
Reviewed by Thomas F. Cloonan, New York City, New York

The names of the psychologists associated with the Gestalt school of psychology that immediately come to the American mind are Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka. Other names that may follow this trinity are Kurt Lewin, Abraham and Edith Luchins, Solomon Asch, and Mary Henle. The name of Wolfgang Metzger, mentee of Wolfgang Köhler and assistant to Max Wertheimer, surfaces less frequently. The manifest reason for the infrequent mention of his name is the very delayed English translation of his published research.

The delay was seventy years long. Were Metzger’s 1936-published book *Gesetze des Sehens* translated and published in English soon after the publication of the German original, Metzger would surely have been member of the above high-profile company—at least he would have been listed with those following in the steps of Wertheimer, Köhler, and Koffka. In his “Introduction to the English Translation” of the book under review, Lothar Spillmann points out that “had this book been available to the English-speaking scientific community at the time of its writing… many a rediscovery could have been saved, for example in the fields of shape-from-motion, depth-from-shading, context dependency…” (p. ix). It is the judgment of this reviewer that the general educated reader, having read *Laws of Seeing*, would also include with confidence Metzger’s name in the overall Gestaltist loop.

Such confidence is supported by the empirical work and conclusions that Metzger offers in the articulation of Gestalt laws of perceptual organization in *Laws of Seeing*. Metzger’s correlation of Gestalt perceptual laws and principles to aspects of visual art styles (Chapters 6 and 7) and to instrumental music and vocal music with their notational displays in compositional scoring (p. 27) is impressive. Metzger offers up, even, Gestalt perceptual associations to mundane areas of the lifeworld such as driving and traffic, and to the strategies and ruses of predation existing in animal life and in the warfare of nations.

Despite the tardiness of translation of Metzger’s work and the resulting ignorance of it and its significance for many in the anglophone community in the world of psychology, particular references have been made to his 1930 research on the ganzfeld (German; *Ganzfeld*, “whole field”—it refers to a homogeneous visual field that provides no stimulus locus). The references have been by the American psychologists James J. Gibson (1979) and, more recently, Alva Noë (2004). In addition to those references, around the 1970s parapsychological researchers appropriated the ganzfeld for their purposes. The references, nevertheless, do not suffice to elevate Metzger’s profile from second tier to first tier.

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Examination of *Laws of Seeing* will determine whether there is justification for this move.

**Empirical Character of Metzger’s Investigations in *Laws of Seeing***

Metzger first addresses “ambiguous figures in our daily environment”. In successive chapters, he then investigates “visible and invisible forms,” “groups and borders,” “developmental stages in shape formation,” “Gestalt laws serving camouflage,” “brightness and spatial form,” “Gestalt laws in the spatial effect of perspective drawings,” “the Prägnanz tendency,” and “Gestalt laws in the spatial effect of brightness.” Wertheimer’s Gestalt laws are done justice in Metzger’s empirical explications of them.

The beginning chapter on ambiguous figures is a discussion of the well-known goblet-faces silhouette, which Metzger calls the Mysterious Goblet. The analysis involved illustrates richly the special style of Metzger’s presentation and it signals the character of the rest of the book. It deserves consideration.

Metzger points out that the perceptual experience that is had of figure within this silhouette is based on the registering of the alternative perceptual option as a formlessness of intermediate spaces. The alternative’s own potential as figure dwells for the moment in this formless intermediate space. There is alternation of goblet and faces as figure for the reason that what passes initially as formless intermediate space soon enough ostends “form” to the perceiver and it becomes figural. How, at any one point in time, either the goblet or the faces-presentation assumes the figural position in perceptual experience, Metzger points out, is accomplished by the required and pro tempore suppression of the alternative that accompanies the upcoming “figure.”

In a manner that is typical of his modus operandi, Metzger proceeds from this classical icon of ambiguous figures, one of human construction, to demonstrations that indicate that the phenomenon of figure-rivalry is “not a peculiar oddity.” It displays “a lawfulness that governs our entire daily visual experience” (pp. 4–5). In daily visual experiences, Metzger makes the observation, “our gaze is by nature directed toward objects; one has to learn to direct it toward the intermediate spaces, the empty environment” (pp. 4–5). Why? He puts to us the example of the cyclist looking at—i.e., focusing figurally on—the tree he or she seeks to avoid collision with. And then collides with it! The cyclist ought to have focused on the empty space that is the right of way. A comparable consequence extends, Metzger tells us, to the soccer player focusing on the goal post rather than on the empty, formless space of the cavity bounded by the goal posts into which the ball should be kicked… which will consequently then not happen on account of the mis-focusing.