

1. How is it that we not only perceive a hammer but also perceive it *as* one with which to drive a nail into the wall? We not only perceive a tree but also perceive it as one which bears flowers and fruits, we not only hear noises emitted by a person but hear him speak, we not only perceive the other as a body in motion, but see him waving, walking or running as the case may be. In brief, we not only perceive a thing but also perceive it *as* such and such. Any theory of perception, therefore, which insists that we perceive only meanings or meaning-structures, as much as any theory which entails that we perceive things but no meanings, must be wrong. We do perceive things, but perceive them as having some meaning or other for us.<sup>1</sup> How to correctly articulate the situation, allocate its proper role to each aspect, and give a sound description of each?

2. One familiar answer, I believe, needs to be rejected at the outset. This answer consists of three parts: (a) The thing out there produced in me, the percipient, sensations; (b) I, my mind, understanding or thinking, 'brings' these sensations "under" concepts that have been learned; (c) consequently, perception is, in reality, a perceptual judgement which is *about* the thing out there, but which predicates of that thing determinations deriving from the concept "under" which the sensations are "brought". On this theory, we perceive a thing inasmuch as the thing *causes* the sensations, and we perceive the thing as such and such inasmuch as we bring those sensations "under" the appropriate concept or concepts.

This Kantian answer needs to be rejected on three grounds: (a) *being about* is not the same as *being caused by*; (b) the sensations are theoretical constructs rather than given data; (c) all perception is not perceptual judgement. A thing's *looking as*  $\Phi$  need not be assimilated to the perceiver's *judging that* the thing is  $\Phi$ . The task that I have set for myself in this paper is

precisely to try to say something more about this 'looking as  $\Phi$ '.

3. There is another possible answer – from within the phenomenological school – which, for the same reason as above, has to be rejected. This answer may be regarded as *based on* the interpretation of the Husserlian noema as an abstract entity such as the Fregean *Sinn*.<sup>2</sup> It will not serve my present purpose to examine this large, and enormously attractive, interpretive stance. What concerns me is only the relevance of this interpretive stance to the case of 'perceptual noema'. Extending the idea of intentionality to perception, and understanding intentionality as the act – noema – object structure, one may want to say that a perception, as an intentional experience, has its noematic content *through* which it is of whatever happens to be its object. One may then interpret the perceptual noema – as much as noema in general – as but an abstract entity (the Fregean *Sinn* extended beyond its original semantic domain to all intentional acts). How to understand this thesis that the perceptual noema is an *abstract Fregean Sinn*?

The best way to understand it is to begin by construing all perceiving as perceiving *that...*, so that my perceiving this yellow pad on which I am writing is really perceiving that this pad on which I am writing is yellow. The perceptual sense or noema, then, is the same as the *meaning* of the sentential clause following 'that', which – in Fregean and Husserlian semantics – is an unreal entity, a proposition or a thought. How does this entity serve as the medium of reference to this object in front of me? To this question, one may want to give any or both of two answers: for one thing, the sense contains a set of descriptive predicates *F*, *G*, *H*, which are together true of the thing I am seeing and a demonstrative 'this-here-now'; for another, the perceptual experience has, besides the thought-component, a sensory-hyletic-component which is

caused, or occasioned by the thing I am perceiving. One may combine these two answers by claiming that the indexical component is occasioned by the causal relation, while the descriptive predicates are true of the thing. Both together give to the sense the role that it plays in mediating perceptual reference.

3.1. This answer, *as I have formulated it*, is not, in my view, acceptable for the following reasons.

First, I find no reason to agree that all perceiving is perceiving *that*.

On the contrary, linguistic usage and report of one's perceptual consciousness support that one perceives a thing, an event or a person. My perceiving the yonder red bird is not reducible to perceiving that the yonder bird is red (why not to perceiving that the yonder object is a red bird, or that the yonder red object is a bird!)

Secondly, if the content/meaning of my perceiving the (yonder) red bird is the same as the *meaning* of the sentence "the yonder bird is red" i.e. the proposition or thought expressed by it – then one would be identifying the content of thought and the content of perception. This consequence, not absurd in itself, I find counterintuitive. I want a theory of perceptual meaning that does not end up assimilating it to conceptual meaning.

One reason that has tended to promote such assimilations is the perhaps undeniable fact that unless one is capable of thinking of red birds, one cannot visually perceive one such. Even if one accepts this, with suitable emendations, it by no means follows that the content of perceptual consciousness is identical with the content of that thought which one must be capable of entertaining if one were to be able to have that perception. It would not do to urge, to set my anxiety to rest, that what distinguishes perceiving a red bird and the thought that the (yonder) bird is red are: the presence of the demonstrative element and the sensuous hyle (causally) occasioned by the object. This is not satisfying, for the demonstrative may be present in the conceptual thought (as when one *understands* the meaning of a sentence such as "This bird over there is red" but does not, perhaps is not in a position to, perceptually verify it); it may not be causally occasioned by the object (as when one uses 'that' in a hallucinatory situation); and, finally, because the sensuous component should not be a mere extrinsic "coating"

to the thought, but must somehow be inseparable from the perceptual meaning.

4. If the perceptual meaning is not the abstract meaning, is it the concrete percept? The percept theory, as Roderick Firth expounds it,<sup>3</sup> rejects the distinction between the datum and its interpretation, and holds that the content of consciousness during perception is an object-percept: not the physical object out there, but a new object which can be isolated by what Firth calls "perceptual reduction". What we "really see" is "a red patch of a round, somewhat bulgy shape" – "an appearance", may be a *Gestalt*. Is this the perceptual meaning? One may understand Husserl's talk of the perceived precisely as it is perceived in this sense of a percept or an appearance. Clearly, this percept, even when understood *gestalt*-theoretically, cannot be the perceptual meaning, it cannot be that *as* which we perceive *the thing* whose appearance or percept it is. The "perceptual reduction" which is the same as the phenomenological-psychological reduction may yield what is the content of perceptual consciousness in the sense of a "real" presence within its immanence, but it does not yield that which claims to be out there. For perceptual consciousness something is bodily given out there (*leibhaftig gegeben*). We are trying to articulate precisely *how*, the precise manner of its presentation. It is not given as a percept.

The idea of a percept, however phenomenologically purified, cannot yield the perceptual meaning, also because it is a concrete particular and, like any other particular, is a brute fact which is just what it is and cannot *contain* – implicitly – what it is not. And yet a thing is perceived *as containing* references to (a) what is not in the percept and (b) what is other than the thing. As is well known in phenomenology of perception, presentation of a side that is turned towards me, as I perceive a thing, points to the side that is turned away from me. The given aspect points to aspects that are not given. Such descriptions are of phenomena which could not characterise a percept qua percept. (This is why the Gurwitschean perceptual noema, so much like an appearance, is yet not quite one, containing as it does references to other such noemata.<sup>4</sup>) Moreover, the thing is perceived as containing references to what falls physically outside of it. The hammer is perceived as one with which to drive a nail, for example. Such a system of references constitutes its

significance and finds for it a place in the perceiver's world.

5. Perceptual meaning must then be sought in a place that is midway between the abstract conceptual thought and the concrete *gestalt*-theoretical percept. It needs to have a generality that is not the generality of a conceptual sense. It also needs to have a concreteness that is not the concreteness of a look. How to articulate this middle status?

There are several ideas in the literature from which I draw my suggestion. First, there is the Kantian distinction between a concept and its schema. The schema, as is well known, is universal without being abstract and discursive, and concrete without being a particular. Are the component senses of the total perceptual meaning such schemata, rather than abstract concepts?<sup>5</sup>

Second, let me recall Rudolf Arnheim's concept of visual thinking.<sup>6</sup> This concept may be misconstrued so as to obliterate the distinction between seeing and thinking, and to make the perceptual content a Fregean thought; or, it may be misconstrued – as by Arnheim himself – as suggesting that concepts are but perceptual shapes. But the really valuable point made by Arnheim is that perceiving shape is grasping of generic structural features. Perception consists not in abstracting common elements from many particular instances – but in seeing the particulars as deformations of an underlying structure. As Hans Jonas puts it, "Sensing of qualities and forms, abstractive indeed, occupies a middle ground in the scale from densest concreteness to rarest abstractness".<sup>7</sup>

Third, Gibson's concept of "affordance": The affordance of events are the invariant properties which imply "the meaningful dimensions of interaction an organism might have with its world".<sup>8</sup> If the physical property of a thing is rigidity, its affordance structure is walk-upon-able. If the physical structure is to be brittle, the affordance structure is breakability.

To Husserl, we owe two concepts which are helpful for the present purpose. Husserl seems to have worked his way toward a concept of concrete noema which not only changes with some changes in the hyletic data, but which also includes the temporal position and horizon of the perceived object, thereby locating the perceived thing not in space alone but also in the experiential time. The other idea of Husserl is to be

found in the *Crisis*: it is the distinction between the vague concepts of everyday life and the precise, idealised concepts of logical-scientific thinking. The distinction pertains not merely to spatial shapes but also to qualitative concepts, such as color and sound concepts.

6. With these ideas in mind, let me return to a standard mode of articulating the structure of the perceptual noema. The noematic core, on this account, has two parts: a set of predicates ( $F, G, H, \dots$ ), and an  $X$  which is the "bearer" of those predicates. In perceiving a hammer as a hammer, one perceives an  $X$ , something which is of such and such size, shape, capable of such and such use, a tool, and so on and so forth. This account with which I am basically in agreement has three problems: one concerns the so-called " $X$ ", the other the "predicates", and the third concerns the predication itself.

First as to the " $X$ ": since any way the  $X$  can be further determined passes over to the predicate place, the  $X$  itself remains like a bare particular, a merely determinable, which, as such, is the same in all perceptual noemata and therefore a universal. One may even complain that the  $X$  in all perceptual noemata is the same, and that it designates the mere function of being "the bearer" of predicates. One would want to be able to articulate the fact that the bearer in each case is indeed different. [Compare the problem in Kant-interpretation: did Kant hold that there is one transcendental object or many?]

Second, as to the predicates  $F, G, H, \dots$ . These are, to be sure, predicate-senses. But predicate-senses such as "rectangular", "yellow", "water" can function as well within the noemata of conceptual thinking. Shall we say that these senses are the same as those which occur within appropriate perceptual noemata? We are back with the anxiety expressed earlier, if perceptual noemata (or their component senses) are abstract, conceptual, senses. Since I have maintained that they are not, the standard mode of articulation of the perceptual noema should, to that extent, be altered.

Third, as to the predication: the pattern "the  $X$  which is..." is taken over from the standard logical form '( $ix$ ) ( $x$  is  $F$ )'. The point at issue is *not* whether this form correctly captures the form of the perceptual statement "That is a red bird", but rather whether the form of any perceptual *statement* can be used to ar-

ticulate the noema of a perception which is not a statement at all, or of a perception which is not a perception *that*, but, instead, a perception *of*. What is perceived, precisely as it is being perceived, must contain attributions, but not necessarily predication.

One may want to deal with the first problem, namely, that regarding the “*X*”, by adding a demonstrative to the *X*: the noematic core then would be ‘this *X* which is *F, G, H, ...*’ But, in view of the third problem, I would prefer to do away with this entire strategy, and rather hold that what I perceive is this yellow pad and not something which is yellow and a pad: the noematic core, then, would be ‘this yellow pad’.

Against this suggestion, two objections may be raised: one concerning the basic philosophical issue, and the other from the point of view of Husserl exegesis. The first objection would be that whereas the standard representation of the noema as ‘the *X* which is *F, G, H, ...*’ clearly separates the purely referential part, namely ‘the *X*’, from the descriptive-interpretive part ‘which is *F, G, H, ...*’, my representation of it as ‘the *F G H*’ does not separate these two parts and either refers or interprets or does both as a whole. Since the fundamental point of view this effort embodies is to articulate the meaning that ‘overlays’, as it were, the perceptual object and that also, in some sense, determines reference i.e. the perceptual consciousness’s being *of* this object rather than that, the standard representation comes closer, it would appear, to satisfying these expectations by clearly delineating a purely referential element and meaning components that function *as how* the object is perceived. My representation fails this test – does it not? – by not clearly showing these two components. My reply would consist in turning this seeming disadvantage into a merit. It is of course true that phenomenology is committed to a distinction between object and meaning, and that noema is the meaning through which reference to the object takes place. Perceptual noema ‘represents’ exactly how the object is given in perception. In perception, the object is not given as a bare *something* to which meanings are attributed, but rather *as a meaningful thing*. The way the perceptual object is given hides, rather than showing, the object-meaning distinction. The perceptual noema, so it seems to me, must reflect *this naivety*, and *not that reflective distinction*. It is true, a *further* noematic reflection would show that the object *could have been perceived* differently, from a different perspective. But

for this perception, this *is* the object – and so must the perceptual noema testify without the least hesitation. The Russellian translation (of ‘the present King of France’ to “the one and the only person who...”) is generated by a skepticism that is out of place in the perceptual situation where the object is *leibhafti gegeben*.

Since this paper is an exercise in phenomenology, Husserl exegesis becomes strangely relevant, for we are in a sense seeking either to understand or to apply some of his fundamental insights. Three exegetical questions come to my mind. First, is the object of perception, for Husserl, always a real existent out there: what about Lady Macbeth’s dagger? In the second place, does not Husserl himself write that the noematic core, the *Sinn*, is a *Satz* – suggesting that all intentional acts, including perception, are propositional? And, then, how to reconcile my construction of the perceptual noema with the Husserlian thesis that under certain circumstances, i.e. when a perception confirms a prior signitive intention, there occurs a synthesis of identification between the two noemata: that of the prior signitive intention and that of the confirmatory perception? It does seem that there can be a synthesis of identification only if the perceptual noema, like the other one, is propositional in structure. Let me briefly touch upon these three questions.

Even in the case of hallucination, the ostensible object is “bodily given”. Bodily givenness does not amount to being a real entity. It is a phenomenological, and not an ontological concept. It is true – to take up the second exegetical question – that Husserl characterises the noematic core as *Satz*. But ‘*Satz*’ here means that which is posited, and so need not be construed as a predicative positing. The third question is the most difficult of the three. For my present purpose, the following remarks may suffice. First of all, all perception is not confirmation or disconfirmation of a prior signitive intention. Therefore, it would be unfair to expect a theory of perception to be a theory of evidence for prior hypothesis, or a theory of fulfillment of prior empty intention. However, perception *can* play this role, and when it does so, its intentional essence, i.e. its “fulfilling sense” achieves an identity with the sense of the signitive intention. Now, it should be obvious that the fulfilling sense and the signitive sense could not be *the same*, for were they *the same* the mere empty symbolic thought could be its own fulfillment, and the fulfilling sense could not add anything

to it, there could be no “synthesis of identification”. The identity is a synthesis of differentials: of thought and intuition, or rather of their respective *senses*. The thought ‘that thing is *F, G, H*’ and the perceptual sense ‘an *F G H* thing over there’ enter into such a synthesis by virtue of which the former i.e. the thought, is fulfilled, confirmed, or verified by appropriate evidence. This is not to say that a perception that ... cannot also play the same role. But even in such cases, if what I have said earlier is correct, it is not identical predicate-senses that function on both sides. The perceptual predicate-senses are rather like schemata which *correspond* to the conceptual predicate senses. If a conceptual predicate-sense be ‘rectangular’, the perceptual predicate-sense would be the concept of a visual shape rather than of the geometrical concept, and yet the one “fulfills” the other.

Using then the subscript *p*, we transform a conceptual predicate sense to its corresponding perceptual sense. ‘*H*’ corresponds to ‘*H<sub>p</sub>*’. The perceptual meaning will consist of such senses in an attributive concatenation. Its form would be: ‘this *F<sub>p</sub> G<sub>p</sub> H<sub>p</sub>*’ rather than the standard one ‘this *X*, which is *F, G, H*’.

(Is the sense of ‘this’ to be carried over without the subscript *p*? or shall we say that since the sense of ‘this’ is *always* perceptual, there is only one sense that belongs to it – the one conveyed by ‘this<sub>*p*</sub>’, and so the use of the subscript may just be avoided without giving rise to misunderstanding. I really am not sure which way to go on this point: Are there two different senses of ‘this’?)<sup>9</sup>

The subscript *p* has to be so understood that the component sense to which it is affixed is thereby inserted into the life-world of the percipient. There is no distinction between object and meaning within life-world. One encounters, perceives, deals with, things, persons, events and situations. These are *meaningful* objects, interlaced and held together by references to each other (in different degrees of intimacy, closeness and relevance) and to the projects and purposes of the percipient. A thing is never perceived by itself. It is always perceived in a place, with other things, and as bearing references to other things, not present in the perceptual field. These references are what constitute perceptual meaning, the *how* of its presentation.

7. There are various views as to how a meaningful object *gets* constituted for perception. As long as one simply describes *how* things *are* perceived, one is

doing static-descriptive phenomenology. When one asks how is it that things *acquire* the significance for perception that they do, one is about to do what is known as genetic phenomenology. If genetic phenomenology is to be not merely an account of genesis, but also a phenomenological account, that account has to be non-causal. It is to be an account of how a new interpretive stance comes into being, and how it is transmitted in general; the story has to be in terms of sedimentation of meanings constituting a tradition and inheritance of a tradition. But should one be looking for how an uninterpreted datum, the bare particular, acquires the meanings that it has for us, there is no phenomenological answer. Going beyond and under my lifeworld, I can reach only a more primitive life-world. In this sense there is no going beyond perceptual meaning, one can only discover another perceptual meaning at the base of the one we have to begin with.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hans Wallach, ‘Some considerations concerning the relation between perception and cognition’, in Jerome S. Bruner and David Krech (eds.) *Perception and Personality: A Symposium*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1968, pp. 6–13, esp. p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. Føllesdal, ‘Husserl’s notion of noema’, *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), 680–687.

<sup>3</sup> R. Firth, ‘Sense-data and the percept theory’, *Mind* LVIII (1949), LIX, (1950), reprinted in R. J. Swartz (ed.), *Perceiving, Sensing and Knowing*, University of California Press, 1965, pp. 204–270.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Gurwitsch: “We interpret the perceptual noema, considered in a static analysis, as a Gestalt-contexture, whose constituents are what is given in direct sense-experience, on the one hand, and, on the other, other perceptual noemata merely referred to...” (‘The phenomenology of perception: Perceptual implications’, in P. Tibbits (ed.), *Perception. Selected Readings in Science and Phenomenology*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1969, pp. 248–260, esp. 254f).

<sup>5</sup> Ulric Neisser recognises the importance of the idea of ‘Schema’ in perception and insists that the schema is not a percept. Cf. his ‘Perceiving, anticipating, imagining’, in C. Wade Savage (ed.), *Perception and Cognition. Issues in the Foundations of Psychology*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. IX, University of Minnesota Press, 1978, kpp. 89–105.

<sup>6</sup> R. Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

<sup>7</sup> H. Jonas, ‘Sight and thought: A review of “Visual Thinking”’, in H. Jonas, *Philosophical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1974, pp. 224–236.

<sup>8</sup> R. Shaw, M. McIntyre, and W. Mace, ‘The role of symmetry in event perception’, in R. S. McLeod and H. L. Pick (eds.), *Perception. Essays in Honor of J. J. Gibson*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1974, pp. 276–310, esp. p. 281.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. König, 'Über einen neuen ontologischen Beweis des Satzes von der Notwendigkeit alles Geschehens', *Archiv für Philosophie* 2 (1948), 5–43 (reprinted in J. König, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, ed. G. Patzig, Alber Verlag, Freiburg/München, 1978, pp. 62–121). The distinction between two senses of 'this' – called 'theoretical' and 'practical' – was further developed by König in his Göttingen logic lectures ('Theoretische und praktische Sätze') of 1953.

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