

Husserl on the Existence of Only One Real World Synthesis and Identity (II)

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at discussing a quite specific aspect of Husserl's phenomenology, i.e., the notion of *synthesis of identification*, and the role it plays in the arguments set forward in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* during the discussion of the constitution of the other, hence of the monadological inter-subjectivity. The case will be made for considering the very heart of the *Meditation* to be what we will refer to as Husserl's "transcendental argument", consisting in the claim that there can be only one inter-subjectivity, hence, the "world" being the correlate of the transcendental monadological inter-subjectivity, only one real and actual world. This will also give us the opportunity to critically approach a series of views lately held by some leading figures of the "continental" and "analytic" tradition, which, as the first part of the essay will show, pursue views directly opposed to Husserl's.

Deine Zauber binden wieder
was die Mode streng geteilt
F. Schiller/L. W. Beethoven, *An die Freude*

1. *De mundi identitate*

Toward the end of the *Cartesian Meditations*, after the full accomplishment of the *Auslegung* of the experience of the other that has kept the phenomenologist busy for twenty paragraphs, Husserl can finally reap the benefits of his work and thus propose a series of quick remarks aiming at elucidate the ultimate goal and end of the phenomenological enterprise. After recognizing that «the illusion of *solipsism* is dissolved» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 176)—this being only the most immediate result of the analyses, perhaps not even the most crucial one, for its

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achievement basically amounts to dismissing a possible objection—Husserl writes that «Phenomenological transcendental idealism has presented itself as a *monadology*, which, despite all our deliberate suggestions of Leibniz’s metaphysics draws its content purely from phenomenological explication of the transcendental experience laid open by the transcendental reduction, accordingly from the most originary evidence, wherein all conceivable evidences must be grounded» (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 176-177). What this passage lays emphasis upon is both the method, or the way in which the phenomenological explication proceeds and works (*aus der ursprünglichsten Evidenz*), and the philosophical “physiognomy” that such an *Auslegung* ends up displaying (that of a monadological idealism). None of them, however, is to be deemed the final result, if we can so call it, that transcendental phenomenology aims to achieve, especially according to the line of thought unfolded in the *Meditations*. Now, immediately after stating, once again, that it operates and proceeds within «the limits of pure “intuition”», Husserl points out what follows:

Particularly in the case of the objective world of realities (as well as in the case of each of the many ideal objective worlds, which are the fields of purely a priori sciences) [...] phenomenological explication does nothing but *explicate the sense that this world has for us all, prior to any philosophizing*, and that it obviously gets exclusively from our experience; namely, *a sense hat philosophy can uncover but never alter* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 177).

In less than ten lines (of the German text), Husserl makes a series of fundamental claims that need to be carefully unpacked and elaborated upon.

- In the most general sense, phenomenology is presented as the «explication» of the «sense» of all worlds (*der objectiven Welt der Realitäten* and *der idealen objectiven Welten*)—meaning this that, for something to count as a world, its sense (*Sinn*) must be drawn upon transcendental experience.
- The parenthetical sentence introduces a crucial clause: all the *ideale objective Welten* are the so-called «fields» of investigation of purely a priori sciences. This is why Husserl can speak of worlds, *Welten*, in the plural: every ideal possible world, such as the one of numbers, the *Zahlenwelt*, or *die arithmetische Welt* (Husserl, 1976, p. 59) is the field of that purely a priori science called arithmetic. Of course, this holds true of phenomenology as well: indeed, insofar as it is taken as an «eidetic science», phenomenology has its

own “exclusive” ontological «field» of investigation (question of *Sein*), i.e., pure consciousness; nevertheless, to the extent that the *ideale objective Welten* stand in an intentional relation to such consciousness, they also fall within the domain of phenomenology, which thereby provides the explication of the sense (question of *Sinn*) that they receive from it. As a consequence, Husserl can speak of phenomenology *in unserem spezifischen Sinne* (the former), but also of an *extendierte Bedeutung* of it (which embraces the latter as well (Husserl, 1952, p. 81)¹).

- Nevertheless, if the question were the one as to the ultimate goal or end of phenomenology, the answer could not be the eidetic investigation of pure consciousness *per se*, nor the explication of the sense of all possible «ideal worlds»; as Husserl puts it: «phenomenological explication does nothing but *explicate the sense that this world has for us all, prior to any philosophizing*». In other words, and to make explicit a crucial point that might not sound as evident as it should be: the ultimate goal of phenomenology is to clarify and elucidate the *Sinn*, namely, the rational sense that *this* world, the factual one we live in, has for «us» human beings² (for the role played by the “human subjectivity” in the constitution of this world, see the manuscripts published in Husserl, 2008, pp. 259-306).

This is why we said earlier that the dismissal of the “solipsism objection” is to be deemed only the immediate outcome of the explication of the experience of the other, yet not at all its end goal; what has always been considered Husserl’s chief concern is to be regarded only as a “means” toward something else:

¹ Already in *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* lectures Husserl remarks how phenomenology is to be deemed the science of the phenomena of knowledge in a double sense (*in dem doppelten Sinn*), i.e., *von den Erkenntnissen als Erscheinungen, in denen sich* the objectualities manifest themselves, as well as of these very same objectualities (Husserl, 1950, p. 14).

² A clear and linear presentation of all the different steps that lead to this, therefore to the understanding of philosophy as the *Tatsachenwissenschaft von dem natürlich gegebenen Weltall*, can be found in the *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lectures (Husserl, 2012, pp. 284-285). Here Husserl sketches what we will venture to call, and without any rhetoric, his “system of philosophy”: he explains in what sense «pure consciousness» is the *Mutterboden* of all possible knowledge, for in it all ontological disciplines are rooted as a series of «noematic» poles, thereby receiving their «sense» from it. The ontological disciplines deal with possible objects, proceeding from possible individual objects to possible natures, cultures and «worlds»; all together, these disciplines and sciences form, not a conglomerate made up of scattered pieces, but a coherent universal «system». Accordingly, they entail the a priori principles of all empirical sciences, which then deal with the empirical world, the factually given one. For an analysis and elucidation of the sense in which this is to be understood in relation to Husserl’s notion of «metaphysics», see Majolino, 2017; Trizio, 2016, 2017.

Husserl's final preoccupation, in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, being to show that there can be only *one* transcendental inter-subjectivity, therefore, being «nature» its correlate, there can be only *one* nature. In the words of Husserl, this is the major «metaphysical outcome» *unserer Auslegung der Fremderfahrung* explicitly presented in §60 (see De Santis, 2018a)³. In a nutshell: if phenomenology's ultimate aspiration consists in elucidating the «sense» that *this world* has *for us*, human beings, then it becomes crucial to show that *there can be only one real world*, rather than a multiplicity of separate and unrelated worlds (this being, on the contrary, the specific aspiration of the explication of the experience of the other of the *Fifth Meditation*).

Now, one of the inevitable consequences, or implications, of Husserl's view is the undermining of all those discourses—more or less rhetorical, more or less metaphorical, and more or less politically correct—that lay claim to the existence of multiple worlds; which, according to Husserl's line of thought, boils down to denying that there can be—and *de facto* there is—only one “real world” (as a «correlate» of the one and only «transcendental inter-subjectivity»). The general aim of the present investigation is precisely to draw on such a radical thesis on the part of Husserl: this will be done by showing how, in the transcendental conceptuality that is peculiar to his phenomenology, the issue of the constitution of the one and only real world («nature as the first form of objectivity») points to a specific system of syntheses—a system resting on what Husserl calls «synthesis of identification» as *die Grundform der Synthesis* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 79)⁴.

Nevertheless, before we embark on such enterprise, a detour immediately imposes itself: indeed, since we asserted that Husserl's view also entails the dismissal of a series of discourses laying claim to the existence of multiple worlds, it would be a good idea to start off precisely with them. Three perspectives have been singled out, in particular, all belonging to those alleged traditions of thought usually labeled «continental» and «analytic philosophy» respectively; our objective is to show that, in spite of the apparently different language and conceptuality, they do have something in common: for—and even if at different levels and to different degrees—they all either explicitly advocate, or implicitly

³ A more detailed analysis will be provided later on, in §2 of the present text.

⁴ Let us hasten to remark that we will not concern ourselves with the problem of how Husserl systematically elucidates the constitution of the *alter ego*, nor with the question as to whether his analysis of the experience of the other (hence, of the transcendental inter-subjectivity itself) is a consistent one: our interest being solely in working out the system of (transcendental) syntheses that constitutes the one and only real world as such.

argue for the existence of multiple worlds. As we will strive to show, from Husserl's own perspective, it could be said that they all end up denying the *identity of the real world* (for they deny that there can be—and *de facto* there is—only “one” identical real world) because, transcendently speaking, they all neglect (or even explicitly deny) the “synthesis” as *die Urform des Bewußtseins*⁵.

In order to provide a clear account of these three discourses, we will talk of *the dismissed identity* (α), *the lost identity* (β) and, finally, of *the multiplied identity* (γ) respectively.

(α) *The Dismissed Identity*

In an essay published in his *In den Netzen der Lebenswelt* («Die verachtete Doxa. Husserl und die fortdauernde Krisis der abendländischen Vernunft»), and originally appeared in 1982 in *Research in Phenomenology* («The Despised Doxa. Husserl and the Continuing Crisis of Western Reason»), the German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels directly and explicitly addresses the issue of the identity of the world during a quick, yet quite dense, discussion of the role played by the *doxa* in Husserl's *Krisis*. The topic at stake is approached through a critical examination of the difference, as well as the relation, that Husserl establishes between «doxa», on the one hand, and «episteme» on the other hand (this latter understood both as a «scientific» and «philosophical reason») (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 35). Waldenfels' major thesis is that Husserl accomplishes both a «revalorization of the doxa» (*eine Aufwertung der Doxa*), which is recognized as the intuitive ground for scientific reason (Waldenfels 2005, p. 39), but also, quite paradoxically, «a devaluation of doxa» (*Abwertung der Doxa*) vis-à-vis the philosophical form of reason: «Doxa appears now as a concealed, anonymous reason, closed in upon itself, i.e., as a mere *preliminary form* (*Vorgestalt*) of the true reason, and thus it sinks back to being “mere”

⁵ As the reader might have already noticed, we have been employing two turns of phrase, *the one and only real world* and *the one and only identical real world*: although they are not to be held as “equivalent” (the former stressing only the *reality* of the world, the latter adding the feature of *identity*), they necessarily go hand in hand and imply each other. For, if the one and only «real world» is always identical to itself (this being the Husserlian claim that interests us), the reverse does not hold true: the ideal world of meanings and propositions, for example, is characterized by “identities”, or, better, identical objectualities, which nevertheless are not to be called “real”. It will be part of our task to elucidate the difference, and mutual implication, of the two expressions in question (hence, of the relevant process of constitution that they involve and require).

doxa» (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 41)⁶. Against such a devaluation, Waldenfels calls for a «*trans-valuation*» (*Umwertung*) of the doxa—by which he means the necessity of acknowledging that the «everyday knowledge» is *die Verkörperung einer spezifischen Vernunft*, one that is not at all to be deemed inferior to the universal one of philosophy.

In what does this exactly consist, in Waldenfels' intention? It consists in elaborating on, and thus radicalizing, Husserl's claim to the effect that there is «a pre-logical a priori» (*vorlogisches Apriori*) (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 45) characterizing our experience of the world, which presents us with «*pre-predicative generalities that exclude and displace each other without contradicting one another*». If this is the case, and Husserl himself concedes this point, then in what, exactly, Waldenfels' position differs from the former's? Let us first see how Waldenfels presents the core of Husserl's view:

As the primal mode of knowledge he recognizes a perception that, in spite of all differences, gives us access to a universally available and identical fundamental asset (identischen Grundbestand). Basically, we all see the same things (dieselben Dinge), since we see everything that we see within universal rule-structures that constitute the «universal pre-logical a priori» of the life-world. To be sure, there are differences and variations [...]. But these various conceptions and interpretations are comparable to perspectives in which the same object (dasselbe Objekt) is viewed in various ways. A unitary experiential system with identical reference-objects (identischen Bezugsobjekten) and universally binding rules is already presupposed (vorausgesetzt), and, as long as this presupposition is made, every conflict within experience can be in principle reconciled (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 46).

Let us pause to make a couple of remarks. The first element to be emphasized that characterizes Waldenfels' strategy—which here perfectly complies with the Husserlian intention—is the coupling together of “the problem of the identity of things as they are given to perception” (the same thing is viewed, and thus grasped, from different perspectives) and the one that can be referred to as that of “the identity of the world conceived (*Auffassungen*) and interpreted

⁶ As the state of affairs is incisively wrapped up by Waldenfels: «The step *back* from the world of the sciences to the everyday world is simultaneously a step *beyond* the everyday world in the direction of a “true world”. *Doxa* takes the center-stage as that *fundamental knowledge* which supports all higher-level constructions, and it is simultaneously pushed into the background as a mere *preliminary knowledge* which falls short of the deeper insights of reason».

(*Deutungen*) in different ways” (the same world given to different, and alien, social spheres (*Verkehrskreise*)⁷). The «identity» of the thing; the «identity» of the world. In both cases, for it is the general form of Husserl’s argument that interests Waldenfels here, the «identity» (he speaks of *identischen Grundbestand, dieselben Dinge, dasselbe Objekt, identischen Bezugsobjekten*) is simply «presupposed» (*vorausgesetzt*). Such is the Husserlian stance that Waldenfels intends to oppose.

Let us now see how he understands the situation in contrast to the father of phenomenology:

But if we consider some easy examples of everyday orderly structures (Ordnungsgefüge), it turns out that the sameness of things (Selbigkeit der Dinge) cannot be presupposed (*vorausgesetzt*) quite so simply. What about a script that one tries to read from right to left rather than from left to right, or from bottom to top rather than from top to bottom? Is a mirror-image really only a reversed image? Is a human face, which we view upside-down really still the same, or does it not sometime appear as a horrifying grimace that we have to translate back into a human face? Is the way down really the same as the way up, or is not Gaston Bachelard right when in his *La poétique de l’espace* he distinguishes between the steps which one climbs (e.g., to the attic) and steps which one goes down (e.g., to the basement)? (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 46).

As should be evident by now, Waldenfels goes without any solution of continuity from the notion of «identity» to that of «sameness». Now, although it was not easy to tell what Waldenfels meant to say by accusing Husserl of «simply» (*so einfach nicht*) “presupposing” the identity, the passage just recalled shed light, at least descriptively, on what Waldenfels takes to be the right approach to the issue at hand. Whereas one is inclined to say that *the same* script can be read both ways, from left to right or from right to left, from bottom to top or from top to bottom—this is what Waldenfels denies and rejects: the script read from left to right *is not the same as* the script read from right to left; the script read from bottom to top *is not the same as* the one read from top to bottom. Now, if it is the case that the equivalence between “things” and “world” previously recognized holds true, then the same will apply to *die Selbigkeit der Welt*; as Waldenfels would probably contend: the world, as is understood in this way, for instance by

⁷ Waldenfels has just recalled the passage, from *Krisis*, where Husserl uses the examples of the «Negroes of the Congo» and the «Chinese peasant» as belonging to two different, alien spheres that nevertheless belong to the one and the same world (being theirs just different *Auffassungen* or *Deutungen* of it).

this *Verkehrkreis*, is not the same world as is understood in this other way, by this other specific *Verkehrkreis*. The script is *not the same*, but a different one, and so is the world—every time a *different world*, depending upon the *Auffassung* of it.

This being recognized, three important remarks need to be added.

- That this is exactly Waldenfels' line of reasoning is also testified by the way in which he seems to render Bachelard's position in *La poétique de l'espace*. Whoever is minimally familiar with the problems addressed by Bachelard in his text, namely, those «posés par l'imagination poétique», also knows that chapter one (to which Waldenfels explicitly refers here) is dedicated to the analysis of a series of quite specific poetical images able to express l'«intimité de l'espace intérieur» (Bachelard, 2012, p. 23), and, accordingly, *la maison* is held as that «image» representing «notre espace vital en accord avec toutes les dialectiques de la vie»⁸ (Bachelard, 2012, p. 24). From reading Waldenfels' argument, on the contrary, one gets the misleading impression that—when it comes to the example of the «steps»—Bachelard is maintaining that the steps that we climb *are not the same as* the steps that we go down, as if what is being called into question were precisely the purported identity of the steps as an object of experience (*Selbigkeit der Dinge*). On the contrary, and as far as we understand Bachelard, the pages in question have nothing to do with what Waldenfels is striving to make him argue for: Bachelard's interest being in what he describes as *la maison onirique* (Bachelard, 2012, p. 42), namely, the *oneiric image* of the house as a domestic space, and the different poetical values and meanings with which both «l'escalier qui va à la cave» and «l'escalier qui monte à la chambre» (Bachelard, 2012, p. 41) can be respectively and symbolically imbued.
- It might be argued that, in the end, Waldenfels is simply missing Husserl's distinction between *Welt* and *Umwelt*—the former understood as the one and only «real» world and the latter both as (i) the *kulturelle Umwelt* (as the correlate of a singular inter-subjectivity) (Husserl, 1973a, §58) and (ii) as

⁸ «Car la maison est notre coin du monde. Elle est—on l'a souvent dit—notre premier univers. Elle est vraiment un cosmos. Un cosmos dans toute l'acception du terme. [...] Ici, en effet, nous touchons une réciproque nous devons explorer les images : tout espace vraiment habité porte l'essence de la notion de maison. Nous verrons, dans le cours de notre ouvrage, comment l'imagination travaille dans ce sens quand l'être a trouvé le moindre abri : nous verrons l'imagination construire des "murs" avec des ombres impalpable, se réconforter avec des illusions de protection—ou, inversement trembler derrière des murs épais, douter des plus solides remparts» (Bachelard, 2012, p. 24).

«what I know of the world» (*was ich von der Welt weiß*) (Husserl, 2008, p. 681). Were this really the case, Waldenfels would be simply lacking the distinction between what is directly experienced and what is the result of its interpretation (cultural or other). If this were the attempt at explaining, if not even saving, Waldenfels, we would object that he is not missing anything; he is eschewing such distinction intentionally: «And when some people see a lobster in regions of the heavens where the Greek discovered a lion, can one say that both really see the same (*dasselbe sehen*) thing and *only* order or interpret it differently (*nur verschieden anordnen und deuten*)?» (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 47).

- Although Waldenfels does not seem to also directly tackle the problem of synthesis (i.e., that of identification), it must be precisely this topic that he has in mind when polemically observing:

Husserl, too, has written a great deal about the process of identification in which identity is constituted, but he does not go far enough when describing the structures of everyday world. When he attributes the same things (*dieselbe Dinge*) to the experience of the Chinese peasant or the African native, is he not doing something similar to what the natural scientist does when he substitutes his own constructions for experience? (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 48).

The dismissal of the *identity* of things (it is not *the same* steps; it is not *the same* script), parallel to that of the *identity* of the world itself (it is not *the same* world), is accompanied by a dismissal of the *Identifikationsprozess*. Without going into any nitty-gritty discussion of Waldenfels' claim⁹, what is to be stressed is that the dismissal of the identity, or, better, of the object as something identical to itself, points to the criticism of its relevant and corresponding transcendental *Leistung*.

As far as we comprehend Waldenfels' reproach, moved against Husserl, of only presupposing the «identity» (of the thing and the world), he seems to be making the point to the effect that rather than *assuming* the «identity» as that *upon which* different *Auffassungen* build, we should hold it as their result: «Es bleibt nur die Möglichkeit der *Übersetzung*, der Transformation und Transposition, wie sie zwischen verschiedenen Sprachen stattfindet» (Waldenfels, 2005, p. 52). The question is not just to show—with Husserl—that *de facto* there is only

⁹ Which in fact sounds more like a bold statement to be proved («is he not doing something similar to what the natural scientist does when he substitutes his own constructions for experience?») than a sound argument.

one «real» world, but also that, transcendently speaking, *there can be only one*. Let us also remark that, were we to embrace Waldenfels' view, and were the identity solely the “result” of a series of *Übersetzungen*, being the latter never completely adequate and perfect (just like any translation¹⁰), then the paradoxical conclusion would be that the *identity of the world*, or the *world as something identical to itself* in which we all sojourn, would never be so. We would always be living in a *different* world, and there would only be a *plurality of worlds*, some being more translatable than others... yet no real and identical world as such.

(β) *The Lost Identity.*

In his famous book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, notably, Chapter 7 on the transition from epistemology to hermeneutics, Richard Rorty dedicates a great deal of energy to discussing Kuhn's conception of (scientific) revolutions as «changes» of world view (Kuhn, 1970, Chapter X). What bothers Rorty is not Kuhn's argument *per se*, but his «“idealistic”-sounding addenda» (Rorty, 2009, p. 324). In other words: if, on the one hand, Rorty praises Kuhn's rejection of the idea that physical sciences («viewed as a paradigm of knowledge») should be thought «in terms of neutral scheme (“observation language”, “bridge laws”))» (Rorty, 2009, p. 323), on the other hand, he dismisses the consequence that Kuhn draws from it: «Kuhn's claim that there is no commensurability between groups of scientists who have different paradigms of a successful explanation [...] seems to many philosophers to endanger the notion of theory-choice in science». Such would be, then, the so-called «“idealistic”-sounding agenda» that, according to Rorty, Kuhn owes to his Kantianism¹¹:

It is one thing to say that the «neutral observation language» is which proponents of different theories can offer their evidence is of little help in deciding between the theories. It is another thing to say that there can be no such language because the proponents «see different things» or «live in different worlds». Kuhn, unfortunately, made incidental remarks of the latter sort, and philosophers pounced upon them. Kuhn wished to oppose the traditional claim that «what changes with a paradigm is only the scientist's

¹⁰ Needless to say that, by resorting to the linguistic paradigm of the «translation», Waldenfels is not doing justice to the Husserlian idea of a «pre-logical» and pre-predicative a priori of experience, upon which most of his arguments directly and clearly build.

¹¹ As Rorty explicitly points out: «he let his notion of what counted as a “philosophical paradigm” be set by the Kantian notion that the only substitute for a realistic account of successful mirroring was an idealistic account of the malleability of the mirrored world» (Rorty, 2009, p. 325).

interpretation of observations that themselves are fixed once and for all by the nature of the environment and of the perceptual apparatus» (Rorty, 2009, p. 324).

A more detailed discussion of this point will soon lead us to Galileo and Bellarmine. As for Kuhn, Rorty grasps the essential point, that is to say, the criticism and dismissal of the idea that a «neutral and fixed sensory experience» provides the basis upon which the scientist will eventually build his or her interpretation. It is during the analysis of the difference between Lavoisier and Priestley that Kuhn resorts to the odd turn of phrase, whose idealism is denounced by Rorty: «Lavoisier, we said, saw oxygen where Priestley had seen dephlogisticated air and where others had seen nothing at all»; then he goes on to incisively conclude that «the principle of economy will urge us to say that after discovering oxygen Lavoisier worked in a different world» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 118). Kuhn himself is aware that this is «a strange locution» and also recognizes the necessity of inquiring about «the possibility of avoiding» it. We know that a full discussion of Kuhn's position should include a full-fledged analysis of his "epistemology" and, more in general, of the question as to what a scientific theory properly is: now, since these problems fall outside the restricted scope of the present paper, we will rather try to follow Kuhn's argument so as to highlight what interests us in this context.

As Kuhn himself asks, in such a way showing how lucid his awareness of the problem is: «Do we, however, really need to describe what separates Galileo from Aristotle, or Lavoisier from Priestley, as a transformation of vision? Did these men really *see* different things when *looking at* the same sorts of objects? Is there any legitimate sense in which we can say that they pursued their research in different worlds?» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 120). Kuhn is ready to admit that «the world does not change with a change of paradigm»; yet, this being acknowledged, it seems unavoidable to claim that «the scientist afterwards works in a different world» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 121), and, as he goes on to strongly assert: «I am convinced that we must learn to make sense of statements that at least resemble these» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 121.). Make sense how, exactly? As far as we understand Kuhn's strategy, the point for him is to directly undermine the opposite thesis, or better: *the basis on which the claim opposite to his* («the scientist afterwards works in a different world») *could be theoretically built*. And such a basis would consist in believing that what happens during a scientific revolution could be reducible «to a reinterpretation of individual and stable data», as if the «data»

collected by the scientist were simply indifferent to their being “interpreted” in such and such a way. As should be clear, the focus of Kuhn’s critical attention is represented by the very notion of “experience”, that is, «immediate experience» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 125) or «sensory experience» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 126) (which, regardless of the specific problem of what a «scientific paradigm» is, amounts to the quite burning and sticky issue of the structure of perception, and of the relation between data and interpretation, *Auffassung* or *Deutung*, as Waldenfels would frame it in his more phenomenological language¹²).

But is sensory experience fixed and neutral? Are theories simply man-made interpretations of given data? The epistemological viewpoint that has most often guided Western philosophy for three centuries dictates an immediate and unequivocal, Yes! In the absence of a developed alternative, I find it impossible to relinquish entirely that viewpoint. Yet it no longer functions effectively, and the attempts to make it do so through the introduction of a neutral language of observations now seem to be hopeless (Kuhn, 1970, p. 126).

As he goes on to radically oppose such «hopeless» view, «The operations and measurements that a scientist undertakes in the laboratory are not “the given” of experience but rather “the collected with difficulty”»; and, as he drastically concludes from this: «When it [the acceptance of a new theory] was done, even the percentage composition of well-known compounds was different. The data themselves had changed. That this is the last of the senses in which we may want to say that after a revolution scientists work in a different world» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 135).

It would be a real mistake to confine Kuhn’s argument just to the restricted reign of epistemology, as if what is really at stake in his discourse were exclusively the “theoretical” question as to what a scientific theory is and the “practical” one regarding the mode of working of scientists; as we firmly believe, Kuhn’s line of thinking bears upon three levels that need to be carefully distinguished: the first level—the one to which Kuhn refers on many occasions but on which, unfortunately, he never really expands—is that of the structure itself of perception and of the role played by sense data in it; the second level,

¹² Kuhn explicitly speaks of «objects of perception» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 128) and some of his leading examples are of clear “perceptual” nature: «modern psychological experimentation is rapidly proliferating phenomena with which that theory can scarcely deal. The duck-rabbit shows that two men with the same retinal impressions can see different things; the inverting lenses that two men with different retinal impressions can see the same thing» (Kuhn, 1970, pp. 126-127).

the one explicitly addressed by Kuhn, is what scientific theories are and the way in which they function as possible paradigms; the third level, which rests on the previous two, is that of the cultural determination, and impact, of a paradigm. As he writes: «As a result of the paradigm-embodied experience of the race, the culture and, finally, the profession, the world of the scientist has come to be populated with planets and pendulums, condensers and compound ores and other such bodies besides» (Kuhn, 1970, p. 128). Were Kuhn's position to be "formalized", it would boil down to the following alternative (which applies to all three levels): either we take the world to be nothing but a complex of "neutral" sense data to be interpreted (*Auffassung* or *Deutung*) in such and such a way (by such and such a perception; by such and such a theory; by such and such a culture); or we acknowledge that the purported neutral data are themselves originally part of such and such an *Auffassung* or of such and such a *Deutung*. If in the former case the world is lost to a dusty and dispersed plurality of sense data, in the latter it falls into a plurality of unrelated worlds—being the *Deutungen*, with which the data are originally entangled, «incommensurable» with one another. In both cases, the identity of the world, or the world as something identical to itself, is inexorably lost, and we are left with nothing but τὰ πολλακῆ διεσπαρμένα (to speak like the Platonic *Phaedrus*).

If our reconstruction of Kuhn's argument is a consistent one, then Rorty is right in rejecting what he labels his «"idealistic"-sounding addenda». After he strongly maintains that «Kuhn should have simply discarded the epistemological project altogether» (Rorty, 2009, p. 324), the "conclusion" is then drawn that «Hermeneutics, rather, is what we get when we are no longer epistemological». As one could go on to point out, on Kuhn's view, the conversation between Galileo and Bellarmine *de facto* took place; nevertheless, embodying each of them a different, incommensurable, paradigm—thereby living in his own world—it was more like a war or a clash of worlds than an actual dispute. Now, what interests us at this point is less Rorty's dismissal of Kuhn than what he propounds as a valid, "hermeneutical" alternative to the latter's «idealistic» conclusion (and conception of what a world, in general, is); in other words: even though most of the second half of the section on Kuhn is dedicated to outlining an alternative way to address the question as to whether Bellarmine's own objections «were illogical or unscientific», so as to answer it «in the negative»¹³

¹³ Here is how Rorty presents the issue: «But can we then find a way of saying that the considerations advanced against Copernican theory by Cardinal Bellarmine [...] were "illogical or unscientific"? This, perhaps, is the

(which rests on the distinction between «objectivity as correspondence and as agreement» (Rorty, 2009, pp. 333-342)), what concerns us here is the consequence that, given Rorty's considerations, can be drawn and that bears upon our own topic. To put it even better: if Kuhn's idea of incommensurable paradigms, thus that of living and working in different worlds, is derived from his idealistic-sounding stance on the relation between data and interpretation, then what is Rorty's view on this very same issue?

Let us see it. Now, after explaining in what sense, even if Galileo, so to say, «won the argument», and «we all stand on the common ground of the “grid” of relevance and irrelevance which “modern philosophy” developed as a consequence of that victory» (Rorty, 2009, p. 331), we cannot use it to actually understand and interpret the discrepancy between the father of modern science and the man who contributed to condemn Bruno to be burnt at the stake as a heretic¹⁴—after explaining this, we said, Rorty rhetorically asks: «But what could show that the Bellarmine-Galileo issue “differs in kind” from the issue between, say, Kerensky and Lenin, or that between the Royal Academy (*circa* 1910) and Bloomsbury?». Because, as Rorty would certainly assert, they do not differ in kind!

To sum up the line I am taking about Kuhn and his critics: the controversy between them is about whether science, as the discovery of what is really out there in the world, differs in its patterns of argumentation from discourses for which the notion of “correspondence to reality” seems less apposite (e.g., politics and literary criticism). Logical-empiricist philosophy of science, and the whole epistemological tradition since Descartes, has wanted to say that the procedure for attaining accurate representations in the Mirror of Nature differs in certain deep ways from the procedure for attaining agreement about “practical” or “aesthetic” matters. Kuhn gives us the reason to say that there is no deeper difference than that between happens in “normal” and in “abnormal” discourse. That distinction cuts across the distinction between science and nonscience (Rorty, 2009, pp. 332-333).

Regardless of the specific problem addressed by Rorty (i.e., the

point at which the battle lines between Kuhn and his critics can be drawn most sharply. Much of the seventeenth century's notion of what it was to be a “philosopher”, and much of the Enlightenment's notion of what it was to be “rational”, turns on Galileo's being absolutely right and the church absolutely wrong. To suggest that there room for rational disagreement [...] is to endanger the very notion of “philosophy”. For it endangers the notion of finding “a method for finding truth” which takes Galilean and Newtonian mechanics as paradigmatic» (Rorty, 2009, p. 328).

¹⁴ Against such a claim, see the arguments set forward by Boghossian, 2007, pp. 58-94.

understanding of science in light of the “Mirror of Nature” sort of paradigm, and the difference between the “scientific” discourse and other forms of discourse, such as the one of politics and literary criticism), the issue at stake can be so presented: between the Scylla of an idealistic conception of the world (Kuhn) and the Charybdis of the hopeless “Mirror of Nature” theory of correspondence, a third path has to be explored able to avoid both. Between the latter’s realism and the former’s incommensurable paradigms, Rorty opts for the idea of *commensurability*: the claim to the effect that what we call truth, namely, objective truth, is nothing else but the ideal result of an interaction of more or less commensurable discourses («converging to a consensus») (Rorty, 2009, p. 377).

This being said, two comments can be added.

- It might be argued that, despite its ability to overcome Kuhn, Rorty’s “convergence” thesis does not seem to avoid the destiny of Waldenfels’ position; in other words: even if it does not fall prey to Kuhn’s dispersion of the one and only real world into a scattered plurality of unrelated worlds, the consequence of what we just called the “convergence thesis” is that, as a correlate of objective truth, the one and only real world is itself nothing but the result of an “interaction” between more or less “commensurable” discourses (whether scientific, political, or other...). As already was the case with Waldenfels, we would always be living in a more or less «commensurable» world; or, even better, there would only be a plurality of worlds—some being more commensurable than others.
- Rorty dismisses the idea itself of developing a «transcendental pragmatics» or «hermeneutics» (Rorty, 2009, p. 380); and, in general, he turns down the notion of transcendental philosophy in the Kantian and Husserlian sense of the term (Rorty, 2009, p. 382, where Husserl’s phenomenology of the life-world as something prior to the view offered by science is briefly mentioned). However, nothing is really conveyed as to what the adjective «transcendental» actually signifies in Husserl¹⁵.

¹⁵ Given the context in which the critical remark is made, the sense ascribed to that adjective seems to directly flow from Rorty’s discussion of Habermas: «The notion that we can get around overconfident philosophical realism and positivistic reductions only adopting something like Kant’s transcendental standpoint seems to me the basic mistake in programs like that of Habermas (as well as in Husserl’s notion of a “phenomenology of the life-world which will describe people in some way “prior” to that offered by science» (Rorty, 2009, p. 382). Here is the text by Habermas that Rorty quotes on this page: «Correspondence-theories of truth tend to

Unlike Waldenfels, then, who explicitly dismisses the identification as a transcendental operation, what we encounter in Rorty is a general break with the idea of “transcendental philosophy”, based on the claim that the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical is an epistemological one. Moreover, if we speak of “lost identity” rather than dismissed identity, it is because Waldenfels makes an explicit effort at dismissing that notion, while in this case the loss turns out to be only the unavoidable implication of the argumentation (not the actually “desired” conclusion). Whether from the angle of a radicalized phenomenology (Waldenfels), which directly engages with the problem of identity in order to dismiss it, thereby also eschewing the transcendental *Identifikationsprozeß* at its basis, or from that of hermeneutics (Rorty), with its emphasizes upon the “consensus”-process, the identity of the one real world, or the world as something identical to itself, ends up being “lost” to a plurality of more or less unrelated worlds, more or less “translatable” or “commensurable” worlds.

(γ) *The Multiplied Identity.*

Radically different is the situation as we turn to *On the Plurality of Worlds* by David Lewis. Let us hasten to remark that it is not our intention here to compare Lewis’ «modal realism» with the two previously analyzed positions *per se*, nor to discuss Lewis’ arguments explaining why we should «believe in a plurality of worlds» (Lewis, 2008, p. 3): our interest being limited to the very «thesis of plurality of worlds» and to how it is presented. Now, in order to understand what the implications of such a «thesis» are, let us first read Lewis’ description of “our” world, «the world we live in»:

The world we live in is a very inclusive thing. Every stick and every stone you have ever seen is part of it. And so are you and I. And so are the planet Earth, the solar system, the entire Milky Way, the remote galaxies we see through telescopes, and (if there are such things) all the bits of empty space between the stars and galaxies. There is nothing so far away from us not to be part of our world. Anything at any distance at all is to be included. Likewise the world is

hypostatize facts as entities in the world. It is the intention and inner logic of an epistemology as such to uncover the objectivistic illusions of such a view. Every form of transcendental philosophy claims to identify the conditions of the objectivity of experience by analyzing the categorial structure of objects of possible experience» (cited in Rorty, 2009, pp. 381-382).

inclusive in time. No long-gone ancient Romans, no long-gone pterodactyls, no long-gone primordial clouds of plasma are too far in the past, nor are the dead dark starts too far in the future, to be part of this same world. Maybe, as I myself think, the world is a big physical object; or maybe some parts of it are entelechies or spirits or auras or deities or other things unknown to physics. But nothing is so alien in kind as not to be part of our world, provided only that it does exist at some distance and direction from here, or at some time before or simultaneous with now (Lewis, 2008, p. 1).

«The world we live in is a very inclusive thing»: this being the major claim that Lewis is trying to “descriptively” elucidate by enumerating some of the things actually included in it. This being said and recognized, if the question were the one as to what it means for our world (or, as one can add, for any world) to be «a very inclusive thing», the answer would be what the last sentence specifies: «nothing is so alien in kind as not to be part of our world, provided only that it does exist at some distance and direction from here, or at some time before or simultaneous with now». The *here* and the *now*, combined together, represent the “axis” around which our world, notably, its «actuality», firmly revolves. They are its *Nullpunkt*, were we allowed to resort to Husserl’s language: while the *here* is the reference point of all spatial distance and direction, the *now* stands for that, with respect to which all temporal determinations are such. Accordingly, rather than say that the world, notably, «our» world, is what includes everything that is related to the *here* and *now*, we should go the other way around and maintain that “whatever stands in a spatiotemporal relation to the *here* and *now*, is included in—or is a part of—‘our’ world”. As Lewis puts it: «The point seems uncontroversial, and it seems open to generalization: whenever two possible individuals are spatiotemporally related, they are worldmates. If there is any distance between them—be it great or small, spatial or temporal—they are part of one single world» (Lewis, 2008, p. 70)¹⁶. This means that we define the concept of *world*, i.e., *our world*, in terms of spatiotemporal relations to the *hic et nunc*, and not the other way around¹⁷.

¹⁶ As for the term *worldmate*, Lewis writes: «A possible world has parts, namely possible individuals. If two things are parts of the same world, I call them *worldmates*»; as he then adds in a footnote: «Worldmates are compossible in the strongest sense of the word. Two things are compossible in another sense if they are vicariously worldmates, in virtue of their counterparts; that is, iff some one world contains counterparts of both of them. Two things are compossible in yet another sense iff some one world contains intrinsic duplicates of both» (Lewis, 2008, p. 69).

¹⁷ As Lewis succinctly puts it: «So we have a sufficient condition: if two things are spatiotemporally related, then they are worldmates» (Lewis, 2008, p. 71).

In other words, and to put it bluntly, if the question were “what is a world, in general?”, the answer would be: the totality of what stands in a spatiotemporal relation to some one *hic et nunc*. Since a world is the existence of a spatiotemporal system hinging on some one *hic et nunc* as its corresponding *Nullpunkt*, then the plurality of worlds-thesis boils down to the existence of a plurality of spatiotemporal systems; now, since any and every (spatiotemporal) determination is possible only “within” a world, namely, in relation to some one *hic et nunc*, then the spatiotemporal systems themselves (i.e., the “worlds”) do not, and cannot stand in a (spatiotemporal) relation to one another. There is no “all-embracing” spatiotemporal system (no all-encompassing world), with its *hic et nunc*, including all the existent worlds (or systems): «A world is unified, then, by the spatiotemporal interrelation of its parts. There are no spatiotemporal relations across the boundary between one and another; but no matter how we draw a boundary within a world, there will be spatiotemporal relations across it» (Lewis, 2008, p. 71). Lewis is inviting us to imagine an infinite plurality of spatiotemporal systems—each of which anchored in a *hic et nunc*—that cannot be said to be, for instance, simultaneously existent, for no relation actually occurs between them.

There are countless other words, other very inclusive things. Our world consists of us and all our surroundings, however remote in time and space; just as it is one big thing having lesser things as its parts, so likewise do other worlds have lesser otherworldly things as parts. The worlds are something like remote planet; except that most of them are much bigger than mere planets, and they are not remote. Neither are they nearby. They are not at any spatial distance whatever from here. They are not far in the past or future, nor for that matter near; they are not at any temporal distance whatever from now. They are isolated: there are no spatiotemporal relations at all between things that belong to different worlds. Now does anything that happens at one world cause anything to happen at another (Lewis, 2008, p. 2).

Even if Lewis’ position seems to be quite clear, a remark is necessary—one bearing less upon his reasoning than the wording through which it is formulated. For, after we maintain that no (further) spatiotemporal relations can bind the “spatiotemporal relations themselves” (no world can actually include or embrace all the other worlds), then the description of them as «isolated» sounds quite inappropriate: indeed, “to be isolated” or “to be in isolation” is a spatiotemporal determination, even if only a “negative” one. As is Brünnhilde

encircled and protected by magical flame, so whatever is *isolated* is isolated *from* something or someone else: «Muß ich dich meiden, / und darf nicht minnig / mein Gruß dich mehr grüßen», sadly explains Wotan to his beloved daughter (*Die Walküre*, 2, II).

Let us see how Lewis expands on this in section 1.9 on *Actuality*:

I say that ours is one of many worlds. Ours is the actual world; the rest are not actual. Why so? I take it to be a trivial matter of meaning. I use the word “actual” to mean the same as “this-wordly”. When I use it, it applies to my world and my worldmates; to this world we are part of, and to all parts of this world. And if someone else uses it, whether he be a worldmate of ours or whether he be unactualised, then [...] it applies likewise to his world and his worldmates (Lewis, 2008, p. 92).

This is what Lewis labels «the “indexical analysis” of actuality»—which he had already outlined in his 1970 «Anselm and Actuality». Here is how Lewis presents it by quoting from his earlier essay:

I suggest that “actual” and its cognates should be analyzed as indexical terms: terms whose reference varies, depending on relevant features of the context of utterance. The relevant feature of context, for the term “actual”, is the world at which a given utterance occurs. According to the indexical analysis I propose, “actual” (in its primary sense) refers at any world *w* to the world *w*. “Actual” is analogous to “present”, an indexical term whose reference varies depending on a different feature of context: “present” refers at any time *t* to the time *t*. “Actual” is analogous to “here”, “I”, “you”, and “aforementioned”—indexical terms depending for their reference respectively on the place, the speaker, the intended audience, the speaker’s acts of pointing, and the foregoing discourse (Lewis, 1970, pp. 184-185).

A series of remarks is necessary.

- It is important to keep in mind that Lewis’ strategy does not consist in reducing the meaning of the word «actual» to that of indexicals such as «present» or «here»: the claim being that it *functions* just like them, so that whenever *actual* is used, employed or uttered in a specific world, it refers to, or «denotes» *w*. As Lewis writes in the 1970 essay: «at any world *w*, the name “the actual world” *denotes* or *names* *w*; the predicate “is actual” *designates* of *is true of* propositions true at *w*» (Lewis, 1970, p. 185). However, it seems to

us that two things need to be distinguished: for, one thing is to say that «actual» functions like an indexical, quite another to explain what the *actuality* of a world, so referred to or denoted, is. And the latter, as far as we understand Lewis' argument, is tantamount to all the spatiotemporal relations “anchored”, so to speak, in some one *hic et nunc*. In other words, and to elaborate on Lewis' examples: to say that something «is actual» means that this something is in a spatiotemporal relation to some one *hic et nunc*; to claim that a proposition «is true» means that it refers to something standing in a spatiotemporal relation to some one *hic et nunc*. Now, being the *hic et nunc* sort of “axis” itself an indexical, it follows that we are confronted with a double system of indexicals, as it were: the «actual» functions as an “indexical” and denotes the totality of all the spatiotemporal relations revolving around some one “indexical” *hic et nunc*.

- This sense of the «actual»—as Lewis stresses—is the «primary» one. Indeed, as the 1970 essay had already clearly explained: «we can distinguish primary and secondary senses of “actual” by asking what world “actual” refers to at a world *w* in a context in which some other world *v* is under consideration. In the primary sense, it still refers to *w*, as in “If Max ate less, he would be thinner than he actually is”. In the secondary sense it shifts its reference to the world *v* under consideration, as in “If Max ate less, he would actually enjoy himself more”» (Lewis, 1970, p. 185). Accordingly, when we say—at a given *w*—that some other world is actual, we are ascribing to the latter “actual” only a «secondary sense»: secondary for us, of course, and in relation to our *hic et nunc*; «primary», on the contrary, in relation to this world's own *hic et nunc*.
- As the 1970 essay goes on to point out, «“This is the actual world” is true whenever uttered in any possible world. This is not to say, of course, that all worlds are actual» (Lewis, 1970, p. 186). It is false to say that «All worlds are actual», for «Everyone may truly call his own world actual, but no one, wherever located, may truly call all the worlds actual». Indeed, if we take «an *a priori* point of view and ignore our own location in time», or «if we ignore our own location among the worlds» (Lewis, 1970, p. 187), we cannot use «indexical terms like “actual”». For, in order to assert that «all worlds are actual» we should be able to adopt a *pensée du survol*, as Merleau-Ponty says, but this is precisely what prevents the indexical «actual» from having a sense (whether primary or secondary).

This is why *On the Plurality of Worlds* recognizes that

Given my acceptance of the plurality of worlds, the relativity is unavoidable. I have no tenable alternative. For suppose instead that one world alone is *absolutely* actual. There is some special distinction which that one world alone possesses, not relative to its inhabitants or to anything else but *simpliciter*. I have no idea how this supposed absolute distinction might be understood (Lewis, 1970, p. 93).

The two extremes that Lewis aims at avoiding are the claims that (i) “All worlds are actual” and (ii) “Only one world, perhaps this one, is absolutely actual”. If the latter amounts to (falsely) ascribing such a world «some special distinction» (which it does not possess), the former derives from the (equally false) assumption of a *pensée du survol*, which strips the indexical «actual» of its sense.

Now, the «relativity» that Lewis proposes is that of an infinite number (what he calls «plurality») of worlds, that is to say, and being a world all the spatiotemporal relations anchored in a *hic et nunc*, an infinite number (a plurality) of unrelated *hic et nunc*'s, each of them counting as primarily actual for itself and only secondarily in relation to all the others (...and vice versa). If each *hic et nunc* can lay claim to be «primarily» actual, the potential ὄβρις (“I am the only one to be actually actual, to be absolutely actual”) involved in such a belief is immediately “dispelled” by the awareness that all the other worlds and *hic et nunc*'s, too, can make (and *de facto* are making) the same demand. Now, if the dismissal of (ii) is understandable, for it directly derives from the “relativity thesis”, the claim that this should also avoid (i) is more puzzling; indeed, it is very difficult to resist the temptation of asserting: “All worlds are actual” just because—in this case—we would not making the distinction between a «primary» and a «secondary» sense of the indexical «actual». Or, the other way around: it is not evident why—once the primary-secondary distinction of the sense of the indexical «actual» has been recognized—one cannot still bluntly say: “All worlds are actual”. Otherwise, how would it be possible to say that «If I am right, otherworldly things exist *simpliciter*» (Lewis, 2008, pp. 2, 3)?

This being recognized, this first section of our essay is brought full circle: for, the view endorsed by Lewis (there exists a plurality of worlds, i.e., of unrelated spatiotemporal systems, each of them with its *hic et nunc* as a *Nullpunkt*) is *precisely* the one, whose impossibility and inconceivability Husserl's *Auslegung der Fremderfahrung* aims at showing once and for all. As §60 of the *Cartesian*

Meditations rhetorically asks: «Is it conceivable (*erdenklich*) [...] that two or more separate (*getrennte*) pluralities of monads (*Monandenvielheiten*), which are not in communion, co-exist, each of them accordingly constituting a world of its own, so that together they constitute two worlds that are separate *ad infinitum*, i.e., two infinite spaces and space-times?» (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 166–167). Husserl’s answer is unequivocal: *Offenbar ist das [...] ein purer Widersinn*. For now, let us simply point out that the task of the present essay is to evaluate and elaborate on such a Husserlian claim: however it would be a mistake to overlook the differences between (α), (β) and (γ).

In a certain way, (α) and (γ) represent the two extremes of what we would dub the same tendency: the one to *explicitly* deny that there is, and *de jure* there can be, only one real world (Lewis) always identical to itself (Waldenfels). If in Lewis the denial takes the form of a pluralization of existence, i.e., of actual worlds as separate *Räume und Raum-Zeiten* (to speak like Husserl), in Waldenfels it is presented as a direct rejection of the «identity» of both the world and the things; if in the former a plurality of unrelated actual and real worlds is added to the one we live in, in the latter a plurality of (more or less) unrelated real worlds is obtained as a result of the denial of the identity of the world we all live in (and of the things as well). Although when it comes to Waldenfels one could simply, and polemically, object that he lacks the distinction between *Welt* and *Umwelt*, from the standpoint of Husserl the “continental” thinker and the “analytic” philosopher meet at a specific crossroad: that of the *transcendental function of the “synthesis”*—which they both fail to acknowledge. In-between, there stands Rorty and his “hermeneutical” interpretation of Kuhn’s paradigms (β)—which we have understood as a variation on (α). In this respect, also the difference between Waldenfels and Rorty is quite telling: if Rorty’s view, too, can be accused of overlooking the distinction between *Welt* and *Umwelt*, Waldenfels goes as far as to assert that the things themselves are every time different (it is not *the same* steps; it is not *the same* script), depending on the *Auffassung* of them.

2. Husserl’s “Transcendental Argument”

At the very end of §55 of the *Fifth Mediation*—dedicated to elucidating the “constitution” of *Naturas die erste Form der Objektivität*—Husserl presents his conclusion with concise and, we could say, quite unequivocal terms:

In this way, the co-existence of my ego (and of my concrete ego in general) and

the other ego, of my intentional life and theirs, of my realities and theirs, in short: a common time-form is originally instituted. As a consequence, every primordial temporality immediately acquires the mere significance of being the individually subjective mode of appearance of the objective one. In this connection, we see that the temporal community of the constitutively inter-related monads is indissoluble, because it is tied up essentially with the constitution of a world and a world time (Husserl, 1973a, p. 156).

What *Welt* (meanings in this passage the same as “nature” as the first form of objectivity) stands for is a system of co-existence of egos, notably of my concrete ego and that of the other. Now, even if the passage accounts for such *Koexistenz* in both the more general terms of «a common time-form» and the specific ones «of my intentional life and theirs, of my *realities* and theirs», the emphasis on *Realitäten* is Husserl’s—as if the primary way of understanding the constitution of a world were in terms of a *co-existence of... realities*. In other words, the ultimate aspiration of the *Meditation* is not to clarify the *Fremderfahrung per se*; the latter, in fact, has *de facto* always already taken place, and the phenomenologist’s task is to descriptively explicate the *possibility* of an undeniable reality, that is, of a *fact* (*Das Faktum der Erfahrung von Fremden* (§48)) that—by having already taken place—teleologically “guides” and justifies the *Auslegung*. As Husserl himself acknowledges: «If we stick to our factual experience of the stranger (*faktische Fremderfahrung*) as it comes to take place at any time (*jederzeit zustandekommende*), we find that actually the sensuously seen body is experienced forthwith as that of the other and not merely as an indication of them» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 150). In this case, the *facts* dictate. What the *facts* cannot decide is whether there is or can be a plurality of unrelated inter-subjectivities, that is—being «nature» as «the first form of objectivity» the correlate of the inter-subjectivity—whether there can be a plurality of natures, a plurality of unrelated worlds. The “demonstration” of the impossibility of such a “scenario” (its being *ein purer Widersinn*) is the *transcendental argument* lying at the very heart of the *Auslegung*. The combination of the latter (the phenomenological *Auslegung der Fremderfahrung* as it *factually* occurs) with the “transcendental argument” (i.e., *de jure* there cannot be more than *one* nature, more than *one* monadological inter-subjectivity having *one* nature as its “correlate”) results in what the very end of §60 will hold as the “metaphysical outcome” of the *Auslegung*; namely: that *there cannot be any other monadological inter-subjectivity than the factual one*; there cannot be any other nature or world (these two being synonyms here) than *this* one, the one

constituted by my concrete «factual-transcendental» monad¹⁸.

*Auslegung des Faktums der Erfahrung von Fremden +
“Transcendental Argument” =
Metaphysical Outcome*

As Husserl will conclude §60, thereby bringing full circle the line of thought of the *Meditation*:

the fact I am prescribes whether other monads are others for me and what they are for me. I can only find them; I cannot create others that shall exist for me. If I imagine myself as a pure possibility different from what I actually am, that possibility in turn prescribes what monads exist for him as others. And, proceeding in this fashion, I recognize that each monad having the status of a concrete possibility pre-delineates a compossible universe, a closed world of monads, and that two worlds of monads are impossible, just as two possible variations of my ego [...] are impossible (Husserl, 1973a, p. 168) 19.

If the *Auslegung der Fremderfahrung* is what almost the entirety of the *Fifth Meditation* is about, and the metaphysical outcome is explicitly brought to the fore at the very end of §60, what we have referred to as “transcendental argument” is made explicit over the course of §60 but preliminarily and systematically set up in the paragraph under scrutiny (§55). Let us see it better.

Now, as we move backward from the conclusion of §55 (quoted above) we will immediately find ourselves confronted with an example (*lehrreiches Beispiel*) that Husserl—once he is finished with the problem at hand—makes to show the structural analogy between such a problem’s solution and the constitution of other «objectual unities»: «This identification is no greater enigma than any other synthetic identification». If the problem is «How does one of my own lived-experiences acquire for me the sense and status of an existent one (*seienden*), something existing with its identical temporal form and identical temporal content?», then the answer will be that even if the «original» is gone, I

¹⁸ As Husserl writes in the *Fourth Meditation*: «By the method of transcendental reduction each one of us, as Cartesian meditator, was led back to their transcendental ego, naturally with their concrete-monadic content as this factual ego (*dieses faktische*), the one and only absolute ego» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 103).

¹⁹ On this text, see De Santis, 2018a, §4.3; for a different perspective, see the important analyses by Bancalari, 2010.

can always go back to it and do so with evidence:

But these repeated representations are evidently themselves a temporal sequence; and each is separate from the others. In spite of this, however, a synthesis of identification connects (*verknüpft*) them in the evident consciousness of the same that implies the same, never repeated temporal form, filled up with the same content. Here, as everywhere else, the same means therefore an identical intentional object of separate lived-experiences, hence an object immanent in them only as something non-really inherent (Husserl, 1973a, p. 155).

The last sentence testifies to the “generalizing” (*hier wie überall*) conclusion of Husserl’s argument: *dasselbe*, «the same», is constituted—thereby turning out to be something like an entity (*seiende*)—as the intentional “correlate” of the *Synthesis der Identifizierung*: Which means that, as far as §55 is concerned, it is to the connection of *dasselbe*, *Synthesis der Identifizierung*, and the *seiend*-resulting aspect of the “correlate” that attention shall be paid.

This is how Husserl describes what is implied in the *Vergemeinschaftung der Monaden*. «The first thing constituted in the form of community, and the *foundation for all other inter-subjective things that are in common*, is the community of nature, along with that of the stranger’s lived-body and the stranger’s psycho-physical ego together with one’s psycho-physical ego» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 149). Husserl’s German reads *in eins mit*; in other words: the constitution of «nature» as «the first form of objectivity» is accomplished *in eins mit* the constitution of the other as a psycho-physical ego; or, to go the other way around: the constitution of the other as a «psycho-physical» ego *eo ipso* results in the constitution of «nature» as «the first form of objectivity».

After remarking that the “other” first appears only as a *Körper* within my nature as «my synthetic unity», Husserl puts the following question:

How can I speak at all of the same body, as appearing within my primordial sphere in the mode There and within theirs and to them in the mode Here? The two primordial spheres, mine which is for me as ego the original one, and theirs which is for me an appresented one—are they not separated by an abyss I cannot actually cross, since crossing it would mean, after all, that I acquired an original (rather than an appresenting) experience of someone else? [...] The body belonging to my original sphere and the body constituted, after all, quite separately in the other ego become identified and are called the identical lived-body of the other. How does this identification come about? How can it come about? (Husserl, 1973a, p. 150).

An *Abgrund* “separates” the two «primordial spheres», that of my own concrete ego and that of the other; an «abyss» that, were it impossible to be bridged, the result would be the constitution within my sphere, not of the other *Körper* as an ego, but of just another *Körper*. Since the same applies to the other’s primordial sphere as well (for, they would constitute just another *Körper* rather than this *Körper* as an other ego, mine), no inter-subjectivity will ever come to take place. As is apparent, the problem is how *dasselbe* can come to be constituted, namely the *unity* of what appears to me merely as a *Körper* and this very same *Körper*’s belonging to an ego as a psycho-physical «unity»: «This implies, however, that from the outset what this experience presents must belong to the same object (*desselben Gegenstandes*)» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 151). As a quite famous passage asserts:

It is the same nature, but in the mode of appearance: as if I were standing over there, at the place of the stranger’s lived-body. The body is the same, given to me as the body there, and to them as the body here, the central body. Furthermore, «my» whole nature is the same as the other’s. In my primordial sphere it is constituted as an identical unity of my manifold modes of givenness an identical unity in changing orientations around my lived-body (the zero body, the body in the absolute Here), an identical unity of even richer multiplicities that, as changing modes of appearance pertaining to different senses, as varying perspectives, belong to each particular orientation as here or there and also, in a quite particular way, belong to my lived-body, which is inseparable from the absolute Here (Husserl, 1973a, p. 152).

In perfect compliance with the *in eins mit* previously discussed, the passage aims at describing two things at once: both the constitution of the other *Körper* as a psycho-physical egological “unity” and that of nature. The seemingly counter-factual aspect of the claim *as if I were standing over there, at the place of the stranger’s lived-body* (*wie wenn ich dort anstelle des fremden Leibkörpers stünde*) is thus meant to point to a twofold order of “sameness”: in the first place, it is the “sameness” of the body to be at stake—of both the body of the other («The body is the same, given to me as the body there, and to them as the body here, the central body») and mine («“my” whole nature is the same as the other’s»). This is the case, however, due to *the “same” system of syntheses and appearances*:

In the appresentation of the other the synthetic systems are the same, with all their modes of appearance, accordingly with all the possible perceptions and the noematic contents of these: except that the actual perceptions and the modes of givenness actualized therein, and also in part the objects actually perceived, are

not the same; rather the objects perceived are precisely those perceivable from there, and as they are perceivable from there (Husserl, 1973a, p. 152).

What we are confronted with is thereby an overall *synthetic system of appearances*, that is, a system of syntheses and modes of appearances.

As Husserl goes on to recognize, it is not the case that I first have an appresented second original sphere (that of the other's) with a second nature, and I "subsequently" ask about the possibility for the two systems of appearances (mine and the other's) to be the appearances of «the same objective nature»: «Quite the contrary, the identity-sense (*Identitätssinn*) of my primordial nature and that of the presentified other is already and necessarily brought about by the appresentation itself and the unity that it, as appresentation, necessarily has with the presentation co-functioning with it». Were we to draw upon the analogy that, as we saw earlier, Husserl himself sets forward toward the end of §55, we could say that: as a «synthesis of identification» binds, *verknüpft*, a series of my *Erlebnisse*, thereby constituting *the same* as «an *identical* intentional object of separate lived-experiences» and marking it with the *seiend*-character, so the *Identitätssinn* is brought about by a synthetic system of appearances and their actual or actualized system of perceptions; as Husserl phrases it: «From this it follows, as is easily understandable, that *every* nature-object experienced [actualized perception] or experienceable [possible perception] by me in the lower layer receives an appresentational stratum [...], one united in a synthesis of identification with a stratum given to me in the mode of primordial originality: the same nature-object in the other's mode of givenness» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 153). This means that, while in my original sphere the *Synthesis der Identifizierung* contributes to constituting the other as a psycho-physical unity (*derselbe Gegenstand*), so the system of synthetic appearances, notably the *Synthesis der Identifizierung*, that the other and I both have («die synthetischen Systeme [sind] dieselben»²⁰) constitutes at the same time the *Identitätssinn* of the «nature-object» (*dasselbe Naturobjekt*) itself. In terms of the synthetic system: what Husserl calls nature-object is the identity of sense of an actualized perception ("mine") with a

²⁰ «It is implicit in the sense of my accomplished apperception of the other that their world, the world belonging to their appearance-systems, must be experienced forthwith as the same as the world belonging to my appearance-systems; and this involves an identity of our appearance-systems (*eine Identität des Erscheinungssysteme*)» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 154).

possible one (“appresentational stratum”)²¹.

Now, this being recognized, what is the specific *seiend*-character of *the same* that results from the latter «synthesis of identification» of the general «system of appearances»? Without getting into any discussion of the conceptual plexus “normality”-“abnormality”, and the latter’s constitution (for it is a task that goes far beyond our ability), it is time to elaborate on the *wirklich*-character of the world so constituted, namely as the original *Koexistenz* of my ego and that of the other. As we shall soon see, this brings us directly to the core of what we have called “transcendental argument” as Husserl brings it to the fore in §60. Here is what Husserl remarks, in such a way elaborating on the idea of an objective world as «existing for us and only by virtue of our own sources of sense, a world that can have neither sense (*Sinn*) nor existence (*Dasein*) for us otherwise»:

The objective world has existence by virtue of a harmonious confirmation (*Bewährung*) of the apperceptive constitution, once this has succeeded: a confirmation thereof by the continuance of experiencing life with a consistent harmoniousness, which always becomes re-established as extending through any corrections that may be required to that end (Husserl, 1973a, p. 154).

As far as this passage is concerned, Husserl is making the point to the effect that the “world”, which up to now was regarded only in terms of a «co-existence» of egos, namely as the *Identitätssinn* of a system of (possible and actualized) appearances, is approached from the angle of its *Dasein*. Which is the correlate of a specific form of «synthesis», what Husserl calls here *Bewährung*: as a matter of fact, the *Third Meditation* has already clarified such a notion, and this is why Husserl does not feel the urge to tackle its meaning and sense anew; and it is by implicitly hinging upon what the *Third Meditation* has already said that in §60 Husserl will expound the “transcendental argument”. For the sake of our problems, we will first go back to the *Third Meditation*, so as to make the reader aware of how the *Bewährung* is to be comprehended, and then move forward directly to §60.

²¹ «L’identité du monde, en tant que même monde perçu par deux consciences, est finalement ramenée par Husserl au modèle de la synthèse d’identification, telle qu’elle est opérée par une seule conscience» (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 259). Now, Ricoeur’s claim holds descriptively true to the extent that Husserl himself *de facto* refers to what could be labeled the “intra-subjective” synthesis of identification («How does one of my own lived-experiences acquire for me the sense and status of an existent one [...]?») to better clarify (he speaks indeed of *lehrreiches Beispiel*) what is at stake in §55; yet, as we have tried to argue for, the constitution of the identity of the world is understood by Husserl in terms of a more general synthetic system of appearances, which is the same in both my case and the other’s (or, better: of a more general synthetic system, of which mine and the other’s are two exemplifications).

The *Third Meditation* introduces «a more pregnant concept of constitution»; if up to now it has not mattered whether the objects in questions were truly existent (*wahrhaft seiende*), possible, or simply impossible, it is now time to do justice to such distinctions. How? Here is Husserl's claim:

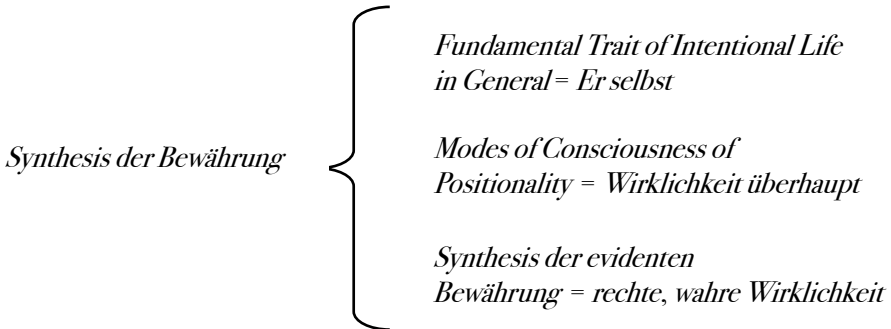
Among such multiplicities [of synthetic modes of consciousness] are included those syntheses that, with regard to the initial intending, have the typical style of verifying (*bewährender*) and, in particular, of evidently verifying (*bewährender*) syntheses—or else, on the contrary, that of nullifying and evidently nullifying syntheses. When such a synthesis takes place, the meant object has, correlatively, the evident characteristic of being (*des seienden*) or of non-being (*nicht-seienden*) (i.e., of the annulled, cancelled being) (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 91-92).

The «harmonious confirmation» of §55 is then to be primarily comprehended, against the backdrop of «a more pregnant concept of constitution», as a specific form of synthesis, of a synthetic form of consciousness. This being preliminarily recognized, the notion of *Bewährung* as a form of synthesis is meant to fulfill three different, yet closely related, functions.

- On a very broad level, Husserl speaks of *Synthesis der Bewährung* to refer to «the striving and actualizing intention» in the case of «anything already meant or meanable» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 93). It expresses the «*fundamental trait of intentional life in general*»: «Any consciousness, without exception, either is itself already characterized as evidence (as giving its object originaliter) or has an essential tendency toward conversion into givings of its object originaliter, that is, toward syntheses of verification (*auf Synthesen der Bewährung*), which belong essentially in the domain of the “I can”». Accordingly, the notion of *identity*, too, receives a quite general sense and meaning: it is the identity of the given object as corresponding to the original intention of it.
- On a less general level, and given the fundamental “modal” distinction between *Wirklichkeit* and *Wirklichkeit-als-ob*, the *Synthesis der Bewährung* characterizes all the modes of being (*Sein, Möglich-Sein, Wahrscheinlich-Sein, Zweifelhaft-Sein, Nicht-Sein*) as they fall under the former rather than the latter. As a consequence, its correlate corresponds to all the different modes of *positionality* in opposition to the quasi-forms thereof (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 93-94; see Belussi, 1990).
- On an even more specific level, and within the just introduced idea of *Wirklichkeit*, the *Synthesis der Bewährung* stands for the most fundamental

form of «positionality» (which Husserl calls *rechte oder wahre Wirklichkeit*), and is hence called *selbstgebende Synthesis der evidenten Bewährung*. As Husserl puts it toward the end of §26: «[...] we can be sure of the actual-being only by virtue of a synthesis of evident verification, which presents rightful or true actuality itself (*rechte oder wahre Wirklichkeit*). It is apparent that truth or the true actuality of objects is to be obtained only from evidence, and that it is evidence alone by virtue of which an *actually* existing, true, rightly accepted object of whatever form or kind has sense for us» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 95).

The state of affairs can be so presented:



Let us briefly sum up what has been argued thus far. If we have decided to switch back to some of the arguments of the *Third Meditation* it was in order to clarify the “claim”, advanced by Husserl in §55, according to which the «objective world»—also designated as «nature» as «the first form of objectivity»—obtains its existence, *Dasein*, from what turned out to be a specific form of synthesis, *die Synthesis der Bewährung*. As we should remember, Husserl’s conclusion in §55 was that: «it is no longer an enigma how I can identify a nature constituted in me with a nature constituted by someone else (or, stated with the necessary precision: how I can identify a nature constituted in me *as* a nature constituted by someone else)». The combination of the “thesis” that the *Identitätssinn* of the «nature-object» is constituted by a synthetic system of appearances (namely, by the synthesis of identification of possible and actualized perceptions) *with* the claim that the *Dasein* of the world is the correlate of the *Synthesis der Bewährung* yields what we have thus far referred

to as Husserl's "transcendental argument", namely, that "*de jure* there cannot be more than *one* actual nature, more than *one* monadological inter-subjectivity having *one* real nature as its correlate". Let us label the former "*Koexistenz*-thesis" and the latter "*Bewährung*-claim"; what is thereby obtained is:

Koexistenz-Thesis + *Bewährung*-Claim = Transcendental Argument

We already know as Husserl frames the question in §60: «Is it conceivable [...] that two or more separate pluralities of monads (*Monandenvielheiten*), which are not in communion, co-exist, each of them accordingly constituting a world of its own, so that together they constitute two worlds that are separate *ad infinitum*, i.e., two infinite spaces and space-times?» (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 166-167). We already know the answer, too: *Offenbar ist das [...] ein purer Widesinn*. Let us quote Husserl *in extenso*, so as to have the argument fully unfolded before our eyes:

each of such groups of monads has, to be sure, its possibly quite different looking world. But the two worlds are then necessarily mere surrounding worlds, belonging to these two inter-subjectivities respectively, and mere aspects of a single objective world, which is common to them. Indeed, the two inter-subjectivities are not absolutely isolated. As imagined by me, each of them is in a necessary communion with me (or with me in respect of a possible variation of myself) as the constitutive original monad relative to them. Accordingly, they belong in truth to a single universal community, which includes me and comprises unitarily all the monads and groups of monads that can be conceived as co-existent. Actually (in *Wirklichkeit* geben), then, there can exist only a single community of monads, the community of all co-existing monads: hence there can exist only one objective world, only one objective time, only one objective space, only one objective nature. This one nature must exist, if there are any structures in me that involve the co-existence of other monads (Husserl, 1973a, p. 167).

The passage makes several points worth being carefully distinguished.

- That there can be, and *de facto* there is, a "plurality" of inter-subjectivities is not denied by the argument; the point is that they all shall be understood as "part" of the one and only transcendental inter-subjectivity having the one nature as its own correlate: as all of these (even factually separate) inter-

subjectivities are only part of the one transcendental inter-subjectivity, so are all their different correlates solely and exclusively parts of the one nature as «the first form of objectivity».

- The fact that Husserl describes the notion of *Um-Welt* by the quite broad term *aussehende Welt* (different *looking world*) testifies to the very “general” meaning he is ascribing to such concept: the notion of *Umwelt* covering the entire spectrum that goes from that of “cultural” world as a correlate of a specific inter-subjectivity to «what I know of the world» (*was ich von der Welt weiß*), which is the way in which the world looks or appears to me (δοκεῖ μοι).
- The last sentence of the passage expresses the “*Koexistenz*-thesis”: this *one nature* must exist (*es muß... geben*) if there are any structures that involve *das Mit-sein der anderen Monaden* (such is the twofold meaning and sense of the phrase *die Vergemeinschaftung der Monaden* analyzed above).

However, this is not enough of an argument to rule out the claim of a plurality of unrelated worlds (i.e., natures) as correlates of a plurality of “unrelated” inter-subjectivities. As Husserl recognizes, I can easily imagine several inter-subjectivities and worlds, which would stand in a relation to me as a possible variation of myself. What is needed is the “*Bewährung*-claim”, whose conjunction with the “*Koexistenz*-thesis” only can yield the transcendental argument and thus rule out the possibility of a plurality of unrelated worlds as a «counter-sensical» one. Here is what Husserl further explains: «It is to be remarked in this connection that, in a free variation, I can imagine first of all myself, this apodictic-factual ego, as being otherwise and can thus acquire the system of possible variations of myself—each of which, however, is annulled by each of the others and by the ego, which I actually (*wirklich*) am» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 167). Here, too, some remarks are required.

- By employing the verb *aufheben* (to annul) and the adverb *wirklich*, Husserl is implicitly relying on what already maintained in the Third Meditation concerning the distinction between «verifying (*bewährender*) syntheses» and «nullifying (*aufhebender*) syntheses»: as we already know, while the former’s correlate has den Charakter des seienden, the latter den Charakter des nicht-seienden.
- Now, the passage does not really help us decide whether the character of *Wirklichkeit* ascribed to my ego (i.e., «this apodictic-factual ego») corresponds to the “correlate” of either the second or the third of the three

meanings of the *Synthesis der Bewährung* distinguished above. Nevertheless, and since Husserl himself speaks of a system of in-compossibility (generated by the systematic variation of myself as a concrete ego), it might be assumed that what he has in mind is the second meaning of the *Synthesis der Bewährung*; whose “correlate” is thus *Wirklichkeit überhaupt* as opposed to the so-called *Wirklichkeit-als-ob* (and all its “internal” different modes of being).

The above argument could be so presented: each possible “variation” of myself yields a possible source for the constitution of a possible inter-subjectivity having a possible nature as its “correlate” (*Identitätssinn*): were any of these variations “real”, they would annul and cancel each other, as they are *de facto* «annulled» by *das ego, das ich wirklich bin*. By the same token, «I recognize that each monad, having validity as a concrete possibility, pre-delineates a compossible universe, namely, a closed *world of monads*, and that two worlds of monads are in-compossible, just like two possible modifications of my ego (or of any presupposedly thought ego whatever)» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 168).

Husserl’s transcendental argument can be broken down as follows:

- (i) any co-existence of monads results eo ipso in the constitution of an *Identitätssinn* as a correlate of their synthetic system of appearances (“Koexistenz-thesis”);
- (ii) the synthetic system of *Bewährungen—proper* to such co-existence of monads—brings about the character of *Wirklichkeit* of the relevant *Identitätssinn* (“*Bewährung-claim*”);
- (iii) if there is a “plurality” of co-existences of monads (*Monandenvielheiten*), there will also be a plurality of synthetic systems of appearance having a plurality of *Identitätssinne* as correlates, thus a plurality of synthetic systems of *Bewährungen* having a plurality of *Wirklichkeiten* as correlates.

Accordingly, only two alternatives seem to be available:

(iii’) *either* the two synthetic systems of *Bewährungen* join together and confirm each other, in such a way that only one single system of verifying syntheses holds, therefore there is only one *Identitätssinn* and only one «actual» (*wirkliche*) nature obtains;

(iii’’) *or* one of the two systems is annulled (*aufgehoben*) by the other, and thus reduced to the rank of mere possibility unable to constitute an «actual»

(*wirkliche*) nature as its correlate (which would hence be only a *Wirklichkeit-als-ob*-sort of nature)²².

We are now in a position to go back to—and understand—Husserl’s claim that the assumption of «two infinite spaces and space-times» (i.e., two transcendently separate inter-subjectivities) is *ein purer Widersinn*. The sense of Husserl’s position flows from *iii*: for, the “plurality of worlds”-thesis would contend that the worlds, namely, the two “inter-subjectivities” (to speak Husserl’s jargon) are neither in a *bewährende*-relation nor in an *aufhebende* one; they would present themselves neither as «actual» worlds nor as merely «possible» ones. If in the latter case they would be «annulled» by the actual synthetic system of appearances, in the former they would turn out to be parts of the one and only actual world as the correlate of the one synthetic system of appearances. To adopt Lewis’ terminology, a plurality of spatiotemporal systems hinging on a plurality of relevant *hic et nunc*’s is possible (as a plurality of *Identitätssinne*), but only to the extent that they count as *Wirklichkeiten-als-ob* («annulled» by the synthetic system constituted by *das ego, das ich wirklich bin*); otherwise, were they to count as actual, they would be only part of the one synthetic system of appearances.²³

²² The sequence has been slightly modified with respect to De Santis, 2018a, where we made no distinction between the syntheses constituting the “identity of sense” and those whose correlate is the *Wirklichkeit*.

²³ A remark is here necessary. As far as our problems are concerned, we should never forget that Husserl distinguishes between two notions of «possibility», which in this context might be called «real possibility» (*reale Möglichkeit*) and «groundless possibility» (*grundlose Möglichkeit*) (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 285-293): while the former is the one that holds *within* the domain of the *Wirklichkeit* according to a specific degree of “foundation” due to its motivations (this is why Husserl also speaks of *begründete Möglichkeit*), the latter is the possibility proper to the domain of the *Wirklichkeit-als-Ob* in general, which is hence said to be «groundless» in opposition to the former’s “grounded”-character. Nevertheless, and to the extent that even within the domain of the *Wirklichkeit-als-Ob* can hold different degrees of motivation, then the *grundlose Möglichkeit*, too, can be characterized as “*reale Möglichkeit*” (Husserl himself uses the inverted commas to stress the improper use of the adjective “real”): «The assumption that a possibility is actualized does not require the actualization of other possibilities. Instead, it carries out a certain selection in the domain of possibilities as phantasized possibilities and determines “real possibilities”» (Husserl, 1973b, p. 292). This being said, it becomes clear the way in which Husserl’s view can accommodate Lewis’. Let us read what Lewis remarks at the very beginning of his work: «The best known application [of the idea of a plurality of worlds] is to modality. Presumably, whatever it may be mean to call a world actual, it had better turn out that the world we are part of is the actual world. What actually is the case, as we say, is what goes on here. That is one possible way for a world to be. [...] If there are many worlds, and every way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world is, then whatever such-and-such might be the case, there is some world where such-and-such is the case. Conversely, since it is safe to say that no world is any way that a world could not possibly be, whenever there is some world at which such-and-such is the case, then it might be that such-and-such is the case. So

3. Excursus on the Synthesis

Having spoken of «synthesis», notably, «synthesis of identification» (*Synthesis der Identifizierung*), it is now time to elaborate a little bit on such expressions. Let us immediately point out that, as far as the *Cartesian Meditations* are concerned, Husserl clearly differentiates the concept of *Synthesis* from that of *Verbindung*: the latter in fact has two different and quite “broad” senses that need to be kept sharply separated from the former’s more technical meaning. On the one hand, *Verbindung* is any and every “connection” construed in as much a broad way as possible (e.g., the “connection” of a series of parts into a whole (*Verbindung zu Ganzheiten*) (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 76-77)). This is why Husserl can speak of *Weisen der Verbindung* (in the “plural”). On the other hand, it stands for what one could call the “unitary” outcome of the *Synthesis* itself. If the question were then the one as to what the *Synthesis* is, Husserl’s answer would be very straightforward: *die Urform des Bewußtseins*, the «original» or «primordial form of consciousness» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 77). As a consequence, the *Synthesis* is both a specific mode of connection (*Weise der Verbindung*) among others, i.e., the one characterizing consciousness (as Husserl says: «The mode of connection uniting consciousness with consciousness can be characterized as *synthesis*» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 77)), and what constitutes the *Verbindungen* themselves as its “unitary” result (e.g., Husserl speaks of the *verbunden-einheitlichen intentionalen Lebens* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 76)). Now, this being preliminarily acknowledged, in what sense is the *Synthesis* the *Urform des Bewußtseins*? Let us read Husserl’s description:

[...] if I take the perceiving of this die as the theme for my description, I see in pure reflection that this die is given continuously as an objective unity in a multiform and changeable multiplicity of manners of appearing, which belong determinately to it. These, in their temporal flow, are not an incoherent sequence of lived-experiences. Rather they flow away in the unity of a synthesis, such that in them one and the same is intended as appearing. The one identical die appears, now in near, now in far appearances (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 77-78).

modality turns into quantification: possibly there are blue swans iff, for some world *W*, at *W* there are blue swans» (Lewis, 2008, p. 5). Given the differentiation between *Wirklichkeit* and *Wirklichkeit-als-ob*, it might be claimed that a plurality of *Wirklichkeiten-als-ob* is enough to think of modality as quantification, i.e., as “quantification over *Wirklichkeiten-als-ob*”. Accordingly, the plurality of worlds-thesis turns into a plurality of *Wirklichkeiten-als-ob*-thesis: in so doing, we keep both the idea that there is only one «world» and a plurality of actualities (*als ob*).

The «die» example is meant to illustrate Husserl's general point, namely, that not only the *cogitata* but also the *cogitationes* are “synthetically” structured; and in order to differentiate the “synthetic” structure of the latter from the former's being their “unitary” result Husserl resorts to two different expressions: indeed, while the *cogitationes* are said *konkrete synthetische Ganzheiten*, the *cogitata* are presented as *Einheiten* and *identische Einheiten* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 79). That the synthesis is *die Urform des Bewußtseins* primarily means that whatever is *in* consciousness (*cogitationes*) or given *to* consciousness (*cogitata*) is either synthetically structured or the unitary result of some syntheses.

If, on the one hand, Husserl speaks of the «synthesis» as *die Urform des Bewußtseins*, on the other hand, he refers to the *Synthesis der Identifikation* as *die Grundform der Synthesis* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 79). What is the difference between *Urform* and *Grundform*? As far as we understand Husserl on this point, the former is meant to lay emphasis on the fact that consciousness as such is synthetically structured and structuring, that consciousness is *synthetic through and through*, that any and every *Leistung* of consciousness has itself a synthetic nature²⁴; on the contrary, the *Grundform* is the most basic form of synthesis, i.e., the one on which all the others build (*a* synthesis among others, even if the fundamental one). All the other forms of synthesis presuppose, rely and rest upon the *Synthesis der Identifikation* as *die Grund-Form der Synthesis*, for they would not even be «possible» without it. As Husserl points out, this is «the form that makes all other syntheses of consciousness possible» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 81). It follows therefrom that whatever is *in* consciousness or given *to* it is either synthetically structured or the unitary result of some syntheses, i.e., it is either directly or indirectly based on the *Synthesis der Identifikation*. What is such synthesis about?

²⁴ It would be quite interesting to compare Husserl's conception with the Kantian one, at least according to the way in which Husserl himself understands it. Let us read how he accounts for Kant's concept of “synthesis”: «Kant führt nun den ihm eigentümlichen Terminus “Synthesis” ein, nämlich so nennt er die im Subjekt sich vollziehende Leistung jener apperzeptiven Vereinheitlichung, wonach Mannigfaltigkeiten von Vorstellungen im Bewußtsein selbst die Bedeutung erhalten als die zur Einheit eines identischen äußeren Objekts zusammengehörigen Erfahrungen *von* eben diesem Objekt» (Husserl, 1956, p. 397). The terminology is quite similar, if not identical, to the one Husserl usually employs to characterize his own view: Husserl speaks of *Vereinheitlichung* as well as of the «unity of an identical external object»; nevertheless, we are under the impression that—by being a *Leistung* performed by or in the subject—such an idea of the synthesis is to be deemed parasitic upon the understanding of it as a *Grund-Form* of consciousness. In other words, the Kantian synthesis—construed by Husserl as a subjective *Leistung*—necessarily presupposes what might be called the more original conception of the synthesis as a primordial or original form.

If we consider the fundamental form of synthesis, namely identification, we encounter it first of all as an all-ruling, passively flowing synthesis in the form of the continuous consciousness of internal time. Every lived-experience has its lived-temporality. If it is a conscious process in which (as in the perception of the die) a worldly object appears as *cogitatum*, then we have to distinguish the objective temporality that appears [...] from the internal temporality of the appearing (for example: that of the die-perceiving). This appearing flows away with its temporal extents and phases, which, for their part, are continually changing appearances of the one identical die. Their unity is a unity of synthesis: not merely a continuous connectedness of cogitationes [...], but a connection that makes the unity of one consciousness, in which the unity of an intentional objectivity, as the same objectivity belonging to multiple modes of appearance, becomes constituted (Husserl, 1973a, pp. 79-80).

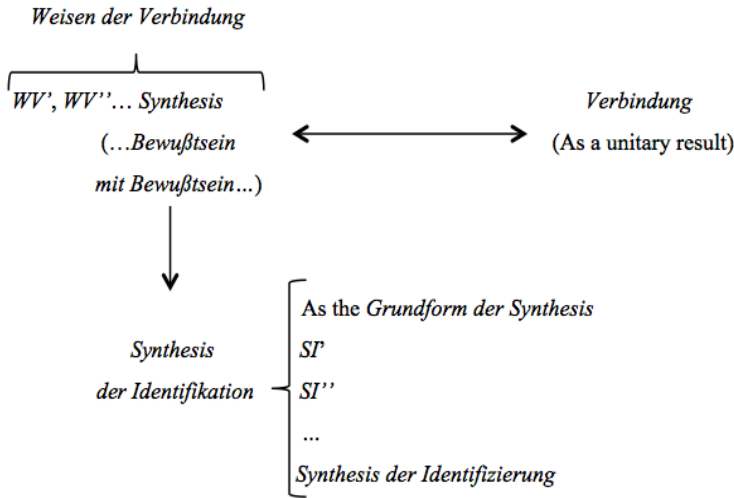
Two observations impose themselves.

- As Husserl points out, *die Synthesis der Identifikation* presents itself in the form of a continuous consciousness in which—or to which—anything and everything appears if it is to be constituted. It has to be kept in mind, however, that the «synthesis» in question, and its relevant *Identifikation*-process, does not bear upon the *cogitata*, but upon the *cogitationes*. *Die Synthesis der Identifikation* is the one constituting the «one consciousness» (*zu Einem Bewußtsein*), «in dem sich Einheit einer intentionalen Gegenständlichkeit... *konstituiert*»; it is the synthesis that makes it be «possible» for consciousness to be *ein Bewußtsein von...* (Husserl, 1973a, p. 79). Differently stated: in order for the *cogitata* to be constituted in their relevant identity as the correlates of some acts, consciousness has to synthetically constitute itself as *the one consciousness* through its many *cogitationes* (it is the synthesis of *cogitationes* «that make the unity of one consciousness»).
- Nevertheless, while introducing *die Grundform der Synthesis*, Husserl points out that *tritt sie uns zunächst*, «we encounter it first of all...». That of a «continuous consciousness» is the *first* form in which *die Synthesis der Identifikation* happens to be encountered; it is not the only one though. The synthesis of identification is to be deemed *die Grundform der Synthesis* to the extent that it is taken as the one at work at the level of «time-consciousness», but this is not its only possible form.

If we are on the right track, then what the *Fifth Meditation* will call *Synthesis*

der Identifizierung (§55) can be seen as one—among others—forms taken up by die Synthesis der Identifikation itself. If Husserl relies on two different, yet similar, expressions (Identifikation and Identifizierung) it is both to underline the analogous outcome and to not make any confusion between them.

The state of affairs so far discussed can be represented as follows (with *WV* standing for *Weise der Verbindung* and *SI* for *Synthesis der Identifikation*):



This being recognized, and before we move on to the last section of our investigation, let us sketch a quick history of how Husserl’s understanding of the *Synthesis der Identifikation* developed, so as to better appreciate the view held in the *Cartesian Meditations*.

In the *Logical Investigations*—where *Verbindung* and *Verknüpfung* mostly operate in the «formal-ontological» framework laid out by *Third Investigation* (Husserl, 1984a, §§1, 5, 6; on this, see the remarks by De Santis, 2015)—the concept of *Synthesis* is introduced in the *Fourth Investigation* (§§12, 13), and then expanded upon in a systematic way over the course of the *Sixth Investigation* and its phenomenology of knowledge. In particular, it is in §11 (dedicated to the so-called synthesis of distinction) that the turn of phrase *Synthesis... der Identifizierung* can be finally found. The issue Husserl is discussing in these paragraphs is that of the «dynamic unity of expression and expressed intuition» (§8) (i.e., the very problem of knowledge), which he

presents as follows: «In the dynamic relation the members of the relation [...] are disjoined in time: they unfold themselves in a temporal pattern» (Husserl, 1984b, p. 567). What happens is that we first have a stage of «mere thought», that is to say, of pure concept or mere signification, «to which a second stage of more or less adequate fulfillment is added, where thoughts repose as if satisfied in the sight of their object, which presents itself, *in virtue of* this consciousness of unity, as what is thought of in this thought» (Husserl, 1984b, pp. 567-568). The *Einheitsbewußtsein* is to be kept separated from the mere *Erfüllung* of the «pure concept» by means of a relevant intuition: indeed, not every *Erfüllung* results in «knowledge», but only the one in which the original signification and the intuited object are united, as it were. In this latter case—Husserl further explains—«we may also speak of *unity of identity*. If we compare both components of a unity of fulfillment [...] we assert their *objective identity*». *Einheitsbewußtsein*, *Identitätseinheit*, and *gegenständliche Identität*: such is the language employed to characterize the phenomenon of knowledge and its resulting objectual correlate. It is then in §11 that the jargon of *Synthesis* is introduced to shed light on the notion of «frustration» (*Enttäuschung*) as opposed to *Erfüllung*: «In the wider sphere of the acts to which distinctions of intention and fulfillment apply, *frustration* may be set beside fulfillment, as its incompatible contrary. The negative expression that we normally use in this case, for example even the term “non-fulfillment”, has not merely privative meaning: it points to a new descriptive fact, a form of synthesis as peculiar as fulfillment» (Husserl, 1984b, pp. 574-575). Two observations could be useful here. One, Husserl presents the «synthesis» as a «descriptive fact» (*ein deskriptives Faktum*), i.e., a *fact* of consciousness that can be observed psychologically, and thus described; two, the synthesis is presented as a positive *fact* to be detected even in the case of a negative phenomenon (frustration corresponding in fact to *non-fulfillment*). It might even be argued that the synthesis becomes visible as such, thereby describable, precisely in a *negative* phenomenon like that of frustration, where—despite the «conflict» taking place—a certain «unity» is still recognizable: the «unity» so experienced pointing to the synthesis as a psychological fact. It is important to emphasize that, as far as we understand Husserl here, the notion of synthesis is not to be equated with that of a *relation* between acts (in this case, in fact, Husserl speaks of *Verhältnis* (Husserl, 1984b, p. 576, §12)); there is synthesis when there occurs consciousness of a certain unity; the synthesis is what *poses* consciousness of a certain unity; or, the other way around: when there obtains consciousness of a certain unity a synthesis of

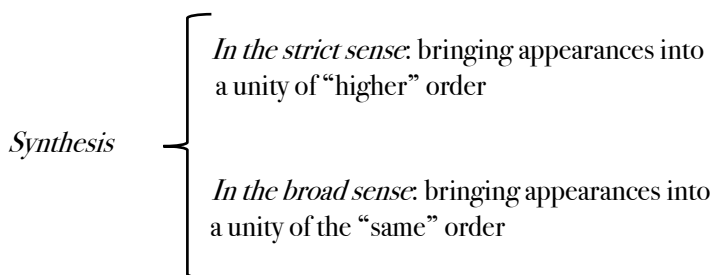
acts has already taken place.

The synthesis of knowledge was consciousness of a certain «agreement». The possibility correlated with agreement is, however, «disagreement» or «conflict»: intuition may not accord with a significant intention [...]. Conflict «separates», but the lived-experience of conflict puts things into relation and unity: it is a form of synthesis. If the previously studied synthesis was one of identification (*Identifizierung*), this new synthesis is one of distinction. [...] In the «distinction» that is here in question, the object of the frustrating act appears not the same as, distinct from the object of the intending act (Husserl, 1984b, p. 575).

As long as even conflicts result in a certain unity («the lived-experience of conflict puts things into relation and unity»), then the notion of *Identifizierung* imposes itself in order to distinguish «unity» from «unity»—that in which knowledge consists and, on the contrary, the one posed by the *Erlebnis des Widerstreites*. Just like any other synthesis, *die Synthesis von der Art der Identifizierung* can be called a «fact» of consciousness to be phenomenologically (i.e., psychologically) described; whose correlate, to adopt a later terminology, is not simply unity but *gegenständliche Identität*.

With respect to this first systematic account of the «synthesis» in general (and of the synthesis of identification in particular) within the framework of a phenomenological clarification of knowledge, a quite interesting development is offered by the 1907 *Ding und Raum* lectures. Let us immediately point out that Husserl distinguishes what he calls «syntheses in the strict sense» (*im engeren Sinn*) from those that, by contrast, might be called “syntheses in the broad sense of the term” (however, Husserl does not bother to actually label the latter). The former, Husserl succinctly writes, are those «that bring discrete appearances into a unity of higher order» (Husserl, 1973b, p. 60); accordingly, as one could easily surmise from this, a synthesis “in the broad sense” is one, which brings a series of appearances into a unity, yet not «a unity of higher order». An example of such synthesis in the broad sense is the one constituting «continuous unities, ones which already belong to the immanent essence of perception as individual, concrete and in itself simple». Differently phrased: a synthesis “in the broad sense” of the term is one that—in the immanent flux of what Husserl calls here «pre-empirical temporality»—binds the different and individual perceptions, thereby bringing them into, or constituting them as, «continuous unities». «Unities» that in this case belong to the same order as

their “ingredients”, as it were. A first and preliminary distinction is therewith obtained.



Accordingly, the *Synthesis der Kontinuität* (Husserl, 1973b, p. 28)—also referred to by Husserl as *kontinuierliche Synthesis* as the very subject matter of the «phenomenology of continuity» (Husserl 1973b, p. 99)—is not a synthesis «in the strict sense». Nevertheless, it is such synthesis that actually “grounds” (*fundieren*) the paradigmatic example of synthesis «in the strict sense» of the term: *die Synthesis der Identifikation* (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 25–30). This should not be confused, however, with what these lectures label—by resorting to a term with which we are familiar—*Synthesis der Identifizierung* (Husserl, 1973b, p. 155), which is a «logical synthesis» (*die logische Synthese*).

Now, and to go back to *die Synthesis der Identifikation*, Husserl ascribes two different senses to it. On the one hand, and by means of what could be considered a generalization of the discourse of the *Logical Investigations*, *die Synthesis der Identifikation* describes the «fulfillment» of any and every «empty pieces of apprehension» (Husserl, 1973b, 57): for instance, «perception is, as I also express it, a complex of full and empty intentions (rays of apprehension)», and the fulfillment of the latter by the former is precisely what the synthesis of identification in this first sense stands for²⁵. On the other hand, *die Synthesis der Identifikation*—as a synthesis in the strict sense of the term, that is, as bringing about a unity of higher order—, is presented by Husserl with the following words:

²⁵ In this respect, also the 1902–03 lectures on *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie* should be taken into consideration, where a true system of conscious syntheses is outlined for the first time, and where the “generalization” of the framework of the *Logical Investigations* is clearly accomplished (Husserl, 2001, p. 124 and ff.).

We said that in perceptions, by their very sense, their object is one and the same. What does the sense, the essence, of the perceptions have to do here? Let us reflect; the datum is this: the perceptions stand in the synthesis of identification (in der Synthesis der Identifikation), the unity, the unity of the identity-consciousness encompasses them.

[...] We are concerned with the «essential», and we notice here immediately that the identity-consciousness is not strapping tape (Bindfaden), with which one can join together any two arbitrary phenomena or perceptions; on the contrary, whether or not the connection is possible depends on the essence of the phenomena involved. A perception or representation of an elephant and that of a stone excludes their identification. [...] To intend the same object with evidence in several perceptions means nothing else than that, by essence, fit themselves into the unity of an identity-consciousness, i.e., that in their essence the possibility of such a unification is grounded a priori (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 27-28).

Die Synthesis der Identifikation is the one rooted in the essence of such and such phenomena and that—by means of such essential rootedness—“unite” them, or make them fit into the «unity» of an «identity-consciousness», and whose correlate is «the identity of what is perceived here and there» (Husserl, 1973b, p. 26). *Die Synthesis der Identifikation* unites the many perceptions in the unity of an identity-consciousness, thereby bringing about the object itself as a «higher order» unity.

With respect to Husserl’s approach in the *Logical Investigations*—where the synthesis is said to be a «descriptive fact»—what the passage makes clear about the more general concept of synthesis is its being grounded in the «essence» of such and such a phenomenon: the synthesis is different, there exists then a plurality of “possible” syntheses, depending on the *Wesen* of the phenomenon at hand; the synthesis being, in other words, that sort of «connection» (*eine gewisse Verbindung*) rooted in the essence of such and such a phenomenon, of such and such an *Erscheinung*: This being accepted, we are now in a position to wrap up our discourse so far, and present the major outcomes of such a short history of the concept of synthesis in Husserl. Three are the specific contexts touched upon.

(I) In the first one—that of the *Logical Investigations*—the synthesis is presented as a «descriptive fact»; now, since at the time phenomenology is still conceived

by Husserl as a form of «descriptive psychology» aiming at singling out and describing the «actual» or «real» content of consciousness (Husserl, 1984a, p. 21, where *aktuellen* is replaced with *reellen*), then a conclusion could be drawn that the synthesis, too, falls within such realm. Better: the synthesis is a descriptive fact to the extent that it is the synthesis of some real or actual contents of consciousness.

- (II) The 1907 framework, with phenomenology already on its way to becoming an eidetic science of transcendently purified phenomena (to speak like *Ideen... I*), discloses a new aspect concerning the synthesis: the synthesis being the specific *Verbindung* connecting the *Erscheinungen* according to their *Wesen*. Differently phrased: as long as an *Erscheinung* is given to consciousness (pleonastic expression!), a synthesis occurs, or can occur, based upon its essence.
- (III) In what can be labeled the more advanced and developed stage of the *Cartesian Meditations*, which combines “static” and “genetic” approach, the synthesis becomes the primordial or “original” form of consciousness, its *Ur-Form*—to resort to Husserl’s jargon. From a «fact» within the actual or «real» domain of consciousness to an «essence»-based connection between appearances up to its turning into the primordial «form» of consciousness itself²⁶. *From fact to form*: as one could put it.

4. The Sense of *Wirklichkeit*

With respect to the arguments set forth by Waldenfels in his *doxa*-essay, we have already tried to explain in what sense, for Husserl, the *Synthesis der Identifizierung* is appealed to as an irreducible form of consciousness: it is not only the synthesis “connecting” separate lived-experiences, thereby constituting *the same* identical intentional object (any and every object) as its “correlate” but—first and foremost—it is the synthesis that, given the same

²⁶ Let us also hasten to remark that *III* does not exclude *II* from its domain; quite the contrary. In order to appreciate the position propounded in the *Cartesian Meditations* (where the synthesis is the *Ur-Form* of consciousness), it is useful to recall what Husserl writes in §86 of *Ideen... I* regarding the so-called functional problems: «the greatest problems of all are *the functional problems*, or those of the “*constitution of consciousness-objectualities*”. These problems concern the manner in which noeses, for example with respect to nature, by animating what is materially there (*das Stoffliche*) and combining it into manifold-unitary continua and syntheses, bring about consciousness of something» (Husserl, 1976, p. 196). If this is the case, then a fourth scenario between *II* and *III* should be added: the scenario in which the «synthesis» is not yet the «original form» of consciousness but the “unitary continuum” resulting from the conjunction of “matter” and “animating form”; the continuum into which *das Stoffliche* is brought by the animating apprehension.

«synthetic system of appearances» which the other and I have in common, constitutes the identity-sense of nature as the first form of objectivity. This being said, and in light of the difference between *II* and *III*, Husserl's argument to the effect that the other and I share the same synthetic system of appearances can be broken down as follows:

- (i) if there is any consciousness—and being the synthesis the *Urform des Bewußtseins*—there will also be a (more or less articulated) system of syntheses;
- (ii) if there is any system of syntheses—and being the *Synthesis der Identifikation* the *Grundform der Synthesis*—there has already occurred the self-constitution of the identity of consciousness;
- (iii) in such synthetic system, any specific *Weise der Verbindung* connecting “consciousness” with “consciousness” (i.e., any synthesis) is rooted in the very essence of the relevant lived-experience;
- (iv) from which it follows that, were there a plurality of consciousnesses, the «synthetic system of appearances», i.e., the system of appearances based upon the syntheses, would be the same.

If this contributes to shedding light on the «identity-sense», or better, on its constitution as the one and only identical correlate of the one synthetic system of appearances (corresponding to what we have called the “*Koexistenz*-thesis”), what needs to be elaborated on is the constitution of the sense of what Husserl calls *Wirklichkeit* (i.e., the “*Bewährung*-claim”).

As we have already seen (§2), the constitution of the «identity-sense» of nature as the first form of objectivity is first presented by Husserl with the following words: «*every* nature-object experienced or experienceable by me in the lower layer receives an appresentational stratum [...], one united in a synthesis of identification with a stratum given to me in the mode of primordial originality: the same nature-object in the other's mode of givenness» (Husserl, 1973a, p. 153). Differently framed: within the system of appearances there obtains a *Synthesis der Identifizierung* uniting an actualized perception (mine, the one I have from where I am standing) with a possible one (that of the other's), which would in fact turn into my own (actualized) perception were I to move over there. What we are confronted with is a system of appearances within which the perceptions are not simply “united” but in which they eventually also confirm each other, thereby constituting the character of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of their

relevant “identical” correlate. A text now published as *Beilage to Ideen... III* (*Überleitung vom zweiten zum dritten Buch*) suggests the path we have to take:

in the sense of such identical objectivity there is required the possibility of legitimizing the identity, and that this legitimizing is in principle only conceivable if either the two pure egos deal with one another or if a third pure ego deals with the two. If one further inquires as to the conditions of the possibility of such intercourse, then one comes upon the a priori necessity that in the constituted world each of those in intercourse must be a lived-body, characterized as own-lived-body and a lived-body characterized as the alien one (Husserl, 1951, p. 128).

Accordingly, what needs to be introduced is what might be called the *Synthesis* peculiar to the body, to the *Leib* as such: the so-called «aesthetic synthesis» (*Ideen... II*, §9). Such type of synthesis is not only «passive» (in opposition to «categorical syntheses»), but a synthesis «in the strict sense» (to use Husserl’s 1907 jargon): «The objectual sense of a pure sense object (a pure thing (*reine Sache*)) is a synthesis of elements, ones which are not for their part products of an aesthetic synthesis. They are the ultimate sensuous features» (Husserl, 1952, p. 19). And the following *Ranbemerkung* could be added: «Regarding the aesthetic synthesis: must one not introduce a fundamental distinction, that between: 1) synthesis as connection or binding in the proper sense, which imply a synthesis of what is *separated*, and 2) continuous synthesis as continuous fusion? Every aesthetic synthesis of the first kind leads to ultimate elements. The thing as a product of an aesthetic connection is constructed out of sensuous features that, for their part, stem from a continuous synthesis» (Husserl, 1952, p. 19)²⁷. In a more precise way, then, any aesthetic synthesis entails two sides to be distinguished: (i) that of the continuous synthesis, which is a synthesis in the broad sense of the term, constituting *die letzten sinnlichen Merkmale* as “unities” of the same order, (ii) and the one in the strict sense of the term, which constitutes *die reine Sache* as a unity of «higher order» out of the result of the former.

As Husserl points out, a further function can be ascribed to the aesthetic synthesis, namely, that of “unifying” «with one another the objectualities that are constituted in the various single spheres of sense: e.g., the visual stratum of

²⁷ The footnote was directly added by Husserl (as noticed by the editor in Husserl, 1952, p. 404) and, as far as we can tell, is nowhere to be found in the *Urtext* (*Die drei Urtexte*, pp. 330-334).

a thing with the tactile one» (Husserl, 1952, p. 20). The «aesthetic synthesis» is a synthesis in the strict sense of the term not only because the “unities” it constitutes belong to an order higher than the sensuous features themselves, but also because they are of a order “higher” than the spheres of sense (visual, tactile, etc.) individually taken.

Aesthetic synthesis: (i) passive synthesis;

(ii) synthesis in the broad sense, to the extent that it constitutes “immanent” sensuous features²⁸;

(iii) synthesis in the strict sense, to the extent that it constitutes:

(iii’) unities of order higher than *it*;

(iii’’) unities of order higher than the ones constituted in the individual spheres of sense separately taken.

This being preliminarily obtained, what needs to be combined is this notion of aesthetic synthesis, as the synthesis proper to the *Leib* (we have insisted on this latter point, in connection to Husserl’s thesis of transcendental idealism, in De Santis, 2018c), with the previously discussed “*Bewährung*-claim”, i.e., the syntheses of confirmation that can obtain between different perceptions²⁹. The point being that the *Empfindungen* (ii) function in *iii* as motivating or «kinesthetic sensations» (Husserl, 1952, p. 57), thereby giving rise to what can be properly designated as a *system of motivating lines* (*motivierende Reihen*). If we are on the right track, then it follows that the above “synthetic system of appearances”, with its polarity of «actual» (mine) and «possible» perception (that of the other’s), is to be comprehended as a system of possible, actual, and potentially actualized “perceptual lines” (*Wahrnehmungsreihen* (Husserl, 1952, p. 19)); namely, as a system of aesthetic syntheses (iii’) that can either confirm or annul each other³⁰.

²⁸ See also Husserl, 1952, p. 24.

²⁹ Now, if the question were the one as to the distinction between “perception”, notably “perceptual synthesis”, and “aesthetic synthesis”, then the answer would be a twofold one. On the one hand, in fact, there is no difference between the two; or, better, the “perceptual syntheses” are called by Husserl «aesthetic» to emphasize their not being categorial syntheses. On the other hand, it could be claimed that a perceptual synthesis is to be deemed «aesthetic» to the extent that the *Leib*, with its duality of «motivated» and «motivating» sensations, is directly taken into consideration.

³⁰ «Those sensations that undergo extensional apprehension (leading to the extended features of the thing) are motivated as regards the course they take either actually or possibly, and are apperceptively related to a

How are we then to understand the distinction between *Wirklichkeit* (as a correlate of the synthesis of confirmation) and *Schein*, the «annulled being», which is the correlate of nullifying syntheses?

As long as we consider cases in which changes of the external world, feigned for us by an abnormal perceptual organ, are revealed as «semblances» by the testimony of the other organs, to that extent the distinction between «seeming» and what actually is is always given [...]. But if we assume for once that a subject would always have only normal perceptions and would never undergo a modification of any of its organs, or on the other hand would undergo a modification, but one that allowed for no possibility of correction (loss of the entire field of touch, or mental diseases that alter the entire typical character of perception), then the motives for the distinction between «semblance» (*Schein*) and «actuality» (*Wirklichkeit*), assumed up to now, would be eliminated (Husserl, 1952, p. 78).

As is clear, Husserl is looking for the «motives», that is, the *Bedingungen* for distinguishing *Schein* and *Wirklichkeit*. Now, and no matter how paradoxical it may sound, it is only on condition that our perceptual experience undergoes an “alteration”, thereby revealing itself as a semblance by means of a correction, that the character of *Wirklichkeit* can exhibit and impose itself. Of course, given the eidetic possibility, always conceivable as a scenario, of an isolated subject whose «body» undergoes absolutely no alteration (a man or a woman of steel, as it were), or that of an alteration which allows for no correction, then no distinction between *Wirklichkeit* and *Schein* could ever be made. Or, to put it better: the *Bedingungen* for distinguishing between *Schein* and *Wirklichkeit* would never obtain (for, Husserl does not intend to say that in the two imagined cases the subject would not experience the world as *wirklich*, what he means to argue being that such a subject would be in a “position” in which there would be no reason for him or her to actually “raise” the question as to the distinction between *Wirklichkeit* and *Schein*). As he goes on to add: «As I communicate to my companions my earlier lived-experiences and they become aware of how much of these conflict with their world, constituted inter-subjectively and continuously exhibited by means of an harmonious exchange of experiences, then I become for them an interesting *pathological* object» (Husserl, 1952, p. 80).

motivating series, to a system of kinesthetic sensations that freely unfold in an orderly connection in such a way that if a free unfolding of one series of this system occurs (e.g., any movement of the eyes or fingers), then from the interwoven manifold as a motive, the corresponding series must unfold as motivated» (Husserl, 1952, p. 58).

The “*Bewährung*-claim” is necessarily an “inter-subjective” claim; the “existence” of a plurality of subjects (the “*Koexistenz*-thesis” of the *Meditations*), that is, of a plurality of systems of aesthetic syntheses, does not stand in the way of a determination of the sense of what is *wirklich*, but it is the very condition for the distinction between *Wirklichkeit* and *Schein* to be exhibited *per se*. And this is possible, as we tried to argue over and over again in §2, based on a *Synthesis der Identifizierung* that has already taken place, thereby constituting the «identity-sense» of «nature» as the «first form of objectivity». In so doing, Husserl’s view is not only capable of ruling out *the multiplied identity*-thesis (Lewis) once and for all (as shown at the very end of §2), but of also accommodating *the lost identity*-view (Rorty), while at the same time showing the “inconsistency” of *the dismissed identity*-stance (Waldenfels). Indeed, were there no identity-sense and no *Synthesis der Identifizierung*, then it would be impossible to even speak of a plurality of *Verkehrskreise*—which, as a plurality, can only be part of the one and only synthetic system of appearances having the one world as its correlate.

Conclusion

We have therewith reached our conclusion. Our aim was not only to clarify Husserl’s argument in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, the one we have been referring to as “transcendental argument”, but also to contribute to shedding light on the quite thorny notion of «synthesis», which represents the very heart of Husserl’s phenomenology (as of any “transcendental” philosophy). A series of crucial distinctions have emerged over the course of our investigation (like those between synthesis «in the strict» sense and «in the broad» sense of the term; synthesis as *Ur-Form* and *Grund-Form*, between synthesis of *Identifikation* and *Identifizierung*; between unities of the “same” order and of “higher” order; as well as between different stages in Husserl’s conception of the synthesis) which proved to be vital to unfold Husserl’s argument to the effect that there can exist only “one” inter-subjectivity, hence, being the “world” its correlate, only “one” world always identical with itself.

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