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Husserl's Theory of Signitive and Empty Intentions in Logical Investigations and its Revisions: Meaning Intentions and Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of Husserl's philosophy of non-intuitive intentions. The analysis has two stages. First, I expose a mistake in Husserl's account of non-intuitive acts from his 1901 *Logical Investigations*. I demonstrate that Husserl employs the term "signitive" too broadly, as he concludes that all non-intuitive acts are signitive. He states that not only meaning acts, but also the contiguity intentions of perception are signitive acts. Second, I show how Husserl, in his 1913/14 Revisions to the Sixth Logical Investigation, amends his 1901 theory of non-intuitive acts, which he now calls "empty" intentions. He there accurately distinguishes empty meaning acts from the empty intentions of perception. In the conclusion, I reveal how Husserl's alterations to his theory of non-intuitive intentions can inform our understanding of a larger shift in his philosophy.


KEYWORDS

Husserl; logical investigations; signitive intentions; empty intentions; perceptual occlusion

1. Introduction

A central pillar of Edmund Husserl's theory of intentionality is his insight that intentions can be of either an intuitive or signitive nature. As Husserl began to outline in his 1901 *Logical Investigations* (hereafter, *Investigations*), an intuitive intention is directed at an object that "can either be actually present through accompanying intuitions, or at least appears in representation, e.g. in a mental image".¹ The intuited object appears directly before my eyes in perception or it appears in my "mind's eye" via imagination. A signitive act, that is, a non-intuitive intention, in contrast, discloses an object that does not appear in person via perception and is not represented imaginatively. Husserl writes that "[a] signitive intention merely points at its object, an intuitive intention gives it 'presence' ... A signitive presentation does not present analogically, it is 'in reality' no presentation, in it nothing of the object comes to life".²

While Husserl's descriptions of intentionality have justly received a great deal of attention in recent years, only his conclusions about intuitive acts have been properly addressed.

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¹ Hua = Husserliana XIX, 44/Vol. 1, 192. I provide references to the corresponding English translation where available, following a slash after the Husserliana page number. Quotes from the *Logical Investigations* always come from the First Edition.

² Hua XIX, 670/Vol. 2, 233.

Because Husserl observed that intuition is the custodian of truth, scholars have concentrated on Husserl's descriptions of intuitive acts, as their studies often have the goal of revealing how Husserl's observations can be employed to critique or amend other philosophies of truth. In contrast, Husserl's observations about signitive intentions have frequently been overlooked.

This paper, in distinction from that contemporary trend, closely examines and critically engages with the evolution of Husserl's theory of non-intuitive acts. To do so, the essay explores two of Husserl's texts and the relationship between them. In the second section of the paper, the essay examines Husserl's theory of non-intuitive signitive acts from his 1901 *Investigations*. I reveal that Husserl employs the term "signitive" in a very broad manner, as he uses the label "signitive", to refer to both meaning intentions and certain partial acts of perception. In the third section, I then discuss how Husserl corrects his 1901 descriptions of signitive intentions in his 1913/1914 revisions to the Sixth Logical Investigation (Husserliana XX-1/2; hereafter, *Revisions*). I reveal that, after the publication of that 1901 text, Husserl sees that his use of the term signitive was far too broad.³ I discuss how Husserl accordingly amends his observations from 1901 by executing his most extensive and definitive study of non-intuitive intentions, which he there simply terms "empty" (*leer*) acts. I discuss how he more clearly differentiates the signitive tendency and the empty meaning intention from the empty contiguity acts of perception.⁴ Finally, in the conclusion, I demonstrate how Husserl's transformations of his theory of non-intuitive acts can inform our understanding of a much larger shift in his thought. I reveal that Husserl made his 1913/14 alterations, in part, to concretely work out a philosophy of meaning and language, which respects the distinction between and autonomy of the sensible and the categorial spheres.

2. Investigations

2.1. Signitive Meaning Acts and Expression

In *Investigations*, Husserl describes how signitive meaning intentions, which are motivated by expressive written or spoken signs,⁵ can have two possible functions. He describes

³ Ursula Panzer – in her introduction to *Investigations* – explains that Husserl employed the term "signitive" to cover all different empty acts, and that

Husserl only turned against the use of the term signitive or symbolic intentions, as the term to label the whole class of "empty intentions" in his lectures in Gottingen. See Ms. Fl 5 / IIb and 13a (1908). (*Introduction*, LXI n. 1)

⁴ As Ullrich Melle writes, "[n]owhere else has Husserl analysed empty intentions in such detail" (*Husserl's Revisions*, 116). Of the few scholars who have discussed Husserl's theories of signitive and empty intentions, Melle has provided the most extensive and accurate analyses. On the one hand, this essay expands upon Melle's conclusions, from his articles, *Signitive and Signifikative Intentionen* and *Husserl's Revisions of the Sixth Logical Investigation*. On the other hand, at times, I develop my own interpretation of Husserl by critically engaging with Melle's reading. In particular, my discussion of Husserl's theory of dark intentions, from section 3.1, is developed in explicit juxtaposition to Melle's interpretation of those acts. Another text, which is worthy of note, is Maxime Doyon's 2019 essay on Kant and Husserl. In his article, Doyon, in passing, comments on Husserl's gradual transition away from his views concerning signitive intentions from *Investigations*, by examining passages from *Perception and Attention* and *Thing and Space*. I draw from Doyon's essay below in section 2.2 and in footnotes 37 and 48. Third, the volume *La représentation vide*, edited by Jocelyn Benoist and Jean-Francois Courtine, is ostensibly meant to address Husserl's theory of empty representations from *Investigations* and *Revisions*. However, as Guillaume Frechette notes in his review of the book, only Melle's text from that edition discusses Husserl's theory of empty representations from *Revisions* in detail (*Review of Benoist*, 262). I do not examine Melle's conclusions from that chapter, as they are nearly identical to his insights from his above-mentioned works. Finally, the author of the current text is indebted to Michela Summa's 2014 book, which eruditely addresses many of the same themes as this essay.

⁵ This section explores Husserl's conclusions about the signitive intentions, which often give meaning to expressive signs, such that they could be called "expressive" signitive meaning acts or, more accurately, the meaning intentions of expressions. Husserl's descriptions of indicative signs – both generally and as they function in perception – are examined

signitive meaning acts that, in reaching out beyond intuited expressive signs,⁶ (1) are directed at objects or states of affairs that *are not intuitively given* and *do lend meaning* to expressive signs. At the same time, Husserl describes signitive meaning acts that, in contrast, (2) are directed at objects or states of affairs that *are intuitively given* and *do lend meaning* to expressive signs or (3) are directed at objects or states of affairs that *are intuitively given*, but do *not lend meaning* to expressive signs. In what follows, I clarify Husserl's descriptions of these three different ways that a signitive meaning act may perform its two operations.

First, Husserl's standard example of signitive meaning acts are those intentions that do give meaning to expressions and are directed at objects or states of affairs that are not intuitively given. These experiences can commence with the intuition of what he calls the *Wortlaut*, which is the physical object that will function as the expressive sign. *Wortlaute* are, for example, the word-scribbles, which make up the sentence on the page, or the word sounds uttered by an interlocutor. When I see the *Wortlaut*, however, I am not just seeing this object as a physical object like any other. Rather, I experience the intuited *Wortlaut* as expressive signs that associatively motivate⁷ me to become aware of another object or state of affairs, which is not intuitively presented. The intuition of the *Wortlaut* as expressive signs motivates the signitive meaning intention, which is directed at the non-intuitively presented signified state of affairs.⁸ This expressive signitive meaning intention is not only motivated by the intuited *Wortlaut*, but also gives the *Wortlaut* its meaning, whereby it is experienced as a meaningful expressive sign. Husserl writes: "In virtue of such [signitive meaning] acts, the expression is more than a merely sounded word [*Wortlaut*]. It means something, and in so far as it means something, it relates to what is objective".⁹ Moreover, in these cases, when I execute this signitive intention, I merely mean the state of affairs, without any seeing, validation, or knowledge that the state of affairs is the way that I mean it. In Husserl's terminology, this meaning intention remains "unfulfilled". To provide one example, I can see the *Wortlaut* before me as the expression, "The drill at the workshop is green". In this case, that *Wortlaut*, intended as an expression, motivates the execution of the signitive meaning intention of the state of affairs, "The drill at the office is green", where I am then aware of the green drill, even though it is not intuitively presented to me, and despite the fact that I may not know or be able to verify that the drill is truly green.

Second, there are the signitive meaning intentions that do lend meaning to expressive signs, but, in contrast to the first case, are directed at objects or states of affairs that are intuitively given. As was the case with the first illustration of a signitive meaning act, so

in the following section. Simply stated, in section 2.1, I elucidate Husserl's theory of expression, whereas, in section 2.2, I explore an element of his analysis of indication.

⁶ Husserl defines expressive signs by writing that,

each instance or part of speech, as also each sign that is essentially of the same sort, shall count as expression, whether or not such speech is actually uttered, or addressed with communicative intent to any person or not.

Such a definition excludes facial expressions and the various gestures which involuntarily accompany speech without communicative intent. (Hua XIX, 20/Vol. 1, 187)

⁷ I have discussed the nature of this associative motivation at length in, Byrne, *The Evolution of Husserl's Semiotics; Husserl's Early Semiotics*; and *Surrogates and Empty Intentions*.

⁸ Hua XIX, 46/Vol. 1, 193. See also, De Palma, *Semiotik*, 44–51; Smith, *Meaning and Reference*, 173–5; Sokolowski, *Semiotics*, 172–3.

⁹ Hua XIX, 44/Vol. 1, 192. See D'Angelo, *Foundations*, 55–7; Woodruff Smith, *Sense and Reference*, 117–9; *Meaning of This?* 194–6.

also in this second example, I execute a signitive meaning intention, which is motivated by the intuition of the *Wortlaut* as an expression. When I intuit the expressive (written or spoken) signs, “The drill at the office is green”, I again execute a signitive meaning act, directed at that state of affairs. The difference between the first and second examples is that, in this second case, I am additionally categorially intuiting the same state of affairs that I signitively intend.¹⁰ I now categorially intuit that the drill, which is at the office, is green: I see it before me. As I see that which I am signitively intending, the signitive act is directed at that which is intuitively given, that is, the green drill. During this experience, this intuition of the state of affairs can “fulfil” the meaning intention of that same state of affairs. In fulfilment, the intuition, which does present that state of affairs intuitively before me, validates the signitive meaning act, which merely means that state of affairs.¹¹ I see that it is correct to mean the drill at the office as green. Importantly, according to the Husserl of 1901, this signitive intention is still executed during fulfilment and is not replaced by the intuition. Husserl states: “We must; therefore, maintain that the same [signitive] act of meaning-intention, ... is also part of the complex act of recognition, but that a [signitive] meaning-intention that was ‘free’ is now ‘bound’ and ‘neutralized’ in the stage of coincidence”.¹²

Third, there are signitive meaning acts that are directed at objects or states of affairs that are intuitively given, but do not lend meaning to expressive signs. Husserl calls such an experience, a “wordless recognition” (*wortlose Erkennen*). He writes that we can, “recognize an object, e.g. as an ancient Roman milestone, its scratchings as weather-worn inscriptions, although no words are aroused at once or indeed at all. We recognize a tool as a drill, but its name will not come back to us”.¹³ Husserl claims that, during these experiences, I execute a signitive meaning intention, which is not motivated by intuited expressive signs and accordingly does not give meaning to expressive signs.¹⁴ Rather, the signitive meaning intention is aroused by the intuition of the object that is to be recognized, here, the drill.¹⁵ He writes: “Genetically expressed, present intuitions stir up an associative disposition directed to the significant expression. But the meaning-component of this last alone is actualized”.¹⁶ Stated otherwise, when I execute a wordless recognition of the drill, the intuited drill itself motivates my signitive intention, which meaningfully intends the object as a drill. I see and recognize the object before me as a drill, even when I can’t recall that word, “drill”. This signitive meaning intention is thus

¹⁰ In Husserl’s 1901 view, single-rayed acts can both lend and fulfil meaning. In *Revisions*, in contrast, Husserl claims that only categorial intentions can lend meaning and fulfil meaning acts. I discuss this point at length in the conclusion to this essay. See Hua XX-2, 139–45; Melle, *Husserl’s Revisions*, 115.

¹¹ De Palma, *Semiotik*, 51–4; Soldati, *Die Objektivität der Bedeutung*, 64–6.

¹² Hua XIX, 571/1970 Vol. 2, 209. See also, Bernet, *Desiring to Know*, 156–60.

¹³ Hua XIX, 592/Vol. 2, 223.

¹⁴ As the signitive meaning acts of wordless recognitions are not motivated by any expressive signs and as they do not give expressive signs meaning, it could be said that these meaning acts are not “expressive” in nature. At the same time, wordless recognitions are certainly not motivated by indicative signs. It is, in part, because of their peculiar nature – being motivated neither by expressive nor indicative signs – that Husserl devotes many pages to wordless recognitions in *Revisions* (Cf. section 3.2 below).

¹⁵ Vanderveelde, *Ambiguity*, 35–7; Husserl and Searle, 59–60.

¹⁶ Hua XIX, 592/Vol. 2, 223. This idea, that the intuition of the recognized object motivates the wordless signitive meaning act is important to point out, because, according to Husserl, no meaning intention can be executed without a corresponding intuition, or at least corresponding intuitive content (*Inhalt*). Even though he claims that it is not possible to execute a totally empty intention, in 1901, Husserl does assert that it is possible to perform an entirely intuitive act; namely, during internal perception.

also fulfilled by the intuition of the object or state of affairs that motivates it. That which is signitively meant is also intuitively given.¹⁷

2.2. Signitive Acts and Perception

These conclusions held in mind, it is possible to turn to examine another kind of signitive intention, which Husserl identifies in *Investigations*. These are the partial signitive intentions of external intuition, which are motivated by indicative signs.¹⁸ Husserl recognizes that there are partial signitive intentions of perception, because he arrives at another insight, which would serve as a pillar of his phenomenology of perception. Namely, externally intuited objects are perspectively given. I do not, properly speaking, see all of a three-dimensional spatial object at one time, but am rather only given the front side of the object in its full authentic appearance.¹⁹ At the same time, the occluded backsides and insides of the intuited object are not simply lost to consciousness. I am still aware of those sides; they are still intended by me. Husserl calls these partial intentions towards the occluded backsides and insides of an object “signitive intentions by way of contiguity”.²⁰ As this terminology is unwieldy, for clarity and brevity, throughout the rest of this paper, I will simply refer to these partial intentions as “signitive contiguity acts”.

Husserl uses that same term, “signitive”, which he employed to label meaning giving intentions, to also characterize contiguity intentions, because he realizes that there is a certain analogy between these two kinds of acts. In his 1913/14 *Revisions*, Husserl discusses the correct insights, which allowed for him to recognize this analogy, and he explains why the parallel between these two kinds of intentions led him, in 1901, to label not only meaning acts, but also contiguity intentions as signitive. Husserl claims that, just as meaning intentions, the partial perceptual contiguity acts can intend more than what is given via the intuitive act. In a similar manner to how I am motivated by the intuition of the expressive sign to execute a signitive meaning act, which is directed towards the state of affairs that is not intuitively given, so also can I be motivated by the intuition of the authentically presented front side of the perceptual object to execute the signitive contiguity intention of the backsides and insides of the object, which are not intuitively given. Husserl highlights that both kinds of signitive intentions direct me beyond the intuitively given via an associative connection, writing:

In fact, the appearance [*Apparierende*] points to the emptily co-meant in a similar manner to how a sign points to its signified. There is, on both sides, a phenomenological relationship of pointing-beyond [*Hinausdeutung*] ... and thereby equally a relationship of association.²¹

¹⁷ Hua XIX, 592/Vol. 2, 223. In *Investigations*, Husserl outlines how the kinds of fulfilment that occur in the second and third examples examined here are of different natures. In the second case, the signitive meaning intention occurs before the categorial intuition. Husserl calls this kind of fulfilment, where there is a temporal difference between the signitive intending and the intuition, “dynamic” fulfilment (Hua XIX, 566/Vol. 1, 206). In the third example, the signitive and intuitive intentions are both executed from the start. The signitive meaning act does not proceed the intuition, such that the former is “statically” fulfilled by the latter (Hua XIX, 558–560/Vol. 2, 201–202).

¹⁸ As mentioned in footnote nine, this section will be dedicated to examining one element of Husserl’s theory of indicative signs. I specifically explore Husserl’s conclusions about how indicative signs motivate the signitive intending of the occluded sides of perceptual objects.

¹⁹ Hua XIX, 667/Vol. 2, 278.

²⁰ Hua XIX, 594/Vol. 2, 224. See also Madary, *Perceptual Constancy*, 148–9; Shim, *Non-conceptual Content*; Tze-Wan, *Husserl’s Horizon*, 362–8.

²¹ Hua XX-1, 94.

Husserl even more explicitly points out this similarity, which led him to term both contiguity and meaning intentions as signitive, by writing:

Obviously, [meaning] intentions have an analogy with signitive [contiguity] intentions. That is, the interdependence of empty and intuitive intentions inside of the unity of the intuition of the transcendent object is analogous to the interdependence of the signitive intentions and the intuition of the sign.²²

Despite the fact that contiguity and meaning acts certainly are analogical in these ways, the conclusion that Husserl draws from this similarity – that the intentions directed at the occluded parts of perceptual objects are signitive – suggests, if not endorses the incorrect idea that partial signitive perceptual acts are directed at signified parts of the object. That is, Husserl’s insight could be read as entailing that the authentically presented front side of the intuited object functions as a sign for the occluded backsides and insides of the object, which are themselves the signified. More specifically, Husserl appears to be claiming that the front-side of the object functions as an indicative sign for the backside of the object. In the First Logical Investigation,²³ Husserl asserts that an indicative sign is given as existing in *reality* and that the existing indicator motivates the signitive intending of the *reality* of the indicated and signified object. Moreover, to be an indicator, that sign has to provide me with good grounds for signitively intending and believing in the existence of the indicated.²⁴ We can see that Husserl’s descriptions of perception clearly seem to endorse the idea that the front side of the object functions as an indicative sign for the occluded backside of the object. The perceived front side of the object, which is given as existing in reality does not express, but rather indicates the existing occluded backsides and gives me good grounds for believing in the existence of those backsides.²⁵

Husserl not only provides this general elucidation of the function of partial signitive intentions of perception in 1901, but also goes to great lengths to determine the inner structure of these acts. Indeed, the vast majority of his statements about signitive intentions in *Investigations* concern their structure.

Husserl asserts that signitive contiguity intentions of a perception, which are directed at the backsides and insides of the object, are composed of “signitive substance” (*Gehalt*), while the partial intuitive intentions, which correlate to the side of the object facing me, are composed of “intuitive substance”. The intuitive substance has two components, the “content” (*Inhalt*) and its “apprehension” (*Auffassung*). The content of perceptual acts are what Husserl calls “sensations” (*Empfindungen*). Sensations are unique, unrepeatable elements of experience. They are not intended or perceived, as they rather belong to the stream of consciousness, as its real (*reell*) moments.²⁶ The apprehension is that which takes up, interprets, or forms the sensations. Via an apprehension, the sensations

²² Hua XX-1, 94.

²³ Hua XIX, 30–37/Vol. 1, 183–187.

²⁴ Husserl writes that the indicating object, “not merely recalls another object and in this way points to it; rather, it also provides evidence for that other object. It fosters the acceptance of the fact that it likewise exists ...” (Hua XIX, 37/Vol. 1, 187). An example, which can show how indicative signs normally operate is that of smoke indicating fire. When I see the smoke, which is perceived as really existing, it motivates my signitive intending of and gives good evidence for my belief in the reality of the indicated and signified fire.

²⁵ D’Angelo and Doyon both emphasize that Husserl believed that the front-side of the object serves as an indicating sign for the occluded backside of the object in 1901. Cf. D’Angelo, *Alterity*, 59; Doyon, *Kant and Husserl*, 187. See also Byrne, *Perceptual Occlusion*.

²⁶ Hua XIX, 397/Vol. 2, 104.

intuitively represent the perceptual object. The intuitive substance of the act is the sensations in and with their apprehension. Husserl writes: “We call the presentative or intuitive representing content [*Inhalt*] in and with its pertinent apprehension, the intuitive substance [*Gehalt*] of the act”.²⁷ The signitive substance of the perceptual act is that “which corresponds to the sum total of the remaining, subsidiarily given properties of the object, which do not themselves become apparent”.²⁸ The signitive substance possesses no content as such. There is nothing which the partial signitive intention in itself apprehends to represent the intended object. The signitive substance of the perception is yet still composed of the apprehension of the act – more specifically, the apprehending matter of the act – which determines how I intend the occluded parts of the object with these or those properties.

Husserl further develops these insights by claiming that there is an unbroken continuum of fullness on which all acts sit. At the upper limit of the continuum of fullness there are completely intuitive intentions, which are composed only of intuitive substance. At the lower limit of the continuum of fullness, that is, at the null-point, there sit entirely signitive intentions, which possess only signitive substance.²⁹ When there is an increase in signitive substance, there is a decrease in intuitive substance, up to the null-point of an entirely signitive act, which has only signitive substance. To clarify these ideas, Husserl analogizes the continuum of fullness with the mathematical continuum between 0 and 1. He writes:

If we now define the *weight* of the intuitive (or signitive) substance as the sum total of the intuitively (or signitively) presented moments of the object, both ‘weights’ in each presentation will add up to a single total weight [...] Always therefore the symbolic equation holds, $i + s = 1$.³⁰

In the case of a normal external perception, s could be .5 and i would also be .5. If then, the signitive substance increases – that is, if the act becomes less intuitive – i could decrease to .25 and s could increase to .75, up until i equals 0 and S equals 1.

3. Revisions

3.1. Empty Acts and Perception

The important changes Husserl makes to his 1901 theory of signitive intentions in his 1913/14 *Revisions* are inspired by his insight that not all non-intuitive intentions are signitive acts. He now asserts that all intentions, which are not intuitive, instead can be termed, “empty” (*leer*) acts.³¹ On the basis of this new terminology, Husserl can clearly distinguish between non-intuitive intentions, which are of an expressive nature, from non-intuitive acts, which are not. Reversing the order of the discussion of *Investigations*, I begin with an analysis of Husserl’s 1913/14 account of the non-intuitive acts of perception. In

²⁷ Hua XIX, 610/Vol. 2, 235.

²⁸ Hua XIX, 610/Vol. 2, 236.

²⁹ Hua XIX, 612/Vol. 2, 237.

³⁰ Hua XIX, 611/Vol. 2, 236.

³¹ Hua XX-2, 90. Husserl does indeed employ the term “empty” in *Investigations*, but he uses this term “empty” primarily to describe signitive acts as “empty” of intuitive substance. For more on Husserl’s use of the term “empty” in *Investigations*, see Byrne, *Perceptual Occlusion*.

Revisions, Husserl outlines two kinds of these intentions; partial empty acts of perception and wholly empty perceptions.

The former are the partial intentions of intuition, which constitute the occluded sides of the object. Husserl asserts, in 1913/14, that these empty acts are not of a signitive nature. As laid out in footnote three, Husserl had already recognized, in 1908, that he was misguided when he applied the term “signitive” to those partial intentions of whole intuitions. His 1901 use of that label was so broad, that it encompassed experiences that did not qualify for that title, including these partial acts of intuition. Indeed, Rudolf Bernet explains that Husserl could have only stated that these partial acts are signitive by means of “fairly implausible contortions”.³² Moreover, as discussed in section 2.2, this mislabelling and some of Husserl’s 1901 descriptions showed that he conceived of the experience of the occluded parts of a perceptual object as if it were indicated by an indicating sign, where the indicating sign would be the intuited front side of the object. Husserl even went so far, in *Investigations*, to assert that signitive content is a “pure signification” (*reine Signifikation*).³³ Yet, even a simple phenomenological analysis of perception reveals that perceptual experiences do not involve indicative signs,³⁴ as Husserl now sees in 1913/14. Accordingly, in *Revisions*, Husserl recognizes that he must amend his terminology and observations to clearly segregate the presentations of signified objects from the perceptual presentations of occluded sides. To begin to do so, he simply labels these partial acts of intuition “empty contiguity intentions”.³⁵

³² Bernet, *Desiring to Know*, 160. It appears evident to me that Husserl described perception as occurring via indication, because he had been trained as a mathematician in his earlier academic life. Even when he began his philosophical career, in both his unpublished dissertation *Concerning the Concept of Number*, and in his first book, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, Husserl dedicated his research to accounting for how numerical signs could signify quantities, which could not be authentically presented. As the focus of Husserl’s early scholarship concerned the relationship between the sign and the signified, it makes good sense that when he was confronted with the perplexing phenomenon of perception, he would reemploy the sign-signified “template”, which he was familiar with. As the adage goes: “When one has a hammer, one tends to look for nails”. Having primarily studied signs, Husserl tended to find signs, even in perception. By doing so, he was not letting the phenomena of perception stand on its own, but instead allowing for prejudices from his past experiences to dictate his descriptions of those acts.

³³ Hua XIX, 612/Vol. 2, 237.

³⁴ While I cannot discuss it at length, one of the major problems with this account is that it seems as if Husserl is describing perception as if it were a composite of different intentions. Summa summarizes this difficulty well by writing,

In other words, does Husserl’s distinction between proper and improper givenness imply that we perceive the singular profiles of the thing as independent parts, which are only subsequently synthesized as to construct the unity of one thing? Does our perception of the thing, and the constitution of its identity, merely result from the sum of our perceptions of the singular parts? (*Spatio-Temporal Intertwining*, 200)

³⁵ To be clear, Husserl’s thought concerning non-intuitive acts did not undergo a radical shift in 1913/14, as if he immediately jumped from his 1901 theory at that later date. Instead, his philosophy evolved slowly over time. As Doyon expertly summarizes the origins of this shift in Husserl’s thought, I quote him at length as writing:

While Husserl was still presenting the position of the *Logical Investigations* in his lecture-course *Hauptstücke aus der Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, in private, he began to doubt about its plausibility. In the margins to the text of the lecture-course, he writes: ‘Doch ist es besser, hier nicht vom Zeichen zu sprechen, da nicht ein ‘Gegenstand’ auf etwas hinzeigt’. ... This view has to be abandoned, and this is precisely what Husserl does in his 1907 *Thing and Space* lecture, which contains the first public sign of departure from the position Husserl espoused in the *Logical Investigations*. As a consequence, Husserl now sees much more clearly into the second problem as well: he now asserts that the occluded parts of objects are simply *not represented at all*. (*Kant and Husserl*, 188)

Doyon’s comments in mind, it can be said that the current article’s juxtaposition of *Investigations* and *Revisions* is a presentation of the results of Husserl’s decade-long endeavour to attain clarity with regards to non-intuitive experience, rather than an extended analysis of each individual step on that path of reconsideration. For the reader interested in the gradual evolution of Husserl’s thought from 1901 to 1913/14, I must recommend Doyon’s *Kant and Husserl*. See also Summa, *Spatio-Temporal Intertwining*, 199–212.

Husserl develops his account of these contiguity intentions in much greater detail in *Revisions* than he had done in *Investigations*. He describes these partial acts, by asserting that they are “*hinausweisende*” intentions, that is, they are partial acts that point out or beyond. Specifically, they point beyond the intuitively given front side of the intuited object to the occluded parts of the object. Husserl writes that in these acts we find “[a] pointing beyond in the form of empty intentions, which, by means of contiguity, point beyond the appearing thing itself to other parts of the thing”.³⁶

In 1913/14, Husserl further identifies a second kind of empty perceptual intention, which is directed at objects in so-to-speak total occlusion. These entirely empty intentions are what Husserl calls “fully dark” (*vollen dunkel*) intentions.³⁷ To clarify this curious kind of empty intention, Husserl outlines two examples. First, I can experience empty dark “perceptual” intentions when the lights in a room go out. In that case, the objects and the room do not simply vanish, such that I take myself to be in a void. Rather, I am still “perceptually” aware of those objects via empty dark intentions. Husserl describes these experiences by writing: “In the often used example of the extinguishing of the light ... in full darkness the object stands there, we are still perceptually directed at it, it is still there, but we do not ‘see’ it”.³⁸ As there is no light shining off of these objects, they are perceptually presented in so-to-speak total occlusion. Second, dark “phantasy” occurs during the intermitting of a phantasy, where the phantasied object does not – at least for a moment – intuitively appear but is yet still intended.³⁹

Husserl clarifies his conception of these two kinds of empty perceptual intentions by reformulating his previous observations about the structure of non-intuitive acts. First, he radically alters his theory by concluding that empty contiguity and dark acts are “empty modifications” of intuitive intentions. Second, he asserts that, even though both kinds of empty intentions sit at the null-point of the continuum of fullness these empty acts yet break with that continuum.

The first revision can be otherwise stated as follows: Empty intentions – both dark and contiguity acts – are not acts which have been drained of intuitive substance, but that they are instead modifications of intuitive intentions.⁴⁰ In his work on this topic, Melle only mentions that the empty modification is “peculiar” and that it is akin to the imaginative and phantasy modifications laid out in *Ideas I*.⁴¹ While the empty modification is marginally analogous to those other modifications, I highlight that it is exceptionally different and that it requires a more extensive analysis. An imaginative modification, for example, does not change the fundamental structure of the perceptual intention. When a perception is imaginatively modified, the resultant imaginative act still possesses an intuitive substance and an empty substance. In contrast, an empty modification transforms the structure of a full perception. When executing an empty completely dark act,

³⁶ Hua XX-2, 93.

³⁷ In contrast to his claims from 1901 (Cf. note 25), Husserl concludes, in *Revisions*, that one can execute an entirely empty act, but not an entirely intuitive act. He now asserts that a totally empty act can be a meaning intention or a fully dark act, whereas a completely intuitive act is not possible, because, as a result of temporal extension, even internal perceptions have empty retentive components.

³⁸ Hua XX-1, 141.

³⁹ Hua XX-1, 142.

⁴⁰ Hua XX-1, 147.

⁴¹ Melle, *Husserl's Revisions*, 118.

[t]he representing contents disappear and with this, the apprehension disappears, thus the entire intuitive substance disappears – and by virtue of the non-independence of the intuitive substance, that is, its essential togetherness with the supplementing empty substance – then also the latter disappears.⁴²

Otherwise stated, according to Husserl, an empty dark intention, as well as the empty partial signitive intention of a perception, is not composed of empty substance and it naturally does not have any intuitive substance, such that there is no structural division between these substances. Husserl writes that an empty dark or partial contiguity intention lacks “any of the *reellen* internal divisions and distinctions which the perceptual act possesses”.⁴³

Melle adopts a different interpretation of Husserl’s theory. He writes: “A difference has to be made between empty representation and an obscure [dark] intuition, i.e. an intuition emptied of intuitive content”.⁴⁴ On the basis of the quotes above; however, it is clear that Husserl does not distinguish between empty representation and dark intuition, but rather claims that the latter is to be classed under the former.⁴⁵ A dark intuition, on Husserl’s account is an empty representation, as it is an empty modification of perception.

On the basis of these conclusions, Husserl further asserts that empty intentions do occupy the null-point on the continuum of fullness, but yet still sit outside of that continuum. To clarify this insight, I return to Husserl’s example of the mathematical continuum between 0 and 1. In 1913/14, Husserl again concludes that an act can continually become less and less full up to, for example, the empty substance is at .99 and the intuitive substance is at .01. But when the act becomes entirely empty, the division between signitive and intuitive substance disappears. The signitive content does not measure at 1, nor does the intuitive substance sit at 0. Rather, there is a fracture, where the completely empty intention breaks with the continuum of fullness.

3.2. Empty Meaning Acts and Expression

Husserl further amends his 1901 theory by establishing a new division between the kinds of experiences involved in the expression of meaning; namely, between signitive tendencies and significative acts. In this section, I first examine those tendencies before looking at Husserl’s conclusions concerning significative intentions.

A fundamental shift in Husserl’s employment of the term signitive occurs during his discussion of the associative motivation, which arises from the signs and impels me to execute the meaning act. In 1913/14, Husserl affirms that I experience this association as a tendency. He writes: “The going-‘through-the-words-to-the thing’ [*‘Durch-das-Wort-auf-die-Sache’Gehen*] has a special character; a ‘tendency’ adheres to the words”.⁴⁶ When describing this tendency, Husserl alters his terminology and theory from the 1901 text. He states that this tendency – and not the act of meaning – is to be labelled

⁴² Hua XX-1, 145.

⁴³ Hua XX-1, 144.

⁴⁴ Melle, *Husserl’s Revisions*, 118.

⁴⁵ Husserl explicitly claims that a dark intuition is an empty modification of a perception and thus itself an empty intention, when he writes, “The empty modification of external perception [...] is exemplified in the halo of perception *and* in the example of the empty, un-intuitive ‘perception’, of the object, which is ‘still standing there’ during the extinguishing of the light” (Hua XX-1, 147).

⁴⁶ Hua XX-2, 154.

as signitive.⁴⁷ The “signitive tendency” of the categorial words⁴⁸ is that which impels me to go beyond the signs to execute the meaning act.⁴⁹ To be clear, this tendency is not a presentation or any kind of intention, but rather the pull I experience to execute the meaning act.⁵⁰ Husserl clarifies his understanding of the signitive tendency by outlining two of its defining traits. He asserts that the signitive tendency can be characterized as the “should” (*das Sollen*) of a categorial sign and as a *Hinweistendenz*.⁵¹

First, Husserl begins his analysis of the “should” of the signitive tendency by stating that the “should” originally has its source in a “demand” (*eine Zumutung*). Husserl observes that when another is speaking to me, I – at least initially – experience that other as placing a “demand” on me to understand the meaning of the expressive signs, which she is uttering. I experience the other not only as one who is composing those meaningful signs, but also as one who is “demanding” me to understand them.⁵² Husserl writes, “All authentic signs have their origin in the [demand], which comes from a demanding subject”.⁵³ As a result of the other’s “demand” of myself, my experience of the expressive authentic signs changes, I experience the categorial expressive signs as possessing a “should”. The categorial expression now manifests itself to me as something that I ought to or “should” take as a communicative expression of a meaning.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Husserl claims that even in those cases where I am not currently experiencing the “demand” of another subject to understand her signs – such as when I first open the pages of a book – the signs can still present themselves to me with a “should”. Husserl asserts that I am yet still able to experience those signs with a “should”, because a trace of the demand remains within the signs. This trace is the result of a habituation. During my previous communicative interactions with other subjects, I always experienced their spoken words as accompanied by their “personal” demands. Because I have encountered word signs as always accompanied by these personal “demands” throughout my life, I have become habituated to the fact that I am always “demanded” to understand categorial expressive signs. By means of this habituation, the personal “demands” of other subjects transfuse or percolate into the authentic linguistic signs themselves. As a result, even if no subject is there to “demand” that I understand the expressive signs, I still experience expressions as something that I am “demanded” to understand. This “demand”, which I experience, does not arise from nowhere or no one, but rather comes from the categorial signs themselves, I experience the signs as “demanding” me to understand them.⁵⁵ Husserl writes that

⁴⁷ Husserl writes, “It was a mistake in the first formulation of this investigation, a mistake which is still apparent in the First Investigation, that signitive and significative intentions were mistaken for each other” (Hua XX-2, 204).

⁴⁸ In the concluding section four, I discuss Husserl’s understanding of “categorial” signs at length.

⁴⁹ Hua XX-2, 184.

⁵⁰ Hua XX-2, 132–133; 135 note 2.

⁵¹ To be clear, Husserl’s two characterizations of this tendency often intersect with each other. As the points of overlap often obscure Husserl’s main ideas, to efficiently and clearly highlight the different elements of this tendency, in the following investigation, I have artificially separated Husserl’s claims about the signitive tendency as the “should” from his assertions about the tendency as a *Hinweistendenz*.

⁵² Hua XX-2, 72.

⁵³ Hua XX-2, 97.

⁵⁴ Hua XX-2, 97.

⁵⁵ Hua XX-2, 97–98.

[t]he thought of the [personal] demand can fall away or entirely withdraws, but it still remains the case that, as soon as I grasp the 'sign' Z, I experience the [demand] to go over into and to terminate in the thematic consciousness of the meaning.⁵⁶

When I experience the categorial sign as “demanding” me to understand it, the sign appears with its “should”. The sign is, in that case, performing both functions, as it “demands” me and appears to me as something I “should” understand.

A second way Husserl characterizes the signitive tendency is as a *Hinweistendenz*. In labelling this tendency as such, Husserl is, as he did in 1901, drawing on the parallel between the contiguity acts of perception – which he calls the *hinausweisende* intentions in 1913/14 – and the experience of expression. Yet, this *Hinweistendenz* is certainly not analogical to the *hinausweisende* intentions in the same ways that the signitive contiguity intentions were said to be similar to the signitive meaning act. The *Hinweistendenz* is not a meaning intention, which is directed at the meant state of affairs beyond the intuitively given signs, but is instead the experienced motivation, which adheres to the words, to execute the relevant meaning act.

Husserl states that the pointing-beyond of the *Hinweistendenz* is different from other kinds of tendencies or intentions. He writes: “The *Hinweis* of the sign is not a general *Hinweis*, or more specifically a mere *Hindrägen* ... rather, the sign as such is characterized in a phenomenologically peculiar manner”.⁵⁷ That which distinguishes the signitive *Hinweistendenz* from other kinds of tendencies for Husserl is that the *Hinweistendenz* draws attention to the meaning and away from the categorial sign itself in a particular and singular manner. Because of the *Hinweistendenz*, when I read the words on the page, “[t]he thematic interest belongs exclusively to the meaning, for which the sign only functions as a means”.⁵⁸ The signitive *Hinweistendenz* establishes such a fusion between the word constituting act and the meaning act, that the word is not attended to, but is only experienced as a bridge to the meaning intention.

Moving forward to Husserl’s new account of the non-intuitive intentions of meaning, I begin by mentioning that, because Husserl applies the term “signitive” to the tendency, which motivates the execution of the meaning act, he naturally does not again use that term, “signitive”, to label meaning intentions. Instead, Husserl now calls a meaning intention, a “significative” act.⁵⁹ Husserl’s new theory of meaning acts does not, however, amount to a mere change in terminology. Rather, he alters his conclusions about the kinds of intentions that can serve as meaning-giving. In what follows, I briefly discuss Husserl’s new theory of significative meaning giving acts and I investigate how he amends his descriptions of the significative meaning intentions of wordless recognitions.

As was stated in section 2.1, in 1901, Husserl concluded that only signitive intentions, which are empty of intuitive content, can serve as meaning giving acts. In 1913/14, he overturns that theory by asserting that empty *or intuitive* acts can give meaning to expressions. The *Hinweistendenz* of the expression can fuse the word-constituting act *either* with an empty act *or* with an intuitive act, where either can serve to give those words their meaning.⁶⁰ Melle explains the novelty of this point well, by writing that

⁵⁶ Hua XX-2, 84.

⁵⁷ Hua XX-2, 134.

⁵⁸ Hua XX-2, 180.

⁵⁹ Hua XX-2, 204–205.

⁶⁰ Hua XX-2, 151–153.

“[l]inguistic consciousness is always two-tiered, either intuitive or not. Intuition, which, since all linguistic signs are categorial signs, can only be categorial intuition, can be directly expressed, that is, it can itself function as a meaning giving act”.⁶¹

On the basis of this insight, in 1913/14, Husserl also alters his 1901 conception of the fulfilment of non-intuitive meaning acts. Because Husserl now asserts that categorial intuitions can themselves operate as significative meaning giving acts, he recognizes that, during fulfilment, the empty significative intention does *not* have to be executed for the relevant words to have meaning. The categorial intuition can itself give the words their meaning in the first place, such that there is no need for an empty meaning act to be performed for the words to obtain meaning. Accordingly, Husserl decides that in those cases of fulfilment where I first execute an empty significative meaning act and then come to categorially intuit that same state of affairs, the categorial intuition can *replace* the significative meaning act. Husserl writes that, during fulfilment, “the word-consciousness is directly related to the intuitive consciousness, the empty intention is replaced (*ist abgelöst*) by the intuitive consciousness, which now itself, and without any mediation from an enduring empty act, [functions] as the meaning”.⁶²

Finally, Husserl also revamps his theory of wordless recognition and, in doing so, he alters his understanding of the words, which can be given meaning by significative intentions. We remember that Husserl previously observed that during a wordless recognition, I execute a meaning act without intending expressive signs at all – hence, the term, “wordless”. Husserl, in contrast, now states that such recognitions, for example, of the drill or of the roman milestone, are not wordless. Rather, in these cases, I am still intending an expressive sign, but I am doing so via an empty intention. During these recognitions, even though the expression is not intuitively presented, it is yet still intended by an empty (seemingly dark) word-constituting act. Husserl describes this experience by stating that the word, “is still there for us; even though it is intended in a fully un-intuitive manner”.⁶³ By combining this insight with Husserl’s new observations about the different kinds of significative meaning acts, it can be concluded that, in 1913/14, Husserl believes that empty or intuitive significative acts can give meaning to and fuse with – via the significative tendency – emptily or intuitively intended words.

4. Conclusion

In this conclusion, I step back to discuss how Husserl’s 1913/14 transformations to his theory of non-intuitive acts can be better understood within the context of a larger trend in his philosophy. Specifically, in the time between the composition of *Investigations* and *Revisions*, Husserl recognizes that the sensible or perceptual sphere is more autonomous from the categorial realm than he had previously realized. In coming to observe that these two kinds of intentions each have their own rules and logic, he establishes a stricter distinction between the sensible and the categorial, which respects the autonomy of both.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Melle, *Husserl Revisions*, 179.

⁶² Hua XX-2, 151.

⁶³ Hua XX-2, 86.

⁶⁴ I quote *Summa* at length as summarizing the results of this shift in Husserl’s philosophy by writing,

If we consider such interplay, the stratification of experience shall not be conceived too statically, as to signify that experience is made up of reciprocally independent moments that are, as it were, piled one on the top of the

This shift arises in part as a result of Husserl's reflections on which intentions can give expressive signs their meaning. We know that, in *Investigations*, Husserl claimed that both single rayed and categorial intentions could endow expressions with meaning or sense, where he treated those latter two terms as largely interchangeable.⁶⁵ In 1913/14; however, Husserl observes that only categorial intentions have meaning and can give meaning to expressions and that, in contrast, single rayed acts only have sense and cannot endow words with their referential power.⁶⁶ In what follows, I demonstrate how two of Husserl's conclusions – which were discussed above – can be viewed as a working out of his new stricter division between sensible sense and categorial meaning, where this recontextualization also sheds new light on Husserl's evolving theory of non-intuitive intentions.

First and most obvious is that Husserl's discovery of the difference between the contiguity intentions of perception and the significative intentions of meaning is a natural offshoot of his new respect for the autonomy of the sensible sphere. By seeing, in 1913/14, that the sensible and the categorial have different rules and logic, he is also able to conclude that he was wrong to state, in 1901, that the non-intuitive acts of both sensible perception and categorial meaning could be classified as the same, that is, as signitive. Instead, he concretely works out his recognition of the autonomy of the sensible, by appropriately describing contiguity and significative non-intuitive intentions as being distinct with regards to their motivations, roles, and fulfilments, as was discussed extensively in the body of this text.⁶⁷

Second, Husserl's 1913/14 descriptions of expressive signs and the signitive tendency can be properly understood as a consequence of his novel stricter division between the sensible and categorial spheres. To understand why this is the case; however, another of Husserl's insights from the *Investigations* needs to be mentioned. In 1901, Husserl asserted that a tripartite isomorphism obtained between the words, the meaning, and the signified. He concluded that the grammar of the words is paralleled in the categorial structure of the meaning and in the categorial structure of the signified state of affairs or object.⁶⁸ Importantly, Husserl continues to maintain this “across-the-board” isomorphism in the *Revisions*, where this leads him to some peculiar conclusions. Because Husserl now

other. Even maintaining the relative autonomy of each layer, we shall emphasize that they do not proceed on separate paths within the process of experience and constitution. As we have seen by considering phenomena such as the experience of the thing independently of its conceptual determination or the possibility of chaos, there are several forms of interplay between the different layers. Experience, in this sense, shall be considered as a complex whole, whereby the different moments can certainly be distinguished for descriptive reasons, although they cannot be separated from each other. Such a re-evaluation of the architectonics grounds the understanding of experience as a field of dynamic interconnections among different ways of relating to the world. (*Spatio-Temporal Intertwining*, 318)

⁶⁵ Cf. note 17 above.

⁶⁶ Hua XX-1, 58–74. In his 2008 text, Vandavelde suggests that Husserl made a mistake when arriving at this conclusion. He claims that Husserl's largely interchangeable use of sense and meaning was a “felicitous” ambiguity, which allowed for Husserl's descriptive psychology to more accurately account for our experiences of meaningful expressions (*Ambiguity*, 45–7). I certainly disagree with this evaluation of Husserl's evolution. In observing that only categorial acts can give meaning to expressions and by separating meaning from sense, I believe that Husserl correctly realized that our expressions and their meanings are always of a categorial or intellectual nature.

⁶⁷ Even though Husserl is attempting to more strictly cleave the sensuous from the categorial during his 1913/14 discussion of non-intuitive acts, to his credit, he does not ignore or deny the similarities between them. We know that he still describes how both kinds of non-intuitive intentions point beyond the intuitively given and how they are both motivated via association.

⁶⁸ Hua XIX, 336–348/Vol. 2, 68–75. See also section 28 from the First Investigation, Hua XIX, 94–97/Vol. 1, 222–224. I have discussed this isomorphism at length in my *Dawn of Pure Logical Grammar* and *Early Genealogy*.

claims that only categorial intentions – be they intuitive or empty – can give meaning to expressions, and because he upholds that theory of isomorphism, he concludes that only categorially structured words can be endowed with meaning. Otherwise stated, only categorial signs can be expressive signs.⁶⁹ In line with this, as mentioned above, only categorial expressive signs can “demand” me to understand them and appear with their “should”. An even more interesting upshot is that Husserl asserts that the signitive tendency itself has a categorial structure. Because the signitive tendency leads me from the categorially structured words to the categorially structured meant, Husserl believes that it must be isomorphic to both. What exactly it would mean for a tendency, which operates via associative motivation, to be intellectually or categorially structured is; however, never clarified by Husserl and *prima facie*, it strikes me as a wooden iron.⁷⁰

By pulling back from dense textual analysis in this conclusion, I have demonstrated how the *Revisions* represents an important step in the development of Husserl’s philosophy as a whole, as he there begins to concretely work out his insight, that the sensible and the categorial possess different rules and distinct logics. Husserl’s discussion of, on the one hand, the sharp contrast between perceptual contiguity intentions and significative meaning acts, and, on the other, his descriptions of categorial words and signitive tendencies, are composed in the attempt to construct a philosophy of language and meaning, which respects the autonomy of the sensible and the categorial spheres, while not ignoring their similarities and their interrelationships. To be clear, Husserl’s 1913/14 discussion of these non-intuitive intentions is only one of the first steps in his quest to properly distinguish the sensuous from the categorial. Indeed, Husserl would not give up this challenging project, as he would continue to pursue it even into his final writings, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and *Experience and Judgment*.⁷¹ Yet, any attempt to trace the whole history of Husserl’s conception of the relationship between non-intuitive meaning, sensible perception, and language would; however, naturally be the task of a much larger project. It was instead the more modest and primary goal of this paper to clearly elucidate Husserl’s philosophy of non-intuitive intentions in 1901 and his revisions to that theory in 1913/14. In doing so, I hope to have demonstrated that Husserl’s descriptions of non-intuitive acts are more complex, philosophically interesting, and important than has often been accounted for.

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⁶⁹ Bernet explains this point well and draws out some of its implications for Husserl’s metaphysics and for the phenomenology of intersubjectivity in his *Husserl’s Theory of Signs* on pages 12–17.

⁷⁰ Bernet entertains this conclusion as – at least partially – justifiable (*Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, 14), whereas Melle rejects it outright (*Signitive and Signifikative Intentionen*, 180).

⁷¹ In this conclusion, I have emphasized the distinctions between the sensible and the categorial, so as to highlight the autonomy of the sensible with respect to the categorial. At the same time, it should be noted that the later Husserl, particularly in his genetic phenomenology and in his genealogy of logic, tries to show how categorial structures are rooted in pre-categorial sensible structures. Drummond explains this point well by writing,

Husserl reveals to us that the logical forms expressed in the grammatical structures of a language have their deep roots in the things of experience themselves. Not all intelligibility, I have said, comes from intersubjectivity and language; intelligibility is rooted in the presentations of things as such, in the core-forms of substantivity and adjectivity. (*Anticipatory Categoriality*, 137)

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