

THE PERCEPT ECHELONS CONSCIOUSNESS PROPOSAL

Gestalt Theory interpreted in a probabilistic skeptic way

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Epistemological introduction

The “Goals and Purposes” leaflet of the Society for Gestalt Theory states that “recognizing and taking seriously the human world of experience as the only immediately given reality;” which refers to the “primacy of the phenomenal¹.” Giving to *phenomena* the meaning of any appearance to consciousness is, I believe, completely correct. But I also think that it is not enough for defining what I call *complete reality*. To be the immediately given reality the definition has to be restricted to *my phenomena* and must not include others’ phenomena. To be more exact, it must refer to *my present phenomena* and not to my remembered past phenomena. In my vocabulary, my present phenomena are phenomena of *immediate-consciousness*. Immediate-consciousness is mine and not available to others consciousness or *other’s-mediate-consciousness*; immediate-consciousness is only my present consciousness and not my former consciousness or *observer’s-mediate-consciousness*. In my vocabulary, these phenomena are the only ones that are defined as *concrete phenomena*. The remaining phenomena, my former phenomena or other people phenomena, are defined as *absent phenomena*. The concrete phenomena are the only ones that are, philosophically, completely real.

You, the reader, possibly have only *your* concrete present phenomena, the only phenomena that are philosophically real in what you would call your immediate-consciousness. But for you, my present phenomena are not concrete, only your present phenomena are concrete. My phenomena, as well as the phenomena of all other people, as well as your past phenomena are absent phenomena. Immediate-consciousness is an individual concept, not a general concept like the great majority of concepts. Your immediate-consciousness, including your *Weltanschauung*, is completely individual.

For me concrete is *anything* that is in immediate-consciousness. It can be percepts, but it can also be images, thoughts, wishes, memories, etc. This reminds one of KÖHLER’s meaning of Gestalt which is not restricted to the percepts (KÖHLER 1929). I define “*outside*” as the entirety that is not in immediate-consciousness.

¹ Leaflet distributed by the Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications (GTA).

In my immediate-consciousness there are only *Gestalten*, in the majority with their *parts*. They are not *elements* of the old constancy hypothesis (KÖHLER 1913/1971; WERTHEIMER 1938). However, many Gestalten are of greater duration than that of immediate-consciousness. The duration of immediate-consciousness—or, the KOFFKA's "actually present"—does not obey the duration of Gestalten (KOFFKA 1935). My present immediate-consciousness has duration that spans from before towards after but I do not know at which *point* my present concrete is transformed into a proximate remembered past absentee.

In my vocabulary, the enormous "outside" is composed of *happenings*. The happenings are mediate. By being mediate they need at least an intercession occurrence. For example, I perceive an "outside" pencil. The pencil percept is a mediator of the "outside" perception of the pencil. But the mediation can be wrong. The percept pencil in some cases could be a mediator of a real "outside" chocolate in the form of a pencil. *Generally, the mediation is not conscious*. It is mediate in the memory contact with observer's-mediate-consciousness giving rise to *remembrances*; it is mediate in my perception contact with the Universe giving rise to percepts; it is mediate through the contact from other people's communications about the Universe or about thoughts; it is mediate in the contact with other's-mediate-consciousness giving rise to percepts, images and thoughts through *indicators of consciousness* like the verbal reports, the pictorial reports, the expressive movements indicators, etc. (ENGELMANN 2004).

There are experiments, evidently with several subjects, that have brought to psychology the duration of a human's immediate-consciousness: WUNDT (1912), FRAISSE (1967), PÖPPEL (1988). The human duration of "actually present" or currently "now" is, on average, equal to 3.0 seconds.

To my knowledge, the first thinker to assent the duplication of consciousness, TOLMAN (1935), reasoned that there is a *disconnection* between *reality* and its *maps*. I strongly agree with him about this disconnection if his reality is equivalent to my immediate-consciousness complete reality. I am a *skeptic*, but not a radical skeptic. I believe that anything in the "outside" has a philosophical probability that varies from a little greater than zero to just less than the maximum probability (COURNOT 1851/1975). However, I do not believe that there is a probability equal to zero or a probability equal to the maximum value. This is *probabilistic skepticism*.

Although I am partially Tolmanian, I am not a behaviorist like TOLMAN was; although I am a follower of Gestalt Theory, I am not a critical realist but a probabilistic skeptic. This has nothing to do with the real greatness of WERTHEIMER, of KOFFKA, of KÖHLER, of LEWIN, of METZGER, whose majority of theoretical explanations I strongly agree with. METZGER (1972/2004) wrote that the psychologist studying the subject's consciousness, or in my term other's-mediate-consciousness, is able to change his position with the subject having in this new position another consciousness, that in my term the subject's immediate-consciousness. METZGER assumed that the observation of consciousness "cannot

be ‘repeated’ in this fashion².” However according to METZGER, the repetition could be possible by other psychologists if they regard the “repetition” under the structural characteristics and the organization of phenomena. I strongly agree with him on this point. But the repetition is, from my point of view, going on in the “outside,” in the absent phenomena of other’s-mediate-consciousness. On the other hand, there is the possibility of “repeated” similar phenomena. That is the reason for the very important occurrences in consciousness, but in other’s-mediate-consciousness. METZGER (1963/2001) wrote in his book *Psychologie*, “this world in which the *person is the only one*.³” I strongly agree that the origin of all the knowledge in the individual. Going further, the individual can be a critical realist if his intuition that the world exists. Or, he can be a probabilistic skeptic if he believes only in the existence of the world.

We live in a period of great scientific discoveries, which are based on a certain number of equal scientific observations. Without an equal number of observations there is no natural science. How is it possible to *unify* the *great number of “outside” scientific observers* with my only *immediate-consciousness*?

I have proposed a number of *basic hypotheses*, which allow the single immediate-consciousness to *know* the mediate world. *Hypothesis* is a proposition used about the manifold “outside” without drawing its reality or falsity, like the scientific hypotheses. I call some of them *basic hypotheses* because there would not be any hypothesis at all if the basic hypotheses would not be accepted. I can give an example of these basic hypotheses. One hypothesis is that there *exists* in the “outside” a very strong feeling for the reality of external things. But I do not know if in all instances the feeling of reality is true and not an illusion or even a hallucination.

What I have written till now about the facts is, for me, an *epistemological solution*, not a natural solution about scientific facts.

The CHALMERS’ division of consciousness problems into two, the easy one and the hard one, is not the more general problem (CHALMERS 1996). The more general problem is the epistemological disconnection between immediate-consciousness and “outside”. The division *in* the “outside” between the other’s-mediate-consciousness and the corresponding *mediate physiological “matter”* is a lighter one. However, there is no doubt that it is also a great problem. I find that the WERTHEIMER and KÖHLER psychophysical isomorphism is a good solution, mainly with the present knowledge of the brain as is apparent in LEHAR’s interpretation (KÖHLER 1938; LEHAR 2003).

What are the differences between the experiments interpreted by a Gestalt theoretical critical realist or by a Gestalt theoretical probabilistic skeptic? Both begin with the phenomena of the experimenter. In the consciousness studies the phenomena are not simply the phenomena of the experimenter but also the

² In the reprint of the METZGER, W. (2004) The phenomenal-perceptual field as a central steering mechanism. *Gestalt Theory* 26, 194-208, p. 195.

³ My English translation of W. METZGER (2001): *Psychologie*, p. 307.

phenomena of the other human subjects. The critical realist interprets the phenomena as simply occurring both in the experimenter and other subjects. The probabilistic skeptic thinks that the only concrete phenomena are the immediate-consciousness of the experimenter. The phenomenal happenings of the subjects, inclusive happenings of the passed experimenter, are mediate-consciousness. As mediate phenomena they are interpreted by the use of indicators of consciousness. The phenomenal happenings are so mediate as the other Universe happenings.

I am using the percept echelons as a proposal of a theory, but also as an example for the probabilistic skeptic approach.

The percept echelons consciousness proposal

At the end of 1962, I was interested in the study of conscious *emotions* in Brazilian subjects. I was not interested in the expressive movements or the physiological parts of emotion but, rather, the emotional other's-mediate-consciousness. The other's-mediate-consciousness part is wholly an internal portion of the organism. With time, I realized that it was not only the emotional other's-mediate-consciousness that is part of affective category but also a diversity of other members of the affective category such as *feelings, moods, passions*, etc. But this was not enough.

When a person says, for example, that he feels *interest*, how does this happen? This happens similarly when he is saying that he feels *sadness*. According to my knowledge, he perceives in the two examples something subjective, not objective. Further, there is no other definite location. I called this a *subjective state*, the duration of which varies (ENGELMANN 1978).

How can we divide the human other's-mediate-consciousness? I think that the old names by which DESCARTES (1649/1989) called them, *passive* and *active*, should be preserved⁴. Passive should be used when there is no origin felt in the consciousness, active when its origin is felt there. The large numbers of contemporary writers that divide the consciousness into a simpler part and a more active or even human part simply repeat this (FARTHING 1992; NATSOULAS 1983). For the moment I am concentrating on passive consciousness, the so-called *percepts*. Percepts are "emotional" and/or "cognitive." The other could be called *thoughts*. However, both percepts and thoughts *always* constitute the same weaker Gestalt in consciousness.

I was uneasy about the kind of percept basis of a great theorist, JAMES (1884/1922), who believed that instead of subjective states, there existed conscious myriad percepts of muscles, skin and viscera. According to KRUEGER (1937/1953), CORNELIUS, in 1897, was the first to write theoretically that *Gefühle*

⁴ DESCARTES thought that "passive" and "active" were different views that depended on whether they are in the *res cogitans* or in the "body", part of the *res extensa*. The actual part in the "*res cogitans*", or in my immediate-consciousness, is Descartes' main view. I only accept the *res cogitans* or immediate-consciousness view because the "matter" *res extensa* view is impossible in the case there would not be the first basic hypothesis accepted (ENGELMANN 2002).

or *feelings* were qualities of the whole. Instead of referring only to the subjective part of a percept, they actually referred to the occurrence of the *total* percept. I was familiar with some of the large amount of literature on the sensory or modal types of perception: vision, audition, smell, etc. But I was rather happy that MARKS (1978a) wrote that what he calls “*multimodal*” percept, and I call *supramodal* percept, is *the rule* rather than the exception of *modals*. Would the analysis into a number of sensation “elements,” each “element” being the same in hue, in brightness, in saturation, etc.–like the cited by TITCHENER’s subjects introspections (TITCHENER 1908/1973) – be another smaller part than the modals? This kind of introspection, which was an “analytic” attention of modals into what I call in the Gestalt way *fragments* and not “elements,” could be extremely difficult. Some people trying to grant the fragments never mastered it. KOFFKA (1924) made efforts to do it, but he remembers it to be something remote from life. According to KOFFKA, the normal human being ignores it.

The whole of consciousness, passive percepts and active thoughts, is always the other’s-mediate-consciousness forming a great Gestalt with two parts: the passive part, *percept*, and the active part, *thought* (KOFFKA 1931). In human developmental psychology, WERNER (1948/1961) proposed two organizations: first a *syncretic* one, then a capacity to transform itself into a *diffuse* one. According to the previous percept discussion, I propose not two but five or at least four organizations. I think that the organizations can be seen as *percept echelons*⁵. Contrary to WERNER, the different percept echelons could, at adulthood, always be possible.

The first percept Gestalt is the *total* and it is made up by two parts: the *objective bipartite*, or beyond the percept of the skin part, and the *subjective bipartite*, or inside the percept of the skin part. These two parts can, in turn, constitute Gestalten. The objective bipartite Gestalt is composed of the *objective supramodal* part, being constituted by visual-auditory-olfactory- ... percepts, and the *subjective supramodal* part, being constituted by proprioceptive-interoceptive-pain- ... percepts. The numerous supramodal objective parts and the numerous supramodal subjective parts also can constitute Gestalten. The objective supramodal Gestalten can be composed of *objective modal* or sensory parts; the same can be said about the subjective supramodal Gestalten being composed of *subjective modal* or sensory parts. Once again, in these cases the parts can be constituted as Gestalten. The objective modal Gestalten can be composed of *objective fragmentary* parts and the subjective modal parts can be composed of *subjective fragmentary* parts. Can these fragments also constitute Gestalten? Or are these fragments always only parts?

Calling the percept echelons *states*, I begin with the *total states*, then I go to the *bipartite states*, then to the *supramodal states*, then to the *modal states*, and, finally, to the *fragmentary states*. If one of them is the present echelon, other echelons cannot be present simultaneously. Only between the second and the fifth percept

⁵ I prefer the name “echelon” to the more common name “level”, because “level” is also the name of the “outside” “levels”, like the “cell level”, “the organ level”, “the organism level”, etc.

echelons, the present echelon could be one among the objective echelons and another among the subjective echelons.

Data have been collected in experiments about the five echelons, some of which I will present. I begin from the lighter total Gestalt and go to the stronger fragmentary Gestalten.

Percept echelons

1. Total state

KRUEGER (1937/1953) has demonstrated in numerous situations that the total whole gives the most important experiences, for example in experiments of evaluation, of hearing chords. They are changing, always constituting a different feeling. For the most part, his disciples continued to emphasize the importance of the total state. For example, SANDER (1962) communicates many experiments containing total states.

Would Zen meditations be cases of total percept? I think not. The final point would not be the total state but a still higher one, the whole of Gestalt composed of passive and active other's-mediate-consciousness (AUSTIN 1998).

2. Bipartite state

Lower than the total state is a state that allows only two kinds of location: or external to the perception of the skin or internal to the perception of the skin.

A. Objective bipartite state

METZGER in 1930 (KOFFKA, 1935), HOCHBERG, TRIEBEL & SEAMAN (1951), among others, obtained a "Ganzfeld" which establishes a condition of homogeneous light as described in the two papers. The responses of the subjects are objective bipartite states. But the definition of objective bipartite states can include the presence of numerous objects, although they are not perceived as Gestalten but only as parts. WACKERMANN, PÜTZ, BÜCHI, STRAUCH & LEHMAN (2002) made an experiment using the homogeneous light and the monotonous sound of a waterfall. But a better example is LEGAL's 2002 doctoral thesis. LEGAL and I carried out an experiment on Brazilians looking for Portuguese locutions about objective states. Factor analyzing 184 locutions, three of the more loaded factors explain 92% of the variance. I expected the results indicating mostly meteorological happenings. However, the number of "emotional" happenings is much higher.

B. Subjective bipartite state

I asked 2249 subjects to classify the 370 locutions of subjective states most spoken in São Paulo by a series of 16 bipolar scales. Using two samples, an orthogonal factor analysis resulted in the same two factors, that I called the first as "Hedonic" and the second one as "Dynamic" (ENGELMANN 1978). There are a large number of "emotional" verbal reports researches that are to me researches on

subjective states, for example, WESSMAN & RICKS (1966), IZARD (1972), FLEESON & KANTOR (1995), SCHIMMACK & DIENER (1997).

3. *Supramodal state*

In Aristotle's scientific work in the fifth century B.C., the importance of something larger than the particular five senses was called a *common sense* (ARISTOTLE 1947; ROSS 1949). Through this view Aristotle was the first that considered also a supramodal state. Twenty-four centuries later, v. HORNBOSTEL (1927/1938) writing about the different esthetic experiences came to the notion that there are, besides the normally modal perceptions, supramodal perceptions.

A. Objective supramodal state

In 1926, JUHÁSZ studied the pitch of sounds and also of odors. In 1931, v. HORNBOSTEL studied brightness of colors, of sounds, of odors. MARKS (1978a, 1978b, 2002) cited a number of experiments done by different investigators including MARKS that have as main purpose the objective supramodal states.

B. Subjective supramodal state

There are lesser experiments of subjective supramodal states than the larger quantity of objective supramodal states. For example, MASON's did research on 28 areas based on body surface (MASON 1961). NIEUWENHUYSE, OFFENBERG & FRIJDA (1987) did research based on 15 body areas. In both of the studies, each area contains different subjective supramodal states.

4. *Modal state*

The majority of texts on perception used only the sensory or modal state. They are characterized by different sensory phenomena.

A. Objective modal states

There are many texts containing objective modal states in experiments on vision, audition, touch, olfaction, etc.

B. Subjective modal states.

There are many texts containing subjective modal states in experiments on proprioceptor, interoceptor, pain, etc.

5. *Fragmentary state?*

KOFFKA (1924) previously cited states in which people believed in the long classical introspections (I am uncertain about the translation here). They are not "elements", like the old experimenters thought, but fragmentary states. I believe that, for these people, the possibility of a fragmentary state was real. However, for the majority of people the fragments could only be parts of the modal states. ARNOLD (1960) quotes in her book "Emotion and personality", under the title

“Feeling as mental elements”, examples of experiments like the one by NAFE in 1924, the one by P. T. YOUNG in 1927, etc.

Conclusion

The percept echelons consciousness proposal is a psychological theory based on a large number of experimental data. As is the case with me, scientific observers obtain these experimental data doing experiments in the “outside”. The proposal will be the same if my epistemological attitude were critical realist. Why then do I insist on the probabilistic skeptical attitude?

However great in number the collective or individual scientific observations, in each observation there is the disconnection between the immediate-consciousness and the “outside”. Only in the “outside” can more or less equal observations be repeated. Among these repeatable observations is the other’s-mediate-consciousness. The other’s-mediate-consciousness is knowable through indicators of consciousness. These indicators of consciousness always transmit less than immediate-consciousness. However, the enormous communication between human beings and the more or less similar perceptions between them of the Universe allow for tremendous scientific advance, despite the necessary probabilistic skepticism.

Summary

In my point of view, Gestalt Theory, interpreted in a probabilistic skeptic way, goes further in the establishment of a true relation between the single immediate-consciousness and the large mediate occurrences of the world. Among these mediate occurrences is the phenomenal mediate consciousness of other people. An example is the proposal of echelons of percept consciousness, to which I arrived by a large series of experiments, some of which were conducted by myself. Starting from the weaker Gestalt, the following states can be gradually enrolled: (1) total states; (2) objective and subjective bipartite states, severed by the skin percept; (3) objective and subjective supramodal states, each formed by different modalities; (4) objective and subjective modal states, formed by the known modalities; and perhaps (5) objective and subjective fragmentary states, each being formed by equalities of attributes in a modality. An individual has only one state in a moment. However, he can change in time from weaker to stronger Gestalten or from stronger to weaker Gestalten.

Zusammenfassung

In meiner Sicht leistet die Gestalttheorie, wenn man sie probabilistisch-skeptisch interpretiert, ein besseres Verständnis der Beziehung zwischen dem einzelnen unmittelbaren Bewusstsein und den großen vermittelten Weltereignissen. Unter diesen vermittelten Weltereignissen befindet sich auch das vermittelte Bewusstsein anderer Menschen. Beispielhaft werden hier Staffellungen des Wahrnehmungsbewusstseins vorgeschlagen, zu denen ich durch lange Reihen von Experimenten, teils unter eigener Regie, gelangte. Beginnend mit der schwächeren Gestalt können die folgenden Zustände schrittweise entfaltet werden: (1) umfassende Zustände; (2) objektive und subjektive zweiseitige Zustände, erschwert durch die Haut-Wahrnehmung; (3) objektive und subjektive supramodale Zustände, jeweils durch verschiedene Bedingungen geformt; (4) objektive und subjektive modale Zustände, durch bekannte Bedingungen geformt; und vielleicht: (5) objektive und subjektive fragmentarische Zustände, jeweils durch die Gleichheit von Attributen in einer

Modalität geformt. Ein Individuum hat in einem Augenblick immer nur einen Zustand. Es kann mit der Zeit von schwächeren zu stärkeren oder von stärkeren zu schwächeren Gestalten wechseln.

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