

**The Great Gurwitsch-Føllesdal Debate concerning the Noema:
The Connection of the Conceptual to the Perceptual**

Daniel Marcelle

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Florida Atlantic University

Introduction: The Context of the Debate

Aron Gurwitsch was among the first commentators to not only take explicit and extensive interest in Husserl's concept of the noema but to offer an intriguing interpretation informed by gestalt theory beginning with his dissertation of 1928, written fifteen years after the noema's official debut with Husserl's publication of the first book of the *Ideas* in 1913. Gurwitsch's interpretation primarily concerned but was not limited to what has become known as the perceptual noema, which is the perceptual object exactly and however it appears through perceptual acts or noeses, and not the object simpliciter. His outspoken interest in the perceptual noema is a result of his efforts to introduce gestalt theory into Husserlian phenomenology in order to solve certain problems of organization and advance it.¹ The perceptual noema is interesting in this way because it lends itself remarkably well to gestalt theory in terms of organization, implication, and a field theory of consciousness, and in this way is a fantastic place to begin. We should point out immediately that Gurwitsch's understanding of the noema is not limited in any way to perceptual matters, but includes the conceptual and eidetic.

Gurwitsch's interpretation of the noema was not challenged in any remarkable way until Dagfinn Føllesdal published "Husserl's Notion of the Noema" in 1969.² This short essay, purporting to accurately present the noema as Husserl has described it in his

¹ The noema is one of the primary points of contention that Gurwitsch has with Husserl and one of the most important for the reason that many of his other advancements are derived from or result from it. See his introduction to *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (1966).

² It needs to be pointed out that this essay was written to be presented at an APA symposium later that year, the commentators of which interestingly were Hubert L. Dreyfus and Robert K. Solomon, both of which would contribute to the noema discussion roughly on the side of Føllesdal. See the first note on p. 680 of the Føllesdal text.

published and unpublished writings,³ succinctly enumerates twelve theses in the attempt to establish that the noema is strictly conceptual in the manner of an intensional entity, directly and closely comparable to Frege's notion of sense (*Sinn*). Føllesdal did not at all name Gurwitsch in that essay or the later follow-up essay of 1990 entitled "Noema and Meaning in Husserl," although his position would in certain ways oppose Gurwitsch's interpretation, which will be seen. Føllesdal's 1969 publication, though, unleashed a tremendous debate that would fill hundreds of publications. One bibliographer noted that at the time of 1983, there were already 104 English publications concerning this debate.⁴ It is in this torrent that Gurwitsch would become unwillingly associated with the side to which Føllesdal's critique is generally aimed, although as far as we can know Gurwitsch himself was unaware of carrying this flag and certainly did not actively partake in this debate prior to his death early in 1973. It was chiefly Hubert Dreyfus and Robert Solomon that would aim the debate at Gurwitsch and assail his position to some extent through certain misrepresentations.

There are three general positions taken in the debate. 1. Føllesdal is correct, not Gurwitsch; the noema is conceptual and any perceptual understanding of the noema is a misunderstanding. 2. Gurwitsch is correct, not Føllesdal; his formulation of the perceptual noema in terms of gestalt theory is accurate. 3. Both are correct; the noema is both perceptual and conceptual roughly along the lines that Gurwitsch and Føllesdal have outlined and thereby these two positions may coexist in their different spectrums. The early commentary tends to take one side or the other, but a trend develops in the later commentary of attempting to reconcile these two positions. The position that I will take and demonstrate is along the lines of the lattermost, that both are in some sense correct, but I will enlarge this position using Gurwitsch's texts to show how Gurwitsch himself has already accounted for this through his writings concerning the perceptual noema, on the one hand, and his numerous discussions of conceptualization, on the other, which leave him with what is arguably the more robust and comprehensive theory of the noema. With this in mind, Gurwitsch's position has been misunderstood and mistreated in two

³ Føllesdal writes: "I shall try to make the picture of the noema that thereby emerges, as accurate and complete as is permitted by the evidence that is available in Husserl's various published and unpublished works." (1969: 681)

⁴ See Kersey (1983), which lists at least 104 English language publications concerning the noema debate. Since then the number has easily doubled or tripled.

ways. First of all, it will be seen that much of the commentary opposing Gurwitsch's position is narrow and pejorative in the sense that it takes quotes out of context and employs belittling rhetoric, both of which are unnecessary and improper for philosophical discourse. Second, Gurwitsch's discussions conceptualization go almost totally unnoticed in the commentary and the greater context of his position is thus left unconsidered; the functional significance of the perceptual noema can only be understood in view of the whole. I will begin exploring some key points of this debate and, in the end, build what we could take to be Gurwitsch's complete account including both perceptual and conceptual matters concerning the noema.

Key Points in the Debate

First of all, let us consider Føllesdal's position that the noema is strictly conceptual, i.e., it is an abstract, intensional entity that is not the object of the intentional act, but the sense of the object through which the act intends the object; we will consider this position insofar as it would seem to oppose Gurwitsch's position. Of Føllesdal's twelve theses, Gurwitsch would readily agree with eight of them, the remaining four (1, 4, 8, and 9), though, seem to either explicitly or implicitly call to question aspects of Gurwitsch's position or at least the manner in which his position has been construed by certain commentators:⁵

1. The noema is an intensional entity, a generalization of the notion of meaning (*Sinn, Bedeutung*).⁶
4. The noema of an act is not the object of the act (i.e., the object toward which the act is directed).⁷
8. Noemata are abstract entities.⁸

⁵ Hubert Dreyfus identifies theses 8, 9, 10, and 11 as being implicitly problematic for Gurwitsch. Thesis 10 states "Noemata are known through a special reflection, the phenomenological reflection." [Føllesdal 1969: 685] It would be difficult to imagine this being problematic for Gurwitsch. The points that Dreyfus makes is whether such is conceptual or perceptual, and problems concerning the act of this special reflection. These are really problems of theses 8 and 4, respectively. Thesis 11 states "The phenomenological reflection can be iterated." [Føllesdal 1969: 685-86] The repetition of phenomenological reflection is compatible with Gurwitsch's account on the basis of ideation or conceptualization of the perceptual noema, which will be seen below. Thus, we can reflect on the concrete perceptual noema and iterate this reflection on its conceptualization at a higher level. See Dreyfus 1972:137-38.

⁶ Føllesdal 1969: 681.

⁷ Ibid., p. 682.

9. Noemata are not perceived through our senses.⁹

We will take accept these four theses as a guideline by which to frame and study the debate. They will be considered in their numerical order, not by importance.

**Thesis 1: *The noema is an intensional entity,
a generalization of the notion of meaning (Sinn, Bedeutung).***

Føllesdal claims that this thesis is the most important one for his position and that the others merely support or clarify aspects of it. He writes: “This thesis and its consequences go against the *usual interpretation* of Husserl.”¹⁰ What is implicitly problematic about this thesis for Gurwitsch's position concerns what Føllesdal means by “intensional entity.” To support his position, he quotes Husserl's *Ideas III*: “The noema is nothing but a generalization of the idea of meaning (Sinn) to the field of all acts.”¹¹ We could add to this the following statement from *Ideas I*: “What was carried out in detail primarily in the case of perception actually holds now for *all kinds of intensitive mental processes*.”¹² If the noema is a generalization of Husserl's theory of meaning in general to all acts, there is no problem for Gurwitsch's position, but what Føllesdal has in mind is *linguistic* sense or meaning, which would limit the noema in certain ways that would be difficult for Gurwitsch and this limitation can be seen in the definition of intensional entity.¹³ Gurwitsch agrees with Føllesdal that the noema is an intensional entity in the sense that such is neither part of the act nor the real object; the noema, of course, is unreal. The contention concerns the sense of unreality. If it is unreal in a strictly abstract and unperceivable sense, as theses 8 and 9 respectively claim, then certain problems could arise for Gurwitsch. Such is elaborated in detail below.

Thesis 4: *The noema of an act is not the object of the act*

⁸ Ibid., p. 684.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 681. My emphasis.

¹¹ The English translation of *Ideas III* by T. Klein and W. Pohl is the following: “the noema in general is, however, nothing further than the universalization of the idea of signification to the total province of the acts.” Husserl 1971: §16, p. 76. Føllesdal's translation is certainly more comfortable.

¹² Husserl 1913: §91, p. 188.

¹³ See Woodruff and MacIntyre 1971: 541.

(i.e., the object toward which the act is directed).

While Føllesdal makes the point that the noema is not the object of the act, he has in mind Brentano's problems in making clear the relation of an act to its object without something like a sense mediating between them. There are others, though, that want to indict Gurwitsch for similar problems. The problem with Gurwitsch, so the claim goes, is that he conflates both sense and referent into the notion of the noema in a way that everything is sense and all reference is lost. What this means, then, is that he, much like Brentano, cannot give an account of the relationship of intentional acts to their objects, but the difficulty in Gurwitsch's case is the claim that for him there really is no object, there are only appearances or phenomena. This problem is known as phenomenalism, which was laid by John Drummond. We will see that Gurwitsch does in some places use problematic phrasing that would seem to incriminate him and taken out of context surely do, but that he overcomes this argument by making a clear distinction between the noema and the object simpliciter and the constitutive relationship held between noeses, noemata, and the intended object. These problematic statements of Gurwitsch can, then, be accounted for with his notion of the "equivalent of consciousness," which is the noematic whole.

I go into more detail in the longer version of this essay, but this is sufficient for our purposes at this time.

Thesis 8: *Noemata are abstract entities.*

In support of this thesis, Føllesdal first discusses the irreality and atemporality of the noema in ways that Gurwitsch would agree to. Like Gurwitsch, he cites Husserl's famous distinction of the tree simpliciter, which may burn or be painted, and the tree noema, which cannot be so physically altered. Abstract in this way simply means that the noema is an unreal object. But then he goes on to write: "Since in principle noemata are not experienced through perspectives, they are not spatial objects."¹⁴ It is in this way that he delimits the noema as an abstract entity that is, for all intents and purposes, identical to the Fregean *Sinn*; the noema for Føllesdal is always and strictly an abstract, linguistic *Sinn*. Backing up Føllesdal in some respects, Drummond makes the following claim: "all

¹⁴ Gurwitsch 1937c: Chapter 4, §1.

interpreters of the noema agree that in some sense or another that the noema is an *abstractum*.”¹⁵ It is important to point out and make clear that we cannot, of course, say that the noema itself is concrete for the reason that it would itself have to be an individual, independent, and empirical entity which the noema is not and cannot be. It is in this sense that we will agree with Føllesdal, but we have to point out that noemata are not only of conceptual affairs. We have to question this strictly abstract interpretation of the noema. Is it possible that the noema in some sense could be a *concretum*? Above we have pointed out several passages where Husserl clearly discusses a perceptual noema. Would not a perceptual noema be concrete? Being perception of this concrete object the noema would also be concrete, yet retain its unreal nature. Irreality alone is not the defining quality for being abstract. Marina Banchetti in her “Føllesdal on the Notion of the Noema” (1993) takes the position that there are noemata of both concrete and abstract affairs. She writes: “The noema of perception, where concrete objects are the objects of perception, is itself ‘concrete.’ But, the noema of abstract [conceptual] thought is ‘abstract.’”¹⁶ Following Husserl, we will take conceptuality as a synonym for being abstract. She goes on to point out that a purely abstract, Fregean account of the noema is insufficient for a complete understanding of the noema. This point contributes to the position arguing for the compatibility of Gurwitschean and Føllesdalian accounts of the noema in below and will be accentuated with subsection. below in which it will be seen that Gurwitsch does have a conceptual account of the noema as well.

Thesis 9: Noemata are not perceived through our senses.

This thesis continues the logic set in Thesis 8; if noemata are strictly abstract or conceptual and cannot be adumbrational, they certainly cannot be perceived through our senses, which can only perceive perspectively. Føllesdal draws more support from an unpublished manuscript of Husserl's, *Noema und Sinn*, where Husserl distinguishes perception of the object from reflection on the noema of that object demonstrating the manner in which noemata themselves are not perceptual objects. When perceiving a

¹⁵ Drummond 1992: 90. It is important to point out that Drummond does not think that the noema is an *abstractum* in the sense that Føllesdal does and accordingly criticizes him for having an incomplete and inadequate understanding on this point. See Drummond 1990: chapters 4-8.

¹⁶ Banchetti 1993: 85.

house, the house is perceived, not the house noema. When the house is remembered, one is certainly not perceiving the noema.

Without acknowledging the difficulties involved, Solomon naively wants to say that perceptual noemata are themselves perceived: “In perception, the noema itself must be perceived.”¹⁷ This matter is not so straightforward as he would want; we have to remember that the noema is not an object in the same way that a tree or a chair are objects. If one does not keep in mind that one is doing phenomenology, this can be a tricky and difficult point. We have to remember how we become aware of noemata in the first place, which is by phenomenological reflection. Noemata are clearly not mundane objects of the everyday lifeworld; they are not perceivable like flowers, rocks, and houses are perceivable. Føllesdal admits this with his Thesis 10, which states as much and Gurwitsch would agree.

Following from the distinction of abstract and concrete that we made above we can take the position also that noemata can be both linguistic and perceptual. J.N. Mohanty supports this distinction: “A noema, in phenomenology, is the *sense* of and act itself—no matter whether the act is linguistic (as in speech acts) or nonlinguistic (as in perception).”¹⁸ Following from this, he makes his own thesis: “All noemata are *not* conceptual. The noema of an act of perception is not so.” When reflecting on acts of perception, the object simpliciter is bracketed and one rather comes to know the noema of that perception through which the object is intended. When reflecting on the memory of that perception, the noema is one of remembrance. Thus, the perceptual noema itself is not perceived through one’s senses directly, but through a reflection on that sensory experience; the perceptual noema is an unreal entity that is not available for real perception. Mohanty explains: “It is not [a sensible percept], for whereas the percept is a *sensible* particular, the perceptual noema is thematized only as a result of a reduction; it is grasped by reflection on perception, not by the perceptual act itself.”¹⁹ It is in this way that Gurwitsch understands the perceptual noema as a percept or, we could say, the perceived as such. There is more to perception than what is available through sensory information; we do not just sense dumb sense data, but rather perception is informed by

¹⁷ Solomon 1977: 176.

¹⁸ Mohanty 1981: 711.

¹⁹ Mohanty 1981: 711.

or, better, interwoven with conceptual and eidetic aspects. I do not just see simple colors associated together in certain ways, but I see objects of certain types and in certain contexts. We will discuss this more below. What is absolutely important is that the perceptual noema can be raised to the level of conceptual meaning through a process of conceptualization or idealization, or the eidetic and conceptual aspects or perception can be analyzed from our perceptions, both of which are absolutely key aspect of Husserlian philosophy in general especially concerning the connection of the sciences, formal and material, to matters of perception.

Regarding the So-called Compatibility of Føllesdal's and Gurwitsch's Positions Concerning the Noema

In the great debate concerning the noema, a few commentators take what they assume is the final position, which is that Føllesdal and Gurwitsch are, in a sense, both correct; Føllesdal is correct concerning abstract conceptual matters, while Gurwitsch is correct when it comes to matters of perception. We could also negatively state that Føllesdal's position leaves out matters of perception, while Gurwitsch's leaves out conceptual matters. The thinking thus goes that because conceptual and perceptual affairs are different and distinct, these two positions can be married without conflict; Føllesdal's investigations clarify abstract, conceptual matters and Gurwitsch's clarify concrete perceptual matters.

The position that Føllesdal's and Gurwitsch's interpretations of the noema are compatible was first made by Robert Solomon in 1977. He seems to think seriously about a reconciliation when he writes: "Føllesdal must be augmented by Gurwitsch, who has given us an exemplary development and characterization of the thetic components of perception. But, accordingly, *there is no serious disagreement between the interpretations*. It is merely a difference in emphasis and interest, not a difference in the supposed nature of the noema."²⁰ It is this point that has become the last say in the debate, but we not only strive to show that Gurwitsch has something to say about perceptual matters, but conceptual as well. Yes, Føllesdal and Gurwitsch are compatible,

²⁰ Solomon 1977: 177.

but it is Gurwitsch that actually has the more robust theory covering more phenomenological ground than Føllesdal's limited conception of the noema.

Conceptualization of the Perceptual Noema

The stalemate of the compatibility of Gurwitsch's and Føllesdal's positions in which the debate would seem to be reconciled by giving Gurwitsch the nod for matters of perception and Føllesdal the nod for conceptual affairs is not the last move of this debate. For many, the significance of this so-called compatibility is that Føllesdal's interpretation of the noema concerns matters of philosophical importance, while Gurwitsch was simply insignificantly stating the obvious. We will take Solomon as the figure-head of this point of view who builds this argument in the following way: "Gurwitsch's 'orthodox' interpretation has established its orthodoxy by virtue of the fact that it is a *manageable interpretation* of Husserl."²¹ He describes Gurwitsch's position as "one-sided" and "inadequate" and goes on to summarize it: "In [Gurwitsch's] view, the noema is simply the object viewed from a perspective and *Sinn* refers us only to the easily storable fact that an act has transnoetic reference."²² It is Solomon's claim that Gurwitsch's account is thereby limiting in philosophically interesting and important ways: "this conception leaves no room for an adequate analysis of the noemata of abstract judgments, arithmetical propositions, and the like."²³ In another place he writes: "Gurwitsch's 'perspective' analysis is far too narrow to do justice to Husserl's interest in judgments and expression."²⁴ Solomon's impetuous conclusion, then, is, thus, the following: "*Nothing would be lost if we deleted these [perceptual] concepts from Husserl's theory altogether. 'Intentionality' alone would be sufficient.*"²⁵

It is clear Solomon's reading, like that of many others, is a surgical excision of Gurwitsch's perceptual noema without considering the greater context and depth of his thought and totally neglecting the important role of the perceptual noema for Husserlian phenomenology in general and even Føllesdal's conceptual affairs. We will see that not only does Gurwitsch consider conceptual aspects of the perceptual noema via the general

²¹ Solomon 1977: 171. My emphasis.

²² Solomon 1977: 171.

²³ Solomon 1977: 171.

²⁴ Solomon 1977: 173.

²⁵ Solomon 1977: 171. My emphasis.

operation of thematization, but he goes on to discuss its possible conceptualization and formalization as well. In this he demonstrates the genealogy of these affairs from matters of perception and the importance of grounding the predicative in prepredicative experience, that is, in perception. Ultimately, he shows us how math, logic, and science can be and are grounded in this way. The writings in which Gurwitsch discusses these themes should have been in plain sight for anyone commenting on Gurwitsch's interpretation of the noema. In his *Field of Consciousness* he discusses “Problems of Ideation” following a long discussion of the perceptual noema.²⁶ In his *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* there are four consecutive essays listed after his essay “Contribution to the Phenomenological Theory of Perception”²⁷—a very important essay concerning the perceptual noema—which include “Philosophical Presuppositions of Logic,”²⁸ “Gelb-Goldstein’s Concept of ‘Concrete’ and ‘Categorial’ Attitude and the Phenomenology of Ideation,”²⁹ “On a Perceptual Root of Abstraction,”³⁰ and “On the Conceptual Consciousness.”³¹ Their collection and location in the volume was certainly planned by Gurwitsch who arranged the volume himself. Then in his *Phenomenology and the Theory of Science*, which was posthumously published, after “Husserl's Theory of the Intentionality of Consciousness in Historical Perspective,”³² which was much quoted by those sharing Solomon’s position, is to be found another important essay concerning conceptualization “Perceptual Coherence as the Foundation of the Judgment of Predication.”³³ In addition, there is the posthumously published “On Thematization,”³⁴ which clearly demonstrates how perceptual matters may be either conceptualized or idealized and what the importance of such is. One would think that these titles would have stirred some interest at least in these commentators. Gurwitsch not only has good discussions pertaining to such conceptual matters, but is keenly interested in the connection and relationship of conceptual affairs to that of perception, which is an

²⁶ The English translation was published in 1964. See Part Three, Section 7.

²⁷ Gurwitsch 1959.

²⁸ Gurwitsch 1951.

²⁹ Gurwitsch 1949.

³⁰ Gurwitsch 1953.

³¹ Gurwitsch 1959b.

³² Gurwitsch 1967.

³³ Gurwitsch 1973.

³⁴ Gurwitsch 1974.

absolutely crucial matter for Husserlian phenomenology for matters of logic and science in general.

Between percepts and concepts stands an important constitutive order; it is from perception that the concepts of these sciences are constituted. We should point out that for Gurwitsch a concept is roughly synonymous with *eidōs* or categorial object. Through a noematic analysis of perception in which it becomes explicit that there is a conceptual moment implicit in perception. It is then through the method of what Gurwitsch calls “disengaging thematization” of such moments that conceptual noemata are constituted. It is in this way that the perceptual noema is conceptualized. This is important because all of the sciences, formal, human, and natural, depend upon it for their very possibility.

Let us first discuss the relationship of the perceptual to the conceptual, which is one of coexistence. In our normal everyday lives,³⁵ we live in a world that is co-populated with both individual perceptual objects and concepts, but this is not apparent from this standpoint. Gurwitsch describes this situation very well:

In pre-predicative [perceptual experience], we do not find ourselves, as a rule, before beings and objects wholly unique and particularized down to the last details. Except for a few beings which have for us the significance of unexchangeable individuals, in the vast majority of cases we perceive *objects and beings of a certain kind*. ... In other words, pre-predicative perceptual consciousness is indeed pervaded by the general and typical; but *the latter is enveloped in the perceived objects, inherent in them, incorporated in them*.³⁶

A world populated only by absolute perceptual particulars without the contribution of concepts or the ability to conceptualize and abstract would certainly be a strange and difficult to imagine world. It is this world that we catch glimpses of in certain of Gelb and Goldstein’s patients for which the categorial attitude has been disabled through some kind of brain injury. Gurwitsch's point is that the everyday lifeworld is replete with an interpenetration of percepts and concepts: “In the life of the normal person, the ‘categorial’ and ‘concrete’ attitudes ... fecundate each other, and it is from this integration into the total process of experience that either derives its full meaning and

³⁵ It is important to point this out because Gurwitsch refers to the work of Adhemar Gelb and Kurt Goldstein concerning brain-injured people that are utterly incapable of conceptual consciousness. See Gurwitsch 1949.

³⁶ Gurwitsch 1959b: 394. The first emphasis is Gurwitsch's and the second is mine.

significance.”³⁷ We perceive individual objects, but he points out that such inherently include or incorporate concepts, we could even say “contain” to continue the terminology we began above. He writes: “A thing perceived is not merely a sum of sensuous qualities given to the senses at the moment of perception, such as, for example, a certain color, form, size, some auditory datum, tactile or thermal properties, etc. Nor is the perceived thing a sum of such actually given qualities to which are added remembered qualities of a similar kind.”³⁸ I perceive this book in front of me not only in terms of the mere sensations that I experience, but conceptually as well. In addition to having a certain idea of how the book would look from other perspectives or when opened, I also understand that it is an object of a certain type. Gurwitsch even goes so far as to claim that there is something like a Piagetian “scheme,” which Piaget considers the sensory-motor equivalent of a concept, included in the perception that Gurwitsch believes has gestalt properties.³⁹ We perceive objects as assimilated to certain schemes, generally as “something to be handled in a certain way.” I turn my attention to objects in the room and perceive them in the same way with their typicality gleefully apparent. I think of conversations with others in which sometimes we refer only to conceptual affairs; I discuss the matter of my car getting a flat tire and for the person I am talking to who was neither present for these events nor has ever seen my car, none of these things is strictly perceptual, though are understood not as particular objects, but conceptually. Now we have to explain how it is possible to reach the conceptual from the perceptual, i.e., to account for the constitution of the conceptual.

Our perception is inhabited by or implicates concepts and this becomes apparent with noematic analysis through a thematization of the conceptual moments. Specifically, the kind of thematization that Gurwitsch has in mind is what he descriptively names “disengaging thematization.”⁴⁰ While thematization is simply the replacement of one theme with another, disengaging thematization reveals an aspect of the object that is one’s theme that previously was unapparent and makes this into a new theme. It is the

³⁷ Gurwitsch 1949: 378.

³⁸ Gurwitsch 1953: 387. In his 1957: 233, he writes: “Hence we must venture beyond that given in genuine sense-experience, since as we have shown, the object as it appears through a given act of perception cannot be accounted for in terms of only that given in genuine sense-experience.”

³⁹ Gurwitsch 1953: 388.

⁴⁰ Gurwitsch 1974: 37.

rendering explicit of “noetic as well as noematic components, constituents, moments ... which are involved and effective in a given theme and the conscious activity related to it, but which, prior to their being disengaged and disclosed, are effective only in an implicit fashion.”⁴¹ In this case, we have to account for the transition from the prepredicative to the predicative.

In our everyday experience, we encounter objects of a certain kind or sort. For instance, when I encounter bicycles, I encounter them as being of a certain type or other. For instance, there is the commuter bicycle designed to get to and fro in fair comfort, there are mountain bikes designed to handle rugged off-road travel, road racing bikes, track bikes, trial bikes, BMX bikes, cruisers, etc. I perceive buildings as houses, factories, stores, restaurants, etc. I perceive cars as sedans, wagons, hatchbacks, limousines, compacts, etc. “Typicality pervades and permeates whatever presents itself in perceptual encounter.”⁴² But we have to point out that in our prepredicative encounter of the object that it is as yet undifferentiated. It is at this point that we can analyze our experiences by disengaging thematization and render types as our thematic object. We disengage these types from their original object and in turn single them out as our new object of experience. It is through this activity that is constituted an “empirical concept,” which is an ideal object in the sense that its existence is different from that of a real material entity. We are now dealing with “categorial objects.” Empirical concepts are disengaged from the types that we began with in the sense that the types remain embedded in perceived thing that is understood in terms of it. This activity of disengaging thematization is a species of “singling out” and has been identified by Gurwitsch as a radical modification of theme in which its relationship to other constituents of the object are disregarded and to which its relations are severed; it is no longer maintains the functional significance it once had. The disengaged empirical concept no longer belongs to the perceptual order of things in the sense that they are neither seen nor sensed in strict sense of these terms. The noetic activity that we have been engaged in thus far is a kind of ideation.

⁴¹ Gurwitsch 1974: 37.

⁴² Gurwitsch 1974: 43. See also Husserl 1948: §8.

We can go beyond certain constraints of the empirical realm of these concepts through the method of imaginative free variation of regional essences in order to discern the eidetic laws and necessities of that region. Such conceptualizing abstraction can from there move in either the direction of generalization, which is important for the natural sciences, or formalization, which is essential for the formal sciences such as logic and mathematics. The distinction between the two is whether the conceptualization refers to a specific material region or not. In the case of generalizing abstraction one comes to notions that refer to a certain qualitative content that is its material region. The notions arrived at by formalizing abstraction do not refer to any specific material region, which gives them the freedom to be universally applied to any and all such regions whatever their qualitative content, thus p's and q's can stand in. In this way one can understand the manner in which both Husserl and Gurwitsch believe that the sciences, formal and natural, can and for their foundation need to be traced back to their perceptual origins. Gurwitsch describes this connection in the following way:

Husserl has laid down the program for a phenomenological theory of logic (understood in a very broad sense) and the sciences, especially physics, and has taken decisive steps toward its implementation. According to this program, these disciplines and their phenomenological origin or genesis of sense have to be traced back to perceptual consciousness. The guiding idea is that perceptual consciousness contains the germs or the roots of whatever entities are the subject matter of study in the mentioned disciplines and that those entities are brought to full development and given their definitive shape by means of specific mental operations.⁴³

He further discusses the reverse case of disengaging abstraction and idealization as a kind of “regressive analysis” leading from the ideal to the perceptual again.⁴⁴ Gurwitsch emphasizes the importance of conceptualization for philosophy and all of the sciences, formal, natural, and human, in the following way: “the theory of conceptualization, generalization, formalization, and algebraization is one of the most urgent tasks with which phenomenological research finds itself confronted at its present stage of development.”⁴⁵ This project of Gurwitsch's is in line with the thinking of Husserl, especially of the later writings in the *Formal and Transcendental Logic, Experience and*

⁴³ Gurwitsch 1973: 241.

⁴⁴ See Gurwitsch 1951: 351–53.

⁴⁵ Gurwitsch 1972: 142–43. Gurwitsch's emphasis.

Judgment, and the Crisis of European Sciences. Gurwitsch puts it quite simply: “Given the gradation of levels of formalization it becomes apparent that in the final analysis every formal term has reference, either directly or through intermediary referrals, to individual objects which pertain to the world of experience.”⁴⁶

Concluding Remarks

We can, thus, conclude that Gurwitsch was not only interested in the affairs of the perceptual noema, but that he had a rich understanding of the connection of perception to conceptual affairs as well and the importance of this connection for the formal and material sciences. In a sense this connection is the lifeblood for these sciences, it is their grounding in the lifeworld. Without this connection the dangers of a crisis for these sciences loom in that they become abstract to the point of losing subjectivity and human understanding. We can also point out some interesting avenues in which this research may be taken. One is that early in Gurwitsch's career he had admonished the introduction of gestalt theory to affairs beyond the level of perception, but later would retract this prohibition, though he never makes explicit how gestalt theory would appear at eidetic levels. This discussion of the perceptual noema and its implicit conceptual moments perhaps can give us an opportunity to take gestalt theory to the next level. Another direction in which this research can be taken is an interdisciplinary one. It is possible to show the manner in which philosophy is and can be interconnected with the other disciplines and the value of grounding in this relationship.

⁴⁶ Gurwitsch 1951: 353.