

Husserl on the Limits of Symbolic Representation

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Structure

- I. Symbols, Empty Intentions, and Fulfilling Intuitions
- II. Fulfilment Semantics and Verificationism
- III. Compositionality and the Challenge from Moorean Propositions
- IV. So what?



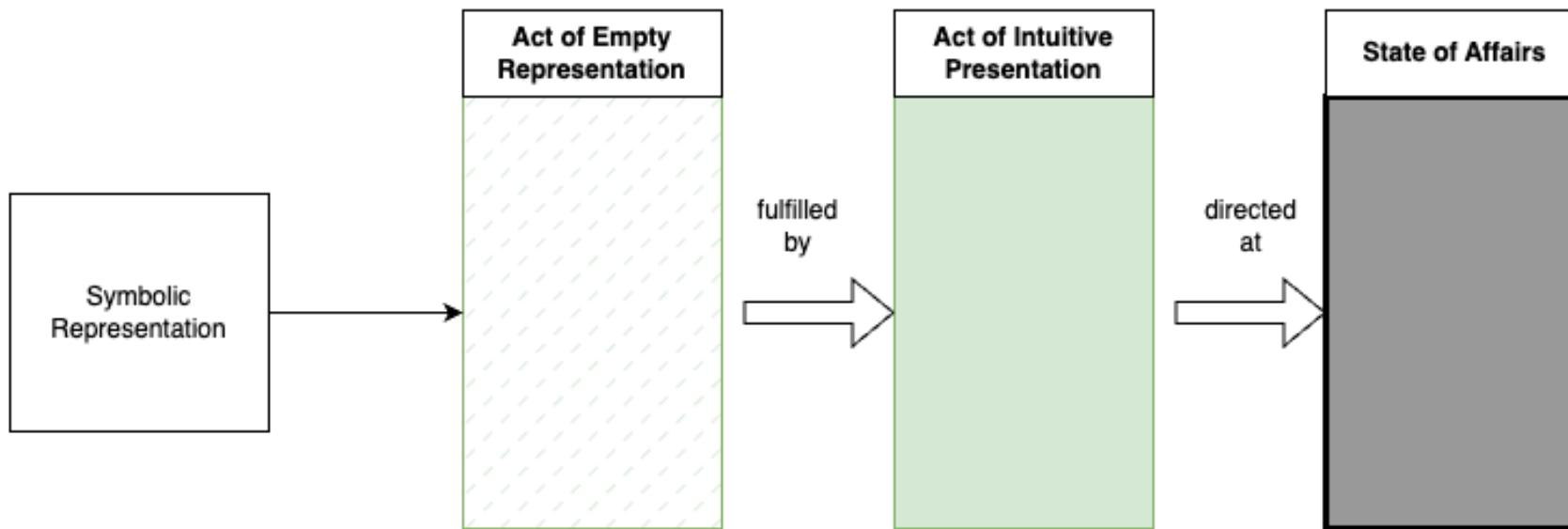
GIFT





“[... In der logisch angemessenen Sprache] läuft dann parallel zu allen möglichen primären und fundierten Anschauungen das System der sie (möglicherweise) ausdrückenden primären und fundierten Bedeutungen.”
(LU, VI, §63, 721)

“[... In the logically adequate language] there runs in parallel to all possible straightforward and founded intuitions the system of primary and founded meanings that (possibly) express these intuitions.” (tr. G.E.B)



Fulfilment Semantics and Verificationism

- Schlick 1936: "the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification". Influential for early logical empiricism but soon discarded.
- Also associated with pragmatism, e.g. Peirce.

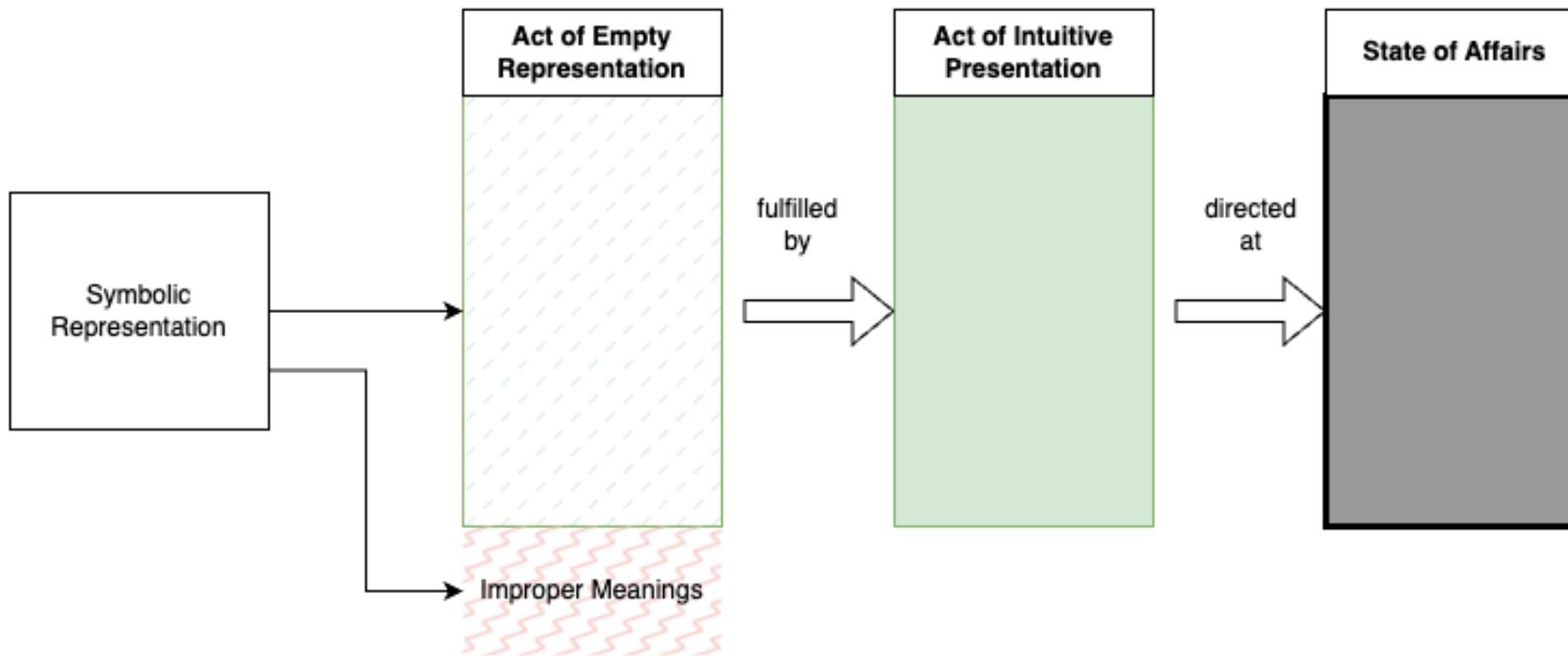
Adding complications

1. There are meaning differences in contradictions.

A mathematician may wonder whether there is a 'regular decahedron'.
This seems to be different from the search for a round square.

Die *Möglichkeit* (Realität) einer
Bedeutung lässt sich [...] dadurch
definieren, daß [...] sie *einen erfüllenden*
Sinn hat [...]. (LU VI, §30, 633)

[...] we may define the *possibility*
(reality) of a meaning by saying [...] that
it has a *fulfilling sense*. (LI VI, §30, 250)



- There are meaning differences in contradictions.
- Fulfilment semantics are also operating at a sub-propositional level
 - 'GIFT' is not a proposition but can be understood emptily or with fulfilment
- Fulfilment semantics distinguish meanings more fine-grained than methods of verification
 - 'a verifies b' does not need to imply 'a fulfils b'; but 'a fulfils b' implies 'a verifies b'.

Fulfilability as a *Criterion* of Meaningfulness

- Uebel (2019) distinguishes between verificationist *theories* and *criteria* for meaning.
- If fulfilability implies verifiability, but not vice versa, we still have a verificationist *criterion* for meaningfulness. Even if ways of verification do not constitute the meaning of our expressions.
- What kinds of idealizations are allowed to achieve an ‘in-principle’ or ‘ideal’ fulfilment of a proposition is of course inviting debate.



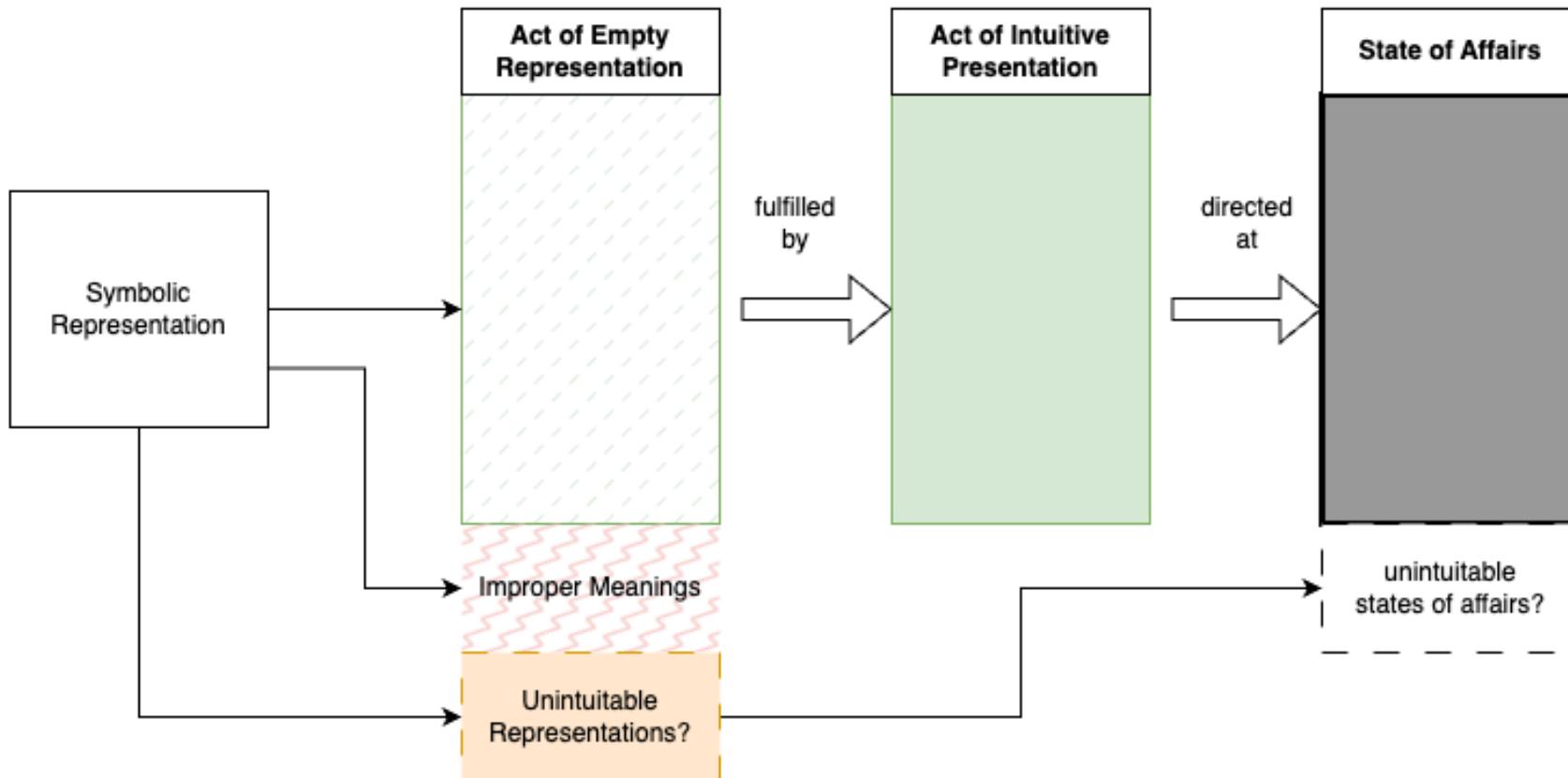
Compositionality and the challenge from Moorean Propositions

- The pairing of empty and fulfilling acts draws a boundary between authentic and inauthentic thought:
 - authentic thought can be fulfilled
 - meaningful thought that cannot be fulfilled is inauthentic/improper (*uneigentlich*) thought.
- *p is consistent* exactly if *p can be fulfilled in a unified intuition* (LU, VI, §63, 723).
- These possibilities may be strongly idealized

Wollen wir [...] den formalen und realen Widersinn fernhalten, so engt sich die weiteste Sphäre des uneigentlichen Denkens, des signifikative Verknüpfbaren, sehr ein. Es handelt sich nun um die objektive Möglichkeit der komplexen Bedeutungen, also um die Möglichkeit ihrer Anpassung an eine sie als Ganze erfüllende Anschauung. Die reinen Gesetze der Gültigkeit der Bedeutungen, der idealen Möglichkeit ihrer angemessenen Veranschaulichung, laufen offenbar den reinen Gesetzen parallel, welche die Verknüpfung und Umwandlung der eigentlichen kategorialen Formen regeln. (Hua 19, VI, §63, 723)

The pure laws of the validity of meaning, the ideal possibilities of their adequate bringing to intuition, evidently [offenbar] run in parallel to the laws that govern the connexion and transformation of the categorial forms proper. (tr. G.E.B.)





- Some empty representations are possible but cannot be fulfilled in a unified act:
“It is raining and I do not believe that it is raining”
- Fulfilling acts have a doxastic (positing) character (cf. *Ideas I*, §104.)
- The fulfilment of the first conjunct introduces a doxastic commitment that precludes fulfilment of the second conjunct.
- But the conjunction itself is not contradictory. It is true whenever it is raining but I am unaware of it.

So what?

- Separating logical and intuitive composition

This version restricts the connection between empty representations and fulfilling acts to basic propositions (Bös 2024).

- Non-doxastic fulfilment in imagination (Kinkaid 2022)

This replaces evident fulfilment with a non-doxastic attitude, namely imaginative illustration.

Thank you

References

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3. Husserl cited from Husserliana .
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Comments always welcome – now or via mail@gregorboes.com !

Some questions about Moorean propositions:

1. Are Moorean propositions contradictory?

No: if I believe wrongly that it is not raining, both conjuncts are true.

2. There might be extremely many ‘blindspots’ for evident fulfilment, even including some that are natural to assert: “It is raining, but I have only been told that it is raining.” These have in common that they are conjunctions where one conjunct makes an assertion about our epistemic state.

1. Do Moorean propositions depend on indexicals?

The fulfilment needs to be possible for the person understanding an empty representation. And that empty representation might contain a more *opaque* reference to oneself. For example, hearing from the professor ‘our best student does not think they are the best student’.

2. Are Moorean propositions paradoxes of the first-person perspective?

Questions about possibility of givenness