

III. SECOND CHARACTERISTIC: THE PHENOMENON OF QUASI-OBSERVATION

When we began this study we thought that we would be dealing with images, which is to say with elements of consciousness. We now see that we are dealing with complete consciousnesses, which is to say with complex structures that 'intend' certain objects. Let us see whether reflection cannot teach us more about these consciousnesses. It will be simplest to consider the image in relation to the concept and to perception. To perceive, to conceive, to imagine: such are indeed the three types of consciousness by which the same object can be given to us.

In perception I observe objects. It should be understood by this that the object, though it enters whole into my perception, is never given to me but one side at a time. Consider the example of a cube: I do not know it is a cube unless I have seen its six faces; I can possibly see three together, but never more. It is necessary therefore that I apprehend them successively. And when I pass, for example, from the apprehension of faces ABC to faces BCD, it always remains possible that face A disappeared during my change of position. The existence of the cube will therefore remain doubtful. At the same time, we must notice that when I see three faces of the cube together, these three faces are never presented to me like squares: their lines are flattened, their angles become obtuse, and I must reconstitute their nature as squares starting from the appearances in my perception. All this has been said a hundred times: it is characteristic of perception that the object never appears except in a series of profiles, of projections. The cube is indeed present to me, I can touch it, see it; but I can never see it except in a certain way, which calls for and excludes at the same time an infinity of other points of view. One must learn objects, which is to say, multiply the possible points of view on them. The object itself is the synthesis of all these appearances. The perception of an object is therefore a phenomenon of an infinity of aspects. What does this signify for us? The necessity of making a tour of objects, of waiting, as Bergson said, until the 'sugar dissolves'.

When, on the other hand, I think of a cube by a concrete concept, I think of its six sides and its eight angles at the same time; I think that its angles are right angles, its sides squares.⁶ I am at the centre of my idea, I apprehend its entirety in one glance. Naturally, this is not to say that my idea does not need to be completed by an infinite progression. But I can think the concrete essences in a single act of consciousness; I do not need to recover images, I have no apprenticeship to serve. Such is without doubt the clearest difference between thought and perception. That is why we can never perceive a thought nor think a perception. They are radically distinct phenomena: one is knowledge conscious of itself, which places itself at once in the centre of the

object; the other is a synthetic unity of a multiplicity of appearances, which slowly serves its apprenticeship.

What will we say of the image? Is it apprenticeship or knowledge? Let us note initially that it seems 'on the side of' perception. In the one as in the other the object gives itself by profiles, by projections, by what the Germans designate by the apt term '*Abschattungen*'. Only, we no longer need to make the tour of it: the imaged cube is given immediately for what it is. When I say 'the object I perceive is a cube', I make a hypothesis that the later course of my perceptions may oblige me to abandon. When I say 'the object of which I have an image at this moment is a cube', I make here a judgement of obviousness: it is absolutely certain that the object of my image is a cube. What does this say? In perception, knowledge is formed slowly; in the image, knowledge is immediate. We see now that the image is a synthetic act that links a concrete, not imaged, knowledge to elements more properly representative. An image is not learned: it is organized exactly as the objects that are learned, but, in fact, it is given whole, for what it is, in its appearance. If you turn a cube-image in thought to amuse yourself, if you pretend that it presents its various faces to you, then you will not be more advanced at the end of the operation: you will not have learned anything.

This is not all. Let us consider this sheet of paper on the table. The more we look at it, the more it reveals to us of its characteristics.

Each new orientation of my attention, of my analysis, reveals to me a new detail: the upper edge of the sheet is slightly warped, the end of the third line is dotted, etc. But I can keep an image in view as long as I want: I will never find anything there but what I put there. This remark is of the utmost importance in distinguishing the image from perception. In the world of perception, no 'thing' can appear without maintaining an infinity of relations to other things. Better, it is this infinity of relations – as well as the infinity of the relations that its elements support between them – it is this infinity of relations that constitutes the very essence of a thing. Hence a kind of *overflowing* in the world of 'things': there is, at every moment, always infinitely more than we can see; to exhaust the richness of my current perception would take an infinite time. Let us not be mistaken here: this kind of 'overflowing' is constitutive of the very nature of objects. When it is said that an object cannot exist without a definite individuality, it is necessary to understand by this 'without maintaining an infinity of determinate relations with the infinity of other objects'.

But in the image, on the other hand, there is a kind of essential poverty. The different elements of an image maintain no relations with the rest of the world and maintain only two or three relations between themselves: those, for example, that I could note, or those that it is presently important to retain.

It should not be said that the other relations exist in secret, that they wait until a beam of light moves on them. No: they do not exist at all. Two colours, for example, which maintain a certain discordant relation in reality can coexist in imagery without having any kind of relation between them. The objects exist only in so far as they are thought. This is what is incomprehensible for all those who consider the image a reborn perception. Indeed, it is not at all a question of a difference in intensity, but rather the objects of the world of images could in no way exist in the world of perception; they do not meet the necessary conditions.⁷

In a word, the object of perception constantly overflows consciousness; the object of an image is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it; it is defined by that consciousness: one can never learn from an image what one does not know already. Admittedly, it can happen that a memory image – the face of somebody, or a certain place – springs up unexpectedly. But, even in such a case, it is given to intuition in one piece, it delivers in one glance what it is. If I perceived this patch of grass, I should study it for some time to know where it comes from. In the case of the image, I know it immediately: it is the grass of such-and-such a meadow, at such-and-such a place. And this origin cannot be deciphered from the image: in the very act that gives me the object as imaged is included the knowledge (*connaissance*) of what it is. One will object, admittedly, that there are rather rare cases where a memory image retains anonymity: all of a sudden, I see again a dreary garden under a grey sky and it is impossible for me to know where and when I saw this garden. But this is quite simply a determination that the image lacks, and no observation, however prolonged, could give me the knowledge (*connaissance*) that I lack. If I discover, a little later, the name of the garden, it is by means of processes that have nothing to do with pure and simple observation: the image gave at once all that it possessed.⁸

Thus the object, in the image, is presented as having to be apprehended in a multiplicity of synthetic acts. Because of this fact, because its contents retain, like a phantom, a sensible opacity, because it involves neither essences nor generating laws but only an irrational quality, it seems to be the object of observation: from this point of view the image would be closer to perception than to the concept. But, in addition, the image does not teach anything, never gives the impression of novelty, never reveals an aspect of the object. It delivers it as a whole. No risk, no waiting: a certainty. My perception can mislead me, but not my image. Our attitude in relation to the object of the image could be called 'quasi-observation'. We are, indeed, placed in the attitude of observation, but it is an observation that does not teach anything. If I give myself in image the page of a book, I am in the attitude of the reader, I look at the printed lines. But I do not read. And, at bottom, I am not even looking, because I already know what is written.

Without abandoning the domain of pure description, one can try to explain this characteristic property of the image. In the image, indeed, a certain consciousness gives itself a certain object. The object is therefore correlative with a certain synthetic act, which includes among its structures a certain knowledge and a certain 'intention'. The intention is at the centre of consciousness: it is the intention that aims at the object, which is to say, that constitutes it for what it is. The knowledge, which is indissolubly linked to the intention, specifies that the object is such or such, adds determinations synthetically. To constitute as an image in oneself a certain consciousness of the table is at the same time to constitute the table as an object of imaging consciousness. The object as imaged is therefore contemporary with the consciousness that I have of it and it is exactly determined by that consciousness: it includes in itself nothing but what I am conscious of; but, inversely, everything that constitutes my consciousness finds its correlate in the object. My knowledge is nothing other than knowledge of the object, knowledge concerning the object. In the act of consciousness, the representative element and the knowledge element are linked in a synthetic act. The correlative object of this act is therefore constituted as a concrete, sensible object and at the same time as an object of knowledge. This results in the paradoxical consequence that the object is present for us externally and internally at the same time. Externally, because we observe it; internally, because it is in it that we observe what it is. This is why extremely poor and truncated images, reduced to a few spatial determinations, can have a rich and profound sense for me. And this sense is there, immediate, in these lines, it is given without a need to decipher it. This is also why the world of images is a world where nothing happens. I can easily, at my liking, move such-and-such an object as imaged, turn a cube, make a plant grow, make a horse run, there will be never the smallest time-lag between the object and the consciousness. Not a second of surprise: the object that is moving is not alive, it never precedes the intention. But neither is it inert, passive, 'worked' from the outside, like a marionette: the consciousness never precedes the object, the intention reveals itself at the same time as it realizes itself, in and by its realization.⁹

IV. THIRD CHARACTERISTIC: THE IMAGING CONSCIOUSNESS POSITS ITS OBJECT AS A NOTHINGNESS

All consciousness is consciousness of something. Unreflective consciousness aims at objects different in kind from consciousness: for example, the imaging consciousness of a tree aims at a tree, which is to say a body that is by nature external to consciousness; consciousness goes out of itself, transcends itself.

If we want to describe this consciousness, it is necessary, we have seen, that

- 6 The existence of such concepts has sometimes been denied. However, perception and imagery presuppose a concrete knowledge without image and without words.
- 7 This is what Jaensch understood extremely well when, pushing the theory of revived perceptions to the end, he made of the eidetic image an object that can be observed and learned.
- 8 What can mislead us here:
 - (a) The use that one makes of the image in mathematical thought. Many believe that we perceive *from within* the image new relations between figures.
 - (b) Cases where the image comprises a kind of emotional teaching.
We will consider these different cases later.
- 9 There are, on the borders of wakefulness and sleep, certain rather strange cases that could pass for images displaying resistance. For example, I may see an unspecified object turning clockwise and not be able to stop it nor make it turn in the opposite direction. We will say some words about these phenomena when we study the hypnagogic images to which they belong.
- 10 This suspension of belief remains a positional act.
- 11 Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics*, edited and translated by G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), part 1, proposition 8, scholium 2 (p. 80).
- 12 August Messer, cited by Albert Burloud, *La Pensée d'après les recherches expérimentales de Watt, de Messer et de Bühler* (Paris: Alcan 1927), p. 69.
- 13 I am not ignoring the fact that these observations oblige me to deny entirely the existence of the unconscious. Here is not the place to discuss this.
- 14 We will see later what 'to exist in a free state' means for the material content of the mental image.
- 15 M. I. Meyerson, in his chapter 'Les Images', in Georges Dumas (ed.), *Nouveau Traité de Psychologie* vol. 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1932), perpetually confuses sign, image, and symbol (see particularly pp. 574 and 581).
- 16 It is this observation that becomes quasi-observation in the case of the mental image.
- 17 Compare Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, translated by F. Kersten (The Hague, Boston, and London: Martinus Nijhoff 1982), § 111, pp. 261–2.
- 18 We are only interested in imitations that are not accompanied by make-up.
- 19 Of course, we are considering the theoretical case in which all the steps of consciousness are clearly distinct. It can also happen that an imitation resembles as closely as a portrait (for example, if the artist is made-up). In that case, we are back to the analyses in the preceding section.
- 20 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books 1988), p. 158.
- 21 Compare Edward Abramowski, *Le Subconscient normal* (Paris: Alcan 1914).
- 22 We should also speak of the *consciousness of imitating*, which is certainly a consciousness *of being possessed*.
- 23 It is possible that this way of organizing my perception is strictly peculiar to me. Readers can determine for themselves the processes that they use.
- 24 If one wants to account for the enormous disproportion that exists between the external representative element and the knowledge incorporated therein, one can consider examples like this one: let us imagine that a well-known personality is often represented in reviews and caricatures by the three following attributes: a straw hat, glasses, a pipe. Eventually, this personality is summarized in these three objects for the