

Behind the Image, Beyond the Image

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“A past which has never been”. Unveiling Merleau-Ponty’s Accountability of the Mythological Heritage of Perception A Modern *nekyia*?

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Abstract This paper focuses on Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the mythological account of knowledge as a cumulative source of temporal sedimentation. In the following lines, I argue Merleau-Ponty holds both a negative and, most importantly, a positive opinion concerning what has to be considered as ‘mythical’: all contents of information and reflection referring to an ‘unreflective’ past. Below, in the third paragraph, I summarise the major features the ‘institutional’ ontology defends: I also highlight the Husserlian influence on Merleau-Ponty’s thought. In the fourth section of this paper, I make a comparison between the most relevant outcomes of the previous paragraphs and Stigler’s conception of tertiary retention: in so doing, I emphasise the unique role the faculty of ‘writing’ has in the theory of sedimentation. Finally, I conclude that ‘past’ as a traditional, mythical foundation is still of service for showing the way the future shall forward.

Keywords Myth. Sedimentation. Memory. Activation. Response.

Summary 1 Introduction: Raising the Dead. Is ‘Tradition’ Still Alive? – 2 What Kind of ‘Myth’ Does Merleau-Ponty Defend? – 3 To be is to Profit. The Grounding of Institutional Knowledge. – 4 The Role of Retentions and the Weight of Inheritance. – 5 Conclusion: Shipping Lanes.

1 Introduction: Raising the Dead. Is 'Tradition' Still Alive?

Dead people wait for us, Emanuele Severino used to say. Quite similarly, in the Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Homers depicts the notorious scene of the *nekyia* (the ancient ritual of questioning ghosts) in which Ulysses and his crew reach the depths of Hades to meet the souls of his beloved ones and ask them to predict them their future journeys, in return for precious gifts and bloody sacrifices. In this underground reign, 'below' human understanding, the hero of Ithaca takes the chance to see again his mother Anticlea, the renowned prophet Teiresias and, in addition to these, to join once again his former fellow and army allied Achilles, the most valuable Greek fighter Trojan soldiers ever faced. These mentioned characters are portrayed as evanescent, flimsy vampire-like figures, thirsty of blood and, broadly speaking, hungry for 'life': Achilles, in particular, doesn't mind openly admitting he would rather be a living, miserable dog than being stuck in hell begging for visitors to come.

This intensely emotional episode is relevant to my subject for at least two reasons.

1. Despite the fact these spirits seem to be so in need of any kind of attention, they actually 'know more' than the still wandering Ulysses and his adventure mates: the aim of why navigators come visiting is to know how to get back home safely. These scary creatures reportedly keep in their memory what happened to them in their previous 'above ground' lives: they specifically know when, where and how they died and, besides the condition of being already passed away, they are aware of what's going on in the Greek world, on its surface. Teiresias the blind priest, as Oedipus sadly knew, can 'see' much further than other men do. Notwithstanding the possession of this faculty;
2. these dead people are completely ineffective: as it is evident, their knowledge serves no purpose in laying buried under the depths of the earth. To be applicable, their wisdom has to be 'reactivated' by the very means of a living intruder, a man in flesh and bones who can legitimately take advantage of these high-priced pieces of information, something he just cannot collect on earth: dead people can seize the weight of past events, they can also see the future, and they can do it in a diachronic dimension mixing up a present with its related events to-be.

This still 'present' past holds a proper, mythical function in Homers' fiction: in this dimension of the 'memory of the world', Heidegger would say, the 'effective' wisdom of the Ancients cannot be lost (along with the typical sense of 'familiarity' which carries with it) but only

'forgotten'. Is this 'mythical function' of memory something expert sailors can factually rely on? Of course not. Nonetheless, pursuing a metaphorical lecture of the Homers text, nowadays readers can still appreciate the crucial role of this brilliant *topos*: as the Cambridge Dictionary quotes, a myth consists of "an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining of a group of people or about natural events and facts".¹

In this quotation, I hold, myth cannot be seen as the opposite of 'science', this latter qua eternal and undeceivable fount of real enlightenment: quite on the contrary, science - given its still to be cleared 'epistemological' origins - is profoundly rooted in myth's 'ground'. The above-described form of dreadful survival coincides, precisely, with the endurance of human culture as a static, anyhow 'frozen' and dismissed content of erudition.² This form of storage of knowledge must be, however, - and at the same time - indirectly dynamic qua ready to develop, since it needs to be 'animated' to be somehow useful to future humankind: as Ricoeur points out, in fact, this sort of 'survival' here means "[n]othing apart from the act of reenactment" (1990, 146).³

1 According to McLuhan, 'myth' as the fundamental "characteristic of oral culture" is "a succinct statement of a complex social process that had occurred over a period of centuries" (1962, 25-31). Moreover, myth is one of the major features of what McLuhan defines as the "overwhelming tyranny of the ear", namely the former condition of subjugation that also Ulysses - the archetypal rational man - had somehow to overcome, just like he did during his journey when he got away from the thread of sirens. These latter were the 'amphibious' beings - that is to say, living creatures who could, McLuhan would say, both bear the wavy transmissions of the "auditory world" as much as the steadiness of the 'visual' and graphic one, i.e., the one of "manuscript cultures" - which once tried to fool him. The sirens, maleficent singers using their voice, the pleasant sound of their words to capture prisoners, were in fact inhabitants of an even more ancient world than the one Ulysses was actually crossing. Adorno and Horkheimer would conclude, since his encounter establishes the end of their 'world', the world of monsters, the world of myth, and the consequent rise of the one of men, the world of *logos*.

2 Yet, as Achilles tells best, to a dead man these worldly events now - if they can maintain a 'now' - appear to be far away to the 'pertinence' of his (past) time since, in a destitute reality as such, "nothing's gained or nothing's lost".

3 This paper takes its title from the Merleau-Pontyanian famous quote cited at the end of "Sense Experience", the most relevant chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 282). The importance of this expression was originally highlighted by Alia al-Saji who, in 2008, published an article entitled "A Past Which Has Never Been Present: Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal", which follows her study edited the previous year, namely "The Temporality of Life: Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Immemorial Past" (2007). My further enquiry on the topic of Merleau-Ponty's mythical past is deeply indebted to these sources, even though it holds a different focus on the role of the Merleau-Pontyanian 'pre-personal' reckoning. In fact, in the following lines, I will not take into account the Bergsonian influence on Merleau-Ponty's thought, nor will I engage in an evaluation of the complex phenomenon of bodily 'habitus' (Al-Saji 2008, 46-59).

2 What Kind of 'Myth' Does Merleau-Ponty Defend?

In this paper, I claim Merleau-Ponty holds a similar account of the so-called 'mythological heritage' of perception and tradition. I here assert Merleau-Ponty embraces a *double-face* interpretation concerning what a 'myth' actually is: in my reading, the French philosopher advances, complementarily, a 'negative' and a 'positive' opinion on this specific subject.

For instance, in "Space", the chapter which comes right after "Sense Experience" in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he expresses an unenthusiastic estimation of what he considers to be

1. "myths in the Platonic [and Cartesian] sense", such as the 'natural geometry' or the 'natural judgement', traditional conceptions which he thinks to be unable to describe the essential phenomenon of eye convergence and 'seizing' in sight (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 300).

Furthermore, in the working note "Tacit Cogito", dated January 1959 and contained in the uncompleted *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the fundamental basis of the "Cogito of Descartes" and, subsequently, he naturally rejects the

2. "[m]ythology of self-consciousness", the full-transparency consciousness should maintain to be fully 'active' in each act of perception and judgement in which it takes part (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 170-1).⁴

Later on, in the same book, within a working note entitled "Indestructible' past, and intentional analytic - and ontology", dated April 1960, Merleau-Ponty not surprisingly testifies the existence of a 'good' denotation of 'myth', a meaning of which he holds a positive account in his theory of the 'past'. In commenting on the Freudian interpretation of unconscious, he states the subsistence of a 'past' belonging to a

⁴ In the same quotation, Merleau-Ponty insists on the positive role terms like 'institution' and 'sedimentation' convey to his critic to this topic. As he highlights, the "transcendental attitude" the I "*form[s]*" is indeed an operation of constitution and, so to say, of long-term construction. The *cogito* could not be tacit qua unexpressed - I do simplify here for obvious reasons - for it is gradually constituted by the proper "combination" of words. It cannot remain silent for it is perpetually 'spoken', i.e., right away immersed in the very core of discourse, in the mutual dialogue the physical subject entertains with his always responsive surrounding environment. This given, it is manifest the inner self has not 'emerged' as a perfect being and once for all, since it is described as the result of a never-stopping building process in which it envisions moments of receptivity and passivity on which he frames its successive natural - and cultural - formations. The conceptualisation Merleau-Ponty here provides will be of great help in my further enquiry.

3. "mythical time, to the time before the time, to the prior life, 'farther than India and China'" (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 243).

In this truly inspiring - and yet enigmatic - formulation, the indestructibility of this specific time-dimension is strictly related to a curious form of 'in-temporality': according to this note, this "architectonic past" is no longer supposed to comprehend the series of the Husserlian *Erlebnisse* which use to constitute every step of our 'temporal', successive conscious life: instead, this past serves a monumental idea of beginning, initiation or *Stiftung* Husserl says in his *Origin of Geometry* (Derrida 1989, 157-9).

This statement, as Merleau-Ponty pursues, records a phenomenological limit which is hard to overcome, since the Husserlian intentional analytic fails to 'objectify' the 'still' living efficiency - or still being present - of this peculiar past, considering the fact the subject has not a direct (intentional) experience of it (as a sensual object): precisely, this classical method 'cannot grasp' this simultaneity, the maintenance of two 'layers' of time. The difficulty is linked to the Husserlian philosophy of consciousness' devotions to the "frameworks of [present] acts", which neglects the appreciation of this primary form - qua invisibility - of "vertical" past (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 244; Al-Saji 2007, 185-6). This impasse is partly compensated by the description of *Ablaufsfähigkeit* which implies a certain kind of correspondence between moments and, so doing, it catches the 'passage', the flowing nature of this living time which cannot be reduced to a single 'perspective' and a unique 'consciousness'. To welcome this temporal continuity, Merleau-Ponty writes, "[i]t is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende or latent* intentionality which is the intentionality within being" since, as he quotes a few lines before, past is "no longer here a 'modification' or modalization of the *Bewusstsein von...* Conversely[,] it is the *Bewusstsein von*, the having perceived that is borne by the past as [a] massive Being. I have perceived it *since it was*" (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 244).

Despite the critics he moves and in respect to this distinct lexicon, the decisive influence Husserl had on the Merleau-Ponty's production may be efficiently underlined: to do so, in the following section,

1. I will examine the role of sedimentation on the theory of 'institution', as it is delineated in *Notes de cours sur L'origine de la géométrie de Husserl* (Merleau-Ponty 1998) and in *Institution in Personal and Public History* (Merleau-Ponty 2010). Thus, in the final paragraph,
2. I will especially consider, concerning what he specifically calls "tertiary retentions", the fundamental contributions of the three-volume work of Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time* (Stiegler 1998; 2008; 2011).

3 To be is to Profit. The Grounding of Institutional Knowledge

So, given what I pointed out in the previous paragraph, I posit Merleau-Ponty supports a 'positive' consideration of what he thinks to be mythical. I conclude so by reading – once again – the noted quotation of "Sense Experience". As Merleau-Ponty explicitly tells, at the end of this chapter

reflection does not itself grasp its full significance unless it refers to the unreflective fund of experience which it presupposes, upon which draws, and which constitutes for it a kind of original past, a past which has never been present. (2002, 281-2)

Al-Saji cleverly remarks the insufficiencies of this translation, since the original – French – text offers to its reader a more nuanced sense of meaning (2008, 41-2). The "upon which it draws" expression translates, indeed, the French "dont elle profite": this latter formulation clearly suggests the idea of 'taking advantage' I previously hinted in referring to the contents of knowledge Greek mariners would only get in traversing Hades (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 280). What appears to be at stake here is the dimension of profitability this 'unreflective fund' brings along with. Indeed, what is to be 'unreflective'? What does it mean to be so, in this primitive condition of perception? To my purpose, something may be 'unreflected' if, *tout court*,

1. it doesn't need to be further 'intellectually' investigated – to be brought into an idealistic subject-object relation, which Merleau-Ponty strongly denies⁵ – because
2. this content is somehow acquired and, so to speak, inherited and integrated within a superior level of knowledge that does not demand to be repeatedly fully re-examined and idealistically re-founded each time it improves on something new.

This elucidation brings to the heart of the dominant features 'institutional' – and 'sedimentational' – ontology Merleau-Ponty elab-

⁵ Admittedly, this is never the case, since the Merleau-Pontynian theory of the 'incarnated subject' disproves the one defending the consciousness of 'survey' which Descartes, among others, partakes in (Merleau-Ponty 2010, 58). This position upholds – *de iure* – the possibility for a subject to know everything may it be known by a single act. The very legitimation to this doctrine lies on the onto-theological credo behind it: admittedly, only God would be capable of knowing as such. In the statement above I just posit that what appears to be 'unreflected' may not be 'reflected' by additional research, since in Merleau-Ponty's ontology human knowledge – as a 'carnal' one – has to cope with limits that even God could not surmount.

orates during the 1950s via Husserl. The *Institution in Personal and Public History* defines institution as an

establishment in an experience (or in a constructed apparatus) of dimensions (in the general, Cartesian sense: system of references) in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense and will make a *sequel*, a history. The sense is deposited (it is no longer merely in me as a consciousness, it is not re-created or constituted at the time of the recovery). But not as an object left behind, as a simple reminder or as something to continue, to complete without it being the case that this sequel is determined. The instituted will change but this very change is called off by its *Stiftung*. (Merleau-Ponty 2010, 8-9)

The subject is thus inserted, agreeing to this definition, into a field of experience which it does not properly constitute. Rather, it appears to be the momentary end of a 'longer' story which the subject keeps writing by acting accordingly to this settled past it inevitably inherits. As it seems, the 'storage' of the past offers a trustworthy system of 'orientation' on which the subject properly relies. Yet, Merleau-Ponty suggests in commenting on the Husserlian *Origin of Geometry*, this past is not only something 'congealed', to which we are totally passive and defenceless: indeed, as composed - from side to side - by what Husserl calls *Erzeugung* (Derrida 1989, 163), (human) cultural productions, this past is anytime partially retrievable (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 30).

Conceding the general *parenté* Merleau-Ponty witnesses in all human acts, history is safely and eventually stocked by all savants: this happens thanks to the imperishable performance of the 'retentions', the operations through which memory can store and recall in present time - and faithfully reproduce - what is important to multiple tasks (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 2-27). Given this crucial 'familiarity' the French philosopher heeds in human acts of 'geometrical' construction - which is arguably the same sentiment Ulysses felt confronting his 'related' past - the retentions above-determined allow cumulating a considerable amount of knowledge of the same 'type'.⁶

⁶ This is similar to what Michel Foucault understands as the process of "accumulation" that occurs in the third form of enunciative analysis (2002, 138-41). The 'discourses' we receive from an approximatively distant past, Foucault notices, appears as nothing more than "written symbols piling up in dusty libraries, slumbering in a sleep towards which they have never ceased to glide since the day they were pronounced, since they were forgotten and their visible effects lost in time" (138-9). It is fascinating to see Merleau-Ponty defines retention, following the Husserlian lesson, as "perception qui s'éloigne, la couche *endlos*" (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 26). This present of perception ceases to be relevant, since it is constantly refreshed, but it is never lost: it is only forgotten. Moreover, likewise for Merleau-Ponty's formulation of the 're-activation' theory I will discuss for-

Although, as mentioned above, this feature of renowned intimacy relating to what undisputedly belong to our twenty-five-century long-lasting culture, Merleau-Ponty explicitly tells the teachings of this familiar past cannot be fully reactivated, cannot be actively 'reflected' at once. Why is that? What does separate us from our ancestors, if not the hardly-crossing waters of Stix? Why can't we profit entirely from a common, eternal, shared 'ground' of wisdom? And why, in particular, in most cases, we don't need to overpass the natural borders of life, to dig so much inside ourselves, to get to know - vulgarly - most sorts of things?

In my view, Merleau-Ponty advances two answers to these compelling questions. At a very first glance, in fact, we cannot wholly restore what has been because

1. of the definition he gives of the term 'tradition'. Accordingly, "tradition" is not "saisissable immédiatement dans une essence statique" and, most importantly, "tradition est oubli des origines empiriques pour être origine éternelle" (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 22, 33). So given, tradition arises as a transcendental, historical - *a priori* and dynamic - condition of possible knowledge which implies the controversial eventuality of 'oblivion'. I shall thus conclude that to 'know more' is actually to have forgotten, to make room, to do not possess the whole comprehension of something. What is known is somewhat selected, reactivated, saved from the obscurity of tradition.

Secondly, which is quite shocking, Merleau-Ponty argues we don't fully recall the past for, under certain circumstances,

2. we just don't need to. This occurs thanks to the "clarté propre de l'acquis", a special brightness inherent to the potentiality of each *Erzeugung*, and which allows the subject to do not 'backtrack', every time it alludes, to the original foundation of a specific culture of reference (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 36). This is evident for what concerns the virtuality of 'writing',

wardly, the Foucauldian enunciative analysis' function is not to "awaken texts from their present sleep, and, [...] to rediscover the flash of their birth; on the contrary, its function is to follow them through sleep, or rather to take up the related themes of sleep, oblivion and lost origin, and to discover what mode of existence may characterize statements, independently of their enunciation, in the density of time in which they are preserved, in which they are reactivated, and used, in which they are also - but this was not their original destiny - forgotten, and possibly even destroyed" (Foucault 2002, 139). The parallelism between the formulations of the two authors may be pursued much longer.

namely, the virtue of written texts.⁷ In fact, as an application of what Husserl calls *Dokumentierung* (Derrida 1989, 162-4), Merleau-Ponty postulates in writing the “coproduction” of past and present combined, which is more than the present activation of a “mémoire passive”: the “sedimentation, l’inactivité, la pensée ‘passive’”, in fact, forms a distinct way of thinking “qui ne réactive pas, qui donc travaille avec du sédimentée” (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 70). This is what Merleau-Ponty characterizes as a “bonne sédimentation”, an epistemological outcome one does not need to arouse to create heuristic “raccourcis” and, equally, synthetic shreds of evidence.⁸

So, given the integrality of this “séries de démarches cumulatives”, *KulturWelt* grounds its basis in a past which maintains a “communication souterraine à travers le temps” and that, so doing, transgresses the rigid bound of linear temporality as such (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 36 and 31). Anyway, as it is evident, ‘good sedimentation’ is just one out of the multiple cases of possible sedimentation: “stratification”, Merleau-Ponty remarks, may indeed lead to “sclérose” as the result of the restauration of an ineffective, pointless “rémémoration”. The time which is recollected is not randomly reactivated but it is a resource still useful to build on new knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 78).

In addition to this, I claim the term ‘good’ has not to be intended as a moral categorisation of the resulting process of successful sedimentation: in this specific context, what is ‘good’ is just something which is easier to assume, to be rapidly synthesised. Indeed, following this reasoning straightforwardly may be misleading: on this topic, Merleau-Ponty manifestly distinguishes two different types of ‘truth’. The first is

1. the ‘logical one’ which “suppose sédimenté le pouvoir de réactivation des opérations fondatrices de l’idéauté. Ces sédiments là elle ne les interroge pas. Elle se meut dans l’univers donné des Sätze [...] elle cristallise les idéautés dans des sciences en même temps que dans des énoncés [...] La logique hérite les propositions et la méthode pour en construire de nouvelle sans hériter le pouvoir de réactiver des Sinnesquellen” (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 80). On the other hand, the second form of truth Merleau-Ponty considers is the

⁷ “[L]es écrits”, Merleau-Ponty (1998, 29) comments on, “véhiculent leur sens comme activité qui a sombré dans l’obscurité, mais qui se réveille et qui peut être de nouveau métamorphosé en activité”.

⁸ In the following pages Merleau-Ponty adds that the formation *KulturWelt*, designed as the sedimentation of secondary passivity “ne s’inaugure comme tel que si l’on renonce à tout réactiver pour se fier à une possibilité de principe de tout réactiver” (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 78).

2. “vérité militante, celle qui met en question les idéalités constitutives et le langage tout fait et veut retrouver hors de toute ‘technique’ – ‘technicisation’ la genèse même de idéalité, c’est la philosophie, i-e la dimension de l’historicité [...] La philosophie, plus large que la ‘logique’, en deçà de la distinction de l’idéalité toute faite et de la passivité, prenant mesure de l’idéalité du monde pré-idéal (non monde sensible des empiristes seulement, mais aussi bien monde historique: le LebensWelt enveloppe le tout)” (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 80-1).⁹

The militant truth, the philosophy, always looks for its origin, always investigates the footprints the *historicité* has left behind and, finally, always questions ghosts about its past to know what is going to happen next.

4 The Role of Retentions and the Weight of Inheritance

I maintain the above-quoted passage from the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 281-2) shows a twofold character of the temporality on which reflection holds: as the extract reveals, reflection seems to possess both a ‘retentional’ moment – in the specific faculty of collecting and storing lore, literally turning back time as needed, either through the result of a direct experience or over a longer period, as the outcome of a ‘story’ one may be passively told – and, comparably, a ‘protensional’ one – the consequent ‘answer’ the subject gives, in adding extra informational content, to the reception of what this original past furnishes. The very idea of a fund, of the un- which precedes the ‘reflective’ offspring, the operation which is proper to the ‘heir’ who receives this legacy of data, is thus profoundly mythical.¹⁰

As Merleau-Ponty clarifies once again, in his comment to the *Origin of Geometry*, the primal *Urstiftung*, the very first foundation, “n’est jamais vraiment devancée” (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 37). Indeed, through the exploitation of a persistent double movement, the past is recovered by the present and “contracté” within this latter and, in the same way, the present is “anticipé par le passé qui reste opérant

⁹ On this topic see Dastur 2016, 80.

¹⁰ Reflection, just like every human action, is embedded in a considerably more extensive flux of time – of the subject’s lifetime – whose instantaneous frame is uniquely the present moment, i.e., the relevant ‘now’ for the action. I profess ‘reflection’ is just one, but a name Merleau-Ponty gives to this effective ‘now’ of which he underlines the temporal legacy.

en lui".¹¹ So tradition consists in this explicit paired performance: tradition is the "être autre pour être le même, oublier pour conserver, produire pour recevoir, regarder devant pour recevoir toute l'impulsion du passé" (1998, 37).

This focus concerns the inner being of 'sedimentation' too, this latter considered as a "trace of the forgotten and thereby a call to thought which depends on itself and goes farther -, moreover, properly speaking, sedimentation is - a resumption which is loss, not totalization, and which precisely for that reason is able to open another development of knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty 2010, 58-9). A certain past invariably carries a related horizon with it, the very idea of a continuation, of a perpetual quest for truth: in doing so, the gone-ness of the past is never and once for all outdated by the dangerously corrosive action of the present which consumes it: conversely, Merleau-Ponty affirms, in his 1954-55 *cours* on institution, that "the true and the essence would be nothing without what leads to them. There is sublimation, not surpassing towards *another*" (2010, 51).¹²

Having said that, I assume three conclusions may hence follow. Given the temporal grounding on which the subject is rooted - even before its birth - I claim the very notion of 'subject' I have used until now has become inadequate for my purpose since it needs to be reformulated employing the richer term of

- i. "field", which occurs in the final pages of the institution *cours*' transcription (2010, 61). Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty observes, the postulation of a "'field,' of institution, of truth, requires that subjectivity not be for itself at first, but the holder = X of an experience, that the *Sinnggebung* be, not the apprehension of this or that under an essence, but the lateral idealization or generalization, by means of recurrence on the ba-

¹¹ In my opinion, this is not too far from what Bergson claims in *Matter and Memory* concerning his theory of images' survival across the time-lapse of perception and, consequently, the proper action of memory over this fleeing flow. In fact, as he explains in the final chapter of his book, "at the same time that our actual and so to speak instantaneous perception affects this division of matter into independent objects, our memory solidifies into sensible qualities the continuous flow of things. It prolongs the past into the present, because our action will dispose of the future in the exact proportion in which our perception, enlarged by memory, has contracted the past" (Bergson 1988, 210).

¹² Again, Merleau-Ponty goes on declaiming that "le système des significations n'est pas intemporal, sa lumière n'est pas celle d'un topos noetos, elle ne descend pas seulement des principes aux conséquences; elle est sublimation d'une lumière du concret, 'idéalisation', s'élève au-dessous de lui par récurrence, ne le dépasse pas sinon en le conservant que l'on peut poursuivre une vérité plus ample, et non en développant simples conséquences des premières découvertes. Stérilité d'une science qui oublierait ses origines" (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 94-5). A comparable assumption may be found a few pages back, where Merleau-Ponty asserts human institution is a "passé qui crée une question, la met en réserve, fait situation indéfiniment ouverte", a past which opens to a future that is forged through the "approfondissement du passé" (57).

sis of a model [...], and consequently that the object is not the only correlate of my *acts*, but also provided with a double horizon by means of which it can become the object for others and not for me alone. The subject gives more than he has because [...] he proposes to the others enigmas that they decipher, with all of themselves, he makes them work" (Merleau-Ponty 2010, 61). This comment directly leads to my second assumption that is that

- ii. the subject – as a personal and enclosed entity, rigidly delimited by corporal borders, who actively constitutes its environment positing the subsistence of intellectual categories to which worldly objects have to be fitting in, to be ontologically founded – is no more, according to this 'institutional' ontology, the *substratum* which is 'subject to' what truly happens around it. From what the 'new' boundaries the concept of 'field' have settled, the resulting *substratum* has to be intended as something considerably larger than the Cartesian *res cogitans*, something plural, related, offered to more 'subjects' to be shared: this is the exact idea of the "intersubjectivité transcendantale", originally highlighted by Husserl (Derrida 1989, 179) and taken up by Merleau-Ponty in *Notes de cours sur L'origine de la géométrie* (1998, 58). Indeed, as the French philosopher points out, this transcendental intersubjectivity is not "seulement les points de vue de chacun, additionnés, mais leur articulation, leur l'ineinander, leur cohésion alternative, leur alternative qui est une cohésion. Füreinander, et non pas seulement l'un pour l'autre en général = les deux points de vue alternatifs, mais les deux points de vue ensemble". Thirdly, this intersubjectivity considerably
- iii. lightens the singular responsibility, i.e., the ideal weight of this 'traditional' legacy, since this latter appears to be co-constituted by a multitude of subjects (ii) belonging to a vast 'field' of electric – McLuhan would conclude –, mutual, spatial along with temporal influence (i). This conclusion immediately brings back to my very first assumption, i.e., the one concerning the intellectual property of this participated past. Indeed, since the subject faithfully relies on this sedimented ground of socially formed knowledge – which it has no apparent reason to discuss, even if it could, as the evidence of the *vérité militante* remembers it – and which is, arguably, a twenty-five-century history of culture, the subject eventually finds itself facing some contents of knowledge it has not created, pieces of information it has not originally established, i.e., a past which it never lived: finally, it meets a survival, vampire-like past which has 'never been present' (to it, at least).

I posit this threefold argument is recovered by Bernard Stiegler through the formulation of what he names 'tertiary retention', after the Husserlian 'image's consciousness' (Husserl 1991, 61-2; Stiegler 1998, 17). Starting from the comment of *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, with a special reference to § 12 (Husserl 1991, 33-4), Stiegler identifies a third form of memory, which is radically different from the first and the second one – the sense-perception and the immediate impression of the former – for the third corresponds to the “material inscription of the memory retentions in mnemotechnical systems” (2011, 4). This engraving 'material' memory, Bergson would probably say, matches the fundamental “already there” of what the subject actually inherits from its forebears, as the result of the plural constitution of a “collective memory qua patrimony” (2008, 98). The development of this capacity is thus the result of a technological, 'prosthetical', 'orthothetic' improvement – for instance, the discovery of printing techniques, the invention of on-line 'cloudy' databases, and so on – which allows to meet our need for collection, to store a huge amount of cumulative 'epiphylogenetic' knowledge that cannot be erased (2011, 221). This becomes important concerning the way of writing, especially in Husserlian *Origin of Geometry*, since this whole oeuvre is

constructed from tertiary memory, from consciousness of the image of a world-historical given through writing's orthothetic prosthetization, as a condition of the secondary's entry into the primary and, through re-activation qua re-animation, survival. No invention, no geometric tradition can exist without writing (without the Living Present's mortification), because of living retention's limitation. But here, in not separating lived from non-lived, primary from secondary, secondary from tertiary, Husserl once again calls the phenomenological principle itself into question. Heritage begins with perception, uniquely with it, and is interrupted by it: perceptive intuitivity, posited as a basic principle, prevents the secondary from entering it. (2011, 217)

The foundation of this intersubjective transcendence is thus possible via the overwhelming of the – too limiting – retentive finitude, the narrow temporality of the inner self, of individual consciousness, towards the formation of the culture-flesh of the “community of geometricians”: we are now able to appreciate what Stiegler calls an “archi-large-now [...] outside of the living present, affecting the originary moment of geometric invention itself” (2011, 230 and 216). This conceptualisation allows us to retrace the steps of our sedimented tradition. Finally, this allows us to raise the dead (Stiegler 1998, 139-40; 2008, 121-2).

5 Conclusion: Shipping Lanes

This said, one may assume we should get rid of the former I-related vocabulary - along with many centuries of prevailing idealistic tradition - to embrace the We-related one. Just like Ulysses, indeed, we do not descend to hell all alone because we, as members of a crew, and despite the fact we 'navigate' as one, are members of a multiple set of individuals. Following the *I and We's* assumptions, the third chapter of the third volume of Stiegler's *Technics and Time*, I share his view concerning the constitution of a social group as a mixture of "‘montages’ defining the *We* whose historico-political adventures are newly staged each time, as the retention and protention of [the] past and future sequences" (2011, 89). Thus, as it seems, the formation of a gathering involves both a past and a forthcoming dynamic of social consolidation. For Stiegler, at the very heart of the unification process of different, plural consciousness, lays what the French ethnologist Leroi-Gourhan calls the principle "unifier-to-come of human groupings". This intriguing statement recites as follows: for Leroi-Gourhan, in fact,

the unification process in one of adoption through which it is possible to construct, solidify, consolidate, perpetuate, and *extend* a *We*, to amass others *I's* and other *We's*. The general rule is to define this constitutive social - ethnic - group as sharing *a common past* [...] such a definition, giving credit to a myth of pure origin and coming from a past that is transmitted *locally*, is structurally and literally *phantasmagorical*: groups are founded through their common connection to a *future*. (Stiegler 2011, 88; Leroi-Gourhan 1945, 308)¹³

All human grouping, pursues Leroi-Gourhan, is above all the "sharing and projection", the sharing of a past that may be 'common', and thus assumed, only through

adoption, concretized only through projection. As phantasmagorical as it can be, this past is *the image of the We-to-come*, the sum total of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentionality constituting, *through perception*, the protensional mechanism that is, finally, the identificatory flux of an *I and* the adoption of a common *temporal* navigational mechanism. It is a 'fantastic' panoply of mechanism 'helping us to become'. (Stiegler 2011, 89)

What keeps us together is thus a twofold mythical foundation that involves both our origin and our destiny. We move, we perceive, we subsequently 'navigate' back to Ithaca, according to a shared so-

¹³ See also Stiegler 1998, 55.

cial *constructum* which provide us security, which enfolds our future and finally lead us – although via a considerably long peregrination – back home.

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