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D. UZNADZE GEORGIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Gestaltization

Transforming diffuse experience formed from sensations into a **perceptual** image. A perceived image is always whole which means that it is not obtained through the combination of its parts. Parts exist only on the level of **sensations**, but trough the perceptual processing of sensations we directly get a whole image, rather than its parts. The whole determines its parts, but not vice versa. Perceptual images are always whole, even in primitive biological organisms. For example, the lane along the road consists of different trees: firs (marked in the scheme in grey lines), lombardy poplar (white lines) and lime trees (black lines) planted in groups in the following way:

There is a factory building behind the lane. The person, chicken, deer and turtle in front of the lane perceive the corresponding spots including the spots of the factory building. These spots are later processed by perception in this or that particular way, but not otherwise (we ignore perceptual distortions, here):

- **1.** The figure stands out from the ground that is the trees always stand out from the building forming the ground;
- **2.** The spots become whole and organized what is perceived is the row of trees and the groups (including four elements);
- **3.** The perceived object becomes internally differentiated none of the groups is homogenous and is composed of four trees (it is clear that an animal is not aware of the concept 'tree' or the number "four" ...)

This kind of processing is determined by the inborn sets and Gestalt images guiding the transformation of sensory material into the whole. However, the direction of Gestaltization, and, consequently, the type of Gestalt received are often determined by the set firmly fixed through experience or temporary situational set rather than inborn set.

One of the common examples from Gestalt therapy:

Such an image with dual meaning is sometimes perceived as two profiles and other times as a vase. This means that sometimes the dark part becomes



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figure image and the white – bacground image or vice versa. The most important point is that if a person is asked to recognize a portrait of people

(including profiles) after being exposed to them ten times, at the eleventh exposure she/he will see two profiles or the dark part in the middle will become the background. The opposite also happens – after seeing pictures of dishes the person perceives a vase in the picture. The sets firmly fixed in the person's experience behave in the same way – the artist who paints portraits will mainly see profiles in the picture, whereas the potter will see a vase.

This means that perception is not a passive reflection of the outer world. The person receives the same sensations from the outside, but different Gestalt-images are formed on the basis of raw material depending on what kind of set the person has (including inborn forming schemas or, to be more exact, inborn sets).

Gestalt does not require consciousness/awareness. It is already

I. different from the ground (stands out from it. As we saw in the above example the lane does not merge with the factory building);

II. whole (the lane is perceived as one whole and the groups of four trees are necessarily perceived as a whole; it is difficult to perceive pairs of trees in the lane, and it is impossible to perceive the trees grouped in five);

III. internally differentiated (the trees in each group do not merge with each other).

But these Gestalts are not objects; they cannot be **objectified** or transformed into a thing-object unless they become **conscious**. The most important thing is that a perceptual image is not an automatic reflection of the outer world, but is rather an essential processing (through inborn sets and the sets formed through experience) of these reflections or the sensations of the neurophysiological level. That is why **perceptual illusions** often occur. Only the raw material in the form of sensations has no Gestalt. R. Natadze gives a clear illustration of this phenomenon described through introspection: Upon waking up he felt 'some greenness', some Gestalt-less greenness which formed into a Gestalt-image of a tree branch seen from the window several seconds later. This means that the psychologist managed to notice the process of Gestaltization. Gestaltization is obvious in the case of language [see linguistic Gestalts].

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The person is not normally aware of the Gestaltization process since it occurs unconsciously, automatically, and very fast (in the tenth of second). But mental disorders clearly show that it is a process, because in this case it occurs in a distorted way. In some mental disorders or some kind of brain injury when functioning is impeded, Gestaltization takes a distorted form: The person who suffers from the disease/injury sees an object (e.g. a bird), hears it singing, but these two sensations are experienced separately and are not related to each other. The patient's awareness of the fact that the bird is singing does not at all help since the patient cannot experience this on the perceptual level. The Gestalt of a singing bird cannot be formed. Another example is the patient who sees grey, green and blue spots and also knows that there is a window in front of him/her through which they can see tree leafs and blue sky, but the patient cannot perceive/see any of these objects.

Apart from perception, Gestaltization is also characteristic of other modalities: long-term memory, thinking, motivation, volition . . . If we are working and the housewife invites us for dinner, we do not normally stop our activity; we first complete some part of the work and then join the dinner. Another example: A picture on the wall which is not hanging properly unconsciously evokes the impulse of fixing it. This case clearly demonstrates the pregnancy phenomenon which is the tendency towards completeness and perfection.