"[T]he thing itself always steals away"[1]
Scholars and the Constitution of Their Objects of Study
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This year's NAASR program focuses

> on the things that we, as scholars of religion, study. What, for instance, counts as data? How is it imagined, handled, or constructed? … There exist longstanding and still active debates in the field regarding whether the items that we study pre-exist our approaches or whether our approaches actually create the conditions in which the former come into existence. It should come as no surprise, then, that the inter-relationship between theory, method, and data is complex and hardly settled.

My contribution to this discussion comes, in part, from a place of anger and frustration. Throughout my career I have consistently argued that scholars constitute their objects of study through the use of discourse. As such, from my perspective scholarship ought to take into account the active role of the scholar in the production of knowledge. This position is based on—at this point—more than 15 years of study of anti-realist philosophers, from G.W.F. Hegel to Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, John Dewey, Hilary Putnam, and Jan Westerhoff. None of these scholars is naively anti-realist. None of them argue that reality is made of discourse or that scholars can magically produce their objects of study by using words like magic wands. And yet, anti-realism is often caricatured as making such claims and cavalierly dismissed on the basis of such caricature.

For instance, recently I posted to Facebook the following quotation, found in Kocku von Stuckrad's excellent work, *The Scientification of Religion*: "[n]o discourse, no grid of classification, however familiar it may appear, has ever been derived 'from the things themselves'; it is the other way round and discourse and classification generate the order of things" (Sarasin 2006, 36; quoted in von Stuckrad 2015, 7). In the online conversation that followed, one friend objected: "a person with one arm cannot by discourse become a two armed person." When I pointed out that no poststructuralist has ever argued such a thing, my interlocutor claimed his statement was a *reductio ad absurdum*—apparently the idea that discourse functions like magic is a logical consequence entailed by the claim that discourse is constitutive of reality. Although the format of Facebook places limits on the depth and subtlety of philosophical engagement, this still struck me as a crude response. Similarly, I was recently accused—in print—of failing to distinguish between discourses and the objects of discourse; apparently poststructuralists—or so was the allegation—"just collapse everything into discourse" (Bush forthcoming).

These cavalier dismissals anger me. Perhaps it is merely because I hate being caricatured. Or perhaps it is because—much like the logic that sustains the practices of hazing—I feel that since *I* went through the pain of reading and digesting the most difficult writings of Hegel, Derrida, or Butler, others ought to as well. Either way, in what follows I offer a detailed defense

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[1] This quote is from Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon* (Derrida 2011, 89).

of the claim that reality is mind-dependent and that scholars therefore produce—via discourse—what they study. The essay is painfully long, dense, and technical, and for that I apologize to my respondents. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that we must do our homework, so to speak, and understand the views we might want to criticize before dismissing them. We would never credit a scholar of the Hebrew Bible who did not know ancient Hebrew, or a scholar of the Vedas who did not know Sanskrit. Similarly, I do not think we should credit rejections of poststructuralist anti-realism that are based on little more than passing familiarity with the claim that "there is nothing outside of the text." (Shockingly, I've found that more than a few dismissals of Derrida's work depend merely on a reading of secondary sources about his work.) If I am wrong about realism and anti-realism (which is entirely possible), and if scholars do not in fact produce their objects of study, scholarly integrity nevertheless requires that that conclusion must be reached *after rather than before* a careful study of poststructuralist literature.

I. Realism and Anti-Realism

Philosophical anti-realism asserts, in some form or another, that "reality" is in some way mind-dependent or consciousness-dependent; that is, reality is in part dependent upon the constitutive work of the mind (or minds) in constructing that reality. Social constructionism is a form of anti-realism that emphasizes, on the one hand, that the construction of reality is social rather than individual, and, on the other hand, that the realities we construct are historically variable. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are perhaps among the most strident anti-realists devoted to historicizing the social construction of gender, sex, and sexuality; in addition, they demonstrate clearly what is at stake in these debates. Arguments about whether reality exists independently of consciousness can, at times, seem insignificant at best and, at worst, a distraction from more important social, political, or philosophical questions. The works of Foucault and Butler press us to consider what social and political consequences follow from the assumption that gender, sex, and sexuality exist as real—and as fixed—independently of human consciousness or culture. For such theorists, realism *naturalizes* historically specific social categories; strident anti-realism, by contrast, sets as its task the *denaturalization* of our systems of classification.

In his early works—from the 1960s and 70s—Jacques Derrida extends Martin Heidegger's "destruction" of Western philosophy by offering immanent critiques of the works of Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Edmund Husserl, and Heidegger, among others. This body of work provides a substantial and, arguably, damning critique of philosophical realism. At the same time, Derrida draws special attention to how Western philosophy's categories or systems of classification were part and parcel of European imperialism and colonialism—Derrida's own contribution to denaturalizing historically specific concepts. His most famous—or infamous—anti-realist statement comes from *Of Grammatology*, in which he claimed that "*[t]here is nothing outside of the text*" (emphasis original; Derrida 1976, 158). In Euro-American scholarship on Derrida, this single sentence—which appears in the midst of Derrida's commentary on Rousseau's *Confessions*—has too often been read apart from the surrounding context on pages 158 and 159 of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation. Removed from its context, this sentence has inspired two broadly popular but unfortunate interpretations, both of which, at times, have served as metonyms for Derrida's work in general, or, worse, for poststructuralist anti-realism in general.

The first of these two interpretations reads Derrida as a sort of linguistic Berkeleyanism. Writing in the eighteenth century, George Berkeley—in *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues*—advances a form of philosophical idealism which claims that the material world does not exist; on the contrary, that all "things" are merely "ideas" that appear to the senses of spirits, and those ideas were causally produced by God rather than a material world. Berkeley writes,

> the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense … cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them. … The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. … [However,] as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things *without any relation to their being perceived,* that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them. (emphasis added; Berkeley 1996, 25)

Following his exposition and defense of this view, Berkeley concludes: "it follows that we have no longer any reason to suppose the being of *matter*" (56).

For those who naïvely read Derrida in this manner, "there is nothing outside of the text" apparently means that all we have is discourse or language (rather than ideas, as Berkeley would have it). Perhaps we are even in a "prison house of language," with nothing on the other side of the prison walls. As one commenter writes,

> With the "linguistic turn" of deconstruction, the radical disjuncture from social reality becomes even more pronounced. With deconstruction, for example, such ideas as "truth" and "history" do not exist outside of language, if at all. … [I]t is not unfair to say that under the linguistic turn, nothing could exceed language, except language itself. But even this excess amounted to a "chain of signifiers" that slid away like a sloughed-off snakeskin to hover around its own coiled body. If it pointed to anything, it was only to itself. (Barkesdale 2013)

In *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*, Manuel A. Vásquez accuses both Judith Butler and Derrida of a form of "linguistic idealism," which he claims—citing Ian Hacking—is "descended from Berkeley's ideal-ism [*sic*]" (Vásquez 2011, 147). As we will see below, unfortunately this interpretation ignores the fact that merely three sentences after stating "there is nothing outside of the text," Derrida explicitly allows for "the real life … existences of 'flesh and bone,' beyond and behind what one believes to be circumscribed as Rousseau's text" (Derrida 1976, 159).

The second unfortunate interpretation, which appears in the secondary literature far more often than the linguistic Berkeleyan interpretation, reads Derrida as a linguistic Kantian: in lieu of Kant's opposition between phenomenological experience and the noumenal thing-in-itself, we are led to believe that the statement "there is nothing outside of the text" opposes discourse or language to a noumenal thing-in-itself.[2] This reading implies that Derrida is, in some way, a

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[2] Richard Rorty notes that, from a realist perspective, anti-realists are often accused of being "some newfangled kind of transcendental idealist[s]" (Rorty 1991, 101); Rorty notes that the point for the anti-realist is, instead, that "she can find no use for the notion" of things-in-themselves (101).

dualist who separates reality from its reception in consciousness or language. For instance, in Lee Braver's otherwise sophisticated history of continental anti-realism, *A Thing of This World*, Braver claims that this passage means that "we cannot get outside of thought, systems, ideas to reach reality itself" (Braver 2007, 443), or that, although signs refer "to an external world, … our access to this world is always mediated by more signs" (446). Similarly, Edward Slingerland, in *What Science Offers the Humanities*, interprets "there is nothing outside of the text" in this manner:

> Of course, Derrida is not actually denying the existence of an extralinguistic reality of objects. What he *is* denying is the possibility that we can have any kind of direct access to the objects *an sich*; they are known to us only as discursive objects, strands in the woven text that makes up the humanly knowable world" (Slingerland 2008, 79)

Slingerland asserts that Derrida and other theorists in the humanities are reproducing a centuries old distinction between mind and body, or between spirit and nature. For Slingerland, "such a rigid dualism is a serious mistake" (4). Although not talking about Derrida in particular, Titus Hjelm, in *Social Constructionisms*, mocks this sort of linguistic dualism:

> From this perspective, the "world out there" and perceptions of that world are radically separated, with no access to the former, except through discourse. It is one thing to say that the *meaning* of, say, gravity is dependent on our ways of talking about it …. It is another thing for me to jump out of a sixth story window and assume a safe landing because I'm shouting "I'm not falling!" on the way down. (Hjelm 2014, 93)

While such a view would deserve mocking, these critiques grossly misunderstand Derrida's poststructuralist anti-realism, which explicitly and vehemently opposes any such dualism.

In this essay, I will turn to where Derrida most explicitly discusses the cognition of "extra-linguistic" objects: in his discussion of Husserl's idealism. I will provide an exposition of Derrida's critique of Husserl, demonstrating that Derrida arrives at an anti-realist view that is neither a linguistic Berkeleyanism nor a linguistic dualism. My exposition of Derrida's writings will of necessity be simplified and one-sided; the texts I'll cite are about *far more* than the cognition of objects, but for my purposes I'll avoid themes that stretch beyond the present agenda. After a consideration of Derrida's reading of Husserl, I will turn to Hegel's anti-realism in the opening passages of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as his anti-realism is structurally homologous to Derrida's in a great many respects. (I would argue that Derrida is, in fact, greatly indebted to the Hegelian tradition, and that many of his strongest arguments are Hegelian. [3]) In conclusion, I will turn back to the famous line, "there is nothing outside of the text," and demonstrate that a careful reading supports neither the linguistic Berkeleyanism nor the linguistic dualism interpretations. If we are going to reject the poststructuralists' insistence that scholars create their own objects of study, it will have to be on grounds other than the sort of *reductio ad absurdum* offered by Hjelm and my Facebook friend.

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[3] Not only does Derrida frequently cite Hegel—for instance, he favorably cites Hegel *over and against* Heidegger in *Of Grammatology*—but, in addition, Derrida studied under and worked with the French scholar of Hegel, Jean Hyppolite. Key themes in Hyppolite's reading of Hegel—particularly those in *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1974) and *Logic and Existence* (1997)—appear throughout Derrida's work in the 1960s and 70s.

II. Husserl, Objects, and Ideality

In several major works, from *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas* to *Experience and Judgment* (dating from the turn of the twentieth century to posthumous publications in the late 1930s), Husserl attempts, among other things, to account for the phenomenological conditions that make cognition of objects *as objects* possible for human consciousness. For Husserl, because objects do not fully appear as such to phenomenological consciousness, they must be constructed or idealized for us, by us: the objectivity or ideality of objects is *a posteriori* for consciousness.

All of Derrida's earliest works offered immanent critiques of Husserl's corpus, often focusing on elements related to this question of the objectivity of objects. These works include his graduate thesis, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (2003 [originally written in 1953-1954]), his first book-length publication, a translation and introduction to Husserl's "Origins of Geometry," (1989 [1962]), and his first book, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology* (2011 [1967; although published in the same year as *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology,* the former was merely a collection of previously published essays and the latter was written after *Voice and Phenomenon*]). In what follows, I will focus on Derrida's reading of Husserl in his introduction to "Origins of Geometry" and *Voice and Phenomenon*, whose critiques of Husserl are largely parallel to one another.[4]

Husserl's phenomenological starting point for a consideration of the ideality or idealization of objects involves a reflection on what I will call "mid-sized objects" within one's visual range. For my purposes, I'm defining a "mid-sized" object as one that an adult human could manipulate and observe all sides of without too much difficulty, barring objects whose details are too small to see without aided vision. For example, for objects one might find in a household, mid-sized objects could include anything from a bread crumb or push-pin to a desk, bed, or dresser. (The size of the object *relative to human bodily capacities* is not an insignificant aspect of this definition, since the way we cognize these mid-sized objects is very different from the way we cognize objects like "religions" or "nations.") Husserl notes that the immediate phenomenological experience of an object is constantly changing; for instance, as one moves, as the object moves or rotates, or as the light source over the object changes, whatever appears in the visual field changes as well. In *Ideas I*, Husserl's example is that of a table:

> Let us start from an example. Looking the whole time at this table, moving around it in the process, altering my position in space as always, I am continually conscious of the existence (as bodily there) of this and the same table, and, to be sure, of the same one, remaining completely unchanged in itself. The perception of the table, however, is a perception that is constantly changing; it is a continuity of changing perceptions. I close my eyes. My other senses are not in any relation to the table. Now I have no perception of it. I open my eyes and I have the perception again. *The* perception? Let us be more precise. Recurring, it is under no circumstances individually the same. Only the table is the same, and I am conscious of it as identical in the synthetic consciousness that joins the new perception with memory. (Husserl 2014, 71)

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[4] Derrida's analysis in *The Problem of Genesis* is dissimilar in many respects, as the point of entry of his critique was considerably different at the time.

A couple of things are significant here. First, Husserl attributes unity and fixity to the table in-itself, but disunity and multiplicity to the changing phenomenological consciousness of the table. The thing-in-itself is what it is—a single, unchanging object—while consciousness of said object continually varies. Second, not only does phenomenological consciousness of the object shift, change, or flow, but it also disappears as one closes one's eyes. However, because the table has a consciousness-independent existence, it persists as a thing-in-itself even when it is not seen; "the perceived thing can be without being perceived, … and it can be without changing" (71). As Derrida will point out, Husserl's description here is a site where classic western philosophical oppositions—with us since Heraclitus and Plato—between identity and difference, logic and experience, or reason and empiricism are played out.

A crucial element of Husserl's account of the experience of the "now" moment in phenomenological consciousness involves what he calls *retention* and *protention*. Retention consists of recalling what has passed out of immediate phenomenological consciousness, while protention consists of anticipating what may come next. The phenomenological experience is thus divided between a "*re-membering*" and an "*anticipation*" (140). In the passage we're considering, Husserl draws attention only to retention and the unstable now: "the now of perception incessantly transforms itself into the following consciousness of the just-passed and at the same time lights up a new now, and so forth" (72). As such, the now moment is not only not stable but also not self-sufficient; all nows refer to what is other than the now.

Consider the phenomenological experience of a spoken sentence, such as the following: "Is a bell making that sound?" Upon hearing the first four syllables, one will not as yet necessarily have heard the words "Is a bell make-"ing. Rather, until one hears "-ing that sound," the words one might have heard could very well have been "Isabel make-"s, as in, "Isabel makes her own marinara sauce." The identity of the word is *not at all existent in* the phenomenological experience; its identity is ideal not empirical. The identity of the "bel" syllable is necessarily constituted on the basis of what came before and what came after. This is, of course, why the talk-to-text features on our phones often change the first words spoken as one continues one's sentence. For example, when I speak "Husserl and Derrida" into the google search feature on my phone, it first translates my speech as "Husserl and Jerry. Die"—presumably because protention anticipates that the syllables which sound like "Derr-ee" are much more often going to have referred to "Jerry" for English speakers than to an obscure French philosopher—before going on to correct to "Husserl and Derrida." The phone itself relies on protention and retention to "understand" the words said. Without protention and retention, phenomenological experience would consist of unrelated, punctual moments without continuity; the experience would be like that of a film in which every single frame is randomly chosen from other films. Protention and retention permit phenomenological consciousness a continuity it otherwise would not have.

Husserl also provides the example of experiencing a melody (143): because a melody is experienced across moments of time, it can never appear in a simple, present now. "[T]he *essence* of something of which one is in this way conscious entails the possibility of reflecting on its having-been-perceived" (143). Husserl insists that "the *entire* phenomenological time-field of the pure ego" is made up of all "*three* dimensions of the before, afterward, simultaneous" (159). Only when we have the "*entire stream* of temporal unities of experience" is that stream "strictly closed off and self-contained" (159). The logic is trinitarian: "*One* pure ego—*one* stream of experience*, replete in all three dimensions, essentially hanging together in this repleteness" (159). This unity is, of course, belied by the very terms Husserl uses: at the very least, if

retention involves "re-membering," then consciousness is dealing with "members" that must be joined, and as such do not constitute a simple, closed unity. The identity of what we experience is constructed by consciousness independently of each empirical, punctual now; the identities of the "things" we "perceive" are essentially non-empirical.

Returning to the previous passage under consideration, Husserl goes on to emphasize that the thing-in-itself, *as a whole*, exceeds immediate perception: "[l]ike the perceived thing generally, so, too, anything and everything accruing to it in terms of parts, sides, inherent aspects necessarily transcends the perception" (72). For example, because the whole table does not appear to phenomenological consciousness at once—the whole as "whole" transcends any individual perception or now moment, e.g., as I cannot see the bottom and the top at the same time—we must idealize it through protention and retention of various phenomenological moments. Its ideality—its unity and identity—is, for us, constructed out of various moments of perception.

Husserl further considers the phenomenological experience of an object's color:

> The color of the seen thing is intrinsically no really obtaining inherent aspect of the consciousness of color; it appears but while it appears, the appearance can and *must* continually change in the course of ostensive experience of it. The *same* color appears "in" continuous manifolds of *shades* of color. (original emphasis; 72)

That is, as we walk around a table, the angles between the light source, the light reflecting off of the table, and the distance and vector of that light to our eyes is constantly changing. Arguably, in "reality" (and, as should be clear, "reality" is what is at stake here), we see shifting shades of the "same" color. As a result, the "sameness" of the color is a product of our idealization, and is not at all present in the phenomenological experience in and of itself.

This extends beyond the experience of color: "Something similar holds for sensory quality and equally for each spatial shape. One and the same shape (given in person *as* the same) appears continuously again and again "in a different way," in profiles of shapes that are always different" (72). For instance, a pyramid could appear as a two-dimensional triangle from one side, or as a two-dimensional square from the bottom. Husserl insists that the shape is "given … *as* the same," but his phenomenological description belies that: the "same" pyramid is given through different "profiles," and its sameness is constructed in consciousness. This holds for an object's spatial depth as well. "A profile is an experience. But experience is only possible as experience and not as something spatial" (73). That is, e.g., one's experience of a pyramid is necessarily two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional or spatial; at any particular moment, we only experience at best a profile of the three-dimensional object. "What is profiled, however, is intrinsically possible only as something spatial (it just is essentially spatial) but it is not possible as experience" (73). We cannot directly experience the thing-in-itself as an object with depth; we construe its spatiality after the fact, through protention and retention of the various profiles we've experienced.

At one point Derrida uses the word "substruction" to refer to this process of idealization that Husserl describes: substruction constructs in part by subtracting inessential, empirical differences. [5] Consider the imagination of geometrically perfect shapes: we start with "*more or*

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[5] There is a great deal of excellent secondary literature on Derrida's early work on Husserl. In particular, my reading of Derrida has been shaped by the following resources: Vernon W. Cisney's *Derrida's Voice and Phenomenon* (2014), Edward Baring's *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968* (2011), Martin Hägglund's

less smooth surfaces, sides, lines, or *more or less rough angles*, and so on. … '[P]roceeding from the factual, an essential form becomes recognizable'" (Derrida 1989, 123). From empirical "roundness" we imagine "pure" roundness, "*under* which is *constructed* the geometrical ideality of the 'circle'" (original emphasis; 124). However, the imagined, pure roundness "is not to be confused with the multiplicity of natural shapes which more or less correspond to it in perception" (124). An object's ideality or identity is never present to phenomenological consciousness, only the object's various empirical manifestations appear.

Derrida also draws attention to the fact that the ideality or substruction of the object is necessarily contingent upon repetition of the "same" in different phenomenological experiences *across time*. Time—an essential condition of protention and retention—makes the ideality of the object possible, since we cannot construct the object in consciousness on the basis of a single phenomenological now. At the same time, however, in a way time separates the thing from itself in our immediate experience: the "it" appears now one way, and now another way, and now a third way. Phenomenological experience of a thing is a continual process of it looking like *this*, then *not* looking like this, but now *that*. Pure nows, without protention and retention, would be punctual moments of perpetual difference. And, crucially for Derrida, protention and retention are *not* in the object but in the subject. As such, the empirical object has as its condition of possibility non-empirical (or no longer empirical) elements and processes. The ideality of the three-dimensional pyramid *at any particular moment* depends upon now moments that are *no longer present or which are not yet present*, except in a subject. The presence of the object's ideality—its identity and unity—is, for us, contingent upon what is absent in perception of the object itself. An object's ideality is, *essentially*, in part non-empirical. Derrida writes, "one sees an irreducible non-presence recognized as a constituting value, and with it a non-life or a non-presence of the living present, a non-belonging of the living present to itself, a non-originarity that cannot be eradicated" (Derrida 2011, 6). The "sameness" of the object is shot through-and-through with difference, and difference which is *irreducible*. If we remove the differences, we cannot construct the object. In addition, "[t]his relation to non-presence … radically destroys every possibility of self-identity in its simplicity" (56). For Derrida, these conditions of possibility of the substruction of objects are *also conditions of impossibility for simple, self-identical objects*. This is, of course, a Hegelian theme: the being of beings is constituted in and through difference and negativity.

For Derrida, another consequence of the fact that the ideality of the object for us is contingent upon time is that "it" is *always open to future reconstruction* (the "it" is in scare quotes because, once reconstructed, the "it" is necessarily a different "it"). What we first take to be a two-dimensional triangle is, once turned 30 degrees to the right and 10 degrees down, reconstructed or re-idealized as a three-dimensional pyramid. However, who is to say that the pyramid could not be turned once again, at which point we might discover that there is no "back" or fourth wall to the pyramid, in which case it's more like a tent with one side open. There is, *a priori*, no way to make the pyramid's ideality appear directly to phenomenological consciousness. The pyramid's ideality is necessarily and inescapably non-empirical.

We might, with some level of confidence, assure ourselves that such a mid-sized object could be manipulated or turned over in our hands long enough that our idealization of it could be closed; we could arrive at a point where its identity would no longer be revisable. However, consider that—apart from infants or toddlers in their nurseries or play rooms—most "objects" of

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Radical Atheism: Derrida and the time of Life (2008), Leonard Lawlor's *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (2002), and Paola Marrati's *Genesis and Trace: Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger* (2005).

consciousness or discourse are not mid-sized objects. As Nelson Goodman notes in *Ways of Worldmaking*:

> Once in awhile someone asks me rather petulantly "Can't you see what's before you?" Well, yes and no. I see people, chairs, papers, and books that are before me, and also colors, shapes, and patters that are before me. But do I see the molecule, electrons, and infrared light that are also before me? And do I see the state, or the United States, or the universe? I see only parts of the latter comprehensive entities, indeed, but then I also see only parts of the people, chairs, etc. (Goodman 1978, 71)

As a professor, I regularly make judgments about objects like "students," the "student body," a particular student's "grade," the "faculty," the "administration," and so forth. Consider just one: the faculty. The faculty as a whole rarely appears before phenomenological consciousness all at once, and even when it does—for instance, at a commencement ceremony—one learns very little about the faculty other than their outward physical appearance (or at least those parts of physical appearance that aren't covered by regalia). But when I think of my college's "faculty" as an object, the physical appearance is typically of little importance; much more important is what the faculty "thinks"—about assessment, for instance, or the college president's new agenda for the college. The view of the faculty about the president's new agenda could be constructed through retention or memories of, perhaps, phenomenological consciousness of interactions with individual faculty members, open discussions in full faculty meetings, nonverbal signals and gestures accompanying such a discussion, rumors of conversations in other departments, bitching sessions over beers at the local pub, and so on. On the basis of such a substruction, one might claim: "the faculty will not like phase two of this new initiative." But with what level of certainty can we make such statements? As should be clear, temporality here provides ample opportunity for the "faculty" to be open to radically different reconstructions. *Temporality makes the substruction of the object both possible and essentially open-ended* (and this is to say nothing of the extent to which the construction of such objects is contested and agonistic, which results in our certainty about the bounds and characteristics of such objects receding further). And, again, most of the "objects" of interest to us are not mid-sized objects: our economy, our environment, our state, our state policies, our jobs, our salaries, our budgets, our debt, our retirement accounts, our future, etc.

Matters are further complicated when we consider one of Husserl's philosophical goals, particularly in his essay, "Origins of Geometry": to authorize as objective the truths of (Euro-American) math and science. In this essay, Husserl is caught in a double bind: he accepts that objective truths—like the Pythagorean theorem—do not descend from the heavens; however, as a type of foundationalist, he nevertheless wants to defend the objectivity of the truths of geometry. Since he doesn't accept that their truth is founded on a transcendent origin, he must ground their truth in human history and consciousness, but it cannot be merely subjective or culturally relative. Husserl writes,

> geometrical existence is not psychic existence: it does not exist as something personal within the personal sphere of consciousness: it is the existence of what is objectively there for "everyone" (for actual and possible geometers, or those who understand geometry). Indeed, it has, from its primal establishment, an existence which is peculiarly

supertemporal and which—of this we are certain—is accessible to all men, first of all to the actual and possible mathematicians of all people, all ages. (Husserl 2014, 160)

As with all sciences, "tradition" is an inescapable part of this achievement of objective truth: "We know of [geometry's] handed down, earlier forms, as those from which it has arisen …. [I]t is not only a mobile forward process from one set of acquisitions to another but a continuous synthesis in which all acquisitions maintain their validity" (Husserl 1989, 159). A mobile process: idealization—to objective truth—requires time and synthesis and the accumulation of tradition. However, the European Enlightenment has as one of its central principles the axiom that a claim is not true simply because it has been inherited from an authoritative tradition. How does Husserl bridge the gap between historically relative, specific human consciousnesses and objective truth?

According to Derrida, Husserl for all practical purposes makes recourse to a Hegelian teleology, whereby we dialectically sublate—or synthesize, to use Husserl's term—empirical evidence until we arrive at an ideal end, albeit one which is sometimes not yet reached. *Ideally*, phenomenological experience will be transformed into objective truth. Over time—and time, as Derrida notes, is essential to the process Husserl describes—we go from empiricism to reason, from existence to logic, from body to spirit:

> The sensible utterances have spatiotemporal individuation in the world like all *corporeal* occurrences, like everything embodied in *bodies* as such; but this is not true of the *spiritual* form itself, which is called an "ideal object." In a certain way ideal objects do exist objectively in the world, but it is only in virtue of these two-leveled repetitions and ultimately in virtue of sensibly embodying repetitions. (emphasis added; 160-161)

The spiritual object appears at the end of a series of repetitions of representations of empirical objects to ourselves; repetition and time are the levers that lift us from the subjective to the objective. Crucially, the product does not exist independently of those spiritual repetitions or representations, but neither does it exist independently of the empirical. *Both* empirical evidence in phenomenological consciousness *and* repetitions in cognition are essential conditions of possibility of objective truths. Husserl, like Hegel, is neither an empiricist nor a rationalist or idealist, but rather both. As Paola Marrati writes, for Husserl and Derrida "[i]deality and empiricity appear at the same time; they are produced by the same movement and it is for this reason alone that any attempt to separate them absolutely is doomed to failure" (Marrati 2005, 83).

To summarize the points thus far,

- the ideality of objects are constructed for consciousness, in time, through protention and retention of various empirical now moments in phenomenological consciousness;
- the ideality produced depends on and simultaneously discards varying empirical evidences;
- the process of idealization is necessarily open-ended, as future phenomenological experiences may produce evidence that requires us to revise the objects at hand for consciousness; and
- this process is neither strictly empiricist nor idealist, but rather both.

III. Ideality and Language

Husserl goes on to note that *language* is a further condition of possibility of this process of idealization, at least as concerns the truths of geometry. When introducing language in "Origins of Geometry," he makes three points. The first is an off-hand comment apparently unrelated to the two points that follow: words, like "things," are themselves similarly idealized. Second, although words are necessary to *refer to* idealized objects—like geometrical figures—those objects have an existence independent of the words or consciousnesses that refer to them; that is, Husserl wants to be realist about such objects. Third, the objectivity of the truths to which such words refer can be certain once we arrive at *invariant* constructions. I'll discuss each of these claims in turn.

  Language and words are themselves idealized. Husserl writes,

> language itself, in all its particularizations (words, sentences, speeches), is, as can easily be seen from the grammatical point of view, thoroughly made up of ideal objects; for example, the word *Löwe* occurs only once in the German language; it is identical throughout its innumerable utterances by any given persons. (161)

Löwe, or "lion" in English, is substructed from all the empirical instances of the word, and—presumably—it refers to the "same" idealized concept in each case. The "same" word "lion," like a pyramid, can appear empirically different each and every time, and still be the same word. It can be spoken aloud, pronounced in a wide variety of ways, in various voices, or even sung in different notes or keys, but it is still the "same" word. Similarly, we could write "lion" in Times New Roman, in a sans serif font, write it in cursive, or print it, but the different marks would all refer to the "same" word.

  While Husserl offers this as an offhand, throwaway comment, this point is of more than a little importance to Derrida. Derrida draws special attention to the fact that signs of words, by definition, must be repeatable. "A sign that would take place only 'once' would not be a sign" (Derrida 2011, 42)—it would be a singular event, a gasp, or an exclamation.

> A signifier (in general) must be recognizable in its form despite and across the diversity of empirical characteristics that can modify it. It must remain the *same* and be able to be repeated as such despite and across the deformations that what we call the empirical event makes it necessarily undergo. (43)

Not only must the signifier be indefinitely repeatable, but the idealized word, sign, or concept to which signifying marks refer, strictly speaking, *does not exist empirically*; rather, the ideal is *referred to* by the various empirical instances. Those empirical instances of the word are not the thing-in-itself. As Vernon W. Cisney writes,

> Language itself is therefore constituted essentially on the basis of this paradoxical entanglement of singularity (irreplaceable, empirical, 'reality' in each of its operations) and ideality—this entanglement, in other words, and hence the essential inseparability of reality and representation, is what makes language what it is. (Cisney 2014, 110)

Derrida notes the irony here: despite Husserl's opposition to Platonism, which makes the *really real* exist in a non-empirical world, here Husserl similarly locates the object—i.e., the ideal object—in a non-empirical space. "By determining the *ontos* as *eidos*, Plato was doing nothing else" (Derrida 2011, 45).

Derrida notes that Husserl is making claims at three different levels here. *Words* refer to *concepts*, and concepts refer to *objects*. However, in each case the object at hand (word, concept, or extra-linguistic referent) is idealized or substructed from multiple empirical instances in a way that is mind-dependent. By no means does Husserl deny the non-empirical reality of the ideal to which he is referring. Indeed, as Marrati puts it, "the cost" of ideality is the reduction of the "existence of the transcendent world. … [T]he site of ideality [is] the neutralization of factual existence" (Marrati 2005, 67). In *Ideas I*, Husserl explicitly emphasizes the role of fantasy in constructing the objects of sense (given the importance of this admission, I quote at length):

> Like the geometer, the phenomenologist can only make limited use of an originary givenness as a means of assistance. To be sure, all the main types of perception and envisaging stand at his free disposal as something given in an originary way, namely, as perspective exemplifications for a phenomenology of perception, phantasy, memory, and so forth. … [T]he freedom of research of essences necessarily demands operating in phantasy.
> … Thus, if one loves paradoxical talk, one can actually say—and if one properly understands the ambiguous sense involved, one can say in strict truth—that *"fiction" makes up the vital element of phenomenology*, … that fiction is the source from which knowledge of the "eternal truths" draws its nourishment. (Husserl 2014, 127)

As Derrida puts it in his gloss on this point, fantasy or imaginary reproduction "opens ideality" (Derrida 2011, 47); representation is the *a priori* of ideality. Thus, despite all of Husserl's attempts to separate the idealized object from its representation, representation appears to be absolutely irreducible to the ideality of the object. This is, of course, a radically anti-realist claim: *if representation opens ideality, the objects represented do not exist for us prior to their representation*. As with the pyramid we turned over in our hands, the object's ideality is, quite literally, *never* immediately present to phenomenological consciousness and—as such—is in part nonempirical. "[T]he thing itself always steals away" (89).

A further point: insofar as the ideality of a word is iterable—the "same" word can be stated over and over again while remaining, at least theoretically, self-identical—the ideality of a word is no more fully present to phenomenological consciousness than the objects to which it refers. As Leonard Lawlor writes, "an ideality can be repeated to infinity, while a fact is singular. But, insofar as being iterable, an ideality can never in fact be given as such in an [empirical] intuition; it can always be repeated beyond the limit of this intuition" (Lawlor 2002, 203). As such, not only does the thing itself steal away, but so does the word.

The consequences of Derrida's point here are radical. For a thing to appear it has to be represented—in part via retention—to the self as an idealized thing; apart from its repetition in retention we would have the blooming, buzzing confusion of difference in the experience of pure, isolated nows. The identity of the thing for us *depends on* idealization over time at different moments. But, insofar as that identity is substructed for us through representation, repetition of the thing *is constitutive of its thingness in the first place*—there are no things for us without their representation. Thus representation of the thing has a logical priority over the thing-in-itself,

insofar as representation is the thing's condition of possibility. There are not things for us that are *then* represented; rather, there are secondary representations that make things possible for us in the first place. Thus the paradox already noted: for us, *the representation of the thing pre-exists what is represented*.

To return to Husserl's claims about language in "Origins of Geometry": despite the fact that the truths of geometry are idealized in language, he insists that *the objects to which words refer exist independently of language or consciousness*. In his own words:

> the idealities of geometrical words, sentences, theories—considered purely as linguistic structures—are *not the idealities* that make up *what is expressed and brought to validity as truth in geometry* …. Wherever something is asserted, one can distinguish what is thematic, that about which it is said (its meaning) *from* the assertion …. And what is thematic here is precisely ideal objects, and quite different ones from those coming under the concept of language. (emphasis mine; Husserl 1989, 161)

This makes for an odd sort of realism: the objects of geometry are real, and real *independently* of language—and yet, despite the fact that he claims they're "quite different" objects, everything else Husserl has already said about such objects explicitly claims that they're formed, intersubjectively, through repetition in language and in *exactly the same way* as the words that refer to them. Since we've already discussed at length how objects are substructed, I'll consider here Husserl's insistence on the importance of *written language* in the production of the objective truths of geometry. To begin with, the construction of math or the sciences is never an individual affair: it requires a *civilization*. "Clearly it is only through language and its far reaching documentations, its possible communications, that the horizon of civilization can be an open and endless one" (162). In addition, *written* language is crucial for communication of "the objectivity of the ideal structure" of objects across space and time (164). Third, the development of sciences is cumulative: "scientific thinking attains new results on the basis of those already obtained" (166). Fourth, scientific thinking is not passive discovery, but rather a human production: "Making geometry self-evident … requires … methodical production … [c]arried out systematically" (173). Again, this is an odd sort of extra-linguistic realism: geometrical objects and truths exist independently of language, but they are *not discovered*; rather, they must be *produced* in language.

Husserl's third claim about language and geometrical truths is that *the objectivity of the truths to which such words refer can be certain once we arrive at invariant constructions*. The sublation of the empirical and the substruction of ideality takes place in history, using the tools of language, but eventually arrives at a "universal a priori" (174). When do we know we have arrived at the end, at an objective truth about geometrical objects? For Husserl, this takes place when we come to an unrevisable truth that can be infinitely repeated *without variation*: a truth is objective "[o]nly if the apodictically general content [is] invariant throughout all conceivable variation," that is, when it "can be understood for all future time and by all coming generations of men and thus capable of being handed down and reproduced with the identical intersubjective meaning." (179). Unlike "time-bound" truths, geometry "is valid with unconditioned generality for all men, all times, all places, and not merely for all historically factual ones but for all conceivable ones" (179). For Husserl, perhaps historically-specific languages are the condition of the possibility for the original substruction of such truths—they serve as the ladders that we

can use to climb from history to objectivity—but once their invariant, universal forms are found, we can apparently kick the ladder away.

For Derrida, here Husserl is writing checks that—empirically—he cannot cash. The future to which he appeals, a long future in which geometry will no longer be revisable, is not present today to any phenomenological consciousness. The truth of geometry is ultimately based upon absent evidence and, as such, is non-empirical. Despite the fact that Husserl elsewhere insists that all truths must be based on empirical evidences that appear to phenomenological consciousness—a premise that Husserl calls "the principle of principles," as Derrida reminds us (Derrida 2011, 46)—here Husserl establishes the truths of geometry on the basis of a leap into the future, and thus beyond the empirical. Once again, the *really real*—as something uncreated by humans, independent of consciousness, and unanchored by history—recedes further and further from the empirical. Those things which he takes to be most secure lack the level of security required by his very own "principle of all principles."

In summary,

- the representation of objects in and through language is a necessary condition for their ideality or substruction, particularly objects such as geometrical figures or theorems;
- as such, for us the *representation* of such objects is logically prior to the objects themselves;
- Husserl claims that the objective truths of, e.g., geometry, have a mind-independent reality, but, as Derrida notes, describes them as essentially dependent; and
- Husserl claims that the universal objectivity of such truths is secured by their invariant repetition throughout time, but, as Derrida notes, this claim is completely unwarranted according to the standards of empirical evidence Husserl sets for himself.

IV. Hegel, Consciousness, and the Thing-in-itself

In the first two sections of *Phenomenology of Spirit*—"Sense-certainty" and "Perception"—Hegel offers a critique of immediate sense-certainty that is very similar in several respects to Derrida's critique of Husserl, and, as such, can enrich our present discussion. Hegel's imagined opponent is the realist who, slamming her fist on a table, insists, here and now, that this table is simply and straightforwardly real, since we can immediately see it and touch it. For such a realist, "neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation …. On the contrary, the thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*. … [T]his pure *being*, or this simple immediacy, constitutes its *truth*" (Hegel 1977, 58).

Hegel's first objection to this realist is that, thus far, we're already dealing not with a single certainty but a dual one: we have an "I" that perceives and an "object"—e.g., a table—that is perceived *by* the I. However, in sense-certainty this I considers itself dispensable: "the object *is* … regardless of whether it is known or not; and it remains, even if it is not known" (59).

Hegel presses another point: for sense-certainty, the object exists in *this* "here" and *this* "now," and yet heres and nows come into existence and pass away. If "this" now is "night," after waiting a time the I will discover that the now is "day." "The now does indeed preserve itself, but as something that is *not* Night" (60); that is, nows persevere but simultaneously change. As such, "this now" is a universal term with various possible instances. The same is true of "this here." In addition, the I, *as a pronoun*, is a universal with various possible instances. "So it is in

fact the universal that is the true [content] of sense-certainty" (addition in brackets provided by the translator; 60).

Hegel notes that although "we do not *envisage* the universal This or Being in general, … we *utter* the universal" (60). Language, in a sense, betrays us. We want to point to *this table,* at *this moment*, at *this here*, but when we say as much we invoke universals that are not contained in this table, at this moment, or at this location; we "refute what we *mean* to say" (60). Even being itself—insofar as we say this table "is"—commits us to universals. To speak of this table is inevitably to speak of *more than* this table.

Jan Westerhoff provides a set of terms useful for understanding in part what Hegel is driving at here. In the midst of a discussion of whether an object can have a self-standing or self-sufficient substance or essence, Westerhoff makes a distinction between *existential dependence* and *notional dependence*. Existential dependence entails a material, causal, or mereological relation between objects:

> Saying that a sprout depends existentially on its cause means that necessarily, if a sprout exists there will be some objects falling under the property "causes of the sprout," such as a seed, soil, water, sunlight, and so on. Similarly, if a complex physical object exists, so will all its parts; therefore the object existentially depends on its parts. (Westerhoff 2009, 26-27)

By contrast, Westerhoff formally defines notional dependence thusly: "Objects falling under the property *F* are notionally dependent on objects falling under the property *G* iff necessarily, if some object *x* falls under *F* there will be a distinct object *y* falling under *G*" (26). The example he gives is "Northern England" (27): because "north" is a term that has a significance in relation to the term "south," "Northern England" is notionally dependent on "Southern England." For Westerhoff, this holds even if, at some point, Southern England ceased to exist. That is—shifting to an American example—even if "southern California" fell into the ocean after a series of earthquakes along the Pacific Rim, "northern California" would nevertheless remain *notionally* dependent upon it. Westerhoff's second example is that of a father and a son, wherein two different types of dependence can hold (28): while a father is notionally dependent upon a son, he is not existentially dependent on a son. By contrast, a son is both notionally dependent and existentially dependent upon a father.

Returning to Hegel, his point here seems to be similar: any proposition referring to "this table, here and now" is *discursively dependent* upon the universals "table," "here," and "now," all of which are not empirically present in immediate sense-certainty or phenomenological consciousness.

It is worth noting that Karl Marx makes a similar point in the part of *Capital* titled "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," wherein he discusses a table as a commodity (Marx 1990, 163ff). Marx notes three possible relations that hold for any particular table as a commodity. First, and most simply, it has a potential use value for a user, who could use it for dining or as a desk for writing. Second, the table is, to use Westerhoff's term, existentially dependent upon laborers who have put labor power into raw materials in order to turn it into a table: "by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him" (163). Third, and perhaps of greatest interest to Marx, is the fact that the price of the table as a commodity is discursively dependent upon the pricing and count or tally of all of the other tables in the same market. That is, when economists reflect on the price of a

commodity, they consider supply and demand, which makes reference not only to all of the other identical commodities available, but also to all of the potential buyers in that particular market. For Marx, this is very strange indeed:

> as soon as [the table] emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which *transcends sensuousness*. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will. (emphasis added; 163-164)

Following this hyperbole, Marx gets more precise: the table, as a commodity, is considered in

> a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. … [T]he products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social. In the same way, the impression made by the thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of that nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye. … It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. (165)

However, while Marx marvels at this magical relation—he calls it suprasensible, religious, and fetishistic—for Hegel this discursive dependence is the norm rather than the exception, at least as soon as we say "this table," thereby invoking two universals that are sensible only in relation to other instances of "this" and "table." If Marx were to consider it further, he might have realized that relating a table to its "use value" or the "labor power" put into it is *equally* magical, suprasensible, or discursively dependent. Of course, the difference in the way he treats these accounts of the "table" is shaped more than a little by the fact that he wants to *denaturalize* the economists' account of supply and demand and *naturalize* his own account of use value and labor power.

Returning once again to Hegel, he imagines the subject of sense-certainty revising her thesis on the basis of these revelations: once we realize that the "I," the "this," the "now," and the "table" are universals discursively dependent on other instances of the *same* universal—and here we reintroduce all of the paradoxes of sameness in difference that plagued Husserl—we are forced to revise the description of our experience as a *movement*.

> In this pointing-out, then, we see merely a movement which takes the following course: (1) I point to the 'Now,' and asserted it to be the truth. I point out, however, as something that *has been*, or as something that has been superseded; I set aside the first truth. (2) I now assert as the second truth that it *has been*, that it is superseded. (3) But what has been, *is not*. (Hegel 1977, 63)

This movement is structurally homologous to Husserl's movement from the now moment to retention of a now moment that is not or is no longer. The experience of the table necessarily entails the retention or representation of a prior now in the present now. The experience is thus not "simple, but a movement which contains various moments" (64). (Derrida includes a remarkably similar discussion in *Voice and Phenomenon*; Derrida argues that whenever a subject says "'here,' 'there,' 'above,' 'below,' 'now,' 'yesterday,' 'tomorrow,' 'before,' 'after,' etc."

something beyond immediate phenomenological consciousness is indicated [Derrida 2011, 80; his discussion of the "here and now" runs from 79 to 85, and is perhaps the most obscure passage in the book].)

Shifting to a new example—"'this' bit of paper on which I am writing" (Hegel 1977, 66)—Hegel concludes that those who say "this paper" want to say *only* this particular paper, "but they say 'actual *things*,' '*external* or *sensuous objects*,' '*absolutely negative entities*' and so on; i.e., they say of them only what is *universal*" (66).

In the next section, on "Perception," Hegel considers the individuation of "an" object as a "one." Much like Husserl, he notes that the unity of "the" thing is not immediately present in phenomenological experience. He considers a grain of salt: "the Thing itself is the *subsistence of the many diverse and independent properties*. Thus we say of the Thing: it *is* white, *also* cubical, and *also* tart, and so on" (73). Out of phenomenological difference, however, *we* can posit its oneness: "Positing these properties as a oneness is the work of consciousness alone" (73). For Hegel, such a positing, synthesis, or sublation—or substruction, to use Derrida's term—entails several moments or elements: the properties experienced, the posited thing to which the properties are attributed, and the consciousness that does the attributing.

Hegel's conclusion? "The object is now for consciousness this whole movement …. The Thing is a One, reflected into itself; it is *for itself*, but it is also *for an other*; and, moreover, it is an *other* on its own account, just *because* it is for another" (74). In essence, Hegel is claiming that a thing-in-itself is an in-itself only insofar as it is for-another. On the face of it, this is a bald contradiction: it makes a thing simultaneously dependent and independent. However, despite his hyperbole, what Hegel appears to mean is that the individuation of the object *as* a single object is dependent on a subject that does the individuating. This is to say that drawing lines between things makes thinghood possible, but that the things-in-themselves that result—i.e., the things considered or imagined in isolation or by themselves—are nevertheless dependent on subjects for their individuation. The thing-in-itself is contingent upon its being-for-another and is therefore consciousness-dependent. As we saw with the pyramid above, we can observe sides of the pyramid in separate empirical moments, but the pyramid *qua* pyramid is consciousness-dependent.

To summarize:

- the unity or identity of an object does not immediately appear in phenomenological consciousness, but relies upon a process of object individuation performed by a subject or subjects;
- any particular object appearing in phenomenological consciousness is thus constructed out of the movement of consciousness between empirical particulars and linguistic universals; and
- it follows that any statement about an object necessarily invokes universals of which the object is a particular instance.

V. Three Sticking Points

At this point I would like to draw attention to three sticking points against realism that follow from the previous discussion of Hegel, Husserl, and Derrida, each of which I'll discuss in turn, with a special emphasis on the second:

1. The thing-in-itself is necessarily for-us.
2. Object individuation is discourse-relative and variable.
3. Matrices of individuation and claims about objects are essentially and indefinitely revisable.

1) The thing-in-itself is necessarily for-us.

Because things never appear in their entirety to phenomenological consciousness, their identity or ideality is constructed in consciousness *a posteriori*. The in-itself we arrive at—and "arrive" is an appropriate word, since ideality or substruction takes place *in time* and via *movement*—is *ours*. And we cannot say anything about any object without engaging in the movement of ideality or substruction.

The obvious realist objection is that, of course, *for us* objects might be subject to the movement of ideality, but, arguably, the objects in-themselves—apart from any observer or speaker—exist independently of the processes of ideality. Common sense tells us that, even if we substruct the table for ourselves, what we end up calling—*at the end* of the movement of ideality—the "table" will exist even when we close our eyes; we can still stub our toe on the table while making our way to the kitchen in the dark.

First, however, we have no direct or unmediated empirical evidence from which we can speak of the table-in-itself. We only have indirect empirical evidence for the table—*because that is the only sort of evidence we can ever have for objects that do not appear in their fullness all at once* (that is—for all objects). Second, the anti-realist needn't deny the realist's last objection that we can stub our toes on tables we cannot presently see: of course our idealized constructions are often not only warranted on the basis of prior empirical evidence but exceedingly reliable in predicting how the stuff of the world can and will push up against our consciousness. But a subject stubbing her toe on a table entails a consciousness: toe-stubbing is, here, mind-dependent. In addition, the point that the realist seems to be pressing is tantamount to saying that the table can make impressions when no one is impressed, or that the table looks a certain way when no one is looking. Such assertions remind us of the famed one hand clapping: what kinds of contact can be made when no contact is made? The realist pursuit of a mind-independent reality makes odd turns.

2) Object individuation is discourse-relative and variable.

For Hegel and Derrida, 1) object individuation requires substruction, and 2) substruction is, for us,[6] a discursively dependent process; 3) this makes "things" dependent on both consciousness and language for their existence *as* things. Note what is not asserted here: it does not follow from this that all of the stuff of the world is mind-dependent, only that the *individuation of* the stuff of the world is mind-dependent. This matters because *not all discourses individuate the stuff of the world in the same manner*, and there is insufficient warrant for the assumption that one matrix of

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[6] The clause "for us" is crucial here, insofar as non-human animals could, conceivably, substruct objects without the use of language."

individuation is superior to or closer to "reality" than another—although some matrices of individuation might be more *useful,* depending on a subject or a group's interests.

For an example, let me turn to *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning* (2003), in which Edward Schiappa provides an account of how the definition of the word "wetlands" changed in the United States during the early 1990s.[7] At the time, conservationists who wanted to protect wetlands were in competition with developers who wanted to build houses, strip malls, etc. on existing wetlands, and each group substructed "wetlands" in a different manner.

For the conservationists, the keys to defining a "wetland" were threefold. 1) The soil had to be sufficiently saturated with water such that 2) less oxygen could get into the soil, creating conditions in which 3) only certain types of plants adapted to soil with less oxygen—called "hydrophytes"—could thrive. Their definition was not random, and nor was it based on a simple description of patches of land that were sort of wet. On the contrary, the conservationists were concerned first with protecting those species of plants and animals that could only live in these types of wetlands. Second, wetlands—at least on this construction—absorb and hold sediments that we, as humans, don't want in our drinking water, keeping the water table cleaner. Third, this sort of soil can also absorb excess water during heavy rainfall, thus protecting humans to some extent from possible floods. So the conservationists fabricated a definition of "wetland" precisely because they wanted to save certain plants and animals, improve drinking water, and protect us from floods. By contrast, developers had another sort of human interest: they wanted to make money by building on the properties designated and protected as "wetlands."

When George H.W. Bush was running for president of the United States in 1992, "wetlands" were a crucial political issue, and Bush needed to earn the votes of those citizens sympathetic to the conservationists. Consequently, one of his central campaign promises was that under his presidency he would ensure that no wetlands would be lost to development. However, at the same time he also wanted to please the developers so as to continue to get their support. When Bush finally came into office, he signed into existence legislation that protected "wetlands," but the legislation changed the substruction of "wetlands" in ways designed to serve the interests of the developers. Specifically, the legislation said that wetlands had to be *very wet*, not just below the surface of the soil, but also at the surface. Bush said, "I've got a radical view of wetlands. I think wetlands ought to be wet" (87). This benefitted the developers because this greatly reduced the number of "wetlands," as, based on the definition of the conservationists, not all of the "wetlands" were really wet or had water on the surface.

Estimates suggested that probably 30 to 50 million acres of land that had been "wetlands" on the conservationists' definition were reclassified as "not wetlands"—reducing the number of wetlands by a third or by half—so that the developers could build houses and strip malls. A great deal of money could be made, and Bush could claim he kept his campaign promise: he *did* in fact approve legislation that protected the "wetlands," even as he redefined the term to suit his purposes. It was a successful bait-and-switch.

The conservationists, of course, were unhappy with these results, insofar as the "really wet" wetlands were so different from the "wetlands" they had singled out that the new legislation no longer served their interests. "Really wet" wetlands couldn't absorb sediments dangerous to human drinking water in the same way, couldn't absorb floodwaters, and didn't sustain the types of endangered species that thrived in the type of "wetlands" that fit their definition. On the new definition, all of the desires of the conservationists were thwarted.

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[7] I've used this example in print before—see Martin 2017.

For Schiappa, what is interesting about this case is that both definitions of "wetlands" are tied to human interests, just different sets of interests. What is a wetland? The answer to that question apparently depends on whether one wants a clean water table and to avoid floods, or if one wants to build a suburb. Note: we cannot simply answer that question by going out and looking at one. The substruction of such an object is, *a priori*, not an empirical matter. The very same patch of land might look like a wetland for the conservationists but not for Bush and the developers. The thing's identity is, ultimately, nonempirical.

Another crucial point for Schiappa is that these definitional decisions are always related to political power, which is why they're so contested. At the end of the day, what is politically crucial is the legal definition *enforced by the state*. Conservationists can define "wetlands" differently all they want, but their definition has no real-world consequences as long as the state is endorsing and enforcing another definition.

Schiappa concludes that abstract questions like "what is a wetland?"—especially when considered outside of any social or political context—are generally useless. Rather, "the questions to ask are 'Whose interests are being served by this particular definition?' and 'Do we identify with those interests'" (82)? Do we want to make money or save houses from floods?

Returning to the anti-realist point, here the individuation of objects is clearly discourse-dependent. Without the discourses of conservationist scholars, we would not have individuated "wetlands" in the first place. Their existence *as wetlands* is a product of their discursive substruction. The things of the world do not individuate themselves; had humans never evolved, no one would ever have individuated wetlands. As Hagglund puts it in his discussion of Derrida's commentary on Emmanuel Levinas' body of writings, "discrimination has to be regarded as a constitutive condition. Without divisional marks—which is to say, without segregating borders—there would be nothing at all" (Hägglund 2008, 82). I would qualify the point: it's not that there would be nothing at all, it's that there would be no "things" at all.

Here it is worth returning to the realist's primary objection, posed above: "of course, *for us* objects might be subject to the movement of ideality, but, arguably, the objects in-themselves—apart from any observer or speaker—exist independently of the processes of ideality." John R. Searle is one of the most strident advocates of this view. In *The Construction of Social Reality*, he defines realism as "the view that there is a way that things are that is logically independent of all human representations" (emphasis removed; Searle 1995, 155). Searle allows that all *descriptions* of the "brute facts" of reality—including, for instance, the "brute fact" that "Mount Everest exists independently of how or whether I or anyone else ever represented it or anything else"—are discourse-relative: "[a]ll representations of reality are made *relative to* some more or less arbitrarily selected set of concepts" (emphasis added; 161). However, he insists that the "brute facts" that discourses describe *exist independently* of discourse and make discourses about them possible; for Searle, conceptual relativism "seems to presuppose realism, because it presupposes a language-independent reality that can be carved up or divided up in different ways" (165). The problem, from the perspective of this chapter, is in the phrase "there is a way that *things* are": for Hegel and Derrida, "things" *entails* individuation and individuation *entails* the intentional consciousnesses that Searle wants to exclude from the "brute facts" of reality.

As should be clear from Schiappa's example, stating that "wetlands" exist *as wetlands* independently of the process of their substruction makes little sense: of *which particular* type of wetlands are we speaking? Of course, the anti-realist could rightfully allow the following: those

things that conservationists eventually individuated as wetlands existed prior to when conservationists individuated them. As Searle rightly notes,

> We arbitrarily define the word "cat" in such and such a way; and only relative to such and such definitions can we say, "That's a cat." But once we have made the definitions and once we have applied the concepts relative to the system of definitions, whether or not something satisfies our definition is no longer arbitrary or relative. (Searle 1995, 166)

However, prior to formulating a definition of "wetland," that referent to which the term *now* refers did not exist *as* wetlands then, because to exist *as* a wetland, or to be individuated *as* a wetland, is always to be *for-us*. Were we to remove the conservationists' individuation or the *for-us*, the resulting claim—"wetlands existed prior to when conservationists individuated them"— would be far more problematic. Such a claim could not be verified as true without investigation of the "extra-linguistic" referent for the word "wetland," and such an inquiry would *necessarily* require reference back to the linguistic discourses of the conservationists, or the *for-us*—in which case we're back in anti-realist territory. *The "extra-linguistic" referent is dependent for its individuation on language*.

This second sticking point is perhaps the most important one because it draws attention to the social and political consequences of realism: *realism naturalizes historically specific matrices of individuation.* Realism insists that a table is just a table, as if that were the final word on the matter, as if what some might call a "table" could not be individuated differently—as a desk, as fuel for a house fire, or as garbage or debris in a landfill. While naturalizing the individuation of a table might be largely politically innocuous or irrelevant, the same is not true of objects like "primitive savage," "woman," or "homosexual." Not all matrices of individuation substruct "woman" in the same manner, but naturalizing one individuation over others can have considerable social consequences—and *that's the risk always taken by the realist approach* to objects. Or, to use another example, a realist for whom the claim that "life begins at conception" is fully naturalized is liable to have difficulty understanding or communicating with those who individuate "human life" in a different manner. For them, "life" just is what it is. In such cases, realism is a considerable barrier to historicization. Similarly, I once got into an argument with a biologist who insisted that "sex" is, by definition, based on XX and XY chromosomes; when I pointed out that, throughout history, other biologists defined "sex" differently, the retort was: "No, *sex is based on DNA*." Because the terms had been thoroughly naturalized for her, thinking in terms of alternate matrices of individuation was apparently impossible.

One needn't be a "radical" poststructuralist to come to such a conclusion about the relativity of object individuation. Euro-American analytical philosophers provide us with similar arguments. In his classic *Ways of Worldmaking*—cited briefly above—Nelson Goodman notes that "[i]dentification rests upon organization into entities and kinds. The response to the question 'Same or not the same?' must always be 'Same what?' … Identity or constancy in a world is identity *with respect to* what is within that world *as organized*" (emphasis mine; Goodman 1978, 8).[8] Hilary Putnam defends a similar view, calling it "conceptual pluralism." He writes,

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[8] See also recent research in psychology. In *the Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought*, Susan A. Gelman—citing John Macnamara's useful volume, *A Border Dispute: The Place of Logic in Psychology* (1986)—writes:

we might describe "the contents" of a room very differently by using first the vocabulary of fundamental physical theory [i.e., "as consisting of fields and particles"] and then again the vocabulary of tables and chairs and lamps …. [W]e can use both of these schemes without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology. (Putnam 2004, 48-49)

Putnam concludes by noting that "[t]he whole idea that the *world* dictates a unique 'true' way of dividing the world into objects, situations, or properties, etc., is a piece of philosophical parochialism" (51). From such a perspective, there is no final or unrevisable ontology or matrix of individuation.

A side point: it is because of these two sticking points that I find it so terribly problematic when scholars use the "lens" metaphor to talk about their use of theory. The metaphor is typically employed to suggest that theory or theoretical discourses function like lenses to open vision on a particular subject matter, perhaps from a particular perspective. For instance, one might say that "feminist theory is a lens through which we can read a text, a lens that enables us to focus on the patriarchal social practices described therein." Note what the metaphor implies: reality is *out there*, beyond the lens, and—despite the fact that the lens enables vision—the lens gets *between us and reality*—perhaps even distorting or coloring vision in some way. The lens metaphor is extremely close to—if not identical with—the linguistic Kantian view whereby theoretical discourses get between us and the noumena of the world.

By contrast, according to the two sticking points I've attended to here, there are no noumenal "things" out there, as the individuation of objects in the first place is discourse-relative. As such, feminist discourses don't get *between* us and patriarchal practices; rather, they *individuate* those practices *for us* in the first place. The lens metaphor invites a worrisome epistemological anxiety: perhaps our lens distorts or colors our access to reality? By contrast, seeing a matrix of individuation as constitutive implies no separation between subjects and the things individuated, any more than a knife used to divide one slice of bread from the next separates those slices from the slicer. The words in a matrix of individuation are the knives that give us the slices, but *they do not get in between us and the slices*. There are many epistemological anxieties about which we should be worried, but the fear that constitutive discourses separate us from the world should not be one of them; individuation carves one object from the next but does not create a barrier between subjects and objects.

3) Matrices of individuation and claims about objects are essentially and indefinitely revisable.

The third sticking point is that matrices of individuation are indefinitely revisable. Time or temporality is the horizon of possibility for the substruction of objects, but openness to temporality simultaneously makes the closure of substruction theoretically impossible. Protention haunts every present now moment: it could always be the case that some future will come along that force us to revise our matrices of individuation. This could be for several reasons. First, by turning objects in our hands—in the case of mid-sized objects—or by gathering

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the question "How many" makes no sense without supplying the sortal—how many *what* (i.e., dogs? legs? molecules?). Likewise sortals are required for making judgments of identity. "Are these two things the same?" makes no sense without supplying the sortal—the same what. (Gelman 2003, 13)

new data—for instance, by performing scientific experiments—we may see a side or profile of the objects we've individuated that have never appeared to us before. Second, "things" change and thus the objects we individuate may present new or previously unprecedented features, characteristics, or behaviors. Third, changing interests may invite us to individuate objects in a novel ways, as when George H.W. Bush's political interests directed his administration to individuate "wetlands" in a different manner.

In summary, things are individuated as things *for-us*, and matrices of individuation are both historically relative and indefinitely revisasble. As such, speaking of the "real" existence of "things" independently of their individuation for consciousness makes little sense—such talk refers to things prior to the construction of their thingness.

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Although my defense of anti-realism ultimately might not be persuasive to many readers, I hope to have demonstrated, first, that Hegel and Derrida's views are neither unargued (as Searle claims about Derrida [see Searle 1995, 159]) nor simplistically naïve—as if they could not tell the difference or recognize a distinction between a word and a referent. Second, I hope to have shown that the stakes of the discussion are not simply esoteric; insofar as realism can be used to naturalize or have the effect of naturalizing particular matrices of individuation, the question of anti-realism matters socially and politically.

VI. "There is nothing outside of the text"

In conclusion, I would like to turn back to Derrida's claim that "there is nothing outside of the text," as well as the various interpretations that read this as defending either a linguistic Berkeleyanism or a linguistic dualism. I presume at this point I've provided more than sufficient evidence against the former charge: by no means is Derrida saying that language is all we have and there's nothing to existence other than words or signs.

As concerns the charge of linguistic dualism, I hope it is also clear that by no means does Derrida deny that there is a stuff of the world outside language. On the contrary, the sticking point is not that language is all we have access to, but rather that language is part and parcel of the *individuation* of extra-linguistic referents. As with Hegel, this is only to say that referents are in part necessarily and inescapably *for-us*. Despite Hjelm's taunting, poststructuralists can recognize a distinction between gravity and the word "gravity," even if the referent of the word—a referent that's clearly not a mid-sized object—is individuated via language.

As with Hegel and Husserl, Derrida is neither an empiricist nor a rationalist, but rather both. Referents—at least ones that are not mid-sized objects—require for their individuation *both* "reality" and language, both empiricism and ideality. *Saying that language is a necessary part of all individuation is not the same as saying language is all we have access to*. To assert otherwise is as absurd as suggesting that because someone says that all human bodies are dependent upon the processes of digestion, they mean that extra-bodily food is inaccessible. For Derrida, individuation is digestion, and such a claim entails no dualism between food and body or between referent and consciousness. In *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida writes the following about Husserl's now moment: "The living present arises on the basis of its non-self-identity, and on the basis of the retentional trace. … This trace is unthinkable if we start from the simplicity of

a present whose life would be interior to itself" (Derrida 2011, 73). "Reality" is retained in consciousness as trace, even as it is digested, transformed, or turned into something different *for us*.

So, in the context of *Of Grammatology*, what does it mean to say "there is nothing outside of the text"? Throughout the book Derrida makes a number of explicit claims that signal the book is not about writing, texts, or language in the colloquial sense, but about the (non)ontological structure of what Heidegger called "Being." For Heidegger, western philosophy has for too long focused on "beings" rather than "Being," which makes beings possible; that is, the focus has been on things rather than the general condition of possibility of things. Although Heidegger distances himself from Heraclitus' famous claim that "no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he's not the same man," it's clear that by emphasizing Being over beings, Heidegger's corpus—particularly after *Being and Time*—produces a similar argument emphasizing change over continuity, or non-identity over identity. For Heidegger, Being is the nothingness (for it is not *a* being, and, as such, does not have its own being) that exempts beings from themselves; in time, beings cease to be what they were and become something new. Being is nothing in itself, but permits this perpetual passage and allows beings to come into existence as beings.

Similarly, for Derrida, temporality is a condition of possibility for things to come into existence, but his emphasis is on how temporality is simultaneously a condition of impossibility: because temporality produces differance and movement, things can never simply be themselves (note: "differance"—with an "a"—is Derrida's neologism for that spacing which is nothing in itself but which makes things possible, similar in many ways to Heidegger's Being). Much like Hegel, Derrida insists that the thing is in the doing, that thingness comes into being through rather than in spite of its different manifestations. Or, to use Butler's term, the thing exists in and through its *performance*, rather than being a prior existing thing that is subsequently performed.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's master metaphor is *writing*. He notes that throughout much of western philosophy, writing has been devalued in relationship to speech. On the classic view, writing is secondary to speech; writing is the re-mark, the trace, or the reproduction of what has already been said. However, by contrast, Derrida notes that speech—and, indeed, all language—traces what has already been said: words are words *only on condition* of their repetition; a word spoken or written once would not be a word. His argument involves a very complex immanent critique of Ferdinand de Saussure, but his conclusion is not all that complicated: even speech involves writing *in a metaphorical sense*—every time one speaks one is re-writing, re-tracing, or re-marking words that have already been written, traced, marked.

His choice of "writing" as a master metaphor emphasizes its apparent secondariness: writing is supposed to be a duplicate of the original, real thing—i.e., speech—and, as such, is not a thing-in-itself but something that refers to another in-itself. However, not only are signifiers representatives or traces of signifieds, but signifieds or referents themselves are traces. Writing is, to use a metaphor invoked above, digestion: it takes something given and transforms it, but it turns out that the "it" that was given *was itself* taken and transformed, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Whether we call it digestion, tracing, or writing, Derrida insists that this process is true of "inscription in general, *whether it is literal or not* and even if what it contributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural 'writing'" (emphasis added; 9). That is, even an "extra-linguistic" referent such as Michelangelo's statue of David is "written," e.g., from Michelangelo's consciousness, his hands, his chisels, his view of bodily ideals, his reading of biblical narratives, the block of marble from

which he started, and more. "All this is to describe *not only* the system of notation secondarily connected with these activities [such as sculpture] *but the essence and the content of these activities themselves*" (emphasis added; 9). That is, the "essence" of even material referents in the world is to have been—metaphorically—written. "The thing itself is a collection of things or a chain of differences" (90). Derrida even invokes biology and the "pro-gram" in living cells as an example (9); the production of biological life entails continually reproducing DNA over and over. Like Heidegger's Being, this movement of things written, traced, or digested makes the coming-to-thingness possible, and the absence of such movement would be *death*. "[L]ife without differance: another name for death" (71). Without the writing of, e.g., DNA, bodies would die.

In *Of Grammatology*, "writing" is thus a metaphor for ontology in general, although an ontology in which the existence of "things" is perpetually usurped, in which case it's a non-ontology of sorts. Even if we went to the "things-in-themselves," we would be inevitably and perpetually referred further back to the tracings that serve as their prior condition of possibility. To use Westerhoff's term above, Derrida's point here is that all things are existentially dependent rather than self-sufficient things-in-themselves. (The production of temporality through the movement of differance is, perhaps, little different from pratityasamutpada.[9]) As such, "[t]he trace must be thought before the entity. … [N]o structure of the entity escapes it" (47). "[T]here is no chance of encountering anywhere the purity of 'reality,' 'unicity,' 'singularity'" (91). "[T]he *thing itself* … gives itself as it moves away" (154). "[T]he origin did not even disappear, … it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin of the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. … [T]here is above all no originary trace" (61). For Derrida, this undermines all of the classic distinctions between "worldly and non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal, transcendental and empirical, etc." (8). There is therefore no "inside" of language as opposed to the "outside" world; either of the two are constituted through the tracing of a great chain of being that is flat rather than hierarchical. If things-in-themselves were self-sufficient, such movement would not be possible; on the contrary, "[t]he presence of the thing itself is already exposed in exteriority" (203).

Turning to Derrida's immanent critique of Rousseau's body of writings, he claims "there is nothing outside of the text" in the midst of a discussion of Rousseau's *Confessions*. In that text, Rousseau nostalgically laments the loss of lovers, while at the same time notes that he never fully enjoyed their presence. At times his lovers were of interest seemingly only because they stood in for—or *supplemented*—absent mother-figures or previous lovers to whom Rousseau was previously attached. In addition, apparently out of fear of attachment or sexually transmitted diseases, Rousseau would turn to masturbation to satisfy his sexual desires. "Rousseau will never stop having recourse to, and accusing himself of, this onanism that permits one to be himself affected by providing himself with presences, by summoning absent beauties" (153). In this manner, "that dangerous supplement"—i.e., masturbation—"has not only the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image: procuring it for us through the proxy of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it" (155). One woman supplements another—his lover "Mamma" supplements his "real" mother, and later Thérèse supplements Mamma—and Rousseau's masturbatory representations of women to himself supplemented the flesh-and-blood women themselves. Thus we have a chain of supplements, each "thing" standing in for an absent "thing."

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[9] Pratityasamutpada is, in the Buddhist tradition, the doctrine of "dependent origination," according to which no things are self-sufficient but rather come into being dependently.

After introducing this discussion, Derrida takes a step back to consider what is taking place in his reading or interpretation of Rousseau's text. Are we learning about the "real" Rousseau? Does this reading tell us about Rousseau in-himself? Derrida denies this is the case, because a reading

> cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. (158)

Derrida insists here that there is no "reality" that we could get to that would not be structured by the displacement of "things" via differance that is writing or tracing. He goes on:

> *There is nothing outside of the text.* And that is neither because Jean-Jacques' life, or the existence of Mamma or Thérèse *themselves*, is not of prime interest to us, nor because we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation. … [T]here are more radical reasons. (158)

That is, Derrida *explicitly* denies that "there is nothing outside of the text" means that we only have access to Rousseau, Mamma, or Thérèse through language or the text. Rather,

> in what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone,' beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed in Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing, there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations, which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity. (159)

Derrida's argument, then, is not that Mamma or Thérèse exist only in language or in the text in the colloquial sense, but that even their flesh and bone—their DNA, their bodies digesting food, their internalized identities and social roles, etc.—are *written* in the metaphorical sense. The "real" as such is *a posteriori,* resulting from an idealization in fantasy or imagination. The "real" Mamma and Thérèse are products of substruction; the "real" we arrive at comes at the end, not at the beginning. Empirically, we have access only to perpetual difference; the ideality substructed from that chain of difference is a *fixing* of what is, in-itself, not fixed.

I suspect that realists might readily allow Heraclitus' point—"of course 'reality' is perpetually changing"—but nevertheless insist that this is a facile or superficial point and that Derrida's emphasis on difference and change over identity and continuity is a naïve, one-sided account of the world. In response, I would point once again to the political stakes of the second "sticking point" for anti-realism: object individuation is discourse-relative and variable. If we emphasize identity and continuity at the expense of difference and change, we risk ignoring the extent to which that individuation is historically variable, as well as the extent to which it must be historicized rather than naturalized—otherwise we risk lending a table-thumping, realist certainty to historically specific referents like "primitive savages," "women," "homosexuals," or

those "lives" that purportedly begin at conception, all of which "are what they are" because of the nature of "reality."

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In conclusion, I would like to reiterate one of the points with which I began: it is quite possible that poststructuralists are wrong about the fact that we construct our objects of study—I, for instance, would argue (based on recent studies on infant cognition) that the individuation of mid-sized objects is not, in fact, completely discourse relative in the way Derrida implies. However, we cannot reject poststructuralist anti-realism without a consideration of their arguments and simultaneously pretend to be responsible scholars.

It no more follows from the claim that scholars create their objects of study that we're not subject to gravity than it follows from the Madhyamika claim that we have no selves that Buddhists then must not have to pay taxes. The *reductio ad absurdum* depends on a complete misconstrual of the argument at hand. And, while we would never tolerate silly dismissals of the doctrine of anatta by scholars who've never read a single primary source from the Madhyamika tradition, realists apparently have free reign to caricature poststructuralism based on secondhand knowledge of the philosophical sources. Despite the fact that this paper has been painfully dense and technical, responsible scholarship typically requires us to do our due diligence before mocking a position we reject. I assert that realists should be held to the same scholarly standards.

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