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Symposium on the Interrelationships of Arts:  
Gesture, Genre and Gender

**Roman Ingarden's Objectivity vs. Subjectivity as a  
problem of Translatability**

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The concept of Aristotelian purity, concerning the objective–subjective debate, has been broadly treated from a plethora of perspectives. This lecture does not attempt to review such perspectives, but barely to analyze the Ingardean opposition of *pure states* of beings —particularly from the view of aesthetics— against a unstable notion of beings, whose ontologically fuzzy borders enable the concept of *impurity*.

Roman Ingarden (1893–1970), a philosopher who developed and transformed many aspects of Husserlian phenomenology, conceived ontological stages of beings, similarly to physical states of matter in which a combination of quantities and qualities can be *false* or *true* in order to obtain a stable point of substances (see Wachter 2005:79–80). For Ingarden, substances appear on their immanent properties, but also they come clear from the kind of relationships they establish with other ontologies. This sort of phenomenology does make a radical difference regarding Husserl transcendental idealism, as Ingarden invites for a re-appraisal of the classical dialectics between realism and idealism, with a corresponding relationship between main and subsidiary meanings.

Ingardean aesthetics are strongly based on the assumption that *works of art* do exist. Obviously, this belief is highly idiosyncratic. The concepts of *work*, *art*, and *artwork* —as they are understood by most of the modern tratises on the topic— are concepts tightly involved with the evolution of culture in the European countries and their historical extensions and areas of influence. In this context, imaginary and physically located *musea* are precincts for the *artworks*, which are milestones for the construction of idiosyncrasy, and the strengthening of cultural dominance. A good

example of this is the preservation of the standard meter rod in Paris, which usually is not considered a *work of art*, but has an analogous function of objective reference, like a *masterpiece*. Many other objects can similarly be mentioned as imaginary and tangible sources for “objective” reference and dominance.

Equivalent concepts of museum already have been explored and criticized by Ludwig Wittgenstein, in philosophy; by Rush Rhees in linguistics, and by William van Orman Quine, specifically in its semantic and ontological implications. After this criticism it can be abstracted that the supposed purity of ontologies is very depending on the kind of museum one desires to build, not necessarily as an inferential construction, but merely as an imposed form of reality, in the sense we impose words, symbols or objects to others. To this view, *will* and *intentionality* (as a power of will) are fundamental for understanding the interplay between objectivity and subjectivity, on construing aesthetic ontologies.

Influenced by Hegel’s categories of *Pure Being*, Ingarden (1962, 1964) thinks that artworks exist in an ‘Objective purely intentional’ manner. According to this idea, objectivity and subjectivity are opposed forms of existence, parallel to the opposition between realism and idealism. Ingarden believes on *intrinsic* values of things, with ‘pure-intentional’ qualifiers (*cf.* Gumpel 1994:25), by contrast to *representational* references. Consequently, Ingarden concerns about the kind of act that generates ‘pure’ objectivity, as an *act of meaning*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a doubt arises when considering a representation as a mental value in itself. This consideration, improbable in the Ingardean conceptualization, has indeed its own place as synecdoche: an efficient and pervasive device for the construction of both, objective and subjective perspectives on things.

Synecdoche is a very basic transaction of the mind, importantly contributing to establish *ontologies*—in the Ingardean way of the term. Adam Wegrzecki (1994:220), a specialist on Ingarden’s aesthetic theories, defines ontology as “the central domain of philosophy to which other its parts directly or indirectly refer”. Thus, ontologies operate in philosophy as synecdoche does in language, pointing the sense of the general into the particular and viceversa.

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as *Meinungsakt* in Ingarden 1931.

The many affinities and similarities among different sign systems, like those found across the interrelationships of arts, are embedded into a transversal, synecdochic intersemiosis. An important question, from this view, is whether Ingarden's pure objectivities lie basically on the impossibility of translation, therefore being absolute self-referential constructions. In a such case, it would be impossible to translate *pure intentional* objectivities into something else. It might nonetheless be useful to consider that a same kind of *act of meaning* can also have twofold or manifold sorts of expression and representation. This is not to say only that an act of meaning can be interpreted through subjective ways. Rather, it is to point out that an act of meaning—even as a pure intentionality—can have the same kind of trigger another act of meaning has. If so, then a same state of the same mind can simultaneously produce compatible substages of meaning, in different, yet correlated networks. This is the very point of this lecture: since synesthesia and analogy are possible in this manner, then how can we consider a pure intentional stage a of mind-object—*e.g.* a musical chord— independently from a simultaneous stage of another directly related mind-object—*e.g.* a visual, intuitive form of the same chord. A relevant question at this point is whether are there pure objectivities translatable into other pure objectivities. From the Ingardenian point of view this is impossible. As a matter of fact, Ingarden (1962:229) does not talk about any intersemiotic translation between arts, but about a 'kinship' (*verwandtschaft*) or 'reconstruction mean' (*Rekonstruktionsmittel*) between different aesthetic fields.

At the beginning of this lecture I promised I would not go forward into the so discussed Aristotelian purity of beings. Nevertheless, I would like to call your attention to the idea of physical purity, very popular during the Ingarden formative period as intellectual. I address, therefore, not to Aristotle nor to any Peripatetic philosopher, but to an influential thinker who published many articles on music philosophy before Ingarden's ontology of artworks:

[T]he Greeks were a Southern people, on whose temperaments the purely physical experience of music, especially of singing, would be far more direct and far more powerful than it is upon people like ourselves whose Northern temperament has in the course of centuries developed a more consciously intellectual attitude towards the art.

This is Edward J. Dent (1928:313) words; the sort of mandatory source for any European aesthetician writing on music during the World Between Wars period. It is difficult to assert that Dent could directly influence Ingarden in this particular. But it is quite notorious that this Positivist view on music was very generalized in those years, in which physicality of things—including biological and geographical issues—embraced the meaning of aesthetic and cultural values. Presumably, Ingarden could keep this kind of focus during the development of his *Ontology of Art* (1962). However, one may see Ingarden effort to explain the existence of things—particularly the aesthetic heteronomies, in the light of his own ultimate ideas, in which he considers a germinal notion of translation rather as an efficient reorientation of the senses, from the ordinary *similarities* perceived in the world, towards the *original* heteronomies of the world.<sup>2</sup> If we consider these heteronomies as *memories*, then the Ingardean dichotomy between Objectivity and Subjectivity can sufficiently be assimilated to a problem of translatability.

Contemplating the most general features of aesthetic phenomena, realism and idealism cannot be *pure oppositions* but aspects of a single process of cognition in different strata.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, realism can be resumed as an empirical extreme of idealism, and idealism can be resumed as a pre-operative extreme of realism. Both kind of systems of knowledge are mutually associated by a synecdoche, featuring main tasks of mental order and categorisation. Consequently, one may suggest that the supposed opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, raises a problem of existential categories, not in absolute terms, but in terms of affinity and self-affinity between cognitive domains and mental spaces.

Last but not least, it must be stressed that Ingardean ‘purity’ should be regarded very apart from the Aristotelian one: Ingarden explicitly recognizes as “pure objective ontologies” those qualities that remain untouchable in translation. This point is also clear in Roman Jakobson; for him there is “something that disappears” in every translation; “something remains”, but something is completely gone with

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<sup>2</sup> This idea (Ingarden 1962:319) appears originally in the following words: “Infolgedessen hat der Zuschauer es nicht direkt mit Personen, Dingen und Vorgängen zu tun, sondern lediglich mit deren „Abbildern“. Indessen: indem der Zuschauer diese Abbilder erfaßt, stellt er sich unwillkürlich auf das Abgebildete selbst ein, sieht in den Bildern die betreffenden Personen und Dinge selbst, ohne sich ausdrücklich zum Bewußtsein zu bringen, daß diese Gegenstände ihm, streng genommen, nicht selbstgegenwärtig sind.”

<sup>3</sup> Ingarden usually admits too few strata (*Schichten*) for his aesthetic theory on “pure objective intentionalities”. This fact has been noticed as a hindrance for its development and analytical application (see for example Simons 1994:138–139, and Thomasson 2005:36–37).

translation: what is gone, according to Ingarden, is ‘ontological purity’. From this perspective, for any translation a lost purity may have been obliterated by another ‘pure ontology’. Purity, in this case, should be understood as a deviation from homology, and as a stage in a process of self-affinity, within its varied degrees of analogy and heterology.

## Sources

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