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Understanding the World and Ourselves in a Different Way:

A Study of Aesthetic Experience.

-
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Master's Thesis in Philosophy – May 2018



Cover: Thorkildsen, Hedvig, *When you have a destination in mind*. Airbrush/silkscreen. 76cm x 46 cm. 2017.

The work belongs to the artist. Photo: Daniel Persson

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1 Introduction

Aesthetic experience is a term that we use to describe experiences with art and with the beautiful in nature. When we have an aesthetic experience, our understanding somehow works differently than it does during the routines of everyday life, and most likely we will find it difficult to make words out of what we have experienced. According to Kant, we cannot derive knowledge through this kind of experience. Knowledge is something that we acquire by means of concepts through the faculty of understanding and what is given to us by means of sensibility. Because art and aesthetics do not fundamentally rely on determinate concepts, their content must be something other than knowledge. This “other” is, according to Kant, not something definite, as we are able to define and determine only what is grounded on concepts or principles. In the case of art and aesthetics, judgments are based on feelings, not on concepts. The possibility of attaining knowledge and truth through an aesthetic judgment is thereby ruled out in Kant’s system of philosophy.

In this thesis, I set out to investigate what it is that art conveys and why it is meaningful to us. Although I am sympathetic to most of Kant’s aesthetic theory, I will argue that his conclusion, which deprives the subject of the possibility of acquiring knowledge or to experience a kind of truth in the arts and the aesthetics, is mistaken. My claim is that Kant’s conclusion follows from his development of a system of cognition that is too rigidly tied to concepts. I will therefore contest Kant’s conclusion and argue that when it comes to aesthetic experience we can indeed acquire knowledge and, also, that truth is inherent in works of art in a non-theoretical and non-practical way. To do this, I ground my arguments on the theories of Heidegger, Gadamer, and on the French philosopher Mikel Dufrenne. Dufrenne’s main work, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, which was first published in 1953, is still regarded as the most insightful, cogent, and systematic study of aesthetic experience from a phenomenological point of view.¹

In Norwegian and in German there is an important difference between the words *erfaring* and *opplevelse* (*Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*), but in the English language they are both translated into

¹ Michael Mitias, "Dufrenne, Mikel" in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*.

Mikel Dufrenne (1910-1995) is a French philosopher who works in the field of aesthetics and existentialism.

“experience”. The difference in meaning between *erfaring* and *opplevelse* highlights the disagreement between Kant and Gadamer and is also at the root of Dufrenne’s aesthetics. Kant’s claim that the ground structure of an aesthetic judgment rests on a feeling of pleasure, a feeling that does not reach beyond itself to the level of knowledge, will be contrasted with the theory of the role of feelings in Mikel Dufrenne’s aesthetic theory. Dufrenne argues that the particular feeling that encounters with art impart on us is knowledge; it is a way of knowing that makes meaning possible. Or, as he himself phrases it: “The supreme proof of feeling’s depth is that it is intelligent in a way that intelligence as such can never be.”²

The thesis unfolds over four chapters:

1. What is Beauty According to Kant’s Aesthetics?

Kant’s description of the beautiful as something that cannot give us knowledge is the main controversy in this thesis. It is therefore apt to start by giving an account of his definition of beauty. In order to do that, we must have an idea of his system of philosophy in general, but due to the scope of this thesis I will limit this part to provide only what must be provided in order to get a solid idea of Kant’s conception of the beautiful.

2. Can Truth be Conveyed Through Art? A Critique of Kant’s Aesthetic Theory.

In this chapter, I will focus on the implications of Kant’s aesthetics. For this purpose, I will turn to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s main work entitled *Truth and Method*, where the introduction by and large involves a critique of Kant’s aesthetics. According to Gadamer, Kant cuts the ties between the perception of an artwork and the rest of our cognitive faculties. The consequence of this move, he further claims, is not only that the beautiful bears no connection with knowledge and does not represent anything true; it also becomes an issue of whether or not it can have any meaning to us. In this chapter I will also discuss Gadamer’s distinct account of understanding, which is relevant for an interpretation of both Heidegger’s and Dufrenne’s philosophy.

² Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 406.

3. On the Difference Between a Thing and a Work of Art. A Question That Involves the Issue of Truth.

In this chapter, I will conduct a phenomenological analysis of the work of art as it is put forward in Martin Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*. The original spirit of the discipline of phenomenology is captured in Edmunds Husserl's famous motto: *Zurück zu den "Sachen selbst!"*³ (Back to the things themselves). Or as David W. Smith puts it: "Phenomenology is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience."⁴ Accordingly, the emphasis in Heidegger's aesthetics is on experience.

We will also look into Heidegger's conception of truth, showing that his way of conceiving of truth differs from that of Kant. I will explain what, in Heidegger's view, makes a work of art different from a mere thing. Interestingly enough, he points out that one peculiar thing about a work of art is that it has the ability of setting truth to work.

4. Feeling and Knowledge in Aesthetic Experience.

In Kant's aesthetics, an aesthetic feeling of pleasure or displeasure is the mark a work of art leaves on us; a feeling with no subject matter for acquiring knowledge. My claim is that Kant is right in the sense that, for the subject, feelings make the strongest impact. However, I will argue, in contrast to Kant's claim, that feelings evoked by works of art have a *noetic* function, meaning that they do involve understanding. Along with the aesthetic theory put forward by Mikel Dufrenne, we will go beyond Kant's conclusion and suggest that, although the appeal of aesthetics primarily is something to be felt, aesthetic experience of the beautiful in arts and nature can indeed give rise to knowledge.

³ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, p.6.

⁴ Smith, "Phenomenology" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

2 What is Beauty according to Kant's Aesthetics?

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter will give an account of Kant's aesthetics. It culminates in a description of the beautiful, which is at the core of his aesthetic theory. However, since the notion of the beautiful is part of a consistent system of philosophy, it seems reasonable to start by providing some background of his critical system as a whole. I will start with his divisions in philosophy.

Following and criticising A. G. Baumgarten, Kant was the one to really establish a philosophy of aesthetics. Believing that all our knowledge begins with experience, Kant sought to combine rationalism and empiricism, and he saw human reason as being twofold: theoretical *and* practical. For philosophy, placing the empirical at the same level as the rational was a radical move at the time. Cognition, he says, has two stems: *the sensible*, where something is given to us through sensation, and *the faculty of understanding*, where something is comprehended by means of concepts. The use of reason can be either pure or empirical. Pure reason is objective and deals only with concepts or principles given *a priori* through the faculties of *understanding, reason and the power of judgement*.

For an overview, see the figure on the following page.

A priori principles		
Concepts of Understanding (<i>Verstandesbegriffe</i>) = Categories/ <i>Kategorien</i>	Concepts of Reason/ (<i>Vernunftbegriffe</i>)= Ideas/ <i>Ideen</i>	Principle of the Power of Judgement: Purposiveness/ <i>Zweckmäßigkeit</i> a) <i>subjective</i> b) <i>objective</i>

Domains of Legislation
Gebiete der Gesetzgebung

Faculties of the Soul (<i>Gemütsvermögen/</i> <i>Seelenvermögen</i>)		
Faculty of Cognition <i>Erkenntnisvermögen</i>	Faculty of Desire <i>Begehrungsvermögen</i>	Feeling of Pleasure and Displeasure <i>Gefühl der Lust und Unlust</i>

5

The domain of understanding is nature, i.e., nature's lawfulness through a priori principles. The domain of reason is the will, meaning the practical legislation of reason in accordance with principles of freedom. Questions concerning morality, including how to act towards others, are dealt with through freedom, not through the lawfulness of nature. If practical questions are dealt with by making an appeal to nature's lawfulness, they are not moral questions. Using concepts belonging to the faculty of understanding means to refer to the laws of nature. Although an undertaking may be *practical* in its performance, its principle is practical only if it follows from freedom(i.e., from the use of reason), not from the use of understanding.

Understanding and reason thus have two different legislatives⁶: one theoretical and one practical on the same territory of experience. By showing that both faculties have their own

⁵ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, AA5: 171-76.

⁶ The word "legislative" occurs like this in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Understanding as the legislative, means that it is understanding that gives the rule or the law. Reason and the power of judgement can also be legislative.

legislations *a priori*, beyond which there is no other a priori principle, Kant believes that he has justified the division in philosophy that has just been described.⁷

2.1 The Power of Judgement

To the family of the higher faculties of cognition, there belongs yet another member which is relevant for aesthetic experience — namely, “the faculty of the power of judgment”.⁸ What makes the power of judgment different from reason and understanding is that its a priori principle for seeking laws is merely *subjective*. By way of mediating between understanding and sensibility, the main role of the power of judgement is to think of the particular as contained within the universal.⁹ The task is to find the rule that a given presentation is contained within because it is only by seeking and finding general laws for the particular that we can feel that there is some order and be able to make sense out of things.

As the figure on the previous page shows, understanding, reason, and the power of judgment are the higher faculties of cognition, and we see that each of them corresponds to a faculty of the soul. In the same order: the faculty of cognition, the faculty of desire, and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure make up the three distinct faculties of the soul. These cannot be further derived from a common ground. In making judgements, we may ask ourselves: is it a question concerning nature, a question of taste, or a moral question? The reflective power of judgment mediates between the purely theoretical and the purely practical, from the concepts of nature to the concepts of freedom, thereby bridging the chasm between the two parts and uniting philosophy into a whole.

2.2 The Principle of Purposiveness and the Beautiful

The power of judgment has two different modes of seeking a universal rule for the particular: it can be determining or it can be reflective.¹⁰ When the power of judgment is determining, it only has to subsume under the universal (and objective) laws given by understanding or

⁷ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 59-65 (5:171-5:177).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65 (5:177).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66 (5:179).

¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 15 (20:211).

reason. In cases where only the particular is given, the power of judgment must adopt the reflecting mode and find a law from itself, its own subjective principle for making a judgment. Kant calls this the principle of purposiveness.¹¹

As mentioned, and as illustrated in the figure shown on page 6, Kant regards the feeling of pleasure and displeasure as one of the three branches within which all the faculties or capacities of the soul can be reduced. The legislative for the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is the power of judgment — specifically the *reflective* power of judgment. A presentation with no law pertaining to understanding or to reason will set the power of judgment into a reflective mode to seek its own law by which to judge itself. To deem something beautiful is an example of a judgement by the reflective power of judgment. As we saw, a feeling of pleasure follows these types of judgments. Now, do we know what fundamentally explains the pleasure we feel after having judged something to be beautiful? Answering this question brings us straight to the crux of aesthetic judgment.

Deciding whether or not something is beautiful is a judgment of taste. It is an aesthetic judgment, which implies that the grounds are subjective. Judging an object to be beautiful is, as already said, neither done by understanding, nor by reason, but by the reflecting power of judgment followed by a feeling of pleasure. The representation of the beautiful object makes an impression on the spectator who makes the judgment. However, as a result and as Kant explains, nothing in the object is determined in a definite and conclusive way.¹²

Two relations are present together in sensory experience of an object: the relation between the object and its logical validity (for cognition) and the object's relation to the subject. The one that constitutes the relation between the presentation of an object to the subject (what is merely subjective) is *aesthetic* feeling. This, Kant says, is an aspect in a presentation that cannot become an element for cognition at all, for through the feeling of pleasure and displeasure nothing in the object is cognized (although it can well be the effect of some cognition or other).¹³

Requisite for cognition in general is that imagination works in accordance with understanding. Generally, however, the feeling of pleasure does not follow from their

¹¹ Ibid, p. 75 (5:189).

¹² Ibid, pp. 75-76 (5:189-5:190).

¹³ Ibid, p. 75 (5:189).

agreement because the judgment is *intellectual* when the power of judgment follows a given rule, giving a sense of order but not a feeling of pleasure. In an aesthetic judgment, imagination and understanding are likewise working together, now without a determinate concept. The lack of a determinate concept leads imagination and understanding into a *free play*. When they happen to be in accord, aesthetic pleasure will be felt.¹⁴ This is, taken broadly, the answer to our question about what grounds the feeling of pleasure.

Aesthetic judgments are not based on concepts a priori, and therefore they are empirical and subjective. However, Kant asserts that when a person judges something to be beautiful, he or she expects (in German: *ansinnen*) everyone's consent. The beautiful is, at the same time, both subjective and universal, which seems paradoxical. I assume that Kant is unwilling to accept paradoxes, so we should take a look at how it is possible for him to make such a claim. By reminding ourselves of the principle of purposiveness, we are given an important clue for how this dilemma can be solved. Kant explains that the ground for the pleasure one feels when an object is beautiful is the purposive correspondence of an object we experience in the world combined with the pleasurable relationship of imagination and understanding.¹⁵

Imagination is subjective, while understanding deals with the objective. When pleasure is connected with the apprehension of the form of an object through imagination, without a determining concept for cognition, the representation is then related solely to the subject and its feeling. But, as Kant explains, the apprehension of forms in the imagination can never take place without the reflecting power of judgment at least comparing them to its faculty of relating intuitions to concepts (through the faculty of understanding). When imagination and understanding unintentionally are in accord through a given representation, and a feeling of pleasure is thereby aroused, the object must be regarded as purposive for the reflecting power of judgment.¹⁶

This judgment is not grounded in any available concept of the object, but in mere reflection of its form and, as necessarily connected with the object, in pleasure.¹⁷ Because we see the pleasure that is aroused as necessarily connected with the experience of the object, we expect the consent of everyone who makes any judgments at all. In this agreement of imagination

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 74-75 (5:188).

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 77 (5:191).

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 76 (5:190).

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 76 (5:190).

and understanding, pleasure is felt and the object is thus judged to be beautiful. This means that it is subjective and universal at the same time. As I will explain in the next sections, this is possible only when any private grounds, such as interest, desire, feelings and emotions, do not play a role in making up the judgment.

2.3 The Relation Between Interest and Purenness

According to Kant, a judgment of taste must be free from any personal interest to guarantee its purity.¹⁸

“A judgment of taste on which charm and emotion have no influence (even though these may be combined with the satisfaction in the beautiful), which thus has for its determining ground merely the purposiveness of the form, is a pure judgment of taste.”¹⁹

Essentially, this means that we should not be fascinated by, or interested in, the beautiful for any other reason than that it pleases. We can often get attracted to objects and find them very appealing; perhaps we even think of *this coat, this vase or that chair* as being very beautiful. However, when we find use-objects like these to be beautiful, they are most likely *not* beautiful in consonance with Kant’s definition of beauty. Intuitively, when we look at, or deal with, these kinds of objects, we interpret their usefulness and function into our judgment, and therefore the purity of the judgment is put into doubt. In addition to the charm and pleasant look of their design, we are likely to have some interest in them because they are tools for us. On the contrary, we would have no interest in using that which is beautiful.

“(…)no interest, neither that of the senses, nor that of reason, extorts approval.”²⁰

As we saw, the beautiful pleases without employing any determinate concept because the reflective power of judgment judges without a determinate concept. All we know is that it pleases, without any specific reasons. If we, on the contrary felt good or felt pleasure, say, for example, because we knew that we have acted out of moral goodness, this should immediately cast doubt about the pureness of the judgement insofar as it is taken to be an

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 107-8 (5:223).

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 108 (5:223).

²⁰ Ibid, p. 95 (5:210).

aesthetic judgment. We need a concept in order to think of something as good, and this is not the case with the beautiful. Since the subject who judges finds no private conditions and no interest in her satisfaction by the beautiful object, she presupposes that everyone else will also find the object beautiful.

With regard to the agreeable, everyone has his or her own taste. I might like the taste of bitter sweets while others may hate them and some might like sharp edges on furniture whereas I prefer a rounded and soft finish (and so on). These are not examples of pure taste-judgements because they are suffused with personal taste. Personal taste can vary from person to person. It is therefore not a possible basis for making a universal judgement. On the contrary, we speak of beauty as if it were a property of things, and thereby expect everyone's consent.

For a judgement of taste to be considered pure, it is imperative that the judgement precedes a feeling of pleasure or displeasure. If the feeling anticipated the judgement, it would amount to agreeableness in sensation and have only private validity. As we have seen, beauty rests on a universal judgement, something that makes it hard to believe that cognition is not involved. But on what level is it involved? Kant asserts that judgements of taste must belong to cognition, because all the cognitive faculties are involved. But, as mentioned earlier, he also said that beauty has no cognitive valence. I think that this is another quite confusing aspect regarding pure judgements of taste and the beautiful. Due to the lack of determinate concepts, the judgement is based on subjective grounds. However, the state of mind that is encountered in this representation is a free play between the two cognitive faculties relating to each other. Since no determinate concept restricts us to a particular rule of cognition, cognition is set into a free play, and accordingly the state of mind in this representation must be that of a free play. Thus, the judgement that beauty rests on belongs to cognition in general, but not to the faculty of knowledge.

Summing up this part on Kant I would like to highlight several points:

First, I hope I have been able to make it clear that according to Kant we arrive at no knowledge from the object that we judge to be beautiful. All we know is that it is pleasing and animating, but we do not really know why. This is because we cannot subsume the beautiful object under a concept of understanding or an idea of reason. Kant asserts that it is not possible to acquire knowledge from an object we deem beautiful. In broad terms, this means

that for Kant *only* what corresponds to, or can be subsumed under, a concept of understanding or an idea of reason, is considered knowledge. Therefore, experiences with arts and the beautiful in nature are not considered knowledge.

Second, placing aesthetics at the same level as natural science and moral philosophy is an achievement of Kant's third critique that I appreciate. By introducing the concept of "disinterestedness", Kant granted the arts autonomy, claiming that the arts and the beautiful in nature have value in themselves and that we should not be interested in works of art for any other reason than that they enhance our feeling of life. It could probably even be argued that Kant hereby gives the arts and the beautiful in nature the highest kind of value that anything can have: the ability to please without interest on behalf of the subject. The problem, however, is that he gives art and the beautiful in nature autonomy, blocking off the possibility of inferring knowledge from aesthetic experience. According to Gadamer, it therefore becomes difficult to argue that aesthetics is truly meaningful and that it has a binding quality in our lives. We will deal with these issues as we look into his critique in the next chapter.

Third, it seems that for Kant little is happening outside the subject's own cognitive faculties. He is concerned with how we project our cognitive capacities onto nature, other people and objects, etc. in order to make judgements. This forms the basis of Gadamer's critique towards Kant — that Kant's aesthetics is too subjective.

3 Can Truth be conveyed through Art? A Critique of Kant's Aesthetics

As we just saw, Kant legitimated the faculties of the power of understanding, reason, and judgement by showing that they rest on a priori universal principles that bestow objectivity. Therefore, according to Gadamer, Kant had to do the same thing regarding the power of judgement's subjective principle in order to make his system of philosophy complete — i.e., to place it entirely under the universal.²¹

The power of judgement's subjective principle is known as the purposiveness of the free play between imagination and understanding — i.e., not subsuming the presentation under a determinate concept. When no interest is involved and the object is judged to be purposive, beauty will be felt. Because the judgement of subjective purposiveness is not founded upon any private conditions like desires, emotions, or other interests, Kant was able to show the universality of the judgement. His grounding of the aesthetics on the judgement of taste therefore does justice to both aspects of the phenomenon, namely its empirical non-universality with respect to the subject's feeling and its a priori claim to universality concerning the abstraction of private grounds.

In the following sections, I will discuss whether there are aspects that follow from Kant's theory of taste that are worth questioning. To this end, I will start by putting forward a critique by Hans Georg Gadamer as it is presented in the first part of *Truth and Method*. Here, Gadamer's main objection towards Kant is that Kant's aesthetic theory is too subjective. It has to be mentioned that Gadamer, before he met Heidegger, was educated according to the neo-Kantian tradition. A central feature of neo-Kantianism, according to the Marburg school with which Gadamer was best acquainted, is the idea that philosophy is the theory of scientific knowledge and its non-empirical a priori foundations.²² As Gadamer interprets Kant, the feeling of the beautiful bears no relation to knowledge because it is disconnected from anything that could make the feeling reach outside itself. The following quotation from *Truth and Method* illustrates this point: "In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be

²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 37-38.

²² Jean Grondin, "Gadamer vor Heidegger".

beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them a priori in the subjective consciousness”.²³

According to Gadamer, we must overcome the radical “subjectivization” of the aesthetic experience that begun with Kant’s critique of aesthetic judgment if we are going to find that there is anything true about the aesthetic experience and the aesthetic judgement. It seems evident that, for Kant, we are not dealing with knowledge, or with anything true when we are not willing to judge according to concepts of understanding or by ideas of reason. In the following quote, we see that Gadamer charges Kant for having placed the human being’s entire cognitive system (including experiences with the aesthetics) under the legislation of science. Gadamer maintains that the concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) must be understood differently from the way Kant did. Gadamer asks:

*Und ist nicht die Aufgabe der Ästhetik darin gelegen, eben das zu begründen, daß die Erfahrung der Kunst eine Erkenntnisweise eigener Art ist, gewiß verschieden von derjenigen Sinneserkenntnis, welche der Wissenschaft die letzten Daten vermittelt, aus denen sie die Erkenntnis der Natur aufbaut, gewiß, auch verschieden von aller sittlichen Vernunftkenntnis und überhaupt von aller begrifflichen Erkenntnis, aber doch Erkenntnis, das heißt Vermittlung von Wahrheit?*²⁴

The quote seems to suggest that Gadamer has a different conception of what counts as knowledge and, also, as truth. He maintains that Kant measures the truth of knowledge according to scientific concepts.²⁵ In order to prove that aesthetics and the arts in fact *do* bear a relation to knowledge, Gadamer’s main task is to justify a connection between the work of

²³ Ibid, p. 38.

²⁴ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p.103.

Is not the task of the aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience (*Erfahrung*) of art is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind, certainly different from that sensory knowledge which provides science with the ultimate data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge, and indeed from all conceptual knowledge -but still knowledge, i.e. conveying truth? (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.84)

²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 84.

art and the faculty of knowledge. In the following sections, we will first see what Gadamer finds problematic about the account Kant gives of the beautiful. Then, by explaining that understanding is structured differently from what Kant argued, Gadamer demonstrates the possibility of acquiring knowledge from aesthetic experience.

3.1 Is the Beautiful Object Autonomous?

In a world dominated by ends, Kant says, the beautiful object is unique in the sense that it represents something that has value in itself — that, in other words, serves no end. A point of paramount significance is that looking away from usefulness and instrumentality is requisite for the feeling of aesthetic pleasure. According to Kant, when we encounter a beautiful object we do not associate or see it as something apart from itself; it should please for no other reason than to please, attesting that our attitude towards the beautiful is *disinterested*.

Therefore, by eliminating any private interest or association, Kant gives the beautiful object autonomy. At least, this is how he has been interpreted by his successors. The philosopher Victor Cousin's (1836) famous slogan "L'art pour l'art" (art for its own sake) is based on Kant's aesthetic theory.²⁶ Taking into consideration the status Kant gives to the beautiful object, we understand that he is a great admirer of arts and aesthetics. The problem is not, however, that we suspect Kant of wanting to wipe out any value that the beautiful can have. What we are targeting, following Gadamer, is the disconnection between the beautiful, on the one hand, and knowledge and truth, on the other, in his aesthetics.

Given that an object has autonomy, we do not associate it with anything else. Therefore, we do not see Kant's beautiful object as something that associates with anything other than itself. If we did, it would be subsumed under another concept and, therefore, not be beautiful. According to Gadamer, the exercise of *purely seeing* and *purely listening*, that Kant provokes, constitute abstractions that prevent us from acquiring knowledge. Gadamer, however, questions whether we can acquire anything at all, given that these abstractions are the right criteria for aesthetic judgement. Kant cuts off the relation between the beautiful object (the artwork) and the world, Gadamer suspects, by asserting that the beautiful stands alone and is

²⁶ https://snl.no/L%27art_pour_l%27art

therefore an autonomous object. For this reason, Gadamer wonders whether the beautiful object can have any meaning to us all.²⁷ Let us investigate this question.

Gadamer explains that the word *Bedeutung* stands for a thing's particular meaning or significance. If something has the quality of possessing meaning or significance pointing towards the uncertain or unstated it is *bedeutsam*, which is close to the word meaningful. *Eigenbedeutsamkeit* (a concept brought up and coined by the art historian Richard Hamann), however, goes even further. When a thing is *eigenbedeutsam*, it is significant in itself and dissociates from everything that could determine its meaning. By having autonomy, the beautiful object is *eigenbedeutsam*. On the contrary, to be *fremdbedeutsam* means to be significant in relation to something else and, as we have now seen, to be *fremdbedeutsam* does not apply to the beautiful in Kant.²⁸ Gadamer wonders if the concept of being significant in itself provides a solid ground for aesthetics, or for perception at all.²⁹ According to him, we do not see the beautiful in nature or in a work of art *as* something definite, or as contained under a concept. In this sense, Gadamer is in accord with Kant. However, does not being able to subsume the artwork under a determinate concept stop us from seeing and gaining knowledge from things like, for example, relationships or social patterns? Ultimately the question is whether all knowledge as rigidly tied to concepts as Kant defends?

3.2 Understanding: Reconsidered

*The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed.*³⁰

Gadamer's theory of understanding is found in *Truth and Method*, ingrained in the hermeneutical process. Traditionally, hermeneutics means interpretation — of texts, for

²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 77-78.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 78.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 78.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 291.

example, like the Bible — but Gadamer’s hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation and understanding that can be applied to the human sciences in general. Therefore, the structure of conceiving of a work of art is also a question of interpretation and understanding.

The attention to the issue of form in Kant’s philosophy established the conditions for formalism, which flourished starting in the mid-19th century. Protagonists were, for example, Eduard Hanslick (*On the Musically Beautiful*, 1854) and the writer Clive Bell (*Art*, 1914). Although we will not be discussing whether or not Kant himself was a formalist, there is consensus that Kant’s philosophy influenced formalism. On this, it should be noted that Gadamer’s critique towards Kant concerns the priority (pre-eminence) Kant gives to *form*. The attitude of disinterestedness requires that we abstract materiality from the object’s form, as reflecting purely on the object means to reflect on its form as opposed to its material (matter). Furthermore, Gadamer maintains that the way Kant describes the feeling of the beautiful suggests a subjectivism that does not encompass the way we engage with (and conceive of) works of art in aesthetic experience.³¹ In Kant, the object that we deem beautiful is neither something we see as a means to fulfil some other end (as a tool) nor as something that provokes associations: not of other objects of any kind, nor of other concepts such as joy, love, or sadness. In turn, these conditions guarantee that the judgment is pure, because interest, associations, emotions, and desires are not taken into account. The relation between the beautiful object and the spectator is thereby, as I take it, a feeling of the beautiful in its utmost purity.

We have now seen how Kant explains the structure of a pure taste-judgement. In the following sections, we will see that, at a fundamental level, Gadamer disagrees with Kant’s description of the relationship between artwork and the subject. Although (in Kant) it is the beautiful object that evokes the feeling of beauty in the subject, the feeling thus evoked determines nothing in the object.³² According to Gadamer, Kant’s analysis of the beautiful as bearing no characteristics for us to recognize, without a connection to anything outside itself, ultimately must deprive it from being meaningful. He argues that, on the contrary, only by somehow being able to recognize what is presented, can it be possible for us to “read” the work. “Seeing means articulating”,³³ he says, meaning that in order for something to be

³¹ Ibid, p. 79.

³² Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 75 (5:189).

³³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 79.

meaningful to us that we must be able to interpret it. Interpreting an artwork as meaningful implies that it provokes something, even though this does not involve anything definite.

As we remember from earlier discussions on Kant, the faculty of understanding contains the categories that we employ in order to make judgements and decide on the nature of things. The categories are universal and by using them we can acquire knowledge that meets the standards for objectivity. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, the phenomenon of understanding is constituted differently. I will therefore look into how Gadamer explains the relationship between interpreting and understanding, focusing more precisely how he explains the composition of the phenomenon of understanding and its role in perceiving a work of art. According to him, understanding is involved not only in order to form concepts, but as the very possibility to perceive anything at all.

First of all, as Gadamer says, openness in our attitude is a prerequisite condition for understanding and the logical structure of openness is "the structure of the question".³⁴ According to him, the question is implicit in all experience, meaning that we cannot have experiences without asking questions. As implied above, what we are essentially doing when we ask a question is bring the subject matter into the open. Therefore, Gadamer maintains that deciding on the question *is* the path to all understanding and to all knowledge.³⁵ In the case of interpreting a text, we must ask, *what is the question the texts answers?* At its bottom, according to Gadamer, to understand something is to understand the question that something is an answer to.³⁶ The meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply. Meaning, we therefore must conclude, exceeds what is said.

Furthermore, Gadamer explains that the dialectic of asking questions/receiving answers and receiving questions/providing answers, which makes up the structure of understanding, is also the *modus operandi* of a genuine dialogue.³⁷ An impression that now takes shape is that, for Gadamer, the question, an attitude of openness, a genuine dialogue, and understanding are expressions of the same phenomenon; they are all based on similar grounds. Understanding is a constant movement from the whole to the part and back to the whole, as we saw, similar to

³⁴ Ibid, p. 356.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 357.

³⁶ Ibid p. 363.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 361.

the dialectic of a genuine dialogue.³⁸ When we enter into a conversation with another person, their response, new questions, or considerations, together with our own, will take form into a new way of understanding. We end up seeing things in a different light than we did prior to this conversation. According to Gadamer, we no longer remain who we were.³⁹ In a work of art too, we must discover the question to which it is an answer — and to understand a question means that we must actively ask this question ourselves.⁴⁰ Questioning, he explains, opens up possibilities of meaning, and therefore he makes the claim that: “The logic of the human sciences is the logic of the question ”.⁴¹

The dialectic of question and answer that has now been demonstrated makes understanding appear to be a reciprocal relationship similar to the structure of a dialogue. Therefore, to achieve an understanding of a work of art, we have to make the work enter into a conversation and into a dialogue with us. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view. Rather, when we understand we are being transformed into a communion that can bring about a change. Therefore, as Gadamer explains, “to understand is always to understand differently”.⁴² If we want to reach an understanding, we must adopt an attitude of “being open,” and one outcome of this can be that we must moderate or change our preconceptions of some subject. Essentially, to understand is to enter into a dialogue by seeking the underlying question and directing this question towards oneself. These considerations seem distinct from the way Kant describes understanding. By making an analogy between the understanding and a dialogue, Gadamer means to illustrate openness in our attitude that tries to tone down the division between subject and object that seems fundamental in Kant’s philosophy.

Gadamer’s critique implies that in Kant’s conception of understanding, it is we who employ categories onto a “silent” nature — nature that makes sense according to the categories. It follows that we understand only what is processed and acquired by the use of categories. In Kant’s theory, neither does the work respond to a question, nor is the subject engaged in a dialogue with the work in such a way that she must direct that question to herself.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 361-2.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 371.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 368.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 363.

⁴² Ibid, p. 371.

A poem by R. M. Rilke appears on the first page of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. I believe this poem epitomises Gadamer's hermeneutics. I have therefore included it here:

*Solang du Selbstgeworfnes fängst, ist alles Geschicklichkeit
und läßlicher Gewinn -;
erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles,
den eine ewige Mit-Spielerin
dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau
gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen
aus Gottes großem Brücken-Bau:
erst dann ist Fangen-können ein Vermögen, -
nicht deines, einer Welt.⁴³*

The opening lines I take to be a criticism of Kant's approach to understanding. According to Gadamer, understanding on Kant's account is indicative of an exaggerated subjectivism with regards to the line "catch only what you've thrown yourself." Then, in the third line, the poem takes a turn; something is thrown back at you, aimed towards your centre. If your attitude has the character of being open towards what is coming, you will catch this ball, and when you do, the communion that takes form is a dialogue. Then, as we saw, the understanding that exists in a dialogue — or better exists *as* a dialogue — is not your subjective conception. It is rather one that exists in-between and, in that sense, belongs to the world.

Kant said that when an object is beautiful, we can judge that it is beautiful. Yet, because we lack a determinate concept to subsume the presentation under, we don't know why it pleases.

⁴³ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, s. xii.

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is mere skill and little gain; But when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball thrown by an eternal partner with an accurate and measured swing towards you, to your centre, in an arch from the great bridgebuilding of God: Why catching then becomes a power-not yours, a world's. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.)

In cases where we (read: the power of judgement) subsume a thing under a determinate concept, we are able to categorize, or decide what the object is. But for Kant, nothing in the beautiful object is to be known or decided conceptually. Thereby acquiring knowledge from — or of the object — is impossible. However, the part about determinate concepts is not what Gadamer is critical towards; he would probably agree that the work of art does not produce conceptual knowledge. But rather, the conception of what knowledge *is* seems to include more on Gadamer's account. A work of art (and the beautiful in nature) is outstanding because we do not employ concepts for understanding or ideas of reason.

3.3 “Experience”: Two Different Meanings.

In this section, we will see that the English translation of the German words *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* into the same word of “experience” is indicative of one of the central aspects of Gadamer's critique towards Kant. Because none of them wrote in English, this is something to keep in mind when discussing them in English. For Gadamer, experience in Kant's aesthetic theory covers the meaning of *Erlebnis*, but not the meaning of *Erfahrung*. When we speak about *Erlebnis* we mean the immediacy of an impression, something Gadamer ascribes to a flash of genius on Kant's account.⁴⁴ When we have an experience as in *Erlebnis*, we tend not to connect the impressions or parts with the whole. We can think of a few examples: visiting an amusement park, betting on the lotto, or shopping. Though the list of examples can go on forever, the point is to illustrate activities that we take part in not on a deep level, but that require little reflecting or questioning. Our consciousness in these kinds of experiences, Gadamer points out, is reminiscent of what Kierkegaard called “aesthetic consciousness”.⁴⁵ As readers may already know, Kierkegaard described three possible stages in a person's life: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious one, where the aesthetic is a stage of pure immediacy and discontinuity. In *Enten-Eller* (Either-Or), Kierkegaard explains:

⁴⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 82.

“Men hvad er det Æsthetiske I et Menneske, og hvad er det Ethiske? Herpaa vilde jeg svare: det Æsthetiske I et Menneske er det, hvorved han umiddelbar er det, han er; det Ethiske er det, hvorved han bliver, det han bliver.”⁴⁶

The person whose life concerns only satisfactions in sensuous pleasure and delight (the aesthete) will ultimately become bored of life. This is because the pleasures he takes are of immediacy and have no binding quality. He therefore ends up seeking a new sensuous pleasure once he's done with the one at hand, and then a new one and then a new one ad infinitum, without ever being able to direct his undertakings in a unifying direction.

A little note to avoid a possible misunderstanding: Gadamer uses the example of aesthetic consciousness in Kierkegaard to illustrate something he considers to be problematic in Kant, and not in Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's description of aesthetic consciousness does not give a proper account of aesthetic experience according to Gadamer. That is because the quality of the pleasure that the aesthete takes in the sensuous is immediate and un-binding. But when we interpret aesthetic experience as *Erfahrung*, the quality changes, something that I will explain in the next sections. In *Erfahrung* a dialectic movement between one self and another is taking place, meaning that the other is incorporated into our experience.

We have to consider the object (the artwork) that we engage with as speaking back. What is being expressed must be taken into account if we want to broaden and develop our understanding. Gadamer wants to reclaim the work of art's relevance for knowledge and therefore establishes a way of connecting the work of art with something that reaches outside the pure subjective feeling of the subject. In the quotation that follows, Gadamer explains that truth in art is something we should consider to be an *event of truth*, something that merely happens to us. Truth is then something we experience, as in *Erfahrung*, and not something that can be covered by any concept. He explains:

(...)dass alle Begegnung mit der Sprache der Kunst Begegnung mit einem unabgeschlossenen Geschehen und selbst ein Teil dieses Geschehens ist. Das ist es, was gegen das ästhetische Bewusstsein und seine Neutralisierung der

⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Enten-Eller i udvalg*, p. 159.

“What is the aesthetic in a person, and what is the ethical? To this I would answer: the aesthetical in a person is that which, in immediacy he is what he is, and the ethical is that by which he becomes what he becomes”. (My translation)

Wahrheitsfrage zur Geltung gebracht werden muß.⁴⁷ Wir sehen in der Erfahrung der Kunst eine echte Erfahrung am Werke, die den, der sie macht, nicht unverändert läßt, und fragen nach der Seinsart dessen, was auf solche Weise erfahren wird. So können wir hoffen, besser zu verstehen, was es für eine Wahrheit ist, die uns da begegnet.⁴⁸

The last sentence in the quotation poses a question: What kind of truth do we encounter in a work of art? We said that an artwork is something we experience, and to the degree that truth is “happening” in the work. This cannot be captured by any concept. Rather, the work of art makes up the other part of the conversation we have entered into when we set our understanding to work. According to Gadamer, aesthetic experience invites us to experience something true about ourselves or gives rise to an understanding of ourselves. As he explains it:

Das Pantheon der Kunst ist nicht eine zeitlose Gegenwärtigkeit, die sich dem reinen ästhetischen Bewußtsein darstellt, sondern die Tat eines geschichtlich sich sammelnden und Versammelnden Geistes. Auch die ästhetische Erfahrung ist eine Weise des Sichverstehens. Alles Sichverstehen vollzieht sich aber an etwas anderem, da verstanden wird, und schließt die Einheit und Selbigkeit dieses anderen ein.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 105.

“All encounter with the language of truth is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event. This is what must be emphasized against aesthetic consciousness and its neutralization of the question of truth. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 85)

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 106.

“In the experience of art we see genuine experience induced by the work, which does not leave her who has it unchanged, and we inquire into the mode of being of what is experienced in this way. So we hope to better understand what kind of truth it is that encounters us here”. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 86)

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 102.

“The pantheon of art is not a timeless present that presents itself to a pure aesthetic consciousness, but the act of a mind and spirit that has collected and gathered itself historically. Our experience of the aesthetic too is a mode of self-understanding. Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other.” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 86)

He explains that since we encounter the artwork in the world and encounter a world in the individual artwork, the work of art is not some kind of alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time, like in a momentarily “aesthetic stage”. Influenced by Kierkegaard, Gadamer claims that the aesthetic stage of existence (the immediacy of impression) proves itself untenable. We therefore recognize that the phenomenon of art imposes an ineluctable task on existence, despite the demands of the absorbing presence of the momentary aesthetic expression. The task is learning to understand ourselves. In his words:

[D]as heißt, wir heben die Diskontinuität und Punktualität der Erlebnisses in der Kontinuität unseres Daseins auf. Es gilt daher, dem Schönen und der Kunst gegenüber einen Standpunkt zu gewinnen, der nicht Unmittelbarkeit prätendiert, sondern der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit des Menschen entspricht.⁵⁰

On Gadamer’s view, it follows from Kant’s theory of aesthetics that our experience is corollary to the meaning of *Erlebnis*, which is also reminiscent of what Kierkegaard called the aesthetic consciousness. In contrast to this, Gadamer maintains that by making the subject reach beyond the immediacy and discontinuity of aesthetic consciousness, the work of art effects self-knowledge; presented with a work of art, the subject is forced to establish the continuity itself.

When we seek the truth of aesthetic experience, Gadamer adds, we should conceive of the experience as being in accord with *Erfahrung* where the subject itself has to make the continuation between itself and the work of art. By that, the subject will go beyond the immediacy and the flash of the beautiful in the work of art. The aesthetic experience (as

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 102.

“[T]his means that we sublimate (aufheben) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence. For this reason, we must adopt a standpoint in relation to art and the beautiful that does not pretend to immediacy, but corresponds to the historical nature of the human condition.” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.83)

Erfahrung) has a binding quality; the aesthetic consciousness in the Kierkegaardian sense does not. As Nietzsche says: “All experiences lasts a long time in profound people.”⁵¹ Therefore, Gadamer concludes that aesthetic experience should not be disintegrated into to aesthetic consciousness.⁵²

To end this chapter, I will repeat the main aspects of Gadamer's critique towards Kant's aesthetic theory. Gadamer introduces “the other” as an integral part of the understanding, considering the structure of the understanding to be similar to the structure of a conversation and a dialogue. With regards to aesthetics this means that when we seek to understand a work of art, we must enter into a conversation with it, and in order to grasp the expression and the meaning of the work of art, it is important that we are open to this response. In comparison to Gadamer, Kant's conception of the understanding can be seen as a one-way conversation. If the goal is to acquire scientific knowledge, Gadamer would agree, the work of art comes up short for this purpose. As I understand it, he supports the idea that knowledge should not be restricted to, and should not be taken to concern only, truths of science. To know something can be taken in broader terms, and by introducing Gadamer, we have opened up this possibility.

We are now moving on to a discussion of Heidegger's aesthetics. We will begin by showing how he defines a work of art in comparison with an ordinary thing. Included here are also some examples of artworks, each of them along with a discussion in order to demonstrate some of Heidegger's terminology. His conception of truth is quite distinctive from Kant's and he operates with truth on two levels, which can cause quite a bit of confusion to the reader.

At the primary level, Heidegger says, truth belongs to our way of being.⁵³ By introducing the concept of *Dasein*, he undertakes to prove that the division between subject and object misunderstands the way human beings experience the world. On his account, we uncover the truth about beings simply by engaging with them. As we will see, Heidegger's description of truth at the primary level, which is truth about beings, bears some similarity to Gadamer's characterization of understanding as a dialogue. On Kant's account of understanding, of knowledge and ultimately of truth, the division between subject and object is implicit. Yet, if there in fact is no sharp division, these terms must be understood differently. Furthermore,

⁵¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 58.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 84.

⁵³ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, p. 75.

Heidegger operates with a second level of truth, which (take a deep breath) tends to be obscured by truth on the first level. At the second level, truth concerns metaphysical questions (truth of being as a whole) that we tend not to be dealing with on an everyday basis.⁵⁴ When we enter the discussion about the work of art, we will show how truth at the metaphysical level can be displayed in the work of art.

First, however, a little note to the reader: Heidegger does not make use of the words beauty or the beautiful. Whereas a work of art for Kant *can* (although inferior to the beautiful in nature) display beauty, for Heidegger a work of art can display truth. We nevertheless denote the same realm of objects when we talk about works of art in the chapter on Kant, as we do when we discuss works of art in Heidegger's aesthetic theory.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 76.

4 On the Difference Between a Thing and a Work of Art and Its Relation to the Question of Truth in Heidegger's Phenomenology.

In Heidegger's phenomenology, the beings that Dasein is familiar with are ingrained in what Dasein understands as knowledge and as truth. Knowledge and truth, then, are developed as an interplay between Dasein and the world (with other objects, or other Dasein). This will thoroughly be accounted for further down.

I am sure that most people intuitively would agree that a work of art is something different from a mere thing. Moreover, I think the general conception is that works of art, in contrast to other objects, are not to be used for anything because they are in themselves infused with meaning. Sympathetic to this notion about art, I want to launch into a philosophical investigation of the question about the distinctness of a work of art to see if we are able to actually say something about it. What is it about works of art that take them out of the domain of mere objects and into a new sphere where our understanding works differently? In *The Origin of the Work of Art* (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*), Heidegger explains that the *work-being* of the work consists in the fighting of the battle between world and earth.⁵⁵ (“*Das Werksein des Werkes besteht in der Bestreitung des Streitiges zwischen Welt und Erde.*”)⁵⁶ In order to find out what this statement means in ordinary language, the following sections approach the topic in a step-by-step manner. For that purpose, looking into Heidegger's definition of “thing” is a good place to start. We then move on to see what he means by “world” and “earth”, and from this the tension between them will become evident. As we come to understand what the tension consists of, what work-being is will come into sight.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, p. 51.

4.1 On Defining Things

The world, Heidegger asserts, is to a large extent made up of things, and by things he means all things that surround us and that we deal with on an everyday basis. But do we know what concept we apply in order to define and understand things? A key, for example, is a tool that I use to open and secure the door to my house. I know this and I also know how to make use of it. Now, if I were to define the being of this key, in words or concepts, what would I say? Most likely, I would say that it is the thing I use to open and secure the door, and I add something about its form and the material it is made from. This conception, which we apply, amounts to what Heidegger calls *form plus matter*, and it is applicable to nearly everything. Apart from living beings, which we would not address as things, we have two categories of things: *objects for utility* and *things of nature*. It is possible to describe things under both categories using the form-matter distinction. Accordingly, form plus matter can be applied to single out the “thingly” element in the work of art: the thingly element is the matter and form of which it consists. However, Heidegger is not convinced that this definition can discover “thingness”. Form and matter are interfused, and this interfusion is controlled beforehand by its purpose or usefulness. When we apply this concept to everything, we take tools as paradigms for all beings. He claims that we have no concept to define those things that are not tools. A mere thing, like a rock in the field or a mountain, is not something that the human being has created, but, as he says, “it has taken shape by itself” and is therefore self-contained (*in sich selbst ruhend*). When we apply the formed matter structure to describe a rock or a mountain, we have turned it into a tool (*Zeug*).

The following quote describes how the form-matter conception entails usefulness, the liaison between *usefulness* and *creation*, and is the being of equipment (or tools, *Zeug*). Heidegger explains:

Dienlichkeit ist jener Grundzug, aus dem her dieses Seiende uns anblickt, d.h. anblitzt und damit anweist und so dieses Seiende ist. In solcher Dienlichkeit gründen sowohl die Formgebung als auch die mit ihr vorgegebene Stoffwahl und somit die Herrschaft des Gefüges von Stoff und Form. Seiendes, das ihr untersteht, ist immer Erzeugnis einer Anfertigung. Das Erzeugnis wird gefertigt als ein Zeug zu etwas. Darnach sind Stoff und Form als Bestimmungen des

*Seienden im Wesen des Zeuges beheimatet. Dieser Name nennt das eigens zu seinem Gebrauch und Brauch Hergestellte. Stoff und Form sind keinesfalls ursprüngliche Bestimmungen der Dingheit des bloßen Dinges.*⁵⁷

4.2 Understanding Equipment in a Theoretical Versus a Practical Way

We have established so far that all things in the world either have the being of an object for utility (*Zeug*) or the being of a mere thing (*in sich selbst ruhend*). We saw that the concept of a thing as formed matter is apt to determine equipment; the mere thing, however, is so far left unexplained.

With the goal of explaining what “world” means in Heidegger’s terminology, we are now going to look into the different ways we can relate to tools as this will largely affect our way of understanding the world. The two modes of relating to objects of use are what Heidegger famously describes as *presence-at-hand* and *readiness-to-hand* (*vorhanden und zuhanden*). When an object is present-at-hand, we are aware of it in a theoretical manner, as we are when we interpret a physical object by depicting traits or characteristics. When I analyse the pen in front of me by determining the material it is made from, colour, hardness, grip, etc., it is present-at-hand. Also, as the reader might have spotted, the conception we are dealing with here is the form-matter distinction. Presence-at-hand is therefore the theoretical way of employing the conception of form plus matter.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, pp. 22-3.

“Usefulness is the basic feature from which this entity regards us, that is, flashes at us, and thereby is present and thus *is* this entity. Both the formative act and the choice of material -a choice given with the act -and therewith the dominance of the conjugation of matter and form, are all grounded in such usefulness. A being that falls under usefulness is always the product of a process of making. It is made as a piece of equipment for something. As determinations of beings, accordingly, matter and form have their proper place in the essential nature of equipment.” (Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p. 28)

Then, simply by putting the pen into use, I establish a connection that changes its mode from being present-at-hand to being ready-to-hand. The relation between the pen and me is now no longer of a theoretical character at all. I am still aware of it; I am just not studying it. This way of being aware is what Heidegger calls *circumspection* (*Umsicht*), and it is according to him the primordial way of the state of our awareness.⁵⁸

Let us return to our initial question of identifying what defines a thing and thingness. According to Heidegger, we will not be able to discover thingness by depicting traits describing the thing in the mode of presence-at-hand, because presence-at-hand is theoretically based and thereby overlooks its being (*Sein*). We can best understand things and the way they are by being engaged with them and by using them — i.e., in the mode of readiness-to-hand. The understanding of things as ready-to-hand is closely connected to the idea of a world (in Heidegger's terminology). Furthermore, he claims that being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) is the essential state of Dasein.⁵⁹ There is a link between the terms thingness, readiness-to-hand, and world and being-in. My aim is to make this pattern clear to the reader. The world, Heidegger says, is already familiar to us and it comes into view just by studying our everyday life.⁶⁰ When I take a sip of water, I use a glass or a cup and when I open the door I use the latch. I do all of this without reflecting, by just being involved with the world which is open and familiar to me. "I reside or dwell alongside the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way"⁶¹. "World" in Heidegger's understanding therefore belongs to the being of Dasein, as "being-in". Things, understood as ready-to-hand, make up the world, and the kind of being Dasein has towards things understood as ready-to-hand is "being-with" (*Mitsein*). Our attitude towards other Dasein is "Dasein-with" (*Mitdasein*).⁶² Both the terms being-with and Dasein-with denote a way of relating to other beings in an already familiar way.

In summarising this part, we sought to understand how a work of art is distinct from a mere thing. To be able to do this, we looked for the conception or scheme we can apply in order to interpret *things*, and we saw that according to Heidegger our only conception/scheme that can be used to define things by is the form-matter distinction. We also said that this is adequate

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 98

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 114.

for determining equipment, and we saw that, so far, there is no conception to define things that are not equipment. Furthermore, according to Heidegger, a thing that we consider to be a tool can be understood in two different ways: we can describe it in the mode of presence-at-hand or we can understand it as ready-to-hand.

Presence-at-hand does not encompass the understanding we get of things by using them; it is, on the contrary, a theoretical method for describing or analysing things. We saw that, according to Heidegger, readiness-to-hand is the primordial way that Dasein relates to things, but in this mode we are not completely aware of them, at least not in a theoretical way. We have a dilemma here. It seems like neither presence-at-hand nor readiness-to-hand can depict thingness.

Yet, a work of art, Heidegger asserts, consists of both a thingly aspect and a workly aspect. The thingly aspect is its material basis together with its form. Because someone has created the piece, the thing-concept we apply displays an affinity with that of equipment. The being of equipment, as we said, relies on the form-matter distinction.⁶³ But we do not, or should not, conceive of the work of art as a tool. Heidegger claims that “[...]by its self-sufficient presence the work of art is similar rather to the mere thing which has taken shape by itself and is self-contained.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, he explains, the thingly element of the artwork is a juxtaposition of a mere thing and equipment.⁶⁵ It has the self-containment of a mere thing. However, because it has been created, we conceive of it as having a purpose, which explains why it has a similarity to the being of a tool.

With this established we will leave this section about things and move on to look at what Heidegger calls the work-aspect. Recalling his claim that the work-being of artwork is present in the *fighting of the battle of world and earth*, we will now look into the terminology of “world” and “earth” in this particular context. What is world and what is earth?

⁶³ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p. 28.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 28.

4.3 The Existential “World”

*The work of art opens up a world and sets it back on earth.*⁶⁶

The world in Heidegger’s conception is not a category, but an *existentiale*, meaning that the world is a characteristic of Dasein itself.⁶⁷ We said that the world to a large extent consist of things, but in the existential sense world has a meaning different from its geological and astronomical representations. Things (read: tools) are always standing in a referential context to something else. Let us consider a tool like, for example, a pen. I understand that the pen is what I use to sign bills, to write shopping lists, and compose articles. Someone has created the pen as a means of helping someone like me, for example, fulfil these tasks. Regarding these purposes, I can go on with existing in the same manner that I do. In this way, the pen has a meaning for me — a meaning that is not encompassed by an interpretation in the mode of presence-at-hand. Heidegger’s term *Umwelt* (the surrounding world) insinuates that all things stand in a context like this, and it is this referential context of dealing with things that gives them their meaning. In broad terms, we can say that the world is full of meaning. By that, we are saying that the world is meaningful to us because everything within it stands in a referential context. Therefore, we call the fact that Dasein deals with and understands things as meaningful (as standing in a referential context) its world (*die Welt*).⁶⁸

The German word “Da-sein”, which means being-there, shows us that Heidegger’s conception of the world partially constitutes Dasein. He says that Dasein is *being-in-the-world*, along with the things, by which he means that we are approaching things by having a comprehensive attitude towards them. This is what being-with and Dasein-with means. We are already familiar with things in our everyday life, and this is what makes up our world.⁶⁹ On a daily basis, Heidegger states, we tend to get caught up in things, or better, we get caught up in the world. As things are already familiar (and meaningful) to us, we do not stop up and wonder about what they are or how they came to exist. We do not perceive the glass, the fork, the bread, the TV, and the chair as objects that require much reflection. Rather, we are just

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p. 45.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 92.

⁶⁸ Gunnar Skirbekk, *Dei filosofiske vilkår for sanning*, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 78.

using them in a way we already know. This illustrates Heidegger's point that we unreflectively get "caught up in the world", the epitome of *readiness-to-hand*. Furthermore, he says that primarily, and for the most part, things are ready-to-hand to us.⁷⁰ However, the sudden break-down of my pen would force me out of the mode of readiness-to-hand and I would become aware of it theoretically as it becomes present-at-hand.

Therefore, a thing's *being* is open and available to us as long as we engage with it, as long as it is ready-to-hand. "Being open to things" (*Erschlossenheit*) he considers being another characteristic of Dasein as it is the way we conduct ourselves towards things.⁷¹ Disclosing being, he goes on to suggest, is connected to the way we primarily understand things. Originally, we are open to things and we are familiar with things within our world. Against this background, Heidegger is sceptical towards the subject/object division. With his philosophy of Dasein and its relation to the world, we get to see that, at least initially, there is no sharp division between the things and us.

We have seen that the referential context that gives things their meaning is what Heidegger calls world. In the following sections we are going to look into the concept of earth. As we shall see, *world grounds itself on earth*.⁷² A library consists of stone, glass, windows, walls, and books. All its materials belong to earth and they are grounded in earth. As we saw, their referential context of meaning — and the library's long tradition of providing literature and the influence it has on the lives of the people in the relevant society — all belong to a world. Therefore, world and earth are present together with earth as its existential foundations and world as its meaning. World, we said, is the realm of being of Dasein where things are familiar. World is, therefore, in principle opening up. In contrast to this, Heidegger says that earth is secluding and holding back in the sense that it cannot display itself on its own. This means that only through world do we get the sense that there *is* an earth. But the term "earth" points towards more than pure material and more than the actual ground something stands on. Heidegger explains that earth is self-secluding in principle, and that it shatters every attempt to penetrate into it.⁷³

⁷⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 96, 101.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 41.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 45.

This I take to be a critique of natural science and technology whose methods try to explain everything and which Heidegger sees as a penetration into earth. But because earth is in principle secluding (and mysterious), these attempts are in vain. The following quotation from *The Origin of the Work of Art* illustrates this:

Der Stein lastet und bekundet seine Schwere. Aber während diese uns entgegenlastet, versagt sie sich zugleich jedem Eindringen in sie. Versuchen wir solches, indem wir den Fels zerschlagen, dann zeigt er in seinen Stücken doch nie ein Inneres und Geöffnetes. Sogleich hat sich der Stein wieder in das selbe Dumpfe des Lastens und des Massigen seiner Stücke zurückgezogen. Versuchen wir, dieses auf anderem Wege zu fassen, indem wir dem Stein auf die Waage legen, dann bringen wir die Schwere nur in die Berechnung eines Gewichtes. Diese vielleicht sehr genaue Bestimmung des Steins bleibt eine Zahl, aber das Lasten hat sich uns entzogen. Die Farbe leuchtet auf und will nur leuchten. Wenn wir sie verständig messend in Schwingungszahlen zerlegen, ist sie fort. Sie zeigt sich nur, wenn sie un-entborgen und unerklärt bleibt.⁷⁴

The material basis of the stone and the colour belong to earth. They are displayed through world, and hidden and pulled back by earth. We see that not only is earth the material basis, it is also a testimony to the fact that our existential ground is impermeable to the human intellect.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, pp. 47-8.

“A stone presses downward and manifests its heaviness. But while this heaviness exerts an opposing pressure upon us it denies us any penetration into it. If we attempt such a penetration by breaking open the rock, it still does not display in its fragments anything inward that has been disclosed. The stone has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull pressure and bulk of its fragments. If we try to lay hold of the stone’s heaviness in another way, by placing the stone on a balance, we merely bring the heaviness into the form of calculated weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone remains a number, but the weight’s burden has escaped us. Colour shines and wants only to shine. When we analyse it in sensibly calculating terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained.” (Heidegger, *The Origin of The Work of Art*, p.45.) I have modified the translation due to my Professor’s advice.

Heidegger explains that, due to the propensity of earth to hide itself and our habit of getting caught up in the closest and most available things, we forget about the earth dimension. Consider for example a boot maker who does not reflect upon the leather he uses in a way that really strikes him. The leather is just being used, and it is spent up and disappears in usefulness. The boot maker is caught up in the world of boot-making, and therefore the material is ready-to-hand for him. He does not pay attention to the earth dimension because it is hidden behind usefulness even though it is, nevertheless, present at all times. Because Dasein is not required to reflect upon things in the mode of readiness-to-hand, we end up concealing this dimension — i.e., we conceal and ultimately forget about the earth-dimension. This attitude is what Heidegger calls “falling” (*verfallen*).⁷⁵ Always being caught up with familiar things is to fall. When I later discuss Heidegger’s conception of truth, I will return to these issues.

4.4 World and Earth in the Work of Art

World, we said, is that familiar realm of things with which we are already acquainted. In the artwork, the world is opened up together with the (unfathomable) dimension of earth. Heidegger states that “the work lets the earth be an earth”⁷⁶ (*Das Werk läßt die Erde eine Erde sein*⁷⁷), meaning that earth is displayed in the artwork *as* self-secluding and mysterious. Since world and earth are, in principle, like magnets opposed to each other, one opening up and the other holding back/hiding, a tension takes place that is brought to the fore. In other objects, like for example a remote control, the earth dimension is hidden by the world dimension. When I sit down to watch television, I grab the remote control without giving it a thought; I also handle it in an unreflective way in order to fulfil my goal, which is to watch television. The way I relate to the objects that are involved in this activity is ready-to-hand, that is, corresponding to the world dimension. Therefore, despite its actuality, the earth dimension gets hidden, which is normally how we occupy ourselves.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 219-20.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, p. 45.

⁷⁷ Heidegger. *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, p. 47.

We saw that, according to Heidegger, for the most part, Dasein's way of being in the world is ready-to-hand. This in turn means that most of the time, if not *all* of the time, the earth dimension is hidden and covered by the world of Dasein. For this reason, the work of art carries a message that it can convey in a unique way. By bringing the strife between earth and world to the fore, the work reminds us of the fact that there *is* an earth. And the work-being of the work, Heidegger states, is present in this struggle. In other words, the work takes us out of the dimension of our world of familiar things (ready-to-hand) and reminds us of the non-explicable and unfamiliar ground that our world of meaning rests upon. As we saw, the world is something ready-to-hand and requires that we conceive of things as tools. When we cannot make use of our tool-conception (formed matter), that thing simply will not be understood, hence it will likely *not* make up part of our world. But we also saw that a tool is something that has been created, which implies that the world is the realm of things manipulated or manufactured by Dasein her/himself, or by other Dasein. Now, that which grounds the very possibility of creating things and tools in the first place, what we call the earth, is *not* something created by Dasein. Deep down, this is something that we all know.

In the next section, I will discuss some examples of artworks with the hope that the reader gets to see the strife between world and earth more clearly. First, I will make use of Heidegger's own example: a painting of a pair of peasant shoes by Van Gogh. Then, I will present a work by a contemporary Norwegian artist. Let us begin with a photograph of Van Gogh's painting:



Van Gogh, Vincent. *A pair of shoes*. Oil on canvas. 38,1cm x 45,3cm. 1886. S0011V1962. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, (Vincent Van Gogh foundation).

The painting portrays a pair of *worn-out* shoes. We understand that their expressive character comes from years of diligent use. Their expression of loyalty and of having sustained years of serving in the field immediately gives the feeling that the shoes are of vital importance to someone. The brush strokes express the dedication of the peasant woman who is being exposed. Her daily work, all her efforts and stubbornness, is manifested here. For the spectator, all of this is being expressed in the painting, while the woman herself is simply wearing them in the field and is perhaps not even aware of them. The shoes are something she understands as ready-to-hand — as something that belongs to her world. Therefore, the perspective we as spectators attain becomes very interesting. First of all, we *see* the world that is experienced by the peasant woman, which explains the world dimension. However, we said, that the artwork consists of a workly aspect as well, which is the earth dimension.

The dimension of earth is somehow issuing the fact *that* the shoes exist; it is issued by the presentation of the materiality. Another point I will mention, but not go in detail about, is that form can be understood as corresponding to world just as matter can be understood as corresponding to earth. It is possible to say, therefore, that by displaying the materiality in a way that is unique for works of art, the earth dimension becomes evident. This is the case because it is conspicuous that our usual way of understanding according to the scheme of form-matter — and furthermore, of our being-in-the-world simply and plainly — will no longer be able to hide this dimension. The struggle, then, is this: looking at the painting, we employ the usual concept of form and matter, seeing a pair of shoes belonging to the world of the peasant woman. But the materiality of earth is displayed in such a way that we are brought to reflect on the very being of this materiality as well, something our being in the world normally would cover over. Our attention becomes divided, therefore, as a result of the alien element of earth forcing itself into the familiar structure of formed matter and world. This painting, therefore, makes us see what the shoes really are.

The next example I will take is an installation by a contemporary Norwegian artist (Rina C. Lindgren)



Lindgren, Rina Charlott. *Glacier*. Pencil on paper, frames. Various dimensions. 2014. The work belongs to the artist.)



Lindgren, Rina Charlott. *Glacier*. Pencil on paper, frames. Various dimensions. 2014. The work belongs to the artist.)

The photos are of the same work with one having been taken from a distance and the other being a close-up. In the first photo, we see the room and we expect it to be a gallery room as this is where works of art are usually exhibited. The installation is placed on a pedestal, again following a long tradition of how works of art are exhibited. The drawing is framed, which is another familiarity, and all considerations so far belong to the world. In the gallery, we are prepared for the pedestal and the frame, with nothing, up until now, going beyond what we expect. But if we look at the drawing, we see some geological figures insinuating an earthly element. Also, the title, *Glacier*, evokes the feeling of earth. The glacier is drawn in a geometrical style, testifying to some human involvement, calculation, and measurement. Usually, a drawing will have frames around its edges, but in this case the drawing is placed between two frames — one horizontal and the other vertical. I understand the work as being an example of the efforts human beings make to try to control and frame the earth. All the elements around the actual drawing belong to the world, signifying endeavours to control and to tame the glacier. Nevertheless, the glacier, its materiality (the earth), is striking; we do become aware of it and we are called to reflect upon it.

By way of summary, we have seen that Heidegger claims that the work-being of the work of art is present in the battle between world and earth. With the examples I have included here, I think that the reader now has an idea of what comprises such a fight. On the side that belongs to the world, we have tools, familiar things that are ready-to-hand. As I have suggested already, the world *amounts to form*. The dimension of earth is, on the other hand, somehow mysterious. We said that the materiality (or the matter) belongs to earth, although not only in the literal sense of materiality, but as everything's material and existential foundation. In an ordinary thing, the earth dimension is covered over by usefulness, keeping itself hidden in the background. This makes up one difference between a thing and the work of art.

In the following section I will be discussing Heidegger's conception of truth. It prolongs our previous discussion because, according to Heidegger, the work of art is a happening of truth or, in his own words, "*Im Werk der Kunst hat sich die Wahrheit des Seienden ins Werk gesetzt.*"⁷⁸. As we saw, the world of Dasein in its primary mode of ready-to-hand is covering over or, as Heidegger says, concealing (*verbergen*). Concealment is done through language, as it is through language and by speaking that our conception of truth is being expressed.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, p. 33.

"In the work of art the truth of an entity has set itself to work"

However, Heidegger thinks that truth, the way it is commonly understood, covers over a more fundamental form of truth. It becomes a vicious circle in which we will ultimately forget that something has been covered over.

4.5 Common Conceptions of Truth and Truth as *Alétheia*.

Heidegger's distinctive contribution to the question of how to understand truth is his conception of truth as *alétheia*, the ancient Greek word that means *un-concealing* or *un-forgetting*.⁷⁹ For the Greeks, *alétheia* was the actual word for truth, so Heidegger is in a way reintroducing the Greek way of conceiving of truth as the unconcealed.

In the essay "On the Essence of Truth" (*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*),⁸⁰ he seeks the underlying basis of every truth by contrasting the modern conceptions with that of the ancient Greeks. What Heidegger considers to be the common conception of truth is the so-called *correspondence theory*. The correspondence theory of truth suggests that we can locate truth in statements. For example, when I say that "this rock is heavy," we check if the rock I refer to is actual and in accordance with what we mean by rock. Then, by lifting the rock, we can decide whether it is heavy or not. In the case that it *is* heavy, my statement is true.

The theory of truth as correspondence between object (or thing) and mind dates back at least as far as to the thirteenth century when Thomas Aquinas defined truth as follows: "*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*" (Truth is the compliance/ conformity between thing and intellect). Up to Heidegger's day, it is still the most popular according to Heidegger.⁸¹ But, as he points out, this concept carries with it an obvious weakness. How can a concept (a word) correspond with a material object? A statement is non-material whereas a physical object is both sensible and material. If they are evidently different in kind, how is a correspondence between them possible? The problem is not a new one, and I will not go deeper into a discussion of the correspondence theory or look at how defenders of it try to overcome the

⁷⁹ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, p. 72.

⁸⁰ The original title is «*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*». The English translation of "wesen" to "essence" is perhaps not good enough. By essence of truth we mean something like the nature of truth, and the ground of truth.

⁸¹ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, pp. 66-67.

problem. Rather I will show that Heidegger's conception of truth does not face this challenge. He says that, although we are under the impression that truth is located in statements, this can only be truth in the secondary sense. For there must be a more primordial form of truth that grounds the possibility of there being anything true in a statement at all.⁸²

According to Heidegger, Dasein's way of being - with and among things - uncovers the truth about their being in a primordial way.⁸³ We went through this in the section concerning the nature of things. We saw that, theoretically, we conceive of and explain a thing as formed matter, which means that we are relating to the objects in the presence-at-hand mode.

Heidegger said that we better understand what a thing is, what its being is, when we are using it in the mode of readiness-to-hand. In sum, therefore, just by putting things into use, Dasein uncovers the truth (the being) of things in a primordial sense.

A physical object (a thing) is related to us. This relation can vary depending on the thing and on our comportment towards it. Comportment means our personal bearing or behaviour, the way we conduct ourselves towards things and beings. But the relation through comportment is totally absent in statements (about beings). If we give our consent to the notion that truth is to be found in statements, we also have to go along with what follows from that — namely that truth is something deprived of the relational factor. But when you think about it, a statement about a chair is not the same as a physical chair. In *The essence of Truth* Heidegger explains it as follows: “How can what is completely dissimilar, the statement, correspond to the coin? It would have to become the coin and in this way relinquish itself completely.”⁸⁴ The relationship between the chair and us is absent in a statement about a chair. This becomes obvious by the fact that *we cannot sit back on the statement*. Let's take a look at how Heidegger points out the distinctive character of things and how truth rests on comportment rather than merely on language. A statement about a thing is merely representing the thing the statement concerns, but what is peculiar about a thing is that it *stands opposed as object*.⁸⁵ When something stands opposed as object, it is physically present as something that we can choose to engage ourselves with.

⁸² Ibid, p. 70.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 70.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 69.

⁸⁵ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, p. 70.

*Das Entgegenstehende muß als das so Gestellte ein offenes Entgegen durchmessen und dabei doch in sich als das Ding stehenbleiben und als ein Ständiges sich zeigen. Dieses Erscheinen des Dinges im Durchmessen eines Entgegen vollzieht sich innerhalb eines Offenen, dessen Offenheit vom Vorstellen nicht erst geschaffen, sondern je nur als ein Bezugsbereich bezogen und übernommen wird.*⁸⁶

We understand that the relevant difference between an object and a statement is that the object stands opposed (as object). A statement representing the object does not stand opposed, evidently because it is not a physical thing that we must encompass. In the quote, Heidegger says that the appearing of the thing takes place within an open region. I think that what he means is that primarily, when an object appears, we are being open to it and engaging in the way that is typical for Dasein without explicitly employing the categories of subject and object. Rather, we –in the open region - disclose its being as something that is connected with ourselves, as being-with.

Between the thing (that stands opposed) and us there is contact, a bond. We comport ourselves towards other people, to things and to the world. We pay attention and we orient ourselves towards something outside ourselves. And all comportment, Heidegger says, is distinguished by the fact that in standing in *the open region*, it adheres to “something opened up as such”.⁸⁷ And what is opened up? The thing’s *being* is opened up. Every way of being engaged with things is a way of being open to them. Just imagine a trivial thing like frying an egg. I am engaged in this activity, having to crack the egg open and bring it to the pan, which I have already preheated and oiled. I pay attention to the way the egg acts in the pan, and perhaps I adjust the heat. All of this is being open; I am involved and I comport myself in an attentive way. In this way, I have disclosed the things (or tools) with which I occupy myself.

⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, pp.11-12.

As thus placed, what stands opposed must traverse an open field of opposedness and nevertheless must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something withstanding. This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposed-ness takes place within an open region, the openness of which is not first created by the presenting but rather is only entered into and taken over as a domain of relatedness (Heidegger, *On the essence of Truth*, p. 70)

⁸⁷ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, p. 70.

In his doctoral thesis on Heidegger's theories of truth, Gunnar Skirbekk⁸⁸ discusses two different ways of speaking, which helps to cast light on the fact that correspondence is a problem for some (but not all) ways of using language (truthfully). Skirbekk says that when we describe things and phenomena *as* we experience them and as we know them, we are using language in a primordial way. When we analyse a sentence, logically or semantically, regarding its reference to things and concepts, we have taken one or two steps away from our original way of being with things. The language we apply thereby has a derivative form. He distinguishes between *å bruke språket og å snakke om språket* (using language and talking of language).⁸⁹ In the first case there is no problem of correspondence because we speak of things the way we experience them.

We meet the problem of correspondence in the second case, because we can't really explain how a concept can correspond to a thing. Between a key and the concept of "key", what really corresponds? The problem that we pointed out is that they are essentially different, but Heidegger's scepticism towards the subject/object relation can make the difference less burdensome. Being engaged with things that are ready-to-hand, we are aware of them through circumspection and here there is no sharp division between the thing and us that creates us a problem of correspondence.⁹⁰ In "*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*" Heidegger explains that,

Jedes Werken und Verrichten, alles Handeln und Berechnen hält sich und steht im Offenen eines Bezirks, innerhalb dessen das Seiende als das, was es ist und wie es ist, sich eigens stellen und sagbar werden kann. Dazu kommt es nur, wenn das Seiende selbst vorstellig wird beim vorstellenden Aussagen, so daß dieses sich einer Weisung unterstellt, das Seiende so– wie es ist zu sagen. Indem das Aussagen solcher Weisung folgt, richtet es sich nach dem Seienden. Das dergestalt sich anweisende Sagen ist richtig (wahr). Das so Gesagte ist das Richtige (Wahre).⁹¹

⁸⁸ Gunnar Skirbekk's thesis *Dei filosofiske vilkår for sanning. Ei tolkning av Marin Heideggers Sanningslære* was published in 1966.

⁸⁹ My own translation. From the original: "å bruke språket, eller å snakke om språket".

⁹⁰ Gunnar Skirbekk, *Dei filosofiske vilkår for sanning*, pp. 57-59.

⁹¹ Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, p. 12.

All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings, with regard to what they are and how they are, can properly take their stand

Therefore, according to Heidegger, truth is a primordial way of Dasein's being. Our way of engaging with things is essentially open to their being. When we talk about things that we surround ourselves with in a way that describes how we experience them, what we are saying about them is true. It is true in a primordial sense, not in a scientific, mathematical, or logical sense, when it comes to ways of conceiving of truth that presuppose the primordial way of truth.

4.6 Untruth as Concealing

According to Heidegger, Dasein can comport itself towards truth and towards the Being of beings, but Dasein can also comport itself towards *untruth*. This is because truth and untruth are intimately intertwined.⁹² We saw that by turning to the most readily available things, being open and engaged, we get caught up in the world, which is familiar and ready-to-hand. By that we forget to think. Or, as Heidegger says, we forget to do metaphysics and consequently, “we conceal the bigger mystery”.⁹³ Therefore, when Dasein is disclosing the truth about beings, by engaging in them, she or he falls into forgetfulness whereby the earth-dimension gets completely covered over.

All the time being preoccupied with projects that do not require us to go beyond the apparent, we just let the mystery pass by. We conceal the bigger questions, living confidently with the readily and most available things (those we can control). We then forget what we have covered up. Heidegger calls this attitude *erring*.⁹⁴ His analysis of our way of being, which is most of the time ready-to-hand, and of our usual way of conceiving of truth, shows us the potential of the work of art. It puts everything in a perspective in which we, according to

and become capable of being said. This can occur only if beings present themselves along with the presentative statement so that the latter subordinates itself to the directive that it speak of being such-as they are. In following such a directive the statement conforms to beings. Speech that directs itself accordingly is true. What is thus said is true. (*On the Essence of Truth*, p.70).

⁹² Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, p. 75.

⁹³ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, pp. 76-77.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 78-79.

Heidegger, can see the truth about beings. The work of art can display things and beings in such a way that we, for the first time, become aware of what they really are.

Before we move to the next chapter on Mikel Dufrenne, I wish to highlight some of the most relevant points of our discussion so far; these are matters that will continue to be discussed in the next chapter.

With the purpose of ensuring objective knowledge, Kant developed a philosophy that investigates the limits and scope of our higher faculties of cognition. As we saw, objective knowledge rests on an a priori principle, belonging to one of the higher faculties (see the scheme for repetition). According to Kant, a judgement that does not comply with the standard of objectivity cannot give rise to any knowledge. The core of Kant's aesthetics is the experience of the beautiful, which is a feeling that occurs in the subject when the power of judgment, under its subjective principle, has judged the presentation of a work of art as being purposive. This is an aesthetic judgement and a judgement of taste. We cannot, however, acquire knowledge through these kinds of judgements.

In contrast, in the theories of Heidegger and Gadamer, knowledge is indeed attainable through aesthetic experience. In Heidegger's aesthetics, truth sets itself to work in the work of art. Heidegger and Gadamer base their accounts of knowledge and of truth on an investigation of features and characteristics of our being. It is constitutive of our being that we are always together with something else. In their respective theories of understanding (perception, cognition), the dichotomy of subject and object is not as strong as it is in Kant's theory. In Gadamer's theory of understanding, we saw that the other is a part of the "the conversation" that makes an understanding possible. In Heidegger's description of Dasein as being-with, in a world that is ready-to-hand, there is almost no division between subject and object. Both Heidegger and Gadamer emphasize our relation to objects and beings that are present in our experience.

With these considerations in mind, we will now turn to the last chapter in this thesis, which deals with the French philosopher Mikel Dufrenne. We saw that both Heidegger and Gadamer think that being with another object is to be together with something that has its own being.

According to Dufrenne, not only does the aesthetic object (the artwork being perceived) have its own being, it even has its own consciousness.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 398.

5 Feeling and Knowledge in Aesthetic Experience

Although Kant describes the experience of the beautiful as *a feeling* in the subject, neither Heidegger nor Gadamer explicitly account for the role of feelings in aesthetics. For that reason, I find it interesting to now turn to Dufrenne. Taken literally, his conclusion is analogous to Kant's as he also asserts that the quintessence of an aesthetic experience lies in feeling. However, Dufrenne's aesthetic theory stands on different grounds than Kant's, and this becomes evident in their respective analysis of what feelings are in the context of aesthetic experience. As we saw in Kant, the feeling that is at the core of experiencing the beautiful bears no relation to knowledge. In straight opposition to Kant, Dufrenne claims that feeling in aesthetic perception *is* knowledge.⁹⁶ In the foreword to *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, the translator Edward S. Casey explains that the phenomenology employed by Dufrenne almost exclusively directs attention onto concrete and corporeal strata of experience.⁹⁷ In aiming towards the concrete, Dufrenne's aesthetic theory represents a transition from his German predecessors, such as Baumgarten and Kant, whose theories of aesthetic experience had, according to Casey, become increasingly divorced from sensory experience.⁹⁸ The ambition of *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Casey maintains, is to provide a theory of the fundamentals of experience.⁹⁹ As he states in the foreword:

[I]t represents a return to that fundamental and most concrete level of human experience which the Greeks had called *aísthēsis*: sense experience. After Baumgarten and Kant, aesthetic experience had become increasingly divorced from sensory experience: the "aesthetic" came, by the end of the nineteenth century, to connote what is elevated, elitist and exclusive. In opposition to such aestheticism, Dufrenne attempted to restore a measure of the Greek meaning of

⁹⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 378.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. xvi.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. xvi.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. xvi.

aísthēsis by providing a basis for aesthetic experience in the open availability of feeling and perception.¹⁰⁰

In this chapter, we will look at the role Dufrenne gives to feeling in aesthetic experience, providing the background of his claim that feeling is knowledge. Dufrenne adds an extensive account of the phenomenology of the structures of experience to our study of the work of art. Therefore, as we will see, his inquiry into aesthetic experience is twofold. First, we need to know something about the artwork because this is, first and foremost, an object given to the senses (as in aesthetics). Second, we also need to know something about the structures of experience. In order to develop an extensive theory of aesthetic experience, Mikel Dufrenne begins by distinguishing between *a work of art* and *an aesthetic object*. Interestingly enough, the difference between them does not have to do with the work, or the object; what decides whether it is a work of art or an aesthetic object depends on whether it is perceived or not. As Casey explains in the foreword: “The work of art is the perduring structural foundation for the aesthetic object. It has a constant being which is not dependent on being experienced while the aesthetic object exists only as appearance, that is, only as experienced by the spectator.”¹⁰¹ Or as Dufrenne himself states, the aesthetic object is primarily, although not exclusively, the work of art as grasped in aesthetic experience.¹⁰² The transition from a work of art into an aesthetic object therefore lies in perception, *in being perceived*. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the phenomenology of aesthetic perception as it is put forward in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*—all the while keeping our attention on grasping the meaning of the aesthetic object.

According to Dufrenne, there are three successive moments in perception: *presence*, *representation*, and *reflection*. The three moments in perception correspond to three elements of the aesthetic object: *sensuous*, *represented object*, and *the expressed world*. The discussion in the fourth and last chapter of this thesis will successively follow the stages in perception along with the parallel elements of the aesthetic object.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. xvi.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. xxiii.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 3.

1. The plane of presence.

This is the first stage in aesthetic perception, where the object's physical presence as something sensuous is what distinguishes the aesthetic object from a work of art.

2. The move from presence to representation.

This move is a transition from body to mind. The object goes from first being perceived through the senses or through our bodies, to being perceived as something reflected and thought upon.

3. The intelligence of the feelings in aesthetic perception.

In this step we will see how reflection and feeling are interwoven in aesthetic perception. In contrast to an object in nature, the aesthetic object is, according to Dufrenne, addressed to perception rather than to understanding.¹⁰³

Let us start with the plane of presence.

5.1 The Plane of Presence

*On the plane of presence, (le plan de la présence) everything is given, nothing is known. Or, if you will, here I know things in the same way that they know me, that is without explicitly recognizing them.*¹⁰⁴

As stated, Dufrenne's theory of perception in aesthetic experience develops from a plane of presence to a level of reflection. The plane of presence is the first stage in aesthetic perception. Most significant here is that the object is present to our bodies and amenable to our senses. Dufrenne claims that the relationship between the object and us is initially corporeal, which makes the transcendental factor at this level "the capacity of being-with,

¹⁰³ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 338.

assumed by the body”.¹⁰⁵ In his aesthetics, the plane of presence lies at the core of aesthetic perception, where reflection has its roots. Therefore, if we want to grasp the full meaning of the aesthetic object, its very presence to our bodies must be embedded in the way we reflect upon it and understand its full meaning. This is captured in Dufrenne’s words: “By invoking a higher level of perception, we do not reject the plane of presence.”¹⁰⁶ For that reason, and as we will be discussing, both his claims that reflection on the aesthetic object culminates in feeling, and furthermore, that feeling is knowledge, are derived from a notion of a sensuous knowledge that presupposes that the object is, or has been, available to our bodies.

Perception of the aesthetic object begins on the plane of presence, which is a purely sensuous level. A mere idea, no matter how artistic or creative, is not something that we can observe or sensuously experience. It is therefore not an aesthetic object. Dufrenne states: “What is irreplaceable, the very substance of the work is the sensuous or perceptible element which is communicated only in its presence”.¹⁰⁷ I take this as meaning that the presence of the aesthetic object to the body is the reason why it is considered to be a sensuous object in the first place. Therefore, as I see it, a well-founded theory of aesthetic perception must take the plane of presence into account. Perception, at this level, is pre-reflective; the object has not yet become an element for thought and for reflection, and any comprehension at this cannot be conceptualized. It is a state of non-reflective presence. According to Dufrenne, only after this, i.e., only after the work is received and experienced by the body, can meaning be read by feeling or elaborated upon by reflection.¹⁰⁸

These considerations make Dufrenne’s aesthetics distinct from, for example, Kant’s account. The point of departure in his theory of perception is the fact that the aesthetic object is something that is first of all present to the body. He develops his theory of aesthetic experience from this starting point. For this reason, Dufrenne’s aesthetics seems to emphasise something that Kant’s aesthetic theory does not. That being said, Dufrenne does not claim that the body alone can comprehend the full meaning of an aesthetic object. On the contrary, he states that in order to fully grasp the aesthetic object, we do not stay at the plane of presence, but we also need to engage in thinking.¹⁰⁹ “Thus we move from the lived to the thought, from

¹⁰⁵ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 345.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 345.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 341.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 345.

presence to representation.”¹¹⁰ Perception, he explains, goes from first perceiving something present to the body and then advancing towards thought — in other words, moving from the pre-reflective to the reflective. Or, as he expresses it himself: “The image, which is itself a *metaxu* or middle term between the brute presence where the object is experienced, and the thought where it becomes idea, allows the object to appear, to be present as represented.”¹¹¹ That something is *represented* means that we have moved from the level of the purely sensuous by taking a step aside and become conscious of it. The level of representation involves thinking, but, as Dufrenne points out, “by invoking a higher level of perception, we do not reject the plane of presence”.¹¹² In this way, he argues that the body is hence not absent from the higher level.¹¹³ In sum, what Dufrenne claims is that reflection on the aesthetic object is not abstracted from the sensuous presence at the level of the body.

In accordance with Kant and Heidegger, Dufrenne also considers non-usefulness to be what separates the work of art from other objects. However, he also argues that the aesthetic object is a *signifying* object of a particular kind.¹¹⁴ The aesthetic object signifies in the sense that something is being represented or proffered through it. However, what is signified is immanent in what does the signifying. As Dufrenne explains it: “While ordinary perception seeks the meaning of the given beyond the given, the aesthetic object does not allow perception to transcend the given”.¹¹⁵ According to Dufrenne, every complete perception involves the grasping of a meaning. The corresponding question is: how is this meaning deciphered?¹¹⁶ The move from the plane of presence towards thought at the level of representation can be seen as a move from the sign to what it signifies, with the task being to find out *what* it is that effects this move. Pointing towards Kant, Dufrenne argues that “[t]o claim that this move is made by judgement alone is to invoke intelligence as a *deus ex machina*, without showing its origin or advent, as well as to presuppose an object already given to this intelligence”.¹¹⁷ Based on this quotation, it seems as if Dufrenne charges that

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 345.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 345.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 345.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 346.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 123.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 123.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 335.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 335.

Kant's philosophy is being impersonal, whereas Dufrenne himself aims at showing that, in reflective judgment, our entire personality is involved.

According to Dufrenne, the object is meaningful by itself, bearing its meaning within itself before the relation constitutive of signification is shown and made explicit.¹¹⁸ A theory of perception, he maintains, must take into consideration that *meaning* (within or beyond appearances) can be discovered through experience. The aesthetic object, he claims, is above all the epitome of the sensuous and its meaning is given in the sensuous; hence the meaning must be available and responsive to the body.¹¹⁹

Although I do not find examples where Dufrenne explicitly charges Kant for neglecting the possibility of finding meaning directly in experience, I do believe that this is implied. To back up this idea, we can simply look back to Casey's foreword where he states that Dufrenne undertakes to take sensory experience back into account.¹²⁰ The following quotation makes this point even stronger. As Dufrenne puts it,

Consequently, a theory of meaning must begin by describing an existential plane of perception in which presence to the world is realized and in which there is manifested an ability to read directly the meaning borne by the object—that is, in living it without having to decipher or explicate a duality.¹²¹

In the quotation Dufrenne states that *in living it without having to decipher or explicate a duality*, which I interpret to mean that the division between subject and object is not obvious at the plane of presence (which is the level of the body). The division is something that develops as we start reflecting upon the object at the level of representation — something that will soon be discussed. Dufrenne points out that “[i]n fact things are present to us in perception and there is no screen between them and us, we are both of the same race.”¹²² At

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 336.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 339.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. xvi.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 336.

¹²² Ibid, pp. 337-9.

the plane of presence, therefore, no sharp distinction between subject and object exists. This conception of our relationship to objects refers to the same idea that we read in Heidegger and Gadamer. It is what makes up the transcendental factor at the plane of presence: *being-with* as assumed by the body.¹²³ But, as we saw, in order for perception to be conscious perception, we must detach ourselves from the pre-reflective plane of presence.¹²⁴ According to Dufrenne, conscious perception begins by adding “the power of seeing”,¹²⁵ which entails that we must become aware of the object as standing out from other things within our vision.

We saw that we need to engage in thinking in order to grasp the full meaning of the aesthetic object, something that implies moving from the plane of presence to the level of representation. In other words, it implies a move from the lived (body) to the thought (in mind). We asked the question about what it is that enacts this move. Dufrenne explains that this passage, i.e., the liaison between body and mind, is created by the *imagination*, which is rooted in the body and enacts the move towards thought.¹²⁶ The transcendental factor that theoretically justifies the move from the lived to the thought is therefore, as Dufrenne states, the capacity of seeing assumed by the imagination.¹²⁷ Based on Kant’s philosophy, Dufrenne holds that perception in general is the interplay between imagination and understanding whereupon a judgment is made. In the next paragraphs we are therefore going to look into how Dufrenne accounts for it by first looking at imagination.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 345.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 339.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 338.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 345.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 345.

5.2 Imagination

*Representation is the heir to what the body has experienced.*¹²⁸

On Dufrenne's account, as well as Kant's, imagination has two forms: transcendental and empirical. As transcendental, the imagination is seen as the possibility of having a vision; it prefigures the empirical and makes the empirical possible. Imagination in its transcendental form opens up the area in which something given can appear, which the empirical imagination completes.¹²⁹ As Dufrenne states: "An opening is involved, insofar as the detachment of consciousness from object hollows out an empty space, which is the a priori of sensibility and in which the object can take on form."¹³⁰ In short, transcendental imagination creates an opening in our awareness in order for something to occur there.

Empirically, imagination realises this possibility by converting appearance into an object.¹³¹ Dufrenne explains it as follows: "As transcendental, the imagination sees to it that there is a given; as empirical, imagination makes certain that this given, enriched by possibilities, possesses a meaning."¹³² But what is the source of these possibilities, he asks? Imagination contributes to perception, he claims, by way of extending and animating appearances. What he is essentially saying is that imagination (in its empirical form) *imagines* the object given to sense perception. Imagination is the source of animating appearances so that we are able to identify and even to see appearances/objects in the first place. But, he argues, its ability to do so is not something created *ex nihilo*.¹³³ Given that imagination plays a dual role in perception, as opening up a space where something can occur, and as giving form to the appearance, the question is really this: How is imagination able to do this and where does it get its material from? Dufrenne has probably developed his account of transcendental and empirical imagination against the background of Kant's discussion in the chapter on

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 346.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 349.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 346.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 347.

¹³² Ibid, p. 348.

I rendered "*de possibles*" as "possibilities"

¹³³ Ibid, p. 348.

schematism in *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹³⁴ Schematism refers to the relation between intuitions and concepts for understanding - products of imagination. An appearance is not subsumed directly under a pure concept of understanding. Before a concept of understanding is applied, imagination provides a concept with its image, i.e. a schema. As Kant explains: “[t]here must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter. This mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet intellectual on the one hand and sensible on the other. Such a representation is the transcendental schema.”¹³⁵ For example, in order to cognize and determine that “this is a dog”, I need an intuition. I need an empirical concept of a dog, which in turn is cognized and subsumed by understanding. In short, a schema is an intuition, an empirical concept, provided by imagination, upon which understanding can form a determinate concept.

Dufrenne explains that imagination nourishes representation with implicit knowledge, which means *knowledge previously developed in lived experience*.¹³⁶ It mobilizes such knowledge, he continues, and converts what has been acquired by experience into something visible. It does so by converting experience undergone by the body on the plane of presence.¹³⁷ The essential function of the imagination can therefore be understood as turning experience into something visible, giving it the status of representation. As he states, “imagination is a force which strives for visibility”.¹³⁸

Implicit knowledge is something founded by experience. It cannot be subsumed under any concepts and does not, therefore, correspond to Kant’s criterion of objectivity. When we perceive, as Dufrenne asserts, these modes of knowledge are not evoked *as* knowledge. Rather, they are there as the very meaning of the perceived object, given with it and in it.¹³⁹ Furthermore, he argues that imagination seeks to dominate appearances with implicit knowledge. This is something that I think can be described by referring to an example from our everyday experience. Trying to decide what something is, we are initially open to several possibilities that make us wonder. This involves a kind of testing, furnished by the

¹³⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 271-77(B177/A138-B187/A147).

¹³⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 372 (B177/A138)

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 348.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 348.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 349.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 349.

imagination, until we eventually make our judgement. As will be discussed later, things that surround us on a daily basis, such as use-objects like a table, the bus, or a pair of shoes, do not pose a huge challenge for imagination. Once imagined, understanding will recognize and judge. On the other hand, an aesthetic object represents a difficulty for us. Why is this so? It is so because we cannot make sense of this appearance just by employing concepts that we usually employ in order to decide the nature of things.

Dufrenne explains that, under its transcendental aspect, the imagination allows the given to arise. However, as empirical, it restores on the plane of representation *a degree of the density and warmth of presence*¹⁴⁰. The two aspects of the imagination therefore result in an ambiguity between body and mind; implicit knowledge belongs to the body and is inherited from experience at the same time as the imagination opens up for reflection, which engages our mind in thinking. According to Dufrenne, imagination plays a less important role in aesthetic experience than in ordinary perception. He explains that this is because the space (which the transcendental imagination opens up) is not filled out by empirical imagination, as normally would be the case. Instead, the aesthetic object fills out this area. “(...)there is no need for imagination to make this object explicit or to grant it quasi-autonomous existence of an imaginary entity –in aesthetic perception it has no existence besides appearance.”¹⁴¹ Imagination does not have to complete the aesthetic object because it is already complete. As Dufrenne points out, “we rarely imagine when we read a novel.”¹⁴² Our next step is to consider the role of understanding. According to Dufrenne, imagination acts as a prelude to understanding in ordinary perception. Perception can turn towards understanding, which it will in ordinary perception. But in aesthetic experience, perception can go in another direction, something we will go deeper into in the following section.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 351.

¹⁴¹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 362.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 365.

5.3 Understanding

*(...) understanding stamps the flux of appearances with the seal of necessity, converting into a necessary unity the contingent unity of association suggested by lived experience.*¹⁴³

In general terms, at the level of representation, understanding takes control over, and modifies or justifies, imagination. Here we no longer perceive the object as meaningful by itself as experienced in presence. Rather, we take a step back to let the thing truly appear. Dufenne explains that imagination, which always opens up new possibilities for interpretation, tries to attach itself to representation, but is then suppressed by the controlling power of understanding.¹⁴⁴ The function of understanding, therefore, is to correct the imagination and create an order. His explanation for this is the following:

Understanding is the faculty of rules through which the represented object becomes an object for the “I think”.¹⁴⁵ Understanding is the imagination as capable of thinking what it represents, because it can now control and, if necessary, restrain its spontaneity. In short, between imagination and understanding there is the same ambiguous relation as between presence and representation.¹⁴⁶

Reflection, which is introduced at this level, is the act of stepping back, of letting the thing appear with the aid of imagination. We move from the sign to what is signified by means of a reasoning, which imagination may inspire but cannot justify on its own. It must be combined with understanding.¹⁴⁷ To reflect, Dufenne states, is to reflect on the possibility of

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 371.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 370.

¹⁴⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 246 (B:132).

¹⁴⁶ Dufenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 372.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 383.

determinate judgement.¹⁴⁸ In ordinary perception, a judgment is composed through the interplay of imagination and understanding. The thing proffers itself through appearance with the aid of imagination, which opens up the possibility of there being a meaning beyond the pure appearance of a thing. Then understanding corrects and controls what imagination has opened up.

Imagination constitutes sense and unites it with the given, which thus becomes more than it is with an excess that constitutes its signification. Understanding intervenes when signs are to be decoded systematically (...) Sense or meaning therefore is no longer an inhabitant of appearance, for it is deduced.¹⁴⁹

At this level of perception, as Dufrenne demonstrates, we often turn a thing in the world into a phenomenon of nature.¹⁵⁰ What he means by this is that we turn beings into something to be understood objectively. The possibility of determinate judgement is decided through reflection. When the appearance falls under a determinate concept, it will be judged by understanding. It occurs to me that the combination of understanding and imagination that decides what beings are at the level of representation is reminiscent of what Heidegger means by interpreting things as something present-at-hand. Notably, presence-at-hand in Heidegger and the level of representation in Dufrenne are the objective ways of understanding and of conceiving. And so far, this is also in line with Kant's account of determinate judgement.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 374.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 383.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 383.

5.4 From Understanding to Feeling

In ordinary perception, Dufrenne states, imagination acts as a prelude to understanding, the task of which is to think nature (*une nature*).¹⁵¹ In aesthetic experience, reflection *can* turn towards understanding. It is at this point, however, that reflection tends to exhaust itself and will therefore turn in the direction of *feeling*. According to Dufrenne, this happens through a movement that is characteristic for aesthetic experience. He explains that the object's exteriority appears, but what its meaning is creates a problem for understanding. This is because the aesthetic object does not comply with any of the categories or determinate concepts. An ordinary object of experience, on the other hand, does not object to the consideration of imagination and understanding. It can, therefore, without resistance, be justified at the level of representation.

As we saw in Kant, a determinate judgement is the intellectual activity through which the categories perform their function in ordinary perception. As such, the determinate judgement decides under which concepts something particular in nature falls. When our judgement is determined through the concepts furnished by understanding, it is *subsumptive* only: The concepts are marked out a priori and empirically, with the power of judgment having no need to devise a principle for its own guidance to enable it to subordinate the particular in nature to the universal. Dufrenne is sympathetic towards Kant's notion of a determinate judgement, even if, on both their accounts, a determinate judgement does not make up the whole of what constitutes a judgement.¹⁵² As we saw in the section on Kant, an aesthetic judgement is an example of a *reflective* judgement where the power of judgement must find its own rule by which to judge. Dufrenne is therefore right when he says that it is Kant himself that has led us to the idea that the activity of the understanding is not the only manifestation of judging.¹⁵³

What we can sum up so far is that Dufrenne explains that imagination is what creates the transition from the body to mind. The level of the body is the plane of presence. At this stage, imagination is in its transcendental mode where it opens up the possibility for something to appear. Imagination in its empirical mode fills out this open field and the

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 357.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 372.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 374.

liaison to the mind is thus created. Perception is now at the level of representation. It is here that the possibility of determinate judgment is decided. When we perceive an aesthetic object, we have no determinate concept by which we can decide on what the object is, and our judgment therefore becomes reflective.

Up until here, Dufrenne seems to be very much in accord with Kant. However, as we go on to discuss *reflective* judgement, we will see why they end up with contradicting conclusions on the topic of aesthetic judgment.

5.5 Reflective Judgement: Dufrenne versus Kant

The aspect of Kant's aesthetics that Dufrenne opposes concerns the subject's relation to the aesthetic object. According to Dufrenne, the communion (or bond) between the aesthetic object and its audience creates a possibility for gaining knowledge. For Kant, on the other hands, the relationship between subject and object, which is established through aesthetic experience, is not to be subsumed under a determinate concept, making knowledge impossible. Accordingly, the dispute is essentially this: In Kant the experience of an aesthetic object of nature or art cannot give rise to any knowledge because the subject will judge through a reflective judgment — i.e. by the free play of imagination and understanding. A feeling of pleasure or displeasure is derived from this judgment. Similarly, Dufrenne claims that in aesthetic experience, judgments are reflective and culminate in feeling. Contrary to Kant, however, Dufrenne argues that the feeling evoked by aesthetic judgment *is* knowledge.¹⁵⁴

Let us recapitulate the essence of aesthetic judgement according to Kant in the words of Dufrenne: "The subject relates the presentation of the object to itself, as well as to the capacity, which it possesses for promulgating the laws of nature, and to the pleasure it takes in exercising this capacity".¹⁵⁵ If, when engaging the cognitive faculties in a free play, the subject finds the object appealing to all its faculties, it is judged to be beautiful. But, as we emphasised before, Kant also said that based on this judgement, nothing in the object is

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 378.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 374.

To promulgate means to put something into effect.

determined. Dufrenne thinks that this conclusion is wrong, stressing that we need not follow the route taken by Kant's notion of reflection insofar as it takes a transcendental turn whereby the subject refers itself to itself.¹⁵⁶ Our concern, he maintains, is with the subject as it comes to grips with the perceived object, reflecting on this object instead of on itself.¹⁵⁷

In his comparison between determinate and reflective judgment, Dufrenne shows that we are more personally engaged in reflective judgment. Reflection can take on different forms. From the plane of presence, reflection can follow a route that takes it to the level of representation. Reflection here tends to include the duality between subject and object, therefore separating from the original relation of being-with that is experienced at the plane of presence. But it is not the only route that reflection can follow. Dufrenne claims that if I stay open towards the object, by means of *adherent* reflection, I submit myself to the work of art instead of submitting *it* to my jurisdiction¹⁵⁸. When we are being committed to the object, we do not separate ourselves from it in the strict manner of the distinction between subject and object.

He explains that, when we prescribe laws onto nature, we do not have to be attentive because we make determinate judgements without acknowledging any involvement.¹⁵⁹ But in reflective judgement, he continues, we cannot forget that it is we ourselves that posit the rule. "Here I posit an *as if*, an objectivity whose mark of subjectivity I cannot ignore."¹⁶⁰

An example might help demonstrate that in reflective judgment we involve ourselves in thinking to a much larger degree than is the case with determinate judgment. Imagine that I look out the window and I see a thing that moves on the balcony. I immediately recognize it as a small bird pecking seeds. I do not have to reflect more upon this scene. There is nothing out of the ordinary in this situation that would force me to question it. Nothing challenges my ability to make sense of the situation. On Kant's account, a bird on the balcony can be an aesthetic object and it could even be deemed beautiful (as beauty in nature). However, on Dufrenne's account, according to his definition, a bird is not an aesthetic object because it has not been created as a work of art. If I came across an aesthetic object, say that one day a strange sculpture appeared on the balcony, it would be a different experience than that with

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 374.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 374.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 393.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 374.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 374.

the bird. I would not be able to judge the sculpture the same way that I judged the bird-scene, because merely employing categories for understanding would not help me make sense of the sculpture. I would be baffled, and I would have to start asking questions in the hope of making sense of it by way of thinking and reflecting.

The next quotation includes a description of a reflective judgement according to Dufrenne. We recognize that in reflection, thinking has the character of questioning — something that was introduced in the section on Gadamer. In Dufrenne's words, we must call the object to account.¹⁶¹

I expect it (i.e. the object) to respond to a certain hypothesis which I posit; my legislation is no more than a wish, but I know that I pronounce this wish in the expectation that nature will fulfil it. I cannot overlook the fact that the question that I pose is my question and that, accordingly, I put myself into question. I find out what I find out because I searched it out, almost as if my wishing made it so.¹⁶²

Accordingly, Dufrenne claims that I am more personally involved in a reflective judgment than in a determinate judgement. What matters, he states, *is to open oneself up with all that one is, to set the entire personality into action.*¹⁶³ In that way, ultimately it is we ourselves that are being put into question, and comprehension is therefore like a personal victory. As Dufrenne states: "I am committed in my reflection, and I commit myself as soon as I open myself up - by participating rather than standing aloof."¹⁶⁴

If reflection thus implies self-consciousness, that is because I put myself into question. And this means not only that I ask myself whether the law which I

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 374.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 374.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 375.

claim to find in nature is admissible but also that I bring myself into play in the question which I pose as if it were strictly my own affair.¹⁶⁵

In aesthetic experience, he explains, there is a communion between the object and me. Because the aesthetic judgement is reflective, I maintain a more intimate rapport with the object than I do when I make a determinate judgement.¹⁶⁶ The communion between the object and me that he speaks of is meant to describe the relationship that we establish with the aesthetic object, reflecting in such a way that thinking is interfused with the experience of its presence. What Dufrenne points to here is reminiscent of Gadamer's portrayal of the understanding as a conversation. Here, I believe that we can interpret Dufrenne's term communion against the background of Gadamer's account of understanding and conversation. The relationship between the aesthetic object and me is not only understood through reflection, but, according to Dufrenne, it is also experienced, particularly in aesthetic experience.¹⁶⁷ At this point, he takes on the task of showing that the communion between the object and myself provides a mode of access to feeling.¹⁶⁸ This is something that we are going to look into further down. First, however, we are briefly going to look into how Dufrenne explains the difference between an ordinary object and an aesthetic object.

5.6 The Aesthetic Object: a Quasi- Subject

Like a subject, Dufrenne asserts, the aesthetic object expresses that which carries an "inside", something that an ordinary thing does not.¹⁶⁹ In ordinary things, everything is given in appearance, or as he puts it himself: "The thing is just appearance, its appearance does not express an inside."¹⁷⁰ Expression, on the other hand, as the capacity for emitting signs and

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 374-5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 380.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 382.

exteriorizing itself, pertains primarily to a subject.¹⁷¹ An ordinary thing has no inside and it does not have to exteriorize itself, as Dufrenne explains: “[A] thing does not need to make a sign, because it already is a sign through and through. It need not exteriorize itself, because it is total exteriority.”¹⁷² For this reason, we most often apply determinate concepts. We thereby value the object based on its usefulness. Considering it from the outside, we see it as something we can use as a means to fulfil some other end, and not as something that seeks to express itself. As long as the thing does not resist being conceived of as an object for utility, it becomes more or less transparent to our intellect. It is a thing that needs no further explanation. The aesthetic object, on the other hand, is not a piece of equipment, and it shows resistance by refusing to be classified by use of the form and matter distinctions. Dufrenne explains that this is so because the aesthetic object expresses that it carries an inside, reminiscent of the inside of a person. On this background, he calls the aesthetic object a quasi-subject.¹⁷³

[I] allow the work to deposit its meaning within me. I consider the object no longer as a thing which must be known through its appearance, as in critical reflection where appearance has no value and signifies nothing on its own- but rather as a thing which signifies spontaneously and directly, even if I am unable to encompass its meaning, as a quasi-subject. And because this thing refers surreptitiously to expression, we shall see that sympathetic reflection culminates in feeling.¹⁷⁴

At the level of representation, we are enabled to imagine what was at first simply given in primary experience. Imagination is to be conceived of as that which creates the space where the object/appearance can occur with regards to imagination in its transcendental mode. Empirically, it lets the object take form as something we can see. As I mentioned already, here the imagination is not working on its own, but under imminent control of

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 380.

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 380.

¹⁷³ Ibid, pp. 380-1.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 393.

understanding.¹⁷⁵ I believe that this shows the intellectual activity we normally use to classify things. Interestingly, Dufrenne points out that this way of deciding what things are is also a kind of taking possession of the objects. He shows this when writing that, “[b]y juxtaposing representation and presence, we have attempted to demonstrate that thought is inviscerated in being. But at the level of representation, it is hard to dispute the fact that knowledge tends to become a form of having.”¹⁷⁶ This is because we tend *not* to take into account the experienced presence of objects. In our interpretation, they become reminiscent of what is present-at-hand in Heidegger’s terminology. In the following quotation, Dufrenne explains how this happens:

I am sure of the object first because I know that it contains nothing of the unforeseeable, (although I may be unaware of certain of its aspects) and next because my knowledge of it precedes any experience with it. Thus I have the power over the object, and since I hold within myself its possible aspects and am able to use imagination to convert the hollow reality of appearance into complete reality, I no longer experience a presence, but give myself a representation.¹⁷⁷

It is worth noticing that Dufrenne claims that the sovereignty we have taken over the object at the level of representation is purely intellectual.¹⁷⁸ Naming, he adds, is not a way of echoing the object or becoming its captive, but a way of possessing the object. Therefore, “[s]peech is the instrument and sign of my mastery, attesting that I hold the key to appearances.”¹⁷⁹

However, to take possession of appearances is something that is partly due to our attitude. I therefore want to take a look at how he explains that there are in fact different modes of knowing where one mode is more possessive than the other. We saw that, according to Dufrenne, perception is a juxtaposition of presentation and representation. The plane of presence we remember as a presence of the object. However, in order for us to be able to think, for example to do metaphysics, we must, as Dufrenne states, escape being-with

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 383.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 383.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 384.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 384.

experienced in immediacy by starting to reflect.¹⁸⁰ The ideal of objectivity implies that we detach ourselves from being-with. Nevertheless, as Dufrenne seems to advocate, perception can remain in a certain closeness to things; we are not impelled to reduce every object to something we master intellectually. Thought, he states, has its ground in a primary experience of being; thinking is therefore deeply seated in being.¹⁸¹ What I understand from this is that sensitivity towards objects, which essentially means awareness and sympathy, depends on our attitude. A non-sensitive attitude in perception would probably classify objects of any kind by employing the form and matter distinction, determinate concepts, and consequently turn all beings into tools.

In Dufrenne's structure of perception, being-with, experienced in immediacy, lies at the root of every representation. His notion of being-with can be understood against the background of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as primordially being-with,¹⁸² which we investigated in the previous chapter. Because perception has its roots in experiencing things as present and as being-with, Dufrenne argues that it is possible to return to that experience and branch off from the attitude that turns knowledge into a form of *having*, adopting instead an attitude in the direction of *being*.¹⁸³ Perception will then tend to become communion between the object and myself. The communion he speaks of, which is the relation between the aesthetic object and me, takes the form of a feeling. However, he warns us not to confuse the immediacy of feeling with a return to the plane of presence. As he asserts: "Feeling is not simply a return to presence".¹⁸⁴ This statement is backed up by three reasons for why feeling in perception is something that transcends the non-reflective character of emotions, surpassing the purely sensuous experience at the plane of presence.

First, he states that in aesthetic experience a feeling's object is particular and it introduces us to another dimension of the given.¹⁸⁵ At this level, the perceiving subject has a mode of *being* that reveals the object's mode of being.

Second, feeling distinguishes itself from presence in implying a new attitude on the part of the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 376.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁸² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 114.

¹⁸³ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 376.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 376.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 376.

subject.¹⁸⁶ As we said, the meaning of the aesthetic object requires us not to extend our knowledge in the same way that we possess knowledge (*étendre mon avoir*), but rather to listen to a message (*entendre un message*) that reveals the being of the aesthetic object. If we acknowledge that an aesthetic object has quasi-subjectivity, this means we take into account that it carries an “inside” just like another person.¹⁸⁷

And finally, feeling is distinguished from presence because it presupposes that representation has been exhausted and surpassed.¹⁸⁸ It is even possible, Dufrenne claims, to attain feeling without passing through the stage of reflection and representation. Feeling is simply another direction which perception may take.

Furthermore, Dufrenne explains that two conditions must be met in order for feeling to realize itself fully. First, empirical imagination must be suppressed. Another way of explaining this is perhaps to say that unless imagination is somehow held back, we will infinitely continue to open up space in a determining way. That is an area into which understanding can enter, without adhering to the object. It does not mean that we must give up the perception of appearances, where the opening act of the imagination is presupposed. It simply implies that imagination combined with understanding must not drag us into the field of purely objective significance, which serves only to confirm our power or our indifference.¹⁸⁹

And second, we need to open ourselves to a reality that must be experienced authentically from the very depths of our being and that demands that we refrain from taking control over appearances.¹⁹⁰

To summarize the chapter so far, the appearance of an object of any kind is, at the primary stage, *presence*. At this level, the object is present to the senses. Imagination, having opened up the space that makes it possible for the object to appear, then effects the move towards thinking and reflecting. Imagination thus has two modes of being: transcendental and empirical. At the level of representation, I perceive the appearing object through the interplay between understanding and imagination. Imagination is opening up possibilities, while understanding is correcting them and creating an order with the object becoming a representation. Dufrenne stresses that at the level of representation, the conception of the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 377.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 377.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 377.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 377.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 377.

object tends to become a sort of having. To put it differently, representation is something that is *mine*, and that I have power over the object in this sense.¹⁹¹ This is, according to him, the structure of perceiving ordinary objects. When it comes to another person, on the other hand, we are not really able to do this. As Dufrenne states: “I cannot assume with certainty what a particular manifestation of human behaviour is expressing. From an object, I expect nothing; rather I call on myself for its signification. In the case of a subject, I can expect anything.”¹⁹² It is impossible to decipher and conceptualize the personality (the inside) of another human being. The same counts for the aesthetic object insofar as we consider it to be a quasi-subject. Implicit here is that we could perceive of the aesthetic object almost as if we stand in front of another person. So, in order to feel or to know, we need to move on from the plane of presence. At the same time, we do not want to turn the aesthetic object into an ordinary object. How can this be done?

At this stage in perception, Dufrenne asserts, perception can orient itself in different directions — either towards objective (scientific) knowledge, or towards feeling. He explains that, “[a]fter having been corrected by the understanding, perception can certainly reorient itself in another direction — precisely that which aesthetic perception will take. The conversion of the given into something intelligible is not necessarily the last step.”¹⁹³

Since reflection on the aesthetic object will exhaust itself at the level of presentation, it turns towards feeling. Or, Dufrenne asserts, from the plane of presence, perception can turn directly to feeling without even going through the level of representation.

[...]feeling distinguishes itself from presence by presupposing that representation has been exhausted and surpassed towards something else. It is, moreover, always possible to attain feeling without passing through the stage of representation and reflection as was the case with the movement from presence to representation, the movement from representation to feeling is not dialectical. Feeling is simply another direction which perception may take.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 375-77.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 385.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 377.

It seems clear to me that for Dufrenne, the meaning of an aesthetic object is best understood in terms of feeling. “In reading expression by means of feeling, I am no longer deciphering an experience or reconstituting what has already been constituted by the intentionality of my body.¹⁹⁵ I am not exploiting a reserve. I am simply reading.”¹⁹⁶

In sum, when perceiving the aesthetic object, it seems to be a bad idea to follow the route that we usually take when we want to determine something. Judgments constituted by the collaboration between imagination and understanding, are based upon reflecting on the outside of objects. As I see it, feeling is a way of comprehending the meaning of the aesthetic object without subsuming it under any concepts without reducing it to something present-at-hand. Manifestly, these considerations are similar to those of Kant. Ultimately, however, Dufrenne disagrees with the status Kant gives to aesthetic judgment. For this reason, the following sections invest some time looking into how Dufrenne explains that the particular feelings in aesthetic perception are indeed intelligent, and that we may, by means of feeling, acquire knowledge.

5.7 The Intelligence of Feelings in Aesthetic Experience

According to Dufrenne, perception in aesthetic experience is realized in feeling.¹⁹⁷ And as we have touched upon already, these particular feelings are not to be conceived of as emotions. In the strict sense, emotions are reactions such as fear, merriment, and pity. We can *react* to a certain situation with an emotion, but this is, according to Dufrenne not the same as feeling. “Fear, merriment and pity denote movements in the strict sense of e-motions, that is, not only alterations of the subject but also undertakings or beginnings of action, whatever its eventual character.”¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, Dufrenne states that *feeling is knowledge*.¹⁹⁹ He explains that

¹⁹⁵ Reference pointing to Husserl’s philosophy of consciousness

¹⁹⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 384.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 378.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 378.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 378.

this particular feeling is a type of knowledge that involves a certain commitment with respect to the world, through which it is neither thought nor acted upon, but simply felt.

[T]his knowledge is feeling because it is not reflective, and above all, because it presupposes a certain predisposition to receive the affective. Of course, by exercising our judgement, we could always deny ourselves such knowledge and thus take refuge in the stoic ideal of objectivity.²⁰⁰

There are two ways of reflecting, Dufrenne argues, and the difference between these is primarily a difference in attitude since their contents can be identical.²⁰¹ It remains, therefore, to see how he demonstrates how reflecting in this or that way happens. There is, he points out, a sort of reflection that treats merely the form and matter (structure) of the aesthetic object. Then there is sort of reflection that treats the sense of the represented object. In the first case, I must detach the object from myself in order to perform a critical examination. In this way, reflection implies what Dufrenne calls *a sort of plumbing of the depths*.²⁰² I can, for example, measure dimensions, investigate material, and study it as something present-at-hand. But, as he points out, “as long as we stay on this level, we have not understood the aesthetic object. The sort of inquiry which could provide the key to understanding objects of use would be of little use in case of an object which represents something else.”²⁰³ The comprehension of meaning, he continues, presupposes another form of reflection in which I must adopt from the beginning a new attitude towards the object.²⁰⁴

And this commitment implies a mode of being on the part of the subject –a direction or “sense” (*sens*) –which is most tellingly revealed in the case of the artist. Thus Racine possesses the sense of the tragic, as does Daumier

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 378.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 393.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 389.

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 390.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 392.

that of the grotesque, and Wagner that of the marvellous. But this sense can also be aroused in the spectator. Indeed if the spectator were entirely destitute of it (as certain individuals are insensitive to certain values or the blind are insensitive to color) he would fail to have an aesthetic experience or to know the aesthetic object.²⁰⁵

The aesthetic object is like a sign through which someone is striving to tell us something. Therefore, perceiving of the aesthetic object in a way that involves critical reflection on its very structure demands that we detach ourselves from the work in question. It is always possible to conduct a purely objective examination of the work, Dufrenne reminds us, reflecting only on its structure, though this would be to misunderstand the aesthetic object.

“[...]reflection on content tends to lose its object to the exact extent that it is faithful to its purpose of moving from appearance to thing- that is, from the work considered as appearance to the represented object- and consequently of transcribing into the language of prose what the work says in its own language.”²⁰⁶

That being said, no one who has not undergone the experience of reflection can come to grips with feeling. Thus, Dufrenne concludes, feeling has a noetic function.²⁰⁷ As he states, “[t]he work of art provokes our intelligence as well, and it is not easy to rid oneself of this provocation”.²⁰⁸ When we are looking at other things (non-aesthetic objects), our view is perspectival, which means that we are looking in a specific way to decide what the object is by, for example, seeing usefulness and functions. But there are indefinite numbers of possible interpretations of the aesthetic object. It can have a plurality of meanings. In order to really see what the aesthetic object wants to express, we cannot do an objective study that works

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 378.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 391.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 379.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 391.

only to determine it from the outside. The aesthetic object is inexhaustible, just like a person is inexhaustible.

To be a quasi-subject, in Dufrenne's terms, means to convey an outside (appearance) and to carry an inside, similar to a human consciousness. And, according to him, the aesthetic object is even *the proxy of consciousness*.²⁰⁹ He states that, "[i]t is not only an object that cannot be fully viewed in a single glance; it is more like a consciousness whose depths are unfathomable."²¹⁰ In a strictly material sense, the aesthetic object can be interpreted as a human-made thing with the being of a tool. But in that way, we would completely miss out on what the work expresses, which amounts to its meaning. How do we grasp the meaning, Dufrenne wonders, of an object that conveys the inside/outside dialectic? His answer to this question implies that we, by means of participation, identify with the object almost as we would with another human being.²¹¹ The affinity between the aesthetic object and me is analogous to the affinity between another person and me, and I am not as radically estranged from an aesthetic object as from a plain material object.²¹²

With these considerations, Dufrenne shows us that by adopting a sympathetic attitude towards the aesthetic object, we can become sensitive enough to grasp its meaning. By merely critical reflection, we will not get the meaning it tries to express. Sympathetic reflection, unlike critical reflection, culminates in feeling, something that indicates that we do not decipher meaning by means of concepts. In the next section, I will be treating Dufrenne's conception of depth and try to point at why this notion is relevant in aesthetic experience.

5.8 On the Notion of Depth and the Aesthetic Attitude

*Depth is our power of joining ourselves with ourselves and of escaping time within time by founding a new time through fidelity to memory and to promises.*²¹³

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 397.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 398.

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 413.

²¹² Ibid, p. 394.

²¹³ Ibid, p. 400.

To possess depth, Dufrenne states, means to reject the idea of being a thing, which is always external to itself and is dispersed and practically dismembered in the passing of time. “It means being capable of an inner life.”²¹⁴ Our present experience, he continues, of uniting ourselves with the past and identifying ourselves with what we have been, gives testimony to a *dimension of interiority*.²¹⁵ In aesthetic experience, this happens with the aid of a particular perception (of the aesthetic object). Dufrenne explains that, although depth has some relation to time, it is not the past by itself that has depth. “What really affects me is the meeting within myself of the past and the present, as well as the sudden and unforeseen nature of this meeting, which the vicissitudes of life arrange.”²¹⁶ We can understand depth as something that arises due to, or in accordance with, the use that we make of our past experiences. Dufrenne emphasises that aesthetic experience can open up for new ways of understanding the world, giving rise to a new aspect in our personality. “All this has depth since it is not a matter of passively storing memory, but of destiny and a commencement.”²¹⁷ In a condensed way, we get an understanding of something that we are ourselves. A new side of my personality is all of a sudden apparent, or an aspect of my social life becomes clear to me. In this sense, I become aware of myself as something that has taken form through the passing of time. Once I have become aware of myself, I can take on a new beginning.

According to Dufrenne, the full grasping of the aesthetic object requires that we are present and that we approach it with an open attitude, similar to the attitude we should adopt when we meet another person. If all we do is exercise our theoretical judgement, we detach ourselves from the object and become more impersonal. In the following quotation, we get to see how Dufrenne proposes that in perceiving and experiencing the aesthetic object, we must commit ourselves totally, with all that we are.

Before the aesthetic object, on the other hand, I am neither a pure consciousness in the sense of a transcendental cogito, nor a pure look, since my look is laden with all that I am. Aesthetic feeling is deep, because the object reaches into

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 404.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 400.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 400.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 403.

everything that constitutes me. My past is immanent in the presence of my contemplation and exists there as what I am.²¹⁸

Dufrenne explains that the aesthetic attitude is a perpetual oscillation between what could be called critical attitude and the attitude of feeling. Since reflection exhausts itself in an attempt to try to know an inexhaustible object, it turns to feeling.²¹⁹ And, as we saw, Dufrenne considers that to reflect upon the object from the outside is to keep it at a distance, and to try to objectify it. But feeling can have a noetic function and value only as a reflective act, otherwise feeling would revert to the pure and simple level of presence. How, then, is reflection involved in the feeling in a way that is particular for the aesthetic experience?²²⁰

Dufrenne draws on Husserl, who claimed that *to wonder* is the ultimate inspiration for philosophy. In the case of aesthetics, Dufrenne states, “wonder has the peculiarity of provoking reflection only to eventually reject it”.²²¹ Reflection, the interplay between imagination and understanding, seeks to understand beings from the outside. However, given that the aesthetic object is unfathomable, reflection will thereby exhaust itself and turn to feeling. However, Dufrenne asserts, aesthetic feeling cannot exist without representation or without the reflection to which representation gives rise.²²² As I read it, Dufrenne illuminates the interplay between feeling and reflection. Because their reciprocity will not arrive at anything definite such as definite knowledge or new concepts, perception of the aesthetic object culminates in feeling. But this particular feeling is one that has undergone reflection. One could say that feeling and reflection exist in us simultaneously, that feeling inspires reflection, and vice versa. Feeling can have a noetic function and value only as a reflective act, Dufrenne argues, in part as a victory of former reflection and in part in terms of being open to new reflection.²²³

At the level of presence, which as we saw is non-reflective, we do feel, and perhaps all we do at this stage is to feel. But this is not the type of feeling that Dufrenne has set out to evaluate

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 404.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 416.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 416.

²²¹ Ibid, p. 409.

²²² Ibid, p. 415.

²²³ Ibid, p. 418.

and spell out. Aesthetic feeling is deeper than theoretical reflection, or as he points out: “To speak of victory over [*sur*] reflection is to imply that the aesthetic object must be known [*connu*] and, in a sense, mastered in order to be felt.”²²⁴ The alternation between reflection and feeling designates a dialectical progress toward an increasingly complete comprehension of the aesthetic object. With these considerations in mind we can return to Dufrenne’s statement that, “[t]he supreme proof of feeling’s depth is that it is intelligent in a way that intelligence as such will never be.”²²⁵

Before we move to the concluding part of this thesis, I will highlight what I consider to be the most central topics in Dufrenne’s aesthetics. My goal in this thesis has been to show that Dufrenne’s account of aesthetic feeling extends Kant’s conception of what knowledge is. As we have seen, Dufrenne builds his theory of perception on a Kantian framework, but his phenomenology of aesthetic experience is nevertheless closer to Heidegger and Gadamer’s philosophy than to the philosophy of Kant. We saw that Dufrenne’s account of aesthetics provides us with an extensive theory of perception. Beginning at the pre-reflective “plane of presence”, perception moves towards reflection and thought. In a certain sense, Dufrenne operates with a body and mind dualism. At the level of the body, the transcendental factor is being-with, and meaning is something that is amenable to the body. Perception then becomes consciously aware of the object, which implies that we must be able to see it. The capacity of seeing is provided for by imagination, something that makes up the transcendental factor at this level (the level of representation). This move is essentially a move from body to mind. Yet, according to Dufrenne, we are not compelled to reject the plane of presence by engaging in thinking. Thus, as I understand it, he does not advocate a body and mind dualism; on the contrary, what he argues is that body and mind are interfused, something that perception in aesthetic experience best exemplifies.

Perception at the level of representation entails that we take a step out of the initial level, which is purely sensuous. Meaning is thus no longer something to be read by the body alone. What *becoming aware* really means is that imagination is set into action. First it opens up an area where something can occur (as transcendental), then it fills out this area by searching for possible ways to turn the appearance of an object into an image (as a schema). The material that imagination can employ to convert impressions into images is what Dufrenne calls

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 416.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 406.

implicit knowledge. As imagination searches for possible sense-concepts, understanding corrects and judges. Thereby, imagination and understanding turn what at the beginning was something purely sensuous, into what it is for us. However, in case the appearance is an aesthetic object, Dufrenne claims that imagination is less at work. As transcendental, it opens up the space in the same manner as it does in normal perception. But now this space is filled out by the aesthetic object. This means that the object carries its meaning within itself and there is no need for schematic imagination, nor for understanding, to project themselves onto the object as is the case in normal perception.

Depending on our attitude, it is possible to turn the aesthetic object into a representation. That would be tantamount to letting imagination and understanding work according to their usual procedure. But since the perception of an aesthetic object does not rest on any determinate concepts, their activity would not be able to infer much, unless they turned it into something which it essentially is not — for example a use-object, an object of trade, etc. But its meaning would then become completely lost. For this reason, Dufrenne suggests that aesthetic perception takes another route, one where imagination and understanding are held back, in favour of interpreting through our feelings. His emphasis on the object's very presence to our bodies seems to have some affiliation with his account of aesthetic feeling. His emphasises is nevertheless on the idea that feeling and sensory presence are *not* the same. As he sees it, aesthetic feeling is imbued with thinking.

Whereas comprehension at the level of representation is detached from the original state of being-with, comprehending by means of feeling is not. By moving from the plane of presence onto the level where reflection is involved, understanding tends to objectify. Comprehension at this level is composed of imagination and understanding. Through their interplay, the object is held at a distance in order to truly appear. Conceiving things objectively means to reflect on their outside appearance only. Things that do not possess an inside, do not protest against being objectified, but the aesthetic object is not something we can understand objectively. As we saw, Dufrenne gives it the status of a quasi-subject, and comprehension depends on an alternative way of reflecting — one that does not separate us from the state of being-with, but remains an intimate rapport with the perceived object. Reflection and comprehension thereby take the shape of feelings. On Dufrenne's account, what I am able to comprehend depends on who I am and whom I have developed into from my previous experiences. When I open myself to the aesthetic object, I "read" by setting my entire personality into action.

6 Concluding Remarks

Throughout this thesis, I have studied aesthetic experience by investigating four different approaches to art and aesthetics. The goal has been to address the issue of meaning in the arts and whether or not it is possible to acquire knowledge from aesthetic experience. In the first chapter we set the stage for our entire discussion by giving an account of the beautiful according to Kant's philosophy. Kant provides a background from which we can understand the distinctness of experiences of art and of the beautiful in nature, a domain that must be explained through other conceptions than the theoretical and practical understanding.

Kant's aesthetics is part of a consistent system of philosophy, a system in which the higher faculties of cognition have three different legislatives. The power of judgment makes up one of them. For Kant, knowledge is something objective, provided by concepts of understanding or ideas of reason. An aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, is an example of the power of judgment seeking and finding a *subjective* rule to judge by. Although Kant was able to bestow universal validity upon beauty, he nevertheless showed that it is not possible to acquire knowledge from experience with art and the beautiful in nature because aesthetic judgments are grounded in feelings. With the goal of re-establishing a connection between art and knowledge, and between art and truth, we turned to Gadamer, Heidegger, and Dufrenne, discussing Kant against the background of their aesthetic theories.

Gadamer's distinct account of understanding as a kind of dialogue, whereby a specific understanding takes place in-between the artwork and the subject, ultimately questions whether a sharp distinction between the subjective and the objective is appropriate, (in this case: a sharp distinction between the artwork and its audience). On Gadamer's account, to understand something is not an entirely subjective enterprise. According to him, we as subjects must engage in a dialogue with the object or subject that we wish to understand; this dialogue is what makes any understanding possible. Conceiving the phenomenon of understanding as something similar to a dialogue opens up a more sympathetic relationship between subject and object than allowed for within Kant's aesthetics.

By targeting the difference between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, Gadamer demonstrates the fact that our experiences are different in kind. Aesthetic experience, he argues, has a binding quality on us because it can make us learn something; it can even make us realize something.

The work of art has a unique potential to make us question who we are, and thereby evokes self-knowledge. This presupposes an attitude of being open to the work of art and to engage oneself in a dialogue with it. In this dialogue, we have established a relationship where the goal is to arrive at something new: a new understanding.

Searching for the difference between a thing and a work of art, we turned to Heidegger, emphasising the discussion in his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*. We saw that according to Heidegger, we understand ourselves as part of our world, not as a subject separated from objects, but as beings partly defined by the things with which we choose to engage and occupy ourselves. From that perspective, it is clear that for Heidegger, a sharp distinction between subject and object is not a suitable conception to explain our relation to the world as made up of other beings. In contrast to Kant, Heidegger does not speak of the beautiful but develops an ontology of the work of art. He introduces the issue of truth, something which Kant's aesthetics does not thematise. Because Kant does not allow for the possibility of acquiring knowledge from the work of art, it seems likely that we can conclude that he would not approve of the idea of inferring anything true from the artwork either. According to Heidegger, however, an artwork has this potential in contrast to objects for utility. The work of art can display and set truth to work, as something that merely happens to us. This means that truth is something that we get an understanding of by means of aesthetic experience. Whereas for Kant knowledge is indispensably tied to concepts, Heidegger does not define all knowledge as something that must be subsumed under definite concepts.

On Heidegger's account, the fact that we cannot rightfully conceive of things conceptually, and as something distanced from ourselves, shows that we are blind to the whole truth about their being. Neither by being open to things as we actively engage with them, nor by studying them in accordance with a theoretical approach, can we arrive at a full account of what things truly are. These considerations highlight the relevance of the work of art. By displaying the tension between "world" and "earth", the work of art displays features that concern our very existence. When we perceive a work of art, our usual routines of comprehending things become inadequate.

As we are most of the time caught up in usefulness, with an advanced ability to manipulate beings, we have, according to Heidegger, concealed the earth-dimension that is the ground of all beings. He describes the work of art as something that reminds us of the unfathomable ground our existence is resting on. The work of art stirs up the world of familiarity. It displays

our world in such a way that we gain a new perspective on our world and on ourselves. Even though we are not able to form conceptual knowledge from this experience, the work of art will make us consider our world and ourselves in a new way. Heidegger's conception of truth is different from the truths of natural science and mathematics. His description of truth as *alétheia* gives an account of the foundation upon which every other truth-conception is founded.

By discussing the philosophy of Gadamer and Heidegger, I have endeavoured to give a broader conception of what counts as knowledge. They have shown us that the world, made up by beings within the world, partly constitutes who we ourselves are. In the last chapter of this thesis, I gave an account of Mikel Dufrenne's phenomenology of aesthetic experience. As we have seen, he follows the system of Kant up to a certain point. Dufrenne's analysis of a determinate judgement is fully in line with Kant. Also, the role he assigns to imagination and understanding in making judgments is built upon a Kantian framework. However, Dufrenne's accounts of aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgments are nevertheless distinct from Kant's.

As I see it, Dufrenne's account of aesthetic perception and aesthetic experience has more in common with Heidegger's phenomenology and Gadamer's aesthetics than with Kant's notion of an aesthetic judgment. His description of the aesthetic object as a quasi-subject implies that any understanding, any grasping of its meaning, presupposes that we establish a relationship with the aesthetic object. This can be understood against the background of Gadamer's account of understanding as a dialogue. Depending on what attitude we adopt, we can turn the aesthetic object into an ordinary object, or into a use-object. However, if we are interested in comprehending meaning we must adopt a different attitude towards it.

Dufrenne explains that the bond between the aesthetic object and the perceiving subject is similar to the relationship constituted by two individuals. A sympathetic attitude towards the other individual is required if the goal is to reach any understanding. If we, in line with Dufrenne, conceive of the aesthetic object as a quasi-subject, we see that the relation between the aesthetic object and us is more akin to a subject-to-subject, than a subject-to-object relationship. Understanding other individuals is never merely conceptual. Still, despite of this fact, understanding between individuals is possible.

Through a determinate judgment, we fail to comprehend any meaning in aesthetic experience. By making a reflective judgment, on the contrary, we are committed in our thinking whereby we can encompass this meaning. As Dufrenne has shown us, we must invest our entire personality in reflecting upon an aesthetic object. Ultimately, we ourselves are put into question. Comprehension of meaning in aesthetic experience thus depends on who we are; meaning exists as something mutual between the aesthetic object and the perceiving subject.

Dufrenne's aesthetics brings to the fore the dispute between Gadamer and Heidegger on the one side, and Kant, on the other. Gadamer and Heidegger claim that knowledge is attainable through aesthetic experience, whereas Kant believes that this is impossible. As I see it, Dufrenne's account of a determinate judgment is Kantian, but his account of perception in aesthetic experience is built upon Heidegger's phenomenology. Whereas feeling on Kant's account of aesthetic judgement bears no cognitive valence, Dufrenne has shown that through aesthetic feeling we understand on a deeper level than we do by making determinate judgments. I believe that I have demonstrated that we can encounter something true and gain knowledge from aesthetic experience, despite the fact that the kind of truth and knowledge we are dealing with here are both non-conceptual and indefinable. By describing what aesthetic feelings are composed of, I have with the help of Dufrenne, argued that the best way of interpreting and understanding an aesthetic object is by means of feeling. Furthermore, I have shown that this particular feeling is knowledge.

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