

## ***Derrida: Introduction to Husserl's Origin of Geometry – Sections 4-7***

by John Protevi / Permission to reproduce granted for academic use

[protevi@lsu.edu](mailto:protevi@lsu.edu) / <http://www.protevi.com/john/DH/PDF/ITOG4-7.pdf>

GENERAL STATEMENT: The entering of sense into history is paradoxical at first sight. Sense enters history--it can be transmitted--only by becoming ideal--that is, by breaking with empirical history, factual embeddedness. But it becomes ideal only by entering language, even if the zigzag will enable the reduction of empirical language.

### **SECTION IV**

STRUCTURE: Despite its brevity, IV contains four topics: a) [62-64] the announcement of the "detour" to genesis of structure or the form of the constitution of objectivity; b) [64b] zigzag method because of sending; c) [64c] sense of sense = object-presentation to a gaze; d) [64d-66] reduction of factual history.

#### **THE DETOUR**

[62-64] IV begins with Derrida following Husserl's "detour": instead of continuing the barely begun investigation of the origin of geometry, the sense of the first acts, Husserl contents himself with knowing the general form of geometrical sense's evidence. Like all evidence, it is the being-before-ness of an object. This "profound philosophical decision" [62] of Husserl, his binding of evidence to object intuition, and hence sense to object presentation, is one of Derrida's abiding concerns; we have seen him investigate it in *SP* and "Form and Meaning." He states the point at 64: "the sense of sense in general is here determined as *object*."

#### **SENDING AND ZIGZAG**

[64b] Having provisionally considered geometrical sense to be established, Husserl now moves to consider the genesis of the objectivity of sense, the way it is intelligible for anyone at any time, and so free of factuality. At the top of 64, Derrida restates the sending and zigzag structures. We should be familiar with this by now.

#### **THE SENSE OF SENSE**

[64c] Here we can anticipate the arguments of "Form and Meaning."

#### **THE REDUCTION OF FACTUAL HISTORY**

The question is now for Husserl to show how intra-subjectively constituted sense can become intersubjective--and indeed intersubjective diachronically, in a tradition, and not just in a synchronic community. Now, as Derrida explains on the bottom of 64, this chronology--first intrasubjective, then intersubjective--is fictional, for a sense counts as geometrical only if it can claim from the start an ideal objectivity, only if its very meaning is to be true for anyone anytime. Thus genesis seems to be rendered fictional, and should be replaced by non-factual, ahistorical conditions of possibility.

But our annoyance at this [cf. Tran Duc Thao] reduction of real history misses the point: Husserl was always only after transcendental historicity, that which underlies any "empirical story" [65], by explaining what must have been the structure of genesis [of structure = objectivity]. Transcendental historicity, due to the zigzag structure of our access to it, is "nothing but the possibilities of the appearance of history as such" [66]. Only the reduction of real history could produce the transcendental structures of historicity; the structure of genesis needs genesis to appear. Thus, "history itself establishes the possibility of its own appearing" [66]; historical events allow for their own reduction and thus the appearance of the essence of historicity.

## SECTION V

STRUCTURE: There are three sections of V: a) intro: role of language in constituting ideal objectivity [66-67]; b) levels of ideal objectivity [67-75]: words, intentional content of expressions; geometrical objects; c) transcendental historicity is posed as problem [75-76].

### INTRO

[66-67] The historical act that allows history to be reduced is linguistic incarnation. Language can preserve the ideal objectivity of geometry because it itself is composed of ideal objectivities, as is shown by the possibility of translation. Thus the language under consideration here as the medium of ideal objectivity is "language in general, not ... the factuality of languages and their particular linguistic incarnation" [66].

But if this is the case, then geometry is only an example of a cultural activity that achieves ideal objectivity through language, and so the exemplarity of science becomes questionable. Thus Husserl will distinguish levels of ideal objectivity, and strictly linguistic components will not achieve the highest level, for language is composed of bound idealities; geometry is a free ideality.

Before we examine these points, Derrida reminds us of the stakes at 66-67. Having shown Husserl's determination of the sense of sense as object presentation--in other words, what Derrida will later name Husserl's logocentrism, the submission of language to logic (*SP*), and the connection of logocentrism with the metaphysics of presence due to the rule of the copula in the judgement of form (FM)--he shows us that ideal objectivity is the "absolute model for any object whatsoever, for objects in general" [66]. In a sentence of extraordinary depth, what will become the themes of *SP* are announced: "absolute Objectivity which can be proposed [set forth over against a theoretical vision in a certain space] for all subjectivity in general in the intangible [because protected by the phenomenologically reduced and purely auto-affective voice of interior monologue] identity of its sense" [67].

### LEVELS OF IDEAL OBJECTIVITY

[67-75] Back to the question of the levels of ideal objectivity. There are three: a) words [67-70]; b) sense of worldly objects [70-72]; c) free idealities such as geometrical truths [72-75].

a) Words are ideal objectivities intended across empirical instances. The practice of speech is then "an immediate eidetic" [67] that brackets the factual existence of i) the speaking subject; ii) words; iii) the thing designated.

The complicated problem of the language adequate to transcendental description here arises. It seems no language could be adequately reduced so it could distinguish between the empirical and transcendental parallels. Derrida asks at 69n66: "What is the unitary ground starting from which this diffraction of sense [into empirical and transcendental parallels] is permitted and intelligible?" But such a "renewed and rigorous philological or 'etymological' thematic, which would precede the discourse of phenomenology" [69n66] is blocked to Husserl, for whom expression of a pre-constituted sense was always the essence of language. Investigating the sense of expressions is putting the cart before the horse for Husserl; the point is rather to investigate the expression of sense. But this stance involves Husserl in tremendous difficulties, as the very dense note at 69n66 explores. Without entering the labyrinth, we can point to the conclusion, which posits "an irreducible proximity of language to primordial thought." This point is further explored in "VM."

b) The next level of ideal objectivity is that of the sense expressed by words [70-72]. Nonetheless, when words express the sense of natural objects intended through the expression and sense-content or meaning, then this reference to the empirical receptivity necessary for seeing a lion "binds" the ideality of the sense "lion."

c) We now finally reach the level of geometry, the completely free ideality of the object itself [72-75]. Now this is not a judgment about a reality, for even false judgments can achieve ideal objectivity; also, to avoid error due to symbolic manipulation without sense-reactivation, geometrical sense needs to reduce the words used to express it. We see here the reduction of expression to reach sense, as Derrida has analyzed it in *SP* and *FM*.

Now because of this break with language, geometry and science are no longer merely examples of the ideal objectivity of linguistic productions, but have become exemplary sites for the question of the origin of objectivity [75].

## TRANSCENDENTAL HISTORICITY

[75-76] The ideal objectivity of geometry must not delude us into a Platonism. Its independence of factual subjectivity reveals its ties to transcendental subjectivity; its objectivity, defined as repeatability of a origin-sense, brings to light its "intrinsic and essential" historicity [75]. Thus "the space for a transcendental historicity is prescribed in all its enigmatic depth" [75].

## SECTION VI

STRUCTURE: There are five main points to VI: a) transcendental language as medium of ideal objectivity [76-79]; three points about universal linguistic community: b) privilege of adult normality [79-80]; c) essential limits: i) pure grammar / ii) universal nameability [80-82]; d) problems of geo-logy [82-85]; e) the intersubjective identity of objects rests on intrasubjective identity (=LP) [85-86].

## TRANSCENDENTAL LANGUAGE

[76-79] An odd "turnabout" is the structure of the genesis of the structure of objectivity as it comes to rescue the ideality of geometrical objects. The oddity of the turnabout comes from the freeing of objectivity through "linguistic incarnation."

This maneuver might seem strange, for Husserl has just freed the sense of geometrical objects from their linguistic expression. Yet this achievement of ideality by bracketing of expression is now complemented by the achievement of objectivity by linguistic incarnation. What Husserl has done in bracketing expression is only the bracketing of de facto language in general; this serves to reveal a "juridical and transcendental dependence" [76] on the "pure possibility of ... a pure language in general"--a "transcendental language" [77] {not to be confused with the problem of a "transcendental discourse" adequate to distinguishing the empirical and transcendental parallels}. Such a transcendental language constitutes ideal objectivity and is a "pure possibility not to be confused with any de facto empirical language" [77n76].

The stakes here are the highest possible, involving Husserl's philosophy of language and the very notion of the transcendental. In order for geometry to be what it is--a truth for anyone anytime--it must be constituted from the start as able to escape its psychological originator. Thus the possibility of linguistic incarnation is there from the start, is essential to geometrical sense. But this means language cannot be seen as the merely optional expression of a silently-constituted sense that would be purely theoretical and temporal (again, cf. *SP* and *FM*). Thus speaking geometry is what lets it be geometry; its transcendental sense is to be spoken. As Derrida puts it: "Historical incarnation sets free the transcendental, instead of binding it. This last notion, the transcendental, must then be rethought" [77]. As we have seen, Derrida wants to propose *différance* as the rethought transcendental, the transcendental essentially contaminated with the empirical.

Derrida now moves to show that the linguistic constitution of objectivity must be thought in the same terms as that of the constitution of transcendental intersubjectivity. [The analogy between intersubjectivity and temporality as relations to alterity should be recalled here.] The key in linking intersubjectivity and language is

that we all inhabit the same world, the "all-inclusive, but infinitely open, unity of possible experiences" [79], and thus can come to talk about the same objects, given enough work at translation.

Derrida notes three points here about this universal linguistic community: 1) privilege of adult normality; 2) essential limits; 3) problems of geo-logy [thematizing of source-point].

### ADULT NORMALITY

[79-80] Concerning adult normality, we find the same slide from example to exemplar and from telos to eidos that we found in Derrida's analysis of the status of science vis a vis culture.

### ESSENTIAL LIMITS

[80-82] Two essential limits are posed: the difficult problems of pure grammar pass without discussion, as Derrida focuses on the problem of a pure natural existent that guarantees translatability and grounds the consciousness of a pure "we": we're all sharing the same world. This is not the move to a primitivism, but the reduction of determinate culture. But in this precultural realm pure nature is inaccessible, so without a common object we can all agree on, misunderstanding seems to be the linguistic norm. Furthermore, Husserl's privileging of scientific language of object presentation is clear here, requiring the denigration of poetic language. The emphasis on objects stems from Husserl's recognition that the pure noetic pole is "fundamentally ineffable" [82], as we see in the famous complaint in *PITC* #36 that "all names are lacking" for the ultimate flux of temporality. We need a noema, an object, to have something to describe when we zigzag back from constituted object to constituting act.

### GEO-LOGY

[82-85] The final problem is that of reflexivity. If geometry offers spatial experience to be analyzed, the objectivity of the objects of our common place, the earth, then by that very token, the earth itself as "ground and foundation of these objects" is unthematizable. "The transcendental Earth is not an object and can never become one" [83], for there can only be "a science of space, insofar as its starting point is not in space" [85].

### LIVING PRESENT

[85-86] After discussing these problems, Derrida returns to the first geometer to show that intersubjective identification of an object requires intrasubjective identification. Here begins a short but important discussion of the auto-affective LP [85-86]. After the passing away of retentional evidence, the same sense can be recalled. The identity between the original sense and the recalled sense is the announcement of ideality. The analogous constitution of intersubjectivity and self-identity through alterity--in other words, *différance*--is the key here. Husserl thinks this production of identity through difference as the form of the LP. But this ultimate structure of genesis is a dialectic that "permits the reduction, without negation, of all alterity" [86]. Thus form and dialectic, as the taming of alterity, its submission to the service of identity, will become for Derrida the targets of deconstruction.

## SECTION VII

STRUCTURE: There are six major topics of VII: a) writing as a subjectless transcendental field [87-89]; b) the original spatiotemporality of writing [89-93]; c) the disappearance of truth [93-98]; d) sedimentation and reactivation [98-100]; e) equivocity and univocity [100-104]; f) the infinitization of reactivation [104-107]

### WRITING AS A SUBJECTLESS TRANSCENDENTAL FIELD

Derrida reminds us that Husserl's analysis is incomplete, for the synchronic speech of a living community is not enough to guarantee historical continuity, which means objectivity for anyone any time, beyond the deaths of the first community, and essentially beyond any living subjects. Only writing guarantees access to a "universal transcendental subjectivity" [87] by virtue of ensuring that communication become "virtual" [Husserl's phrase at 164; quoted by Derrida at 87]. But of course such virtuality opens sense to passive accretion, to the associative manipulation of symbols. The moment of writing is the moment of crisis: necessary and dangerous.

Writing, the opening of the space of "pure transcendental historicity" [87] operates as a "subjectless transcendental field" [88]: a production and transmission of sense free of any empirical subject yet serving as the condition for transcendental [inter]subjectivity. But this freedom from any empirical subjectivity retains a dependence on "a writer or reader in general" so that writing must be "haunted by a virtual intentionality" or risk "chaotic literalness or the sensible opacity of a defunct designation" [88]. This exile from intentional animation thus discloses a "transcendental sense of death" [88] as "silence ... illegibility." The connection to machinic writing, the production of sense without the guarantee of its intelligibility that Plato in the *Phaedrus* called the "father of the *logos*" is raised here, and is further examined by Derrida in "The Pit and the Pyramid" in *Margins*.

Derrida draws the same consequences here for writing [89] as constitutive of sense as he did above for speech [77]. Writing is not an optional addition to a pre-constituted sense, but is in all strictness a "supplement": that which in supposedly being added on later, reveals itself to be essential. Here we see in *ITOG* the germ of *SP* chapter 7.

#### THE ORIGINAL SPATIOTEMPORALITY OF WRITTEN SENSE

Derrida now goes on to show how writing entails an "specific spatiotemporality" beyond both the sensible/intelligible distinction and the empirical/metempirical distinction [90]. How does writing work? Writing is an inscription that both binds and releases: it binds free ideality to facts of ink on paper, yet in doing so it releases the sense of these events to repeatability. Thus writing is both localizing and temporalizing and unlocalizing and untemporalizing; thus writing joins essence and fact. It is not the case that writing is the becoming-spatiotemporal of a preconstituted nonspatiotemporal sense; rather, writing is the becoming-nonspatiotemporal of sense through becoming-spatiotemporal. Derrida writes: "the ability to sense to be linguistically embodied is the only means by which sense becomes nonspatiotemporal" [90].

Derrida emphasizes the strangeness of writing's constitutive role. Truth as the ability to be the same for anyone anytime entails the "pure possibility" of being spoken and writing down, but is independent of what is factually written down. This essential constitution of sense by writing means that "sense is gathered into a sign, and the sign becomes the worldly and exposed residence of an unthought truth" [92]. This exposure to the world of truth in signs is at the moment thought by Derrida prior to the expression vs indication distinction of analyzed in *SP*, although he does drop the hint at 92n96 that crisis could be seen as the becoming-indicative of expression. As we have seen in *SP*, this contamination has always already occurred, so we must think crisis as the norm, not as an empirical event. Writing is dangerous; sense is endangered; truth can disappear.

#### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TRUTH

Now the disappearance of truth is "the most difficult problem posed by the *Origin* and all of Husserl's philosophy of history" [93]. Truth can disappear: it can be annihilated, because of its worldly "exposure"; it can hide itself from factual appearance without affecting the sense of its being as non-worldly. Conversely, the sense of the "appearance" of truth, its dependence on an endangering writing, is the very question of phenomenology--the science of appearance--yet it cannot be answered "unequivocally" by Husserl, who seems both to neglect and respect history [93].

Derrida now examines several hypotheses of the disappearance of truth: a) within individuals; b) via a factual destruction of documents;

First of all [93], we can rule out the possibility that sense might die in general in an individual consciousness. Having once been constituted, it can always be reactivated from its "dormant potentiality" [93]. Thus forgetfulness is only a historical category, not an individual, psychological one.

Second [94-97], a universal burning of libraries would, Husserl admits, ravage bound cultural idealities; they can die because they had not reached the free ideality that is their telos. But for free idealities, since they are free of any one embodiment, the factual destruction of all embodiments would not affect their sense [94]. Thus although they have an intrinsic historicity, ideal objects are independent of external history, a "decisive" distinction according to Derrida [95], which sets up an analogy with the "world-annihilation" thought experiment of *Ideas* 49.

Analogous questions can thus be posed to OG concerning the relation of the eidetic and transcendental reductions [96]. Husserl's answer to the question whether the history of the ego posited in CM wouldn't tie consciousness to facts and thus contaminate the transcendental reduction is that he is after an invariable "form of historicity" [97]. And it is precisely this form of historicity that is the intrinsic historicity of geometrical ideal objects, that which saves them from external historical catastrophe. Thus the static analyses of eidetic reduction, the isolation of form, serve as the "indispensable guard rails for all genetic [ego] and historical [intersubjective] phenomenology" [97]. In other words, Husserl's final stopping point is always the structure of the genesis of structure; since this structure or form of the LP is thematically described in terms of presence, as we have seen in SP--just as the very notion of form was analyzed as to its ties to presence in FM--we see here the point of Husserl's complicity with metaphysics.

Third [97-98], the life-status of writing, which causes Husserl problems. Writing is not just a sensible depository of a pre-constituted sense, but the very "upsurging of sense" [97]; not just a *Körper* but also a *Leib*. To dissociate an ambiguity here, Husserl needs to perform a new reduction that would isolate the living intentionality animating writing/reading [cf. reduction of indication to expression as meaning-intention as examined in SP]. Sense is threatened not in its *Körper*--factual writing--but in its *geistige Leiblichkeit*--its intentional animation/reactivation. Sense cannot be destroyed by a fire burning factual books, but it can be forgotten by irresponsibility [98]. Forgetfulness now returns to the ego, where it can never be radical, since sense can always be reactivated.

### SEDIMENTATION AND REACTIVATION

[98-100] Sedimentation is both structural and genetic; it has three images: a) stratum: what is deposited after an upsurge; b) what is presupposed under actual evidence; c) what can be brought back to the surface as grounded ground of the new.

The passivity tempting us in sedimentation is combatted by reactivation, which is the bringing [back] to life of origin-sense. This re-animation of sense out from under sedimentation is two-fold: I see the dependence of the [new, reactivated] sense on my [present] act, yet I see the identity of the [new, reactivated] sense with the origin-sense.

### UNIVOCITY AND EQUIVOCITY

[100-104] Equivocity has two forms: contingent, based on objective convention of word meanings; and essential, based on subjective reactivation in "unforseeable configurations" [101]. This latter becomes the Derridean notion of "dissemination," the production of too much meaning to be controlled by an author's intention. Nevertheless, as SEC says explicitly, Derrida does not wish to reduce intentionality completely; he wishes only to see it as an inscribed effect in a general text of force and signification.

Univocity, as Husserl's prescription, is both a "refusal" and a "deep fidelity" to history. It refuses history by protecting truth from historical change; it does this by combatting poetic profundity. Everything comes to the surface in univocal expression, nothing stays latent [101]. [Can we say that univocity is the desire of fundamentalism, or even totalitarianism, in that it desires the elimination of any metaphorical surcharge that would require interpretation?] On the other hand, univocity is faithful to history, for history is nothing but the "transmission and recollection of sense" made possible by the "limpidity of the historical ether" [102] that allows the recognition of the identity of reactivated and origin-sense.

But as always for Derrida, an alleged purity is to be shown as contamination. A pure equivocity would preclude history by making all idealities bound, while a pure univocity would "paralyze history in the indigence of an indefinite iteration" [102]. So there must be both univocity and equivocity in the structure of historicity. We must have neither radical equivocity, which would preclude history, since nothing could be identified in order to be transmitted, nor absolute univocity, which would paralyze history, since nothing could be transmitted (reactivated in another context).

Derrida's comparison of Joyce's putting equivocity to work and Husserl's demand for univocity results in his showing the same "relativity" in each [103]. Joyce needs a relative univocity for intelligibility, while Husserl "had to admit an irreducible, enriching, and always renascent equivocity into pure historicity" [103], because absolute univocity is possible in two impossible limit cases.

First, suppose we are to name a proper, singular object, that which existed preculturally, and as such deserves a proper, singular name. The proper name is impossible, since names are cultural entities; even though ideal universals, they function in a "network of linguistic relations and oppositions" [103]. Thus the very act of naming instills the potential for equivocity in the unforeseeable contexts the name might enter into on the basis of its linguistic incarnation.

The second limit case is that of ideal objectivity or omniculturality; here we do not have a singular object, but the same object for anyone anytime. The same iterability/dissemination argument holds here as well. As iterable, the sense can be placed in novel contexts; for example, the Pythagorean theorem can, with the same sense, now function as an example of a type of geometry, rather than as a theorem of the only possible geometry.

Derrida now concludes that the factually irreducibility of equivocity rests on the case that words are not absolute objects, but only signs. They have no being of their own, but have being from animating intentions; thus same words have different meanings in different contexts. E.g., the word "I" (here we should recall SP) has a different referent, hence meaning, with each utterance, yet there must be some identity of meaning, a universal structure making it available for more singularizations.

## THE INFINITIZATION OF REACTIVATION

[104-107] Now Husserl has tried to encompass this irreducible equivocity by the "absolute horizon" of univocity. This is possible only by making univocity an Idea in the Kantian Sense [104], the asymptotic pole of an infinite task, a merely regulative rule guiding practice. In this way univocity as a value can be both the "apriori and teleological condition for all historicity" [104]; it must be there at the start to allow history as reactivation of an identical sense, yet it is only the telos guiding our practice of language.

Thus univocity and reactivation share the same schema. But if the univocity we have achieved in the practice of science is always relative to an unreachable *telos*, then this fact, coupled with the finitude of reactivation, threatens the very idea of a transcendental historicity of sense. Reactivation is finite in two ways: one, human beings need sleep; two, since science is systematic, no one piece could ever be immediately reactivated [105]. But why not then start with finitude as the ground of history instead of univocity and reactivation? Husserl's

response is to point to an idealization or infinitization of the power of reactivation [Husserl 168; quoted by Derrida at 106].

This infinitization is analogous to two important Husserlian motifs: the IKS as the form of the LP and as the passage to the limit as the production of geometry. These analogies will occupy Derrida in the rest of *ITOG*. The question of phenomenology's recourse to the IKS at crucial moments rests on the odd form of evidence of the IKS. One can never have an intuition of the content of that which has the form of the IKS, since that form is a rule dictating the addition of yet more content. Yet we can have evidence of that form itself, Husserl insists.

Derrida postpones this problem by reminding us that Husserl's immediate concern is the crisis of the sciences, the threat to their ability to transmit a capacity for reactivation, and so avoid the "dreamlike" state of the science caught on the penultimate step of Plato's divided line [107]. Return inquiry is the key to reawakening the origin-sending, the original and originary sense of science, which is at the same time their final sense.