

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF ELEGANCE: AN OUTLINE

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ABSTRACT. Elegance ranks low on the list of debated topics in philosophy, mainly because of the fleeting and mundane character of phenomena that it relies on for its existence. However, the rise of kinaesthesia as an important topic in today's philosophical and phenomenological environment facilitates the inclusion of elegance in the canon of philosophical debates. This article reviews two important positions regarding elegance, that of Renaissance philosopher Baldassare Castiglione and of 20th Century realist phenomenologist Dietrich von Hildebrand. First, we underline three aspects of Castiglione's concept of *sprezzatura* and showcase the significance and purpose of practicing elegance. This step is succeeded by a close look at von Hildebrand's attachment to a realist phenomenological frame for understanding why he denies elegance the status of an ideal value. Last, we look at the connection between elegance and three ideas from a hybrid phenomenology from Husserl and Sheets-Johnstone. These connections form the basis for filling the significant gap between Castiglione's Renaissance take on elegance and von Hildebrand's realist perspective with a new phenomenological project regarding elegance.

Keywords: Castiglione, von Hildebrand, Sheets-Johnstone, intentionality, kinaesthesia, axiology

Introduction

When was the last time you heard of a philosopher proposing a new account about elegance? The concept of elegance does not have much of a history in Western philosophy. In a world of concepts dominated by metaphysics and abstract concepts, elegance is forced to reside at the margins of ideas. Nevertheless, is this destiny justified for a concept representing a plurality of situations that people pay attention to? We can easily claim that the importance of elegance for philosophy is given by its presence in many people's daily lives. We speak on several occasions of elegant women, discreet persons, or elegant objects, particularly clothes or home

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decor objects. We can even speak of elegant programming² or elegant systems engineering processes³. Therefore, these occurrences would justify a minimum effort of reflection upon the concept that unites all these disparate cases.

On the other hand, we immediately get a hint about the scarcity of reflection on elegance in Western philosophy. Elegance seems to be dominated by contingency. Indeed, if we were to ask ourselves, “What do discreet people and elegant vases have in common?” we would have to make an effort and escape a tautological route. In this sense, elegance is *too* contingent, so contingent that it would need an exterior concept to make sense and unite its disparate occurrences. The concept would have to be present in all the elegant instances: people, objects, and actions. This idea indicates that elegance is a concept worthy of philosophical attention since it appears to infiltrate these three fundamental regions of existence. It would only need the help of at least one concept that has a more philosophical grip on reflective minds.

Occasionally, elegance has received the help of such a concept. In Western philosophy, elegance occurs on the reflective agenda of two philosophers: Castiglione and Hildebrand. On each occasion, elegance is doubled by a conceptual context that lets elegance display its philosophical potential. However, both these versions have a limit. As we will see after introducing the phenomenological method, both positions on elegance are interested in the objectual character of elegance rather than in its performative nature. Von Hildebrand even more than Castiglione at that.

1. Castiglione’s elegance

Before approaching Castiglione’s account, I invite you to deepen on the problem of elegance poses. We started by underlining the contingent character of elegance. Elegance appears in many things that have different natures. As a consequence, elegance appears in radically different ways. As mentioned before, elegance can be seen in both people and objects. The radical difference between living subjects and lifeless objects widens the gap between the elegance correlated to an object, for instance, an elegant room design, and the elegance correlated to a person’s gestures. Therefore, from a logical standpoint, this gap can be bridged in two ways: by having a subject behave in a clean and pristine way as if it were an object, or by having a subject move around with an object to create the illusion that the object is a natural extension of the subject’s body.

² Matthew Fuller, “Elegance,” in *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2008, pp. 87-92.

³ Azad M. Madni, “Elegant Systems Design: Creative Fusion of Simplicity and Power,” in *Systems Engineering*, 15:3, 2012, pp. 347-354.

The first version involves an effort to be elegant by renouncing the body's natural tendencies to move and shape that movement according to a thing's rigidity. This subject is after the lack of change and the robust character that things have. Such a perspective will make a subject attempt to reify itself when moving for concealing the particularities of its movement. On the other hand, the second version involves an effort to be elegant by accepting the body's natural tendencies and transmitting that naturalness to the object held or attached to the moving subject. This subject is reconciled with itself to such a degree that it transmits the reconciling character to its relation with the object. Moving with an object does not appear to have the object oppose or resist its mover. These two versions of elegance provide the context for Castiglione's position on elegance.

Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* came out in 1528. It served as a practical manual for any educated individual who wanted to hone their skills and become an essential member of someone's court. In a time of turmoil and conflict, *The Book of the Courtier* provided a more idealized version of human character, which became a model for behaving: an idealized courtesan or counselor.⁴ *The Book of the Courtier* adopts the dialogue form, which signals a vital connection to the book's content: as the courtier needs to go through a process of discovery and self-discipline, so does the effort of reflecting on elegance need to go through a process of hypothesizing, analyzing and furthering the discussion.

One of the main points in *The Book's* dialogue touches on the topic of grace. One of the participants in the dialogue, Count Lodovico da Canossa, debates with Cesare Gonzaga, Castiglione's cousin, on whether "the courtier has to imbue with grace his movements, his gestures, his way of doing things and in short, his every action"⁵ or not. Since the presupposition is widely accepted to be affirmative, the problem deepens into the nature of grace. One position is to say that grace is "a God-given gift"⁶. The other position is to claim that grace arrives through discipline and training. Therefore, the dilemma Castiglione's characters debate on revolves around the genetic aspect of grace. Implicitly, the inquiry does not ask so much to answer the question "What is elegance?" but rather to the question "How can a subject become elegant?" We can easily deduce this question's inherent practicality since the question's form requests a method or a process description. The description does not arrive as such and does not benefit from an analytical account. Instead, Castiglione builds this dialogue scene on a concept that should guide practitioners in their quest for elegance.

⁴ Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes. Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1992, p. 5.

⁵ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 65.

⁶ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 65.

The Count criticizes people who think they can be great (or at least look great) if they imitate others that are generally acknowledged as significant. Since great people are usually famous, the imitation would be rather distasteful. For instance, when imitating the gesture or way of talking of a well-known person just to be appreciated by the people around you, you would only succeed in getting the attention you desire if the crowd is ignorant. Otherwise, you would want to avoid such a strategy when desiring to impress educated and knowledgeable people. In essence, we deduce that the path towards elegance is not straightforward and cannot be accomplished if the subject specifically aims to acquire elegance.

After this Platonist criticism of Renaissance nobility mimicry, the Count proposes a radically different strategy:

“having already thought a great deal about how this grace is acquired, and leaving aside those who are endowed with it by their stars, I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from all affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless.”⁷

The Count’s strategy has two steps. The first is negative, while the second is positive. The negative step implies abstinence from all gestures that are emotional, sometimes too emotional. The natural tendency, when imitating others, is to exaggerate. Therefore, we can see the Platonist criticism in the Count’s construction of a method for obtaining elegance. The surplus of emotion must be rooted out and bracketed methodologically across all human actions and words.

On the other hand, the second step represents a positive indication. Elegance cannot be obtained by abstinence alone. Instead, the aspiring subject must act towards a particular goal to produce elegance as a side-consequence. This goal is called *sprezzatura*, which translates as a “certain nonchalance” or a studied carelessness. The object character of *sprezzatura* is as evident as its abstract character. Since imitation is off the table, the subject can only use an abstract concept of carelessness to guide its actions and reform its character. Once again, we immediately the Platonist structure of this idea.

Nevertheless, as with all Plato style arguments, we cannot overlook that *sprezzatura* becomes an idea in itself, a model that cannot be obtained, but that is worth pursuing regardless of results. Thus, we must acknowledge the objectual character of *sprezzatura*, independent of any courtier that tries to become elegant.

⁷ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 67.

By underlining the Platonist structure in Castiglione's concept, we end up with a *sprezzatura* that translates as "elegance in itself." Consequently, elegance is rehabilitated for entering the classical world of philosophical ideas, along with beauty, goodness, and truth.

We previously mentioned two ways of bridging the elegance of an object and the elegance of a subject: we either have a subject behave like an object, having perfect and precise movements, or we have a subject move around with an object to create the illusion that the object is a natural extension of the subject's body. We would now ask ourselves: which version would Castiglione endorse? Doubtless that he would go for the second. Studied carelessness and precise, object-like movements and gestures are almost contradictory. Carelessness is based on freedom and liberty of expression, while precise, mechanical movements rely on an artificial constraint. The pristine aesthetic suggested by the first version is not in line with Castiglione's ideal courtesan because, we must not forget, the practical drive to become elegant was to conceal one's thoughts and, by consequence, to preserve one's power, which opposes the very nature of objects: to be manipulated as others see fit.

Not long after formulating the principle, the Count supports his idea by offering an example that all the characters are familiar with: "Who is there among you who does not laugh when our Pierpaolo dances in that way of his, with those little jumps and with his legs stretched on tiptoe, keeping his head motionless, as if he were made of wood, and all so labored that he seems to be counting every step? Who is so blind that he does not see in this the clumsiness of affectation?"⁸ The bodily aspect of overdriving the elegant dance falls immediately into disgrace. Castiglione's message is clear: whoever wants too much to be elegant will fail in its endeavor. Pierpaolo's case provokes laughter to the group because he strives to be something he is clearly not an object. This endeavor immediately makes Pierpaolo become a caricature of a powerful subject: just like an object, Pierpaolo is vulnerable to any action someone might take upon him since he is caught in the routine of his mechanical dance.

The power correlate of nonchalance becomes more and more visible in the Count's speech on elegance. *Sprezzatura* is not only an abstinence from affectation and an ideal model to be pursued. Besides, the learned nonchalance also has an immediate practical consequence that starts from the idea that it conceals all artistry and all the effort to obtain a skill. As the Count remarks, the practice of *sprezzatura* "makes onlookers believe that a man who performs well with so much facility must possess even greater skill than he does and that if he took great pains

⁸ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, pp. 67-68.

and effort, he would perform better.”⁹ In other words, concealing one’s artistry gives the impression of even more remarkable artistry than one actually has. In modern terms, we can call it a tool to make others overestimate a subject’s expertise. As such, we now understand that *sprezzatura* is not only a practice to better one’s mind and character through abstinence, not only a paedagogic ideal but also a power-tool to manipulate others into believing you are more of an expert than you really are. Such a tool would, indeed, be as useful in a Renaissance court as it would be useful today in any work environment.

Castiglione’s perspective on elegance showcases a redesigning of Platonism on a value that appears to have not been conceptualized in ancient philosophy. By contrast, we observe that another philosopher explicitly interested in values, including elegance, had a different view.

2. Von Hildebrand’s take on elegance

Husserl’s phenomenology provoked numerous reactions from the phenomenological camp, especially from realist phenomenologists like Max Scheler, Roman Ingarden, and Dietrich von Hildebrand. Husserl’s central idea was that methodological doubting (or the *epoché*) reveals that what we know is an appearance in our consciousness, so our study should be about the consciousness acts that get fulfilled into objects of consciousness, but also about the transcendental dimension on which those acts rely on. This direction was rejected by many phenomenologists, which rallied in the so-called “realist phenomenology” camp. The strategies these philosophers deployed usually had to do with trying to rehabilitate the “real object”. For instance, when comparing Husserl’s and Ingarden’s work on image consciousness, you find Ingarden’s move to add another layer to Husserl’s threefold distinction.

Husserl distinguishes between image-thing, image object, and image subject¹⁰. When looking at our graduation picture featuring the whole class, we can produce several consciousness objects. For instance, we are aware of the image-thing, which is the glossy paper on which ink has been distributed in a particular way. Then, we are aware of the image object, which is what the image represents, a group of people standing to be photographed. Finally, we conceive of the image subject, the actual people who were photographed. Husserl’s threefold distinction appears to capture the whole territory of image consciousness. However, there is

⁹ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 70.

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory (1898-1925)*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2006, p. 21.

one still missing for the realist minded philosopher: the real object. In his *Ontology of the Work of Art*, Ingarden added the fourth dimension, a more realist one, to Husserl's idealistic perspective. Besides the three layers of a picture, we have the real, objective picture¹¹. Through this addition, Ingarden returns to a more classical perspective and subdues the relativity and freedom of Husserl's consciousness concept to the deterministic conception of having consciousness rally around the reality of a standalone and pure object from outside consciousness.

To return to elegance. Dietrich von Hildebrand made a similar move, except that Husserl, as far as I know, did not analyze elegance, so von Hildebrand most probably did not have a phenomenological theory to work on. Von Hildebrand starts his short chapter on elegance from his *Aesthetics* by recognizing elegance as a value-quality lying on the border of beauty. Nevertheless, unlike beauty, "especially the beauty of the second power, elegance is entirely this-worldly. It has no place in eternity. Nor is it to be found *per eminentiam* in God and in eternity, as are all the typically aesthetic values, such as lovely, graceful, or poetic. It is not a message from God. Often it has a fashionable flair and is therefore on the margin of the world of values. Elegance can appear conjoined to a certain beauty; but the beauty of the second power cannot join with elegance."¹²

Von Hildebrand's realism is straightforward. He conceives of beauty in two ways. The first is of this world, for instance, a beautiful face or a beautiful gown. The second is eternal, similar to Plato's concept of beauty. The "second power beauty" is beauty in itself. Following this distinction, we discover that von Hildebrand's elegance can, at most, be compatible with first-order beauty, with the more mundane version of ideal beauty. The fashion character of elegance underlines this position: elegance changes, whereas beauty can be the imitation of an idea. For instance, a beautiful suit can be worn elegantly. Alternatively, a beautiful woman dances elegantly in her evening dress. However, for von Hildebrand, elegance cannot be coupled to the idea of beauty and is stuck on the contingent level.

Denying an ideal status to elegance is not surprising. On the one hand, elegant clothes or objects are not ideal candidates for having their idealities, especially in a modern post-Cartesian setting. On the other hand, the elegance of persons is a fleeting quality, and it usually refers to elegant movements, gestures, the way someone walks or talks. Having a fleeting quality also opposes the requirements for ideality: to be unchanged, eternal. Therefore, it makes sense for a realist philosopher to look at elegance as a lesser version of beauty.

¹¹ Roman Ingarden, *Ontology of the Work of Art*, Ohio University Press, Athens OH, 1989, p. 137.

¹² Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics. Volume I*, 2016, Hildebrand Project, Steubenville OH, p. 399-400.

Despite the somewhat thin account of elegance, von Hildebrand finds another value with ideal status and is close to elegance and can sometimes overlap with elegance: gracefulness. The fashionable character of elegance, says von Hildebrand, “is completely lacking in gracefulness. However, that which is ungraceful is also not elegant. The graceful has no trace of the fashionable, and it often appears in a form in which elegance is completely superseded. Their only point of contact is the fact that the ungraceful and ungainly likewise form an antithesis to elegance.”¹³ We observe that, for von Hildebrand, elegance and gratefulness rather have a negative contact; their opposites are the same. If a person is scruffy, as opposed to elegant, it will also be graceless. Nevertheless, if a person is clean and elegantly dressed, it will not necessarily be graceful. Such persons can have the markings of elegance but inspire something less than divine through their behavior.

Like Castiglione, von Hildebrand conceives of elegance as a value. Since grace and elegance are synonymous in the Renaissance philosopher’s perspective, we can safely think that Castiglione and von Hildebrand share a similar perspective on the ideality of grace/elegance. However, unlike Hildebrand, Castiglione does not shy away from the more mundane aspect of elegance. The practical and worldly side of elegance almost lacks in von Hildebrand, as most of his examples from the *Aesthetic* deal with Classical music and ballet. In contrast, Castiglione is interested in the more instrumental nature of elegance and the actions a subject can enterprise through it.

We now delineate a path between these two perspectives. Castiglione does not deal with the elegant subject’s consciousness but tries to ideate the process of becoming elegant. On the other hand, von Hildebrand had the methodology to tackle the elegant subject’s consciousness but limited himself because of his realist agenda. Therefore, we will now propose the premises for a middle way between these two perspectives, which we call a practical phenomenological perspective.

3. Sheets-Johnstone’s phenomenology of movement

We noticed that elegance is often exemplified through subjects that dress and move in a certain way. For instance, when walking on the catwalk, the model is interested in giving life to the otherwise lifeless sartorial object the model wears. The model becomes conjoined to the object she wears. Therefore, an analysis of the elegant subject and its consciousness is at home with movement phenomenology. If we could understand the main idea movement shows us about consciousness, we would be able to describe the consciousness structures at play in elegance.

¹³ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics. Volume I*, 2016, Hildebrand Project, Steubenville OH, p. 400.

The most detailed phenomenological analyses of movement were and are done by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. In her *The Primacy of Movement*, she struggles with the realist infiltrations in the field of Husserlian phenomenology and claims that movement is a neglected phenomenon because of having an ephemeral nature. Unlike ideas, especially ideas belonging to a realist perspective, movement does not stay still to be analyzed and dissected. Movement is a rather tricky subject to conceptualize precisely because of its fleeting character. This situation calls for a methodology different from philosophical realism that can be more tolerant of the changing nature of movement and, by extension, of elegance.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues that movement has been mostly neglected in science and philosophy “because perception — most especially visual perception — language, information-processing, computational modelling, and other such topics are at the focal point of contemporary attention”¹⁴. The philosophical preoccupation with vision and all concepts configured upon visual metaphors (for instance, truth is often synonymous to light, or an investigation requires seeing ideas or essences) show¹⁵ us the low importance of movement in configuring the language of reflection. In this context, Sheets-Johnstone’s argument relies on bringing Husserl’s concept of animate organism into attention and, with it, to underline the importance of kinaesthetic consciousness. In short, her work develops into attempts to underline how kinaesthetic consciousness pre-configures important philosophical concepts like numbers, power, or empathy. I propose we review three ideas that are important for a phenomenological understanding of elegance.

Elegance is a kinaesthetic phenomenon. There can be no elegance without movement, and since elegance is a predominately human phenomenon, there can be no elegance without human movement. The first idea from Sheets-Johnstone’s work that is useful for animating elegance phenomenology refers to how the upright posture configures kinaesthetic consciousness. From a phenomenological standpoint, the upright posture becomes *the* form of kinaesthetic consciousness and, in a broader Husserlian sense, a mode of intentionality. To use Husserl’s act-object distinction¹⁶, Sheets-Johnstone rewrites this distinction through the relation between upright movement (the act) and kinaesthetic consciousness (the object). I propose that we look at some examples from this methodological shift.

¹⁴ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam, 2011, p. 114.

¹⁵ Please observe the immediate manifestation of the visual in philosophical research.

¹⁶ For a helpful short introduction to the distinction between acts and objects, or, in other words, that underline the exclusive belonging to consciousness, the distinction between noema and noesis, see John J. Drummond, Intentionality, in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, Routledge, London, pp. 125-134. For a more detailed account, see Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosopher. First Book*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1983, pp. 211-235.

One significant result from Sheets-Johnstone's work on the upright posture is that the upright posture frees the hands¹⁷ and thus opens up the possibility of having a standalone concept of possession in our consciousness. Down this line of investigation, the project would deepen Castiglione's understanding of elegance as a power-tool through the relation between elegant subject and possessive consciousness. Possessive acts would undoubtedly confront elegance, and yet, it will have to evade the tendency to think in terms of possessing the object or person with whom the elegant subject moves.

For instance, an elegant lady dances with a handkerchief. The dance will not be elegant (nor graceful, in von Hildebrand's terms) if the lady will hold on to that handkerchief as her life depends on possessing it. Instead, if the lady gently waves and plays with the handkerchief so that they become a couple in movement, we can talk about an elegant dance. Sheets-Johnstone's earlier work on dance is also important here, especially her concept of "illusion of force," manifested as a form that emerges from the moving dancer. "Since movement is never complete at any one instant or point, never fully there, consciousness exists its body in movement as a form continuously projecting itself toward a spatial-temporal future; hence, as a form-in-the-making."¹⁸ The lady elegantly dancing with her handkerchief creates a form that is continually being remade. The stable form produced and left behind by the fleeting movement gets an objectual yet immaterial character. It becomes a *dance*. Precisely this form-in-the-making, this dance object, is valuable or not, elegant or inelegant. The dance object of consciousness is, no doubt, harder to observe than a painting or a symphony because, unlike the symphony's sound or the painting's colors and shapes, the dance is never fully there. This idea strongly points out that denying elegance an ideal status because its objects are never fully there by comparison to other objects of consciousness is either a habit of intellectual self-limitation or a case of what Sartre calls, "bad faith."¹⁹

A second significant result from Sheets-Johnstone is again related to upright posture. In *The Roots of Thinking*, Sheets-Johnstone analyzes the walking posture and maintains that the brachiation in upright locomotion creates particular concepts of "front," "back," "left," "right." Besides, upright walking creates a unique sense of "forward" and "backward."²⁰ All movements are done in a forward fashion, even though we may move away from something or return to something. Returning is still done by moving forward. This idea weighs heavily when connected to Castiglione's

¹⁷ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam, 2011, p. 162.

¹⁸ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia PA, 2015, p. 28.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Pocket Books, New York NY, 1978, pp. 47-70.

²⁰ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia PA, 1990, p. 79.

idea of practicing elegance: the practice of concealing one's artistry. The repetitive movement is fundamentally new even though the subject is aware that the movement was done before. Becoming aware of the need for repetition is the key, in an almost stoic fashion, towards sculpting your movements into movements and gestures that conceal the bettering repetition and effort put into them. Conceiving elegance as a permanently new yet repetitive task is an act that enters the phenomenological-existential territory about relating to the world and oneself in the broadest sense possible.

We observe the eidetic trajectory in the results, as mentioned above. This trajectory of analysis is typical to phenomenology, especially to constitutive phenomenology. We start from the most straightforward evidence we can find in experience, in this case, the sense of "forward" that infiltrates most movements. Then, we contextualize the idea and give it a supplementary meaning concerning the subject that we chose for our analysis: in this case, the practice of elegance. Last, we synthesize the two versions of the idea. The forward-ness in movement and the repetitive forward-ness of practicing elegance as a way of relating to the world are synthesized into a concept of elegance that is ready for further phenomenological exploration.

The third concept is shared by Husserl and Sheets-Johnstone: intentionality. Famous in its Husserlian form, intentionality is defined by its characteristic of always being intentionality of something²¹. However, intentionality is not only of something but also *for* something. Consciousness is, on the one hand, always forming objects, directed at objects, and, on the other hand, ahead of itself, lunged into further object formation. For example, I am in a room. All the objects of the room, including myself and the room, are objects in my consciousness. Every change in objects is a change in my consciousness. If there is a pot on the stove boiling water, every boiling bubble is a change in the "boiling water in a pot" object of consciousness. If someone walks in the room while I pay attention to the pot and I turn around to see the person, my consciousness is ready to form the "new person in the room" object in my consciousness.

My consciousness is always directed at objects. Consciousness is always going through the routine of forming objects. Here we have one of phenomenology's central themes: describing and sorting out types of objects based on their particular objects. Some objects are predominately visual; some are auditory; some are images

²¹ This is the idea that the act-object distinction promotes: acts are always fulfilled into objects of consciousness. The distinction is both logical and dialectical, logical because acts and objects represent clear and distinct ideas of the phenomenological reflection, and dialectical because acts never remain "as they are." Instead, acts are always on a trajectory towards objecthood. The dialectical aspect of consciousness is often brought up when discussing temporality. See Nicolas de Warren, "Time," in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, Routledge, London, 2011, pp. 190-201.

and have their special register, as we have seen before. Finally, some are primarily based on movement, like a dance. To return to the example of myself in the room with a new person and a pot of boiling water: consciousness is not only of objects of consciousness but also *for* objects of consciousness. Consciousness is always ahead of the current state of objects I am aware of. Consciousness always starts to constitute objects before I am aware of them. For instance, when I turn around to see the new person walking in the room, I already start to vaguely see a “standing shape” heading towards me and vaguely hear some “approaching noise.” Only when about to finish my movement of turning around can I fully see that a person is approaching me. I can deduce that a person is approaching after clarifying that the noise I hear is a pattern of steps.

To conclude this example, consciousness has a twofold character. On the one hand, consciousness always functions with the object format. It always creates reality in a certain way, to a certain degree of clarity and vagueness. On the other hand, consciousness always starts to recreate reality before I notice the result, which is the net of objects that constitute my present situation, or in other words, the Aristotelian “now.” This twofold characteristic is called intentionality.

Sheets-Johnstone’s main addition to the concept of intentionality is the relocation of intentionality on a purely kinaesthetic basis. A radical methodological move on her part, she explains the genesis of most concepts based on kinaesthetic consciousness, just like a philosopher like Spinoza would describe the continuity we can find in intentionality as a *conatus*²² tirelessly backing-up desires. Sheets-Johnstone’s purpose in locating intentionality in kinaesthesia is to investigate the occurrence of concepts in the chronic subjective process of learning to move oneself²³. As she cites from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: “Matter will surely not move itself.”²⁴ Therefore, the phenomenology of movement will be interested to see how concepts emerge out of the dialectics of *learning to move oneself* against a surrounding that is nothing more than a collection of objects of consciousness.

²² Spinoza’s essentialism regarding the concept of endeavor, or conatus, is similar to Husserl’s intentionality concept because Spinoza’s conatus is conceived as an “unmoved mover” for consciousness. However, just like intentionality, the conatus is not a “something,” a quiddity, nor a self, an author that moves. See more in Spinoza, *Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 102.

²³ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam, 2011, p. 217.

²⁴ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam, 2011, p. XXII. For the original text, see Aristotle, „Metaphysics,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1991, p. 174.

As a consequence, the phenomenology of elegance must both be constitutive and genetic²⁵. It must be a constitutive phenomenology because it must describe the possibilities consciousness has to deploy in every moment of experience to allow for the appearance of elegance in consciousness and action. However, it must also be a genetic phenomenology because it must describe the steps that led to elegance's appearance throughout the more chronic process of learning to move. The opposition between constitutive phenomenology and genetic phenomenology is clear at this point: it resembles the opposition between the acute and the chronic. Constitutive phenomenology is "acute" because it describes the experiential structure of the elegant moment. Genetic phenomenology is "chronic" because it describes becoming elegant out of becoming versed in moving oneself.

We must now close the circle. Castiglione and von Hildebrand laid out different perspectives on elegance, in between which we propose the Husserlian methodology in the kinaesthetic version Sheets-Johnstone proposes. We picked-up three ideas from the hybrid phenomenological methodology. The first refers to the freeing of hands by the upright posture, possession, and the configuration of elegance in relation to possessive consciousness. The second pertains to the forward character of locomotion and its relation to the attitude that changes the routine of practicing elegance. Castiglione's idea of concealing one's artistry and previous efforts in obtaining skill is deepened through a phenomenology of the forward character of consciousness. The last idea that we presented in this section is about relocating intentionality at the heart of kinaesthesia. The consequence is methodological, and it involves a distinction between constitutive phenomenology and genetic phenomenology. The phenomenology of elegance needs to be developed along these two lines. From what we saw, we would say that Castiglione partially touches on the genetic aspect by offering the final destination for the effort of learning to move and act elegantly. On the other hand, von Hildebrand partially joins in the constitutive analyses of objects by distinguishing between elegance and gracefulness. Nevertheless, none of these analyses are properly pursued in a thorough idealist context.

4. Conclusions

We began with the idea that elegance is a contingent phenomenon. This idea represented the argument for excluding elegance from philosophical debates. Along the way, we saw a few philosophers' efforts to take elegance seriously and

²⁵ For a short and clear description, see Dieter Lohmar, „Genetic Phenomenology,“ in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, Routledge, London, 2011, pp. 266-275.

analyze its significance for a subject. We must observe that each philosopher treated elegance in the context of its larger picture, and precisely that larger picture influenced their perspective on elegance. Whether we consider the effort to write a manual for counselors or a theologically flavored aesthetics, we see that the broader methodology pre-defines what the philosopher thinks about the topic he, or she, is investigating. Then, we should ask ourselves if the topic is thoroughly analyzed or just used as a mean for demonstrating another idea. Therefore, we see that saving elegance from the negative label of contingency does not save it from being a topic that is analyzed for another topic.

Castiglione analyses elegance for having an account of training the Renaissance counselor, while von Hildebrand analyses elegance out of completionism: the topic must be analyzed, even though it is inferior to the rest of aesthetic topics. Pursuing elegance through the methodology offered by the phenomenology of movement will also deform elegance. A phenomenological elegance cannot leave it with the status of an idea. Instead, the phenomenological elegance is a mode of consciousness: a mode of acting, thinking, and being. The elegant object is reduced to the consciousness that understands the object as an elegant object. Perhaps we should ask ourselves if the endeavor to deepen elegance is not a quest to enrich our knowledge about a marginal philosophical topic but instead, an effort to produce a new perspective on existence at the heart of an aesthetic concept.

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