
Husserl on Sensation, Perception, and Interpretation

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Husserl's theory of perception is remarkable in several respects. For one thing, Husserl rigorously distinguishes the parts and properties of the act of consciousness — its content — from the parts and properties of the object perceived. Second, Husserl's repeated insistence that perceptual consciousness places its subject in touch with the perceived object itself, rather than some representation that does duty for it, vindicates the commonsensical and phenomenologically grounded belief that when a thing appears to us, it is precisely that thing, rather than some other thing (its 'appearance'), that we perceive. Third, his distinction between empty and intuitive acts, and his descriptions of their complex interplay in perceptual consciousness, provides a way of making sense of the fact that an object can be perceived even when some of its parts and properties are not. Finally, his theory of perceptual acts as constituents of higher-order acts of fulfilment provides one of the few detailed accounts in the philosophical literature of *how* a perceptual experience can transform a mere thought into knowledge, despite the fact that the relation between perception and belief is not a logical or inferential one. Because Husserl's theory of perception is a serious candidate for truth, it is also a serious candidate for philosophical criticism. As such, in what follows I will treat it as a live force to be reckoned with rather than a historical curiosity.

Despite these and other virtues, however, one of the more controversial aspects of Husserl's theory of intentionality is his contention that perception consists in the 'interpretation' (*Auffassung*) of intrinsically non-representational sensations or intuitive contents. This theory is, to

be sure, designed to explain an interesting phenomenological feature of perception: mental acts with identical intuitive or sensuous contents can nevertheless represent different objects and properties in different contexts. As I look at the table before me, I perceive it as being uniformly brown. However, not only do portions of the uniformly brown table appear to me in multiple ways as a result of light, shadow, and my position, but some of those portions appear the way non-brown things appear. The intuitive contents involved in grasping that portion which is basking in the sunlight over there are identical with those that would, in another context, present a tan object. Such examples are not confined to colors, of course. Consider Husserl's example of the wax figure in the museum: upon walking into a waxworks museum, we perceive a woman greeting us on the stairs. It soon becomes apparent that this is no person, but a wax figure. We then experience the figure — veridically — as a mere wax figure. 'Two perceptual interpretations, or two appearances of a thing, interpenetrate, coinciding as it were in part of their perceptual content.'¹

Unfortunately, there are several difficulties confronting this view. The first, as I will argue, is that it is not obviously compatible with Husserl's theory of fulfilment (*Erfüllung*). The second is that it stems, in part, from a misconception of sensations as features of mental acts that literally resemble the objective sense-perceptible features of physical objects. The third is that Husserl never manages to specify exactly what interpretation amounts to, and some of his remarks on the topic are inconsistent.

The task of the present paper is to examine Husserl's position and some of the main arguments for and against it. Despite my rejection of Husserl's conception of sensations as non-intentional hyletic data, I agree with Husserl that there is a legitimate sense in which intuitive contents must be 'interpreted.' I suggest that the divergent presentational functions of identical intuitive contents can be best explained in terms of differences in the horizons of the acts to which those contents belong. The task of interpretation, on this view, is not to bestow intentionality on otherwise non-intentional sensations, but to give them a determinate presentative function. Not only does this account explain the relevant phenomenological facts while respecting some of Husserl's central insights, it also avoids the objections that plague Husserl's official theory. Finally, I strongly suspect that not only does this constitute an improved version of Husserl's theory, but that it is largely true.

1 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press 1970), Investigation 5, section 27, 610. I will henceforth refer to this work as 'LI' and cite investigation, section, and page numbers in a shortened format.

I

According to Husserl's account of mental content in the *Logical Investigations*, every act of consciousness has two independently variable but non-separable components, a *matter* and a *quality*.² Husserl characterizes the quality of an act as 'the general act-character, which stamps an act as merely presentative, judgemental, emotional, desiderative, etc.'³ The matter of an act is that feature responsible for its intentional bearing or aboutness.⁴ It is itself complex, consisting of both a *reference to something*, an 'objective reference,' and an 'interpretive sense,' which determines the manner in which that something is meant, what it is intended *as*. The matter of an intentional experience is, in short, 'that element in an act which first gives it reference to an object, and reference so wholly definite that it not merely fixes the object meant in a general way, but also the precise way in which it is meant.'⁵ The union of matter and quality is the *intentional essence* of an act.⁶ So, to provide examples, believing that grass is green and believing that snow is white have the same quality but different matters, while believing that snow is white and wondering whether snow is white have identical matters but differ in quality. The belief that Hesperus is Hesperus and the belief that Hesperus is Phosphorus differ in matter despite having the same objective reference and quality. Like Frege, Husserl maintains that identity of sense is sufficient for identity of reference.⁷

2 The elusive noema can safely be bracketed for the purposes of this investigation, which focuses on the noetic side of the perceptual act.

3 *LI* 5, 20, 586

4 More precisely, both the matter and the quality of an act are particular parts or moments belonging to an act's real content. Its ideal content is related to its real content, according to the account in the *Logical Investigations* at least, in precisely the same way that universals are related to their instances — and *not* as an act is related to its object. 'The manifold singulars for the ideal unity Meaning are naturally the corresponding act-moments of meaning, the *meaning-intentions*. Meaning is related to varied acts of meaning... just as Redness *in specie* is to the slips of paper which lie here, and which all 'have' the same redness. Each slip has, in addition to other constitutive properties (extension, form, etc.), its own individual redness, i.e. its instance of this colour-species, though this neither exists in the slip nor anywhere else in the whole world, and particularly not 'in our thought,' in so far as this latter is part of the domain of real being, the sphere of temporality' (*LI* 1, 32, 330).

5 *LI* 5, 20, 589

6 *LI* 5, 21, 590

7 *LI* 5, 20, 589: 'Identical matters can never yield distinct objective references...' Un-

Without doubt the most fundamental distinction among intentional acts is that between empty or 'signitive' acts and intuitive ones — a distinction whose phenomenological and epistemological relevance can be readily appreciated when we contrast the case of merely believing that this table is brown and actually seeing that it is brown. On the basis of what has been said thus far, one might suppose that the difference between merely thinking that the table is brown and perceiving that it is brown resides in the matters of the respective acts. This is not, however, Husserl's view. Rather, Husserl holds that empty and intuitive acts can have precisely the same matters. 'However the fullness of a presentation may vary within its possible gradients of fulfilment, its intentional object, intended as it is intended, remains the same: its "matter," in other words, stays the same.'⁸

If an intuitive and an empty act can have identical matters, then an intuitive act must owe its intuitiveness to something other than its matter. Some part distinct from the matter or quality, that is, must be that in virtue of which the act is intuitive or perceptual. This feature is an act's intuitive fullness (*Fülle*), which Husserl characterizes as '...a characteristic moment of presentations alongside of quality and matter, a positive constituent only in the case of intuitive presentations, a privation in the case of signitive.'⁹ The three moments of matter, quality, and fullness make up what Husserl calls an act's 'epistemic essence,' which consists of 'all the content which has relevance for the knowledge-function.'¹⁰

like Frege, however, Husserl does not seem to hold that identity of cognitive value (*Erkenntniswerte*) is sufficient for identity of sense. See *LI* 5 20, 588: 'Two identically qualified acts, e.g. two presentations, may appear directed, and evidently directed, to the same object, without full agreement in intentional essence. The *Ideas equilateral triangle* and *equiangular triangle* differ in content, though both are directed, and evidently directed, to the same object...'

- 8 *LI* 6, 25, 738. Husserl makes similar points throughout his discussions of fulfilment (*Erfüllung*). In fulfilment 'the semantic essence of the signitive (or expressive) act reappears *identically* in corresponding intuitive acts...' (*LI* 6, 28, 744). Husserl also defines a possible or 'internally consistent' meaning in terms of there being a possible 'complete intuition whose matter is identical with its own' (*LI* 6, 30, 749). In *Ideas I*, Husserl claims that the distinction between experiences in which an object acquires 'primordial givenness' and those in which it does not does 'not concern the pure meaning and position, for this is the same for both members of every such pair of examples' [Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books 1962), section 136, 350-1]. 'Meaning' and 'position,' in this context, correspond to 'matter' and 'quality' in the terminology of the *Investigations*.

9 *LI* 6, 21, 729

10 *LI* 6, 28, 745

A further noteworthy consequence of Husserl's theory is this: because the intentional direction of an act is entirely determined by its matter, and because acts that differ in their intuitive content can have exactly the same matter, it follows that the intuitive content of an act contributes nothing to the intentional direction of an act. If we characterize conceptual content as the kind of content that (a) could serve as the meaning of a linguistic expression and (b) could be the content of acts that differ from one another in their intuitive content,¹¹ then according to Husserl's theory of intentionality, at least at this stage of its development, conceptual content is the only kind of intrinsically intentional content.¹² Husserl is not, of course, alone in endorsing this sort of conceptualism — summed up by the famous slogan 'intuitions without concepts are blind'¹³ — but joins the company of thinkers as diverse as Kant, C.I. Lewis, Wilfrid Sellars, and, more recently and with some important modifications, Bill Brewer and John McDowell.

And yet intuitive contents, despite being intrinsically 'blind,' are responsible for the fact that objects are *given* to us perceptually. They do this by means of what Husserl variously refers to as 'interpretation' (*Auffassung*) and 'apprehension.' Interpretation or apprehension, whatever else it is, is that in virtue of which mere sensations or hyletic data

11 I do not mean to suggest that these are the most common, much less the only, characterizations of conceptual content. Nevertheless, both characterizations of conceptual content have been put forth in the literature on content. Peacocke, for instance, claims that '...any content that can be expressed in language by the use of an indicative sentence, including sentences containing indexicals and demonstratives, will be a conceptual content' [Christopher Peacocke, 'Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?' *The Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2001) 239-64, 243]. As for the second characterization, McDowell writes: 'We can ensure that what we have in view is genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity if we insist that the very same capacity to embrace a colour in mind can in principle persist beyond the duration of the experience itself' [John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1994), 57].

12 'The perceptual presentation arises in so far as an experienced complex of sensations gets informed by a certain act-character, one of conceiving or meaning' (*LI* 1, 23, 310). Husserl also writes that it is 'analytically true' that 'everything that is intuitively present is also meant' (*LI* 6, 23, 732). I think these passages, together with Husserl's contention that the matter of an act can survive the obliteration of its intuitive content, seriously compromises the plausibility of Kevin Mulligan's contention that, according to Husserl, 'to see particulars is not to mean, is not to exercise a concept, neither an individual nor a general concept' [Kevin Mulligan, 'Perception,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, ed. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995) 168-238, 170].

13 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan 1965), A51/B75.

are transformed into presentations of objective sense-perceptible qualities. In sense-perception hyletic data are 'in a certain manner 'interpreted' or 'apperceived,' and ... it is in the phenomenological character of such an animating interpretation of sensation that what we call the appearing of the object consists.'¹⁴ Every perceptual act, then, consists of both an intentional essence (matter plus quality) and hyletic data that have undergone interpretation. In the normal course of perception, a hyletic datum will be interpreted as the manifestation in the flesh of some objective quality of the act's object.

II

Before discussing the nature of hyletic data and interpretation, it is worth pointing out a tension between Husserl's theory of perception and his characterization of fulfilment (*Erfüllung*). Husserl's most complete account of fulfilment takes place in the sixth of his *Logical Investigations*. In it, Husserl attempts to spell out 'the relation between 'concept' or 'thought' on the one hand, understood as mere meaning without intuitive fulfilment, and 'corresponding intuition,' on the other.'¹⁵ The structure of an act of fulfilment is best appreciated by describing a simple instance of it. Suppose I believe that my lawn is a green. Here, 'an act of meaning is performed... but nothing is thereby known, recognized.'¹⁶ But this thought can be verified by actually going to see whether my lawn really is green. When I do so, the mere act of meaning previously carried out is realized or fulfilled (*erfüllt*). I 'experience how *the same* objective item which was 'merely thought of' in symbol is now presented in intuition, and that it is intuited as being precisely the determinate so-and-so that it was at first merely thought or meant to be.'¹⁷

14 *LI* 5, 2, 539. See also all of *LI* 5, 14, as well as *LI* 6, 6, 688, where he identifies perceiving something (an inkpot, in this case) with undergoing 'a certain sequence of experiences of the class of sensations, sensuously unified in a peculiar serial pattern, and informed by a certain act-character or 'interpretation' (*Auffassung*), which endows it with an objective sense. This act-character is responsible for the fact that an object, i.e. this inkpot, is perceptually apparent to us.'

15 *LI* 6, Introduction, 668

16 *LI* 6, 8, 694

17 *LI* 6, 8, 694. See also *LI* VI, 16, 720: 'What the intention means, but presents only in more or less inauthentic and inadequate manner, the fulfilment — the act attaching itself to an intention, and offering it 'fullness' in the synthesis of fulfilment — *sets directly before us*, or at least more directly than the intention does. In fulfilment our experience is represented by the words: '*This is the thing itself.*'

Without going into the details of this account, of which there are many, Husserl quite clearly maintains that fulfilment is a higher-order act with complete acts — one empty or ‘signitive,’ the other intuitive — among its constituents. Husserl characterizes fulfilment as an act of identification, in which the two constituent acts, in virtue of the (possibly partial) identity of their matters, achieve a ‘unity of identity.’¹⁸ This structure is most evident in the dynamic case of fulfilment like the one described above, but Husserl insists that even in the static case, the same structure is in place.¹⁹ If that is so, then not all intuitive acts, of which perceptual acts are a species, can be acts of fulfilment. If an intuitive act *A* were itself an act of fulfilment, then it would contain another intuitive act *A**. Yet if this additional intuitive act *A** were in turn an act of fulfilment, it would have to contain another intuitive act *A***, and so on.

It is not, however, entirely obvious just what the difference between an intuitive act and an act of fulfilment is, or whether Husserl’s theory provides us with the tools to distinguish them. When we compare an intuitive act with an empty act with precisely the same matter, it seems that the difference between them is that in the latter case the object is merely meant, while in the former it is both given and meant, which is just how Husserl characterizes fulfilment. Moreover, Husserl repeatedly describes perception and fulfilment in similar terms, especially in his discussions of the perception of ordinary empirical, ‘external’ objects. ‘Each individual percept (*Wahrnehmung*),’ he writes, ‘is a mixture of fulfilled and unfulfilled intentions.’²⁰ And he describes a synthetically unified series of such perceptions as ‘a continuous flux of fulfilment or identification...’²¹

The problem here is that if intuitive fullness is not itself an act, but a third moment ‘alongside’ an act’s matter and quality, then either (a) it cannot perform a fulfilling function, or (b) Husserl’s contention that acts of fulfilment are higher-order, founded acts involving a relation between at least two acts is mistaken. In addition to depicting fullness

18 *LI 6*, 8, 696

19 It is, however, ‘a seamless unity, which only acquires articulation when drawn out in time’ (*LI 6*, 9, 698).

20 *LI 6*, 14b, 714

21 *Ibid.* See also Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 2001), 44: ‘Every momentary phase of perception is in itself a network of *partially full and partially empty intentions*. For, in every phase we have genuine appearances, that is, *a fulfilled intention...*’ (My italics).

as a third moment of an act, however, Husserl also maintains that the fullness of an act has a matter of its own.²² But while this move enables moments of fullness to perform a fulfilling function, it also reinstates the regress we are attempting to avoid. To see this, let us turn to the intuitive fullness itself. If Husserl is correct in maintaining that the matter of an act is conceptual, and therefore can serve as the content of an empty or signitive act, then the matter of the intuitive fullness of an act is capable of functioning merely signitively. But how, then, are we to characterize the difference between the intuitive fullness and an empty act with exactly that matter? Our only option, it seems, is to say that the former possesses intuitive fullness while the latter does not. But consistency demands that we treat this further moment of fullness — the fullness of the intuitive fullness — as a whole consisting of matter and fullness, and so the regress is on. ‘The intuitive act,’ as Dreyfus puts it, ‘will indeed have its own intentional content, which can be entertained independently of whether this content is fulfilled or not, but then an act having this content is not necessarily a fulfilling act. And we will have to seek again for an act which necessarily supplies the filling.’²³

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- 22 ‘Matter and fullness are, however, by no means unrelated, and, when we range an intuitive act alongside a signitive act to which it brings fullness, the former act does not differ from the latter merely by the joining on a third distinct moment of fullness to the quality and matter common to the two acts. This at least is not the case where we mean by ‘fullness’ the intuitive content of intuition. For intuitive content (*Inhalt*) itself already includes a complete ‘matter,’ the matter of an act *reduced* to a pure intuition’ (*LI* 6, 25, 738).
- 23 Hubert L. Dreyfus, ‘The Perceptual Noema,’ in *Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus (Cambridge: The MIT Press 1982) 97-123, 105. It is noteworthy that Dreyfus discovers this difficulty for the wrong reasons: he is convinced that the ‘intentionalist thesis’ that ‘all acts always have objects’ (102) is unproblematic in the case of signitive acts, since signitive acts have ideal meanings or *Sinne* as ‘direct objects’ or ‘correlates,’ and real objects as ‘indirect’ objects (101). Such ‘direct’ objects, Dreyfus thinks, are required to serve as ‘correlates’ in cases where the real or ‘indirect’ object does not exist. In the case of intuitive or fulfilling acts, however, the introduction of such an ‘intermediary object’ as an ideal meaning or *Sinn* is untenable, since fulfilling acts purport to present the object itself directly. If we treat the intuitive act along the same lines as signitive acts — as having an object-independent *Sinn* as its ‘correlate’ — then acts entertaining such a *Sinn* can exist independently of the existence of the real object, in which case we must forfeit the claim that such fulfilling acts constitute a direct relation to an object. In order to establish such a relation, we must appeal to intuition. But this model of intentionality requires us to analyze intuition along the same lines, generating the regress. This objection stems from a radical misunderstanding of Husserl’s theory of intentionality. Husserl never asserts, as Frege sometimes seems to, that ideal contents or *Sinne* are the direct objects of acts, and with good reason. For supplying acts with direct objects such as *Sinne*, which themselves

John Drummond, in his discussion of Dreyfus's rendition of the regress argument, criticizes Dreyfus for 'confus[ing] fulfilling acts with the experience of fulfilment,'²⁴ a criticism echoed by Frode Kjosavik.²⁵ Dreyfus, the criticism goes, applies the analysis of fulfilment to the fulfilling act itself, thereby treating veridical perception as an act in which 'we experience not the object but fulfillment.'²⁶ However, two points deserve consideration. First, Drummond's criticism assumes that in fulfilment, we do not experience the object, but instead experience 'the identity between the emptily intended meaning and the bodily present one,' that is, the fulfilment of the act of meaning by the act of intuition.²⁷ However, it might be possible to experience *both* the object *and* the fulfilment, and some commentators have taken this to be the case. '[F]ulfilment (knowledge) is still a relation to the object (LI 726 and 728), even though it rests or is "founded" upon a kind of "gathering up" or "synthesis" of other cognitive acts directed upon that same object.'²⁸ Indeed, not only are we conscious of the object, but we are often *thematically* conscious of it, and only peripherally or apperceptively aware of the relation of coincidence between our acts. And Husserl himself makes it clear that not all cases of fulfilment involve a thematic consciousness of identity. Where we experience the 'connective union of significant intention and corresponding intuition,' we 'are entitled to say that an identifying coincidence has been *experienced*, even if there is no *conscious intention* directed to

refer beyond themselves, leaves it unexplained how *Sinne* themselves can refer to objects that do not exist. If they cannot, then nothing has been solved — we will require such *Sinne* to refer to still further *Sinne*. And if they can, then there is no principled reason why acts themselves cannot. (See Dallas Willard, 'A Crucial Error in Epistemology,' *Mind* 76 (1967) 513-523, at 517.) The problem does not stem from Husserl's insistence that acts have existing objects, since that commitment is no part of Husserl's theory of intentionality, but from the thesis that what makes an act intentional is its conceptual content.

- 24 John J. Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1990), 81
- 25 See his 'Perceptual Intimacy and Conceptual Inadequacy: A Husserlian Critique of McDowell's Internalism,' in *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation: Phenomenology in the Nordic Countries*, ed. D. Zahavi, Sara Heinämaa, and Hans Ruin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 2003) 49-71, 55-6.
- 26 Drummond, *Intentionality*, 81
- 27 Drummond, *Intentionality*, 81
- 28 Dallas Willard, 'Knowledge,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, ed. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995) 138-67, 151

identity....²⁹ Second, and as we have seen, Husserl himself seems guilty of exactly this confusion; he seems to provide no way to distinguish between acts of fulfilment and acts of perception. The error of which Drummond accuses Dreyfus extends to Husserl as well.

Now the problem of distinguishing fulfilment and perception, it seems, would be soluble in a rather straightforward way if intuitive contents were intrinsically intentional; if, that is, there were acts whose intentional contents or matters were intrinsically intentional and intuitive.³⁰ That would enable us to say that fulfilment occurs when an act of meaning and an act of intuiting are directed upon the same object and consciously unified or 'synthesized' in the appropriate way. Perceiving, or at least one kind of perceiving, would consist in merely carrying out an intuitive act without an act of meaning — an act, in short, in which the object is given without being conceptualized. But because Husserl holds that all intrinsically intentional components of an act are conceptual, this option is unavailable to him. And because of that, it is not obvious what the difference between a perceptual act and an act of fulfilment is.

III

While I do think that construing intuitive contents as intentional is the solution to the above worry, it is not something that can simply be postulated for theoretical consistency. Obviously we must turn to the things themselves — the intuitive contents, in this case — and try to determine whether Husserl is right in supposing that they are intrinsically non-intentional, and whether they do in fact undergo anything like interpretation in normal perceptual situations.

Husserl's distinction between sensations or hyletic data and objective sense-perceptible qualities is drawn, in part, from the familiar phenomena of shape and color constancy.³¹ When I look at a table, I perceive it as being uniformly rectangular and brown, even though it

29 *LI* 6, 8, 697

30 Dreyfus again: 'If we wish to preserve the notion of fulfilling acts which corresponds to our experience of perceiving objects and thus arrive at the end of this regress ... we must introduce an incarnate meaning, a meaning which is not abstractable from the intuitive content which it informs' ('The Perceptual Noema,' 105).

31 'Colour-constancy amidst variation of light and shadow is the phenomenon that the colour sensation/colour quality distinction is intended to do justice to' (Mulligan, 'Perception,' 182). Another explanation, perhaps, is that when we perceive colors, we are also conscious of the light and shadow, and make allowances for such things.

appears differently depending on lighting conditions, my position, and so forth. The table, being the physical thing that it is, can only be given to consciousness one-sidedly and partially by means of perspectival foreshadowings or *Abschattungen*. But I do not, in all cases, take the variations in *Abschattungen* to indicate corresponding changes in the object or its properties. In fact, sameness of hyletic data is neither necessary nor sufficient for sameness of perceived properties.³² One may have the same sensations without perceiving the same quality, and one may have different sensations and perceive the same quality. For instance, precisely the same sensations may be involved in the perception of a woman and a mannequin, and different sensations may present a single, unchanging mannequin as we view it in different light and from different angles.

So what *are* these sensations or hyletic data? Four points deserve special mention. The first is that, in normal perceptual consciousness, hyletic data are not the objects of perception. What we visually perceive are colors and shapes, not the perspectival variations through which they are given. Naturally we are conscious of them in some sense, but in an apperceptive, non-thematic way.

Second, hyletic data are among the real (*reell*) constituents of acts of consciousness; unlike the object of a perceptual act, the hyletic data are included in its real content as proper parts or components, arising and passing away with the act itself. This claim, I submit, poses no great mystery: a mental act, just like any non-simple entity whatsoever, consists of parts and moments. Matter, quality, and hyletic data make up the most notable of these.

Third — and here we enter more controversial territory — Husserl sometimes maintains that hyletic data resemble, in some way, the objective properties they are capable of presenting. ‘Only those contents can be intuitively representative of an object that resemble it or are like it.’³³ This claim will be the subject of close scrutiny below.

32 See Edmund Husserl, *Thing and Space*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1997), 39: ‘...[T]he complex of the contents of sensation is quite varied, and yet the corresponding perceptions, by their very essence, pass themselves off as perceptions of the same object. Conversely, it is also (*sic*) holds that the same complex of contents of sensation can be the basis of diverse perceptions, perceptions of diverse objects, as every mannequin proves...’

33 *LI* 6, 26, 741. Elsewhere he maintains that sense contents ‘provide, as it were, the analogical building-stuff for the content of the object presented by their means’ (*LI* I, 23, 310). And in *Ideas* he writes: ‘To every phase of perception there necessarily belongs, for instance, a definite content in the way of perspective variations of colour, shape, and so forth. They are counted among the “sensory data”...’ (*Ideas* section 41, 119).

Fourth, and as we have already seen, hyletic data are not intrinsically intentional moments of consciousness; they only acquire the character of ofness or aboutness in virtue of bearing a special relation — being interpreted — to the intrinsically intentional or noetic moments of an act, namely the matter and quality. The plausibility of this thesis is enhanced considerably by the fact that their presentative function varies from context to context, and, perhaps more importantly, that they resemble sense-perceptible qualities. For, first of all, sensible qualities of objects are not themselves intentional. If hyletic data are in some important respect like sensible qualities, there is no reason to expect them to be either. Second, as Husserl says, ‘Resemblance between two objects, however precise, does not make the one be an image of the other.’³⁴ This is obviously true, since ‘x resembles y’ names a symmetrical relation while ‘x is an image of y’ does not.

Nevertheless, many of Husserl’s remarks betray a deep ambivalence about the nature of hyletic contents. Experiences are not, for instance, spatially extended. But color and shape both are. Husserl does attempt to accommodate this point, in *Ideas I*, by admitting that the ‘sensory data’ that present properties ‘differ wholly and in principle’ from the presented properties. ‘The perspective variation is an experience. But experience is possible only as experience, and not as something spatial.’³⁵ So much, it would seem, for the claim that representative contents must resemble the properties they present. Despite this, however, Husserl continues to say that we find a ‘colour-like something’ or a ‘sensory color’ as a literal constituent of the experience.³⁶ And, while he resists, in *Ideas I* at least, the idea that sensations or any other parts of experience are extended, he does characterize ‘sensory phase(s)’ as having ‘spread.’³⁷ In a later work, Husserl seems to have lost his aversion to treating experiences as colored and spatial, saying that ‘the optical lived-experience itself, the thing-appearance that arises anew in each Now ... is a complex of surface color moments that are extended in this way or that.’³⁸ He goes on to assure us that ‘these surface color moments are immanent data...’

Sartre once complained, with some justice, that ‘In giving to the *hyle* both the characteristics of a thing and the characteristics of conscious-

34 *LI 5*, Appendix to 11 and 20, 594

35 Husserl, *Ideas*, section 41, 119

36 Husserl, *Ideas*, section 97, 261

37 Husserl, *Ideas*, section 81, 216

38 Husserl, *Passive and Active Synthesis*, 54

ness, Husserl believed that he facilitated the passage from one to the other, but he succeeded only in creating a hybrid being which consciousness rejects and which can not be a part of the world.³⁹ Part of Husserl's trouble, I think, stems from his failure to distinguish at least three different sorts of things: acts of being appeared-to, ways things appear, and 'thing-appearances' or images, all of which are summoned to explain the fact that experiences can change independently of any changes in the object experienced. In one passage he seems to run all three things together: '...[W]hen we speak of the image which a person has of a thing, what is meant by this is precisely the way we see it, how it presents itself to us.'⁴⁰ These things are not, however, identical.

First, consider the relationship between the way something appears and the acts in which one is appeared-to. Obviously, when things are going well at least, these two things co-vary in a lawful way. However, the way something appears is not a bearer of intentionality, either intrinsically or even in normal perceptual situations where, according to Husserl, hyletic contents are 'interpreted.' When I look at a table, my table will always appear to me in a certain way. But these ways of appearing are not *about* the table — not even when they are interpreted as ways of appearing of the table. A way of appearing is, to be sure, *of* the table, but in much the same sense that its color and its style are 'of' it. Ways of appearing, then, must be distinguished from whatever it is in a mental act that becomes intentional when interpreted, since ways of appearing are not intentional in any context.

This leads to a second point: the way something appears, unlike the act of being appeared-to, does not seem to be something that is mental or psychological. 'There is nothing private or subjective,' P.M.S. Hacker notes, 'about straight sticks looking bent when immersed in water, or for that matter about stick insects looking like sticks.'⁴¹ Moreover, the way something appears is not a property it loses when no one is being appeared-to. Not only do the figures on the side of Mount Rushmore really look like the faces of four United States presidents, but they do not cease to look like those presidents at night or when no one is look-

39 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 20

40 Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, ed. Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1973) 83

41 P.M.S. Hacker, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1987), 218. Austin makes a similar point: 'I am not disclosing a fact about *myself*, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water' [J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (New York: Oxford University Press 1964), 43].

ing at them. To put it in Husserlian terms, ways of appearing are transcendent to, rather than immanent in, acts of perception, in that (a) they are not real components of the act of perception and (b) they are not always given to consciousness adequately or with full evidence.⁴² This is one reason why judgments about the way things look are not only susceptible to error, but corrigible. Someone who fails to recognize that a stick insect looks like a stick, or that a facsimile of a painting looks like an original, is out of touch with the way things objectively are, and can, if compelling enough reasons are presented, come to see this. And this might indicate not just a deficiency of judgment, but that the way he is appeared-to does not correspond, in the right way, with the way things really do appear.

These two points are, I think, sufficient to establish the non-identity of acts of being appeared-to, or any of their components, and ways things appear. Moreover, I think we should be wary of comparing the ways things appear with individuals of any sort, whether images, 'thing-appearances,' or *Abschattungen*. Images such as paintings and photographs — and these, rather than mental things, are what count as 'images' in the first instance — are themselves things that appear. And when they are good images, they appear in much the same way that the things that they depict would under certain conditions. Note, however, that what we have singled out here is something common to both the image and the object — a way of appearing. But this is a property, not another sort of individual on a par with the image and the object. The way an object appears can be similar to the way an image appears, but it verges on nonsense to say that the way that they both appear itself appears similar to either. When something appears red or round, its way of appearing does not *itself* appear red or round.

As for mental images or 'appearances,' I very much doubt these play any role in perception at all, either as 'immediate' objects, as traditional representationalist theories would have it, or as contents, as Husserl sometimes appears to hold. In normal speech, of course, the term 'appearance' functions as a harmless nominalization of the verb 'to appear.' To say that Jones made an appearance is just to say that Jones appeared, not that there is some additional individual, Jones's appearance, stalking about. There is a standing temptation, however, to treat appearances as certain types of individuals or things, much like images except that they occupy consciousness rather than photo albums. Their job, traditionally, has been to actually bear the properties that things

42 For an explanation of these two senses of the term 'transcendent,' see Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy (Boston: Kluwer 1999), 27.

appear to (but might not) bear. Now the first thing to note about these things is how miserably they perform their appointed task, since there are plenty of properties that things can appear to bear but which could not possibly belong to appearances, thus conceived. A man can appear angry; a building can appear on fire; an animal can appear to be injured or running. And by 'appear' I don't *just* mean 'seem.' Rather, these are properties that are manifest to intuition. But appearances cannot *be*, or even be like, any of these things. The permissibility of inferences from statements of the form '*a* (visually) appears *F*' to 'there is an appearance which is *F* (or *F*-like)' is really only remotely plausible with respect to color and shape predicates. But, again, anything with colors and shapes is spatially extended, while experiences and their parts and properties are not. It is strictly nonsensical to ask how wide or what color an act of perceiving or any of its constituents is.

What, then, are we to make of Husserl's conception of hyletic data? If Husserl's account is correct, a consciousness without the right concepts to interpret its sensations would somehow have color-like, spread-out somethings 'in' his consciousness, without being able to treat them as signs or presentations of something 'out there.' 'One is at once tempted to express the situation by saying that its sensations *mean* nothing to such a consciousness, that they do not *count as signs* of the properties of an object, that their combination does not count as a sign of the object itself.'⁴³ If what I've said above is correct, on the other hand, this is a temptation to which we should not yield. There are no color-like, spread-out entities *in* consciousness at all. What is 'in' consciousness is the act of being appeared-to in a certain manner. To be appeared-to, however, is to be conscious of something that appears. In particular, to be appeared-to visually is to be conscious, minimally, of colors and shapes. If, therefore, the mark of an intentional state is to be directed towards something 'beyond' or other than itself, then even the states of a consciousness that is merely appeared-to would be intentional. What it is conscious *of* is colored and extended, but its act of consciousness is neither. With Moore, then, I venture to assert that 'There is ... no question of how we are to 'get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations.' Merely to have a sensation is already to *be* outside that circle.'⁴⁴

43 *LI* 1, 23, 309

44 G.E. Moore, 'The Refutation of Idealism,' in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1922) 1–30, 27

IV

As one might expect, Husserl's uneven remarks about hyletic contents are to some extent mirrored by his portrayals of what interpreting them amounts to. In the *Investigations*, Husserl explicitly compares the manner in which sense contents operate in perception with the manner in which signs operate in symbolic thinking.⁴⁵ Neither sensations nor signs are the terminal objects of awareness, but are 'lived through.' However, it is also clear that signs could not function as signs if we were not conscious of them as objects, and being conscious of them as objects requires corresponding acts that intend them. Husserl occasionally denies this: 'Signs are in fact not objects of our thought at all...'⁴⁶ His official view, however, seems to be that in signitive or empty thinking, signs are the objects of intuitive acts, upon which acts of empty signification are founded.⁴⁷

If, therefore, the interpretation of sense contents is like the interpretation of physical sounds and inscriptions as signs, then the sense contents must be among the objects of consciousness. Indeed, they must normally be among the *intuited* objects of consciousness. Yet this is something that Husserl explicitly, and more than just occasionally, denies. After comparing the interpreting of sense contents to that of signs, he goes on to implicitly renounce his contention that signs are not objects of consciousness *at all*, while appearing to maintain that this is true of hyletic contents:

...[T]he above talk should not be misread as implying that consciousness first looks at its sensations, then turns them into perceptual objects, and then bases an interpretation upon them, which is what really happens when we are objectively conscious of physical objects, e.g. sounded words, which function as signs in the strict sense. Sensations plainly only become presented objects in psychological reflection...⁴⁸

45 See *LI* 1, 23.

46 *LI* 1, 20, 304

47 See *LI* 6, 28, 744. After characterizing purely signitive acts as lacking moments of intuitive fullness but as having representative content, Husserl says that this latter moment is 'really not fullness.' But he continues: 'Or rather it is fullness, but not fullness of the signitive act, but of the act on which it is founded, the act in which the sign is set up as an intuitive object.' A signitive act, then, is an act founded on an intuitive act directed towards the sign.

48 *LI* 1, 23, 309-10

In the much later lectures on passive and active synthesis, the achievement of interpretation or ‘transcendent apperception’ remains, as before, that of ‘bestow[ing] on the mere immanent contents of sensible data, on the so-called data of sensation or hyletic data, the function of exhibiting something “transcendent.”’⁴⁹ But, he continues,

It is dangerous here to speak of represented and representing, of interpreting data of sensation, or to speak of a function that outwardly signifies through this ‘interpreting.’ Adumbrating, exhibiting in data of sensation, is totally different from an interpretation through signs.⁵⁰

Just as hyletic data both resemble and ‘differ wholly and in principle’ from sensible properties, so the acts of interpreting them both bear comparison to and are ‘totally different’ than interpreting signs.

Apart from these (rather easily overcome) internal tensions within Husserl’s account of interpretation, one might suppose that there are rather strong phenomenological reasons to doubt whether anything like ‘interpretation’ takes place in normal perceptual situations. Certainly we are not typically conscious of carrying out *acts* of interpreting our sensations as presentations of something else, nor does reflection disclose any such acts. This criticism, however, misses the mark. For while Husserl does occasionally speak as though the interpretation of hyletic data is a peculiar kind of act — and in other, more paradigmatic cases of interpretation, such as interpreting a text of Husserl’s or the inscriptions on an obelisk, it certainly is — this is not in fact his view. In the Introduction to the Sixth Logical Investigation, Husserl characterizes interpretation as ‘the unity of material and representing content by way of interpretive form.’⁵¹ And in section 26 of that investigation, where he elaborates on this, he maintains that the ‘form of representation’ or ‘interpretive form’ is what lends representative contents their ‘representative character.’⁵² In other words, what makes a given hyletic content H represent a property Q on a given occasion is not that a special act trained upon H has interpreted it as the self-manifestation of Q, but that H stands in a certain form of unity with the matter or the noetic components N of an act. That is, if N and H are united in consciousness in a given way, then H will present Q. H’s representative character arises from the fact that it is embedded within a certain sort of whole

49 Husserl, *Passive and Active Synthesis*, 55

50 *Ibid.*

51 *LI 6*, Introduction, 669

52 *LI 6*, 26, 740

— no ‘glue’ holds it together with the noetic components of the act, and, in particular, no acts of the ego are necessary to bring its representative function about. Just as the function of a note in a melody arises from its place within the whole melody, without the addition of any other elements, so the presentative function of hyletic content H arises from its ‘place’ within the whole of a conscious act. Husserl does insist that differences in interpretive forms of acts are phenomenologically ultimate and incapable of reduction to anything else,⁵³ but this is quite distinct from their being impervious to phenomenological surveillance and description.

This point also, I think, makes it quite plain why Husserl does finally insist upon drawing a sharp distinction between sign-consciousness and the interpretation of hyletic data. For in the latter case, as he points out, we really do have an act trained upon a physical sign. The physical sign is perceived, and is thus the object of an act that serves to found an act of signification. Here we have a case in which (at least) two acts are present: one, the founding act directed towards the sign, and second, the founded (and dominant) act directed towards whatever is designated by that sign. In the case of the interpretation of hyletic data, however, the case is otherwise. We obviously have a whole consisting of parts, but the parts need not include a special act that unifies those parts, nor need the act itself be a founded one, that is, an act whose dominant intention towards x constitutively depends upon some other act directed upon some other object y. Husserl is quite explicit in maintaining that perceptual acts trained upon real qualities and objects are not founded, but are rather ‘straightforward’ (*schlichte*), acts.⁵⁴

Two positive comments, then, are in order concerning Husserl’s account of interpretation. The first is that his account is not, despite the comparison in the First Investigation of interpreting sense contents with sign-consciousness, at odds with itself. Husserl’s considered view seems quite plainly to be that the interpretation of sense contents is not an act at all, but arises from the distinctive manner in which the hyletic and noetic moments of an act are united into a whole. The second virtue of his account, and one that follows from what has just been said, is that it avoids the phenomenological objection that we are not conscious of carrying out an acts of interpreting hyletic data. But there remains a glaring problem: if the function of interpretation is that of bestowing intentionality on otherwise non-intentional hyletic data, then, since the latter appear not to exist, there is no need for anything like this to occur.

53 *LI* 6, 26, 742

54 See *LI* 6, section 47.

The theory of interpretation, that is, may seem well motivated only if there are non-intentional moments that stand in need of being interpreted. But I have argued that there are no such moments of mental acts, but that, on the contrary, even the intuitive or sensuous contents of consciousness ought to be treated as intentional.

V

However, the fact that intuitive contents always function intentionally does not discredit Husserl's contention that interpretation, or something appreciably like it, is an essential component of perception. For although there are powerful reasons to reject the existence of non-intentional hyletic data that resemble sensible qualities, we must address an important question that Husserl's theory of perception is designed to answer: how is it that the very same intuitive contents can present different things in different contexts?

One option, adopted by Aron Gurwitsch, is to deny that the perceptual or intuitive contents of qualitatively different experiences actually do coincide. Gurwitsch holds that the very identity of intuitive contents is determined by their role within a larger perceptual 'Gestalt-contexture.' 'It is the functional significance of any part of a Gestalt-contexture that makes this part that which it is. That part is what it is only as a constituent of the Gestalt-contexture and as integrated into its unity.'⁵⁵ If this is right, then the intuitive content *S* that presents the color brown in one situation is not, and cannot possibly be, identical with any intuitive content *S'* that presents tan in another. Indeed, even the wax figure example can be handled along these lines. For included in the Gestalt-contexture of a perceptual act is its *horizon* — a complex of intentional acts pointing beyond what is strictly intuitively given in an experience and which, among other things, prescribes which other perceptions are compatible with or would count as perceptions of the same thing as what is strictly perceived now.⁵⁶

55 Aron Gurwitsch, *The Field of Consciousness* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1964), 121

56 'The 'horizons' of perceptions are another name for empty intentions ... that are integrally cohesive and that are actualized in the progression of perception in and through different orientations' (Husserl, *Passive and Active Synthesis*, 144). The horizon is much like the Network in Searle's account of intentionality, which must be carefully distinguished from the Background, which consists of *non-intentional* capacities and abilities that make intentional capacities possible. See John Searle, *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 65 and following. Among the better discussions of the horizon in Husserl's work are section 44 of

To support his holistic account of mental content, Gurwitsch turns to a familiar sort of example: Rubin's famous faces/vase drawing.

Let us consider a certain segment of the boundary between the two areas. When the two faces are seen, the segment appears as the outline of the half-open mouth of the face to the right. When, however, the white goblet is perceived, the same segment is seen as the contour of a small projecting part of the goblet.⁵⁷

From this fact he draws the conclusion that 'the appearance ... is *entirely* determined by its functional significance for the contexture to which it belongs.'⁵⁸ Problems emerge, however, as soon as we ask: *which* appearance is thus determined by its functional significance? Well, the appearance of 'the same segment.' But if it is possible to identify and re-identify the very same thing across different Gestalt-contextures, and on the basis of perception, moreover, then obviously its identity is not *entirely* determined by its place within a Gestalt-contexture. Gurwitsch, recognizing that presentations must partially agree in order to conflict, maintains that the 'identical something' common to each perception is 'a definite location in perceptual space.'⁵⁹ He never does explain, however, exactly why locations in perceptual space have the unique privilege of not having their identities tied to Gestalt-contextures. Moreover, it is not the locations in perceptual space *per se* that conflict, but what is perceived to occupy them.

What must be kept firmly in mind in the case of examples like this one is that ambiguous figures and the aspect-shifts that they provoke are remarkable because it is the *same* object, and the same parts of that object, that appear in such divergent ways and have such a distinct functional significance. There is, after all, nothing remarkable about different things looking like different things. But our capacity to find them remarkable plainly relies on our ability to recognize that it is the same thing that appears. The same segment is, and is evidently, the outline of a half-open 'mouth' and part of the 'vase's' projecting contour. If we were incapable of appreciating this, then it would be an open question whether the Gestalt-shift is in fact a reality shift, that is, a change in the

Ideas I, sections 8 and 9 of *Experience and Judgment*, and section 19 of *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1977). For one of the best expositions in the secondary literature, see David Woodruff Smith and Ronald McIntyre, *Husserl and Intentionality* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1982), chapters V and VI.

57 Gurwitsch, *Consciousness*, 118

58 Gurwitsch, *Consciousness*, 119

59 Gurwitsch, *Consciousness*, 272

objective properties of what is before us. But it's obviously not an open question. And this means that there is a component of our experience that manages to single out the thing and its features independently of their shifting functional significance. From the fact that we *always* see the ambiguous figure as either a vase or two faces, it does not follow that we *only* see it as either a vase or two faces. We also see it as an ambiguous figure.

Still, we should not lose sight of the core of truth in Gurwitsch's account. There is no denying that the Gestalt-contexture of an act, including both the intentions towards co-given objects and those mental acts making up the act's horizon, plays an essential role in determining what an intuitive content is of. Husserl, for his part, is prepared to admit all of this. He is, first of all, by no means unaware of the modifications that intuitive contents — and indeed all contents and objects of any sort — undergo when embedded within greater wholes. When parts are 'knit into wholes,' they undergo a 'certain change of character.'⁶⁰ In the case of intuitive contents, Husserl readily admits that the horizon of an act exercises a sense-giving function, and one that is necessary for intuitive contents to present ordinary physical objects and properties. Indeed, the thesis that every perception has an empty horizon is simply a corollary of Husserl's insight that all perceptions of physical objects are essentially inadequate, involving both filled and empty intentions.⁶¹ In order, for instance, for my current perception to count as a presentation of, or at least as-of, a table, it must be partial and recognized as such. My current perception must have a horizon of empty intentions that point to unseen parts and properties of the table and prescribe, with varying degrees of determinacy, what the table would look like if I were to perceive it from different angles or under different conditions. The intuitive contents in such cases, Husserl claims, 'are nothing for themselves; they are appearances-of only through the intentional horizons that are inseparable from them.'⁶² In short, what the intuitive

60 *LI 6*, 9, 699

61 As Gurwitsch puts it, 'No perceptual appearance of a material thing can be altogether devoid of references to aspects other than that actualized at the moment. To assume that as possible would entail the consequence of a material thing perceptually apprehended through a single perception' (*Consciousness*, 237). More precisely, it absurdly entails that a material thing could be *adequately* apprehended through a single perception.

62 Husserl, *Passive and Active Synthesis*, 43. Again, the whole of an act of perception 'is not only determined by what in it is genuinely a perception; rather, it is also determined by the anticipatory intentions that are concordantly harmonizing and also sense-giving' (137).

content of an act presents depends upon more than its specific nature, but upon the whole of intentional acts of which it is a part, among them those acts making up the total act's horizon.

Now Husserl plainly believes that the presence of the horizon of an act is a necessary condition for the intuitive contents of that act to present the objects and qualities that they in fact present. What I wish to suggest is that the presence of such horizons — together, of course, with the intrinsic character of the intuitive contents themselves — is also a sufficient condition for their presentative function. In determining the role of the horizon of a perceptual act, we also seem to have discovered what it is that accounts for the fact that identical intuitive contents can present different objects and properties. To see this, compare a case in which Husserl's wax figure is perceived as a woman and a case in which it is perceived, veridically, as a wax figure. In this example, there are certain points in the process of perception — the initial points of each act, for instance — in which the two perceptions have exactly the same intuitive content. What determines whether the figure is perceived as a woman or a wax figure is the horizon of the act, which both anticipates further, unperceived parts and properties of the figure and prescribes which experiences are compatible with the content of one's present perception. When the figure is perceived as a woman, the horizon prescribes, in a not fully determinate but unmistakable manner, that it is capable of autonomous movement, that it will respond in various ways to the world around it, that it will be capable of communication, that it will be warm to the touch, and so forth. (If the wax figure is perceived as a person with whom we are acquainted, a great deal more will be prescribed by the horizon.) These empty intentions will, of course, fail to find corresponding intuitions that would fulfill them. When it is perceived as a wax figure, the horizon prescribes a very different set of properties of the object and corresponding experiences in which those properties would be given, experiences that, in this case, may actually take place. Simpler cases involving color- and shape-constancy can be handled along the same lines.

On the theory that I am advocating, then, there is indeed an important sense in which intuitive contents undergo interpretation. But interpretation is not a matter of bestowing intentionality on otherwise dead sensations that in some sense resemble the sense-perceptible qualities of objects. The intentional direction of intuitive contents arises, as Husserl puts it, from the 'the phenomenological peculiarity of the relevant form of unity' of the act.⁶³ Such forms of unity or interpretive forms do

not, however, resist all further phenomenological treatment, but are to be analyzed in terms of the joint interaction of the intuitive contents and the empty intentions constituting the horizon of the act. It is because of what the horizon of an act of perception prescribes that the intuitive content counts as the perception of, say, a woman rather than a mannequin. Finally, despite the fact that the intentional direction of intuitive contents is capable of variation, they are always bearers of intentionality in whatever context in which they occur. The task of 'interpretation,' on the present account, is to minimize the range of the possible intentions that intuitive contents can bear — a range that is obviously restricted by the intrinsic character of the intuitive contents in question, insofar as, for instance, no intuitive content could present both a color and a sound, or a shoehorn and a city — not to bestow intentionality upon them in the first place.⁶⁴

Husserl's unwillingness to abandon the model of perceptual intentionality criticized here calls for an explanation. I am not at all sure just what that explanation is. It seems, however, that Husserl summons empty horizons to explain the essential inadequacy of 'external' perception without recognizing that those horizons can account for the phenomena of color- and shape-constancy as well. In order to explain the latter phenomena, Husserl continues to rely upon the model criticized above, treating intuitive contents as non-intentional color- and shape-like somethings standing in need of apprehension or interpretation. Why? The inadequacy of external thing-perception consists in the fact that there are empty intentions pointing beyond a 'core of givenness.'⁶⁵ But what is it, exactly, that these empty intentions point beyond? One

64 There is some evidence that Husserl, in his later writings, moved toward an account along these lines and away from the conceptualism characteristic of his earlier work. His acknowledgement of 'prepredicative' experience and passive synthesis might seem to indicate that Husserl abandoned the model criticized here. However, Husserl does not hold that all conceptual content, in the sense used here, is propositional content. The simplest independent meanings are nominal meanings, which can serve as the matters of single-rayed acts with varying degrees of intuitive fullness. That Husserl recognized such meanings in the *Logical Investigations* means that he recognized prepredicative intentionality at that time. And yet he treated intuitive contents as intrinsically non-intentional, standing in need of apprehension by meaning-instantiating acts. There is no clear evidence that he changed his mind. On the contrary, Husserl still puts forth the doctrine in many later works, maintaining that 'consciousness' accomplishment' consists in bestowing on 'mere immanent contents' the 'function of exhibiting something "transcendent,"' (*Passive and Active Synthesis*, 55) and that 'Individual objects, spatial things, are constituted by "apprehension," "apperception," of sense data...' (*Experience and Judgment*, 255).

65 Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 33

answer, and the answer that Husserl seems to have endorsed, is that they point beyond an immanent, purely given entity, which, though not a color or shape, is nevertheless a determinate sort of entity, is color- and shape-like, and whose only possible home is within consciousness' own immanent sphere.

Another answer, however, and one that is compatible with the present account, is that what the empty intentions pass beyond is a merely determinable intuitive intention towards a transcendent property. That is, one may hold that an intuitive content in abstraction from the empty horizon with which it is always in fact united is neither a determinate non-intentional sense datum nor a determinate intentional content directed towards an immanent entity, but is instead a merely determinable or indeterminate intuitive intention towards a perfectly objective, mind-independent property. If one merely gets a passing glimpse of an isolated color or shape, for instance, one may not be in any position to determine just which color or shape one saw. This does not mean, however, that one has a determinate and adequate intuition of an immanent color- or shape-like something. It means no more than that one had an indeterminate and very inadequate perception of a color or shape. It would require a more expansive and determinate horizon to make the intuitive content of the perceptual act intend a more determinate property.⁶⁶

VI

Naturally this account of perception has some interesting, and potentially objectionable, consequences. The first is that the problematic distinction between non-intentional hyletic contents and intentional, interpreted moments of intuitive fullness collapses. In its place we have essentially intuitive matters, whose specific intentional direction is determined by their place within the total matter of an act — a total matter which includes the partial matters making up the act's horizon. All of these partial matters constitute, in the normal case of perception, a whole, and this whole is the matter of the total act. In particular, intuitive content is not to be treated as something that is 'alongside' the matter of an act as a third moment, much less as something that resembles or is analogous to the sensible qualities of material objects. It is, rather,

66 There's a toll to pay here, though, for it precludes analyzing all perceptual inadequacy in terms of the presence of empty horizons. A perceptual act might, on this view, be inadequate not because it has sufficiently expansive empty horizons, but because it lacks them.

itself a matter, which belongs, in the strictest sense, to the total matter of the act. Consequently, no two acts that differ in their intuitive content can have fully identical matters. To merely think about a house and to perceive a house is to carry out acts with different, albeit intimately related, matters, not to carry out acts with identical matters that differ only in some third moment that is entirely inessential to the intentionality of the act. This, I think, is one of the benefits of the account. If we, following Husserl, define matter as 'that moment in an objectifying act which makes the act present *just this object in just this manner*,'⁶⁷ then it seems entirely plausible to suppose that the difference between mere thinking and perceiving points to corresponding differences in the matter of an act rather than, or in addition to, the presence or absence of accompanying sensations or hyletic data.

Another distinction that disappears on this account is that between the intentional and the epistemic essence of an act. The intentional essence, recall, is the unity of matter and quality, while the epistemic essence is the unity of the intentional essence and the moment of intuitive fullness. But on the account offered here, according to which intuitiveness is an essential feature of the matter of an act, any two acts with different intuitive content will also have different matters. Accordingly, any two acts that differ with respect to those properties that are relevant for knowledge will also differ in their intentional essence.

While the present account collapses two problematic distinctions, it enables us to make a distinction that was not at all clear on Husserl's official account, namely that between perception and fulfilment. Fulfilment consists, in part, in finding something to be as one thinks it to be — or of thinking something to be as one finds it to be — and involves being conscious not only of the object that is known, but of the correspondence between one's thought and the object of that thought. Now it seems plain that many acts of perception are fulfilments in this sense. When I attentively perceive my blue chair, I am conscious not only of a thing which just so happens to be a blue chair, but I am conscious of it as a blue chair. Not only that, but I am conscious, at least non-thematically, of the fact that my thought that the chair is blue is verified on the basis of my perception that the chair is blue. This is, plausibly, what makes it rational for me to base a belief that the chair is blue upon such an experience.

Nevertheless, there are cases in which something is perceived without any act of fulfilment taking place. Most notably, one may perceive something that happens to be *F* without carrying out a conceptual act,

67 LI 6, 25, 737

or an act of meaning, that intends that object as an *F*. This occurs, for instance, when someone who does not have the concept '*F*' manages, despite that, to perceive an *F*. Numerous philosophers have alleged that this is impossible, or that this is simply another manifestation of the 'Myth of the Given.'⁶⁸ But consider an example given by John Campbell. Suppose that our descendants a millennium from now discover a teacup. They do not need to have the concept 'teacup' in order to perceive the teacup. Far from it — the unearthed artifact would, assuming our descendants are civilized enough to value knowledge of the past for its own sake, most likely be an object of deep curiosity and untamed speculation. But, as Campbell notes, 'Given the intense discussion it receives, it would be absurd to say that our descendants have not managed to "single it out."⁶⁹

It might be replied that our descendants have applied at least *some* concepts to the thing. For instance, they will certainly see that it is a material object, that it is an artifact, and so forth. All that, I think, is true. And arguably at least *some* of these concepts are necessary for singling out the teacup in the first place. For instance, someone who does not intend a perceived object as having hidden parts and sides arguably cannot even have a material object in view. But this does not establish what needs to be established. From the fact that at least some of the properties of the thing which are given are also meant, it does not follow that everything which is given is meant. But for there to be properties which are given but not meant is for the intuitive content of an act to outpace its conceptual content.

One might also object that this manner of describing things fails to capture what the world looks like from their point of view. In characterizing their perceptions as being of a teacup, it might be supposed, we are simply describing how the world would look if we, who possess the concept 'teacup,' were to have our sense organs stimulated in the same way that theirs are. However, since they don't have the concept 'teacup,' they cannot perceive the teacup as a teacup.

It is certainly, and trivially, true that without the concept 'teacup' our descendants would not be able to perceive it *as* a teacup. And this obviously marks an important difference between their experience and ours. However, even our descendants themselves would agree, once they acquired the concept 'teacup,' that this is what they had seen and wondered about all along. When they ask, 'What is this thing?' for in-

68 This expression is due to Wilfrid Sellars. See his *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1997)

69 John Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2002), 71

stance, they will not be asking for information about something other than what they see, nor will they be asking for assistance in singling out an object of perception. Rather, they are asking, of an *already* singled-out item, what it is. And that means that, *even on their own terms*, they do not have to possess the concept 'teacup' in order to perceive a teacup. We must accommodate the fact that one can legitimately wonder, of some object singled out perceptually, what in the world it is.⁷⁰

The charge that this account of perception is a version of the Myth of the Given, then, is true provided that this is taken to mean that there exists a type of intentional, nonconceptual content operative in perceptual experiences which plays an epistemically important, rather than merely causal, role in human knowledge. One very important point, however, is in order. The Myth of the Given is frequently presented as the thesis that there are mental states which have the following two characteristics: first, their existence presupposes no prior learning or concept-formation on the part of the subject whose mental states they are, and secondly, they constitute knowledge. As Gail Soffer points out, however, Husserl is by no means committed to the existence of anything satisfying both of these conditions.⁷¹ This is also true of the present account. On the present account, there is a sharp distinction to be drawn between mere intuition without conception, on the one hand, and fulfilment, on the other, which is a higher-order act involving both intuition and conceptualization. Only the latter is knowledge. And so the present account is compatible with the claim often advanced by opponents of the given that concepts are essential for knowledge.

Obviously there are numerous details of this revised Husserlian account of perception that require working out. Nevertheless, I regard it as a promising general account of how consciousness and its objects come into contact with one another, one that, moreover, preserves the most original and phenomenologically grounded elements of Husserl's theory of intentionality.

Received: January 2006

70 See A.D. Smith, *The Problem of Perception* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2002), 112: 'For to deny that we can perceive something without classifying it is to deny that a question such as 'What is that?,' uttered in a perceptual context, can ultimately have any meaning.'

71 See Gail Soffer, 'Revisiting the Myth: Husserl and Sellars on the Given,' *Review of Metaphysics* 57 (2003) 301-337, 305.

