

**Husserl's Mereological Semiotics: Indications,  
Expressions, Surrogates**  
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## Husserl's Mereological Semiotics: Indications, Expressions, Surrogates

### §1. Introduction

In their “Evolution of the Genus *Homo*,” anthropologists Ian Tattersall and Jeffrey H. Schwartz write that it is “symbolic consciousness that makes our species,” *Homo sapiens*, “unique.”<sup>1</sup> The closest they come to defining “symbolic consciousness,” however, is the following.

Human beings alone, it seems, mentally dissect the world into a multitude of discrete symbols, and combine and recombine those symbols in their minds to produce hypotheses of alternative possibilities. (“Evolution,” 83)

They “suggest” (84), furthermore, that it was “the invention of language, the ultimate symbol-dependent activity” (85) that led *Homo sapiens* to fully actualize its “symbolic capacity” (83). Though Tattersall and Schwartz do not tell us what symbols are, this appeal to language is enough to point the way. Symbols, at the very least, must be signs, or things that function like signs.

But what precisely are signs? For assistance on this point, we might begin with Jacques Derrida’s attempt to “describ[e] . . . the structure of signs as classically determined.” Signs, he says, are things that we use in place of other things. They stand in for something that we cannot access. To be a sign for something is to be its replacement or substitute.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Tattersall and Jeffrey H. Schwartz, “Evolution of the Genus *Homo*,” *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences* 37 (May 2009): 67–92, here 67. Henceforth cited as “Evolution.”

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Differance,” in *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129–60, here 138. *Speech and Phenomena* itself will be cited henceforth as *SP*. For the French original of *SP* (though not the “other essays”), see Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le Phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).

Whether or not this is the traditional understanding of signs, it *is* the one Derrida claims to find in the work of Edmund Husserl. “Every sign is a sign for something,” writes Husserl,<sup>3</sup> and this means—Derrida says—that being a sign means “‘being-for’ . . . in the sense of ‘being-in-the-place-of’.” Indeed, “reference” is a matter of “substitution” (*SP*, 23). To be a sign, for Husserl, is to be a stand-in for something else.

But is this, in fact, Husserl’s understanding of signs? Perhaps philosophers cannot settle the issue of whether “symbolic consciousness” is unique to humans, but we *can* help to clarify the phenomenology of signs. Let us, then, like Derrida, turn to the first of the *Logical Investigations*, where Husserl describes three types of signs. It will be my contention, contra Derrida, that we do *not* experience the relation between indicative signs and what they indicate, nor that between expressive signs and their referents, as relations of substitution. Rather, we experience these as mereological relationships. Only with surrogative signs do we have an experience that might match Derrida’s description of signs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, 2 books, ed. Ursula Panzer, Husserliana XIX (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1984); English translation: *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., trans. J. N. Findlay, ed. Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 1970). Henceforth cited as *Hua* XIX with German and English page references, respectively. (The English page references will include the volume number, since the page numbering starts over from “1” in v. 2.) I will modify Findlay’s translation by Americanizing the spelling, and will note the places where I have revised his translation for greater literalness. The quotation above is from *Hua* XIX, 30/1:183.

<sup>4</sup> I frequently employ the construction, “we experience *x* as *y*,” in what follows. To “experience *x* as *y*” is to intend *x* as *y* (whether that intention is fulfilled or empty), without this seeming to be an active interpretation on our part (that is, without it seeming to be something we have consciously chosen). Synonyms include, “*x* shows up for us as *y*,” “*x* appears to us as *y*,” and “*x* seems to us to be *y*.” Further, “we experience *x* as *y*” is meant to be a phenomenological claim, not an ontological claim about the nature of *x*.

This essay, though greatly expanded, is based upon, and employs material drawn from, the first chapter of: [Author], “[Title]” (Ph.D. diss., [University], 2011), published online—under [University]’s requirements for graduation—by UMI Dissertation Publishing/ProQuest.

## §2. Indicative Signs

In §1 of Investigation I, Husserl draws a distinction between indications (*Anzeigen*) and expressions (*Ausdrücke*). He does not begin his investigation of indications, however, until §2.

### a. *Investigation I, §2*

After providing a list of things that function as indications, Husserl tells us that things only are indications when they are experienced in a certain manner. This experience, Husserl says, involves two beliefs. The first is a belief that the indication itself—whether it be an “object” or a “state of affairs”—exists. The second is a belief that some other “object or state of affairs” also exists. Furthermore, Husserl says, when something is actually “functioning” as an indication, this is because the first belief “motivates” the second. That is, we believe that some other thing is actual *because* we believe that the indicating thing is actual (*Hua* XIX, 31–32/1:184).

The experience of something as an indication for something else does not involve two *separate* beliefs, however; rather, we have a single belief about the whole indicative situation.

[T]he ‘motivational’ unity of our acts of judgment has itself the character of a unity of judgment; and, therefore, in the judgment’s being a whole, an appearing objective correlate, a unitary state of affairs—which seems to be in it—is meant. (*Hua* XIX, 32/1:184)<sup>5</sup>

We should not take the terminological shift here, from “belief” to “judgment,” too strictly, given what Husserl says later. Our experience of an indication’s indicating something need not be

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<sup>5</sup> I have altered Findlay’s translation: “[T]he ‘motivational’ unity of our acts of judgment has itself the character of a unity of judgment; before it as a whole an objective correlate, a unitary state of affairs, parades itself, is meant in such a judgment, appears to be in and for that judgment.” The German reads: “[D]ie Motivierungseinheit der Urteilsakte hat selbst den Charakter einer Urteileinheit und somit in ihrer Gesamtheit ein erscheinendes gegenständliches Korrelat, einen einheitlichen Sachverhalt, der in ihr zu sein scheint, in ihr vermeint ist.”

“conceptual.” It is, or at least can be, much closer to simple perception, as if we “see” the indicated thing through the indication (*Hua XIX* 40–41/1:189–90; cf. 32–35/1:184–86). The point of the above quotation, then, is that in encountering an indication, we are actually encountering a single “state of affairs,” consisting of two parts: the indication’s “being given,” and the indicated object’s existing (though *not* its being given). These two parts, like the two parts of the complex “judgment,” are not separate. Rather, they have an “objective connection” in the former’s entailing (to speak loosely)<sup>6</sup> the later (*Hua XIX*, 32/1:184).<sup>7</sup>

b. *Investigation I, §4*

In §4, “Digression on the origin of indication in association,” Husserl claims: (a) to experience one thing as indicating another, one must experience the two as associated, and (b) to experience two things as associated is to experience them as unified, independently of any (lack of) objective unity created by their “essences” (*Hua XIX*, 35–36/1:186–87). Husserl’s argument, however, is not that two associated things are unified only because we take them together; rather, they are unified because association “operates creatively, and produces peculiar descriptive characters and forms of unity” (*Hua XIX*, 36/1:186–87). We experience the unity of two associated things as something that “forc[es] itself upon us,” rather than as something we introduce. When we experience two things as associated, thinking of one calls the other to

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<sup>6</sup> As Investigation I, §3 tells us, the way in which an indication points to (“hinweisen”) its indicated-object is not the same as the way in which premises point to (“beweisen”) conclusions.

<sup>7</sup> Alphonso Lingis writes: “A sign, really visible, audible, palpable, can refer to some real object, some event or entity present or absent in the world.” Alphonso Lingis, “The Signs of Consciousness,” *SubStance* 13, no. 42 (1984): 3–14, here 4. However, given the contrast here between what is given and what is not given, it would be more accurate to say: “The absence of what is indicated is necessary to indication; smoke is not a sign of fire when we see both the smoke and the fire. Indication is the paradigmatic case of something absent being intended by consciousness.” Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 112. Henceforth cited as *HM*.

mind—one “points to the other”—because they form an “intentional unity,” in which they “seem to belong” together, or to be “pertinent” to each other (*Hua* XIX, 36/1:187).

Husserl then takes up our experience of physical objects as an example in which we experience association. It is because we experience the parts of a physical object as associated with each other, and hence as “pointing to [one] another,” that we experience the thing (the whole) itself. The whole, as it were, hangs together in our experience because of the fact that we experience the various parts of the whole as “referring” to each other (*Hua* XIX, 36–37/1:187).<sup>8</sup>

Husserl then applies this to what we already know about indications. In both the case of empirical wholes, and in the case of indication, association between two (or more) things leads us to experience the two as unified into a whole, such that one points to the other. In other words, whenever we experience one object as indicating another, we experience the two as associated, and thus as forming a unified whole with each other, and thus as pointing to each other (*Hua* XIX, 37/1:187).

### §3. Results regarding Indications

#### a. *Wholes versus Aggregates*

Any object that—because of the type of object it is—cannot exist unless some other object of a specific type exists, is “founded” upon some object of that type (*Hua* XIX, 281–82/2:34). In Investigation III, Husserl uses this idea of “foundation” to define parts and wholes.

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<sup>8</sup> What Husserl says here, however, does not mean that we experience the parts, and then must synthesize them into a whole. It is, rather, that our experiences of empirical wholes do not splinter into separate experiences of individual parts (which “can be made to stand out as units” [*Hua* XIX, 36/1:187]) because we experience those parts as pointing to other parts within the whole, even when we allow them to stand out for themselves. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie der Arithmetik mit ergänzenden Texten (1890–1901)*, ed. Lothar Eley, Husserliana XII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), 195; English translation: *Philosophy of Arithmetic: Psychological and Logical Investigations with Supplementary Texts from 1887–1901*, trans. Dallas Willard, *Edmund Husserl Collected Works*, vol. 10 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 207. Henceforth cited as *Hua* XII with German and English page references, respectively.

“By a Whole we understand a range of contents which are all covered *by a single foundation* without the help of further contents. The contents of such a range we call its parts” (*Hua XIX*, 282/2:34).<sup>9</sup> The color, extension, and shape of one face of a die form a whole, for example, because each is founded on the other two. You cannot have a color that is unextended, nor an extension that is not shaped, nor a shape that is not colored. The four dots that form the square on that face of the die, however, only do so because they together found a “figural moment” of squareness; this is what makes them a whole (*Hua XIX*, 237/2:8, 284/2:35–36, 288/2:38, 293/2:40; see also, *Hua XII*, 201–5/213–17). Each could exist without the other three, but their configuration could not exist if any of them were not to exist. If two parts of a whole are independent of each other, therefore, they are only members of the same whole because they together found some third part (or because there is some third part that together with them helps to found a fourth part, etc.) (*Hua XIX*, 286/2:36–37).

While the connections between the parts of a whole have to do with the essences of the parts (even if, e.g., it is just that each part is “visible,” and thus together they enter into a visible configuration), the members of an aggregate can be of completely unrelated species. They unite within the aggregate simply because someone mentally intends them together (*Hua XIX*, 288–89/2:38). Here, we are dealing with Husserl’s understanding of groups, developed in *Philosophy of Arithmetic*: for two or more things to belong to an aggregate or group, some person must intend each individually, while intending all of them together in one mental act (*Hua XII*, 69–74/72–77). Insofar as this is all there is to a group, groups are not wholes. Only if all parts are connected by relations of foundation do we have an actual whole (*Hua XIX*, 289–90/2:38).

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<sup>9</sup> By “content,” here, Husserl means the same as “object” (*Hua XIX*, 231/2:5).

Now, our question is, “Were we right to maintain that the unity we experience between an indication and what it indicates is that of a whole, not that of a group?” One might think that the unity is that of a group, because Husserl insists that when we experience two things as associated, we experience them as unified even if the species to which they belong are not intrinsically related. However, association “operates creatively, and produces peculiar descriptive characters and forms of unity” (*Hua* XIX, 36/1:186–87), such that we experience associated things as “belonging” together, and “pertinent” to each other. Their unity is something that “forc[es] itself upon us” (*Hua* XIX, 36/1:187), not something we introduce by simply intending them together. Thus, Husserl’s description of the unity created by association does not fit his description of aggregates or groups. Furthermore, since the only other type of unity Husserl describes is the unity of wholes, we must conclude, on Husserl’s account, that we experience indications and what they indicate—since we experience them as associated—as being united in the manner of a whole. This conclusion is supported by Husserl’s appeal to our experience of the parts of physical wholes as being a paradigm case of the experience of association (*Hua* XIX, 36–37/1:187).

*b. Indications and Their Referents Experienced as*

*Parts within a Whole*

Husserl says, “Objects can stand to others in the relation of wholes and parts, or also in the relation of coordinated parts of a whole” (*Hua* XIX, 229/2:4).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, given that we experience an indication as forming a whole with its indicated-object, we have two possible

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<sup>10</sup> I have modified Findlay’s translation to eliminate a comma splice, make capitalization consistent, and hew more closely to the German: “Gegenstände können zueinander in dem Verhältnis von Ganzen und Teilen oder auch in dem Verhältnis von koordinierten Teilen eines Ganzen stehen.” Findlay has: “Objects can be related to one another as Wholes to Parts, they can also be related to one another as coordinated parts of a whole.”



explanations of this experience. Either (a) we experience one as the whole to which the other belongs, or (b) we experience the two as parts, united within some larger whole.

We must, I believe, reject option (a). A “knot in a handkerchief” is an indication of something to remember, but we do not experience it as itself a part of the thing to be remembered, nor do we experience the thing to be remembered as part of the knot. “Martian canals” are a sign of “intelligent beings” (*Hua* XIX, 31/1:184), but we do not experience them as part of those intelligent beings, nor do we experience the intelligent beings as part of the canals. The rooster’s crowing is an indication of sunrise, but we do not experience it as itself part of sun’s rising, nor do we experience the sun’s rising as part of the rooster’s crowing. Smoke is an indication of fire, but we experience it precisely as smoke: a product, but not a part, of fire.

Therefore, we must experience an indication and its indicated-object as being two parts within some larger whole. But how exactly are we to describe this union? Do we experience (a) the indication as founding the indicated-object (or vice versa), (b) each as founding the other, or (c) them both, together, as founding some third part?

If there is any “founding” going on in our experience of indication, it must have something to do with the “objective connection” we experience between an indication and what it indicates. Husserl writes that to encounter one thing as indicating another is to believe that “certain things”—namely, the object(s) indicated—“*may* or *must* exist, *since* other things”—namely, the indicating object(s)—“have been given” (*Hua* XIX, 32/1:184). That is, “*if* the indicating thing(s) have been given, *then* the thing(s) indicated may or must exist.” In the cases where we experience the connection as a “must,” therefore, we experience the existence of the indicated object as a necessary condition for the givenness (and, hence, existence) of the indication; we experience the indicated object as founding the indication. But the motivation we

experience between our beliefs in some experiences of indication only rises to the level of “may” (not “must”). What consequences do such experiences have for Husserl’s claim that the connections between parts must be that of foundation (and, hence, necessity)?

Here are the facts, as we have them: (1) Husserl’s description of our experience of indications in Investigation I is a description of an experience of a relation between parts within a larger whole, (2) Husserl admits that sometimes we experience the relation between indication and indicated object as falling short of necessity, and yet (3) Husserl claims in Investigation III that parts are united into wholes by relations of foundation, which involves parts being *necessary* conditions for other parts. That is, (4) there is an apparent conflict between Husserl’s description of our experience of indication in Investigation I, and Husserl’s description of parts in Investigation III. What are we to make of this?

First, we must note that Husserl is engaged in phenomenology in Investigation I, describing the *experience* of indications, while he is engaged in ontology in Investigation III, describing the *nature* of parts and wholes. Thus, there may be no ultimate conflict between saying that (a) we *experience* indications as united with their referents as parts within a whole, even if we sometimes *experience* the connection between them as falling short of necessity, and (b) *in themselves*, parts are connected with other parts into wholes necessarily.

Second, reality is often more complex or vague than any precise set of definitions, or any precisely formulated theory, can perfectly capture. Thus, we need not be surprised if Husserl’s attempt at formulating a theory of the nature of parts and wholes in Investigation III turns out to fall a bit short of completely capturing his phenomenology of our experience of indications in Investigation I. The phenomenology, if properly done, may get us closer to reality than the theory, even if the theory is generally adequate.

Third, in those cases where we experience the connection between the reality of the indication and the reality of its referent as falling short of necessity, this does not mean that we do not experience both as having a necessary connection to some third part. Take, for instance, our experience of the human body. The sight of a hand will motivate us to believe in the existence of an arm. However, we recognize that one can exist without the other. That is, if pressed, we will admit that the existence of an arm is not a necessary condition for the existence of a hand. The arm in question may have been completely destroyed, leaving only the hand behind. When the two are actually part of a whole, however, they do serve to found a third part: the figural moment, or overall arrangement, form, or shape of the whole to which they belong. Each is a necessary condition for that figural moment to exist. Thus, in those cases where we experience the connection between indication and indicated as being less than necessary, perhaps they help to found some third part of the whole to which we experience them as belonging.

And fourth, it may be that the experience of motivation leads us to experience the indication as founding the referent. We are not, after all, theoretically reflecting on the situation when we encounter one thing as an indication for another. “In the moment,” our belief in the reality of the referent is founded on our belief in the reality of the indication; the belief in the reality of the referent would not exist were it not for the belief in the reality of the indication. And since the whole of which the indication and referent are parts is showing up for us through those believing intentions<sup>11</sup> or experiences, we may experience the objects of those beliefs as similarly related by foundation.

Again, it is not as if we were engaged in reflection upon our beliefs and the fact that one is founding the other, and then inferring that this reflects the relation between the objects of the

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<sup>11</sup> My thanks to an anonymous commenter for bringing this formulation to mind.

beliefs. Everything is more immediate than that. We are experiencing (or “intending”) the two objects in a believing manner, and the part of this believing experience that is directed upon the indication founds the part of this believing experience that is directed upon the referent. Thus, our experience is structured such that the indication we are experiencing may show up for us as founding its referent. I offer this as a possibility, without being able to say with confidence that it would actually match a proper phenomenology of the experience of indications.

What we *can* say, in the end, is that Husserl has portrayed the experience of indication as an experience of the indication and its referent as being united as two parts within a larger whole, and that in at least some of these experiences we experience the referent as a necessary condition for (as “founding”) the indication. Investigation III’s theory of parts and wholes, therefore, is helpful in explicating Husserl’s phenomenology of indication, but we must leave open the question of whether that theory is fully adequate.

*c. Indicative Experience Grounded in Mereological Experience*

It would seem that we cannot experience one thing as an indication of another if we do not experience the two as parts within a whole. But can we experience two things as parts within a whole without experiencing one as indicating the other? Surely we can. A hand is not an indication of an arm unless the arm is absent (i.e., hidden by a wall, a sleeve, graveyard soil, etc.). If both the hand and arm are given, we would experience the two as associated, and as being two parts of a whole, and yet we would not experience either as indicating the other,<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Sokolowski, *HM*, 112. Sokolowski even argues that to experience any two things as associated, we must experience one as absent, while the other is present. Robert Sokolowski, *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 24. Henceforth cited as *PA*.

since our belief in each would be merely confirming our belief in the other, rather than giving rise to it through motivation.

Thus, our experience of things as parts united within wholes is “wider” than our experience of things as indicating and indicated. But when we do experience one thing as indicating another, do we experience them as indicating and indicated because we experience them as parts within a whole, or do we experience them as parts within a whole because we experience them as indicating and indicated? Husserl says that indication has its “origin in association” (*Hua* XIX, 35/1:186), and, as we saw above, when we experience things as associated, we experience them as being mereologically unified. Thus, while we can experience two things as united as parts within a whole without experiencing either as an indication of the other, we cannot experience two things as indication and indicated if we do not first experience them as associatively united within a whole. Our experience of indications depends on our experience of parts and wholes. Semiotic experience is grounded in mereological experience (at least insofar as indications are concerned).

#### d. *Preliminary Results regarding the Nature of*

##### *Signs*

Signs, we learned from Derrida, are substitutes or replacements. They are things that we use as present stand-ins for absent objects (“Differance,” 138). Though Derrida (*SP*, 23) claims to find this understanding of signs in Husserl, we have examined Husserl’s description of the experience of one type of sign, and found him to be describing an experience of the sign’s uniting with its referent as two parts within a larger whole. We do not find something to be absent, and then go looking for a replacement. Rather, we find something present, and discover that it motivates us to believe in something absent—something for which the present thing is not

experienced as a substitute but with which it is experienced as being unified as two parts within a whole.

Derrida argues that Husserl, in the end, believes all signs are indications (*SP*, 42), but the understanding of signs that Derrida attributes to Husserl does not match Husserl's understanding of how we experience indications. Whether it matches Husserl's understanding of how we experience expressions—the other type of sign to which Husserl devotes extensive study in *Investigation I*—we shall now see.

#### §4. Expressive Signs

##### a. *Investigation I*, §§5–9

What distinguishes expressions from indications is that they have a meaning (*Hua XIX*, 59/1:201; cf. 30/1:183), and thus Husserl's primary example of expressions are the signs used in "speech" (*Hua XIX*, 37/1:187). An expression obtains its meaning from "acts of mind" (*Hua XIX*, 39/1:189),<sup>13</sup> "and in so far as it means something, it relates [*bezieht*] to what is objective." This "relation [*Beziehung*] to an object is realized [*realisiert*]," however, only when the object meant by the expression is "actually present through accompanying intuitions"—intuitions that have the role of "confirming" or "illustrating" the expression "and so actualizing [*aktualisieren*] its relation to its object." Without such an intuition of the referent, the "relation of expression to object is . . . unrealized [*unrealisiert*] as being confined to a mere meaning-intention." Only when "the originally *empty* meaning-intention is . . . fulfilled" (i.e., when "the object is . . . intuitively before one") does the expression's "relation to [its] object [become] realized" (*Hua XIX*, 44/1:192).

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Hua XIX*, 38/1:188, where Husserl calls them "states," rather than "acts," and insists that they are not, in fact, the meaning of expressions. Cf. also *Hua XIX*, 44/1:192.

b. *Investigation I, §10*

In §10, Husserl says that the experience of expression falls into two basic kinds of mental acts: (a) the mental act(s) of experiencing the expression itself (e.g., seeing it or hearing it), and (b) the act of meaning something through the expression, as well as, perhaps, actually intuiting the object that is meant (*Hua XIX, 45/1:193*). However, if we are to properly describe the experience of an expression, we must note that some of its parts are more “weight[y],” obtrusive, or important than others. Specifically, when we experience an expression, we are primarily engaged not with the sign itself, but with enacting some meaning. Our mission (as it were) is not to examine the sign, but to mean the sign’s meaning (*Hua XIX, 45–46/1:193*).<sup>14</sup>

Husserl’s claim is that our emphasis on the act of meaning, rather than on the act of presenting the sign, is due to “the asymmetry [*Ungleichseitigkeit*] of the relation between an expression and the object which (through its meaning) it expresses or names” (*Hua XIX, 45–46/1:193*). In §9, Husserl only spoke of the relation between expression and referent insofar as it was given to an expression by its meaning-intention, and actualized by its meaning-fulfillment (*Hua XIX, 44/1:192*). In §10, we now learn the relationship between an expression and its referent is asymmetrical.

This does not mean, however, that the signs themselves are unimportant in our experience of expression. In fact, a hearer or reader is spurred to mean some referent by the words she hears or reads.<sup>15</sup> She is invited to join the speaker or writer in giving sense to the

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<sup>14</sup> Thus, we can understand why Levinas claims that expressions are like windows, for Husserl. We do not look at them, but instead look through them to some object beyond them. Emmanuel Levinas, “The Work of Edmund Husserl,” in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. and ed. Richard Cohen and Michael Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 47–87, here 59. Henceforth cited as “Work of Edmund Husserl.”

<sup>15</sup> What Husserl says here cannot be a description of the experience of an expression from the speaker’s or writer’s point of view. Husserl claims that when we hear or see an expression, this leads us to engage in a meaning-intention directed at some object, and to focus on that object. If this were a description of the speaker’s or writer’s

words, to participate in expressing the object to which the words point (*Hua* XIX, 46/1:193).<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Husserl argues:

Such pointing [*Hinzeigen*] is not to be described as the mere objective fact of a regular diversion of interest from one thing to another. The fact that two presented objects *A* and *B* are so linked by some secret psychological coordination that the presentation of *A* regularly arouses the presentation of *B*, and that interest is thereby shifted from *A* to *B*—such a fact does not make *A* the expression of the presentation of *B*. To be an expression is rather a descriptive aspect of the *experienced unity* of sign and thing signified [*der Erlebniseinheit zwischen Zeichen und Bezeichnetem*]. (*Hua* XIX, 46/1:193)<sup>17</sup>

Here, Husserl echoes his exploration of indication and association in Investigation I, §4. In our experience of both indications and expressions, we have something other than the fact that experiencing the sign brings the thing signified to mind. With indications, Husserl appealed to our experience of part-to-part relationships, and said that indications “point to” what they indicate and “provide evidence for” them (*Hua* XIX, 36–37/1:187). With expressions, Husserl does not appeal to part-to-part relationships, but does say that expressions point to their referents and that there is an “*experienced unity* of sign [expression] and thing signified [referent].” That is, the expression and referent are experienced as united into a whole.

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experience, Husserl would be saying that people first speak or write, and only subsequently mean or intend the objects about which they are speaking or writing. In the rest of §10, furthermore, Husserl continues to focus on the reader’s point of view.

<sup>16</sup> See Sokolowski, *PA*, ch. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Panzer notes (*Hua* XIX, 46, n. 1) that in the first edition of *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl had included the following clause at the end of the quotation’s final sentence: “genauer zwischen sinnbelebter Zeichenerscheinung und sinnerfüllendem Akt” (“more precisely, between the sense-activated sign-appearance and the sense-filling act [i.e., the intuition of the meant object]”). That Husserl deleted this clause for the second edition suggests that Husserl came to the conclusion either that it was not, in fact, a more precise way of putting the issue, or else that it was not a helpful way of putting the clause more precisely.



We can see that Husserl has the unity of a whole, not an aggregate, in mind here through his description of the hearer's passiveness in the experience. Hearing the expression "awakens" the hearer's meaning-intention, directed at the expression's referent. The expression can do this because it "points to" the referent, rather than being pointed to the referent by the hearer. Furthermore, as we just saw, we *experience* the unity of expression and referent (*Hua XIX*, 46/1:193), rather than experiencing ourselves as *imposing* a unity on the two (as with an aggregate).

We have, therefore, encountered two descriptions of the relationship between expression and referent in §10. First, Husserl said the relationship between expression and referent is "asymmetrical" (*Hua XIX*, 45–46/1:193). In this part of his discussion, Husserl seems to be focusing on the speaker's or writer's experience. Second, Husserl described an "experienced unity" between the expression and referent (*Hua XIX*, 46/1:193). In this part of the discussion, Husserl is focusing on the hearer's or reader's point of view. We, who are both writers and readers, hearers and speakers, therefore, experience the sign and referent as united into a whole, though we experience the relationship as being asymmetrical.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, though we experience the two as united, the relationship between them is "unrealized" if we do not have an accompanying intuition of the referent (*Hua XIX*, 44/1:192).

Since we experience the unity between an expression and its referent as the unity of a whole, we must now ask whether this is the unity of part with part or of part with whole. If we experienced the relation as that of a part to its whole, we would expect it to seem "asymmetrical," whereas, if we experienced the relation as that between two parts within a larger whole, we would expect it to seem "symmetrical." Therefore, our initial presumption must be

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<sup>18</sup> See pp. 25–26, below.

that—on Husserl’s account—we experience expressions as parts of their referents. To further explore this issue, however, we must turn to §§6 and 7 of Investigation VI, where Husserl once again takes up the subject of expressions and fulfillment.

*c. Investigation VI, §6*

To clarify the nature of what he calls “static” fulfillment in Investigation VI, §6, Husserl employs the example of an inkpot,<sup>19</sup> describing a situation in which the meaning-intention that animates the expression “my inkpot” is based on an intuition of the inkpot (*Hua* XIX, 558/2:201). In this example, we are dealing with an expression for the object itself, rather than with an expression of some property of the object. We are not bringing out the identity of some part of the object, but are instead bringing out the identity of the whole.

From the speaker’s point of view, the expressed object is both meant and present in “static” fulfillment. In such fulfillment, Husserl says, the expression “names the object of my percept,” “seems to *overlay* [“*legt sich . . . auf*”]” it, and “belong *sensibly* [*gehört sozusagen fühlbar*] to it” (*Hua* XIX, 558–59/2:201). He then, however, adopts a point of view from outside the experience. From that stance, we see that the expression is not ingredient in (a) the physical “context” to which the referent belongs, or the physical content of which the referent consists (*Hua* XIX, 559/2:201). Why, then, does it seem to us from inside the experience that the fulfilled expression “overlays” and “belongs to” its referent? It is because, in addition to the intuitions of the referent and the expression, there is a third act that joins them together. This is the act of

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<sup>19</sup> The topic of inkpots comes up also in §2 of Edmund Husserl, “Anschauung und Repräsentation, Intention und Erfüllung,” in *Aufsätze und Rezensionen (1890–1910)*, ed. Bernhard Rang, *Husserliana* XXII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979), 269–302; *Aufsätze und Rezensionen* henceforth cited as *Hua* XXII with German and English page references respectively. English translation: “Intuition and Repräsentation, Intention and Fulfilment,” in *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, trans. Dallas Willard, *Edmund Husserl: Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 313–44; henceforth cited as “Intuition and Repräsentation” and *Early Writings*, respectively. (We will study §3 of “Intuition and Repräsentation” below.)

“recognition,” in which the intuited object is seen to be the kind of object to which the intuited word refers (*Hua XIX, 559/2:201–2*). He concludes:

[I]n so far as the act of meaning is most intimately one with an act of classification, and this latter, as recognition of the perceived object, is again intimately one with the act of perception, the expression seems to be *applied* to the thing and to clothe it like a garment [*als dem Dinge aufgelegt und als wie sein Kleid*]. (*Hua XIX, 559/2:202*)

Standing outside the experiences in question, we see that our mental acts unite with each other. Within the experience, this unification gives rise to the expression’s seeming to be lain out upon the object like its clothing.

What, however, is the nature of this experienced relation between expression and referent? We have already seen that hearers and readers experience expressions as mereologically united with their referents. More specifically, it seemed that we experience the expression as a part of the referent. Now we can say the same seems to be true for those who experience the fulfillment of expressions, given Husserl’s talk of expressions seeming to “overlay,” “belong sensibly to,” be “applied to,” and “clothe” their referents. Husserl’s description portrays the unity as being too intimate for an aggregate. We experience the sign and referent as fitting together of their own accord, as it were, rather than experiencing ourselves as imposing unity upon them. We must experience the unity, then, as that of a whole. Furthermore, as before, the relation appears asymmetrical, with the referent being more substantive, and the expression being more like adornment (which, nevertheless, fits the referent like a glove). These descriptions, once again, seem to match the experience of a part’s unifying with its whole, rather than that of two parts uniting into a larger whole.

d. *Investigation VI, §7*

In §7, Husserl turns to the examination of words that refer to the properties of objects, rather than referring to the identity of objects. He writes that when we recognize something as red, the word “red” does not simply refer to the color property of the object, but rather “names” the object itself “as red.” Furthermore, it does not just belong to the color of the object, but “it belongs to this object” because of its color (*Hua XIX, 561/2:203*).<sup>20</sup> We can explain this as follows.

The property Husserl uses in his example—red—is the type of part that Husserl calls a “moment.” That is, it is founded on other parts of the whole to which it belongs. Such a part cannot be recognized without also noticing the whole to which it belongs (*Hua XIX, 246/2:13–14*). When, therefore, we are struck by some red, and recognize it as red, we cannot help but recognize it as belonging to some larger whole. Thus, though we experience the word “red” as belonging to the red property we see, we also experience it as belonging to the object that is red.

Husserl takes up this issue of “belonging” next, repeating a familiar theme.

We observe first that the word does not attach externally, and merely through hidden mental mechanisms, to the individual, specifically similar traits of our intuitions.

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<sup>20</sup> In this regard, see the following passage from Husserl’s unpublished essay, “Zur Logik der Zeichen (Semiotik),” in *Hua XII, 340–73*; henceforth cited as “Logik der Zeichen” with German and English page references respectively. English translation: “On the Logic of Signs (Semiotic),” in *Early Writings, 20–51*. “Any proper name is a direct sign, any general name is indirect. In fact, the general name designates the object under mediation of certain conceptual marks. The adjective ‘red’ directly designates being-red (including the abstractum red as a metaphysical part), which, precisely, can then serve as the signitive mark for the object itself—although other conditions must be added in order to make the designation univocal. All multivocal signs which connote a determinate range of multivocality are indirect; for such a connotation can only come about through a general mark or property, which thus mediates between the sign and the designated.

“In the case of indirect signs it is necessary to distinguish: that which the sign signifies (bedeutet) and that which it denotes (bezeichnet). With direct signs the two coincide. The signification of a proper name, for example, consists just in the fact that it names precisely this determinate object. With indirect signs, on the other hand, there are intermediaries between the sign and fact; and the sign designates the fact precisely through these intermediaries, which therefore constitute the signification. . . . [T]he signification of the general name, for example, consists in this: that it denotes some object on the basis of and by means of certain conceptual properties which the object possess” (“Logik der Zeichen,” 343–44/23). (The essay is from 1890 or 1891; “On the Logic of Signs (Semiotic),” 23, n. 1.)

It is not enough, manifestly, to acknowledge the bare fact that, wherever such and such an individual trait appears in our intuition, the word also *accompanies* it as a mere pattern of sound. A mere concomitance, a mere external going with or following on one another would not forge any internal bond among them, and certainly not an intentional bond. Yet plainly we have here such an intentional bond, and one of quite peculiar phenomenological character. The word *calls* the thing red. The red appearing before us is what is *referred* to by the name, and is referred to as ‘*red*’. In this mode of naming reference, the name appears as *belonging* [*gehörig*] to the named and as *one* with it [*und mit ihm eins*]. (*Hua* XIX, 561/2:203).

The unity, in other words, between the word for a property of some object and that property itself is not the unity of an aggregate. It is much more intimate, involving “belonging” and being “one.” But if we experience the expression as “one with” a property of an object—that is, a part of an object<sup>21</sup>—and as also belonging to the object as a whole, surely we must also experience the expression as a part of the object.

#### e. *The Original Passage*

Behind Investigation VI, §§6 and 7, lies a portion of Husserl’s unpublished essay (of ca. 1893),<sup>22</sup> “Intuition and Repräsentation” (*Hua* XXII, 269–302/313–44). In §3 of that essay, Husserl describes the experience of seeing an object that has a property, of recognizing that property, and of explicitly identifying the property in question using the appropriate predicate.

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<sup>21</sup> Husserl writes: “Every non-relative ‘real’ (*reale*) predicate, therefore points to [*weist . . . hin*] a part of the object which is the predicate’s subject: ‘red’ and ‘round’, e.g., do so, but not ‘existent’ or ‘something’” (*Hua* XIX, 231/2:5).

<sup>22</sup> For the date of this essay, see *Early Writings*, 313, n. 1.

When recognizing a property of a perceptually-present object brings its name to mind (*Hua XIX*, 286/329), Husserl writes:

My impression is completely as if the word *overlay* [*aufgelegt*] the named in the manner of a quality, in accordance with the intended (signified) Moments, and in fusion with them [*mit diesen verschmolzen wäre*]—wholly as a tactile quality appears to suffuse [*überziehen*] a visual object, in that *it* is, as it were *fused* with certain visual Moments (glossiness, roughness, and the like). (*Hua XIX*, 286/330).

What we see here is Husserl describing the experience of an expression uniting with its first and immediate referent (the property to which it refers) as an experience of (a) two parts uniting within the whole to which that referent belongs, and (b) the expression uniting with its mediate referent (the object to which the property belongs, and which the expression “names” as so propertied) as a part with its whole. This latter he describes as an experience of the expression’s “overlying” its mediate referent like a “quality” (i.e., a property).

Husserl’s discussion in “Intuition and Repräsentation,” §3 of how a word for a property seems to “overlay” the object to which its referent belongs is recapitulated in Investigation VI, §§6 and 7. The terminology in the earlier passage of an expression’s “overlying” an object is repeated in Investigation VI, §6, but in reference to an expression of the type of object in question (rather than of some property of the object). The discussion of expressions for properties can then be found in Investigation VI, §7. Where Husserl had said in “Intuition and Repräsentation,” §3, that the expression seems to “fuse” with the property to which it refers, he says in Investigation VI, §7, that the expression seems to be “one with” that property.

## §5. Results regarding Expressions

### a. Recapitulating Our Results

We can summarize what we have seen as follows.

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>1</b>	“Intuition and Repräsentation,” §3	Expression for property of object	names object	seems to overlay object	seems to “fuse” with property	seems like part of object
<b>2</b>	Investigation VI, §6	Expression for type of object	names object	seems to overlay object	?	seems “to belong sensibly” to object
<b>3</b>	Investigation VI, §7	Expression for property of object	names object	?	seems to “belong to”/ be “one with” property	?

Table 1

The accounts in the three passages we have studied are basically the same. First, Husserl’s account of expressions that refer to the properties of objects does not seem to have changed between “Intuition and Repräsentation” and *Logical Investigations*. The difference between E1 and E3 above seems to be a matter of synonymy, and we can fill in F3 with “seems to be part of object,” on the strength of E3. (If something seems to “belong to” and be “one with” some property of an object, then surely it also seems to be part of the object. After all, it seems to

belong to and be one with something that is a part of the object.) Then, given the other parallels, we would seem justified in filling in gap at D3 with “seems to overlay object,” from D1.

But what of line 2? The gap at E2 cannot be filled in. The expression refers not to any property of the object, but to the object itself. However, we should explain the difference between F1 and F2 as simply another case of synonymy. First, Husserl does not seem to draw much of a distinction (other than the obvious one at E2) between using an expression to refer to an object’s property and using an expression to refer to an object’s identity. Second, Husserl’s emphasis on the asymmetrical mereological unity we experience between expressions and their referents fits the part-to-whole relation better than the part-to-part relation. And third, what else could “*x* seems to belong sensibly to *y*” (*Hua* XIX, 558–59/2:201) mean—especially given that we experience the two as mereologically united—other than “*x* seems to be a property or part of *y*”?

In general, therefore, Husserl thinks of our experience of the relation between expressions and their referents in terms of an experience of a part’s being united with a whole. When we are referring to the identity of an object, the expression refers directly to this whole. When we are referring to some property of an object, the expression refers indirectly to this whole. In either case, the whole to which the expression seems to belong is on the side of the referent. With indications, in contrast, we experience both the indication and its referent as parts of a larger whole that belongs neither to the sign-side, nor to the referent-side, of the relationship. It seems, as it were, distributed equally across the relationship.

#### b. *Generalizing Our Results*

In the analysis above, we saw Husserl describing both the experience of hearers and readers, as well as the experience of speakers and (perhaps) writers. Likewise, we also saw him



describing the experience of static fulfillment. Are we justified in generalizing our results such that they apply equally to the experience of hearers and readers, and to the experience of speakers and writers? Likewise, are we justified in generalizing our results such that they apply equally to the experience of static fulfillment and dynamic fulfillment? Finally, are we justified in generalizing our results such that they apply not only to fulfilled expressions, but also to unfulfilled expressions? The answer to each of these questions, I would argue, is “yes.”

First, a speaker is—unless deaf or in some otherwise unusual situation—always also a hearer, as Derrida has pointed out (*SP*, ch. 6). To speak is also to hear oneself speak. Much the same can be said for the writer. For instance, as I type this essay, I am also automatically reading what I type. Furthermore, to hear or read is to join with the speaker or writer in giving meaning to the expressions used, by engaging in meaning-intentions directed at the referents of the expressions. Thus, the speaker and hearer are both hearing the same words—or the writer and reader are both reading the same words—and giving meaning to them by engaging in meaning-intentions aimed at their referents.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, an expression has a relation to a referent for both speaker and hearer, writer and reader, it has this relation because of the meaning given to it by our meaning-intentions as either speaker or hearer, writer or reader, and this relation is realized or actualized in the experience of fulfillment for both speakers and hearers, writers and readers. Thus, Husserl’s mereological analysis of the experience of expressions for a hearer or reader should apply just as well to the experience of expressions for a speaker or writer.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Husserl writes that static fulfillment is equivalent to “the lasting outcome” of dynamic fulfillment (*Hua XIX*, 567–68/2:207). That is, both dynamic and static fulfillment

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<sup>23</sup> See *Hua XIX*, Investigation I, §7 and 46/1:193 (cf. §8), and Sokolowski, *PA*, ch. 10.

<sup>24</sup> On the *differences*, see §6, below.

end up amounting to the same thing. Thus, Husserl's analysis of the experience of expressions relative to static fulfillment should apply just as well to the experience of expressions relative to dynamic fulfillment.

Finally, Husserl says that fulfillment "actualizes" or "realizes" the relation between an expression and its referent, but that relation is still there, in an unactualized or "unrealized" state, outside of fulfillment. The experience of fulfillment "confirms" the relationship that was already present (*Hua XIX*, 44/1:192). Furthermore, his description of our experience of the relation between expression and referent as being one of asymmetrical unity is presented as holding outside fulfillment (*Hua XIX*, 46/1:193). Thus, Husserl's mereological analysis of the experience of fulfilled expressions should apply as well to our experience of expressions outside fulfillment.

### *c. Standardizing Our Results*

It would seem, then, that Husserl thinks of our experience of the relationship between expressions and their referents in terms of the experience of the relationship between parts and their wholes. However, in the passages we saw above, the whole in question was sometimes the immediate referent of the expression (when expressions referred to the identity of an object) and sometimes the mediate referent of the expression (when expressions referred to some property of an object). In the latter cases, do we experience the relationship between the expression and its *immediate* referent (the property in question) as a relationship between two parts (the expression and the property) within a whole (the object), or as a relation between a part (the expression) and its whole (the property), which is, in turn, a part of a larger whole (the object)?

Husserl does not attempt to answer this question, perhaps because his ultimate goal was to explore the nature of meaning (see Investigation II) and rationality (see Investigation VI), rather than to provide a thorough examination of expressions. The basically mereological nature

of our experience of expressions was clear enough, so Husserl could move on to what, for his purposes, were more pressing issues. Since we are trying to clarify and develop Husserl's understanding of signs, however, we need to make explicit and consistent what Husserl left implicit and ambiguous. Thus, whether or not Husserl recognized this, a full and consistent *Husserlian* semiotics will have to claim that we experience the unity between all expressions and their (immediate) referents as a unity between parts their wholes, for the following reasons.

(1) On Husserl's account, our experience of the relationship between an expression and its referent must differ from our experience of the relationship between an indication and its indicated-object. Otherwise, we would experience the two types of sign in the same way, and would not experience them as different types of sign. That is, we would experience both as indicating their objects, or both as meaning their objects.

(2) Furthermore, the relationship between an expression and its referent must be the same, no matter what type of referent is in question. Otherwise, the relationship between some expressions and their referents would be different from that between other expressions and their referents; some expressions would "point to" their referents in different ways than other expressions "point to" theirs. And this would mean that some expressions are not expressions, but some other type of sign.

(3) Some passages in the *Investigations* imply that we experience the relationship between an expression and its referent as a relationship between a part and its whole, and yet others—let us call them "problem passages"—can bear the reading that we experience the relationship between an expression and its referent as a relationship between two parts within the larger whole to which the referent physically belongs.

(4) However, we could read the “problem passages” as follows. We can say that we experience an expression (e.g., “red”) and its referent (e.g., some object’s property of redness) as being two parts that belong to the object to which the referent belongs (e.g., some red object), *and* say that we also experience the expression as a part of its referent (e.g., “red” as part of the object’s redness). After all, a part of a part is also a part of the whole to which the part belongs (*Hua* XIX, 274/2:30).

(5) Reading the “problem passages” in this way would allow us to explicate and develop a Husserlian theory of signs in a way that is consistent with both (1) and (2) above.

*d. Do We Experience Expressions as Moments or Pieces?*

A consistent Husserlian semiotics, therefore, will hold that we experience an indication as united with what it indicates as two parts within a whole, and an expression as united with its referent as a part with its whole. In §3b, above, we asked how far Husserl’s explicit mereological theory from Investigation III was capable of accommodating the phenomenology of indications, and discovered that it was useful, but may not be fully adequate. It is now time we ask the same question with regard to our experience of expressions. Specifically, can we say whether we experience expression signs (1) as being founded by one or more (non-sign) parts of their referents, (2) as founding one or more (non-sign) parts of their referents, or (3) as, together with one or more (non-sign) parts of their referent, founding some other part of their referents?

We can eliminate option (2) immediately. We do not experience any (non-sign) part of the referent as founded upon the expression. I experience the Eiffel Tower as having already been there with all its physical parts when I first recognize it for what it is, and call it by its name. I do not experience any of its parts as depending for its existence on the name I use.

We are left, therefore, with options (1) and (3). In option (1), we experience the expression as a moment of the referent—that is, as a part that cannot exist without some (non-sign) part of the referent existing to found it. It is difficult to imagine, however, how such a hypothesis could explain the functioning of expressions for non-existent or imaginary objects. Could we experience something that exists—the expression we speak or write—as being founded on the existence of something that we do not experience as existing? This seems unlikely to me. Might it be that when we have a prior belief that something is non-existent or imaginary, we must imaginatively intend it (for the moment) as existing to be able to speak of it?

Given these questions, the most promising hypothesis may be option (3). In it, we experience the expression as a “piece” of its referent. It is “separately presentable” (*Hua XIX*, Investigation III, §6) and yet we experience it as part of its referent. This would mean, however, that we experience it as helping to found a “moment of unity” with some part(s) of its referent (see *Hua XIX*, Investigation III, §§21–22).

If indeed we experienced expressions as pieces of their referents, what would we make of Husserl’s claim that “an expression’s meaning . . . pertains to it essentially” (*Hua XIX*, 42/1:190) and that “[r]elational talk of . . . ‘meaning’ and ‘object’ belongs *essentially* to every expression” (*Hua XIX*, 56/1:199). If we experience expressions as pieces of their referents, do not we experience them as being essentially separable from their referents, rather than, as it were, as being essentially tied to a meaning and a referent?

The answer to this question is that to experience something as an expression, we must experience it as having a meaning, and thus as being directed to some referent. However, the “expression physically regarded (the sensible sign, the articulate sound-complex, the written sign on paper etc.)” only takes on a meaning, and hence a referent, because it is animated by the

sense-giving mental acts of some subject (*Hua XIX*, 38/1:188). Independent of those acts, the expression is a mere physical mark (e.g., an “arabesque” [*Hua XIX*, 115/1:161]), an object (e.g., a chunk of marble carved, or pieces of metal molded, into the shape of a word), or a sound. To experience something as an expression is to experience it as having a meaning, and hence a referent, and yet as being something whose physical side could exist independently of that meaning, and separately from that referent. Likewise, to experience something as a piece is to experience it as a part of a whole, and yet as being something that could exist independently of, and separately from, that whole. It is part of the essence of a piece, *qua* piece, that it be a part of a whole, and yet it is possible for a piece, as a whole of its own, to exist independently of, and separately from, any larger whole.

Finally, there is a case to be made (see Appendix I) that we experience expressions as being parts of their referents in a way that the basic distinction between “moment” and “piece” (*Hua XIX*, Investigation III, §17) may not fully capture. That is, it may be that Investigation III’s theory of parts and wholes must be expanded or nuanced to account for types of part that it currently overlooks or conflates with moments and pieces. If this were the case, it would be but another instance of the freedom of the phenomenologist, whose job it is to be faithful to the phenomena, rather than to any particular theory. Investigation III’s theory of parts and wholes may be the first word in mereology for the phenomenologist, but it need not be the only word.

*e. Expressive Experience Is Grounded in*

*Mereological Experience*

Setting aside for the time being the question of whether we experience expressions as parts in the sense of moments, in the sense of pieces, or in some other sense, we return to the basic fact (if the account above is correct) that we experience expressions as parts of their

referents. But do we experience an expression as a part of its referent because we experience it *as* an expression of its referent, or do we experience the two as expression and referent because we experience one as a part of the other? And, furthermore, can we experience anything as a part of some other thing without experiencing one as an expression and the other as its referent?

We may answer the last question first. It is clear that our experience of things as parts of wholes is much wider than our experience of things as expressions of referents. I experience the whiteness of the paper as a part of the paper, but not as an expression of it. I experience the wheel of a car as a part of the car, but not as an expression of it. Experiencing something as a part of something else is not a sufficient condition for experiencing it as an expression of that thing (see Appendix 1, below). The mereological aspect of our experience of expressions, however, is a necessary condition of that experience, as we will now see.

We asked above whether (a) we experience an expression as a part of its referent because we experience it *as* an expression of its referent, or (b) we experience the two as expression and referent because we experience one as a part of the other. Husserl seems to choose the latter option, at least for readers and hearers. As readers and hearers, expressions point to their referents because we first experience them as united with their referents. And it is only because of this experienced unity and pointing that we take the thing in question as an expression—as something meaningful—infusing it with meaning through a meaning-intention (*Hua* XIX, 46/1:193). Thus, the reader or hearer's expressive experience is grounded in mereological experience. To experience something as an expression of some referent, one must first experience the two as united in the manner of a whole.

I believe we should say the same of the speaker's or writer's experience of expression, though Husserl himself does not mention it in *Logical Investigations*. There will, furthermore, be

a kind of reversal compared to the hearer's or reader's experience. While a reader sees marks on a page, and a hearer hears sounds, that point him or her to some object, a writer does not usually start making marks, nor a speaker usually start making sounds, and then find them directing him or her to a referent. One does not normally find oneself talking or writing, and then have to figure out what one is talking or writing about. One normally has something about which one wishes to say something and then begins to talk or write.

Nevertheless, writers and speakers will experience the expressions they use as pointing to their referents because they experience the signs and referents as united with each other in the manner of a whole. A writer or speaker will have a referent in mind, experience it as united with one or more expressions, and have to select from among those expressions the one(s) that seem(s) fitting, or appropriate, to what she or he wants to say.<sup>25</sup> This, however, will usually not be a matter for deliberation; normally, it will happen automatically, "by feel." In the usual case, we find that what we want to say immediately fits one or more of the expressions we experience as united with the object, and, without really thinking about it, select those that we find fitting. (We have, however, all had the experience of wanting to say something about an object, of being unable to find "the right word" for it, and then, perhaps, of finally finding it.)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This seems to echo the following. "A name is used referentially when we speak to someone else about the thing named; our words bring his mind to the subject. A name is used evocatively when we refrain from addressing someone else, when we let the name simply hold the object in focus for our own exploration. In evocation we invite the named object to suggest its appropriate words, and so become truthful, in us, but we do not speak to anyone" (Sokolowski, *PA*, 5). Cf. Sokolowski, *PA*, 71–72, 89–90, and Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 120. Henceforth cited as *PHP*.

The idea that using signs is a process of making choices between signs was introduced to me (I believe) by John R. Pierce's discussion of Claude Shannon's information theory: John R. Pierce, *An Introduction to Information Theory: Symbols Signals and Noise*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1980); see, e.g., 42, 61–62; Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998). The idea was later reinforced for me by Robert Sokolowski.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Bennett L. Schwartz, *Tip-of-the-Tongue States: Phenomenology, Mechanism, and Lexical Retrieval* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002). The idea that words can be fitting not only to an object (see Husserl's discussion of fulfillment in Investigation I, §§9–10) but also to a meaning-intention, and that



It seems to me, then, that something like the following usually occurs. One sees a ball, wishes to inform someone of its color, and experiences it as being united with sounds like “ball,” “sphere,” “orange,” and “rubber.” If one is in an “everyday” context, one will be more likely to select “ball” than “sphere,” and thus to say something like, “This ball is orange.” However, if one is in the context of a physics or engineering class, one might be more likely to select “sphere,” and say, “This sphere is orange.” Alternatively, if one wishes to inform someone else of the material of which the ball is made, one will select “rubber” instead of “orange,” and say, “This ball is rubber” or, “This sphere is rubber.”<sup>27</sup>

In any event, encountering or using something as a meaningful sign—that is, as an expression—will depend on our experiencing it as mereologically united with its referent. The meaning-intention that gives it sense may be awakened by the experience of it as mereologically united with some referent (for readers and hearers) or may have to “search out” a fitting mark or sound from among those we experience as mereologically united with the referent (for writers and speakers). However, in either case, our experience of something as a meaningful expression will depend upon our experiencing it as mereologically united with some referent. As with indications, in other words, expressive experience is grounded in mereological experience.

#### *f. Intermediate Results regarding the Nature of*

##### *Signs*

Is Derrida’s understanding of signs as present replacements for absent objects adequate to account for our experience and employment of expressions? The answer, we can now say, is,

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finding the right word for what one wants to say can be seen as a kind of fulfillment, I owe to Robert Sokolowski. (Cf. his discussion of “the unnamed” in *PHP*, 154.)

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Sokolowski’s discussion of having to choose the appropriate words for one’s interlocutor (*PA*, 5–6).

“Not if we are following Husserl.” What we have found in *Logical Investigations* simply does not match what Derrida claims to find there. Our experience of both indicative and expressive signs is grounded in mereological experience, not in the experience of substitution and replacement.<sup>28</sup>

## §6. A Unified Account of Indications and Expressions

Readers of Investigation I could be forgiven for coming away with the impression that indications and expressions may both be called “signs,” but that there is ultimately no unity to the genus *sign*. Indications are not expressions, nor expressions indications, but what exactly makes them both specifications of a single generic essence is unclear. Derrida’s theory that being a sign—of whatever type—for something means standing in for that thing, does the reader the service of suggesting that perhaps there *is* a unity to the genus. The theory I have been expounding above—arguing that it is the theory implicit in Husserl’s discussion of indications and expressions—likewise argues that there is a unity to the genus *sign*. For one thing to be experienced as a sign for something else—and thus for it to *be* a sign of something else (*Hua* XIX, 31–32/1:184, 46/1:193)—is grounded in the thing’s being experienced as mereologically united with that other thing. The distinction between the two main categories of signs, then, is grounded in the differing ways in which we can experience the sign and its referent as mereologically united.

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<sup>28</sup> Gadamer writes: “In the earliest times the intimate unity of word and thing was so obvious that the true name was considered to be part of the bearer of the name, if not indeed to substitute for him.” However, “Belief in the word and doubt about it constitute the problem that the Greek Enlightenment saw in the relationship between the word and thing. Thereby the word changed from presenting the thing to substituting for it.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2006), 406. Henceforth cited as *TM*. If Gadamer is correct, Derrida propounds the later understanding of signs, while Husserl reveals the phenomenological motivation behind the original understanding.

To this point, we have been engaged primarily with static descriptions of the experience of indication and expression. However, we have also employed some dynamic analyses, and it is time we gave this approach its full due. In doing so, the unity of the genus *sign* will come out in a new and striking fashion.

a. *The Receiver's Experience of Indications and Expressions*

Husserl argues that our experience of indications grows out of our experience of associations between things. In this experience of association, we experience indications and what they indicated as united in such a way that we can experience one as indicating the other. I would suggest that something similar occurs in the case of expressions. Association, or something like association<sup>29</sup> (informed by our experiences of other expression-like things; see Appendix 1) leads us to experience expressions and their referents as unified in such a way that we can encounter the expressions as referring to their referents.

So, in both our experience of indications and our experience of expressions, we begin from an experience of the sign and its referent as unified, and this motivates a certain belief (in the case of indications) or awakens a meaning-intention (in the case of expressions). How, precisely, should we describe the shift from experiencing a sign as united with its referent, to taking it as an indication of that referent, or to infusing it with a sense such that it now *means* that referent? The shift, if it occurs, will usually happen so quickly that it may be difficult to tease apart the two stages. However, I suggest that it would involve moving from the vague awareness that the two are united in the manner of a whole, to the more distinct awareness of the sign and referent as two parts of the same whole, or of the sign as a part of the referent.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sokolowski's discussion of association eliciting vocalization in *PA*, 3–4.

To clarify these claims, it would be helpful to understand the hearing of a spoken, or “vocal,” sign, as falling into five stages.

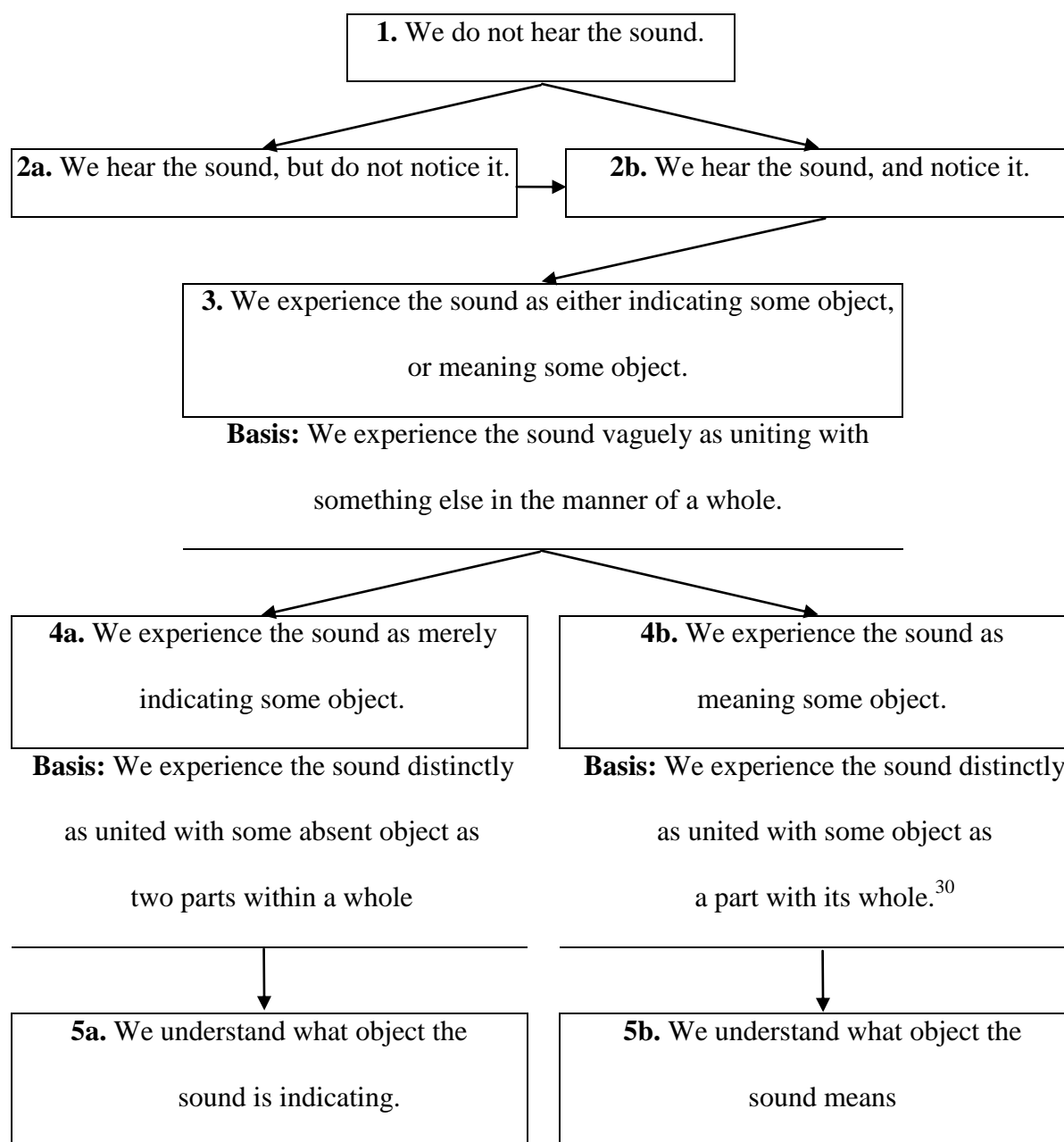


Figure 1.

I believe that Figure 1 lays out the basic structure of our experience of vocal signs. Since we can and do sometimes find ourselves called up short at any one of the stages listed in Figure

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix 1, below, for a fuller description of this experience.

1, we must say that each is part of the experience of vocal signs at least potentially. However, various stages often will be “combined” with others, as when we hear and notice the sound simultaneously,<sup>31</sup> or when in noticing the sound we can immediately tell that it is a word (an expression) not a mere noise (an indication).

Let us examine a concrete example. Walking down the street, we hear a shout. If we are deeply absorbed in something else, it might take a moment for the sound to register. In any case, it does, and we have moved from stage 1 to stage 2b.<sup>32</sup> The shout is indistinct, however, and we cannot tell at first whether it is an inarticulate cry of alarm, or perhaps some word or other. Thus, we become temporarily stuck at stage 3. In stage 3, we experience the sound as mereologically united with something else, but it is ambiguous whether this is the unity of two parts within an overarching whole, or that of a part with its whole.

After a moment, it sinks in: what we have just heard is a word; perhaps it had too many syllables, or the wrong kind of consonants, to be a mere vocal outburst. Whatever the case, we have moved to stage 4b. “Beneath” this move is a shift to experiencing the mereological unity between the sound and the other indeterminate thing as that between a part and its whole.

However, what kind of word we have just heard remains unclear. Was it a name, an instruction, a question, etc.? It then clicks: what we have heard is a name. Evidently, the person is calling out to someone else; we experience the sound as a part of some person, even if we do

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<sup>31</sup> See Husserl’s discussion of attention in Investigation V and Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, red. und hrsg. Ludwig Landgrebe (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985), 24, 28, 79–84, etc.; English translation: *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, rev. and ed. Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. James Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 30, 33, 76–79, etc. Henceforth cited as *EU* with German and English page references, respectively. There is a discussion somewhere in Husserl’s writings of hearing a sound before becoming aware of it, and then realizing that one was already hearing it.

<sup>32</sup> For an example of being stuck at stage 2, see *Hua* XIX, 398/2:105.

not know whom. We have moved to stage 5b. The type of whole (i.e., “person”) to which we experience the sound as belonging is now clear.

In contrast, imagine that we are walking down the street and hear a noise. Our attention is immediately drawn to it, so we move from stage 1 to stage 2b. However, we are unsure at first whether it is was a human voice or the sound of machinery (or something to that effect). Thus, we become stuck at stage 3. In stage 3, once again, we experience the sound as mereologically united with something else, but it is ambiguous whether this is the unity of two parts within an overarching whole, or that of a part with its whole.

Then, perhaps we hear an identical sound, and it becomes clear that what we have now heard twice is something inorganic. Thus, we move to stage 4a, taking it to be part of the working of some machine. “Beneath” this move is a shift to experiencing the mereological unity between the sound and the other indeterminate thing as that between two parts within an overarching whole.

Finally, we realize that what we are hearing is the sound of squealing truck brakes (or train whistle, etc.). Thus, we have moved to stage 5a. The type of part to which we experience the sound as being united (within the overarching whole) becomes clear.

If, in Figure 1, we change “sound” to “sound or mark,” and “hear” to “hear or see,” we can generalize the figure to cover cases of reading, in addition to cases of hearing. But what are we to say about the speaker’s or writer’s (the “signer’s”) experience?

*b. The Signer’s Experience of Indications and Expressions*

I would offer the following as an illustration of the unity of the signer’s dynamic experience of indications and expressions.

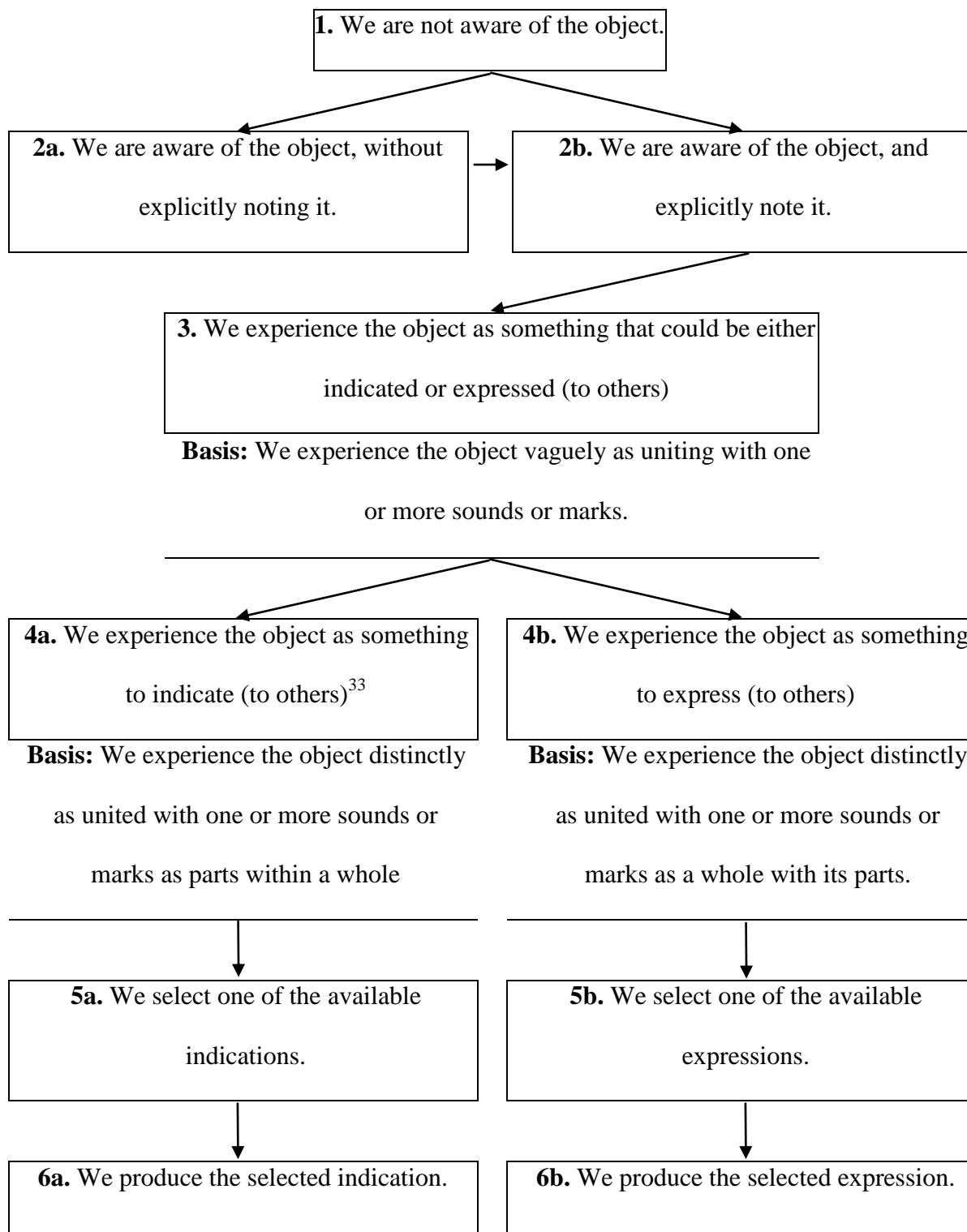


Figure 2.

<sup>33</sup> We, unfortunately, do not have space here for exploring the role that others play in our experience of a thing as to-be-indicated or -expressed. See Sokolowski, *PA*, 5–11, 33, 35; *PHP*, 40, 58–65.

I believe that Figure 2, above, lays out the basic structure of our experience of signing (producing indications or expressions). Like Figure 1, various stages will often be “combined,” as when we become aware of and explicitly note an object simultaneously, or when in discovering that the object is something to be indicated we simultaneously select and produce an indication for it. But since we can and do find ourselves called up short at any one of the stages listed in Figure 2, we must say that each is part of the experience of signing at least potentially.

The main question to answer regarding to Figure 2 is how it happens that we end up taking the object as something to indicate, rather than as something to express. This, surely, is not a choice about which we usually deliberate. Rather, it is, in the normal case, something we find ourselves as already having made. I believe the answer comes down to what we might call “distance.” Sokolowski argues that to *name* something, rather than merely indicating it, we must take a certain distance to it, implicitly understanding it as maintaining its identity (and nameableness) across both its presence to, and absence from, us (*PA*, 27–30.). To take something as something to indicate, on the contrary, requires no such distance.

This difference in “distance” is reflected by the mereological nature of the situation. When we experience something as to be expressed, we experience it as a whole, standing over against us (as the object of our primary intention). We experience the sign we (will) produce as belonging to it, but the referent remains in its place, “there,” across from us. When we experience something as something to be indicated, however, we experience it as a part of a larger whole to which we experience the sign we (will) produce as also belonging. The whole is not the central object of our intention, and thus not something “there,” over against us. Rather, it seems to be something overarching, including both the referent “there” and the sign “here.” The whole seems to hang over our heads, as it were, as we focus on one of its parts (the thing to be



indicated) and produce the other (the indication). Our experience is something like being caught up in that whole, and not being given space to think and speak articulately. So, we cry out instead (see Sokolowski, *PA*, 24–27; *PHP*, 31).

*c. Conclusion*

The theory I have attempted to expound above provides an account of our experience of indications and expressions that is unified in two ways. In its static analysis, it explains the experienced connection between sign and referent for both indications and expressions using a single framework: that of mereological experience. In its dynamic analysis, it explains how mereological experience allows our encounters with, or employment of, indications and expressions to grow, or branch out from, a single stem.

The account I have provided, though schematic, will provide scaffolding for elaborations and complexifications as the further work is done (see Appendices 1 and 2 below). Furthermore, it has advantages over two of the primary alternatives. The first, adopting a straightforward reading of Investigation I, states that there are two types of signs, one based on motivation and the other on meaning. This reading, while accurate, makes no attempt to explain the unity of the two species of signs within the broader genus *sign*. The second, adopting Derrida's reading of Investigation I, states that all signs are substitutes, and there is, ultimately, only one type: indication (*SP*, 42). This reading, while inaccurate, does attempt to give a unified account of all signs. The theory expounded here, I believe, has the strengths of both alternatives, while remedying their weaknesses.

## §7. Surrogative Signs

Although discussions of Husserl's theory of signs typically focus on indications and expressions, Investigation I also alerts us—almost in passing—to a *third* type of sign. Husserl's summary treatment of “surrogative” signs in §20, however, masks their importance to his early philosophy of mathematics and logic. Thus, any fully developed Husserlian semiotics will eventually have to take them into account.

### a. *Investigation I, §20*

In the opening of §20, Husserl is concerned his reader will misunderstand what it means to mean objects in their absence. When our referent is absent, our expressions do not take on a “surrogative function [*stellvertretenden Funktion*]” such that they now stand in for their referents (“für irgendetwas surrogierten”) as the focus of attention. Indeed, Husserl says, “Signs are . . . not objects of our thought at all, even surrogatively [*in stellvertretender Weise*]; we rather live entirely in the consciousness of meaning, of understanding” (*Hua XIX, 73/1:210*).

Given this passage, it is surprising that Derrida would claim that to be a sign, for Husserl, is to be a present substitute for an absent referent. However, the rest of §20 shows Husserl does recognize one class of sign that seems to fit Derrida's substitutionary theory. After calling attention to his discussion of mathematical signs in *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, Husserl writes, “In arithmetical thought mere signs genuinely do duty for concepts [*surrogieren doch wirklich die bloßen Zeichen für die Begriffe*]” (*Hua XIX, 74/1:210*). They do this because the rules of “the game of calculation” give them a “games-meaning [*Spielbedeutung*]” (in addition to their “original meaning”) (*Hua XIX, 74/1:210–11*). This he likens to “bits of ivory and wood” taking on “games-meanings” in chess, because of “the game's rules” (*Hua XIX, 74/1:210*). Thus, he says, “signs taken in a certain *operational or games-sense* [*Operations oder Spielbedeutung*] do

duty [*surrogieren*] for the same signs in full *arithmetical* meaningfulness [*arithmetisch bedeutsamen Zeichen*]<sup>34</sup> (*Hua XIX*, 75/1:211).

There are, therefore, two types of surrogation or substitution going on with arithmetical signs. When we are engaged in calculation, the mathematical signs we are using function as surrogates for “concepts” (e.g., for numbers [*Hua XII*, 81/85, 222/235]), and for themselves in their normal sense (e.g., when we take them as signs for numbers) (*Hua XIX*, 74–75/1:211–11).

#### b. *Final Results regarding the Nature of Signs*

It is particularly relevant for our purposes here to note Husserl’s insistence on the difference between taking signs in a surrogative, “games-meaning” fashion, and taking them in the normal, meaningful, way. Even in arithmetic, where signs usually function in a surrogative fashion (*Hua XII*, 257–58/272–73), they have this function because they first were designed to function in a non-surrogative fashion (*Hua XIX*, 237–39/251–53, 257–59/271–74). Furthermore, their essence as surrogative signs is not exhausted in their replacing the numbers they once represented. Rather, having done so, they now function as something like “counters in the . . . game” governed by rules that connect them with other signs (*Hua XIX*, 74/1:210–11).

Given such facts, Mirja Hartimo argues that when we treat a sign as having a “games-meaning,” we are treating it neither as an indication, nor as an expression (“*Spielbedeutungen*,” 76). However, Hartimo claims, this means “Husserl’s own architectonics” of signs in *Logical Investigations* fails to accommodate surrogative signs (“*Spielbedeutungen*,” 76). If this were true, it would make it even harder to believe Derrida’s claim that for Husserl, *all* signs are ultimately surrogative signs. But is it true?

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<sup>34</sup> Findlay emphasizes both “arithmetical” and “meaningfulness,” but Husserl only “arithmetisch.”

When a sign begins to function surrogatively, its primary function ceases to be referring us to its referent. To be a surrogative sign, therefore, is in a sense, to have ceased to be a sign, and to have become something much more like a chess piece or other game token (*Hua* XIX, 74/1:210). And yet, the sense of having been a proper sign remains as part of our experience of surrogative signs. The original meaning is “sedimented,” as J. Phillip Miller has argued, within such signs.<sup>35</sup> Miller’s argument, furthermore, is supported by psychological research showing that people who have lost the ability to deal with numbers also lose the ability to work with numerals, even when those numerals should be functioning surrogatively.<sup>36</sup> The original number reference is evidently still there, operative however vaguely and in the background, even as the numerals have taken center stage. Therefore, if that background reference is completely eliminated, we find the numeral no longer makes sense; it becomes unusable.

How are we to explain this experience of the surrogative sign’s having taken pride of place from its original referent, and yet still being somehow connected with its referent such that it only makes sense in light of its referent? I would suggest we begin as follows. The relationship between a surrogative sign and its referent seems to have been flipped, or inverted. The sign, which is meant to direct attention away from itself to the referent, now stands in for the referent. The sign, rather than the referent, has become our main object. It occupies the center of our

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<sup>35</sup> J. Phillip Miller, *Numbers in Presence and Absence: A study of Husserl’s Philosophy of Mathematics*, *Phaenomenologica*, no. 90 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), 80. Cf. Ilka Diester and Andreas Nieder, “Numerical Values Leave a Semantic Imprint on Associated Signs in Monkeys,” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 22, no. 1 (2010): 174–83.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Butterworth, “Numbers in the Brain,” in *What Counts: How Every Brain Is Hardwired for Math* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); “Foundational numerical capacities and the origins of dyscalculia,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, Special Issue: “Space, Time and Number” (2010): 1–8; Rochel Gelman and Brian Butterworth, “Number and language: How are they related?,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 9, no.1 (January 2005): 6–10. (My thanks to Prof. Marcus Giaquinto, University College London, for introducing me to this topic in general, and to Butterworth’s work in particular.)

attention, while its referent hangs on at the fringes of consciousness. This is, if not the mirror image of how we experienced the original sign-referent relationship, something very close to it.

Let us assume, then, that our experience of the original relationship between a numeral—the type of sign Husserl seems to have most in mind when discussing surrogation—is, in essence the same as our experience of the relationship between expressions and their referents. (After all, Husserl refers to “arithmetical signs” as originally having “arithmetical meanings” [*Hua* XIX, 75/1:211] and it is expressions, not indications, that have meanings.) If, then, the relationship between the sign and its referent is inverted when we take the sign surrogatively, we would now say: we experience the (present) *sign* as the whole, and its (absent) *referent* as a mere part. If this is correct, it would help to explain our continued experience of a “sedimented” connection between the sign and its referent, even as we experience the original connection as having been radically altered, such that the sign now stands in place of its referent.

This interpretation of our experience of surrogative signs would neatly round out our mereological understanding of Husserlian semiotics. To experience one thing as an indication of another is to experience the two as united as two parts within a whole. To experience one thing as an expression of another is to experience the former as a part, and the latter as that part’s whole. To experience something as a surrogative sign is to experience it as a whole to which its original referent belongs as a part. This would cover all three basic mereological relationships: part-to-part, part-to-whole, and whole-to-part.

But perhaps this would be a little too neat. Perhaps further study of the nature of surrogative signs would reveal that surrogative signs’ standing in for their referents cuts off any relationship between them that we might experience in a mereological fashion. Even if this were the case, however, we could still explain surrogative signs mereologically. We would simply

need to shift our focus from the relation between the signs and their original referents, to the relations between the signs themselves. If we do this, we discover the following.

We experience surrogative signs as signs for each other, when properly combined and arranged. For example, we experience “ $2 + 2$ ” (or, at least “ $2 + 2 =$ ”) as a sign for “4.” The givenness of the complex sign “ $2 + 2$ ” (or “ $2 + 2 =$ ”) indicates to us that there exists some solution numeral that is not currently given. Likewise we experience “ $2x + 4 = 8$ ” as a sign for “2.” Once again, the givenness of the complex sign “ $2x + 4 = 8$ ” indicates to us that there exists some solution numeral that is not currently given.

On this analysis, to be a surrogative sign would involve being a sign that has a sedimented sense like that of expressions, which we currently experience as functioning with the mereological structure of indications. We would experience surrogative signs as being initially parts of the wholes that were their *original* referents, but now as being parts (when arranged in the appropriate way) that are united with their *new* referents as parts within the same whole. Our experience of surrogative signs, then, would combine our experience of a sedimented part-to-whole relationship with our experience of a current part-to-part relationship.<sup>37</sup> This would, likewise constitute a “rounding out” of our mereological theory.

It would require another essay to fully explore surrogative signs and test the above proposals. Until then, I must speak tentatively, though I believe the first proposal has merit, and am confident in the second. If either were confirmed, this would mean our experience of even the type of sign that seems to fit Derrida’s description is fundamentally mereological, enabling us to provide an ultimately unified account of all three types of sign recognized by Husserl.

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<sup>37</sup> This is true of expressive experience as well (see Appendix 1, below), but in a different way.

## §8. Conclusion

We began with comments from a pair of anthropologists who claim that being properly human boils down to a capacity for working with “symbols.” To better understand what symbols are, we turned to Derrida’s interpretation of signs as substitutes—an interpretation he claimed to find in Husserl. We have since seen, however, that a consistent Husserlian theory of signs would actually present our experience of signs as grounded in mereological, rather than substitutional, experience. The only possible exception to this rule involves our experience of surrogative signs, but even these, I suggested, should be understood in mereological terms.

What I have tried to provide is a consistent, unified, mereological account of all three types of sign recognized by Husserl in Investigation I, and to do so—as much as is possible—on Husserl’s own terms. I may have to settle ultimately for a mereological account of indication and expression alone, but even this would constitute a significant step forward in understanding the unity of Husserlian semiotics. Furthermore, it would (1) make it possible to provide a fuller account of the genesis of semiotic experience out of our more fundamental, or “primal,” engagement with the world and its part–whole structures,<sup>38</sup> and (2) provide a means for better understanding human nature, if being human fundamentally involves being engaged with signs.<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, the theory expounded above should provide a new direction for research and debates about the relation between the cognitive abilities of humans, nonhuman animals, and machines. If an animal or machine is incapable of the types of mereological experience that

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<sup>38</sup> For some initial steps in this direction, see Appendix 1. See also the genetic phenomenology of judgment in Husserl’s *EU*. Sokolowski writes: “Two formal structures are everywhere present in Husserl’s philosophy: the contrast . . . between absence and presence, and the relationships between wholes and parts. Other formal structures, like . . . [the] relationship of sign and the signified, are defined with the help of the first two” (*HM*, 8).

<sup>39</sup> Even if there is more to being human than this alone; see Derek C. Penn, Keith J. Holyoak, Daniel J. Povinelli, “Darwin’s Mistake: Explaining the Discontinuity between Human and Nonhuman Minds,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31 (2008): 109–30, here 121–22.

ground semiotic experience, then it would be incapable of encountering and employing signs, as much as it might seem to act in a semiotic fashion. More specifically, if an animal or machine were incapable of experiencing the type of mereological experience necessary for experiencing expressions, we would be able to conclude that it was incapable of encountering or employing language *qua* language.

Scientists who study animal behavior, neurology, and cognition would surely be able to design experiments for teasing out the nature of animal's mereological experiences (assuming, as I do, that many species have such experiences).<sup>40</sup> Computer cognition, however, is another issue. It is difficult for me to believe that computers understand the signs they encounter, but others seem to have no such difficulty.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps progress in this debate might be made by asking whether computers encounter the signs with which they function in terms of parts and wholes. If they do, perhaps they can encounter some of those signs as expressions, and hence, perhaps they can understand some of them. If they do not, however, there would be no point in asking if they could understand the signs they encounter, since they would not be able to encounter them as signs.

It is my hope, then, that the semiotic theory sketched above will provide impetus for a renewed interest in Husserl's understanding of signs, a deeper investigation of the phenomenology of signs, and a more nuanced exploration of human, animal, and artificial cognition.

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<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, however, I can find no scientific literature that even examines the issue (though this may be simply because I have been looking in the wrong places).

<sup>41</sup> See John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 (1980): 417–24, with commentary and response (424–57). To settle this debate would require, at the very least, a more complete phenomenology of what exactly it means to experience one thing as a part, and another as a whole, than we have been able to provide here (see, e.g., Sokolowski, *HM*, chapter 1).



## Appendix 1: Elaboration on the Character of Expressive Experience

To experience one thing as an expression for another, we must experience it as a part of that other. And yet there must be more to our experience than this, or we would encounter everything that seems to us to be a part of some whole as being an expression for that whole. This Appendix will attempt to give a more thorough account of exactly what it is that we must “add,” as it were, to our experience of one thing as part of another in order to experience that thing as an expression of the other.

### a. *Five Traits of Expressive Experience*

What exactly is distinctive about our experience of expressions? First, we experience an expression as a kind of bridge between at least two wholes, because we experience it as being simultaneously a part of both wholes. The first whole is the referent to which the sign belongs. The second whole is constituted by the expression and the meaning-intentions of the subject who uttered or wrote it. Husserl says that the two are “phenomenally one with” each other “in the consciousness of the man who manifests them” (*Hua XIX*, 37/1:188). (This, I would argue, is connected with the phenomenon of finding an expression fitting for what one wants to say.) Hearers and readers also experience this whole, since the expression indicates to them the meaning-intention that animates it (*Hua XIX*, 39/1:189).<sup>42</sup>

Second, we experience expressions as parts that we can make present at will, even when the object itself is absent.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, consider the nature of a “normal” part. Here in North

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<sup>42</sup> But not to the speaker or writer, since the speaker or writer is engaged in those meaning-intentions, and hence they are not absent (*Hua XIX*, 43/1:191).

<sup>43</sup> This fact is related to Derrida’s claim that signs have typically been understood as present replacements or substitutes for absent referents, along with his emphasis on the will in expression (*SP*, 32–36). See also Sokolowski, *PA*, 25: “The sound is part of an attempt to make the object present, at least in fantasy. I bring about the

America, I cannot make any of the four legs of the Eiffel Tower physically present, and yet I can make the auditory analogue of, “the Eiffel Tower,” present whenever I wish, simply by speaking.

Third, we experience each expression as a part that can be essentially identical to an infinite number of other parts of the same whole.<sup>44</sup> We do not experience a chicken’s foot as being potentially identical with an infinite number of other parts of the same chicken, and yet we experience “rooster” as being essentially identical with “rooster,” “rooster,” and “rooster,” etc., which could all just as well be expressions for (i.e., seem to be parts of) the same chicken.

Fourth, we experience many expressions as potentially belonging simultaneously to an indefinite number of wholes. After all, I could take the “rooster” in, “The rooster is a bird,” as an expression for all roosters at once. Any rooster’s left foot, however, could only be a part of at most one rooster, or perhaps two (e.g., in the case of conjoined twins), at any given time.

And fifth, we experience expressions, in fulfillment, as belonging to and uniting with their referents. Husserl describes this as the sign’s “clothing” its referent (*Hua* XIX, 559/2:202). However, we also experience expressions as directing attention away from themselves to their referents in such a way that they (the expressions) cease to be the center of focus (*Hua* XIX, 45–46/1:193). The spoken sound fades away,<sup>45</sup> and the written sign is no longer seen, as our attention is directed toward the referent. Thus, in fulfillment, the expression seems to disappear (although it is retained in memory). These two aspects of our experience—the expression’s

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items associated with the object which are in my power to bring about—and the sound is always mine to make—in the hope that the object will come too.”

<sup>44</sup> This is a point brought out by Derrida’s (*SP*, 41, 49–52, 57; cf. 6, 9–10) and Gadamer’s (*TM*, 394) talk of signs and “repetition” and Sokolowski’s discussion of consonants (*PA*, 68–69). Also, “When no one is saying the word ‘lamplight,’ it falls into a kind of latent existence; but when it is said again by someone, it returns as the very same word that was said before by him or by another speaker. It is not a similar word, but the same one” (Sokolowski, *PA*, 65).

<sup>45</sup> “Spoken words are almost insubstantial” (Sokolowski, *PHP*, 185). See, once again, Levinas on the window-like nature of expressions (“Work of Edmund Husserl,” 59).

seeming to be united with its referent, and its seeming to disappear—lead the experience of fulfillment to be an experience in which the expression seems to soak into, or be absorbed by, its referent.<sup>46</sup> But this requires further discussion.

b. *Elaboration on the Fifth Trait*

In fulfillment, the expression “fuses” (*Hua* XXII, 286/339), or is one (*Hua* XIX 561/2:203), with its referent, clothing (*Hua* XIX 559/2:202) and overlaying it (*Hua* XIX, 558–59/2:201). However, since it directs attention away from itself and toward its referent, it fades away or slips from view. I suggest this experience of unity, in which one part seems to disappear, amounts to an experience of the referent’s seeming to absorb the sign. The predicate seems to soak into its referent, and thus to be a part of it.

As an illustration, I suggest the following exercise. Looking directly at a physical object in your vicinity, correctly identify it, but apply an incorrect predicate. For example, looking at a white wall, you might say, “This wall is orange.” Then, repeat the sentence, but this time employing both the correct identification and the correct predicate. Go back and forth between the two sentences a few times, keeping your eyes fixed on whatever you are describing.

You will notice, I believe, a certain tension whenever you predicate of the object falsely, and a certain relief of tension when you predicate of it correctly. The incorrect predicate will feel unfit, as if it does not belong.<sup>47</sup> It will seem to hang in the air, as if rejected by the thing of which you are predicating, while the correct predicate will seem to disappear, as if it had been accepted and absorbed by the thing of which you are predicating.

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<sup>46</sup> And the relation we experience in fulfillment as being “actualized,” we experience as being there, though “unrealized” even outside of fulfillment (*Hua* XIX, 44/1:192; see p. 26, above). This, furthermore, would be true no matter to what type of object we find ourselves referring (see Appendix 2, below).

<sup>47</sup> This is the experience Husserl calls “frustration [*Enttäuschung*]” (*Hua* XIX, 574/2:211).

Once you have noticed the difference between the experiences of the two sentences, you will also begin to notice that the tension you feel regarding the incorrect sentence does not actually arise until the moment you reach the incorrect predicate. The part of the sentence involving the identification of the object will feel fitting. If you are looking at a brown chair, and say, “This chair is yellow,” only the “yellow” (or perhaps the “is yellow”) will feel as if it hangs in the air. The beginning of the sentence, “This chair,” will seem to fit, and soak into, the object.

Similarly, you might look at a table, and identify it as a television, but correctly describe its shape. You might listen to a fan, correctly identify it as a fan, but incorrectly describe its sound (it actually hums, but you use the predicate “chirp”). Or, you might incorrectly identify it as a microwave, but correctly describe its sound. Or, you might both correctly identify it and correctly describe its sound. In going back and forth between these various versions of a sentence, you will experience different parts seeming to be accepted and rejected, to be absorbed and to hang in the air, to be fulfilled and frustrated.

What is going on here? We are experiencing various levels of harmony and conflict between the object as we are intending it through the expression and the object as we are experiencing it perceptually. The experienced conflict leads to the erroneous part of the expression becoming prominent, drawing attention to itself, and remaining a center of focus, rather than directing attention away from itself. That is, when we experience a conflict between the object as perceived and the object as expressed, we also experience a second conflict between how the expression is functioning and how it is supposed to function. The expression is failing to express the object, and thus to direct attention away from itself. It is failing to achieve its telos, and in this failure is drawing attention to itself. This is why it seems to hang in the air, rather than being absorbed by its referent.

In contrast, when we experience harmony between the object as we perceive it and the object as we are expressing it, the expression we use seems to fit the referent, and to direct attention away from itself to the referent. The referent becomes the center of focus, and the expression fades out of our immediate perception (we cease to hear the words, or read the words, as we focus on the referent) and toward the periphery of consciousness. In this combination of fitting and fading, we have the experience of the referent as accepting or absorbing the expression.<sup>48</sup>

I have emphasized fulfillment here because it shows the relation between expression and referent in its full actuality. It is a matter of teleology; we see most fully what a thing is in its achieving its telos.<sup>49</sup> However, this relation is still there, in “unrealized” form, even outside fulfillment (*Hua* XIX, 44/1:192, 46/1:193).<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, we have seen how we can experience an object as absorbing parts of our expression, but rejecting others. This leads us to the issue of complex expressions, with which we will deal in Appendix 2.

### *c. Other Things that Seem Like Expressions*

To experience something as an expression is to experience it as a part of its referent, and this, I have been arguing, is to experience it (at least in fulfillment) as being absorbed, as it were, by its referent. A significant amount can be said to make the latter claim sound less exotic. Let us begin with the five traits of the experience of expressions that we identified earlier.

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<sup>48</sup> This, it seems to me, is true even if the referent itself also fades away. It still remains closer to the center of attention in retentional consciousness than does the expression-sign.

<sup>49</sup> See Francis Slade, “On the Ontological Priority of Ends and Its Relevance to the Narrative Arts,” in A. Ramos, ed., *Beauty, Art, and the Polis* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press/American Maritain Association, 2000), 58–69, here 58–59.

<sup>50</sup> See, once again, p. 26, above.

First, we experience expressions as parts that simultaneously belong to two wholes; the first whole is the referent of the sign, while the other part of the second whole is the meaning-intention that animates the sign. Second, we experience expressions as being parts that can be made present at will, even in the absence of their wholes. Third, we experience expressions as being parts that are identical with a potentially infinite number of other parts of the same whole. Fourth, we experience at least some expressions as potentially being parts of an indefinite number of the same kind of whole simultaneously. And fifth, we experience expressions as being united with their referents, even while they disappear—that is, they seem to be absorbed by their referents—when we bring them to fulfillment.

Now, we might ask, are there any other things that seem to share the above five attributes? Take food and drink, for example. These are things that, in becoming a part of a person or animal, disappear into, and seem to be absorbed by, that person or animal. This matches (to some extent) the fifth attribute of expressions. Furthermore, we spend our lives eating and drinking the same things repeatedly. This matches (to some extent) the third attribute of expressions. It is even the case that we experience one thing becoming part of multiple persons in sharing food and drink with others. This matches (to some extent) the fourth attribute of expressions. Many foods and drinks, furthermore, are intentional creations, and thus indicate for us the intentional acts of their creators. In experiencing them as indicating these intentions, we encounter them as related to the objects of those intentions; cake and champagne are “for,” or “represent,” celebration, while other foods (e.g., turkey or beer, in contemporary America) are “for,” or “represent,” family or community. This matches (to some extent) the first attribute of expressions. The only attribute which food and drink do *not* seem to match in any way is the second; we cannot make food present at will.

Our experience of air and breath is similar to that of food and drink. Breathing involves the repeated (similar to attribute three) taking in of air (similar to attribute five), and usually occurs at will (similar to attribute two), although the almost immediate exhalation of the air no doubt leads us to experience breathing as something less than the continual taking on of new, though basically identical, parts. However, we have the experience of breathing the same air as other people (similar to attribute four), and can even experience air's being, to some extent, an intentional creation (similar to attribute one), when we experience the fresh air let in by a deliberately opened window, the cool air created by someone's "turning down the thermostat," or the warm air created by someone's "turning up the thermostat."

Then we have things like creams, makeup,<sup>51</sup> jewelry, and clothing (the last of which Husserl himself uses to describe our experience of expressions). We experience these as parts of ourselves to a certain extent. Creams disappear into us (similar to the fifth attribute of expressions), makeup does not, but *is* absorbed into the skin, and jewelry and clothing are not absorbed (except in the case of jewelry for piercings, perhaps), though the extent to which we become distressed when certain articles are lost or damaged shows just how much we experience them as parts of ourselves.<sup>52</sup> We, furthermore, apply these things day after day, wearing the same clothing, jewelry, makeup, or cream over and over (similar to the third attribute of expressions). We find other people applying the same creams, makeup, jewelry, and clothing (similar to the fourth attribute of expressions), and as "trying to say something" about themselves in so doing (similar to the first attribute of expressions). However, we do not experience creams, makeup, and clothing as things we can make present at will.

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<sup>51</sup> Tattersall and Schwartz call "bodily decoration" like makeup "a hallmark of modern humankind" ("Evolution," 81).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. John Locke on one's property's being a part of one. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), §26, 19.

And then there is the part-whole relationship between our lives and the experiences or events we constantly add to them. They become a part of our lives, even as they slip into the past and disappear (similar to attribute five of expressions). We have the cyclical or repetitive nature of the day, the week, the month, the season, and the year, with repeated events within the calendar like weekly religious meetings or liturgies, or yearly festivals, holidays, and birthdays.<sup>53</sup> In these, we are adding new parts to our lives that are the same as many other parts (similar to attribute three). And communal participation in events leads one and the same event to become a part of many different lives (similar to attribute four). Through memory, furthermore, we have a way of making these parts present again at will, in a certain way (similar to attribute two), and we experience many as being intentional creations, and thus as having an “object,” purpose, or “meaning” (similar to attribute one).

Likewise, we experience facts (e.g., that the sun rises in the east, that the ball is in the corner, or that four is two more than two) as, in a sense, becoming part of our minds, though they “disappear” from present consciousness into long-term memory (similar to attribute five of expressions). Furthermore, we experience the same facts as becoming parts of an indefinite number of other minds (similar to attribute four), and perhaps in relearning things, or remembering things with difficulty, we even have the experience of a things becoming part of our minds over and over again (similar to attribute three). Likewise, in remembering or recalling things with ease, we have the experience of making a part of our minds present again at will (similar to attribute two). We even experience some facts as being intentional creations or choices, and thus as having an object or meaning in some sense (similar to attribute one).

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<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Gadamer, *TM*, 120–21.



d. *Ground and Context for Expressive Experience*

It is, I would propose, the fact that our lives are suffused with experiences of the above types that allows us to experience expressions. In our early months and years, we become familiar with things that are intentional creations or are intentionally chosen, that seem in some instances to be presentable at will, that seem to be repeatable and to be able to belong to multiple wholes at once, and that seem to be parts that disappear into that of which they are parts. As we develop a greater and greater familiarity with such things, we become more and more able to experience and employ things as expressions, and with greater and greater ease.

This does not mean, however, that we experience the various things listed above *as* expressions. We simply experience them as being similar to expression, and as our familiarity with them grows, we are laying the groundwork and context for our experience and use of expressions themselves. Without our experiences of the things described above functioning as a kind of background, it would be much more difficult, and perhaps impossible, for us to grasp “what is going on with” expressions.

**Appendix 2: Elaboration on the Many Types of Expressions**

There are many different types of expressions. Is it possible to understand them all as parts of their referents? Husserl’s primary examples, unfortunately, are only two: using a noun to name what an object is, and using a noun to name a property of some object (or to identify an object as being so propertied). He has not, in the passages we have read, given us a study of other types of expressions. However, he appears to think of nouns of other varieties as names (*Hua* XIX, 45–46/1:193, 54–55/1:198, 558–59/2:201, 691/2:292), and there is no reason that we cannot expand the Husserlian theory beyond Husserl’s explicit statements.

I see no problem, for example, with understanding proper names as naming people, verbs as naming activities, adverbs as naming ways of engaging in activities, and adjectives as naming ways of being a thing.<sup>54</sup> Prepositions, likewise, may name relationships.<sup>55</sup> After all, a statement's categorial structure is filled by the structure of its object (*Hua* XIX, 671/2:280).<sup>56</sup> But what of syncategorematics like “the,” “if,” “whether,” and “every”? I suspect we would have to say that they are parts of expressions, rather than expressions themselves, just as letters are parts of words, but not words themselves (excluding cases like “a” and “I,” in English, or “y” and “o” in Spanish).

All of these issues are complex, and would require a much longer essay to explore. However, the general principle I would propose is that we experience the various types of words employed in expressions either (a) as parts of their referents, and thus as being themselves fulfilled or frustrated (absorbed or rejected) by their referents, or (b) as affecting or influencing the fulfillment or frustration (absorption or rejection) of other words within the expression, and thus as being fulfilled or frustrated (absorbed or rejected) along with those other words. (Perhaps type (b) words are not complete expressions, but form complete expressions in conjunction with type (a) words.)

What, then, of entire sentences? To be consistent, I believe we would have to say that we experience each part of a sentence that can itself be called an expression as being a part of whatever it refers to. In, “The cow is white,” we experience “The cow” as a part of the cow, and

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<sup>54</sup> “The noun, in its more elementary forms, names an individual, a group, or a class, while the verb either names an activity the subject is said to be engaged in, or it names a characteristic the subject is said to possess. . . . But perhaps we can dig deeper. . . . The verb can be considered as naming . . . the way the subject appears. The ‘process’ of appearing can occur either in an action performed by the subject or . . . in the possession of an attribute” (Sokolowski, *PA*, 12).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Sokolowski on prepositions having a sedimented spatial sense (*PA*, 123–24).

<sup>56</sup> “I say ‘is,’ and this word . . . names the predicational crease in the object under discussion” (Sokolowski, *PA*, 106).

“is white” as a part of the cow’s color (and hence as a part of the cow). (Alternatively, it may be we experience “is” as being a part of the cow alone.) In, “The blue book is on top of the grey book,” we would experience “The blue book” as a part of the blue book, and “the grey book” as a part of the grey book. But what of, “is on top of”? It seems to me (a) that I experience this part of the sentence as being part of both books at once, and (b) that this is made possible by the state of affairs of blue books’ actually being on the grey book. Given such examples—in which it seems we can account for each part of the sentence—I do not think we need to say that we *also* experience the whole sentence as itself a part of something. However, I am open to being convinced otherwise.

Finally, what are we to say of expressions that refer to imaginary and ideal objects? Take, for example, “Frodo carried the Ring to Mt. Doom,” “The triangle has three sides,” or “Two is two less than four.” On the theory I am developing here, we must experience the expressions in such statements as parts of their referents. Otherwise, the sentences we take to refer to imaginary and ideal objects would not involve expressions at all, and hence such objects would be fundamentally ineffable. But can it make sense to say that we experience concrete, physical expressions as parts of imaginary or ideal objects?

It seems to me there are at least four different ways of answering this question. First, we might say, “Whether or not it makes sense to rational, theoretic reflection, we do in fact experience expressions as parts of imaginary and ideal objects.” Second, we might say, “We obtain intuitive access to ideal objects through imagination” (see *EU*, 410–20/340–48) “and can also imagine expressions” (see *Hua* XIX, 42/1:191); “the experience of unity between expressions and imaginary or ideal referents, then, may somehow be achieved by imagination.” Third, we might say, “Expressions are ideal objects that have physical manifestations” (see, e.g.,

*Hua* XIX, 48–49/1:195; Derrida, *SP*, 50); “when expressing physical things, we experience some physical manifestation of the sign as united with its referent, and when expressing ideal objects, we experience the ideal essence of the sign as united with its referent.” Fourth, we might say, “When we refer to ideal objects, what we are actually referring to is to a class of concrete objects, such that, ‘The triangle has three sides,’ means, ‘All triangles have three sides.’ Thus, there is actually no problem with saying that we experience concrete expressions as parts of ideal objects; ideal objects are actually just a bunch of concrete objects”

To decide between these responses would require us not only to settle some thorny ontological issues, but to be able to study the fulfillments of the expressions in question. Unfortunately, describing how to bring imaginary and ideal objects to intuitive givenness is something into which we cannot go now.<sup>57</sup> Thus, we must satisfy ourselves for the moment with a suite of possible solutions, rather than one definitive conclusion.

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<sup>57</sup> On imaginary objects, see *Edmund Husserl, Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung: Zur Phänomenologie der anschaulichen Vergegenwärtigungen. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1898-1925)*, ed. Eduard Marbach, *Husserliana* XXIII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980), 56–63, 70–71, 134–35, 160–62, 301–5, 317–20, 506–7, 519–24, 527–30, 535–36, 546–64, 566–70. English translation: *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*, trans. John B. Brough, *Edmund Husserl: Collected Works*, vol. 11 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 61–67, 75–77, 148–50, 191–94, 363–67, 384–88, 608, 620–25, 630–34, 642–43, 659–77, 683–88. On ideal objects, see *EU*, 410–20/340–48, and Sokolowski, *HM*, 62–66.

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