

# Introduction with a Fictional Scenario

Though order never can be willed  
But is the state of the fulfilled,  
For will but wills its opposite  
And not the whole in which they fit,  
The symmetry disorders reach  
When both are equal each to each,  
Yet in intention all are one,  
Intending that their wills be done  
Within a peace where all desires  
Find each in each what each requires,  
A true *Gestalt* where indiscrete  
Perceptions and extensions meet.

- W.H. Auden, excerpt from *New Year Letter* (1940)<sup>1</sup>

## In the Midst of Arnheim's 'Daily Paradise'

How to discriminate and yet create a bond between parts and their whole or between a whole and its parts is one of the oldest philosophical questions to meditate on. As an axiom to which I have never found a serious contradiction, we can state that everything is and can be a part of something, and everything is and can be a whole for something. There is nothing, except for some unprovable assumptions like indivisible physical atoms or an all-encompassing God, that cannot serve as an example for this axiom. Given that the philosophical question of parts and wholes is applicable to every domain of being, because part-whole structures are inherent among others to the (in)organic nature and the contents of experience, the syntax and semantics of language and the concepts of abstract thinking, the patterns of metaphysical speculations and the (dis)orders of everyday emotions, it is first of all an ontological question. It concerns all aspects of reality, which means that it is omnipresent and thus concerns reality itself. Parts and wholes, including their possible relations, are a fundamental part of reality, whereby reality should not be understood as a whole which is not and cannot itself be a part of a more comprehensive whole, e.g. of nothingness or becoming. Otherwise, the axiom would indeed be contradicted and another one would have to be defended, whereas it is rather something else that I want to defend as a thesis in this project.

I want to argue that ontology alone, i.e. the discipline that investigates the existence and the proper nature of entities taken *as* the entities they *are* and not as something different (for example as objects for scientific experiments), is insufficient to determine a fundamental aspect

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Auden [1991: 200].

of the relationship between parts and wholes. The fundamental aspect of parts and wholes for which pure ontology is insufficient concerns their meaningful interplay, their dynamic ‘in-between’, their switching from one to another – what I will henceforth call, for lack of a better technical term, ‘part-whole oscillation’ (PWO). We will see that PWO has an ontological nature, which means that it is something special and important which is irreducible to and incomparable with anything else. But in order to determine this ontological nature, it is impossible to stay within the rationalistic limitations of formal thinking and a priori argumentation that ontology often consists in. I will demonstrate instead that what is needed to approach the reality of a dynamic and meaningful interplay between parts and their whole is an interdisciplinary opening of the discipline of ontology, or, more precisely, the inclusion of methods to study empirically perceptible phenomena in the conclusions that are drawn with ontological pretensions. Only then can we discover the omnipresence of a phenomenon that might be able to distinguish and yet account for the bond between parts and the whole, since, as we will see in the course of this project, in a purely formal, (onto-)logical reflection that does not take into consideration what is perceptually given, we cannot arrive at a complete picture of reality in its fabric of interconnected part-whole structures, which are often less conceivable than they are simply experienceable.

Although part-whole relations are everywhere, we do not always reflect on them. Most of the time, their ontological omnipresence is something taken for granted, something we automatically deal with and experience without surprise. For this obvious reason, before the sleeves are rolled up and the argumentative work of this project begun, it is important to gain some *awareness* of the philosophical question that is at stake. Without awareness as an unprejudiced and intuitive anticipation of the singular and often personal nature of a philosophical question, any confrontation with argumentative pros and cons is like being thrown in at the deep end. By providing the possibility of becoming aware of the not always unproblematic omnipresence of part-whole relations, I also want to touch upon my own personal commitment, i.e. my ‘motivation’ for reflecting on this topic, and in so doing, delineate the parameters which I think are the most important for an approach towards the determination of PWO’s ontological nature. Therefore, with the invitation to the reader with advanced philosophical knowledge about part-whole relations to jump directly to the roadmap below, let me begin by illustrating the significance of the subject matter by means of a fictional scenario. Compared to a random list of examples, a single comprehensive scenario can create a more efficient presentation of the topic we should become aware of. The scenario I would like to present is recounted in a passage of a text written by the art theorist and Gestalt psychologist Rudolf Arnheim. In his life, he wrote one single novel, which, unlike his influential theoretical writings, still remains untranslated and therefore, under the politically loaded label of German exile literature, almost unnoticed. The novel in question was written between 1936 and 1940. It is entitled *A Topsy-Turvy World. A Fantasy Novel*<sup>2</sup> and tells the story of a nameless young man who crosses two ontological borders, one at the very beginning and one at the very end of the book. He crosses these borders unintentionally, the first one as a result of inattentiveness and falling asleep, and the second one while holding the hand of a girl, thus out of love and the longing for communion.

The world in which he finds himself at the outset, after napping during a train ride, is like a

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<sup>2</sup>The original German title reads: *Eine verkehrte Welt. Phantastischer Roman*. All translations from this book are my own.

*selva oscura* in which nothing makes sense and everything goes wrong: Children rule over their parents and teachers; the poor are dictating to the rich; the arising daylight indicates bedtime; the social order is rigid and mutual control is a virtue; disharmony and aggressiveness among the people are common place, and even material objects like furniture and houses are, as formless and soulless entities, subject to human demands. “Skew and contorted the contours were running, they bulged preposterously or narrowed into concaves, nothing adjacent harmonized, no single entity complied with a major form.”<sup>3</sup> [Arnheim 1997: 270] It is a dystopian, hectic world in which laws are arbitrary and opaque, bodily pleasure is found in disgust or abstinence, privacy is despised and information is dispersed in order to confuse and intimidate. Nothing makes sense, nothing works out well, faces are covered with masks and the concept of peace is nothing but a dishonest ideal. Although the protagonist has to live through this chaotic world in which no single member shows any capability of forming a stable community with other members or things, he falls in love with a young woman who is a native of this land. Finally, after one of the story’s many fights between persons and families, she takes his hand and brings him to a land where this corrosive dismemberment ceases to disturb the positive lawfulness of the social and natural world.

This is the second ontological transition, and it is where my philosophical interest has been triggered each time that I read the last chapter called ‘Daily Paradise’ (*Tagesparadies*). To me it seems that what happens in this chapter is ontologically significant to such an extent that it will serve to mark the parameters from which the present project receives its bearings. It is ontologically significant, because it exemplifies the possibility of an ontological dimension of Gestalt-thinking, i.e. of the general idea that there can be a qualitative difference between a whole and the sum of its parts, such that the ‘supra-summative’ whole is primary to and determines the nature of its parts. In this way of thinking, the whole is then the Gestalt, and although it is composed of parts, it is characterized by a kind of homogeneity in the sense of order and conciseness (*Prägnanz*) that the parts do not have, neither in isolation nor as a sum. I always wondered, however, if the idea of a Gestalt does not make more sense if it is not just the whole that is of interest, but rather the perceptible and dynamic, *interconnecting difference* between whole and parts. Wherein could the nature of this difference, of this interplay between allocatable parts and an allocatable whole within one and the same Gestalt-entity, possibly lie? Unsatisfactorily, as we will see, most research in the Gestalt tradition has focused on the qualities a whole possesses whereas its parts do not, or vice versa, which accounts for the distinguishability of parts and whole. Also, most contemporary research on Gestalts stays within the empirical and cognitive realm, without drawing more general consequences of a philosophical scope. But granted that there are indeed wholes that are qualitatively different from the sum of their parts, then what might be the ontology of this interconnecting difference itself? With ontology, I mean less its *ontological status*, i.e. the loci and conditions of its existence, since it would take many scientists from different disciplines to answer this question, but rather the equally relevant *ontological nature*: What is this interconnecting difference, what is PWO in itself?

This question matters, because if parts and whole are both qualitatively discernible *and* at the same time make for one single Gestalt-entity, then there must be an interface or hinge between

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<sup>3</sup>“Schief und gewunden liefen die Konturen, bauchten sich sinnlos aus oder verengten sich zu Höhlungen, nicht [sic!] Benachbartes stimmte zusammen, und kein Einzelnes fügte sich in eine große Form.”

the parts and the whole, a point  $x$  where both are able to be switched into each other and where, in a synthetic direction, the extra qualities of the whole appear or, in an analytic direction, they vanish and part-qualities might be glimpsed at instead. I will argue that it is not enough to just observe which kind of qualities a whole has and its parts do not, or vice versa, and conclude from there that a whole is somehow different and can be labelled as a ‘Gestalt’. We need to disclose the particular nature of this difference between the parts and the whole, this difference that both unifies and separates them. At this early stage, let me only hypothesize that the interplay of parts and wholes is not only an important and often overlooked aspect of Gestalt-thinking and other disciplines concerned with part-whole relations (in particular mereology), but that it could also be seen as a general, irreducible and creative feature of reality itself. In other words, my hypothesis is that a determination of PWO’s ontological nature can help to develop a more complete ontological framework that integrates this category of reality as one constitutive element among others. I will not develop such a framework here, because it would also have to deal with the ontological status of PWO. My sole interest lies in the nature of this category itself, not in its place within a system or a Theory of Everything. This category, to sketch it again in a preliminary way, is the energetic momentum between the parts and the whole. It is the *oscillation* preventing a Gestalt-entity being either reducible to its functional parts, or its being an integrative whole. It should be a dynamic and a creative category that allows for the existence of whole-qualities or part-qualities without thereby superseding the singularity of the other. Of course, all of this is vague now and will become clearer and better defined once I discuss relevant part-whole theories and distill from them the characteristics of PWO in the subsequent chapters.

For now, allow me to further create an awareness for this topic by encompassing this hypothesis with the help of the events that occur in Arnheim’s novel. They make me assume that Arnheim, who himself was a prominent figure of the psychological and aesthetic side of Gestalt-thinking, must have shared the assumption that what he elsewhere calls “the patterns of forces that underlie our existence” [Arnheim 2004: 315] are dynamic relations with their very own ontological nature. The first event in the story in which the ontological dimension of Gestalt-thinking is exemplified takes place just after trespassing over the border of this paradisiac reality. At this moment, the very first thing the protagonist becomes aware of is a tree, standing on the side of the road. Initially, he takes it to be a work of art, because its forms appear to be regular and perfected. While looking at it, he hears the voice of his girl: “‘Here, the arbitrariness ends’, she said, ‘and the realm of the law begins. [...] Out here, people do not rule anymore’, she said, ‘here, it is the law that rules.’”<sup>4</sup> [Arnheim 1997: 271] Still under the spell of the overall disorder they are coming from, the protagonist asks, “‘But who can effectuate the law, if not humans?’”<sup>5</sup> [id.], to which the girl responds, “‘The law rules in the things’ [...] ‘and out of the things it comes to us.’”<sup>6</sup> [id.] Now, the protagonist takes a closer look at the tree, and what he sees effectuates a profound experience of reality in him. In the regularity of the tree, he observes an organic diversity of parts, a depth and balance among

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<sup>4</sup>“‘Hier endet die Willkür’, sagte sie, ‘und das Reich des Gesetzes beginnt.’ [...] ‘Hier draußen herrschen keine Menschen mehr’, sagte sie, ‘hier herrscht das Gesetz.’”

<sup>5</sup>“‘Wer kann das Gesetz zur Wirkung bringen, wenn nicht Menschen?’”

<sup>6</sup>“‘Das Gesetz herrscht in den Dingen’, entgegnete, nach einem Augenblick, das Mädchen, ‘und aus den Dingen kommt es zu uns.’”

branches, birds and leaves, a manifold so unconstrained and yet quintessentially associated. Created out of this interplay of forms and life, the tree thrones almost proudly as one single, stable entity, and in return it provides each of its parts with an identity and function. It seems as if “augmentation and diminishment, acting and being, compensated for each other in a wondrous equilibrium.” [id.: 273] The contrast between this impression, as simple as it may be, and the previous disarrangement is remarkable, both for the reader and for the persons involved in the story.

The girl clarifies that marveling at this tree inaugurates the crossing of the border. After some time, while continuing their way through the borderland of this naturally organized realm of balanced cohesion, the protagonist notices more and more trees, and “the closer they converged, the more incomplete a single tree seemed in itself: The trunks were bending, the crowns were leaning heavily to the side, but looking from the one to the other and along the rows, the deviations of the single trees balanced themselves to a new unit, uniting the road. It seemed as if every tree sacrificed its completeness for not being alone; and in the wind they bowed to each other as if they engaged in dialogue.” [id.: 274]<sup>7</sup> From this experience of nature as dynamically unifying itself on, the protagonist’s every perception becomes enriched with an interplay of parts and wholes, with an attribution of subjective qualities like loneliness and communicativeness, with a richness of external meanings and values. After some time, he also experiences this interconnected reality while observing animals, farmers, friends, couples and – finally – himself as being both an integral part of every such percept as well as one of the causes of the perceived integralities. Symbolically at the very end of the story, the masks of the two lovers disappear and at the same time, the singularity of their connectedness becomes evident: that, while intrinsically connected, both are still independent parts of their love and therefore cannot kiss each other. If they were to kiss, they would fuse and consequently lose their parthood. The wholeness they form together would cease to exist, because it would lack the parts it requires to do so. Enlightened by this insight, the protagonist states, “Never again do I want to go back to the other world.” The girl looks at him. “‘To the other world?’ she asks, ‘To mine – or to yours?’” “‘I don’t know’”, the protagonist answers confused and sorrowful, “‘I was only speaking generally’”.<sup>8</sup> [id.: 289] At this point, the story ends, and the reader may wonder how their own world relates to the events and experiences described in the story.

With this scenario in mind, knowing that it comes from a literary text, above all one that is classified as a ‘fantasy novel’ by the author himself, it is indeed justified to doubt whether we can extract any truth from it for our own world, for the ‘real’ one, so to speak. The protagonist may not want to go back to his world, but are we, as philosophers and readers, allowed to verify his experiences by identifying them with experiences and structures we are actually confronted with in what we call our own reality?

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<sup>7</sup>“[...] je näher sie einander rückten, um so unvollkommener schien der einzelne in sich: die Stämme bogen sich, die Kronen neigten sich übergewichtig zur Seite, aber schaute man vom einen zum anderen und die Reihen entlang, so glichen sich die Abweichungen der einzelnen Bäume zu einer neuen, die Straße zusammenschließenden Einheit aus. Es schien, als habe jeder Baum von seiner Vollkommenheit geopfert, um nicht allein zu sein; und im Winde verneigten sie sich gegeneinander wie im Gespräch.”

<sup>8</sup>“‘Ich möchte nie wieder in die andere Welt zurück’, sagte ich. Das Mädchen sah mich an. ‘In die andere Welt?’ fragte sie: ‘In meine - oder in deine?’ ‘Ich weiß nicht’, antwortete ich verwirrt und betrübt, ‘ich sprach ganz im allgemeinen.’”



It would be far from any intention of the present thesis to ignore the work of philosophers who elaborate and discuss such questions about the capability of literature for bearing propositional truths. J. Stolnitz, for example, confronts artistic truths with other kinds of propositional truths and concludes that “[a]rtistic truths are, preponderantly, distinctly banal. Compared to science, above all, but also to history, religion, and garden variety knowing, artistic truth is a sport, stunted, hardly to be compared.” [Stolnitz 1992, 200] P. Lamarque [2007] states that at a thematic level of a literary text (and less at the level of concrete contents, like the ones in Arnheim’s novel depicted above), there are ‘candidates’ for propositional truths in literature. However, he stresses the point that these candidates should be regarded as relevant only for the internal structure of the fictional text and not as propositional truth claims about the external world. J. Gibson [2003] holds the position that literary texts neither tend to argue in favor of a certain proposition they proclaim, nor are they (in accordance with Lamarque) able to overcome a thematic self-referentiality in order to generate knowledge about the real world. Therefore, the function of literary texts as bearers of worldly knowledge can be regarded as defective. To avoid literature falling prey to a sceptical point of view à la Stolnitz, however, Gibson thinks that it serves to acknowledge what we already know. According to him, literature can flesh out, bring to life, critically implement, make us experience and concretize the factual domain of knowledge we adopt via science, philosophy, and everyday experience.<sup>9</sup> However, can we count an experience of unity in diversity, or of diversity in unity, such as described by Arnheim in his chapter ‘Daily Paradise’, among the factual domain of knowledge? Is it already part of our so-called ontological inventory before we read about it? Or is it just a kind of truth whose validity merely ranges over the world of the story and cannot be carried into the world we as readers live in? In short, what can we learn from this scenario?

At least from a commonsensical and purely descriptive point of view, it seems legitimate to assert that many a time we experience the world around us in coherent patterns, that is to say, in discernible wholes in which every part somehow contributes to the meaningfulness of the total impression. Be it in nature, while gazing at the life of a blooming tree or observing animals interacting with their environment, be it in our identification with a social group that determines our individual qualities and without which we, as individuals, would not possess and develop them, or be it in the perception of a painting whose beauty is due to its total composition in which every stroke and dot accentuate each other: Such experiences of part-whole interrelatedness are part of the everyday world we live in. At the same time, however, they tend to happen at a pre-reflective level due to the immersive nature in which we participate in them. A literary description of such an experience can be ‘true’ in the way it helps us to sharpen our awareness for situations in which reality or at least something real is experienced as unified, as a synthetic or integral unity, and as meaningful only through this act of somehow interrelating and ordering a diversity of single constituents. A literary passage like Arnheim’s, to say it in the words of C. Elgin, can help us in “[re]organizing a domain in terms of different kinds, highlighting hitherto ignored aspects of it, developing and deploying new approaches

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<sup>9</sup>In Gibson’s own words: “Literature has a unique ability to present our world to us not as a mere conceptual object but as a living world. And it is thereby able to take what is dull, wooden, or tenuous in our understanding of how our words and our concepts unite us with our world and inject it with this essential vitality of understanding, returning our knowledge to us fulfilled.” [Gibson 2003, 236] He thereby draws on S. Clavell’s [1969] distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘acknowledgment’: We cannot know anything new by literature, but we can acknowledge what we already know about our world.

to it, and setting ourselves new challenges with respect to it [...]. Then categories need to be reconfigured, new lines need to be drawn.” [Elgin 2002, 3] Art can show us which experiences matter and are therefore worth exploring scientifically and philosophically.

In sharing Elgin’s view, I will continue this introduction by carving out the categories, i.e. the main parameters of the nameless protagonist’s situation when entering the ‘Daily Paradise’. His fictional situation will substantiate what Elgin, in drawing on a logical positivists’ distinction, describes as the ‘context of discovery’, “the realm in which the free play of ideas will be drawn.” [id.: 10] Furthermore and still following Elgin, the parameters from the context of discovery, which is at the same time the pre-reflexive context of many day-to-day impressions we encounter, will be connected in order to create a map of categories that will help us in finding philosophical ‘contexts of justifications’. Their task is to evidence what has initially been vague, immersive, undefined, fictional and, as such, simply ‘a free play of ideas’. In the course of the following chapters, we will see how this map of parameters can be gradually unfolded in order to reveal the ontological nature of PWO. To begin with, in making use of this interpretative freedom the context of discovery offers, it is the following four parameters that appear to be crucial for a philosophical understanding of the literary passage depicted above and whose appropriateness we may intuitively share: *experience*, *reality*, *part-whole* and *meaning*. Let me derive each of these cardinal points from the text one by one.

## The Parameters Experience, Reality, Part-Whole and Meaning

**Experience** The protagonist enters the new land. He immediately becomes aware of a universal law that governs and organizes it. Firstly, this law is present in every sensual impression: in the visual field in which the tree, birds, more trees and later a whole farmland appear; in the audible percepts of birds’ twittering, voices and laughter; and in the cool smell of the forest that “was like a good morning dram.” [Arnheim 1997, 275] Thus, the protagonist undergoes an empirical awareness of sensory cues, all indicating some kind of natural organization. Everything he sees, hears and smells is enriched with instances of this singular law. Secondly, this natural organization appears to be like a work of art. Several of the protagonist’s empirical impressions are clearly accompanied by an aesthetic dimension: “Was it a tree? Or was it a work of art?” [id.: 271] Thirdly, he claims that he “senses”<sup>10</sup> [id.: 274] the law, which is to say that he feels how his body as a whole – and not as partitioned into faculties like vision, hearing, etc. – awakes to it. This becomes clear towards the end of the chapter, where he and his girlfriend join a group of people who are engaged in farm work. Grouped together in a human chain, they catch and throw watermelons from one to the other. In order to become a functioning part of this chain of workers, he not only has to experience the object tactilely. The situation also demands the integration of his whole body. It is only by incorporating the ‘law’, by fusing with the surrounding situation, that the melon can be successfully caught and thrown.<sup>11</sup> Fourthly,

<sup>10</sup>“‘Ich glaube’, sagte ich, das Gezwitscher der Vögel übertönend, ‘ich glaube, etwas von dem Gesetz zu spüren, das ihr meint.’”

<sup>11</sup>“‘Don’t try to command the ball – just help its swing!’ I understood; and by making it easier on myself and giving in more joyfully, by and by I felt myself to be a link of the chain: The arriving balls only touched my hands slightly and flew on almost of their own volition up to the girl [...]” – “‘Versuche nicht, der Kugel

this harvest of melons in which every co-worker participates as a functional part, uncovers a social experience of the same law that holds true of the whole ontological domain the chapter describes. Unlike in the previous events of the story, where the collapse of social bonds was looming at all times due to the incapability of the citizens to get consonant with each other, being social is now experienced as something positive and productive.

In addition, there is a fifth kind of experience, namely the experience of certain qualities that can be classified as emotive states and whose origin seems to lie both inside *and* outside of the experiencing person. The emotive states of the protagonist himself are epistemologically comprehensible. They arise from his empirical, aesthetic, embodied, and social perception of this world. The network of the tree's branches he perceives as "mysteriously pleasant" [id.: 273], the social cooperation yields a "desire" [id.: 287] to be with his girl, and looking at her for the first time without masks brings about a "deep shock" [id.: 288] in him. More surprisingly, however, the objects themselves also have such anthropomorphic qualities: trees can be lonely and communicative [id.: 274], mountains emanate "pain and joy" [id.: 281], and watermelons and plants seem to possess a palpable responsiveness to the way they are treated [id.: 285-7]. Whereas the former states could be reduced to acts of human consciousness, the latter are ascribed to exist in reality itself without having to be perceived in order to exist.<sup>12</sup> In short, there are different kinds of experience involved in the protagonist's encounter with the world he entered. Therefore, it is difficult to give a clear definition of *experience* at this point and, as with *reality*, *part-whole* and *meaning*, I prefer to classify it as a parameter that is open for finite yet varying possibilities of being bound in the context of a more embracing theory. Yet, while experience in this story may be empirical, aesthetic, embodied, social or (subjectively or objectively) emotive, it is always the same 'law' that is present and expressed in every such experience – and that was absent in all similar kinds of experience before the ontological transition in question.

**Reality** The second parameter of philosophical relevance delineates this ontological transition from one world into another. Although phenomenologically, the concept of 'world' has been strongly connected to the concept of 'experience' and in my opinion rightly so,<sup>13</sup> it seems to be nothing less than reality itself that changed in this transition. As we remember from the last paragraph, every possible kind of the protagonist's experience points towards a certain law, a fundamental structure in the new world that demarcates it from the previous world. The protagonist has to learn to experience this law, to find adequate ways of approaching it with his senses and body, with his aesthetic and social, his emotive and axiological awareness. Furthermore, as the girl remarks, the law lies in the things and from the things it reaches out.

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zu befehlen - diene nur einfach ihrem Schwung!' Ich verstand; und indem ich mir's leichter machte und vergnügter nachgab, fühlte ich mich allmählich als ein Glied der Kette: die ankommenden Kugeln berührten nur eben meine Hände und flogen wie von selbst empor zu dem Mädchen [...]" [Arnheim 1997, 287]

<sup>12</sup>This distinction is based on Tengelyi [2007: xi-xii; 15; 142-151], who calls the former kind of experience *Erlebnis* (experience reducible to acts of consciousness), the latter kind *Erfahrung* (experience irreducible to acts of consciousness). It is only in the latter in which the experiencing subject encounters something new and unexpected. Since the meanings of both words are covered by the English term 'experience', one should always be careful to clarify whenever one of the two meanings is intended.

<sup>13</sup>See Stenger [2008] for a historical survey of the notion of 'world' in pre-phenomenological and phenomenological contexts. See for the latter also Tengelyi [2007: 87-106]. David [2014] provides a very instructive philosophical and etymological history of the German word *Welt*.



Whatever this law may be – there is no explicit formulation of it to be found in the text of the story –, it has to be an ontological one, it has to be real and fundamental, because first, it exists independently of the person who experiences it, and second, it is universally present. Invariably it can be felt and detected everywhere. It is an existing law of being as such, without any urge to receive further specifications into restricted ontological subregions of this world: It exists, but *not only*, as a physical law prevailing in the watermelon; it exists, but *not only*, as a social law prevailing among the group of co-workers throwing the melon, etc.

On the one hand, I agree with Fulda [1987: 64], who stresses that the philosophical discipline of ontology has undergone an arbitrariness and uncertainty of self-definition during the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to its redeterminations by Kant and Hegel. Indeed, the term ‘ontology’ has been available as a discretionary label with which every theory dealing with something real or formal can be promoted, in particular since the “revival of a genuine interest in ontology” [Poli 2010: v] in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, I think that there is no need to speak of arbitrariness in relating the events happening in the story to philosophical research on existence and reality, thus to ontological questions like ‘what is there?’<sup>14</sup> or “what *is* the world in its totality?” [Rickert 1934: 54]. Thereby the existence of *the* world as an overarching whole can be altogether refused, of course, but still on ontological grounds.<sup>15</sup> However, although there may be no arbitrariness in subsuming the story’s description of inner-worldly structures and trans-worldly contrasts between such structures under the header of philosophical ontology, there still remains the uncertainty of how exactly, in what form, the experienced law is concretized among the different entities within the respective worlds. In other words, what is it at bottom that makes the protagonist want to remain in the world of the Daily Paradise; why does he prefer this ontological setting to the ones he experienced before?

**Part-Whole** To answer this question, an interpretation of this so-called ‘law’ is needed. We have seen that it is neither only physical, nor only social, and certainly not legally imposed. It is a universal law, a law of this world *as* a world, and as such it is to be experienced everywhere. Therefore, a simple comparison between the protagonist’s last experience before leaving the world in which he met his girl and his first experience of the world the girl takes him to should suffice to shed light on the nature of this law. Indeed, there is a remarkable difference between these two experiences in question. While lying on a hay wagon with which they escape from the former world, the protagonist throws a last glance at the houses receding in the distance.

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<sup>14</sup>See Quine [1953] for one of the most influential depictions of this question.

<sup>15</sup>This ‘no-world-view’ has recently been defended by Gabriel: “To maintain that the world does not exist is to maintain that there is no overall focus. Another way of putting this is to assert that there is no such thing as *the* meaning of it all and that this is the reason why there is no such as *it all*.” [Gabriel 2015: 194] I sympathize with Gabriel’s ontological pluralism resulting from his view in any case, and it is safe to say that in order to experience reality like the protagonist in Arnheim’s story does, an ontological contrast is needed. This contrast is constructed both by the world the protagonist originally comes from (about which we only learn of its existence, but not its concrete contents) and the fantastical world he finds himself in at the beginning of the novel. All three worlds have different laws and meanings and there is no ‘overall focus’ from which the ontological contrasts between these worlds are combined into one all-encompassing law or meaning, into one determinable set that includes the other worlds. Even in one single world, there is no general point of view on it *as* a world, but only singular experiences in which the nature of this single world (the presence or absence of the ‘law’) manifests itself. Thus, presumably in accordance with Gabriel’s view, the ontological experiences involved in the story presuppose a certain pluralism of meanings and worlds, or of ‘fields of sense’, as he calls it.

It becomes clear to him how arbitrarily and irregularly they are built, thereby expressing the “narrow stubbornness of the inhabitants, who arrange their walls according to their mood and little insight, without respecting the whole as a part of which they lived.”<sup>16</sup> [Arnheim 1997: 270] In reflecting on this discrepancy of parts and wholes, the protagonist finally feels “the discordance in their disunity, the silent war in their Gestalt [...]” [id.] Every entity appears to be self-satisfied, thereby misusing a certain contingency that enables it to not transcend itself towards something more comprehensive. Only a few moments later, however, this perception of parts and wholes as not belonging to each other is turned upside down in the first perception of the protagonist after entering the new world. When gazing at the boundary tree, the witness mark that inaugurates the law, it suddenly becomes clear wherein this law consists: in the actual necessity of correlation between part and whole. This universal and necessary law of part-whole correlation was absent before, whereas now, through this contrast, it is experienced in an even more intense fashion.

In fact, the correlation between parts and whole is both a terminological and an ontological one. The terminological explanation of this correlation is straightforward. “The words ‘whole’ and ‘part’ are normally used for correlative distinctions, so that x is said to be a whole in relation to something y which is a component or part of x in some sense or other.” [Nagel 1952: 18] Regarding the ontological level, Angelinus [1947] points out that the designation ‘part’ neither refers to the essence of an entity, because, for example, an arm as part of a body is something different than a sentence as part of a speech. Nor is ‘being a part’ merely one of an entity’s contingent qualities. How something can be a part of something else is different and can thus be predicated differently from case to case. There is no simple, univocal attribution called ‘is a part’. Instead, an entity can only be a part in relation to another entity, whereby the latter is a whole. “It seems that the being-a-part characterizes a thing not *in itself*, but only *in its relation to something else*.”<sup>17</sup> [id.: 10] This can be taken as illustrated in the story we are talking about. A branch remains a branch, a tree remains a tree, the protagonist remains himself throughout the ontological transitions taking place. What changes is their relational becoming or failing to become a part of one or another encompassing whole: of a tree, a forest, a group of melon-throwers. Consequently, the concrete relation of the different parts to the different wholes is never identical. The relationship between the *ratio partis* and the *ratio totius* can only be understood analogically, or to be precise, as an analogy of proportion: a branch as a part relates to a tree as a whole like a tree as a part relates to a forest as a whole.

This relating to a whole, however, presupposes ontologically a certain incompleteness of the part and may effectuate epistemologically – in the case of the protagonist – the becoming aware of it. It seems that a self-sufficient entity, for which Angelinus uses the scholastic term “*substantia completa*” [id.: 12], thus an entity that does not need to develop any further because it is fully *actus* without any *potentia* left to be realized, cannot find completion in a whole, because it is already complete in itself. It seems that it can merely be added to other entities of this kind. The first world can be characterized as such an aggregate of self-satisfied entities

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<sup>16</sup>“Nachdem ich erfahren hatte, wie unfriedlich und selbstsüchtig die Familien miteinander lebten, schienen mir die willkürlichen Grenzen der Behausungen den engen Eigensinn der Bewohner auszudrücken, deren jeder seine Wände so einrichtete, wie es seiner Laune und geringen Einsicht entsprach, ohne an das Ganze zu denken, als dessen Teil er lebte.”

<sup>17</sup>The original Dutch of Angelinus reads: “Het deel-zijn karakteriseert blijkbaar een ding niet *in zich*, doch alleen *in zijn betrekking tot iets anders*.” All translations from *Deel en Geheel* are my own.

without motivation for mutual completion. Everything is juxtaposed like elements added to a set. No mutual bonds are created for fear of forfeiting independence. If the set dissolves, nothing is lost. Personal autarchy finds expression in interpersonal conflicts and demonstrations of power towards inanimate objects. The ontological incompleteness of the latter is intensified by the repeated willful deformation effected by its citizens. However, the epistemological illusion the inhabitants of the first world fall prey to is that, from an ontological perspective, even entities that are self-sufficient in themselves can be seen as incomplete in relation to another. In keeping their own complete substance, they can still unite with other parts in order to form a greater whole and receive a supplementary completion, a surplus value, through this unification. “Through essentializing this new integrity together, the in themselves complete things become parts of a new unity; but then a unity of a different order, a mutual unity, a unity of relation.”<sup>18</sup> [id.: 13]

Accordingly, the ontological law we are looking for is simply the following principle: Both an ontologically incomplete *and* an ontologically complete entity can be enriched by committing their incompleteness in relation to something else. Everything and every person in the new world agrees with and therefore acts according to this universal principle. Gradually, also the protagonist learns to experience it, starting with empirical observations of the boundary tree’s interplay of parts and wholes, continuing with the integration of his body into the group of workers and resulting in the final epistemological insight that if he kissed the girl, then both of them would lose the ontological completeness of relation they receive exactly by committing themselves to be incomplete parts of the whole they create. We can also say that in principle, independence and interdependence can go hand in hand. Now we only have to find out wherein the positive nature of this additional completeness lies, regarding the fact that everything could exist self-sufficiently without it and that, even in the new world, there always remains the freedom either of not experiencing the law, like the protagonist did in the beginning, or of acting against it, like he could do if he decided to kiss his female companion.

**Meaning** The benefit of the law the story tells about seems to lie in the bonus every entity receives for engaging in interdependence. This bonus lies in a certain surplus value a respective whole distributes among its parts. Otherwise, there is no internal motivation for committing to a relational incompleteness. The only non-motivational way in which parts can form a whole would be under compulsion. This is the case in the world the couple is escaping from. Here, the parts co-exist in agglomerations such as families, houses, schools, public places and celebrations. Although the parts, that is to say the persons but not the objects they are surrounded with, are ontologically complete in that they do not need and even refuse other parts in order to exist, they are forced to co-exist for the sake of social order. This social order is necessarily rigid and denunciatory, or else there would be too many conflicts among the mutually exclusive parts. The point is, however, that this order is completely arbitrary. Neither to the reader, nor to the protagonist does it make any sense. On the one hand, there is a strict social hierarchy with visible class markers and corresponding authoritarian modes of treatment. On the other hand, at the top of this hierarchy stands a queen who commands total

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<sup>18</sup>“Doordat zij te samen die nieuwe volmaaktheid verwezenlijken, worden die op zich zelf geheel volledige dingen dan toch bestanddelen van een nieuwe eenheid; maar dan een eenheid van andere orde, een betrekkelijke eenheid, verhoudingseenheid.”

equality of the citizens: Everybody has to wear a mask, nobody has a name. This inflicted hierarchization and equalization of the parts, which causes confusion and even more conflicts, stands in sharp contrast to the effects created by the ontological law of the world the couple escapes to. Whereas the wholes in the former world are simply meaningless aggregates and even afflict the substantial completeness of its parts, the wholes of the new world provide a surplus value to each part that is expressed in the latter's internal motivation for uniting without any external enforcement to do so.

The reasons why entities unite in the new world are thus not to be found in external constraints. Nor are they reducible to the individual nature of an entity, because, as we have seen, parthood neither applies to the essence of an entity nor to one of its qualities. Two or more things may not have any qualities in common and be completely different in essence, but they can still stand in a part-relation to the same whole. To use an example from the story, the physical momentum of a watermelon and the joy of co-workers throwing that melon belong as parts to the same experiential whole or overall situation, while what they are and how they are parts differ considerably. Instead, the surplus value they receive from the whole is the meaning they co-create as parts. In other words, it seems as if 'is meaningful' can only be directly attributed to the whole as an ontological entity in its own right (albeit not as a *material* entity, which we will see in chapter 2). Indirectly, the parts as parts and not as what they are apart from being a part are also meaningful, but always in relation to and thanks to the whole. This presupposes that, from an ontological point of view, the whole must exist prior to and independent of its parts because, as Angelinus points out, "the parts are made a part in a formal sense by the whole they form. But the whole is not made a whole in a formal sense by the parts due to which it exists, but by the unity it forms with the parts; and for this unity a whole does not rely on its parts, but on the contrary, because of its parts it would rather be a diversity."<sup>19</sup> [Angelinus 1947: 42] Furthermore, a whole is always more complete than any of its parts, because being a part presupposes a relational incompleteness for which the whole as such is able to compensate, and this is only possible if it is more complete than the relationally incomplete parts. It is hard to imagine, however, that the existence of something with a higher degree of ontological completeness is composed of entities with lower degrees of completeness – although from a merely temporal point of view, both parts and whole are created simultaneously and neither can be said to have existed prior to the other.<sup>20</sup>

Let us assume the plausibility of this argumentation for the sake of our philosophical interpretation of the story. When the protagonist looks at the boundary tree, he experiences not only that there are parts belonging to the tree, but it is the very motivation of the parts to unite in order to participate in the meaningfulness of the whole that becomes evident. Taken as such, the parts remain black birds and brown branches and green leaves. In the realm of what is known as primary and secondary qualities, there are no differences. What changes through their unification is that by committing themselves to be incomplete in relation to one another and therefore to a whole, they gain an additional value that elevates them ontologically,

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<sup>19</sup>"De delen worden formeel tot deel gemaakt door het geheel, dat zij vormen. Maar het geheel wordt niet formeel tot geheel gemaakt door de delen, waaruit het bestaat, doch door de eenheid, die het daaruit vormt; en die eenheid heeft het geheel niet aan zijn delen te danken, integendeel, wegens zijn delen zou het veeleer een veelheid wezen!"

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Angelinus [1947: 42].

but without thereby creating arbitrarily inflicted hierarchies. Rather, the meaning dispersed by a respective whole consists in an experiential composition which brings the parts together regardless of whether they are persons, animals, things or even emotive and abstract entities such as feelings or thoughts. “It seemed as if every tree sacrificed its completeness for not being alone; and in the wind they bowed to each other as if they engaged in dialogue.” [Arnheim 1997: 274] Thus, at least in the ontological setting of the story, an entity’s compensation for its relational incompleteness is not a different answer to the question ‘what is it?’, but to the equally ontological questions ‘why and how is it meaningful?’. Furthermore, an answer to this latter question can be found in a “not recalculating and for each deliberating view still convincing manner [...]” [id.: 272] The ontological meaningfulness as a whole’s tertiary quality from which every part receives relational completion is thus experienceable in different ways: empirically, aesthetically, bodily, socially and emotionally.

Yet, we still do not know if and how all of this is possible. In his novel, Arnheim does not give us any theoretical justification for the ontological law and the corresponding experiences in question. There are no passages to be found in which a narrator or the protagonist switches to a ‘thematic level’ from which the parameters we have extracted or any other philosophically relevant notions are elucidated. This may complicate the transference from the events happening in the story to our own world. Having said that, for any theoretical elucidation of our own everyday experiences of reality and us as inevitably included by it, we have no choice but to begin with the concrete contents and meanings that happen to be experienced, even if they initially seem to be inordinate and too individual to be generalized. Only gradually are we able to form a philosophical clarity in which basic categories and definitions, inferences and justified beliefs can come into effect and be discussed. Likewise in the philosophical discipline of ontology, such general yet intense intuitions as a story like Arnheim’s or our own perception of the world around us proffer are worth taking into account. This is especially the case if a philosopher takes ontology to be descriptive rather than revisionary.<sup>21</sup> Whereas a revisionary ontologist attempts to reduce the universal categories of reality to a fundamental, often physical and not always intelligible principle by making use of, or at least drawing on, scientific approaches, a descriptive ontologist contents themselves with the factual given and respects intuitions at least as criteria of truth for or against ontological claims. Let us now draw a roadmap of how I will attempt, in the following chapters, to engage in descriptive ontology by transcending the discipline of pure ontology in favor of an interdisciplinary approach that starts out with a priori intuitions but then draws on what is factually given in empirical perception in order to determine the ontological nature of PWO.

## **The Roadmap**

To repeat, the aim of this project is to give a convincing characterization of the momentum in which parts switch into a whole and vice versa: their dynamic ‘in-between’, their interface or hinge. This interface or hinge can be regarded as an oscillation, because it appears as a movement that sways between parts and whole within one and the same entity, thereby

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<sup>21</sup>For an explanation of this difference see Strawson [1959: 9]: “Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure.” Cf. for a critical analysis of this difference Löffler [2001] and Kanzian [2003].



making it the kind of entity it is. I will give many examples for this movement in the following chapters. Right now, I can only hypothesize, due to its universal scope, that this oscillation is an ontological category of reality, one whose structure comes very close to what is generally understood as a ‘Gestalt’. We will see in chapters 6 and 7 that many representative figures of Gestalt-thinking take the world as it is given, as it is perceived. If the idea of PWO actually implies an ontological category, which is hypothesized here, it has to be a descriptive and not a normative one. This will become clearer in the course of this project. What I have done so far was to provide a philosophical interpretation of a fictional scenario in which the experience of parts and wholes is crucial for the orientation in the world with which we interact. My intuition is that with the ontology underlying these events and by critically considering different theories on part-whole relations, we can describe certain aspects of our own reality as well in terms of meaningful part-whole interrelations. As a first step in this descriptive approach, I have highlighted four main parameters (*experience, reality, part-whole, meaning*) which not only result from the scenario of Arnheim’s story, but which could also describe a category of the reality or realities we call our own. These four inseparable parameters will therefore lead us through the upcoming investigation.

However, to adopt such a descriptive point of view and to determine PWO’s ontological nature based on the four parameters would be insufficient for the claim that in so doing, a complete ontological framework is presented. I do not make such a claim, because one category alone does not make a complete framework. Since reality is multifarious and never shows itself to one person in all its aspects, a complete ontological theory has to consist of multiple fundamental categories and has to be developed in interdisciplinary collaboration.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the determination of PWO as an intersection of the parameters *experience, reality, part-whole* and *meaning* is only intended as an element or subframework for one or more theories that are more comprehensive and more collaborative. To that effect, I agree with L. Puntel that a complete theoretical framework cannot rely on one single theory or element alone, but is a whole, the substantiation of which goes hand in hand with the substantiation of its parts as subframeworks. “Any philosophical theoretical framework is highly complex; taken as a whole, each consists of numerous particular theoretical frameworks that are to be understood as stages in the process of the development of the complete systematic theoretical framework. At the outset, the philosophical theoretical framework is only quite globally determined, as including quite general elements (concepts, etc.). In the course of the systematic determination and concretization of the theoretical framework, new elements are added in such a way that, step by step, broader, more determinate, more powerful subframeworks emerge *as* more concrete forms of the general theoretical framework.” [Puntel 2010: 9-10] With the present project I want to compile in an argumentative and interdisciplinary fashion a subframework for a more comprehensive theoretical framework of reality, regardless of whether the latter is yet to come or already existing and open enough for the implementation of new elements. Thus, neither what will follow nor what it is intended for can be or should be a closed philosophical system, but is and should rather be, as it were, a cooperative ‘open source’ project.

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<sup>22</sup>Here I agree with Poli [2002: 661], who writes that “ontology needs the contributions of mathematicians, logicians, linguists, psychologists, social scientists and philosophers. Collaboration with philosophers is possibly the most difficult. [...] Ontology needs the achievements of all the sciences if it is to accomplish its aims.”

At present, even the sub-framework is ‘only quite globally determined’. I have derived four different parameters from a fictional scenario and decided to organize the ontological determination of PWO around them. I claimed that they bear ontological importance for how different aspects of reality are often experienced as being meaningful both for us and in themselves via a relational movement between parts and whole. Furthermore, the one-by-one derivation of the parameters made clear that not only in the story, but also in a preliminary approach of theorizing about *experience*, *reality*, *part-whole* and *meaning*, it is hard to avoid reflecting on one of these parameters without referring to another one. In any concrete setting in which something or somebody is involved as a part, the immediacy of it does not allow any isolation of either the meaning every part receives through partaking in the whole, the reality *in* and particularly *as* which the setting takes place, or the kind of experience at play. More often than not, everything happens at once and is factually given *en bloc*. In playing football, for example, we may see and hear the other players as parts of the game, feel how our body is constantly re-positioned during the ever-changing constellation of the parts on the field, and experience what it means to rely on other players in order to be or not to be successful. Without hesitation, we commit ourselves to the existence of rules, norms, techniques as well as spatial and temporal boundary conditions without which the whole situation would not function.

This is how everyday, pre-theoretical and pre-reflexive ontology occurs in many cases, namely as ‘being-in a more or less meaningful whole with distinguishable parts’, whereby we can switch from the whole (the match, the field) to the parts (the players, the ball) and back without problem. However, even a preliminary description of one of these parameters reveals their own relational incompleteness: What is experienced? What is taken to be real, to be meaningful, to be a part or a whole? Just as south has no significance without north, every parameter of the frame points beyond itself in order to be understood. If we do not take the heuristic freedom of correlating our parameters instead of isolating them, the determination of PWO remains as arbitrary as any proposition about a phenomenon that is analyzed while the rest of the world it normally relates to has been bracketed. To use Elgin’s words, we need to draw lines between our categories to develop – with Puntel – subframeworks for the overall theoretical framework we seek. Whereas with this subframework, I focus on *one* possible category of reality and determine *only* its ontological nature,<sup>23</sup> a complete and systematic theoretical framework would comprise several fundamental categories (reality consists of much more than part-whole structures) and determine not only their ontological nature, but also at least their ontological status and perhaps their normative or revisionary implications. Every serious attempt to develop such a complete theory of everything is a mammoth project and cannot succeed without interdisciplinary teamwork. I believe that as a contribution to such a future project, an unbiased and original approach to the complex of problems concerning the relations between parts and whole is fruitful. But in order to achieve this, it is necessary to interconnect and bind the parameters by turning to concrete methods and research findings of different disciplines in which their presence or absence play a significant role. To show in which lines this will be put into effect, the following roadmap indicates the different stages,

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<sup>23</sup>Towards the end of the second chapter, I will argue that for certain reasons a third limitation of the sub-framework is required, namely a concentration on the empirical-cognitive domains of language and perception. This third limitation indicates the transcendence of ontology proper towards disciplines the methods and objects of which traditionally do not seem to fall into its purview.

ordered in chapters and sections, in which this project aims to engage in the development of the subframework that comprises the ontological nature of PWO.

1. Any serious research, regardless of the scientific discipline, should reflect on its methodology and determine its method(s) before it is carried out. Therefore, I will begin with a meta-ontological chapter on the most appropriate way(s) to approach the determination of PWO's ontological nature.
  - 1.1 What are proper methods of the discipline of ontology with which to carry out the present project? By drawing both on a classical text by J. Hessen and on I. Kant's distinction between *quaestio facti* and *quaestio iuris*, I adopt two different research methods: a *deductive* method of formal ontology in the domain of a priori reasoning and an *inductive* method of experimental ontology in the domain of empirical perception.
  - 1.2 This section specifies the advantages and disadvantages of the deductive method.
  - 1.3 This section specifies the advantages and disadvantages of the inductive method and divides this method into an 'ordinary language' and an 'experimental' aspect.
  - 1.4 A brief recapitulation and summary of the chosen methods.
2. The second chapter approaches the research object with the deductive method, for which E. Husserl's formal part-whole ontology that he develops in the 3<sup>rd</sup> of his *Logical Investigations* forms an ideal source text.
  - 2.1 Before turning to Husserl, I start out with some brief remarks on how formal ontology should be understood within this project.
  - 2.2 This section then gradually introduces Husserl's part-whole ontology in several subsections, with a particular focus on the possibility of PWO.
  - 2.3 It appears, however, that the idea of PWO is contradictory and incoherent in pure (onto-)logical terms, while it might make sense in the empirical-cognitive realm towards which Husserl points, yet without going there himself.
3. In the third chapter, I reflect on two at first sight plausible lines of argumentation. On closer examination, however, both lines of argumentation would form a dead end for the further determination of the research object.
  - 3.1 Contemporary theories on mereology and composition are not suitable, because they usually presuppose a physicalistic account of independent parts and summative wholes, whereas PWO involves an experiential account of dependent parts and supra-summative wholes.
  - 3.2 Another way to continue would consist in turning to Husserl's linguistic 4<sup>th</sup> *Logical Investigation*. However, instead of considering natural languages with an empirical basis, Husserl strives towards an ideal language based on his formal ontology, in which there is no possibility for PWO.
4. The fourth chapter attempts to realize the first aspect of the inductive method by determining the ontological nature of PWO in the domain of ordinary language. To do so,

- I discuss approaches from cognitive linguistics, in particular the seminal research of M. Johnson (often co-authored with G. Lakoff) on conceptual metaphor.
- 4.1 The first section of this chapter discusses Johnson's understanding of meaning and embodiment on which his more specific linguistic analyses of conceptual metaphors rely. In particular, his denial of body/mind/world dichotomies provides a plausible ontological basis both for PWO's function in language and in empirical perception.
  - 4.2 What are conceptual metaphors and is PWO one of them? After a series of arguments, the answer to the latter question is 'no'.
5. The fifth chapter re-attempts to realize the first aspect of the inductive method by elaborating on the cognitive linguistic notions of image schemata and conceptual metonymy.
- 5.1 Although PWO is not a conceptual metaphor, Johnson's and Lakoff's postulation of image schemata includes a schema for part-whole structures which not only influences conceptual metaphors, but is also vital for conceptual metonymy.
  - 5.2 What are conceptual metonymies and could their underlying structure be constitutive for the determination of PWO's ontological nature? The answer to the latter question is 'yes'.
  - 5.3 In the course of summarizing the research results of the fourth and the fifth chapter, I suggest three determinations of PWO's ontological nature for the empirical domain of ordinary language.
6. After this first positive determination of PWO in terms of conceptual metonymy, the sixth chapter takes up the second aspect of the inductive method by turning to empirical experiments on Gestalt perception. The dominant question in this and the next chapter concerns the notion of the ontological primacy of a whole/parts over parts/a whole and their one-sided or two-sided dependency relations.
- 6.1 A brief introduction to certain aspects of Gestalt theory with a motivation for giving an interpretation of some of its ontological aspects. The discussion of conceptual metonymy made clear that we need a theory of Gestalt perception which postulates an interdependence of parts and whole.
  - 6.2 Not all reflections on Gestalts entail part-whole interdependence. On the one hand, C. von Ehrenfels defends a position according to which a whole can be said to one-sidedly depend on its atomic parts.
  - 6.3 On the other hand, I introduce major thoughts in this regard from the Berlin School of Gestalt theory and their general stance towards the one-sided dependence of parts on the whole in which they appear.
  - 6.4 How to proceed from Ehrenfels' part-primacy and from the Berlin school's whole-primacy to a model in which there is no one-sided primacy of either parts or whole?
7. In the final chapter, I focus on the development of a perceptually meaningful, interdependent and dynamic part-whole structure on the basis of contemporary literature on Gestalt perception and emergence. The four sections of this chapter result in four determinations of PWO's ontological nature for the empirical domain of perception.

- 7.1 To begin with, B. Pinna's research on perceptual meaning as 'happening' in Gestalt perception offers a promising account of perceptible part-whole structures in which there is neither an ontological primacy of the parts, nor of the whole.
- 7.2 J. Koenderink's ideas on the perceptual acts of *splitting* and *merging* within the context of *visual awareness* can be seen as an elucidation of Pinna's account of perceptual meaning.
- 7.3 What is missing in both accounts, however, is a clarification of the concept of emergence. How does a whole with supra-summative qualities emerge out of its parts? How do parts with qualities not shared by their whole emerge out of their whole? By considering recent literature on emergence, I suggest a model of emergence-demergence for the determination of PWO.
- 7.4 Such a model, which is already implied by perceptual meaning as (well as) splitting/merging, requires a hierarchy of parts and whole that is not unchanging, but reversible and flexible instead. Therefore, I turn to multistable figures, including ambiguous figure-ground phenomena, and apply their inherent flexibility of hierarchical patterns to interdependent, perceptually meaningful part-whole structures (PWO).

Finally, the 'Conclusion' consists of a (self-)critical review of the line of argumentation, with additional conjectures on the subject matter to suggest further research and point out desiderata in my argumentation. To this end, I list and derive the determinations of PWO's ontological nature developed in the course of this project and combine them into one single characterization, which can serve as a kind of building block for more comprehensive ontological frameworks.