

## *Introduction*

The conviction that underpins this study is that Derrida's work confronts us with a theoretical thinking: a philosophy. If a certain proliferation of texts, themes and styles of writing make Derrida difficult reading, this difficulty stems from a theoretical overdetermination and *not* from the supposedly "literary" character of his work (at least if by "literary" one understands a sort of pure freedom in the play of writing, its being beholden or responsible to nothing other than itself—a conception, it should be said, that scarcely does justice to the idea of "literature"). There are very good reasons why reading Derrida is difficult, reasons that are specific to his body of work; this difficulty of reading, however, is essentially no different from that proper to any philosophical reading. If, as Derrida sometimes likes to put it, the sense [*sens*] of a text is never unveiled by a hermeneutic that takes the infinite as the temporal horizon of its task, for the simple reason that there is no such thing as the sense—in the singular—of a text, then this is something that his own texts can be said to share; which does not, of course, exempt us from attempting the most faithful interpretation possible.

The legitimacy of such a theoretical approach to Derrida's thinking does not strike me as something that could be contested, therefore, either in the name of a poorly understood conception of deconstruction—according to which the absence of a transcendental signified would allow us to dispense with all exegetical rigor—or in the name of an attitude that would seek to deny this thinking any force whatsoever, trusting all too quickly in its explosive appearance and dispensing accordingly with the work of reading.

There are clearly many ways into Derrida's oeuvre. So far as the present study is concerned, it is his relation to Husserl's phenomenology on the one hand and to Heidegger's phenomenology on the other that provides the point of entry and raises the following questions: What is it in Derrida's interpretation of Husserl that runs throughout the trajectory of his subsequent work, particularly through his confrontation with Heidegger? What is it that gives his first texts, which remain almost wholly "classical" in style, such a singular status? How, and why, is Husserl not simply the

first “object,” subsequently abandoned, of deconstruction, the first philosopher that Derrida would have subjected to his strategy of deconstructive reading? The reasons for the singular role played by Husserl in Derrida’s thinking are neither purely “chronological” nor simply “historical.” My hypothesis here is that the unique position occupied by Husserl in Derrida’s work cannot be explained—at least not fully—by his status as the first paradigm or exemplar of deconstruction. It seems to me that it is only through the singular interpretation that he gives of Husserl’s work that Derrida is able to find the formulation for his *own* questions, for those questions that he will continually repeat—and so, one might say, continually *alter* (repetition always involving alteration; such is the status of *ideality*, as thought by Derrida). Equally, if it is through an interpretation of Husserl that Derrida formulates his own questions, then, over and above all historical or biographical reasons one might cite, he does so because there is something in Husserl’s work that lends itself or gives rise to just such an elaboration. It is this “something” that I want to try to discover here. Let me say from the outset, then, that this “something” can be seen in the way Husserl raises—and profoundly renews—the question of the transcendental. It is the question of the *genesis* of the transcendental and of its failure that leads Derrida to think the irreducible “contamination” that lies at the very heart of his work. What contamination? The contamination of the empirical and the transcendental that, certain appearances to the contrary, is never an empty, formal structure but always the expression of a double demand—and a double fidelity—for which we will have to account, a demand—and a fidelity—that we will have to *think*. Yet the fact that this double demand ceaselessly guides Derrida’s confrontation with Heidegger implies that, between the two equally “deconstructive” readings, there is nonetheless a dissymmetry. Although Derrida undertakes to show, in Heidegger as in Husserl, the point at which the axiomatic of a discourse is called into question from within, the point at which the rigor of distinctions, which should be pure and untouchable, begins to founder, the gesture is not the same—not quite the same.

Through Derrida’s double confrontation with Husserl and Heidegger, I want to try to follow the trajectory of a *thought of contamination* of the finite and the infinite that no longer has any place either in a phenomenology—of the visible or of the invisible, it scarcely matters which—or in a thought of ontological difference; a thought of contamination that finds in writing its exemplary paradigm and is driven by an ethical urgency that becomes more and more legible.