

# Irrelevant Spheres and Vacancies of Artworks: Phenomenological Aesthetics Revisited

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## 1 Phenomenological Aesthetics Against Psychologism

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Gustav Fechner's experimental aesthetics had become influential, which advocated "aesthetics from below" against the idealist speculative aesthetics arguing about the ideas of aesthetic beauty "from above."<sup>1</sup> Experimental aesthetics introduced the inductive method to define aesthetic values, for instance, collecting data of people's reactions to geometrical figures or proportions such as the golden ratio. Theodor Lipps and Johannes Volkelt, critically inheriting Fechner's methodology, systematized the aesthetics of empathy (*Einfühlung*). They understood aesthetics as an applied psychology, and the beauty of artworks as effects of beholder's empathy regarding it. Accordingly, the object of the aesthetics should be the psychological principle of our aesthetic impressions in this perspective. Moritz Geiger as a phenomenologist also admitted that Lipps' view was "the common basis for many aestheticians" around that time (Geiger 1915, p. 68).

Hence, also in the field of aesthetics, the first requirement to the Husserlian phenomenology was to overcome psychologism. And it were, amongst all, Lipps' former students in München University such as Johannes Daubert, M. Geiger, Alois

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<sup>1</sup>Ingarden reports the situation of the literary study at the time: "What with the tendencies to psychologism in aesthetics which were still active at the beginning of the century (especially in Germany, for instance in the works of Theodor Lipps and Johannes Volkelt) and the aftereffects of psychology and historicism of Dilthey, literary study was constantly diverted into other fields of investigation, primarily into a historically colored individual psychology of the poets. Husserl's antipsychologism and the attempts to reorient aesthetics took effect very slowly in the field of literary study" (Ingarden 1968/1973, pp. 3f.).

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Fischer, and Theodor Conrad, as well as Husserl's students in Göttingen represented by Waldemar Conrad and later Roman Ingarden, who undertook this task.<sup>2</sup>

W. Conrad (1878–1915) was the first to apply phenomenological method to aesthetics in his paper on the structure of aesthetic objects (Conrad 1908/1909). This paper appeared in the journal, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, which was the journal edited by Max Dessoir, an aesthetic theorist who played an important role in promoting the general science of art, trying to reintegrate art and beauty dissociated since Konrad Fiedler's science of art (Dessoir 1923).

Against the psychologistic notion of aesthetic effects (*Wirkung*), Conrad claimed the peculiar ideal being of artworks. "The essential thing for Conrad is to distinguish the aesthetic object from the performances to which it gives rise, and, above all, from the perceptions which we have of it. Since the aesthetic object is distinct from its epiphanies, it is an ideal object" (Duffrene (1953) 1973, p. 217). Although he acknowledged that our value judgments regarding artworks could be seen as the effects of the aesthetic objects, he rather insisted on the importance of inquiring into the "intentional relationship" to the object, which value judgments drew upon.

When we evaluate an artwork, this is beautiful, or that is not beautiful, then these (actual) judgments are surely "effects" of the artwork in some sense, but it is at any rate more than that. We say, "the judgment means something," or "the judgment is related to an object and evaluates this object." Or as far as we speak of actual judgments, we say, for instance, "We mean something in this judgment," and we are oriented to an object and evaluate it. And looked at closely, this "relation to an object" is found also in the "acts" of observation, the grasping, and enjoying of artworks, upon which the judgments are founded. (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 73 –My translation)

Conrad's strategy to approach artworks is based on his characterizing our appreciation of arts by its difference from our perception of natural objects as "real" things. For instance, Ludwig Beethoven's fifth symphony as an aesthetic object must be distinguished from both its musical score and each performance, which we can really perceive here and now. Real things are rather contraposed to ideal objects, and the phenomenological descriptive method is required by Conrad to grasp the latter. According to him, it is the feature of natural science to grasp object in the sphere of real things, and psychologism has erroneously reduced aesthetic realities to such empirical-naturalistic realities.

In the view of evading psychologism, and also for the reason that we cannot escape possible false senses in the naive attitude, Conrad requires that phenomenological intuition identify this philosophical attitude with the "adequate" aesthetic attitude or *Kunstgenuß*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See the details of Husserl's first contacts with Münchener students in Spiegelberg 1982. The influences of the great mentor and the students were bi-directional. Scaramuzza and Schumann (1990) discusses that Husserl's notes on aesthetics (Hua. XXIII Beilage VI, VII, LX) are based on the lessons from Fischer's *Habilitationsschrift* entitled *Untersuchungen über den ästhetischen Wert* (unfortunately not published).

<sup>3</sup>As his methodological basis, Conrad refers to Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* and his lecture on "*Hauptstücke aus der Phänomenologie und Kritik der Vernunft*" (Husserl, 1973). This lecture

## 2 W. Conrad: Irrelevant Spheres of Artworks

In the concrete analysis of aesthetic objects in the case of music, Conrad concentrates on the issue how an ideal musical object (artwork) can be constituted. He argues that the structure of musical object can be articulated in two ways, i.e., musical “sides” (*Seiten*) and “pieces” (*Stücke*). The “sides” consists of four further essential qualities of sound (*Ton*) as “the simplest musical type,” namely, pitch (*Tonhöhe*), duration, intensity, and tonal color (*Klangfarbe*). “Pieces” consist of rhythm units and meaning units, which are respectively structured into further different levels into single tones. The two kinds of units are independent from each other. According to Conrad, these articulations are “essentially” attributed to the aesthetic object, namely independent from the listener’s arbitrary experience (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 89).

Pitch, duration, intensity, and tonal color are the qualities of sound behind which we cannot go, and “when natural scientific-mathematically expressed, sound as such is to be seen as the function of these four variables, within which value setting the sound can be defined” (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 81). Among four qualities, the incomparable property is the duration of sound, which is fulfilled by the other three, not vice versa. And pitch is a “substantive” quality contrary to the other two, because we can speak of the “same sounds” only by identifying the pitch, even with different intensity and tonal color (Conrad 1908/1909, pp. 83f.).

Different sounds are united by characteristic patterns of these four sides, which form “an acoustic core” of the melody and the musical piece as a whole. The most decisive for melody is “sound line form” (*Tonlinienform*) determined in the coordinates of pitch and duration, which he equates with the contour of a painting (Conrad 1908/1909, pp. 91, 101f.).

According to Conrad, intensity and tonal color are in the background of a listener’s interests, while their “expression character” (*Ausdruckscharakter*) and “sound atmosphere” (*Stimmungston*) come to the fore. These two psychological factors depend not only on the combination of sound sides, but also on the meaning units, and the effects and resonance brought by each of them reflect upon each other. Conrad seems to understand these as noetic/noematic spheres of psychological impacts inherent to the sounds.

While the musical arts are characterized as temporal art forms (Conrad counts also poetry among such art forms) to be analyzed temporarily along the rhythm and meaning units, which are based upon the duration of sound, the articulation of sound qualities and their fringes enables us to see further the thematic relevance structure of music, which is conceived spatially or better horizontally.<sup>4</sup>

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is known nowadays under the title “*Ding und Raum*” published in *Hussaliana XVI*. By Conrad’s manner of applying phenomenology to music, poetry, and the spatial artworks, Husserl was “impressed greatly” (Spiegelberg 1982, p. 167).

<sup>4</sup>Mazzoni (1998) investigates possible developments of Conrad’s analysis of temporal melodic structure of music.

Conrad maintains that the acoustic core and its psychological fringes constitute “the most important sphere within the object field” of music, which is, however, surrounded furthermore by the sphere of “*Mitgemeinten*,” that is, the horizon of intentional meanings (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 91). And this is what is interesting to us, in view of situating Alfred Schutz’s concept of the social sciences in relationship to phenomenological aesthetics.

The sphere of *Mitgemeinten* is articulated by Conrad into two components: those implicit and those explicit. The former includes possible division, complexion, and relationship of acoustic core, and the latter consists of the further four components: (i) the non-acoustic milieu such as the “fringe” of reverberation which poses as a preparation of the succeeding sounds and which evokes the claps and cheers of the audience (this fringe named by Conrad “temporal environment” of the acoustic core); (ii) personalities of composer, players, or singers; (iii) those associated by the listeners to the music such as their memories of the past; and (iv) those depicted by the musical theme in the horizon of acoustic core.

In this context, Conrad expounds his suggestive notions of “spheres of irrelevance,” and “the allocation of interest” (*Interesseverteilung*) distinguished from the field of subjective attentions.

Taking the allocation of interest into account: an aspect falls in the “foreground” of interest, and others in the “background,” and so on. Namely the question is not about what subjective attentions or interests accidentally turn to (*Zuwendung*) in the above mentioned field of attention. Rather our interests are required by the object . . . (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 91. My translation)

We distinguish the acoustic core and the adherent psychological characters in the case of musical object. Both can vary within a certain boundary without any loss of the identity of the meant object. For the moment there is always a *sphere of irrelevance* in the aesthetic domain in contrast to the mathematic. The absolute pitch (the pitch position of the melody) and also the tempo and intensity (clearly in changes brought by distantiation) and so forth can vary within a certain, more or less small sphere without the completeness of performance in danger. (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 105. Translated and italicized by MK)

Conrad’s idea of the sphere of irrelevance is inspired by the Husserlian notion of *Ideation*, i.e., free imaginative variation to reach an eidetic from an arbitrary instance (Husserl 1954, sec. 87–93). Irrelevant spheres explain why we can identify an aesthetic object in spite of each performance in greater or less degrees of expertness and in a different instrumental setting. If a performance violates the relevance sphere of the musical identity, then it is recognized as an erroneous incomplete performance or the one of another different piece (Conrad 1908/1909, p. 105). Conrad considers the above mentioned “sound line form” especially vital for the preservation of the melodic identity. Since intensity and tonal color play little role in (i.e., they are irrelevant to) the constitution of the sound line, the irrelevance spheres of these two are broader when considered from the viewpoint of melodic identity. And if I might put forward an amendment, what is relevant to the melody is not the “absolute” pitch and duration of the sound, but relative distance and interval between each tone, (in the case of jazz or karaoke, we often play the sound with a different key and tempo) although the rhythm units have to remain of a hearable size.

Also noteworthy is that Conrad understands the allocation of interest not to be a subjective psychological matter, but rather it belongs to the objective side, or better within the intentional relationship of beholders to aesthetic objects. Schutz's notion of relevance is sometimes interpreted as an indication of his alleged "subjectivism," but he uses this term instead of "interest" exactly to keep away from the subjectivist connotation of the latter. It is not certain whether he had ever read Conrad's paper (at least, no reference is found in Schutz's published works), but I see here in Conradian object aesthetics a precursor of Schutz's ingenious relevance theory. Schutz himself also adduces instances of actual and marginal topics of music (*Haupt- und Nebenthema*) in his earlier fragmental manuscript on relevance Schütz 2004 [1929] as a better metaphor of the "counterpointal structure" of mind than that of personality split. So it is surely affirmed that his relevance theory derives an important inspiration from the structure of music. And Conrad's analysis suggests the potentiality for us to read Schutz's relevance theory as a theory of interpretation of artworks, too.

Generally speaking, Conrad's endeavor has not been thus far influential in comparison to the other phenomenologist such as Geiger or Ingarden. But it leaves no room for doubt that he laid the first foundation of the phenomenological aesthetics in terms of his investigation on the peculiar mode of being and the stratified structure of aesthetic objects. His insights further anticipate Ingarden's ontologist theory of aesthetics in essential points, as I will show in the following section.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 R. Ingarden: Multiple Layers and Vacancy of Artworks

Conradian object aesthetics was developed further critically by Roman Ingarden, a Polish phenomenologist, who also belonged to the Göttingen circle. Born in Cracow under the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in 1893, he studied under Kazimierz Twardowski (1866–1938), a student of Brentano in Vienna from 1885 to 1889,<sup>6</sup> and thereafter became a student of Husserl at Göttingen (1912–1915) and also in Freiburg (1916–1918).

Ingarden published his major works in aesthetics, *The Literary Work of Art* (1931), *Ontology of the Work of Art* (1962), and *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1968) which cover literature, music, picture, architecture, and film. After the Soviet annexation of Poland, he was forbidden to teach from 1949 until

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<sup>5</sup>Conrad's object aesthetics also anticipates the New Criticism flourishing in the Anglo-Saxon world in the "autonomous" mode of being (*Seinsweise*) of the artworks, which they call "texts". They also maintain that the literary criticism can be understood as an individual science by dispelling the so-called "intentional and affective fallacies" with which we identify the meaning of texts with either author's intention or reader's affection (Cf. Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946).

<sup>6</sup>See Rollinger (1990) for the relation between Twardowski and Husserl (pp. 139ff.).

1956 because he pursued an alleged idealist direction against Marxism. According to Spiegelberg, it was after the late 1950s when Ingarden's prominence mainly developed on the international scene (Spiegelberg 1982, p. 224), and after the 1960s his works on aesthetics have been increasingly reevaluated, given the success of the Konstanz school of reception aesthetics.

Ingarden's aesthetics departs from his recognition of the specific mode of being of artworks as in Conrad, and he shared Conrad's views that a musical work should be identified with neither its performances, score, nor listeners' mental experiences of it. At the same time, however, he takes a censorious attitude toward Conrad, who identifies aesthetic works with ideal objects.

Ingarden distinguishes artworks not only from mental experiences and physical reproductions, but also from ideal objects like mathematic objects, because an artwork is something existing in time, having its date of birth and changing in the history. And he defines the mode of being of an artwork as that of a "purely intentional" object, because every object must be intended to be objectivated. The objectivity of purely intentional objects cannot be reduced to either an idealist or realist notion of existence. Ingarden admits that Conrad also detects a difference between an artwork and a mathematical objectivity, but "Conrad is here too much under the influence of Husserl's position in the *Logical Investigations* to grasp the peculiar mode of existence of the literary work," and "his arguments regarding this question are still quite primitive," due to the lack of "existential-ontological investigations."<sup>7</sup>

However, Ingarden also concedes Conrad's "correctness in principle" and the kinship with himself in his finding of the stratified structure of artworks. Similar to Conrad's recognition of different "sides" of the artwork as an object, Ingarden also sees the different "strata" of artworks. Independent from any interpretations, the artwork (especially literary work) has an objective structure of four strata of sound, meaning-units, represented objectivities, and schematized aspects (schematic means that absolute qualities are in a sense already idealized and formatted to be recognizable).<sup>8</sup> And different layers, in turn, invited manifold interpretations due to their multiplicity which surfaces differently in terms of the interpreter's diverse interests and knowledge.

Noteworthy here is that the third and fourth layers are conceptualized by Ingarden as something including "indeterminate spots." (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*)

For example, if the story of a novel "takes place" on a given street in Tokyo, and a reader does not know the place from his own experience, the reader has to imaginatively concretize and actualize these spots of indeterminacy of the description, while he actualizes also the predetermined aspects of the given street (Ingarden

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<sup>7</sup>Ingarden 1931, pp. 27f. = 1973, p. 32. Krenzlin summarizes the difference between Conrad, Geiger, and Ingarden in terms of their treatments of *Seinsweise* of artworks (Krenzlin 1998, pp. 50f.).

<sup>8</sup>However, Ingarden recognizes only one stratum of sound formations in a work of music, and two strata of objectivities and aspects in the case of painting.

1931/1972, §42). Represented objectivity cannot be unequivocally determined, but can be only a schematic skeleton with indeterminate spots. Adumbration as unlimited diversity (*unendliche Mannigfaltigkeit*) is, *ex vi termini*, indeterminate in different perspectives. Ingarden introduces the notion of “concretization” in this context, which means filling vacant spots and completing the artwork in the beholders’ perspective.

Unlike the classical aesthetics, Ingarden’s insight into indeterminate spots and concretization tolerates the beholder’s active participation in the art creation. Here, I would like to point out that we can think of these spots of indeterminacy as kinds of “variables” contained in the text, which Conrad rightly analyzed in his theory of irrelevance. The variables in artworks give rooms for the reader’s or spectator’s “free” interpretation,<sup>9</sup> without, however, violating the identity of such artworks.

Gaps and vacancies are not a deficiency, but essential components of the artwork, as they make artistic expressions pregnant with implications. This idea very much inspires Konstanz school, especially Wolfgang Iser (1970), to which Schutz’s analysis of thematic relevance made a significant contribution.

## 4 Theory of Vacancies and Structure of *Nichtwissen*

The theory of the vacancy is a systematic plan of a book sketched by Schutz in his draft on relevance (Schutz 1970, pp. 159ff.), and this later evolved into his original published work of sign and symbol (Schutz 1955).<sup>10</sup> According to the Schutzian theory of symbol, each province of meaning such as the world of science, dream, fantasy, etc., is a finite holistic universe of meaning. But every given world has its open horizons of space and time which transcend the actual here and now, and human-beings come to terms with these sorts of transcendences, using the signs and symbols immanent within the world in question.

Transcendences to be fulfilled by signs and symbols are called “vacancies” (*Leerstelle*) by Schutz in his above-mentioned manuscript, and in order to clarify the ambiguity of the term “unknown,” (*Nichtwissen*) Schutz planned to dissect them into three types of “unknowns”:

- A. What has never been known and has to be known;
  - B. What was formerly known and has been lost;
  - C. The “hidden” (covert = *verdeckte*) knowledge.
- (Schutz 1970, p. 162)

<sup>9</sup>Although an interpretation is not indefinitely “free” since they it involves communicative processes within author’s mind and text itself. Ingarden requires “polyphonic harmony” of different strata for an “adequate” interpretation. Iser was skeptical of this normative assumption, as I will argue soon after.

<sup>10</sup>Luckmann also embodied the theory of *Nichtwissen*, opaqueness of our knowledge, in *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Schütz and Luckman 1979).

In the succeeding sentences, it is further suggested that (A) the typically expected knowledge be referred to as a “blank,” and (B) lost knowledge be an issue of inner and outer horizon in the Husserlian sense, respectively whether it is elements or contexts which are lost. (C) Hidden knowledge indicates the issues of different modalities as well as negation.

We should remember that, Schutz distinguishes in his paper on symbol (i) “marks,” which correspond to the vacancies lost but within restorable reach; (ii) “indications,” which means the appresentational relationships between certain things typically known as interrelated; (iii) “signs” manifesting others cogitations; (iv) “symbols,” which arrange sorts of vacancies belonging to one province of meaning enclosed by another (And this kind of vacancy is called “enclaves”).

In any case, vacancies of inner horizon are exactly what Ingarden called “indeterminate spots” found in the basal layers of literary artworks. Critically accepting Ingarden, Wolfgang Iser refines and extends the notion of indeterminate vacancies from his view of reading as communication between text and reader. Here, I cannot argue details of Iser’s reception aesthetics within the remaining space,<sup>11</sup> but apparently Schutz’s reflections made a significant contribution to this contemporary development of phenomenological aesthetics.

Toker (1994/95) examines Iser’s somewhat vague usage of the term and sees the notion of vacancy as including three possible subclasses: “blank,” “vacancy,” and “gaps.” (i) “Blank” refers to the “suspended connectability” of different segments of the text; (ii) “vacancy” in the narrower refers to “non-thematic segments”; and finally, (iii) “gaps” refer to the felt absence of instructions by the author, such as breaks in a serial novel.<sup>12</sup> By breaking the coherency of the text, vacancies rather facilitate and spur reader’s imagination.

Interestingly, Iser’s notion of blank, contrary to Ingarden, focuses on the above mentioned vacancies of outer horizon, which indicates a knowledge lacking context.<sup>13</sup> From the viewpoint of the reception aesthetics, readers are required to participate in reading as an action, namely, the process of selection and decision, and also to fill in blanks in order to secure coherency despite thematic alternations of different segments. And in this context of thematic-horizontal relationship of text segments, Iser cites Schutz’s notion of thematic relevance.<sup>14</sup>

Indem sie die notwendige Beziehbarkeit zweier Segmente anzeigt, konstituiert sich der Leserblickpunkt als ein Feld, wodurch sich die Segmente wechselseitig bestimmen . . .

Folglich wird der Blickpunkt des Lesers zwischen den jeweils gruppierten Segmenten hin- und herpendeln. Was er in den Blick nimmt, wird für ihn thematisch. Wenn eine Position zum Thema wird, so kann die andere nicht ebenfalls thematisch sein. Das aber heißt nicht, daß sie verschwindet; sie verliert nur ihre thematische Relevanz und bildet im Blick auf die zum Thema erhobenen Position eine Leerstelle. (Iser 1976, pp. 305f)

<sup>11</sup> See also Prof. Barber’s reflection in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> Iser 1976: Chap. 4. Cf. Toker 1994/95, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> And he also investigates the issue of negation as the other basic structure of indeterminacy in the text (Iser 1976, pp. 327ff.).

<sup>14</sup> Iser also refers to Gurwitsch’s theory of field of consciousness at the same place (Iser 1976, p. 305).



Speaking of Schutz's notion of sign as intersubjective appresentation, Iser develops his theory of vacancies, analogizing them with impossibility of "pure" experience of others we interact with. He calls this sort of opacity between persons "no-thing," referring to R. D. Laing's communication theory, and argues that every interpersonal relationship is inevitably based upon this "no-thing" (Iser 1976, pp. 259f.). "For we react so, as if we knew how the partner experience us, and thereby we form a steadfast belief in it and act as if this assumption is real. That is, interpersonal relationship draws upon this sort of compensation of primary blanks of our experiences" (Iser 1976, p. 260). In common-sense thinking, we "idealize" reciprocity of perspectives in Schutz's terminology. Taking for granted until counterevidence, we behave ourselves as if our standpoints are interchangeable, and our differences in perspectives are irrelevant for the purpose at hand, although others always leave unpredictable and uncertain elements.

Iser also refers to the difference between our real interpersonal communication and the aesthetic relationship of the reader with the artworks: "Text-reader relationship lacks any face-to-face relationships, from which every form of social interaction originates" (Iser 1976, p. 262). In the case of social interactions, one can fulfill or reformulate vacancies found in conversations by directly questioning to his/her partners. But the text as such will never "tune in" to readers as a partner of conversations does. And yet, the text, as the sign of author's intentions, is also suspended as in the case of a serial novel. Hence, readers can never know whether his interpretation is "adequate" or not. In this respect, Iser is opposed to Ingarden's metaphysical assumption of the inherent polyphonic harmony between different strata (Iser 1976, pp. 267ff.).<sup>15</sup> Artworks are open to reader's interpretation, and in turn, interpretations create artworks.

Texts do not have the dynamism of expressive others in the face-to-face relationship. Iser, however, maintains that despite this difference of condition, interactions between text and reader share an important point with the social interactions, for the asymmetry of text and reader rather gives impetus and momentum to his/her aesthetic reception of the text. Thus, the thinker of reception aesthetics underscores beholder's active role to "create" artworks by taking notice of the bidirectional interaction between readers and text full of vacancies.

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<sup>15</sup>See also Brinker (1980) who argues that Iser "misinterpret" Ingarden in this respect.

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