

Artifacts and subjects as companions in action

*A thesis on the non-dualistic understanding
of artifacts as cultural collaborators.*



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Figure 2: Alessandro Mendini, *Poltrona di Proust*, 1978.
Atelier Mendini, Milano

Preface

Glancing at the exposed matter in museums one can easily conclude that objects are regarded as meaningful and always have been. Throughout history we find a vast collection of items that have been valued and presented accordingly. These phenomena tell the stories of forefathers and conserve cultural traditions. They are presented in beautiful exhibitions and preserved using the most advanced methods. Yet, when discussing value embedded matter, this consideration seems to be limited to archeological items. Old crowns, ancient vases and Egyptian knives express stories that are immediately acknowledged and recognised. These artifacts embed cultural information of a historical past so evidently and would never be regarded as empty, soulless or invaluable materiality.

When it comes to the things we surround ourselves with in our own contemporary lives, it seems as if we have lost attention to the notion that these items disclose meaning too. In an even more expressive way, namely in our present relationship with them. Does it take an object to decay hundreds of years before we are able to acknowledge its impact and active-ness? It seems as though we are not fully aware or receptive for the ways in which daily substances are shaping our existence while we are living with and through them. Even if they are already telling their stories to us and directing our lives by revealing them.

In this thesis I intend to open up the dialogue regarding the relationship between objects and subjects. Bringing the concept of artifacts as special matter in to play, I want to illustrate how the mutual constitution between artifacts and subjects is more complex and why we should credit artifacts with more agency than discussed in traditional understandings of the object-subject relationship. Artifacts affect the relationship between people and the world around them in a distinctive way. When we become aware of the active nature of artifacts and their presence in our worldly experience, we can also improve our understanding on how to co-work with this agency and thereby contribute to a more considerate world.

- *Anniek Moll*

Chapter 1

Introduction



Figure 3: Aldo Magnelli / Riccardo Levi, Typewriter MP1 (Modello Portatile 1), 1932. Olivetti, Italy.

1. Introduction

Human existence is - and always has been - established in a fundamental involvement with matter. When one reflects on daily encounters, it becomes hard to imagine an experience that is not facilitated by an item. Contemplating the various things people encounter on a daily basis, it appears that most of these phenomena are not just matter naturally at hand but created to support and contribute to human existence. These items are artifacts. Within the domain of matter it is necessary to distinguish between organic matter, objects and artifacts. Although all three represent material entities, they are conceptually distinctive and should be characterised as such.

From using a particular product as a tool to the designed milieu of an entire space, artifacts are omnipresent. Even interacting with other people often requires the use of artifacts, facilitating communication and sharing rituals. Continuous interaction with the world is what constitutes human presence; essentially it is within this interaction that humans acquire their existence. As artifacts support interaction and unfold worlds of experience, the presence of artifacts is intimately intertwined with the constitution of meaningful life.

Designed to serve a certain purpose, artifacts express values and as a result, humans are (unawarely) impacted by these embedded values within interaction. Respectively, the relationship between subjects and artifacts can be encountered as a dynamic circumstance. On the one hand artifacts are primarily created by human action and manifest a particular instrumentality *for* people. Yet, on the other hand artifacts acquire significant agency by shaping the way humans give meaning to their own existence. Accordingly, artifacts seem to involve a much more dynamic presence than is commonly assigned to objects, however also lack the cognitive capabilities to be characterised as a subject. This gives rise to the question how we can account for artifacts and can come to understand artifacts as matter in the world.

Informed by Cartesian dualism there is a strong object-subject distinction rooted in Western reasoning. This dualistic tradition has become inherent to human understanding of the world and to the consideration of objects. Respectively, the human framework of understanding is grounded in a fundamental dualism. The dichotomy between cogito (mind) and res extensa (body) as foundation of knowledge, has resulted in a regression of dualities that obstruct human understanding of the world as it appears in experience. Ever since, objects have been distinguished as fundamentally distinctive and subjects have earned sovereignty on the capability of domination. However, if we look at daily experiences the distinction does not always seem to be so apparent and subjects do not appear to fundamentally control the effect objects exhibit in their lives. The strong division particularly becomes troublesome if we want to unfold the ways in which artifacts, as active matter, play an import role in shaping human experiences and how they embed meaning.

Phenomenology has intended to overcome the traditional object-subject dichotomy by providing an understanding of the relationship between these two entities from an integral approach. By placing human experience itself as focus point of investigation, it moves beyond the concept of duality and permits objects the necessary agency that they sustain within experiences. Phenomenological investigations provide an understanding of subject and object as an intertwined relationship in which both constitute one another. Being in the world from a phenomenological stance embeds no clear contrast between a thinking subject and a passive object, but only organises meaningful interpretations in which both subject and object play a role. With as result, a more dynamic structure of understanding that intends to transcend any form of dualism.

As artifacts are increasingly taking up prominent roles, influencing human existence itself, it is more important than ever to understand how humans, as subjects, can come to understand artifacts. It is crucial to overcome the dualistic notion and account for artifacts on their own terms, as meaningful entities. This thesis will therefore focus on an understanding of artifacts from a phenomenological perspective, that is as matter with agency. Up until now, phenomenological discourse has mainly discussed the meaningful interaction between humans and objects and has left a specific inquiry of artifacts out of the scope. Popular examples in phenomenology contain items such as trees, tables and hands. Although these cases illustrate the points being made adequately, they do not really touch upon the complex matter that distinguish human experiences of day-to-day lives. This thesis intends to expand the discourse by introducing an important type of matter, that extensively dominates our experiences, to the discussion. By acknowledging artifact agency it will provide both a new understanding of artifacts and expand the field of phenomenology itself.

1.1 Literature review

In the following paragraph the main different theoretical stances that inform the question *how to understand artifacts beyond duality* will be introduced.

1.1.1 Artifact as non-dualistic entity par excellence

Artifacts are things brought forward by human subjects as the result of a making-process. Therefore, artifacts have a significant different nature than objects and organic matter. There is a certain intentionality within artifacts, a purpose-directedness that objects and nature do not possess. This results in the notion that artifacts are distinguished as having a type of instrumentality to them. They are not accidentally there and do not develop over time; they are what they need to be from the first moment they are brought to existence. Organic matter and objects lack this directedness and intentionality, they are simply a collection of materiality. In common speech people often refer to collections of matter as 'objects', for example when referring to a cup. However, from a conceptual understanding, these types of matter are not objects but distinguished as artifacts.

Artifacts are manifested as complex assemblies of issues and embed a certain normative dimension too. In this way, artifacts are not just a plain collection of material that is open to interpretation; they have a meaning and agency themselves which they exhibit within interaction. Artifacts as designed things are always created for a reason and reflect these social values by merely existing and as a human extension, these values become part of humans within action. This demonstrates that artifacts mean so much more than what the common understanding of an 'object' as item involves.

Accordingly, the hard distinction between objects and subjects that modernity imposed, is not adequate when accounting for artifacts. For this reason Bruno Latour (2007) advocates that the definition 'object' does not hold any longer and these types of matter need to be called 'things'. With his definition of the thing-concept, Latour intends to provide a perspective on artifacts as complex assemblies and expand the understanding of artifacts as matter in the world. His notion of artifacts as 'things', is a fair attempt at grasping the active dynamic character that ascribes to artifacts, as it underlines their distinctive nature from objects or organic matter but still acknowledges them as a material entity.

Objects, as matters of fact have changed into things, complex matters of concern. The fact that people even assign actions to things and have a constant intimate attachment with artifacts shows that there is a continuous intertwinement between people and artifacts. Therefore they need to be regarded as actors in society. This emphasises that the strong division between materiality and subjectivity has dissolved, or at least has no connection to experiences in life. How can we account for the agency of artifacts? Where should we place artifacts as material actors within the dualistic framework of objects and subjects? It appears that artifacts do not resemble one side of the scale, meaning that artifacts transcend any notion of duality.

1.1.2 Existing approaches to account for artifacts

There are existing approaches by different scholars that mean to overcome the object-subject duality and intend to find a way to explain how artifacts come to have agency. With the rise of industrialisation and the increasing presence of consumer products, these scholars questioned what the influence of such artifacts would be on human presence. Subsequently, they developed different attitudes and proposed particular views towards the effect of artifacts.

A. Confrontational approach

The first approach focuses on the threat (technological) artifacts enforce on human existence. This stance is an approach that is much represented by Martin Heidegger in his *The question concerning technology* (Heidegger, 1977). In this work, Heidegger mainly warns for the mode of being that applies to technology. It is not technology itself that worries Heidegger, but the way of thinking that involves technology. Because of technology the human outlook on the world has become distorted and human life has become corrupted. Essentially, humans have become subjected to the constituting power of artifacts.

In the same spirit, Herbert Marcuse in *One dimensional man* (Marcuse, 2007), discusses the ways in which matter is used to govern over people. Essentially, he claims, humans are subjected to the power of politics through the things that are imposed on them. Artifacts have become the ways in which the political manipulates people and cause material and intellectual needs. In this way subjects within a society are

being repressed. In times where object integration within subjectivity is more common, ultimately an alienation from the self can develop and subjects turn in to extended objects.

Within the confrontational position, especially the loss of opposition between matter and subjects is highlighted. As artifacts have a layered existential nature they bear substantial intentionality. Through the realisation that things exist with meaning, the confrontational approach concludes that this meaning is always for the worse. Artifact intentionality necessarily results in the manifestation of political agenda's and manipulation, subjects become purely subjugated to power systems organised through matter. This seems as a limited perspective, juxtaposing agency as only a negative quality provides a limited understanding of how artifacts can act in the world.

B. Mediating approach

The second stance provides a more optimistic perspective for subjects, yet also carries its own limitations. The mediating approach focuses on the way humans can instrumentalise matter. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002) Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno discuss the ways in which humans have used the creation of artifacts to control nature. Within Enlightenment, according to them, objects in-themselves have turned into objects *for* subjects. The account of subjects developed into a meaning giving entity, attaining a primacy over objects. Tools or things were created with the intentionality of controlling the chaos of nature. Because they could create things for a specific purpose, humans started to believe they were actually able to control nature and believed they mastered the world. However, Horkheimer and Adorno point out that this impression of domination is a fundamental mistake. Although created by humans, artifacts and systems gain capacity when manifested in the world and grow more powerful than intended. Subjects become part of the system they designed themselves and become overpowered by the dominance of artifacts that they can not control any longer.

As with the confrontational approach, the understanding of artifacts leads to the conclusion of self-alienation. The mediating approach stresses that with the notion of creation, people have acquired a false belief of control. As a result, people have a wrong impression of their relationship with the world. In the artifact-world relationship, subjects are not established as the conquerors of matter through the artifacts they create but subjected to the power instantiated by these artifacts.

1.1.3 Expanding the notion of duality

Both confrontational and mediating positions provide a reflection on the agency of artifacts from within a narrowed perspective. Where the confrontational approach focuses on artifacts as threat and the mediating approach focuses on artifacts as conqueror of matter, they both seem to fail at providing a complete understanding of artifacts.

Although both positions try to resolve the object-subject dichotomy there is still a dualistic inclination guiding the position of both approaches. In the confrontational approach we find that there is a distinction between activity of artifacts and passivity of subjective submission. Also in the mediating approach we find this duality that is still based on a biased distinction between mind and body. Examining the ways in which both positions account for artifacts makes apparent that there is an active-passive differentiation and knowledge-action distinction at play, besides the subject-object dichotomy.

In attempting to characterise what identifies an artifact, both approaches demonstrate a clarification that is based on these types of differentiations. Where objects are passive and pair to knowledge, artifacts are active and involve action. What we find here, is the understanding that the mind-body duality results in a regression of dualities up to the characterisation of artifacts and their identification. In order to account for the agency of artifacts, they still build upon frameworks that are rooted in dualities and both positions seem to fail at overcoming dichotomies in order to clarify the agency of artifacts. Because of this a limited understanding of artifacts remains and we are left with unsatisfied perspectives on artifacts. The only way to truly understand artifacts is by refraining from dualities and give a dynamic structure of constitution.

1.1.4 How phenomenology can remedy dualities

If one domain of philosophy is adequate to resolve duality, it is phenomenology. Phenomenological discourse has extensively discussed human experience and consequently, the influence of objects on the human experience of the (life)world. By refraining from a detached world knowledge, it opens doors to a dynamic outlook on perception and with this an acknowledgement for the situatedness of our daily experiences, fundamentally changing the outlook on object-subject relationships.

The inclination that the world solely becomes understandable through a structure of meaning is a fundamental change contrasted to the object-subject dichotomy. Humans are incapable of ever knowing things in themselves, there is no possibility for a birds eye perspective on understanding of the world; people are already and foremost, situated in that world. This primordial manifestation within the world forms the basis on which subjects encounter the world. Because of this, humans are involved with the world and do not merely gaze around but look *at* something. This directness towards objects is what Edmund Husserl (1960, 1970,1991) calls intentionality and it is precisely this self-given intentionality that characterises humans as embodied subjectivity in the world. As humans are bound to their being in the world, they can not step out of it and reflect on that world in itself. Therefore, the quest of phenomenology is not to uncover the truth about the existence of the world, nor the things in themselves but the relation between objects and subjects, as this is the only thing humans can truthfully say something about. It is the meaning that objects entail to subjects, which is important and what is truly up for inquiry.

Most important, subjects are not managing their experiences of objects. Phenomenology introduces an interesting perspective on subjective experiences of (object) perceptions. It proposes a standpoint in which perception is always already an intertwinement of activity and passivity at once. This means that both object and subject constitute experience and in this way phenomenology provides an understanding that transcends a framework of duality. There is always a dynamic interrelationship between objects and subjects in experiences of the world in which both object and subject influence one another. Through a fundamental openness to that world, people gain experiences of the world. In the end, everything that is encountered in the world by subjects is therefore the result of the dynamic constitution of experience and therefore the expression of meaning.

Phenomenology succeeds in illustrating that we do not need exactness and hard distinctions between entities in order to make trustful conclusions about the world as we experience it. The ways in which phenomenological discourse shows that non-duality does not result in illusions will inform the non-dualistic, dynamic understanding of artifacts. As phenomenological discourse acknowledges the agency of matter, it is the perfect means to resolve the dualities that have obstructed a clear understanding of artifacts.

1.2 Outline of thesis

In order to answer the main question *how to understand artifacts beyond dualism*, this thesis is divided into three parts that together will provide the necessary framework to enclose the proposed solution.

1. Distinction between objects & artifacts and limitations to existing identifications of artifacts

Artifacts unfold a multifactoredness that makes them distinctive from objects and should be properly distinguished as such. The first part of this thesis will therefore set out the ways in which artifacts are different from objects and organic matter. Especially because artifacts are human-created, the human involvement within their structure is what makes them ambiguous matter. Prominent in this analysis will therefore be the (designed) intentionality within artifacts that constitutes their instrumentality and meaningful way of appearing.

When the dynamic nature of artifacts is conceptually distinguished, the existing different approaches towards artifact agency will be disclosed. Both these attitudes focus on one specific capability and for this reason provide a limited understanding of artifacts as a whole. The dualistic traits that underline these frameworks will be unpacked in order to show how a non-dualistic approach towards artifacts is required.

The following points will be central:

- *What precisely is an artifact*, using several notions given by different (design) philosophers and eliciting how an artifact is distinctive.
- *How artifacts manifest themselves within the world*, considering both confrontational and mediating approaches and eliciting what both methods intend to accomplish.

2. Object - subject relationship as in phenomenology

Phenomenology has overcome the disengagement between the two domains that traditionally have been distinguished separately in the world: objects and subjects. The second part of this thesis will therefore

focus on this relationship as put forward by phenomenologists Husserl (1960, 1970, 1991) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2014).

First the constitutional relationship between objects and subjects will be discussed in order to illustrate how both entities mutually shape experiences of each other. Thereby clearing away the strong division between two conceptually different entities and providing a new perspective on how subjects gain knowledge of objects. After this, the impact of this understanding will be enhanced with the introduction of the concept of lifeworld as cultural and historical world and horizon of all experiences. The notion of generative passivity at last, will ultimately show how lived experiences inform new ones to arrive and how subjects come to understand the world over time.

Both thinkers contribute to a more complete understanding of human experiences and the way people are open to the world. They expand the notion of knowledge and give room for a dynamic, embodied type of knowledge. In this way the passive-active dichotomy that results from a strong object-subject distinction also falls away, which creates room for nuance and a more organic perspective on experiences. Their line of reasoning results in the recognition that non-duality does not necessarily result in a fluid understanding of knowledge. It simply underlines that we do not need a strict division if we want to understand how objects appear meaningful, as the disconnection was never truth-apt to our experiences. The dynamic approach of constitution will later support the understanding of how artifacts can affect subjects within interaction and how their meaningful relationship endures.

Part two of the thesis will therefore focus on the following points:

- *Defining in what way subjects transcend the given within experience* as discussed by Husserl and his notion of intentionality and transcendence.
- *Explaining how both object and subject constitute one another in a meaning giving process* as proposed by Husserl through his account of mutual constitution and the lifeworld.
- *Describing how subjective understanding of objects is something that develops over time* using Don Beith's explanation of Merleau-Ponty's notion of generative passivity.

3. Non-dualistic approach towards understanding artifacts

The strict division between objects and subjects has dissolved and insights from the phenomenological method will inform a new perspective on the understanding of artifacts. Although artifacts are often seen as purely instrumental, this thesis intends to show that artifacts play such a bigger role in human experiences and ultimately co-shape the lifeworld. Artifacts have a special character as they, like objects, co-constitute our world and unlike objects, have a distinctive agency and express meaning. Even household products that one might suggest as meaningless are not plain in terms of values: they embed a certain outlook and lifeworld in themselves. They are not exclusively constituting, they are (inter)acting. The mere fact that artifacts are not just something to be looked at but involve action and turn in to an extension of humans during usage, makes that they become intimately involved in human experiences, ultimately defining those experiences.

First, the way in which artifacts become understandable in a generative process and respectively how artifacts turn expressive in this relationship will be discussed. After this, an explanation will be given on how artifacts stimulate and co-create habits in an active way, following the conceptions of mutual constitution and the lifeworld. The relationship between subjects and artifacts is something that develops gradually over time, reshaping and sustaining habits of that lifeworld. In the final chapter of this thesis a case-study is given to exemplify how artifacts gain agency and become collaborators of constituting collective memory within societies. Conclusively, the effects of a non-dualistic understanding of artifacts are provided.

The third part of this thesis will focus on answering the main question: *how to understand artifacts beyond dualism* by combining the understanding of artifacts as active matter and the phenomenological approach towards the relationship between subjects and objects. In order to do so the following points will be set out:

- *How do artifacts turn meaningful in subject existence?* In order to answer this question the theory on mutual constitution and the lifeworld by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty will be combined with the existing theories on artifacts.
- *How does the artifact becomes an expressive entity in the lifeworld?* This question will touch upon the notion of mutual constitution as mentioned in phenomenological discourse and the manner in which artifacts become expressive over time within a specific lifeworld.
- In order to answer the proposed problem properly a case study involving a pressure cooker as example artifact will be adopted. This will illustrate how the theory comes to live in an actual situation.

1.3 Significance of the Study

There are three main areas of concern in which this thesis will add to an already ongoing discussion or will provide a new perspective.

1. Traditional phenomenology focusses mainly on non-active objects within object - subject relationship

Objects as discussed in phenomenological discourse are given agency through the way they mutually shape experiences but still come across as rather passive and value-neutral matter themselves. More complex matter such as artifacts, as meaningful entities, are barely accounted for or discussed. As the world turns more complex day by day, we are in need of a clarification how these artifacts turn meaningful in our experiences. Therefore an expansion in phenomenological discourse is necessary. Artifacts as distinctive materiality and their accompanying particular constituting relationship with subjects is something that can add a new perspective to object-subject relationships in general and also substantiates the concept of our lifeworld.

2. Field of philosophy of technology focusses on the mediating role of artifacts in a rather linear way

Philosophy of technology often discusses the agency of artifacts in such a way that it appears as if technological entities behold an autonomy on controlling people's lives and humans are solely handed over to the power of these matter. People are indicated as not always being conscious of this dominance and therefore seem to be subjected to a "hidden" power of technology that is inescapable. In this way, technology determines people's worldview and experiences of life. This proposes quite a narrow perspective on the ways in which artifacts play a role in human existence. Although it is important to underline that artifacts have agency, subjects seem to earn more agency in this relationship as well. The field of philosophy of technology seems to value the influence of artifacts better, resulting in a one-directed relationship. Artifacts affect human existence, yet the ways in which people can understand and grasp the value of artifacts from within their relationship towards them, has been quite underexposed. By accepting that artifacts have agency, one does not imply that they have complete authority. Moving the perspective towards the position how subjects can come to understand this agency, is a valuable addition to the dialogue on the impact of (technological) artifacts in our human world.

3. Design of artifacts

Gaining more insight in the ways artifacts manifest themselves in meaningful interactions can benefit the design of conscious products and the implementation of aspired values within society. As designers are receiving substantial impact in society through the things they bring forth, it is valuable to research how artifacts manifest values so designers can become more conscious of the effects their designs have and the implicit ways in which they influence the existence of people within a society. Also from this, designers can learn how to deliberately make meaning appear in order for users to have a fundamental understanding of the values embedded in the items they use. In this way users will gain autonomy and will also benefit from a more conscious design of artifacts.

Besides these specific areas of relevance, there is also the general aspect that the proposed topic touches upon daily life interactions for every human being. It therefore respects the credo of phenomenology to bring philosophy back to lived experiences and attempts to truly reconnect philosophy to life itself.

Chapter 2

On Artifacts



Figure 4: Achille Castiglioni, RR126 hi-fi stereo, 1965. Brionvega

2. On Artifacts

Artifacts, although often regarded as ambiguous matter, are essentially the most natural phenomena of human existence. Since artifacts arise out of creation, they are the consequence of the natural necessity of subjects to bring forth and leave something behind in the world. However, it is exactly this circumstance of creation and human involvement that makes the condition of artifacts as things hard to grasp and why they often are distinguished as conceptually vague. What exactly *is* an artifact? Why are they distinguished as different from objects? What makes that artifacts admit agency? In the following chapter I will first shed more light on the distinctive nature of artifacts and provide a deeper understanding of artifacts as different from objects and natural matter. Making use of both the confrontational and the mediating approach I will explain how existing approaches account for the activeness of artifacts and why these proposed methods are not sufficient. At last, the multifactness of artifacts will be expanded in order to underline why we are in need of a non-dualistic account of artifacts.

2.1 What is an artifact?

Artifacts can best be described as having the status of a dual nature as matter with people's intentions entangled in it. (Kroes, Meijers, 2006) Due to their complex way of being-in-the-world, artifacts appear conceptually complex and fuzzy. Though, postulating a too tight description might harm the various shapes artifacts can take on. In order to understand what determines artifacts as matter, it is necessary to further explore where artifacts originate from and how this defines their mode of being.

Artifacts are always the product of handcraft, they require a certain author and are made for a specific purpose. This human involvement within their structure is fundamental for their appearing. As the result of craftsmanship, artifacts always and already have an intentionality inscribed in them. They are not accidentally here in the world, but precisely because they will serve a particular goal. However, this instrumentality has endless possibilities and can take on many different forms. For example in the shape of a spiritual or aesthetic engagement such as in religious or cultural items. Or in a more practical mode as consumer goods that people use every day. Although not always explicitly visible, all artifacts have a directedness to them and ever appear embedded with meaning. Considering the fact that designers interpret a problem and provide an answer to this by means of a design, the designed artifact becomes the manifestation of the designers answer to the interpreted problem. For this reason it is important to emphasise that although artifacts work towards a particular objective, their solution is always in light of a subjective understanding of how that objective should be interpreted. Consequently, the instrumentality of artifacts is not neutral.

The mere fact that a person is engaged in creating the thing, makes that there is always an involvement of a particular outlook on the world, and therefore the intertwinement of beliefs embedded within an artifact. Yet, this does not always occur consciously or deliberately. Just by being a subject in the world, one takes subjectivity along in every act one undertakes. Through the responsiveness within the act of designing/creation, the craftsman incorporates a layer of normativity and embeds values in the artifact. This fundamental subjectiveness is inescapable as human beings. When discussing artifacts such as relics, the interpretation and manifestation of meaning might seem much more apparent than with the design of a consumer product such as a phone. Nevertheless, they are equally subjectively constituted. The mere fact that the artifact exists, already presupposes a certain value that is celebrated. Since artifacts are created to answer to a certain intention, they always relate to that specific context which becomes manifested in the artifact itself. As Wybo Houkes and Pieter Vermaas (2010) put forward; the artifact function is a capacity, a preferential status within the context of certain actions and beliefs. So, an artifact has a certain way of being which is designed in accordance with the context it relates to. It exists in order to provide an answer to an existing situation. Ultimately, the designed artifact becomes argumentative in its way of framing. (Halstrøm, 2016).

There are many different types of artifacts that are used for very distinctive purposes. Although they all have a certain instrumentality to them, this is not always of a practical nature. The way humans interact with artifacts shows that they mean so much more than 'just' a material thing. Often, artifacts are used in such a habitual way that they become intertwined with its using subject. It is an intimate relationship that takes shape within the interaction with artifacts itself. Especially in connection with rituals, artifacts arouse, embed meaning and portray values. Things as artifacts mean something to subjects for different reasons.

Whether this conveys itself as a relation of instrumentality, for instance with glasses, or as spiritual relationship, such as with relics; there is always an emotional bond that grounds the relationship with these things. One does not simply pray for a piece of wood, but for the statue of Maria. One does not constantly perceive the world through glass, but the outlook on the world by these glasses turns into vision as such. Artifacts always mean more than just their physical build up and need to be understood as the carriers of meaning within their habitual interrelationship with subjects.

2.2 How artifacts are distinctive from (natural) objects

In an article on “Philosophy of Technology” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Franssen, Lokhorst, & van de Poel, 2018) artifacts are stated to be distinguished differently from objects and organic matter. Objects, are traditionally distinguished as everything that is matter and therefore opposing spiritual subjects. Yet, if we look closer to the domain of matter we can find a substantial difference between the ontological presence of objects. In the world of matter we can distinguish between three types of materiality that each have their own character: organic matter, objects and artifacts.

The way these types of matter manifest themselves is different and conclusively, they carry distinctive effective behaviour. Organic matter bears no intentionality and therefore simply involves evolution. It contains no point of reference and it is not heading towards a particular objective other than fulfilling its purpose by growing in itself. Objects then, include everything that is just a material thing, with no intentionality and no organic manifestation. For artifacts though, intentionality is precisely what constitutes them. They are created with a specific purpose, ready to put to action.

However, these three types of matter remain to be material entities. In reality their appearances are closely connected to one another. Therefore their differences are mostly visible when investigating their conceptual character. To illustrate, a piece of glass is an object, yet when one puts two pieces of glass together in a frame it turns in to a pair of glasses, which is an artifact. Then if we examine the pieces of glass more closely, it has organic roots. As the sand that needs to be melted in order to create a piece of glass, is organic matter. By turning the pieces into a complex assembly, it receives a purpose of use and turns in a characterisation of ready-for-action, thereby turning into an artifact. While the object, as piece of glass remains ready-for-knowledge. It can be used, if one gains knowledge of how to turn it in to something purposeful. As soon as intentionality comes along, the artifact character arises. Instrumentality makes artifacts stand out from all other matter in the world.

What distinguishes an artifact from organic matter or an object is respectively its activeness. Whereas organic matter and objects are passive materiality, artifacts are always involved in action. (Natural) objects are awaiting for subjects to be used, while artifacts instantiate a (bodily) reaction themselves. Differently from organic matter or objects, humans do not only look at them but engage and interact with artifacts. The most important point is that artifacts are not simply materiality that is ‘just there’. They are intimately involved in the way humans perceive reality and how people are present in their world. It is often through the use of artifacts that subjects are in contact with the environment around them.

Therefore artifacts have a two sided presence in terms of activeness. On the one hand they are scripted with meaning and actively facilitate certain behaviour, and on the other hand they are always depending on human existence. This gives reason for Latour (2008) to state that the relation between humans and artifacts is symmetrical: it works both ways. Although lacking pure mental states, artifacts still portray values. For this reason artifacts are already active by nature and never purely content-dependent on a subject. Artifacts are both object-like and subject-like, as materiality with embedded values. Therefore, the traditional strict division between objects and subjects does not appear to be accurate if we want to clarify out of what framework artifacts act. They can only be positioned as acting somewhere in the middle.

2.3 What works of art teach us about artifacts

The agency of artifacts is a notion that comes down to the understanding that things as artifact entail more than their physical build up and can mean beyond than what is consciously attributed to them by a subject. To substantiate this notion of the active mode of being that applies to artifacts, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s theory on artworks is a valuable contribution. Both artworks and artifacts are hard to be placed in the distinction between mind and body as they turn expressive within interaction. They are not passive materiality, yet also not active subjectivity.

In *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1975) Gadamer advocates the fact that art has a significant way of speaking towards subjects and is more than purely the presentation of aesthetic ideas. According to him artworks are the carriers of spirit and have depth to them. Within the interaction with art, humans experience a “*fullness of meaning*” (Gadamer, 1975, p61) that does not only relate purely to the content of the artwork but also to life itself. The work of art presents itself as a world of its own, that is to be discovered as a meaning. In the work there are symbols made visible to the senses, yet the deeper meaning lies beyond the visual representation of these symbols and is only obtainable by understanding what the symbols mean. Similarly, artifacts also have symbols that refer to meaning and can be understood within interpretation.

Humans always make sense of artworks from within their own meaning making institutions. But a work of art is not like any matter that just stands in front of a subject; it changes the person who experiences it *while* perceiving. It affects the spectator in such a way that a person will come to see something in it. The topic of the experience of art, is the artwork itself, but it is also active as it exerts a certain attraction over the spectator. The person looking at the work of art is in that manner ‘being played’. Through the interpretation of the content, the being of representation becomes more than the being of the thing represented. In this interrelation the work itself is coming into existence, it becomes encountered as a meaningful whole.

The work of art itself determines how people will experience the artwork through its mode of being, but it also reacts and therefore corresponds with what spectators bring along with them. In the experience of art, the meaning of the work itself is fully presented as well as the opening up of life. Both these two layers of experience are given at the same time and the experience of an artwork is therefore a dynamic combination of both the world and being in the world. So, the different possibilities that can be encountered emerge from the work itself, composed with the person viewing it. “*But in them too it is not the case that the work exists “an sich” and only the effect varies: it is the work of art itself that displays itself under various conditions.*” (Gadamer, 1975, p141) Every viewer does not only look in a different way, he or she will also see different things. So the work of art is a continuous determination of meaning that can change according to the interaction with the subject it has in front of it.

Gadamer puts forward that works of art can take on different shapes in different contexts. The work of art is thus not a fixed entity, but it co-develops with its context. The fact that an artwork depends on a presenting is not the sign of a lacking autonomous meaning, to be presentation simply belongs to its essence of being. The different possibilities of the work, emerge as the work, from out of itself. The artwork changes according to its context and viewer yet it is still the artwork itself that changes as phenomenon.

Although the work of art is interpreted contextually and historically, there is also a particular origin within the work that remains over time and it never loses through contemporaneity. Thus there is something to the artwork that can not simply be a subjective undertaking but is a core of meaning fundament instantiated by its creation. In this way the work carries a certain historical horizon or cultural world in it and the work is able to present this meaning through its own content over time. Artworks need to be accounted for as lived objects and not empty wholes. They tell stories within them, culturally, historically and contextually.

Artifacts involve an instrumentality that artworks do not possess yet, Gadamer illustrates an important point with his theory on artworks that also contributes to a dynamic understanding of artifacts. What Gadamer shows is that artworks, as physical thing, also carry meaning and are ‘active’ matter. They work as worlds of their own and it is through interaction that they become the expression of a certain meaning. This is not something that is predefined and preserved within the artwork itself, rather the artwork opens up a dimension of interpretation in which the spectator can find a meaning. It is the artwork that gives rise to a certain meaning and not purely the subjective projection of meanings on to the work.

This is very similar to the way in which artifacts are involved with people and also portray a specific meaning. Within interaction, the meaning arises and artifacts open up new domains of experiences to people, ultimately affecting the world. For artworks this interaction is constituted in perceiving and contemplating the work. As spectator of a work of art, one has a more distanced interaction than what an interaction with artifacts involves. Artifacts can be touched and collectively shape experiences as extended capacity. It only seems sensible to conclude that if created objects such as artworks bear meaning and agency, artifacts do so too. The dimension of values and meaning that artifacts signify will be manifested in a much more fundamental way, as they result out of an intimate bodily interaction with subjects. One will

not only look and contemplate the dimension they open up, but will be thrown into the world by means of their interference.

2.4 The way in which artifacts involve action

In *Acting Artifacts* (Verbeek, Slob, 2006) Peter-Paul Verbeek advocates a perspective on artifacts as active matter. He puts forward that as artifacts have a mediating role, they facilitate human involvement within reality. Through the meaningful interaction with the world by artifacts, reality presents itself to subjects. Therefore artifacts are constituted as acting agents in the relationship humans have with their own world. In this way society is not only build up by a collective of subjective forces but is a unified project in which artifacts also play their part.

Although artifacts are created by humans, intriguing enough they start living a life of their own once placed in the world. The way they will influence behaviour through different interpretations is not always something the creator has in mind nor what is controllable once the artifact is manifested. Therefore the intentional character of artifacts is a dynamic and complex circumstance. Due to the fact that artifacts are constituted by subjective interpretations within the act of creation, they influence peoples actions in the world in a non-neutral manner. However, these intentions are also not fixed as artifacts are always up for interpretation by their users. As artifacts turn meaningful context dependent, artifacts are differently perceived and distinctively interpreted by various subjects. Ultimately, their artifact effectiveness gets shape *within* the relationship with subjects.

Artifacts exhibit agency due to their embodiment of meaning and the way they shape human behaviour. But what entails this agency of artifacts exactly? How do artifacts express values and as a result affect society? Ultimately; in what way are artifacts 'active'? Within the theoretical field there are two positions, that can be distinguished as a confrontational attitude and a mediating attitude. Both positions maintain a different stance towards the way in which artifacts affect human existence, but they align in the mere understanding that artifacts as such are active agents within society.

2.4.1 Confrontational attitude

The most well known critic of technological artifacts is Heidegger in his work *The question concerning technology* (Heidegger, 1977) In this work, Heidegger famously stated that "*the essence of technology is nothing technological*" (Heidegger, 1977, p35). What Heidegger intends to argument for is the notion that the manner in which subjects think of technology and therefore of creation, has disrupted the human worldview and consequently the way humans exist in their world.

The instrumentality that men discovered in the use of technology has changed the human attitude towards the world. By making use of technological developments, humans have brought new means in the world that have freed humanity from incredible burdens and liberated life. Work could be done easier and in more efficient ways. However, now everything has become judged according to its use and regarded as a means. Every matter is approached as 'standing reserve', ready to be used and serve a certain purpose later. By immediately instrumenting every matter as a possible device, humans fail to see what things actually are and in this way the human mode of encountering the world has turned corrupted.

Instantiated by the modern technological mode of being (enframing), every thing already presents itself as meaningful and necessary from the first encounter. The bringing forth of an artifact within this cultural framework is therefore a revealing of the technological attitude within the modern human mode of being. People are already born in this mode of ordering and as a consequence the internalisation of enframing within subjectivity, becomes manifested in the creation of artifacts as meaningful wholes. Most important, Heidegger does not account for technology as a means to an end, but it *is* the mode of human existence. What is revealed in the world and shows itself, first needs enframing in order to be acknowledged to exist in the world and to be understood. In this way every artifact only makes sense through the technological mode of being. Humans are therefore no longer free, but are subjected to the power that technology has over them. Through technology people exploit resources as means to end, it constitutes the enframing of the world as instrumentality and it substantiates the mood in which the world appears to make sense.

Heidegger advocates a position in which humans do not experience the way artifacts become apparent for them, since subjects are already too pre-occupied with them. There is not a particular moment of coming to presence but humans are already enclosed in their natural mode of enframing. Besides, it is only through

this structure of enframing that the world makes sense and appears meaningful. The mode of being that is continuously supported by the introduction of new artifacts, perpetuates the existence within enframing and causes humanity to drift away further from a natural attitude towards the world.

Marcuse (2007), in the same tradition, discusses in *One dimensional man* (Marcuse, 2007), the ways in which artifacts are utilised to govern over people. In a society, false needs are superimposed on citizens by political affairs. Instead of providing a liberation, the revolution of products has brought a repression. They have become the means through which politics manipulates humans and causes material and intellectual needs. Individuals have no control on this and are subjected to the external powers that are imposed on them through materiality. Since people are stuck in this totalitarian system, Marcuse believes that people have become unable to require freedom. *“How can the people who have been the object of effective and productive domination by themselves create the conditions of freedom?”* (Marcuse, 2007, p9) Effectively, artifacts root and re-enter in the same societal structure. In this way, humans are unable to get out of the system of manipulation and ever require freedom. There are no specific forms of technology that are being played to dominate, but technology itself has turned into a form of social control and domination.

The alienation of the self that consequently occurs is an effect of the material world becoming an extension of human’s mind and body. Even personal inner lives have become invaded by technological reality, which is mastered according to the agenda of consumerism. Within artifacts, the false needs and false consciousness of society become embodied, ultimately enslaving humans. As a result subjects have become dependent on objects and *“the objective world loses its “objectionable” character, its opposition to the subject.”* (Marcuse, 2007, p152)

What both thinkers express clearly, is that non-social means are invoking power on the social. This is not necessarily controlled by one evil genius towards a particular effect but rather the manifestation of the institution itself by means of the artifacts it brings forward. Artifacts become the manifestation of this mode of being and simultaneously hold individuals within the system. In this way artifacts bear active occupation of people towards their way of being in the world. A contemporary example of this confrontational perspective would be the understanding of smartphones as manipulating people to comply and socialise through their phone. The confrontational approach does not imply that artifacts support one objective that needs to be obtained but rather that by their presence a mode of being is maintained. Artifacts are maintaining a negative power system over humans by preserving their subject-attachment to this system. Resulting in a distorted relationship between subjects, the world and life itself. There is no escaping to this mode and in this way artifacts hold sway over people. It is the mere existence of artifacts themselves that makes them active matter. Because they are, they affect and institutionalise.

There is a strong active-passive duality underlying these confrontational conclusions. Subjects are approached as purely being dominated by the effects of artifacts. This proposes a rather passive stance towards subjects and the agency they maintain. Presenting artifacts as active does not necessarily have to result in an opposing characterisation of subjects. As for the smartphone, subjects can still decide to live without it and thereby not be subjugated to any power institutionalised on them. Stating that artifacts involve a transformation of action does not imply that subjects have no freedom concerning these affairs. The dualistic traits that have always distinguished a duality between subjects and objects seem to be so deeply emerged in modern thinking that they become troublesome once more when accounting for concepts as artifacts. Just as artifacts do not solely belong to a subject-object distinction, we do not have to define the relationship between subjects and artifacts as a passive-active dichotomy. The distinction between liberty and constraint is a too narrow and fast conclusion resulting from the inability to accept the possibility of a non-dual judgement.

As artifacts are indeed affecting subjects throughout their existence, a more dynamic understanding would be much more informative and helpful. Accounting for artifacts and subjects as an actor-actor relationship can help to expose how artifact-intentionality truly informs subjective life, while subjects also maintain governance over their own existence.

2.4.2 Mediating attitude

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) also provide an analysis on the active nature of artifacts but with different conclusions. In *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments* (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002) they explain how humans have developed their attitude towards matter and how this has resulted in a new way of being for subjects. In the enlightenment a strict division between reason and matter has been distinguished, turning objects into things *for* subjects. Since the subject with its reason is always regarded as more

powerful, the *in-itself* of objects changed into *existing for a subject*. In this way, humans believed they were in control and dominated the essence of matter. Objects changed conceptually into merely the carriers of meaning that subjects wished to embed. *“The manifold affinities between existing things are supplanted by the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object, between rational significance and its accidental bearer.”* (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002, p7)

But the whole clean split between matter and subjects is only an intellectual construct and has no connection to sensuous experiences in real life. For Horkheimer and Adorno this is what grounds the immense mistake of after-enlightenment thinking and what has fundamentally corrupted humanity itself. The need to rationalise everything and regard reason as the only form of power is not truth-apt to encounters in reality. How about affectionate and bodily reactions? The body and the soul, which are incredibly important for human experiences of life, have a difficult place in after enlightenment thinking as they can not be mathematically distinguished. Yet, the intertwinement of these two in habitual, emotional experiences are fundamental parts of being a human. Through the disconnection of body and soul, with as result an alienation of these sensuous experiences, society ultimately has alienated from itself.

Humans are raised in a world where objects have turned in to significations of mastery and every matter has become objectified by means of instrumentality. But this has lead to a domination of (technological) rationality and the loss of independent subjectivity. Humans created all kinds of artifacts and systems to control nature but have now become embedded within those organised systems. Subjects have lost control over the things that they intended and brought to existence themselves. Finally, they become submersed to the power systems that their systematic approach has brought about. In this way, they have become the product of their own dominating rationality and this cycle of manipulation will continue as the system rationale is inevitable. *“Each single manifestation of the culture industry inescapably reproduces human beings as what the whole has made them”* (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002, p100)

What Horkheimer and Adorno portray is that, when manifested, artifacts become part of a system and become empowered by their connection to the world. As the rationale of artifacts will gain sovereignty when becoming manifested in the world, they will entail more than what they were intended to involve by their creator. They expand the width of their scope and will obtain more touch points. Consequently the creators, although once feeling a sense of authority in the process of creation, are in the end also being submersed to the power-system that is maintained in the world by all manifested artifacts. It is a false belief that they can control the ways artifacts develop within the world and all possible interpretations. As for the smartphone as contemporary example, people have a false understanding that they can control these items and their effect, while in reality new habits are already developed and have (unconsciously) become immersed within people and culture.

The mediating attitude focuses on two impressions of artifact characters. First, it wants to convey how subjects have a false impression on how artifacts will sustain an ability to maintain control of nature. Informed by the distinction between matter and spirit, there is still a strong action-knowing duality manifested in this conception of artifacts as pure instrumentality. Subjects are accounted to have knowledge and the right know-how, artifacts provide the instrument and involve action. In this sense, artifacts are accounted as being instrumentalised by the dominance of subjects. However, although artifacts do not bear ‘knowledge’ in themselves they are still the carries of understanding or spirit instantiated by subjects. Therefore artifacts are not solely related to pure action. Moreover, they gain power beyond their scope and turn even more active when manifested. This is where the mediating argumentation reaches at a strong active-passive distinction. The distinction between knowledge and action, keeps subjects from wholly understanding the agency artifacts bear. Again, we find a rather passive attitude ascribed to subjects. It appears as if artifacts are the active entities and subjects are passively continuing their lives, while being dominated by power systems of artifacts. Conclusively, although subjects might create artifacts they are not authorities on the effects of these artifacts.

But artifacts do not act on their own, they only become instrumentalised in pair with a using subject. In effect, there is not one specific entity in control of the system but the combined activeness of both artifact and subject is what results in activity.

What this shows is that again, strong dualities do not effectively inform how artifacts turn active. It is not the case that since artifacts are material entities and used as instrument, they can solely involve action. At the same time, it is just as biased to conclude that when artifacts are active, subjects necessarily need to be passive. The active mediating character that involves artifacts is precisely why they can not be

distinguished as fundamentally opposing subjects. A better way to account for artifacts in a mediating approach, is to position them as working alongside subjects. This might involve that artifacts are not the signs of pure domination by subjects but rather the instantiation of knowledge in the world, as instrument. Thereby acknowledging artifacts as an extension, rather than a servant. Then, artifacts sustain an objective for subjects while simultaneously acquiring new possibilities in implementations of action. This means that the artifact can be both an instrumentality to the subject's cause as manifesting an individual agency. The strong distinctions between subject-object, knowledge-action and passive-active prove to be rather unnecessary as these characterisations are essentially continuously intertwined within the composed action of subject and artifact.

2.4.3 Embracing non-duality in the activeness of artifacts

Both confrontational and mediating attitude provide a limited understanding of artifacts as they prove committed to a dualistic approach. This is obstructing a truthful understanding of artifacts rather than informing one. In order to unpack how artifacts are truly engaged with people and why they are distinctive in the world of matter, it is necessary to refrain from such dualistic frameworks.

Important is to recall that artifacts only articulate values as material thing. They are not just *carriers* of meaning, but material entities that people interact with. The way artifacts therefore influence subjects and express any meaning is always through a social bound: the attachment and the intimate relationship that is sustained within interaction. As the meaningful artifact derives out of the interaction with a subject, the 'acting' artifact is therefore an appearing composite of both entities.

Artifacts have become a dual phenomenon by interiorising and directing societal values in the world. They embody meaning in line with the cultural values of their creator and simultaneously act within that cultural framework as manifestations of values. Ultimately, by the creation of artifacts, people are also designing the sort of humans they are and want to become. Meaning and morality become embedded and turn into complex assemblies in which these parts come together.

Latour (2007) already senses the active nature that relates to artifacts in the manner subjects talk about products. When talking about things, people already assign actions to them, for instance in the way of stating that 'the knife cuts the meat'. According to Latour's explanation everything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference can be accounted for as an actor. For this reason artifacts, as things, can be seen as actors in society too.

With his theory Latour does not intend to claim that artifacts do things *instead* of human actors but that they do possess certain agency. Artifacts are participating, but do not determine the action. This approach seems much more akin to daily experiences. People are not overruled by the things they use, but they are certainly affected by the way they make use of them. So, understanding that artifacts have agency is not the same as claiming that there is always a necessary causality of thing intentionality.

As Latour points out, the whole division between the social world and the material world is in reality an artifact in itself. It is the construct of a social embedded activity. The way the world is divided in different domains is something that is only conceptually there and yet still affects the way humans make sense of the world. When encountering the world this already occurs from within a framework that we as humans do not reflect upon within experience. People have already taken up these meanings and values in an unconscious manner. The same accounts for subject's relationship towards artifacts. People are already placed in a world where artifacts make sense and bear a particular meaning.

Since there is so much symbolic meaning in artifacts, Latour comes to the conclusion that matters of fact have changed into matters of concern. "*The discussion begins to shift for good when one introduces not matters of fact, but what I now call matters of concern. While highly uncertain and loudly disputed, these real, objective, atypical and, above all, interesting agencies are taken not exactly as object but rather as gatherings.*" (Latour, 2007, p114) The change of matters of fact in to matters of concern underlines the changed perspective towards materiality. As matter of concern, artifacts are regarded as the carriers of signs that imply a certain meaning. Artifacts are being interpreted, play a role, have a meaning and respectively, subjects become concerned with them.

The normative dimension within artifacts, their hidden politics and their meaning contribution work as directive signs that come to life within praxis with humans. Truly, in the relationship with artifacts, humans

are never outside of meaning. This postulation of meaning is shaping both subject and artifact, and can only be explored further when the relationship between the two is encountered as a mutual engagement.

2.5 How to progress from here

Conclusively, artifacts are interesting forms of materiality in the world since they are:

- different from subjects because they lack consciousness
- different from objects and organic matter because they have intentionality
- different from artworks because they bear instrumentality

It appears hard to give an integral description of artifacts while maintaining a strict object-subject duality. As artifacts have a dual nature as physical thing with embedded intentions they, per definition, overthrow any form of duality. They are the expression of a certain cultural conviction and they lead to the continuation of these conceptions by manifesting themselves as meaningful embodiments accordingly.

Although both confrontational and mediating methods prove too limited in order to grasp artefact agency in all its full complexity, they both contribute to an understanding that artifacts are actors in our society. Combining both approaches leads to the conclusion that artifacts are to be encountered as meaningful worlds that open up in connection with humans. It is in this relationship that they always manifest themselves as more than pure materiality. Although artifacts always need a subject to be brought to existence this does not entail that they are act-dependent on humans. Humans might create artifacts themselves, but are simultaneously affected by them. When presented in the world, artifacts require their own agency and influence human experiences in - and of the world. They have a depth of meaning to them which makes them versatile and transformative and their embedded meaning co-shapes subjects and their world. Through this system, artifacts are to be encountered as active meaning institutions within the human-world relationship.

As subjects become intertwined with artifacts in experiences and co-work rather than dominate, we need an account that acknowledges this dual relationship. An approach that can account for artifacts as active and constituting, while remaining matter and provides an understanding of subjects as being affected in interaction but remaining authoritative. Ultimately, an understanding that overthrows duality and provides a dynamic understanding of subject-artifact relationships as how they unfold in experiences.

Chapter 3

Overcoming object - subject dualities



Figure 5 : Studio Drift, *Drifter*, 2018. Stedelijk Museum

"Back to the things themselves "
- Husserl

"The flesh is at the heart of the world."
- Merleau-Ponty

3. Overcoming object - subject dualities

From the moment René Descartes (1983) intended to solve the question of human ontology by introducing his division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, our meaningful understanding of the world has been obscured. Through the separation of mind and body, a radical dualism between activity and passivity emerged within human existence. The active mind that involved knowledge, was no longer immersed in a corporeality. Hence, the body turned in to regulated materiality, understood as passively acting. This strong conceptual differentiation resulted in a dichotomy between subjects and objects, as mind-matter and extended-matter and a regression of conceptual dualities to follow.

The separation of experiences and the material world is a conceptual framework that has no connection with daily human existence. This dualistic approach shows to be especially problematic if we want to understand how humans are open to the world and actively engaged with their surrounding. Phenomenology intends to overcome this duality by returning the focus to what experiences of the world mean and how they appear within interaction. Ultimately, bringing philosophy back to the domain of authentic human existence. Rather than focussing on conceptual structures, phenomenological discourse is directed towards the objects humans authentically can investigate: the phenomena of experiences.

In the following chapter I will consider the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty in order to elaborate on the constituting relationship between subjects and objects, and explain how humans come to experience objects in a meaningful way. First, I will show how Husserl grounds subjects within the world, thereby within experience and overcomes object-subject duality by providing a dynamic understanding of their interrelation in mutual constitution. Afterwards, this outline for a new relationship will be expanded to embodied, habitual interactions in the concept of lifeworld. At last, the distinction in active-passive synthesis will be dismissed in order to provide a more nuanced perspective on how objects and subjects are intertwined in unified experiences. These attitudes together will show that non-dualism does not result in fluidity and will finally inform the outline for a dynamic framework of understanding artifacts.

3.1 How subjects relate to objects from a phenomenological perspective

3.1.1 Embedded within the world

In *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl defined phenomenology for the first time as a new attitude towards the analysis of human knowledge. (Zahavi, 2003, p7). It has been a lifelong journey for him to reveal the ways in which humans make sense of the world. The most vital part of Husserl's quest for understanding human knowledge was to place it exactly *within* experience and to refrain from idealities. He emphasised that the fundamental subjectivity of humans as subjects *in* the world is crucial for their understanding of the world. (Zahavi, 2003, p12) Humans are simply unable to step out of their subjective placement within the world and the constant engagement this characterises. Merleau-Ponty took this understanding of embodiment a step further and underlined the relevance of our corporeality in *Phenomenology of perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2014) by grounding his whole philosophy of perception on the notion of the body.

Both thinkers emphasise that the way in which humans exist within the world, is of crucial importance for their relationship with objects. According to them, a static relationship between objects and subjects does not at all seem accurate if we reflect on the dynamic nature of daily life experiences. The world already signifies something and experiences therefore only present themselves as a meaningful whole. As humans, we are not merely *looking* at the world, we are *in* it and continuously interacting accordingly. Experience is therefore neither a direct copy of reality brought to consciousness nor the unfolding of a systematic process in which perception emanates from reality and a subjective reflection is installed. Instead, the impression one receives is already an immediate intertwining of the visible object and the subject's meaning giving. One does not encounter a trunk and leaves, but perceives a tree. It is an appearing at once, within the synthesis of perceiving itself.

All mental content is essentially directed at something, respectively there is a certain about-ness to it. Husserl emphasises that as part of the world, all subject experiences are characterised as being conscious of something. In perception, it is not any object that one is conscious of, but that particular one that is 'intended'. As humans, we are looking *at* something, trying to grasp its appearance for us. This object-

directedness of consciousness is what Husserl defines as intentionality and is an integral part of consciousness, therefore indispensable from being. (Zahavi, 2003, p14) However, this intentionality occurs regardless whether the object truly exists and moreover, *“the very existence of the intentional object is phenomenologically irrelevant”* (Zahavi, 2003, p40). Despite whether the object truly exists, the experience of something meaningful occurs. It belongs to the active human mode of being towards - and in the world.

Merleau-Ponty (2014) provides a valuable consideration of this understanding by replacing ‘perceiving’ with the concept of ‘sensing’. *“The word ‘perception’ indicates a direction more than a primitive function.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p12) Perceiving implies a certain ability to have a transparent impression of the object as it is, whereas sense embeds the interpretive understanding that subjects obtain of objects.

Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty address the point that the way humans receive information of the world through senses, is not a passive handing over but an *activity*. Humans plunge into experiences of the world. Bodies are not mere conductors of worldly information from a reflective stance but rather work as meaning making institutions within that world. For this reason, understanding always occurs from within a certain perspective. Both the physical body and a cultural framework provide a particular outlook and deliver tools to interpret the world with. In both ways, subjects never have an outside-of-experience perspective on objects. There is no birds eye viewpoint accessible but only a fundamental being-in-experience, constituted by an embeddedness in the world that is inescapable.

3.1.2 Transcending the given

Thus, humans are fundamentally embedded within their subjectivity and manifested in an active openness towards the world. Does this subjective interplay within experience entail that impressions are considered imaginary and that there is a ground for relativism regarding the possibilities of gaining knowledge of the world? How does the notion of subjective embeddedness inform the object-subject relationship?

Husserl puts forward that the real object *is* the intentional object, only conceptually they are distinctive. Reality unfolds within the phenomenon and there is no other object out of this, or behind it. What is intuitively given in bodily presence is there. (Zahavi, 2003, p22) However, it is only regarded as an object because of subjective meaning-giving contribution: it is a phenomena *for* a subject. In other words: only since it is an object of subject intentionality, it appears as something meaningful to that subject. Or as Merleau-Ponty (2014) accounts: perception does not discover the sense objects have, but it *creates* sense. It composes something out of the given. Perception thus only appears when there is an actual object that can be intended by a gaze and in this way the given phenomenon of human experience always corresponds to an object. Still, since people always add (or miss) something, the perception never beholds the object entirely.

Perceiving in this way develops into the understanding of a subjective activity that is manifested in a constant intention of grasping objects (in themselves) yet, fundamentally failing to ever succeed at this attempt. People are mentally and physically constrained by perspective, therefore incapable of ever having an absolute vision of an object. However, humans fill up the gaps of what they miss in order to shape a complete perception in an active synthesis. For example how one accounts for an entire tree, although one may have a look on one side of the tree only. Subjects fill up the gaps of what they miss in order to form a complete perception of the object. In this way, subjects always *“transcend the given in order to grasp the object itself”*. (Zahavi, 2003, p34)

Husserl distinguishes between active and passive synthesis that together compose of one unified experience. An active synthesis is organised by subjective processes that specifically call for an act by the Ego, the subject. However, every active synthesis already presupposes a passive synthesis; the mere bringing forth of an object as object. For this reason everything that comes to perception is first synthesised in a passive experience that subjects are not conscious of. This passivity is constituted by a process of recognition that structures all new experiences and pairs them to known structures as a representation. For example one can (re)direct one’s gaze with an active consciousness but in order to do so, the subject already contains a passive synthesis of the entire object that is presented to vision. To illustrate, when one actively intends to look specifically at the trunk of a tree, consciousness is directed and an active synthesis of the trunk will occur. However, this trunk does not become an individual perception but is perceived as part of the bigger, entire tree that was passively synthesised. Husserl intends to point out that in perception there is no distinction between what is actively perceived and passively perceived, they become unified in the flow of the experience itself.

The passive synthesis is informed by the development of recognition that is constituted out of previous experiences that determine the object-definition of a phenomenon. All the latter experiences are paired to these object-modes and through eidetic processes compared. An experience can therefore be distinguished as being a modification of an earlier experience and not only a collection of the present. Every subject therefore has their own world-phenomena that arise from personal intentional lives and are in accordance with their own reflective verification mechanisms. "...every apperception in which we understand their sense and horizons forthwith, points back to a "primal instituting", in which an object with a similar sense became constituted for the first time." (Husserl, 1960, p111) Here we find how, passive understandings and active perception become intertwined within the subject and form one experience that is contextualised by ones subjective history.

What Husserl recognised is that it is always from within this active, transcendental attitude that the world is encountered. In this mode of being, consciousness is experiencing so much more than what is purely given to vision. Due to the directedness of consciousness and accompanying subjective historical, physical and mental perspectives, perception always transcends a plain representation and is the mere manifestation of a dynamic synthesis of what is given both actively and passively.

This leads to the consideration that subjects perceive objects "*pregnant with irreducible sense*" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p23). They already have a meaning and a certain truth that emanates from the experience, and this defines how they appear. This meaning is therefore not something that is necessarily embedded within the object itself. As Merleau-Ponty states: "*There is nothing in the sensible appearance of a landscape, an object, or a body that predestines it to have the air of being "gay" or "sad", "lively" or "gloomy", "elegant" or "crude".*" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p25) There is always room for other possible interpretations of the object.

Nonetheless, there is a certain self-givenness of the object, that informs a passive synthesis and which makes the experience of it resemble it. Experience is a dynamic process of what is given and what is attributed by a spectator. To illustrate; when I look at my desk, I can see that it is made out of wood. When I place my hands on it, I can feel the nerves within the material and I understand the desk is made out of wood, in that moment my expectations are met. Yet, while touching the top I already assume that the bottom will also feel and look like wood. I will not even look at the bottom of the desk to make the judgement that this desk is entirely made out of wood. So there is always an active interrelation of what the object gives to a perceiving subject and what that subject attributes to it. This interrelation happens before one is consciously aware of it and makes that life occurs as a continuous flow of experiences instead of a sequence of thorough mental investigations.

3.1.3 Mutual constitution

The Cartesian duality between mind and matter informed an understanding of perception as a process in which subjects controlled their relationship with objects. Husserl problematised this approach as it neglects the affordance objects have in perceptions. As discussed, he primarily advocated for a more worldly understanding of subjects by bringing forth the concept of intentionality and consequently the about-ness of experiences. Secondly, he expanded this notion by acknowledging the intertwinement of passive and active synthesis in one unified experience. In this manner he especially acknowledged the openness that characterises being in the world for a subject. Later, Husserl expanded the notion of intentionality by understanding that experience is co-constituted by both object *and* subject, as mutual constitution. In this manner, the linear directedness of the concept intentionality, progressed in a dynamic understanding of experience. Mutual constitution grants objects substantial agency within experiences.

Mutual constitution can best be understood as a process in which both an unfolding and an articulating takes place, essentially it is a process of both subjectivity and the world. In constitution both object and subject manifest themselves as significations of meaning and inform the experience that is developed. As material entity, the object requires significant agency in the way it directs the possible conscious synthesis of the perceiving subject. The way objects are situated in a specific context, informs the possibility for recognition and the contribution of memory at that instance. As a result, objects open themselves up as lived signification and only come to appear in that specific way, for the particular subject that interacts with it. Finally, object and subject both mutually influence the experience through a dynamic interplay, rather than a static perception.

What we can discern from this, is the understanding that perception can be distinguished as the receiving of an immanent sense that presents itself at once, while simultaneously always being in reference with the subject's own existence. There is no pure conscious contemplation taking place within the moment of

experience. Rather, it is an active stance, a bodily reaction that is all encompassing. At the moment of perception it already has this particular way of presenting itself. One does not contemplate whether something appears attractive, the sense 'attractive' immediately emanates from perceiving the object. Subjects therefore experience before they consciously judge. Yet, this perception is not only pure projection, the object directs the impression that occurs in a certain manner. Therefore there is a constituting force performed by both subject and object. The perceived object then, is always given as this unity of passivity and activity, the phenomenon that arises out of mutual constitution.

In *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1960) Husserl points out that subjects are simultaneously constituted as subject within the process of constitution itself. Only within the relationship with the world can true being articulate itself. As a consequence, it is within experiencing and sense-making that one manifests itself as a subject in the world and accordingly: exists. It is within this process that things are allowed to be manifested, that the world receives signification and objects come to mean something.

As the world becomes meaningful within interaction, it is within mutual constitution that object and subject become intertwined and subjects truly experience their own meaningful existence. This explains the dynamic relationship humans have with the world and the things around them. While experiencing the world, subjects first experience their own worldly being. "...which embraces all the particular multiplicities of cogitation's collectively and in its own manner, namely as belonging to the identical Ego, who, as the active and affected subject of consciousness, lives in all processes of consciousness and is related, through them, to all object-poles" (Husserl, 1960, p66) For this reason, the ego always first constitutes its own being and from this starting point, an understanding of the world can arise. The presence of the self as Ego constitutes the collection of all mental acts as one coherent flow. According to Husserl, it ensures that all experiences become connected as one system of meaning giving, thereby shaping frameworks of association and recognition that inform the process of mutual constitution.

The consciousness of time within perception, plays a fundamental role for Husserl as it also influences how objects receive meaning for subjects within experience. When perceiving something one does not identify disjointed fragments, but perceives one integrated moment. Although effectively there is a new awareness every moment, these become merged together to shape one unified image that is brought to consciousness. "*The content in the case of perceptual appearance are these complete appearances as temporal unities.*" (Husserl, 1991, p96) This synthesis is temporal in nature and progresses as a continuous flow. According to Husserl, this constitution of objects over time is an account of the temporal self-givenness of consciousness itself. As it is consciousness that initiates an intentional directedness, this is where we find the relation between constituted objects and constituting consciousness. Ultimately, it is consciousness that makes objects appear as meaningful wholes over time.

Here we find a deeper understanding of experiences as subjective undertaking. Not only physical perspectives intermingle with experiences of the world, but also ones individual history makes objects appear in a certain way. The notion of temporality appears to be of crucial importance for the understanding of objects within mutual constitution. It is not only because of time but also due to time that humans make sense of the world and the world makes sense to them. Temporality gives history to subjectivity and as a consequence provides the framework of understanding for individual perception.

Merleau-Ponty adds substantially to the notion of mutual constitution with his understanding of sense. He progresses further on how constitution is an undertaking in which both active and passive influences are occurring. It is a constitution of what is in us and what is in the world, between sense and non-sense. The subject always grasps the current appearance in light of the past. Through contribution of memory, the current is organised in such a way that the subject recognises the past and through association understands the current. Yet, this is not a clarification through pre-given facts. It is realised as a new articulation, a new understanding. "... in short, the actual past is not imported into the present perception through an association mechanism, but is rather deployed by present consciousness itself." (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p20) Perception it is thus not the manifestation of a pre-existing idea or a recollection but a spontaneous synthesis of what is given within that instance by both object and subject. The thing in perception is therefore not given *through* association, but is being the condition *for* association. "*Association thus never works as an autonomous force; the proposed word never "induces" the response like an efficient cause. Association only acts by making a reproduction intention probable or tempting; it only operates in virtue of the sense that it caught in the context of the previous experiment*". (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p19)

Hence, perception is a direct combination of what is passively given and actively organised. In this manner the passive and the active are always together, in the act of understanding. The reception of what comes to vision is a passive recognition but the judgement of that sensation is an active interpretation. Precisely the way an object is organised gives rise to the specific memory. What this entails is that the object itself influences and directs the constitution, not solely being penetrated by the perception of a subject. So there is always this intertwinement of the passively given and active understanding within constitution. The sensation of the object is therefore an exchange and not a handing over of a sense from one to the other. *“The sensing being (le sextant) and the sensible are not opposite each other like two external terms, and sensation does not consist of the sensible invading the sensing being.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p221)

All of our previous understandings therefore take part in the understanding of what is given in the present. Everything that is previously experienced becomes sedimented and serves as a horizon on which every new experience is understood. This historical thickness, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, makes that we never perceive an object in isolation. It is always in reference with what is experienced before. *“Taken precisely as I see it, it is a moment of my individual history, and, since sensation is a reconstruction, it presupposes in me the sedimentations of a previous constitution; I am, as a sensing subject, full of natural powers of which I am the first to be filled with wonder.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p222) If we account for sense as mutual constitution of object and subject through the active and the passive, we can also acknowledge how the present and the historical are always intertwined in our understandings of the world.

Merleau-Ponty clearly distinguishes how we therefore can recognise that perception always signifies beyond itself. Since perception is constituted within this intertwinement of active and passive understandings, it is more than what the object individually signifies or more than solely subjective projection. Perception is continuously defined by a spontaneous synthesis that does not find its origin in one specific source, but is always the product of mutual constitution established by both subject and object. In this manner, objects gain substantial agency in shaping experiences and move away from their passive characterisation as in a dualistic approach.

The concept of mutual constitution overthrows any mind body dualism as it brings passivity and activity to unite within experience. What it demonstrates is that by taking away the strong distinctions that maintained subject authority, matter does not suddenly evolve in to a conqueror and comes to dominate subjects. Just by attributing objects substantial agency, the way they contribute to experience becomes acknowledged. The point that objects are *also* involved within perception only ensures that subjects have *meaningful* understandings of the world and not mere illusions. Giving objects agency admits the way objects co-constitute experiences and in a way, safeguards that experiences of the world have meaning by interconnecting to a point of reference.

Subjects experience in such strong bodily manners, that the whole relationship between object and subject is much more guided by expressions than by impressions. The meaningful experience is something that subjects *feel* and is not a cognitive judgement. This type of experience which is more bodily than mindful presents itself as one unified whole that is engaged and manifested within the experience itself. This is why glancing at something can give one immediate shivers or why something that excites fills the entire body with energy at once.

Most of the interactions with objects take place unconsciously and in a manner of reflex. These habitual experiences emphasise that the distinction between mind and body, therefore between knowing and action is non-sensical. When encountering a specific object one does not first judge how it appears and then recalls how to behave towards it. The right way of approaching is immersed within the subject and becomes a habit-way of behaving. This is all intertwined within the one experience one has with the object. Conclusively, experiences are bodily lived and mind-body dualism undermines this notion of embodiment within experiences.

The static relationship that once defined objects and subjects has completely vanished and what remains is a dynamic process in which both object and subject define each other. The active and the passive are not excluded but given at once, within experience itself. In this way, object and subject are mutually engaged in a dynamic constitution in which knowing and action, mind and matter become intertwined.

3.2 How objects and subjects together compose a lifeworld

Husserl even expands the notion of mutual constitution by explaining how objects and subjects are also interrelated in collective experiences. According to Husserl, objects do not only appear meaningful due to personal meaning attribution mechanisms but also by collective meanings that have become embodied within individual subjectivity. In *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970) Husserl discusses the notion of lifeworld as a crucial fundament for human understanding of the world. Husserl does not provide one specific explanation but it can best be understood as a structure that is “.. constituted by subjective perspectives and correlated to transcendental subjectivity, or, to use a term from Husserl’s last years, to the intersubjective life of world-consciousness.” (Zahavi, 2003, p132)

First and foremost, the lifeworld is not a pre-given framework which is static and has a purpose in itself. Rather it continuously transforms and precedes all purpose. “*With this continual change in the human lifeworld, manifestly the men themselves also change as persons, since correlatively they must always be taking on new habitual properties.*” (Husserl, 1960, p135) Thus, the lifeworld emerges out of subjective interpretations of the world that humans share in co-existence, but simultaneously determines the formation of all experiences by providing the interpretative framework that life is encountered with. As a result, it also constitutes the horizon on which objects appear as meaningful and valuable. It serves as a structure of understanding by distinguishing what an object-concept is and hence defines the way in which social groups accordingly structure their world in to objects. Therefore it shapes the intentional background of all experiences and meanwhile influences possible future experiences as well. The lifeworld can therefore be seen as a meaning fundament that is active both on a subjective and intersubjective level. It is “..*the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception, that is ever experienced and experienceable—our everyday life-world.*” (Husserl, 1970, p49)

This structure of meaning arises out of a world justification that is socially, culturally, evolutionary established as a sense of meaning and informs concepts such as historicity, generativity, traditions and normality. As humans, we belong to a specific lifeworld; we are manifested in it and we are perceiving the world correspondingly through it. Therefore it is embodied in an everyday attitude towards the self and the world. People are manifested in specific cultural worlds, analogous to the communities in which they live and understand their surrounding and culture as someone who belongs to that community.

Interestingly, the cultural objects that are created “within these communities bear a certain “*thereness-for-everyone*” (Husserl, 1960, p92). Everyone belonging to the same cultural community, will experience a certain belonging and the spiritual predicates within these objects. This underlines how the lifeworld serves as a framework of understanding and normativity, that is intersubjectively shared and established. In this way the lifeworld is also already intertwined with the first immanent world one can attain and becomes immersed in all the subjective processes that follow in both passive and active acts. For Husserl the understanding of intersubjective agency on subjective experiences, is a crucial part of the lifeworld as meaning fundament.

Ultimately, the lifeworld is all about the unfolding of meaning that constitutes experiences. “*Because continued penetration shows that every phenomenon attained through this unfolding of meaning, given at first in the life-world as obviously existing, itself contains meaning- and validity-implications whose exposition leads again to new phenomena, and so on.*” (Husserl, 1970, p112) What Husserl shows with the concept of the lifeworld, is that bracketing is not enough in order to get to the absolute foundations of consciousness, as consciousness is always already embedded in a world that is full of meaning and pre-understandings. Experiences are guided by the leading concepts of normality, developed over time as generative intersubjectivity. The implications of lifeworld as a universal framework are so fundamental that it is taken up in ones own functioning body, even effectively informing the corporeality that belong to it such as sexual drives etc. (Zahavi, 2003, p132).

In *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1960) Husserl puts forward that members of the same community acquire constitutive systems that are in harmony. This does not hint at a universal experience of the world but rather highlights the implicit intentional components that make up the experiential world exist for people. What is conceived as ‘normal’ to subjects refers back to the appearance-systems that are shared in a community with others. In a passive manner, communities inform understanding that become internalised within subjects of that community. Accordingly, providing the horizon on which experiences are constituted and thereby informing experiences of that world in a passive way. Also predicates that are not part of the world

of natural sense, such as values become collectively established. These are not primarily experienced by one but cohere with a specific world-phenomenon, that will also inform further experiences.

Within the cultural world, as Merleau-Ponty describes lifeworld, we also learn through our relation with others how to use objects and to make understanding of the world. *“... that I cease to see the sun “rise” and “set”, or that I cease to think with the cultural instruments that were provided by my upbringing, my previous efforts, and my history.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p62) These expressions of meaning constitute the world that people share. Simultaneously, this cultural world becomes manifested in each individual presence and understanding as it provides the horizon of understanding for each experience.

The cultural world always penetrates personal life by informing how objects already bear meaning. Not only because it constitutes the horizon on which objects appear but also because it provides the ‘tools’ by which humans interpret objects. Merleau-Ponty states that *“each of these objects bears as an imprint the mark of the human action it serves.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p363) The purpose objects are believed to have, are only conform the community that shares that belief. *“The civilisation in which I participate exists for me with an evidentness in the tools that it adopts.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p363) However, the lifeworld and all its implications only has meaning for those who accept its existence. This includes that the norms that people share within a community, only apply to the people that accept these. There is no absolute norm - materiality that can be found somewhere in the world. It is a social construct yet that does not make its impact nor its presence less real. *“The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject who is nothing but a project of the world; and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world that it itself projects.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p454)

What both thinkers express, is that there is a certain evidentness in how objects have a certain meaning and function, that is manifested on an intersubjective level, constituted by the community in which one is raised and grown. Importantly, these particular understandings are not something people are born with, they become internalised as a progressive understanding.

Merleau- Ponty understands intersubjectivity as intercorporeality, that is as a system of lived bodies embedded in a certain cultural world. With the notion of shared understandings of corporeality, Merleau-Ponty intends to highlight the point that within cultures people do not always explicitly discuss interpretations but often simply copy each others behaviour. In this way, immersing each other’s behaviour in their own being and establishing norms and culture in a bodily manner. For example when one uses an object for the first time; one simply copies the behaviour of others and then this copied behaviour becomes internalised. This evolves into a sense and an understanding of the object’s intended use. Therefore through embeddedness in the lifeworld, interpretations of the world are constituted in relation with others. This notion is comparable to Husserl’s claim that the absolute shows itself as an intersubjective relation between subjects, as a shared lifeworld. This means that things only make sense in a particular lifeworld, a world in which norms and outlooks on the world are shared with the other people, within that community. As meaning of objects changes intersubjectively, it is possible that the same object is interpreted entirely different in distinctive communities.

Conclusively, the lifeworld appears to be an extremely important constituting factor for experiences of the world. Essentially subjects are always born within a certain lifeworld and therefore in a substantial way, they become the product of that lifeworld themselves. In that way, the lifeworld determines the lenses through which subjects perceive the world. Although substantial for the resulting experience, the influence of the lifeworld on subject’s existence is implicitly manifested. Therefore, people might not even be actively aware of their own being as social construct.

Yet, it is not only the interrelation of subjects together that determine the lifeworld. All objects, in the form of buildings, (consumer) products, artworks etc. make up and co-distinguish the continuation of a lifeworld. The objects that consist in a certain community, establish the values of that community. In a dynamic way, the objects that become created within a certain lifeworld are the product of that world but simultaneously affect constitution of life within. By means of their mere creation and presence, signifying a certain mindset and intention. This underlines the interesting nature of lifeworld as a social construct that is at the same time authoritative. It always progresses as an informing flow with no purpose or objective to ahead at. It is a self manifestation of the flow.

In the concept of lifeworld we find another perspective on how subject experiences are being affected. Subjects do not live in a vacuum but are rooted and embedded in their cultural world. This cultural framework, although passively immersed, actively distinguishes experiences. Understandings of what constitutes knowing and action for a subject, becomes internalised through interaction within the (life)world.

Therefore, the lifeworld is an expansion of overcoming duality. Where mutual constitution involves the dynamic relationship people have with the objects around them and thereby moves beyond action - knowing dichotomies, the lifeworld on a broader notion provides an understanding of how this relationship is first and foremost already embedded in a specific culture. For this reason already constituted within a framework of understanding, that becomes passively manifested within subjects through the shared experiences of a culture. Subjects are not merely governing their own culture in a conscious way, but are created by that culture and manifest that culture in an active manner, just by being. As a dynamic structure, in which there is no specific authority, the lifeworld and subjects also mutually constitute one another.

3.3 Understanding as generative passivity

In his book *The Birth of Sense* (Beith, 2018) Beith elaborates on the notion of generative passivity as put forward by Merleau-Ponty. What Beith clearly distinguishes, is the fact that meaning is not constituted in determinate moments but rather in the flow of meaning making itself. Life does not occur in fixed frameworks but is a generative process. Through sedimentation, the activity of constitution grows into a flow of understanding and this pre-reflective directedness within experience, provides guidance for association.

Subjects do not enter experiences with a clean slate, since the flow of sedimented experiences always provides a reference point. The more familiar something appears, the more one will understand it in that familiar way. In this way experiences are (historically) directed. However, this directedness is not provided by a sovereign force of consciousness but passively given in the activeness of the constituting flow itself. In this manner, we can find how all experiences become related in the generative flow of experience. Previous experiences become passively intertwined in the flow of experience, merging history and the present, and actively inform understanding. Here we again find the paradox of active passivity that is key to human experience and understanding.

For Husserl passivity refers to pre-reflective experiences but Merleau-Ponty focuses much more on the spontaneous evolution of life and the transformation of the self throughout history. People are expressive and energetic, they feel something when they experience the world and articulate something back towards that world. It is within this expressive movement of life, as generative flow, that sense occurs.

The notion of lived constitution and lived consciousness seems much more accurate to suit the human nature as expressive beings than a transcendental ego would appear. In the end all human behaviour comes down to signification: perceiving meaningful wholes. Objects always mean something as they become understood in a particular way. But as Merleau-Ponty has stated "*The perceived thing possesses me as much as I possess it; I perceive according to or with it, rather than perceiving it itself.*" (Beith, 2018, p48) Subjects always gain an understanding in light of what the object appears to mean in that moment.

An understanding is never absolute or transparently brought to consciousness. Rather than the work of effective immanence it establishes a mode of meaning making and involves active development. Therefore, through the act of understanding, people are creating possibilities of being. There is always one possibility that receives primacy, according to the effective interplay of object and subject in the particular lifeworld at that moment.

3.4 What phenomenology teaches us about the object-subject relationship

Since it's start with Husserl's optimistic credo "to the things themselves!" the focus of phenomenological discourse has been directed towards the only thing humans can truly investigate: the objects of experience. It turns out that those meaningful interpretations make up for a dynamic manifestation of lived meaning giving, that is manifested in a close relationship with objects and the cultural world. Interaction is a mutual constitution, an activity of both object and subject, and thereby overthrowing mind-body dualism.

To summarise, the dynamic relationship between object and subject is based on the following judgements:

- Subjects are fundamentally embedded in the world. Hence, an independent subject or object does not exist.
- Subjects always transcend the given and experience in a meaningful way. Therefore absolute knowledge is not attainable.
- Subjects and objects mutually constitute one another in a dynamic interplay of passivity and activity. Experience is therefore a dynamic encounter and not a singular undertaking.
- Subjects and objects together constitute a lifeworld that serves as a meaning fundament and the horizon on which all experiences take place. In this structure, understanding of objects occurs in a generative passive manner.

For these reasons objects can no longer be distinguished as being subordinated to the will of subjects and the object-subject dichotomy makes place for a more nuanced perspective. Objects and subjects exist together and live with one another, collectively contributing to a lifeworld that is transformative over time.

The understanding of objects is therefore never absolute but is constituted in a permanent unfolding of meaning. “To the things themselves” has progressed into “to the understanding itself”. It is never about what the definite object is, but about what it means and how we go and live according to it. Objects are ever so meaningful for human existence and a more fluid understanding grants them the necessary agency for furnishing our human presence with flourishing experiences that constitute life. Human existence is embedded in an unfolding of the active and passive within perception and grounded in the encounter of meaningful wholes within the expressive relationship with objects. This dynamic framework will provide the necessary considerations to finally understand how subjects can come to understand artifacts, as meaningful matter per definition.

Chapter 4

Artifacts and subjects as cultural collaborators



Figure 6 : Universal advertisement for pressure cooker around 1960

4. Artifacts and subjects as cultural collaborators

Concerning the process of mutual constitution in which objects and subjects establish one another, the active character of artifacts becomes an even more fascinating circumstance. Artifacts develop into more than pure instrumentality within their relationship towards subjects. How does this agency affect the process of constitution and the development of the cultural world? Ultimately returning to the question: *how to understand artifacts beyond dualism?*

In the following chapter, a new approach towards the understanding of artifacts will be disclosed. First is explained how artifacts have a generative way of influencing people by sustaining habits throughout history. After this, the manner in which artifacts turn expressive within mutual constitution is clarified. At last a case-study concerning pressure-cookers will demonstrate how artifacts possess agency in reshaping habits within communities and acquire a significant effect on society. Ultimately, providing a non-dualistic account of artifacts as collaborators within the world; understanding the manifestation of everyday things as active phenomena in the (life)world.

4.1 The way in which artifacts become expressive in mutual constitution

4.1.1 Artifacts as generative understanding

Artifacts do not articulate a certain meaning that is immediately apparent as material presence. Rather, due to their instrumentality, artifacts become closely involved with subjects in a relationship that gradually develops. Through use, they co-shape experiences and turn to be meaningful for subjects. It is within interaction that artifacts convey what their effect is and subjects become engaged with them. As this engagement progresses over time, the artifact becomes much more familiar and intertwined with the subject in a generative series of events. Finally, establishing a long-term meaningful relationship and connection.

Through frameworks that subjects become acquainted with in cultural living, artifacts turn understandable. Husserl states that the *“ready-made” object that confronts us in life as an existent, physical thing (when we disregard all the “spiritual” or “cultural” characteristics that make it knowable as, for example, a hammer, a table, an aesthetic creation) is given, with the originality of the “it itself”, in the synthesis of a passive experience.*” (Husserl, 1960, p78). This understanding is something that progresses passively through a sequence of interactions with the thing. By incorporation cultural established judgements, one will distinguish the artifact too in that specific manner. Really, the meaning only applies to the group of people that together share this belief. So, the cultural meaning is not something that emanates directly from the materiality itself but becomes connected to it. Let us adopt the example of a crown as reference of authority. The context, the cultural rituals, the shared beliefs make a crown the symbol of power. When one would perceive the thing without these contributing forces, it would simply be an object, a collection of materiality. But in the system of shared beliefs within a lifeworld, it turns in to an artifact; a crown. The first time one lays eyes on a crown, the expressiveness of this object becomes learned as reference to the shared cultural outlook it conveys. This meaning will then become internalised. *“Thus it is in the case of all cultural objects (books, tools, works of any kind, and so forth), which moreover carry with them at the same time the experiential sense of thereness-for-everyone (that is, everyone belonging to the corresponding cultural community, such as the European or perhaps, more narrowly, the French cultural community, and so forth).”* (Husserl, 1960, p92)

Nonetheless artifacts are not simply cultural structures projected on material entities. By interaction with a subject, they overcome this temporal distance in order to have a meaningful presence in the present. As an artifact is not something that is only glanced at but is an extension of a subject, the artifact meaning also becomes intertwined within the subject that interacts with it. Someone who wears the crown will *feel* more powerful and other people will perceive that person as the powerful authority. In that way, artifacts express meaning through action, as a reference to a cultural world becoming intertwined with someone’s being and co-shape the expression of meaning in the world. Turning into active materiality rather than passive materiality, as mere objects would be.

People always perceive and interact with artifacts as meaningful wholes, similar to how one perceives a crown in all its signification, instead of a collection of material. This meaning *becomes* the entire expression of the artifact in the lifeworld. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of a bouquet of flowers. There is not one

specific thing about the flowers that signifies its romance and yet, the bouquet signifies love. However, it only has this trace of signification due to the presence of others that share this notion. The signification and therefore the meaning it expresses is not something that emanates from individual imposing. One needs to experience the signification of a bouquet as it is manifested in the lifeworld, before he or she can adopt this signification as well. After this, when one will feel romantic the handing over of a bouquet will constitute the individual's expression of love. There is nothing physical within the bouquet that signifies an absolute idea of love and still the value of love is perceived and manifested collectively. It is in the combination of: unity of matter and the contextual signification that these values will be experienced. What the example of the bouquet illustrates, is that in a passive manner, the lifeworld constitutes the active presence of artifacts and therefore their expression in action. Ultimately, influencing how subjects become present in their own world.

4.1.2 Thing, subject and lifeworld as one intertwined manifestation

Artifacts only express meaning when interacting with a subject, so it is *in* mutual constitution that the artifact is constituted as meaningful matter. In the process of mutual constitution, the artifact itself passively informs the possibilities that are open for interpretation by its material presence. Within the process of mutual constitution, the artifact becomes constituted as the effective manifestation of meaning by the subject; as an active intertwinement of both its instrumentality and that meaning. In action, the artifact becomes the active manifestation of these values. Thereby the artifact becomes expressive in its way of co-shaping and sustaining behaviour within society. Ultimately, informing the continuation and organisation of a specific lifeworld.

The expression of the artifact therefore arises because of the subject's being *and* the artifact's being. It is not a situation in which we find exclusively subject meaning attribution or purely artifact autonomy, but mutual involvement. As manifested artifacts will give rise to the arrangement of new artifacts, this is a continuous process that will progress perpetually. This shows how artifacts and subjects are connected in a dynamic structure that involves the re-creating and establishment of culture. Both entities are reacting, informing and corresponding to one another. In this way the agency artifacts is never as linear or straightforward as an autonomous artifact leading to a specific effect. In a non-contextualised situation, the artifact is still a thing and not understood as expressive matter. As soon as this thing becomes contextualised, its instrumentality turns meaningful and the constitution of artifact agency emerges.

For this reason it is always the network of: thing + subject + lifeworld, that becomes the eventual artifact. A dualistic understanding of artifacts could never grasp this identity of artifacts as the manifestation of a dynamic interrelation while simultaneously accepting artifacts have agency. It is this conception of artifacts as intertwinement, that also constitutes what the artifact will express and therefore what kind of effect it will behold. An artifact is always depending on the lifeworld for its existence and therefore its manifestation of values. If people do not accept its effect, the artifact will not be there.

However, the impact of artifacts does not always appear to be directly controllable and therefore becomes often interpreted as a sign of domination and submersion. This happens when an artifact has an effect that was not particularly wished for in society. Yet, this unwanted consequence is not a claim for the understanding that artifacts work autonomously. These effects are still the result of an interplay between subject, artifact and the lifeworld. For example mobile phones were initially presented as luxurious product for a niche in the market. Once manifested, mobile phones became popular to a much bigger audience, to the extent that they became almost indispensable from human existence. Throughout the years the mobile phone progressed into new models, each time increasing the number of users and thereby expanding the effects on society gradually. Amongst a lot of effects it changed the way people behave, the way people interact and the way people communicate. People effectively have become dependent on their mobile phone in order to function and succeed in life. This extensive impact is not always appreciated in the present, but was never envisioned when the mobile phone was introduced. Finally, the presence of mobile phones has influenced the lifeworld substantially. Yet, these influences are not necessarily conveyed by the control of an artifact or of a subject. As a dynamic interplay without captain, the effectiveness evolves. It is constituted within the relationship between subject and artifact and therefore the manifestation of mutual (un)control.

4.1.3 Artifacts as expressive matter

Artifacts become expressive in the way their material elements become interpreted through collectively established frameworks. Artifacts do not literally 'say' something, but their way of presenting beholds a certain meaning for the people within a specific community. By means of this, artifacts bear a distinctive characterisation of expressive matter. Within mutual constitution, artifacts passively inform the subject who

will actively distinguish these elements by means of a culturally informed interpretation. However, subjects do not account for the artifact as a possibility of many. The artifact-nature is, once culturally established, always evidently there. One will not distinguish a hammer as 'the object that I account for as possibility of being a hammer' but 'the object is a hammer, since I know it to be a hammer'. After this process of defining, the artifact will become the active manifestation and will influence subjects accordingly. It is therefore that within mutual constitution artifacts turn meaningful, receive agency for this meaning and consequently become the expression of this meaning.

Hence, artifacts do tell stories and embed values in an active manner. Since artifacts become intertwined with subjects through usage, they constitute the active manifestation of the represented values within both subject and the world. Often, artworks have received significant primacy in the domain of matter. Artworks are distinguished as materiality that embed values and a world of their own. Accordingly, influencing people by their presence. Artifacts however, are actually much more active and intimately involved with subjects. Therefore it seems only fair that artifacts gain more agency for the way they shape behaviour compared to artworks that have received this agency.

While artworks are purely to be looked at, artifacts co-shape behaviour for a much longer period of time. In a generative process they become intertwined with subjects and by means of this, the impact of their value expression will operate to a substantial degree. Artifacts do not purely *signify* meaning, they actively *express* and *manifest* meaning. As people live with them rather than sided by them, artifacts can be accounted as much more impactful than artworks. Art, in its pure meaning should have no practicality to it and provide aesthetic pleasure. Artifacts on the other hand, are objects that should be used and thereby extensively impact the world around them through action.

The interpretation of artifact materiality and their overall presence constructs the meaningful existence that remains acknowledged and therefore expressed. Artifacts embed lifeworlds within them, this precisely makes artifacts stand out from objects or organic matter. The form, the shape, the colour; all material aspects inform the meaning giving process in mutual constitution and afterwards develop into a reference to the cultural world in which the artifact was created and the (historical) meaning it expresses.

However, due to a different context, the instrumentality can change and the artifact can even become an item for pure aesthetic purpose. For example ancient vases, now regarded as works of art in a museum, were once practical matter to be used. By putting them in a museum their identity changed from vase to sculpture-like. However, as vase-artifact they still express the historical and cultural world that they belonged to. Yet in order to understand what the vase meant in the time it was used, one has to take on the lens of that cultural world and interpret the signs from within that era. It is possible the vase will express different things in history than in the present and thereby embodies the recollection of historical perspectives, as material entity.

4.2 How artifacts have a generative way of influencing culture

Artifacts help sustain, challenge and reshape habits by co-constituting the world through history. Not in a radical manner by enslaving subjects to a controlling power, but in a mutually engaged process that is manifested within action. As distinguished, artifacts mean more than pure materiality. In order to illustrate that artifacts convey an activeness in shaping lifeworlds, a case-study on a pressure-cooker as cultural influencer will be explained in the following paragraph. The pressure cooker is an excellent example of a household product that appeared to be (unintentionally) impactful and culturally distinguished.

4.2.1 How a pressure cooker shapes culture

In the 1970's (Viccie, 2020) there was an increasing sell of pressure cookers due to the campaign for healthier meals. The pressure cooker turned out to be a great alternative for frying pans and a lot of households in Western societies bought a pressure cooker with the intention to cook healthier. The presence of the pressure cooker in households had an unexpected effect. Due to its efficient way of cooking it saved women a lot of time. Suddenly they had more time to do other things, starting to realise that they might have other dreams of their own as well. It turned out that the use of the pressure cooker, by providing women more spare time, paved the way for emancipative development. Women could explore their own interests within the 'saved time'. It changed the way in which they organised their days. They started thinking differently about their time schedules, maybe questioning if they could also take up other tasks and find jobs. The signifying value of the pressure cooker as 'cooking healthy' changed in to 'saving

time'. Still, today in Western society the pressure-cooker is defined as a means to cook efficiently and, combine family-life and working-life. "A pressure cooker is one of the best hands-off ways to get dinner on the table fast." (Gold, 2020)

This effect was never intended by the designer of pressure-cookers. Yet in use, it created an effect that apparently touched upon neglected drives within the (female) community. This illustrates how the presence of artifacts within a cultural world gives expression to new sentiments and by that can change that cultural world. The artifact becoming identified as the expression of this new sentiment by evolving and sustaining new habits.

The same pressure cooker was also introduced in Asian culture. In these countries it became connected to traditional food and gained increased significance as a rice cooker. The pressure cooker turned out to provide an easy and fast way of cooking rice, which normally would be a lengthy process. As rice is the centre piece of Asian cuisine, the pressure cooker provided an easy way to create traditional dishes. Also soups and sauces that normally would cost excessive effort became accessible. "To get a rich and flavourful bowl of Chinese soup requires at least an hour of simmering on low heat on the stove. With the pressure cooker, you can now enjoy restaurant quality soup at half the time." (Henson, 2015) Because of this efficient way of cooking traditional, in Asian households the pressure cooker turned indispensable. Becoming especially important in its way of providing a means to cook traditional food faster and thereby making it accessible at home. Resulting in an embracement of culture and traditional food.

4.2.2 What the pressure-cooker teaches

What we find here is a strong argument for the understanding and the way that artifacts co-shape society. Artifacts do not necessarily in themselves signify a certain value, but their presence becomes the expression of something meaningful and certainly has an effect.

In the case-study given we find an example for the understanding that artifact meaning is not fixed and changes depending on the culture it is interpreted in. The lifeworld distinguishes the way an artifact becomes manifested. Because of this, the artifact agency and expression develop accordingly. When artifacts are placed within society they become immersed within a cultural framework.

It is interesting to identify how artifacts provide a way to change behaviour by providing the expression of a particular value. As for the pressure-cooker in Western society, it was intended to be facilitating healthy food. But the presence of the artifact brought awareness to a problem that was not accessible or evident within households before. The way the artifact functioned, shaped the behaviour of housewives and thereby informed an understanding of current society, shaping a way to progress from it. So ultimately the artifact, by co-shaping behaviour, provided the space for thought and reflection. In this manner becoming the platform for reshaping behaviour. After this, the character of the artifact changed as well. By informing a particular understanding at first and proving a new perspective, the artifact gained a new intention for use.

Here we find that a confrontational or a mediating approach would fall short in grasping the entire artifact agency that we find today in societies. A confrontational perspective on pressure cookers would likely highlight a manipulative understanding in which women become submerged to consumer culture. A mediating approach would mainly consider the way in which pressure cookers can inform a false belief of saving time, but in reality facilitate women in taking up more tasks and thereby increasing their workload. However, the given analysis illustrates that in reality the pressure cooker facilitated feminism and multiculturalism. This substantiates the notion that in order to understand the agency of artifacts, a solely confrontational or mediating approach is not substantial as these do not align with the multifacetedness of artifacts in the lifeworld.

Although artifacts are distinguished as active and powerful, the case-study exemplifies that the manner in which they express is not direct and all encompassing, but rather indirect and gradually. The effectiveness of an artifact is something that progressively develops. Artifacts do not crush conventions or conquer the status quo, they become collaborators in use and thereby influence behaviour in a generative way. Artifacts do not exhibit revolutions, although they can influence one. By becoming intertwined with rituals and habits, they are much more than pure instrumentality. They become actors within society, yet the role they play is always culturally established. As actors within society they mutually constitute and transform culture in a unique way.

4.3 The effects of non-dualism on artifact agency

By implementing a specific artifact, that conveys a particular effect, it starts working as a catalyser for that field of thought. It ensures that more people become acquainted with it through the expressive nature of the artifact within interaction. In this way, the artifact starts to have substantial effect, changing the attitude of more people and ultimately, changing the lifeworld as such. To illustrate; only in the new lifeworld, with increased use of mobile phones and negative effects correspondingly, people came to account for mobile phones in a different way and saw an expression of negative impact. Conclusively, artifacts and the lifeworld are engaged in an interrelated, influencing constitution that evolves constantly according to each others manifestations and gives rise to (new) expressions.

Artifacts are involved with subject's inner life through action. Yet, subjects of a society are not always aware how the things they are using, co-develop their behaviour and eventually even informing their inner-life. Through action, the subject internalises the value-framework of the artifact that has become an extension of the subject itself. By means of this connection, subjects are involved with the artifacts they use and change accordingly.

The notion of intentionality, understood as the about-ness of experiences in Husserlian sense or understood as the practical purpose that accounts to artifacts, gains a new understanding in the mutual constitution between subject and artifact. Within mutual constitution, the artifact has a certain intentionality that it performs in action and as such fulfils a purposeful performance. This provides an expanded view of artifact intentionality as purpose that is directed by the about-ness that occurs within mutual constitution, established between subject and artifact.

Artifacts can also impose new meanings onto people. This understanding is exactly what thinkers of both the confrontational and mediating approach were mainly concerned with. However, as discussed earlier, the agency of artifacts is not an autonomous force. Although artifacts can represent something that one does not approve of, it only has this signification to the ones that accept its meaning. Subjects are often too involved with their artifacts to step out of the interrelation they have with them. One can judge that the mobile phone had a negative impact on ones behaviour but one is too closely connected to it, to truly detach from it. In that sense, the artifact is dominating through its attraction and intimate connection. But the fact that artifacts substantiate certain power over subjects, because of their attractiveness, does not automatically result in oppression. That an artifact has influence on subjects to some extent, is not the same as implying that they rule over subjects. Both entities affect one another and it is only this mutual engagement that constitutes the relationship.

Subjects do not constitute what artifacts mean in a conscious manner as they first and foremost already appear as meaningful entities. But subjects can actively decide to take them into their lives and decide upon the role they get to play. The artifact possess the subject just as much as the subject possess the artifact. Subjects need to acknowledge that they are always conscious entities, that can get rid of a phone if they are determined to do so. Subjects are still free beings that can decide in what way they want to let artifacts affect their lives and to what extent they want to become intertwined with them.

When constituted in the world the artifact grows as it becomes contextualised. The thing that has meaning, expresses, and acts accordingly *is* the artifact. So it is not the design nor it is the designer that can determine what the artifact truly will become and completely manage the way in which artifacts will be manifested. One can try to design for a value manifestation, but the artifact can still have multiple interpretations and therefore different outcomes. When placed, it can behold interpretations that were not thought of in the vacuum dimension of designing. In the context, the thing comes 'alive' and through this constitution it turns into a real artifact, functioning accordingly. But surely the manner in which the thing is materialised, directs what it can become. Therefore, there is always room for a designer to try to control the range in which a thing can become meaningful.

Does that entail that people are powerless in terms of their relation towards artifacts? No, but the opposite of powerless is in this case not: being *in* control. As stated before, artifacts do not suddenly manifest an entirely random meaning. There is always a range of possible interpretations and the presence of a generative relation, analogues to a specific society and culture. Yet, it is always the case that one can not control the ways in which a thing will be used and therefore the distinctive light that will be shined upon it. However, when one reflects on the outcomes and effects of existing artifacts one can understand the different interpretations that were possible. Just by understanding that the artifact is only expressive and

meaningful because we, as subjects, make it valuable, people can feel that they are never simply subjected to the power of artifacts. Subjects, primordially, make them that way.

In this reflective approach, one can come to realise the expressive values within an artifact. Within interaction people are too involved with the things as they appear, but when taking a step back, people can reflect on how artifacts affect their lives and what these artifacts mean and represent to them. Through this, the realisation of the values within artifacts takes place. Realistically, humans will not always succeed in grasping the values that artifacts behold because at times, people are not even aware that artifacts are affecting them and their experiences of the world.

4.4 Conclusions on non-duality between artifacts and subjects

Artifacts have a unique agency in sustaining, challenging and reshaping habits within the cultural world. In mutual constitution, subject and artifact overcome any duality and intertwine in the establishment of a meaningful artifact, as actor in society.

Conclusively the following points are crucial in the understanding of this non-dualistic relationship:

- Artifacts are constituted out of the construct: thing, subject and the lifeworld. Artifact agency is therefore culturally distinguished.
- Artifacts influence subjects and the lifeworld in a generative manner. Due to their instrumentality they become intertwined with subjects over a longer period of time.
- Artifacts become the active manifestation of values within mutual constitution but do not conquer subjects with this meaning. Rather, their effect is something that also gradually informs life.
- Artifacts therefore constitute life in a passive manner, not by submersing people but by co-shaping behaviour. In this way artifacts can also be accounted as active passivity.

The phenomenological approach illustrates that non-duality does not necessarily lead to fluidity. A non-dualistic stance towards the artifact-subject relationship leads to the understanding of an interrelation that is expressive, meaningful and progresses over time. Within mutual constitution, artifacts become much more than pure instrumentality and are defined as the manifestation of a particular value that is culturally established. Due to their instrumentality, artifacts turn into extensions of subjects in use. Because of this, subjects become intimately involved with artifacts and the meaning they express.

Artifacts become collaborators in sustaining and manifesting cultural values, ultimately shaping the lifeworld. However, artifacts do not possess a particular dominance in themselves. It is within the relationship with subjects that they become meaningful and shape behaviour. The relationship between subject and artifact is therefore a dynamic interplay that does not involve one authority. The mere presence of an artifact gives rise to the expression of a certain meaning that can inform a new understanding, which can change society. Conclusively, the agency artifacts behold is constituted in an interplay of both artifact *and* subject within a specific cultural and historical world.

Examples such as the crown and pressure-cooker have illustrated that artifacts are not solely mental constructs but active material expressions of meaning within the world. As an embodied social construct, it manifests meaning in the world and is shaping that world in a gradual manner. Establishing a relationship with subjects that reveals social values and thereby provides space for insight and reflection.

When artifacts have negative effects on society, this does not entail that subjects are subordinated or powerless to this force. Artifacts do not dominate over subjects. Their effectiveness is something that progressively develops in relationship with subjects. Artifact and subject are both actors in the (newly) established world. Therefore, as artifacts become intertwined with subjects and constitute collective memory, they can never be distinguished as solely materiality. By their presence they signify cultural, historical frameworks that are influencing the subjects and the world around them. Ultimately overcoming deep-rooted dualistic frameworks and manifesting both materiality and thought, passivity and activity in one thing, as acting artifact.

Chapter 5

Conclusion



Figure 6 : Marco Zanuso & Richard Sapper, folding telephone
"Grillo", 1966. Società Italiana Telecomunicazioni Siemens.

5. Conclusion

To answer the question *how to understand artifacts beyond duality* this thesis was divided in three parts that together provide a framework of understanding.

The first part concentrated on clarifying artifacts as active materiality within the world. Artifacts are distinguished as the expression of cultural values and manifest themselves in the world as the meaningful embodiments of this. Artifacts are particularly interesting as matter since they involve this dual nature of matter with embedded meaning. In this way they are distinctive from all other material entities. They differ from objects and organic matter because they bear intentionality and are distinguished as different from artworks since they involve instrumentality. For this reason, artifacts convey a peculiar position as meaningful materiality within the world.

Once manifested, artifacts influence human experiences in - and of the world. Within literature, a confrontational and a mediating method is proposed to provide an understanding of artifact agency in culture. However, these methods provide a too narrow description in order to define the complexity of artifacts as actors in society and their far-reaching effects. Artifacts admit substantial influence through the meaningful relationship that becomes constituted between subject and artifact within use. As subjects become intertwined with artifacts and artifacts are the carriers of meaning, a non-dualistic approach proved necessary to explain how these two entities become interrelated within experience and how artifacts can be distinguished as active matter.

Therefore the second part of this thesis was involved with phenomenological discourse, the field of thought that moves beyond dualities and resolves problems that emerge from the object-subject dichotomy. As humans are embedded in a fundamental openness towards the world, they always perceive meaningful wholes. This meaning giving is however not purely subjective ideas implanted within objects, but something that resides out of a dynamic interplay of passivity and activity by both subject and object. It is within mutual constitution that meaningful interpretations of the world appear.

The unfolding of meaning is not the result of a cognitive process but an immediate manifestation within the presentation of mutual constitution. This process is nevertheless also determined by other structures of meaning. Subjects and objects are always first and foremost already manifested in a particular understanding of a world that is historically and culturally defined. The lifeworld serves as a fundamental meaning structure that distinguishes how objects appear and how they become understood for a subject. Meaningful experiences of objects are therefore the phenomenon of lived interpretations that have become manifested in a cultural world.

These reflections underline the point that in experience there is no strict division between subject and object, their relationship is much more nuanced. Experience is a progressive undertaking and not a singular activity. In the establishment of meaningfulness, the coming together of both matter and mind is essential. As material entities, objects involve agency for the way they shape human experiences. Objects and subjects co-constitute each other and exist intimately in a collective commitment to the lifeworld that is ever transformative in history. Phenomenology accentuates the understanding that entities do not have to bear consciousness in order to be considered active constitutors within society.

In the third, and last part of this thesis the notions of artifacts as active materiality and the non-dualistic object-subject relationship are combined in order to provide an answer on how to understand artifacts as actors in society.

Within mutual constitution, subject and artifact overcome duality and become intertwined in the establishment of a meaningful artifact, as actor in society. Artifact meaning is never fixed and changes according to the cultural world in which it is established. The acting artifact, is therefore always an intertwining of the material thing, the constituting subject and the specific lifeworld. This intertwining makes that the artifact appears meaningful and gains a unique agency in sustaining, challenging and reshaping practices within the cultural world. The presence of artifacts becomes the expression of something meaningful, conclusively affecting and shaping society through interaction.

Although artifacts are active matter and powerful influencers of society they do not break with conventions or beat the status quo on their own. Rather they become closely involved with subjects in a relationship that

evolves and progresses over time. The effects of an artifact on society are therefore not encompassing but are formed in an indirect and gradual manner. They become collaborators in action and shape behaviour in a generative way. As they become intertwined within rituals and cultural habits they mean so much more than pure instrumentality. The manifested artifact opens up a world of reflection and understanding, that affects the subjects involved. When artifacts inform new understandings, they change the lifeworld by providing new perspectives. Accordingly, their own artifact character changes as well. This underlines how subjects, the lifeworld and artifacts are intermingled in a dynamic constitutive interplay that progresses gradually throughout life.

To understand artifacts beyond duality, a non-dualistic stance towards the artifact-subject relationship provides an understanding of a dynamic and meaningful relationship without directed control. A definite artifact character does not exist nor a definite subject authority. The notion that artifacts need another entity in order to become activated, does not weaken the claim for their agency. As embodied cultural understandings, their presence becomes an active expression that is both subject- and object-like. That is, as both active thought and passive materiality. The artifact character transcends any notion of duality and progresses as entity that involves both characterisations.

The cultural frameworks artifacts constitute within communities become manifested in an unescapable manner, which reveals how artifacts, when contextualised, become active entities that subjects are involved with. Artifacts become cultural collaborators in manifesting cultural values and become expressions of these in the lifeworld. Artifacts do not submerge people to particular beliefs, but co-work with subjects in order to sustain meaningful life. As active material entity they shape behaviour. The relationship between subjects and artifacts illustrates how artifacts as meaningful entities truly affect and shape the human world in a way that can not be neglected. It is within a specific cultural and historical world that we come to find acting artifacts. Once established on these constituting horizons, pressure-cookers and crowns become active matter and not only signify, but manifest meaning. In this way artifacts are always cultural collaborators that substantiate subject life through action. Ultimately, establishing the flow that constitutes a meaningful existence.

Bibliography



Figure 8 : Marco Zanuso & Richard Sapper, television "Algo!",

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