

Chad Kidd\*

# Re-examining Husserl's Non-Conceptualism in the *Logical Investigations*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2019-3004>

**Abstract:** A recent trend in Husserl scholarship takes the *Logische Untersuchungen (LU)* as advancing an inconsistent and confused view of the non-conceptual content of perceptual experience. Against this, I argue that there is no inconsistency about non-conceptualism in *LU*. Rather, *LU* presents a hybrid view of the conceptual nature of perceptual experience, which can easily be misread as inconsistent, since it combines a conceptualist view of perceptual content (or matter) with a non-conceptualist view of perceptual acts. I show how this hybrid view is operative in Husserl's analyses of essentially occasional expressions and categorial intuition. And I argue that is also deployed in relation to Husserl's analysis of the constitution of perceptual fullness, which allows it to avoid an objection raised by Walter Hopp – that the combination of Husserl's analysis of perceptual fullness with conceptualism about perceptual content generates a vicious regress.

## 1 Introduction

A recent trend in Husserl scholarship takes the *Logische Untersuchungen (LU)* as advancing an irredeemably confused conception of perceptual experience.<sup>1</sup> Within the confines of the same work, these commentators claim, Husserl advances both conceptualist and non-conceptualist doctrines about perceptual content.<sup>2</sup> However, they continue, Husserl's eventual recognition of this confu-

---

1 I will cite Husserl's *Logical Investigations* by "LU" followed by the number of the investigation, section, page of the Husserliana edition Husserl 1975, and then the page of Findlay's English translation Husserl 1970. Nearly all the quotations from *LU* are modified versions of Findlay's translation.

2 Hubert Dreyfus 1982 was, to my knowledge, the first to suggest this kind of inconsistency in Husserl's views. And the first to clearly articulate it as an internal conflict in *LU* was Kevin Mulligan 1995. Mulligan's reading set a trend followed in Barber 2008, Hopp 2008, 2010, 2011,

---

\*Corresponding author: Chad Kidd, Department of Philosophy, City College of New York (CUNY), 160 Convent Avenue, New York, NY 10031, USA; ckidd@ccny.cuny.edu

sion in his early work spurred a gradual growth out of inconsistency into the light of the systematic view of perceptual intentionality and the nature of knowledge presented in his later works.<sup>3</sup>

While I agree that there is a distinctive development to be found in Husserl's corpus, I believe that the familiar story just related rests on a deep misunderstanding of the analysis of perception and fulfillment in *LU*. For, as I will argue here, there is no confusion over conceptualism in *LU*. Rather, *LU* presents a consistent view of the nature and intentional content of perception, which one can easily misread as self-contradictory, since it combines a conceptualist view of perceptual *content* (or matter) with a non-conceptualist view of perceptual *acts*.

The paper has two main divisions, each of which addresses a distinct challenge to the consistency of Husserl's analysis of perception in *LU* as it relates to non-conceptual content. The first division (Sections 2 to 5) focuses on the core argument for non-conceptual content, which is found in the Sixth Investigation (*LU VI*), and it explores this argument's connections with other key aspects of Husserl's analysis of perceptual intentionality. In Section 2, I present the basics of Husserl's analysis of intentionality and intuitive fulfillment. Close scrutiny of the latter, I believe, highlights a core conceptualist commitment of Husserl's view – that the type of intentional content (or “matter”) instanced in perception can also be instanced in judgment and belief. In Section 3, I present the inconsistency over non-conceptualism attributed to *LU* by reviewing the core argument for non-conceptual content that recent commentators claim to find in *LU VI* § 4. And in Section 4, I argue that this charge of inconsistency rests on a misinterpretation of this argument. In my view, Husserl is working with a distinction between two varieties of non-conceptualism about perception: a non-conceptualism about perceptual *states* or *acts* and a non-conceptualism about perceptual *contents*. I introduce this distinction by contrasting it with a strikingly similar distinction recently brought to prominence by Richard Heck (2000, 2007). And I show how

---

Leung 2010, Mooney 2010, and Doyon 2011, just to name a recent few wherein this influence is most evident.

<sup>3</sup> Commentators disagree about the view of perceptual content that Husserl endorsed in the *Ideas* (published in 1913) and later work. Mooney 2010, § 4, thinks that Husserl grew into a consistent conceptualism. Barber 2008 and Hopp 2008 claim he later developed a consistent non-conceptualism. While Doyon 2011, 43, argues that he found his way into a position in which “the dialectic between the conceptual and non-conceptual ultimately makes no sense on a phenomenological basis.”

I will not argue for any interpretation of Husserl's position in his later work here. However, for a reading of Husserl's later view of perceptual content that is, I think, consistent with the hybrid view that I argue is presented in *LU*, see van Mazijk 2016.

Husserl's arguments for non-conceptualism in *LU VI* are to be understood as advancing a non-conceptualist view of perceptual *acts* that is compatible with the conceptualism about perceptual *content* (or matter) at the heart of Husserl's analysis of perceptual fulfillment. I conclude this division by showing how Husserl's hybrid view of perceptual content fits with his analysis of the meaning of essentially occasional expressions (§ 4.1) and categorial intuition (§ 4.2).

The second division (Sections 5 and 6) focuses on a related charge of inconsistency over non-conceptualism developed by Walter Hopp 2008. On Hopp's reading, the combination of Husserl's content (or matter) conceptualism with his analysis of the sensuous fullness (*Fülle*) of perceptual experience, articulated in the infamously obscure third chapter of the Sixth Investigation, generates a vicious infinite regress (Section 5). In response (Section 6), I argue that Hopp's allegation rests upon a misreading of the text, which can be corrected in light of Husserl's hybrid view of perception. In Sections 6.1 and 6.2, I provide the details of the correct reading, which exonerates Husserl's view of the charge Hopp brings against it.

## 2 The Conceptualist Core of Husserl's Analysis of Fulfillment

According to Husserl, every act of consciousness has two interdependent yet independently variable aspects (*LU V* § 20). One of these is the act's *matter* (*Materie*). This is a part of the act that determines the act's total intentional bearing on the world. The matter determines not only *which object* the act is intentionally directed at, but also *as what* the act characterizes its object, i. e. what properties the act presents its object as having. The other aspect is the act's quality (*Qualität*). This is a part of the act that determines "whether what is already presented in definite fashion [in the act's matter] is intentionally present as (e. g.) wished, asked, posited in judgment, etc." (*LU V* § 20, 429/589). Husserl calls the specific combination of matter and quality instanced in an act the *intentional essence* (*intentionale Wesen*) of the act (*LU V* § 21).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that in *LU V* § 21 Husserl defines in tandem with *intentionale Wesen* or "intentional essence" the term *bedeutungsmäßige Wesen*. I find Findlay's English translation of this term as "semantic essence" very misleading, especially after more recent developments in philosophy of language that have given the term "semantic" a specific technical meaning. I prefer to translate the German literally as the "meaning-related" or "meaning-wise" essence, since it

In this connection it's important always to distinguish the abstract or ideal essence from the parts or "moments" in an intentional act that realize or instantiate this essence. When you and I both believe that the cherry trees in Central Park are in bloom, we each have a numerically distinct cognitive experience. Nevertheless, since these are both "believings" about the same thing, they each have a set of type-identical features that constitutes the abstract intentional essence realized in each. Our two experiences are, in realizing the same intentional essence, distinct *tokens* of the same *type*.<sup>5</sup> Husserl makes clear from early on in *LU* that the distinction between abstract or ideal types and the real (*real* or *reel*) moments that realize or instantiate them plays a crucial role in the analysis of intentionality given therein (cf., *LU* I § 31, 105 f./330, § 35; *LU* II Introduction; and *LU* V § 20, 430/589). Where this distinction is important in the following, I will refer to the particular parts of a concrete whole as "moments" or "instances". And I will refer to the abstract essences instantiated in these moments as "species," "types," or "ideal essences."<sup>6</sup>

These two distinctions are deployed in Husserl's phenomenological analysis of the structure of the experience of knowledge, which is communicated in the Sixth Investigation. This analysis focuses on articulating the structure of *Evidenz* – a term that refers to the distinctive experiential quality of an experience that marks it, from within the first-person perspective, as being an experience of knowledge (cf., *Prolegomena* § 6, 13/60). The analysis hinges on there being a phenomenological difference between the experiences of *knowing* that such-and-such is the case, on the one hand, and *thinking* or *merely believing* that such-

---

is clear that this term is meant to refer to the components of the concrete act that in, their given configuration, realize the abstract or *ideal* intentional essence.

5 It is helpful to point out here that the kind of case just considered is different from that where, say, I have an experience of believing that Caesar crossed the Rubicon and you have an experience of believing that Pluto is a dwarf planet. Here the two experiences instantiate the same type of quality, but different types of matter. It is also possible for my *merely supposing* that Pluto is a dwarf planet to instantiate the same type of matter as your *believing* that Pluto is a dwarf planet, even though they instantiate different qualities. As Husserl says, "*Every quality can be combined with every objective reference [or matter]*" (*LU* VI § 20, 428/588).

6 This is not to suggest that the ideal essence of the *object* of an intentional act – e. g., the ideal essence of the cherry tree itself – is the same as the matter of an intentional act directed at the object. Rather, these are two distinct essences, which have important, *a priori* correlations (*LU* I § 33). But, in *LU* at least, the type of matter (*Materie*) or meaning (*Bedeutung*, *Sinn*) of the act is something *instanced* in the total make-up of the act (*LU* I § 31), even though it is not to be categorized as a merely psychological phenomenon. Or, as one might also put it, the matter of an act is a psychological feature, but it has irreducible logical aspects, which require a kind of de-psychologized psychology, viz., *phenomenology*, to investigate (cf., *LU* Introduction to Volume 2 § 3).

and-such is the case, on the other. Husserl calls the former a “fulfilled” (*erfüllt*) intentional experience, and the latter an “unfulfilled” or “signitive” (*signitiv*) intentional experience (cf., *LU VI* § 8, 566–8/694 f. and § 15).

For example, suppose that I *believe* that the cherry trees in Central Park are in bloom simply on the basis of reading a report in the newspaper (signitive act). But then, because of my zeal for cherry blossoms, I go to the park and see the cherry trees for myself (intuition), thereby confirming my belief (fulfilled intentional experience). Husserl calls this kind of experience – an experience of seeing something to be just as I believe it to be – an *act of fulfillment*.

Husserl maintains that every act of fulfillment is a *complex act* (*zusammengesetzt Akt*) – i. e., roughly, an act that is composed of acts and whose total intentional reference is the sum of the intentional references of its part-acts (*LU V* § 18, 417/580).<sup>7</sup> The part-acts that together constitute an act of fulfillment are:

1. an “empty” signitive act (e. g., an experience of believing or supposing that the cherry trees in Central Park are in bloom),
2. an intuitive act directed at the same object or state of affairs intended by the signitive act (e. g., a perceptual experience of the cherry trees in Central Park in bloom), and
3. a recognition that the intentional object of the intuitive act is the same (and has more or less the same properties) as the intentional object of the signi-

---

<sup>7</sup> More carefully expressed, Husserl defines a “complex” or “compound” act as an act that is compounded out of other acts such that the intentional references of each component-act are “bound together in one total act, whose total achievement lies in the unity of its intentional reference. [...] [T]he unity of the presentational object [*der vorstelligen Gegenständlichkeit*], and the whole manner of the intentional reference to it, are not constituted *alongside* of the partial acts, but *in* them, in the way in which they are combined, a way which realizes a unified *act*, and not merely a unity of experience [*Erlebnisses*]” (*LU V* § 18, 417/580).

It is worthwhile to note that, according to this definition, acts that Husserl calls *Aussagen*, i. e., “assertions” or “statements” – which philosophers today would call propositional attitudes – are synthetic acts of presentation, which also count as complex acts. For the matter of an assertion always has a complex, “articulate” (*gegliedert*), and “many-rayed” (*mehrstrahligen*) structure consisting of at least two “single-rayed” (*einstrahligen*), “inarticulate” or “unstructured” (*ungegliedert*) presentations – i. e., a subject-presentation and a predicate-presentation (see *LU V* § 38, especially 502/640 and § 42). As Husserl says, in acts of assertion, “Each member has its objectifying quality [*objektivierende Qualität*] [...] and its matter. Likewise, the synthetic whole as a single objectifying act has a quality and a matter, but the latter is now articulate” (*LU V* § 38, 502/640). This point about the way in which the complexity of assertions differs from the complexity of an act of fulfillment will be crucial for the defense of Husserl that follows, especially in the discussion of the differences between his conceptualist commitments and those often found in the contemporary debate (cf., the beginning of Section 4 below), and in the discussion of categorical intuition (Section 4.2 below).

tive act or, with reference to the essences of these acts, that the moments of matter instanced in the signitive and intuitive acts stand in a relation of “coincidence” (*Deckung*).

Within the unity of an act of fulfillment, the intuitive act confirms or justifies the signitive act by “offering it fullness” (*LU VI § 14*, 591/715; cf., *LU VI § 42*, 615/735). This confirmation of the content of the signitive act constitutes a new “appearance” of the object: the “appearance” of the object as *known* to be just (or more or less just) as it is presented in the signitive act. I will address in more detail what intuitive fullness is in Section 6 below.

Husserl calls the combination of the intentional essence of the act and the degree of fullness with which its object is presented the *epistemic essence* of the act (*LU VI § 28*, 626/745). The complete articulation of the epistemic essence of every possible intentional act is the grand ambition of Husserl’s phenomenological epistemology in *LU*. And the elucidation of the ideal essential structure of the act of fulfillment in perceptual judgment is the heart of this project. If we can elucidate the ideal essential structure instanced in those experiences wherein perceptual experience makes the truth of a judgment manifest, then this could serve as the touchstone for the theory of knowledge in other domains. For it would deliver an articulation of the fundamental structures of consciousness by which intuitive experience becomes *reason giving*.

A key point in all this for the argument to follow is the claim that the type-identity of moments of matter in intuitive and signitive acts is the core of what Husserl means by “coincidence” or *Deckung* in fulfillment. Now, I concede that this point is obscured in the text of *LU* by the fact that Husserl starts out using the term *Deckung* in a weaker sense, which does not entail type-identity (see especially *LU VI §§ 6–8*, where he leaves unspecified *how* two acts in the unity of fulfillment achieve reference to the same object as being much the same).<sup>8</sup> And so, some readers might come away from the text of *LU* with the impression that *Deckung* does not involve type-identity. However, a key result of a line of investigation Husserl carries out at *LU VI §§ 9–26* is that *Deckung* does involve type-identity. As Husserl puts it in the initial formulation of his conclusion,

---

<sup>8</sup> *Deckung* literally means “covering” or “backing”. And it is often used colloquially to refer to the kinds of financial “backing” or “coverage” that one buys in an insurance policy. So, it seems, *A* can in this sense “cover” or “back” *B* without being type-identical to *B*. Thanks to Walter Hopp for pressing an objection to an earlier version of this paper that forced me to make this important point clear.

[...] it is clear that the concept of matter is defined through the unity of a total identification, namely as that in the act, which serves as the basis [*Fundament*] of identification; and, consequently, that all the many determining differences of fullness, all the peculiarities of fulfillment and increase in fulfillment, going beyond mere identification are not to factor in the formation of this concept. In whatever way the fullness of a presentation [*Vorstellung*] varies within its possible gradients of fulfillment, its intentional object [*intentionaler Gegenstand*], which is intended and just as it is intended [*welcher und so wie er intendiert ist*], remains the same. In other words, its matter remains the same. (*LU VI § 25 618/738*)

Briefly, the key point Husserl is making here is that the “unity of total identification [...] which serves as the basis of identification”, i. e., the unity of *Deckung*, between two presentations in fulfillment is the type identity of the moments of matter in each or, as Husserl puts it, it is when “the matter remains the same” despite differences in degree of fullness.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, even with this passage as proof-text, the defenses of the weaker reading of *Deckung* are not yet exhausted. While I do not have space in this paper to respond systematically to all of these, I will confront the weaker reading's primary bulwark: the lack of an interpretation of Husserl's view of perceptual content that makes clear how an endorsement of conceptualism about perceptual content is compatible with the passages and implications of doctrines in *LU* that seem to deny it. Therefore, in setting up the controversy over conceptualism in the next section, I proceed as if the reading of *Deckung* as involving the (at least partial) type-identity of matter is correct. And, starting in Section 4, I begin to show how this strong reading of *Deckung* does not generate inconsistencies in *LU* once we correctly identify the kind of non-conceptualism Husserl is advancing alongside the basic conceptualist commitment of his analysis of fulfillment.

Henceforth, I will call to the strong reading of *Deckung*, which involves the type-identity of matter between intuitive and signitive acts, the *conceptualist core* of Husserl's analysis of fulfillment.

### 3 The Controversy over Conceptualism in *LU*

The conceptualist core of Husserl's analysis of fulfillment is strikingly similar to conceptualism about perceptual content as this is understood in recent debates over non-conceptual content in philosophy of perception. John McDowell, in his

---

<sup>9</sup> See *LU VI § 8* where he makes this correlation between “unity of identity” and “*Deckung*” explicit; cf., *LU I § 14*.

paradigmatic presentation of conceptualism in *Mind and World*, defines what it is for an intentional content to be *conceptual* in the following way:

In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. (McDowell 1996, 26)

This statement of conceptualism about content is a near equivalent to the conceptualist core of Husserl's doctrine of fulfillment elucidated in the foregoing. As Husserl says, "To every intuitive intention there pertains, in the sense of an ideal possibility, a signitive intention exactly accommodating its matter" (*LU VI* § 21, 607/728). Therefore, we have grounds for the claim that there is indeed a commitment at the heart of Husserl's view about perceptual content that would be recognized as distinctively conceptualist today.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there is a resemblance between the ways McDowell and Husserl motivate conceptualism. For each argues that perceptual experience can secure the epistemic function of *Evidenz* (Husserl) or of being a reason for belief (McDowell) only if the intentional content of perception or intuition can also be the content of belief or a signitive act.

Alongside these striking similarities, however, there is one important difference that must be noted here. In *Mind and World* McDowell claims that conceptualism about perceptual content involves taking it to have a propositional structure, Husserl's conceptualism, however, only requires that the matter of perception can also be *part of* the total matter of a possible judgment or other kind of signitive act; and this does not entail that perception itself has a content with propositional structure. Husserl maintains that the matter or "interpretative sense" (*Auffassungssinn*) of (straightforward) perception is importantly different in type from the matter of a statement (*Aussage*), an act with propositional content (*LU V* §§ 33–36 and *LU VI* §§ 47 f.). For while Husserl takes the subject- and predicate-presentations in the unity of a complex propositional matter to represent their objects like a perception does – i. e., in a "straightforward," "nominal" fashion – they are united in this synthetic presentation by virtue of the imposition of a new "form," a subject- or predicate-form, that is not already found in the matter of a straightforward object-perception (*LU VI* § 49; cf., *LU V* § 36, 490–3/631–3). Yet, one must notice, even though there is *more* to the propositionally structured matter of judgment than is in the matter of straightforward perceptual experience, this does not preclude – indeed, it presupposes – the possibility that

---

<sup>10</sup> See also the way that Husserl's conceptualist commitment in *LU* is characterized in Hopp (2008, 223).

“the new [propositional] form includes the whole old [straightforward perceptual] interpretative sense in itself and only grants it the sense of a new ‘role’” (*LU VI* § 49, 686/797; cf., *LU V* § 36, 491–3/632f.). So, even though Husserl does not claim that the matter of straightforward perception is already formed in a way that would allow it to serve a subject- or predicate-role in the matter of an act of judgment, he nevertheless maintains that the matter of a straightforward perception can be *imported into* the matter of a belief or judgment after it's been appropriately “shaped” by subjective synthetic operations (*LU VI* § 49, 687/797). Therefore, Husserl's conceptualism is weaker than McDowell's insofar as it holds that the total matter of perception lacks propositional structure and that it can only be a *part* of the total matter of a judgment.<sup>11</sup>

According to recent commentators, even this weaker conceptualism is enough to create inconsistencies in *LU*. For these commentators see arguments for the opposed doctrine of non-conceptualism in *LU VI* § 4.<sup>12</sup> That Husserl is arguing for a non-conceptualist thesis in this section might seem obvious just from the section title: “The expression of a perception (‘perceptual judgment’). Its meaning cannot lie in perception, but must lie in peculiar expressive acts.” But to see more clearly how commentators read this as an expression of non-conceptualism, we must first understand what Husserl means by the term “perceptual judgment.” This term is defined in *LU VI* § 3 as meaning a kind of experience in which

I derive my judgment from my perception, that I do not only assert the relevant matter of fact [*Tatsache*], but perceive it and assert it as I perceive it. The judgment here is not concerned with the perception, but with the *perceived*. (*LU VI* § 3, 548/679).

Perceptual judgment is, then, not *introspective* judgment – i. e., judgment *about* the perceptual experience itself – but judgment about the *object* of the perceptual experience, about the *object that appears* to one in the experience. Per the struc-

---

<sup>11</sup> McDowell 2009 abandons the strong conceptualist view of perceptual content for one that is more like (but not exactly like) the one that I argue Husserl advances in *LU*. In this later view, McDowell abandons the idea that perception saddles the subject with propositionally structured claims. Rather, the content of perception is simply an immediate presentation of an object and its properties, which can itself be taken up in a judgment. Furthermore, this process of “taking up” perceptual content into a judgment requires more than just endorsing the content of a perception. Rather, this process involves “carv[ing] out that content from the intuitions's unarticulated content before one can put it together with other bits of content in discursive activity” (McDowell 2009, 263f.). This is not to say that McDowell's later view of conceptual content is just like Husserl's. But it certainly moves in that direction. For further characterizations of Husserl's view that can be used to distinguish it from McDowell's, see Section 4 below.

<sup>12</sup> See Mulligan 1995, 171f., Mooney 2010, § 3, and Leung 2010, § 6.

ture of Husserl's conception of intentionality (as outlined in the previous section of this paper), if an "expression of a perception" is an expression that refers to the intentional object of the perceptual experience, then it is also an expression (albeit in a different sense of the term) of the *matter* of the perceptual act. And so, here Husserl must be claiming that the matter expressed in judgment "cannot lie in perception, but must lie in peculiar expressive acts." This in turn suggests to commentators that the matter of the "expression of the perception" is peculiar to the linguistic act in the sense that the ideal type of matter instanced in the linguistic act of perceptual judgment cannot also be instanced in the perceptual experience that grounds the judgment.<sup>13</sup> In other words, it seems that we could paraphrase the overall conclusion (as expressed in the title) of *LU VI § 4* as

**Non-conceptualism:** the type of matter (or "meaning") of perception cannot also be instanced in the "sense-giving" or "meaning-conferring" acts of thinking, judging, and believing.<sup>14</sup>

The central line of argument for non-conceptualism that these commentators see in this section is:

1. Numerically distinct perceptual judgments that instantiate different types of matter could be based on the same perception.
2. The same perceptual judgment with no alteration in its matter could be based on numerically distinct perceptions that instantiate different types of matter.
3. The same perceptual judgment can suffer no alternation in matter even after the perception it is based on has ceased.
4. Therefore, the matter instanced in perceptual experience is non-conceptual, i. e., the matter of a perceptual judgment is not instanced in a perceptual experience, even when that perceptual experience serves as the foundation of the perceptual judgment. (cf., Leung 2010, 136)

To illustrate through an example, suppose I have a visual experience of a blossoming cherry tree. (1) Any of the following judgments could be based on this

---

<sup>13</sup> See, e. g., Leung (2010, 136).

<sup>14</sup> Leung (2010, 136) gives the following paraphrases of the conclusion of the argument in *LU VI § 4*: "that meaning does not lie in perception or any other intuitive" act, "that the intuitive act is not sense-giving," and "that the intuitive act is also meaningful even without uniting with the meaning-conferring act in the synthetic act of fulfillment." It is not clear to me, at least, that these are all saying the same thing. But as we will observe below, Leung thinks that Husserl himself does not realize what conclusion his argument in *LU VI § 4* actually supports anyway. And so, he could claim that the shifts in meaning between these three statements are a symptom of the confusion in Husserl's view.

experience, even though each judgment instantiates a distinct type of matter: “The cherry tree is in bloom,” “There are pink flowers on that tree,” “This cherry tree is thriving,” “This cherry tree is beautiful.” (2) I could base the same perceptual judgement, e. g., “This cherry tree is in bloom,” on a variety of different perceptual experiences: a visual experience of the tree from the street, from the top of the neighboring building, or as depicted on a television screen across town from a live feed on a security camera. None of these variations in perceptual experience affects a change in the matter of the expression. (3) Suppose that I judge “The cherry tree is in bloom,” while gazing at the tree in bloom. But then I lie down in the grass, close my eyes, and make the same judgment. Even after perceptual experience of the tree has ceased, my judgment can have the same matter as the judgment made while gazing at the tree. (4) What these possible variations in perception and judgment show is that the matter of my perception and the matter of my judgment can vary freely in relation to one another (at least after the perceptual judgment is made in relation to a perceptual experience that presents the object judged about). Therefore, the matter instanced in perception is distinct from the matter instanced in a signitive expression of perceptual judgment. These commentators take this conclusion to be expressed by Husserl in passages such as the following, which is found at the end of *LU VI § 5*:

If we may trust our arguments, we must not only draw a general distinction between the perceptual and the significant element in the statement of perception; we must also locate *no part of the meaning in the perception itself*. (*LU VI § 5*, 556/685, emphasis in original; cf., *LU VI § 4*, 551/681)

However, the incoherence that these commentators detect in Husserl's thinking about non-conceptualism emerges clearly in the very next sentence, which – when read with the interpretation of coincidence (*Deckung*) as involving the type-identity of matter – seems to deliver an unabashed endorsement of conceptualism about perceptual content:

The perception, *which presents [gibt] the object, and the statement which, by way of the judgement or, otherwise expressed, by way of the “thought-act” woven into the unity of the judgement thinks and expresses it, must be rigorously kept apart*, even though, in the case of the perceptual judgement now being considered, they stand to each other in the most intimate interrelation [*in der innigsten Aufeinanderbeziehung*], the relation of coincidence [*im Verhältnis der Deckung*], or the unity of fulfilment. (*LU VI § 5*, 556/685)

Puzzling, indeed.

## 4 Resolving the Controversy: Husserl's Hybrid View of Perceptual Content

Many commentators maintain that, at junctures like this, Husserl was fundamentally confused.<sup>15</sup> However, I want to argue that these passages actually express a consistent view. For while *LI VI § 4* is advancing an argument for a non-conceptualist thesis, it is a kind of non-conceptualism about perceptual experience that is compatible with the conceptualist core of Husserl's analysis of fulfillment. Expressed in terms that I will clarify in the following, Husserl is advancing a non-conceptualist thesis about the nature of perceptual *acts* that is different from a non-conceptualist thesis about perceptual *contents* or *matters*.

A clue that this is the case is suggested by Leung's response to the inconsistency in Husserl's thought that arises on his reading. Leung argues that *we* – readers of Husserl, intent on understanding the view that Husserl was *attempting* to articulate in *LU* – can simply set aside the slips of thought in *LU VI § 4* because the argument for non-conceptualism it contains is not sound. As Leung points out, the independent variability of the matters instanced in perception and associated perceptual judgment only demonstrates that these matters are *numerically distinct*, but not that they cannot be distinct instances of the *same type*. As Leung puts it:

What it can accomplish is only the assurance that the intuitive act is not essential to the phenomenon of meaning and that expression is still meaningful even without the corresponding intuition. But it is not enough to exclude the possibility that the intuitive act is also meaningful even without uniting with the meaning-conferring act in the synthetic act of fulfillment; thus it might still be sense-giving in itself. [...] Husserl seems to have neglected to consider the possibility that intuition [or perception] is essentially sense-giving, in the sense that it has always already been united with a meaning-conferring act insofar as it is an intuition, that is, insofar as it is an intuitively intentional act. (Leung 2010, 136)

However, this criticism of the argument in *LU VI § 4* could also suggest – something that Leung does not recognize – that the foregoing presentation of the argument contains a misreading of its conclusion: that Husserl is not arguing for a non-conceptualism about the matter instanced in a perceptual state at all, but rather a non-conceptualism about the perceptual *act* (or state) as a whole.

As an adumbration of the more thorough elaboration of this distinction given below, let us characterize it as follows. *Content non-conceptualism*, on the one hand, claims that the same type of intentional content present in a perceptual act

---

<sup>15</sup> See, e. g., Mulligan 1995, 172 n9, Hopp 2008, Mooney 2010, and Leung 2010.

cannot also be present as content in a belief or judgment. *State or act non-conceptualism*, on the other hand, claims that in order for a subject to have a perceptual experience with a certain kind of intentional content or matter, the subject need not *possess* any of the concepts deployed in a characterization of the perceptual experience's content. Content non-conceptualism, then, is a thesis about the intentional content of perceptual experience and the kinds of act in which it can serve as intentional content. Whereas act non-conceptualism is a thesis about the kinds of intentional acts (or mental states) that a subject can have. What I'm claiming about *LU VI § 4*, then, is that it communicates an argument for *act non-conceptualism* – i. e., for a claim that the conditions that must be satisfied for an act of consciousness to qualify as a perceptual act are not the same as the conditions that must be satisfied for an act to qualify as a propositional act.<sup>16</sup>

In light of this brief characterization of act non-conceptualism, we can see another clue that this is the thesis Husserl is pursuing in *LU VI § 4*, which comes at the end of *LU VI § 3*. There Husserl delivers a statement of the “general question” to be pursued in the following sections. He writes:

[I]n connection with the [...] defined new sense of 'expressed act' [i. e., in relation to the notion of perceptual judgment], we wish to make clear the whole relation between meaning [*Bedeutung*] and expressed intuition [*ausgedrückter Anschauung*]. We wish to consider whether such an intuition may not itself be the act constitutive of meaning, or if this is not the case, how the relation between them may be best understood and systematically classified. We are now heading towards a more general question: *Do the acts which give expression in general, and the acts which in general are capable of receiving expression, belong to essentially different spheres, and thereby to firmly delimited act-species?* (*LU VI § 3*, 549/679, emphasis added in last sentence)

What should now stand out in this passage is that Husserl does not say that he's setting out to find out whether the same type of matter can be instanced both in intuitive and in propositional acts, but that he is setting out to determine whether the *act* of intuition and the *act* of expression are of the same specific type or, as he puts it, “firmly delimited act-species.” In other words, Husserl is saying that the arguments of *LU VI § 4* do not concern the question of matter or content non-conceptualism, but instead the question of act or state non-conceptualism.

In light of this, we can interpret away the alleged inconsistency over non-conceptualism in *LU* in the following way. First, Husserl decides in favor of *act non-conceptualism* as a result of the arguments of *LU VI § 4*. And then he decides in favor of *matter conceptualism*, as expressed in the conceptualist core of fulfill-

---

16 For Husserl's conception of what I am here calling a propositional act, see footnote 7 above.

ment, as a result of the investigations in *LU* VI §§ 6–26. So, what recent interpreters take to be a self-contradictory tangle in *LU* is actually not that at all. Rather, it is the expression of a hybrid view of perceptual content, which combines act non-conceptualism with matter conceptualism.

In order to begin to make this interpretation clearer and more compelling as a reading of “*LU*”, I will do the following: (i.) elucidate the distinction between state and content non-conceptualism as this has been formulated in the recent debate over non-conceptual content in the writings of Richard Heck (2000; 2007) and others, (ii.) show how Heck’s way of formulating this distinction must be substantially modified before it can be applied as a characterization of Husserl’s view in *LU*, and (iii.) demonstrate that the hybrid Husserlian view that emerges is internally consistent.

*i. Elucidation:* I start on the first task by reviewing the introduction of the relevant distinction to the contemporary debate in the work of Richard Heck (2000; 2007).<sup>17</sup> Using a formulation from Josepha Toribio (2008, 354), we can express Heck’s distinction as follows:

*Content non-conceptualism:* For any perceptual experience *E* with content *C*, *C* is content non-conceptual iff *C* is essentially different in kind from the content of beliefs.

*State non-conceptualism:* For any perceptual experience *E* with content *C*, any subject *S*, and any time *t*, *E* is state non-conceptual iff it is not the case that in order for *S* to undergo *E*, *S* must possess at *t* the concepts that a correct characterization of *C* would involve.

To illustrate through an example: according to *content* non-conceptualism, in order to accurately describe my perceptual experience as being of a blossoming cherry tree, the intentional content of this experience must be such that it cannot also serve as the intentional content of the belief that the cherry tree is in bloom. On the other hand, according to *state* non-conceptualism, in order to accurately describe my perceptual experience as being of a blossoming cherry tree, I need not “possess” and “deploy” (as those in the contemporary literature like to say) the concepts BLOSSOMING and CHERRY TREE.

According to Heck, these claims are logically independent of each other. According to content non-conceptualism, the intentional content of my perceptual experience has no direct bearing on whether I can or cannot deploy the relevant concepts in a judgment or inference. Thus, even if the content of my percep-

---

<sup>17</sup> This distinction has also been recognized, although not using Heck’s terminology, in Speaks 2005 and Crowther 2006.

tual experience of a blossoming cherry tree could also be (a part of) the content of a belief, this does not entail that I must “possess” (in the relevant sense) the concepts BLOSSOMING and CHERRY TREE. Indeed, this condition on the content of my perceptual experiences entails nothing about my conceptual capacities at all. With regard to state non-conceptualism, the claim that I do not possess concepts that correctly characterize the content of my perceptual experience implies nothing about whether this content can also be the content of a belief or not. So, it seems, there is a clear conceptual independence of state non-conceptualism from content non-conceptualism.<sup>18</sup>

As Heck and others have noted, the distinction between two concepts of non-conceptualism is useful for blocking certain influential objections to conceptualism. Take, for instance, Speaks's 2005 argument that the fineness of grain argument against conceptualism only supports state non-conceptualism, not content non-conceptualism. The fineness of grain argument is based on the idea that the content of our perceptual experience far outstrips the concepts that a perceiving subject possesses – that, e. g., I don't have a color concept for every specific shade that is presented in my visual experiences. Upon grasping the distinction between state and content non-conceptualism, however, we can see that the flaw in this argument is a confusion of the conditions of a perceptual experience's having a certain kind of content – a content that can also be the content of a belief – with the conditions of a subject's possessing concepts that correctly characterize a content. Once we distinguish the former from the latter, we see that it is possible for perceptual experience to have a content that can also be the content of a belief or judgment (i. e., it is conceptual) without the subject of that experience possessing concepts that would correctly characterize this content.

*ii. Modification:* The distinction between these two varieties of non-conceptualism must be modified in three important ways before applying it as a description of Husserl's position.

First, we must bring Husserl's species-theory of meaning to bear. Heck's formulation of the distinction comes about in an engagement with Gareth Evans's 1982 conception of non-conceptual content. As such, it assumes a conception of intentionality that is largely influenced by Frege's approach to linguistic meaning. This conception recognizes a fundamental tripartite distinction between the act of

---

<sup>18</sup> This claim has been contested in the literature by Toribio 2007. However, I believe that the arguments in defense of the distinction in Duhau 2011 are convincing. Even if one is not of the same mind as me about these issues, I believe that Husserl's version of this distinction can avoid all the points of concern that Toribio raises about it.

meaning, the object meant (*Bedeutung*), and the intentional content, meaning, or sense (*Sinn*) of the act. Husserl fundamentally agrees with this tripartite distinction, if not in these terms; but there is at least one important difference. For the neo-Fregeans, especially after the work of Michael Dummett, it is best to remain as neutral as possible about the nature of the relation between the subject and the intentional content of her mental states. So many have opted to characterize this relation largely in terms of subjective psychological capacities, capacities such as a capacity to draw a certain kind of inference (cf. Toribio 2008, 359 f.). Husserl in “*LU*”, on the other hand, advances what would strike these neo-Fregeans as a dangerously metaphysically loaded characterization of the relation between the intentional content and act of meaning, namely, as being the *realization* or *instantiation* of a universal in a particular.<sup>19</sup>

This flourish in Husserl’s view, however, allows it to avoid a point of contention in the contemporary debate over non-conceptualism that abides even after recognizing the distinction between act- and content-varieties. That is the task of articulating the conditions of concept *possession* without taking on any unacceptable metaphysical commitments – a task which has proven to be very difficult.<sup>20</sup> The Husserl of *LU* can simply pass this difficulty by and characterize the metaphysical differences between acts in which the subject deploys concepts and those in which she doesn’t straightforwardly as differences in the essential experiential structures instantiated in each.

Second, we should remind ourselves of the fact, noted above in relation to McDowell’s conceptualism (Section 3), that Husserl’s content, or better, matter conceptualism does not require that the matter of perception have a propositional structure, but only that it can also be instanced as a part of a subject- or predicate-presentation in the unity of a propositional matter.

Third, these two differences in Husserl’s view entail a reduction of the distinction between Heck’s state and content non-conceptualism to a distinction between a thesis about *the total essential structure of the perceptual act* (in the decision concerning act non-conceptualism) and a thesis about *the essential structure of the matter instanced in a perceptual act* (in the decision concerning matter conceptualism). In other words, Husserl’s content or matter conceptualism is a thesis only about a *part* of the total epistemic essence (type of

---

<sup>19</sup> That the act-content distinction is a substantial metaphysical thesis about the relation between mind and meaning in *LU* is suggested in Willard 1972. However, for an alternative reading of *LU* that takes it to be metaphysically neutral, see Zahavi 1992. I will remain neutral on this point, since my argument here does not rely on one or the other side.

<sup>20</sup> For an overview of the kinds of issues that arise at this point in the debate over non-conceptual content see Bermúdez 2007, especially §II.

matter, quality, and fullness) of a perceptual act – in particular, the thesis that the types of matter instanced in perceptual acts can also be instanced in an act of judgment. However, Husserl's act non-conceptualism is a thesis about the epistemic essence of the perceptual act *as a whole* – in particular, that the total essence of perception is in some way different from the total essence of an act of judgment.

*iii. Demonstration of consistency:* These observations set the stage for a demonstration of the overall logical consistency of Husserl's hybrid view. It's clear that, in general, we can acknowledge that two things have different natures, while also acknowledging that they have some feature in common. Since there is no reason to think that this possibility does not also hold for the relation between the total essences of two experiences, there is no reason to think that the two following doctrines, which together constitute Husserl's hybrid view of the content of perceptual experience, are inconsistent with one another:

*Conceptualism about perceptual matter:* the intentional content or matter of any given perceptual state can also be a part of the intentional content or matter of an act of judgment or belief.

*Non-conceptualism about perceptual acts:* the total essence of a perceptual experience need not involve all of the elements necessary for an act to be an act of judgment or belief. In particular, it need not involve a propositionally structured matter.

In the next two sections (4.1 and 4.2), I will argue for the second thesis, that a basic distinctive feature of perceptual acts in Husserl's view is the fact that they need not involve propositionally structured matter. I will do this by considering two cases where commentators have read Husserl as advancing non-conceptualism about perceptual matter in *LU*, namely, in his doctrines of essentially occasional expressions and categorial intuition. And I will argue that the relevant distinction Husserl is drawing in both does not concern whether the matter of a (straightforward) perceptual act can also be at least part of the total matter of a propositional act, but rather it concerns whether the matter of the (straightforward) perceptual act needs to have a propositional structure or not. In other words, in both cases Husserl is attempting to maintain a commitment to matter conceptualism alongside a commitment to act non-conceptualism.

## 4.1 Essentially Occasional Expressions

How does this reading of *LU VI § 4* bear on Husserl's observations about the meaning of demonstrative and indexical expressions or, as Husserl calls them, "essentially occasional expressions" in *LU VI § 5*? There are prominent interpretations of these remarks in *LU VI § 5* according to which they are expressions of commitment to non-conceptualism about perceptual *matter*. However, I think that *LU VI § 5* is most plausibly read as expressing commitment to non-conceptualism about perceptual *acts* and that this section presents a development of Husserl's hybrid view of perceptual content.

In this section of *LU*, Husserl contrasts two views of the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of essentially occasional expressions. According to one, which I will call the *importation view*, the meaning of an essentially occasional expression is imported from the meaning content of the perceptual act. As Husserl puts it, "the intuitive act itself is a carrier of meaning [*Bedeutungsträger*]," which "in a literal sense makes *contributions* [*Beiträge*] to the meaning [of the essentially occasional expression]; contributions which can be *discovered* in the produced [essentially occasional] meaning" (*LU VI § 5*, 553/683). In contrast to the importation view, Husserl recommends a conception on which "perception is an act which determines [*bestimmenden*], but does not embody [*enthaltenden*] meaning" (*LU VI § 5*, 553/684). On this view, which I will call the *determination view*, the meaning of the term "this," for example, does not derive its meaning from the direct perceptual experience of the object, but it achieves its own fully determinate object-oriented meaning by coming into relation with the perception. As Husserl puts it:

Perception accordingly realizes the possibility of an unfolding of this-meaning [*die Entfaltung des Dies-Meinens*] with its determinate relation [*bestimmten Beziehung*] to the object, e. g., to this paper before my eyes. But it [the perception] does not constitute [*konstituiert*] [...] the meaning itself, nor a part of it. (*LU VI § 5*, 554/684)

Perception, in other words, is "an act determining [*bestimmenden*], but not embodying [*enthaltenden*] meaning" (*LU VI § 5*, 555/684).

It's not hard to see how Husserl's rejection of the importation view of the meaning of essentially occasional expressions might suggest that he's rejecting conceptualism about the matter of perception. For the importation view entails matter conceptualism. And since Husserl rejects the importation view, it's natural to think that he must also reject the matter conceptualism it entails. The way that some commentators speak about Husserl's view strongly suggests this connection. According to David Woodruff Smith, for example, Husserl holds

that “the this-intention which is a constituent part of the judgment is not a constituent part of the perception” (Smith 1982, 206). And Kevin Mulligan and Barry Smith say that in Husserl’s conception of indexical meaning “perception does not require ‘the possession or acquisition of concepts or beliefs, in the sense in which adult human beings – but not neonates, squirrels, and mosquitoes – can be said to have concepts and beliefs (the sort of thing that can serve as premise in an inference)’” (Mulligan and Smith 1986, 138).<sup>21</sup>

Now, these interpreters do not explicitly recognize the distinction outlined above between two varieties of non-conceptualism. And so, in passages like these they would not describe themselves as attributing to Husserl a rejection of matter conceptualism, but rather a rejection of conceptualism *tout court*. But the fact that they do not recognize the distinction is actually the root of the problem with their interpretations. For after the distinction is as operative in “*LU*”, we can see that there actually is no one-step rejection of conceptualism available here. Instead, any complete rejection of conceptualism must be a two step procedure, involving the rejection of each of its two varieties.

It is clear that Husserl’s preference for the determination view embodies a rejection of act conceptualism. For the determination view marks a clear difference between the total essence of the essentially occasional act of meaning and the total essence of the perceptual act insofar as it characterizes the former as an act whose existence is conditioned by the existence of a perceptual act that occasions the determination of its meaning. Relatedly, as a clarification of the essential ground of this difference, Husserl suggests that there is a difference between the total matters instanced in perception and essentially occasional thought, insofar as each essentially occasional act involves a moment of matter that is not also found in the matter of a perception. Husserl calls the moment of matter peculiar to an essentially occasional act an “indicating” (*anzeigende*) meaning (*LU VI § 5, 556–8/686 f.*). (I will talk about the moment that is common – the “indicated” (*angezeigte*) meaning – in the next paragraph.) Therefore, the determination view of essentially occasional expressions entails act non-conceptualism about perception.<sup>22</sup>

---

**21** Mulligan and Smith are here quoting Stephens 1978. I could not obtain a copy of this dissertation in order to provide the page number for their reference here.

What Mulligan and Smith say in this passage can be read as a rejection of act conceptualism, but not matter conceptualism, insofar as it only explicitly rejects the claim that perception does not require the *possession* of concepts. But their parenthetical qualification makes it clear that they *also* intend to include matter conceptualism in the set of positions Husserl rejects.

**22** However, caution is required here. For it is not entirely clear how the indicating meaning bears on the total matter of an essentially occasional act. One option –if one reads *LU VI § 5* in

But is the determination view compatible with matter conceptualism? I think so. For it is important to notice that even though the determination view doesn't preclude the possibility that at least a *part* of the total matter in an essentially occasional meaning can be of the same *type* as that instanced in the perception. Moreover, Husserl must grant this possibility because he asserts that there *is*, alongside the essential difference between the total matters in essentially occasional thought and perception, an essential *sameness* of matter between the two acts, namely, a moment of matter with nominal form, which he calls the "indicated" (*angezeigte*) meaning of an essentially occasional expression (*LU VI § 5, 556–8/686 f.*; cf., *LU I §§ 2–6*). As Husserl puts it, this is a type of matter that "names an object 'directly' [...] not attributively, as the bearer of these or those properties, but without such 'conceptual' mediation, as what it *itself* is, just as perception might set it before our eyes" (*LU VI § 5, 555/684*; emphasis added in final clause). This essential sameness in the total matters instanced in perception and essentially occasional thought suggests that Husserl is leaving room for the indicated meaning of essentially occasional thought to be essentially the same as (to be another instance of) the nominal matter of perception. And this is all that's needed to admit the compatibility of Husserl's analysis of essentially occasional expressions with the conceptualist core of his analysis of fulfillment.<sup>23</sup>

---

light of the distinctions drawn in *LU I §§ 2–6* – takes the indicated meaning of an essentially occasional act to be a function of indicating meanings and contexts of utterance. And it takes *only* indicated meanings to be a part of the matter of the act. But this reading too is compatible with the act non-conceptualist understanding of perception, since it is still the case that essentially occasional expressions necessarily involve a kind of association with indicating meanings and contexts of utterance that straightforward perceptual acts do not. Thanks to an anonymous referee for help making the importance of this distinction salient.

**23** There are, thus, as Husserl understands it, two meanings present in each essentially occasional thought, a "*duality* [*Doppelheit*] in the indicative [*hinweisenden*] intention" in these acts (*LU VI § 5, 557/686*): the indicating meaning that is common to every act of a certain essentially occasional type (this-thoughts, I-thoughts, you-thoughts, here-thoughts, etc.), and the indicated meaning of nominal form that is peculiar to a "direct" awareness of the particular object of thought (this blackbird, myself, you, this place, etc.). Husserl's characterization of these two dimensions of meaning is not as carefully spelled out as we might desire today, especially in light of the astounding developments in the logic and semantics of demonstrative and indexical expressions of the last few decades. However, I think it is eminently plausible to see Husserl's two-dimensional treatment of the meaning of essentially occasional expressions as anticipating at least the broad outlines of David Kaplan's distinction between "character" and "content" in Kaplan 1989 (cf., Smith 1982, §III). As Smith points out, there are many important differences between Husserl's and Kaplan's conceptions. But the analogies are strong enough to suggest the ways in which one might develop Husserl's view further so that it can be modeled in a fully-fledged semantics.

Therefore, ultimately, what we find in the details of *LU* VI § 5 is not a rejection, but rather a reaffirmation and development of the act non-conceptualism found in *LU* VI § 4: a kind of non-conceptualism that claims there are crucial differences between the total essence of the act of perception and the total essence of the act of essentially occasional thought, which in this case includes differences between the total matters instanced in each. But these differences are compatible with the conceptualist core of fulfillment, since it does not entail the impossibility of an overlapping of the total matters of perception and essentially occasional thought.

## 4.2 Straightforward and Categorical Intuition

Another source of resistance to the conceptualist core of fulfillment in *LU* is Husserl's distinction between "straightforward" and "categorical" intuition, developed in *LU* VI chapters 6 and 7. Some commentators take this as marking a distinction between a kind of perceptual act that has conceptual content (i. e., categorical perception or intuition) and a kind that does not (i. e., straightforward perception).

What motivates the matter non-conceptualist reading of straightforward perception in *LU* VI chapter 6? First, Husserl's characterizations of the distinction between categorical and straightforward perception in *LU* are largely cast in terms of the different kinds of matter that can be expressed in perceptual judgments about each. It is easy to read these characterizations as asserting a complete difference in the types of matter found in each. Consider, for example, how Husserl sets up the difference between the meanings expressed by categorical and non-categorical meanings early on in *LU* VI chapter 6 (e. g., § 40, 659–61/775 f.). There he draws attention to the contrast between the meaning expressed by the nominal expression "the white paper" and the meaning expressed by the propositional judgment "the paper is white." The former expression, Husserl claims, refers to an object with a property (a piece of paper and its whiteness) in the straightforward manner of a name. However, the copula in the latter expresses a categorical meaning that refers to the peculiar *union* of the object (the paper) with its property (whiteness) in a state of affairs (the paper's *being* white). Therefore, one might maintain, since the second expression refers to a different kind of object (a state of affairs) from the first (a particular object), it must achieve this reference by means of a completely different kind of matter, a matter that has no essential structure in common with that of the first expression.

Now, of course, one might respond by pointing out that a total difference in types of matter does not preclude the possibility of a partial sameness of matter.

But there is a prominent interpretation of the difference between straightforward and categorial intuition in Mulligan 1995, which takes the distinction between the two to preclude any overlap or sameness in the types of matter instantiated in straightforward and categorial acts.<sup>24</sup>

According to Mulligan, Husserl expresses the following distinctions in his conception of the difference between categorial and straightforward perception:

- (i) to see is to see either simply or propositionally;
- (ii) to see particulars is not to mean, is not to exercise a concept, neither an individual nor a general concept [...]. (Mulligan 1995, 170)

“To see simply,” as Mulligan uses this phrase, is to have a straightforward perceptual experience that lacks all categorial content. And “to see propositionally” is to have a perceptual experience that involves categorial content. Mulligan equates “seeing particulars” with “simple seeing.” And he reads Husserl as asserting that simple seeing “is not to mean, is not to exercise a concept,” but that propositional seeing does involve (or at least presupposes an act involving) the “exercise” of a concept. As Mulligan puts it,

[Husserl] often describes the content of a judging, like that of an act of supposing, as an act of “meaning” (*Bedeutend, Meinend*), used as a gerund. Meaning, so understood, is complex, consisting of acts of naming and predicating. This is a somewhat unusual way of using “meaning,” which is most often used as a noun (*Bedeutung*). Husserl also uses “meaning” in this second way to describe the types or species instantiated by namings and predicatings and by the propositional wholes they make up. Husserl argues that seeing particulars is not any sort of meaning, neither naming (whether descriptive or not) nor predicating, because of the independent variability of perceptions, on the one hand, and perceptual judgements, on the other hand. (Mulligan 1995, 171)

To support these claims, Mulligan cites the argument from *LU VI § 4*, which he reads as an argument in support of matter non-conceptualism (*LU VI § 4*, 172). With this as background, Mulligan claims that Husserl’s main argument for non-conceptualism about straightforward perception in *LU VI*, chapter 6 is the following (*LU VI § 4*):

---

<sup>24</sup> Others who follow Mulligan’s reading of Husserl’s doctrine of the difference between categorial and straightforward perception as advancing a matter non-conceptualism about straightforward perception include Mooney 2010 and Doyon 2011.

1. Straightforward perception does not involve acts of naming or predicating (per Mulligan's reading of the argument of *LU VI* §§ 4 f.).
2. Categorical intuition necessarily does involve such acts (at least as a condition of the possibility of categorical intuition).
3. Straightforward perception is neither identical with nor a part of categorical intuition.
4. Therefore, the content (or matter) of straightforward perception cannot be part of the content (or matter) of categorical intuition.

There are at least three major problems with the background assumptions of Mulligan's interpretation, which undermines the support for premise 1 of the argument just presented. And a close inspection of the text of *LU VI* chapter 6 reveals a further problem: that Husserl himself, for systematic reasons, denies premise 3 of the argument just presented.

*Problems with background assumptions:* First, as Leung 2010, § 7, observes, Husserl's use of the term "*Bedeutung*" in *LU* (at least) does not support Mulligan's claim that this term is used in that text only as a technical term denoting propositional meaning-types. Rather, Husserl consistently uses this term to refer *both* to the meaning (matter) of straightforward perception as well as the meaning (matter) of categorical acts (cf., *LU I* § 15, 58/292).

Second, as I have argued above, *LU VI* §§ 4 f. does not argue for matter non-conceptualism, but rather for act non-conceptualism.

Third, as we have seen in Section 4.1, Mulligan is wrong to say that for Husserl "seeing particulars is not any sort of meaning," including "naming," *if* by this Mulligan means that acts of straightforward perception lack matter with nominal form. For Husserl is clear that the way that a perception intentionally relates to its object is *the same* as the way that a name refers to its object – i. e., "directly" or "not attributively, as the bearer of these or those properties" (*LU VI* § 5, 555/684) – and that this happens by virtue of the instantiation of the same type of matter in both perceptual acts and acts of merely thinking about an individual thing (cf., *LU V* §§ 38 and 42; *LU VI* § 40, 659/774 f. and § 49).

*Problems with the textual basis:* Husserl himself, in the very same chapter that Mulligan locates this argument, explicitly denies both premise 3 and the conclusion that Mulligan attributes to him. In *LU VI* chapter 6, Husserl claims repeatedly that the same type of nominal matter instanced in a straightforward perception can also be instanced in a categorical intuition (contra the conclusion of Mulligan's argument); and that this is so because the token matter of a straightforward perception is imported into the total intentional content of a categorical percep-

tion founded on it (contra premise 3) (*LU VI* § 46, 674 f./787; § 48, 682–5/793–5; § 49, 686 f./797; § 53, 695 f./804; and § 57, 703 f./810 f.).<sup>25</sup>

These claims are not haphazard, but are born from what Husserl takes to be *the essential peculiarity* of categorial intuitions: that they are *founded on straightforward perceptual acts*. As Husserl understands it, an act *F* is a *founded act* just in case:

- i. *F* contains at least one other act *A* as a part,
- ii. *F* is founded on (it could not exist without) *A*,<sup>26</sup> and
- iii. *F* has a part of its total matter that is not type identical to a part of the total matter in *A* (or, in the case where there is more than one founding act, the sum of the matters of all the other acts that are a part of *F*) (*LU VI* § 48, 681 f./792 f.; cf. *LU III* § 14 and *LU V* § 18).

Per (i.), an essential peculiarity of a categorial perception *F* as *founded on* a straightforward perception *A* is that *F* involves *A* as a *part*. To further substantiate this claim, consider how Husserl makes this point in a passage at *LU VI* § 48, 681 f./793 f., where he analyzes the performance of an act of categorial intuition (as expressed in the perceptual judgment, “This paper is white”) on the basis of a straightforward perception of an object (as expressed in the phrase “this white paper”). There he claims that the transformation of consciousness that occurs in the shift from the straightforward seeing of the white paper to the categorial seeing of it *as being white* consists in setting the total matter of the straightforward perceptual act in the subject position of a predicative relation to the matter of a “part-intention” directed at a property of the perceived object. The intuitive consciousness that results from this synthesis, therefore, contains the straightforward perceptual consciousness as that which supplies the matter of the subject-term of the judgment – this nominal content is *imported* into the total matter of the categorial act. But the abstracted part-intention is added to it as a part of

---

<sup>25</sup> Mulligan notes that “Husserl often contradicts his thesis that simple seeing involves no meaning (*Meinen*), e. g., at *LU I* § 23, and his thesis that to see is not to judge or believe (since these attitudes require propositionally articulated contents), e. g., at *LU V* §§ 27, 38” (Mulligan 1995, endnote 9). So, one might come to Mulligan’s defense by saying that Husserl’s multiple denials of the conclusion Mulligan attributes to him are born from the same confusion that bred the other contradictory moments in *LU*. However, I respond: until I see reason to think that this charge of inconsistency is not itself a symptom of the confusion bred in the interpreter who does not recognize the crucial distinction between act and matter non-conceptualism, then I see no reason not to think of this objection as simply begging the question against my interpretation.

<sup>26</sup> See Section 6.2 below for further discussion of the concept of “foundation” (*Fundierung*) in Husserl’s mereology, which is developed in the Third Investigation.

the predicate-term, which is united to the token matter of the original straightforward object-intention by a predicative function, which

[...] will not itself count as this experienced bond among acts [*dieser erlebte Verband der Akte*]; it is not itself constituted as the object [*Gegenstand*], but it helps to constitute another object. It acts representatively [*sie repräsentiert*],<sup>27</sup> and to such effect, that A [the intentional object of the straightforward perception] now appears [*erscheint*] to have  $\alpha$  [the intentional object of the part-intention] in itself (or, in reversed direction,  $\alpha$  appears to be in A). (LU VI § 48, 683/794)

Therefore, since the categorial intuition is founded on – and so, *imports* the matter of – the straightforward perceptual act, this means that the type of matter instanced in a straightforward perception can be instanced in categorial perception as a part of its total matter. And that means that the matter of straightforward intuition is conceptual by the measure of matter conceptualism, but the straightforward act still qualifies as non-conceptual by the measure of act non-conceptualism.

## 5 The Infinite Regress in the Constitution of Intuitive Fullness

A significant gap in the foregoing discussion concerns the difference between the total essences – or, more specifically, the epistemic essences (see the definition in Section 2 above) – of straightforward perception and mere (unfulfilled) thought, belief, or judgment. Clarifying this essential difference is important for my defense of the claim that Husserl advances a hybrid view of the content of perceptual experience, since it partially underwrites the attribution of act non-conceptualism by isolating a key difference between the total essences of perception and mere thought (judgment, belief).<sup>28</sup> As mentioned in Section 2 above, Husserl claims that there is a feature of intuition, which Husserl calls the “fullness” (*Fülle*) of the intuitive act, alongside its matter and quality that is not present in purely significative acts. It marks one of the differences between the total essences of

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the concept of representative content, see Section 6.1 below.

<sup>28</sup> This difference only *partially* underwrites the attribution of act non-conceptualism because in some cases there are also essential differences between the matters of straightforward perception and thought or judgment, as we have seen in the case of perception and essentially occasional thought in Section 4.1 above, and in the case of straightforward and categorial perception in Section 4.2.

perception and mere thought (or signification) that supports my attribution of act non-conceptualism about perception to Husserl's view in *LU*.

However, for some commentators – most famously, Hubert Dreyfus (cf. Dreyfus 1982) and, more recently, Walter Hopp (cf. Hopp 2008) – Husserl's analysis of the constitution of fullness is itself deeply problematic. For, they contend, trouble arises when one attempts to bring Husserl's conception of sensory fullness together with the conceptualist core of his analysis of fulfillment.

In this section, I present Hopp's 2008 articulation of the problem. In the next section I will argue that this reading rests upon a misunderstanding of Husserl's analysis of intuitive fullness.

I focus on Hopp's version of this objection instead of Dreyfus's for two reasons. First, Dreyfus's interpretation of Husserl's doctrine of perception is seriously flawed in ways that have been well-documented in the literature.<sup>29</sup> Second, Dreyfus's challenge is primarily directed against Husserl's *Noema*, which is a concept involved in Husserl's more mature conception of intentionality and which was not operative in *LU*. Hopp, however, both studiously avoids the mistakes in Dreyfus's reading and articulates an objection that focuses squarely on Husserl's view in *LU*.

In the Sixth Investigation, Husserl says that the moment of fullness (*Fülle*) in an intuitive act has the following characteristics:

- A. It is the moment of an act that gives its intended object “‘presence’ in the pregnant [*prägnant*] sense of the word, it brings something of the fullness of the object itself [*sie bringt etwas von der Fülle des Gegenstandes selbst*]” (*LU* VI § 21, 607/728) or, as he also puts it, it “*analogically* gives presence to its object, or apprehends it as itself given” (*LU* VI § 21, 608/729).<sup>30</sup>
- B. Fullness is completely lacking in purely signitive acts, e. g., acts of mere thought, belief, and judgment. It is a “privation” (*Manko*) in purely signitive acts (*LU* VI § 21, 608/729; cf., *LU* VI § 20, 605/726).
- C. “Fullness [...] is a characteristic moment of presentations alongside quality and matter” (*LU* VI § 21, 607 f./729, emphasis in the original). This is so because the fullness of a given act can vary independently of its matter and vice-versa (*LU* VI § 25, 618/738).
- D. The moment of fullness is a complex part of the intuitive act, which is constituted in part by a moment of matter. As Husserl puts it:

<sup>29</sup> See the critical discussions at Drummond 1990, 81, Kjosavik 2003, 55f., and Hopp 2008, 226–8.

<sup>30</sup> This does not mean that fullness involves bringing the object *itself* into the act. Rather, it is the making experientially “present” of the object to the subject that it is not in merely thinking about it (cf. *LU* VI § 23, 613f./734).

When we range an intuitive act alongside a signitive act to which it brings fullness, the former act does not differ from the latter merely by the joining on of a third distinct moment of fullness to the quality and matter common to the two acts. This at least is not the case where we mean by 'fullness' the intuitive content of intuition. For intuitive content already includes a complete matter [*ganze Materie*], namely, the matter of an act *reduced* to a pure intuition. (*LU VI § 25, 618/738*)

According to Hopp, the root of the problem in Husserl's view is the combination of (C) and (D) with matter conceptualism. According to (C) (as Hopp reads it), fullness is a *third part* of the intuitive act, which is *numerically distinct* from its moments of matter and quality. And, according to (D), fullness has a moment of matter internal to it. In Hopp's reading, this entails that every intuitive act has *two* numerically distinct moments of matter: the moment of matter belonging to the intuitive act as a whole and the moment of matter belonging to its intuitive fullness.

One interesting result of this reading is that the moment of intuitive fullness itself has an internal structure that is fundamentally the same as the internal structure of an act of fulfillment (Hopp 2008, 225 f., and 2010, 17). As stated in Section 2 above, in an act of fulfillment, there are two numerically distinct acts – an intuitive and signitive act – with two numerically distinct moments of matter. And fullness is transferred from the intuitive act to the signitive act through the coincidence (*Deckung*) of the token matters in each. Analogously, as Hopp understands it, the moment of fullness itself is constituted by a coincidence (*Deckung*) between the moment of matter in the intuitive act and the (second) moment of matter that's a part of the moment of fullness (Hopp 2008, 226).

This understanding of Husserl's analysis of the constitution of fullness has a striking elegance. However, Hopp's remarkable insight is that, when one combines this conception of the constitution of fullness with the conceptualist core of Husserl's analysis of fulfillment, the elegance of the view erupts into an infinite regress of ever more complicated relations of coincidence internal to the fullness of intuition. Here is how Hopp expresses the point:

If Husserl is correct in maintaining that the matter of an act is conceptual, and therefore can serve as the content of an empty or signitive act, then the matter of the intuitive fullness of an act is capable of functioning merely signitively. But how, then, are we to characterize the difference between the intuitive fullness and an empty act with exactly that matter? Our only option, it seems, is to say that the former possesses intuitive fullness while the latter does not. But consistency demands that we treat this further moment of fullness – the fullness of the intuitive fullness – as a whole consisting of matter and fullness, and so the regress is on. (Hopp 2008, 226)

In other words, if every intuitive act  $A$  consists of a moment of matter  $M$  and a separate moment of intuitive fullness  $F$  (C above), and if every moment of fullness  $F$  contains a distinct moment of matter (D above), then, given matter conceptualism, the matter  $M_1$  of  $F$  must itself be distinct from the “fullness of  $F$ ” (call this  $F_1$ ) with which  $M_1$  coincides to constitute  $F$  itself. For, per matter conceptualism,  $M_1$  in  $F$  could be instanced in a purely signitive act, which lacks sensory fullness. So there must be a “fullness of intuitive fullness”  $F_1$  that combines with  $M_1$  to constitute  $F$ . But at this point, consistency with claim D demands that  $F_1$  also its own moment of matter  $M_2$  alongside a further moment of fullness  $F_2$ , which coincide to constitute  $F_1$ , and so on *in infinitum*, down the dark hole of conceptual matters and correlated moments of fullness of intuitive fullness.

In response to this problem, Hopp argues that we can retain the outline of Husserl’s analysis of fullness (represented in A–D above) only if we drop the commitment to matter conceptualism and adopt instead a weaker reading of *Deckung* that does not require the type-identity of matters in signitive and intuitive acts in the unity of fulfillment (Hopp 2008, 233). When we abandon matter conceptualism, it is no longer required to posit a moment of “fullness of intuitive fullness” with a moment of matter of its own that stands in coincidence with the matter of the moment of fullness itself. Rather, we can maintain, that the matter of intuitive fullness is *sui generis* insofar as it contains fullness as an intrinsic feature, not as something constituted in relation to a numerically distinct moment of the overall act (Hopp 2008, 237–45; cf. Hopp 2011, especially chaps 1 and 5–7).<sup>31</sup>

## 6 Terminating the Regress on Husserl’s Terms

I believe that Hopp’s argument is built upon a misreading of the text. In particular, I think that Husserl does not say that the matter of fullness is a *numerically distinct* moment of matter from the matter of the act as a whole. Rather, Husserl maintains that the matter of intuitive fullness is a *part* of the matter of the intuitive act as a whole. In other words, it is the same moment of matter that plays a dual mereological role: one the one hand, it is a moment of the intuitive act as

---

**31** I should like to note that I agree that Husserl’s later analyses of perceptual sense, especially as articulated in *Experience and Judgment*, reject the claim that perception has the same noematic sense as a judgment. But there are interpretations of Husserl’s later views (as noted in footnote 3 above) that see them as maintaining a kind of content conceptualism, which, in turn, leaves room for the strong reading of *Deckung*. However, as I said before, I will not advance or defend any interpretative claims about Husserl’s later work in this paper.

a whole; on the other, it is a moment of the fullness of the intuitive act, which is itself a moment of the act as a whole. As Husserl puts it (in a passage that we will examine closely in the following), the matter of intuitive fullness is nothing other than “the matter of an act reduced to a pure intuition” (*LU VI § 25, 618/738*). I will clarify and argue for this claim in the next section (Section 6.1), where I will also argue that it is compatible with Husserl's hybrid view of perceptual content. Then, in the next (Section § 6.2), I will show how this conception of fullness is compatible with Husserl's emphatic claim that the fullness of an act is a third moment “*of presentations alongside quality and matter*” (*LU VI § 21, 607 f./729*).

If this interpretation is correct, it yields a view of the constitution of intuitive fullness that avoids Hopp's regress without abandoning anything in the foregoing outline of Husserl's analysis of intuitive fullness and without abandoning the conceptualism about intuitive matter that is at the heart of his analysis of fulfillment.

## 6.1 The Moment of Matter in Fullness is the Same as the Matter of the Intuitive Act, the Compatibility with Matter Conceptualism

The key to understanding how the view in *LU* is innocent of Hopp's charge of regress lies in understanding how one can hold both:

- i. that the matter of intuitive fullness is the same as the matter of the intuitive act as a whole and
- ii. that the matter of fullness could also be a part of the matter of a purely significative act that lacks intuitive fullness (matter conceptualism)

The key to understanding how this is possible lies in a proper conception of what Husserl says about the constitution of intuitive fullness in the crucial passage I referenced above, which I quote in full here:

For intuitive content [*der intuitive Inhalt*] already includes a complete matter [*ganze Materie*], namely, the matter of an act *reduced* to a pure intuition. If the intuitive act [*Anschauungsakt*] in question was from the outset a purely intuitive act, its matter would at the same time be a constituent [*Bestandstück*] of its intuitive content [*intuitiven Inhalts*]. (*LU VI § 25 618/738*)

To understand this passage, we must understand some of the technical terminology it deploys and some of the distinctions these terms mark, which Husserl develops in the sections leading up to it.

First, in *LU VI* § 22, Husserl clears up an ambiguity that infects his use of the term “fullness” up to that point. On the one hand, he claims, “fullness” can be used to refer to a non-intentional sensation-content in intuition (*LU VI* § 22, 608 f./730). On the other, it can be used to refer to sensation-contents “in their interpretation [*Auffassung*], i. e. not these [sensation] moments alone” (*LU VI* § 22, 609/730). After marking this distinction, Husserl consistently uses the term “fullness” to refer to the latter: a complex of non-intentional sensation content in combination with an intentional interpretation or matter.<sup>32</sup> For only the latter has “a value for the function of fulfillment” (*LU VI* § 22, 608 f./730).

Second, after this, Husserl engages in a dizzying proliferation of distinctions and correlated technical terms within the space of four sections, which yields at least the following four terms that refer to the same thing that he uses the technical term “fullness” to refer to: “intuitive substance” (*intuitive Gehalt*) (*LU VI* §§ 22 f.), “intuitively presentative content” (*der darstellende Inhalt*) (*LU VI* § 23, 613/734; § 24, 615/736), “intuitive content” (*der intuitive Inhalt*) (as in our key passage above), and “representative content” (*der repräsentierende Inhalt*) of an intuitive act (*LU VI* §§ 25 f.).

Now, with this background, we can see straightaway that in the crucial passage above Husserl is saying that the fullness (=intuitive content) of an intuitive act has a complete matter unto itself. But this claim should not be surprising at all, given that he has stipulated just three sections prior that he’s going to use the term “fullness” only to refer to the special combination of sensation content and interpretative matter. What is new in this passage, however – and is of paramount importance to my interpretation – concerns the nature of the matter that is present in fullness: that it is nothing more than the matter of the intuitive act itself that’s “reduced to” the matter of an act of “pure intuition.”

To clarify what this means, we must understand the difference between the matter of a purely signitive act and the matter of a purely intuitive act. In this connection, it is helpful to start out by noting that Husserl defines a “reduced” act as one in which

---

**32** Another important text in this connection is Appendix 8 of *LU VI*. There Husserl criticizes Brentano for holding that the mere presence of sensation to the mind is itself an “act” of consciousness, i. e., a part of the stream of consciousness that is itself intentional. As the appendix makes clear, Husserl was eager to maintain a clear distinction between the simple, non-intentional sensation-content and the complex, intentional fullness of an intuitive act against Brentano’s view, which construes all the parts of a conscious act, including its sensory data, as intentional.

[W]e abstract from all signitive components, and limit ourselves to what actually comes to representation [*wirklich zur Repräsentation kommt*] in its representative content. By so doing we form a *reduced* [*reduzierte*] presentation, with a reduced object in regard to which it is a pure intuition [*reine Anschauung*]. (LU VI § 23, 612/733)

Thus, a “reduced” act is one in which all of the purely signitive components of the act (including the relevant components of the act’s matter) are stripped away by abstraction – i. e., we disregard all that corresponds in the meaning of the act “to the sum total of the remaining, indeed co-meant, determinations, which do not themselves fall in the appearance” (LU VI § 23, 610/731) – leaving only the precipitate of “the sum total of the determinations of the object ‘that fall in the appearance’” (LU VI § 23, 610/731).<sup>33</sup> And so, “the matter of an act reduced to a pure intuition” is nothing other than that aspect of the matter of an act that intends a determination of the object that “falls in the appearance” of the object.

But what constitutes the difference between an aspect of the act’s matter whose objective correlate “falls in the appearance” and an aspect that does not? Husserl addresses this question in LU VI § 26 where he says that the difference is nothing other than the presence of fullness in the former and the lack of fullness in the latter. And he analyzes the presence of fullness in an act as a difference in the relation between the moments of sensuous content and matter in the intentional act. When the objective correlate of the moment of matter and the sensuous content in an act have a “contingent, external” relation of dissimilarity, then the objective correlate does not fall in the appearance constituted in the act and it thereby lacks the feature of fullness (LU VI § 26, 623/741). But when the two enjoy an “essential, internal” relation of “resemblance,” then a moment of fullness is thereby constituted in the act (LU VI § 26, 623 f./741 f.).

---

<sup>33</sup> This distinction between the total matter of an intuitive act and the matter of the act “reduced to a pure intuition” might suggest that Hopp 2008, 225, is right to take Husserl as claiming that the internal structure of the moment of fullness *within* an intuitive act is the same as the structure of an act of fulfillment. However, Husserl distances himself from this view by claiming that “the presentation [with complete fullness] has *no* signitive content whatsoever. In it all is fullness: no part, no side, no property of its object fails to be intuitively presented [*intuitiv dargestellt*] [...]. Not only is everything that is presented also meant [*was dargestellt ist, gemeint*] [...] but all that is meant is also presented [*alles Gemeinte dargestellt*].” (LU VI § 23, 612/732f.).

In other words, unlike an act of fulfillment, there are not two distinct moments of matter that coincide within an intuitive act, which in turn constitute the fullness of the intuitive act. Rather, the fullness of an act just is the matter of an act that, within the confines of this act, presents its intentional object in a particular way – i. e., as intuitively presented. And, as we shall see more fully in what follows, it is *this kind* of intuitive content – where intention and sensuous presentation completely and seamlessly unite – that I think Husserl calls “the matter of an act *reduced* to a pure intuition”.

Now, there is much to give one pause here – most striking of which is the claim that material objects have some sort of substantive and reflectively discernible *resemblance* with pure sensation contents.<sup>34</sup> But I want to set these worries aside for now in order to focus on how this understanding of the constitution of intuitive fullness facilitates the reconciliation of the two key claims mentioned at the beginning of this section (i. and ii. above). The crucial insight about Husserl's view of the constitution of intuitive fullness is that both the presence of intuitive fullness and its privation in an act are states of affairs *made up of the same basic kinds of elements*. Fullness is not, then, an isolated feature of intuition, which can be added to and taken away from the total make-up of an act without correlated changes in the other constituents of the act. Rather, the presence of fullness in an act is nothing other than the fact that the matter and sensation content in the act share a relation of *resemblance*; and its lack is nothing other than the fact that matter and sensation do not share this kind of relation. This elucidates what Husserl means in our target passage when he writes that if we consider a purely intuitive act, “its matter would at the same time be a constituent [*Bestandstück*] of its intuitive content [*intuitiven Inhalts*].” For the matter of a purely intuitive act would refer to an object that resembles the sensation content completely. The object of the act would be a mirror-image of the sensation content.

In light of this, we can see, contra Hopp's interpretation, how it is possible for the matter of an intuitive act to be both: (i.) a constitutive part of the act's fullness and (ii.) potentially the matter of a purely signitive act. For the difference between the presence and absence of fullness consists only in the relation that the matter of the act has to its sensation content. It's possible, then, for the very same moment (and so, also, the same type) of matter to be instanced in one act where it resembles its sensation content in the right way – thereby constituting the fullness of an intuitive act – and then in another act where it does not – thereby constituting a signitive act that lacks fullness.

## 6.2 How Fullness is a Third Moment in Intuitive Acts

This picture of the constitution of fullness poses a “prima facie” difficulty for understanding how fullness could also be a moment of an intuition *alongside*

---

<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of problems and potential responses to problems arising from the concept of resemblance as employed here, see: for problems, de Boer 1978, 133–5, and Hopp 2008, 229–31, and the references he gives there; for responses to some of these problems, see Williford 2013, especially footnote 34, and Kidd 2014, 136 f.

its quality and matter (*LU VI § 21, 607 f./729*). To get a better feel for the trouble one encounters here, consider that Husserl defines a moment (*Moment*) as a dependent part of a given whole, which cannot exist independently of the whole of which it is a part. For example, unlike the wood plank that makes up the table-top, which *can* exist independently of the table – this is a kind of part that Husserl calls a “piece” (*Stück*) of a whole – the top surface of the table cannot exist independently of the table. The top surface of the table is, therefore, a *moment* of the table (cf. *LU III § 17*). This, in turn, might suggest that it is not possible for one thing *P* to be a moment of two different wholes. More specifically, it might suggest that it is not possible for the same moment of matter to be both a moment of an act and a moment of another moment of the act, e. g., of the act's moment of fullness. If this is correct, then our reading of the moment of matter as serving double mereological duty in an intuitive act is actually unintelligible.

But there are two important distinctions that Husserl develops in his doctrine of parts and wholes in *LU III* that can be deployed to save the view.

The first is the distinction between “immediate” (*unmittelbar*) and “mediate” (*mittelbar*) or, as Husserl also calls it, “nearer” (*näher*) and “farther” (*ferner*) parts of a whole (*LU III §§ 18 f.*). If *P* is a part of a whole *W* without being a part of any other part of *W*, but *PI* is a part of *W* only by virtue of being a part of *P*, then *P* is an immediate part of *W* and *PI* is a mediate part of *W*. This definition is applicable to both pieces and moments of wholes. However, it applies in a non-arbitrary way only in the case of the relations of moments to their wholes (cf., *LU III § 19*). This means that the difference between mediate and immediate parthood is not absolute, but can only be specified in a non-arbitrary way by reference to the kind of whole in which the given part is present. For example, the top surface of the table is a moment of the table. And it is a moment of the plank that constitutes the table top. But we can see that this case does not present an illicit double-counting of moments after we specify that the top surface of the table is a *mediate part* of the table by virtue of being an *immediate part* of the plank that is a piece of the table. So, it's a part of both the table and the plank, but it is a part of each in a different way.

The second important distinction is that between two kinds of whole: a “pregnant whole” and a “narrow whole.”<sup>35</sup> A pregnant whole is one in which every part of the whole is dependent on or, as Husserl puts it, “founded on” every

---

<sup>35</sup> These names are suggested by Husserl (*LU III § 21, 282/475*). See Simons 1982, § 3, for some helpful commentary.

other part in the whole (*LU* III § 21, 282/475).<sup>36</sup> And a narrow whole is one in which all parts of the whole are independent of each other except for one part, which all the other parts found (*LU* III § 21, 282/475). Narrow wholes, in other words, are made up almost completely of parts that are “relatively independent as regards one another – where the whole falls apart into its *pieces* [*Stücke*],” except for the part that these all found together (*LU* III § 21, 282/475). This dependent part or moment in a narrow whole Husserl calls the “moment of unity” of the whole (*LU* III § 4, 237/442; § 22, 286–8/478 f.).<sup>37</sup> Since the “only true unifying factors [...] are relations of ‘foundation’” (*LU* III § 22, 286/478), the moment of unity is the tie that binds the otherwise independent pieces together into a whole; as Husserl says, it is the moment in a narrow whole that “gives unity to the whole” (*LU* III § 22, 288/479).

We can use these two distinctions to elucidate how the same moment of matter can be both the moment of matter in the act and the moment of matter in fullness by showing (i.) that fullness is a *mediate* moment of intuitive acts, which the act has by virtue of having the matter and sensation content that it does, and (ii.) that this is so because fullness is a narrow whole, constituted out of a moment of matter, sensation content, and a resemblance relation between these two that functions as the moment of unity in the whole.

*i. Fullness is a mediate moment of intuitive acts:* Relative to the intuitive act as a whole, the moment of fullness counts as a third moment of the act, which “may vary [...] while the same object with the same determinations is constantly meant with the same act-quality” (*LU* VI § 28, 626/744). But fullness is only a *mediate* part of the act. For, as we have seen (in Section 6.1 above), an act has intuitive fullness only by virtue of having the right combination of matter and sensation content instanced in it. This interpretation is confirmed by what Husserl says in *LU* VI §§ 25 f. about the structure of the intuitive act that makes the independent variation of (the degree of) fullness possible: namely, that one can vary the degree of fullness present in the act only by varying either the type of matter or the type of sensation content in the act in a way that brings about changes in the similarity each has with the other.

---

**36** Husserl defines “foundation” as a relation in which “an *A* cannot exist as such except in a more comprehensive unity which associates it with an *M*” (*LU* III § 14 267/463). In other words, *A* is founded on *M* iff, necessarily, if *A* exists as the kind of thing it is (with its particular properties) in a whole *W*, then *M* exists as the kind of thing it is in *W*.

**37** Cf., the concept of a “figural moment” in Husserl 2003, 215–19.

ii. *Fullness is a narrow whole*: If we abstract from the consideration of the intuitive act as a whole and focus only on the moment of fullness within it, we can see that the moment of fullness itself has the structure of a narrow whole. For, again, the moment of fullness in an intuition is composed of (1) a moment of matter and (2) a moment of sensation content that (3) share the appropriate relation of resemblance. Now, since matter and sensation content can vary independently of each other in the unity of an intentional act, these count as independent parts or pieces *of the act*. (Of course, considered relative to the total stream of conscious life, these count only as *moments* of the act [cf., *LU* III § 13].) But since the relation of resemblance is founded on the moments of matter and sensation content in the act, and since it cannot vary independently of variations in those moments themselves, then it qualifies as a moment of the whole. Furthermore, since the relation of resemblance is what constitutes the unity of the moment of fullness *as such* by virtue of its being founded on the moments of matter and sensation content – i. e., since (*per impossibile*) removing it from the whole would be, as it were, the pulling of the thread that unravels the whole, reducing it to a collection of independent pieces – then it counts as the moment of unity in the fullness (cf., *LU* VI § 26, 623 f./741 f.).

It is illuminating to note in this connection that the possibility of a phenomenology of knowledge relies upon our capacity to consider fullness in a way that considers it as being a third moment of the intuitive act alongside its matter and quality. For without the ability to categorially “see” that structure in an act, we would not be able to identify the epistemic essence of a given act. Yet, the possibility of a phenomenology of perception that elucidates its epistemic function relies upon the kind of abstraction that considers fullness as a whole unto itself – a narrow whole. Fullness is that feature of an intuitive or perceptual act that gives it a value for the function of fulfillment. And to describe the constitution or essential internal structure of this feature, we must set aside concern for it *qua* moment of an intuitive act and, instead, to describe it as a whole unto itself. It is the *same* moment of fullness operative in fulfillment and in perception, but our phenomenological investigations must conceptualize it from two different vantage points. We can see now that this is no contradiction within Husserl's phenomenological program in *LU*, but rather an exhibition of its analytical power.

## 7 Conclusion

If my interpretation of the doctrines of fulfillment and fullness delivered in the Sixth Investigation is correct, then *LU* suffers no inconsistency about the conceptualist core of Husserl's analysis of fulfillment. Rather, what *LU* offers is a hybrid view of perceptual content that consistently combines a conceptualist view of the intentional *content* or *matter* of perception with a variety of non-conceptualism about perceptual *acts*. More specifically, it is a view that combines the thesis that the type of matter instanced in perception can also be instanced as a part of the matter of an assertive or propositional act (of judgment, belief, thought, etc.) with the thesis that the complete essence of perception is distinct from the complete essence of an assertive or propositional act. Given the number of obstacles in the contemporary debate over non-conceptual content that Husserl's view overcomes (as noted in Section 4 above), I believe, it is of more than just historical interest, but is a view to be reckoned with in the contemporary debate. However, my primary concern in this paper has been to deliver my interpretation of *LU* as a correction to the historical record. In particular, my goal is to correct the misidentification of the kinds of failure in *LU* that motivated later developments in Husserl's thought. If my arguments here are correct, Husserl did not begin the development of his phenomenological philosophy with a view of perception that mangles the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content. Rather he begins with a view that combines conceptual and non-conceptual commitments in a distinctive and systematically consistent way. Therefore, the motives for the changes represented in Husserl's later work must be other than what recent commentators have identified.<sup>38</sup>

---

**38** I would like to express my gratitude for feedback from audiences that heard parts of this paper at the Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy at California State University Northridge and a colloquium at the Center for Subjectivity research at the University of Copenhagen. I would particularly like to thank the following persons for helpful feedback and discussion: Mandel Cabrera, Benjamin Crowe, Steven Crowell, George Heffernan, Walter Hopp, Søren Overgaard, Iain Thomson, Robin Muller, Kevin Mulligan, David Woodruff Smith, Philip Walsh, Dan Zahavi, and two anonymous referees for this journal.

LU Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*

- Barber, M. D. 2008. "Holism and Horizon: Husserl and McDowell on Non-Conceptual Content." *Husserl Studies* 24, 79–97.
- Bermúdez, J. L. 2007. "What Is at Stake in the Debate on Nonconceptual Content?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 21, 55–72.
- de Boer, T. 1978. *The Development of Husserl's Thought*. Trans. by T. Plantinga. The Hague.
- Crowther, T. M. 2006. "Two Conceptions of Conceptualism and Nonconceptualism." *Erkenntnis* 65, 245–76.
- Duhau, L. 2011. "Perceptual Nonconceptualism: Disentangling the Debate Between Content and State Nonconceptualism." *European Journal of Philosophy* 22, 358–70.
- Doyon, M. 2011. "Husserl and McDowell on the Role of Concepts in Perception." *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 11, 42–74.
- Dreyfus, H. L. 1982. "Husserl's Perceptual Noema." In *Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science*. Eds. H. Dreyfus/H. Hall, Cambridge, MA, 97–123.
- Drummond, J. 1990. *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism: Noema and Object*. Kluwer.
- Evans, G. 1982. *Varieties of Reference*. Oxford.
- Heck, R. 2000. "Nonconceptual Content and the 'Space of Reasons'." *Philosophical Review* 109, 483–523.
- . 2007. "Are There Different Kinds of Content?" In *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*. Eds. B. McLaughlin/J. Cohen, Oxford, 117–38.
- Hopp, W. 2008. "Husserl on Sensation, Perception, and Interpretation." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 38, 1–28.
- . 2010. "How to Think About Nonconceptual Content." *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 10, 1–24.
- . 2011. *Perception and Knowledge*. Cambridge.
- Husserl, E. 1970. *Logical Investigations*. Trans. by J. N. Findlay. Vols. I and II. London.
- . 1975. *Logische Untersuchungen*. Ed. E. Holenstein. The Hague.
- . 2003. *Philosophy of Arithmetic*. Trans. d. Willard. Dordrecht.
- Kaplan, D. 1989. "Demonstratives." In *Themes From Kaplan*. Eds. J. Almog/J. Perry, H. Wettstein/D. Kaplan. Oxford, 481–563.
- Kidd, C. 2014. "Husserl's Phenomenological Theory of Intuition." In *Rational Intuition*. Eds. D. Osbeck/B. Held. Cambridge, 131–50.
- Kjosavik, F. 2003. "Perceptual Intimacy and Conceptual Inadequacy: A Husserlian Critique of McDowell's Internalism." In *Zahavi 2003*, 49–71.
- Leung, K.-W. 2010. "Meaning and Intuitive Act in the Logical Investigations." *Husserl Studies* 27, 125–42.
- McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World: with a New Introduction*. Cambridge, MA.
- . 2009. "Avoiding the Myth of the Given." In *McDowell 2003*, 256–72.
- . 2003. *Having the Word in View*. Cambridge, MA.
- Mooney, T. 2010. "Understanding and Simple Seeing in Husserl." *Husserl Studies* 26, 19–48.
- Mulligan, K. 1995. "Perception." In *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*. Eds B. Smith/D. Woodruff Smith. Cambridge, 168–238.
- Mulligan, K./Smith, B. 1986. "A Husserlian Theory of Indexicality." *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 28, 133–63.

- Simons, P. 1982. "The Formalization of Husserl's Theory of Parts and Wholes." In *Parts and Moments: Studies in Logic and Formal Ontology*. Ed. B. Smith, 113–59. München.
- Smith, D. W. 1982. "Husserl on Demonstrative Reference and Perception." In *Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science*. Eds. H. Dreyfus/H. Hall, 1–21. Cambridge, MA.
- Speaks, J. 2005. "Is There a Problem About Nonconceptual Content?" *Philosophical Review* 114, 359–98.
- Stephens, J. W. 1978 *Phenomenology and Realism. An Essay on Husserl's "Logical Investigations"*. PhD. Princeton.
- Toribio, J. 2008. "State Versus Content: The Unfair Trial of Perceptual Nonconceptualism." *Erkenntnis* 69, 351–61.
- van Mazijk, C. 2016. "Kant and Husserl on the Contents of Perception." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 54, 267–87.
- Willard, D. 1972. "The Paradox of Logical Psychologism: Husserl's Way Out." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 9, 94–100.
- Williford, K. 2013. "Husserl's Hyletic Data and Phenomenal Consciousness." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 12, 501–19.
- Zahavi, D. 2003. *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation. Phenomenology in the Nordic Countries*. Dordrecht.
- . 1992. "Constitution and Ontology: Some Remarks on Husserl's Ontological Position in the Logical Investigations." *Husserl Studies* 9, 111–24.