

Phenomenology  
of Perception  
M. Merleau-Ponty  
Translated from the French  
by Colin Smith



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by

M. Merleau-Ponty  
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Colin Smith



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PHÉNOMÉNOLOGIE DE LA PERCEPTION

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## PREFACE

WHAT is phenomenology? It may seem strange that this question has still to be asked half a century after the first works of Husserl. The fact remains that it has by no means been answered. Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'. It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a 'rigorous science', but it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide. Yet Husserl in his last works mentions a 'genetic phenomenology',<sup>1</sup> and even a 'constructive phenomenology'.<sup>2</sup> One may try to do away with these contradictions by making a distinction between Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenologies; yet the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the 'natürlicher Weltbegriff' or the 'Lebenswelt' which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology, with the result that the contradiction reappears in Husserl's own philosophy. The reader pressed for time will be inclined to give up the idea of covering a doctrine which says everything, and will wonder whether a philosophy which cannot define its scope deserves all the discussion which has gone on around it, and whether he is not faced rather by a myth or a fashion.



Even if this were the case, there would still be a need to understand the prestige of the myth and the origin of the fashion, and the opinion of the responsible philosopher must be that *phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy*. It has been long on the way, and its adherents have discovered it in every quarter, certainly in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but equally in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. A purely linguistic examination of the texts in question would yield no proof; we find in texts only what we put into them, and if ever any kind of history has suggested the interpretations which should be put on it, it is the history of philosophy. We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this *phenomenology for ourselves* which has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for. Phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method. Let us, therefore, try systematically to bring together the celebrated phenomenological themes as they have grown spontaneously together in life. Perhaps we shall then understand why phenomenology has for so long remained at an initial stage, as a problem to be solved and a hope to be realized.

It is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analysing. Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a 'descriptive psychology', or to return to the 'things themselves', is from the start a foreswearing of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. Science has not and never will have, by its nature, the same significance *qua* form of being as the world which we perceive, for the simple reason that it is a rationale or explanation of that world. I am, not a 'living creature' nor even a 'man', nor again even 'a consciousness' endowed with all the characteristics which

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<sup>1</sup> *Méditations cartésiennes*, pp. 120 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See the unpublished *6th Méditation cartésienne*, edited by Eugen Fink, to which G.Berger has kindly referred us.

zoology, social anatomy or inductive psychology recognize in these various products of the natural or historical process—I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished—since that distance is not one of its properties—if I were not there to scan it with my gaze. Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. 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.

This move is absolutely distinct from the idealist return to consciousness, and the demand for a pure description excludes equally the procedure of analytical reflection on the one hand, and that of scientific explanation on the other. Descartes and particularly Kant *detached* the subject, or consciousness, by showing that I could not possibly apprehend any thing as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it. They presented consciousness, the absolute certainty of my existence for myself, as the condition of there being anything at all; and the act of relating as the basis of relatedness. It is true that the act of relating is nothing if divorced from the spectacle of the world in which relations are found; the unity of consciousness in Kant is achieved simultaneously with that of the world. And in Descartes methodical doubt does not deprive us of anything, since the whole world, at least in so far as we experience it, is reinstated in the *Cogito*, enjoying equal certainty, and simply labelled 'thought of...'. But the relations between subject and world are not strictly bilateral: if they were, the certainty of the world would, in Descartes, be immediately given with that of the *Cogito*, and Kant would not have talked about his 'Copernican revolution'. Analytical reflection starts from our experience of the world and goes back to the subject as to a condition of possibility distinct from that experience, revealing the all-embracing synthesis as that without which there would be no world. To this extent it ceases to remain part of our experience and offers, in place of an account, a reconstruction. It is understandable, in view of this, that Husserl, having accused Kant of adopting a 'faculty psychologism',<sup>1</sup> should have urged, in place of a noetic analysis which bases the world on the synthesizing activity of the subject, his own '*noematic reflection*' which remains within the object and, instead of begetting it, brings to light its fundamental unity.

The world is there before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses which link, in the first place

sensations, then aspects of the object corresponding to different perspectives, when both are nothing but products of analysis, with no sort of prior reality. Analytical reflection believes that it can trace back the course followed by a prior constituting act and arrive, in the 'inner man'—to use Saint Augustine's expression—at a constituting power which has always been identical with that inner self. Thus reflection is carried off by itself and installs itself in an impregnable subjectivity, as yet untouched by being and time. But this is very ingenuous, or at least it is an incomplete form of reflection which loses sight of its own beginning. When I begin to reflect my reflection bears upon an unreflective experience; moreover my reflection cannot be unaware of itself as an event, and so it appears to itself in the light of a truly creative act, of a changed structure of consciousness, and yet it has to recognize, as having priority over its own operations, the world which is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself. The real has to be described, not constructed or formed. Which means that I cannot put perception into the same category as the syntheses represented by judgements, acts or predications. My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately 'place' in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams. Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things whose presence is not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of the imaginary. If the reality of my perception were based solely on the intrinsic coherence of 'representations', it ought to be for ever hesitant and, being wrapped up in my conjectures on probabilities, I ought to be ceaselessly taking apart misleading syntheses, and reinstating in reality stray phenomena which I had excluded in the first place. But this does not happen. The real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgement before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination. Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man',<sup>1</sup> or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science, I find, not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to the world.

All of which reveals the true meaning of the famous phenomenological reduction. There is probably no question over which Husserl spent more time—or to which he more often returned, since the 'problematic of reduction' occupies an

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<sup>1</sup> *Logische Untersuchungen, Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, p. 93.

important place in his unpublished work. For a long time, and even in recent texts, the reduction is presented as the return to a transcendental consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely transparent, quickened through and through by a series of apperceptions which it is the philosopher's task to reconstitute on the basis of their outcome. Thus my sensation of redness is *perceived as* the manifestation of a certain redness experienced, this in turn as the manifestation of a red surface, which is the manifestation of a piece of red cardboard, and this finally is the manifestation or outline of a red thing, namely this book. We are to understand, then, that it is the apprehension of a certain *hylè*, as indicating a phenomenon of a higher degree, the *Sinnggebung*, or active meaning-giving operation which may be said to define consciousness, so that the world is nothing but 'world-as-meaning', and the phenomenological reduction is idealistic, in the sense that there is here a transcendental idealism which treats the world as an indivisible unity of value shared by Peter and Paul, in which their perspectives blend. 'Peter's consciousness' and 'Paul's consciousness' are in communication, the perception of the world 'by Peter' is not Peter's doing any more than its perception 'by Paul' is Paul's doing; in each case it is the doing of pre-personal forms of consciousness, whose communication raises no problem, since it is demanded by the very definition of consciousness, meaning or truth. In so far as I am a consciousness, that is, in so far as something has meaning for me, I am neither here nor there, neither Peter nor Paul; I am in no way distinguishable from an 'other' consciousness, since we are immediately in touch with the world and since the world is, by definition, unique, being the system in which all truths cohere. A logically consistent transcendental idealism rids the world of its opacity and its transcendence. The world is precisely that thing of which we form a representation, not as men or as empirical subjects, but in so far as we are all one light and participate in the One without destroying its unity. Analytical reflection knows nothing of the problem of other minds, or of that of the world, because it insists that with the first glimmer of consciousness there appears in me theoretically the power of reaching some universal truth, and that the other person, being equally without thisness, location or body, the Alter and the Ego are one and the same in the true world which is the unifier of minds. There is no difficulty in understanding how *I* can conceive the Other, because the *I* and consequently the Other are not conceived as part of the woven stuff of phenomena; they have validity rather than existence. There is nothing hidden behind these faces and gestures, no domain to which I have no access, merely a little shadow which owes its very existence to the light. For Husserl, on the contrary, it is well known that there is a problem of other people, and the *alter ego* is a paradox. If the other is truly for himself alone, beyond his being for me, and if we are for each other and not both for God, we must necessarily have some appearance for each other. He must and I must have an outer appearance,

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<sup>1</sup> In te redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas (Saint Augustine).

and there must be, besides the perspective of the For Oneself—my view of myself and the other's of himself—a perspective of For Others—my view of others and theirs of me. Of course, these two perspectives, in each one of us, cannot be simply juxtaposed, *for in that case it is not I that the other would see, nor he that I should see*. I must be the exterior that I present to others, and the body of the other must be the other himself. This paradox and the dialectic of the Ego and the Alter are possible only provided that the Ego and the Alter Ego are defined by their situation and are not freed from all inherence; that is, provided that philosophy does not culminate in a return to the self, and that I discover by reflection not only my presence to myself, but also the possibility of an 'outside spectator'; that is, again, provided that at the very moment when I experience my existence—at the ultimate extremity of reflection—I fall short of the ultimate density which would place me outside time, and that I discover within myself a kind of internal weakness standing in the way of my being totally individualized: a weakness which exposes me to the gaze of others as a man among men or at least as a consciousness among consciousnesses. Hitherto the *Cogito* depreciated the perception of others, teaching me as it did that the I is accessible only to itself, since it defined *me* as the thought which I have of myself, and which clearly I am alone in having, at least in this ultimate sense. For the 'other' to be more than an empty word, it is necessary that my existence should never be reduced to my bare awareness of existing, but that it should take in also the awareness that *one* may have of it, and thus include my incarnation in some nature and the possibility, at least, of a historical situation. The *Cogito* must reveal me in a situation, and it is on this condition alone that transcendental subjectivity can, as Husserl puts it,<sup>1</sup> *be* an intersubjectivity. As a meditating Ego, I can clearly distinguish from myself the world and things, since I certainly do not exist in the way in which things exist. I must even set aside from myself my body understood as a thing among things, as a collection of physico-chemical processes. But even if the *cogitatio*, which I thus discover, is without location in objective time and space, it is not without place in the phenomenological world. The world, which I distinguished from myself as the totality of things or of processes linked by causal relationships, I rediscover 'in me' as the permanent horizon of all my *cogitationes* and as a dimension in relation to which I am constantly situating myself. The true *Cogito* does not define the subject's existence in terms of the thought he has of existing, and furthermore does not convert the indubitability of the world into the indubitability of thought about the world, nor finally does it replace the world itself by the world as meaning. On the contrary it recognizes my thought itself as an inalienable fact, and does away with any kind of idealism in revealing me as 'being-in-the-world'.

It is because we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world that for us the only way to become aware of the fact is to suspend the resultant activity, to refuse it our complicity (to look at it *ohne mitzumachen*, as Husserl often says), or yet again, to put it 'out of play'. Not because we reject the certainties of common sense and a natural attitude to things—they are, on the

contrary, the constant theme of philosophy—but because, being the presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed, and because in order to arouse them and bring them to view, we have to suspend for a moment our recognition of them. The best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world.<sup>2</sup> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. Husserl's transcendental is not Kant's and Husserl accuses Kant's philosophy of being 'worldly', because it *makes* use of our relation to the world, which is the motive force of the transcendental deduction, and makes the world immanent in the subject, instead of *being filled with wonder* at it and conceiving the subject as a process of transcendence towards the world. All the misunderstandings with his interpreters, with the existentialist 'dissidents' and finally with himself, have arisen from the fact that in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it and, also, from the fact that from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world. The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl is constantly re-examining the possibility of the reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on to which we are trying to seize (since they *sich einströmen*, as Husserl says), there is no thought which embraces all our thought. The philosopher, as the unpublished works declare, is a perpetual beginner, which means that he takes for granted nothing that men, learned or otherwise, believe they know. It means also that philosophy itself must not take itself for granted, in so far as it may have managed to say something true; that it is an ever-renewed experiment in making its own beginning; that it consists wholly in the description of this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all. Far from being, as has been thought, a procedure of idealistic philosophy, phenomenological reduction belongs to existential philosophy: Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' appears only against the background of the phenomenological reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, III (unpublished).

<sup>2</sup> *Die phänomenologische Philosophie Edmund Husserls in der gegenwärtigen Kritik*, pp. 331 and ff.

A misunderstanding of a similar kind confuses the notion of the ‘essences’ in Husserl. Every reduction, says Husserl, as well as being transcendental is necessarily eidetic. That means that we cannot subject our perception of the world to philosophical scrutiny without ceasing to be identified with that act of positing the world, with that interest in it which delimits us, without drawing back from our commitment which is itself thus made to appear as a spectacle, without passing from the *fact* of our existence to its *nature*, from the *Dasein* to the *Wesen*. But it is clear that the essence is here not the end, but a means, that our effective involvement in the world is precisely what has to be understood and made amenable to conceptualization, for it is what polarizes all our conceptual particularizations. The need to proceed by way of essences does not mean that philosophy takes them as its object, but, on the contrary, that our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement, and that it requires the field of ideality in order to become acquainted with and to prevail over its facticity. The Vienna Circle, as is well known, lays it down categorically that we can enter into relations only with meanings. For example, ‘consciousness’ is not for the Vienna Circle identifiable with what we are. It is a complex meaning which has developed late in time, which should be handled with care, and only after the many meanings which have contributed, throughout the word’s semantic development, to the formation of its present one have been made explicit. Logical positivism of this kind is the antithesis of Husserl’s thought. Whatever the subtle changes of meaning which have ultimately brought us, as a linguistic acquisition, the word and concept of consciousness, we enjoy direct access to what it designates. For we have the experience of ourselves, of that consciousness which we are, and it is on the basis of this experience that all linguistic connotations are assessed, and precisely through it that language comes to have any meaning at all for us. ‘It is that as yet dumb experience...which we are concerned to lead to the pure expression of its own meaning.’<sup>1</sup> Husserl’s essences are destined to bring back all the living relationships of experience, as the fisherman’s net draws up from the depths of the ocean quivering fish and seaweed. Jean Wahl is therefore wrong in saying that ‘Husserl separates essences from existence’.<sup>2</sup> The separated essences are those of language. It is the office of language to cause essences to exist in a state of separation which is in fact merely apparent, since through language they still rest upon the ante-predicative life of consciousness. In the silence of primary consciousness can be seen appearing not only what words mean, but also what things mean: the core of primary meaning round which the acts of naming and expression take shape.

Seeking the essence of consciousness will therefore not consist in developing the *Wortbedeutung* of consciousness and escaping from existence into the universe of things said; it will consist in rediscovering my actual presence to myself, the fact of my consciousness which is in the last resort what the word and the concept of consciousness mean. Looking for the world’s essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse;

it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization. Sensationalism ‘reduces’ the world by noting that after all we never experience anything but states of ourselves. Transcendental idealism too ‘reduces’ the world since, in so far as it guarantees the world, it does so by regarding it as thought or consciousness of the world, and as the mere correlative of our knowledge, with the result that it becomes immanent in consciousness and the aseity of things is thereby done away with. The eidetic reduction is, on the other hand, the determination to bring the world to light as it is before any falling back on ourselves has occurred, it is the ambition to make reflection emulate the unreflective life of consciousness. I aim at and perceive a world. If I said, as do the sensationalists, that we have here only ‘states of consciousness’, and if I tried to distinguish my perceptions from my dreams with the aid of ‘criteria’, I should overlook the phenomenon of the world. For if I am able to talk about ‘dreams’ and ‘reality’, to bother my head about the distinction between imaginary and real, and cast doubt upon the ‘real’, it is because this distinction is already made by me before any analysis; it is because I have an experience of the real as of the imaginary, and the problem then becomes one not of asking how critical thought can provide for itself secondary equivalents of this distinction, but of making explicit our primordial knowledge of the ‘real’, of describing our perception of the world as that upon which our idea of truth is forever based. We must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive. In more general terms we must not wonder whether our self-evident truths are real truths, or whether, through some perversity inherent in our minds, that which is self-evident for us might not be illusory in relation to some truth in itself. For in so far as we talk about illusion, it is because we have identified illusions, and done so solely in the light of some perception which at the same time gave assurance of its own truth. It follows that doubt, or the fear of being mistaken, testifies as soon as it arises to our power of unmasking error, and that it could never finally tear us away from truth. We are in the realm of truth and it is ‘the experience of truth’ which is self-evident.<sup>1</sup> To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth. So, if I now wanted, according to idealistic principles, to base this *de facto* self-evident truth, this irresistible belief, on some absolute self-evident truth, that is, on the absolute clarity which my thoughts have for me; if I tried to find in myself a creative thought which bodied forth the framework of the world or illumined it through and through, I should once more prove unfaithful to my experience of the world, and should be looking for what makes that experience possible instead of looking for what it is. The self-evidence of perception is not adequate thought or apodeictic self-evidence.<sup>2</sup> The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have

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<sup>1</sup> *Méditations cartésiennes*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Réalisme, dialectique et mystère*, l’Arbalète, Autumn, 1942, unpaginated.



no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. There is a world', or rather: There is the world'; I can never completely account for this ever-reiterated assertion in my life. This facticity of the world is what constitutes the *Weltlichkeit der Welt*, what causes the world to be the world; just as the facticity of the *cogito* is not an imperfection in itself, but rather what assures me of my existence. The eidetic method is the method of a phenomenological positivism which bases the possible on the real.

We can now consider the notion of intentionality, too often cited as the main discovery of phenomenology, whereas it is understandable only through the reduction. "All consciousness is consciousness of something"; there is nothing new in that. Kant showed, in the *Refutation of Idealism*, that inner perception is impossible without outer perception, that the world, as a collection of connected phenomena, is anticipated in the consciousness of my unity, and is the means whereby I come into being as a consciousness. What distinguishes intentionality from the Kantian relation to a possible object is that the unity of the world, before being posited by knowledge in a specific act of identification, is 'lived' as ready-made or already there. Kant himself shows in the *Critique of Judgement* that there exists a unity of the imagination and the understanding and a unity of subjects *before the object*, and that, in experiencing the beautiful, for example, I am aware of a harmony between sensation and concept, between myself and others, which is itself without any concept. Here the subject is no longer the universal thinker of a system of objects rigorously interrelated, the positing power who subjects the manifold to the law of the understanding, in so far as he is to be able to put together a world—he discovers and enjoys his own nature as spontaneously in harmony with the law of the understanding. But if the subject has a nature, then the hidden art of the imagination must condition the categorial activity. It is no longer merely the aesthetic judgement, but knowledge too which rests upon this art, an art which forms the basis of the unity of consciousness and of consciousnesses.

Husserl takes up again the *Critique of Judgement* when he talks about a teleology of consciousness. It is not a matter of duplicating human consciousness with some absolute thought which, from outside, is imagined as assigning to it its aims. It is a question of recognizing consciousness itself as a project of the world, meant for a world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but towards which it is perpetually directed—and the world as this pre-objective individual whose imperious unity decrees what knowledge shall take as its goal. This is why Husserl distinguishes between intentionality of act, which is that of our judgements and of those occasions when we voluntarily take up a position—the

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<sup>1</sup> *Das Erlebnis der Wahrheit (Logische Untersuchungen, Prolegomena zur reinen Logik)* p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> There is no apodeictic self-evidence, the *Formale und transzendente Logik* (p. 142) says in effect.

only intentionality discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—and operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*), or that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, being apparent in our desires, our evaluations and in the landscape we see, more clearly than in objective knowledge, and furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language. Our relationship to the world, as it is untiringly enunciated within us, is not a thing which can be any further clarified by analysis; philosophy can only place it once more before our eyes and present it for our ratification.

Through this broadened notion of intentionality, phenomenological ‘comprehension’ is distinguished from traditional ‘intellection’, which is confined to ‘true and immutable natures’, and so phenomenology can become a phenomenology of origins. Whether we are concerned with a thing perceived, a historical event or a doctrine, to ‘understand’ is to take in the total intention—not only what these things are for representation (the ‘properties’ of the thing perceived, the mass of ‘historical facts’, the ‘ideas’ introduced by the doctrine)—but the unique mode of existing expressed in the properties of the pebble, the glass or the piece of wax, in all the events of a revolution, in all the thoughts of a philosopher. It is a matter, in the case of each civilization, of finding the Idea in the Hegelian sense, that is, not a law of the physico-mathematical type, discoverable by objective thought, but that formula which sums up some unique manner of behaviour towards others, towards Nature, time and death: a certain way of patterning the world which the historian should be capable of seizing upon and making his own. These are the *dimensions* of history. In this context there is not a human word, not a gesture, even one which is the outcome of habit or absent-mindedness, which has not some meaning. For example, I may have been under the impression that I lapsed into silence through weariness, or some minister may have thought he had uttered merely an appropriate platitude, yet my silence or his words immediately take on a significance, because my fatigue or his falling back upon a ready-made formula are not accidental, for they express a certain lack of interest, and hence some degree of adoption of a definite position in relation to the situation.

When an event is considered at close quarters, at the moment when it is lived through, everything seems subject to chance: one man’s ambition, some lucky encounter, some local circumstance or other appears to have been decisive. But chance happenings offset each other, and facts in their multiplicity coalesce and show up a certain way of taking a stand in relation to the human situation, reveal in fact an *event* which has its definite outline and about which we can talk. Should the starting-point for the understanding of history be ideology, or politics, or religion, or economics? Should we try to understand a doctrine from its overt content, or from the psychological make-up and the biography of its author? We must seek an understanding from all these angles simultaneously, everything has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships. All these views are true provided that they are not

isolated, that we delve deeply into history and reach the unique core of existential meaning which emerges in each perspective. It is true, as Marx says; that history does not walk on its head, but it is also true that it does not think with its feet. Or one should say rather that it is neither its 'head' nor its 'feet' that we have to worry about, but its body. All economic and psychological explanations of a doctrine are true, since the thinker never thinks from any starting-point but the one constituted by what he is. Reflection even on a doctrine will be complete only if it succeeds in linking up with the doctrine's history and the extraneous explanations of it, and in putting back the causes and meaning of the doctrine in an existential structure. There is, as Husserl says, a 'genesis of meaning' (*Sinn-genesis*),<sup>1</sup> which alone, in the last resort, teaches us what the doctrine 'means.' Like understanding, criticism must be pursued at all levels, and naturally, it will be insufficient, for the refutation of a doctrine, to relate it to some accidental event in the author's life: its significance goes beyond, and there is no pure accident in existence or in co-existence, since both absorb random events and transmute them into the rational.

Finally, as it is indivisible in the present, history is equally so in its sequences. Considered in the light of its fundamental dimensions, all periods of history appear as manifestations of a single existence, or as episodes in a single drama—without our knowing whether it has an ending. Because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meaning*, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history.

Probably the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality. Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges. But it should not be set in a realm apart, transposed into absolute Spirit, or into a world in the realist sense. The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own. For the first time the philosopher's thinking is sufficiently conscious not to anticipate itself and endow its own results with reified form in the world. The philosopher tries to conceive the world, others and himself and their interrelations. But the meditating Ego, the 'impartial spectator' (*uninteressierter Zuschauer*)<sup>1</sup> do not rediscover an already given rationality, they 'establish themselves',<sup>2</sup> and establish it, by an act of initiative which has no guarantee in being, its

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<sup>1</sup> The usual term in the unpublished writings. The idea is already to be found in the *Formale und transzendente Logik*, pp. 184 and ff.

justification resting entirely on the effective power which it confers on us of taking our own history upon ourselves.

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing, truth into being. One may well ask how this creation is *possible*, and if it does not recapture in things a pre-existing Reason. The answer is that the only pre-existent Logos is the world itself, and that the philosophy which brings it into visible existence does not begin by being *possible*; it is actual or real like the world of which it is a part, and no explanatory hypothesis is clearer than the act whereby we take up this unfinished world in an effort to complete and conceive it. Rationality is not a *problem*. There is behind it no unknown quantity which has to be determined by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrated inductively. We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships. The world and reason are not problematical. We may say, if we wish, that they are mysterious, but their mystery defines them: there can be no question of dispelling it by some 'solution', it is on the hither side of all solutions. True philosophy consists in re-learning to look at the world, and in this sense a historical account can give meaning to the world quite as 'deeply' as a philosophical treatise. We take our fate in our hands, we become responsible for our history through reflection, but equally by a decision on which we stake our life, and in both cases what is involved is a violent act which is validated by being performed.

Phenomenology, as a disclosure of the world, rests on itself, or rather provides its own foundation.<sup>1</sup> All cognitions are sustained by a 'ground' of postulates and finally by our communication with the world as primary embodiment of rationality. Philosophy, as radical reflection, dispenses in principle with this resource. As, however, it too is in history, it too exploits the world and constituted reason. It must therefore put to itself the question which it puts to all branches of knowledge, and so duplicate itself infinitely, being, as Husserl says, a dialogue or infinite meditation, and, in so far as it remains faithful to its intention, never knowing where it is going. The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoative atmosphere which has surrounded it are not to be taken as a sign of failure, they were inevitable because phenomenology's task was to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason.<sup>2</sup> If phenomenology was a movement before becoming a doctrine or a philosophical system, this was attributable neither to accident, nor to fraudulent intent. It is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry or Cézanne-by reason of the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to seize

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<sup>1</sup> *6th Méditation cartésienne* (unpublished).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being. In this way it merges into the general effort of modern thought.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Rückbeziehung der Phänomenologie auf sich selbst,' say the unpublished writings.

<sup>2</sup> We are indebted for this last expression to G.Gusdorf, who may well have used it in another sense.

# *INTRODUCTION*

## Traditional Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena

# I

## THE 'SENSATION' AS A UNIT OF EXPERIENCE

AT the outset of the study of perception, we find in language the notion of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious: I have a sensation of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold. It will, however, be seen that nothing could in fact be more confused, and that because they accepted it readily, traditional analyses missed the phenomenon of perception.

I might in the first place understand by sensation the way in which I am affected and the experiencing of a state of myself. The greyness which, when I close my eyes, surrounds me, leaving no distance between me and it, the sounds that encroach on my drowsiness and hum 'in my head' perhaps give some indication of what pure sensation might be. I might be said to have sense-experience (*sentir*) precisely to the extent that I coincide with the sensed, that the latter ceases to have any place in the objective world, and that it signifies nothing for me. This entails recognizing that sensation should be sought on the hither side of any qualified content, since red and blue, in order to be distinguishable as two colours, must already form some picture before me, even though no precise place be assigned to them, and thus cease to be part of myself. Pure sensation will be the experience of an undifferentiated, instantaneous, dotlike impact. It is unnecessary to show, since authors are agreed on it, that this notion corresponds to nothing in our experience, and that the most rudimentary *factual perceptions* that we are acquainted with, in creatures such as the ape or the hen, have a bearing on relationships and not on any absolute terms.<sup>1</sup> But this does not dispose of the question as to why we feel justified *in theory* in distinguishing within experience a layer of 'impressions'. Let us imagine a white patch on a homogeneous background. All the points in the patch have a certain 'function' in common, that of forming themselves into a 'shape'. The colour of the shape is

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<sup>1</sup> See *La Structure du Comportement*, pp. 142 and ff.

more intense, and as it were more resistant than that of the background; the edges of the white patch 'belong' to it, and are not part of the background although they adjoin it: the patch appears to be placed on the background and does not break it up. Each part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is therefore already charged with a *meaning*. But if the shape and the background, as a whole, are not sensed, they must be sensed, one may object, in each of their points. To say this is to forget that each point in its turn can be perceived only as a figure on a background. When Gestalt theory informs us that a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us, we reply that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception, which leaves us free, in an ideal analysis, to bring in the notion of impressions. It is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be perception at all. The perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a 'field'. A really homogeneous area offering *nothing to be* cannot be given to *any perception*. The structure of actual perception alone can teach us what perception is. The pure impression is, therefore, not only undiscoverable, but also imperceptible and so inconceivable as an instant of perception. If it is introduced, it is because instead of attending to the experience of perception, we overlook it in favour of the object perceived. A visual field is not made up of limited views. But an object seen is made up of bits of matter, and spatial points are external to each other. An isolated datum of perception is inconceivable, at least if we do the mental experiment of attempting to perceive such a thing. But in the world there are either isolated objects or a physical void.

I shall therefore give up any attempt to define sensation as pure impression. Rather, to see is to have colours or lights, to hear is to have sounds, to sense (*sentir*) is to have qualities. To know what sense-experience is, then, is it not enough to have seen a red or to have heard an A? But red and green are not sensations, they are the sensed (*sensibles*), and quality is not an element of consciousness, but a property of the object. Instead of providing a simple means of delimiting sensations, if we consider it in the experience itself which evinces it, the quality is as rich and mysterious as the object, or indeed the whole spectacle, perceived. This red patch which I see on the carpet is red only in virtue of a shadow which lies across it, its quality is apparent only in relation to the play of light upon it, and hence as an element in a spatial configuration. Moreover the colour can be said to be there only if it occupies an area of a certain size, too small an area not being describable in these terms. Finally this red would literally not be the same if it were not the 'woolly red' of a carpet.<sup>1</sup> Analysis, then, discovers in each quality meanings which reside in it. It may be objected that this is true only of the qualities which form part of our actual experience, which are overlaid with a body of knowledge, and that we are still justified in conceiving a 'pure quality' which would set limits to a pure sensation. But as we have just seen, this pure sensation would amount to no sensation, and thus to not feeling at all. The alleged self-evidence of sensation is not based on any testimony of



consciousness, but on widely held prejudice. We think we know perfectly well what ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘sensing’ are, because perception has long provided us with objects which are coloured or which emit sounds. When we try to analyse it, we transpose these objects into consciousness. We commit what psychologists call ‘the experience error’, which means that what we know to be in things themselves we immediately take as being in our consciousness of them. We make perception out of things perceived. And since perceived things themselves are obviously accessible only through perception, we end by understanding neither. We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world. If we did we should see that the quality is never experienced immediately, and that all consciousness is consciousness of something. Nor is this ‘something’ necessarily an identifiable object. There are two ways of being mistaken about quality: one is to make it into an element of consciousness, when in fact it is an object *for* consciousness, to treat it as an incommunicable impression, whereas it always has a meaning; the other is to think that this meaning and this object, at the level of quality, are fully developed and determinate. The second error, like the first, springs from our prejudice about the world. Suppose we construct, by the use of optics and geometry, that bit of the world which can at any moment throw its image on our retina. Everything outside its perimeter, since it does not reflect upon any sensitive area, no more affects our vision than does light falling on our closed eyes. We ought, then, to perceive a segment of the world precisely delimited, surrounded by a zone of blackness, packed full of qualities with no interval between them, held together by definite relationships of size similar to those lying on the retina. The fact is that experience offers nothing like this, and we shall never, using the world as our starting-point, understand what a *field of vision* is. Even if it is possible to trace out a perimeter of vision by gradually approaching the centre of the lateral stimuli, the results of such measurement vary from one moment to another, and one never manages to determine the instant when a stimulus once seen is seen no longer. The region surrounding the visual field is not easy to describe, but what is certain is that it is neither black nor grey. There occurs here an *indeterminate vision*, a *vision of something or other*, and, to take the extreme case, what is behind my back is not without some element of visual presence. The two straight lines in Müller-Lyer’s optical illusion (Fig. 1) are neither of equal nor unequal length; it is only in the objective world that this question arises.<sup>1</sup> The visual field is that strange zone in which contradictory notions jostle each other because the objects—the straight lines of Müller-Lyer—are not, in that field, assigned to the realm of being, in which a comparison would be possible, but each is taken in its private context as if it did not belong to the same universe as the other. Psychologists have for a long time taken great care to overlook these phenomena. In the world taken in itself

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<sup>1</sup> J.P. Sartre, *L’Imaginaire*, p. 241.

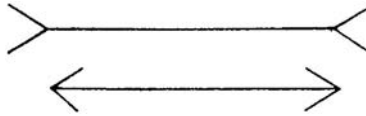


Fig. 1

everything is determined. There are many unclear sights, as for example a landscape on a misty day, but then we always say that no real landscape is in itself unclear. It is so only for us. The object, psychologists would assert, is never ambiguous, but becomes so only through our inattention. The bounds of the visual field are not themselves variable, and there is a moment when the approaching object begins absolutely to be seen, but we do not 'notice' it. But the notion of attention, as we shall show more fully, is supported by no evidence provided by consciousness. It is no more than an auxiliary hypothesis, evolved to save the prejudice in favour of an objective world. We must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon. It is in this atmosphere that quality arises. Its meaning is an equivocal meaning; we are concerned with an expressive value rather than with logical signification. The determinate quality by which empiricism tried to define sensation is an object, not an element, of consciousness, indeed it is the very lately developed object of scientific consciousness. For these two reasons, it conceals rather than reveals subjectivity.

The two definitions of sensation which we have just tried out were only apparently direct. We have seen that they were based on the object perceived. In this they were in agreement with common sense, which also identifies the sensible by the objective conditions which govern it. The visible is what is seized upon *with* the eyes, the sensible is what is seized on *by* the senses. Let us follow up the idea of sensation on this basis,<sup>1</sup> and see what becomes of this 'by' and this 'with', and the notion of sense-organ, in the first-order thinking constituted by science. Having shown that there is no experience of sensation, do we at least find, in its causes and objective origins, any reasons for retaining it as an explanatory concept? Physiology, to which the psychologist turns as to a higher court of appeal, is in the same predicament as psychology. It too first situates its object in the world and treats it as a bit of extension. *Behaviour* is thus hidden by the reflex, the elaboration and patterning of stimuli, by a longitudinal theory of nervous functioning, which establishes a theoretical correspondence between each element of the situation and an element of the reaction.<sup>2</sup> As in the case of the reflex are theory, physiology of perception begins by recognizing an anatomical path leading from a *receiver* through a definite *transmitter* to a recording station,<sup>3</sup> equally specialized. The objective world being given, it is assumed that it passes on to the sense-organs messages which must be registered, then deciphered in such a way as to reproduce in us the original text. Hence we have

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<sup>1</sup> Koffka, *Psychologie*, p. 530.

in principle a point-by-point correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and the elementary perception. But this ‘constancy hypothesis’<sup>4</sup> conflicts with the data of consciousness, and the very psychologists who accept it recognize its purely theoretical character.<sup>5</sup> For example, the intensity of a sound under certain circumstances lowers its pitch; the addition of auxiliary lines makes two figures unequal which are objectively equal;<sup>1</sup> a coloured area appears to be the same colour over the whole of its surface, whereas the chromatic thresholds of the different parts of the retina ought to make it red in one place, orange somewhere else, and in certain cases colourless.<sup>2</sup> Should these cases in which the phenomenon does not correspond to the stimulus be retained within the framework of the law of constancy, and explained by additional factors—attention and judgement—or must the law itself be jettisoned? When red and green, presented together, give the result grey, it is conceded that the central combination of stimuli can immediately give rise to a different sensation from what the objective stimuli would lead us to expect. When the apparent size of an object varies with its apparent distance, or its apparent colour with our recollections of the object, it is recognized that ‘the sensory processes are not immune to central influences’.<sup>3</sup> In this case, therefore, the ‘sensible’ cannot be defined as the immediate effect of an external stimulus. Cannot the same conclusion be drawn from the first three examples we have mentioned? If attention, more precise instructions, rest or prolonged practice finally bring perception into line with the law of constancy, this does not prove the law’s

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<sup>1</sup> There is no justification for dodging the issue, as does Jaspers, for example (*Zur Analyse der Trugwahrnehmungen*) by setting up in opposition, on the one hand a descriptive psychology which ‘understands’ phenomena, and on the other an explanatory psychology, which concerns itself with their origin. The psychologist always sees consciousness as placed in the body in the midst of the world, and for him the series stimulus-impression-perception is a sequence of events at the end of which perception begins. Each consciousness is born in the world and each perception is a new birth of consciousness. In this perspective the ‘immediate’ data of perception can always be challenged as mere appearances and as complex products of an origin. The descriptive method can acquire a genuine claim only from the transcendental point of view. But, even from this point of view, the problem remains as to how consciousness perceives itself or appears to itself as inserted in a nature. For the philosopher, as for the psychologist, there is therefore always a problem of origins, and the only method possible is to follow, in its scientific development, the causal explanation in order to make its meaning quite clear, and assign to it its proper place in the body of truth. That is why there will be found no *refutation*, but only an effort to understand the difficulties peculiar to causal thinking.

<sup>2</sup> See *La Structure du Comportement*, Chap. I.

<sup>3</sup> We are translating roughly the series ‘Empfänger-Übermittler-Empfinder’ spoken of by J. Stein, *Über die Veränderung der Sinnesleistungen und die Entstehung von Trugwahrnehmungen*, p. 351.

<sup>4</sup> Koehler, *Über unbemerkte Empfindungen und Urteilstäuschungen*.

<sup>5</sup> Stumpf does so explicitly. Cf. Koehler, *ibid.*, p. 54.

universal validity, for, in the examples quoted, the first appearance possessed a sensory character just as incontestable as the final results obtained. So the question is whether attentive perception, the subject's concentration on one point of the visual field—for example, the 'analytic perception' of the two main lines in Müller-Lyer's optical illusion—do not, instead of revealing the 'normal sensation', substitute a special set-up for the original phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> The law of constancy cannot avail itself, against the testimony of consciousness, of any crucial experiment in which it is not already implied, and wherever we believe that we are establishing it, it is already presupposed.<sup>5</sup> If we turn back to the phenomena, they show us that the apprehension of a quality, just as that of size, is bound up with a whole perceptual context, and that the stimuli no longer furnish us with the indirect means we were seeking of isolating a layer of immediate impressions. But when we look for an 'objective' definition of sensation, it is not only the physical stimulus which slips through our fingers. The sensory apparatus, as conceived by modern physiology, is no longer fitted for the rôle of 'transmitter' cast for it by traditional science. Non-cortical lesions of the apparatus of touch no doubt lessen the concentration of points sensitive to heat and cold, or pressure, and diminish the sensitivity of those that remain. But if, to the injured system, a sufficiently extensive stimulus be applied, the specific sensations reappear. The raising of the thresholds is compensated by a more vigorous movement of the hand.<sup>1</sup>

One can discern, at the rudimentary stage of sensibility, a working together on the part of partial stimuli and a collaboration of the sensory with the motor system which, in a variable physiological constellation, keeps sensation constant, and rules out any definition of the nervous process as the simple transmission of a given message. The destruction of sight, wherever the injuries be sustained, follows the same law: all colours are affected in the first place,<sup>2</sup> and lose their saturation. Then the spectrum is simplified, being reduced to four and soon to two colours; finally a grey monochrome stage is reached, although the pathological colour is never identifiable with any normal one. Thus in central as in peripheral lesions 'the loss of nervous substance results not only in a deficiency of certain qualities, but in the change to a less differentiated and more primitive structure'.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, normal functioning must be understood as a

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<sup>1</sup> Koehler, *ibid.*, pp. 57–8, cf. pp. 58–66.

<sup>2</sup> R. Déjean, *Les Conditions objectives de la Perception visuelle*, pp. 60 and 83.

<sup>3</sup> Stumpf, quoted by Koehler, *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Koehler, *ibid.*, pp. 58–63.

<sup>5</sup> It is only fair to add that this is true of all theories, and that nowhere is there a crucial experiment. For the same reason the constancy hypothesis cannot be completely refuted on the basis of induction. It is discredited because it overlooks phenomena and does not permit any understanding of them. To discern them and to pass judgement on the hypothesis, indeed, one must 'suspend' it.

process of integration in which the text of the external world is not so much copied, as composed. And if we try to seize 'sensation' within the perspective of the bodily phenomena which pave the way to it, we find not a psychic individual, a function of certain known variables, but a formation already bound up with a larger whole, already endowed with a meaning, distinguishable only in degree from the more complex perceptions, and which therefore gets us no further in our attempt to delimit pure sensation. There is no physiological definition of sensation, and more generally there is no physiological psychology which is autonomous, because the physiological event itself obeys biological and psychological laws. For a long time it was thought that peripheral conditioning was the surest method of identifying 'elementary' psychic functions, and of distinguishing them from 'superior' functions less strictly bound up with the bodily substructure. A closer analysis, however, reveals that the two kinds of function overlap. The elementary is no longer that which by addition will cumulatively constitute the whole, nor is it a mere occasion for the whole to constitute itself. The elementary event is already invested with meaning, and the higher function will bring into being only a more integrated mode of existence or a more valid adaptation, by using and sublimating the subordinate operations. Conversely, 'sense-experience is a vital process, no less than procreation, breathing or growth'.<sup>1</sup> Psychology and physiology are no longer, then, two parallel sciences, but two accounts of behaviour, the first concrete, the second abstract.<sup>2</sup> We said that when the psychologist asks the physiologist for a definition of sensation 'in causal terms', he encounters once more on this new ground his familiar difficulties, and now we can see why. The physiologist for his part has to rid himself of the realistic prejudice which all the sciences borrow from common sense, and which hampers them in their development. The changed meaning of the terms 'elementary' and 'more advanced' in modern physiology proclaims a changed philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The scientist too must learn to criticize the idea of an external world in itself, since the facts themselves prompt him to abandon that of the body as a transmitter of messages. The sensible is what is apprehended *with* the senses, but now we know that this 'with' is not merely instrumental, that the sensory apparatus is not a conductor, that even on the periphery the physiological impression is involved in relations formerly considered central.

Once more, reflection—even the second-order reflection of science—obscures what we thought was clear. We believed we knew what feeling, seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Stein, *op. cit.*, pp. 357–9.

<sup>2</sup> Even daltonism does not prove that certain systems are, and are alone in being, entrusted with 'seeing' red and green, since a colour-blind person manages to distinguish red if a large area in that colour is put before him, or if the presentation of the colour is made to last a long time. *Id. ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>3</sup> Weizsäcker, quoted by Stein, *ibid.*, p. 364.

and hearing were, and now these words raise problems. We are invited to go back to the experiences to which they refer in order to redefine them. The traditional notion of sensation was not a concept born of reflection, but a late product of thought directed towards objects, the last element in the representation of the world, the furthest removed from its original source, and therefore the most unclear. Inevitably science, in its general effort towards objectification, evolved a picture of the human organism as a physical system undergoing stimuli which were themselves identified by their physico-chemical properties, and tried to reconstitute actual perception<sup>4</sup> on this basis, and to close the circle of scientific knowledge by discovering the laws governing the production of knowledge itself, by establishing an objective science of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> But it is also inevitable that this attempt should fail. If we return to the objective investigations themselves, we first of all discover that the conditions external to the sensory field do not govern it part for part, and that they exert an effect only to the extent of making possible a basic pattern—which is what Gestalt theory makes clear. Then we see that within the organism the structure depends on variables such as the biological meaning of the situation, which are no longer physical variables, with the result that the whole eludes the well-known instruments of physico-mathematical analysis, and opens the way to another type of intelligibility.<sup>2</sup> If we now turn back, as is done here, towards perceptual experience, we notice that science succeeds in constructing only a semblance of subjectivity: it introduces sensations which are things, just where experience shows that there are meaningful patterns; it forces the phenomenal universe into categories which make sense only in the universe of science. It requires that two perceived lines, like two real lines, should be equal or unequal, that a perceived crystal should have a definite number of sides,<sup>3</sup> without realizing that the perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous, the shifting, and is shaped by its context. In Müller-Lyer's illusion, one of the lines ceases to be equal to the other without becoming 'unequal': it becomes 'different'. That is to say, an isolated, objective line, and the same line taken in a figure, cease to be, for perception, 'the same'. It is identifiable in these two functions only by analytic perception, which is not natural. In the same way the perceived contains gaps which are not mere 'failures to perceive'. I may, through sight or touch,

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<sup>1</sup> Weizsäcker, quoted by Stein, *ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> On all these points see *La Structure du Comportement*, in particular pp. 52 and ff., 65 and ff.

<sup>3</sup> Gelb, *Die Farbenkonstanz der Sehdinge*, p. 595.

<sup>4</sup> The sensations are certainly artificial products, but not arbitrary ones, they are the last component wholes into which the natural structures can be decomposed by the "analytical attitude". Seen from this point of view, they contribute to the knowledge of structures, and consequently the results of the study of sensations, correctly interpreted, are an important element in the psychology of perception.' Koffka, *Psychologie*, p. 548.

recognize a crystal as having a 'regular' shape without having, even tacitly, counted its sides. I may be familiar with a face without ever having perceived the colour of the eyes in themselves. The theory of sensation, which builds up all knowledge out of determinate qualities, offers us objects purged of all ambiguity, pure and absolute, the ideal rather than the real themes of knowledge: in short, it is compatible only with the lately developed superstructure of consciousness. That is where 'the idea of sensation is approximately realized'.<sup>4</sup>

The images which instinct projects before it, those which tradition recreates in each generation, or simply dreams, are in the first place presented on an equal footing with genuine perceptions, and gradually, by critical labour, the true, present and explicit perception is distinguished from phantasms. The word perception indicates a *direction* rather than a primitive function.<sup>1</sup> It is known that the uniformity of apparent size of objects at different distances, or of their colour in different lights, is more perfect in children than in adults.<sup>2</sup> It follows that perception is more strictly bound up with the local stimulus in its developed than in its undeveloped state, and more in conformity with the theory of sensation in the adult than in the child. It is like a net with its knots showing up more and more clearly.<sup>3</sup> 'Primitive thought' has been pictured in a way which can be understood only if the responses of primitive people, their pronouncements and the sociologists' interpretations are related to the fund of perceptual experience which they are all trying to translate.<sup>4</sup> It is sometimes the adherence of the perceived object to its context, and, as it were, its viscosity, sometimes the presence in it of a positive indeterminate which prevents the spatial, temporal and numerical wholes from becoming articulated into manageable, distinct and identifiable terms. And it is this pre-objective realm that we have to explore in ourselves if we wish to understand sense experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guillaume, *L'Objectivité en Psychologie*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *La Structure du Comportement*, Chap. III.

<sup>3</sup> Koffka, *Psychologie*, pp. 530 and 549.

<sup>4</sup> M.Scheler, *Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft*, p. 412.

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<sup>1</sup> M.Scheler, *Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft*, p. 397. 'Man approach s ideal and exact images better than the animal, the adult better than the child, men better than women, the individual better than the member of a group, the man who thinks historically and systematically better than the man impelled by tradition, "imprisoned" in it and incapable of objectivizing, by building up recollection, the environment in which he is involved, of localizing It in time and possessing it by setting it away from himself in a past context.'

<sup>2</sup> Hering, Jaensch.

<sup>3</sup> Scheler, *Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft*, p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Wertheimer, *Über das Denken der Naturvölker*, in *Drei Abhandlungen zur Gestalttheorie*.

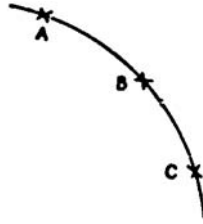
## ‘ASSOCIATION’ AND THE ‘PROJECTION OF MEMORIES’

ONCE introduced, the notion of sensation distorts any analysis of perception. Already a ‘figure’ on a ‘background’ contains, as we have seen, much more than the qualities presented at a given time. It has an ‘outline’, which does not ‘belong’ to the background and which ‘stands out’ from it; it is ‘stable’ and offers a ‘compact’ area of colour, the background on the other hand having no bounds, being of indefinite colouring and ‘running on’ under the figure. The different parts of the whole—for example, the portions of the figure nearest to the background—possess, then, besides a colour and qualities, a particular *significance*. The question is, what makes up this significance, what do the words ‘edge’ and ‘outline’ mean, what happens when a collection of qualities is *apprehended* as a figure on a background? But once sensation is introduced as an element of knowledge, we are left no leeway in our reply. A being capable of sense-experience (*sentir*)—in the sense of coinciding absolutely with an impression or a quality—could have no other mode of knowing. That a quality, an area of red should signify something, that it should be, for example, seen as a patch on a background, means that the red is not this warm colour which I feel and live in and lose myself in, but that it announces something else which it does not include, that it exercises a cognitive function, and that its parts together make up a whole to which each is related without leaving its place. Henceforth the red is no longer merely there, it represents something for me, and what it represents is not possessed as a ‘real part’ of my perception, but only aimed at as an ‘intentional part’.<sup>1</sup> My gaze does not merge with the outline or the patch as it does with the redness considered concretely: it ranges over and dominates them. In order to receive in itself a meaning which really transfuses it, in order to become integrated into an ‘outline’ which is bound up with the ‘figure’ and

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<sup>1</sup> The expression is Husserl’s. The idea is taken up with insight by M. Pradines, *Philosophie de la Sensation*, I, particularly on pp. 152 and ff.





independent of 'background', the atomic sensation ought to cease to be an absolute coincidence, which means ceasing to exist as a sensation. If we admit 'sensation' in the classical sense, the meaning of that which is sensed can be found only in further sensations, actual or virtual. Seeing a figure can be only simultaneously experiencing all the atomic sensations which go to form it. Each one remains for ever what it is, a blind contact, an impression, while the whole collection of these becomes 'vision', and forms a picture before us because we learn to pass quickly from one impression to another. A shape is nothing but a sum of limited views, and the consciousness of a shape is a collective entity. The sensible elements of which it is made up cannot lose the opacity which defines them as sensory given, and open themselves to some intrinsic connection, to some law of conformation governing them all.

Let three points A, B and C be taken on the outline of a figure: their spatial order is both their way of co-existing before our eyes and that co-existence itself, however near together be the points chosen: the sum of their separate existences, *the position of A, plus the position of B, plus the position of C*. It may well happen that empiricism abandons this atomistic manner of expression, and begins to talk about pieces of space or pieces of duration, thus adding an experience of relationships to that of qualities. But that does not affect the empiricist position in the slightest degree. Either the piece of space is traversed and inspected by a mind, in which case empiricism is abandoned, since consciousness is no longer defined in terms of the impression; or else it is itself given in the manner of an impression, when it becomes just as exclusive of any more extensive co-ordination as the atomic impression first discussed.

The fact is that a shape is not only the sum of present data, for these latter call up other complementary ones. When I say that I have before me a red patch, the meaning of the word patch is provided by previous experiences which have taught me the use of the word. The distribution in space of the three points A, B and C recalls other comparable distributions, and I say that I see a circle. Nor does the appeal to experience gained affect the empiricist thesis. The 'association of ideas' which brings past experience into play can restore only extrinsic connections, and can be no more than one itself, because the original experience involved no others. Once consciousness has been defined as sensation, every mode of conscious needs will have to derive its clarity from sensation. The word *circle*, or the word *order*, could only signify, in the earlier experiences to which I

refer, the concrete manner in which our sensations distributed themselves before us, a certain *de facto* arrangement, a way of sensing (*sentir*). If the three points, A, B and C are on a circle, the path AB 'resembles' the path BC, but this resemblance means no more than that one path makes one think of the other. The path ABC resembles other circular paths over which my eye has travelled, but that merely means that it recalls them and brings the image of them to mind. It is never possible for two terms to be *identified*, perceived or understood as *the same*, for that would pre-suppose that their this-ness is overcome. They can only be indissolubly associated and everywhere substituted for each other. Knowledge thus appears as a system of substitutions in which one impression announces others without ever justifying the announcement, in which words lead one to expect sensations as evening leads one to expect night. The significance of the percept is nothing but a cluster of images which begin to reappear without reason. The simplest images or sensations are, in the last analysis, all that there is to understand in words, concepts being a complicated way of designating them, and as they are themselves inexpressible impressions, understanding is a fraud or an illusion. Knowledge never has any hold on objects, which bring each other about, while the mind acts as a calculating machine,<sup>1</sup> which has no idea why its results are true. Sensation admits of no philosophy other than that of nominalism, that is, the reduction of meaning to the misinterpretation of vague resemblance or to the meaninglessness of association by contiguity.

Now the sensation and images which are supposed to be the beginning and end of all knowledge never make their appearance anywhere other than within a horizon of meaning, and the significance of the percept, far from resulting from an association, is in fact pre-supposed in all association, whether it concerns the conspectus of a figure before one, or the recollection of former experiences. Our perceptual field is made up of 'things' and 'spaces between things'.<sup>2</sup> The parts of a thing are not bound together by a merely external association arising from their interrelatedness observed while the object is in movement. For in the first place I see, as things, groupings which I have never seen in movement; houses, the sun, mountains, for example. Whether or not it is insisted that I extend to static objects a notion acquired through the experience of objects in motion, the fact remains that the mountain must present in its actual appearance some characteristic which gives ground for recognizing it as a thing, and justifies this transference. In which case the characteristic is sufficient, without any such transference, to explain the segregation of the perceptual field. Even the unity of ordinary things, which a child may handle and move about, does not amount to establishing their substantiality. If we set ourselves to see as things the intervals between them, the appearance of the world would be just as strikingly altered as is that of the puzzle at the moment when I pick out 'the rabbit' or 'the hunter'.

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Chap. I, *Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Koehler, *Gestalt Psychology*, pp. 164–5.

There would not be simply the same elements differently related, the same sensations differently associated, the same text charged with a different sense, the same matter in another form, but in truth another world.

There are not arbitrary data which set about combining into a thing because *de facto* proximities or likenesses cause them to associate; it is, on the contrary, because we perceive a grouping as a thing that the analytical attitude can then discern likenesses or proximities. This does not mean simply that without any perception of the whole we would not think of *noticing* the resemblance or the contiguity of its elements, but literally that they would not be part of the same world and would not exist at all. The psychologist, who always conceives consciousness as in the world, includes resemblance and contiguity of stimuli among the objective conditions which bring about the grouping together of a whole. The stimuli nearest to each other or most similar, he says,<sup>1</sup> or those which together endow the spectacle with the best balance, tend, for perception, to unite into the same configuration. But this way of talking is misleading, because it confronts objective stimuli which belong to the perceived world—and even to the second-order world elaborated by scientific consciousness—with perceptual consciousness, which it is the duty of psychology to describe according to direct experience. The psychologist's hybrid thinking always runs the risk of reintroducing into the description relationships belonging to the objective world. Thus it was possible to think of Wertheimer's law of contiguity and law of resemblance as bringing back the associationist's objective contiguity and resemblance in the rôle of constitutive principles of perception. In reality, for pure description—and Gestalt theory claims to be a description—the contiguity and resemblance of stimuli do not precede the constitution of the whole. 'Good form' is not brought about because it would be good in itself in some metaphysical heaven; it is good form because it comes into being in our experience. The alleged conditions of perception precede perception itself only when, instead of describing the perceptual phenomenon as the first way of access to the object, we suppose round about it a setting in which all disclosure of the implicit and all cross-checking performed by analytic perception are included, and all the norms of actual perception vindicated—in short, a realm of truth, a *world*. In doing so we relieve perception of its essential function, which is to lay the foundations of, or inaugurate, knowledge, and we see it through its results. If we confine ourselves to phenomena, the unity of the thing in perception is not arrived at by association, but is a condition of association, and as such precedes the delimitations which establish and verify it, and indeed precedes itself.

If I walk along a shore towards a ship which has run aground, and the funnel or masts merge into the forest bordering on the sand dune, there will be a moment when these details suddenly become part of the ship, and indissolubly fused with

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<sup>1</sup> Wertheimer, for example (the laws of proximity, of resemblance and the law of 'good form').

it. As I approached, I did not perceive resemblances or proximities which finally came together to form a continuous picture of the upper part of the ship. I merely felt that the look of the object was on the point of altering, that something was imminent in this tension, as a storm is imminent in storm clouds. Suddenly the sight before me was recast in a manner satisfying to my vague expectation. Only afterwards did I recognize, as justifications for the change, the resemblance and contiguity of what I call ‘stimuli’—namely the most determinate phenomena, seen at close quarters and with which I compose the ‘true’ world. ‘How could I have failed to see that these pieces of wood were an integral part of the ship? For they were of the same colour as the ship, and fitted well enough into its superstructure.’ But these reasons for correct perception were not given as reasons beforehand. The unity of the object is based on the foreshadowing of an imminent order which is about to spring upon us a reply to questions merely latent in the landscape. It solves a problem set only in the form of a vague feeling of uneasiness, it organizes elements which up to that moment did not belong to the same universe and which, for that reason, as Kant said with profound insight, could not be associated. By placing them on the same footing, that of the unique object, synopsis makes continuity and resemblance between them possible. An impression can never by itself be associated with another impression.

Nor has it the power to arouse others. It does so only provided that it is already *understood* in the light of the past experience in which it co-existed with those which we are concerned to arouse. Imagine a set of double syllables<sup>1</sup> in which the second is a ‘softened’ rhyme of the first (*tak-dak*), and another set in which the second syllable has the letters of the first in reverse order (*ged-deg*); if the two sets have been learnt by heart and if, in a critical experiment, the subject is given the uniform task of ‘finding a softened rhyme’, it is noticeable that he has more difficulty in finding such a rhyme for *ged* than for a neutral syllable. But if the task is to change the vowel in the syllables given, no delay occurs. It could not, then, be powers of association which operated in the first experiment, for if they existed they ought to operate equally in the second. The truth is that, faced with syllables often associated with softened rhymes, the subject, instead of rhyming in reality, takes advantage of what he knows, and sets in motion a ‘reproduction intention’,<sup>1</sup> so that when he arrives at the second set of syllables, in which the task is no longer related to the patterns with which he has been trained to deal, the reproduction intention can lead only to mistakes. When, in the second critical experiment, the subject is told to change the vowel in the prompting syllable, as the task has never figured in the preparatory drill, he cannot use the by-pass of reproduction, and under these circumstances the preparatory drill has no effect. Association therefore never comes into play as an autonomous force; it is never the word suggested which ‘induces’ the reply in the manner of an

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<sup>1</sup> K.Lewin, *Vorbemerkungen über die psychischen Kräfte und Energien und über die Struktur der Seele*.

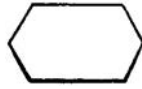


Fig. 1

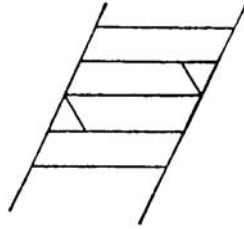


Fig. 2.

efficient cause; it acts only by making probable or attractive a reproduction intention; it operates only in virtue of the meaning it has acquired in the context of the former experience and in suggesting recourse to that experience; it is efficacious to the extent to which the subject recognizes it, and grasps it in the light or appearance of the past. If finally it were desired to bring into operation, instead of simple continuity, association by resemblance, it would still be seen that in order to recall a former image which present perception resembles, the latter must be *patterned* in such a way that it can sustain this resemblance. Whether a subject<sup>2</sup> has seen Figure 1 five or five hundred times he will recognize it almost equally easily in Figure 2 where it appears ‘camouflaged’; moreover he will never see it there constantly. On the other hand a subject who is looking, in Figure 2, for another disguised figure (without knowing which one), rediscovers it there more quickly and more frequently than a passive subject who is equally familiar with the figures. Resemblance is, therefore, like co-existence in not being a force so to speak in the third person, which directs a traffic of images or ‘states of consciousness’. Figure 1 is not recalled by Figure 2, or rather it is so recalled only if one has first seen in Figure 2 ‘a possible Figure 1’, which amounts to saying that the actual resemblance does not relieve us of the necessity of asking how it is first made possible by the present organization of Figure 2. The ‘prompting’ figure must take on the same meaning as the induced figure before it can recall it, and finally the *de facto* past is not imported into present perception by a mechanism of association, but arrayed in present consciousness itself.

From this can be judged the worth of accepted formulas about ‘the rôle of memories in perception’. Even outside empiricism there is talk of ‘the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Set to reproduce’, Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, p. 581.

<sup>2</sup> Gottschaldt, *Über den Einfluss der Erfahrung auf die Wahrnehmungen von Figuren*.

contributions of memory'.<sup>1</sup> People go on saying that 'to perceive is to remember'. It is shown that in the reading of a book the speed of the eye leaves gaps in the retinal impressions, *therefore* the sense-data must be filled out by a projection of memories.<sup>2</sup> A landscape or newspaper seen upside down are said to represent our original view of them, our normal view of them being now natural by reason of what is added to it by memory. 'Because of the unaccustomed arrangement of impressions the influence of psychic causes can no longer be felt.<sup>3</sup> It is not asked why differently arranged impressions make the newspaper unreadable or the landscape unrecognizable. The answer is: because in order to fill out perception, memories need to have been made possible by the physiognomic character of the data. Before any contribution by memory, what is seen must at the present moment so organize itself as to present a picture to me in which I can recognize my former experiences. Thus the appeal to memory presupposes what it is supposed to explain: the patterning of data, the imposition of meaning on a chaos of sense-data. No sooner is the recollection of memories made possible than it becomes superfluous, since the work it is being asked to do is already done. The same may be said of this 'colouring of memory' (*Gedächtnisfarbe*) which, in the opinion of other psychologists, eventually takes the place of the present colour of objects, so that we see them 'through the spectacles' of memory.<sup>1</sup> The question is, what at this moment awakens the 'colouring of memory'. It is recalled, says Hering, every time we see an object we already know, '*or believe we see it*'. But on what basis have we this belief? What is it, in present perception, which teaches us that we are dealing with an already familiar object, since *ex hypothesi* its properties are altered? If it is argued that recognition of shape or size is bound up with that of colour, the argument is circular, since apparent size and shape are also altered, and since recognition here too cannot result from the recollection of memories, but must precede it. Nowhere then does it work from past to present, and the 'projection of memories' is nothing but a bad metaphor hiding a deeper, ready-made recognition.

In the same way, the illusion of the proofreader cannot be understood as the fusion of a few elements truthfully read off with memories merging indistinguishably with them. How could the evocation of memories come about unless guided by the look of the strictly visible data, and if it is thus guided, what use is it then, since the word already has its structure or its features before taking anything from the storehouse of memory? Obviously it is the analysis of illusions which has lent credence to the 'projection of memories', and which follows roughly this sketchy reasoning: illusory perception cannot rest upon 'present data', since I read 'deduction' when the word printed is 'destruction'.

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<sup>1</sup> Brunshvicg, *L'Expérience humaine et la Causalité physique*, p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> Bergson, *L'Energie spirituelle*, 'L'effort intellectuel', e.g., p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for example Ebbinghaus, *Abriss der Psychologie*, pp. 104–5.

The letter *d*, which has taken the place of the group *str*, not being presented to the eye, must come from somewhere else. It is then said to come from memory. In the same way in a flat picture a few patches of light and shade are enough to provide relief, a few branches of a tree in a puzzle suggest a cat, several blurred lines in the clouds a horse. But past experience can appear only afterwards as the cause of the illusion, and the present experience has, in the first place, to assume form and meaning in order to recall precisely this memory and not others. It is, then, before my eyes and at this moment that the horse, the cat, the wrong word and the relief come into being. The light and shade of the picture convey relief by imitating 'the original phenomenon of relief',<sup>2</sup> where they were invested with a basic spatial meaning. To enable me to find a cat in the puzzle, it is necessary that 'the meaning-unit "cat" should in some way prescribe those elements of the picture which the co-ordinating activity is to retain and those which it is to overlook'.<sup>3</sup> Illusion deceives us, and passes itself off as genuine perception precisely in those cases where the meaning originates in the source of sensation and nowhere else. It imitates that privileged experience in which the meaning exactly fits the sensation, clearly cohering, or being evinced, in it. It implies this norm of perception, and therefore cannot spring from any *contact* between sensation and memory, and this is even more true of perception. The 'projection of memories' makes nonsense of both. For if a thing perceived were made up of sensations and memories, it would depend for its precise identification on the contribution of memories, and would have in itself nothing capable of stemming the flood of the latter, with the result that, being deprived even of that outer fringe of vagueness which it always in fact has, it would be, as we have said, intangible, elusive, and always bordering on illusion. Illusion would, *a fortiori*, never present the firm and well-defined appearance which a thing eventually assumes, since perception itself would not have it, and so illusion would not mislead us. If finally it is conceded that memories do not by themselves project themselves upon sensations, but that consciousness compares them with the present data, retaining only those which accord with them, then one is admitting an original text which carries its meaning within itself, and setting it over against that of memories: this original text is perception itself. In short, it is a mistake to think that with the 'projection of memories' we are bringing into perception some mental activity, and that we have taken up a position opposed to that of empiricism. The theory is no more than a consequence, a tardy and ineffective correction of empiricism, accepting its postulates, sharing the same difficulties and, like empiricism, concealing phenomena instead of elucidating them.

The postulate, as always, consists in *deducing* the given from what happens to be furnished by the sense organs. For example, in the illusion of proofreaders,

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<sup>1</sup> Hering, *Grundzüge der Lehre vom Lichtsinn*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Scheler, *Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Id. *ibid.*

the elements actually seen are reconstituted according to the eye movements, the speed of reading and the time needed for the retinal impression. Then, by subtracting these theoretical data from total perception, the ‘recollected elements’ are obtained which, in turn, are treated as mental entities. Perception is built up with states of consciousness as a house is built with bricks, and a mental chemistry is invoked which fuses these materials into a compact whole. Like all empiricist theories, this one describes only blind processes which could never be the equivalent of knowledge, because there is, in this mass of sensations and memories, *nobody who sees*, nobody who can appreciate the falling into line of datum and recollection, and, on the other hand, no solid object protected by a meaning against the teeming horde of memories. We must then discard this postulate which obscures the whole question. The cleavage between given and remembered, arrived at by way of objective causes, is arbitrary. When we come back to phenomena we find, as a basic layer of experience, a whole already pregnant with an irreducible meaning: not sensations with gaps between them, into which memories may be supposed to slip, but the features, the layout of a landscape or a word, in spontaneous accord with the intentions of the moment, as with earlier experience.

It is at this stage that the real problem of memory in perception arises, in association with the general problem of perceptual consciousness. We want to know how, by its own vitality, and without carrying complementary material into a mythical unconscious, consciousness can, in course of time, modify the structure of its surroundings; how, at every moment, its former experience is present to it in the form of a horizon which it can reopen—‘if it chooses to take that horizon as a theme of knowledge’—in an act of recollection, but which it can equally leave on the fringe of experience, and which then immediately provides the perceived with a present atmosphere and significance. A field which is always at the disposal of consciousness and one which, for that very reason, surrounds and envelops its perceptions, an atmosphere, a horizon or, if you will, given ‘sets’ which provide it with a temporal situation, such is the way in which the past is present, making distinct acts of perception and recollection possible. To perceive is not to experience a host of impressions accompanied by memories capable of clinching them; it is to see, standing forth from a cluster of data, an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible. To remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting. To perceive is not to remember.

The relationships ‘figure’ and ‘background’, ‘thing’ and ‘not-thing’, and the horizon of the past appear, then, to be structures of consciousness irreducible to the qualities which appear in them. Empiricism will always retain the expedient of treating this *a priori* as if it were the product of some mental chemistry. The empiricist will concede that every object is presented against a background which is not an object, the present lying between two horizons of absence, past



and future. But, he will go on, these significations are derivative. The 'figure' and the 'background', the 'thing' and its 'surrounding', the 'present' and the 'past', are words which summarize the experience of a spatio-temporal perspective, which in the end comes down to the elimination either of memory or of the marginal impressions. Even though, once formed in actual perception, structures have more meaning than can be supplied by a quality, I am not entitled to regard this evidence of consciousness as adequate; I must reconstruct theoretically these structures with the aid of the impressions whose actual relationships they express. On this footing empiricism cannot be refuted. Since it rejects the evidence of reflection and produces, by associating external impressions, the structures which we are conscious of understanding by proceeding from the whole to its parts, there is no phenomenon which can be adduced as a crucial proof against it. Generally speaking, the description of phenomena does not enable one to refute thought which is not alive to its own existence, and which resides in things. The physicist's atoms will always appear more real than the historical and qualitative face of the world, the physico-chemical processes more real than the organic forms, the psychological atoms of empiricism more real than perceived phenomena, the intellectual atoms represented by the 'significations' of the Vienna Circle more real than consciousness, as long as the attempt is made to build up the shape of the world (life, perception, mind) instead of recognizing, as the source which stares us in the face and as the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge of these things, our *experience* of them. The adoption of this new way of looking at things, which reverses the relative positions of the clear and the obscure, must be undertaken by each one for himself, whereupon it will be seen to be justified by the abundance of phenomena which it elucidates. Before its discovery, these phenomena were inaccessible, yet to the description given of them empiricism can always retort that it *does not understand*. In this sense, reflection is a system of thought no less closed than insanity, with this difference that it understands itself and the madman too, whereas the madman does not understand *it*. But though the phenomenal field may indeed be a new world, it is never totally overlooked by natural thought, being present as its horizon, and the empiricist doctrine itself is an attempt to analyse consciousness. By way of guarding against myths it is, then, desirable to point out everything that is made incomprehensible by empiricist constructions and all the basic phenomena which they conceal. They hide from us in the first place 'the cultural world' or 'human world' in which nevertheless almost our whole life is led. For most of us, Nature is no more than a vague and remote entity, overlaid by cities, roads, houses and above all by the presence of other people. Now, for empiricism, 'cultural' objects and faces owe their distinctive form, their magic power, to transference and projection of memory, so that only by accident has the human world any meaning. There is nothing in the appearance of a landscape, an object or a body whereby it is predestined to look 'gay' or 'sad', 'lively' or 'dreary', 'elegant' or 'coarse'. Once more seeking a definition of what we perceive through the

physical and chemical properties of the stimuli which may act upon our sensory apparatus, empiricism excludes from perception the anger or the pain which I nevertheless read in a face, the religion whose essence I seize in some hesitation or reticence, the city whose temper I recognize in the attitude of a policeman or the style of a public building. There can no longer be any *objective spirit*: mental life withdraws into isolated consciousnesses devoted solely to introspection, instead of extending, as it apparently does in fact, over human space which is made up by those with whom I argue or live, filling my place of work or the abode of my happiness. Joy and sadness, vivacity and obtuseness are data of introspection, and when we invest landscapes or other people with these states, it is because we have observed in ourselves the coincidence between these internal perceptions and the external signs associated with them by the accidents of our constitution. Perception thus impoverished becomes purely a matter of knowledge, a progressive noting down of qualities and of their most habitual distribution, and the perceiving subject approaches the world as the scientist approaches his experiments. If on the other hand we admit that all these 'projections', all these 'associations', all these 'transferences' are based on some intrinsic characteristic of the object, the 'human world' ceases to be a metaphor and becomes once more what it really is, the seat and as it were the *homeland* of our thoughts. The perceiving subject ceases to be an 'acosmic' thinking subject, and action, feeling and will remain to be explored as original ways of positing an object, since 'an object looks attractive or repulsive before it looks black or blue, circular or square'.<sup>1</sup>

But not only does empiricism distort experience by making the cultural world an illusion, when in fact it is in it that our existence finds its sustenance. The natural world is also falsified, and for the same reasons. What we object to in empiricism is not its having taken this as its primary theme of analysis. For it is quite true that every cultural object refers back to a natural background against which it appears and which may, moreover, be confused and remote. Our perception senses how near is the canvas underneath the picture, or the crumbling cement under the building, or the tiring actor under the character. But the nature about which empiricism talks is a collection of stimuli and qualities, and it is ridiculous to pretend that nature thus conceived is, even in intention merely, the primary object of our perception: it does in fact follow the experience of cultural objects, or rather it is one of them. We shall, therefore, have to rediscover the natural world too, and its mode of existence, which is not to be confused with that of the scientific object. The phenomenon of the background's continuing under the figure, and being *seen* under the figure—when in fact it is covered by the figure—a phenomenon which embraces the whole problem of the *presence* of the object, is equally obscured by empiricist philosophy, which treats this covered part of the background as invisible (in virtue of a physiological

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<sup>1</sup> Koffka, *The Growth of the Mind*, p. 320.

definition of vision) and brings it down to the status of a mere sensible quality by supposing that it is provided by an image, that is, by a watered-down sensation. In more general terms, the real objects which are not part of our visual field can be present to us only as images, and that is why they are no more than 'permanent possibilities of sensations'. If we abandon the empiricist postulate of the priority of contents, we are free to recognize the strange mode of existence enjoyed by the object behind our back. The hysterical child who turns round 'to see if the world behind him is still there',<sup>1</sup> suffers from no deficiency of images, but the perceived world has lost for him that original structure which ensures that for the normal person its hidden aspects are as indubitable as are its visible ones. Once again the empiricist can always build up, with psychic atoms, near equivalents of all these structures. But the inventory of the perceived world given in the following chapters will increasingly show it up as a kind of mental blindness, and as the system least able to give an inclusive account of experience as it is revealed to us, while on the other hand reflection embraces empiricism's subordinate truth and assigns to it its proper place.

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<sup>1</sup> Scheler, *Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*, p. 85.

## ‘ATTENTION’ AND ‘JUDGEMENT’

THE discussion of traditional prejudices has so far been directed against empiricism, but in fact it was not empiricism alone that we were attacking. We must now show that its intellectualist antithesis is on the same level as empiricism itself. Both take the objective world as the object of their analysis, when this comes first neither in time nor in virtue of its meaning; and both are incapable of expressing the peculiar way in which perceptual consciousness constitutes its object. Both keep their distance in relation to perception, instead of sticking closely to it.

This may be shown by studying the history of the concept of attention. It is deduced, in empiricist thinking, from the ‘constancy hypothesis’, or, as we have explained, from the priority of the objective world. Even if what we perceive does not correspond to the objective properties of the source of the stimulus, the constancy hypothesis forces us to admit that the ‘normal sensations’ are already there. They must then be unperceived, and the function which reveals them, as a searchlight shows up objects pre-existing in the darkness, is called attention. Attention, then, creates nothing, and it is a natural miracle, as Malebranche to all intents and purposes said, which strikes up like sparks just those perceptions or ideas capable of providing an answer to the questions which I was asking. Since ‘bemerken’ or taking notice is not an efficient cause of the ideas which this act arouses, it is the same in all acts of attention, just as the searchlight’s beam is the same whatever landscape be illuminated. Attention is therefore a general and unconditioned power in the sense that at any moment it can be applied indifferently to any content of consciousness. Being everywhere barren, nowhere can it have its own purposes to fulfil. In order to relate it to the life of consciousness, one would have to show how a perception awakens attention, then how attention develops and enriches it. Some internal connection would have to be described, and empiricism has at its disposal only external ones, and can do no more than juxtapose states of consciousness. The empiricist’s subject, once he has been allowed some initiative—which is the justification for a theory

of attention— can receive only absolute freedom. Intellectualism, on the other hand, starts with the fruitfulness of attention: since I am conscious that through attention I shall come by the truth of the object, the succession of pictures called up by attention is not a haphazard one. The new appearance of the object assigns to the previous one a subordinate place, and expresses all that its predecessor was trying to communicate. The wax is from the start a fragment of extension both pliable and alterable; I simply realize this clearly or confusedly 'according as my attention is applied more or less to the things which are in it and of which it is composed'.<sup>1</sup> Since in attention I experience an elucidation *of* the object, the perceived object must already contain the intelligible structure which it reveals. If consciousness finds a geometrical circle in the circular form of a plate, it is because it had already put the circle there. For it to gain possession of the knowledge brought by attention, it is enough for it to come to itself again, in the sense in which a man is said to come to himself again after fainting. On the other hand, inattentive or delirious perception is a semi-torpor, describable only in terms of negations, its object has no consistency, the only objects about which one can speak being those of waking consciousness. It is true that we carry with us, in the shape of our body, an ever-present principle of absent-mindedness and bewilderment. But our body has not the power to make us see what is not there; it can only make us believe that we see it. The moon on the horizon is not, and is not seen to be, bigger than at its zenith: if we look at it attentively, for example through a cardboard tube or a telescope, we see that its apparent diameter remains constant.<sup>2</sup> In-attentive perception contains nothing more and indeed nothing other than the attentive kind. So philosophy need attach no importance to any credit which appearance may be thought to enjoy. Clear consciousness, freed from the obstacles which it was prepared to create, the real world purged of any admixture of daydreams, are there for everyone. We are not called upon to analyse the act of attention as a passage from indistinctness to clarity, because the indistinctness is not there. Consciousness does not begin to exist until it sets limits to an object, and even the phantoms of 'internal experience' are possible only as things borrowed from external experience. Therefore consciousness has no private life, and the only obstacle it encounters is chaos, which is nothing. But, in a consciousness which constitutes everything, or rather which eternally possesses the intelligible structure of all its objects, just as in empiricist consciousness which constitutes nothing at all, attention remains an abstract and ineffective power, because it has no work to perform. Consciousness is no less intimately linked with objects of which it is unheeding than with those which interest it, and the additional clearness brought by the act of attention does not herald any new relationship. It therefore becomes once more a light which does not change its character with the various objects which it shines upon, and once

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<sup>1</sup> *2nd Meditation*, AT, IX, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Alain, *Système des Beaux-Arts*, p. 343.

more empty acts of attention are brought in, in place of 'the modes and specific directions of intention'.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the act of attention is unconditioned, for it has all objects at its disposal, as was the 'bemerken' of the empiricists, because in relation to that all objects were transcendent. How could an object, distinguished by its presence, call forth an act of attention, since consciousness includes all objects? Where empiricism was deficient was in any internal connection between the object and the act which it triggers off. What intellectualism lacks is contingency in the occasions of thought. In the first case consciousness is too poor, in the second too rich for any phenomenon to appeal compellingly to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching. They are in agreement in that neither can grasp consciousness *in the act of learning*, and that neither attaches due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still 'empty' but already determinate intention which *is* attention itself. Whether attention gets what it wants by ever-renewed miracles or whether it possesses it in advance, in both cases silence is maintained over the production of the object. Whether it be a collection of qualities or a system of relationships, no sooner does it exist than it must be pure, transparent, impersonal—not imperfect—a truth for one moment of my life. and of my knowledge as it emerges into consciousness. Perceptual consciousness is confused with the exact forms of scientific consciousness and the indeterminate does not enter into the definition of the mind. In spite of the intentions of intellectualism, the two doctrines, then, have this idea in common that attention creates nothing, since a world of impressions in itself or a universe of determining thought are equally independent of the action of mind.

Against this conception of an inactive subject, the analysis of attention by the psychologists acquires the value of self-discovery, and the criticism of the 'constancy hypothesis' develops into a criticism of the dogmatic belief in the 'world' seen as a reality in itself by empiricists, and as the immanent end of knowledge by intellectualists. Attention first of all presupposes a transformation of the mental field, a new way for consciousness to be present to its objects. Take the act of attention whereby I locate a point on my body which is being touched. The analysis of certain disorders having their origin in the central nervous system, and which make such an identification impossible, reveals the profound workings of consciousness. Head has spoken summarily of 'a local weakening of attention'. It is in reality neither a question of one or more 'local signals', nor of the collapse of a secondary power of apprehension. The primary condition of the disorder is a disintegration of the sensory field which no longer remains stable while the subject perceives, but moves in response to the

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<sup>1</sup> Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, t. III, *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, p. 200.

exploratory movements and shrinks while it is being probed.<sup>1</sup> A *vaguely located spot*, contradictory phenomenon that reveals a pre-objective space where there is indeed extension, since several points on the body touched together are not confused by the subject, but as yet no univocal position, because no spatial framework persists from one perception to another. The first operation of attention is, then, to create for itself a *field*, either perceptual or mental, which can be 'surveyed' (*überschauen*), in which movements of the exploratory organ or elaborations of thought are possible, but in which consciousness does not correspondingly lose what it has gained and, moreover, lose itself in the changes it brings about. The precise position of the point touched will be the invariable factor among the various feelings that I experience according to the dispositions of my limbs and body. The act of attention can localize or objectify this invariable factor because it has stepped back from the changes of appearance. Attention, therefore, as a general and formal activity, does not exist.<sup>2</sup> There is in each case a certain liberty to be acquired, and a certain mental space to make the most of. It remains to bring to light the object of attention itself. There it is literally a question of creation. For example, it has long been known that during the first nine months of life, infants distinguish only globally the coloured from the colourless; thereafter coloured areas form into 'warm' and 'cold' shades, and finally the detailed colours are arrived at. But psychologists<sup>3</sup> would concede here no more than that ignorance or the confusion of names prevents the child from distinguishing colours. The child must, it was alleged, see green *where it is*; all he was failing to do was to pay attention and apprehend his own phenomena. The reason for these assertions was that psychologists were not yet able to conceive a world in which colours were indeterminate, or a colour which was not a precise quality. The criticism of these prejudices, on the other hand, allows the world of colours to be perceived as a secondary formation, based on a series of 'physiognomic' distinctions: that between the 'warm' and 'cold' shades, that between the 'coloured' and the 'non-coloured'. We cannot compare these phenomena, which take the place of colour in children, to any determinate quality, and in the same way the 'strange' colours seen by a diseased person cannot be identified with any colour of the spectrum.<sup>1</sup> The first perception of colours properly speaking, then, is a change of the structure of consciousness,<sup>2</sup> the establishment of a new dimension of experience, the setting forth of an *a priori*.

Now attention has to be conceived on the model of these primary acts, since secondary attention, which would be limited to recalling knowledge already gained, would once more identify it with acquisition. To pay attention is not

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<sup>1</sup> J.Stein, *Über die Veränderungen der Sinnesleistungen und die Entstehung von Trugwahrnehmungen*, pp. 362 and 383.

<sup>2</sup> E.Rubin, *Die Nichtexistenz der Aufmerksamkeit*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Peters, *Zur Entwicklung der Farbenwahrnehmung*, pp. 152–3 3

merely further to elucidate pre-existing data, it is to bring about a new articulation of them by taking them as *figures*.<sup>3</sup> They are preformed only as *horizons*, they constitute in reality new regions in the total world. It is precisely the original structure which they introduce that brings out the identity of the object before and after the act of attention. Once the colour-quality is acquired, and only by means of it, do the previous data appear as preparations of this quality. Once the idea of an equation has been acquired, equal arithmetical quantities appear as varieties of the same equation. It is precisely by overthrowing data that the act of attention is related to previous acts, and the unity of consciousness is thus built up step by step through a 'transition-synthesis'. The miracle of consciousness consists in its bringing to light, through attention, phenomena which re-establish the unity of the object in a new dimension at the very moment when they destroy it. Thus attention is neither an association of images, nor the return to itself of thought already in control of its objects, but the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon. At the same time as it sets attention in motion, the object is at every moment recaptured and placed once more in a state of dependence on it. It gives rise to the 'knowledge-bringing event', which is to transform it, only by means of the still ambiguous meaning which it requires that event to clarify; it is therefore the motive<sup>1</sup> and not the cause of the event. But at least the act of attention is rooted in the life of consciousness, and one can finally understand how it emerges from its liberty of indifference and gives itself a present object. This passage from the indeterminate to the determinate, this recasting at every moment of its own history in the unity of a new meaning, is thought itself. The work of the mind exists only in act.<sup>2</sup> The result of the act of attention is not to be found in its beginning. If the moon on the horizon appears to me no bigger than at the zenith, when I look at it through a telescope or a cardboard tube, the conclusion<sup>3</sup> cannot be drawn that in free vision equally its appearance is invariable. This is what empiricism believes, because it is not concerned with what we see, but with what we ought to see, according to the retinal image. It is also what intellectualism believes because it describes *de facto* perception according to the data of 'analytic' and attentive perception, in which the moon in fact resumes its *true* apparent diameter. The precise and entirely determinate world is still posited in the first place, no longer perhaps as the cause of our perceptions, but as their immanent end. If the world is to be possible, it must be implied in the first adumbration of consciousness, as the transcendental deduction so forcibly brings out.<sup>4</sup> And that is why the moon on the horizon should never appear bigger than it is. Psychological reflection, on the contrary,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Koehler, *Über unbemerkte Empfindungen...*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Koffka, *Perception*, pp. 561 and ff.



makes us put the world of the exact back into its cradle of consciousness, and ask how the very idea of the world or of exact truth is possible, and look for its first appearance in consciousness. When I look quite freely and naturally, the various parts of the field interact and *motivate* this enormous moon on the horizon, this measureless size which nevertheless is a size. Consciousness must be faced with its own unreflective life in things and awakened to its own history which it was forgetting: such is the true part that philosophical reflection has to play, and thus do we arrive at a true theory of attention.

Intellectualism set out, it is true, to discover by reflection the structure of perception, instead of explaining it in terms of a combination of associative forces and attention, but its gaze upon perception is not yet direct. This will be seen better by examining the rôle played in its analysis by the notion of *judgement*. Judgement is often introduced as *what sensation lacks to make perception possible*. Sensation is no longer presupposed as a real element of consciousness. But when it is desired to delineate the structure of perception, it is done by joining up the points of sensation. Analysis is then dominated by this empiricist notion which, however, is accepted only as the boundary of consciousness and serves merely to throw into relief a power of co-ordination of which it is itself the antithesis. Intellectualism thrives on the refutation of empiricism, and here judgement often has the job of offsetting the possible dispersal of sensations.<sup>1</sup> Analytical reflection makes its position firm by carrying to their logical conclusions the realist and empiricist theses, and validating their opposite by showing their absurdity. But in the *reductio ad absurdum* no contact is necessarily made with the actual workings of consciousness. It remains possible that the theory of perception, ideally starting from a blind intuition, may end compensatorily with some empty concept, and that judgement, the counterpart of pure sensation, may degenerate into a general function of an indifferent linking of objects, or even become once more a psychic force detectable in its effects. The famous analysis of the piece of wax jumps from qualities such as smell, colour and taste, to the power of assuming an infinity of forms and positions, a power which lies beyond the perceived object and defines only the wax of the physicist. For perception there is no wax left when all its sensible properties have vanished, and only science supposes that there is some matter which is preserved. The 'perceived' wax itself, with its original manner of existing, its permanence which is not yet the exact identity of science, its 'interior horizon'<sup>2</sup> of possible

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<sup>1</sup> E. Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, pp. 35 and ff.

<sup>2</sup> Valéry, *Introduction à la poésie*, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> As Alain does, *Système des Beaux-Arts*, p. 343.

<sup>4</sup> The following pages will make clearer in what respects Kantian philosophy is, in Husserl's language, a 'worldly' and dogmatic philosophy. Cf. Fink, *Die phänomenologische Philosophie Husserls in der gegenwärtigen Kritik*, pp. 531 and ff.

variation of shape and size, its dull colour suggestive of softness, which in turn suggests the dull sound I shall get when I pat it, in short, the perceptual structure of the object, are lost sight of, because specifications of a predicative kind are needed to link up objective and hermetically sealed qualities. The men I see from a window are hidden by their hats and coats, and their image cannot be imprinted on my retina. I therefore do not see them, I judge them to be there.<sup>3</sup> Once vision is defined in the empiricist way as the possession of a quality impressed upon the body by the stimulus,<sup>1</sup> the least illusion, endowing the object as it does with properties which it does not possess on my retina, is sufficient to establish that perception is a judgement.<sup>2</sup> As I have two eyes, I ought to see the object double, and if I see only one of it, that is because I construct by means of two images the idea of one object a distance away.<sup>3</sup> Perception becomes an 'interpretation' of the signs that our senses provide in accordance with the bodily *stimuli*,<sup>4</sup> a 'hypothesis' that the mind evolves to 'explain its impressions to itself'.<sup>5</sup> But judgement also, brought in to explain the excess of perception over the retinal impressions, instead of being the act of perception itself grasped from within by authentic reflection, becomes once more a mere 'factor' of perception, responsible for providing what the body does not provide—instead of being a transcendental activity, it becomes simply a logical activity of drawing a conclusion.<sup>6</sup> In this way we are drawn away from reflection, and we construct perception instead of revealing its distinctive working; we miss once more the basic operation which infuses meaning (*sens*) into the sensible, and which is

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<sup>1</sup> 'Hume's nature needed Kantian reason and Hobbes' man needed Kant's practical reason if both were to approximate to the actual. natural experience we have of them.' Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, e.g., p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Descartes, *2nd Meditation*, 'I do not fail to say that I see men, just as I say I see wax; yet what do I see from the window, except hats and coats which may cover ghosts or dummies worked by springs? Yet I judge them to be real men..' AT, IX. p. 25.

<sup>1</sup> 'Here too relief seems obvious; yet it is concluded from an appearance which bears no resemblance to a relief, namely from a difference between the appearances presented to our two eyes by the same things.' Alain, *Quatre-vingt-un chapitres sur l'esprit et les passions*, p. 19. Moreover Alain (*ibid.*, p. 17) refers to the *Physiological Optics* of Helmholtz in which the constancy hypothesis is always assumed, and where judgement intervenes only to fill the gaps in physiological explanation. Cf. again *ibid.*, p. 23, 'It is fairly obvious that in the case of this forest horizon, sight presents it to us not as remote but as bluish, by reason of the intervening layers of air.' This is logically entailed if we define sight by its bodily stimulus or by the possession of a quality, for then it can give us blueness but not distance, which is a relationship. But it is not strictly speaking *obvious*, that is, attested by consciousness. Consciousness is in fact astonished to discover in the perception of distance relations which precede all assessment, calculation or conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> 'What proves here that I judge is that painters know perfectly how to provide me with the perception of a distant mountain by imitating its appearance on a canvas.' Alain, *ibid.*, p. 14.

taken for granted by any logical mediation or any psychological causality. The result is that intellectualist analysis eventually makes nonsense of the perceptual phenomena which it is designed to elucidate. While judgement loses its constitutive function and becomes an explanatory principle, the words 'see', 'hear', 'feel' lose all their meaning, since the least significant vision outruns the pure impression and thus comes under the general heading of 'judgement'. Ordinary experience draws a clear distinction between sense experience and judgement. It sees judgement as the taking of a stand, as an effort to know something which shall be valid for myself every moment of my life, and equally 'for other actual or potential minds; sense experience, on the contrary, is taking appearance .at its face value, without trying to possess it and learn its truth. This distinction disappears in intellectualism, because judgement is everywhere where pure sensation is not—that is, absolutely everywhere. The evidence of phenomena will therefore everywhere be challenged.

A large cardboard box seems heavier to me than a small one made of the same cardboard, and if I confined myself to phenomena I should say that in advance. I *feel* it heavier in my hand. But intellectualism limits sense experience to the action of a real stimulus on my body. Since here there is none, we have to say that the box is not felt but judged to be heavier, and this example which seemed ready-made to show the sensory aspect of illusion serves on the contrary to prove that there is no sensory knowledge, and that we feel as we judge.<sup>1</sup> A cube drawn on paper changes its appearance according as it is seen from one side and from above or from the other and from below. Even if I *know* that it can be seen in two ways, the figure in fact refuses to change its structure and my knowledge must await its intuitive realization. Here again one ought to conclude that judging is not perceiving. But the alternatives of sensation and judgement force us to say

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<sup>3</sup> 'We see objects double because we have two eyes, but we pay no attention to these double images except in order to gain from them knowledge about the distance or relief of the unique object which they afford our perception.' Lagneau, *Célèbres Leçons*, p. 105. And generally 'we must first of all look for the elementary sensations which belong to the nature of the human mind; the human body represents this nature'. *Ibid.*, p. 75. 'I have met a person', says Alain, 'who was not prepared to admit that our eyes present us with two images of each thing; it is, however, sufficient to fix our eyes on a fairly close object such as a pencil to see that the images of distant objects are immediately doubled.' (*Quatre-vingt-un chapitres*, pp. 23–4.) That does not prove that they were double beforehand. Here can be seen the prejudice in favour of the law of constancy which demands that phenomena corresponding to bodily impressions be given in places where they are not observed.

<sup>4</sup> 'Perception is an interpretation of the primitive intuition, an interpretation apparently immediate, but in reality gained from habit corrected by reasoning...', Lagneau, *Célèbres Leçons*, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for example Alain, *Quatre-vingt-un chapitres*, p. 15: Relief is 'thought, concluded, judged, or however you like to put it'.

that the change in the figure, since it does not depend on the 'sensible elements' which, like the stimuli, remain constant, can only depend on a change of interpretation, and that 'the mind's conception modifies perception itself',<sup>2</sup> 'appearance assumes form and meaning to order'.<sup>3</sup> Now if we see what we judge, how can we distinguish between true and false perception? How will it then be possible to say that the sufferer from hallucinations or the madman 'think they see what they do not see'?<sup>4</sup> Where will be the difference between 'seeing' and 'thinking one sees'? If the reply is made that the sane man judges only by adequate signs and completely coherent material, it is, then, because there is a difference between the motivated judgement of veridical perception and the empty judgement of false perception. And as the difference: is not in the form of the judgement but in the sensible text to which it gives form, to perceive in the full sense of the word (as the antithesis of imagining) is not to judge, it is to apprehend an immanent sense in the sensible before judgement begins. The phenomenon of true perception offers, therefore, a meaning inherent in the signs, and of which judgement is merely the optional expression. Intellectualism can make comprehensible neither this phenomenon nor the imitation which illusion gives of it. More generally it is blind to the mode of existence and co-existence of perceived objects, to the life which steals across the visual field and secretly binds its parts together. In Zöllner's optical illusion, I 'see' the main lines converging. Intellectualism simply reduces the phenomenon to a mistake, saying that it all comes of my bringing in the auxiliary lines and their relation to the main ones, instead of comparing their main lines themselves. Basically I mistake the task given to me, and I compare the two wholes instead of comparing the principal elements.<sup>1</sup> My mistake apparently remains unexplained. The question ought to arise: How does it come about that it is so difficult in Zöllner's illusion to compare in isolation the very lines that have to be compared according to the task set? Why do they thus refuse to be separated from the auxiliary lines?<sup>2</sup> It should be recognized that acquiring auxiliary lines, the main lines have ceased to be parallel, that they have lost that meaning and acquired another, that the auxiliary lines introduce into the figure a new meaning which henceforth clings to it and cannot be shifted.<sup>3</sup> It is this meaning inseparable from the figure, this transformation of the phenomenon, which motivates the false judgement and which is so to speak *behind* it. It is at the same time this meaning which gives a sense to the word 'see' on the hither side of judgement and on the far side of the quality or impression, and causes the problem of perception to reappear. If we agree to call any perception of a relationship a judgement and to keep the term visual impression for the atomic impression, then certainly illusion is a

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<sup>1</sup> Alain, *Quatre-vingt-un chapitres*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Lagneau, *Célèbres Leçons*, pp. 132 and 128.

<sup>3</sup> Alain, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Montaigne, quoted by Alain, *Système des Beaux-Arts*, p. 15.

judgement. But this analysis presupposes at least in theory a layer of impressions in which the main lines are parallel, as they are in the world, that is, in the physical environment which we measure—and a second-order operation which changes the impressions by bringing in auxiliary lines, thus distorting the relationships of the principal lines. Now the first of these phases is purely conjectural, and with it the judgement which produces the second. We construct the illusion, but we do not understand it. Judgement in this very general and quite formal sense explains perception, true or false, only when it is guided by the spontaneous organization and the special mode of arrangement of the phenomena. It is true that the illusion consists in involving the principal elements in the figure in auxiliary relationships which break up the parallelism. But why do they break it up? Why is it that two straight lines so far parallel cease to make a pair and begin to converge by reason of the immediate surroundings provided? It is as if they no longer belonged to the same world. Two genuinely oblique lines are situated in the same space which is objective space. But these do not actually converge upon each other, and it is impossible to *see* them in this way if our eyes are fixed on them. It is when we look away from them that they move insidiously towards this new relationship. There is here, preceding objective relationships, a perceptual syntax constructed according to its own rules: the breaking of old relationships and the establishment of new ones—judgement—express merely the result of this complex operation and place it on record. True or false, in this way must perception first be constituted for predication to be possible. It is quite true that the distance from us of an object, or its relief, are not properties of the object as are its colour or its weight. It is true that they are relations introduced into a total grouping which, moreover, includes weight and colour. But it is untrue that this grouping is effected through an 'inspection of the mind'. It would follow from this that the mind runs over isolated impressions and gradually discovers the meaning of the whole as the scientist discovers the unknown factors in virtue of the data of the problem. Now here the data of the problem are not prior to its solution, and perception is just that act which creates at a stroke, along with the cluster of data, the meaning which unites them—indeed which not only discovers the meaning *which they have*, but moreover sees to it *that they have a meaning*.

It is true that these criticisms are valid only against the first stages of analytical reflection, and intellectualism might reply that one is forced at the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example Lagneau, *Cèlèbres Leçons*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Koehler, *Über unbemerkte Empfindungen und Urteilstäuschungen*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Koffka, *Psychologie*, p. 533: 'One is tempted to say: the side of a rectangle is after all just a line. But an isolated line, both as a phenomenon and as a functional element, is something other than the side of a rectangle. To limit ourselves to one property, the side of a rectangle has an inner and an outer face, the isolated line on the other hand has two faces absolutely equivalent.'

beginning to talk the language of common sense. The conception of judgement as a psychic force or a logical mediator, and the theory of perception as 'interpretation'—the intellectualism of the psychologists—is indeed simply a counterpart of empiricism, but it paves the way to true self-discovery. One can begin only with a natural attitude, complete with its postulates, until the internal dialectic of these postulates destroys them. Once perception is understood as interpretation, sensation, which has provided a starting-point, is finally superseded, for all perceptual consciousness is already beyond it. The sensation is not experienced,<sup>1</sup> and consciousness is always consciousness of an object. We arrive at sensation when we think about perceptions and try to make it clear that they are not completely our work. Pure sensation, defined as the action of *stimuli* on our body, is the 'last effect' of knowledge, particularly of scientific knowledge, and it is an illusion (a not unnatural one, moreover) that causes us to put it at the beginning and to believe that it precedes knowledge. It is the necessary, and necessarily misleading way in which a mind sees its own history.<sup>2</sup> It belongs to the domain of the constituted and not to the constituting mind. To the world or opinion, perception can appear as an interpretation. For consciousness itself, how could it be a process of reasoning since there are no sensations to provide it with premises, or an interpretation, because there is nothing prior to it to interpret? At the same time as we thus discard, along with the idea of sensation, that of a purely logical activity, our foregoing objections disappear. We asked what seeing or feeling are, what makes this knowledge still enmeshed in its object, and inherent in one point of time and space, distinct from the concept. But reflection shows that there is nothing here to understand. It is a fact that I believe myself to be first of all surrounded by my body, involved in the world, situated here and now. But each of these words, when I come to think about them, is devoid of meaning, and therefore raises no problem: would I perceive myself as 'surrounded by my body' if I were not in it as well as being in myself, if I did not myself conceive this spatial relationship and thus escape inherence at the very instant at which I conceive it? Would I know that I am caught up and situated in the world, if I were truly caught up and situated in it? I should then merely *be* where I was, as a thing, and since I know where I am and see myself among things, it is because I am a consciousness, a strange creature which resides nowhere and can be everywhere present in intention. Everything that exists exists as a thing or as a consciousness, and there is no half-way house. The thing is in a place, but perception is nowhere, for if it were situated in a

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<sup>1</sup> 'In fact the pure impression is conceived and not felt.' Lagneau, *Célèbres Leçons*, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> 'When we have evolved this notion by scientific knowledge and reflection, we think that what is in fact the last effect of the process of knowing, namely the expression of the relationship between one being and others, is the beginning; but this is an illusion. The idea of time which leads us to think of sensation as anterior to knowledge, is a construction of the mind.' *Id. ibid.*

place it could not make other things *exist for itself*, since it would repose in itself as things do. Perception is thus thought about perceiving. Its incarnation furnishes no positive characteristic which has to be accounted for, and its thisness (ecceity) is simply its own ignorance of itself. Analytical reflection becomes a purely regressive doctrine, according to which every perception is a muddled form of intellection, and every setting of bounds a negation. It thus does away with all problems except one: that of its own beginning. The finitude of a perception which gives me, as Spinoza expressed it, 'consequences without premises', the inherence of consciousness in a point of view, these things amount to my ignorance of myself, to my negative power of not reflecting. But how is this ignorance possible? we want to ask. To reply that it never *is*, would be to abolish me as an inquiring philosopher. No philosophy can afford to be ignorant of the problem of finitude under pain of failing to understand itself as philosophy; no analysis of perception can afford not to conceive perception as a totally original phenomenon under pain of misconceiving itself as analysis, and the infinite thought discovered as immanent in perception would not be the culminating point of consciousness, but on the contrary a form of unconsciousness. The impetus of reflection would overshoot its goal: it would transport us from a fixed and determinate world to a consciousness without a rift in it, whereas the perceived object is infused with secret life, and perception as a unity disintegrates and reforms ceaselessly. We shall have only an abstract essence of consciousness as long as we refrain from following the actual movement by which it resumes its own operations at every instant, focusing and concentrating them on an identifiable object, gradually passing from 'seeing' to 'knowing' and achieving the unity of its own life. We shall not reach this constitutive dimension if we replace the plenary unity of consciousness by a completely transparent subject, and the 'hidden art' which calls up meaning from 'the depths of nature', by some eternal thought. The intellectualist process of self-discovery does not penetrate as far as this living nucleus of perception because it is looking for the conditions which make it *possible* or without which it would not exist, instead of uncovering the operation which brings it *into reality*, or whereby it is constituted. In actual perception taken at its origin, before any word is uttered, the sign offered to sense and the signification are not even theoretically separable. An object is an organism of colours, smells, sounds and tactile appearances which symbolize, modify and accord with each other according to the laws of a real logic which it is the task of science to make explicit, and which it is far from having analysed completely. Intellectualism is unequal to dealing with this perceptual life, either falling short of it overshooting it; it calls up as limiting cases the manifold qualities which are merely the outer casing of the object, and from there it passes on to a consciousness of the object which claims to hold within itself the law or secret of that object, and which for this reason deprives the development of the experience of its contingency and the object of its distinctive perceptual style. This move from thesis to antithesis, this flying from one extreme to the other which is the regular procedure of intellectualism

leaves the starting-point of analysis unaffected. We started off from a world in itself which acted upon our eyes so as to cause us to see it, and we now have consciousness of or thought about the world, but the nature of this world remains unchanged: it is still defined by the absolute mutual exteriority of its parts, and is merely duplicated throughout its extent by a thought which sustains it. We pass from absolute objectivity to absolute subjectivity, but this second idea is no better than the first and is upheld only against it, which means by it. The affinity between intellectualism and empiricism is thus much less obvious and much more deeply rooted than is commonly thought. It arises not only from the anthropological definition of sensation used equally by both, but from the fact that both persist in the natural or dogmatic attitude, and the survival of sensation in intellectualism is merely a sign of this dogmatism. Intellectualism accepts as completely valid the idea of truth and the idea of being in which the formative work of consciousness culminates and is embodied, and its alleged reflection consists in positing as powers of the subject all that is required to arrive at these ideas. The natural attitude, by throwing me into the world of things, gives me the assurance of apprehending a 'real' beyond appearance, the 'true' beyond illusion. The value of these notions is not questioned by intellectualism: it is merely a matter of conferring upon a universal creative force the power of recognizing this same absolute truth that realism ingenuously places in a given creation. Intellectualism no doubt normally sets itself up as a doctrine of science and not of perception, purporting to base its analysis on the test of mathematical truth and not on the naïve acceptance of the self-evidence of the world: *habemus ideam veram*. But in reality I would not know that I possess a true idea if my memory did not enable me to relate what is now evident with what was evident a moment ago, and, through the medium of words, correlate my evidence with that of others, so that Spinozist self-evidence presupposes that of memory and perception. If, on the other hand, we insist on basing our constitution of the past and of other people on our power of recognizing the intrinsic truth of the idea, we do away with the problem of others and that of the world, but then only because we persist in the natural attitude which takes them for granted, and because we put into action the force of naïve certainty. For never, as Descartes and Pascal realized, can I at one stroke coincide with the pure thought which constitutes even a simple idea. My clear and distinct thought always uses thoughts already formulated by myself or others, and relies on my memory, that is, on the *nature of my mind*, or else on the memory of the community of thinkers, that is, upon the *objective mind*. To take for granted that we *have* a true idea is to believe in uncritical perception. Empiricism retained an absolute belief in the world as the totality of spatio-temporal events, and treated consciousness as a province of this world. Analytical reflection, it is true, breaks with the world in itself, since it constitutes it through the working of consciousness, but this constituting consciousness, instead of being directly apprehended, is built up in such a way as to make possible the idea of an absolute determinate being. It is the correlative of a universe, the subject possessing in absolutely completed form



all the knowledge which is adumbrated by our actual knowledge. What happens is that what exists for us only in intention is presumed to be fully realized *somewhere*: there is thought to be a system of absolutely true thoughts, capable of co-ordinating all phenomena, a geometrized projection which clarifies all perspectives, a pure object upon which all subjective views open. Nothing less than this absolute object and this divine subject are needed to ward off the threat of the malicious demon and to ensure that we possess the true idea. Now there is indeed one human act which at one stroke cuts through all possible doubts to stand in the full light of truth: this act is perception, in the wide sense of knowledge of existences. When I begin to perceive this table, I resolutely contract the thickness of duration\* which has elapsed while I have been looking at it; I emerge from my individual life by apprehending the object as an object for everybody. I therefore bring together in one operation concordant but discrete experiences which occupy several points of time and several temporalities. We do not blame intellectualism for making use of this decisive act which, within time, does the work of the Spinozist eternity, this 'original doxa';<sup>1</sup> what we do complain of, is that it is here used tacitly. There is here a *de facto* power, as Descartes put it, a quite irresistibly self-evident truth, which, by invoking an absolute truth, brings together the separate phenomena of my present and my past, of my duration\* and that of others, which, however, must not be severed from its perceptual origins and detached from its 'facticity'. Philosophy's task is to reinstate it in the private field of experience from which it arises and elucidate its origin. If, however, this *de facto* power is used without being explicitly posited, we become incapable of *seeing* past the rending of separate experiences the phenomenon of perception, and the world born in perception; we dissolve the perceived *world* into a *universe* which is nothing but this very world cut off from its constitutive origins, and made manifest because they are forgotten.

Thus intellectualism leaves consciousness on a footing of familiarity with absolute being, while the idea of a world in itself persists as a horizon or as the clue to analytical reflection. Doubt has certainly interrupted the explicit assertions concerning the world, but leaves untouched its insidious presence, even though it be sublimated into the ideal realm of absolute truth. Reflection, then, furnishes an essence of consciousness, which is accepted dogmatically, and no one wonders what an essence is, or whether the essence of thought adequately covers the fact of thought. It loses the character of observation and henceforth there can be no question of describing phenomena: the perceptual appearance of illusions is challenged as the illusion of illusions; now only what is can be seen, the view itself and experience being no longer distinct from conception. Hence a philosophy with two guises, and observable in any doctrine of the understanding: a leap is undertaken from a naturalistic view, which expresses our *de facto*

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\* *durée* in the Bergsonian sense (Translator's note).

<sup>1</sup> Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, e.g., p. 331.

condition, to a transcendental sphere in which all bondage is theoretically removed, and we never have to wonder how the same subject comes to be a part of the world and at the same time its principle because the thing constituted exists only for the constituting agent. In fact, the image of a constituted world where, with my body, I should be only one object among others, and the idea of an absolute constituting consciousness are only apparently antithetical; they are a dual expression of a universe perfectly explicit in itself. Authentic reflection, instead of turning from one to the other as both true, in the manner of a philosophy of the understanding, rejects them as both false.

It is true that we are perhaps once more distorting intellectualism. When we say that analytical reflection anticipates all possible knowledge over and above what we at present know, that it includes reflection in its results and abolishes the phenomenon of finitude, perhaps we are caricaturing intellectualism, and offering in its name a world-centred reflection, a truth as seen by the prisoner in the cave who prefers the shadows to which he is accustomed and who does not understand that they owe their existence to the light. Perhaps we have not yet understood the real function of judgement in perception. The analysis of the piece of wax means, one may say, not that there is a reason hidden behind nature, but that reason is rooted in nature; the 'inspection of the mind' would then be, not the concept gravitating towards nature, but nature rising to the concept. Perception would be a judgement, which, however, is unaware of the reasons underlying its own formation,<sup>1</sup> which amounts to saying that the perceived object presents itself as a totality and a unity before we have apprehended the intelligible law governing it, and that the wax is not originally a pliable and alterable bit of extension. When he says that natural judgement has not 'time to weigh and consider any reasons', Descartes lets us know that by the word 'judgement' he is thinking of the constitution of a meaning for the thing perceived which is not prior to the perception itself and which seems to emanate from it.<sup>2</sup> The vital knowledge or 'natural inclination' which shows us the union of body and soul, once the light of nature has taught us to distinguish them, is a thing which it seems contradictory to guarantee by divine truthfulness; for this is after all nothing but the intrinsic clarity of the idea, and can in any case validate only self-evident thoughts. But perhaps Descartes' philosophy consists in embracing this contradiction.<sup>3</sup> When Descartes says that the understanding knows itself incapable of knowing the union of soul and body and leaves this knowledge for life to achieve,<sup>4</sup> this means that the act of understanding presents itself as reflection on an unreflective experience which it does not absorb either in fact or in theory. When I discover the intelligible structure of the piece of wax, I do not identify myself with some absolute thought in relation to which the wax is a mere result, I do not constitute it, I re-constitute it. 'Natural judgement' is nothing but the phenomenon of passivity. It will always be the task of perception to know perception. Reflection never lifts itself out of any situation, nor does the analysis of perception do away with the fact of perception, the thisness of the percept or the inherence of perceptual consciousness in some temporality and

some locality. Reflection is not absolutely transparent for itself, it is always given to itself in an *experience*, in the Kantian sense of the word, it always springs up without itself knowing whence it springs and offers itself to me as a gift of nature. But if the description of the unreflective experience remains valid after reflection and the *Sixth Meditation* after the *Second*, conversely this unreflective experience is known to us only through reflection and cannot be posited outside itself as an unknowable final stage. Between the self which analyses perception and the self which perceives, there is always a distance. But in the concrete act of reflection, I abolish this distance, I prove by that very token that I am capable of *knowing* what I was perceiving, I control in practice the discontinuity of the two selves, and it would seem that, in the last resort, the significance of the *cogito* lies not in revealing a universal constituting force or in reducing perception to intellection, but in establishing the *fact* of reflection which both pierces and sustains the opacity of perception. It would be quite consistent with the Cartesian intention to have thus identified reason and the human condition, and it might be held that the ultimate significance of Cartesianism is to be found here. The 'natural judgement' of intellectualism in this case anticipates the Kantian judgement which sees the birth of the individual object's meaning in the object itself, and does not see it as imposed ready-made.<sup>1</sup> Cartesianism, like Kantianism, would seem to have seen quite clearly that the problem of perception resides in its being an *originating* knowledge. There is an empirical or second-order perception, the one which we exercise at every moment, and which conceals from us the former basic phenomenon, because it is loaded with earlier acquisitions and plays, so to speak, on the surface of being.

When I glance rapidly about at the objects surrounding me in order to find my bearings and locate myself among them, I scarcely can be said to grasp the world in some instantaneous aspect. I identify here the door, there the window, over there my table, all of which are the props and guides of a practical intention directed elsewhere, and which are therefore given to me simply as meanings. But when I contemplate an object with the sole intention of watching it exist and unfold its riches before my eyes, then it ceases to be an allusion to a general type, and I become aware that each perception, and not merely that of sights which I am discovering for the first time, reenacts on its own account the birth of

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<sup>1</sup> '...I noticed that the judgements which I was accustomed to make about these objects were formed within me before I had time to weigh and consider any reasons which might have forced me to make them.' *6th Meditation*, AT, IX, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> '...eemed to me that I had learnt from nature all the other things that I judged concerning the objects of my senses . . .' *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> '...since it did not seem to me that the human mind was capable of conceiving distinctly and simultaneously the distinction between soul and body and their union, for in that case it would be necessary to conceive them as a single thing and at the same time as two things, which is contradictory.' To Elizabeth, 28th June, 1643, AT, III, p. 690 and ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

intelligence and has some element of creative genius about it: in order that I may recognize the tree as a tree, it is necessary that, beneath this familiar meaning, the momentary arrangement of the visible scene should begin all over again, as on the very first day of the vegetable kingdom, to outline the individual idea of this tree. Such would be natural judgement, which cannot yet know its reasons since it is in process of creating them. But even if we grant that existence, individuality, 'facticity' are on the horizon of Cartesian thought, there remains the question whether it has posited them. Now we must recognize that it could have done so only by transforming itself radically. To make perception into an original knowledge, we should have had to endow finitude with a positive significance and take seriously the strange phrase in the *4th Meditation* which makes me 'a middle term between God and nothingness'. But if nothingness is without properties, as the *5th Meditation* leads one to understand, and as Malebranche asserts, if it is *nothing*, this definition of the human subject is merely a manner of speaking and the finite has nothing positive about it. In order to see in reflection a creative deed, a reconstituting of past thought not prefigured in that past thought, yet specifying it perfectly validly—because only thus have we any idea of it, because the past in itself is for us as if it had never been—it would have been necessary to develop an intuition of time to which the *Meditations* contain only a brief allusion. 'Let who will deceive me, the fact remains that he cannot cause me to be nothing when I think I am something; *or cause it to be true one day that I have never existed, since it is true that I now exist.*'<sup>1</sup> The experience of the present is that of a being assured of his existence once and for all, whom nothing could ever prevent from having been. In the certitude of the present, there is an intention which outruns the presentness of the present, which posits it in advance as an indubitable 'former present' in the series of recollections, and perception as knowledge of the present is the central phenomenon which makes possible the unity of the ego and with it the ideas of objectivity and truth. But in the text it is given merely as one of those self-evidences which are irresistible *only de facto*, and which remain in doubt.<sup>2</sup> The Cartesian solution is therefore not to accept as a guarantee of itself human thought in its factual reality, but to base it on a thought which possesses itself absolutely. The connection between essence and existence is not found in experience, but in the idea of the infinite. It is, then, true in the last resort that analytical reflection entirely rests on a dogmatic idea of being, and that in this sense it does not amount to an act of self-discovery.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The faculty of judging 'must, then, itself provide a concept, which in reality does not bring knowledge of any thing, and which serves as a rule only for itself, not an objective rule to which its judgement is to be adapted; for then would be needed another faculty of judging in order to be able to discern whether this is or is not a case to which the rule applies.' (*Critique of Judgement*, Preface.)

<sup>1</sup> *3rd Meditation*. AT, IX, p. 28.

When intellectualism took over the naturalistic notion of sensation, a whole philosophy was implied in the step. Conversely, now that psychology finally discards this notion, we can look forward, in consequence, to the beginning of a new type of reflection. On the psychological level, the criticism of the 'constancy hypothesis' means merely that the judgement is abandoned as an explanatory factor in the theory of perception. How can we pretend that the perception of distance is a conclusion reached from the apparent size of objects, from the disparity between retinal images, from the adjustment of the crystalline lens, from the varying convergence of the eyes; or that the perception of relief is a conclusion drawn from the difference between the images furnished respectively by the left and right eyes, since, if we stick to phenomena, none of these 'signs' is clearly given to consciousness, and since there could be no reasoning where the premises are lacking? But this criticism of intellectualism only affects its popularization by psychologists. And, like intellectualism itself, it has to be transferred to the level of reflection, where the philosopher is no longer trying to explain perception, but to coincide with and understand the perceptual process. Here the criticism of the constancy hypothesis reveals that perception is not an act of understanding. I have only to look at a landscape upside down to recognize nothing in it. Now 'top' and 'bottom' have only a relative meaning for the understanding, which can hardly regard the orientation of the landscape as an absolute obstacle. For the understanding a square is always a square, whether it stands on a side or an angle. For perception it is in the second case hardly recognizable. The *Paradox of symmetrical objects* contrasted the originality of perceptual experience with logicism. This idea has to be taken up and generalized: there is a significance of the percept which has no equivalent in the universe of the understanding, a perceptual domain which is not yet the objective world, a perceptual being which is not yet determinate being. However, the psychologists who practise the description of phenomena are not normally aware of the philosophical implications of their method. They do not see that the return to perceptual experience, in so far as it is a consequential and radical reform, puts out of court all forms of realism, that is to say, all philosophies which leave consciousness and take as given one of its results—that the real sin of intellectualism lies precisely in having taken as given the determinate universe of science, that this reproach applies *a fortiori* to psychological thinking, since it places perceptual consciousness in the midst of a ready-made world, and that the attack on the constancy hypothesis carried to its logical conclusion assumes the value of a genuine 'phenomenological reduction'.<sup>1</sup> Gestalt theory has clearly shown that the alleged signs of distance—the apparent size of the object, the number of objects interposed between it and us, the disparity of retinal images,

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<sup>2</sup> On the same footing as 2 and 3 make 5. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Following its own line, analytical reflection does not bring us back to authentic subjectivity; it conceals from us the vital node of perceptual consciousness

the degree of adjustment and convergence—are expressly known only in an analytic or reflective perception which turns away from the object to its mode of presentation, and that we do not go through these stages in knowing distances. Nevertheless, it goes on to conclude that, not being *signs* or *reasons* in our perception of distance, bodily impressions or the interposed objects in the field

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because it looks for the conditions in which absolutely determinate being is possible, and is dazzled by the theological view, falsely regarded as self-evident, that nothingness is nothing. The philosophers who practised this method, however, have always felt that it was necessary to search *beneath* absolute consciousness. We have just seen that this is so in the case of Descartes. One could show it equally with Lagneau and Alain.

Analytical reflection carried to its limit should leave on the subject's side only a universal *naturans* for which the system of experience exists, including my body and my empirical self, linked to the world by the laws of physics and psycho-physiology. The sensation which we construct as the 'psychic' extension of the sensory stimuli obviously does not belong to the universal *naturans* and all idea of a genesis of mind is a hybrid idea, because it puts back into time the mind for which time exists, and confuses the two selves. Nevertheless, if we are this absolute mind, without a history, and if nothing stands between us and the true world, if the empirical self is constituted by the transcendental ego and set out before it, we ought to pierce its opacity, and it is not possible to see how error is possible, still less illusion—the 'abnormal perception' which no knowledge can conjure away. (Langeau, *Célèbres Leçons*, pp. 161–2.) It can be said (*ibid.*) that illusion and perception in its entirety are on this side of both truth and error. This does not help us to solve the problem, since it then becomes one of knowing how a mind can be 'on this side of' truth and error. When we feel (*sentir*), we do not perceive our sensation as object in a network of psycho-physiological relationships. We do not possess the truth of sensation. We are not confronted by the true world. 'It amounts to the same thing to say either that we are individuals or to say that in these individuals there is a sentient nature in which something happens which is not a result of the action of the environment. If everything in our sentient nature were subject to necessity, if there were for us a manner of feeling which was the true one, if at every moment our manner of feeling were produced by the external world, we should not feel at all.' (*Célèbres Leçons*, p. 164.) Thus feeling does not belong to the order of the constituted, nor does the ego find this order set out before it, escapes from its gaze, it is as if it were piled up behind it and produces a kind of thickness or opacity which makes error possible, it marks out an area of subjectivity or solitude, it represents for us what is 'anterior to' the mind, evokes the latter's birth and calls for a more searching analysis capable of elucidating 'the genealogy of logic'. The mind is conscious of itself as 'based' on this nature. There is therefore a dialectic of the *naturata* and of the *naturans*, of perception and judgement, in the course of which their relationship is reversed.

The same tendency is to be found in Alain in the analysis of perception. One realizes that a tree always looks bigger than a man, even if it is at a distance and the man near. I am tempted to say that 'Here again a judgement enlarges the object. But let us look more closely. The object is unchanged because an object in itself has no size; size is always relative, and so the size of these objects and of all objects forms an indivisible whole and one truly without parts. Sizes must be judged together. From which it is seen that one must not confuse material things, always separate and made up of mutually external parts, and the thought of these things, in which no division can be admitted. However obscure this distinction may be now, and however difficult it must always remain to conceive it, let us keep

can only be *causes* of this perception.<sup>2</sup> So we are back in an explanatory psychology, the ideal of which has never been abandoned by Gestalt psychology,<sup>3</sup> because, as psychology, it has never broken with naturalism. But by this very fact it betrays its own descriptions. A subject whose oculo-motor muscles are paralysed sees objects moving to his left whenever he believes that he is turning his eyes towards the left. This, classical psychology maintains, is because perception reasons: the eye is supposed to swing to the left, and since nevertheless the retinal images have not moved, the view must have slipped leftwards to have kept them in place in the eye. Gestalt theory informs us that the perception of the position of objects does not pass through the detour of an express body-consciousness: at no moment do I know that the images remain stationary on the retina; I see directly the landscape move to the left. But consciousness is not confined to receiving ready-made an illusory phenomenon produced outside itself by physiological causes. For the illusion to be produced, the subject must have intended to look to the left and must have thought he moved his eye. The illusion regarding the subjects' body entails the appearance of movement in the object. The movements of his body are naturally invested with a certain perceptual significance, and form, with the external phenomena, such a well articulated system that external perception 'takes account' of the movement of the organs of perception, finding in them if not the *express*

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it in mind. In a sense, considered materially, things are divided into parts of which one is not another; but in another sense, considered as thoughts, perceptions of things are indivisible and without parts.' (*Quatre-vingt-un chapitres sur l' Esprit et les Passions*, p. 18.) But then an inspection of the mind which surveyed them and established one in virtue of the other would not be true subjectivity and would borrow too much from things considered as in themselves. Perception does not draw conclusions about the size of the tree from that of the man, or about the man's size from the tree's, nor either from the meaning of the two objects; it does all these things at once: the size of the tree, that of the man, and their significance as tree and man, with the result that each element agrees with all the others and composes with them a landscape in which all *co-exist*. Thus do we broach the analysis of what makes size possible, and more generally the relations or properties of the predicative order, and we broach that subjectivity 'prior to all geometry' which Alain nevertheless declared unknowable. (Ibid., p. 29.) Analytical reflection becomes more strictly conscious of itself as analysis. It becomes aware that it had left behind its object, perception. It recognizes behind the judgement which it had brought into evidence, a deeper function than judgement which makes judgement possible; it rediscovers, before arriving at things, phenomena. This is the function envisaged by psychologists when they talk about a *Gestaltung* of the landscape. It is to the description of phenomena that they redirect the philosopher, by separating them rigidly from the constituted objective world, and they do it in terms which are almost identical with Alain's.

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<sup>1</sup> See A.Gurwitsh, Review of *Nachwort zu meiner Ideen of Husseri*, pp. 401 and ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example P.Guillaume, *Traité de Psychologie*, Coap. IX, *La Perception de l'Espace*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *La Structure du Comportement*, p. 178.

*explanation*, at least the *motive* for the changes brought about in the spectacle, and can thus understand them instantly. When I intend to look left, this movement of the eye carries within it as its natural translation an oscillation of the visual field: the objects remain in place, but after a moment's fluctuation. This consequence is not learnt but is one of the natural formations of the psychosomatic subject. It is, as we shall see, an annex of our 'bodily schema', the immanent meaning of a shift of 'gaze'. When it stops short of such a change, when we are conscious of moving our eyes without the view's being affected, the phenomenon is translated, without any express deduction, by an apparent shift of the object leftwards. The gaze and the landscape remain as it were glued together, no quiver dissociates them, and the gaze, in its illusory movement, carries with it the landscape, and the latter's sideslip *is* fundamentally nothing but its fixity in a gaze which we think is moving. Thus the immobility of images on the retina and the paralysis of the oculo-motor muscles are not objective causes which produce the illusion and carry it ready-made into consciousness. Nor are the intention to move the eye and the landscape's passivity in relation to this impulse premises or reasons for the illusion. But they are the *motives* (*motifs*). In the same way, the objects interposed between me and the thing upon which I fix my eyes are not perceived for themselves; they are nevertheless perceived, and we have no reason for refusing to recognize that this marginal perception plays a part in seeing distance, since, when the intervening objects are hidden by a screen, the distance appears to shrink. The objects filling up the field do not act on the apparent distance in the relation of cause to effect. When the screen is removed, we see remoteness born of the intervening objects. This is the silent language whereby perception communicates with us: interposed objects, in the natural context, 'mean' a greater distance. It is not, however, a question of a connection recognized by objective logic, the logic of constituted truth: for there is *no reason* why a steeple should appear to me to be smaller and farther away when I am better able to see in detail the slopes and fields between me and it. There is no reason, but there is a motive. It is precisely Gestalt psychology which has brought home to us the tensions which run like lines of force across the visual field and the system: own body-world, and which breathe into it a secret and magic life by exerting here and there forces of distortion, contraction and expansion. The disparity between retinal images, and the number of intermediate objects do not act either as mere objective causes producing from outside my perception of distance, or as demonstrative reasons for it. They are tacitly known to perception in an obscure form, and they validate it by a wordless logic. But what Gestalt psychology lacks for the adequate expression of these perceptual relationships is a set of new categories: it has admitted the principle, and applied it to a few individual cases, but without realizing that a complete reform of understanding is called for if we are to translate phenomena accurately; and that to this end the objective thinking of classical logic and philosophy will have to be questioned, the categories of the world laid aside, the alleged self-evidence of realism placed in doubt, in the Cartesian sense, and a true 'phenomenological reduction'



undertaken. Objective thought, as applied to the universe and not to phenomena, knows only alternative notions; starting from actual experience, it defines pure concepts which are mutually exclusive: the notion of *extension*, which is that of an absolute externality of one part to another, and the notion of *thought* which is that of a being wrapped up in himself; the notion of the vocal *sign* as a physical phenomenon arbitrarily linked to certain thoughts, and that of *meaning* as a thought entirely clear to itself; the notion of *cause* as a determining factor external to its effect, and that of *reason* as a law of intrinsic constitution of the phenomenon. Now, as we have seen, the perception of our own body and the perception of external things provide an example of *non-positing* consciousness, that is, of consciousness not in possession of fully determinate objects, that of a *logic lived through* which cannot account for itself, and that of an *immanent meaning* which is not clear to itself and becomes fully aware of itself only through experiencing certain natural signs. These phenomena cannot be assimilated by objective thought, and that is why Gestalt psychology which, like all psychology, is imprisoned within the 'self-evident truths' of science and of the world, can choose only between reason and cause, and that is why any criticism of intellectualism which it undertakes ends with the rehabilitation of realism and causal thinking. On the other hand, the phenomenological notion of *motivation* is one of those 'fluid'<sup>1</sup> concepts which have to be formed if we want to get back to phenomena. One phenomenon releases another, not by means of some objective efficient cause, like those which link together natural events, but by the meaning which it holds out—there is a *raison d'être* for a thing which guides the flow of phenomena without being explicitly laid down in any one of them, a sort of operative reason. Thus the intention to look to the left and the fact that the landscape remains stubbornly fixed in one's gaze bring about the illusion of movement in the object. To the degree that the motivated phenomenon comes into being, an internal relation to the motivating phenomenon appears; hence, instead of the one merely succeeding the other, the motivated phenomenon makes the motivating phenomenon explicit and comprehensible, and thus seems to have preexisted its own motive. Thus the object at a distance and its physical projection on the retinas explain the disparity of images, and, through a retrospective illusion, we speak with Malebranche about a natural geometry of perception. We place beforehand within perception a science constructed upon it, and we lose sight of the original relationship of motivation, in which distance springs into existence ahead of any science, not from a judgement of 'the two images', for these are not numerically distinct, but from the phenomenon of the 'shift', from the forces which reside in this rough outline, which are trying to

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<sup>1</sup> 'fließende', Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, p. 428. It was not until his last period that Husserl himself became fully aware of what the return to phenomena meant, and tacitly broke with the philosophy of essences. He was in this way merely explicitly laying down analytic procedures which he had long been applying, as is precisely shown by the notion of motivation to be found already in the *Ideen*.

come to rest and which lead it to the most determinate form possible. To a Cartesian doctrine, these descriptions will never have any philosophic importance: they will be treated as allusions to unreflective states of mind, which, by their nature, can never become articulate and which, like any form of psychology, are without truth in the eyes of the understanding. In order to admit them completely, it would be necessary to show that in no case can consciousness entirely cease to be what it is in perception, that is, a fact, and that it cannot take full possession of its operations. The recognition of phenomena, then, implies a theory of reflection and a new *cogito*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See below, [Part III](#). Gestalt psychology has adopted a kind of reflection the theory of which is furnished by Husserl's phenomenology. Are we wrong to discern a whole philosophy implicit in the criticism of the 'constancy hypothesis'? Although we are not here concerned with history, it may be pointed out that the affinity of Gestalt psychology and phenomenology is equally attested by external similarities. It is no chance occurrence that Köhler should propose, as the task of psychology, 'phenomenological description' (*Über unbemerkte Empfindungen und Urteilstäuschungen*, p. 70). Or that Koffka, a former disciple of Husserl, should trace the leading ideas of his psychology back to this influence, and try to show that the attack on psychologism leaves Gestalt psychology untouched (*Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, pp. 614–83), the Gestalt being, not a mental event of the type of an impression, but a whole which develops a law of internal coherence,

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Or that finally Husserl, in his last period, still further away from logicism, which he had moreover attacked along with psychologism, should have taken up the notion of 'configuration' and even of Gestalt (cf. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, I, pp. 106, 109). What is true is that the reaction against naturalism and against causal thinking is, in Gestalt psychology, neither consequential, nor radical, as can be seen from the naïve realism of its theory of knowledge (cf. *La Structure du Comportement*, p. 180). Gestalt psychology cannot see that psychological atomism is only one particular case of a more general prejudice; the prejudice of determinate being or of the world, and that is why it forgets its most valid descriptions when it tries to provide itself with a theoretical framework. It is unexceptionable only in the middle regions of reflection. When it tries to reflect on its own analysis, it treats consciousness, despite its principles, as a collection of 'forms'. This is enough to justify Husserl's criticisms expressly directed against Gestalt psychology, but applicable to all psychology (*Nachwort zu meiner Ideen*, pp. 564 and ff.) at a time when he was still distinguishing fact and essence, when he had not yet arrived at the idea of historical constitution, and when, consequently, he was stressing the break, rather than the parallelism, between psychology and phenomenology. We have quoted elsewhere (*La Structure du Comportement*, p. 280) a text of E.Fink restoring the balance. As for the fundamental question, which is that of the transcendental attitude in relation to the natural attitude, it will not be possible to settle it until we reach the last part of this work, where we shall examine the transcendental meaning of time.

## THE PHENOMENAL FIELD

IT will now be seen in what direction the following chapters will carry their inquiry. ‘Sense experience’\* has become once more a question for us. Empiricism had emptied it of all mystery by bringing it down to the possession of a quality. This had been possible only at the price of moving far from the ordinary acceptance of the word. Between sense experience and knowing, common experience establishes a difference which is not that between the quality and the concept. This rich notion of sense experience is still to be found in Romantic usage, for example in Herder. It points to an experience in which we are given not ‘dead’ qualities, but active ones. A wooden wheel placed on the ground is not, *for sight*, the same thing as a wheel bearing a load. A body at rest because no force is being exerted upon it is again for sight not the same thing as a body in which opposing forces are in equilibrium.<sup>1</sup> The light of a candle changes its appearance for a child when, after a burn, it stops attracting the child’s hand and becomes literally repulsive.<sup>2</sup> Vision is already inhabited by a meaning (*sens*) which gives it a function in the spectacle of the world and in our existence. The pure *quale* would be given to us only if the world were a spectacle and one’s own body a mechanism with which some impartial mind made itself acquainted.<sup>3</sup> Sense experience, on the other hand, invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us, for that heavy mass which is our body, whence it comes about that it always involves a reference to the body. The problem is to understand these strange relationships which are woven between the parts of the landscape, or between it and me as incarnate subject, and through which an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become the *imago* of a whole segment of life. Sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it

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\* The original French word is ‘le sentir’ (Translator’s note).

<sup>1</sup> Koffka, *Perception, an Introduction to the Gestalt Theory*, pp. 558–9.

that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness. It is the intentional tissue which the effort to know will try to take apart. With the problem of sense experience, we rediscover that of association and passivity. They have ceased to be problematical because the classical philosophies put themselves either below or above them, giving them everything or nothing: sometimes association was understood as a mere *de facto* co-existence, sometimes derived from an intellectual construction; sometimes passivity was imported from things into the mind, and sometimes analytical reflection would find in it an activity of understanding. Whereas these notions take on their full meaning if sense experience is distinguished from quality: then association, or rather 'affinity', in the Kantian sense, is the central phenomenon of perceptual life, since it is the constitution, without any ideal model, of a significant grouping. The distinction between the perceptual life and the concept, between passivity and spontaneity is no longer abolished by analytical reflection, since we are no longer forced by the atomism of sensation to look to some connecting activity for our principle of all co-ordination. Finally, after sense experience, understanding also needs to be redefined, since the general connective function ultimately attributed to it by Kantianism is now spread over the whole intentional life and no longer suffices to distinguish it. We shall try to bring out in relation to perception, both the instinctive sub-structure and the superstructures erected upon it by the exercise of intelligence. As Cassirer puts it, by mutilating perception from above, empiricism mutilated it from below too:<sup>1</sup> the impression is as devoid of instinctive and affective meaning as of ideal significance. One might add that mutilating perception from below, treating it immediately as knowledge and forgetting its existential content, amounts to mutilating it from above, since it involves taking for granted and passing over in silence the decisive moment in perception: the upsurge of a *true* and *exact* world. Reflection will be sure of having precisely located the centre of the phenomenon if it is equally capable of bringing to light its vital inherence and its rational intention.

So, 'sensation' and 'judgement' have together lost their apparent clearness: we have observed that they were clear only as long as the prejudice in favour of the world was maintained. As soon as one tried by means of them, to picture consciousness in the process of perceiving, to revive the forgotten perceptual experience, and to relate them to it, they were found to be inconceivable. By dint of making these difficulties more explicit, we were drawn implicitly into a new kind of analysis, into a new dimension in which they were destined to disappear. The criticism of the constancy hypothesis and more generally the reduction of

<sup>2</sup> Id., *Mental Development*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Scheler, *Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft*, p. 408.

<sup>1</sup> Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, T. III, *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, pp. 77–8.

the idea of 'the world' opened up a *phenomenal field* which now has to be more accurately circumscribed, and suggested the rediscovery of a direct experience which must be, at least provisionally, assigned its place in relation to scientific knowledge, and to psychological and philosophical reflection.

Science and philosophy have for centuries been sustained by unquestioning faith in perception. Perception opens a window on to things. This means that it is directed, quasi-teleologically, towards a *truth in itself* in which the reason underlying all appearances is to be found. The tacit thesis of perception is that at every instant experience can be co-ordinated with that of the previous instant and that of the following, and my perspective with that of other consciousnesses—that all contradictions can be removed, that monadic and intersubjective experience is one unbroken text—that what is now indeterminate for me could become determinate for a more complete knowledge, which is as it were realized in advance in the thing, or rather which is the thing itself. Science has first been merely the sequel or amplification of the process which constitutes perceived things. Just as the thing is the invariant of all sensory fields and of all individual perceptual fields, so the scientific concept is the means of fixing and objectifying phenomena. Science defined a theoretical state of bodies not subject to the action of any force, and *ipso facto* defined force, reconstituting with the aid of these ideal components the processes actually observed. It established statistically the chemical properties of pure bodies, deducing from these those of empirical bodies, and seeming thus to hold the plan of creation or in any case to have found a reason immanent in the world. The notion of geometrical space, indifferent to its contents, that of pure movement which does not by itself affect the properties of the object, provided phenomena with a setting of inert existence in which each event could be related to physical conditions responsible for the changes occurring, and therefore contributed to this freezing of being which appeared to be the task of physics. In thus developing the concept of the thing, scientific knowledge was not aware that it was working on a presupposition. Precisely because perception, in its vital implications and prior to any theoretical thought, is presented as perception of a being, it was not considered necessary for reflection to undertake a genealogy of being, and it was therefore confined to seeking the conditions which make being possible. Even if one took account of the transformations of determinant consciousness,<sup>1</sup> even if it were conceded that the constitution of the object is never completed, there was nothing to add to what science said of it; the natural object remained an ideal unity for us and, in the famous words of Lachelier, a network of general properties. It was no use denying any ontological value to the principles of science and leaving them with only a methodical value,<sup>1</sup> for this reservation made no essential change as far as philosophy was concerned, since the sole conceivable being remained defined by scientific method. The living body, under these circumstances, could not escape

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<sup>1</sup> As L. Brunschvicg does.

the determinations which alone made the object into an object and without which it would have had no place in the system of experience. The value predicates which the reflecting judgement confers upon it had to be sustained, in being, by a foundation of physico-chemical properties. In ordinary experience we find a fittingness and a meaningful relationship between the gesture, the smile and the tone of a speaker. But this reciprocal relationship of expression which presents the human body as the outward manifestation of a certain manner of being-in-the-world, had, for mechanistic physiology, to be resolved into a series of causal relations.

It was necessary to link to centripetal conditions the centrifugal phenomenon of expression, reduce to third person processes that particular way of dealing with the world which we know as behaviour, bring experience down to the level of physical nature and convert the living body into an interiorless thing. The emotional and practical attitudes of the living subject in relation to the world were, then, incorporated into a psycho-physiological mechanism. Every evaluation had to be the outcome of a transfer whereby complex situations became capable of awakening elementary impressions of pleasure and pain, impressions bound up, in turn, with nervous processes. The impelling intentions of the living creature were converted into objective movements: to the will only an instantaneous fiat was allowed, the execution of the act being entirely given over to a nervous mechanism. Sense experience, thus detached from the affective and motor functions, became the mere reception of a quality, and physiologists thought they could follow, from the point of reception to the nervous centres, the projection of the external world in the living body. The latter, thus transformed, ceased to be my body, the visible expression of a concrete Ego, and became one object among all others. Conversely, the body of another person could not appear to me as encasing another Ego. It was merely a machine, and the perception of the other could not really be *of the other*, since it resulted from an inference and therefore placed behind the automaton no more than a consciousness in general, a transcendent cause and not an inhabitant of his movements. So we no longer had a grouping of factors constituting the self co-existing in a world. The whole concrete content of 'psychic states' resulting, according to the laws of psychophysiology and psychology, from a universal determinism, was integrated into the *in-itself*. There was no longer any real *for-itself* other than the thought of the scientist which perceives the system and which alone ceases to occupy any place in it. Thus, while the living body became an exterior without interior, subjectivity became an interior without exterior, an impartial spectator. The naturalism of science and the spiritualism of the universal constituting subject, to which reflection on science led, had this in common, that they levelled out experience: in face of the constituting I, the empirical selves are objects. The empirical Self is a hybrid notion, a mixture of in-itself and for-itself, to which

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example, *L'Expérience humaine et la Causalité physique*, p. 536.

reflective philosophy could give no status. In so far as it has a concrete content it is inserted in the system of experience and is therefore not a subject; in so far as it *is* a subject, it is empty and resolves itself into the transcendental subject. The ideality of the object, the objectification of the living body, the placing of spirit in an axiological dimension having no common measure with nature, such is the transparent philosophy arrived at by pushing further along the route of knowledge opened up by perception. It could be held that perception is an incipient science, science a methodical and complete perception,<sup>1</sup> since science was merely following uncritically the ideal of knowledge set up by the perceived thing.

Now this philosophy is collapsing before our eyes. The natural object was the first to disappear and physics has itself recognized the limits of its categories by demanding a recasting and blending of the pure concepts which it had adopted. For its part the organism presents physico-chemical analysis not with the practical difficulties of a complex object, but with the theoretical difficulty of a meaningful being.<sup>2</sup> In more general terms the idea of a universe of thought or a universe of values, in which all thinking lives come into contact and are reconciled, is called into question. Nature is *not* in itself geometrical, and it appears so only to a careful observer who contents himself with macrocosmic data. Human society is *not* a community of reasonable minds, and only in fortunate countries where a biological and economic balance has locally and temporarily been struck has such a conception of it been possible. The experience of chaos, both on the speculative and the other level, prompts us to see nationalism in a historical perspective which it set itself on principle to avoid, to seek a philosophy which explains the upsurge of reason in a world not of its making and to prepare the substructure of living experience without which reason and liberty are emptied of their content and wither away. We shall no longer hold that perception is incipient science, but conversely that classical science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete. The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history. Our task will be, moreover, to rediscover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us, the system 'Self-others-things' as it comes into being; to reawaken perception and foil its trick of allowing us to forget it as a fact and as perception in the interest of the object which it presents to us and of the rational tradition to which it gives rise.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example Alain, *Quatre-vingt-un chapitres sur l'Esprit et les Passions*, p. 19, and Brunschvicg, *L'Expérience humaine et la causalité physique*, p. 468.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *La Structure du Comportement*, and below, First Part.

This phenomenal field is not an 'inner world', the 'phenomenon' is not a 'state of consciousness', or a 'mental fact', and the experience of phenomena is not an act of introspection or an intuition in Bergson's sense. It has long been the practice to define the object of psychology by saying that it was 'without extension' and 'accessible to one person only', with the result that this peculiar object could be grasped only by means of a special kind of act, 'internal perception' or introspection, in which subject and object were mingled and knowledge achieved by an act of coinciding. The return to the 'immediate data of consciousness' became therefore a hopeless enterprise since the philosophical scrutiny was trying to *be* what it could not, in principle, *see*. The difficulty was not only to destroy the prejudice of the exterior, as all philosophies urge the beginner to do, or to describe the mind in a language made for representing things. It was much more fundamental, since interiority, defined by the impression, by its nature evaded every attempt to express it. It was not only the imparting of philosophical intuitions to others which became difficult—or rather reduced itself to a sort of incantation designed to induce in them experiences comparable to the philosopher's—but the philosopher himself could not be clearly aware of *what* he saw in the instant, since he would have had to think it, that is fix and distort it. The immediate was therefore a lonely, blind and mute life. The return to the phenomenal presents none of these peculiarities. The sensible configuration of an object or a gesture, which the criticism of the constancy hypothesis brings before our eyes, is not grasped in some inexpressible coincidence, it 'is understood' through a sort of act of appropriation which we all experience when we say that we have 'found' the rabbit in the foliage of a puzzle, or that we have 'caught' a slight gesture. Once the prejudice of sensation has been banished, a face, a signature, a form of behaviour cease to be mere 'visual data' whose psychological meaning is to be sought in our inner experience, and the mental life of others becomes an immediate object, a whole charged with immanent meaning. More generally it is the very notion of the immediate which is transformed: henceforth the immediate is no longer the impression, the object which is one with the subject, but the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts. My own 'mental life' is given to me in precisely the same way, since the criticism of the constancy hypothesis teaches me to recognize the articulation and melodic unity of my behaviour as original data of inner experience, and since introspection, when brought down to its positive content, consists equally in making the immanent meaning of any behaviour explicit.<sup>1</sup> Thus what we discover by going beyond the prejudice of the objective world is not an occult inner world. Nor is this world of living experience completely closed to naïve consciousness, as is Bergson's interiority. In criticizing the constancy hypothesis and in laying bare phenomena, the psychologist, it is true, runs counter to the natural direction of the process of knowing, which goes blindly through the operations of perception straight on to their teleological results. Nothing is more difficult than to know precisely *what we see*. 'There is in natural intuition a sort of "crypto-mechanism" which we



have to break in order to reach phenomenal being'<sup>2</sup> or again a dialectic whereby perception hides itself from itself. But although it is of the essence of consciousness to forget its own phenomena thus enabling 'things' to be constituted, this forgetfulness is not mere absence, it is the absence of something which consciousness could bring into its presence: in other words consciousness can forget phenomena only because it can recall them, it neglects them in favour of things only because they are the cradle of things. For example they are never completely unknown to scientific consciousness, which borrows all its models from the structures of living experience; it simply does not 'thematize' them, or make explicit the horizons of perceptual consciousness surrounding it to whose concrete relationships it tries to give objective expression. Experience of phenomena is not, then, like Bergsonian intuition, that of a reality of which we are ignorant and leading to which there is no methodical bridge—it is the making explicit or bringing to light of the prescientific life of consciousness which alone endows scientific operations with meaning and to which these latter always refer back. It is not an irrational conversion, but an intentional analysis.

If, as we see, phenomenological psychology is distinguished in all its characteristics from introspective psychology, it is because it is different in basic principle. Introspective psychology detected, on the perimeter of the physical world, a zone of consciousness in which physical concepts are no longer valid, but the psychologist still believed consciousness to be no more than a sector of being, and he decided to explore this sector as the physicist explores his. He tried to describe the givens of consciousness but without putting into question the absolute existence of the world surrounding it. In company with the scientist and common sense, he presupposed the objective world as the logical framework of all his descriptions, and as the setting of his thought. He was unaware that this presupposition dominated the meaning given to the word 'being', forcing it to bring consciousness into existence under the name of 'psychic fact', and thus diverting it from a true grasp of consciousness or from truly immediate experience, and stultifying the many precautions taken to avoid distorting the 'interior'. This is what happened to empiricism when it replaced the physical world by a world of inner events. It is again what happens to Bergson precisely when he contrasts 'multiplicity of fusion' and 'multiplicity of juxtaposition'. For it is here still a question of two modes of being. All that has happened is that mechanical energy has been replaced by spiritual, the discontinuous being of empiricism by being of a fluid kind, but of which we can say that *it flows*, describing it in the third person. By taking the *Gestalt* as the theme of his reflection, the psychologist breaks with psychologism, since the meaning, connection and 'truth' of the percept no longer arise from the fortuitous coming

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<sup>1</sup> We shall, consequently, in the following chapters, resort indifferently to the internal experience of our perception and to the 'external' experience of perceiving subjects.

<sup>2</sup> Scheler, *Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*, p. 106.

together of our sensations as they are given to us by our psycho-physiological nature, but determine the spatial and qualitative values of these sensations, and *are* their irreducible configuration.<sup>1</sup> It follows that the transcendental attitude is already implied in the descriptions of the psychologist, in so far as they are faithful ones. Consciousness as an object of study presents the peculiarity of not being analysable, even naïvely, without carrying us beyond common sense postulates. If, for example, we set out to create a positive psychology of perception, while still allowing consciousness to be enclosed in the body, and through it suffer the action of a world in itself, we are led to describe the object and the world as they appear to consciousness, and in this way to inquire whether this immediately present world, the only one we know, may not also be the only one of which there is reason to speak. A psychology is always brought face to face with the problem of the constitution of the world.

Psychological reflection, once begun, then, outruns itself through its own momentum. Having recognized the originality of phenomena in relation to the objective world, since it is through them that the objective world is known to us, it is led to integrate with them every possible object and to try to find out how that object is constituted through them. At the same time the phenomenal field becomes a transcendental field. Since it is now the universal focus of knowledge, consciousness definitely ceases to be a particular region of being, a certain collection of 'mental' contents; it no longer resides or is no longer confined within the domain of 'forms' which psychological reflection had first recognized, but the forms, like all things, exist for it. It can no longer be a question of describing the world of living experience which it carries within itself like some opaque datum, it has to be constituted. The process of making explicit, which had laid bare the 'lived-through' world which is prior to the objective one, is put into operation upon the 'lived-through' world itself, thus revealing, prior to the phenomenal field, the transcendental field. The system 'self-others-world' is in its turn taken as an object of analysis and it is now a matter of awakening the thoughts which constitute other people, myself as individual subject and the world as a pole of my perception. This new 'reduction' would then recognize only one true subject, the thinking Ego. This move from *naturata* to *naturans*, from constituted to constituting, would complete the thematizing begun by psychology and would leave nothing implicit or tacitly accepted in my knowledge. It would enable me to take complete possession of my experience, thus equating thinking and thought. Such is the ordinary perspective of a transcendental philosophy, and also, to all appearances at least, the programme of a transcendental phenomenology.<sup>1</sup> Now the phenomenal field as we have revealed it in this chapter, places a fundamental difficulty in the way of any attempt to make experience directly and totally explicit. It is true that psychologism has been left behind, that the meaning and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *La Structure du Comportement*, pp. 106–19 and 261.

structure of the percept are for us no longer the mere outcome of psycho-physiological events, that rationality is no longer a fortunate accident bringing together dispersed sensations, and that the Gestalt is recognized as primary. But although the Gestalt may be expressible in terms of some internal law, this law must not be considered as a model on which the phenomena of structure are built up. Their appearance is not the external unfolding of a pre-existing reason. It is not *because* the 'form' produces a certain state of equilibrium, solving a problem of maximum coherence and, in the Kantian sense, making a world possible, that it enjoys a privileged place in our perception; it is the very appearance of the world and not the condition of its possibility; it is the birth of a norm and is not realized according to a norm; it is the identity of the external and the internal and not the projection of the internal in the external. Although, then, it is not the outcome of some circulation of mental states in themselves, neither is it an idea. The Gestalt of a circle is not its mathematical law but its physiognomy. The recognition of phenomena as an original order is a condemnation of empiricism as an *explanation* of order and reason in terms of a coming together of facts and of natural accidents, but it leaves reason and order themselves with the character of facticity. If a universal constituting consciousness were possible, the opacity of the fact would disappear. If then we want reflection to maintain, in the object on which it bears, its descriptive characteristics, and thoroughly to understand that object, we must not consider it as a mere return to a universal reason and see it as anticipated in unreflective experience, we must regard it as a creative operation which itself participates in the facticity of that experience. That is why phenomenology, alone of all philosophies, talks about a transcendental *field*. This word indicates that reflection never holds, arrayed and objectified before its gaze, the whole world and the plurality of monads, and that its view is never other than partial and of limited power. It is also why phenomenology is phenomenology, that is, a study of the *advent* of being to consciousness, instead of presuming its possibility as given in advance. It is striking how transcendental philosophies of the classical type never question the possibility of effecting the complete disclosure which they always assume *done somewhere*. It is enough for them that it should be necessary, and in this way they judge what is by what ought to be, by what the idea of knowledge requires. In fact, the thinking Ego can never abolish its inherence in an individual subject, which knows all things in a particular perspective. Reflection can never make me stop seeing the sun two hundred yards away on a misty day, or seeing it 'rise' and 'set', or thinking with the cultural apparatus with which my education, my previous efforts, my personal history, have provided me. I never actually collect together, or call up simultaneously, all the primary thoughts which contribute to my perception or to my present conviction. A critical philosophy attaches in the last analysis no

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<sup>1</sup> It is set forth in these terms in most of Husserl's works, even in those published during his last period.

importance to this resistance offered by passivity, as if it were not necessary to become the transcendental subject in order to have the right to affirm it. It tacitly assumes, consequently, that the philosopher's thinking is not conditioned by any situation. Starting from the spectacle of the world, which is that of a nature open to a plurality of thinking subjects, it looks for the conditions which make possible this unique world presented to a number of empirical selves, and finds it in a transcendental ego in which they participate without dividing it up, because it is not a Being, but a Unity or a Value. This is why the problem of the knowledge of other people is never posed in Kantian philosophy: the transcendental ego which it discusses is just as much other people's as mine, analysis is from the start located outside me, and has nothing to do but to determine the general conditions which make possible a world for an ego—myself or others equally—and so it never comes up against the question: *who is thinking?* If on the other hand contemporary philosophy takes this as its main theme, and if other people become a problem for it, it is because it is trying to achieve a more radical self-discovery. Reflection cannot be thorough-going, or bring a complete elucidation of its object, if it does not arrive at awareness of itself as well as of its results. We must not only adopt a reflective attitude, in an impregnable *Cogito*, but furthermore reflect on this reflection, understand the natural situation which it is conscious of succeeding and which is therefore part of its definition; not merely practise philosophy, but realize the transformation which it brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence. Only on this condition can philosophical knowledge become absolute knowledge, and cease to be a speciality or a technique. So there will be no assertion of an absolute Unity, all the less doubtful for not having had to come into Being. The core of philosophy is no longer an autonomous transcendental subjectivity, to be found everywhere and nowhere: it lies in the perpetual beginning of reflection, at the point where an individual life begins to reflect on itself. Reflection is truly reflection only if it is not carried outside itself, only if it knows itself as reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience, and consequently as a change in structure of our existence. We earlier attacked Bergsonian intuitionism and introspection for seeking to know by coinciding. But at the opposite extremity of philosophy, in the notion of a universal constituting consciousness, we encounter an exactly corresponding mistake. Bergson's mistake consists in believing that the thinking subject can become fused with the object thought about, and that knowledge can swell and be incorporated into being. The mistake of reflective philosophies is to believe that the thinking subject can absorb into its thinking or appropriate without remainder the object of its thought, that our being can be brought down to our knowledge. As thinking subject we are never the unreflective subject that we seek to know; but neither can we become wholly consciousness, or make ourselves into the transcendental consciousness. If we were consciousness, we would have to have before us the world, our history and perceived objects in their uniqueness as systems of transparent relationships. Now even when we are not dealing with psychology; when we try to

comprehend, in direct reflection and without the help of the varied associations of inductive thought, what a perceived movement, or a circle, are, we can elucidate this singular fact only by varying it somewhat through the agency of imagination, and then fastening our thought upon the invariable element of this mental experience. We can get through to the individual only by the hybrid procedure of finding an *example*, that is, by stripping it of its facticity. Thus it is questionable whether thought can ever quite cease to be inductive, and whether it can assimilate any experience to the point of taking up and appropriating its whole texture. A philosophy becomes transcendental, or radical, not by taking its place in absolute consciousness without mentioning the ways by which this is reached, but by considering itself as a problem; not by postulating a knowledge rendered totally explicit, but by recognizing as the fundamental philosophic problem this *presumption* on reason's part.

That is why we had to begin our examination of perception with psychological considerations. If we had not done so, we would not have understood the whole meaning of the transcendental problem, since we would not, starting from the natural attitude, have methodically followed the procedures which lead to it. We had to frequent the phenomenal field and become acquainted, through psychological descriptions, with the subject of phenomena, if we were to avoid placing ourselves from the start, as does reflexive philosophy, in a transcendental dimension assumed to be eternally given, thus by-passing the full problem of constitution. We could not begin, however, our psychological description without suggesting that once purged of all psychologism it can become a philosophical method. In order to revive perceptual experience buried under its own results, it would not have been enough to present descriptions of them which might possibly not have been understood, we had to establish by philosophical references and anticipations the point of view from which they might appear true. Thus we could begin neither without psychology nor with psychology alone. Experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is merely an elucidated experience. But now that the phenomenal field has been sufficiently circumscribed, let us enter this ambiguous domain and let us make sure of our first steps as far as the psychologist is concerned, until the psychologist's self-scrutiny leads us, by way of a second-order reflection, to the phenomenon of the phenomenon, and decisively transforms the phenomenal field into a transcendental one.