

The Phenomenology of Representational Awareness*

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1.

Permit me to begin with some autobiographical remarks. I was trained in Husserlian Phenomenology at the New School during the 1960s by Dorion Cairns as well as Aron Gurwitsch. Husserlian or Constitutive Phenomenology is ultimately a transcendental first philosophy. In it one seeks to ground the world and the special sciences in intersubjectivity as it presents itself when one takes up an attitude of neutrality with respect to its being in the world. I was then persuaded and am now still persuaded that this is the most promising of strategies for first philosophy, provided, that is, it includes the transcendental grounding of value and purpose as well as being.

I am profoundly grateful for the training I received. One among the various reasons for my gratitude has become especially prominent for me in recent years. While most of our contemporaries chiefly devoted their efforts to interpreting the remarkably difficult texts that have come down to us within the phenomenological movement, those of us from the New School were trained by students and followers of Husserl and became confident that, while exegetical problems would no doubt keep coming up, we were on the right track in our comprehension and could hence devote ourselves chiefly to phenomenological investigation rather than scholarship on texts. This is not to say that I have not interpreted, translated, and edited my share of materials, efforts that were needed in the struggle to establish the American period in the phenomenological movement. But it is to say

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that my teachers taught me by word and deed what mattered most: reflective investigation of the matters themselves. Over the years, I have done more and more phenomenological investigations.

One book that I edited a few years ago was Gurwitsch's *Marginal Consciousness* (1984). As a sort of addendum there I included a translation I entitled "Signals and Significations." This was made from the last lecture in the last course that Gurwitsch offered in Paris. In it he extends his objections to and reconstruction of Husserl's dualistic theory of perception to Husserl's theory of signs. Signs of course stand for other objects and Gurwitsch divides them into linguistic expressions, which convey significations, and what he calls signals, which do not carry significations, but nevertheless represent the signaled objects. Autobiographically speaking, that is when I started to reflect on what I have come to call representational awareness.

Three motives had previously impeded me from such reflections. In the first place, the effort to secure transcendental grounds entailed the examination of the relative powers of various sorts of evidence or, as I prefer to say, evidencing. Evidencing is the awareness that directly justifies believing and makes it cognition and thereby indirectly justifies valuing and willing. Thus, other things being equal, should there be a conflict between remembering and perceiving, perceptual evidencing is the superior justification for cognition. More interesting for this essay, should there be a conflict between representational and presentational evidencing, other things being equal, then presentational evidencing is stronger. For example, what we see with our own eyes outweighs what we become aware of on the basis of what other people tell us. Thus, my partly naive commitment to the transcendental project of ultimate grounding led me, following Husserl, to emphasize the most reliable evidencing and thus disinclined me from investigating the modes of representational awareness.

The second motive also pertained to the historical situation I found myself in after I left graduate school. In a time when so many colleagues had progressed from existential to hermeneutical phenomenology and came to focus on speech and interpretation, I became as suspicious of the preoccupation of academics, myself included, with words as I would be of a shoemaker for whom leather was the most important thing in the world. From Gurwitsch I had learned to resist the interpretation-theory of perception and from Husserl I had learned to recognize prepredicative experience. Eventually I was told of the hermeneutics of traces as different from that of texts, but in the 1970s I saw little of that practiced, often had the impression that people were trying to read even Being as if it were a text, and I am still watching. Even the scope of existential phenomenology in the hands of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, which had narrowed the phenomenological problematics to worldly human life, appeared broader than this *linguisticism*. To live is a lot more than to express, which is itself more than to write.

In the third place, constitutive phenomenology includes opposition to much of modern philosophy where the so-called theory of ideas or *representationalism* is concerned. According to that theory, all of our awareness of objects is mediated by ideas, images, or representations. Back when I was an undergraduate, the central philosophical issue still was to prove the existence of the outer world, i.e., to justify belief in external objects that we cannot directly observe, but which are out there, really real, and help cause us to have representations of them. From Husserl and my teachers I learned that this is an essentially unsolvable and hence spurious problem and that what I see and hear and feel when I look at and listen to and touch objects around me are not images somehow inside a private projection room that is allegedly my mind. Rather, the mind is not some sort of physical thing but rather a marvelous thing, directly located nowhere spatially yet able to intend objects at any distance in space from our bodies, to be, in one way or another,

aware of objects far off in the future as well as far off in the past, and able even to be aware of ideal objects, which are in neither space nor in time but also not "in" the mind other than as objects of intentiveness. In sum, I am afraid that, having rejected representationalism, I tended toward an antirepresentationalism that disregarded the great deal of representational awareness that occurs. This third motive fits in with pursuing the project of first philosophy as well as suspicion of approaches preoccupied with language.

On the positive side again, besides being impressed with Gurwitsch's phenomenology of signs in the late 1970s, I was at the same time becoming interested in the philosophy of archaeology. This is not the occasion to argue it, but, to the consternation of most philosophers of science, but to the delight of archaeologists, I am persuaded that archaeology is the most basic of the positive sciences and that the type of observation it relies upon is representational, something I will return to. And let me also mention in autobiographical perspective that I have been making videos in recent years and that this is quite instructive concerning the production and consumption of representations, particularly for someone trained chiefly to represent objects merely linguistically. Once I came in these ways to appreciate representational awareness, it was not difficult for me to recognize how the vast bulk of adult human life is founded on representation, something that is of the greatest importance for the human sciences and cultural disciplines.

2.

What, phenomenologically speaking, is representation or, as it is bet called, representational awareness? To answer this question we must course reflect, i.e., practice reflective theoretical observation. That which we reflect upon can be called, generically, *the intentive process*, a formulation I have from Cairns. That

which is intended to in the intensive process can be called the object as it is intended to or, preferably, *the object as it presents itself*, a formulation I have from Gurwitsch. The latter no less than the former is reflectively observed in phenomenology. And reflecting thus noematically as well as noetic ally, we need to engage in analysis, in discriminating the components within both intensive processes and objects as they present themselves.

II. Positional

C. Volitional

B. Evaluational

A. Cognitiveal

I. Awareness

B. Representational

3. Linguistic

2. Pictorial

1. Indicational

A. Presentational

3. Exceptional

2. Recollectional

1. Perceptual

Fig. 1. Classification of some components of intensive processes and objects as they present themselves.

In broad terms, the following analysis locates the phenomena of concern to us. It is readily represented schematically with a classificatory outline in which specific and sub specific concepts are related to generic concepts (see Figure 1). Two

abstractions while we reflect theoretically are needed. The first consists in disregarding thethetic or positional components of intensive processes and the correlative cultural characteristics of objects as they present themselves. The emphasis in classic Husserlian phenomenology is epistemological and hence the positional components focused upon are doxic. But besides thethetic components of belief there are also those that pertain to evaluation and willing. All three are always to be found, but they can be abstracted from. Within objects as they present themselves we abstract not only from the noematic belief characters but also from values and functional characters or uses. It was from Cairns that I learned to reflect on values, but it was from Gurwitsch's work that I learned to appreciate the functional characters or uses of objects. Belief characters, values and uses can best be called, collectively, *cultural characteristics*. Sometimes they are called the "meanings" of things, but such meanings are not significations, the meanings of words, and it is better to speak of cultural characteristics and, for that matter, to prefer the expression *signification* for the meanings of words.

When thethetic or positional has been abstracted from within the object as it presents itself as well as within the intensive process, we are left with what can be called *awareness*. For phenomenologists there is also of course awareness of ideal objects, such as numbers and propositions, but let us furthermore confine ourselves to real objects, objects that are always in time and sometimes also in space. The awareness of real objects is of two sorts. The sort heretofore most investigated in phenomenology is best called *presentational awareness*. It has three subspecies, namely perception, recollection, and expectation. These differ, respectively, according to whether the real objects intended to in them are in their present, their past, or in their future. They have it in common to be immediately acquainted with their objects. There are, e.g., no memory images, for in recollection one is directly aware of previously perceived objects.

Representational awareness contrasts with purely presentational awareness. There are three and only three subspecies to this species. They are best called linguistic awareness, pictorial awareness, and indicational awareness. They have in common to be indirect or mediated awarenesses of their objects. *Pictorial awareness* seems the best subspecies to begin with. This awareness has two levels or strata to it. The infrastratum is intentive to a depiction. This depiction can be a still or moving photograph or a video, a drawing or a painting, but it can also be a bas-relief or a sculpture in the round or an audio recording the awareness of which is predominantly auditory rather than predominantly visual. On the basis or foundation of the awareness of the depiction there is then a founded awareness of that which is depicted in the depiction, the depicted object or even the depictum, as we might on occasion call it.

What is specific to pictorial awareness is that, through a modicum of reflection, we can find a resemblance or similarity between the depiction and the object depicted. The photograph or the tape recording or the audiovisual videotape looks and/or sounds more or less like the person or scene it represents. Pictorial awareness has in common with other subspecies of representational awarenesses to be stratified and as a whole to have two objects. Normally, however, we are representationally aware in an unreflective manner and hence overlook the representing object and the relations of similarity and focus upon the representatum or, in the plural, representata. That we do not normally focus on the founding noetico-noematic stratum reflectively does not signify it is not there or does not determine the awareness of the represented object.

Curiously, the least appreciated species of representational awareness is *indicational awareness*. This is curious, because this is the most highly populated subspecies. Once one can recognize what an indication is, one finds indications practically everywhere. The difference between indications and depictions is that,

when reflected upon, indications are found not to resemble the indicated objects. A lit-up house indicates our friends are home but they are people and do not resemble illuminated rooms. Furniture can be arranged to indicate the relative social power of the people in a place, for example the judge, jury, prosecution and defense, and the audience in a courtroom, but arrangements of furniture resemble neither humans nor social power relationships. A smile may indicate happiness, but happiness is not a facial configuration, which would be required if the visage *depicted* happiness. Probably it is the stunning diversity of indications that impedes their receiving the recognition they are due. Considerably more work at classification and naming is needed for indications. Differences among them include, but are not limited to, the deliberate produced vs. the non-deliberately produced, between humanly produced or artifactual ones and non-artifactual ones, between those produced by the consumers themselves and those produced by others, and between those with communicative intent and those without it.

The third subspecies of representational awareness I call *linguistic awareness*. Under this heading I group speaking and writing as types of expressing and listening and reading as types of comprehending. Linguistic representations can be called expressions or words as well as linguistic representations. Here too the normal attitude is an unreflective one in which we focus on what the words are about, somehow overlooking the words themselves and how they refer. Where expressions and linguistic awareness differ from the intensitive processes and objects as they present themselves of the other two representational subspecies is with respect to their additional degree of complexity. The linguistic representation or expression includes a real object that, by virtue of its audible, tangible, or visible structure, supports, carries, or conveys a concept or, better, a signification. Correlative to the sounds or marks there is either predominantly auditory or predominantly visual perceiving (and the sound- or mark-making) and there are

also processes of thinking in which the signification is constituted. Now it can be said that there is cogitation as well as perception in the *founding stratum* for the founded awareness of that which is spoken about, heard about, read about, written about, or, with Braille, perhaps touched about.

What I have just tried briefly to describe and illustrate are pure types. There are of course mixed types. Television would seem the most familiar case of mixed type, for it displays not only pictures and words but also a rich accompaniment of visual and auditory indications in the music, pacing, and so on. Besides *mixtures* there are *compoundings* of representation. Thus we can talk about depictions of indications, depict texts that are about indications and so on. I have no doubt that mixed and compounded representations are what we deal with most of the time, but I am equally sure that getting clear about the pure types is indispensable for the analysis of the mixed and compounded.

The foregoing sketch may have been considered as non-fictive or serious (in the technical signification), but actually it can be further specified according to whether the represented objects are non-fictive or not. A text can easily represent objects that are merely feigned. As for pictorial awareness, we can become aware of a fictive person on the basis of viewing a statue, for example a statue of a mermaid. And as for indicational awareness, we can easily pretend that odd sounds in the night indicate visits by ghosts. The representations in these cases are non-fictive, but of course we can also feign expressions, depictions, and indications whether or not the objects represented by them are non-fictive for us or not.

3.

My approach is phenomenological. This signifies that I rely on reflective observation. The foregoing has emphasized the noematic and how the representation represents the represented object. This can be balanced with a noetic

emphasis and additional expressions clarified. I have . spoken generically of representational awareness. Such awareness is part of the consumption as well as of the production of representations. In linguistic awareness this is the difference between speaking and writing on the one hand and hearing and reading on the other. In pictorial representation, there is production in painting, drawing, sculpting, film directing and so on and correlatively there is consumption in viewing and watching.

Much work is needed in this respect as in others for indicational awareness. Gesturing, beckoning, and signaling are producings of representations, but I am not familiar with even that much differentiation of terminology for the types of the consumption of them; it seems we just say we see, perceive, or "read" them. Part of the reason for this might be the vast diversity of such representations and also the variety of the areas in practical and professional life in which they are relied on. For example, the indications relied on in medicine are called symptoms. But what are the indications specific to driving trucks and other vehicles over the highway? The expression *road sign* is already taken for the relevant linguistic representation. Another reason why indicational awareness seems under-analyzed may be the way in which indications often function unnoticed in the background, which is not to say that, as in the case of music in film, indications cannot play a powerful role.

It occurs to me that the production/consumption distinction that seems to work fairly well for linguistic and pictorial representation does not work as well for indicational awareness. Gray hair indicates maturity, but it is unusual that this indication is produced or even imitated except in theatrical activities. Nevertheless, it is consumed. If we make a distinction between the artifactual and the non-artifactual, then all or most linguistic and pictorial representation is artifactual, while at least a great deal of indicational awareness has to do with non-artifactual connections that we have learned, such as that between sunsets and the weather the

next day.

It deserves emphasis that the consumption of representations is learned. Obviously we learn to speak and hear and later to read and write. It is not so obvious that we learn patterns of gesture, intonation and pacing that are strictly non-linguistic modes of representation in the expressing and comprehending of significations. As any teacher knows, there are postures and facial configurations that indicate whether hearers are or are not taking seriously or enjoying what they hear. But it takes little if any learning to become aware of many depicted objects on the basis of resembling depictions. If we have seen the bottom of a foot, perceiving a footprint motivates an awareness not merely of a foot but of somebody who walked through this place earlier. More learning is involved in viewing sculpture and representational painting. We are never done learning to consume indications, whether or not we focus on them. For example, a closed bathroom door indicates that the bathroom is in use and leaving the door ajar indicates the availability of the facilities. But at least one person I know proceeded on this basis for over forty years before he accidentally learned the consternation that could be caused at a party by leaving the door of an empty bathroom shut.

Further analysis of representation would obviously have relevance in film and television studies, more generally in cultural studies, and in various other human-scientific types of inquiry. It is important to know what sort of discipline one is working in. I chiefly work in epistemology and in philosophy of science, so let me discuss the use of the phenomenology of representation in those areas.

Truth is a well established issue in epistemology. I support the theory whereby a proposition is true if and only if the matters the proposition is about are as alleged in it. Whether those matters are as alleged is determined prepredicatively by whether the evidencing of the objects is there to justify the believing in them. For example, if my companion says that the cat is stalking a bird

in the garden, it may be true for her if she is looking out the window and seeing and thus justifiably believing in that behavior on the part of the cat. It can be true for me if I accept her testimony as an eye witness, but I can also go to the window and evidence and thereby justifiably believe in the matter in question for myself and thus most originally have a referent believed in that makes the proposition true.

Thus conceived, truth plainly pertains to linguistic awareness, for propositions are significations conveyed by linguistic representations or words, by sounds or marks, and their mode of representation is called reference. What about the other types of representational awareness? Is there not something like verification that occurs when we compare photographs with the photographed objects that we perceive or remember? I am not referring to a proposition that we might affirm after we see that the depiction is an accurate likeness but rather the evidencing itself in which the degree of resemblance is given. Likewise, we are constantly testing whether indications are reliable. For example, we can learn that one of our friends does not always answer her telephone and hence in her case no answer does not indicate she is not home. Consequently, I generalize beyond the theory of truth and call for a general theory of *representational adequacy* within which the specific theory of truth concerns the adequacy of the representations in linguistic awareness, i.e., linguistic adequacy.

Pictorial and *indicational adequacy* name the other two species. Analogous to truth, a non-linguistic representation is adequate if the represented object is justifiably believed in as represented. After comparing a few photos with the perceived or remembered object that was photographed, we trust photos to be accurate. This is not the best of justifications because there can be fake or doctored photographs, but it is still justification of a weaker sort. Then again, we cannot confirm that George Washington looked as Stuart painted him by remembering or

going to look at the first president of the United States, but we can consider other depictions and written descriptions of him, and also texts about the adequacy of Stuart's painting from people who were familiar with Washington himself. Absent a preponderance of data to the contrary, we are justified in believing he looked as Stuart makes us pictorially aware of him.

Concerning indications again, it deserves emphasis that a large proportion of those that we are interested in scientifically as well as practically are causes indicating effects and effects indicating causes. We are constantly learning about these also. After observing many causal connections, we come to believe in causes and effects as indicated by events. Once established, this belief as well as the representational awareness continue so long as the causal connections do not fail.

Matters become complicated when justified belief in a non-linguistically represented object makes the representation in a linguistic awareness of that object true. "They are home" is true if the lights being on adequately indicates that the friends are in their house. Then again, there are mixed and compounded adequacies, so that the visually depicted components of a videotape can be more or less adequate than the linguistic description also recorded and reproduced. Certainly much more work would be needed in a defensible account of representational adequacy, but I trust that these few remarks indicate how one might proceed phenomenologically.

The phenomenology of representation is helpful in the philosophy of natural science for understanding how the directly unobservable can be believed in and also how microscopes and telescopes as well as the growing variety of so-called imaging equipments work in our observation, which is often indirect rather than direct. Some equipments produce pictorial representations, some produce indications, some produce expressions (numerals are linguistic), many are mixed and compounded, and only some literally involve reading, although that is what it

is often called because appropriate technical expressions have not been developed.

Like the philosophies of the physical and biological sciences, the philosophy of human science and, in particular, the philosophy of archaeology are parts of epistemology. I confine myself now to archaeology as an historical human science. To keep my discussion brief, I omit considering the use of such equipments as infra-red satellite photography and ground-penetrating radar. When we ask what archaeologists do, the answer is that they seek to describe and explain long-term continuity and change in human worlds. If it is *prehistoric* archaeology—and there has been literacy for merely 5,000 years—then linguistic awareness is not involved in the observation that is employed, although of course it is involved when archaeologists communicate with one another about ancient non-linguistic representations. If we ask what archaeology's immediate objects are, the answer is that they are non-verbal remains found in and on the land and also under the water.

Archaeological observation is representational in a non-linguistic way.

The role of anciently produced depictions, such as statues and vase paintings, is actually quite small in scientific archaeology, although not in art history. What is more important, however, is how, for example, a projectile point indicates that game of some species, say deer, was hunted and arrowheads do not resemble deer. They are not depictions but indications. Generally, then, archaeological remains represent human lifeways and the archaeological facts are what is justifiably believed to have been the case in ancient behavior. How believing in the long past objects of mixed and compounded representational awareness is justified is a complicated story this is not the time to try to tell. I might mention, however, that while it can be justified through analogical reasoning, it is not itself a matter of thinking with concepts but rather a representational awareness of human behavior in the past beyond memory. Obviously, this is also not a reading of texts; arrowheads are not linguistic expressions.

To close, let me make it explicit that I am well aware that this exposition raises more questions than it answers. But this is the way of all genuine investigation, something else I learned from Aron Gurwitsch.

Reference

Gurwitsch (1984). *Marginal consciousness*, L. Embree ed. Athens, OR: Ohio University Press Series in Continental Thought.