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On Derrida's Iterability

—The Sameness between the Sensible and the Ideal—

Osaka University

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0. Introduction

Jacques Derrida（1930-2004）, who is a French philosopher, wrote about numerous topics in his books; for example, he has discussed politics, biology, mathematics, sexuality, linguistics, psychoanalysis, education, ethics, and so on. However some authors argue that, in short, Derrida's discussion is about language[1] even though Derrida wrote about a lot of themes. In fact, the three main books that Derrida wrote in the late 1960's -- *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, *Speech and Phenomena* -- might give the impression that Derrida is a philosopher, so to speak, of writing and language. Moreover it is true that Derrida was strongly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure who is a structural linguist. But, from only such a point of view, we would not be able to follow Derrida's variety of topics. However it is also true that, because of Derrida's fetish about language, we are confused when we read his books.

The purpose of this presentation is to, by analysing Derrida's notion of iterability, examine the sameness between the sensible and the ideal in order to reinterpret Derrida's text in a broad sense and to understand his project of deconstruction from his first book[2]. First, we will clarify the reason why the notion of iterability is important in Derrida's discussion. Second, we will see the relation between the iterability and the ideality through Derrida's reading of Husserl. Finally we will focus on Derrida's analysis of Husserl's sensible idealization.

1. The Role of Iterability in Derrida's Discourse

What is iterability? In *Signature Event Context*, Derrida wrote that iteration is not the repeating of identity, but the repetition to alter[3]. Hence, for Derrida, iteration is the strategy to reveal differences dismissed by a closed theoretical identity. However Derrida did not follow the distinction strictly. Therefore in this presentation, I use the word 'iteration' as the repetition to alter.

Derrida criticized the metaphysics of the presence like Husserl's phenomenology that regards the presence of the sense in the fulfilled original intuition as the principle of all principles. Derrida

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[1] Kaganoi（2005）said that Derrida's discussion is just in the problem of the language throughout and his interpretation of Husserl is mainly concerned with the transcendental or the ideal. Jean-Michael Salanskis（2008）also interpreted Derrida's thought in relation to the linguistic turn.

[2] Vicky Kirby（2011）, in her work, expressed her feeling when she was asked the reason why she uses the notion of the textuality while discussing the body.

[3] 'Signature Event Context' in *Marges de la philosohie* p.7

used iterability as a strategy against the metaphysics of the presence because iterability makes theoretical sense, which, based on intuitional evidence, deviates from *Now-and-Here* and functions in spite of the absence of the evidence of the original intuition. In *Speech and Phenomena*, published in 1967, Derrida criticized Living Present, the source of the evidence in the system of Husserl's phenomenology, for having always already been contaminated by 'the possibility of the repetition of the writing' and 'the possibility of death'[4].

This summary is not wrong but we have to pay attention to the fact that Derrida did not only criticize Husserl but exploitted Husserl's argument about ideality as his own notion of iterability. 'Absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition.'（SP p.52）Then we have to investigate the relation between iterability and ideality.

However, before investigating it I would like to propose some points to be discussed. First, from our point of view, this interpretation based on *Speech and Phenomena* or *Signature Event Context* is problematic because the description may lead us to a Derrida that is too idealistic and linguistic. On the one hand, Derrida **seems** to propose iterability as **the minimal determination of language**; on the other hand he wrote on **the relation between ideality and infinite iterability**. Second, in *Speech and Phenomena*, it seems that Derrida did not clearly show the reason why the repetition is possible. It is sure that he wrote that the ideal form of presence itself makes repetition possible[5]. But because at the same time Derrida also criticized the presence, we have to be careful to decide that Derrida's iterability is the ideal form of presence[6]. Besides, the explanation that language has iterability as the minimal determination is insufficient because I want to question the reason why iterability is possible.

In *Of grammatology*, Derrida wrote that **the trace is the origin of all repetition and ideality**[7]. In addition, **the（pure）trace is the differance**[8]. But what are the trace and the differance? The trace rooted in Levinas' works has a very important role in Derrida's work.

But in this presentation, I will not investigate the complicated system of the trace or the problem of the differance. Instead of investigating them, I will try to explain iterability with the clues of the character of the trace, the ambiguity between the sensible and the ideal.

Firstly, in the next chapter, we have to examine the relation between ideality and iterability in Derrida's reading of Husserl.

2. Iterability and Ideality

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[4] For example, in *Speech and Phenomena* chapter 7.
[5] *La voix et Le phénoméne* p.111
[6] Derrida did not refuse the value of presence completely. However it seems to be related to the problem of the singularity of the unrepeatable, the instant rather than iterability. Cf. Kei Kiritani（2014）
[7] De la grammatologie, p.95
[8] ibid,. p.92

In this section, we have to examine Husserl's discussion of the ideality on which Derrida's iterability seems to be based.

First, for Husserl, mathematical identities are privileged models as ideal identities through all of his works[9]. It is because geometrical objects are always the same for everyone. For example, the assertion 'the fastest artificial transportation is the train' is wrong in 2015. On the contrary 1+1 is always ２. The supratemporality of geometrical objects is the character of the objective ideality that Husserl aims to construct:

> What my assertion asserts, the content that the three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point, neither arises nor passes away.' 'Each time I（or whoever else it may be）pronounce with the same sense this same sense in this same assertion, there is a new judgment. （…）But what they judge, what the assertion says, is all the same thing.' 'It is **an identity in the strict sense**, one and the same geometrical truth.'（LI, I,pp.285-286）

Second, for Husserl, 'every ideal objectivity is produced by the act of a concrete consciousness.' We can compare Husserl's production with the Kantian revelation of mathematical objects. On the contrary, for Kant, 'the first geometer merely becomes conscious that it suffices for his mathematical activity to remain within a concept that it *already possesses.'* For Husserl, mathematical objects must be produced with intentional fulfillment by geometers.

This attitude of Husserl is related to the third point. Husserl wanted to think about the absolute identity of objective ideality, but the identity must not be a transcendental object in another world like a Platonist Idea because of his principle of principles. For Husserl, it is sure that ideal objects have supratemporality or timelessness distinguished from merely sensible objects. However the supratemporality is the **omnitemporality**:

> **[I]deality**, which is but **another name for the permanence of the same the possibility of its repetition**,（…） it does not come from another world; it depends entirely on the possibility of acts of its repetition. （…） absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition.（Speech and Phenomena p.52）

Then we have to focus on how Derrida used the word 'ideality' and 'ideal'. First, Derrida seems to criticize the pure ideality that means both the fulfilled identity and repeatability. But because Derrida clearly criticizes the metaphysics of presence, then ideality must be able to mean merely repeatability. Therefore we try to seek the iterability as **ideality without identity**.

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[9] In spite of changes in Husserl's theory, Derrida interprets the privilege as Husserl's consistency. *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction* p. 27

Second, although Derrida exploits the Husserlian ideality as repeatability, at the same time, Derrida's repeatability has to be the alteration. It must cover 'other in the same'. Hence Derrida's ideality is not based on the mathematical one.

In the next chapter, I would like to focus on sensible ideality as the model of ideality without identity, or so to speak, the proto-type of iterability. This is because Derrida developed the analysis of sensible idealization in *the Introduction to the Origin of the Geometry;* nevertheless, Husserl did not write about it clearly.

3. Sensible Idealization

For ideal identities of geometrical objects, Husserl thought they have to be transmittable in inter-subjective communities because, without the possibility of transmission, the geometrical objects that are produced in the subjective evidence of a geometer are just for him or her, that is to say, they are personal, not universal, and they cannot obtain their omnitemporality. It is here that Husserl needs the possibility of writing. Writing enables us to transmit the contents of geometrical truth not only in synchronic communities, but also in diachronic communities. Hence writing makes ideal identities perfect.

However when Husserl needs writing, at the same time, it means he introduces the sensible factual thing into the process of the constitution of ideality. In this process, writing is 'not merely a constituted sensible body (*Körper*), but was also a properly constituting body (*Leib*).' Husserl would reduce the factual danger of writing (*Körper*) and believe he could save 'the intentional primordiality of a Here-and-Now of truth' (*Leib*) *de jure*. However Derrida opposed his attitude because, in a word, *Körper* and *Leib* are *in fact* numerically one and the same existent[10]. Derrida point out the limit where fact and right are contaminated in Husserl's theory.

But it is strange that Derrida seems to treat the problem of writing in relation to the possibility of being destroyed rather than iteration. Introducing writing is necessary to constitute the omnitemporality of the ideal objectivity of mathematical objects. On the one hand, writing has the role of transmitting the memory of the original production of geometry but, on the other, it holds the possibility of being damaged and endangers the original evidence of geometrical idealities. This is the case that Derrida analyses in chapter 7. However, iterability is not focused on in spite of this argument of writing. It is because, in *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry*, Derrida treats writing by putting emphasis on its factual side.

Therefore, in *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry*, we must focus on the sensible ideality that is the product of imagination in the discussion about idealization. The sensible ideality is neither ideal objectivity like mathematics nor merely a sensible given. This instance, that is to say, the ideality without the identity and the resemblance which includes differences, supports Derrida's

[10] ibid,. pp.97-98

strategy of deconstruction.

In chapter 5, Derrida mentioned the distinction of three types of idealities: idealities of the word, bound idealities and free idealities based on Husserl's explanation in *Experience and Decision*. Derrida proposed the distinction among Husserl's idealities as below.

(1) the ideality of the sensible form of the signifier, the word
(2) the ideality of the signified or intended sense,
(3) the ideality of the object itself[11]

(1) and (2) are called the bound ideality because they are bound in real contingency to some extent. For example, the word 'lion' can be said many times and remain the same. But the word 'lion' is limited in factual subjectivity in a certain community in which people speak English. 'Lion' as the unity of intended sense has the higher ideality and is freer than the word 'lion'. Various languages can think the same content of the sense 'lion'. This ideality is free from all factual linguistic subjectivity. However the object itself is neither the expression of the sense nor the content of the sense. The object 'lion' is a natural, contingent reality. Therefore this level is also at the level of bound idealities.

On the contrary, geometrical idealities have absolute free ideality. This is the ideality of the highest level "the ideality of the object itself."

This distinction is, however, insufficient; nevertheless, it contains the possibility of sensible ideality, because it does not explain why ideality is possible.

However in *Introduction of Origin of Geometry*, Derrida proposes more detailed distinctions because, mainly in chapters 7 and 10, he treats the analysis of the sensible embodiment of the ideality in contrast to the analysis of the writing I mentioned above[12].

In chapter 7, Derrida proposes two cases concerned with sensible embodiment. First, the embodiment is the inscription of an absolutely '*free*' and objective ideality within the '*bound*' ideality; in other words, the embodiment is the inscription of a *freer* ideality within a less free ideality, for example, the incarnation of the geometrical truth within the word.[13] Second, 'the embodiment is inscription of a necessarily bound ideality within a real-sensible event.[14] It is the latter case that Derrida problematized. In the latter case, the inscription of a bound ideality within a real-sensible event, he proposes 'another step of **mediate ideality** which Husserl does not directly

[11] We can also see this distinction in *Speech and Phenomena*. In chapter 4 of *Speech and Phenomena*, SP p.52
[12] *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction* p.89. Leonard Lawler proposed to divide Derrida's discussion into four parts. But this division is not sufficient. (p.106)
[13] ibid. p.89
[14] ibid,.

describe, but which we think can be located on the basis of strictly Husserlian concepts.[15]'

Mediate ideality refers to **ideal vague morphological types** that are proper to the corporeality of graphic and vocal signs. This type of ideality does not have the ideal identity like mathematical objects but '**a certain identity'** which is imposed and recognized each time in the empirical fact of language.

Next, in chapter 10, Derrida analyzes Husserl's ideation. In *Origin of Geometry,* Husserl wrote that before exactitude emerges, proceeding from the factual, an essential form becomes recognizable through a method of variation[16]. Derrida interprets this sentence through the explanation in *Ideen 1* and *Crisis*. By imaginary variation, we can get '**inexact but pure morphological types**: "roundness" under which is constructed the geometrical ideality of the "circle".[17]'

This roundness is **sensible** in that it has to be distinguished from pure geometrical ideality, which is released from **all sensible or imaginative intuitiveness**[18]. However at the same time this roundness is called **pure sensible ideality**[19]. Besides, Derrida distinguished **a pure sensible ideality** from **a pure sensible reality**[20]. Then, from the description I presented above, we can get the relation between ideality and sensibility as below.

(1) **an objective ideality**
(2) **a bound ideality**
(3) **a pure sensible ideality**
(4) **a pure sensible reality**

In a sensible ideation, starting from (4) a pure sensible reality, at the level (3), we can get the minimal ideality which is repeatable. Besides, because a pure sensible ideality and a bound ideality are different from an objective ideality, both of them are related to iteration. Then what makes a pure sensible reality a pure sensible ideality makes iterability possible. Derrida surely wrote about it. It is imagination[21]:

> Only an imaginative intending can attain that **ideality in its pregeometrical purity**. But **this pure ideality** is of a sensible order and must be distinguished carefully from **pure**

[15] ibid,.
[16] ibid,. p.123
[17] ibid,. pp.123-124.
[18] Ibid,.
[19] ibid,.
[20] ibid,. p.125
[21] It is related with the imaginative variation used for getting the ideality. But for Husserl in *Origin of Geometry*, the role of the imagination seems to be a little bit changed because of the problem of the omnitemporality and the Idea in the Kantian sense.

geometrical ideality, which in itself is released from **all sensible or imaginative intuitiveness**. **The imagination** is what gives me **the pure morphological type**（…）.（ibid,. p.124）

After this analysis, following Husserl's discussion in *Origin of Geometry,* Derrida moved to the problem of the unity of the Idea in the Kantian sense.（'Starting from an anticipatory structure of intentionality, we go beyond morphological ideality toward the ideal and invariant pole of an infinite approximation.'（IOG p.134））As I wrote above, the supratemporality of the ideal identity means omnitemporality. Because of this character, the ideal identity must be supported 'infinitely' by repetition in fact. This 'infinity' must regulate the factual repetition toward the ideal identity although we cannot obtain this 'infinity' in fact. This 'regulative pole for every infinite task' is the Idea in the Kantian sense[22]. Although Husserl tries to regulate the factual contingency by the Idea in the Kantian sense, this Idea in the Kantian sense itself is out of the evidence of the presence because it remains **the infinite telos** for our finite existence in fact. The leap from the sensible to the ideal would be postponed infinitely in fact.

Telos =the Idea in Kantian sense
⑴ **an objective ideality**
----------Infinite Delay
⑵ **a bound ideality**
⑶ **a pure sensible ideality**
---------- Imagination
⑷ **a pure sensible reality**

Then, an objective ideality repeats the wholly identity but only in the infinite telos. A pure sensible reality cannot be repeated. A bound ideality and a pure sensible ideality produced by the imagination can repeat themselves, including in gaps. The iteration produced by the imagination produces the differences in the delay between the fact and the telos, although Husserl hoped for the unity of the ideal identities.

Here it is important that Derrida mentions 'an unforeseeable and inorganic proliferation of morphological types'.（IOG p.126) 'Unforeseeable'[23] is the character of an 'event' that is beyond Husserlian teleology in Derrida's later works. Even though Derrida wrote that the geometrical unity would not be influenced by the proliferation of forms[24], it was only as an explanation of Husserl's

[22] Ibid,. p.137
[23] Read Matsuda（2014）on 'foreseeable'.
[24] '[H]owever generous the proliferation of its forms and metamorphoses may be, they do not call again into question the unified sense of what, in this development, is to be thought of as the geometrical science' *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction* p.52

logic.

4. Conclusion

Iterability is often interpreted as a characteristic of language. It is reasonable in some sense because language is an exemplary in Derrida's discussion. However, as we confirmed, the imagination enables iteration as the repetition of minimal identity, the same under identity (for instance, phoneme, grapheme, roundness), rather than language (for example, the structure of signifier and signified used by structural linguistics). This shows that the problem of the iterability can be interpreted as a problem between the sensible and the ideal. This perspective can immediately be connected to Derrida's theory of the imagination, mimesis, fiction, specters, and so on. By regarding Derrida's theory as the something between the sensible and the ideal, we can understand more easily the reason why Derrida treated not only writing, language, literature but also, at the same time, virtual reality, technology, prostheses, and body. Body is not language. Derrida, however, had to think about body because it has ambiguity between binary logics.

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桐谷慧、ジャック・デリダにおける現前の問題の再検討、ジャック・デリダ没後１０年シンポジウム・プレセッション発表原稿、2014 年

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