⁰⁵ Vernant, *Mortals* 190.

through reminiscence, *anamnesis*, to allow for the transition from seeming to being. And as we shall see, it is *anamnesis* that holds the key to the real status of the image for Plato.

For Plato, everything that can be classified as *eidōpoiikē* (activity that fabricates an image) belongs to the domain of *mimētikē*. "*Mimēsis* is something like a fabrication [*poiēsis*], a fabrication of images [*eidōlon*], to be sure, not of realities."¹⁰⁶ What distinguishes *mimēsis* is the relationship between the image and the real object connected via a bond of resemblance: the image is an imperfect copy of a reality it is trying to replicate. As we have already pointed out the archaic *eidōlon* replicates and becomes the double of a reality. In itself it has a real presence but also points to an irredeemable absence (the *psuchē* has the same voice and appearance of the dead person but at the same time it is ungraspable, belonging to another world). With Plato, this play of absence and presence has vanished; the image can only reproduce an already given appearance that is exterior to itself: an *eidōlon* no longer points to an absence but bears the stigma of nonbeing. To repeat: "Instead of expressing the irruption of the supernatural into human life, of the invisible into the visible, the play of Same and Other comes to circumscribe the space of fictive and illusory between the two poles of being and nonbeing, between true and false. The "apparition," along with the religious values that invest it, gives way to a "seeming," to an appearance, a pure "visible" where the question is not one of making a psychological analysis but of determining its status from the point of view of its reality, of defining its essence from an ontological perspective."¹⁰⁷

Plato's shifting of the vocabulary towards the domain of *seeming* is not unprecedented. Certain societal changes in Greek culture put additional demands on the image, orienting it towards a privileging of vision, of seeming—though, we might add, without the prejudice against appearances. As mentioned, in the assimilation of the foreign

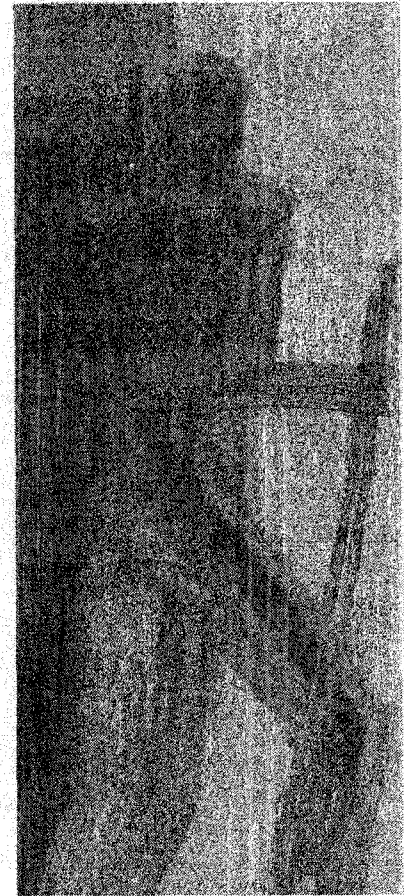


Figure 18: *Double Wanderer*, 1985

¹⁰⁶ Plato, *Sophist* 265b1, as quoted in Vernant, *Mortals* 165.

¹⁰⁷ Vernant, *Mortals* 168.

through the act of mimicry madness is acted out, the barbaric human sacrifice is civilized by replacing the human victim with an animal double. Though everything 'looks real'—dressed like a girl, a sacrificial goat mimics the human victim—the ritual in fact goes through a transformation, through dance or mimicry or transference a slight shift is accomplished. Of course the extreme case of such mimicry is achieved through the theater, from *theoria*, literally 'a looking at'. Additionally, the replacement of the palace by the *polis* creates further demands on the cult idol. *Xoana*, as already discussed, belong to the domain of the private: kept in private dwellings, as talismans, they provide privileges to a cult or a royal family. Mobile and self-contained, their effectiveness is directly related to their active involvement in rituals. The Greek temple of the *polis* is conceived of as a residence of the god, but far from a private domain, it is open to the public. The potency of the cult idol, now placed visibly in the temple, no longer depends on the rituals within which it partakes; it does not need to be carried around, dressed, bathed. Participation in the invisible is achieved through vision alone, from afar. The image of the god can no longer be "a sign of privilege for the one whose house it inhabits, the god reveals his or her presence in a directly visible way to the eyes of all: under the gaze of the City, the god becomes form and spectacle . . . It has no reality other than its appearance, no ritual function other than to be seen."¹⁰⁸ It now has to serve a collective experience: the cult idol is transformed into a *semblance* of the divinity, rather than the god's double. Now thoroughly anthropomorphic in form, it makes visible the perfect qualities of glory, beauty, and splendor that define the god. Moreover, it localizes and defines the sacred space around it; placed somewhere central in the *polis*, it both protects and legitimizes the City.

ii

Mimēsis, belonging to the domain of *seeming*, originates from the performance arts. The *mimēisthai* group of words first entered the Greek language from Sicily, where the genre of mime started.¹⁰⁹ It is believed to have been an overall presentation of human life "as it is"—as opposed to tragic or comic descriptions—, the mime was either a recitation acted by one person or a dramatic performance executed by two or more persons. The emphasis was more on the relationship between the mime and the spectator; an exact copy of a model with all its details was not at all the requirement. Instead, the mime relied on the

¹⁰⁸ Vernant, *Mortals* 158-159.

¹⁰⁹ The research regarding the *mimēisthai* group of words, as well as the genre of mime is based on Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavian University Books, 1966), 22-41. See also Vernant, *Mortals* 164-185.

representation of phenomena by reproducing its typical and characteristic qualities—just enough to convince the spectator. Soon the *mimeisthai* word group entered the Greek vocabulary: the “originally metaphorical meaning ‘to behave like a mime actor (or as people do in the mimes)’ merged into something like ‘to represent something vividly and concretely by means of qualities that are similar to qualities in other phenomena.’”¹¹⁰

Much use of the word (prior to the Socratic dialogues of Xenophon and Plato) emphasizes the intention to deceive the beholders by copying the general traits of the model. In Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*, Orestes and his friend need to infiltrate the fortress to kill Aegisthus. In order to accomplish this, they decide to “speak the speech of Parnassus, imitating the utterance of a Phocian tongue.”¹¹¹ To paraphrase: they disguise themselves as messengers from Phocis and adopt a Parnassian accent to fool the guards; rather than try to accomplish a complete portrait of a person from Phocis, they try to mimic only a typical characteristic, such as the accent, in order to achieve their disguise. “In the first place, there is deception: in the mimic—and through him—the spectator perceives not the person in question as he really is, but the one the mimic is trying to copy. A second factor is identification: *mimēsis* implies that, by adopting the other’s ways, the simulator becomes just like the one he is intending to mimic.”¹¹² In Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, Dionysus wants to go to Hades and return safely to earth. In trying to mimic Heracles, who has accomplished this trip before, Dionysus dons the skin of a lion—over a silk himation—and carries a club with him. Although Dionysus really believes in his disguise, the result is more comic than successful. Overall, throughout the fifth century B.C., the *mimeisthai* word grouping retains a performative aspect. By performative, we mean that the relationship between the imitator and the spectator is more important than the one between the model and the copy.¹¹³ It is less about making an exact copy, an *eikōn*, and more about representing a phenomenon, an appearance, a *phantasma*.

¹¹⁰ Sörbom 39.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Sörbom 28.

¹¹² Vernant, *Mortals* 166.

¹¹³ We should also note here that mimicking keeps its performative aspect for some time, until Xenophon, in his *Memorabilia*, marks a shift in the vocabulary. In order to speak about the work of painters and sculptors, he employs a set of words related to the genre of miming: *mimeisthai* (to mimic), *mimēma* (the product of the action of mimicking), and *mimētēs* (the one who mimics, the imitator). Plato goes even further, *mimēsis* becomes the common feature of all figurative and representational activities, but the balance is clearly shifted; while the earlier uses of *mimēsis* equally referred to the relationship between the model, imitator and spectator, Plato’s use privileges the degree of resemblance between the model and the image. However, this does not mean that the spectator has vanished at all.

THE MOVABLE FIGURE

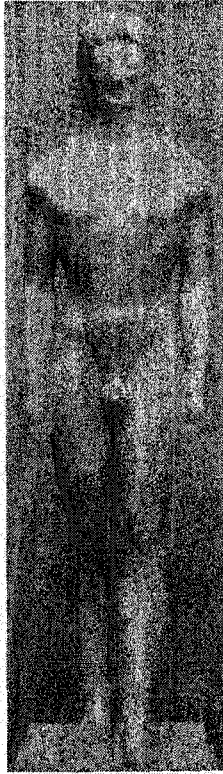


Figure 19: Kouros from Tenea, c. 575-550 B.C.

Perhaps it is this performative aspect of *mimēsis* that allows the Greeks to receive works of art as vivid and full of life. In the late archaic and early classical period, with the development of a new manner of composition, movement is organically integrated into sculptural works. While the archaic *kouros* (figure 19) incorporates movement with the simple forward placement of the leg, nothing else changes in the rest of the body: the elements are separate yet self-sufficing wholes. With the organic approach, each part of the sculpture is related to one another, a leg placed forward affects the entire body, the hip is rotated, and appropriate muscles bulge (figure 20). "It shows us the represented phenomenon as an organism and how this organism actually looks when involved in the action

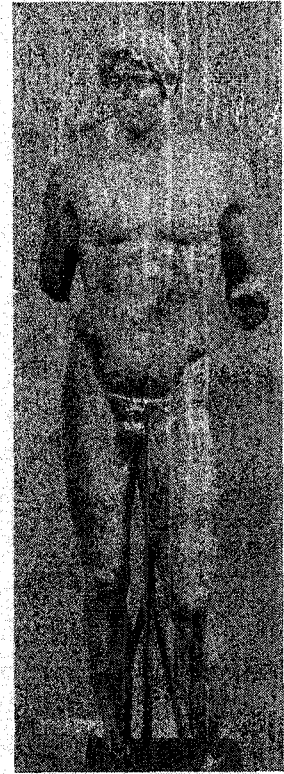


Figure 20: the 'Omphalos Apollo', c. 460-450 B.C. Roman copy.

represented."¹¹⁴ Movement is mimicked and integrated fully into the work of art: it *appears to move*, perhaps enough to convince the viewer that it *is moving*.

Pausanias reports that most of the man-made *xoana* are created by Daedalus,¹¹⁵ adding that all "the works of this artist, although rather uncouth to look at, are nevertheless distinguished by a kind of inspiration."¹¹⁶ Yet, an even closer relationship between *xoana* and Daedalus exists. Pausanias mentions the Plataean festival of the Daedala: Hera is angry with Zeus and refuses to speak to her husband. Zeus consults Cithaeron (the king of Plataea), who is famous for his cleverness—the solution to the marital problem is to make Hera jealous. Zeus is to make a *xoanon*, dress it up as a bride and carry it in a bullock wagon, announcing his marriage with Plataea, the daughter of Asopus. The trick works: Hera is furious, appears on the scene at once, tears the dress away from the *xoanon*; recognizing the deceit, she is pleased. To commemorate this reconciliation, the Plataeans

¹¹⁴ Sörbom 48.

¹¹⁵ Alternate spelling is Daidalos.

¹¹⁶ Pausanias 2.4.5.

celebrate the festival of Daedala, during which *xoana* dressed as brides are taken to the altar and burned. The “men of old time gave the name of *daedala* to *xoana*,”¹¹⁷ Pausanias explains, and “this name was given to *xoana* before Daedalus, the son of Palamaon, was born at Athens, and that he did not receive this name at birth, but that it was a surname afterwards given him from the *daedala*.”¹¹⁸ Several relationships are revealed in this story: we learn that *daedala*—an ancient name for imagery—are first conceived of as tools of deceit, but, more significantly, that such deception requires cunning intelligence. And who is famous for his *mētis* (wily intelligence), his *dolie technē* (skill in trickery)? Why, Prometheus, the father of the arts himself. Although here Pausanias is referring to a *xoanon* made out of wood, elsewhere *daedala* are referred to as dazzling products of metalworking; jewelry and armor made with the assistance of fire, Prometheus’ gift to humanity. And we are reminded of another bride created for the purposes of deception: Pandora, who in turn is crafty and deceiving. It is also significant that it is not Prometheus, nor even another divinity whose intelligence is consulted here; Zeus seeks the advice of a *mortal*.

Image with the power of deception becomes the surname of Daedalus, the mythical architect and sculptor. One such image is the cow outfit that he makes for Pasiphae. Apollodorus explains: Minos is trying to secure his leadership over Crete and in order to prove the legitimacy of his reign, he asks Poseidon to send him a sacrificial bull as a sign. His prayers are answered, but Minos breaks his promise. Angry at the king for not sacrificing the animal he has sent, Poseidon causes Pasiphae, Minos’ wife, to fall in love with the bull. The queen enlists the help of Daedalus, who constructs a cow costume out of wood and leather. Pasiphae uses this outfit to couple with the bull: the result of this union is the Minotaur, a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a human. In order to contain the monster, Daedalus builds a labyrinth “in which he who entered could not find his way out; for many a winding turn shut off the secret outward way.”¹¹⁹

Daedalus is often credited with making sculptures that actually move and speak (though many other references stress that they only *appear* to do so). Overall, he is accepted as a sort of magician with the ability to imitate life itself, rather than construct mere appearances. References to his legendary ability to create such life-like images are mostly humorous and are quite possibly the result of dramatic practices. “Ritual interaction with statues in tragedy inevitably inspired parodies in satyr plays and comedy, where conversant

¹¹⁷ Pausanias 9.3.2.

¹¹⁸ Pausanias 9.3.2.

¹¹⁹ Apollodorus 3.15.8.

and active statues became a popular topos.”¹²⁰ The ability of the sculptures to talk is no doubt related to the practice of carving inscriptions on them, enabling them to ‘speak’. On the other hand, we should not discount the proximity of appearance and reality; the imitator-spectator relationship is very much active here. It is not important that the sculpture is an exact copy, i.e. can actually move; if it successfully mimics and gives the appearance of movement, it may be enough to fool the audience into believing that it actually moves. In a satyr play by Aeschylus, titled *Theoroi* or *Isthmiastai*, a character encounters a portrait of himself: “this image [*eidōlon*] full of my form, this imitation of Daidalos lacks only a voice . . . It would challenge my own mother! For seeing it she would clearly turn and [wail] thinking it to be me, whom she raised. So similar is it [to me].”¹²¹ It would be erroneous here to think that what the character is looking at is a perfect replica. The perception of the image as so life-like is most likely related to the early concepts of *eidōlon* we mentioned earlier, the image as a double. Additionally, this is prior to Plato's shifting of the vocabulary of *mimēsis* to emphasize the degree of resemblance between the model and the image.

The ability of the sculptures to speak is significant. Voice, as breath, denotes a literal manifestation of the spirit, and its ability to animate physical matter. Empedocles imagines the ancestors of man as *tupoi*, forms or models, with the later addition of speech. Demokritos, for whom the soul enables movement in the body, defines the gods as *agalmata*

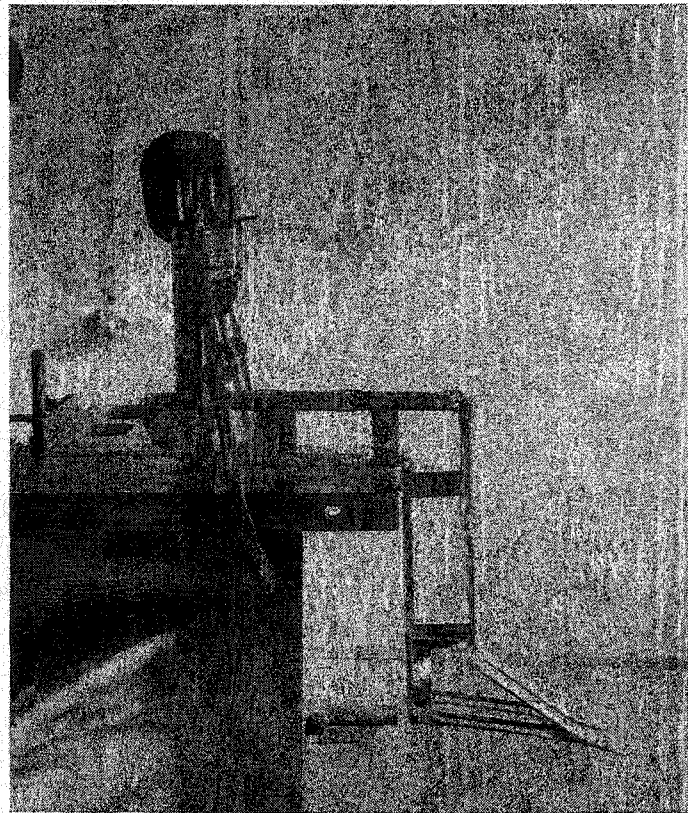


Figure 21: the Movable Figure, 1978-82
sitting in the studio, naked

“I began work on the Movable Figure by making first one finger, then feeling my way, joint by joint.”¹²²

¹²⁰ Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 217.

¹²¹ Morris 218.

¹²² Pichler, *Austria* 11.

phonoenta, statues with voices.¹²³ It is the addition of speech that allows the statue to mimic life itself, to really come alive; speech being the soul in turn would also move the body. In fact, both Plato and Aristophanes suggest that the statues created by Daedalus had to be bound, much like the *xoana* we discussed, in order to prevent their running away. Aristotle not only takes this seriously (or perhaps not so seriously), but also uses it as an analogy to explain the effects of the soul on the body: "Some say that the soul in fact moves the body . . . in the same way in which it moves itself . . . [Daedalus] endowed the wooden



Figure 22: the *Movable Figure* at home, standing, dressed

[*xoanon*] Aphrodite with motion, simply by pouring in quicksilver."¹²⁴ Unlike the *xoana* we mentioned earlier, this one does not need to be moved around by someone else; it can move itself. But that is the least significant part. What is striking is that Daedalus is not imitating the appearance of movement, he is imitating its source, the soul, that which makes things move. "The principle value of *daidala* is that of enabling inanimate matter to become magically alive, of reproducing life rather than representing it."¹²⁵ At this point, we are no longer just in the realm of mimesis, but demiurgy; not imitation but production (*poiesis*).

"Will we not affirm that the art of the mason creates [*poiein*] a real house, and that of the painter another house, a kind of dream [*onar*] presented by the work of a man's hand to eyes that are open? . . . And in the same way, we say, all the other works of our creative activity [*poiêtikês*] also are twofold and go in pairs—the thing itself, produced by the art that creates real things [*autourgikê*], and the image, produced by the image-making art [*eidôlopoiikê*]."¹²⁶

The mason is a demiurge; his product, the house, resembles the real (the idea, the model),

¹²³ For more on the significance of speech, see Morris 221.

¹²⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 1.3, 406b9, as quoted in Donohue 181. See also Morris, 225.

¹²⁵ Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "The Myth of Daedalus" in *AA Files*, no. 10 (1985): 50.

¹²⁶ 266c-d in Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) *the Perseus Project*, ed. Gregory R. Crane, Tufts University, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plat.+Soph.+216a>> last accessed July 2001. Plato also says that if the craftsman "does not make the essence of the bed, he does not make the real bed, but something which resembles the real bed without being it," in *Republic* 597a4as quoted in Vernant, *Mortals* 171.

not the appearance. The house that the painter produces is merely an image, an imitation of the *appearance* of a physical house. The *xoanon* of Aphrodite is a creation rather than an imitation, it resembles the real, life itself, and in doing so it is more than an image.

But then, it won't be long before Aristotle will add: all human *techne* is an imitation of nature. This sudden intrusion of *techne* into our discussion of *mimēsis* demands some clarifications. The relationships between *techne*, *mimēsis* and images (*eidōlon*, *eikōn*, *phantasma*) are in fact more complex than we have indicated so far. In his use of *mimēsis*, Plato does indeed shift the balance towards the degree of resemblance between the model and the copy (construed in terms of the real versus unreal, being versus nonbeing, etc.). Yet the reason for this shift in the first place is the transformation in the relationship between the spectator and the copy, which is no longer about deception and hiding, but actually *revealing*.

"Is not rhetoric in its entire nature an art [*techne*] which leads the soul by means of words . . . ?"¹²⁷

"Since the power of speech happens to be a leading of the soul [*psuchē*], it is necessary that one who is going to be rhetorical know how many forms [*eidos*] the soul has."¹²⁸

"he who knows not the truth [*alētheia*], but pursues opinions [*doxa*], will, it seems, attain an art of speech which is ridiculous, and not an art at all."¹²⁹

In *Phaedrus*, during a discussion on the art of rhetoric, Plato reveals that speech, which signifies the soul as its expression, has the ability to move the souls of others through its powers of persuasion. Not just any speech, but the *techne* of speech, rhetoric. Thus, in the first instance, *techne* gains significance in that it can reach and move the *souls* of others. Secondly, *techne* only refers to truth and even has the power to bring to light those things that are concealed, and it accomplishes these through *anamnesis*, remembrance.

Referring to the scholars of Homer, Socrates explains that gods speak a different language from man. He recites a song from the secret verses:

"Mortals call him flying Love [Eros],

¹²⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 261a.

¹²⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998) 271c-271d. Please note that two different translations of *Phaedrus* are used in this section, with the quotes picked according to the clarity of the text.

¹²⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. H. N. Fowler) 262c.

The immortals call him Winged [Pteros],
on account of wing-growing necessity."¹³⁰

The divine language of the gods contains more truth since it carries both "the cause and the experience of lovers" or as Anne Carson explains it "includes both the *pathos* (describable experience) and the *aitia* (definitive cause or reason) of desire."¹³¹ Thus although mortals can recognize the effects or experience of love; in naming it as Eros, they do not immediately have access to the cause of it. Only the gods know truth in its totality with their penetrating clear vision: *love is caused by a wing-growing necessity*. Socrates, who often announces his lack of knowledge, considers himself an expert in Eros.¹³² Eros offers a hope of understanding or recognition of truth among mortals: it is the site where the bodily experience interacts with a divine source of knowledge. The soul, which can come into being in various forms, is perfect when it has wings and it travels the whole cosmos: in this winged form, it has access to the language of the gods, to truth. Only those souls that have seen truth in their winged form can take on an earthly body and "soul and body stuck fast, is called living being and has the surname mortal."¹³³ Thus the mortal has lost its wings, has fallen onto the earth and is filled with forgetfulness of its previous state.

Eros works as a kind of memory device, allowing the mortal to recollect "those things that our soul saw once upon a time, when it proceeded along with god and looked down upon things."¹³⁴ This comes easy to the philosopher whose power of memory is best. Yet all mortals share this potential and if they use these reminders correctly (for instance recognize Eros as love rather than superficial lust) they can become perfected. Whenever someone sees earthly beauty, a godlike face or perhaps the idea of a body that *imitates* beauty well, he first shivers and is in awe as if before a god; through this he recollects true beauty. This recognition of truth comes through the body, through the physical, through *appearance*, without which we cannot remember anything in our fallen (wingless) state. Yet upon this remembrance, the soul begins to grow wings: it is a maddening, uncomfortable feeling like "the same experience that happens around the teeth to those cutting teeth, when they are just growing them—itching and irritation around the gums: it boils and is irritated and tickles around the growing wings."¹³⁵ The mortal in love remembers the wing-growing

¹³⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.) 252c.

¹³¹ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998) 161.

¹³² See translator's commentary on 227c in Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.).

¹³³ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.) 246c.

¹³⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.) 249c.

¹³⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.) 251c.

necessity; this is the erotic experience of the one philosophizing: a possession of a divine origin.

In our mortal state, the only way for us to reach the soul is through the living body, through experience, through appearances; all of which serve as aids to anamnesis. Human *techne* is directly related to remembrance; after all, in Greek mythology Mnemosyne (Memory) is the mother of all nine Muses. Only those who recognize truth in the first place, and in turn reveal this through their works can accomplish real art. The artwork can in turn remind the spectator of this truth.

Writing stands as an image of speech and is thus in close proximity to painting, Plato explains. Just as written words cannot defend themselves, "the creatures of painting [*zôgraphia*] stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence."¹³⁶ Although speech can directly move the souls of others, writing does not know its audience and cannot interact with them; it is passed around equally to those who understand and those who have no interest in it. To explain this, Plato retells the myth of the Egyptian god Theuth, who very much reminds us of Prometheus. Theuth—who is the inventor of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, draughts, games of dice and written letters—presents writing to the king as a knowledge that "will make Egyptians wiser and provide them with better memory; for it has been found as a drug [*pharmakon*] for memory and wisdom."¹³⁷ The king replies that, instead, writing "will provide forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it, through neglect of memory, seeing that, through trust in writing, they recollect from outside with alien markings, not reminding themselves from inside, by themselves. You have therefore found a drug [*pharmakon*] not for memory, but for reminding."¹³⁸ This does not mean that writing has no value. Charles Segal explains that in Greek "to read" is to 'recognize,' *anagignōskein*, which is also Aristotle's word for the climactic moment of tragedy, the 'recognition,' or *anagnōrisis*.¹³⁹ Therefore, *to read* is *to*

¹³⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. H. N. Fowler) 275d. The Greek word for painting, *zôgraphia*, comes from *zô*, meaning 'live', 'living'.

¹³⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.) 274e.

¹³⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. J. H. Nichols Jr.) 275a.

¹³⁹ Charles Segal, "Spectator and Listener," in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Charles Lambert and Teresa Lavendar Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 214.

Alphabetic writing and the Greek theater come together in the most literal way in a play by the Athenian poet Kallias (mid-fifth century B.C.), named *ABC Tragedy* or the *Grammatike Theoria*. The few fragments that are extant suggest that it was a play about letters, with the chorus made up of the twenty-four letters of the Ionian alphabet. For Jennifer Wise, this play demonstrates "the special kinship between an alphabetical and theatrical manner of making things visible." See Jennifer Wise, *Dionysus Writes, the Invention of Theater in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) 15.

know again, namely the ability to recognize the letters and what they stand for. Both *reading* and *recognizing* require a prior knowledge or memory.

The bodily experience of Eros provides the mortal with the memory of a winged past in the heavens; writing stands as a representation of that memory, as a mnemonic device for none other than the writer himself. For the one who lacks memory, writing would be mute and meaningless. For instance, any reader who has never fallen in love, who lacks the knowledge of the *wing-growing necessity*, would not be able to understand—to *know again*—a text on Eros. For this reader, the written word would have no referent in the lived experience, in the world outside of the text.

On the other hand, Plato mentions another kind of text—the ‘offspring’ of the art [*techne*] of speech, which we can call the art of writing. Art does not depend on the beauty of the words, it is not about composition or meter; only the one who knows truth [*alêtheia*] and can transmit this knowledge to others can attain an art which can move the souls of others. “The word which is written with intelligence in the mind of the learner, which is able to defend itself and knows to whom it should speak, and before whom to be silent”¹⁴⁰ is “the living and breathing [*empsuchon*] word of him who knows, of which the written word may justly be called the image [*eidōlon*].”¹⁴¹ Just as the living body is the *eidōlon* of the soul, the art of writing provides us with the *eidōlon* of truth contained in the living and breathing word, making it available “for others who follow the same path.”¹⁴² Such “gardens of letters” that the artist has planted will put forth “tender leaves” in the reader—it will speak to them, move their souls, help them *recognize* truth and reveal to them that which is concealed.

¹⁴⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. H. N. Fowler) 276a.

¹⁴¹ Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. H. N. Fowler) 276a.

¹⁴² Plato, *Phaedrus* (trans. H. N. Fowler) 276d: “The gardens of letters he will, it seems, plant for amusement, and will write, when he writes, to treasure up reminders for himself, when he comes to the forgetfulness of old age, and for others who follow the same path, and he will be pleased when he sees them putting forth tender leaves.”

CONCLUSION

Does art still have the capacity for revealing truth, *alêtheia*? In order to even attempt to answer this question, we need to first specifically qualify what we mean by truth. Having delegated the responsibility of revealing truth to science for such a long time, it is easy to construe any truth as 'truth as correspondence' or 'fact', rather than 'truth as disclosure'.

The myth of Prometheus reveals to us the shared origin of ritual and *techne*, both of which point to our ambiguous human condition, both of which provide a mediated communication with the gods. Ritual reveals our imperfect state in contrast to divine order; via its own modes of mimesis, ritual allows for an ordering of our experiences, delivering us out of barbarity into civilization. Aspiring to an order out of our chaotic existence, we must constantly define ourselves lest we fall into a bestial state—the ritual must be repeated over and over again. It is *techne* that allows us to survive our imperfect state, through agriculture and making of tools and shelters, keeping us above animals. Yet it is also *techne* that accentuates our day-to-day struggles, for *techne* is always imperfect in the face of necessity. We must constantly labor in order to meet our needs, relentlessly make and remake our world. And the world is presented as deceitful through the hiding game of the gods, and the way to recover knowledge is also through *techne* (which has its own order of deceiving and revealing).

Nietzsche interprets the myth of Prometheus as first and foremost the creation of a thirst for knowledge, "a taste for hidden and forbidden powers."¹⁴³ It would be in the context of religion, in this case Greek mythology, that man would first seek the self-sufficiency of a god. For hunger, man's fate that emerges with the sacrifice of the ox, is not limited to his stomach: the potential for hearing and seeing and understanding—activated by Prometheus—creates a desire for knowledge. Yet, for Nietzsche, man is caught in a delusion: thinking that he is merely revealing knowledge that was hidden away and mediated by the gods, fancying that "he is a spectator and listener who has been placed before the great visual and acoustic spectacle that is life" overlooking that "he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life . . . As a poet, he certainly has *vis contemplativa* and the ability to look back upon his work, but at the same time also and above all *vis creativa*, which the active human being lacks, whatever visual appearances and the faith of all the world may say."¹⁴⁴ It is less a matter of deciphering what is already imbedded in

¹⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Preludes of Science" in *the Gay Science* # 300.

¹⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *the Gay Science* # 301.

nature and more of “really continually fashion[ing] something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations.”¹⁴⁵

Elsewhere Nietzsche presents the Greek conception of culture as a new and improved *physis*.¹⁴⁶ For Nietzsche, *techne* appears as man’s remaking of his own world, transforming nature, as well as himself. So Promethean *techne* more than allowing a communication between man and the gods, allows man to realize his fate. For Nietzsche, of course, the world is deserted by the gods, nature has no inherent secret awaiting recovery. In this world what is revealed to us through our own making and any other human labor (including thinking and thus philosophy) is not something outside of humanity, i.e. divine, but almost a mirror image of ourselves, a knowledge that belongs to us. Constantly unable to accept this, we underestimate ourselves, cut the discussion short by bringing in the gods, and fail to recognize our own responsibility and worth: “We are neither as proud nor as happy as we might be.” Nietzsche goes so far as to humanize Prometheus himself:

“Did Prometheus have to fancy first that he had stolen the light and then pay for that—before he finally discovered that he had created the light by coveting the light and that not only man but also the god was the work of his own hands and had been mere clay in his hands? All mere images of the maker—no less than the fancy, the theft, the Caucasus, the vulture, and the whole tragic Prometheia of all seekers after knowledge?”¹⁴⁷

It is perhaps for this reason that Heidegger adjusts the terminology, replacing ‘happening of truth’ with ‘opening up of world’. World is the “all-governing . . . open relational context,”¹⁴⁸ what we may interpret as our historical situation. In this view, what is revealed is the historical and symbolic context one is living in. What art exposes is our own world, our own outlook onto the world, helping us *recognize* it. We can perhaps paraphrase Aristotle’s claim that ‘all human *techne* is an imitation of nature’ as ‘all human *techne* is a remaking of the world.’ Gadamer restates Aristotle’s position that “all art of whatever kind is

¹⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *the Gay Science* # 301.

¹⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 123.

¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *the Gay Science* # 300.

¹⁴⁸ Heidegger, as quoted in Young 22.

a form of recognition that serves to deepen our knowledge of ourselves and thus our familiarity with the world as well.”¹⁴⁹

This is where our concerns regarding myth resurface. Gadamer himself points out that recognition “presupposes the continuing existence of a binding tradition that is intelligible to all and in which we can encounter ourselves. Myth played this role in Greek thought, providing the common subject-matter for artistic representation.”¹⁵⁰ Without a mythology to provide a common ground, is recognition, and thus art possible? There are common things we all share, our need to find an appropriate way to live, our dealings with the Other, love, fear, most of all, our need for the more-than-human. They may not add up to a collective experience, and if that is the absolute criteria for art, then perhaps it is indeed dead.

The end of metaphysics does not make all the wrongs right again—the realization that rationality itself is a myth does not simply allow us to go *back* to mythology “our relation to myth does not return as naïve as before, but remains marked by this experience.”¹⁵¹ Nietzsche describes this effect as “dreaming while you know you are dreaming.”¹⁵² The mythological experience of the pre-rational man was something of a dream. Having been sobered up, so-to-speak, by rationalism, any experience of this dream state comes with the consciousness that one is dreaming. For Nietzsche, this state reveals itself most when one is in love; being irrational as we know we are being irrational (a state of consciousness that can only belong to a rational person who can differentiate between the two). In this light, when “demythologization itself is revealed as myth, myth regains legitimacy, but only within the frame of a generally ‘weakened’ experience of truth.”¹⁵³ Through rationalism, our experience of the world has lessened in intensity; and in the post ‘end of metaphysics’ era, our existence may not be as colorful and vivid as it used to be but it “gains security and formalization”. In the end both rationalism and mythology go through a mutual weakening. “A secularized culture is not one that has simply left the religious elements of its tradition behind, but one that continues to live them as traces, as hidden and distorted models that are nonetheless profoundly present . . . Modernism does not come about as tradition is

¹⁴⁹ Gadamer 100.

¹⁵⁰ Gadamer 100.

¹⁵¹ Vattimo 40.

¹⁵² Nietzsche, *the Gay Science* # 54. Also see Vattimo 40.

¹⁵³ Vattimo 42.

abandoned, but as it is interpreted almost ironically, distorted . . . in such a way that it is conserved, but also in part emptied.”¹⁵⁴

Art has one great advantage in this view; it posits itself as art, and thus already a weakened reality. If the *Altar* (figure 8) or the *Cross* in Pichler's works were meant to be real religious objects, we would perhaps take a different view. But as art, they demand from us a suspension of belief. When we look at his work, we are—in a sense—dreaming while we know we are dreaming. The questions raised by the work perhaps take us back to the origins of art, but only to question our own mode of participation with the work today. And while we become aware of our need for the more-than-human, in the end, the way we really participate in Pichler's work is through meditation on *his* relationship to his own oeuvre. He points to a need, but does not provide the answers for it. And myth today can only reveal its lack.

“[Aristophanes] tells us that originally all human beings were spherical creatures. But later, on account of their misbehavior, the gods cut them in two. Thereafter, each of the halves, which originally belonged to one complete being, seeks to be made whole once again. Thus every individual is a fragment or a *symbolon tou anthropou*. This expectation that there is another half that can complete us and make us whole once more is fulfilled in the experience of love. This profound image for elective affinity and the marriage of minds can be transferred to our experience of the beautiful in art.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Vattimo 40-41.

¹⁵⁵ Gadamer 31-32.

APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Walter Pichler was born in a stone house in 1936 in South Tyrol.¹⁵⁶ Many of Pichler's works allude to his childhood memories (figures 23 & 24). The family lived in an abandoned sawmill in an area filled with workshops and storage sheds; his grandfather, a blacksmith, and his father, a

shoemaker, had their workshops nearby. A wooden drain on posts leads the water from a brook over an iron impeller; in the distance, a well where the family got their water. In a rather traumatic experience for him, the family participated in the resettlement to North Tyrol—only five years old, he was reluctant to leave home. When his father returned from the war, as a means of transport, he constructed a wagon out of a chest and the rack of an old baby carriage; many years later Pichler built his own small and large wagons (figure 25).

At age sixteen, he entered the vocational school in Innsbruck, and upon his professor's suggestion, he decided to continue his studies at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna. Between 1955-1959,



Figure 23: *Stone House*, 1996



Figure 24: *House by My Grandfather's Smithy*, 1996



Figure 25: *the Three Wagons at the Remise*, 1993

¹⁵⁶ The information regarding Pichler's childhood and education were mostly taken from a text written in 1973 by Max Peintner, who studied with Pichler at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna. The essay appears in *Walter Pichler, 111 Zeichnungen mit einem Essay von Max Peintner und einem Prosatext von Thomas Bernhard* (Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1973).

Walter Pichler studied in the graphic arts section, experimenting with lithography, etching, pen-and-ink and pencil drawing. During the summer after graduation, Pichler made his first three-dimensional piece, the *Small Figure* from soldered wire. That autumn, he went to Paris with a French scholarship for nine months; although he ignored his classes at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, he did make frequent visits to the Louvre, especially to see the Egyptian, Sumerian, and similar collections. In his hotel room, he then began work on the *Old Figure* (figures 9, 11 & 13), another soldered piece. While in Paris, he visited Brancusi's studio and met Giacometti (his 'hero'). After his return from Paris, he kept a studio in the Viennese city center. He acquired a mattress for the *Old Figure* to serve as a base, "for months, Pichler laid it [*Old Figure*] down in the evening and set it upright in the morning again."¹⁵⁷ He also started working on the *Steles* (figure 17) in bronze.

At the time, post-war Austria had an ambiguous relationship with its past. The suppression of 'decadent art' during the war years had created a gap in the art tradition; many Austrian artists had emigrated out of the country. And the "monstrousness of the country's dual role under Nazism, as both victim and perpetrator, left its traces until at least the late 60s. After the war Austria played victim, and this hypocrisy affected the arts."¹⁵⁸ The post-war socio-political structure remained largely conservative and repressive, resulting in the late arrival and slow acceptance of international movements (including Modernism and Functionalism). Taking a stance against post-fascist tendencies in the country, the Austrian avant-garde of the 1960s took on a more international outlook.

In 1962, Pichler was in the audience of a lecture given by Hans Hollein at the Galerie nächst St. Stephan in Vienna.¹⁵⁹ Hollein had just returned from his graduate studies at MIT and was familiar with the American art of the time. With a refreshing energy, he presented his point of view that "regarded architecture as something absolute, as a far-reaching fundamental manifestation."¹⁶⁰ In the lecture entitled "Back to Architecture" Hollein explained:

"The origin of architecture is ritual.

Man's need to build manifests itself primarily in the erection of structures with a sacred significance of magical, sacred-sexual meaning.

¹⁵⁷ Max Peintner in Walter Pichler, *111 Zeichnungen* 12.

¹⁵⁸ Patricia Grzonka, "Better Bodies," *Frieze*, no. 43 (1998): 64.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Cook offers further insight, as well as gossip, regarding this period in Vienna in his "Walter Pichler: the Fountainhead," *Architectural Review* v. 169, no. 1010 (1981): 226-229.

¹⁶⁰ Hans Hollein in Walter Pichler, *Austria* (Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1982) 7.

The first pillar, a heap of stones, a sacrificial block hewn from the rock—these are the first structures, man-made structures with a spiritual significance and meaning—these are architecture. Their function is purely spiritual, magical.

They have no material function.

They are pure architecture, without purpose.”¹⁶¹

Working with similar ideas at the time, Pichler was becoming increasingly interested in architecture; he contacted Hollein after the lecture. Their exchange of ideas and collaborations resulted in a 1963 joint exhibition “Architektur” held at the Galerie nächst St. Stephan, at the time run by a progressive Catholic priest, Father Otto Mauer.¹⁶² In the exhibition catalog, along with photographs of models, drawings and collages, Pichler and Hollein published their manifestos. Critical of the Functionalist movement, they declared: “From its origins until today the essence and meaning of architecture have not changed.”¹⁶³ Architecture was neither about utilitarian function nor beauty; elitist and brutal, instead it belonged to a spiritual order. Since science and technology had liberated form from material constraints, architecture could now become once more metaphysical and mythical. Yet the results of this emancipation through technology were less than utopian: Pichler and Hollein presented images of rockets, warships and oilrigs, alongside their drawings of underground cities and vast religious centers.



Figure 26: *Core of a City*, 1963

Right after the exhibition, Pichler went to New York for an extended visit. The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) purchased his drawings from the “Architektur” exhibition; he started working for a printer and produced catalogs for the MOMA. He was also in close contact with Friedrich Kiesler as well as the Pop Art circle. He traveled to Mexico and Guatemala, and then unable to re-enter the USA, he returned to Austria.

¹⁶¹ Hollein in Pichler, *Austria* 7.

¹⁶² Since the mid 1950s, the gallery had become a center for the Viennese avant-garde, and continued its influence through the 1960s, hosting various happenings as well as exhibitions of artists working with multiple disciplines.

¹⁶³ Hans Hollein, “Architecture” from Ulrich Conrads, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, translated by Michael Bullock, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970) 181.

Back in Vienna, Pichler became involved with the so-called 'Thin Upper Crust' (a combination of the 'Englische Flotte' and 'Wiener Gruppe'). The group actively distanced themselves from the Wiener Aktionismus ("smeary, mucky art") and the Wotruba school (the messy "scribblers and sculptor folks who all ran around in turtleneck sweaters . . . with their sleeves rolled up"¹⁶⁴). In reaction to the bourgeois social structure as well as the typical image of the artist, they styled themselves ironically as "a coterie of dandies, to whom Courrèges and Paco Rabanne mattered more than Heidegger and Jackson Pollock . . . [and who enlisted] Italian fashion photographers to snap them in front of their own works rather than, say, have themselves observed at work by experimental cineasts."¹⁶⁵

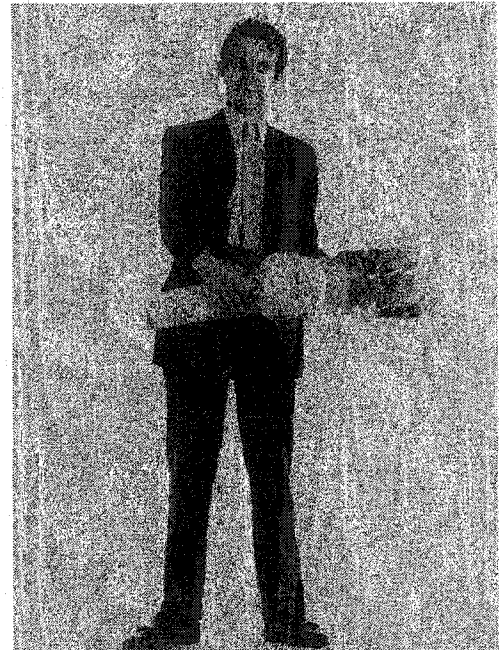


Figure 27: Pichler posing in a crisp suit with his *Prototype 7*, 1967.

In Vienna, Pichler finished working on a book on Otto Wagner with Max Peintner and Heinz Geretsegger. Between 1965-1967, along with Hollein, Dimitriou, Feuerstein and Peichl, he designed and edited the journal "Bau". Later in 1967, Pichler was able to return to the USA as a Visiting Critic at the Rhode Island School of Design by the invitation of a fellow Austrian, Raimund Abraham; in the same year he participated in the "Visionary Architecture" exhibition at the MOMA with Hollein and Abraham.

Between 1966-1969, Pichler worked on a series of sculptures that he named "Prototypes." (After hiding them for 30 years, Pichler showed these pieces in an exhibition at the Generali Foundation in 1998.) The prototypes exhibited a continuing optimism towards technology, though perhaps mixed with a healthy dose of cynicism: Pichler described some of these works, especially the TV Helmet or Portable Living Room (figure 29) and Small Room (figure 28) as "cynical...[and] critical in a funny way."¹⁶⁶ "At the time



Figure 28: *Small Room*, 1967

¹⁶⁴ Walter Pichler, "a Conversation with Walter Pichler" in *Pichler: Prototypen/Prototypes 1966-69*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1998) 30.

¹⁶⁵ Georg Schöllhammer, "the Bolted Gesture" in *Prototypen* 50.

¹⁶⁶ Pichler, *Prototypen* 28.

television was just appearing on the scene. These works are about isolation cells. The critical thrust consisted in revealing this isolation and expressing it in a very overdrawn way."¹⁶⁷ One of these so-called prototypes, the Intensive-Box was essentially a chamber that provided all the material needs stressing the "idea that one is totally isolated but at the same time connected with everything."¹⁶⁸ He also designed prosthetic devices that extended the functions of the human body (Finger Stretcher, 1967; Standard Suit, 1968) as well as chairs and tables: "Architectural work once again had to do with function. Just as the 'Table for Oswald and Ingrid' [Wiener] which could be theoretically used as such."¹⁶⁹

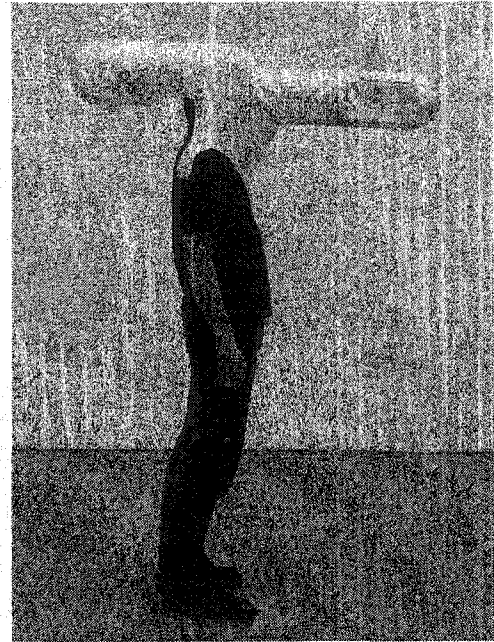


Figure 29: TV Helmet (*Portable Living Room*), 1967

In the early 1970s, Pichler took a turn away from the prototypes and renounced his early ideas about architecture. He decided to explore the relationship between sculpture and architecture: "I always saw my works more as spaces than as sculptures."¹⁷⁰ He said:

"Ever since I began working, I never understood how sculptors could pay so little attention to the space that surrounds their work, why space should be treated so carelessly. From the start I began designing spaces for my sculptures, sketching houses, making models in an attempt to visualize a conception of space. None of these experiments had really satisfied me . . . To put it simply, I wanted to build houses."¹⁷¹

Pichler found the opportunity to put these ideas into practice; in 1972 he bought a neglected farm on a ridge outside of St. Martin an der Raab, at the Southeastern corner of Austria, a few kilometers away from the Hungarian and Yugoslavian borders. Since then, he has been renovating the existing buildings and constructing new houses for his

¹⁶⁷ Pichler, *Prototypen* 28.

¹⁶⁸ Pichler, *Prototypen* 31.

¹⁶⁹ Pichler, *Prototypen* 31.

¹⁷⁰ Pichler, *Prototypen* 29.

¹⁷¹ Walter Pichler and Rudi Fuchs, *Tekeningen: Beelden: Gebouwen; Drawings: Sculptures: Buildings* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1998) 20.

sculptures, turning the farmland into an extensive complex (figures 30 & 31). He funds his project through the sale of his drawings. A number of the houses have been built (Houses for the Torso and Craniums, the Movable Figure, the Steles, the Wagons, the Large Cross, and the Small Tower) and many others are yet in project phase.

"I sometimes reflect whether my mode of life and work in St. Martin might not easily be misconstrued as a model of the so-called complete and comprehensive life. It is quite possible to have fulfillment and concentration in an area of which one commands a view, but they may equally well be transformed into isolation. By returning to the country, I exclude a great deal from my field of vision, but what I do see is all the clearer, and magnified."¹⁷²



Figure 30: Buildings on the Gable Side, 1987. Clockwise from the left: House for the Ridge, Cold Storage, House for the Torso and Craniums, Small Tower and Chapel for the Large Cross.

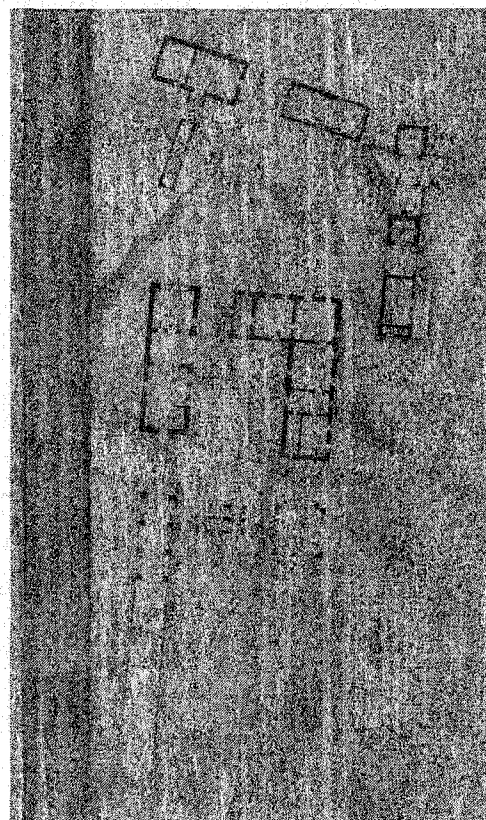


Figure 31: Buildings in St. Martin, site plan, 1988

¹⁷² Pichler, *Austria 7*.

Only four of Pichler's sculptural pieces are in museum collections. The Museum of Twentieth Century Art in Vienna has the *Portable Shrine* (1970), a portable construct made of a zinc metal box and brass plates on a wooden stretcher. A piece made of bronze and earth, the *Two Crucibles* (1970), is at the Kunsthalle Hamburg. The Lenbachhaus in Munich owns the *Crucifix* (1973), created out of willow branches, bandages, soldered copper wire, pewter, gesso ground and a concrete pedestal. Pichler was commissioned by the MAK Vienna to design and oversee the construction of a door to the garden.

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