

The Reification of Aesthetics: Reading Heidegger's Destructive Critique of Modernity in Light of his Early Philosophy

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“Art then belongs in the domain of the pastry chef.”
(Heidegger 2000, 140)

Heidegger's Understanding of Reification

One of the acknowledged goals of *Being and Time* (2010) is to contest and destroy the modern idealist tradition from Descartes to Nietzsche which presupposes the priority of knowledge, and consequently the knowing subject, over practical involvement in life. This tradition is based on the Cartesian illusion of wiping out the world through doubt in order to establish knowledge on indubitable ground. The subject who abolishes the world is, according to this vision, autonomous from it and able to judge it as if he were not part of it. The ego, hence, becomes an entity in itself separate from the world, standing against it and able to judge it. This separate entity has taken multiple forms in the modern philosophical tradition, all of which share the basic aspect of being a thing-like entity. The Husserlian rejection of the autonomous subject in favor of a pole of receptivity sought to challenge this tradition. Yet in its abolition of the world through the phenomenological practice of *Epoché* or bracketing, it repeated the Cartesian gesture and situated the receptive pole over and above the world. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) challenged this whole tradition and introduced the idea of Dasein to describe the individual as being-there in the world not autonomous from it or standing above it (Dreyfus 1993, 17). From this position of finitude, he sought to reinterpret the whole of modern tradition which tried to overcome finitude into absolute knowledge.

In *Being and Time*, originally published in 1927, Heidegger acknowledges Georg Lukács' newly introduced term “reification” and the whole Marxist problematic of viewing consciousness as a thing. Unlike Lukács (1885 – 1971), nevertheless, Heidegger does not regard reification as a modern phenomenon nor does he ascribe it to the dominance of the capitalist mode of commodity

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production as is evidenced by his inclusion of the religious concept of a substantial soul among the reified forms of consciousness. Heidegger writes:

One of our first tasks will be to show that the point of departure from an initially given *ego* and subject totally fails to see the phenomenal content of Dasein. Every idea of a “subject” – unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character – still posits the subjectum ... ontologically along with it, no matter how energetic one’s ontic protestations against the “substantial soul” or the “reification of consciousness” [are]. Thingliness itself needs to be demonstrated in terms of its ontological source in order that we can ask what is now to be understood *positively* by the nonreified *being* of the subject, the soul, consciousness, the spirit, the person. All these terms name definite areas of phenomena which can be “developed.” But they are never used without a remarkable failure to see the need for inquiring about the being of the beings so designated. (Heidegger 2010, 45)

Nevertheless, Heidegger’s acceptance of Lukács’ criticism of bourgeois philosophical notions of consciousness as reified is not unconditional. He says that no matter how vehement one’s condemnation of reification is, this criticism remains parasitic on an unacknowledged reference to a healthy non-reified state which the latter does not explain. This would be Heidegger’s first remark. The second is implied in his inclusion of the premodern religious concept of the “substantial soul” in the forms of reified subjectivity. This shows that Heidegger does not take reification to be a modern problem resulting from the capitalist mode of production as Lukács does. The problem predates the modern age yet it seizes control of the project of modernity. In order to understand what is meant by reification (*Verdinglichung*) according to Heidegger, one needs to understand the “being of beings so designated.” Heidegger proceeds to investigate the unreified being of Dasein, “nicht-verdinglichten Sein des Subjekts, der Seele, des Bewußtseins” as well as the being of beings (*Seienden*) or things (*Dinge*) which are characterized by thinghood, “Dinglichkeit,” in order to distinguish between them (Heidegger 1977 *Sein*, 62).

As is clear from Heidegger’s constant complaint about the forgetfulness of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) in the history of western thought, Dasein forgets its being and being in general because it is part of its nature to do so. In all his life, Dasein is surrounded by things. It is not surprising that he forgets his being and interprets himself as an entity among other entities, a thing-like being. Reification happens not due to the dominance of commodity production in the

modern capitalist age as Lukács thinks but because it is the nature of Being (*Sein*) to conceal itself.

Axel Honneth brings Heidegger and Lukács closer to each other in his comparison of the structures of their philosophies. Both condemn social life and bourgeois philosophy as reified. In so doing, they acknowledge the existence of a state prior to the onset of reification. Reification would be the forgetfulness of this prior healthy state and acceptance of the reified forms of life as the only reality. From an ethical point of view, reification “signifies a type of human behavior that violates moral or ethical principles by not treating other subjects in accordance with their characteristics as human beings, but instead as numb and lifeless objects—as ‘things’ or ‘commodities’” (Honneth 2008, 19). Heidegger and Lukács condemn reified behavior not because it disregards certain moral standards but because it does not acknowledge ontological facts whether this leads to negative ethical consequences or not. Therefore, to treat another person as a thing or as an instrument to achieve a goal may be morally reprehensible and is an instance of reification but it is only the moral manifestation of a deeper problem. If Dasein forgets being and interprets himself as a thing-like entity or a substantial soul, this would lead to wrong epistemological conclusions but not to ethical problems. One of the wrong conclusions that Heidegger finds a result of a reifying vision of the world is the dominance of the epistemological model of the subject as a passive contemplative entity that seeks to understand the world through a cognitive gap. For Heidegger, this is one example of a reified vision of the subject as an autonomous entity in itself separate from the world (Honneth 2008, 30). This attitude which characterizes the whole idealist tradition is based on forgetting an essential inalienable characteristic of Dasein which is being-in-the-world.

Lukács refers to a mode of life prior to capitalist mass production in which people lived and communicated with each other without their everyday dealings being determined by the form of commodity exchange. People’s lives and dealings were not determined by being providers or consumers of commodities. They did not contemplate the market and society as functioning automatically according to their own selfless objective laws and mechanisms. Consequently, they did not regard their own lives as being determined by alienating objective laws over which they had no control. Another aspect is that they did not turn into passive perceivers of the functioning of the market and society. The passive onlooker mode which characterizes the modern individual becomes a “second nature” which denies first nature and is based on its forgetfulness (Lukács 1967, 63). Doubtlessly, this change in human nature to the passive contemplative

attitude is regrettable. This is also the same attitude of the subject in the idealist epistemological theories. Yet Heidegger does not ascribe it to the dominance of capitalist production but rather to an essential forgetfulness of being.

Apart from the reason why a healthy state dwindles and is covered over by the onset of a reifying attitude, both Lukács' and Heidegger's philosophies share an essential understanding:

Both Lukács' allusions to engaged praxis and Heidegger's notion of care designate that form of practical orientation that is especially characteristic of the structure of the *human* mode of existence. For in opposition to the prevailing conception that has become second nature, and according to which humans primarily and constantly strive to cognize and neutrally apprehend reality, humans in fact exist in a modus of existential engagement, of "caring," through which they disclose a meaningful world.... In this sense, both thinkers are convinced that even in the midst of the false, ontologically blind present circumstances, the elementary structures of the human form of life characterized by care and existential interestedness are always already there. (Honneth 2008, 32)

Honneth, thus, describes reification through Heidegger, and also through Lukács, as forgetting that primary mode of engagement with and care about (*Sorge*) the world. Heidegger finds the metaphysically congealed concepts of epistemology also reified because they are based on the denial of this primary mode.

In order to overcome the reification of consciousness and "positively" understand what the nonreified being "nicht-verdinglichten Sein" of Dasein is, Heidegger resorts to formal indication (*formale Anzeige*) which he utilized in his earlier studies. The basic idea of formal indication, that of a critical philosophical methodology which reaches the essential via investigating the accidental, predates Heidegger's concern with the project of being per se. It appears in his early 1919 course lectures published as *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* in which he attempts to establish philosophy as the primordial science by means of examining particular sciences:

It is meaningful to deduce the derivative from the origin; the reverse is nonsense. However, precisely from the derivative I can go back to the origin as spring (since the river flows, I can return to its source). Although it is absurd, and precisely because it is absurd, to wish to derive primordial science from any particular science (or the totality thereof), the possibility

of a *methodological return* to primordial science from the particular sciences is necessary and illuminating. Further: every particular science is as such derivative. It is therefore evident that, from *each and every* particular science (whether actual or merely possible), there is a *way* leading back to its origin, to primordial science, to philosophy. If, therefore, we are to solve the problem as to how our own problematic — the concretion of the idea of philosophy *as* primordial science — can be scientifically validated, [25] this must be through a methodological return from the non-original to the origin. (Heidegger 2008, 21)

It is this critical methodology which performs a “return” from the non-essential to the essential via excluding “everything individual, conditioned, historical and accidental” that defines formal indication as the critical procedure he utilizes in *Being and Time* after the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) is abandoned (2010, 30). In the ontological project, the return is not performed from a particular science to the primordial science of mental processes that underlie all cognition but rather from the non-essential features of experience to the basic structure of Dasein as the being having experience.

The purpose of formal indication is to overcome the particular qualities of each individual into a transcendental account of what makes this individual an individual. It is “the method by which, out of my individual, factual existence, I am able to reflexively generate a transcendental account of my being, i.e., an account of that which constitutes me as a first-person singular entity as such, rather than just the particular one I happen to be” (Shockey 2010, 526). Formal indication is, hence, a reflexive technique that Dasein employs to reflect on and understand himself. Dasein has to overcome the interpretations of his being in terms of “thing-concepts” with which the history of thought works and which pose the “danger of ‘reifying consciousness’” (Heidegger 2010, 414). “Formal indication does precisely this unveiling of the conceptual limitations of traditional philosophy and language” (De Oliveira 2012, 42).

Through formal indication, Heidegger starts by “referring to some object or class of objects provisionally, using contingent features, and arrives at the referent’s essential features only after an investigation” (Dreyfus 2010, 192). He might start by referring to the Kantian transcendental concept of space which is part of the a priori structure of consciousness and proceed to show that Dasein never sees space as an empty container to be filled out later with objects. Dasein is always in the world. The concept of empty space is an idealist abstraction from the real world, one which never materializes because Dasein is always

surrounded by things. Heidegger, thus, starts with the Kantian transcendental concept of space and proceeds to destroy it in order to show its dependence on an unacknowledged engagement with the world. By making the Kantian concept of space indicate one of the formal categories characteristic of Dasein – namely being-in-the-world – Heidegger reaches the structure of Being of Dasein. Being can be roughly defined as “the set of standards in terms of which entities make sense as entities” (Blattner 2006, 117). In other words, it is the sum total of the conditions which make something what it is, or which make something understandable as what it is. In addition to being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*), the Being of Dasein is also characterized by temporality and care (*Sorge*) – aspects which the things surrounding Dasein do not and cannot share as part of their being. In order to indicate the Being (*Sein*) of a given phenomenon, the technique of formal indication proceeds via three concepts:

A concrete experience consists in both *having* and *conceiving* of “something.” The “having,” “conceiving” and “performing” are all, in a sense, formal properties of any concrete experience: they constitute the structure of the pre-worldly something, as Heidegger understands it. A living experience can now be understood as a living experience provided that we grasp the three “senses” or modalities figuring into any experience and whose “completion” or fulfilling is the concrete, ordinary, factual experience: the content-sense (*Gehaltsinn*- the “whatness”, the formal character of that which the experience is about; for example, “objectively real,” “worldly significant” etc.), the relating-sense (*Bezugssinn* - *the formal character* of the attitude, comportment, relation to the content; for example, perceptual, loving, cognitive, emotional etc.), and the performing-sense (*Vollzugsinn* - *the formal character* of the manner in which the relating-sense is performed, “and thus governing the manner in which the content is presented”). (Lepadatu 2009, 142)

Heidegger’s use of formal indication makes his understanding of reification and the un-reified state clear. In experiencing any phenomenon, the content-sense, relation and performance of the relation to the phenomenon must be in harmony. When one does not acknowledge the humanity of another human being – a colonized subject or a woman – he misses the content-sense or the “whatness” of the phenomenon. When he deals with a colonized subject or people as less than human or as an underdeveloped stage in the evolutionary chain or with a woman as a sex object, he performs the relation to the whatness of the phenomenon in a wrong way. When Dasein forgets his being (*Sein*) as

temporality, care, being-in-the-world, and being-towards-death as well as dealing with himself as a being (*Seienden*) in the sense of a thing-like entity, he has a reified sense of being. He forgets what he authentically is. In this case, the authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) – or what is properly (*eigentlich*) of one's own (*eigen*) as the literal meaning of the German word suggests – of the being of Dasein is missed and he is treated as another phenomenon. This happens because Dasein tends to interpret his being in terms of the being (*Sein*) of the beings (*Seienden*) that are closest to it, i.e. in terms of things at hand (*Vorhandenheit*). Authenticity is the state when Dasein interprets his being in a way that is proper to it and does not confuse it with the being of other phenomena – “authentic, that is, it belongs to itself” (Heidegger 2010, 42).

Whereas authenticity is interpreting Dasein's being according to what belongs properly to it, reification is interpreting it in terms of the being of another thing, in ways which do not belong properly (*eigentlich*) to it. Reification is a deformation of authenticity. It can be best understood in terms of the correspondence of the formally indicated content-sense and its interpretation as its relation-sense. Authenticity, one of Heidegger's important ideas, can hence be understood as being true to the formally indicated being of Dasein lurking beneath the reified forms of modern subjectivity and other premodern formulations of consciousness and spirit. Reification, as an inauthentic vision of Dasein, starts as categorical confusion in which the content-sense (*Gehaltsinn*) is confused with another. Upon this primal confusion, a forgetting of what Dasein or any phenomenon authentically is ensues. The third step when reification is more than categorical confusion and becomes morally reprehensible is when the performance of the relation to the phenomenon is mistaken. This is when actual damage occurs. Thus, Heidegger reached an understanding of reification as categorical confusion via the reflexive technique of formal indication.

The Project of Modernity as Part of a Reified Concept of Being

With all the change that *Being and Time* triggered, it was supposed to be only the first division of a larger project that Heidegger never finished. The reason was a *Kehre* or a turning in his thought which led him to realize that his occupation with Dasein is a remnant of the German idealist interest in the subject – the idealist tradition which formed the backbone of the project of modernity that he set out to destroy. After the *Kehre*, Heidegger moved to offer ontological studies of other phenomena such as art and technology. While the former offered better access to being (*Sein*), the latter threatened any revelation of it.

Technology is part of the modern inauthentic concept of being. Its expansion to invade all aspects of life makes any revelation of being outside its sway hard to conceive. Modernist art is also part of an inauthentic concept of being centered on subjectivity. When applied to art – old or modern – technology (*Techné* or method) results in the aesthetic vision and in literary theory.

Modern art, aesthetics, and technology are all parts of a reified concept of being which Heidegger seeks to destroy because it obstructs a more original revelation of being. In this part of the article, the modern concept of being and its inauthenticity will be explained. The centrality of method or *techné* to this concept will also be discussed. In the last part, aesthetics – part of the modern concept of being – as a reified vision of art will be tackled in light of the definition of reification as categorical confusion that has been offered in the first part. While the idea of formal indication was no longer employed – because it was originally developed as a reflexive technique through which Dasein can reflect on itself as Heidegger had already moved from investigating the being of Dasein to the being of other phenomena, – the resulting understanding of reification as categorical confusion and forgetfulness of the primary character of the phenomenon – the content-sense or *Gehaltsinn* – remains. It lies at the ground of his understanding of aesthetics as a reified vision of art.

For Heidegger, the failure of the modernity project – of which aesthetics is one part – was neither haphazard nor corrigible. The modern tradition was doomed to failure because it is predicated on an essentially reified vision of being. Modern thought – starting from Descartes, via Kant and Hegel and ending with Nietzsche whom Heidegger regards as part of this tradition – is based on two premises: first, the subject can separate himself from the world and achieve autonomy and, second, knowledge can be established on a secure ground and absolved of any contingencies – i.e. Hegelian absolute knowledge. Both these premises deny one fundamental feature of Dasein which is his involvement in the world. Being-in-the-world cannot separate itself from the world or gain absolute knowledge. Man is finite and cannot overcome his finitude; he can neither be autonomous nor separate from the world. The reified concept of subjectivity on which the project of modernity is predicated denies the being of Dasein. All the modernist concepts based on this initial reification are, hence, based on concealment of being and are, consequently, inauthentic.

One result of the modern separation of the subject from the world or the object is that the subject became the source of value; something is valuable if I regard it as bearing importance to me in some sense. The Kantian separation of pure reason – knowledge, truth, and science – and practical reason – moral value – is, hence, a subjectivization of value. Although Kant meant it as a foundation of

value on the subjective structure of consciousness, Heidegger read it as an early expression of the modern value crisis. This crisis manifested itself, for instance, in the invention of the atomic bomb which is a result of great scientific development devoid of any ethical value. The modern positing of the subject as the sphere of value and ground of certitude has, thus, robbed the world of meaning and value – any meaning or value other than those which the subject endows. Heidegger reaches his harsh conclusion on modernity: “The essence of modernity is fulfilled in the age of consummate meaninglessness [which] does not stand on its own. It fulfills the essence of a concealed history” (Heidegger 1987, 178). The meaninglessness and the crisis of valuation of late modernity are the results of the concealment of authentic being throughout history. They are, hence, the result of the reified concept of Dasein as subject which conceals its being (*Sein*). The contradictions which trouble Nietzsche’s thought, as part of the metaphysical project of modernity, are the result of the reified concept of the subject. These contradictions are the result of a vision of the subject as separate from the world. In other words, they deny Dasein’s formally indicated being-in-the-world. The inauthentic, reified concept of being on which the project of modernity is grounded misses the whatness or the content-sense of Dasein. Heidegger’s destructive reading of modernity is, thus, best understood in terms of formal indication.

The value crisis which Heidegger sees in the late modernity of Nietzsche is the logical result of the Kantian foundation of ethics on a subjective ground that denies Dasein’s essential being-in-the-world. Although Friedrich Nietzsche dedicated a considerable part of his writings to criticizing Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, Heidegger realizes that he did not depart from the modern tradition. Heidegger saw the Kantian attempt to renounce tradition and establish knowledge on a firm ground through the subjective structure of consciousness as an illusory attempt to establish empty subjectivity as the source of knowledge and value. This robbed the world of any intrinsic value. This attitude culminated in Nietzschean nihilism where all values are rejected as illusory and the only remaining value is the will to power: that which increases power is considered valuable. Yet even the Nietzschean power ideals of “*amor fati*” or loving one’s fate, self-affirmation, and the pursuit of the *Übermensch* become problematic because there is no certain fate to love; it simply becomes “not wanting anything to be different” (Nietzsche 2007, 35). While Nietzsche meant this as criticism of idealism, loving one’s fate as it is, no matter what, ends up with confirming the world as it is rather than attempting to create a better world: “[R]esignation bows down in the *amor fati*, the glorification of the absurdest of all things, before the

powers that be” (Adorno 2005, 98). It ends up in acquiescence. The subject is not strengthened before the world, but weakened instead. Moreover, “[s]elf determination, or Nietzschean ‘affirmation’ could now no longer be linked in any way to the cosmos, one’s true self, real happiness, complete, rational autonomy, or one’s realization within the historical community” (Pippin 1999, 117).

Robbing things of value and relating them to the subject is, for Heidegger, the logical conclusion of the modern Kantian beginning where the dissolution of the substantial reason that was expressed in religion and the division of reason into three spheres turned value – practical reason and ethics – into something subjective. The end – Nietzschean nihilism – is implied in the beginning. Although Nietzsche heavily criticized the metaphysical tradition starting as it does with Plato’s establishment of the real world as separate from the actual world, – which found its medieval manifestation in the religious separation of heaven and earth and modern expression in the philosophical differentiation of the intelligible and the sensible worlds – Heidegger finds that he still belongs to this tradition. His analysis of nihilism does not move him beyond it. The reason is that metaphysics robbed the actual world – the *mundus sensibilis* of changing appearances – of value and located it in what it considered the real world – the stable *mundus intelligibilis*. While Nietzsche rejects metaphysics and the idea of the real world together with the separation, the crisis of values in which he is still involved, his vision of the lack of value in the world, and setting the will to power as the standard of valuation display the same metaphysical deprivation of any value from the world. Simply put, Nietzsche, like the metaphysical tradition he criticizes, still sees the world as deprived of value. This is why Heidegger finds him part of this tradition, “the last metaphysical thinker of the West” (qtd. in Pattison 2001, 177).

Moreover, setting the subjective will to power as the standard of valuation shows entanglement in the subjective tradition no matter how heavily Nietzsche criticized it. Thus, the failure of the modernity project perceptible in the late modern relativity and value crisis is the result of concealing the authentic being of Dasein as engagement in the world which has been forgotten – but not totally lost – under the reified concepts of the subject and object. To forget Dasein’s authentic being and treat him as subject is the reification criticized in *Being and Time*. This reification is the reason behind the contradictions that the modernity project is entangled in. The epistemological project of modernity misses the formally indicated content-sense of Dasein. Not only does epistemology conceive of the relation between the subject and the content-sense of Dasein, i.e. the relating-sense, in a mistaken way – seeing the subject as autonomous hides

being-in-the-world – but it also performs this relation wrongly by turning the world into a standing-reserve. The three concepts of formal indication conceived early on in Heidegger’s career, thus, cast light on Heidegger’s late critique of the project of modernity.

Heidegger’s harsh criticism of modernity is not a mere condemnation of the crisis of values that occurred in Nietzsche. It is not even just an understanding of how this crisis was implied in the early foundational attempts of Descartes and Kant. All these are parts of an investigation of how a whole new concept of being came into existence and how it dominated all the different aspects of life and thought:

At the inception of the modern age the beingness of beings changed. The essence of that historical inception consists in this very change. The subjectivity of the *subiectum* (substantiality) is now defined as self-representing representation. Yet it is man, as rational creature, who is in a distinctive sense self-representing representation. Thus man becomes a distinctive being (*subiectum*), becomes the “definitive” “subject.” (Heidegger 1987, 220)

Prior to the modern age, substantial matter existed in its own right: “Formerly every being was a *subiectum*, something lying before us on its own basis” (Heidegger 1987, 220). In the modern frame of being, substantial matter becomes something that represents itself to the beholder. The concept of being becomes that of what can be represented. Perhaps George Berkeley’s famous dictum “*Esse est percipi*” or “to be is to be perceived” is the clearest vindication of Heidegger’s analysis of the shift in the concept of being (Berkeley 1999, xxxiv). To be no longer means to exist in itself. In religion, a lot of beings are thought to exist without being perceivable in any form. In modern science, to be means to be visible and measurable. The concept of being shifts from one in which being means “permanence of presence” to “bringing-before-oneself;” “Permanence of presencing, that is, beingness, now consists in representedness through and for such representation; it consists in such representation itself” (Heidegger 1987, 220). This resulted in a monumental shift towards the modern concept of being. First, man becomes the subject. Formerly, the word subject “*subjectum*” meant the material from which something is made. When matter became that which can be represented, the word subject stopped referring to matter *per se*. “The subjectivity of the *subiectum*” or the substantiality of substance came to mean that which appears and represents itself. Since man is a

distinctive creature who both represents himself and the one to whom representation is made, “*subjectum*” came to refer to man.

In the modern age, man becomes the subject to whom everything is represented. The subject becomes the center of the world. Second, being is not permanence of presence but representation to the subject. Man started to see himself as autonomous from the world. Since man as the subject became the center of the world, the latter has to be represented to him. What cannot be represented in any way cannot be said to exist. Being came to mean representation to the subject. Third, man started to see the world as a picture that he represents to himself. The concept of the world as a picture came into existence. Fourth, knowledge became representation which is already clear in Descartes. Fifth, the search for truth was replaced by the desire to guarantee the certitude of knowledge or of representation. Truth came to be replaced with certitude; the pursuit of truth has been supplanted by the need to guarantee the correctness of information, hence the necessity of method. Methodology is an indispensable part of the modern concept of being; this has dominated thought since Descartes’s essay on the method of doubt (1641) until the modern literary theories with all their diverse methodologies. This is a total shift from one concept of being – one way man understood himself to be – to another. The modern concept of being is inauthentic because it is grounded in the reified epistemological concept of the subject that misses the content-sense of Dasein and performs the relating-sense to the world in a way that subscribes to autonomy and forgets the nature of Dasein as being-in-the-world.

The failure of the modernity project is a manifestation of the inauthenticity of the modern concept of being which this project has as its ground. Two aspects of this inauthentic concept of being are the dominance of technology and the movement of art into the sphere of aesthetics. The idealist tradition has invested heavily in its investigation of the nature of the subject and in its attempt to overcome the subject-object dichotomy which occurs once one thinks in terms of a subject standing opposed to the world. In its pursuit of the certitude of knowledge, the Cartesian ego as the first manifestation of the modern subject cancelled out the world. The ego starts by doubting everything and accepts nothing that cannot be proven correct. A method which guarantees the certitude of knowledge, hence, becomes necessary. The fact that René Descartes (1596 –1650) who formulated the ego as the first manifestation of modern subjectivity was himself also the one who wrote *Discourse on Method* is not coincidental. Method is a necessary part of the subject-object relation. In order to bridge the gap between the ego and the world, the subject has to devise some method that guarantees the certitude of knowledge in order not to allow

superstition to infiltrate knowledge as was the case in the Middle Ages, for instance. Any knowledge represented by the senses must be filtered by method to avoid error. Method, hence, becomes the means of revealing the world to the subject.

Since his early phenomenological studies guided by the desire to go “back to the things themselves” – “*Wir wollen auf die ‘Sachen selbst’ zuruckgehen*” as Edmund Husserl wrote – Heidegger has been sensitized against methodology (Husserl 1982, 168). Even in *Being and Time*, he still maintains the same sensitivity towards method and the desire to be in contact with phenomena or the things themselves:

The more genuinely effective a concept of method is and the more comprehensively it determines the fundamental concept of science, the more originally is it rooted in confrontation with the things themselves and the farther away it moves from what we call a technical device – of which there are many in theoretical disciplines. (Heidegger 2010, 26)

Against the mediating function of method, Heidegger seeks the revelation of being through phenomena. This early understanding is later developed in his study of *techné* or method. Technology is usually grasped as a means to achieve ends. Heidegger accepts this definition yet finds it both humanist and instrumental (Heidegger 1977 *Question*, 5). It is based on a deeper confrontation with being which it denies. This instrumental concept of technology, *techné* or method, is based on the possibility of revealing one aspect of matter. Something cannot be used as a method or instrument to achieve an end if the possibility to achieve this end is not present in it. Technology, hence, is a means of revelation. The dangerous aspect of technology is that it is a limited revelation of being. It frames phenomena as usable objects and denies any other aspect of their being. It turns phenomena into instruments, i.e. equipment. It deals with all phenomena according to the model of equipmental being (*Zuhandenheit*). Since it deals with the diversified content-sense (*Gehaltsinn*) of all phenomena – including things and artworks – on the model of equipment being, it reifies them. Thus, methodology – an indispensable part of all idealist systems – is a reifying vision.

As a reifying vision, technology makes possible only a limited framed revelation of being and therefore denies being itself: “The rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth”

(Heidegger 1977 *Question 28*). Since method or *techné* is a necessary part of the modern worldview, it takes control of all that may be revealed to man:

But Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiēsis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance.... Where Enframing holds sway, regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing. They no longer even let their fundamental characteristic appear, namely, this revealing as such. Thus the challenging Enframing not only conceals a former way of revealing, bringing-forth, but it conceals revealing itself and with it that wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, comes to pass. (Heidegger 1977 *Question, 27*)

Method as *techné* results in a kind of framed revelation which passes itself as the only possible vision of phenomena and conceals the truth of being. Even more, it conceals itself as concealment. It passes itself as the only revelation. It turns the world and all phenomena into “standing-reserve” to be used in time of need. It turns the whole world into instruments to be used by the subject. The world becomes both controllable and secure. As a sign of control, the world becomes measurable. Space and time are homogenized and can be measured. Every point in space or time is similar to any other point. Unlike the religious view of the world in which certain places and times are more special and enjoy more holiness than others, modern science creates a sense of homogeneity which levels off differences and renders phenomena ready for scientific treatment. By securing its framed revelation as the only one possible, the homogeneity engendered by the dominance of technology leads to theory:

Theory makes secure at any given time a region of the real as its object-area. The area-character of objectness is shown in the fact that it specifically maps out in advance the possibilities for the posing of questions. Every new phenomenon emerging within an area of science is refined to such a point that it fits into the normative objective coherence of theory.... Because modern science is theory in the sense described, therefore, in all its observing, the manner of its striving-after, i.e., the manner of its entrapping-securing procedure, i.e., its method, has descriptive security. (Heidegger 1977 *Question, 169*)

The descriptive security of science ascertains that the methodologically revealed nature of phenomena is not challenged. Thus, technology makes the world manageable and science secures the idea of phenomena as instruments. The idea of modern science is not limited by Heidegger to the natural sciences. It includes “psychiatry” (Heidegger 1977 *Question*, 174), “history” and “philology” (175).

The human sciences, employing methodology like the natural ones, have their areas of objectivity and reveal certain aspects of phenomena. Each literary theory has a certain concept of what the literary object is and develops techniques for analyzing it out of this concept. The results reached via the method confirm the concept adopted by the theory. Aesthetics and the literary approaches stemming from it view the work as a beautiful object and pursue the source of beauty in the artwork, i.e. harmony. Since beauty and harmony are formal concepts, this determines the literary techniques influenced by aesthetics and used in investigating the artwork to be formal. Analyzing the literary object from a formal perspective leads to discovering its unity and harmony; it shows that the parts work together in harmony to create the whole and that the whole is embodied in each of the parts. This confirms the idea of the work as a source of beauty, a concept which aesthetics starts with. In a self-confirming circular manner, theory determines the nature of the object and the methodological procedures employed by theory confirm the concept already adopted. It is not surprising, hence, that a literary critic who approaches a given artwork from a feminist, post-colonial or psychoanalytic perspective always ends up with results related to the approach s/he adopts. The sociological approach turns the artwork into a social document that can prove or disprove a point about the society which produced it – i.e. equipment. The psychoanalytic approach deals with the literary work of art on the model of a dream revealing the subconscious of the author or the society which produced it. The results reached through methodological analysis confirm the concept adopted by theory in each case.

Seen through Heideggerian ontology, theory reifies the artwork by making only ordered revelation possible. While literary theory reveals a certain aspect of the artwork, it banishes all others. It turns the artwork into a manageable entity. Theory reveals one aspect of the artwork and secures the revealed meaning. Yet this also means that the encounter with the being of the artwork has been aborted. Theory and methodology are reifying because they ignore the content-sense of phenomena and recruit them in subjective use. Technology deals with all phenomena, including artworks with their different ontological mode – on the model of equipment being – *Zuhandenheit* – and turns them into

tools. The being of the artwork which lies beyond the subject's methodological "entrapping securing procedure" is concealed.

The Reification of Aesthetics

Method turns the artwork into a "standing-reserve" as it does with all other phenomena. As a reserve, it is used in time of need. It becomes an instrument. Aesthetics, as part of the idealist project and the attempt to establish science, morality, and beauty on subjective grounds, deals with art as a source of mental pleasure. It is established on the subject's ability to realize "the subjective purposiveness in the representation of an object without any end" or, in other words, to take the harmony and meaningfulness of form as the source of mental pleasure without any practical results (Kant 2000, 106). Aesthetics takes art's ability to induce subjective pleasure to be its sole *raison d'être*. Aesthetics is, hence, the product of an instrumental and technological mentality that recruits everything in the service of the subject. For Heidegger, this denies the being of the artwork and deals with it on the model of equipment being. The artwork is used as an instrument to achieve pleasure to the subject. Modern aesthetics, like the whole project of modernity, is inescapably related to the subject and is, hence, based on the forgetfulness of being. Instead of revealing the being of the artwork, it misses the content-sense of the phenomenon and performs the relation between Dasein and art as the former's attempt to derive mental pleasure from the latter rather than witness the revelation of what comes to presence in the artwork. By missing the content-sense, banishing the work being of the artwork and treating it as equipment, aesthetics reifies the work of art.

The fact that Kant has distinguished between art and cheap forms of entertainment -- in that the pleasure induced by art is mental resulting from the harmonious form of the artwork whereas the pleasure in cheap entertainment comes from pleasing the senses -- does not absolve aesthetics from Heidegger's criticism that it stems from an inauthentic subject-centered concept of being. It is still grounded in a concealment of being. Julian Young finds the same concealment of being in modernism which is "nothing more than a fully integrated part of 'the sphere of the techno-scientific world-construction' ... modern (so-called) art is a farewell to everything that art once was" (Young 2001, 120). For him, modernist art, like aesthetics, is part of the same subject-centered vision of the world.

Thus, aesthetics as part of the modernity project, is grounded in the subjective understanding of art which views it as a source of pleasure to the subject. It is based on a concept of the artwork as equipment the goal of which is to induce

mental pleasure. Criticizing the aesthetic vision of the artwork, Heidegger writes:

In contrast, for us today, the beautiful is the relaxing, what is restful and thus intended for enjoyment. Art then belongs in the domain of the pastry chef. Essentially it makes no difference whether the enjoyment of art serves to satisfy the refined taste of connoisseurs and aesthetes or serves for the moral elevation of the mind... For aesthetics, art is the display of the beautiful in the sense of the pleasant, the agreeable. And yet art is the opening up of the Being of beings. We must provide a new content for the word "art" and for what it intends to name, on the basis of a fundamental orientation to Being that has been won back in an originary way. (Heidegger 2000, 140)

As a part of the modernity subject-centered project, aesthetics treats the artwork as performing a service to the subject. It deals with art on the model of equipment being not according to its own being. It confuses the content-sense of artwork with that of equipment and reifies it. Aesthetics offers a reified vision of the artwork since it confuses one aspect of art – its ability to please and edify – with its being. Thus, while the technique of formal indication was no longer used after the investigation of the being of Dasein, the resulting understanding of reification as categorical confusion still directed Heidegger's thought even in his later philosophy and lies at the ground of his vision of aesthetics as a reification of art.

Since aesthetics reifies the artwork, a destructive reading becomes necessary in order to dissolve the hold of the metaphysical concepts on our understanding of art. This destruction will be accompanied by an attempt to restore an authentic understanding of the artwork that corresponds to the being of art. In the history of thought, many concepts are created to capture human experience without reaching down to the original temporal and worldly experience of Dasein; they conceal being rather than reveal it: "This destruction is based upon the original experiences in which the first, and subsequently guiding, determinations of being were gained" (Heidegger 2010, 21-2). Destruction seeks to recover the "original experiences" through showing that the reified concepts cover up and misrepresent unacknowledged experiences: "That destruction has as its aim to recover possibilities of thinking that the tradition has covered over or sedimented. It does not so much aim to think what the other thinker thought once again, but to think the unthought of his thought, to think what he did not or

perhaps could not think” (Wood 2002, 83). If aesthetics blocks access to a more original revelation of the being of the artwork, destruction (*Destruktion*) promises a revelation of that being.

Aesthetics, whether Kantian or Hegelian, is conceptual. The concepts employed by Kant and Hegel seek to capture the presumably eternal unchanging nature of art. Even Hegel’s historicization of the Kantian concepts presupposes Greek art as a focal point in history in which the perfect materialization of form in matter occurs. It, thereby, eternalizes one concept of form and establishes it as the irretrievable standard of perfection against which the imperfection of all other forms can be judged. As part of the absolute spirit in Hegel’s system, aesthetics seeks knowledge that is absolved of contingency and dependence on materiality. While the artworks themselves are historical products, the concepts which Hegel employs to capture the different art forms rise above materiality and become part of absolute knowledge. In its grasp of the nature and function of art, aesthetics seeks to deny time and reach the atemporal nature of art. It, thus, shares the basic feature of Hegelian thought and becomes subject to destruction for the same reason. “What is a being? According to Heidegger, Hegel’s answer is that a being as such, ‘the actual in its genuine and whole reality,’ is the idea or concept. But this, he says, is ‘the power of time,’ i.e. it allows time to be annulled” (Wood 2002, 85).

Aesthetics – part of Hegel’s conceptual system which restores all material phenomena to the subject via capturing them in concepts – is based on an inauthentic concept of being as subjectivity that denies the temporality and finitude of Dasein in its hope for absolute knowledge free of the changeability and contingency of non-conceptual materiality. Due to the idealist desire to capture everything in concepts – which Heidegger reveals as a desire to annul time – aesthetics presupposes the total recuperability of sense through the artwork. Heidegger reveals that the idealist hope to capture the artwork conceptually cannot be materialized due to the impossibility of overcoming finitude and temporality: “We owe the possibility of escaping the idealistic conception of sense to a step taken by Heidegger in our time. He enabled us to perceive the ontological plenitude or the truth that addresses us in art through the twofold movement of revealing, unconcealing, and manifesting, on the one hand, and concealing and sheltering, on the other” (Gadamer 1987, 34). The experience manifested in the artwork cannot be totally revealed. Thinking in light of temporality and finitude forces the thinker to acknowledge his limitations and abandon the idealist hope for absolute knowledge. Due to its conceptual nature – its attempt to capture art in concepts – aesthetics participates in the denial of temporality and finitude which are essential conditions of Dasein.

Having offered a destructive criticism of aesthetics, – both through showing that it depends on a denial of the essential possibilities and conditions of being and that it deals with the work of art on a model that does not suit its content-sense – Heidegger must offer an authentic (*eigentlich*) understanding of the artwork that is proper (*eigen*) to its being, an understanding that moves beyond the reified aesthetic concepts. In his famous article “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger enquires about the “work-character of the work” (Heidegger 1971, 79). He starts by affirming that “[i]f we consider the works in their untouched actuality and do not deceive ourselves, the result is that the works are as naturally present as are things” (Heidegger 1971, 19). Heidegger, then, proceeds to add that “the art work is something else over and above the thingly element” (19). This leads the investigation in two directions: first, identifying what a thing is and, second, identifying the work-character of the work as different from its thingliness.

Heidegger starts by destroying three thing concepts that have congealed over the thing being of the thing. The first concept of thing is that of a “substance with its accidents,” or the “thing as bearer of its characteristics” (23-24). This concept is found inappropriate since it does not belong to the thing but is rather derived from the sentence structure consisting of subject and predicates. The second is that of the thing as “the unity of a manifold of what is given in the senses” (25). Yet this concept which may be ascribed to the idealist reduction of phenomena to subjective perception is also rejected because it does not reach the thing itself. One does not encounter things as groups of sensations. Things are closer to us than mere sensations. “We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds” (26). The third concept which Heidegger rejects is that of the thing as “formed matter” which he finds inappropriate since it is derived from the being of equipment (26). This is the most important concept here because it is the one on which aesthetics is based.

Aesthetics conceives of the artwork as something formed in a harmonious way to induce pleasure. This concept is unfit for the artwork because in equipment matter is formed to be useful, it is hence used and also used up. In the work of art, matter or thing – stone, color, or sound – is flaunted not used up. No one thinks of the qualities of the color red in a traffic light. It simply means to stop. The color is absorbed in the use it is put to. Red in a painting, by contrast, draws attention to itself. The same is true of the language of a poem. It does not simply deliver a message but celebrates itself as language and reveals more than it says. Matter in the artwork is flaunted not exhausted. These concepts of thingness and equipmentality do not fit the being of the work. Heidegger

destroys them by showing that they mistake the content-sense of the work which is not only a thing but something else over and above the thing.

In order to investigate the being of the artwork *per se*, Heidegger chooses a Greek temple. This strategic choice is made because the temple does not represent anything. The idea of art as representation is precisely what Heidegger rejects because it is part of the old metaphysical tradition of ancient ontology that he seeks to destroy. Representation means that the artwork is a thing formed in a certain way to represent something else whether mental or actual. Again the idea of equipment being steps in though in a different form. Representation is problematic for two reasons: first, it diverts the beholder or reader from the artwork to the object represented in it. Art becomes the representation of someone else's subjective experience or an essence that exists in consciousness; this is both humanistic and subjective. Second, if one pays attention to the form of representation, s/he focuses on the aesthetic qualities – i.e. the framed revelation of only that which appeals to the subject's senses – and forgets what is revealed in the artwork. Heidegger does not deny that art bears subjective experiences or that it causes aesthetic pleasure. He objects to focusing attention on these aspects since they occlude the more original being of the work of art *per se*.

Having destroyed the concept of formed matter which fits equipment being – the ground of aesthetics – as well as the idea of representing an essence that exists elsewhere as concepts which enframe art, Heidegger proceeds to investigate the being of the work of art *per se*. In Van Gogh's famous painting of the peasant girl's shoes, Heidegger sees the world of the peasant girl coming into presence. It is not represented. It is evoked by the shoes and the dust that hangs on to them from the daily tread and toil of the peasant girl. Heidegger does not invest in a technical discussion of the post-impressionist aesthetics of Van Gogh for this would entangle his investigation in the frame he seeks to destroy. This would lead him to focus on how the mind perceives the world on the one hand and how it forms the painting on the other. In short, it would get his investigation entangled in modernist aesthetics and the modern concept of experience which would hide the more original being revealed through the painting of the shoes due to the subjective concepts.

The modern enframement of art as the object of "sensuous apprehension" or aesthetic experience kills it: "Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies" (Heidegger 1971, 77). Whether art is considered the object of aesthetic experience or appropriated by a critical methodology, in both cases it is framed,

it is incorporated in a technical frame that regards it as an equipment either to induce aesthetic pleasure through its harmonious form or to prove or disprove a point from a critical perspective. Enframing is the form of reification that corresponds to the modern inauthentic concept of being, “the Being that defines the modern period—Being as framing, framework” (84). Aesthetics is reification in the sense of enframing which denies the more original unconcealment (*aletheia*) of being. It disregards the content-sense of art and performs the relation-sense in two inauthentic ways that do not suit its content-sense, i.e. art as a source of pleasure or proof. Dealing with art must overcome both forms of reification and attend to the more original revelation of what comes to presence in the work of art – i.e. being.

Heidegger proceeds to investigate a Greek temple as an example of art that cannot be regarded representational. If one thinks of a Greek temple as an aesthetically pleasurable object due to its symmetry and harmony, one absorbs it into an aesthetic framework that is geared towards the pleasure of the subject and misses the original call of being unconcealed via the temple. Moreover, he deals with it from a perspective that was not devised when the temple itself was built. Subjective considerations hide the original being unconcealed via the temple. Heidegger starts by peeling off the reified humanist idea of representation as making present of a previously existing essence: “Who could maintain the impossible view that the Idea of Temple is represented in the building?” (Heidegger 1971, 36). Having moved beyond the idea of art as representation and the humanist frame within which it works, Heidegger attends to what presences in the temple. He sees the Greek experience of divinity shining through the temple:

A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. The temple is not a representation of the religious life of ancient Greeks; it brings their mode of being into presence. (Heidegger 1971, 40)

The presence of god in the temple sets him apart from the *Deus absconditus* of other religions. A certain way of how people conceived of the experience of divinity and, most importantly, of their existence, – their mode of being – is revealed via the temple; this is “the basic Greek experience of the Being of beings in the sense of presence” (Heidegger 1971, 23). This revelation happens

when the technical methodologies that frame art are bracketed out. Only then does art start to indicate some of the formal features of the mode of being that prevailed when the artwork was produced. Thus, art freed from reified frames, indicates the formal features of the being of a historical nation.

The work of art has a thingly aspect – pigment in the case of the painting and stone in that of the temple – which brings into presence a world. Yet just as the temple cannot bring the whole Greek world of worshippers into presence, the girl’s shoes cannot bring her whole world into presence either. It also conceals it. In the artwork, there is a “strife” between revelation and concealment (Heidegger 1971, 48). Moreover, the girl does not conceive of the equipmental being of the equipment, the shoes, as she wears them in the being-for-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) mode of everyday existence; she merely uses them. It is only in the artwork that we can understand serviceability as the being of equipment. The work of art brings the being (*Sein*) of beings (*Seienden*) into presence in the strife between its thingly aspect – which Heidegger calls the earth – and the world it reveals: “The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work” (Heidegger 1971, 35). The being of the work of art, thus, consists in the revelation of the Being of beings via setting itself to work of the truth of beings through the strife between the earth and the world or the thingly aspect and the revealed world.

The being of the artwork is revealed only when the technological concepts that recruit it as an aesthetically pleasurable object in the service of the subject or a technologically usable entity to prove or refute are destroyed. Both concepts are based on the serviceable being of equipment. Heidegger does not deny that the artwork can induce aesthetic pleasure or that it can represent the artist’s subjective experiences but he refuses these visions as the essence of the artwork because they occlude a more original revelation of the being of the artwork. They reify it by mistaking its content-sense for that of another mode of being – (*Zuhandenheit*). Thus, Heidegger’s understanding of aesthetics as reifying the artwork is based on his early notion of reification as categorical confusion which he developed in his early philosophy via formal indication.

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