



# Gestalt and intentionality in Goldstein's organismic theory

*Gestalt e intencionalidade na teoria organísmica de  
Goldstein*

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## Abstract

The present study seeks to investigate what in Goldstein's organismic theory can bring the Gestalt notion, proposed by the Psychologists of Form, closer to the notion of intentionality, as Merleau-Ponty reads it. It is about understanding how, insofar as it reveals the power of centering that operates in the concreteness of the existence of organisms in the surroundings, the notion of figure-background corresponds to the phenomenological notion of operative intentionality. In the same way, it is a matter of showing in what sense, as a form of operative intentionality, the power of centering of organisms does not need to be based on the presupposition of an "I think".

**Keywords:** Goldstein. Merleau-Ponty. Gestalt. Organismic theory. Intentionality.

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## Resumo

*O presente estudo busca investigar o que na teoria organísmica de Goldstein pode aproximar a noção de Gestalt, proposta pelos Psicólogos da Forma, da noção de intencionalidade, conforme Merleau-Ponty a lê. Trata-se de compreender de que maneira, na medida em que descortina o poder de centragem que opera na concretude da existência dos organismos no entorno, a noção de figura-fundo corresponde à noção fenomenológica de intencionalidade operante. Da mesma forma, trata-se de mostrar em que sentido, enquanto uma forma de intencionalidade operante, o poder de centragem dos organismos não carece de estar fundado na pressuposição de um "eu penso".*

**Palavras-chave:** Goldstein. Merleau-Ponty. Gestalt. teoria organísmica. intencionalidade.

## The search for a gestalt phenomenology: the motives of Merleau-Ponty reader of Goldstein

After 1949, when he assumed the Psychology and Pedagogy's chair at the *Sorbonne*, Merleau-Ponty taught a series of courses, published posthumously under the title *Merleau-Ponty at the Sorbonne*. The first of the two volumes bring together courses on "Psychosociology and Philosophy". And among them we can find the famous course entitled "The sciences of men and phenomenology." According to the published summary of the course, Merleau-Ponty (1990, p. 151-213) would offer it for two purposes. In the first place, it would be about showing "how Husserl conceives the human sciences at the beginning and in the development of the doctrine". Or still: "what does the phenomenologist expect from the sciences of men and how does he situate them in relation to phenomenology?" (1990, p. 153). But, secondly, Merleau-Ponty wanted to point out "how the development of contemporary Psychology shows us a convergence with phenomenological research" (1989, p. 153). Specifically here, Merleau-Ponty (1990, p. 154) would be in charge of showing that, despite the shift of the Gestalt psychologists towards objectivism (whether isomorphic or trans-objective), the notions of "primacy of the whole" and of "spontaneous structuring of figures from the ground" continued to serve as new alternatives to think the genesis of meaning without, for that, the admission of previous laws or the admission of the primacy of the self as "I think" becomes necessary. In Koffka's words (1975, p. 59), "(...) the psychologist who deals with behavioral fields does not need to introduce a special substance, Mind."

Likewise, according to Merleau-Ponty's evaluation, the notions of the primacy of the whole and of the spontaneous structuring of figures from the background will gain new life when they are incorporated not only in the field of neurophysiological research by Kurt Goldstein (1878-1965), but, mainly, in his praxis as a doctor. The reflections and, above all, Goldstein's practices allowed Merleau-Ponty (1989, p. 154) "to show not a direct influence, but a spontaneous evolution in the investigation that, when considering its object, reaches consistence theoretical and experimental positions with phenomenology's intentions".

Indeed, in Merleau-Ponty's assessment, an example of convergence between phenomenology and the human sciences can be found in Kurt Goldstein's writings. In the 1934 work, entitled *The Organism – a holistic approach to biology derived from pathological data in men*, Goldstein (1987a) recommends describing the physiological and behavioral domains not from categories drawn from a general model, but from the meaning that both domains assume throughout the doctor's research and practice. In the Goldstein's words (1971b, p. 6):

(...) the doctor must consider each of the symptoms and terms of its functional importance for the personality of the patient. Thus, it is obviously necessary for the doctor to know the organism (as a whole), the total personality of the patient and the changes that this organism (as a whole) undergoes with the disease. The whole organism, the individual human being, becomes the center of interest.

This implies not only the recognition of the existence of a field relationship in which physiology and behaviors are articulated, but also the understanding that a truly radical science must start from its own investigative and practical event. Hence, as Merleau-Ponty (1990, p. 154) has correctly pointed out, "the truth must be defined after the operations of verifications" and not before. For Goldstein, during the investigation, what matters is what emerges as unexpected, as what cannot be anticipated by the theoretical commitments of the investigation. Or then, in scientific research, what matters is the spontaneous way in which, beyond or on this side of the research stratagems, the researched (in this case, the diseased organism) finds ways or alternatives for survival. It is as if Goldstein had recognized – not only for the physiology and behavior of the organism, but also for the research event itself – a kind of intentionality, which is, ultimately, the profound sense of what is articulated as meaning experienced by someone, whether he is the doctor or the patient. Here Goldstein comes very close to Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's (1976, p. 271-2) theory of operative intentionality, once it is – according to Merleau-Ponty's (1945,

p. iv) – of a spontaneous process of articulation of whole meaning without a prior objective model or a reference to a thinking self being necessary. That is, according to Merleau-Ponty's interpretation (1945, p. xvi), Husserl makes a distinction between two levels of intentional activity. On one hand, we have:

(...) the intentionality of the act, which is that of our judgments and our voluntary position taking, (...) and the operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*), which forms the natural and ante-predicative unity of the world and of our life, which it appears in our desires, our valuations, our landscape, more clearly than in objective knowledge, and provides the text from which our knowledge seeks to be translated into exact language.

For Merleau-Ponty, Goldstein's descriptions concerning patients' adjustments, but also relative to the concrete involvement of the professional in the patient's clinical developments, agree with the idea of a spontaneous intentionality that is not lacking in being clarified by a mental representation.

However, as is well known, Goldstein never called himself a phenomenologist and his formulations sometimes expressed marked differences when it comes to phenomenology. As Spiegelberg (1972, p. 304) presents us in his historical tour of the phenomenological movement and in which he tells us about an interview Goldstein granted him in 1964, the neurophysiologist admitted that he had "considerable reservations" about phenomenology, especially with the reading established by Merleau-Ponty. In the interview given to Spiegelberg (1972, p. 305), Goldstein remembered he was paid a visit by Merleau-Ponty in New York. However, even such courtesy did not serve as a reason for Goldstein to mention in his publication the interpretations of the French critic. For example, when trying to define it as the spontaneous capacity of the organism to adjust to the environment, Goldstein did not take Merleau-Ponty's warnings (1964, p. 170) into account and continued to make references to Henry Bergson (2005, p. 120-121, as if that spontaneity had to do with the "immediate and inexpressible spontaneity of the vital impetus".

Even so, Merleau-Ponty believes that, despite having confused spontaneity with the existence of an immediate occurrence, Goldstein's reflection continued to have a phenomenological scope, as Goldstein (1967, p. 145-166) himself recognized in a posthumously published autobiographical work. After all, regardless of used nomenclature, Goldstein understood the need to study the nervous system from the first-person point of

view, from the point of view of one who experiences a specific physiology or lack thereof. This is the only way to understand the spontaneous nature of the adjustments made by the central nervous system. More than that, this is the only way to understand in what sense, in different people, the same injuries have different behavioral consequences. It is that, between the neurons themselves (and between them and the behavior of the organism in the environment), there is something that – according to Goldstein – cannot be explained in mechanical terms. In the organism and between the organism and the environment, a function field operates, which is a creative adjustment, which is – according to the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty (1990, p. 200) – another name for what in phenomenology is called operational intentionality. It is about the recognition, both in phenomenology and in Goldstein's organismic theory, of the experience's autonomy to articulate itself in the form of spontaneous wholes, which are allowed to be resumed at progressively higher levels of complexity. Now, says Merleau-Ponty (1990, p. 202), "we find ourselves once again before a beautiful example of convergence, not deliberate, between experimental research and the demands of the phenomenological method".

In any case, Goldstein's interest in phenomenology is less evident than his interest in some of the theses professed in *Gestalttheorie*. The most important of them is the one that proposes that perceptions and behaviors cannot be understood from their constituent parts, but, yes, from the global relationships that they spontaneously establish among themselves and in which the sense perceived or acted it is always a figure that stands out from a background that supports it. It is through this thesis that the neurophysiologist tries to establish a new reading concerning pathology, which he deals with as a doctor.

## **Goldstein's motives regarding the Gestalt Psychology: a new look at the organism**

Goldstein's interest in Gestalt Psychology came through Adhèmar Gelb, Köhler's assistant, and Husserl's student. In the years of 1918 and 1930, Gelb and Goldstein not only worked together, but also published studies on the problem of the figure-ground organization, which they gave a closer interpretation to phenomenology. Goldstein's main concern at this time was to understand the language disorders of soldiers who had fought in the First World War, since the acquired brain injuries were not usually directly related to

those symptoms. From where, then, Goldstein intuits that they could mean something other than an effect of the injuries, but rather an indication of a general adjustment of the organism in the face of such injuries. That is, the symptoms were not effects, but indicative "figures" of the arrangements that the organism (as a whole) would trigger to maintain its unity after the accident (GELB & GOLDSTEIN, 1918, p. 1-142)

However, very soon Goldstein perceives that the formula that Gestalt psychologists would lend him could designate not only the symptomatic behaviors of the presumably sick patients, but also all the forms of the organism's insertion in the environment. All the reactions of the organism could be described as figures with respect to a background that sustains them and from where they acquire a particular meaning (GOLDSTEIN, 1971b, p. 12-13). Goldstein calls "Gestalt-reaction" (1987, p. 159) the way that, at all vital levels, from the somatic to the behavioral, organisms react globally in their insertions in the environment. Such globally or Gestalt-reaction means to say that, when faced with a stimulus, the organism does not produce a specific response or determined by this stimulus. As the Gestalt psychologists (KÖHLER, 1968, p. 64; KOFFKA, 1975, p. 184; WERTHEIMER, 1955, p. 3) had already shown in relation to perceptions and behaviors involved in perception, the stimulus only makes sense in the context of the field's complex relationship, to which Goldstein (1931, p. 453-456) called organism-environment. It is such a field that lends to the stimulus an importance or value of figure – and that another thing is not to signal the general arrangement of the organism to update itself in the face of changes in the environment. According to Goldstein (1987, p. 76), the stimulus is not the cause of a reaction, but rather the way in which the whole of the organism points (*greift*) to the new ordering that is sought and that - for the organism itself – is nothing more than a new figure.

Of course, this way of using the idea of figure-ground highlights an important difference between Goldstein and the Gestalt psychologists. As he demonstrates in the article *Analyse de l'aphasie et étude de l'essence*, unlike the Gestalt psychologists, for whom the terms figure-ground designate the dynamics of physical correlation of the parts of an autochthonous whole, either the perceptual or behavioral, Goldstein (1987a, p. 265) includes, in the figure-ground dynamics, an intentionality form typical of living organisms with the intention of updating themselves. Rather, in Goldstein, the figure-ground

dynamics has to do, at the same time, with the intentional way in which the organism functions as a whole and with the organism's insertion into the environment.

I have always tried – in my research going back more than ten years – to let myself be guided by my material and, certainly, I was pleased to see that the Gestalt Psychology achieved results in perfect harmony with those that came from this same different material. However, my orientation was different: it was always the total organism that appeared to me as "totality", as "form", not the phenomena of a single domain or even simply "conscious impressions", and it was from there that I tried to understand each fact. It is also from this that some differences arise between the Gestalt Psychology and the one I represent (GOLDSTEIN, 1987 p. 405)

That is, for Goldstein (1987, p. 267), the figure-ground dynamics is not a way of designating physical objectivity, but a way of describing a certain experience or operation, which Goldstein called "existence"; and that something else is nothing more than a kind of memory or capacity that each organismic whole has, be it a cell or a social behavior, to integrate - in the same whole - all the temporary occurrences that reach it.

## Existence and temporality

This way of using the figure-ground dynamics – as if it indicated a self-protective spontaneous existence or intelligibility of organisms – displaces *Gestalttheorie* from the field of objective correlations (whether isomorphic or trans-objective) to the field of Philosophical Anthropology. In Goldstein's words (1971b, p. 13):

It (existence) means to me an epistemological concept based on phenomenological observations that allows us to describe normal and pathological behavior, as well as provide definitive guidance for therapy. It is a kind of Philosophical Anthropology.

Once they are invested with an existence, which is their ability to articulate themselves (as a whole) for the benefit of different figures that are interspersed in time, organisms are not only physical, physicochemical, and physiological structures. They are also subjectivities. But when he speaks of subjectivity, Goldstein is not referring to "thinking self" governed by laws of logical representation. Goldstein does not even refer to psychic selves – according to Freud's hypothesis – governed by forgotten word registers. Existing organisms are functions of survival, which occur in the form of figure-ground dynamics, as a Gestalt-reaction capacity. Or then, organisms are survival functions that spontaneously take shape when their temporal unit is threatened.

Here, of course, we have a very particular way in which Goldstein links the notions of existence and temporality, as if organismic life were the gestalt capacity to integrate, in the same current whole, the physical past and present. As Goldstein understands it, time is a succession of events in which all spontaneous events are formed to the extent that they are suitable for conservation and growth. Therefore, these wholes must incorporate novelties without destroying it to the preserved unit. This is the base from which Goldstein is going to propose not only a thesis about what organismic life is, but also a definition of health. According to Goldstein's interpretation, a healthy organism is one capable of integrating itself to the present conditions with conserved structures, which, thus, would gain survival or updating, which would lead Goldstein to the concept of health as self-actualization of the same homeostatic whole in which a capacity for conservation (of the past homeostatic form) and growth (through integration of the new environmental conditions). Everything would happen as if there were in the organism a power to focus that would enable it, at various levels, to integrate the novelty (by what had been conserved) and to the benefit of the continuity of homeostasis. In his words (GOLDSTEIN, 1971a, p. 88):

(...) the basic tendency of the organism is to realize itself according to its nature. All the acts that can be observed are manifestations of the activity of the organism in this sense. This realization or actualization means existence, life.

Still according to Goldstein (1971a, p. 89), the organismic experience of the power of centering as realization or actualization would occur at different levels. There would be, on one hand, the power to focus as it occurs to us on the vital or conservative level. It is an internal physiological compensation system, which is the ability of each cell to "maintain" the "balance (homeostasis)" between its own internal concentration (ratio between its solvent particles and its soluble particles) and the concentration of neighboring cells. This implies a kind of community, which is established through the release and absorption of ions between the cells involved. From which it does not follow that, for Goldstein, the organism was an anarchic organization. As Merleau-Ponty (2001, p. 62) underlines in his reading of Goldstein's use of the figure-ground dynamic:

The whole brain contributes to each partial operation, so there is no mosaic operation. This does not mean that brain functions are diffuse; nor that all the parts of the brain contribute in the same way



to each operation: one plays the role of figure, the others, background; there is localization in the sense that the integrity of a certain part of the brain is "absolutely" necessary for the activation of a certain function.

The other level of the figure-ground dynamic (which spontaneously operates as the centering power of organisms embedded in the environment) is what Goldstein calls evaluative or functional. These are contact, sensory, and motor systems, through which the organism obtains from the environment what it needs to satisfy its vital needs. Goldstein here describes the organism as a process of individuation or self-realization in the environment (1987, p. 146). In the realm of self-realization sought by organisms in the environment, "(...) the relationship between somatic phenomena and psychic phenomena is exactly the same as that previously revealed between somatic phenomena themselves." It follows that "(...) the 'psychological' and the 'physical' are indifferent to the real process. The 'functional' meaning for the whole is the only relevant one." (GOLDSTEIN, 1987, p. 339). After all, "we assume that the organism is a unit" (GOLDSTEIN, 1971b, p. 11). In this sense, the investigation of the complex organism's behaviors, such as those in which the use of language is noted, always starts from the search for the Gestalt that structures such behaviors. It is precisely in this way that Goldstein (1971b, p. 23) deals with studying the pathologies of his patients, victims of injuries acquired during the First World War. For him, the most important thing is to understand the Gestalt that even in the patients' symptoms makes itself known as a present structure. But in what sense does the Gestalt make itself felt in the symptoms?

## **Goldstein's clinical studies and symptoms as Gestalt adjustments**

Goldstein has become famous for his clinical cases, most notably through the case involving the patient known as Schneider. According to Goldstein's description of his patient, Schneider has a war wound in the occipital region that presumably prevented him from distinguishing colors that were not variations between black and white. However, after the accident suffered in battle, the patient developed a multiplicity of other disorders of perception, visual and tactile recognition, as well as motor and language disorders, which had no apparent relationship with the occipital injury. How to understand these symptoms?

On one hand, from the point of view of a theory that seeks to explain behaviors based on localized brain functions, there is no way to relate Schneider's symptoms to his injury, since they are symptoms related to functions coordinated from other presumed brain locations. On other hand, from the mental representation theory's point of view, Schneider's symptoms could be explained as a kind of "psychic blindness", as if the patient had lost in the accident not a neuropathophysiological basis, but rather a set of representations. However, as Goldstein is going to observe, the presumably destroyed representations are still present, although they only allow themselves to be recognized in specific situations, which Goldstein calls concrete, as opposed to abstract situations.

In fact, according to Goldstein (1950, p.8),

we can distinguish, in general, two different kinds of attitude, which we will call the "concrete attitude" and the "abstract attitude". In the concrete attitude, we are passive and subject to an immediate experience caused by certain objects or situations. Our thinking and acting are determined by the immediate demands caused by the "particular" aspect of an object or situation. [...] If, on other hand, we give up turning on the light thinking that we can wake up someone who is sleeping in this house, then we are acting in an abstract way. We disregard the specific aspect, the sensory impressions that are immediately presented to us, and we consider the situation from a conceptual point of view and react accordingly. [...] We also call this attitude a categorical or conceptual attitude.

Schneider is not capable of performing abstract tasks. If Goldstein asks Schneider to distinguish the parts of his body that are being touched during an experiment, or if he asks him to perform a movement with his eyes closed, the patient fails to do so. In the case of language behaviors, the difficulty is even more severe and evident. Even some affective responses, such as those that used to accompany his sexual life with his wife, dissipated after the accident (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 180-181).

On the other hand, if it is about elementary habitual movements, necessary for life, such as killing a mosquito that bites you, or lighting a candle, blowing your nose, or telling the nurse that he does not like receiving injectable medication, then Schneider performs these movements without difficulty, even with his eyes closed. From which follows Goldstein's conclusion, underlined by Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 93), that the symptoms do not refer "to the content of the behavior, but to its structure and that, consequently, it is not something that is observed but something that is understood". What is there to understand?

As Goldstein shows, the Schneider symptom is not something that is "explained in itself", as an absolute effect of an agent that would operate directly on it. It is therefore not

a neurological defect (such as loss of visual acuity) or representational defect (as if the patient had completely lost the ability to communicate). The symptom is, yes, a structural reaction of the total organism. Or then, it is about the spontaneous effort of the organism as a whole to level the functions not affected by the accident with the one that was effectively affected, so that the affected function could henceforth find a new location in life possible for Schneider, whatever it is, concrete life. It is, in this sense, a Gestalt-reaction in which, although the patient cannot reverse the losses suffered, his body seeks an adjustment, which is nothing more than "being capable of an orderly behavior that can prevail despite of the impossibility of some performances that were first possible" (GOLDSTEIN, 1987, p. 437). According to Goldstein, the spontaneous or gestalt rearrangement is here a way of defining health, which is not the absolute conservation of a state, but the search for updates in the way of existing as everything.

Which is the same as saying that, if it is true that the accident in the occipital region took away from Schneider the visual acuity to distinguish them from the colors, as if he had seen them again as he did when he was very young, an occasion in which his optical system was not yet fully matured; It is also true that, after the accident, Schneider's sensorially and language were arranged to function in a barely concrete way – and not abstractly – as usually happens when he is very young. These are the symptoms that are nothing more than the figures produced by the organism "as a whole" for the benefit of the global restructuring of the patient's functioning. Whence follows, then, a conception according to which symptoms must be able to be understood as modes of health. They are versions of the organism's power to center itself to adjust to new conditions, as if the organism sought to modify itself for the sake of its own continuity "as a whole". It is a new "state of health" that, of course, "is no longer like the old one" (GOLDSTEIN, 1987, p. 437), since "life knows no reversibility" – as Canguilhem (2007, p. 122) commenting on Goldstein's ideas. Schneider – as Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 128) underlines – had real losses, which forever took away the possibility of carrying out certain abstract activities, including giving people certain affective responses. Yet, at more basic concrete levels, what might at first appear to be dysfunction revealed creative adjustment, a spontaneous integration of remnant abilities that Goldstein called symptoms.

In fact, for Goldstein, the symptoms are not indicative of absolute stimuli that would provoke a reaction. The symptoms are, yes, the effort of the organism to incorporate

novelties that it lacks and that allow it to continue as a homeostatic whole invested with an integral and integrated functioning. Or then, the symptoms are not indicators of something broken in the neuropathophysiological normality of the organism. It is, rather, the manifestation of an arrangement or adjustment offered by the organism “as a whole” in the face of a threat. The symptom, in this sense, is only the figure that operates, in the concreteness of the insertion of the organism in the environment, the effects of the arrangements triggered in the organism “as a whole”. But if the symptom – as a creative adjustment in the face of difficulties – is a form of health, what is illness for Goldstein?

## Sickness and distress

According to Goldstein (1987, p. 432), "(...) the disease cannot simply be considered as a localized disorder in the function of circumscribed parts of the organism." On the contrary, the disease is the compromise of the existence of the organism “as a whole”, which means to say, in its insertion in the environment, which always includes the social environment. Even because, for Goldstein (1971a, p. 6), "many of the manifestations of the disease can only be understood in the light of their social origin and can only be eliminated by taking this origin into consideration." In this sense, as he presents it in his best-known work, precisely, *Der Aufbau des Organismus* (GOLDSTEIN, 1987, p. 432):

Illness is a shock and a danger to existence. Therefore, a definition of disease requires a conception of individual nature as a starting point. Disease occurs when an organism is modified in such a way that, despite being in its own "normal" environment, it undergoes catastrophic reactions. This is manifested not only in specific performance disturbances corresponding to the location of the damage, but in general there are disturbances because, as we have seen, disordered behavior in any field always more or less coincides with disordered behavior in the whole organism.

The disease - therefore - does not have to do with the failure of an organismic system's part, but with the disruption of the organizational whole. In other words, what is affected in the disease is the organism's own power to focus, its ability to react “as a whole” in defense of its actualization in the environment. According to what Bimbenet (2004, p. 65) comments,

where an inductive psychology would base all the related symptoms on the only deficit of the visual function, emphasizing its role in the performance of these other functions (vision accompanying

touch, guiding movements, illuminating intellectual operations, etc.), Gelb and Goldstein, on the contrary, insist on the structural nature of the disease: through vision it is the categorical attitude, as a general and encompassing function, that has been affected

It is as if the environmental conditions made it impossible for the organism to seek another form of organization that would allow it to maintain itself as a coherent and integrated whole. The environment threatens not just one aspect, but the total configuration that characterizes this organism as an integral temporary existence. Under these conditions, the organism's power to focus loses its place for anguish.

Here is the theme of anguish, which is for Goldstein (1971a, p. 231-255) the point of equivalence between the somatic and the mental in the field of illness. It is, at the same time, a new look towards the disease and that integrates psychic and physical elements in the same phenomenon.

Initial observations came to characterize anguish in general as the subjective experience of being in danger of losing "existence." This is the existential danger that the individual experiences in all conditions that we call disease. In contrast to this, health seems to be the condition of order by which the realization of the nature of the organism is guaranteed.

In other words, anguish is when the organism experiences the risk of losing its own existence. There is no way to integrate them with novelties since they threaten the survival of the organism "as a whole". The organism experiences the sensation of the overflow of its own unity.

Before falling into anguish, the organism still tries a radical form of defense, which is fixation. However, such fixation is not an adjustment promoted by the organism's power to focus. On the contrary, it is a radically opposite position, in which it tries to impose its usual way of responding to the world. In this sense, Goldstein (1987, p. 443) tells us: "The tendency towards self-preservation is a phenomenon of disease, of the 'decay of life'." It is not about saying that – in fixation – the organism is afraid of changing and for that reason it stops. Well, for Goldstein, fear is not related to possible changes or unknown events. Only what is known is feared. And in the case of organismic fixation, if it is true that fear can be felt there, what is feared is precisely the possibility of falling completely into anguish. In this sense,

(...) the individual who fears is because he knows anguish from previous experiences, as well as through imagination and anticipation. But the individual in a state of anguish cannot know fear, because in the state of anguish he is incapable of any recollection of the past (GOLDSTEIN, 1971b, p. 93)

Once submerged in the state of anguish, the organism is not able to do anything but shudder. As Goldstein says (1987, p. 295)

The patient experiences, we could say, not an anguish about something, but only anguish; he "lives" the impossibility of relating to the world, without knowing the reason. He has the thrilling sensation that affects both the existence of the world and that of the self. He can no longer become aware of himself, nor of an object. The patient experiences the shudder of the existence of his own personality and that is anguish for him. This trembling, as experienced, is what we call anguish. Therefore, it is not entirely fair to say that the patient "is in" anguish; it would be fairer to say that the patient "is" anguish.

What then could the doctor do for the patient? If it is true that the theory of the symptom (as a form of health tested by organism's centering power) offers us an idea of therapy that will make a fortune in the praxis of an infinite number of scholars of Goldstein's work; It is also true that the notion of disease will represent, for Goldstein's critics, proof of the lack of rigor with which Goldstein intends to describe diseases, since such a description does not give us any possible form of therapeutics that was not already planned by classical physiological theories and by psychology. According to Manzi Filho (2015, p. 83-84)

If we read Merleau-Ponty and Canguilhem, throughout, it becomes clear how well Goldstein's work was received. After all, he had succeeded in freeing us from a duality in the understanding of illness: there is no organic illness and mental illness, but an organic unity of body and mind. However, according to Foucault, this conception has a price: the exclusion of rigor in the analysis of diseases.

Understood by Goldstein as a state of anguish or trembling of the organism, the disease remains trapped in the bad ambiguity of the somatic and the mental, as if there were not enough specificity in the organism to discern precisely what aspect would be sick. From where then Foucault (2005, p. 11) concludes:

Because of the unity it ensures and the problems it suppresses, this notion of totality is adequate to endow pathology with a climate of conceptual euphoria. It is from this climate that those, close or not, have been inspired by Goldstein. But misfortune wanted the euphoria not to be on the same side as rigor.

Merleau-Ponty, in turn, is not interested in discussing the therapeutic possibilities favored or not by Goldstein's view of illness. Merleau-Ponty is interested in extracting – from Goldstein's use of the notion of Gestalt – a way of rethinking the phenomenological notion of operative intentionality, as if, used in a gestalt way, the notion of intentionality could finally fulfill the task of description of meaning as it is lived and shared in the sphere of the coexistence of bodies.

## **The effects of Goldstein's clinical studies on the work of Merleau-Ponty**

Despite Goldstein's resistance against the way his studies were interpreted by Merleau-Ponty, they remained very important for the French philosopher (according to SPIEGELBERG, 1972, p. 304). The analysis of the Schneider case was not just the occasion for Merleau-Ponty to denounce the limits of “psychologism” explanation about the difference between pathology and normality. Beyond pointing to the insufficiency of the thesis that perceptions and behaviors would be governed by a power of synthesis - being neurophysiological or representational - and that in pathology it would be compromised; the Schneider case served Merleau-Ponty to show in what sense the symptomatic adjustments reveal to us a concrete intentionality, embodied by the body inserted in the environment and that, at the same time, allow the body to seek creative solutions without thinking about them, even in situations of vulnerability.

Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, the Schneider case reveals a new reading of how disease and symptoms can be distinguished. In themselves, the symptoms are not pathological. They are, yes, a form of response, by means of which the organism proposes a change in the way in which it structures itself in its insertion in the environment. At the same time, because the changes proposed by Schneider were not preceded by abstractions, but rather were born spontaneously as Gestalt-reactions concretized in the organism-environment field, Merleau-Ponty thinks that they favored a new reading of what should be the spontaneity studied by Gestalt psychologists and, before them, by phenomenology. In this sense, different from Husserl, who recommended not making use of the results achieved by the sciences, since the phenomenologist would be better off taking the radical position of suspending all judgments about existence – just as Descartes did in his first of the

Metaphysical Meditations – Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, starts precisely from these results (as shown to us by Moutinho, 2006, p. 54). In this sense, the philosopher emphasizes that, although he has lost his ability to make abstractions, Goldstein's patient continued to experience nuclei of meaning, which emerged in the concreteness of his behavior, as adjustments not decided by a thinking self, nor regulated by prior laws. On the contrary, it is about adjustments spontaneously born on the edge of the multiple functions still available to the organism in its mundane insertion. In other words, at least in the field of occurrences described by Goldstein as concrete events, Schneider reveals a form of temporary link between habits and perceptions, which is another way of describing them to the operative intentional acts proposed by Husserl.

In other words, beyond illness, in terms of a power to focus on time, Schneider makes us see that operative intentionality is not an abstraction of the philosopher concerning what would have to link scientific representations from their foundations and the silence of the world. It is – as revealed by the spontaneous adjustments made by the patient – an event embodied in a phenomenal field, which Goldstein called 'concrete'. In it, things are not closed as if they were entities in themselves. Nor is subjectivity separated from others and from things in favor of a contact with its own interiority, where, presumably, thoughts would replace the external world with representations that are more transparent than the things themselves. In the form of his symptoms, Schneider shows us that “[...] the events of the body become the events of the everyday path” (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1945, p. XV), that is, they become existential. Or then, in the concrete situations experienced by Schneider,

the phenomenological world is not pure being, but the meaning that appears at the intersection of my experiences, and at the intersection of my experiences with those of the other, by the intersection of one in the other; it is therefore inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity that form their unity through the resumption of my past experiences in my present experiences, of the experience of the other in mine.

This is the basis from which Merleau-Ponty poses his existential rereading – in Goldstein's sense – of Husserl's phenomenology. Which means to say that, for Merleau-Ponty, in the concreteness of existence, the different dimensions of experience overlap and are modified without needing to become abstractions of a "I think". Although they are two orders of phenomena that have different natures, in the field of existence, the



physiological and the psychic, they are connected in a spontaneous way, without requiring a kind of power of synthesis for their integration. “What allows us to reconnect the 'physiological' and the 'psychic' is the fact that, upon reintegration into existence, they are no longer distinguished as the order of the in-itself and the order of the for-itself, and that both are oriented towards an intentional pole or towards a world” (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1945, p. 129).

From which it follows that the characterization of the organism – as an existence in which a function of self-realization would spontaneously occur as a dynamic figure-background – opened up to Merleau-Ponty a possibility of going beyond phenomenology itself. After all, without diluting subjectivity in the objectivism of the Gestalt psychologists, Goldstein succeeded in describing the unity of experience without having to establish, along with the description of lived experience, a reflexive structure in which the unity of experience would be represented, as Husserl demanded. For Merleau-Ponty, it is as if Goldstein had managed to demonstrate – through a radical use of the notion of Gestalt – the integration between the different dimensions of experience, without needing to reissue the dualism, if not ontological, at least methodological, that not even Husserl managed to placate. And this is how, starting with Goldstein, Merleau-Ponty envisions the possibility of conceiving Gestalt as a form of intentionality, whose subjectivity or particularity does not need to be assured by a thinking self. This involved establishing a rereading of the phenomenological theory of intentionality itself.

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