

## **Abstract**

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The subject matter of this thesis is the theoretical foundations and philosophical implications of Gestalt theory. Gestalt theory provides an important yet largely neglected alternative perspective on mental processes – a strong alternative to representational theories of mind. The first half of the thesis presents some important components of the historical context of Gestalt theory: the empiricist tradition, the empiricist conception of psychological explanation, notions of psychophysical parallelism as well as the concept of sensation, and criticism made by Gestalt psychologists and others against the empiricist notion of sensation. The discussion leads up to the notion of Gestalt in an attempt to capture the intuitions behind different analyses of the so-called Gestalt phenomena. The Gestalt psychologists' analysis of perception provides a contrast to the rationalist intuitions that form the basis for contemporary representational theories of mind.

The second half of the thesis unfolds the basic tenets of Gestalt theory: the intentions behind notions like the laws of Prägnanz and figure-ground, the notion of psychophysical isomorphism both as a heuristic in psychological research and as a metaphysical stance, the alternative conception of cognition found in Gestalt theory and concepts like insight, requiredness and behavioral environment. The impact Gestalt theory made on the works of Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein is also sketched. The thesis suggests that Gestalt theory is not only an important historical precursor to more sophisticated contemporary approaches, but that Gestalt theory actually can provide a clarifying framework for the new sub-symbolic paradigm of cognitive science.

**Key words:** artificial neural networks, attention, behavioral environment, consciousness, description, dynamical systems, ego-object structure, empiricism, explanation, figure-ground, functional dependence, Gestalt quality, Gestalt structure, Gestalt theory, insight, introspection. phenomenology, Prägnanz, psychophysical isomorphism, psychophysical parallelism, rationalism, requiredness