



UNIVERSITETET I BERGEN

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**PHENOMENOLOGY OF READING
MEANING, INTERPRETATION, DISCOURSE.**

Supervisor

Associate Prof. HANS MARIUS HANSTEEN

Candidate

PASQUALE CUOMO, 322375

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But an essentially mechanistic world would be an essentially *meaningless* world! Suppose one judged the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, expressed in formulas – how absurd such a “scientific” evaluation of music would be! What would one have comprehended, understood, recognized? Nothing, really nothing of what is “music” in it!

F. NIETZSCHE- *THE GAY
SCIENCE*

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Introduction.

The present work is an enquiry on phenomenology and hermeneutics. The main aim shall be presenting a phenomenology of reading and interpretation. Hermeneutics shall not be here understood as an *ars intepreptandi*, as a methodology of understanding a text and its structure. Hermeneutics shall be investigated in its theoretical presuppositions and its encounter with the meaning of the text. Through the reading of Paul Ricoeur we aim to demonstrate how the presuppositions of hermeneutics hinge on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl as presented in the *Logical Investigation*. What is going to be thematized shall not be the act of understanding and the act of interpretation, as Heidegger and Gadamer did, but the relation between text, reader and meaning. Such relation, we shall demonstrate, is not immediately given via understanding, but via intentionality of reader and text. The theoretical assumption that shall guide us is provided by Husserl in his first Logical Investigation and acknowledge by Ricouer is the assumption about the priority of Meaning. Husserl describes Meaning as an ideal entity that is instantiated by a subject by act of meaning intention; the characteristics of this ideal entity, we shall demonstrate, are *centrality, autonomy and ideality*. These characteristics are inherited by Ricoeur and will shall try to find them in his notion of *text*. Detecting these features and the inheritance of these features in the work of Paul Ricoeur shall be the first step to explain what a phenomenology of reading is. The main question that shall guide our interpretation of hermeneutics as a phenomenology of reading shall therefore be not “what is understanding?” but “what is a text?”, due to the fact that the text is that ideal, central and autonomous entity that intentions a meaning and is a meaning. By doing so the first question that we shall pose is what is the language of hermeneutics. Husserl clearly states that the meaning of a sentence is not in the sentence itself, neither in the words as objects, but in the meaning intention that a subject confers to sign-objects. Ricoeur himself accepts this theory, stating that language is only a medium that shall die as an object. If language is only a medium and hermeneutics is the philosophical discipline that engages with text what does happen to the text? The main aim of this work shall be to explain how hermeneutics as a phenomenology of reading is that discipline that provides the theoretical notions and structures for understanding and interpreting not just a text, but a meaning. Ricoeur provides us with a notion of interpretation that is the final stage of the hermeneutical arc that

starts with the encounter of a text, passes for the understanding of it as explanation and ends with interpretation as appropriation of the text. The appropriation of the text is presented by Ricoeur as the appropriation of new possibilities of being for the consciousness that appropriates the text. Ricoeur's hermeneutics is framed in a context of reflexive philosophy where a consciousness gets out of itself to become more aware of itself. The present work shall challenge this reflexive attitude of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and following another path within the same arc. The claim of our thesis is to show that a kind of hermeneutics that starts with the presupposition of meaning's centrality, autonomy and ideality shall account for the theoretical outcomes of the encounter with the text and not the reflexive ones. For theoretical outcomes we mean explaining how understanding and interpretation are articulated between the intention of a text that presents and shows a meaning and the intention of the reader that gets access to the text via meaning and reading. We are trying to prove that an intention requires a fulfilment by intuition, following Husserl's theory of knowledge. In the case of Edmund Husserl to gain knowledge is to have a meaning intention fulfilled by the adequate intuition; intuition being the perception or the imagination of what has been merely intended. While keeping the structure of meaning intention and fulfilment of the intention by intuition we shall account for understanding and interpretation as the fulfilment by the meaning of the text of the intention of the reader, central for our operation shall be the concepts of static fulfilment and dynamic fulfilment as explained by Husserl in his *Sixth Logical Investigations*.

Hermeneutics as a phenomenology of reading is a sort of hermeneutics that does not engage with meaning for answers to a question, whether existential or ontological. A phenomenology of reading is the interplay of two poles, reader and text, that can be explained by means of a relation to meaning. It is this relation that will be thematized throughout the entire work. In doing so we shall focus on the current debate over Husserl's conceptualism. The current debate on Husserl's conceptualism in the *Logical Investigation* is a debate about the character of the contents of intuitive intentions, such as perception or imagination, and whether such contents can be carriers of meaning. It is important to engage and take position in the debate because our phenomenology of reading considers reading as an act of perception. In our everyday life reading is that activity that allows us to have a perception of what the text is about and more than that makes us perceive what the text is describing and what is happening in the plot or in the descriptions. If reading as

perception is an act that carries meaning, as the conceptualist view holds, our phenomenology of reading is reduced only to the act of reading and it is not clear how understanding or interpretation could obtain, because reading would be that act which both gets access to a meaning and appropriates that very meaning, neglecting the autonomy and ideality of the text. Our line of enquire is rather focused on the possibility of perceiving the presence of a meaning and having our intention fulfilled by its manifestation within the act of reading. The phantom behind the present work is the phantom of the constitution of new meaning when a reader meets the text and its world, with the exclusion of a definitive and total understanding due to the finite possibilities of our human conditions both as readers and interprets. Finally, our phenomenology of reading shall show what does it mean to understand a text and constitute a new meaning together with the text and to what extend the interpretation of this new meaning shall be a threat to hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline.

In chapter 1 we shall demonstrate by a thorough comparison of Husserl's and Ricoeur's text that hermeneutics and hermeneutics as phenomenology of reading is not busied with language per se but with meaning and meaning intentions. The first Logical Investigation of Edmund Husserl shall be *locus* of our understanding of the phenomenological treatment of meaning and meaning intentions, while Ricoeur's text *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics* has to be considered as a structure, a skeleton on which to build, that points to other *loci* to find the building material, in order to explain how and why Ricoeur's hermeneutics is first and foremost a phenomenological hermeneutics and how Husserl's conception of meaning is not only fully endorsed but also inherited in Ricoeur's theory.

In paragraph 1.1 we shall go in deeper details about the metaphysical features of Meaning, its centrality, autonomy and ideality. The aim of this paragraph is showing how it is possible building a phenomenology of reading starting from the meaning. The centrality of meaning shall be considered both as a topological centrality for a relation with the world and an ontological centrality in the sense that only via meaning is possible to have a reference to the world. Meaning's autonomy shall be presented as its autonomy in regards of any possible actualization either by meaning-intention or meaning-fulfilment, this feature is a direct consequence of meaning's ideality conceived by Husserl as ideality in a platonic sense. It shall be demonstrated that Ricoeur's notion of the text is the consequence of inheriting Husserl's conception of

meaning. Our phenomenology of readings starts here, considering the text both as such ideal, autonomous and central entity and an instantiation of this meaning, with the possibility of considering a text as something more than a collection of sentences.

Chapter 2 is entirely focused on Husserl and his notion of “interpretation”. Here takes place the battle between conceptualists and non-conceptualists. While presenting the husserlian notion of interpretation and of his contents of perception we shall defend a non-conceptualist view, advocating that interpretation for Husserl is a component of the whole act of perception that presents to a consciousness the ostensive features of an object. After the exposition of our position we shall conclude the chapter with the explanation of what is for Husserl the fulfilment of an intention by perception. This exposition shall be fundamental to prove the possibility for a phenomenology of reading and a different sense to understanding and interpretation.

Chapter 3 shall present Ricoeur’s theory of understanding as explanation and interpretation, here we shall give a better exposition of how the text is both an ideal entity and an intentionality that instantiates meaning. After doing so we will be able to provide our final exposition of the phenomenology of reading.

We want to give an introduction to the methodology adopted in this work. We preferred quoting in large extent and details from the texts of the two authors taken in consideration. The main reason is to present that the conjunction between these two authors can be found within the texts itself and not only through an interpretative slanting. What we are giving with our interpretation is the possibility of a new theoretical framework for hermeneutics that engages with the text not only as something on which a consciousness imposes itself, or where a text has an ontological mastery on the reader, but a situation in which a relation from time to time, every time that a reading takes place, opens an interplay between reader and text without any priority of one over another.

1. What language for Hermeneutics? Husserl and Ricoeur on Meaning and Language.

The aim of this chapter is to present the receiving and the influence of Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*,¹ on Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics. Ricoeur himself acknowledges the influence of phenomenology upon hermeneutics in his famous work *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, talking about the «phenomenological presupposition of hermeneutics» and «the hermeneutical presupposition of phenomenology».² Nevertheless, this chapter shall engage in a deeper analysis of the one provided by Ricoeur intertwining the French philosopher's works and Edmund Husserl's masterpiece. The first strategy for achieving the goal of the chapter is an analysis of Husserl's concepts of *expression* and *meaning* and how these concepts have been received by Paul Ricoeur, showing that there is a strong bond between the husserlian understanding of language and Ricoeur's one. Language is a medium meant to get surpassed and went through in order to focus on meaning. Centrality, autonomy and ideality of meaning shall be discussed together with the conception of words as mere signs irrelevant for meaning. The central aim of such discussion about centrality, autonomy and ideality of meaning is to show that Ricoeur's conception of the text and therefore of meaning shows exactly such features. This manoeuvre shall be met by Ricoeur's conception of *the world of the text* and shall highlight the archaeology of such a concept. What shall be finally achieved at the end of this first paragraph of the chapter is an answer to the question "what language for philosophical hermeneutics?". It is well known that hermeneutics hinges itself upon texts, made by sentences and ultimately words, however as we mentioned words are considered as mere signs irrelevant to the meaning

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008.

² Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 61-89.

for both Husserl and Ricoeur, therefore it is of the greatest importance comprehending the relationship with language in this line of thought. We shall see that it is not language the first concern of husserlian phenomenology and ricoeurian hermeneutics, but meaning.

Husserl begins his *Logical Investigations* claiming that every sign is a sign for something, but not every sign has a meaning. The only signs endowed with meaning are expressions. The first fundamental distinction of the *Logical Investigations* starts here: sign as indication (*Anzeigen*) and sign as expression (*Ausdruck*).

An indication is a sign whose presence through empirical association informs about the presence of another thing or state of affairs. It is an empirical connection not provided with causality that allows us to notice the presence of something else. A mark on the skin of a slave is an indication that that person is indeed a slave, the shot of the starting gun indicates the start of a race, or the channels on Marth indicate the existence of forms of life on the red planet.

A thing is only properly an indication if and where it in facts serves to indicate something to some thinking being. [...]. In these we discover as a common circumstance the fact that certain objects or state of affairs of *whose reality someone has actual knowledge* indicate to him *the reality of certain other objects or states of affairs*, in the sense that *his belief in the reality of the one is experienced* (though not at all evidently) *as motivating a belief or surmise in the reality of the other*.³

An expression is a sign with a meaning. Husserl proceeds his analysis on what is an expression, meaning and what actually meaning is. The meaning of an expression is bestowed by a meaning-conferring act and is potentially fulfilled by a meaning fulfilling act. Before entering into these complicate notions, we shall focus on how Husserl treats language and signs related to the meaning, that being a first point of connection with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Husserl analyses expressions in two senses: their functioning in communicative life and in solitary life.⁴

³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 184

⁴ Edmund Husserl, Op. Cit., pp. 189-191.

When we talk about expression we have to distinguish between the physical side of an expression: sound-complex, words, the written sign on a paper or a wall and so on and certain acts linked to the expression which give to it the possibility of expressing about something. Words, signs, are endowed by a meaning in order to get employed for expressing something about something else.

The articulate sound-complex, the written sign, first becomes a spoken word or a communicative bit of speech, when a speaker produces it with the intention of “expressing himself about something” through its means.⁵

Words and sounds are in itself neutral, not having any force, their function is within the expression only to give a speaker something to confer sense to.

He must endow it with a sense in certain acts of mind, a sense he desires to share with his auditors.

Such sharing becomes a possibility if the auditor also understands the speaker’s intention.⁶

For communicative purposes not the signs but such “acts of mind” are important. The acts of mind endow a meaning to the signs, otherwise signs would just be some physical objects without any importance. However, what Husserl is aiming here, therefore the distinction between expression in communicative life and in solitary life, is showing where meaning actually lies and where meaning shows better its characteristics and this cannot happen if we just consider communicative life. What happens in communicative life and during communication is that, although the sign does not play any central role, the sign is functioning as an indication, in the sense explained above. An indication refers empirically to something else, such empirical association could be shown at the level of communicative life as well. Words, sound-complex, or written signs become an indication of the fact that someone is talking or communicating, moreover they become an indication of those acts of mind that are endowing sense. To clarify

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 189.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

we can say that the sign here is indicating three things: it is indicating that someone is speaking and it is indicating that a certain mental activity is operating in order to speak and it is indicating what the speaker is referring to. We therefore have: a speaker, mental activity and reference to something.

What first makes mental commerce possible, and turns connected speech into discourse, lies in the correlation among the corresponding physical and mental experiences of communicating persons which is effected by the physical side of the speech. Speaking and hearing, intimation of mental states through speaking and reception thereof in hearing, are mutually correlated. If one surveys these interconnections, one sees at once that all expressions in *communicative* speech function as *indications*.⁷

The problem at stake here is the fact that although a speaker may intimate a series of experiences to a hearer, it will not be possible by any means for the latter to have a direct experience of those, the mind of the speaker is locked for the hearer. Expression as indication will always lack insight, because every indication lacks insight. The problem with indication is the fact that it is empirical, without and objective ground that will ensure a possibility of building knowledge upon it and even if such indicating might be true, if after every gun shot a race indeed starts, it is not the case that that truth is granted and repeatable.

When one says that the state of affairs *A* indicates the state of affairs *B*, that the existence of the one points to that of the other, one may confidently be expecting to find *B* true, but one's mode of speech implies no objectively necessary connections between *A* and *B*, nothing into which one could have insight.⁸

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008., p. 185.

This points us to the direction of disregarding not only the sign in itself, but even expressions as a bearer of meaning. Actually, expression in communicative life could be quite dangerous since they work just as indications, because it will never be possible to have insights of the mental acts and experiences of the speaker, therefore no certainty.

He [the hearer] does not, however, himself experience them, he has not an 'inner' but an 'outer' percept of them. Here we have the big difference between the real grasp of what is in adequate intuition, and the putative grasp of what is on a basis of inadequate, though intuitive, presentation.⁹

Although Husserl here makes a claim about knowledge what we should really notice is the consideration made about the language and the signs in themselves. Husserl is disregarding the signs because if the ultimate goal is knowledge it is not through the expression and what they communicate that we are going to be able to attain such knowledge, that is because Husserl's conception of the sign as an object is subsidiary to the meaning. The sign, the words, are not relevant; therefore, Husserl can claim

Signs are in fact not objects of our thought at all, even surrogatively; we rather live in the consciousness of meaning, of understanding, which does not lapse when accompanying imaginary does so.¹⁰

We will get to the "consciousness of meaning" in the following paragraph, first is useful to show a bit more about Husserl's, and subsequently Ricoeur's, conception of signs. What we can anticipate is the fact that for Husserl the sign is irrelevant for the meaning, as stated in the above quote and that our focus is on *the meaning*. The operation that he does serves the purposes of providing a solid argumentation for the autonomy of the meaning and therefore why is that our focus and the carelessness towards the signs, granted because they are not the bearers of meaning. Husserl shows this in his analysis of the *expressions in solitary life*. In our mental and isolated

⁹ Edmund Husserl, Op. Cit., p. 190.

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, Op. Cit., p. 210.

life, we do not fulfil any communicational task: words and expression do not indicate anything to ourselves that we are not already perceiving or presenting directly. If the problem with the expressions in the communicative life was their indicative function of the “internal experiences of the speaker”, which are only indirectly presented to the hearer through indication and therefore without certainty, in the solitary life such a problem will be avoided. Does that affect the expressions? Ultimately, it does not. As Husserl claims «expressions continue to have meanings as they had before.».¹¹ It has showed then that meaning does not rely on communication, but it does not even rely on words

A word only cases to be a word when our interest stops at its sensory contour, when it becomes a mere sound-pattern. But when we live in the understanding of a word, it expresses something and the same thing, whether we address it to anyone or not.¹²

In our solitary life we are not really communicating with ourselves. The first reason has been stated above, we are not intimating any of our inner experiences because we are living them directly, secondly because what we are focusing on our solitary life is the meaning of our expression and the expression can be set aside. Two things are then left behind, the words because

The word comes before us as intrinsically indifferent, whereas the sense seems the thing aimed at by the verbal sign and meant by its means: the expression seems to direct interest away from itself towards its sense, and to point to the latter. [...] The existence of the sign neither “indicates” the existence of the meaning nor, properly expressed, our belief in the meaning’s existence.¹³

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Op. Cit.*, p. 190.

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in *International Library of Philosophy*, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p.191.

And the expressions, because what we are really interested in is the expression's meaning and such meaning is given by the acts that confer meaning, and such acts are what makes an expression something different than a «merely sounded word.»¹⁴

Before moving to the analysis of meaning, where we shall further up on the concept of autonomy of meaning, and the meaning conferring acts, we shall see how is the matter according to Paul Ricoeur.

Ricoeur agrees with Husserl about his view of signs and language, more than agreeing Ricoeur's inherited the view of the German philosopher. In the words of Don Ihde Ricoeur has «a husserlian model of language.»¹⁵ According to Ihde language for Ricoeur is a *mediation*. In fact in his *The conflict of Interpretations*, Ricoeur writes

Language is that through which, by means of which, we express ourselves and express things. Speaking is the act by which the speaker overcomes the closure of the universe of signs, in the intention of saying something about something to someone; speaking is the act by which language moves beyond itself as sign toward its reference and toward what it encounters. Language seeks to disappear; it seeks to die as an object.¹⁶

We can see here how Ricoeur holds a position similar to Husserl in regards of language: language seeks to disappear in order to show its reference. The overlap in this case is not total, because as we shall see later for Husserl *reference* is not the first aim of the meaning, but what is important is the fact that Ricoeur is well aware of the main characteristic of the signs, being a medium for the meaning, waiting to be more than a mere physical sign and getting endowed with a sense, or in this case with a reference, by an act. In Husserl the meaning conferring act, here the act of

¹⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 192.

¹⁵ Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, in *Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1980, p. 168.

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Structure, Word, Event* in *The conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Ihde, Northwestern University Press, The Atlon Press London, London, 1974, p. 85.

speaking. In another text however, Ricoeur clearly states that his intending of the expression is exactly the Husserlian one.

Expression, in the sense of verbal expression (*Ausdruck*), according to the first of the *Logical Investigations*, is a significative indication in the sense that it announces to others what I mean. It conveys meaning to others, however, only because it signifies, that is denotes a sense, a represented content.¹⁷

Although here Ricoeur still focuses on the communicative side of the expression, he is taking the whole theory into account, therefore in the last line he insists upon the fact that an expression conveys meaning only because it signifies, but Husserl has shown us that the meaning is not given by the expression, but rather by the meaning-conferring acts or *meaning-intention*. Therefore, Marco Salvioli writes

In this sense, as Don Ihde clearly claims, Ricoeur's theory of language is "a husserlian mode of language", that means the strong subordination of the sign to the act that confers meaning. [...] The sign, as residual materialisation of meaning-intention, is asked to be subtle. The sign is something that works as a "passage", the necessity of which is not entirely sure. [My translation].¹⁸

The main focus again lies on the meaning rather than the sign. Ricoeur does not provide a crucial explanation of the thesis of the derivative character of linguistic meaning, as Husserl did or at least not as clear as Husserl's. What Ricoeur does is inheriting the husserlian concept of the autonomy, and in this case we shall add, of the centrality, of the meaning, which is gained by the german philosopher in the passages analysed above. The strong connection between Husserl's

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of the Will. Fallible Man*, translated by C. A. Kelbley, Fordham University Press, New York, 1986, p. 27.

¹⁸ Marco Salvioli, *Oltrepassare il segno, Derrida e Ricoeur Lettori di Husserl*, in *Segni e comprensione*, vol. 45, January-April 2002, Univeristà degli Studi del Salento, Lecce, 2002, DOI Code: 10.1285/i18285368a16n45p26, pp. 29-30. My translation from italian.

conception of language and signs is not re-enacted by Ricoeur, but acknowledged as a basis for the constitution of his hermeneutical philosophy and his clarification of how philosophical hermeneutics operates.¹⁹ Ricoeur opens the gates of hermeneutics to phenomenology in order to describe where phenomenology can point hermeneutics' aims, namely on the meaning, more than the words

Hermeneutics also shares with phenomenology the thesis of the derivative character of linguistic meaning.²⁰

Hermeneutics deals with texts and their complexity, both on a diachronic and a synchronic level, but also hermeneutics deals with art, monuments, documents in general. It would be easy to lose themselves in the manifold of forms of expression that are presented to the hermeneutical philosophers, but since we are not concerned with the sign and its physical side what really matters is the meaning and that is because the meaning makes a sign worth of attention, attention caught by the sign as a medium to forget in order to obtain access to the meaning, because as Ricoeur states «with Husserl, between *Bedeutung and Erfullung*, what we thus articulate is a *signifying intention that breaks the closure to the sign*».²¹ More will be said in the next paragraph, for the moment let just prepare the grounds for the discussion about meaning remaining with Husserl's and Ricoeur's conception of sign and language. Such conception had already before Ricoeur an enormous impact on hermeneutics and with Ricoeur we can see why.

We have claimed, following these two authors, that the sign is a mere medium for expression and following Husserl that expression is not the bearer of meaning, because in communicative

¹⁹ See Don Ihde, Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, in *Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1980, p. 168-181.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Edited and translated by J.B Thompson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 77.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Structure, Word, Event* in *The conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Ihde, Northwestern University Press, The Atlon Press London, London, 1974, p. 87.

life it functions as an indication of mental acts of a speaker that are not possible to be understood by the hearer, who does not have direct access to them. This is the main critique that Ricoeur gives about the hermeneutics of Dilthey and Schleiermacher. Dilthey and Schleiermacher had a conception of hermeneutics confined within the boundaries of explanation and understanding, where the first term was referred to a technical-exegetic operation upon the words of a subject who is expressing himself through those words and finally being understood by the interpreter better than the subject could have ever understood himself. The life of an author experienced and expressed by means of according to Schleiermacher and Dilthey could have been grasped and explained by words and leading to a deeper understanding of the author's inner life.

Husserl has clearly showed us how this deeper understanding is negated by the very characteristics of the expression in communicative life, being just an indication of the fact that such experienced-life exists, but without any access to it. Moreover, if we try to rescue Dilthey's and Schleiermacher's view by saying that the meaning of the words, the meaning in itself, could guarantee such access is Ricoeur that would stop us, because hermeneutics, according to Ricoeur, shares the notion that the linguistic meaning of those words has a derivative character in respect of the meaning conferring acts of the authors, that again are inaccessible to us. Moreover, according to Husserl, the meaning conferring acts are not the bearer of meaning either, because the autonomy of the meaning will be broken.²² We shall say something about it in the upcoming paragraph.

What the French philosopher here is doing is focusing and centring the debate not on the authors but on the texts and not on the texts *qua* collection of sentences, but on the texts as *meaning*. Following Gadamer, Ricoeur claims that the hermeneutical task is to «discern the “matter” of the text and not the psychology of the author.»²³ Ricoeur adds that

²² Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p.229.

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Edited and translated by J.B Thompson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 72.

Dilthey's work, even more than Schleiermacher's, brings to light the central *aporia* of an hermeneutics which subsumes the understanding of texts to the law of understanding another person who expresses himself therein. If the enterprise remains fundamentally psychological, it is because it stipulates as the ultimate aim of interpretation, not what a text says, but who says it.²⁴

But even before Ricoeur, Dilthey after the first publication of the *Logical Investigation* in 1901 saw the problem of his theory

It was the reading of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* to convince the old Dilthey, at the beginning of the 1900, of the impossibility of the aim of understanding other's, as well as ours, experienced-life's manifestations. An impossible task to perform not only via introspection but also to whom had followed a psychological analysis of the experienced-life. [My translation]²⁵

This as an historical point of view to show the impact of Husserl's work on hermeneutics, before the beginning of contemporary hermeneutics.

What we have done in this first paragraph is a demonstration, trough and supported by the texts, of how Ricoeur's thoughts about language and about hermeneutics are strongly bonded and influenced by Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. Ricoeur criticizes Dilthey and Schleiermacher for considering language as the mean to gain access to the inner life of an author, as we have seen this is impossible. Communication and reception of expressions provide us only with presumptive without any truth value or possibility to clear understanding. Nevertheless, if we stopped here the consequences for hermeneutics and the understanding of a meaning would be fatal, expressions would remain only an indication without any access. To the question "what language for philosophical hermeneutics?" we shall answer "none", but this is not the case. We have postponed a crucial analysis for the matter at stake, the analysis of meaning and its

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The task of Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Edited and translated by J.B Thompson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 12.

²⁵ Franco Bianco, *Introduzione all'ermeneutica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1999, p. 98. My translation from italian.

characteristics, but however we have gained another answer. It is not the language that hermeneutics is concerned with, but the meaning. It is time to investigate and explain this claim.

1.1. The centrality, autonomy and ideality of the meaning.

According to Keiichi Noé in his "*The hermeneutic turn*" in *Husserl's phenomenology of language*,²⁶ when expressions are used in communicative life

The content of the intimation consists in the whole of the speaker's inner experiences. But, obviously there is a gap which cannot be overcome between the speaker's intention and the hearer's understanding.²⁷

Following Noé we can gain access to the pivotal question of the First Logical Investigation and the starting point to understand one hermeneutics that cannot be built upon words and expression, which were declassified to mere indications. What we are going to gain is the access to the meaning and to what the meaning is. The notion of intention will be central.

Noé claims that in the First Investigation Husserl operates five distinctions and as many exclusions. The first is the distinction of signs in indications and expressions, with the exclusion of the sign as indication for what concerns being the bearer of meaning. The second one is the reduction of words to mere signs, that do not concur to give meaning to expressions, therefore an exclusion of words as objects. The third one is the distinction between expressions in communicative life and in solitary life, with the exclusion of expressions in communicative life because of their functioning as indication, and the irrelevance of the expression and their physical side for the meaning. The fourth distinction is the distinction between the meaning-conferring acts and the meaning-fulfilling acts, which we have just hinted to in the first paragraph and it is now time to focus on, after this fourth distinction there is the exclusion of the meaning-fulfilling

²⁶ Keiichi Noé, "*The hermeneutic turn*" in *Husserl's Phenomenology of language*, in *Human Studies* 15, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 1992, Doi code 10.1007/bf00142735, pp. 117-128.

²⁷ Keiichi Noé, *Ivi*, p. 120.

acts as not essential for the meaning of an expression. The fourth distinction is thematized by Noé as it follows

In the forgoing argument, the fourth stage of exclusion is carried, where the sensible *signifier* is separated from the expression and the insensible *signified* is thematized. Here Husserl is apparently positing the pre-expressive or pre-linguistic stratum of meaning.²⁸

In the paragraph above we have focused on the first three distinctions and exclusions, called by Noé *Semantic Reduction*.²⁹ A few things are worth to be said before starting the exposition about meaning-conferring acts and presenting the fifth exclusion, the one that excludes the meaning-fulfilling acts as not essential for the meaning of an expression.

Noé calls the operation that Husserl has accomplished, and of which we have described the first three moments in the paragraph above, a *reduction*. The word used by Husserl in his later works is *epoché*.³⁰ For our purposes is enough saying that *epoché* is the suspension of the natural attitude towards the world in order to focus on the transcendental structures of an Ego that within acts informs the world and constitutes it. The Ego and the analysis of the Ego are the way in which is understood the manifestation of the world. This centrality of the Ego will be discussed and criticized by Paul Ricoeur and is the reason why the French philosophers turns towards the *Logical Investigation* to find the phenomenological presuppositions of hermeneutics. The kind of reduction that Husserl operates in his *Logical Investigations* is not the reduction that he

²⁸Keiichi Noé, Ivi, p. 121.

²⁹ Keiichi Noé, Ivi, p. 122.

³⁰ See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological Philosophy*, Kluwer, Boston, 1998 and Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Kluwer, Boston, 1991. In this work I shall not focus on this two works of Husserl and on the theory of Transcendental Reduction exposed there. Focusing on such texts will lead the current analysis to far away from its main point: showing how the germinal point of phenomenology in the *Logical Investigations* has influenced contemporary hermeneutics and Paul Ricoeur, however something will be hinted in order to appreciate why the *Logical Investigations*, more than the further developments of phenomenology had such an impact on contemporary hermeneutics.

operates in his later works. Here Husserl operates a suspension of the natural attitude towards the expressions as objects and indications in the communicative life in order to understand what is the bearer of meaning and what meaning is, the result, as we will see in a few moments, is that the consciousness does not produce meaning, but is inclined towards it and instantiate it. This is the thesis of the ideality of the meaning. Ricoeur acknowledges it and states

Hermeneutical distanciation is not unrelated to the phenomenological *epoché*, that is, to an *epoché* interpreted in a non-idealist sense as an aspect of the intentional movement of consciousness towards meaning. For all consciousness of meaning involves a moment of distanciation, a distancing from “lived experience” as purely and simply adhered to.³¹

Throughout this semantic reduction is achieved that conception of the language as a medium that we have presented by Ricoeur words and that is clearly stated by Noé as well regarding Husserl

There [in the Semantic Reduction] the language itself is transformed into a transparent medium and there is no distance between signifier and signified.³²

It is now time to present Husserl’s view of meaning. Husserl writes

If we leave aside the sensuous act in which the expression, *qua* mere sound of words, makes its appearance, we shall have to distinguish between two acts or sets of acts. We shall, on the one hand, have acts essential to the expression if it is an expression at all, i.e. a verbal sound infused with sense. These acts shall call the *meaning-conferring acts* or the *meaning-intentions*.³³

³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 76.

³² Keiichi Noé, “*The hermeneutic turn*” in *Husserl’s Phenomenology of language*, in *Human Studies* 15, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 1992, Doi code 10.1007/bf00142735, p. 121.

³³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in *International Library of Philosophy*, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 192.

The first function of a meaning-conferring act is indeed informing the word with a meaning; the word stays a physical object onto which a meaning is hinged, therefore after a meaning-conferring act has given a meaning hence, our attention is on the meaning and not on the words.

The word (*qua* external singular) remains intuitively present, maintains its appearance, but we no longer intend. [...] Our interest, our intention, our thought – mere synonyms if take in sufficiently wide senses – point exclusively to the thing meant in the sense-giving act.³⁴

Now we are not looking anymore at the words in their physical fashion, but at the sense conferred to the words, it is not towards the words that we look at but their meaning. Husserl is here interested not in the sentences or in the meaning of an expression, but to those acts that make an expression to be so, the *meaning conferring acts*.

Talking of meaning in this sense is not quite exhaustive, because it seems that the words are still the vehicle of meaning and not the meaning-intention. Husserl starts talking about the *content* of an expression and the *object* of an expression. We have to keep in mind here that Husserl uses the terms *Sinne* and *Bedeutung* as synonymous for meaning.³⁵

Talking of meaning is talking altogether of reference as well, because it is the meaning that provides the possibility of reference. When we talk about *content* we are talking about content as meaning and content as the content of the expression that is actualized by a meaning-fulfilling act. The reference is inscribed in the meaning as content and not in the content as a meaning-fulfilling act. The object is not the reference to, but it is an object towards which we refer something by means of meaning. Reference, this will be explained again later in the chapter, derives from meaning, a second independent pole. Let's use an example to clarify the point. Suppose that someone utters "the cat is on the mat". This is an expression: it has a sense intended by the speaker, comprehensible and expresses the speaker's judgment about the fact that the cat is on the mat. Such expression has a *content* and a related object: the state of affairs

³⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 193.

³⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p.201.

presented by the cat being on the mat. The *content* in this case is «the self-identical meaning that the hearer can grasp even if he is not a percipient.»,³⁶ while the object is the objective correlate that the expression expresses, i.e. the state of affairs where a cat is on the mat. Husserl is pretty clear in stating that *content* and *object* are two different things and at this state they do not coincide.³⁷ What the *content* is, it is the actual meaning of the expression that remains the same no matter what happens to the object, it can exist or not, but the expression will always be understandable. The relation of the meaning to the object is however provided by those acts that according to Husserl are not essential to the meaning of an expression, the *meaning-fulfilling* acts.

Acts, not essential to the expression as such, which stand to it in the logically basic relation of *fulfilling* (confirming, illustrating) it more or less adequately, and so actualizing its relation to the object.³⁸

Every intentional act is an act of relation to the world, in this case a relationship to the world through the meaning intended.

An act of meaning is the determinate manner in which we refer to our object of the moment, though this mode of significant reference and the meaning itself can change while the objective reference remains the same.³⁹

It is not the case that our speaker is gambling or guessing about the being of the cat on the mat, what she is doing is setting a relation between her and the world by the means of meaning, through a content. However, the expression “the cat is on the mat” has another kind of content, the objective reference to the state of affairs, this content is given, actualized, by the act that

³⁶ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 200.

³⁷ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 197.

³⁸ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 192.

³⁹ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 198.

fulfils the relation, in this case the act in which we perceive the cat being on the mat. The argument presented in this fashion results tortuous and cumbersome, and in part we wanted it to be so. Let's use an husserlian example. Take a sentence such as "Three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point". This sentence has a content, that *three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point*, this content stays the same no matter who asserts the sentence or whether a percept of this case happens. Whether we saw a cat on the mat or whether we judged that three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point, it would not matter for the meaning-intention, the meaning would stay the same in each case and it would be the meaning intended by the speaker, no matter what.

My act of judging is a transient experience: it arises and passes away. But what my assertion asserts, the content that *three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point*, neither arises nor passes away. It is an identity in the strict sense.⁴⁰

Of course, someone could object that this is the case of a mathematical truth, therefore is not fair to say that it is the same case for the assertion "the cat is on the mat", however Husserl does not agree. At the level of *content*, the relation to the object does not matter, it is just the meaning conferred to the expression that matters: «the content as intending sense, as sense, *meaning simpliciter*».⁴¹ This *meaning simpliciter* rests on the side of intention which constitutes the meaning for the expression and this is the case for every expression.

It is the same in the case of all assertions. [...]. We distinguish their ideal content from the transient act of affirming and asserting it: it is the meaning of the assertion, a unity in plurality.⁴²

There is another way in which we could think about the content: content as the fulfilling sense.

⁴⁰ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 195.

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 200.

⁴² Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 196.

We have said that a fulfilling act is not essential to the expression, simply because it comes after the expression has been informed by a meaning and the meaning is essential to a string of words in order for it to count as an expression, but there is more to be said. The act of meaning fulfilment is what the actual expression expresses: when we ask what does the expression express, Husserl answers

One should not, therefore, properly say (as one often does) that an expression *expresses* his meaning (its intention). One might more properly adopt the alternative way of speaking according to which the *fulfilling act* appears as *the act expressed by the complete expression*; we may say e.g. say, that a statement “give expression” to an act of perceiving or imagining.⁴³

In the case of the statement “the cat is on the mat” the ideal content, the meaning of the expression, finds its actualization in the relationship to the world by the act of perceiving the cat on the mat, or we can say: the content of the act of perception, *seeing* the cat on the mat, is expressed by the meaning of the expression. What matters here is that the content as *fulfilling* sense is that content of an expression that actualizes the relationship of the meaning-intention to what it actually means, to the object or state of affairs that the expression is saying something about. However, even the fulfilling content is not the same as the object. This will become clear in the next section where we shall investigate more the character of fulfilment, for now it is worth saying that the act of fulfilment is the actualization of the meaning-intention, but it is not the meaning in itself, it is what is expressed by the meaning and it is the content that regards the object meant in the expression. The fulfilling content is a content of the expression, not of the meaning, therefore it is not essential for the meaning. The meaning as an ideal content of an expression would always be possible, always be understandable, whether or not there is an object perceived or aimed to by intentionality. What the fulfilling act does, however, is giving knowledge when it realizes our relation intended by the meaning.

⁴³ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 192.

These acts, which become fused with the meaning-conferring acts in the unity of knowledge or fulfilment, we call the *meaning-fulfilling* acts.⁴⁴

For the moment such unclarity about the *meaning-fulfilling* acts must remain. The aim of this paragraph is focusing on the meaning and the meaning-conferring acts, this detour about the meaning-fulfilling acts serves the purposes to get us on the explanation of why the object and the content at the level of meaning-conferring acts do not coincide and to talk about the ideality of the meaning. In the next section the relation between meaning-conferring acts and meaning-fulfilling acts shall become clearer since the exposition will be on the entire act of fulfilment of an intention and not only a meaning-intention. What has been saved for a later analysis is the character of the *content* of a fulfilling act, such as perception or imagination. For now, we shall maintain two things: the fact that for Husserl meaning is both sense and reference and the reference is only secondary and the fact that the object of which the expression says something does not affect the expression in any regards, nor the meaning.

Husserl writes

Each expression not merely says something, but says it *of* something: it not only has a meaning, but refers to certain *objects*. [...] But the object never coincides with the meaning.⁴⁵

Then he provides some examples for explaining the necessity of the distinction between meaning and object. An expression counts as such only if it has a meaning. If an expression is saying something about an object that does not exist it will still count as an expression, Husserl is very much clear on these regards.

A meaningless expression is, therefore, properly speaking no expression at all.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Edmund Husserl, Op. Cit., p. 197.

⁴⁶ Edmund Husserl, Op. Cit., p. 201.

A meaningless expression would be something like a string of letters without any sense such as “rgndhe”. The relation to the object is in fact given through the *ideal content* of the expression and when the expression finds its meaning-fulfilment it finds it on the side of *content*. The meaning intended by the meaning-conferring act is fulfilled by the *content* of perception, in case of statements about perception, that are distinguished from the *object* perceived. This talk of *content* of perception that are distinguished from the object perceived means that in our act of perceiving we constitute *contents* that present the object in such a way that the *content* of the expression, the meaning, and the *content* of perception, the interpretation of the object and the presentation of it for a consciousness, coincide in the fulfilment: we have knowledge of the object. A question that could raise is: do we live only in representations and never have actual knowledge of the outside world? We must answer to this question negatively, but an analysis of the presentation of the *content* of perception shall be given in order to explain why, as we said this shall be given in the next chapter.

For the moment what we have to keep in mind is that although the content of perception, or imagination, or every meaning-fulfilling act, are not essential for the expression in itself. The only thing that is necessary for an expression is a meaning and a meaning is necessary for the relation with an object. To say this is not to say that the meaning has a chronologically priority over meaning-fulfilling acts, but a logical one. This feature shall be called *centrality of the meaning*. Talking of centrality of meaning is talking in two ways: the first is *topological* and the second *ontological*. The topological centrality of meaning is the way in which we shall visualize for a better understanding the relationship between meaning intentions and meaning fulfilling acts. Having the meaning in the centre means that there is a passage from meaning intention, through meaning, to meaning fulfilling act; without meaning, the completion of such passage could not obtain, however it is through and within meaning that such movement is possible. Such a passage is possible only because of the *ontological* centrality; where the meaning is that centre, that starting point, from which we can make sense of what is a “reference” and what means for the consciousness to move towards something. Without meaning and the act of intentioning a meaning, it would not be possible to have a relationship with the world; it is not the subject that experiences the object, where the duality is kept by the separate existence of the two poles, the

former active and the latter passive. The relationship to the world departs from meaning and proceeds within meaning because the world and the objects, irregardless of their ontological status, is present for a consciousness only via meaning. The most important act for a consciousness to be a consciousness of something is to intention a meaning for something and for itself. As Gary B. Madison states

This sort of “intentional analysis (*Intentionale Analyse*) (or “meaning analysis” – phenomenology, like pragmatism which is also a philosophy of experience, is in the first instance a theory of meaning and only secondarily a theory of truth) proceeds entirely by means of reflexive acts.⁴⁷

A meaning intention is an instantiation of meaning through which is established a relationship to the world, or an object. It is therefore a meaning that is needed for us in order to address our attention towards the world, or better say: our intending a meaning is our way to relate with the world. Ricouer captures this very well writing

The first act of consciousness is designating or meaning (*Meinen*). [...] The empty act of signifying is nothing other than intentionality. If intentionality is that remarkable property of consciousness to be a consciousness of... of moving out from itself toward something else, then the act of signifying contains the essence of intentionality.⁴⁸

The ontological status of the objects in the world does not affect the meaning, what it does affect is the possibility of fulfilment, so to say, of knowledge. An objectless expression is not a meaningless expression, Husserl claims. Who claims that an expression about a non-existent

⁴⁷ Gary B. Madison, *The Interpretative Turn in Phenomenology: A Philosophical History*. In Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy, vol. 8, issue 2, 2004, p. 400, doi code <https://doi.org/10.5840/symposium20048235>

⁴⁸ Paul Ricouer, *Husserl. An analysis of His Phenomenology*, translated by E. G. Ballard and L.E. Embree, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1967, p. 6.

object is meaningless is confusing two kind of being meaningless, the actual meaningless of “rgndhe” and

The a priori impossibility of a fulfilling sense.⁴⁹

However,

The tendency therefore arises to treat the *fulfilling intuitions* - categorially formative acts are here in general passed over - as meanings. But fulfilment is often imperfect – we shall have to devote closer study to all such possibilities - and expressions often go with remotely relevant, only partially intuitive illustrations, if with any at all.⁵⁰

The object is therefore irrelevant for the meaning of an expression and meaning-fulfilment acts as well, because they are relevant for knowledge, but not for the meaning.

All our concern about the unnecessary of object’s existence for the meaning is motivated by the need to show, after showing the first impact that husserlian phenomenology of language had on Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and hermeneutics in general, the second largest impact that Husserl’s phenomenology had on hermeneutics, i.e, hermeneutics as a philosophy of meaning.⁵¹ After this long exposition of Husserl is now time to intertwine Husserl and Ricoeur again. Reading the husserlian theory of meaning intention with a privilege over the autonomy of the meaning respect the object is reading Husserl with an hermeneutical slanting, but let’s go in order. In his *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics* Ricoeur writes that if we turn to the phenomenology of the *Logical Investigations* we will notice

⁴⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 202.

⁵⁰ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 203.

⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 75.

This subordination of the logical notion of signification to the universal notion of meaning, under the guidance of the concept of intentionality, in no way implies that a transcendental subjectivity has sovereign mastery of the meaning towards which it orients itself. On the contrary, phenomenology could be drawn in the opposite direction, namely towards the thesis of the priority of meaning over self-consciousness.⁵²

And then proceeds to attest how the meaning's centrality and autonomy, hinted by us above and that shall be explained further in the following passages, are the phenomenological presuppositions of hermeneutics.

[However,] In order to become a hermeneutical problem – a problem about concealed meaning – the central question of phenomenology must be recognised as a question about meaning. Thereby the phenomenological attitude is already placed above the naturalistic-objectivistic attitude. *The choice in favour of meaning is thus the most general presupposition of any hermeneutics.*⁵³

It is in another text that we can appreciate the similarities in the structure of husserlian thought and Ricoeur's. In his *The Hermeneutic function of distanciation*, Ricoeur operates three distinctions similar to the those operated by Husserl, turning his attention on the meaning.⁵⁴ The three distinctions are the distinction between language and discourse, the distinction between discourse and meaning and the distinction between meaning and text.

The first distinction that Ricoeur operates is between *language* and *discourse* and chooses the terminology of *linguistics of language* or *codes* and a *linguistics of discourse* or *messages*.⁵⁵ The linguistics of language has as a basic unit the sign, in his morphology and phonetics, while the

⁵² Paul Ricoeur, Ivi, p. 76.

⁵³ Paul Ricoeur, Ivi, p. 74.

⁵⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 93-106.

⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur, Ivi, pp. 94-95.

linguistics of discourse has as a basic unit the sentence, understanding a dialectic of «event and meaning».⁵⁶ When Ricoeur talks about the linguistics of language what he has in mind is the structural analysis of language as meant by De Saussure where language is conceived as a self-sufficient system of signs, outside the temporality, where there is no signification and it is possible to study the changes within the system only by virtue of signs and their interaction. For Ricoeur the linguistics of the language does not have temporality, no subject since the question “who speaks?” does not apply at the level of the analysis of signs, and does not have a world to refer to, closed as it is in the system. Discourse on the other side is an *event* that happens in time and at a present time, an event hinged with a speaker that says something and an event as saying something about the world, it has a reference and someone to whom the discourse is spoken to. This distinction is better appreciated in an earlier work of the French philosopher and is a recursive *topos* of his intellectual work. In his *Structure, Word, Event* Ricoeur talks of *semiotics*, referring to what are we calling now “linguistic of language”, and *semantic*, referring to what are we calling now “linguistic of discourse”. *Semiotics* is defined as the structural point of view, with the characteristics stated above, what we would like to report from the text *Structure, Word, Event* is this definition. According to Ricoeur *semiotics* works «on a corpus already constituted, finished, closed, and, in this sense, dead.»⁵⁷ And «establish an algebra or combinatory system of these elements and opposed pairs.»⁵⁸ The pairs being words and signs considered as a unit. In some way Ricoeur has made a distinction, again, between sign and meaning, taking the side of the meaning in the event of discourse and disregarding the sign as a neutral medium that does

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 95.

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Structure, Word, Event* in *The conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Ihde, Northwestern University Press, The Atlon Press London, London, 1974, p. 79.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*. This Ricoeurian notions in the text quoted are situated in an earlier phase of the thought of the French philosopher, where the point at stake will be carried in the present work with regard on the meaning and the meaning of the text. The purposes of quoting passages from *Structure, Word, Event* are to establish how is possible a distinction between meaning and text, even though in the chapter we assimilate meaning and text. The distinction is between text *as* a structure and text as a meaningful work that opens a world.

not have temporality, subjectivity, expressivity. However, Ricoeur proceeds to make a distinction between discourse and meaning.

If all discourse is realised as an event, all discourse is understood as a meaning. What we wish to understand is not the fleeting event, but rather the meaning which endures.⁵⁹

We have already seen how much Husserl prioritized the meaning and the meaning conferring acts over the sentences and the signs, the language in general, but also how Husserl prioritized the meaning over acts of judging or perceiving, that are transitory acts, while the meaning remains. The thesis of the logical priority of meaning is present both in Husserl and Ricoeur and as we have stated above is inherited to Ricoeur's hermeneutics from Husserl's phenomenology.

If language is a *meinen*, a meaningful intention, it is precisely in virtue of the surpassing of the event by the meaning. The very first distanciation is thus the distanciation of the saying in the said.⁶⁰

Ricoeur focuses on what happens to discourse in the case of texts, that are written. The act of writing, quite simply, interrupts many of the characteristics of the discourse, if not all of them. In a discourse the acts involved are speaking and hearing, in a present temporal situation between two or more people that are in the same space and time. This is not the case in regards of a written text. A text could be read after centuries, when the cultural and sociological conditions have been through drastic changes.

⁵⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 96.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

In contrast to the dialogical situation, where the *vis-à-vis* is determined by the very situation of discourse, written discourse creates an audience which extends in principle to anyone who can read.⁶¹

Another feature that falls down is the subjectivity of the discourse. To the question “who writes?” we cannot simply answer “the author”. We have seen why specifically in the first paragraph, but here Ricoeur furthers up by saying that what the text signifies and what the author meant no longer coincide. This is a problem, as we have said, in every case that a meaning is instantiated. The psychology of an author, or even a speaker, cannot be acknowledged because locked to the perception of the hearer or the reader, but here Ricoeur goes further and says that the text is autonomous even in regard of what the author meant. A text has its own meaning, its own ideal content, that survives the psychological intention of the author. In a novel, or a poem, there are not the expressions of the author’s life, what he thought, how he perceived the world, but there is a meaning that goes further and survives the author’s life, his thoughts and what he perceived. Moreover, the meaning of a text is different even from the meaning-conferring acts of the author, this will be explained in the next few pages. We can say for the moment that the meaning is ideal in regards of the meaning-conferring acts, which instantiate the meaning. If this is the case, again, we are not reading about the acts, there are not any acts in the text, but about the meaning. Therefore

What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; henceforth, textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies. [...]

The autonomy of the text already contains the possibility that what Gadamer calls the ‘matter’ of the text may escape from the finite intentional horizon of its author; in other words, thanks to writing, the ‘world’ of the text may explode the world of the author.⁶²

⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 101.

⁶² Ibidem.

The autonomy of the text is given by means of its meaning. When we think of the text, we have already learnt to not take in any consideration the intention of the author, but to look to the text as an autonomous essence, why so? If we think about it a text is made of sentences, those sentences become expressions by virtue of meaning-intention. If we cannot reach the meaning-intention of the author the only thing that remains, in order to make sense of the meaning of the text is that the text has its own intention. At this point the distinction between text and meaning becomes very clear. Ricoeur tells us that by act of writing a discourse gets composed in a structured way susceptible of structural analysis as in the *semiotic* level, or at the level of linguistic of language. The sentences in the former case would be a unit in a structure.

For the work of discourse presents the characteristics of organisation and structure which enable structural methods to be applied to discourse itself, methods which were first successfully applied to linguistic entities shorter than the sentence in phonology and semantics.⁶³

However, since the text is not a complex or signs, nor a complex of sentences loaded with the intention of an author, it is necessary to understand what does make a text such a thing and we know that the answer is: the meaning. With Husserl we discovered that a word becomes a word in the sense of a meaningful word only when informed by a meaning-intention, considered that the intention of the author is out of the play the only thing that remains is the meaning-intention of the text itself, what has been called “the matter” of the text. This is a peculiar kind of intention, but this time it is possible to reach this intention, because it is not based upon acts. The meaning of a text unfolds itself clearly by virtue of giving sense to the sentences there expressed. Ricoeur can arrive at this conclusion because all the features of the event of discourse, in the act of writing, fall down, as we have seen, but the meaning does not go anywhere. What remains is the

⁶³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 100.

text and the meaning attached to it to: the intention of the text is the unfolding of its meaning. As Iasmina Petrovici claims

Given its placement, the objective meaning of a text tends to be autonomously analyzed compared to the intention of the author. Overtaking the event character of meaning, the “autonomy of the text” concept implies that a text must be interpreted based on its signification intent, its relation between noema and noesis.⁶⁴

How can we intend this notion of *autonomy* of the meaning? In Husserl the autonomy of the meaning must be conceived as that feature of the meaning that renders it comprehensible without the presence of any objects or without any actualization, or without any act of judging, perceiving and so on. In Ricoeur the autonomy of the meaning assumes the nuance of the autonomy of the constitution of itself, the possibility of raising wherever a series of sentences is in the framework of a text. Moreover, for Ricoeur the autonomy of meaning *qua* meaning grants the autonomy of the text *qua* meaning-intention. It is because there is a meaning within the text that the text is autonomous from its author.

For both, Husserl and Ricoeur, meaning is an access and not a goal, it does not have anything that performs it, but it is self-performative. It must not be mistaken the fact that a meaning-conferring acts does not create the meaning, but it renders a string of words meaningful, it instantiates meaning. The autonomy in these regards means that meaning is self-substantial and does not need anything else but itself to persist. The meaning is experienced through intention, however meaningful is the form of intentionality, this means that without a meaning a consciousness would not be possible and without a consciousness any experience would not be possible. To experience a meaning presupposes a meaning that is autonomous and that is not created by anything else. The autonomy of meaning is seen at the level of the expression by the fact that a meaning does not need words to be understood, at the level of the reference by the fact that an expression is meaningful even if does not have an object and at the level of the

⁶⁴ Iasmina Petrovici, *Philosophy as Hermeneutics. The World of the Text Concept in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics*, in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 71. Doi code 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.004, 2013. p. 23.

meaning-intentions by the fact that it is only through meaning that an intentionality is possible. The autonomy of the meaning has been shown by Ricoeur himself through his distinction. The meaning is autonomous in regards of the signs, and we have seen how. It is autonomous in regards of both psychology of author and direct context of reference and it is autonomous in regards of the text as a structure of sentences, because it is what informs those sentences with indeed a meaning. This will lead us to another central feature of the meaning, interwoven with its autonomy and probably a condition of it. Ricoeur again

The text must be able, from a sociological as well as the psychological point of view, to “decontextualise” itself in such a way that it can be “recontextualised” in a new situation- as accomplished, by the act of reading.⁶⁵

The meaning shall be able to recontextualise and still be itself. How is this possible? What if a meaning changes, even slightly from situation to situation? In our everyday life it is full of situation in which the context of utterance affects the meaning. We are referring to expressions that are called “indexicals” and Husserl calls “essentially occasional expressions”.⁶⁶

Words such “This”, “I”, “there”, “now” seem to shift meaning depending on the occasion in which they are uttered. If we say “It is happening now” our reader will read such a sentence without being able to grasp what we mean, because his “now” is different from ours. But what happens here is not that the meaning in itself has changed, what has changed, Husserl would say, is «the subjective acts which confer meaning on expressions are variable»,⁶⁷ but not the meaning themselves. The meaning of “now” is always the same, what changes is our way of using it, let’s say. In fact, Husserl writes

⁶⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 101.

⁶⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in *International Library of Philosophy*, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. pp. 217-220.

⁶⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 224.

Meaning themselves do not alter: this is in fact absurd manner of speech if we adhere to our view of meanings as ideal unites.⁶⁸

The act of reading and the recontextualization of the text are not a change of meaning, if something it is a new act of meaning on the side of the reader. If this happens the scenario in front of us will be a scenario where we have to account for transformation or changing in meaning on behalf of the reader-interpreter. This is actually what all this chapter aims to claim, but it is not quite the moment to prove it, because in order to do so the act of reading must be tight with the concept of interpretation and in order to show how this creates an actual new meaning we have to engage in deeper analysis of the concept of *fulfilment* and *intuition*. This analysis shall be provided in the following chapters.

What matters here is the fact that, at this stage, the ideality of the meaning allows for its recontextualization without changing it. If nothing is touched, if we stay just on the side of the reading and not on the one of interpretation, the meaning stay the same. The meaning is autonomous in regards of the acts of meaning as well. Imagine to read a poem by Dante Alighieri, or the entire *Divina Commedia*. The *Commedia* will be read in our present time, in Norway, with our current issues, nevertheless the meaning of the opera would stay the same. It is the meaning that at first, thanks to its ideality, and its autonomy, allows for a reading in the present times. The meaning has as part of its feature atemporality and independence of real occasions,⁶⁹ or we could say the non-spatiality, and such features partake onto the *ideality of meaning*.

Husserl provides us with great details about the ideality of meaning, while Ricoeur confirms that meaning is «identifiable and repeatable».⁷⁰ Husserl expresses himself about the ideality of

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *On Husserl's early theory of Meaning*, The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy, FALL, 1974, Vol. 5, No. 3, Husserl Issue (FALL, 1974), University of Arkansas Press, 1974. p. 231.

⁷⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 99.

meaning as an ideal unity that as a species unifies the manifold of the meaning-conferring acts. This will help us to give clarity to the relation between meaning-conferring acts and meaning and it will help us to give a clear frame of what is the “world” of the text and its reference according to Ricoeur. Husserl writes

The genuine identity that we here assert is none other than the *identity of the species*. As a species, and only as a species, can it embrace in unity, and as an ideal unity, the dispersed multiplicity of individual singulars. The manifold singulars for the ideal unity Meaning are naturally the corresponding act-moments of meaning, the *meaning-intentions*. Meaning is related to varied acts of meaning - Logical Presentation to presentative acts, Logical Judgement to acts of judging, Logical Syllogism to acts of syllogism - just as Redness *in specie* is to the slips of paper which lie here, and which all 'have' the same redness.⁷¹

It is the meaning-intention that needs the meaning, not the meaning the meaning-intention. Every act could exist or disappear, the meaning will stay, in order to have an act a meaning is needed. Moreover, a meaning-intention, or meaning-conferring act, even if instantiate the same meaning does not reproduce it. The meaning is the pivot around which all our experiences and our intentionality revolves. Without the ideality and the unity of the meaning it would not be possible to have expressions, as used in solitary life, that signify something. Neither the objects, nor the perceptions, would be present for a consciousness without the medium of the meaning. The ideal meaning is the content, we have said with Husserl, of our acts. This means that our acts are constituted around and through the meaning: If we perceive x we have some perceptual content of that x, but *the meaning* of our perception would be given only as that ideal content through which I can understand my perception, because I am referring to an object. The way in which I am referring to an object is the meaning of my perception also in the sense that once the object is given to us via our perceptual content we can measure our intending of it, our meaning, with those contents and have knowledge of it. But most importantly, as Mohanty states

⁷¹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 230.

Thus meanings qua meanings cannot also be objects, and when made into objects they cease to be meanings and are referred to through some other meanings.⁷²

Meaning is the medium for the reference to the object and cannot be referred to, otherwise it would become an object and we referred to it through another meaning. The ideality of meaning guarantees the possibility of reference to every kind of objectivity. In the words of Jocelyn Benoist there is a complete detachment of the meaning from any possible ontological commitment.⁷³ The meaning does not need any reference to any object, but it is the *conditio sine qua non* for the reference. An intention is a relational aspect of the consciousness that goes towards the world, we have said, therefore through meaning-intention a reference to an object, but if the meaning-intention is an instantiation of the ideal meaning, it is the meaning that allows this relation. Reference is a matter of meaning and its instantiation in meaning-intentions.

If we return to Paul Ricoeur now, we can see how this husserlian notion is helpful in cases where the text suspends his reference to the world. Ricoeur asks

What happens to reference when discourse becomes a text? Here we find that writing, and above all the structure of the work, modify reference to the point of rendering it entirely problematic.⁷⁴

⁷² Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *Husserl's thesis of the Ideality of Meaning*, in *Readings on Edmund Husserl's Logical Investigation*, edited by J. N. Mohanty, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1997, p. 78.

⁷³ Jocelyn Benoist, *Fenomenologia e Teoria del significato*, translated from French by C. Cappelletto, in *Leitmotiv*, revue online de L'Università Statale di Milano, n. 3, 2003, p. 134 www.ledonline.it/leitmotiv/. Original in *Les limites de l'intentionnalité. Recherches phénoménologiques et analytiques*, Paris, Vrin, collection « Problèmes & controverses », Février 2005, 288 p

⁷⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 103.

This is not a problematic and Ricoeur knows very well. According to him the world of the text, or the meaning of the text, opens a new order of reference, an order of reference that is not the ostensive one of everyday language, but opens to a second order of reference. He identifies this second order of reference as an order where it is possible to unfold not the *being* but the *power to be*. However, what is important here is that this “opening another level of reference” can be seen as the inheritance of that ideality of meaning and its being the medium for reference that we have acknowledged in Husserl. Ricoeur’s concept of the text, can be said, manifests the features of *autonomy, ideality and centrality* of the meaning that makes it similar to the meaning described throughout the *First Logical Investigations*. Such features, however, are displayed in the work of the French philosopher with a generative character. The distancing of the meaning from the text is, in fact, the distancing from an order of reference to another. Strictly speaking the meaning cannot be separated from the text, because the meaning *is* the text. Without meaning there could not be any text. The intention of the text is that presentification of the meaning that breaks the ostensive reference of the meaning that refers again to something else, this referring is not ostensive in any regards because what the meaning presents is a realm of possibility. What we must keep in mind is that although Husserl and Ricoeur are very close, their theoretical projects aim to different directions: for Husserl the gaining of knowledge, for Ricoeur an interpretation of the reader in front of the text that allows the interpreter to understand himself and to gain a self-interpretation, such self-understanding is possible only via the possibility opened by the meaning of the text.⁷⁵

More must be said, and more has been left unresolved or just hinted. What we have gained from this first paragraph is the observation that a line of interpretation for Ricoeur’s hermeneutics can be traced from Husserl’s *Logical Investigation* and rediscovered, *mutadis mutandis*, in the thought of the French philosopher. Some metaphysical features of the meaning, for example, that in Ricoeur has a major productive role and makes the text something more than a collection of sentences informed with a sense. The text is alive, has its own matter and its own meaning and the meaning of the text is ultimately this opening of a new world, of a new reference, that is gained via meaning. The next paragraph will focus on the interpretation of such a meaning.

⁷⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, pp. 105-106.

Another similarity among Husserl and Ricoeur is their conception of language, it is where everything starts and following that thread we arrived to the meaning's conception. In the next section we shall expand on the issue of the meaning, on Husserl's side it shall be explained what is a meaning fulfilling act and the act of fulfilment and why Ricoeur can say that in Husserl's thought is it possible to find some hermeneutics presupposition, such as *interpretation*. Interpretation will be the red thread of the entire paragraph, because is what constitutes the object for the perception and what, for Husserl, allows the grasp of meaning. For Ricoeur interpretation will be a comprehension through explanation and appropriation of the text. I shall show how Ricoeur's concept of comprehension and appropriation could be found in the Husserlian concept of *fulfilment*, both as a static and a dynamic unit.

2. "Interpretation": Is Husserl a Conceptualist?

The second chapter shall be premise for our treatment of the concepts of understanding and interpretation. In this regards the husserlian notion of and *fulfilment* is going to be the key to clarify the concept of understanding and interpretation in philosophical hermeneutics. Here, Ricoeur shall be the point of arrival of the discussion and shall irradiate backwards some light on the functioning of those husserlian notions. Ricoeur's notion of explanation and interpretation shall be paired with what Husserl calls the static unity of fulfilment and the dynamic unity of fulfilment in his sixth *Logical Investigations*.⁷⁶ In order to function as a premise the chapter will

⁷⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001.

touch on the current debate about Husserl's conceptualism and, without any claims of permanently solving the issue, within a dialogue among Ricoeur and Husserl, shall try to take a side on the debate, arguing for a non-conceptualist position. The current debate on Husserl's conceptualism in the *Logical Investigation* is a debate about the character of the contents of intuitive intentions, such as perception or imagination, and whether such contents can be carriers of meaning. If the answer is that these contents can be carriers of meaning then a conceptualist view is held, because it is a concept already meaningful per se. A non-conceptualist view holds, on the opposite, that a content of perception or imagination can be meaningful only if paired with a meaning-conferring act, therefore the content of perception or imagination are not meaningful per se. Finally, questions will be asked about the results of the analysis provided, especially regarding the possibility of further communication and reception of meanings. Overall, the chapter argues for a problematization of the notion of interpretation along the line that goes from Husserl to Ricoeur, investigating the possibility of a rift that every interpretation operates on meaning. If every interpretation is an appropriation upon which is possible to build with a new intention it will mean that the new intention is conferring a new meaning, therefore it is not possible to talk of the same thing but about, or around, the same thing, pushing the line of the meaning always forward.

In his essay *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics* Paul Ricoeur writes about what he considers «the hermeneutical presuppositions of phenomenology.»⁷⁷ In the previous section we have seen how a main phenomenological presupposition of hermeneutics is the *centrality, autonomy and ideality* of meaning. In regards of the hermeneutical presuppositions of hermeneutics Ricoeur focuses on the concept of *interpretation (Deutung)*.

⁷⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 80-89.

In the *Logical Investigations*, the concept *Deutung*- which is indeed interpretation suddenly appears precisely in order to characterise a phase in the work of elucidation or clarification of logical meanings.⁷⁸

What Ricoeur is referring to is paragraph 23 of the First Logical Investigation, where we can read

The grasp of understanding, in which the meaning of a word becomes effective, is, in so far as *any* grasp is in a sense an understanding and an interpretation, akin to the divergently carried out “objective interpretations” in which, by way of an experienced sense-complex, the intuitive presentation, whether percept, imagination, representation etc, of an object, e.g an external thing arises.⁷⁹

In this case two are the paths that we shall follow. The first is the path that will allow us to show how Husserl can claim the kinship between the understanding and interpretation that set up the meaning for an expression and the understanding and interpretation that set up the object; the second path shall show us the difference between the two moments and therefore what we can conceive as understanding and interpretation for Husserl. In this section we shall engage on the debate whether Husserl is a conceptualist or not. This debate can take many slantings, basing on the categorial intuitions,⁸⁰ or as Ka-Wing Leung and Walter Hopp do on whether perception is a carrier or meaning and how the interpretation (*Aufassung*) of perceptual content shall be considered.⁸¹ We will partake on the latter side of the debate. The reason for doing so is because our issues are concerned with the act of interpretation on itself and whether this is interpretation

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 82.

⁷⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 213.

⁸⁰ See Timothy Mooney, *Understanding and simple seeing in Husserl*. Husserl Studies 26 (1), Springer, Berlin, 2019:19-48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-009-9063-9>

⁸¹ We will quote and present the views of these authors later in the thesis.

of meaning or not, or to consider how Husserl's concept of interpretation relates to the fact that Ricoeur talks of interpretation as a hermeneutical presupposition for phenomenology. We are inclined to give an account of Husserl as a non-conceptualist, trying to stay as much loyal to the text as possible and to give an account of *conceptualization* that does not lay on the side of interpretation (*Aufassung*), but rather on the side of meaning intentions and acts of fulfillment. This should be the most sounding and logical conclusion of the *ideality, autonomy and centrality* of meaning asserted above. We shall clarify why sensations, although are content, are not concepts and that interpretation is rather the illustration and presentification of the object via contents, in this case via ostensive contents which are sensations informed by interpretation, this will be our reply to Ka-Wing Leung. The effect of taking position in this debate for our interpretation of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics shall be appreciated when analysing that act which grants access to the world of the text: the act of reading. As Michael Foessel rightly acknowledges an act of reading is an act of perception, nevertheless for him reading, therefore perception, is not different from interpretation.⁸² We shall challenge this claim because if what is true about Husserl non-conceptualism and the fact that perception is not a carrier of meaning, then it is not possible for the act of reading to be an interpretative act. We shall demonstrate that in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics the act of interpretation is a carrier of new meaning, therefore it is not an act of perception, considered the pairing of Ricoeur's interpretation and Husserl's intentions and fulfilling acts.

As we have said the debate whether Husserl holds a conceptualist or a non-conceptualist view starts with the possibility for intuitive intentions to be carrier of meaning

In paragraph 23 Husserl continues saying that «the phenomenological structure of the to “grasps” is, however, somewhat different.»⁸³ If we take in account only paragraph 23 it will not be clear how this difference arises. It is appropriate to step back for a second and to recontextualize the

⁸² Michael Foessel, *The World of the Text and the World of Life: Two Contradictory Paradigms?*, In Contributions to Hermeneutics, Vol. 2, *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur. Between Text and Phenomenon*. Edited by Scott Davidson and Marc-Antoine Vallée, Springer, 2016, p.84

⁸³ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, pp. 213-214.

way in which Husserl is talking about *signs*. The discussion shall be framed on the account of symbolic meanings, those meanings without fulfilment. Let's take the example of mathematics. Is it possible for the sign " π " to be an expression, to have a meaning? Husserl says that it is indeed possible and brings as an example the game of chess. In the game of chess a bishop is more than a wooden piece with a sharp head, but as a unit of the game that have a certain role and certain moves; in the same way π is not just a letter of the Greek alphabet, but in the context of mathematics is intentioned with a certain meaning. " Π " is certainly a symbol, but is still an expression, a symbolic expression even though some intuitions are presenting it to us in symbolic fashion. If that had had been the case, it would have meant that intuition had an informative role about the empirical sign, that transformed it in a symbol, and after that a meaning-intention had made the symbol into an expression. If that had had been the case, the autonomy of the meaning would have fallen because the intuition would have been the presupposition of symbolic meaning, while we have seen that meaning is autonomous in regards of objects and their ontological condition. Being symbolic or not a meaning is still a meaning and the symbolic status of it is given only by the fact that an intuition is not there to fulfil it. Every meaning is symbolic when a fulfilment is missing or is not performed yet. We know that meaning has a priority in regards of reference, if we constituted a symbolic meaning based on intuition this priority would fall and we would be able to have a meaning only after referring to objects and signs as objects via intuition, but how mathematics would be possible if we cannot have intuitions of non-empirical objects?

Meaning cannot first have been acquired through intuition: otherwise we should have to say that much the greater part of our experience in speaking and reading is merely an external perceiving or imagining of optic and auditory complexes.⁸⁴

It can be concluded that

⁸⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, pp. 211-212.

An expression functioning symbolically also means something, and means the same thing as an expression intuitively clarified.⁸⁵

To sum up: what intuition cannot give is the symbolic fashion of the meaning, or the meaning, what can give is the symbol as a sign, as an object, printed or typed. If until this moment we have disregarded the sign in favour of the meaning it is now time, in order to explain the difference between the two kinds of grasp, to focus on the sign as a physical object. Focusing on the sign as a physical object is the key to talk about intention as signitive intention and intuitive intention, then to talk about how the interpretation works on the side of the intuitive intentions, in a smaller picture, and in a bigger picture on the side of fulfilment. The starting point shall be, again, what Husserl says on paragraph 23 of the First Investigation, because it will ferry us to the Sixth Investigation. To frame correctly our discussion, we have to start with two Husserl's quotations from paragraph 23. In the first Husserl says

Meaning, the characteristic function of the expressive sign, presupposes the sign whose function it is. [...]. Meaning is a variously tintured act-character, presupposing an act of intuitive presentation as its necessary foundation. In the latter act, the expression becomes constituted as a physical object. It becomes an expression, in the full, proper sense, only through an act founded upon this former act.⁸⁶

But before saying this, dwelling on the comparison between the grasping of understanding and interpretation that presents a meaningful expression and the grasping of understanding and interpretation that presents the object, Husserl claims that the former grasp is different from the latter and asks us to imagine a consciousness prior to all experiences, we will have a consciousness that has only sensations but those sensations will *mean nothing* and they will be without an *objectifying interpretation*, Husserl proceeds to warn us that

⁸⁵ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 211.

⁸⁶ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 214.

The above talk should not be misread as implying that consciousness first looks at its sensations, then turns them into perceptual objects, and bases an interpretation upon them, which is what really happens when we are objectively conscious of physical objects, e.g, sounded word, which function as signs in the strict sense.⁸⁷

Can this ruin our talk about the autonomy, ideality and centrality of the meaning? Not really. Husserl is pretty explicit in saying that what is constituted by an act of intuitive presentation is the physical side, the objectual side, of the sign. This object is the presupposition of meaning, but meaning has to be intended here not in the sense of the ideal content that we clarified above, but meaning-conferring act. If we pause for a second and read carefully the above quotes we will read that Husserl, in the first quote, talks of meaning as an act-character, referring indeed to meaning conferring acts, while in the second case, between commas, he talks about an interpretation that happens when we are conscious of the physical object which does not occur when we deal with sensations. Such interpretation is the interpretation of the physical sign in the strict sense, therefore an expression. We know that what makes a physical sign an expression is the meaning-conferring act. In this sense the meaning conferring act, the meaning intention, is an interpretation of a sign. However, this talk is not quite definitive. Why are the two grasps different? Why does suddenly the physical sign become a presupposition for the meaning? Why the interpretation that happens on the physical sign is not similar to the one that happens in cases of meaning-conferring activity?

In Henry Pietersma's words, in his last *Logical Investigation* Husserl begins by

Calling attention to a new range of differences in the manner in which intentional acts are directed to objects, or rather differences in the modes in which objects are given to us. In some cases, we refer to an object or a state of affairs by purely linguistic means. We utter words by mean of which we refer to something that is not perceptually present at all. In other cases, we actually see what we mean, in that we see the object itself.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Henry Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 39.

What is Pietersma referring to here is the distinction, set up in the Sixth *Logical Investigation*, between signitive intention and intuitive intentions. A signitive intention is what we have so far called a meaning-intention, or meaning conferring act. The peculiarity of this intention is that, although they have an intuitive support on the sensuous side of the expression, they do not have any intuitive *content*.⁸⁹ What in fact gives such intuitive *content* is the intuitive intuition, which has indeed intuitive contents of the objects. Talk of intuitive contents in this case is talking about those contents that provide an actual presence of the object intended. Intuitive intentions are imagination and perception. To clarify the matter at stake we can make an example. If we intend something through a signitive intention the object is merely thought of and it is not present to us, there is no presentation of the object. Different is the case of imagination, in this case the object imagined by us is presented to us by the content of imaginations by *likeness*: the object imagined in our intention will be found to be alike to the actual object once the intention is fulfilled. Perception is an intuitive intention as well, more powerful than imagination because the contents of the former are actually closer to the contents of the object itself. When the object is given to and through perception, we get the object itself. However, perception is an intention not only because it is a way through which we get to the object, but also because in cases of outer perception we have the object given in *perspective*, so to say, we can see only one side of an object and not its entirety, therefore what is missing can be thought of, as in the case of signitive intentions, without actual correlation to the object. Husserl assures us that even though this is the case, the object in itself «is not wholly different from the object realized, however imperfectly, in the percept.»⁹⁰ The point of this distinction, for our concern, is to show this talk of *contents*, because it is on the *content* of perception that is engaged a debate about Husserl's thought: his conceptualism. If the contents of the intuitive acts are conceptual then they will be carrier of meaning, as the signitive intentions, therefore perception and imagination could be considered as acts that confer meaning, dropping the fact that meaning is the carrier of reference.

⁸⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 219.

⁹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 221.

As we have said the debate whether Husserl holds a conceptualist or a non-conceptualist view starts with the possibility for intuitive intentions to be carrier of meaning. The debate starts here because is Husserl himself whom asks, at the very beginning of the Sixth *Logical Investigation*, «whether every type of mental act, or only certain types, can function as carriers of meaning.»⁹¹ The answer is that it cannot be the case. Acts can be expressed, but cannot be carriers of meaning. For an act to be expressed means either that is an act that gives meaning to an expression or that is an act that «we name, acts we are now experiencing, and through such naming manage *to say that we are experiencing them.*».⁹² Being able to express an act does not mean that this act is the carrier of meaning. If we are experiencing our desire for a pizza and we utter “I desire a pizza”, the meaning of such expression is not in the desiring, but rather on another sort of act, the meaning conferring act. This could be proven by the fact that if we were not experiencing the desire for a pizza and still uttering the same sentence the meaning will not change. Husserl concludes that «a truly sense giving experience can never be absent if the living sense of the expression is to survive change.»⁹³ However, on this second sense of an act to be expressed Husserl wants to expand. An act expressed can be thought as an act where what is expressed is not the experience of the act, as in the sense of “I desire a pizza”, which is an object of discourse, but a grounding of our judgment on the content of the act expressed. In the present situation it would be the pizza. Husserl elegantly puts the matter as it follows.

We have rather a judgment *grounded* upon such acts, which does not demand their objectification.

That I express my percept of something may, e.g, mean that I attribute this or that content to it: it may also mean that I derive my judgment from my percept, that I do not merely assert but also

⁹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. pp. 191-192.

⁹² Edmund Husserl, Ivi, pp.192-193.

⁹³ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 193.

perceive the matter of fact in question, and that I assert it as I perceive it. My judgment is not here concerned with the perceiving but with the thing perceived.⁹⁴

The matter at issues then turns to be where the meaning resides; in this case is it in the intuition of the object that the meaning resides? Husserl starts then two paragraphs devoted to the discussion of this matter.⁹⁵ Husserl starts with the example of a sentence expressed after seeing a blackbird flying off a garden. We can say “There flies a blackbird!” and Husserl claims that in such a sentence it is not the case that perception is the carrier of meaning, for two reasons, or better for one reason divided in two factors. The first factor is that on the same perception could hinge different meanings, by saying for example “that bird is black”. The state of affairs perceived is still the same, a blackbird that is flying, but our meaning is different from the first percept, but most importantly the sentence “there flies a blackbird!” will have the same meaning even though the blackbird is gone and we are not perceiving it anymore. In this case the changes in *individual* percept do not affect meaning. Husserl then furthers up and writes that the percepts «may not only vary, but may also vanish altogether, without causing an expression to lose all its meaning.»⁹⁶ Husserl can conclude that perception cannot be the carrier of meaning, but he makes another important remark, deepening on what achieved in the First Investigation, saying that many acts attaches to the sounds of our words, depending on whether they are symbolic, or intuitively filled with significance, therefore it cannot be by these always changing acts that meaning is conferred. The stability and peculiarity of the meaning-conferring acts is now ensured via empirical demonstration. There is another quote that is worth to be reported in this work, but its importance will be appreciated better after concluding what is the intake of an intuitive intuition, in this case perception, to an expression and its meaning. Husserl continues by proving that although perception does not carry meaning, still contributes to it, determining it but not embodying it.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 194.

⁹⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, pp. 195-200.

⁹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 195.

⁹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 198.

The case presented by the German author is a case where we deal with indexicals, or essential occasional expressions. In such a case when we say “this is a bird” pointing to a bird that in the present situation of utterance, such utterance would be quite indeterminate, although a meaning exists and is comprehensible. What perception does in this case is determining the relation between the meaning of the expression and the object, *this specific bird in this specific situation*.
The addition of perception

The addition of intuition has as effect that this common element of meaning, indeterminate in abstraction, can determinate itself. Intuition in fact gives it complete determinateness of objective reference, and thereby its last difference.⁹⁸

But this determination is still not a meaning conferring act. On this perception, the perception of *this bird*, a new act arises: the meaning conferring act that assigns the meaning intended. Why cannot be perception the carrier of meaning in this case? The reason is simpler to think than to explain, but a good tentative might be the following. “This” has already a meaning, we would know when and how use this word, without a percept. However, “this” has a meaning that is not determinate and that needs determination. “This” might be determinate by an act of imagination as well as an act of intuition, when for example we imagine an object and we refer to it by saying “this is an island”. All that intuition does is giving an actual determination, not a reference. If we talk about signitive intention and intuitive intention we can say that when the signitive intention “this” is uttered it has a meaning but no concrete relation to the object intended, when an intuitive intention determines it the relation obtains.

Without a percept – or some correspondingly functioning act- the pointing would be empty, without definite differentiation, impossible in the concrete. [...]. Perception accordingly *realizes the possibility* of an unfolding of my act of this-meaning with its definite relation to the object.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p.197.

⁹⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 198.

There is something more to be said, just for clarification. What the intuition is, in this case an intuitive intention as the perception, is something that does not affect the meaning. Once the meaning of *this* has been determinate the first time, every time that the meaning of *this* in the particular determinate occasion would be expressed, it will not be necessary to have the same perception.

Once the intention to an object has been formed on a suitable intuitive basis, it can be revived and exactly reproduced *without* the help of a suitable act of perception or imagination.¹⁰⁰

The intention Husserl is talking about is the general intention, the one that can function sometimes as meaning intention, or signitive intention, and intuitive intention. In this case the general intention is declined in its intuitive fashion, because it is the intention directed as perception that directs to an object, the one expressed by the meaning intention through the word “this”. We hope it is clarified the exposition about how the perception concurs to the meaning without being the carrier of the meaning. We said that another quote from Husserl was worth to be reported, this will allow us to start a discussion about the conceptualism in Husserl, the fulfilment of an intuitive intention, *intuitive illustration* and *fullness*. After that it will be possible to focus on the static and dynamic unit of fulfilment and to see how they relate to Ricoeur’s concepts of interpretation as explanation and appropriation. The theoretical support of Ricoeur will be useful to validate a non-conceptualist reading of Husserl.

The last quote about the determination of perception on meaning is the following.

We have good reason to say: the statement *expresses the percept*, i.e. brings out what is perceptually “*given*”. The same percept may serve as a *foundation* [my italics] for several statements, but, however the sense of such statement may vary, it addresses itself to the phenomenal content of perception.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 196.

Before commenting and interpreting this last quote it is better for the argument's sake to dissolve the ambiguity about the kinship among comprehension and interpretation in the formation of the word and the object. In this sense the first of the three foundational roles of perception in the constitution of the word as a physical object can help us to solve the issue. Perception, or intuitive intentions, since we can refer in these regards to imagination too, solves three different foundational roles, according to the three different kind of contents that pertain to it. More generally we shall not consider perception as three things at once, but engaging in perception's analysis with a phenomenological point of view, i.e. to see how perception works and behaves at the various stages of the constitution of the object. Let's start with the constitution of the word as an object starting from the data of sensations. Above we have showed Husserl's warning against thinking that consciousness first looks at its sensation and then interprets them into objects. The first reason for stating such a warning is due to the fact that if the consciousness had worked on sensations transforming them into objects gaining the representation of the object, we would have fallen back into a duality where there is the consciousness on a side and the object on the other, mediated by the sensations. One of the most important achievements of phenomenology is the breaking of such a duality, where the consciousness and the object intended are one and the same and there is not a mediation but a straightforward relationship, a meaningful relationship; not a reality outside of the consciousness but a consciousness within the reality that relates to it through its intentionality. Gary B. Madison correctly states

One thing that I *cannot* legitimately say that I know or claim to have experienced is what metaphysicians call "the reality itself" reality as it exists (supposedly), apart from my consciousness of it. Indeed, from a strictly phenomenological point or experiential point of view the notion of a reality that would be totally "in itself" totally "outside" of consciousness, is a notion

devoid of any discernible meaning. Being devoid of any real meaning, it is, as the distinguished Husserl would say, absurd.¹⁰²

The second reason is a more phenomenological one, as we have said above. We need to look at and into the perception, or intuitive intentions, and intentionality tout-court, observing how it functions at the various stage of meaning or object constitution. Robert Sokolowski affirms that «signifying and perceiving are two kinds of intentionality, but they become visible in what they do, not in themselves. [...]. The differences between signs and perceived things allow us to discover differences in the intentionalities that are correlated with them.»¹⁰³ We should maintain from Sokolowski's statement the fact that we can appreciate the difference between signitive and intuitive intentions in what they do, although we reject the fact that those are two different intentionalities. The rejection of this theoretical statement is going to be motivated in the following discussion about Husserl's non-conceptualism, for now it is worth to say that if we take for granted this division it will be easier to slip into an understanding of Husserl as a conceptualist, due to the fact that in order for the two intentionalities to communicate it will be needed a common ground, a concept, where meaning and perception can encounter. It is now time to start untangling the problem of content as sensation and the clarification of the first reason why we partake for a non-conceptualist reading of Husserl. Husserl's warning, it has been said, leans on two reasons: a broader one based on the actual nature of the phenomenological attitude and a narrower one based on how intentionality, in this case perception as intuitive intention, works. Let's recall Husserl's warning.

The above talk should not be misread as implying that consciousness first looks at its sensations, then turns them into perceptual objects, and bases an interpretation upon them, which is what really

¹⁰² Gary B. Madison, *The Interpretative Turn in Phenomenology: A Philosophical History*. In *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, vol. 8, issue 2, 2004, p. 401, doi code <https://doi.org/10.5840/symposium20048235>

¹⁰³ Robert Sokolowski, *Semiotics in Husserl's Logical Investigations*, in *One Hundred Years of Phenomenology*, edited by D. Zahavi and F. Stjernfelt, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 2002, pp. 171-172.

happens when we are objectively conscious of physical objects, e.g, sounded word, which function as signs in the strict sense.¹⁰⁴

And let's pair it with his definition of what is a sensation. In the paragraph 22 of the Sixth Logical investigation Husserl names sensations as *intuitively presentative* contents (*Inhalten*) and writes

We understand those contents of intuitive acts which, owing to the purely imaginative or perceptual interpretations that they sustain, point unambiguously to definitely corresponding contents in the object, represent these in imagined or perspectival slanting.¹⁰⁵

And he furthers up in the same page by saying that

The intuitively presentative contents of outer perception define the concept of *sensation* in the ordinary, narrow sense. [...]. The intuitively presentative or intuitively representative contents in and with interpretation put upon them, we call *intuitive substance (Gehalt) of the act*.¹⁰⁶

The first thing to disentangle then is whether the interpretation of sensations brings meaning to the sensations and it is at the same time a condition of possibility for the appearance of a perceptual object, also this will show us the difference between the understanding and the interpretation that sets up the complete word and the one that gives us the object. Interpretation being carrier of meaning and condition of possibility for the appearance of a perceptual object is

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 214

¹⁰⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 235.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

exactly Ka-Wing Leung's thesis in his *Meaning and Intuitive Act in the Logical Investigations*.¹⁰⁷ The debate must be situated, at this stage, on sensations because the interpretation will be what applies *concepts* to sensations in order to interpret them and provide the object for a consciousness. Hence, a consciousness must have been provided by its concept even before having sensation. As Walter Hopp presents the conceptual position in such regards.

What, then, are we to make of Husserl's conception of hyletic data? If Husserl's account is correct, a consciousness without the right concepts to interpret its sensations would somehow have color-like, spread-out something "in" his consciousness, without being able to treat them as signs or presentations of something "out there".¹⁰⁸

Ka-Wing Leung states his position as it follows:

In interpretation (*Auffassung*) is also an act which is sense-conferring (*sinnverleihend*), and if it is at the same time a condition of possibility for the appearance of a perceptual object, no matter whether the perception in which it appears is united with the meaning-conferring act or not, then it is obvious that perception is in itself sense-giving in a certain sense, or that it is an act in which there is always an element which is sense-giving in a certain sense.¹⁰⁹

What we shall challenge is Ka-Wing Leung's statement and his argumentation that we shall report after stating our own premises. In the first place, we shall challenge the nature of the sensations as interpreted by Ka-Wing Leung. In his paper he never gives a particular claim or definition of sensations, nor he reports Husserl's definition as the one we stated above. However,

¹⁰⁷ Ka-Wing Leung, *Meaning and Intuitive Act in the Logical Investigations*, in *Husserl Studies*, published online 14 December, 2010, issue 27, December 2010, Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 2010, pp. 125-142. Doi code: DOI 10.1007/s10743-010-9086-2.

¹⁰⁸ Walter Hopp, *Husserl on Sensation, Perception, and Interpretation.*, in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, Number 2, June 2008, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 233.

¹⁰⁹ Ka-Wing Leung, Op. Cit., p. 137.

talking about the act of interpretation he writes that is the very thing «that confers the sensation with an “objective sense”».».¹¹⁰ From this we can imply that for Leung sensations are not something objectual, but something, belonging to the object, that is perceived that turns to be objective via interpretation. For an object to be perceived, it seems, we need a sensation such a colour-like bit that is seen, to be interpreted as the colour of a thing and then the thing will be perceived after further interpretation. But this is not quite accurate, specially recalling the fact that Husserl calls *sensations* “the intuitively presentative content of outer perception”. The perception is an intuitive intention, and as intention is toward *something*, in this case toward the object: perception as an intuitive act has components, *contents* and in this case contents as sensations. Such contents have an ostensive nature and it is Husserl himself telling us. In talking about the *fulness* of a presentation, he writes that there is an ideal of complete fullness and a fullness of presentation, what interests us at the moment is how he characterizes the fullness of presentation:

The ideal of complete fullness is, accordingly, the fullness of the object itself, as the sum total of its constitutive properties. The fullness of the presentation is, however, the sum total of properties pertaining to the presentation itself, through which it analogically gives presence to its object, or it apprehends it as itself analogically given.¹¹¹

This quote precedes the definition given by Husserl of sensations as the intuitive presentative contents quoted above. It is therefore reasonable to think that what analogically gives presence to the presentation is the sensation, with the interpretation. It could be objected to this reading that we are re-introducing a duality between consciousness and object, intending the sensations as what gives presence of the object. We should resist this objection claiming that we are currently analysing a moment of the overall act of perception, taking in account the contents as sensation. We must keep in mind that the act of perception is directed to the object tout-court

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. pp. 233-234.

and does not need any mediation, however, looking into the perception a moment of analogical presentation is given by the sensations as what makes the presence of the object known. To sum up: sensations are not something on what perception is built on, but sensations are in the act of perception the ostensive element that presents, gives the appearance of the object. It would be hard to say that we are perceiving a car if we do not have any sensations of the car, if we do not hear the sound of the engine or we see its colour. At this level we are seeing a colour or hearing a sound, sensations are presenting us the object, within perception, we are not perceiving the sensations but the object. In our way of saying, intuitive intention is logically prior to its sensations, but sensations are chronologically prior.

To say that interpretation gives sensations an objective sense misses the mark, since sensations have already an objective sense, actually they give the sense of the object. In this case we use the word “sense” not as meaning but as an intuitive idea of the presence of something else. Something appearing in certain ways, i.e. the appearance of the car through the sound of an engine, is not the act of perception tout-court, but one moment of perception that is “lived-through” by the consciousness in its understanding of the object.¹¹² If it has to be excluded that interpretation gives sensations an objective sense it is still not clarified how we can dismiss the thought that interpretation is alike a meaning-conferring act. Leung motivates the fact that interpretation of sensations is the same as a meaning-conferring act analysing the paragraph 23 of the first *Logica Investigation*, namely the bits that we have not quoted yet, we are going to report it as in Leung’s texts, where he applied some modifications on the English translations. We will highlight the words substituted by Leung in round brackets.

The phenomenological structure of the two sorts of interpretation (grasp) is, however, somewhat different. If we imagine a consciousness prior to all experience, it may very well have the same *sensations* as we have. But it will intuit no things, and no events pertaining to things, it will perceive

¹¹² Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 214. See also, Walter Hopp, *Husserl on Sensation, Perception, and Interpretation.*, in Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 38, Number 2, June 2008, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 232.

no trees and no houses, no flight of birds nor any barking of dogs. One is at once tempted to express the situation by saying that its sensations mean nothing to such a consciousness, that they do not count as signs of the object itself. They are merely lived through, without an objectifying rendering (interpretation) derived from experience. Here, therefore, we talk of signs and meanings just as we do in the case of expressions and cognate signs (LU II/1, p. 75/309; translation altered).¹¹³

Leung focuses on the fact that Husserl talks, in the above quote, about “signs” and claim that signs to what Husserl is referring are expressions because Husserl talks about meanings. There is no such a thing as cognate signs, he claims, only indications and signs as expressions and since in the quote Husserl is talking of meanings the only candidate left are expressions. If we are talking about expressions, he concludes, interpretation of sensations is a meaning conferring act as interpretation of signs is a meaning conferring act, due to their likeness.

Provided that we can, as Husserl believes, talk about sign and meaning in perception, and the expression is the only kind of sign that has meaning, then all perceptions are actually synthetic act of fulfilment, and the objective interpretation is nothing other than the understanding interpretation which confers meaning on a word. We are talking about the same kind of sign, the same kind of meaning or sense, and the same kind of interpretation in both cases.¹¹⁴

We believe this interpretation is flawed for three reasons. The first is the fact that sensation do not need an objective sense put upon by an interpretation, as we showed above. The second is that Leung ignores Husserl’s warning stated right after that quote, where he warns us that it is not the case that the consciousness looks at its sensation and then turn them into a perceptual object and finally bases an interpretation above them. The third is a misinterpretation of an analogy that Husserl is making, therefore there is no need to focus on so much attention about the fact that there is a talk of signs and expression.

¹¹³ Ka-Wing Leung, *Op. Cit.*, p. 139.

¹¹⁴ Ka-Wing Leung, *Ivi*, p. 140.

The argument for our claim that Leung has ignored Husserl's warning goes as it follow. Sensations, we have said, are ostensive components of a perception; there is nothing to make objective about them because they are a content of perception; sensations make the object to appear but does not give the object. If we hear the sound of one engine, we might think that a car is appearing, but maybe it is a tractor: in this sense the *sensed* sound is not a perceived sound. The sensations can lead us to a mistake, the perception cannot because the object is given as it is and not as it appears. However, the appearance of the object is via content of perception called sensations. Husserl says

Sensations plainly only become presented objects in psychological reflection: in naïve, intuitive presentations they may be *components* of our presentative experience, parts of its descriptive content, but are not at all its objects.¹¹⁵

What is the role of interpretation then? It is what makes sensations representative content for perception, which give the intuitive substance of the act of perception. This means nothing more that interpretation is what gives the status of components of perception to sensations. The ostensive role of such contents is given by interpretation: the sound of an engine is not a mere sound but it is interpreted as sound of an engine, whether of a car or a tractor. At this very level, if we imagine the famous consciousness prior to all experience, we can say that this consciousness cannot mark a sound as the sound of the engine or the barking of a dog, there is just a sound, because it is a consciousness prior to all experiences, without the intentional drive toward the world, drive that we have said is driven by *intentionality*, and perception is an *intuitive intuition*.¹¹⁶

A consciousness that interprets such ostensive components can mark the sound as the sound of an engine and this component as a component of the overall act of perception that gives the

¹¹⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. I, 2008. p. 214.

¹¹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. pp. 218-222.

object-car. Our claim finds a good confirmation in what Walter Hopp has to say about interpretation

What makes a given hyletic content H represent a property Q on a given occasion is not that a special act trained upon H has interpreted it as the self-manifestation of Q, but *that H stands in a certain form of unity with the matter or the noetic components N of an act*. That is, if N and H are united in consciousness in a given way, then H will present Q. H's representative character arises from the fact that is embedded within a certain sort of whole- no "glue" holds it together with the noetic components of the act, and, in particular, no acts of the ego are necessary to its representative function about.¹¹⁷

To perceive is already to represent we might say and to interpret is to specify and narrow-down the ostensive components, the sensations. What we have to take from Hopp's interpretation is the fact that sensations are already embedded in the act of perception and not prior to it. To perceive is not an act where there is a check-list to complete, where we first have a sensation, then an interpretation, then some other steps and then eventually the perception of the object; to perceive is an act that has internal components that play a role all at the same time within the choreography of the act.

If sensations were conceptual contents, and not ostensive contents, that would mean that we already had the concept sound of an engine, then sound of a car and again sound of a tractor. This kind of view, however, would not give us the sense of two things: the first is that Husserl says that a consciousness prior to all experiences would not *perceive* no trees and no houses nor any barking of dogs; this means, we believe, that since we always hear a sound as a sound of an engine, a bark as a barking of a dog, the consciousness cannot be prior to any experiences. Far from claiming the innatism of conceptual contents in our minds, Husserl is expressing the fact that when we perceive something, we are experiencing it through our sensations, in an ostensive manner. The ostensive quality of sensations and the fact that the interpretation is something that regards the sensations as already a manifestation of the object, can be confirmed by the fact that

¹¹⁷ Walter Hopp, Op. Cit., pp 235-236.

the act of perception while presenting the object «gives it “presence”, in the pregnant sense of the word, it imports something of the fulness of the object itself.». It is a movement from the object to the consciousness, from a first ostensive level given by sensations, interpreted in order to present it as sensations of the object, to the consciousness. When we hear the sound of an engine our sensation of hearing is telling us that something as a car or a tractor exists and when we interpret such sensations we are grasping the features, the components of the object: it sounds metallic, it is noisy, it is a roar sound and so on. A perception without sensations, any sort of sensations, could not exist, but a sensation could never be interpreted if it is not a sensation of something that is perceived, i.e. an object. In this case we have a kinship to the fact that Meaning is logically prior to objective reference; however, we do refer to objects via meaning because we perceive objects. Here, we perceive objects, but we grasp objects’ features because we interpret our sensation, within the act of perception of such an object.

The second reason for rejecting a conceptual view of sensation and interpretation, once the logical priority of the act has been established, is a well-known argument in the debate between conceptualist and non-conceptualist. As Walter Hopp states it

It is possible to be conscious of something, to have it as an intentional object, without exercising or even having a concept of it. One can see colours and hear sounds for which one does not have concepts, or for which one does not have concepts of the appropriate way of granularity. [...]. If one can be perceptually conscious of an object without having or using a concept of it, then using that concept cannot be a necessary condition of perceiving it.¹¹⁸

To explain it let’s go back to the example of the sound. A person hears a sound, it is a sensation that gives ostensive reference to an engine, the interpretation of this sound marks it as the sound

¹¹⁸ Walter Hopp, *Phenomenology. A Contemporary Introduction.*, I edition, Routledge, London and New York, 2020, pp.185-186. The literature about the topic and this argument is extremely wide and a thoroughly examination of it will be beyond the aim of the present work, for an overview see Christopher Peacocke, *Does perception have Nonconceptual content?*, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 98, No. 5, (May, 2001), *Journal of Philosophy, Inc.*, 2001, pp. 239-264.

of an engine, it takes for the consciousness the metallic and mechanical features of the engine, the fact that it is noisy, the roar of the engine, and the interpretation gives to the consciousness that is perceiving all these features, and possibly many others. First of all, if the features are, so to say, imported from the object to the consciousness the object should have been conceptual in order to have conceptual features, but the object is not a concept, that engine exists and the person is intentionally directed to it via act of perception. Moreover, a consciousness in order to have sensations as conceptual contents should have an act of interpretation that interprets following the concept of *sound of an engine, noise, metallic, mechanic, roar* and so many other concepts. It is an extremely baroque and non-economic view of our acts of perception postulating an act of interpretation that has every singular concept to capture the features of an object. Finally, if the interpretation had worked as it had been a conceptual translation it would have been against what Husserl himself said about the presentation of the object that *analogically* gives presence to the object, a remark on which Husserl insists when he says

*The more of these features enter into the analogical representation and, as regards each separate feature, the greater the similarity with which the presentation represent in its content, the greater is the fulness of the presentation.*¹¹⁹

The third problem with Leung's argument, we believe, is not catching the analogy presented by Husserl on chapter 23. We cannot talk about signs in perception. If we are allowed to talk about signs in perception we are only in so far as we are talking about the physical object "sign", the sign that is printed on a book, the sign on a blackboard or the signs that this thesis is constituted of. We can perceive signs, we have an intuition of signs, as we have shown at the beginning of this chapter, but we do not perceive the meaning of such signs, that is something that pertains to meaning-intentions. When Husserl is talking about signs and meaning we believe is making an analogy, something as: the sensations are like signs and the whole act of perception is like meaning. What does that mean? A sensation alone if it was possible, we have said, would be just

¹¹⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 234.

a sound without any ostensive role, just as some letters on a book would be signs without a meaning, but a sign with a meaning-conferring act would be interpreted as an expression, it would have a meaning and therefore a relationship to the world; hence, a sensation within perception with an interpretation would be an ostensive component in the act of perception. The kinship is due to the fact that both interpretations give a determination to a datum, the difference is that a meaning-conferring act interprets something that is given to it after being perceived. We do not create the word ex-nihilo, we perceive a word, a physical object, i.e the sign,¹²⁰ and then apply an interpretation upon it, in this case a new intention: a meaning intention. In the case of interpretation of sensations, we are still in the process of the act of perception, and it is that particular framework, that we are looking at with the lenses of the phenomenologist, the interpretation determines a datum as an ostensive component. Something anew arises in both cases, but in the case of interpretation of sensation what is anew is not totally alien to the consciousness. It requires more energy, let's say, to make of a sign an expression than to make of a sensation an ostensive component.

With this we can claim that we reject a conceptualist view of Husserl's theory of perception based on three arguments: the first is the ostensive nature of sensation, the second is the fact that interpretation is that element within the act of perception that gives to the consciousness the features of the object, the third is that the kinship between an interpretation via meaning-intention of a word and an interpretation of a sensation is due to the fact that both interpretations determine a *datum*, the first one giving a new fashion to the sign, the second one providing sides and features of an object for the consciousness within the act of perception. Interpretation is that operation in perception that presents the contents of the object to consciousness, a consciousness that is directed to the object in an act of perception. A person that is perceiving the car approaching is directed to the car, the sensations of the sound of the engine are giving to that consciousness the presence and the features, if we want to maintain the analogic sense, the presentation of that car's components.

¹²⁰ Walter Hopp, *Husserl on Sensation, Perception, and Interpretation.*, in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, Number 2, June 2008, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p., 236.

2.1. What does happen to Meaning's ideality, autonomy and centrality?

Our focus on perception and sensations as its content in order to advocate for Husserl non-conceptualism might lead us to think that we have lost the ideality, autonomy and centrality of meaning, specially the autonomy and the centrality. If perception has its own drive towards the world and the object what happens to the centrality of meaning? We called centrality of meaning that feature of the meaning that permits to pass from an intention to a concrete relation to the world and the object, we also claimed that meaning is autonomous in regards of the object, because the existence or non-existence of the object does not affect the possibility of a meaning to be expressed and intentioned. We have also said that the autonomy of the meaning as inherited and understood by Ricoeur is what allows the autonomy of the text.

If now we claim that perception has its own direct relationship to the object, that perception actually gives the object in its presence more than any signitive intention, or meaning intention, are we giving in on such features? It could be said so only if we agree that we are shifting our focus from the intentionality that relates to the world via meaning and meaning conferring acts, to the intentionality that relates to the world via act of perception; the intentionality stays the same, its focus changes. Moreover, as we have said in our paragraph on the centrality, autonomy and ideality of meaning, the centrality of meaning relates to the fact that only a Meaning gives meaning to expressions and not the object perceived. The mere fact of perceiving an object does not account for the fact that we can talk about that object, as a matter of fact we can talk about an object without perceiving it or even if that object does not exist. Meaning is what makes us relate to the world on a theoretical level, perception is what makes us to the world in a existential manner; it gives presence, for a consciousness, of the object.

The same must be said for Ricoeur, if we understand the act of reading as an act of perception, agreeing with Foessel, we must explain how it is possible for such act of perception to be the two things: fulfilment of an intention and the mode of giving presence to the texts, without being

an interpretation that gives meaning to the text, Ricoeur himself uses a phenomenological vocabulary talking of reading as fulfilment of the text's reference.¹²¹

It must be kept in mind, however, that when we perceive the object, we are not attaching a meaning to it, but just getting the object for a consciousness; this act could obtain chronologically before or after the intentioning of a meaning. There is an implicit here that must be written clearly and in order to avoid confusions that cases of everyday life bring to our phenomenological analysis.

When we talk about the chronological priority of an act of perception beforehand a meaning conferring act, we have in mind the perception of a word as a physical object. It could be said that even an object like a tree could be perceived and then having a meaning-conferring act put upon it; but in this case the meaning conferring act put upon the perceived object is already fulfilled by the perception of the tree that aroused a meaning intention on our side; this case is called by Husserl a case of *wordless recognition*. If we see a tree and we do not remember the word that names it we are still perceiving a tree, the perception of it will make us remember or recall the word "tree" and formulate the expression "this is a tree". What happens here is a situation where an expression arises *after* a perception, but is still a meaning-intention that gives a meaning to the expression, the only difference is that the relation to the object is already actualized by perception.

Genetically expressed, present intuitions stir up an associative disposition directed to the significant expression. But the meaning-component of this last one is actualized, and this now radiates backwards into the intuition which aroused it, and overflows into the latter with the character of a fulfilled intention. These cases of wordless recognition are none other than fulfilments of meaning-

¹²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 110.

intentions, but phenomenologically divorced from the signitive contents which otherwise pertain to them.¹²²

The divorce of the “signitive contents” from meaning-intentions can be explained as the lack of object, sign-object, to whom we apply a meaning via meaning-conferring acts. It must be kept in mind that a sign-object does not need to exist in order to be endowed with a meaning, as we have explained while considering the *expression in solitary life*, where we do not need any sign to intention a meaning, therefore it is perfectly reasonable for us to have such cases of recognition without words, without signs, the recognition is purely the recognition of a meaning intended, thought, with an object that has been perceived; the only difference here is that our meaning-intention chronologically arrives after the perception of the tree. However, at the level of phenomenological analysis nothing has changed: to have a recognition of something, to have a full relation with something, knowledge about it, it is first and foremost to have a meaning that bridges between intentionality and object. To know that the tree in front of us is a tree is different from just perceiving the tree. This will bring us to finally talk about the notion of fulfilment, showing where is the conceptualization in Husserl’s theory, locating it not on the side of the perception but on the side of meaning-intention and fulfilment.

Before starting our presentation of fulfilment, it must be noticed another thing to explain why we did not lose any of the characteristic of the meaning even while giving to perception its intentional character and a direct access to the object. If we now keep in mind that the object constituted or perceived is a sign, as it can be a word in this thesis, or the lexemes of the graffiti “forza Napoli”, or even a piece of art, we can make sense of a first important disclaimer that Husserl poses. We shall arrive at it using an example.

Imagine that you, reader of this work, enter in a room and open a book, maybe this thesis. Once you have opened the thesis you will see a lot of words, by seeing you will have the visible sight of

¹²² Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 223.

words, your interpreted sensations will show you the shape of the letters in each word, then the word in its entirety, then the word in the sentence, and then the sentence and the sentences and so on. You are perceiving some physical, printed, objects. These objects, taken as just printed inked figures on paper, do not have meaning. Imagine now that you intend a meaning on the words, that the “word” is not anymore just a printed inked object, but it is now an expression that means something, whatever you want, for the sake of the example it is not important the meaning intended, but focusing on the act of intending a meaning.

What Husserl would say here is that the sign as an object just «appeared» to you, but it is not significant. The sign-object has been perceived, «intuitively presented», to you in the same way that a car could be perceived and presented, what happens in the case of reading this thesis however is that the focus is not on the sign of a physical object, but on the meanings that the thesis is showing. The focus is not on the sign, but on the expression, as we have argued during the first chapter and from the first chapter we know that in order to have an expression we need a new intention attached to the sign-object: a meaning intention. Husserl clearly says it again in the context that we are discussing now

The sign as object is constituted for us in an act of appearing. This act is not significant: it needs, as we held in former analyses, to be tied up with a new intention, a new way of taking things, through which a novel, signified object takes the place of the old, intuitively apparent one.¹²³

It must be noticed that this operation of applying a meaning-intention to a perceived sign-object is what Husserl called “interpretation” in paragraph 23 of the First Logical Investigation and corresponds to the interpretation performed by the consciousness *after* an object is perceived, while during the act of perception the interpretation operates within the act in order to grasp the ostensive features of the object. We can say that the autonomy of meaning still persists, recalling the fact that the existence of the object is not a necessary condition for a meaning-intention to

¹²³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 219.

obtain, while the existence of the object is a necessary condition for an interpretation within perception to obtain, that is to say that interpretation concerns the existing feature of the object.¹²⁴ With the persistence of meaning's autonomy it is granted the persistence of ideality, the reason is that meaning is still that ideal entity instantiated by meaning-intention whenever a meaning is conferred to a sign-object without the necessity for the object to exist.

2.2. Fulfilment: the static and dynamic unity of expression and expressed intuition.

We shall conclude our section on Husserl's conceptualism while presenting his theory of fulfilment, here we shall finally show the difference between meaning-fulfilling act and act of fulfilment that has only been postulated and not further explored in the first chapter. Moreover, we shall claim that something as conceptualism in Husserl is possible to be found, but not on the side of perception. With this section we can consider concluded our presentation of Husserl's theories that are inherited by Ricoeur and in the next chapter we shall focus on the French author's hermeneutics and finding the application of Husserl's theories.

Husserl talks about fulfilment from two points of view, a static unity of expression and expressed intuition and a dynamic unity. We will give some example to show these two points of view.

The static unity is defined by Husserl as it follows

Where a sense-giving thought has based itself on intuition, and is thereby related to its object.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Our treatment of the intuitive intentions focused mainly on perception for reasons concerning the necessity of addressing the act of reading in Ricoeur's phenomenology. For a more detailed overview of intuitive intentions and the relation with objects see Dan Zahavi, *Constitution and Ontology: Some remarks on Husserl's ontological position in the Logical Investigations*, in *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 9, January, Springer, The Netherlands, 1992, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00366750>, pp. 111-124.

¹²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in *International Library of Philosophy*, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 201.

The second important characteristic of the static unity of expression and expressed intuition is that meaning-intention and intuition happen at the same time, they are chronologically coincident.¹²⁶

The fulfilment of the intention is not here an event of self-fulfilment, but a tranquil state of being fulfilled, not a coming into coincidence but a being coincident.¹²⁷

Let's say that we perceive a car. To perceive a car and having an actual intuition of the object car means that after having the object constituted for our consciousness because of the ostensive interpretation of the object's feature we finally have a clear presentation of it. In Husserl's words, we have an «intuitive illustration» of the object that fulfils the intuitive intention,¹²⁸ which means that our perception of the object has presented as fully, as complete, as possible, the object itself. If we think about it, perception is inadequate. Perception does not give us the totality of an object because we see it prospectively. In the case of a car, if we are in front of it, we see the front, but we perceive the whole car and even though we do not directly perceive the trunk we are still perceiving the car and not only what we see of it. However, we think about the trunk of the car when we perceive the car and what intuitive illustration does is fulfilling those parts of the car of which we do not have sensations, the parts that we do not see and we just think of, we mean them. In order to account for the fact that perception is *in perspective* Husserl claims that sometimes perception has both intuitive and signitive contents. Illustration is a quite fitting word for that process through which our perception gets rid of the signitive contents of the presentation and acquires more and more of the object presence, because it gives to our minds the idea that we illustrate to ourselves the object in order to have a better grasp of it and in fact Husserl writes that we have authentic intuitive illustration «if fullness is not added anywhere, but only imparts an increase to the object presented *as a whole*, which accordingly becomes more fully

¹²⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p.207.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 232.

presented». ¹²⁹ We now have an intuition of the object that is good enough for saying that we perceive the object and we have it present for ourselves, the car is perceived *as it is*. ¹³⁰ Now that we have the full presence of the car, the intuition of the car on which a sense-giving act is based, we can continue with our example. The car stands before us, we think about the car and we want to say something about it, we may want to say “this is our car” or “here’s a car” or even saying something more complicated as “a red car is in front of me”, in Husserl’s word we are thinking about the car, we want to express something: we have a meaning-intention. These two acts that we have, the perception and the meaning-intention, are into relation, we mean a car and we perceive an object and we recognize the car we are perceiving as the car we mean and we do it at the same time, the intuition and the meaning-intention are already together, and Husserl says

Not word *and* inkpot [car in our example], therefore, but the act-experiences just described, in which they make their appearance are here brought into relation: in these word and inkpot [car] appear, while yet being nothing whatever *in* the acts in question. ¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁰ It should be noted that for Husserl the total and adequate perception of an object is ideal, however this does not avoid us from having a perception of the object itself. Husserl writes it clearly « In each percept, despite these differences, one and the same object is “there”, in each it is intended in the complete range of its familiar and of its perceptually present properties. To this corresponds phenomenologically a continuous flux of fulfilment or identification, in the steady serialization of the percepts 'pertaining to the same object'. Each individual percept is a mixture of fulfilled and unfulfilled intentions. To the former corresponds that part of the object which is given in more or less perfect projection in this individual percept, to the latter that part of the object that is not yet given, that new percepts would bring to actual, fulfilling presence.». Edmund Husserl, *Op. Cit.*, p. 221. For a detailed account of perception and the inadequacy of perception see Walter Hopp, *Phenomenology. A Contemporary Introduction.*, I edition, Routledge, London and New York, 2020, pp. 132-137.

¹³¹ Edmund Husserl, *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.

This husserlian remark should not strike us as something new, we do not busy ourselves with words but with meaning and what fulfils our meaning is not the car, the object car, but the perception of it. In this sense perception is the meaning-fulfilling act, but is not the *act* of fulfilment as a whole. The meaning fulfilling act has been defined as that act of which the expression is an expression; the expression “we see our car” is fulfilled by the act of perceiving the car, but the act of fulfilment is something different, it is not what the expression expresses but is an act where something new arises, not a new object or a new intention, but a new act: the act of recognition and knowing. While we perceive the object, we recognise it as the car we were thinking or talking about.

In Husserl’s example the focus is on the relation of *naming*; we have already encountered the relational attitude of meaning-intentions in the first chapter, relational attitude that is bestowed by the meaning as that referring medium that allows our relationship with the world, now Husserl furthers up such a point by saying that

The relation, *as one of naming*, is mediated, not merely by acts of meaning, but by acts of recognition (*Erkennen*), which are also acts of classification. The perceived object is *recognized* as my inkpot [my car in our example] and insofar 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.¹³²

The coincidence of meaning-intention and object of perception is a classification of the object as known because is recognized as the object that we were talking or thinking about, via meaning, and it is classified as the car. The object is now presented in a new manner, as that exact car that we were thinking about. This recognition is possible only because we had intuited the object-car and we referred via meaning to it *as* the car. When this happens meaning and intuition are coincident, they appear in temporal coincidence: when we express something about the car, we

¹³² Edmund Husserl, Op. Cit., pp. 201-202. My italics.

already have the intuition of the car. The union of expression and expressed intuition is static because it happens at the same time, we think, or we talk, or we write, about the object-car, as we see it. To better understand this static union is worth to say that we can have all the perception and the presentation of the object that we can, but to perceive an object is not to know it. The object is known when the intuition of the object is recognized as is meant. Genetically speaking, we can decide to look into the static unity of fulfilment prioritizing the intuition of the object as the first chronological bit, or maintain our focus on the fact that to know an object is to have a meaning-intention of it that will always be logically prior to the object, as one of the two necessary and sufficient poles for the union. Nevertheless, what is important about the fulfilment is that although we can establish the priority, logical or chronological, of one of the two acts the act of knowing, or recognition, happens with the chronological coincidence of the two acts. The consciousness recognizes the object as what it means while perceiving and meaning it. Husserl says about the intuition that «the signitive intention is rather lacking in every sort of fullness: the intuitive presentation first brings fullness to it, and then *through identification, into it.*».¹³³ What we want to highlight is the fact that it is the act of identification that allows the carrying of the fullness gained by the intuition to the meaning intention. We have seen that this act of identification is the act of fulfilment itself that brings the consciousness to recognise the object intuited as meant. It is not always the case that this coincidence of intention and intuition happens simultaneously. There is a dynamic fulfilment, the main characteristic of which is the fact that intention and intuition do not coincide at the same time, here there is a chronological priority and is the chronological priority of the intention.

In the dynamic relationship the members of the relation, and the act of recognition which relates them, are disjoined in time: they unfold themselves in a temporal pattern.¹³⁴

In this case the recognition happens after the intention has been fulfilled by the intuition. If we are in our house and we think “There is my car outside” and then we go outside to check our car

¹³³ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 233. My italics.

¹³⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ivi*, p. 207.

and we see that the car is indeed there. In this case we have a meaning-intention first and then the intuition of the car that fulfils it, therefore the recognition happens at the end of this process. The dynamic fulfilment does not exclude the static fulfilment, the difference among the two is only the temporal manifestation; but the static fulfilment is described by Husserl as the *lasting outcome* of the temporal transaction that the dynamic fulfilment is. Once the object is first thought and then intuited the consciousness of unity arises, when the act of recognition has faded because of the temporally pattern of the dynamic of fulfilment we remain with such a consciousness. As we can see the outcome is the same, the difference is that in the former case of static union there is no passage from intention to intuition, but temporal coincidence, in the latter case there is a passage from thought to object, within the passage it is possible to experience the being fulfilled of our intention, *a descriptive consciousness of fulfilment*.¹³⁵

A last important remark is worth to say. We believe that in this case is possible to say that a *conceptualization* of the intuition is performed. When the object is recognized as what is meant, if we have the object as focus of interest, or a meaning intention has been fulfilled by an intuition, if we take the act as focus of interest, what we have is a *concept* intentioned that directs ourselves to the intuition of the object. Husserl says indeed that

It is a primitive phenomenological fact that, that the act of signification and acts of intuition can enter into this peculiar relation [of fulfilment]. When they do so, where some act of meaning-intention fulfils itself in an intuition, we also say: “The object of intuition is known through its concept”.¹³⁶

This conceptualization is best appreciated in the dynamic fulfilment, where our meaning once intended moves us toward the word with a knowledge seeking attitude, such knowledge seeking attitude is first and foremost driven by the meanings we intention. As Pietersma points out Husserl

¹³⁵ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 206.

¹³⁶ Edmund Husserl, Ivi, p. 207.

Does not assume a passive mind, a tabula rasa, on which the fullness of time objects impinges. We are not asked to imagine a mind which has not yet experienced anything. The mind is not confronted with mere data, something merely given and waiting to be conceptualized and interpreted. On the contrary, what presents itself to the mind are objects that have already been conceptualized to a certain extent. His account invites us to transport ourselves in which we already assume to have a certain amount of knowledge.¹³⁷

Basing ourselves on our former analysis we can safely say that this “certain amount of knowledge” is the fact that the world is presented to us by intended meanings, that our direction to objects, our constitution of them via perception, is indeed a direction because we have something to aim: the fulfilment of our intended meanings. To gain knowledge is to have fulfilled meanings, but more than that it is to actualize our relationship with the world. The Husserl of *Logical Investigations* does not constitute the world for a consciousness, on the contrary claims that a consciousness is towards the world in order to better constitute a relationship with it. When a meaning intention is fulfilled, the object we discover with a new awareness is not a new object, but that object *as we conceptualized it* via meaning. To mean an object, however, and to perceive it, are two different acts that need to be brought to identification, therefore we exclude that perception is a carrier of meaning and gets the object via concepts, what is got with the intuition of the object is the object presented as it is, after that we can confirm whether it fits our concept, our thought, of it; it would be only fooling ourselves to perceive according to our concepts, as if the world is decided by us. The most important feature of fulfilment is the fact that something non-conceptual confirms our concepts. When the object is known, Husserl says,

If we try to say more exactly “as what” we recognize something, our objective reflection points, not to our *act* of meaning (*Bedeutens*), but to the meaning (*Bedeutung*).¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Henry Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 41.

¹³⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 208.

We know the object as the object of the meaning that we had, therefore a perception has a meaning in the sense that what we perceive is perceived in order to fulfil the meaning, the relationship to the world, we meant. This claim applies for fulfilment, we should not commit the mistake of thinking that perception does not have its own status, as a matter of fact without perception, or intuition, fulfilment will not obtain. However, to say that perception has a meaning means that perception has that exact meaning that we intended and the percept is identified as it is meant. In a nutshell, we could say that we can perceive the whole world, but we still won't be able to know anything about the world if our perception is not guided or paired with a meaning intention and hence a meaning.

It follows that the cognitive experience of this thing as "my inkpot", is nothing but a recognition which, in a definite and cognitive fashion, fuses an expressive experience, on the one hand, with the relevant percept, on the other.¹³⁹

Ricoeur captures this when he says that

The logical notion of signification [...] is carved out of a broader notion of meaning which is coextensive with the concept of intentionality. Hence the right to speak of the "meaning" of perception, the "meaning" of imagination, the "meaning" of the will and so on.¹⁴⁰

In conclusion, we have offered a possible interpretation where perception and its contents have to be considered as a whole and where the contents are interpreted in the act of perception as the features of the object perceived, the interpretation of the object's features informs the

¹³⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, in International Library of Philosophy, translated by J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York, Vol. II, 2001. p. 202.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 76.

consciousness of the object better and better until the object gets illustrated and understood by the consciousness. The intuited object fulfils the meaning, the concept, and through fulfilment the object is identified with the concept. If there is conceptualism in Husserl it rests on his theory of meaning and meaning's ideality, centrality and autonomy. Perception in itself does not have conceptual contents, according to our interpretation, and interpretation is an operation within the act of perception that makes sensations to be the ostensive contents of perception that present the features of the object.

3. Interpretation and Understanding in Paul Ricoeur: the access to the world of the text.

If we now come back to our example of the reader of this thesis, what it seems we are suggesting is that the reader of this thesis, but any reader of any work that perceives signs and intends a meaning to them, is applying a meaning-intention to the sign-objects, and therefore is able to get the meaning of the thesis. Our claim becomes extremely problematical for two reasons and we shall see how this apply to Ricoeur as well. The first reason is that we have said that the reader is applying a meaning to the text, but shouldn't the text have a meaning on its own? It is not only common sensical that this is the case, but also what we have learned from our analysis about meaning with Husserl and Ricoeur, that a text has a meaning on its own, therefore what the reader should do is intending the same meaning that the text has to the sign-objects that constitute the text, but we know that this is not possible. To confer to the object-text the same meaning that the text has, would be having either the same intention of the author of the text, and this option is not available, or the same intention that the text has. Is this possible? The second reason to assert that our claim is problematical is due to the fact that it is problematical to think about the intentionality of the text as it was another living entity, almost another person, that is trying to communicate with us. The aim of this chapter shall be answering and articulating our answers to this question by providing what we shall call a phenomenology of reading, namely a phenomenology about the act of reading that gives access to the text and that through the analysis of text's intention and interpreter's intention will give us an account of interpretation that relies entirely on the notion of Meaning. We can talk about text's intention, following Ricoeur, even though Husserl and Ricoeur himself, point us that the path should not lead us to think about the text as another person, or a living entity. However, this is what Ricoeur seems to intend when he writes that

A text is quasi-individual. [...] A text is more than a linear succession of sentences. It is a cumulative holistic process. The specific structure of the text cannot be derived from that of the sentence.¹⁴¹

The question that we can ask to Ricoeur is: how is it possible for the text to have a meaning, being a quasi-individual, and not falling into the husserlian remark that in cases of communication the expressions work as indications and not as expressions? We have to recall the fact that in cases of communication Husserl has said that expressions would be indications of the acts of the speaker's mind, speaker that endows signs with a meaning, and that although it is possible to understand each other we do not have access to the speaker's mind, therefore we could not have any certain knowledge about theirs acts. If the text is a quasi-individual shall we take the sentences as indications of the text's acts of a quasi-mind? This will be a serious threat to Ricoeur's hermeneutical account because it will reintroduce the problem of recovering the intention of the author, Ricoeur's critique to Dilthey, to a level where it is the text's intention to be recovered or discovered. In one word, the problem that we are raising here is a problem about the kind of entity that the text is and how the relation of interpretation works. Another question that we must ask is in which sense we should understand the notion "world of the text". Is it a world that belongs to the text, created by the text? Or is it a world that the text is about, the world that the text is talking about? Ricoeur does not seem to draw a sharp distinction among the two ways of intending the genitive, but he is nevertheless aware of the risk to remain enclosed withing Dilthey's concept of understanding and interpretation.

To interpret, we said, is to appropriate *here* and *now* the intention of the text. In saying that, we remain enclosed within Dilthey's concept of understanding. Now what we have just said about the depth semantics unveiled by the structural analysis of the text invites us to say that the intended

¹⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The model of the text: meaningful action considered as a text*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 174. My italics.

meaning of the text is not essentially the presumed intention of the author, the lived experience of the writer, but rather what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction.¹⁴²

What we want to highlight from this quote at first is that Ricoeur hinges on Dilthey's hermeneutics because there is still an appropriation of something *external* or alien to the interpreter but overcomes Dilthey's hermeneutics because it is not the author that is reached, and her intention, but the text's. The second thing that we want to highlight is how Ricoeur refers to the text, saying that the text, and not the author, means something for whom complies with its injunction; therefore, the text is treated as an intentional entity: an entity that can instantiate meanings owing to its intention. It seems then that Ricoeur does not acknowledge or thinks about the very husserlian concept of language and meaning that he inherited and firmly claimed to adhere to. From this quote it seems that the world of the text is indeed the world that the text owes and creates. Is it "create" the right word? Our claim can be challenged by Ricoeur itself if we consider the second horn of the genitive, namely that the world of the text is the world that the text is talking about. If we take into account what a text is for Ricoeur we will be able to account for the world of the text as the world that the text is talking about.

Ricoeur starts his discussion about the text as a discourse fixated by writing. We have seen in the first chapter how the French philosopher differentiates between discourse and text: discourse has a temporal, simultaneous, horizon among the speakers; discourse has the coexistence of speaker and hearer in the same milieu, therefore discourse refers to the actual world and situation that the subjects are in; discourse has a clear speaker and a clear hearer thanks to the grammatical devices that designate the speaker and the hearer; discourse is an event that appears and disappears, because it is owned by the fact that someone is speaking, someone is hearing and a message is conveyed about something. It is important to notice that discourse refers about

¹⁴² Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 123.

something and that something is «a world which it claims to describe, express or represent.»¹⁴³ What is fixated by writing is not a discourse in itself, what we have called in the first chapter, following Ricoeur, “a fleeting event” but the meaning of discourse. We have dwelled on this theoretical move to explain what does mean for the text to be autonomous from his author and the world of his author, but we shall further up on that by saying that the text because of its meaning breaks the first order reference to the world of the author and the world tout-court, as well as the world of the reader. It is normal to find in a text sentences or propositions that are referring to a world, similar to our everyday world in some cases. If we read a novel written by Dostoevskij, for example, we can meet many descriptions of houses, streets, people, shops, bars and taverns, and situations that despite being narrated two hundred years ago are extremely similar to ours. However, what the text is referring to via its meaning is not Dostoevskij’s world, as he intentioned or saw it, nor ours, but to the specific houses, situations, people, streets and so on that are *within* the text. What happens to reference from discourse to text, Ricoeur says, is a shift that is considered almost problematic.¹⁴⁴

In discourse reference is granted and resolved by the ostensive possibility given by the shared milieu of speaker and hearer; if A and B are talking about a situation that has happened is possible for the speaker to point where it has happened, in which context, in what place, in which time. Ricoeur says

Reference is determined by the ability to point to a reality common to the interlocutors. If we cannot point to the thing about which we speak, at least we can situate it in relation to the unique spatio-temporal network which is shared by the interlocutors. It is the “here” and “now”, determined by the situation of discourse, which provides the ultimate reference of all discourse.¹⁴⁵

But this is not the case when we are engaging with a text. There is a distance from the writer and the reader due to the autonomy of meaning and text, autonomy of the text given by the autonomy

¹⁴³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutical function of distanciation*, in Op. Cit., p. 95.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 103.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

of meaning as we have seen in the first chapter. The distancing is also the distancing from our everyday world and the world of the text, and from us to our everyday world. When we read *Brothers Karamazov*, for example, we are not busied with our own struggles and our own situation, but we are busied with what happens to Ivan, Alex and Dimitrij, with the world that the text is about. When they drink, or travel or fight, we do not consider the glasses or the trains they are using, but the meaning that is presented and talked about. The distancing is distance from a naïve conception of our surroundings.

This abolition of the ostensive character of reference is no doubt what makes possible the phenomenon we call “literature”, which may abolish all reference to given reality.¹⁴⁶

While abolishing the first order reference, the ostensive reference, the text refers to something else. This referring, we want to argue, is *referring to* the world of the text. The second side of the genitive is here explained as the text that refers to its own world. To abolish reference to a given reality is not having lack of reference, the text refers to the very reality that depicts, the text is about something.

The role of most our literature is, it seems, to destroy the world. [...]. *Nevertheless, there is no discourse so fictional that it does not connect up with reality.* But such discourse refers to another level, more fundamental than the attained by the descriptive, constative, dialectic discourse which we call ordinary language. My thesis is that the abolition of a first order reference, an abolition effected by fiction and poetry, is the condition of possibility for the freeing of a second order reference, which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects.¹⁴⁷

Leslie MacAvoy writing about the concept of distancing in Paul Ricoeur states that

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

In distanciation there is a bracketing of the everyday world of our lived experience, which is intended through the first order reference, and this distancing opens us up to the world proposed by the text through second order reference.¹⁴⁸

And she asks what kind of world is the one proposed by the text: is it a different world, an entirely different world, or is it our world presented with a phenomenological attitude that detaches us from the mere operability of things and signs and gives us the possibility to signify it? To signify our own world after reading the possibilities that the text opens? MacAvoy partakes for a reading where the latter possibility is the case.¹⁴⁹ For MacAvoy the world of the text is our own world seen with a new awareness and with new possibilities. MacAvoy's interpretation gets us the chance to talk about the world that the text is talking about.

If distanciation is text's distanciation from the author's world and from the author's intention then it is distanciation from our own world as well, but in this latter case the distanciation that we fall into is from our understanding of the world in our everyday life to a new proposal of the same world. To achieve this new proposal of our own world, we shall demonstrate, is to fulfil an intention thorough the second order reference of the text. To give an example of what is this second order reference let's take the sentence "there is a glass." A first order reference of such a sentence is a reference to a glass, present in a *here* and *now*, to a present object which gives to the sentence the truth value "true" if it is indeed present, or "false" if it is absent. The second order reference of such a sentence, a sentence that we might find in a poem or in a novel, means that the glass is not an object that might be present or might not be present, it is not an object of use of everyday life either, but an object that contextualized in the world of the text refers to something else, a meaning or a realm of possibilities. If we think about Proust's *madeleine* we

¹⁴⁸ Leslie MacAvoy, *Distanciation as Epoché: The Influence of Husserl on Ricoeur's Hermeneutics*, in *Contributions to Hermeneutics Volume 2: Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur, Between text and explanation*, edited by Scott Davidson and Marc-Antoine Vallée, Springer, Switzerland, 2016, p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ Leslie MacAvoy, *Ivi*, p. 24.

can definitely see that the reference is not to a pastry, but to the meaning of that pastry as the access to a travel back in time via memories.

The genitive is active in both senses. The text both creates a world and through that world refers to ours. If we think about it the text performs the two characteristics that we have discovered analysing Husserl's notion of meaning: meaning as that ideal entity which is instantiated by intentionality and meaning as the medium of reference. The choice to focus in favour of one or the other side of the notion of world of the text depends on our intention, as philosophers. If we care to thematize the meaningful side of the text and its coherence then we shall talk about the world intentioned by the text; if we care to thematize the effects of such world on the reader or the interpreter we shall focus on its reference and the ways in which the second order of reference is proposed by the text. The meaning instantiated by the text in *Brothers Karamazov* might be a meaning about the twofold nature of the human kind, close to high morals on one hand, and ready to get lost in sinful actions on the other; but the reference via meaning of *Brothers Karamzov* might as well be a reference to our own world and situations and will help us to enlarge our understanding and possibilities. This second order of reference is thematized by MacAvoy by saying that the text shows up a «sphere of possibilities that connects to the world of the reader.»¹⁵⁰ These possibilities, in our interpretation of Ricouer's work, are referred by the text as new meanings instantiated by the text itself.

We want to highlight two more things before starting our investigation about understanding and interpretation. We cannot in the case of the notion of *the world of the text* state any priority, logical or chronological, of meaning as ideal over meaning as medium of reference. The text has a meaning that is instantiated by the text but the text is that meaning as well, to say that is to say that the text is that second order reference, the possibilities and the intentions that the text is about. The ideal meaning instantiated by the text is what the text is referring to. Only in this way is possible to account for the second order reference of the text. Moreover, the reference of the text's meaning is not the first order reference of our tangible objects, but a second order reference that is on a level of possibility and not actuality and reality, but possibility that is about reality. This means that the reference of the text is in fact a reference to an intention, in this case a

¹⁵⁰ Leslie MacAvoy, Ivi, p. 25.

possible meaning, present in the text because instantiated by it; the actualization of such a possible meaning is what the interpretation as appropriation is for Ricoeur.

To sum up: the text, we have seen, is not a fleeting event but a meaning that is autonomous, ideal and central. We have been fighting during all this present work with the characterization of what is the meaning of the text and if it is the same as the world of the text. We shall try to give a final answer here.

If we recall Husserl's notion of the ideality of meaning we are faced with characteristics that suggest that meaning is a sort of platonic-idea. Meaning exists independently from subjects' minds, is universal; whether a meaning is intended in China or Hawaii the meaning stays the same, meaning does not rely on any existence or any ontological condition of the object. The text is the same in this sense: a text is independent both from the author and from the reader, a text can be read and understood in China or in the Hawaii, the text is about things and people that are completely fiction and yet is meaningful. Thus, when we say that the world of the text is the meaning of the text in this ideal sense, we claim that we encounter this exact meaning; when we claim that the text intends a meaning, following Ricoeur, we claim that the text intentions that meaning that it is because it needs it to refer to its own world. When we claim that the world of the text is the reference of the text, we claim that the text is referring to its own meaning that the interpreter interprets as possibility of being, this possibility of being as we have seen with MacAvoy refers backwards to the actual reality of the reader, we shall see how this referring to the actuality of the reader obtains via interpretation as appropriation. Moreover, the text is what we understand and explain and we are faced by its plurivocity and its perspectival slanting, as we shall see in a moment.

The starting question to articulate a phenomenology of reading is therefore: how do we access this *world of a text*? Ricoeur is extremely clear in answering this question. We access the world of a text by act of reading and with reading it is unfolded the possibility of understanding and interpretation.

We must start with Ricoeur's consideration about the fact that between author and reader there is no communication. The reader has a relation with the text and not with the author. To establish a relation with the text is to read a text.

The author does not respond to the reader. Rather, the book divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides, between which there is no communication. [...]. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer.¹⁵¹

But as we have said, the text is not something that hangs in the air, that does not refer to anything; to understand what is the text referring to is needed an act of perception, such as reading. This act of reading is the perception of what the text is about

The text is not without reference; the task of reading, *qua* interpretation, will be precisely to fulfil the reference. [...]. Such is the upheaval which affects discourse itself, when the movement of reference towards the act of showing is intercepted by the text. Words cease to efface themselves in front of things; written words become words for themselves.¹⁵²

Ricoeur's aim is at this point to provide a theory of interpretation that is able to hold together a moment of understanding as explanation and of interpretation as appropriation. Two are his polemical aims in this case. The first, as seen, is Dilthey, the second is Heidegger and precisely the Heidegger of *Being and Time*.

Ricoeur's critique of Heidegger concerns the *ontologization* of understanding described in *Being and Time*. For Ricoeur the ontologization of understanding is the "short route" that loses its focus on the text and radicalize understanding as a way of being; a constitutional element of that human being. The question that Heidegger poses, says Ricoeur is not a question of *method* but

¹⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 108.

¹⁵² Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 110.

It carries itself directly to the level of an ontology of finite being in order there to recover *understanding*, no longer as a mode of knowledge but rather as a mode of being.¹⁵³

The hermeneutical problem of understanding a text becomes an ontological and existential problem about the understanding as the mode of being of the human being, while Ricoeur rather than the ontology of understanding asks what happens to the *epistemology of understanding*. Thus, the central question is a question about the text. Ricoeur's "long route" is the path that starts from the text and its meaning, proceeds with an explanation of such a meaning of the text, then an interpretation that appropriates this meaning and culminates with a self-understanding of the reader in front of the text. Ultimately, Ricoeur starts from the text to understand and to model the shape of the subject and not from the subject and its mode of being to understand what there is. Ricoeur's aim rests upon a reflective philosophy where engaging with textual meaning is the key for self-understanding.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, our final aim for this chapter is not following Ricoeur in such a reflective philosophy, but to pose some questions about one hermeneutics that raising from a phenomenology of meaning engages with meaning and within understanding and interpretation creates new meanings. The encounter of the interpret with the text risks to be the encounter of a subject with a quasi-individual that cannot be consulted in the same way in which we can consult a person, moreover such quasi-entity seems to have an intentionality that is displaced in front of the interpret and that cannot be recovered. What it's left then is an encounter with a meaning that shall be understood and interpreted and our working hypothesis is that within understanding and interpreting new meanings arise; meanings that are not entirely crafted by the interpret but that are not anymore only the meaning of the text: understanding a text is never to understand the

¹⁵³ Paul Ricoeur, *Existence and Hermeneutics*, in *The conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Ihde, Northwestern University Press, The Atlon Press London, London, 1974, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 11.

meaning in its totality, but always something similar to the text's meaning, not entirely different but a novelty that might be within the text and that we become aware about.

3.1. Understanding as explanation: explanation as the static fulfilment.

The first concern for Ricoeur's long route is to grant the start of this route in the text and not in the interpreter. To understand is to understand the meaning of a text. In doing so Ricoeur engages again with Dilthey as his polemical aim. In this case the problem is granting a methodology and an epistemological model for an understanding of the text that does not rely on the methodology and epistemology of natural sciences. Dilthey separated explanation and understanding. He considered the first the model of natural sciences. Natural sciences are the study of objects that are observable, explainable in their cause-effect relations, objects that can be measured and testable via experiments and therefore is possible to give an explanation of what happens. Human sciences on the other side do not have the same objects, and then the character of sciences must be granted. Dilthey's move was granting the scientificity of human sciences on the side of understanding. The scientific knowledge of the other humans is granted, for Dilthey, by the understanding of the signs of the humans' minds and the objective expression of their inner life. Ricoeur sums up Dilthey's position by saying that

Understanding, as the knowledge through signs of another mental life, thus provides the basis in the pair understanding-interpretation; the latter element supplies the degree of objectification, in virtue of fixation and preservation which writing confers upon signs.¹⁵⁵

We have seen how a bit of Ricoeur's critique of Dilthey rests upon phenomenological grounds, but there is a second bit of such critique that rests upon epistemological grounds. What does happen to the coherence and the autonomy of a text if it is only a sign of a mental life? A text

¹⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 112.

that refers back to its author mental life cannot be explained as a whole that is constituted by its own parts. Understanding must be sought within the text.

Ricoeur proposes to engage with the text itself and looking at its own structures in order to explain the meaning that is instantiated by the text. To understand a text is at first to explain the text. Explanation then is that moment of a theory of interpretation that engages with the text in its full autonomy

We can, as readers, remain in the suspense of the text, treating it as a wordless and authorless object; in this case we explain the text in terms of its internal relations, its structure.¹⁵⁶

To guarantee a methodology for understanding that is both epistemologically valid and does not threaten the autonomy of the text Ricoeur appeals to the structural analysis, taking as an example the structural analysis of Oedipus' myth performed by Levi Strauss.¹⁵⁷ The first thing that Ricoeur takes from the structural approach to the text is that the text is treated as «a place that is a non-place.»¹⁵⁸ The reference to the actual world is here interrupted, the reader is situated within the closure of the text and in the meaning that the text is intending; what is seen at this stage is the fact that the text does not have any «transcendent aim»,¹⁵⁹ everything that what the text is about is within the text. If we follow the structural analysis, we shall at the end explain

¹⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁷ For matter of space we cannot give the full presentation of such analysis as described by Ricoeur. We shall focus on the main reason why Ricoeur gives preference to the structural method. For a detailed exposition and exemplification see Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 116-118.

¹⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 114.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 115.

the text by the interactions of his parts and the logic that governs such operations, from the smaller units to the whole structure.

We can indeed say that we have thereby explained the myth, but not that we have interpreted it. We have brought out, by means of structural analysis, the logic of operations which interconnect the packets of relations.¹⁶⁰

Although this is a valid methodological explanation that grants the autonomy of the text because it considers the text as a whole and is worried only about the sentences of the text and how their interplay in the structure, Ricoeur expresses some concern about it.

Can it be said that structural explanation neutralises the specific meaning of sentences, retaining only their position in the myth? [...]. It is this function of myth as a narrative of origins that structural analysis seeks to place in parentheses.¹⁶¹

If we consider the meaning of the text as the meaning instantiated by the text, we can see why Ricoeur is worried by the structural analysis. The world of the text as the meaning instantiated by the text becomes a desert where sentences float and mingle, but what the text means is not taken into consideration. The meaning of the myth as narrative of origins dissolves and the text becomes meaningless in the sense that does not have an intention anymore. Moreover, without the intention of the text the meaning that the text is disappears.

There is another motif of critique for structural explanation performed by Scott Davidson. Davidson's critique touches Ricoeur as well, even though we have seen that the French philosopher has some hesitations about structural analysis. It must be repeated that such critique that we are providing to the structural analysis is based on the methodology that such analysis implies, namely the suspension of the meaningful side of the text. In the frame of a

¹⁶⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 117.

¹⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 122.

phenomenology of reading, where the reading is the encounter with a text and its meaning in order to provide an understanding or explanation and therefore an interpretation, we therefore agree with Davidson.

Davidson's critique is articulated specifically about Ricoeur's choice of structural analysis as one of the steps for his long route towards interpretation. While choosing structural analysis Ricoeur is guilty, according to Davidson, to narrow down the plurivocity of the text.

The main flaw in Ricoeur's account of explanation, arguably, is more profound than his adherence to structuralism. It might have to do with the fact that structuralism is a "single-axis" method of explanation and the limitations inherent in any "single-axis method" whatsoever. Regardless of whether it is a structuralism or any other single axis explanation, the problem is that a single-axis theory will narrow the plurivocity of the text.¹⁶²

The main concern for Davidson is that an analysis such as the structural analysis is that is possible to narrow down the text to an univocal meaning that is explained by means of a single methodological point of view, such as the structural one and its search for the oppositions in a text. Davidson argues that the application of an artificial schema does not account for the autonomy of the text, but on the contrary applies a grid that forces the text toward a single explanation with a claim of completeness. Such a claim of completeness of structural analysis has been challenged by many scholars in each field where structural analysis has been tried, Davidson argues, at the point that structuralism itself is not granted anymore as a valid explanatory theory, but also, Davidson continues, as a way of misunderstanding a text.¹⁶³ Rather than insisting on the correctness or incorrectness of structural analysis what we shall highlight from Davidson's claim is the fact that structural analysis shuts down the plurivocity of the text and its autonomy. The autonomy of the text is taken away by structural analysis because in order

¹⁶² Scott Davidson, *Intersectional Hermeneutics*, in *Contributions to Hermeneutics Volume 2: Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur, Between text and explanation*, edited by Scott Davidson and Marc-Antoine Vallée, Springer, Switzerland, 2016, p. 168.

¹⁶³ Scott Davidson, *Ivi*, p. 167.

to explain the text such analysis assumes a point of view, a theoretical point of view, into which the text is constrained. Moreover, as we have seen structural analysis is more worried with the operations of the signs within the text, rather than the meanings.

There is another point of view that we can adopt to show why structural analysis shall be dropped and is within Ricoeur's treatment of the explanation of a metaphor, there we want to answer Davidson challenge and propose a theory of explanation that has its roots into the static fulfilment proposed by Husserl. Davidson challenges is whether «Ricoeur's hermeneutics can continue to have any relevance, and if so, under what conditions this is possible.»¹⁶⁴ The reason for trying to answer Davidson's challenge and critique of the structural analysis as a methodology is not because we want to get rid of the structural analysis *tout-court*, but it is simply because our concerns rather than the methodology of understanding are directed to the phenomenology of reading and to the theoretical structure that is involved for understanding and interpreting.

3.1.1. The explanation of a metaphor.

Ricoeur argues that the explanation of a metaphor serves as a guide for the explanation of longer texts. With the metaphor what is at stake is the event of a meaning that is new, within the whole of the text, and such element of novelty must be explained.¹⁶⁵

The new meaning that the metaphor is, we must ask, is a creation of the reader or of the text? Ricoeur is extremely clear in answering this question when he says that

Only one answer remains possible: it is necessary to take the viewpoint of the hearer or the reader and to treat the novelty of the emergent meaning as the counterpart, on the author's side, of a

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Metaphor and the central problem of hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 132.

construction on the side of the reader. Thus, the process of explanation is the only access to the process of creation.¹⁶⁶

Structural analysis is therefore excluded as an explanatory theory for the metaphor. Structural analysis cannot explain this creative moment of this moment of construction that the reader does while reading the text and perceiving it, busied as it is with the structure of the text and its operations and differences. A theory of reading as the perception of the world of the text shall account for such element of novelty. Reading is indeed considered as an act of perception because it is what gives the intuition of the world of the text, the world of the second order reference. To perceive, we have seen with Husserl, is to intention an object in a way that carries out all the features of the object and presents it for a consciousness. Within the world of the text we do not have ostensive features, but we enter in the text *in medias res*, we are faced by the text as a whole that needs to be reconstructed in order to be explained. If we think about this act of reconstruction as an act of presentation, we can see that reading is that perceiving of the world of the text that presents it with its features for the reader. We have already seen how for Husserl after a word is presented to the subject, such a word must be endowed by a new intention in order to be a meaningful word. Husserl called this act an act of interpretation. Here, we are into a different level: it is not a sign-object that is being presented by us, but an ideal meaning instantiated by the text and that refers to a second order of reference.

How is it possible to make sense of this meaning, the meaning of a metaphor? We want to suggest that the explanation of a metaphor is similar to the act of recognition described by Husserl in the static unity of fulfilment. There, a sense-giving thought was based on an intuition and thereby related to an object. Here, we do not encounter objects, but we perceive, we intuit a world, recalling that for Husserl perception is an intuitive intention. What we shall try to show, then, is not a complete overlapping of fulfilment and metaphor explanation, but a theoretical structure for the reader to grand a sense-giving thought onto an intuition. The need for reading as an act of perception is due to the fact that we need to construct the text, to present the text to ourselves.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 136.

The decisive moment of explanation is the construction of a network of interactions which constitutes the context as actual and unique.¹⁶⁷

Let's make an example to show what we mean. In reading *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevskij we are faced with sentences and expression talking about the fever that the main protagonist Raskol'nikov suffers. We perceive is fever by reading of it, we are presented by the act of reading with his suffering, with his delirium and with his pain. We are therefore presented with a meaningful state of affairs; meaningful because embedded withing that meaningful whole that the text is. But what is the meaning of that fever? Why must we construct that meaning? Ricoeur answers us by saying that

First, because it is written: in the asymmetrical relation between the text and the reader, one of the partners speaks for both. Bringing a text to language is always something other than hearing and listening to its speech. [...]. For the text is an autonomous space of meaning which is no longer animated by the intention of its author; the autonomy of the text, deprived of this essential support, hands writing over the sole interpretation of the reader.¹⁶⁸

To say that is to say that the meaning of the text, as an ideal meaning in this case, is yet something to be understood. The rift that emerges is due to the fact that when we read a text we are not in the solitary life where we decide which meaning we intention and we are aware of our intention; here we are confronted with an ideal meaning that is intentioned and now rests in front of us as an ideal unity. We cannot ask the text what it actually means, nor the author; the intention once again disappears and we are left either with a reference or an ideal meaning. The interplay of these three moments confront us at every stage of the text.

The meaning of Rask'lnikov fever is yet to be understood. We have intuited it, we have seen that there is a fever and has some features, but a meaning must be based on that intuition. Moreover,

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*

Rask'lnikov fever appears many times in the text and we perceive it with perspectival slanting, similar to the way we perceive the front or the back of a car depending where we are standing. The act of explanation as recognition of that fever as the burden of Rask'lnikov's guilt, or as the intolerance for the overman Rask'lnikov's towards the constraint imposed by the moral rules of the society and is human condition or again, as the suffering for Sonja's sorrow, forced to sell her body to provide for her family, helpless and without any rescue from a condition of misery; an helpless victim rescued by no one, while the murdering of the evil loan-shark killed by him is accounted as an horrible crime. These meanings could all be based on the intuition given by the perception of Rask'lnikov's situation. Reading is that act that grants us with such features, but our work is not merely to read, but to explain and understand. Here our meaning-intention is fulfilled by the intuition based on our perception of Rask'lnikov fever.

This strategy has two advantages: first does not impose any theory over the text, but takes what the text presents and means as it is; second, it advocates for the plurivocity of the text and for different explanations. As much as perception is in perspective, so it is reading, therefore the new meanings brought by the one who explains are not definitive and are even able to change. As Ricoeur says

Like a cube, or a volume in space, the text presents a "relief". [...] Therefore the reconstruction of the whole has a perspective aspect similar to perception.¹⁶⁹

But changes in the intuition on which we build our meaning-intention are because we are able «to relate the same sentence in different ways to this or that sentence considered as the cornerstone of the text»,¹⁷⁰ we claim that such a change is due to the different perception and reading that we can have of the whole, because

¹⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *The model of the text: meaningful action considered as a text*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 174.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

The kind of plurivocity which belongs to texts as texts is something other than the polysemy of individual words in ordinary language and the ambiguity of individual sentences. This plurivocity is typical of the text considered as a whole, open to several readings and to several constructions.¹⁷¹

With such an interplay of intuition that fulfils a meaning-intention based upon it is possible to overcome Davidson's critique as well. The plurivocity of the text is what presents different angles and prospective for Rask'lnikov fever, opening the explanation to a possibility of fulfilment that is not single-axis, but has as many axis as the text can present. The text here is the ultimate stage for the possibility of explanation, that becomes not an explanation of the text but within the text. There is another outcome that we must highlight. Taking into account the form of fulfilment of a meaning-intention of the reader fulfilled by the intuition based on the reading of the text we can see that a new meaning is given to the text as a whole. Nevertheless, this meaning is not totally a construction of the reader; Rask'lnikov's fever taken as a metaphor for his struggle against the cage of morality is a meaning that explains the metaphor and the metaphor within the text, but is not a construction that springs only from the reader's mind. On the contrary, the mind of the reader is exposed to the intentionality of the text and its meaning, it is the way of explaining such a meaning that is new. The element of novelty in explanation is a shift, a perspectival shift, on what the text intends, namely that there is a character named Rask'lnikov, that this character is presented by being so and so, that this character has his own thoughts, ambitions and struggles. All of these aspects are entirely textual, they belong to the text as a meaning owned by the text. When an act of recognition of these features of the character intended by the text emerges, when the reader is finally able to say "Rask'lnikov's fever means *that*" then we have a new meaning that is possibly not the exact same of the text's meaning, but one of its possible explanations. The shift here is extremely subtle, but relevant.

If we suppose that the meaning given to Rask'lnikov's fever by the text is *the burden of his guilt*, we can see how an explanation that recognizes the fever as the suffering for the constraint of human morality does not match with the text's meaning. However, we have some reasons for saving our interpretation against the charge of being solely a construction of the subject.

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

First of all, as we have said many times in the present work, the intention of the text is unreachable for us. At the level of meaning-intention we are excluded from the “true” text’s intention. Second, at the level of ideal meaning we know that the text has only the features of ideality, autonomy and centrality and it is not a specific ideal meaning, it instantiates an ideal meaning through intention: we cannot know what is the meaning that the text has for Rask’lnikov’s fever, we only know that his fever has a meaning. Finally, as we have said the explanation is not drawn from nowhere, but it is based on what we perceive from the text. We believe that our interpretation will find a good confirmation by Ricoeur as well when he says that

Here understanding a text, at the level of its articulation of sense, is strictly homologous to understanding a metaphorical statement. In both cases, it is a question of “making sense”, of producing the best overall intelligibility from an apparently discordant diversity.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Paul Ricoeur, *Metaphor and the central problem of hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 137.

3.2. Interpretation: appropriation as dynamic fulfilment.

Our line of inquiry as so far brought us to a conclusion where on the side of the interpretation that is concerned with understanding as explanation, we are faced by a meaning intentioned by the text that must be constructed by the reader. In doing so the reader perceives what the text intends and the presence of a meaning within the text. Such a meaning is what gets explained by the reader as an act of recognition based on an intuition. A new meaning arises within the interplay of text and intention of the reader that bases its explanation on what the text presents. But Ricoeur goes further, to understand a text is not yet to interpret a text. Ricoeur provides a notion of interpretation as appropriation. The explanation based on a meaning intuited by the presentation provided by the reading could be called by Ricoeur an objectification of meaning, such objectification is described by Ricoeur as a medium, a necessary medium step, in order to gain the act of appropriation.

The objectification of meaning is a necessary mediation between the writer and the reader. But as a mediation, it calls for a complementary act of more existential character which I shall call the

appropriation of meaning. “Appropriation” is my translation of the German term *Aneignun*. *Aneigen* means “to make one’s own” what was initially “alien”.¹⁷³

To understand specifically what is that alien that is made our own we have to return back to Ricoeur’s paper about phenomenology and hermeneutics. There, Ricoeur gives an account of appropriation as the response to «the matter of the text and hence to the proposal of meaning which the text unfolds.».¹⁷⁴ If we go back to our threefold definition of the meaning of the text as the ideal, autonomous and central meaning that grants text in its ideality, autonomy and centrality, then as meaning of the text as the intention of meaning that the text endows and as the reference of the text to its world, we can see that here the last two options are at stake. Ricoeur helps us when he writes that

What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities. Recalling the principle of distanciation mentioned above, it could be said that the fictional or poetic text not only places the meaning of the text at a *distance* from the intention of the author, but also places the reference of the text at a *distance* from the *world* articulated by everyday language.¹⁷⁵

But also,

¹⁷³ Paul Ricoeur, *Appropriation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 147.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 73.

¹⁷⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Ivi*, p. 72.

The emergence of the sense and the reference of a text in language is the coming to language of a world and not the recognition of another person.¹⁷⁶

What we shall appropriate is the world of the text as a reference of new meanings and possibilities: the reference to the text's world. Ultimately, the text refers to new ways of being. Here it starts the reflexive turn of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. To appropriate the world proposed by the text and the new possibilities and modes of being, the meanings of the text, is to lose the egoic sight over the world of everyday life and to reshape our subjectivity with the text's meaning. At first, it is not to force one own's meaning-intention on the text, but to lose it in order to get the text's meaning. The meaning of the text can properly be appropriated only if the appropriation is to get the new meanings and not reintroduce in the text our own meanings intended and fulfilled into our everyday world. What we appropriate is the meaning proposed by the text. To appropriate the meanings that the text is referring to it to build a *self* for the subject, because its ego is lost when entered into the world of the text. The ego that must be lost is indeed the ego that intentions the everyday world and finds there its fulfilment.

Appropriation is also and primarily a "letting-go". Reading is an appropriation-divestiture. How can this letting-go, this relinquishment, be incorporated into appropriation? Essentially, by linking appropriation to the revelatory power of the text which we have described as its referential dimension. It is in allowing itself to be carried off towards the reference of the text that the *ego* divest itself of itself.¹⁷⁷

Being exposed to a text is being exposed to its new meanings, when we read a text we are at *distance* from our own world and the way in which we intentioned it.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, Paul Ricouer, *Metaphor and the central problem of hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 140.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Appropriation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 153.

What we can say, however, since we do not want to follow Ricoeur into his reflexive turn, is that it is still possible to stay faithful to the phenomenological form of intention and fulfilment described by Husserl, but this time as a dynamic one. Our question will therefore be: given that we cannot appropriate the text's intention and given that the ego is lost because carried off by the meaning of the text to its world, to a reference of new meanings and possibilities, how does the appropriation work phenomenologically? What shall bring us into the world of the text? We know that reading is that act of perception that presents the meaning and the world of the text to the reader, but what does bring us to read a text? The answer is once again given by Ricoeur and the Ricoeur reader of Husserl. In our first chapter we have seen that Ricoeur captures the essence of what intentionality is describing it as a property of a consciousness to be consciousness of..., to move towards something else, and we know with Husserl that intentionality moves primarily towards a meaning, only in this way is possible to intention a meaning. The consciousness intentions a meaning even in cases of perception, we have seen. It does so because even when we perceive an object and when we constitute it in acts of perception the interpretation within the act, we have recognition and knowledge of the object only because a meaning was intended beforehand. Our going outside into the world is always because we want to actualize our relation with it, for such a relation to bear our intention must be fulfilled. Intentioning a meaning is therefore the starting point to relate to the world. Ricoeur is aware of it and radicalizes this claim by saying that if we turn to Husserl's *Logical Investigations* we discover a notion where

The thesis of intentionality explicitly states that if all meaning is for a consciousness, then no consciousness is self-consciousness before being consciousness *of* something towards *which* it surpasses itself.¹⁷⁸

The consciousness is primarily towards the meaning, without meaning there will be only perception, but not a meaning of perception. We talk about meaning of perception in the sense

¹⁷⁸ ¹⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 75.

of a meaning-intention that gives meaning to the perception by whom is fulfilled. As we have said, to perceive a car is not the same of knowing that there is a car, for that to be the case a meaning-intention is needed.¹⁷⁹

What interests us is the fact if we take this last Ricoeurian remark we are given a mode of access to the text that is not just the act of reading. As readers of a text we are driven to the text in so far as the text is a meaning which our intentionality is directed to. But our encounter with the text is an encounter primarily with its meaning. Now, Ricoeur would say that the appropriation of the meaning of the text will give to the consciousness a self-consciousness and in fact he states this by saying that

In short, in hermeneutical reflection – or in reflective hermeneutics- the constitution of the *self* is contemporaneous with the constitution of *meaning*.¹⁸⁰

But outside the reflective attitude of hermeneutics we can say that the constitution of a meaning is the fulfilment of an intentionality that is toward that meaning and by that meaning as the reference of the text. The dynamic relation of fulfilment, for Husserl, happens when an expression first functions in merely symbolic function and then gets accompanied by a corresponding intuition. What we have in the case of reading a text is an intention that at first is without a meaning and then gets informed by the intuition had while reading the text, the meaning by whom it is driven. What this consciousness gains is, therefore, the new meanings and the new possibilities that the text discloses. Let's continue with our example of *Crime and Punishment* to make clear what we want to say. In a sort of phenomenological experiment we can think of a person that starts reading the book, at first we have said how it is possible for this person to explain the book by basing a sense-giving thought on the intuition given by the act of reading: the act of explanation there becomes an act of recognition of a meaning, a

¹⁷⁹ See 2.1 and 2.2 of the present work.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 120.

new meaning based upon what the text gives and what the reader intends. Let's now imagine that the reader has an empty intention, is not intending any meaning but is looking for a meaning, and that the reader starts reading the book, at the end of the book the reader shall have his intention fulfilled by the second order of reference that the text displays. The appropriation here will be the appropriation the new meaning that fulfils the reader intention, because the reader has appropriated, by reading and intuition, the meaning of the text. The rift that we are experiencing here can be phrased by asking: how is it possible for the reader, in this dynamic fulfilment that is appropriation, to get any meaning if the text's intention is alien to him and not possible to recover? Our line of defence will be the following.

First of all, it is not the text's intention that is appropriated, but the meanings that are within the text. Going forward, we know that one step of the hermeneutical arch is the explanation, where a new meaning is constituted, a meaning that is constituted by the interplay of text and reader. Finally, we can say that what fulfils the general intention of the reader is indeed this meaning, this meaning objectification, that the reader has achieved by explanation. The general intention of the reader-interpreter is the intention that on the first place moved the subject towards the text, toward a meaning. Such intentionality, once fulfilled with a meaning will not give knowledge about the object-text, but as we have seen with Ricoeur will have a new meaning for itself, therefore the possibility of intentioning a new meaning in the actual world, the world of the everyday life. The detour that a consciousness goes through within the text ultimately ends back into that world that was at first distanced by entering in the world of the text. At some point we close the texts and the books that we are reading and what we are left with is that *consciousness of fulfilment* that springs from the fulfilment of the empty intention we had before reading the text. This empty intention that we are referring to is a meaning-intention that seeks fulfilment of itself via meaning; it is an intention that seeks a meaning since is at distance from the other possible meanings of everyday life.

But why taking so much efforts and pain and trying to highlight this phenomenological possibility within Ricoeur's hermeneutics?

4. A new challenge for hermeneutics. Conclusions.

If our line of enquiry and our reading of Ricoeur's hermeneutics through phenomenological lenses holds, we are faced with a possible problem for hermeneutics. If the meaning that fulfils the intention of the interpret is a meaning constructed by the interpret can we say that the text has been properly interpreted? The outcome of our analysis is that from the text a new meaning emerges, possibly even more than just one new meaning. Moreover, if from a text it is possible to get different and multiple fulfilments and multiple meanings what happens to knowledge and to conversation? Imagine if two readers of *Crime and Punishment* met, both of them have explained the text differently and therefore have different meanings for the same text. Meanings that will not be completely alien to each other but nevertheless different. One could argue that *Crime and Punishment* is a text about redemption and a travel through the human's soul, fragile and keen to fall into the abyss of a consciousness trapped into itself. Another could argue that the text is a text about the travel through the human's soul, impossible to redeem and that digs into self-knowledge through pain, and so on. The constitution of a meaning is not an ultimate constitution, because the text eschews an ultimate constitution. We could argue that the two readers can talk about their interpretations and their appropriations of a text, but none of them could possibly explain in definite fashion why the constitution of the meaning that they have performed was

that. Such an explanation is prevented by the fact that the very intention of the readers is at stake and for them is impossible to understand and to grasp each other's minds and intentions. Moreover, the act of reading is a solitary act, both in the sense that it is not shared and both because even in front of the text we are alone. We cannot communicate with the text, what we can do is "answer" to the text.

Appropriation is the concept which is suitable for the actualisation of meaning as addressed to someone. It takes the place of an answer in the dialogical situation, in the same way that "revelation" or "disclosure" takes the place of the ostensive reference in the dialogical situation.¹⁸¹

But the text does not answer back our questions, it shows us something that we perceive but that still has to be interpreted and explained: it is this activity of explanation and interpretation that is solitary. From the hermeneutical relation to a text a new meaning arises, not completely different from the meaning of the text, but not equal either. The hermeneutical problem is therefore a problem about understanding. Understanding is the step into hermeneutical arc where the constitution of meaning arises and can be perspectival and can change from one person to another, given the, plurivocity and multisided nature of the text and the impossibility to communicate with it. Our question therefore will be: is this finitude of understanding a threat for hermeneutics or a blessing? In his paper *Are we a Conversation? Hermeneutics, Exteriority, and Trasmittability* Theodore George argues that hermeneutics is in philosophical embarrassment because its notion of understanding rests upon a need for a common ground, ontological or historical-contextual, as its presupposition.¹⁸² George finds this philosophical embarrassment specially in Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutics.

¹⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Appropriation*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 147.

¹⁸² Theodore George, *Are we a Conversation? Hermeneutics, Exteriority, and Trasmittability.*, in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Sept. 2017), Brill, Leiden, 2017, pp. 331-350.

The specter of this embarrassment is raised by Heidegger's and Gadamer's assertions that conversation, unending though it may be, is only made possible by prior accord.¹⁸³

Understanding is therefore rooted in such ontological, for Heidegger, or historical, for Gadamer, milieu that a conversation is. The result of this, according to George, is that understanding is doomed to fail as misunderstanding in situations where the alleged prior accord does not hold, cases of cultural dissimilarities or cases where such prior accord is based on the misunderstanding about being in prior accord; for example cases where a text of a former occidental colony is read with the lenses of the western colonizer or western civilization.

Quite on the contrary, conversation characteristically takes shape in the transmission of traditions that are contested, fractured, crisscrossed; in histories that are told in divergent and conflicted registers; in languages that may purport to be a mother tongue but are rather Creole, or perhaps interlaced with foreign and colonial influences. [...]. Conversation is, therefore, also characterized always, and again, by misapprehension and even delusion. *Whenever we participate in conversation, we recognize that we are in conversation, though we typically, or at least often, miss whom we participate in conversation with and, moreover, what we converse about.*¹⁸⁴

We believe that Ricoeur's strength is in fact the absence of such *prior accord*, because it offers the possibility of interaction with a text as an autonomous, ideal and central pole of such conversation thanks to its ideality, autonomy and centrality that frees the text from any context that is not the textual context.

Ricoeur's choice in favour of an epistemology of understanding rather than an ontology of understanding frees the possibility to observe the interaction and interplay of reader and text, of reader and their intentional approach toward meaning. However, we have seen with Ricoeur that the text is an *alien* to appropriate, that its meaning is to be constructed from perception and fulfilment of a meaning-intention that recognizes that meaning *as* something. To recognise a

¹⁸³ Theodore George, Ivi, p. 335.

¹⁸⁴ Theodore George, Ivi, p. 336. My italics.

meaning *as* something is the first step in order to appropriate that meaning and therefore fulfils the intention of the reader. In Ricoeur's case what might be missing is not whom we participate in conversation with, but what we converse about. Our reading of Ricoeur's epistemology of understanding through the lenses of Husserl's phenomenology as described in the *Logical Investigations* shows that even without a prior accord the conversation with a text might not be about the same thing. The problem is caused by the reader's intention presence. This intention is not possible to overcome or to eliminate, it is actually needed for the text as well, Ricoeur says.

Henceforth, only the meaning "rescues" the meaning.¹⁸⁵

Is hermeneutics doomed to misunderstanding or to miscommunication in the sense that a new meaning arises after interpretation? We believe that this might be the most important hermeneutical strength. Whether taken into an existential or reflective fashion or into a theoretical framework the intention of new meanings is the ultimate and most important hermeneutical achievement. As a theoretical framework hermeneutics might be that theoretical tool by means of which new meanings and new concepts might raise and travel amidst many different fields. The challenge for hermeneutics is becoming that very philosophical methodology that within the boundaries of a finite understanding finds new meanings that could be taken into account by many other disciplines. If we look at this thesis, for example, we can see how the interpretation here proposed of Husserl and Ricoeur concurs to build a new meaning such as the hermeneutical possibility of discovery of new meanings and the fact that these new meanings do not belong into the field of "invention", but belong into the field of a meaning constructed within and on the texts, the appropriation of which raises new questions and challenges. The ultimate challenge for hermeneutics is becoming a challenging voice via interpretation and intention of new meanings.

¹⁸⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The model of the text: meaningful action considered as a text*, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated by J. B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 163.

This work has brought us through two kinds of philosophy that despite being related might be very different from each other. Phenomenology and hermeneutics, especially Ricoeur's hermeneutics, are two reflexive disciplines, the former looking for a theory of knowledge, the latter looking for new possibilities of being through the encounter with a text. In our thesis, on the contrary, we have decided to privilege what is recognized by Paul Ricoeur as the central and main presupposition of phenomenology for hermeneutics i.e. the meaning. The choice in favour of meaning is not only the phenomenological presupposition of hermeneutics, but also the constitutional common ground for the coexistence phenomenology and hermeneutics. It is the choice in favour of meaning that allowed us to present a theory of reading as understanding and interpretation that puts at its centre the reader and the text with the same importance, a theory that shows how it is possible to have a conversation with the text that is not entirely one-sided, although being without communication. The act of reading is that act that perceives the world of the text as much as everyday perception perceives the world we inhabit; at the same time the act of reading is the act that perceives a second order object that must be recognised via meaning-intention, the same meaning-intention that we use in our everyday life. The fulfilment that occurs in the understanding of a text is not different from the fulfilment that happens when we recognise a car as a car, a white wall as a white wall or a triangle as a triangle. Reading is that special activity suspended between everyday life and the world of the text, but it is the activity that does not perceive just trees and houses; it displays and presents the events within a text, the meaning of which is unclear and must be explained by meaning-intentions. We do not form our explanation of a text without reading it, without having the presentation of its world, its matter, in the same way that we do not form our perception of something via concepts, without any ostensive presentation. Nevertheless, reading is not only our way to perceiving the world of the text, but that phenomenological act driven by the intentionality of the reader towards a meaning and the meaning of the text. In our hypothesis, what makes possible the appropriation of new possibilities of being is the fact that the intentionality of the reader gets fulfilled by the Meaning that the text is and not by the meaning-intention of the text. Interpreting that Meaning is therefore grasping a meaning within the text, knowing that a complete and final appropriation is not possible. The future of hermeneutics, according to the outcomes of this work, could be directed on the understanding on how the Meaning of a text is interpreted, the novelty that the fulfilment

of an intentionality by Meaning can create and the new meanings that is possible to instantiate in the world.

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