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THE TRUTH “NO ONE HAS EVER THOUGHT”: MERLEAU-PONTY READER AND INHERITOR OF HUSSERL’S *ORIGIN OF GEOMETRY*

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a thorough examination of the impact of Edmund Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* on the philosophical development of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It aims to analyse the pivotal conceptual intersections between the two thinkers, highlighting the innovative ideas that emerged in Merleau-Ponty's work as a response to Husserl's text. Additionally, this study seeks to clarify the unique factors that contribute to the originality of Merleau-Ponty's ideas, exploring how he both engages with and transcends Husserlean thought in his own writings. By closely investigating these relationships, the paper aspires to offer a deeper understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical contributions while situating them within the broader context of existential and phenomenological discourse.

KEYWORDS

MERLEAU-PONTY. HUSSERL. PHENOMENOLOGY. GEOMETRY. HISTORY.

RESUMO

Este artigo empreende um exame detalhado do impacto de *A Origem da Geometria*, de Edmund Husserl, no desenvolvimento filosófico de Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Seu objetivo é analisar as interseções conceituais fundamentais entre os dois pensadores, destacando as ideias inovadoras que emergem na obra de Merleau-Ponty em resposta ao texto husserliano. Além disso, este estudo busca esclarecer os fatores únicos que contribuem para a originalidade das ideias de Merleau-Ponty, explorando como ele tanto dialoga com quanto transcende o pensamento de Husserl em seus próprios escritos. Ao investigar essas relações de forma minuciosa, o artigo almeja oferecer uma compreensão mais profunda das contribuições filosóficas de Merleau-Ponty, situando-as no contexto mais amplo do discurso existencial e fenomenológico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

MERLEAU-PONTY. HUSSERL. FENOMENOLOGIA. GEOMETRIA. HISTÓRIA.

1. INTRODUCTION. OPENING OUT SOMETHING ELSE

Husserl significantly influenced Merleau-Ponty, who became well-known in France also through the latter's interpretation and mediation of his ideas¹. Merleau-Ponty was an avid reader of Husserl and frequently visited his archives in Leuven (Van Breda, 1962). On his part, Merleau-Ponty explicitly recognised the pivotal role that Husserl's phenomenology played in his intellectual development and, more generally, in advancing philosophical thought. Throughout his early works and beyond, Merleau-Ponty consistently pays homage to Husserl. This profound inspiration manifests in various ways. Merleau-Ponty adopts much of Husserl's vocabulary and delves into essential concepts such as *intentionality* and the phenomenological analysis of temporality, as he mainly does in one of his seminal works, i.e., *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 483-503). In a similar vein, Merleau-Ponty's understanding evolves through his engagement with Husserl's reflection as his famous worship of him – i.e., *The Philosopher and His Shadow* – seems to overtly account for (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 159-181)².

In this text, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the strengths of Husserl's ideas while highlighting theoretical challenges that may arise in the long run. Here, he aims to clarify what remains unexpressed or latent – hence the reference to the *shadow* cast by the philosopher – in Husserl's works and the essence of his

¹ Recently, Aurora highlighted the crucial role Aron Gurwitsch played in bringing Husserl's work to France, as well as his involvement in the promotion of Gestalt psychology, which was shaped mainly by key figures in Germany. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's insights, Aurora argues that we also owe Gurwitsch this mediating role, a contribution that Merleau-Ponty may not have adequately recognised (Aurora, 2022, p. 94).

² This essay does not aim to explore the extensive range of references Merleau-Ponty makes regarding Husserl's approach to phenomenology. Instead, it will briefly address the most pertinent points relevant to the main argument of this paper. Specifically, this study investigates Merleau-Ponty's response to the concise text “The Origin of Geometry”, i.e., the third appendix to §9 of Husserl's *Crisis* (Husserl, 1970, p. 353-379). Indeed, the attentive commentary on this text is contained in the transcription of one of the last courses taught by Merleau-Ponty at the Collège de France, namely *Husserl on the Limits of Phenomenology* (Merleau-Ponty, 2001). Therefore, the following discussion will concentrate solely on the summary insights that Merleau-Ponty presents concerning Husserl's work, particularly in the chapter titled “The Philosopher and His Shadow” of *Signs*.

philosophical spirit³. As he holds, Husserl's "venture has awakened so many echoes", which is appropriate to shed new light (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 159). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty desires to "evoke" the "unthought-of element in Husserl's thought in the margin of some old pages", i.e., by direct and repeated confrontation with some famous passages from his edited books and unedited manuscripts (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 160). This is possible and desirable in Merleau-Ponty's report because at "the end of Husserl's life there is", in his words, "an unthought-of element in his works which is *wholly his and yet opens out on something else*", i.e., something which is maybe not physically present in his writings but that could have arisen anyway given his deeper intentions or suspected motivations (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 160, emphasis mine)⁴.

³ This critical proposition has accompanied Merleau-Ponty throughout his life and career. As has been the case with other authors, such as, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre or Henri Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, in his writings, seeks to clarify how his position ripens from direct contact with and subsequent overcoming of the ideas of his predecessors (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 70 et ss.). In the case of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty shows appreciation for the attention Husserl accords to corporeality as a vehicle of intentionality, especially from *Ideas II* onward, but rejects the remnants of idealism that he finds still present in the notion of consciousness or the overly linear understanding of time, as expressed in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 190-192).

⁴ In this text, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges Husserl for having finally escaped the frontal relations between "pure subject and pure things", at least starting from the considerations contained in *Ideas II* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 163). Moreover, indulging in the so-called genetic turn of his doctrine, Merleau-Ponty praises the Husserlean attempt to describe the temporal conditions indeed structuring our sensitive experience and knowledge of intellectual order. The latter would rest, according to Husserl, on a "*Weltthesis*", which is "prior to all theses", i.e., on the sense of a more profound and *natural* belonging than the upsurging consciousness of act and its constituent activities could only validate (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 163). Furthermore, in late Husserl's work, Merleau-Ponty appreciates an ongoing "archaeology" or genetic re-foundation of his former static phenomenology, whose "proper work is to unveil the pre-theoretical layer" on which "idealizations" and their "relative justification" stand on (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 165). In this study, I aim to clarify how the restructuring project—both theoretical and methodological—of Husserlean phenomenology is also reflected in Merleau-Ponty's works (and mostly in his academic course). Indeed, the two authors seek to *institute* a new idea of rationality grounded on new foundations, emphasising the importance of physicality or bodily experience in intersubjective engagement as a necessary condition for its establishment and validation while also acknowledging the potential for revision.

1.1. THE ORIGIN OF GEOMETRY. A STARTING AND AN ENDING POINT

In this spirit, my paper targets to investigate Merleau-Ponty's commentary on *The Origin of Geometry's* central claims, i.e., the third appendix to §9 of Husserl's *Crisis* (Husserl, 1970, p. 353-379; Hua VI, 1962, p. 365-386)⁵. *The Origin of Geometry* is a brief transcript whose reception had a tremendous impact on the French cultural context of that time. Indeed, it was drafted and published by Fink in 1939 and then translated into French by Derrida in 1962 (Derrida, 1989). While acknowledging Derrida's *Introduction* to this text of crucial relevance, I argue Merleau-Ponty had a preceding and closer relationship with this writing, so much so that he partly dedicated an academic course to it at the Collège de France between the fall of 1959 and the spring of 1960. The course took the programmatic name of *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* (Merleau-Ponty, 2001)⁶. Moreover, this scientific endeavour is essential for grasping the late evolution of Merleau-Ponty's thought and the significant role that Husserl's works played in it (Alloa, 2014b). Indeed, in the concluding phase of his speculative journey, Merleau-Ponty primarily engages with the theme of language to reveal being from an ontological standpoint, as also influenced by Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Moreover, as additionally evident in the lectures he dedicated to the theme of *Nature* (Merleau-Ponty, 2003), Merleau-Ponty thereafter tries to

⁵ In this paper, I will occasionally provide direct quotations from *Husserliana*, i.e., the most complete, German-language edition of Husserl's texts. I will do that in the case that the text has not yet been translated into English and also when I believe it is essential to mention the German term(s) to make the reader comprehend the poignancy of the question and the possible thematic commonality the quotation may have with other Husserlean texts.

⁶ The English translation follows the first French edition, originally appearing in 1998. The remarkable contributions here contained demonstrate this topic's enthusiasm among French scholars (see Merleau-Ponty, 1998). Indeed, this course also contains some brilliant considerations on Martin Heidegger's *On the Way to Language* and Husserl's unpublished notes about *Umsturz der Kopernikanischen Lehre: die Erde als Ur-Arche bewegt sich nicht* (then translated into French under the title of *La Terre ne se meut pas* by D. Franck, J.F. Lavigne and D. Pradelle) that I will not considerate in this paper. Although Dastur acknowledged Robert's original transcription of the German text contains several errors, I believe the current edition is still reliable for understanding the meaning of this writing (Dastur, 2016, p. 193-194).

elaborate on language as an expressive tool for constructing ideal content and nurturing intersubjective connections across history. This ultimately leads to the development of his theory of chiasm, as detailed in his last writing, i.e., *The Visible and the Invisible*. These developments were also nourished by his achievements in studying the theory of expression, which had occupied him throughout the first half of the 1950s (Merleau-Ponty, 2020b). However, why is *The Origin of Geometry* so relevant? Why did an appendix – i.e., something that is generally negligible, as we may conclude at first glance – arouse so much curiosity and interest in various phenomenologists and phenomenologically-informed commentators, such as Merleau-Ponty, already mentioned Fink and Derrida, but also Richir and Stiegler? And, finally, what, inside it or by its lecture, fundamentally *opens out something else* in Merleau-Ponty's words?

1.2. MY CLAIM(S)

In this paper, I would like to retrieve the fundamental theoretical assertions of this text while also profiting from the commentary of Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers⁷. At specific points, I will also try to encourage a *synoptic reading* of some passages from Merleau-Ponty's *Notes de Cours* (Merleau-Ponty, 1998/2001) and Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* to clarify the communal and ongoing phenomenological work that takes shape in these pages. What I want to bring out is that the two philosophers argue that meaning and historical truth are *intersubjectively* and *sociogenetically* constituted, that is, through the contribution of multiple interpreters; *diachronically* formed, that is, in time distribution and constitutive deferral to which an *intergenerational* unity must be acknowledged⁸; and through the necessary

⁷ In the following text, I will include Husserl's original work along with Merleau-Ponty's commentary. Additionally, I will attach annotations by Derrida and Stiegler.

⁸ In Husserl's analysis of temporality and the recognition of the other in the *Cartesian Meditations* the extension of subjective temporality into an intersubjective dimension is fully justified based on his exploration of the phenomena of pairing (*Paarung*) and empathy (Husserl, 1977, p. 112). Merleau-Ponty adopts and expands on this concept, applying it in various contexts (Merleau-Ponty, 2010a, p. 28). Indeed, he seeks to articulate this idea more explicitly, as

support offered by *technology*, as evident in the analysis of the strengths of *writing* in instituting, preserving and handing down the manifold contents of meaning. I will primarily outline this in the first part of this essay (2.). In the second part (3.), I will try to seek in what sense, starting from these epistemological suppositions, Merleau-Ponty *opens out on something else*, i.e., in his original production – and thus even before his 1959 and 1960 famous commentaries, which represented, unfortunately also for Merleau-Ponty, a kind of spiritual testament and a premature review of his work. What I will argue for is that Merleau-Ponty also retrieved the idea of a “rationality of investigation” in his texts, which he mainly attributes to Husserl, as he primarily clarifies in his course notes on *Institution* (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 48).

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty also supports a specific type of *intergenerational cooperation*, diachronically and sociogenetically motivated and supported by expressive instruments like writing and *painting*. For him, this observation is particularly clear when examining the history of painting and the *institutions* surrounding it. He notes that the relationship between works of art and the artists who create them reflects a continuous dialogue as if each painting contributes to a larger, evolving narrative. This interconnectedness spans from the earliest days of human creativity to contemporary art, demonstrating how each piece resonates with and influences those that precede and follow it. In this way, the evolution of painting can be viewed as a single, expansive work that encapsulates the thoughts, emotions, and cultural contexts of different eras. I believe this argument is sound when confronted with Husserlean *geometricians’* everlasting enterprise. To defend this, I will primarily refer to these notes, and then I focus on *The Indirect Language and the Voice of Silences*, a text contained in *Signs* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 47-113), *The Prose of the World*

he notes in the conclusion of the chapter on *Temporality* in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he discusses the “social horizon” that shapes every “living experience” and its intrinsic openness to multiple “temporalities” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 503).

(Merleau-Ponty, 1973), and some other to date less-considered course notes⁹. Additionally, I aim to clarify the specific Husserlean theories that influence Merleau-Ponty's work and, in conclusion, I will try to raise some questions about the role of technique and technology in the traditional establishment and propagation of meanings.

2. THE ORIGIN OF GEOMETRY. HOW DO WE DO SCIENCE?

So, why *The Origin of Geometry*? Why geometry? What lies behind this concept? Indeed, *The Origin of Geometry* is not a treatise on formal axiomatics. There are no drawings of triangles or sketches of any other kind in it. Instead, this appendix arises from the Husserlean desire to point out certain aspects of negligence that he recognises in the modern scientific method and its aftermaths, which he primarily discusses in paragraph §9 of the *Crisis*. For him, this method has allegedly forgotten its meaning and former mission and, with them, the primitive and intuitive evidence of its foundation practices. Indeed, the modern scientific method distances itself from the life world or *Lebenswelt*. This distance or forgetfulness is phenomenologically translated into the impossible recall or revival of its *instituting* or traditional deeds that yet initially marked its estrangement. Indeed, Husserl's work starts from this very observation.

2.1. INSTITUTION AND TRADITION(S)

In this sense, Husserl aspires to recall a different way of doing and communicating *science*, no longer based on undue solitary abstractions or inductive models, which he primarily recognises at work in the writings of Galileo, but on renewed and *reduced* transcendental foundations. However, this reduction is now based on the conventions of the genetic turn in his doctrine,

⁹ I refer to *Research on the Literary Use of Language* (Merleau-Ponty, 2013) and *The Problem of the Word* (Merleau-Ponty, 2020a).

which is recognisable from the 1920s onwards and accomplished in this context according to new theoretical assumptions. Indeed, the *epoché* or reduction here opens to the active participation of history and time, of other subjects' joint action in forming idealities, and the analysis of the possible ways, including language and writing, through which they can efficiently communicate and cooperate. Husserlean reconstruction or re-foundation in *Crisis*, therefore, must programmatically account for both the origin of a given, ideal content of knowledge and thus of its primitive i) *institution* or *Stiftung*, as well as its intimate possibility of being historically handed down, communicated and taught, without however losing anything of its original and *transcendental* vocation or meaning. This is what Husserl defines as ii) *tradition* in this text. In the same way, tradition must be able to follow, at least formally, the cultural path that has led its knowledge to be handed down without, however, superimposing itself - and thus annulling itself as such - on its primary institution. Tradition must, therefore, explain knowledge potential evolution and how the given content is integrated into the *Stiftungen*, but not on an "ontic" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, 34) or merely "empirical" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 46) account.

Indeed, through *expression* and *linguistic predicability*, geometry as science can genuinely advance without forgetting where it originally started. Thus, what we should call geometry, as Merleau-Ponty says in his commentary, is, for Husserl, the possible attainment of the definition or phenomenological expressive outwarding of a given "ideal object", which is accomplished as the "integral of a series of cumulative advances" forming its *tradition* (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 30). In this context, the object ideality of geometry is always a provisional result at first made possible by its primal *institution*, provided by first or proto-geometrician, but also by the *tradition* that incarnates its legacy or experiential inheritance through the action of its interpreters to come. Institution or "*Stiftung*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 73-74; 2001, p. 26) is here the inauguration of *Sinngeneses* or genesis of sense, which, by its very birth, already

opens up the search and the progressive refinement of the ideality-ness in front of it, to which, however, only *Tradition* or *Tradierung*, a concept mirroring the *Stiftung*, here, can do full justice. However, why is Husserl so concerned with this two-fold alternative? Why does an institution necessarily call forth tradition? And why does Husserl aim to conceptualise an “ideality which has need of time” to be an ideality in the first place? (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 19). To answer these questions, we should clarify what role language and writing play in this text.

2.2. LANGUAGE AND WRITING. ON INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATIONS’S MEANS

In *The Origin of Geometry*, Husserl significantly emphasises the role of language and writing in forming and perpetuating human knowledge. He also argues that language achieves everlasting validity when expressed in writing. This feature is particularly manifest in geometry, where evidence needs to be documented in writing to be understood. It must handed down in a living “tradition” (Landgrebe, 2011, 10) in which past, present, and future epochs and contributors keep themselves in communication thanks to the far-reaching of this technical medium, as he states in a letter to Fink (Fink, 1995, p. 174-176)¹⁰. Indeed, the objective *ideality* of geometry Husserl thinks of is only attainable when put into writing, i.e., when its meaning becomes *sedimented* and shareable in space and time *for someone* else who recovers and *reactivates* it as such, granting herself an unedited way to grasp its former and original *institution*. Moreover, geometry and the relentless idealisation of its new findings are

¹⁰ Stiegler also made this clear by speaking of a “technical continuity” of the “milieu” in which invention takes place (Stiegler, 1998, p. 61). This relates to writing as a technical enhancement of memory and knowledge in general when it reaches the stage of “exteriorisation” and thus attains a “new diachrony” of sense perseverance (Stiegler, 2009, p. 54; p. 110). For Stiegler, diachrony allows one to comprehend human knowledge “in terms of the evolution of the living being and, beyond that, of the living being’s non-living creations”, as is the case for geometrical transgenerational meaning construction and for their “undetermined” being (Stiegler, 2011, p. 163).

permanently under construction and always “perfectible” (Thierry, 1997, p. 94). The idealisation’s process of geometry follows the temporal feature of the “continuous synthesis” of past and new “acquisitions”, which would be incomprehensible if we do not adequately grasp its “*persisting manner of being*” (Husserl, 1970, p. 355, emphasis mine)¹¹.

For Husserl, only writing provides this material *perseverance*, making a step forward in theory always possible. Furthermore, the process of idealisation here at stake engages several generations of researchers in its formation because its development may never be completed but only constantly improved. As Derrida and Stiegler stated, writing as material support properly makes geometricians what they are, i.e., inheritors and continuers of an institution of everlasting knowledge perpetuation¹². Indeed, geometricians collaborating this way seem to constitute a larger group of suppliers in the field of culture

¹¹ In Husserllian terms, it is a “linguistic embodiment”, like writing, which makes the ideality of geometry “valid” and “understandable by all” (Husserl, 1970, p. 358; see also Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 57) as he tells in *The Origin of Geometry*. This validation forms an “ideal construction” which can “be understood for all future time and by all coming generations of men and thus be capable of being handed down and reproduced with the identical meaning”, and so, finally, building an ideal construction “valid with unconditioned generality for all men, all times, all peoples” (Husserl, 1970, p. 377). For Husserl, this validation is only possible once what a geometrician discovers is visible to everyone else (Hua XIV, p. 136-37; p. 254). Other geometricians, be they her contemporaries or successors, can read what she marks into writing and corroborate what they find correct. Conversely, they can fix what is wrong without nullifying her contribution’s sedimented, historical, and structural value. Whether they confirm or deny it, they can do this because they inherit it as such by its appearance in a written document (Cahonne, 1986, p. 5; Pradelle, 2013, p. 297-98). Here, nothing new arises except based on the previous content of knowledge thus found. Evolutions are discrete and only possible with the help of a plurality of interpreters. Truth content refers to an implicit and unlimited totality of receivers and senders when written and thus formed and consigned to history. These interpreters form an ideal sequence of contributors capable of transcending the immediacy of the present and establishing an underground but indissoluble link with omni-temporal human knowledge, enabling contributors to teleologically recognise themselves as such (Blomberg, 2019, p. 84; p. 87). Indeed, it is only through the technique of writing that more and more complex idealities may be formed and conserved over multiple generations of geometricians-writers, thus constituting a *diachronic* and *participative* dimension of sense formation that is not reducible to the oeuvre of an individual or a single group or generation of agents whose death or disappearance may cause the tragic end of the history and continuation of geometrical culture as such (Blomberg, 2019, p. 82; Vioulac, 2015, p. 164).

¹² Derrida says that, according to Husserl, without “the ultimate objectification that writing permits, all language would as yet remain captive of the de facto and actual intentionality of a speaking subject or community of speaking subjects” (Derrida, 1989, p. 87-88). Conversely, “by absolutely virtualising dialogue, writing creates a kind of autonomous transcendental field from which every present subject can be absent” (Derrida, 1989, p. 87-88).

through writing's "communal" sedimentation and reactivation, i.e., throughout the technical achievement of pinning down relevant contents which may be passed on to the geometricians-writers of the future, when recovered from geometricians-writers of the past (Landgrebe, 2011, p. 38). This is feasible because these ideal contents survive their creators and are passed on across multiple generations of individuals (Husserl, 1977, 120; Hua XXXIX, p. 297)¹³. Besides, these geometricians-writers' temporal combined action also partake in the continuous constitution of geometry backwards, i.e., a *sociogenetic* cultural factor whose temporal and conceptual "solidarity" escapes rigid boundaries of the immediacy of the present and *intuition* (Housset, 1997, p. 179).

2.3. DIACHRONY OVER SYNCHRONY. DEPLOYING THE VITAL MOVEMENT OF THE COEXISTENCE

For Husserl, geometricians do not only *synchronically* work in the foundation of their knowledge. Synchrony, as the concurrent sum of their efforts, cannot describe the temporal duration of geometrical modification made possible through writing, content passive sedimentation, and ideal active reassumption (see Husserl, 1970, p. 378; Hua XV, p. 378-386; Casement, 1988, p. 235). So, this kind of understanding is also *diachronically* broadcasted, according to the constant evolution of a "structural truth", as also noted by Merleau-Ponty, and which can only be partially attained over multiple generations who conserve the comprehensiveness of their joint enterprise (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 52)¹⁴. By *diachrony*, I intend a dimension of non-simultaneous time

¹³ Indeed, writing, as technics, also constitutes them as geometricians-writers. Indeed, as seems to be the case for the "chain of generations" composing the *diachrony* of meaning transmission, writing appears to Husserl's eyes the only tool granting the formation of what Stiegler would also call the cross-generational "community of geometricians" (Stiegler, 2009, p. 230).

¹⁴ As Husserl states "every science is related to an open chain of generations to those who work for and with one another", a chain precisely composed of "researchers (...) who are accomplishing subjectivity of the whole living science" (Husserl, 1970, p. 355-356; see Housset, 1997, p. 181-188). For Husserl, this statement may be applied to every epistemic content intended as an ineludible geometrical construction where "scientific thinking attains new results based on those already attained" because "the new ones serve as the foundation for still

distribution and agency where sense is constituted via the temporal and cumulative contributions of numerous geometers operating. In this respect, in *The Origin of Geometry*, time is critical in comprehending the revolutionary concept of "historical a priori", the latter encompassing, for Husserl, "everything that exists as historical becoming and having-become or exists in its essential being" (Husserl, 1970, p. 372), a notion that he here introduces through the term "sedimentation" (D'Amico, 1981, p. 11). Indeed, the "coconsciousness"¹⁵ of what is "constructed through human activity" and then through boundless sedimentation which guarantees its validity in time, "implies", in Husserl's words, "a continuity of pasts which imply one another", i.e., a permanency which appears to be a form of cultural endurance that corresponds the very sense of sedimentation he suggests (Husserl, 1970, p. 371; see Husserl, 1977, p. 125-126).

History thus made and unbrokenly developing is, for Husserl, "nothing other than the vital movement of the coexistence and the interweaving of original formations and sedimentations of meaning", as it is for the case of geometry as a collective initiative of knowledge (Husserl, 1970, p. 371). These expressive sedimentations are indispensable for meaning to be "stabilised and communicable across space and time" because they provide, accordingly, "the historical process spanning generations" of geometers (Blomberg, 2019, p. 79; p. 81)¹⁶. Again, while language, as the most primitive means of

others, [...] in the unity of a propagative process of transferred meaning" (Husserl, 1970, p. 362; see Goris, 2014, p. 15). Indeed, each "stage" of this construction and transferal of meaning functions as a fundamental service to the general economy of the teleological project of geometry (Husserl, 1970, p. 362; see Hua XV, 593-596; Hua XXXIX, p. 319-320). Indeed, although geometry claims to be a collective enterprise, it does not neglect the autonomy of "every researcher": the latter operates "on his part of building" knowledge, i.e., makes her job having the bigger goal in mind (Husserl, 1970, p. 362; see Thierry, 1997, p. 111). Here, successive and superior "meaning is grounded upon meaning", and, in this process, "the earlier meaning gives something to its validity to the later one" and "becomes part of it" (Husserl, 1970, 362).

¹⁵ "mitbewußt" (Hua VI, p. 379).

¹⁶ According to Husserl, sciences are instituted and endure as a matter of history, passive sedimentation, and tradition, from which arises an "activity of producing new structures of meaning" that will, in turn, sediment and become again "working materials" for further and more elaborated inquiries (Husserl, 1970, p. 368-369; see Hua XV, p. 510-513).

communication, allows the geometricians to “intersubjectively share” (Blomberg, 2019, p. 84) what they find out in the immediacy of the present condition, it is only through writing that geometry may be constituted as such and dress a relevant “scientific community” whose messages are recovered, and, finally “pass beyond the individual act and become a cultural object” compelling for everyone who may read it (D’Amico, 1981, p. 12; see Hua XXXIX, p. 159-160). So, Husserl here underlies the aprioristic role of *history* and *instrumentality* in forming and perpetuating human culture and related meaning. He defines this item as a “validity ground” that has never been “observed” nor thematised (Husserl, 1970, p. 373). According to this text, more complex meanings can only form through time of sedimentation and the cooperation of individuals working on them across generations. However, how do these generations relate to each other in continuing the open chain of research? How can a new one reassume what the former once made clear and take over?

2.4. LINGUISTIC GENERATIVE INCOMES. ON SCIENCE CONTINUATION AND EVENTUAL ENHANCEMENT

Again, the *materiality* of the support instrument they work on entitles the geometricians-writers *to be groups of contributors* linked across generations in their missions undefeated and *uninterrupted diachronic unity of meaning* (Vioulac, 2015, p. 172-175)¹⁷. The materiality of this “supplement” (Blomberg, 2019, p. 90) – as it is more apparent in Derrida’s reading (Derrida, 1989, p. 88) – seems to gain a peculiar autonomy over the singularity of contributors employing it. Writing allows the geometricians to enter the field of contributors, for language alone is not appropriate to establish this cultural dimension, i.e., something capable of involving proper “communication” with a related “communicator” and surviving for an open-ended timelapse (Husserl, 1970, p. 360). As Husserl

¹⁷ Derrida understands the “act of writing” as the “transcendental reduction performed by and toward the *we*”, emphasising its immediate intersubjective connotation (Derrida, 1989, p. 92).

makes clear, what is “lacking” in oral expression to get this is the “persisting existence of the *ideal objects* even during periods in which the inventor and his fellows are no longer wakefully so related or even are no longer alive”, i.e., when the geometrician could not intuitively show her finding to someone else (Husserl, 1970, p. 360). Writing is the technical tool enabling the geometricians to sediment their findings, i.e., to make them showable, forever valid, and reactivable. Writing results in the “communalization”¹⁸ process, banding fellow geometricians at work (Husserl, 1970, p. 364; see Husserl, 1977, p. 128; Vioulac, 2015, p. 165-172). It is the “infiniteization”¹⁹, i.e., the artificial enhancement of our capacities and the overcoming of the “finitude of the individual and even the social capacity” of data retaining (Husserl, 1970, p. 365).

According to Husserl, the “important function of written, documenting linguistic expression is that it makes communications possible without immediate and mediate personal address”, making it “virtual” and so anytime transmissible and emendable (Husserl, 1970, p. 360-361). “Through this”, for Husserl, “the communalization of man is lifted to a new level” of complexity which oral transmission would never have achieved in sheer time synchrony (Husserl, 1970, p. 361; see Housset; 1997, p. 203-204), i.e., a level which permits to constitute the sense of a composite “ideality that no one alone has ever thought”, as a single individual, i.e., by herself, as Merleau-Ponty also noted (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 57). Writing allows content to be sedimented without losing effectiveness in the actuality of the present assignment. In reading written signs, we can reawaken what lies sedimented in books and transform or *metamorphose* – as Merleau-Ponty would tell – the original intentions of its authors, bringing it back to corresponding activity in giving this content a new life and a *richer sense* in its *reinstitution*. Moreover, language which goes through linguistic embodiment does not become something like congealed speech, i.e., stationary and immobile possession, as Merleau-Ponty remarked in evaluating

¹⁸ “*Vergemeinschaftung*” (Hua VI, p. 374; see Hua I, p. 156). See also Hua XIV, p. 523-530 on properties of “*Paarung*”.

¹⁹ “*Verunendlichung*” (Hua VI, p. 375).

this passage. Instead, writing represents the very “transporter of meaning” and tradition, what makes meaning *meaningful* (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 78).

Sciences and knowledge that are embodied this way “are not handed down ready-made in the form of documented sentences” because “they involve”, conversely, “a lively, productively advancing formation of meaning, which always has the documented, as a sediment of an earlier production” (Husserl, 1970, p. 365). Finally, this liveness and participative technical account of geometric meaning grants the epistemic “continuity from one person to another” and, comparably, “from one time to another” across multiple cohorts of actors and researchers (Husserl, 1970, p. 366)²⁰.

3. MERLEAU-PONTY: THE READER, THE INHERITOR

Before turning to Merleau-Ponty’s fundamental *opening*, I want to remark on what he shares about Husserlean reading and under what assumptions. Again, why is this text so crucial to Merleau-Ponty? What role does it play in his production? And what, in a sense, does it allow him to say using Husserl’s words and not his own?

²⁰ Commenting on the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, Stiegler identifies a third form of retention, i.e., of memory conservation, which is the “material inscription of the memory in mnemotechnical systems” (Stiegler 2011, p. 4) as books or papers are. This form of retention defines the “collective memory qua patrimony” (Stiegler, 1998, p. 98), i.e., as collective mnemonic possession and accountability. Patrimony is a historical feature that is constantly growing as time goes on. Most importantly, *geometricians* historically deliver for its advancement. As for geometry, the heritage of culture does not coincide with a specific achievement of the moment but with the “enchainment” (Stiegler, 2007, p. 15) of the geometrical evolution of the system of reference. The enchainment brings forth an enlargement of the dimension of the present. Once again, this transformation is possible via writing and through the written documentation this faculty provides. Through writing, knowledge becomes accessible, historical and immediately communitarian. Knowledge passes to the heirs for the realisation of the “intersubjective transcendence” ruling the “community of geometricians” of all ages (Stiegler, 2011, p. 230; see Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 47). It happens via the formation of a “transcendental We” forged by “written expressions”, the latter aiming at an ideal sense collectively shared by multiple subjects. To become “We”, geometricians this made, we must have departed from “egological monadicity and finally found, in tertiary memory”, as Stiegler states, “a certain (re)constitutivity” in which “present-time-consciousness and past-past-time-consciousness can coincide” (Stiegler, 1998, p. 229). This process leads to the formation of larger cross-generational communities of *scientists* that overcome the contributions of singular individuals.

3.1. ON EXPRESSION AND THE QUEST FOR TRUTH. INSTITUTION AND TRADITION NECESSARY BOND

As Robert pointed out, *The Origin of Geometry* is of great interest to him because here Merleau-Ponty envisions Husserl as a “writer”: as a writer, i.e., someone grasping this mean technical footing and intimate transcendental possibilities, Husserl would sublimate *literature* beyond the conventional artistic dimension to the heights of the phenomenological institution of ideality (Robert, 2021, p. 425). In this text, language is supposed to have a “foundational role in the transition” of evidence or intuitions to ideal “essences”, which practically occurs when we consider the *institution* of a geometric theorem, given by observation and the *traditional* expression of its truths (Dufourcq, 2012, p. 48). Indeed, geometry, like any scientific discipline understood as an endless perpetuation of an instituting practice, needs its results to be communicated or expressed in writing to become evident and be entirely historical, in a sense, i.e., handed down to a “tradition” that enables its intergenerational and integrative validation and coherent development of idealities (Ramírez Cobián, 2001, p. 347)²¹. In *The Origin of Geometry*, again, Merleau-Ponty believed Husserl to have opened himself “to the themes of historicity, language, human community and, ultimately, the sensible world” (Ramírez Cobián, 2001, p. 346), bringing to full fruition the *genetic* and *generative* turning points of his doctrine.

This is why Merleau-Ponty finds this little paper so attractive. In his commentary, Merleau-Ponty aligns with Husserl’s definition of *tradition* or historicity as the fundamental opening of an institutional register that may not be closed. Indeed, *traditional* institutions primarily – and consequentially – grant the collection of “materials” that corroborate the assembly of an “open chain of researchers”, the latter of which is attentive to its conceptual recovery and

²¹ It is here imperative to state what an institution is, for Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and by what it is maintained, i.e., the “uninterrupted communication and knowledge [*reconnaissance*] of others”, in their equally genetic and generative role (Dufourcq, 2015, p. 359).

enrichment (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 21). In this context, language and writing are crucial because they incarnate the cultural production that becomes mediately usable by a diachronic and endless community of interpreters and under the “relationship” of their activities that are kept in the geometric history record (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 23)²². Writing also contributes to this mutual encroachment in the quality of the possible presentation or re-presentation of what is intuitively no longer offered, in the past of retention, as the possibility of the “permanence of the ideal” content “outside of all conversation” and even “when the interlocutors are dead” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 24). Here, “the texts”, i.e., written expressions, “convey their sense as an activity which has fallen into obscurity but which is reawoken and which can again be transformed into activity” by fellow geometricians, and that is never wholly lost (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 25). As history this made, geometry thus corresponds, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, to a fundamental “presence that is richer than what is visible of it” because the transgenerational unity calls forth an ideal continuation granted by a “subterranean communication across time” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 27). In this sense, current geometrical research “supports itself on the landmark of inherited geometry and its oldest forms”, profiting from a “sense” which is spiritually “*undivided between us and the past*” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 28, emphasis mine)²³.

3.2. INSTITUTION(S)

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty recovers the Husserlean concept of *Stiftung* or institution and proposes a sort of *crisis* with that of tradition. As he holds in the *Introduction* to the eponymous course, taught in 1954, institution primarily means the “establishment in an experience [...] of dimensions [...] in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense and make a *sequel*, a

²² “parenté”, in French (Merleau-Ponty, 1998, p. 26).

²³ We will see in paragraph 3.4. how this idea of temporal and intersubjective *indivision* also unfolds in other domains of artistic production.

history" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 7-8)²⁴. According to him, an *institution* is the always deferred initiation and continuation of a complex unity of experiences that refer to each other and are expected to multiple subjects. Again, the institution is what "makes possible [a] series of events, [a] historicity: in principle event-ness"²⁵, as may be the case for Husserlean geometry (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 13). Finally, the institution is defined as an "elaboration of an 'inherent' possibility" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 22), "a transformation which preserves" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 23) what is transformed, "a truth that becomes" *truth*, in a certain sense, one that "condenses and opens up a future" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 24) without uprooting from the lessons of the past.

For Merleau-Ponty, the institutional model equally pertains to every juncture of our lives as incarnated subjects. As he states in the following, institution uniformly applies to the formation of feelings, to human phylogenetical development or different animal species, or the sentimental relations with other subjects, to the production of works of art, the domain of any possible knowledge, culture and all eras historical facts. From this point of view, the whole world is made up of instituting events that overcome, deny, or confirm others made the same way and whose overcoming does not mark the

²⁴ According to Dufourcq, an institution, in Merleau-Ponty's sense, may be defined as an "impersonal and intersubjective [...] structure", which is "the fruit of a historically situated act" and which "endures with its own inertia as a tradition that transcends and conditions each individual" (Dufourcq, 2015, p. 356).

²⁵ The french text reads «*événementialité de principe*» (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 44). I believe this conception is retrieved from Charles Péguy and his main yet unfinished work, *Clio*, as also stated by Anne Gléonec (Gléonec, 2017, p. 167; p. 440) and Fabrice Colonna. In this text, Péguy focuses on the notion of "work" as praxis and of the latter's connection with that of "event", as the minimal dimension and unity of the happening of things in time. Human work, as an event, is described here in the terms of irremediable "incompleteness" (Colonna, 2013, p. 417) and impermanence. This condition of impossible ultimacy causes the meaning of this enterprise "to be the object of incessant resumption, which also exposes it to the risk of abandonment" (*ibid.*), as Husserl also makes clear in *The Origin of Geometry*. According to Colonna, for Péguy – and for Merleau-Ponty too, I can here assume – "the very condition of meaning lies in this promise of fruitfulness that is, inseparably, risk of degradation. There is no sense given, and there is only a sense taken up, the result of the cooperation we bring, a sense therefore fragile and demanding a responsibility to it" (*ibid.*; see also Prinzi, 2017, p. 267).

caesura with a past that would be lost forever²⁶. Institution is what unites every event with which we can come into contact as subjects endowed with a body and a history, as the example of the *perspective* pictorial and representational model introduction and actual choice during the Renaissance precisely proves (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 45-49). Moreover, an institution does not require the confirmation of absolute subjectivity or consciousness to have or maintain its historical value for a given community of practice, i.e., those who still believe in its truth, as here holds against the most challenging forms of idealism popular at that time. Indeed, quoting Merleau-Ponty, “the instituted”, i.e., what is left for good as *Erzeugung* and remains there for others to come also “makes sense without me”; it persists in doing so, while “the constituted”, i.e., the result of the intellectual act of the traditional consciousness, “makes sense only for me and for the ‘me’ of this instant” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 8)²⁷, thus *de jure* disqualifying any possible temporal contamination(s) and eventual intersubjective and transgenerational encroachment.

However, Merleau-Ponty also acknowledges the positive role of this intergenerational collaboration in the institution of truth in other texts. Moreover, he recognises it in different fields of expertise, and thus not only in literature, where the quest for truth only pertains to written documents and texts of any kind²⁸. Indeed, the openness of a given institutional register and the continued enlargement of its practice or frequentation, as in the case of *pictorial art*, for instance, ratifies the primordial communion and communication with other subjects, the latter equally endowed with a body and placed within the history of the living culture. In this sense, their acts make sense without me, as

²⁶ Institution is also depicted as the “reactivation and transformation of a preceding institution,” as it happens to be in the case of human puberty when a human being dramatically changes without losing the previous functional configurations (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 9; see Robert, 2005, p. 331).

²⁷ As Merleau-Ponty states in the following, “[C]onstitution [means] continuous institution, i.e., never done. The instituted straddles its future, has its future, its temporality, the constituted depends entirely on the ‘me’ who constitutes” (*ibid.*).

²⁸ This may shift the focus away from where precisely this collaboration *takes place*, as the topic of the historicity of *life* and *death*, which I will introduce below, will make clear.

mine will do for them, even when I am or will be gone, as replicas or answers to my previous questions, i.e., to my former attempts to reach or regenerate former truths. Indeed, these individual yet communal efforts do not relate to eternal “essences” but “praxis” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 11), i.e., concrete actions that concur in instituting what materially counts in world history. Furthermore, every institution contains the germ of its overcoming within itself. For Merleau-Ponty, an institution is always beyond itself, according to the *congenericity* that will eventually sanction its expiration as a fundamental yet partial moment of “Permanent Revolution” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 7) always going on.

3.3. THE CASE OF PAINTING. ON THE *SINGLE TASK* DIACHRONIC EXTENSION

In light of these considerations, I believe it is easy to see why Merleau-Ponty intends painting and its artistic expression as a “single” (Merleau-Ponty 2010b, p. 7; see Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 70) and intrinsically unitary “task”, yet something deeply felt as naturally “infinite” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 57) and, most importantly, “inherited” and collected from the incomplete analysis of a “collective institution” that is eventually and only individually subsumed (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 41). Indeed, in this case, the painter Merleau-Ponty thinks of does not create her art by herself *ex nihilo*, nor does she master the criteria for its success from thin air. Instead, she learns her art, according to Merleau-Ponty, “by visiting the predecessors” and their related “Universe” of the “Field of painting” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 47). She makes out her *praxis* of their theory. Indeed, here, instituted or to-be-instituted sense is said to be somehow convicted to “perpetual rereading” in the course of which truth and

its historical “sublimation” would be nothing without the path that led to their formation (Merleau-Ponty, 2010b, p. 51)²⁹.

Nevertheless, the most stimulating texts that prove this point are *The Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence (Signs)* and *The Indirect Language (The Prose of the World)*. Here, Merleau-Ponty also confronts with André Malraux’s works³⁰. In *The Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, Merleau-Ponty claims that “the writer’s act of expression is not very different from the painter’s” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 45; see Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 89; Couderc, 2023, p. 56-58), for they both are to be considered *modern*. Accordingly, they are *modern* because both refuse the idea of a complete and detached dimension of truth, which would only unravel in time but whose contents would already be established by eternity (Robert, 2021, p. 13). Instead, the concurrence of multiple authors, according to Merleau-Ponty, and their historical confirmation or disavowal specifies the track that marks the establishment of truth and its progressive, albeit fragile, achievements. Indeed, truth involves the attainment of instituted stations or sedimentations of meaning, primarily identifiable in *styles* (Delcò, 2002, p. 614), especially in the case of figurative or pictorial art, but not of the ideal conclusion of its course.

There is no perfect content to achieve or to coincide with (Matos Días, 2001, p. 130-141; Robert, 2020, p. 151). This is one of the most significant successes of modernity, according to Merleau-Ponty, which is finally proven to

²⁹ I think this probing yet implicit idea of conviction is also present in *Bergson in the Making*, i.e., the tribute speech given by Merleau-Ponty on the centenary of Bergson’s birth, where he ratifies the existence of a “public duration linking numerous suppliers in memory and culture” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 188-189). Accordingly, for him and here reading Charles Péguy, those “who write” and “live publicly” are condemned to a “cruel law”, which is “to expect from others or successors a different fulfilment than the one they are achieving” because “others or successors are also men” and “by this substitution, they make themselves fellow men of the initiator” (*ibid.*). This feature is connected to the writing craft and the institution of a content of knowledge that is durable through time and perpetual confirmation by others. As a matter of different but complementary durations, providers in the field of culture thus defined intertwine and reflect in each other’s initiative via a cumulative process of never-ending *substitutions*.

³⁰ For a review of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Malraux and his works, see Bimbenet, 2004, p. 210-222; Bimbenet, 2011, p. 101; Dalmasso, 2019, p. 25, p. 123; De Saint Aubert, 2004, p. 213; Kaushik, 2011, p. 30-31, p. 40-43.

understand the historical and transient significance or depth of artistic message and thus to see in the admissible incompleteness of work the prefiguration – or the retroaction – of its possible references rather than the sign of its constitutive deficiency (Dalissier, 2017, p. 729-734)³¹. Here, the incompleteness of the works of art refers to each other in the unity of a *great representative enterprise* that, at the same time, coincides with the actual germination of brand-new meaning³². In these historical yet transcendental dimensions, pictorial or linguistic action is always a reaction or an “answer” (Ménasé, 2003, p. 76) or “response” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59)³³ to a previously posed question, even implicitly. For Merleau-Ponty, indeed, the provisionally:

accomplished work is thus not the work which exists in itself like a thing, but the work which reaches its viewer and invites him to take up the gesture which created it and, skipping the intermediaries, to rejoin [...] the silent world of the painter (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 51).

For this very reason, it is “in others that expression takes on its relief and becomes signification”, thus concretely realising an “institution whose efficacy” others “will never stop experiencing” in the exchange of its endless *metamorphosis* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 52-53).

3.4. METAMORPHOSIS. LIKE FIRES ANSWERING ONE ANOTHER IN THE NIGHT

I believe the term *metamorphosis* is crucial in this context because it helps us understand how this intergenerational joint venture may happen. Indeed,

³¹ As Merleau-Ponty argues, the “tolerance for the incomplete shown by those moderns who present sketches as paintings, and whose every canvas, as the signature of a moment of life, demands to be seen on ‘show’ in a series of successive canvas” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 51; see Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 55).

³² It is in this sense, I believe, that Merleau-Ponty speaks of “coherent deformation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 54; see also Alloa, 2014a, p. 70; Andrieu, 1993, p. 43-44; Johnson, 2020, p. 171. Moreover, as Toadvine states, “it is through expression that a relation of distance can paradoxically be a proximity” (Toadvine, 2009, p. 126).

³³ In these terms, Merleau-Ponty even speaks of a sense of “brotherhood” expected of all contributors, painters in this case, who are united in the perception of a “provisory eternity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59) but no less significant for that.

the representative tools kept changing in the course of art history. Still, the feeling of “fraternity” or *sisterhood* that unites the many contributors to building this complex artistic or knowledge tower does not (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 62). As Merleau-Ponty himself clarifies, “productions of the past, [...] once went beyond anterior productions towards a future which we are, and in this sense called for [...] the metamorphosis which we impose upon them”, that is, our eventual reassumption or *reactivation*, in Husserlean terms (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59). Moreover, in the history of pictorial representation, “the first sketches on the walls of caves set forth the world as ‘to be painted’ [...] and called forth an indefinite future of painting”, as the union of institution and tradition, “so that they speak to us and we answer them by metamorphoses in which they *collaborate with us*” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 60, my emphasis)³⁴.

Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty, the artistic institution’s effectiveness or continuation is primarily collected by its interpreters rather than by the artists themselves, who often fail to be aware of their work’s concrete offspring or potential fallout (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p. 77; p. 82). However, from this viewpoint, Merleau-Ponty warns about the meaning we should give to pictorial history and its cumulative and comprehensive gathering, the latter occurring in cultural institutions currently in charge, such as museums, galleries or pinacothecas. Indeed, although the “styles which escape the view of the creator and become visible only when the Museum gathers [them] together” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59), as it does at a certain point in human history, we should carefully introduce a further distinction here. According to Merleau-Ponty, we must acknowledge “two historicities”, i.e., one of “death” and one of “life” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 63). Indeed, the first, the assemblage of the “cruel history” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 60), as Malraux defines it, theoretically struggles to understand the real meaning,

³⁴ I believe Merleau-Ponty also finds this idea of collaboration in Proust’s *Research*, as he proves in *The Problem of the World*. Here, he writes, “the participation of a past and a present will be a special case of the multiple’s participation in my life” (Merleau-Ponty, 2020a, p. 152). See also Robert, 2020, p. 155 on how writing is implied in this process of perpetual transformation.

affinity and deep harmony of the historical evolution that the institution model and tradition envisions because it conceives works of art only once they are made without indulging the very process by which they were created (*ibid.*, see Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 72)³⁵. Conversely,

the other history, without which the first would be impossible, is constituted and reconstituted step by step by the *interest* which bears us toward that which is not us and by that life which the past, *in a continuous exchange, brings to us and finds in us*, and which continues to lead in each painter who revives, and renews the entire undertaking of painting in each new work (*ibid.*, emphasis mine; see Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 72).

For Merleau-Ponty, the *traditional* “unity of painting does not exist in the Museum alone” but primarily “exists in that single task which all painters are confronted with and which makes the situation such that one day they *will be* comparable in the Museum, and such that these fires answer one another in the night” (*ibid.*; Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 67-70), as it may be for geometrical institutions and related writings for Husserl. The possibility of this diachronic and intersubjective collaboration is genuinely granted by the feeling of a sort of “fraternity” between “painters”, i.e., a fundamental sentiment which “makes a history of painting possible” as the intimate coherence of all their imaginable experiences and multiple pictorial devices or questionable artistic choices (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 62). Another passage in this text also hints at the everlasting span of this ideal or spiritual unity, and the singularity of this assignment, which is also essential to argue for the subsistence of this deep, historical and intergenerational expressive willingness Merleau-Ponty also supports. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty points out, every work of art generally pertains

³⁵ In this context, as Ramírez Cobián observed, there is no longer “any opposition between beginning and development, between tradition and actuality, between time and truth” (Ramírez Cobián, 2001, p. 345-354).

to the universe of conceived painting *as a single task stretching from the first sketches on the walls of caves up to our 'conscious' paintings*. No doubt one reason why our painting finds something to recapture in art which are linked to an experience very different from our own is that *it transfigures them*. But it also does so because *they transfigure it*, because they at least have something to say to it, and because their artists, believing that they were continuing primitive horrors or those in Asia and Egypt, secretly inaugurated another history which is still ours and which makes them present to us (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 60, emphasis mine).

In the transfiguration process that Merleau-Ponty mentions, we can appreciate every artistic production's retroactive and projective action. Since the dawn of time, every artistic output has been united by the same feeling and expressive desire for him, thus answering the same questions unceasingly and providing very different answers. This is the unity of a story not told by museum exhibitions or *vernissages* but by the subterranean impetus that resurrects to the heart of the artists and geometricians of all times.

4. CONCLUSION. INDULGING THE *HISTORICITY OF LIFE* AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL SPIRITUAL UNION

In conclusion, I would like to revisit the central thesis of this paper and elaborate on potential avenues for further development concerning the investigations I have examined. Just as Husserl delved into the concept of geometry and its embodiment within the literary tradition, Merleau-Ponty proposes that painting serves as an intersubjective and collaborative endeavour that evolves over time, reflecting the interplay between artists and their cultural contexts. This perspective highlights the significance of shared experiences and mutual influence in the development of artistic practices. As such, the theoretical and practical contributions that arise from this intergenerational collaboration ought to be recognised as sociogenetic achievements. These attainments emerge from the continuous reinterpretation and reworking of the artistic and cultural traditions established by earlier institutions and sedimentations, which serve as foundational frameworks for contemporary

expression. In both the realms of writing and painting, I have emphasised the crucial role of outward expression and the various tools and mediums that facilitate this intergenerational collaboration. These elements allow for a dynamic exchange of ideas and insights, fostering a richer understanding of creative processes.

4.1. WHICH INSTITUTION CAME FIRST?

As I previously mentioned, reading Husserl Merleau-Ponty regards written expression as the genuine “transporter of meaning”, a mechanism through which ideas can be disseminated, received, and later retrieved by others who engage with the text (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 64). However, as seen in the case of museums and their possibilities, I think it is important to emphasise here the truly *vital* conditions that enable such perspectives to be distinguished rather than the inauthentic, *deadly*, or second-order ones. In other words, an attempt must be made to determine whether it is the techniques that foster this diachronic and sociogenetic development of the becoming of expression, i.e., painting and writing, or whether it is instead the primitive and transcendental community formation that makes use of these channels to make its way through history and find its echo within. In this respect, I do not feel the critics agree entirely when commenting on Merleau-Ponty’s quotations on Husserl and his opinion on sense temporal and expressive institution. Indeed, Dufourcq claims that “institution enables the establishment of community and communication beneath a fundamental discontinuity”, i.e., that of the multiplicity of durations and interpreters’ lifespans implicitly considered here (Dufourcq, 2015, p. 358). It seems to me that Ramírez Cobián’s interpretation aligns with hers when he says that thanks to the institution and the spiritual world to which it trans-temporally comes together, “an objectivity, a culture and a community become possible” (Ramírez Cobián, 2001, p. 350). This said, Robert’s position seems more controversial and challenging. If, indeed, in

Merleau-Ponty, *L'origine de la géométrie et la littérature*, he argues that, in Merleau-Ponty's commentary of *The Origin of Geometry*, language produces "objectivity" and that, once established, the expression acquires an "intersubjective dimension" it is equally valid that to be right about this fact "a community of language" must also "be assumed", i.e., a distributed yet epistemologically coherent universe of readers and speakers who recognise a given truth content as trustworthy (Robert, 2020, p. 154). Again, in *Phenomenology and Ontology*, Robert says that "others are virtually present in every *Stiftung*", i.e., institution, and, most notably, that "the unity of meaning of geometry, as of all spiritual meaning, rests first of all on the discovery of a common field between thoughts, on a community [*communauté*] of meaning" (Robert, 2005, p. 301).

4.2. GENUINE TRANSCENDENTAL FEATURES

This claim also introduces one last yet fundamental aspect of this theory in my reading. As Ramírez Cobián also pointed out, Merleau-Ponty argues for the distinction between an "empirical" and a "spiritual tradition", which is not subject to the laws of the former, however much in the former it shows itself in its historical becoming, as seen in the case of tradition and its expressivity. Where the first temporality flows linearly, according to the succession and diversity of its instants or moments, the second proper to "productive acts" is fundamentally "intensive" and "simultaneous" to the different and maybe temporally distant acts themselves (Ramírez Cobián, 2001, p. 349). For Merleau-Ponty, according to Ramírez Cobián, the time of true and vital tradition is an "enveloping" and "involving"³⁶ time, i.e., the one of *chiasm* (*ibid.*) he would later define in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Again, as Robert clarifies this time, the

³⁶ *Ibid.* What Ramírez Cobián says in the following is also noteworthy. However, I do not wholly agree with him because I consider this idea of spirituality the most fundamental one when he argues that "it is thanks to tradition that there is a temporality: that is our interpretation" (*ivi*, cit., p. 34) suggesting *institutional continuity*, which, however, rests on other foundations.

ideality that is the always provisional outcome of this spiritual tradition is the “hinge” offered between the sensible and the intelligible, the fragile but unequivocal union between all human productions (Robert, 2020, p. 152). Finally, Dufourcq also contemplated this inner fragility of sense, suggesting, however, that this feature has to be intended as nothing more than the “counterpart of its intersubjective reality and its ability to endure as a tradition” and thus, in its undeniable power and full brightness, just like that of the abovementioned fires that answer one another in the mists of time (Dufourcq, 2012, p. 277). For this reason, I believe *spirituality* here at stake represents the innermost core of this diachronic and sociogenetic account of the meaning of institution and preservation in Merleau-Ponty’s theory of expression and *opening*, something also present in Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry*.

4.3. A FINAL WORD ON INSTITUTION AND TRADITION

I believe that the discovery of both the *instantaneity* and *simultaneity* of vital tradition is the most significant theoretical outcome of this paper and of the study of *The Origin of Geometry*’s influence on Merleau-Ponty overall. In a certain sense, the collaboration among geometers is an immediate factor that transcendental phenomenology aims to illuminate. This objective entails freeing these ideas from the shadows of misleading historicity, which often obscures our understanding of their significance. We can engage with the work of Galileo and his groundbreaking discoveries in a manner akin to the interactions we have with our colleagues in the office. This analogy underscores the importance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of knowledge across time and space. The tradition we follow must explicitly recognise this vital link. Knowledge, much like geological sedimentation, develops through a process of layering and accumulation of meaning. Therefore, it is essential that the unifying foundation of knowledge is preserved across all conceivable contexts. Science must possess the ability to retrospectively reflect on its origins while

also proactively looking ahead to the paths that its traditions carve out in the future.

As we have seen, the latter aspect is fundamentally intersubjective; in other words, what flows downstream in the development of knowledge is intricately connected to what exists at the source. Any content of knowledge is inherently directed toward an audience, a notion that will be further clarified by the subject of *transcendental pedagogy*, as minimally articulated by Fink. Moreover, each tradition, when understood in this comprehensive manner, embodies the dynamic vitality of science, which transcends individual persons and distinct historical eras. This transformative continuity, which Merleau-Ponty articulates with great insight, is governed by the alternating metamorphoses and transfigurations of meaning that propel history forward. While doing so, it also preserves, as he emphasises in his commentary on *The Origin of Geometry*, an undivided sense of connection between our present understanding and the past. Thus, the interplay of tradition and knowledge institution serves not only as a bridge to earlier eras but also as a foundation for future exploration and discovery, in the constant invitation to retrace its path of meaning.

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