

# ENERGY IN FORM – Jo Kley

## Synopsis

Some sculptures are known to have an enormous direct immediacy, so that one as a beholder may feel thunderstruck. This strong sentiment seems to be a matter of mind. Probably the emotion is triggered by a certain insight, but an attempt of explanation usually encounters difficulties in contrast to the easiness of the insight. Verbal language appears to be insufficient. We are equipped with several cognitive senses and we have as well developed a number of ways to express ourselves. Despite the insufficiency of speech I hope to reach an adequate theory about the impact of sculpture on the development of the human mind. We ought to consider the long history of sculpture. I am convinced that the little sculptures which recently were discovered by archeologists in some caves in southern Germany, almost 40.000 years old, played a significant role in the evolution of mind. I believe that a part of the Paleolithic idea is still literally perceptible when we are directly moved by a sculpture nowadays.

Certainly, everybody who sometimes considers how the world is constituted in terms of one's individual perception faces the problem that one newly opened door to understanding reveals several other closed doors. This might be a common problem, but even Newton, who here is a good example for a scientific authority and who successfully used his pictorial thinking found an expression for it: "Knowledge is a drop, and lack of knowledge is an ocean." It seems knowledge always encounters chaos. As an artist I feel to be in a way predestinated to consider the image of the world on my individual perception which then finds potentially a mirrored expression through my work as a sculptor. This essay is an attempt to put in order - in this way the work of a stone-carving sculptor could be interpreted as a regulative principle. Through my input from a disorderly broken stone an orderly form will arise. I find this is a very likeable effort. However, while giving form I realize a lot of questions whose answers are generating new quests and so one can say that "an energetic complex is arising". It seems also that the entropic principle applies, whereby a certain slope always supplies progress, from outside to inside and vice versa. As we know the entropic principle is the engine of progress. So when shaping forms and giving order it appears to me that the chaos expands around me. In consideration of the tendency of the entropic principle I want to figure out a thesis about my artistic way of thinking in due consideration of the material stone as a geomorphologic product and the human idea as a product of the human mind. So the title *Energy in Form* could also be *Matter and Mind*, but I prefer the energetic postulation. I see the potency of sculpture finds expression as an energetic form and as this I shall explain the emotional experience of being thunderstruck when facing a distinguished sculpture.

Art and science have the same roots of origin. Nevertheless, one of them has the freedom of subjectivity, whilst the other faculty seems to fear it. The challenge for a stone-carving artist now is to create an excellent sculpture which touches the intuitive faculties of the beholder and touches upon an immediate part of real life. This has been the challenge since the very early beginning of stone carving from the Paleolithic until today. Considering the long history of sculpture, the major part of stone sculpture production took place in a more or less pre-scientific ambience. An artistic theory though does not have to change imperatively to be of mere scientific objectivity; at least I

propose this in my case. My thesis is rooted in my practical, intuitive and subjective stone-carving work, which is essentially traditional, although nowadays we may use modern electric and pneumatic machines. In consequence this is a defense for the Stone Age phenomenon of sculpture, including its psychological impact, and in this way it is of considerable scientific merit.

The human being seems to have a necessity to evaluate and to count; by means to put in order and that is why we seek an answer to the eternal question: What came first, the egg or the chicken? This question is applicable in diverse fields; I challenge it in coherence with stone-age human artifacts which we consider today as earliest human artworks. In my understanding these old-time artworks are the antecessors and therefore they build up a constituent part of art history. In the current appreciation of art certainly we can talk about an interlacing or a synchrony within the "Egg-Chicken Problem", since out of matter may arise an idea or an idea may become materialized into an artwork. In my point of view, there is no ascending order. Matter can bear an idea and vice versa. In my experience as a stone-sculptor it often happens that the material gives rise to the idea for a sculpture and then, while carving, new ideas come into my mind, thus also here I can see an energetic complex, which will be one aspect amongst others deserving consideration in my thesis.

I understand myself as well as a successor of the "stone-age artist" who, presumably inspired by the natural forms of pebbles resembling a mammoth for example, created primal figurative artifacts. For me as a sculptor the work with the material stone is a constant source of new ideas and forms. The interlacing and synchrony of matter and idea in interconnection with my physical and intellectual stone-carving work is my challenge. That is why I see the necessity to reflect on themes like matter and its origin (Geology) in connection with an establishment of my theory about the origin of my personal art-perception.

Seen from today, the reason for our highly developed culture is distinguished in the potential of our theoretical rationality. In my point of view theory needs praxis, thus praxis is the basis of theory. By all means, for me it is like that. Often I do not know what was first – the idea or the stone. In the reality of my stone-carving "daily grind", which I already said is an exciting challenge for me, I experienced many times that a theoretical rationality follows my practical work.

The Christian call "In the beginning was the Word ..."<sup>1</sup>, implies that the word was prior. In my understanding the "Word" here has an equal significance to the laws of nature. But then again, what was first, the force, the mass or the acceleration? The gravity is an essential force and factor of the universe and our early ancestors somehow were familiar with the fact that  $force = mass \times acceleration$ <sup>2</sup>. In the event, their hunting success was hooked on this law of nature even when they were not conscious about it. Assuming that the early Homo sapiens wanted to hunt down a huge mammoth, they had to be clever since the mass and force of this animal was a multiple of a man's. Consequently, they developed projectiles like spears and their discovery was that they can reach an enormous force by accelerating a small piece of mass – the spear. Certainly a hunted mammoth provided a high feeling of success and supported the whole tribe with nutrition for the next days. Now, man found rest at the fireplace. Probably here, out of bones, ivory or pebbles, he carved small figures like mammoths, bulls or lions and since man apparently has a need to believe in a metaphysical world, these small sculptures became idols – helpers for the next hunt for example.

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel according to John 1:1

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Newton; classical mechanics,  $F=ma$

I assume that the stone-age man understood that the small stone, or piece of bone, already bore the idea of the sculpture – the pictured animal, be it that the prior form already resembled an animal, or be it that the bone was of a mammoth, thus the idea of the mammoth was obvious. I can see within the small statue of a mammoth from a cave (Vogelherd-Höhle) in South Germany a counterpart to my bull-shaped sculptures.



Roter Bulle, 2006 - Foto: Berndt Perlbach



Mammoth - 35,000 years old,  
Vogelherd-Höhle, Lonetal, Germany  
© Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte  
Tübingen, Germany  
Foto: Hilde Jensen

However, the force of an accelerated mass - the spear- and the spiritual force of an idol are totally different items of course. One important difference is that a spiritual force is not measurable by physical laws, and hence cannot be seriously compared with physical forces. I do not want to exclude the possibility that one day it may be possible to verify this by experiment, since scientific research continuously approaches surprising stages, whereby unimaginable things are becoming visible. But a spiritual energy so far is a subject of mind and belief. Even though we are convinced of the potential of human ability to rationality our behavior to a considerable extent is dominated by irrationality. Perhaps irrationality is even dominating. I do not intend to solve this problem, since it is a part of an ongoing unsolved philosophical discussion of epistemology<sup>3</sup>. My knowledge about epistemology is far too frugal, but while working on stones sometimes I have experienced revealing moments of understanding. Hence, I aim to investigate these personal moments within my thesis. For me it is obvious that the emotional experience when facing an artwork is based on archetypical know-how which we gathered during our phylogeny. This is a very long time, where a distinction between rationality and irrationality did not exist, at least up to the time when human beings developed minds.

In a previous clause I mentioned already the Christian religion. My opinion concerning this matter is that religions, as well as arts, are human principles. My hypothesis is: The "archaic man" – (mankind) in times of the "*Urmythos*"<sup>4</sup> – did not distinguish between the real and the metaphysical world. He

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<sup>3</sup> David Papineau: The Evolution of Knowledge

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ip/davidpapineau/Staff/Papineau/OnlinePapers/evoknow.html>

<sup>4</sup> Griechische Mythologie – Quellen und Deutung; Robert von Ranke-Graves ©1960 Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag; ISBN 3 499 55404 6; The hypothesis of Robert von Ranke-Graves is that man before understanding the coherence of sexual relation and pregnancy believed in the mystery of maternity, hence this was the period of the "Real Mythos" or what he calls "*Urmythos*", in consequence Ranke-Grave says,

naturally understood it as a unit. Through observance of the natural phenomena of his environment the idea of a metaphysical force was inevitable. The various results of this idea amongst others were carved idols and narrations. In this way man through thousands of years, albeit unconsciously, developed a mythological basic concept. In the common perception of today mythology rather has the reputation of a collection of superstitious stories; but I think by denying a mythological basic concept, we cannot really understand art and religion in coherences with systems of societies.

I find in the various mythologies a rich source for my work as a sculptor. Many of my works bear a reference to mythological themes, like the one in Bingen on the Rhine. When I talk to friends there, suggesting that we all should offer sacrifices to "*Poseidon*" when the flood of the river is getting dangerously high, I was actually astonished by myself. Bingen is a town in Germany not far from the famous "*Lorelei*" and as well at the bank of the river Rhine. In 2008 I was a participant of the sculpture symposium<sup>5</sup> there, where I made a spiral-shaped sculpture. It is placed at the junction of two rivers, where the Nahe and the Rhine meet, and is named *Poseidon*. The horizontal form of a powerful spiral, made of a limestone bearing marine fossils, could be interpreted as a wave. Within a next second the wave could become either huge and destructive, or calm like a lagoon. The form depicts the capriciousness of the element water. The astonishment I mentioned before reveals my impression that irrationalism again dominates the rationalism. It seems that we want to believe in the power of a sculpture, even when it is irrational. In the end the sculpture merely is a piece of stone; why should it help in an act of prayer? Hence our concept about this complex is obviously comparable to the one of a stone-age man who carved idols.



*Poseidon, 2008, Bingen on the Rhine, Germany*  
Even the place is magic!  
Foto: Bernd Perlbach



Foto: Susanne Geel

Furthermore and again regarding the entropic principle, it might be that rationality and irrationality are the two factors of human mind which are competing for dominance; therefore an eternal progress is provided and entropy is evident. As in a figurative sense, the principle is an unbalanced and changeable see-saw which tends from time to time to one side and then to the other. In this way

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the stories which we know as Greek mythology and others are a collection of political-religious motivated anecdotes. Many of these anecdotes became mixed with real mythos, transformed in mythological language and carrying messages of real happenings.

<sup>5</sup> SKULPTUREN BEI 529 BINGEN AM RHEIN: ©2008 Gerda & Kuno Pierothe Stiftung; ISBN 978-3-00-024695-1

I understand the human process as an effect on the energetic complex – rationality is generating irrationality and vice versa. Epistemologically what I say here is very hypothetical, but to me it seems quite plausible.

So what is it, creating an energetic form? Is it just our intellectual background in connection with our emotional perception? In my opinion it is the coherence of these, but of course as well it is the sculpture. In view of the form of a sculpture I claim an importance of the authenticity of material, shape and surface. When these three factors fit together, the sculpture of course is a strong and energetic form. When we try to see a strong sculpture independent from the corresponding ambience, we could place it for example in an empty white room. It may possibly happen that the sculpture then completes and apprehends the whole space. And so, to turn the room into a vivid and energetic charged space, it needs nothing more than just one small sculpture. This I experienced once when I moved into a new flat. The first thing that I put into our new, empty living room was my sculpture *Artemis*. The effect was sensational for me and after that I did not want to change anything. Since it was supposed to be our family's living room, *Artemis* had to share the space with other things. *Artemis* is still a good sculpture, but the emanate energy from the sculpture in the empty white room was an experience of pure beauty. The white room logically is an idealistic space which in the normal course of life is to be found in art galleries or museums. I guess at home the sensation by the time could diminish, since it is a biological feature of sensual perception to tire with time. So the white room is good for the museum, but in the everyday life the sculpture has to compete with all the parallel sensations of ambience.

In consequence the energy while regarding a sculpture is a matter of sensory perception. How to literally extract the emanated energy from the sculpture, without regarding the ambience-dependent emotions? My attempt is to investigate the energy in form - so let us try to see just the sculpture; even when it is nothing more than a fictive approach, since our mind unavoidable combines thoughts and emotions. What is important in the meaning of a powerful form? In my approach I want to focus on whether the "making-of" is responsible for a potential emanation of energy. I want to begin with the material, which does not mean that the material inevitably builds the beginning of my thought-chain. Sometimes I just have an image in my mind which makes me then search for the right stone. There is no fixed ascending order.

## **Material**

The choice is huge, since there are hundreds of geologically different stones.

*In modern terminology, geologists recognize three basic groups: first **igneous rocks**, which form by freezing of molten rock, second **sedimentary rocks**, which form either by cementing together of fragments broken off preexisting rocks or by the precipitation of mineral crystals out of water solutions at or near the Earth's surface and third **metamorphic rocks**, which form when preexisting rocks change into new rocks in response to a change in pressure and temperature conditions, and/or as a result of squashing, stretching, or shear, which means that it does not require melting. Each of the three groups contains many different individual rock types, distinguished from one another by physical characteristics such as grain size, composition, texture and layering.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Marshak; EARTH – PORTRAIT OF A PLANET, page 134

This short and precise description of Stephen Marshak seems to me like a naturalistic poem and reveals my difficulties to focus just on the sculpture without any ambience-dependent emotions. It shows to me the immediate coherence of stone and idea. An igneous stone like granite is of plutonic origin, thus millions of years ago the material has built a hot magma chamber. The more time the pluton had to cool down, the bigger the grains grew. When I choose granite, I want to see that the origin of the material finds in a way its expression in the form. In comparison a fine grained crystalline and sometimes slightly transparent marble is quite soft of course; it is metamorphic just as the totally different and again very hard gneiss. A limestone may bear even fossils, or different colors and faults, which are interpretable as records of stressful geologic times. The material stone is a frozen narration about their long history, which I try to respect in my choice of the raw material, when I am looking for a stone.

### **Shape and Surface**

Generally shape and surface of a sculpture reveal an individual style. The definition of style conveys the Latin *Stilus = penholder*, hence it implies an individual handwriting. So style is an expression of a notable countenance. I attach importance to manual-technical skills, but not in a categorically and orthodox manner, since I was trained during my apprenticeship as a stonemason with a sometimes dogmatic attitude to the use of tools and stones. Later as an art student, in the sense of being open to new opportunities, I had to get rid of some of these stonemason's categories. I do not deny mechanical techniques, since I also do not ride a horse when I go shopping instead of driving a car. In the end it is important that shape and surface express a treatment which fits the material and the idea. The aim is important; on the way to it everything is allowed. This position opens a wide potential of sculptors' language.

Some examples of the sculptors' language, contrasts like rough and smooth, naturally broken and polished, angular and roundly, are featured in my sculptures. A line, which in terms of the sculpture is an angle, usually I work out with a minimal convex tension. Planes usually are tensed as well. When I work on a concave form, then the form bears the idea that it is generated by convex forms. A tension in the form makes the vivid emanation, as if the form could breath. In my work a plane or an angle should appear as being perfect, but not perfect in terms of industrial polishing or cut. I can see a big difference here, and what is much more important, I can feel it. My aim is to explain the sensual perception - the emanation of energy - which is by scientific physical experiment probably not yet provable, but which has to do with a certain working-style.

In former times a sculptor's reputation was somehow more like that of a good skilled craftsman. That is what I am interested in as well. Finally, carving stone is still a manual work which demands a great deal of practice. As an example of the absolute exercise, I recall what is reported about the famous Japanese painter Hokusai. In the last moments before he died he said that, if he could live for five years more, he would probably become a good painter. He was 89 years old and his paintings nowadays are admired as icons of Japan. He is one of my heroes and I, like him, also see my way of working as a permanent exercise.

## Imagination

I realize my work also as a dialogue between myself and the stone. Accordingly as I carve the form changes and I have to react to these changes. After many years of stone-carving, thankfully, I can say that I know what I am doing. Shaping a raw block of stone needs some working strategy, I compare it with the rules of games like chess for example. When I do this, then the stone makes that, while I am prepared for the next step. It is a matter of imagination and exercise, but also of respect. When I faced my first 25 ton block I was even scared, but this was probably just because I knew that I am going to be the servant of the stone for the next 3 months. It does not really matter if the stone is huge or small, the imagination is important. To imagine the form, when looking at the raw block, is an essential condition for me and I believe that it is possible to train it.

In conclusion to the theme of the "making-of" I try to compile an adequate theory about the significance of the complex - material and shape/surface, facing "Energy in Form". One more factor, which I have not mentioned so far, is intuition; this might be even a key. As I said earlier, the aim is important; on the way to it everything is allowed. I would like to clarify this phrase. I usually have a clear imagination of the form I am working on in my mind. It does not mean that I exclude intuitive changes, since I understand the work as a dialogue, hence sometimes the stone, or a reached working-state demands a change of idea. These changes I understand as intuitive decisions and so intuition forms an essential part of my working method, perhaps it is the most important one. The simultaneity of image, sensory perception and intuition is an all-time-background and it becomes apparent that I cannot just take the sculpture out of the whole complex to extract the energy in form. In my understanding the human essence is an undividable unit of matter and mind. Therefore a stone-sculpture might be understood as an analogy to this unit.

Nowadays it could seem that stone sculpture has completely gone out of fashion. And indeed, at the great art exhibitions of the world, sculpture has been scarce for years. This is however no reason for concern. On the contrary, I ask myself, what influence and significance the current art market really has on art. Artists who comply with market demands mostly produce art that is as interesting as a sparkling soap bubble. I recall a story on the subject which I would like to briefly relate here: On one of my symposium trips to Spain my friend and host, the sculptor Miguel Isla, told me how he once gave a talk on stone sculpture to a group of young art students. One of the students raised the objection that stone-sculptors were the "Dinosaurs" of the art market and thus completely "out". Without embarrassment Miguel countered that dinosaurs are still universally remembered even after 65 million years!

I am conscious that, also for me, it remains impossible to fully reveal the secrets of art-perception. I take the attempt as a challenge to understand a little more of the remaining secrets through building coherence between complexes: the material stone including the geology, the sculptures' "making of" and the human mind. Finally, a sculpture is the complex of material, form and idea. I would like to point out that my theory about all these interrelations are of a hypothetical character. It is a personal view on my sculpture-work. It is not my intention to deny what is made by colleagues whose point of view on material, shape and surface, are obviously different. Anytime when I see authenticity within a sculpture, I consider it as strong and important.

As a person who studied fine arts and who tries to enhance different skills and qualifications, not only of an artist, I intend to think in an interdisciplinary manner, even though I have not studied natural sciences or humanities. The work of an artist is an interdisciplinary challenge. Working on my

artist's statement, I am striking diverse fields of sciences and I can hardly state a deep or basic knowledge of those. Consequently, I am working with footnotes, giving some notes beyond the author and sources.

## **Essence**

I am convinced that the small sculptures which recently were discovered by archeologists in some caves in southern Germany - almost 40.000 years old - are an example for the significance of art on the evolution of mind. I believe that a part of the Paleolithic idea is still literally perceptible when we are directly moved by a sculpture nowadays.

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