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September 10, 1979

Dear Dr. Metelli,

First of all, congratulations on becoming a grandfather! I hope that your son's family lives near enough to you so that you can see something of your granddaughter, especially when she gets a little older and can begin to become an individual. And I was sorry to hear of your aunt's fall, but glad that she is recovering. It must have ~~been~~ made great demands on your time. Now I hope you have some time for yourself again.

I have been wanting for a long time to write to you, too, and my delay was partly for the same reason as yours. I had three papers for APA, just over, and I spent the whole summer working on them. It was, of course, not enough time. One paper was of no importance, and the other two need a good deal more work. Like you, I was not satisfied with them, but I suppose we both did all right.

I was very much interested in your report on the conference on perception, especially since I have been concerned with something similar during the summer. I wish the issues of information theory vs. Gestalt theory had really been addressed. I would say that Gestalt theory not only challenges the information theorists, but provides them with their problems. I was concerned mainly with cognitive psychology, where what they call organization theory has nothing, so far as I can see, (except for the problems) in common with organization in Gestalt theory. It is just a computer model of human memory, learning, and thinking. They do not see the issue of mechanism vs. dynamics, which seems to me to be crucial. One amusing aspect of the literature I read is that the organization theorists, around 1970, thought they were engaged in a revolution against associationism, but now use associationism more and more, even speak of the compatibility of the two approaches. They are right, I think, insofar as both are machine theories.

APA was celebrating what it considers the centennial of scientific psychology, so a recurrent theme at the meetings was: What have we learned ~~XX~~ in the past century? The best speakers (e.g. Gibson) said we have learned essentially nothing; the worst ones (e.g. Kimble and Catania, both prominent behaviorists working in the field of human learning) believe we have learned the old behaviorist stuff.

At a symposium at which ~~Sigmund Koch~~ Howard Kendler and I spoke, Sigmund Koch (do you know him? he is one of the best people in psychology, naturally a critic of the discipline) congratulated Kendler on a brilliant defense of an indefensible cause. Kendler began to attack Gestalt psychology for the vagueness of its concepts, and I said I didn't know any concepts as vague as stimulus and response. The discussion was just

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beginning to get animated when the session had to end.

I find it impressive that, even though Gestalt psychologists are an endangered species in America, I ~~am~~ am still given opportunities to speak about it and can even publish. Of course, nobody pays any attention to it, but it speaks well for American tolerance.

You mentioned a couple of other possible Gestalt psychologists. I know Leeper and know of Luchins, though I have never met him. Leeper is very nice and has doubtless, at one time or another, come under the influence of Gestalt psychology, particularly Lewin; but there are some issues he does not understand at all. I once had an exchange of very long letters with him, and I cannot remember details, but my impression is that we could not understand each other. Once I heard him say at a meeting: I never understood why Köhler is so antagonistic to learning. I indicated some of the contributions of Köhler and other Gestalt psychologists to learning, but I don't believe he ever understood the kind of learning theories Gestalt psychologists reject. Luchins has been making a career of Wertheimer. I have read various of his articles as well as his three-volume monograph on Wertheimer's seminars revisited, the seminars on thinking. (There are other endless volumes on others of the seminars.) The worst of it was that he makes Wertheimer into a rather dull fellow, and Luchins himself more and more gets the center of the stage in the monograph. I am keeping out of ~~his~~ ~~my~~ Luchins's way, but I would hate to think that the fate of Gestalt psychology in America lies in his hands.

We are alarmingly close to a new term, and I had better stop this already too long letter and begin to get ready for another year of teaching.

With warm greetings,

Cordially,

*Mary Henle*

I hope you succeed in convincing Kanizsa that the informational point of view will not do in thinking any more than in perception. Computers are too dumb to be taken as models of human thinking. While it is a rather long-lived fad, like all our mistakes in American psychology, even some of its advocates are beginning to recognize the limitations of computers (without abandoning them).