

## DIFFÉRENCE BEYOND PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION (EPOCHÉ)?

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*The old ontological doctrine, that the knowledge of 'possibilities' must precede that of actualities (Wirklichkeiten) is, in my opinion, in so far as it is rightly understood and properly utilized, a really great truth.<sup>1</sup>*

### Phenomenology: a perpetual return to beginnings

Husserlian phenomenology is often characterized as a complex, terminologically convoluted codification of a 'naïve' metaphysical tradition - a stubborn methodological adherence to a foundationalist schema whose prime directive is given form by the insistence on the possibility of totalization. Husserl has been accused of merely producing yet another 'system', thereby discreetly slotting him in among the victims of Nietzsche's 'damning criticism of the 'will to a system'. It has been claimed that Husserl produced a corpus of theory which inevitably leads to solipsism and, conversely, that he merely followed in the footsteps of traditional German idealism.

None of these criticisms, however, actually address the nature of the horizons opened up by phenomenology. They make no reference to the radical changes in attitude and styles of inquiry which are both produced and reflexively studied within the phenomenological sphere.

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl's movement toward an apparent transcendental subjectivity which, in the fourth meditation, broadens out into a form of transcendental idealism has led many to bracket phenomenology in general as being paradigmatic of the latter. But as so often happens in the case of such a superficial reading, the vital area of philosophical interest is simply obscured by a feverish atmosphere of polemic. The *Cartesian Meditations* and the later *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental*

Before answering these questions we must first familiarize ourselves with the distinction between the more general 'phenomenological reduction' and the 'eidetic reduction'. To explicate the former we might use, as our example, the strategy employed in the *Cartesian Meditations*. The phenomenological reduction is the methodological abstention from acceptance of the actuality status of the world - a withdrawal from the non-reflexive positionality of the 'natural attitude' where existents are simply acknowledged as 'given' - that is, the world remains as a 'possible' horizon of being, though one which is effectively placed in 'brackets', to be re-appropriated only within the sphere of the transcendental ego. This eventual re-emergence into the world (whose sense as 'existing world' is bestowed by the meditator) is facilitated by first progressively putting it out of play and then establishing the ways in which it is given within an intentional matrix. In other words, Husserl's strategy is one which first loses the world (not by doubting it but by simply abstaining from any position-taking in regard to its actuality or non-actuality) and then allows the re-appropriation of the world according to a modified perspective through a series of successive reductions - that is, the world is revealed in a new 'style'.

It is essential we understand that the *epoché* (in terms of its effects of neutralization) is not the same as that of the Cartesian procedure of systematic doubt. Phenomenological reduction is precisely the strategic 'abandonment' of a judgement or position and not merely the adoption of a diametrical opposition.<sup>2</sup>

The eidetic reduction is the method by which the phenomenologist initiates a movement from fact to essence [*eidōs*]<sup>3</sup> from the empirical particular to pure generality. Essences [*eidē*] are not to be confused with empirical generalities which allow us to identify 'things' according to their categories within the sphere of what Husserl refers to as the 'natural attitude'. They are to be understood as those fundamental characteristics of experience (essential structures) which are implicated in all forms on a higher level. This is by no means a lapse into mysticism, but is a systematic application of our 'perfect freedom' to distance ourselves from common facts and the unquestioning acceptance of the axioms of the sciences - to open up alternative spheres of possibility through acts of imaginative variation.

*Phenomenology* exemplify Husserl's actual position not as a 'doctrinal' idealist, but as a 'methodological' idealist (this distinction will become apparent when we begin to uncover the meaning of phenomenological procedure through the movement of *epoché*). Each mode of entry into the heart of phenomenology, every 'style' or 'schematic space' can be put into question by the initiation of further reductions (some elements being allowed to pass over from a prior sphere and some not). Despite the wealth of different strategies and the correlative horizons opened up by Husserl (no single one actually 'defining' phenomenology) it is the method of *epoché* that persists and which prescribes the possible 'attitudes' and 'spaces' of phenomenological research without being limited by any one of its theoretical moments or styles of passage.

It is, therefore, clear that in order to arrive at some kind of understanding of phenomenology we must attempt to uncover the meaning of the *epoché*.

### ***Epoché: methodological spacing as the production of spaces through the possibility of their suspension***

Phenomenology appears to begin with the initial presupposition of the possibility of conclusive grounding. The movement is initiated by first putting out of play that which does not conform to its initial idea of self-evidence/apodicticity. However, on first appearance this seems to present us with a paradox, in the sense that the quest begins by supposing that it is possible to open up a space free of all presuppositions, despite the fact that the guiding idea which defines the scope of the enterprise is itself a presupposition. It would seem, then, that the guiding idea, which finds its form in the (natural) attitude responsible for the movement toward the goal of pre-suppositionless apodicticity (through phenomenological reduction) is one which must be negated by what is effectively the bracketing of itself - thereby making the whole enterprise null and void.

Can the 'ideal' of apodicticity - absolute certainty or immediate self-verification - be one which persists as an essential teleological guide through each successive reduction without being touched by the effects of bracketing itself? Does this ideal maintain itself as a determinate unchanging form throughout the various strategic manoeuvres of phenomenological research - or is it one which undergoes modification through the undermining style of the activity itself?

Nor should the prime directive "to the matters themselves" be understood in terms which presuppose an objective realm of determinate 'things' (as one pole of a dualistic ontology) which are to be grasped and 'fully' explicated within the fold of a totalizing science. This banner under which phenomenological inquiry guides itself is a 'methodological' imperative which does not directly focus on the 'objects' with which it is engaged, but rather on the 'style of engagement' in which these objects are disclosed, on the 'attitude' of research in general: a demand for resolute vigilance against an all too familiar tendency to slip into a form of complacency in which axiomatization tyrannically wields its authority without opposition.

In essence, then, one of the integral themes characteristic of the attitude and conduct of phenomenological inquiry is a constant preparedness to put its own judgements and those of any other 'system' into question. The *epoché*, as the articulation of this resolution, is indicative of a motivational force which is fundamentally deconstructive in spirit.

The idea of perfect evidence may act as the form of the initial motivational factor which 'ideally' extends towards totalization, but it is also to be understood (as will be shown below) in relation to an 'idea' in the Kantian sense as both a regulative principle and the expression of the open-endedness of an ever receding horizon - totality and infinity. The essential theme of phenomenology is its emphasis on the quality of the journey, in terms of its methodological rigour, rather than a simple immersion in its objects or a mere impatient anticipation of a terminus.

Ultimately, the phenomenological quest is one which manifests itself as a perpetual return to beginnings where the essential focus is not one which simply loses itself in contemplation of the objects (within the strict limits of a predetermined and inflexible objective) of its activity, but is a reflexive directing of its attention to the unfolding of the 'activity' itself; an attempt to draw some kind of understanding about the 'ways' in which we ask questions - the manner or modes of thinking itself.

As Heidegger remarks in *Being and Time*:

*The expression phenomenology signifies primarily a methodological conception. This expression does not characterize*

Husserl provides a clear explication of the scope of eidetic analysis when he writes:

*Starting with this table-perception as an example, we vary the perceptual object, table, with a completely free optionality, yet in such a manner that we keep perception fixed as perception of something, no matter what. Perhaps we begin by fictively changing the shape or colour of the object quite arbitrarily, keeping identical only its perceptual appearing. In other words: Abstaining from acceptance of its being, we change the fact of this perception into a pure possibility, one among other quite 'optional' pure possibilities - but possibilities that are possible perceptions. We, so to speak, shift the actual perception into the realm of non-actualities, the realm of the as-if which supplies us with 'pure' possibilities, pure of everything that restricts to this fact or to any fact whatever.<sup>4</sup>*

In view of the potentially infinite field of possible modes of imaginative variation (pure phantasy) that can be opened up by this procedure, an essential theme is clear. The eidetic reduction and phenomenological reduction operate as a form of methodological spacing (distanciation through imaginative constitution); a breach in the idea of 'absolute totalization' - a movement into an 'infinite' horizon of possible research. Of course, taken to its logical limits the *epoché* has no essential limitations other than those arbitrarily imposed by the mediator himself. But then the phenomenological reduction is an 'empty' gesture without a guiding idea or regulative principle to endow it with sense and direction.

Are we to understand this 'idea' as one which is and remains a presupposition despite Husserl's intention to suspend that which does not conform to his demand for perfect evidence - a demand which bases itself on the ungrounded idea of the possibility of perfect evidence?

On the contrary, this 'demand' should be understood as a direct reference not to the totalization of the content of scientific inquiry in general, but to the possibility of method - a rigorous self-questioning enterprise which, although guided by a 'provisional' aim, is effectively open-ended in terms of the multifarious forms of its possible application.

*the what of the objects of philosophical research, but rather the how of that research.*<sup>5</sup>

Each space or sphere opened up by phenomenological reduction has its own rules (in the sense of 'logical' systematicity) but not infrangible limits which act as a mental strait-jacket. The movement of spacing by *epoché* is one which expands horizons of possible research by its interminable construction of alternative themes - but it does so in a way that presupposes some form of 'logical' contribution operative at a deeper level. Logic, for Husserl, is a far broader realm than the 'regional' logics of the 'natural attitude' which he is intent on putting out of play. Husserl insists that logic (or, for our purposes, its etymological root: *logos* - reason - the word) is operative on all levels, providing the substance by which all higher spheres understand themselves - which of course includes phenomenology. In this sense we appear to have an absolute limit to what the *epoché* can actually bracket.

Therefore the objection, alluded to earlier, that the *epoché* is a futile gesture because it cannot free itself of presuppositions 'absolutely' without thereby annulling itself is a naive and misguided appropriation of the meaning of phenomenological reduction. The essential point is that one can put in abeyance specific judgements about being or truth and falsehood in relation to a particular theme without causing the whole procedure to collapse - at no time is there a suspension of *logos* itself. The opening of phenomenology unto itself is an infinite movement of self-appropriation through the methodological uncovering of the grounds of its own possibility.

It is this fundamental recognition of the necessity of primordial, 'essential' structures underlying all possible experience (presupposed by the fact of consciousness, which, for Husserl, remains as a phenomenological residuum) that guides the reduction through its various stages as a "unity of an act of rupturing which permits anticipating the unity of an act of constituting"<sup>6</sup> and which establishes an endlessly open horizon of possible work. Eidetic research (fictive play) is the very form of phenomenological movement.

Finally, to conclude this section, it would be beneficial to make reference to a certain disjunction which should clear up the question about totalization once and for all. Husserl makes a firm distinction between the *éide*, which are the morphological essences of a 'thing' as it is given in experience through a harmonious flow of 'aspects' (the fundamental characteristics of a thing

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without which the object would not be what it is i.e. spatio-temporal extension, shape, density, any complex of meanings as 'cultural object', the roundness or straightness of its contours, etc.), and the 'thing' itself in the sense of a Kantian *Idea* - a regulative principle towards which the *éide*, as 'essential moments' of the 'thing', aim - though only asymptotically.

Levinas neatly describes this interminable tension when he writes,

*That idea [in the Kantian sense] has its origin from the comparison of a series of 'éide' in which there is disclosed a gradation toward a goal which is continually approached but never reached, in other words toward an ideal.*<sup>7</sup>

This asymptotic relationship may also be understood in terms of the way in which phenomenology moves toward its own realization in the ideal at which it aims without ever reaching or achieving coincidence with the form of its goal. Each successive reduction in its production of further possibilities undermines the form of the ideal postulated in a prior sphere - thereby altering the ways in which it attempts to appropriate itself according to what is always a provisional and constantly shifting limit.

And today? The age of phenomenological philosophy seems to be over. It is already taken as something past which is only recorded historically with other schools of philosophy. But in what is most its own phenomenology is not a school. It is the possibility of thinking (at times changing and only thus persisting), of corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought. If phenomenology is thus experienced and retained, it can disappear as a designation in favour of the matter of thinking whose manifestness remains a mystery. Its essential character does not consist in being actual as a philosophical school. Higher than actuality stands possibility. The comprehension of phenomenology consists solely in grasping it as possibility.<sup>8</sup>

### Rigour and Play

Here we must begin to speak of the foreground articulation of method and strategy, the cutting edge: style. In *Speech and Phenomena* Derrida employs a 'textual maieutic' technique - a procedure which seeks to transgress the

limits of the Husserlian phenomenological space:

*by setting down and demonstrating various contradictory or untenable propositions within it, attempting thereby to institute a kind of insecurity and to open it up to the outside. This can only be done from a certain inside.<sup>9</sup>*

However, despite Derrida's disclosure of his intended strategy as one which will attempt to cause a breach from 'within' the Husserlian phenomenological space we will later question whether this is an accurate representation of what Derrida does in practice. We have attempted to show that phenomenology is a self-reflexive movement - an expanding horizon within which there are many regions. Derrida often allows these different spaces to bleed into one another without addressing the sequential and schematic differences between them by frequently (as Derrida himself writes) "Skipping over many mediations and inverting the apparent order."<sup>10</sup>

Derrida's strategy, in this particular work, is his most traditionally oriented form of critical engagement with a text. He writes with precision - a methodic rigour that is not unlike the obsessively systematic precision so characteristic of Husserl's writings. Derrida also writes with a specific goal in mind - though not one that is subsumed under the umbrella of a limiting *telos* which is meant to 'totalize' his aim. The attempt to bring about the fragmentation of the traditional Western metaphysical idea of presence is a project which comports itself in such a way as to aim 'beyond' its apparent limits into 'openness'. The moment of transgression, for Derrida, is the dissolution of a totalizing *telos* - which brings us to the strategy of 'play'.

It will eventually become apparent that this move, is only possible against a phenomenological background through the initiation of a form of *epoché* - a movement of suspension and distanciation through differentiation and deferral whose strategic force is one which allows freedom from the constraints of any determinate set of values within the field of research. At the appropriate point we must ask, therefore, whether the Derridian fracturing of limits is one which takes place within the fold of an expanding phenomenological enterprise or one which propels Derrida beyond it.

### Inter-Textuality and the Compression of Time

*One needs to orient oneself within Husserl's work. Each text is a labyrinth with several entries and perhaps several centres, each relative to different perspectives on the total work. Comparison between the Logical Investigations and Ideas is, therefore, not simple, because the two works are neither on the same plane of reflection nor on the same line of entry to the heart of phenomenology.<sup>11</sup>*

In *Speech and Phenomena* Derrida suggests that Husserl's style of inquiry is entrenched in a metaphysical and phonocentric tradition which operates according to a vocabulary laid down by Plato - a tradition which, according to Derrida, underwrites the phenomenological manoeuvre of reduction and which abides throughout the whole enterprise despite Husserl's intention to free the project from naive metaphysical dogma.

Derrida starts his analysis by attempting to uncover the points at which he believes the phenomenological project begins to break down on the basis of the early distinctions (between various types of signification) postulated by Husserl in his seminal work, the *Logical Investigations*. Derrida does this by employing the same methods, thereby exploiting each philosophical move which seems to hinge on these divisions by showing its weakness in an appeal to criteria often only available in Husserl's own 'later' work - beyond the sphere in which the separation between expression [*Ausdruck*] and indication [*Anzeichen*] is a legitimate first level 'dialogical' distinction.

Derrida believes that by undermining the distinction Husserl makes between expression and indication, and by showing that self-presence relies on no such 'immediate' expressive experience unmediated by representative indication, that he will effectively undermine the fundamental principles upon which phenomenology rests. In taking this position, Derrida seems to be conflating a 'moment' of phenomenological practice (a particular schematic sphere) with the 'movement' constitutive of its possibility - undervaluing the meaning of the animating form of phenomenology, namely, phenomenological reduction [*epoché*].

Husserl, in the early phase of analysis where the distinction between expression and indication is drawn, is attempting to show the heterogeneity

between 'meaning as meant' (the stratum of expression - which will later be described as the noético-noematic sphere of 'lived' experience) and meaning as 'inferred' by the Other through an indicative medium. That is, Husserl's analysis is one which focuses on the discursive 'space' between speaker and auditor, which takes as its starting point the alterity between an 'intended meaning' in the act of 'declaration' (the meaning of the locution precisely-as-it-is-meant) and the open-endedness of possible 'interpretations' by the auditor who pin-points the meaning of the locution through his/her own intentional acts of appropriation (which are always creative, never merely passive - and, therefore, never 'wholly' coincidental with the intentions of the speaker).

*Mutual understanding demands a certain correlation among the mental acts, mutually unfolded in intimation and in receipt of such intimation, but not at all their exact resemblance.*<sup>12</sup>

Indicative discursive interplay at best provides the form of a fluctuating congruence between individuals (independent intentional loci) - where the locutions or verbal expressions do not 'express' (fully disclose) the meaning-intention 'as meant' (lived) by the speaker, but only intimate/indicate the speaker's intention to communicate something to the listener through a mediating network of signs - a medium which presents us with a surplus of meanings whose contours never exactly coincide between the two poles of saying and interpreting. In other words, the locution only 'indicates' the object of a meaningful intention which initiated the act of discourse and does not immediately or directly express the 'way' in which the locution was 'intended'. Each utterance, therefore, has sense [*Sinn*] and expresses meaning [*Bedeutung*] in that it may refer to a common referent, but it only serves to indicate and not express the 'way' in which the meaning was intended. It is a simple distinction between 'the meant' and the 'way-in-which-something-is-meant' [*Bedeutung* and *Bedeuten*].

When Derrida writes: "In declaring this distinction illegitimate, we anticipate a whole chain of formidable consequences for phenomenology"<sup>13</sup> he makes no distinction between Husserl's own initial sphere of investigation (in other words Husserl's own particular utilization of phenomenological procedures 'at that time') and the limits of phenomenology itself. Husserl is attempting to show that there is a relative homogeneity of meaning as experienced within one's own sphere of consciousness (in contradistinction to mediated

engagement with the Other) where these meanings are 'immanent as intentional acts' - which forces us to consider the 'ways' in which consciousness relates itself to the objects toward which it is directed through discourse. Strategically, this sphere is treated as one which is pre-dialogical, where 'discursive' (indicative/representative) forms of signification are superfluous.

Husserl, at this stage of the investigation, wishes to focus on the ways in which appearances present themselves within experience - where consciousness is the phenomenological remainder and one which is 'lived' rather than represented to oneself as if to an Other. This is a 'schematic' necessity in view of the fact that Husserl is trying to devise a strategy where one can withdraw from traditional metaphysical dualism - that is, abstain from presupposing the Other - in an attempt to understand how alterity is experienced as a phenomenon, thereby allowing for the possibility of a re-emergence into exteriority as it is given qua phenomenon. This is not to set up an implacable distinction between inner and outer, but is rather an attempt to eventually disclose their interdependency.

Derrida's emphatic deployment of his criticism of the expression/indication distinction is inappropriate if he believes that phenomenology rests on this foundation - and is doubly inappropriate in terms of the exteriority of the 'vantage point' from which he attacks it. The breakdown of the distinction (which is decisive on a more general meta-genetic level) is precisely due to the 'alternative space' Derrida has opened up - one which is 'schematically' incommensurable with the sphere within which the distinction operates in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. Husserl (in this phase) and Derrida are effectively operating within two different dimensions - two different attitudes; they do not address the 'content' of their work on the same level. The distinction between indication and expression defines the space not of phenomenology in general but of the sphere opened up by Husserl himself given his 'aims' at that time. We thus have a distinction between phenomenology as a 'methodological conception' and the manner of its application (the 'particular aims' which motivate its use).

In contradistinction to his original intention, Derrida clearly imposes himself from outside - not from outside a possible phenomenological horizon but from outside the regional sphere set up by Husserl as one moment of an expanding horizon. Derrida's analysis of Husserl is one which effectively

squashes time in the sense that the 'movement' of phenomenology - a process of duration (continually evolving) which stretches throughout Husserl's lifetime and potentially beyond it - is compressed into one reified, atemporal sphere.

Derrida writes:

*One must admit that the criterion for the distinction between expression and indication in the end rests on an all too summary description of 'inner life'.<sup>14</sup>*

From the vantage point of the horizon which (on principle) supersedes this distinction, this is, indeed, true - but then Husserl, at this stage of the analysis, does not have the benefit of hindsight, the recourse to criteria established in his own 'later' work (first opened up by the path to which the distinction leads) that Derrida wields against him. Derrida's polemic against the 'purity' of the 'expressive stratum' of noeses and noemata (which is meant to be free of mediate indicative forms of signification) is one which - through the appropriation of insights achieved phenomenologically - bases itself within the horizon opened up by Husserl's treatment of inner time consciousness<sup>15</sup> (another sphere of inquiry) where 'signification in general', as opposed to mere expression, is always implicated in the possibility of 'repetition'. Repetition and return are to be understood as the condition of the possibility of 'ideal' structures of sense which are themselves the condition of any experience whatsoever. But this analysis operates on a meta-level which does not address the relatively simple distinction Husserl is attempting to uncover on a higher 'dialogical' plane which is meant to facilitate a movement to the sphere of 'intentional analysis'. It is true that the *de jure* bifurcation between indication and expression does break down at the level of temporalization, but it is necessary to uncover this first. Such disclosure is achieved through a reflexive phenomenological-deconstruction of the specific applications and 'schematic' relations which define the evolving spaces/dimensions of phenomenological research (and whose potential rely on the possibility of radical distanciation through *epoché*). This is a continuation of a phenomenological unfolding-of-itself-to-itself through multiple spheres of 'genetic' analysis - further moments of open-ended movement. Derrida's 'strategic' beginning is precisely Husserl's 'methodological' endpoint.

At the level of internal time consciousness we come up against the limits of possible reflection where consciousness, always ahead of itself (the temporal streaming being the very form of its existence - *ekstasis*), cannot achieve experiential contemporaneity or coincidence with itself as this 'streaming'. Consciousness cannot catch itself other than in its effect - it cannot appropriate itself other than as performance. The idea of immediate presence becomes fragmented into a flux of temporal 'signs', 'spacings', retentions and protentions which allow the possibility of the persistence of themes (as 'ideal' entities) through time - an endless temporalizing mimetic activity providing the conditions for the possibility of unity and, ultimately, of presence.

That meaning (as 'ideal') is only possible through 'signification in general', which presupposes temporalizing repetition - the 'return of the same' - as the form of all experience and thereby relegates 'expression' to 'effect', is an insight that is achieved phenomenologically through *epoché* from an analysis of pure appearing to the 'conditions' of this appearing. In other words, one first withdraws from exteriority (from that which is, at first, postulated as being extraneous to the immediacy of experiential phenomena) by employing the procedure of reduction. By imaginative variation, one then continues to suspend that which 'seems' to be the essence of what is to be investigated until one is inexorably drawn back into exteriority through the insight of the very conditions of the possibility of this 'activity'. One first has to move 'to' problematic immanence in order to conceive of the radical alterity to which Derrida's style is the 'index'. Derrida, in contradistinction to Husserl, has simply opted to thrust himself into the exteriorizing part of this cycle. Which is perfectly admissible only in that Husserl has done all the essential preliminary leg work.

As Heidegger reminds us:

*It is very easy and pleasant to make great projections after the great barricades of prejudice have been breached, after the horizon has been laid open, but then one forgets that the crucial work in the field of philosophical research is always this first step, namely, the work of laying open and disclosing as such.<sup>16</sup>*

### The Criticism of the Criticism of...

Has Derrida misappropriated the significance of phenomenological *epoché* by assuming that the phenomenological method is merely an analytical procedure which seeks to become coincidental with an initial, predetermined and unchanging ideal projected as *telos*? Derrida's reading obscures the reflexive (self-critical) movement of phenomenology towards an infinite horizon of possibilities - its continual development of innumerable 'ways' or attitudes in a never ending series of appropriations and re-evaluations of itself). He persistently conflates various different levels (modes) of phenomenological investigation on the assumption that each sphere not only interests itself in the same objects as the others but also that they share the same 'attitudes'. This is a misconception of the central dynamic of phenomenological movement, and does not by any means serve as an indication of Husserl's entrenchment in a 'naive' metaphysics of presence and in the belief in totalization (the possibility of realizing an absolute grounding/total apodicticity). There is a difference between 'completeness of meaning' (totalization) and 'specificity within limits' (parameters which can allow of infinite expansion). It is the latter which is of legitimate philosophical interest to phenomenology and hermeneutics.

In the conclusion of the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl presents us with the full meaning of phenomenology's 'perpetual return to beginnings' when he writes

*Meanwhile we have lost sight of the demand so seriously made at the beginning - namely that an apodictic knowledge, as the only 'genuinely scientific' knowledge, be achieved; but we have by no means dropped it. Only we preferred to sketch in outline the tremendous wealth of problems belonging to the first stage of phenomenology - a stage which in its own manner is itself still infected with a certain naivete [the naivete of apodicticity]... All transcendental - philosophical theory of knowledge, as 'criticism of knowledge' leads back ultimately to criticism of transcendental-phenomenological knowledge (in the first place, criticism of transcendental experience); and, owing to the essential reflexive relation of phenomenology to itself, this criticism also demands a criticism.<sup>17</sup>*

Derrida is concerned with breaking down the chimera of 'specificity' (full concrete presence) as perpetuated by the traditional Western philosophical perspective - which he believes phenomenology represents. But phenomenology resists this form of pigeon-holing by the very manner in which it operates. It is an open-ended mode of inquiry which seeks not to add to knowledge (in the sense of any traditional epistemological project, existing science or metaphysics) but to widen the parameters of what is taken, within the 'natural attitude', to be self-evident in the act of questioning. Phenomenology is a testing of limits which, in attempting to banish all presuppositional thinking, proceeds on the basis of its own critically reflexive engagement with itself.

### The Rigour of Play

Each question carries temporality with it, projecting itself into a possible future of answers. Every act of inquiry seeks its own fulfilment - it 'anticipates'. And yet, as shown by the arguments above, the movement of phenomenology - as successive reductions - is one which brings about the continuous modification of the form of the 'motivating idea' which seeks realization in the future, thus sowing the seeds of doubt about the possibility of adequate fulfilment. But if this is the case, are we then to be reduced to apathy, a cessation of all activity, or does the act of questioning take on new meaning? Is anticipation a directedness towards the future which always only relates itself to a determinable event, sphere, plateau, or specific quantum of meaning, as in the sense of 'expectation', or might it not be a more primordial 'openness to possibility' - an infinite movement in which 'expectation' is merely a possible moment or mode? The undercurrent themes which have silently accompanied the investigations so far finally emerge in the asking of this question.

Does the initial ideal (*telos*) define the axioms and procedures that are to be employed for its future recovery - or is this ideal itself a malleable 'series' of possible (though unactualized) constructions which owe their fleeting permutations of form to the very operations they were meant to initiate? Do all acts originate from the concrete? Does 'writing' or 'consciousness' seek to reappropriate this ground? Or, alternatively, does activity begin in darkness as an originary outward thrust into possibility which then recoils from this vertiginous openness to the abyss by setting limits to its own



project(ion) in a desperate attempt to constitute, actualize, produce a ground in flight from nothing? Or, perhaps we cannot speak of a beginning at all?

The notion of a 'beginning' tends to carry with it the sense of an instantaneous determinate 'event' - one which relates itself to death in both the manner of its directedness towards its end (which, in the appropriation of its *telos*, would be the end of the beginning) and the void which constitutes the background from which a beginning must first emerge. The conclusion of any project is always, in a way, like a mini-death (*petit-mort*) - the pinnacle of its self-fulfilment being contemporaneous with its extinction as a 'striving'. Metaphysics, understood (in the Heideggerian sense) as flight from angst, seeks to radically annihilate itself in its attempts to ground Being (tame it, reify it) by cutting itself off from the source of its own possibility (the meaning of its 'becoming' - its 'standing out from itself' as an 'ekstatic' project) by its refusal to come to terms with the temporality of Being. The history of metaphysics is one of oppositional tension and repetition - a recursive fold characterized by a simultaneous motion of 'revelation and concealment' - a striving for the comfort of full self-presence through its 'forgetting of the meaning of Being'. The desire for self-coincidence in a *telos* which is fully revelatory of absolute presence concretely grounded in the 'instant', and therefore outside time (beyond its effects of erosion), is doomed to non-fulfilment. Since the striving to grasp actuality presupposes a more primordial openness to it as possibility (as the condition of the possibility of the question which characterises the striving) the project is one which must inevitably turn in upon itself, not as if upon a 'thing', but as a return to the condition of its 'agitation' (its existence) - the 'nothing' out of which it emerges in anguish. Death is not merely a terminal 'event' but the primordial horizon in which something may 'stand out' as an 'event' - the very condition of a beginning. The structure of repetition, the endless replaying of death (whose spacing presupposes the nothing) allows presencing - the 'standing out of an event' - to spring forth by proclaiming itself as 'not-nothing'. In this sense, nothingness, void, death, is equivalent to a horizon of possibility.

Heidegger, during his discussion on various modes of Being- towards-death, carefully sets up a distinction between expectation and anticipation.<sup>18</sup> It is pointed out that Dasein's authentic comportment towards death is not to be understood as 'expectation' which grasps the 'actual form' of an impending 'event', but is to be seen in the sense of an 'anticipatory running ahead'

(without rushing headlong into...) - the 'anticipation' of possibility 'as possibility' - where in coming "closer understandingly, the possibility of the possible just becomes 'greater'."<sup>19</sup> Heidegger does not fix his sights on a possible description of a 'determinable event' - death cannot be contained. Being-towards-death is not a Being-towards an experienceable 'way-of-Being' (which would be a logical impossibility) but is to be understood as that manner of Being- towards which is disclosive of Dasein's own existence 'as possibility' in the face of the 'possibility of the impossibility of existence'.

*In accordance with its essence, this possibility offers no support for becoming intent on something, 'picturing' to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility. Being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first makes this possibility possible, and sets it free as possibility...Anticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one's ownmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being.*<sup>20</sup>

Here, through a phenomenological transgression of 'limits' - where the meaning of 'anticipation' is uncovered as an interminable thrust towards 'possibility' - we find ourselves at a crossroads where phenomenology and deconstruction coincide in their disclosure of the horizon of 'play'.

Like phenomenology, Derrida's manner of philosophizing adds nothing to any existing body of thought. He 'opens' the field within the attitude of play. His strategy, free of the limits imposed by the obsession for closure, is one of constant readiness to reflect upon its own activity; the dynamism of its flow within the crawl-spaces thinly veiled by the metaphysics of presence (a metaphysics borne in anguish and whose every object of revelation conceals a determinate act of negation, disavowal, flight). Derrida's aim is to plunge into the incarnation of historical repression, axiomatic rationalization and systematic self-delusion within the bounds of philosophical discourse - to open it up - cause a breach - thereby opening the flood-gates to an infinite surplus of meanings within the text and an open horizon of *différance*.

### The Question

How are we to extend our study to the question of *différance*? Can one experience it? Could one recognize the alterity of absolute non-presence (*différance*) simply as a determinate absence in its fracturing of the fabric of presence? Is *différance* the moment that 'appears' as non-presence (if one can excuse the paradox), limited by a determinate breakdown within the system - a tangible breakdown which indicates or points to *différance* through various forms of determinate absences?

But a determinate absence is merely a sign of the 'non-fulfilment' of an 'expected' presence, a sign of the breakdown of a 'naively' established language in which there is the expectation of the immanent presence of a determinate form. Its ghost provides the contours of the absence beyond its own collapse. As a vague indicator of *différance*, it more immediately 'expresses' the absence of 'what was anticipated' as 'presence': a mere presence turned inside out - its own absence as a presence - presence reflecting itself as non-presence of itself. This, as we shall see, is not *différance*.

As can be seen in the above, it is quite apparent that the very distinction against which Derrida polemicalizes in *Speech and Phenomena* is at work in any preliminary delineation of what *différance* is not. Accordingly, we can resort to the expediency of re-invoking the Husserlian distinction between expression and indication in order to express the proximity and distance peculiar to *différance*. We refer to the sign of a determinate absence as the 'expression of the non-fulfilment of an anticipated presence' - one which (from the point of view of presence) does not express but merely 'indicates' (points to) *différance* 'without revealing it'.

### The Ultimate Lacuna

Derrida introduces us to the "thought of *différance* by the theme of the strategy or stratagem."<sup>21</sup> He maintains an attitude of non-teleological intent, his style reflecting the ambiguities, ambivalences and endlessly open horizons of possibilities - the kinds of in-betweenness which always threaten to explode into the veiled spaces between the concrete dualisms of classical Western metaphysics. Within, or better, 'through' his style, Derrida (without seeking an elusive Grail) steers between the Scylla and Charybdis of the

onto-theological islands and whirlpools of a kind of Kantian scenario<sup>22</sup>: islands approached in the anticipation of rest - a concrete terminus - a lust for the appropriation of a 'ground' - to take comfort (in the negation of lust) within the reassuring arms of 'groundedness'. Like a voyage through a kind of 'textual' stream of consciousness (as chargeable as an Heraclitean flux) fluidly breaking down the reductive parameters of systematization and speculative metaphysical assumptions, we find ourselves reflexively engaging in a journey through 'philosophy as a kind of writing'<sup>23</sup> - oscillating between alternative and chimerical land-spaces, properties (propositions for the appropriating) and experiencing the irreverent humour of a deconstructive parody of traditional Western metaphysical notions of philosophical 'propriety' and its self-perpetuating and endlessly bi-polar classification of presence.

Difference and deferral are the conditions for thinghood, presence, individuation of any kind (they define spatio-temporality). They are not to be understood as mere determinate differences registered purely in terms of their relation to some kind of primordial presence. Derrida's strategy is one which, by its movement, will attempt to disclose that the possibility of individuation lies in repetition and exclusion (spatio-temporal distanciation) the trace, *différance*.

Although presence (according to Derrida) owes its very possibility to *différance*, it is only through the metaphysics of presence, as it begins to break down, that we can become aware of *différance* (in its fracturing of the fabric of presence) through a kind of limited fissure. However, it is to be understood (as previously explained) that this 'determinate absence' - that is, a lacuna described within the metaphysics of presence as a 'lack' of determinate presence - is not *différance*; no more than the 'form of roundness' could be said to be in a 'particular ball' instead of the ball having the characteristics of roundness in general. One would not say that roundness was 'over there' - that is, pin-point roundness in general by limiting it to a particular location in space.

Articulation is the disclosure of presence - but in an attempt to grasp *différance*, we find that all articulation is entrenched in a metaphysic which 'conceals' *différance* (due to its fascination in that which comes to pass as presence) in and through its attempts to describe it within the limits of the language of presence.

Is it impossible, then, for the trace to articulate itself as its own 'theme', to unfold itself under its own gaze, bring itself to presence? To ask this question implies a radical misconception of the meaning of *différance*: any 'presentation' of itself would never be 'it' itself, the trace cannot become an 'object'. The trace as the differential/deferral 'return of the same' allows 'presenting - the 'articulating' of the articulated - but never the articulating of itself 'as trace'.

*Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presenting of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the 'a' in writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in différance.*<sup>24</sup>

If it is clear, as Derrida seems to think it is, that philosophical discourse is thoroughly immersed in a metaphysics of presence (in which our very language reflects wonder in the face of presence and our burning curiosity about why there is presence at all rather than nothing) 'how' is it possible to attend to *différance*? In other words, how are we to envisage the manner of our approach?

It can be argued that Derrida is, in fact, attempting to disclose the necessary 'conditions' for the possibility of experience and identity - 'presence' - which, despite his radical style, would effectively place him within a traditional historical enterprise shared by Kant and Husserl. Kant's 'Copernican revolution' was an attempt to establish the conditions of experience within the field of transcendental subjectivity, while retaining (some might say illegitimately, given the limits of his system) the notion of a noumenal realm of 'things in themselves'.<sup>25</sup> Husserl, in noting that his investigations always seemed to refer back to a transcendental unity of apperception, sought the conditions of experience at the level of 'passive genesis': temporalizing consciousness. As shown above, it is in the approach to the question of temporality that we begin to address the possibility of the persistence of themes or identity through change.

The movement to *différance* is a fascinating one which finds its most immediate roots in an opposition between Husserl and Saussure. Derrida, when 'provisionally' adopting a Saussurean notion of language, is attempting to show that meanings owe their determinacy to their relations of difference

within language which is no-thing but a 'network of differences'. Husserl, on the other hand, is attempting to show how individual things (meanings) are such due to general essences which provide 'unity' among differences i.e. such as the essence of 'similarity'. Husserl's position might be characterized as follows:

*In every case...the consciousness of otherness of difference presupposes a unity. In change, and likewise with alteration something enduring must be present - something which makes up the identity of that which is altered or undergoes change.*<sup>26</sup>

Alternatively, Derrida writes:

*the appearing and functioning of difference presupposes an originary synthesis not preceded by any absolute simplicity. Such would be the ordinary trace. Without retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. The [pure] trace is différance.*<sup>27</sup>

By employing a similar 'structure' to Husserl's declaration above (but inverting the content) we might state Derrida's position as follows:

*In every case the consciousness of homogeneity, of sameness presupposes difference - and that in every case the consciousness of otherness, of difference presupposes différance. In change and likewise with alteration, anything that might be said to endure as a 'present' unity which purportedly makes up the identity of that which is altered or undergoes change is itself only possible through différance.*

Derrida begins by provisionally occupying an opposite pole to Husserl (in his initial emphasis on difference) within the framework of a kind of metaphysical duality. He then initiates a movement beyond this 'tension of opposites' through a form of synthesis (a kind of inverted *Aufhebung*) thereby relegating presence/unity and difference/alterity to derivative positions within

the fold of *différance* - "the formation of form" and "the being-imprinted of the imprint."<sup>28</sup> As can be seen, in the quote taken from *Of Grammatology*, Derrida facilitates this movement through the application of a model that bears a rather striking resemblance to the structure of temporalization revealed in Husserl's *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*.

Although Derrida maintains that there cannot be a science of *différance*, he still aims at that which can be designated as a unifying though 'non-present' fold within which sameness and difference are made possible. Is this movement not the paradigm of the operation of *epoché*?

### Deconstruction - The Wake of Phenomenology?

Does Derrida assume that the movement beyond the 'values' of the metaphysics of presence (as he so defines phenomenology) towards *différance* is one which emerges from a phenomenological<sup>1</sup> background (understood as 'method') and yet is somehow not underwritten by this background? Has he in effect initiated the 'absolute' reduction - the *epoché* which obliterates its own ground or history? Is the initial move to *différance* a phenomenological one which ultimately surpasses itself, its past, its form structure, its own superego? Is this the negation of phenomenology by phenomenology - phenomenology cutting its own throat or, at the very least, the castration of that which imposed castrating limits on a potentially open field of possible 'play'?

Deconstruction is a dynamic disseminating force. It fragments all that it touches by unearthing a radical alterity in the heart of presence. It solicits (shakes foundations), disrupts linguistic conventions - it be-comes though never arrives. The movement-to (not just a negative theological movement-from) which seeks no terminus and which cannot arrive at a 'ground' (a reified self-coincidental presence), is the banishment of the totalizing ideal - the *telos*. The movement-to is a movement-out into 'openness'.

Has Derrida 'fully' determined, objectively classified, the methodological background from which deconstruction emerges? Has he captured and defined the essential 'sense' of phenomenology, (reduced it to mere determinate categories) by showing its 'absolute limits', thereby robbing it of any further possibility? Would not phenomenological vigilance, in keeping to its primary aim (one which characterises 'rigour' as a perpetual self-reflexive

questioning, by phenomenology, of the basis and methods of its own activity), simply refer back to itself in a new style (deconstructively); a further moment of a continuing process of re-evaluation, thereby eluding any 'specific' determination of itself or its objects? But this is the very attitude deconstruction exemplifies by the character of its own movement - that is, no mode of appropriation or critical engagement is ever absolute due to the possibility of opening up the field through further variations in perspective. This essential 'aspect' of phenomenology is the guiding force behind Derrida's strategic 'play of difference and deferral' and yet Derrida seems to forget this principle of conduct in his engagement with the question of the limits of phenomenology. How can one limit a form of research whose attitude is such that it not only demands the avoidance of saturation in the objects towards which it directs itself but also holds as 'potentially' suspect its own 'modes of engagement' which characterize the various spheres in which these objects come to be disclosed?

Understood in this manner, any observation by deconstruction of phenomenology's entrenchment in a naive metaphysic (located within a particular moment of phenomenological research) only marks the passage of phenomenology's development - its own treatment of itself. No one particular stage of phenomenological development is axiomatic to the point where it imposes an absolute limitation to possible supersession.

Derrida's 'rigorous strategy' is the articulation of this methodological ethic, and as a continuation of this attitude through a refinement of its interpretation, disallows the kind of transgression (beyond the movement of phenomenology) that he implicitly suggests. How can one radically surpass an 'attitude' through its strict delimitation when this very attitude towards which phenomenology strives (as its ideal) is, itself, that which defines the scope of deconstructive activity? Even the movement of spacing through *epoché* is one which only draws back from a 'particular delineation' of its guiding principle in order to allow its reappropriation in a richer form. We are reminded here of Wittgenstein's attempt to distance his own field of research from philosophy in general and the obvious fact that the very possibility of doing so is itself a philosophical question.

It has already been sketched in outline how Derrida has rigorously employed a technique which expresses the notion of infinite play as endless non-arrival - one that emerges through the possibility of *epoché*. In the context of this

essay, given the perspectives disclosed through the application of a phenomenologico-deconstructive method, could Derrida legitimately claim that he has surpassed phenomenology without simply confusing 'phenomenology in general' with the 'particular' spheres opened up by Husserl himself? Derrida has indeed moved beyond the limits 'provisionally' imposed by Husserl (in terms of the latter's 'use' of the reduction). But then the movement of *epoché*, which defines the possible scope of phenomenology in general (thereby being synonymous with it) has no 'actual' limitations (as Husserl understood) other than those that are arbitrarily assigned to it.<sup>29</sup> Through the method of 'perpetual return', Husserl laboured to develop new strategies, alternative horizons, without attempting to rigidly fix or totalize their boundaries. Implicit within Husserlian phenomenology is an invitation "to go with Husserl beyond Husserl."<sup>30</sup>

If Derrida's 'strategy' could be fixed under the heading of a particular category we might tentatively describe it as a 'strategy' which constantly undermines the possibility of its own fulfilment in some kind of determinate goal. But then, this is precisely its fulfilment as 'open-ended strategy' - its restless movement inducing a kind of philosophic vertigo as we find the foundations of 'habitual' thinking being ripped out from beneath our feet.

The efficacy of this 'strategy' clearly depends on the possibility of a certain 'suspension' of that which is generally taken for granted - the presuppositions which often govern philosophical thinking. When Derrida writes "no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field,"<sup>31</sup> the movement of *epoché* is already implicit in the strategic play of deconstruction, providing the very conditions for the possibility of the 'delineation of *différance*'. This 'movement' is the precise parallel to Husserl's original initiation of the methodological distanciation between his sphere of research and that of the 'natural attitude'<sup>32</sup> - the only essential difference being between Husserl's and Derrida's respective choices about which horizons (levels of generality) are to be opened up. It is the actual possibility of this 'distanciation' which is so extraordinary and which binds phenomenology and deconstruction together as the 'articulation' of this possibility. Once the primordial potentiality of this spacing is acknowledged the notion of 'totalization' falls victim to an explosive transgression through the emergence of that which already lies at the heart of the of the ideal as the very condition of the movement of 'appropriation' which was to realize it.

## BEYOND PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

We have shown that phenomenology, which finds its form through the movement of reduction, cannot be reduced to any one or number of its spheres. The *epoché* does not exhaust itself in its production. Phenomenology is precisely this possibility of ever new modes, levels or spheres being opened up by its ceaseless activity as *epoché*.

Therefore, it is argued that the movement to *différance* is not by any means one which pushes beyond phenomenology itself, but is a folding in on itself to the conditions of its possibility 'as openness'. Far from causing a breach, thereby surpassing phenomenology, Derrida has succeeded in expanding its parameters. The *epoché* is the soul of deconstruction - and, understood as open-ended 'strategy', deconstruction is the reflexive celebration of this possibility of infinite movement.

## Notes

1. Husserl: *Ideas*, sec. 79 - p. 213.
2. *Ibid.*, sec. 87 - p. 236.
3. *Eidos* - essence, shape, form, idea.
4. Husserl: *Cartesian Meditations*, 4th meditation, p. 70. [Henceforth referred to as *C.M.*]
5. Heidegger: *Being and Time*, pp. 49-50. (Henceforth referred to as *B.T.*)
6. Ricoeur: *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, p. 95.
7. Levinas: 'Intuition of Essences', in (ed. J. Kockelmans), *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, p. 103. (See bibliography.)
8. Heidegger: *On Time and Being*, p. 82.
9. Derrida: *Speech and Phenomena*, n., p. 57. (Henceforth referred to as *S.P.*)
10. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
11. Ricoeur: *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, p. 29.
12. Husserl: *Logical Investigations*, p. 278.
13. Derrida, *S.P.*, p. 56-7.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
15. Husserl: *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. (Henceforth referred to as *P.I.T.*)
16. Heidegger: *History of the Concept of Time*, pp. 68-69.
17. Husserl, *C.M.*, p. 151.

18. Heidegger, : "only because factual Dasein is thus awaiting its potentiality-for-Being, and is awaiting this potentiality in terms of that which it concerns itself, can it expect anything and wait for it [*erwarten und warten auf*...]. In each case some sort of awaiting must have disclosed the horizon and the range from which something can be expected. Expecting is founded upon awaiting, and is a mode of that future which temporalizes itself authentically as anticipation. Hence there lies in anticipation a more primordial Being-towards-death than in the concerned expecting of it" (*B.T.*, p. 387).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

21. Derrida, 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 7.

22. See the opening paragraphs to the section 'Phenomena and Noumena' in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

23. As Rorty once put it (see his *Consequences of Pragmatism*, University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

24. 'Différance', p. 23.

25. It is worth noting that, in the section 'Phenomena and Noumena' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there is an ambiguity about the actual role of the noumenon. It is unclear whether Kant uses the term in a 'doctrinal' sense (giving ontological status to a noumenal sphere of things in themselves) or merely as a 'schematic strategy' - a limiting concept "to curb the pretensions of sensibility" (A255-B311, p. 272).

26. Husserl, *PJT.*, p. 114.

27. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 62.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

29. See the opening paragraph to sec. 32 of Husserl's *Ideas*: "on good grounds we limit the universality of this *epoché*. For were it as inclusive as it is in general capable of being, then since every thesis and every judgement can be modified freely to any extent, and every objectivity that we can judge or criticize can be bracketed, no field would be left over for unmodified judgements, to say nothing of a science. But our design is just to uncover a new scientific domain, such as can be won precisely through the method of bracketing, though only through a definitely limited form of it" (p. 99.)

30. Welton, D., Introduction, in Langrebe: *The Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl*, p. 30.

31. Derrida, 'Différance', p. 7.

32. In accordance with our understanding of the non-reflexivity of the 'natural attitude' (which characterises simple immersion in its objects), the guiding principle of attitude towards and through which phenomenology and deconstruction attempt to

comport themselves is its 'anti-thesis' (in that it is objectless); or, to put it another way, the aim is one which constantly defers 'positional' totalization.

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