

# Ideas for a phenomenological interpretation and elaboration of personal construct theory

## Part 2. Husserl and Kelly: A case of commonality

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In the first part of their work, the Authors substantiated the strong similarities between Kelly's personal construct theory and phenomenology, notwithstanding the rejection of the latter from the American psychologist. In this second article the Authors go so far as to uphold the thesis that Kellyan theory even represents an example of the realization of the Husserlian project of a rigorous science of experience, alternative to the naturalistic one. After having briefly expounded the new idea of objectivity described by Husserl, Kelly's theory is presented as world of the general forms deriving from experience, which take shape as structural invariants in Kelly's enunciation of professional constructs.

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Kelly's opposition to phenomenology seems to assign to this philosophical stance the same fate suffered by his theory when it is assimilated to different and incompatible systems. In the passages quoted in the first part of our work (Armezzani & Chiari, 2014) one can see how he managed to blame phenomenology for particularistic subjectivism, idealism and logical positivism at the same time. It is the destiny of all new and difficult ideas.

How it happened to Kelly, so Husserl had frequently to denounce prejudices and misinterpretations surrounding his thought. In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), at that point elderly, at once with the pride for having "introduced phenomenology in history", expresses his deep bitterness for having being already misunderstood many times, and for these misunderstandings put forward a reason which could be still valid: "One goes to seek advice from my disciples [...] and saves oneself the trouble of study-

ing my writings, undoubtedly very difficult”<sup>1</sup>. Also Kelly’s writings are hardly easy to read and understand adequately, and this makes our work difficult. It seems almost clear, however, that Kelly happened to know distorted versions of Husserl’s thought, and that as a result his meeting with phenomenology has been missed.

What we would like to maintain here is that personal construct theory (PCT) shows not only important similarities with phenomenology, as already suggested by other authors (Butt, 1998a, 1998b, 2003, 2004; Epting, 1988; Warren, 1998) and by ourselves (Armezzani, 2010; Chiari & Nuzzo, 2004, 2010), but even that Kellyan theory represents in many respects an unaware realisation of the Husserlian project. In order to uphold this thesis, it is necessary to recover Husserl’s scientific project (after having read his very difficult writings), and highlight how this style of thought and analysis has been gone along in the construction of PCT in spite of its explicit rejection.

In this connection it is interesting to note the similar stand taken by Varela, who put back the Husserlian phenomenology on the scientific stage with the foundation of his *neurophenomenology* (1996, 1998). In his previous book written in collaboration with Thompson and Rosch (1991), Husserl had been criticised for his solipsism, his reductionism and his representation-alism, and depreciated for his excess of theoreticism. Some time later Thompson (2007) withdrew honestly these accusations, justifying them with the scanty knowledge of Husserl and the influence of an interpretation of phenomenology offered by Dreyfus and Harrison (1982):

I now believe (i) that Husserl was not a methodological solipsist; (ii) that was greatly concerned with the intersubjective and embodied aspects of experience; (iii) that his theory of intentionality was not a representational theory; and (iv) that his theory of the life-world was not reductionistic and representationalist. (Thompson, 2007, p. 414)

As to Kelly, he did not have second thoughts (or maybe he did not have the time for that), but this does not jeopardize the possibility of seeing, beyond the subjective intentions, how a certain cognitive attitude can lead to parallel paths of knowledge and shared outcomes, even though contexts, purposes and languages are very different. Of course, these differences remain and are very clear. Husserl is a German philosopher and Kelly a psychologist who portrays well the American tradition of logical pragmatism; Husserl wants to go back to the origins of knowledge, Kelly is content with providing a theory useful to a certain range of convenience.

But our comparison is a view between the lines which shows up similarities beyond the first sight, trying not to misrepresent the originality and peculiarity of both the perspectives. The interest for the ways of human knowledge, the rediscovery of experience, and the recursive game between particularity and generality, are the core of the present face-to-face between Husserl and Kelly. The third part of our contribution will focus on clinical aspects and will see PCT compared with hermeneutics and the contributions of the phenomenological stance.

Though aware of the impossibility of condensing phenomenology in few paragraphs and of exhausting the comprehensiveness of Kellyan theory with some quotations, we hope that this attempt, even though risky, helps to throw light on certain core areas of the Husserlian thought in order to allow an interpretation of PCT under this light, and to propose the occasion for a comparison open to other contributions.

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<sup>1</sup> This passage from *The Crisis of European Sciences* appears in appendix XIII, not included in the English translation. We translated into English the Italian edition of the work.

## The project of a science of experience

Husserl's project is the foundation of a *strenge Wissenschaft*, a rigorous science, altogether different from the naturalistic one: a *science of experience* that, for its fidelity to "the lived", will have to adopt "a wholly new point of departure and a wholly new method, a method that distinguishes it in principle from every 'natural' science" (1907, Engl. transl., p. 20). The scientific program takes form as "the scientific opening-up of the life-world" (Husserl, 1936, Engl. transl., p. 128), and "its execution implies the creation of a new science of a peculiar sort" (p. 146).

The life-world (*Lebenswelt*) is "what is always taken for granted in all human life, always familiar to us in its typology through experience" (Husserl, 1936, Engl. transl., p. 123): the layer of lived experience preceding naturalistic constructions, and that has never been object of scientific inquiry.

"There is never been a scientific inquiry into the way in which the life-world constantly functions as subsoil" (1936/1970, p.124). "No one ever thinks about the predications and truths which precede science, about the 'logic' which provides norms within this sphere of relativity" (1936, Engl. transl., p. 135). "Is not it possible, [...] by a new attitude, to take in the life-world at a glance, and to resolve to know it for what it is in its own mutability, relativity, making of it the object of a science?" (1936)<sup>1</sup>

The need for a science of experience arises from a deep dissatisfaction for the proposals offered by positivism and idealism. "Normal" sciences have failed in giving answers to the more radical questions because have been edified on the prejudice of an outer reality independent of the subject, and neglected to take into consideration that "wonderful correlation" between consciousness and world (Husserl, 1907, Engl. transl., p. 68) which is human experience. It is therefore necessary to restart from the origins of knowledge and refound on this basis a coherent method. Without such fundamental question about the *how* of knowledge, "all natural science is naïve in regard to its point of departure" (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 85).

In order to find the layer of original experience Husserl asks for the practice of *epoché*: the bracketing of prejudices and acquisitions taken for granted. *Epoché* is a "methodic expedient" (1912-1929, Engl. transl., p. 58) to be used "to free of the strongest and most universal, and at the same time most hidden, internal bond" (1936, Engl. transl., p. 151) and to "set aside all hitherto prevailing habits of thinking" (1912-1929, Engl. transl., p. xix). It is a "vocational attitude" (1936, Engl. transl., p. 136) able to reveal what we should know all the time: that our view of things is necessarily perspective, and that our knowledge is inside experience.

*Epoché* is anything but a denial of reality. Husserl always rejected the philosophical tradition which "plays" with the possibility of the real: "there is" a world, and if it asks for being enlightened with regard to its meaning, does not tolerate of being questioned about its being. While we put into parentheses the thesis of a world, in fact, "all that has been 'put out of play' remains for us, here as elsewhere, preserved in the bracketing-modification" (Husserl, 1912-1929, Engl. transl., p. 183). Rather than moving us away from the world, phenomenological reduction gives us it back in its original form, revealing the prejudices of previous constructions.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of the third quotation is ours, since the English translation does not include paragraph XVII

If one considers this methodological and instrumental function of *epoché*, the scientific implications implied will appear clearer. Through the “bracketing” of the obvious, the field of phenomena and meanings, the life world that naturalistic science has never explored, discloses.

Husserl therefore does not contrast naturalism with a renewed version of the “spiritual sciences” and, least of all, with philosophical idealism:

Not a subjective idealism (1912-1929, Engl. transl., p. 128) [Husserl almost seems to reply to Kelly]. If anyone reading our statements objects that they mean changing all the world into subjective illusion and committing oneself to a “Berkeleyan idealism” we can only answer that he has not seized upon the sense of those statements. [...] The real actuality is not “reinterpreted”, to say nothing of its being denied; it is rather that a countersensical interpretation of the real actuality, i.e. an interpretation which contradicts the latter’s own sense as clarified by insight, is removed. (p. 129)

To the phenomenologist, the world is not “a figment of his imagination” as Kelly (1965/1969, p. 219) wrote, but the real correlate of our knowledge, inseparable from it:

The world, however, never is a thinker’s experience. To refer to the world may be an experience, but the world itself is the object intended. It is immaterial, from the point of view of our distinction, what attitude one takes up to the question of the make-up of objective being, of the true, real inner being of the world or of any other object. (Husserl, 1900, Engl. transl., p. 223)

What Merleau-Ponty (1945) translates into this meaningful assertion: “We must not [...] wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive” (Engl. transl., p. xviii).

The rediscovery of the fundamental correlation between knowledge and world dissolves the realism/idealism antinomy, and brings the term “reality” back to the meaning of an actual “making experience” of things. To study experience scientifically means, substantially, having no longer as objects the data of nature meant as independent from the subject, but the phenomena, that is, “the manner in which each type of objects is present to us” (Husserl, 1900, Engl. transl., p. 135).

In order to understand what a phenomenon is one must break away from the idea of an objective reality distinct from the person who grasps it. Actually, the phenomenon is prior to all distinctions. There is no “external” phenomenon which presents itself to consciousness: the phenomenon is this very presentation. The practice of *epoché* is used for removing the mistake which makes us distinguish the thing from its manifestation.

It is a serious error to draw a real (*reell*) distinction between “merely immanent” or “intentional” objects, on the one hand, and “transcendent”, “actual” objects, which may correspond to them on the other. [...] It need only be said to be acknowledged that the intentional object of a presentation is the same as its actual object, and on occasion as its external object, and that it is absurd to distinguish between them. (Husserl, 1900, Engl. transl., p. 240)

Naturalistic objectivity is a delusion: like von Foerster (1974) stated in more recent times, “objectivity is the delusion that observations could be made without an observer”.

The first consequence of this discovery is the recognition that any representation is a phenomenon, a real experience, even when the object of representation is non-existent. If I represent the god Jupiter – Husserl (1900) writes – the mental object is not real, but

this does not prevent our-idea-of-the-god-Jupiter from being actual, a particular sort of experience or particular mode of mindedness [...] If, however, the intended object exists, nothing becomes phenomenologically different. It makes no essential difference to consciousness whether it exists, or is fictitious, or is perhaps completely absurd. (Engl. transl., p. 216)

We shall see later on that Kelly takes a similar position as to the reality of phenomena. Even though not justified in the same analytical and radical ways in which Husserl deals with the question, this crucial epistemological deviation seems to be at the basis even of Kellyan philosophy, constructive alternativism, and the fundamental postulate of his theory. It is plain that also for Kelly the theme has changed compared to naturalistic psychologies: no more data, but meanings. Only on this basis it is possible to assert that “all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement” (Kelly, 1955, p. 15) and that people do not react to objective stimuli, but anticipate events. The very same notion of *personal construct* implies the unmissable relationship between subject and world, which is the condition for dealing with meanings and interpretation.

Even though Kelly did not succeed in overcoming the realism/idealism opposition and kept the ontological distinction between events and constructs, he is nevertheless disposed to give the latter a status of reality which no naturalist would allow. Actually, the passage quoted in the first part of our work as a proof of his dualistic stance ends with a significant statement:

The summary answer to our question of whether or not constructs are real is that a construct is indeed real, but its reality is not identical with the factual elements in its context. [...] Its reality is not their reality. The construct has its own reality. (Kelly, 1955, p. 136)

“The construct has its own reality”; and it is on this very reality that Kelly concentrates his inquiry, not on the reality of factual events. The same reality that Husserl assigns to phenomenological studies:

The phenomenologist defines as reality something completely different compared to the researcher of natural sciences. Their topic is basically different, corresponding to a different attitude. The naturalist investigates nature which shows itself in consciousness, but not the showing consciousness. He investigates the objective elements which show themselves, not the showing or the manifestation in itself, as lived experience of consciousness. (Husserl, 1911-1921, Ital. transl. 2007, p. 58)<sup>1</sup>

In Husserl, the scientific alternative to naturalism defines itself clearly as the rigorous study of lived experience, of this reality neglected by scientists which also Kelly, though keeping the dualism, chooses as his own subject. At this point, it is inevitable that the change of subject demands a coherent change in methods and aims. By following the developments of phenomenology on this methodological path, we could discover surprising echos with Kellyan theory, placed on a submerged level and never explicitly thematized.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation from Italian is ours.

### A new idea of objectivity

According to Husserl (1911), once the experience devoid of prejudices has been recovered, it is a matter of constructing on that a rigorous science, “a radical science, rising from below, based on sure foundation and progressing according to the most rigorous methods” (Engl. transl., p. 142). In this phenomenological science the subjective reference is unavoidable, in a radical sense: it is not possible to give up it because it does not depend on an arbitrary choice, but on the structural manner of knowledge. For this same reason, it is necessary to abandon once and for all the idea of an objective science as meant by naturalism, and refound a “sensed” science or, as phenomenological scientists say today, “a science of consciousness as if experience mattered” (Varela, 1998), or a “science as if situation mattered” (Bitbol, 2002).

No doubt that when Husserl speaks of scientificity he is thinking of an “objective” knowledge, in the sense of universally valid and communicable, and is thinking also of a useful knowledge, in the sense that it must contribute to the transformation of reality. In the meaning of the word “science”, those attributes which generally refer to it remain. The “particularism” which Kelly (1955) regards as “the bane of the phenomenologists” (p. 318) was actually as much countered by Husserl who, since his first work (1907), took sides against relativism, psychologism, and the particularistic worldviews:

Phenomenological judgments, as singular judgments, are not terribly instructive. But how do we acquire judgments, especially scientifically valid judgments? The word “scientific,” however, immediately places us in a predicament. (Engl. transl., p. 37)

If scientificity is equated with naturalistic objectivity, phenomenology is destined to keep out of it forever. And yet, without leaving experience, it is possible “to conceive of knowledge that can not only bring particulars, but also universals, universal objects, and universal states of affairs to absolute givenness. This knowledge is of crucial significance for the possibility of phenomenology (Engl. transl., p. 39).

It is crucial, in order that phenomenology can be considered a science, to conceive a different idea of objectivity: an idea arising from the evidence of invariant general structures occurring in experience. Such general structures are called by Husserl *essences (eidos)*, and there is no doubt that the term has gone a long way towards suggesting an idealistic stance. Even though he has made clear time after time that his meaning of “essence” should be freed from old philosophical sediments, and that “intuiting essences conceals no more difficulties or ‘mystical’ secrets than does perception” (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 181), it was almost unavoidable that this part of phenomenology became the most disregarded from scientists, not only naturalistic<sup>1</sup>, so not allowing the realisation of the phenomenological project.

This was however the very decisive step for the foundation of a science of experience. “But of course we are restricting ourselves to the sphere of singular individuals, so we can’t get much underway with these kinds of judgments. Only when we construct general judgments of essence do we attain the secure objectivity required by science” (Husserl, 1907, Engl. transl., p. 51).

Here Husserl agrees with Kelly as to the fruitlessness of solipsism, but it is exactly because the aim is the attainment of a “secure objectivity” that the intuition of essence does not bring any metaphysical expectation along: it is enough to come back to experience to realise

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<sup>1</sup> Jaspers (1913) himself, the initiator of phenomenological psychopathology, refused to take into consideration the intuition of essence and supported phenomenology as empirical procedure.

that only “the spell of inborn naturalism [...] makes it so difficult for all of us to see ‘essences’ or ‘ideas’ – or rather, since in fact we do, so to speak, constantly see them, for us to let them have the peculiar value which is theirs instead of absurdly naturalizing them” (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 110).

Whenever we look at an object we see, together with the individual and concrete thing, certain “essential” characteristics which constitute it. If this applies to any perceived object (a house, a table, a bridge), applies also to those experiences presenting themselves as “inner” (a fear, a desire, a memory): each time, the particular experience brings along its essential form, which allows us to recognise other experiences of the same kind. The relationship between general and particular in lived experience is not a relationship of exclusion, but of mutual intelligibility, a recursive relationship happening in the stream of knowledge. The following passage makes clear the question very well:

Certainly its own specific character is such that intuition of essence has as its basis a principal part of intuition of something individual [...] Certainly, in consequence of that, no intuition of essence is possible without the free possibility of turning one’s regard to a corresponding individual and forming a consciousness of an example – just as, conversely, no intuition of something individual is possible without the free possibility of bringing about an ideation [...]. To the essential difference between the intuitions there corresponds the essential relationship between “existence” (here obviously in the sense of individual factual existent) and essence. Following up such interconnection with insight we seize upon the conceptual essences which correspond to these terms and will be firmly attached to them from now on; and thus all the semi-mystical thoughts clinging particularly to the concept Eidos (idea) and essence will remain cleanly separate from them. (Husserl, 1912-1929, Engl. transl., pp. 10-11)

In order to convince that his proposal is hardly scandalous, Husserl (1912-1929) often resorts to the analogy with geometry and mathematics, defined “old highly developed eidetic disciplines” (Engl. transl., p. 160). What phenomenology and mathematical sciences share is their having as subject the essential meanings and the conditions of their relations rather than “things of nature”. If I see a square table, I see at the same time its structural organisation (the identical length of the sides, the closure, the regularity of the angles) which allows me to recognise it in essential way and re-recognise when I meet other square objects, even though realised with different materials<sup>1</sup>.

In a similar way phenomenological research addresses the general regularities directly graspable in the configuration of data, and will be able to apply the essential knowledge in empirical sciences by proceeding “like the geometer in the freedom and purity of his geometrical intuition” (Husserl, 1912-1929, Engl. transl., p. 360).

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<sup>1</sup> It would deserve a study apart the similarity between Husserlian ideas and the definition of *organisation* and *structure* in Maturana’s and Varela’s (1980, 1984) theory of autopoiesis. According to the authors the organisation of anything is “those relations that must be present in order for something to exist. For me to judge that this object is a chair, I have to recognize a certain relationship between the parts I call legs, back, and seat, in such a way that sitting down is made possible. That it is made of wood and nails, or plastic and screws, has nothing at all to do with my classifying it as a chair. This situation, in which we recognize implicitly or explicitly the organization of an object when we indicate it or distinguish it, is universal in the sense that it is something we do constantly as a basic cognitive act” (Maturana & Varela, 1984, Engl. transl., pp. 42-43). Chiari (in press) has shown recently the similarities between the theory of autopoiesis and PCT.

It is like construing a geography starting from the real experience of the landscape<sup>1</sup>, as far as putting forward a *mathesis* of *Erlebnisse* (lived experiences) (Husserl, 1912-1929, Engl. transl., p. 169), which will never have the same exactness of mathematical sciences, but will be able to assure the construction of a science of experience:

That the “essences” grasped in essential intuition permit, at least to a very great extent, of being fixed in definitive concepts and thereby afford possibilities of definitive and in their own way absolutely valid objective statements, is evident to anyone free of prejudice. (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 111)

It is necessary that the invariant structures with which phenomena present themselves stand the test of all the possible variations in order to accomplish this task of systematisation of phenomenological concepts. The method of “free variation” suggested by Husserl for the search of essences is described in this way:

It is based on the modification of an experienced or imagined objectivity, turning it into an arbitrary example which, at the same time, receives the character of a guiding “model,” a point of departure for the production of an infinitely open multiplicity of variants. [...] It then becomes evident that a unity runs through this multiplicity of successive figures, that in such free variations of an original image, e.g., of a thing, an *invariant* is necessarily retained as the *necessary general form*, without which an object such as this thing, as an example of its kind, would not be thinkable at all. (Husserl, 1948, Engl. transl., p. 340-341)

This is what happens in the life-world: the “structural invariants” of phenomena do not derive from a laborious inductive process, but from an immediate appearance of essences in single perceptions. The first time I experience fear is enough to let me know “what fear is in essence”, but the variations of examples, real or imaginary, make clear to me its “structural invariants” through an intersubjective and dialogical comparison leading to the only possible objectivity of human phenomena.

Dialogical interaction is necessary for this science of phenomena since it is the very same condition of our structurally situated presence to require the reciprocal exchange of perspectives for the constitution of objectivity.

On these conditions, and freed from the prejudices surrounding it, the inquiry on structural invariants anticipates a radically new field of research of great scientific significance, if only one is able to sense the possibility of a systematic and rigorous analysis of what reveals itself common in human experiences.

We shall try to show how this road, even though not thematised in phenomenological terms, was explored by Kelly in his psychological field of work, carrying out at least in part the task Husserl (1911) had assigned to a science of experience: “to recast the conjectures of profundity into unequivocal rational forms (Engl. transl., p. 195).

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<sup>1</sup> The expression originates from Merleau-Ponty (1945): “To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.” (Engl. transl., pp. ix-x)



## Husserl, Kelly, and psychology

Husserl (1936) calls psychology “the decisive field” (Engl. transl., p. 203), since here, more than in other scientific fields, should become manifest the fundamental relationship between subjectivity and world, and the primacy of meanings. From psychology therefore he expected a significant answer to his project.

But even then only disappointments arrived from psychology: “the majority of psychologists have not understood the already present beginnings of phenomenology, that often, in fact, they have even considered essential investigation carried out from a purely intuitive standpoint to be metaphysical abstraction of the scholastic variety” (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 184). Maybe for the same reason, still today the majority of psychologists keeps on disregarding the Husserlian proposal. Right in the “decisive field”, the anchorage to naturalism has resisted beyond any evidence (Armezzani, 2012), notwithstanding the decline of such paradigm in other scientific realms.

Yet, Husserl’s criticism of psychology (a recurring theme in his writings) should still set us thinking.

modern exact psychology, by the very fact that it considers itself as already methodically perfect and strictly scientific, is actually unscientific wherever it will pursue the sense of the psychical element that enters into psychophysical regularities, i.e., wherever it will penetrate to a real psychological understanding. (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 175)

Psychology, as long as puts itself as naturalistic science and keeps fastened to the “superstition of the fact” (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 193), will not be able to account for psychic phenomena because it does not see them and recognise as such; because it deals with them as things of nature, loosing sight of its main task.

How could that which is in principle the most essential escape it? How could psychology fail to see that in its purely psychological concepts, with which it now cannot at all dispense, it necessarily gives a content that is not simply taken from what is actually given in experience but is applied to the latter? (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., pp. 36-37)

This is the same criticism that Kelly (1955) will address to his fellow psychologists, responsible for tying meanings to their assumptions (of behaviorism, psychoanalysis, or need theory) and accepting “the prior assumption of the inertness of psychological objects”. Kelly’s invitation too leads in an altogether different direction: “It seems time to reconsider this prior assumption and give life back to the person who lives it” (p. 37).

Following this direction, psychology has a refounding task which can give it back its specificity. Psychology should pass from the study of the things of nature to the study of phenomena.

It must have acquired the necessary rigorous concepts by methodical work. Where is this methodical work accomplished in “exact” psychology? We seek for it in vain throughout its vast literature. (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 177)

Still today one could hardly find, within a literature which in the meantime has become endless, anything similar to what Husserl meant for “scientific foundation” of psychology: a rigorous knowledge of experience which can lead to clear definitions of phenomena and of

their typical relationships. Husserl's project is still waiting for realisation, but our reading of Kelly is aimed at showing that such a work is possible.

Though treading on another ground and having different cultural premises, Kelly shared with Husserl the rejection of a psychology which removes from "data" their reference to a subjectivity, and the need for a rigorous study of experience which can lead to a definition of its general forms.

The first consequence of this common choice is the rediscovery of the intersubjective dimension in which research takes place, and the core importance of the other as the center of a field of signification, similar to mine, which has coessentially an epistemological and ethical value, too often disregarded by official psychology. For this reason, the sphere of human encounter is strongly enhanced both from constructivism (Chiari & Nuzzo, 2006) and phenomenology. The similarities between role relationship and phenomenological empathy will be one of the objects of the third part of the present contribution. For the time being, in reply to the charge of solipsism levelled also by Kelly to phenomenology, this recognition by Varela will be sufficient:

One of the most impressive discoveries of the phenomenological movement is to have quickly realized that an investigation of the structure of human experience inevitably induces a shift toward considering several levels of my consciousness as inextricably linked to those of others and to the phenomenal world in an empathic mesh. (Varela, 1998, p. 37)

### Kellyan psychology as science of experience

In introducing the autobiography of his theory, Kelly (1969/1963) tells to have very soon abandoned physiological psychology to look for a psychology closer to the human. Later on, he will abandon also psychoanalysis. The reason is the same:

There must be something more than emotion, thought, and behavior that goes to make the man. To find this "something" is the challenge of psychology, though I doubt that very many psychologists see it this way. (Kelly, 1963/1969, p. 57)

What we could call "phenomenological attitude" is well expressed by the dissatisfaction for established knowledge which prevents him from identifying with the main currents of American psychology, and by his sincere and firm rejection of obviousness: "I have even speculated that man's greatest challenge and noblest undertaking may be to transcend the obvious." (1963/1969, p. 61).

By taking up this research attitude Kelly constructs a formal theory which, as Bruner (1956) observed in a famous review, is the first attempt at elaborating a personality theory starting from a theory of knowledge.

Kelly's stance is well outlined at the beginning of his work and implies a viewpoint indeed hardly considered at his times:

Sometimes scientists, particularly those who are engrossed in the study of physical systems, take the stand that psychological events are not true phenomena but are rather epiphenomena, or merely the unreliable shadows of real events. This position is not ours. A person may misrepresent a real phenomenon, such as his income or his ills, and yet his misrepresentation will itself be entirely real. This applies even to the badly deluded patient: what he perceives may not exist, but his perception does. (Kelly, 1955, p. 8)

The passage reminds that of Husserl above quoted, where he pointed out that, from a phenomenological point of view, the representation of god Jupiter is a phenomenon equivalent to the perception of a real datum. It is a sharp and hard choice both for Husserl and Kelly, in favour of experience as subject-matter: the same choice made by Wundt (1896) when he founded psychology distinguishing it from the natural sciences, but that was very quickly discarded by the predominance of behaviorism and the power of Freudian unconscious.

On the contrary, Kelly (1955) speaks explicitly of experience as “a set of personally construed events”, as “the extent of what we know” (p. 171), as “that portion of the universe which is happening to us” (p. 172). Experience defines itself, also for Kelly, as inextricable correlation between knowing subject and fact. Psychological analysis takes therefore the form of the study of “meaningful events” and of “the way those events, in turn, are construed” (p. 172).

In this sense Kelly (1963) connotes his psychology as “a disciplined psychology of the inner outlook” (p. 183)<sup>1</sup>, equally distant from the scientific psychologies of outer perspective and the experiential psychologies of inner feelings. By means of more present-day terms, we could say that his is a “second person” psychology, which opposes to the “third person” naturalistic psychologies and the “first person” intimistic ones.

The analysis of experience, if cannot be “external” research on facts, cannot even be only aimed at individual knowledge. This is a fundamental issue for the construction of a science, and this is the reason why Kelly, as we observed in the first part of the present contribution (Armezzani & Chiari, 2014), cares to distance himself from what he believes to be the phenomenological stance. Paradoxically, however, the approach he suggests is very close to the definition of “structural invariants” of phenomena as advanced by Husserl. Kelly’s idea of a theory actually seems recognisable as the task of analysing and systematically arrange the forms which reveal themselves common in experience. According to Kelly (1955), a theory

“is a tentative expression of what man has seen as a regular pattern in the surging events of life” (p. 19); should be aimed at “abstracting the scientific principles [...] from our experiences as well as others” (p. 23); “should be expressed in terms of abstractions which are of a sufficiently high order to be traced through nearly all of the phenomena with which psychology must deal.” (p. 27)

As in phenomenology, a basic reconsideration of the idea of subjectivity is needed. If the subject-matter is experience, it is no longer possible to derive general principles from naturalistic sciences, but it will be necessary to look for them in the very same place in which they manifest themselves: the subjective experience of any individual.

The psychologist, too, when he describes a case, may be conducting an idiographic study; but if the description is to have any thread of meaning running through it, he must relate his selection of relevant facts to principles of human behavior. The principles, of course, may be derived within a realm no larger than the individual case, but they are still principles – they are abstractions of events. (Kelly, 1955, p. 42)

If one reads again the last lines of the above quotation, the continuity with the hard idea of phenomenology which, coming back to experience, ties again in a recursive circle singularity and generality, should clearly reveal itself. The realisation of a science of experience ap-

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<sup>1</sup> Though the edition published in 1963 is supposed to consist of the first three chapters of Kelly’s two-volume work, we chanced upon some revisions in the text. This quotation is in chapter 3, § 23 (Conclusion), not present in the original edition.

appears to dissolve spontaneously, even in Kelly's words, the contradiction between the idiographic and the nomothetic: in order to obtain general principles, it is not necessary to deprive events of their ambience of meaning. Quite the opposite, we can see regularities and structural relations constituting the "principles," the "intentional laws" of psychic life, by accepting meaning in its singular manifestations. Phenomenological reflection can now help us to remove also the seeming contradiction to which Kelly exposes himself when defining his psychology as a "psychology of the inner outlook" and, at the same time, as a nomothetic science. When the subject-matter is experience, the separation between scientific knowledge and personal knowledge is no more needed, because "the individual, phenomenologically, is always typical" (Paci, 1961, p. 141, translation ours).

The understanding of meanings can happen only through the intersubjective encounter, and this very same understanding allows us, then, to grasp invariant structures and, as Husserl said, "permit, at least to a very great extent, of being fixed in definitive concepts" (Husserl, 1911, Engl. transl., p. 111). Kelly articulates his thought in a similar manner:

each study of an individual becomes a problem in concept formation for the psychologist. After he has conceptualized each of his cases, he next has the task of further abstracting the individual constructs in order to produce constructs which underlie people in general. (Kelly, 1955, p. 43)

This is therefore the task of a psychological theory: not to distance itself from the problem which any subjective experience poses for the calculating reason with its confusion of meanings, but to try to catch the typical forms and their relations through a recursive circle of particularities and generalities.

While arguing about statistical generalisation, Kelly believes it is more important to refer to lived experience of any single individual in order to grasp the "essential features" (1955, p. 42), instead of looking for data in groups of individuals. In a similar way Merleau-Ponty (1945) expresses himself when saying that statistical thought "is not thought at all, since it does not concern any particular thing actually existing, any moment of time, any concrete event" (Engl. transl., p. 513). And, one could add, any meaning.

To make a classical example, the statistically significant correlation between the measures of frustration and aggression finds its reason in the understandable relationship linking the two phenomena and implicit in it. In the science of experience – in phenomenology and in PCT – even the concept of scientific prediction changes its sign and is reconsidered as anticipation of what "sensibly" promises to be by starting from meanings. I do not expect that a frustrated person reacts with aggression because psychological tests measuring the two variables present a high correlation in scores, but, having come to know the meaning of frustration and having investigated its "essential relationship" with aggression, I can anticipate that this essential correlation manifests itself also in other cases. The variation of examples does not go in the direction of the quantity of data, but in that of the depth of experience, where what is more common and shared is hidden.

### Kellyan theory as world of forms

"Essence", *eidos*, means "form", and derives from the Greek verb *ὁράω* with the meaning of "to see". The general forms deriving from experience are a sort of evidences we derive from our lived experience and our understanding of the lived experience of other people.

In order that these forms manifest themselves it is however necessary that we rid ourselves of all the mental schemata and prejudices which prevent their appearance. This recommendation of phenomenology finds confirmation in Kelly's (1955) psychology, which is realised in the attempt at understanding one's own and others' experience by accepting it "as it stands" (p. 587), "directed toward the tendency for psychologists to impose preemptive constructions upon human behavior" (p. 775). Even though it can seem hazardous to equate Kellyan "credulous approach" to Husserlian phenomenological *epoché* as Butt (2003) suggests, the whole Kelly's work can be read as a firm stance against naïve realism in favour of experience.

This is exactly the aspect which distinguishes it from classical psychological theories: reports are not conducted from the viewpoint of the third person, but from within the experience itself. The creation of all his theory takes as method the analysis of meanings, and arrives to the formulation of one postulate and eleven corollaries consistent with each other, without commenting specific contents, but only *typical forms* and their *relationships*.

There are no theoretical constructs placed from the outside to the subjective lived experience in the attempt at explaining people and their functioning (what commonly happens in psychological theories), but the *how* of experience is outlined, expressing the formal regularity abstracted from single events. We dare say that the definition of postulate and corollaries has derived implicitly by a continuous variation of examples which allowed to grasp the general forms underpinning the single "cases". Clinical experience, from this point of view, can be re-read as an incessant exercise of free variations, not calling for a separation between scientific and personal knowledge, but which proposes to keep together and harmonise the two moments of knowledge.

Even though Kelly did not expressly say how arrived to the formulation of his theory, one can credit what he himself asserts:

Wherever man is struggling mightily to make something of himself there is a fertile place for the researcher to be. [...] In my own case this has meant nearly thirty-five years of part-time service as a psychotherapist-not because feeling useful was the primary reward I sought but because I knew of no better way to bring all my resources to bear on the problems of scientific psychology with which I had undertaken to cope. (Kelly, 1964/1969, p. 131)

Science must pass through the real experience of single subjects, and only from this direct knowledge can draw its general forms. The formal organisation of Kellyan theory seems to realise Husserl's (1911) call to psychology towards an analysis of experience able to extract from it the structural invariants "and thereby afford possibilities of definitive and in their own way absolutely valid objective statements" (Engl. transl., p. 181). This is indeed a sort of geography of experience constructed starting from the landscape and, given its clinical purposes, destined to return continuously there in order to validate its usefulness.

All this is particularly manifest in the definition of the transitions. Transitions, which in Kelly's intention cover the sphere of "emotional" experiences dissolving the classical distinction between emotion and cognition (Chiari, 2013), are *ways* to live change expressed in their general structure.

Let us take guilt as an example. This transition is defined as the "perception of one's apparent dislodgment from his core role structure" (Kelly, 1955, p. 502). The formal definition is again about experience: that of whom does no longer recognises him/herself as the person he/she believed to be, an experience which can happen to all of us, each time filled of personal contents. It can be lived by the person who committed a violent crime while considering him/herself gentle, or by the heartless Unnamed in the night of his conversion in Manzoni's

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*The Betrothed* (1842), when he can't understand how it is possible that he experiences a feeling of pity. What remains invariant in the variation of contents is the *structure* of guilt, that feeling of non-correspondence of one's own actions with the most core self-image. The definition obeys the conditions established by Husserl for the search of general forms:

It then becomes evident that a unity runs through this multiplicity of successive figures, that in such free variations of an original image, e.g., of a thing, an invariant is necessarily retained as the necessary general form, without which an object such as this thing, as an example of its kind, would not be thinkable at all. (Husserl, 1948, Engl. transl., p. 341)

All the particular cases in which it is possible to recognise the general form (in this case, guilt) are as a consequence "arbitrary particularizations of the one *eidos*" (1948, Engl. transl., p. 341).

The formal knowledge of this experience has however a practical effect: it allows the clinician to understand the person who lives it and, moreover, to anticipate some typical relationships between guilt and other phenomena, like hostility, constriction, aggressiveness, thus suggesting intervention strategies.

Each professional construct described in Kelly's theory obeys to this formal criterion. To say that a construct is preemptive, just to make another example, means to describe how that construct is used by the person at a level of formal abstraction, without the necessity of pronouncing on specific contents.

The whole Kellyan theory can be read as the construction of a world of forms consistently connected and organised in a system, a "mathesis of lived experiences" arising from the study of experience and which must necessarily come back to experience in order to determine its validity. Maybe Kelly, who would have never accepted an interpretation of his theory in terms of "essences", would have agreed with this analogy to which he himself resorted (Kelly, 1961/1969). The fact that both Husserl and Kelly come from a former mathematical education can have had a role in their common tendency to look for pure forms able to give order to the chaos of events. What shares them even more deeper however is their passion for experience, the intention not to loose sight of the place of origin of those forms.

## A case of commonality

One of the corollaries of Kelly's (1955) theory, the Commonality Corollary, reads: "to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person" (p. 90). If we try to apply this general form of experience to the specific case of Husserl and Kelly, we could confirm that "two persons may be using essentially the same constructions of their experience, although they express themselves in quite different terms" (p. 92).

Notwithstanding the difference of their original cultures, of the traditions settled in readings, and of their specific professional fields, Husserl and Kelly share some basic ways of construing experience and derive from them convergent scientific implications, without ever having been in touch. This confirms the idea that a similar look at reality implies a likeness in the practical consequences and choices, which that look opens ahead.

The Commonality Corollary however does not conflict with that of Individuality. We tried here to highlight the aspects of commonality between Husserl and Kelly in the construc-

tion of the scientific view, the subject-matter, and the working method; nevertheless, insuperable differences we invite not to underestimate remain and distinguish the work of these authors.

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