

**New Studies in Phenomenology  
Neue Studien zur Phänomenologie**

**Band 2**

**Christina Schües**

**Changes of Perception**

**Five Systematic Approaches  
in Husserlian Phenomenology**

**PETER LANG**  
Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften

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**David Carr, Klaus Held, Christian Lotz**

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Man muß erst die Welt durch *epoché* verlieren, um sie in universaler Selbstbesinnung wiederzugewinnen.

#### Cartesianische Mediationen

Das Objekt 'drängt sich dem Subjekt auf', übt auf es Reize (theoretische, ästhetische, praktische Reize), es will gleichsam Objekt der Zuwendung sein, klopft an die Pforte des Bewußtseins in einem spezifischen Sinne (nämlich dem des Zuwendens), es zieht an, das Subjekt wird herangezogen, bis schließlich das Objekt aufgemerktes ist.

#### Hua IV

### INTRODUCTION

Perception begins when I wake up and ends when I fall asleep. In perception I am intentionally directed towards things or human beings with interest or disinterest, just casually noticing them in passing by or scrutinizing them with keen attention. An object or a human being, towards which, or whom, I am directed, is perceived *as* this or that in the field of perception.

Most theories of perception do not address misperception and doubt; however, I believe that misperception, doubt, as well as changes and modifications of perception inevitably form a part of our perceptual experiences. So it is my main aim to provide a descriptive analysis of the process involved in the perception of an object or a human being, and, even more important, I shall concentrate upon misperception, doubt and the consequent changes and modifications of perception insofar as they bear upon the 'same object'.

A change of perception presents itself in consciousness as a change from one perception to another, say, from a wax figure to a

human being, or from a human being to a plastic mannequin. Any change of perception is embedded in certain modifications of the modes of givenness of the object, e.g. the modes of affirmation, negation, or doubt.

I shall be discussing the perception of an object, the perception of a human being, their differences and the possibility of changing from one perception to another. If one perception turns out to be a misperception and the perceptual sense ‘explodes’, then something different is perceived. The exemplifying stories<sup>1</sup> about perception shifting from a human being to an object, and vice versa, involve a radicality which cannot be captured by a theory of perception which limits itself to the perception of a material object, or by a theory of intersubjectivity which limits itself to the experience of the other by empathy.

#### THE WINDOW-SHOPPER

*Strolling down the street with the lazy attitude of a window shopper on a summer afternoon I approach the immaculate display offered by the latest fashions. Pressing my nose flat against the glass I search for the price of these pants which please me so much. Studying the back of the mannequin I cannot find it. I only note that the mannequin wearing them looks so real. The woman next to me says: doesn't she have nice legs? Suddenly these legs move, someone is watching – I cannot bear to press my nose against the window any more. To be sure, this is not the first time I have had the feeling that the mannequins in the window display are looking at me; but this experience is different. I come to realize, in a flash, that real women are being engaged as mannequins: This is a woman showing off the latest fashions. New York, New York how you have*

<sup>1</sup> The following two stories exemplify Husserl's examples of conflicting perceptions, see Hua XIX/1, § 27; Hua III, or the english translation Ideas I, § 138, § 151; Hua XVI, 45; Hua XI, § 6-8, Beilagen, 405; EU, § 21b.

*tricked me? What sort of a job is this for a woman? My eyes are startled, my thoughts dangle in the sunny day light. The search for the price tag is forgotten. Then, my gaze oscillates between the focus on the human – the human face, her eyes which are capable of looking back at me – and her body draped with clothes, with this pair of pants. Her cosmetically patched up carnal skin and her sensual panache win out over the rigid pose and the stony facial structure – how could I ever have taken her for a plastic mannequin? I am no longer searching for the price tag when it suddenly slips out of the mannequin's pockets. Now I note the price in a state of ambivalence; the pants are still beautiful.*

*Armed with my new experience I continue my walk and have the uneasy feeling that all the mannequins in the windows are watching me. Approaching another window I notice that I just don't know whether the figure in the window is human or plastic. The two conflicting perceptions seem equally verifiable. Finally, when I am close enough, my doubts turn – like an instantaneous, though invisible leap – into the perception of a plastic mannequin. Once the mannequin-perception has displaced the human-perception, I get the feeling that there never was a human being there. However, a moment before I had the sense of seeing her – I am left with an awkward feeling.*

#### IN THE WAX WORKS MUSEUM

*I enter the hall of the wax works museum, buy my ticket and proceed to the stairs which lead up to the exhibition on the second floor. Smiling, and with a ticket clutched in my hand, I approach a woman dressed in a blue blouse. She is already waiting to fulfill her role by checking whether the proper entrance fee has been paid. But – wait, suddenly I feel the smile in my face freezing in disbelief. The most I can manage is a doubtful grimace as I realize that this woman is not alive. She is nothing but the first piece in the exhibition – a well done mannequin made of wax. Slightly embarrassed by my silly mistake, I turn to the next figure which is a copy of a guard of the kind stationed in front*

of Buckingham Palace. The figure stands stiffly in the dusty light beam as I approach it to study its facial features. But what is that? A little drop of sweat slowly appears from under the bushy and rolls slowly over the cheeks to disappear in between the throat and the collar of the uniform. This detail tells me, like a shock, that this is indeed a human being – in fact, the security guard.

The issue of changes of perception has led me to wonder about the verifiability of perceptual facts. Facts, individual spatial-temporal beings are 'contingent'. It is so-and-so, but according to its essence it may be other than it seems. This sentence implies that "*it belongs to every sense of anything contingent to have an essence and therefore an Eidos which can be apprehended purely*" (Ideas I, § 2). From this thought follows the interdependence of the sciences of fact and of essence. The sciences of essence proceed by way of assuming an eidetic intuition: *What* is perception? or *What* is a human being? Another form of questioning is to ask *how* a perceptual object, say, a wax figure, is presented to consciousness? Or *how* an object could have been constituted as such and such? This sort of questioning leads us into the realm of transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology starts by employing the transcendental-phenomenological method, a method which calls for a personal transformation of the natural attitude (in which the world is experienced in its everyday's existence), into a theoretical attitude in which the phenomenologist investigates *how* the world is constituted in the realm of transcendental subjectivity. The realm of transcendental subjectivity embraces the sphere of the subject and her consciousness, a sphere in which 'something' is constituted *as* something.

An attitude is, generally speaking, a habitual style of life in which volition and interests, ways and modes of perception and action, are determined. The style of life is usually in accord with culture

and society.<sup>2</sup> The motivation to change one's style of life, or one's attitude, is based on everyday life. Everyday life is characterized by the natural<sup>3</sup> attitude in which we live naively. Events in my life, like feeling 'really down', or perhaps engaging in a discussion with a friend may motivate me to try to change my way of acting or even my way of experiencing the world around me. However, "all those productive intentional functions of experiencing, on account of which physical things are simply there, go on anonymously" (CM, § 64. And it is the task of phenomenology to disclose these anonymities. There may be times when I have the initiative to proceed more radically and wonder not only about my prejudices and certainties but also about the question *how* I could have perceived as I did; that is, basically any phenomenological investigation is geared to a questioning of the foundations of intentionality.

Phenomenologically radical self-reflection, or self-understanding (*Selbstbesinnung*), is a theoretical attitude which is required in order to show how intentionality functions in anonymity and to find out *how* something could have affected us and so be lifted off from the anonymity of indifference. A change of attitude, invoked by a *wondering being directed towards* the phenomena without being captivated by the naive certainty of worldly life, will bring the investigator closer to that which takes place anonymously in the natural attitude. The *phenomena* of perception and of perceptual changes, which are taken up in this investigation as our guide line, are concretized in the two stories presented above. However, this work is not only problem oriented, it is also about the Edmund Husserl whose work inspired me to investigate *changes of perception*. By way of a critical reading of his work and by contrasting and relating Husserl's thinking with that of Merleau-Ponty, among

2 See Hua VI, 326.

3 Not naturalistic attitude which is the attitude of the factual sciences.

others, I follow my leading theme through the different topics which are involved in, and implicated by, it.

Since changes in perception involve and implicate very different themes it would be impossible to discuss it step by step in a linear way. Different aspects and variations of this complex phenomenon are intertwined and stand next to each other. Therefore, this work, understood as variation upon the theme of 'sameness', is situated somewhere between a monograph and a collection of essays.

Any theoretical account of the consciousness of perception, if it is to be at all adequate, must include and allow for the following: the conditions governing the constitution of perceptual sense; the distinction between perceptual sense and perceptual judgement; elements of both constancy and change in the sense content of perception; the possibility of misperception and of doubt; the differentiation and identification of an object or a person; the question of the perception of a human being, a body, a material object looking like a human being; the question of how things are perceived *as* this or that, as having functions, or how humans are perceived as having experiences and perceptions themselves, questions of intersubjectivity and of the *habitus*.

In chapter I, I first state why a phenomenological method is necessary for the study of perception. I then go on to reformulate the notion of the '*noema*' which, in turn, leads me on to a systematic description of the structure of perceptual experience. Finally I show the limits of static analysis, and emphasize the need for a genetic analysis.

In chapter II, I begin with an introduction to genetic analysis through which notions of 'sensation', 'horizon', 'presentation' and 'appresentation', 'proximity' and 'distance' are explored along the lines of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. This allows me to address the question of the 'identity' of an object and the possibility of changes of perception.

Changes and modifications, determining a perceptual object more closely or experiencing another human being, take place in time. Any experience is constituted in time and temporality itself is thereby constituted. Thus, in chapter III, I shall discuss the temporal structure of perception, time-constitution and its origin, being in a common time with others and the necessity of the temporal flow.

In chapter IV, I discuss the structural differences between the experience of a human being in distinction to the perception of a thing, and the sense-constitution of the other with regard to two alternatives: (i) a one-sided constitution of her, and (ii) a reciprocity of constitution between me and the other human. Intersubjectivity is basic to any experience. In chapters II, III, and IV, I show that perception of a perceptual object as well as of another human being is dependent upon three factors: sensation, the present and the other. However, neither of these three concepts can ever be fully grasped. Therefore, perception, and perceptual changes, take place *across* sensation, *across* the present, *and across* the other. Finally, in the last chapter, I thematize perception and changes of perception in the context of an everyday life characterized by the *habitus*. I contrast phenomenology with sociology in order to exhibit the different methods of interpreting the notion of habituality in respect to perceptual changes. Through the analysis of different notions of 'habituality', I shall show how and why an analysis of perception and perceptual changes is done in the attitude of transcendental reflection. A transcendental reflection is needed in order to 'distance' oneself from the anonymities of the *habitus* in order to 'approach' the *habitus* itself. The purpose of this investigation is not simply to provide a means of self understanding but also to provide a framework for comprehending the different aspects of perceptual changes and their modification by way of phenomenological reflection – a radical *Selbstbesinnung*.

This book is based on my dissertation. For the time during writing the dissertation and revising it I like to extend general gratitude to my friends who encouraged me with many discussions and particular thanks to: Jitendra Mohanty, my dissertation adviser and first teacher in phenomenology; Christopher Macann who took the pain of proofreading the whole manuscript; Pascal Delhom who supported me with loving and thoughtful company; Marianne Averbek for her technical assistance; and Rudolf Rehn who urged me to publish this work with Peter Lang.

I dedicate this work to my grandmother Hildegard Bieber, who had anticipated the final manuscript with greatest faith but who will not see it anymore.