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## Relativity of Taste without Relativism. An Introduction to Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience

The author explores Ingarden's aesthetics taking as a leading thread his repeated attempts at a refutation of the common locus of relativity of taste. Ingarden's position is summarized in four theses: (1) values do exist as the proper correlates of aesthetic experience, (2) aesthetic values must be distinguished from artistic values, (3) artistic and aesthetic values are founded in other ontic strata, and finally (4) acts of valuation in aesthetic experience are presupposed by value judgements. In the light of the philosophical and phenomenological interpretation of the physical theory of relativity (special and general) by authors such as Weyl or Geiger, Ingarden's refutation of the relativity of taste appears as incomplete. The phenomenology of aesthetic experience formulated by Geiger and Husserl and their own refutations of relativism in general and aesthetic relativism in particular suggest a more fruitful approach, which is undermined by Ingarden: the transcendental phenomenology of intersubjective aesthetic experience.

**Key words:** Relativism, aesthetic experience, aesthetic values, intersubjectivity, Ingarden, Husserl, Weyl

In his book on *Symmetry*, the mathematician and philosopher Hermann Weyl provides us with a striking insight on the tasks falling upon a rigorous relativistic theory of art. What has been named traditionally "form" (*Form/Gestalt*), in works of arts and more generally in aesthetic experiences, can be mathematically described as a group structure, i.e. symmetries (vs symmetry breakings) in the mathematical sense of the term. As suggested by Weyl, Paul Andrew Ushenko has already developed such a theory of relativity (hence of invariance, in a mathematical sense) for the perception of the work of art. Following A. Speiser (*Musik und Mathematik*,

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1926), Weyl insists on the fruitfulness of this approach. But he admits that “certainly we have not already discovered the adequate mathematical tools” to describe it. But although they have historically contributed to plead for group theoretical considerations in art, I shall let aside the contributions of Andreas Speiser (1926; 1932) or Paul Andrew Ushenko.<sup>2</sup> The first proposes indeed a rigorous theory of the relativity of the work of art, but his analyses seem confined to a sub-sphere of aesthetic experience, that of perception of work of art as perception of form, and if we go as far as to give an explanation of the perceptual foundation of artistic value, the specific aesthetic experience (*Erlebnis*) (which belongs to the sphere of feelings and emotions) and its correlates, aesthetic values, are kept aside.

This is certainly not the only failing. Correctly understood, the philosophical understanding of the principle of relativity, mathematically mastered through complex continuous groups and tensor calculus, opens, as Weyl phrases it, to the mystery of intersubjectivity, and its correlates, the positing of an objective domain of phenomena, a nature *materialiter spectata*, understood following Kant’s statement, as a system of invariant laws. But contrary to Kant’s transcendental metaphysics, exposed in his *First Metaphysical Principles of the Science of Nature*, this nomological frame is established, in General Relativity, through a purely mathematical process: the introduction of the metrical ground form, which enables the formulation of “physical laws, so that they remain invariant for arbitrary transformations” (Weyl 1952: 226). No determined laws are *a priori* posited, but only the general relations of co-variances between the metrical field and a material factor, which is contingent and *a posteriori*.

The present hypothesis demands analogically invariant laws for the world as such and in its full extension, the lifeworld, as world of praxis and feelings, the world of culture in its more encompassing sense. In other words, this entails that the world as such, in its phenomenological constitution, is amenable to a formal and mathematical treatment: a *mundus formaliter spectatus*.<sup>3</sup> And as the aesthetic experience represents apparently the most variable domain of human experience, seemingly rebellious to any structural approach, it represents the touchstone for any true formalization in human sciences, any sound “structuralism”. “Intentionality” or the “correlational *a priori*”<sup>4</sup> provides us with the frame to thinking this possibility.

<sup>2</sup> Among Ushenko’s work one is noticeable: Ushenko 1941. The implementation of the principle of relativity to the sphere of aesthetic require to define precisely the kind of observables at stake as well as the type of coordinate system.

<sup>3</sup> This goes on a par with the promotion of a mathematical treatment of biology and more generally a “formal typic” (*sic*). See Hua 41: 286. Subsequently, references to *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff / Dordrecht: Springer, 1950–) volumes will be abbreviated followed by the volume and page numbers. The list of cited volumes is included into the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> This is still vindicated in 1935: “*Der erste Durchbruch dieses universalen Korrelationsapriori von Erfahrungsgegenstand und Gegebenheitsweisen* (während der Ausarbeitung meiner ‘Logischen

These structures, as experienced, are indeed *correlated* to dynamical processes from the part of the listener, reader and spectator. We are thus led to the following hypothesis: a scientific exploration of aesthetic experience *with its correlates* – artistic *and* aesthetical values – should be *relativistic* in the rigorous sense of the term, i.e. it presupposes *invariant laws of aesthetic pleasure*. Following this analogy, the observables and the reference frame are respectively what is called aesthetic values and aesthetic sensibility (or “taste”).

Thus understood the problem of aesthetic experience should justify a phenomenological approach, in its traditional sense. And yet, very few among the phenomenologists interested in aesthetical experience considered noteworthy the classical problem of “taste”, and the phenomenological eidetic description of the correlation of affective acts (correlation between modes of axiological positing and correlated values) as an adequate method for its solution. Even fewer saw in this problem a parallel, in the axiological sphere, of the problem of objectivity, in the field of natural sciences.

My hypothesis is that this parallel exist and that Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, precisely under the form of its method of parallelization of objectifying and non-objectifying (affective and practical) forms of intentionality, provides the adequate frame and method for a new setting and a solution of the so-called dialectic of taste exposed in Kant’s Third Critique. And by taking into account the *a priori* correlation, it provides an adequate philosophical interpretation and understanding of the problem of relativity of observation taken in its more rigorous sense, that of relativity theory, as well as an adequate interpretation of relativity of taste.

To our knowledge, among commentators, the French philosopher and mathematician Gilles Châtelet is one among the few who insisted, in recent times, on the fact that relativity theory and transcendental phenomenology followed a parallel path: same date of birth and development, and that, in a deeper sense, they were scientifically contemporary. According to Châtelet, “Husserl’s phenomenology, contemporary to relativity theory, poses a question which could be phrased thus: ‘Following which conditions is a world possible?’; generalizing thus Kant’s question. The triumph of relativity has rendered more promising the exploration of the ‘a priori’” (Châtelet 2010).<sup>5</sup> Although Einstein himself imbedded his theory in different philosophical interpretations such as positivism (through the influence of Mach), empirical realism (with Hume), and finally

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Untersuchungen’ ungefähr im Jahre 1898) erschütterte mich so tief, daß seitdem meine gesamte Lebensarbeit Von dieser Aufgabe einer systematischen Ausarbeitung dieses Korrelationsapriori beherrscht war” (*Krisis* § 48, especially note 1, p. 167 (Hua 6: 167), emphasis is mine).

<sup>5</sup> I have commented extensively this sentence, comparing it to Mannerism in painting in: Lobo 2017a.

a very blurred out Kantian *apriorism*, Relativity theory (special and general) did not only developed symmetrically, but also complementarily to transcendental phenomenology in its full extension, i.e. under the form of a transcendental monadology.

This view is confirmed and summed up by the leading figure of the so-called French epistemology, Gaston Bachelard who, in 1929, in *La valeur inductive de la relativité*, without quoting Husserl or even mentioning phenomenology, equates Einstein's Relativity with something which is central in transcendental phenomenology, since relativity consists, according to him, in taking *seriously appearances* and in considering exclusively the *conditions of possibility of objectivity*, i.e. of translatability and communicability of observables between possible observers. And his statement that the "Relativist does *not merely* establish the *a priori* possibility of an experience", entails that *at least* he does. But moreover, the Relativist physicists annexes a dimension of experience and knowledge of the phenomenon currently treated by transcendental philosophy, since "he studies this possibility by itself and for itself", by building up "a system of the possible", in a way which is neither metaphysical nor merely logical, but was traditionally devolved to transcendental philosophy. He even reaches the level of a renewed form of idealism, a blending of transcendentalism and Platonism, that one is tempted to identify to Husserl's phenomenology, and "one even gets the impression that the Relativist goes further and that, taken by a true Platonic realism of the possible, he is inclined to assign a form of substance to a rich and consistent organization of the possible" (Bachelard 2016: 122), that is, to consider as the ultimate physical reality the background of possibilities structured through the mathematical groups at the basis of tensor calculus. The last form of this organization of the possible culminates in a mathematical expression of the *a priori* and ideal intersubjective possibility of communication of physical observations.

In investigating the underpinnings of such a hypothesis, for reasons briefly alluded to above, my purpose is clearly *not* to bring water to the mill of common sense mistakes and confusions about relativity theory. It is neither to promote a naively objectivistic approach of aesthetics, be it grounded on so-called mathematical laws (we think here to the multifarious trends of Pythagoreanism or mathematism which persisted throughout the history of art and esthetical reflection: gold number, theory of proportions and their variants, old and new, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The literature on the subject is so vast, that it is almost derisory to try to indicate them. But it is worth mentioning the influential aesthetical conceptions of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (two will be centuries later, the place of birth of another great mathematician: George Boole), and as his follower, he exposes in his *De Luce* and *On Divine Names*, a mathematical conception of beauty, which consists in an identity of proportionalities (quoted by Edgard de Bruynes, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale*, 1948, 1998, Albin Michel, Paris, vol. 2, p. 124).

It is to explain why the attempts by some of Husserl's followers, such as Moritz Geiger and Roman Ingarden, although well informed of both (phenomenology and relativity theory), partially failed in their attempt to set up a *true relativistic phenomenological theory of aesthetic experience*, by stumbling on the main obstacle to the constitution of such a theory. This obstacle is the traditional *locus communis* of any aesthetic reflection, a *locus*, which constitutes, according to Kant, the only thinkable dialectic of a Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, that of the relativity of taste, taken in its ordinary and proverbial sense: *de gustibus non est disputandum*. This saying expresses precisely what must be called *common sense relativism*.

(I) As a cross-check, we shall study rather attentively Ingarden refutation of common sense relativism and show how he draws the main lines for a theory of general relativity of aesthetic and artistic experience, at its due level, which is as well the least explored, that of axiological experience.

(II) This refutation is itself hindered by the amphibological use of the words "subjectivity" and "objectivity". Although he tries to list exhaustively their diverse meanings, this refutation remains incomplete. This is clearly a consequence of his anti-idealism. Still, these analyses of some of Ingarden's arguments are nothing but rough indications for a more extensive work, which is still to be done, and would shed a new light on other aspects of Ingarden's thought and positions: on ontology and in controversial question about transcendental idealism.

(III) On the footsteps of Moritz Geiger and Hermann Weyl, we shall see that the refutation of epistemological relativism as well as axiological relativism forces us to adopt a deeper understanding of *intersubjective experience*, which brings to light the circularity of any realist foundation or justification of the positing of beings or values. I shall study later and elsewhere the rich proposals and renewed and stimulating approaches of Geiger on aesthetic, on *Einfühlung*, and intersubjectivity (Geiger 1910: 29–73; 1911a: 125–162; 1911b: 1–42). Yet it is worth mentioning his contribution to the philosophical interpretation of the principle of relativity.

(IV) We shall end and conclude by gathering some statements from Husserl's writings which represent one of the clearest setting of the problem of axiological relativism and its refutation: clear and critical elaboration of the fundamental insight at the ground of modern science and a modification of the transcendental frame adjusted to this new epistemological situation; sharp distinction of the parallel but different paths for a refutation of axiological and logical relativisms; and, accordingly, an adequate refutation of aesthetic axiological relativism.

## I. Ingarden's refutation of aesthetic relativism

Against objectivist and formal as well as against relativist and subjectivist approaches, Roman Ingarden aesthetics is installed from the start in the frame of the phenomenological description, but with some restrictions. Starting from the so-called "realist Husserl", Ingarden considers *aesthetic commonplace relativism* not only a *variant of psychologism*, but maybe its deepest and most resisting form.

His major contribution to the question is an eidetic-analytical description of aesthetic experience as *experience of a certain category of value* – namely aesthetic values.

For Ingarden, the sense and forms of "relativism" are numerous and equivocal. Some of them are partially acceptable. But the elucidation of aesthetic experience in its diversity and dynamic (which expresses itself in diverse and sometimes opposed value judgments) is given through three major following statements: 1) Aesthetic values are not reducible to pleasure, which is something psychological and represents, phenomenologically, in Husserlian terms, a "real" (*reell*) component of the lived experience (*Erlebnis*). 2) Aesthetic values are moments of a synthetic unity belonging in the aesthetic object and founded on the work of art, and even on an axiological founding level, that of artistic values. 3) Aesthetic values are given and experienced as such, *as* founded unities; that is to say that some dependence relation is clearly or confusedly aimed at in aesthetic experience, but this dependency does not entail that this value be something subjective (i.e. "relative" in the common relativistic sense). It will be useful to have an overview of those propositions.

Against one of the fundamental theses of common-place relativism, Ingarden not only shows that aesthetic experience is analysable, but he even distinguishes clearly between two *strata*, ordinarily involved in this experience, which cannot be clearly disclosed without phenomenological analysis. Last but not least, he tries to dominate the amphibology of the notions of "subjectivism" and "objectivism".

Let me recall those distinctions, at least those, which are necessary to understand Ingarden's particular stance against commonplace relativism. As we learned from his talk in Brussels (Ingarden 1947), those distinctions are just another way to pursue the fight against psychologism, started by Husserl in the *Logical Investigations*. Since relativism rests on confusions, the only way to defeat it is to exhibit clearly the different "objective" components of aesthetic experience, which are mixed up in the so-called "aesthetic pleasure". For the sake of clarity and concision, let us stick to the main arguments, insisting on their impact on aesthetic relativism.

Thesis 1. *Values do exist, in a non-naive sense, as the proper correlates of aesthetic experience.* Yet, this type of correlates presupposes the recognizance of

a non-objectifying (of affective and axiological)<sup>7</sup> intentionality and, methodologically speaking, the phenomenological method of investigation. This method is, as repeatedly said by Husserl, in this particular case, that of “parallelization” or “analogy”.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, this method receives some restrictions with Ingarden. It is taken in the frame of the so-called “realism” and aesthetic objectivism. Hence, against psychologically oriented aesthetics of music, Ingarden claims that musical work cannot be reduced to something psychological (*mental*), but as for any other ontic entity, one can consider it as mental *in another sense of the term*: “that is *relative to the experience of consciousness of ‘mental’ individuals*” (emphasis mine). Because he is aware of the ambiguity of such a statement, Ingarden explains that this comes from the equivocal and confused use of the concept of *dependence*, such as it is used by “psychologists theorists”. On the one hand, *dependent* means that the experience is “subjective”. On the other hand, “this ‘subjective’ objectivity is identified with everything that is an experience of consciousness”, “without *this shift being noticed*” [emphasis mine]. In order to avoid falling into a form of radical subjectivism, “it is assumed that at best only material things or processes (they often say ‘physical appearances’) are ‘independent’ of experiences of consciousness”.<sup>9</sup>

In order to overcome this ambiguity, we must refer back to the formal and object-like notion of dependency which was at the core of Husserl’s Third Logical Investigation, and led him explicitly to introduce of the formal and phenomenological concept of “*foundation*” (*Fundierung*). Through the distinction between *a priori* – “objective” and “ideal” – dependency, both concepts of *dependence* and *independence*, as well as those of *abstract* and *concrete*, were “freed from all relation to interpretative acts and to any phenomenological content that might be interpreted”, “no reference back to consciousness”, “no references to differences in the ‘modes of presentation’”. The shift here pinpointed by Ingarden belongs to the denounced and incorrect, “misguided confusions and the subjective slanting of expressions of purely objective, ideal states of affairs” (Husserl 2001: 20; Hua 19/1: 240).

In the case of aesthetic experience with works of arts, the ideal states of affairs are the aesthetic values founded on the artistic values. These axiological qualities or aesthetic values are the direct correlates and the constituents of any true work

<sup>7</sup> In the Fifth Logical investigation, the class of “objectifying acts” is isolated from that of “non-objectifying” (§ 41, Hua 19/1: 417) and developed, in the perspective of an investigation into the form and phenomenological foundations of their logical expression, in the Sixth Logical Investigation: *Logische Untersuchungen*, Chapter 9 and (Hua 19/2: 734–750). For this particular question, see Lobo 2006 and Lobo 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. especially the first section of the Lessons on Ethics and the Theory of value (Hua 28: 10, *passim*). This parallelism remains in the later period, including the *Krisis*. (Concerning the period of 1920, and Hua 37, see my paper at the conference of Gdańsk: Lobo 2016: 5–14).

<sup>9</sup> The Musical Works and mental experiences, in Ingarden 1989: 18.

of art, but they are themselves more or less composed on a purely axiological level. For the literary work of art, Ingarden isolates thus the *aesthetic components* (beauty as a category, beauty in many qualitative variations, qualities of positive aesthetic values, such as charm, daintiness, prettiness, depth, maturity, coherence, etc.), which represent “all different value qualities or perhaps also categories of values, which in the individual case occur *in concreto* in different *qualitative variations*”. Each sphere of values being threefold, the sphere of aesthetic values – although characterized by its neutrality if we compare it to other axiological spheres (like the practical one) – *contains positive, negative values* and axiological *indifferent* components. Thus, opposite aesthetic values “are also value qualities, but only of ‘negative’ values or ‘non-values’, that are to be distinguished from complete ‘lack of value’, that is, from complete value neutrality”<sup>10</sup>

At this axiological level, Ingarden introduces that which could be called the *depth dimension* or aesthetic experience itself and subsequently a sort of perspective within the purely aesthetic stratum of aesthetic experience – not to be confused with the value qualities just mentioned. Apparently, this axiological depth must be distinguished from the relation of foreground and background with which he describes the relation between artistic value and aesthetic value. No picture is deprived of “aesthetically valuable qualities”, or “*appropriate* value qualities”. But in order to become the object of an aesthetic experience these values must be combined in a certain way: “Only a special selection (combination) of aesthetically valuable qualities results in an assortment of aesthetic value qualities and constitutes a work of art of a definite kind or category, that is positive in value” (Ingarden 1986: 166).

Thesis 2. *Aesthetic values must be distinguished from artistic values.* All those components which entered the afore mentioned constitution must be distinguished from the *artistic components* strictly speaking, which divide in turn into axiological (positive or negative) and neutral. Both are relative in a very special

<sup>10</sup> *The Picture*, in Ingarden 1986: 165. Compare to Husserl’s presentation of the doctrine of adiaphoron in his *Lessons in Ethics and Theory of Value* (as Hua 28). This problem is rather entangled. It involves different dimensions and layers, which are intimately connected: that of the adiaphoron, that of neutralization of value (eventually under the form of skeptical neutralization) and that of the objectification of value. See respectively, on the distinction between what is value-less and neutral-value Hua 28: 84–89 which leads to the principle of the *quartum non datum*; analogically in an axiological sum, the adiaphoron plays the role of a *zero*, i.e. that of a neutral element (Hua 28: 93); and can be preferable to a negative value (Hua 28: 130). The axiological neutralization modifies any values, including positive and negative values. This modification cannot suspend contrary to the skeptical pretention absolutely every act, while the act of neutralizing implies a practical position taking from the part of the subject performing it, which contradicts the pretention of the skeptic itself contradictory to “an absolute *epoché*”, since it takes in absolute terms, something which has “simply” a methodological meaning (Hua 28: 238–239). The phenomenological and transcendental *epoché*, the pure *epoché*, is fully inscribed in the deep striving toward understanding which is not suspended by the implementation (Hua 28: 248–249).



sense. Relativity of “tastes” is thus partially and subtly elucidated, 1) by the composition of different sorts of aesthetical values and 2) by the *dependence* of some of the components *on* others (some of them are relative or relational). But in any case, claims Ingarden, there are necessarily absolute valuable qualities. Even though there are *relative values*, which consists solely in significance for something else, and indeed something else of a wholly determinate kind, there remain “aesthetically valuable qualities which are valuable in themselves”. The latter ones are “*not relative but absolutely valuable*”. There are relativized only secondarily, they “acquire *this relativity* to the viewer only *derivatively*”.

Ingarden concludes thus that aesthetic relativism “that denies the existence of objective values”, on the pretext that “value relativity of a certain kind has been discovered”, is not only superficial but “completely erroneous and at bottom attacks only the possibility of the relative values as such” (Ingarden 1986: 168–169).

Is aesthetic relativism defeated, with such arguments and distinctions? It is dubious and Ingarden does not seem to be convinced either. Other ambiguities are still at play on both sides which require further analysis. And indeed, in the same book, “The problem of relativity” of artistic and aesthetic values is once again confronted (Ingarden 1986: 231). Anew, Ingarden distinguishes different senses of *relative*, and, subsequently, different forms of relativism. 1) The first kind of relativism stems from the equivocal expression “mental”. The relativism proceeding from this confusion is just a variant of Psychologism, i.e. mere blindness to the phenomenological noetico-noematic correlation. 2) The second form is due to the lack of clarity of the concept of “*ontic dependence*”, usually and wrongly assimilated to a mere lack autonomy, autonomy being confused with objectivity. 3) From this dependence must be distinguished the axiological dependence, the dependence of the artistic values on the constituting axiological activity of the recipient. But, as for ontic dependence, axiological dependence, does not entail that artistic values would be part of the subject, consequently they are not subjective.

Thesis 3. *Artistic values as well as aesthetic values are founded in other ontic strata*, whose experience belong to a pre-aesthetic experience (i.e. to a kinesthetic and sensuous experience). This applies to musical works as well as works of art, and correlatively, to the consciousness of them, to their specific “perception”. As every value is relative, they are *relative* in the general sense of the term. Different legitimate meanings of relativity of aesthetical values are here at play. This installs a new complexity and new relativities. But after such a careful and cautious analysis of aesthetic experience and such refined distinctions of the different pertinent meanings of relativity, Ingarden stumbles once again against the stubborn denial from the part of the relativist and his *De gustibus non est disputandum*. In his most radical form, it appears as a mere denial: “there is no such thing as beauty”;

combined to a sentimentalist and even hedonist reduction: “Beauty consists only in pleasure”, presupposing a vague but stubborn naturalism: “Every object as such is axiologically neutral”. The only undisputable fact is that “it pleases us”, and this independently of the thing itself. To sum up, Ingarden argues: “This conception is tantamount to a complete denial of beauty and is completely skeptical regarding the cognitive accomplishment of pleasure”. This skeptical denial rests ultimately on the confusion between the *aesthetic object* as such and the *work of art on which it is founded*, and the whole axiological aesthetic unity, which is thus constituted (by the founding of aesthetic value on the artistic value) with the perceivable work of art reduced to a perceptive “aesthetic unity” – deprived of any axiological components or dimensions. The experience of the aesthetic value rests on two layered manifolds which gives way to the infinite variety of concretizations of the same “aesthetic value”. The fact that a same work of art can be aesthetically diversely experienced by different subjects, or differently experienced by the same subject at different times does not entail any denial of “the absoluteness of the aesthetic value in the sense just set forth”, since this variability can be easily explained by and founded on the diversity and richness of “aesthetically valuable qualities” themselves. These partial and diverse realizations of the composition of values at the core of a work of art are called “concretizations”. But whatever the variations motivated through “subjective conditions”, the work of art once produced is endowed with “a particular aesthetic value, completely independently of the relation of this object to the viewer” (Ingarden 1986: 232). Taken literally, this statement, as we shall see, is a remnant of naïve objectivism or absolutism.

Thesis 4. Moreover, this act of valuation in aesthetic experience is not and does not presuppose any value judgement, which is a predicative and theoretical act, in the larger sense of the term. On the contrary, aesthetic value judgments presuppose the “existence” of those values originally given in pre-judicative valuating acts, and to start with, in aesthetic emotion. Conversely, an aesthetic value judgment is right if it is fulfilled by and harmonizes with an authentic valuation. A valuation can be possibly empty or improperly fulfilled, wrong or illusory. The transference of the central relation of intention-fulfilment of intention to affective acts is fully legitimate. Thus, the variability of aesthetic judgements is not necessarily the expression of the variability of the aesthetic valuation itself. For the same reason, aesthetic judgments can evolve through time, and aesthetic experiences can deepened and modified (modalized). But these arguments are obviously insufficient to get rid of relativism. Aesthetic values are neither “created by the valuation of aesthetic object”, nor founded on the value judgement on the work of art, and even less on the “assessment” on its ontic constitution (Ingarden 1986: 232).

## II. Logical and phenomenological refutation of aesthetic relativism

A more systematic refutation of relativism is displayed throughout the late investigation on the knowledge of the literary work of art (Ingarden 1968; 1973). Common sense relativism is clearly identified with a form of axiological or ethical relativism. If a phenomenology of aesthetic experience has any sense and any chance of coming to light, it must, from the start, get rid from “the so-called subjectivity and relativity of aesthetic values”. It is motivated by the empirical and apparently plain fact of the variability of aesthetic experience from one subject to the other, and for the same subject: “we cannot realize two identical or similar aesthetic concretizations of the same work”. But as common as they are, the principles underpinning it have never been tested and amount to an *aposteriori* and *ad hoc* reconstruction of aesthetic experience rather than a straightaway description of it. On the contrary, the equation between variability and relativism will be immediately “given up as soon as we simply analyze the process of reading without prejudice and as soon as we ask ourselves how actually fare in our attempts to become acquainted with a particular work in a correct reading” (Ingarden 1973: 310).

This fictitious reconstruction of aesthetic experience is reinforced by the confusion between the variability of diverse concretizations of the same aesthetic value and the relativity of the *criteria* of the judgement on it; or in other terms, by the confusion between the original “valuation” (*Wertung*) or “evaluation” (*Bewertung*) of the work of art as the correlate of aesthetic experience strictly speaking and the “judgement of value” or “value judgment” (Ingarden 1973: 312), and the subsequent subordination of the former (valuation) to the latter (judgment). With the requirement of a criterion of value judgement comes into play a typical skeptical argument.<sup>11</sup> The fulfilment of an aesthetic experience is suspended to the successful application of such a criterion of judgement.<sup>12</sup> The judgment being in turn subordinated to the (inner) perception of a criteria in the object evaluated, we seem to move into a vicious circle, which is no other than that of “psychologism”. This virulent form of psychologism proceeds from a reduction of experience (*Erlebnis*) to its real content (to an ineffable mental act); an obsolete theory, according to Ingarden. Combined to the belief in the relativity

<sup>11</sup> As we learn from Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Skepticism* (Pyrrhoneion Hypothyposeon, Book II, c. 3–8) exposition of the criterion arguments.

<sup>12</sup> “The widespread opinion prevails that in order to make such an evaluation we must necessarily have so-called criteria for this evaluation, criteria which provide general principles of value (in a specific category of value) and which must be applied to the particular case in order to decide whether the conditions provided by the criterion are fulfilled in that special case” (Ingarden 1973: 312).

(i.e. extreme variability) of aesthetic “impressions” and values, it gives rise to the principle of aesthetic skepticism or relativism. Relativism of taste appears a peculiarly resisting form of “psychologist theory” and the root or first and ultimate lair of all forms of ethical skepticism.

Beyond subjective insufficiencies (or “inabilities”), two quasi-spontaneous conceptions, of diverse virulence, stand on the way as obstacles to an unprejudiced account of aesthetic experience. The first one is the psychologistic reduction of the meaning of a work to a mental experience, understood as a solipsistic and uncommunicable experience. This form of subjectivism, according to Ingarden, is less pregnant nowadays. The second misinterpretation, much more difficult to overcome, reduces aesthetic feelings to “aesthetic impressions” and considers all values, and in particular aesthetic values, as relative. The very possibility of a common or congruent experience of the “same” work of art is denied, and consequently each experience is performed in a fully solipsistic and inexpressible mode; “each is supposed to ‘see’ (perceive) the work of art in question in a completely different way and to obtain completely different and mutually incomparable aesthetic objects.” “From this arises the principle of *de gustibus non est disputandum* and also the assertion that we have no common language and are unable to come to any understanding” (Ingarden 1973: 321). For Ingarden, the first theory has been refuted long ago, but “the second, however, still awaits refutation and is regarded by many as indubitable”. Despite the absence of any “satisfactory proof”, this theory is largely shared among cultivated people. What is required for such a proof? Answer: something that is banned from the start, i.e. “a satisfactory theory of value” and “a sufficient clarification of the aesthetic experience and of the cognition of aesthetic objects?” (Ingarden 1973: 322).

These requirements apply to the refutation of the second theory as well. Ingarden comes then to a key argument which is the touchstone for relativism and his own anti-relativism. It is exposed under the form of rather logically convoluted argument, which won't be retaken later one. The problem is stated in the term of cognitive communication. The relativist *thesis* that the content of the cognition of aesthetic objects is uncommunicable if and only if it is “logically *proved that it is impossible* for two persons who have immediate aesthetic contact with the *same* objects constituted on the basis of this work of art and to cognize them in the *same aesthetically valuable qualitative harmonies*” (Ingarden 1973: 322, the emphasis is mine).

Let us sum up this strange argument: the only positive argument in favor of aesthetic relativism would be *to prove* the impossibility of *communicability* of the result of the experiences of any two subjects, proof which would require the “logical proof” of the impossibility for any two persons to be equally and affectively acquainted with the *same object*. But the requirement is at the same time a trap, and

reveals as double-edged. A trap: since the proof of an impossible agreement on the knowledge about aesthetic values presupposes that nonetheless both subjects are conscious of the same object, and the argument requires, consequently, that they agree on the fact that their axiological and affective disagreement or impossible agreement is founded on an epistemological agreement (“we don’t appreciate things in the same way, but we are talking about the same thing”). In other words: To be coherent relativism cannot be absolute. But not being absolute means that it presupposes some residuum or some ground of absoluteness or non-relativism. No wonder that Ingarden settles abruptly that “an indubitable proof of this is lacking” (Ingarden 1973: 322, the emphasis is mine). But the argument is also double-edged: because the trap itself slips from one level to the other, from the level of mutual agreement on the object, on the work of art and to that on the value (artistic and aesthetic) and that of the knowledge about it. Considered from a logical point of view, this amounts to require a logical proof of a radical idealistic subjectivism, which denies in fact the possibility of any objective knowledge of a real being, but still presupposes the validity of ideal of formal objectivities (such as proofs, inferences, propositions, etc.). From an epistemological point of view, Ingarden requirement presupposes that the constitution of an intersubjective agreement is founded on objective knowledge. As we see, intersubjectivity remains for Ingarden,<sup>13</sup> as in Kant’s transcendental philosophy, at each level or form of reality (that of the thing, that of the work of art and that of the value), a mere and derived *criterium* of objectivity, in no case, as in Husserl, the fundamental constitutive dimension of objectivity.

The question connected to this problem, that of “the universal validity of aesthetic evaluation”, is discussed on the following chapter, without receiving either any clear answer. No surprise, that the refutation of relativism should be attempted once again, later on (Ingarden 1973: 376). It is considered as ethically vital, since the saying: *De gustibus...*, “legitimizes a complete anarchy in both judgments of works of art and our contact with them.”

Ingarden tries to trace back the modern dominant forms of aesthetic relativism, to its origins. This form of subjectivism takes two different forms in our times: 1) Sensualistic colored axiological skepticism (neo-positivists of various provenance). 2) Historical relativism (derived, according to Ingarden, from Dilthey and Hegel). The sources of aesthetical relativism lie in the confusion between diverse dimensions of aesthetical experience: 1. between work of art and its various concretizations; 2. between artistic and aesthetic value and subsequently between aesthetic judgment and value judgment; 3. between the value itself and

<sup>13</sup> This is the case in *Das literarische Kunstwerk*, Chap. 14, and especially § 66 in Ingarden 1972. Despite the reference to the § 43 of the *Cartesian Meditations*, intersubjectivity remains a rather derivate problem, and not the fundamental constitutive stratum for, at least, any real objectivity.

the value judgment: “since they basically deny the existence of all values, especially aesthetic values, they try to reduce them to ‘value judgements’ (evaluations), which they make relative to psychology and sociology, or to philosophy of history”; between the value itself and the subjective mode of behavior toward values (*Stellungnahme*); and last, between those dimensions and the fact that the literary works of art are “schematic configurations” determining “sets of possible aesthetic concretizations”. Once these “confusions have been unmasked, and the appropriate distinction have been made” (Ingarden 1973: 377), “the basis for axiological skepticism has been destroyed”, claims Ingarden. “So long as this has not been done and the points of departure of the skeptical solution to the whole question have not been rectified, axiological skepticism and relativism with regard to aesthetic values is simply an easy way out, which serves to free its proponents from the trouble of a responsible investigation of the question” (Ingarden 1973: 377).

The touchstone for the “correctness or incorrectness of the common saying *De gustibus non est disputandum*” faces difficulties as long as those distinctions have not been done. In order to implement the criterion, it is necessary to distinguish between the judgment describing the aesthetic object, from the judgment stating that this object has, qualitatively, a certain value, and, last, from the value judgment on the aesthetic experience; and all those judgments from the original act of valuing. Even though, Ingarden still considers rather difficult the application of this criterion, as long as the two terms of the correlation have not been “investigated and explicated thoroughly enough”: the valuing act (feeling or emotion) and the value itself. But *prior* to this, the crucial question remains, that of the ontological status of values: Is there any sense in positing values and especially aesthetic values as existing beings?

Because he takes stance for a kind of axiological absolutism, or realism, Ingarden proceeds to an absolutizing of the correlation itself, at least of the “value” correlate. This is why he claims that, in order to answer this question, it is not enough to start from the “reaction to value”, since “this ideal correlation, which would have to be proved in detail, cannot [moreover] by itself protect us from axiological skepticism, especially in the sphere of aesthetic values” (Ingarden 1973: 381). But, observes Ingarden, the necessary correlation between value and value responses for *all* aesthetic experience has not been established. Since it seems possible that there can be aesthetic reactions without aesthetic values or vice versa, there is still a ground for relativism. Consequently, and against the optimistic and premature conclusion that the “basis for axiological skepticism has been destroyed” (Ingarden 1973: 377), we must admit that it is still alive.

Under such circumstances, the criterion of the logical proof of “the saying *De gustibus non est disputandum*” must itself be reshaped and rephrased, under the form of a mortal dilemma: (1) no value response can deviate from this ideal

correlation, in other words, no value response can be inadequate, or (2) value responses are always defective. The first option forbids any discussion of taste since the discussion presupposes that value responses *can be* “defective or inadequate”. The second, discussing of taste is senseless since “all value responses would be equally good or equally bad” (Ingarden 1973: 381).

Now if we examine both options, not only from a dialectical point of view, but phenomenologically, we see that the first requisite is not tenable. It presupposes indeed that the correlation between valuation and value, or value response and value, in aesthetic experience functions as a *norm*, and that deceptive aesthetic experiences (affective fallacies) must be interpreted as a lacking correlation. This presupposition is clearly contradictory with the very notion of correlation which can never be lacking, although it can be deceptive. The *pretention* to a value in an affective act (as an aesthetic pleasure) must not be confused with its fulfillment, nor with the ideal value to which the posited value refers. The fact that posited values (presumed as valid) can reveal afterwards as deceptive and illusory is itself an index of a new correlation, obtained through a modification of the former. The correlation of a deception is not an incomplete or a deceptive correlation. The second requisite is not logically sustainable, neither for the sceptic nor for the phenomenologist – for whom the phenomena is precisely the correlation, be it valid or not. For the former, no value response can be deceptive, since all are equally valid. Mimicking Protagoras’s assertion: is aesthetically valid, that which appears to be so to the individual to which it appears so, for the time and during the circumstances under which it appears to be so. This mimicking of phenomenism is the simulacrum of phenomenology.

Ingarden cannot escape the conclusion which seems to be a direct consequence of his axiological and ontological dogmatic “realism”, and the restrictions it imposes to his phenomenology. They emerge in the confession that the two terms of this correlation “have not yet been investigated and explicated thoroughly enough”; that we “do not know what aesthetic values even exist or which of them can appear in the concretization of literary works of art” (Ingarden 1973: 378). The tasks of the anti-relativistic axiology thus promoted are to “really looking at these values and explaining their qualitative determinations and discovering the sufficient foundations of their existence and their appearance” (Ingarden 1973: 405).

Such statements clearly do not belong in the frame of a transcendental phenomenology, which cannot investigate and describe this correlation in its essence unless those questions concerning *transcendent values*, i.e. absolute values have not been neatly and firmly bracketed. From a phenomenological point of view, the deceptive and the fulfilled aesthetic experiences are equally interesting, and the deceptive is even more important, since it provides a quasi-natural entry into

the abstractive analysis of the components (or modes) of axiological experience, precisely because the absolute denial of such a possibility from the part of the relativist offers the strongest support for the claim that this experience can never be invalidated, and the last ground for ethical skepticism.

### III. The last obstacle to the refutation of relativism: Axiological realism

These limits of Ingarden's phenomenology are consequences of the restrictions imposed by Ingarden to the full transcendental method. They represent a particular expression in his famous but ambiguous "realism". Why ambiguous? Because, his position cannot be assimilated to that of naturalistic realism, or to a form of empiricist realism, but rather to a "phenomenological realism", i.e. a very peculiar kind of (rigid) Platonism.<sup>14</sup> As "realists mathematicians", the axiological realists posit values as ontic rigid entities, independent of any constitution (cf., e.g., Ingarden 1973: 306–307). We could label Ingarden's realism, an axiological and aesthetic Platonism, which result of an embedding of phenomenological eidetic descriptions into a larger frame where diverse influences are melded to Husserl's central reference (for instance that of Bergson and Kant<sup>15</sup>), and we could discern other influences such as that of Hume combined, perhaps, to a Meinongian ontology.

Dziemidok claims rightly that: "For Ingarden the question of the objectivity or subjectivity of values is the most fundamental problem of axiology" (Dziemidok 1989: 75). Unfortunately, Ingarden's rejection of transcendental reduction or rather its subordination to the eidetic variation leads him to undermine some aspects of this experience, and expose his phenomenology to objections developed very clearly by Bohdan Dziemidok, in his article "Ingarden's theory of Values and the Evaluation of the Work of Art".

As a consequence of the rejection or limitation of transcendental reduction, what is at stake in this struggle against commonplace relativism is nothing less, as what we learned in opposite ways from Hume and Kant, than a defense of a united humanity or a generic human nature (Ingarden 1960; 1961). That exposes him to critics from the "right side" of the Academic world, among late contemporaries.<sup>16</sup> But also, to unexpected critics, *subjectivist absolutists* and *objectivist relativists*, coming from the left side: from an anarchical socialism which is relativistic, but

<sup>14</sup> For a presentation of what a non-rigid Platonism, or "modal Platonism" in Husserl means, I must refer here to my articles: Lobo 2017. And more specifically: Lobo 2011: 161–186.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Schutz 2013. For further on the integration of Bergson into Husserl's phenomenology, see Ingarden 1922: 284–461.

<sup>16</sup> Such as: Markiewicz 1976: 324, 326; Kuczyńska 1972: 41; Drobnickij 1972: 27, 29, 36; Hawthorn 1973: 146–148; Morawski 1974: 8, 41–49.



not subjectivist, and absolutists which are not objectivists, but radical subjectivists. Both groups of positions are, according to Ingarden, inconsistent positions, but *partially* acceptable, if we consider the equivalence between subjectivity and relativism, subjectivity and subjectivism.

The solution of the problem concerning the nature of values (*changeability – unchangeability, universality – particularity*) is largely determined by the approach taken in the controversy toward the *mode of existence of values. Aesthetic subjectivism naturally leads to relativism* (only the Epicurean Philodemus and E. Abramowski do not conform to this rule). However, the opposite does not hold true, *for one can be a relativist while simultaneously rejecting subjectivism (only extreme axiological relativism is usually combined with subjectivism)*. A similarly regular, though complex, relation obtains *between objectivism and aesthetic absolutism*. Absolutism is first of all close to objectivism, although one may encounter an *exceptional case of absolutist subjectivism* (E. Abramowski). Still, not every follower of aesthetic objectivism must also be an absolutist (e.g., the Soviet Aestheticians J. Boriew and L. Stolowicz). (Dziemidok 1989: 83)

This assimilation of *absolute and objective, subjective and relative* is closely linked to Ingarden realism, and is position against the idealist turn of Husserl. To my knowledge, one of the most harmful aspect of this rejection is that Ingarden misses the most efficient way to defeat relativism: transcendental intersubjectivity.

Ingarden's concern is precisely that, which has been pointed out by Kant and Hume in opposite ways: the existence of a standard of taste is the *criteria* of the possible unity of mankind, not only as rational being, but as sensible and natural being – through its acculturation (*Kultivierung*). In other words, aesthetic relativism and consequently artistic *relativism* are the major and the sole obstacles to the constitution of a scientific aesthetical theory, and subsequently of a rational axiology. This so much looked-for science, since the time of Plato's Hippias and Symposium, should not be alien to the general standard of any strong scientific theory: it must have, somehow, a *nomological* (lawful), and this nomological structure should be accountable under a mathematical form. Now despite its status of positive physical theory, this lawfulness is precisely at the core of relativity theory under the form of the physical and mathematical theory of invariants. On the other hand, we must at least ask if the setting of invariants in the realm of subjectivity does not represent precisely the aim of the method of eidetic variation within the frame and the field opened by transcendental reduction.

### 3.1. The fundamental insight of modern physics

In order to understand why, despite the many attempts to overcome it, especially following the work of some eminent followers of Husserl, such as Ingarden and

Geiger, this theory is still a *desideratum*, we must take into account a special form of obstacle: the resistance opposed – even fragmentarily – by common-place relativism. The relative failure of Geiger and Ingarden lies in an unquestioned presupposition, clearly pointed at by Weyl and by Husserl.

In the debates between *objectivism* and *subjectivism*, *absolutism* and *relativism* in aesthetic, and in ethics in general, as well as in epistemology, the hidden presupposition and mismatch consists in putting *objective on the side of the absolute*, and the *relative on the side of the subjective*. This common-sense assimilation, contradicted by the performances of science, has resisted throughout logical and reflective epistemological analyses. And yet, “one of the most fundamental insights of science”<sup>17</sup> (which was already at play with Galileo and Copernicus) phrases this way: the “immediate experience is *subjective and absolute*”, while the “objective world”, such as it is crystalized by the methods of natural sciences, “is of necessity *relative*”.

With these opposite pairs of concepts (*subjective-absolute* vs *objective-relative*), we have a guiding thread for the dissolution of most of the puzzles of modern philosophy. Those puzzles are aspects of that which Husserl calls the “fateful objectivism” of modernity. But at the same time, with Descartes we had an indication that subjectivity was not tantamount to relativity, and as Weyl rephrased the Cartesian discovery of the *cogito*: “Whoever desires the absolute must take the subjectivity and egocentricity into the bargain”. On the other hand, “whoever feels drawn toward the objective faces the problem of relativity” (Weyl 1949: 116). The vivid consciousness of this fundamental split, characteristic of modern philosophy in his idealist trends (from Descartes to Fichte) as well as in its empiricist tradition (especially with Hume), emerges within science under the form of a scientific theory, special and general relativity.

The modern idea of science appears historically split under the form of a Janus called Descartes and Galileo,<sup>18</sup> and the misinterpretation of the principle of

<sup>17</sup> This insight has been suggested by Born: “This thought is vividly and beautifully developed in the introduction of Born’s book on relativity theory, quoted earlier”. In his introduction, Born states: “Tout phénomène perçu directement conduit à une affirmation qui possède une certaine valeur absolue. Quand je vois une fleur rouge, quand j’éprouve du plaisir ou de la douleur, j’ai là des données dont il serait déraisonnable de douter. Elles ont une valeur indiscutable, mais pour moi seules elles sont absolues, mais subjective” (Born 1923: ix).

<sup>18</sup> Among many other passages: “Kein Wunder, daß wir schon bei Descartes die Idee einer Universalmathematik finden. Natürlich wirkte in dieser Hinsicht mit das Schwergewicht der sofort mit Galilei einsetzenden theoretischen und praktischen Erfolge. Demnach bekommt korrelativ Welt und Philosophie ein völlig neues Gesicht. Die Welt muß an sich eine rationale Welt sein, im neuen Sinne der Rationalität, welcher an der Mathematik bzw. der mathematisierten Natur abgenommen worden war, und dementsprechend muß die Philosophie, die universale Wissenschaft von der Welt, aufzubauen sein als einheitlich rationale Theorie *more geometrico*. Allerdings wenn, wie das – in der gegebenen historischen Situation – als selbstverständlich gilt, die naturwissenschaftlich rationale Natur eine an sich seiende Körperwelt ist, so mußte die Welt an-sich eine in einem früher

relativity admitted by both, paradoxically, gives way to a fatal dualism, splitting the correlation into a confused notion of subjectivity and a restricted notion of objectivity, and the world, into a lifeworld without clear ontological status and a nature restricted to its physicalist nucleus. This is the source of modern naturalism. Beyond all the subtle and kin distinctions proposed by Ingarden, something remains unquestioned in the refutation of aesthetic relativism: precisely this presupposition that *relativism means subjectivism*. As derivatives forms or corollaries of this presupposition, we should mention the assimilation of relativism to a kind of “perspectivism” (view point and limitation of perspective) to the classical frame of projective geometry.

### 3.2. Geiger’s clear understanding of Relativity theory

But despite the well-known controversy between Geiger and Husserl, on psychological and phenomenological method, and more especially on the possibility of implementing the descriptive method of static phenomenology to aesthetic leaved experiences, Geiger’s position is complex and would require a careful examination.

Geiger suggests some arguments for a refutation of aesthetic relativism, considered as the den of axiological and ethical relativism. This position could seem paradoxical, since his phenomenology of aesthetic experience focuses on pleasure and taste as the central phenomenon of aesthetic experience and seems to fall back into a kind of hedonism; moreover, he is rather skeptical regarding the possibility of a psychological direct observation of leaved experience in general, and aesthetic experience in particular.<sup>19</sup> As it is summed up by Husserl: “Geiger means that the analytical observation of emotional feelings is impossible, since, while “experienced” feelings cannot become object, be objectified”.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, this hedonism does not evolve into a relativistic and axiological skepticism. We find even some interesting and incentive suggestions in his work on “empathy” that could develop into a strong relativity theory of aesthetic pleasure. Most

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unbekannten Sinn eigentümlich *gespaltene Welt* sein, *gespalten in Natur* an-sich und in eine davon unterschiedene Seinsart: das psychisch Seiende” Hua 6: 62, the emphasis is mine.

<sup>19</sup> See Husserl’s discussion of Geiger’s objection presented for the first time in his *Dissertation*: Dissertation de 1904, *Bemerkungen zur Psychologie der Gefühlselemente und Gefühlsverbindungen*, 1904 (then in Geiger 1911a: 125–162) in *Ideas I*. This discussion is deepened in the manuscript (part of the Volume of the Husserliana on Gefühl in preparation). Text Nr. IV (§§ 1–3 = S. 78–101) Gefühlsbewusstsein – Bewusstsein von Gefühlen. Gefühl als Akt und als Zustand, § 1. Über die Beobachtung von Gefühlen. Lektüre von und Kommentar zu Moritz Geigers Abhandlung in der Lipps-Festschrift [from the manuscript A VI 8 I/60a “30”]. See my commentary in Lobo 2009: 121–126.

<sup>20</sup> “Geiger meint, die > *analysierende Beobachtung* von emotionalen Gefühlen <sei> unmöglich, weil Gefühle während des „Erlebens“ nicht zum Objekt gemacht, nicht vergegenständlicht werden können” (A VI 8 I/60a “30”).

interestingly, Geiger has developed a clear philosophical interpretation of relativity theory, understood as a theory of invariants.

Geiger is known as a member of the Munich school. His famous book has since then been repeatedly quoted as an important contribution, if not to phenomenology, at least to modern aesthetic theory. On the other side – and this is undermined or fully ignored – Geiger was well acquainted with Einstein's theory as well as modern mathematics. He did not only write a book on the axiomatic of Euclid's geometry inspired by Hilbert *Grundlagen der Geometrie*, he was recommended as a trained mathematician not only by Husserl,<sup>21</sup> but also by Weyl.<sup>22</sup> He also wrote a valuable book on the meaning and philosophical importance of relativity theory.<sup>23</sup> To go straight to the point, his essay on the interpretation of relativity demonstrates a clear understanding of Einstein's theory, avoiding absurd confusions with common place relativism in any domain, and distinguishing unessential philosophical interpretations from philosophical substantiations of the theory itself, mostly those through which Einstein himself went: a kind of phenomenist positivism, an empirical-realism and a Kantian Apriorism, with their correlative worldviews (*Weltanschauung*).

Relativity theory is not commonplace relativism. Against "obscurantists and retrogrades", i.e. against common sense relativism and so-called "philosophical world views" based on it, as well as tenants of classical physics ("absolutists") – Geiger insists on his true scientific meaning of relativity theory: a scientific theory positing objective laws of optical and gravitational phenomena. While obscurantists tend to assimilate it to mere relativism, Geiger argues that the implications of the theory of relativity are opposed to the "that ill-fated relativism, which pervades our world today in art and life, in morality and politics".<sup>24</sup> And contrary to retrogrades who take

<sup>21</sup> Although Husserl declares to Ingarden that "Schon Geiger ist nur Phänom<enologie>", he praises him above Pfänder. Husserl 1994, Bd. I: 215. And in 1930, to Gurwitsch about Geiger's book on Hilbert: "Ich finde sie in der ersten Durchsicht wirklich förderlich, da die rein math<ematische> Untersuchung Prof. Geigers nun einen ontol <ogischen>, also erst eigentlich philosophischen Sinn erhält." (Husserl 1994, Bd. II: 102).

<sup>22</sup> In Weyl 1949: 29, Weyl recommends the reading of Geiger's, *Systematische Axiomatik der euklidischen Geometrie*, (Geiger 1924), on the side of Hilbert, Gonseth and Pasch.

<sup>23</sup> See Husserl's Letter to Natorp, on this particular book by Geiger: "Ich bin besonders von seiner letzten Arbeit, die mir bei oberflächlicherem Betracht nicht sogleich einging, doch nach ihrem genaueren Studium stark beeindruckt. Es störte mich anfangs, daß grade in dieser ins Tiefe gehenden Arbeit der Charakter der Phänomenologie in den Hintergrund zu treten schien. Bei nochmaliger Prüfung finde ich aber, daß von einer Abbiegung (zur Metaphysik) doch nicht die Rede sein kann, jedenfalls aber eine starke systematische Kraft (obwohl anderer Art und Methode als in Hartmann) zutage tritt. Ich bin in diesem Urteil wohl nicht befangen dadurch, daß er von seiner Seite in sehr tief einschneidenden Fragen auf dasselbe hinauskommt, was ich von meiner Seite gefunden zu haben meine" (Husserl 1994, Bd. V: 145).

<sup>24</sup> "For these reasons, we need to defend, scientifically, the theory of relativity, against obscurantists and retrogrades. *The so-called philosophical explanations, which, for general philosophical*

a stance in defense of an absolutist understanding of scientific laws and objectivity, Geiger insists on the philosophical import of Relativity theory, after three Centuries of naïve objectivism, here comes a scientific theory which, under the form of a mathematical theory of invariants, gives an exact account of the conditions of possibility of physical phenomena and experience involving light and gravitational forces.

A first task of a philosophical interpretation of Relativity theory is thus to purge this physical theory of all philosophical inadequate interpretations in which is usually wrapped, including to a certain extent Einstein's own popular presentations and self-understanding – except the final one (Geiger 1921: 6). After a clear and accessible presentation of the main lines of Special and General relativity (Geiger 1921: 6–15), Geiger starts with a critical examination of the three major philosophical interpretations quoted above, before concluding (Geiger 1921: 31–46). He distinguishes: three senses or modes of “relativization” (*Relativierung*) and “absolutization” (*Absolutierung*) (Geiger 1921: 21). But still, Geiger falls into an opposite excess, when assimilating absolute and objective. I shall skip the critical examination and sketch the main lines of Geiger interpretation.

But I must insist first on his “philosophically neutral” presentation of Special and General Relativity: “the so-called Relativity theory is as much absolutist as any other physical theory. It searches to free the natural laws of movement of any relativity, and to formulate them in such a way that they have the same validity for the observer *whatever* its movement” (Geiger 1921: 12). The search for *objectivity* i.e. for invariants, for laws is thus tantamount to the searching of the *absolute*, according to Geiger. That means *independent* of the subject, i.e. of the observer. In this context, the progress of the “relativization” in physics means on the contrary that what was considered up to then as objective (i.e. absolute) is now demonstrated as relative, *dependent* of the position of the observer (time, space, and finally mass) and thus *subjective*.

This is confirmed by the interpretation given in the last part of the article, which is akin to that of Weyl. By deepening the conditions of experience, physics confirms in its main lines the philosophical statement of transcendental philosophy: space and time are “rejected in the subjectivity, as well as colors”,<sup>25</sup> and “become in fact pure subjective forms of intuition” – and there is no sense in determining qualitatively a physical reality lying beyond “the mathematical determinations” of the four dimensional world – at least a world reduced to the physical world.

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*reasons, take a positive or negative stance towards a scientific theory, must remain far from us. We will have to go the opposite way. For us, the theory of relativity is initially a physical theory. The decision about its correctness or incorrectness as a physical theory, falls upon the physicist – and not the philosopher – not to talk about the journalists” (Geiger 1921: 5–6).*

<sup>25</sup> At this stage, one must recall that colors along with tastes are an essential part of commonplace relativism.

### 3.3. Philosophical meaning and import of Relativity theory

Now what is Geiger's philosophical interpretation of Relativity theory? It consists in the combination of two spiritual roots: a cultural root, relativism properly speaking, and another which is metaphysical which stems from 19<sup>th</sup>-century metaphysics: the nomological form of physics and nature. Contrary to a dominant historical view which interprets the starting point of modern physics (the Copernic revolution) as "relativization of man and the earth, because it unties the whole world from its dependence from man", Geiger claims that relativity theory shows that physics is rather the exploration of always deeper dependences of phenomena to the "subject"; "because it *relativizes* and *subjectivizes* space and time", Relativity theory "transforms them into the state of movement of the observer", it "insists even stronger on the man, the observer, the spectator, it considers man not so much as a component of the world than the world as given to a man, as apprehended from a point of view" (Geiger 1921). But this does not convert physical reality into naught. "On the contrary", the aims of Relativity theory "is to replace all that is relative, subjective and qualitative by the unique and stable and always clearer thing which forms the reason of all scientific research: *the law*". What is constantly postulated by empirical sciences behind all the details of their theories, the "guiding thread of the physicist to the most invisible researches of his laboratory", which define the fundamental tendency of his theoretical activity, can be expressed by the "*unwritten maxim*", "*In the beginning was the law*" (Geiger 1921: 46). The transcendental determination of objectivity, exposed under the title of analogies of experience by Kant, is recast into its due frame, that of a mathematical theory of invariance. Relativity theory strives toward a systematic overcoming of any subjectivism, by establishing the formal conditions of objectivity, i.e. of a nomological theory of physical phenomena (optical and gravitational, to start with).

Now, are there invariants in Geiger's researches on aesthetic? Only a close examination of his writing on the essence of empathy and on empathy in aesthetic and artistic experience would answer this question. A Relativity theory of aesthetic experience would amount to the positing of invariant laws stemming from whatever the affective and cognitive positions of the singular subject experiencing that which appears to phenomenological reflection as a peculiar kind of object (aesthetic values), but is primarily constituted in an emotional and affective activity. This is precisely against such a reflection, that Geiger expresses strong doubts.<sup>26</sup>

Following his strong commitments with physics and mathematics recent achievements, Geiger approaches the issue of aesthetic experience from the point of view of *observation*, and the concrete conditions of *self-observation*. But the

<sup>26</sup> Among others, in his dissertation published as the *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genußes*, in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* (Geiger 1913).

situation described is that of a sort of distortion, which has much more to do with the formalization of experimental situation at stake in quantum mechanics, than that of Relativity theory, which deals with the convertibility (transformations) of different types of coordinate systems, with more or less rigid or relaxed constraints (coefficients).

Geiger rises thus the famous objection of the *inevitable modification of actual experience induced on the experiencing subject by self-observation*. Quantum Mechanics brought to the fore another understanding of relation between object and subject: "Observation is impossible without an encroachment the effect of which can be predicted only in a statistical sense. Thus, a new light is thrown on the relationship of subject and object; they are tied together more closely than classical physics had realized. (...) There are obvious analogies to this situation in the domain of psychic self-observation" (Weyl 1949: 263). This old analogy which was proposed from the beginning have been renewed in recent years.

#### IV. For a refutation of aesthetical skepticism on the footsteps of Husserl

Does Husserl's phenomenology of aesthetic experience represent a rigorous form of relativity theory we are looking for? And does he escape the usual misunderstandings related to subjectivism and relativism? This seems at least plausible, without any metaphysical dogmatic options, if we try developing the analysis in the frame of the correlational *a priori*, namely under neutralization of the natural-thesis and of any subsequent position of "transcendences".

What is disclosed in this frame is precisely the correlation between aesthetical experience and its aesthetic correlates (i.e. values), in their manifold and multifarious modes and components, and especially according to the dynamic relations between intention and fulfilment. Ingarden refusal to satisfy this methodological requirement led to phenomenological inconsistencies such as that of proposing, on the footsteps of Husserl, a refined and abstract analysis of the moments of such an experience (the constituents or more precisely the modifications occurring in the sphere of positing, such as those of the modes of belief (Ingarden 1973: 214–215) or, respectively, of valuing) and asking for a proof of the existence of ideal (absolute) aesthetical values. It is not only "ideally" that this correlation exists, but rather it develops under various forms, susceptible of various modifications such as modifications of the axiological-thesis (of value positing), of fulfilment, of determination, etc.

#### 4.1. The roots of ethical and axiological skepticism

By looking back to Husserl's "early" investigations in ethics from 1902 onward, and his first attempts of refutation of ethical and axiological skepticism, it appears that aesthetic relativism is obviously nothing but the most radical form and, maybe, the root of all axiological skepticism – according to Socrates the root of all evil ("the greatest and worst of all evils") lies in the conception of degrees of good confused with supposed intensities of pleasure. This is the presupposition and the ultimate argument of relativism. Relativists and ethical skeptics rely on the natural belief that, whenever "the feeling of pleasure or pain in the soul is most intense", we must take it as a sure and univocal indication "that the object of this intense feeling is the plainest and truest", for the one who feels in such a way. The fundamental task and responsibility of philosophy according to Socrates (and Plato), as for Husserl and beyond, is to prove that "this is not the case" (*Phaedo*, 83c).

For fear of falling into such an ethical skepticism, some philosophers have promoted reason as the real foundation of ethics. Because its theoretical goals are to set up a phenomenology of *axiological reason* (aesthetical and practical reason), subsequently Husserl criticizes, in his lessons on ethics, the strange to-ing and fro-ing between so-called empiricists and rationalists, between partisans of foundation of morals on feelings and partisans of a foundation in understanding or reason.

Fearing that "sensibility" and "feeling" would necessarily lead to skepticism in ethics, rationalists such as Kant have conceded too much, and admitted that the sphere of feelings (to the exception of respect) is fully empirical and irrational, not only in the practical sense, but also theoretically: since no "geometrizing" of the phenomena of the "inner sense" seems possible, no psychology and no scientific anthropology can be constituted (Kant 2004: 7). By the same token, this kind of rationalists presupposed that the sphere of taste was irreducibly affected by relativity: "In matter of feelings and taste, there is no arguing about feeling and taste", even though there is room for a talking about them. According to those thinkers, feeling is inevitably the source of an irreducible and moving relativity (Hua 28: 384–385).

Conversely, some partisans of a foundation of morals in feelings, developed an objective approach under "empirical clothing" (Hua 37: 58). Authors such as Hume, which are reputed sceptics, showed that, by taking feelings and sensation as source and fundament of all moral judgements, it was possible to promote an empirical science of morals, and even grounding empirically an objective standard of taste, as one of the most spectacular achievement of a general anthropology. Against relativism, Hume argued in his *Treatise*: "the dispute about ethical issues is quite easily understandable". As in other empirical natural sciences,



there is no point in starting from individual differences in the modes of feelings (*Gefühlswesen*), but “one must take, as a basis, general modes of feelings, more precisely modes of feeling, desiring and willing”.<sup>27</sup> Those general modes would be grounded, according to Hume, in the constitution of human being, in “human nature”. Those feelings are so natural that: “there never was any nation of the world, nor any single person in any nation, who was utterly deprived of them, and who, in any instance, never shewed the least approbation or dislike of manners. These sentiments are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, ‘tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them”.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, the relativist will not dismiss and will object: that such an empirical necessity is limited to human nature, and that such a conviction should be grounded on an empirical enquiry into every possible kinds of nation and culture. This in turn is submitted to the fate of any empirical science; and, if this knowledge was to remain valid, it would be of no use in practical instances, since this would amount to ground our practical moral beliefs in the knowledge of their universality and the rational conviction of their intrinsic validity – against Hume’s general claim. Even though we would admit that “certain modes of feeling and approving are universally spread in humanity”, the relativist would ask: “why should these general modes of feeling really have any advantage over the particular, the individuals and groups of individuals. Why should one admit relativism of the species of intelligent beings and reject individual relativism? Why deny it to the individual, when he is self-centered and says: I feel that way, you feel different, I have that taste, you have another?” And he would argue that there would be no reason to prefer one trend rather than the other. Individuals, groups, societies, nations, “differ in their sensuous taste”, and this affects all moral qualifications, it seems that we have no other ground to distinguish between good and bad taste, as virtue or vice. “A special kind of disgust is defined as vice, that’s all; a special kind of amenity as a virtue” (Hua 28: 389).

## 4.2. Refutation of aesthetic skepticism

The only escape from such skeptical doubts is to look for ideal foundations and agree with the idealist claim that the true correlate of a feeling should be an *ideal value*. Feeling and not judgments, because the objectivity of judgements on value presupposes ‘values and especially moral values’, independent of any contingent variation, “values *per se*”. Consequently, concludes Husserl, there is a “sky-high

<sup>27</sup> *Treatise of Human Nature* quoted in Hua 28: 388.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

distance between sensual and moral values”, and “between the taste of the common and the taste of the nobility”.<sup>29</sup>

The refutation of relativism clears thus the way to the constitution of a formal axiology. Kant’s psychologist conception of the sphere of values, feelings and emotions represents a relativistic residue which hinders a rigorous phenomenology of aesthetic experience. Although rationalist in his theory of praxis, Kant did not eradicate relativism from the sphere of feeling (agreement) and even from the sphere of aesthetic experience, but just preserved a sphere of a possible, but limited form of “intersubjectivity”. Hume’s ground for his objectivist approach to taste and the positing of a norm of taste – i.e. a human nature – constitutes only an ideal of sensibility, an ideal support of a *sensus communis*. Kant “does not therefore see, that the fact of the dispute in both domains says equally little”, and at least nothing against the possibility of an ideal, providing the norm or the standard for rightness of judgment, will or feeling: “each time there is, *de facto*, a judgement, a feeling, there is always in every case a right judgement and a right feeling, even though nobody accomplishes it actually.”

If, in the domain of valuation, we hear often the sentence *de gustibus “non est disputandum”*, we also hear the parallel sentence in the sphere of knowledge: *Everything is a matter of standpoint*. Both prove nothing. Men show in their cognitive behavior, and already in their perception, their memory and again in their logical judgments, very different position taking. There is conflict everywhere. And yet there is undoubtedly genuine validity here, the possibility of a truly correct opinion, of a correct perception, of a correct memory, a correct theoretical judgment, and so on. And everything conflicting with it is just a fact, it is precisely false. And this correctness, correlatively the cognitive truth, is bounded by *a priori* laws, to which all laws of logic belong. *The same holds true for the emotional sphere*, which is not so thoroughly explored, and *whose logic of feeling as analogous to the logic of judgment* or, in our language, whose formal axiology is not yet well founded, or is at least only now emerging in the context of phenomenology. (Hua 37: 226)

We have here a typical example of Husserl’s method of parallelization, and as we can easily notice, this parallel has developed historically. The “logic of feeling”, which includes a “logic of aesthetic pleasure”, should become possible in the frame of phenomenology, on condition that phenomenology, through the thorough critic of naturalism and objectivism, succeeds in disentangling the modern dualism. Against the fatal self-misinterpretation of modern rationality, we must acknowledge that what is objective is necessarily relative (for all appearances are ruled) and that which is subjective and spiritual is absolute.

<sup>29</sup> “The dignity of the ethical lies in its ideal and absolutely irretrievable validity and in the sublimity of its absolute values over all low and all apparent values, a sublimity which itself can be grasped as value distance and belongs to the sphere of objective validity” (Hua 28: 389–390).

### 4.3. The fundamental insight of modern science critically exposed

*That which is objective is relative.* This is particularly clear from the famous refutation of the hypothesis of an *intuitus originarius*, in *Ideas II* (Hua 4).<sup>30</sup> Roughly speaking, such an originary intuition is not only intellectual in the Greek sense of the term, but extends throughout the whole reality and all individual existences taken in their full inner constitution and complete history. This infinite intuition perceives and for-sees everything, the general course of the world. Leibniz's Good, Newton's *sensorium dei* or Laplace's demon are instantiations of such this theoretical intuitive power. Any positing of an objective or absolute entity which would not be *ideally* intersubjectively accessible and would escape the absolute legality of an intersubjective constitution is just as mythical as the complementary fiction of a fully inner and proper experience of evidence (*Evidenz*), that would escape the requirement of intersubjective testability ("transcendental Psychologism"). The distinction between primary quality and secondary qualities is thus only a distinction of two levels or two stages of intersubjective constitution of objectivity. Even an infinite mind, *as far as we can conceive it*, is bounded by the requisite of a mutual understanding with an indefinite number of finite minds.<sup>31</sup> Correctly understood: "*the distinction between secondary and primary qualities*" does not allow to understand the former as purely subjective: their "non-Objectivity" means nothing else than: "in no way do they escape the *relativity of appearances*, not even in the way we easily overlook insofar as we spontaneously think of ourselves as normally sensing in a world of beings of normal sensibility". The "*main feature of the relativity consists in the dependence upon the subject*". And yet as we saw, such a dependence is precisely a necessary condition for the constitution of

<sup>30</sup> English translation as Husserl 1989. Since the pages from the German edition are given in the English translation, page number refer to the German edition.

<sup>31</sup> The passage, we are here alluding to, starts: "Shall we say that God sees the things as they are in themselves while we see them through our sense organs, which are a kind of distorting eyeglasses? That things are filled space with absolute quality and it is only that we know nothing of it? But should the things which appear to us as they appear to us be the same as the things which appear to God as they appear to God, then a unity of mutual understanding would have to be possible between God and us, just as, between different men, only through mutual understanding is there the possibility of *knowing* that the things seen by the one are *the same* as those seen by the other. But how would the identification be thinkable if not in the sense that the supposed absolute spirit sees the things precisely also through sensuous appearances, which, likewise, have to be exchangeable in an understanding that is reciprocal – or, at least, unilateral – as is the case with the appearances we share among us men? And if not in that case, then God would be blind to colors, etc., and men blind to his qualities. Is there any sense, however, to arguing about which are the true qualities? The new qualities would again be secondary and would be eliminated once more by physics, which has to be the same for all, if the things are the same. Obviously, the absolute spirit would also have to have a Body for there to be mutual understanding, and thus the dependency on sense organs would have to be there as well" – Hua 4: 85.

an objective world. First, under the form of a common world of things “shared by subjects”, actual or potential subjects, “to which they actually relate, hence to which they *can relate* through appearances, as is required by thingly being” (Hua 4: 86). The variability, due to the diversity of their sensory constitution and even of some deficiency, does not imply that the “true reality” should stand *beyond* any possible observation. Of course, constitution of experience and of nature does not mean creation. Yet, a physical theory pretending to give an account of physical phenomena which would not presuppose the possibility of directly or indirectly experiencing them is just absurd as that of a phenomenology which would not explain *how* such a physical theory is subjectively constituted. Those are the two sides of a same absurdity. There can be contingent differences of sensuous activity, and we can even imagine subjects differently embodied with completely different sensorial systems, “provided that they make possible a common understanding and constitute a common nature as an appearing one”. The subjects ideally presupposed by science “cannot be blind as regards *all* the senses and consequently at *once blind to space, to motion, to energy*”. “Otherwise there would be no world of things there for them”, and “in any case it would not be the *same* as ours, precisely *the spatial world, the world of nature*” (Hua 4: 86). The objective nature as the realm of so-called *independent* realities is just another layer and a correlate of an idealized form of intersubjective constitution. From a transcendental point of view, “nature is an intersubjective reality”. The subjects are ideal and even virtual, but they must be posited in such a way that they may have some sort of (direct or indirect) communication with us, and more generally with factually and contingently embodied subjects. This represent what could be named the Cartesian way to a transcendental monadology.<sup>32</sup> Any position or presupposition of reality implies that it holds, “not just for me and my companions of the moment, but for us and for everyone *who can have dealings with us and can come to a mutual understanding with us about things and about other people*”. *Communicability* is not just a mere criterion of objectivity, but a phenomenological index of an intersubjective constitution, an index of constitutive possibilities. As such, these background of possibilities without being fully undetermined is intrinsically open: “There is always the *possibility that new spirits enter into this nexus*”. But the subjects must be bodies (“which are represented through possible appearances in our consciousness and through corresponding ones in theirs”), and capable of experiencing the same phenomena under analogous ways as mine.

Each singular thing is just an ideal rule (“*a rule of possible appearances*”), and an index of an intersubjective agreement of a manifold of mono-subjective experiences, each one raising its pretention to validity. Space itself becomes objective,

<sup>32</sup> This justifies the qualification of “Cartesian monadology” (see Lobo 2014, “Self-variation and self-modification”).

as “an intersubjective unity only as related to a totality of normal ‘like-sensing’ subjects”. This dynamical process at work in the lower level of objectifying experience is continued at a higher level, through diverse mediations (symbolical, technical). These mediations support the work of the free imagination of possible subjects, “endowed with different sense faculties” and opens the horizon of a fully different and purely ideal intersubjectivity. By contrast, the real and factual intersubjectivity of humans and animals are revealed “as a new dimension of relativities”. This leads, correlatively, to the “thought of a purely physicalist thing” (Hua 4: 86–87, the emphasis is mine).

Conversely, *that which is spiritual is absolute*, irrelative, even though it is also, in a different sense, derivatively relativized. “Nature is a field of relativities throughout”, but “it can be so because these are always in fact relative to an absolute, the spirit, which consequently is what sustains all the relativities”. As we learn (from the paragraph 64 of *Ideas II, Relativity of nature, absoluteness of spirit*), this represents the unsurpassable limit of any naturalization, and any objectivism.

Of course, as we just saw, subjectivity is also the index of spheres of relativities, in as much as it “manifests dependencies of various kinds once it is placed in relation to the nature constituted with reference to the personal world”. But at the risk of falling into some form of absolute relativism, and breaking the correlational *a priori* (intentionality), here again the possibility of seizing subjectivity as something independent is always presupposed: “the spirit can be grasped as dependent on nature”, but this necessary naturalization hits a limit. The physicalist reduction at defining spirit by mere “natural dependencies is unthinkable”: “Subjects cannot be dissolved into nature, *for in that case what gives nature its sense would be missing*”. Indeed, the meaning of natural phenomena and that of their objective positivity would be dissolved by the same token. As Husserl argues, against naïve forms of realisms, and in full agreement with the philosophical meaning of relativity theory, the elimination of all spirits from the world would put an end to *nature*, as it is posited by physics, since, “as true, objective-intersubjective existence”, nature is the correlate of an intersubjective constituting activity, an intersubjectivity which is a complex combination of facticity and ideality, human and non-human, rational and irrational, actual and potential monades. Or, as Weyl formulates it, the elimination of the subjectivity from physical sciences leaves paradoxically as residuum and symbol of subjectivity the coordinate system. Conversely, the elimination of nature does not suppress all that is spiritual and subjective, but only what is required for its embodied intersubjective and social constitution, what is lost is “the possibility of sociality, the possibility of comprehension, for that presupposes a certain Bodily intersubjectivity” (Hua 4: 86–87). But the absoluteness of subjectivity as individual spirit would remain.

The “result of the phenomenological sense-clarification of the mode of being of the real world, and of any conceivable real world at all, is that only the being of transcendental subjectivity has the sense of absolute being, that only it is ‘irrelative’ (i.e. relative only to itself), whereas the real world indeed is but as an essential relativity to transcendental subjectivity, due, namely, to the fact that it can have its sense as being only as an intentional sense-formation of transcendental subjectivity”, a phenomenology of aesthetic experience is precisely the investigation of the “essential relativity” of aesthetic values to “transcendental subjectivity”. This is a typical example of relativization of transcendental subjectivity and a clear expression, as well, of the requirement of an effective communication, of an effective intersubjective community of real and contingent subjects, within the solipsistic subject, in that of feelings, apparently the most intimate experience: that of pleasure to appearances from an individualized standpoint).

#### 4.4. Husserl’s phenomenology of aesthetic experience and its variability

Moving to the phenomenology of aesthetic experience, we can state that values, artistic and aesthetic values, “are not simply objectivities founded in general and in this sense objectivities of a higher level”, but “objectivities originally constituted as spontaneous products and which, only as such, come to possible originary givenness” (Hua 4: 8). Whatever the correlate, every posited entity “depends” on a correlative act, and loses its meaning as soon as it is severed from this correlation.

Following Husserl’s constant method, let us exemplify this. The example of a radiant blue sky. The seeing can be performed in a pure theoretical way, in a cognitive attitude, or in an affective one. Both can coexist, but according to the fundamental attitude the one or the other is repressed on the background of the performing consciousness. And it is always possible to convert from one attitude to the other: this “characteristic change of attitude belongs, as an ideal possibility, to all acts”. One of the sources of axiological and aesthetic relativism lies in the naive ontology of naturalist attitude. Since there are no values in nature, following a common saying, one infers that the object of pleasure, be it aesthetical or purely physiological, is, in the proper sense of the terms, neither object, nor objective. As soon as we see that the natural object of any degree of constitution and values are correlates of parallel attitudes, and that, by essence, it is always possible to convert from one to the other, objects and values are disclosed as correlates.

If we come more precisely to the artistic value, e.g. a picture, as correlate of an act of “delight”, we seize that, as the thing, every work of art, as aesthetically valuable, can support endless modifications and is itself a rule for possible aesthetic

experiences,<sup>33</sup> for “possible aesthetic feelings”, for possible axiological theses, in various modes and position-takings, even for series of objectifications. A picture, which is not a mere physical thing, can be looked at in diverse attitudes: “in the performance of aesthetic pleasure”, as an object of judgment when we “judge the picture, with the eyes of the art critic or art historian, as ‘beautiful’”, or “in the performance of the theoretical or judgmental attitude”. The affective or feeling attitude, as a valuating attitude, must not be confused, “as so often happens by equivocation”, with a judgment, possibly a predicating of value. This valuating as an original experience of value is an “*axiological intuition*” (*sic*), which as such is different from the sense intuition as well as the categorial intuition which fulfils the value predicative judgment. Through this axiological intuition a new form of object is constituted, which can be judged axiologically.

In that case, in the judging in terms of value, such as it emerges out of the attitude of a purely delighting abandon or surrender, the work of art is objective in quite a different manner. It is intuited, however not only with sense intuition (we are not living in the performance of perception) but with *axiological intuition*. In the active abandon of the “being-occupied-with-it-in-aesthetic-pleasure,” in the aesthetic enjoyment, understood as act, the Object is, as we said, the Object of the delight. (Hua 4: 8–9)

Both sort of intuition are acts of positing, but in a different sense. The theoretical positing is a doxic-thetic act. So is the aesthetic judgement expressing and founded on the original aesthetic delight. In the lowest level, that of a “simple sense intuition”, where we perceive the sensible character of the picture, we are also performing a theoretical act, in the larger sense of the term, and grasping “a mere thing in the most straightforward manner” (Hua 4: 8–9). To the primitive “object” emerging from the “mere delighting abandon” is assigned a new meaning “the character of aesthetic enjoyableness”, as an attribute, as the “*what*”, so to speak, which is “a new ‘theoretical’ Objectivity” (theoretical in a broad sense), of a higher level: namely a value. As such, in the constitutive process, it is not apprehended as an object. The aesthetical value is not constituted by the objectifying intentionality, but through feeling-intentionality, namely aesthetic emotion and pleasure.

These descriptions have been so difficult to understand for the former generation of phenomenologists, and face still nowadays strong resistances. It was not unnecessary to quote more extensively those analyses which are no *hapax* in Husserl’s writing and teaching, but a constant position as he declares here explicitly.

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<sup>33</sup> This should help to elucidate Kant’s conception of the “exemplarity” of the work of (fine) arts, in the third Critique.

## Concluding remarks

Since this contribution was just an invitation to explore more attentively the resources of transcendental phenomenology and take into account more attentively Husserl's insights, we shall conclude by summarizing some propositions which draw a clear position of the problem of relativity of taste, and the dissolution of his *nexus* to aesthetic skepticism.

Aesthetic values are constituted originally in feelings as are constituted perceptive objects in their analog sphere, that of opinion and perception.

As the latter is ruled by the relation of intention and fulfilment, and other modifications which constituted the horizon of determination (object perceived from afar or near), analogously aesthetic feelings as axiological intention can "relate to the object emptily", "and as the former is fulfilled in intuitive representing, so is the empty feeling fulfilled by way of the delighting". Aesthetic feelings, as any other intention, are subjected to an endless series of modifications, and be performed under the "mode of non-originary pleasure" or "in the mode of the evaluation of the pleasurable as such without the feelings being moved "originally" and in "a lively way", which "would be the analog, in the sphere of feelings, of obscure representations as opposed to the clear". An aesthetic pleasure can be incomplete, and even empty. "For example, if at a first glance, I find the violin 'beautiful' and a 'work of art,' the pleasure is then incomplete, if the beauty itself is present at all. I can see the violin and find it to be beautiful, without my feelings being aroused in any 'genuine' way" (Hua 4: 9–10, the emphasis is mine).

In both cases, something is posited which is submitted to an endless and open process of thetic-modifications or modalizations. This process is described as a "striving" to a goal which is either cognitive or affective", or in other words, "a representing (cognitive, tending toward knowledge) striving versus an evaluating one, which tends toward expectations, toward the delighting enjoyment". As a further and deeper perceptual experience can erase and prove wrong a former perceptive intention, analogously, a deeper aesthetic experience can modify (increase or diminish) and even invert the former presumed value (positive or negative).

Consequently, the relativism, which states or presupposes that *any feeling is right*, is wrong.

The sketchy remarks define what should be a full scientific program. We would come to another understanding of the source of values, located beyond the scholastic opposition between material and formal values, or that between subjectivists and objectivists aesthetical theories, since the phenomenological and formal exposition would pave the way to a deeper understanding of the distinction between subjective and objective values, between evanescent and stable values, mono-values and poly-values, and subsequently clarify the way value judgment



can be founded and how they can be fulfilled, confirmed or deceived, and, cor-  
relatively how feelings, even pre-reflective and pre-expressive, can be fallacious or  
sound; or how they come to expression by being grasped and transformed into  
a theme of new objectifying acts.

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