

# INTROSPECTIVE ATTENTION

## *An Exploration of the Gestalt Switch Account*

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*To my parents*

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## **CHAPTER 1.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

What is introspection? The very short answer I favour is: a specific type of phenomenally conscious experience. My moderately short answer is: one's experience of attending to the phenomenal character of one's occurrent experience – or to certain features of that phenomenal character. The longer answer consists in unpacking the shorter answers. Thus, my attempts at clarifying some of the parts of the longer answer are what make up this thesis. This thesis, more precisely, is an attempt at exploring some aspects of the phenomenal dimension of introspection. That is, it is an exploration of some aspects of what it is like to attend to the phenomenal character of one's occurrent experience – or, put differently, what it is like to be introspectively aware of some features of that character. It is also an exploration of what it takes, from the subject's point of view, to become so introspectively aware. In other words, it is also an exploration, from our point of view as experiencing subjects, of the transition from our undergoing a phenomenal experience to our introspecting that experience.

The plan for this introductory chapter is as follows. In section 1, I clarify and delimit the project of the thesis in some more detail. In section 2, I justify this project by showing that the phenomenon of introspection as I defined it is presupposed in various philosophical debates or in the way they have been conducted in the recent literature. In doing so, I also review some more sceptical takes on introspection.

## **1. Introspection as attentive awareness of phenomenal character**

The general project of the thesis, as I have announced at the beginning, is to explore some aspects of the phenomenal dimension of introspection, where I conceive of introspection as a specific type<sup>1</sup> of phenomenally conscious experience. What does it mean to conceive of introspection as a phenomenally conscious experience? One way to clarify this thought is to consider a parallel with another type of conscious experience. This is the strategy adopted for instance by Elijah Chudnoff to outline his conception of intuitions as a type of experience, when he provides the following parallel with perceptual experiences:

“[...] while sensory perceptions are experiences that purport to, and sometimes do, reveal how matters stand in concrete reality by making us sensorily aware of that reality, intuitions are experiences that purport to, and sometimes do, reveal how matters stand in abstract reality by making us intuitively aware of that reality.” (2013a: 1)

Likewise, a complete conception of introspection as a conscious experience could arguably be one on which introspective experiences are experiences that purport to, and sometimes do, reveal how matters stand in phenomenal reality by making us introspectively aware of that reality. The phrase “to reveal how matters stand in phenomenal reality” may sound somewhat strange, but it would in this context simply mean that introspective experiences make us aware of the phenomenal character of the experience we are introspecting.

In his case, of course, Chudnoff goes very far in his parallel with perceptual experiences, since he ultimately wants to defend the view that intuitions are a form of intellectual perception. I would like to steer clear of making a corresponding claim in the case of introspective experiences, though. That is, I would like, especially at this stage, to

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<sup>1</sup> For more clarifications on what I mean by “a specific type of experience”, see Chapter 2, section 1.



steer clear of the claim that introspection is a form of inner perception.<sup>2</sup> I am attracted to the conception of introspective experiences I just outlined, and I admit that in this specific respect introspection has features in common with perception. But there may well be on the other hand good reasons to think that introspection and ordinary sense perception exhibit very dissimilar features in other important respects. In particular, I do not think that this conception of introspective experience commits one to a perceptual model of introspection of the sort that proves for instance vulnerable to the argument that Charles Siewert develops against inner sense theories.<sup>3</sup> As far as I can see, one could consistently accept both the conception of introspective experiences outlined above and the conclusion of Siewert's argument.

Be that as it may, I shall in fact not undertake to develop and defend that specific conception of introspective experience in what follows. Rather, I am merely pointing it out as one overall conception of introspective experience within which the more limited project of the thesis makes sense. This project may well be compatible with other conceptions of introspective experience that make it less akin to perception. But what should at least remain from that conception, I would suggest, is this: the project I shall undertake should be seen as stemming from an overall view of introspective experiences as providing us with the kind of conscious awareness of the phenomenal character of our conscious episodes that is poised to serve as a basis of our epistemic situation with respect to our own consciousness.

To be sure, one wider ambition of an exploration of the phenomenological dimension of introspection should be epistemological. More precisely, in my view, the epistemological ambition should be to understand how a proposed phenomenological characterization of introspective experiences can provide a basis to build an account of

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<sup>2</sup> For more on perceptual, or inner sense, models of introspection, see Chapter 6, section 4.

<sup>3</sup> See Siewert (2012). More on this argument in Chapter 6, section 4.

the justification of phenomenal beliefs (i.e., beliefs about the phenomenal character of an experience) and, ultimately, an account of phenomenal knowledge. I cannot undertake such an ambitious project in this dissertation, though – but I certainly hope to do so in some later work.

So the first tenet of the definition of the phenomenon of introspection I shall be operating with in what follows is a conception of introspection as a phenomenally conscious experience. The second main tenet of that definition is that I conceive of the introspective experience as an experience of *attending* to the phenomenal character of an introspected experience, or to a certain feature of that character. Therefore, a phenomenally conscious form of attending to our experience, as opposed to a mere non-attentive awareness of it, is necessary for introspection as I conceive of it here. The phenomenon of a subject having a non-attentive or pre-reflective awareness of the experience she is undergoing has been much discussed in the phenomenological tradition, as well as in more recent research in philosophy of mind.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the route I shall take to explore introspection gives attention a central role. There may of course be other possible routes, but this route has a lot of initial attractiveness, in part because the conception of introspection as involving introspective attention is not unfamiliar in the literature, and actually plays an interesting role in some debates, as I will show in the next section.

My exploration with respect to this second tenet of my conception of introspection will also largely focus on its phenomenal dimension – that is, it will focus on attending to the phenomenal character insofar as this makes a difference to my overall phenomenal state at a certain time. What I want to understand, in a nutshell, is

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<sup>4</sup> For more on pre-reflective awareness, see Chapter 3, section 1 (and in particular note 3 for references).

what happens in my overall phenomenology<sup>5</sup> when I turn my attention towards the phenomenal character of one of the experiences that I am undergoing. The main idea here is that when I deploy introspective attention in this sense, this brings about a change in my overall phenomenal state. There is something it is like for me before deploying introspective attention, before attending to the phenomenal character of my current experience. For instance, there is something it is like for me to see the red sun umbrella on the neighbours' terrace, or for me to kick a football across the office floor. Then there is something it is like for me to undergo these experiences while attending to their phenomenal character, while introspecting them. And what it is like to undergo them before attending to their phenomenal character is different from what it is like to undergo them while attending to their phenomenal character.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the main idea is that there is a phenomenal change, a phenomenal contrast here, which I shall explore thoroughly in Chapter 2.

The third tenet of my delimitation of the phenomenon I want to explore is that it consists in attending to an experience of mine in the sense of attending to its *phenomenal character*, or to features of this character – that is, to phenomenal features of my experience – and not to features of another kind. In other words, the phenomenon that I am interested in here is not the phenomenon of introspection in the sense of attending to or finding out, for instance, how it is that I perform a certain calculation, or how I deliberate on a particular question. The terminology of “introspective attention” is sometimes used in that latter sense in the literature. For example, in a paper on the implications of moral cognition for theories of cognitive architecture, Regina Rini writes:

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<sup>5</sup> I appreciate that this use of “phenomenology” is somewhat incorrect, insofar as, strictly speaking, phenomenology is the discipline that studies conscious phenomena from the point of view of the subject of these phenomena. But this use of phenomenology to refer to the phenomenal character (or to a feature of the phenomenal character) of an experience is widespread in the recent literature in philosophy of mind. And it can prove, in some circumstances, to be quite convenient, so I will allow myself to sometimes resort to it as well.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Chudnoff (2015: 2).

“If theories of cognitive architecture generate predictions for moral cognition, then tests of moral thinking provide feedback to cognitive science. In certain circumstances, philosophers’ *introspective attention* to their own moral deliberations can provide unique data for these tests.” (2015: 569; my emphasis)

She clarifies the role of introspection in her argument as follows:

“What I will now argue is that certain instances of the experience of engaging in moral philosophy, facilitated by philosophers’ training in *introspection*, can provide helpful tests of these rule- and association-based accounts of moral cognition – and through these, evidence for or against general theories of mental architecture.” (2015: 577; my emphasis)

We can see, then, that what Rini has in mind when talking of philosophers paying introspective attention to their moral thinking has not directly to do with attending to the phenomenal character of their moral thinking – it has to do, rather, with finding out how they deliberate on a given moral issue. This is not, therefore, the conception of introspective attention I shall be operating with myself in what follows.

## **2. Introspective attention as presupposed in the literature**

The goal of the thesis is to explore the phenomenal dimension of introspection, where introspection is conceived as the experience of attending to the phenomenal character of our experience, or, for short, the experience of exercising *introspective attention*. But why should one worry about introspective attention in the first place? What justifies investing philosophical resources to explore this phenomenon in particular?

One important motivation for my overall project here comes from the fact that the phenomenon of introspective attention is presupposed by the discussions of a number of thinkers in various contemporary debates, most prominently – though not exclusively – in philosophy of mind. That is, their discussions in those debates often seem to assume

that conscious subjects are able to do such a thing as attending to the phenomenal character, or to phenomenal features, of their own conscious experiences. Furthermore, not only do they presuppose introspective attention, they do so largely without providing an explicit clarification of what introspective attention involves, let alone what it consists in.

I now want to back up the claim that introspective attention is presupposed in various debates by considering several examples that have been prominent in the recent literature. I shall use the first example to somewhat develop my diagnosis – the subsequent examples will be discussed more briefly. In their 2003 paper on “the phenomenology of first-person agency”, Terence Horgan, John Tienson and George Graham provide a symptomatic example of what I have in mind here. Here is what they write in arguing for the following view of agential experience:

“the phenomenology of agency is inherently *intentional*, presenting in experience – as an intentional object of experience – a self that is an apparently embodied, apparently voluntarily behaving, agent. In the pages to follow we will argue for the phenomenology of first-person agency, and for its intentional content, largely by description. Once you pay proper introspective attention to the features we will describe, you should find such phenomenology ubiquitously present in your own experience, and you should appreciate its built-in intentionality.” (2003: 323; their emphasis)

What is of particular interest for my purpose here is obviously the point that Horgan, Tienson and Graham express in the last sentence of the quoted passage. Their point takes the form of the following claim: if you perform a certain action A, then you should find out that P. Let us look at the second part of that claim first. Read literally, what you are meant to find out is that “the phenomenology of first-person agency” they describe is present in all your agential experiences. More precisely, I take it that what Horgan, Tienson and Graham are saying is that you should find that the account they put

forward of the phenomenal character of agentive experiences indeed captures what it is like for you to undergo an agentive experience. Yet how are you supposed to find that out? Let us look now at the first part of the claim and ask, in particular, what it is that you are supposed to do – what is this action A which you are meant to perform?

Taking what Horgan, Tienson and Graham write at face value again, the action A requires that you deploy your attention in a particular way, since, in their own words, the action they invite you the reader to perform consists in “paying proper introspective attention” to certain features of your own agentive experience. This seems to suggest that, in order to perform the action A, a conscious subject has to use her attention differently from the way she would ordinarily use it when she engages in an action such as, for example, raising and waving her hand to attract somebody’s attention. Specifically, she is not merely undergoing the experience of raising and waving her hand: she is also attending to certain features of that very experience. But what is it that we are supposed to do in order to do precisely this, that is, in order to attend to (features of) the phenomenal character of our experience? This is what I want to investigate in this thesis.

It is worth noting, however, that the claim Horgan, Tienson and Graham make is not that if you perform the action A, then you will immediately find an adequate and complete theoretical understanding of the phenomenology of agentive experiences – for instance by finding, laying in plain sight as it were, the best formulation of the veridicality conditions of such experiences. If anything of the sort was the case, then there would hardly be any need for them to write the rest of their paper, nor for you to read it, really. All that would be required would be for you to direct your introspective attention onto the relevant features of agentive experiences, and to read off the correct phenomenological account of what it is like to act.

No – the way we should make sense of this, and of what Horgan, Tienson and Graham are saying here, I suggest, is the following. When you focus your introspective attention on the relevant features of the phenomenal character of your agentic experience, you then become introspectively aware of these phenomenal features. And only when you are aware of them in that manner are you then in an adequate position to assess a certain theoretical account of the phenomenal character of that type of experience.<sup>7</sup> That is, more generally, introspective attention, on the conception of it that I am assuming here, is a condition of phenomenological enquiries into the character of a given phenomenal episode.

This conception of introspection as attending to the phenomenal character of one's experience is also explicitly endorsed by Barry Dainton. In *Stream of Consciousness*, he writes notably this:

“When we want to find out about our current experience, we introspect: we deliberately focus our attention and see what we find. Think of what you do when you wonder whether your toothache is getting better or worse. As you scrutinize your toothache, you become *introspectively aware* of it.” (2000: 29; his emphasis)

Dainton is even more unequivocal a few pages later about the definition of introspection that he is operating with:

“For present purposes I will take it that *we are introspectively aware of an experience when we attend to it*, actively or passively, usually (though not always) with a view to forming a judgment or belief about it on the basis of the direct or non-inferential access that we have to our own experiences.” (2000: 34; my emphasis)

In a seminal paper on phenomenal beliefs and phenomenal concepts, David Chalmers relies on the phenomenon of a subject attending to the phenomenal quality of an

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<sup>7</sup> That assessment is itself a philosophical process involving theorizing, making distinctions and exchanging arguments, etc.: see Siewert (2007).

experience for his well-known account of how what he calls “direct phenomenal concepts” are formed. He writes:

“The clearest cases of direct phenomenal concepts arise *when a subject attends to the quality of an experience*, and forms a concept wholly based on the attention to the quality, “taking up” the quality into the concept.” (2003: 235; my emphasis)

Chalmers then goes on to add:

“all direct phenomenal concepts, like all demonstrative phenomenal concepts, are based in *acts of attention to instances of phenomenal qualities*. A direct phenomenal concept such as R does not characterize a quality as an object of attention, but it nevertheless requires attention to a quality for its formation.” (2003: 236; my emphasis)

Attention to the phenomenal quality of one’s experience, I take it, is a particular instance of what I refer to as introspective attention. Exercising one’s introspective attention, therefore, is a necessary condition for one to acquire direct phenomenal concepts, on the view that Chalmers suggests.

In the course of developing her acquaintance account of our introspective knowledge of sensations – which is not without relations to what Chalmers puts forward in the article I just quoted from – Brie Gertler makes use several times of the idea of attending to one’s phenomenal experience. She writes, for instance:

“Pinch yourself (gently). By *focusing your attention on the phenomenal quality of the sensation* that results, you can come to know something about your current experience. Philosophers generally agree on this much. Yet there is widespread and profound disagreement about what this kind of knowledge consists in, and how it is achieved.” (2012: 93; my emphasis)

And in that same paper, she adds later on:

“[...] I find it nearly impossible to doubt that my experience has a certain phenomenal quality – the phenomenal quality it epistemically seems to me to have, *when I focus my attention on the experience*.” (2012: 111; my emphasis)



Both Gertler and Chalmers are talking explicitly of introspectively attending to a given phenomenal quality, or what we might also call a qualitative feature, of one's experience. But the talk of introspective attention in the literature is not limited to these cases where the subject attends to a qualitative feature of her conscious episode. Here is an example where introspective attention is meant to target a certain phenomenal feature of experience that very plausibly is not a qualitative feature of it. In the following passage, Elijah Chudnoff is discussing the phenomenal character of an intuitive experience and the fact that it exhibits what he calls "presentational phenomenology":

"[...] presentational phenomenology can be elusive. By that I mean it can be difficult *to focus introspective attention on it*. This is not a problem for the presentational phenomenology of perception, but it is a problem for the presentational phenomenology of intuition. Why? The reason, I think, is that the presentational phenomenology of intuition often occurs in conjunction with more impressive phenomenology, such as the phenomenology of visualizing, or imagining a situation in a thought experiment, or carefully thinking about the order of the quantifiers in a proposition. These other experiences can be literally attention-grabbing: they grab your attention and keep it to themselves and away from the presentational phenomenology of intuition." (2013a: 59; my emphasis)

Chudnoff had defined earlier in his book what it is for an experience to exhibit presentational phenomenology in that manner:

"An experience has presentational phenomenology with respect to the proposition that p when it not only makes it seem to its subject that p, but also makes it seem to its subject as if it makes him or her aware of the very chunk of reality that makes p true." (2013a: 18)

Hence, the presentational phenomenology of an experience is part of its phenomenal character, it makes a difference for what it is like to undergo that experience, so it is in this sense a phenomenal feature of it. Chudnoff argues moreover that it is a phenomenal feature that one can introspectively attend to, even though it might be hard for one to do

so for the reasons he mentions in this passage. However, the presentational phenomenology is a phenomenal feature of an experience that strikes me as being rather unlike the features that we ordinarily group in the category of the qualitative features.

Uriah Kriegel argues for the existence of a type of phenomenal feature he calls the “structural features of phenomenology”, which should be distinguished from the category of what I have just called the qualitative features of an experience. “Something is a structural feature of phenomenology if it is an aspect of it – if it makes a difference to the phenomenology – without being an item in it”, he writes (2009: 172). That is, a structural feature “is not an extra item in the phenomenology, alongside bluishness, nervousness, and so on” (2009: 171-172). Examples Kriegel gives of such structural features include the synchronic and diachronic unity of one’s phenomenology at a time and across time, or phenomenal intensity.

The distinction between qualitative and structural phenomenal features is a difficult one to draw with precision, and here is not the place to try to clarify it further. One might perhaps think that the presentational phenomenology of an experience is a structural feature of it, as it does not seem to be an “item” like bluishness or nervousness either – but there may also be other categories of phenomenal features that can be distinguished from ordinary qualitative features and that might prove more suitable to include presentational phenomenology.

In yet another debate regarding yet another type of experiences, namely emotional experiences this time, Jonathan Mitchell also relies on the notion of introspective attention when he writes in a recent contribution:

“This paper examines whether, and in what sense, emotional experiences are transparent. It argues that they are opaque in a distinctive way: *introspective attention* to emotional experiences does not principally reveal non-intentional

somatic qualia but felt valenced intentional attitudes [...]” (2020: 525; my emphasis)

Finally,<sup>8</sup> here is how Gary Hatfield characterizes the use of introspection in the fields of perceptual and cognitive psychology:

“When “introspection” is defined as deliberate and immediate attention to certain aspects of phenomenal experience, we see that it continues to be used as a source of evidence in perceptual and cognitive psychology.” (2005: 279)<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, however, a number of philosophers have expressed scepticism at the idea of a subject directing her introspective attention to the phenomenal character of her experience, and have more or less explicitly denied that such a thing is possible. This famous passage by Gilbert Harman is probably one of the most often quoted in this context:

“When you see a tree, you do not experience any features as intrinsic features of your experience. Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree.” (1990: 667)

As is well-known, the view that Harman expresses here has subsequently come to prominence as the view of the transparency of experience. The transparency view comes in several different flavours, from weaker to stronger versions<sup>10</sup> (a point I shall return to in due time).<sup>11</sup> And in one form or another, the idea of transparency has been endorsed by various thinkers, as Eric Schwitzgebel remarks in discussing Harman’s quote:

“Harman’s emphasis here is on the negative thesis, which goes back at least to Moore (1903; though Moore does not unambiguously endorse it). The view that it is impossible to attend directly to perceptual experience has been especially stressed by Tye (1995, 2000, 2002; see also Evans 1982; Van Gulick 1993;

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<sup>8</sup> There are of course many more examples that one could mention where introspective attention in the sense I defined it here is presupposed.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Wu (unpublished).

<sup>10</sup> For useful distinction between different transparency claims, see for instance Kind 2003.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 7, section 1.

Shoemaker 1994a; Dretske 1995; Martin 2002; Stoljar 2004), and directly conflicts with accounts according to which we learn about our sensory experience primarily by directing introspective attention to it [...].”<sup>12</sup>

Here Schwitzgebel insists on the epistemological dimension of introspective attention, his own view being one of strong scepticism<sup>13</sup> regarding the prospects of introspection as a source of knowledge about our sensory experience. But of course, the idea of transparency as expressed by Harman has phenomenological implications as well. For instance, if Harman is right that when one undergoes a perceptual experience, the only features one can attend to are features of the object perceived, then this would make it impossible for one to attend to a feature such as the presentational phenomenology of one’s perceptual experience, which I mentioned in discussing Chudnoff’s quote above. For it would not make any sense to say that an object one perceives has the feature of “not only making it seem to its subject that *p*, but also making it seem to its subject as if it makes him or her aware of the very chunk of reality that makes *p* true”.<sup>14</sup> It is not clear, though, that weaker versions of the transparency view are inconsistent with the idea of introspective attention to phenomenal features. However, I shall postpone further discussion of this point to a later time (see Chapter 7, section 1).

It is no surprise that proponents of the transparency idea often use examples of perceptual experiences (and especially visual experiences) to illustrate their claims. It is indeed when we consider perceptual experiences that transparency claims appear the most plausible. In my present exploration of the phenomenology of introspective experiences, I will also mostly focus my discussion on the case of introspecting our perceptual experiences. I believe that one should ultimately aim for a unified account of

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<sup>12</sup> Schwitzgebel (2019), section 2.3.4.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance Schwitzgebel (2011). For defences of the reliability of introspection see for instance Bayne and Spener (2010), Kriegel (2013), Hohwy (2011), Ramm (2016), Peels (2016), Smithies (2013), Watzl and Wu (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Chudnoff (2013a: 18).

the phenomenology of introspection that proves plausible for the introspection of other types of conscious experiences – but I shall have to leave a proper discussion of such an extension of the account considered here to another occasion.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **PHENOMENAL CHANGES AND THE INTROSPECTIVE OPERATION**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an anchoring point from which I shall set forth into my exploration of the phenomenon of introspective attention. I mentioned in Chapter 1 the idea that when I deploy introspective attention, this brings about a change in my overall phenomenal state. A central task of the present chapter will be to try to determine more precisely the relevant phenomenal change that the deployment of introspective attention brings about. In order to do so, I shall gradually hone in on that phenomenal change by distinguishing it from other kinds of changes brought about by other phenomena. This is the main respect in which this chapter provides an anchoring point for what follows in the rest of the dissertation. But this chapter also serves as an anchor in another respect: it introduces in broad brushstrokes some of the central ideas of the account that I want to explore and develop further in the next chapters.

Here is what I plan to do in this chapter in more detail. In section 1, I develop two guiding questions that we should, in my view, expect an account of the phenomenal dimension of introspection to address. In so doing, I articulate a number of constraints on the kind of answer which that account should be able to deliver. In section 2, I outline the core tenets of the account I want to explore in what follows, and I introduce several key notions that are crucial for that account. This allows me to make a first pass at

tackling the two guiding questions I outlined in section 1. In sections 3 to 8, I discuss an array of cases involving different types of phenomenal change. As I go through these different cases, I zero in progressively on the type of phenomenal change that is relevant for the case of introspection. In doing this, I also introduce some further important ideas that I shall develop in the next chapters.

### **1. Two guiding questions and some constraints**

I shall begin by presenting, in turn, two questions that in my view play an essential role in guiding an exploration of the phenomenal dimension of introspection. In developing these two questions, I shall formulate a number of constraints that an account of this phenomenon should fulfil in order to meet its target.

#### ***Question 1:***

*What do we do when we introspect our current phenomenal experience?*

We should expect of an account of introspection that it clarifies what it is that we do when we introspect our current phenomenal experience. The main general question that this dissertation investigates is “What is the phenomenology of introspection?” (call it question Q).<sup>1</sup> Yet it seems reasonable to expect of an account addressing Q that it will be partly informed, at least, by its response to the question “What do we do when we introspect ?” (question Q1). It is true that Q1 is not itself a phenomenological question about introspection. Nonetheless, it would be rather surprising if our account of Q1 had no bearing whatsoever on our account of Q. Such a result would at the very least call for further explanations. The default assumption, I thus want to suggest, is that we should expect an account of Q1 to inform an account of Q.

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<sup>1</sup> More precisely, the dissertation explores some aspects of the phenomenology of introspection.

Compare this situation with the enquiry into the question “What is the phenomenology of thought?”. Here as well it seems natural to expect our response to “What do we do when we think?” to inform our account of the phenomenology of conscious thinking to a certain extent. Likewise, if it turned out that what it is like to think has nothing whatsoever to do with what we do when we think, we would be surprised. In the absence of good reasons to believe that this is so, that should not be our default assumption.

Of course, asking what we do when we introspect only makes sense if we actually *can* introspect. That is, Q1 only makes sense if we assume a positive answer to the question “Is it possible at all for us to introspect our experiences?”. Call that latter question Q0. One kind of scepticism about introspection answers Q0 negatively. A sceptic of this kind denies that we can do such a thing as attend to the phenomenal character of our experiences. I shall not directly argue here for the claim that we can actually do so. On the contrary, I shall in a sense assume that we are able to introspect. This may perhaps surprise the reader – yet my justification for doing so is that we should not expect of an account of the phenomenology of introspection that it argues directly for the claim that we can introspect.

That is not to say, however, that an account of Q will be of no significance whatsoever with respect to Q0. We should not expect an account of the phenomenology of introspection to include an argument that we can introspect, but it is reasonable to expect such an account to be informed by an account of what we do when we introspect. And while an account of what we do when we introspect presupposes that we can introspect, it also indirectly makes it plausible that we can do so. The reason is that articulating precisely what it is that we do whenever we attend to the phenomenal



character of our conscious experience puts on the sceptic the extra burden of providing reasons as to why we could not do exactly the thing which has been articulated.

A similar dialectic applies to another assumption implicit in the project of addressing Q, i.e. the assumption that introspecting itself constitutes a phenomenally conscious experience. Here also: the question Q only makes sense if we assume a positive answer to “Is introspecting itself a phenomenally conscious experience?”. Call that latter question Q2. Another kind of scepticism about introspection answers Q2 negatively. A sceptic of this kind does not necessarily deny that we can do such a thing as attend to the phenomenal character of our experiences. What she denies is that attending in such a manner itself constitutes a conscious experience (as opposed to an unconscious awareness of the experience in question). Here again: while it is true that an account of the phenomenology of introspection presupposes that introspecting is a conscious experience, one can lend plausibility to that claim by laying out a detailed account of the various aspects of what it is like to introspect.

***Question 2:***

*What is the phenomenal relation between having an experience and introspecting that experience?*

We should also expect of an account of introspection that it sheds light on the phenomenal relation between having an experience and introspecting it. That is, the account should articulate how phenomenally different or similar it is for the subject to undergo the former as opposed to the latter experience. Are there reasons to believe that the two experiences differ strongly, perhaps even radically? Or, on the contrary, are there grounds to think that the transition from one to the other is elusive from the subject's point of view and the difference rather faint?

Call this question (What is the phenomenal relation between having an experience and introspecting that experience?) Q3. Q3 can be seen as a more specific

version of the main question Q, in that it addresses one particular aspect of the phenomenology of introspection. Accordingly, some of the things I said about Q apply to Q3 as well. Q3 of course also only makes sense if we assume a positive answer to Q2, i.e. if we assume that introspecting itself is a phenomenally conscious experience. And here too, answering Q3 should lend some plausibility to the claim that introspecting is a conscious experience. That might even be particularly the case for Q3. Indeed, if one can provide a convincing phenomenological account of the transition from, say, perceiving a certain feature of the world to introspecting that perception, then such an account will speak in favour of the introspecting itself being a conscious episode. If the state resulting from that transition was not phenomenally conscious, one should in fact be at a loss to say anything about that phenomenal relation in the first place, because there is simply no phenomenal relation of similarity or difference between a conscious and an unconscious state.

An account of Q3 is equally bound to be shaped by the account given in response to the question as to what we do when we introspect (Q1). As we have seen, this is true of Q, the general question, but it should be especially true of Q3. For Q3 is specifically concerned with the phenomenal relation between the two experiences before and while we introspect. Therefore, we can see that what a conscious subject does in order to introspect is what will bring about the change in her overall phenomenology that Q3 targets. For this reason, tackling Q3 will not only be a matter of articulating that phenomenal relation. It will also involve accounting for why the experiences before and during introspecting are related as they are; that is, it will involve clarifying what it is about introspecting which explains why one's experience before introspecting is similar to, while differing from, one's experience when one introspects. Ideally, the account put

forward in response to Q1 should shed light on our account of Q3. At the very least, it should not be the case that the latter is rendered less plausible by the former.

Another constraint on the account of the phenomenal relation that I shall seek to clarify here is that it should not turn out to be a relation of exact sameness. That is, what it is like for the subject should not be exactly the same when she has, say, a perceptual experience and when she introspects it. To make this constraint clearer, let us consider the difference between the following claims:

- (i) introspecting an experience E is always (or at least typically) phenomenally distinct from just having E;
- (ii) introspective experiences form a specific phenomenal type, i.e., what it is like to introspect any experience has important phenomenal commonalities with any other introspective experience.

The constraint I mentioned earlier amounts to a commitment to claim (i), but it does not amount to a commitment to claim (ii). One may accept (i) without accepting (ii), as it might be the case that introspective experiences fail to form a specific phenomenal type, even though each instance of introspecting an experience E still typically differs phenomenally from just having E.

It is worth noting at this point that, strictly speaking, one could deny (i) while answering both Q0 and Q2 positively, that is, while accepting both the reality of introspection and its status as a conscious experience. This might be a workable view of introspection, albeit a phenomenologically deflationary one, since, from the subject's point of view, introspecting would be nothing else but merely having any ordinary conscious experience.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the view could also be seen as an inflationary view of

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<sup>2</sup> It might be on this view that introspecting is a conscious experience, tokens of which are exactly phenomenally similar to tokens of the introspected experiences, but nevertheless that introspection is a different type of experience to e.g. perceptual experiences, because introspection is typed in functional terms, or in terms of specific neural realization, for instance.

standard conscious experience, one on which being phenomenally conscious would also always involve attending to the phenomenal character of the experience one is undergoing. This seems rather hard to believe, though, not least because it seems to generalize an unlikely situation of split attention if one does not want to give up the idea that our attention is normally also directed at other features (typically, in perception, features of the external world), and not only at the phenomenal character of our experiences. For that reason, it does not ultimately seem to be a very attractive and plausible view.

As far as I can see, a denial of (i) would be best combined with the view that introspection merely consists in a pre-reflective<sup>3</sup> and non-attentive form of awareness of one's experiences. However, that would amount to missing the target of my investigation, which I explicitly defined as one's experience of attending to the phenomenal character of her occurrent experience. Therefore, we should expect of our account of introspection that it meets the constraint expressed in (i). Moreover, the account should be able to explain why it is the case that (i) is fulfilled. Ideally, it should be able to explain why to introspect an experience E as opposed to just undergoing E makes a phenomenal difference in the light of what one does when one introspects.

This completes my discussion of the two guiding questions I announced in opening this section. I shall now make a first pass at tackling these two questions and, in doing so, introduce some of the core ideas of the account that I want to explore in the rest of the thesis. Those will be the main tasks of the next section.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on pre-reflective awareness, see Chapter 3, section 1 (and in particular note 3 for references).

## **2. The introspective operation and the gestalt switch: a first pass**

What do we do when we introspect our current phenomenal experience? My short answer is that we perform a certain operation upon it. I shall call that operation *the introspective operation*. Hence, when we introspect, say, our current visual perception, we perform a certain operation upon the perception that we are now undergoing. As a result of that operation, the phenomenal character of our overall conscious state changes. There is something it is like for us before the introspective operation and there is something it is like after it. And what it is like before the introspective operation is different from what it is like after it. In other words, something changes at the phenomenal level: there is a phenomenal contrast, a phenomenal change that the introspective operation brings about. It is this phenomenal change that I want to explore and to account for in what follows.

Yet, in order to be able to do so, we first need to have at least a rough idea of what the operation we perform when we introspect involves. At a general epistemological level, this operation corresponds to a shift in the subject's epistemic interests: a shift from her interest in knowing what the world that she perceives is like to her interest in knowing what the phenomenal character of her experience of the world is like – or, in other words, knowing what it is like to perceive the world as she does. But at the experiential level, more specifically, the introspective operation involves a certain change in the way she is deploying her conscious attention. Let me take a concrete example: suppose that at the time  $t_1$  I am seeing the blue sofa in the corner of my office and that at the time  $t_2$  I am introspecting that very visual perception. The relevant change in attention between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , to a first approximation, would be this: at  $t_1$  I am attending to, say, the blue colour of the sofa, whereas at  $t_2$  I am attending to what it is

like to have this visual experience of the blue sofa, or, in other words, to the phenomenal character of this perceptual experience.

However, this first approximation is potentially misleading insofar as it may invite the interpretation that the introspective operation involves shifting one's attention away from the blue colour of the sofa to focus it entirely upon a 'new' element, an element that was not present when undergoing the visual experience at  $t_1$ , namely the phenomenal character of that perceptual experience. Moreover, the first approximation might also misleadingly suggest that at  $t_2$ , my perceptual experience has given way to some other, different experience, i.e. an introspective experience. Both of these suggestions should be resisted, I believe, as both misconstrue what really goes on when we introspect. Both suggestions are mistaken because they fail to properly appreciate what has changed and what has not changed between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ .

While there certainly is a change, it is important to get clear about what, at  $t_2$ , has in fact remained the same as in my earlier experiential situation at  $t_1$ . What remained the same is, first and foremost, this: my perceptual experience has not changed insofar as I am still seeing the same blue sofa. As far as this visual state is concerned, one should actually say that neither its phenomenal content nor its intentional mode has changed. Therefore, what is significant about the introspective operation is that it does not replace, nor delete, nor screen off, the initial experience upon which it is performed. Rather, the introspective operation is performed alongside – or, more precisely, it is performed upon – the very same experience as before: in this case my visual perception of the blue sofa. For this reason, it is misguided to think that at  $t_2$  my visual experience has given way to some other, different kind of conscious experience.

Furthermore, the introspective operation does not affect either what we may call the 'internal make-up' of my initial visual experience, where that internal make-up

includes the distribution of attention *within* this visual experience. At t2, when I perform the introspective operation, I am seeing the blue sofa and I am still, for instance, attending to its blue colour, just as I was doing at t1. And yet it is true, as I submitted before, that introspection brings a change in the way we deploy our attention. So it is true that there is such a change in my experiential life between t1 and t2: it is a change in the global distribution of my attention. At t2, I am still undergoing the same perceptual experience as before, but I am now also performing this further introspective operation upon it. So, inasmuch as we are talking about my overall experience at t2, it is not exhausted by my perception anymore. I am still having a perceptual experience, and insofar as it is a perceptual experience it is the same as before, but my overall experience now includes something more. There is a change in attention, but crucially it does not consist in a change in attention within my perceptual experience itself. That point is really important because it singles out the difference between the change in attention brought about by introspecting my current perception and the change in attention brought about for instance by shifting my attention from one object I see to another within my perceptual experience itself. I shall explore that difference much more thoroughly in the next sections of this chapter.

But what is it, then, that I attend to when, at t2, I transition to introspecting my current experience? From what I have said so far, things might look rather puzzling. For, on the one hand, I have introduced the phenomenon of introspection by stating that it involves a change in conscious attention, while, on the other hand, I have denied that it involves shifting my attention away from what I am attending to (e.g. the blue sofa) and refocusing it instead entirely on a new element that would, so to speak, ‘show up’ in my experience once I perform the introspective operation.

It is at this point – and so as to see more clearly our way out of that apparent puzzle – that I believe it useful to start thinking of what is going on here in terms of a *gestalt switch*. The general thought is the following. Well-known ordinary cases of gestalt switches typically involve an ambiguous figure that one can see in two different ways, such as the famous duck-rabbit drawing.<sup>4</sup> Two things about gestalt switches interest me particularly for my present discussion. Firstly, there is obviously a phenomenal change when one switches from seeing the drawing as a drawing of a duck to seeing it as a drawing of a rabbit – what it is like to have one or to have the other experience is different. Yet, secondly, one is well aware, after the switch, of the drawing as the very same drawing as before, and of each part of the drawing (e.g. the lines which depict the rabbit’s ears) as the very same as before (i.e. as the lines that depicted the duck’s bill).

The view that I would like to explore in what follows is a view suggesting that something analogous happens when we introspect our current experiences. Something similar happens when we perform the introspective operation – something like an introspective switch, or more precisely, an *introspective gestalt switch*. Here, too, we get the sense that there is a global change in our overall experience, although nothing changes in the sense that nothing new comes into view, so to speak. I shall come back to this analogy, and to the various points I just mentioned, and discuss them in much more detail later on (see Chapter 3). For now though, I merely want to give to the reader a general picture of the view I shall explore in the thesis.

So let me, for the moment, add this. Earlier I was asking what it is that we attend to when we transition from having an experience to introspecting it. In a sense, all there is for us to attend to are the features we are already aware of in merely having the initial experience. In the case of visual perceptions, these features will be the properties we

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<sup>4</sup> See figure 1 in Chapter 3, section 1.



become aware of *in* seeing, that is, typically, colours and shapes of various kinds. What changes with the introspective switch is that we no longer experience these properties *only* as properties of the external objects that our perception discloses to us. We no longer experience them only as characterizing the objects we see and only as contributing to contrast these objects from their background or from other objects that we may see. For the introspective switch has the result of making us *also* experience these properties insofar as they contribute to determining the phenomenal character of the very experience we are undergoing. When I switch from merely seeing the blue sofa to introspecting my visual experience of the blue sofa, I switch from a state of experiencing a certain shade of blue as determining the colour property that the sofa has, to (not only that, but also) experiencing that shade of blue insofar as it contributes to determining what it's like to undergo the very phenomenal experience I am having right now.

We can easily see how the introspective switch outlined in this way corresponds to the more global shift in epistemic interests that I said is characteristic of the introspective operation – namely, the shift from knowing what the world is like to knowing what the phenomenal character of one's experience of the world is like. I shall flesh out this central thought further later on (see Chapter 3, section 3). For now though, I want to use this rough outline to draw the reader's attention to the phenomenal change that the introspective switch brings about. In order to identify properly what it is that really happens at the phenomenal level, we must look at concrete examples and distinguish the phenomenal change I want to account for from other similar phenomenal changes we may experience. This will be the task of the following sections.

### **3. Two instances of dramatic phenomenal change**

I have said that I believe it useful to think of the transition from having an experience to introspecting it on the model of a gestalt switch. Using the notion of an introspective switch proves especially attractive because it allows us to properly capture the kind of phenomenal change brought about by the introspective operation, and to distinguish it from other kinds of phenomenal change. The strategy I shall pursue in the next sections will be to gradually zero in on the kind of change that is relevant to the introspective operation. I shall do so by considering various other kinds of phenomenal change and by showing how the change that occurs in the introspective case is qualitatively different from them.

#### **Case 1**

Let us suppose that I find myself in the following experiential situation. I am sitting at a desk in the university library. There are a few similar desks around me, where other people are taking notes while reading books or typing away on their laptops. Suppose further that for now we leave aside all the other kinds of conscious experience I am having at the time in order to focus only on my current visual experience. From where I sit I can notice, among various things in my visual field, a yellow jumper someone has left on a chair at the table near mine; on that table, on the top of a pile of photocopied notes, lies a purple plastic folder. Let us then say that this constitutes the (simplified) visual scenery I am presented with at the moment. Accordingly, my current (simplified) visual experience is an experience as of a yellow jumper on the left of a purple folder.

Consider now what happens when I turn my head away from that visual scenery and start looking instead at the shelves of books on the wall of the library to my right. What happens, amongst other things, is that this results in a change in my visual

experience. That experiential change, the change I bring about by turning my head, is a certain phenomenal change: what it is like for me to see now is different from what it was like for me to see before I turned my head. It is a change in the scenery that is visually presented to me. Accordingly, this is one way in which the phenomenal character of different token experiences of mine can differ: with respect to the scenery with which I am visually presented, simply by having each experience. We could also say that it is a change in the *phenomenal content* of my visual perception: a change in what appears to be the case in virtue of the phenomenal character of my experience.

However, the phenomenal change characteristic of the introspective operation is not the same as changes in visual scenery, since neither kind of change requires that the other also occurs. Moreover, the phenomenal change involved in introspecting my visual experience is not a change in what I see. It is not a change in the visual scenery with which I am presented, nor is it a change in phenomenal content of that sort. For it is certainly not as if I am starting to *see* something else, or something more, once I start taking the introspective attitude towards my visual experience. On the contrary: whatever the introspective change turns out to be exactly, it is not such that I start seeing things other than the yellow jumper and the purple folder. Nor is it such that I start seeing new things in addition to them – nor such that I am under the impression that I do.

### Case 2

A second kind of phenomenal change we should distinguish the introspective change from is the following. Consider the change I can bring about by going from looking at the jumper and folder in front of me to only thinking, with my eyes closed, about the scenery I saw a mere second ago. Unlike the first kind of change I just discussed in case

1, this change is not a change in what I see (insofar as we assume here that I do not see with my eyes closed). The operation considered here is not an operation that changes the content of my visual experience. It is, rather, an operation that replaces that experience altogether. Therefore, in this case, the phenomenal change in question might be somewhat trickier to characterize. It is not a straightforward change in phenomenal content as in the previous case – although it may arguably also involve a change in phenomenal content (for it is, at least, not obvious that what appears to be the case when I think about the scenery is exactly the same as what appears to be the case when I perceive the scenery). Whatever is true of the change of content, the contrast here surely involves a change in phenomenal mode, though. My perceptual experience (my seeing the jumper and folder) is replaced by a cognitive experience (my thinking about visual scenery). The mode of thought has been substituted for the mode of sight.

If this is so, then it is not hard to see again that the kind of phenomenal change involved in this second case does not get us much closer to what happens in introspection. For here as well: it is certainly not as if I am ceasing to see whatever I was seeing as soon as I start taking the introspective attitude towards my visual experience. Indeed, whatever may be true of the introspective phenomenal change, it is not a change such that I stop seeing the yellow jumper and the purple folder when the change occurs. Nor am I under the impression that I do not see these things anymore. Therefore, it seems inappropriate to conceive of the introspective operation as an operation that would, as it were, delete or screen off the initial experience upon which it is performed. However, this does not amount to saying that the introspective operation involves no change in phenomenal mode whatsoever when we consider one's whole experiential state. Even if it is not the case that the mode of the initial experience gets screened off, perhaps the introspective operation actually brings into play an extra mode, an

introspective mode, in addition to the initial mode of the introspected experience (e.g. the visual perceptual mode). If that is the case, then we would have a situation where there is a change in phenomenal mode relative to one's whole experiential state at a time, for though the mode of the initial experience does not change, there is an extra introspective mode coming into play whenever one performs the introspective operation. I shall come back to this issue of an extra introspective mode, and of the nature of that mode, later on (see Chapter 7, section 2).

#### **4. Phenomenal changes and shifts in attention**

##### **Case 3**

For the moment though, let us consider a third type of phenomenal change that should help us zero in on the relevant change involved in introspection. If we come back to my initial example of the visual experience I have in the library, that third type of change can be specified as follows. But first, I will need to detail a bit more my description of the initial perceptual experience upon which I perform the introspective operation. Let us imagine, just as before, that I am still sitting at the desk and looking at the same scene composed of a yellow jumper lying on the left of a purple folder. But let us add this time that I am intently directing my gaze at the jumper on the left-hand side of the scene, focusing my attention on this piece of clothing. When I do that, I still see the folder – I am still visually aware of it, but it is in the periphery of my visual field, on the right side, and outside the focus of my attention. Now, the phenomenal contrast that interests me here is the one I bring about by shifting my gaze and my attention away from the pullover and onto the folder. In other words: I am still looking at the same visual scene as before, only this time I am directing my gaze at the purple folder and focusing my

attention on it. And now, although I am still visually aware of it, it is the jumper's turn to lie in the periphery of my visual field and outside the focus of my attention.

Perhaps some readers will have doubts that the case I just described is a case where a genuine phenomenal change occurs to begin with. They might be inclined to think that there is no such change to begin with, for instance because they believe that the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience supervenes on what appears to the subject in undergoing that experience. Since the exact same scene appears to me before and after I shift my attention and my gaze,<sup>5</sup> my visual experience before and after that shift will have the exact same phenomenal character. They might thus want to endorse a view on which attending to one object or another has no phenomenal effect whatsoever on one's visual experience, as long as it does not entail a change in what appears to the subject. Thus what it is like for the subject to be aware of the visual scene in both cases would be the same. Let us call such a view the *appearance view* of phenomenal character.<sup>6</sup> Note that, on the appearance view, one does not have to claim that shifting one's attention makes no phenomenal difference whatsoever, only that it makes no difference with respect to the phenomenal character of one's perceptual experience; perhaps the shift in attention still makes a phenomenal difference with respect to one's agitive phenomenology, for instance. I have to say that I find the appearance view implausible. I shall not argue against it here, however (although I shall discuss the issue more thoroughly later on – see Chapter 6, section 2). For now, I merely want to point out that when we consider another perceptual modality, namely audition, the phenomenological inadequacy of such a view appears even more vividly, or so I would suggest. One well-

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<sup>5</sup> I shall henceforth discuss the phenomenal change relevant to this third case as the change brought about by shifts in attention, even though case 3 is a case where both my gaze and my attention shift. The reason is that I assume in this third case that both shifts go together, and that what is relevant for my aim here is the phenomenal change brought about by shifts in attention. In case 4, I shall discuss the situation where both shifts do *not* go together.

<sup>6</sup> The terminology is borrowed from Watzl (2017: 156).

known illustration of this is provided by the case of hearing two different musical parts. Imagine for instance that you are listening to Rachmaninov's piano concerto no. 2 and that you attend alternatively to the accompanying cellos part or to the main piano part itself. The thought that speaks against the appearance view is that what it is like to hear the music changes as you shift your attention in such a manner – in other words, the phenomenal character of your auditory experience varies depending on what you attend to, even if what acoustically appears to you does not.

Let us now move beyond those doubts as to whether a genuine phenomenal change occurs in the third situation I described and turn to the issue as to what that phenomenal change might consist in. Things are becoming more complex than in the two first cases, for we are advancing towards kinds of phenomenal change that turn out to be less and less striking as we are zeroing in on our target. This could mean, for instance, that the ordinary tools provided by the notions of phenomenal content or phenomenal mode could prove to be too coarse-grained to capture such changes properly. It might seem uncontroversial that the change occurring in this third case does not concern the phenomenal content of the respective states. Whether I direct my gaze at the yellow jumper or at the purple folder, whatever appears visually to me to be the case stays the same, provided that I am visually aware of the same visual scene throughout (that is, provided that I am visually aware of both the folder and the jumper throughout). Neither is it the case that the visual scene I perceive could change as a result of my directing my attention to one or another object that makes up that visual scene.

I do think that that much is true, broadly speaking, but that the details turn out to be somewhat more complicated than they might seem at first glance. Of course, changes in attention do not entail changes in phenomenal content in the sense that it is unlikely that changes in attention change what objects – or what aspects of the world, if you like –

appear to me in perceiving. But the notion of phenomenal content we have been operating with so far, the notion of what appears to be the case in virtue of the phenomenal character of my experience, allows for changes other than changes in what objects appear to me. In other words, the phenomenal content of my experience could be different although I am not under the impression that the things appearing to me are different. The content could be different, for instance, because the same things as before appear to me now as having properties different than before. And indeed it is likely that attention in perception can have such an effect. For example, it has been argued that attending to a Gabor patch increases the contrast that the patch appears to have.<sup>7</sup> This would be a case where one can say that the phenomenal content of my experience has changed as a result of my deployment of attention. What appears to be case – the apparent contrast of the Gabor patch I am seeing – has changed as a result of my attending to it. I shall have more to say on this point later on (see Chapter 6, section 2.)

Yet, even if changes in attention can bring about changes in the phenomenal content of one's perceptual experience, it is still a very different thing to claim that all phenomenal changes brought about by shifts of attention are of this kind, i.e. that these phenomenal changes are exhausted by changes in what appears to be the case. For, after all, nothing of the sort seems to be going on in my initial example of my perception of the pullover and the folder. Here it seems very hard to identify a change in the properties these objects appear to have as a result of my shifting my attention from one to the other. Nevertheless, as we saw, there is a change in the overall phenomenal character of my perception, because what it is like to look at the scene is not the same when I attend to the one or when I attend to the other object.

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<sup>7</sup> See Carrasco et al. (2004).



So, what is it? Could it be that a change in the phenomenal mode accounts for the change in what it is like to be in the respective states before and after the shift in attention? Here we enter a terrain where it becomes more difficult to steer clear of theoretical commitments about the nature of attention. What seems clear, nonetheless, is that my switching attention from the jumper to the folder, or vice-versa, does not have the result that I stop *seeing* the jumper or the folder and that I am instead aware of them via some other phenomenal mode which replaces my former mode of seeing. That is: the phenomenal change brought about by attention shifts is not such that the mode of the initial experience gets supplanted by another mode. If it is not of such a kind, then perhaps the phenomenal change in question still involves a change in mode in the sense that it involves the coming into play of an extra mode, an additional mode of attention. We would then have a situation where, say, whenever I attend to the yellow pullover, not only am I aware of it via the mode of sight, but I am in addition aware of it via the mode of attention. An alternative view would be that the phenomenal change in question involves a change in mode in the sense that the mode of the initial experience itself gets modified (without being replaced altogether). On such a 'mode modification' view, shifting attention from the pullover to the folder would involve a phenomenal change because it would involve going from seeing attentively the first and merely seeing the second to seeing attentively the second and merely seeing the first. Or, on yet another alternative account, the phenomenal change brought about by shifts in attention would be a change along a further phenomenal dimension, a dimension that cannot be reduced to either mode or content. On a view of this kind, the phenomenal dimension of attention would constitute a fundamental phenomenal feature of one's conscious experiential state, in the sense that it would be a feature which is 'over and above' other phenomenal features that vary with changes in contents or in modes of one's experiential

state. This would correspond to possible views of conscious attention such as the one put forward for instance in Watzl 2017 – I shall come back to this idea, and discuss it in due course (see Chapter 6, section 3).

Now, irrespective of what the details of the correct view of the phenomenal change brought about by shifts in attention turn out to be, I want to ask the following question: do we have reasons to think that such a change is akin to the phenomenal change brought about by introspection? I am inclined to think that there is something not too far away from this that going on in introspection. That much should not overly surprise us, since attention is also crucially involved in the introspective operation as I conceived of it earlier (see section 1). However, we are still not quite there yet, because it is of course not the same for me to attend to the pullover as it is for me to attend to the phenomenal character of my visual perception of it.<sup>8</sup> And therefore it would be surprising if the operation of shifting attention from one object to another in perception would have the same phenomenal effects as the introspective operation itself. I shall reserve the articulation of the respects in which the change is similar in both cases for my positive characterization of the introspective change in discussing the case number 5 below; for the moment, let me elaborate on what is dissimilar between the two cases.

The main difference between the two, or so I want to suggest, stems from the fact that the introspective operation does not bring about a change in the internal distribution of attention within the initial experience upon which it is performed. On the contrary, when I shift attention in perception, for instance as I do between the folder and the jumper I am seeing, this constitutively affects the distribution of attention within my perceptual state itself. This is of course trivially the case, for this is after all a very natural description of what attending to the jumper I see consists in: it consists in redistributing

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<sup>8</sup> At this stage of the enquiry, one could at the very least remark that it seems to be possible to attend to the pullover without attending to the phenomenal character of one's experience of the pullover.

my attention among the objects I see by shifting it away from the folder and towards the jumper, hence it consists in redistributing my attention within my visual perceptual experience itself. However, even though the introspective operation also constitutively involves a certain deployment of attention, it does not consist in a change in the internal distribution of attention within the initial experience itself. For instance, the introspective operation I perform upon my visual perception of the jumper and the folder does involve a change in attention, but this change is different in kind from the one consisting in shifting attention between the folder and the jumper. It is, one could say, a change at another level. Before I move to the discussion of ‘where’ exactly this change should be located, let us first consider another case of phenomenal change, a case that does not yet involve the introspective operation but that will nonetheless prove dialectically useful on the way there.

## **5. The focus of my gaze and the focus of my visual attention**

### **Case 4**

This fourth case of phenomenal change builds on the same starting situation as the previous one. That is: here I am again in the university library, looking at the same visual scene as before, a scene made up of the yellow jumper and purple folder. This time again I am directing my gaze at the jumper and focusing my attention on it. And as before, while I do so I am still seeing the folder, I am still visually aware of it in the periphery of my visual field, outside the focus of my attention. But in this fourth case, the operation that I perform and that will induce a change in the phenomenal character of my experience is the following. Unlike in the third case, I will now keep my gaze steady and fixed on the jumper while I move the focus of my attention to the folder. As a

result, I end up in a visual state where the target of my gaze, the jumper, is dissociated from the target of my attention, the folder. Of course I am now still visually aware of the pullover – it is still the target of my gaze, although it is not the target of my visual attention. We should obviously have in mind here a situation where the angle and the distance from which I see these two objects is such that I can switch my attention from one to the other without moving my gaze. What is going on in this fourth case, then, is that I am looking at the same visual scene throughout and holding my gaze fixed at same object throughout, while only the target of my visual attention changes, because I go from attending to the jumper to attending to the folder.

To be sure, what I just described is a very unusual way of directing my visual attention to the folder. Ordinarily, whenever we direct our attention to something that we see, we naturally also thereby direct our gaze at that thing. In usual circumstances, targets of our visual attention and targets of our gaze coincide. Changes in what we attend to go together with changes in what we gaze at, and in shifting the one from here to there we usually also shift the other. That being said, the point I am making here is not just that the case I described corresponds to something we obviously can do (I invite, by the way, any sceptical reader to try it out for herself). But I think we actually do it sometimes. It happens that we do look at things, or at people for that matter, in such a way. Consider what is going on in the following fictional situation, for instance. Let us imagine that I have moved from my desk for a moment and that I am now talking to a colleague in the lobby of the university library. As I am standing in front of my colleague and looking at him as he talks to me, I notice this woman I like entering the periphery of my visual field, engrossed in an animated conversation on the phone. I may, perhaps, glance at her briefly as I first notice her. But then, for most of my conversation, my gaze does not move away from my interlocutor, for I do not want to give him the impression

that I am not paying attention to what he is telling me. Also, I do not want the woman to notice that I am looking at her. My visual attention, however, is very much directed at her. At her gesturing hands and the way she is moving her head as the conversation heats up. At the colour of her hair as well, which she seems to have dyed, for it looks much fairer than usual, even though I cannot quite make out the exact colour it actually is without gazing at it properly.

One may wonder at this point if the dissociation I describe here between the target of my gaze and the target of my attention is actually relevant to perceptual experiences in general. Does the possibility of such a dissociation tell us something structural about perceptual experiences? Or is its significance limited to the contingent idiosyncrasy of our visual physiological apparatus? Here is not the place to go far into that intriguing issue, but I shall at least note the following points. The fact that the physiological contingencies of our visual system enable us to direct our gaze and capture some stimuli rather than others certainly plays a role in the fact that the dissociation proves to be so clear in the case of visual experiences. And it may appear that such a dissociation is in fact not as clear for other sensory modalities. Is there for instance an equivalent of the visual gaze in audition, an 'auditory gaze' that we could hold fixed while varying what we auditorily attend to? To bring out this dissociation may certainly appear harder in that case, but it is not true that we have no means of directing our auditory apparatus to capture certain stimuli in particular. We can orient our heads so as to better hear sounds coming from a particular source. We can place our hands around our ears to enhance our perception of those sounds, or place a hand on an ear and cover it to diminish our perception of them. And there does not seem to be any principled reason why we cannot in that manner direct our 'auditory gaze' independently from what we actually attend to in audition. I can, for example, position my ears so as to hear

better the conversation the neighbours are having on the balcony, while at the same time focusing my attention on the sound of the siren of the ambulance driving by. It might well be the case that it is even harder to bring out that dissociation in the other perceptual modalities, although there may be no principled reason why it is impossible in those cases either.

Let us now go back to our main point and to the phenomenal contrast that I want to highlight in this fourth case. The thought here again, obviously, is that there is a phenomenal change brought about by my shifting attention as I do in case 4. My visual experience when I both gaze at and attend to the jumper has a different phenomenal character from my visual experience when I gaze at the jumper but have shifted my attention to the folder instead. That is to say that the change in the target of my attention makes a phenomenal contribution to my conscious experience, just as it does in case number 3. And my discussion of that phenomenal contribution in case 3 applies in the same way here in case 4. The only difference with case 3 is that here I switch my attention to an object in the periphery of my visual field (where the periphery of my visual field corresponds to what is outside the target of my gaze), instead of focusing my attention on an object that I also target with my gaze. But that difference is not a difference that impinges on what the phenomenal contribution of attention consists in. The same reasoning as in case 3 applies to the relation between the phenomenal change illustrated by this fourth case and the change brought about by the introspective operation. For the same reasons as outlined in case 3, here also we can see that attending to the folder when it lies in the periphery of my visual field cannot be the same as attending to what it is like to perceive the folder in the manner that I do here.

I shall therefore limit my characterization of the phenomenal change present in case 4 to this rough outline for now. The motivation for considering this case should

become clearer with my discussion of the next case, since as we will see case 4 is mainly a useful step on the way to articulating the kind of phenomenal change involved in introspection. The discussion of case number 5 below will also provide the appropriate setting to characterize further the kind of experiential state I end up with in case 4, by contrasting the two cases.

## **6. The phenomenal change of the introspective operation**

### **Case 5**

Let us then move, at last, to a case of phenomenal contrast that involves the kind of introspective operation I am interested in here. In order to illustrate this, I shall add a further variation to my initial example of the visual experience I undergo in the university library. The experiential situation we start with this time is identical to the situation we had at the end of case number 4. Namely: I am sitting at the desk, again looking at the scene involving the yellow pullover and the purple folder. And although I am gazing steadily at the pullover, the target I am purposefully directing my attention to is the purple folder in the periphery of my visual field.

Now, here is the way I would describe how I bring about what in my view constitutes a typical instance of the phenomenal change characteristic of the introspective operation. I bring it about by attending, in this case, to what it is like to see the purple folder when I see it while holding my gaze fixed on the pullover. So, what I am doing is adding to my initial experiential situation an operation that consists in explicitly attending to what it is like to see this folder as I am seeing it in this very circumstance. But note, importantly, that I do not achieve this by changing the distribution of my attention ‘within’ my visual experience itself – that is, by changing the

distribution of my attention amongst the objects I see. Therefore, I do not achieve this by performing an attention shift of the kind involved in the cases number 3 or 4, where I was shifting attention between objects that I was seeing, the pullover and the folder, be it that those shifts also involved a shift of my gaze or not. In other words, the situation resulting from the operation I perform in this present case number 5 is the following: I am still looking at the exact same visual scene and holding my gaze fixed in the exact same way as before, but now I also attend to how it is like to visually experience the folder in the specific manner that I do in this very circumstance.

It should be uncontroversial enough that there is indeed a distinctive way it is like to experience the folder in this particular circumstance. That distinctive way is, for instance, relevantly dissimilar to the way it is like for me to see the folder when I attend to it, as I was doing in case 3 once I had shifted my attention onto it and away from the pullover. No – that distinctive way, one may say, is the way it is like to experience the folder visually *qua* object present in the periphery of one's visual focus. More substantially, it is for me to be presented with a purple expanse towards the far right-hand side of my visual field. The purple expanse appears of a quite similar shade of purple as when I attend to the folder directly, although the shade I am presented with now seems less vivid. More significantly perhaps, the exact shape of that purple expanse presented to me is somewhat undetermined, as its boundaries are a bit fuzzy. I am not, of course, under the impression that the folder itself has fuzzy boundaries – rather, the purple expanse I am presented with in this very moment does not exhibit sharp boundaries, nor a clear shape.

That is all very well, but now what is really the difference between what is going on in this present case number 5 and in the earlier case 4? For – or so could insist a reader who is sceptical that there is such a difference – is it not the case that what I have



just put forward here as an outline of what it is like to experience the folder corresponds rather to a description of *what I see* when I attend to the folder as I do in case 5 (and also in case 4, for that matter)? The sceptical worry here, thus, is the following: what is the difference between what I presented as an outline of what it is like to experience the folder, as opposed to what I would say when asked in case 4 to describe what I see, once I have shifted my attention to the folder? This worry easily generalizes into the following sceptical challenge: what is the difference between what I would say when asked to describe *what I see* (i.e. the visual scene as it appears to me), and what I would say when asked to describe *what it is like to see this scene* (i.e. to describe the phenomenal character of my experience of the scene)?

We have now reached the place where I wanted to lead the reader – to bring us here was one of the dialectical purposes of this series of phenomenal changes that I have considered so far. Furthermore, one of the main topics of this dissertation is to explore a certain answer to the challenge I have just outlined. This is a challenge that I shall not undertake to tackle fully here and now – but I shall, nonetheless, give some outline of the path I aim to explore in what follows. Such will be my task in the following section.

## **7. What I see versus what it is like to see**

At the end of the last section, I formulated a challenge as a request for a difference between my description of what I see and my description of what it is like to see the scene that I see. But we should be wary of these terms. We should be careful of the precise way we frame this challenge, and especially of the articulation of the two sides of the opposition – the ‘what’ vs. the ‘what it is like’ sides – between which a difference in description is requested. Because a first thing I should like to mention, only to leave it

aside shortly, concerns the formulation of the second side, the ‘what it is like’ side. If we ask, as I did, for the difference between ‘what it is like to *see*’ and ‘what I see’, then we might easily be drawn to overlook part of that difference already. Namely: that it is significant for the ‘what it is like’ description that I am in fact undergoing an experience of seeing, as opposed to another type of conscious experience I could be undergoing. Yet, that what I see is presented to me in the mode of seeing is not itself something I see – it is not something that will figure in a complete description of *what* I see. Therefore, we might have the misleading impression that mentioning it is trivial whenever we ask for a description of what it is like to see the visual scene, rather than when we ask – as we should, more neutrally and hence fruitfully – for a description of what it is like to experience what I experience in my present state of consciousness.

I shall leave aside that point for now though, because I think that we should not rest content with the idea of merely mentioning the mode of the experience we introspect in order to meet the challenge I set up here. This would not be satisfactory, in my view, partly because it tends to invite the thought that between the ‘what it is like for me to experience’ question and the ‘what I experience’ question, the pertinent difference in what we can say mainly boils down to the mode of the experience at issue. In its crude version, this poor way of meeting the challenge would take the following form: take whatever you say in response to the ‘what you experience’ question, then stick on top of that the relevant mode of your experience and there you have a roughly suitable answer to the ‘what it is like to experience’ question.

The principal reason this is unsatisfactory, though, is that this overlooks significant distinctions within the first side of the opposition, the ‘what I experience’ side. Take again the opposition as I first put it regarding my visual experience, i.e. the opposition between what I see and what it is like for me to see what I see. In a nutshell,

the problem with the first side of that opposition is the following. How am I to decide in principle what should be mentioned in a description of what I see? Well, one option that might appear natural would be to mention whatever I am aware of in seeing. Anything I am aware of in seeing, that is, any object or property or anything else I am aware of in having this visual experience should count as something I see. For a proponent of this option, whatever I am aware of in undergoing this experience is something that is given to me in the mode of seeing – *seeing* is, in this case, the determinate of the determinable relation of awareness. And, he might insist, how else could it be? It is, after all, an experience of seeing that I am having, so it would be quite surprising if anything were given in a mode different from that of seeing in undergoing the experience. But if this is how we understand ‘what I see’, then it seems mysterious how a description of what it is like to see could add anything to a description of what I see (apart from adding a mention of the mode, as I just remarked).<sup>9</sup> If we take that route, then it would seem that a description of what it is like to see just collapses into a description of what I see.

However, there are reasons to reject this line of thought. For one thing, it seems to conflate what I am visually aware of (in an experience of seeing) with what I am aware of in having a visual experience (i.e. an experience of seeing). But it is not obvious that the first of these exhausts the second. For example, in seeing a scene over several seconds I may have a sense of time passing which is not eliminable from my extended visual experience, but it is surely counterintuitive to say that I literally see time passing.

Now, another way to move beyond that line of thought is to consider another more promising route to tackle the question as to what should be mentioned in a description of what I see. This is a route that builds on the idea that there are significant distinctions to be drawn amongst whatever I am aware of in undergoing a certain type of

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<sup>9</sup> Provided we also leave aside here considerations pertaining to pre-reflective awareness. See Chapter 3, section 1, for more on pre-reflective awareness.

experience – a visual type of experience in our present case. Let us go back for a moment to one of the visual experiences I mentioned above, the one I am having in the library's lobby when talking to my colleague and seeing the woman in the periphery of my visual field. I have considered the case where I attend visually to the woman I see, although my gaze is not directed upon her. When I look at her in that (rather unusual) way, I can nonetheless describe what I see regarding her physical appearance. For instance, as mentioned above, I can be interested in the colour of her hair, which looks to have changed, and describe her in saying that she seems to have blonde hair now. When I do that, I am interested in the actual, seemingly new, colour of her hair. If I am a bit shallow, I might perhaps entertain thoughts like 'Will I still find her attractive if she has fake blonde hair now?'. However, still amongst the 'things' I am visually aware of in seeing her, I can now instead refocus my interest on the colour that is merely presented to me in my visual field when I see her hair in that manner, as opposed to the colour her hair appears to be. And here I can notice that the colour I am presented with actually is, say, a certain shade of yellow. That is, what I notice is that there is an expanse coloured in a certain shade of yellow in that area of my visual field. I am not under the impression that the woman has now dyed her hair in yellow, of course – her hair still appears to me to *be* blonde. But if I am to describe the colour I am presented with in that area of my visual field – perhaps because of the lighting conditions in the library's lobby and because of the particular way I am looking at her – I would describe that colour as a shade of yellow. Whenever I focus my attention on that colour, I am not interested in the actual colour of her hair. Indeed, attending to the colour that is merely presented in my visual field is not something that would be pertinent for my shallow questioning about her attractiveness, for instance.

Hence, when I attend to that area of my visual field and describe the coloured expanse as being of a certain shade of yellow, I am still describing something I see. But I am not describing what I see in the sense of describing how the object I am seeing – the woman’s hair – actually appears to me to be. Accordingly, we should conclude that describing what I see does not necessarily amount to describing properties which the things I see seem to instantiate. I can describe some properties, such as colour properties in the present case, that are merely presented to me in my visual field as I am seeing something – properties merely presented in the sense that they are present in my visual field without me being under the impression that they are actually instantiated by the objects out there in the world that I am seeing. We may call properties of this kind *presented properties*, and oppose them to *apparent properties*, namely those properties that the objects I am experiencing appear to instantiate.<sup>10</sup> We should note, furthermore, that we are also able to explicitly attend to these presented properties: we can direct our attention onto them – and here too we can direct our attention in that way independently from the way we direct our visual gaze.

Let us now go back and apply these ideas to my experience of the purple folder with which I began the exposition of this case number 5. My experience, I said then, is an experience of seeing the folder in the periphery of my visual field and of attending to it, while my gaze is steadily targeting the yellow jumper. When I am attending to the folder in this manner, I can describe what I am seeing with respect to the visual appearance of the folder. I can thus aim at satisfying my epistemic interest in the folder, my interest in what properties it has, and therefore I can attend for instance to the shape and size it appears to have – in the present case, a standard A4 rectangular shape. (No doubt the usual way of satisfying my interest in its shape would be for me to gaze at the

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<sup>10</sup> The terminology of apparent and presented properties is borrowed from Nida-Rümelin (2018).

folder – it is perhaps here even more outlandish than in the previous case of the woman’s hair colour to seek satisfaction of my epistemic interest in this bizarre manner, but that does not make it impossible, which is what matters for my reasoning here.) However, just as in the previous case when I was looking at the woman’s hair colour, I can here also switch my attention away from the shape the folder appears to me to have and redirect it onto the corresponding shape that is merely presented to me in my visual field when I undergo such a visual experience. As a result, what I attend to now is the shape of the purple expanse present in the area towards the far right-hand side of my visual field. And this shape is different from that which the folder appears to have, for, seen from the point of view where I am, the purple expanse presented to me exhibits something closer to a trapezoid shape. At the same time, the trapezoid so presented seems to have somewhat fuzzy and underdetermined edges and sides. That this purple expanse presented to me exhibits somewhat fuzzy edges is certainly something that I see – it is not something I merely think or judge or imagine. It is indeed something that I see in looking at the folder in the funny way that I look at it in the present situational set-up.

Although it is certainly correct that I am visually aware of both the trapezoid expanse and the purple folder, it would be misleading to say that the trapezoid is something I see as somehow superimposed on the folder, or in-between me and the folder. Rather, when I see the folder as I do now – that is, *qua* object outside the focus of my gaze – I notice that I can bring myself to see the folder *as* a purple expanse, as an expanse that is merely presented to me. And I notice that I can attend to the merely presented shape that this expanse has. Discussing a related issue, P. F. Strawson points out in “Perception and its Object” how someone can “by an effort of will, bring himself to see, or even will-lessly find himself seeing, what he knows to be the branches of the tree no longer as branches at all, but as an intricate pattern of dark lines of complex

directions and shapes and various sizes” (2011: 131). Strawson does not say that one can see a pattern of lines and shapes superimposed on the branches of the tree one sees; rather, what he says is that one can see the latter *as* the former. The overall argument in which Strawson makes that point is admittedly somewhat different from mine here; I shall come back to his overall argument later on, however (see Chapter 3, section 2).

We may say, then, that when I do what I just described, I shift my attention between instances of two kinds of properties I am aware of in seeing the folder: from an apparent property – the shape the purple folder appears to have – to a presented property – the shape that is merely presented in my visual field when seeing the folder in that manner. The contrast between the apparent shape and the presented shape is particularly striking when I attend to the folder as I do in cases number 4 and 5, that is, without gazing at it directly. For when it is outside the focus of my gaze, the folder still appears to me as being clearly rectangular, whereas the shape of the purple expanse presented to me is different – it is fuzzy, it is not rectangular but rather somewhat trapezoidal. More generally, even if the contrast between apparent and presented properties one is aware of in perceiving is not always as striking, one can in principle switch one’s attention between the former and the latter kind of properties.<sup>11</sup> When undergoing a visual experience, I can for instance go from focusing on the shapes and colours objects I see appear to have, to focusing on what shapes and colours are merely presented to me in seeing the things I see. One way I can do so is for instance by asking myself what shapes and colours I would have to draw if I were to draw how things appear to me visually from my point of view in that experience. Or, to take an example in another perceptual modality, when I am trying to get to sleep and getting annoyed by the music the

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<sup>11</sup> I do not want to exclude that it might sometimes be possible to attend to both at the same time. My point here is only that there is a phenomenal contrast when one switches from attending to properties of the one kind to attending to properties of the other.

neighbours are playing, I can attend to how loud they are playing the music as I am trying to judge whether they are playing it louder than what would be acceptable at this hour of the night, which would justify that I go downstairs and ask them to turn the volume down. Alternatively, I can attend to the loudness of the sound that is presented to me, and perhaps realize that it is a sound that will not in fact prevent me from going to sleep (in which case I might conclude that my irritation has more to do with them playing the music louder than I think they should at this hour of the night rather than with them playing it in a way that in fact prevents me from going to sleep).

#### **8. The introspective attitude as taking a step back from the default perceptual attitude**

However, as interesting as it may otherwise prove, the contrast between attending to apparent versus presented properties in my visual experience does not yet correspond to the phenomenal contrast I want to isolate in putting forward the case number 5. For I do not want to suggest that attending to what it is like to see the purple folder qua object outside my visual gaze simply amounts to attending to e.g. the shapes and colours that are merely presented to me in seeing it in that manner. That would be oversimplifying things, even though it may be well be true that explicitly attending to the properties that are merely presented in a given experience may play a role in bringing us closer to explicitly attending to what it is like to undergo that given experience. For we should note at this point already that attending to presented properties as such constitutes a departure from what may be called the default perceptual attitude. When we undergo a perceptual experience, the default attitude we usually endorse is that of attending to how the objects disclosed to us in that experience are, to what properties they instantiate independently of our experience of them. In other words, the default perceptual attitude



is to attend to the apparent properties we are aware of in experiencing, because, we may usually assume, our default epistemic attitude in perceiving is that of seeking knowledge of what the world that we experience is like. In this respect, explicitly attending to the properties that are merely presented in my experience is not the most appropriate operation to obtain knowledge of what the objects I perceive are like independently of my experience of them.

It might prove useful for my purpose here to make explicit the relation between what I briefly outlined here as the default attitude and what might be articulated as a more general realist view of perceptual experience, such as the one P. F. Strawson argues for in “Perception and its Object”. The default attitude I mentioned to ‘go straight’, when we perceive, to the objects and the properties of these objects we experience, because we eventually want to judge how the objects we perceive are, can be linked to Strawson’s observation that we would in fact have to take *a step back* from perceiving in the default attitude whenever we intend to characterize our perceptual experience for itself – when we want, as he puts it, to describe it “within the limits of the subjective episode” (2011: 127). Indeed, Strawson goes on to write that “whereas Ayer says we take a step beyond our sensible experience in making our perceptual judgement, I say that we take a step back (in general) from our perceptual judgement in framing accounts of our sensible experience, for we have (in general) to include a reference to the former in framing a veridical description of the later” (2011: 130). So what I should do according to Strawson whenever I want to describe how things seem to me in having a certain experience is to use the perceptual claim one would make if one was to endorse the judgement as to what one sees, but to use it in a way that falls short of making that judgement. For instance, if I want to characterize in such a way my visual experience of seeing the setting sun through the branches of a tree, I should not say that “I see the red

light of the setting sun filtering through the black and thickly clustered branches of the elms” (2011: 127), but I should rather say that “I had a visual experience such as it would have been natural to describe it by saying that I saw, etc.” (2011: 128).

I think that the Strawsonian metaphor of ‘taking a step back’ can actually prove of further interest for my purpose here. Indeed, going from perceiving in the default attitude, where my attention is directed at the worldly objects I encounter and the properties they appear to instantiate, to the attitude where my attention is directed at properties presented in my experience merely insofar as they are presented – doing that could also be described as taking a step back. It is certainly a step back different in some respects from what Strawson is describing in the passage above, but it is a step back in the relevant sense that is of interest to me here. This sense might somewhat extend Strawson’s idea beyond what he had intended, although it keeps the same spirit, I believe. The main thought of it is that a token perceptual experience – or a token conscious experience in general – is already ‘given’ to the subject who undergoes it in all its richness – where by that I mean the following. When I direct my attention for instance onto properties that are merely presented in my perceptual experience, it is not as if I discover new properties I was not aware of when perceiving in the default attitude. It may be that I only noticed them explicitly at that moment, but they were already present in my perceiving in the default attitude; they were already present before I took that step back. What that suggests then is that what changes when I take the step back to attend explicitly to the presented properties is that these properties become *perceptually* more salient – in a sense that I shall develop later on (see Chapter 6 section 5) – than other properties I am aware of, for instance apparent properties. More generally, what can be described as a step back here is therefore an operation performed upon the initial

perceptual experience that makes some of its aspects more salient than when I was only implicitly aware of them in the default attitude.

With that in mind, let us go back at last to the main point of this case number 5. I have acknowledged that what I have said so far, though it puts us on the right track to zero in on what it is to attend to the phenomenal character of one's experience, does not yet amount to doing exactly so. What I want to submit now is that the operation I perform in this case number 5 and which brings about the phenomenal change characteristic of introspection can also be adequately thought of as taking a step back. However, one could even say that it involves taking a step even further back than the step I just described. The reason is that the introspective operation does not have the result of making more perceptually salient a mere aspect of what I see, such as was the case with apparent and presented properties. Rather, the introspective operation has the result of making *phenomenally* more salient an aspect of the phenomenal character of my visual experience. In other words, the introspective operation makes phenomenally more salient an aspect of what it is like to see as I do in this experience, as opposed to making perceptually more salient an aspect of what I am visually aware of in having this experience. I shall come back to the distinction between perceptual salience and phenomenal salience and articulate it further later on (see Chapter 6, section 5).

Accordingly, the step characteristic of introspection retreats further back not only from the perceptual judgement and the apparent properties I am aware of, but also, in a sense, from whatever is visually presented to me in seeing. The reason is that what I attend to in introspecting my perceptual experience is not (only) the objects and properties themselves that I am aware of in seeing, such as the apparent and presented properties insofar as they are apparent or merely presented properties. What I attend to (in addition) is the apparent and presented properties *insofar as they contribute to or*

*determine the phenomenal character* of my perceptual experience. In other words, I attend to (part of) whatever I am aware of in seeing – where this includes anything that may count as something I am visually aware of – insofar as it determines what it is like for me to see.

Thus, whenever I attend to, say, presented and apparent properties insofar as they determine what it is like for me to see, I do not merely attend to these properties ‘on their own’, so to speak. As noted above, apparent and presented properties are properties I see. They are, viewed more generally, properties I am aware of, hence one relatum of the relation of awareness between myself and them (in this case, seeing is the determinate form of the determinable relation of awareness). Therefore, for me to attend to presented and apparent properties insofar as they determine the phenomenal character of my experience is for me to attend to them as being in that relation of awareness to me, and insofar as they contribute to what it is like for me to instantiate that awareness relation to them. Thus the step back that I take in order to make phenomenally more salient an aspect of the phenomenal character of the experience I introspect involves ‘widening’, as it were, the scope of my attention so that it targets not merely the relatum of my relation of awareness, but what it is like to be in that very relation. This is part of what I want to come back to and articulate more precisely in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3.

### THE GESTALT SWITCH ACCOUNT OF THE INTROSPECTIVE OPERATION

#### Introduction

I shall now tackle in detail the two guiding questions that I formulated in Chapter 2, section 1, and offer a detailed account in response to each. I deal with them in reverse order, opening with the second – ‘What is the phenomenal relation between having an experience and introspecting that experience?’ – before turning to the first – What do we do when we introspect our current phenomenal experience?

Let me begin, though, by connecting what I shall do now with what I did in the last chapter. The main purpose of the previous chapter was to hone in on a specific type of phenomenal change that the introspective operation brings about. Zeroing in on the phenomenon at issue in such a way has enabled me to distinguish it from other phenomena in the vicinity, such as attention shifts between objects we experience. In the present chapter, I want to explore a specific account of the phenomenon identified<sup>1</sup> in Chapter 2 – an account of the relevant phenomenal change that relies and builds on the notion of a gestalt switch. I shall call this account *the gestalt switch account*; or the GS account, for short. Thus, whereas the aim of the last chapter was to distinguish my

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<sup>1</sup> As acknowledged in Chapter 2, this amounts to an identification of its phenomenal dimension; this is not to say that there is not also a functional dimension to the phenomenon in question, a dimension which I shall not explore here.

target phenomenon from other phenomena, one central aim in this chapter is to distinguish the GS account from alternative accounts of the phenomenal change that the introspective operation involves. A related aim is to clarify why the alternatives are less satisfying than the GS account.

In what follows, I shall detail the content of the notion of a gestalt switch I shall use here. I shall also explain exactly how this notion can be used to bear on the issue of the phenomenology of introspection. But the interest of using the notion of a gestalt switch is not limited to the suggestion that it allows us to give an enlightening account of the phenomenal change characteristic of the introspective operation. The wider ambition the GS account harbours is to show that building our understanding of the introspective operation from the notion of a gestalt switch can provide fruitful results with respect to other dimensions of the phenomenology of introspection.

The plan for the chapter is as follows. In section 1, I introduce the idea of using the notion of a gestalt switch to characterize the phenomenal change identified in Chapter 2. In section 2, I set out more precisely what such an ‘introspective switch’ would consist in, notably by clarifying what is changed (and what is not changed) in such a switch. Section 3 explains how, on the gestalt switch account, a subject engaging in the introspective operation can thereby become attentively aware of the phenomenal character of her experience.

### **1. Introducing the gestalt switch: a relation of sameness and difference**

The starting thought of the GS account is that if we allow ourselves to use the concept of a gestalt switch, then we can give an enlightening account of the phenomenal change involved in the introspective operation. More precisely, the talk of gestalt switch is

attractive in this context for at least two reasons, or so the GS account contends. Firstly, it enables us to properly capture and articulate the kind of phenomenal change one experiences when going from having an experience to introspecting it. Secondly, it helps us to clarify the contrast between the kind of phenomenal change relevant to the introspective operation and phenomenal changes of other kinds.

In this respect, one distinctive job for the GS account will be to capture what is particularly interesting about the phenomenal relation between having an experience and introspecting it. Here is a first, rather metaphorical, pass at characterizing this distinctive interest, expressed in some sort of slogan: it is a relation of both *sameness and difference*. Introspecting an experience is both different and, in another respect, very similar, to merely undergoing that experience. And note: the sameness-difference relation is one the gestalt switch account is especially well-suited to capture. In fact, the sameness-difference slogan echoes the words of Wittgenstein on one's experience of the famous 'duck-rabbit' drawing (see *figure 1* below): "What is incomprehensible is that nothing, and yet everything has changed, after all." (*RPP II*, 474)<sup>2</sup> I shall come back to the duck-rabbit case much more thoroughly in what follows. I shall also, of course, acknowledge the limitations of the metaphorical sameness-difference characterization. For now however, let me ask you to bear with me in this first step – and allow me to clarify what I mean at this rather metaphorical level, before I change gear and set out a more literal and precise account in the following steps.

The relation, says the slogan, is one of sameness and difference: for when one goes from the pedestrian enjoyment of a conscious experience to the more uncommon situation of introspecting that experience, or an aspect of it, one does indeed have a sense that there is a difference, that something has changed experientially, although at the

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Wittgenstein's discussion of gestalt switches, see Eilan (2013). For the historical background of the notion of gestalt, see Smith (1988).

same time things have remained the same in an important sense. On an initial understanding, this may be taken merely to mean that the phenomenal change brought about by the introspective operation is rather subtle and undramatic. Such an idea is actually reflected in what I said in the previous chapter in contrasting the phenomenal change involved in introspection from other types of changes. The former is much less dramatic than what changes when I turn my head and look elsewhere, or when I close my eyes and think about the visual scene I saw a moment before. And it is also subtler than when I switch my gaze or my attention between objects that I see, for instance.

This idea that the phenomenal change in question is of a rather undramatic or subtle nature is not unknown in the literature. The idea has been used notably by Uriah Kriegel to make his case for the existence of a phenomenon often discussed under the heading of ‘pre-reflective (self-)awareness’<sup>3</sup> – namely the implicit awareness one has of one’s own experience merely in virtue of undergoing that experience. About the phenomenal transition from undergoing an experience to introspecting it, Kriegel writes:

“[...] it feels very much like shifting one’s attention from piano to cellos, rather than creating a previously non-existent awareness of cellos. This may be taken to constitute phenomenological evidence that, prior to the introspecting, there was already inner awareness of the conscious experience, albeit peripheral—just as it suggests that, prior to attending to the cellos, there was already an auditory awareness of them, albeit peripheral. If the inner awareness was altogether outside the phenomenology, introspecting would be phenomenologically more dramatic than it actually is [...].” (2009: 186)

‘Inner awareness’ in Kriegel’s terminology refers to one’s awareness of one’s mental states and events, as opposed to the ‘outer awareness’ one has of external objects (such

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of pre-reflective self-awareness, see for instance Zahavi (1999), Kriegel (2009), O’Conaill (2019). The notion is often traced back to Brentano (1874: 2, II, §7). For a discussion of the ambiguities in the different ways the notion is used, see Guillot (2017). Here I shall use the phrase ‘pre-reflective awareness’ to refer to the implicit awareness one has of one’s own experience merely in virtue of undergoing that experience.



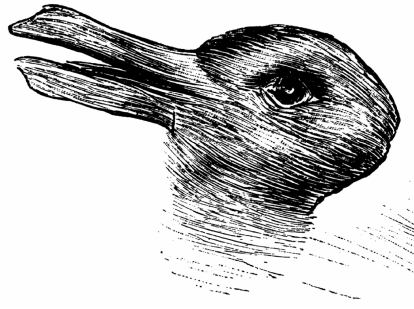
as, e.g., someone on a bike riding past), external events and states of affairs.<sup>4</sup> That is, inner awareness actually encompasses both one's pre-reflective awareness – what Kriegel calls 'peripheral inner awareness' – and one's introspective awareness of one's experience. So Kriegel's argument here for the phenomenological reality of peripheral inner awareness actually relies on the assumption that the phenomenal change involved in the introspective operation is undramatic, for he thinks that this change would be very different if we were not in general already implicitly aware of the experiences we undergo.<sup>5</sup>

There is, however, a more substantial understanding of the metaphor of sameness and difference – an understanding of it that goes beyond the initial thought of an undramatic phenomenal change. It is an understanding that builds on a fundamental feature of gestalt switches in experience. Namely: my experience before and after a gestalt switch is phenomenally different, even though there is also a clear sense in which *what* I experience remains the same. Hence, applied to the introspective operation, the thought is not only that the phenomenal relation between having an experience and introspecting that experience manifests a subtle phenomenal change. There is also a robust sense in which *what* I experience stays the same throughout that change. Now, what is this sense precisely? Let me unpack this thought with the help of a concrete and familiar example of an experience of a gestalt switch.

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Kriegel (2009: 360).

<sup>5</sup> For Kriegel's whole discussion of this argument, see Kriegel (2009: 185-186). An alternative explanation to the one Kriegel offers here could be that we do not after all have a representation of our experience in introspection.



*Figure 1 : the 'duck-rabbit' drawing*

Consider for a moment the famous case of the 'duck-rabbit' drawing (see *figure 1*). As is well-known, when presented with this drawing, one might alternatively see a drawing of a rabbit or see a drawing of a duck. One might also of course see neither of these, but see only an array of black lines and shapes against a white background. Yet when one is seeing, say, the drawing of a rabbit, then one is in a position to switch to seeing the drawing of a duck, and vice-versa. (Or we may want to say that one can switch from seeing a rabbit to seeing a duck – the extra complication as to whether we may only say to be seeing the drawing of a duck rather than a duck will not matter for my overall point here.) Clearly, the experiences one has before and after such a switch are different. They have a different phenomenal character, for what it is like to have a visual experience of the drawing of a rabbit is different from what it is like to have a visual experience of the drawing of a duck. Moreover, what one experiences before and after the switch has changed in a clear and noticeable sense for the one who experiences: what one was seeing – the drawing of a rabbit – is not what one is now seeing – the drawing of a duck. Yet in another clear sense, what one is seeing is exactly the same both before and after the gestalt switch. For one is seeing black lines and shapes on a white background – one is, in fact, seeing the exact same lines and shapes before and after the switch. The lines and shapes making up the drawing are the same throughout, whether one sees the drawing of a rabbit or that of a duck (or even mere lines and shapes, for that matter).

Furthermore, one experiences them as being the same throughout, that is, one is under no impression that the lines and shapes themselves have changed as a result of the switch; on the contrary, one is under the impression that they have stayed the same. Such is, therefore, the sense in which one is, after the switch, aware of the drawing as the very same drawing as before, and of each part of the drawing (e.g., the lines which depict the duck's bill) as the very same as before (when they depicted the rabbit's ears). Very similar things can be said for other cases of gestalt switches – I shall discuss a number of them later on.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of important issues that this characterization of gestalt switches raises, and I shall discuss them in due course.<sup>7</sup> For the moment, though, we may proceed with the characterization I painted in broad brushstrokes of what is going on in such a familiar case of gestalt switch. For that should provide us with a firm enough basis to articulate further the analogy with the case of introspection that the GS account puts forward. More specifically, its suggestion is that the introspective switch – the switch from having an experience to introspecting that experience – bears features analogous to the features characteristic of familiar gestalt switches, such as the switch from seeing the drawing of a rabbit to seeing the drawing of a duck. Seeing the former or seeing the latter are different experiences, as we have seen, although there is a robust sense in which what one experiences – the drawing – remains the same throughout. Analogously, having an experience and introspecting are different experiences – that is, they are conscious states with different phenomenal characters – although there is a robust sense in which what one experiences remains the same throughout. Obviously, the suggestion is not that the analogy between the two kinds of switch is a perfect one. For this reason, one important task will be to clarify their points of departure. Another

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 4, section 2.

<sup>7</sup> See section 2 & section 3 below.

central task for the GS account will be to specify what exactly in one's experience remains the same, and what changes, after the introspective switch. Both are among the tasks tackled in the next section.

## **2. What changes and what remains throughout the introspective switch**

Before I set out what I believe to be the most promising route for thinking about what changes versus what remains the same throughout the introspective switch, I shall first consider briefly a couple of less satisfying routes for doing so. Proceeding in this way should help me clarify the route I favour by contrasting it with less attractive alternatives.

A first possible route would be to conceive of the introspective switch as a switch from, for instance, a normal visual experience to something like an experience of an array of various shapes and lines – provided that we focus the discussion for now on the introspection of visual states. It should help, in order to clarify the idea here, to consider the sort of view that P. F. Strawson in “Perception and its Object”<sup>8</sup> seems to attribute to A. J. Ayer.<sup>9</sup> The point of disagreement between them is not, of course, thematised by Strawson as a disagreement about the nature of introspection, but as a disagreement about the nature of perceptual experiences. Strawson considers the case of someone asked to describe her current visual experience. Prompted to tell ‘how it is with her, visually, at the moment’,<sup>10</sup> she might initially report things like: “I see the red light of the setting sun filtering through the black and thickly clustered branches of the elms [...]” (2011: 127). But once instructed, more specifically, to account for her experience “strictly within the limits of the subjective episode” (127), says Strawson, she should then use

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<sup>8</sup> Strawson (2011: 125-145).

<sup>9</sup> Strawson presents that view as a view that Ayer develops in *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (1973: 68-111).

<sup>10</sup> Compare Strawson (2011: 127).

locutions such as: “It sensibly seemed to me just as if I were seeing such-and-such a scene” (128), etc. Hence, Strawson argues, even when one refrains from making perceptual judgements as to what one sees and withholds “all commitment to propositions about independently existing objects” (128) from one’s report, one nonetheless cannot faithfully characterize one’s visual experience without making reference to those judgements. The reason for this being that “our sensible experience itself is thoroughly permeated with those concepts of objects which figure in such judgments” (128-9).

That being said, Strawson is not thereby ruling out that there could be rare cases of perceptual experiences such that this would not hold – that is, such that “the employment of full-blooded concepts of physical objects would not be indispensable” (131) to characterize them adequately. I quoted in chapter 2 the case he considers where someone who would come to see the branches of the tree “no longer *as* branches at all, but as an intricate pattern of dark lines of complex directions and shapes and various sizes” (131). Now, Strawson contends, it is a description of this sort that would be appropriate for perceptual experiences in general if Ayer’s view were correct. For on Ayer’s view, as we saw in Chapter 2, “we take a step beyond our sensible experience in making our perceptual judgement” (130). Accordingly, the character of our visual experience *stricto sensu*, that is, its character whenever we stop short of endorsing the perceptual judgement, when we refrain from taking this step beyond the mere sensible experience, should be of the sort adequately captured by descriptions in terms of, e.g., ‘a pattern of lines and shapes’.

Say we endorse something like the view that Strawson attributes to Ayer. What should then be natural to say is that when we make the switch from a perceptual state to an introspective experience of that perception, what we become explicitly aware of is

precisely this character of our perception that is adequately captured in terms of e.g., ‘a pattern of lines and shapes’. That is, the introspective switch would be a switch that makes explicit the character that our perceptual experience has prior to any perceptual judgement as to what we see – in other words, the character is has *qua* not yet ‘permeated with concepts of independently existing objects’.<sup>11</sup> And on this view, what it is like to e.g., visually perceive the branches of the elm is, *stricto sensu*, to be presented with a pattern of lines and shapes.

However, it is important to distinguish clearly here between contentious issues about perceptual experience and contentious issues about introspective experience. The point I want to drive home here is of course not a point about perceptual experience in and of itself – it is not about the nature of perceptual experience. In principle, I want to stay as uncommitted as I possibly can with respect to contentious matters concerning the nature of perceptual experience. These include for instance the disagreement between Strawson and Ayer explained above. Therefore, my point here is rather the following. If we assume that in normal perceptual experiences – or on what I have called the default perceptual attitude in Chapter 2 – we do see for instance elm trees and branches, then a view of the introspective switch that would result in us being aware of a mere array of lines and shape (and most probably also colours) would be a view on which that switch brings about a lot of changes in our overall experience. If performing the introspective operation on my experience of seeing the branches of an elm tree brings about a switch to an experience of an array of various shapes and lines, then what we end up with is a view of the introspective switch on which not so much remains the same. To mention just one significant change, it seems for instance that, after such a switch, I would not be aware of three-dimensional objects anymore, such as trees and branches, objects that

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<sup>11</sup> Compare Strawson (2011: 129).

appear as having a side that I do not see but which I could see if I repositioned myself (e.g., by walking around them).

Thus, it seems that such a view of what changes with the introspective switch will be in tension with the ideas that I developed in the first section – ideas to the effect that the phenomenal change brought about by such a switch is rather undramatic. Because a view on which I would switch from an experience of branches and trees to an experience of lines and shapes is a view that involves a rather dramatic phenomenal change. Note that saying this does not, of course, constitute an argument against the kind of view of perceptual experience that Strawson attributes to Ayer. It is an argument against that kind of view only if its proponent also independently accepts the result of section 1 and the assumption that in normal perceptual experiences we do experience things such as, e.g., trees and branches. And while its proponent could in principle resist both, she would of course most likely resist the latter, for it seems close to contradictory to hold simultaneously that we do perceptually experience trees and branches and that the character of such an experience can be adequately described in terms of being presented with an array of lines and shapes.

Let us now move, more briefly, to a second misleading route for thinking about what changes versus what remains the same throughout the introspective switch. In order to articulate this route, it will be helpful to consider another example of perceptual experience upon which I may perform the introspective operation. Say I am now attentively looking at the colour of the sofa in the corner of my office, a sofa which is of a uniformly royal blue colour. According to this second route, the introspective switch in this case would be a switch from looking at the shade of blue the sofa appears to have to being aware of a blueish ‘quale’, where this blueish quale is conceived of as an intrinsic,

non-representational quality<sup>12</sup> of my visual experience of the blue sofa. More generally, the thought here is that the introspective switch is a switch that would take us from undergoing an experience, such as a perception, which is characterised by certain qualia, to a distinct experience where we are explicitly aware of these qualia. After all, provided that it makes sense to talk of qualia in this way, it might seem natural to think that if there is any circumstance in which we become explicitly aware of them, it must be in introspecting our experiences – and, thus, it might also seem natural to think that the introspective switch should be conceived of in that manner.

My criticism of this second route is related to my criticism of the first route above. One could say that the criticism of the first route was that the suggested switch would have dramatic effects if it resulted in going from experiencing worldly objects such as branches and trees to experiencing objects that do not appear as worldly, three-dimensional objects but as entities such as patterns of shapes and lines. Now, my criticism of the second route is again that the switch would be too dramatic if it resulted in going from experiencing the shade of blue as a colour property of the object I am seeing – the sofa – to experiencing something like a blueish quale, namely something that does not appear to be a property of any worldly object I see.<sup>13</sup> More generally, it would be an unwelcome result for any account of the introspective switch if it implied that for instance a colour property that an object seems to have when I have a perceptual experience of that object ceases to appear as a property of that object as a result of the introspective switch.

One fundamental line of thought underlying both criticisms is the following. The introspective switch should make me attentively aware of the phenomenal character of

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<sup>12</sup> This view of qualia has been attributed for instance to Peacocke (1983) and Block (1990). For a discussion, see for example Tye (2017).

<sup>13</sup> Such as it would be the case on one of the accounts of qualia cited earlier – see note 12 above.



the experience I am having, for example my visual perception of the blue sofa or of the elm and its branches. But it is precisely part of the phenomenal character of my perception that in undergoing that experience I am under the impression that the blue colour property is a property that the object (the sofa) I perceive instantiates. Likewise, it is precisely part of the phenomenal character of my perception that in having this experience I am under the impression that the objects I see (the elm and its branches) are three-dimensional objects and have another side that I could see if I were to walk around the tree.

Perhaps there exists an operation I could perform on my current experience which would distort it in just the ways corresponding to the first or second routes I discussed. That is, perhaps there exists an operation that would distort my experience in such a way that the objects I experience cease to appear as three-dimensional or the properties I perceive cease to appear as properties of the object I perceive. In any case, this is not the operation I am interested in investigating here. For I want to investigate the introspective operation understood as the operation that allows me to become attentively aware of the phenomenal character of my experience. And I contend that we should be wary of views of the introspective operation positing phenomenal changes in my experience of such dramatic kinds: we should be wary of views of this sort at least as long as we do not have both overwhelming reasons in favour of them and an absence of credible alternatives. But we do have at least a more promising alternative, or so the gestalt account of introspection suggests.

This more promising route for thinking of what changes versus what remains the same throughout the introspective switch is a route that starts from an idea that I outlined in Chapter 2. As I said there, one central tenet of the GS account is that the introspective operation is not an operation that deletes or screens off the initial

experience upon which it is performed. A fortiori, the introspective operation does not delete, for instance, my awareness of external three-dimensional objects or of properties these objects seem to instantiate when I perform it upon my perceptual experience.

On the contrary, the introspective operation is, precisely, performed upon the initial experience and in this sense it *adds* something to it. What it adds to it is, in a nutshell, the following. It adds a different awareness of that which I was already aware of in the initial experience, namely an awareness of it *as determining the phenomenal character* of the initial experience.<sup>14</sup> Such is the crucial thought of the route favoured by the GS account. I shall have more to say as a way of unpacking the respective elements of that thought in what follows. But for now, here is, more concretely, what the thought would involve. Consider again the example of my experience of looking at the shade of blue that the sofa in my office appears to instantiate. When I perform the introspective operation upon that experience, what happens is that, in addition to that experience, I also become aware of that shade of blue insofar as it determines the phenomenal character of my perception. In other words, what the introspective operation adds is an awareness of the shade of blue insofar as it determines what it is like to for me to undergo the visual experience that I am undergoing.

With this picture in place, what becomes now of the issue as to what changes versus what remains the same throughout the introspective switch? In order to make progress on that issue, let me unpack somewhat further this idea I mentioned that the introspective switch, or operation, adds a different awareness of that which I was already aware of in the initial experience. What is it that I was already aware of in the initial experience? If the initial experience is a perceptual experience, then it seems likely that it will be the various properties and entities I am perceiving, for instance seeing. In the case

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<sup>14</sup> This claim will be qualified slightly in section 3 below.

of my visual experience as I am looking at the sofa, what remains the same throughout the introspective switch is that I am aware of that particular shade of royal blue. The switch itself, then, can be detailed as follows. In the initial perceptual experience, I am visually aware of the shade of blue – this is the colour property that the sofa appears to instantiate, in my experience, the colour it appears to me to have.<sup>15</sup> When I am looking at the blue colour of the sofa, what I am doing is that I am attending to this shade of blue as determining the colour property that the sofa has. This corresponds to what I have called in Chapter 2 the default perceptual attitude. After the switch, in the resulting introspective experience, I become in addition attentively aware of the phenomenal character of my visual experience of the blue colour of the sofa. When I am introspecting my visual experience, what I am doing is attending to the shade of blue as determining the phenomenal character of the visual experience I am still undergoing. And in doing so, I am still aware of the shade of blue as the colour property the sofa appears to have – in other words, that awareness has not been screened off or replaced by the introspective experience I am also now undergoing.

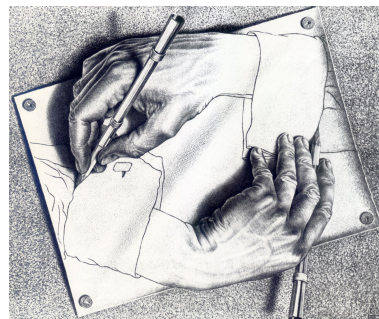
We are now in a position to inject some more elements into the analogy between the introspective switch and a gestalt switch of the usual kind like the duck-rabbit. In the duck-rabbit switch, I am aware of the same array of lines and shapes that makes up the drawing throughout the switch from being aware of it as a drawing of a duck to being aware of it as a drawing of a rabbit. In the introspective switch, I am aware for instance of the same shade of blue throughout the switch, from initially being aware of it as

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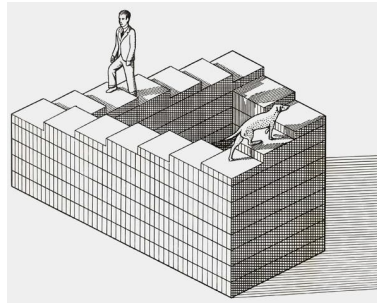
<sup>15</sup> Note that this property might well turn out to be a property of the sofa, that is, a property that the sofa instantiates (as opposed to a property it appears to instantiate in my perceptual experience). I intend my formulation here to be neutral with respect to contentious issues where this distinction (i.e. between properties the sofa instantiates and properties it appears to instantiate) would matter, for instance in the debate between naïve realism and intentionalism, as well as with respect to issues about the ontology of colours or colour properties.

determining the colour the sofa instantiates to being aware of it as determining the phenomenal character of my visual experience of the sofa.

However, there is an important disanalogy between these two switches. When I am aware of the shade of blue as determining the phenomenal character of my perception, I do not stop experiencing it as the colour the sofa appears to have, as I insisted – the introspective switch adds this second awareness to the first. But when I switch to seeing the drawing of a duck, I usually stop seeing the drawing of rabbit. In other words, this switch does not add the second awareness to the first. Put more generally, the point is that in usual cases of gestalt switches, the experience before the switch has a content that is incompatible with the content of the experience after the switch. And typically, we do not have both experiences simultaneously either. That is, it is typically not the case with gestalt switches that we have experiences that represent objects as having incompatible properties, contrary to what happens when we see for instance M. C. Escher's Drawing Hands (see *figure 2* below) or The Penrose Steps, (see *figure 3* below). On the other hand, in the case of the introspective switch, the experiential states before and after the switch do not have incompatible contents – and we can have both the introspective experience and the perceptual experience, for instance, simultaneously.



*Figure 2: Escher's Drawing Hands*



*Figure 3: The Penrose Steps*

For that reason at least, the analogy with the usual cases of gestalt switches on which the GS accounts builds is not a perfect analogy. It is not an analogy suggesting that the introspective switch exhibits all features typical of usual gestalt switches – I will have more to say on those features below in Chapter 4, section 1. For now though, I want to explore further the question as to what I am aware of before versus after the introspective switch. More specifically, there are three issues relevant to it that need more exploring. In the example I discussed, I have said that after the switch I become attentively aware of the shade of blue (the colour property the sofa appears to have) as determining the phenomenal character of my visual experience. The three issues I shall turn to in the next section are the following: (i) What is the sense in which the phenomenal character of my experience is determined by the property the sofa appears to have? (ii) What is the phenomenal character which is thus determined? (iii) Does the introspective switch make one aware of some entity or property of which one was not aware before introspecting? I shall take on the second first.

### **3. Becoming reflectively aware of the phenomenal character of one's experience**

One way to answer the question (ii) above would be to appeal to the notion of an experiential property. Although there could be, of course, other possible routes to answer

that question that are also compatible with the GS account, this is the option I shall choose here. One conception of experiential properties has been developed by Martine Nida-Rümelin. She writes:

“To undergo an experience is to have experiential properties over a stretch of time. To say that Antonietta undergoes a blue experience, is to say that she is phenomenally presented with blue; to say that she has an acoustic experience is to say that she is phenomenally presented with a sound. All talk about Antonietta’s experiences can be expressed by attributing certain properties to her, properties which I will call *experiential properties*. It is characteristic of experiential properties that there is something it is like for the subject concerned to have them. But the something-like locution is not precise enough to capture what is essential for being an experiential property. We may say that experiential properties are properties of experiencing individuals such that instantiating them at a moment *m* partially constitutes what it is like for the individual concerned to live through moment *m*.” (2017: 55-56; her emphasis)

This is the conception of experiential properties with which I shall proceed in what follows. I said earlier that the introspective switch enables me to become attentively aware of e.g., the shade of blue (the colour property the sofa appears to have) as determining the phenomenal character of my visual experience. The question (ii) I formulated above<sup>16</sup> is asking to clarify what is the phenomenal character which is thus determined. With the conception of experiential properties just outlined, we are in a position to answer as follows. It is *my having a given experiential property* which is determined in some way by the property the sofa appears to have (i.e. the shade of blue I am seeing). In other words, to attend to that shade of blue *qua* determining the phenomenal character of my experience comes to this. I attend to a property the sofa appears to have, in the awareness that this property stands in a certain determining relation to my having a distinct property, namely the experiential property I am

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<sup>16</sup> See the last paragraph of section 2 above.

instantiating in looking at the sofa. In the initial (default) perceptual experience, I was attending to the same property, but the contrast is that before the switch I was then not aware of that property as standing in a specific relation to an experiential property I am instantiating. Or, at least, I was not explicitly aware of that fact before the switch.

Depending on how much we emphasize this last point, we can distinguish at least two different possibilities of specifying the contrast between what I am aware of before versus after the introspective switch. In discussing these two possibilities, I shall also answer the question (iii) above, i.e. the question as to whether the switch makes one aware of some entity or property of which one was not aware before introspecting.

The first possibility would be that before the switch, in the initial perceptual experience, I am aware of the various objects and properties I perceive, for instance the sofa and the shade of blue that the sofa appears to instantiate. Whereas after the switch, I become aware, in addition, of having a certain experiential property. I become aware of having that experiential property by attending to the shade of blue insofar as it determines which experiential property I am having. Before the switch, I was not yet aware of instantiating that experiential property; I was merely instantiating it. A second possibility would be that there is no difference in what I am aware of both before and after the introspective switch, because I am aware throughout both of the various objects and properties I perceive and of having a certain experiential property. What changes is that the switch transforms my implicit, non-attentive awareness of having a certain experiential property into an explicit, attentive awareness of that phenomenal fact.

In principle, the GS account is compatible with both of these possibilities. The account does not necessarily involve a commitment to a form of pre-reflective awareness of my experience that I would enjoy prior to the introspective switch. So on the one hand, the first option, where I become aware of having a certain experiential property

only when I introspect, might seem to fit more literally the idea of there being an introspective switch. The switch would result in an awareness that I did not enjoy before introspecting, just as the switch might be taken to result in an awareness of the drawing of a duck that I did not enjoy while I was seeing the drawing of a rabbit.

On the other hand, there are some compelling reasons speaking in favour of the second option. For one thing, there are considerations, quite independent from issues about introspection, in support of the existence of a form of pre-reflective awareness of my experience prior to introspection. It has been argued, notably, that a proper understanding of what being in a phenomenally conscious state consists in should allow us to see that one always enjoys some minimal awareness of being in the conscious state one is in just in virtue of being in it<sup>17</sup> – a line of thought that has been traced back to Franz Brentano by some authors.<sup>18</sup> Within the specific framework of experiential properties, Nida-Rümelin has put forward similar reasoning:

“Experiential properties are such that, by their nature, the instantiation of such a property by a subject at a given moment *m* partially constitutes what it is like for the subject to live through moment *m*. Now there is an obvious and clear sense in which any subject is aware of what it is like for it to live through moment *m* just by living through that moment. One may say that the subject is immediately aware – without reflection and without conceptualization – of every specific aspect of what it is like for it to live through moment *m* while it is living through moment *m*.” (2017: 65)

Thus, we can easily see why a view of this sort would go together well with the second option above, i.e. the option suggesting that the introspective switch transforms my pre-reflective awareness of having a certain experiential property into an attentive awareness of it.

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<sup>17</sup> See note 3 in Chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance Brentano (1874: 2, II, §7).



But apart from considerations in favour of pre-reflective awareness *per se*, there is another reason supporting the second option. In Chapter 6, I shall discuss the question of the proprietary phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. There I shall suggest that, on the GS account, this phenomenal contribution can be accounted for in terms of phenomenal salience – the idea being, in a nutshell, that attending to my having a certain experiential property makes my having that property phenomenally more salient in my overall phenomenology at a given time. Such an idea seems to fit very well within the view corresponding to the second option. One result of the introspective switch would then be to increase the degree of phenomenal salience that a certain experiential property had when unattended to, i.e. before the switch. But if that experiential property had some degree of phenomenal salience prior to introspection, then it seems likely that I had some implicit awareness of having it before the switch. That is, unless we want to endorse either the idea that there is a determinate limit of phenomenal salience above which I become aware of having that property, or the idea that the property had no phenomenal salience at all before the switch – both rather unattractive ideas given the fact that phenomenal salience is a relational notion (see Chapter 6, section 8 for a more thorough discussion of that point) – we may want to move away from the first option.

For these reasons, it might seem that the option most congenial to the GS account is the second, where I have some pre-reflective awareness of my having a given experiential property prior to introspection. However, there is a noticeable difficulty here. For one thing, a view on which the introspective operation would consist in transforming my pre-reflective awareness of having a given experiential property into an attentive awareness would seem somewhat in tension with the idea that the introspective operation involves a switch in my overall experiencing. The idea of the switch seems to

suggest that this operation brings more of a difference than the mere ‘making explicit’ of an awareness that I was enjoying all along before introspecting brings. This worry runs deeper than the mere dialectical concern to find a way that fits the commitments of the GS account. If we endorse a conception of pre-reflective awareness along the lines outlined above, i.e. as an awareness of the experience we have merely in virtue of undergoing that experience, then we should perhaps be cautious about the idea of a straightforward ‘upgrade’ of that pre-reflective awareness into full-blood introspective awareness. The reason is that the difference between the two does not seem to be only a matter of degrees of explicitness,<sup>19</sup> but it seems to be also a matter of introspective awareness being more articulate than pre-reflective awareness.

Here is how I suggest to understand the idea of introspective awareness being more articulate. After the introspective switch, not only do I become explicitly aware of having a given experiential property, I also become aware of the determining relation there is between, for instance, the blue colour property that the sofa appears to have, and the experiential property I am instantiating. More generally, in introspection I become aware of the determining relation there is between what I am aware of in the initial experience and the experiential property I am instantiating as I undergo that initial experience. In this respect, the introspective operation makes me aware of something more than what I was already aware of. And in this sense, it seems justified to talk of that operation involving something like a switch, rather than a mere variation in degrees of explicitness. This constitutes, therefore, a third possibility for specifying what changes versus what remains the same throughout the introspective switch. Arguably, it might be seen as a variation on the second option, yet an option that makes it clear why

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this idea, see Chapter 6, section 6 & section 7.

introspective awareness is more than just an explicit version of pre-reflective awareness, because it is an awareness of the relevant determination relation I have discussed.

But how should we understand that determination relation itself? Our discussion, thus, leads us naturally to the point raised by the question (i) at the end of the last section – namely: what is the sense in which the phenomenal character of my experience is determined by the property the sofa appears to have? Given our discussion so far, one natural answer to that question would go along the following lines. Within the framework of experiential properties, that question concerns the determination of the experiential property I am having (when looking at the sofa) by the shade of blue I am seeing, i.e. the colour property the sofa appears to have.

Let us refer to that blue colour property the sofa appears to instantiate as I look at it as the property *PB*, and let us call the experiential property I am instantiating when looking at the sofa *EP*. The sense in which the experiential property I am having is determined by the property the sofa appears to have is the sense in which *EP* is determined by *PB*. And this sense is the following: *PB* (partly) determines *EP* because instantiating *EP* (partly) consists in (a) being phenomenally presented with *PB* and (b) *PB* appearing as a property of the sofa.<sup>20</sup> Hence, on this picture, I attend to the experiential property *EP* which I am having by attending to *PB* insofar as *PB* is being phenomenally presented to me and is appearing as a property of the sofa I seem to be visually aware of. In other words, I attend to the experiential property *EP* I am having by becoming explicitly aware that at this moment in time it is a true description of myself that I am in a phenomenal state in which I am being presented with *PB qua* property of the sofa I seem to see. What I become explicitly aware of, then, is a phenomenal fact

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<sup>20</sup> Recall the conception of experiential properties I endorsed at the beginning of the present section, and in particular this part of Nida-Rümelin's characterization: "To say that Antonietta undergoes a blue experience, is to say that she is phenomenally presented with blue; to say that she has an acoustic experience is to say that she is phenomenally presented with a sound." (2017: 55-56)

involving myself. It is in becoming explicitly aware of that phenomenal fact and of what that fact consists in that I am truly attending to the experiential property I am having – that is, that I am introspecting my current experience.

Now, why should one accept that characterization of the sense in which PB determines EP? I think that at this stage of the reasoning this should be answered as follows. To the extent that one understands the phenomenal notion of what it is for an object to appear to someone as instantiating a given property, the above characterization should become almost trivial. That is, it should be almost trivial that being presented with PB, as opposed to, say, a shade of yellowish brown, does determine the particular experiential property I am instantiating, since it makes a difference for what it is like for me to be conscious at that moment in time. Now, philosophers will have different theoretical understandings of the determining relation between PB and EP, depending on the specific view of perceptual experience they might endorse. A naïve realist is likely to think that this determining relation is ultimately explained by the relation between the perceiver and the actual colour property that the sofa instantiates, since, on her theory, the phenomenal character of a perceptual episode is constituted by that later relation.<sup>21</sup> A representationalist will rather think that the determining relation is explained by something like the fact that instantiating EP amounts to representing PB as a being a property of the sofa.<sup>22</sup>

Note that condition *b* is not superfluous, even if it initially seems to be, for condition *a* alone – my being presented with PB – will not do. Indeed, there could be special situations in which I am presented with PB as I look at the sofa, that is, in which I am presented with the same shade of blue, although the sofa does not appear to instantiate PB. That would be a situation where I am not under the visual impression

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<sup>21</sup> For defences of the naïve realist view, see for instance Martin (2004) and Logue (2012).

<sup>22</sup> For the representationalist account, see for instance Crane (2006) and Tye (2008).

that the sofa has that blue colour, perhaps because I am aware of unusual lighting conditions in the room, even though I am presented with that same shade of blue in my visual experience. What matters here is that in this case I would not be instantiating EP, but a different experiential property. For experiential properties (partly) consist in what it is like to have them, and what it is like to see the sofa in that special situation is different from what it is like to see it in the initial situation.

## CHAPTER 4.

### THE INTROSPECTIVE GESTALT SWITCH AND PHENOMENAL HOLISM

#### Introduction

My discussion of the gestalt switch account up to this point has been mainly focused on those issues relevant for the idea that the introspective operation involves a *switch* in the experiencer's overall phenomenal state. I shall now turn my attention to the second term giving its name to the account, and investigate the *gestalt* dimension of the GS account. In other words, I shall turn now to what makes the introspective switch a gestalt switch. I shall pursue two central goals in what follows. The first is to provide more substance to our understanding of the notion of a gestalt switch by exploring the concept of gestalt in connexion to phenomenal holism. The second is to examine how we can think on this basis about what is going on in the introspective gestalt switch.

Here is the plan for this chapter – it involves three main steps. In section 1, I look at the holistic features that typical instances of gestalts in experience, or experiential gestalts, exhibit. In section 2, I build on this basis an understanding of what gestalt switches in experience consist in. In section 3, I explain how this discussion of phenomenal holism can help further our understanding of the introspective gestalt switch.

## **1. The holistic dimensions of experiential gestalts**

According to the guiding thought of the gestalt account, the transition from undergoing an experience to introspecting that experience is, phenomenally, akin or analogous to a gestalt switch. This characterization leaves open the possibility that the introspective switch, the switch resulting from the introspective operation, may not constitute, strictly speaking, a perfect instance of a gestalt switch. That is, the characterization allows for the possibility that the introspective switch may not exhibit all the typical features of the familiar cases of gestalt switches, while it nonetheless does exhibit a number of significant features of such cases.

The strategy I shall pursue in what follows aims at providing more substance to the idea that introspection involves an instance of a gestalt switch. To this end, I shall explore possible connexions between that idea and issues concerning phenomenal holism, notably by looking first at some claims that Elijah Chudnoff makes about the holistic dimensions of experiential gestalts.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the way I see it, the GS account does not unavoidably depend on very substantial views of what gestalt switches in experience are. A rather minimal understanding of gestalt switches may already be enough for the GS account to tell us something enlightening about introspective experiences. That might be for instance an understanding on which a gestalt switch is a switch between experiences that have distinct contents, albeit being experiences of something that is experienced as staying the same throughout. However, a more substantial understanding of gestalt switches might also in turn result in a deeper understanding of what is going on in the introspective operation. This is a matter upon which the exploration that follows will shed some light.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chudnoff (2013b).

A few words of caution are in order before beginning this exploration. The first thing worth noting is that Chudnoff himself does not provide an account of gestalt switches as such, but rather of what we might call gestalts in experience, or experiential gestalts.<sup>2</sup> My strategy will be to build an understanding of what gestalt switches are on the basis of the typical features that Chudnoff identifies in experiential gestalts. In this respect, we should also note that there exist various cases of gestalts and that, *prima facie*, it is not obvious that all cases will exhibit the exact same features.

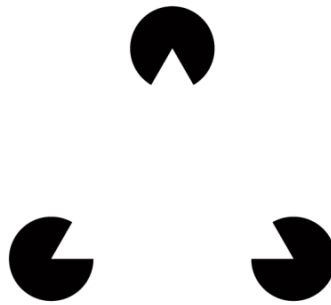
Nevertheless, it seems that some typical traits of gestalts are to be found in their *holistic* dimensions. Or at least, so Chudnoff suggests, since he defines gestalts as “wholes that explain their parts” (2013b: 563). He then details three dimensions along which gestalts may vary: “(1) what kind of thing the whole and its parts are; (2) what explanatory relations the whole bears to its parts; (3) which properties of its parts the whole determines” (563)<sup>3</sup>. As a result, different types of gestalts will involve different things as wholes and as parts, or different explanatory relations, or different properties explained by the relevant explanatory relation. Hence, one way to specify the type of gestalt which I have referred to as experiential gestalt, or gestalt in experience, is to say that a given case of gestalt will be of this type only if, in its dimension 1, the whole at issue is a whole or total experience and the parts are partial experiences making up that total experience. Conversely, if the whole is for instance a visual figure itself, as opposed to a visual experience of that figure, then the gestalt in question will not be of the experiential type. One concrete example of experiential gestalt that Chudnoff discusses can be found in the visual experience one has when looking at a depiction of the figure called Kanisza’s triangle (see *figure 4*).

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<sup>2</sup> For a definition, see the next paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> The numbering is mine.





*Figure 4: Kanisza's triangle*

In this case, Chudnoff contends that the three gestalt dimensions can be specified as follows. (1) The whole is the total visual experience of the figure, whereas the parts are the partial visual experiences of each individual disc. (2) The relevant explanatory relation is the relation of metaphysical dependence and (3) the properties of the parts determined by the whole are their phenomenal contents.<sup>4</sup> The notion of phenomenal content Chudnoff is operating with here is such that the phenomenal content of an experience is a property of that experience of “representing things as being a certain way in virtue of phenomenology” (565-566).

Chudnoff's general claim, then, is that the total visual experience of the figure is a gestalt. Namely, it is a whole that explains its parts. One more detailed claim that Chudnoff makes is that the partial visual experiences of each disc depend for their phenomenal content, i.e. for what they represent as being the case, on the total experience of the whole figure. That means that, were one partial experience of an individual disc actually part of a total experience which does not represent the hovering white triangle, that partial experience would itself actually have a different content. Indeed, Chudnoff writes exactly what he believes that difference in content would be: “Your visual experience of the bottom left pie represents it as a disc with a wedge that is

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Chudnoff (2013b: 564).

occluded by a white triangle. Your visual experience of the isolated pie represents it as a disc with a wedge that is cut out.” (564)

Yet, Chudnoff’s holism claim is not only that the phenomenal content of each partial experience depends on the whole experience. It is, moreover, that each partial experience depends for its existence on the whole experience, for the relevant determination relation, according to him, is the relation of metaphysical dependence. Therefore, he submits that two more claims are required in order to get to the conclusion establishing metaphysical dependence. First, the claim that an experience’s phenomenal content is a determinant of its phenomenal character<sup>5</sup> – that is, that what I am under the impression to be the case in undergoing an experience contributes to what it is like to undergo the experience. And, second, the claim that experiences have their phenomenal character essentially<sup>6</sup> – that is, that an experience cannot exist with a different phenomenal character.

I have two potential worries regarding Chudnoff’s reasoning up to this stage. The first is that it seems to me to be one thing to say that the partial experiences depend on the total experience because one cannot have experiences of the individual discs with the same phenomenal content without having the total experience of the figure. But it is another thing to say that the total experience is what *explains* the fact that the partial experiences have the phenomenal content they have. What would be needed to move from the first to the second claim is an explanation as to why the partial experiences have the phenomenal content that they have in virtue of the total experience being the experience that it is. This is not to say that such an explanation cannot in principle be provided, but Chudnoff has not, as far as I can see, provided such an explanation.

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Chudnoff (2013b: 566).

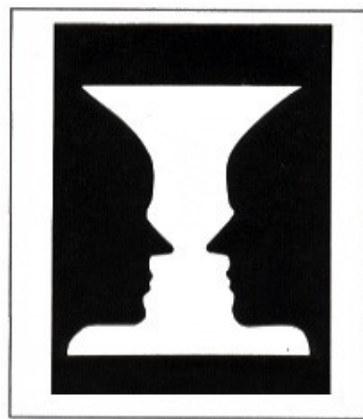
<sup>6</sup> Compare Chudnoff (2013b: 572).

To be entirely fair, it is not the case that Chudnoff explicitly commits to the holistic claim that the total experience of the figure explains the phenomenal contents of the partial experiences of the individual discs. Rather, I believe that what he wants to endorse is the thesis that the total experience explains the partial experiences in virtue of the partial experiences depending for their existence on the total experience. In other words, the explanatory relation that the total experience bears to its parts is the relation of metaphysical dependence. So one might think that the worry I raised is in fact rather a worry about the claim that the relation of metaphysical dependence is a genuine explanatory relation, and not a worry about the other points of Chudnoff's reasoning. I do not think that this is an entirely accurate way to diagnose this worry, though. For the problem is that the partial experiences depend on the whole in virtue of their phenomenal content depending on the phenomenal content of the whole. But we do not have an explanation in terms of the whole experience as to why the contents of the parts depend on the whole, so we do not have an explanation as to why the partial experiences are what they are in virtue of the whole being what it is. All we have is an explanation as to why the partial experiences exist in virtue of the whole being what it is.

A second worry one might want to raise – and that I shall only mention without discussing further – concerns the direction of the dependence relation between the whole experience and the partial experiences. And, by extension, it concerns the direction of the explanatory relation. Chudnoff has defined *gestalts* as wholes that explain their parts. As such, this definition does not rule out that the parts, in turn, explain the whole. In the case of the experience of Kanisza's triangle, one could indeed also wonder whether it is the case as well that the total experience depends on its parts, that is, whether one could have the total experience of the figure with the phenomenal content it has without having the partial experiences of the individual disks.

Now, in addition to the kind of experiential gestalt discussed so far, which the visual experience of Kanisza's triangle is an example of, Chudnoff suggests that there exists another kind of experiential gestalt, and refers to the importance in the work of Aron Gurwitsch<sup>7</sup> of the distinction between the two kinds. This second kind of experiential gestalt varies from the first along the third dimension detailed above: this time the total experience does not determine the phenomenal content of the partial experiences, but what Chudnoff calls their phenomenal manner. An experience's phenomenal manner is defined as its "property of representing things as being a certain way in a certain manner in virtue of phenomenology" (2013b: 566). As an example of phenomenal manner, Chudnoff mentions the property of a visual experience of representing things in "the manner characteristic of vision as opposed to the manner characteristic of touch or thought" (566).

Now, just as for his discussion of the first kind of experiential gestalt, Chudnoff uses an example of the experience one has when confronted with a depiction of a well-known visual figure, this time the Rubin Vase (see *figure 5*).



*Figure 5: Rubin Vase*

As is familiar with this figure, one can have, when looking at it, either a visual experience of a white vase against a black background or an experience of two black

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<sup>7</sup> See Gurwitsch (1964).

faces against a white background. Both these experiences are gestalts, since they are whole experiences that explain their partial experiences. For instance, the partial experience of the two faces depends for its phenomenal content on its occurring within a whole that includes the partial experience of the white background.<sup>8</sup> To that extent, the whole experience of the vase and the whole experience of the faces are gestalts of the same kind as the experience of Kanisza's triangle.

But Chudnoff is interested more specifically in another kind of experiential gestalt that a figure such as the Rubin Vase can give rise to. Here is how he characterizes this second kind, in which the whole experience determines the phenomenal manner of its parts, as opposed to their phenomenal content:

“Two figure experiences representing a white vase combined with different ground experiences representing different backgrounds can have the same phenomenal content. But the whole experiences of which the figure experiences are parts are still gestalts because the figure experiences depend for their exact phenomenal manners on the whole experiences of which they are parts. The idea is that the figure experience representing a white vase represents a white vase in a distinctive manner, fixed by the distinctive background against which the vase stands in relief.” (2013: 566)

I have some doubts with respect to Chudnoff's discussion of this second kind of experiential gestalt as well. First and foremost, the notion of phenomenal manner that he puts forward seems to me much too underspecified. For we need to consider that, according to him, a difference in phenomenal manner is supposed to capture the contrast between, for instance, between seeing a square and touching a square. At the same time, the difference between experiences of seeing one and the same figure against various distinct backgrounds is also a phenomenal difference to be captured in terms of phenomenal manner. These two kinds of phenomenal variations, however, strike me as

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Chudnoff (2013b: 565).

very different from one another. Apart from that, I think that Chudnoff's choice of the Rubin Vase to illustrate the case of experiential gestalts involving phenomenal manner is an unfortunate one. As far as I can see, this choice muddies the water unnecessarily, since the fact that this figure can give rise to a switch between seeing the vase and seeing the two faces does not play any role in illustrating his claim about differences in phenomenal manners. It is not clear therefore that Chudnoff's point about the phenomenal manner being fixed by the specific background against which the figure appears could only be illustrated by figures such as the Rubin Vase, rather than by any unvarying figure seen against various successive backgrounds.

Be that as it may, however, let us now try to see how this discussion of experiential gestalts can be of use to shed light on the gestalt dimension of the introspective switch that the GS account posits. This is the issue I shall move on to in what follows.

## **2. A holistic account of gestalt switches in experience**

Before we can get to the gestalt dimension of the introspective switch per se, we first need to understand in more detail what goes on in usual cases of gestalt *switches*, i.e. in cases of experiential gestalts which allow for a switch. As I said before, Chudnoff does not himself provide an account of gestalt switches, but only of experiential gestalts. Accordingly, my strategy in what follows will be to try to understand what goes on in a case of gestalt switch on the basis of the holistic features of experiential gestalts identified in Chudnoff's discussion. Prima facie, though, it is not obvious that every case of gestalt, or experiential gestalt, is such that it should allow for a gestalt switch. This is not, however, an issue that I shall need to pursue further here, since my interests lie precisely

in these cases that do allow for a switch. And for these cases, it seems at least initially plausible to presume that the fact that they can give rise to a switch has something to do with the typical features that experiential gestalts exhibit, namely their holistic features.

Building on the discussion of Chudnoff's ideas above, I shall thus suggest that one plausible characterization of an experiential gestalt switch could go as follows. Usual cases of experiential gestalt switch – notably the switch between different visual experiences of an ambiguous figure – typically involve a change in the phenomenal character of the relevant total experiences one has before versus after such a switch. That change in phenomenal character is typically grounded in a change in the phenomenal contents of the relevant total experiences. In turn, the change in content in the total experiences determines a change in content in the partial experiences of these total experiences. Hence, one may say, the gestalt switch brings about a change in the phenomenal contents of (some of) the partial experiences included in the whole experience at issue, for instance the whole visual experience of an ambiguous figure.

If we apply the account outlined above of an experiential gestalt switch to the familiar case of one's visual experience of the duck-rabbit figure<sup>9</sup>, we can distinguish the following main steps in the transition from one's experience before to after the switch.

- (1) The initial experience – seeing the drawing as a drawing of a rabbit – includes as a part experiencing part of the drawing as a drawing of a rabbit's ears.
- (2) The phenomenal character of the partial experience of a drawing of a rabbit's ears depends (partly) on its phenomenal content.
- (3) The phenomenal content of the partial experience depends on the phenomenal content of the whole experience.

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<sup>9</sup> See figure 1 in Chapter 3, section 1.

- (4) After the switch, the phenomenal character of the whole experience of the figure is different to the phenomenal character of the whole experience before the switch.
- (5) After the switch, the whole experience includes as a part experiencing part of the drawing as a drawing of a duck's bill.
- (6) The phenomenal character of this part of the experience depends on its phenomenal content.
- (7) The phenomenal content of this part of the experience depends on the phenomenal content of the whole experience.

In the initial situation (step 1), before the gestalt switch, both my whole experience of seeing the drawing as a drawing of a rabbit and my partial experience of seeing a drawing of a rabbit's ears each have a specific phenomenal character and a specific phenomenal content. Step 2 makes explicit the thought that the phenomenal character of my partial experience of the rabbit's ears is partly determined by its phenomenal content. In other words, the thought is that what it is like for me to see this particular part of the drawing, i.e. these particular lines and shapes, is partly determined by my being under the impression that I am seeing a drawing of a rabbit's ears. The phenomenal character is only partly so determined, because there are other determinants of it, for instance my seeing black lines and shapes (as opposed to seeing green lines and shapes) also makes a difference for the phenomenal character. Now, step 3 (with step 7) is arguably the most important step, since it incorporates the main gestalt claim. In its stronger version, the claim is that what explains my experiencing part of the drawing as a drawing of a rabbit's ears is that this experience is a part of my whole experience of the drawing as a drawing of a rabbit. In a weaker variant, the claim is that my experience of part of the



drawing as a drawing of a rabbit's ears depends on my whole experience of the drawing being an experience as of a drawing of a rabbit.

After the gestalt switch, what it is like for me to see the drawing has changed, my whole experience has a different phenomenal character (step 4). As a result of the switch, my whole experience of the figure has a different phenomenal content, for now I have an experience as of a drawing of a duck. Also, I see now as a drawing of a duck's bill the very part of the drawing that I was seeing before as a drawing of a rabbit's ears (step 5). That is, what it is like for me now to experience these particular lines and shapes – what I was seeing before as making up the drawing of a rabbit's ears – has changed, because my partial experience of these lines and shapes is now an experience as of a duck's bill (step 6). Finally, step 7 integrates the gestalt claim again. That is, what explains the fact that I experience that part of the drawing as a drawing of a duck's bill is that this partial experience is a part of my whole experience of the drawing as a drawing of a duck (strong gestalt claim). Or in a weaker version: my experience of part of the drawing as a drawing of a duck's bill depends on my whole experience of the drawing being an experience as of a drawing of a duck.

In addition, and so as to fully capture what is going on in an experiential gestalt switch, we also need to factor in that I am aware, after the switch, of the drawing as the very same drawing as before. And besides, I am also aware of each part of the drawing, that is, each part of the array of lines and shapes that make up the drawing, as the very same as it was before the switch. I am, for instance, aware of the lines that depicted the rabbit's ears before the switch as the very same lines now depicting the duck's bill after the switch.

Note that the claim here does not merely amount to the familiar point that one and the same representational vehicle (in this case, the drawing) can have different

representational contents (in this case, be a drawing of a rabbit or of a duck). That point is indeed well-known, and applies for instance when we consider a sentence with ambiguous terms, such as 'Jones is at the bank'. That sentence can have two rather different contents, depending on how 'bank' is understood. But one interesting point about experiential gestalt switches, or so the GS account submits, is that the shift in representational content is experienced rather than being a matter of mere convention. One might want to insist, however, that the shift in representational content is at least a matter of interpretation in this case, and argue that what I do in fact is to interpret the drawing alternatively as a representation of a rabbit or of a duck. But even to the extent that this shift is a matter of interpretation, it does not involve merely stipulated or assigned meaning, or meanings that the drawing acquires simply as a result of convention. The reason why the shift is not a matter of mere convention is that I am under the impression of *seeing*, after all, a drawing of a duck or a drawing of a rabbit, and not merely of seeing lines and shapes and stipulating that they constitute a drawing of a rabbit or of a duck.

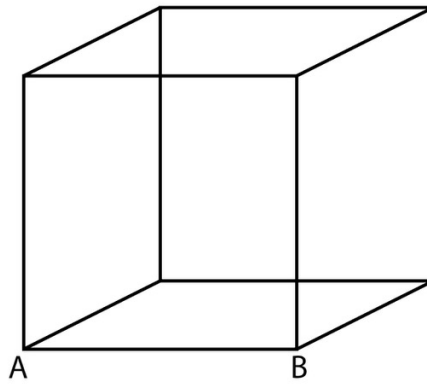
For this reason, a process of experiencing this change in representational content is crucial to experiential gestalt switches, and it is what distinguishes them from other cases where a single representational vehicle harbours multiple contents. What we end up with, therefore, is a picture of experiential gestalt switches that crucially integrates the two key experiential features I have been discussing. Namely it is, for one thing, a switch where I experience something as remaining the very same throughout – I experience the drawing as being the same before and after the switch. And it is at the same time a switch between experiences that have distinct contents, where that change in contents itself is being experienced rather than being just the result of a matter of mere

convention. This also, thus, constitutes one way to clarify the first idea we started with, the idea of an experience of sameness and difference.

A line of reasoning parallel to the one I have just detailed for the case of the duck-rabbit applies to other cases of ambiguous figures that allow for an experiential gestalt switch. That is, when confronted with such figures, one will have an experience of them as remaining the same while at the same time experiencing a change in the phenomenal character – grounded in phenomenal content – of the respective experiences one has before versus after the switch. To mention only a couple of such examples, here is how the reasoning applies to the figure of the Rubin Vase for instance, which we encountered earlier<sup>10</sup>. In this case, one goes from having a visual experience of the white expanse as a vase, hence as some figure that exhibits a contour, to seeing the white expanse as a background, and thus as something that does not have contour. And one switches from one experience to the other while experiencing both the white and the black expanses as remaining the same. Or in the case of the Necker Cube (see *figure 6* below), the switch brings about a change in the phenomenal content of one's partial visual experience of the line *A-B*. One goes from seeing it as a line delimiting the front face of the cube – the face facing the perceiver – to seeing it as line delimiting the back face of the cube. All this again happens while one experiences the line *A-B*, as well as the whole figure, as remaining the same throughout.

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<sup>10</sup> See figure 5 in section 1 above.



*Figure 6: Necker Cube*

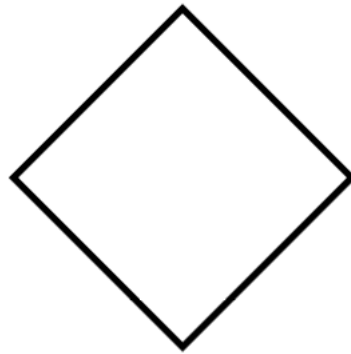
Are all cases of experiential gestalt switches such that we can account for them on the basis of something like the reasoning detailed above? Perhaps some might want to insist, on the contrary, that there are cases of gestalt switches that do not involve changes in the phenomenal contents of the respective before and after experiences – and even cases that in fact involve visual figures similar to those of the most familiar cases I have discussed so far. The issue is controversial, though, and, it seems to me, at least partly depends on one's commitments on largely independent issues about phenomenal content.

For instance, Fiona Macpherson (2006) discusses the case of one's visual experience of the square / regular diamond figure (see *figure 7* below). This figure, she argues, can give rise to what I have called an experiential gestalt switch, for it is “such that initially one sees the figure as a regular diamond, but one can also see it as a square” (2006: 87). More precisely, one can see it either as a regular diamond or as a tilted square, a square ‘standing’ on one of its corners after rotation of 45 degrees. Let us say that we grant that this case is indeed a genuine case of experiential gestalt switch<sup>11</sup> – that is, that it gives rise to a switch between two experiences with different phenomenal characters. If so, then Macpherson's argument purports to show that this switch in phenomenal character cannot be accounted for by representationalism, defined as “the

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<sup>11</sup> For Macpherson's arguments in favour of that claim, see Macpherson (2006: 88-90).

position that the phenomenal character of an experience is either identical with, or supervenes on, the content of that experience” (2006: 82). This is because, in short, it is implausible that a difference in content is what could ground the difference in phenomenal character in this case, she submits, if we assume the conceptions of the content of an experience that the representationalist views she criticizes put forward<sup>12</sup>.



*Figure 7: The square / regular diamond*

As I have said, however, one may think that whether or not the case described by Macpherson involves a change in phenomenal content will ultimately depend on which particular conception of content one adopts, as well as on the view of the relation between representational content and phenomenal character one is prepared to endorse<sup>13</sup>. For, amongst the several different options for both the former (e.g., Russellian, Fregean, conceptual or non-conceptual content) and the latter, it is not clear that all of them will yield the same conclusions on the issue as to what change the gestalt switch

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<sup>12</sup> More precisely, Macpherson argues that the difference in phenomenal character cannot depend on a difference in either conceptual or non-conceptual content. Not the former because it “does seem possible that creatures lacking the relevant concepts could undergo Gestalt switches” (2006: 95). Nor the latter because neither the causal covariation nor the teleological theories could do the job. She submits: “Every time a square shape is present, a regular-diamond shape is also present, because a square *is* a regular diamond. How could an experience covary with one and not the other, or be caused by one and not the other? How could an experience have the function of indicating one and not the other?” (2006: 98)

<sup>13</sup> For instance, one may conceive of the phenomenal or representational content of an experience as a rather non-technical notion that simply captures what appears to be the case to the subject in undergoing that experience. If so, then the case of the square / regular diamond figure does not seem to pose any particular problem for the claim that experiential gestalt switches involve a change in phenomenal content. Indeed, what first appears to me to be case is that I am presented with (a depiction of) a regular diamond, and what appears to me to be case after the switch is that I am presented with a tilted square – hence what appears to me to be the case has changed as a result of the gestalt switch.

involves. However, discussion of these considerations would go well beyond my aims in this thesis. I shall not, therefore, want to commit here to any specific view of the content of an experience (and certainly not to any particular version of representationalism about content). For my aim is not to defend against potential objections the claim that all cases of experiential gestalt switches involve a change in phenomenal content. Rather, it is to put forward the above discussion as one useful way of thinking about what is going on in familiar cases of gestalt switches. And since it is, in particular, a way that makes use of the holistic features of gestalts, it is accordingly a way that will prove useful for my purpose in the next section: to see how we can think on this basis about what is going on in the case of the introspective gestalt switch.

### **3. The gestalt dimension of the introspective switch**

Let us therefore come back, at last, to the gestalt switch in introspection. One central thought of the GS account, let us recall, is that the introspective operation brings about an experiential switch from – in my original example – experiencing some shade of blue as determining the colour property that a worldly object that I see has (e.g. the sofa), to experiencing the shade of blue as also<sup>14</sup> determining the phenomenal character of my visual experience of that worldly object. Now, how could some of the phenomenal holism ideas discussed above help to understand what happens in the introspective switch? A more precise question in this respect would be: what could be the part-whole relation involved in the introspective switch? There are several different routes one could take here. I shall discuss three of them (A to C), in turn.

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<sup>14</sup> Recall that the introspective operation is an operation which is added to the initial experience. I shall always implicitly assume this in what follows and therefore not add ‘also’ every single time.

*A.* One first possible way to think about the gestalt dimension of the introspective switch would be as follows. In normal visual perception, I experience the shade of blue as a part of the whole of the visual scene that I am seeing, a scene which is composed also of many other properties and objects. Whereas in introspection I experience the shade of blue as a part of the whole of all the many determinants of the phenomenal character of my total conscious state at that moment. There is however a rather obvious problem with that first way of bringing the parts-whole gestalt claim to bear on the issue of the introspective switch. Articulated in that way, the parts-whole relation does not constitute a case of experiential gestalt. More precisely, the problem is that the gestalt claim as discussed and applied above did not concern the parts-whole relation of what I experience, e.g. the parts and the whole of the drawing itself. Rather, it concerned the parts and the whole of my experience of the drawing.

*B.* By taking into account that first criticism, we can thus formulate the following, second, way of conceiving of the parts-whole relation at play in the introspective switch. Here is how things can be detailed with respect to my respective experiences before and after the switch, namely in the merely perceptual case (claims 1 to 3) versus in the introspective case (claims 1\* to 3\*).

- (1) I experience some property (e.g. the shade of blue) as determining the property (e.g. the colour property) that a worldly object (e.g. the sofa) instantiates.
- (1\*) I also experience this property (the shade of blue) as determining the phenomenal character of the experiential property (the property of seeing the blue sofa) that I am instantiating.

- (2) My experience of the shade of blue is a part of my whole perceptual experience of the visual scene I see at that moment, a scene composed also of many other properties and entities.
- (2\*) My experience of the shade of blue is a part my whole introspective experience of all the many other elements that contribute to determining the phenomenal character of my total conscious state at that moment.
- (3) What explains that my experience of the shade of blue has the phenomenal character it has is that it is a part of my whole perceptual experience of the many other properties and entities composing the visual scene that I see.
- (3\*) What explains that my experience of the shade of blue has the phenomenal character it has is that it is a part of my whole introspective experience of the many other elements that contribute to determining the phenomenal character of my total conscious state at that moment.

We can also formulate another version of that same second route, but a version which relies on a weaker phenomenal holism claim and which would thus result in the following claims, in place of (3) and (3\*):

- (4) The phenomenal character of my experience of the shade of blue depends on this experience being a part of my whole perceptual experience of the many other properties and entities composing the visual scene that I see.
- (4\*) The phenomenal character of my experience of the shade of blue depends on this experience being a part of my whole introspective experience of the many other elements that contribute to determining the phenomenal character of my total conscious state at that moment.



There are several worries that a proponent of this second route would have to address. For one thing, we might wonder whether this suggests some limits on which aspects of one's experience one could attend to in introspection. For instance, could I attend not just to the aspect corresponding to my awareness of the shade of blue – what it is like to see it – but to the phenomenal character of my whole visual or perceptual experience at a time? Or, even, to the phenomenal character of my total experiential state at a time? In that last case, I would be focusing not on a (proper) part of what determines the phenomenal character of my total conscious state at a time, but precisely on the whole of the many determinant of that phenomenal character.

Perhaps it is actually sensible to expect some limitations when it comes to what aspects of the phenomenal character of my total experience I can attend to at a given moment. Can I realistically attend all at once to the total phenomenal character of my whole conscious state at a given time? I doubt that we are able to do such a thing – and that does not seem to be a matter of not being a sufficiently well-trained introspector. Incidentally, I also doubt for this reason that we are able to form a phenomenal concept of our total experiential state at a time, or even in many cases of our total perceptual state at a time. If we form phenomenal concepts on the basis of attending to some aspect of the phenomenal character of our experience,<sup>15</sup> then the doubts I just expressed would transfer to our capacity to form a phenomenal concept capturing all the richness of our total conscious state at a given time. Yet here again, it seems to me more plausible anyway that our phenomenal concepts are concepts of much more local and limited phenomenal commonalities between conscious states we are in, rather than concepts of whole conscious states at a time.

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<sup>15</sup> This is a view I find independently plausible. See for instance the quoted passages from Chalmers in Chapter 1, section 2, for more on such a view.

I do not want to suggest that it is inconceivable that a conscious creature could attend to the phenomenal character of her whole conscious state,<sup>16</sup> but there certainly seem to be some limitations in our own case – just as there are limitations in what we can attend to in perception for instance. There also I cannot attend to a whole complex visual scene all at once. And this is just what we should expect, both in perception and in introspection, given the selectivity function of attention (see Chapter 5, section 1).

However, there are more serious worries that the route B faces anyway. Above all, the claims incorporating the gestalt holistic idea, namely claims 3 and 3\*, are very controversial, even in their weaker versions 4 and 4\*. They are, one could reasonably suggest, much more controversial than the holism claims we encountered in our discussion of Chudnoff for instance, or than the ones I formulated in analysing the gestalt switch in the duck-rabbit case. For to argue that the phenomenal character of my experience of the shade of blue depends on this experience being a part of my whole perceptual experience of the visual scene (claim 4) does commit one to a very strong form indeed of experiential holism. It would be a view on which the phenomenal character of my partial visual experience of the blue sofa depends, for example, on my partial visual experience of the cup I see on the desk in the periphery of my visual field. For if the phenomenal character of my partial visual experience of the cup varies, then so does my whole visual experience, and therefore so does my partial visual experience of the blue sofa, insofar as it depends on my whole experience.<sup>17</sup> It is easy to see how such a holistic claim is more controversial than the claim that my visual experience of an individual disc depends on my whole experience of Kanisza's triangle, or the claim that

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<sup>16</sup> I do not think that we should realistically expect our best account of introspection to allow for such a possibility, but this possibility might prove worth exploring nonetheless.

<sup>17</sup> In my view, Barry Dainton has provided good reasons to be sceptical of this stronger form of holism; see Dainton (2010).

my experience of part of the drawing as a drawing of a duck's bill depends on my whole experience of the drawing as a drawing of a duck.

C. A more modest and also more plausible claim about the gestalt dimension of the introspective switch would go as follows. Let me first briefly bring again into perspective what it is that I am trying to achieve here. What I am trying to understand is a change in my experience that the introspective operation brings about. It is, more precisely, a change in my awareness of, in my example, a certain shade of blue – a change which is analogous to a gestalt switch in that my awareness of that shade of blue changes, albeit I am at the same time aware of it as the very same shade of blue concerning which my awareness has changed. Accordingly, in this respect the shade of blue is analogous to the ambiguous duck-rabbit drawing or the Rubin Vase figure, for instance. At this stage, more specifically, the idea is to explain this change in my awareness of the shade of blue in terms of my awareness of it being part of two distinct experiential wholes, so that it is the switch between my awareness of the wholes that constitutes the change in my awareness of the shade of blue.

The holistically more modest suggestion I want to consider now would thus not identify the relevant whole within which my awareness of the shade of blue fits as being my whole visual experience at that time, or my experience of the whole visual scene, including things that are part of it other than the blue sofa. Rather, one straightforward way to describe that first relevant whole, the whole before the switch, would be to say that it is simply my visual experience of the sofa itself. Whereas, on the other hand, we could describe the second relevant whole, after the switch, as being my experience of determining the phenomenal character of my visual experience of the sofa.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Note that I intentionally do not suggest characterizing the first whole, before the switch, as my experience of determining the colour of the sofa – in what would be a characterization parallel to the one favoured for the second whole. Even though the experience of determining the colour of the sofa is arguably closely related to that of being aware of the shade of blue as determining the colour of the sofa,

Thus, unlike in the previous route B, each of the two wholes identified now in route C are plausibly cases where my experience of the shade of blue has its phenomenal character in part because of the whole within which it is experienced. That is, because it is part of my whole visual experience of the sofa, my experience of the shade of blue is an experience of it as the colour that the sofa instantiates, as opposed to, say, an experience of the shade of blue as not belonging to any visually manifest object I am perceiving. On the contrary, it seems possible to vary other elements in my whole visual experience of the overall scene I am perceiving – or even to delete some of these elements – without that resulting in a change in my experience of the shade of blue. For instance, it seems possible to delete the cup left on the table from the perceived scene without impacting the phenomenal character of my experience of the shade of blue. One might perhaps be tempted to respond that it seems also possible to delete the sofa from the perceived scene while still seeing the shade of blue. It certainly is, but it is also clear that my experience of the shade of blue would then vary. In other words, what it is like to experience the shade of blue as the colour the sofa instantiates is different from what it is like to experience it as not belonging to any object I see, and that difference is at least partly constituted by my awareness of it being part of the whole visual experience of the sofa I am having.

So whereas the form of holism embodied in route B involved a dependence of my awareness of the shade of blue on all the many experiential details of my total visual experience, the holism used in route C only makes it depend on my experience of the

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the former is more cognitively demanding and sophisticated than the latter. That is, the experience of determining the colour of the sofa does not merely amount to being aware of the shade of blue as determining the colour of the sofa. One could wonder, though, whether the same distinction may also apply to the introspective case – that is, whether the experience of determining the phenomenal character of my experience does not merely amount to being aware of the shade of blue as determining the phenomenal character of my experience. Perhaps there is such a less cognitively sophisticated state where I may be so aware, but in any case what I am interested in here is the full-blooded introspective experience, and introspection is somewhat cognitively demanding after all.

sofa. However, this is not all that differs between the two forms of holism I am considering here. If the difference was only a matter of the scale of the relevant whole, then in route C my awareness of the shade of blue would, in a similar manner, depend on every experiential detail of my visual experience of the sofa. But this would be implausible. Rather, the relevant whole should be my visual experience of the sofa, along with my experience of some of the sofa's other visually manifest properties – though, most likely, not all such properties. Since it seems that, for example, the perceived shape of the sofa could vary, or its perceived texture possibly as well, without my awareness of the shade of blue itself changing.

Yet, in contrast, my awareness of the shade of blue does seem to depend on the whole of my visual experience being an experience as of a certain kind of object – a concrete, three-dimensional object, which is moreover a piece of furniture. If the whole of my visual experience was an experience as of a completely different kind of object – or, as I have said, as of no discernible object at all – then my awareness of the shade of blue would be different. In this respect, the analogy with standard cases of experiential switches proves helpful once more. We have seen that my partial experience of the ears of a rabbit depends on my whole experience of the duck-rabbit drawing being an experience as of a drawing of a rabbit. But, precisely, it does not depend on every detail of my whole experience as of a drawing of a rabbit – rather, it depends on my experience being an experience as of a rabbit *gestalt*. And so, similarly, my awareness of the shade of blue does not depend on every detail of my visual experience as of a sofa – it depends, rather, on my visual experience being an experience as of a three-dimensional object of a certain kind.

After the introspective switch, on the other hand, my awareness of the shade of blue depends on my whole introspective experience of attending to the phenomenal

character of my visual experience of the sofa. And insofar as it is part of that whole introspective experience, it is an awareness of the shade of blue as a feature that determines what it is like for me to undergo that visual experience. Thus, what it is like for me to experience the shade of blue (merely) as determining the colour the sofa instantiates is different from what it is like to experience the shade of blue (also) as determining the phenomenal character of my visual experience, and that difference is partly constituted by my awareness of the shade of blue being, in the latter case, part of a different whole than in the former case – namely, it is part of the whole introspective experience I am having. This means that it is in part the contrast between two different experiential wholes within which my awareness of the shade of blue fits which grounds the phenomenal change in my awareness of that shade of blue that the introspective switch brings about.

## **CHAPTER 5.**

### **ATTENTION, ITS PHENOMENAL DIMENSION, AND ITS DISTRIBUTION IN INTROSPECTION AND IN PERCEPTION**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapters, I have characterized the introspective operation as an introspective switch that results in the situation where I am attentively aware of – where I am attending to – my having a given experiential property. But how should we understand attention in this context? What would attending in introspection consist in and what would it involve? With which views of attention could the gestalt switch account be combined and what would be the upshot for the main tenets of the account? And what is the relation between the distribution of a subject's conscious attention in her perceptual experience and the distribution of her attention when she introspects that perceptual experience?

The detailed plan for the chapter is as follows. In section 1, I delimit my discussion of attention to its phenomenal dimension and I situate this topic in the broader area of research on attention. I then explore the combination of the gestalt switch account with one prominent recent account of the phenomenology of attention, and I consider the upshot of this combination. This discussion leads me to a set of issues concerning the distribution of attention in perception and in introspection, issues that I tackle in the next two sections. Thus in section 2, I ask whether I can, when I introspect

my perceptual experience, direct my attention independently from the way I direct it in the perceptual experience which I introspect. I assess the view the GS account is committed to and contrast it with a rival view. In section 3, I discuss the question as to whether the introspective switch involves a change in the object attended to in comparison with the initial perceptual experience, i.e. before the introspective operation, and I compare again the stance of the gestalt switch account with a competing view on that issue.

### **1. A view of introspective attention**

The strategy I shall pursue in this section will consist in exploring the combination of one recent prominent view about attention with the major tenets of the gestalt switch account of introspection I have developed so far. The view I shall consider in what follows is the priority structure view developed by Sebastian Watzl.<sup>1</sup> But before I start outlining that view, I want to make clear what it is that I am looking for in exploring that combination. There are, specifically, two main questions which will guide my exploration in this chapter. First, what would attending to my having an experiential property involve on Watzl's view of attention? And second, what is the upshot of a given answer to the first question for the central ideas of the GS account, especially for the idea that the introspective operation involves some kind of gestalt switch?

A word of caution is in order before I pursue these two questions further, though. Attention, as a mental phenomenon, has both a functional and a phenomenal

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<sup>1</sup> See Watzl (2011), (2017). I shall restrict my present discussion to the combination of the GS account with Watzl's view. But there would be many other interesting combinations to explore, of course (even if Watzl is perhaps, amongst contemporary authors, the one who offers the most thorough account of the phenomenal dimension of attention). For other accounts, see for instance Wu (2014), Mole (2011), Prinz (2012). In the phenomenological tradition, see for instance Merleau-Ponty (1962), Gurwitsch (1964). Wayne Wu has recently made available work on attention and introspection that to my knowledge has not been published yet; see Wu (unpublished).



dimension. Here I shall focus mainly on its phenomenal dimension – that is, on attention insofar as it makes a difference for what it is like for a subject to be conscious at a certain time. Therefore, I shall leave aside a lot of what pertains to the functional side of the phenomenon of attention – although I shall nonetheless discuss some particular functional points of Watzl’s account of attention, but only to the extent that this helps in understanding that account’s phenomenal characterization of attention.

The field of research on attention is fairly vast and lively, and it has been so for quite some time, most notably in cognitive sciences and in psychology for the last few decades at least.<sup>2</sup> As a result, considerable efforts have been deployed in these disciplines in order to understand the functional dimension of attention, leading to some significant results. One central research focus in this respect has consisted in accounting for attention as a selectivity function – a selectivity explained, in turn, in terms of either the limitations of some of the subject’s sub-personal, hardware capacities (e.g., limitations of the information processing capacities of its brain), or the limitations of what the subject can cognitively process, or else a selectivity that is not ultimately explained in terms of limitations.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, however, the dimension of attention as a phenomenally conscious phenomenon has received comparatively far less interests in analytic philosophy of mind – at least until recent years, which have seen a few authors investigate the topic.<sup>4</sup>

In order to provide answers to my first guiding question above, we will first need to properly understand, on any given account of attention such as Watzl’s, what attending to X in usual circumstances consists in. In other words, we will first need to understand what attending consists in in the ordinary case where I attend to a feature F

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<sup>2</sup> Arguably, even earlier than the last few decades: for a discussion of earlier work on attention, see Hatfield (1995). For the last few decades, see notably Broadbent (1958), and the discussion in Mole (2017), especially Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Mole (2017).

<sup>4</sup> See note 1 above for some work in recent philosophy of mind and in the phenomenological tradition.

of the external world (let F be a property, an object, an event etc.). Once we will have clarified what it is to attend in that usual case, we will then be in a position to enquire about the special case which is of interest to my purpose here: the case of attending to X where X is not a feature F of the world, but an experience as of an F – that is, in other words, the case where I attend to my having a given experiential property.

I shall now outline in broad brushstrokes some central ideas of the view of attention put forward by Sebastian Watzl, where he develops an account of the phenomenon in terms of priority structures.<sup>5</sup> On his view, attention is not itself one mental attitude, or one mental state, amongst other mental attitudes that the subject can take or be in. Rather, attention is constituted by the priority ordering of one's mental states – or, to put it differently, one's attention is constituted by the relational structure of relative priority that one's mental states bear to one another. A subject's engagement in the activity of attending, accordingly, consists primarily in managing that priority structure. More precisely, it consists in shifting upward and downward in the priority ordering some of one's mental states which fill in that structure at a given time. Thus, the mental states that fill in that structure should be distinguished from the objects to which I attend. In concrete terms, this means that in the scenario I described earlier,<sup>6</sup> for instance, what I attend to is the jumper, and my visual experience of the jumper is what takes the 'highest' position in the priority structure.

That characterization of what attention consists in translates into a view of the phenomenal dimension of attention that Watzl calls *phenomenal structuralism*.<sup>7</sup> The phenomenal structuralist view suggests that the phenomenology of attention is constituted by the centrality ordering of the subject's conscious experiences, where this

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<sup>5</sup> See Watzl 2011, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Watzl 2017: 184 ff.

centrality ordering concerns which conscious states are phenomenally central for a subject at any one time. Thus, at the phenomenal level, attending has the result of imposing a centrality structure over the subject's overall stream of consciousness. Centrality relations holding between the subject's various conscious experiences at a time are structural phenomenal features of that subject's overall phenomenology at that time. That is, the phenomenal structure of centrality relations that results from the subject's directing her attention in a certain manner makes a difference for the overall way it is like for her to be conscious at a given time. That phenomenal structure is determined by the priority structure mentioned above, according to Watzl<sup>8</sup> – although weaker relationships between the two are not necessarily ruled out on his overall account.<sup>9</sup>

Now, what does my attending to a feature *F* of the external world consist in on the account of attention just outlined? In a nutshell, it consists in moving to the top of the priority ordering structure a mental state of mine that is directed at *F*.<sup>10</sup> As a result, at the phenomenal level, attending to *F* shifts to the centre of the phenomenal structure this conscious experience of mine which takes *F* as its intentional object. Other experiences, experiences that are about features which I am not attending to, occupy the periphery of that phenomenal attentional structure. For example, when I am sitting in the library and directing my attention at the yellow jumper that I see, my visual experience of the jumper occupies the centre of my attentional structure, while for instance my auditory experience of people whispering behind the bookshelves is phenomenally less central than that visual experience.

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<sup>8</sup> See Watzl 2017: 192.

<sup>9</sup> See Watzl 2017: 188-189.

<sup>10</sup> See Watzl 2017: 83.

With this outline of the central ideas of Watzl's account, we may now come back to the first guiding question I mentioned above, namely: what would attending to my having a given experiential property involve on this account? Watzl himself does not commit to any particular view about attending to the phenomenal character of one's experience,<sup>11</sup> nor does he actually discuss much the issue of one's awareness of one's phenomenal features in general. One particular case of awareness of a phenomenal feature on which he does take a stance is the case of one's awareness of the phenomenal attentional structure of one's overall experience at a time. There, Watzl puts forward an account of that type of awareness which relies on one's agential awareness of directing one's attention in a specific manner. But the question of attending to the phenomenal character of one's experience goes beyond this particular case and encompasses also, in Watzl's own terminology, the issues concerning one's introspective attention to "phenomenal qualities", rather than the mere phenomenal structure<sup>12</sup> of experience.

One very natural way to answer the question as to what attending to the phenomenal character of my experience involves on Watzl's framework would be as follows. To attend to my having an experience E1 consists in having at the centre of my attentional structure an experience E2 that takes E1 as its intentional object. This is a natural consequence to draw from what attending to an X consists in, as we have seen, on that view. However, it should be noted that, however natural, this is not a claim that Watzl himself seems prepared to commit to.<sup>13</sup> This may be only a possible, and quite natural, way of applying his account in the case of introspective attention – even though,

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<sup>11</sup> See Watzl (2017: 225) note 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Watzl (2017): Chapter 11 (especially pp. 226-227).

<sup>13</sup> In fact Watzl seems, on the contrary, rather inclined to resist such a claim, for instance if we consider his discussion of what he calls "mediators of introspection" (2017: 228). He then goes on to offer his account of being aware of the phenomenal structure in terms of agential awareness, but it is hard to see how such an account could be generalized so as to apply to other aspects of the phenomenal character of an experience which do not concern its phenomenal attentional structure.

as far as I can see, it is not at all clear what an alternative account of attending to one's having an experiential property would look like on his view of attention.

Let me now turn to the second guiding question I detailed above and ask what conclusions we can draw for the gestalt switch account if we consider the understanding of attending to the phenomenal character of my experience I just outlined. It might seem that this understanding is indeed inconsistent with one central tenet of the GS account, namely the idea that in attending to what it is like, for instance, to see the blue colour property of the sofa, I am thereby still attending to the shade of blue. Because if to attend to my having an experience E1 I need to prioritize an experience E2 that targets E1, then it seems that in doing so I will substitute E2 for E1 at the centre of my attentional structure and as a result stop attending to the shade of blue. In fact, one way to circumvent this problem on Watzl's account would be to describe the situation as a case of divided (or split) attention.<sup>14</sup> Both E1 and E2, in this case, would occupy the top of my priority ordering. One obvious consequence of this suggestion is that it would generalize to all introspective experiences the occurrence of a situation of split attention.<sup>15</sup> This matter touches on a more general set of issues, however, a set of issues about the distribution of attention in perception and in introspection. The discussion of these issues will be the focus of the next two sections (i.e. sections 2 & 3).

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<sup>14</sup> See Watzl (2017: 81).

<sup>15</sup> It might seem that the GS account could also make use of the notion of split attention in its analysis of the situation where one is, for example, attending both to the shade of blue and to the phenomenal character of one's perception. I do not think that the notion of split attention is the best suited to capture this idea, though. It is not a situation where I attend to two different 'unconnected' things at the same time, rather it is a situation where I attend to one by attending to the other – something the notion of gestalt switch is better suited to capture, in my view.

## **2. The distribution of attention in perception and in introspection**

In order to disentangle the issues about the distribution of attention in perception and in introspection, one main question I shall consider is the following: (1) Does the introspective switch involve a change in the object attended to in comparison with the initial experience, i.e. before the introspective operation? It would be the case that such a change takes place for instance if the introspective switch resulted in a shift of attention away from the object attended to in the initial perceptual experience.

A second question, related to the first, which I shall explore here is as follows: (2) Is it possible, in introspecting my perceptual experience, for me to direct my attention independently from the way I direct my attention in the introspected perceptual experience? In other words, are the two ways I direct my attention in the respective perceptual and introspective experience independent from one another? What interests me especially here is the issue as to whether I can attend in introspection to what it is like for me to perceive X without thereby attending to X in perception as well. The strategy I shall pursue in order to clarify the stance of the gestalt switch account with respect to questions (1) and (2) will consist in contrasting it with the stance of alternative accounts concerning these issues. I shall begin with question (2) here; I tackle question (1) in the next section (i.e. section 3).

My discussion of the gestalt switch account so far<sup>16</sup> has already indicated that, on this account, the ways I can direct my attention in perception and in introspection are likely to be not entirely independent from one another. The more precise claim in this respect that I would like to evaluate now is the following:

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance Chapter 3, section 3.

DA-thesis:

If one attends to the phenomenal character of one's occurrent perception of X, then one also necessarily attends to X.<sup>17</sup>

We may call this the thesis of the dependence of introspective attention upon perceptual attention, or the DA-thesis for short. The DA-thesis is a restricted version of the more general claim which says that if one attends to the phenomenal character of one's experience of X, then one also necessarily attends to X. I think that the more general claim might have some plausibility as well, although I shall not defend it here.

The restriction to one's *occurrent* perceptions is also important, as will become clear in the discussion below. I do not assume that the gestalt switch account is committed to the stronger thesis that if one attends to the phenomenal character of one's perception of X, then one also necessarily attends to X. That is, the GS account might be compatible for instance with the idea that I can introspect my perception of X in immediate memory, where I can attend to the phenomenal character of my remembered perception of X without attending to X.

On the other hand, the GS account is committed to the claim that when I introspect my current perceptual experience of X, when I attend to its phenomenal character, then I also necessarily attend to X. That is, the GS account is committed to the DA-thesis, since it holds that in order to introspect one's visual experience of the shade of blue that the sofa appears to have, one has to attend to the shade of blue insofar as it determines the phenomenal character of that experience.

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<sup>17</sup> The case of hallucinations raises specific difficulties for this thesis. I cannot address them properly here, but I assume that it is possible to attend to non-existent entities or to 'quasi-objects' (e.g., in a wholly hallucinatory experience one's perceptual attention will be distributed in a certain way, such that one attends to certain quasi-objects or to non-existent entities). Therefore, I assume that if one introspects an occurrent hallucination of X one must attend to X, even though X will be a quasi-object or a non-existent entity. For a view of perceptual experiences involving quasi-objects, see Nida-Rümelin 2011.

One easily foreseeable – and potentially worrying – consequence for the GS account of its commitment to the DA-thesis is that it renders the introspective operation, as the GS account conceives of it, impotent to introspect one's occurrent perceptual experience of X when X is outside one's perceptual attentional focus. In other words, I will be unable, as I am undergoing such a perceptual experience, to attend to what it is like to perceive X *qua* entity I do not attend to – or so the GS account of introspection implies. The extent to which this is a genuinely worrying consequence of the account will depend on whether it is independently plausible or not to think that I should be able to do such a thing. That is, if there are reasons to think that I cannot attend to the phenomenal character of my inattentive occurrent perception of X, then it would be a result that the GS accounts predicts, and this way of conceiving of the introspective operation would find itself vindicated.

However, it might appear that Barry Dainton suggests a line of thought that contradicts the DA-thesis, at least at first glance. That is, he seems to suggest that it is possible, in given circumstances, to attend to what it is like to perceive X *qua* entity one does not attend to, and to do so while one is perceiving X. For, to put it rather cautiously, Dainton says a number of things that may initially appear to go in that direction, when he submits that we have the ability to exercise what he calls 'passive introspection':

"We can make judgments about the phenomenal background more or less as it happens. Try the following experiment. Focus your attention as hard as you can onto the page in front of you, onto its colour or texture; keep your attention focused here, and while doing so describe out loud something else you can perceive, e.g. the colour of the walls that you can see in your peripheral vision, or any sounds you can hear. Suppose the walls are green: you can notice and report on this without significantly lessening the degree of attention you are paying to the page in front of you. There will probably be some reduction in the degree of



attention you are paying to the page, but not a great deal. The important point is that you can register something of the character of the contents of your peripheral experience without focusing your attention onto your peripheral experience itself. We can call this procedure *passive introspection*.” (2000: 33; his emphasis)

Dainton is using here some terminology which makes it somewhat tricky to understand with precision his overall point in this passage. One such piece of terminology is his notion of the ‘phenomenal background’. He had, earlier in the book (2000: 31), introduced the notion of the phenomenal background to refer to cases such as one’s inattentive experience of the refrigerator’s hum – that is, those cases where “there is experience that goes unnoticed; there is experience without conscious awareness, in the sense of ‘awareness’ as attention or recognition”. Dainton even contends that “it is plausible to suppose that the bulk of our consciousness consists of this sort of unnoticed experience”, and he adds: “I will call this sphere of experience the *phenomenal background*.” (2000: 31; his emphasis)

Presumably, then, one’s experience of the green coloured walls that Dainton mentions in the passage quoted above is part of one’s phenomenal background in this very sense. What he is suggesting here, therefore, is a method to reach judgments about such an experience, a method that relies neither on memory,<sup>18</sup> however short-term, nor on focusing one’s attention onto that experience itself, an experience he also calls ‘peripheral’ at the end of the quote. That alternative method Dainton offers, then, is what he terms ‘passive introspection’.

I have a number of doubts about what Dainton is suggesting here – doubts both about what are exactly the points he is trying to drive home and about the validity of those points as I understand them. One important but problematic part of the issue is to

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<sup>18</sup> See Dainton (2000: 33).

understand what he means exactly when he talks of making judgements about, or registering, parts of the phenomenal background. I take it that it is the same point he expresses, in the passage quoted above, when he says that passive introspection enables you to “register something of the character of the contents of your peripheral experience”.

Because of his talk of noticing and reporting that the walls are green, one might initially surmise that what Dainton means by making judgments about the phenomenal background simply amounts to this: registering the colour of the walls, albeit without attending to the walls themselves. Or, in other words, judging that the walls are green without shifting one’s attention away from the page in front of one. The possibility of one doing so seems uncontroversial enough – be it the case or not that this is the point Dainton is in fact making here. But as uncontroversial as it might seem, I think it is useful to distinguish nonetheless between two quite different things in this context. As I discussed in Chapter 2,<sup>19</sup> there is a difference – in vision at least – between the focus of my visual gaze – what I foveate – and the focus of my visual attention – what I attend to amongst the various things that I see. I can of course reach a judgment about the colour of the walls on the basis of my visual experience of them, but without directing my gaze upon the wall, without foveating it. That much is clearly feasible. But it would seem also natural to describe this case further as a case where the focus of my gaze and the focus of my attention diverge – that is, a situation where I attend to something in my visual field that I am not foveating. Namely, I attend to the green walls that I see outside the focus of my gaze, while I keep my gaze fixed in the exact same manner – upon the page. However, if this was what Dainton really had in mind,<sup>20</sup> then it would seem rather

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 2, section 5.

<sup>20</sup> It is unlikely that this is what Dainton really had in mind, though, since in the passage quoted he asks the reader to keep their attention focused on the page in front of them.

implausible that I would do that “without significantly lessening the degree of attention” that I pay to the page I foveate. I do, after all, attend to the wall in such a case.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, one might perhaps think instead that Dainton must have in mind something rather like the following. While I foveate and also attend the page in front of me, I judge at the same time that the walls are green on the basis of my visual experience of them, even though I do not attend to the walls themselves. It is not obvious that doing such a thing is impossible. But, on the other hand, it is not obvious either, to say the least, that it is possible. When I try to follow these instructions, I actually find it hard to tell whether I succeed or not – all the more so if I bear in mind the distinction between the focus of my gaze and the focus of my attention. Am I really judging that the walls are green without significantly redirecting my attention to how they look to me, without attending to what I am seeing in that peripheral area of my visual field? Or is my attention rather shifting<sup>22</sup> rapidly back and forth between the page and the walls, while I keep my gaze fixated on the page?<sup>23</sup>

When I am asked to describe the colour of the walls in that situation, I find that I can with some effort resist the natural temptation of shifting my gaze away from the page and onto the walls. I am not so sure, however, that, when being so instructed, I can resist the temptation of attending to the walls *qua* objects I see outside the focus of my visual gaze – especially when it comes to reaching a judgement about the colour they appear to have. Furthermore, it seems to me that this might prove even harder in

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<sup>21</sup> One might counter that I could be attending to both the page and the walls, and that this would not have the effect of reducing the attention I pay to the page. If we construe this case as involving a situation of split attention, and if split does not have this effect, then perhaps that would be true. In the end, the point does not matter much either way, though, because it is much more plausible that Dainton is talking here about phenomenal judgements (second interpretation) rather than judgments about the walls (see discussion below). The point about split attention will not matter for that second interpretation either (see note 31 below).

<sup>22</sup> Again: could I not be attending to both at the same time? See note 21 above on split attention.

<sup>23</sup> Or else still: I could be basing my judgement, not on my seeing the walls in the periphery of my visual field, but on my immediate memory of seeing them so, a memory I can summon up while I am still perceiving the same visual scene.

situations involving other perceptual modalities. Recall again the case of your auditory experience of Rachmaninov's piano concerto n.2 and imagine being instructed to make judgements about the part played by the piano while keeping your attention focused on the part played by the cellos. Insofar as you are asked to make judgements on the basis of the auditory experience of the piano you are currently undergoing, I suspect that it will prove very hard for you to do so without significantly lessening the degree of attention you are paying to the cellos' part.

Be that as it may, there are good reasons anyway to think that what Dainton has in mind in the passage I quoted above is something else, though. For he does talk, after all, of passive *introspection* and so it would be natural to think that a judgement about the phenomenal background is, for instance, a judgement about one's visual experience of the green walls rather than a judgement about the walls and their colour. Things are made somewhat more complex, however, by Dainton's endorsement of what he calls a projectivist view of perceptual experience.<sup>24</sup> On such a view, he writes, "everything that is immediately present in experience is regarded as an experience" – for instance, "when I see the bus approaching, I regard the bus (the direct object of my visual experience) as a part of my consciousness" (2000: 19). In consequence, the distinction between judgements about the green walls and judgements about my experience of them might seem to lose some of its clarity (since the green walls, insofar as they are present in experience, would be regarded as an experience too).

But even if both judgements are judgements about experiences in that sense, Dainton nonetheless acknowledges significant distinctions between them. Following David Chalmers,<sup>25</sup> he distinguishes between first-order and second-order phenomenal

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<sup>24</sup> More precisely, Dainton describes his standpoint as "the standpoint of a critical phenomenology informed by projectivism" (2000: 19).

<sup>25</sup> See Chalmers (1996: 175-6).

judgements,<sup>26</sup> the former being about “the objects or states of affairs the experience is of”, whereas, in making the latter, “I deliberately focus my attention onto the character of (a part of) my current experience, and I realize that it is my experience that I am making a judgment about” (2000: 19). And, precisely, in the case of passive introspection that interests me here, Dainton then goes on to add that the relevant judgements are second-order judgements:

“Of course, ordinarily, if we wanted to make a second-order judgment about some aspect of our current experience, we would deliberately turn our attention onto it: we would actively introspect. Passive introspection is certainly less informative than active introspection, but memory aside, there is no other route of access to the phenomenal background.” (2000: 33)

Therefore, it seems that what Dainton is in fact suggesting here is that that I can form second-order phenomenal judgements about my peripheral experience of the green walls without attending to the walls themselves. The key claims supporting this reading are (a) that passive introspection is a way of arriving at second-order phenomenal judgments, and (b) that in passively introspecting a peripheral experience, we do not focus our attention on the content of the experience,<sup>27</sup> e.g., in this case, the green walls. Now, the most plausible interpretation overall of Dainton here is that, in passive introspection, we do not focus on the experience we form a second-order phenomenal judgement about. For Dainton says at the end of the very first passage I quoted<sup>28</sup> that in passive introspection we do not focus our attention on the peripheral experience at issue. Thus, it seems that what is going on in the example he considers is that we form a second-order judgment about the phenomenal character of our experience of the green

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<sup>26</sup> In addition, there are also third-order phenomenal judgements, which are “generalizations about types of experience” – see Dainton (2000: 19).

<sup>27</sup> (b) is also what Dainton says in the first sentence of the next passage quoted below.

<sup>28</sup> See pp. 120-121.

walls without attending to the walls, and without attending to the phenomenal character of our experience of the walls either.

Hence, if this is what passive introspection involves, then it poses no threat to the DA-thesis, since the DA-thesis has no implication for a situation where one attends neither to the perceived object nor to the phenomenal character of that perception. The DA-thesis would be under threat only if forming second-order phenomenal judgements about my peripheral experience requires that I attend to that experience. According to Dainton's own definition of such judgements<sup>29</sup> that I quote above, this should ordinarily be the case, but he seems prepared here to amend that definition in the case of passive introspection.<sup>30</sup>

One may perhaps wonder if it is plausible that we can form genuine judgements about the phenomenal character of our experience without attending to that character or to the aspects of it that are being judged about. I shall not pursue this issue much further here, but I would like to consider briefly the interpretation of passive introspection that would pose a threat to the DA-thesis. That is, I would like to examine briefly the plausibility of passive introspection conceived of as the method by which we could attend to the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience of X *qua* object we do not attend to. That conception of passive introspection, as I said, is likely not the one Dainton has in mind. Yet one might possibly be misled into interpreting him that way when one considers the distinction that Dainton draws between primary and secondary attention in the following passage:

In passive introspection we focus our attention away from the content we wish to describe or take note of; in this manner, we can (in a manner of speaking) attend to what we are not paying attention to. There may seem to be more than a whiff

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<sup>29</sup> See Dainton (2000: 19).

<sup>30</sup> Hence the first sentence in the last passage I quote: "Of course, *ordinarily*, if we wanted to make a second-order judgment about some aspect of our current experience, we would deliberately turn our attention onto it: we would actively introspect." (Dainton 2000: 33, my emphasis)

of paradox here. How can we pay attention to something we are deliberately not paying attention to? But the problem is only verbal. We can distinguish between primary and secondary attention. Primary attention is what we ordinarily mean by attention. The objects of secondary attention are the parts of the phenomenal background we choose to register or make a judgment about while deliberately keeping our (primary) attention fixed elsewhere.” (2000: 33)

On the most plausible overall interpretation of Dainton, secondary attention presumably means only forming a phenomenal judgement about a peripheral experience. But if we understand secondary attention as genuine attention to the phenomenal character of a peripheral experience, passive introspection would then pose a threat to the DA-thesis. This is what I want to consider here for the sake of the argument. Passive introspection would then allow for a situation where one’s primary and secondary attention diverge, as Dainton suggests: for example, my primary attention is directed at the page in front of me, while my secondary attention is directed at the phenomenal character of my peripheral experience of the green walls. If we add that in doing so I am not attending to the walls themselves, then this would be a situation that the DA-thesis has to rule out. But this situation would be a plausible counter-example to the DA-thesis only if we have good reasons to think that it is situation which is in fact possible. However, I am rather sceptical that it is possible to do such a thing. Let me try to clarify why by considering the following example.

Let us recall first the type of phenomenal contrast that I illustrated by my description of case 4 in Chapter 2.<sup>31</sup> This case starts from the situation where I am sitting at a desk in the university library, looking at the visual scene composed of the yellow jumper and the purple folder. I am both directing my gaze and focusing my visual attention upon the jumper, while I am seeing the folder outside the focus of my attention. The phenomenal character of my experience then changes, I said, as a result of

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 2, section 5.

my shifting my attention away from the jumper and onto the folder, while I make an effort not to move my gaze but to keep it fixed on the jumper.

Now consider the following variation on case 4, which I shall call here case 4\*. The starting situation is the exact same as before: I am seeing the jumper and the folder, looking and attending to the folder while seeing the jumper outside the focus of my attention. But the change I will try to bring about now will consist only in adding a secondary attention (to use Dainton's terms) to what it is like to see the folder in this circumstance. Note that I should do so without moving my gaze or my visual attention away from the jumper. That is, I should keep all the parameters of my perceptual state fixed, while attending to the phenomenal character of my visual experience of the folder. My suspicion is that if I try to do as instructed in case 4\*, what will happen is that I will find myself doing what I actually described in case 4. That is, what I will find myself doing is moving my attention to the folder, in the periphery of my visual field, while I keep my gaze fixed on the jumper.<sup>32</sup>

In the light of the above discussion, therefore, it does not seem to me that Dainton's passive introspection, on any of the interpretations considered, provides a clear and acceptable counter-example to the DA-thesis. If this is so, then it seems legitimate to assume the DA-thesis in going forward.

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<sup>32</sup> Here one might be tempted bring up again the point about split attention (see note 20 above). Perhaps I can attend both to the jumper and to the folder in this case. But if this is so, then the case would be no counter-example to the DA-thesis, since I would be attending to the folder (and to the jumper) and to the phenomenal character of my experience of the folder. What the DA-thesis rejects is the situation where my attention is split between the jumper and the phenomenal character of my experience of the folder, while I do *not* attend to the folder. Hence I do see how the point about split attention can help arguing against the DA-thesis here.



### 3. The introspective switch and attention shifts

I now turn to the first of the two questions I formulated in opening the last section, namely the question as to whether the introspective switch involves a change in the object attended to in comparison with the initial experience, i.e. before the introspective operation. We have seen already that a central tenet of the gestalt switch account, as I articulated it in Chapter 3, involves the idea that after the introspective switch I am still attending to whatever I was attending previously in the initial perceptual experience. I do still attend, for instance, to the blue colour property that the sofa appears to have as I introspect my perceptual experience of it, but I attend to it insofar as it determines the experiential property that I am instantiating in seeing that sofa, and to that extent I am also attending to the experiential property I am having at that moment.

It will prove illuminating to contrast the GS account with what constitutes a rival view on this very issue, that is, a view according to which the introspective operation does in fact result in a change in the entity attended to. One such view to consider in this context is the view that Uriah Kriegel puts forward under the name of the ‘attention-shift model’ of introspection:

“Consider my visual experience of the laptop before me and the bonsai to my left. Before the introspecting, my visual awareness of the laptop is focal, whereas (a) my visual awareness of the bonsai and (b) my inner awareness of my overall experience are peripheral. When I introspect, what happens is that the inner awareness displaces the visual awareness of the laptop in the focal center. Now the inner awareness is focal, whereas both the visual awareness of the laptop and the visual awareness of the bonsai are peripheral. We may call this the *attention-shift model* of introspecting.” (2009: 183; his emphasis)

It is not hard to see that on the attention-shift model the introspective operation does indeed involve a shift in the entity attended to. Kriegel says that the inner awareness –

his term for the introspective experience<sup>33</sup> – replaces the perceptual experience in the focal centre. That is, on Kriegel's description one shifts attention from the laptop to one's visual experience. His way of conceiving of the workings of attention here fits well with the framework of Watzl that I outlined earlier. In the terms of that framework, we can understand what Kriegel says in this manner: the introspective operation has the result of moving the perceptual experience out of the centre of the attentional structure and to replace it with the introspective experience. In consequence, the entity that the subject engaging in introspection attends to has changed: instead of attending to the intentional object of her perception, she is now attending to the perceptual experience that her introspective awareness takes as its intentional object.

On the gestalt switch account, the introspective operation that the subject performs does involve her exercising her attention in a specific way. But it does not, contrary to the attention-shift model Kriegel puts forward, involve the subject shifting her attention away from the entity she is attending to in her initial perceptual experience. Rather, it involves her still attending to what she is aware of in that initial experience, but in the specific manner I have characterized in Chapter 3.<sup>34</sup> For this reason, phenomenologically, the result of the introspective operation is quite different to what Kriegel advances in the passage quoted earlier.

Above all, what is in my opinion clearly mistaken, on phenomenological grounds, is the contention of the attention-shift model that when I engage in introspection, my visual awareness of the laptop becomes peripheral – to use Kriegel's terminology – in something like the way my visual awareness of the bonsai is peripheral

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<sup>33</sup> More precisely, on Kriegel's view here, one's inner awareness of e.g., one's perception amounts to an introspective experience of one's perception when it is an attentive awareness, whereas when it is inattentive it constitutes a pre-reflective awareness of that perception (see Kriegel 2009: 183).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 3, section 3.

when I focus my visual awareness on the laptop. First, as I argued earlier,<sup>35</sup> it would be an error to construe the introspective operation as involving a change of attention within the perceptual experience that the operation is performed upon. Yet Kriegel's account involves just this: a shift from attention being focused on the laptop and the bonsai being peripheral, to both the laptop and the bonsai being peripheral.

Second, the phenomenological characterisation of the introspective operation that the attention-shift model offers should readily appear to us implausible. According to that characterisation, in introspection the phenomenal character of my perception of the laptop changes just like it changes when I shift attention away from the laptop and focus it on the bonsai instead. But this is very hard to believe. If, when I tried to attend to how it phenomenally is for me to see the laptop as I am seeing it right now, my awareness of the laptop would transform into a peripheral awareness, then introspection would be a somewhat flabbergasting operation for me to perform on my experience. I should be astonished, because what I was aiming for in the first place as I engaged in the introspective operation was to become reflectively aware of what it is like to see the laptop as I see it now, that is, as I am foveating it and attending to it. But the odd implication of this picture of introspection that Kriegel suggests is that, as far as I can see, I would always be bound to fail to achieve this aim. I could never attend to the phenomenal character of my concurrent attentive visual awareness of the laptop, because as soon as I engage in the introspective operation, that visual awareness would recede to the periphery of my phenomenal attentional structure. The best, it seems, that I could do on this picture would be to introspect the attentive visual experience I was undergoing a moment ago, before the introspective operation, since now that I am introspecting, it is not anymore an experience that I am undergoing (as it is not attentive anymore).

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2, section 4 & section 5.

Moreover, when it is merely peripheral and not attentive, the phenomenal character of my visual experience of the laptop is different in various respects. It is part of the phenomenal character of my peripheral visual experience of the laptop that what is presented to me is for instance less detailed, less sharp, exhibits less contrast etc. than what is presented to me when I am gazing at and attending to the laptop. Therefore, if what I am aiming for in engaging in the introspective operation is to become reflectively aware of what it is like to see the laptop in the manner characteristic of my attentive visual experience of it, then what I want is to be aware of the characteristic phenomenal character my experience has when it is an experience as of a laptop that presents to me a high degree of detail, sharpness, contrast etc. But I cannot see how this may happen if my visual experience of the laptop becomes merely peripheral as soon as I perform the introspective operation.

If the main points of the above discussion are on the right lines, then I think that we have very good reasons to be sceptical of the idea that the introspective operation changes the phenomenal character of the initial perceptual experience in the way that the attention-shift model alleges. That is not to say, however, that the introspective operation has no effect whatsoever on the phenomenal character of the introspected experience, or that it remains entirely unchanged. In the next chapter, I shall indeed argue that the specific manner in which we direct our attention in introspection has such an effect, an effect I shall refer to as the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. I shall also present the view that the gestalt switch account favours regarding what that very contribution consists in, namely a view that articulates this contribution in terms of phenomenal salience.

Before I turn to that, though, there is a remaining piece of business that needs to be addressed here. Recall the first opening question of this section, i.e. the question as to

whether the introspective switch involves a change in the entity the subject attends to. As a consequence of the above discussion, we can see now that it is not the case that we should give a positive answer to that question for the reason that the subject shifts her attention away from the entity she attended to before performing the introspective operation. But one may legitimately wonder whether there could be another reason, on the gestalt switch account, to acknowledge such a change and thus answer affirmatively. After all, I have argued in Chapter 3 that on the GS account the introspective operation enables the subject to attend to her having a given experiential property. Should that not also count as a change in what the subject is attending to? Arguably yes, one could say, in the sense that in introspecting I attend to more than I was before it, I attend to something in addition to what I attended in perceiving, namely to my having an experiential property. Now, is doing so genuinely attending to a new entity? Is my having a given experiential property an entity? It is certainly a fact about my phenomenally conscious life – hence, if we are liberal enough about what counts as an entity, we might want to say so. What matters far more though is that the way we may attend to our having a given experiential property is quite different from the way we attend to entities we are aware of in perception.<sup>36</sup> For that reason, and more importantly still, the change in attention involved in attending to having an experiential property is quite unlike the change in attention postulated by a view such as the attention-shift model of introspection that Kriegel endorses.

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<sup>36</sup> I say more about the difference in ways of attending in Chapter 3, section 3.

## **CHAPTER 6.**

### **THE PHENOMENAL CONTRIBUTION OF ATTENTION IN INTROSPECTION AND IN PERCEPTION**

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter, I explored the combination of the gestalt switch account with the view of the phenomenology of attention that Watzl puts forward, and I discussed some issues related to the distribution of attention in perception and in introspection. In the present chapter, I now turn to the topic of the phenomenology of attention which is specific to the case of introspection – this is what I call here the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. I develop an account of that phenomenal contribution in terms of phenomenal salience – the phenomenal salience thesis – and explore its relation to the GS account. To assess the phenomenal salience thesis, I use a specific dialectical strategy where I compare the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection with the parallel issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception.

The detailed plan for the chapter is as follows. In section 1, I clarify and delimit the question of the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention which I want to tackle here. I also make a first pass at answering this question and formulate the phenomenal salience thesis. In section 2, I start implementing the dialectical strategy mentioned above and introduce the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception. I discuss an argument offered by Sebastian Watzl against one prominent

interpretation of that phenomenal contribution, the appearance view. In section 3, I look at the positive view of the phenomenal contribution of attention that Watzl suggests. In section 4, I introduce the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection, and I consider what would be the parallel to the appearance view at the level of introspection. In sections 5 and 6, I turn to the discussion of alternative views of the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention, amongst them the view I favour for the GS account: the phenomenal salience view. In section 7, I develop further the notion of phenomenal salience and I clarify how the introspective operation conceived as an introspective gestalt switch could result in a modification of phenomenal salience.

### **1. The phenomenal salience thesis**

I want to move on now to one of the central issues that this dissertation investigates: the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection.<sup>1</sup> I shall, firstly, clarify and delimit the exact question that I want to tackle here. Secondly, I shall make a first pass at formulating, in response to that question, the claim which I want to assess in what follows. In a third step, I set out the details of the kind of dialectical strategy I shall use in order to assess that claim.

The issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection is worth clarifying in a number of respects. There are rather general questions we may ask with respect to it. What is it that attention is supposed to have phenomenal effects upon? What kind of phenomenal effects are we to consider here? What is of specific interest in this issue for my overall discussion of introspection here? In response, there are a few

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<sup>1</sup> The terminology of ‘phenomenal contribution’ is used in Watzl (2017). Dainton (2008) uses ‘phenomenological contribution’ to mean the same thing, as far as I can see.

more precise considerations – distinctions, definitions – that I want to mention at this stage.

One important distinction I want to make is the distinction between the *overall* and the *restricted* phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. When I write ‘the contribution of attention’, what I mean, really, is the phenomenal contribution of a subject attending in a certain specific manner to her experience, i.e. the manner specific to the introspective operation I have discussed at length earlier. Now, it should be obvious that when we talk of a subject attending or directing her attention in a specific manner, then there is bound to be an agentic dimension to the phenomenology of her doing so.<sup>2</sup> Precisely: I have to write here ‘her doing so’, because attending is something we do, it is a type of action – it is a mental action, notwithstanding the fact that sometimes our attention may be grabbed by features of our environment.<sup>3</sup>

That being said, I want to leave that agentic dimension aside in my discussion of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. I have no doubt, however, that the agentic dimension represents an intriguing and significant aspect of the overall phenomenology of introspection, a dimension worth exploring in another work. My strategic reason for leaving it out now is that the type of claim that I want to investigate here is not a claim that targets the agentic component of the introspective operation. The overall phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection, then, encompasses its agentic dimension, whereas its restricted contribution, as I want to define it, does not:

*(Definition) The restricted phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection:*

The restricted phenomenal contribution of attention consists only in its non-agentic components.

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<sup>2</sup> I assume here without argument that there exists agentic phenomenology in general, that is, that there is something it like for one to act in various ways. I realize that the reader might not believe that this is so, in which case that will have no bearing on the point I want to drive home here, since I am concerned with excluding the agentic component of the phenomenology of attention from my subsequent investigation.

<sup>3</sup> For more on that issue, see Watzl (2017) Chapter 6, section 4.



Accordingly, in what follows, the claim I shall explore will be a claim about the restricted phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. Furthermore, it will be a claim that targets the specifically *proprietary* phenomenal effects of introspective attention. That is, it will be a claim about these phenomenal effects of attention that make an introspective episode phenomenally different from any other type of conscious episodes which a subject may undergo. The notion of proprietary phenomenal character that I shall use for my purpose here is a familiar one in the literature. It is the same notion as the one David Pitt, for instance, uses in his argument for cognitive phenomenology when he writes that “what it is like consciously to think a particular thought is [...] different from what it is like to be in any other sort of mental state (i.e. *proprietary*)” (2004: 4; his emphasis). Uriah Kriegel has a very similar notion in mind when he mentions the question as to “which types of experience have a *proprietary* qualitative character – that is, a kind of qualitative character that is not merely a composite of other kinds” (2009: 46; his emphasis). Thus, from here onwards, when I shall write about the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection, I shall refer to its restricted and proprietary contribution.

We are now in a position to have a first pass at formulating the claim that I want to assess in what follows. I call it the phenomenal salience thesis – or PS-thesis, for short:<sup>4</sup>

*Phenomenal salience thesis (PS-thesis):*

The phenomenal contribution of a subject introspectively attending to her having a given experiential property EP consists in making her having EP phenomenally more salient in her overall phenomenology at a given time.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that I am not yet assuming that the PS-thesis is correct at this stage – rather, I shall argue for this thesis over the course of this chapter, especially in sections 4-6.

The notion of phenomenal salience, as I intend to use it here, is a phenomenal notion: it is a notion introduced with the intention of capturing a certain significant phenomenal feature of our conscious life.<sup>5</sup> In this specific case, it is a notion that aims at capturing a feature characteristic of what it is like for a subject to be instantiating a given experiential property at a time when that subject is introspecting it. I shall proceed at this stage with a rather metaphorical understanding of the notion of phenomenal salience, and postpone further clarification of it to a later time (see section 7 below). Other metaphorical ways of characterizing the feature that phenomenal salience is meant to capture include for instance the idea that the relevant introspected experience is ‘taking more space’ or is ‘having more weight’ than other experiences in one’s overall phenomenal life at a given time. For the moment, also, I shall leave open what particular kind of phenomenal feature the notion of phenomenal salience will ultimately turn out to capture.

My goal in what follows will be to explore and assess the phenomenal salience thesis and its relation to the gestalt switch account of introspection. The main tasks that I shall tackle in doing so will be, on the one hand, aimed at giving a more detailed account of what phenomenal salience is – especially, how we should understand this very notion and what we can say of the kind of phenomenal feature that it captures (see section 6 below). A further piece of business, on the other hand, will be to clarify how the introspective operation could result in a modification of phenomenal salience. This will be a matter of understanding changes in phenomenal salience on the basis of what happens in the introspective switch (see section 7 below).

However, before I set out to investigate the phenomenal salience thesis, I want to make clear that ‘phenomenal salience’ as a piece of terminology is used in the literature

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<sup>5</sup> In consequence, what I am doing here does not amount to merely defining a phenomenal feature into existence. Rather, I am introducing a phenomenal notion with the aim of capturing a certain phenomenal feature, the existence of which is supported by a particular account of what happens in introspection. For simplicity, I might in what follows sometimes use ‘phenomenal salience’ to talk directly about that feature.

with quite different meanings than what is intended in the PS-thesis above. Wayne Wu, for instance, uses phenomenal salience to characterize how a feature attended to in perception appears to the subject: “let us introduce the term phenomenal salience to refer to the way an object or property figures to a subject when she consciously attends to it in perception, a way that constitutes what it is like to attend to that object or property” (2011: 93-94). Whereas, in the way Sebastian Watzl uses the notion, phenomenal salience refers to the distinctive phenomenal character of experiences where one’s attention is captured, for instance by a fire alarm (see 2017: 213). “Phenomenal salience is a *felt* command to attend to something; or more generally: a felt instruction to restructure one’s field of consciousness so that something else becomes central”, he also writes (2017: 163). The specific manner in which I shall use the notion of phenomenal salience, hence, will be my own and will depart substantially from those other uses.

## **2. The phenomenal contribution of attention in perception and the appearance view**

I shall implement a specific dialectical strategy in order to investigate and assess the phenomenal salience thesis, as well as to tackle the tasks I just set myself in section 1 above. The general strategical idea will be to contrast the PS-thesis with other possible rival views on the issue of the phenomenal effects of introspective attention and to consider a number of objections against it. The more specific dialectical line of thought I shall pursue, though, will be to use a comparison with the parallel issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception. In more detail, my strategy will be to map out in a first step what plausible options there are for locating and accounting for the phenomenal effects of perceptual attention. In assessing the different options concerning the phenomenal effects of perceptual attention, I shall draw on Watzl’s

discussion of this issue and on his own view, phenomenal structuralism.<sup>6</sup> The second step will consist in making use of the insights gained from that discussion to tackle the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection.

Here is one general question I shall set out from, a general question as to what we might call the location of the phenomenal effects of attention, be it in perception or in introspection. Let me refer to it as the question *Q*:

(*Q*): What does attending to *X* have a restricted and proprietary phenomenal contribution upon?

I intend the question *Q* to be very general in scope, so that *X* ranges over various types of entities. Thus, in principle, *X* could range over just about any entity one is able to attend to in experience. For my specific present purpose, however, I shall restrict my discussion of the phenomenal effects of attention to perceptual experiences and introspective experiences in particular. The question *Q*, then, asks what it is that gets modified in a subject's phenomenal life as a result of that subject directing her attention in a specific manner, be it in perception or in introspection.

As far as I can see, we can distinguish between at least three main possible answers to the question *Q*. That is, there are three main possible 'locations' or levels where one could find the phenomenal effects that my attending to *X* has – I refer to them as possibilities *A*, *B* and *C*.

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<sup>6</sup> Watzl offers phenomenal structuralism as an account of the phenomenal dimension of attention *tout court*, and not merely an account restricted to attention in perceptual experiences. But as he explicitly says himself, Watzl makes no claim about attending to, or becoming aware of, the phenomenal character of our experience, except for how we can become aware of the attentional structure of our overall phenomenology (see his 2017: Chapter 11). Since I delimited my enquiry in a way that allows me to compare the effects of attention in perception and in introspection, I shall in what follows present Watzl's view as an account of attention in perception, in the implicit understanding that his account applies in this case but is not restricted to it.

Attending to X has phenomenal effects upon:

- (A) X itself;
- (B) how X appears to me;
- (C) my awareness of X.

I shall clarify what each of these possibilities amounts to shortly, once I have also clarified what we should substitute for the variable X in the different cases I shall consider in what follows. As I said, my dialectical strategy here is to first articulate the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception, in order to apply later some of the results to the case of introspective attention. I turn now, therefore, to the case of perceptual attention. What this means for my general question Q is that we have to substitute for X the characteristic entities that attention can target in perceptual experiences. I shall operate with the following stipulation on that point: perceptual cases are cases where the X a subject attends to is a feature F of the external world:

(Stipulation) Attention to X in perception:

X is a worldly feature F.

By a worldly feature F, I mean here a feature of the external world – for instance a property, an object, an event, etc. – as opposed to a feature of one’s experience of the world, that is, as opposed to a phenomenal feature.

With this understanding of the target of perceptual attention in mind, let us now consider the different options A, B and C I just distinguished above. The three of them, in the present case, represent different possibilities as to what attending to a worldly feature F contributes phenomenal effects upon – hence I call them possibilities *A'*, *B'* and *C'*.

Attending to a worldly feature *F* has phenomenal effects upon:

(A') *F* itself;

(B') how *F* appears to me;

(C') my awareness of *F*.

The first option, option A', would thus be to say that attending to a worldly feature *F* modifies *F* itself. This does not look like a promising route, not to say an impossible route. If what I attend to is a worldly feature I perceive, such as the tree I see outside of my office's window, then this would mean that when I attend to the tree I thereby modify the tree itself. But this cannot be. For one thing, I have construed my question as the question of the *phenomenal* contribution of attention, and it is hard to see how anything I do could have a phenomenal effect on the tree, unless one construes the tree as a phenomenal entity itself, for instance by saying that it is a part of my experience – which would amount to committing oneself to a rather costly view indeed.

Thus, let us move instead to a more serious route. Option B', then, would consist in saying that my attending to *F* in a perceptual experience phenomenally modifies how *F* appears to me in undergoing that experience. On this view, therefore, perceptual attention does not have effects on the worldly entity itself that I perceive, contrary to the previous view. It does not have effects, for example, on some visible feature of the tree that I am seeing; rather, it has effects on how that very feature appears to me in my visual experience (see below for some concrete examples).

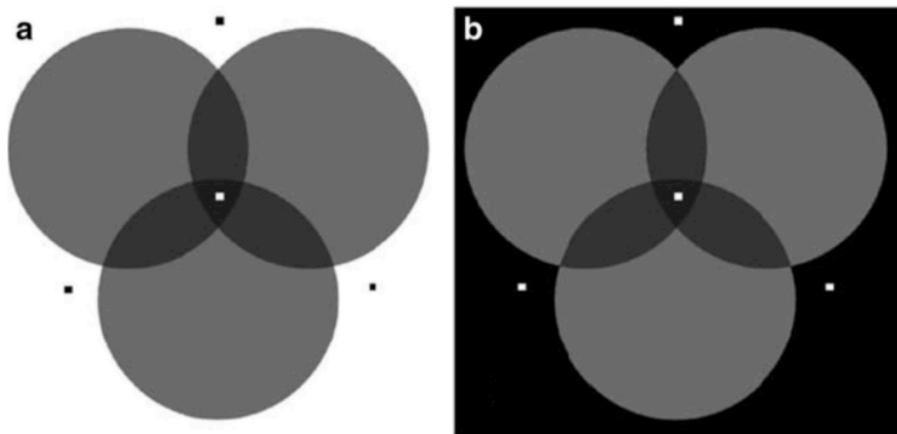
There are indeed very good reasons in favour of the proposition that attention affects the way things appear to the subject in perception, at least in the case of visual appearances. The case of the Tse Illusion<sup>7</sup> (see *figure 8* below) provides one good example of the phenomenon. In this particular case, attention modifies the way a perceived object appears to the subject because it modifies the perceived brightness of the object. Here is

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<sup>7</sup> See Tse (2005). The case is discussed for instance in Ramm (2018).

how Brentyn Ramm, in his discussion of the Tse Illusion, describes the instructions one should follow while looking at the figure 8 below:

“Look at A and fixate on one of [the] small squares. Now shift attention to one of the discs. The perceived brightness of the attended disc decreases. It seems darker. This demonstrates that attention can change subjective brightness. Repeat this for B and notice that the effect is absent.” (2018: 9)



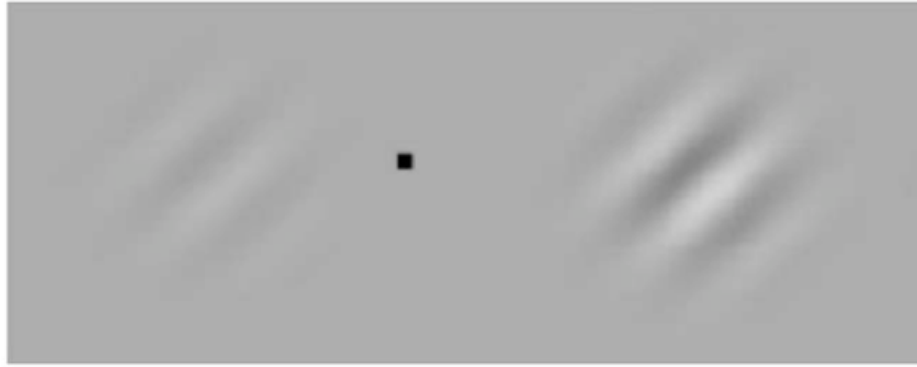
*Figure 8: Tse Illusion*

Further evidence suggesting that attention affects visual appearances is provided by the work of Marisa Carrasco and her colleagues<sup>8</sup> on the perception of a visual figure such as a Gabor patch (see *figure 9* below). In this case, their research suggests that attention affects the apparent contrast of the perceived figure. Subjects seem not to be able to differentiate between the apparent contrast of a 22 percent Gabor patch they attend to (on the left hand-side in figure 9) and the apparent contrast of a 28 percent patch they do *not* attend to (on the right-hand side in the figure).<sup>9</sup> (One should try this while keeping one's gaze fixed on the small black square in the middle of the figure.)

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<sup>8</sup> See Carrasco et al. (2004).

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Watzl (2017: 161) for a discussion of this case.



*Figure 9: Gabor patch*

Now, the way of accounting for the phenomenal contribution of perceptual attention that this second route suggests fits perfectly the spirit of a more general view regarding what the phenomenal character of an experience consists in. That more general view of phenomenal character, which Watzl submits is widely endorsed by philosophers of mind under one species or another,<sup>10</sup> is the view he usefully defines for his own dialectical purposes and names “the appearance view”:

“According to the *appearance view* of phenomenal consciousness, as I will call it, the phenomenal character of experience is *exhausted* by the way the world or an aspect of the world appears to the subject.” (2017: 162; his emphasis).

In somewhat more technical details, the appearance view can be defined as the view that “the phenomenal properties of every experiential episode supervene on its appearance properties” (2017: 162). The key notion in that definition is of course the notion of appearance properties, a notion for which Watzl offers the following specification:

“The appearance properties of a phenomenally conscious episode are, I will say, those of its properties that contribute to the way an aspect of the world appears to the subject when she undergoes that episode.” (Watzl 2017: 160)

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<sup>10</sup> See Watzl (2017: 162).



Even if one may legitimately suspect here that Watzl's notion of appearance properties would deserve some further clarification,<sup>11</sup> that specification should prove sufficient for us to understand the point about his discussion that I want to drive home now and reapply later to the introspective case. Crucially, Watzl's goal is ultimately to argue against the appearance view, and his rejection of the appearance view is in fact motivated by what that view implies for the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception. In other words, the idea that this contribution is to be accounted for in terms of the effects of attention on the way things appear to the subject is a mistaken idea, or so Watzl wants to argue.

More precisely, what Watzl denies is that the entirety of what it is like, for instance, to switch attentional focus between the respective musical parts played by the piano and the cellos in Rachmaninov's piano concerto n.2 can be captured in terms of how the sounds of the playing instruments appear to the subject. It may well be that the notes coming from the cellos appear slightly different (for instance louder, or more distinct) when we bring onto them our attentional focus that was an instant ago directed onto the piano. But there is more, phenomenally, to what attention contributes in such an experiential situation, Watzl insists.

The main argument that he puts forward against the appearance view is what he terms the *replication argument*. In a nutshell, the central idea of the replication argument is this: whatever may be the effects that attention contributes to the appearance properties of my perceptual experience, this exact way in which the relevant worldly features appear to me 'under the influence' of attention is a way that could be replicated even with a different distribution of attention. That is, these effects of attention could be replicated *in principle*: even if they are not actually replicable, the idea is that it is at least

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<sup>11</sup> This is a point Watzl acknowledges himself (see 2017: 163).

conceivable that the exact same way things appear to the subject in a given episode of attentional phenomenal consciousness could be replicated while the subject's attention is distributed differently.<sup>12</sup>

Take again the concrete example of hearing the piano's part of Rachmaninov's concerto along with the cellos' accompaniment in the background. And say we grant, for the sake of the argument, that the sounds of both respective types of instruments appear slightly different to us whenever we shift our attentional focus onto them. Then the crux of Watzl's objection, I take it, is that what it is like for us to auditorily experience the part of the cellos when we attend to it could be replicated exactly as it is even though we do not attend to the cellos' part, but to something else instead, for instance the sound of the piano.

More precisely, here is how I suggest to reconstruct the main steps of Watzl's replication argument<sup>13</sup> (where F stands for the feature of the world that the subject attends to in her perceptual experience, and where AP are the relevant appearance properties that, according to Watzl, contribute to the way F appears to her in undergoing that perceptual experience):

- (P1) If the subject S perceives a worldly feature F, then F appears (in the way contributed to by the appearance properties) AP to S. [From the definition of appearance properties]
- (P2) If S attends to F, then the way F appears to S is modified: now F appears AP\* to S. [Premise: 'Influence of attention']

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund Husserl might have been a precursor of this line of argument; see Watzl (2017: 181-182).

<sup>13</sup> The full presentation of Watzl's replication argument can be found in his 2017: Chapter 8, section 10.

- (P3) The difference between AP and AP\* constitutes the phenomenal contribution of attention to the way F appears to S. [From P1, P2, and the appearance view]
- (P4) S could undergo a conscious episode instantiating AP\* even though S is not attending to F. [Premise: 'Replicability']
- (P5) There is a phenomenal difference for S between undergoing the conscious experience E1 (E1 instantiates AP\* and S attends to F) and the conscious experience E2 (E2 instantiates AP\* but S does not attend to F). [Premise: 'Difference']
- (C) The phenomenal contribution of S attending to F in perception is not exhausted by its contribution to the way F appears to S. [from P3, P4, P5]

The conclusion C of the replication argument is clearly inconsistent with the appearance view. If the appearance view is correct, then it cannot be the case that the phenomenal character of one's conscious episode is not exhausted by this episode's appearance properties. Hence, it cannot be the case that some aspect of its phenomenal character is not determined by how things appear to the subject, but that it varies on the contrary with how the subject directs her conscious attention.

Premises P1 to P3 capture the idea that attention in perceptual experience affects appearance properties, that is, that it affects how things appear to the subject who undergoes that experience, while the premise P4 implements Watzl's central replication claim. Premise P5 is also crucial for Watzl's argument to succeed. For without the premise P5, all that the argument would be saying is that the phenomenal effects of a specific distribution of perceptual attention can be replicated without that distribution. In other words, all the argument would be saying is that if perceptual attention modifies the

appearance properties of the relevant perceptual experience, then such a contribution is not proprietary to perceptual attention.

However, Watzl does not actually want to argue that the appearance view has the mistaken consequence that the phenomenal contribution of perceptual attention is not proprietary, he wants to argue for the claim that the appearance view fails to capture that phenomenal contribution in its entirety. This is the reason why he needs the ‘Difference’ claim, which is implemented in P5. According to that claim, it makes a phenomenal difference for me whether I am in a given perceptual state with my attention specifically directed at feature F or whether I am in a perfect appearance replica<sup>14</sup> of that state but with a different distribution of my attention.<sup>15</sup>

Now, if the conclusion C is the claim that Watzl wants to support, it seems that his replication argument is unnecessarily strong and that a weaker version would suffice. This is because P4, the ‘Replicability’ premise, entails that the effects of attention on the appearance properties of an experience are not proprietary to attention. As a result, therefore, the conclusion of the argument could be stronger: it could be that the proprietary phenomenal contribution of attention does not even partly consist in the phenomenal difference between AP and AP\*. However C, as formulated above, is compatible with the more moderate view that while the proprietary phenomenal contribution of attention is not exhausted by its effects on appearance properties, it partly consists in these effects. On such a view, at least some of these effects would not be replicable without the appropriate distribution of attention.

That being said, I find Watzl’s case against the appearance view to be a rather convincing one. But my overall purpose here, naturally, is not to take a stand on the

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<sup>14</sup> An appearance replica is “an experience that presents the same appearance properties with a distinct distribution of attention”, see Watzl (2017: 173).

<sup>15</sup> For Watzl’s full defence of that claim, see Watzl (2017: 177-180).

replication argument or, more generally, in the debate about the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception. Rather, as I said, I want to use some of the results of this debate for my exploration of the parallel issue concerning introspective attention. Now, of course, if the replication argument does indeed uncover a genuine shortcoming of the appearance view, then we should conclude that the option B', which locates the contribution of attending to a worldly feature F at the level of how F appears to a subject, is not satisfactory. We need, then, to look elsewhere, namely to the last option among the three I distinguished above, option C'.

### **3. Beyond the appearance view: phenomenal structuralism and the mode modification view**

This third option, then, consists in saying that my attending to a worldly feature F in a perceptual experience phenomenally modifies my very awareness of F, that is, that it has phenomenal effects on my perceptual experience itself. More precisely, the idea is that it modifies my awareness of F in a way that is different in nature from any changes that may happen on option B'. Thus, on option C' the phenomenal effects of attending go beyond any changes that may take place in the way F appears to me when I am perceiving F.

But how could we articulate further and in a positive manner the phenomenal effects on my awareness of F that attending to F should have according to option C'? There are (at least) two main possible routes for doing so that we should distinguish. The first possibility – I shall call it option *C1'* – would be to say that attending to F has effects on some intrinsic phenomenal feature of my awareness of F. The second possible route – option *C2'* – would be to say that attending to F has effects on some extrinsic phenomenal feature of my awareness of F. The distinction between intrinsic and

extrinsic phenomenal features I have in mind here is the distinction between these phenomenal features (i.e. intrinsic) that a conscious experience has in itself, regardless of the relations it bears to other conscious experiences, and those of its phenomenal features (i.e. extrinsic) that the experience has in virtue of being related to other experiences that the subject also undergoes.<sup>16</sup>

One view that typically takes the route suggested by option C1' is what has been called the *mode modification view*.<sup>17</sup> On that view, my attending to a worldly feature F in perception modifies the respective mode of my perceptual experience, for instance its visual mode. That is, whenever I am attending to an F that I am seeing, then my experience is not merely an experience of seeing F, but it is an experience of *attentively* seeing F, where seeing attentively is a modification of the standard intentional mode of seeing. If this is so, then we can see that what the contribution of perceptual attention amounts to on the mode modification view is not something that the appearance view could capture. What changes when perceptual attention is brought into the picture goes beyond any changes in how F appears to the subject, even if it might also involve changes of this kind, i.e. changes in the appearance properties of the experience. For what changes is located at the level of the intentional mode in which the subject relates to these things that appear to him in undergoing the perceptual experience at issue. Therefore, the replication argument will prove harmless against a view such as the mode modification view.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic phenomenal features, see amongst others Dainton (2000). Dainton writes for instance: "The phenomenal characteristics usually taken to be relevant to experiential identity are purely intrinsic, the characteristics an experience has in itself, irrespective of how it is related to other experiences." (2000: 217)

<sup>17</sup> See Watzl (2017: 191).

<sup>18</sup> It may be that the mode modification view is not the only view that the route C1 may lead one to. That is, it might be that attention affects some other intrinsic property of the experience that the appearance view cannot capture.

The second possibility on the option C', namely the route C2', contends that attending to F has phenomenal consequences at the level of some extrinsic phenomenal feature of my awareness of F. That is, my attending to F has effects on some feature that my perception of F has in virtue of its relations to other experiences I am also undergoing. One typical example of a view which takes this route is the view that Watzl himself puts forward and that he terms *phenomenal structuralism*. On the phenomenal structuralist view, the phenomenal contribution of attention consists in variations in the centrality relations of the various experiences – what Watzl calls the qualitative parts – that fill in the attentional centrality structure of a subject at a given time. In other words, when I attend for instance to a worldly feature F that I perceive, this has the effect of moving my perception of F towards the centre of the centrality ordering of my experiences – that is, it has the effect of increasing the phenomenal centrality of my perceptual experience of F. Phenomenal centrality, however, is conceived of as an extrinsic phenomenal feature of my experience on this view:

“[...] weak centrality is an external phenomenal relation, i.e. a relation between qualitative parts that makes a phenomenal contribution that does not supervene on the intrinsic phenomenal qualities of those qualitative parts. There is something it is like to experience  $x_1 \geq x_2$  that is not fixed by what it is like to have  $x_1$  and by what it is like to have  $x_2$ . At the same time what it is like to instantiate a centrality system where  $x_1 \geq x_2$  holds *does* fix what it is like to instantiate  $x_1$  and what it is like to instantiate  $x_2$ .” (Watzl 2017: 193; his emphasis)

In this passage, Watzl actually talks about weak phenomenal centrality (i.e. the relation he symbolizes with the sign ' $\geq$ '), rather than simple phenomenal centrality. But this plays no role for the overall point I want to make here, since the relation of weak centrality that the experience  $x_1$  bears to  $x_2$  simply expresses the idea that  $x_1$  is *at least as central* as  $x_2$  in the centrality ordering, rather than  $x_1$  being strictly more central than  $x_2$ . Watzl also refers to phenomenal centrality as an “external phenomenal relation” that the experience

$x_1$  bears to  $x_2$ : I take it that this expresses in substance the same thought as saying that the experience  $x_1$  possesses an extrinsic phenomenal feature in virtue of its relation to the experience  $x_2$ .

Just as before with the mode modification view, we can easily see that what the phenomenal contribution of attention amounts to on phenomenal structuralism is by definition not something that could be captured by the appearance view. Since phenomenal centrality is an extrinsic feature of my perceiving and as such does not supervene on the intrinsic features of my perception, phenomenal centrality will not, a fortiori, supervene on the appearance properties of my perceptual experience either. And therefore, again, a position putting forward such a phenomenal contribution of perceptual attention will not be vulnerable to the replication argument.

This completes the present stage of my investigation, in which I have aimed to present and discuss the main options for accounting for the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception. I shall now turn to the next stage of my exploration, and to a matter more central to it: the issue of the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection.

#### **4. The phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection and the issue of the appearance of an experience**

In the last two sections, I discussed several possibilities for locating and accounting for the phenomenal effects of perceptual attention. As I explained earlier, my strategy now is to use some of the results of that discussion in order to investigate the parallel issue at the introspective rather than at the perceptual level. One specific aim I shall have in doing so is to be in a position to assess the phenomenal salience thesis I formulated in section 3 above – namely the claim that the phenomenal contribution of introspectively attending



to my having a given experiential property EP consists in making my having EP phenomenally more salient in my overall phenomenology at a given time.

How are we to transition from the case of attention in perception to attention in introspection? Recall my general question Q from section 4: What does attending to X have a restricted and proprietary phenomenal contribution upon? The way I suggest to transition to introspection is by substituting for X a different target of attention than before. What I attend to is not anymore a feature F of the world. Rather, it is my *awareness* of a worldly feature F.

(Stipulation) Attention to X in introspection:

X is an awareness of a worldly feature F.

More precisely, I shall have in mind the particular case of introspecting a perceptual experience for my investigation of the effects of introspective attention. That is, the target of my introspective attention is my perceptual awareness of F. Because what interests me is to draw as close a parallel as possible between perceptual attention and introspective attention. For simplicity of exposition, then, I shall conduct the present discussion in terms of attending to my perceptual awareness of F, or simply to my awareness of F – but this talk can be easily translated in terms of attending to my having the relevant experiential property, given the way I use these various terms here.

Now that we have clarified the target that I want to assign to introspective attention, we can consider again the three possible options A, B and C detailed above as possible answers to the general question Q. Those three options were to say that my attending to X makes a phenomenal contribution on X itself (option A), on how X appears to me (option B), or on my awareness of X (option C). By substituting ‘my awareness of F’, i.e. the target of introspective attention, for the variable X, we then get the following three possible routes to explore – I call them routes  $A^*$ ,  $B^*$  and  $C^*$ :

Attending to my awareness of F has phenomenal effects upon:

(A\*) my awareness of F;

(B\*) how my awareness of F appears to me;

(C\*) my awareness of my awareness of F.

I shall start my discussion with the possible route B\* first, before moving on to route C\*; I shall leave the discussion of the route A\* for the next section, for reasons that should become apparent later on.

Thus, the option I want to consider first – option B\* – would consist in locating the proprietary phenomenal effects of introspective attention at the level of how my awareness of F appears to me. In other words, the idea here is to argue that my attending to my visual experience of F modifies how this visual experience appears to me. Hence, the account suggested here on option B\* is parallel to the one discussed above with option B'. While on B' my attending to a feature F I am seeing was said to affect how F visually appears to me – that is, to affect the visual appearance of F – likewise here on B\* my attending to my awareness of F affects how that visual appearance (of F) itself appears to me – that is, it affects the (presumably introspective) appearance of that visual appearance (of F).

There are reasons to believe that the route B\* is a very unpromising route, though. For there are reasons to believe that the very notion of an appearance – or an experience of mine, or my having a given experiential property – itself appearing in one way or another to me is a confused notion. This point should of course be understood as a phenomenological point and, accordingly, the claim that an experience could not appear in one way or another should be understood as the claim that an experience could not appear in different *first-personal* ways to its subject. For otherwise, depending

on one's views about the metaphysical status of conscious experiences,<sup>19</sup> one might question that claim for reasons of a different kind. A token identity theorist, for instance, could presumably say that the very same experience could appear in one way to the subject who has it, simply by her having it, and in another way to the same subject if she is looking at an fMRI scan of her own brain.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the point I want to drive home against option B\* here is not merely that an experience could not appear in *different* first-personal ways to its subject because it always appears as it is. Rather, the point is that an experience, or an appearance, does not appear *at all*. That is, the option B\* involves a mistaken notion of what an appearance is, because an appearance is just not the kind of entity that can *appear* to a subject – at least not if the notion of appearance we have in mind has anything to do with notion of a sensory appearance. Therefore, there are no appearances of appearances, no second-order appearances, if you will. Charles Siewert emphasizes that very same point when he writes:

“But the visual appearance is never then somehow “of,” or “about” itself, it does not “refer to” itself. Nor for that matter does it “present” itself to you— either just as it is, or as other than it is. For the visual appearance you experience is never an object of appearance to you [...].” (2012: 154)

That being said, why should we believe that this is so, namely that a visual appearance of a worldly feature F cannot itself be an object of appearance to a subject? In the same paper where one finds the above passage, Siewert develops a phenomenological argument against accounts of introspection that conceive of it on the model of an inner sense. This is a view of introspection that has been for instance famously endorsed by David Armstrong, who traces it back to Kant:

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<sup>19</sup> Although, since I have assumed that token experiences are instantiations of phenomenal properties, this probably rules out most conceptions of token identity theory.

<sup>20</sup> See Farkas (2010: 156, note 5) for the description of circumstances of this kind in another dialectical context.

“In sense-perception we become aware of current happenings in the physical world. A perception is therefore a mental event having as its (intentional) object situations in the physical world. In introspection, on the contrary, we become aware of current happenings in our own mind. Introspection is therefore a mental event having as its (intentional) object other mental happenings that form part of the same mind. Nevertheless, introspection may properly be compared to sense-perception, and Kant’s description of introspection as ‘inner sense’ is perfectly justified.” (Armstrong 1968: 323)

Inner sense theorists, then, hold introspective experiences to be very much akin to perceptual experiences. Siewert’s objection to such a perceptual model of introspection comprises several interesting steps, but the main reasoning of his that proves of interest for my purpose here is the following. If the perceptual model was adequate, then it should be the case that in introspection a (visual) appearance could appear to me in different ways while I am still under the impression of experiencing the very same appearance – just as it is the case that in perception something can appear to me in different ways while I am still under the impression of experiencing one and the same thing. But this is not the case in introspection – and here is how we can see why, according to Siewert:

“First-order case. Consider the change in how a stable figure looks to you as you shift attention while it appears unchanged. This allows you to distinguish what is (visually) sensed from how it is (objectually) sensed.

Second-order case. Now repeat the same sort of operation on the visual appearance. Without changing the way the figure looks to you, shift your attention with respect to this (constant, stable) appearance, so as to alter how that appearance is sensed by you.

In the first-order case the operation seems, again, easy enough. But in the second-order case I am drawn up short. How do I even try to follow these instructions? How could I vary the way the visual appearance is experienced or sensed by me, without changing the figure’s visual appearance to me? If I cannot

do this, then I just can't find, in first-person reflection, an objectual, higher-order sensing of sensing." (Siewert 2012: 143)

What matters for my discussion of the option B\* above is not so much whether Siewert is right that inner sense theorists are committed to our being able to follow his instructions in introspection. What matters is that we seem to be unable to follow Siewert's instructions, and that in consequence a visual appearance I experience does not itself appear to me (in one way or another). For if this is so, then the option B\* would construe the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention in a manner that requires a mistaken conception of appearances, a conception on which I could experience an appearance of my visual awareness of the worldly feature F. I shall come back to the issue of a perceptual model of introspection and consider an alternative view in Chapter 7, section 2. For the moment though, I want to turn to the second option I have outlined above, namely option C\*.

### **5. Phenomenal structuralism at the introspective level?**

The second option I want to discuss, option C\* above, will perhaps seem initially the most natural one, especially if one is inclined to find Watzl's replication argument plausible, and if one thinks that the perceptual and the introspective cases should be treated symmetrically with regard to the phenomenal contribution of attention. One could indeed argue that a symmetrical treatment of the two situations should constitute our natural or default assumption here, and that this should be the case at least until further reasons to depart from it are provided. A symmetrical treatment, then, would yield the following results: if attending to F modifies my awareness of F, then attending to my awareness of F should modify my awareness of my awareness of F – that is, it should modify my awareness of having a certain experiential property. Option C\*, thus,

corresponds to the view that the proprietary effects of attending to my awareness of F are to be found ‘at the level of’ my awareness of my awareness of F.

Prima facie, though, one reason that comes to mind to treat the possibilities A\*, B\*, and C\* asymmetrically to their perceptual counterparts A', B', and C' – and hence to depart from the default assumption just mentioned – has to do with what the first route represents in both cases. While the schema ‘attending to X modifies X’ leads down a dead-end when X is a worldly feature F, the route it opens when X is an awareness of a feature F proves a lot more palatable. For it is far from being immediately implausible that a subject’s act of attending phenomenally modifies something that is of a phenomenal nature, such as that subject’s awareness of feature F. Ultimately, then, I shall be inclined to argue that the symmetric assumption mentioned above is mistaken. That is, I shall suggest that to find the proprietary phenomenal effects of attending to my awareness of F, we need not look at the level of my awareness of my awareness of F.

For the moment, though, let me unpack in some more detail what the route C\* involves. The general thought, then, is that my attending to my awareness of F has phenomenal effects on my awareness of my awareness of F: that is, in other words, my attending to my awareness of F has effects on my introspective experience itself, i.e. my experience of my awareness of F. Moreover, option C\* departs from option B\* in that introspective attention modifies my awareness of my awareness of F in a way that is different in nature from any changes that may happen on option B\*.

Now, how can we go further in the articulation of these phenomenal effects on my awareness of my awareness of F? Just as in option C' above for the perceptual case, we can distinguish between two main possible routes for doing so. The first of these, route *C1\**, conceives of the phenomenal contribution of attending to my awareness of F as modifying some intrinsic phenomenal feature of my awareness of my awareness of F.

Whereas the second possible route, option C2\*, conceives of it as modifying some extrinsic phenomenal feature of my awareness of my awareness of F. The same distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic phenomenal features as in options C1' and C2' above applies here (see section 3 above).

Let me explore these two routes in turn. Options C1\* contends that introspective attention has effects on some feature that my introspective experience has in itself, regardless of how that experience is related to other experiences I am also undergoing. If we go down that route, one natural view we might end up with would be something like an iteration of the mode modification view at the introspective level, i.e. at the level of my awareness of my awareness of F. In concrete terms, here is how this could go: as a result of the introspective switch, I become attentively, reflectively aware of my awareness of F, as opposed to being merely implicitly, pre-reflectively aware of it before the switch. Thus, my attending to my perceptual experience of F would modify the mode in which I was previously (i.e. before introspecting) aware of my perceptual experience, namely its pre-reflective mode.

The other route on option C\*, option C2\*, will also sound familiar given our earlier discussion: it consists in saying that attending to my awareness of F modifies an extrinsic or relational phenomenal feature of my awareness of my awareness of F – a feature it has in virtue of its relations to other instances of awareness that I have at a given time. Hence we can here also easily imagine, as the kind of view that this route would lead one to, an iteration of the phenomenal structuralist view previously considered. What that would mean in the introspective case would actually be a perfect transposition from what happens in the perceptual case. Recall that on this view the phenomenal contribution of attention consists in variation in phenomenal centrality. Hence, just as the phenomenal upshot of attending to a feature F I perceive is to increase

the phenomenal centrality of my perceptual awareness of F, the upshot of attending to my perceptual awareness of F is to increase the phenomenal centrality of my introspective awareness of my perceptual awareness of F.

That being said, let me zoom back a little and take stock with respect to the two particular views that I have considered on the present option C\*. What would it mean for my overall purpose here if we were to endorse a version of either the mode modification view or the phenomenal structuralist view at the introspective level? What that would mean, for one, is that the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention can be captured by the notion of an attentive mode of experience, or by something like Watzl's notion of phenomenal centrality. Concretely, on that latter option, that would mean that the phenomenal effects of my attending to my visual awareness of F would amount to the fact that my introspective awareness of my visual experience is more phenomenally central than, say, my auditory awareness of G.

But one might argue that if this is so, then there would ultimately be no proprietary phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. More precisely, one might insist that there would then be no contribution which is proprietary to attention in introspection as opposed to attention in perception (or in other ordinary experiences that do not involve the introspective operation). The reasoning would be that the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention would be entirely captured by a notion such as phenomenal centrality, a notion which also captures what is going on in perceptual attention. Therefore, according to this line of thought, there would be no phenomenal effects of introspective attention which go beyond the usual phenomenal effects that conscious attention ordinarily has.

However, this diagnosis should be somewhat qualified. To be sure, on the view considered above, the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention would simply



be one variant of the kind of contribution made by any kind of attending, that is, it would consist in changes in phenomenal centrality. But, first, this is something that we should actually expect, since introspective attending is one kind of attending. Second, there would still be something unusual and perhaps unique about introspective attending, in comparison to any other kind of attending (and perhaps in comparison to any other kind of mental state): introspective attending makes my introspective experiences phenomenally central. Put another way: introspective attending makes my awareness of my awareness of F phenomenally central and, to this extent, it does seem phenomenally different to any other kind of experience I might have.

Even if I am sympathetic to this qualified diagnosis, I still think that we have to go beyond it if we want to capture the phenomenal change that the introspective switch brings about in its entirety. One first step in that direction consists in drawing the following important distinction: the distinction between the claim that the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection involves effects on my awareness of my awareness F and the claim that this phenomenal contribution is exhausted by those effects. It is the latter that I suggest we should dispute, not the former. In other words, we should accept that the introspective operation brings about effects of the sort detailed above, but resist the stronger claim that this is all there is to the phenomenal contribution of attention in introspection. That is, while I shall suggest that the proprietary effects of my attending to my awareness of F are to be found at the level of my awareness of F (as opposed to my awareness of my awareness of F), I do not want to suggest thereby that the phenomenal effects discussed above should be ignored.

This brings to an end my discussion of option C\*. I shall now turn, in the next section, to the last remaining option that has not been explored yet, namely option A\*.

## 6. The phenomenal salience view

The last option that I want to discuss – option A\* – is also the one that I find the most promising. Recall my general question Q, a question asking what attending to X has phenomenal effects upon. We have seen that the counterpart of the option A\*, namely the option A' for the perceptual case, was deemed the most implausible. But in the introspective case, if X corresponds to my awareness of a feature F of the world (as opposed to F itself), then it is not implausible that my attending to my awareness of F modifies this awareness itself, that is, that it has phenomenal effects on my awareness of F. Such is the guiding idea of the option A\*.

One consequence of going down that route immediately comes to mind, though. If we choose to account for the phenomenal contribution of attention in perception along the lines of the option C' above, that is, along the lines for example of phenomenal structuralism (a view that I am inclined to find attractive), then we will find ourselves in the following situation. We would have an account of the contribution of my attending to a feature F in terms of its phenomenal effects on my awareness of F, and we would have an account of the contribution of attending to my awareness of F also in terms of its phenomenal effects on my awareness of F. In other words, both my acts of attending – perceptually to F, introspectively to my awareness of F – would contribute phenomenal effects on my awareness of F.

Yet rather than being a worry, this could in fact be a desirable result in the light of what I have argued before on behalf of the gestalt switch account. Specifically, I have argued for the DA-thesis: the claim that if one attends to the phenomenal character of one's occurrent perception of X, then one also necessarily attends to X.<sup>21</sup> I have also developed the idea, related to that claim, that I attend to one and the same entity, for

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 5, section 2.

instance in perceiving the blue colour that the sofa appears to have and in introspecting what it is like to see the blue colour of the sofa – and that I attend to the latter by attending to former and performing the introspective gestalt switch. All this suggests a picture where my introspective act of attending to my awareness of F is not only intimately linked with my perceptual act of attending to F itself, but also partly dependent upon it. The former act of attention is only *partly* dependent upon the latter, because it depends on more, for instance it also depends on my engaging in the introspective operation.

What I want to suggest now is that the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention is also, in a similar manner, intimately linked to and even partly dependent upon the phenomenal contribution of perceptual attention, in the sense that the phenomenology of introspective attention builds upon the phenomenology of perceptual attention. In other words, what I am suggesting is that the proprietary effects on my awareness of F that my attending to it contributes are partly dependent upon my awareness of F being phenomenally more central as a result of my attending to F (provided we assume phenomenal structuralism).

So the pressing task at this stage will be to account for the phenomenal effects on my awareness of F that my attending to my awareness of F contributes, effects which differ and go beyond the effects resulting from my merely attending to F. A failure to do so would, on the contrary, indicate that the phenomenal contribution of both acts of attention is indistinguishable. Such a result would, in turn, speak in favour of the view that introspective attention does not bring about proprietary phenomenal effects, and, ultimately, in favour of a deflationary conception of its phenomenal contribution.

If the deflationary view is mistaken, as I want to suggest – that is, if it is correct that the phenomenal contribution of both acts of attention can be distinguished – then

there must be phenomenal effects on my awareness of F resulting from introspective attention that do not amount to the effects described above on either route C1' or C2' (see section 4). But are there any other ways that my awareness of F can be phenomenally impacted? How else, then, could we account for the contribution of introspective attention?

The option that I would like to put forward here consists in bringing into the picture the notion of *phenomenal salience* that I introduced in section 1 above. Back then, I formulated what I called the phenomenal salience thesis (PS-thesis), namely the claim that the phenomenal contribution of introspectively attending to my having a given experiential property EP consists in making my having EP phenomenally more salient in my overall phenomenology at a given time. What does the PS-thesis mean in the present dialectical context then? It is precisely the thesis that the phenomenal consequence of my introspective attention targeting my awareness of F consists in making that awareness phenomenally more salient in my overall phenomenology. (Here, the relevant experiential property is the property I am instantiating when I consciously perceive F, hence attending to my perceptual awareness of F amounts to attending to my having that experiential property.)

As I said in section 1 above, the notion of phenomenal salience needs further articulation: I shall actually move to that task shortly (see section 7 below). But first let me make clear how the phenomenal salience claim relates to what I have said so far concerning the route A\* on the phenomenal contribution of introspection. What I want to suggest here is that the effects of the second act of attention – my attending, after the switch, to my awareness of F and not merely to F itself – can be characterised as (also) making my awareness of F phenomenally more salient, as opposed to (only) making it

more central (on phenomenal structuralism) or more attentive (on the mode modification view).

Recall my original example of my visual experience of the blue sofa in my office. When applied to it, the phenomenal salience idea just outlined gives us the following result. Depending on how I attend to the shade of blue (the worldly feature F) I am presented with in my visual experience, my awareness of F becomes more phenomenally central, or in addition it also becomes more phenomenally salient. That is, if I attend to the shade of blue only *qua* determining the colour that the sofa has, then my awareness of F merely becomes more phenomenally central. Whereas if I also attend to the shade of blue insofar as it determines the phenomenal character of my perceptual experience, then my awareness of F becomes also more phenomenally salient in my overall phenomenology, in addition to becoming phenomenally more central in comparison to other conscious instances of awareness I am enjoying at that moment.

From that articulation of the phenomenal salience thesis with the both the route A\* and the route C' above, we can draw a substantial conclusion with regard to our overall understanding of the introspective gestalt switch. There is a significant distinction to be made between what is going on at the level of my awareness of F and what is going on at the level of my awareness of my awareness of F when I perform the introspective switch. Put more generally: there is a significant distinction between what happens to my having a given experiential property and to my awareness of having it: as a result of the introspective operation, the former becomes more phenomenally salient in comparison with other experiential properties that I also instantiate at that moment. In other words, my having a given experiential property 'gains more weight', as it were, in my overall phenomenology at that time. On the other hand, the latter, i.e. my awareness of having a given experiential property, becomes more phenomenally central, it becomes more

attentive, more explicit: that is, it becomes a reflective awareness of having a given experiential property, as opposed to the pre-reflective awareness of having it I enjoy in ordinary circumstances.<sup>22</sup> Since one might readily confuse those two phenomenal results of the introspective gestalt switch, that important distinction may easily get overlooked.

## **7. Phenomenal salience and the introspective switch**

We are now in a favourable position to come back at last to the two tasks I identified earlier (see section 1) in order to articulate further the notion of phenomenal salience. As I said then, what needs to be accounted for is as follows:

- (i) what phenomenal salience is;
- (ii) how the introspective operation can result in a modification of phenomenal salience.

I shall deal with them in turn. The first task, for one part, consists in tackling the question as to what kind of phenomenal feature phenomenal salience is – or, more precisely, the question as to what kind of phenomenal feature it is that the notion of phenomenal salience captures. For another part, the first task requires me to say more in order to clarify the notion of phenomenal salience itself. I begin with that latter part. As I have suggested earlier (see section 1) when I first introduced the notion of phenomenal salience, there are some metaphorical understandings of it that should help us fix the reference to and apprehend the phenomenal feature I have in mind here. One such metaphorical understanding is to think of phenomenal salience in terms of *relative weight*. The idea is this: a particular experience of mine becomes phenomenally more salient in the sense that it has, or it gains, more weight than other experiences of mine in my

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<sup>22</sup> As I said earlier (see Chapter 3, section 3), a commitment to pre-reflective awareness is not strictly speaking required by the gestalt switch account.

overall phenomenology at a given time. Another way to express it is to say that the more phenomenally salient an experience is, then the more it weighs upon my overall phenomenology, the more it weighs upon what it is like for me to be conscious at the given moment when I am introspecting that experience.

Now, one path I am inclined to take in order to clarify further that last idea of an experience weighing upon my overall phenomenology would go as follows. My experience, e.g. my visual awareness of a worldly feature F, weighs more upon my overall phenomenology in the sense that it becomes clearer to me how my awareness of a feature F *impinges upon what it is like for me to be conscious* in this moment. It becomes clearer to me how my visual awareness of F impinges upon – or impacts, constraints – my phenomenal life in the present moment.

This should help for our understanding of phenomenal salience, because we can now see that a parallel thing cannot be said for the case of my attending to a worldly F (as opposed to my awareness of F). That is, we cannot say that in this case, F becomes phenomenally more salient or that F weighs more upon my overall phenomenology in the sense that it becomes clearer to me how the feature F impinges upon what it is like for me to be conscious in this moment. We cannot, because a worldly feature F as such cannot, strictly speaking, impinge upon my overall phenomenology, because F *per se* does not have a phenomenal nature; only my awareness of F can be said to do so. Worldly features cannot impinge in this way on my stream of consciousness without the mediation of my awareness of them, that is, without my undergoing a phenomenally conscious experience of these very worldly features.

One will perhaps take this point to be overly pedestrian – however this is a point that underlies the distinction we should make between phenomenal salience and what we might refer to as *perceptual salience*, namely the phenomenon of an entity I perceive

standing out amidst the various other entities which I am perceptually aware of at the same moment. For example, when I attend to it, the blue sofa I am seeing stands out amongst the various other things that are present in my visual field. Whereas when I attend to that visual awareness of the blue sofa I am having, what it is like to enjoy that visual awareness stands out against, or in comparison to, all the other various determinants of my overall phenomenology at that time. In other words, what it is like to enjoy that visual awareness of the blue sofa becomes phenomenally more salient: it stands out in comparison to all the other instances of conscious awareness I am having and that are impinging on what it is like for me to be conscious in the present moment. Thus, it should be clear that the blue sofa itself cannot become more phenomenally salient to me in such a way; it can only become perceptually more or less salient to me.

For this reason, a variation in phenomenal salience does not characterize a change in how what I experience appears to me, i.e. it is not a change in how salient what I experience appears to me. That would be the case only if a feature *F* I perceived, for instance the blue sofa itself, appeared more or less salient to me as a result of my exercising perceptual attention – but we have seen that this cannot be so. However, is it not the case then that a variation in the phenomenal salience of my awareness of *F* constitutes in fact a change in how my awareness of *F* appears to me? If that would be the case, then we would be back to the option *B\** that I have already discussed above.<sup>23</sup> Indeed: provided that the variations in the phenomenal salience of an introspected experience capture the phenomenal contribution of introspective attention, and if those variations amount to changes in how the introspected experience appears to the introspecting subject *S*, then we would have a situation where attention has phenomenal effects on how its targets appear to *S* (i.e. a situation where my attending to *X* modifies

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<sup>23</sup> See section 4 above.



how X appears to me). However, I have discarded option B\* earlier for the reasons I presented then.<sup>24</sup> At the very least, thus, I would say this: we do not have to construe phenomenal salience as a modification of the way in which my experience appears to me, where the relevant notion of appearing in this context is conceived on the model of sensory appearing – that is, on the model of how things do appear to a subject in perceptual experiences.

With that understanding of phenomenal salience in mind, what should we say of the kind of phenomenal feature it is that the notion of phenomenal salience captures? Phenomenal salience, in the manner I have been developing it, is a comparative notion. When my having a given experiential property is more salient as a result of the introspective operation, it means that it is more salient *in comparison to* my having other experiential properties at that same time. Now, if phenomenal salience is a comparative phenomenal notion, then the phenomenal feature it captures is a relational feature. That is, it is a feature which my conscious episode (i.e. the episode that consists in instantiating a given experiential property) has in virtue of being related to other conscious episodes that I am also undergoing. For this reason, the degree of phenomenal salience of that first conscious episode of mine is relative to the degrees of salience of these other conscious episodes of mine. Typically, when I am introspecting that conscious episode, then my having that relevant experiential property is phenomenally more salient relatively to the lesser degree of phenomenal salience of my having other experiential properties at that time. I have defined earlier as extrinsic phenomenal features of a conscious episode these features that an episode has in virtue of being related to other episodes (as opposed to the intrinsic phenomenal features of that

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<sup>24</sup> The main reason being that the idea of an experience or an awareness of mine appearing in different ways to me is a confused idea, because experiences are not the kind of entity that can appear in different first-personal ways to their subject.

episode, i.e. those feature it has in itself, irrespectively of such relations). Since the phenomenal feature captured by phenomenal salience is a feature that an episode has in virtue of its relations to other conscious episodes, it is therefore an extrinsic phenomenal feature of that episode.

I turn now to the second of the two tasks mentioned at the beginning of this section, namely the task of clarifying how the introspective operation can result in a modification of phenomenal salience. This will be, in other words, a matter of understanding modifications in phenomenal salience on the basis of what happens in the introspective gestalt switch.

I have detailed in Chapter 3<sup>25</sup> how the introspective operation involves attending to, for instance, a certain shade of blue *qua* determining the phenomenal character of my experience. In my original example, I have said that this means that I attend to a colour property the sofa appears to have, in the awareness that this property stands in a certain determining relation to my having a distinct property, namely the experiential property I am instantiating in looking at the sofa. I have argued further that I thereby become explicitly aware of having a given experiential property, as well as aware of the determining relation there is, for instance, between the blue colour property that the sofa appears to have, and the experiential property that I am instantiating. This is why, or so have I suggested then, my introspective awareness is more articulate than my pre-reflective awareness of having a given experiential property.

What I want to suggest now is that this provides the basis we need for clarifying the thought that the introspective switch results in the phenomenal fact that my having a given experiential property becomes more salient to me. The flip side of the fact that my introspective awareness is more articulate, more reflective (compared to my pre-

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 3, section 2 & section 3.

reflective awareness), is that its target, i.e. my having a given experiential property, becomes more phenomenally salient in the sense that its phenomenal internal structure, its articulation, becomes *sharper, more explicit, more 'visible'* to me. As a result, (the structure of) my having a given experiential property becomes *more easily graspable, more apprehensible* to me, and hence more readily available to conceptualizations that I can form upon it. It becomes more readily available for me to bring my conceptual capacities to bear upon it, for instance in forming phenomenal concepts of what it is like to instantiate that experiential property.<sup>26</sup> One could also say that my having a given experiential property thereby becomes more readily available for me to theorize about it – that is, to engage in what constitutes phenomenological reflection.

We can now see how all this ties up with the way I have developed above the idea of my experience, e.g. my visual awareness of a feature F, weighing more upon my overall phenomenology as a result of the introspective switch. I have suggested making sense of this idea in terms of the introspective switch making it clearer to me how my awareness of a feature F impinges upon what it is like for me to be conscious in this moment. The way I see this, it becoming clearer to me how this experience of F impinges upon and constrains my phenomenal life is a matter of this experience's structure becoming more discernible, more readily graspable amongst the multitude of other phenomenal features that impinge upon and constrain my overall phenomenology in the present moment.

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<sup>26</sup> That is not to say that we always perform the introspective switch in order to bring our cognitive and conceptual capacities to bear on our awareness of our introspected conscious episode. See for instance Dainton (2000: 34): "Although we often make judgments or form beliefs about what we introspect, it is important to note that not all introspection, whether passive or active, is judgmental. Sometimes we introspect in a purely exploratory way: we focus on some part of our experience with the intention of merely making ourselves open to whatever is there. Indeed, this exploratory kind of introspection will often precede any attempt at coming to a belief or forming a judgment." See also Giustina (2019).

## **CHAPTER 7.**

### **CONCLUSIONS & OUTLOOKS**

The preceding pages are undoubtedly far from containing the whole phenomenological story one could tell about introspective attention. Moreover, the gestalt switch account that I have articulated in this dissertation could also certainly be developed further in a number of significant respects. Therefore, in this final chapter, I want to consider a few of the many prospects there are for further research on the gestalt switch account, and on the phenomenology of introspective attention more generally.

The plan for this closing chapter is as follows. In section 1, I come back to the issue of the transparency of experience I introduced in Chapter 1,<sup>1</sup> and I draw some conclusions about the consistency of the idea of transparency with the gestalt switch account. In section 2, I discuss one important issue about the phenomenology of introspection on which an extension of the GS account has the potential to bear fruit.

#### **1. The gestalt switch account and transparency**

The issue of the transparency of experience is vast, and one could easily dedicate a whole dissertation to its discussion – my intentions for the project I undertook here were different, however. That being said, I should like, nonetheless, to make a few brief

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, section 2.

remarks about transparency in the light of some of the ideas I developed above on behalf of the gestalt switch account of introspection.

As remarked in Chapter 1, claims based on the idea of transparency come in weaker and stronger flavours. Depending on their particular flavour, transparency claims will prove consistent, or on the contrary in explicit tension, with the gestalt switch account. Consider again the well-known passage by Harman I quoted earlier:<sup>2</sup>

“When you see a tree, you do not experience any features as intrinsic features of your experience. Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree.” (1990: 667)

One point is certainly beyond contention: when we attend to a tree that we see, we cannot attend to features of our visual experience in the exact way in which we can attend to features of the tree. If anything, the way in which we can attend to features of (the phenomenal character) of our experience has to be substantially different. Yet, precisely, the gestalt switch account suggests such a way. It suggests that, with the introspective operation, we switch from the ordinary manner of attending in perception to the manner of attending specific to introspection – that is, attending to e.g., some given feature of the tree insofar as it determines the experiential property we instantiate in seeing that feature. Of course, if Harman’s intention is to deny flatly that we are ever able to attend to features of our experience *in any way whatsoever*, then this is a claim that the gestalt switch account does, and should, reject. But in doing so, the account finds itself in the company of a number of philosophers who have also rejected such a claim explicitly – Ned Block, for instance, writes in response to Harman’s claim: “As a point about introspection, this seems to me to be straightforwardly wrong.” (1996: 27)

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1, section 2.

In contrast, things are quite different when we look at some of the definitions of transparency that other philosophers have put forward. For instance, here is the characterization of the idea that Chudnoff offers:

“[Transparency is] the idea that when one attends to a phenomenally conscious state the object of one’s attention is the object presented in that state not the state itself.” (2015: 170)

Conceived of in that way, the transparency claim may well prove compatible with the gestalt switch account. This may be the case in particular if one reads “object” in a phenomenological manner, since, depending on the notion of object that one endorses, it could well be the case that the only objects I can attend to in introspecting a perceptual experience are the objects presented to me in that perception.<sup>3</sup> Put more precisely, depending on what it takes for something to be presented to me as an object in experience, it may well be that one of my experiences itself, or phenomenal features of it, cannot be presented to me as an object at all – hence, my experience (or its features) cannot be an object of my attention in that sense. But this is consistent with the idea that I can attend to (the phenomenal character of) my perception by attending to some object that is presented to me in having that experience, even if (the phenomenal character of) my perceptual experience is not itself an object I can attend to.

The gestalt switch account also seems to a certain extent to be consistent with the understanding of transparency that Michael Tye, another prominent proponent of the idea, suggests in the following passage:<sup>4</sup>

“Here is one way of illustrating the thesis of transparency for the perceptual case: Suppose you are standing before a tapestry in an art gallery. As you take in the

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, this would not be the case if by “the object of one’s attention” Chudnoff merely means something like the target of one’s attention, irrespective of whether that target is phenomenally presented as an object or not. For a discussion of the phenomenological notion of objectual awareness, see for instance Siewert (2012) and Zahavi (2006).

<sup>4</sup> What Tye writes in other places, however, might imply a stronger reading of the transparency claim; see for instance Tye (1995: 30).

rich and varied colors of the cloth, you are told to pay close attention to your visual experience and its phenomenology. What do you do? Those who accept the transparency thesis say that you attend closely to the tapestry and details in it. You are aware of something outside you – the tapestry – and of various qualities that you experience as being qualities of parts of the tapestry, and by being aware of these things you are aware of what it is like for you subjectively or phenomenally.” (Tye 2009, 117)

What Tye is describing here does not strike me as being in strict contradiction with the central tenets of the GS account, although the introspective operation, as the account conceives of it, goes well beyond what Tye is saying in this passage. The idea that it is by being aware of the tapestry and its details that you are aware of what it is like for you to see it is not in tension with the GS account, but more needs to be done to perform the introspective operation than just attending closely to the tapestry, however – you need to attend to it in the specific manner that I articulated in Chapter 3, section 3.

It is also worth saying a word about the second passage on transparency that I quoted in Chapter 1, where Schwitzgebel, reacting to Harman, characterises the transparency idea as “[t]he view that it is impossible to attend directly to perceptual experiences” (2019). The significant element of that characterization is, of course, the adverb ‘directly’, and one should legitimately wonder what it implies exactly here. If this term is meant to say that we can only attend to our perceptual experience by attending to what we perceive, then this is in no way uncongenial to the spirit of the gestalt switch account. I have emphasized this point earlier:<sup>5</sup> of course we have to attend to features that we see in order to attend to features of the phenomenal character of our visual experience – how else could it be? We are, after all, undergoing a visual experience, so, on the contrary, what would be astonishing is if we would have to stop attending to what

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance Chapter 3, section 3, and Chapter 5, section 3.

we see in order to become reflectively aware of what it is like to see just as we do in this instance.

However, if Schwitzgebel means something stronger, as he likely does since he goes on to contrast the transparency view with the “accounts according to which we learn about our sensory experience primarily by directing introspective attention to it”, then probably a transparency view of that stronger flavour is not consistent with the GS account. Schwitzgebel’s formulation of the transparency idea here is actually very similar to the definition that Amy Kind offers of what she calls “strong transparency”, namely the claim that “it is *impossible* to attend directly to our experience, i.e., we cannot attend to our experience except by attending to the objects represented by that experience” (2003: 230; her emphasis). Thus, the same consequences for the GS account that I just mentioned in discussing Schwitzgebel could also be drawn here.

Kind, however, contrasts strong transparency with “weak transparency”, according to which “it is difficult (but not impossible) to attend directly to our experience, i.e., we can most easily attend to our experience by attending to the objects represented by that experience” (2003: 230; her emphasis). The gestalt switch account is certainly consistent with that weaker flavour of the transparency idea – it is even a flavour, one could say, that fits particularly well with the spirit of the account. And as Kind remarks, this is in fact the flavour that best corresponds to what G.E. Moore had in mind in writing this celebrated passage of “The Refutation of Idealism”, to which transparency theorists often trace back their position:

“[...] the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it can be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know that there is something to look for.” (1903: 450)



The gestalt switch account could be seen, then, as an attempt to articulate what it is that we have to do in order to “look attentively enough”.

Admittedly, a lot more could be said and would undoubtedly need to be said to explore the various implications of the transparency idea for the gestalt switch account, in particular, and for the topic of introspection more generally. I shall have to leave a more thorough discussion of these issues for another occasion, however. A similar diagnosis could certainly be made regarding other issues that are discussed in the thesis, or their interrelations. For instance, an exploration of the relation between my discussion of phenomenal holism and the phenomenal salience view I argued for seems a promising way to better understand the phenomenal change involved in introspection. Or else, exploring the combination of the GS account with a different view of conscious attention that the one Watzl develops could shed a novel light on it, and on the picture it gives of the phenomenon of introspective attention.

I should like, however, to go beyond these very schematically outlined suggestions and to present in more detail one dimension of the phenomenology of introspective attention on which the GS account has the potential to shed light. This will be my aim in the second and final section.

## **2. An example of a promising extension of the gestalt switch account**

One important contribution which we could expect from the GS account is in helping to clarify the nature of introspective awareness. By the *nature* of introspective awareness, what I mean here is the type, broadly conceived, to which introspective experiences belong or are most similar to. My discussion of introspection so far has made it clear that I conceive of it as a phenomenally conscious awareness of our phenomenal experiences,

as opposed to an unconscious awareness of them (see Chapter 1, section 1). However, the question as to what broad types of conscious awareness exist is far from being uncontroversial. On one plausible assumption, we can distinguish at least between perceptual, cognitive and agentive types of awareness. Distinctions of modes of awareness are obviously related to distinctions of types, but they are not at the same level, in my view. As I conceive of them, distinctions of types are more fundamental in the sense that they are distinctions between relevant sets of modes. Each type then typically allows for further distinctions into modes. Perceptual awareness, for instance, subdivides into a visual and a tactile mode, among others – but modes falling under the type ‘perceptual’ are relevantly different from modes falling under the type ‘cognitive’. Therefore, someone who would for instance hold the view that the mode introspective awareness falls under the perceptual type would be committed to the claim that the introspective mode is relevantly similar to other perceptual mode like the visual or the auditory mode. She would not be committed, however, to the (rather unpalatable) claim that the introspective mode is identical to one of those perceptual modes.

That being said, how exactly one is supposed to distinguish between types of awareness is arguably an issue even more controversial than the issue of what types there are. There are phenomenological differences which (at least typically) characterize experiences belonging to the different types of awareness. These differences provide us with phenomenological criteria which we can apply to a given experience to determine to which type of awareness it belongs (or to which type of awareness it is closest). The GS account is essentially concerned with the phenomenal dimension of introspection. Therefore, insofar as it sheds light on which type of experience introspection belongs to, it will do so by focusing on phenomenological criteria.

There are two main things we should expect an extension of the GS account on this issue to provide us with. First, it should give us some reason to think that our introspection of phenomenal experiences belongs to one or another of these types of awareness (i.e. the perceptual, cognitive or agential type). This will not merely be a matter of applying a given set of phenomenological criteria (and of, perhaps, weighing up these criteria). It will also for a large part be a matter of clarifying and discussing the criteria themselves. That is because showing that a given criterion does or does not apply to this specific issue about introspection requires a detailed discussion of its validity and relevance. One such criterion of what characterizes a perceptual form of awareness is provided by Siewert in his attack on the inner sense model of introspection.<sup>6</sup> One could indeed read Siewert as suggesting that there is a specific kind of experienced change that only perceptual experiences (or experiences of “objectual sensing” in Siewert’s terms) exhibit. Another criterion characteristic of the perceptual type could perhaps be extracted from Chudnoff’s discussion of presentational phenomenology. Here the idea would be to assess whether introspective experiences exhibit presentational phenomenology.<sup>7</sup>

As far as I can see, a critical discussion of a phenomenological criterion of that kind should examine and evaluate it along three main dimensions. First, one could argue that the criterion at issue should be rejected for phenomenological reasons. That is – to adapt a popular metaphor from metaphysical debates – because it fails to carve the phenomenal space at its joints, e.g., the genuine phenomenological differences between different types of awareness. Alternatively, the criterion considered might draw the distinction where it is phenomenologically most plausible, but its application to the case of introspection might be incorrect. Third, one could argue that other theoretical

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<sup>6</sup> See Siewert 2012. In Chapter 5, section 4, I discuss some points related to his criticism of perceptual – or inner sense – models of introspective awareness.

<sup>7</sup> I have mentioned Chudnoff’s presentational phenomenology in Chapter 1, section 2. See for instance Chudnoff 2013: 18.

considerations pertaining to the phenomenon of introspection as defined here should weigh against the criterion in question. For instance, I have emphasized that in a case of experiential gestalt such as seeing the duck-rabbit drawing, the experienced change does not merely consist in the fact that one judges that the drawing is a drawing of a duck or of a rabbit. Rather, one sees the drawing as, alternatively, the drawing of a rabbit or of a duck. So one route of exploration that the GS account suggests could be this. The difference between an episode of attending to, e.g., a shade of blue as a property of the sofa and an episode of attending to it as determining the phenomenal character of the perception of the sofa is not just a matter of forming phenomenal judgements (i.e., of forming such judgements in the latter episode but not in the former). Rather, it is a matter of experiencing the shade of blue in different ways. Wittgenstein famously argued that the notion of ‘seeing as’ relevant to the case of seeing the duck-rabbit drawing *as* a duck or *as* a rabbit was the notion of “seeing with thought in it”, and that the nature of such an experience “lies between that of seeing and thinking, that is [...] bears a resemblance to both; and the phenomena [...] are akin to those of seeing and thinking” (*RPP II*, §462).<sup>8</sup> Hence, the GS account could perhaps help articulate a possible compromise between perceptual and cognitive models of introspective awareness.

The second main thing we should expect from an extension of the GS account on this issue is to explain why introspective experiences belong to one or another of these types of awareness. This will certainly be a matter of arguing why introspective experiences satisfy phenomenological criteria for a given type of awareness. But it will also be a matter of understanding why introspective experiences are of this type in the light of what the introspective gestalt switch consists in. That is, part of what we should

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<sup>8</sup> See Eilan (2013) for a discussion.

expect from the GS account here is an explanation of why, given that account of introspection, introspective experiences have the character they do.

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