1. Metzger

In July 1918, a 19-year-old German soldier lost his left eye during the French offensive in Champagne. This terrible fact, however, awakened in him quite profound reflections. Indeed, the soldier realized that contrary to what he had been “told in the first class of high school in Introduction to Psychology that spatial perception was due to two eyes, [he] immediately regarded this incident as an experiment [and understood] that this could not be true” (Metzger, 1972, p. 205).

It goes without saying that this soldier is Wolfgang Metzger, and the importance of this episode for what we say later will become clear.

Metzger (Figure 1), born in Heidelberg in 1899, was one of the most important representatives of Gestalt theory. He was a direct student of Köhler (with whom he received his doctorate in 1926) and of Hornbostel, but above all of Max Wertheimer, whom he followed in Frankfurt a.M. in 1930. In his dissertation, Metzger examined the stereokinetik phenomena of Benussi (1917) and Musatti (1924), a problem he later took up in Chapter 9 of *The Laws of Vision* (Metzger, 1975, pp. 275–305). In his dissertation, however, his main interest was the problem of monocular vision, probably stimulated by the war injury he suffered, mentioned above. We return to this problem in the next section.

Metzger will always remember his research time with Wertheimer in Berlin as his “lost paradise” (Metzger, 1970). In 1933, Wertheimer then fled to the United States as a Jew, but Metzger, who was married and expecting a second child, did not want to leave Germany. This period also includes perhaps his most famous experimental study of himself, *Ganzfeldforschung* (Metzger, 1930). After his stint in Berlin, Metzger wrote his two most important essays in Frankfurt: *Laws of Seeing* (1936) and *Psychology*, whose original title was *Gestalttheorie, Grundgesetze der Allgemeinen Psychologie*. The former quickly became the bible of all perceptual
researchers, not only in the field of Gestalt theory. The second work is a theoretical treatise on general psychology with solid Gestalt-theoretical foundations, with which we mainly deal here.

After Frankfurt and a year in Halle, Metzger was in Münster until the end of his academic career. After the war, Metzger's purely experimental contributions became less frequent, and he devoted himself mainly to theoretical analysis of the problems of Gestalt psychology. These theoretical works, aimed primarily at the study of perception, are of the greatest importance and are still frequently cited—see, for example, Metzger (1954, 1974, 1975) and the three chapters he wrote for the first volume of the monumental *Handbook of Psychology* on “Perception and Consciousness,” which he edited with H. Erke (Metzger, 1966a, 1966b, 1966c).

Metzger also devoted himself to various other areas of psychology and its applications, especially in the educational field, and exerted great influence on some Italian students of education, especially Egle Becchi and Lucia Lumbelli; the latter was well known to the friends of the Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications (GTA) and died in 2019. In this context, his essay on creativity (Metzger, 1962–2022), now published in a new edition by M. Soft and G. Stembergen, has great importance.

Above all, however, I would like to recall how open Metzger was to new ideas, and in particular, his theoretical contributions to the conception of mind in terms of self-organization and servomechanism (Metzger, 1950, 1955). These ideas were developed in particular by one of his students and our close friend Michael Stadler (Figure 2), who also died just 2 years ago in 2020, a pioneer in applying complex systems theory in synergetic terms to psychology, in collaboration with
the great physicist Hermann Haken (Haken and Stadler, 1990). And I would like to recall that the great Trieste Gestalt psychologist Gaetano Kanizsa also explored these ideas in the final years of his life (cf., Kanizsa and Luccio, 1990, 1995).

It should be remembered that Metzger was a great friend of Italian psychology and a profound connoisseur especially of phenomenological research here, and in the final years of his life, he came very often to Italy. In particular, he was often here in Trieste, where he was a great friend of Kanizsa (Figure 3), whom he affectionately called Spitzbube (rascal). Consider that in the last edition of the *Laws of Seeing* (1975), Metzger cites Kanizsa 26 times, just after Wertheimer (32 citations) and before Köhler (24 citations) and Koffka (20 citations).

2. **From the Rejection of the Eleatic Postulate to the Five Meanings of Reality**

The analysis of Metzger’s concept of reality here is, of course, based mainly on what he says about it in *Psychologie* (1941). It must be said, however, that Metzger

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**Fig. 2.** Michael Stadler (1941–2020).

**Fig. 3.** Gaetano Kanizsa (1913–1993).
returns to the subject at length in 1969 in a work coauthored with Lewis Brandt. However, the 1941 analysis is essentially repeated in this work, but it should also be emphasized that there are some new and theoretically distinctly important aspects here, on which we focus in the course of our discourse.

The starting point of Metzger’s analysis is the rejection of what he calls the “Eleatic Postulate” or “Eleatic–Rationalist Postulate” (Metzger, 1940, pp. 8–14). This postulate, which according to Metzger “underlies both dogmatic rationalism and agnostic skepticism and, moreover, irrationalism in its extreme form, i.e., in the strictest sense of the word,” can be defined as follows:

Logical thinking is an infallible judge of being and non-being. No immediate information may be safely accepted as real, everything must first be “logically justified.” Only what can be explained is real. What cannot be expressed in a contradiction-free proposition does not exist. (The possibility that the contradiction arises from inherent errors in the terms is not even considered). (Metzger, 1940, p. 8)

Obeying this postulate, psychology, according to Metzger, has always tried to “prove” or “zurückzuführen” (Metzger, 1940, p. 9) to other facts or principles, little (or not) proving what cannot and must not be proved or traced back to something else, but simply taking it as primary datum. In psychology, this leads to “psychologism,” that is, the need to attribute mental facts to something “underlying,” be it cerebral localizations, neural pathways, stimuli, and so on. In this way, one thinks one has obtained a scientific result, but in reality, one could only trace one definite and precise fact to another vague and only probable fact, which can be read directly from arbitrarily obtained rules and insufficiently tested hypotheses, phenomena that clearly reveal the inner necessity “of blind laws of probability and of habits formed on their basis” (Metzger, 1940, p. 10). For, according to Metzger, the things we investigate in our phenomenological research are “indisputable facts of immediate experience” (Metzger, 1940, p. 9), but psychologism treats them as if they were simple assumptions that “can or even must be dropped” because of some general principle, for example, that of economy or that of repeatability. (For a discussion on psychologism and the debate over it, see the article by Kusch [1995]). It should be noted that the Eleatic Postulate does not concern particular properties of reality, but access to it, the way we can know it. For Metzger, however, psychology is the study of the immediately given (Metzger, 1940, p. 14), which is exactly the opposite of what the immediately given requires.

One of the immediate consequences of applying the Eleatic Postulate to psychology is atomism, a favorite target of Gestalt psychology since Wertheimer (1912). Metzger (1940, p. 48) confronts the problem and defines it thus: it is the atomistic principle or “summativity,” which can be formulated as follows:
In everything that is manifold (complex), the single, simple components are what is actually real. All comprehensive structures are amalgamations (aggregates) of such components, which enter into them unchanged; they have no properties and effects on those of the individual components or their sum or mixture.

According to Metzger (1940), a circumstance that makes the negative consequences for the psychological theory of atomism particularly clear is the question of monocular rather than binocular vision (pp. 49–50). Hering’s (1879) theory of binocular bathoscopic vision, which was taken absolutely for granted at the time Metzger wrote about it, said that the depth of the visual field is determined for each point of the object because the image of an object is formed in both eyes. That this was not true, Metzger had experimented with his painful war experience. How much the problem of monocular/binocular vision was always close to Metzger’s heart is then proved by his extensive analysis of the problem still in 1966(b), which is considered one of the cornerstones of the construction of the perceptual world.

Two brief considerations are presented before we move on to Metzger’s analysis of the possible meanings of reality. First, the fallacy of the Eleatic Postulate applies not only to psychology, but to all sciences, which always start from the immediate datum but then are always in search of what lies beyond it, but its effects are particularly serious in psychology through psychologism. The term “Eleatic Postulate” is, in my opinion, unfortunate, and I think that Parmenides would be the first to be surprised by this usage.

Second, the terms of Metzger’s analysis are sometimes referred to as “levels” of reality. In reality, Metzger does not speak of levels, but of “senses,” that is, of the meanings that the concept of reality can assume. In this sense, Metzger does not claim that reality as such can be located on different levels, so that one could say, for example, that physical reality is located on a first level and phenomenological reality on a second level. What Metzger means, rather, is that when we speak of reality on the level of the physical world, we express ourselves with terms that correspond to a first meaning, whereas when we speak of the phenomenological world, we express ourselves with terms that have a different meaning. But the reality as such of the first meaning is not on a different level from the reality of the second meaning: it is the concepts, not levels, which differ.

But these two considerations should be explored with more space than is available here.

2.1. The first meaning of reality

If, as said, in all sciences, not only in psychology, the data of the scientist are those of immediate experience, the distinction between appearance and reality
(Schein und Wirklichkeit— Metzger, 1940, p. 14) remains valid in every case and always. Reality in the first sense consists of everything that we assume to exist independently and beyond our experiences, thus containing all “scientific knowledge” as well as the objects we assume to underlie each of our perceptions. In the natural sciences, it indicates the correspondence or noncorrespondence between states or relations of the phenomenal world and possibly homologous states or relations of the physical or generally metaempirical world. That is, it is a matter of distinguishing the phenomena that can be translated directly into metaempirical terms from those for which such translation is either impossible or can be achieved only by considerable modification.

It is tempting to assume that this applies only to the natural sciences, but as noted earlier, it applies to all sciences, including psychology. For example, when we speak of perception, a certain view leads us to assume as real the stimuli, that is, the fluctuations of environmental energy that act on our sense organs and that are the primary cause of the formation of perception. Now, however, we have no direct access to these stimuli, just as we have no direct access to the memory traces in the study of memory and so on. We consider all these constructs to be absolutely real, but they are a reality of the first type, not directly accessible to the senses, but the same is true for the objects that surround us in daily life, which we consider with our naive physics to be components of entities that we consider to be real, but which are not accessible to our senses.

2.2. The second meaning of reality

The problem that arises, however, is quite different when, in contrast to the natural sciences, the object of investigation is the appearance itself, as is the case in psychology, at least in its phenomenological meaning as given in Gestalt psychology. Metzger then states that for psychology,

> everything that happens in this world is a fact that cannot be eliminated: a negative corollary, a dream, a conjecture, and an indeterminate feeling, no less than the table at which I write and the people with whom I converse, and the good or bad mood of these people, their desires and expectations, which, even if they do not speak, I feel as clearly as I see that they have bodies and limbs. (Metzger, 1940, p. 17)

According to Metzger, it must be strictly observed that there is only one perceiving subject, namely, what we call “I,” and only one perceptual reality, namely, that which appears to us immediately. However, between this reality and the world of physics (or stimuli), there is a relation of dependence that can be objectively described; because of this dependence, ‘the perceptual world can be used by the subject as a source of information about the world of physics” (Metzger, 1940, p. 16).
Thus, it is necessary to understand that the people and things that surround us no longer exist in certain “complexes of sensation or perception” that then “inform” or “designate” the former or allow us to “go back” (infer) to reality itself; for us, there are only real people and things as they present themselves to us and as they relate to us. And these real things and people, including our own person, are our fulfilled perceptual images (Metzger, 1940, p. 17).

It should be noted that reality in the second meaning, that is, phenomenological reality, however, must be further analyzed and viewed from at least three different perspectives. In other words, we can divide a reality in the second sense into three other levels of phenomenological reality. We then begin to see the third meaning of reality.

2.3. The third meaning of reality

It should be noted that what belongs to the first two meanings of reality, both as physical and as purely phenomenal, as events or actions as such or as pure representations, is, in the context of our experience, in each case, something that acts directly on us in a way that we can define “in person” (leibhaft. corporeal; Metzger, 1940, p. 18). Note, however, that reality in the second sense, that is, phenomenological reality, must be further analyzed and viewed from at least three different perspectives. In other words, we can divide a reality in the second sense into three other levels of phenomenological reality so that we begin to see the third meaning of reality. But if what we address is only mentally present, that is, if it is exclusively the object of thoughts, of imaginations, but also of hypotheses, fantasies, memories, and expectations, then we speak of reality or nonreality in a third sense.

The first of these three levels, namely, reality in the third meaning, refers to what Metzger defines as “the encountered,” (das Angetroffenes), that is, met with its own specific physicality and what allows us to distinguish it from mere representations. These often (though not always) have the character of so-called “intentionality,” that is, of mediating or depicting function, and are experienced directly as “indications” of other realities—this does not apply to the “met” phenomenal objects with which we are palpably confronted, which for naive perception always have reality in the third sense. Only when the concept of a reality in the first sense is introduced, they can also be referred to.

The term “met” has enjoyed great popularity and is perhaps Metzger’s most frequently cited term. Often, however, these are inaccurate or second-hand quotations that ultimately distort what Metzger meant. To give just one example, which is not wrong but oversimplified, Zuckowski (1998, p. 121 ff.) states: “The met is what we perceive within us and outside of us; the represented, on the
other hand, is what we think, remember, imagine, etc.” It is therefore worth saying a few words, then, to clarify the meaning of “met.” As Brandt and Metzger (1969, p. 139) say,

> We must also warn against another confusion, namely to mistake what is encountered (real) for ‘external reality’ and what is represented (unreal) for ‘inner world’. For you my representations are part of my inner world. But for me they may experientially lie in specific locations among the objects I encounter outside of myself. Even if they have no such specific location in space, my thoughts and images are not experienced by me as being inside myself but as in some way in front of me.

First, however, it is necessary to define what Metzger means by “intentionality.” Now mere representations often have the character of so-called “intentionality” (though it is not certain that they always do), that is, a mediating or representational function, in the sense that they are directly experienced as “referring” to other realities. With respect to the “met” phenomenal objects, that is, for those perceptual products that we have before us and that are tangible, the reality is always in the third sense, without any intentional reference—unless it also refers to scientific objects that are real in the first sense. But no intentional reference of the real in the third sense makes sense outside of scientific or theoretical reflection. However, according to Metzger (p. 18), if one instead attributes the character of intentionality to all contents of consciousness, it becomes clear that only representations are regarded as “contents of consciousness.”

It is the field of perceptual factors that makes clear the difference between “met” and “represented.” The phenomena of constancy (of size, shape, clarity, color, etc.) are the clearest evidence that what is “known” about the objective conditions of presentation of an object (in terms of distance, spatial orientation, intensity, or color of illumination) has no bearing on the perceptual outcome. The properties of the object are independent of knowledge about these conditions.

For this reason, one should avoid to speak of a “consideration” (in the example of the light conditions), which presupposes a nonexistent mental activity, which is supposed to influence the perceptual result.

### 2.4. The fourth meaning of reality

The third meaning of reality also articulates itself between what we consider “full” and what we consider “empty,” between what we consider “something” and what we consider, conversely, “nothing.” In the articulation figure-ground, for example, what we think of as full and empty is what ground is, which does not mean that emptiness is not real, as fullness is. Even emptiness, waiting to be filled by something, is filled just as fullness is. This is evident in every figure-ground configuration, as in Figure 4.
A particularly important aspect is that of amodal presence. Now, it is obvious that, in some cases, the amodal presence does not correspond absolutely to what is encountered, but only to what is assumed, to what is represented. For example, even if I know that there is a human figure behind the screen, this is not a modal presence for me, but only a hypothesis, a knowledge, an idea. But let us consider Figure 5. Here, we see not three rectangles, but two, one of which is partially obscured by the other. Now the partially covered rectangle continues with the uncovered parts, and indeed I do not see three rectangles, but clearly two, even if a part of the second rectangle is only amodally present. But this amodal presence is neither presupposed nor represented, it is directly given: it is fulfilled.

![Figure 4](image1.png)

**Fig. 4.** An example of Figure-Ground configuration. One can see at will the black elements over a white ground as figures, and viceversa.

![Figure 5](image2.png)

**Fig. 5.** Amodal completion. Spontaneously, the observer sees in (a) the two rectangles in (b) with the white partially occluded by the black one, and only with an effort of scrutiny, one can arrange the figure as in the three rectangles of (c).
2.5. The fifth meaning of reality

In the fifth meaning, Metzger distinguishes between the phenomenally real and the phenomenally apparent. Indeed, also in the sphere of the encounterable, a further distinction must be made: on the one hand, objects, processes, and properties with a phenomenal reality character “to be taken seriously” and, on the other hand, objects with a phenomenal character of “mere” appearance, of nothingness that “only appears so,” such as the successive colored images, the “shadows”, the points of light, many mirror images, and so on.

Brandt and Metzger (1969) think that there is little point in distinguishing this meaning from the fourth, and in my opinion, we can only agree. Indeed, it is clear that a colored afterimage, for example, appears unreal to us, but does it actually appear as such or because we “know” that it is not real? And there is indeed a difference from the fact that the rectangles in Figure 5 do not appear to us to be really recognized in relation to the sheet of paper, because we know that they are not recognized but only recorded. But the example of Metzger presenting physically three-dimensional configurations with reversible perspective, such as a cube with wire edges (or Mach’s cardboard, or papier-mâché masks from the fair), is particularly striking.

Let us look at the cube with the wire tips and reverse (which is not difficult) its perspective. Then, we move sideways and keep the reversed perspective. Everyone who has had this experience knows that the cube visually shows rotational movements that are invisible in the noninverted perspective, where only the normal parallactic movements are seen. But the appearance of reality in the two cases does not change, apart from the fact that we “know” that we have a reversed perspective in one case and not in the other. Finally, all the famous demonstrations of the Princeton transactionalists—from the distorted chamber to the rotating trapezoid (and the extraordinary demonstrations in the artistic field of Escher), based on exactly the same principles—lead to paradoxical results with a clear reality of the fourth type (cf., Ames, 1955).

3. Conclusions on Metzger

In this paper, I was essentially interested in drawing the attention of psychologists back to what I consider to be a fundamental contribution of Gestalt theory, which has somewhat disappeared from the radar of psychology in recent years, even in the field of Gestalt theory, without being replaced by another theoretical development of equal importance. Thus, my interest was mainly in clarifying some controversial points, such as the reading of meanings as levels or the simplistic equivalence between external and represented-internal, and in highlighting the contribution of the last work of Metzger with Brandt, with their fusion of the fourth and fifth meanings. I note that the rich examples Metzger
provides are not limited to those related to perception, which I have focused on, but encompass all areas of psychology, from social psychology to psychopathology. Although Metzger’s analysis of reality is rightly considered a landmark in the construction of Gestalt theory, no one has gone beyond a citation. At his death, however, Witte (1980) enthusiastically recalled his analysis of the sense of reality in particular, noting that “the chapter on the problem of reality contains something so fundamental that not only theoretical psychology but also phenomenology and the philosophy of science will have to deal with it for a long time to come” (p. 548). But his prediction has come true only in part, and not for phenomenology. Consider that even Smith (1988), in perhaps his most incisive analysis of the philosophical foundations of Gestalt psychology, devotes only a few scattered quotations to Metzger and never mentions his analysis of the concept of reality. Metzger himself rarely returns to the problem. The last work dealing with the problem cited above (Brandt & Metzger, 1969) has only two differences from the text of Metzger (1941). For the remaining works, the psychologists who have approached the problem of reality in the spirit of Metzger (e.g., Bischof, 1966; Rausch, 1966) have confined themselves to repeating his remarks.

4. Merleau-Ponty

But now, I would like to introduce a whole new topic: the analysis of reality in the works of Merleau-Ponty (Figure 6). As you all know, he was not a psychologist, but a philosopher of the Husserlian type, never concerned with the scientific aspects of psychology. But for Merleau-Ponty (1947a,b; 1945), there is even a primacy of perception in philosophical speculation.

Obviously, it is absolutely impossible to summarize Merleau-Ponty’s position in short lines. In fact, as with all philosophers who refer to phenomenology with
a Husserlian derivation (the ramifications of phenomenology after Husserl are numerous, and it is impossible to merely summarize them here), Merleau-Ponty’s language is particularly complex and unfamiliar to the world of psychologists in general (even to those who are, as supporters of Gestalt theory say, phenomenologists). Therefore, we will limit ourselves here to noting that Merleau-Ponty is rightly called a philosopher of ambiguity and intentionality, but beware, these two terms are used in a completely different way than in psychology.

As Mancini says,

In fact, perception cannot be placed in the unambiguous schemes of categorical thought, and in this sense[,] it is “ambiguous,” like the bodily subjectivity in which it takes place. Sensation, the substratum of perceptual activity, is a dimension that precedes any distinction between the senses and that, before grasping anything finished, conveys a certain general atmosphere, so that it cannot be translated into the terms of the dualistic relation of subject and object. (Mancini, 2006–2010, p. 7308)

But for Merleau-Ponty, there is a primacy of acting, unreflective intentionality in this question—he develops it in the new concept of the “tacite cogito” (especially developed in Merleau-Ponty, 1945, pp. 427–459), in which it synthesizes the life of the prereflective consciousness of the self. As Kwant (1955) notes, intentionality in Merleau-Ponty represents a common and necessary outcome of phenomenology and existentialism, which converge in his philosophy: “Intentionality, the central theme of phenomenology, is no longer distinguished from existence” (p. 294). For an extensive bibliography of works by and about Merleau-Ponty, see Derossi (1965).

Closely related to what has been said is Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “incarnate sense,” that is, the impossibility of distinguishing between thought and perception. It should be noted, however, that the starting point of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of perception was undoubtedly Gestalt theory, from which, however, he has moved away in recent years and criticized some of Gestalt theory’s assumptions (1964—on these aspects, see Barbaras, 1991; Foulter, 2015).

If Merleau-Ponty was an attentive reader of Gestalt researchers, the opposite is not the case. There is virtually no mention of his work in the Gestalt literature. In particular, I have always been struck by the fact that the scientific lives of Merleau-Ponty and Metzger—the former a bit younger, the latter deceased a few years later—ran parallel, without there ever being any points of contact. Perhaps there was also a certain snobbery on the part of psychologists toward philosophers and vice versa, with the former always regarding the latter as mere salesmen and the latter regarding the former as lost in their laboratories, unable to grasp the essence of things.
So let us look at what is “real” for Merleau-Ponty. It is appropriate to quote his words directly:

A thing immediately appears as the concept of a bodily teleology, the norm of our psychophysiological assembly. But this is nothing but a psychological definition that does not make clear the whole meaning of the thing in question and reduces the thing to the experiences in which we encounter it. We now discover the core of reality: a thing is a thing because of all that it communicates to us through the organization of its sensory aspects. The real is the means in which each moment is not only inseparable from the others, but in a certain way synonymous with the others, in which the aspects signify each other and in absolute equivalence; it is unsurpassed fullness. It is impossible to fully describe the color of the carpet without saying that it is a carpet, a wool carpet, and without attributing to this color a certain tactile value, a certain weight and a certain tonal permanence. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 379)

I confess that few readings in my life have made me think as much as these words from Merleau-Ponty, which I had to read several times to fully grasp their meaning. And there are two deeply conflicting feelings that arise in me. On the one hand, I feel incomplete by Metzger’s definitions of the meanings of reality; on the other hand, I do not understand how to implement what Merleau-Ponty is telling me in my laboratory.

Perhaps we need to start at the bottom and make sense of all the constructs of Merleau-Ponty in order to verify them experimentally: what ambiguity is, that is, the inevitable need to bring my physicality into my experiential field; to give intentionality its full meaning and reconcile its reduction to the merely represented, as in Metzger, and conversely, its pervasiveness of all our experiences, including those we encounter; to understand what embodied meaning is by definitively rejecting the notion that perception can be studied as something pure and untouched by thoughts, emotions, or values.

I do not know if all this will be possible.

But it is a challenge that I would like to set for those who will come after me.

5. Conclusion: nagori

In conclusion, I would like to express and share with you some of the emotions I felt while writing this note. In doing so, I would also like to acknowledge our Japanese colleagues who have perhaps held the torch of Gestalt psychology higher than here in the West, and I am thinking in particular of Kaoru Noguchi, who often visited our department in Trieste with other Japanese colleagues, partly because of the very high esteem in which Kanizsa was held in Japan. I remember that one day, talking with these colleagues, they conveyed to me an aspect of
Japanese culture that was unknown to me and that fascinated me. In Japan, there are many ways to divide time—a year can be divided into four seasons, like ours, but also into 24 or 72 and so on. But however a season is defined, it is certain that for each of them there is a beginning, a full maturity, and an end, and each of these phases corresponds to a state of mind called hashari, sakari, and nagori, respectively. Think of the fruits of a season: hashari corresponds to the first fruits, sakari to full maturity, and nagori to the end of the season. But in nagori, there is not so much the sense of the end as the subtle longing for what is about to end, and in the same sense, the joy of the fullness of what one has lived. There is a wonderful little volume on this by Sekiguchi (2018).

Well, I have found Gestalt psychology to be the more exciting scientific season in which I have been fortunate enough to participate. And if Wertheimer, Koehler, and Koffka were its hashari, Metzger, like Kanizsa or Rausch or Goldmeier, was its sakari, the full unfolding and ripening of those fruits that began to blossom with Wertheimer and the other initiators. Today, we live in the nagori, not only for the Gestalt season but, as far as I am concerned, also for my season. In this, there is no sadness, but the joy of having participated in this fantastic adventure, even if only in a very small part, and the subtle regret of seeing how much there is still to do—knowing that I have no more time.

Abstract

In 1940, Wolfgang Metzger began a profound reflection on the meaning of the phenomenological approach to Gestalt psychology, which had its starting point in the rejection of what he called the “Eleatic” or “Eleatic–Rationalistic Postulate,” that is, the notion that, in his opinion, had dominated Western scientific and philosophical thought of the past centuries, according to which any assertion about the state of things that could lead to self-contradictory conclusions had to be considered unfounded. On the basis of this rejection and with exclusive reference to access to experiential data, Metzger proposed to distinguish five meanings of reality: (1) the physical or experiential world; (2) the intuitive or experienced world; (3) the experienced world (met, Angetroffen) in contrast to the represented world; (4) the something or fullness in contrast to emptiness or nothingness; (5) the real in contrast to the apparent. For Metzger (1950), this concept, although primarily related to perception, has far-reaching implications for our conception of others and of society. We question here the validity of Metzger’s concept, its explanatory significance, and its relation to other phenomenological concepts, such as that of Merleau-Ponty.

Keywords: Gestalt theory, meanings of reality, phenomenology


Riccardo Luccio was born in Rome in 1941 and graduated in Medicine and Surgery in 1965. From 1968 assistant professor at the University of Milan, in 1975 he became full professor in the University of Turin. Since 1978 he has been a professor at the University of Trieste, where he taught Psychometry until his retirement in 2010, and where he headed the Department of Psychology. He has conducted research on perception, and the application of dynamic models to psychology, and has worked on the history of psychology. In 1986, together with Getano Kenizsa, he was awarded the Metger Prize for “outstanding merits in the development of Gestalt Theory”. In 1999, he was awarded the gold medal of Meritorious Science by the President of the Italian Republic.

Address: Professor Emeritus, University of Trieste, Department of Life Sciences
E-mail: rluccio@units.it,
ORCID: 0000-0002-5858-5553