

# Husserl's Semiotics of Gestures: *Logical Investigations* and Its Revisions

Thomas Byrne

*Sun Yat-sen University*

---

**Abstract:** By examining the evolution of Husserl's philosophy from 1901 to 1914, this essay reveals that he possessed a more robust philosophy of gestures than has been accounted for. This study is executed in two stages. First, I explore how Husserl analyzed gestures through the lens of his semiotics in the 1901 *Logical Investigations*. Although he there presents a simple account of gestures as kinds of indicative signs, he does uncover rich insights about the role that gestures play in communication. Second, I examine how Husserl augmented his theory of gestures in his 1914 Revisions to the Sixth Logical Investigation. Husserl describes some gestures as signals, which are experienced as intersubjective communication, as having a temporally diachronic structure, and as possessing an obliging tendency. Husserl also contrasts gestures to language by showing how language habitually leaves traces on us.

**Keywords:** expression, indication, communication, intersubjectivity, mimetics.

## 1. *Introduction*

Phenomenologists could approach the experience of gestures through many different lenses. Amongst others, we could examine how we experience the body when gesturing, the role gestures play in intersubjective communication, and how gestural motions can be ingrained via sedimentation. It should; however, be of no surprise that the early Edmund Husserl—the good mathematician—studied gestures as signs. In his famous semiotics from his 1901 First Logical Investigation, he examines how gestures operate as signs, which signify the inner psychic life of others. There, Husserl writes that, during certain gestures, “a man's mental states achieve understandable ‘expression’ for

his environment without the added help of speech” (Hua XIX: 37 / Husserl 1970: 187–188. Hereafter, LU).<sup>1</sup>

Even though Husserl does discuss gestures in 1901, his examination of them is certainly not central to his semiotics. He only describes gestures on two pages of the First Investigation and does not examine them again in that text. This decision makes sense within the context of the *Logical Investigations*. That work has the overarching goal of determining how scientific propositions are expressed and verified and Husserl believes that gestures play no essential role in those processes.<sup>2</sup> Most commentators have reasonably followed Husserl’s lead here; they have not paid much attention to his analysis of gestures or have treated it as a mere detour.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to that interpretative trend, this essay closely and critically engages with the evolution of Husserl’s semiotics of gestures. By doing so, I not only reveal that he developed a much richer account of gestures as signs than has been recognized. Rather, I also present a new and more detailed interpretation of the origin and trajectory of Husserl’s philosophy of linguistic and bodily communication. To accomplish these objectives, my following discussion is broken down into five further sections.

In section two, I study Husserl’s analysis of gestures from LU. I show Husserl defines gestures by locating them within his central division between signs in the expressive and indicative sense. After revealing that Husserl conceived of gestures as a kind of indicative sign, I then show that Husserl’s 1901 insights concerning communication from that work are rich in ways that are rarely recognized.

Any examination of Husserl’s theory of gesture-signs that only looks at his claims from LU would be incomplete. While many interpreters have taken Husserl’s semiotics from LU to be his definitive work on signs, in his

<sup>1</sup> I provide references to the corresponding English translations where available, following a slash after the Husserliana page number. Quotes from the *Logical Investigations* always come from the First Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Husserl’s study of gestures appears to be especially out of place in LU; he excludes from study or neglects the topic of the body, which is the medium of a gesture, the issue of communication, which is often the purpose of a gesture, and existent signs, which gestures always are.

<sup>3</sup> Historically, there are a few scholars who have touched upon Husserl’s analysis of gestures, mostly as a side-note to their study of his theory of the body. See Crowell 1996; Depraz 1995; Flynn 2009; Heinämaa 2010. Very recently, however, Christian Ferencz-Flatz (2022) and Zhida Luo (2021) have published articles that address this topic in detail. I certainly agree with Ferencz-Flatz’s conclusion, that Husserl unfortunately ignores the role of intersubjectivity when discussing gestures in LU (Ferencz-Flatz 2022: 14–15). In contrast, my reading differs from Luo’s. An important distinction between our analyses concerns “mimic” or “mimetic” signs. While Luo all but ignores these signs, mentioning them only once (Luo 2021: 12), I will argue that they are a central pillar of Husserl’s 1913/14 theory of gestures. I contend that an extensive discussion of mimetic signs is necessary if one is to properly grasp Husserl’s mature account of gestures as authentic signs.

manuscripts, Husserl often expressed dissatisfaction with the First Investigation, including his comments about gestures. While Husserl continued to amend his 1901 semiotics throughout his life, his greatest alterations are to be found in his revisions to his Sixth Logical Investigation, as they are presented in *Husserliana XX-2* (Hereafter, *Revisions*). As a part of that sweeping change to his semiotics, Husserl alters his understanding of what he considers to be a gesture-sign. In sections three, four, and five of this essay, I examine three ways Husserl changes his understanding of gestures, where each of these alterations is enmeshed in a larger shift in his semiotics. In section three, I show that Husserl narrows his definition of signs, where this allows for him to identify two kinds of gestures; “standard” and “mimetic” gestures. In section four, I explore how Husserl distinguishes between indicators and authentic signs in a novel manner, where this results in him reversing his 1901 conclusion; he now classifies (mimetic) gestures as authentic signs and not as indicators. In section five, I examine how Husserl distinguishes gesture signal signs from linguistic categorial signs, by drawing from his new insights concerning temporality and intersubjectivity. I conclude this work with some brief critical comments.

## *2. Logical Investigations*

According to Husserl's 1901 semiotics, gestures can be clarified along two lines. Gesture signs can be contrasted to language signs and gestures can aid some language signs during communication. I address each of these points individually in what follows.

Husserl's extensive investigation of gestures from 1901 concerns how they are different from language signs. Specifically, he claims that these two kinds of signs fall into two different senses, either expressive or indicative (On this division, cf. Byrne 2017: 220–226). On the one hand, Husserl asserts that all correctly grammatically structured sentences composed of language signs are signs in the expressive sense, writing that, “each instance of speech, and also each sign that is essentially of the same sort, shall count as an expression” (Hua XIX: 37 / Husserl 1970: 187). On the other hand, he concludes that gestures are to be understood as signs “in the sense of indicating” (Hua XIX: 38 / Husserl 1970: 188). Husserl has a relatively broad understanding of what counts as an indicating gesture. Gestures include not only bodily movements, which “involuntarily accompany speech without communicative intent” (Hua XIX: 37 / Husserl 1970: 187), but also voluntary bodily movements in which one's acts are signified for others (Hua XIX: 37 / Husserl 1970: 187–188). For Husserl, this division between indicative gesture signs and expressive language signs holds for four reasons, which I now discuss.

First, Husserl observes that all signs in the indicative sense and thus indicating gesture signs, have no meaning. What Husserl means with this is that when I see an indicative sign, that sign does not “state” anything about its

signified. The indicative sign gives no information about the referent, such that when I employ an indicative gesture sign, I am making no (truth) claim about it. Robert Sokolowski explains this point well, by writing that indicative signs, “do not possess a meaning that can be quoted, paraphrased, or communicated to someone else by the use of other signs; there is something abrupt and concrete and singular about [indicative signs]. They just bring something to mind, they just show that it is present in some way” (Sokolowski 2002: 177). Importantly, the indicative sign accomplishes its signifying via mere associative motivation; The sign points at its referent, because, when I see the former, it simply motivates me to become aware of the latter. Regarding indicative gestures, Husserl concludes that when I see another person perform a gesture, that gesture can associatively motivate me to become aware of and thereby signifies the inner state of that other person. For example, when I see another smash her fists on the table and pull her hair, these gestures indicate that she is (*reelly*) experiencing anger. However, when she so gestures, she is not communicating any structured information about her anger, nor is she making any truth claim about the anger (*cf.* Bianchin 2018). She is not doing something that can be quoted, paraphrased, or communicated to others. Husserl writes, “In such manifestations one man communicates nothing to another: their utterance involves no intent to put certain ‘thoughts’ on record expressively, whether for the man himself, in his solitary state, or for others. Such ‘expressions’ in short, have properly speaking, no meaning” (Hua XIX: 38 / Husserl 1970: 188). In contrast to indicative signs, Husserl concludes that linguistic expressions are meaningful and do make truth claims about their referents. If the other were, for example, to speak about her anger, she would be affirming some categorial proposition about it, which can either be true or false.

Second, indicative gestures and linguistic expressions differ with regards to doxic concerns. All indicative signs are given to me as existent, signify something that is also existent, and give me good reasons to believe in the existence of the signified. For example, in the case where I see the Union Jack flag on a ship in the distance, the flag can indicate that the British Navy is on approach. Here, the flag is given as real, the navy is signified as real, and the flag gives me reason to believe that the British navy is approaching. Other examples Husserl provides are experiences where the real “canals” on Mars indicate real past water and real fossils indicate real past life. In the case of a gesture, when the other slams her fists on the table, I see that gesture as a real gesture in the world, I signitively intend her anger also as something that she is actually experiencing, where the former gives me good reasons to believe in the latter. In contrast, linguistic expressive signs do not need to meet any of these three doxic requirements (*cf.* Plotka 2020). The expressive word, “Jupiter” could imaginatively appear. The signified object—Jupiter himself—naturally need not exist for me to use the word “Jupiter” to express and mean him. Finally, the word does not need to give me any reasons to believe in the existence of the king of the Pantheon.

Third, Husserl claims that there is a special unity between the expressive sign and the act that gives it meaning, which is lacking for the indicative gesture. According to Husserl, the act that refers to the words (the so-called word-constituting act) is intimately fused with the “meaning-giving intention,” which endows those words with their meaning. Husserl writes that they “form an intimate unity of a peculiar character” (Hua XIX: 45 / Husserl 1970: 193). Because they are so fused, when I employ linguistic expressions to mean such-and-such, the words (normally) do not appear as a separate object on their own. Rather, I go “through” the words to the meaning. Husserl writes that, “while we experience the [word], we do not live *in* such a presentation at all, but solely in enacting its sense, its meaning. And in so far as we do this, and yield ourselves to enacting the meaning-intention and its further fulfillment, our whole interest centers upon the object intended in our intention and named by its means” (Hua XIX: 46 / Husserl 1970: 193). In contrast, the smashing of the hands on the table is not so fused with the anger, which it “expresses.” When I see the other smash her fists, I do not go “through” the smashing fists to the anger, where the smashing of the fists would then be unthematic. At the same time, from the perspective of the person observing the gesture, there is still a unity between gestures and the acts they indicate, which is however, less strictly bound. Specifically, Husserl claims that the perception of the gesture is itself so-to-speak the perception of the inner experience it indicates. There is here little mediation between the indicative sign and its indicated; the inner intention is manifest to others with the appearance of the gesture. When we perceive others’ gestures, we thereby “perceive other peoples’ inner experiences; we ‘see’ their anger, their pain, etc. [...] we perceive these experiences themselves” (Hua XIX: 40 / Husserl 1970: 190). Naturally, with these claims, Husserl does not mean that I literally “see” into the other’s conscious intentions, but rather that I have an “outer’ percept of them” (Hua XIX: 40 / Husserl 1970: 190). Nor does he mean that the two acts are fused with each other. There is an external rather than an internal binding between the intending of the indicating gesture and the indicated inner state.

Finally, Husserl concludes that while gestures can only indicate, language signs not only express, but—in communicative contexts—can also indicate. That is, language signs can take on a very similar function to gestures. When another speaks to me, I not only take her word signs to be meaningful expressive signs, which mean a state of affairs. Rather—in the same way that her fist-bashing gesture can inform me that she is experiencing anger—so also can her words indicate that she is performing a meaning-giving intention, which is giving her words their meaning (Hua XIX: 39 / Husserl 1970: 189). In other words, I do not perceive my interlocutor as a noise-machine, who is producing different guttural sounds. Instead, via the indication of her word signs, I experience her as one who is executing meaning acts, that is, thinking. I see her as an existing fellow subject in the world who is attempting to communicate with me. Again, just as the fist-bashing reveals her anger, so does the uttering

of words reveal her thinking. Importantly, Husserl claims that it is because I take my interlocutor as one who is trying to communicate with me, that I can approach the physical noises that she is making *as* expressive signs. Because I experience those signs as expressive signs, I can be motivated by them to meaningfully intend their signified state of affairs. With these conclusions, Husserl is affirming that oral communication is achievable because language signs perform their indicative function during conversation. He writes that communication, “becomes a possibility if the listener also understands the speaker’s intention. He does this inasmuch as he takes the speaker to be a person, who is not merely uttering sounds *but speaking to him*, who is accompanying those sounds with certain meaning-giving acts” (Hua XIX: 39 / Husserl 1970: 189; *cf.* Byrne 2018: 9–10; 2022a). The indication of the meaning-giving act of the speaker for the listener is what Husserl calls, indication or intimation in its “narrow sense” (Hua XIX: 39 / Husserl 1970: 189). The word signs can also indicate in the “wider sense” of the term, when they indicate to the listener that the speaker is executing additional intentions. For example, when another expresses that she is angry at me, her words not only indicate, in the narrow sense, that she is performing a meaning-giving act, but also indicate, in the wider sense, that she is angry (Hua XIX: 39 / Husserl 1970: 189). For this experience, the language signs are performing the “same” function as the gesture of smashing fists; both indicate the experienced anger of the other.

The second insight about gestures that can be drawn from Husserl’s 1901 analysis, which I more briefly discuss, concerns their role in essentially occasional expressions (*cf.* Byrne 2022a: Section four; Ferencz-Flatz 2022). According to Husserl, an essentially occasional expression is an expression whose meaning can only be fully understood via reference to the specific context. Even though a speaker endows their words with a determinate meaning when she utters her expression, the listener can only fully determine that meaning, when they orient themselves “to the occasion, the speaker, and the situation. Only by looking to the actual circumstances of utterance can one definite meaning out of all the mutually connected classes of meaning be constituted for the hearer” (Hua XIX: 87 / Husserl 1970: 218). Concretely, any uttered expressions that use subject-bound locational or temporal expressions, such as “here” and “there” or “today” and “tomorrow,” are essentially occasional.

Husserl’s insights about these expressions hold import for understanding our experiences of indicative gestures. Namely, during communication, the speaker may need to employ gestures for the listener to understand the meaning of the uttered essentially occasional expression. For example, if another were to simply say to me, while standing in front of a rose bush, “This ... is beautiful,” I would be unable to fully determine what the speaker meant with this essentially occasional expression. I could know that the speaker is likely referring to something in front of us that is beautiful, but whether the speaker is stating something about this or that single rose or about the rose bush as a whole, is unclear. Husserl writes, “If I say ‘this’ the hearer at least knows that something

is being pointed at. On the other hand, the true aim of my talk lies not in this general element, but in the direct intending of the object in question" (Hua XIX: 557–558 / Husserl 1970: 200). If the speaker were to additionally gesture, for example, point at or gently hold a specific rose when uttering the statement, by orienting myself towards that situation, I could then understand that the speaker means that *this* specific rose is beautiful. I thus grasp the full meaning of the expression. I would know what "*this*" she means and is referring to. In sum, Husserl argues that indicative gestures must—in certain circumstances—be considered if one is to understand the meaning of a linguistic expression.

### 3. Revisions: Signs

Husserl's descriptions of the operation of gestures in *Revisions* appears initially similar to his account from LU. He again concludes that when I see another person gesturing, I can learn about the conscious experiences of that other. He writes that a gesture is a "free bodily activity and is grasped as such, and connected with this is the co-grasping of the spiritual-life, of the presentations, etc., which are '*exprimieren*' with such movements" (Hua XX-2: 69). Otherwise stated, my "interest normally goes from the external [gestures] to the internal [consciousness], in such a way that the apprehension passes from the manifold of the external movements towards the interior" (Hua XX-2: 69). Despite this similarity to his past account, in 1914, Husserl does augment his understanding of gestures. This renovation of his philosophy of gestures is part of a much larger transformation to his semiotics (*cf.* Byrne 2018). In this and the following two sections, I examine the different ways those overarching changes to his semiotics inspired Husserl to rethink gestures. Furthermore, the analysis of Husserl's mature semiotics will disclose a more robust and accurate picture of Husserl's overarching theory of signs and present a more nuanced vision of his philosophy of gestures.

In this section, I discuss how Husserl rethinks gestures, because he profoundly reconceives of what it means to be a sign; He observes that his past understanding of what counts as a sign was far too expansive. Husserl worked with a broad operative definition of signs, having claimed at the start of his career that, "The word 'sign' in our definition is to be taken in the widest conceivable sense" (Hua XII: 340 / Husserl 1994: 20).<sup>4</sup> The reason why his past grasp of signs is erroneously broad can be made clear when we remember that, for the early Husserl, an intuited object functions as a sign when it *motivates* an awareness of a signitively intended object. In contrast to that old view, Husserl now sees that mere motivation is not signification. Just because one thing motivates me to intend another thing does not mean that the former

<sup>4</sup>I say *operative definition*, because Husserl famously does not even attempt to provide a definition of signs as such in LU, as he begins the execution of his semiotics only by differentiating between signs in the indicative and expressive senses.

signifies the latter. He writes that “the with-the-one-thing-the-other-co-given-is-motivated (*Mit-dem-einen-ist-das-andere-motiviert-Mitgegeben*) is not however the with-the-one-thing-the-other-co-given-is-meant (*Mit-dem-einen-ist-das-andere-Gemeint*) in the sense of a co-meaning of a sign” (Hua XX-2: 73). Only because Husserl previously believed that a motivational relationship is a signitive relationship, could he also hold the clearly wrong-headed ideas, that Martian canals *signify* water and that fossils *signify* life. The “canals” on Mars may motivate the signitive presentation of flowing water and fossils may motivate an awareness of previously living animals, but these motivational relationships are not signitive relationships. With the canals, I do not “mean” the water, nor do the fossils “mean” life. Instead, “A sign is an accomplishment, which should make a co-apperceived given in the way of a meant” (Hua XX-2: 73; cf. Byrne 2021: 23–25).<sup>5</sup> In other words, a sign can signify when I explicitly choose and use that sign *to signify its signified*. Rudolf Bernet writes that, for the Husserl of 1914, “Genuine signs—and this is their second positive determination—signify on the basis of a deliberate decision, on the basis of a will [...] Husserl goes so far as to understand this will in analogy with the kinesthetic ‘I can’. A speech act or an act of writing is just another form of voluntary bodily movement” (Bernet 1988: 7–8). Straightforwardly stated, my deliberate creation of a sign is executed via my will, which builds a connection between the sign and its meant: the will endows a meaning to the sign and *makes* the sign signify its meant.

For Husserl, the question, which at least in part led him to reconsider the definition of signs, is; do gestures signify and mean something? That is, does my perception of a gesture merely motivate my awareness of the other’s consciousness or does the gesture signify the other’s experience? At first, Husserl claims that most gestures do not signify anything. I do not experience the other’s gesture as signifying or indicating her intention. I may be motivated to become aware of her experience, but this is no signifying relationship. He writes that, “When we see the other and ‘co-grasp’ their soul ‘in’ their bodily appearances, then we have a duality, but not a duality in a unity [...] just as little as the other means the one with the other, so little do we—when we see the other—mean the psychic with the bodily externalization” (Hua XX-2: 73). Stated from the perspective of the one who is gesturing, Husserl claims that with most gestures, I am not indicating or signifying my intention. I am not actively choosing to form a sign to signify my act. Husserl writes, “When I accompany my psychic experience with bodily ‘externalizations,’ I then live in my act ... But with this, we do not have the ‘with-the-externalization-the-i

<sup>5</sup>This insight has critical ramifications for Husserl’s theory of perception. Previously, Husserl took perceptions to be executed via signification—he claimed that the front appearing side of a perceived object indicates its non-apparent backside. As I discuss in one of my previous articles (Byrne 2020b), by limiting what counts as a sign in 1914, Husserl can also correctly recognize that perceptual intentions are distinct from signitive intentions. Cf. D’Angelo 2013: 60–65; Summa 2014: 220–230.



ntending-of-the-internal-experience (*'Mit-den-Außerungen-die-inneren-Erlebnisse-Meinen'*). We have no relationship of a sign" (Hua XX-2: 72–73).

Husserl expands upon these insights by showing that my motivated awareness of another's experience is—properly grasped—an empathetic understanding of the other's psychic life. The basic idea here is a revision of his 1901 claim, that both gestures and expressive signs can function as indicators to reveal the inner psychic life of the other. In 1914, he claims that gestures and lingual signs do not indicate or signify the life of the other, but rather allow for my passive reception of the others mental life via empathy. Bernet writes that this empathetic understanding is, for Husserl, certainly “not a form of indicating or natural motivation of belief” (Bernet 1988: 20). All of this is to say that Husserl now concludes that my awareness of another's mental state on the basis of normal gestures cannot be accounted for via the sign-signified schema, but instead occurs through motivated empathy.

Husserl, however, does not claim that *all* gestures are not signitive. Rather, he concludes that there is one particular kind of gesture that can function as a sign, which he calls, “mimetic gestures”. While Husserl conjectures that a mimetic gesture must meet four criteria if it is to operate as a sign, only two of these are important for current purposes.

First, a mimetic gesture is not executed involuntarily or haphazardly. Rather, I must execute the gesture *purposefully* (*absichtlich*). Second, the gesture must be executed with the explicit goal of awakening an awareness of my own psychic experience in the person who is observing my gestures. That is, I must execute the gesture with the explicit goal of communicating about my experience (Hua XX-2: 99). If, for example, I wanted to communicate with another that I were happy or scared, my gesture would be a mimetic gesture if I explicitly executed it by using my body to “depict” myself as someone who is happy or scared. I would (perhaps in an exaggerated manner) respectively smile, skip, or jump or alternatively, cower, bite my nails, and shake. I, as the gesturing person, execute bodily movements, which mimic or “ape” bodily gestures that customarily empathetically disclose to others that the person is currently having this or that experience. Hence, the reason why Husserl calls these gestures mimetic; they mimic or emulate other “standard” gestures.

Husserl notes that one might object to his account, by claiming that mimetic gestures are not experienced as signs, but rather as images. Because, when executing a mimetic sign, I am similar to an actor on a stage, who performatively emulates these or those movements, one might think that my movements do not signify, but rather depict me as being in this state. Husserl even admits that when I am mimetically gesturing, I am so-to-speak acting or pretending for others. He writes that these gestures, “are produced images of external processes, and really imitations of the processes via bodily-movements [...] the communicator ‘pretends’, as if he were involuntarily recalling or perceiving those processes with imitations, for the purpose of making this memory itself known and thereby to communicate” (Hua XX-2: 100). Even though it is possible to see mimetic

gestures as images, Husserl concludes that it would be wrong to take gestures only or primarily as images. Rather, mimetic gestures can be and normally are apprehended as signs. To clarify this point, Husserl compares mimetic gestures to Egyptian hieroglyphics. Both mimetic gestures and hieroglyphics could be understood as images—either as the image of one “acting” or “portraying” their inner experiences, or as pictorial images of birds, lions, and snakes. Yet, it is customarily the case that, “We by no means live in image-consciousness, but rather we go through the image and [intend] that which is meant, which is outside of, but meant with the image. [...] There is still something of the imaginary there and understandably there [...] but it can also signify, function as a sign” (Hua XX-2: 101). This is to say that normally, the observer does not take my gesture as a depicting image—she does not take me to be an actor—but rather as one who is signaling and communicating about my inner psychic life.

#### 4. *Revisions: Indicators, Gestures, and Authentic Gesture Signs*

Husserl’s second important change to his understanding of gestures is a result of another sweeping transformation to his semiotics. In 1914, he presents a new way to classify signs in accordance with new criteria. He now differentiates not between indicative and expressive signs, but rather between indicators and authentic signs. In this section, I examine how the new and more general division between indicators and authentic signs led Husserl to change his terminological classifications of gestures and to describe mimetic gestures in a novel manner.

The crux of this step of Husserl’s analysis is that the two kinds of gestures that he has already identified—standard gestures and mimetic gestures—fall under different categories. Importantly, he takes neither kind of gesture to be an indicator, despite claiming that many gestures are indicative signs in LU.

Concerning most gestures—that is, non-mimetic gestures, which are not purposefully executed as communicative—Husserl sees that they cannot be indicators, because there is no sign-signified relationship that obtains for them. Rather, as we have seen, these gestures simply motivate the empathetic understanding of the other’s psychic life.

In contrast, Husserl now takes mimetic communicative gestures as authentic signs. Husserl so classifies mimetic gestures, because he has specific and original requirements for what qualifies as an indicator and an authentic sign. While both signify, Husserl claims that authentic signs can be distinguished from indicators, because I experience authentic signs as signs that are created by another subject with the express purpose of communicating.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, I normally

<sup>6</sup> This conclusion is a reversal of one claim from 1901. Whereas Husserl believed that expressive signs can perform a communicative function, but that they are not necessarily or essentially communicative (in fact, in LU, he is primarily interested in studying expressive signs within that monological context; cf. Hua XIX: 41–43 / Husserl 1970: 189–190), in *Revisions*, Husserl descriptively defines authentic signs, including authentic language signs, as essentially communicative.

do not experience signifying indicators as created by another subject or, if I do, I do not experience them as formulated for the sake of communication. Husserl writes, “In all cases, authentic signs are understood in the sense, that their meaning (*Meinung*) is to be understood as communication (*Mitteilung*) (that is, as the meaning of a communicator)” (Hua XX-2: 80). Simply stated, because mimetic gestures are executed and experienced as communicative, they are not indicators, but authentic signs. Importantly, because Husserl no longer limits the expressive operation to language, but expands it to encompass all authentic signs, he is also concluding that mimetic gestures not only signify, but also *express* inner psychic life (Hua XX-2: 53).

This new classification of mimetic gestures as authentic signs is not a mere terminological shift. In 1914, Husserl does not simply state that mimetic gesture signs are experienced as communicative, but also introduces novel insights, which significantly augment his understanding of intersubjective communication and thus of gestures. Husserl sees that these revisions are necessary, because authentic signs are experienced with two interrelated moments; the “demand” (*die Zumutung*) and the “should” (*das Sollen*) (cf. Byrne 2021: 27–28).

Husserl looks first at how I experience the “demand”. He states that the demand is at least initially, the demand of some other subject, who is attempting to communicate with me. When the other attempts to communicate with me by the use of signs—via gestures, language, or other means—her demand is a demand to understand the signification of her signs. She demands me to *not* take her signs as physical objects in the world like rocks and buildings, but rather to take them as so-to-speak communicative-things, which carry meaning and signify other states of affairs. Simply, she demands me to understand the meaning she puts forward into the public sphere via her signs. Husserl writes, “All authentic signs have their origin in the [demand], which comes from a demanding subject” (Hua XX-2: 97).

As a result of the demand of the other, my experience of the authentic sign has been altered. I experience the authentic sign, which the other has produced, as possessing a “should” (Hua XX-2: 97; cf. Melle 1998). The sign now manifests itself to me as something that I ought to or “should” take as an authentic sign (Hua XX-2: 97). Because the other has placed a demand on me to understand the sign, I experience the sign itself as carrying a normative, if not even an ethical imperative to understand it. For example, if I did not take my interlocutor’s sign as communication and thus did not attempt to understand her, I would be ignoring the “should” of her signs and would thereby be acting in a rude or perhaps unethical manner.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In *Revisions*, Husserl describes this should as a tendency. He writes, “The unity of the sign and the signified [...] is accomplished via the unity of the tendency of the should” (Hua XX-2: 129). Of note is that the notion of tendency is only first discussed in depth by Husserl in 1914. A tendency is so-to-speak a pull on consciousness, which one can follow and satisfy the

These insights can be applied to help us understand our experience of gestures more clearly. When I see the other execute a mimetic gesture, I experience her as demanding me to understand the meaning of that gesture. In *Revisions*, Husserl discusses the example where I am at home and execute mimetic facial expressions and gestures—such as furrowing my brow and displaying a “thumbs-down” symbol, in a purposeful and voluntary attempt to communicate with my butler that I am displeased. With these communicative gestures, I am demanding that he understand me (Hua XX-2: 98). Moreover, via my demand, the butler experiences my authentic gesture sign with a should; the gesture presents itself as something that he ought to or “should” take as an authentic sign for my internal experience of displeasure (Hua XX-2: 97). For another example, my friend could mimic being cold, by wrapping her arms around herself and pretending to shiver. When I see these gestures, I experience her as demanding me to understand the meaning of those gestures; she demands me to understand that she is cold. Further, I experience her gestures as something that I “should” take as communicative signs; I should understand that these signs signify and communicate to me that she is cold (cf. Hua XX-2: 191). In this case, my “Interest should thereby be turned towards the internal [experience of the other] because the demand arises, the should and the taking over of the should (*das Sollen und Übernahme des Sollens*)” (Hua XX-2: 70).<sup>8</sup>

### 5. *Revisions: Gesture Signals and Categorical Language*

To present a more comprehensive analysis of gestures, in *Revisions*, Husserl also clarifies how they are distinct from language signs. He does so by creating a division within the class of authentic signs; he concludes that gestures and language signs are distinct kinds of authentic signs. While gestures fall under the category of authentic “signal signs,” language signs comprise the class of authentic “categorical signs”. In this concluding section of the essay, I outline the three reasons behind this distinction, where this will further reveal the importance of intersubjective communication for Husserl’s 1914 semiotics.

First, Husserl claims that signal signs are not categorially structured, whereas he naturally describes categorical signs as categorially structured. Husserl’s famous example of the former is a storm-siren signal that signifies for the

tendency or alternatively, not follow and obstruct it. Both Melle and I have written extensively about Husserl’s understanding of the tendency emanating from signs, as it is presented in the *Revisions*. Cf. Byrne 2021: 25–32; Melle 1998: 176–178.

<sup>8</sup>Husserl also mentions that the demand and the should are at least in part responsible for the perception of a mimetic gesture as a sign and not as an image. For example, if I see another executing a mimetic gesture meant to communicate anger, Husserl writes that it is only because the should draws us “from the image to the meant [that] the image of the angry appearance not only serves as if it simply should be presented as such an image, but rather it points through the image to the presented anger, that is, the signified real anger” (Hua XX-2: 100).

fishermen the fact that a cyclone is inbound. This siren signal is clearly not categorially structured and it signifies and expresses the cyclone. When the fisherman hears the siren, he does not have to think or categorially intend, "A cyclone is in bound," but can simply become straightforwardly aware of that fact (Hua XX-2: 52–54). This is naturally also the case with mimetic gestures. When I see a mimetic gesture, that gesture is not categorially structured, but rather straightforwardly signifies the mental state of the other. In contrast, language signs alone can be categorially structured and thus singularly qualify as categorial signs (Hua XX-2: 53).

Second—in parallel with his 1901 conclusions that indicators lack the unity that expressions have—Husserl asserts in 1914 that categorial language signs possess a certain unity, which can be contrasted to the disjunction inherent to the signal and the signaled. Concerning the latter, Husserl recognizes that the awareness of the signal—here the mimetic gesture—and the awareness of the signaled—the inner life of the other—can be taken as abstractly distinct. I first have the awareness of the gesture signal and then "transition" to a consciousness of the signaled intention of the other. Because this transition—so Husserl claims—occurs in a straightforward and undeviating manner, it has an arrow-like quality. Husserl writes, "From the sign there goes a straight arrow (*ein gerader Pfeil*) to the state of affairs" (Hua XX-2: 126). At another point, Husserl writes, "One apprehends the sign and is thereby led from this to the positing of that which is signified with the sign. The sign is constituted in an externally bound consciousness (*äußerlich angeknüpften Bewusstsein*); such that the togetherness from  $Z$  to  $G_z$  is certainly:  $Z \rightarrow G$ " (Hua XX-2: 125; cf. Byrne 2020a: 369). Critically, Husserl asserts that this is not a transcendental difference, but rather that there is an actual *temporal distinction* between my intending of the gesture signal and the intending of the gestured inner state of the other. At point  $T_1$ , I intuitively experience the gesture signal and then, at point  $T_2$ , I signitively intend the signaled act of the other. He writes, "We are led from the grasping of the sign, into a second consciousness, that is, of the signified state of affairs. The one consciousness is externally bound together with the other, and really in a temporal continuity, one follows after the other" (Hua XX-2: 124).

Categorial language signs, in contrast, have no such division between the intending of the sign and the signified. I do not experience the linguistic sign and then, subsequently, the state of affairs. Husserl claims that there are not two consciousnesses, which I transition between, but rather only "one" consciousness. I am not thematically conscious—in the robust sense of the term—of the linguistic categorial signs at all, but instead only thematically intend the meant state of affairs! Husserl writes, "Freely, I do not make the sensuous sign into an object" (Hua XX-2: 126). Of course, when I am reading, I must be intending the authentic linguistic signs if I am to be able to become aware of the meant state of affairs, but Husserl states that this intending of the words is not distinct or separate from the consciousness of the state of affairs. He writes, "I go over and beyond the word in a certain manner. It is however

an entirely different kind of ‘going over and beyond’; it is no ‘going over and beyond’ into a second consciousness, which is externally bound with the first” (Hua XX-2: 126). The intuition of the word is not a whole intention in and of itself, but is rather subsumed into or, as Husserl claims—echoing his 1901 assertion (Hua XIX: 45 / Husserl 1970: 193)—in “a peculiar fusion” [*eine eigentümliche Verschmelzung*] (Hua XX-2: 129) with the intending of the state of affairs from the start. He writes,

I grasp the word and I live in the meaning-consciousness; the word as a *Wort-laute* remains not outside of the consciousness of the meaning [*außerhalb des Bewusstseins der Bedeutung*], because the word and the meaning collapse into a unity [...] in which the word and the word-forms “coincide” [*“decken”*] with the meaning and the meaning forms. (Hua XX-2: 126)

Third, briefly, categorial language signs can be separated—both temporally and spatially—from their creator, that is, via writing, while a mimetic gesture could only ever be executed here and now with the body of the gesturing person.<sup>9</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

This analysis suffices to initially outline the evolution of Husserl’s theory of gestures. Certainly, Husserl’s 1901 examination of gestures was relatively elementary, as he studied gestures only through the lens of his semiotics, claiming that they are indicative signs. By working from many of the insights that he arrived at in the intervening decade, Husserl came to propose a more accurate account of gestures in 1914. On the basis of his new observations about intersubjectivity, Husserl recognizes that non-mimetic standard gestures function via empathy and that mimetic gestures are executed and experienced as communicative. Moreover, he develops his account of tendency when he discusses the demand and the should of gestures (and language signs). Finally, Husserl is able to describe how temporality also plays an important role in the experience of gestures. On the one hand, there is a temporal gap between the intending of the gesture signal and the gestured inner act. On the other hand, gestures cannot be temporally or spatially separated from the body of the gesturing person.

While these 1914 insights generally augment Husserl’s theory of gestures, it should be mentioned that his account is still far from perfect. In *Revisions*,

<sup>9</sup>As I concluded my discussion of LU with an analysis of the relationship between gestures and essentially occasional expressions, I also address that issue here at the end of my examination of *Revisions*. Simply stated, while Husserl does partially change his perspective on essentially occasional expressions in 1914 (*cf.* Urban 2010, 2018), he does not alter his core insight, that gestures—be they mimetic or non-mimetic—can help the listener to determine the full meaning of an essentially occasional expression.

Husserl still does not extensively discuss the body, even though the body is the vehicle of gestures. Moreover, Husserl's semiotics is still limited by the fact that he places emphasis on meaning and gesturing as purely the voluntary choice of the speaker or gesturing person, without leaving any space for the provision of the sign. This is to say that, Husserl's account, while interesting and admirable, is a noticeably flawed phenomenological analysis of gestures. By studying the subsequent works of Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, and Derrida on the body and signs, can a more rigorous account of gestures arise, as is discussed in the other articles of this volume.<sup>10</sup>

**Thomas Byrne**

135 Xingang W Rd, Binjiang Road,  
Haizhu District, Guangzhou,  
Guangdong Province, China  
t.byrne3@gmail.com

### Works Cited:

- Hua XII = Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *Philosophie der Arithmetik. Logische und psychologische Untersuchungen*, ed. Eley Lothar. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua XIII = Husserl, Edmund. 1973. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil. 1905-1920*, ed. Iso Kern. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua XIV = Husserl, Edmund. 1973. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Zweiter Teil. 1921-28*, ed. Iso Kern. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua XVI = Husserl, Edmund. 1973. *Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907*, ed. Ulrich Claesges. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua XIX = Husserl, Edmund. 1984. *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. Ursula Panzer. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua XX-2 = Husserl, Edmund. 2005. *Logische Untersuchungen. Ergänzungsband. Zweiter Teil*, ed. Ullrich Melle. Den Haag: Kluwer.
- Hua XXII = Edmund, Husserl. 2003. *Philosophie der Arithmetik. Mit ergänzenden Texten*, ed. Lothar Eley. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that there are resources in Husserl's mature philosophy, which—if studied along with the writings of other phenomenologists—could be employed to begin to develop a more subtle phenomenology of gestures. This would require analyses of Husserl's insights about the body (Hua XVI: 275–284, 326–332; Heinämaa 2010: 10–13), intersubjectivity (Hua XIII: 229–230; Hua XIV: 60–67, 324–326, 374–377), and the instincts (Hua XLIII/3: 308–314, 346–354; Husserl 1939: 87 / Husserl 1973: 82; Melle 1997: 191–192). Naturally, this task falls beyond the scope of this paper.

- Hua XLIII/3 = Husserl, Edmund. 2020. *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins. Teilband III. Wille und Handlung Texte aus dem Nachlass (1902–1934)*, ed. Ullrich Melle, Thomas Vongehr. New York: Springer.
- Bernet, Rudolf. 1988. Husserl's Theory of Signs Revisited. In *Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. Rudolf Bernet, Robert Sokolowski, 1–24. Washington: Catholic University Press.
- Bianchin, Matteo. 2018. Husserl on Meaning, Grammar, and the Structure of Content. *Husserl Studies* 32(2): 101–121.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2017. Surrogates and Empty Intentions: Husserl's On the Logic of Signs as the Blueprint for the First Logical Investigation. *Husserl Studies* 33(3): 211–227.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2018. The Evolution of Husserl's Semiotics: The Logical Investigations and its Revisions (1901–1914). *Bulletin d'Analyse Phénoménologique* 5(14):1–23.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2020a. A “Principally Unacceptable” Theory: Husserl's Rejection and Revision of His Philosophy of Meaning Intentions from the Logical Investigations. *Studia Phaenomenologica* 20: 357–378.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2020b. Husserl's 1901 and 1913 Philosophies of Perceptual Occlusion: Signitive, Empty, and Dark Intentions. *Husserl Studies* 36: 123–139.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2021. Husserl's Theory of Signitive and Empty Intentions in Logical Investigations and its Revisions: Meaning Intentions and Perceptions. *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 52(1): 16–34.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2022a. Husserl on Impersonal Propositions. *Problemos* 101: 18–30.
- Byrne, Thomas. 2022b. The Meaning of Being: Husserl on Existential Propositions as Predicative Propositions. *Axiomathes* 22: 123–139.
- Crowell, Steven. 1996. Husserl, Derrida and the Phenomenology of Expression. *Philosophy Today* 40(1): 61–70.
- D'Angelo, Diego. 2013. The Foundations of Alterity. Husserl on Referencing and Indication. *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas* 10: 53–71.
- Depraz, Natalie. 1995. *Transcendance et Incarnation*. Paris: Vrin.
- Ferencz-Flatz, Christian. 2022. Gesten als Okkasionelle Bedeutungserfüllungen. *Husserl Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-021-09295-w>
- Flynn, Molly. 2009. The Living Body as the Origin of Culture: What the Shift in Husserl's Notion of “Expression” tells us about Cultural Objects. *Husserl Studies* 25: 57–79.
- Heinämaa, Sara. 2010. Embodiment and Expressivity in Husserl's Phenomenology: From Logical Investigations to Cartesian Meditations. *SATS* 11: 1–15.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1939. *Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, ed. Ludwig Landgrebe. Prag: Academia.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *Logical Investigations*, transl. J.N. Findlay. London: Routledge.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1973. *Experience and Judgment*; transl. James Spencer Churchill and Karl Ameriks. Evanston, Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1994. *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, transl. Dallas Willard. Dordrecht: Springer.



- Luo, Zhida. 2021. Husserl's Theory of Bodily Expressivity and its Revision: In View of the "1914 Texts". *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2021.1991236>
- Mayer, Verena. 2008. Die Bedeutung objektivierende Akte. In *Edmund Husserl: Logische Untersuchgen*, ed. Verena Mayer, 159–188. Berlin: Akademie.
- Melle, Ullrich. 1997. Husserl's Phenomenology of Willing. In *Phenomenology of Values and Valuing*, ed. James Hart and Lester Embree, 169–192. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Melle, Ullrich. 1998. Signitive und Signifikative Intentionen. *Husserl Studies* 15: 167–181.
- Melle, Ullrich. 2002. Husserl's Revisions of the Sixth Logical Investigation. In: *One Hundred Years of Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi and Frederik Stjernfelt, 111–124. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Parpan, Reto. 1984. *Husserls Theorie der Sprachzeichens*. University of Heidelberg. Unpublished Diss.
- Plotka, Witold. 2020. A Controversy over the Existence of Fictional Objects: Husserl and Ingarden on Imagination and Fiction. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 51(1): 33–54.
- Sokolowski, Robert. 2002. Semiotics in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. In *One Hundred Years of Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi and Frederik Stjernfelt, 171–184. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Summa, Michela. 2014. *Spatio-Temporal Intertwining*. London: Springer.
- Urban, Petr. 2010. Husserls Phänomenologie des sprachlichen Ausdrucks in ihrer Entwicklung. *Filosofický časopis* 2(1): 1–10.
- Urban, Petr. 2018. Revisiting Husserl's Account of Language. *Logical Investigations. Horizon* 7(2): 263–272.