

# GESTALT, HARMONY, AND HUMAN ACTION IN ROMAN INGARDEN'S THOUGHT

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*Abstract: This paper aims at showing the significance in Roman Ingarden's thinking of two often overlooked ontological concepts: Gestalt quality and harmonious unity. Ingarden understands Gestalt a derived quality that springs from the coexistence of several qualities standing in harmonious unity. The main feature of the Gestalt quality is that it is more than the sum of its part and thus brings something new into being. In Ingarden's hands, that quite simple and intuitive idea is refined to be used in fields as diverse as ontology, aesthetics, theory of values or anthropology. After having presented those concepts, the paper then shifts to further developing their significance in a particular field: Ingarden's conception of human being. To this end, the paper successively addresses Ingarden's conception of human nature, the ontology of value, responsibility and human value-driven action.*

## Introduction

I would like to dedicate this paper to the concepts of Gestalt and harmony in Roman Ingarden's thought. Roman Ingarden (1893-1970), one of Edmund Husserl's most gifted pupils, worked extensively to ground phenomenology in a convincing and systematic ontology. Building from this ontology, he produced a philosophical work both extremely coherent and diverse. The reader may find opus about ontology, aesthetics, ethics, theory of knowledge, anthropology, etc. It is easy to get lost in such a vast but sharp conceptual landscape, especially since Ingarden's commentators usually focus on the same fields (existential ontology and aesthetics).

Even though often overlooked by commentators,<sup>1</sup> the concepts of Gestalt (quality) and harmony (or harmonious unity) are extremely significant in Ingarden's ontology. They are also profoundly intertwined: they form, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin: where there is a Gestalt, there is a harmony; where there is a harmony, there is a Gestalt. As we shall see, Ingarden provides us with an original operative way of understanding harmony as, to put it bluntly, an emulating interaction

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<sup>1</sup> This may be explained both by the fact that (a) Gestalt belongs to the least developed part of Ingarden's ontology (the so-called "material ontology") and (b) Ingarden's terminology changed over the years: Gestalt (*postać* in Polish), harmonious quality (*Qualität des Zusammenklanges – jakość zestroju*), derivative quality (*abgeleitet Qualität [Wesenheit] – jakość pochodny*), etc. (Synonymity is established in Ingarden, 1973, 204-205 and Ingarden, 2016, 373.) To confuse his reader even more, Ingarden sometime uses the term "Gestalt" (but never Gestalt quality) in (a) with much broader and looser meaning (as "figure") and (b) in a precise but totally different conceptual sense (see nota nr 6 on this).

between harmonized founding entities (may they be qualities, objects, or even situations) that lead to the formation of a whole that is more than the sum of its parts (a Gestalt quality). Ingarden's concept of harmony is thus way more encompassing than the traditional one, that often includes ideas of "pleasure" (of seeing one), of "order" or of "balance": an harmony (or, as Ingarden prefers to put it: a harmonious unity, that is a Gestalt-producing unity) is something that *creates something new*, that was not previously present in the now harmonized elements.

In Ingarden's hands, that quite simple and intuitive idea is refined to be used in fields as diverse as ontology, aesthetics, theory of perception, theory of values or anthropology. As such, those concepts may also be used as a valuable breadcrumb trail to navigate through the various fields of Ingarden's philosophy. Harmony and Gestalt especially prove to be of paramount importance in Ingarden's anthropology and we will thus use this field as a chosen example.

I will start (I) by some elements of Ingarden's fundamental ontology that are required for a proper understanding of the correlative concepts of Gestalt and harmonious unity in Ingarden's thought. This first part will underline the creative nature of harmony and show its embodiment in the very fabric of our world. I shall then focus on harmony in Ingarden's anthropology as a chosen example of its relevance. Therefore, I will present (II) two theses of Ingarden regarding human nature: (a) that human nature is a Gestalt quality that requires an inner harmony (a certain set of harmonized qualities) to manifest itself and thus *acts* to acquire them and, (b), that human nature can only thrive in a cultural world saturated with different values. I will then try to understand these theses further through an analysis of Ingarden's conception of value (III), that will get us back to the concepts of harmony and Gestalt. Those analysis will then lead us (IV) to the question of the responsible action, that is action creating value-bearing objects or situations, where the concepts of harmony and Gestalt will once more prove indispensable. Finally, a brief conclusion will summarize my results.

### I. Harmonious Unity and Gestalt(quality) – Ontological Groundwork

Ingarden's conception of Gestalt roots itself in the work of Christian Von Ehrenfels (the first to use the term in its 1890 famous paper "Über Gestaltqualitäten") and in the work of Henri Bergson – even though Bergson does not himself use the word, Ingarden considers (Ingarden 1973, 205n) him to be the first to present the concept's content in his 1889 book *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. The core idea of the *Gestalt* is quite intuitive and easy to grasp: sometimes, the whole is more than the mere sum of its parts. Ehrenfels exemplifies this with music: isn't it obvious that a melody is *more* than the sum of the notes? And equally obvious that there would be no melody without those notes? A Gestalt quality is thus a peculiar content (the melody) that may only appear in conjunction with a complex of separable elements appearing together or in close succession (the music notes). Those elements

are thus *grounding* the Gestalt quality.<sup>2</sup> Gestalt qualities are obviously not limited to the realm of music and Gestalt qualities from our visual perception are particularly rich and diverse as the possible conjunctions of grounding elements are virtually infinite. Moreover, Gestalten may also be grounded upon elements which are already Gestalten. This is, for example, the case for artistic style: the gothic style of a cathedral is an overall impression grounded on the coexistence of various other Gestalt-elements (stained glass, pointed arch, etc.)

Ingarden picks up those basic features of Gestalt qualities but inserts them in the frame of his general ontology. Ingarden indeed defines a Gestalt as a particular type of *matter*. To understand this, we must briefly get back to the fundamentals of his ontology. Ingarden's advocates for and develops a finely crafted ontological frame that encompasses his whole philosophy. This ontology is threefold as, in every object (in the broadest sense), Ingarden distinguishes between existence, form and matter. Ingardenian ontology is thus existentially plural and, to a certain degree, neo-Aristotelian (Chrudzimski 2016, 216-217). Regarding existence, Ingarden proposes a sharp distinction between four modes of being: the real, the purely intentional, the ideal and the absolute.<sup>3</sup> It will be enough to discuss our topic for now to focus on real and purely intentional and to remember that real objects exist autonomously, *by themselves*, while intentional objects only exist thanks to our consciousness (Ingarden 2013, 109-118). The latter are thus *heteronomous*.

Regarding form and matter, it is no overstatement to stress that Ingarden completely reshapes the traditional distinction between form and matter. If, for Aristotle, matter is an indeterminate informed by form, on the contrary, for our author, matter is the *complete* set of qualitative determinations (qualities) of the object, whether it is its color, its weight, or what can be called, in everyday language, its "shape" (square, round, etc.) (Ingarden 2016, 51-52). But if the matter is already pure determination, what is the role of form? Form is what allows matter to *accrue* to an object. To put it simply: "brown" is a quality, but "the brown-of-this-table" is a *formed* quality. The form so to speak "attaches" the quality to an object, transforms the isolated quality into an (object) *property*. All of those qualities pertain to a subject of properties that, together with the properties, constitutes the *fundamental form* of an object (Ingarden 2016, 75sq). Some formed qualities also occupy a special function in the object, namely being its *constitutive nature*, but more on that later.

We will now focus on two important features of Gestalt and harmony: (a) the fact that they create something *new* in being, (b) their significance as a principle of cohesion in numerous objects, including human beings.

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<sup>2</sup> "a certain positive content of representation, linked to the presence of a corresponding complex in consciousness, which in turn consists of mutually separable and independently of each other representable elements. Such a complex of representations which is essential for the presence of the Gestalt qualities, we call it the foundation of these same qualities." (Von Ehrenfels 1890, 263, all translations are mine)

<sup>3</sup> The *ideal* way of being encompasses ideas, ideal qualities, ideal objects, etc. The absolute way of being pertains to God, should he exist.

*Harmony and Gestalt as Qualitative Novelty*

Being on the *material* side of being, the Gestalt is thus a *quality*. The ‘Gestalt’ is a *qualitative* moment that is not primal in the same sense as e.g. the simple color-qualities (such as ‘redness’, say), since it only makes its appearance in the presence of other qualities that found it. It is nonetheless primal in the other sense; in that it is quite specific and singular. It cannot be ‘composed’ out of other qualities, nor be reduced to them (Ingarden 2016, 91). Although it arises on the basis of other qualities, a Gestalt cannot be reduced to it: “It contains a *novum* vis-à-vis those qualities that goes beyond each and every one of them, as well as beyond their *ensemble* as a whole.” (Ingarden 2016, 91, italics are mine). On the other hand, the grounding qualities themselves gain some kind of unity, as they, together, lead to the manifestation of a Gestalt quality.<sup>4</sup> And this unity is, for Ingarden, of a *harmonious* nature:

Harmonious unity obtains between two entities (material moments) *a* and *b*, when they do not indeed have to be together but do in fact exist in the unity of a whole, and their coexistence necessarily implies the emergence in the same whole of a third entity (moment), *c*, that encompasses them both, but at the same time leaves undisturbed the peculiarity and otherness of each of them : *a* and *b* shine through so-to-speak via the moment that is grounded in them, and that encompasses them, whereby this latter [*c*] is the predominant moment in the whole constituted in this manner, and brands this whole in a unifying and holistic manner (Ingarden 2016, 60).

Thus, to take a simple example, the color orange is a Gestalt quality produced by the factual coexistence – but not necessary, since there is no need to assemble these two colors – of red and yellow; the square is a Gestalt produced by the coexistence of the qualities of having four sides, parallel sides, right angles and sides of the same length, etc. Gestalt qualities may rise for the coexistence (orange, squareness), or the succession of their founding qualities (melodies). It should be noted that, in Ingarden’s perspective, Gestalt qualities are not always only in the viewer’s eye: they may be, but they may also be grounded in the object itself – or even be cofounded in the object and in the reader’s consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Hence, knowing if a Gestalt truly pertains to a particular object requires a case-by-case analysis.

A Gestalt quality is thus a particular *synthetic* quality that appears when other qualities are present and stand in harmonious unity. As a result, harmony is a curious mixture of facticity and necessity: the combination of its founding qualities is factual,

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<sup>4</sup> “the Gestalt quality [...] is built up on a manifold of other qualities that belong intimately together, yet at the same time shine through it, as it were – and forms a harmonious unity with them.” (Ingarden, 2016, 371).

<sup>5</sup> This is namely the case for the aesthetic object, but I shall not elaborate on that.

but *necessarily* leads to the appearance of Gestalt. In some cases, Gestalts allow a margin of variation in their founding qualities (e.g., the squareness is impervious to the side's lengths) (Ingarden 2016, 61). In some other cases, their "requirements" stretch out of pure matter and reach to *form* or *way of being* (Ingarden 2016, 373) (ex: the Gestalt quality of a melody may only appear in a *temporal* being, as it needs to unfold). Without sinking into the ins and outs of Ingarden's ontology, it should be said that those harmonious relations primarily exist as *pure possibilities* between ideal qualities and are then incarnated or concretized into respectively real or purely intentional objects (Chrudzimski 2016, 226). To anticipate on further developments, artistic creation is thus both a *finding* of hidden possibilities in order to manifest in our world harmonies still unheard of and the molding of an object possessing the required set of qualities to ground a Gestalt quality. As we see, *harmony* is not to be understood in the common sense of "peaceful agreement", but as a *creative interaction*, as the fact that from the union of some things, something *more* and *new* emerges.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Harmony and Gestalt in Objects: A Principle of Cohesion*

As stated earlier, Gestalts are of a qualitative (material) nature. But when we encounter them, they generally accrue to objects<sup>7</sup> (ex.: the orange-of-this-fruit). That entails that they also have a *form* (see *supra*). Gestalts may either be mere properties or build the core of the object's constitutive nature and essence, in which case they occupy a role of particular importance. Even though the properties and the constitutive nature are both material, they have a different function in the object: the property is only a quality pertaining to the object, while its nature grasps it "as a whole": I *have* brown hair, but I *am* Olivier Malherbe. Ingarden also links the constitutive nature with the question of *essence*. Essence is what ensures an object inner *cohesion*; what is *needed* for me to be or remain *myself*. As such, my essence consists of my constitutive nature and of what is needed for it to stay in being: the qualities, the form and mode of being it *requires* (Von Wachter 2000, 119-120). In other words, it is the degree of requirement of the constitutive nature, what it needs to appear, that determines the strength and extent of the essence of an object.

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<sup>6</sup> NB: in its other conceptual meaning (see nota nr 1), the Gestalt (never the Gestalt quality) "means the full endowment [*Ausstattung*] of the object, all its form and mode of being in which it appears (is aimed at)." (Ingarden, 1996, 450). The conceptual difference is blatant as, in this sense, the Gestalt is not of a material nature, but encompasses the whole of the object, existence and form included.

<sup>7</sup> It has to be pointed out that Ingarden also distinguishes between "primary" individual object (like an atom in the absolute sense : something that is not composed upon the aggregation of "smaller" objects), and "derivated" individual object, meaning an object that is built upon "smaller" objects but have some kind of inner "unity". This distinction of course complicates all essence-related issues but I shall not elaborate on that.

Even though constitutive nature (and thus essences) may be extremely diverse, ranging from perfect cohesion to nearly absolute looseness (Ingarden 2016, 392-395)<sup>8</sup>, Ingarden sees Gestalts as core components of a lot of the most significant objects to be found.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as the Gestalt *only* appears if certain harmony of underlying qualities (often numerous) is present, it entails that, if the constitutive nature of an object is a Gestalt, it will *require* the presence and maintenance of a certain number of qualities, or even of particular existential features (a melody can, of course, only unfold in a temporal being), thus ensuring cohesion to its essence. Significant Gestalt-natured objects include God (should he exist) (Ingarden 2016, 382 and 392), the ultimate elements of the material world (Ingarden 2016, 552), works of art (Ingarden 1969, 17-18) and, last but not least *human beings* (Ingarden 2016, 60 and 373). As such, harmony reveals itself as a principle of *cohesion* in certain objects, notably human persons, that infuses through them and allow them to be and remain themselves. We will now focus on the essence of human beings as it will allow us to tackle with all the ramifications of Ingarden's conception of harmony.

## II. Human Essence, Harmony and Values

### *Harmony and Gestalts as Sources of Action for a Dynamic Human Being*

We said that Gestaltic essences "require" a harmony of various qualities to manifest or stay in being. In most objects, this only entails that the object will lose its essence if some of those qualities disappear (to take a very blunt example: if you burn entirely a work of art, it ceases to be a work of art). But when we speak of the essence of a *dynamic* object as a human person, it entails that those "Gestalt-requirements" may trigger the being to *act* in order to achieve them and "maintain" itself in being, or even and more fundamentally "realize" itself.<sup>10</sup>

Ingarden's conception implies that there is an "essence" which nestles and hides in the heart of every (wo)man and which regulates his(her) changes and behaviors. This essence, encompassing a set of harmonized qualities, is of course one of a kind: each essence – and thus each human – is organized around a unique Gestalt

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<sup>8</sup> Sadly, Ingarden proves light on examples – he is more concerned by presenting the various conceptual possibilities than linking them with actual objects, lest he would risk making statements without sufficient analysis. In his opinion, God's essence would be so coherent it wouldn't allow any modification in God's properties; the essence of a triangle would still be strong, but allows some variations (as the length of the sides); the essence of a human being would accept even more variations, etc.

<sup>9</sup> "It was the discovery of so-called Gestalts, or Gestalt-qualities, that first made it possible to understand – at least in some cases – on what the inner cohesion of individual object's structure depends." (Ingarden 2016, 371).

<sup>10</sup> As we shall see below when we discuss values, those Gestalt-requirement may also prompt us to act to allow the required harmony to manifest itself in a particular object (as the artist that finishes his work to allow its valuable Gestalt to manifest).

(*haecceitas*). Of course, this does not mean that humans are impervious to their surroundings: their essence is flexible enough to allow important variations in their grounding qualities, variations that may obviously come from our interaction with the world. Yet, in Ingarden's opinion, something truly essential remains at our core. Ingarden therefore sees in the human individual a two-levels layered structure. The first, the upper stratum, is formed during the life of the individual, particularly in relation to his environment. The second stratum, the fundamental, essential core, the "essence-nucleus", persists through life and "depending on circumstances, is more or less dominant in the whole of the individual" (Ingarden 2013, 268), more or less manifest (Ingarden 2013, 269). This means that every person requires an inner harmony of qualities to be himself, that is to say qualities that, together, allow its Gestaltic constitutive nature – something *more* than the set of those qualities – to be truly embodied and to manifest itself. As this manifestation depends on circumstances, human beings will be able to *act* to ensure this self-realization.

#### *Human Essence, Values and the World of Culture*

The idea that our essence may require *action* to be realized of course leads to the question of what kind of action may be required in order to do so. In his anthropological essays (1983a, 17-52), Ingarden characterizes the essence of the human being by his impossibility to be satisfied with a purely biological existence, by the desire and the *need* to create things which *enrich* and give meaning to his existence in that they carry *values* whose presence gives him a joy without which he cannot live (Ingarden 1983a, 22): works of art, literature, scientific treatises, laws, etc. However, these values (ethical, aesthetic, scientific, etc.) are impossible, in any case too rare, in the purely real world. This is why man always creates a "second" world, a film of intentional being which is superimposed on the real world and serves as a harbor for the various values: the *cultural world*.

Man changes nature [...] and confers upon it at the same time a certain sense which it does not possess of itself. [...] *These works are made to respond to his soul and comprise his completion.* [...] He creates works of art (literature, music, etc.), creates science, philosophy, religion as well as his own history, and that of mankind. He also creates in some sense his own family and other families, his own nation and other nations, which in turn lays on him obligations with respect to his family and nation, and also brings about obligations of nations with respect to humanity. *A whole wealth of diverse values then spreads before his eyes, and commits him to various deeds towards his relatives, friends or enemies. His life begins to have some purpose and goal and acquires a particular sense and meaning which it would not have in brute nature.* (Ingarden 1983a, 18, italics mine)

As we see, Ingarden provides us with two theses regarding human nature: (a) it is a Gestalt that requires a whole set of harmonized qualities in order to be fully manifest and (b) our essence's needs can only be fulfilled in a cultural world full of value-bearing objects. We will now try to understand how these two theses articulate and, therefore, analyze Ingarden's conception of values.

### III. Harmony, Gestalt and Axiology

Ingarden's conceptions of human nature and values are so deeply entangled that we will have to weave from one to another to understand them properly. We will start (a) with saying a few words about Ingarden's material conception of values, then (b) analyze how values call us to realize objects embodying them and how this "call" is at the same time a response to some of our deepest longings, before (c) reverting back to a sharper analyze of values themselves, that will get us back to the notions of harmony and Gestalt.

#### *A Material Conception of Values*

Ingarden inherits from Max Scheler a *material* conception of value: values accrue to their bearers; they are grounded in some of their bearer's properties. To say it crudely: the "beauty" (or charm or sublimity or grace, etc.) of a painting<sup>11</sup> is grounded in the painting's very qualities: colors, shapes and the unique assemblage thereof.<sup>12</sup> As they are grounded in qualities, they are as diverse as those qualities: not only does Ingarden distinguishes between aesthetic, artistic, moral, utility, vital, etc. values, but he also recognizes a great number of values inside each realm: aside from the beautiful, there is the charming, the sublime, the pretty, the ugly, etc., each having their own qualitative endowment (and, of course, each prone to spring from various qualitative sets). Accruing to a bearer, values do not reduce themselves to it as they possess their own particular and peculiar form and way of being<sup>13</sup> and may "use" so to speak only some parts of their bearer's qualities (ex: the beauty of a person is unrelated to the shape of its inner organs).

#### *Value's Call-to-Existence*

As we have said, the realization of value-bearing objects is the most significant source of action according to Ingarden. This can be explained by the fact that values are characterized both a by a particular positivity or negativity and by a correlative ought-to-(not)-be that transpire in our reaction to their encounter. Ingarden insists on the strong *emotional* response and feelings with which we react to their presence or even, to a certain extent, their foreseeing in our imagination (like when we picture ourselves the possible outcomes of an action or an event with moral implications, or when an

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<sup>11</sup> We shall use numerous examples from the realm of aesthetics as it is the one Ingarden analyzes the most.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, it is also possible that the value is not really (or not sufficiently) grounded in the object, put imposed upon it by the subject who "adds," so to speak, certain qualities to it.

<sup>13</sup> Although Ingarden states this clearly, his analysis of the form and mode of being of values are embryonic at best. See Ingarden 1969, 97-142. It should be noted that the ontology of values gives Ingarden tremendous trouble and does not fit easily in his tripartite ontology.

artist imagines the lineaments of a future work). This reaction will be positive or negative depending on the value's own positivity and negativity, and we will also feel *called* by the values to realize them (if they are *positive*) or to prevent them from being realized (if they are *negative*) (Ingarden 1973, 217). The most topical example is given by moral values: we feel appealed, called, even compelled to "do the right thing" (i.e. realize an action embodying a moral value). The same goes, to a certain extent, for any kind of value, especially aesthetic values: the artist, even the observer, feels compelled to realize them, to finish his work, or to keep listening to this beautiful music he heard by chance. So, not only do we feel called to realize positive values, but this realization also "rewards" us with a strong positive emotional response. As values have this calling-to-be, they also give their bearer a special significance in being: it *matters* whether or not they exist.

The value or, to be more precise, the object in its being-gifted-of-value [*Wertvollsein*] rises above all axiologically neutral entities, which exist simply but do not "mean" nothing, while it gains *significance* in being by its value. (Ingarden 1969, 116, italics mine)

Of course, values do not only fall on human beings as a command to be fulfilled, but as an *answer* to some of our longings, may they be physical (vital values) or spiritual (aesthetic, ethic, scientific values). This is the very reason why experiencing positive aesthetic value provokes a strong emotional response in the observer; the reason also why the spectacle of a good action may move us, or the reading of an implacable scientific argument may excite us: it *answers* to something that comes from us. As Ingarden puts it:

There is no doubt that the origin of works of art is no mere happenstance, nor any free play or capriciousness of the imagination. Works of art originate from people's spiritual plight and *spiritual need*. The work of art has to accomplish something quite essential vis-à-vis the creator and the beholder. The generation of the work of art is a form of spiritual discharge of creative forces as well as the fulfillment of a special sort of yearning, the yearning to embody the initially just presaged aesthetic value-qualities, and eventually also certain metaphysical qualities, that can be brought to appearance within the work of art in its concretization. It is the need to be able to break out of people's solitude and solitary suffering and to have a world of certain common values with others. The work of art exercises precisely the function of a unique sort of tool that enables the creator to have *one* world in *common* aesthetic experience and enjoyment with others. Precisely therewith, it also exercises vis-à-vis the beholders the function of procuring for them an epistemic and emotional access to values of a very special kind. The primary issue here is [...] *to enrich him first of all by a stock of values of a specific sort*, the possession and knowledge of which *confers on the human being a sense of his being*. From the *deepest essence of the human spirit* grows the need to realize the creative forces hidden in human beings by means of the deed of creativity, and therewith *afford human existence a special dignity*. This applies to the creation (or concretization) of all values, especially the moral ones, but it also plays a significant role in the concretization of aesthetic values. Artistic creative activity is

only *one* special mode of human creativity. So is also the totality of works of art and of the values that attain appearance in them only *one* realm among the various dominions of cultural works produced by human beings. This realm is singled out by the specific character of artistic or aesthetic values, as well as by the specific function they fulfill in human life and destiny. (Ingarden 2016, 609-610, italics are mine)

Ingarden's references to "spiritual discharge" and to "essence of the human spirit" are better understood while linked to his conception of the human being. Without going here into too many details,<sup>14</sup> Ingarden conceives the human personal as a psycho-corporal being, as a *unique monad* (Ingarden 2016, 692 and 700) in which different facets are to be distinguished, even though they are essentially intertwined: the *Leib*, the flow of consciousness, the I, the soul and the spirit. At the bottom of our essence, grounded in the depth of our I (Ingarden, 2016, 691) lay creative faculties and strengths. They thrive, more or less (in)consciously in our soul and sometime surface in our consciousness. They are what allow us to act and realize values and they manifest themselves to us through our actions (Ingarden 2016, 688-689).

#### *Values' Qualitative Endowment as Layers of Harmonized Qualities*

As Ingarden sets it forth in his writings about aesthetics, the matter of values (at least of aesthetic values, but I think this may be generalized) is staged in a three-levels structure (each of those levels may itself be composed of qualitative sub-levels [Ingarden 1969, 145]): (a) aesthetically neutral qualities (*ästhetisch wertneutrale Qualitäten*), (b) aesthetically valent qualities (*ästhetisch valente Qualitäten*) and (c) value-qualities (*Wertqualitäten*) (Ingarden 1969, 143).

Those three levels differ in regard of the aforementioned "positivity" of the values: the value-quality (c) is the immediate determination of the value (ex: beauty, sublimity, charm, etc.) As such, it has a determined positivity (beauty) or negativity (ugliness) (Ingarden 1969, 144). On the other end of the spectrum, the aesthetically neutral qualities (a) have nor the former nor the latter: they have, *in themselves*, no direct axiological significance. Those two stages of structuring are brought together by the middle stage: the one of aesthetically valent qualities (b).<sup>15</sup>

Ingarden presents us with multiple examples of qualities which, at least in certain contexts, are axiologically valent, such as emotional (sadness, melancholy, enchantment, bliss, etc.), intellectual (ingenuity, etc.) or formal qualities (symmetry, consistency, etc.).<sup>16</sup> However, what is fundamental here is that the valent quality in itself does not yet have *definite positivity* or *negativity*: everything will depend on its qualitative context. The valuable qualities are therefore eminently dependent on the

<sup>14</sup> On this, see Makota, 1975 and Kalinoswki, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Ingarden uses three German terms: *valente*, *relevante* and *wertvolle*. I shall not elaborate on the possible minor distinctions to be made here between those.

<sup>16</sup> For more examples: Ingarden 1969, 175 and 184-186.

context which interacts with it. The same quality can be neutral, positive or negative (Ingarden 1969, 187). This is where harmony, and the Gestalt qualities it induces, proves once more vital: how may aesthetically neutral qualities build aesthetically valent qualities and then value-quality if not because their harmonic conjunction brings something that is *more* than their sum? To take once more a (very) blunt example: consider a pointillist painting (one of Seurat for example). In isolation, each dot of color has no particular aesthetic significance. But together, they may form a face (let's say a melancholic one), or a house, or a landscape that may be of aesthetic significance. And all those objects, once more considered together, form a painting that can have an aesthetic value as a whole (and we could even think of a painting with an "ugly" character, but where this ugliness participates to the beauty of the painting as a whole, through contrast, etc.). Such a painting is of course infused by a multitude of layers of harmonies that each time creates something "more" than the mere sum of the harmonized qualities or objects. Same goes for music, where an isolated note has little aesthetical power, while the Gestalt of a chord or of a melody have more, etc. As Ingarden puts it in more technical terms:

aesthetic value qualities, as well as the aesthetically valuable qualities underlie them are not only qualitative in their nature, but they are also often synthetic formations (Gestalten of higher degree) which, in their ultimate determination, are special and unique. And precisely for all works of art that are really great, these are synthetic and unitary formations which establish the qualitative individuality of the aesthetic object, and of which we can only indicate that it is impossible to conceptually master their individuality taken as such (Ingarden 1969, 17-18).

This harmonious synthesis may even go further, as several value qualities may ground together a Gestalt-quality of higher order, the value quality of an aesthetic "holistic" value (*Gesamtwert*);<sup>17</sup> they may also form higher-order value with values of different realms (for example, the final value of a work of architecture can be a synthesis of its artistic value and its practical value [Ingarden 1989, 288-289], or its religious value, etc.).

#### IV. Gestalts, Values and Human Action

##### *Value's Qualitative Harmonies as Regulators of Human Action*

These Gestalt generating harmonies embedded in the qualitative endowment of the values then enlighten the way values "call" us to realize them. As I have tried to show

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<sup>17</sup> "If values [...] appear in an aesthetically concretized work and are of such a kind that they all accord "harmoniously", a total synthetic value of the relevant concretization of the literary work of art is constituted in them whose value quality arises from the selection of value qualities of the values and nonvalues (defects) founding it." (Ingarden 1983, 326). As we see, positive *and* negative values may even synthesize together to create a holistic value.

in another article (Malherbe, 2020), Gestalt is for example absolutely essential in the context of artistic creation:<sup>18</sup> it is the imaginative intuition (Ingarden 1969, 71) of a quality of Gestalt endowed with positive aesthetic value (which "must" therefore be) that "calls" the artist to discover the founding harmony of qualities that could make it present and incarnate them in the work-in-becoming (what color, what word, what note, chord, etc.); and as the creation proceeds, the potentialities of "harmonies" (in the sense of emulating interaction) that emerge in the work in becoming suggest to the artist possible ways for him to finish his work. And, in doing so, the artist becomes intoxicated in the strong emotional response that characterizes any encounter with positive values as this encounter fulfills some of its deepest needs.

This importance of harmonies and Gestalts as regulators of human action can be generalized to all situations where man tries to realize an object or situation of value. The call to action (in its most diverse forms: ethical, aesthetic, scientific, vital) always plays out in concrete *values situations*.<sup>19</sup> We do not feel compelled to be "good" or "heroic" in pure abstraction, but always in a concrete situation (shall I give *today* to this homeless person I just stumble upon?; shall I help this person in distress?; shall I find means and ways to finish this work of art or this academic paper?).

As we see, it is the imaginative forecast of the qualitative content of the final value situation that drives the agent to act (Ingarden 1983a, 22). If I do act, it is, for example, because the situation (moral, vital) or object (aesthetic, scientific) that I picture myself and that I imagine arising from it will be endowed with positive (or negative) value. In other words, it is because I picture myself a Gestalt-of-value that I accomplish this or that act, rearrange the world in such and such a way as to have multiple axiologically potent qualities structure, harmonize, synthesize themselves into a positive value quality. Ingarden states this explicitly when he explains that the actor "finds his support in the clear grasp of both the value-quality of the final outcome of his actions and the worthiness of the given value" (Ingarden 1983b, 68). As such the value-bearing Gestalt quality is thus the driving force and the guide of human action. It invites agents to realize it, to allow it to appear.

#### *Human Action and Responsibility*

We started this inquiry by stating that, according to Ingarden, the realization of value-bearing objects was indispensable for the flourishing of human nature. We have then seen how those values both called us to realize them and filled some of our deepest

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<sup>18</sup> I generally disregard the distinction between artistic and aesthetic values in Ingarden's philosophy in this paper for the sake of simplicity. In a few words: artistic values accrue to the work of art while aesthetic values only accrue to the aesthetic object which is co-founded by the work of art and the spectator. See Ingarden, 1969, 153-180).

<sup>19</sup> Gestalt qualities may indeed be grounded upon qualities pertaining to different objects, forming together a situation or a process. See, for example, Ingarden's discussion on metaphysical qualities in Ingarden, 1979, §§ 48-49: at least some of those are derived qualities (i.e. Gestalt qualities, see note nr 1) encompassing a whole situation.

needs. But values do a lot more: they also transform us deeply. Ingarden addresses this transformation in his latest book, *On Responsibility* (Ingarden 1983b, 69). As mentioned above, values give *significance* to things and situations bearing them. They are thus a prerequisite for responsible action – it is hard to see how persons could be held "responsible" for perfectly meaningless actions. Correlatively, as our actions can bring values into being (or destroy them), we thus automatically bear *responsibility* for them.<sup>20</sup> Responsibility and the "call" of values to be realized turn out to be two sides of the same coin: it is precisely because we are invited – or even required – to act in a certain way that we are responsible for our answer to this call, or lack thereof. As we have seen, there are different types of values and, as a result Ingarden modalizes responsibility according to the type of values at stake (Ingarden 1983b, 53). As Ingardenian translator and commentator Ph. Secrétan puts it:

Utility values, aesthetic values, epistemic values can have their corresponding forms of responsibility. Religious or artistic values can be promoted or rejected, and man bears the responsibility thereof. (Secretan 1997, 18)<sup>21</sup>

The major consequence of responsibility is that it creates so to speak a "backlash" effect from the realized values to their realisor: human action is driven by values and those values then give value to action and, ultimately, to the *agent* itself. Man finds himself modified by the value (positive or negative) of his deeds. Cases of absolute unconsciousness or irresistible coercion set aside, human acts ultimately have their values reflected on the *responsible agent himself*. This is particularly clear in the case of moral values, since Ingarden specifies (Ingarden 1981, 206sq) that, unlike e.g. aesthetic values, they can only attach themselves to the human person (who is or becomes good, noble, courageous, dishonest, etc. following his deeds) But, on closer inspection, something similar goes for aesthetic or even knowledge-related values: do Leonardo da Vinci or Husserl not acquire a particular value – alien to morality – because of the aesthetic or cognitive values they have brought, and for which they are *responsible*? Do they not "rise" above other worldly objects such as the cup or the teaspoon? Obviously, since every human being also has value as a human being (Ingarden 1981, 233-241), they were already of high value, but this elevation is colored in different guises. It is up to the call-to-being (or non-being) that radiates from the valuable agent that changes. Such genius, such good (wo)man, such loved person "must" be, "cannot" die, is "gone too early". Such bloodthirsty criminals "must" be put in prison; such telegenic false philosopher "should" stop writing and saying nonsense (embodying negative knowledge values), etc. Of course, depending

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<sup>20</sup> "If there were no positive or negative values, nor interconnections of being and determination which obtain among them, there could be not authentic responsibility whatever, nor any fulfillment of the requirements posed by it." (Ingarden, 1983b, 70)

<sup>21</sup> See also Pawlica (1988, 38-39) who suggests speaking of legal or professional responsibility. In his ethics' classes, Ingarden also accounts for social or economic responsibility (Ingarden, 1981, 297).

on the values at stake, this call-to-being shall be modalized, take a more or less absolute turn, be more or less imperative (we will not – fortunately – put an artist in jail because he will have been too lazy to complete a work) (Ingarden 1981, 325).<sup>22</sup>

This backlash effect can be best understood if we revert once more to the concepts of harmony and of axiological valence. All those situations of human action involve several elements with axiological potentialities, such as the act of the agent, the intention of the agent, the result of his action, and, last but not least, the agent himself. All those axiologically valent elements are bound together and, as Ingarden's emphasizes it: "the value of the outcome generates the realization of the value of the deed and, as a further consequence, the value of the agent" (Ingarden 1983b, 70). Ingarden also talks about "generative existential relations" (Ingarden 1983b, 70).<sup>23</sup> In other words, all those elements harmonize and generate the final value of the situation, a value whose matter is a Gestalt quality. It is then this final value of the situation which, depending on whether it is positive or negative, gives their value to the different components which led to the coming-into-being of the situation (thereby also modifying their value qualities): the same act – and this is common sense – ought-to-be or ought-not-be depending on the value it allows to realize. And this value of the act then goes back to the agent himself.

#### *The Crystallization of Ourselves Through Inner Harmony*

The values that man incarnates through his actions come back upon him and give *him* value; as such he, as a person, gains a special significance in being and a meaning for his life. He gains *personal* and *moral* values. Moreover, it is through those value-awarding-actions that he *crystallizes* himself as a person, that he, to get back to what we said in the beginning of this inquiry, allow his unique Gestaltic constitutive nature to flourish, to manifest itself. As this constitutive nature itself bears a particular value, it desires to realize itself (Ingarden, 1981, 240). As such, "the inner structure of the person that comes to be crystallized in the given human being will also be all the more harmonized and concentrated" (Ingarden, 2016, 700) In the end, as M. Piworwarczyk underlies it, our constitutive nature is

unchangeable merely in the sense it cannot be removed from the object. But it can develop itself. This development is something strange: it is no typical change consisting in acquirement and loss of properties nor it is continuous process of its own constitution. It is as Ingarden says *continual embodiment or disembodiment of*

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<sup>22</sup> M. Golaszeswka begs to differ on this and proposes that, as aesthetic and scientific values are required for the human's being humanity, the fact of not realizing them even though we could is a moral flaw (Golaszewska, 1975b, 57) . I think Ingarden wouldn't go as far as he distinguishes between several types of responsibilities.

<sup>23</sup> Even though Ingarden here discusses ethics, this also applies to aesthetic values (Swiderski, 1995, 188). M. Golaszewska (1975a, 144) also considers this pattern to be applicable to any value that can be realized through human action.

*some quality which is present in object in an embryonic form.* (Piwowarczyk 2014, 72, italics are mine)

Earning value, the human being also gains a right to see this value being acknowledged to him, to be seen by the others as valuable, to be *recognized* as a unique and valuable person (Ingarden 1983b, 66).

### Conclusion

As announced in my introduction, this paper aimed both at presenting a strong case (at least I hope so) regarding the general significance of the concepts of Gestalt quality and harmony in Ingarden's philosophy and at exemplifying this by analyzing their importance in Ingarden's anthropology. We started by approaching those concepts in their broadest generality in Ingarden's ontology. As Ingarden puts it, various qualities (or even entities) may, when they find themselves in conjunction or in succession unite *harmoniously*, form a *whole* that is more than the sum of its part. They may entail the manifestation of a *new* quality, grounded in them but irreducible to them: a Gestalt quality. Of course, *harmony* is thus not to be understood as "agreement" or "symmetry" but as an *interactive emulation*, as a creative encounter so to speak. We then focused ourselves on the inscription of Gestalts in Ingarden's formal ontology: Gestalts form the constitutive nature of numerous objects of particular significance (God, work of arts, human beings, etc.). This qualification of human being as essentially constituted by a unique Gestalt quality was then the first occasion to assess harmony not only in his static feature but as a dynamic: the very essence of each human requires a set of harmonized qualities to manifest itself, and *acts* to acquire them. Ingarden's anthropology then showed the close connection existing between human nature and the realization of value-bearing objects in a cultural world.

We thus took a close look at Ingarden's conception of value. Ingarden defines values as grounded in their bearers' qualities. They, as such, have a staged qualitative structure, building from axiologically neutral qualities to axiologically valent qualities and ending up in value qualities endowed with a particular positivity or negativity. We then showed how it was harmonious unities that allowed those three stages to build up from one another. Be they positive or negative, values always carry with them a special call to (non)existence; they appeal or even command us to realize (or destroy) their bearers in order for them to (dis)appear. And our encounter with them is always stamped with a strong emotional response as their encounter fulfills some of our deepest needs. We then turned our attention to the strong connection existing between values, human action and responsibility. Values bring *meaning* into situations or objects and, as we can realize or destroy those, our acts also gain meaning and, as a result, we bear responsibility for them. Depending on the final result of our actions, those very actions, our intentions in doing them and, finally, ourselves gain some value through what Ingarden called generative ontological relations. As such, it is our life itself that gain significance through our value-generating-actions, both on a personal level – where they allow our unique

constitutive Gestalt quality to manifest and deploy itself –, and on a social level as our actions participate in the creating of a cultural world in which values may manifest themselves and that transform our very existence – and allows us to become truly human.

As we can see, Ingarden’s conception of harmony as an interactive emulation allows him to place this concept at the core of his philosophy to conceptualize a world where the whole is often more than the sum of its parts. It is true for melodies or work of arts, but it is also true for us human beings. Ingarden understands human essence as a dynamic quest to embody and make our Gestaltic constitutive nature thrive thanks to a set of harmonized qualities. This quest brings us to try and realize value-bearing objects, that is to create more qualitative harmonies to allow those values to appear. Human responsible actions then place the agent in a net of axiologically leaden connections that end up endowing him, as a person, with a particular value, finally allowing him to crystallize as a human person, that is a person whose constitutive nature has succeeded in manifesting itself thanks to an inner harmony.

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