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# Ingarden, Dufrenne, and the Passivity of Aesthetic Experience

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## ABSTRACT

Recent phenomenological research has picked up on the old claim that sometimes artworks seem to take possession of the perceiver. Simon Høffding and Tone Roald have argued that Edmund Husserl's notion of *passive synthesis* offers significant explanatory force in understanding aesthetic experiences where the artwork exhibits signs of such agency. Husserlian passivity refers to the non-egoic acts of consciousness that precede and enable higher-order acts such as judging and reflecting. Høffding and Roald suggest that experiences of being overwhelmed by an artwork stem from the way the work triggers passive processing and alters the perceiver's sense of agency. In this article, I take their suggestion further by reading Roman Ingarden's and Mikel Dufrenne's accounts of aesthetic experience in the light of Husserlian passivity. I claim that both Ingarden's and Dufrenne's accounts have weaknesses that can be amended by interpreting them as describing aesthetic experience as a form of passive synthesizing. This interpretation in turn leads towards a more robust understanding of the exact role of passivity in aesthetic experience, which Høffding and Roald's tentative suggestion leaves largely unexplored.

## KEYWORDS

Roman Ingarden; Mikel Dufrenne; Edmund Husserl; aesthetic experience; aesthetic object; passive synthesis; phenomenology

## I. Introduction

Sometimes artworks can feel as though they were doing something to us and not the other way round: a novel can force us to continue reading, a painting can command the trajectory of our gaze, a piece of music can compel us to dance. They can seem to possess a peculiar agency, as if it is not us who are reading, listening, or looking but, rather, it is the artworks constituting themselves before our eyes and ears without any effort from our part. Sometimes we can even be engulfed by an artwork to the extent of losing our sense of the subject-object distinction.<sup>1</sup> Recently, Simon Høffding and Tone Roald have argued that there is both empirical and theoretical evidence to hold the experience of being taken control of by an artwork as an integral aspect of aesthetic experience.<sup>2</sup> They further suggest that Husserl's notion of passivity offers a powerful tool in understanding the processes that underlie such experiences. In Husserl's works, passivity refers to mental acts that consciousness achieves without the participation of the ego. Høffding and Roald suggest that some integral aspects of aesthetic experiences can be accounted for in terms

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of passive acts. I consider this to be one of the most fruitful suggestions in recent discussions regarding the nature of aesthetic experience.<sup>3</sup> Yet there remains much work to be done in outlining the precise role of passivity in aesthetic experience.

In this article, I will build on Høffding and Roald's largely tentative suggestion by comparing it with the works of Roman Ingarden and Mikel Dufrenne. Both thinkers develop extensive phenomenological accounts of aesthetic experience, which, I argue, help to flesh out a more robust understanding of the role of passivity than Høffding and Roald's article offers. At the same time, the Husserlian notion of passivity helps us to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Dufrenne's and Ingarden's accounts. What mostly interests me here is a fundamental, seemingly irreconcilable difference in Ingarden's and Dufrenne's descriptions: for Ingarden, the constitution of the aesthetic object requires active participation from the perceiver, whereas Dufrenne describes the aesthetic object having a life of its own and needing the perceiver only as a platform in which it constitutes itself. Curiously, both of them describe the exact same process but reach vastly different conclusions. Even more curiously, both thinkers make valid cases for their views, and yet accepting them both seems to lead to a contradiction. My argument is that Husserl's notion of passivity can be used to unravel this contradiction.

In the following, I will first give a short summary of Ingarden's notion of aesthetic experience and its relation to the constitution of the aesthetic object. Then I will do the same with Dufrenne and compare the respective strengths and weaknesses of both accounts. Lastly, I will lay out how the outcomes of this comparison can be coupled with the Husserlian notion of passivity, thereby paving a way for a clearer understanding of the role of passivity and activity in aesthetic experience that overcomes the insufficiencies in all three existing accounts.

## II. Ingarden and the creativity of aesthetic experience

Ingarden's phenomenology of aesthetic experience, most elaborately presented in *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (*Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks*, 1968) but also present in the earlier works *The Literary Work of Art* (*Das literarische Kunstwerk*, 1931) and *The Ontology of the Work of Art* (*Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst*, 1962), builds on the basic phenomenological observation that engaging with an artwork usually involves transcending what is empirically given in the perception of that artwork.<sup>4</sup> When we read a novel, say, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the primary object of our attention is not the printed letters on the pages but the story of Raskolnikov's crime, even if, objectively speaking, we are looking at printed letters on the pages. Similarly, when we look at *Venus de Milo*, we see a female figure even if, in fact, we are looking at a block of marble. In phenomenological terms, the *intentional object* of aesthetic perception is not identical to the real object of that perception. This intentional object is what Ingarden calls the *aesthetic object*.<sup>5</sup> Much of Ingarden's aesthetics concentrates on elaborating on what precisely happens in this engagement with an artwork.

Ingarden posits as a "basic postulate" of aesthetics that aesthetic experience and the aesthetic object cannot be thought of apart from each other: aesthetic experience is what the perceiver experiences in constituting the aesthetic object, and the aesthetic object only has existence in and through these constitutive acts of the perceiver.<sup>6</sup> An artwork in itself is only a "stratified formation" (*mehrsichtiges*

*Gebilde*) that consists of various strata, e.g. sentences, depicted persons, and the plot in a literary work, or colours, composition, and the depicted space in a pictorial work.<sup>7</sup> The perceiver has to perform a “synthesizing objectification” where the strata of the artwork are brought together into a unified whole.<sup>8</sup> In doing this, the perceiver comes across various “spots of indeterminacy” (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*), i.e. details that the work does not provide but which need to be added in order for the work to be transformed into a unified whole.<sup>9</sup> For example, Hamlet’s height is not mentioned in Shakespeare’s play, and it remains for the reader to imagine how tall he is.<sup>10</sup> The act of filling in the spots of indeterminacy and synthesizing the work’s strata into a unified aesthetic object is what Ingarden calls “concretizing” (*konkretisieren*).<sup>11</sup> Ingarden’s account of aesthetic experience is largely an account of the process by which the perceiver concretizes the aesthetic object in their engagement with the artwork.

The important point is that aesthetic experience is not a momentary and homogeneous experience but a temporally extended process with “multidetermined phases and in the course of which several distinct acts of consciousness are performed,” some of which are active and some passive.<sup>12</sup> Crudely put, Ingarden’s account of aesthetic experience is built on three main phases. The first, passive phase consists of being arrested by some quality of an artwork—a colour, a melody, a rhythm—that attracts the perceiver’s attention and gives rise to what Ingarden calls an “original emotion” (*Ursprungsemotion*), a yearning to perceive the quality and its object better and deeper. This produces a “check” (*Hemmung*) in consciousness, i.e. a dislocation in the ordinary way that consciousness attends to objects: the object is isolated from its perceptual background and the flow of time, and the doxic modality of the perception is neutralized, i.e. the perception no longer posits a belief in the existence or non-existence of the object. This change in the relation of consciousness to the object amounts to a transition from the practical, everyday attitude to the aesthetic attitude. Here begins the second, active phase of the experience. In attempting to fulfil the initial yearning, the perceiver studies the artwork further and begins to notice larger schematic layers—sentences, figures, represented objects, etc.—and various aesthetic qualities attached to these schemata. Here the perceiver begins to transcend the real object and “overlook” (*übersehen*) some of its qualities—cracks on the painting’s surface, etc.—and starts to aim at structures that are not qualities of the real object but are constituted in the intentional act of perceiving that object, such as the perceived depth of the depicted space, which is not a quality of a painting’s flat surface. Finally, the third main phase consists of valuing and reflecting on the achieved aesthetic object.<sup>13</sup>

The second phase of Ingarden’s account is the most consequential for our purposes. Ingarden does acknowledge that, at least to a certain extent, there is “an automatic intentional projection” of meanings present in the act of perceiving an artwork, a passive and involuntary mode of understanding that requires no active effort from the perceiver.<sup>14</sup> However, this “passive reading” only accomplishes a limited number of the interpretative possibilities of the artwork, and it can also furnish concretizations that are not justified by the work itself.<sup>15</sup> Actualizing the work’s possibilities more fully and justifiably requires “active reading.”<sup>16</sup> The task of the perceiver is to concretize the aesthetic object in a manner that maximally actualizes its aesthetic value. Achieving this task, in Ingarden’s eyes, requires active, co-creative engagement with the artwork,

where the perceiver chooses the best possible concretization from all other possibilities. Ingarden thus takes conscious effort to be an integral part of genuine aesthetic experiences and considers more passive experiences to be less valuable.

Ingarden has very little to say about the experiential agency of aesthetic objects. Even when discussing the “life” of the aesthetic object, Ingarden does not speak of the experience of it having a life of its own, but speaks of the acts through which the reader gives the work life and of the historical context that enlivens the concretization; it is not the concretization itself that is “alive.”<sup>17</sup> He does acknowledge that “lively” artworks differ from “lifeless” ones in that their subjects are “more vividly, distinctly, and fully portrayed,” but here he is describing the artistic value of some works, not the automatic character of the experiences they produce.<sup>18</sup> The overall account holds that the artwork has no agency of its own; it is merely a bare skeleton that needs the active, creative efforts of the perceiver to give it flesh. In Ingarden’s vision, achieving an adequate concretization amounts to first encountering the work as a field of possible concretizations and then choosing that concretization which maximally actualizes the potentialities of the work. The work does give suggestions and directives as to how it should be concretized, but in the end it is up to the perceiver to choose among several possibilities the one that maximally actualizes the work’s aesthetic value.

There are several strengths to Ingarden’s account. His formulation of aesthetic experience as a temporally extended and multi-phased process with active and passive aspects is one of the most detailed and robust we have to date. Ingarden also makes a convincing case that the aesthetic object is the result of the perceiver’s synthesizing and creative activity: it is indeed difficult to understand how we could perceive an artwork as a unified aesthetic object without projecting all sorts of elements into it. Ingarden’s account also gives an elegant explanation as to how we can have different concretizations of an artwork—e.g. different mental images of Hamlet’s appearance—and still consider them experiences of the same artwork.

There is also a clear weakness in Ingarden’s account. Ingarden’s idealization of aesthetic experience as the result of conscious effort goes against the often recorded ecstatic, self-forgetful descriptions of aesthetic experience. His view does not sufficiently take into account what Dufrenne calls the “autogenesis” of aesthetic experiences<sup>19</sup>: no conscious effort is usually needed for the concretization of the aesthetic object, as it seems to achieve this by itself—Dufrenne himself, as we will soon see, takes this point to the extreme. Ingarden, in contrast, clearly argues that passivity has a legitimate role only in the initial phase of the experience, and after that further investigation and a *justified* concretization of the aesthetic object requires the perceiver’s conscious effort. With Dufrenne, we find a completely opposite view.

### III. Dufrenne and the autogenesis of aesthetic experience

Like Ingarden, Dufrenne builds his *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (*Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique*, 1953) on the basic observation that the aesthetic object is not identical to the artwork as a real thing and that aesthetic experience and the aesthetic object cannot be thought of apart from each other.<sup>20</sup> In perceiving an artwork, we transcend its physical reality and lose ourselves in a completely new world with its own space-time separate from the real world—and this is what having an

aesthetic experience is all about. Like Ingarden, Dufrenne argues that the aesthetic object has a peculiar mode of existence, where it is dependent on the consciousness of the perceiver but irreducible to a mere mental entity existing inside the perceiver's consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

However, Dufrenne does not accept Ingarden's formulation of the aesthetic object as the *concretized* artwork, i.e. that the perceiver partakes in the *creation* of the aesthetic object. Instead, Dufrenne claims that the aesthetic object is merely "the work of art as perceived."<sup>22</sup> The choice of the verb *perceive* instead of *concretize* signals a fundamental point of difference between the two thinkers. A thread that unifies Dufrenne's *Phenomenology* is the claim that genuine aesthetic experience requires no conscious effort to maintain it and no creative act to somehow fill an otherwise insufficient and lifeless artwork. In Dufrenne's characterizations, the artwork is a peculiar entity that is inanimate but still somehow has a "will-to-be"; it has a capacity to pose demands on and take hold of the perceiver.<sup>23</sup> "The work is a forceful lover," Dufrenne writes, "who draws the spectator to precisely those points where he must place himself in order to become a witness."<sup>24</sup> Perceiving a work of art is fundamentally about succumbing to the demand posed by the artwork, letting oneself be absorbed and taken over by the work; the work turns into an aesthetic object when it "gets the perception it solicits and deserves and which is fulfilled in the spectator's docile consciousness."<sup>25</sup> For Dufrenne, the artwork is not a mere skeleton that needs the creative acts of the perceiver to become alive but rather a "quasi-subject," an entity that appears to have a life of its own.<sup>26</sup> Understanding the phenomenology of aesthetic experience is largely a question of understanding how the artwork commands the subject: "the phenomenology of aesthetic experience is implicitly a deontology."<sup>27</sup>

In Dufrenne's *Phenomenology*, the role of the perceiver also differs radically from Ingarden's account. While the artwork does need the consciousness of the perceiver to exist, it merely needs it as a "registering apparatus" or "instrument" which the work uses to organize itself, being just "the place of its manifestation and the echo of its power."<sup>28</sup> The artwork lives an almost parasitic existence in which it takes possession of the perceiver:

It is in me that the aesthetic object is constituted as other than me. [...] I cannot say that I constitute the aesthetic object. Rather, it constitutes itself in me in the very act by which I intend it, since I do not intend it by positing it as outside myself but by vowing myself to its service. Thus one can see why consciousness is not the provider of meaning. Instead of positing the object, consciousness embraces the object, which affirms itself in this embrace.<sup>29</sup>

Instead of Ingarden's cool composure, aesthetic experience in Dufrenne's view is an ecstatic event where the subject and the object melt into one another: "The sensuous fascinates me and I lose myself in it. [...] I am lost—literally 'alien-ated'—in the aesthetic object," Dufrenne writes. He continues: "This alienation itself is a task for me, since I must surrender to the enchantment, deny my tendency to seek mastery of the object, and conjure up the sensuous so as to lose myself in it."<sup>30</sup>

This is why Dufrenne does not say that the perceiver *concretizes* the artwork but merely *performs* (*exécute*) it.<sup>31</sup> By this Dufrenne understands lending one's perception to the self-constitution of the work. Nor does Dufrenne speak of the perceiver as the co-creator of the aesthetic object but simply as its *witness* (*témoin*).<sup>32</sup> In stark contrast to

Ingarden's account, Dufrenne is adamant in claiming that "man brings nothing to the work except its consecration," that he is even "prohibited from adding anything to the work."<sup>33</sup> Dufrenne flatly denies the idea, so prominent in Ingarden, that the perceiver has to imaginatively fulfil the otherwise insufficient artwork; on the contrary, an artwork differs from ordinary objects precisely in that it:

spares us the expense of an exuberant imagination, since to understand and follow the work all that is required is its presence to the mind and to the senses. Aesthetic perception does not need the kind of completion which we give to an obscure and ambiguous perception from the everyday realm.<sup>34</sup>

Aesthetic perception is a matter of submitting myself "to the work instead of submitting it to my jurisdiction and [allowing] the work to deposit its meaning within me."<sup>35</sup> If the perceiver adds something to the work, it is a mark of either a failure on the work's part or of unfaithfulness on the perceiver's.<sup>36</sup> What Dufrenne is arguing here is that even if an artwork does not explicitly spell out all its details, the perceiver does not have to actively fill out the work's indeterminacies, since the work itself commands how these details are to be imagined. These imagined details, Dufrenne argues, are immanent in the artwork and rise from its "internal necessity."<sup>37</sup> If it were not so, the aesthetic object would become contingent, and the artwork would be reduced to a mere "pretext for unrestrained acts of imagining."<sup>38</sup> In a backhanded jab at Ingarden (and, even more so, at Sartre<sup>39</sup>), Dufrenne claims that "the real task of imagination in aesthetic experience is therefore to grasp the represented object *in appearance*, without substituting for it [...] an imaginary object held to be more or uniquely true."<sup>40</sup> In genuine aesthetic perception of an artwork, the perceiver does not go *beyond* the work, as Ingarden holds, but perceives it as it comes into appearance by its own accord.<sup>41</sup>

This claim, of course, faces an imminent problem: how can Dufrenne account for the fact that different perceivers imagine the same artworks differently if the perceiver adds nothing to the work? It is not just that we interpret the message of *Crime and Punishment* differently, but that we also imagine the novel's world and its characters differently. Ingarden's theory of concretization can elegantly explain this issue, but Dufrenne has a harder time accounting for it. He acknowledges this problem but simply states that the work's contents are "refracted differently in different consciousnesses."<sup>42</sup> A possible explanation for this opaque claim can be found from the later section "Phenomenology of Aesthetic Perception" in *Phenomenology*. There Dufrenne argues that the perceiver is not a *tabula rasa* but rather that perceptions are always conditioned and coloured by the perceiver's bodily and affective capacities and sedimentations of prior experiences.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the way phenomena are given as meaningful varies, at least to some extent, depending on the person's history and capabilities even before any reflection or conscious interpretation occurs. In speaking of different ways an artwork can "refract" in different consciousnesses, Dufrenne is arguably referring to this point. The fact that different persons can perceive different aesthetic objects while engaging with the same artwork does not necessarily require that they consciously "choose" different ways of concretizing the work. Instead, Dufrenne argues that different sedimentations and capacities of different perceivers lead the artwork to manifest itself differently in each case without any conscious part from the perceiver.

The phenomenological force of Dufrenne's account, when compared to Ingarden's more intellectualist one, lies in the way it captures the experience of being possessed by an artwork. Yet Dufrenne's account generates problems of its own. By taking ecstatic, self-forgetful experience as his ideal, he leaves hardly any room for the perceiver's activity and thus ignores the kind of reflective, self-possessed experiences that Ingarden idealizes. In Dufrenne's account, there is room for the perceiver's contribution only in reflection after the artwork's self-manifestation.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Dufrenne's account leaves the agency of the artwork clouded in romantic, semi-mystical ambiguity. Dufrenne claims that the aesthetic object has a "density of being" similar to that of living beings, yet we never mistake artworks for living beings.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, Dufrenne thinks that the difference is so obvious that it needs hardly any elaboration.<sup>46</sup> However, it is not at all clear how inanimate artworks can appear to be living and how their lifelikeness differs from that of actual living beings. This, I think, is the major insufficiency in Dufrenne's account: it builds the autogenesis of aesthetic experience within its very heart, but it fails to account for what this autogenesis is actually about.

#### **IV. Passive synthesis and aesthetic experience**

The picture that forms from the preceding comparison is roughly as follows. Ingarden gives a rich account of the perceiver's role in synthesizing the artwork into an aesthetic object, but he overemphasizes the perceiver's active role, missing almost altogether the autogenetic character of aesthetic experience. Dufrenne, in contrast, succinctly captures this autogenesis in the face of the artwork's imperative presence but overemphasizes it to the point of exaggeration, leaving too little room for the perceiver's contribution. Furthermore, Dufrenne does not sufficiently explain what this agency of the artwork is all about. Thus, we find ourselves in a tricky situation where both thinkers present justified albeit insufficient views. The perceiver, we can validly argue, has a co-creative role in the constitution of the aesthetic object, as Ingarden shows, and yet sometimes the aesthetic object seems to be self-constituting without needing our participation, as Dufrenne observes. At least on the face of it, we cannot accept both views without contradiction. I believe that the difference between them cannot be reconciled if we stay on the purely exegetical level. But for more systematic purposes, would it be possible to find a middle ground between the intellectualism of Ingarden and the romanticism of Dufrenne? Would it be possible to find a way of combining the strength of both accounts and avoid their weaknesses?

I argue that Edmund Husserl's notion of passive synthesis offers such a middle ground.<sup>47</sup> Here I follow Høffding and Roald's recent proposal that Husserlian passivity offers a powerful tool in understanding the nature of aesthetic experience. My claim is that it also helps to synthesize Ingarden's and Dufrenne's accounts in a way that unifies their strengths but avoids the weaknesses indicated above.

In Husserl's idiosyncratic usage, passivity does not mean inactivity or pure receptivity, but rather the primordial, pre-reflective life of consciousness that precedes all active, higher-order acts, such as judging, deciding, and conceptualizing. Høffding and Roald define passivity as "the dimension of consciousness that founds, or acts as, a meaning-making substratum for active mental cognition and that regulates the distinction between self and other."<sup>48</sup> A basic point in Husserl's phenomenology is that to be conscious of

something is not simply to be affected by that something but also to contribute to its meaning by integrating it within a unified stream of consciousness. Husserl's phenomenology of passivity elaborates on the fact that my perceptions are always already organized and meaningful prior to any active cognition, and that I find myself always already situated and attuned to my surrounding in one way or another without conscious decisions. I do not, first and foremost, perceive unorganized sensory "stuff" which I then actively have to sort out and link into the flow of consciousness in order for it to have meaning; neither do I have to actively orient my body to my environment or choose how this or that object affects me. My consciousness has always already organized its perceptions into regular and stable sense-formations before I become aware of them—and this is what Husserl calls passive synthesis. Among passive acts that constitute this synthesis Husserl includes the organization of the perceptual field into a spatio-temporal unity, the furnishing of the perceptual objects with adumbrations and associations, and the coordination of the body with its surroundings, affective reactions, etc. Furthermore, passive synthesis organizes the perceptual field into a relief, where some objects or qualities come into *prominence* (*Abhebung*), drawing our attention and occluding other objects. It is only on account of passive synthesis that we are able to relate to objects and ourselves *actively*, e.g. in the form of abstractions or judgements.

Why is Husserlian passivity useful in analysing aesthetic experiences? Høffding and Roald point out that the notion helps us to clarify certain seemingly paradoxical aspects of aesthetic and artistic experiences. Mainly their interest lies in the situation where an artwork seems to take control of the artist and perceiver, and where they "lose" themselves in the act of creating or perceiving it. Such experiences are paradoxical in that, objectively speaking, the person remains the agent of those experiences while losing the sense of agency. For example, when I read a novel, it is me who is performing all sorts of acts that synthesize the text into an imagined world, but experientially it appears to *me* that the text summons the world by its own accord. Høffding and Roald argue that Husserlian passivity offers a way out of this paradox. For Husserl, passive syntheses are precisely mental processes that "run out by themselves as objective events, though they are subjectively produced."<sup>49</sup> They are, by nature, "non-egoic" in that they are not accomplishments of the self-conscious ego and thus appear as if they unfold by themselves, even if they are really products of consciousness. On an experiential level, passive syntheses occur as peculiar experiences of which I have a *sense of ownership*, i.e. a sense of being the one who experiences the results of those acts, but no *sense of agency*, i.e. a sense of being the instigator of those acts.<sup>50</sup> Høffding and Roald's suggestion is that aesthetic experiences can be accounted for as situations in which an artwork triggers passive processing and hinders active processing. Furthermore, Høffding and Roald point out how passive syntheses regulate the self-other boundary, and they argue that passivity can account for the experiential merging of subject and object so often described in aesthetic literature.<sup>51</sup>

It is important not to interpret this as suggesting that aesthetic experience is about regressing into some primal, unconscious trance ruled by instincts and drives. Passive syntheses themselves are unconscious, but the experiences they bring forth are conscious. A heightened sense of passivity simply refers to experiences that seem to flow *as if* by themselves. It is only in retrospect that we can recognize the acts underlying these experiences as being achievements of our own consciousness. Nor are passive

experiences a matter of wallowing in pure affects devoid of any understanding; on the contrary, passive synthesis is precisely a pre-reflective form of understanding. Furthermore, these acts are not some unusual incidents but something that happens all the time: the organization of the perceptual field and our interaction with it is largely a product of constant passive synthesizing, and even much of our everyday lives are lived with a certain habitual automatism. For example, as I am typing this text, I am not typically aware of the movements of each of my fingers, as my mind is occupied with the meaning I intend to solidify into text, and yet my fingers passively follow my intention. Husserl himself points out that we mostly live our lives in a mode of self-forgetfulness, where we act in the world without needing to be constantly aware of ourselves as the ones acting.<sup>52</sup> In everyday experience, this automatism is possible because the lifeworld is mostly habitual and yields to my preconceived understanding of how it works—and thus I can operate within it passively. Aesthetic experiences arguably differ from this everyday passivity. While in everyday experiences the sense of agency and the sense of ownership usually remain intact, it is characteristic of aesthetic experience that the sense of agency alters so that it seems that the aesthetic object was doing something to the perceiver while, objectively speaking, it is the perceiver acting all the time. I believe this is what Høffding and Roald are suggesting.

As I already mentioned, I consider Høffding and Roald's suggestion to be one of the most fruitful in recent literature on aesthetic experience. Yet much work remains in fleshing out how precisely artworks manage to trigger passive syntheses and what exactly happens in these syntheses. Here I believe that the foregoing comparison between Dufrenne and Ingarden becomes relevant. In the following, I will argue that the Husserlian notion of passivity helps us to entangle the contradictions between their views. In return, a combination of Dufrenne's and Ingarden's theories can be used to work out the role of passive synthesis in aesthetic experience more fully.

As I claimed, the fundamental problems with Dufrenne's account is that it leaves the autogenesis of aesthetic experience and the corresponding agency of the aesthetic object largely unexplained. The romanticism of Dufrenne's account becomes tenable when read in the light of Husserlian passivity. My claim is that what Dufrenne is describing are, in fact, experiences brought about by consciousness's own synthetic activity, even if, on the experiential level, it seems as if the artwork was imposing commands on the perceiver. In fact, Husserl's phenomenology of passivity prefigures Dufrenne's idea of the deontology of the aesthetic object in terms of what Husserl calls the *enticement* (*Anmutung*) that objects exercise on consciousness.<sup>53</sup> As noted earlier, Husserl claims that consciousness furnishes perceptions with all sorts of elements that are immediately given in the perception itself, e.g. adumbrations, affects, associations, etc. The way perceptions are furnished is not solely up to the perceiver's choice, as often objects themselves entice in varying degrees certain reactions and modes of comportment: a cloudy sky, for example, entices us to think that a storm is coming.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, we can argue that some artworks can exert an unusually powerful enticement on the perceiver to fulfil them in certain ways. Dufrenne's claim that the spectator is "prohibited from adding anything to the work, for the work imposes itself upon the spectator [...] imperiously" is to some extent misleading<sup>55</sup>: we do add all sorts of elements to these artworks—as Ingarden shows—but this can be argued to happen passively, enticed by the artworks themselves. Experientially, such enticing objects seem to be able to pose norms on the subject. On

the whole, Husserl argues, the perceptual field is “a constitutive duet”<sup>56</sup> between the subject and objects, an outcome of the subject’s own initiative and enticement on behalf of the objects. Dufrenne’s talk of the “quasi-subjectivity” of artworks can be formulated as a special case of this passive interplay between consciousness and objects (the nature of which, surely, requires more elaboration). By doing so, we can eliminate the two troubling aspects of Dufrenne’s account: the unexplained agency of aesthetic objects and the explicit denial that the perceiver adds nothing to the artwork.

Furthermore, Dufrenne does not explain in any great detail how we usually do not mistake artworks for living beings despite their lifelikeness. Husserl’s phenomenology of *image-consciousness* (*Bildbewußtsein*)—which I count as another dimension of passivity<sup>57</sup>—offers some leeway in understanding how consciousness differentiates between the two.<sup>58</sup> Seeing an image is about seeing in an object another object that is not actually present. According to Husserl, the consciousness of an image *qua* image requires that there remains at least a latent consciousness of the physical substratum of the image, since otherwise the perception of the image would turn into an illusion—as in the case of some waxworks, for example.<sup>59</sup> In other words, a *consciousness of conflict* (*Widerstreitsbewußtsein*) between the *image-thing* (*Bildding*), e.g. a canvas with pigments on it, and the *image-object* (*Bildobjekt*), e.g. a portrait of a person, is constitutive of image consciousness.<sup>60</sup> Seeing an image is thus a sort of double-apprehension of two overlapping objects that requires consciousness to intend both of them at the same time. While the image-object becomes thematic and the image-thing recedes into the non-thematic background of the perception, the image-object is still posited as being a mere *semblance* (*Schein*) that is not taken to exist as a real object.<sup>61</sup> This very same point is made by both Ingarden and Dufrenne with regard to the constitution of the aesthetic object. Now, this intentional structure differentiates image consciousness from the consciousness of another person: in perceiving another person, I do not apprehend the other’s body as depicting another object that is not actually present but rather as expressing the actual presence of another consciousness.<sup>62</sup> The experience of the aesthetic object’s lifelikeness and the experience of the lifelikeness of another person thus differ according to the intentional acts that constitute them.

For Ingarden’s part, the application to Husserl’s theory faces more difficulties. Ingarden explicitly emphasizes the importance of active participation in the concretization of the artwork, holding passive concretizations less valuable and more problematic. He even goes on to claim that the emphasis of subjective aesthetic experiences over objective values—the recognition of which requires active, reflective effort—stems from “defective standards in communing with the work of art.”<sup>63</sup> In order to apply the notion of passivity to Ingarden, we need to depart from Ingarden’s own convictions. Moreover, Ingarden’s relationship with Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is famously vexed, and it is not altogether clear to what extent he would have accepted Husserl’s phenomenology of passivity.<sup>64</sup>

Yet there are enough grounds for us to make a passive version of Ingarden’s phenomenology. As noted earlier, a problematic feature of Ingarden’s account is that it ignores the ecstatic and autogenetic character of some aesthetic experiences and makes the engagement with the artwork into an overtly intellectual endeavour. Much of what Ingarden claims can be salvaged by arguing that the concretizing activity of the perceiver occurs more passively than Ingarden himself grants. The cornerstone of Ingarden’s

account, the theory of concretization, is actually prefigured by Husserl's theory of passivity: it is not just artworks that we furnish with various determinations in the act of perceiving them, and the concretization of an artwork could be interpreted as a special form of such passive synthesizing. For example, the perception of three-dimensional objects entails that we cannot see these objects from all sides at once, and yet perception of the visible sides are furnished with a (usually non-thematic) consciousness of the non-visible sides and expectations of what they might look like. The non-visible sides are "filled out" passively until they become actually visible. It is not just artworks that contain spots of indeterminacy, and every perception is to some extent an act of concretization.

Furthermore, Husserl's analyses contain much that can be used to elaborate Ingarden's accounts. For example, Husserl's notion of "allure" (*Reiz*), which refers to an object's affective quality that conditions consciousness's motivational relation to that object, is closely reminiscent of Ingarden's notion of "original emotion," and overall Ingarden's account of the initial phase of aesthetic experience sits very well within Husserl's elaborate analyses of how various affective relations between the subject and the world motivate the subject to act in particular ways.<sup>65</sup> Closely connected to this, Ingarden observes that the cognition of an aesthetic object involves "a narrowing of the field of consciousness," where the aesthetic object is separated from the surrounding perceptual field and intended as a separate, self-contained unity. For example, a landscape depicted in a painting is not perceived as belonging to the same space as the gallery in which it hangs, while the surroundings are pushed to the periphery of consciousness.<sup>66</sup> This phenomenon can be seen as a special case of Husserl's theory of prominences: each object within the perceptual field has a different allure, a different motivational pull, and some rise into prominence and repress others.<sup>67</sup> An artwork can, arguably, become so prominent that it represses the surrounding perceptual field and draws the perceiver's consciousness into its own world—much in the same way as images in Husserl's theory of image-consciousness. Finally, Husserl's doctrine of association—i.e. the logic of how consciousness comes to position its intentional objects within a matrix of relations based on a sedimentation of prior experiences—could be used to flesh out more clearly how the determinations used in concretizations arise in an engagement with an artwork.<sup>68</sup> In sum, reading Ingarden's aesthetics through a Husserlian lens allows us not only to situate his phenomenology within a larger framework of consciousness's constitutive activity but also to salvage it from the intellectualism that affects the validity of Ingarden's own account.

By interpreting their accounts in the light of Husserlian passivity, we can make Dufrenne and Ingarden complement rather than contradict each another: from Dufrenne, we find a succinct description of the autogenetic character of aesthetic experience, and from Ingarden a detailed analysis of the passive syntheses that occur underneath these experiences. Together they could be used to form an account of how the perceiver passively concretizes the artwork but experientially witnesses the resulting aesthetic object as something autonomous and self-constituting. In this way we could combine the strengths of both accounts and avoid their problems.

The benefits also go in the other direction: Ingarden's and Dufrenne's work could also be used to elaborate on precisely what happens in the passive synthesis of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, Ingarden's works provide a detailed account of the synthetic objectifications of consciousness and the interplay of passivity and activity in aesthetic experiencing (which, as I have argued, overtly emphasizes the role of activity). Høffding and Roald's article on

passivity is tentative at best, leaving largely unexplained what kind of passive syntheses are at work in aesthetic experience. While Husserl's own work on passivity offers various possibilities for further elaboration, they are not explicitly aesthetic in nature. In contrast, when interpreted in the framework of Husserlian passivity, Ingarden's works in particular can be read as elaborate descriptions of the passive syntheses involved in an act of concretizing an artwork, whereas Dufrenne captures succinctly the experiential character of such passivity. Thus, their works could offer a rich reservoir in the task of turning Høffding and Roald's suggestion into a robust account of aesthetic experience.

## V. Conclusions

I claim to have made two steps forward in this article. From a more exegetical perspective, Ingarden's and Dufrenne's works are amongst the most elaborate phenomenological accounts of aesthetic experience we have to date, but these accounts contradict each other. So far, there has been little comparison between them and, to the best of my knowledge, no attempt to solve this contradiction. I have argued that Husserl's notion of passivity offers a solid way of interpreting Ingarden's and Dufrenne's accounts, and combining them in a way that preserves the strengths of both accounts but avoids their weaknesses. Of course, it is to be noted that I have here remained on the purely phenomenological level, concentrating on the way both thinkers view the engagement between the perceiver and the artwork. The more ontological underpinnings of their accounts would need further comparison.

This leads us to the systematic step forward. I have criticized Høffding and Roald's suggestion for remaining largely tentative. By interpreting Dufrenne's and Ingarden's works in the light of a Husserlian phenomenology of passivity, I believe we could gain significant leeway in taking Høffding and Roald's suggestion further and developing a robust understanding of the role of passivity in aesthetic experience. We do not need to start from nothing, since we can use the insights—nowadays all too often ignored—of these pre-eminent aestheticians in this task.

Of course, the reproach of being too tentative can also be aimed at this article, and it is true that much work remains to be done. The notion of passivity perhaps solves some problems regarding aesthetic experience, but it also gives rise to a host of other problems: How do some artworks promote passive agency? What conditions have to be met for passivity to overcome activity? What is the relation between activity and passivity in aesthetic experience? Does employing the notion of passive synthesis entail accepting Husserl's transcendental idealism? On a more exegetical note, can we just appropriate Dufrenne's and Ingarden's ideas into a Husserlian framework of passivity without residue? And shouldn't we evaluate Ingarden's and Dufrenne's account more fully before embarking on applying them? All these questions surely pose a challenge, but I believe we are better off facing the question of passivity in aesthetic experience with Dufrenne and Ingarden rather than trying to build an account solely using Husserl's non-aesthetic theories.

## Notes

1. See Mäcklin, "Aesthetic Self-Forgetfulness."
2. Høffding and Roald, "Passivity."

3. The connection between passive synthesis and aesthetic experience has been made earlier by Wolfgang Iser in the context of reading in *The Act of Reading*, chapter 6.
4. Ingarden's conception of aesthetic experience remained largely unchanged throughout his career, as he himself notes (*Cognition*, 175n2). Although he published his most robust account of aesthetic experience in 1968, he had presented the basic outline of this account already in his lecture "Das ästhetische Erlebnis" at the *II<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Esthétique et des Sciences de l'Art* in 1937. The original lecture is published in Ingarden, *Erlebnis, Kunstwerk und Wert*, 3–7.
5. For Ingarden's discussion on the aesthetic object, see Ingarden, *Cognition*, 175–87.
6. Ingarden, *Selected Papers in Aesthetics*, 34.
7. Ingarden, *Literary Work*, §8, and Ingarden, *Ontology*.
8. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 47.
9. Ingarden, *Literary Work*, §38.
10. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 54.
11. Ingarden, *Literary Work*, §62.
12. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 179.
13. *Ibid.*, 187–218. For summaries of Ingarden's account of the genesis of aesthetic experience, see the essays "Phenomenological Aesthetics: An Attempt at Defining its Range" and "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Object" in Ingarden, *Selected Papers in Aesthetics*.
14. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 37–41, quote at 38.
15. *Ibid.*, 40, 52–4.
16. *Ibid.*, 40–50.
17. Ingarden, *Literary Work*, §64.
18. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 61.
19. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 393.
20. *Ibid.*, xlv–lxvii.
21. There is, however, a significant difference between their views on the ontological status of aesthetic objects: Ingarden holds that the aesthetic object is ontologically "a purely intentional object," whereas Dufrenne views it as being a purely sensuous object. For more details, see Ingarden, *Literary Work*, §§20–2, and *Controversy*, chapter IX, and Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 218–33. For Dufrenne's criticism of Ingarden's view, see *Phenomenology*, 206–12.
22. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, lii.
23. *Ibid.*, 224.
24. *Ibid.*, 51.
25. *Ibid.*, lii.
26. *Ibid.*, 146.
27. *Ibid.*, lii.
28. *Ibid.*, 55, 226, 231.
29. *Ibid.*, 323.
30. *Ibid.*, 226.
31. *Ibid.*, 48–54.
32. *Ibid.*, 55–60.
33. *Ibid.*, 55, 59.
34. *Ibid.*, 366.
35. *Ibid.*, 393.
36. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, lii; Dufrenne, *Presence*, 6.
37. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 396.
38. Dufrenne, *Presence*, 6; Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 367, 396.
39. Cf. Sartre's account of the aesthetic object in *The Imaginary* and Dufrenne's critique of it in *Phenomenology*, 200–6.
40. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 367.
41. Cf. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 2015.
42. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 60.

43. Ibid., 335–57.
44. Ibid., 370–5, 387–92.
45. Ibid., 73–4, 412.
46. Ibid., 73.
47. Husserl's thoughts on passivity are scattered over several volumes, the most important of which include *Analyses Concerning Active and Passive Synthesis*, *Ideas II*, *Experience and Judgment*, and *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. I would also read Husserl's meditations on image-consciousness in *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory* as belonging largely under the rubric of passivity.
48. Höffding and Roald, "Passivity," 7.
49. Husserl, *Ideas II*, 347. Quoted in Höffding and Roald, "Passivity," 8.
50. See Gallagher, "Agency and Ownership."
51. Höffding and Roald, "Passivity," 6–9.
52. Husserl, *First Philosophy*, 291.
53. Husserl, *Analyses*, §§11–13.
54. Ibid., 85.
55. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology*, 59.
56. Husserl, *Analyses*, 52.
57. Image-consciousness is not often mentioned in the context of Husserlian passivity, but Husserl (*Phantasy*, 583) himself does emphasize that a consciousness of images is formed involuntarily and that trying to see the image-thing (*Bildding*) without seeing the image-object (*Bildobjekt*) requires active effort. Wolfgang Iser (*Act of Reading*, 136–51) posits the formation of mental imagery as the fundamental passive synthesis involved in reading.
58. For Husserl's most sustained discussion of image-consciousness, see *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*.
59. Husserl, *Phantasy*, 582.
60. Husserl, *Phantasy*, 55. Husserl also identifies a third object in the image, the image-subject (*Bildsujet*), by which he refers to that which the image-object represents. There is also a consciousness of conflict between the image-object and the image-subject, e.g. the consciousness that a portrait is not identical to the person it depicts. However, elaborating on this aspect of Husserl's theory is not relevant for our present purposes.
61. Husserl, *Phantasy*, 23, 692.
62. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §§50–4.
63. Ingarden, *Literary Work*, 24.
64. Much of Ingarden's ontological work, which culminates in *The Controversy over the Existence of the World* (*Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt*, published in German in 1964 and in English in 2013–6) is motivated by his rejection of Husserl's transcendental idealism. In the preface to the first German edition of *The Literary Work of Art*, Ingarden (*Literary Work*, lxxii–lxxiii) also notes that the motive behind his meditations on literary artworks is his rejection of transcendental idealism: by studying the essential structures of purely intentional objects by way of literary artworks, Ingarden aims to show that not all objects can be conceived of as being purely intentional by essence, as he takes Husserl to suggest.
65. Husserl, *Analyses*, §32. Ingarden (*Selected Papers in Aesthetics*, 34) himself notes that the German term *reizend*, "alluring," describes aptly the qualities that produce the original emotion.
66. Ingarden, *Cognition*, 192. For similar observations in Husserl's phenomenology of image-consciousness, see Husserl, *Phantasy*, 49–51.
67. Husserl, *Analyses*, §§32–5.
68. See Husserl, *Analyses*, §§26–41) and appendices 11–25. See also Biceaga, *Passivity*, chapter 2.

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