

The Nature of Art

MATERIALITY I

Series editors Donata Levi and Lucia Simonato

Edited by Anna Anguissola and Andreas Grüner

The NATURE *of* ART

Pliny the Elder on Materials

BREPOLS

This book is dedicated to the memory of Irving Lavin

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Editorial Note and Abbreviations

This volume has been designed with an interdisciplinary audience in mind. Therefore, the names of ancient authors and the titles of their works are mainly presented in their conventional English form, while the few exceptions reflect current citation standards.

The Latin text of the *Natural History* follows the Teubner edition by Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff. Unless otherwise specified, all English translations from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* are taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition (in particular, Harris Rackham translated Books 33-35 and David Edward Eichholz was responsible for Books 36-37). Within each chapter, only the first lengthy quotation from Pliny's encyclopaedia has been provided with the title of the work, *Natural History*; subsequent quotations in the text only indicate the book and paragraph.

The series editors, Donata Levi and Lucia Simonato, as well as the press' reviewers, read earlier drafts of the manuscript at various stages with care and generosity, each improving it in distinctive ways. We are extremely grateful to Rubymaya Jaeck-Woodgate, who revised and edited the English manuscript. We would also like to thank Sarah W. Lynch, Huub van der Linden, and Salvatore Settis for their help and support throughout this enterprise. The Friedrich-Alexander-Universität of Erlangen-Nuremberg generously supported the costs of the language editing.

Abbreviations used in this volume for editions and translations of, and commentaries on, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (Books 33-37):

- | | |
|---|---|
| Pline-André, Bloch, Rouveret 1981 = Pline l'Ancien, <i>Histoire Naturelle. Livre XXXVI</i> , texte établi par J. André, traduit par R. Bloch, commenté par A. Rouveret, Paris, 1981 (Les Belles Lettres) | Plinio-Conte 1982-1988 = Gaio Plinio Secondo, <i>Storia Naturale</i> , edizione diretta da G.B. Conte, con la collaborazione di G. Ranucci, 5 vols [I. <i>Cosmologia e geografia. Libri 1-6</i> , prefazione di I. Calvino, saggio introduttivo di G.B. Conte, nota bibliografica di A. Barchiesi, C. Frugoni, G. Ranucci, traduzioni e note di A. Barchiesi, R. Centi, M. Corsaro, A. Marcone, G. Ranucci; II. <i>Antropologia e zoologia. Libri 7-11</i> , traduzioni e note di A. Borghini, E. Giannarelli, A. Marcone, G. Ranucci; III. <i>Botanica. Libri 12-19</i> , traduzioni e note di A. Aragosti, R. Centi, F.E. Consolino, A.M. Cotrozzi, F. Lechi, A. Perutelli; IV. <i>Medicina e farmacologia. Libri 28-32</i> , traduzioni e note di U. Capitani e I. Garofalo; V. <i>Mineralogia e storia dell'arte. Libri 33-37</i> , traduzioni e note di A. Corso, R. Mugellesi, G. Rosati], Torino, 1982-1988 (I Millenni) |
| Pline-Croisille 1985 = Pline l'Ancien, <i>Histoire Naturelle. Livre XXXV</i> , texte établi, traduit et commenté par J.-M. Croisille, Paris, 1985 (Les Belles Lettres) | Plinio-Ferri 2000 = Plinio il Vecchio, <i>Storia delle arti antiche</i> , testo critico, traduzione e commento di S. Ferri (reprint of the 1946 edition), con introduzione di M. Harari, Milano, 2000 ² |
| Pline-de Saint-Denis 1972 = Pline l'Ancien, <i>Histoire Naturelle. Livre XXXVII</i> , texte établi et traduit par E. de Saint-Denis, Paris, 1972 (Les Belles Lettres) | |
| Pline-Le Bonniec, Gallet de Santerre 1953 = Pline l'Ancien, <i>Histoire Naturelle. Livre XXXIV</i> , texte établi et traduit H. Le Bonniec, commenté par H. Gallet de Santerre, H. Le Bonniec, Paris, 1953 (Les Belles Lettres) | |
| Pline-Zehnacker, Dauzat 1983 = Pline l'Ancien, <i>Histoire Naturelle. Livre XXXIII</i> , texte établi et traduit par H. Zehnacker, introduction et notes de P.-E. Dauzat, Paris, 1983 (Les Belles Lettres) | |

- Plinius-Jex-Blake, Sellers 1968 = Caius Plinius Secundus, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, translated by K. Jex-Blake, with commentary and historical introduction by E. Sellers (reprint of the 1896 edition), Chicago, 1968²
- Plinius-König, Bayer 1989 = C. Plinius Secundus der Ältere, *Naturkunde. Lateinisch-deutsch. Buch XXXIV*, herausgegeben und übersetzt von R. König, in Zusammenarbeit mit K. Bayer, Darmstadt, 1989
- Plinius-König, Hopp 1992 = C. Plinius Secundus der Ältere, *Naturkunde. Lateinisch-deutsch. Buch XXXVI*, herausgegeben und übersetzt von R. König, in Zusammenarbeit mit J. Hopp, Darmstadt, 1992
- Plinius-König, Hopp 1994 = C. Plinius Secundus der Ältere, *Naturkunde. Lateinisch-deutsch. Buch XXXVII*, herausgegeben und übersetzt von R. König, in Zusammenarbeit mit J. Hopp, Zürich, 1994
- Plinius-König, Winkler 1997 = C. Plinius Secundus der Ältere, *Naturkunde. Lateinisch-deutsch. Buch XXXV*, herausgegeben und übersetzt von R. König, in Zusammenarbeit mit G. Winkler, Darmstadt, 1997
- Plinius-Mayhoff 1892-1909 = C. Plinius Secundi, *Naturalis Historiae Libri XXXVII*, herausgegeben von C. Mayhoff, 5 vols, Leipzig, 1892-1909
- Pliny-Bostock, Riley 1855 = Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, translated by J. Bostock, H.T. Riley, London, 1855
- Pliny-Eichholz 1962 = Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, X, Books 36-37, translated by D.E. Eichholz, London-Cambridge MA, 1962 (Loeb Classical Library, 419)
- Pliny-Rackham 1961 = Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, IX, Books 33-35, translated by H. Rackham, London-Cambridge MA, 1961 (Loeb Classical Library, 394)

Other abbreviations:

- AE = *Année épigraphique*
- AGD = *Antike Gemmen in Deutschen Sammlungen*
- CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- DNO = S. Kansteiner, K. Hallof, L. Lehmann, B. Seidensticker, K. Stemmer (ed. by), *Der neue Overbeck (DNO). Die antiken Schriftquellen zu den bildenden Künsten der Griechen*, Berlin-Boston, 2014
- DNP = H. Cancik, H. Schneider (hrsg. von), *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, 18 vols, Stuttgart-Weimar, 1996-2003
- EAA = *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica, Classica e Orientale*, 7 vols, Roma, 1958-1966
- IMagnesia = O. KERN (hrsg. von), *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander*, Berlin, 1900
- LEWIS, SHORT 1879 = C.T. Lewis, C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1879
- LIMC = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*
- LSJ = H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. St. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1996
- LTUR = E.M. Steinby (ed. by), *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*, Roma, 1993-2000
- OGIS = *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*
- OLD = *Oxford Latin Dictionary*
- PPM = *Pompei. Pitture e mosaici*, 10 vols, Roma, 1990-2003
- RE = *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
- SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
- ThesCRA = *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*
- ThLL = *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*

Parian Marble and «quella che si fa per forza di levare»

Omnes autem candido tantum marmore usi sunt e Paro insula, quem lapidem coepere lychniten appellare, quoniam ad lucernas in cuniculis caederetur, ut auctor est Varro, multis postea candidioribus repertis, nuper vero etiam in Lunensium lapicidinibus. Sed in Pariorum mirabile proditur, glaeba lapidis unius cuneis dividendum soluta, imaginem Sileni intus extitisse.

All these artists used only white marble from the island of Paros, a stone which they proceeded to call *lychnites*, since, according to Varro, it was quarried in galleries by the light of oil lamps. However, many whiter varieties have been discovered since their time, some indeed only recently, as is the case with the Luna quarries. As for the quarries of Paros, there is an extraordinary tradition that once, when the stone-breakers split a single block with their wedges, a likeness of Silenus was found inside. (*Natural History* 36.14)

Pliny places this story about Parian marble at the end of the short section (36.9-14) he devotes to the beginnings of the art of marble sculpture and just before asserting that «this art is much older than that of painting or of bronze statuary, both of which arose with Phidias in the 83rd Olympiad, that is, about 332 years later»¹.

As noted by a number of scholars, the same anecdote – or variations thereof – occurs in both ancient and modern sources, including ones dealing with artistic practices and techniques². Cicero, for example, records a similar story twice in his treatise *On Divination*:

The title of this paper derives from the letter by Michelangelo Buonarroti to Benedetto Varchi, edited and published in the sixteenth century in VARCHI 1549, pp.154-155 (see also BUONARROTI-MILANESI 1875, no.462, and BUONARROTI-MASTROCOLA 1992, no.213). I wish to thank Luca Giuliani, Carlo Ginzburg and Salvatore Settis for their invaluable criticisms and observations, and Sara Olson for her thoughtful revision of the English text. A shorter version of this essay was presented at the international conference *Bild Wort Zeichen. Tagung der Forschergruppe Symbolische Artikulation der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin* (with the support of the Volkswagenstiftung), 25-27 October 2017. Pliny's text is translated throughout according to PLINY-EICHHOLZ 1962.

1 *Natural History* 36.15.

2 CORSO 1988-1990, I (1988), pp.58-59 and 116, as well as note 6 in reference to *Natural History* 36.14 (PLINIO-CONTE 1982-1988, v [1988]). For the general issues implied by this passage, DANEU LATTANZI 1982, pp.97-107, in part. p.101. On the *topos*, its tradition, and the implied notions of sculpture and artistic activity, PANOFSKY 1952, p.21 and note 43, pp.87-92 and notes 15, 17; BALTRUSAITIS 1957, pp.47-72; JANSON 1961, pp.254-266; JANSON 1973; HIRST 2011, p.18 and note 77. See also the inscription from Magnesia from the middle of the first century CE (*IMagnesia* no. 215; McCABE 1991, no. 324; SEG, 17, no. 495) reporting the emergence of an image of Dionysus from a tree. STEINER 2001, pp.86-87.

Item Carneadem fingere dicis de capite Panisci; quasi non potuerit id evenire casu et non in omni marmore necesse sit inesse vel Praxitelia capita! Illa enim ipsa efficiuntur detractioe, necque quicquam illuc affertur a Praxitele; sed cum multa sunt detracta et ad lineamenta oris perventum est, tum intellegas illud quod iam expolitum sit intus fuisse. Potest igitur tale aliquid etiam sua sponte in lapicidinis Chiorum extitisse. Sed sit hoc fictum. Quid? In nubibus numquam animadvertisti leonis formam aut hippocentauri? Potest igitur, quod modo negabas, veritatem casus imitari.

You also mentioned that myth from Carneades about the head of Pan – as if the likeness could not have been the result of chance! And as if every block of marble did not necessarily have within it heads worthy of Praxiteles! For his masterpieces were made by chipping away the marble, not by adding anything to it; and when, after much chipping, the lineaments of a face were reached, one then realized that the work now polished and complete had always been inside the block. Therefore, it is possible that some such figure as Carneades described did spontaneously appear in the Chian quarries. On the other hand, the story may be untrue. Again, you have often noticed clouds take the form of a lion or a hippocentaur. Therefore it is possible for chance to imitate reality, and this you just now denied. (CICERO, *On Divination* 2.48-49)³

The role of chance images or images made by Nature could be used to serve a number of different discussions, for example investigations into the relationship between art and nature, as well as that between material and *techne*, or, further, in seeking an explanation for the beginnings of a specific *techne* (in this case sculpture)⁴ or a definition of the procedures appropriate to individual *technai*. Cicero's text – in which a head of Pan appears instead of Silenus' in Pliny's text – explicitly connects the anecdote to the notion of marble sculpture as a subtractive process. The fact that even Praxiteles' masterpieces, so the argument goes, were not obtained by adding anything to the marble block, but rather by taking away from it until the lineaments of a face emerged, would prove that the head had always been inside the marble-block. Therefore, the anecdote about the head of Pan produced by nature could very well be true. As widely acknowledged, the notion of marble sculpture as a process of subtraction was also to be highly influential in post-Antique sources⁵.

3 Translation after CICERO-FALCONER 1912; cf. CORSO 1988-1990, I (1988), pp. 58-59. The same story closes the enumeration of different accidental events in CICERO, *On Divination* 1.23: «Aspersa temere pigmenta in tabula oris liniamenta efficere possunt; num etiam Veneris Coae pulchritudinem effici posse aspersione fortuita putas? Sus rostro si humi A litteram impresserit, num propterea suspicari poteris Andromacham Ennii ab ea posse describi? Fingebat Carneades in Chiorum lapicidinis saxo diffisso caput extitisse Panisci; credo, aliquam non dissimilem figuram, sed certe non talem ut eam factam a Scopa diceres. Sic enim se profecto res habet, ut numquam perfecte veritatem casus imitetur».

4 *Natural History* 35.15 and 151 famously also connect the origins of both painting and terracotta sculpture to a natural image, that is a shadow. Particularly interesting are those cases, in which the relationship between natural/chance images and *technai* is reversed. See, for example, 34.5: «adeoque exolevit fundendi aeris pretiosi ratio, ut iamdiu ne fortuna quidem in ea re ius artis habeat»; 35.3: «inventum, Neronis vero maculas quae non essent in crustis inserendo unitatem variare [...] qualiter illos nasci optassent deliciae».

This essay will use Pliny's passage as a starting point to focus on one particular detail of this notion's history in Antiquity, as well as on a significant and relevant moment in its post-Antique tradition, a moment evidenced by a letter from the hand of Michelangelo Buonarroti. Finally, the discussion will consider this key notion's possible connection with the type of anecdote recounted by, among others, Cicero and Pliny.

In analysing the *aporia* regarding whether or not mathematical objects are substances, Aristotle discusses the opinion of those who held⁶ the idea that geometrical/mathematical objects (the plane, line, and point) are more truly substance than bodies. In contrast to this opinion, Aristotle raises the objection that mathematical objects are divisions of bodies and, as such, cannot be substance. It is possible that Aristotle has the Pythagoreans and perhaps also the Platonists in mind when he goes on to consider the sense in which the plane, line, and point are divisions of bodies, asserting that these divisions do not exist in bodies as determinate:

ἔτι δὲ φαίνεται ταῦτα πάντα διαιρέσεις ὄντα τοῦ σώματος, τὸ μὲν εἰς πλάτος τὸ δ' εἰς βάθος τὸ δ' εἰς μήκος. πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ὁμοίως ἔνεστιν ἐν τῷ στερεῷ ὅποιον οὖν σχῆμα· ὥστ' εἰ μὴδ' ἐν τῷ λίθῳ Ἑρμῆς, οὐδὲ τὸ ἥμισυ τοῦ κύβου ἐν τῷ κύβῳ οὕτως ὡς ἀφωρισμένον. οὐκ ἄρα οὐδ' ἐπιφάνεια· εἰ γὰρ ὅποιον οὖν, κἂν αὕτη ἂν ἦν ἡ ἀφορίζουσα τὸ ἥμισυ. ὁ δ' αὐτὸς λόγος καὶ ἐπὶ γραμμῆς καὶ στιγμῆς καὶ μονάδος [...].

Further, it is apparent that all these lines are divisions of body, either in breadth or in depth or in length. In addition to these things, any figure is equally in a solid as any other, so that if not even Hermes is in the stone in a determinate way, neither is the half-cube in the cube in a determinate way; therefore, neither is the surface; for if any surface were in it, so would the one which determines the half-cube be. The same argument applies to line and point and unit [...]. (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* III.5, 1002a 18-25)⁷

It is worth underlining the argumentative function of the Hermes figure in this passage, which might very well have already been crystallized as a proverb by the time this was written. The obvious fact that Hermes' figure cannot be in the marble-block as determinate is used by Aristotle as a self-evident premise, to which everyone would consent, in order to show the

5 On chance images and their role in the Renaissance sources, see note 2, above. Among the post-Antique sources, it is worth quoting, at least, Leon Battista Alberti (*De statua*, par. 2), who uses the idea, like Pliny, in the context of his discussion of the origins of sculpture: «Sed via alii alia non eadem id omnes assequi didicere. Namque hi quidem cum additamentis tum ademtionibus veluti qui cera et creta quos Graeci πλαστικούς (plasticos), nostri fictores appellant, institutum perficere opus prosecuti sunt. Alii solum detrahentes veluti qui superflua discutiendo quaesitam hominis figuram intra marmoris glebam inditam atque absconditam producunt in lucem. Hos quidam sculptores appellamus, quibus fortassis cognati sunt qui sigillo

interlitescentis vultus lineamenta excavationibus eruunt [...]» (ALBERTI-COLLARETA 1998); cf. also COLLARETA 1982, pp.171-187, in particular p.184; POSÉQ 1989, pp.380-384.

6 There is a modern scholarly debate as to whom Aristotle refers to in this passage. ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics* III 230.11-13 thinks the reference is to the Pythagoreans and the Platonists. See also ARISTOTLE-ROSS 1997, I, p.248; *contra* MÜLLER 2009, pp.188-209, in part. pp.192-193 and pp.197-201.

7 Translation after MÜLLER 2009, p.200, with a valuable commentary.

difficulty (to which the Pythagoreans and probably the Platonists, for different reasons, would not consent) that stems from the idea that geometrical divisions would exist in bodies as determinate and are thus substance. The figure of Hermes, then, cannot exist in a solid (the marble block) as determinate, just as the half-cube cannot exist in the cube as determinate. This conclusion is then extended to other geometrical and mathematical objects.

The three literary sources we have quoted so far narrate or refer to anecdotes or proverbs that claim that the figure of a Silenus (Pliny), Pan (Cicero) or Hermes (Aristotle) exist inside the block of stone before it is touched by any sculptor. As we shall see, this variability of subject (Silenus, Pan, Hermes) is absent from the work of Aristotle, who consistently and exclusively refers to the figure of Hermes in his work. The same example of Hermes is evoked at the end of paragraph 7 of Book 5 of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle discusses the senses in which 'to be' is said. He concludes that 'to be' is said of both that which potentially is, and that which actually is:

ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν οὐσιῶν · καὶ γὰρ Ἑρμῆν ἐν τῷ λίθῳ φαμὲν εἶναι, καὶ τὸ ἥμισυ τῆς γραμμῆς, καὶ σῖτον τὸν μήπω ἀδρόν · πότε δὲ δυνατὸν καὶ πότε οὐπω ἐν ἄλλοις διοριστέον.

Similarly too in the case of substances. For we say that Hermes is in the stone, and the half of the line in the whole; and we call 'corn' what is not yet ripe. But when a thing is potentially existent and when not, must be defined elsewhere. (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* V.7, 1017b 6-9)⁸

In this passage as well, the figure of Hermes in the stone is evoked in strict connection with a geometrical entity, in order to strengthen the conclusion as applied to what really matters here for Aristotle, which is the status of mathematical objects.

Aristotle resorts to the figure of Hermes for a third time in *Physics* I, a particularly relevant context from our point of view. After having discussed the senses in which 'to become' (γίγνεσθαι) is said, he proceeds by remarking:

[...] ὅτι δὲ καὶ αἱ οὐσίαι καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἀπλῶς ὄντα ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τινὸς γίνεται, ἐπισκοποῦντι γένοιτ' ἂν φανερόν· αἰὲ γὰρ ἔστι τι ὃ ὑποκεῖται, ἐξ οὗ γίνεται τὸ γιγνόμενον, οἷον τὰ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ ζῶα ἐκ σπέρματος. γίγνεται δὲ τὰ γιγνόμενα ἀπλῶς τὰ μὲν μετασχηματίζει (οἷον ἀνδριάς ἐκ χαλκοῦ), τὰ δὲ προσθέσει (οἷον τὰ αὐξανόμενα), τὰ δ' ἀφαιρέσει (οἷον ἐκ τοῦ λίθου ὁ Ἑρμῆς), τὰ δὲ συνθέσει (οἷον οἰκία), τὰ δ' ἀλλοιώσει (οἷον τὰ τρεπόμενα κατὰ τὴν ὕλην). πάντα δὲ τὰ οὕτω γινόμενα φανερόν ὅτι ἐξ ὑποκειμένων γίνεται.

8 Translation: ARISTOTLE-TREDENICK 1933; commentary: ARISTOTLE-ROSS 1997, I, p. 309.

9 Translation after ARISTOTLE-WICKSTEED, CORNFORD 1957. Cf. also ARISTOTLE, *Physics* I.5, 188b 18-21 and I.7, 190b 12-191a 3.

10 See also ARISTOTLE, *Posterior Analytics* I.27, 87a 32-38.

11 I follow here CLEARY 1985, pp. 13-45; CLEARY 1995. See also MENDELL 2017; MENDELL 2012, pp. 707-708.

[It will be equally obvious that] a substance also, or anything, whether natural or artificial, that exists independently, proceeds from something that may be regarded as the subject of that change which results in its coming into being; for in every case there is something already there, out of which the resultant thing comes; for instance the sperm of a plant or animal. The processes by which things come into existence in this absolute sense may be divided into (1) change of shape, as with the statue made of bronze, or (2) addition, as in things that grow, or (3) subtraction, as when a block of marble is chipped into a Hermes, or (4) combination, as in building a house, or (5) such modifications as affect the properties of the material itself. Clearly, then, all the processes that result in anything 'coming to exist' in this absolute sense start with some subject that is already there to undergo the process. (ARISTOTLE, *Physics* I.7, 190b 2-11)⁹

It must be noted, at least in passing, that Aristotle includes the example of Hermes in a list of natural and artificial instances of 'becoming'. Bronze statuary would thus exemplify the process of 'coming to be' by means of *metaschematisis*, that is a 'change in figure', whereas things that grow would come to exist by means of *prosthesis*, that is addition¹⁰. The process of *prosthesis* is followed in the list by its contrary, namely the process of *aphairesis* (subtraction, taking away), which is exemplified by the instance of the figure of Hermes in the stone. Finally, the processes of *synthesis* (exemplified by the construction of a house) and that of *alloiosis*, or alteration, complete the list.

The methodological relevance of the term *aphairesis* is far-reaching in the context of Aristotle's analyses of scientific knowledge, as are the processes of addition and subtraction by which it is possible to identify the subjects to which mathematical or physical predicates respectively belong¹¹. A passage from the treatise *On the Heavens*, among many others, could clearly exemplify Aristotle's use of *aphairesis/prosthesis* in a specific mathematical/physical context:

τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐπ' ἐκείνων ἀδύνατα συμβαίνοντα καὶ τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἀκολουθήσει, τὰ δὲ τούτοις ἐπ' ἐκείνων οὐχ ἅπαντα διὰ τὸ τὰ μὲν ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως λέγεσθαι, τὰ μαθηματικά, τὰ δὲ φυσικὰ ἐκ προσθέσεως.

The mathematical impossibilities will have consequences on physical objects, but not all physical impossibilities will have consequences on mathematical objects, since mathematical objects are spoken about as a result of subtraction, while physical objects as a result of addition. (ARISTOTLE, *On the Heavens* III.1, 299a 15-18)¹²

It should at least be mentioned that the processes of 'addition' and 'subtraction' were to play a highly relevant role as descriptive tools for a great variety of technical procedures even in post-Antique literary sources, and were used well beyond the fields of mathematics and

12 I translate according to the interpretation of the term proposed by CLEARY 1985, pp. 30-33. On the same distinction between mathematics and physics, see also ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* XI.3, 1061a 28-b17 and *Physics* II.2, 193b 22-194b 15. As shown by

CLEARY 1985, pp. 18-20, Aristotle, in the *Topics*, uses the *aphairesis/prosthesis* couple as non-technical terms and in contexts different from mathematics.

physics, for example, in grammar, rhetoric, and the critical vocabulary of artistic production. The translation of the word *aphairesis* as *abstractio*, probably introduced by Thomas Aquinas¹³, became standard. It is particularly relevant, in our context, that Aquinas also gave this translation of *aphairesis* in the passage from *Physics* I.7, where Aristotle mentions the example of Hermes¹⁴. It is not possible to investigate here the role that the existence of a technical, workshop-related language, proper to specific fields (in this case sculpture), and the direct mediation of Latin sources such as Cicero and Pliny, might have played in prompting deviations (for example, Alberti's *detraho*) from Aquinas' translation of the word, which enjoyed such a wide and lasting success.

The example of Hermes is used a fourth time by Aristotle in Book 9 of the *Metaphysics*, in a passage in which the philosopher defines actuality as opposed to potentiality¹⁵. It should however be noted that the proximity of the Hermes case to the geometrical examples of the half-cube or the half-line – as in *Metaphysics* III.5 and V.7 – and the use of the verb *aphaereo* might also help the reader to correctly interpret the term *aphairesis* even in those contexts where the Hermes example is not explicitly mentioned.

Ἔστι δ' ἡ ἐνέργεια τὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ πρᾶγμα μὴ οὕτως ὥσπερ λέγομεν δυνάμει· λέγομεν δὲ δυνάμει οἷον ἐν τῷ ξύλῳ Ἑρμῆν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὄλῃ τὴν ἡμίσειαν, ὅτι ἀφαιρεθεῖται ἄν, καὶ ἐπιστήμονα καὶ τὸν μὴ θεωροῦντα, ἂν δυνατὸς ἦ θεωρῆσαι· τὸ δὲ ἐνέργεια. δῆλον δ' ἐπὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα τῇ ἐπαγωγῇ ὁ βουλόμεθα λέγειν, καὶ οὐ δεῖ παντὸς ὄρον ζητεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνάλογον συννοῶν, ὅτι ὡς τὸ οἰκοδομοῦν πρὸς τὸ οἰκοδομικόν, καὶ τὸ ἐγρηγορὸς πρὸς τὸ καθεῦδον, καὶ τὸ ὄρων πρὸς τὸ μύον μὲν ὄψιν δὲ ἔχον, καὶ τὸ ἀποκεκριμένον ἐκ τῆς ὕλης πρὸς τὴν ὕλην, καὶ τὸ ἀπειργασμένον πρὸς τὸ ἀνέργαστον.

'Actuality' means the presence of the thing, not in the sense which we mean by 'potentially'. We say that a thing is present potentially as Hermes is present in the wood, or the half-line in the whole, because it can be extracted from it: and as we call even a man who is not studying 'a scholar' if he is capable of studying. That which is present in the opposite sense to this is present actually. What we mean can be plainly seen in the particular cases by induction; we need not seek a definition for every term, but must comprehend the analogy. As that which is actually building is to that which is capable of building, so is that which is awake to that which is asleep; and that which is seeing to that which has the eyes shut, but has the power of sight; and that which is differentiated out of matter to the matter; and that which is finished to the raw material. (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* IX.6, 1048a 32-1048b 5)¹⁶

13 CLEARY 1985.

14 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* I.108: «Et dicit quod eorum quae fiunt, quaedam fiunt transfiguratione, sicut statua fit ex aere; quaedam vero fiunt appositione, ut patet in omnibus augmentatis, sicut fluvius fit ex multis rivis; alia vero fiunt abstractione, sicut ex lapide fit per sculpturam imago Mercurii; quaedam vero fiunt compositione, sicut domus; quaedam vero fiunt alteratione, sicut ea quorum

materia alteratur, sive fiant secundum naturam sive secundum artem: et in omnibus his apparet quod fiunt ex aliquo subiecto. Unde manifestum est quod omne quod fit, fit ex subiecto. Sed advertendum est quod artificialia connumeravit inter ea quae fiunt simpliciter (quamvis formae artificiales sint accidentia), quia artificialia quodammodo sunt in genere substantiae per suam materiam: vel propter opinionem

In all four contexts where the example of the image in the block of stone or wood appears, Aristotle consistently evokes the figure of Hermes. In three of these four cases, the example is recalled within more or less explicitly geometrical-mathematical discussions questioning or correcting Pythagorean and possibly Platonic theories. In two cases (*Physics* I.7 and *Metaphysics* IX.6), the figure of Hermes in the stone or wood is evoked in connection with the term *aphairesis* or the verb *aphaireo*.

Unlike Aristotle, later sources would often vary, dilute or generalise the Hermes example. Apart from Cicero and Pliny, who narrate anecdotes concerning the heads of Pan and Silenus respectively, we may quote, for instance, Dio Chrysostom who renounces every concrete example, in favour of a very general statement:

[...] εἴτε λίθων γλυφαῖς εἴτε ξοάνων ἐργασίαις, κατ' ὀλίγον τῆς τέχνης ἀφαιρούσης τὸ περιττόν, ἕως ἂν καταλίπη αὐτὸ τὸ φαινόμενον εἶδος.

or by the carving of stone, or by the craft which makes images of wood, in which the art little by little subtracts the excess until nothing remains but the image which appears.

(DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Olympic Discourse* 44)¹⁷

Aristotle's commentators also show a marked tendency to generalise, expand and/or elaborate upon the Hermes case. In his commentary on *Metaphysics* III.5, Alexander of Aphrodisias explains:

ἐπὶ τούτοις ὅτι μὴ ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς σώμασι ταῦτα, ἢ τε ἐπιφάνεια καὶ ἡ γραμμὴ καὶ τὸ σημεῖον, οὕτω δείκνυσιν. ἐπινοία ταῦτα ἐν τοῖς σώμασι λέγεται εἶναι· οὐ γὰρ δὴ τῇ ὑποστάσει καὶ τῷ χωρίζεσθαι δύνασθαι. τούτῳ συγχρώμενος λέγει ὅτι ἐν τῷ σώματι ἔστιν ὅποιον οὖν σχῆμα καὶ ὅποιον οὖν ἐπιφάνειαν ὁμοίως ὄντα λαβεῖν. τῇ γὰρ ἐπινοίᾳ ἐν τῷ λίθῳ τῷ ἀργῷ καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ ἄλλου τινὸς ὁμοίως ἔστι λαβεῖν σχῆμα· [...] ὥστε εἰ μὴ τὸ τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ σχῆμα ἐν τῷ λίθῳ, οὐδὲ ὁ δοκεῖ ἔχειν, καὶ εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ κύβῳ ἢ διαιρούσα δίχα ἐπιφάνεια, οὐδ' ἦν δοκεῖ ἔχειν.

In addition, Aristotle proves that they, that is, surface and line and point, are not present in bodies, as follows. It is by thought [*epinoia*] that these things are said to be present in bodies; for it is not by virtue of reality [*hupostasis*], i.e. the ability to exist in separation. Making use of this, he says that it is possible to assume any figure whatever and any surface whatever as being in like manner in a body. For example, it is possible, by thought, to assume both the figure of Hermes and the figure of Apollo as present in the unworked stone – and in like manner the figure of someone else. [...] Therefore

antiquorum, qui similiter aestimabant naturalia ut artificialia, ut in secundo dicitur».
 15 I will not discuss here ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* IX.8, 1050a 19-21, on which see ARISTOTLE-ROSS 1924, II, p. 263; CARLINI 1959, p. 312, no. 36; POGLIANI 2007, pp. 1530-1639, in particular p. 1634, note 137. The interference of the example of 'Hermes in the stone' is particularly clear from Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on this passage (ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS,

On Aristotle's Metaphysics IX, 588.9-589.6). Pauson's painting mentioned by Aristotle, might well represent a further inflection, in painting, of the proverb on 'Hermes in the stone'.
 16 Translation after ARISTOTLE-TREDENNICK 1933, slightly modified.
 17 Translation after DIO CHRYSOSTOM-COHOON 1939.

if the figure of Hermes is not present in the stone, then neither is the figure that the stone appears to have; and if the surface that divides the cube in two is not present in the cube, then neither is the surface that the cube appears to have. (ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics* III, 230.32-231.11)¹⁸

A passage from Simplicius' commentary on *Physics* I.2 is particularly relevant as it preserves what has been recognized as a fragment from Eudemus' work on physics. In the context of a discussion about the relationship between 'one' and 'many', Eudemus offers an explanation in terms of 'potentiality' and 'actuality', thus concluding:

ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ λίθῳ πολλὰ ἔσται, οἷον Ἑρμῆς Ἡρακλῆς μυρία ἕτερα· δυνάμει γάρ ἐστι ταῦτα πάντα ἐν τούτῳ, ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ ἓν μόνον.

in the same block of stone there are many things, such as Hermes, Herakles and many others. Potentially all these things are in it, but in actuality only one. (SIMPLICIUS, *On Aristotle's Physics* I, fr. WEHRLI 37a)¹⁹

The tendency to dilute and generalize the Hermes-in-the-stone case (which served a specific function in relation to the discussion of mathematical objects in Aristotle's texts) would prove instrumental in guaranteeing its significant later tradition both as an analytical tool in many different fields, including technical fields such as sculpture, and as one of the media facilitating the hybridisation of different philosophical and cultural traditions such as Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Neoplatonism. Freed from the argumentative needs they served in their original Aristotelian context, both the idea of sculpture as a process of subtraction (of the excess stone), and that of it as a head or figure already existing in the stone could be employed independently, not only removed from the field of mathematics, but also separated from the specific figure of Hermes.

Aristotle's repeated and consistent use of this specific example, though, deserves particular attention. Unlike Eudemus, Alexander or even Cicero and Pliny, Aristotle's choice of the example of Hermes is clearly not neutral; he must rather have been driven in his choice by a specific role he expected the Hermes' figure to play in his argumentation. Through this particular figure, Aristotle seems to have consistently chosen an object that could at best both concretely exemplify and visualize the relationship between, say, the half-cube and the cube, the half-line and the line, as well as actuality and potentiality. He chose therefore not any statue of Hermes, but specifically the herm (Figs. 1-3b): that is, a fully sculptured and polished artefact in the form of a simple block of stone, surmounted with a fully sculptured head and with fully sculptured male genitals appearing on the front of the block at an appropriate height²⁰. We see

18 Translation by A. Madigan in ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS-DOOLEY, MADIGAN 1992.

19 DIELS 1882, pp.97-98.

20 CURTIUS 1903; WREDE 1986; SIEBERT 1990, pp.285-387; SIEBERT 1991, pp.103-120; DE CESARE 1997, pp.113-119, 160-165, 263-268; RÜCKERT 1998; HÖLSCHER 2005, pp.52-65, in particular pp.54-55.

21 In BUONARROTI-GIRARDI 1967.

22 VARCHI 1549. Both lessons are published in VARCHI 1858-1859, II (1859), pp.611-648; the second *lezione* in BAROCCHI 1960-1962, I (1960), pp.3-86, 335-341 (philological note). Particularly relevant in our context: SCARDAMAGLIA 2017, pp.113-135; COLLARETA 2007, pp.173-184, esp. pp.178-179; LO RE 2012, pp.485-516, esp. pp.511-516; QUIVIGER 1987, pp.219-224; MENDELSON 1982, esp. pp.103-108.

an example of a late archaic marble herm from Siphnos (Fig. 1) and a fragmentary *pelike* picturing three marble herms (Fig. 2). The tondo of a late archaic cup attributed to Epiktetos (Figs. 3a and 3b) shows a young artisan completing a carving of a wooden herm with an awl. The boy sits on a low stool: in order to get a firm hold of the object that he is carving, he has placed its lower part on the edge of the stool, while holding its upper part, from the back, with his left hand and forearm. It is worth noticing that the head of the herm is fully sculptured and already painted, while the artisan is polishing the block-like part of the herm.

It seems likely that Aristotle might have chosen the herm precisely because as a finished object it entertains a very peculiar relationship with the material it is made of, that is the block of stone or wood, which functions as an analogue to a geometric solid. As a specific object then, the herm might have been chosen because it intrinsically gives visual form to the dynamic relationship between the sculptor's illusionistic and immersive finished work, which aims at creating a sculpture wherein the original form of the marble block disappears, and the material from which that sculpture is drawn. We might say that the herm, as a finished and fully polished sculpture, is the closest approximation to a *non-finito* that Greek culture might have conceived, in terms of the argumentative functions it could serve in the Aristotelian contexts we have analysed.

In 1547, Benedetto Varchi held a *lezione* at the Accademia Fiorentina on Michelangelo's famous sonnet *Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto*²¹. He would then publish it in Florence in 1550 (1549), as *Due Lezioni di M. Benedetto Varchi. Nella prima delle quali si dichiara un sonetto di M. Michelagnolo Buonarroti. Nella seconda si disputa quale sia piu nobile arte la Scultura, o la Pittura, con una lettera d'esso Michelagnolo & piu altri eccellentiss. pittori, et scultori, sopra la quistione sopradetta*²². The identification of the specific sources and the analysis of Varchi's Aristotelianism have rightly attracted much scholarly attention and produced important results²³. Here, however, we can only observe that even in his commentary on Michelangelo's sonnet Varchi, albeit resorting to notions drawn from Platonism and Neoplatonism, explicitly frames both such notions and his entire commentary within a decidedly Aristotelian framework. This is often mediated and supplemented by both ancient and medieval commentators on Aristotle, including Averroes, as well as other ancient sources such as Galen, Lucretius, and Pliny²⁴. Commenting upon the *soggetto* of the sonnet, Varchi writes:

Se uno scultore avesse un marmo, certa cosa è che in quel marmo sono in potenza, ciò è si possono cavare di lui, tutte le figure che si possono immaginare, come un uomo, un cavallo, un leone e così di tutti gli altri egualmente; o volemo più tosto dire che in quel marmo sono in potenza, e si possono cavare di lui tutte le bellezze che si possono immaginare da qual si voglia ottimo maestro di dare a qualunque figura, diciamo, per cagione d'esempio, a un Mercurio. Ora se uno scultore lavorando questo marmo, e faccendone questo Mercurio [...]»²⁵.

- 23 SIEKIERA 2013a, pp.198-218, with earlier literature; SIEKIERA 2013b, pp.113-123. See also ANDREONI 2014, pp.61-76; LINES 2014, pp.1-10; SIEKIERA 2014, pp.149-167; ANDREONI 2012; VASOLI 2007, pp.1-25; FIRPO 1997, pp.155-217; PIROTTI 1965, pp.280-311; PRUNAI FALCIANI 1985, pp.14-29; VASOLI 1970.
- 24 Particularly relevant are VASOLI 2007; QUIVIGER 1987; PIROTTI 1965.
- 25 VARCHI 1549, pp.15-16 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], p.614): capitalisation and punctuation have been

normalised according to modern use. Cf. PANOFSKY 1952, pp.89-92; SIEKIERA 2013b, pp.115-120. See also VARCHI 1549, p.21 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], p.616): «d'un marmo solo si possono cavare tutte le figure, e nel più perfetto modo che se le possa immaginare qualunque Maestro. Ora seguita, che se bene si possono cavare, non le cava però, se non chi ha l'arte e la pratica, dicendo [...]»). See also VARCHI 1549, pp.17-18 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], p.614).

Varchi, then, sets a completely Aristotelian scene. The occurrence of the technical verb «cavare», as well as the figure of Hermes (Mercurio) together with its 'diluted' inflection («si possono cavare di lui, tutte le figure che si possono immaginare, come un uomo, un cavallo, un leone e così di tutti gli altri egualmente»), must be underlined.

Varchi's analysis of the first quatrain of Michelangelo's sonnet shows, as do other passages, how even the most Platonic and Neoplatonic notions were reframed within the Aristotelian tradition through the essential contributions of important medieval commentaries. Varchi's statement that the only true master is the one who can realize with his hands what he has perfectly imagined in his brain, is followed by an explanation in terms of potentiality and actuality:

La quale sentenza tratta della più vera e più profonda dottrina d'Aristotile, non si può bene intendere, se non sappiamo prima, che gli esseri (per dir così) sono duoi, o volemo dir più tosto che l'essere è di due maniere. Uno si chiama ed è essere potenziale; l'altro è, e si chiama essere reale. L'essere potenziale d'una qualche cosa è quello, il quale non è ancora venuto a l'atto, ma si giace nascoso in chechessia. Verbigrazia nella terra, nella cera, nel marmo sono in potenza uomini, cavalli e tutte l'altre figure che se ne possono cavare, e tutte quelle tali figure si dicono aver l'essere potenziale, perché non sono ancora venute a l'atto [...]. E se bene l'essere potenziale è più tosto un essere finto e immaginato che vero, e non si può chiamare essere semplicemente, ma essere in potenza, non è che egli non sia cagione dell'essere reale, perché come diceva quel grande Arabo nel dodicesimo della scienza divina al diciottesimo testo del commento [...]²⁶.

Latin quotations from Aristotle, as well as a few lines from Averroes – such as «actio agentis [...] nihil aliud est, quam extrahere rem de potentia ad actum» or «Onde diceva il Filosofo nel settimo libro della Prima filosofia: 'Forma agens respectu lecti est in anima artificis'»²⁷ – do deserve closer analysis aimed at identifying the specific editions from which Varchi draws his Latin quotations, from both Aristotle and Averroes. This, however, falls outside the limits of the present discussion.

Varchi's commentary on Michelangelo's expressions «circonscriva» and «col suo soperchio», on the other hand, is particularly relevant in our context. In order to illustrate the significance of the verb «circonscrivere», he once again resorts to the notion of potentiality and actuality, after having mentioned Anaxagoras' and Lucretius' idea «che tutte le cose fussero in tutte le cose», which he thus refutes:

la quale oppenione è recitata leggiadrissimamente da Lucrezio nel primo libro e confutata gagliardissimamente da Aristotile nella Fisica: né intendiamo ancora che elle vi siano come si vede talvolta essere un viso o altra figura fatta dalla Natura in un marmo, come si può vedere nel S. Giovanni di Pisa e in Padova e altrove: e Plinio racconta che nel fendere un marmo vi si trovò dentro un viso di Sileno, ma intendiamo

26 VARCHI 1549, pp.18-19 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], p.615). Concluding the analysis of the first quatrain, VARCHI 1549, p.32 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], pp.619-620) writes: «s'è veduto come tutte le forme artificiali che si possono immaginare e fare dagli artefici, sono in potenza nei loro subbietti,

ma che a volernele cavare, bisogna avere la mano che ubbidisca e corrisponda all'intelletto, perché altramente non solo non si fa quello che l'uomo s'è immaginato, ma tutto il contrario [...]. Bisogna dunque sapere che una delle principali cagioni che inducesse Platone a porre l'Idée fu il non vedere

in quel modo che avemo dichiarato di sopra e che dichiara Aristotile tante volte e massimamente nel quinto della Metafisica quando disse 'In marmo est forma Mercurii in potentia'²⁸.

The relevance of this passage is obvious, as it traces Pliny's anecdote about Silenus' head and the whole tradition of the images made by Nature back to Aristotle's example of Hermes in the stone. The anecdote narrated by Pliny actually functions as a hinge in Varchi's text, connecting visual examples of images made by chance, which were still visible at Varchi's time («come si può vedere nel S. Giovanni di Pisa e in Padova e altrove») to the Hermes-in-the-stone example, and, thus, to Aristotle's explanation given in terms of potentiality and actuality.

In the same way, Varchi's commentary on Michelangelo's expression «col suo soperchio», not only relies on Aristotle's passage from *Physics* I,7, but it also underlines the connection between Michelangelo and the philosopher:

pensando io quanto sia profondo l'intelletto di questo uomo, poiché uomo è, e come convenga con Aristotile e con Dante, giudico che egli l'abbia usato propriamente e voglia inferire quello stesso che dice il Filosofo nella Fisica. Il che, a fine che meglio s'intenda, diremo che tutte le cose che si fanno artificiatamente si fanno in uno di questi cinque modi: o col mutare e trasfigurare una cosa in un'altra, come quando del bronzo si fa una statua: o coll'aggiugnere e mettere insieme quello che era sparso e disgiunto della medesima spezie, come si farebbe un monte di sassi o d'altro: o col ragunare e porre insieme cose di diverse spezie, come quando si fa una casa: o mediante alcuna alterazione per mezzo d'alcuna delle qualità attive, come quando del loto si fanno i mattoni e della farina il pane: o col togliere e levar via delle parti, come si fa (dice il Filosofo), d'un marmo, Mercurio. Volendo dunque il nostro Poeta, o più tosto Filosofo, dimostrare che il propio della scultura era di fare per levamento di parti (come aveva detto Aristotile) disse col suo soperchio, ciò è con quello che avanza, che sono quelle parti che, lavorando, si levano e se ne vanno in iscaglie²⁹.

In this text it is worth noticing how Varchi, through the expressions «dice il Filosofo» and «come aveva detto Aristotile» added in parentheses, underlines the Aristotelian provenance of both the example of 'Mercurio' and the definition of sculpture as a process «per levamento di parti». Such emphasis is particularly evident insofar as the entire passage is already and explicitly a paraphrase of Aristotle's *Physics* I,7. The deviations from Aristotle's (and his commentators') text are also particularly significant. The process of change by means of subtraction is moved to the last position in the list by Varchi, even though it occupies the third position – just after the mention of the process by means of addition – in Aristotle's text. Varchi's choice is dictated, of course, by his intent to emphasise the strict connection between Michelangelo's expression «col suo soperchio» and Aristotle's text.

donde e come s'introducessero le forme nelle cose (benché egli non poneva l'Idée delle cose artificiali) la cui oppenione ripruova Aristotile lungamente nel settimo della Metafisica».

²⁷ VARCHI 1549, pp.20, 24 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], pp.615, 617). Cf. SIEKIERA 2013b, pp.115-120.

²⁸ VARCHI 1549, pp.26-27 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], pp.617-618), italics in the original text.

²⁹ VARCHI 1549, p.28 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], p.618).

Upon Varchi's request, Michelangelo and other artists famously expressed their opinion on the «paragone delle arti», sculpture and painting in particular, which were the subject of Varchi's second *lezione*. Both this latter lecture and the previous *lezione* on Michelangelo's sonnet were published in 1549 (actually 1550), together with the artists' letters. It is in the letter that Michelangelo wrote to Varchi that the artist famously defined sculpture as «quella che si fa per forza di levare»³⁰.

Varchi's reading of Michelangelo's sonnet and artistic conception is, then, decidedly Aristotelian. Such Aristotelianism, though, is not only intertwined with Platonic and Neoplatonic traits, but it is also based, as far as the specific example of Hermes and the definition of sculpture are concerned, on passages in which Aristotle might have criticized Plato. The relevance of Varchi's commentary is increased by the circumstance that such a reading of Michelangelo's sonnet was in some way 'approved' by the artist himself, as noted by Erwin Panofsky³¹. Indeed, the intersection between Michelangelo's widely claimed and accepted Neoplatonism and Varchi's Aristotelian reading of his poetry and art deserves a longer analysis, which, again, cannot be carried out within the scope of this paper.

Aristotle had consistently chosen the herm – the closest approximation to the non-finito in sculpture that his culture might have been familiar with – as the object that could best exemplify and visually articulate the relationship between matter and form, and most importantly was capable of settling the issue surrounding the status of mathematical and geometrical objects. As a by-product, so to speak, the same object could also end up visually exemplifying, within the work of art itself, the relationship between the sculptor's *techne* and his material, a theme that was also conceptualised and addressed, visually as well as theoretically, in Antiquity³².

Partially freed from the argumentative role it performed in Aristotle's texts, the Hermes example could be diluted, generalised, and thus function, in the post-Antique contexts we have analysed, as a mediator of the very definition of marble sculpture as a process by means of *aphairesis*³³. Hermes' argumentative and mathematical function within Aristotle's text, and indeed its identification as a herm, might not have been fully recognised by all the sources that mention it. However, the herm example entailed the additional possibility – destined to become prevalent and extremely successful – of visually thematising, in the work of art itself, the dynamic relationship between material, i.e. the marble block, and *techne*, i.e. the sculptor's ability.

Both the definition of sculpture as «quella che si fa per forza di levare», and the non-finito as a technique (I will return to this point in a separate essay) seem to offer the possibility of theoretically and/or visually addressing this problematic relationship. Once marble sculpture

30 VARCHI 1549, pp.154-155 (VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], pp.647-648); BUONARROTI-MILANESI 1875, no. 462; BUONARROTI-MASTROCOLA 1992, no.213; see also Michelangelo's letters nos. 463, 464, 465 in BUONARROTI-MILANESI 1875; BUONARROTI-MASTROCOLA 1992, nos. 209, 212, 211, specifically referred to Varchi's commentary. The letter to Luca Martini (BUONARROTI-MILANESI 1875, no.463; BUONARROTI-MASTROCOLA 1992, no. 209) is also published in VARCHI 1858-1859, II [1859], p.647.

31 PANOFSKY 1952, p.90, note 28, who quotes Michelangelo's letters nos. 464 and 465 in BUONARROTI-MILANESI 1875 (also in BUONARROTI-MASTROCOLA 1992, nos.212, 211). While in 1924, through Varchi's commentary, Panofsky highlighted

the Aristotelian traits of Michelangelo's poetics, in 1939 he wrote: «But among all his contemporaries Michelangelo was the only one who adopted Neoplatonism not in certain aspects but in its entirety, and not as a convincing philosophical system, let alone as the fashion of the day, but as a metaphysical justification of his own self» (PANOFSKY 1939, p.180). See COLLARETA 2007; QUIVIGER 1987; MENDELSON 1982.

32 ANGISSOLA 2018. See, though, DIETRICH 2017.

33 See POSÉQ 1989.

is defined as a process by means of *aphairesis* or 'subtraction', the possibility arises for the sculptor to stop his work of 'chipping away' at the penultimate moment, thus dynamically showing through the non-finito the power of his art.

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◆ Fig. 1
Marble herm from Siphnos, ca. 520 BCE,
marble, 66 cm. Athens, National Archaeological
Museum, inv. no. 3728
(© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports /
Archaeological Receipts Fund)

◆ Fig. 2
Red-figure *pelike* depicting three herms,
ca. 480-460 BCE. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no.
C10793 (© RMN-Grand Palais, Musée du Louvre /
Hervé Lewandowski)



CATONI PARIAN MARBLE



◆ Fig. 3a
ΕΡΙΚΤΕΤΟΣ (attrib.), red-figure *kylix*,
ca. 520-510 BCE. Copenhagen, National
Museum of Denmark, inv. no. 119
(© National Museum of Denmark)

◆ Fig. 3b
Detail of Fig. 3a

