CHAPTER V

A SENSE OF PRESENCE

1. INDEXICAL VERSUS SINGULAR AWARENESS

Indexical awareness involves a sense of the object's presence, and that sense of presence is a defining trait of acquaintance.

The basic forms of awareness in acquaintance, we know, are indexical: in perception I am presented "this" or "her", and in consciousness I have an inner awareness of "I" and of "this very experience". There are other types of indexical experience, too, such as my thinking that "it is now noon" or that "my grandfather was born here". My presentation of "now" or "here" in so thinking is indexical (arguably based on a concurrent acquaintance), and so my thought is indexical, though not itself an acquainting experience. However, we are concerned only with acquainting experiences.

A singular presentation is a presentation of a particular object "itself" — as opposed, for instance, to a descriptive presentation of "the such-and-such (whichever that be)". (This distinction is part of the familiar de re/de dicto distinction for intentional attitudes.) An indexical presentation is thus a singular presentation. For in perception I am presented a particular object before me: "this object itself", or "this person herself". And in inner awareness I am aware of "I myself" and of "this very experience itself". The reflexive pronouns — "itself", etc. — come naturally to these phenomenological descriptions; they emphasize the individuality of the objects presented, and hence the singularity of the presentations described.

Now, there are other types of singular presentation. Consider my thinking that my grandfather was born in Moravia not long after Freud and Husserl. This thought includes two quite different modes of singular presentation: my presentation of either Freud or Husserl is a presentation "by name" of a well-known public figure, but a presentation of Freud or Husserl "himself" — with no further, descriptive content; my presentation of my grandfather is a presentation of Grandpa "himself", a presentation
that depends on my recollection of him in countless past experiences, yet includes no descriptive content and no appeal to the name "J. L. Huebl". Both types of presentation rely on an appreciation of the identity of the individual presented, though the content includes none of the background information that helps to individuate him for me. Consider now my surmising that that man I met yesterday is a Freudian (judging from his beard and speech). I am presented the man "himself", in a kind of deferred acquaintance, where my presentation depends on my recollection of my having seen the man yesterday. This too is a singular mode of presentation, albeit of a different type than the two above or than indexical awareness in acquaintance.2

What distinguishes indexical modes of presentation from other modes of singular presentation, then, is a sense of presence: the object is presented not only in its individuality but in its presence. That is part of the characteristic force of an indexical content. But when I am presented "Freud" or "Husserl", or "my grandfather" or "Grandpa", or "that man I met yesterday", my presentation is singular yet includes no sense of the individual's being now here before me, or in any other way currently present to me. So indexical awareness is indeed singular, but there is more to indexicality — and acquaintance — than singularity.

There is a long but wrong tradition that tends to identify intuition, or acquaintance, merely with singular presentation. Kant's notion of intuition is sometimes interpreted as singular representation. Bolzano explicitly defined intuition as singular and simple presentation. Husserl's notion of an "X"-content in perception defined the presentation of a thing "itself", "in abstraction from all predicates", that is, a singular presentation (though Husserl also stressed the sense of an object's "bodily presence" in intuition).3 There has been a similar tendency in semantic theory to identify indexical reference — by words like "this" — with singular reference, where the reference is determined by the context of utterance.4 Indeed, the Medieval notion of "thisness", or haecceitas, was already the notion of an individual's particularity, or individuality — although "thisness" ought to include an individual's being present (compare "nowness" or "hereness").5

But tradition or no, there is more to acquaintance than singular awareness. Indeed, it is only by virtue of an indexical presentation of "this" or "her" or "I", carrying a sense of the object's presence, that a particular object is presented in acquaintance, making the awareness singular.