

Art Is (Not) Knowledge.

A question of Hegelian terminology

di Luca Illetterati*

ABSTRACT

In a seminal paper published in 1974 and titled 'On Artistic Knowledge. A Study in Hegel's Philosophy of Art', Albert Hofstadter focuses on the cognitive value of art within Hegel's philosophy. In particular, Hofstadter aims at explaining in what sense we should understand the Hegelian idea that art is a deeper form of knowledge than the sciences. In my paper I intend to show how the question becomes clearer if we take into account the specific terminology that Hegel uses and in particular the fundamental distinction between the German terms 'kennen' and 'wissen'. In the English language, these terms tend to deflate into one indistinct notion, namely that of 'knowledge', which blurs this conceptual distinction.

KEYWORDS

Hegel, Art, Science, Knowledge, Truth

1. *Introduction*

The aim of the current paper is to account for the title that I have given it – Art is (not) knowledge.

This is a title that is explicitly and voluntarily ambiguous. In the following pages, I will try to give reasoning for the negation in parentheses, that is, within the context of Hegel's thought, why one can and at the same time cannot say that art is knowledge. The 'not' in parentheses means that with respect to Hegel, we can both say that art is knowledge while at the same time saying art is not knowledge. And saying this does not imply a trivial contradiction. That we can say that art is knowledge and that it is not knowledge can only be explained by asking ourselves what is meant by knowledge, that is, by trying to clarify the meaning from which art must be denied the status of knowledge and its meaning with respect to which we must instead say, according to Hegel, that art is knowledge. Therefore, I will try to explain in what sense for Hegel art is knowledge and in what sense art is not knowledge.

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The fact that for Hegel art is knowledge is clearly derived from art's systematic location. Art, in the systematic Hegelian articulation, constitutes one of the three expressions of the absolute spirit: art, religion and philosophy. For Hegel, the absolute spirit is 'knowledge of the absolute idea' (*Das Wissen der absoluten Idee*).¹

This conviction has been rooted in Hegel since Jena's time. In his Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit of 1805/06, Hegel writes the following:

Thus, at the immediate [level], spirit is art: the infinite knowledge (*Wissen*), which, immediately alive, is its own fulfillment – the knowledge (*Wissen*) which has taken back into itself all the exigency of nature, of outer necessity, and [has bridged] the division between self-knowledge and its truth.²

One of the most significant secondary literature works on the relationship between art and knowledge in Hegel is that of Albert Hofstadter, titled 'On Artistic Knowledge. A Study in Hegel's Philosophy of Art'.³ The text was published in a collective volume edited by Frederick Weiss in 1974, titled *Beyond Epistemology. New Studies in the Philosophy of Hegel*.

Hofstadter's text opens with the explicit question about the possibility of considering art as knowledge: 'Is art knowledge?' The answer, according to Hofstadter, can only be an affirmative answer:

On Hegel's view, it must be; for he maintains that art is called upon to disclose truth in the form of the sensible artistic construction, and the disclosure of truth is certainly a cognitive process.⁴

For Hegel, in fact, "in art, as in thought, we are seeking truth". Art differs from other ways of truth "only in virtue of the manner of its appearance".⁵ The way truth appears in art is that of the sensitive medium. Art is a disclosure of truth through a sensible medium. This reference to truth, which is a distinctive feature of the Hegelian conception of art, necessarily implies, according to

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), together with the *Zusätze*, trans. by W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, revised with introduction and commentary by M. Inwood, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, §533.

² L. Rauch (ed.), *Hegel and the Human Spirit. A translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (1805-6), with commentary, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1983, p. 173.

³ A. Hofstadter, 'On Artistic Knowledge. A Study in Hegel's Philosophy of Art', in F.G. Weiss (ed. by) *Beyond Epistemology*, Springer, Dordrecht 1974, pp. 58-97.

⁴ Hofstadter, 'On Artistic Knowledge', cit., p. 58.

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, together with an introduction by A. Gethmann-Siefert, edited and translated by Robert F. Brown, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 183.

Hofstadter, that art is a cognitive process. Hofstadter insists on this character and goes so far as to say that art is, according to Hegel, a cognitive process that lies at a higher level than the cognitive processes that are realized in the natural sciences.

However, according to Hofstadter, this clearly involves a serious problem. How can it be argued that:

art stands closer to ultimate truth than does empirical natural science, like physics, chemistry, and biology, as well as empirical psychological or social science, like individual psychology or economics or history?⁶

Hence, Hofstadter's even more explicit question:

Is the knowledge we receive in a Bach fugue – assuming there to be knowledge here at all – superior as knowledge to the knowledge that Newton gave us in his equations or that more recent physics provides about the external world? Is music closer to the truth of reality than physics? Can anyone in his right mind believe such an absurd declaration?⁷

To say that art is a form of knowledge closer to the truth than the sciences is not, Hofstadter asks, simply a bombast?

2. *Knowledge between 'Kenntnis' and 'Wissen'*

Hofstadter's entire text is aimed at clarifying this point, at explaining that this idea, if properly understood, is not simply bombast, hence clarifying and explaining what it means for Hegel to say that art is something that has to do with truth in a more intimate way than what is found in the sciences, that is, what kind of experience of truth is proper to art and in what sense this experience of truth is a more radical experience than what can be done within what we call scientific disciplines, that is, in the special sciences.

Now, what I would like to show is that this different experience of truth that, on the one hand, characterizes the particular (non-philosophical) sciences and, on the other hand, art (and with it also religion and philosophy) finds its clear explication in Hegel in two clearly distinct cognitive acts that should not be confused with or superimposed on one another. These two cognitive acts are also expressed within Hegel's thought with different nouns – *Kenntnis* and *Wissen* – and different verbs – 'kennen' and 'wissen'. Therefore, I would like to try to show how different it is for Hegel

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

to talk about *Kenntnis* and about *Wissen*. These two expressions, however, deflagrate in the English language within a single word – *knowledge* – which risks mixing within itself semantics that in Hegel’s language are clearly distinct.

A considerable part of Hofstadter’s difficulties in making sense of the Hegelian idea that particular non-philosophical sciences and art are different experiences of truth is connected to the impossibility of the English language to distinguish between ‘kennen’ and ‘wissen’.

This is of some relevance because if the two cognitive acts are clearly different, it also weakens the discourse that tries to show how one is more a true knowledge compared with the other. There is no doubt that for Hegel, art, religion and philosophy are more radical and profound experiences of truth than the experiences of truth embodied in the sciences. However, it is also true that for Hegel, the experience of the truth of the particular sciences, on the one hand, and that of art, religion and philosophy, on the other hand, are not trivially two different degrees of the same knowledge but are two structurally different forms of knowledge or two different spiritual activities.

Within the section *Der absolute Geist*, we never find the verb ‘kennen’ and its correlates (‘Kenntnis’, ‘Erkenntnis’, ‘erkennen’), making explicit the type of cognitive activity that is at stake in it, but we always and only the verb ‘wissen’ and the noun verb ‘das Wissen’.

3. Knowledge and Science

What is the difference between these two activities that both refer to the verbs ‘kennen’ and ‘wissen’? In the 1801 essay with which Hegel first entered the philosophical debate of the time, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, he proposes a distinction that can introduce us to the question. At the very beginning of the text, Hegel distinguishes between *knowledge* in the sense of ‘Kenntnis’ and *science* (*Wissenschaft*), that is, between cognitive activity that belongs properly to the field of knowledge, which is understood as ‘kennen’, and cognitive activity, which is instead characterized as knowledge in the sense of ‘wissen’.

Kenntnis, Hegel says here, “is concerned with alien objects (*Kenntnisse betreffen fremde Objekte*)”.⁸ That is, knowledge in the sense of *Kenntnis* is such because it is directed towards an object

⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. by H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, SUNY Press, Albany 1977, p. 85.

that presents itself as other and separate from the knowing subject. In this type of knowledge, there is, on the one hand, a subject who knows and, on the other hand, an object that is known. Therefore, knowledge is a movement that a subject makes in the direction of an object that is always something else and separated from it and that as the other and separated is necessarily always something given.

On the other hand, in its difference from *knowledge* (*Kenntnis*), *science* (*Wissenschaft*) cannot, according to Hegel, take anything as a presupposition and as a given. At the moment in which it assumes something as a datum or as anything of a presupposition, it is no longer *science*. This is like saying that *science*, to be such, cannot be founded in something else by itself – in an external object – but only in itself. In this sense, *science* does not have so much to do with the knowledge of an external object, but rather, so to speak, with itself. The knowledge that is proper to *science* is a knowledge that does not turn into something else or separate and, therefore, is already given, turning to itself. Therefore, in the Hegelian perspective, *science* is the process by which reason recognizes itself in the other from itself in such a way that recognizing itself and thus having itself “as an object”, it finds in itself, in reason itself, and not in something external from itself, says Hegel, “its whole work and activity”.⁹

Now, it is clear that Hegel is discussing the difference between the mode of being science of philosophy and the mode of being science of the so-called particular sciences. On the one hand, the particular sciences are knowledge of objects separated from the knowing subject, and these objects determine the scope of investigation of each science; on the other hand, philosophy is knowledge that does not have any particular object that identifies it as a specific investigation because what reason knows in it is reason itself, it is itself, its own activity. Philosophy – which is not *Kenntnis* but *Wissenschaft* – is knowledge that knows itself, that knows and recognizes itself in the other by itself. If the sciences have an object that in some way establishes the disciplinary sphere within which they operate, philosophy then has no proper object: there is no object that identifies the sphere of investigation of philosophy. On the contrary, from a certain point of view, it can be said that philosophy is the dissolution of the very object structure of what it knows.

Therefore, it is clear that knowledge understood as *Kenntnis* and knowledge understood as *Wissen* are not simply two cogni-

⁹ Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, cit., p. 87.

tive activities that are placed within a graduated line with respect to which knowledge of science is less knowledge of philosophy. Rather, they are two forms of knowledge that respond to different logics, to two different experiences of truth, neither of which can totally absorb the other and for which Hegel uses different verbal expressions: 'kennen' for particular scientific knowledges and 'wissen' for philosophy.

Taking a deeper look, the verb 'wissen' is not used by Hegel for philosophy alone. Philosophy is certainly the highest and most complete form of that knowledge of the absolute idea that Hegel calls 'wissen', but this 'wissen' – which in English is rendered with the construct 'absolute knowledge' – is not a domain that Hegel reserves only to philosophy. According to Hegel, the absolute spirit is in fact articulated in art, religion and philosophy; therefore, also art, as a form of the absolute spirit, is a kind of 'wissen'. It is a *Wissen*, not a *Kenntnis*. Art, like philosophy, has no object in itself. That is, anything can be an object of art. As Hegel writes in his *Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*: "Everything can be elevated into art".¹⁰ And everything can be elevated to art precisely because what defines the work of art is not its objectivity, its addressing to an object or another, but it is the fact that in that object, the spirit recognizes itself.

4. Accuracy and Truth

To assert that art has no specific object and that, therefore, any object can be elevated to art does not mean that it has no *aboutness*. Somehow, it is possible to say that the two traits that Arthur Danto considers essential for a work of art (*aboutness* and *embodiment*) – the idea that works of art are embodied meanings – are the translation of the Hegelian idea that art is a knowledge of truth through a sensitive medium.¹¹ Hegel is far from arguing for any decorative or ornamental conception of art, just as he is far from any instrumentalist reduction of it. This does not mean that we should deny its ornamental value in relation to pleasure or its educational function in relation to the moral sense. However, it means that it is not in these determinations, in the feeling of pleasure or in its ability to refine customs, that art finds its *raison d'être*. What is decisive, for Hegel, and what distinguishes the embodied meaning of art from other forms of embodied meaning (e.g., that of adver-

¹⁰ Rauch (ed.), *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, cit., p. 174.

¹¹ Cfr. A.C. Danto, *What Art Is*, Yale University Press, New Haven (Conn.) 2013.

tising communication) is that it is always an experience of the absolute, that is, an experience through which the spirit knows itself in the other from itself, an experience in which the spirit recognizes itself, in which the spirit grasps itself as a self-awareness activity.

In a way, one can also say that, for Hegel, what lies behind any aboutness of art is the truth:

Art accordingly has for its object the portrayal of the truth of the existent being that, insofar as it is commensurate with the concept, must be in such a way that it is in-and-for-itself. Therefore truth has to be other than mere accuracy, for instead what is external must harmonize with something inner that in itself is something true.¹²

When speaking of truth for Hegel, one must be very careful, and it is not by chance that in the quoted text Hegel, distinguishes between truth (*Wahrheit*) and accuracy (*Richtigkeit*). *Richtigkeit* – accuracy or correctness – is the agreement between a subjective representation and an object. *Wahrheit* – the truth – is instead the agreement of something with its essence, with its concept. Interpreters tend to distinguish between at least two meanings of ‘truth’ in Hegel. The first is the propositional meaning (and *Richtigkeit* is associated with it), indicating the correspondence between a statement and a state of affairs. The second is what some have called the material meaning or even ontological meaning of truth, which precisely indicates the correspondence of the thing with its essence, that is, the thing as it realizes itself. Robert Stern clarifies the issue in a famous article in 1993:

Truth is *propositional* when it is attributed to statements, judgements or propositions on the basis of their accordance with the way things are. Truth is *material* when it is attributed to something on the basis of the accordance of the thing with its essence.¹³

For Hegel, art is an experience of truth, not in so far as it gives rise to any correspondence between the work and state of things represented in it (this is the sphere of what Hegel calls *Richtigkeit*), but in so far as it reveals the agreement of a content with itself, the agreement of the object with itself, that is, with its concept, which is the very realization of the idea, which here is understood as the unity of the inside and outside, of the subject and object, of the concept and of reality.¹⁴

¹² Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, cit., p. 248.

¹³ R. Stern, *Did Hegel Hold and Identity Theory of Truth?*, in “Mind”, 102/408 (October 1993), pp. 645-647, here, p. 645.

¹⁴ On the concept of truth in Hegel and for a critical analysis of the most recent debate, cfr. G. Miolli, *Il pensiero della cosa: Wahrheit hegeliana e Identity Theory of Truth*,

At this point, we have some fundamental elements that allow us to understand in what sense we can say that art is not knowledge and in what sense we can say that it is. If by knowledge we mean the activity that Hegel indicates with the notion of *Kenntnis*, art is extraneous to it. Art does not know any object; it is not a cognitive activity of a subject directed at the apprehension of an object that is external to it. When it tries to be this activity, it can only be structurally fragile, insignificant, and inferior to any scientific knowledge. However, art is knowledge, but not in the sense of *Kenntnis* but rather in the sense of *Wissen*, that is, as knowledge, that is, self-knowledge, that is, recognition of itself in the other by itself, the aptitude of the spirit to find itself in what presents itself as something else with respect to it.

5. *Connoisseurship*

The concept of knowledge as understood as *Kenntnis* and, therefore, as the knowledge proper to the particular scientific disciplines actually appears in the Hegelian philosophy of art. It appears in relation to that figure that Hegel calls the connoisseur (*der Kenner*). Among the non-trivial ways of considering the work of art, Hegel mentions the person of taste, the man educated in the sense of beauty and the connoisseur. The attitude of the connoisseur is, for Hegel, the attitude, one might say, typical of his time, the attitude typical of the modernity to which Hegel refers: “The *connoisseur* replaced the person of taste”.¹⁵

If, in fact, a man of taste is one who is able to perceive beauty and distinguish between beauty and what is not in relation to external appearance – “So taste is a way that the senses apprehend what is beautiful, a way of relating oneself to it sensibly”¹⁶ – the connoisseur instead is the one who does not rest on the external elements and who assumes the work of art as the *object* of his knowledge, approaching it by considering it in its historical side, in its material aspects, with reference to the technique with which it is composed, to the external conditions that determined its emergence. This moment – that of the connoisseur – constitutes the necessary overcoming of the type of relationship embodied by the person of taste precisely because

Verifiche, Trento 2016.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, cit., p. 196.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

it relates to the work of art by assuming it as a complex object, not only as a superficial immediacy. The taste theme is, as is well known, decisive for all eighteenth-century culture and crosses both English empiricism and the French Enlightenment, along with German empiricism; yet Hegel seems to consider it a theme that in many ways belongs to the past.¹⁷

The attitude that Hegel seems to identify as that of typical of his own time – as we have said, the attitude that, in many ways, is more emblematic of modernity – is, instead, that of the connoisseur, who, unlike a man of taste, does not stop at the surface and tries to grasp the constituent aspects of the work of art that lie beyond its surface:

However, connoisseurship does at any rate involve specific information about all aspects of the work of art, including reflection about a work of art, whereas taste just carries out a wholly external reflection. So the work of art necessarily has aspects that occupy the connoisseur; it has a historical aspect, a material aspect, and a lot of conditions involved in its production. The work of art is linked to a stage of technical development, and the artist's individuality is also an aspect it exhibits. Connoisseurship makes these specific aspects its objects: the technique, the historical occasion, and many external circumstances. All of these are essential for the fundamental knowledge of a work of art, and for its enjoyment. So connoisseurship accomplishes a lot. Of course it is not the greater thing, but it is a necessary element.¹⁸

That of the connoisseur is not the supreme approach because his consideration of the work of art cannot grasp the *truth* of the work. This is precisely because the connoisseur considers the work as an object to be *known*:

Connoisseurship, then, can stick to mere externalities too, can stock to the technical aspect, to the historical aspect with no notion of anything of a more profound nature. It can even hold its historical aspect to be above than profundity.¹⁹

The connoisseur, the *Kenner*, has a relationship with the work of art, which is that of knowledge in the sense of *Kenntnis*. In this sense, her work is a cognitive activity aimed at investigating the specific object that is the work of art. Therefore, the knowledge of the connoisseur is not a knowledge in the sense of *Wissen* precisely because in it, the knowing subject and known object remain separated from each other.

For Hegel, the supreme moment in the consideration of the

¹⁷ *Ibid.* About the notion of “taste”, cfr. B. Babich, *Reading David Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste'*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2019.

¹⁸ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, cit., p. 197.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, cit., pp. 196-197.

work of art – a moment beyond the characteristics of the man of taste as much as that of the connoisseur – is that which is able to grasp art as an experience of truth, that is, as an experience in which the spirit recognizes itself in the other by itself:

If we wish to set forth an ultimate purpose of the work of art, it is this: to uncover and represent truth, what stirs in the human breast, and of course to do so in a pictorial, concrete way.²⁰

What should be stressed is that art does not have a purpose outside itself for which it would be the means. Truth is not something that lies beyond the work of art and to which the work of art can or must lead. There is no purpose at which art is aimed. Art has its purpose in and of itself, inasmuch as it is the revelation of truth. In this lies its absoluteness:

Therefore the roundabout way of positing, as ultimate purpose, something other to it as essential apart from the work of art is superfluous. Of course there are things that are mere means and have their purpose outside themselves, and the work of art can also in a certain sense be one of them, for instance, as bringing money and honour and fame, although these purposes have nothing to do with the work of art as such.²¹

This attitude that considers art as the disclosure of truth implies a radical transcendence of the cognitive dimension proper. This is a transcendence that in no way implies an annulment of knowledge or of the contribution of the connoisseur, who is indeed fundamental for the work's observer to be able to bring himself to the knowing that the work embodies. However, the consideration of the work of art as an experience of truth is not knowledge in the sense of *Kenntnis*; it is cognitive activity that turns to an object external to the knowing subject. In this knowledge that is a *Wissen*, the spirit grasps nothing but itself in something other than itself, here in a sensitive medium, in an existent materiality. What the spirit knows is not so much the objectivity of the work but the fact that that the work is precisely spirit. The connoisseur's knowledge is fundamental to be able to comprehend the work in its truth. However, at the same time, the comprehension of the truth of the work implies a transcendence of the purely cognitive dimension, the experience of the truth that the work embodies can be grasped only by going beyond the fundamental cognitive elements that allow us to grasp the work

²⁰ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, cit., p. 208.

²¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, cit., p. 209.

in a more refined way.

6. *Still Life*

I would like to give an example of the need for the connoisseurship and, at the same time, for its transcendence.

To that aim, I would like to consider the painting that Luc Tuymans, one of the most significant and influential contemporary painters working today, presented for *Documenta 11* in Kassel in 2002, a gigantic painting titled *Still Life*.



Figure 1. Luc TUYMANS, *Still Life*, 2002, Oil on canvas, 347 x 500 cm
Courtesy David Zwirner, New York and Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.
Pinault Collection

The event, which was curated that year by Okwui Enwezor, ended on 15 September, a few days after the first anniversary of the 11 September 2001 attacks: as a result, the German exhibition was marked by strong political and social connotations. Many of the works raise an issue. Tuymans is an artist who has worked within the area of history, on the tragedies of history. One of the fundamentals of Tuymans' painting is the Shoà, the unrepresentable horror of reality, which can only be represented by showing its ordinary, normal side.

Tuymans' work for Documenta raised a lot of expectations: he is expected to tackle the theme head-on. The painter, on the other hand, presents a gigantic still life, the largest still life that has ever been produced, it is said.

The work takes the viewer by the wayside. It displaces the horizon of the viewer's expectation. The work seems to have no relation with reality. Yet that is exactly what the work is about. And this emerges not so much from the subject matter but from the way in which it is represented and how it is treated.

There is a sense of suspension, like a sort of floating in a void. Perhaps, it is what remains after the tragedy, perhaps it is the insistence of the ordinary after the extraordinary. Maybe it's what remains and what to start from again. Maybe it is a trace of life (*Still Life*) suspended in nothing, in a void that has erased everything.

Tuymans seems to put the viewer in a different perspective, in the right perspective, Wittgenstein would have said.

Marc Donnadiu, one of the leading experts on Tuymans' work, describes this work as follows: "The painting is like an inverted vanity: it doesn't signal that life is ephemeral and fragile, but on the contrary that it resists and is resilient".²²

The information we receive about the work, the knowledge we acquire about it, opens the way for us to participate in its revelation of the truth. It is even said that without that knowledge, without the knowledge of the circumstances, the work would remain at least partially closed to us. Yet at the same time, the recognition that the work is capable of initiating cannot be reduced to the knowledge we have about it. Through the information provided by the connoisseur, we approach the work, and we recognize ourselves. In that still life, we are not invited to know the fruit, the jug of water, the dishes. In it, we see something that concerns us, that is totally contained in the work without being represented.

7. (Anti)Reductionism

In *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, from which we started to trace the difference between knowledge as *Kenntnis* and knowledge as *Wissen*, Hegel does not just distinguish between *Kenntnis* and *Wissenschaft*. What he denounces there as a typical feature of modernity is the reduction of *Wissenschaft* to *Kenntnis*:

²² Cf. C. Bourgeois and M. Donnadiu (eds.), *Luc Tuymans, La Pelle* (Venice, Palazzo Grassi, 24 March 2019 – 6 January 2020), Guide to the works, p. 18.

[The individual] refuses the living participation demanded by science (*Wissenschaft*), transforming it into mere information (*Kenntnis*) keeping it at a distance and in purely objective shape. Deaf to all demands that he should raise himself to universality, he maintains himself imperturbably in his self-willed particularity.²³

In this way, philosophy is reduced to mere knowledge (*Kenntnis*). In philosophy, reduced to mere knowledge, “the inward totality does not bestir itself, and neutrality retains its perfect freedom [from commitment]”.²⁴

This reduction – the reduction of the knowledge in the sense of ‘wissen’ to knowledge in the sense of ‘kennen’ – is at the origin of the inability to grasp the type of knowledge (*Wissen*) that is proper to art, religion and philosophy and the transformation of art, religion and philosophy into experiences of truth that belong to the knowledge that Hegel calls *Kenntnis*. When art, religion and philosophy are thought of within the form of knowledge in the sense of *Kenntnis*, they can only reveal themselves as weak, fragile and pathetic forms of knowledge, thus paradoxically opening the way to an idea of art as decoration, to an idea of religion as a private feeling and to an idea of philosophy as opinion.

8. Conclusions

I would like to conclude with some words by David Foster Wallace taken from an interview that is mentioned in the text that closes the collection of occasional essays by Zadie Smith entitled *Changing My Mind*. The essay is called ‘Brief Interviews With Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace’.²⁵ In this interview, David Foster Wallace is talking about literature and says:

I guess a big part of serious fiction’s purpose is to give the reader, who like all of us is sort of marooned in her own skull, to give her imaginative access to other selves. Since an ineluctable part of being a human self is suffering, part of what we humans come to art for is an experience of suffering, necessarily a vicarious experience, more like a sort of ‘generalization’ of suffering. Does this make sense? We all suffer alone in the real world; true empathy’s impossible. But if a piece of fiction can allow us imaginatively to identify with a character’s pain, we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying with our own. This is nourishing, redemptive; we become less alone inside.²⁶

²³ Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, cit., p. 85.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Cf. Z. Smith, ‘Brief Interviews With Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace’, in Ead., *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*, Penguin, London 2012, pp. 257-300.

²⁶ The entire interview with David Foster Wallace published in “The Review of Con-

When Hegel says that art is a knowledge of the absolute idea (*Wissen der absoluten Idee*), he does not say something very different. To say that art is an absolute knowledge (*ein absolutes wissen*) means that it is not the knowledge of an object (even if this object is another subject) but that it is one of the fundamental experiences in which the spirit knows itself by recognizing itself in the other by itself. This is an experience that is not a simple knowledge understood as *Kenntnis* but a knowledge understood as *Wissen*, as self-knowledge, that is self-recognition in the other by itself.

In this sense, we can return to the title of this work – Art is (not) knowledge – and dissolve its ambiguity: if one thinks of knowledge as *Kenntnis*, for Hegel, art is not knowledge. If one thinks instead of knowledge as *Wissen*, then one must say that art is knowledge.

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List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: Tuymans L., *Still Life*, oil on canvas, 347,8×502,5cm, Pinault Collection, in Bourgeois C. and Donnadieu M. (eds.), *Luc Tuymans, La Pelle* (Venice, Palazzo Grassi, 24 March 2019 – 6 January 2020), Guide to the works, Marsilio Editori, Venezia 2019, p. 86-87.