

*Making sense of the lived body and the lived world: meaning and presence in Husserl, Derrida and Noë*

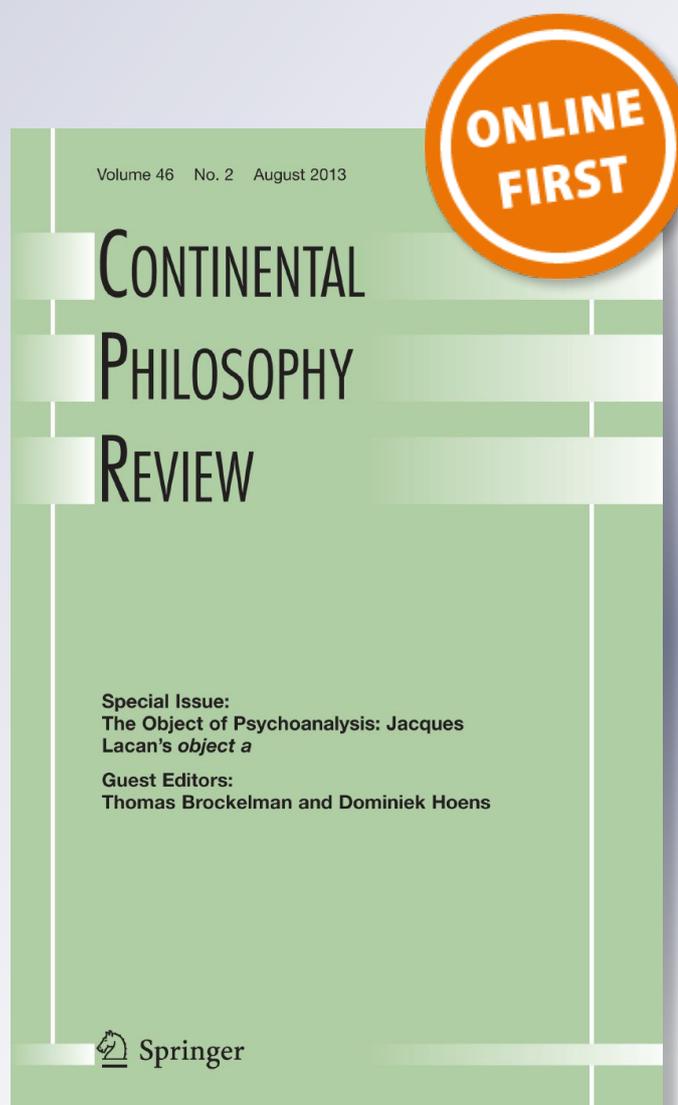
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# Making sense of the lived body *and* the lived world: meaning and presence in Husserl, Derrida and Noë

Jacob Martin Rump<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** I argue that Husserl's transcendental account of the role of the lived body in sense-making is a precursor to Alva Noë's recent work on the enactive, embodied mind, specifically his notion of "sensorimotor knowledge" as a form of embodied sense-making that avoids representationalism and intellectualism. Derrida's deconstructive account of meaning—developed largely through a critique of Husserl—relies on the claim that meaning is structured through the complication of the "interiority" of consciousness by an "outside," and thus might be thought to lend itself to theories of mind such as Noë's that emphasize the ways in which sense-making occurs outside the head. But while Derrida's notion of "contamination" rightly points to an indeterminateness of meaning in an outside, extended, concrete lived world, he ultimately reduces meaning to a structure of *signification*. This casts indeterminateness in terms of absence, ignoring the presence of non-linguistic phenomena of embodied sense-making central to both the contemporary enactivist program and to the later Husserl, who is able to account for the indeterminateness of meaning in lived experience through his distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and more exact linguistic meaning (*Bedeutung*). Husserl's transcendental theory of meaning also allows for a substantive contribution to sense-making from the side of the perceived object—an aspect missing from Noë's account. Thus, in contrast to Derrida and to Noë, Husserl accounts for sense-making in terms of both the lived body *and* the lived world.

**Keywords** Meaning · Presence · Perception · Embodiment · Intentionality · Husserl · Derrida · Noë

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In recent years, philosophers across Continental and Anglo-American philosophy have increasingly questioned the focus on language that dominated both traditions in the later twentieth century. This decrease of emphasis on language has been accompanied by an increased focus on the body, resulting in views according to which the relationship of mind and world is not governed exclusively by language, systems of signifiers, concepts, or propositions, but also characterized in terms of kinesthetic or affective dimensions, non-conceptual perceptual content, or forms of non-propositional knowledge. This essay examines the ideas of one recent proponent of such embodied views, Alva Noë, alongside Jacques Derrida—a continental figure whose early work can be taken as a foremost exemplar of the continental “linguistic turn.” I focus on the problematic of meaning and presence in these two figures by situating them with regard to a common predecessor: Husserl.<sup>1</sup>

Noë, like other enactivists in recent philosophy of mind, has sought to replace representational and cognitivist accounts of mind closely tied to presuppositions about the linguistic nature of meaning with accounts that emphasize the body itself as the site of a more general conception of sense. His critique of language-oriented “intellectualist” presuppositions extends not only to analytic philosophers of mind, but even to existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Hubert Dreyfus, who Noë claims are “crypto-intellectualist” in accounting for our relation to world through a reactionary focus on absence or that which “withdraws” from our minded interaction in the world.<sup>2</sup> They “repudiate presence in favor of absence, because they insist that there can be no ‘unthought’ presence, and they insist on this because they take for granted an over-intellectualized conception of the intellect.”<sup>3</sup>

At first glance, Derrida would seem a poor suspect for Noë’s charge of (crypto-) intellectualism, given his well-known problematization of both the fixity of meaning and its “pure presence” to an interior consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, I argue that the exclusive orientation of Derrida’s theory of meaning to structures of signification and language prevents him from fully accounting for an aspect of presence more fundamental according to both the Husserlian phenomenological project and recent enactivist approaches such as Noë’s: the role of the sensorimotor and the embodied in the constitution of shared meaning and knowledge.

If recent enactivist work such as Noë’s demands a rethinking of meaning as a category not just of language but of a somehow more basic embodied sense-making, one of its greatest allies should be Husserl, whose thinking about these topics, I will show, did not accord with common presuppositions of the linguistic turn and who insisted that the theory of meaning belongs not simply to the philosophy of language but also to broader questions of mind and epistemology, which for him included the

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<sup>1</sup> Noë mentions Husserl occasionally in his work, but rarely discusses his ideas directly or at length and does not mention him at all in *Varieties of Presence*. As shown below, Derrida’s relationship to Husserl is frequently acknowledged and well documented.

<sup>2</sup> See Noë (2015, p. 9).

<sup>3</sup> See Noë (2012, p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> Derrida is included in the list of “existential phenomenologists” in the introduction to Noë’s *Varieties of Presence*, but is not further discussed in the book (2012, pp. 6–7).

role of the lived body. Husserl's original work on these topics is today too often either ignored in the ongoing prejudice against Continental approaches to mind, meaning, and knowledge, or only briefly mentioned but then substantively ignored in favor of the more popular phenomenology of his existential protégés.

I begin (Sect. 1) by showing how a theory of meaning lies at the heart of the phenomenological approach to knowledge, mind and perception, and how this view is a precursor to some of Noë's recent remarks concerning sensorimotor knowledge. I then (Sect. 2) briefly summarize Husserl's conception of a non-linguistic level of meaning, before turning to Derrida (Sect. 3), showing how his critique of Husserl on this issue stems from a disagreement concerning the status and origin of meaning in relation to the temporal flux of experience, the methodological distinction between empirical and transcendental analysis, and the degree to which perceptual meaning is "contaminated" by the structure of signification. In the following section (Sect. 4), I argue that for Husserl there is an important sense in which not only language is prior to distinctions between interior and exterior, present and absent, passive and active, but also and more originally<sup>5</sup> the lived body, a claim that allows him to account for the indeterminacy of meaning in a way that avoids the Derridean notion of "contamination," and that anticipates Noë's notion of 'sensorimotor knowledge' and the continuity between intellect and embodiment. In the final section (Sect. 5), I briefly criticize Noë's account for downplaying an important noematic aspect of the structure of sense-making on the Husserlian view—that meaning arises not only from the lived body but also the lived world.

## 1 Meaningful perception

From a Husserlian phenomenological standpoint the problem of knowledge is ultimately a problem of meaning. The phenomenological reduction opens the path to an analysis of the world "on the grounds of mere meaning," capable of exhibiting fundamental logical and epistemological laws because it is the element in common between our experience of the world and our thought about it.<sup>6</sup> While manifesting objective laws and structures, meaning analysis begins in subjective intentional acts consisting of a meaning intention (a *possible* meaning), and, if that intention is realized in experience, in a resultant meaning-fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I use "originary," "co-originary," and "originarily" throughout in accord with recent English translators of Derrida's works on Husserl (Hobson and Lawlor), where it generally translates "*originaire*," and in place of the terms "primordial" and "equiprimordial" more common in the English-language phenomenological literature and sometimes also used to translate Husserl's "*Ursprung*" and "*Urquelle*." The term refers to the question at issue between Derrida and Husserl, which concerns the notion of an *origin* of meaning, and not merely its *originality* in the everyday sense.

<sup>6</sup> See Husserl (1987, p. 4).

<sup>7</sup> See Husserl (1984, 2001b, Investigation 6, §5–6). While for Husserl the structure of intentionality is shared by a variety of intentional modalities, for the purposes of this essay I focus exclusively on perception, which he generally takes as the paradigm case in his phenomenological descriptions and which plays a central role in his explication of meaning (in the guise of *Sinn* or *Wahrnehmungssinn*) at the level of passive synthesis, where it most directly intersects with his account of the body discussed below.

And while they do presuppose a subject involved in the intentional relation, neither the meaning intention nor the presentation that (possibly) fulfills it presuppose a “conscious” or “self-reflective” mental state on the part of that subject. Whereas the phenomenological inquiry into intentional acts made possible by the reduction is a reflective activity, typical “immanently oriented” intentional acts, such as those of perception and its fulfillment (or frustration) are—while still meaningful, as will be shown below—themselves non-reflective structures of immediate experience in which the intentional object belongs to the same stream of experience as the act.<sup>8</sup> It is only upon reflection, when we further analyze them with the aid of a system of representation, that meanings become *necessarily* thematic.<sup>9</sup> For the same reasons, on Husserl’s view, meaning in lived experience also does not imply the existence of an interior “mental content” that linguistically or propositionally “represents” something exterior. At the unreflected level of immediate lived experience, our everyday experience of meaning often remains *non-thematic* and a part of our lived world; its structure is *presentational* rather than representational.<sup>10</sup>

So, if while perusing a yard sale I perceive what appears to be an antique Chinese lacquered cabinet on the ground ahead of me, I can bracket existential considerations (Am I dreaming? Is the lacquer’s quality perhaps an illusion caused by the reflection of the bright sun off of the shiny pots and pans lying next to it?) and consider the perceptual object as a meaning-object, a nexus or unity of meaning intentions which will contain along with it—regardless of whether I am dreaming, hallucinating, etc.—a series of associated intentional anticipations: that the back side will look roughly like the front; that what appear to be doors on hinges will indeed be capable of being opened; that the interior may contain old dishes or stains; that the object will be smooth and solid to the touch, etc. If further experience disconfirms these intentional expectations, my original intention has not been fulfilled but frustrated, and my intentional directedness toward the object *qua* unity of meaning intentions undergoes a modification.

This process of frustration and modification also presupposes a broader implicit horizon of anticipations<sup>11</sup> dependent upon the normal conditions for experiencing cabinets, but neither these conditions nor their fulfillment or frustration need to be reflected upon or even represented in consciousness prior to the intentional experience: I need not *think to myself* “the backside surely looks like the front” or “in cabinetry of this variety, the spatial dimensions of the front panel are generally

<sup>8</sup> See Husserl (1977, p. 78; 2014, p. 66).

<sup>9</sup> This is related to what Rinofner-Kreidel (2013) calls this the “performance-reflection distinction” in phenomenology. I make use of this distinction (in a way that differs slightly from hers) in the rest of this paper with reference to that which is ‘performed’ or ‘non-reflective’ versus ‘reflected’ or ‘reflective.’ Note that this is not the same as the thematic versus non-thematic distinction, which has to do with attention, not reflection.

<sup>10</sup> See Drummond (2012), Jansen (2014).

<sup>11</sup> The later Husserl distinguishes between “internal” and “external” horizons (Husserl 1964a, 1973, §§8, 22). I am here referring to the internal horizon of the cabinet *qua* intentional object. For the sake of brevity, in the account that follows I will have to pass over several such intricacies in the Husserlian account.

good indications of the dimensions of the other panels,” and I may only become aware of my intentional anticipation in the moment that it is frustrated. Indeed, such anticipations may not ever become objects of reflection at all, if, for instance, instead of walking around to the backside of the cabinet I move down the row to another item at the yard sale that has just drawn my attention.

As Husserl emphasizes in his earlier, static account of meaning, the systems of relations that govern such meaning-objects exhibit universal, essential laws. It is on this basis that phenomenology can be conceived as a rigorous and eidetic science of meaning analysis: a method for reflectively examining the logic and ideal forms of meanings in lived experience. In Husserl's later thought, however, a greater interest in the genesis or constitution of meaning leads to a gradual shift away from (though not a rejection of) the earlier emphasis on the ideality of the object as a fixed essence toward a new emphasis on eidetic analysis as revealing a regular but open-ended nexus of essential possibilities of meaning (in our example, the cabinet *qua* unity of meanings with its own horizon of meaning-possibilities).<sup>12</sup> While still considered an essence in any particular act of reflection, since this nexus or horizon of possible meanings arises in the context of ongoing lived experiences and in a historical continuum, it is itself under constant revision in light of my experience. Suppose I walk around the cabinet and, instead of seeing a back part resembling the box-like contours of the front, I see rounded corners that flatten out just behind the front panel, allowing for only an extremely shallow and oddly shaped interior space. In this moment it dawns on me that what I perceive is not in fact a cabinet as expected but a cabinet-replica, and I begin to see the cabinet, say, as a non-functional sculptural object, and to reflect that perhaps it is being sold for a pittance by an unsuccessful and disgruntled sculptor, or that it is a discarded theater prop.

When this occurs, the intentional horizon in which I perceive the cabinet has changed, such that, e.g., I no longer hold the implicit anticipation (or explicit expectation<sup>13</sup>) that the cabinet doors will open: This possibility no longer figures prominently among the nexus of possible meanings. And while my speculations about the reason for this abnormal situation are clearly reflective acts of consciousness, the anticipation that was frustrated—that the cabinet will be roughly as deep as it is wide—is not something established via conscious reflection so much as *felt*: Until the very moment of intentional frustration I may be engaged in an impassioned conversation with a friend, and while I “see” the cabinet in the broad sense that it is a part of my perceptual field, it may not be the object of my attention at all. And yet I stop short in our conversation as I walk around to the backside because something *feels* out of place. The intentional anticipations in play are not simply intellectual and are performative, not reflective; they are *embodied* and *felt*.

In the contemporary literature, recognition of such embodied phenomena is not limited to the work of Noë. Hubert Dreyfus has discussed a similar phenomenon,

<sup>12</sup> See Mohanty (1976, p. 139ff); Cf. Aldea (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Following Carr (2014, pp. 33–36), throughout this essay I distinguish between mere anticipation (implicit; protentional) in the flow of lived experience and explicit expectation about the future. Either could be in play in this example.

following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, in terms of embodied “coping” and, following the “ecological approach to perception” developed by Gibson, accounting for the lived perceptual environment in terms of “affordances.”<sup>14</sup> On this view, the cabinet itself as thing in the world would be said to “afford” a breakdown in my otherwise seamless perceptual experience. As for Husserl, for Dreyfus, “responding to affordances does not require noticing them. Indeed, to best respond to affordances (whether animal or social, prelinguistic or linguistic) one must not notice them as affordances, but, rather, as Heidegger says, they ‘withdraw’ and we simply ‘press into’ them.”<sup>15</sup> Dreyfus insists that we have overlooked the degree to which our being in the world takes the form not of a self-aware intellectual involvement but rather a sort of automatic and embodied “absorbed coping”<sup>16</sup> that responds to the affordances of a lived world characterized by an incompleteness of presence—in terms of withdrawal or absence.<sup>17</sup>

While sharing a recognition of the importance of embodiment in such cases, Noë has insisted that Dreyfus’ approach “over-intellectualizes the intellect,” preserving rather than effacing hard dichotomies between inside and outside, minded and embodied, present and absent, whereas his own approach seeks to overcome such dichotomies by framing presence as an embodied form of “sensorimotor” knowledge and understanding that, while still conceptual in a very broad sense, also includes practical and non-representational components, and thus is continuous with rather than opposed to (i.e., absent or withdrawing from) rational or propositional thought.<sup>18</sup> On Noë’s view, then,

[T]he knowledge in question is not straightforwardly conceptual, it is sensorimotor. The charge of over-intellectualizing is thus answered, in two distinct ways. First, sensorimotor knowledge is knowledge of the way sensory stimulation varies as we move; it is knowledge that we share with non-linguistic creatures. Second, sensorimotor knowledge gets brought to bear in experience not in the form of judgment or belief or representation construction. The knowledge is practical, and we *use* it to gain and maintain contact with the world.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, for the later Husserl (as I show below), the non-thematic changes in meaning intention that Dreyfus calls “coping” occur at the level of conditions of possibility for meaning constitution that need not involve discrete representational meanings, but that are *also* not foreign to rational consciousness understood in the broader, enactivist sense.

At the same time, there is one aspect of the “affordance” view that Husserl shares with Gibson (and, perhaps, Dreyfus), but that distinguishes both of their positions from the account of the body’s role in meaning found in Noë. (I return to

<sup>14</sup> See Gibson (1986).

<sup>15</sup> See Dreyfus (2005, p. 56).

<sup>16</sup> See Dreyfus (2007, p. 371).

<sup>17</sup> See Noë (2012, pp. 7–8).

<sup>18</sup> See Noë (2012, pp. 149ff).

<sup>19</sup> See Noë (2012, p. 69).

this point in Sect. 5, but it will be useful to make preliminary note of it here.) While rejecting the dichotomy between mindedness and embodiment, Noë places the emphasis on minded-embodied *activity*—on what the lived body *does*. In Husserlian terms, his account is almost exclusively *noetic*: For Noë, the lived world itself, independent of my movement in it, seems to have very little *noematic* significance. In effect, whereas meaning arises *in* the world and *through* the lived body, the world itself seems to do little work, except to serve as the set of surfaces and contours to which my sensorimotor meaning-making responds. This is in stark contrast to Gibson, for whom “the meaning is observed before the substance and surface, the color and form, are seen as such.”<sup>20</sup> In Gibson’s terms, “the theory of affordances is a radical departure from existing theories of value and meaning. It begins with a new definition of what meaning and value *are*. The perceiving of an affordance is not a process of perceiving a value-free physical object to which meaning is somehow added...”<sup>21</sup> I return to this issue in Sect. 5. At this point, however, we need to turn to Husserl to further specify what exactly non-linguistic, non-propositional, and non-conceptual meaning might be.

## 2 Husserl’s transcendental theory of meaning and non-linguistic sense

By the time of *Ideas I*, Husserl conceives of phenomenological inquiry (including meaning theory) as a “second-order” inquiry; one that is transcendental in the Kantian sense. In line with the phenomenological and eidetic reductions, transcendental phenomenology is not concerned with the existential or metaphysical status of the objects of experience as such (e.g., the cabinet *qua* three-dimensional, spatio-temporal entity) but the essential conditions of their possibility as lawfully organized meaning-objects bestowed with meaning in the intentional act.<sup>22</sup> Such “second-order” inquiry is made possible because the phenomenological reduction has bracketed the existential status of the existing object, but not the presence of the meaning-object as a node in a nexus of conditions of possibility for experiencing the world as meaningful in the first place. Lived experience reveals a set of interconnected intentional meanings that are still essences *qua* ideal and universal—since the logical structure of meaning guarantees they will be shared by other similarly situated and rationally equipped perceivers—but at the same time open-ended and subject to revision in the light of future experience, which is constantly disclosing new meaning-possibilities and foreclosing others.

In his later genetic phenomenology, this transcendental focus on possibility leads Husserl to supplement his earlier static account of intentionality in a present lived experience with an account of the prior genesis of meaning. If every intention were simultaneously a fulfillment, there would be no distinction between intention and

<sup>20</sup> See Gibson (1986, p. 134).

<sup>21</sup> See Gibson (1986, p. 140).

<sup>22</sup> Just as for Kant “the difference between the transcendental and the empirical therefore belongs only to the critique of cognitions and does not concern their relation to their object” Kant (1998, A56-57/B80-81). For a discussion of this notion in the Derridean context, see Bennington (2000, p. 82).

intuition at all, resulting not in phenomenology but in a phenomenism or ‘first-level’ direct realism of sense-contents.<sup>23</sup> The very structure of intentional fulfillment demands a moment of meaning-intention *theoretically prior to and independent of* the moment of intuition in which the intention may be fulfilled.<sup>24</sup> My present situation is thus always simultaneously partly determined by the largely non-thematic consciousness of my previous meaning experience (retention), and partly open to largely non-thematic anticipations that together make up part of an open-ended horizon of possible future experiencing (protention).<sup>25</sup> The ‘living present’ of my consciousness is not merely ‘between’ past and future but is in fact *situated in* and to some degree *determined by* them. Husserl’s later genetic phenomenology more fully integrates this conception of temporality into his theory of meaning by asking how and when—if they are not simply fixed in some Platonic heaven, since they are said to remain open to revision on the basis of subsequent experience—such partial pre-determinations of meaning originate.

As is well known, part of the answer to how and when is given in Husserl’s account of the “sedimentation” of meaning. In the “Origin of Geometry,” he attempts to show how writing accomplishes a sedimentation of meanings capable of structuring our future experiences in a way that, once recorded, can remain passive and non-thematic in future experiences, just as, in terms of the example above, I can intend the cabinet *as* a cabinet (i.e., intend the sedimented meaning-content “cabinet”) without attending to the word or concept or uttering a proposition about it. Such sedimented meanings remain part of the background of my perceptual experience even when not made explicit. In this respect, an intended sense that precedes the moment of fulfillment/frustration in a present lived experience may have come from a long-forgotten previous lived experience, or, Husserl insists, may even have been passed down to me in an already sedimented state via language.

But whereas later thinkers in the phenomenological tradition tended to frame the inquiry into meaning largely if not exclusively in such linguistic terms, Husserl continued to conceive of the analysis of meaning at its ultimate, originary level as non-linguistic.<sup>26</sup> Because of the transcendental concern with not just actual but *possible* meaning in relation to lived experience, Husserl’s foremost interest is not the linguistic expression of meanings, but the “second-order” ideal possibility of meaning conceived in terms of a set of objective, lawful intentional structures common to thought and experience, whose analysis he calls, following Kant, “pure

<sup>23</sup> See Rinofner-Kreidl (2013, p. 49).

<sup>24</sup> See Benoist (2008, p. 84).

<sup>25</sup> See Husserl (1964b, 1969b, *passim*, 1977, p. 185, 2014, p. 159); Cf. Benoist (2014). As noted above, this retention–protention structure should not be confused with the phenomena of recollection and explicit expectation about the future such as making plans or looking forward to something. The latter phenomena are necessarily thematic whereas the former are not. This is not to say that the latter play no role in meaning constitution for Husserl, but only that the role of the former in the genesis of meaning cannot be simply assimilated to that of the latter.

<sup>26</sup> See Michael Dummett’s preface to Husserl (2001b). This does not mean, of course, that expressed, linguistic meaning plays no role in Husserl’s account. Husserl does maintain that language helps to shape sense through its presentation in a linguistic expression, but it ultimately still “borrows” the sense from the underlying act (Smith 2006: 113–117).

logic,”<sup>27</sup> and later “transcendental logic.”<sup>28</sup> These structures, uncovered by an inquiry into the subjective but shared conditions on the basis of which meaning is constituted, thus precede meaning as a phenomenon related to linguistic expression<sup>29</sup> and include a transcendental-logical level which Husserl insists is prior to the level of determinative judgment and propositional or truth-logic.<sup>30</sup>

It is an important implication of this view that the theory of meaning is not neatly separable from inquiries that today would fall within the purview of the philosophy of mind and epistemology. Despite the inevitability of examination in reflection through descriptions, signs, or propositions, for Husserl meaning as such arises from “intuitive experience”; it is always at the level of intuition that phenomenological analysis as a method of meaning inquiry going “back to the things themselves” must begin.<sup>31</sup> Language—especially because of the function of *description*—is centrally important in the execution of Husserl’s method, and yet ultimately it remains in the first instance a tool or a sort of calculus,<sup>32</sup> something that the phenomenologist uses in her reflective mode of inquiry to bring into focus a level of intuition which in the living present is not necessarily thematic and which, as part of the “practical” world of everyday experience, is not characterized by the same exactness or determinateness of meaning presupposed in linguistic, conceptual, or natural-scientific analysis.<sup>33</sup> While it is through reflective analysis that the aforementioned origination of pre-determinations of meaning is *described* in phenomenological inquiry, the terms of the description do not exhaust the content of the experience described.

Husserl calls meaning content at this pre-predicative, pre-linguistic level sense [*Sinn*]. Senses are well beyond the scope of the traditional concerns of the philosophy of language, and expressed linguistic meanings (for which in the later work he generally reserves the term *Bedeutungen*) are understood to be founded upon prior intentional acts characterized in terms of sense.<sup>34</sup> Since, as noted above, the intentional theory of meaning necessitates a moment of the intentional act independent of its fulfillment or frustration, a moment that may but need not be

<sup>27</sup> See Husserl (1975, 2001b, Prolegomena §3).

<sup>28</sup> See Husserl (1969a, 1974).

<sup>29</sup> See Husserl (1977, p. 258, 2014, p. 247).

<sup>30</sup> See Husserl (1974, p. 228, 1969a, p. 220).

<sup>31</sup> See Husserl (2002, p. 320).

<sup>32</sup> See the discussion of the “language as calculus” versus “language as universal medium” distinction in Hintikka (1984). Husserl’s work is examined explicitly in terms of this distinction in Kusch (1989, pp. 1–134).

<sup>33</sup> See Husserl (1974, pp. 437–46).

<sup>34</sup> See Husserl (1977, p. 284, 2014, p. 245). Cf. Lee Hardy, Translator’s Introduction to Husserl (1999). The exact nature of the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction in the later Husserl is as yet not extensively treated in the literature, and the interpretation presented here cannot be fully defended in this essay. For the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction in early Husserl, see Hill (1991, pp. 29–42), Vandavelde (2008), Roy (1996). Husserl never adopts the more familiar Fregean use of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, though he does explicitly acknowledge it in the *Logical Investigations* (1975, 2001b, §15). There is widespread consensus that Husserl’s use of *Bedeutung* corresponds more closely to Frege’s use of *Sinn*, whereas Husserl’s use of *Sinn* has no clear parallel in Frege, although its functional role is similar to the latter’s later conception of *Gedanken*.

made thematic, Husserl claims that the intending component of the act must *already* include a sense independent of any act or structure of signification:

[W]e distinguish the intending and the intended meaning, the sense-giving act and the sense itself (which is given to consciousness thematically in the sense-giving act). This holds generally. When a thematic act is attached to words, what is meant in the act is called the sense of the word, or even, its meaning [*Bedeutung*], because the word signifies [*deutet auf*]. But independently of whether an act has such a function of lending words meaning [*Bedeutung*], and perhaps being able to lend words meaning [*Bedeutung*], it has in itself a sense-content [*Sinnesgehalt*]. Accordingly, *we must liberate the concept of sense [Begriff des Sinnes] from its relation to expressions [Ausdrücke]*. Put in a quite general manner, every intentional lived-experience possesses as such its intentional sense; the latter becomes precisely a specifically meant sense [*spezifisch gemeinten Sinn*] when the ego becomes a subject who carries out acts thematically and becomes the subject of thematic interest. Let us now enter this realm of greater generality, the general realm of sense-giving and sense; without an encompassing study of this realm, all attempts to clarify logic in the specific [transcendental] sense are hopeless.<sup>35</sup>

Two different cases of thematic acts are distinguished in the passage. In the more obvious case, “carrying out acts thematically” occurs for the subject when a sense is intended via language, through an expressed *Bedeutung*.<sup>36</sup> But the passage also describes a case in which senses are “given to consciousness thematically in the sense-giving act” independently of *Bedeutung*-relations. In other words, thematic givenness may be necessary for word-meaning, but the former should not thereby be assimilated to the latter: *Sinne* may also appear in thematic acts that are *not* mediated by expressions.

The point of Husserl’s calling for the “liberation” of the concept of sense is not to guarantee our intuitive access to the content of the world independent of *Bedeutungen*; this capacity of *intuition* needs no guarantee; it is simply given as part of the phenomenological project in which we begin from the things—not the words—themselves.<sup>37</sup> The point is rather to emphasize the separate status of *Sinn* as thematically available to consciousness independent of *Bedeutungen*: For Husserl it is not the case that every *Sinn*-analysis will be *de facto* a *Bedeutung*-analysis; sense-giving acts are necessary conditions for the existence of *Bedeutungen*, but not the converse.<sup>38</sup> The “realm of greater generality” that the analysis of sense opens up to us is a level of meaning constitution, including transcendental-logical

<sup>35</sup> See Husserl (1974, p. 374, 2001a, p. 33, translation modified, my emphasis).

<sup>36</sup> Insofar as a particular *Sinn* can be understood as the possible fulfillment of a meaning intention that has been made thematic through expression, it is not incorrect to say that an *intended Sinn of this sort* has as a condition of its possibility *Bedeutung(en)*. But, contra Derrida (1972a, pp. 185–192, 1973, pp. 109–113) for Husserl this precondition cannot be generalized to hold for *Sinne* as such.

<sup>37</sup> Thanks to Dermot Moran for useful clarification on this point.

<sup>38</sup> As Drummond notes, “The assertion of an identity between the meaning of an expression and the noematic sense of an act does not entail that the noematic sense is in and of itself an intensional entity” (1990, p. 189).

considerations, below the level of the “specifically meant” or determinate judgment (considerations of relevance here but whose full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper; I return to them briefly in Sect. 4).

In sum, according to Husserl’s later phenomenology, which is at its core a theory of meaning, sense is indexed not to language or propositions per se but to originary, pre-predicative, potentially fulfillable intentional acts that may but need not rise to thematic awareness. *Sinn* may get expressed as *Bedeutung*, but it need not; it is already present at a more originary level. This most originary level is not that of signification but of a broader and (in a way still to be specified) less determinate conception of meaning.<sup>39</sup>

### 3 Signification, contamination, and originary difference: Derrida’s critique of pure presence

I now turn to Derrida’s theory of meaning, couched in terms of the structure of *signification*, and his extension of that theory to experience and perception. Derrida rejects accounts of meaning that rely on a conception of “pure presence”—foremost among them, on his view, Husserl’s—in favor of a system of differential relations of signification that remain open-ended, complex, and never completely decidable because not traceable to a single spatiotemporal point of experiential origin. This structure of signification is said to extend not only to the spoken or written word, but “to all ‘experience’ in general, if it is granted that there is no experience of *pure* presence, but only chains of differential marks.”<sup>40</sup> By insisting that we take language and “writing” in this radical sense, Derrida reinforces the priority of signification—although, importantly, in a form which is never complete or fully “present”—and interpretation over whatever “transcendental signifieds” are assumed to exist “outside of the text.”<sup>41</sup>

While Derrida’s account of the differential structure of the sign system is developed primarily through readings of Saussure, his claim that this structure extends to experience as such is developed largely through a critique of Husserl. For Derrida, a problem arises when we investigate more deeply the theoretical space accorded to self-evidential structures of meaning constitution in Husserl’s method. If Husserl sees language as a sort of calculus capable of reaching *beyond* the meanings expressed *in* language to something outside it, how are we to understand or phenomenologically analyze the ultimate field—which, in line with the “principle of all principles” must be some aspect or dimension of lived experience, of “the things themselves”—in which meaning originates, and which that linguistic calculus seeks to reach and analyze?

<sup>39</sup> Derrida criticizes this notion of a pre-expressive level of sense in several places, perhaps most prominently in the section of 1972a, 1973 cited above. Since this essay appears after the more definitive treatment of Husserl in 1967b, 2011 and is said by Derrida to be ‘dependent upon it at every moment’ (1972a, 1973, note 2), I focus in the following section primarily on the book-length version, which also includes other criticisms central to the theme of this paper not as well developed in Derrida’s later essay.

<sup>40</sup> See Derrida (1972b, p. 378, 1982, p. 318).

<sup>41</sup> See Derrida (1967a, p. 227, 1997, p. 158).

In the introduction to his French translation of Husserl's "Origin of Geometry," Derrida argues that because of the role writing plays in making idealities "fully objective," i.e., linguistically available to other subjects in the flux of history via sedimentation, what Husserl called a "transformation of the original mode of being of the meaning-structure" is not a pure transformation—i.e., a move from the pre-linguistic to the linguistic level of meaning—but rather an indication that the purported origin of meaning *already* presupposes a prior system of signification and language: There is an important sense in which representation always already informs or contaminates presentation, and iteration always already presupposes the possibility of reiteration. There is no simple pre-linguistic level of meaning.<sup>42</sup> Later, in *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida similarly claims that Husserl's conception of expression, conceived as the *immediate* presentation of meaning in closest proximity to the originary and pre-expressive layer of sense, is always already "contaminated" by indication, which implies a structure of spatial and temporal difference. There is thus no "now-moment" of pure presence—what Husserl called the "living present"—but always already a "spacing" that at once precludes the perfect reiteration of meaning as pure presence and also makes reiteration—as a "deferral" of meanings always partially absent—possible at all.<sup>43</sup>

In the final chapters of *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida extends this logic to the field of intuition itself, appealing to Husserl's description of the peculiar status of the "inner voice" of thought as that which makes phenomenology's claim to the self-conscious intuition of universalities on the basis of concrete "worldly" or "intramundane" experience of phenomena possible:

[T]he unity of the sound and the voice, which allows the voice to produce itself in the world as pure auto-affection, is *the unique instance* that escapes from the distinction between intramundanity and transcendental; and by the same token, it makes this distinction possible. It is this universality that results in the fact that, structurally and in principle, no consciousness is possible without the voice. The voice is being close to itself in the form of universality, as con-sciousness; the voice *is* consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

The unique status of the voice as 'auto-affection' calls into question the simple originarity of ideal meanings in an interior consciousness by showing that an outside world of signifiers in differential relations first makes the auto-affection of consciousness (through the voice) possible.<sup>45</sup> By the same logic—since it is the "unique instance" to escape the distinction—the voice makes possible the very methodological distinction between transcendental possibility and empirical ("intramundane") actuality presupposed by the "second-order" inquiry of phenomenology. In order to arrive at the co-originarity of worldly and ideal phenomena, Derrida's account of the voice deconstructs the supposed ideality of the meaning-

<sup>42</sup> See Derrida (1962, p. 56, 1978, p. 66). For the notion of contamination, see Derrida (1967b, pp. 21f, 2011 pp. 17ff), and the translator's introduction in Derrida (2011, pp. xxvff).

<sup>43</sup> See Derrida (1967b, pp. 97–98, 2011, pp. 74–75).

<sup>44</sup> See Derrida (1967b, p. 89, 2011, p. 68, first emphasis mine).

<sup>45</sup> See Zahavi (1999, pp. 132–37).

object and establishes “originary difference” at the origin of meaning constitution in *intuition itself*.

As his early engagements with Husserl’s “Problem of Genesis” help to show, the rationale for this approach is itself phenomenological.<sup>46</sup> The point here is a rejection of “pure presence”—of the idea that aspects of experience can be directly, completely, and immediately present to consciousness in a temporal moment—in favor of an account that allows for a “withdrawal,” in which experience is always complicated by the absence of complete meaning, and thus is better characterized by a complex “dialectic” of presence and absence that—against the presumed fixity of the signifier—never stands still to be captured in discrete temporal moments.<sup>47</sup> This *indeterminateness* of meaning in our everyday lived experience is for Derrida in tension with the supposed purity of experience in Husserl’s theory, despite the latter’s insistence in later texts—well-known to Derrida—that while exact concepts (such as those of geometry) are arrived at through “idealization,” they begin from experiences which in their originaryity exhibit only a “vague and fluid typification.”<sup>48</sup> This is the notion of indeterminateness that, as noted in the previous section, Husserl wished to ascribe to the pre-predicative, pre-linguistic level of experience he characterized in terms of *Sinn*.

There is thus, in a certain way, basic agreement between Derrida and the later Husserl regarding the fundamental *indeterminateness* of everyday experience, but a fundamental disagreement regarding how this is to be accounted for: Whereas for Husserl this problem points beyond language and signification to the lifeworld itself, for Derrida the very presupposition of a something “beyond,” a something significant “itself,” reachable in a living present and in its “purity” by means of a method, is a remnant of the metaphysics of presence and part of that which obscures the nature of the phenomena in the first place.<sup>49</sup>

Against this presupposition, *différance* is ascribed to Husserl’s supposedly interior conception of ideal sense by writing it into the conditions of the possibility of intuition itself, leading Derrida to describe the “primary intention” of *Voice and Phenomenon* as “asserting that *perception does not exist* or that what we call perception is not originary, and that in a certain way everything ‘begins’ by means of ‘representation’ ... by re-inserting the difference of the ‘sign’ in the heart of the ‘originary’ ...”<sup>50</sup> This rethinking of intuition according to the logic of representation and *différance* amounts to an insistence on the originary priority of the sign (inscription) as a condition of the possibility of the fundamental forms of experience: “A new transcendental aesthetic must itself be guided not only by mathematical idealities but by the possibility of inscriptions in general, not befalling an already constituted space as contingent accident but producing the spatiality of

<sup>46</sup> See Derrida (1990 [1954], 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Derrida himself uses this language of “dialectic” in *The Problem of Origin* (1990, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> See Husserl (1970, p. 51, 1976, p. 51).

<sup>49</sup> Husserl does indeed occasionally use the language of “purity” in later works, especially the *Crisis* (1970, 1976). For a different critique of the possibility of access to the ‘pure’ lifeworld, see Carr (1974).

<sup>50</sup> See Derrida (1967b, p. 49n, 2011, p. 39n). See also Evans (1991, p. 143).

space.”<sup>51</sup> By extending the account of *différance* to perception and experience as such, Derrida radically reframes the Kantian claim that transcendental logic must be accompanied by a transcendental aesthetic—by an account of temporality and spatiality as originary conditions of the possibility of judgments because conditions of the possibility of the intuitions providing the material to be judged—to include the possibility of inscription as a co-condition of the possibility of all intuition.<sup>52</sup> And whereas Kant claimed that time was the general a priori condition of all appearances, as well as “the immediate condition of the inner intuition (of our souls), and thereby also the mediate condition of outer appearances,”<sup>53</sup> in Derrida’s version the inclusion of inscription demands that priority be given not to the temporal but to the spatial.<sup>54</sup> Spatiality is co-implicated in the very “interiority” of time, and thus there is no such simple interiority. For Derrida space or “spacing” is more originary, even for auto-affectation (Kant’s “inner intuition of our souls”).

Many commentators have interpreted this argument from the final chapters of *Voice and Phenomenon* as opposing to Husserl’s account of the transcendental ideality of meaning—a theory of meaning premised upon the priority of the sign as an empirical object—upon the *facticity* of writing and speech as concrete phenomena in space and time.<sup>55</sup> But Derrida does not wish simply to *replace* Husserl’s doctrine of ideality with a doctrine of the pure priority of the empirical sign, for this would only reinstate the problem of a pure origin in place of original difference. His move is better understood as a *complicating* of the phenomenological account of ideality by insisting upon the *equally* originary status of the concrete, and of the repeatability of the sign for the process of idealization<sup>56</sup> (thus the claim above that inscription is a *co-condition*). Phenomenology has not been simply rejected in favor of an existential ontology, but instead transformed into an irreducible “*dialectic* of phenomenology and ontology,” of the transcendental and the empirical modes of inquiry.<sup>57</sup> It is not merely the empirical existence of language as a spatio-temporal, written or spoken entity, but also its ideal *possibility*, that determines the equally originary status of the concrete or empirical and thus governs the conditions of the possibility of intuition as such.<sup>58</sup>

Derrida’s real target is thus not Husserl’s transcendentalism per se—he himself endorses at least a ‘quasi-transcendentalism’<sup>59</sup>—but his *intuitionism*, the notion that ideal meanings can be intuited by consciousness as directly and purely present in an

<sup>51</sup> See Derrida (1967a, p. 411, 1997, p. 290).

<sup>52</sup> See Derrida (1967a, p. 411, 1997, p. 290), Cf. Bennington (2000, pp. 80–92), Hodge (2009, pp. 272f).

<sup>53</sup> See Kant (1998, A31, A34).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Lawlor, translator’s introduction to Derrida (2011, p. xxii).

<sup>55</sup> See Kates (2005, pp. 62ff, 72).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Ruin (2010, p. 18).

<sup>57</sup> See Derrida (1990, p. 40, 2003, p. 4).

<sup>58</sup> Kates insists that this entails the need to conceive of language more radically. If the empirical existence of the sign were all that was at issue, “Derrida’s own thought would never have had to finally transgress the confines of philosophy and philosophical argumentation” (2005, p. 74).

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion and overview of some of the prominent positions on the status of quasi-transcendental in Derrida’s work, see Kates (2005, Ch. 1).

experience not already structured by the sign system<sup>60</sup> or characterized by absence and *différance*. For Derrida, if meaning—which is never pure presence—is to be close enough to presence and ideality to be sharable at all, it is only as a function of the structure of signification, which cannot be neatly separated from the spatial as the condition of the possibility of all experience. Presence presupposes signification, and thereby also partial absence.

In effect, then, in the attempt to account for absence, Derrida makes his readings of Husserl's conception of the sedimentation of exact and intersubjective meaning by means of language—which, as shown above, is only *one part* of Husserl's broader and not exclusively language-oriented theory of meaning—the cornerstone of a deconstructive phenomenology of meaning *in toto*. By insisting not only that the logic of *différance* governs the structure of signification, but that signification, despite being a “differential” structure, governs all intuition and thus all perceptual experience in an always—already representationally “contaminated” world in which “*perception does not exist* or... what we call perception is not originary,”<sup>61</sup> Derrida accounts for the indeterminate character of lived experience by appeal to the all-pervasive structure of signification.

#### 4 Non-reflective access to the life-world: kinesthesia as embodied sense-making

If, as I have argued above, Derrida and Husserl are in at least basic agreement concerning the phenomenon that I have called the “indeterminateness” of experience, why do they arrive at such different views concerning meaning and presence? I have already suggested that part of the difference lies in their respective stances toward the exhaustiveness of the representational—embraced, with qualifications, by Derrida, and rejected on my reading by the later Husserl. In this section I show how, like Noë's, Husserl's anti-representationalism is justified largely through appeals to the *lived body*. For Husserl, the crucial theoretical link is provided by the simultaneous empirical and transcendental status of kinesthetic structures and their role in providing a “non-reflective” form of access to the lifeworld that overcomes dichotomies between subjective and objective, inside and outside. Contra Derrida, then, the “voice” of consciousness is *not* the only thing to escape the binary between transcendental and empirical modes of inquiry.

In the final pages of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, one of the places in his later work where Husserl lays claim to his own revision of the transcendental aesthetic, he conceives the project of genetic phenomenology as an *expansion* of the Kantian notion, arguing that the phenomenological field of lived experience cannot be accurately understood on the basis of the a priori forms of intuition of time and space alone, but must also involve “an investigation of transcendental constitution”

<sup>60</sup> On this point Derrida's critique of Husserl aligns interestingly with Frege's. See Ruin (2010), Evans (1991, pp. 131–133).

<sup>61</sup> See Derrida (1967b, p. 49, note, 2011, p. 39 note).

“at the ground level.”<sup>62</sup> If the Kantian account of the (re)presentational origin of meaningful judgments in space and time as the a priori forms of intuition is explanatory only with regard to the conditions of the possibility of Newtonian science, the transcendental phenomenologist, who is concerned not only with the apodictic grounding of *natural scientific* inquiry but with the wider project of grounding the constitution of meaning *as such*, proposes a radical rethinking of the entire field of intuition. Even if we accept that space and time are the a priori *forms* of intuition, we have not thereby clarified how the content appearing through those forms comes to be *meaningful* for us.

In order to accomplish such a clarification, Husserl rejects the requirement that an account of the contributions of lived experience to meaning be limited to purely formal description, and thus to space and time as formal conditions for intuition.<sup>63</sup> Kant's account of judgment begins “too high” from a Husserlian standpoint, in its concern primarily for exact scientific concepts, thereby missing the more originary phenomenological dimension of meaning discussed above, consisting of presentations of sense in the indeterminateness of the everyday life-world.<sup>64</sup> Like Derrida, Husserl felt the need to supplement the Kantian theory of intuition to better account for the phenomena of lived experience.

But if Kant's theory of intuition in the first *Critique* was conceived with an eye to the concepts of natural science, Derrida's version of intuition—itsself an attempt to *limit* the role of intuitionism in phenomenology—is conceived with an eye to the semiotic structures of *différance*. From a Husserlian standpoint, then, this raises the suspicion that Derrida's account of intuition also begins too high, missing fundamental experiential structures by refusing to countenance elements of experience not already “contaminated” by the structure of signification.<sup>65</sup>

Husserl's attempted expansion of the field of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic is intended to account for the way in which meanings can first become present in lived experience at a “lower” level, through passive synthetic acts prior to reflection and to thematic mediation via signification, language, and even concept use.<sup>66</sup> Meaning arises through pre-predicative constitutional syntheses which organize overarching patterns of sense-evidence that have their own “relative rationality,” prior to the exacting reflective structures of natural science and language but not prior to cognition as such.<sup>67</sup> As Derrida and many others recognized, such a supposedly “pure” pre-linguistic level of lived experience raises important problems in the context of the later Husserl's conception of the life-world: In explicating this level, it seems that we invariably express our results as predicative judgments in language,

<sup>62</sup> See Husserl (1974, pp. 296–298, 1969a, pp. 291–293).

<sup>63</sup> This is at odds with Kant's account of a priori synthetic judgment, since Kant ultimately finds the ordering of the manifold of intuition on *intellectual objectivity*, conceived in terms of *formal intuition*, which, as an *intellectual* activity, is considered to be dependent upon the rational employment of concepts in the understanding (Ricoeur 1967, p. 194).

<sup>64</sup> See Rump (2014a).

<sup>65</sup> It is a similar suspicion that leads Noë to include Derrida in his critique the “over-intellectualization of the intellect,” as noted above (2012, pp. 6–7).

<sup>66</sup> See Husserl (1970, pp. 115f, 1976, p. 118), Cf. Welton (2000, pp. 298f).

<sup>67</sup> See Husserl (1969a, p. 278, 1974, p. 283), Cf. Welton (1983, pp. 245ff).

and arrive at this level via a process of reflection that unavoidably presupposes both predication and sedimented structures of prior meaning.

Recognizing this problem, in his later writings Husserl appeals to a distinction between the “pre-given” life-world—the immediate precondition of lived experience for us today, with all of its sedimentations of sense and scientific and cultural acquisitions—and an “original” life-world, the world prior to sedimentation and the idealizations of science.<sup>68</sup> In *Experience and Judgment* he attempts to sketch a path of phenomenological access to these original, pre-predicative aspects of the life-world through the process of “deconstructing” or “dismantling” [*Abbauen*] of layers of sedimentation, a process that is said to be non-reflective.<sup>69</sup> In the process of *Abbauen* we analyze the structure of past experience by attempting to strip away the sedimented meaning structures of history and tradition, in order to arrive at an understanding of the original life-world that is entirely free of sedimented meanings. This “retrogression” to a “transcendental subjectivity constituting the pre-given world” involves two steps: first, the move from our pre-given life-world to the original life-world, and second, the move from this original life-world to the investigation of the passive-synthetic “subjective accomplishments [*Leistungen*] out of which it itself arises.”<sup>70</sup> At this second, deeper level, Husserl claims, regressive phenomenological inquiry already reveals a proto-structure of logic and sense, containing two elements that contribute to the construction [*Aufbau*] of the lifeworld:

Here, also, we already find logical accomplishments of sense [*Sinnesleistungen*]*—not* logical, to be sure, in the sense of our traditional logic, which always has as a foundation the idealization of being-in-itself and being-determined-in-itself [*Ansichseins und Ansichbestimmenseins*] but in the sense of an original logical accomplishment which is primarily focused on determination, cognizing in the limited and relative horizons of experience in the life-world. But the logical accomplishments of sense are only a part of that which contributes to the construction [*Aufbau*] of the world of our experience. Also belonging to this structure are practical and affective experiences [*Gemüts Erfahrungen*], the experience in willing, evaluating, and manual *activity*, which on its part creates its own horizon of familiarity, the familiarity involved in practical association, evaluation, etc.<sup>71</sup>

I will return to the first element Husserl mentions, the “logical accomplishments of sense,” in Sect. 5. Here I want to focus on the second element the *Abbau* is said to

<sup>68</sup> See Carr (1974, pp. 225ff).

<sup>69</sup> As Carr notes (1974, pp. 225–231) Husserl’s claim that this “dismantling” is non-reflective is highly problematic, and may even be circular. For my purposes here, what is important is only the notion that what would be revealed by such dismantling would be originary lifeworld structures independent of sedimentation and idealization.

<sup>70</sup> See Husserl (1964a, p. 49, 1973, p. 50).

<sup>71</sup> See Husserl (1964a, p. 49, 1973, p. 50, translation modified, my emphasis).

uncover non-reflectively: practical and affective experiences and manual activity, which I take to include sensorimotor movement or kinesthesia.

For Husserl, such habits of bodily movement function much like Dreyfus's "absorbed coping," but with an important difference: Whereas Dreyfus's notion is explicitly distinguished from mindedness because not an object of reflective self-awareness in the form of language or concepts,<sup>72</sup> for Husserl such embodied structures, while similarly non-conceptual and non-linguistic, and while not (typically) the product of conscious reflection or willing and something exceeding the interiority of consciousness, are nonetheless in an important sense *continuous* with it. These embodied structures are thus not guilty of Noë's charge of "over-intellectualizing the intellect": They are *part* of the structure of meaning and reason, functioning *constantly* in the making-present (which is not a re-presenting) of new meaning-horizons, in a way that can be seen at *any time*, and not only in moments of 'breakdown.'<sup>73</sup> Husserl labels such sensorimotor structures *kinestheses*:

I move my eyes, my head, alter the posture of my body, go around the object, direct my regard to it, and so on. We call these movements, which belong to the essence of perception and serve to bring the object of perception to givenness from all sides insofar as possible, *kinestheses*. They are consequences of perceptive tendencies, 'activities' in a certain sense, although not voluntary actions. In doing all this, I do not (in general) carry out voluntary acts. I move my eyes, etc., involuntarily, without 'thinking about my eyes.' The kinestheses involved have the character of an *active, subjective process*. Hand in hand with them and motivated by them goes a sequence of visual or tactile changing 'images,' which 'belong' to them, while the object is still given to me in an inactive duration or alteration. My relation to the object is on the one hand receptive and on the other hand definitely productive.<sup>74</sup>

Kinestheses are subjective and active, insofar as they are activities of a body of which I am generally aware and that I for the most part can consciously control: It is usually in my power, e.g., to simply turn away or to close my eyes. But such kinestheses are at the same time both (typically) independent of my thematic conscious awareness and involuntary with regard to their implications for sense-constitution, insofar as I do not determine the associations and intentional anticipations to which they give rise and in the retentional context of which they always occur: "[W]ith regard to this, I am purely receptive; if these or those kinestheses are put into play vis-à-vis the object, these or those images will come into view. This holds for rest as well as for movement, for alteration as well as for

<sup>72</sup> See Dreyfus (2007).

<sup>73</sup> As Crowell puts this point, arguing for the normative character of phenomenological inquiry, "Even if practical coping and embodied engagement is not a matter of explicit thematization or rule-following, it is not opaque either, not zombie-like or robotic. Nevertheless, if we are to understand the transcendental subject of phenomenological immanence, we shall have to go beyond consciousness. Husserl understood this point clearly, since his mature work emphasized the 'ego of habitualities,' the constitutive contribution of the lived body, transcendental intersubjectivity, and the life-world" (2013, p. 123).

<sup>74</sup> See Husserl (1964a, pp. 89–90, 1973, pp. 83–84).

non-alteration.”<sup>75</sup> Kinestheses are at once passive and active, subjective and normatively intersubjective, and analyzable both empirically and transcendently: They are both part of the “motivational structure” of my perceptual experience of objects and determinants of the horizons of possible meaning, as discussed in Sect. 1.

Derrida is well aware of this later Husserlian view. In a passage from *Of Grammatology*, published in the same year as *Voice and Phenomenon*, he acknowledges that Husserl believed himself to have overcome the sorts of problems highlighted in the latter book through an account of the body. But for Derrida, Husserl’s appeal to kinesthesia as both passive and active structure only amounts to his having “erased the one with the other constantly” and in the end, “the Husserlian radicalization of the Kantian question is indispensable but insufficient.”<sup>76</sup> According to Derrida, in claiming a level of passivity that nonetheless accounts for original activity, first under the guise of transcendental consciousness and then under that of kinesthesia, Husserl has continued to buy into the metaphysics of presence and the illusion of a world simply present to inward consciousness, not already contaminated by an “outside,” and still structured according to a simple opposition between pure passivity and pure activity.<sup>77</sup>

The argument should sound familiar. As in his other 1967 work, the passage from *Of Grammatology* insists, in effect, that if the distinction between passivity and activity is not complicated and “contaminated” by means of the trace of signification, there must be no complication *at all*. In the language of *Voice and Phenomenon*, either *the voice* resides irreducibly at the origin of meaning and experience, complicating the relationship between passivity and activity through the representational logic of signification and deferral, or *nothing* does, and without such complication we remain “imprisoned in metaphysics.”<sup>78</sup>

If Husserl’s transcendental account of kinesthesia as described above is right, however, it looks instead as if the desired complication of activity and passivity is maintained, but ascribed to something phenomenologically more ordinary: the lived body. On the Husserlian view, kinestheses themselves qualify as an “instance that escapes from the distinction between intramundanity and transcendental; and by the same token... makes this distinction possible,”<sup>79</sup> For Husserl, the distinction between the intramundane and the transcendental is a *methodological* one; to say that the body escapes this distinction (or is found on both sides of it) is simply to say that the lived body is both an object of my experience and a condition of that experience.<sup>80</sup> “Escaping” the distinction is not unique to the voice or the associated structures of signification and *différance*.

Similarly, the claim that experience is exhaustively “contaminated” by an “outside” of language only works if experience is taken to mean “consciousness”

<sup>75</sup> See Husserl (1964a, p. 90, 1973, pp. 83–84).

<sup>76</sup> See Derrida (1967a, p. 411, 1997, pp. 290–291).

<sup>77</sup> See Derrida (1967a, p. 411, 1997, p. 290).

<sup>78</sup> See Derrida (1967a, p. 411, 1997, p. 290).

<sup>79</sup> See Derrida (1967b, p. 89, 2011, p. 68).

<sup>80</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for a helpful discussion of this issue.

and this latter is understood as always reflective or “interior,” in line with the Cartesian caricature. This is precisely what Husserl’s account of consciousness in terms of the intentional correlation rejects: There is no noesis without noema. We are not ‘interior’ rational operatives with ‘outside’ non-rational machinery, but rather *embodied* beings with *embodied* intentionality and rationality, in a world that is indeed always already *meaningful* to us, but not only—not exclusively—through the mediation of language or representation. On the Husserlian view, the distinction between passivity and activity is indeed problematized, but the primary problematizing mechanism is not, as for Derrida, the ubiquitous trace of signification, but rather the *lived body in a lived world*.

At this point, from the Derridean standpoint, an obvious objection arises: If contamination occurs because of the disconnect between the fixity of the sign and “differal” or spacing in the temporal flux, then the claim that the lived body can be involved in sense-making without the mediation of the sign might be thought to imply the opposite of such contamination—the very presupposition of pure presence against which Derrida warns us. Since the meaning that I am asserting arises from the lived body is not fixed, but rather to some degree indeterminate, there is at this level no “fixing” of meaning to which to contrast a Derridean structure of differal. Isn’t the meaning arising from the lived body then still problematically completely present, still “pure?”

This objection fails in assimilating indeterminacy to contamination and impurity. There is an imperfect presence to experience on Husserl’s account—a sort of “absence”—only it is not the result of some contamination, linguistic or otherwise, but rather of the indeterminacy that characterizes our experience because it is open-ended, a nexus of meaning-possibilities governed not by what is the case or even what is asserted to be the case through the fixity of the sign, but *of what*, in immanent experience and typically non-thematically, is generally or normatively anticipated:

In the oscillation of the anticipatory envisionment, in the transition from one temporary variant or orientation to another, we remain in the unity of the anticipation, namely, that of the color of the backside of the thing [the example used earlier in the paragraph]; but, as an anticipation, it is indeterminate and general: the determination is anticipated in terms of a type, an element of familiarity. In the clarification of this typical generality in the form of determinate “possibilities” open to the real being of this color, the realm [*Spielraum*] for these possibilities is given as the explicit “extension” of the indeterminate generality of anticipation...every real thing whatsoever has, as an object of possible experience, its general “a priori,” a preknowledge that is an indeterminate generality but which remains identifiable as the same, as a type belonging a priori to a realm of a priori possibilities...<sup>81</sup>

The lived body functions as a site for the production of meaning not at the level of exact words, concepts, or mathematically exact representations, but rather as a

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<sup>81</sup> See Husserl (1964a, pp. 31–32, 1973, p. 36).

lifeworld structure whose fundamental character is that of the “typicality”<sup>82</sup> characteristic of our everyday experience, which remains general, “open to real being” and not-yet clarified in the form of determinate judgment. (As I argue in Sect. 5, this typicality and openness further implies a role in sense-making on the side of the lived world: Coping is the noetic side of a correlation. Its other side is noematic affordance.)

Like Derrida and the existential phenomenologists, Husserl wishes to capture the way that “presence” is always incomplete, but on his account, insisting that this indeterminacy is a “contamination” due to signification locates it in the wrong place. The turn to signification goes wrong in attributing a *reflective, representational* notion to a non-reflective, immanent experience. This effaces the distinction, central to the phenomenological method, between “living through” as an active, situated, and embodied performance of lived experience, on the one hand, and the analysis of the structure of such experience through a reflective act of consciousness on the other. For Husserl, by contrast, the distinction between reflective analysis and engaged embodied activity *simply does not map onto* the distinction between a “minded” realm of thought and an embodied realm of “coping.” As for enactivists such as Noë, the latter distinction, like those discussed above between inside and outside, passivity and activity, is at least partly effaced, but the former distinction—between reflection and non-reflective lived experience—cannot be. If it were, the phenomenological reduction would serve no purpose, and transcendental phenomenological description would be no different from empirical description; the phenomenological enterprise would fall apart.<sup>83</sup>

Thus for Husserl it is only at the level of reflective consciousness, and not the level of all perception or experience as such, that we necessarily encounter the complications of signifying structures so artfully expressed by Derrida as *différance*. The phenomenon of linguistic sedimentation (as discussed, e.g., in the “Origin of Geometry”) reveals that there is *sometimes* a “contamination” of experience by representational structures such as signification, but such sedimentation is not ubiquitous in perception. I have argued that there are good reasons, following Husserl, to account for the indeterminacy of perceptual meaning instead with reference to the phenomenologically obvious fact that everyday experience *itself* is never complete, exact, or present in any single or simple sense: It is characterized in terms of intersecting *horizons of possibility* which are not modal lists of propositions in possible worlds but the lived context of our ongoing embodied sense-making.

With this account in place, we can now return briefly to the lacquered cabinet example introduced in Sect. 1. When I walk around toward the backside of the cabinet focused primarily on the conversation with my friend, only to have my attention drawn from the conversation to the object before me, my non-thematic anticipations are frustrated, and in that moment my intentionality is re-oriented away from the conversation and back to the cabinet, which then shifts from one

<sup>82</sup> On the role of the notion of the “type” in Husserl’s later theory of pre-predicative experience, see Lohmar (1998).

<sup>83</sup> Such a case would, in a certain sense, amount to the situation that Derrida takes to be revealed by his critique.

element among others in my background perceptual horizon to the foregrounded meaning-object of contemplation or thematic awareness. This shift in the “principal theme” of my perceptual experience does not result from a change in linguistic or conceptual mediation, but from a *felt* frustration on the basis of an unthematized, passively pre-given unity of experience.<sup>84</sup> It is because something first *feels* out of place that I turn toward and reflect upon it in the first place.<sup>85</sup> And things can feel out of place only against background anticipations of typical conditions for experiencing such cabinets, of the sort that are shared by similarly embodied and rationally equipped experiencers and in this sense “objective.” The shared quality becomes evident, for example, when my friend follows my gaze and immediately understands my cutting off mid-sentence, without need for explanation.<sup>86</sup>

One reason for her ability to do so is a shared normativity of bodily expectations: a common set of kinesthetic anticipations or field of “sensorimotor knowledge.” As discussed above, kinesthetic experience is both a precondition for meaning, knowledge and perceptions shared by rational experiencers, and for each of us necessarily original *subjective* experience. Such “original intuiting” is prior to the constitutive overlappings of the original lifeworld, the “all-embracing essential interconnections” on the basis of which experience of the world *as* a world imbued with objectivity and truth is possible.<sup>87</sup> The determination of meaning is at once open-ended for me in light of future experience and partially pre-determined for me and others via normative embodied structures such as kinestheses.<sup>88</sup> The fact that the phenomenological *description* of the role of meaning in experience occurs via reflective thinking mediated by shared structures of signification does not imply that the normativity and meaning that experience manifests must itself be *ascribed* to those structures. And the status of my subjectivity in this case seems—if I am true to the testimony of my lived experience—much closer to the embodied, lived rationality described by Noë than to the Cartesian ego-consciousness exclusively “in the head” in line with which Husserl has been so often caricatured.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> See Husserl (1964a, pp. 177f, 1973, pp. 154f).

<sup>85</sup> See Husserl (2000, pp. 8f, 2001a, pp. 280ff). Bower (2014) takes such observations as reasons to reject Husserl’s conception of perceptual sense (*Wahrnehmungssinn*). My own view is that Husserl’s conception of sense, in the case of perception, can be taken to include feeling and affect (see the example of the feeling of nostalgia at the end of Sect. 5 of this paper).

<sup>86</sup> The sense of objectivity at play here is thus, in an important sense, *normative*. This idea is explored at length in Crowell (2013). While I cannot discuss it further here, my framing of intentional objects as “unities of possible meaning” and of the “shared objectivity” of kinestheses accords with Crowell, though in my view his account does not give enough weight to ideas of the later Husserl of the sort described here [see Rump (2014b)].

<sup>87</sup> See Husserl (1969a, p. 279, 1974, p. 285).

<sup>88</sup> It is of course no coincidence that this account of kinesthesia and passive synthesis develops in the same later period in which, as noted above, Husserl moved away from a static conception of phenomenological ‘essence’ to a ‘genetic’ and more open-ended account of meaning (Cf. Costa 1998: 16ff).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Crowell (2013, Ch. 5).

## 5 Meaning as sense in the lived world

Before concluding, however, I want to return to the point of disagreement between Husserl and Noë briefly introduced at the end of Sect. 1. While Noë rightly recognizes the importance of the lived body for sense-making, his account differs from Husserl in the weight it accords to the *lived world*. Returning again to the lacquered cabinet and the felt frustration of my intentional anticipations, is it accurate to say that in cases where it is not intellectual (mediated by propositions or language), this frustration is *exclusively* the result of my sensorimotor anticipations? Is there no other factor involved—at the pre-predicative level, to use Husserl's terms—in embodied intentional frustration or fulfillment?

As I noted above, from a Husserlian standpoint, Noë fails to do justice to the noematic aspects of sense-making in perception. Despite his insistence on its sensorimotor quality, perceptual experience on his view seems to amount to little more than the set of possible and actual sensorimotor activities of the embodied subject; it does little to explain in what way that subject experiences a world that is *itself* a source of meaning.<sup>90</sup> Noë has, in a sense, collapsed the sensory into the motor.<sup>91</sup>

On the Husserlian picture, by contrast, while kinesthetic capacities *reveal* possibilities of sense, they alone do not *found* them. At a “deeper” level, the world is *already* potentially meaningful or significant—a fact that is pre-determined, to use Husserl's language, by transcendental “logical accomplishments”: Recall from Sect. 4 that for Husserl there were *two* elements said to be involved in the analysis of “fields of sense” at the prepredicative level—not only “practical and affective experiences” as explained through the account of kinesthesia, but also “an original logical accomplishment which is primarily focused on determination, cognizing in the limited and relative horizons of experience in the life-world.” While a full explication of this point is beyond the scope of this paper, Husserl's notion is that, at the level of transcendental logic (as opposed to “traditional” or truth-logic), the phenomenologist is concerned not with predicative but with *pre-predicative evidence*, organized not in relation to universals named by already established words or concepts, but to the *immediate sense-evidence of lived experience* prior to determinative judgment, “the genetical tracing of predicative evidences back to the non-predicative evidence called experience.”<sup>92</sup> The *Aufbau* of the original lifeworld, then, is not only the result of the lived body and its possibilities for movement; it is also governed by the transcendental-logical norms and quasi-determinate typicalities the lifeworld in accordance with which determinate

<sup>90</sup> Campbell (2008, p. 667) makes a related criticism against Noë's earlier (2004) account. Tellingly, in his response to Campbell, Noë (2008) asserts at one point (p. 702) that sensorimotor knowledge is merely a “necessary enabling condition” for the perception of objects, but on the next page seems to *equate* perceptual knowledge with sensorimotor knowledge. In subsequent works (2009, 2012, 2015) Noë further addresses such objections by appeal to a broader notion of the understanding, but this notion is itself cashed out in terms of conceptuality, and thus still seems to assimilate intentional noematic content to a kind of intensional content [see Drummond (1990, p. 189; cited above), and note 94 below].

<sup>91</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for this useful formulation.

<sup>92</sup> See Husserl (1969a, p. 209, 1974, p. 216).

concepts and language are first possible. Noë is right to extend rationality below the level of the intellectual and to see the lived world as a context for our sense-making; but on his account the spatio-temporal presence of that world as the space in which I move seems to exhaust its constitutional and rational contributions. For Husserl, by contrast, the lived world is much more than the context of my bodily movements; it is a field of horizons of possible sense that themselves contribute to the norms and rationality of sense-making. Although I have been discussing this Husserlian conception, in the context of his theory of meaning, in terms of “sense” (*Sinn*) it should not be forgotten that in the case of perception Husserl also employs the more specific term “perceptual sense” (*Wahrnehmungssinn*), and explicitly ties it to the noematic side of perceptual intentional acts.<sup>93</sup>

Take, for example, a different sort of frustration of my intentional anticipation vis-à-vis the lacquered cabinet: In this case, as in that above, the shift in my perceptual experience results from a *felt* frustration on the basis of an unthematized, passively pregiven unity of experience. I stop and reflect because of a bodily *feeling*. But this feeling need not result from a mismatch between anticipations and experiences of *spatio-temporal* features of the experience. The cabinet may conform to all of my sensorimotor expectations, and yet suddenly it appears with a new *significance* for me. I *know* this cabinet in a way I didn't before. I experience it, say, with a certain feeling of familiarity and nostalgia, even if I cannot specify from whence. It may even be that—in an objective, empirical sense—I am wrong about this: There may *in fact* be no specific prior experience, nothing I can name that explains the feeling. But I cannot be wrong about the *feeling*, and the *possibility* it introduces—of an experience forgotten or repressed, or of an as-yet unfamiliar similarity to the familiar—is itself already an alteration in the nexus of possible meanings (or what we can now call, more precisely, possible unities of *sense*) in which the object shows up for me.

Contra Derrida and Noë, the later Husserl is able to account for this sort of case not merely because of the lived body but also because of his distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. Like Derrida's account of contamination, Noë's account of the sensorimotor provides only a *part* of the story of what is going on in perceptual sense-making. The rest of it—what is needed to accomplish a full phenomenological description of sense-making in perceptual experience, is a recognition of the contribution from the perceptual object *itself* that is reducible neither to its spatiotemporal modes of showing up for us, nor to the determinateness of conceptual, linguistic, or propositional meaning. As I suggested at the end of Sect. 1, this is the place where Gibson's conception of affordances is closer to Husserl—in Gibson's account of affordances it is clear that objects *themselves* have meanings that can be directly perceived.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> See Husserl (1977, p. 203, 2014, p. 175).

<sup>94</sup> Noë acknowledges this Gibsonian point (2012, p. 121), but assimilates such meaning under a broadened notion of the “conceptual.” But borrowing a label typically associated with linguistic capacities to refer to something not at that level is not the same as giving an adequate phenomenological description of it on its own terms. It has not been possible in this essay to address the important difference between Noë and Husserl concerning the question of the conceptuality of non-representational meaning in embodied structures of experience—the topic of work currently in preparation. Briefly sketched: Noë

## 6 Conclusion

The world pushes back. Not just because we cannot perceive all of the sides of an object at once or have to move around it, but also because our lived experience is meaningfully present in a way that is not entirely derived from language, signifiers, propositions, or concepts, but is rather a necessary, if incomplete and underdetermined, *precondition* for them. Husserl provides an account of sense-making that overcomes both the presumed ubiquity of representation in any of the above forms, *and* the assimilation of sense-making to an exclusively noetic activity. The transcendental-phenomenological analysis of meaning in Husserl's later work thus respects the full breadth of the structures of our sense-making—the lived body *and* the lived world.

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Footnote 94 continued

continues to conceive of meaning—even at the level of embodied structures—through an extremely broad version of conceptualism. While he is clear that his notion of the concept is non-representational and not directly tied to language, his account, like the Derridean account discussed here, still relies upon a reflective notion (the concept) in accounting for a non-reflective aspect of immanent, lived experience. This view is not only suspect from the standpoint of recent work on non-conceptualism (where Husserl is again an important forebear and resource); it also ignores the problem of meaning *constitution*—of how we get from non-representational, embodied aspects of meaning to full-blown propositional knowledge. For a critique of John McDowell's conceptualism along these lines, see Rump (2014a).

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