This brief essay marks an attempt to think along with the masterful Aron Gurwitsch on topics indigenous to a genetic phenomenology. Here I must simply presuppose as established and understood Professor Gurwitsch's rethinking of the noematic structure and organization of perceptual objects in terms of fundamental insights of Gestalt theory. A brief rehearsing of certain aspects of Gurwitsch's genetic phenomenology will lead us to focus our attention upon the problem of the identity or self-identity of the perceptual object throughout the stages of pre-predicative genesis. It will appear, as Aron Gurwitsch repeatedly maintained, that this problem of "identity throughout genesis" must be either radically revised and reformulated or else completely rejected. Sustaining then our focus upon this particular issue, we shall be able to grasp a crucial similarity between Gurwitsch's genetic phenomenology and Jean Piaget's genetic psychology.

In the genesis of mental life, perceptual, practical objects acquire new qualities and determinations. Take, for example, the household tool we adults know as "scissors." At one phase in my mental development the object acquired for me the specific instrumental sense of "something to cut with." Prior to that stage the object presented to me certain visual, tactile, and perhaps other aspects and uses, but not yet the practical sense of "something to cut with." During a certain phase it acquires that noematic sense for the first time.

Henceforth, whenever I encounter the object there is appresented to me the sense of "something to cut with." Thus, when I view the object from a distance and focus my attention upon, or, in Gurwitsch's terminology,
thematize the silvery color, there will be in my mental life an automatic intending to the functional meaning of the object, "something to cut with." Noematically described, the thematized sense of the silvery color presents to me, as part of its very visual meaning, noematic references to the instrumental sense. In other words, the perceived color as a perceptual noema is not now what it previously was. Previously, the particular color aspect of the object intrinsically exhibited references to and implications for other visual aspects, tactile aspects, and perhaps even other uses; but it was completely devoid of the reference to this particular instrumental sense, "something to cut with."

Now if, following Gurwitsch, we define the "perceptual noema" as that which presents itself to consciousness in any single perceptually intential process precisely and exactly as it presents itself, we recognize that we can phenomenologically describe the perceptual noema of the color precisely and exactly only if we now describe that visual noema as intrinsically exhibiting noematic references to the instrumental sense. And since these sense references were absent from the earlier perceptual noema of the color, what has actually occurred in this "acquisition" of sense is not a simple "addition" to the earlier visual sense by a new one. Hence, the perceptual noema does not retain its identity throughout genetic change. There is no "accretion" of a new sense "to" the original sense. There is no "sedimentation" of a new sense "upon" an original sense. There is rather the annihilation of the original sense and the birth of an entirely new one.

This problem of perceptual identity is amplified if we now examine the object as a perceptual whole. The perceptual object is, as Gurwitsch claimed, the systematic unity of its noematic constituents. To assert that they are a "systematic unity" signifies that the noematic constituents are, with regard to their very sense, intrinsically interrelated to and interdependent upon one another. Thus, the incorporation of new noemata into "the" noematic system entails a reorganization and restructurization of the entire system. To speak, then, of an object, a self-identical object, "acquiring" new aspects and determinations is, at least, misleading and, probably, thoroughly mistaken. Strictly speaking—phenomenologically speaking—there is no one object which maintains its noematic identity throughout accretions of new noematic senses. To augment or otherwise alter the noematic components of a perceptual object is nothing less than to replace the original object with a wholly new one.

Gurwitsch's cautious but thorough reconstruction of genetic phenomenology in the light of certain insights of Gestalt theory soon led him to recognize one of the shortcomings of the work actually accomplished by