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The Baroque Formulation of Consciousness – Bridging the "Unbridgeable Gap" through Indicational Representation

Fred Kersten, *Galileo and the 'Invention' of Opera, A Study in the Phenomenology of Consciousness* (Contributions to Phenomenology, Vol. 29). Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997. 280 pp.

> GALILEO: Now we see it's true. Keep your eye at the telescope, Sagredo. You are looking at a new truth — there is no difference between heaven and earth. Today is the tenth of January, 1610. Man writes in his diary — Heaven abolished.
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> Berthold Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*

Creative and innovative phenomenological research projects are rare and do not appear frequently among contemporary philosophical and sociological investigations. Fred Kersten's opus *Galileo and the 'Invention' of Opera, A Study in the Phenomenology of Consciousness* presents without any doubt a challenging and thrilling research program. He develops an original, innovative phenomenological project with roots in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, in particular following concepts developed by Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch; Kersten combines Schutz's theory of "multiple realities" with Gurwitsch's reflections on "formulations of consciousness" in order to analyze the "invention" of Baroque phenomena such as "modern sciences" and "opera" on the basis of a specific Baroque formulation of consciousness. The author himself has a specific, amusing baroque style of scientific analysis and with his bizarre writing style, adorned with flourishes, he transfers the reader into a Baroque world of the arts, music, painting, modern sciences, philosophy and above all, the world of everyday life. Kersten tells us what Galileo has in common with Monteverdi and Kepler and Copernicus with Rossini and Descartes, and why all of them are related to Rilke's Nikolai Kusmitch and the everyday life of a lonesome Harley–Davidson rider (who is supposedly represented by the author himself).

A Phenomenological Analysis of Formulations of Consciousness

The main focus of *Galileo and the 'Invention' of Opera* is the quest for the "presence of the Baroque" in ordinary experience; the work aims to unravel the specific forms in which this presence finds expression. Kersten believes that the parallel emergence of modern sciences and opera can be described as the "birth of twins." Citing the words of Paracelsus, he argues that they "resemble one another completely without its being possible for anyone to say which of them brought its similitude to the other" (x).

The author establishes this dichotomy of Baroque twins with reference to the contemporaries Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643). He introduces them as two quasi ideal-typical figures that represent the two everyday transcendent spheres of "modern sciences" and the "arts," or more specifically "music," during the Renaissance and especially the Baroque (i.e. the last decade of the sixteenth and the first decades of the seventeenth century) (Kersten, 1983, pp. 405). They "uniquely embody and thereby provide a compass to the many-sided complexity of Baroque thought and experience" (x), as Kersten argues. Within the concept of his phenomenological analysis, "Galileo" and "Monteverdi" are names, among others, for sets of ideas attributed to historical persons but which nevertheless transcend this attribution (xi). Apart from psychological, metaphysical and musicological reflections, he claims that modern sciences and opera, rather than being finished products of the Renaissance and Baroque, are instead *objectives* to be accomplished by people with a specific world view, sharing an (ideal) possibility or "essence" (Edmund Husserl). The question of how we have access to and explain our world and how we perceive our "reality" as experiencing subjects, of whether this world is described as a "mathematical manifold" or the "human condition," is, to introduce one of Kersten's most crucial concepts adopted from Aron Gurwitsch, implied by a quite specific "formulation of consciousness" included in modern theories and ideas (1979, pp. 1–33). According to this reflection, a characteristic formulation of consciousness is the basis for the development of phenomena like the twins "science" and "opera." The author demonstrates his procedure in the analysis with the following:

> And if the ideas of our world and the "real" are to be anything more than a mere assemblage of whatever grounds bestowing greater or lesser plausibility on our beliefs, and if we are to undercut the diversity of stylistic, social and art-historical connotations of the word, "Baroque," then a *phenomenology of consciousness* is required to secure the experiential data of ordinary experience that allow for them and their legitimation in the first place. (xi).

Kersten's aim lies in the application of a Husserlian phenomenological method to issues of historical, musicological, literary and philosophical research by

focusing on the interplay of opera, science, painting, architecture and sculpture from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. But this does not mean that he intends to present a phenomenology of each of these disciplines. A "phenomenology of the formulations of consciousness," claims Kersten, discriminates exactly what is granted to everyday life and "parenthesizes" theories about everyday life at a certain time, but always within the domain of phenomenological clarification (xii). He uses a great variety of outstanding musicians, scientists and philosophers of the Baroque epoch (e.g. Monteverdi, Galilei, Kepler, Descartes, Leibniz) as empirical cases to demonstrate how the Baroque formulation of consciousness is "operative" in their thinking and work as a shared "ideal possibility" or "essence." Kersten describes the specificity of this formulation of consciousness as a means of explaining the unique achievements of these artists and thinkers as a result of a characteristic shared worldview.

Indicational Representation and the "Unbridgeable Gap"

In Chapter 1, Kersten develops his general phenomenological framework. Chapters 2–7 offer an enormous multitude of examples from historical worlds of art, science and philosophy of a specific epoch to clarify what he designates as the "Baroque formulation of consciousness." The final Chapters 8 and 9 comprise the attempt to clarify his phenomenological thesis. One fundamental characteristic of the Baroque formulation of consciousness, as argued in Chapter 1, is the idea of "the gap," a recurring concept within the author's terminology. "The gap" is experienced in ordinary life between the reality sphere of ordinary life and its "representation" in scientific thinking, as well as in music and art in general. Clearly, this idea of "the gap" results from Alfred Schutz's conception of the multiple reality spheres that form part of the life-world of the experiencing subject.

The "reality of everyday life" (what Kersten calls "ordinary life") as "paramount reality" is the predominant sphere of the life-world in which we act and communicate; it is the world of the real outer objects that we can manipulate operatively by our actions. Other multiple realities are the worlds of imagination and fantasies, such as the play-world of the child, but also the world of the work of art, the world of dreams or the world of theoretical-scientific contemplation (cf. Schutz, 1962 a, b). "Multiple realities" are not only *subjectively* experienced, they can also be objectified art forms, systems of thinking or worldviews shared by a community and, accordingly, the members of this community commonly experience them. Therefore, they are historical phenomena like Kersten's examples of the "modern sciences" and the "opera," which, he states, were "invented" or came into existence in the Renaissance and Baroque. Similarly the "gap," the discrepancy, between

"ordinary life" and the "worlds" represented by "science" and "opera" is also a historical phenomenon (p. 9). Before science in the "Galilean style" as an achievement of a Baroque formulation of consciousness was practiced, science existed e.g. in the "Aristotelian style" resulting from the "Classical formulation of consciousness" which conceived of Nature as a morphological rather than a mathematical manifold.

Kersten argues that the shaping of both the specific "gap" between "ordinary life" and the world of "modern science" and between "ordinary life" and the world of "opera" is similar. There is therefore an essential connection between the phenomena "science" and "opera": both of them are separated from "ordinary life" with its centric/eccentric structure by an "unbridgeable gap" specifically anchored in the Baroque formulation of consciousness (cf. p. 19). To demonstrate how "the gap" between ordinary life and other reality spheres functioned, Kersten borrows Rainer Maria Rilke's literary figure "Nikolai Kusmitch," who proves to be the appearing hero of *Galileo and the* '*Invention*' *of Opera*. For the reader, Nikolai Kusmitch functions as an "anchor" within a baroque labyrinth of argumentations and exemplifications which prevents the reader from losing track of the central theme or even the thread of this phenomenological analysis. His hero represents the bridging of the "unbridgeable gap" between ordinary life and the world of science; what Galileo as scientist experiences and discovers in his everyday transcendent world of science, of astronomy, is directly experienced by the fictional character Nikolai Kusmitch within his everyday life-world:

> His surprises were not yet at an end. Beneath his feet as well there was something like a movement, not one movement only, but several, curiously interoscillating. He went stiff with terror: could that be the earth? Certainly, it was the earth. And the earth moved, after all. (Rilke, 1958, 151f.)

As a literary figure, Kersten's hero, Nikolai Kusmitch, combines the experience of everyday life with scientific contemplation; both styles of cognition "interfere" with each other when Kusmitch actually feels the movements of the earth.

In Chapter 2 and in the following chapters, the author analyzes the nature of "the gap" existing within the Baroque formulation of consciousness. What differentiates the "Baroque" from the "historically" *antecedent* "Classical" formulation of consciousness is the idea that the latter is characterized by "mimetic representation." In other words, the constructs of an everyday transcendent scientific or artistic reality show some resemblance to the thing (e.g. Nature) represented (pp. 30–37). In contrast, what characterizes the "Baroque formulation" is the idea that "the gap" is established through "indicational representation" (58ff.), that is to say non-mimetic, or one might add, *symbolic* representation. Both "mimetic" and "indicational" representation are specific

forms of "appresentation," a term which describes the "making co-present" of objects or ideas that are not directly perceivable within the everyday life-world (cf. Schutz, 1962b, 294ff.). "Mimesis" is representation by appresenting resemblance by means of images, copies, pictures or imitations (p. 35). "Indication," on the other hand, functions completely differently. "What is right" (true, valid) about things in Nature is indicated by "what seems right," and about "what is there in and of itself" by "what is always only here." In other words, "the far is always read off the near" (p. 60). This relationship can best be explained by the procedure of "experimentation" as practiced by Galileo. Experiential data are tangible and at the center of human action; they can be altered, changed and manipulated so that the far (the "what is right", the true and valid) is symbolically appresented (p. 85).

Indicational representation, the way it is methodically applied to achieve insights e.g. about Nature, is the crucial mechanism for the Baroque formulation of consciousness.

> Fantastic images, the marvelous, are sufficient, it suffices to "imagine" (or "reason"): the verisimilar can appresent the "real" just as much as, or even better than, the "factual." Yet this is not quite correct. Indeed, on the Baroque formulation of consciousness, after all, Nature is no longer to be accounted for in its own terms as either real or ideal, but instead in mathematical (geometrical and exponential) terms. (p. 150)

Viewed from this perspective, science establishes symbolic, indicational, "mathematical" reflections of Nature; Nature is thus reflected within the everyday transcendent world of "science" by means of mathematic symbols. The most obvious equivalent in the realm of the world of "music" is demonstrated by Johann Sebastian Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," in which an exact mathematical acoustic system of symbol is transferred into musical harmonies to overcome the "natural" non-tempered musical harmonies.

Baroque Twins: "Science" and "Opera"

In Chapters 6 and 7, Kersten tries to show in what sense the Baroque phenomena of "opera" and "science" were "invented" on the basis of a shared formulation of consciousness. The "closed musical form," he argues, is *compossible* with the "closed mathematical form" of the expression of the law of motion that informs us of motion itself. In Baroque opera, the "best possible" passions, the "true idea of human life," "love" as well as "jealousy," "wrath," "pain" or "suffering" are expressed, as demonstrated in Kersten's favorite example of Monteverdi's *Favola d'Orfeo*. Like the world of sciences, the world of "Baroque opera" "explains" the everyday world and portrays the "true idea of human life" within a symbolical sphere and accordingly, offers a *reflection*

of everyday life. "And, phenomenologically, the less the resemblance, the truer the presentive idea of the Divine incorporation. . . . the greater the exaggeration, distortion and the like of the character, the truer the idea indicationally appresented" (p. 188). This is exactly what "Baroque opera" has in common with "modern sciences"; they both tell us about the world and ourselves by *not being like* the world and ourselves (p. 201).

Kersten describes in Chapter 8 how the two selected Baroque twins "opera" and "modern science" were invented on the basis of the "principle of the compossibility" which enables indicational appresentation by means of opposites and truth by means of least resemblance (p. 215). The nature of the indicational Baroque symbolism that was criticized a century later becomes clear with the following words:

> For the Baroque formulation of consciousness, it is "reason" which makes us believe that the true idea of the "real" is the opposite, that the idea which appresents the truth is the idea that least resembles it. The gist of eighteenth-century criticism, in those terms, is that what "reason" really does is to make us "suspend rationality" so that the "real" extrapolated from the center of action and ordinary experience is "confused" with the opposite, the fantastic, the "illusion," which appresents it. (p. 225)

Following these reflections, what singles out the Baroque formulation of consciousness is the "parenthesizing" or "suspension" of "reason" and "rationality" in symbolic spheres such as the world of "opera" and the world of "science." A unique epistemological gain could be achieved through this specific reflexion that perhaps characterizes everyday transcendent reality spheres of the Baroque epoch. Experimentation according to Galilei can be described as a result of these processes of "parenthesizing" in relation to the world of "science."

A phenomenological clarification of the main thesis follows in the closing Chapter 9. Kersten "discovers" that the Baroque formulation of consciousness requires the "mimetic epoché" to make communication via form possible. The same holds true for opera, painting, sculpture, architecture, but also science: "only through the form, say, of an hypothesis expressed mathematically can I communicate with Copernicus or Kepler" (p. 246). The author refuses to speak of a "common ground," or of "parallel ideas," or of a "mutual influence" of science and art; he argues that it is more appropriate to say that Nature is an ideal possibility that lends itself to the fantastic, non-mimetic "images" comprising the "fable of the world."

> Taken over as a task by physics, painting, music, sculpture, drama, poetry, each under the guidance of its own methodological norms under the mimetic epoché with its principle of truth by least resemblance, each constructs its universe by means of a continuing process of feigning awareness (including idealization and mathematization). (p. 252)

What remains "real" and accessible for the subject is ordinary life, the world of everyday life that can be arranged by the working individual. This world of common-sense thinking and communication is accessible, no matter what may be the compossibilities of systematization opened up by the Baroque formulation of consciousness in science and art (p. 252). To summarize Kersten's phenomenological reflections; the specific "gap" between the world of everyday life and the everyday transcendent reality spheres of "science" and "opera" "invented" as twins in Baroque times is brought into being by the Baroque formulation of consciousness. The connection between these realities and the everyday life-world is established through symbolization, through indicational representation on the basis of the "mimetic epoché."

Bridging the "Unbridgeable Gap" through Symbolization

But is this specific "gap" as part of the Baroque formulation of consciousness really "unbridgeable," as Kersten argues in the beginning of his phenomenological analysis? Is it impossible to connect ordinary life with the everyday-transcendent spheres of "science" and "opera"? I argue that the "bridges" between these spheres of the life-world are established by means of "symbols," as we have demonstrated. "Symbols" are for example mathematical figures written on a piece of paper; they are elements of ordinary life, of the everyday life-world and they can be perceived "directly" or even touched. Without symbols ("bridges" between reality spheres), an idea out of the world of "science" or "opera" could not be communicated and shared with other fellow human beings. One further aspect concerning the Baroque formulation of consciousness would have been relevant from a sociological perspective. An important question would have been what repercussions the Baroque spheres of "science" and the "arts" had or still have on the sphere of the everyday life-world (cf. Schutz, 1962b, 347ff.). How did or do these everyday transcendent reality spheres affect the everyday thinking and acting of human beings? Obviously, the findings of Copernicus and Galileo, achieved on the basis of indicational representation, gradually affected the world views of human beings, made them change their personal religious belief systems, and thereby influenced their everyday actions. By "bridging the gap" from the world of "science" to the everyday life-world through symbolization, scientific "ideas" are used to determine perception and action within the everyday life-world of the experiencing subject.

Finally, the figure who could not overcome "the gap," who was not able to differentiate between the distinct realities he was confronted with, is our hero Nikolai Kusmitch, who got "caught up in the gap" (p. 254); for his experiences within the reality of "science" he locked himself in his room as part of his everyday life-world and put himself to rest, maybe for the rest of his life.

Kersten's *Galileo and the 'Invention' of Opera* contains a challenging and highly stimulating phenomenological analysis of the problem of the formulations of consciousness; he clearly demonstrates that phenomenological analysis can be a thrilling challenge and venture, but also funny to read as well as highly informative. Even though various argumentations and exemplifications were redundant and even if it was sometimes quite hard to follow the trail of systematic analysis, this work opens an exciting perspective to a specific phenomenological problem: how are cultural and historical phenomena "invented" on the basis of the specific formulation of consciousness which characterized the "Baroque age"?

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