

# Aesthetics, by T. Adorno

## a. People / Organizations:

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## b. Quotes:

- "today, reality itself is in a very serious crisis of meaning" - Author (pg. 73)
  - "So there is not only no longer a binding order, a binding worldview or anything similar which is given so that one could react by searching, with greater or lesser success, to find another such binding worldview to hold onto; rather, the very meaning through which the experience of existence would organize itself has become as problematic as the hope that this disastrous course of the world could one day be changed" - Author (pg. 73-74)
  - "...I believe, this crisis...is an inevitable consequence of the historical-philosophical state of things" - Author (pg. 74)
- "the better someone actually understands art...the less they will really enjoy art" - Author (pg. 117)
- "...there is such a thing as vulgar existentialism!..." - Author (pg. 207)

## c. General Notes:

- Lecture 1 (pg. 1)
  - "**Philosophical aesthetics...has, in fact, fallen a little into disrepute and, compared to the development of a large number of other philosophical disciplines, has received only a desultory treatment during the last thirty years**" (pg. 1)
    - "For we are told there that, on the one hand, philosophical aesthetics is infinitely dependent on prior assumptions, that it depends on the respective overall philosophies underlying it, especially the epistemological ones, and that it is swept up almost without resistance in the changes affecting these tendencies; but, on the other hand, that it never entirely penetrates the work of art in its concretion and, in a sense, always falls short of the work. Philosophical aesthetics, the author states, lacks the secure foundation of other philosophical disciplines. Now, I would argue that the secure foundation of the other philosophical disciplines is a somewhat precarious matter too; if you look at how many things are mere assumptions there - with the exception of the most formal and, I would say, the most meaningless logical theorems - one will surely encounter no less of a vacuum." (pg. 1)
      - *\*notice, Adorno does not deny the attack against aesthetics but equally points his finger in the other direction.*
  - "Although I cannot promise you that I will present anything resembling a fully developed aesthetics here - for the very simple reason that my own aesthetic thoughts are in flux, and by no means in a state today that would permit such a codification, but also for the simple reason that an occasion like this course of two-part lectures would, for reasons of time alone, not allow me to provide you with such a fully explicit theory - I do think that these lectures can at least give you an idea of how a theory of aesthetics, a philosophical aesthetics, is possible, even today, that it is required, and, using some models of aesthetic problems, at least to elaborate on what the nature of such an aesthetics should be. The course is ambitious, to the extent that it seeks to expound the possibility of philosophical aesthetics, which I feel is a very urgent matter today; on the other hand, it is not ambitious at all, to the extent that it does not presume truly to carry out such a philosophical aesthetics." (pg. 2)
  - "Kantian aesthetics, the Kantian definition of beauty - or one of the Kantian definitions of beauty, at least - is, as many of you will know, that of 'disinterested pleasure' - that is to say, some objects or other give pleasure to us as subjects without the involvement of any interest on our part, in the sense of our appetitive faculty or will." (pg. 2)
    - "That means it first of all contains what one could call 'transcendental subjectivism'; the nature of beauty is recognized here from the perspective of the relationship between beauty and us as subjects, while the thought of something inherently beautiful, with a beauty that is independent from our specific forms of perception and only faces them autonomously, is not envisaged at all in this definition of beauty. And it is, furthermore, a definition of beauty in which a formal criterion such as enjoyment - where some forms exist which our need for sensory perception views as satisfying rather than unsatisfying - is presupposed. I think you need only a second to consider whether the things we understandably call beautiful always have this sensually pleasing element - or whether this concept of the sensually pleasing, at least, does not perhaps undergo such incredible refinement and complication that nothing is left of this originally plain idea - and to call to mind that, because of this precondition of Kantian philosophy, so plausible a definition of beauty as the one he provides here ultimately loses much of its plausibility. This means, then, that aesthetics is here indeed swept up in the entire problems of philosophy." (pg. 2-3)
  - "**Hegel defines beauty thus: beauty is 'the sensual appearance of the idea'**" (pg. 3)
    - "I would like to say now, at the very start of this course, that I feel extremely close and indebted to the Hegelian approach in one respect at least: for when the aforementioned definition by Hegel mentions this 'appearance of the idea', or 'of the absolute', it is already referring back and this is once again due to the fundamental difference between the two great philosophies, the Kantian and the Hegelian - to the fact that beauty itself is not merely a formal thing, or merely a subjective thing, but rather something in the matter itself" (pg. 3-4)
      - *\*and, this is what dialectics supposedly aims at. Cf. T. Adorno, An Introduction to Dialectics [https://www.binseelsnotes.com/files/ugd/d7b063\\_e154ae09aa164fbf867f05236b7a3de0.pdf](https://www.binseelsnotes.com/files/ugd/d7b063_e154ae09aa164fbf867f05236b7a3de0.pdf)*
  - "Let me begin by saying that I will attempt to align the deliberations on aesthetics we are carrying out here with this notion of aesthetic objectivity, the notion that not only the nature of beauty but all aesthetic categories - and beauty, I would add, is only one aesthetic category that, in its isolation, is by no means sufficient to open up the entire realm of the aesthetic - must be disclosed in their objectivity, not as mere effects on us as subjects." (pg. 4)
    - "What I can attempt is possibly and at most the following: to show you with an analysis of the categories that something resembling aesthetic objectivity does actually exist, and thus to do something that I increasingly recognize as the essential approach to dialectical philosophy, namely to render fruitful all the experience, the living experience that lies sealed within dialectical philosophy and show it to you. In other words, quite simply put: that objectivity of the aesthetic which I assume will occupy us here can result as objectivity only from an analysis of the facts, problems and structures of aesthetic objects - that is to say, the works of art. There is no other path to this objectivity than to immerse oneself in the works themselves, and I will not hesitate to show you at least with a few models how I think such an objectively oriented aesthetic investigation should actually be carried out; here our central methodological tenet should be - if I may use Hegel's words again - to devote ourselves as purely as possible to the matter without adding too much of ourselves. And the more purely we devote ourselves to the matter, the movement of the concept, I the more emphatically, I would think, our own subjective needs will be honoured." (pg. 4)
  - "...art is indeed largely the area whose substance includes those very impulses, forms of behaviour, feelings or whatever else that otherwise fall victim to the progressive control over nature and to the rationality that progresses together with it. Art, then, cannot simply be subsumed under the concepts of reason or rationality but is, rather, this rationality itself, only in the form of its otherness, in the form - if you will - of a particular resistance against it. But, having conceded this, **I believe that the fact of this element of irrationality in art itself** - or, if I might indulge in a little pathos for a moment, the riddle character of all arts - to which we will return at the end of the lecture, does not automatically rule out a theoretical, reasonable engagement with art." (pg. 9)
    - "reflection on a matter does not immediately turn the matter itself into something reflected." (pg. 10)
- Lecture 2 (pg. 12)

- "every work of art is a strange union of objective and subjective elements..." (pg. 13)
- "it seems to me that the notion of talent is, in a sense, greatly overestimated in art" (pg. 14)
- "I will keep to the concept of aesthetics that is captured to some extent by phrases such as the 'doctrine of beauty' or the 'doctrine of art', though I should say in advance that none of these encapsulates all the things that aesthetics means. For the concept of aesthetics - like any philosophical reflection that views its object as living, not in a dogmatically hardened form - eludes such abstract definition; rather, aesthetics is then the content underlying the definitions that are brought together under this name. This correlation is really what constitutes the name, not some individual verbal definition" that one need only give for a hand to be raised and say that there is also something else that is aesthetics, but which does not fall under this definition. Once you have eliminated that, then all that remains of the conventional definition of the word 'aesthetics' in the most general sense is that, in aesthetics, one deals with the sensually perceptible - as one substantial element, at least - and when I get to my critique of the absolute validity of the reduction of the aesthetic to the sensually perceptible, this critique is only meaningful, of course, if one first concedes that in art, or in the realm of the aesthetic in a more general sense, one is not dealing with knowledge in the literal sense, as used in the sciences, nor is it a practical behaviour, as I ruled out in my brief psychological excursus. For now, this sparse definition of the concept is all we hold in our hands." (pg. 19)
- Lecture 3 (pg. 23)
  - "...aesthetic experience...is actually dialectical in itself - that is, it is not simply the harmonic experience of something sensually enjoyable, as he formulates it in his aesthetics of artistic beauty; rather, it is caught within such a tension, such a coincidence or balance of opposites, namely that between something stronger and something weaker." (pg. 31)
  - "if [the] element of desire is not contained within the idea of beauty in a negated form, then the concept of beauty itself becomes stale and empty" (pg. 32)
- Lecture 4 (pg. 33)
  - "...artistic beauty, in the sense of disinterested pleasure, is connected to natural beauty in the sense of a desire" (pg. 33)
  - "sublimation...constitutes the precondition for the spiritualization of art..." (pg. 35)
    - "This removal of desire, this transfer to the imagination, this form of sublimation itself is already a process of spiritualization; and, at the same time, this process is also what in turn enables the work of art, as an objectivity, conceivably to become the carrier of something spiritual. It must be said, however - and I think this is central to a precise notion of artistic beauty in its complex relationship with nature - that this process of sublimation, like all such psychological processes involving the strongest drives we have...that **there is nothing definite about such a process of sublimation. Its nature is precarious, one could say; at any stage, at any moment, it can be cancelled.**" (pg. 35)
  - "...every work of art constitutes a form of tension field between the sensual and spiritual aspects, which keep working away at each other and never arrive at anything definite" (pg. 35)
    - "...in the end, the phenomenon of sublimation...always has an element of need to it" (pg. 36)
  - "one can say that art, by distancing itself from nature and thus no longer making itself the immediate object of desire but, rather, transferring the happiness of immediacy to the mediation of the imagination, always tries through this very act of immanent constitution to come to the aid of nature, to preserve something of nature, to give back to nature some of what belongs to it and is taken from it by the historical world. I am well aware how significantly these two elements - nature and history, or the human and the artificial - are mediated by each other. Let me add, however, that, even if two categories are mutually mediated, any thought that simply rejected these categories because of their mediatedness would be invalid; for only if they are retained in their determinacy, only - to speak of nature and art - if one holds on to their ideas as such, is one capable of correctly understanding their mediation, the way in which each produces the other. And I therefore consider it right if I now leave aside for a moment the mediatedness of nature, which I told you enough about in our last session, and say that art in particular is no less mediated by nature than vice versa." (pg. 37-38)
  - "**art is a mimetic behavior that is captured, preserved in an age of rationality**" (pg. 41)
  - "while this process of progressive enlightenment saw humans, on the one hand, becoming ever freer and more powerful in relation to nature, they increasingly reduced nature, on the other hand, to what is known in psychological gestalt theory as an 'object of action' - that is to say, the practical object. So, in other words: in this process whereby humans removed themselves from the threat of forceful nature, they always did nature an injustice too. And art, by clinging in a certain sense to the mimetic process, to this archaic, older phenomenon rather than the rational one - and, in this, I would almost say that all art is childlike, infantile, because it truly still has the notion that it can take full control of reality through the image, not by intervening in reality with thought and action - by clinging to this aspect, art always tries at the same time to do justice to that element of suppressed nature. This strikes me as the more comprehensive historico-philosophical explanation for the circumstance we have discussed in general terms today, namely the return of nature in art. That is why nature returns in art, that is why art means the restoration of nature in a certain sense, because it is part of the prehistory of art itself - the idea of art itself, if you will - that that which would otherwise perish because of rationale, law, order, logic, classificatory thought, because of all these categories, finds its voice and receives its due after all." (pg. 41)
- Lecture 5 (pg. 43)
  - "Today I mean to conclude, at least provisionally, the fundamental reflections on the relationship between natural beauty and artistic beauty - or, as we can perhaps say more broadly now, the relationship between nature and art. Let me repeat once more that this relationship should be understood very much as a dialectical relationship, not a simple contrast..." (pg. 43)
    - "I will attempt to present **this dialectic - that is to say, this unity of opposites or this identity in non-identity** - theoretically as vividly as possible. Art, at least in the way we have experienced the concept historically, initially stands in contrast to nature, in so far as it is taken out of the natural world and occupies an area that does not coincide directly with the real world; indeed, we consider it a failing in works of art if this line of demarcation from empirical reality is not drawn." (pg. 43)
  - "it is a feature of every game in existence that it is not initially part of immediate reality..." (pg. 44)
    - "...one can indeed treat the sphere of art as a tension field between these two aspects, play and semblance, which are both separate from empirical reality" (pg. 45)
  - "every work of art is, in a certain sense, 'the world once again', namely the world cleansed of immediate purposes..." (pg. 46)
  - "...the semblance also has what is initially an entirely immediate relationship with the truth that, as Hegel splendidly puts it, keeps on unfolding; for Hegel said that art is neither a pleasant nor a useful plaything but, rather, itself an unfolding of the truth, and I think you would do well to measure what I am putting forward to characterize the aesthetic against this statement by Hegel, which, in a certain sense, I have taken as my canon." (pg. 47)
  - "So now I have already touched on the opposite of what I demonstrated to you first of all, namely that art is separated from nature as 'the world once again' and stands in opposition to it. For it is precisely by opposing the entire workings of the empirical world - and this applies in an additional sense to the one in which I spoke to you just now of the relationship between art's semblance and the claim to magical truth - that it acts in the interest of nature in a certain sense. This should be understood in the sense that the social process as a whole - and allow me to remind you of some thoughts from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that you will find expounded particularly in the first part about the concept of enlightenment, and which I will therefore restrict myself to hinting at - takes place primarily under the banner of the progressive rational control of nature. The old mimetic behaviours are replaced by a progressive alienation from nature; and, because the knowledge of like by like - to use the classical metaphor - is increasingly replaced by the motif of knowing like by unlike, **the control of nature becomes possible to an ever higher degree. And it is precisely this**

- process that, in a very broad sense, one calls the process of enlightenment - or, if you prefer, the process of rationalization. Every conceivable thing falls victim to this process - starting from the actually and genuinely suppressed natural world mangled by humans, and extending to the infinite abilities of humans themselves, such as all the abilities that were once mimetic abilities and which we perceive in ourselves only in a scattered, fragmented state. One could say that art is an attempt to do justice to all that falls victim to this ongoing concept of control over nature, to give nature its due, albeit for now only a symbolic portion - namely the portion of memory, the memory of the suppressed, of that which becomes a victim, and also the memory of all those internal human powers which are destroyed by this process of progressive human rationalization" (pg. 47-48)**
- **"this relationship between nature and art which I just outlined to you is not a static thing; there is not once and for all the sphere of nature on the one side and the sphere of art on the other. Rather, these two aspects are constantly in a state of mutual tension - and probably will be for as long as there is such a thing as art - and the relationship between these two aspects keeps changing at every stage of art history." (pg. 49)**
    - "art's attempt to object to the ever-advancing control of nature itself involves an element of that control, and as a very substantial, a truly central aspect" (pg. 50)
  - "So what I mean is that a work of art approaches the idea of giving a voice to suppressed nature only once it manages to free itself from the heteronomy of nature - that is, once it is no longer dependent on some materials that stand outside the artistic process as something unilluminated, blind and unpenetrated, and which exercise a power over humans that they perceive as heteronomous, as foreign, as other. In other words, then - and I would say that this is really the true dialectical key to the relationship between nature and art: the aspect that nature is salvaged in art is inseparable from the fact that art is increasingly able to control nature, yet, as long as it is blind and powerless in the face of whatever materials, it lacks the power to make nature as a whole speak within itself; then it falls victim to something blind and unilluminated, to a kind of mythology. And I would say that the tension between these two aspects, the idea that the progressive control of nature can at once help it to achieve freedom, this is the tension that truly distinguishes the artistic process and thus defines the meaning of the work of art in the first place." (pg. 51)
  - Lecture 6 (pg. 54)
    - "in the current situation, the task of art as such is almost entirely to express what has been damaged, or...to express the powerless and oppressed parts of humans..." (pg. 54)
      - "...there is really no art that does not have, as a substantial element, the aspect of giving a voice to what has been muted or suppressed..." (pg. 54)
    - "...the opposition between the aspect of nature and the aspect of art, or the relationship between nature and art as both opposed and identical - this relationship should not be understood as a static one; it is not fixed and immutable once and for all, as if some form of treaty long ago had removed art from nature, and it could now settle down comfortably in its little garden until the end of time." (pg. 56)
    - "...when I speak of experiences, I always mean the compulsion exerted by the matter itself, not the psychological experiences of the individuals..." (pg. 61)
  - Lecture 7 (pg. 65)
    - "In the last session, we attempted to address the problem of the relationship between nature and art - or, rather, the return of the natural aspect in art and the specific engagement with this aspect - by way of a central problem in contemporary art, namely the relationship between the aspect one can call expression and that of construction. In general terms, we had described the aspect of expression as a returning aspect of nature and that of construction as the artificial, as what one does to nature. I think that, after everything we have already discussed here, I do not really need to point out to you, and do so only out of conscientiousness, that, when I say expression is an aspect of nature in art, I do not mean that it is a piece of static, untransformed nature that remains as it is. Rather, of course, this aspect in art is itself also subject to a historical process; indeed, one can virtually retrace - and that is what I was primarily doing in the last session - how, in modern art, this expressive aspect, this aspect of nature, this aspect of the not-quite-grasped, and also of the mimetic, hence the direct announcement of a feeling, went through an extraordinarily long and difficult process before it became capable of manifesting itself at all. In a certain sense, one can say that the emancipation of this aspect is itself a very late, artificial product, and that the purity of expression in general stands only at the end of a historical process in art, not its beginning; and this obviously means that, compared to a pure natural material of expression, this expressive aspect also went through an extraordinary internal transformation - transformation in the sense of differentiation. What distinguishes this natural aspect from original nature, then, is that, by finding its way into art, a differentiation takes place between feelings of the most varied kinds and between the finest shadings. Indeed, it seems as if the restoration of what can be interpreted as the voice of nature is essentially tied to this differentiation process; this means that, only when art is capable of the utmost specificity, of that which has not yet been mangled through classificatory impositions and generalization, when it truly attains specific difference - and that is only a very late result - does it actually become capable of being the voice of nature. And it means that the pure sound or the pure colour in art creates itself as a carrier of expression only when it is simultaneously defined, in a sense that will not be pursued at all, as a here and now, as something that is here and is unique. And perhaps that also gives you a sense of that idea of nature - the nature which, in the dialectic of art, is dominated and simultaneously restores itself - which differs entirely from the superficial concept of nature lyricism, for example, from nature painting, and from the superficial notions of what is termed 'natural' art. For, in reality, these traditional ideas of the natural in art presuppose certain conventions, certain generalities, as valid. Usually they refer - just think of all the bad nature novels - to the concept of nature in the abstract, instead of yielding to that impulse which I have tried to show you is in keeping with the true ideal of expression. Hence one could practically say that the concept of nature in art, as I developed it for you in the previous session, is the precise opposite of the notion of an art deemed 'close to nature', as cherished by the cultivated philistine and displayed time and again by the enemies of modern art - although, on a side note, I think their basic reasoning error is that they view some states, whether forms of artistic expression or some prevailing conventions in art, as if they were themselves [*\*Greek word*], as if they were naturally there, instead of recognizing their own historical character." (pg. 65-66)
      - "On the other hand, however, it must be said that the attempt at a pure construction - the attempt to breathe meaning into the material purely by surrendering to it completely unreservedly - seems itself doomed to fail, primarily because this material one is dealing with is not like some [natural material]. That is indeed the error made by many material fetishists among my young artistic friends, who think this material is itself a natural material, and that one need only make it speak, as it were, for nature itself to speak purely. This marks the limit of construction, for construction, as I told you, is the attempt to surrender completely to the material by, if you will, crossing out the subject. But because, not being nature, it does not produce the material in a pure state of its own accord, because this material is also historical, such attempts to yield unreservedly to the material themselves display an element of the arbitrary, the random. They treat as a pure natural force something which is only a human will concealed from itself. In this way, **it is the extreme anti-subjectivism of today's constructivist art that finds itself especially caught up in a form of subjectivism**. This means that the self-unaware subject overlooks its own presence in the material - as if it were the actual force that posits meaning. The material itself is never pure and entirely material, nor does it guarantee any meaning on its own. So this is how the problem of randomness has entered art today - a randomness that concerns not only the individual aspects within the works of art but also the construction, the formal principles themselves, in which, the more rigorously they are executed, the more there is also a degree to which they could equally well be different. And that is why the problem of the aleatoric, and thus in a sense a purely scientific category - if you will: the idea of statistics - has now infiltrated art; and that is the present state of nature in this dialectic of art and nature." (pg. 74)
    - "Do not forget that - and this is explained at length in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - part of the signature of our entire civilization from a very early stage has been to place a sort of taboo on stirrings of expression; that, compared to the claims of the rationality which controls nature, every mimetic

- feeling that [deviates] to an extent from the straight path of the rational..." (pg. 69)
- Lecture 8 (pg. 75)
    - "...it is the task of art to give a voice to mutilated nature, meaning nature in the respective form in which it exists through its historical mediations at a particular stage in history, not that it should dwell on the chimera of such a pure form of nature." (pg. 77)
    - "what I mean is not that one can give a voice directly to nature in its manifestations, however they may be transformed, but rather that only by casting a veil of silence over what lies beneath, which art can never lose, after all, and showing nothing but the form of alienation itself, by excluding it, by refraining from taking the side of this nature in some illusory or deceptive manner, only by confronting its very deformation, if I can formulate it very starkly - only thus can one express at all what might, at best, be meant by the category of nature today. If you recall the concept from philosophy of 'determinate negation', meaning that the abstract form of truth is not given to us, not 'verum index sui et falsi', but rather 'falsum index sui et veri' - that is, by measuring and confronting every phenomenon with what it claims to be, we can thus arrive at its untruth and, by negation, if we want, also at its truth. If you hold on to this idea and view it as constitutive for art too - and here, I believe, art and philosophy truly form a radical unity - then I think you will understand that it is precisely through the expression of complete alienation - the fact that every corner of pure nature is excluded from art, that art does not pretend nature is still present in it - that, precisely because of this, the aspect of nature which, as I said, consists in suffering and negativity is captured and can only be expressed at all in this manner." (pg. 78)
    - "**The task of art is, in fact, to defamiliarize the familiar**, which allows it to be seen from a perspective that is the perspective of its essence, no longer the mere appearance. Through this aspect of defamiliarization itself, however, something happens that communicates, if you will, with the concept of nature in an extraordinarily profound sense. For this dismantles the conventional, it dismantles everything that mediates between the matter itself and consciousness. So, through the fact that the object is defamiliarized, through the fact that the artistic formulation does justice radically to the actually existing alienation between the subject and the object, the object is, in a certain very delicate sense, changed back into nature; not into an ahistorical nature that faces us once and for all - you know I ruled out such a notion very thoroughly - but rather changed back into that which is, one could say, freed of its ideological ingredient. [And that actually comes] very close to what I meant when I said that mutilated nature - namely, what the world has largely done to us and to nature - is meant to be given a voice in this manner in the work of art. So one could genuinely say that, on the dialectical level of estrangement we inhabit, the consistent technique of aesthetic defamiliarization somehow restores the view of nature." (pg. 78-79)
      - "This means there is not nature over here and alienation or defamiliarization over there; rather, the categories of nature and alienation are themselves mutually mediated, they necessarily refer to each other and necessarily depend on each other in the situation of contemporary art." (pg. 79)
  - Lecture 9 (pg. 86)
    - "...what the Platonic theory of beauty essentially states is that the power of beauty comes from the fact that we recognize the Form - or whatever it is - in the objects or people we have reason to call beautiful. It is this splendid motif of pain and longing, which seizes people in the face of beauty, that was formulated for the first time and in the most outstanding fashion in this dialogue. This interpretation is then followed by a third part, which also has a very typical Platonic form that I would like to place in the category of return. This means that now the soul, saturated with the experiences gathered by philosophy after turning towards its highest objects, namely the Forms, returns to the earth and now brings the sublime - to use one of Kierkegaard's terms - into the pedestrian. This Platonic motif, incidentally, went on to play a tremendous part in German classicism too..." (pg. 88)
    - "Anyone who approaches a work of art directly with the categories of everyday life, with the thoughts, feelings and impulses one has at some moment without, I would almost say, carrying out a kind of reduction, without entering this circle and leaving their jacket outside, as is rightly expected of us at the theatre, will thus deny themselves the experience of art as such from the outset. What I mean to say to you is the following, which is perhaps quite important for Plato and the theory of forms in general: the Form, or rather the Idea, in the very emphatic philosophical sense in which Plato uses it - and which actually still clings to it if we are speaking truly philosophically and not using the term in a completely debased fashion - is not a concept that can be defined simply as the entirety of however many objects encompassed by it that share one attribute; rather, it draws its life from within, it is the life of the matter itself. And the things which are named in order to concretize this concept, to fulfil it, are not the defining qualities that distinguish it; rather, they are all elements of this movement that takes place inside it, which I have already mentioned and which we will hear much more about, which forms its true substance." (pg. 93)
    - "In a sense - at **that moment of sublimation, in its distancing from the realm of the immediacy of purposes** - the potential for collapse is inherent in the idea of beauty itself: that the aesthetic distance is not maintained, and that the aesthetic subject either falls back into the sphere of the merely existent, the sphere of self-preservation, of immediate desire, or that it indeed loses itself in that madness of which Plato very rightly says that it is an integral aspect of the experience of beauty as such." (pg. 95)
  - Lecture 10 (pg. 96)
    - "herein lies **the twofold nature of art**: in so far as it is critical and does not betray the absolute, as it were, it opposes reality; yet at the same time, by refraining from realizing that absolute quality, it becomes embroiled with - not to say degraded by - reality, and then in turn becomes part of the merely existent, of mere reality. And that, if you will, is really the moral question that can be put to art and the justification for art, especially the justification for art today." (pg. 102)
    - "The difficulty and the real problem of a genuine philosophical theory of beauty, which is simply the central issue of aesthetics, can perhaps be formulated thus: one the one hand, it is impossible to construct a concept of beauty in such a way that the tension between these aspects - the sensual and the spiritual - is simply done away with by bringing the two together in an unbroken unity, as has repeatedly been attempted with the concept of the symbol. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to polarize the concept or the idea of beauty in such a way that you say: 'the beautiful consists of a sensual and a spiritual component, where the sensual is the mere bearer of the spiritual'. **The essence of the definition of beauty seems to lie rather in the fact that, while these two aspects exist as distinct, and hence in a state of tension towards each other, each is mediated by the other.** That is to say, there is nothing spiritual in a work of art that is not also sensual, and nothing sensual that is not also spiritual, though without the two ever simply subsuming each other. And understanding a work of art in these terms really means realizing the constellation or dialectic that obtains between these aspects, understanding how the sensual is the spiritual and the spiritual sensual, always keeping the two apart yet conceiving of them together." (pg. 103)
      - "anyone for whom a work of art is nothing but the intricate written form of something spiritual, anyone who simply reduces works of art to their meanings without recognizing that there is no meaning, no spiritual aspect in a work that is not mediated by the sensual, and which does not become the spiritual thing that it is only through its sensual manifestation - they indeed fall prey to what one could call the intellectualization of art in the negative sense. That is, they confuse the so-called intentions, the meanings of the works, with what one can call aesthetic substance, and which constitutes itself only in this state of tension. And expressing this tension in its various stages and making it ever more concrete - this alone could be the task of a developed philosophical aesthetics." (pg. 104)
  - Lecture 11 (pg. 106)
    - "Generally speaking, the concept of beauty we resist in art is indeed a subjectivist concept. This means it is synonymous with the sensually pleasing - be it the mere harmony of some formal properties that are meant to accommodate some primal need for harmony in us or the sensually pleasing in the sense of the attractive, the enticing, the enjoyable, or an image removed from erotic beauty in the widest sense. What I aim to undertake here, and what I shall now begin, is another attempt at **immanent critique**. This means I will not attempt...to show you positively in what sense the true

- substance and nature of works of art come only from their own objective constitution; rather, I will take the opposite approach and seek to show you how far the aspect of subjective enjoyment falls short of what, in our genuine aesthetic experience, we encounter as beautiful. In other words, I intend to take aesthetic subjectivism at its word." (pg. 110)
- Lecture 12 (pg. 116)
    - "I would like to draw on the definition we formulated at the start and to which we keep being led back: that of the work of art as a special area, as a removed, secularly magical domain that may be connected to empirical reality through its elements and does, after all, refer to them in a highly mediated way, either critically or utopically, but, in so far as it is something aesthetic, in so far as we experience it as aesthetic, is not directly experienced as a piece of physical reality. It seems to me that the artistic experience we are examining at the moment essentially consists in being in this special area - and, if you recall, the definitions of this area should not be considered static, for the removal or positing of the aesthetic area itself rather takes place in a kind of endless process, starting anew at every moment. So I would say that **aesthetic experience essentially consists in taking part in this co-enactment, in joining the process of the work of art by being inside it, by - to put it very simply - living in it.**" (pg. 117)
      - "the better someone actually understands art...the less they will really enjoy art" (pg. 117)
    - "Works of art are not divine manifestations but the work of humans, and this gives them both their limits and their connection to human matters. What I wish to say, however, is that the happiness emanating from works of art, or I suppose even the enjoyment they provide, is not directly one with the aesthetic experience of them; this aesthetic experience itself does not directly provide enjoyment in its individual aspects, as imagined by the amateur and the bourgeois, who turn the work into a plate of pork rib and sauerkraut. Rather, the work of art offers happiness because it succeeds in drawing us into it in the way I have tried to show you; that it forces us to accompany it on the paths it traces within itself; and that, at the same time, it thus alienates us from the alienated world in which we live, and through this very alienation of the alienated in fact restores immediacy or undamaged life. If there is such a thing as happiness coming from the aesthetic, or aesthetic enjoyment, then **this enjoyment therefore lies in that to which the work succeeds in subjecting us by absorbing it, by the fact that we enter it and follow it.**" (pg. 120)
      - *\*I have trouble seeing how this isn't parallel to Heidegger's 'submission' as it pertains to Being - itself reified.*
      - "**For it is precisely the work's ability to absorb the viewer or the listener so strongly, to draw them into itself so far and, as I put it, to alienate them from the alienated world, which strikes me as the idea of the work of art** - this itself depends on the power and greatness of the work, on its autonomy, the extent to which it can embody within itself its own formal law down to the smallest details. In this sense, one could say - if I may return to the categories I laid out for you in the last session - that happiness through the work of art concerns the work as a whole, whose power ultimately decides how far it takes us out of mere existence, even if only temporarily, or whether it does not. To that extent, the description of being elevated through the work of art which is still found in earlier aesthetics, but scarcely exists today, is certainly as superior to the description of so-called enjoyment as it is to the question of what the work has to give us." (pg. 120-121)
      - "to remain on the subject of aesthetic experience, I would argue that, even with what I have said to you - that the so-called liberating or elevating quality one attributes to art lies in the totality of the work and in its power to remove us from the immediacy of a bad and questionable existence - that even that does not truly describe the whole but is still something abstract. I think some of you will already have been bothered by this abstractness, and rightly so..." (pg. 122)
    - "So if I may refer to my own experience once again, I have the impression that, in actual artistic experience, where it is genuine and the relationship with the work of art is intensified to the utmost degree - one could almost say, where one becomes entirely one with the life of the work in the pulse, the rhythm of one's own life, where one is taken up in it - that there are then moments of breakthrough. **What I mean by breakthrough is that there are moments** - they could be chance moments, but it could also be the highest and most intense moments of a work of art - **in which that feeling of being lifted out, that feeling, if you will, of transcending mere existence, is intensely concentrated and actualizes itself, and in which it seems to us as if the absolutely mediated, namely that idea of being freed, is something immediate after all, where we think we can directly touch it. These moments are probably the highest and the most decisive which artistic experience can achieve...**" (pg. 122-123)
      - "...these moments are far less ones of enjoyment than of being overwhelmed, of forgetting oneself, really the annihilation of the subject..." (pg. 123)
        - "**It is then as if, in that moment - one could call them moments of weeping - the subject were collapsing, inwardly shaken. [They are] really moments in which the subject annihilates itself and experiences happiness at this annihilation** - and not happiness at being granted something as a subject. These moments are not enjoyment; the happiness lies in the fact that one has them." (pg. 123)
          - ◆ "the experience of art is not one that benefits the subject in the usual sense but, rather, one that leads away from the subject" (pg. 123)
    - "the genuine relationship with works of art is not really one of understanding, because art categorically, by its very nature and constitution, if I may put it thus, initially contains an element of incomprehensibility; because art itself, as a piece of secularized magic, eludes any attempt to make it like ourselves and like the subject, which is what the concept of understanding essentially demands. If the definition I tried to give you earlier applies, namely that artistic experience is a co-enactment or being-inside, then this type of behaviour towards the work of art would indeed do away with the distance, the thing-ness, that is inherent in the concept of understanding." (pg. 124)
      - "So one could almost say for now: **the less one 'understands' art, meaning the less one reduces it to some abstract, underlying general concepts which it supposedly conveys, and the more one instead surrenders to its happening, the better one will understand it, grasp its context of meaning, which means following the work of art without guessing what it means.**" (pg. 124)
        - *\*hypocritical (literally) asshole. Substitute 'Being' for the word 'art' and you're back at Heidegger.*
    - "When Hegel once responded to the accusations that his philosophy was so hard to understand, and that people often did not know what they were supposed to think of when reading about his concepts, by saying that one should not think of anything but the concept itself, he was describing an experience that specifically corresponds to the relationship with art. And, indeed, the experiences with which Hegel's philosophy is saturated have a great deal in common with the type of aesthetic experience I am seeking to define - though this should not lead one to aestheticize his philosophy, of course. Understanding a work of art does not mean understanding what is behind it, as it were, what the work means, but rather understanding the work of art as it is: understanding the logic that leads it from one chord to the next, from one colour to the next, from one line to the next. And only when this understanding of the matter itself is fully achieved, albeit without yet touching on the work's riddle character, only then does one come close to the work. On the other hand, the works of art - and this will perhaps show you in closing how essential a part of the work is that aspect of the riddle, the enigmatic element, which I have tried to describe to you - are completely helpless and exposed at the moment when someone who knows nothing about the artistic sphere, the philistine, asks: 'So, what is that, what does it say, what is it all about?' Attempting to convey to a person who is radically amusical, who suffers from amusia in the clinical sense, what a work of art is for, what it means, what it is - aside from what the work says immediately and of its own accord - is a completely hopeless undertaking. And in reality, as soon as one breaks free of its spell and faces it as one faces a piece of reality, all art has an element of perplexity and helplessness that spreads to those who regard it. But let me say one more thing: the experience of art must not stop at this level of experience but must, rather, insist, in a higher and far more mediated sense, on comprehending the work as something incomprehensible - if I may formulate it so paradoxically." (pg. 124-125)
  - Lecture 13 (pg. 126)
    - "**one is within a work, and participates in its enactment, but does not enter it from without and unlock it**, as talk of understanding would suggest, for

this quality of being in the work of art is closer to the way one lives in a language, lives immediately without reflecting on its so-called meaning, and reflection on the meaning of a work of art really constitutes a higher level than primary aesthetic experience." (pg. 126)

□ *\*yet, in Negative Dialectics, Adorno urges us to reflect.*

Cf. ND, pg. 141 [https://www.binseelsnotes.com/files/uq/d7b063\\_746c37c8ecd24147957477809ef60914.pdf](https://www.binseelsnotes.com/files/uq/d7b063_746c37c8ecd24147957477809ef60914.pdf)

- "only by co-enacting the different aspects of the work to which you surrender, whose discipline you share, if I may put it like this, by floating along with it while also reflecting on its aspects, contrasting them with one another, recalling past ones and awaiting the coming ones - only then can you arrive at a true understanding of the construct you have before your eyes or in your ears. A reflective behaviour towards the work of art, I would say, is first of all nothing foreign to the work that comes from without, a philosophical behaviour in the true sense. It is not the philosophy of art that first causes such reflection but, rather, the co-enactment of the work of art itself. This means that this act of being in the work of art, of co-enacting it, already demands that you go beyond its mere immediacy and become aware of those aspects of the work that are not immediately evident to you as sensual elements. And there you can already see what I keep trying to convey to you from the various perspectives: that the conventional notion of the work of art as something merely sensory is not quite sufficient, but that you can only experience those works fully - to put it in the most emphatic terms - not by simply observing, but always by thinking at the same time. That is because this element of what is thought, the mediated element, is necessarily contained in the specific substance of the work of art - which should be all the less amazing and shocking after what I have already attempted to elaborate to you, as we have already developed, I hope, a concept of **the work of art as something substantially spiritual.**" (pg. 126-127)
- "And I consider it a substantial aspect of aesthetic quality as such that it possesses this aspect of congestion, of self-reflection, but that, on the other hand, it does not stop at this self-reflection, for this reflection in turn translates into the pure logic of the matter, the pure enactment of the work. But once such a concept of reflection is brought into play - and I think I am touching on something that by no means applies only to art but is much more far-reaching and applies to all rationality - then this process of reflection can no longer be stopped, one cannot somehow force it to a halt; rather, such a reflection process necessarily leads further. So if you enact this process in the work of art itself, these reflections in the matter itself of which I have provided a few examples, a few models - or for whose absence I have given you various such models - then your experience will necessarily turn into a reflection on the work of art itself and its meaning. So I would like to continue what I said in the last session by telling you that the primary experience is not that of the so-called meaning, of course; **it is not an understanding experience in the usual sense but rather a surrendering.** But this surrendering, being a blind act, also holds an aspect of negativity: precisely that aspect of the stupid, the minstrel-like, which then necessarily pushes beyond itself. And what lies at the end of this process is an understanding, ultimately a comprehension of the meaning of all aspects, a comprehension whose canon is the experience of the necessity underlying the relationship between all aspects of the work of art. So once this reflection on the work of art is brought into play, it returns to the work. And when it returns into the work, having first left it and viewed it from without, as it were, it then becomes constitutive of true artistic experience, which ultimately presents itself as something mediated and spiritual after all. I think that there is some use for this line of thought, because it points you to the fact that certain forms, such as that of translation, but most of all commentary and critique, are not parasitic forms that proliferate like weeds growing on art and exploit the primary elements, namely the works, but that these forms too are actually constitutive of art's essence. This means that only through commentary and critique, only through the reflection brought into play by the work of art through its own logic, is a full experience of the work possible, and only through these aspects does the work of art return to itself, or only through them can you really understand the work of art. Accordingly, you must imagine understanding the work of art as a process that is demanded by the work itself but does not take place in the sense that one faces it and suddenly, as if by a wave of a magic wand, this understanding is realized. But this may also show you that art, which, as the antithesis of mere existence, has a deep affinity with philosophy anyway - through this special structure of which I attempted at least to give you an intimation - now proceeds towards philosophy, and demands of its own accord something like philosophy." (pg. 128-129)
- Lecture 14 (pg. 135)
  - "What counts in the work of art, however, is only that which is embodied in the matter itself. And spirit exists in the work as spiritual content, as something binding, only in so far as it manifests itself objectively, without any consideration for its producer, through the work of art itself - one could say, in so far as it is realized by the work." (pg. 135)
  - "if there is any sense in not surrendering to art as a mere experience but, rather, engaging in philosophical reflections about art, then I think this is precisely what justifies it: that the spiritual content of the work of art itself, first of all the definition of what such a spiritual content even is, does not simply present itself directly but requires strenuous consideration. I already outlined this for you in the previous session by telling you that interpretation and critique, and thus philosophy itself, constitute a necessary element in the objective unfolding of works of art..." (pg. 138)
    - "I think you can come closest to understanding the concept of the work of art's content if you try to grasp it, to get hold of it as the very aspect that results from the specific configuration of the work. So what I am saying - and I will try once again to convey this to you as clearly as possible - is that **the spiritual content of a work of art is not its mere appearance, not its sensual side, nor is it something expressed as intention through this sensual side, as signs generally convey a meaning to us in languages, in significant languages. Rather, the spiritual content of the work of art is the relationship between its sensual aspects in such a way that, through their connections, their relationship with one another, the material aspects or the sensual aspects of the work go beyond themselves.** If one loves to speak in such abstract terms, one could also say that **the spiritual content of the work of art is essentially the transcendence of all its interrelated sensual aspects.** When one speaks of the structure of a work, after all, one does not really mean a description of the typical sensual forms being used - let us say a merely geometric underlying structure, or an impressionistic structure, or the like. Rather, what aestheticians were seeking to determine in the work of art with the term 'structural context', with reason and also from different perspectives, was really always defined as a context of meaning. In other words, when several different aspects within a work of art enter a relationship with one another that unites them and creates a synthesis, but also distinguishes between them and does not hide their contrasts - indeed, that might even place them expressly in opposition to one another - then the work of art is experienced directly as something meaningful. And the concept of the spiritual that is at issue here can genuinely - and concretely, I would almost say - be defined. For concerning this structural aspect, the reason why we can speak of something spiritual that goes beyond the merely sensual is that it cannot be pinpointed in any isolated sensual element, because it is not a matter of some sensual aspect of the work on its own, but because it is really a relational concept, something which only becomes tangible through the relationship between the different sensual aspects - or, as I love to say in the Hegelian language of philosophy, because it is something mediated. I think now you can see fairly precisely what is meant here: on the one hand, something that is not contained in the work of art as something separate and independent from the sensual form of the work itself, like the nut in its shell; but, on the other hand, also something that is not limited to the sensual appearance but [is] rather that aspect which goes beyond the sensual appearance through the pull of that same sensual appearance. That is, it is the embodiment of the phenomena in the work of art, which is more than merely these phenomena, and hence not pure immediacy" (pg. 139-140)
  - "...the question of the unity of the work of art must really be understood as a dynamic question, as a becoming, and not as a static relationship or form of harmony" (pg. 141)
    - "And if I polemicized earlier against the attempt by Heidegger and the Heideggerian school to reduce the work of art to the concept of being, I think I can give you the precise reason for that polemic: that the work of art necessarily consists of antagonistic aspects, not of ones that exist in

a form of prearranged unity. Because the unity of the work is a self-producing one, the work itself - even if it is there, however internally static it seems - **is in reality a force field and a process**. And I would say it is one of the most profound matters in aesthetics that the work remains true to its ideal the more it transforms this process, this character of a tension field, into the appearance of being. When the work of art emerges directly as a mere becoming, we will say that it is not objectified, it has not reached the sphere of something which is-in-itself in the appearance, which has certainly belonged to the concept of art up to a specific threshold. If this constitutive-dynamic aspect is missing, however, then this unity itself is mere semblance and not binding at all but, rather, external to the work. Here, as so often in aesthetics, we see once again the return of a definition which dialectic essentially gained for logic, just as dialectical logic could generally, in a certain sense, be represented in the medium of artistic experience: the spiritual content of a work of art would thus, in so far as this interplay of forces reaches a sort of balance in it - we shall return to this - be the result of the antagonistic forces driving the process that takes place within it. At the same time, however, it is always this process whose totality comes together to form the work of art. And the thing that strikes us time and again as the life of the work, which we experience as something living - and works of art are not creatures, after all, and the concept of life has only a refracted, mediated meaning in this context - is really nothing but the fact that, even in its congealed, objectified state, it utters the process contained within it; but that in a sense, by uttering it and rounding it off, by making it take its form, it in turn transcends it. To experience or co-enact a work would then mean no more or less than co-enacting in the work all these aspects of the force field which the work constitutes, which it simultaneously is and exceeds. In that sense, one can say that aesthetic experience itself is really a spiritual experience, even though this spiritual experience must fall short of the work's essence if it is not the most intense and precise experience of its sensual attributes." (pg. 141)

- Lecture 15 (pg. 145)
  - "if you take anything away for your own relationship with art and understanding of art from the suggestions I am making here, then I would hope it is this; that you co-enact this peculiar movement of the idea but do not ascribe to any individual observations I have made the authority of a fixed standard; it does not exist in this form, as every work of art has such a measure only within itself and in its own movement." (pg. 147)
  - "I did not say that society's possibilities for controlling nature do away with alienation. On the contrary, it would be more accurate to say that **control over nature, along with the associated forms of domination in society, has actually increased the alienation of humans from one another and from nature**, and that art, at every level, has the task of revoking this process." (pg. 147)
- Lecture 16 (pg. 155)
  - "The conclusion to be drawn from this is probably that one must cling to the idea of beauty, but not as an ontological category, not as a particular form of being that emerges specifically in the work of art and comes into itself, but rather only as something dynamic, something in a state of becoming and always internally in motion" (pg. 162)
    - "all I mean to say is that the work of art...is always an internally contradictory thing" (pg. 162)
- Lecture 17 (pg. 165)
  - See text
- Lecture 18 (pg. 175)
  - See text
- Lecture 19 (pg. 185)
  - "...one should approach the work of art in a certain very delicate rational manner" (pg. 185)
    - "That is, one concentrates on the work in all its aspects, in everything that it brings with it, but that this concentration is not merely a passive concentration, not the kind where one just sits there in a 'relaxed' manner, as they say in America, lets things take their course and waits to see what nice things the work will offer; rather, one takes on that same responsibility as a listener - or a viewer or a spectator - which, as I once told you, the work itself bears at every moment, and faces it with such concentration that one is capable of carrying out the same synthesis, the same unification, of diverging yet connected aspects of the work that takes place in the work itself. Because **this synthesis, if I may remind you, is a spiritual synthesis**. For the aspects as such always remain separate in the work of art, and you can only perceive the work as a spiritual unity, as a context of meaning, as a structure, to the extent that you bring synthesizing power of your own to the work - that is, if I may exaggerate somewhat, in so far as you are prepared to renew in yourself, as an observer, that process which is present in the work in a solidified form." (pg. 185-186)
  - "And this effort involved in making the non-present present, namely remembering or anticipating, is precisely the effort that we normally describe as intellectual effort. Art, the true experience of art, involves all the synthetic functions that we usually ascribe to thought, and which should not be assigned simply to intuition; except that here we are dealing with a kind of thought whose structure has barely been analysed at all, namely a conceptless thought, a conceptless synthesis - and, beyond that, a synthesis without judgement, a synthesis that does not conclude by saying, 'This is so', but rather results in something being placed there with a gesture of 'This is so', without any predication from outside the work of art that this is so. In terms of its structural elements, however, it essentially contains all the elements of logical synthesis, except without any claim that something general encompasses something particular beneath it, and that this constitutes a judgement on anything existent. By imposing such a synthesis or enactment on the observer, art is more than just a passively intuitive thing. It is precisely that merely passive intuition, the ideal of art imposed on us by almost all aesthetics, is - it I may be so blunt - essentially anti-artistic; the upshot of it is that we simply surrender to the individual stimuli conveyed to us by works of art." (pg. 189)
    - "It is as if all the formal components of thought - synthesis, differentiation, recollection, recognition, expectation, creation of proportions - as if all of that were returning in the experience and constitution of the work itself, but with a peculiar modification that cuts off what, in the language of logic, is termed an objectifying act. It is as if the logical categories were all at work, but in a way that is not objectifying and thus does not enable a form of concrete objectivity, an intra-worldly objectivity, of which abstraction forms a central part, as we know; rather, what constitutes itself is an object of a completely different nature; I hope that I will be able at some point to define very precisely what that nature is. In fact, that is really what I consider **the topic of a true aesthetics: to show what kind of logic works of art possess in comparison to the logic and cognition of the concrete world...**" (pg. 190-191)
- Lecture 20 (pg. 195)
  - "If I may give you some pedagogical advice, as it were, then it is this: to check your own reactions to art, as far as possible, to see whether they are under the spell of the machinery to a certain extent, and whether, even for you, the experience that something is up to date in this particular sense - that it is filtered through the prevailing mechanisms - wins out over objective reactions." (pg. 196)
  - "...subject and object - that is, the matter and the viewer - are so closely intertwined in art that it should not be impossible, if one simply throws the whole wealth of objective experience into subjectivity, to learn something about the matter itself from subjective analysis too." (pg. 205)
- Lecture 21 (pg. 206)
  - See text

d. Further Readings:

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