

**Derrida's Criticism of Husserl Reconsidered:
Historicity, Ideality and the Phenomenon of Voice**

Abstract:

The importance of Derrida's pre-deconstructive critique of Husserl's last phenomenological works for his deconstructive critique of his first work will be demonstrated. On the basis of this, I argue 1) the importance of Derrida's embrace of Husserl's account of the coincidence of historical and ideal meaning in the *Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology* for his deconstructive critique of signification in the *Logical Investigations* as paradigmatic for Husserl's phenomenology as a whole; 2) Derrida's historically driven appeal to role of the phenomenon of the voice in the epoch of metaphysics cannot withstand historically critical scrutiny; and 3) one result of 2) is to render Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl null and void.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Derrida, Historicity, Husserl, Ideality

Introduction

Derrida's criticisms of Husserl, in both the pre-deconstructive (*Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*)¹ and deconstructive phases (*Speech and Phenomena*)², have their basis, respectively, on readings of Husserl's last (*The Crisis of European Sciences and European Philosophy*) and first (*Logical Investigations*) phenomenological works. In the discussion to follow, the considerable extent to which Derrida's deconstructive critique of Husserl's first phenomenological work has its basis in his pre-deconstructive critique of his last works will be demonstrated. On the basis of that demonstration, I will argue three things: 1) the importance of Derrida's embrace of Husserl's account of the coincidence of historical and ideal meaning in the *Crisis* for his deconstructive critique of signification in the *LI* as paradigmatic for Husserl's phenomenology as a whole; 2) Derrida's historically driven appeal to role of the phenomenon of the voice in the epoch of metaphysics cannot withstand historically critical scrutiny; and 3) one result of 2) is to render Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl null and void.

1. Derrida's Account of History and Ideality in Husserl's Late Work

Jacques Derrida's pre or proto-deconstructive work focuses above all on opposing what he characterizes as Husserl's concept of «intentional history»³ to empirical history in his late

* Université de Lille.

¹ Derrida (1978).

² Derrida (1973).

³ Derrida (1978), pp. 34, 98, 109. One possible source for Derrida's expression may be the passage in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* where Husserl introduces the term "sedimented history". There intentionality is said to involve «a complex of accomplishments [*Leistungen*] that are included as *sedimented history* in the currently [*jeweils*] constituted intentional unity and its current [*jeweiligen*] manners of givenness a history that *one can always uncover by following a strict method*» (Husserl, 1969, p. 217); This method is articulated as «*uncoverings of intentional implications*» (*ibidem*). Thus, while there is no mention by Husserl of the term "intentional history" in this passage, it is plain from what is stated here that he understands the method of uncovering the sedimented history of the *Leistungen* responsible for the constitution of both an intentional unity and its manners of givenness as the «*uncoverings of the intentional implications*» that manifest this *history*.

Another possible source of Derrida's expression may be found in the version of *The Origin of Geometry* edited and published by Fink. There the expression «intentional-historisches Problem» occurs in the full title *Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem*, and once in the text: «Freilich hat diese ihrerseits selbst wieder Wissenstraditionen und ihnen entsprechende Seinsgeltungen, die wiederum in einem weiteren und noch radikaleren Rückfragen zu einem intentional-historischen Problem werden müssen» (Husserl, 1939, p. 219).

text, *Origin of Geometry*, to the history that falls under Husserl's transcendental epoché and is therewith bracketed and put out of play. Indeed, in order to highlight this opposition, Derrida speaks of intentional history as «transcendental historicity»⁴. Derrida characterizes this opposition by drawing attention to the role Husserl assigns to language generally and written language preeminently in the constitution of the historicity of the objective meanings at stake in transcendental historicity. For Derrida, the phenomenological condition of possibility belonging to Husserl's early static investigations of objective meanings involves the exclusion of both empirical history (and therewith seemingly history per se) and the empirical significance of words (and therewith seemingly language per se), an exclusion that Derrida takes to be what Husserl thinks insures the *purity* necessary for the phenomenological cognition of objective meanings.

In contrast, Derrida takes note of the fact that in Husserl's late essay *Origin of Geometry* language and history are *not* excluded from Husserl's account of the origin of the objectivity of the ideal meanings which belong to geometry as a mathematical science. On the contrary, it is language, in the guise of the graphic embodiment of words, which is to say, writing, that Husserl maintains is responsible for the objectivity in the sense of the enduring intersubjective accessibility that constitutes the phenomenological meaning of a tradition of the ideal meanings constituted by the «first»⁵ geometer at issue in *Origin of Geometry*. Derrida maintains that as a result of this graphic embodiment, the first or proto-geometer's original insight into his ideal creation becomes *virtual* and, with this, *not* subject to but rather the very *medium* of history. This is the case because inseparable from the virtual embodiment of the original insight in the written word is the possibility of it becoming forgotten. Forgotten in the sense that those who subsequently read it may do so without the illumination of the original insight that it was supposed to make virtual. Such forgetting is therewith coincident with the origin of the sedimentation of the original meaning, a sedimentation that Derrida, following Husserl, endorses as one of the two essential aspects of the a priori constitutive of historicity. The other aspect of this a priori, again for Derrida as for Husserl, is the original production of the ideal meaning by the proto-geometer. Because of this, language is now understood by Derrida to function for Husserl as an indispensable *transcendental* condition for the very constitution of the objectivity belonging to ideal meanings, the *ideality* of which he now characterizes, for this very reason, as being both constituted by and subject to the a priori structure of historicity.

2. Derrida's Opposition of Ideality and the Empiricality of Language

Derrida characterizes this account of the historicity belonging to the ideality of ideal meaning, an account that he understands to be respectful of Husserl's «intention»⁶ in the *Origin of Geometry*, as nevertheless being in a certain opposition to Husserl's account of the meaning of historicity and therewith of the relation between ideality and history. The opposition, however, is one that Derrida thinks cannot be avoided and therefore one that he makes no effort to censure. On the contrary, he is intent on exploring its significance for the phenomenological method's disclosure of both the meaning of historicity and historicity as meaning, since on his view «phenomenology alone can make [the] infinite historicity [at issue here] appear»⁷. The opposition concerns, quite literally, the fact that for Derrida the empirically «bound»⁸ ideality of language is called upon by Husserl, in the *Origin of Geometry*, to constitute an ideality that, at its origin, cannot be so bound if the geometrical ideality in question is to come into being. It is for this reason that Derrida characterizes as «transcendental language»⁹ the net effect of this intersection of the proto-geometer's transcendental constitution of geometric ideality and the empirically bound ideality of the language whose medium renders it virtual. Hence, for Derrida, inseparable

⁴ Derrida (1978), p. 121.

⁵ Husserl (1970), p. 354.

⁶ Derrida (1978), p. 49.

⁷ Ivi, p. 152.

⁸ Ivi, p. 73, note 71.

⁹ Ivi, pp. 68, 77.

from the origin of geometrical ideality is also its telos, in the guise of this ideality's inevitable sedimented «passage»¹⁰ through the written word. For this reason, Derrida maintains that the «de-sedimentation»¹¹ of this passage is at once the awakening of the historicity of meaning and the meaning of its very historicity. De-sedimentation is historicity's awakening because the recognition of the need to recover the ideality of the original insight by an inquiry into its origin is inseparable from the recognition that it has not been preserved by the written word. And the meaning of this very historicity is likewise this de-sedimentation, because historicity's appearance is coincident with the attempt to recover the lost original insight.

3. Derrida's Account of the Deferral of Ideality

It is important to note here that Derrida is not in any way contesting the original emergence and perduring of the being of ideality. Ideality for him not only is something that *is*, but also something whose very manner of being as ideal is precisely what is in question. This manner of being for Derrida is such that its origination, by virtue of the historicity inseparable from its very manner of being, is always already beyond the ambit of the reach of the only method that he thinks is capable of disclosing its true manner of being, namely Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method. Hence, the opposition in question between the empirical bondage of ideality made virtual through the written word and the absence of such bondage necessary for the transcendental constitution of ideality itself, is not determined according to Derrida by an either or, but by a both and. Ideality is *both* the empirically inaccessible unbound origin and the infinite telos announced by this origin's linguistically empirical embodiment. That is, because the transcendental constitution of ideality is inseparable from its embodiment in something that is intrinsically not ideal, its pure appearance, which is to say, its empirically unmediated *presence* as ideal, is not only not coincident with its origin but it is also unrealizable as its telos. Ideality's manner of being is therefore the meaning of historicity, in the precise sense of its non-coincidence with either its origin or its telos. At the same time, this historicity itself is the meaning of its being, in the precise sense that it is the manifestation of this very non-coincidence. Ideality is therefore constituted by this insuperable interplay between the empirically conditioned delay of its origin and the absoluteness – in the sense of the intrinsic unrealizability – of its passage through empirically bound language to its telos. This delay and passage mean that ideality can only appear in terms of the «alterity»¹² of its absolute origin, an alterity in which is announced the infinitely deferred telos of its absolute presence. Ideality, in a word, is therefore constituted by the phenomenological apprehension of the infinitude of the difference between its equally inaccessible origin (or origins) and its telos.

4. Derrida's Account of the Impossibility of Ideality Apprehending the «Alterity» of its Origin

The transcendental historicity of ideality as both the meaning of historicity and the historicity of meaning does not rule out the question of what Derrida calls *de facto* history but, on the contrary, it prepares the way for asking the question that only Husserl's phenomenology can ask, without, however, being able to provide an answer, namely: «*What is the primordial unity of meaning and fact, a unity which, by themselves alone, neither can account*»?¹³ That Husserl's phenomenology can only ask this question is rooted for Derrida in the pure certainty of its *thought*. That it cannot provide an answer to it is rooted in the «interminable disquietude of [its] thought striving to “reduce” difference»¹⁴ to overcome the historicity of ideality and the ideality of history in a manner that would at once chart the

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 106.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 50.

¹² Ivi, p. 153.

¹³ Ivi, p. 151.

¹⁴ Ivi.

infinitude announced by the delay in its origins and the deferral of its telos and embrace the singularity of the «fact»¹⁵ – not the right – of history.

Ideality and fact, transcendental historicity and actual history, are thus separated according to a necessity whose overcoming for Derrida would be rooted in an impossibility, namely, the impossibility of ideality appropriating the alterity of its origin. That such an appropriation is not necessarily impossible it shall be the burden of the rest of my discussion to call attention to by making two points. The first will concern the phenomenological constitution of ideality, the second the role of crisis in Husserl's formulation of the method of historical reflection generally and specifically the place of the essay *On the Origin of Geometry* within the context of the execution of this reflection.

5. Derrida Misses Husserl's Twofold Account of the Problem of the Origin of Ideality

The phenomenon of ideality, or «*irreality*»¹⁶ as Husserl also and indeed preferably comes to refer to it, has two interrelated and interdependent moments: one is the constitution of an object as «*numerically identical*»¹⁷ (across numerically distinct acts of consciousness, the other is the constitution of the identical object's «*ontic-meaning (Seinssinn)*»¹⁸. At issue in the former is the representation of certain subjective processes wherein the *same* object can – at will – be made evident. In the latter, the intentional explication of the mode of being of the objective identity that is constituted in the subjective representation is at issue. The reason why the term «*irreality*» is preferable to «ideality» for designating this phenomenon can be easily illustrated. Both a singular physical thing, for instance Husserl's writing desk, and a geometrical object, for instance an equilateral triangle, can be constituted at will as numerically identical objects by my initiating the appropriate acts of representation. However, only one of these identities is *ideal* according to the traditional meaning of that word, namely, in the sense of a non-particular object that does not exist in space and time¹⁹. They are both, however, *irreal*, that is, constituted in acts of representation. It is important to note that Husserl's account in his late work of the essential involvement of language in the constitution of this first moment of *irreality* mentioned above does not entail its involvement in *irreality*'s second moment. On the contrary, the modes of being of different *irreal* objects, for instance, ideal and formalized mathematical objects, point to the very opposite conclusion. The ideal mode of being of pre-modern mathematical objects and the formalized mode of being of the modern ones is not, in any way, contaminated or otherwise infected by their putative bondage to an empirical logos. The ideal being of the number used to count two chickens is 'two', no matter what empirical language its being two is expressed in. And the formalized being of the formula $y=mx+b$, in virtue of the very mode of being of its *irreality*, bypasses completely the empiricity of the symbolic conventions of the «language» – or, more precisely, letter signs – in which it is expressed.

Husserl's articulation in the *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*²⁰ of the methodical necessity for a historical reflection back to the origin of modern science (mathematical physics) is inseparable from the account of his feeling regarding the «unintelligibility»²¹ of the formalized meaning structures that make modern mathematics possible. Specifically, the symbolic calculational technique inseparable from mathematical formalization is conceptually blind, which is to say *empty* of the kind of meaning that refers to objects in the world and that itself arises from mental concepts. Its epistemic foundation and ontological meaning are therefore incomprehensible to a human

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 48.

¹⁶ Thus Husserl writes: «The transcendence of the real, as such, is a particular form of «ideality» or, better, of psychic irreality» (Husserl, 1969, p. 166).

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 154.

¹⁸ Ivi.

¹⁹ «Physical objects too make their appearance «in the field of consciousness»; and, in respect of what is most general, no differently than ideal objects that is to say: as intentional unities» (Husserl, 1969, p. 163).

²⁰ Husserl (1979).

²¹ Ivi, p. 55.

existence that still wants to take its cosmic bearings from the intuition of worldly objects and the concepts that are somehow related to these objects. It is thus the crisis precipitated by this double unintelligibility of the meaning formations of modern science that turns Husserl's methodical reflection to the history of the foundational mathematical innovations that make modern natural science possible. Specifically, to the history of the mathematization of nature initiated by Galileo, to the historical investigation and reactivation of the intentional constitution of the meaning of nature that the concealing and revealing genius of Galileo accomplished by taking for granted the ideal objects of Euclidean geometry handed down to him by tradition. And then, finally, it is this crisis that leads to Husserl's fragmentary intentional-historical reflection on the intentional constitution of these ideal objects themselves in the meaning accomplishments of the forever unknown but transcendently necessary proto-geometer.

Attentiveness to the second moment of *irreality* mentioned above, to its mode of being and therefore to the phenomenological necessity of an intentional investigation of its ontic-meaning, is at the basis of Husserl's claim in the *Crisis* that, in the case of the ideal objects of science, the intentional history of their constitution is inseparable from the actual history of their origin. That is, accounting for the capacity of acts of representation – mediated by the written word – to constitute the first mentioned moment of *irreality*, namely, its numerical identity as the same across a multiplicity of temporally individuated acts, does *not* account for its second moment, the specific ontic-meaning of the content of its ideal *irreality*. Hence, to cite a relevant example: a line in Euclidean geometry and the algebraic formula $y=mx+b$ are both *irreal* meanings. Their *irreal* modes of being, however, are not only radically different, but this very difference is something that can only be fully accounted for by an historically oriented intentional investigation of the genesis belonging to the meaning structures in question that links up with an actual historical investigation of their origins. Husserl's *Crisis*, to be sure, provides only fragments of the intentional-historical investigation necessary to account for the genesis of these radically different meaning structures. But the small beginning evident in these texts points the way to a recovery of the origins of ideal meaning structures that Derrida's proto-deconstructive meditation on historicity rejects as being – in principle – impossible.

6. *Derrida's Collapse of the Problem of the Origin of Ideality into that of the Origin of the Objectivity of an Intersubjective Tradition*

The principle behind Derrida's rejection of the possibility of a recovery of the origins of the ideal meanings belonging to science stems from his collapsing all talk of ideality into its first moment mentioned above, that is, into the acts of representation that constitute the *irreality* of an intentional unity as a numerically identical intentional object. This moment of the constitution of *irreality* is, as we have just seen, radically different from the all-important moment of the ontic-meaning that composes the mode of being of a given *irreality's* intentional unity. We have seen that Husserl's account of the meaning of historicity and the historicity of meaning not only does not elide this difference, but that the small beginning of his last works adumbrates a transcendental-historical method whose goal is to recover the origin of a given moment or moments of the ontic-meaning composing ideal *irreality*.

This adumbration is not visible to Derrida. Consequently, he is unable to see that what he calls the alterity of the origin of ideality is not something that necessarily has to remain inaccessible to thought. Indeed, Derrida's very notion of the alterity of the origin is suspect precisely because his very claim regarding its inaccessibility presupposes that *his* thought has sufficient access to ideality's origin to be able to rule out certain things about it. Moreover, this notion of Derrida's is suspect because it arises on the basis of his conflation of Husserl's account of the role of language in the constitution of the objectivity belonging to an intersubjective tradition with Husserl's account of the constitution of the ideality proper to the ontic-meaning of the ideal *irreality* that is transmitted by a tradition, such as geometrical science, via its intersubjective objectivity.

Thus, as we have seen, Husserl's claim that the necessity – in order to account for the transcendental constitution of the ideal meaning structures belonging to a science such as geometry – of positing a proto geometer whose initial anticipations of ideal geometrical meaning structures are fulfilled in geometrical evidence and subsequently available at will in his *intrasubjective* representations, is different from his claims regarding the necessity of linguistic embodiment for the constitution of a scientific tradition. While these latter claims are indeed concerned with the constitution of the ideality of the objectivity presupposed by the intersubjectivity of a tradition, they presuppose rather than establish the initial *intrasubjective* constitution of ideal meaning. And it is the ideality of the latter, which, according to Husserl, has already been constituted before its embodiment in both spoken language and written language, that forms the ontic-content that is taken up in an intersubjective ideality and therewith the *original* basis of a tradition that is handed down over the ages.

Derrida's claim that the necessity of linguistic embodiment for the constitution of ideality introduces a difference into its being that is as inseparable from this being as it is ineradicable from it, is therefore based on the unwitting exchange of what is other than ideality in the sense of *intrasubjective* ideality with what is the same as this ideality. That is, Husserl's account of the constitution of the ideality that composes an *intersubjective* tradition is mistaken by Derrida for an account of the *intrasubjective* ideality wherein originates the specific ideal content of a given tradition. This exchange is what makes it impossible for Derrida to see that the true *difference* operative in Husserl's late account of ideality is that between precisely these two idealities and their origins.

As we have seen, Derrida's pre or proto-deconstructive critique of phenomenology credits Husserl's phenomenology with posing a question about the relation between meaning and fact that it alone (presumably alone among philosophies) can pose, even though it is incapable of providing the answer. The question concerns their primordial unity and Derrida maintains that neither an account limited to meaning nor one limited to facts can by themselves answer this question. Neither, however, can both types of an account answer it together, because to answer the question of the unity of meaning and fact would be tantamount to eliminating their difference. The unity at issue here for Derrida is therefore not one of the identity of meaning and fact but of their primordial belonging together despite the opposition that defines their difference. We have also seen that the specifically critical moment of Derrida's proto-deconstructive critique of Husserl is contained in his claim that Husserl's phenomenology nevertheless attempts to eliminate this difference by reducing the infinitude wherein appears the alterity of both the origin and telos proper to ideality's historicity to the singularity of an origin in actual historical fact.

Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl's phenomenology also takes issue with its ability to deal the inseparable alterity belonging to the difference at issue here for Derrida. However, at stake in the deconstruction of phenomenology is something far more monumental than identifying the putative dynamic of an unlimited disquietude at work in Husserl's late attempt to come to terms with historicity. At issue in its deconstruction is Derrida's attempt to show that the ultimate, and therefore most original condition of possibility of any phenomenological appearance is itself inseparable from a phenomenon that cannot appear within the conceptuality of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. The recognition of this, which is to say, the encounter with this phenomenon, like the gesture or strategy that generates it, is most decidedly not paradoxical but, rather, in as precise a sense as what sense it has will admit, *deconstructive*. Phenomenology's deconstruction is not paradoxical because what deconstruction deconstructs is precisely the ground that heretofore has made any paradox as such possible, namely, the unity of Being and therewith the identity of its meaning presupposed by doxa from its ancient Greek inception to Derrida's present. And, according to Derrida, because Husserl's phenomenology brings this unity and identity to consummate clarity, phenomenology's deconstruction coincides with the deconstruction of the tradition it brings to completion. Neither beside nor beyond the phenomenon it brings to appearance in phenomenology, and not just despite the

putative limits of its conceptuality but on the basis of what deconstruction's inventor presents as its rigorous contestation, deconstruction signifies nothing while exposing phenomenology's, and with it, the metaphysics of presence's, significative limit. Deconstruction signifies nothing because any signification whatever has already been determined by what it, deconstruction, purports to contest definitively and thus bring to a closure, namely the singular limit of the signification *determinative* of metaphysics since its Greek beginning, the interpretation of the infinitive *to be* of Being in «the third person singular of the present indicative»²².

7. *The Focal Point of the Deconstruction of Phenomenology: The Absence of a Phenomenological Account of the Sign's Power to Signify*

Whereas Derrida's proto-deconstructive critique of phenomenology presented itself as working within Husserl's intentions, even if, in the end, he gave himself the permission to draw conclusions at variance with Husserl's, what is at stake in its deconstruction is so significant that it warrants, on Derrida's view, bypassing its author's intentions. For at stake is the origin of something both infinitely more chthonic than historicity and more singularly irreducible than the ideality of the smallest unit of meaning. In a word, at issue in Derrida's deconstruction of phenomenology is the origin of the sign's power to signify. That this issue is not a problem for Husserl's phenomenology is not only not beside the point but also precisely Derrida's point. The *difference* that plagues phenomenology, Derrida comes to realize, is not exhausted by the difference between the ineluctable empiricity of written language and the demand of the ideality embodied therein for empirical purity, but, rather, it is something originally manifest in the «phenomenological voice»²³ that, by keeping silent, divides its self-presence according to what it supposes is a *pure* difference.

As pure, this difference is supposed to insure the immediacy and therefore transparency of that which it divides, the phenomenological self-relation that has methodical priority over the appearance of any object, the appearance of the Being of any object, or the appearance of any meaning whatever. As voice, this priority is signitive, which is to say with Derrida, it *gives itself*²⁴ as «the phenomenological and the ideal face of» the signifier. As silent, it is free of empirical signs and the empirical reality signified by them, having instead the status of the absolute appearance of the pure possibility of the sign's power, as a signifier, to signify, together with that of the appearance of the ideality proper to the signified that is inseparable from this power's innermost condition of possibility.

The purity of this *pure* difference, however, is anything but, and therein lays the crux of phenomenology's deconstruction. For as the origin of any signification whatever, which, with Derrida, is to say, any idealization whatever²⁵, the manifest *impurity* of what the phenomenological voice takes to be the *pure* difference of its divided self-presence in «auto-affection»²⁶, in «hearing oneself speak»²⁷, *deconstructs* the voice's apparent signification of the pure presence inseparable from its idealizing potency. With this, the telos of this potency, which from its ancient Greek inception until its completion in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology had heretofore baptized every notion, thought, and concept of the sign with the indelible mark of its origin in «the metaphysics of presence»²⁸, is henceforth disrupted.

Given what is at stake in these claims, it is not unreasonable to ask exactly how deconstruction makes manifest both the supposition of pure difference and its untenability, which is the basis upon which the truth of Derrida's claims about Husserl's phenomenology ultimately rest. Heeding deconstruction's fundamental premise that

²² Derrida (1973), p. 74.

²³ Ivi, pp. 16, 33, 75-76.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 76.

²⁵ Derrida writes, «between idealization and the voice, the complicity is indefeasible» (ivi, p. 75).

²⁶ Ivi, pp. 68, 78-80ff.

²⁷ Ivi, pp. 76, 78-80, 86.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 51

something more original is at stake in Husserl's phenomenology than the intention of its author, we will not look to the letter of Husserl's text for our answer but to what Derrida doubtless thinks such texts, indeed, above all, one such text, adumbrates. The first adumbration, right at the beginning of Husserl's breakthrough phenomenological text, the *Logical Investigations*²⁹, is that Husserl's distinction between two meanings of the word "sign", as "expression" and "indication", amounts to the «reduction of indication»³⁰, insofar as Husserl makes this distinction in order to limit his logical investigations to expressions. Derrida finds this reduction as significant as it is problematical. It is significant, because the «possibility of all the reductions to come, be they eidetic or transcendental»³¹, and, therefore, the «future problematic of the reduction»³² together with «all the conceptual differences through which it is pronounced (fact/essence, transcendental/mundaneity ...)» would deploy themselves in a separation between two types of signs³³. It is problematical, because the reduction of indication from linguistic (expressive and therefore discursive) signs is illegitimate, as «we know... already that, in fact, the discursive sign... is always... held in an indicative system; held, that is to say, contaminated»³⁴.

Before looking more closely at the status of the distinction between expression and indication behind the first adumbration, the second adumbration Derrida finds in Husserl's same text bears noting. Husserl's claim that a merely imagined expressive sign in a soliloquy does not communicate but functions solely to facilitate the logical presentations requisite for conceptual thought, adumbrates for Derrida, «against Husserl's express intention»³⁵, that «the *Vorstellung* [presentation] itself»³⁶ depends «on the possibility of repetition, and the most simple *Vorstellung*, presentation (*Gegenwärtigen*)»³⁷, depends «on re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*)»³⁸. For in Husserl's claim that in soliloquy the expressive sign communicates nothing while nevertheless assisting the work of logical presentation, Derrida finds the opening to the reversal of the roles Husserl assigns to presentation and re-presentation, because the expressive sign, albeit as a merely imaginary sign, appears to be recognized by Husserl in soliloquy as functioning to generate presentations. Moreover, this function, being tied to the representative function of the expressive sign – even if imagined – provides still another opening, this time for the *priority* – over the presentation of that which is signified – of this potency proper to the sign to generate, via its *repetition*, the signified. Thus, for Derrida, the «sign is never an event»³⁹, which means that its appearance is not singular but always «implies representation»⁴⁰.

8. Derrida's Adumbration of the Primordial Unity of "Expression" and "Indication" in the Texts of Phenomenology

Returning now to what is behind Husserl's distinction between expressive and indicative signs, it is beyond dispute that the *ispsissima verba* of the text deconstructed by Derrida do not present this distinction as an answer to the question: what is a sign in general. Expression and indication for Husserl are therefore not two kinds of signs unified by the general concept of sign. Rather it is patent for him that despite both being called signs they *neither* share common features *nor* are they conceptually grounded upon or in relation to one another. An expression, or, more precisely, its *essence* for Husserl, is a whole with two non-independent parts: articulated sounds and an intentional act that instantiates an ideal species. An indication, on the contrary, is, again in *essence*, a motivational relation

²⁹ Husserl (2001).

³⁰ Derrida (1973), p. 27.

³¹ Ivi, p. 30.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 20.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 52.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 50.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

in which belief in one existent, e.g., smoke, leads to belief in another, e.g., fire. Thus, not only do they not share common features, such as representing something else or transcending themselves, but, rather, as Derrida himself recognizes, an expression is a sign that for Husserl has been *purified* of all indication.

Husserl's conclusion then, that the term "sign" is equivocal, as it is a name to which pertains a «double meaning (*Doppelsinn*)»⁴¹, therefore cannot possibly be accurately construed to presuppose, as Derrida maintains, an «unexplored metaphysical assumption of the essence of the sign». And this is the case for the simple reason that for Husserl the essences of expressions and indications are different.

Of course, it is precisely the stability of this essential difference that Derrida not only contests, but also that he maintains breaks down in Husserl's own text. For, on the one hand, the identity of an indicative signifier, no less than an expressive one, «must be formally recognizable»⁴², because a sign «can function as a sign, and in general, as language, only if a formal identity enables it to be issued again and to be recognized»⁴³. Inseparable, then, from this recognition is the realization that a «signifier (in general)»⁴⁴ must possess ideality, «the possibility of reproductive repetition in general»⁴⁵. On the other hand, if, in its imagined, non-communicative employment, the expression's representative function deviates from Husserl's standard account of the essence of representation, then, even in its purest form as an expression, the sign will be implicated in the *difference* between sign and signified characteristic of the indicative sign. What is at issue here, then, is Derrida's contestation of Husserl's account of the essence of representation as the reproductive modification of an ultimately *original* presentation whose mark of originality is manifest precisely in its *non-reproductive* character.

The instability that Derrida thinks he shows here *in* the essential distinctions drawn by Husserl's texts, though not, to be sure, by the conceptuality that draws them, is what is behind his claim that Husserl's account of the sign's double meaning presupposes a metaphysical assumption about the essence of the sign that is unexplored. Among other things, this means that were it possible to show that the indication's empiricity, its signitive embeddedness in factual relations, and the expression's ideality, its signitive instantiation of ideal meaning, were somehow encompassed by a unity responsible for their inseparable signitive belonging together despite their essential differences, then the following claim of Derrida would be within hailing distance of being borne out: that Husserl's account of the double meaning of sign is undergirded by a metaphysical presupposition. For all that would be required to show this would be to establish that the metaphysical status of a *signifier in general* is defined precisely by the primordial unity of ideal meaning and *fact*, a unity in which is implicated the infinite reiterability inseparable from the phenomenon of ideality and the irreducible singularity determinative of its signitive embodiment.

9. The "Auto-Affection" of the Phenomenological Voice Implicates Phenomenology in the "Metaphysics of Presence"

We have seen that Derrida's pre or proto-deconstructive critique of Husserl credited his phenomenology alone with the capacity to raise the question of this primordial unity and attributed its inability to answer it to the irreducibility of the difference between the terms in opposition. We have seen, too, that Derrida had critically defined Husserl's late phenomenology by its attempt nevertheless to *reduce* this difference to the singularity of a factual origin. Now, with his deconstruction of phenomenology, we see that for Derrida Husserl is not alone in the attempt to reduce the difference in question, and that not only does his thought have this in common with metaphysics, but also, we see that the telos of Husserl's attempt is driven by metaphysics in a manner that transcends his authorial

⁴¹ Husserl (2001), p. 269.

⁴² Derrida (1973), p. 50.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

intentions. Metaphysics, then, or, more precisely, the *metaphysics of presence*, is what composes this primordial unity of – to use Husserl’s terminology – expression and indication. Owing to their irreducibility, this unity is not only unstable, but it is also as impossible to realize in terms of its metaphysical origin as it is in terms of its phenomenological closure.

Derrida returns to Husserl’s discussion of soliloquy in order to find the final adumbration in Husserl’s text that establishes both the supposition of *pure* difference at the heart of Husserl’s phenomenology and, by extension, the metaphysics that determines this phenomenology, together with its untenability in both. By doing so, metaphysics’ commitment to presence as the supreme criterion of the Being of anything that *is*, as well as the impossibility of maintaining the *purity* of the difference that must be presupposed by both metaphysics and phenomenology in the service of this criterion, is exposed with Derrida’s deconstruction of the *signitive* conditions of the possibilities of each. Thus in Husserl’s allusion to the non-communicative status of soliloquy Derrida finds adumbrated a pure and ideal *semblance* of speech (*parole*), in which not just both the signifiers, the *phonemes* (meaningful units of sound), but also the signs themselves, signifiers and signifieds, are disconnected from any source in empirical language (in either its conventional signs or real sounds). Rather, as the *pure* appearance of speech, of discourse, and, therefore, of expression, hearing oneself speak «has already suspended the natural attitude and the thesis of the existence of the world»⁴⁶. (SP, 78). It is this suspension operative in auto-affection that is responsible for both the appearance that phenomenological propinquity is ensured by the voice as well as that this appearance itself manifests the sign’s pure possibility as *self-presence*. The untenability of the supposition that the voice’s auto-affection *would* suppose, in order to insure this self-presence, namely, that the difference between its speaking and hearing itself speak is *pure*, is made manifest by what Derrida calls «the movement of *différance*»⁴⁷. Specifically, what is made manifest is that the *pure* difference supposed by the voice cannot be seized «in its identity, nor its purity, nor its origin», because «[it] has none of these»⁴⁸.

10. The Impurity of the Difference Supposed to be Pure by the Phenomenological Voice has its Source in ‘Différance’

Within the context of Derrida’s deconstruction of Husserl’s phenomenology, «différance»⁴⁹ signals the impossibility of the «the possibility of all one believes able to exclude from auto-affection», that is, «space, outside, world, body ...»⁵⁰. And this impossibility, for Derrida, is not rooted in anything extrinsic to Husserl’s phenomenology but precisely in the *phenomenological* voice’s pure appearance, which, as the pure signitive condition of possibility for all transcendently reduced appearances, is also the condition of possibility for the impossibility of maintaining these appearances in their purity. For its (the voice’s) supposition that the *difference* between its pure speaking and pure hearing of itself speak is marked by the pellucidity of the *phenomenon* of its auto-affection breaks down as soon as that which it has excluded in order to *affect-itself* reappears with its *talk* about all objects, including its talk about itself as absolute consciousness. The conclusion is therefore inevitable: «no pure transcendental reduction is possible»⁵¹.

Independent of the answer to the question of the fidelity of Derrida’s interpretation of phenomenology to its original, which, as we have seen, is a red herring, given deconstruction’s fundamental premise that something more original is at stake in Husserl’s phenomenology than the intention of its author, two problems nevertheless render null and void phenomenology’s putative deconstruction. The first, and more serious, is that the metaphysics of presence as a Greek phenomenon is an invention of

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 78.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 82.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

Heidegger, the source of which is his projection of Husserl's discovery of categorial intuition back into the Greeks⁵². The second, and related, problem, which is less serious only because, absent the legitimacy of the historical context within which to frame the self-importance of its auto-affection, the deconstruction of phenomenology, perhaps not in the hands of Derrida but certainly in the hands of others, is continually in danger of becoming a joke, is the following: The notion that the functioning of the voice, «lived as absolutely pure auto-affection»⁵³, manifests not speech but its *semblance*, cannot withstand critical scrutiny if it is attributed to the Greek metaphysics that Derrida, following Heidegger, apparently thought could be exhausted in its essence without taking into account Aristotle's dispute with Plato over the true manner of being of the *eidē*⁵⁴.

These two problems, of course, are not unrelated. Derrida not only follows Heidegger, as mentioned, in maintaining that the fundamental limit of Husserl's phenomenology is predetermined by the historical precedent of the Greek understanding of the meaning of Being as presence, but he further situates this limit in terms of its interrelated sources in *logocentrism* and *phonocentrism*. By the former, Derrida understands the interpretation of language's significative capacity that privileges *speech* as the source of the intelligibility inseparable from signification, that is, the capacity *to say* something about something and thereby provide what its Greek innovators called a "*logos*", an "account". By the latter, he understands the privileging of the *phônē* (sound, voice) as the medium of signification over all others, a privileging that because of its privileging of speech, is inseparable from *logocentrism*. Derrida's deconstruction of the phenomenological voice purports to show both of these *centrisms* at work in determining the limit of Husserl's phenomenology. And, by tying them to the historical predetermination of Western metaphysics, Derrida is committed to the presupposition of their role in determining the limit of Greek metaphysics as well.

11. The Absence of the Phenomenological Voice in Plato's Portrayal of Logos

We need look no further than Plato's portrayal in the *Sophist* of the Stranger and Theaetetus' conversation (*dialogos*) about the relationship between the kinds (*genē*) – thinking (*dianoia*) and speech (*logos*) – to see that an adumbration here of something along the order of the pure phenomenological voice Derrida claims to find in Husserl is out of the question. «Stranger: Well then, aren't thinking and speech the same (*tauton*), except that the soul's inner conversation (*dialogos*) with itself, when it arises without voice (*phônē*), has been given just this title by us: thinking?» (263 E)? The *kinds* of thinking and speech, then, are the same for Plato, but for one exception: thinking – as *dialogos* – occurs through a *logos* without voice, while speech flows through the mouth in a vocal stream. Speech for Plato, therefore, can no more be the *expression* of thinking than thinking can *privilege* speech – as Derrida would have it – *because* the sameness of their kinds (*gene*) unites them on the basis of a commonality that is more fundamental than the phenomenon of voice. Of course, they are not the same in the sense of being identical and therefore indistinguishable; rather, they are the same in the sense that the one difference between them marks not a difference in their *kinds* but of something less fundamental: whether or not the commonality in question is accompanied by *voice*.

Even *if* this account of thinking and speech could be construed as privileging voiceless *logos* over its embodiment in sounds – and there is absolutely no evidence in Plato's texts to support such an interpretation – the status of voiceless *logos* in Plato simply cannot be understood, as Derrida understands the phenomenological voice in Husserl, as the *pure* appearance, and, therefore, the *semblance* of expression. This is the case, because *both* voiceless and uttered *logos* are engaged for Plato in assertion and denial, and, moreover, when both kinds of *logos* share the *genos* of opinion (*doxa*), their assertions and denials, their expressions as it were, are called by that name. This means, among other things, that

⁵² Hopkins (2021), pp. 230-238.

⁵³ Derrida (1973), p. 79.

⁵⁴ Ivi, pp. 232-234.

for Plato both voiceless and uttered *logos* can appear as a semblance, that is, can appear to be what they, in truth, are *not*. The one *logos*, the voiceless, is therefore decidedly not the *appearance* of the other, the uttered *logos*; both, rather, are emphatically *logos* – “speech” in a sense that transcends an essential connection with *voice* – for Plato. Thus, contrary to Derrida’s interpretation of the *pure* phenomenological voice, whose appearance as well as its purity are calibrated in relation to the positing of the impurity of an empirical voice, that is, a voice embedded in language’s empiricity – its conventional words and *phonetic* manifestation – Plato’s voiceless “speech” is neither more pure nor less empirical than uttered “speech”. Indeed, the category of ‘the empirical’ posited in these terms neither exists nor can possibly make any sense within the context of Plato’s thought.

12. Deconstruction’s Most Basic, and Unwarranted, Presupposition: The Subordination of Being to Speech in Greek Philosophy

Only by recognizing that the fundamental meaning of *logos* for Greek philosophy is speech, and that for speech to be speech it need not be uttered, can Plato’s discussion of voiceless – thinking as *dia-logos* without *phônê* – and uttered speech make sense. Derrida’s claim that Greek philosophy privileges speech in its interpretation of language therefore amounts to the claim that Greek philosophy privileges speech in its interpretation of speech. Such a claim, then, can only be based in the unwitting exchange of what Plato’s account in the *Sophist* characterized as the Other and the Same, the two *genê* that manifest the *archai* of the *genos* Being (254 E-255 C). For the very notion of a logocentric interpretation of speech in Greek philosophy takes, as we have just shown, what is the same, namely speech, and treats it as something other, namely logocentrism.

It is also worth mentioning in this connection that Plato’s Socrates’ privileging of spoken *logos* over written *logos* in the *Phaedrus* only makes sense in connection with the account of *logos* in the *Sophist*. For just as uttered speech cannot be understood to have in Plato the status of the expression of voiceless speech, since voiceless speech, as speech, is already inseparable from expression, so, too, written *logos* cannot be understood as the expression of spoken *logos*, because, as written, it is no longer fundamentally *speech*, but its *imitation*. The hierarchy here is therefore one of image and original, not *expression* and something *other* than expression that is *not* expressed.

Bibliography

- Derrida, J. (1978), *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, Eng. trans. by J.P. Leavey, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Derrida, J. (1973), *Speech and Phenomena*, Eng. trans. by D. Allison, Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Hopkins, B. (2021), “Phenomenology and Greek Philosophy: Methodological Protocols and One Species of Interpretation”, in *Phenomenological Interpretations of Ancient Philosophy*, eds. K. Larsen and P. Rykkja Gilbert, Brill, Leiden, pp. 229-259.
- Husserl, E. (1939), “Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem”, in *Revue internationale de Philosophie*, ed. E. Fink, pp. 203-225.
- Husserl, E. (1970), *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Eng. trans. by D. Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Husserl, E. (1969), *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Eng. trans. by D. Cairns, Nijhoff, The Hague.
- Husserl, E. (2001), *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., Eng. trans. by J.N. Findlay, Routledge, London and New York.