

Contributions to Phenomenology 106

Federica Buongiorno
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Phenomenology in Italy

Authors, Schools and Traditions

 Springer

Contributions to Phenomenology

In Cooperation with The Center for Advanced Research in
Phenomenology

Volume 106

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ISSN 0923-9545

ISSN 2215-1915 (electronic)

Contributions to Phenomenology

ISBN 978-3-030-25396-7

ISBN 978-3-030-25397-4 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25397-4>

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The Experimental Phenomenology of Paolo Bozzi



Roberta Lanfredini

*Don't look for anything behind the phenomena: they themselves
are the theory
(Paolo Bozzi)*

Abstract Paolo Bozzi, a pupil of Gaetano Kanizsa and Cesare Musatti, is the most important exponent of Italian experimental phenomenology. His theoretical perspective, influenced by the *Gestaltpsychologie*, Mach's empiriocriticism, Peirce and James' pragmatism and Wittgenstein's philosophy, is based on two fundamental theses. The first is related to the non-privative character of the perception: the phenomenon (*Erscheinung*) enjoys a full effectuality which can in no way be reduced, as a long philosophical tradition would have it, to an obscure and deceptive dimension. The second is related to the non-conceptual character of perception, according to which perception as such has its own structure and dignity. The reference framework is that of empirical realism, shared by Husserl's phenomenology and the Kantian tradition, enriched by a sophisticated ontology of the observable able to mediate theoretical instance and experimental apparatus.

1 Introduction

Paolo Bozzi (Gorizia 1930–Bolzano 2003), a pupil of Gaetano Kanizsa and Cesare Musatti, contributed to developing the tradition of *Gestaltpsychologie* (in particular, that of Alexius Meinong's Graz school and, in Italy, of Vittorio Benussi) and the middle-European phenomenological tradition. These two traditions are interpreted by Paolo Bozzi in an experimental direction, from a standpoint inspired by the so-called Berlin school, that of Wolfgang Köhler and Max Wertheimer, but also by Ernst Mach, Charles Peirce, Carl Stumpf, William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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F. Buongiorno et al. (eds.), *Phenomenology in Italy*, Contributions
to Phenomenology 106, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25397-4_9

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It was Bozzi himself who called his perspective an “experimental phenomenology.” The experiment, which according to Piana can seem like an apparatus within the broader apparatus of science, “a sort of trick inside a bigger trick,”¹ is presented instead as a way of establishing a contact with experience, so as to try it out and put it to the test. In this sense, even simple observing is also experimentation in that it is a “gaze which rummages through the real the way a botanist does,” an interrogation in which there is present that “immediate joy in seeing and understanding” of which Einstein spoke with reference to Mach. “In experimentation,” Piana goes on, “there is invention and imagination, planning and construction, wonder and passion; above all, there is the observational tension by means of which we must sometimes take note of what we have always seen and of which we have never taken note.” In this sense, all of Bozzi’s work can be read as a constant clarification of what it means to perceive and observe something.

2 The “Fabric” of Observation

Hence we may at once dismiss an easily foreseen but futile objection, “that by our admitting the ideality of space and of time the whole sensible world would be transformed into pure appearance.” After all philosophical insight into the nature of sensuous cognition was spoiled by making the sensibility merely a confused mode of representation, according to which we still know things as they are, but without being able to reduce everything in this our representation to a clear consciousness (...). Inasmuch as I leave to things as we obtain them by the senses their actuality and only limit our sensuous intuition of these things to this—that it represents in no respect, not even in the pure intuitions of space and of time, anything more than mere appearance of those things, but never their constitution in themselves.²

This well-known passage from Kant’s *Prolegomena* contains two theses which later run together into the phenomenology of Husserl and can be seen as the theoretical starting point for Paolo Bozzi’s experimental research.³

We will denominate the first thesis that of the non-privative character of the phenomenon. According to this thesis, the notion of phenomenon cannot be intended by that of seeming (*Schein*), understood as an illusory appearance; something which, simply by being an appearance, sets itself against reality. The phenomenon (*Erscheinung*), or manifestation, enjoys a full effectuality and positivity which can

¹Piana, Giovanni. 1990. Contribution to the book *Fisica ingenua* by Paolo Bozzi (available at: <http://www.filosofia.unimi.it/piana/>). Accessed 20 March 2018.

²Kant, Immanuel. 1977. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. 31–33.

³It was, moreover, Bozzi who acknowledged that Kant’s work is “punctuated by the finest phenomenological analyses.” Bozzi, Paolo. 1991. Dal noumeno cervello ai fenomeni o dai fenomeni al noumeno cervello. In: *Il problema mente-corpo*. Proceedings of the Conference organised for the awarding of the Cortina Prize–Ulisse 1991, 39–57. Padua, 19–20 April 1991; also in: Bozzi, Paolo. 2007. *Un mondo sotto osservazione. Scritti sul realismo*. Milan: Mimesis.

in no way be reduced, as a long philosophical tradition would have it, to an obscure and deceptive dimension, a mere shadow of the effective reality of things. We will call the second thesis that of the non-conceptual character of perception. It is the responsibility of experience to take note of what is manifested exactly as it is manifested, and it is misleading to read the relationship between phenomenon and concept, or being appearing and thinking, in terms of a difference between obscurity and clarity. This relationship can in fact be correctly interpreted as a difference of function and destination, rather than of origin. This means acknowledging that perception as such has its own structure and dignity; and also, as common-sense ontology and physics have attempted to show many years after Kant,⁴ its own stability, autonomy, and non-emendability.⁵ These characteristics allow perception to become the object of a discipline in its own right, one which we will be able to denominate naïve physics or, if we prefer, phenomenological physics.

The autonomy of observation with respect to the conceptual dimension in Bozzi arises from a profound contrast with the empirio-criticism of Ernst Mach, one of the writers who most influenced him.

The strong nucleus of Mach's thought presupposes two components in the constitution of facts: a) the observables in the pure state (elements, sensations) and b) the conceptual integrations which are applied to such immediately given material. In the traditional paradigm of scientific discourse, the two components are always co-present and inseparable (the "facts," among which are the previously mentioned bodies—bodies as physics thinks of them). In psychological and epistemological discourse, the two components are kept distinct, and theoretical attention is directed with particular care to the first of these, which—as such, and freed from conceptual integrations—becomes the object of scientific analysis.⁶

Mach's idea, according to which experience grows through progressive adaptation of ideas to facts,⁷ was taken on by Bozzi without reservation. Indeed, for Bozzi as for Mach (and Husserl), there exist *pure observables* (colors, sounds, spaces, times) which are evident, stable, independent, not conditioned by theoretical instances, categories, conceptual schemes, or antecedent hypotheses. In dealing with the conceptual integration exercised on sensation, Bozzi takes Mach as his starting point, speaking of an adaptation of representations to facts without ever taking the inverse case into consideration: that is, "a transformation of the sensations or elements or structures observable under the action of more or less well organized

⁴See also, for example: Smith, Barry. 1995. The structures of the common-sense world. *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 58:290–317 and in relation to: Bozzi, Paolo. 1990. *Fisica Ingenua. Studi di psicologia della percezione*. Milan: Garzanti; Bozzi, Paolo. 1993. *Experimenta in visu. Ricerche sulla percezione*. Milan: Guerini.

⁵Ferraris, Maurizio. 2012. *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*. Rome-Bari: Laterza.

⁶Bozzi, Paolo. 1990. Mach e i fatti. *Nuova civiltà delle macchine* VIII. 1 (29):49–54; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 31.

⁷Mach, Ernst. 2017. *Conoscenza ed errore*. Milan: Mimesis. On this point see also the "Introduction" by P. Parrini, in particular 29ff.

representations or conceptual integrations.”⁸ Therefore, theory does not act on the observables. The reason resides in the fact that, contrary to what is maintained by theorists of the theory-laden character of observation, the plane of the observable is not amorphous and undifferentiated but has an autonomous and quite stable structure.

No one can be deceived about the blue of the sky, even when the mind experiences physicalist perplexities: this total, homogeneously colored field has (it might almost be said) an unparalleled dependability.⁹

3 Stability and Sufficient Differentiation

The purity of the datum should not be confused with simplicity. Bozzi’s conception of the observable datum reflects, in all likelihood unconsciously, the conception in Husserl’s phenomenology which is the eidetic reduction applied to “sensible material.” The proposition which Husserl develops on the basis of his critique of the empiricist conception of abstraction is in fact founded on the observation that in order to speak of a datum, or of a similarity between data, it is necessary to presuppose an underlying ideating process.¹⁰ For Husserl, what is phenomenologically relevant is not the fact, understood as *hic et nunc*, but the datum understood as the field of an individual’s eidetic variation. Without being subjected to eidetic reduction, phenomenologically understood as unification of the possibility of its variations, the datum could not be discriminated, and hence understood. Bozzi’s experimental stance fully endorses the Husserlian hypothesis by which the phenomenon is marked by boundaries which Husserl calls eidetic and which become “operationally fixable:” that is, determinable. Determination, which corresponds to the phenomenological idea of *eidetic boundary* (that is, the boundary which, once passed, allows a sensible note or quality to be transformed into a distinct note or quality), is here attributable to the *differential threshold*.

The meaning of the term “sensation” oscillates between two poles: on one side the “visible minimum,” on the other, the homogeneous sample. A sensation of red can be understood as a small point of that color among the other minuscule and variously colored points (...) and a sample, in the sense in which we speak of a “sample of fabric;” a portion of simple sensations which can be explored as a homogeneous surface. The “stimulus” of psychophysics is thought of as a continuum of operationally fixable values (intensity of a light, purity of a

⁸ Bozzi, Mach e i fatti, 35.

⁹ Bozzi, Paolo. 1992. Alexius Meinong: attualità ed errori fecondi di una distinzione fra ordine inferiore e ordine superiore degli oggetti. *Rivista di Psicologia* LXXVII (1):35–48; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 126.

¹⁰ It is important, nevertheless, to emphasize that this does not mean adhering either to a *metaphysical hypostasis* of essence, as a result of which the species enjoys a real existence outside of thought, or to a *psychological hypostasis* of essence, as a result of which the species enjoys a real existence in thought. For a distancing from both these positions, see Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (in particular the *Second Investigation*).

color, pitch of a sound, force of a pressure) and placed in a one-to-one relationship with its sensation which does not vary with its variation within a certain range of values, but appears to undergo a transformation as soon as it operationally passes beyond that range.¹¹

The experimental translation of eidetic reduction consists therefore in the conjunction of the *principle of stability* and that of *sufficient differentiation*. These are the principles which allow us to say that “a color, seen under certain defined variations of lighting, does not vary perceptually”¹² or to identify “a musical texture rich in timbres but perceptually homogeneous”¹³ as a “fourth harmonic.” Stability and sufficient differentiation guarantee the identity and homogeneity of a perception, exactly as the eidetic reduction does in Husserl.

Beyond the differential thresholds are located the absolute thresholds, understood as the extreme boundary of sensibility, “beyond which sensory experience no longer takes place, but only possibilities of the subtlest physical measurement, and where the subliminal psychic perhaps exists.”¹⁴ In this case too, Bozzi proposes an experimental translation of Husserl’s regional ontology: the absolute threshold can in fact be seen as corresponding to what is extra-regional; that is, to what is no longer immediately perceptible. The difference between differential and absolute thresholds permits a phenomenological reading of the relationship between the perceived (or intuited) thing and the thing as understood by physics. For Bozzi, as for Mach and Husserl, the physical corresponds to that which is not perceptual, insofar as it is devoid of intuitive content. The thing of physics is a borderline case, not a hidden cause, inaccessible in itself, of that which is perceived. Once again it is Husserl who provides, although not explicitly, the theoretical frame for Bozzi’s experimental practice.

Indeed, for Husserl the identity of the object depends on the motivational link between original appearance and successive appearances: in this sense, that which is at present given, motivates the further appearances of the thing, from those that are sensible (the unseen side of the thing) to those that are more abstract and conceptual, sanctioning a synthesis or integration among the appearances.

*Experienceableness never means a mere logical possibility, but rather a possibility motivated in the concatenations of experience. The concatenation itself is, through and through, one of “motivation,” always taking into itself new motivations and recasting those already formed.*¹⁵

¹¹ Bozzi, *Mach e i fatti*, 28–29.

¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵ Husserl, Edmund. 1983. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (trans: Kersten, F.). The Hague: M. Nijhoff. 106–107. In this context, it therefore seems legitimate to counterpoise the genetic-motivational nexus against the causal nexus: “in a countersensical manner one thus connects by *causality* things pertaining to the senses and physical things as determined by physics.” *Ibid.*, 122.

4 The Stimulus Error

The sharp critique which Bozzi directs at psychophysics precisely retraces the Husserlian distinction between causality and motivation. The principal thesis of psychophysics, the so-called constancy hypothesis, by which “sensations are a function of stimuli, and therefore no variation of the stimuli means no variation of the sensation; equal sensations for equal stimuli”¹⁶ has, as it is easy to intuit, innumerable potential falsifiers, a “population of monsters” which need to be kept at bay by resorting to *ad hoc* hypotheses. We need only think of all those cases of “illusion” in which the properties of the perceived are not in the least attributable to the properties of the stimuli. The Gestaltists’ downright obsession with the so-called “stimulus error”¹⁷ stands as a warning, or more precisely as a command: not to confuse our knowledge of the physical conditions of sensory experience with sensory experience itself. This command is manifested, in Bozzi, in a general reluctance towards the notion of stimulus.

To this should be added a certain irritation with the word “stimulus,” which today I encounter at every turn, associated as it is with medical advice like “try to eat as soon as you feel the stimulus,” or “this linctus suppresses the stimuli of the cough, not the causes:” or with certain ponderous pedagogical injunctions such as “he needs to be stimulated to do something, to write, etc.,” and this irritation becomes intolerance when a colleague (...) says something like, “when the cat sees the stimuli” or “the subject, as soon as he sees the stimulus.”¹⁸

In this connection, Bozzi’s drastic solution is to believe (contrary to many Gestaltists, including Kanizsa)¹⁹ that “the stimulus error (...) consists entirely in the fact of believing that stimuli exist.”²⁰

The deflationary stance towards the traditional notion of a stimulus and the hypothesis of a science of the observables founded on autonomous epistemological bases has two theoretical consequences, one critical and the other constructive.

Let’s begin with the first. It resides in the obsolescence, starting with the “stimulus error” itself, of any theoretical hypothesis which operates an inference indebted to manifestation, or to the observable, to what would be its hidden cause. Hence, Bozzi’s experimental phenomenology has in its sights both the causal theories of perception and the hypothesis, of a reductionist—or rather, eliminativist—stamp, which considers the cerebral mechanisms an unavoidable condition, or basis for attribution, of

¹⁶ Bozzi, *Mach e i fatti*, 29.

¹⁷ See also the following observation by Köhler reported by Bozzi: “In psychology we have often been warned against the stimulus error, i.e. against the danger of confusing our knowledge about the physical conditions of sensory experience with the experience as such”. Bozzi, Paolo. 1998. *Considerazioni eccentriche sull’errore dello stimolo*. *Giornale italiano di psicologia* XXV:239–252; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 177.

¹⁸ Bozzi, *Considerazioni eccentriche sull’errore dello stimolo*, 177–178.

¹⁹ Who, as Bozzi himself recalled, urged us against committing the stimulus error less in the sense of believing that stimuli do not exist, than in the sense of not confusing “perceptual aspects” with “aspects of the perceptual situation.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

effective perception. In the face of these theories, which manifest an obvious physicalist prejudice, Bozzi's position is easily identifiable as a form of radical anti-reductionism. The example suggested by Bozzi is that of the S-D schema. This is a sketch which ideally places on the left all that belongs in the sphere of the physical, arising from stimuli (electromagnetic waves, sound waves, etc.), and on the right the world of phenomena. This general schema "takes its origin from the experience of seeing something in front of us and not from the experience of looking at something ourselves."²¹ And yet, as Wittgenstein asserts, "nothing in the visual field permits us to conclude that it is seen by an eye."²² Furthermore—and this is the main objection which Bozzi has to any causal theory of perception (and to the constancy hypothesis)—"we could, entirely theoretically and without contradiction, imagine two observers endowed with perceptual modes identical in every respect (...), but nevertheless endowed with different underlying mechanisms."²³ The result is the negation of the view of the brain as noumenon, an underlying entity which would determine the world of the phenomena in a necessary way, reducing them to the status of mere epiphenomena, or even illusions on a level with phlogiston and witches.²⁴

Which is to be then? Either the brain is treated as one phenomenon among others, in which case the causal theory falls into crisis; or the brain is considered as a noumenon, but in this case the intelligibility of the relationship between it and the phenomena turns out to be indecipherable.

For Bozzi (as for any phenomenologist) the brain is simply one phenomenon among others. Not a noumenon-brain, therefore, but a phenomenon-brain.

It is obvious that this complicated piece of material which we call the brain is one phenomenon *among others*: that is—leaving aside the finer details—it is a piece of observable material like the mechanism of a clock, the fruit of a plant, or any physical system, whether simple or complex (...). But this brain, visible at all the levels of magnification made possible by the instruments available to man, is silent on the subject of its relationship to the phenomena. The observation of the brain phenomenon does not lead to that world of phenomenon which we propose to consider as the product of its activity: the hypothesized relationship between these and it remains absolutely in the indeterminate and unattainable.²⁵

The only certain datum, against the causal theory of perception and in favour of phenomenological description, is the priority and unavoidability "of the immediately observable qualitative event, in flesh and blood."²⁶ However thin the interface becomes between the qualia and what Kant in his *Opus Postumum* calls the

²¹ Ibid.

²² For Bozzi's reception of Wittgenstein, see Bozzi, Paolo. 1998. *Vedere come. Commenti ai §§1–29 delle "Osservazioni sulla Filosofia della psicologia" di Wittgenstein*. Milan: Guerini.

²³ Ibid. p. 147. This argument is very like that of the inversion of the qualia proposed by Ned Block in: Block, Ned. 1978. Troubles with Functionalism. In: *Perception and Cognition. Issues in the Foundations of Psychology*, ed. C. Savage, 261–325. Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press.

²⁴ On this point, see Churchland, Paul M. 1981. Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes. *The Journal of Philosophy* 78(2):67–90 and Churchland, Paul M. 1985. Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of Brain States. *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1):8–28.

²⁵ Bozzi, Dal noumeno cervello aifenomeni o dai fenomeni al noumeno cervello, 148.

²⁶ Ibid., 150.

“*Erscheinung einer Erscheinung*,” understood as an ideal transcription of the phenomena in the light of the conceptual unification of experience (for example, a field of force in physics), in passing from one to the other there will always remain that “pause of silence”²⁷ between what is directly and immediately manifest and what is manifest, but only indirectly.

The problem of the “qualia,” or perhaps the pseudo-problem of the “qualia” and of their unimaginable genesis, nevertheless signals that something is not working. And the fault lies in the fact that one does not start from there to arrive here, but starts from here to arrive there.²⁸

For Bozzi, the question of how the color red can be generated by an electrochemical process, or sound by a processing of information in the neuronal circuits is an authentic “false step,”²⁹ because of the simple fact that there will never be a way to scrutinize the “generating” itself, to fill that “pause of silence” which interposes between the immediate and the mediated. The true step—that is, the methodologically correct step—is not projecting the quantitative into the qualitative, but the reverse, “since in reality every move in our game is always a projection of the qualitative into the quantitative.”³⁰

However, we have also hinted at a constructive consequence of the Bozzian theory of the relationship between observable and stimulus. This consists in an operationist interpretation of the notion of stimulus: that is, its configuring as an “operationally reconstructed fact.”³¹ This is an idea which Bozzi picks up explicitly from Bridgman and it allows him to make a further step in the explanation of that motivational nexus which, according to Husserl, subsists between what is given in an immediate and direct way and what is given only in a mediated and indirect way: that is, between phenomenon and the thing of physics. The reading which Bozzi gives of motivation is operational in type, and it is this reading which allows us to tone down the deflationist thesis in relation to the stimulus, and to speak not just of a “stimulus error” but of an “error of the logical image of a stimulus,”³² to indicate that perhaps it is not so much the abolition of the notion of a stimulus that must be effected, as its correct interpretation.

As an example, take the famous Müller-Lyer illusion. The two segments, which offer themselves to perception as unequivocally different in length, turn out to be equal when measured.

We cannot open a door in the phenomenal to see things as they really are, and we cannot surprise things in the act of making themselves illusory in comparison to some hypothetical state.³³

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

³² Bozzi, *Considerazioni eccentriche sull'errore dello stimolo*, 181.

³³ *Ibid.*, 186.

The only way to circumvent the problem is to interpret such a “hypothetical real state” as a totality of operations (in this case, measurements³⁴) on observables. This choice, according to which “the stimulus is a bad synopsis of good operations,”³⁵ has the merit of maintaining the analysis within the realm of the observable, avoiding the hypostasis of mysterious entities located beyond that realm: “during the operation of measuring, we have never left the field of the directly perceived observables.”³⁶ At the same time, it has the merit of give a legitimate meaning to notions such as “stimulus,” “unobservable,” “illusion,” “apparent” which, if they had not been interpreted in this way would remain simple “*flatus vocis*.”³⁷

5 Empirical Realism

On a more general level, the critique which Bozzi directs against the notion of stimulus raises the question of objectivism and realism. The possible objections to the stimulus error still do not in fact succeed in solving one of the main problems raised by the concept of observable, and that is its *privacy*. Historically, the traditional distinction between observation and protocol (inter-observable, measurable, describable conduct) has been proposed to shore up the problem of the private character of observation, in an attempt to offer an objective counter-figure to what philosophers of mind call the thesis of privileged access, or the “first person” character of observation, summed up in the motto “no one can verify another person’s verification.”³⁸ In this connection, let us consider two characters, we’ll call them Rino and Quirino, and imagine them discussing “their way of perceiving red on a blue background. Or a tonic chord after a diminished seventh.”³⁹

The solipsist knows for certain that whatever they discuss, Rino will never verify the way a pair of colors or a group of sounds appear to Quirino, nor will Quirino verify the respective sensations felt by Rino, since by definition there is no private perceptual mode available to one or to the other.⁴⁰

Against the thesis of the private character of observation (or of privileged access), which gives rise to most of the problems relating to the *qualia*, Bozzi proposes on the one hand the thesis of the non-ineffable, public, independent character from conceptualization (including the key thesis expressed by the protocols) of the given,

³⁴ Bozzi opportunely adds, “neglecting any problem concerning the non-contraction or expansion of the ruler during transportation.” *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Bozzi, Paolo. 1990. Su alcune aporie e alcuni paralogismi che stanno alla base delle correnti teorie psicologiche della percezione. In: *Proceedings of the Conference: Nuovi problemi della logica e della filosofia della scienza*, 49–54. Viareggio, 8–13 January 1990; also in: *Un modo sotto osservazione*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

and on the other hand the denial of the thesis of the objective and neutral character of the protocols. When we assert “I see a circle” we are speaking of something independent of assertions like “a place where all points are equidistant from a given point.” We have said that observation has a “solidity” and a structure, and understanding, and hence language, are founded on this, not vice versa. Perceptual events are not “ornaments solipsistically distributed through the private worlds of the observer and the experimenter at work.”⁴¹ On the contrary, “it is the micro-structure of the observed objects which takes possession of the word;”⁴² it is the observables which “attach” themselves to their labels. On the other hand, the protocols of the experimental subjects are by no means irrevocable. *Contra* Wittgenstein,

the perceptual world, with its ascertainable peculiarities and its sample book of discernible, and in some ways indicable, components is a common, radically intersubjective domain, and constitutes a fixed point external to its observers; whereas the linguistic universes in which the observers move can at the start be very “private,” idiosyncratic.⁴³

This proposition by Bozzi is an empirical (and not metaphysical⁴⁴) realism which aims to overcome two types of *a priori*:⁴⁵ the first is an intellectualistic model, according to which it is the higher subjective activities (memory, judgement, attention, etc.) which constitute the concrete observational situation; the second is a physiological model, according to which the activity of the organism’s nervous system must be given priority over what is observable. For Bozzi, both stances, which distance themselves from what is manifest, must be “de-activated.”

Speaking of subjectivity in reference to observation can mean two things, both contained in the Berkeleyan expression “*Esse est percipi*.” According to the first and stronger of the two, the *esse* is contained in the *percipi*. According to the second, weaker interpretation, the *esse* is dependant on the *percipi*: objects and their properties essentially refer back to perceptions, but are not contained in them. Now the first of the two interpretations is absolutely refuted by Bozzi (“red,” he claims, “is not inside my mind”⁴⁶), just as it had been explicitly refuted by Husserl, referring specifically to Berkeley.⁴⁷ However, for Bozzi as for Husserl, refuting the first thesis does not mean also refuting the second. In fact, “the object must be viewed as it is, and it is as it seems. In phenomenological observation there is a perfect coincidence between ‘*esse*’ and ‘*percipi*’.”⁴⁸

⁴¹ Bozzi, Paolo. 1991. Sulle descrizioni degli eventi percettivi sotto osservazione. *Intersezioni* XI (1):75–85; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 51.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁴ Bozzi often uses the term “external” (see *ibid.*, 58), but the same ambiguity that he himself attributes to Mach could be attributed to this usage.

⁴⁵ The expression “*a priori*” is used explicitly by Bozzi, for example in: Bozzi, Paolo. 1991. Considerazioni inattuali fra io e non io. *Rivista di psicologia* LXXVI (1/2):19–33; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 68.

⁴⁶ Bozzi, Paolo. 1991. Parlare di ciò che si vede. *Versus. Quaderni di studi semantici* 59/60:107–119; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 87.

⁴⁷ In this connection, see Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book*.

⁴⁸ Bozzi, Paolo. 1991. Sull’epistemologia che sta alla base della teoria dei colori di Goethe. *Rivista*

Objectivity-subjectivity (the imminent transcendence of which Husserl speaks), though it is inevitably linked to acts of perception, will not as a result lose any of its friction. On the contrary, it has the power to impose itself, thereby satisfying the requirement of the mythical ‘thing in itself’: “the observable world is by no means an appearance” and “all things are fully objective, visibly and palpably objective, independent of the solipsistic efforts of observers and attainable by anyone who observes them.”⁴⁹

This is not subjectivism on Bozzi’s part, since the phenomena are by no means contained in acts of perception. But neither is it a metaphysical realism, since the phenomena are not independent of acts of perception. In this delicate balance between not being effectively contained (*reel*, in Husserl’s sense) and being dependent of the “*percipi*” resides the empirical realism of Bozzi. The phenomenological object therefore constitutes “a region of experience in itself,” not to be confused with the myth of the thing in itself or of a “beyond” (in this, Bozzi unreservedly adopts the Kantian position), but nevertheless without aligning himself with the myth of ineffability and privacy.

Anyone who has practiced experimental work knows very well that events subjected to the observation of subjects are public: not just the square, the triangle, the greater than or nearer than, but also natural movement, passive movement, the red of a surface and of a volume, or even the red that is more cheerful than another less charged red.⁵⁰

This objectivity is guaranteed by experience itself. For example, environmental changes or alterations in the means of perception do not condition the invariance of phenomenal properties. That is, the changes are not experienced as changes in the objects observed, but as changes in the visual field. In this sense, there is a legitimate distinction (also proposed by Gibson) between visual field (our optical point of view) and visual world. If we observe the scenery outside our window while the panes are streaked with rain, we do not usually have the impression the visible deformations produced by the water running down the panes are deformations of the things which compose the scenery. Not only this, but the field of present experience of the “external” world is phenomenologically broader than the totality of all showable things or things attainable by looking, hearing, etc., and “the space outside the environment delimited by walls is an equally directly ascertainable space.”⁵¹ Thus, “when we see a man pass behind a column, beyond the column there is not only that amount of space that is sufficient to let the man pass: there can be much more, and this is normally the case.” Similarly, “when we slip a newspaper into a coat pocket (...) no one in the world sees the paper gradually ceasing to exist as it enters the pocket: one sees the paper slipping inside, the hidden part being as real as the still visible part.”⁵²

In other words, there exists a space which Bozzi calls *amodal space*—that is, beyond the limits of the ostensible—which is an integrating and essential part of the phenomenal world. This is a broader space than that occupied by the bodies that are

di *Psicologia* LXXVI (1/2):81–89; also in: *Un mondo sotto osservazione*, 103.

⁴⁹ Bozzi, *Parlare di ciò che si vede*, 90.

⁵⁰ Bozzi, *Sulle descrizioni di eventi percettivi sotto osservazione*, 47.

⁵¹ Bozzi, *Considerazioni inattuali sul rapporto fra io e non io*, 78.

⁵² *Ibid.*

actually seen: “beyond the door there is in reality ascertainable space.”⁵³ The proposal of an amodal space, beyond which would be located the ideal space understood as physical space, re-proposes in an experimental terminology the phenomenological distinction between actual and inactual experience. This distinction, like that between directly ascertainable and amodal space, confirms the public and “real” character (although not in a metaphysical sense) of the observable world. The objects of experience are not subjective. The distinction, *inside* experience, between visual field and visual world, like the distinction between modal and amodal space, confirms their being “presuppositions,”⁵⁴ unlike the objects of physics, which are to all intents and purposes constructions resulting from experience. In this sense, and only in this sense, “the observable world is by no means an appearance.”⁵⁵

6 Ontology of the Observable

Bozzi’s is a phenomenology of the “pure phenomenon”⁵⁶ where the term “pure” stands not for the ineffable, but for the original, independent of conceptualization and judgment. Indeed, we have seen how the notion of phenomenon implies a constant unification or synthesis of oscillations and appearances. The phenomenon is, phenomenologically, an invariant in the variations.

Conceiving of the phenomenon as invariance in the variations entails an adherence to a certain phenomenological ontology. Observable does not have a single definition. In fact, there are at least two interpretations of this notion that are compatible with the phenomenological standpoint. The first, introduced by Stumpf and Meinong and completed by Husserl, is a mereological interpretation of the observable. The second, introduced by Bergson and completed by Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, is a continuist interpretation of the observable. For the former, experience is naturally divisible into parts; for the second, it is continuous and unfragmentable. The two approaches differ in the role which the notions of fixity, invariance, and independence play within phenomenological description: in the first case these are constitutive notions; in the second they are derived notions. The first approach gives rise to a phenomenological theory which we can call that of the *mosaic*, or of the *tesserae*; the second to a theory we can call one of *force*. In the first case,

we are concerned with a world which is not at all identifiable with a flux of interconnected experiences or tied by ‘ubiquitous relations’, to use an expression by James, and still less with a world fluctuating through continuous gradients which never separate one occurrence from another, or are ever contracted into definite boundaries between one thing and another, as is the case in Bergson’s metaphysics—which means that this indistinct flow is sliced up into ‘facts’ according to need, and to the demands of pure pragmatism.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁵ Bozzi, *Parlare di ciò che si vede*, 90.

⁵⁶ Bozzi, *Sull’epistemologia che sta alla base della teoria dei colori di Goethe*, 108.

⁵⁷ Bozzi, *Parlare di ciò che si vede*, 91.

For Bozzi, as for Husserl and for Stumpf before him, it is independence that is primary. The world, at the moment in which it is observed and even more in the moment in which it is spoken about, is inventable, and its base material is not fluid but composed of “little blocks of world variously assembled.”⁵⁸ In contrast to the “romantic conception of reality” proposed by Bergson, according to which “perception would be made of fluctuating and elastic things, endowed with indefinable outlines and mutable in their contents,”⁵⁹ the realm of the immediate, or of the observable, has statically conceived laws.⁶⁰ “Therefore: the independence of the systems which occupy the world’s space in their varying ways is primitive, and the non-independence of numerous observables making part of a certain system is derived.”⁶¹

For Bozzi, the world is made of tesserae, and the tesserae can compose themselves into a mosaic.

There are the tesserae, and there is the completed mosaic. There are the rules to be discovered for empirical and observational procedures of various types, which in a definite way connect the completed mosaic to the visible elements into which it can be decomposed. In some way, there is a relationship of “production” which starts with the elements and converges on the finished product. It seems obvious that the seeds and the tesserae are the “*inferiora*” and the organizations of elements are the “*superiora*” formed of relations which connect the “*inferiora*” to each other in various ways.⁶²

The superseding of Meinong consists in the fact that the *inferiora* (the tesserae) can mutate at the moment in which they begin to be part of a system of relations: that is, of *superiora* (the mosaic). This allows Bozzi to supersede phenomenalist reductionism, precisely in the name of those perceptological laws which point out the *operational error*⁶³ which consists in reducing complex structures to the operations employed by the ingredients which compose them. Such complex structures are in fact “irreducible to the material points in play and their positional relationships.”⁶⁴

For Bozzi, there is a further important distinction between what he calls “tractable” objects and “punctual” objects. The former introduce the time factor, more specifically “time in presence:” i.e. what Bergson would denominate real duration. Punctual objects, by contrast “fall in their entirety in the time of presence, and with all their characteristics, even when they are little more extended than the ‘tick’ produced by a pencil tapping a table top;”⁶⁵ therefore they can be conceived of as fractions of the period of time into which they are inserted.

But tractable objects are also, and above all, important because they reconsider, albeit in an indirect way, that ontology of the continuum which Bozzi, following

⁵⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ In this sense, for Bozzi, psychophysics and Bergson’s perspective constitute two opposite and equally erroneous poles: “Exactly as classical physics neglects the phenomenology of immediate experience of the external world in order to put discontinuity (...) even where there is none, so Bergson neglects it in order to put continuity even where divisions are present.” Ibid., 207.

⁶¹ Bozzi, Alexius Meinong, 117.

⁶² Ibid., 119.

⁶³ Ibid., 124.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 128.

Meinong and Stumpf, aims to refute radically. In the case of tractable objects, like a melody for example, we in fact experience the “uncomfortable circumstance”⁶⁶ in which the *superiora* are already present, even when the *inferiora* have not made their appearance. Just as a melody will not consist of the appearance of a note and the memory of the notes which preceded it, but of the fact that “the five or six notes which fill my musical listening at that moment are all equally present, and it is impossible to say which of them is more present than the others.”⁶⁷ At the same time, it is undeniable that in a melody the notes come one after the other and “the meaning of the melody consists precisely in this: they are necessarily successive; that is, not co-present.”⁶⁸

Bozzi’s gloomy conclusion is that “we must accept this paradox, or rather swallow this contradiction.”⁶⁹ Besides being an experimental phenomenologist, Bozzi was also a violinist. As a musician, he could not deny the ontological paradox which resides in every melody: that of making elements live together when they present themselves as simultaneously co-present and successive. In reality, the very definition of structure as something not reducible to the schema of *inferiora-superiora*,⁷⁰ together with ascertaining that in some cases the *superiora* are already present when the *inferiora* still are not, as in melody, introduces the dimension of duration into Bozzi’s ontology of the observable. This very duration which is the principal object of Bergson’s continuist analysis.

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⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.