

Max Wertheimer/Lothar Spillmann (Ed)(2012): On Perceived Motion and Figural Organization. With contributions of Michael Wertheimer, K. W. Watkins, Steven Lehar, Robert Sekuler, Viktor Sarris and Lothar Spillmann. Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press. ISBN-10: 0262017466; ISBN-13: 978-0262017466. Pp. xiv + 296, \$ 40.

Among the ten most frequently cited papers in the field of perception (and not only there), the two papers by Max Wertheimer entitled *Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung* (1912 – here pp. 1-92) and *Untersuchungen zur Lehre von der Gestalt II* (1922-1923 – here pp. 127-182) stand out prominently. Why then is it that for a century after the publication of Wertheimer's first article, and 90 years after the publication of the second one, we were left without a complete English translation of both, but had only the excerpts translated by Ellis (1938), Beardslee and Wertheimer (1958) and Shipley (1961)?

The main reason is that Max Wertheimer's prose is very difficult to translate. In reading his articles, I was always in two minds: on one side, what he wrote was clear; on the other side, when I tried to translate excerpts into Italian or English I had enormous difficulties, which I did not have with other classical Gestalt authors, e.g. Koffka, Köhler, Rausch, or Metzger. To be true to the meaning, I frequently had to restructure the sentences, with the constant fear of falsifying the text and losing the peculiar flavour of Wertheimer's prose. The current translation is authentic and at the same time readable, something few people thought could be achieved.

For these reasons, I am sure that every scholar of perception, and experimental psychology in general, will enthusiastically welcome the translation of these two papers, edited by Lothar Spillmann and published with great care by MIT Press. In this regard it should be noted that Lothar Spillmann, with other contributors to this book, also gave us the English translation of yet another precious document of Gestalt psychology: the first edition of Metzger's *Gesetze des Sehens* (Metzger, 2006), also by MIT Press.

Apart from Lothar Spillmann, the people engaged in this task were Michael Wertheimer, Max's son, and K. W. Watkins, Michael's daughter, but several other distinguished scientists contributed as well: Heiko Hecht, Steven Lehar (author of the first draft of the translation), Zygmunt Pizlo, and Dejan Todorović. They all deserve our thanks.

The book is not limited to Wertheimer's articles. It includes two important reviews that highlight the significance of Wertheimer's experiments for today's readership: the first, by Robert Sekuler, on apparent motion (pp. 101-127); and the second, by Lothar Spillmann, on the current status of Wertheimer's figural factors (pp. 191-152).

There are also two useful synopses by Viktor Sarris of both articles, a real compass to orient the reader in the intricacies of Wertheimer's thinking (pp. 93-100, 183-190); and, again by Sarris, a short historical account of the scientific life of Wertheimer in Frankfurt and thereafter (pp. 253-265).

At the end of the book, to the delight of the historians of Psychology, there are five appendices on Max Wertheimer's chronology (pp. 269-270), a list of his publications (pp. 271-274), the courses held in Frankfurt (pp. 275-276) and New York (pp. 277-278), and the apparatuses used at the Frankfurt institute in 1933 (pp. 279-283). Max Wertheimer, amid the politically trying times which ultimately forced him to emigrate from Germany, comes alive in these pages.

Fitting to the first publication of Wertheimer's paper on motion, last year we celebrated the centennial of Gestalt psychology with two symposia in Bielefeld and Helsinki. In the same year, we also witnessed the appearance of two review chapters by Wagemans et al. (2012, in press), testifying to the fact that Gestalt psychology is very much alive.

The first complete English translation of Max Wertheimer's pioneering articles on motion and figural organization deserves wide-spread attention. I highly recommend it for active study by everyone interested in the renaissance of Gestalt psychology that is currently taking place in the neurosciences. The phenomena observed by Max Wertheimer are as fresh as they were at the time of his writing and his ideas are as profound (and inspiring) as ever. At a time when vision researchers discuss the neural mechanisms underlying the transition from local to global, his visionary thoughts assume a new relevance.

Riccardo Luccio

Riccardo Luccio, born in 1941, emeritus of Psychometrics in Trieste, has taught History of Psychology and Psychometrics mainly in the Universities of Florence and Trieste, and retired in 2011. He works on visual perception, mathematical models and history of psychology. He is author of about 300 papers and 12 scientific books. In 1987 he was awarded the "Wolfgang Metzger Prize" and in 1999 the "Golden medal for Science" of the Italian Republic.

Address: Dipartimento di Scienze della Vita, Università di Trieste, via Weiss, 2 (Pal. Q) - st. T16, I-34128 Trieste, Italy.

E-mail: rluccio@units.it