



## EDITORIAL

### **Editorial – About Aron Gurwitsch’s “Place”**

Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1974) was a prominent Lithuanian philosopher and phenomenologist, and has an important role in the development and expansion of the boundaries of Husserl’s phenomenology. His work stands out for the mastery with which he walks through the phenomenological field, presenting us in each text, repeatedly and tirelessly, direct and clarifying definitions of the basic concepts under which the edifice of constitutive phenomenology is built. In addition, his contributions touch the plane of opening phenomenological thought to a new attitude, certainly inherited by Merleau-Ponty, characterized by efforts to advance the limits of phenomenology from innovative interlocutions, which, in his case, are situated primarily alongside Gestalt Psychology and Kurt Goldstein’s work.

Aron Gurwitsch’s name is relatively unknown among Brazilian readers. No less than the history of phenomenological thought itself – which has belatedly entered the spectrum of Brazilian philosophical and scientific reflection, associated with specific authors, and in a disorderly manner, resulting in an equally differentiated capture of this important movement<sup>1</sup> – justifies this moment to bring out one of our time’s most important thinkers. The unawareness of Gurwitsch’s contributions manifests itself by various reasons: his thinking is often reduced to an obscure or idealist type of phenomenology; historiographical inaccuracies attribute his contributions to other authors, or yet, his achievements do not even reach the level of “academic awareness”, that is, they are not noticed, which contributes to the perpetuation of erroneous historiographical readings.

Of course, it is impossible to ignore that Gurwitsch’s philosophical path is marked by the vital task of carrying out the transcendental project of phenomenology, so that the author positions himself as an “eternal disciple, faithful to the spirit and general orientation of Husserl.”<sup>2</sup> However, the other side of the coin is that Gurwitsch’s allegiance to the Husserlian program should not be confused with unshakeable orthodoxy. Since his doctoral thesis, *Phenomenology of the Thematic and the Pure Ego*<sup>3</sup>, published in 1929, Husserlian philosophy has always been associated with a critical, explicitly dialogic attitude in which it is a matter of expanding the limits of the phenomenological framework through articulations with different areas of knowledge. Thus, in Gurwitsch’s work, one finds a masterful spectrum of references and comments that range from authors of psychoanalysis (Freud), of developmental psychology (Jean Piaget), of modern philosophy (Descartes, Hume and Kant) and contemporary philosophy (Merleau-Ponty, Sartre), Gestalt Psychology (Koffka, Köhler, Wertheimer), Scientific Psychology (James, Wundt, Helmholz), Psychiatry (Gelb and Goldstein), Sociology (Schütz) and Anthropology (Lévy-Bruhl).

Gurwitsch, who was originally a mathematician, has a prominent role associated with Psychology, particularly Gestalt-Psychology, and shows the relationship between these disciplines with Phenomenology through epistemological reflection, as we will see throughout the texts of this Dossier. Gurwitsch was a student of Moritz Geiger, and followed Husserl’s courses in Freiburg between 1921 and 1922 (based on indications from none other than Husserl’s advisor, Carl Stumpf), according to Spiegelberg<sup>4</sup>. Between 1933 and 1940, he taught at the Université de Sorbonne in Paris, a crucial period in the development of phenomenology on French soil, influencing a whole generation of thinkers, including Merleau-Ponty. He later migrated to the United States – having taught at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore; at Harvard, Wheaton College, Brandeis University, and the New School of Social Research in New York – then returning to Europe in 1958 to teach in Cologne, Germany. He was a friend of Alfred Schütz, and among his students were Harold Garfinkel (the founder of ethnomethodology), Lester Embree (a renowned phenomenologist), and Henry Allison (Philosopher at the University of California).

Although he was critical of Husserl, notably of his idea of intentionality, he was a strong supporter of Gestalt Psychology, which was equally not immune to his criticism. Concerned first and foremost with scientific foundations, it becomes a name of extreme relevance for us to consider the scientific status of Psychology – and of the so-called “human sciences” in general – by questioning, in a manner similar to Husserlian criticism, the forgetting of subjectivity in the context of mathematization of the physical sciences and its impact on the “sciences of the spirit”.

The author’s relevance is made evident by the echoes that his concepts and ideas philosophical and the human-sciences discourses. When reviewing Husserl’s theory of intentionality, for example, he weaved important interpretations through the critical lens provided by his learning path with Berlin School representatives such as Koffka, Köhler and Wertheimer, to detach from his subject of study an important reconfiguration regarding perception theory. Instead of simply representing a school of thought in a debate, he engaged a genuine philosophical

1 Holanda, 2016a, 2016b, 2022; Mendonça & Holanda, 2021.

2 Gurwitsch, 2009a.

3 Gurwitsch, 2009b.

4 Spiegelberg, 1972.



confrontation from which his own conception could emerge, according to which perception should no longer be considered, as Husserl did, from two different strata, one sensitive and the other intellectual, but should be seen and described as a Gestalt, that is, as an internally organized form or structure.

From this perspective, and building on the conclusions reached in his doctoral thesis of 1929<sup>5</sup>, the author argued that his conception of intentionality would imply conceiving consciousness, then, as a structured totality or as a context of indicative references, and that it would be up to phenomenology to describe this structure and its relationships. In his terminology, the field of consciousness would be structured in three distinct, although inseparable, components with different levels of participation in the constitution of the perceptive object, namely: the theme, or the thematic nucleus of consciousness itself; in relation to this, the thematic context, which provides meaning and orientation to the theme; and, finally, the margin, which is cut from the irrelevance to the theme, but which is made up of everything that is simultaneously given to the stream of consciousness itself. His basic observation – which gains phenomenological status as a result of his particularly rigorous investigation – is that organization is “an autochthonous property of experience”, that it is “inherent and immanent in immediate experience, and unprovoked by some organizational principle, agency or activity”<sup>6</sup>. This central formulation contains one of the main legacies of his thought, in dialogue with which not only Merleau-Ponty<sup>6</sup>, but also Schütz<sup>7</sup> and even Garfinkel<sup>8</sup>, certainly wrote their own perspectives. As this claim differs from Husserl in some ways, we believe it is up to current researchers in phenomenology to confront this thesis and draw conclusions from it.

Gurwitsch’s other important considerations could be drawn from this principle, such as his non-egological theory of consciousness, which the author develops in dialogue with Sartre, for example, and which no longer presupposes any participation of an agent (the transcendental ego) in structuring perception and the stream of consciousness<sup>9</sup>; his theory of the categorial attitude, which implies the transformations by which objects are apprehended in their form of organization to the intuitive apprehension, from sensible objects to categorial objects<sup>10</sup>; and his theory on the orders of existence, which consists of a more general and formal application of the principles of Gestalt Theory to areas of the relationship between objects and what Husserl called “regions of being”<sup>11</sup>, among others. Systematically and methodologically concerned with the development of a “rigorous science”, Gurwitsch advanced all these themes in deep dialogue with authors and theories of his time, possibly leaving us an important legacy not only in the theses he formulated, but also with regard to their way of doing it: theoretical imbrications and injunctions are productive and the theorist’s or philosopher’s imaginative and analytical exercise must encompass them, even if remaining faithful to a tradition, in order for it to advance and respond in due course, without becoming lost in orthodoxy.

Keeping this in mind, the purpose of this Dossier is not only to rescue an important name in the history of Phenomenology, nor is it simply to introduce him to the Brazilian reader, but to bring to light themes that are becoming increasingly relevant in a time and society intensely marked by technology and the speed of change.

This issue of Phenomenology, Humanities and Sciences thus includes six studies on Gurwitsch, three translations of related topics – including a text by the honouree himself, previously unpublished in Portuguese – and is accompanied by three manuscripts from the journal’s flow, with debates around of various themes of phenomenology.

Below, we have listed some of the main works of Aron Gurwitsch, in order to assist the reader in his research and to instigate the knowledge about this important personality. We hope that the quality of its productions will make up for the long wait for this Dossier.

We wish everyone a pleasant reading experience.

**Adriano Furtado Holanda**  
(Editor)

**Hernani Pereira dos Santos**  
**Pedro Henrique Santos Decanini Marangoni**  
(Dossier Editors)

5 Gurwitsch, 2009b.

6 See Marangoni & Verissimo, 2022; and Lind, 2022, in this dossier.

7 Santos, 2022.

8 Garfinkel, 2021.

9 Gurwitsch, 2009c.

10 Gurwitsch, 2009d; e 2009e.

11 Gurwitsch, 2010.



## Major Works of Aron Gurwitsch

- “On the Intentionality of Consciousness”, In Marvin Farber (Ed.). *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl* (1940), pp. 65-83. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- “A Non-Egological Conception of Consciousness”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 1 (1941), 325-338.
- “On the Object of Thought”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 7 (1947), 347-356.
- “The Phenomenological and Psychological Approach to Consciousness”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 15 (1955), 303-319.
- Théorie du champ de la conscience* (1957), Bruges et Paris: Desclée de Brouwer (*Das Bewußtseinsfeld*).
- “La Conception de la conscience chez Kant et chez Husserl”, *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, Vol. 54 (1960), 65-96.
- “The Commonsense World as Social Reality - A Discourse on Alfred Schutz”, *Social Research*, Vol. 29 (1962), 50-72.
- Field of Consciousness* (1964), Pittsburgh, Pa., Dusquesne University Press (Original em alemão, *Das Bewußtseinsfeld*).
- “Der Begriff des Bewußtseins bei Kant und Husserl”, *Kant-Studien*, 55 (1964), 410-27.
- Studies in phenomenology and psychology* (1966). Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press.
- Leibniz* (1974), New York: de Gruyter.
- Phenomenology and the Theory of Science* (1974), Lester Embree (ed.), Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press.
- El campo de la conciencia: Un análisis fenomenológico* (1979). Trad. Jorge García-Gómez. Madrid: Alianza Editorial. (*Das Bewußtseinsfeld*).
- Kants Theories des Verstandes* (1990), edited by Thomas Seebohm. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Esquisse de la phénoménologie constitutive* (2002). Édition par José Huerta-Jourda, J. Vrin.
- The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901–1973)* (2010), Springer (Vol. I: *Constitutive Phenomenology in Historical Perspective*. Volume II: *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*. Volume III: *The Field of Consciousness: Theme, Thematic Field, and Margin*).

## References

- Garfinkel, H. (2021). Ethnomethodological Misreading of Aron Gurwitsch on the Phenomenal Field. *Human Studies*, 1-24.
- Gurwitsch A (2009a). Author’s introduction. In: F. Kersten (Ed.). *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), II: Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (p. xvi-xxvi). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Gurwitsch, A. (2009b). Phenomenology of Thematics and of the Pure Ego: Studies of the Relation Between Gestalt Theory and Phenomenology. In: F. Kersten (Ed.). *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), II: Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (pp. 193-317). Dordrecht: Springer. Original publicado em 1929).
- Gurwitsch A (2009c). A Non-Egological Conception of Consciousness In: F. Kersten (Ed.). *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), II: Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2009j, p. 319-334. (Original publicado em 1941).



- Gurwitsch, A. (2009d). Gelb-Goldstein's Concept of Concrete and Categorical Attitude and the Phenomenology of Ideation. In: F. Kersten (Ed.). *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), II: Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (pp. 403-431). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Gurwitsch, A. (2009e). Theme and attitude. In: J. García-Gómez (Ed.). *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), I: Constitutive Phenomenology in Historical Perspective* (pp. 331-349). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Gurwitsch, A. (2010). The Field of Consciousness. In: L. Embree, & R. M. Zaner (Eds.). *The Collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), III: The Field of Consciousness: Theme, Thematic Field, and Margin*. Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer, p. 1-409.
- Holanda, A. F. (2022). Psychology and philosophy in the early days of phenomenological thought in Brazil. In: Adriano Furtado Holanda (Org.), *Perspectives on Phenomenological Psychology: Brazilian Experiences* (pp. 48-76). Porto Alegre: Editora Fi (Acesso Aberto: <https://www.editorafi.org/402psy>).
- Holanda, A. F. (2016). Apuntes para una historia del pensamiento fenomenológico en Brasil: filosofía y psicología. *Anuario Colombiano de Fenomenología*, 9, pp. 444-461. Disponível em: <https://1drv.ms/b/s!Am-JSTLFsy5th6ZxqNfmyzdPTqNdtg?e=jkUGgq>
- Holanda, A. F. (2016). Fenomenologia e Psicologia no Brasil: aspectos históricos. *Estudos de Psicologia* (Campinas) 33 (3), 383-394. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-02752016000300002>.
- Marangoni, P.H.S.D & Verissimo, D.S (2020). A Autoconsciência na Teoria de Aron Gurwitsch: Posição e Crítica. *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia*, 20 (spe), 1128-1148. Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12957/epp.2020.56654>
- Mendonça, D. N. & Holanda, A. F. (2021). Nilton Campos e a Psicologia Brasileira: Um Resgate Biográfico e Bibliográfico. *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia* (UERJ), 21 (2), 786-804. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12957/epp.2021.61069>
- Santos, H. P. (2022). Relevância nas Fenomenologias de Gurwitsch e Schütz: Contornos de um Problema, *Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica – Phenomenological Studies*, 28(1), 115-127.
- Spiegelberg, H. (1972). *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry: A Historical Introduction*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.