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PERCEPTUAL SET AS CONDITIONED RESPONSE:  
AN INCIDENT

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## PERCEPTUAL SET AS CONDITIONED RESPONSE: AN INCIDENT\*

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The details of the introspective experience to be described seemed objectively clear and definite at the time and they were recorded immediately at the termination of the event.

The writer and a student were making observations on color charts in the psychological laboratory at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The illumination falling on the charts had to be checked periodically. I glanced at the light-meter and read the scale as about 20 foot-candles; I took another look and found that it was really somewhat less than 20. I remarked to Taylor that we did not have to get an exact reading; that 20 was about it and as close as was worthwhile. But I looked at the meter again just as I was holding the pencil to record, and the reading was 19. I hesitated a second or two, my feeling being to record what I saw, namely, 19; but would that be consistent with what I had just said. If the round number 20 was close enough, why bother about 19? But the matter was not important, and then I did record 19 anyway. All this could not have taken more than a few seconds.

At 11 p. m. the same evening the writer was reading on page 64 of the October 22, 1938 issue of the Saturday Evening Post. I read ". . . . . the conductor fanned himself with his hat. 'Wow-wow!' he shouted. 'Next stop Wow-wow!' Twenty minutes for 'freshments!'" I clearly read "nineteen minutes" instead of "twenty minutes." Immediately there was a vague feeling of strangeness. It occurred to me that it was strange for the conductor to allot an odd time like 19 minutes for a thing like refreshments. Then I directed attention back to the text and read the "twenty minutes" actually printed there. I do not feel positive that the feeling of strangeness actually preceded the correct reading of the time; but that is what was believed and recorded at the time. Next, the experience with the light-meter during the afternoon was recalled. The fact that it was recalled at once and the fact that the unusual numerical values were identical in both ex-

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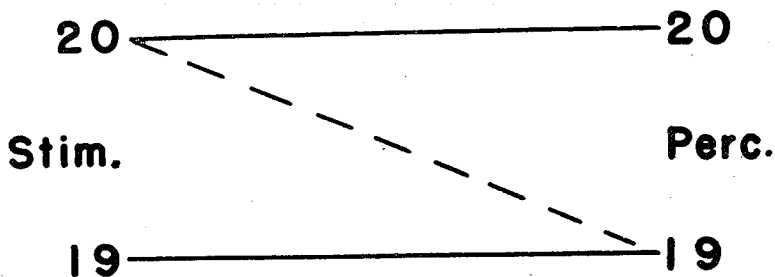


FIGURE 1

## CONDITIONED PERCEPTUAL RESPONSE

Fig. 1 is a conventional schema of the conditional interpretation. The continuous parallel lines indicate the permanent ordinary associations between stimulus-20 and perception-20 and between stimulus-19 and perception-19, respectively. The broken inclined line represents the temporary extraordinary connection formed between stimulus-20 and perception-19 by the preoccupation over the meter reading.

The extraordinary connection is known to have functioned once, i.e., when reading the magazine story. No repetitions of the response have been detected. Perhaps this unintentional confusion of association could be called an "eye-slip" in the sense that it seems analogous to some of the tongue-slips or pen-slips which are occasionally observed. But the experience was of the phenomenal nature at least of a true visual hallucination which by definition lacks an immediate sensory basis. So the conditional pattern of interpretation may account for some hallucinations.

periences indicates a causal connection between the two. All this seems to have taken only a few seconds.

Interpretations of such experiences are doubtful but a few suggestions may be of interest. In the afternoon the number 20 had been taken as a sign (a sufficiently close approximation) of the true value which was known to be and was eventually recorded as 19. Then in the evening, when the word twenty occurred in the story it also was taken as indicative of nineteen and was, therefore, read as nineteen. This time, of course, twenty was the true value rather than nineteen. But 20 had become the conditioned stimulus to 19 in what might be thought of as a single trial and it had presumably lasted through 8 hours of varied activity. The fact that words in the latter experience replaced numerals in the former evidently did not prevent the functioning of the specific set.