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## Why not ‘act-content-object’? / Wieso nicht ‚Akt-Inhalt-Gegenstand‘?

### ABSTRACT

It is well-known that from *Ideen I* (1913) onward, Husserl employs the Greek terms *noesis* and *noema*—roughly, ‘the exercise of thought’ and ‘that which is thought’—as the most general terms in the analysis of intentional phenomena. To say they are the most general is to say that any feature of the intentional is intelligible only in terms of them, and not vice versa. Intentional features organize according to a form, and that form is ‘noesis-noema’. The expression of transitive verbs of a certain sort give us the phenomena, while the grammar of such verbs give us the form: for every seeing, judging, imagining, liking, remembering, and discussing, there is the seen, the judged, the imagined, the liked, the remembered, and the discussed.<sup>1</sup> The former is the activity of intending, or ‘noesis’; the latter is the intentional object, or ‘noema’.

But this appears to be a change in path. Husserl did not always hold that two and only two terms give the form of the intentional. For in *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/01), phenomenology is inaugurated as a clarification according to which three terms give the form: act, content, object. Intentionality is a three-place relation: a phenomenon is intentional just in case it is (i) a psychological activity that (ii) instantiates an ideal content or meaning, by which it is (iii) a directedness towards an object. Notably, both LU and Id1 contend that LU gives the best version of the act-content-object schema (henceforth ‘ACO’) on offer.

This invites two questions. First: why, by 1913, did Husserl find even the best version of ACO inadequate to give the form of the intentional? Second: *is* ACO inadequate? Did Husserl make a mistake in Id1? Two orthodoxies speak in favor of him making a mistake. The first is the orthodoxy of the early phenomenological movement that grew up around Husserl’s LU, and consequently parted from Husserl upon the publication of Id1. The second is the abiding orthodoxy of contemporary philosophy that still happily employs the language of ‘attitude’, ‘content’, and ‘object’ in referring to intentional phenomena, remaining fully within the contours of ACO.<sup>2</sup> Yet if Husserl made no mistake in Id1, if the intentional most generally divides into two rather than three terms, it is these orthodoxies that are mistaken. Whatever they might clarify of the intentional is accidental—for they do so blindly, without a proper picture of what it is they clarify.

This paper argues for the following thesis: Id1 holds ACO to be inadequate because inapt to articulate the *self-consciousness* of the act of intending and the *objectivity* of what we intend,

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<sup>1</sup> The verb is of this sort: it ascribes no *natural* activity to something, but rather a *logical* activity to someone. (It is true, but uninformative, to say the verb is an ascription of *psychological* activity, for the word ‘psychological’ has precisely this ambiguity.) A transitive verb such as ‘pushes’, for example, would not be of this sort in the case where one says ‘the wind pushes the leaves’. (It is arguably also not of this sort when one says ‘Sally pushes the cart’; for though it involves a subject or agent, her activity is practical rather than logical. But I can’t make the argument here.)

<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding grievants as diverse as W.V.O. Quine, Ruth Millikan, Charles Travis, and Sebastian Rödl.

and that this ineptitude is a problem because it is the ineptitude to articulate how intentionality, rather than any psychological or even natural activity, is the activity of *reason*. The paper aims to interpret Husserl correctly. Whether one, in light of the view of Husserl's that emerges, ought to abandon the orthodoxies, is a question for subsequent work.

I advance my interpretation in three steps. In section 1, I argue that Id1's first problem with ACO is that according to ACO, the object's appearance is inessential to the intentional. This is false: it is essential to the intentional, as Id1 makes pains to show. In section 2, I argue that the second problem with ACO is that according to ACO, the self-consciousness of the act (which Husserl *does* note in LU) is at best an awareness that I am intending, and not an awareness that I am intending on an evidential basis. This is false: the self-consciousness of the act or noesis *is* an awareness that I am intending on an evidential basis, as Id1 makes pains to show. In section 3, I broach perhaps the most obvious difference in Id1: the disappearance of a third term between intending and intended, LU's celebrated concept of ideal meaning, which takes its lead from Lotze and Bolzano. I argue that elimination of the third term, in the form of its reduction to noetic and noematic forms, is required in order to avoid a second form of psychologism, which Husserl in *Formale und transzendente Logik* (1929) names 'transcendental psychologism'. This form of psychologism, as any other, makes intentional phenomena unintelligible.