

Introductory Lecture

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The objective of this course, "The Basic Problems of Deconstruction," is to introduce you to the conceptual field inhabited by texts appearing under the signature "Jacques Derrida." (By the way, that field will explain the reason behind the somewhat baroque formula: "conceptual field inhabited by texts appearing under the signature X.") We'll attempt this introduction through reading most of the texts JD devoted to analyzing Edmund Husserl. Why Husserl? After all, in "Différance," the 1968 essay in which Derrida sums up his thinking to date, the name Husserl does not appear, even as Saussure, Hegel, Levinas, Freud, Heidegger, and even a certain Deleuzean Nietzsche are introduced as forerunners to the thought of différance, Derrida's signature concept, if you will.

Yet this word, to which his name is now so closely linked, first appeared in a 1959 text devoted to Husserl, "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," a text which appears in the middle of a 15 year involvement with Husserl for Derrida (1952-67). As Derrida puts it in the first interview in Positions, conducted in December 1967: "[*SP*] is perhaps the essay I like best... In a classical philosophical architecture, *SP* would come first: in it is posed, at a point which appears juridically decisive ... the question of the privilege of the voice and of phonetic writing in their relationship to the entire history of West, such as this history can be represented by the history of metaphysics [we will return to this qualification!!], and metaphysics in its most modern, critical, and vigilant form: Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. What is 'meaning,' what are its historical relationships to what is purportedly identified under the rubric 'voice' as a value of presence, presence of the object, presence of meaning to consciousness, self-presence in so-called living speech and in self-consciousness? The essay which asks these questions can also be read as the other side ... of [*ITOG*]. In this essay the problematic of writing was already in place as such, bound to the irreducible structure of 'deferral' in its relationship to consciousness, presence, science, history and the history of science, the disappearance or delay of the origin, etc."

Here Derrida lays out "the basic problems of deconstruction": how to deal with the privilege of presence in the history of the West, and how to think the limits of the ways we represent that history by the history of metaphysics. The names of philosophers as signatories are then indices of texts which are indices of real history. The role of presence in the West is the target; philosophy texts are only a path to this target. This relation, the difference between the history of the West and the history of metaphysics, is thought by Derrida under the rubric of "force," as it is by Marx, for instance, who writes concerning "primitive accumulation ... preceding capitalistic accumulation ... This primitive accumulation plays in political economy about the same part as original sin in theology. ... Such insipid childishness is every day preached to us in defense of property ... In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force [*Gewalt*] play the great part" [Chapter 26, Vol I *Capital*). The difference between a theological--metaphysical--political economy, and "actual history" is force, and writing that intervenes in history by deconstructing metaphysics (in the guise perhaps of political economy) needs to take account of force. (The interest in force explains Derrida's interest in Deleuze's Nietzsche.)

Introductory Husserl Sketch

Spiegelberg, a useful introductory writer, tells us of four constant themes to look for in Husserl: 1) the ideal of rigorous science; 2) philosophical radicalism: the search for the sources; 3) the ethos of radical autonomy; 4)

subjectivity as "wonder of all wonders." These are summed up in the slogan "to the things themselves" [*zu den Sachen selbst!*]: the rigorous search for grounding in autonomous subjectivity. You must see **the things themselves** [*Sachen*]: not just perceptions of things in the narrow sense [*Dingen*], of course, but relations, essences, etc. **You** must see the things themselves, and not rely on passed on theories. You must **see** the things themselves: you must perform the reductions, analyses, etc., for which Husserl merely provides a script, and see what it does to you, what difference it makes in your living in the world.

Now perhaps the most basic guiding thread of Husserl's scripts is that of the parallelism of subjective act and objective correlate, which becomes known as the "constitution" of noesis and noema, a constitution performed ultimately by temporalization. Perhaps a useful schema, but one to be used carefully, is to think of Husserl as a thinker of the "middle" as all thinkers have been since Parmenides: *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*.

We will have to conflate Husserl's development in this sketch, overlooking the differences between eidetic analysis in LI, transcendental phenomenology in *Ideas*, and lifeworld analysis in *Crisis*. See Th. de Boer for details. Husserl's major works are: 1) *Philosophy of Arithmetic*: 1891: genetic constitution of numbers; unclear relation to psychologism. 2) *Logical Investigations*: 1900-1: breakthrough to phenomenology; preparatory study of pure logical grammar [restriction from general grammar]. 3) *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*: 1905: ultimate constitutive level. 4) *Ideas I*: 1913: methodological reflections on structural transcendental phenomenology; most well-known work of EH for many years. 5) *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: 1929: return to problems of LI from transcendental phenomenological perspective. 6) *Cartesian Meditations*: 1931: Best introduction to Husserl's mature thought, taking a Cartesian path to transcendental ego; 5th meditation on intersubjectivity focus of Levinas and JD in "Violence and Metaphysics." 7) *The Crisis of the European Sciences*: 1936: lifeworld investigations, includes "Origin of Geometry."

Derrida will have his own view of this development, tracing different emphases on genesis and structure at each step. Ultimately though, he will find something in his 1962 reading (ITOG) of Husserl's last work ("Origin of Geometry") that sends him back to Husserl's "first" work (LI) for his 1967 "farewell" to Husserl (*SP*). One of the interesting things in this course will be that Derrida describes this zigzag structure of movement from tentatively determined telos back to newly-determined origin in Husserl's own work on origin.

Now Derrida of course does not pose his questions to Husserl in a vacuum. One of his prime influences was Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, who in 1933 published a to-become-famous article in *Kant-Studien* on "The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism," in which he answered neo-Kantian critics of Husserl, with Husserl's express approval of "every sentence." In reading *SP* and *ITOG* we will see the importance to JD of Fink's formulation of the problem of the relation of transcendental and empirical, and the problem of communicating transcendental concepts in mundane language.

In his article, Fink writes that phenomenology is after "the origin of the world" from a non-worldly standpoint, that is, a point of a certain remove from worldly involvement achieved by the phenomenological reduction. The reduction is not the retreat to a sphere of psychological immanence that intends transcendent reality, but the bracketing of the world-acceptance that occurs in the background of any intentional act. That is, any intentional act--seeing this table, for instance--operates on the basis of an unacknowledged acceptance of not only the independent existence of the table, but also my own existence as a worldly subject. The phenomenological reduction--to the performance of which we are to be provoked, so that phenomenology lives as a movement, rather than as the positing of completed theses which are to be analyzed--allows one to see one's own concrete living subjectivity at a distance, so that the constitution of the world, the origin of the world as constitutive idealism, can be analyzed.

Two points can be noted here: 1) Kantian, or at least neo-Kantian, critical philosophy, on Fink's interpretation, moves from beings to their meaning, that is, from beings to an "a priori world form." This fitting of all beings into a priori world form means all beings must conform to the structures of the relation of the transcendental object = X to the transcendental unity of apperception, a relation that is articulated in space-time and the categories. In other words, critical philosophy means all beings must appear as spatio-temporal and as categorial. A final way to see the difference is to think that Kantians work from the top-down, describing a structure to which all objects must submit, then transposing that structure to the subject's a priori formation of objects, which could do nothing but conform; phenomenology, on the other hand, would work from below, from concrete descriptions of the constitutive middle between subject and object. 2) The non-worldly character of Husserlian transcendental subjectivity prompted Heidegger to come up with the analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world.

Thus phenomenology will be a transcendental philosophy, which can function as a ground for science and all human endeavor. Husserl always writes from a sense of crisis, even if only his last book is named such. He wants to justify knowledge claims in the post-Cartesian, post-Kantian modern world (again, with philosophers' names as indices of the forcefully significant history of the general text, which is also subject to politico-economic-cultural analyses of gender/race/class ...): how can subjects claim "objectivity"? How can an individual establish something that is true for everyone everywhere? In other words, how is "meaning" possible?

We start in the natural attitude, which (falsely: the fallacy of "objectivism" or "realism" or "Platonism") assumes the independent existence of things--tables and chairs, or ideal objects like "triangle"--in the world: independent that is, of consciousness. We perform the phenomenological reduction, by suspending the thesis of the independent existence of things and consciousness, and observe things as they appear to consciousness in order to trace their constitution by transcendental subjectivity, both at the act-intentional level, and at the ultimate level of temporalization. We should note that this is not an abstraction to the universal and anonymous "epistemological ego" of Kant, but revelation of a concrete individual ego, at a transcendental level. Husserl will eventually call the concrete ego a "monad" because it includes not just the living streaming present, but also its past and future, its habits and capabilities, even its idiosyncracies. Nevertheless, there is a certain plurality of transcendental egos interrelated in such a way as to form an intersubjectively verifiable, objectively shared, world. By the way, the personal or impersonal nature of the transcendental field becomes an issue: Sartre attempts to define an impersonal transcendental consciousness in "Transcendence of the Ego," an attempt Deleuze objects to in his characterization of an "impersonal and pre-individual" transcendental field in the 15th series of *Logic of Sense*. We'll have to consider carefully Derrida's remarks on "death" in SP in this context.

Now the reduction looks somewhat similar to Cartesian doubt, as it allows a return to the field of appearance to individual consciousness, but reduction is not doubt, just suspension of belief. Nevertheless, it is consciousness which is absolute for Husserl. At the level of acts (which are themselves constituted by temporalization) "object" becomes the name for "a priori forms of connection within consciousness" (*Ideas*, p 166 Gibson). The object, that is, the meaningful concept of a transcendent thing, is nothing but the unity intended through a series of profiles. The object is the ideal focus of the unfolding of the series of profiles, so that there is no "in-itself" behind appearances. Phenomenology is transcendental then in that it describes how the transcendence of things to consciousness is constituted or finds its meaning in immanent acts of consciousness governed by a priori laws (which are ultimately those of temporalization). This means consciousness transcends itself according to its own laws; phenomenology is transcendental then because it describes how consciousness is transcending according to a priori immanence, or in classical terminology, how objectivity is constituted by a priori subjectivity.

So transcendental phenomenology is an idealism. But like all transcendental idealisms, phenomenology denies it is a subjective idealism: objects appearing to consciousness are still objects, still an objective meaning true for everyone everywhere. To reduce objectivity to a simple function of really-existing conscious acts would be "psychologism": basically, making objects--of logic initially, but in principle, any object--into functions of the software of human beings, so that the rules, subject-matter, and criterion of truth are all derived from the scientific study of a particular entity: the human psyche. More details later, but remember this schema: Husserl wants to avoid both "objectivism" and "psychologism" in his account of objective meaning.

Our new object is now the world-constituting transcendental ego, the seat of capabilities of 1) object formation: e.g., a) synthesis of profiles into a unified perceptual object [e.g., this table]; b) thinking ideal objects [e.g., rectangle]; and of 2) higher-level operations, such as judgments, founded on these objects [this table is rectangular]. The transcendental ego is concrete and singular, but intersubjectively related to other egos so as to insure objectivity as truth for everyone everywhere. Husserl now faces a difficult problem: he must maintain a reference to concrete singular world-constituting consciousness without at the same time falling into solipsism. The Fifth *Cartesian Meditation* tackles this problem: how to constitute, as part of the world constituted within me, the other as other: in other words, how can I as absolute origin of the world see another as another absolute origin of the same world? This problem provokes Levinas--the translator of CM and the author of the first book on Husserl in French--to his own project of articulating a philosophy of "absolute alterity."

Now the transcendental ego is not an ontic double of the always singularly-placed empirical ego, but is uncannily "related" to it. Fink writes concerning the "logical paradox of transcendental determinations,"--in language that we can only see as provocative for Derrida--of the relation of transcendental and empirical egos, as "this singular identity-in-difference, this sameness in being-other" (Fink, 144). This relation, which will come to be called *différance*, is the key to JD's investigation, as it is for all philosophers writing in a post-Kantian world.

We have thus isolated what is truly independent, consciousness, and have now to show how objects are constituted within consciousness. For phenomenology to be a science we must be able to isolate the essential structures of consciousness. We do this through the method of free variation, or eidetic analysis, which identifies the essence of X as the invariant in a series of variations, as that without which it is impossible to think an object of the type X.

The essential structures of consciousness are: intentionality and time-consciousness. Intentionality is the relation of the subject to what is other than itself, what can become an object for it and everyone else. Intentionality is an explosion out of subjectivity toward objectivity; consciousness is being-toward-difference. We must stress that intentionality is not subjective, but is the "between" of subject and object, the middle out of which objects and subjects are constituted.

Intentionality has two poles: *noesis*: the "act" pole; *noema*: the "object" or "intentional correlate" pole. Objects can be internal--a recollected act--or external. Since we are finite, the unity of objects is only given in the form of an Idea in the Kantian sense, that is, we are given a rule for indefinite addition of yet more content. We thus have a gap between form--a rule directing us to add yet more--and content--what is added. For external objects we add yet more spatial perspectives; for internal objects--recollected acts--we add yet more protentions, so that the unity of the living present is only such an Idea.

Here we come to internal time-consciousness, the fundamental constituting level. The form of all acts is the "Living Present," which is built up of primal impression, retention, and protention. JD focuses on protention in *ITOG*, and on retention and recollection in *SP*.

A fundamental tension in Husserl, which JD investigates in all the works, starting with "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology" (1959), and intensely in *ITOG*, is that between structural or static, and genetic phenomenology. The tension between the two arises because Husserl is caught between describing essential structures and being faithful to their embeddedness in lived experience. Static phenomenology investigates the constitution of stable objects in consciousness, how they are manifested and authenticated as unities in the flow. The constitution of objectivity is described by Husserl in *Ideas I* as correlation of *noema* and *noesis*; this is act-intentional analysis, which needs to be supplemented by temporalization as ultimate constitution, a supplementation which occurs in genetic analysis. The *noema* is a repeatable identity of meaning, an intended concept to which I can return; the *noesis* is the bundle of synthetic acts which inform sensations yielding profiles of a thing: these sensory data are what Husserl calls *hyle* or matter. Without getting into any of the details, the Kantian problematic of using form and matter to describe concept and sensation should be obvious. NB, though: constituting objectivity does not mean producing reality, but letting something be seen in its objectivity.

Knowledge, or justified true belief, then occurs for Husserl when *noesis* corresponds to, or fulfills, the *noema*: in other words, when the synthetically unified *hyle* corresponds to the intended concept. Such fulfillment is called "evidence." It can be "apodictic" (necessary truth about essential connections) or "assertoric" (an assertion about contingent facts). The "fulfillment of a meaning-intention" occurs in two ways: sensible intuition fulfilling intention of a name, or, founded upon this, categorial intuition fulfilling the intention of a judgment. A categorial intuition is the seeing of the categorial structures of objects: seeing, e.g., the "unity, plurality, relation" of objects as a seeing founded on sensory intuition. As Heidegger puts it, "sense perception [is] pervaded by categorial acts. This means that concrete intuition expressly giving its object is never an isolated, single-layered sense perception, but is always a multi-layered intuition, that is, a categorially specified intuition" (*PHCT*, 68). It's important to note that for Husserl, all intentional acts are oriented toward their eventual fulfillment as their proper destination: intentions are promissory notes that are to be cashed in. If it can't be cashed in, it's a badly written note, a badly formed intention. Derrida will make much of this teleological structure of intentionality.

To return to our earlier discussion of objectivity appearing to consciousness, Husserl tells us that the *noema* is not a *reell* part of consciousness: it is not the actual content of consciousness, but what is intended by consciousness. The *noema*, the intended concept of the object to which we can return, is related to consciousness, but not simply reducible to consciousness. If it were reducible, we would fall prey to "psychologism."

Static phenomenology, the analysis of the constitution of objects, is not enough. We need genetic phenomenology, which investigates the history of the stabilizing acts and stabilized objects. Genetic phenomenology investigates the history of the "I," the formation of habitual acts by which it can constitute objects. It is thus of course also a history of the objects so constituted. Genesis is strange: unique irruption encased in an ongoing history. All objects are constituted in a background of acts which exceed the present in a series of retentions and protentions; all objects are "given" in a context of retained acts and objects, whose "history" can be traced, as the self-constitution of habits and goals of a subject. But of course, as we now know, Husserl will try to keep genetic phenomenology clear of the danger of psychologism.

Now according to our "basic problem of deconstruction" the history of the subject produced by phenomenology must be thought in history itself, the forcefully significant history of the general text. We see this interweaving of histories as we consider the two types of genesis: active and passive. Active genesis forms cultural products and ideal objects. Passive genesis works by association, which is the principle for the formation of unified perceptual objects. We develop habits of unifying sensations into objects. So in a sense, we are pre-given objects by unconscious passive syntheses that have a history to them. In so analyzing the history of acts and objects, the history of how things are pre-given, Husserl's analyses of passive synthesis

come to focus on the form of time, the living present, as the foundation of all temporal geneses: of hyletic data, animating acts, and intentional objects. Now in a vitally important paradoxical auto-affective way, the living present is also passively generated as an interweaving of retention, primal impression, and protention. But there is an essential reference to alterity in the living present that is analogous to the constitution of alterity in intersubjectivity, so the retained self is another self. We will need a lot of patient analyses here.

Husserl came at the end to investigate the "lifeworld." This is not the mute world of preconceptual, prelinguistic, pre-predictative experience, as it was for Husserl in the 1920s, but in the Crisis, becomes the actual historical cultural world of everyday experience. Out of the lifeworld, as one area of human praxis among others, arises the project of science: the establishment of an objective world and the ideal truths explaining this world. The establishment of objectivity is a historical European project for Husserl, beginning with the Greeks and applied by Galileo to nature. In a sense, then, modern science is the realization of Platonism: the discovery of independently existing objective being. This Platonist project, reason, culminates in phenomenology, which is the supercession of metaphysics in that it shows the subjective constitution of objectivity.

But is subjectivity the final resting point? Again we are back to one of the basic problems of deconstruction: the relation of history to the history of metaphysics as it culminates in phenomenology, a relation to be thought under the rubric of "force." Tran Duc Thao, in his 1951 *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*--a work Derrida often cites--also thought through this basic problem of history, metaphysics, and force. Perhaps his themes will help us focus on the role force plays, as Derrida thinks it, in opening subjectivity to the world, rather than tracing the constitution of the world back to subjectivity. Tran Duc Thao claimed that genetic phenomenology, the history of acts and objects lived as the life world, must be supplemented by a Marxist historical materialist science, since the relation of the constitution of objects in consciousness and the production of the real is a "symbolic transposition." Meaning is first produced in the world by material laboring creativity [compare Deleuze and Guattari's "desiring-production"] and then read off the world by subjective constitutive acts: "The realizing of meaning is precisely nothing but the symbolic transposition of material operations of production into a series of intentional operations in which the subject appropriates the object ideally by reproducing it in his own consciousness." In other words, I see a table not because I have picked up the habit of constituting it as such from a cultural background, but because it was produced in the world as a table by real creative labor. For Tran Duc Thao, consciousness exploits the meaning-labor of real work by ideal appropriation.

Derrida will not follow the details of Tran Duc Thao's path in the Husserl interpretations we will read in this course, but Tran Duc Thao's formulation can help us think our theme for the course, our basic problem of deconstruction: how does phenomenology open out onto a world of force producing the real?