

The Complicated History of *Einfühlung*

Magdalena NOWAK
Warszawa

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the history of the *Einfühlung* concept. Theories of ‘feeling into’ Nature, works of art or feelings and behaviours of other persons by German philosophers of the second half of the nineteenth century Robert and Friedrich Vischer and Theodor Lipps are evoked, as well as a similar theory of understanding (*Verstehen*) by Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Schleiermacher, to which Dilthey refers. The meaning of the term *Einfühlung* within Edith Stein’s thought is also analysed. Both *Einfühlung* and *Verstehen* were criticized as non-objective and naive methods consisting only in the identification of the subject with the object or the projection of feelings onto the object. The article refers to criticism by Georg Gadamer and Bertolt Brecht and proposes ways to reconstitute the concept of *Einfühlung* after this criticism, recalling the theory of empathy by Dominick Lacapra, in terms of its advantages for the historical enquiry, or the myth of Narcissus analyzed in the spirit of psychoanalysis by Julia Kristeva. The article proposes a reformulation of the concept of *mimesis*, connected to the *Einfühlung*, understood as the identification, analogy, imitation of feelings (as it was described by Lipps and Vischer). *Mimesis* does not necessarily mean a passive repetition and reconstruction of the feelings of the object, but serves only as a starting point for the interest of the subject for the outside world or for the experiences of historical protagonists. Then there is no identification or projection of feelings, but the creative, active and critical reformulation of knowledge. It is stated that empathy is not a passive, uncritical process, but that it deals with the critical choice of the object of empathy and with an active approach to the perceived feelings and appearances. In addition to this cognitive aspect, empathy may also contribute to the analytical and valuable introspection. Furthermore empathy allows us to connect the analysis of the facts with a personal narrative and understanding of individual identity in historical knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the German notion *Einfühlung* is difficult to describe and the concept itself not easy to define. It is translated into English as ‘empathy’ or ‘feeling into’, but there are so many different notions close to it like ‘sympathy’ or ‘understanding’ that over time they have become mixed together or superseded one another. This essay will not be a complete analysis, but rather an attempt to systematize and gather different interpretations of the concept. I will focus on showing the complicated history of the concept, from its creation, through its later rejection, and then reintroduction into contemporary philosophy and historiography. Therefore, rather than quoting definitions, I will concentrate on showing the most “prolific” characteristics of empathy, which at certain points in history have been a cause of enthusiasm, and at others rejection.

The issue of empathy has been well described by Matthew Rampley¹, Juliet Koss² and Georges Didi-Huberman³. Rampley and Didi-Huberman concentrated on issues connected to Aby Warburg’s concepts of *Pathosformeln* and *Nachleben*. Juliet Koss showed the depreciation of the idea of empathy at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this context, the aim of this paper is, firstly, to show broader aspects of the understanding of this concept (e.g. in terms of phenomenology and as a historical method), and secondly, to present what happened after the rejection of the *Einfühlung* concept in the second half of the twentieth century, that is to describe the opportunities that were found to overcome the criticism of the concept and thus restore its cognitive value. At the beginning, the investigations by some of the above-mentioned authors are going to be referred to and then other threads in the history of empathy will be analysed.

THE BEGINNINGS

The concept of *Einfühlung* originated in the eighteenth century and at the beginning concerned the possibility of exploring the human psyche by empathising with other people. Later on, it was also used to describe the relation between Man and Nature. It was developed especially in the

¹ Cf. Rampley (1997).

² Cf. Koss (2006).

³ Cf. Didi-Huberman (2002).

thought of the German Romantic philosophers, but was not subjected to thorough debate until the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at the time of the increased interest in the psychology of perception.

It is believed that the notion has its source in the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder, who thought that while perceiving different natural phenomena one can look for similarities to the human and thus ascribe human feelings to them. Herder endowed Nature with a consciousness which could be penetrated by man thanks to empathy. Empathy leads to a mystical union of the subject and the object, Man and Nature⁴. Similar thoughts can be found in other texts of the Romantic period; Herder's theory echoed in the writings of philosophers of nature: Jean Paul, Friedrich Schelling, Novalis and the Schlegel brothers. The Romantics used the term *Einfühlen* to describe the unification of the subject and object which enabled the existence of aesthetic value. In *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), Herder also stated that empathy is needed in the interpretation of texts, cultures and history. In *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774), he wrote about the possibility of interpretation through *Einfühlung*, which influenced Friedrich Schleiermacher and later Wilhelm Dilthey.

Attention must be also drawn to certain roots of *Einfühlung* in eighteenth century English aesthetics, which placed emphasis on the empirical, and above all psychological, aspect of perception. 'Sympathy' plays an important role in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), where he analysed many aspects of this concept and claimed that all judgements of beauty involve 'sympathy'. He described the sensations associated with the contemplation of works of art; for example, he explained the pleasure arising from the perception of a statue due to sympathy with the feelings expressed by the facial expression of the sculpted figure.

An extremely important figure for the development of the concept of empathy was Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–1887), a German philosopher under Hegel's influence. He wrote in *Das Symbol* (1887) that in sensory objects people find spiritual elements and he called this operation symbolism. Both artworks and nature manifest themselves as emotional beings that can be felt with empathy, which was for him a primary, natural instinct. He divided symbolic representation into two types: 'magical', in which the symbol and what is symbolized merge into one, and 'logical', where they are separated. The latter was associated with al-

⁴ Cf. Rybicki (1976: 336).

legorical thinking, and was attributed by Vischer to developed cultures. On the other hand, magical-symbolical thinking was associated with empathy. The symbolic-empathic way characterized primitive cultures in which logical thinking had not led to the separation of man from nature. In this case, primitive men anthropomorphise nature and identify it with feeling and emotions⁵.

The son of Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Robert (1847–1933), used the term *Einfühlung* for the first time in his essay *Über das Optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* (*On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*) from 1873, in which he further developed the theory of his father⁶. *Einfühlung* meant for him the viewer's active participation in a work of art or other visual forms. It was a mutual experience of exchange between the body and the perceived object. He put the viewer in the centre of aesthetic discourse and thus effected a very important transition from a focus on the work of art and its aesthetic "being" to an emphasis of the role of the spectator. The meaning of art lies in the reception and the recipient, not the object. This was no longer romantic empathy and "feeling with" the author, as Herder saw it; rather the emphasis is on the spectator's feelings toward the object. On the other

⁵ Cf. Rampley (1997: 49–50).

⁶ This work was preceded by those of Johann Herbart, Hermann Lotze and Karl Kostlin. Herbart in the work *Psychologie als Wissenschaft* (1824–1825) tries to mediate between the rationalist and empirical approach. He pointed out (opposing the Kantian idea of space as an *a priori* form) that our sense of space is based on haptic and sensual impression. Bodily movement in space and the perception of this movement by the eye (which transfers information to the brain) are both important for the feeling of space. Cognition is therefore both intellectual and empirical. The development of this theory can be observed in later writings, such as Adolf Hildebrandt's *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (*The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts*, 1893) and that of Alois Riegl who also used the haptic — optic opposition to describe the process of perception (*Late Roman Art Industry*, 1901). The interaction of the body and the eye in the cognitive process, and the dialectic of visual perception and physical activity became the basis for the psychology of perception. The combination of the cognitive with psychology became the basis for the extended theory of empathy (cf. Rampley 1997: 44). In aesthetics, it manifested itself as an interest not only in the outer form of perceived objects, but primarily in the subject's emotional involvement in the object. This idea was also developed by Hermann Lotze in *Grundzüge der Aesthetik* (*Outlines of Aesthetics*, 1885), where he wrote about the emotional engagement with the perceived object. By interacting with the visual and trying to understand it, we project ourselves onto its content and empathise with it (Cf. Rampley 1997: 44). Lotze also developed the so-called associative theory of empathy. Man looking at a sensual phenomenon remembers his own feelings experienced in a similar situation. While perceiving this phenomenon, these feelings are somehow evoked in him, and thus, through the memories associated with the object perceived at this moment, a feeling of empathy is provoked (cf. Rybicki 1976: 337).

hand, there is a possibility in *Einfühlung* theory of the excessive immersion of a viewer in the work of art. This was described by Friedrich Nietzsche, a contemporary to Vischer, when he spoke of the performances of Richard Wagner. Although he used the notions *Miterlebnis* and *Mitleid*, you can see some similarities with the concept of *Einfühlung*. According to Nietzsche watching the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* caused a merging of "the self into the work of art that provoked a loss of speech and the dissolution of individual identity" (Koss 2006: 139). This was meant in positive terms: the identification of the spectator with the work of art testified to its importance. However, this type of statements led later to a critique of empathy and ultimately to its rejection.

The basis of Vischer's thought was a distinction between passive 'seeing' (*sehen*), and active 'looking' (*schauen*). Active looking was associated with physicality. It was charged with emotional value and the ability to animate inanimate objects⁷. The basis for "penetrating" inanimate phenomena was the mimetic impulse. Similarity and harmony between the subject and the object of the gaze trigger the feeling of empathy. Mimesis then helps to identify with the object and in a mimetic way feeling is transferred to it. The measure of similarity between the object and the subject is the human body, while the mimetic "entry" into the object is enabled by the imagination. Looking provides stimuli and data that allows the existence of empathy, but it is through the imagination that a viewer enters into a mutual, empathic relationship with the object, and thus the object gains emotional value⁸. In empathy, an object is animated like the living body of the viewer. The important role of the imagination in the *Einfühlung* theory brings it close to aesthetics and art. According to Vischer, in a work of art and thanks to artistic imagination the subject and the object merge. Transferring artistic vision onto a haptic impression allowed viewers to enter into the picture.

It seems that the most important figure associated with the concept of *Einfühlung* was Theodor Lipps (1851–1913), a contemporary of Robert Vischer, connected with the so-called psychological mainstream of the end of the nineteenth century. His theory is best explained in the essay *Einfühlung und ästhetischer Genuss (Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure)* of 1906, in which he claimed that during perception the subject permeates the object with affection and strength⁹. The viewer is thus active, and through his activity objects can exist and be seen. Empathy is the men-

⁷ Cf. Rampley (1997: 45).

⁸ Cf. Rampley (1997: 45).

⁹ Cf. Koss (2006: 143).

tal process during which the subject becomes aware of the emotional states of the object expressed through sensory symptoms, by what is visible. The aspect of the sign/symbol that expresses feelings is very important. Not only a work of art or a natural phenomenon is a carrier of feelings that can be activated by the viewer, but all objects can be “empathised”. Lipps also writes in *Asthetik* (1903–1906) about such abstract forms as a diagonal line, which can cause an internal feeling of lifting or sinking¹⁰. Later in the same work, he states that the viewer feels as if he was inside the object — the source of the feelings. As a result, there is a kind of identification with the object, the merging of subject and object into one¹¹. Lipps distinguishes four types of empathy objects: the psychological life of humans, the psyche of animals, nature and works of art¹². The psychological life of people can be empathized due to memory, anamnesis, when feelings that have once been experienced are recognised in the gestures and facial expressions of other people. This is based on the drive of mimesis that is innate to human, as Jan Rybicki (1976: 342) writes: “The instinctive imitation of various mimic symptoms is accompanied by an experience of one’s own feelings corresponding to changes in the observed environment. The tendency to imitate and harmonize with the surrounding environment occurs throughout the whole life of man”. With the psyche of animals we can empathise according to parallels between their facial expressions and behaviour, and human reactions. The context here may be the work of Charles Darwin’s *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), where he showed the origin of human expression in that of animals.

Empathy with nature involves the human tendency to anthropomorphize and animate nature that facilitates the understanding of strange phenomena and ascribes life and feelings to the inanimate elements of nature. For example, a storm is commonly associated with fight¹³. Empathy with a work of art depends on the “form of life” given to it by the author: this form is subjected to a process of empathy. Particularly important for our later discussion is the remark about the realism of a work of art. Lipps does not believe that art was to provide the illusion of the real world, but merely to present the most important and most hidden items, in relation to which empathy will have a real cognitive value for the spectator¹⁴.

¹⁰ Cf. Lipps (1914: 442–447).

¹¹ Cf. (Rybicki 1976: 339).

¹² Cf. (Rybicki 1976: 339).

¹³ Cf. Lipps (1914: 169–183).

¹⁴ Cf. Lipps (1914a: 69).

Lipps is also interested in the problem of expression and gesture. According to him, when we see an unknown gesture or expression we tend to reproduce it. Imitation is a waking up of the emotions associated with this expression. Then man projects these feelings onto the perceived object. The projection is necessary because the only emotional states to which man has access are those he has been through himself. Thus, the perceived object is needed to trigger these feelings in us, and only then, in a feedback relation do we assign these feelings to the object¹⁵.

As Juliet Koss writes in the article *On the Limits of Empathy* the identification of *Einfühlung* with the psychology of art (e.g. by Hildebrand in *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, 1893) led, after the time of its development and popularity in the last decade of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, to the need for a confirmation of the theory in empirical research. However, it was noted that the viewer described by Vischer and Lipps is an imaginary, unreal recipient constructed on the basis of the individual experience of the authors of this theory. Research on perception showed that individuals respond differently to the same signs, and even the reactions of the same individuals may vary depending on the moment of the study. Attempts to make *Einfühlung* an objective, serious cognitive theory have been discredited. The above-mentioned thinkers created an ideal spectator, an educated scholar originating from the higher social classes, who devoted himself to contemplating art in the comfort of his office. Their theories very quickly became outdated and obsolete because of the development of mass culture, cinema and popular culture in the twentieth century. They did not notice that reality was rapidly changing and thought about the perception of visual stimuli in a contemplative individual and in an isolated manner¹⁶.

EINFÜHLUNG AND HISTORY

Controversy over the *Einfühlung* theory can be noted not only in aesthetics and the psychology of art. Another important current in the development of empathy was its use for the historical examination of the past. Empathy was used to understand ancient texts and material artefacts. Immersion in the lives of people of the past was supposed to be followed by an understanding of their actions. Lipps's theory, nevertheless, was quickly criticized as a naive method assuming that we have access to the

¹⁵ Cf. Zahavi (2006: 288).

¹⁶ Cf. Koss (2006: 144–145).

feelings of other individuals and that we can fully understand them. Among others, Max Weber in *Roscher and Knies*, written in the years 1903–1906, objected to considering empathy as a cognitive method aimed at understanding. He was particularly against the use of *Einfühlung* theory in relation to historical understanding because he believed that the real interest of a historian should be the feeling and behaviour of the historical person, the subject of historical research, not the feelings of an empathising historian¹⁷. He believed that during the projection about which Lipps wrote, the researcher's feelings are most important and that these are wrongly attributed to historical persons. Weber also addressed this criticism to the thought of Wilhelm Dilthey, whom he regarded as the inheritor of Lipps' naive theory of empathy and to the thought of another philosopher and theologian from the Romantic period — Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).

It is important at this juncture to have a closer look at Wilhelm Dilthey's essay *The Rise of Hermeneutics* of 1900, and more generally, his vision of historical understanding (*Verstehen*). Although *Verstehen* is not identical with the theory of empathy, it was criticized as an heir of the *Einfühlung*. In Dilthey's philosophy the fundamental difference between the two meanings of the word *Einfühlung* is revealed — as between of understanding the feelings of others and of a supposed experiencing of the feelings of others. Max Weber believed that to understand someone's feelings we do not need to experience them and he considered it to be naive to believe in the possibility of true empathy with other people, he called this belief a primitive psychologism. The psychological "immersion" in the world of others led only to a false projection of one's own feelings and to assigning them to objects of historical enquiry. And indeed, in *Einfühlung* theory there is a problem of an immersion in the feelings of others, and of a partial loss of one's own subjectivity (a fusion of the object and the subject into one), which prevents real understanding. Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* conducted a lively critique of this way of reasoning, especially in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who in turn had been praised in Dilthey's *The Rise of Hermeneutics*. But even Gadamer observed that Dilthey managed to overcome the naive romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher in a certain way¹⁸. I would like to rehabilitate Schleiermacher's writings and thus to show that Dilthey has found in them what his contemporaries were not able to see, and used it to create his notion of *Verstehen*.

¹⁷ Cf. Weber (1975: 165–166).

¹⁸ Cf. Harrington (2001: 312).

Schleiermacher's most important considerations deal with hermeneutics or the theory of interpretation. He was influenced by Friedrich Schlegel, whom he befriended, and with whom he even lived under the same roof for some time. His theory is also inspired by some of Herder's thoughts from the *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772). In the years 1805–1833, Schleiermacher gave lectures on hermeneutics, which he understood as the art of the understanding of verbal communication, not coincident with translation or the use of language. He regarded it as a universal science, which should be used for both ancient and contemporary texts of all kinds and origins. To understand a text, one must immerse oneself in the historical context of the text. Interpretation takes place on two levels: linguistics and psychology. The first explores how to use words, combine them and produce meaning. The second focuses on the psychology of the author. The linguistic interpretation insists, therefore, on what is general and typical in the text, while the psychological one focuses on what distinguishes the author. Understanding should combine both methods of interpretation, because authors differ in their use of language, which may result from differences in their psyche. Psychological interpretation may also help resolve the ambiguity in the use of certain phrases by an author in a given context. According to Schleiermacher it was important to understand not only the linguistic meaning, but also the "illocutionary" power — the intent of expression. He used two methods: 'comparative' applied to the study of language and 'divinatory', which was associated with psychology, and related to intuition and the guessing of the meaning¹⁹. The method of 'premonition' was one of the major causes of the misinterpretation of Schleiermacher's assumptions. It stated that Schleiermacher proposes a psychological self-projection of the interpreter's feelings onto a text and its author. However, it seems that the German philosopher rather paid attention to the power of intuition in formulating an interpretation that was always coupled with a meticulous examination of the socio-cultural context. So projection is not involved here.

Schleiermacher drew the overlapping of linguistic (grammatical) interpretation and psychological interpretation, as well as the 'premonition' method from Herder's writings. He wanted particularly to draw attention to the individuality of an author's motives and their causes. Schleiermacher stated that "the interpreter should aim to understand an author better than the author understood himself"²⁰. This statement later

¹⁹ Cf. Forster (2008).

²⁰ Cf. Forster (2008).

led critics to assign to him as postulating projection methods and as promoting an emphasis on the interpreter, and not the author of the text. More detailed analysis of Schleiermacher's grammatical interpretation can be found in the texts by Manfred Frank, who tried to show that the 'divinatory method' cannot be equated with empathy (understood in a traditional, romantic way). Frank wanted to reveal that the criticisms concentrated only on divination are superficial. He showed that divination did not deal with the author's psychology and life but with his literary style²¹.

Dilthey devoted a large part of the text *The Rise of Hermeneutics* to Schleiermacher and wrote *Leben Schleiermachers* — a biography of the philosopher. In the first article, he saw Schleiermacher as influenced by "Herder's congenial empathy into the spirit of ages and people" (Dilthey 1976: 256). This shows that the tradition of *Einfühlung* was close to him. Dilthey argues that Schleiermacher "went behind the rules to the analysis of understanding, to the comprehension of the purposive act itself and from this comprehension he deduced the possibility of valid interpretation, its aids, limits and rules" (Dilthey 1976: 256). He "recognised the imaginative consideration of the creative process through which a vital literary work originates as the basis for appreciating the process by which we understand the whole of a work from its written signs and from this the purpose and mentality of its author" (Dilthey 1976: 256). He then "needed a new psychological-historical view" (Dilthey 1976: 256). Prior to Schleiermacher, a logical conception of literary production, stemming initially from Aristotle, had prevailed: the "categories according to which this methodology proceeded were always: production, logical connection, logical order and then a clothing of this logical product with style, tropes and images" (Dilthey 1976: 256). Schleiermacher on the contrary underlined the emotional aspect of a text.

Dilthey saw himself as an heir to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic method of understanding, but he was regarded by his contemporaries as a typical representative of a naive faith in the ability to empathise with the author of a text. In Schleiermacher's writings the process of interpretation was, according to critics such as Gadamer, the intuitive and empathic identification with an author's thoughts and feelings. Dilthey, as do contemporary scholars rehabilitating Schleiermacher, pointed out that intuition is not just about empathy but is associated with the surrounding world and the context in which the text was created. This is not an introverted and psychologising intuition; rather it is directed towards the

²¹ Cf. Frank (1997: 17–18).

exterior, towards the world and socio-historical processes. Dilthey recalled Schleiermacher's method of 'grammatical interpretation', which consisted primarily of a comparative analysis of the structure of text, not just a guessing of the author's intentions.

Gadamer in *Truth and Method* expressed criticism of Dilthey's 'psychologism' and his borrowings from Schleiermacher's theory. He knew, as he himself admits in his text, only the late writings of Schleiermacher, and was not aware of the results of his collaboration with Schlegel that have been described above. He says that in the late period Schleiermacher was overwhelmed by psychological interpretation and that it was this that dominated Dilthey. According to Gadamer, Dilthey appreciated Schleiermacher's romantic intuition and also believed that the meaning given by the author can be read from a text and that the interpreter is absolutely contemporary with the author²². He wrote in *Truth and Method*:

As we saw Schleiermacher's model of hermeneutics is congenial understanding that can be achieved in the relation between I and Thou. Texts are just as susceptible of being fully understood as is the Thou. The author's meaning can be divined directly from his text. The interpreter is absolutely contemporaneous with his author. This is a triumph of philological method, understanding the mind of the past as present, the strange as familiar. Dilthey has a profound sense of this triumph (Gadamer 2004: 233).

He believed that Dilthey had not gone beyond the romantic approach, criticized him for basing his theory on psychology and for an aestheticization of history. "Romantic hermeneutics here come to assistance since, as we saw, it took no account whatsoever of the historical nature of experience. It assumed that the object of understanding is the text to be deciphered and its meaning understood. Thus for romantic hermeneutics every encounter with a text is an encounter of the spirit with itself" (Gadamer 2004: 233). In a similar vein, later Dilthey was criticized by Jürgen Habermas, particularly for the "identification of everyone with everything else" (Habermas 1973: 181) and then the "danger of psychologism" (Harrington 2001: 313). Meanwhile, Dilthey in *The Rise of Hermeneutics* advocated the transition from experience to understanding (*Verstehen*). The understanding of the expressions of other people and the "analysis of inner experience" "demonstrate the possibility and limits of general knowledge in the human studies" (Dilthey 1976: 249). An expression can inform us about the interior of a speaker and allow the interpretation of his feelings, but it does not involve the projection of one's own feelings on the subject. An echo of Lipps' writings and his emphasis on gestures and facial expressions as car-

²² Cf. Harrington (2001: 312).

riers of information can be found here, but there is no projection of feelings on the object nor the unification of the subject and the object.

Gadamer's critique, unnecessarily focused on "the psychological doctrine of understanding" thus forgot about "grammatical interpretation" (Harrington 2001: 313). Similarly, Dilthey's attitude towards the *Einfühlung* was far from naïve. He focused more on critical aspects of this theory. He noted that imagination and feeling play an important role in understanding, but that they do not necessarily lead to empathy with the protagonists of history. Psychology needs a historical point of reference, just as history and sociology need psychological experience. Psychology and hermeneutics are not exclusive, but complementary, together enabling understanding²³. Because of Schleiermacher's influence, Dilthey did not think about *Verstehen* as a closed, logical whole, but valued imagination and spontaneity in the creation of texts and their interpretation. He adapted Schleiermacher's method involving a penetration in the author's unconscious creative process, but also wanted to show how this unconscious process is based on sociological constructs and the culture to which the author belonged.

For Dilthey, understanding involves the reconstruction (*Nachbilden*) of the psyche of others by analogy. We perceive the signs with which the object expresses feelings and look for a situation in which we express the same signs, and we ascribe these emotions to an object. However, we must pay close attention to the context in which the emission of these signs takes place. This process also allows us to know ourselves, because it is not possible to know oneself through introspection, we need comparison with 'the other' to understand our own feelings²⁴. Dilthey's theory was thus very far from the purely psychological, intuitive theories of immersion and projection postulated by some Romantics or aestheticians of the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly benefited from the positive achievements of the empathy concept proposed by Schleiermacher.

The concept of *Verstehen* is not identical to *Einfühlung*, but apparently they have common roots in the thinking of the German Romantics, especially in Herder's legacy. For this reason it is important to consider them in parallel, noting also that they were formulated at the same time (late nineteenth / early twentieth century). They also met a similar fate. Shortly after the theory of historical understanding had been proposed by Dilthey, it was criticized and dismissed as naïve and "too emotional".

²³ Cf. Harrington (2001: 317).

²⁴ Cf. Dilthey (1976: 247).

The same thing happened with the concept of *Einfühlung* in aesthetic thought.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE CRITIQUE OF *EINFÜHLUNG*

After the first rejection of *Einfühlung* theory by psychologists of perception, for whom it became merely a hypothesis without proof, came criticism from theorists of art who had earlier used the term quite often. In 1908 Wilhelm Worringer published a book *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (*Abstraction and Empathy*). It postulated that any aesthetic activity is the result of a dialectical relation between empathy and abstraction, with Worringer's thoughts on *Einfühlung* being based on the writings of Lipps and his disciple Paul Stern²⁵. He stated that this doctrine is by no means universal, and that it can be applied only to the realistic art of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. Other times and cultures are characterized by the "urge to abstraction", typical for developed civilizations. Primitive culture is characterized by the need for "things as such", the realist urge. Abstraction involves some kind of anxiety and distance, and empathy is a convenient, friendly contact between the spectator and work. An empathic viewer, liberating himself emotionally lets his subjectivity dissolve in the work of art²⁶. As a result of the book's publication, the concept of *Einfühlung*, created in the era of the realistic and figurative art of the nineteenth century, started to also be associated with narration (a typical feature of academic or realist painting) and time (narrative develops over time). Soon after, *Einfühlung* became synonymous with naturalist art and the faithful imitation of reality. And also with storytelling — with which viewers could easily empathize. Meanwhile, according to Worringer, abstract art, more difficult and not temporal, was to be perceived at one moment. At the time of the publication of Worringer's book, movements like Fauvism, Cubism and Expressionism were developing and the term *Einfühlung* came to represent an outdated, naive, primitive art that for the modern meant the academic and realistic art from the end of the previous century. Thanks to realism a viewer could somehow 'enter' into a painting, stay in it and imagine himself inside. To be understood, the new abstract art required a greater involvement of the intellect. There is no more the positive 'immersion' in a work of art described by Nietzsche. Empathy became the domain of common people who thought they could contemplate art. But the identification of *Ein-*

²⁵ Cf. Koss (2006: 146).

²⁶ Cf. Worringer (2009: 66–69).

föhlung with realist art seems unfair, because almost all theorists of empathy (Lipps, Vischer...) claimed that all forms, also abstract ones, can be empathized. Lipps, for example, emphasized that the imitation of the reality is not the aim of art.

According to Juliet Koss empathy was ultimately compromised by Bertolt Brecht in the 1930s. For it was then that Brecht created the concept of 'the empathy theatre' (*Einföhlungstheater*) to describe performances and theatre. He identified this kind of theatre with simple, bourgeois entertainment for the masses, and he opposed it to the theatre of alienation or estrangement and 'the alienation effect' (*Verfremdung*) that it should provoke²⁷. 'The empathy theatre' was associated with the strong emotional identification of the audience with what they saw on stage. Viewers were losing control and engaged themselves uncritically in the performance. Brecht no longer associated the concept of *Einföhlung* with the active participation of the viewer in the object, but rather with passive stupor and lack of critical reflection²⁸. There was no memory of Nietzsche's writings, no cathartic empathy allowing the experience of deep feelings. Given that these thoughts come from 1936, it is possible to understand the basis on which Brecht drew such pessimistic conclusions. The development of national socialism, numerous Nazi propaganda rallies and the ease with which German civilians involved themselves in the totalitarian machinery showed *Einföhlung* theory in the worst possible light.

RESTITUTION OF THE CONCEPT

The allegations made by Gadamer against Dilthey and Schleiermacher (and through this against the romantic tradition of empathy) and those developed later by Brecht and modernist art theorists were similar, although they concerned different aspects of the theory. Empathy was accused of a lack of objectivity, it was criticized because of a faith in the possibility to "live through" another person's experiences. Critiques resisted the possibility of the existence of a cognitive aspect to empathy (assuming that empathy consists only of the projection of one's own experiences onto the other, rather than a real knowledge of one's life), and finally they identified it with a naive yielding to emotion and the inability to think critically and perpetuate a distanced evaluation of reality.

²⁷ Cf. Koss (2006: 152).

²⁸ Cf. Brecht (1994).

However, it seems that in recent years the concept of empathy has enjoyed a revival both in philosophy and history. There is no space here to present the full spectrum of this 'return', but I would like to indicate at least two ways of making positive use of *Einfühlung* theory. Certainly the rejection of the obligation of objectivity and a renewed interest in the domain of experience in postmodern times contributed to the restoration of this concept. The tragic events of World War II also had a considerable impact on this, when it became clear that the usual description of historical facts, such as the Holocaust, was not enough. The need for a new method focusing on the experience of victims arose. Also, a resistance to universalism and the holistic view drew attention to the variety of ways of understanding and experiencing, which resulted in a further reflection on the possibility of personal empathy.

Dominick Lacapra, a contemporary historian and philosopher of history, again postulates empathy as a method of historical enquiry. He has constructed a vision of historical cognition which does not seek objective knowledge, but is interested in affective modes of the representation of memory. In his book *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* he writes:

One important question here is the role of empathy or compassion in understanding, including historical understanding, and its complex relations to objectivity and transference. Objectivity is indeed a goal of professional historiography, related to the attempt to represent the past as accurately possible. One may reformulate and defend this goal in postpositivistic terms by *both* questioning the idea of a fully transparent, unproblematic, neutral representation of the way things in the past "really were" *and* recognising the need to come to terms with one's transference and affect-laden implication in the object of study by critically mediating perhaps inevitable projective or incorporative identifications, undertaking meticulous research, and being open to the way one's findings may bring into question or even contradict one's initial hypotheses (Lacapra 2004: 133–134).

Lacapra draws attention to the impossibility of the absolute neutrality of the historian and the inevitability of his involvement in his object of research. Projection and identification are to some extent unavoidable. An object of research may influence the historian when it comes to his views, especially if they concern his moral values. Lacapra criticizes contemporary historians for repressing empathy from the discussion on historiography, despite the return of an interest towards experience and memory. In his opinion, empathy is unnecessarily confused with intuition or projective identification. This refers precisely to the debates on Dilthey's and Schleiermacher's hermeneutics: the same accusations are still valid. Unfairly, however, "empathy may also be seen as a self-suffi-

cient psychological response that obviates or obscures the need for socio-political understanding, critique, and action” (Lacapra 2004: 134). According to Lacapra, empathy is not self-sufficient and does not mean unmediated identification. It restricts in some way the objectification of history and reinforces an affective aspect of understanding. Above all, however, it enables the people whose lives the historian is examining to remain human and not simply lifeless objects of research. The empathic study is a virtual, not real experience. A researcher puts himself in the position of another person, but he does not appropriate his life, he does not steal his voice. An affective relationship with the object is associated with a profound respect for the diversity of ‘the other’, which is not present in the process of overidentification²⁹. Lacapra’s empathy theory insists therefore, just as Schleiermacher and Dilthey wanted, on an individual, unusual experience of the object. It does not allow the projection or shadowing of the object by the interpreter/historian. Empathy is an essential element of historical knowledge, since belief in an objective, rigid structure of history is no longer valid. Now the subjective lives of historical protagonists seem more important than “historical narratives”.

Empathy enabled historians to pay attention to the data earlier considered unimportant, which were often causal or incidental, which were based on the personal narrative of the witnesses or victims and were not coherent and even at variance with the facts. It opens up history to its more fluid and less concrete part called ‘experience’ instead of the analysis of factual evidence (which does not mean that facts are not important any more). The traditional historiography was based on written evidence, and explained the causes and effects of actions but it did not contribute to the real understanding of them nor explain their essential sense neither for the protagonist of history nor for the interpreter. New, modern history should be more concerned with understanding and empathy. It underlines the affective aspect of knowledge and helps the historian to place the facts in the context of human life. Lacapra uses a specific term ‘empathic unsettlement’ to describe the desirable aspect of empathy (Lacapra 2004). It analyses how the historical events were lived through by the protagonist without the identification with him on the side of historian. Lacapra’s theory deals mostly with the notion of trauma which after World War II demanded the discussion in the field of history, but which was impossible to define by traditional historiographic instruments. Then the ‘empathic unsettlement’ became crucial.

²⁹ Cf. Lacapra (2004: 135).

It enabled the understanding without the identification, with the preservation of the difference between the subject and object of enquiry that means without the psychologism of which Gadamer and others were afraid. Without empathy the specificity of certain historical events could not be grasped. But this affectivity imputed by empathy into history is controlled.

This kind of historiography is against the reconstruction of the event, because the reconstruction always tends to objectify the past, that is to pass over some events and to choose some others as more important in order to present the "average" course of the event. This sort of objectivity represses some part of the experience, something is lost in the writing of history in this way. What is more, the reconstruction tends to reproduce the past "as it was" without the critical approach of the historian. On the other hand, the feeling of empathy helps not only to empathise with the protagonist but also to see the difference, the incompatibility between his feelings or experience and those of the researcher. This sort of impossibility of accord between the object's and the subject's experience is, as I think, the same as Lacapra's 'empathic unsettlement'. It is against the mimetic reconstruction and the term *mimesis* is crucial here to understand the problem of *Einführung*.

This difference, as for historical understanding, has been analysed and summed up recently not by philosophers but by the visual artists dealing with the critic of the re-enactment movements. The term re-enactment (for example developed by R. G. Collingwood in his book *The Idea of History* written in 1946) is opposite to Brechtian detachment. In re-enactment the thoughts and beliefs of a historian are suspended so as to provide the reconstruction of the thoughts of the history protagonist. The idea of re-enactment is realised by the societies that gather people who reconstruct the historical events together, disguising themselves as figures from the past and feeling into their characters. This sort of empathy was described e.g. by the artist Heike Gallmeier in her work *War & Peace Show*, where she presented a critical study of one of the biggest re-enactment events in Beltring, England. For Gallmeier this sort of reconstruction leads to nothing else than the eternal return of the same thing, everlasting repetition without any critical thought about the past. The participants of re-enactments want only to live through the supposed experiences of the people they impersonate. This 'historical spectacles' create a sense of identification between the participants, the audience and the event. The history is embodied. This total empathy and identification are vain. But still the empathic part of historical enquiry is inevitable to understand and include in the narrative various and vary-

ing testimonies about the same historical event. It enables the personal narratives to be linked with the facts, to grasp the real meaning of the event. Thanks to that the real objectivity is gained in which the persons and their identity are more important than the events themselves. The centre of the research is now the individuality of a person and their experience. However, it is not analysed through the projection. In Lacapra's theory empathy is not incompatible with objectivity, and therefore the argument about the non-objectivity of empathy is debunked. The mimetic re-enactment studies history only for history's sake. Meanwhile, the critical approach to empathetic re-enactment poses the question about the meaning of the past for the present. It asks what it might mean to contemporary people if they were to experience these situations personally. So empathy helps to 'update' history, to make it again relevant for contemporary human beings and their moral and emotional lives. Empathy became a moral issue and introduced ethics to 'distanced historical research' by involving personal choices, judgements and values into the study of the past and present. The impossibility of undisputed knowledge about our behaviour in the same situations as were lived by people from the past opens up history to a wider context of possibilities and different, equal narratives about the same event. Thus empathy can bring us closer to the object, but the full *mimesis* between subject and object is inconceivable and that's why history remains open and flexible.

Bertolt Brecht's negative way of seeing *Einfühlung* has also been challenged after World War II. Among others, Julia Kristeva uses this term in a positive way. In particular, she refers to the writings of the nineteenth century, namely to the definition claiming that empathy is a feeling of oneness with the outside world, accompanied by the loss of a subject's identity. In *Histoires d'amour (Tales of Love, 1983)* she tries to understand it from the position of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. She deals especially with the time of primary identification in the pre-oedipal phase. At this stage a child strongly identifies itself with the parents, according to Kristeva, especially with the mother. This kind of osmosis is an early phase of the narcissistic relationship³⁰. Here Kristeva combines *Einfühlung* with narcissism, she sees it, however, very positively, not as a perversion or an introverted confinement, but as the inclination towards the other. It would seem that narcissism is the rejection of others, of the outer world, and an obsessive focus on self-affection. But Kristeva believes that the mythical Narcissus all the time thinks that he looks at the nymph, a part of the outside world, and does not know that, in fact, he

³⁰ Cf. Kristeva (1987).

is looking at himself. There has been an identification of the subject with the object of love. So paradoxically, narcissistic inner life leads to a relationship with others, with the outside. The positive role of narcissism and empathic introspection is that it enlarges the inner life of man, as long as a subject is aware of his own narcissism. This means that a subject must be aware of self-love and of what is the object of his desire. Kristeva believes that inner life is threatened at the present time, but that it is an important source of self-awareness, thanks to which the subject can look at himself as in a mirror. The opening to the interior stimulates, dynamizes, sublimates and enables the creation of a conscious relationship with the external world. Introspection really opens up to 'the other' and to difference³¹. Experience and empathy, so important for romantic philosophers' cognition theory, are shaped therefore by narcissism. Kristeva writes:

Narcissus is not located in the objectal or sexual dimension. He does not love youths of either sex, he loves neither men nor women. He Loves, he loves Himself — active and passive, subject and object. The object of Narcissus is psychic space; it is representation itself, fantasy. But he does not know it, and he dies. If he knew it he would be an intellectual, a creator of speculative fiction, an artist, writer, psychologist, psychoanalyst (Kristeva 1987: 116).

What is very important is that Kristeva does not consider empathy as identification with the whole object as such, but with a chosen, unique part. She stresses the role of consciousness in this process. For Kristeva, the most crucial element is the awareness of the empathic object, and she shows what creative and great things Narcissus could do if he was aware of the true nature of the object of his love and empathy³². This statement seems to be fundamental when it comes to the restitution of *Einführung*. Awareness and choice are crucial in this theory, which is opposed to Brecht's allegations of empathy as unreflective and uncritical. Kristeva shows that empathy is conscious and involves the choice of its object. In this way, the subject is critical towards the world, does not yield to it thoughtlessly, but makes conscious and critical decisions while expanding his inner life.

The myth of Narcissus is also the founding story for the art history. Connected to the notion of *mimesis* it refers to the classical aim of art to reproduce Nature. Narcissus died because he fell in love with his own image, he failed to recognise it was not the real world. He was deluded by the beauty of the imitation of Nature. The use of empathy, in history or

³¹ Cf. Kitliński (2001: 76–78).

³² Cf. Kristeva (1987: 116).

in philosophy, should not be based on the immersion, projection or identification with the perceived object or object of research. Positive empathy deals with contrast and difference instead of imitation. This is a contrast between the real, lived through experience and imaginative representation of this experience. Lipps' projection and fusion with the other based on the imitation and mimicry is therefore rejected. *Mimesis* itself is integral with empathy and can be a positive notion. Imitation is at stake when we deal with understanding, we try to reconstruct or reproduce the feelings of others in order to grasp them. But this sort of repetition does not have to reproduce them entirely, *mimesis* should only be a trigger to explore these feelings thanks to the 'empathetic unsettlement', which restricts the certainty in the interpretation of the feelings of others. In this mimetic process, the interpreter does not want to depict *natura naturata*, but he wants to act like *natura naturans* — to change and actively reformulate what is before his eyes in order to understand better his own feelings about it. The empathy relativizes our feelings of certainty and transforms 'history as a reconstruction of the past' into 'history as a critical rewriting and understanding of the past'. There is no possibility of reproducing what happened, the only thing that one can do is to cautiously empathise and always remain in a state of unsettlement about the past, which contributes more to the real knowledge than a strict classification of facts. *Einfühlung* does not mean a passive immersion as Brecht would have seen it. In this context *mimesis* has a positive meaning not as an imitation but as an active reformulation of what is perceived or experienced. *Mimesis* is a process which opens up to the external world, which makes one interested and fascinated by it, the same as Narcissus was enchanted by the mirror image. But this enchantment does not have to lead to the submission to the outer world and passive reproduction of it but rather to the energetic rethinking and analysis. The imitation or *mimesis* mentioned by Vischer and Lipps and later criticised by Husserl, Scheler or Stein is in fact the very important factor that invalidates the objectifying distance and triggers the positive emotional involvement with the exterior world.

EINFÜHLUNG AND PHENOMENOLOGY

At the time of the critique of *Einfühlung* theory, this concept was reformulated in yet another way by phenomenology philosophers. For phenomenologists, it became clear that the classical theory of empathy should be replaced by a theory which recognized empathy as a special

kind of perception of psychical states manifested in bodily expression³³. Edmund Husserl criticized Lipps for considering imitation the basis for empathy. On the contrary, Husserl claimed that it is possible to understand expressions that we can not imitate. He also blamed Lipps for failing to distinguish between different forms of expression, between fear, exhaustion and other states³⁴. Husserl used the term *Einführung* for the first time in 1905, and then developed his ideas in *Ideen II* and *Cartesian Meditations* published in 1931. He explored it in more detail in a manuscript from 1934 published in 1973 in *Husserliana*. Empathy was for him "a form of participation in the being of another person, sharing in his spiritual life" (Węgrzecki 1992: 28). Among phenomenologists empathy was also analysed by Max Scheler. However, I would like to focus on Edith Stein's dissertation *Zur Problem der Einführung* (*On the Problem of Empathy*, 1916), because it is not possible here to stress the whole phenomenological interpretation of this concept. More on the problem of empathy in phenomenological thought was explained by Dermot Moran in the article *The Problem of Empathy: Lipps, Scheler, Husserl, Stein*³⁵.

In the forward to her study, Stein wrote:

The complete work, from which the following expositions are taken, began with a purely historical treatment of the problems emerging one by one in the literature on empathy before me: aesthetic empathy, empathy as the cognitive source of foreign (fremdes) experience, ethical empathy, etc. Though I found these problems mingled together, I separated them in my presentation. Moreover, the epistemological, purely descriptive, and genetic-psychological aspects of this identified problem were undistinguished from one another. This mingling showed me why no one has found a satisfactory solution so far (Stein 1989: 1).

Stein focused on the understanding of empathy as a knowledge of another human being. She did not refer to artistic forms, aesthetics or stage performances, but focused on man's ability to experience and feel, think and interact with other human beings. The term empathy served primarily to describe the experience of man, not of the object. And yet, her aim was similar to that of Weber and Gadamer when criticising Dilthey — to liberate the human sciences from the methodology of the natural sciences and psychologism. She saw the way to achieve this goal in phenomenological method and in empathy theory. This seems paradoxical, given that empathy was the cause of accusing Dilthey of psychologism!

³³ Cf. R. Ingarden quoted in: Zahavi (2006: 287).

³⁴ Cf. Zahavi (2006: 290).

³⁵ Cf. Moran (2004: 269–312).

In her doctoral thesis, Stein precisely presented the theory of Theodor Lipps, Max Scheler and Hugo Münsterberg, and then introduced her own interpretation. According to her, empathy requires direct contact, which is an encounter with another man. It does not concern the external perception of existence of the object of study, but a capturing of his psychical states. Man can experience directly only his own feelings: the experiences of others can affect us only indirectly³⁶. The subject in the act of empathy experiences the feelings of others, but in a different way than they do. So there is no mixing and immersion of the "I" and "You" in *Einfühlung*, it is not compassion or a feeling of unity, but rather one of otherness³⁷. In this way, Stein rejects the possibility of the unification of the subject and object of empathy and assigns high cognitive value to that process. Conscious distance makes the subject direct his empathy and have control over it, opening himself to what is different and external, as Kristeva described it later using the tradition of psychoanalysis. Empathy also involves a lot of respect towards others, as was later postulated by Lacapra: a tolerance to otherness without the projection of our feelings onto others, without stealing their voice and narrative. There is total acceptance of the difference in the object's feelings. Empathy is the way to understand another human being's spirit and mind, not only his feelings. In a confrontation with the other, and in respect for his experience, we can compare our lives and reflect on our morality and values. Empathy with another person helps us to know ourselves. Knowledge of another human being is therefore a way to self-reflection.

Stein (and also Husserl) postulated that we can understand also those expressions that we cannot reproduce and on this basis they criticised Lipps' theory. But it would be very superficial to think that Lipps really thought this to be the only way to the understanding. On the contrary, he just pointed out the importance of the human habit of comparing someone's experiences, characters and expressions to one's owns. But the very comparison, the very attempt to imitate, may fail and lead to the impression of the otherness which would be the positive impact of *mimesis* and empathy. The unfulfilled drive for imitation enables the cognition and perception of otherness which is the main focus of Stein's empathy theory and which is not in opposition to Lipps' comments on imitation provided projection and immersion are not involved. On the one hand, mimetic drive encourages one to become interested in the outer world (it is important to remind oneself here of Vischer's 'active mimeti-

³⁶ Cf. Stein (1989: 22–24).

³⁷ Cf. Stein (1989: 22–24).

sism' or 'active looking') and on the other hand, narcissistic mimetisism does not lead to projection but to the introspection and understanding of self. The empathy criticised for its imitative aspect makes of it positive use, reinforcing empathy's cognitive value. In this way two seemingly opposite attitudes, empathy and narcissism are reformulated and paradoxically reunited.

CONCLUSION

The complicated history of empathy shows how ambiguous this concept is. Despite the faults which were attributed to it, it can nonetheless be considered very important for the philosophy of the twentieth century. It has been shown here how it affected both the perception of visual forms, nature, art and also historical cognition, cognition in general and the understanding of another person. The contemporary interest in the role of the viewer and the reception of visual culture draws on the ideas of nineteenth century philosophers. The extraordinary achievement of empathy theory was in drawing attention to the other person, to the opportunity to learn the feelings of others. *Einführung* contributed to the development of ways of understanding the feelings and intentions of other people; it emphasised the specificity of particular cases, which should always be considered individually. The need for objectivity was also questioned. Empathy denies the possibility of a comprehensive and general description of feeling and perception, and rather stresses subjective, individual experience.

Also, although initially criticized, an introverted turn into the 'self' or a feeling projection proved to be useful as a way of self-knowledge, of self-reflection, which could only arise in the confrontation with the outside world. In this way, the urge to formulate our judgements in confrontation with other people's values lends empathy moral value. On the one hand, we define ourselves, on the other we open ourselves to others as subjects requiring attention and respect for their otherness. Finally, it is the critical value of empathy that has been highlighted, once the theory of the total immersion of the subject in the object had been rejected. Empathy became a conscious and critical choice of the objects with which one wants to empathize. One is not passive, does not yield to the outside world, but has a freedom of choice of what one wants to empathize with, and it is this which develops critical thinking.

However, you can see *Einführung* more dialectically, as a clash between two opposing forces: on the one hand, a human need for immer-

sion and oblivion and, on the other, a distrust of the object and the desire to study it critically. This would be the realization of Friedrich Vischer's vision of the world and culture as a place of conflicting forces: of the empathic and logical ones. As it turned out both these ways of 'being' are inherent to empathy and both are integral aspects of human existence. Empathy has shown how important emotions and the emotional perception of the world are and caused a shift away from a purely intellectual reflection on the relations of man with the outside world.

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