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Book Name	Transcendentalism Overturned	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	Helena
	Particle	
	Given Name	De Preester
	Suffix	
	Division	Faculty of Fine Arts
	Organization	Ghent University College
	Address	9000, Ghent, Belgium
	Email	helena.depreester@hogent.be
Author	Family Name	Vijver
	Particle	Van de
	Given Name	Gertrudis
	Suffix	
	Division	Faculty of Fine Arts
	Organization	Ghent University College
	Address	9000, Ghent, Belgium
	Email	
Abstract	<p>In “Sublime historical experience” (2005), Frank Ankersmit argues that the past originates from an experience of rupture. Such an experience of rupture separates the present from the past, and, at the same time, means the beginning of an effort to overcome the separation. Moreover, the experience is <i>precognitive</i> since it precedes (the possibility of) historical knowledge. As such, it is a condition of possibility for history. Ankersmit resists post-modern thinking about history, considered as too relativizing from the perspective of current philosophy of history. In his view, the focus on text and context, but also the emphasis on categories in transcendental thinking, result in a neglect of <i>experience</i>. Experience should be given its due, also in philosophy of history. Starting from the above challenge, the “original beginnings”, which Husserl posits as meaning-origins of a particular history in <i>The Origin of Geometry</i> (cf. appendix 6 to <i>The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology</i>, 1970) are questioned from a transcendental perspective. More in particular, it will be investigated if these meaning-origins are to be grasped as structural and <i>nachträglich</i>, in a Derridean style, or if they are to be considered as founding moments of experience, probably in a more Merleau-Pontian style. At stake is here the transcendental status of the <i>first acquisition</i>. Is the point from which a historical demarcation is being made, and thus also the meaning-origin itself, a matter of interpretation after the facts or is it the witness of a supposedly genuine experience? The differences between these two options are both subtle and crucial for transcendental thinking today. In the conclusions, we point to the importance of thinking the possibility of history in structural terms, and to different possible appreciations of the spiritual products of culture and more specifically, of works of art.</p>	

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[...] *our investigations are historical in an unusual sense, namely in virtue of a thematic direction which opens up depth-problems quite unknown to ordinary history.*

(Edmund Husserl, 1970: 354)

What could this be other than a sign that each effort or even each desire of a mastery of the past was momentarily exchanged for a submission to the spell of the moment?

(Frank Ankersmit, 2005: 16)

ABSTRACT

In “Sublime historical experience” (2005), Frank Ankersmit argues that the past originates from an experience of rupture. Such an experience of rupture separates the present from the past, and, at the same time, means the beginning of an effort to overcome the separation. Moreover, the experience is *precognitive* since it precedes (the possibility of) historical knowledge. As such, it is a condition of possibility for history. Ankersmit resists post-modern thinking about history, considered as too relativizing from the perspective of current philosophy of history. In his view, the focus on text and context, but also the emphasis on categories in transcendental thinking, result in a neglect of *experience*. Experience should be given its due, also in philosophy of history. Starting from the above challenge, the “original beginnings”, which Husserl posits as meaning-origins of a particular history in *The Origin of Geometry* (cf. appendix 6 to *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 1970) are questioned from a transcendental perspective. More in particular, it will be investigated if these meaning-origins are to be grasped as structural and *nachträglich*, in a Derridean style, or if they are to be considered as founding moments of experience, probably in a more Merleau-Pontian style. At stake is here the transcendental status of the *first acquisition*. Is the point from which a historical demarcation is being made, and thus also the meaning-origin itself, a matter of interpretation after the facts or is it the witness of a supposedly genuine experience? The differences between these two options are both subtle and crucial for transcendental thinking today. In the conclusions, we point to the importance of thinking the possibility of history in structural terms, and to different possible appreciations of the spiritual products of culture and more specifically, of works of art.

THE TREASURE DISCOVERED OR MADE UP?

In this contribution, the possible status of “original beginnings” in Husserl’s thought is explored. Due to the peculiar mixture between the empirical and the ideal order, the matter is quite complicated. In its most simple, but misleading, form, the issue can be put in the following metaphorical terms: is the treasure – buried in the past – discovered, or is it made up in the present time? In other words, are “original beginnings” a matter of experience, i.e. a supposedly genuine experience in which self-evidence plays a central role, or is it rather the case that its present in the past is retrospectively presupposed?

A possible answer, however, does not simply consist in choosing for one of these options. The reason is that the tension between necessity and contingency, subjectivity and ideal objectivity, and history and lawfulness already is present at the heart of the “original beginnings”.

In the next section (“Original Beginnings and the History of Geometry”), we follow Husserl’s text *The Origin of Geometry* and spell out the issue at stake in its most pregnant form. This means that our focus is on the history of geometry, and on Husserl’s thoughts about its original beginnings in particular. In “Beyond the Alternative Between History and A-Temporal Ideality?” and “Merleau-Ponty and History As the Unfolding of Ideality”, we try to get beyond the alternative between history and a-temporal ideality. Merleau-Ponty’s comments on parts of Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry*, offers valuable efforts to read the tension between history and ideality not as a contradiction, but as an intimate connection between time and ideality. In “Ankersmit: History and Historical Experience”, we present some thoughts on historical experience by Frank Ankersmit (2005) and point to a number of similarities to and differences with Husserl’s account of the experience of history. In the final Section, we come back to the status of “original beginnings” and add some critical remarks. These remarks bear upon the importance of thinking in a structural way about the possibility of history, and upon the way we understand our experience with language and cultural meanings, in particular works of art.

ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS AND THE HISTORY OF GEOMETRY

In *The Origin of Geometry*, Husserl is concerned with the specific status of ideal objectivities, in particular those of geometry. He inquires how such objects came to be, or rather, how they *had* to come to be considering that geometry is what it is, i.e. a science of very particular, ideal objectivities. Husserl thus concentrates upon the *constitution* of such objectivities, and he clearly demarcates this type of inquiry from an inquiry into merely historical facts. For him, it makes little sense to focus, for instance, on Galilei’s particular thoughts in the history of geometry, or on the particular meaning geometry had in his thinking. The reason is plain: the meaning that is of interest cannot be different in the mind of Galileo and in that of past or future geometers. What is looked for, is the original meaning, i.e. the *most original* sense in which geometry first arose in history, and this is, to Husserl, the sense in

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which geometry *had* to appear, “even though we know nothing of the first creators and are not even asking after them.” (Husserl, 1970: 354) Husserl thus sets up a historical inquiry into the *original beginnings of geometry as they necessarily must have been in their “primally establishing” function.* (Ibid: 354)

He starts from geometry as it presents itself nowadays, a tradition amidst numerous other traditions that is implicitly¹ passed on from generation to generation. But even if it emerged from within our human space out of human activity, the forms of a tradition cannot be grounded in purely causal terms. A tradition is the frame within which individual human activity is *organized*, and as such it requires an understanding in more than merely material or causal terms; we also need a spiritual account of it.

In this writing, the constitution of ideal objectivities is described as a process of gradual detachment or distancing from the factual, or from what is based in contingent encounters and particular acts of consciousness of particular minds. Five steps are distinguished: (i) the original self-evidence in the first mathematician’s actual consciousness, which is plainly contingent and factual, (ii) the retention of this self-evidence and its passive memorization, whereby its permanent character is increased, even if it is still factually and contingently grounded, (iii) the reactivation of this original self-evidence in an active memory, allowing for the *possibility* to recall the evidence ad infinitum, without having to recall it literally, (iv) the intersubjective memory, mediated by language, on the basis of which the self-evidence can be reactivated and communicated by all those mastering the language, (v) the memory fixed through writing, a crucial step opening up the perspective of focusing exclusively on the *possibility* of reactivating the self-evidence, through which a clear independency is materialized with regard to actual realizations by actual mathematicians. In this way, the constitution of ideal, scientific objectivity contributes to virtualize the factual in as far as there is *no* longer the *need* to continuously recall and factually awaken the original self-evidences, even if there is the *possibility* to do so.²

What then can a return to original beginnings as Husserl envisages in *The Origin of Geometry* imply? What can be the status and the relevance of an “original self-evidence”, considering that the constitution of objective ideality seems to involve a form of structural, “symbolic”, independency in regard to what counts as original self-evidence or factual realization?³ Clearly, Husserl does not merely have in mind the return to an original, first, factual realization, even if he claims that there *must have been* a first acquisition. Indeed, to him, the challenge of an inquiry into original beginnings is to understand how each and every acquisition *maintains its validity* in the next step or is persistent in the process in which a tradition is made, building further upon previous acquisitions and their validities. In Husserl’s phrasing: “Clearly, then, geometry must have arisen out of a *first* acquisition, out of first creative activities. We understand its persisting manner of being: it is not only a mobile forward process from one set of acquisitions to another but a continuous synthesis in which all acquisitions maintain their validity, all make up a totality such that, at every present stage, the total acquisition is, so to speak, the total premise for the acquisitions of the new level.” (Ibid: 355)

Of course, the *total* meaning of geometry (i.e. as a developed science), as a project and later as a movement towards its realization, could not be explicitly *given* in the original beginnings. There must have been a “more *primitive formation of meaning* [...]” as a preliminary stage [...]” (Ibid: 356) And this more primitive formation of meaning must have taken place through the self-evidence of successful realization. To Husserl, self-evidence here refers to the most adequate fulfillment of consciousness by its object. It is “nothing more than grasping an entity with the consciousness of its original being-itself-there [*Selbst-da*]”. (Ibid: 356). An original being-itself-there and the successful realization of a project are one and the same, because what is realized is there, originally, as itself.

The basic question of *The Origin of Geometry* then is how the initial self-evidence, as based in the subject of the inventor, is to be related to ideal objectivity. In other words, how to make comprehensible the fact that the objective validity of geometry presupposes the activity of the mental space of an inventor, while being also in a peculiar way transcendent with regard to this temporally situated activity. To Husserl, there is indeed a supratemporal existence involved in geometry, also in the first establishment (cf. ibid: 356), even if it is not yet “ideal” objectivity. Ideal objectivity (*ideale Gegenständlichkeit*), proper to science, is the kind of objectivity that is identical in all its empirical “translations”. As such, it is similar to other forms of ideal objectivity present in the cultural world. Husserl mentions spiritual products such as the constructions of fine literature, and he distinguishes these from other kinds of objectivities, such as tools (e.g. a hammer) and also architectural products. The reason for distinguishing the latter from the former, is that the latter are not amenable to repetition in the same way. The repeatability of e.g. tools is a repeatability in many like exemplars, whereas e.g. a theorem “exists only once, no matter how often or even in what language it may be expressed.” (Ibid: 357) Of course, ideal objects of any kind can be said to have objective existence in the world, in virtue of their being expressed, and being endlessly expressible, in language. Moreover, language itself is made up of ideal objects: “[...] the word *Löwe* occurs only once in the German language; it is identical throughout its innumerable utterances by any given persons.” (Ibid: 357) But the idealities at stake in geometry, however much they are expressed in language, and however much they presuppose the ideality of language, are not to be equated to the idealities of linguistic forms. What is brought to validity as truth in geometry, are ideal geometrical objects, states of affairs, etc.

Nevertheless, there is a most intimate link between language and geometrical ideality, as it is on the basis of language that ideality can proceed from its intrapersonal original to ideal objectivity. “The objective world is from the start the world for all, the world which ‘everyone’ has as a world-horizon. Its objective being presupposes men, understood as men with a common language.” (Ibid: 359). From the moment language enters the scene, it is, and must be, a language about something; to participate in language, is then to participate in this involvement with something. It is to count on the possibility of a minimal understanding between those who participate, prior to all forms of more specific understanding that can be articulated afterwards. It is, in other words, to inhabit a world *as* a world of fellow human beings acknowledging this (minimal) possibility.

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Yet, language alone is not enough. Even if the first mathematician expresses his inner creation through language – just as any one can make something objective, communicable, real, by using language – this does not make this creation *ideally* objective. The question, therefore, still is how to make the transition from the psychic inner world of the first mathematician to objective ideality, to an intersubjective existence of an ideal object?

To Husserl, it is clear that the original self-evidence, the original being-itself-there at the moment of the original beginnings does not automatically imply a persisting acquisition that could have objective existence. The original, vivid self-evidence passes and “immediately turns into the passivity of the flowingly fading consciousness of what-has-just-now-been.” (Ibid: 359) However, Husserl immediately adds the following: “Finally this ‘retention’ disappears, but the ‘disappeared’ passing and being past *has not become nothing* for the subject in question: it can be reawakened” (Ibid: 359, italics added). That the “having disappeared”, the “being-past”, *does not become nothing* for the subject in question is important. The past experiencing can be lived through in the possible activity of a recollection. The originally self-evident production is recollected and renewed, and this active recollection of what is past is accompanied by an activity of concurrent *actual* production. It is precisely this possibility of actively recollecting that proves or at least indicates that what has disappeared has not become nothing: it cannot have become nothing as it is recollected. Moreover, and this is crucial to Husserl’s argument, through an original equality (*Deckung*) a *self-evidence of identity* arises: what has now been realized in original fashion (in the act of recollection) is identified as *the same* as what was previously self-evident. It is not a matter of likeness, but of identity, as well as a matter of self-evidence of this identity. Indeed, it also becomes possible now to “repeat at will the self-evidence of the identity (coincidence of identity) of the structure throughout the chain of repetitions.” (Ibid: 360) In other words, what becomes self-evident, is the capacity to repeat, to *do* the same, and this presupposes the identification of the old and new meaning *as* structurally isomorphic. They *must be* the same to the extent that they are identified as the same: the identity is self-evident.⁴

However, all this happens to the subject and his or her subjective capacities and does not allow for “objectivity” in the genuine sense. But as soon as we take into consideration empathy and “fellow man as a community of empathy and of language” (ibid: 360), reciprocal linguistic understanding comes into view and the original production can be actively understood by *others*. Husserl describes this as follows: “In this full understanding of what is produced by the other, as in the case of recollection, a present co-accomplishment on one’s own part of the presentified activity necessarily takes place; but at the same time there is also the self-evident consciousness of the identity of the mental structure in the productions of both the receiver of the communication and the communicator; and this occurs reciprocally.” (Ibid: 360). In the unity of communication the repeatedly produced structure becomes an object of consciousness. Again, this object does not appear as a likeness, but “as the one structure common to all.” (Ibid: 360).⁵

In a next step in the process of becoming a tradition, the ideal objectivity gains *persisting* existence, i.e. also when the inventor and his fellows are not awake or

no longer alive. Until now, the existence of the “ideal objects” was not permanent, since there could be times when no one consciously realized them in self-evidence. It is here that writing fulfills a vital role. Due to writing, factual communication becomes *virtual*, and the way man communicates is lifted to a new level. Now, the geometrical meaning-structure is put into written words, and this writing-down effects a transformation of its original mode of being: it becomes sedimented. Yet, the reader can reactivate its self-evidence.

Finally, and often not mentioned in discussions of Husserl’s *Origin*, logical inference also is pivotal in this process. Since geometrical science is an immense construction, and since the capacity for reactivation is limited, reactivation is de facto not always feasible. “When he [the geometer] returns to the actual continuation of work, must he first run through the whole immense chain of groundings back to the original premises and actually reactivate the whole thing? If so, a science like our modern geometry would not be possible at all.” (Ibid: 363) Fortunately, and here logical inference is at work, if the premises *can* be reactivated back to the most original self-evidence, and if your reasoning is sound, then the self-evident consequences of the premises *can* also be reactivated. Of course, this is only valid for deductive science – history itself, as a science, is not a logical construction. History does not produce *ideal* objectivities. In this case, we can never be sure of the possibility of reactivation. In other words, the “seduction of language” may be more strongly at work in descriptive disciplines, in the sense that the claimed validities probably are disappointed by subsequent experience – if this “historical experience” were possible at all in the first place (cf. “Ankersmit: History and Historical Experience” on historical experience). Yet Husserl sees this not only as a problem for sciences with a logical-deductive construction or a construction based on description, but for all kinds of sedimentations – sedimentations whose content once arose in life itself. “But propositions, like other cultural structures, appear on the scene in the form of tradition; they claim, so to speak, to be sedimentations of a truth-meaning that can be made originally self-evident; whereas it is by no means necessary that they [actually] have such a meaning, as in the case of associatively derived falsifications.” (Ibid: 367)

In the final paragraphs of *The Origin of Geometry*, Husserl answers to the objection that his undertaking is not history, but epistemology. According to Husserl, the separation between epistemology and history makes the deepest problems of history invisible. The knowing Husserl aims at, is not a knowing about an external causality that determines the course of history. In contrast, it is a knowing about the *inner structure of meaning* that historical facts have, and he proposes to further disclose the *motivational* interconnections between historical facts. “All [merely] factual history remains incomprehensible because, always merely drawing its conclusions naïvely and straightforwardly from facts, it never makes thematic the general ground of meaning upon which all such conclusions rest, has never investigated the immense structural a priori which is proper to it.” (Ibid: 371) Next to this merely factual history, there is an “internal history”, in which there is no distinction possible between internal-historical problems and epistemological problems.

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BEYOND THE ALTERNATIVE BETWEEN HISTORY
AND A-TEMPORAL IDEALITY?

In the year 1959–1960, in his course on Monday at the Collège de France, Maurice Merleau-Ponty translates and comments parts of Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*.⁶ In the next two sections the notes of this course are our point of departure for a further interpretation of Husserl's text. Merleau-Ponty extensively comments on Husserl's idea that even *ideal* beings, such as the objectivities of mathematics, necessarily unfold in the course of time, i.e. in history. Moreover, and as just explained (cf. *supra*), ideal beings acquire their ideal meaning only in and through spoken and written language. Stated differently, both language and history participate in the formation of ideal being. This is because both the sensible inscription and the objectivity/a-temporality of ideal being is assured by history and language.

We have seen that *The Origin of Geometry* explains how every genesis of meaning presupposes an originary foundation, a *Stiftung*. Such a *Stiftung* or creative foundation opens up a field that the creator cannot survey, but in which later geometers can work, in a tradition of *Nachstiftung*. The initial steps of geometry therefore have not only a literal and manifest meaning, but also a *surplus* of meaning. Geometry is more than the lived experiences of Galilei and others, and more than these thoughts reactualized by others. There is a deeper sense, a deeper structure of sense, upon which thoughts of geometers open. What is opened is a field that is at first only aimed at, but not yet developed, and which remains present in the whole history of geometry. Even more, this deeper sense makes geometry into what it is as such, i.e. as a consistent theory. Merleau-Ponty considers this movement, this opening up of a field, as a model for conceiving not only the history of geometry, but universal history. And in whatever history, the opening of a field is something suprapersonal.

The field laid open, initiated by an original acquisition, is not organized according to causal relations, but is seized by a necessity. To take this into account, the notions of fact and essence, real and ideal have to be reconsidered. To Merleau-Ponty, the basic challenge is to conceive of an ideality that requires time. The most important idea for the present contribution, is that the original beginnings, the originary meaning, can be reactualized in the future. According to Merleau-Ponty, the original beginnings, the moment of self-evidence, is the place where a chiasmus occurs between me and the other, between past, present and future. As such, the chiasmus is the depth of life itself.

If the origin of geometry is to be thought, and if we do not want to lapse into a psychological history, e.g. of Galilei's thinking, how, then, do we have to consider the history of geometry? What kind of history do we have to conceive of? Geometry, in its development, is not the same as the lived thought of geometers at work. How then, are we to say something about the original acquisition? And are we gaining something by attempting to say something about the original acquisition? Experience is, after all, of the order of the psychological and the empirical. The opening of a field, however, is something suprapersonal. This is, in a nutshell, how Merleau-Ponty frames the tension between factual existence and ideality.

The question therefore seems to be how a meaning can arise which is not confined by the thought of one or more persons. According to Merleau-Ponty, the original meaning, which opens up the ontological space of the first propositions, is *pre-ideal*. However, the *Urstiftung* of meaning is not a recorded fact, but is something considered as a necessity in the geometry which results from it. Does this way of reasoning lead to “ideal” history? Is this history then about the genesis of meaning or about the meaning of genesis? If the original beginnings are not searched for in the thinking of geometers or in their works, if they are searched for in a certain *idea* that we have about what they necessarily must have been, is this not contriving ideal history? If this were the sense that we attribute to the genesis of geometry, wouldn’t it be the case that our construction is merely ideal or purely linked to the present? Yet Husserl resists a history that would be purely present or ideal. According to Merleau-Ponty, he wants an inquiry into the meaning or essence of geometry which does not appeal to an a-temporal ideality that would dominate the genesis and engulf it. The history of geometry, or the genesis of its meaning, is not some construction that merely happens from our present point of view, i.e. as a merely ideal construction. This would swallow up history in a kind of a-temporality. In contrast, the history of geometry should reveal a *movement* of meaning, i.e. truly a *genesis* of meaning. By historical reflection, we find the living current of the internal meaning, i.e. what this current necessarily must be in its becoming. What we have to do, is to look at the crucial steps in this process of becoming, in order to see the inner, living sense of history.⁷

According to Merleau-Ponty, what is seized in the original beginning is not a-temporal: the research does not yet contain its results, and reflection upon the results is not a simple analysis. The total meaning is not exhausted in the founding act, and it is precisely for this reason that ideality needs history! In the words of Merleau-Ponty: “Thus its total meaning is not exhausted in the founding act.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1998: 24; our translation).⁸

Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, history precisely *is* the place of ideality. Therefore, we have to overcome the alternative between history and ideality by a historicity which is not *merely* causal. We have to consider historicity as opening, as *Ineinander* of present and past, as an intentional historicity (ibid: 22). In the next section, we have a closer look at the historical process and its relation to ideality in Merleau-Ponty.

MERLEAU-PONTY AND HISTORY AS THE UNFOLDING OF IDEALITY

Let us get back to the core problem. The problem that Husserl addresses is that geometry is, in the originary act, just a moment of personal life. At first sight, it seems to be written language that has the power to give geometry, outside of the space of consciousness of its inventor, the status of ideal objectivity. Of course, it is never an ideal being that is in the world; the expressions of meaning (*Bedeutung*) are in the world, in space and in time. Thus, geometry is objectified only insofar as the content of one’s thoughts is expressed. Thanks to expression, the psychic content of

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the creator can become “objective”, “experienceable”, nameable. But the intersubjective being as *ideal* being (*ideale Gegenständlichkeit*) still is completely different from the psychic-real (*psychisch-Reales*). How, then, does this ideality originate?

The answer is as simple as it is ingenious. It is because the original accomplishment never becomes *nothing*: in passing by, the original accomplishment becomes passive, but *it can be reawakened*. That there is a possibility of reawakening *something*, that there is the possibility of attaining self-evidence of identity in this reawakening, that is what potentially makes geometry into something *ideally objective*. If there would not be a possibility of reawakening, or no longer a need to do so, geometry would be confined to pure formalism. So, in the recollection (*Wiedererinnerung*) there is the identification with an original accomplishment, and there is consciousness of an *identity* between something that was produced before, at whatever time of origin, and what is quasi-produced in the recollection. Through the process of identification (self-evidence *of* the identity), it becomes clear that it was precisely the original accomplishment that also *stiftet* this possibility of reactivation and of identity. In this sense, the recollection in which the original accomplishment is reactivated, differs from “ordinary” recollections, such as the recollection of a perception. In the recollection of a perception, there is no establishment of self-evidence of identity; the perception is not actual in the recollection, but is merely there as the retention of a retention of a retention etc.

It can be said, with Merleau-Ponty, that Husserl does not seek to *explain* ideality by language: this would imply a renunciation of phenomenology (ibid: 27). On the one hand, ideality does emerge in language, but it cannot be reduced to a content of language. On the other hand, ideality does not dominate language as a superior possibility. Ideality is the hinge of the connection between me and the other, and operates in (and only in!) this connection. Ideality is realized by this connection between me and the other – a connection enabled by language. In sum, ideality and intersubjectivity are two sides of the same coin.

Language is also what changes the modus of being of ideality: words (spoken or written) exist objectively like physical things, and it is thanks to speech or writing that meaning can be reactivated. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, ideality somehow seems to exist before it is expressed, but not in the status of “objective” ideality. However, expression, and writing in particular, is not merely a means for transmitting meaning, but it transforms the original accomplishment into a *stabilized* accomplishment. This means that the accomplishment is passed, but at the same time it has become available for others. The sedimentation in writing is this *availability*. Most importantly, the sedimentation and the concurrent availability is *a part of the thought*, and not merely decoration added to the thought. *The sedimentation of the thought is the realization itself of the thought* (ibid: 29).⁹

Of course, how can we understand this meaning that can be reactivated? What is this meaning that we can share with the past? We find a message in the past, without knowing who the sender is. According to Merleau-Ponty, the internal character of geometry is to be a message from someone to someone. And our ignorance of the empirical origin of this message guarantees that the message has a human origin, that the communication is human. The obscurity of the empirical origin testifies

that what is created had the possibility to survive in some other way than merely as a past which has passed. In contrast, it has survived as something which can inhabit all spirits. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty calls tradition: tradition is the forgetting of the empirical origins in order to be eternal origin. This is also why the becoming of history is not merely a causal way of becoming, but a spiritual one. And ideality is that which emerges in a history that I can repeat. So, in Merleau-Ponty's analysis, like in Husserl's text itself, there is no separation between ideality and history, but ideality precisely unfolds in history.

But, to return to the beginning, how do we have to consider ideality in the space of personal consciousness of the inventor? Although Merleau-Ponty calls it a *pre-ideal* ideality, we cannot simply refuse all a-temporal ideal being to it. If we did, isn't it the case that only isolated, and hence, psychic facts would remain, without any ideality at all? But if thought were founded immediately upon a-temporal ideal being, we would lose history. So, what is there since the *Urstiftung* that founds its universal validity, its ideality?

We know that it is on the basis of speech that *Bedeutung* appears in the world. Becoming causal and becoming spiritual happens in one and the same movement! Acts of expression have two layers: an ideal meaning and a sensible incarnation that does not compromise the ideal meaning. But how does it happen that in expression ideality becomes objective? And, again, is ideal being already attained in the interior of the geometer? In order to answer these questions, we have to turn back to Husserl's most simple but ingenious solution: there is a surpassing of the psychic-real in the inventor, because the production is not only retained as a dated event which will never be as if it never had happened. This is the crux of the matter. Original beginnings – and that is why they possibly are original beginnings – are retained in a peculiar way: they are exactly, and only, that which can be, and has to be, reactivated (cf. *supra* the difference with the recollection of a perception).

In the recollection of original beginnings, there is actual renewal of that production, there is a re-comprehension of the productions of the other, the recreation of them when I am told about it. Moreover, this happens through the identification with the production of the other. What is produced in me and in the other does not simply have a relation of resemblance, it is not that there is likeness between both, but they are *one and the same*. In other words, the process is one of identification.

Ideality is thus something more specific than mere intersubjectivity: it is not just something psychic-objective. In Merleau-Pontian terms: ideality is not *parole parlée* but *parole parlante*. Because of *parole parlante*, a co-production is possible. Ideality is not causally dragged out of language. Ideality is this possibility of equivalence, of identification, between me and the other.

Writing founds the permanence of the ideality outside experiences of empathy (*Einfühlung*). In writing, the ideal world becomes sedimented. Sedimentation, forgetting, is not a failing of ideality; it is constitutive of ideality (see also *supra* the notion of tradition). And since we cannot reactivate everything, the *possibility* of being mistaken (cf. the seduction of language) is also the *possibility* of truth.

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ANKERSMIT: HISTORY AND HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

For Ankersmit (2005), openness to the past asks for a submission to the spell of the moment. This openness to the past is essential to historical experience (Ankersmit, 2005: 16). In historical experience, it is as if a remote personal past comes to life again. This shift from the historical to the historical experience, which is itself a-historical, is not a transcendence of history in order to arrive at time-transcending truths. Historical experience is only possible in a cross-sectional approach (*Querschnitt*), not by placing something within a chronological and narrative context, but by decontextualizing elements subsumed under cross-sections. The past should be dissolved in individual “atoms”; this is the only way in which the past can become an *object of historical experience* (Ibid: 167). “As long as these atoms have their fixed place in the endless chain of events reaching from the past to the present, as long as we can get access to them only by carefully following the chain itself, all contact with the past will be indirect and mediated by this chain of events. The event, or the past, is then a product or function of the chain of events, and we will never succeed in disentangling it from the cloak of what surrounds it” (Ibid: 167). This description of chaining up historical events can be read as a Husserlian seduction of language,¹⁰ in which one gets stuck, or simply relies on the chain of reasonings, without ever aiming at the reactivation of an original beginning, i.e. a moment that cannot be thought, but of which the identity with the original beginnings must be experienced as self-evident. This is Ankersmit’s reason for decontextualizing the event, which is a condition for having a historical *experience*. Works of art can pre-eminently lead us into historical experience. The reason is that the *work of art*, as a remnant of earlier times, carries a meaning that “will never surrender to the powers of history” (Ibid: 167). As such, it is – together with writings – an essential element in historical experience. It is here that we can experience the past, because, here, the past “is a past denuded of the protective shell of narrative in which nineteenth-century historicism had always wrapped it; it is a past that we encounter as we look at a painting and where all that truly counts happens between the painting and ourselves – [...]” (Ibid: 168). Historicism, we may say, uses the seduction of language in an effort to know the past or in order to connect to the past. The historical experience, in contrast, is an experience that is not concerned with putting what we have discovered from the past into a temporal order (beginning – middle – end), and therefore it may be called a-historical. In the words of Ankersmit: “One first has to historicize everything with the historian, so that one can make, with Burckhardt, this movement of dehistoricizing what was historicized [...]” (Ibid: 169). Here, Joseph von Eichendorff’s insight that in historical experience present (subject) and past (object) meet each other “cleaned of all their historical denominations” (ibid: 169) is repeated.

Moreover, and still according to Ankersmit, the past becomes past if there is an irreparable rupture, such as the Revolution in France, because of which a pre-revolutionary identity is lost and a new one is constituted. The previous order is gone forever and the old identity cannot be recovered. Under these circumstances,

a desire to know the past arises – a desire that substitutes the desire of *being* what is lost. “History became an object of knowledge, an object of research forever separated from the world of the subject, of the historian. The past became a world successfully resisting any attempt to restore the union of being and knowledge.” (Ibid: 327) We have been expelled from the past, because of some event that caused an irreparable rupture between past and present. This leads to a desire for *knowing* the past.

For Husserl, in contrast, the possibility of reactivation presupposes that what is reactivated is not strange to us, once reactivated. Even more, we identify it with the same self-evidence as the original inventor did. Husserl seems concerned, not about what inevitably slips away, but about what from the past can still be recovered in the present. And this seems limited to what has acquired general validity. But then the question rises again if this is to be called “history”, i.e. if all what fails of this identification (i.e. what cannot be reactivated) is principally excluded. Not only is history’s radical difference avoided, but also the question about our relation to it does not figure in Husserl’s account. The reason why is plain: Husserl’s question is not a question for contingency, for the merely empirical and factual. Yet, Ankersmit’s account, e.g. of the power of a work of art, does not take into account the spiritual, ideal dimension of it, which, in Husserl’s account, is solely responsible for our present possibility to reactualize the self-evidence of its identity. Another difference between Husserl and Ankersmit, is that historical experience is sublime for Ankersmit, but not for Husserl. The reactivation in a Husserlian sense is more a matter of adequate identification with a past production, whereas historical experience is for Ankersmit a matter of sublime dissociation. It is precisely the dissociation between past and present that is constitutive of the sublime. Nevertheless, the following description of the experience of the past is not incongruent with Husserl’s intentions, if history is indeed not conceived as a mere concatenation of empirical facts, but as the dimension in which idealities unfold and are taken up by subjects past, present and future. “The experience of the past, as described in Hegel’s account, is a movement both *within* and *against* history: it is, at the same time, the deepest and most intense experience of the past *and* a stepping outside the realm of history.” (Ibid: 344) For Ankersmit, however, sublime experience also involves a dissociation of a former self from the self that we are after having had the sublime experience in question. In the Husserlian reactivation of an original meaning-formation, there also is what can be called a “loss of identity of the self”, since in reactivating a historical accomplishment, my accomplishment is *identical* with the original accomplishment. Here, in this experience, I do aim at reactivating someone else’s thoughts. These thoughts, however, from the start did not belong solely to the original thinker either; the possibility of communication, empathy and thus intersubjectivity is present from the very beginning. This “distance” between the thought and the thinker is a distance that implies the space of intersubjectivity. Yet, for Ankersmit, the dissociation is more straightforwardly a dissociation between identities. Ankersmit thus writes: “ [...] it is the kind of experience which involves our identity in the sense that the experience makes us look at ourselves from the perspective of the outsider; we look at ourselves as if we were looking at

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541 *somebody else*. Put differently, we suddenly become aware of a *previous* identity of
 542 ourselves, of the kind of person that we had been up to now and had never realized
 543 that we were, and *this* we can do only thanks to our having acquired a *new* iden-
 544 tity.” (Ibid: 349) Near the end of the quote, the difference between the views of
 545 Ankersmit and Husserl become apparent again: there is no identification with the
 546 other for Ankersmit, whereas for Husserl this is precisely the precondition, not for
 547 ruptures in history, but for the constitution of a tradition. This brings us back to their
 548 different points of departure: thinking the past as past and as radically different but
 549 allowing sublime historical experience, or thinking the past as constitutive of tradi-
 550 tions and based on the possible reactivation of thoughts thought before us, and on
 551 the identity of meaning in these thoughts.

CONCLUSIONS

556 Our presentation of Husserl’s view on history, starting from his *Origin of Geometry*,
 557 in confrontation with Ankersmit’s focus on the sublime experience, can enable us
 558 to conclude the following.

559 Firstly, it seems to us important to underline the fact that Husserl, with his work
 560 on the *Origin*, but also with his *Crisis*, contributes to the idea – even if he fails
 561 to make it fully explicit – that the possibility of history can only be grasped in
 562 structural terms. Or rather, to write history means to occupy a place in it, i.e. to
 563 identify oneself as having a place among other places. We have interpreted Husserl’s
 564 stress on “Deckung” in these terms, as a requirement of realization of self-evidence
 565 of identity. This realization implies a movement of *identification*, which seems to
 566 us to be the central idea in Husserl’s text, but which would clearly require further
 567 elaboration. Identification indeed is a process, as Merleau-Ponty also beautifully
 568 illustrates, a movement as well as a grasping of a movement *as* a movement of a
 569 certain kind, which results in the positing of an identity and which has a number
 570 of consequences. It makes a difference to identify, and in a sense it does not matter
 571 what the content of identification is. This idea can refer to the specific status of
 572 reflection in a critical viewpoint: to reflect is to presentify things in a mediated way.
 573 Mediated, this means that it is *about* something – and it has to be about something,
 574 otherwise there is only either pure empirical stimulation or pure formalization –
 575 but it also means that it implies an acknowledgment of the proper place. Husserl,
 576 perhaps more explicitly than Merleau-Ponty, stresses, on the basis of a radicalized
 577 form of cartesian meditation, that the refusal of the pure stimulus as well as of pure
 578 formalization that is at stake in identification and that makes it so different from pure
 579 identity, involves a point of abyss, a passage through hell. This passage through hell
 580 is “the loss of identity” that enters the scene from the moment the logic is that of
 581 identification.

582 The advantage of Ankersmit is that he has the potential to critically under-
 583 mine accounts that have attained a form of self-sufficiency in which this “loss
 584 of identity” is lost sight of. This can happen in post-modern as well as in tran-
 585 scendental accounts. But one can wonder if he does not himself recover another

kind of self-sufficiency, that of the fullness of the experience in the sublime, for instance.

Second, it is remarkable that works of art figure pre-eminently, albeit at the same time in passing, in the accounts by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Ankersmit. Husserl, due to his focus on pure ideality, is obliged to distinguish two kinds of works of art: “fine literature”, which is capable to present ideal meanings as somehow independent of the specific material embodiment that accompanies it, and more “materialized” works of art (e.g. the products of architecture), in which a layer of pure meaning is not so easily discernible or conceivable apart from the material specificities of it. It is well known that Merleau-Ponty resists the idea that there is a layer of ideal meaning that can be isolated (even if this happens merely in thought) from the material form in which the meaning appears. And for Merleau-Ponty, this is true both for visual arts and for literature. Meaning is always structured in a form, and this form cannot be thought as “pure” or not materialized (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1942). That ideality needs history is the very same idea: ideality is embodied, both in historical time and in matter. As both history and matter preclude a pure form of ideality, the process of identification is difficult to think of as a process that only involves ideality. It is true that Husserl takes into account writing (as an embodiment of ideality), but it is also true that the most intimate intertwining between ideality and materiality – as Merleau-Ponty (1942) describes it – remains an obstacle for him for thinking the cultural tradition of works of art that are not amenable to pure ideality (as is for Husserl the case for “fine literature”). Nevertheless, as Merleau-Ponty considers some works of art as an *Urstiftung*, he recovers the Husserlian idea of original beginnings without succumbing to the call of *pure* ideality, but while holding onto the idea that their meaning-structure is not reducible to a causal or *purely* material history. The way history is conceived of, thus turns out to be decisive not only for our relation to a history of art, but more importantly for a point of view on the way we can experience art. Vice versa, the status of a work of art in philosophy can be revealing for philosophy’s point of view on the status of history and ideality. An account of the status of the work of art necessarily implies an account of the status of meaning and its relation to history. As such, it can be said that a philosophy of the work of art also is a philosophy of history.

For Ankersmit, the work of art is something that resists – in Husserlian terms – the seduction of language; we can have immediate experience of it, unmediated by history. As the examples he gives, mostly are examples from literature, we should be watchful here. It might be the case that his choices are motivated by an underlying but not explicated view on what works of art convey through time. In a rather unexpected way, it might be that Ankersmit is in agreement here with Husserl’s view on the work of art, especially literature, as capable of having pure meaning. If sublime experience is possible, this might be the case because the very specific material (and historical!) conditions can be neglected in his view.

In our view, the distinctions that are at play here, are all to be related to the issue of identification, as indeed, to identify is to select and hence to neglect certain aspects of the thing one is directed upon – it is in this sense a loss of identity – but it is also a recovery of identity at a different level. The constraint, indeed, is the possibility.

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Faculty of Fine Arts, Ghent University College, 9000 Ghent, Belgium
 e-mail: helena.depreester@hogent.be

NOTES

¹ The way in which a tradition comes into being and develops, is not necessarily a matter of explicitly and consciously building and developing this tradition. A number of passages in the *Crisis* point to the rather implicit way in which a tradition is developed. In the following passage, Husserl is discussing Descartes. “After Galileo had carried out, slightly earlier, the primal establishment of the new natural science, it was Descartes who conceived and at the same time set in systematic motion the new idea of universal philosophy [. . .]. And immediately it had a powerful effect.

This does not mean, then (in accord with our exposition above), that he had *fully and systematically* thought out this idea in advance, much less that his contemporaries and successors, constantly guided by it in the sciences, had it in mind in *explicit* form. For this it would have been necessary to have the higher systematic development of pure mathematics under the new idea of universality which appears in its first, relative maturity in Leibniz [. . .] and which is now, in more mature form, still a subject of lively research as the mathematics of definite manifolds. Like all historical ideas that result in great developments, those in the new mathematics, the new natural science, and the new philosophy live in very diverse noetic modes in the consciousness of the persons who function as the bearers of their development: sometimes they strive forward like *instincts*, without these persons having any ability to give an account of where they are going; sometimes they are the results of a more or less clear realization, as plainly and simply grasped goals, possibly crystallizing into ever more precise goals through repeated consideration” (Husserl, 1970: 73–74, italics added).

In another passage, concerning rationalism, Husserl states the following: “Borne by the same spirit, all the new sciences seem to succeed, even the highest, metaphysics. Where physicalistic rationalism could not be carried through in earnest, as precisely in the case of metaphysics, aid was sought in unclear qualifications, through the use of variations of Scholastic concepts. For the most part, in fact, the guiding sense of the new rationality was *not precisely thought out*, even though it was the *driving force* behind the movements. Its explicitation in more precise terms was itself a part of philosophy’s intellectual labor . . .” (Husserl, 1970: 64).

² When Husserl speaks about a “crisis” of the European sciences, he intends precisely the radical carrying through of this project of virtualization, leading to a surreptitious replacement of the world in which we live by a world of objectivistic truths, presented as *the* truths that are valid independently from any form of actuality and embodiment, and no longer calling for a realization from within the “lifeworld”.

³ That objective ideality involves a form of structural, symbolic autonomy, does not mean that it can be equated to it. In the *Crisis*, Husserl introduces at various places the idea of symbolism to refer to a form of structural detachment from intuition. Referring to Galilei’s thinking, he notes that the “philosopher of nature and ‘trail-blazer’ of physics, was not yet a physicist in the full present-day sense; that his thinking did not, like that of our mathematicians and mathematical physicists, move in the sphere of symbolism, far removed from intuition”. (Husserl, 1970: 24). He also uses the word to capture the idea of emptying of meaning: “Of course one does not calculate ‘mechanically’, as in ordinary numerical calculation; one thinks, one invents, one may make great discoveries – but they have acquired, unnoticed, a displaced, ‘symbolic’ meaning. Later this becomes a fully conscious methodical displacement, a methodical transition from geometry, for example, to pure *analysis*, treated as a science in its own right.” (Husserl, 1970: 45).

⁴ That is what the word “Deckung” refers to in this context.

⁵ We can wonder whether the order of treatment in the constitution of ideal objectivity is not in part responsible for the discussions that followed it and of which we present here a very fragmented image. Because indeed, one can ask what can be the status of the self-evidence of identity in a particular subject that is not yet part of language and does not communicate. Of course, Husserl acknowledges that it is only through communication, and further through writing, that ideal objectivity can emerge. But is it possible, even if only in thought, to isolate a subject capable of producing self-evident “Deckung”?

Or rather, is it relevant at all to think of a subject that genuinely *identifies* something as structurally isomorphic while not having articulated its structural embeddedness in a language community? Should it not be more relevant to think, the other way around, about the capacities of identification of self-evidence from within a certain form of communicability and writing? It seems to us that Husserl is perhaps too faithful to a (conscious) subject that disposes of capacities of identification and self-evidence, that in a sense subsists in isolation from its linguistic capacities. In our view, it is precisely this point that explains the uneasiness some authors have in regard to the view he presents on ideal objectivity. We are thinking of Derrida here (a.o. 1967), but also of psychoanalytic thinkers inspired by Freud and Lacan, who stress much more radically the idea that subjectivity emerges with and within language, as well as the idea that the subject is part and parcel of language in such a radical way that it is continuously at the verge of loosing its identifiability as a “point of consciousness present to itself (cf. De Preester and Van de Vijver, 2005). To think in this way indeed involves a totally different view on the subject, of which it can be said that Husserl announces a number of aspects, but does not really articulate or take up the consequences. We are thinking here, for instance, of what he says on the drive and on instincts (see note 1 and 3), that could be pertinently related to the debate on consciousness and the unconscious.

⁶ These notes from 1959–1960 are published for the first time in 1998 in the volume *Notes de cours sur ‘L’Origine de la Géométrie’ de Husserl – suivi de ‘Recherches sur la Phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty’*, edited by Renaud Barbaras. A (very short, 12 page–) summary of these courses is part of *Résumés de cours – Collège de France 1952–1960* (Gallimard, 1968). In 1961, Jacques Derrida edited his translation of and comments on Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry*. These were published in 1962.

⁷ It seems to us that what Merleau-Ponty touches upon is, once again, the issue of structural autonomy. It is certainly the case that he attempts, as did Husserl, to express the idea that something is qualitatively different from the “first intuition of the first mathematician”, something that is in this sense “suprapersonal” and a-temporal. This refers, in our view, to the idea that things are organized or structured in a certain way, which implies certain possible and other impossible movements. This is also in agreement with Merleau-Ponty’s fundamental viewpoint on structure extensively elaborated in *La Structure du Comportement* (1942). However, Merleau-Ponty, perhaps more overtly than Husserl, indicates that there is, and there *has to be*, a *participation* in a movement of meaning that is situated in a space of possible movements. Both authors do however express the idea that history requires participation.

⁸ Our translation of: “Donc son sens ne s’épuise pas dans l’acte fondateur.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1998: 24).

⁹ Cf. “La sédimentation, c’est cette disponibilité, elle fait partie de la pensée, elle n’en est pas une décoration. [...] La pensée: la sédimentation est sa réalisation comme pensée.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1998: 29).

¹⁰ See also both in Husserl and Ankersmit the use of the word “association” for describing this process. Ankersmit describes history as the “art of association” (Ankersmit, 2005: 344).

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Chapter 22

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