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## Ontology and the Phenomenology of Perception: On the Privacy and Fleetingness of Phenomenal Entities

### 1. Introduction

In our perceptual activity, as well as in dreams and hallucinations, we all directly experience gestalts (“object-shaped” items) endowed with properties and typically linked to each other by relations (we hardly experience “bare” gestalts without properties or, for that matter, properties which are not properties *of* gestalts). As a result, we also directly experience *states of affairs*, which are the exemplifications of such properties and relations by gestalts or (in the case of relations) “groups” thereof, as we may say. These directly experienced entities can be called, following the tradition, *phenomenal* entities. They have received various other names in philosophy: sensory appearances, phenomena, sense-data, percepts, sensory givens, indexical guises, qualia, etc. We often find philosophers who appear to deny their existence. Yet, their arguments, sophisticated as they might be, can hardly jeopardize the fact that experience lays such things before us. In fact, we can even discover intersubjective general laws governing their manifestation, as has been fruitfully demonstrated in Gestalt psychology.<sup>1</sup> We can thus take phenomenal entities, most indubitably, for granted. This is what I shall assume here without further ado, although I wish to refer to Fales 1996 to back up this claim. Let us then say that, for any subject *S* who is conscious at a certain time *t*, there is the *phenomenal world* (or *field*) of *S* at *t*, reality as it appears to *S* at *t*, something which “contains” all that the subject (directly) experiences and thus in particular certain (phenomenal) gestalts, properties, relations and states of affairs. We might also call it the *field of consciousness* of *S* at time *t*.

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<sup>1</sup> As is well-known, according to Gestalt psychology, experienced object-shaped items can be related to each other in such a way that they allow new object-shaped items, with their own properties, to emerge as directly experienced. These are *higher-order* gestalts, we may say (perhaps only these are properly called “gestalts,” according to some Gestalt psychologists). For example, a number of dots appropriately placed in circular fashion generates the experience not only of phenomenal dots, but of a phenomenal circle as well, so to speak. For present purposes, however, it is not important to consider these higher-order gestalts.

This is to be contrasted with the “external” physical reality at time  $t$ , a reality within which  $S$  is physically located (in veridical perception the gestalts in the field of consciousness somehow correspond, we can assume, to external objects in physical reality). Analogously, the Gestalt psychologist Koffka (see his 1999) distinguishes between the *behavioral world* of the subject  $S$  on the one hand and the *geographical world* where  $S$  finds herself on the other hand.

To assess the nature of phenomenal entities is however much more problematic than asserting their existence, for it involves a loop from the secure boundaries of what is phenomenologically given to the fallible realm of ontological theorizing. In particular, there are two features which are, more or less explicitly, often attributed in this way to phenomenal entities, or so it seems to me. They are supposed to be *essentially private* or *subjective*, i.e., incapable, by their own nature, of being experienced by more than one subject at a time (the phenomenally red gestalt which I experience is not the same as the one you experience, although they both correspond to one red object yonder; not simply because of some slight difference in perspective which we may have, but more generally because the former is in *my* phenomenal world and the latter is in *your* phenomenal world, and the two worlds are wholly distinct). Moreover, they are supposed to be *essentially ephemeral* or *fleeting*, i.e., incapable by their own nature of existing if not in the brief moment wherein they are experienced by a certain subject. When this moment fades, they go with it, never to come back to existence again (the phenomenally red gestalt which I am experiencing right now in looking at that object yonder ceases to exist as soon I turn my neck and at best it can be replaced by *another* similar red gestalt as I look at the object again after some time; my phenomenal world, as time goes by, is dynamically replaced by a *new* phenomenal world, so as to allow me to keep track of changes in the environment as I move and act within it).

Admittedly, I have no way to prove that a phenomenal entity experienced by me now is numerically identical to one experienced by you, nor that a phenomenal entity which I am experiencing now is numerically identical to one which I experienced, say, a year ago. And the same holds, I presume, of you. But these may be mere epistemological limitations of our human condition, which merely *suggest* that phenomenal entities are essentially private and ephemeral, something which in fact they may not be. Perhaps they are private and ephemeral only in a *contingent* way, when they *happen* to be experienced once and for all by just one subject (which may well be the standard circumstance), but they are not essentially such. Can we find further arguments to back up the claim that phenomenal entities are *essentially* private and ephemeral or should we rather deny, for at least some kind of phenomenal entity, that they have these features?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From now on, unless the context requires more terminological precision, in using “private” and “ephemeral” I shall assume that the qualifier “essentially” is implicitly understood, unless the use of “contingently” indicates otherwise.

This is what I wish to explore here, by focusing in particular on gestalts. In the final section I shall briefly discuss the relevance of this issue for certain kinds of propositional judgements and thus for certain aspects of our descriptive use of language.

## 2. Universals and Particulars

I shall rely on an ontological scheme according to which properties and relations are *universals* (Of course, this is contentious, for philosophers of nominalist tendencies will object to this stand. All I can do here is to point to the defence of universals in a work such as Armstrong 1989. The properties and relations that are of interest here should not be confused with concepts and meanings of general terms, as discussed in Bealer 1982 and Orilia 1999.) In essence, that properties and relations are universals means that they can have (at least in typical cases) *multiple* instances in different places, whether at the same time or at different times. As a result, they are somehow “shared” by different entities and are thus somehow localized in more than one place at once and “re-occur” at different times. For example, take two rectangular sheets of paper, one in Rome and the other in Milan, at time  $t$ . They share the property of rectangularity, which is then at the same time  $t$  both in Rome and in Milan. This property is also exemplified by another sheet which (let us suppose) happens to be rectangular at a later time  $t'$ . Rectangularity thus re-occurs at  $t'$  after having occurred at  $t$ .

Properties can be exemplified by other properties. For example, rectangularity exemplifies the property of being a shape. Most importantly, however, among the entities that exemplify properties we should acknowledge *particulars*. Typical examples of particulars are ordinary material objects such as tables and stones. The most fundamental mark of particularity is the fact that a particular always exemplifies some properties or others, but is not exemplified by any entity. For example, a particular stone exemplifies properties such as grey, hard, and roundish. However, this particular stone is not exemplified by anything. At least in paradigmatic cases such as those constituted by ordinary material objects, a particular is at any given time localized at a specific spot and thus cannot be in two different places at once. For example, a certain chair cannot be at the same time both in Rome and in Milan. Thus, another distinguishing mark of particularity is this: a particular has only one location at any given time in the sense in which a chair has just one location (there may be, for all we know, entities that are like particulars in many respects, but are not localized in one specific spot as stones and chairs are, e.g., disembodied minds; but we can leave these non-paradigmatic cases of particularity out of the picture for present purposes).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I should note that in my view our ontological inventory should include those items traditionally called *states of affairs*. A *monadic state of affairs* is the exemplification of a property by a certain item. Similarly the being connected of a number of items by a relation is a *relational state of affairs*.

With this ontological background in mind, let us turn to phenomenology. As Gestalt psychologists have emphasized, the gestalts contained in a phenomenal world appear as set against a background, i.e., we may say, as located in a “phenomenal space” within the phenomenal world in question. For example, consider a subject, Dori, who experiences at time  $t$  a cat-looking black-looking gestalt  $c$  grabbing a white-looking mouse-looking gestalt  $m$ . By hypothesis the gestalt  $c$  exemplifies what we may call “phenomenal black” and thus not only  $c$ , but this property as well is contained (or “is present”) in Dori’s phenomenal world at time  $t$  and thus more specifically in Dori’s phenomenal space at time  $t$ . More precisely, phenomenal black is located in the very same region of phenomenal space occupied by  $c$  (this does not rule out that phenomenal black, *qua* universal, is also located somewhere else).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, phenomenal white is also present in Dori’s phenomenal world at time  $t$ , located in the region of phenomenal space occupied by  $m$ .<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Gestalt-types and Gestalt-tokens

The distinction between universals and particulars naturally leads to a distinction between gestalt-types and gestalt-tokens. To illustrate it, consider the following situation. A certain subject, Castor, is shown two qualitatively indistinguishable green discs, one above the other, in such a way that he experiences two qualitatively indistinguishable gestalts,  $g_1$  and  $g_2$ : they share the very same phenomenal properties, e.g., ph-green<sub>53</sub> (a specific shade of phenomenal green), ph-size<sub>88</sub> (a specific phenomenal size) and phenomenal roundness. Yet, they *look* different by virtue of the very fact that they occupy different positions in one (Castor’s) phenomenal space. We are in the realm of appearances where *esse est percipi* and we must then take this distinctness at face value (Bozzi 1969). It seems then that we have *two particulars*. But notice:  $g_1$  and  $g_2$  are distinct particulars on account of the fact that they occupy two distinct *phenomenal* places. To put it otherwise, they occupy distinct locations in the phenomenal space which is somehow within Castor’s field of consciousness. We shall go back to this point in a moment. For the time being, note that  $g_1$  and  $g_2$  do not exemplify only ph-green<sub>53</sub>, ph-size<sub>88</sub>, phenomenal roundness and (presumably) other “first-order” phenomenal properties. We call them gestalts insofar as these first-order phenomenal properties are for both of them mutually related in such a way that they conjure in making the two places in which they both occur places occupied by “objects.” In other words, both places exhibit not only the first-order properties  $P_1, \dots, P_n$  (such as

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, since phenomenal black is exemplified by  $c$ , the state of affairs which is the exemplification of phenomenal black by  $c$  is also present in the phenomenal space in question.

<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that a “grabbing” phenomenal relation  $G$  is also present in Dori’s phenomenal world at time  $t$ , insofar as  $c$  and  $m$  are experienced as one grabbing the other. Accordingly, a state of affairs consisting of the exemplification of  $G$  by  $c$  and  $m$  is also contained in Dori’s phenomenal world at time  $t$ .

ph-green<sub>53</sub>, ph-size<sub>88</sub>, and phenomenal roundness), but also these properties as in a relation of “compresence,” which we may in short call *C*. There is then a further “higher-order” universal, dub it “ $C[P_1, \dots, P_n]$ ,” which somehow involves *C*,  $P_1$ , ...,  $P_n$  as constituents.<sup>6</sup> A *structured* universal of this kind is, as I see it, what has often been called an “invariant structure” (see Smith 1988, in Smith 1988, 14). I call it a *gestalt-type*. The specific one under consideration here is exemplified by (at least) two corresponding particulars: the *gestalt-tokens*  $g_1$  and  $g_2$ . As universal, it can occur at the same time in different locations. In our example, it occurs in two locations in Castor’s phenomenal space. (We can continue to use “gestalt” as ambiguous between “gestalt-type” and “gestalt-token” and rely on context to disambiguate, unless more precision seems appropriate.)

Is a phenomenal space identical to a certain portion of objective physical space, say a portion of space somewhere inside the brain? According to Castañeda 1977, 305, a positive answer is given by Bertrand Russell and by the neurophysiologist Russell Brain and he accordingly speaks of the “Russell-Brain hypothesis.” In effect, the Russell-Brain hypothesis implies the reductionist view according to which each gestalt-token is identical to a neural correlate in the brain of the subject who experiences the gestalt in question. Castañeda tries to argue against the Russell-Brain hypothesis. He thinks that, at any given time *t*, the whole of reality contains physical space and, in addition, all the phenomenal spaces determined by the conscious subjects existing at time *t*, which do not overlap with physical space. A moment of reflection shows that something like this must be accepted by the currently fashionable view according to which the mental *supervenes* on the physical, but is not identical to the physical (on this “supervenientist” view of the mind, see, e.g., Kim 1998, ch. 1). According to this picture, the existence of a gestalt supervenes on the existence of a corresponding neural correlate but is not identical to it. Since presumably there is no physical object, other than the neural correlate in question, to which the gestalt could be identical, we must grant that the gestalt is not in physical space, but in a phenomenal space of its own. Castañeda admits however that he does not have any conclusive evidence that he is right. Clearly, if, following reductionism, Castor’s phenomenal space coincides with a portion of physical space, then Castor’s gestalts  $g_1$  and  $g_2$  occupy two different locations *tout court*, and not just two different *phenomenal* locations. But if Castañeda is right, we must make allowance for the possibility that particularity is incompatible not just with occupying two different physical locations, but with occupying two locations in general, whether they are physical or phenomenal.

<sup>6</sup> On higher-order universals, see Armstrong 1978, vol. II. Note that in describing the bundle theory of particulars, a doctrine attributable to philosophers such as Berkeley, Hume and Russell, compresence is taken to be a relation capable of generating, out of a set of properties, not simply a universal, but a particular (see Armstrong 1989, ch. 4). This is not the line that I am following here.

#### 4. Privacy

Let us now go back to the issue of the privacy of gestalts. To shed light on it, it will be useful to imagine a possible situation that can incline us as much as possible toward admitting that gestalts, whether tokens or types, are not private. Suppose that Castor has an identical twin, Pollux. They have exactly the same sensory apparatus and mental capabilities and have been raised in such a way that they have the same background knowledge. At time  $t$  they are placed in experimental settings of the same kind, let us say of kind  $K$ , in two different Gestalt labs, Lab1 and Lab2. They are shown under the same observation conditions (same distance, same lighting, etc., while they are in the same state of mind) two qualitatively indistinguishable green discs, disc  $d_1$  in Lab1 and disc  $d_2$  in Lab2, in such a way that each of them experiences two gestalts with the same phenomenal properties, gestalt-token  $c$  in Castor's phenomenal world and gestalt-token  $p$  in Pollux' phenomenal world. In general, since our twins are both in an experimental setting of kind  $K$ , we have every reason to think that each of them experiences at time  $t$  two qualitatively indistinguishable phenomenal fields. Thus, in particular, the two gestalts  $c$  and  $p$  should be assumed to have the very same phenomenal properties. It seems to me that we have in this case no reason to deny that, as Castor and Pollux experience  $c$  and  $p$ , respectively, they experience at the same time the very same gestalt-type. In other words, the envisaged situation suggests that gestalt-types are not essentially private (although, of course, they may be contingently private).

As regards gestalt-tokens, the issue is more complicated. If we could convincingly argue that the particular  $c$  in Castor's phenomenal world is numerically identical to  $p$ , a particular in Pollux' phenomenal world, we should admit that gestalt-tokens are not essentially private after all (although they could still be contingently private), in that at least under certain conditions they can be experienced by two subjects at once. But are  $c$  and  $p$  identical? It is clear that, if we follow the reductionist line, the answer is negative. For in this case  $c$  and  $p$  are located in two different areas of physical space, since they reside in two different brains. If we follow Castañeda's non-reductionist line, however, the issue is trickier. Why should we rule out that two phenomenal spaces may overlap? Perhaps to the extent that two subjects have qualitatively indistinguishable experiences they share the very same field of consciousness and thus the very same phenomenal space within it. And if their experiences are only in part qualitatively indistinguishable, then they enjoy two fields of consciousness which partially overlap, possibly with two overlapping phenomenal spaces. If we admit something like this, then the numerical identity of  $c$  and  $p$  is compatible with their particularity. They could be one and the same particular, located in a region of a phenomenal space which belongs at the same time in Castor's and in Pollux' fields of consciousness (which indeed would be one and the same phenomenal field, since, by hypothesis, Castor

and Pollux have qualitatively indistinguishable experiences). This *unitarian* view, as we may call it, may seem more economical than the rival, *anti-unitarian*, view, according to which the phenomenal worlds of two distinct subjects are always wholly distinct and in particular do not involve overlapping phenomenal spaces. That the unitarian view may appear to be more economical is evident if we consider that it postulates, in our Castor/Pollux example, one field of consciousness and one particular,  $c (= p)$ , whereas the rival view postulates two fields of consciousness and two particulars,  $c$  and  $p$ . One might then be inclined to prefer unitarianism in the light of Ockham's razor. To be sure, on the face of it, it seems a very implausible doctrine, for we tend to think of phenomenal fields, and the phenomenal spaces within them, as dependent on conscious subjects pretty much as smiles depend on faces. The existence of a particular smile depends on a certain face and a face cannot give rise to two smiles at the same time. Nor does it make sense to say that two smiles, one dependant on face  $A$ , and another on face  $B$ , somehow overlap. By the same token, one could argue that two conscious subjects give rise to two wholly distinct phenomenal fields and thus to two wholly distinct phenomenal spaces. This is mere analogical reasoning, however, far from constituting conclusive evidence. But perhaps a further argument can be offered. The anti-unitarian could insist that  $c$  and  $p$  cannot be identical, for the existence of  $c$  has been caused somehow by disc  $d_1$  in Lab1, something which cannot be said of  $p$ . Similarly, the existence of  $p$  has been caused by disc  $d_2$  in Lab2, something which cannot be said of  $c$ . To counter this, the unitarian can only reply something along these lines: gestalt-tokens are not brought into existence by accidental events such as veridical perceptions, dreams and hallucinations. They rather pre-exist in a sort of Platonic world and can be "grasped" from there in different ways. The Castor/Pollux example should then be so described. Castor grasped gestalt  $c (= p)$  by perceiving object  $d_1$  and Pollux grasped the very same Gestalt  $c (= p)$  as a result of perceiving object  $d_2$ . But if this line is taken, the unitarian can no longer appeal to Ockham's razor to support her view. For she must conceive of the Platonic world as populated with a presumably infinite number of potentially graspable gestalt-tokens. In the end, the anti-unitarian position is less economical than its rival and the latter must yield to the former. To the extent that these arguments are convincing, we can then conclude that, whether or not we accept the Russell-Brain reductionist line, gestalt-tokens are essentially private after all.

## 5. Fleetingness

It is finally time to turn to whether gestalts are ephemeral. Again, it is instructive to imagine a situation in which we would be most inclined to deny that gestalts have the characteristic under consideration. Suppose then that, after some time, Castor undergoes again the same experiment discussed above. He is thus exposed

again to the green disc  $d_1$ , which, we may assume, has remained qualitatively identical. He has the same mental capabilities and attitudes, we should imagine. Overall, he is again in an experimental setting of kind  $K$ , just as before. We have every reason to think that he experiences a certain gestalt-token  $c'$  which exemplifies the same gestalt-type exemplified by the gestalt-token,  $c$ , which he had experienced in the previous experiment. In other words, we should admit that gestalt-types are not essentially ephemeral. Just like all universals, they can in principle re-occur.

But what about gestalt-tokens? Once more, things are much foggier as we turn to them. If the gestalt-token  $c$  experienced during the first experiment were identical to  $c'$ , experienced now during the new experiment, we could say that  $c$  has been brought back to life and conclude that gestalt-tokens are not ephemeral after all. But are  $c$  and  $c'$  identical?

This question must be tackled differently, depending on whether we consider gestalts to be identical to corresponding neural correlates or at most merely supervenient on them. If we follow the first option, the issue at hand can be reformulated as follows: is it possible that a certain neural correlate that was present in Castor's brain during the first experiment (identical to  $c$ ) is present again (identical to  $c'$ ) in Castor's brain during the new experiment? Presumably, a neural correlate is a mere aggregate of appropriately related organic molecules. For all we know, in such aggregates new molecules and atoms continuously replace old ones as the flow of life goes. But an aggregate of parts cannot survive the loss of a part. Even if a part is replaced by an "equivalent" one it will still be a numerically different one and accordingly, after the replacement, there will be a new aggregate. The old one, strictly speaking, will have ceased to exist. In other words, aggregates abide by the principle of *mereological essentialism*, according to which an entity  $x$  made up of parts and existing at time  $t$  can be identical to a material entity existing at time  $t'$  only if  $x$  and  $y$  have exactly the same material parts (see, e.g., Chisholm 1989, ch. 7, for a discussion of mereological essentialism). In sum, neural correlates, for all we know, are entities that are most likely to not re-occur. Hence, chances are that  $c'$  is not identical to  $c$ . The former is merely a neural correlate somehow functionally equivalent in some appropriate sense to the different neural correlate which the latter was during the first experiment. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in principle things could go otherwise. Consider some ultimate constituents of matter that are so configured to constitute a certain material object  $x$ . If at some point they come apart we should say that  $x$  has ceased to exist. But if at a later time, perhaps by some cosmic accident, they come together again in the same configuration, we should say that  $x$  has come to life again. Similarly, why couldn't the very same neural correlate come to life again? It seems to me that, given strict reductionism, gestalt-tokens are at most only contingently ephemeral.

Again, things are a bit trickier, once we put reductionism aside and do not assume that gestalt-tokens are identical to corresponding neural correlates. From this standpoint, how should we consider the idea that placing Castor again in an experimental setting of kind  $K$  brings the old gestalt-token  $c$  back to life (as identical to  $c'$ )? Of course, we have no empirical way to decide between this “resurrectionist” hypothesis and the rival “new birth” hypothesis, according to which  $c'$  is numerically distinct from the old gestalt  $c$ . But one might try to argue for the new birth hypothesis as follows. Imagine that, simultaneously with Castor, Pollux also undergoes again the same experiment and thus he experiences a gestalt-token  $p'$  of the same gestalt-type as the gestalt-token  $p$  that he experienced in the previous experiment (perhaps this time, however, labs and discs are exchanged; you will see the relevance of this in a moment). If the resurrectionist line were correct, we would have two candidates for resurrection,  $c$  and  $p$ . Which one will be resurrected so as to be experienced by Castor and which one by Pollux? Could not  $c$  be identical to  $p'$  and  $p$  to  $c'$ ? We have to postulate either some blind randomness that is repugnant to reason or some strange laws of nature that “direct” a resurrected gestalt-token to a certain subject rather than to another; perhaps it would be relevant which subject had already experienced the gestalt-token in the past, or perhaps which external object had caused the gestalt-token to exist in the past, or who knows what. But we can avoid these complications, if we stick to the new birth hypothesis. However, the resurrectionist could try to argue in reply along these lines: the resurrection at time  $t'$  of a gestalt-token  $g$  that existed at time  $t$  simply depends on the fact that at  $t'$  a neural correlate functionally equivalent to the one that brought about  $g$  at time  $t$  is somehow generated in the same brain; there is no need to bring the external object responsible for the neural correlate to bear on the issue. Moreover, if we conceive of a subject as something distinct from the brain, a “host” of a phenomenal space who keeps existing at least as long as an underlying brain allows for it, the resurrectionist hypothesis appears to be not so implausible. A gestalt-token might be seen from this perspective as a particular “perturbation” in an enduring phenomenal space. And why should we rule out that such perturbations could re-occur?

## 6. Conclusions

Gestalt-types should not be considered as essentially private and ephemeral.<sup>7</sup> This grounds our capability, testified by decades of successful research in Gestalt psychology, of discovering the truth of general propositions which describe perceptual principles of gestalt formation and which can be intersubjectively shared.

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<sup>7</sup> Obviously, this claim can be generalized to phenomenal properties and relations in general and indeed, for first-order phenomenal properties and relations, the likelihood of their being shared by different subjects and of their re-occurrence at different times appears to be higher.

As regards gestalt-tokens, it seems reasonable to say that they are essentially private. This is relevant for the correctness of what seem to me the most fundamental perceptual judgments about external objects, which crucially involve gestalt-tokens. For example, consider Castor, when he is visually confronting disc  $d_1$  during the first experiment. When he correctly judges that it is a disc, very roughly speaking, a belief along these lines is (tacitly) mobilized in him:

(1) the (external) object corresponding to  $c$  is a disc,

where  $c$  is, as we have seen, a gestalt-token. Now, a proposition of this kind would be false, if it turned out that the very same gestalt  $c$  occurs in another phenomenal world (Pollux') as corresponding to a different object such as disc  $d_2$  (it would be false in the sense in which it is false that *the* author of most Beatles songs is British; there are *two* authors, Lennon and McCartney). It should be noted that the fact that gestalt-tokens are not essentially ephemeral does not constitute a similar threat. Since there is a present tense component in (1), the truth-value of this proposition is not affected by the possibility that in the past or future the very same gestalt-token  $c$  may re-occur as corresponding to an external object, say disc  $d_2$ , different from the one corresponding to  $c$  at the time in which Castor participates in the first experiment.

### Summary

The phenomenal entities that we directly experience in perceptions, dreams and hallucinations tend to be viewed as essentially private and ephemeral (fleeting), i.e., necessarily incapable of being directly experienced by more than one subject and incapable of re-occurring more than once. Among phenomenal entities are the "object-shaped" gestalts studied in Gestalt psychology. The traditional ontological dichotomy of universals and particulars is appealed to, in order to make a distinction between (phenomenal) gestalt-types and gestalt-tokens. It is then proposed that the former are not essentially private and ephemeral. As regards the latter, it is argued that they are indeed essentially private, but ephemeral at most only in a contingent sense. The relevance of these claims for our perceptual judgments about external objects is briefly investigated at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** Perception, space, universals, particulars.

### Zusammenfassung

Die phänomenalen Entitäten, die wir in Wahrnehmungen, Träumen und Halluzinationen unmittelbar erfahren, werden tendenziell als im Wesentlichen privat und ephemere (flüchtig) angesehen. Demnach wären sie der unmittelbaren Wahrnehmung durch mehr als ein Subjekt zwangsläufig unzugänglich und könnten auch nicht öfter als ein einziges Mal auftreten. Zu den phänomenalen Entitäten gehören aber auch die „objektförmigen“ Gestalten, die in der Gestaltpsychologie untersucht werden. Entsprechend der in der

Ontologie traditionellen Dichotomie von Universalien und Einzeldingen nimmt der vorliegende Beitrag zuerst eine Differenzierung zwischen (phänomenalem) Gestalt-Typus und konkreter Einzelgestalt vor. Daran schließt sich der Vorschlag an, die ersteren (die Gestalt-Typen) nicht als zwangsläufig privat und ephemere anzusehen. Bezüglich der Letzteren (der konkreten Einzelgestalten) wird argumentiert, dass diese tatsächlich zwangsläufig privat sind, ephemere aber höchstens in einem bedingten Sinn. Die Relevanz dieser Behauptungen für unsere Wahrnehmungsurteile über externe Objekte wird am Ende des Beitrags kurz untersucht.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Wahrnehmung, Raum, Universalien, Einzeldinge.

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