

HIGHER-ORDER OBJECTS

1. INFERIORA AND SUPERIORA

The attentive reader of Meinong's essay "Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung..." will notice that, from the very beginning, he introduces the concept of non-independence in relation to the facts of direct experience or perception. There must be a reason for Meinong's use of the negative forms 'non-independence' and non 'dependence' when quite acceptable terms from any dictionary are available. The reason is the following: we exist in a world in which observable events are independent of each other ; that is, we live in a world which cannot be identified in a flux of experiences which are totally interconnected or — to use an expression by W. James — bound by "ubiquitous relations". Least of all do we exist in a world which fluctuates through continuous gradations which neither separate one event from another nor reduce themselves into definite borders between one thing and another, as happens in Bergson's metaphysics, where the task of fashioning this indistinct flux into 'facts' is left to needs and to purely pragmatic exigencies. From the beginning, Meinong's thought assumes a world which is no more than what it actually is, when it is not being merely thought or represented, but when it is being carefully observed in an endeavour to avoid the distractions of a philosophical language corrupted by the idea that everything is within everything and that everything depends on everything else. Before it is problematized or even 'spoken', Meinong's world is that collection of enumerations which any of us, at this moment-now, finds within his or her ascertainable horizon and considers in the spirit of one who has the task of filling an inventory. In short, Meinong's world is the world as it is.

Those who start from an indistinct and magmatic experiential flux later find themselves confronted by the task of separating things, and this they must do

whether they address others in writing or in person (the last line of Plotinus' *Aenneades* describes the only circumstance in which this task would be futile), because some of the words used in utterance of the theory must correspond to something which is not confusable with anything else. This task is difficult and demanding. Indeed it is sometimes even grotesque, as when Bergson teaches us that our needs like beams of light affect indistinct and continuous becoming, and thus receive usable and well-defined objects. One may wonder if any section would be adequate for any object or if in the indistinct the invisible objects which light extracts already harboured, and how the light-bearer could know that they were in that very place (and usually needs are in a hurry). Of course, the same applies to current 'constructivist' theories of perception. Deducing facts and real events from a tissue of functional relations or from a flux is a task for metaphysics; while one of the duties of science is to show which of a vast collection of facts are independent of each other, how some of them are formed by constituents which are non-independent of each other, which are functionally connected in a definite way, observable and, if we wish, formalizable.

Thus the independence of the systems that fill the space of world with different roles is primitive; and the non-independence of observables belonging to some system is derived.

Four nuts thrown onto the table one after the other form a quadrilateral, the shape of which depends on the position of the nuts. Slightly moving just one of them changes more than one property of the quadrilateral. The quadrilateral is therefore non-independent of the position of the nuts. But it is independent of the colour of the tablecloth, of the size of the table on which the nuts have been thrown, of the (natural or artificial) light which illuminates the room, of the noise made by the two children playing with other nuts, and — note — of the philosophical opinions of those observing the nuts, as well as of any theory of perception. The quadrilateral is a higher-order object; the four nuts are its 'inferiora'; the 'superiora' depend on the 'inferiora'. There is an asymmetric relationship between 'superiora' and 'inferiora': a 'superius' without 'inferiora' is not possible, but the reverse is not the case. "What is now the bearer of a higher-order object may later appear without it".¹ One nut may be found in a drawer, another in a shopping-bag.

¹ Meinong 1899, § 3.

2. STIMULI AS *ENTIA RATIONIS*

The tiles for a mosaic may be stored in different boxes; those who look into these boxes will fail to gain an idea of the mosaic or of any coloured representation. It is evident, though, that an already-constructed mosaic is formed only by tiles. "The fact is that if something appears as an 'inferius' this does not say anything about its importance in supporting a 'superius'".² Careful observation of a tile never reveals the place which it must occupy in order to help construct a certain picture. There is nothing inherent to a tile which places it in a necessary relationship with other tiles. But the overall scene depicted by the mosaic requires that each tile must occupy a particular position.

Although these obvious and very simple observations mark a clear advance on the speculative schemes of psychophysics, they contain the germ of an error.

Classical psychophysics is distinctly speculative in character: it compares various parameters of the physical stimuli that, in controlled situations, impinge on the peripheral sense organs with sense impressions or sensations, or more severely with certain quantitative data that is possible to obtain in different ways from the observers. Comparisons are drawn between parts of the world pertaining to different regions — or better data located at different levels: so-called 'stimuli' and sensations. Stimuli are obviously invisible to the observer, but their relative sensations (even before the subject starts to show the behaviour that the experimenter expects from him/her) are obviously ascertainable. Stimuli are invisible because they are ideally located at the beginning of a chain of facts which are more or less known and which subsequently in a mysterious — and hypothetical — manner give rise to a sensation. True, in the laboratory we often hear expressions such as "when the mouse sees the stimulus...". However, such expressions are merely the dialectal remnants of an imprecise way of behaving in which the verb 'to see' has a totally different meaning from its conventional one. Nobody ever 'sees' stimuli, by definition. But the sensations (if we insist on thus denoting certain elements of direct experience available to observation by one or more spectators) are ascertainable facts, again by definition.

Psychophysics then establishes the relations between ideal entities — *entia rationis* (stimuli) which are the result of certain real operations — and fragments of an effective ascertaining. The stimulus is operationally defined a moment before it has impinged on the peripheral organ. The sensation has no need of any definition. What visibly happens — in this speculative framework — is regarded as the effect of an indirectly defined cause. The cause lies in the space-time of physics, the effect in the effective time-flow and in a region of

² Meinong 1899, § 3.

the space of ascertainties. The hereafter lies in this world, and in between there are infinite models of metaphorical minds. Ideally located in these minds are all possible justifications for the anomalies revealed by comparison of a certain representation of stimuli against the real and ascertainable features of some sensation. Meinong was well aware of this (the question is not posed in a manner qualitatively different from before), and it is exactly what he wanted to avoid. Stimuli are (ideally) parts of physical reality; the colours, the sounds and the tiles of any mosaic are parts of the real world. Any attempt to explain the latter as effects of the former is precarious, and it is an error to think that the former are constitutive elements of the latter. An observable fact certainly has its constitutive elements, it is enough to observe it carefully to see these elements implicated. An observable fact certainly obeys to laws: we live, not in a chaos of sensations, but among things with which we interact. There are thus laws that govern the union of constitutive elements, and they must concern explanation of how things are made. This is scientific curiosity, one that is wholly naturalistic but also totally central to any programme of foundation of a philosophy of knowledge. Only a few years before Meinong, Mach had shown very well, in principle, that this was the fact of the matter but without drawing the furthest consequences entailed by his premises. What he called "space sensation" was in fact already form and structure and required the use of a logic different from that of sensations.

The speculative step just described separates the problem of perceptions from psychophysics and founds the science of objects, and any science of observables in general, on an epistemologically autonomous basis. The question is no longer 'under what physical conditions do the sense organs evoke a certain world of subjective sensations?', but 'what constitutive norms control the formation and the stability of things?'.

3. MULTIPLYING THE NUTS

There are the tiles, therefore, and there is the completed mosaic. There are norms, discoverable by various empirical and observational procedures, which connect the completed mosaic to the visible elements into which it is divisible. There operates, in some way, a relation of 'production' which starts from elements and converges on the completed product. It seems logical that the nuts and the tiles are the 'inferiora' and that organizations of elements are the 'superiora' formed by relationships which connect 'inferiora' to each other in various ways. Hence it follows that the 'inferiora', taken together with the connecting

relationships, determine the ascertainable properties of 'superiora'; and from this derives the asymmetry of the relation between the latter and the former.

It is here that Meinong fails to see the limit which obstructs the complete development of his theory of objects. He overlooks the fact that the 'inferiora', by entering into a reciprocal relationship, may stop being what they were when they were not part of that relation, thereby rendering the assertion "what is now the bearer of an object of superior order may later appear without it" impossible to interpret.³ It is important to understand that this *may* happen, and hence that it does not always and necessarily happen (i) because by understanding it we do not tend towards a universal interactionism like 'everything depends on everything' and (ii) because this speculative choice confines the problem to the strictly empirical level, obliging any speculation on terms and their relations to specify themselves into files which are not only ascertainable but even experimental. Experimental in the naturalistic sense, as in a laboratory.

This is by no means to imply that any inferius preserves its properties intact when it joins a system of relationships; that is, when it starts to occupy a specific and discernible place in the whole of a certain 'thing'.

Nor, moreover, does it imply that a pair of definitely interconnected inferiora, with or without loss of their initial (and now already ideal) identity, will not come jointly to constitute an inferius for something else. But since it *may* happen that an inferius changes its aspect by entering into a relationship with something which is also observable, in this case we will have to consider it a superius, transformed by its new contacts (if it is true that superiora change as a result of transformations made to inferiora). That is to say, a system of relationships (both large or small) could be the inferius of a term — no longer as such, of course — which functional dependence has rendered into a superius.

This does not entail that we must imagine terms and relationships as nuts and spatial distances, or as tiles and spatial contiguities, i.e. as pieces of things that are smaller than the compounds in which they may appear; compounds which are necessarily bigger than the elements into which they can be broken down. This aspect of the question is present, and can be addressed in various ways: but it does not provide the basis for the superiora/inferiora relationship, which is functional. And if we examine the interplay of functional dependencies within a complex of relationships among apparent inferiora, we soon discover that there are also relationships of mutual foundation among the aspects which are present in objects. So much for the theory.

Without conducting analysis of a real and complex object like a pipe or six bars of a piano sonata, let us examine a simpler example obtained by multiplying Meinong's nuts (Fig. 1).

³ Meinong 1899, § 3.

Fig. 1a

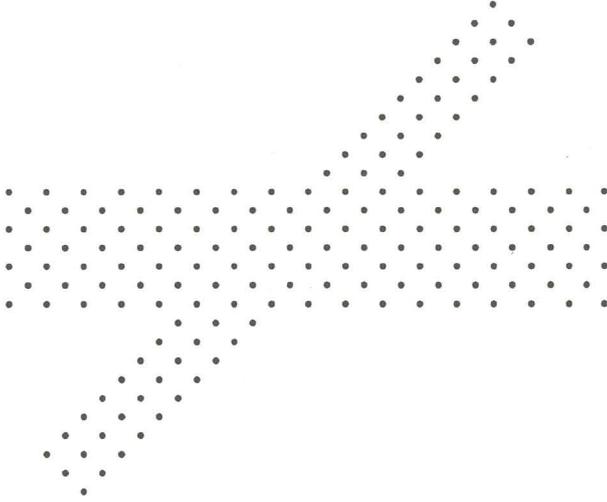
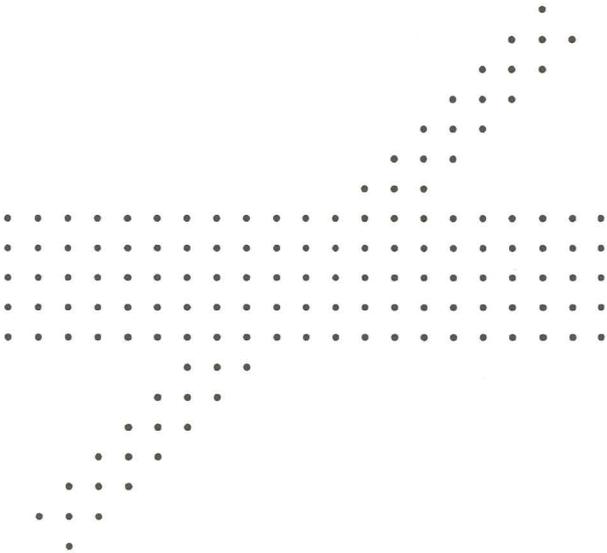


Fig. 1b



The dots stand in certain very simple spatial relationships (the repetition of an identical spatial relation). In each of the two pictures they form two rectangular shapes, one thinner than the other. The thinner one is arranged crosswise. In Fig. 1a the thinner rectangle is above the bigger one, in that at the right it is below. Why do some points placed in the central part of the two pictures belong in the first case to one and in the other case to the other of the two? In other words, what should be changed in the pictures so that this does not happen?

We can remove, for example, all the overflowing dots from the bigger and horizontal body in the picture 1a. Although this is banal it compels us to say that the relationships among the overflowing dots that have been removed are foundational with respect to the pattern of the dots in the centre (at the intersection, as it were, between the two shapes). They form two superiora that are inferiora for the status of those other dots — which are the constitutive inferiora, through spatial relationships, of the central part of the transversal bar. But the transversal bar stays *above* that body, which is also rectangular but horizontal, and formed in its turn out of homogeneously distributed dots. This means that the dots in question belong to the transversal bar and form a single entity with the projecting appendices towards the north-east and south-west. But, as we have seen, they belong to it because it has these appendices. So: *is the bar the foundation the appendices, or are the appendices the foundation for the bar?*

The horizontal shape also passes behind the bar: although the bar is superposed on this body it does not interrupt it, and for this reason we say that it stays below. So also this shape, in the area of the intersection, is made up of dots, but they are not visible because the transversal bar covers them. All of these dots are located exactly behind a certain dot which constitutes the horizontal bar. The occluded part is present 'behind', with that typical form of presence which characterizes all partially occluded objects (amodal presence).

The horizontal band is partially occluded; the occluded part is of the same material as the visible parts, i.e. it is made up of dots which are arranged like the knots of a square-mesh net. But none of its dots in that zone is visible, because it is hidden by a dot of the horizontal bar. Hence the inferiora are invisible, but the texture is not interrupted and these dots exist amodally: they — far from being founding inferiora — form a superius that is founded by the visible parts of the horizontal bar, which, according to Meinong's logic, should find everywhere its inferius made of dots, but it is not because it is a superius! Now: *do the visible dots found the horizontal band, or does the horizontal band found its dots where they are visible?*

The above reasoning can be repeated for Figure 1b, and would be a good exercise for the reader; indeed, it would be even more interesting to apply it to two further, somewhat more complex, pictures (Fig. 2), one of which has a square with two opposing corners included in the square-mesh net. The

question is how these corners are founded by the dots which lies round about; and if it is not the square that founds the specific appearance of 'corner' to two of these dots, then this — in an excessively simplified conception — would contribute to found the picture in its globality.

Fig. 2a

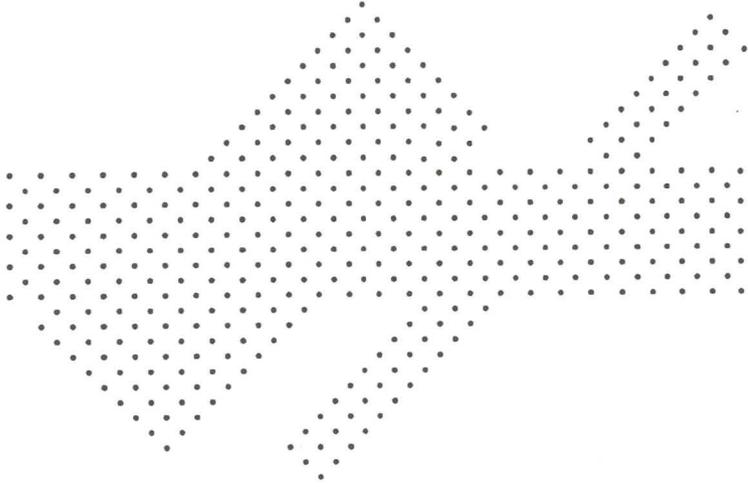
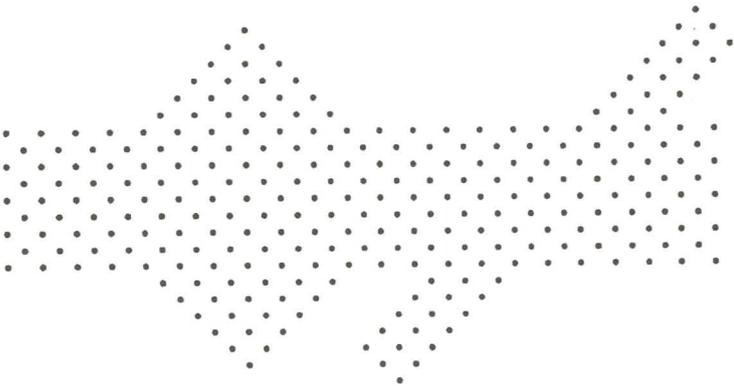


fig. 2b



4. *ESSE EST PERCIPI*

The postulate of inferiora which invariably remain the same, and of superiora which derive from inferiora has a certain sense that I shall now seek to clarify. When conducting the experiment from which the above examples were taken, I operated only on dots. I took self-adhesive black disks and placed them in certain places chosen at random according to an abstract experimental plan — i.e. according to the stages of a certain logical scheme — and stuck them on sheets of cardboard. In building these ‘patterns’ I moved only disks, I operated only on dots; and, in a certain sense, the whole result depended on the position of the dots.

Isn’t this a good reason to think that the real inferiora are the disks, and that the real superiora are what remains? If we take as the independent variable what our hands have manipulated in order to produce certain effects, we must answer in the affirmative. And our answer will be correct within the framework of a simple and pragmatic realism: what is ascertainably given is real; and real, therefore, is any form of observable under any condition, with all its discernible properties, as well as the relations among such properties, provided that the latter present themselves in a phenomenally explicit manner; provided, that is, they are not the result of inductions, conjectures or abstracting reductions to their basic elements — even for the noblest and most fruitful purposes.

This distinction is not difficult to draw. It is enough to distinguish between what is actually present in ongoing experience and what is ‘thought of’, between the cognitive integrations of phenomena and phenomena themselves. I *see* that the triangle has three sides or three angles, but I *know* that the sum of the internal angles is an angle of 180° : I do not see this latter property, but I know it. I also *know* that I cannot make a billiard-ball move with the idea of a billiard-cue; and I *know* that my ashtray is a Christmas present, although I simply *see* that it is transparent and even heavy (I do not need to weigh it: I *see* it is heavy).

Suffice it to say that the ascertainable properties of things are real. *Esse est percipi* and vice versa; and this is in perfect agreement with Meinong’s theory.

When I arrange my black dots in a certain order on the white cardboard sheet, at first I see the creation of something that relates to Meinong’s four nuts, little geometrizations of visible space, limited objects of a higher order: let us call it of the first level. Here there are terms and relations, nuts and virtual lines among nuts. These are clearly visible inferiora which do not change their aspect because they have been stuck in a particular pattern; and they perform a role in the clearly visible superiora based upon them.

But an unexpected phenomenon arises at this point; one irreducible to the pure geometry of the position of the dots. A community of dots already stuck or

about to be stuck on the cardboard is self-segregated in comparison with other dots already attached to the surface. Nothing has been done to isolate this community as an autonomous shape from the rest. A good phenomenological analysis will explain the reason for this segregation, although it is analysis which cannot be conducted here. Since this new shape does not limit the other one, but is placed upon it, so that we can reasonably talk of non-visible parts in the objects under our observation. Therefore a front and a back, even the white of the background among certain rows of dots, becomes clearer. The experimental phenomenological explanation will have to consider all these circumstances and verify how one helps to determine another, or how co-determination comes about between two or among more of them. The phenomenological analysis able to explain these facts cannot use the only two ingredients represented by dots and by the relations among dots.

It is certain, however, that construction of the picture — its material realization on the sheet of cardboard — uses only dots and spatial relations, i.e. a ruler and a pair of compasses. Herein lies Meinong's mistake (which is also the mistake made by many other interpreters with little familiarity with experimental investigation): namely that of believing that the ingredients of complex structures can be reduced to the elements in constructing them. We may call this the 'operational error'. It prevents us from seeing that the final perceptive outcome, apart from a certain complexity which is in any case not substantial, depends on a subtle dialectic between factors and components and components and factors of such components which are irreducible to the act of arrange material dots and to their positional relationships.

The procedure following in constructing the pattern is not important: since the completed product is under observation, it has no history; and the knowledge that it has been realized using particular materials and according to such rules constitutes a pure and simple cognitive integration of the considered object which — as a real and observable structure — does not have any observable consequence upon it.

5. OBSERVATIONS ON COLOURS

We built our objects out of dots in order to respect the example of the four nuts and to show the inner limitations to each theory of 'inferiora-superiora'; but it is obvious that not many of the objects of common experience are constructed in this manner. Retrieving the inferiora in the world of common experience is a difficult undertaking, because we usually have to do with relatively homogeneous surfaces and with more or less clearcut divisions between homogeneous

regions. Under these more usual conditions it is not easy to distinguish — analytically — a thing from the parts of a thing. Meinong develops a number of important insights in his analysis of this serious question. First, also homogeneity has parts. Consider a uniformly coloured square: there is a part above and a part below, a right part and a left part. Although these parts are not visibly defined by borders, we cannot deny that they exist. We may also speak of the upper left part and of the lower right part of the square, or of its central zone. A segment is not made up of dots, as geometry maintains, but its discernible parts are its extremities and the portion lying between them. Our reason for saying this is not that if we tell somebody to mark a spot in the upper right part of a square he does so, or if we tell him to consider the right extremity of a horizontally placed segment he does so; nor is it because, when looking at the different parts of homogeneously coloured shapes, our eyes move here and there. We say it because, even if our eyes rest on a spot of the picture and we say nothing to anybody, and if we do not think of anything, the picture continues to have distinct regions, even though they are not definitely divided. Any division will be in some way arbitrary, but some divisions will be less arbitrary than others. “Having parts does not mean being divided into parts”.⁴ There is a special kind of chromatic homogeneity, namely shading, which is the just perceptible and progressive passage from some chromatic parameters to others. A horizontally arranged rectangle, like a piece of ribbon, can be red at its left edge and light pink at its right one, and between these two edges the red progressively merges into a different and increasingly lighter pink. The ribbon has differently coloured parts, although we cannot definitely establish the border of any of them.

One notes with interest that if a clearly visible vertical black line is drawn in the middle of this piece of ribbon to mark the border between its right and left part, the lighter part unexpectedly becomes much lighter, and the darker one much redder, as if the border line concealed a change and not a transition (the gradation is, by hypothesis, the same everywhere). Being a part defined by a border it confers a sort of autonomy to the zone, and a sort of right to the internal redistribution of colour. I do not know if Meinong was aware of this observation of Mach’s, but it is assuredly of considerable importance in the complex phenomenology of the zones of world called ‘parts’.

Furthermore, the opposite phenomenon exists, as evidenced when slight changes are made to the situation considered. If we take a chromatic atlas — for instance Harald Köpper’s *Dumont’s Farben Atlas* or the Italian equivalent published by Zanichelli and edited by Folco Douglas Scott — as the eye moves across the page, we note that shadings of all colours and level gradually and

⁴ Meinong 1899, § 14.

persistently develop from one side to the other, from one corner of the table to the other. Only careful observation of a single, isolated rectangle of colour allows us, not without difficulty, to see that the colour internal to it is homogeneously distributed; but it is sufficient for our attention suddenly to include a slightly larger field and the colour of any chromatic tessera seems gradually to merge with the colours of the adjoining tesseras, as if the tinted stamps were rather holes made in the white sheet, and we see a completely shaded tint that is toning down with an identical gradient in any place behind this white grating. Reflection on these simple circumstances allows us to address at the level of experimental phenomenology two opposing tendencies which connect the parts and the whole at a mere discourse level ("Parts are unity as well as the whole they form").⁵ On the one hand, there is the autonomy of the part which, supported by a border, tends to be internally as homogeneous as possible; on the other, there is the hegemony of the whole — i.e. the whole page of one of these atlases — which, in spite of the borders between side and side, tends to impose its own global characteristic of gradation also on the single tesseras that constitute it. In the first case, the coloured element endowed with gradation tends to lose it; in the second, the homogeneously coloured element tends to acquire the gradation that it lacks. "It is well known how easily a 'violinist' with 'feeling' can change discreet into a melody, no matter of what sort, in the more in-discreet continuum".⁶

This is only one of the questions we address when we seek to develop a theory of the production laying (existing) between superiora and inferiora from cases in which the latter are punctiform events to cases in which they are portions of surfaces which are homogeneous in themselves (also shading is a form of homogeneity) and in some way delimited. Meinong says that colours "probably or surely lack the faculty of appearing as objects of superior order";⁷ but cases like this clearly demonstrate that even very limited and simple chromatic structures can undergo internal changes caused by characteristics that are present elsewhere, and in this sense they resemble the object constituted by the four nuts, rather than this or that nut of the four in question.

6. TEMPORAL STRUCTURES

Matters are further complicated when the structures considered (I use the term 'structures' to refer to objects that resist analysis based on the 'inferiora-

⁵ Meinong 1899, § 14.

⁶ Meinong 1899, § 14.

⁷ Meinong 1899, § 3.

superiora' scheme, according to the examples discussed above) have a temporal development. This complication is reflected in the complexity of Meinong's arguments, which in the section devoted to time — the section which concludes his study of higher-order objects — occasionally border on confusion. As often happens in texts by authors of genius, the farrago of Meinong's argument is frequently shot through with astonishing insights. The first consists in his analysis of the prolonged observation of an object which homogeneously fills everything visible, the homogeneous blue of the sky. It is impossible to mistake the blue of the sky, even when the mind is preoccupied by physicalistic perplexities: this homogeneously coloured total field "is (we might almost say) insuperably reliable". Indeed, "it could of course be hallucinatory too, without compromising the validity of the knowledge derived from perception": the observer "will be always allowed to linger as long as he wants, practically speaking, on the object of his observation, without a sensible weakening in the clarity and reliability with which he knows the object of his observation".⁸ This paradigm comprises two important concepts: the certainty of perceptive experience as such, and the restriction of such certainty to the perceptive event 'under observation'; i.e. as long as it lasts. It is less easy to be certain of the progress, and analysis of series or temporal structures involves the presence of the progress.

Meinong's second exceptionally important intuition consists in his distinction between lasting and punctiform objects. This distinction captures with extreme precision the link that joins space with time. "A point is what has no parts" runs the Euclidean definition. A punctiform object in time has no parts, in fact. If we rap the surface of a table with the point of a pencil, the 'tap' is perfectly perceptible and distinct against the background of the usual noises around us, but it is impossible to distinguish between the moment at which it starts and that at which it ends: in the 'tap' the beginning and the end coincide. This very important property can be captured by a paradox: *when the punctiform event happens it has already happened.*

Prolonged events have a beginning and an end: a single ring of the telephone starts and then stops. *When such events happen they are happening.* We can perceive them in their central part, in the memory of their beginning and as we wait for them to cease. In these circumstances we may achieve exact perception of what is meant by Meinong's expression "time of presentness" (which he borrows from Stern).⁹ Before being a concept, the psychic time of presentness is an experience. And it is a curious experience given that even though it is the container within which any real experience necessarily happens (and is also

⁸ Meinong 1899, § 16.

⁹ Stern 1897.

imagined, if we think of an act and not of its content), most people spend their lives without realizing it; without noticing, that is, that when they listen to a melody or watch a train pass by they are witnessing moment by moment the collapse of the world into an irretrievable 'already been' past, one painfully close to the becoming of any event. It might be said this is a seldom experienced phenomenon. On the other hand, von Helmholtz found by means of careful investigation that almost no adult is aware that he or she has perceived after-images in his or her life provided that they have invariably occurred in the visual field after the prolonged observation of colours or lights.

'Time of presentness', I believe, eludes the attention of the majority because, even before being an experience, it is a condition of any experience. Hence psychology has found it difficult to isolate the question of the perception of the 'unity' of events precisely because the existence of unity renders a non-chaotic experience in the Kantian sense possible, and it has consequently developed a categorial role in the constitution of immediate factuality. The same applies to identity. These are concepts of great antiquity which refer to percepts discovered only much later and submitted to phenomenological analysis because — for almost any speculative purpose — discussion of them seemingly exhausted the field of possible explorations.

'Time of presentness' (later called psychic present, phenomenal present, or — referring to Bergson — *durée réelle*) is on certain occasions perceivable as a clearly present aspect of the event that occurs within it. When the telephone begins to ring, for a moment we hear perfectly that it has just started — but we do not have sufficient time to focus on the idea that it is already enduring: it has evidently started, and it is homogeneously present like a sound which started a moment ago (different from a sound that lasted for a period, and also from a small sound or continuous noise that we suddenly realize we are hearing, instantly deducting it from our distraction). Sometimes a sound to which we were not paying attention suddenly stops, and we instantaneously hear that 'it has been', that it lasted until a moment ago, and that this silence is just present, present in the present.

Punctiform objects fall within the time of presentness in their completeness, and with all their characteristics, even when they are somewhat more extensive than the 'tap' produced by a pencil lightly rapped on the table. They exhibit all their observable properties jointly (if they are sounds: loudness, intensity, timbre, harmonic function in the melodic context, relative duration, and so on) in a fraction of time of presentness — which, note, is not 'their' time of presentness, but the time of presentness of the experience in which they are included — even if sometimes, after their transformation into immediate memory, doubts arise as to their connotations, and the impression remains that these events were too short to be well observed. However, also this characteris-

tic belongs to their observable properties; properties for which Meinong coined the appropriate term "transient events".

The fact that these events occur entirely within the realm of ascertainties is demonstrated by uncountable circumstances which can be subjected, with few technical complications, to laboratory experimentation.

Suppose that a friend is playing on the piano a rapid cadenza like the one assigned to the harpsichord in the fifth *Brandenburg Concert*, or simply a rapid scale. It is evident after superficial logical-linguistic analysis that an event of this kind is not describable — moment by moment — by the statement: "I hear just one note, I remember many of them in the immediate past and I wait for many others in the near future; moreover, the note I now hear is of a duration equal to that of the notes I hold in my memory". The 'fit' between event and description breaks down, because the event is not made in this way. (The first part of the description is valid for the act of listening to a quite long note after listening to rapid flourishes of notes). The event is constituted in such a manner that only mention of the presence of many little notes together authorizes a truthful description; but it must involve a succession: "I hear a rapid sequence of notes which is similar to an already occurring rapidity in the immediate past".

If the time of presentness were a moment long, say a thousandth of second, then we would hear only one note and would remember the previous ones according to the first description. But if the 'fitness' of such a description fails, this means that things are not made thus. A problem arises here: the five or six notes that I am now listening to are all equally present, and it is impossible to say which of them is more present than the others. But since they come one after the other, and since the sense of the melody resides precisely in this, they are necessarily in succession, i.e. not present together. This paradox enjoins acceptance; or better it is a contradiction which needs to be tolerated. It lies in the linguistic device used to emphasise facts rather than in the facts themselves. The experience of rapid sequences of events is formed by successive events that are all jointly present. Everyday language has been fashioned to deal with gross matters, and the technical languages of philosophy, as well as of those sciences which seldom use formal instruments, often contain absurdities which derive from this fact. Not surprisingly, a linguistically paradoxical expression is an effectively good phenomenological description, if facts stay in this way. And they exactly stay so: I would ask the reader to stop reading, take a pencil, paying attention to what is going to happen, and produce a rapid discharge, almost obliging his hand to tremble, keeping the point of his pencil very close to the surface. The reader will assume the acoustic result of this motor behaviour with extreme attention, trying — as it were — to intercept the presumed 'tic' that is more present than the others, to realize that it doesn't

exist. Indeed, going on in the operation more times, since the exercise which is repeated makes the production of quite rapid discharges easier, he surprisingly will find at a certain moment that it is impossible to attribute a certain heard thrust to a certain movement of the hand, because the motor discharge soon assumes an almost independent development, and that is merely parallel to the acoustic succession of the thrusts; without, on the other hand, a sure biunivocal relationship among the elements of a series or of another one.

I ask the reader to consider this pause in his reading as a printed example on the page, as if it were a picture (for instance no. 3). Producing an acoustic example (in this case a recording of Paganini's *Perpetual Movement* would also perfectly fit; after some bars, in fact, this composition evokes a vivid sense of simultaneous presence in the succession, in "resounding together one after the other, but which one after which other?") is exactly like inserting a picture into the text. It is, in other words, an invitation to suspend for a moment the logical philosophical angers of the higher faculties to make room the pre-categorially real field — i.e. reality — which any speculative farrago wants to bear, and that in the meanwhile stays there, as it is, without showing concussion for our argumentative efforts. There are pictures that on the page, don't show anything of them, like the diagrams of engineers, but show only themselves (this is a typically Brentanian concept).

Time of presentness is hardly accepted by Meinong, and this is as it should be, because it demonstrates that it is a concept that *must* be accepted, willy-nilly. English philosophy (after Russell) often provides a very appropriate example: "if the universe had been created two minutes ago, with all that it comprises, memories and testimonies of the past and illusions of history and of autobiography... how would we know that a divine trick had been played on us?". Nobody, as far as I know, has ever tried to shorten the time between now and this supposed creation. A minute ago. Half a minute ago (more and more). But not four milliseconds ago! This is nonsense, because four milliseconds ago I was here, under my direct control. The present that results from a creation of two minutes ago cannot arise from a creation that is supposedly part of it, that perhaps divides it in the middle (if time of presentness lasts 150 msec., how can its creation be imagined as happening 75 msec. ago?). If Meinong had considered this problem, it would have persuaded him to accept Stern's time of presentness with less reluctance. What probably annoyed him was that he had to surrender to the crude presence of a few simple facts.

7. THE CASE OF THE LIVED PRESENT

A discovery by Benussi — Meinong's disciple — confirms that it is possible to restrict the time of presentness in certain circumstances, and therefore to move the moment of Russell's false creation too much near in the times axis in physics. In a replication of Benussi's experiment by Vicario (see Vicario 1973), an electronic device produced sounds in the sequence La (100 msec) — white noise (35 msec) — Sol (100 msec): La and Sol being the keys located more or less in the middle of the piano keyboard (La 440).¹⁰

In the presence of this brief acoustic discharge it is impossible not to hear the following sequence: La — Sol — very brief pause — noise. In the programmed sequence of sounds produced by the device, the white noise came between the two notes. The acoustic event, however, contains two sounds in rapid succession, a very quick fall from La to Sol, and, well separated by them, a 'crak', a very brief noise.

The phenomenon can be explained in theoretical terms, but in any case the order in the time of physics has not been preserved in the audible order, and in the latter the two sounds typically appear together in the sequence. They echo even when the brief noise appears for a short time.

With the means available to Benussi there was little further that he could do. Today, however, the sequence of sounds can be produced in various, as it were, magnitudes: for example, if we make the two notes last for six seconds and the interposed noise for a little more than two seconds, we distinctly hear a La, a noise, and a Sol.

If we repeatedly shorten the three phases in the same proportions, we eventually hear the sequence: sound — noise — sound. Only by overcoming a certain measure next to the one above-referred we suddenly have a different order: finally the alien body (the noise) and the two sounds adjoined together, almost for elective affinities.

It is the critical magnitude of this time-frame internal to the time of presentness that causes the temporal displacement (*Zeitverschiebung*); a magnitude so close as to allow a contiguity by elective affinities instead of following a point-to-point correspondence between the time of physics and the time of perception. Real time cannot be broken down into points, and thus no wonder.

If Russell's creation is incorporated into durations with properties such as these, only paradoxes result. Within these durations, creation might happen after the perception of the created world.

The importance of the perceptive *Zeitverschiebungen* — apart from that investing individual experimental problems and the models that more or less

¹⁰ Cf. Vicario 1973.

appropriately connect them to each other — resides in the fact that their existence imposes a certain interpretation of time presentness, apart from others. This interpretation states that, for a given observer, the flow of time is not made up of a succession of pieces, even if it could contain pieces into succession. It comprises a zone characterized by its accessibility to the reordering of events; and therefore, albeit for a short period, the functional connections among events can proceed forwards or backwards. Accordingly, the act of listening to a melody must no longer be considered — according to von Ehrenfels' scheme — as a succession of notes, plus a succession of relations among notes. Here too the scheme 'terms plus relations' looks somewhat weak, and adapt to illustrate just very elementar situations, imagining then — on the logical level — the rest of the world paradigmmed on these.

I believe that, after surrendering to the factual evidence implicit in Stern's idea, Meinong failed to understand that with it everything changes: the existence of a stretch of time which is ascertainably real and characterized by a certain more or less definable duration, in which we absolutely always exist, and in which the events of experience are distributed, cannot simply be accepted without incurring further consequences. If we only accept that there is a time presentness where a myriad of short successive events are ordered one after the other, we should conclude, with Meinong, and surprisingly, that the sense of a melody appears to us exactly when its last note is struck (Meinong's coherence is always admirable, also when it is erroneous). In fact, if a melody is a superius with respect to its individual notes, "a distributed superius would then consist in the representation of this adding object appearing at the end of the succession, or in the representation first of all of the inferiora and then also of the added one, but simultaneously with the last inferiora". Before all the notes have been played, there is no melody: "in fact it is impossible to represent a superius if its inferiora or just a part of them are not represented".¹¹ This would be true if melodies were notes + intervals (terms + relations).

But the advancement through time of a melodic line which can be only abstractly decomposed into notes and time relations among notes consists in the progressive appearance of an object which is already in itself complete, like the progressive development of a landscape seen from the window of a train; which is a landscape even before we have seen it, as various as it could reveal itself in time.

Were the ongoing development of a melody to consist in the note-by-note establishment of relations (intervals) among notes, we would not tend to perceive a *future* in comparison with a given note, the last to arrive in

¹¹ Meinong 1899, § 21.

chronological order (establishing a moment in the flow of listening, as in a snap). And yet this future exists and its phenomenal evidence is the basis for the meaning of the musical sentence — and, moreover, for the meaning of the sentences that we usually say speaking. Of course, we are not clairvoyants able to predict the future. The future is an immanent aspect of the time of presentness, here and now, one of its constant requirements; but if it is neglected, any analysis of events as they develop breaks down. Such is the melody, because it is a complete object even if it is only partially heard, and it is in the process of development, like a pen only partially concealed by a sheet of paper, a newspaper in the pocket of a coat, a postcard we see in the act of posting it (and of course, as numerous experiments have shown, all of these — the postcard, the pen and the newspaper — could be devoid of their unseen part, but we would nevertheless see them as complete).

It may be objected that this applies only to melodies that we already know; melodies of which we can imagine the total development even after a bar and a half. The fact of the matter, however, is that the harmonic and dynamic properties implicit in a melodic development, even if they are very elementary, pre-represent in some non-indefinite way, even if it is achievable with different sonorous aggregates, what is up to now covered by the rim of present.

Hence, although some superiora are already present when certain inferiora are not yet present, we must eliminate the distinction as deceptive, because in the world of the true and ineludible objects of ongoing experience what sometimes appears to be a superius determines its supposed inferius, and is effectively its inferius. Moreover, more or less extensive items of temporal sequences co-determine each other, exactly as in the non-temporal examples analysed in sections 3, 4 and 5 of this essay.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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TABLE OF CROSS-REFERENCES

on:

see also:

time

1.19, 6.4, 8.4
