Affecting meaning: Subjectivity and evaluativity in gradable adjectives
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Chapter 5

Intentionality for evaluative judgements

In the previous chapter, we have seen that evaluative judgements importantly depend on how people act, and how they expect each other to act. We argued that one can nonetheless see these judgements as expressing specific contents. But a narrow conception of intentionality would not give us grip on them because how people act non-linguistically is normally seen to fall outside of the scope of semantics. Our strategy will be to argue that the notion of disembodied intentionality underlying the semantic theories for gradability and predicates of personal taste (PPTs) we have reviewed can be identified as the source of the limitations that make it difficult to get a grip on evaluative judgements. More importantly, our task here is to sketch an alternative, an embodied notion of intentionality. To perform this revision, we appeal to phenomenology, in particular to Merleau-Ponty [1945]. Hopefully we smooth the way for the reader who is not familiar with phenomenology. We do not make here full commitments with Merleau-Ponty’s views, our goal is to enlighten our problem by borrowing a few of the lessons that he leaves.

Although Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological enterprise is by no means limited to the study of consciousness and cognition, this aspect of his work has been taken up as a source of questioning of analytic philosophy of mind, epistemology, the cognitive sciences, and even artificial intelligence. By conceiving the subject as an embodied consciousness which is possible only in the ground provided by the social world, Merleau-Ponty has become the source of alternative conceptions of

1This chapter is partly based on joint work with A. Battán Horenstein, presented in Nijmegen in June 2013, and also on joint work with J. Kiverstein and E. Rietveld, presented in Evian and Budapest in 2013.

2Our reading of Merleau-Ponty owes a lot to Battán-Horenstein [2004] et ss., as well as to Kelly [2010] et ss.

3Although the contributions from Dreyfus [1972] to embodied cognitive science is mainly associated with his attack of AI which heavily relies on Heidegger as the source of suspicion, it also draws from Merleau-Ponty’s own work. One can also see Merleau-Ponty being turned against AI explicitly in Dreyfus [1996].
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the mind and intelligent agency which overcomes the limits of intellectualist or
dudsonist views.

In section 5.1, we try to spell out something that should be most familiar, and
for that very reason our move is difficult. The semantic theories for PPTs we have
reviewed have a common root. After Frege, semantics focuses on the informational
content of a sentence or discourse, on what we learn about the world. We argue
that the underlying view of intentionality is disembodied in the sense that it
assumes that the world constituted by objects and properties is a given which is
independent of the experiences or actions of agents. We point out how this idea
of intentionality as a property of an intellectual consciousness closely relates to
Merleau-Ponty’s reconstruction of Husserl’s notion of thetic intentionality. Thetic
intentionality posits, intellectually, a world of objects. Taking Merleau-Ponty’s
criticisms as a springboard, we will argue that disembodied intentionality does
not leave room for the subjectivity of evaluative judgements. The only way a
subject can fit in a world of objects is to reduce it to an objective body, which is
different from a lived body, the body of a subject.

Phenomenology is usually concerned with aboutness not just limited to lin-
guistic expression, and it can contribute to a reworking of the notion of linguistic
meaning, as we shall see in section 5.2. In particular, we will appeal to Merleau-
Ponty’s idea of operative intentionality, the kind of directedness we recognise in
purposive movement, as being basic for every intentional act, so also for thetic
acts. The role he assigns to what he calls the lived body, in contrast to the ob-
jective body, as the axis to all meaningfulness will allow us to re-work the notion
of intentionality relevant for linguistic meaning. We will thereby come to see how
linguistic agents can become embodied, how to see the meaning of their utter-
ances as signaling not only what information they have about the world but also
how they feel embedded in it. The punchline is this: the aboutness of evaluative
judgements involves a mesh of information and affect, an entanglement of how
we feel, how we expect others to act, and what we know and believe. To spell
this out, we appeal to the notion of affordance in order to specify the way ex-
pected patterns of behaviour can come to be part of the meaning of evaluative
judgements. Intersubjective understanding is possible, not by virtue of a shared
(partial) representation of what the world is like, but rather by our shared in-
tercorporality. This is not the only, but it is the most crucial element in the
shared background that shapes our expectations concerning how others feel, and
what they expect of us. This is the public face of subjectivity, and through it
subjectivity can enter into linguistic meaning.

Any pushing requires some effort. As we try to push the boundaries of the
notion of intentionality that the semanticist can be concerned with, there is an

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4Here and elsewhere the relevant notion is that of ‘Setzung’ which has a strong locative
element that the translations “to posit” or “to postulate” miss. We stick to the expression “to
posit” but only for lack of a better expression.
effort to be made. Even if there is some straining in our pushing, we hope that our reader will see that no boycott of semantics is proposed here, only a problematisation and enrichment of its object of study. The fundamental revision of the notion of intentionality offers, we hope, a renewed basis for a semantic analysis of PPTs and other relative gradable adjectives (RGAs). Before we get to sketch a semantic theory for these adjectives in chapter 6, we argue in section 5.3 how the revised basis we offer in the present chapter sheds light on the specific linguistic phenomena addressed in this dissertation. We include a discussion of the relation between semantics and pragmatics in this revised setting, and we also address the issue whether we are making the same claims as the expressivist.

5.1 Disembodied intentionality

Great and many are the achievements of semantic theorising, which since Frege has shed light on the compositional folding and unfolding of the meaning of sentential expressions. What we wish to do here is certainly not to question or discredit its many successes, but rather to make explicit the underlying general notion of intentionality that a well-established conception of semantics relies on. Disembodied intentionality takes semantic contents as being independent from our experience as situated, embodied agents. Powerful as though this notion of intentionality may be, it does not exhaust all intentional phenomena.

In subsection 5.1.1, we sum up the main traits of this post-Fregean idea of meaning, and we further explain why we take this to be a disembodied perspective. We shall make clear that although this view may accommodate the objective dimension of our embodiment, it misses its lived dimension. In subsection 5.1.2, a historical excursus, we indicate the relation of this view on linguistic meaning with Husserlian thetic intentionality, as reconstructed by Merleau-Ponty. In subsection 5.1.3, we give a systematic argument why disembodied intentionality alone is too narrow to account for the meaning of evaluative judgements. This is as well a plea for a broader view on intentional content relevant for semantics, one that encompasses the embodied aspects of cognition.

5.1.1 An assumed view of aboutness

In our attempt to describe the underlying notion of intentionality within which semantic analyses for PPTs have been given, one challenge is that theories differ and often for good reasons. Here we will not deny their differences, but rather focus on how these trends all see linguistic utterances as propositional acts of a disembodied consciousness. Although the exact physiognomy of propositions varies with each formalism, there is coincidence in taking a proposition not to be a subjective idea, to be a subject-independent entity whose main characteristic is to be the bearer of truth values. The objective, be that the actual or the non-
actual, is sharply separated from the subjective, the psychological, what belongs to the subject and its consciousness.\footnote{A cornerstone of Frege’s view is found in this sharp separation explicitly made in various works, notoriously in the \textit{Grundlagen}: “Always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective”.}

Existing analyses for PPTs have been developed within a strong tradition in semantics which focuses on the informational content of linguistic expressions as the kernel of their meaning. The informational content of a sentence, which we may generally call a proposition, is determined a priori, through a calculus of possible states allowed by a language. The intentional content of a sentence is a partial representation of states of affairs, summed up in an enumeration of the conditions under which what is said would be true.

We cognise by apprehending objective thoughts, recognising their truth, and asserting their contents. Linguistic expressions seen as information carriers are meaningful by virtue of the objective positing and predication they achieve, given a context. The objectivity of the semantic contents of linguistic expressions is the Fregean and post-Fregean warrant of intersubjective understanding. Communication is achieved precisely because a proposition which is expressed or grasped, believed or doubted, belongs to our “common treasure”, it is thus shared and is not the feeling or experience of a single subject. Although two-dimensional semantics holds that truth-values are relativised to two possible world parameters, these are still objective features of context, like who is the speaker, the time, the place at which the conversation holds. In Kaplan’s setting, the context is the state of the world in which a sentence is uttered, a circumstance of evaluation is the (possible) state of the world which is relevant to determining the extensions of expressions in the sentence. Even those who support different versions of relativism hold that contents remain constant across individuals. So although the truth-value of a proposition may be decided differently by different subjects, what determines satisfaction is objective.

If human thought is expressible only if it concerns “common property of many and is not a mode of an individual soul”\footnote{Frege [1892], p. 29}, an intentional state is such only insofar as one can characterise its truth-conditions or informational content. A mental state is contentful only if what it is about can be specified objectively, because otherwise it is not possible to say whether it is true or false. Even though information may be partial, it concerns the objective — either actual or non-actual —, and not how things are with individual souls. When one leaves no room between, on the one hand, the objective features of context, and, on the other hand, the subjective and incommunicable, there is no chance of giving linguistic expression to the undergoings of individual beings. This general view, though Fregean in origin, is by no means limited to Fregean semantics. It is, after all, a very sensible view on what language can express if one believes that when one provides a formal representation and pairs them with natural language expressions, one
actually reflects cognition as being a matter of discovering by perception and inquiry a world constituted by objects and properties. One could say that most research in semantics is an heir of Frege, in this sense, for it is commonly assumed that indeed the focus of the discipline is informational content, the information about the current or potential state of the world it carries.

Allow us a terminological clarification. Why call it disembodied intentionality? Contents are eternal objects of a transcendental consciousness, only grasped but not produced by concrete people who are moved and act in this or other way. Within this view, “embodiment is not some real phenomenon from which we abstract, but an irrelevant property of human subjects.”

Linguistic meaning is given by objects on which no trace of the subject is imprinted, even though there can be no object without a constituting subject. For the view we are trying to characterise here representation is taken to be the feature of language that semantics should take care of. Sentences and discourse carry information, they represent the way things are, or can be, and semantics takes care of bootstrapping the context-invariant content which makes this possible. Disembodiment is a theoretical choice which partly hinges on the idea that the aboutness of linguistic expressions depends on acts of an intellectual consciousness.

5.1.2 Disembodied and thetic intentionality

Disembodied intentionality as a general account of linguistic meaning can be embedded in a slightly more general but also restricted view of intentionality as aboutness of conscious acts: Husserlian thetic intentionality, as reconstructed by Merleau-Ponty. This embedding is meant to show some of the deeper roots of the idea of subjectivity underlying disembodied intentionality, and it will suggest where to look for alternatives. We do not wish to identify the two here, disembodied and thetic intentionality, but rather point out that disembodied

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7Here we are looking at the introduction of Peregrin [1995].

8In cognitive science, in particular in neuropsychology, disembodied cognition is seen as the hypothesis concerning the relation between conceptual processing and sensory and motor systems (cf., Mahon and Caramazza [2008]). Disembodied intentionality, as we use it here, would surely be related to that hypothesis but is not exactly the same. If the disembodied cognition hypothesis is right, then, e.g., from recognising the cake in front of me as a sachertorte, a conceptual ability, and exclaiming Sachertorte is tasty!, to the mouthwatering sensation and fixation of my eyesight on the cake, “the output of conceptual processing must, at some level of processing be packaged into a format that can be ‘read’ by the neural systems that enervate the body.” Mahon and Caramazza [2008], p. 60.

9Stokhof and van Lambalgen [2011], p. 15.

10Here we are not trying to reconstruct in full detail and justice Husserl’s own notion of judgement, which is rather complex and which evolves along his oeuvre. We are trying to give an extremely succinct reconstruction of how, in the eyes of Merleau-Ponty, Husserl conceives of intentionality as being fundamentally thetic.

11The label ‘disembodied intentionality’ as we are deploying it here concerns linguistic meaning. Intentionality that Husserl examines (and which Merleau-Ponty labels as being ‘thetic’)
intentionality as an all-encompassing view of linguistic meaning fits well with the idea that all consciousness, mostly consciousness as involved in acts of so-called higher cognition, is thetic.

“All consciousness is consciousness of something”, says the phenomenological dictum, and the essential characteristic of consciousness is intentionality qua directedness or aboutness. But, as Smith indicates, “Husserl focused on the intentionality of thought and perception as cognitive apprehension of objects in the world, whereas Merleau-Ponty focused on the intentionality of perception as essentially involving meaningful embodied behavior, or action.”

It is difficult to make a very contentful reconstruction of Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of Husserlian thetic intentionality, for not much is written by him on this. For our purposes, it suffices to make clear that thetic intentionality renders judgements as intellectual operations with no trace of the pre-linguistic, be that gesture or habitual behaviour.

In Merleau-Ponty’s reconstruction, Husserlian thetic intentionality is the sort of aboutness of a judgement involving an intellectual positing of a world of objects. A judgement involves an intentional act that has an object which is intended in a particular way. There is an intellectual act in which the conscious

concerns experience, for instance in perception, where language can play a role but which is not by itself a linguistic phenomenon. We do not wish to subscribe to the so-called West Coast interpretation of Husserl and remove all distance between Husserl and Frege, who is arguably one of the patriarchs of the view for which intentionality as pertaining language is to be seen in terms of informational content. Husserlian thetic intentionality does not mediate between the intentional agent and reality, whereas Fregean Sinn certainly does. For a view defending the idea that Husserl’s Sinn is also mediational, see Smith and McIntyre [1982], ch. 3.

Perhaps this reconstruction is most closely related to the Logical Investigations, where positing awareness affirms the existence of its object whereas nonposing awareness suspends judgement about the existence or non-existence of the object. For with the introduction of the activity of judgment we also introduce an ideal-governed domain — a domain of activity that is partly constituted by its recognition of the authority of an ideal
agent reflects on the position she takes with respect to the intended object, and explicitly classifies it under some category or other.\textsuperscript{17} It is a portrayal of our contact with the world as always involving the determination of an object as distinct from ourselves, a cogitation in which attitude and intentional object can always be distinguished.\textsuperscript{18}

In judgements as characterised by thetic intentionality, the subject can only be spoken of if it is posited as an object of a consciousness. Subjectivity can be linguistically expressed against the background of an already constructed world of objects. If the body comes to matter in a conversation, this is the body as an object among other objects. Disembodied intentionality as a characterisation of linguistic meaning thus fits within the boundaries of thetic intentionality, for the latter characterises every intentional act as one which intends a transcendent objectivity (actual or non-actual). A consciousness which is thetically constituted presupposes that one can always distinguish attitude and object. Beholder and beheld are neatly distinguished in Frege’s conception of proposition and propositional attitude; this is, after all, the very crux of the Hesperus-Phosphorus puzzle that partly motivates the specific Fregean notion of proposition.

With this embedding of disembodied intentionality within Husserlian thetic intentionality in mind, we note that once one sets the boundaries of the expressible along the boundaries of the thetic, aboutness beyond the thetic also goes beyond what can be linguistically expressed. This leads to the core of the argument: the subjectivity of evaluative judgements is not accommodated within the boundaries of disembodied intentionality. We need to consider critically the notion of body that is at stake when we say that taste, together with other experiences involved in evaluative judgements featuring PPTs and other RGAs, is subjective. For this, we introduce a further couple of phenomenological tools, namely, the Merleau-Pontyian distinction between the objective and the lived body. We shall see that the latter is the one directly involved in the subjectivity of taste.

\textsuperscript{17}Heinämaa \textsuperscript{1999}: “... Husserl explains in the first part of his Ideas, that all experience includes primordial belief. Every experience has, in other words, a doxic thetic layer.” (p. 53)

\textsuperscript{18}Merleau-Ponty also associates thetic intentionality with Kant, as he refers to it as “the only intentionality discussed in the Critique of Pure Reason”. (Merleau-Ponty \textsuperscript{1945}, Preface, p. xx) But he grants Kant with a little bit more sophistication: “Kant himself shows in the Critique of Judgement that there exists a unity of the imagination and the understanding and a unity of subjects before the object, and that, in experiencing the beautiful, for example, I am aware of a harmony between sensation and concept, between myself and others, which is itself without any concept. Here the subject is no longer the universal thinker of a system of objects rigorously interrelated, ... It is no longer merely the aesthetic judgement, but knowledge too which rests upon this art, an art which forms the basis of the unity of consciousness and of consciousness.” (Merleau-Ponty \textsuperscript{1945}, Preface, p. xix) This remark is remarkably close to the interpretation of the role of merely reflective judgement we presented in chapter 4.
5.1.3 Objective and lived body

Merleau-Ponty takes up Husserl’s\[19\] distinction between a material, inanimate body (‘Körper’), and a living, animate body (‘Leib’). Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl, who sees our own body in the second sense as a “‘zero point’ of all orientations”\[20\], but he goes beyond Husserl because he takes the body as the root of all intentional content, from the most primitive to the most intellectual.

The material or objective body, a conglomerate of organs with interconnected physiological functions which we can understand with the aid of scientific disciplines and empirical research, is an abstraction which does not include the lived experience. The objective body exists but only conceptually; it may be the material vessel of consciousness, and its workings and (mal)functions may affect consciousness, but it is not the body that a sentient agent feels as its own. At the level of the objective body, though countless processes take place which have an influence of how we perceive the world, the body that we live by is not involved.\[21\] As Merleau-Ponty argues, “the objective body is not the true version of the phenomenal body, that is, the true version of the body that we live by: it is indeed no more than the latter’s impoverished image, so that the problem of the relation of soul to body has nothing to do with the objective body, which exists only conceptually, but with the phenomenal body.”\[22\] The objective body is, by its very definition, not a subject.

The lived body\[23\] has abilities, it is a a task-directed system of possible actions, a “lived relationship between an intelligent but pre-reflective body and the world it encounters and perceives through continuous immersion, awareness, and actions.”\[24\] Thus, the subject is “neither a thinker who takes note of a quality, nor an inert setting which is affected or changed by it, it is a power which is born into, and simultaneously with, a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it.”\[25\] In the meeting of body and world when, for instance, we move our hand to reach out a cup, each pole in these pairs is defined in terms of its interaction and complementation with the other pole. The subjective and the objective form together an inseparable dyad, so reductionist or functionalist options

\[19\]In his introduction, Moran [2002] argues that this distinction also has its roots in Scheler.
\[20\]Husserl [1989], 166.
\[21\]One may think here of Nagel [1974] and whether Merleau-Ponty is not doing just the same. Their projects concur here insofar as perspective is integral to subjectivity. But “While Nagel tries to integrate phenomenal properties into the real world, Merleau-Ponty shifts to the phenomenal level of the life-world and ‘lived body’ where physico-chemical and mental properties become integrated into each other.” Northoff [1997], sec. 6, p. 114.
\[22\]Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 501-502
\[23\]Terminology is not always consistent, partly due to differences among translations of Merleau-Ponty’s work, and partly because Merleau-Ponty himself explores the notion through different angles. Thus, one could put together the lived body, living body, phenomenal body, and corps propre, as slight variants of one same idea.
\[24\]Seaman [2013], p. 2.
\[25\]Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 245.
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are not an option in this view. The objective world as an ideal of impartiality is the result of our taking distance from what is presented to us in the phenomenal field, that which is presented to consciousness. Consider again the Müller-Lyer arrows. How the segments in the arrows are presented to us is given in of our phenomenal, in particular our visual field. The question about how their length compares only arises when we compare each segment’s determinacy beyond their givenness in our perceptual experience, it belongs to the objective world.

Now that we see the difference between objective and lived body, we can get to the core of the argument. The subjectivity of evaluative judgements is not accommodated within the boundaries of disembodied intentionality because this view on meaning does not allow for the lived body to enter into language, except if it is transported onto the realm of the objective.

5.1.4 Disembodied intentionality and subjectivity

Our point is that evaluative judgements are not fully accountable only on the basis of disembodied intentionality. If one tries to do this, the subjective component combusts away, for it is captured as an objective determination and not as a lived experience. The bottomline is that disembodied intentionality objectifies subjectivity: the delineation, cut-off point, judge index or parameter, perspective, or experiencer is said to be the anchor for claims whose meaning depends on their truth-conditions. This assumes that what is true is given to the lived body, whereas in perception we are given presences, profiles. To clarify what a profile is we take the example of a lamp we have in front of us. When we see a lamp, we do not see its back, and yet we are ready and happy to say that it has a back. The issue is that “...this formula, ‘It is true’, does not correspond to what is given to me in perception.”

None of these profiles is true or false, just as none of the presentations of a lamp to perception is the true lamp. A recursive characterisation of the truth-conditions of an evaluative judgement may be an interesting task from a formal point of view, but it will not help to capture what is subjective, what is given to us through experience in perception. This is not to say that thetic intentionality leaves no room for subjectivity. This is to say that disembodied intentionality cannot handle subjectivity without objectivising it.

This discussion is tied to the global objection to degree vs. delineation approaches made in chapter 3 subsection 3.3.2. The discussion here goes beyond the one there because now we see a more precise sense in which subjectivity is

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26 "This phenomenal field is not an ‘inner world’, the ‘phenomenon’ is not a ‘state of consciousness’, or a ‘mental fact’, and the experience of phenomena is not an act of introspection or an intuition in Bergson’s sense.” Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 66.

27 Cf., Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 6.

28 This notion of profile is related, although not identical to Husserl’s ‘Abschattung’.


objectivised. When putting what is subjective about taste, or about any embodied experience, as a component of what makes a claim true, we actually lose grip on experience as given in perception.

With respect to evaluations, like assessing a mountain to be high, Merleau-Ponty says that a mountain can appear high to him “because they exceed my body’s power to take them in its stride”\textsuperscript{31} I could believe I can climb it and be wrong. Someone may desire to climb it at some point in her life, in spite of the effort that would take. One of us may intend to climb it anyway, to prove she is strong enough. These considerations, the belief, the desire, the intention, indeed involve an intellectual process. Still, the position I take when I see the mountain and it appears to be high remains until I have taken enough strolls to become an experienced climber, in the course of which the mountain may slowly come to appear less high. The positing character of thetic intentionality involves the constitution of an object of experience and the reflection of the agent of her position with respect it. The affective dimension of our evaluations is not posited on an object, it concerns our embodied condition and interaction with potentialities of our environment: we are involved as lived bodies\textsuperscript{32}

Consider once more the Müller-Lyer arrows. When the segment in the image above appears longer than the one in the image below, what matters is how they appear in our visual field. The horizontal lines are given to the lived body but not as determinate lengths\textsuperscript{33} Our belief that the two segments are of equal (or unequal) length might be wrong, we can lie about how something appear to us, but in what sense could their appearance be wrong? Once we come up with a way in which we can observe and compare the two segments alone, stripping off the rest of the context by covering or by using another segment whose length remains constant, we can see the segments as being equal. But this is different from our initial findings, from the appearance of the ensemble of figures to in our field.

Under these lights, the idea that subjectivity of PPTs may be given in the denotation of an object’s position according to a qualitative scale, as some theories of PPTs hold, squares with the objective body, but not with the lived body. If an evaluative judgement’s business would be to report a measurement, qualitative or otherwise, it would not concern the subject as such but its material, objective determinations. Subjectivity is neither a mental nor a material phenomenon. This middle ground where it is given is the lived body\textsuperscript{34} Of course, living and

\textsuperscript{31}Merleau-Ponty \textsuperscript{1945}, p. 511

\textsuperscript{32}As we shall see in the coming section, they make thetic intentionality and thus the positing of objects possible, according to Merleau-Ponty.

\textsuperscript{33}One may think that what is at issue here is a case of epistemic uncertainty, that the phenomenal field is epistemically underdetermined and that this is the difference with the objective world. This is not really viable, first because the mere question of length does not arise unless we get out from the phenomenal field and move towards the objective world.

\textsuperscript{34}The psycho-physical event can no longer be conceived after the model of Cartesian physi-
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thinking and feeling are intertwined. But they are not reducible to each other.

The contextualist includes the judge (or a group thereof) as the source of a (qualitative) scale, a standard, or the source of the linguistic convention that this judge tries to pass on the conversation at hand. The contextualist is careful to note that linguistic conventions are not objective, not a matter of fact. But if the linguistic convention depends on where judge draws a line, what standard of comparison she settles, it is an objective matter nonetheless. What of subjectivity is left if its only trace is to fix a standard for the intensity or extent of an experience in a given context of utterance? A difference in linguistic conventions is, in the end, a case of there being “materially different assumptions about the discourse situation”.

For the relativist, though the content of an evaluative judgement is one and the same for all judges, each judge determines truth for herself. Is the judge objectively given? Lasersohn is careful with this matter. He claims explicitly that he secures the subjectivity of the assignment of the judge who is to judge, in other words, that there is not one view that fixes objectively the truth or falsity of a taste judgement. In his words, “we must allow that the objective facts of the situation of utterance do not uniquely determine a judge.” The picture coming out of this gambit to avoid the objectivity of judge assignments is philosophically limited. Indeterminacy and subjectivity are not to be confused. What Lasersohn gets is that upon the utterance of an evaluative judgement at a given situation, a multiplicity (if not an infinity) of contexts arise, all of which seem to be on equal footing to assess the judgement’s truth. An evaluative judgement may be indeterminate because of the multiplicity of possible judges one can pick, but once a judge or (group thereof) is picked, no subjectivity is left. One can read this as a straightforward neglect of the distinction between Merleau-Ponty proposes that we think of how “It is true” relates to what is given in perception.

Nuanced absolutists are, first and foremost, absolutists. In this sense, they claim that taste judgements concern matters which have absolute truth-conditions and which are independent of any specific subject. The specific means to get subjectivity into the picture deploying first-person based genericity assume subjectivity involves the application of a property to individuals in the domain as if to oneself. But this in a way neglects the clear fact that, for instance in the example of the lamp, the profile I see is not the profile you see when you stand...
opposite of me in the same room, on the other side of the table where the lamp
stands. It seems that the price to pay to make room for subjectivity is to ignore
that others have in fact other stances and experiences, for them the phenomenal
field is not like mine.\textsuperscript{37}

Expressivism of the sorts we have seen proposes two different strategies. Com-
m mon to them is to claim that there are two aspects of meaning, where the basic
one is a truth-conditional component. For the kosher option, the additional as-
pect of meaning belongs to pragmatics.\textsuperscript{38} For the non-kosher one, the additional
layer is semantic in nature, it is a use-conditional layer working next to the truth-
conditional one.\textsuperscript{39} This strategy objectifies subjectivity because the when Alf says
This cake is tasty, what is subjective here is that he is actually saying This cake
is tasty to me, which has plain truth-conditional content, it is an objective facts
in the world. The kosher strategy pictures subjectivity as an expressive-affective
dimension that is understood by an addressee when she succeeds in imagining
herself as having the attitude the speaker is in. This comes close to the sort of
givenness of profiles that we get in the phenomenal field, except that it makes it
a job of imagination to understand what profile our interlocutor is getting, what
her subjective experience is. Whether agents in an audience actually manage to
imagine themselves in the position of the speaker is a contingent matter. How-
ever, we understand the other’s view even when we do not in fact manage to
imagine ourselves in it.

We quickly sum up this section before moving on. We have argued that the
notion of intentionality underlying natural language semantics as an enterprise
which theorises on meaning in the footsteps of Frege is disembodied. We have
shown how this idea of intentionality pertaining to language fits the notion of
thetic intentionality, and we have then discussed the unfitness of disembodied
intentionality if one wants to capture the subjectivity of evaluative judgements.
In the next section, we start lay down the building blocks for a positive alternative.

5.2 A sketch of embodied intentionality

The core of our analysis is that evaluative judgements express the concerns of
linguistic agents qua embodied agents. Relying on Merleau-Ponty’s characteri-
sation and analysis of pre-reflective or operative intentionality, we elaborate an
embodied conceptualisation of linguistic meaning. The aboutness of evaluative
judgements concerns a mesh of information and affect, it is determined not only

\textsuperscript{37}Our own use of dispositional genericity in Crespo and Fernández\textsuperscript{[2011]} suffers from a
different problem. Dispositional genericity as we deploy suggests that subjectivity is mainly a
matter of how we are disposed to act, but subjectivity often takes us beyond our dispositions
and habits. We need to make room for suprise, for the new, dispositions are not an adequate
tool for this.

\textsuperscript{38}Cf., Buekens\textsuperscript{[2011]}

\textsuperscript{39}Cf., Gutzmann\textsuperscript{[2014]}
by what we know but also by the way we respond to our environment qua embodied agents, before any objective positing is achieved. We respond because the environment solicits us to do so, its sets before us more or less difficult challenges and summonings. The thetic and the bodily aspects of evaluative judgements intervene in their semantic specification, where the bodily aspects stand in a primary position with respect to the thetic. This should give a clue of why we will not simply claim here that what is needed is a layer of meaning or use or thought which stands next to the thetic, disembodied one. What we will need is a prior layer, that can make sense of what goes on in the thetic one.

To spell this out, we draw upon the notion of affordance, the solicitation of an aspect of the environment to an agent who is drawn to respond in a specific way. We argue that evaluative judgements express our responsiveness to relevant affordances offered by the environment. Their interpretation requires us to accommodate and abide by the expectations, linguistic and non-linguistic, that these judgements engage us with. Our evaluative (dis)agreements allow us to signal and attune our responsiveness to our environment, to categorise it, and to modify it. Isn’t this something that comes with all language, not just with evaluative judgements? Possibly, but our claim here is limited. We focus on how this view gives a better rendering of where subjectivity and experience into the semantic anatomy of restricted and unrestricted judgements.

In subsection 5.2.1 we present Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of operative intentionality, and how he sees the relation between operative and thetic intentionality. In subsection 5.2.2 we explore how both aspects of intentionality, the thetic and the operative, are at stake in the production and interpretation of evaluative judgements. We give a condensed presentation of the notion of affordances in subsection 5.2.3. Then in subsection 5.2.4 we argue that evaluative judgements signal our responsiveness to relevant affordances of (more or less determined) objects, agents, or aspects of our environment. Finally, in subsection 5.2.5 we argue how this picture accommodates intersubjective understanding of evaluative judgements, how it renders evaluative (dis)agreements possible and meaningful.

Are we confusing semantics and phenomenology? This is not a confusion, it is a crossing. We are trying to build a bridge to deal with a problem coming from semantics aided by considerations and distinctions made by phenomenologists. The step we make in this section is to constitute the soil on which it is possible for evaluative judgements to be meaningful. We argue how their contentfulness is made possible by prelinguistic structures related to gestures and other primitive physical behaviour. Evaluative judgements are uttered by embodied agents whose intentional states do not just consist of an information structure but which are defined by an affective structure. What we do in this section is to try to spell out, conceptually, how to specify such intentional state.

Merleau-Ponty is most commonly re-visited by those who are skeptical of any formal enterprise concerned with cognition. Still, we believe that we do not leap into inconsistency.
5.2.1 Operative intentionality

Merleau-Ponty presents and discusses the role of thetic intentionality in the context of his revision of Husserl’s distinction between thetic and operative intentionality. Merleau-Ponty re-appropriates the notion of operative intentionality, giving it a different role and status than Husserl did. In operative intentionality, the traditional idea of intentionality as directedness is enriched with the notion of projection. The aboutness of our conscious experience establishes a relation with a partial and dynamic construction of the world. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, we should start by “considering consciousness itself as a project of the world, meant for a world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but towards which it is perpetually directed — and the world as this pre-objective individual whose imperious unity decrees what knowledge shall take as its goal”.[41]

Operative intentionality, a form of non-positing consciousness, is manifested for instance in our unreflective engagement and dealings with objects in our environment, like grasping a mug or riding a bike.[42] At work in such cases isn’t reflex — as in the adaptation of the eye pupil’s size to light — but operative intentionality, a pre-reflective know how directed to the real and concrete world spontaneously present to the subject. It is a category of behavioral phenomena between the physiological and the cognitive, irreducible to both muscular and cognitive descriptions.[43]

What is the difference between movement as an intentional act, and as mere

ourselves when we sketch a formal model for the semantics of evaluative judgements, as we shall do in chapter [3] The objections Merleau-Ponty voices against the “logician” are addressed to a logician committed to disembodied intentionality. “The logician” focuses on logic as the science of constituted truth and objective thinking. (Cf. [Merleau-Ponty] [1945], p. 56-7) Logic characterised this way is strictly and only focused on thetic intentionality. “The logician knows, on principle, only positing consciousness, and it is this postulate, this supposition of a wholly determinate world, of pure being...” [Merleau-Ponty] [1945], p. 318. We believe that the boundaries of what makes sense can be pushed back, so that the logician may take into consideration experiences which involve our affective grip.

[42]Here is a partly terminological, partly philosophical digression concerning whether operative and motor intentionality are the same concept in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. In our interpretation, they are different but related concepts. Motor intentionality is specifically related to motility as one specific manifestation of operative intentionality, one which plays a prominent role in Merleau-Ponty’s own work and in the reception of it in the Merleau-Ponty’s work in the development of the trend now known as the Embodied and Embedded Cognition view. The study of movement as a phenomenon provides raw material for a description that displays the intentional dimension of embodied agents. [Dreyfus and Kelly] [2007] and [Rietveld] [2008] give enlightening reconstructions and make interesting uses of this notion. However, and perhaps as a consequence of a mere terminological shuffle, the distinction between motor and bodily intentionality seems not to be drawn as sharply as it could be. (See fn. 30 in [Rietveld] [2008].) The distinction as we propose it here deserves extensive discussion and requires a fair amount of textual evidence, none of which fit here, but which surely will receive our attention in the future.
reflex.\textsuperscript{44} The phenomenological description through which Merleau-Ponty elaborates his analysis the intentional dimension of movement by contrasting the morbid case with the non-morbid one. Merleau-Ponty describes certain pathologies described by empirical psychology as forms of psychical blindness, which are related to a subject’s difficulty in making abstract movements, like gestures or mimicry, which lack of an apparent goal. Describing Schneider, a war veteran who suffered a traumatic injury to the brain incurred during trench warfare in the First World War, Merleau-Ponty says: “If the patient [Schneider] is ordered to shut his eyes and then perform an abstract movement, a set of preparatory operations is called for in order to enable him to ‘find’ the operative limb, the direction or pace of the movement, and finally the plane in which it is to be executed.”\textsuperscript{45} Thus, he concludes that in the morbid subject the ideal formula of movement is given separately from the blind attempts to perform it. Movement for the normal subject is movement and, at the same time, consciousness thereof.\textsuperscript{46} Consider the corporeal consciousness of movement needed in order to take a shovel for digging a hole.\textsuperscript{47} Here, movement and action are preceded, made possible by a bodily know-how which is intentionally directed to an object, the shovel, and to the world, the soil, in a certain way from the very moment in which it is activated.

Merleau-Ponty argues that while Husserl considered operative intentionality a collateral phenomenon and saw thetic intentionality as the culmination of the powers of an intentional agent, one should take operative intentionality to be the very condition of possibility of thetic judgements. While the former characterises our thetic attitudes, the latter “produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, being apparent in our desires, our evaluations and in the landscape we see, more clearly than in objective knowledge, and furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language.”\textsuperscript{48} A concrete example that illustrates why Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology takes operative intentionality to be fundamental for thetic intentionality is the following. In the example of the corporeal consciousness of movement needed in order to take a shovel for digging a hole, the intentional act of digging a hole is animated by thetic consciousness by which I know that this is a shovel, what a shovel is for and why I take it in order to dig a hole somewhere. This intentional act is, in its turn, made possible by operative intentionality giving me certainty that I have a body, that I can move it, that my hand is fit for gripping a shovel, that I have enough strength, etc. This form of intentionality is given by a basic “I can” rather than by the traditional “I know that”. The experienced world is apprehended by the lived body according to the possibilities for action we are capable of carrying out.

\textsuperscript{44}This distinction is already explored in Merleau-Ponty\textsuperscript{1942}.
\textsuperscript{45}Merleau-Ponty\textsuperscript{1945}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{46}“The plunge into action is, from the subject’s point of view, an original way of relating himself to the object, and is on the same footing as perception.” Merleau-Ponty\textsuperscript{1945}, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{47}Here we are following Smith\textsuperscript{1988}.
\textsuperscript{48}Merleau-Ponty\textsuperscript{1945}, p. xx.
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It is important to note, as Merleau-Ponty himself does, that “It is not easy to reveal pure motor intentionality: it is concealed behind the objective world which it helps to build up.” And although examples of physical activities involving coordination and rhythmic activities, like dancing or sewing, clearly manifest an intelligence which involves our body as a task-oriented system, mostly any action of the lived body will also feature thetic intentionality. Sewing or knitting requires a physical ability that one indeed has to be drilled on, to acquire by practice and repetition, lots of seamstresses nowadays buy magazines at kiosks where they can find patterns, instructions, measurements, etc. Conceptual, embodied, situational, cultural layers intermingle in almost all intentional acts.

5.2.2 The operative and the thetic in evaluative judgements

Sense (noun): one of two opposite directions especially of motion (as of a point, line, or surface).

The epigraph suggests the move we wish to make. We want to integrate this entry of the definition of sense to the conception of meaning which we think is appropriate to accommodate the semantics of evaluative judgements. The bottom line of our analysis is: linguistic aboutness is not only related to the description of possible states of the world, or possible perspectives of people about those possible states. Language also expresses our situation in the world as a field of possibilities for the lived body, a way we are directed to our environment. Thetic and operative intentionality are intertwined in our judgements: information and affect are traded every time we offer or learn a new determination, and for this intentionality needs to get embodied. Embodied intentionality should make room for the affective dimension of meaning, and still accommodate the informational trade that is typically conceptualised via disembodied intentionality.

Affect lies somewhere between automatic response and representation: “Man is a permanent sensorium commune, who is affected now from one quarter, now from another.” The morbid case of Schneider is telling of the role played by the affective dimension in the normal subject. For this patient, people and things have no significance, no emotional valence. “Faces are for him neither attractive nor repulsive, and people appear to him in one light or another only in so far...

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4 Merleau-Ponty [1945], fn. 94. This appears in a very interesting and long footnote, in which Merleau-Ponty discusses how apraxia has been presented by Liepmann as a case of failure of motor intentionality, but where the arguments given to establish the case have remained within the cast of the intellectualist vs. empiricist view, making the artificial separation between pure thetic consciousness and and objective body, thus actually leaving no room for operative intentionality which is a phenomenon of the lived body.


51 Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 253. It would be interesting to investigate the relation with this and the sensus communis in Kant [1790] and in Descartes’ Med. VI.
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As he has direct dealings with them, and according to the attitude they adopt towards him, and the attention and solicitude which they bestow upon him. Sun and rain are neither gay nor sad; his humour is determined by elementary organic functions only, and the world is emotionally neutral. Through operative intentionality, we configure and navigate our affective milieu, which by itself does not posit determinate qualities in objects but which makes it possible to achieve such determinations. Herein partly lies the meaning of evaluative judgements.

Embodied intentionality has to make room for the intertwining of the informational and the affective dimension. Intentionality as the semantic content of linguistic expressions is the signaling of the action possibilities and impossibilities through which we navigate. True sentences are those which are established at the confluence of our action possibilities, those where the experience of an encounter with a thing becomes irrelevant, those where the world appears as

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52Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 182.

53Note that Merleau-Ponty’s own concern with evaluations is not strictly semantic in nature. He does have an interest on how language (‘parole’) is possible and in the key role embodiment plays there, which reassesses rather than assumes a simple distinction between semantics and ontology. But he does not deal systematically with the linguistic expression of evaluations. Actually, the Merleau-Pontyian line about the significance of adjectives goes quite far. He claims that “It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words.” Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 273. For our purposes, we do not need to go follow him this far, for Merleau-Ponty’s view seems to make interesting claims for which we would not be able to offer no decisive support:

If a word is shown to a subject for too short a time for him to be able to read it, the word ‘warm’, for example, induces a kind of experience of warmth which surrounds him with something in the nature of a meaningful halo. [...] It is not a matter of reducing the significance of the word ‘warm’ to sensations of warmth by empiricist standards. For the warmth which I feel when I read the word ‘warm’ is not an actual warmth. It is simply my body which prepares itself for heat and which, so to speak, roughs out its outline. (Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 273)

(He gives similar examples about hard, damp, red. It is interesting to note that all these terms are adjectives, which suggests that our own claims may in the end not be so far from Merleau-Ponty’s own ideas after all. Interesting as though this observation may be, its exegetical nature puts it beyond the aim of our chapter.)

This indication can be related to how embodied cognition broadens the notion of cognition to cover our perceptual, cognitive, and motor capacities as capacities that depend upon features of the physical body. Whether this claim can or should lead to the discovery of motor control processes underlying the semantic processing, active or passive, of evaluative judgements, is a claim that goes beyond the conceptual analysis we offer here.

Even though we will not go as far as endorsing this claim as a neurocognitive hypothesis, as something that happens upon the mere hearing of a phonological pattern, we believe there is a key observation in this quote. That is, that when we hear an evaluative judgement like This is warm, this generates expectations about the object. This bodily roughing out of a plan may be read as a way of describing the anticipation raised or present in an addressee which accepts this utterance. The role of expectations of this sort, these bodily anticipations, will be spelled out in below.
constituted according to a theory and not as it reveals itself to the lived body. True or false is not what we cope with, but what we distill as systematic and subject-independent in what we cope with. Meaning consists of intertwined and complementary dimensions: a conceptual one and a lived or phenomenal one, where the latter makes the former one possible\textsuperscript{54}. While analytic philosophy of language and natural language semantics have developed powerful analyses and tools to tackle the former, it has remained largely silent about the experiences underlying the institution of disembodied intentionality. As operative intentionality endows significance to the environment in which we inhabit, language signals the projections of the lived body, and gradable adjectives play an important role in this.

Consider a simple exclamation: \textit{This is heavy!} In absence of all information, there is a good deal of evaluation that can be made. I may not know the exact weight of the thing, or what sort of thing it is, but when I carry it I may be overwhelmed and exceeded by the effort. Our evaluation simply expresses the action possibilities at reach. The action possibilities which are expressed by evaluative judgements are not explicit plans or meditated decisions but rather operative sketches of the things with which we interact. Now think of \textit{That is spicy!} as said of something one tries without knowing what exactly one is eating. The addressee learns that the edible thing in question tastes in a certain way but learns nothing specific about the objective constitution of the thing in question. Strength and sharpness are felt, not believed or inferred. Thetic and operative aspects are intertwined because extreme spiciness may preclude a thing’s edibility, and because spiciness is chemically correlated with capsaicin. A similar Janus-faced content is given by \textit{That is sour!} The thing’s constitution is related to its tasting sour, but we do not learn something specific about it, only how it affects someone who eats it. Sourness is a sort of sharpness, but so is bitterness. What is the difference between these two? One way to make it is to specify an exemplary case, like naming lemons or coffee, respectively. But this helps only if one has tasted lemons or coffee, and if one is able to identify these, to pick out the referent of \textit{lemon} as opposed to \textit{fig}.

Think now of \textit{That is tasty!} Someone who hears this learns that the edible thing in question is appealing. How does it taste? Nothing is specified. What kind of thing is this? A tasty thing. Is this related to the thing’s making? Of course it is! But it is also related to how we are attracted or repulsed in our eating experiences whose valence relies on not just gustatory input, but also on input from the other senses (most notably olfactory and tactile, but also visual and possibly also auditory), on information we have about a thing’s ingredients and elaboration, on memories and on physiological associations (like rejecting a sort of food with which we once got poisoned). To say whether something is tasty, then that thing must be edible, but for something to be edible it must be fit to

\textsuperscript{54}Cf., Park \textit{1979} who distinguishes between “sens vécu” and “sens conceptuel”. 

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be eaten, which takes us again to the operative side. We do not wish to try to
give any kind of systematic reduction of concepts to action possibilities here, that
would be totally beyond our interests and needs. All this is to stress that one
should better see the operative and the thetic as being aspects of intentionality
than as being two exclusive or categorically different sorts of content.

As soon as we offer a nominal determination of the object under assessment,
the thetic becomes present in a more patent way. Consider these examples: *This
suitcase is heavy, These plums are sour, This cake is tasty.* These evaluations
contain more precise information, for understanding these utterances requires
that one is able to identify suitcases among different pieces of luggage, plums
among fruits, and cakes among desserts or pâtisseries. But is this information
central to the judgement in question? I may be wrong about whether this is a
suitcase or a trunk. Still, if I have experienced great effort when carrying it, the
predication holds even if the identification fails.

How about claiming *This suitcase is heavy* not after lifting it but after reading
the figures on a scale at an airport? Apart from the thetic component involved
in the identification of the object as a suitcase, we may also see that the numbers
on the scale mean something only if we are familiar with the measurement con-
vention. But how do we become familiar with such conventions? The convention
you are most familiar with tells you something about the weight of the suitcase
because you are used to operating with it. But not only this, you also have a
feel for what one kilogram amounts to. When you discover that your suitcase
weights 30 kg because you read the figures on a scale, you may not have a direct
bodily understanding of the heaviness of the object, but you do have an indica-
tion of what possible bodily experiences it might induce. Does this mean that
some evaluative judgements are reducible to thetic intentionality and others are
not? No, it does not, for the conclusion that the 30 kg suitcase is heavy requires
that we have a sense for what 1 kg or, say, 10 kg weigh. Suppose the scale uses a
different convention from the one you are used to: do the numbers you read mean
something now? Only if you can translate this to the scale you know and, again,
whether you have experience in manipulating objects whose weight is given mea-
sured in that scale. Suppose the scale indicates that the suitcase is 100 kg heavy,
you think there must be a mistake. You try to lift the suitcase, you manage to
do so, and from that you conclude that the scale is not right. There are not two
meanings of *heavy*, the standardised and conventionalised procedure of measur-
ing things with scales has become sedimented and integrated with the primary,
affective layer, but the affective layer is still there, still present, underlying every
apparently merely thoughtful protocol.

Unrestricted judgements impose a (more or less) sparse and indeterminate
structure based on not merely on linguistic grounds but how we, not in partic-

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55This is reflected in the choice of a partial setting for the semantics presented in the next chapter.
ular you or I but any embodied agent, is expected to cope with the object under assessment. The structure is surely less determinate in the case of a strongly evaluative adjective like *tasty*, a bit more determinate with a weakly evaluative like *tall*, for when I learn that John is tall, then I will call *tall* anyone I compare with John who happens to be taller than John. With taste, things are less homogeneous. A tasty cake and a tasty wine are hardly comparable, and calling a certain cake tasty does not entail that I should call all similar cakes *tasty*.

What notion of judgement can we distill from what we have said? Is a judgement a cognitive operation? Yes, this indeed is our claim, but the claim holds within our appeal to an embodied view of cognition, if we consider cognition as an integrative activity of the lived body, which involves both bodily and intellectual capacities, operative and *thetic* intentionality. Judgement is neither an act of understanding, nor a pure sensory activity. The body as a system of possibilities makes evaluative judgements possible, and it is these action possibilities which we signal. We do not refer to them as something that is the case, on a par with facts that we measure and strictly classify. Operative and *thetic* aspects of intentionality are interlocked in the meaning evaluative judgements, which also show clearly that one aspect cannot be reduced to the other. They are not separate layers of content or different kinds of states. The operative makes the *thetic* possible but it does not simply vanish from language. It remains, and the case of evaluative judgements makes it visible.

The claim that we need an embodied turn in semantics needs to be made more precise. One of the fundamental strengths of disembodied intentionality is the detailed account it provides when articulating contextual and compositional elements in the interpretation of sentences. Can we get anywhere close to this level of description? We can if we have simple building blocks that are suitable, that allow us to integrate informational and affective aspects of meaning.

### 5.2.3 Zooming into affordances

Our claim is that affordances, or rather a certain analysis thereof, can be fit for the task at hand. Affordances are not abstract possibilities, plans, or desires but rather summonings, felt tensions, ways in which we are drawn to respond as complex intentional agents. The concept of an affordance will let us spell out Merleau-Ponty’s action possibilities in a way that shows how the *thetic* and the

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56 The mountain is great or small to the extent that, as a perceived thing, it is to be found in the field of my possible actions, and in relation to a level which is not only that of my individual life, but that of ‘any man’. (Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 513.)

57 Note that Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between perception and judgement when he criticises intellectualism as a position assuming that perception is *thetic*, when he argues that “perception is not an act of understanding”. (Merleau-Ponty [1945], p. 54) Here we are not reproducing his critical view but rather gathering the lessons he draws to enrich the idea of judgement in our semantic analysis.
operative can and do come together. Affordances can be seen as building blocks of embodied intentionality, where the “I can” and the “I think” meet.

Gibson introduced the notion of affordance in his discussion of visual perception. The ecological approach he took approaches perception as an interactive process between agents and their environment. Gibson introduced the concept of affordances to refer to the way in which animals are sensitive to the possibilities for action provided by substances, surfaces, objects, other creatures, and other aspects of their milieu. Typical examples of affordances are those of a rigid surface which affords support to agents of a certain mass, or that of a leaf which affords nutrition to an ant and blowing to a child. In such cases, there is a relation between a concernful agent and an aspect of its environment, a relation in which neither subject nor object is primary or dispensable. Before we can perceive a chair or a table, we are first drawn and steered by action possibilities offered by (among others, physical) qualities of things, given our own configuration. A plastic stool may look support-able or stand-on-able to me, but not to my father. A leaf may look nutritious to an ant, but not to me.

Although affordances have been employed mainly in relation to motor action they can also be seen more generally as action possibilities provided by the environment to an agent embedded in a sociocultural setting, for our abilities are shaped not just by biological factors but also, and very strongly, by stable patterns of social and cultural interactions. Considered this way, it is easier to see how affordances play a role in cognition beyond the motor case, and how linguistic expression may signal our selective and normative responsiveness to action.
possibilities offered by the environment.

Does this picture lead to relativism? Because if it did, we would not get the stable core of intersubjective sharedness needed for linguistic meaning to be possible. Perceiving and responding to an affordance requires an ability that is socially grown. Affordances are independent from individual perceivers and actual responses, but dependent on a community of skilled perceivers. They are defined with respect to abilities acquired within sociocultural settings. This is how we say that an individual’s specific responses in a given situation fail to meet the solicitations of her environment. When Alf is drunk, he cannot climb stairs, but stairs are still climbable to those with the right abilities (and not, for instance, to a young infant). Likewise, I may not be able to tell a beech from an elm, but someone with the proper training does. Responding adequately to an aspect of our environment is set by a history of attempts and responses of the community to which we belong. The individual and the social levels are involved here. Individuals can show spontaneous responses but social feedback can affect them. So the adequacy of a response is given by the interaction of an agent with a thing and with other agents in her community.

It is important to note that while agents are potentially responsive to all affordances available in a situation, they respond only to those that are relevant to them. So relevant affordances are a subset of existing affordances, i.e., those that an agent is properly trained to respond to and which solicit the agent in a situation, given her concerns. Water affords quenching thirst; this is certainly relevant for us when we are thirsty (though we often drink when we are not thirsty, e.g., if someone offers a glass of water I may take it anyway). An individual may be indifferent to certain affordances not only if she lacks skills and training, but also depending on her interests and concerns. Our contention is that evaluative judgements let us signal relevant affordances, i.e., those affordances that at least one of the interlocutors in a conversation is responsive to. As linguistic expressions, they allow us to indicate the salience of certain action possibilities.

An affordance “cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective.” We analyse the notion of affordance further in order to lay this bidirectionality bare. A useful conceptual distinction comes from Frijda’s analysis of emotions as func-
5.2. A sketch of embodied intentionality

A sketch of embodied intentionality in the context of emotional provisions, according to which an emotion involves an appraisal of an aspect of the environment which impacts on the agents action possibilities with a change in the agent’s action readiness modes that are demanded from her. An agent’s lived experience of the demands of a relevant affordance determines her appraisal of the thing or event she assesses. This appraisal can be seen to impact on the agent’s action readiness by bringing certain action possibilities to the foreground. Action readiness modes are different ways to establish, maintain or modify relationships between agent and object. Some examples are, for instance, approach as tendency to get closer in order to possess, use, enjoy or inspect; avidity as tendency to act ardently, enthusiastically, in response to the pull of a craving; rejection as tendency to reject or break contact, or indifference as tendency not to pay attention to. We will not try to provide here an exhaustive list, our point is to illustrate the sorts of patterns of gestures and behaviour that evaluative judgements may signal. These patterns of responsiveness may be withheld, remaining at the level of a feeling and not having appreciable motor consequences. Note that we do not want to argue here that appraisal and action tendencies are more basic or primary than affordances, but rather that they can help us see how subject and object are indissoluble in them.

Under the analysis we offer here, affordances should not be reduced to either a judge’s dispositions or to a dispositional property of the environment. As Chemero notes, “[i]ndividuals with abilities are supposed to behave in particular ways, and may fail to do so” but dispositions can never fail, like the solubility of sugar does not fail when conditions are not the suitable ones. Likewise, if we take an affordance to be an object’s causal disposition (to burn, to attract, to disgust), the affordance will necessarily actualise related actions, given suitable circumstances. However, when we say Careful, it’s hot!, we warn the addressee.

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68 Cf., Frijda [1986, 2007].
69 Cf., Bennett and Hacker [2003], p. 217.
70 Cf., Ellsworth and Scherer [2003, 2007].
72 Cf., Frijda [2010], p. 573.
73 For a contrasting voice, see Turvey [1992] or Michaels [2000], who holds that affordances are dispositional properties of the environment which are complemented by the agent’s action tendencies.
74 “Even on a firm surface, with no wind, while perfectly healthy and sober, I may fail in my attempt to climb a step that affords climbing for me.” Chemero [2003], p. 190.
75 As Zipoli-Caiani [2014] notes.
so that she does not get burnt, so that the related actions do not get actualised. The addressee has picked up the signal, has recognised the object’s demands without having to check that the related actions do get actualised.

Affordances, we believe, can be seen as the basic building blocks for embodied intentionality. Evaluative judgements convey how someone is affected, how others may expect her to act, and how she expects others to act in the world about which she has more or less information. Signaling an affordance indicates this relation, it points out salient opportunities and challenges of the world as a field of action possibilities, and not properties of objects which are posited through a neat distinction between object and agent. This signaling is what we take gradable adjectives and, as a consequence, evaluative judgements to do.

5.2.4 Evaluative judgements signal affordances

Our claim is that we linguistically signal relevant affordances, i.e., how we are moved, and that gradable adjectives play an important role in this. We evaluate to say how we are moved. Evaluative judgements provide some information but they first and foremost signal patterns of action readiness issued by our appraisals, and therefore allow the coordination of action. Operative and thetic aspects of intentionality are brought together by affordances, and are inseparable when we try to account for what we say when we judge a thing to be high, expensive, spicy, or tasty. Determinations start out with how we are moved before we can lay down rules and have our adjectives denote degrees or draw lines among comparable objects.

Gradable adjectives are mostly associated with aspects of things, people, anything we can name, aspects which are special because they can vary in intensity. Characteristics of things are features we are recurrently attentive to, and which give rise to recurrent patterns of action possibilities. Gradable adjectives express our affective orientation in the world by signaling recurrent bundles of patterns of action readiness solicited by our environment. A thing’s relevant affordances solicit a certain responsiveness, not just any reaction, but one that our interaction demands us to provide. A high mountain demands effort when climbed, more to untrained climbers than to expert hikers. A hot fever demands care, a hot tea offers comfort in the evening (but if it is too hot, you will be unable to drink it). A smiling face invites us, a threatening gesture repulses us. To be solicited is

\[77\] In [Crespo and Fernández 2011], we offered a dispositional reading of unrestricted judgements. For agents with the required abilities, the cake should be tasty. This analysis is not quite suitable. With a generic binding of an agent variable, we require that This is tasty means that any agent that is able to undergo a phenomenological experience of taste, it holds that the cake should be tasty for those agents. But as indicated in various footnotes in preceding chapters, this dispositional approach requires actualising circumstances. The problem is that evaluative judgements can and often do function as warnings, so they do not require actualisation to be meaningful. This approach, similar at some level to [Hirvonen 2014], goes too far in its naturalistic aims at the expense of normativity.
contingent on the fitting of an agent’s skills and concerns, her epistemic state, and the accidental features of the state of affairs. But how we ought to respond when solicited by a relevant affordance is not determined by our contingent circumstances. This ‘ought’ is neither logical nor metaphysical, for we may fail and we may encounter cultures where the same situation gives rise to a rather different pattern of responsiveness. But if we signal an affordance, the addressee comes to expect not just any behaviour, but one befitting the thing’s solicitations.

Are we suggesting that whether Mont Blanc is a high mountain depends on how one climbs it or whether a cake is tasty depends on a judge’s gustatory functions? If this were our suggestion, we would be making no step further with respect to our starting point. No, what we are suggesting is that gradable adjectives signal recognisable sorts of action possibilities issued by our relation with objects and other aspects of our environment. What high, hot, spicy, tasty mean does not hinge on the concrete reactions of one or other agent, but rather on how shared intercorporeality shapes our similar action tendencies towards what we face, feel, and taste. The patterns that you and I and other agents in our social niche associate have to be the same, or sufficiently similar.

How about the comparative form? A higher note, mountain, or rent present an increase, a change in intensity. In the intensity of what? Pitch, height, and price would be a natural answer. One can measure an interval and then claim that this is what the adjective denotes, but first one has to be able to see the transition and recognise what is compared as being of the same sort: two notes, two men, two rents. With the aid of more or less sophisticated measurement instruments, we can correlate change with discrete steps in a transition by analysing it into units, a subexpression of change whose stability we can identify with some constant manifestation of the quality. It is true, we can compare two things by measuring their difference. But not every comparison involves measurement! For a cake to be tastier than a pie, intensity concerns how we are drawn and compelled, an experienced precedence. One may find out through empirical research that there is a correlation between the experienced precedence and amounts of neuronal firings, endorphines, or any other difference concerning the objective body. But such difference is not what the comparative tastier than denotes.

Gradable adjectives can be embedded under the attitude verb find to form restricted judgements, to express our own appraisal of mountains, infusions, or food, the experiences of the lived body. Whether I find a mountain high, a tea hot, or a dish spicy, my experiences are endured rather than observed. A linguistic expression of these affective inclinations commits us to showing patterns of action readiness which are in accordance with what we say or, to put it less stringently, not to show incompatible patterns of action readiness. Third-person restricted judgements put out in the open the commitments of others to show

\footnote{That would be queer, as exclaimed by Wittgenstein [1958a II, p. xi.}

\footnote{See, e.g., Bartoshuk and Snyder 2004.}
certain patterns of action readiness, by which their appraisals come to be shown. If we have seen that the agent in question has shown incompatible patterns of action readiness, we may challenge this report, though this is no proof that the judgement is incorrect (the agent’s reactions may have changed in the meantime). What are incompatible patterns of action readiness? Consider, for instance, motor relaxation and high autonomic arousal. Conflicting emotions and complex states may lead us to swing between attraction and repulsion, or to feel that our attention is demanded but to see it interrupted. While these states do take place, they do not show that, e.g., attraction and repulsion are compatible, but rather that the affective aspect of our environment is often neither smooth nor simple.

The crucial mark of unrestricted judgement is that, in contrast to find embeddings, they do not report one or other person undergoing an appraisal or showing patterns of action readiness, what we do is to posit the affordances as being offered by the object under evaluation. Unrestricted judgements like This is high, expensive, spicy, tasty, painful signal our responsiveness to relevant affordances of an aspect of the environment. If we say the cake is tasty, for instance, this signals that the cake solicits readiness to consume the cake and perhaps willingness to accept more. As a solicitation of the cake, we expect that anyone as experienced and acculturated as we are will similarly respond to it. If we have not tried the cake ourselves, and without any further information about the cake’s composition or the oddness of the speaker’s preferences, the unrestricted evaluation lays down expectations about our eating and relish. The same goes for a small trunk on which we paste a sticker saying Heavy because it is filled with books. Anyone who reads the sticker is supposed to be warned about the demands of the piece of luggage, and although someone very experienced may be able to carry it, her whole bodily coping is influenced by the sticker’s warning. That there are people for whom such a load would be insignificant can easily be recognised. But we recognise these people as being exceptional, and their action possibilities are singular and special.

How much should we worry about which sorts of action readiness patterns are associated with different gradable adjectives? For two reasons, we think we can postpone worries of this sort. On the one hand, if our goal was to provide

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80 Cf., Frijda [2010].
81 This discussion of incompatibility is also present in expressivism. We discuss similarities and differences with our account in subsection 5.3.3.
82 One could perhaps think of [Lakoff 1987] objections against Gibson’s affordances, and wonder whether these are not equally applicable to our case. Lakoff rejects this notion mainly because he interprets it as being too limited, relying on a notion of environment which is “not the kind of world-as-experienced that is needed in order to account for the facts of categorization.” (Lakoff 1987, p. 216) But the reconstruction of the notion of affordances we have relied on is more encompassing than Lakoff’s interpretation of Gibson, thus allowing the environment to be less monolithic and common to all people, and to accommodate categorisation which depends on experience, science, and culture.
83 E.g., participants of the World’s Strongest Man contest.
5.2. A sketch of embodied intentionality

a thorough lexical semantics, the challenge would be enormous and it would require a systematic empirical approach, going far beyond what we can achieve here. Our goal being to focus on the semantics of the evaluative judgements we are concerned with, our worries should be limited to analyse the differences between unrestricted and restricted judgements, and to shed light on the reasons why some gradable adjectives can be embedded under *find* while non-gradable ones cannot. On the other hand, patterns of action readiness are, as it were, one side of the coin. The other side are expectations, the normative prospect of action possibilities of this or that sort. These are the key to the interpretation of evaluative judgements and they will allow us to have just enough resources for what we have to deal with. This will be exploited in chapter 6.

Important for us is that affordances are very flexible, to the extent that they can accommodate both thetic and operative aspects of intentionality. Our lived experience does involve objects, objects and theories which require fixed criteria and refined measurements. With judgements like *This sachertorte is tasty* or *Alf finds this sachertorte tasty*, we learn that the cake the speaker refers to is thought to be a sachertorte, and in the restricted one we get to know something about someone named Alf. When does a something afford being called a sachertorte? It depends on whether a recipe has been followed. And when we make evaluative judgements not concerning a specific thing but a kind, like when we say *Sachertorte is tasty* or *Alf finds sachertorte tasty*, the assessment concerns a cake baked according to a specific recipe. Items of sachertorte are concrete and singular, but affordances are bestowed by, and can be imputed to, anything we can cognise: sorts of cakes, kinds of fruit, men grouped by nationalities, objects grouped by shape or composition, ideas, memories, anything we can name. Affordances are the flesh out of which we constitute objects, and conceive stable properties once we have set up intersubjectively accessible criteria, a rod in Paris or a recipe reconstructing Franz Sacher’s 1832 creation.

So people, context, and world as we experience it when we make evaluative judgements are not only structured by how we are able to act in a situation, but also through our beliefs, knowledge, desires, intentions, hopes, and doubts. Our evaluative judgements partly concern information we have and to that extent, these judgements can be right or wrong or inaccurate. But as far as our coping goes, accuracy has to do with how responses fit a solicitation, and not whether our (partial) representations are correct. Only in some specific contexts may we sensibly take the gradable adjective involved to denote a degree or a delineation dependent on a contextually set standard. These are very specialised uses which are indeed present and pervasive in how we speak, but this is not where modeling should start. Lines are drawn once we can talk about heights or weights, when a reason or purpose calls for this.

\[84\] A way to account this is that one can see objects as being stable bundles of affordances, as in [Gorniak 2005]. We do not want to go as far as this view right here.
What we say is that evaluative judgements have specific semantic contents. Are we hereby accepting or denying that experiences like tasting a cake or lifting a suitcase have representational contents? Do we, e.g., codify and decodify a fixed set of patterns of action readiness making up a representation of the gradable adjective at hand? The question is pressing because affordances are generally taken to provide a non-representational pathway for intelligent behaviour. Whether experiences are representational is an old contention, one that we would not want to delve into or settle here. It is, however, prudent to say that we do not believe that experiencing a tasty cake or a heavy suitcase requires that we have or produce a representation of our action possibilities.

If evaluative judgements signal relevant affordances but these judgements also involve claims which are not evaluative — e.g., whether a cake that is tasty is sachertorte, whether a man who is tall is called Alf —, does this mean that experiences involved in our evaluations are partly representational, and partly not? Our answer is not straightforward, for as we have tried to argue we believe that the fact that evaluative judgements signal affordances does not mean that they have no content, and because non-evaluative claims or subclaims need not be conceived representationally in order to do justice to their meaning. A clash in the semantic composition of evaluative and non-evaluative claims only arises if one insists in assuming that the semantics devised to tackle the latter is rich enough to deal well with the former, and if one resists the idea that a less traditional semantics can be rich enough to make room for all of it, for evaluative and non-evaluative discourse.

Embodied intentionality as we put it forward here takes our affective encounter with the world to be a primary layer on which the information we gain and lose is built up. The object and its empirically determined properties crop out as stable patterns, as action possibilities which endure across agents and across unique occasions, thus allowing us to identify rules and regularities fixing what counts as evidence to be such an object. So far, we have claimed that evaluative judgements signal relevant affordances. How is it possible to understand these judgements, to correctly interpret them, to reach successful communication? There must be some warrant for this achievement, for the sharedness how we associate patterns of action readiness with gradable adjectives.

### 5.2.5 Embodied sense coordination in conversation

How is dialogue — agreements, disagreements, or just any exchange — possible if evaluative judgements mean what we claim they mean? A usual way to phrase this issue is: how do linguistic agents, speaker and addressee, come to...
share meanings? In the context of our reworking of the notion of intentionality, sharedness of meaning requires that the action possibilities signaled by Alf when he says that the cake is tasty or that he finds a suitcase heavy are those which Bea is made aware of. This should be possible even when, for some reason, Alf is in fact unable to eat more of the cake he is praising, or when Bea disagrees with Alf’s assessment. To disagree, Bea should understand Alf’s utterance. Understanding an evaluative judgement requires that we come to the right expectations concerning the speaker’s actions, and her own expectations about how we and others are moved. Why do people disagree when it comes to whether something is tasty, expensive or boring? Coordination of action among embodied agents is, we believe, a cardinal point (surely not the only one). But for this to be possible, a great deal of agreement in valuation and action is presupposed.

Consider a few made up short dialogues:

(1)  
   a. A: This is tasty!  
      B: Yes, it is!
   b. A: This is heavy!  
      B: No, it’s not!
   c. A: This cake is tasty!  
      B: Yes, it is!

Correctly interpreting an evaluative judgement made by someone else amounts to understanding how the speaker is ready to act in response to the possibilities for action the environment offers. Unrestricted, the evaluation posits the affordance which sets up the expectation that speaker and others, all those with similar skills, will react to the cake or the suitcase in the same way. This positing is more like a sanctioning. The addressee understands the judgements if she sees that there’s a claim as to the solicitations of the cake reaching out beyond the single speaker’s case. When we understand This cake is tasty, we anticipate a host of possibilities for action solicited by the particular aspect of the environment which we identify as the cake.

This anticipation is not merely predictive, not just a contingent association, an empirical regularity. This is a normative anticipation: if the expectation is not met or, worse, if action possibilities shown are incompatible with those signaled by the adjective, the addressee’s interpretation is conflicted. When the addressee cannot meet the expectations that are sanctioned, marking this with a denial is in order. Evaluative (dis)agreements are cogent: we communicate the possibilities for action solicited by the particular aspect of the environment which we identify as the cake.

This stagnation in some of our evaluative disagreements is not a sign of irrationality, but rather a mark of how we negotiate our shared lived world.

Consider these two pairs, [2-a] [2-b] and [2-c] [2-d]
(2) a. This is tasty... and I don’t want anymore!
b. This is tasty... but I don’t want anymore!
c. This is heavy... and it’s easy to hold it!
d. This is heavy... but it’s easy to hold it!

The simple conjunction of the two judgements is problematic (at least on the face of it, trying to keep focus and stress of sight to keep it simple). The oddness is removed when we use a contrastive like ‘but’. This is not because to say that something is tasty, we ought to desire more, or that if something is heavy, we cannot hold it. But when we say that something is tasty, we do signal that the cake solicits in a certain way, likewise for the suitcase; while we may actually not feel like having another piece because we are full or on a diet, the first half of the utterance does create expectations released by the contrastive ‘but’.

Our conception of understanding presupposes some agreement in action, an agreement of natural and social constitution. The patterns that you and I and other agents in our social niche associate have to be the same, or sufficiently similar. Patterns of actions readiness can be (successfully or unsuccessfully) sanctioned only if a shared intercorporality allows us to expect similar action responsiveness from each other. We understand evaluative judgments by comprehending the future and past action possibilities they express. Action possibilities are given to the lived body whose constitution, as we saw, depends on our shared intercorporality.

So communication is not a mere expressing and grasping of thoughts, and communicative competence is not just a matter of recognising the claims to truth made by others. Understanding is first and foremost played at the level of the concerns of the lived body, and communication involves a comprehension of our shared and non-shared bodily sensitivities. Evaluations say something about how we profile in our field of perception the objects, agents, and events which we cope with. This profiling reveals an object delineated along the action possibilities that each foreshortening brings along. Of course, and this was the point made in chapter 4, sec. 2, our claim is not that comprehending the gestures concomitant with saying This is tasty is enough to understand what the speaker means. The specific motor behaviour associated with our assessments are a public marker but neither a necessary nor a sufficient marker of the right expectations.

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86 This reflects agreement in judgement in the distinction introduced in Wittgenstein 1958a, §242: “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments.” This is the sort of agreement that is assumed for certainties. Cf., Wittgenstein 1969, §§225, 274, 298.

87 To describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies. Weiss 1999, p. 5.

88 This dependence is limited: a necessary condition but possibly not a sufficient condition. There is a cultural and social dimension dependent but different from our intercorporeality. “It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’.” Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 216.
about what the speaker is prepared to do. The possibility of intersubjective understanding is not guaranteed in this case by equal access to a common realm of truths but by the shared character of the phenomenal field, of the physiognomy we delineate before a background.

Evaluative judgements turn out to have a very prominent role in maintaining horizon necessary for communication. Agents embedded in a by and large shared environment may not respond to an object's affordances at the same time, or may be differently skilled. Changing the other's mind involves changing her possibilities for action, involving the development of an ability: for instance, I may dislike a taste now but I may acquire it in the future, with some experience and possibly also some guidance. Some evaluative disagreements, e.g., those about heaviness, may sometimes be resolved by virtue of conventionalised practices that grow on top of our primary affective grip (e.g., the effort to lift things). To this extent, some evaluative disagreements involving comparatives may be easy to solve, when we have a method by which the dispute can be settled.

Agreements and disagreements presuppose understanding: we agree on how we should act given what we have said. We disagree when we are not responsive to the relevant affordance that our interlocutor signals. In the examples below, B reacts to signal that the responsiveness is not shared, which presupposes that she knows what kind of action possibilities are being put forth as being shared.

(3) a. A: The cake is tasty.
   B: No, it's not!

b. A: This suitcase is heavy.
   B: No, it's not.

To understand each other, we do not need to agree in each and every case. The background of agreement that makes language possible does not require us to always act in the same way, but to sufficiently share our lived world. We should agree on the sort of possibilities for action signaled by the adjective we use but we do not need to be equally responsive to each and every aspect of our environment. A misunderstanding occurs when we disagree on how we should act given what we have said. Non-understanding takes place when for the addressee, the object under assessment cannot possibly afford what the speaker signals.

Now isn't it problematic that the action possibilities associated with an adjective like tasty may be confounded with those associated with hungry. What we call heavy may not be, as far as action possibilities go, be easily distinguishable from that of what we call unbearable or unmanageable? If we intended to give a comprehensive lexical semantics for gradable adjectives the issue raised here would be of utmost concern, but our own aim is not to cover the full lexical landscape, so Clark's concern remains, thus suggesting the need to step into the lexical level with more conviction to describe PPTs within the adjectival domain. Our focus is on sentential constructions, (non)implications, (seeming) contradictions, and (so called) faultless disagreements. If our analysis sheds lights on these phenomena, then one may think it worth to investigate the lexical differences of these related adjectives.
Differences in exposure and the social and diachronic character of skill acquisition shape differences in whether and when we can come to accept certain judgements. There are novices and experts, amateurs and connoisseurs, gourmet chefs and canteen cooks. If the judgements of those who are more skilled become a sort of reference, this is as examples of refined appreciation, discernment, and choice. However, they do not provide a conceptual determination of the meaning of PPTs and other RGAs, and therefore do not lead to a deliberative and determining judgement.

So our point here is that successful communication in our exchanges of unrestricted and restricted judgements is possible by virtue of the intersubjectivity underlying our subjectivity. The phenomenology of our being solicited by an affordance, the so-called felt tension is the subjective element we were looking for, one that does not come at the price of the normativity of evaluative judgements.

To recap this section, we have provided an embodied approach to the meaning of gradable adjectives and of evaluative judgements. Gradable adjectives express our affective orientation in the world by signaling certain patterns of readiness to respond to action possibilities offered by our environment. Evaluative judgements signal our responsiveness to relevant affordances of an aspect of the environment, as skilled agents in a natural, social and cultural environment. Unrestricted ones have a sanctioning power that restricted ones do not have. Affordances give us a way to integrate subjectivity into the meaning of PPTs and other RGAs, a way that makes intersubjective agreement possible. Evaluative (dis)agreements are significant because this is how we can coordinate our actions; how we can negotiate the lived world we share and increase our understanding of the affordances available.

5.3 Taking stock

In this section, we want to consider what we have in our hands. We discussed in chapter 2 a few markers of subjectivity which one can find in other RGAs. In subsection 5.3.1 we return to the puzzling phenomena related to PPTs when compared to other RGAs, to see whether our account sheds some light on them. Given the role that action possibilities have in the analysis of evaluative judgements presented in section 5.1 one may wonder whether we are actually doing semantics or pragmatics. We discuss this in subsection 5.3.2. In this chapter we have not presented a semantic theory but rather a conceptual revision of what a semantic theory could be concerned with, so naturally some pushing of the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics is in order. The reader will likely

92 Think of Michelin guides or other critical reviews.
93 The term comes from Dreyfus and Kelly 2007, following Merleau-Ponty.
also wonder whether we are advocating for expressivism, given the role given to affect and expressive behaviour in our analysis. In subsection 5.3.3 we summarise points of similarity and contrast between that position and our own.

5.3.1 Embodied intentionality and the subjectivity of RGAs

PPTs are gradable adjectives, they belong to RGAs, but they are not like other RGAs in their subjectivity. Our account is conceived with an eye on these phenomena, now what explanations do we get from it? What is subjective about PPTs and other GAs?

Does our account have to say why certain adjectives are gradable? It gives a clue, we think, but not a systematic explanation. In the affordance-based view we have sketched, an adjective is gradable when it signals recurrent bundles of patterns of action readiness solicited by our environment. Intensity in how we are solicited is reflected in the comparative, and if adjectives like married vs. single do not admit a comparative, this is because to have a wife or a husband is a culturally established fact, depending on the institutional rites according to which a marriage counts as being celebrated. If adjectives like freezing vs. boiling are not gradable, that is because there is an empirical fact, a perceivable change in state of a liquid into ice or gas correlated with a measurement on a scale. Some adjectives are gradable because before and independently of whether we can establish a factual difference between different objects’ heat, height, wetness, or tastiness, we appraise and compare how things feel, how we are affected. While it is generally thought that gradable adjectives denote properties that can be placed along a scale and so allow for intensification, we see things in the opposite sense: patterns of action readiness can be solicited with varying intensity, and this allows us to place some gradable adjectives along a scale.

Gradable adjectives are also distinctive among adjectives because they usually form pairs of polar antonyms. While antonymy is by no means restricted to gradable adjectives, the interaction of the comparatives of polar antonyms is indeed peculiar to gradable adjectives. As we saw in chapter [2] the relation between the positive and the comparative form differ and interact in different ways between polar antonyms. Although the notion of validity and the semantic relations between positive and comparative are still to be defined in the coming chapter, the point that we want to make here is that incompatibility as that of possibilities for action associated with, e.g., tasty vs. disgusting is certainly different from the complementary nature of the antonymy between pairs like tall vs. short. In the latter case, if one can distinguish a positive difference in height between two men, one can thereby conclude that one is shorter than the other. In the former case, two different patterns are involved, patterns which are incompatible but not complementary: if a cake is tastier than a pie, we do not thereby conclude that the cake is less disgusting that the pie, or that the pie is more disgusting than the cake. Disgust involves a specific response which is incompatible with, but not
inferable from, responding to something's being tasty. Showing more delight does not amount to feeling less disgust. Comparative difference as a mark of antonymy is characteristic of only some gradable adjectives, those which like tall vs. short signal reverse possibilities, a specific form of antagonism that not all gradable adjectives carry.

How are these solicitations of varying intensity related to comparative judgements? In the case of a judgement like This cake is tastier than this pie, we compare the intensity of two responses. In the case of This suitcase is heavier than that bag, the judgement implies not just solicitations of varying intensity, but a difference which is correlated with the possibility of establishing the difference between the two by using an instrument like a scale. Because we have a conventionalised method by which we can measure object's lengths and weights, an unrestricted comparative judgement does not merely indicate a difference in solicitations; restricted judgements like I find this suitcase heavier than that bag take care of this. The expectation that others will agree with the comparative judgement when expressed unrestrictedly cannot be divorced from the availability of a public method by which a dispute could be settled. Herein lies the difference between weak and strong evaluativity. Our view favours the idea that the genesis of the adjective as a linguistic category starts with strongly evaluative adjectives, for the intersubjectively stable nature of weakly evaluatives depends on a cultural process of sedimentation and on the development of practices which allow us to find common ground to our specific and singular experiences. If this is right, then in a way the order is reversed, for one no longer needs to see degrees as being the cornerstone of gradability, but instead one can see evaluativity as the cornerstone, and degrees as a sophisticated development which only come to play role for just some gradable adjectives.

Gradable adjectives admit multiple syntactic constructions, attributive and predicative. Semantic theories usually attempt to derive one construction from the other, the predicative from the attributive, or vice-versa. This is not an issue we wish to settle, for we would need to spell out the exact syntactic transformations involved, a task lying beyond the scope of our work. However, we can perhaps see that our view suggests a certain priority of the predicative form, given that an object under assessment may be indeterminate, to the point that we may not know what it is or how to identify it besides the evaluation we offer, as in Whatever this is, it is tasty! So at least conceptually, one could think that if the attributive form in this case would not be prior to the predicative form, since priority would take a very odd form, e.g., This is a tasty (some)thing! True, even the most indeterminate object is known to the extent that it meets the sortal restrictions of an adjective; for instance, if something is tasty, then it must be edible. However, the sortal requirement is too general to act as the noun to which the adjective is attributed, as shown by the strangeness of a claim like This

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94See the discussion of edibility given above in section subsection 5.2.2.
5.3. Taking stock

is a tasty edible thing! So to some extent, then, our view favours thinking of the predicative form as having a certain priority, at least insofar as it poses less stringent cognitive demands, for one does not need to identify a specific comparison class to which the object under assessment belongs.

The account we offer here and in the next chapter does not explicitly deal with adjectival modifiers, and for that reason it is not possible to offer arguments why so-called degree adverbs like very, too, enough, almost, little, fairly, rather, slightly, etc., can modify gradable adjectives, why some of these are only associated with certain gradable adjectives but not all, and under what circumstances. Generally, adjectival modifiers are seen as intensifiers of varying characteristics. In the degree-based view, for instance, degree adverbs are analysed as standard modifiers, with, e.g., very being a booster, slightly lowering the bar, and completely setting the bar as high as possible. In our account, standards do not play a role, so the analysis of these modifiers would have to change. However, what we can say here is that the way we conceive of the meaning of gradable adjectives as being rooted in the patterns of action readiness we signal, we may see that their smooth collocation with adverbial modifiers may be an indication that our analysis is adequate. If an adjective says something about how we act, its adverbial modification modulates this in a systematic way.

As we saw in chapter 2, the phenomenon known as faultless disagreement is taken to be one of, if not the crucial feature that an account of PPTs has to explain. Recall that such disagreements are special because dialogue participants are both in some sense right, hence the faultlessness, even though one asserts the negation of the proposition asserted by other, hence the disagreement. The initial formulation of the phenomenon in the literature says that a faultless disagreement is a conversation between A and B in which “A believes (judges) that p and B believes (judges) that not-p, and neither A nor B has made a mistake (is at fault).” However general this formulation may sound, it imposes a specific way of conceiving of the problem and therefore of the sort of solutions that may be fit to it, as discussed in chapter 3. Evaluative judgements lead to faultless disagreements, but if we analyse a taste dispute as suggested here we simply assume that disembodied intentionality is the right view on the content of these judgements. Our own take on the matter is not to claim that evaluative judgements cannot be assessed for truth. Evaluative judgements can surely be assessed for truth, but their meaning is better understood when one focuses on the actions possibilities they signal and the expectations that they bring in their train.

When Alf claims This cake is tasty and Bea denies this and says No, it isn’t!, there is a disagreement going on, but one that is quite difficult to resolve. Alf signals certain action readiness patterns following an appraisal of the cake, and

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95It is also good to keep in mind so-called evaluative adverbials like surprisingly, amazingly, which also apply to gradable adjectives and not to non-gradable ones. We do not extend our account to adverbs but one can suspect that they would fit in the sketch we have provided here.

96Kölbel [2004], p. 54.
that he expects Bea and anyone else with the right skills to share his assessment and engage those action readiness patterns. Alf does not simply hold a belief, his assessment has to do with how he feels and what he is ready to do. Bea’s response signals that the expectations are not met, that she is not ready to engage in the possibilities for action signaled by Alf. This antagonism can bring great disappointment and frustration, mainly because to reach an agreement it is necessary to change not just the other’s mind or point of view, but how she is attuned to the world, how she responds when embedded in it as an embodied agent. So Kölbel is partly right in saying that in such a situation, “there might be nothing either of them could learn that would make it recommendable for them to change their mind.” It just happens that changing one’s mind, in terms of giving up a belief, has little to do with changing one’s taste. The point is, what Bea learns cannot by itself change her assessment because for this, the way she responds has to change and that takes more than someone’s opinion, more than discourse: her experience has to change, not what she thinks. Our diagnosis of faultless disagreements moves away from the solutions discussed in chapter 3 mainly because we move away from the commitment to disembodied intentionality. Rather than resolve the problem, we dissolve it by broadening the picture, by enlarging the notion of intentionality that is relevant for semantics.

Difficult disagreements can also happen with gradable adjectives like tall, rich, heavy in the positive form. For instance, when Alf claims Yanjing is tall and Bea denies and says No, he isn’t!, it might be that Alf and Bea have different comparison classes in mind, e.g., Northern vs. Southern Chinese men; or that they have different information concerning the normal height for a Chinese man. Disagreements like these may be resolved by virtue of conventionalised practices that grow on top of our primary affective grip, on how long things looks to us, how we develop techniques to compare length of different things with one specific, fixed length which may be instituted as a unit, and then can calculate average heights and compare measurements rather than consider how things look to us. Where such conventionalised means are set, some evaluative disagreements involving comparatives may be easy to solve because we have a shared method by which the dispute can be settled. These conventionalised means, however, are sometimes irrelevant to the case at hand, for instance, when we discuss heaviness to decide who carries a suitcase and who carries a backpack. In this case, measurements of the weights of the objects, what we compare them to, what we consider a normal weight for such objects, is irrelevant. Settling the disagreement involves developing a skill in one of the dialogue participants, as illustrated in this example:

(4) A: This suitcase is heavy.
B: No, it’s not. Try bending your knees and keeping your waist straight.
A: Oh, it’s not heavy!

Kölbel [2004], p. 54
So even if an adjective like heavy can be easily related to measurements of weight, and long can be easily related to measurements of length, one can see their meaning as being primarily given by the action possibilities they signal. To consider the identification and measurement of properties of objects which underlie such action possibilities is an important but derived operation which certainly has an impact on the lexical meaning of such adjectives but which should better be seen as a derived aspect rather than as a basic one.

Difficult disagreements can take place when evaluative judgements involve PPTs in comparative form, as when Alf claims This cake is tastier than that pie and Bea denies this and says No, the pie is tastier than the cake. Alf and Bea are differently solicited by the cake and the pie, and this is as far as the comparison goes. A concomitant difference in neurophysiological reactions might be discovered, or a systematic difference in proportions of, e.g., fat, protein, and carbohydrates ratio may be correlated to every comparison of tastiness made between any two things. But while these empirical correlations may be discovered, they would not constitute a criterion for saying whether something is tasty. If someone said something is tasty and these empirical correlations were absent, she would not thereby be proved to be wrong about her judgement.

Difficult disagreements also take place with adjectives like healthy, skilful, clever. This may be diagnosed as being due to the multidimensionality of these adjectives. If Alf thinks Carl is healthy, and Bea thinks he is not, then that may be because Alf considers Carl’s cardiovascular system, which works fine, and Bea considers Carl’s immune system, which is not ok. One may want to see adjectives like beautiful as being a multidimensional adjective. As argued earlier on in chapter 3, one problem with reducing PPTs to multidimensionals is that no enumeration of dimensions whose weighing and composition could be exhaust the meaning of beautiful. One may institute an evaluation card in, e.g., a women’s beauty contest, and give a rule for how the points given to each single criterion weighs in the final count, just like assessment cards are created by food or wine critics. But suppose Alf checks one of the beauty contest cards, picks Bea’s who got a perfect score or highest core, he looks for Bea, and when he sees her he exclaims: Oh, she is not beautiful at all! Is there is something wrong with his judgement?

Which aspects of a person, a thing we attend to, how we appraise these, and how separate assessments relate to a global judgement depends on the specific occasion and is completely singular. Our affective responsiveness may show some patterns but it is not rationally constrained by these.

The next question that has to be addressed is: can we embed RGAs under an

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Note that if one considers emotion adjectives like sad/happy or more specific terms adjectives relating to emotional disorders like depressed, empirical correlations may at some point may start to function as criteria. Cf., De Haan et al. [2013].

Is there something wrong with finding three-starred Michelin restaurants lame and pompous, to not enjoy the food they offer, to say out loud that molecular gastronomy is disgusting?
attitude verb like find? Special about restricted judgements is that they how the
agent (or group) is affected. Restricted judgements signal the actions possibilities
of a specific agent (or group thereof), but they do not bring with them expecta-
tions concerning the agreement of others. In this account, the attitude verb find
relates the matrix subject to an extralinguistic entity by showing how the agent
appraises it. This entity is not a proposition. A claim like Alf’s I find this cake
tasty is not simply the equivalent to I find that this cake is tasty because to find
that this cake is tasty, Alf should have expectations about her interlocutor’s action
possibilities that need not be there when he simply signals his findings, his own
responsiveness, without thereby claiming a make about others. Outright denial
of a first-person judgement like I find this cake tasty is off because the notion of
mistake does not operate with regard to the agent’s situation and construction
of the perceptual field as it operates in her epistemic contact with the objective
world. We can make mistakes about third-person restricted judgements like Alf
finds this cake tasty because Alf’s reactions are visible to us either in what he
says or does; peers are in principle in equal position to judge, be misled, or be
wrong about Alf’s verbal and non-verbal reactions.

We have been using the case of the Müller-Lyer arrows to explain the difference
between the perceptual field and the objective world. The situation we come to
is in a sense paradoxical, strange, disharmonious as we will dub it in chapter 6
but not contradictory. How the segments appear and how they are, we can keep
those apart, but they are not independent. But their separation is kept as an
abstraction which is not available for PPTs like tasty. So This is tasty but I don’t
find this tasty is not a plain contradiction because the restricted judgement does
not deny the claim made by the first half. But the sequence declares the inability
of the speaker to fulfill the demand she is making on others, a demand which
prescribes on others a response she immediately declares not to fulfill. In terms
we will define in chapter 6 this is a case of incoherence.

5.3.2 Is this semantics or pragmatics?

Adjectives are known to straddle the boundary between semantics and pragmat-
ics, as the idea that there is a separation between “linguistic facts about utter-
ances from those that involve the actions, intentions, and inferences of language
users (speaker-hearers)” [50]. The general idea is that what linguistic expressions
mean has a stable core treated in semantics, and a variable component treated in
pragmatics given by the fact that utterances are made in specific circumstances,
in a determined (linguistic or nonlinguistic) context. So it is not surprising that
one should wonder what position we take the semantics/pragmatics debate. For
us, taking a position in this debate should be informed by the specific semantic
framework one adopts, so it is too soon to discuss this. However, we can dis-

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cuss here whether our account can legitimately aspire to make a contribution to semantics.

In our analysis, we have argued that action possibilities have to become part of the semantic analysis of (at least) certain judgements and adjectives therein. So in a sense, someone could argue, we claim that we broaden the scope of semantics while what we actually do is describe the pragmatics of evaluative judgements. If one draws the boundary considering that semantics only covers the context-independent component of content, then certainly our broadening of the focus of semantics goes off board. Action possibilities are highly context dependent. But then so does any account of gradability that includes elements of context.

If one considers that pragmatics covers conventionalised aspects of meaning that do not contribute to truth-conditional content, then what we are doing certainly tries to put into semantics something that cannot belong there. However, this is an assumption of how to characterise semantic content which has no character of necessity. Truth-conditional semantics is but one way, a powerful and popular one, to model stable features of the meaning of linguistic expressions. But why would this be the only legitimate way? More generally, it is highly doubtful that there is a meaningful characterisation of “semantic” and “pragmatic” that is independent from some theoretical framework, which makes the whole point moot.  

But then it is clear that we take affordances to be a key to the meaning of evaluative judgements. Now isn’t this just what Austin called perlocutionary effects, i.e., “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons” However, these are causal effects on the addressee characterised, whereas the action possibilities signaled by our evaluative judgements certainly not caused by what we say. What to conclude from this, however, is not that action possibilities are mentally represented, or that they are parts of the world that our judgements should correspond to. Semantics does not need to fall into the dichotomy of intellectualism vs. empiricism, this is precisely the point we made by drawing from Merleau-Ponty to work out embodied intentionality.

Yet another point of consideration concerns another foundational distinction, the traditional way of seeing the division of labour between semantic content vs. world knowledge. With this seemingly intuitive view in mind, one could say that the affordance-based account we have presented is actually just world knowledge that we are trying to force into the linguistic content of PPTs and other RGAs. A fair discussion of this seemingly intuitive distinction and how it has been challenged would take us too far from our main thread here. However, we need to note that the distinction is made on the basis of a conviction of where the boundaries of semantic content lie, and we have seen that such convictions

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101 Cf. Stokhof [2014].
Chapter 5. Intentionality for evaluative judgements

depend on the commitments one makes of what meaning is and how it can be conceptualised. In any case, the main concern here regards whether embodied intentionality as sketched here can be “structural enough” to plausibly lead to a theory of meaning. The claim we have tried to put forward by calling on affordances to spell out how embodied intentionality can specify content is that action possibilities relevant for gradable adjectives are inherently correlated with our abilities. Affordances give us a stable core of patterns of behaviour across contingencies that make each occasion of use different. A good share of the stability that is achieved is guaranteed by our shared intercorporality. But there is a cultural and social dimension of context that contribute to the modulation of our bodies, the sedimentation of cultural habits, and the tight interdependence of nature and culture in an embodied agent. Such external constraints determine spaces of possibilities for different people that are sufficiently similar to avoid substantial relativism. Such constraints depend on intercorporality but it is probably salutary not to erase all distinctions here.

All this talk of the affective dimension might suggest that our project is a variant of expressivism. Let us elaborate on this somewhat further to spell out our coincidences and differences.

5.3.3 Relation with expressivism

Since kosher expressivism we reviewed in chapter 3 actually argues that the expressive-affective dimension belongs to the level of pragmatics, and given that our own claim is that embodied intentionality integrates the affective dimension of cognition, one may again think that all we are doing is pragmatics. However, in our view the demand to universal agreement made by unrestricted judgements is not optional, and social persuasion is not a perlocutionary effect of the utterance. At an obvious level, we do not endorse the expressivist project, for we strive to accommodate evaluative judgements as expressions which have specific cognitive contents, while expressivists usually stand as non-cognitivists turning the additional (semantic or pragmatic) layer of meaning into a non-cognitive attitude or use-conditional constraint. Unrestricted judgements demand the agreement of others but make specific claims with specific contents. The fact that we argue for the integration of the affective dimension into the meaning of the expressions we have discussed here can be taken as a move towards Ayerian emotivism. Our own point is: states are not either motivational or non-motivational. Information and affect are inseparable aspects of cognition, not exclusive ones. As we conceive of them (a conception that will be spelled out rigorously but more abstractly in

One can see in Merleau-Ponty a stronger claim which would suggest that intercorporality carries all the weight, for “It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’.” The point is that making a distinction between intercorporality and what we call here external constraints is not really possible in the context of Merleau-Ponty’s work.
intentional states can be both informative and motivational.

Our analysis might give the impression that we think evaluative judgements are somehow very special and different from ordinary descriptive judgements, that we draw a line between normative and non-normative discourse as expressivists do. The truth is that we do not think that there is a radical difference between evaluative judgements and non-evaluative ones, only that evaluative judgements make it clear that a change in how we conceive of linguistic meaning is in order. The idea of embodied intentionality we outline here would not be exclusive to PPTs or RGAs. Admittedly, the argument given in this chapter focuses on this case, and nothing much is said of how our account would accommodate non-evaluative judgements. However, this is a general claim, one that is beyond the scope of this chapter. On the one hand, because we have dealt here with a specific case which calls for embodied intentionality, to argue for the need and feasibility of such an alternative. On the other hand, because this claim can be substantiated only when we have a systematic, compositional analysis, so this is a matter that we need to return to in chapter 6. In any case, the fact that non-evaluative judgements do not call for embodied intentionality does not mean, in the line we have developed, that a different kind of meaning applies to them. Disembodied intentionality is contained in, and actually made possible by, embodied intentionality.

Another aspect of our account that may seem to bring us close to expressivism is the fact that we take evaluative judgements to signal action possibilities. One may think that our claim is that evaluative judgements merely replace the gestures and characteristic behaviour by which we naturally express pain, anger, relish, etc. Our reliance on Wittgenstein’s view on avowals can surely suggest this. However, our argument is precisely that although characteristic expressions are not conventional, the link between the linguistic marker and the action possibilities thereby signaled is conventional. Unlike yawns or shrieks, adjectives and evaluative judgements have specific contents.

There are, however, common challenges to our view and expressivism. One of this is the issue concerning incompatibility. Expressivism is faced with the challenge of accounting for the inconsistency of a sentence like *Murder is wrong* and its negation *Murder is not wrong*. Aren’t our conflicting action possibilities just incompatible plans as like Gibbard’s? For one thing, we have argued that the responsiveness pulled by affordances is not really plan-like because it is unreflective and spontaneous. Plans lead to decisions but we do not get to decide how we respond when we are summoned by an affordance. The well known Frege-Geach objection to expressivism, will be discussed in chapter 6, once we actually have a semantics and logical connectives in place.

\(^{{105}}\) Remember Wittgenstein’s oft-noted comparison of a cry of pain with the utterance *I’m in pain* (Wittgenstein [1958a], §244).

\(^{{106}}\) Schroeder [2008b], p. 7.

\(^{{107}}\) As in Gibbard [1990].
5.4 Conclusion and work ahead

In this chapter, we have tried to sketch embodied intentionality as a broader foundational ground for the semantics of PPTs and other RGAs. We argued that disembodied intentionality has inherent limitations to get a grip on evaluative judgements, and we drew from phenomenology a few conceptual tools to get a clearer picture of what is subjective in gradable adjectives, and how to put this at the basis of a revised view of what semantics is or can be. Human agents are embodied creatures whose lived bodies are the locus of subjectivity. Evaluative judgements communicate our affective stance in the world, a world which we first navigate through the primary grip given by our embodied condition.

Before we move on, let us briefly see how the claims of this chapter bear on the Dreyfus-McDowell debate we referred to in chapter 4, section 4.3. We have claimed in this chapter that the meaning of evaluative judgements is fundamentally tied up with the responsiveness to relevance affordances they signal. Does this involve conceptual processing, or does it rather show that not all mindedness is conceptual? At this point, we have to distinguish experience from judgement, assessment from utterance. A point is clear and that is that finding something tasty is an achievement accessible to creatures which we generally take to be conceptually empowered as the adult human being. This is what we see with the case of baby Anna who finds infant formula tasty. Somewhat more far-fetched is the case of a cat that finds a certain brand of cat food tasty. What such examples make clear is that having the sort of response that *tasty* signals is, by our account, something that babies and maybe also cats can get. They can get it because we can recognise their responsiveness as being very much (for Anna) or more or less (for the cat) like our own. This is not to claim, however, that these creatures pass judgements, and this is where what is at stake in the debate actually seems to kick in. Linguistic creatures pass judgements, non-linguistic creatures have experiences but do not pass judgements. Should we conclude from this that passing judgements involves conceptual abilities? Well, this is not a conclusion that easily follows from what we have said, unless one has already assumed that linguistic creatures are conceptual creatures. The issue goes beyond what we can discuss here, naturally, but one point can be distilled: the kind of responsiveness that is relevant for embodied intentionality does not necessitate concepts because it is tied to abilities that heavily depend on our shard intercorporality. However, as soon as we start passing judgements, even of the most simple nature, our conceptual development starts. A key to this is the idea of reflective judgement as presented in chapter 4, subsection 4.1.2 and then extended in subsection 4.1.3. The normative character of our affective responsiveness is necessary for the development of concepts.

In the next chapter, we take the lessons from this foundational revision to outline a formal model of the semantics of evaluative judgements.