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Lucas Dazin. Husserlian investigation of the presence of writings in the social world. Philosophy. 2017. dumas-01563121

HAL Id: dumas-01563121

<https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01563121>

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MASTER II — CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

2016 – 2017

HUSSERLIAN INVESTIGATION
OF THE PRESENCE OF WRITINGS
IN THE SOCIAL WORLD



Lucas DAZIN

June 14, 2017

JURY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



I would like to thank Claudio Majolino for introducing me to phenomenology last year; since then, he has been an exceptionally available, motivating and perceptive interlocutor. Thanks to Thomas Bénatouïl for his conversation and encouragements. Thanks to the teachers I have had the chance to meet this year: Thomas Dutoit, Philippe Sabot, Shahid Rahman and Édouard Mehl. I am intimately beholden to my partner Stéphanie for her discernment and kindheartedness, and to the motley party or long- and short-time friends in company of whom I so often have the occasion to refine my thoughts.

INTRODUCTION



*Rien n'est mortel pour une mémoire
comme ces lèpres qui partant du
bourgeon censément le plus éloigné
ressortent, ayant remonté par un
cheminement intérieur à rebours,
jusque sous l'écorce du tronc.*

— Charles Péguy

The invention of writing is a turning point in human history, what a trivial claim. We generally take for granted that, with the invention of writing, prehistory ends, while history begins. A commonplace property of writing is to make linguistic content at anyone's disposal for consultation; thus, a civilization may collapse, as long as it bequeathed writings to humanity, potential readers may learn about its major figures, its intellectual achievements, and its important deeds. This is why the use of writing is commonly thought of as the prerogative of historical civilizations.

We more and more have the capacity to produce writings ourselves, an ever increasing amount of documents are written and read, and we are moving fast towards a universally literate humanity. Therefore, at first sight, it stands to reason that 21th century humans take part in history.

The question of writing

Nonetheless, is this so evident? Even before the democratization of literacy, we had access to so many testimonies from past humanities, holding out to us a lot of lessons to learn, and beauties to perpetuate. But even equipped with the technical apparatus of literacy, humans do not act as if they had a history. We may wonder how it is possible that humans do not seem to remember the errors of the past to the point that, in

recent times, they repeatedly engendered peaks of inhumanity. Thus, the amount of written documents does not seem to come with increased consciousness of history. Does it really suffice to live in presence of writings to take part in history? How important is the relationship that humans maintain with writings for the course of history? When a civilization does not remember, is it even well-founded to consider it as a historical civilization?

What comes before these concerns, and even before the historical ups and downs of humanity, is *the presence of writings*, by virtue of which, as literates, we have access to humanity's memory in the first place. Thus, in order to eventually define history and understand how forgetting is possible, we primarily have to know what the presence of writings implies for humans in general. *Before* historical contingencies – before the types of script and technical advances, even before any initial use of writing – we will progressively question back the presence of writings in order to seize its *a priori* contribution to humanity.

Outline

In order to catch a glimpse of the implications of the presence of writing, in the first part of this dissertation¹ we will consult the works of social scientists who put forward many historical and anthropological elements that, they argue, illustrate the vast impact the use of writing has had both on human cognition and on humanity's history. We will synthesize major claims that indicate the importance of the presence of writing for humanity. Yet, their accounts is retrained to specific scripts. Thus, with regard to our philosophical concerns, this first part will show the need for an inquiry of the essential structure of the relationship between humans and writings in general.

Husserl's phenomenology is, on many regards, adapted for conducting this philosophical reflection. Primordially, it provides a method (the phenomenological reduction) and concepts that precisely aim to safely extract essences from the domain of contingency. Besides, we will see that his phenomenology of the social world allows us to think the question of writing coherently from the most minimal activity of consciousness to humanity at large. In this sense, we will overtake many methodological dichotomies that are common in social sciences. Furthermore, Husserl has paid specific attention to the question of writing in his latest work and has even initiated the unveiling of the essential contribution of writing, although he remained focused on the paradigmatic example of the scientific community. This is why Husserl provides the resources and paves the way

¹ *Infra*, p. 5.

to our reflection on the impact of writing for humans in general.

Nonetheless, we will have to become familiar with his method and concepts. The aim of the second part of this dissertation² is to provide an introduction to the aspects of his philosophy that are relevant to our inquiry. In a didactic perspective, we will base ourselves on two texts that we will read and illustrate. This overview will serve as on-the-job phenomenological training, which is faithful to my progressive handling of Husserl's thinking.

On the ground of the elements gathered, in the last part³ we will be able to tune our concepts and adopt the phenomenological attitude ourselves. Thus, our insight on the presence of writings will go from the domain of the contingent as explored in the first part, to the ontological so as to extract and analyze the essential contribution of the presence of writings.

Theoretic pitfalls

We can already pinpoint two major risks that we will have to overtake. First, we will have to bear in mind the distinction between historical and phenomenological perspectives. The danger of the confusion is historicism, i.e. to fail thinking what comes before the domain of contingency: essential necessity. We will concretely keep them apart by settling and firmly clinging to the opposition between the natural and the phenomenological attitudes.

Second, we must not fall into the opposite extreme: phenomenologism. Hence, we have to make clear that the strict distinction between the attitudes is only methodological and not doctrinal. Therefore, we do not pretend to brandish the phenomenological approach against, nor above, other sciences or pre-philosophical life. On the contrary, being grounded in phenomenology and social sciences, this work aims to bring genuine evidence of their complementariness. Hopefully, the results of our inquiry will motivate further joint research.

Finally, we can only evoke for now another theoretic problem which we will have to address. Indeed, the terrain of phenomenology of writing has been famously trodden by Jacques Derrida, whose thinking is influenced by Husserl's work. Yet, Derrida challenges Husserl's view and, by extension, will question our own. Therefore, in the last part of this dissertation, we will pay attention to his account on writing and we will make explicit his divergence with Husserl. After that, we will elaborate a response staying faithful to

² *Infra*, p. 27.

³ *Infra*, p. 57.

the husserlian perspective.

PART I

EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS
OF WRITING & MIND
INTERACTIONS



Introduction to part 1

Writing is a *technology* that functions thanks to different parts. Let us reassert some lexical distinctions that will single them out. The physical mark one can read that results from inscribing is an *inscription*. A system of signs designed to be inscribed is a *script*, the *alphabet* is a specific type of script that appeared in Greece late in the history of writing from the adaptation of the Phoenician writing system to the Greek language around VIIIth century B.C.¹. Inscribing signs – or *letters* in the case of an alphabet – was exclusively done by hand until the invention of *print*, the technology that allowed mechanized mass reproduction of writings. Finally, the person who practices inscription fluently, and deciphers written material without effort, is *literate*; *literacy* is the mastery the technology of writing. These definitions simply gird the commonsense understanding

¹ J. Février. *Histoire de l'écriture*. Payot, 1948, p. 382.

of writing which serves as a backbone for the following two chapters; we will progressively introduce these terms and their connections with one another.

The anthropologists and historians whose work we will review maintain that the practice of writing cognitively affects individuals. According to them, sustained influence of writing on consciousness eventually made possible historic advances in abstract thought such as the creation of philosophy and mathematics in the societies that mastered this technology. Their analyses are based on historical and anthropological facts. Studying the interactions between mind and writing in this framework imposes to tread simultaneously two apparently impervious epistemic paths: there is, on the one hand, a set of questions relating to the cognitive side of the issue, i.e. how being confronted to writing influences *individual* consciousness; on the other hand, there are anthropological and historical questions that arise concerning the long-term influence of writing on human collectivities. These concerns are somehow conflated in our author's anthropological work, but we will keep them distinct in the two chapters of this first part. The cognitive aspect is dealt with in the first chapter, the historical one in the second chapter².

² *Infra*, pp. 7 and 17 respectively.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROPERTIES OF SCRIPT



Before investigating what historical role the technology of writing has played in the societies that made use of it, we ought to single out the *technical characteristics* of script that distinguish it from the oral. Thus, the aim of the current chapter is first to determine how script, and then how the Greek alphabet in particular, cognitively enable one to do specific things with his mind like utensils mechanically enable one to do specific things with his hands¹.

1.1. THE COGNITIVE INFLUENCE OF SCRIPT

British anthropologist Jack Goody² studies the modalities of the cognitive influence of script. In his own words, his general argument is that “writing, and more especially alphabetic literacy, made it possible to scrutinise discourse in a different kind of way by giving oral communication a semi-permanent form”³. Let us examine important arguments in support of this hypothesis.

To inscribe is to formalize

As we know, oral speech is made of phonic matter, it is a unidirectional flux⁴. Physically, when oral speech ceases it yields to silence or, at least, to the absence of speech and its content. However, inscribing literally *objectifies* speech in that it turns it into an “object of visual as well as aural inspection”⁵. When script lays under the eyes of one

¹ *Infra*, pp. 7 and 11 respectively.

² J. Goody. *The domestication of the savage mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 (henceforth cited as Goody, *The domestication*).

³ Goody, *The domestication*, p. 37.

⁴ F. Saussure de. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot et Rivages, 1997 [1916], pp. 156-157.

⁵ Goody, *The domestication*, p. 44.

who knows how to decipher it – like notches on a wax tablet, a monumental inscription on the stone frontage of a building, or as an ink mark on parchment –, they can freely discontinue the movement of their eyes on a specific word, go back in text, or focus on parts of it. Therefore, the physical existence of speech under the form of an inscription enables what Goody calls “backward scanning”⁶. Through the visual manipulation that objectification allows, the content of it is “abstracted to some extent from the flow of speech”⁷.

What is transcribed does not have to be a verbatim transcription of the flow of speech. A further step towards manipulation and abstraction consists in rearranging language, e.g. making tables and writing lists. On the one hand such practices depend on script to exist, on the other hand Goody reminds us that in return they are made used of by people who create them, and by anyone able to read them. Indeed, tables and written lists are scriptural artifacts that *formalize* content. The form of lists, which each element necessarily “has to be placed either up or down in rows”, and that of tables, “consisting of k columns and r rows”, impose the emergence of unsuspected, albeit binary, choices to the practitioner of script. It creates an order, oppositions, that in return provide a new take on the objectified elements because they incite the practitioner of script to wonder about connections between elements that otherwise would not be thought of as related⁸ and can serve as a teaching device⁹. Goody’s analysis of these artifacts introduces a first take on how practices derived from the technology of writing may suggest paths to thought.

Thus, script decontextualizes content and literally turns it into a physical object. As a matter of fact, the alphabet was used to adorn Greek vases¹⁰; such practice reveals the connexion between objectification and a certain fascination for writing, or the writing system itself. In the third appendix to Février’s history of writing entitled *Alphabet et magie*¹¹, the historian shows that since its historical beginnings, inscription fostered magical interpretations. Février too remarks that script formalizes content, but he adds that it can make it obscure in the same movement. This characteristic helps to explain,

⁶ Goody, *The domestication*, p. 128.

⁷ Goody, *The domestication*, p. 46.

⁸ Goody sees this process as the seed of scientific theory, as we will see in the upcoming chapter, *infra*, p. 17.

⁹ Auroux works on the pedagogical dimension of inscription and the interactions between the technology of writing and linguistics. He takes the example of handbooks to illustrate that writing not only formalizes language, but also “formalizes knowledge” (S. Auroux. *La révolution technologique de la grammaticalisation*. Liège: Mardaga, 1994, p. 164).

¹⁰ Février, *Histoire de l’écriture*, p. 589.

¹¹ Février, *op. cit.*, pp. 588-591.

in all cultures which had the technology of script, the rapid emergence of a multitude of grids of interpretation of script based on existing religious systems. For instance, a common manipulation with the Greek system was called isopsephy: it consisted in assigning numeral values to each letters and elaborate theories concerning the sum obtained by certain words. There were also analogies between the number of letters and the elements of the cosmos, zodiac signs, and theological discussions concerning the shapes of the written signs themselves. Besides, Février also indicates that legends surrounding letters and the origins of their names were used pedagogically to teach Greek and Roman children how to read¹². We see that the form inscription imposes to content can make a puzzle out it, therefore opening a window for interpretation by analogical reasoning with already formed cultural knowledge. Nonetheless, script does not just arouse knowledge like a magic formula invokes ghosts, it also profoundly shapes it.

On the nature of written knowledge

Without script, memorization depends – to an extent which is unknown to us, literate people – on *incorporation* via ritualized bodily practices. Hence the importance of dances and complex bodily rituals found in societies without script, which are practices that anthropologists have studied since the early ages of the field. The work of Havelock¹³, who concentrates on the transition of ancient Greece from an oral to a literate culture, proposes close-reading analyses of classical texts in relation to the cognitive influence of inscription on knowledge. According to Havelock, the language features that strike the reader of Homer’s verses are not literary tropes. Not only would it be anachronistic to say so for Homer’s work was composed orally, but it is a profound interpretation mistake due to our unreflective literacy. As a bard of his time, Homer did not rely on script. Rather, he employed the resources of rhythm, hence of the body, as complex mnemonics. Therefore, the rhymes, repetitions, cumulative constructions, formulaic patterns that structure these verses are the expression of memorization techniques. As opposed to such oral practices of memorization, Havelock maintains that script, “making available visualized record” and providing it with physical perdurance¹⁴, frees knowledge from the intrinsic limitations of corporeal memory.

The new kind of knowledge introduced by script “abolished the need for memorization

¹² Février, op. cit., p. 589.

¹³ E. A. Havelock. *The literate revolution in Greece and its cultural consequences*. Princeton University Press, 1982 (henceforth cited as Havelock, *The literate revolution*).

¹⁴ “It could lie around as an artifact, to be read when needed” Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 87.

and hence for rhythm”¹⁵, thus making written prose possible. The “economy of memory”, that Havelock relates to script, not only changed the place of knowledge accumulation from bodily incorporation to physical artifacts, but he argues this change contributed to “an immense expansion of knowledge available to the human”¹⁶.

For Havelock, this “expansion” of knowledge thanks to the technology of writing is double. Inscription allows knowledge to expend *quantitatively*, because script allows humans to store content in artifacts like documents that, as physical objects, accumulate content beyond the physiological limits of one’s brain, and may perdure over longer time spans than human lives. Besides, script makes knowledge independent of the form imposed on the content of speech by the bodily memorization techniques oral folks depended on to accumulate knowledge. Therefore, Havelock argues that knowledge expands *qualitatively* as a result of the shift to the practice of script. We will develop in greater details Havelock’s argument in the upcoming chapter that will deal specifically with the interweaving of script and thought. Now let us discuss another cognitive influence of script that is of the utmost importance for our phenomenological inquiries in the offing.

Reflexive thinking raises from confrontation with inscription

Ong’s work is in the continuity of Havelock’s on the cultural shifts from orality to literacy¹⁷. He provides us with a supplementary argument to our examination of the influence of script on cognition; for Ong, the practice of script enhances reflexivity: “The highly interiorized stages of consciousness in which the individual is not so immersed unconsciously in communal structures are stages which, it appears, consciousness would never have reached without writing”¹⁸. Ong explains that the mastery of articulate oral language “first illuminates consciousness” at two different levels: first and foremost it implements the distinction between subject and predicate. It connects them to one another and the speaker is able to exploit this relation. Secondly, Ong adds that oral language plays a foregrounding role in communautization because it “ties human beings to one another in society”¹⁹. However, in the confrontation of the speaker with inscription, subjectivity can become a theme for the subject himself. More precisely, according to Ong script calls attention to the sense of self, and eventually “intensifies”²⁰ it. The

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ W. J. Ong. *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word*. London: Routledge, 1999 [1982] (henceforth cited as Ong, *Orality and literacy*).

¹⁸ Ong, *Orality and literacy*, p. 178.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

self practicing script can engage in reflections that touch “the depth of the psyche”²¹; “Writing is consciousness-raising”²². Similarly as he did for oral speech, Ong relates the practice of script to intersubjectivity. His argument being that practicing script develops the reflexive appreciation of one’s own self and makes possible a higher degree of consciousness, he maintains that the practice of script “fosters more conscious interaction between persons”.

1.2. THE SPECIFICITIES OF THE GREEK ALPHABET

Havelock’s argument on the links between knowledge and script was incompletely introduced in the previous section. Indeed, the classicist paid specifically attention to the linguistic specificities of the Greek writing system, the alphabet. He holds the view that the characteristics of the Greek alphabet, that we are going to review, enhanced more than any other writing systems the cognitive interactions we discussed. The invention of the Greek alphabet constitutes a major turn in the history of the West to the extent that Havelock writes: “The true parent of our history was not any ‘writer’ like Herodotus, but the alphabet itself”²³. Before that, we have to note that his arguments have been mitigated based on recent accounts on the advances of scientific knowledge parallel to ancient Greece, in China²⁴. We will examine the Greek alphabet not as the ultimate system, but as an exemplary and well documented case of interaction between the mind and writing to which remarkable intellectual achievements can be related.

The ideal writing system according to Havelock

Février and Havelock alike consider the ideal writing system should reach perfect phonetism, i.e. a one-to-one correspondence between written shapes and phonemes. One sound should correspond to one sign, and *vice versa*. The reasons of this stance will be detailed below, but we can now briefly trace the birth, and specificities, of the Greek alphabet. Phoenician was a semitic language with a consonantic writing system which, on these aspects, resembled Hebrew or Arabic writing systems. In the history of writing, the isolation of consonant signs is a leap toward phonetism – and a leap forward according to Havelock and Février – away from ideographic scripts like Sumerian cuneiforms and Egyptian hieroglyphs, and from syllabism, like the persepopolitan syllabary. The Greek

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 23.

²⁴ J. Goody. *Pouvoirs et savoirs de l’écrit*. Paris: La Dispute, 2007, pp. 202-203.

alphabet results from the adaptation of the Phoenician writing system to the Greek oral language, which achieved an almost perfect phonetism. We know that in semitic languages, the root of the word, what remains unchanged regardless the context of occurrence, is a consonatic skeleton. However, Greek not being a semitic language, there was no hindrance to assigning specific signs to vowels. The earliest documents that provide evidence of this adaptation date back to VIIIth century B.C., and back then the decomposition of all the phonetic elements into vowels and consonants was already achieved without exceptions²⁵.

Havelock's ideal writing system should optimize "easy and swift" "decipherment"²⁶. He identifies three elements that would constitute an ideal writing system, among which phonetism is a central requirement that gathers two conditions:

First, the coverage of linguistic sound offered by the writing system should be exhaustive. The visible shapes (I avoid here the term "letter" because of its association with the uniquely Greek invention) must be sufficient in number or character to trigger the reader's memory of all sounds of the language which are distinctive in the language. Conveniently, these noises can be reduced in any language to a given number and identified by the modern term "phoneme." Ideally there would be no exceptions to be supplied by guesswork from context²⁷.

Havelock asserts that no sound of the language must be left unrepresented graphically, reading should exhaustively be directed by script and not even partly left open to contextual determinations. He adds that, in the other way too, each "shape" is assigned only one phoneme:

Second, this function should be performed unambiguously. That is to say any one shape or combination of shapes must trigger the memory of one and only one phoneme. Again speaking from an ideal standpoint, there should be no room for a requirement imposed upon the reader to make choices in his attempt to recognize the sound represented²⁸.

After phonetism, Havelock puts forward another requirement, which pertains to memory. The range of shapes must not be too vast so as to not be heavy on memory:

²⁵ Février, *Histoire de l'écriture*, p. 382.

²⁶ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 60.

²⁷ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 61.

²⁸ Ibid.

the total number of shapes must be held to a strict limit to avoid overburdening the memory with the task of mastering a large list of them before the process of recognition, that is of reading, can even begin. It is to be remembered that it is not enough for the brain to catalog the shapes with precision. It is also required to associate them with a corresponding series of sounds and to be prepared to recognize the connection not in the tidy, constant sequence of the letters of a memorized alphabet, an “abecedarium,” but in the thousand eccentric combinations which make up words and sentences²⁹.

Havelock adds: “The fewer the shapes, the less is the burden on the brain to memorize them”³⁰, the ideal number being, according to him, situated between 20 and 30. With twenty-four letters and a quasi-perfect phonetism, the classic Greek alphabet tended, from the origins, in an unprecedented manner towards this ideal.

Consonant signs are an abstraction

We discussed earlier that the use of script in general induces a certain amount of formalization. However, the almost perfect phonetism of the Greek writing system introduces a specific style of formalization that, according to the scholars we are referring to, will co-occur with a specific style of cognitive interaction with the system, and eventually call specific attention from users to particular elements according to the process we saw previously.

In order to demonstrate that the phonetism of the Greek alphabet is tied to a specific cognitive aftermath, Havelock replaces language as being first and foremost a bodily practice that produces a range of sounds:

the basic elements of a language as it is pronounced [...] are vibration of a column of air in the larynx or nasal cavities it is expelled past the vocal chords and modified by them, and there are the controls, restrictions, and releases imposed upon this vibration by the interaction of the tongue, teeth, palate, lips, and nose³¹.

This return to corporeity helps him reaffirm the primarily phonic reality of language which “consists of sounds, not symbols or letters”³². Then Havelock introduces, on acoustic grounds, the difference between vowels and consonants:

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 62.

³¹ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 67.

³² Ibid.

The vibration by itself can produce a continuous sound which is modifiable simply by altering the shape of the mouth. These modified vibrations we call vowels. The rest of the physical equipment can also be used, to start the vibration or to stop it, or to do both. When this occurs, the representation of the start or stop is called a consonant³³.

His point is to highlight a historical correlation between explicit knowledge of this dichotomy and the specificities of the Greek alphabet. Indeed, the vowel/consonant contrast was stated “only after the Greek alphabet made these sounds ‘visually’ recognizable as ‘letters’”³⁴. Before being the taken-for-granted phonological dichotomy used in linguistics, “vowel and consonant, though derived from the Latin, denote types of letters of the Greek alphabet”³⁵. To understand how we go from the contingent specificities of a writing system to a scientific reality, we have to understand that, as Février puts it, an alphabet is both an instrument for synthesis and analysis³⁶. Here the phonetism of a system has made possible the enhancement of phonetic understanding. In other words, *the specificities of the Greek system have fostered the passage from a phonemic to a phonetic knowledge of language.*

The example of the consonant/vowel divide illustrates that, as Auroux puts it, one needs not know more about language to invent writing, but one must invent writing to know more about language³⁷. We already noted, via the work of Goody, that script introduces a certain degree of abstraction to content. In the case of the Greek alphabet in particular, Havelock interestingly ties the acoustic characteristics of consonants to abstract thinking. The following passages deserves meticulous attention:

A consonant is a non-sound and was correctly so designated over two thousand years ago by Plato. The pre-Greek systems set out to imitate language as it is spoken in these syllabic units. The Greek system took a leap beyond language and beyond empiricism. It conceived the notion of analyzing the linguistic unit into its two theoretic components, the vibrating column of air and the mouth action imposed upon this vibration. The former could exist by itself in language, as in exclamations like “Ah.” The latter could not. It

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “un alphabet est un instrument de synthèse, en même temps que d’analyse” Février, *Histoire de l’écriture*, p. 208.

³⁷ “Contrairement à ce qu’on pense ordinairement, il ne faut pas simplement savoir davantage sur le langage pour inventer l’écriture, il faut inventer l’écriture pour savoir davantage sur le langage” Auroux, *La révolution technologique de la grammaticalisation*, p. 43.

was therefore an abstraction, a non-sound, an idea in the mind. The Greek system proceeded to isolate this non-sound and give it its own conceptual identity, in the form of what we call a “consonant”³⁸.

Havelock’s argument is that, contrarily to syllabic or consonantic writing systems, the acoustically abstract character of consonants stands out by contrast when script displays both consonant and vowel signs, like the Greek system does. One could perfectly imagine a syllabic system to transcribe Greek; it would attribute written shapes to consonant-vowel-consonant clusters. However, the clear vowel/consonant parsing that the alphabet institutes constitutes an *abstraction* in itself because it makes apparent in script phonetic entities that do not occur on their own in spoken language. The Greek alphabet inscribes more than what the phonotactics of the Greek language allow Greek speakers to pronounce. What is written is really what is pronounced, but it is encrypted in finer details than what is immediately perceivable given the mere acoustic characteristics of spoken Greek. Therefore, there is already an analytic tenor to the Greek alphabet than cannot be found in the sole phonic matter that anyone familiar with spoken Greek has access to. Hence, the mediacy of script imparts the seeds of analytical elaborations concerning the spoken correlate it encrypts, as well as language in general and, as we will see, all sorts of objects.

*
* *

We have seen that script intrinsically makes an object of the content it encrypts, which becomes a material entity that can be manipulated by the hand as much as by the gaze. Objectification is the originary formalization of language by script. Furthermore, the physically of encrypted content allows more elaborated manipulations: formalization in tables and lists for instance. These rearrangements of language abstract content from the context of occurrence orality entails. This abstraction may trigger unsuspected thoughts based on visually motivated generalizations and imports from cultural knowledge like religion. Besides, Ong’s allusion to writing being “consciousness-raising”³⁹ suggests a deepened reflexion on the modalities of this raise. Finally, the example of the vowel/consonant opposition has shown how the synthetic and analytic tenets inherent to the technology of the Greek alphabet operate their influence on cognition. The analytical characteristics of a technological system pass on to the mind a corresponding analytical

³⁸ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, pp. 80-81.

³⁹ Ong, *Orality and literacy*, pp. 178-179.

functioning. Now it is time to see what historic impact such mind-script interactions have had over time.

CHAPTER 2

THE INTERTWINING OF WRITING AND MIND IN THE WEST



We have reviewed the properties of script as a utensil which technically enables man to produce inscriptions that consign intelligible content. We looked at the manner the technology of script correlates with cognition, notably how the practice of script suggests novel directions to the mind. But writing at large is not reducible to script, nor to the mere act of inscribing, or to its finished products. When writing becomes habitual in the life of one or several individuals, writing becomes a *technique* in the way Marcel Mauss conceives it: “a set of movements, acts, generally and for most of them manual, organized and traditional, that combine towards reaching a physical, chemical or organic goal”¹. To a certain extent, the technique of writing *travaille*, in two senses of the French word: the mind durably *warps* under the technique of writing like the wood of a string instrument warps over time due to the tension of the strings, and writing and man historically *work* together.

Moving away from the technology of script as a utensil to the technique of writing, in this chapter we will discuss the implications of writing from a historical perspective; writing as a “mode of communication” that, as Goody writes, leads to a “succession of changes over time, each influencing the system of thought in specific ways”². With Havelock and Goody, we will examine the role writing, and the characteristics of the Greek alphabet in particular, have played over time in the development of thought³, as well as subsequent technological advances like print and a generalized educational system⁴. Finally, we will address the criticisms that were leveled out against our author’s

¹ M. Mauss. “Les techniques et la technologie”. (1941). With annots. by F. Vatin. In: *Revue du Mauss* 23 (2004).

² Goody, *The domestication*, p. 46.

³ *Infra*, p. 18.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 21.

thesis and we will call attention to the ontological implications of these social science findings, as a step toward our upcoming phenomenological inquiry⁵.

2.1. THE TECHNICAL POSSIBILITIES WRITING OFFERS TO THOUGHT

The technique of writing can be seen as the mind's entrenched cognitive exploitation of the abstract character given to content as a result of inscription. But the exploitation of abstraction can happen in two distinctive ways: on the one hand, when the written is contrasted to the oral and, on the other hand, when the written is completely detached from the oral. Let us explain each way of handling abstraction.

Making novel statements thanks to the alphabet

When something is inscribed in a non-phonetic script, the process of decontextualization attains content more seriously than it is for the Greek alphabet. Indeed, a greater amount of content is not explicitly encoded due to the structural openness of non-phonetic scripts. Therefore, a greater amount of content remain implicit, and a greater room is left for equivocity and obscurity to sneak in. Reading non-phonetic scripts is not only semiotic deciphering but entails, to a certain degree, an interpretative adjunct. On the contrary, the phonetic character of the Greek alphabet makes the content it encrypts less reliant on the reader's contribution. The characteristics of the Greek alphabet make possible the autonomy of full-fledged meaningful statements.

According to Havelock, by virtue of its phonetism, not only does the Greek alphabet minimize semantic entropy, but it fosters the emergence of novel statements. Indeed, things that are not known to have been said or written can safely be given an originary flesh as an inscription using the Greek alphabet: "the alphabet therewith made possible the production of novel or unexpected statements, previously unfamiliar and even 'unthought'"⁶. Furthermore, the capacity of the Greek alphabet to be the bearer of novel, "unexpected"⁷ statements is very closely linked to the emergence of novel thoughts. In that sense, the alphabet is key to the development of knowledge because: "The advance of knowledge, both human and scientific, depends upon the human ability to think about something unexpected"⁸. From the point of view of the inscriber, the technical contribution of the alphabet is double: it participates to the conditions of emergence of novel thoughts, and it makes possible the unambiguous inscription of novel statements.

⁵ *Infra*, p. 24.

⁶ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Besides, Havelock highlights that the relationship between the thoughts the alphabet enables its user to develop, and the precision of the statements it is technically able to inscribe, are inseparable from presupposing an *intersubjective dimension*. He writes: “Such novel thought completed existence when it becomes novel statement, and a novel statement cannot realize its potential until it can be reserved for further use”⁹. This quote introduces intersubjectivity into the script/mind correlation we had so far. In the first part of the quote, Havelock adopts the perspective of *any* reader to which inscribed content is made available. Without presupposing this undefined readership, Havelock could not assert as he does that a novel thought exists fully as a novel statement. Indeed, a statement is, like a injunction or a word of advice: language that is *addressed*. A statement is language that happens in a world in which the potentiality of intersubjective understanding is, although impersonal, presupposed and targeted. In writing, content is thrown into a world of potential intersubjective use.

In the second part of the quote, Havelock relates potential readers with the physical persistence script grants to content. Persistence of meaning is a duty of script owes content given that, in the horizon, there is an open community of potential users. The “potential” of meaning is, for Havelock, to be found in the indefinite possibility of use that is essentially fostered by inscription. A statement is the mode of existence thought adopts when written which, in return, constitutes it as a thought *per se*, because transcribed statements give potential readers the possibility to relive thoughts and to motivate new ones¹⁰.

We see that, again, the technical features of the alphabet and the workings of the mind are intertwined: new thoughts are, to a certain extent, provoked by script that, in return, ensures their physical persistence as inscribed statements. The cultural implications of the interweaving between the mind and the Greek alphabet, as a technology made technique, has made possible no less than the emergence of logics, science, philosophy, literature as the edifices, made of thought and text, that we know of and to which literates westerners participated:

The power of novel statement is not restricted to the arrangement of scientific observation. It covers the gamut of the human experience. There were new inventive ways of speaking about human life, and therefore of thinking about it, which became slowly possible for man only when they became inscribed

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Our discussion of Husserl’s account on the function of inscription in chapter 4, *infra*, p. 43, will give us the occasion to develop these points.

and preservable and extendable in the alphabetic literatures of Europe¹¹.

Written signs as universal abstractions

We have seen that the phonetism of the Greek alphabet abstracts content from context and, in doing so, its structural properties introduce an analytical tenor to written linguistic elements. It was the phonetic precision of the Greek alphabet that, paired with the abstraction of script, led to analytical achievements. Furthermore, the power of abstraction inherent to script also makes possible the deciphering of content regardless of the phonetics. When the technology is mastered by a group of people at a given time or over generations, i.e. when acts of writing are intended towards the horizon of intersubjective understanding, the written can also be used as a symbolic set of shapes that functions independently of orality. Therefore, writing creates a domain of universal understanding precisely because it is detached from the oral.

This property of writing as a communal technique is seen by Goody as decisive to the existence of mathematics:

Mathematics is international because its language is independent of phonetic systems; its concepts are inter-cultural because they are not phrased in a particular vernacular. And it is the existence of a notation far removed from speech that makes possible mathematical thinking and mathematical operations. Whatever relationship exists between the structure of mathematical systems and the structure of the human brain, the invention of a notation is clearly a prerequisite for the kind of highly abstract, decontextualised and arbitrary procedures that are typically represented by the formula¹².

Mathematics is thus possible thanks to a specific use of script as a “notation” to inscribe “formulas” instead of simple sentences or statements. The formula has vocation to be “international” because the internal properties of the script it is inscribed in make it available to the most indefinite horizon of humanity.

The hindo-arabic system of numerals is such a notation. The specific characteristics of this “atomic system of ten elements” represent “an intellectual achievement comparable to that of the alphabet” according to Havelock¹³. Putting forward similar arguments as for the Greek alphabet, he argues that the small number of symbols facilitates early

¹¹ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 88.

¹² Goody, *The domestication*, p. 122.

¹³ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, pp. 342-343.

teaching to children. As a result, the “recognition of a number can become as swift and automatic as the recognition of a sentence” which opens the door to the democratization of arithmetics¹⁴.

2.2. GENERALIZED INSTRUCTION OF THE WRITING SYSTEM

In the work of the scholars that we discuss, we are now interested in the technical conditions that contribute to the generalization of the mastery of the technique of writing to an entire community, and the implications of this generalization for the mind, and the collective achievements.

What literacy is

Havelock’s definition of literacy does not confine to the cognitive, nor social levels. Rather, it highlights how the two correlate. As we can instinctively figure out, an individual “is literate in so far as he reads documents and also does so as a matter of habit, not painfully deciphering them, but fluently and rapidly recognizing what has been written”¹⁵. On cognitive and biological grounds, Havelock asserts that fluent reading and writing can effectively be attained when a system of instruction is

devised to impose the habit of recognition upon the brain before it has fully concluded its growth; that is, the developmental stage before puberty. More precisely, the habit must be formed in that period when the brain is still engaged in the task of acquiring the oral language code for which it is biologically equipped. It would appear that the two codes necessary for speaking and then for reading have to meld together at a time when mental resources are still on a plastic condition [...] so that the act of reading is converted into an unconscious reflex¹⁶.

Thus, a literate is not just a mind that masters the technique of writing, neither is *literacy* a mere cognitive add-on. The fact that people live in a context in which writing exists does not necessarily entail literacy either:

literacy cannot be defined as coterminous with the historical existence of writing in Egypt or Mesopotamia or Mycenae or Greece. Literacy, though

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 58.

¹⁶ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 62.

dependent on the technology employed in inscription, is not to be defined by the simple existence of that technology¹⁷.

Rather, Havelock makes clear that literacy is inseparable from an intersubjective dimension: it is a “social condition which can be defined only in terms of a readership”¹⁸. Indeed, for an individual to become literate, he needs “a body of writing which would not exist for him to be read if it had not been composed for others to read as well”¹⁹. Therefore, literacy is the *correlation* between a mind and a world that makes available to the mind two specific products of history: already-written material and an open community of readers (and writers). In other words, the mind warps into becoming literate only on the ground of the already-written, and with intersubjective understanding in the horizon. Literacy exists when the technique of writing and the world *work on one another* in a way that affects both the nature of the literate and that of the world.

Besides, it is obvious that before the technology of print the development of literacy was hindered by the scarcity of written material because their production was a handicraft. As a result of technological advances, the number of literates steadily increased in Western Europe from the xvth century onward²⁰ with a sharp rise at the end of the xviiith century²¹. The technologies of script fully release their influence on the mind through democratized literacy.

Western thought has become naive of how much technically it owes to the intertwining of mind with the technology of writing

Besides the Greek alphabet and hindo-arabic numerals, Havelock considers western musical notation, that dates back to the xvith century, to be the third element of the “tripartite foundation of western culture, built upon three technologies each of which is designed to trigger mental operations with automatic rapidity by using the sense of visual recognition”²². We understood that Goody, Ong and Havelock hold the view that the technologies of script have made historically possible literature, logics, philosophy and science, and make possible in present day the sustained existence of these cultural achievements. Furthermore, the unbroken use of these technologies of script – including

¹⁷ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 57.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 58.

²⁰ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 346.

²¹ R. Chartier. “Les pratiques de l’écrit”. In: *Histoire de la vie privée*. 3, De la Renaissance aux Lumières. Ed. by P. Ariès and G. Duby. Paris: Seuil, 1986, pp. 112–161.

²² Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 344.

Roman and Cyrillic alphabets that derive from the Greek one and share many of its properties – creates a unity of the minds at the scale of the West at large, experienced as a “the ‘European mind’ or the ‘Western mind’” according to Havelock²³.

The melding of technologies of script and mind has been in constant progress, and the modalities of practicing literacy recently took a major turn due to technological advances in print and education. As an illustration of this, Chartier notes²⁴ that before the democratization of literacy, the users of the technique of writing could not read without vocalizing. Silent reading is a very recent development that shows our minds have reached an unprecedented level of hybridization with the technology of script. As much as Ong relates the use of script to an inward turn that leads thoughts into the depth of the psyche²⁵, Chartier argues that silent reading is at the source of the idea of an inner-life in the privacy of the mind. Could silent reading be related to the traditional Western representation of the mind that Sokolowski sketches out as an intra-mental world²⁶? As a matter of fact, the first occurrence of the term *consciousness* in European languages, which illustrates a reflexive take on the activities of consciousness, is found in XVIIth century English. Etymologically meaning “shared knowledge”, Descartes is first to use of the word with its contemporary, individualistic meaning²⁷.

Every westerner technically owes to the technologies of script, because our minds cognitively interweave with them from the early stages of our individual lives, and because, over time, our collective mind gets increasingly intertwined with the technologies of script via the changes in the modes of accumulation and transmission of knowledge that generalized literacy entails. We may have forgotten that our abstract thinking, our capacity for discussing the transcendental, and the truth we get from it, actually presupposes and is built up on a contingent, technological foundation. Hence Ong’s warning towards philosophies that take the text as a starting point for textual reflexivity: “Philosophy, it seems, should be reflexively aware of itself as a technological product – which is to say a special kind of very human product. Logic itself emerges from the technology of writing”²⁸. If we are, as Sokolowski maintains, “agents of truth”²⁹, literacy and writing being constitutive of both the western mind and the western world, can we seize truth

²³ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 345.

²⁴ Chartier, “Les pratiques de l’écrit”.

²⁵ Ong, *Orality and literacy*, p. 178.

²⁶ R. Sokolowski. *Introduction to phenomenology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 9-11.

²⁷ J. Delacour. *Biologie de la conscience*. Paris: PUF, 1994, p. 34.

²⁸ Ong, *Orality and literacy*, p. 172.

²⁹ Sokolowski, *Introduction to phenomenology*, p. 12.

without including a reflexive understanding of our dependence on writing? Ong lets us think that literates ought to make good use of the reflexivity writing has granted them if they want to produce thoughtful analyses of experience; we will address these questions in the third part of this dissertation³⁰.

2.3. THE CRITICISMS OF ONG, HAVELOCK AND GOODY'S THESIS

Before moving on to our philosophical investigation, we have to address the objections that our authors met. It is the occasion to respond to them by explaining our position with regards to their hypotheses for the rest of this work.

Three objections

Three main objections were leveled out against the thesis held by Havelock, Goody and Ong³¹. The first objection is made on theoretical grounds: given that our authors try to show that the factual correlation between the evolution of thought and the practice of writing is actually a bilateral causal relationship, the thesis was overall denounced as deterministic. Although he never ceased to defend his positions, Goody progressively mitigated the mechanistic aspect of his model. More recently, he would conceive of the various influences of script as "implications" rather than "consequences"³².

A second objection was made on historical grounds to Havelock who viewed the alphabet as a groundbreaking invention, the "original achievement, the Greek one"³³. Goody progressively distanced his view from Havelock's on the alphabet, attenuating the historical rupture. The Greek system was "not that different" from surrounding and preceding writing systems such as the Phoenician and other semitic scripts, he admits.

The last, and graver objection is made on ethical grounds: Havelock and Ong's emphasis on the unique and decisive characteristics of the Greek alphabet among all scriptural systems, was accused of being fraught with a Eurocentrist bias. It is certain that some scholars have tended to fall into such shortcomings. For instance, the way Février's history of writing presents the Greek system as the climax of human scriptural evolution is historically inexact and ethically dubious. Furthermore, he pleads in favor of the process of worldwide scriptural Romanization of vernacular non-European languages in

³⁰ *Infra*, p. 57.

³¹ Three chapters are dedicated to synthesizing the thought of each of our authors, with an overview of the criticisms and the evolution of their thought in K. Jahandarie. *Spoken and written discourse: a multi-disciplinary perspective*. Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999.

³² Goody, *Pouvoirs et savoirs de l'écrit*, pp. 243-244.

³³ Havelock, *The literate revolution*, p. 336.

a chapter dedicated to the question. Knowing that the imposition of the Roman alphabet for transcribing vernacular languages was part of the colonialist process, one could rightfully pinpoint Février's Eurocentric bias. Nonetheless, this critique is missing the point with regard to Havelock and Ong, because they are not trying to demonstrate the superiority of the Greek alphabet over all scripts. Rather they take it as a historical conjunction of contingent scriptural characteristics that may have happened anywhere in the world, at any time, and they draw connection with the evolution of thought in presence of this system based on historical and cognitive data.

*Theoretical standpoint in the current dissertation
concerning Havelock et al.'s hypothesis*

Our authors put forward a historical and cognitive *hypothesis* that accounts for available facts. As a hypothesis, Husserl points out, it lives in an open horizon of factual confirmation or refutation³⁴. Now, we are interested in discovering the essential properties of writing on the one hand, and of the mind in the other, that determine the factual correlations discussed above. In other words, we want to extract the *a priori* contribution of writing to humanity. Nonetheless, since our reflection finds its roots in Havelock, Ong and Goody's work, the objections that were leveled out against their work have to be responded to in advance with regard to our own work.

Since we try to overcome historical contingencies, we will conceive writing very generally as a technology that allows humans to consign linguistic content materially so that it can be deciphered by potentially any human afterwards. Besides, thanks to Havelock and Ong, we know that the Greek alphabet and its derivatives technically allow content to be stored particularly safely because these systems tend towards phonetism, and therefore leave less room for ambiguities compared to ideographic or syllabic systems for instance. Therefore, the Greek alphabet and related systems stand as *paradigmatic examples* for reflecting upon what the presence of writing necessarily implies for humans.

Alongside our philosophical reflection, we also have to take into consideration that technologies of script related to the Greek alphabet now concern humanity at large: alphabetization and the use of the Roman alphabet continues to spread encouraged by technical contingencies such as English being the *lingua franca* and keyboarding. The technologies of script and the achievements that writing, and the Greek alphabet, made possible are now taught to, and exercised, by humanity at large. Furthermore, their

³⁴ §9, E. Husserl. *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Trans. by D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970 (henceforth cited as *Krisis*), pp. 41-42.

technical applications have more or less become common knowledge: “natural sciences, exact sciences, social sciences”³⁵ – have become worldwide³⁶. Therefore, in the contemporary world, humanity at large has an interest in pondering over the writing and mind interrelation in order to understand themselves and the world, despite the fact that the technologies of script in question originated in the West.

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* *

The texts discussed in the first part of this work give facts in support of one hypothesis: historical interactions between the technologies of script on the one hand, and the mind and human collectivities on the other, have sculpted people’s experience of the world, and the world itself, into what Ong and Goody call *literate cultures*.

In these models, memory appears as central to the writing/mind interaction: for Havelock, writing frees the mind from the burden of memory and leaves space for sophisticated reasoning while, according to Goody, logical reasoning is possible because writing externalizes knowledge from the internality of the body, and allows second-hand manipulation. Havelock and Ong show that the nature of memory is affected by the shift from orality to literacy. Given that writing allows humans to store content materially, the body is not, as it is in oral culture, the sole bearer of memory. While, in oral culture, the body is entirely and complexly mobilized for the preservation of cultural content, memory appears as something predominantly cognitive for literates who can rely on the physical persistence of writings to store intelligible content. Furthermore, literates assume the existence of consigned content, written by their peers since the invention of writing, and sitting at their disposal.

In this framework, intellectual achievements are given a contingent condition of possibility: the shaping of consciousness into its literate version by the technology of writing. Thus, sciences and philosophy owe their existence to technological advances. Based on these findings, we will have to show that Husserl’s phenomenology is the appropriate method to seize what comes before contingencies, the *a priori* contribution of writing to humanity. Let us first familiarize ourselves with his thought on the social world and writing.

³⁵ Goody, *Pouvoirs et savoirs de l’écrit*, p. 238.

³⁶ Goody, op. cit., p. 196.

PART II

HUSSERL'S TAKE ON THE SOCIAL
WORLD & WRITING



Introduction to part 2

The aim of this part is to introduce Husserl's take on the social world and on the functions of writing. Besides, we will show that Husserl's work paves the way, and makes available conceptual resources, to tackle the question of the presence of writing in the social world in general. In chapter 3¹, we will base ourselves on the third part of the second book of the *Ideas*², and on some texts related to intersubjectivity³ in order to define Husserl's concept of the social world. In chapter 4⁴, we will read *The Origin of*

¹ *Infra*, p. 29.

² E. Husserl. *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy. Second book: Studies in phenomenology of the constitution*. Trans. by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989 (henceforth cited as *ID II*), pp. 181-219.

³ Gathered in French in E. Husserl. *Sur l'intersubjectivité II*. Paris: PUF, 2001 (henceforth cited as *SI-2*).

⁴ *Infra*, p. 43.

*Geometry (OG)*⁵ as a guideline for introducing Husserl's take on the question of writing⁶.

⁵ E. Husserl. *The origin of geometry*. In: *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Trans. by D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 353–378 (henceforth cited as *OG*).

⁶ In the rest of this dissertation, we will also refer the syntheses made by Perreau (L. Perreau. *Le monde social selon Husserl*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2013) and, before him, Toulemont (R. Toulemont. *L'essence de la société selon Husserl*. Paris: PUF, 1962) who, beside pointing at relevant passages in the work of Husserl on the question of the social world, circumscribe major trends of his thought on this topic and highlight its diachronic development.

CHAPTER 3
THE SOCIAL WORLD ACCORDING TO HUSSERL
— A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Pendant qu'elle tenait sa pincée de sel en petits cristaux, je savais ma main semblable à celle de toutes les grand-mères de la terre quand elles font le geste d'ouvrir la marmite pour saler la soupe, le geste que j'avais vu faire à ma mère, et je dialoguais avec elle dans la rapidité du songe : « Je sale ma soupe, ma main est la tienne, tu n'es pas morte. »

— Georges Navel, *Travaux*

To become familiar with Husserl's analysis of the social world does not allow any thematic approach. Rather, Husserl makes apparent several strata of necessary correlations and interdependences at stake in sociality, among which the phenomenon of communication is elementary¹. We will first study the subjective level of social experience² so as to tackle the intersubjective level afterwards³. Finally we will focus on the role of communication in this model in order to reach the concept of the social world⁴. By the end of this chapter, it will become clear that a primary contribution of Husserl's phenomenological approach to our inquiry is to overtake the subjective/intersubjective

¹ Toulemont, op. cit., p. 101.

² *Infra*, p. 30.

³ *Infra*, p. 33.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 37.

dichotomy, which we had to keep apart on methodological grounds in our initial cognitive and anthropological accounts.

3.1. THE SUBJECT IN HIS ENVIRONMENT

In the third part of *ID II*, we will see how Husserl settles the way to the phenomenological attitude⁵ and then conducts an analysis of the subject in his conscious relationship to the world that surrounds him⁶. He examines how the subject makes his immediate environment “his own”.

Thematizing the personalist attitude

For analyzing sociality phenomenologically, Husserl needs to break from the attitude one naturally maintains in the social world, while not adopting the relationship scientists adopt with things. The sciences he is targeting as giving unsatisfactory analyses are those who copy the attitude and methods of “natural sciences” – physics, zoology, etc. – to objectify human psyche – e.g. psychology, linguistics, and we could add materialist sociology for contrasting with his approach to the social world. The type of relationship to things that the naturalist maintains, the naturalist attitude, inappropriately cuts off its object of study from the subjective dimension, it objectifies. The materialist sociologist who collects data in the social world sees things laying for investigation, not persons, nor objects invested with a spiritual dimension to him. This attitude is an abstraction of objects from the experience of sociality in order to produce the kind of data on which rely the results expected by the sociological method.

But the materialist sociologist, or the natural scientist, breaks from this attitude when he, himself, is amid the social world. He conducts a personal life. In his office, the physicist does not see mere matter, weights and forces at play, he also grabs with enthusiasm a book that he loves from the bottom of his heart and re-read a passage he always finds inspiring. When he encounters individuals in daily life, the sociologist does not see things but persons that he personally knows or not, whom he greets and with whom he chitchats about the news, whom he is planning to invite for dinner. This is the relationship with the world that the subject maintains naturally within the social world, it is the *personalist attitude*⁷.

⁵ *Infra*, p. 30.

⁶ *Infra*, p. 31.

⁷ The attitudes are mingled and often the subject shifts from one to the other without reflexive awareness. The physicist may use objects to illustrate a principle of physics to students, and those who have sufficient knowledge of these principles will see objects as matter in movement, while

Ontologically, the world of everyday life is pre-given to the physical, psychic, or materialist gaze and the natural scientist's "nature" is an object that his unreflexive perspective has abstracted from the world. What a scientist in natural science sees as nature appears as "contrary to nature"⁸ to the person. The nature of the natural scientist is not the world, rather, natural sciences are "relative"⁹ to the world. Furthermore natural scientists are themselves caught in sociality, they construct their abstract nature as members of the social world. Thus, the naturalist attitude happens by virtue of the forgetting of the socialized ego by himself, this is why it is subsumed to the personalist attitude, and natural scientists' findings are relative to their unthematized being in the world.

As opposed to naturalist accounts, Husserl proposes to take as a theme what is not made thematic in the naturalist attitude: the personalist attitude itself. The reflexive conversion of perspective that Husserl advocates presents to the eye the life of the person "from within"¹⁰, i.e. as a sustained intercourse between the socialized subject and his environment. Husserl's phenomenology of the social world aims to fit the person and his/her environment (*Umwelt*) in the thematic sphere, to fit multiplicities of persons and their common environment in the thematic sphere. Let us now make thematic the personalist attitude in order to clarify the concepts of person and environment that we just mentioned.

The subject's environment

We may start from Husserl's example of the fire and the perception of its heat to illustrate the concept of environment (*Umwelt*)¹¹. I have experienced fires that start from sparks and combustible materials, therefore I have some knowledge of what burns, i.e. what is physically able to furnish a fire, e.g. wood. Besides, I have experienced the heat that burning material emits: the fire in the stove breaks the cold of the room in the morning, I get closer to the source of heat and the intensity of the perceived heat varies with my distance to the stove. I may have burnt my fingers on the surface of the stove when I was a child. The physical temperature of the fire may remain stable while I have access to it through a manifold of perceptual aspects. Synthesizing the perceptual information, I become conscious that the hearth is hot, that its heat is an objective

others will have trouble abstracting objects from perceiving them as simple objects.

⁸ § 49, *ID II*, p. 189.

⁹ § 49, *ibid.*

¹⁰ § 49, *ibid.*

¹¹ § 49, *ID II*, p. 191.

property of the incandescent material.

As the room warms up, I experience the presence of the fire as fulfilling my need to get warm. Its warmth gives itself to me with a pleasant sensation. Now when I see a piece of wood that can fit into the stove, I see it as firewood. Wood that fits the size of the stove comes with a usage value, I know it can be useful to me for producing effects I seek. Similarly, the stove appears useful to warm a pot of milk. Perception of the stove will now motivate me to fetch firewood in order to make a fire the next day. I find a log on the beach, it is too large for my stove but I know I have an ax that will allow me to chop it and it is light enough for me to carry it to my house, therefore I seize it as potential firewood. Back home, I chop it into smaller pieces and as product of my work it turns into firewood to me. The various memories I have with the stove in my environment enrich my experience of the stove. I may associate the presence of the fire with a cozy atmosphere in the room in the evening, with music and an infusion.

This example aims to show that the world is primarily perceptually given to me as “on-hand”, it is “a world given in straightforward empirical intuitions and perhaps grasped actively”¹². Then, new acts of consciousness, like acts of pleasure, become part of the object: the ego makes them *his*, as part of his environment. Thus the stove, the firewood and all the objects that surround me are part of my personal environment (*Umwelt*), I am in a “*practical attitude*”¹³ towards these objects. They are given to me with a character of value – e.g. the warmth of the stove is pleasant to me, and I find the light that the fire emits beautiful –, a character of desire – I want to make a fire when I come home –, and a practical character – I need to chop this log to have it fit into the stove. The *Umwelt* is “the world of which this personal Ego is conscious, the world which is there for it”¹⁴. It gathers all that is immediately close and easily accessible to the personal ego¹⁵, which means physical objects that are perceived by the subject as much as what he remembers, thinks about, presumes or infer. All potential acts of the subject toward his environment fall within the personal *Umwelt*; it has an

open horizon encompassing the Objectivities which could subsequently present themselves, or which, under given circumstances would present themselves, in connection with the course of his active constitution of surrounding Objects (things, objects of value, etc.). The experiences actively performed motivate

¹² § 50, *ID II*, p. 196.

¹³ § 50, *ID II*, p. 199.

¹⁴ § 50, *ID II*, p. 195.

¹⁵ Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 184.

possibilities for new experiences¹⁶.

Thus, we see that the *Umwelt* is a *world to me*. At a given moment in time, it constitutes is the “the finite horizon of all possible practice”¹⁷ but in the long run it is “always in the process of becoming, constantly producing itself”¹⁸.

Thematizing the personalist attitude enables us to observe the subject in his surrounding world. Let us now integrate to this paradigm the presence of other subjects.

3.2. THE WORLD OF PERSONS

I am not alone in the world, my *Umwelt* comprises other subjects. I do not seize them as mere things, but as subjects whose relationship to the world – their use of objects, gestures, language, habits – are “intimations of personal life”¹⁹. I seize them as socialized subjects, with their *Umwelt* and character. Let us continue with the example of the stove to progressively get to Husserl’s concepts of the social world.

The community and its collective environment

I live with several subjects in the house that has the stove in its living room. We have common relations to a number of objectities like the stove which warms up the living room that we share; we form a collectivity of subject that is similarly related to a common environment²⁰. We all are cold in the morning and have a common desire to make a fire in the stove, which we know will give off pleasant warmth into the living room. I found a log, another subject of our collectivity chopped it using the ax we all use to fabricate firewood, and still another builds a fire with it. The ax, the firewood, the fire itself, have an “intersubjective use value”²¹. The incandescent hearth is the product of our work in common, and we all benefit from its warmth²².

¹⁶ § 51, *ID II*, p. 205.

¹⁷ Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 184.

¹⁸ § 50, *ID II*, p. 196.

¹⁹ § 51, *ID II*, p. 202.

²⁰ § 51, *ID II*, p. 201.

²¹ § 50, *ID II*, p. 197.

²² I am conscious that this example is very narrow. The acts of this collectivity towards the stove illustrate a specific kind of intercourse based on reciprocity, but in § 5. of *Gemeingeist 1 (SI-2, pp. 272-275)*, Husserl reminds that “not all communities are communities of reciprocity”. We may evoke the contrast Husserl draws, at a much larger scale, between communism and imperialism; as an example of the former he gives the state, which draws its imperialist drive from a common yearning, while the latter is ideally represented by the scientific community, which each member is personally concerned by the communal final goal the community is oriented towards (Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 261).

Thus, we share a practical attitude toward the objects we have in common, and towards each other. In our community, subjects “give themselves in advance to each other in a ‘practical objectivity’”²³. Other subjects “do us good” or “harm us”²⁴. Furthermore, as subjects we are unified in an intentional conviviality that is an instinctive drive²⁵ analogous to parental love²⁶. When I see another subject who is glad, I feel glad because I perceive that she is glad, without necessarily sharing the reason for being happy. This is a sample example of what Husserl calls a relationship of *empathy*.

Besides, in our community subjects do not just give themselves to each other in a relationship of empathy, we rely on processes of *reciprocal comprehension* to organize our work. In comprehension, subjects determine each other and, serve as a “motivating power”²⁷ for each other. Comprehension gives us the possibility to act in common upon the environment we co-live in. Comprehension is the basis to a “conscious *mutual relation*”²⁸ of subjects and “at the same time a unitary relation of them to a common surrounding world”. In comprehension, subjects exist collectively as correlated to a common environment that lays before them, therefore a community constitutes itself on the ground of comprehension and common work. Before getting there, we can now tackle the concept of *person*.

The personalization of the ego

The constitution of the personal ego, or person, is correlated with that of the *Umwelt*; the person “finds its sensible roots”²⁹ in it. The fictional subjects we have used in the examples illustrate Husserl’s concept of persons because they are defined in correlation to the *Umwelt* that lays before them; the personal life of the subject takes place in the conscious relationship with the *Umwelt*: “a person is precisely a person who represents, feels, evaluates, strives, and acts and who, in every such personal act, stands in relation to something, to objects in his *surrounding world*”³⁰.

The subject is a person in the reflexive gesture of the ego who seizes himself as the center of the surrounding world: “To live as a person is to posit oneself as a person, to find oneself in, and to bring oneself into, conscious relations with a ‘surrounding world’”³¹.

²³ *SI-2*, p. 271.

²⁴ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 1. *SI-2*, pp. 264-265.

²⁵ We will deal in greater details with the concepts of instincts and love in chapter 5, *supra*, p. 59.

²⁶ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 1. *SI-2*, p. 265.

²⁷ § 51, *ID II*, p. 202.

²⁸ § 51, *ID II*, p. 203.

²⁹ Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 184.

³⁰ § 50, *ID II*, p. 195.

³¹ § 49, *ID II*, p. 193.

The person is more than just the ego that is conscious of himself as the pole of his acts, it is the socialized subject that is reflexively aware of belonging to the social world³². Such personal reflexive awareness arises from the fact that in social intercourse with other subjects, the subject finds himself to be to some degree an object in the environment of others³³:

I am not only the subject of a *praxis*, but also subject-object, belonging to the content on the action (of what is wanted, of what we yearn for, of what is projected). If I agree with somebody of something, if I take in charge a function, the other determines me to determine myself into taking in charge some thing or another³⁴.

We see that, while Husserl's concept of *Umwelt* has to do with the subject's relationship to objectivities of the social world, his concept of person relies on the reflexive take on the implications of belonging to the social world has on one's own self³⁵, like being subject-object in interpersonal actions. Now that we have discussed the conditions for the emergence of the person, how does the person acquire a personality that is his/hers? Husserl singles out two elements that need explanation: "The *origin of personality* resides in empathy, and in social acts that crop out additionally"³⁶.

In the example of the stove and the practical community that makes it work for the good of all, we have seen that in empathy I seize the body of the other as announcing a personal life, which makes possible reciprocal comprehension. Thus, "the I becomes already *conscious* of himself as the subject of his life and the subject of his *Umwelt*"³⁷. Empathy is a preliminary to the ego's sociality, but the ultimate premise to it is his intention to communicate³⁸. The actualization of this intention, that is communication between me and another subject, constitutes the "originary social relation of the I and the You"³⁹. Communication is a further step towards the sociality of the subject: the *I-You* intercourse is "precisely the active personal intercourse"⁴⁰.

In social contexts, like the family dinner table⁴¹, interpersonal communicative commerce confronts the subject with comments, orders, warnings, etc. Such communicative

³² Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 174.

³³ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 8. *SI-2*, p. 276.

³⁴ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 9. *SI-2*, p. 280.

³⁵ Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 174.

³⁶ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 8. *SI-2*, p. 275.

³⁷ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 4. *SI-2*, p. 270.

³⁸ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 2. *SI-2*, pp. 265-266.

³⁹ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 2. *SI-2*, p. 266.

⁴⁰ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 2. *ibid.*

⁴¹ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 9. *SI-2*, p. 281.

acts, along with other acts of consciousness, sediment as the personal history of the subject, his *habitus*. The *habitus* are the “horizon of past”⁴² of consciousness, they are passively present as a “system of dispositions, tendencies and predeterminations of position takings”⁴³ that shapes the character of socialized subject. Husserl’s concept of *habitus* provides the ego with practical, social and ethical dimensions⁴⁴. Nonetheless, the *habitus* is not at the source of the subject’s individuation. Rather, the ego is the “psychic basis of *habitus*”⁴⁵. The ego constitutes the *Umwelt* and the *habitus* sediment in the communicative commerce with other persons⁴⁶.

Back home from hiking, an other person and I similarly judge the main room we share too cold, which motivates a common desire to make a fire. By virtue of communication, I can suggest the other person to chop wood while I fetch kindling from the grove near our shack, communication is an action that serves as means for achieving an ulterior action⁴⁷. His action of chopping wood is mediately mine, and my fetching kindling is mediately his; each of us contributes his part to the fire that *we* are building, it is our common work. Communication enables individuals to tune their consciousnesses on the same line of action, it makes possible a *practical community of willing*. The other is “determined, in the contact situation, not simply to acknowledge, but to execute an action of another nature, somehow and external action, an action that acts upon the physical or spiritual *Umwelt*”⁴⁸.

The whole process, driven by the common will to build the fire, is therefore *our* action: “my doing comprises the doing of the other, or is comprised by it”⁴⁹ and vice versa with his doing. Interpersonal communication and common action illustrate that, phenomenologically, consciousness bears, unlike things, the property to “really coincide with consciousness”⁵⁰. Communication makes effective the “overlapping of my consciousness and the foreign consciousness”⁵¹ that concretely crystallizes in the “we”. Two subjects in mutual comprehension, in empathy, only reach out spiritually⁵², while communication effectively creates spiritual unity⁵³. We will return to spirituality at the end of the cur-

⁴² § 64, *ID II*, p. 314.

⁴³ Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 222.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ § 61, *ID II*, p. 290.

⁴⁶ We will discuss in greater details the *habitus* in chapter 5, *supra*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 3. *SI-2*, p. 269.

⁴⁸ *Gemeingeist 1*, § 3. *SI-2*, p. 268.

⁴⁹ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *SI-2*, p. 293.

⁵⁰ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *SI-2*, p. 292.

⁵¹ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *SI-2*, pp. 292-293.

⁵² *Gemeingeist 1*, § 2. *SI-2*, p. 268.

⁵³ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *SI-2*, p. 292.

rent chapter⁵⁴ while we will deal specifically with the importance of unity with regard to sociality in chapter 5⁵⁵.

We have started to see how subjects constitute an environment in common through interpersonal relations. In this process, the subject becomes a person. Unlike what this brief overview might suggest, we need to make clear that the person does not define itself via a “vague awareness”⁵⁶ of being social. We will properly do justice to the subtlety of this concept in chapter 5. Let us retain so far that Husserl’s theory of the person opens new tracks to investigating “the subjective conditions of possibilities to our belonging to the social world”⁵⁷. Notably, as Perreau suggests, Husserl’s concept allow us to comprehend “‘how’ the awareness of belonging to the social world advents [, and to identify its] modes of development, of institution, and its conditions of possibilities”⁵⁸. Let us now widen the scope and move towards the constitution of the social world.

3.3. THE COLLECTIVITY OF PERSONS IN COMMUNICATION

Communication shoulders the foundational role of sociality *in general*: “Sociality is constituted by *specifically social, communicative acts*”, “acts in which the Ego turns to others and in which the Ego is conscious of these others as ones toward which it is turning, and ones which, furthermore, understand this turning”⁵⁹. In order to the importance of communication for Husserl, we will first examine the constitutive role of communication with regard to the social world⁶⁰. Then we will reflect upon the spiritual ties between subjects in the social world that communication makes possible⁶¹.

The world of communication

Social acts constitute a vast category of acts that take place between persons. Among those, communicative acts are these done by a person who has the intention to communicate to another person who, in return, is conscious that he/she is to be addressed by the other. Most often this address is made by means of language. Nonetheless, *language is not the social* for Husserl. Language has to be apprehended as the most accomplished

⁵⁴ *Infra*, p. 39.

⁵⁵ *Infra*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 176.

⁵⁷ Perreau, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ Perreau, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁵⁹ § 51, *ID II*, p. 204.

⁶⁰ *Infra*, p. 37.

⁶¹ *Infra*, p. 39.

manifestation of social communication⁶², but it is not, on its own, constitutive of sociality. Along with language, Husserl's phenomenology seizes the "corporeal, practical and expressive anchoring" of sociality⁶³. In the phenomenological attitude, we understand that a linguistic community is not a social community because it does not *a priori* rely on the communicative intending between subjects. Subjects who, as a fact, master the same linguistic system, are not necessarily engaged in an interpersonal relationship: "a linguistic community is not a connexion between *persons*, that produces a whole of persons"⁶⁴.

In our fictional, rustic community, we all know that we are dependent on the stove: we need it to cook potatoes, to boil water, and so on. We are aware of having in common the same practical relationship to the stove. Besides, we appreciate the warm room and the cozy atmosphere that the stove creates, and we know that the stove has this shared value to us. Communication makes this consensus explicit and allows us to organize our work in order to have a flame in the stove every night and every morning. In communication, "all of our senses benefit to each other"⁶⁵, which makes possible acts that are commonly directed to our environment. Correlatively, communication makes concrete the common relationship that we sustain with the stove and other objects of our common environment, and with each other too. Communication unifies the social subjects that we are, in the constitution of a unified set of objects that faces us, i.e. our world of communication or common *Umwelt*: "What we call the world of *communication* is the *Umwelt that is constituted* in our experience of the others, in reciprocal comprehension and in *consensus*"⁶⁶. In analogy with the person who is precisely "*subject-object*"⁶⁷ of and in his environment, a collectivity of subjects constituted in communication, such as our pastoral community, becomes an object of its environment as much as an object for itself⁶⁸, a communitary subject-object unified around certain unity of experience and action.

We understand that primarily every subject constitutes a world that is relative to him and to whom and what stands before him. However, the subjects who experience interpersonal communication are part of each other's world of communication. Such interpersonal relationships of *consensus* constitute both a world of communication in

⁶² Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 75.

⁶³ Perreau, op. cit., p. 76.

⁶⁴ Emphasis mine. *SI-2*, p. 283.

⁶⁵ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 4. *SI-2*, p. 291.

⁶⁶ § 52, *ID II*, p. 218.

⁶⁷ § 51, *ID II*, p. 205.

⁶⁸ § 51, *ibid.*

common, and its correlate the whole of persons as a collectivity: “thereby is constituted the association of persons and the communicative world relative to this association, its surrounding world, which is not only surrounding, external, but embraces the association itself”⁶⁹. Unlike things that are given in their mere before-ness, members of a world of communication that is theirs are given to each other in face-to-face intercourse, as “*companions*”⁷⁰: they co-live through reciprocal acts of love, hatred or confidence. At this point, Husserl can properly talk about a “social association”⁷¹; still we have not reached the social world *per se*.

Sociality and spirituality

In our community routine, one of us chops wood, another person collects kindling, a third person takes the ashes off the stove and cleans its window pane, etc., each of us has a function and our actions are unified towards objects and person comprised in our common *Umwelt*. Our collectivity has a social character, but depicted in this restrained way, we only see a community of action. There is a higher level of sociality that Husserl highlight in an analogy between the subjective and the intersubjective levels. While the personal ego is the unitary substrate of individual singularities, i.e. of a plurality of sedimented individual acts, analogously, the plurality of personal acts is a substrate to a suprapersonal spiritual unity of consciousness⁷²: a “personality of a higher order”⁷³. While the ego is the support of the *habitus*, analogously the spiritual unity is the “ideal support (*support idéal*)”⁷⁴ of the character, sensibility, i.e. the identity of the personality of a higher order⁷⁵.

By virtue of this specifically social layer of consciousness, the physical world gives itself to the person and to the personality of a higher order with “a social character in this apperceptive inclusion; it is a world that has a spiritual significance”⁷⁶. It is clear that, for Husserl, the social world is a world that gives itself to persons with a spiritual tenor, which is itself reliant on the decisive role communication plays in the constitution of the personal ego and collectivities of persons.

I keep the stove clean and carefully place the kindling into the hearth for the fire

⁶⁹ § 51, *ID II*, p. 203.

⁷⁰ § 51, *ID II*, p. 204.

⁷¹ § 51, *ibid.*

⁷² *Gemeingeist 2*, § 6. *SI-2*, pp. 294-295.

⁷³ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *SI-2*, p. 292.

⁷⁴ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *ibid.*

⁷⁵ We will discuss the concept of personality of a higher order in chapter 5, *infra*, p. 67.

⁷⁶ § 51, *ID II*, p. 204.

to catch fast. My practical attention to the objects that surround me, and the value with which they give themselves to me, are not necessarily the result of the practical relationship of dependency that I sustain with my environment. My parents had a stove in their home, I saw my mother wiping the window pane clean regularly and I revive her gesture, and herself when, in a similar manner, I rub the soot off the glass. My companions saw our fathers and elder brothers being in charge of the wood on their own, and we have spiritually taken on their work and made it less time-consuming by means of dividing labor. We are spiritually influenced by persons of the past and our work too may serve as a starting point to other persons in the world like us whom we do not know⁷⁷. To us, the stove is permeated with spirit to an extent that the separation between persons and objectivity blurs in experience: as an object of personal operations it is and becomes a person⁷⁸. To me, personal memories from childhood, my parents, are present with the stove, and when I take to heart keeping the stove working, they live through my acts of perception, and action; they live through me, in the objects of my environment.

Consciousness “transcends all times”⁷⁹ in its ability to unify with the consciousness of other persons, in the present and from the past. As a collectivity of persons in communication, we are a multiplicity of social subjectivities; we constitute a personality of a higher order in correlation to a common personal *Umwelt* which comprises social objectivities. Persons and objects, like the stove, give themselves with a spiritual signification that, to a certain extent, we have in common in our community. However, there is a world external to our small pastoral community, it is “all the rest of the world”⁸⁰ that gives itself to us as an open horizon of indeterminacy. There is an essential distinction between, on the one hand our community, which is more like a circle of friends, with its – so to speak – “subjective” character and its common environment and, on the other hand, the external world that comprises “the remaining spirits, spiritual communities, and the physical things, as well as the cultural Objects, the sciences, and the arts insofar as they are precisely objects of [my, or our communities’] interests and concerns, etc”⁸¹: the person or group is subject-object in the personal or communal *Umwelt*, whereas the *external* world necessarily *excludes* the subject as a self-objectified subject⁸².

⁷⁷ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 2. *SI-2*.

⁷⁸ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 7. *SI-2*, p. 298.

⁷⁹ *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5. *SI-2*, p. 293.

⁸⁰ § 51, *ID II*, p. 205.

⁸¹ § 51, *ID II*, pp. 205-206.

⁸² § 51, *ID II*, p. 206.

We understand that a social collectivity is not a mere collection of persons. Rather, the “*idea of communication*”⁸³ spiritually fuses, and organizes persons into constituting one social subjectivity, which constitutes correlatively a common *Umwelt* and its open horizon of indeterminacy. Let us illustrate with an example why the idea of indeterminacy is important here.

The external world that faces the personality of a higher order gathers simple objects. These objects can be found by *any* person that is part of the community, but they will appear to any of them with the same spiritual signification. When members of a cult that worships rainbows individually perceive any rainbow, they experience it in the same manner without concerting. Ideally, any actual or potential cultist can similarly make sense of any actual or potential rainbow; hence, generally speaking, objects of the person’s, or collectivity of persons’, *Umwelt* have a power of “ideal potentiality”⁸⁴ that is *essentially* part of the spiritual signification of the *Umwelt*. The power of ideal potentiality of objectivity contrasts with the immutability of the traditional spiritual signification that all members of this social subjectivity bear in themselves as a *habitus*. Thus, the spiritual unification of persons in communication is co-constitutive of a common spiritual sphere in which this unification happens. The community in communication constitutes the “world of spirits”⁸⁵: to a certain extent, the external world will always give itself to the social subjectivity as bearing a spiritual signification that is the same for all actual or potential members.

Husserl describes belonging to the spiritual world as the highest level of socialization, it is the

sum total of social subjects of lower or higher levels (and we include here the isolated person as zero limit-case of social subjectivity) which are in communication with each other, actually or in part actually in part potentially, together with the sum total of the social Objectivities pertaining to it⁸⁶.

In sum, Husserl identifies two levels of collective experience in the world: there is “at its lowest level, intersubjective material nature as common field of actual and possible experience”⁸⁷ for all subjects or collectivities, it is the intersubjective-objective world.

⁸³ § 51, E. Husserl. *La crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendentale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p. 206.

⁸⁴ § 51, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ § 51, Husserl, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁸⁶ § 51, *ID II*, pp. 206-207.

⁸⁷ § 51, *ID II*, p. 207.

In this indefinitely open material world, subject may elevate to the highest level of sociality: the “plural collection of spirits, of singular minds and spiritual communities” that constitute the spiritual world. The social world sits in between these two poles, an intermediate level in which nature is apprehended as a “a field of theoretical, axiological, and practical actions, activities of spirits on various social levels”⁸⁸. Socialization is the elevation of consciousness(es) in interaction with objects and subjects, toward the world of spirits.

*
* *

The aim of this chapter was to introduce Husserl’s theory of the social world. We understand that the social world is situated between the material intersubjective-objective world and the spiritual world, which pre-exists the subject, and amid which he is thrown. Thus, the socializing subject grounds himself corporeally in the world and, correlatively, sets foot in the spiritual world. We will refine our analysis of this process in chapter 5⁸⁹. So far, we understand from this rapid overview what Husserl’s phenomenology will give us access to with regard to the presence of writing: on the one hand, via social sciences we could only consider writing as a technology that hypothetically has factual implications on the subject’s – or collectivity of subjects’ – understanding of things. Thanks to Husserl’s thematization the personalist attitude, we are now able to observe the subject in the socializing process. Therefore, can now frame anew the question writing: we will observe the implication of the presence of writing in the process of (inter-)subjective constitution of the spiritual world. In order to complete this work, which Husserl does not pose for the social world in general, we need beforehand to examine Husserl’s view on the functions of writing in the scientific community.

⁸⁸ § 51, *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Infra*, p. 59.

CHAPTER 4

HUSSERL ON THE FUNCTIONS OF INSCRIPTION



The brief account of the social world that was given in the previous chapter ended with the concept of a spiritual world to which subjects get access by taking root in the intersubjective-objective world. The social world is ideally open to all persons, and the spiritual unity of humanity is grounded on this possibility. We saw that communication plays a crucial part in this process. Within this framework, what is Husserl's take on writing? The reflection Husserl conducts in *The Origin of Geometry (OG)*¹, appendix to *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (Krisis)*, revolves around the question of writing. In this text, he does not deal with writing in the social world at large, but within the paradigm of the scientific community. Nonetheless it provides the elements of Husserl's answer to our general question on the presence of writing in genera. In this chapter, we will explicate this text in order to pave the way for proposing a development based on chapters 1 to 4 in the third part of this dissertation.

At the beginning of *OG*, Husserl makes clear that he is not about to conduct any historical inquiries in the ordinary sense: he is not looking for an inaugural landmark such as the date and place of invention of any theorem. Instead of facts, he is looking for “the most original sense in which geometry once arose, was present as the tradition of millennia, is still present for us, and is still being worked on in a lively forward development”². This quote introduces two aims that will occupy two sections in this fourth chapter: geometry has to be thought of as a “human activity”³, a spiritual edifice to which Husserl wants to excavate the sense of the first brick by interrogating it as

¹ E. Husserl. *The origin of geometry*. In: *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Trans. by D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 353–378.

² *OG*, p. 354.

³ *OG*, p. 355.

it gives itself vividly in the now⁴; then, as a continuous synthesis of spiritual acts that gives itself as a living tradition, Husserl also wants to understand how such a meaningful tradition may endure through time⁵.

4.1. THE CONSTITUTION OF IDEAL SCIENTIFIC OBJECTS

For Husserl in *OG* as much as for us in this chapter, “geometry” has a paradigmatic value for posing philosophical questions that resonate beyond this specific scientific discipline. Yet in this section, we will first explicate that geometry, unlike other modern sciences, deals purely with a specific kind of objects, ideal scientific objects⁶. This purity allows Husserl, in the first half of the text, to highlight the essential functions of language⁷ and then of writing⁸ in the constitution of ideal scientific objects.

On ideal scientific objects

As we mentioned, “geometry” has for Husserl in this text an exemplary value for it refers to “all disciplines that deal with shapes existing mathematically in pure space-time”⁹. These shapes, along with sciences themselves and literary art pieces, are part of the “spiritual products of the cultural world”¹⁰, but they constitute a special class within it: that of ideal scientific objects. Let us explain what is specific about them.

Geometrical properties that pertain to geometrical forms – e.g. triangles – are universally valid for any triangle regardless of its proportions, and that for any geometer who deals and has ever dealt with triangles. The properties of triangles have been demonstrated mathematically and can potentially be demonstrated again by any geometer for any triangle. In this sense, triangles and their properties are objective. However the actual object aimed at by acts of consciousness, the idea, or concept, of a triangle, has no worldly existence in itself. The proper object of geometrical study is not any approximate chalk drawing, but the ideal form itself. The ideal objectivity of geometrical forms is *idealized* from imperfect representations of geometrical figures that we use on sheets or blackboards.

What is special with sciences like geometry is that they deal exclusively with this kind of objects, which is not the case for descriptive sciences for instance. The entomologist’s

⁴ *Infra*, p. 44.

⁵ *Infra*, p. 49.

⁶ *Infra*, p. 44.

⁷ *Infra*, p. 46.

⁸ *Infra*, p. 48.

⁹ *OG*, p. 354.

¹⁰ *OG*, p. 356.

object of study is out there in nature: e.g. little weevils creeping in the undergrowth to be captured, observed and classified. This being said, if our entomologist writes an article about coleopterans in general, relying on a multiplicity of individual observations, she proceeds to an abstraction in order to constitute a hypothetical general law that, through discussion with her peers, aims toward ideal objectivity. All sciences are rooted in the experience of their practitioners who aim at ideal *and* worldly objects; while some sciences like geometry account for the former relying on worldly sketches, others like natural sciences focus on the latter for proposing scientific analyses.

Unlike other human products like tools, or monuments, geometrical objects are irreproducible: Thales's theorem is unique, it "exists only once"¹¹, and so regardless of how many times, when and by whom it has been mobilized, no matter the language used to work it out¹².

Now, let us trace the constitution of ideal scientific object step by step such as it is done in *OG*. The processes of idealization that lead the proto-geometer to experiment geometry, and possibly to (re-)discover geometric truths, are obviously intra-psychic, they are enclosed in the psyche of the proto-geometer, who is necessarily the source of the form. Thus the ideal form is "originally self-evident"¹³ to the proto-geometer.

At this stage, not only is the geometric form aimed at by the proto-geometer not objective, because restrained to his or her personal consciousness, but it is also very frail. Consciousness of "what-has-just-now-been [is] flowingly fading"¹⁴, and the presence of a given ideal form surreptitiously degenerates into passivity. Thus the ideal form soon becomes present only as a "retention"¹⁵, i.e. a psychic footprint, which finally fades out too¹⁶. Therefore, in the psychic sphere, the vivid presence of a given geometric form is bound to be transitory.

However, what is passed, or faded out, is not annihilated for the proto-geometer who may, at every possible opportunity, re-awake the ideal form. Still within the bounds of the

¹¹ *OG*, p. 357.

¹² The criterion of translation differentiates ideally objective forms from literary pieces. Indeed, we might think that the printed books and their written signs are analogous to triangles sketched out on a blackboard pointing at the ideally objective identity (after all, *The Trial* by Kafka is *unique* regardless of the printed instances of it), but Husserl points out that unlike literary texts, the identical access to geometrical objects (forms or theorems) is not affected by translation, but only made indirectly accessible by it (*OG*, p. 357n).

¹³ *OG*, p. 360.

¹⁴ *OG*, p. 359.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ We give a more detailed account on *retention* and, correspondingly, *protention*, in chapter 5, *infra*, p. 60.

psyche, the past can be re-lived, the form can be “reawakened”¹⁷ through and through in its originality. Importantly, remembering allows one to realize that the past-present form and the re-presented form are the same: “what has now been realized in original fashion is the same as what was previously self-evident”¹⁸. The sameness of the form makes its identity evident, and the form can be indefinitely repeated identically. Furthermore, remembering is also the occasion for the proto-geometer to tread new paths to reach the truth he has already been conscious of, to explore anew the evidence of the form, and hence to enrich the grasp of the geometric form’s identity he seizes.

The acts of consciousness discussed so far – seizing the form repeatedly and identically, ideally varying the accesses to its identity and confirming its evidence – are synthesized in the proto-geometer’s individual, cognitive memory. Remembrance is re-presenting an ideal form whose identity has already been seized, and enriching it in a fresh grasp. Thus, re-activation refines the knowledge of the form by enriching the memory synthesis. Yet, when this person dies the possibility to re-activate the evidence is lost along with the findings themselves. These findings are subjective, therefore it has to be determined how they become objective in their ideality.

The functions of language

At this point in *OG*, Husserl introduces language in a way that builds up on, and refines, the functions of language that we ended the previous chapter on. But the remarks on individual memory we just made allow us to draw the distinction between communication and commemoration, two functions of language that the paradigm of geometric idealities makes clear while they were conflated in our brief account of the social world.

Communication – i.e. transmitting, making collective – is only one premise to the important role played by language in the case of ideal objectivities. It allows the proto-geometer to expose the evidence of his or her finding to other geometers, to make it originally, vividly present to them as it is to him. Afterward, once the findings are transmitted, there are several geometers that are able, for themselves, to re-activate the evidence, and possibly transmit it in the same way to yet other geometers in the “the unity of the community of communication”¹⁹.

The ideal form, in its identity, has thus gone “beyond the subject”²⁰ and now takes

¹⁷ *OG*, p. 359.

¹⁸ *OG*, p. 360.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

part in a process of “cooperation”²¹: each geometer who has been transmitted geometrical findings in their evidence via communication should be able to retrieve them. If one forgets and cannot, he or she can cooperate with the others to reconstitute the findings. Therefore, we see that communication serves the process of co-operation, which is more precisely a process of *co-memoration*.

Thanks to communication, the collectivity constitutes a shared knowledge, a collective memory, in which individuals store and fetch the same ideal objects. The synthesis that happens in commemoration, is far from being simply analogous to that of the individual memory. Once geometers share the potential to re-activate the identical ideal form and demonstrate its evidence, it is not just the same form that is present to each of them, but a unique, universal form. Communication of evidence, and the potentiality of commemoration it makes possible, transfigures the psychic form that is valid for one, into a unique universally valid form that is valid for potentially anyone to whom it is transmitted and made self-evident.

The passage from a communicated form to a universally valid one has to be developed. At the end of the previous chapter, we remarked that in sociality, we necessarily consciously aim at an open horizon of civilization, which is partly a horizon of foreignness, i.e. characterized by the ideal potentiality of meeting *any* person, with whom I could communicate. Husserl’s argument in *OG* builds up on the habitual knowledge of being part of an open community through potential communication to define the specific function of language in this situation. He introduces the notion of a universal language:

It is precisely to this horizon of civilization that common language belongs. One is conscious of civilization from the start as an immediate and mediate linguistic community. Clearly it is only through language and its far-reaching documentations, as possible communications, that the horizon of civilization can be an open and endless one, as it always is for men²².

We understand that spoken (immediate) and written (mediate) forms of expression are undifferentiated so far, yet Husserl’s point encompasses both, because he defines the function of an ideal, universal language as the necessary condition for humanity’s reflective consciousness of itself.

In other words, the idea of language constitutes humanity as a “we-horizon”²³ interwoven in potential expression and comprehension. Humanity constitutes itself as much

²¹ *OG*, p. 328.

²² *OG*, p. 358.

²³ *OG*, p. 359.

as does, correlatively, the world that is right before it, the world whose objects can potentially be named and referred to by all. The world thus stands as a world-for-all which is constituted as the “universe of objects which is linguistically expressible in its being and its being-such”²⁴: language provides subjects the power, and function, to make the world objective, i.e. to say things about it that are universally valid. Humans, co-humanity and the world are always already “intertwined”²⁵.

Husserl cannot show how the geometrical ideal form reaches full objectivity, universal validity, if he keeps written and spoken expression undifferentiated. The functions of language identified so far are, on the one hand, to make the world intersubjective-objective, and, on the other hand, to *transmit* the access to the ideal form, that is to say the exploitation of language’s potential of communication for commemoration. The geometrical truth is less frail when several persons are able to reactivate its evidence, yet it is still dependent on human memory to be re-activated; the may chain break, all geometers may die or progressively forget the original sense of geometry, and it could not be retrieved. Ideal scientific findings lack “*persisting existence*”²⁶, a “continuing-to-be”²⁷ to become fully objective.

Writing and intersubjective-objectivity

As we saw at the end of the previous chapter on the social world²⁸, in Husserl’s view the subject’s social grounding necessarily comes with absolute spiritual existence. It is a somewhat similar pattern that surfaces in the decisive third step of the constitution of ideal scientific objects in *OG*: Husserl shows that full objectivity of ideal scientific objects is achieved with writing. In short, the material incarnation of geometric findings comes with its full objectivity; Husserl’s point highlights a specific ontological function of writing that we must clarify.

The mere material presence of writing as a sum of written signs available in the objective world does not suffice for grounding any objective evidence, because meaningfulness is donated by consciousness. Neither are epistolary exchanges the kind of use for writing that interests Husserl in this text. Happening from a personal addresser to a personal addressee, letter exchanges only are mediate communication via writing. Confined to this function, writing only plays an incidental role in the constitution of objectiv-

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *OG*, p. 360.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Supra*, p. 42.

ity. Epistolary exchanges are *actual* communication whereas for Husserl, it is *virtual* communication, made possible by writing, that is an essential condition to objectivity. “Virtual” means that, for the practitioner of geometry, writing makes the evidence of the ideal form available to *anyone, without relying on any personal address*. It is specifically this function of writing, that of “communication become virtual”²⁹, that Husserl highlights.

Writing durably sediments³⁰ findings, therefore writing solves the cognitive memory issue: when geometrical findings were not expressed, they entirely relied on the proto-geometer’s cognitive memory; then, communication between subjects made possible commemoration; but it is only when inscribed that findings are fully sheltered from human lacunae. The accumulated written material of geometry is self-less memory at any geometer’s disposal: “Written signs are, when considered from a purely corporeal point of view, straightforwardly, sensibly experienceable; and it is always possible that they be intersubjectively experienceable in common”³¹.

It is precisely because writing entrusts findings to the indeterminacy of an open horizon of civilization that ideal scientific objects can hoist themselves to full objectivity. Writing makes possible a chain of consciousnesses of geometers that perpetuates through space and time because it makes the evidence available to an indefinite number of geometers who can rely on the perdurance of inscription to take previous findings as a starting point for new investigations, and add up their own findings to the theoretic edifice of geometry. *The virtual communication writing enables provides findings with an ideally intersubjective dimension, they become universally objective.*

4.2. WRITING AND HISTORICITY

Ideal scientific objects reach universal objectivity when writing makes them durably at disposal of any geometer; besides, geometry, as long-term human work, enters history. The geometer is the person who, based on the writings of his peers, manages to discover more forms are more of their properties. Therefore, the geometer is more than a person who manipulates or unveils ideal forms, *he orients his practice according to the sense of practice of geometers since the proto-founders of the spiritual edifice of geometry*. The geometer is the one who works as part of the chain of consciousness that geometers maintain alive through time. In this process, writing plays an intrinsically ambiguous

²⁹ OG, p. 361.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

role. In order to understand why, we need first to grasp how the originary sense, or meaning, of geometry is reactivated from the passivity of the inscription³² and, secondly, why the reactivability of originary meaning is a condition to geometry's historicity³³. This will allow us to catch a glimpse of the specific functions, with regards to geometry's meaningfulness and historicity, that it is incumbent on geometers to shoulder in presence of writings.

Passivity and reactivation of originary meaning

As a preliminary remark before discussing the reactivation of originary meaning of a spiritual formation such as geometry, we have to make clear that Husserl's quest for the original meaning – the *Rückfrage* – , is not a detailed description of regular scientific practice. Actually, posing the question of the originary sense in such a way is somehow artificial because ideally, the originary meaning of geometry is not problematic: it is constantly active in the geometers' practice of geometry. In reality, Husserl's research is motivated by a historical thesis which structures the *Krisis* and that we will come back to later³⁴: somehow, the reactivation of the originary meaning failed in modern times, the chain of consciousness broke. Hence the question of looking for the originary meaning poses itself and necessitates a "regressive inquiry"³⁵: an analysis that sails against the *a priori* current of the meaning formation process in order to bring back the originary sense of geometry that was one unquestionably part of it as a spiritual tradition. Therefore, by stressing the importance of the reactivation process in the current chapter, our aim is not to describe the ordinary practice of science; on the contrary, given that reactivation is incidentally lacking in modern times, we want to progressively show that this break is primarily related to the ambiguous presence of writings.

We have seen that remembering geometric evidence is re-presenting past acts of consciousness. Yet, written signs do not give themselves as memories do: an act that aims at past presents is not similar to an act that aims at graphic signs. An inscription that consigns geometric statements primarily involves the geometer as a language practitioner in that it appeals to his linguistic skills for decoding it. Furthermore, decoding is not enough, because written linguistic signs spontaneously give themselves with their ordinary meaning: unquestioned associations, taken-for-granted confusions, etc.,

³² *Infra*, p. 50.

³³ *Infra*, p. 52.

³⁴ Cf. chapter 6, *infra*, p. 92.

³⁵ *OG*, p. 354.

that are received passively by consciousness. That kind of passive reception of linguistic expression suffices to read the newspaper³⁶, but it does not suffice when it comes to exercise science or philosophy that cares about apodictic truth, and authentic, meaningful practice. The evidence of the written geometric statement, its originary sense as it was present to the proto-geometer who encrypted it, will not become present to the reading geometer if passivity is taken for granted and obstructs the desedimentation of the evidence. Therefore, passivity has to be “transformed back”³⁷. The evidence, in its meaningfulness, has to be *reactivated*.

Due to the passive linguistic form amid which content gives itself, the process of re-activation is composed of two distinct activities of consciousness. First, the activity of reading with the “intention of explicitation”, i.e. to “dis-insert” propositions from the “what has been vaguely, passively received as a unity”³⁸; and then, on the “mode of having been originally produced”³⁹, there is the activity of *meaning formation (Sinnbildung)*. Meaning formation relies on the activity of parsing out the relevant propositions from passivity, in order to bring “the total validity to active performance in a new way on the basis of the individual validities”⁴⁰. An effective reactivation of a geometrical form is the reactivation of the originary meaning formation. By virtue of such an “explicated judgment”⁴¹, an ideal objectivity is “universally accessible”⁴² and “certain a priori”⁴³. When it is completely (re)activated in this manner, the evidence is “exclusively” what “is meant by logic when it speaks of sentences or judgments”⁴⁴.

At this final stage, the originary sense is “*capable of being passed on*”⁴⁵ and can nourish new geometric discoveries without the noise of passivity. Hence we understand that issues related to passivity and reactivability are key to the meaningfulness of a chain of consciousness such as geometry through time: sustained throughout reactivation is needed for geometry to continue as a “lively, productively advancing formation of meaning”⁴⁶. In other words, when the originary meaning of geometry is intimately active for each geometer, the edifice safely and durably builds up on the solid base of collective written findings. However, without strict reactivation of the originary meaning – i.e.

³⁶ *OG*, p. 364.

³⁷ *OG*, p. 361.

³⁸ *OG*, p. 364.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *OG*, p. 366.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *OG*, p. 364.

⁴⁵ Emphasis mine, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *OG*, p. 365.

if consciousness is contented with neglectfully leaning on words received passively – , geometry is unintelligible, its meaning is untransmittable, and the spiritual edifice remains hollow⁴⁷.

The historical function of the writing and reading geometer

The original meaning, once reactivated, grants geometry with authentic comprehension and transmittability. Thus, we understand that reactivability of the original meaning is actually the principle of geometry's historicity: *it is only because its originary meaning can be reactivated over time that geometry lives as a spiritual tradition*. This is what Husserl explains when he writes that keeping active the "genuine, original meaning"⁴⁸ is a condition "upon which rests the historical possibility of a genuine tradition, true to its origins, of sciences like geometry"⁴⁹.

Importantly, the question of writing draws a distinction between historicity and history. Geometry, as a human production that deals with ideal objects, enters history because physical inscription allows its original meaning to be reactivated by any, at any time. However, the sole ideal potentiality for geometry to be read and understood by any does not suffice for it to maintain its authentic, original meaning over time, that is to say its historicity. The historicity of geometry is donated by geometers who reactivate and transmit its originary meaning. Therefore, the fact that geometers' findings are selflessly consigned as written expression introduces the need for transmitting the "capacity for reactivating the primal beginnings"⁵⁰. In sum, thanks to the use of virtual, written memory geometry stands amid a certain tension: geometry enters history but, in the same gesture, selflessness suspends geometry's historicity.

Given that in presence of writings the historicity of geometry is donated by geometers, Husserl shows that the reliance on virtual memory grants geometers the *function* of sustaining geometry's historicity by systematically reactivating its originary meaning. This function is accomplished via the activities of reading and writing which, ever since proto-geometers inscribed their findings, are part of being a geometer.

The *function of reading geometers* that inherit writings from proto-geometers is to extract the virtual memory that is common to any geometer from the passivity amid which graphic signs give themselves. Then, they have to reactivate for themselves the

⁴⁷ *OG*, pp. 366-367.

⁴⁸ *OG*, p. 366.

⁴⁹ *OG*, p. 367.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

original meaning of geometry. They have, so to speak, to re-play the origin of geometry in the intimacy of their consciousnesses based on inscribed geometric propositions. The sense of practice of any geometer should be the one that animated proto-geometers.

The *function of writing geometers* is to inscribe findings “once and for all”⁵¹, that is to say “forever identically repeatable with self-evidence and usable for further theoretical or practical ends – as indubitably reactivatable with the identity of its actual meaning”⁵². This way, finding add up to the edifice of geometry, they become part of geometers’ virtual memory and of history at large. The function of the writing geometer is not to inscribe elements for himself like a draft, but to make at any geometer’s disposal a piece of writing that optimizes reactivation, that is to say inscribing *unequivocal statements* which the form will not hinder the subsequent reformation of the authentic meaning of geometry by geometers across time.

In sum, the geometer’s function with regards to written material is to keep geometry alive by, as a reader, reactivating its original meaning based on inscription and, as a writer, to make sure that the originary meaning is reactivable based on inscriptions. The stability of geometry’s meaningfulness over time, its historicity, depends on this collective work from geometers.

Nonetheless, geometers may fail at carrying out this work. In this case, geometric writings are passively apprehended, the originary meaning is not reactivated, neither is it transmitted or transmittable; the original meaning of geometry is not intimately experienced by its users. As a result geometry does not live as a authentic meaning formation, but only survives as ready-made, inherited propositions and method⁵³. Such meaninglessness may not impinge on the “extraordinarily far-reaching practical usefulness”⁵⁴ of geometrical tools, but the theoretic edifice of geometry itself is hollowed of its spiritual tenor and turns to meaningless construction work. When inscription allows findings to be consigned selflessly by giving them a material incarnation, it also throws them out in the open, and *the technical selflessness of inscription makes possible utilizing findings meaninglessly*.

When geometry is only apprehended passively, reduced to a meaninglessness method and set of propositions, the historicity of geometry is absent. The *authentic geometer* is the one who consciously donates and transmits the historic character of geometry by reactivating its originary meaning in the intimacy of his consciousness. Husserl considers

⁵¹ *OG*, p. 362.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *OG*, p. 367.

⁵⁴ *OG*, p. 368.

that geometers – and not only “the inventor but [...] every scientist as a member of the scientific community”⁵⁵ – have a “*common responsibility*”⁵⁶ in making sure that this work is done. A “*firm direction of the will*”⁵⁷ is necessary to drive each geometer towards this end.

When inscribing their own findings, each of them should be concerned about “the univocity of linguistic expression”⁵⁸ which is secured concretely “by means of the most painstaking formation of the relevant words, propositions, and complexes of propositions”⁵⁹. Therefore, in order to orient scientific work toward a common conservation of originary meaning, Husserl advocates a sort of *graphic ethic*⁶⁰. It is interesting to cross this argument with another text found in *Cinq articles sur le renouveau (Renouveau)*⁶¹ in which Husserl asserts that the “intersubjective stability, the objectivity”⁶² of science is based on the “generally deep-rooted convictions that stem from very ancient traditions acquired by work”⁶³. More clearly still, we understand that, for Husserl, the common willingness of each scientist to maintain alive in his or her own work the original meaning formed by the work of the ancients is necessary for authentic science to exist and endure meaningfully.

Finally, in the following passage from *OG*, Husserl indicates the problem that will occupy us in the last part of our work:

only the consciously set task of [discovering] the historical origin of geometry (within the total problem of the a priori of historicity in general) can provide the method for a geometry which is true to its origins and at the same time is to be understood in a universal-historical way; *and the same is true for all sciences, for philosophy*⁶⁴.

Husserl’s point is twofold: on the one hand, when it comes to theoretic meaning formations such as sciences, the question of historicity poses itself as a question of *meaningfulness and authenticity*; on the other hand, the issue of historicity has to be *consciously*

⁵⁵ *OG*, p. 362.

⁵⁶ We emphasize, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ We emphasize, *OG*, p. 362n.

⁵⁸ *OG*, p. 362.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Our account of the presence of writing in the social world will lead us to the elaboration of a graphic ethic based on this passage of *OG*, *infra*, p. 99.

⁶¹ E. Husserl. *Cinq articles sur le renouveau*. Paris: Vrin, 2005 (henceforth cited as *Renouveau*).

⁶² *Renouveau*, p. 94.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ We emphasize, *OG*, p. 372.

part of the scientist's work, otherwise no authentic science or philosophy, and no understanding of history, are possible.

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* *

In chapter 3⁶⁵, following Husserl's argument on the constitution of the social world in *ID II*, not only did we see that the subject enriches to being a person when it gets progressively rooted in the world of persons; we also understood that being a person – and, more generally, sociality – necessarily implies experiencing the world as loaded with a spiritual dimension. The question of the subject's historicity was not explicitly made thematic then, but it was implicitly present because, as Husserl underlines at the end of *OG*, socialized individuals – and the social world that is their common correlate – are always already historical: “The historical world is, to be sure, first pre-given as a social-historical world. But it is historical only through the inner historicity of the individuals, who are individuals in their inner historicity, together with that of other communalized persons”⁶⁶.

Reading through *OG* in chapter 4⁶⁷, it seems that for Husserl the question of writing is the means for thinking historicity. Indeed, writing makes it possible for scientific achievements, consigned in an articulate way, to outlive the lacunae of human memory. Thus writing makes possible the building of theoretic edifices such as geometry while, in the same gesture, it introduces the need for the reading and writing scientist to consciously re-activate and maintain alive the original meaning of the meaning formation he pretends to take part in. Therefore, even though writing seals theoretic findings and makes them at disposal for potentially any scientists, in presence of writings the work of scientists is exposed to new risks and thus gets acquainted with new responsibilities: the function of literate scientists is then to strive towards throughout reactivability and systematic reactivation of the originary meaning of theoretic formations. In this sense, literate scientists are *collectively responsible* of science's sustained meaningfulness, authenticity, hence of science's historicity.

Throughout chapters 3 and 4, a network of concepts related to writing progressively emerged: passivity, reactivation and meaningfulness; spirituality, universality and virtuality; memory, authenticity, historicity and work. In the last part of this dissertation, we will rearrange and refine our knowledge of Husserlian concepts in order to highlight anew

⁶⁵ *Supra*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ *OG*, p. 372n.

⁶⁷ *Supra*, p. 43.

the overall coherence of Husserl's thinking with regard to the social world and writing. This will allow us to develop a reflection beyond the case of geometry on the presence of writing in the social world. Only then will we be capable to make sense of the findings of social sciences that we discussed in the first part⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ *Supra*, p. 5.

PART III

THE PRESENCE OF WRITINGS



Introduction to part 3

In chapters 3 and 4¹, we based ourselves on linear readings of Husserlian analyses in order to apprehend the constitution of the social world and the function of writing in the constitution of meaning formations. Now, we want to synthesize and rearrange these elements in order to refine our conceptual apparatus and address on its own right a problem Husserl poses in *OG* with regards to writing and the social world: Husserl asserts that writing offers the possibility for human collectivities to “be lifted to a new level of communalization”². Thus, in these last two chapters, we aim to examine in details the contribution of writing to sociality.

In chapter 5³, we will deal with the enhancement of communalization that the presence of writing makes possible, while in chapter 6⁴ we will see that the presence of writing is by essence ambiguous and makes necessary a specific form of work from literate persons and communities in order for humans to effectively “be lifted”. Notably,

¹ *Supra*, pp. 29 and 43 respectively.

² *OG*, p. 361.

³ *Infra*, p. 59.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 79.

we will see that Husserl's phenomenology does not only help understand the aporia of a flawed relationship to writing, it also provides the resources for avoiding it.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING AND THE NEW LEVEL OF COMMUNALIZATION



In order to apprehend the contribution of writing to communalization, we first need to understand in greater details Husserl's conception of communalization. We will do it in light of the concept of *unity*, following Hahn¹. Indeed, we will see that the concept of unity is central to our inquiry because it sheds light simultaneously on the multi-layered constitutive processes at stake in communalization and on the teleological dimension of human existence². Once the coherence of Husserl's conception of communalization is clear, it will be possible to examine how the presence of writings may enhance communalization³.

5.1. COMMUNALIZATION AND UNITY FOR HUSSERL

Our main concern in this section is to clarify the notion of unity that, at the subjective and at the intersubjective levels, characterizes socialization for Husserl. First we will remind ourselves of two dynamics that structure the life of consciousness⁴. With this in mind, we will reexamine how the socialized subject constitutes himself as a *person*⁵. Finally, in analogy with the discussion on the person, we will grasp anew the genesis of human communities⁶.

¹ Hahn is the first to account of Husserl concept of person along the guiding thread of *unity*. We will largely rely his translations and passage selections from Husserl. C. J. Hahn. "The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl". PhD thesis. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University, 2012, p. 34.

² *Infra*, p. 59.

³ *Infra*, p. 72.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 60.

⁵ *Infra*, p. 61.

⁶ *Infra*, p. 67.

The organic cycle of intentional life

In order to finely understand the constitution of the social world, we never have to lose sight of two basic properties of consciousness. The first one is the correlation of consciousness and the world or, more generally, the correlation between the intentional act and the object that is aimed at by this act; this correlation is central to all phenomenological analyses. For instance in perception, consciousness synthesizes sensory data, it *creates unity* in order to make proper objects out of what is aimed at. Consciousness *constitutes* the object so that it appears as an object that has certain qualities, a certain value, to the subject: as an object, it makes sense to the subject.

The constitution of the object is a co-constitution of the object and the subject: “it is clear that the genesis of the *object* as a distinct unity present in consciousness is indissociable from the *genesis* of the subject as that which is conscious of the object here and now”⁷. We had a glimpse of this process of co-constitution with regards to the social world in chapter 3. Indeed, we saw that the constitution of the social world is correlative to the socialization of the subject, we will come back to this point below⁸.

Another central property of consciousness that we need to keep in mind is the distinction between *passive* and *active* intentionalities: acts of consciousness are, to various degrees, motivated by the object (passive), or decided by the subject (active). Passive and active intentionalities co-occur in the life of consciousness, and co-sculpt the subject’s experience of the world. Intentionalities are situated on a “spectrum”⁹ from passivity to activity. What is passively given to the subject is the domain of the *already-there*, the pre-given. It is part of the domain of taken-for-granted-ness: for instance, the implicit belief in the world, and instincts such as natural drives or cultural traits, are passively present in the subject’s experience of the world. By means of *association*, the passive life of consciousness forms the coherent *background* of active intentionalities.

The presence of passive intentionalities motivates active intentionalities, such as judgments, position takings or recalling of past experiences. In this sense, the active life of consciousness *is grounded on* the passive one. The living present is labile, thus, once past, active intentionalities are bound to be retained in a passive state. They *sediment* on the ground of experience.

⁷ Translated by Hahn from J. Bloechl. “Egoity without Ego.” In: *Passive Synthesis and Life-World: Sintesi passiva e mondo della vita*. Ed. by A. Ferrarin. Firenze: Edizioni ETS, 2006, pp. 93–108, p. 94.

⁸ *Infra*, p. 67.

⁹ Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 62.

These very general remarks on intentional life aim to stay aware of these two pairs of complementary facets of consciousness. First, there is the indefectible correlation between the subjective and objective poles of experience: the two inseparable ends of intentional acts that the phenomenological reduction reveals. Furthermore, the subject and the object co-constitute in experience, the unity of the object is made correlatively to that of the subject. Secondly, Husserl's telluric metaphor which illustrates the movement of activation and sedimentation of intentional acts is important for understanding how passive and active intentionalities co-participate in the subjective experience of the world. Now, the ground is prepared for using this model with regards to the social world.

The unity of the person

We are now interested in the subject's acts in the world as a world that comprises other subjects. As we know, the subject that gets to seizing the world as a social world correlatively constitutes itself as a social subject. In light of our remarks on the passive and active aspects of intentional life, we would like to show how passive and active experience of the social world articulate into constituting the subject's unified personal character.

By means of associative synthesis, the experience of objects from the world that immediately surrounds the social subject relates to the subject's sedimented, past-lived experiences. Thus, the objects of the surrounding world are given passively as familiar objects. The objects of the surrounding world bear a cultural tenor, a *spiritual charge*, they make sense to me in a cultural and personal way. They are objects that are part of a *world to me*, my *Umwelt*. These objects motivate acts of remembering or acts of anticipation; thus, the surrounding world is the background of social life¹⁰.

The surrounding world is given to the subject with personal sense because the personal history of the subject is passively present when he experiences the surrounding world. Therefore, the experience of the social world has to be thought of in relation to the "inner historicity"¹¹ of consciousness. Minimally, at a given moment in time, consciousness of the vivid present comprises traces from what is just past, and aims at what is to come. This is what Husserl calls *retention* and *protention*; about this, Husserl writes:

we cannot even conceive of a consciousness that would not go beyond the

¹⁰ See *supra*, p. 31 our account on the *Umwelt*.

¹¹ *OG*, p. 372n.

strict present in its essential flux from presence to new presences; consciousness is inconceivable without retentional and protentional horizons, without a co-consciousness (although a necessarily non-intuitive one) of the past of consciousness and an anticipation of an approaching consciousness (no matter how indeterminate it may be)¹².

This fine observation of cognitive processes serves as the matrix for observing the experience of the world at various scales, such as the experience of the social world. In the living present, the subject experiences his surrounding objects with, in the background, a horizon of past, and a horizon of anticipation, that find their roots in the personal history of the subject in his environment and that nourish a sense of what is to-come.

The personal history of the socialized subject manifests itself on the passive mode under the form of instincts and habits. Very generally, instincts – that Husserl, from a psychological perspective understands as subconscious responses to particular stimuli¹³ – and habits are both passive manifestations of specific *drives*. A habit is more stable than an instinct, it is an abiding tendency that has become “sedimented via a history of instinctive responses to similar contents. [...] the associative link is strengthened as the instinct becomes sedimented into a habit”¹⁴. Over time, by repetition, a drive become sedimented as a *habitus* and manifests itself as a habit. Whereas the psychological perspective focuses on the mechanisms of the response, from a phenomenological perspective, it is the transcendental dimension of instincts and habits that interests us, i.e. we focus on the *performance of consciousness* in order to determine the significance of the instinctive or habitual act with regards to the processes of constitution¹⁵.

Instincts and habits are intentionalities that aim at implicit objects, they manifest an implicit drive of the subject. In that sense, they *passively participate* to the constitution of the world. Notably, Hahn highlights that for Husserl, the constitution of an experienced object out of hyletic data – i.e. “the sensuous contents that present the objective, sensible determination of an object”¹⁶, which includes feelings and drives – depends on an “objectifying instinct”¹⁷. In other words, *the subject instinctively makes sense of the world*. Furthermore, by means of associative synthesis, the subject leans on his personal

¹² E. Husserl. *Analyses concerning passive and active synthesis. Lectures on transcendental logic*. Trans. by A. J. Steinbock. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001, p. 626.

¹³ Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 48.

¹⁴ Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁵ On Husserl’s use of “transcendental” see J. J. Drummond. *Historical dictionary of Husserl’s philosophy*. Lanham, Maryland/Toronto/Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008, pp. 203-204.

¹⁶ Drummond, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁷ Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 54.

instincts and habits to make sense of the world in a personal, coherent way:

the background history of transcendental subjectivity can become the material for further constitutive activity. Because past constitutive activity can be recalled via association, the history of consciousness can exert an influence on the current constitutive activity of the subject¹⁸.

Now that we understand how instincts and habits passively participate to the constitution process, we can come back to the socialized subject and fully grasp the correlation between, on the subjective side, instincts, habits, which manifest a personal history; and, on the objective side, the surrounding world constituted as a world “to me”. We start to grasp the individual coherence, or unity, that the subject acquires via the experience of the social world. This is what Hahn refers to as “the passive concretion of subjectivity”¹⁹. In the following passage, Husserl describes the associative “force” of action of habits as the expectation of unity in the vivid present:

If one configuration has formed a prominent, specially bound unity through the affective forces governing in it, then the force will radiate out from it to accentuate objects that will fulfill the conditions for forming a *uniform* configuration – initially within the same living present. *The part “demands” the whole* – something uniform awakens something else that is uniform, which is not yet at all constituted as a unity explicitly for itself: and it does not demand the whole by a pure and simple awakening, but rather by a co-connected “expectation,” by the demand as coexisting as co-belonging to the *unity*²⁰.

With regards to the socialized subject, we understand that the subject’s past, present under the form of habits, provides unity to the subject’s experience on the world, i.e. to the sense of existence. Bloechl words it well: “the unity of my present... may be traced to the particularity of my past”²¹.

So far, in our review of the passive subjective side of social experience, we have mentioned “personal” properties of the subjects such as their personal history, or personal habits. However, we have not yet used the term “person”. Hahn notes that “being in a world or being passively affected are not sufficient to make one into a person. Personhood

¹⁸ Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁹ Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁰ We emphasize, Husserl, *Analyses concerning passive and active synthesis*, p. 240.

²¹ Translated by Hahn from Bloechl, “Egoity without Ego.”, p. 98.

is an achievement of subjectivity”²². Thus, let us now discuss the active dimension of experiencing the social world, that results into the constitution of the person.

Husserl compares the passive and active aspects of intentional life to the asleep and awake subject:

The subject develops itself, we say, from sleeping to waking I, and the awake I develops itself with its intentionality. It is no empty identity-point of consecutive acts. In one, since in the acts of the I it constructs a surrounding world for the I, it develops the I into personality, or more clearly, from the I-point of acts constitutes a person as a personal subject, which in turn manifests personal properties²³.

This passage makes clear that the pre-given background of social life, the surrounding world, is *actively constituted* by the subject. More precisely, the person and his or her personal surrounding world actively co-constitute. Yet, as we saw in chapter 3, the person constitutes him- or herself in the presence of other persons by communication; we will discuss intersubjectivity in the following subsection.

For the moment, let us focus on subjective activities that actively forge the person. The husserlian concept that is central to the constitution of personhood is “taking a position” (*Stellungnahmen*)²⁴ – which includes “theoretical, valuing, and practical position-taking”²⁵. *Stellungnahmen* conveys the idea of the subject’s *commitment* with regards to the object of his intentional acts or to his attitude towards it²⁶. Thus, the subject endorses a position concerning the existence of such-and-such objects, concerning beliefs, judgments, etc. Husserl maintains that position-takings are key to the individuation of the subject, not only because position-takings sediment into dispositions, and attitude, through which they passively participates to giving personal character of the subject, but because *they actively distinguish subjects from each other*. Indeed, position-takings grant the subject a distinctive behavior: “the unity of the person is a unity of position-taking commitments”²⁷. Husserl writes: “What is the identity of the I as a person, the identity of the human I? Identity of its ‘behavior,’ of the behavior in the active

²² Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 113.

²³ Husserl, manuscript A V 21, 62a, translated in Hahn, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁴ Hahn, op. cit., p. 115.

²⁵ Hahn, op. cit., p. 116.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hahn, op. cit., p. 137.

position-takings”²⁸. Therefore, the personal I, is instituted “from the inside”²⁹ in the unity of the position-takings.

Let us introduce a special kind of position-taking: *vocation*. When the person actively aims at objects of the surrounding world – e.g. when the person works and creates –, the person attributes a certain value to the objects of his or her acts. Hence, Hahn defines vocation as:

a particular kind of position-taking in which *the subject takes on specific values as absolute for him or her*. The decision to regard those values as absolutely important, while motivated in part by the passive, affective and worldly history of the individual, is *an active decision that orients the entire person’s life around those values and hence provides a unity to the life of the person*³⁰.

The person follows a vocation if he or she actively orients his or her whole life towards values placed as absolute. Vocation provides the person with a “concrete core” around which the whole life of the person unifies:

It is something special, however, that the I is not only a polar, centering interiority, thereby and interiority that is achieving sense and value and acts from out of itself, but that it also is an individual I that, in all its presentation, emotive valuing and self-deciding still has a *deepest center*, the center of every love in the eminent personal sense, the I, that in this love follows a “call,” a “vocation,” an inner call, which concerns the deepest interiority, the innermost center of the I itself and determines new decisions, new “self-responsibilities,” self-justifications³¹.

We understand that the concept of vocation is closely link to *ethical concerns* for Husserl. The person who pursues a vocation throughout his or her life must fulfill the duties that stem from vocations³² in order to work towards the “fullness”³³ of his or her being.

²⁸ Translated by Hahn, E. Husserl. *Husserliana XIV: Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Zweiter Teil: 1921–1928*. Ed. by I. Kern. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973 (henceforth cited as *Hua XIV*), p. 296.

²⁹ Husserl, manuscript E III 2, 6a, translated in Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 118.

³⁰ We emphasize, Hahn, op. cit., p. 113.

³¹ We emphasize, Husserl, manuscript B I 21, 55a translated in Hahn, op. cit., p. 130.

³² Hahn, op. cit., p. 219.

³³ Hahn, op. cit., p. 131.

Furthermore, pursuing a vocation is actually decisive in the constitution of the person, to the extent that, Hahn writes, “the vocation of the person is what constitutes that person *as a person*”³⁴. What gives vocation such a paramount importance in personal constitution is the *incomparable unity* that it grants to the person in social life; through vocation, the person truly concretizes: “the concrete aspects of the person’s life – the depth dimension, the worldliness, and the unique values, which all individuate the person – are unified”³⁵. Toulemont’s analysis of vocation completes Hahn’s by adding that, in spite of the inner historicity of consciousness, the person as a socialized subject truly becomes *historical* when he or she embraces a vocation (*mission*):

Il ne peut y avoir historicité au sens propre que pour un homme qui a prédestiné le sens unifié de sa vie, comme celui qui s’est *librement décidé à consacrer sa vie à une mission* et a prescrit par là toutes ses volontés et ses actions futures à une règle, *une norme*; en la maintenant à travers toutes les vicissitudes, en restant fidèle à lui-même, il mène dans l’histoire de sa mission *une vie unifiée pleine de sens*³⁶.

The authentic person, the subject that embraces a vocation “transforms”³⁷ his or her life, and his- or herself, in accordance with absolute values. The person thus “dominates the flow of phenomena of consciousness by seizing their authentic orientation and by guiding himself constantly in light of it”³⁸. The glow that lights the way for the person is no less than the reflection of the *telos* of personhood, i.e. acute, reflective consciousness of the teleological aspect that is constitutive of personhood.

Indeed, phenomenological inquiries of the person reveal that, from the most basic properties of intentional life, to the highest levels of social life – i.e. from the instinctive strivings, the habitual horizons of past and of future, to the person’s embracing a vocation –, there is “*a unified teleological progression that runs through all the aspects of personhood*”³⁹. The *telos* is the *ideal of unity* that pre-exists the person, towards which consciousness is implicitly directed via the constitutive instinct, it is the orientation the person ought to adopt radically by embracing a vocation in order to fulfill his- or herself

³⁴ Hahn, op. cit., p. 132.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ We emphasize, Toulemont, *L’essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 137.

³⁷ Translated by Buckley (modified by Hahn), from E. Husserl. *Husserliana XXVII: Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*. Ed. by T. Nenon and H. Rainer Sepp. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989, p. 26.

³⁸ Toulemont, *L’essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 147.

³⁹ We emphasize, Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 183.

as a human being: “this teleology is understood in its relationship to absolute subjectivity as the infinite way to develop itself into true being”⁴⁰. Thus, reflective consciousness and one’s active participation to the teleological ideal of unity is the ultimate achievement sought by the authentic person. Husserl’s concept of *telos* will become clearer by the end of this section.

The unity of personalities of a higher order

We have artificially left out of our scope the intersubjective dimension of the experience of the social world. Yet, we have to make clear that, although we did not make it thematic, interaction with other subjects plays a central role in the constitution of the person and, its correlate, the social world. So far in this section, intersubjectivity has been in the background, now let us tackle the phenomenon of communalization with regards to the concept that we have been highlighting in the current section: unity.

We understand that Husserl’s conception of personhood is based on the unification of the subject’s life in a vocation; we are now going to proceed to an analogous review of the properties of communities of persons. As we did in the previous subsection, we will go from the passive to the active sides of the life of communities. However, note that the analogy between the person and communities of persons is a *theoretical metaphor*⁴¹ that aims to render the fact that phenomenologically, as we saw in chapter 3, the concretion of the person and that of communities are interdependent: “the development of every individual I is directed and indirectly intertwined intentionally with that of other [Is]. [...] Thus its development is the forgoing process of the fulfillment of intersubjective intentionality”⁴². Indeed, only consciousness constitutes, and while members of communities can co-aim at objects and at each other, the community *per se* does not perform acts of consciousness.

As we mentioned in chapter 3⁴³, the key aspect of personal constitution is the I-you relationship; Husserl writes that the subject “becomes an I and therefore a personal subject...in the I-you relationship”⁴⁴. On the ground of a common surrounding world that is passively given and which weaves a background of cultural objects and familiar persons, consider two subjects actively aiming at each other. Establishing a relationship

⁴⁰ Husserl, manuscript E III, 4 36a-b, translated in Hahn, op. cit., p. 184.

⁴¹ Toulemont, *L’essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 177.

⁴² Husserl, manuscript E III 4, 17a-b, translated in Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 188.

⁴³ *Supra* p. 34.

⁴⁴ *Hua* XIV, pp. 170-171.

of empathy, subjects seize each other as “‘*companions,*’ not as *opposed objects but as counter-subjects* who live ‘with’ one another, who converse and are related to one another, actually or potentially, in acts of love and counter-love, of hate and counter-hate, of confidence and reciprocated confidence, etc.”⁴⁵.

Their mutual body language indicates analogous drives and instincts, as well as distinct behaviors or habits, i.e. they *indicate an inner personal life*. One motivates the other’s reflection, primarily in a passive, implicit way, and vice versa. Further, one takes on the other’s motivation and *their personal strivings unify*. That is what Husserl calls a *community of striving* or *community of willing*⁴⁶. Hence, the relationship of empathy is not just intersubjective: given that it concerns *two persons* in a common environment, it is an *inter-personal* relationship, within which, and through which, two persons concretize: the “I” and the “you”.

The utmost social acts of consciousness are communicative acts, acts in which the “I” and the “you” unify in the “we”. In the “we”, consciousnesses unify⁴⁷: the two subjects do not just live with each other but *live in each other*. In the background, the surrounding world that includes the “we” constitutes itself as a common surrounding world, i.e. the environment that both persons can experience as similarly spiritually charged. The unity that communicative acts institutes strengthens through personal position-takings, agreements and disagreements, by which one affirms his personal character as much as the other constitutes knowledge of that person’s character, and vice versa.

As we know, the person’s position-takings, strivings and instincts, sediment into habits that passively sculpt the person’s character. Analogously, via life in common, companions inherit, establish and transmit, communal habits, characters, and cultural traditions. Nonetheless, for Husserl the collectivity truly lifts itself to a superior level of communality *when it becomes reflectively aware of the unified aspect of communal life*. More precisely, a collectivity of persons within which the individual strivings of its members are harmonized and consciously oriented towards the accomplishment of a common vocation “can be said to have its own unified personality”⁴⁸. Thus, the collectivity truly gains a personal dimension, it is a *personality of a higher order*:

Overall, we have a multitude of persons with many personal capabilities, with many streams of consciousness, in which many acts of consciousness are

⁴⁵ § 51, *ID II*, p. 204.

⁴⁶ Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 149.

⁴⁷ See *supra* chapter 3 p. 39.

⁴⁸ Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 167.

entering and integrating – and therefore “a spirit,” a personality “of a higher order” as the ideal bearer of a character, a capacity... with a consciousness that encompasses all the individual consciousnesses in a selection, etc.⁴⁹

The reflective take of subjects towards themselves as a collectivity of striving is therefore key to the constitution of a personality of a higher order, like it is for the individual subject to become a person. Indeed, it is likewise the condition for taking in hand the life in common, and *to take on a collective vocation*: to conduct life in common in light of absolute values that constitute an ideal to tend to, such as the values of harmony, love and good⁵⁰. In light of the reflective consciousness of collective unity, by virtue of which members identify each other as part of a collectivity, persons can strive towards the concretion of an even more unified collectivity.

The unity of an authentically personal community concretizes through *work*. The important unifying action of work goes beyond the mere punctual unity of persons who organize each other to collectively achieve a task. Rather, the communal-personal significance of a collectivity is founded on *sustained* collective work. In the following passage, we understand how, via work, the ethical and historical dimensions of the collectivity of persons intersect:

Thus the community would progress towards the practically leading idea of a community of good individuals, all of whom live knowing that there is, and there ought to be [*Seinsollen*] a community; *a community constantly maintained through self-work* and also maintained through *continuously on-going culture* in the form of the *education* of the apprentices. And this community would no longer be a mere collection of individuals with a similar will according to similar ideals, but it would be, rather, an already constituted community of willing. *A communal will would run through the unity of individual lives* and the individual subjects and individual willings⁵¹.

The work of persons testifies of their unity and common achievements guarantee deeper and prolonged unity. The unity of the personality of a higher order persists across time by virtue of the long-term chains of transmission of knowledge, chains of consciousnesses that, from the elders to the apprentices, *unify the collectivity in a common history*. Persons passively inherit historical formations, but they actively participate in

⁴⁹ Translated by Hahn, *Hua* XIV, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Hahn, “The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl”, p. 167.

⁵¹ We emphasize, translated by Buckley, Husserl, *Husserliana XXVII: Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, p. 52.

the making of history through their collective work, and transmit their cultural-historical vocation to the next generation, and so on. In a personality of a higher order, the continuation of the community's present unity is incumbent on persons because they are responsible of their collective history.

In the passage quoted above, Husserl relates the ideal of good to collective life. The conservation and production of collective history through work is indeed inseparable from the ethical dimension of communal life that falls to persons: communalization is concomitant with the extension of the levels of value. Husserl writes:

The community can have a self-valuation and a will directed towards this, a will of self-formation. All acts of community are founded in the acts of the individuals which found the community. Therein *lies the possibility that a community is able to become an ethical subject*, just as the individual subject *reflecting upon itself* in a valuing and willing manner⁵².

Following Hahn, we have to make clear that, for Husserl, the imperative to collective ethical orientation is not a conservative or normative drive with regards to common traditions: "Rather, it is an obligation to participate in the generation of one's own context, through a combination of self-reflection and communal influence"⁵³. Again, we see that in an authentic personal community, *unity and harmony prevail among past, present and future members*.

For Husserl, unity culminates when each person of the community consciously and entirely orients him- or herself according to the value of *love*. Love is, for Husserl, not an emotional concept but a conscious drive towards other subjects taken not as objects but as persons, it is "a striving...for personal contact"⁵⁴. Members of the community of love (*Liebesgemeinschaft*) are constantly directed towards one another as persons. Yet, what make the community of love the pinnacle, the ideal of human unity is that its members are *collectively conscious of being bound together by love*. Thus, members of the community of love know of their communal responsibility in keeping alive the community as a community of love, the community of love comes with the "*ultimate level of responsibility towards one's entire ethical context*"⁵⁵. A collectivity that would be entirely and authentically oriented towards the practice of *philosophy* is for Husserl the paradigm of such ideal community. The following passage synthesizes Husserl's view on the collective

⁵² We emphasize, translated by Buckley, Husserl, op. cit., p. 49.

⁵³ Hahn, "The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl", p. 174.

⁵⁴ Translated by Hahn, *Hua XIV*, p. 172.

⁵⁵ We emphasize, Hahn, "The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl", p. 174.

striving towards absolute, universal values of good, and rationality, which is concomitant with being directed towards the *telos* of humanity:

the ultimate self-understanding of man as being responsible for his own human being: his *self-understanding as being in being called to a life of apodicticity*, not only in abstractly practicing apodictic science in the usual sense but [as being mankind] which realizes its whole concrete being in apodictic freedom by becoming apodictic mankind in the whole active life of its reason – through which it is human; as I said, mankind understanding itself as rational, understanding that it is rational in seeking to be rational; that this signifies an infinity of living and striving toward reason; that reason is precisely that which man *qua* man, in his innermost being, is aiming for, that which alone can satisfy him, make him “blessed”; that reason allows for no differentiation into “theoretical,” “practical,” “aesthetic,” or whatever; that being human is teleological being and an ought-to-be, and that this teleology holds sway in each and every activity and project of an ego; that through self-understanding in all this it can know the apodictic *telos*; and that this knowing, the ultimate self-understanding, has no other form than self-understanding according to a priori principles as self-understanding in the form of philosophy⁵⁶.

In this section, we have reconstructed the process of communalization in Husserl’s analyses of the social world. We have highlighted, following Hahn, that communalization builds *unity both at the subjective and intersubjective levels*. Through communalization, the subject concretizes as a person, and a community of authentic persons strives towards the utmost unity, the community of love. Besides, this explanation has allowed us to see how Husserl’s ethical and teleological notions articulate. Notably, we have seen that ethical and teleological ideals are *always phenomenologically present in the intentional life of subjects*, but through communalization, they are progressively made thematic by the subject, or the community of subjects. Their implicit presence in the passive life of consciousness is *progressively reflectively apprehended*, and thus is lifted to the active life of consciousness. The unity of persons based on the values of love and reason fits into *an ideal of active, reflective and collective awareness of the ethical task of humanity*, which resides in striving towards the ideal of a community of love.

⁵⁶ Appendix IV *Krisis*, pp. 340-341.

5.2. THE SPIRITUAL PRESENCE OF WRITINGS

We now have all the conceptual resources for studying how the presence of writing in general serves the collective striving towards the community of love. First we will explain why we will restrain the discussion to the ideally active mode of dealing with writing in this section⁵⁷. Then, we will discuss Husserl's recurrent example of the scientific community because it provides a paradigm for thinking a community that benefits from the presence of writing in order to achieve high levels of unity⁵⁸. Finally, we will determine the essential *positive* contributions of writing to communalization⁵⁹.

The two modes for aiming at writings

As we know, the phenomenological insight reveals that passive and active intentionalities co-occur in the life of consciousness; and in general, the degree of passivity and activity of intentional life stands in a continuum⁶⁰. Besides, we have just seen how, for Husserl, the active seizing of consciousness, i.e. reflection, is a necessary activity for fulfilling personal or communal unity.

By extension, consciousness has the possibility to aim at writings in a predominantly active or passive way. Husserl writes in *OG*: "There is a distinction, then, between passively understanding the expression and making it self-evident by reactivating its meaning"⁶¹: on the one hand, when writing is passively aimed at, the subject's experience of writing is dominated by associations which are motivated by the object; on the other hand, when he actively aims at writing, the subject works, or strives, to have the *personal certainty* that he aims at the correct objects via the words. We will see that this distinction is central to analyzing the links between writing and communalization. Indeed, on the one hand, active aiming at writing fosters communalization is a way that we will detail below while, on the other hand, we will analyze in the following chapter how passive aiming at writing can hinder, or damage the unity of the person and of communities.

Thus, as for now, we can note an initial contribution of Husserl's method: the phenomenological reduction allows the analyst to see that writing offers the possibility to be seized passively and actively. Hence, it provides an approach to *examining the implications of this distinction for the subject's experience of the world*. In the rest of our

⁵⁷ *Infra*, p. 72.

⁵⁸ *Infra*, p. 73.

⁵⁹ *Infra*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ *Supra*, p. 60.

⁶¹ *OG*, p. 361.

discussion, we aim to show that, beyond this, the Husserlian apparatus contributes to grasping anew the whole problem of the presence of writing for humanity.

The paradigm of the scientific community

Husserl recurrently takes the community of rigorous philosophers and scientists as a paradigmatic example of an ideally unified human association⁶². The link between the ideally unified human community – the community of love –, and the ideal scientific community is drawn by Husserl based on the notion of *rationality*. Indeed, Ales Bello writes: “The idea of a community of love is concomitant with the ideal of a ‘rational’ humanity, that is, a humanity that is aware of its own ethical task”⁶³. Thus, the scientific community is a community that is collectively consciously oriented towards the love of humanity *because it exclusively seeks achievements of reason*.

As much as any subject, scientists – such as rigorous philosophers or geometers – become persons through the process we described in the previous section⁶⁴. Further, given that their collective vocation is to discover, study, and share ideal forms that are valid for any human, science practitioners elevate to a higher level of communalization such as we discussed above⁶⁵ by virtue of their scientific activity.

More precisely, scientists attain a new level of communalization by virtue of the *idealization process*⁶⁶, which is the “internal ‘origin’ of scientific theory”⁶⁷. Idealization enables persons and collectivities “living in finitude” to consciously orient themselves towards “poles of infinity”⁶⁸. In this passage from the *Krisis*, Husserl explains how the process of idealization, which he attributes the first instance to Greek philosophers, is a major lift for the communalization of humans:

Precisely in this way there arises a new type of communautization and a new form of enduring community whose spiritual life, communalized through the love of ideas, the production of ideas, and through ideal lifenorms, bears within itself the future-horizon of infinity: that of an infinity of generations being renewed in the spirit of ideas. This, then, is accomplished at first within

⁶² To the previously cited instances of Husserl’s recurrent use of the scientific community, we can add *Renouveau*, p. 74.

⁶³ A. Ales Bello. *The divine in Husserl and other explorations*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, p. 56.

⁶⁴ *Supra*, p. 61.

⁶⁵ *Supra*, p. 67.

⁶⁶ On this, we may refer back to our discussion on scientific idealities in chapter 4, *supra*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Toulemont, *L’essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 221.

⁶⁸ *Krisis*, p. 277.

the spiritual space of a single nation, the Greek nation, as the development of philosophy and of philosophical communities⁶⁹.

Being oriented towards the universal value of reason, the collective and reflectively conscious striving of scientists for the discovery of ideal, universal forms is thought of by Husserl as an authentically human mode of existence. Thus, scientists, and rigorous philosophers, are not just a theoretic example in Husserl's model, they actually have a *practical exemplary function* in the community: that of guiding the community towards higher levels of communalization and providing methods for it⁷⁰.

Let us now clarify the relation between the ideal scientific community and the presence of writings. In chapter 4, via the example of geometry, we have seen that writing is the necessary technique for assuring the full constitution of ideal scientific objects because it provides them with physical persistence and makes them at disposal for any geometer⁷¹. Therefore, correlatively, on the subjective side, the scientific community which deals with these ideal objects persists by virtue of the presence of writings. Accordingly to our remarks about the distinction between the passive and active mode for aiming at writing, we need to add that, more precisely, the scientific community persists *by virtue of its active relationship, or work, with writing*. For the moment, let us consider that we are dealing with an ideal scientific community which maintains an *ideally active* relationship with writing.

Writing preserves the ideal objects of the scientific community which, in return, by virtue of writing, can develop large meaning formations via potentially unbreakable chains of consciousness. Therefore, ideally, scientists form a personality of higher order collectively oriented towards an ideal end of reason *by virtue of the presence of writing*. Thus, the new level of communalization which comes with writing that Husserl evokes in *OG* is closely related to the new level attained by the scientific community via the process of idealization because writing completes the constitution of ideal objects as much as it lifts the entire scientific community to higher levels of communality. We still have to examine the modalities of this lift. Bearing the example of the scientific community in mind, we can reflect beyond it upon the essential contribution of writing to the constitution of personalities of a higher order.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *Renouveau*, p. 74.

⁷¹ *Supra*, p. 48.

The unity of literates

Examining the exemplary relationship of the ideal scientific community with writing enables us to make some remarks about the role of writing in communalization at large. First, we understand that writing does not lift man to a new level of communalization mechanically. Writing is a mode of conservation of meaning that may be used by humans in order to reach higher levels of communal life, but the mere presence of an inert mass of writings does not turn subjects into more fulfilled persons. To illustrate this point, we can draw an analogy between the mass of writings and Husserl's example of the linguistic community⁷². Husserl notes that a group of subjects that share the same language, that could potentially understand each other, does not constitute a community because the members of such a group are not *a priori* bound by personal ties, e.g. it does not imply that they consciously pursue a vocation in common. Analogously, the presence of written words consigned by contemporary or passed-away co-humans does not by itself constitute a community of trans-historic literates.

However, we know that active intentionalities are necessary to personal and communal unity⁷³. The contemporary literate has the possibility to work on the writings others put at humanity's disposal in order to reactivate and intuit *personally* their originary meaning. If he or she succeeds, progressively, to seize the objects that the authors aimed at, their consciousnesses unify; in this sense, writings makes possible *genuine virtual communication*.

More than a punctual active relationship to writings, the subject may even take on as a *vocation* to study other persons' writings. This person decides to unify his or her life with co-humans from a horizon of past and in a horizon of potential co-humans to come. Amid this horizon of co-humanity, the active literate may continue, correct, or complete, the work co-humans left unfinished⁷⁴. Then, as a subject who strives for fulfillment in an actively apprehended horizon of co-humanity, this literate person is striving to become an authentic human.

Thus, we understand that literates will not reach personal fulfillment as a mere consequence of the presence of writing, nor due to their technical ability to potentially decipher texts. Rather, we see that the vocation of persons guides the usage of writing, not the contrary. Importantly, contemporary literates are able to take on as a vocation the work of co-humans based on their writings *only if these authors were, in the first*

⁷² We already discussed this example in chapter 3, *supra*, p. 37.

⁷³ Following Hahn, we made apparent the decisiveness of activity in the constitutive process throughout the previous section, *supra*, p. 59.

⁷⁴ We are leaning on Husserl's Plato example in *Gemeingeist 2*, § 5, *SI-2*, pp. 291-292.

place, pursuing a vocation. Writing effectively makes possible for vocations to reemerge via the life of others in spite of contingent breaks of transmission such as cognitive forgetting or death only by virtue of the literate's reactivation work of the persisting traces of personal and collective vocations it conceals. Therefore, *the vocation by virtue of which the presence writings may lift literates to higher level of communalization necessarily relies on a collective, trans-historic active relationship to writings.*

The writings bequeathed by the elders to contemporary literate persons constitute a horizon of past humanity, while contemporary literate persons work in a horizon of literate co-humans to come. Hence, *writing enables co-humans to virtually address humanity at large.* Active literates collectively maintain alive trans-historic spiritual ties with an indefinite horizon of co-humanity. This is why active literates may not only strive towards more fulfilled personal constitution, they most importantly have the possibility to collectively strive towards the unity of humanity.

Therefore, a community that is *reflectively* aware of its literacy becomes conscious that, by virtue of it, it is directed towards humanity at large and has the possibility to foster its unity through work. In light of this, it may effectively strive towards the all-encompassing unity of human consciousness, a humanity of persons reflectively striving towards a universal end: the absolute values of reason, love, harmony; *an authentically human, unified humanity.*

We have just seen that vocation is a necessary condition for a practice of writing that fosters trans-historic unity of humanity. Furthermore, we know from our account on the constitution of the person and personalities of a higher order that reflection is indeed the ultimate step towards fulfillment for Husserl, this is why we have just mentioned the necessity for *reflective literacy* so that literates effectively strive towards unifying humanity. Nonetheless, we are still confined to a superficial understanding of the presence of writing and we do not seize its specific contribution to communalization. We now have to take into account that the presence of writing makes necessary a *specific work* from literate persons. We will see in chapter 6 that, by extension, literacy necessitate a specific kind of reflection.

Indeed, as we saw in chapter 4 via the example of geometry, the collective work of literate persons necessarily includes two technical activities: reading and writing⁷⁵. Husserl writes:

the writing-down effects a transformation of the original mode of being of the meaning-structure, [e.g.] within the geometrical sphere of self-evidence,

⁷⁵ *Supra*, p. 50.

of the geometrical structure which is put into words. It becomes sedimented, so to speak. But the reader can make it self-evident again, can reactivate the self-evidence⁷⁶.

Thus, not only does the presence of writing introduce two technical activities – reading and writing –, but at the ontological level it makes necessary integrating *two secondary tasks* to the collective striving of literate persons: reactivation of the originary meaning, and concerns about univocal language; let us unpack this claim.

Husserl shows in *OG* that the more univocal the written statement, the easier the reactivation of the original meaning. Besides, we have just seen that personal unity via writing is attainable only if literates actively work to seize the original objects as they were consigned by co-humans. Therefore, we can further argue that it is thanks to the univocal character of writings that the literate subject can virtually communicate with past co-humans and consign safely his own writings in a horizon of co-humans to come. In other words, *specifically by virtue of the univocal character of writing, the subjective and intersubjective constitutive horizons widen to potentially encompass humanity at large, and the trans-historic unity of humanity itself that the presence of writing makes possible is grounded in the univocity of written statements*. We may finally put forward that *the more univocal the written statements, the wider the horizon of humanity in presence of writings*.

Given that, it does not suffice to say that literate persons are unified by a vocation: furthermore, they have to pay attention to their relationship to writing itself in order to make sure that, collectively, they have full control over the meaning consigned in writings. They have to complete what Husserl calls the “linguistic duty”⁷⁷: i.e. they have to make sure the words disclose the meaning they conceal and completely reactivate it. The unity of literate persons essentially depends on the completion of the linguistic duty. Furthermore, given the widening of the constitutive horizon that univocity entails, *in presence of writings the unity of humanity depends on the literates’ reflective take on their literacy and its essential implications*⁷⁸.

Note that, in our Husserlian framework, we provide an ontological ground to the critique Ong addresses to philosophers: as we discussed earlier⁷⁹, the scholar blames contemporary philosophers for their lack of reflectivity with regard to literacy and its causal implications on thinking. Our analysis of the essential properties of the presence

⁷⁶ *OG*, p. 361.

⁷⁷ Husserl, manuscript A V, 5, p. 26, cited in Perreau, *Le monde social selon Husserl*, p. 348.

⁷⁸ We develop the ethical aspect of this question in the upcoming chapter, *infra*, p. 95.

⁷⁹ See *supra* p. 22.

of writings give reasons for taking this critique seriously. Moreover, in the next chapter, we will argue that Husserl's model provides tools for concretely achieving the reflective literacy Ong advocates.

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* *

In this chapter, we first highlighted that the process of communalization is characterized by the advent of unification both at the subjective and intersubjective levels: the person concretizes and communities acquire a personal character in the social world. Notably, we insisted on the shift from passive to active experience of the world for the achievement of unity: *the elevation to reflective awareness of personal and interpersonal unity is a decisive step towards higher, more human levels of communalization.*

In this framework, we saw that by virtue of univocity the presence of writing offers humans *extended powers of unification* because it allows virtual communication and co-working with humans from the past and in a horizon of indefinite co-humanity. In this sense, *the presence of writing widens subjective and communal constitutive horizons.* Importantly, literates who rigorously work to make sense of writings from peers and elders in the present, and literates who produce authentically sensible and univocal writings, elevate collectively to unprecedented levels of communalization *when they become reflectively aware that they are taking part in the universal historic production of humanity.* Thus they know that they contribute to unifying humanity; through their work, they commemorate humanity itself. By virtue of this, they behave in an authentically human way. In light of the reflection appears the possibility to collectively dedicate their lives to the constitution of a humanity unified by values of love, harmony and rationality.

CHAPTER 6

WRITING AND THE IDEA OF HUMANITY

*Nous voulons conserver ce qu'avaient
d'humain les anciennes humanités.
Nous voulons sauver ce qu'a d'humain
l'humanité présente.*

— Charles Péguy

In the previous chapter, our discussion about literate communities was voluntarily limited to the ideal case of communities that seize *actively* the presence of writing. By virtue of reflective awareness of their literacy, we saw how humans are offered the possibility to collectively benefit from the presence writings. Even though activity and reflective awareness are decisive steps in the elevation of personal and communal lives, we must now take into consideration that they are “by no means necessary or even factually normal”¹. As we saw in the previous chapter², writings offer consciousness the possibility to be aimed at “purely passively and receptively”³. Now we have to deal with this side of the issue; what if subjects, individually and collectively content themselves with a predominantly passive relationship to writing?

In order to address this question, in the first section of the current chapter we will rely on a paradigmatic example. Indeed, *OG* is a foundational text for Derrida: his philosophy and subsequent developments of his thought can be traced back to his introduction to this Husserlian manuscript⁴. Nonetheless, we will study how he comes to adopt a theoretical stance with regard to writing that is diametrically opposed to Husserl’s⁵.

¹ *OG*, p. 361n.

² *Supra*, p. 72.

³ *OG*, p. 361n.

⁴ J. Derrida. *Introduction*. In: E. Husserl. *L'origine de la géométrie*. Paris: PUF, 1962, pp. 3–171.

⁵ *Infra*, p. 80.

These observations will lead us to do the phenomenology of the passive experience of writing in general and, respecting Husserl's methodological analogy between the person and communities, we will reflect upon the implications of such a passive relationship with writing regarding the process of communalization⁶. Finally, we will suggest a philosophical response to the ethical concerns that our analysis will unveil⁷.

6.1. THE LITERATE BYSTANDER

Based on his acute knowledge of historical facts with regards to the interactions of writing and mind, Ong reproaches Derrida's unreflective literacy⁸. According to Ong, Derrida's philosophy distorts reality because he disregards the fact that his own reflection is, on various aspects, dependent on the technologies of script. The influence of the presence of writing onto the mind is not questioned in Derrida's reflection on writing. Acknowledging Ong's remarks, in this section we would like to examine passages from early Derridean texts in order to describe and understand his relationship with writing. First, we will read a passage from his introduction to *OG* in which Derrida introduces a reflection on writing that departs from the Husserlian project⁹. Then, based on two passages from *L'écriture et la différence*¹⁰, we will examine how Derrida implements his relationship to writing¹¹ and, finally, we will put our phenomenological inquiries into practice in order to analyze and comment on the workings of Derrida's take on writing¹².

The choice of equivocity

In his introduction to *OG*, Derrida explicates in details Husserl's account of the distinction between active and passive relationship to writing; he writes in a note:

Dans *La crise de l'humanité européenne*, le phénomène de crise est présenté comme une « maladie » de la société et de la culture européennes, maladie qui n'est pas « naturelle » et ne relève pas de quelque art naturel de guérir. Cette « pathologie » a d'ailleurs le sens éthique profond d'une chute dans la « passivité », d'une incapacité à se rendre « responsable » du sens dans une activité ou une « réactivation » authentiques. L'activité technique – celle de

⁶ *Infra*, p. 88.

⁷ *Infra*, p. 95.

⁸ Ong, *Orality and literacy*, pp. 169-170.

⁹ *Infra*, p. 80.

¹⁰ J. Derrida. *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1967.

¹¹ *Infra*, p. 83.

¹² *Infra*, p. 85.

la science aussi – en tant que telle, est une passivité au regard du sens ; elle est l'agitation du malade et, déjà, le tremblement d'un délire¹³.

Derrida's citation condenses central aspects of Husserl's thought on writing which motivates this work and that we will develop in the last section. Let us retain for now that, very generally, Husserl relates the intellectual crisis he points at with a *passive collective relationship to writing and techniques in general*. Besides, we observe that, the issues of passivity and activity with regard to meaning pertain to ethical concerns for the phenomenologist. Nonetheless, Derrida does not put his own thinking in line with his master's.

On the contrary, Derrida gives himself over to a meliorative take on passivity in the sixth section of his introduction. Before examining this significant passage, let us replace the discussion in its context. Midway through his piece, Derrida has just introduced the central role of writing in *OG*. As we saw in chapter 4¹⁴, Husserl advocates optimizing re-activability of geometric statements. Reactivation is most attainable when the statement is unequivocal, therefore geometers must care about the “*univocity*”¹⁵ of their written statements. In Husserl's view, equivocity hinders reactivation and thus encourages passive aiming at statements. This is why equivocity is ruinous for the preservation of the originary meaning of spiritual formations. Derrida insists, formulating Husserl's stance: « Husserl n'a jamais cessé d'en appeler à l'impératif de l'univocité. L'équivocité est le chemin de toute aberration philosophique »¹⁶.

In the sixth section of his introduction, while Husserl is interested in the constitution and preservation of the originary meaning of geometric propositions, Derrida himself takes the floor and surreptitiously introduces a project that is foreign to Husserl's: to “interiorize the memory of a culture”¹⁷. Leaving the domain of scientific statements, he proposes two “tentatives”¹⁸ for dealing with the cultural equivocity of writing. As we know, one of them is embodied by Husserl, who seeks ideal univocity; the other tentative is introduced by Derrida and explicitly inspired by J. Joyce's relationship to writing. It relies on a mode of writing that reverses the value of univocity and equivocity. In the following passage, quoted in full, Derrida depicts what form such meliorative apprehension on equivocity might take:

¹³ Derrida, *Introduction*, pp. 74-75n.

¹⁴ *Supra*, p. 50.

¹⁵ We emphasize, *OG*, p. 362.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Introduction*, p. 101.

¹⁷ Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

L'une [des deux tentatives] ressemblerait à celle de J. Joyce : répéter et reprendre en charge la totalité de l'équivoque elle-même, en un langage qui fasse affleurer à la plus grande synchronie possible la plus grande puissance des intentions enfouies, accumulées et entremêlées dans l'âme de chaque atome linguistique, de chaque vocable, de chaque mot, de chaque proposition simple, par la totalité des cultures mondaines, dans la plus grande génialité de leurs formes (mythologie, religion, sciences, arts, littérature, politique, philosophie, etc.) ; faire apparaître l'unité structurale de la culture empirique totale dans l'équivoque généralisée d'une écriture qui ne traduit plus une langue dans l'autre à partir de noyaux de sens communs, mais circule à travers toutes langues à la fois, accumule leurs énergies, actualise leurs consonances les plus secrètes, décèle leurs plus lointains horizons communs, cultive les synthèses associatives au lieu de les fuir et retrouve la valeur poétique de la passivité ; une écriture qui, au lieu de le « réduire », s'installe résolument *dans* le champ *labyrinthique* de la culture « enchaînée » par ses équivoques, afin de parcourir et de reconnaître le plus actuellement possible la plus profonde distance historique possible¹⁹.

Derrida exposes the interest, in his view, to *embrace equivocity*. In order to pursue this project, note that at the end of this passage Derrida explicitly formulates the need to leave the phenomenological reduction behind. He refers to, and refuses, Husserl's *epoché*²⁰, when he writes that such a novel relationship to writing does not aim to “put off-side in quotation marks” the domain of equivocity. Rather, it aims to “resolutely settle *in* the *labyrinthic* field of culture that is ‘*enchained*’ in equivocity”²¹. Therefore, Derrida makes explicit that his analytical gaze does not seek a methodologically distanced, or overarching standpoint from the life of consciousness, but aspires to look at equivocity *horizontally*, at the ground level so to speak. Furthermore, Derrida seems to attribute a predominantly passive role to the reader who, in his view, may let him- or herself be suggested meaning that co-humans consigned in the text by being receptive to the equivocity of writing.

This passage is important in Derrida's thought: as a matter of fact, later in his career, Derrida would make explicit in an oblique way that he had his own agenda in his *Introduction*. Even in his academic writings, and in this one in particular, he

¹⁹ He emphasizes, Derrida, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

²⁰ I.e., the methodological and temporary *bracketing* of contingencies that is a premise to Husserlian phenomenological analyses.

²¹ Derrida, *Introduction*, p. 104.

confesses that he is inhabited by J. Joyce's ghost²². Hence, Derrida signals that he has to be taken at his words and, *for analytical purposes*, we have to be attentive to what his texts evoke to us as readers, such as the somewhat lyrical tone that is latent in this depiction of equivocal writings. In order to prolong and refine our description of Derrida's relationship to writing, let us examine some passages from one of Derrida's 1967 publications: *L'écriture et la différence*.

The spectacle of the crisis

In "Force et signification"²³, Derrida asserts his conception of writing with more confidence. Let us comment on the literal aspects of two passages in particular in which Derrida's writing style itself illustrates the enactment of the meliorative take on equivocity that he mentioned in his *Introduction to OG*. More precisely, we will see that he literally *puts up a show* with writing. Let us replay the performance he invites the reader to be the spectator of before reflecting upon the mechanisms behind the scene.

On the scene of writing, before the eyes of the enthralled reader, writing makes its entrance:

C'est parce qu'elle est inaugurale, au sens jeune de ce mot, que l'écriture est dangereuse et angoissante. Elle ne sait pas où elle va, aucune sagesse ne la garde de cette précipitation essentielle vers le sens qu'elle constitue et qui est d'abord son avenir. Elle n'est pourtant capricieuse que par lâcheté. Il n'y a donc pas d'assurance contre ce risque. L'écriture est pour l'écrivain, même s'il n'est pas athée, mais s'il est écrivain, une navigation première et sans grâce²⁴.

This passage first strikes at the level of form, the words used to depict writing evoke a wild animal – "dangerous", "frightening", "capricious". The writer is like a sailor amid a rough sea, he does not have control over the elements, he takes risks by handling writing. In this scenery, Derrida posits himself as the person who unleashes the beast. Indeed, in his view, writing is tamed by "no wisdom", it is "cowardly". Besides, note that writing is said to "precipitate itself towards the meaning *that it constitutes*"²⁵. This claim shows that Derrida does not consider consciousness to be the only organ of constitution, the

²² J. Derrida. *Ulysse gramophone*. Paris: Galilée, 1987, p. 27.

²³ J. Derrida. "Force et signification". In: *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1967, pp. 9–49.

²⁴ Derrida, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁵ We emphasize.

source of sense. As he mentioned in his introduction to *OG*, he has departed from the radical insight of the phenomenological reduction.

In another passage, Derrida rattles the structures of meaning, then withdraws and incites the reader to observe from afar formations of meaning collapsing:

On peut alors menacer *méthodiquement* la structure pour mieux la percevoir, non seulement en ses nervures mais en ce lieu secret où elle n'est ni érection ni ruine mais labilité. Cette opération s'appelle (en latin) *soucier* ou *solliciter*. Autrement dit *ébranler* d'un ébranlement qui a rapport au tout (de *sollus*, en latin archaïque : le tout, et de *citare* : pousser)²⁶.

In his introduction to *OG*, Derrida advocates embracing every shades of meaning of written words. Here, he manifestly accentuates this stance by providing the reader with language that is loaded with equivocity. The ambiguous language he plays with evokes the image of a literary critic pining for the imminent theoretical collapsing of the text, the “*moment décadent*”²⁷. In this passage, the deconstruction of the text appears as the solitary pleasure of the post-structuralist literary critic. We may envision that passage as an advanced expression of the “impure”²⁸ literary critique he aims to deliver.

Although it may seem superficial, given that Derrida pays attention to his writing style, we ought to take seriously, as a philosophical and historical problem, the malaise one may feel in front of such writings. Phenomenologically, this impression necessarily has to do with how writing is aimed at by consciousness and we have to analyze this phenomenon. Besides, at a theoretic level, Derrida attributes certain properties to writings that are foreign to our own analysis. Further than that, his understanding of writing apparently goes against our conclusions in the previous chapter: while our Husserlian account showed that writing enlarges the constitutive prospect of individuals and collectivities, Derrida holds the view that writing is dangerous and self-destructive. We are concerned all the more so as Derrida gets to his conclusions based on the same texts we use. In the next subsection, we will adopt the phenomenological attitude in order to reflect upon Derrida's understanding, and usage of writing. Thus, we will see how, in practice, Derrida's reflection deviates from Husserl's, which explicates his philosophy of writing. Besides, paying attention to the experience of Derrida's texts will also give a more complete insight on the essential properties of the presence of writing. Finally,

²⁶ Derrida, “Force et signification”, p. 13.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, p. 366n.

it will indicate a method for getting around what, we will argue later²⁹, is one iconic manifestation of the “seduction of language”³⁰ that Husserl warned his contemporaries about.

The textualist attitude

Let us depart from discussing the form and try to reflect upon the principle of Derrida’s relationship with writing. In *L’écriture et la différence*, Derrida depicts writing as a subject-less entity that constitutes meaning (*sens*). However, cognitively and in our Husserlian model, *only consciousness constitutes*, only subjects make sense of objects. Thus, we need to wonder about the logic behind these claims. The experience of writing that Derrida advocates, and implements, necessarily has to do with some mechanisms that are internal to the life of consciousness. The question we have to answer is the following: what mechanisms underlying consciousness’s relationship with writing is Derrida’s philosophy the expression of?

In the passages discussed above, Derrida incites the literate subject that is confronted to writing to be the *spectator* of the meaning that “*arises*”, rather than to be in control of it. Thus, Derrida pay particularly attention to the intentional acts that are *primarily motivated by the object* rather than those actively decided by the subject. As we know from our brief account of the workings of consciousness³¹, this is the definition of passive intentional acts.

In *OG*, Husserl gives a succinct description of the passive aiming at writings:

there also exist possibilities of a kind of activity, a thinking in terms of things that have been taken up merely receptively, passively, which deals with significations only passively understood and taken over, without any of the self-evidence of original activity. Passivity in general is the realm of things that are bound together and melt into one another associatively, where all meaning that arises is put together passively³².

The acts of association that, in the natural attitude, happen without the subject’s reflective awareness, are stimulated by equivocal writings. As we saw via his meliorative take on equivocity in his introduction to *OG*, Derrida values these passive acts of consciousness. Furthermore, in “Force et signification” he deliberately triggers them by making

²⁹ *Infra*, p. 95.

³⁰ *OG*, p. 362.

³¹ *Supra*, p. 60.

³² *OG*, p. 361.

use of equivocal language himself. Therefore, we understand that *the matter of Derrida's reflection is the passive life of consciousness*.

We saw that Derrida knows how to play with equivocity, to put a show with it, so as to stimulate the passive life of consciousness. In order to be able to do this, Derrida must somehow sense the passive life of consciousness that his writing motivates. More precisely, Derrida's equivocal writing style shows that as a subject he does not merely receive passivity but that, cognitively, he must simultaneously have a reflective awareness of his own passive intentional life. This is necessary in order to, even subconsciously, be able to exploit equivocity as he does in writings that generate passive intentionalities. Let us examine in greater details the specificities of his reflective take.

As a person in the social world, the most natural way to experience a text written in a language that I master is *comprehension*, like when I make sense of road signs and newspaper articles. However, this is not the attitude one is incited to adopt with Derrida's texts. Rather, his texts call the reader's attention to themselves, both by striking at the level of form, and by depicting a weary experience of writing; *Derrida's texts call the reader's attention to their being-given-ness*. Implicitly, the reader himself engages in a reflection on how writing is given to him. Yet, reflecting upon the passive reception of writing is not a normal, personalist attitude with regard to text: let us call it *the textualist attitude*.

Derrida's enterprise relies on the subject's capacity to adopt these two attitudes: on the one hand, in the personalist attitude³³, the subject experiences equivocal writing passively; on the other hand, the subject reflects upon his passive experience of writing. One might ask: given that Derrida is reflecting upon one's life of consciousness and incites the reader to do so, why is his enterprise any different from Husserl's?

The difference between Derrida's reflective take and Husserl's phenomenological reduction finds its roots in their divergent relationship to passivity and activity. On the one hand, Husserl aims to discern introspectively the modalities of the experience of the world in order to describe acutely intentional life in an unequivocal way. Thus *Husserl's reflection is necessarily active*, it is even one of the utmost active activities of consciousness: a "fully consciously practiced method"³⁴. On the other hand, Derrida makes explicit that he is not interested in actively accounting for the passive constitutive life of consciousness and advocates passive reception of meaning. As proof of this stance, he maintains that writing generates meaning, and clearly yields to the impression that

³³ See *supra* p. 30 for our discussion of the personalist attitude.

³⁴ § 69, *Krisis*, p. 236.

meaning is coming to him. Furthermore, in his introduction to *OG* Derrida suggests positing the gaze at the level of passivity, and in the passages we read, he does not make thematic the distinction of the personalist to the textualist attitudes. On top of that, his multi-layered equivocal writing style, made for stimulating passive intentionalities while simultaneously depicting writing that calls attention to itself, makes it complicated to even discern the transition from one attitude to the other. Only is it by virtue of our subsequent phenomenological analysis that we are able to start making apparent these mechanisms. Therefore, we can affirm that *his reflective take on writing is also situated in the passive life of consciousness*. Unlike Husserl's reduction which is firmly active and sharply separated from the natural or personalist attitude³⁵, *the Derridean subject constantly and subconsciously oscillates between the personalist and textualist attitudes*.

Now, we can unveil the cognitive machinery behind the scene of writing. Derrida's thought rests on the equivocity of writing which, experienced passively, motivates passive intentionalities which are themselves seized by a form of passive reflective take and finally written about in an equivocal manner. Therefore, Derrida creates the conditions for instituting a *circular intentional movement* within the passive life of consciousness of the subject who is confronted to his texts: *the subject who is passively aiming at the text is incited to simultaneously and implicitly aim at himself being affected by the text, while the text actually depicts such puzzling experience of writing*. When Derrida writes that writing precipitates onward to constitute meaning, this is precisely the phenomenon he is reporting.

As a final remark, now that we have shed light on the cognitive workings behind the scene of writing, we have to evoke the *theoretic pitfall* that Derrida's relationship with writing introduces. While Husserl keeps strictly distinct the phenomenological, reflective attitude from the personalist or natural attitudes, on the contrary Derrida *blurs the distinction* between the different attitudes. Therefore, although he may simply be playing with the impression that writing donates meaning, he also sets a trap for inattentive readers by leaving the door open to *an illusory reversal of constitutive process* between consciousness and writing; writing being taken as the source of meaning and consciousness its optional recipient. This would be diametrically opposed to a phenomenological analysis of the experience of the world, and detached from any cognitive reality.

In the previous chapter, after the account on subjective and intersubjective unity, we saw that the actively reflective use of writing could lift humans to the highest levels of communalization. We insisted, following Husserl, that linguistic univocity is central

³⁵ § 72, *Krisis*, p. 258.

to the unity of humanity because it provides any co-human with the ideal potentiality to make self-evident for himself the originary meaning of writings from passed away elders and to safely consign meaning to the attention of any co-human to come. Yet, Derrida suggests to move away from univocal to equivocal language in his introduction to *OG*, and he stages a relationship with writing that dwells in passivity in *L'écriture et la différence*. However, by reflecting upon the experience of Derridean texts, we saw that Derrida's conclusions with regard to the experience of writing are related to *a very specific relationship to writing*: Derrida depicts, exploits and incites the reader to adopt *a passive reflective take on writings experienced passively*. Based on the refined insight onto passive experience of writing that the paradigmatic example of Derrida offered us, the main objective of the following section is to reflect upon the passive experience of writing in general. We will see that, from our husserlian conception of the social world, the passive experience of writing is not directed toward the unity of persons and humanity, quite the contrary.

6.2. THE SPIRITLESS PRESENCE OF WRITINGS

Let us reflect upon the essential implications of a passive relationship to writings. First we will discuss the condition of the person who fails to seize meaning actively through text and, secondly, we mobilize Husserl's observation of the scientific community in crisis in order to ponder over the collective failure to reactivate meaning³⁶.

The literate vagabond

We saw in the previous chapter that, by reactivating the originary meaning consigned in writings, any literate subject can establish spiritual unity with co-humans from the past. Besides, written productions are virtually addressed to any co-human to come. In this regard, the presence of writing offers the literate subject the possibility to become reflectively aware of his taking part in human historic production and thus can strive to becoming a genuine human being by orienting his entire life towards building an authentically unified humanity. We also know from *OG*³⁷ that this possibility implies *to be attentive to the quality of technical work that writings necessitate*: the activities of reading and writing themselves³⁸. Indeed, conservation, reactivation and transmission of the authentic meaning via writings are optimized by the univocity of the linguistic

³⁶ *Infra*, pp. 88 and 92 respectively.

³⁷ *Supra*, p. 52.

³⁸ We will develop this point below, see *infra*, p. 99.

consigning.

However, it is possible that the literate subject fails to reactivate the originary meaning. Furthermore, we have just seen via the paradigmatic example of Derrida that the literate can refuse to acknowledge the importance of univocal writing. This situation has a twofold impact: on the one hand in this subsection we would like to show that it hinders the subject's personal constitution, on the other hand, we will see in the upcoming subsection that, correlatively, it impacts humanity's unity³⁹.

Consider an author who aims at an ideal object and writes a proposition that, when its meaning is fully reactivated, is supposed to enable the reader to aim at the same ideal object as the author. The subject who does not manage to reactivate independent parts of propositions, or does not articulate them correctly, cannot constitute the originary meaning consigned in the proposition of the author in an active unified way. Instead, it gives itself as vague, or distorted associatively by the reading subject's thinking habits for instance. *The passive literate cannot constitute the object he aims at through the words of the author as it was present to the author himself.* Husserl explains the process of failed activation in *OG*:

What often happens here is that a meaning arises which is apparently possible as a unity – i.e., can apparently be made self-evidence (*sic*) through a possible reactivation – whereas the attempt at actual reactivation can reactivate only the individual members of the combination, while the intention to unify them into a whole, instead of being fulfilled, comes to nothing; that is, the ontic validity is destroyed through the original consciousness of nullity⁴⁰.

Importantly, in this passage, Husserl makes clear that failed reactivation *affects both poles of the intentional act*: the object and the subject. We have just described the incomplete constitution of the object that is passively apprehended via writings, yet our account is partial if we do not take into consideration the subjective pole of the co-constitution process.

In the passage quoted above, Husserl writes that, in front of passively received writings, the subject experiences “the original consciousness of nullity” which “destroys” any possible conscious activity towards the object itself. Indeed, when the object is not self-evident *to the subject*, correlatively, the subject is therefore unable to aim at the same object that the author aimed at. His consciousness and that of the author *cannot unify*,

³⁹ *Infra*, p. 92.

⁴⁰ *OG*, pp. 361-362.

neither can one continue the work of the other for instance. A whole range of acts are out of reach of the subject who attempts to aim at an object via imperfectly reactivated propositions: the subject cannot understand, repeat, remember, assert, explain, judge an approximatively constituted object. In sum, the literate cannot *personally* take position with regards to the object. In this sense, failing to reactivate the originary meaning affects subjective constitution. More precisely, *predominantly passive reception of text obstructs the horizon of personal constitution.*

Let us see in greater details what constitutive prospects the subject is deprived of by predominantly passive apprehension of writings. We know that, by essence, an ideally active relationship to writing allows literate subjects to enter a domain of experience that is common to humanity at large. On the contrary, subjects who do not succeed in actively aiming at objects in common with other humans via writings cannot enter in a conscious and controlled way the domain of the universal. Necessarily, in this situation, *they cannot become reflectively conscious of the universality of his experience because they do not have access to this domain in the first place.*

By extension, without reflective awareness of accessing to the universal domain of experience, it is impossible for passive literates to consciously unify and orient their lives towards values that concern humanity in a universal way. For instance, a non-rigorous geometer who fails gaining access to the domain of ideal objects cannot consciously strive towards the ideal of discovering universal properties of geometric forms; in other words he cannot pursue the value of reason as a vocation. Similarly, subjects who do not have access to the consciousness of a universal domain that concerns any human cannot consciously strive towards the ideal of universal personal contact with regards to *any* co-human; in other words, the value of love cannot be placed as an absolute value with regard to humanity at large. More generally, *the ideal of a unified humanity cannot be pursued.*

We know that, by essence, writing gives humans the power to unify consciously with a horizon of past humanity and to virtually address a horizon of future humanity. In this sense, writing virtually gives humans access to the spiritual world of humanity at large. So far in this chapter, we have seen that maintaining a predominantly passive relationship to writings *obstructs* the constitutive horizon of the subject because it prevents the subject to access this level of communalization. Let us now take this situation to its logical conclusions by examining the further implication of passive literacy for the condition of the subject.

Subjects who are deprived of the access to humanity's spiritual world because of

a predominantly passive relationship to writings are unable to consciously act in line with co-humans in a common striving towards the idea of a humanity entirely oriented towards the ideal of love and reason. In other words, passive literates cannot intimately seize the universal *telos* of humanity, nor can they consciously take part in it. Therefore, *the subject who maintains a passive relationship to writings cannot become authentically human, in spite of its technical skills as a literate.*

The fact that we relate literacy and inhumanity may go against common understanding, so we let us say a bit more. Consider *non-literate subjects in the absence of writing*. For them, no trans-historic unity of consciousness such as the one that happens through virtual communication is possible. Thus, the horizon of humanity of non-literate subjects or communities is not as large as in presence of writings, nor is their constitutive horizon as wide. Yet, the absence of writings *does not impinge on the teleological prospects*: non-literates have the possibility to adopt a vocation and actively strive towards higher levels of constitution. In this sense, *they can strive towards authentic humanness.*

In presence of writings, the condition of the subject is more radically at stake. On the one hand, the constitutive horizon and the horizon of humanity are by essence widened to much higher levels. The *telos* of humanity *at large* is made at consciousness's reach. On the other hand, a passive relationship *closes* the access to this universal domain of experience. Hence, passive literacy deprives the subject of a "toward" to tend to, it purely *annihilates* constitutive prospects in favor of the consciousness of nullity. This is why the presence of writing makes possible seizing the universal *telos* of humanity while, in the same gesture, it condemns technically literate subjects to inhumanity as long as they maintain a predominantly passive relationship to writings.

The annihilation of constitutive prospects has very grave consequences with regard to the literate's relationship to history in general. Indeed, the passive literate cannot have any authentically human perspective amid the open horizon of humanity's historic production. Without teleological consciousness, the subject is incapable of understanding the course of history, nor the sense of his existence within it. Because of his passivity with regards to writings, *the literate is pushed aside from active participation in humanity's history*. Among co-humans, he is like a *vagabond*⁴¹, drifting from one ordeal to the next without the possibility to consciously conduct his life in coherence with the universal *telos* of humanity. He is incapable to lead a life with internal coherence *as a human*,

⁴¹ "Un vagabond qui se laisse pousser à l'aventure a ses épreuves, ses faits et méfaits. Mais il n'a pas d'histoire, il n'est pas un thème possible de biographie, s'il est vrai que la biographie doive être un mode de l'histoire. Il ne peut y avoir historicité au sens propre que pour un homme qui a prédestiné le sens unifié de sa vie [...]" (Toulemont, *L'essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 137).

i.e. a coherent human life. *He finds himself destitute of human historicity, hence of humanness.* Unlike what is commonly taken for granted, literacy does not necessarily come with human historicity. On the contrary, the passive literate is blatantly ahistoric, he is a vagabond.

In sum, the passive literate is incapable of unifying his life with any co-humans via writing, thus he cannot reflectively seize his existence as part of the universal historic production of humanity, nor can he consciously orient his life towards values that are universally good for humanity at large. In this regards, we understand that the presence of writings introduces the possibility for a radical undermining of subjective constitution: *the predominantly passive literate cannot constitute as a human.*

The division of literates

Analogously to the example of the passive literate, let us now examine the implications, for a community, of a predominantly passive relationship to writings. We will start again from Husserl's example of a scientific community. Yet, this time, we will not take it as the paradigm of an ideal community. On the contrary, throughout his life, Husserl has kept pointing at the critical situation of contemporary scientific and philosophical thinking. We will discuss some of his observations on this matter in order to highlight the analogy between our account on the passive literate and the scientific community in crisis. Then, we will go one step further than Husserl in suggesting that the situation of intellectual crisis primarily corresponds to a flawed relationship with writing such as the one we witnessed at the subjective level with the literate vagabond.

At the beginning of the *Cartesian meditations* (*CM*), Husserl formulates a critique of the practice of sciences and philosophy that he would later develop in the *Krisis*. He points at the *theoretical dispersion* of thinkers which, in his view, manifests an intellectual crisis. He deplors that there are now "so many philosophers and almost equally many philosophies" instead of "a unitary living philosophy"⁴². The unity of thinkers is only superficial, because they meet as persons in congresses, while their philosophies tread distinct paths.

By criticizing the fact that philosophers work in incoherent directions, Husserl does not imply that all thinkers should use similar methods and work on the same objects. On the contrary, he regrets the absence of "a serious discussion among conflicting theories"

⁴² E. Husserl. *Cartesian meditations. An introduction to phenomenology*. Trans. by D. Cairns. Dordrecht: Springer-science + Business media, B. V., 1960 (henceforth cited as *CM*), p. 5.

instead of a “pseudo-reporting and a pseudo-criticizing” as in contemporary philosophical debates. What Husserl points at is the absence of “the spirit that characterizes serious collaboration and an intention to produce ‘Objectively [*objektiv*] valid results’”⁴³. As conscious bearers of such spirit, fellow thinkers, even those who are in conflict with one another on intellectual grounds, “demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy”⁴⁴. Therefore, the incoherence of the work of thinkers shows that *they do not achieve an authentic unity of the will*, and are not moved by a common drive towards one universal end.

Interestingly, Husserl notes that, in spite of the crisis, thinkers continue to produce writings. He mentions the “philosophical literature growing beyond all bounds and almost without coherence”⁴⁵. Husserl relates the spiritless intellectual practice with *an aberrant use of writing*. Deprived of the authentic spirit of philosophy, writings amass inhumanly, which, we will see, contributes to establishing the crisis in return.

In the introductory passage from the *CM* that we are referring to, writing, unity and ethics are conceived of as interdependent. Indeed, Husserl writes that the intellectual division “hardly attests a mutual study carried on with a consciousness of responsibility”⁴⁶. Husserl indicates that, although they are not conscious of it, thinkers are commonly responsible for achieving spiritual unity via their collective work, whereas the disproportionate expansion of the thinkers’ written production is closely tied to an *unethical intellectual practice*. Husserl implies that science and philosophy practitioners lack reflective awareness of being actively participating in the universal work that has been carried out collectively by all authentic thinkers, in order to unify individual strivings in a common historical vocation.

In the previous chapter, Husserl’s paradigmatic example of the scientific community as an ideal community that relies on writing allowed us to highlight essential properties of the presence of writings with regard to communalization in general⁴⁷. Similarly here, his concerns about the critical state of the scientific community instantiates essential properties of the presence of writings.

Technically speaking, humans have the possibility to consult writings and bring back to life the past experience of co-humans. Yet, contrasting the examples of an ideal scien-

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Supra*, p. 75.

tific community with that of a scientific community in crisis shows that, schematically, this technical possibility offered by the presence of writings can be dealt in two opposed ways.

On the one hand, by fulfilling reactivation, literate subjects commemorate and co-work personally with potentially any human by means of writings. In this case, subjects precisely work, think, and remember *as humans*, they commemorate humanity, and writings are present to humans as *the living memory of humanity*. Furthermore, the presence of writing experienced as the living memory of humanity allows humans to become reflectively conscious that, by means of writings, they commemorate and address humanity at large, and that they may contribute to the conservation, transmission and production of the living memory of humanity. In this sense, working, thinking and remembering as a human allows one to seize, via the writings of its authentic thinkers, the universal *telos* humanity is directed towards, and to try being personally and collectively in line with this *telos*. In this sense, *the presence of writings offers the possibility to become conscious of what it means to be human*.

On the other hand, collectivities may fail reactivation, as illustrated by the intellectual crisis. The possibility of the crisis shows that the presence of writings does not guarantee the livingness of humanity's memory, but this is not the most important point with regard to the interrelation between crisis and writing. Beyond that, we see that the production of writings *itself* is altered by the crisis: when passive reception of writings prevails over active penetration of it to the originary meaning, literates are unable to unify through their use of writing. Instead of the living memory of humanity, *an incoherent mass of document immoderately accumulates*, and the enormous literature appears in return as dangerously overwhelming, it is the "weight of history"⁴⁸.

The idea of the *weight of history* is crucial because it makes apparent a parallel between subjective and intersubjective passivity with regards to meaning. At the subjective level, we saw how Derrida's multi-layered writing would stimulate the passive life of consciousness by using equivocal language while simultaneously describing the impression of writing freewheeling towards meaning. Hence, Derrida's experience of the deconstruction of the text is based on intentional circularity⁴⁹. At the intersubjective level, we see that due to passive literacy the living memory of humanity degenerates into a dead weight. The collective passive relationship to writings leads to the accumulation of documents which, in return, literates experience as an imposing mass because the lack

⁴⁸ Toulemont, *L'essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 210.

⁴⁹ *Supra*, p. 85.

of coherence hinders their capacity to have “the intuition of the essential”⁵⁰. Therefore, here again, writing experienced passively gives the impression of a self-feeding creature that contributes to the division of literates more than to their unity.

Actually, the analogy between the subjective and intersubjective passive uses of writing is twofold. The second parallel to be drawn has to do with intersubjective constitution which, let us not forget, is part of the co-constitution of the subject and the object⁵¹. On the objective side of the constitutive process, we know that prominent passivity with regards to originary meaning prevents literates to collectively constitute meaning and objects that are universal. Correlatively, on the intersubjective side, a collectivity of passive literates cannot achieve authentic human unity around these universal objects. As a result, a collectivity of passive literates cannot constitute itself as a community oriented towards universal values. Therefore we see that, analogously to the subjective constitution, *prominently passive collective reception of text obstructs the horizon of interpersonal constitution*. In spite of superficial, organizational coherence in the temporal life, collectivities of passive literates are fraught with the weight of history, they are bounds to live as a disparate ensemble of vagabonds, collectively at the margins of humanity’s universal historic production.

Both at the subjective and intersubjective levels, a predominantly passive relationship to writings hinders constitution. Besides, in this situation, subjects create the conditions for the presence of writing to be experienced as a menacing, self-feeding dead weight deprived of meaning. At this critical level, the presence of writing may even contribute to intra- and intersubjective division and dispersion, and, more generally to *dis-humanization*.

6.3. REBIRTH IN PRESENCE OF WRITINGS

So far, we discussed active and passive relationships to writing as two possibilities open to the choice of literate subjects. However, we have just seen that subjective and intersubjective phenomena of crisis find their roots in the literates’ passive relationship to writings. Thus, we finally have to address the *significance* of the choice between passivity and activity for literates, and their responsibility with regard to it.

In order to do so, we will first pinpoint the essential impact of the presence of writings for humanity⁵². After that, we will see that the presence of writing is inseparable from a

⁵⁰ Toulemont, *L’essence de la société selon Husserl*, p. 210.

⁵¹ *Supra*, p. 34 and p. 67.

⁵² *Infra*, p. 96.

specific ethical imperative that correlatively falls to literates⁵³. Finally, we will propose an ethical response to the menace of passive literacy⁵⁴.

The phenomenal distinction between passive and active intentional lives

Adopting Husserl's phenomenological attitude in chapter 5 allowed us to examine precisely what social sciences cannot see: *the intentional life*. In the processes of sedimentation and reactivation, passive and active intentionalities form what we called the organic cycle of the life of consciousness⁵⁵. Through this cycle, the person and the social world co-constitute.

Therefore we know that passive and active intentionalities are intertwined in the experience of the social world, socialized subjects spontaneously aim at the world simultaneously in active and passive ways. With regard to writing in particular, we examined how consciousness constitutes meaning actively and simultaneously lets itself be suggested meaning passively by writings, which may motivate active exploration. Generally speaking, passive and active intentionalities are both constitutive of unified persons and communities.

By virtue of our phenomenological understanding of the life of consciousness, we can make sense in a new fashion of the anthropological findings that we reviewed in the first part of this dissertation. Social scientists indicate that the interaction between consciousness and the technology of writing has had cognitive and historical impacts on human thought. For instance, at a cognitive level, Goody holds the view that scripturally formal techniques such as lists and tables might suggest new paths to thought⁵⁶. Besides, via Havelock and Ong's paradigmatic example of the Greek alphabet, we saw that the contingent features of a given script could pass on an analytical intuition to the literate mind⁵⁷ and open large theoretical perspectives⁵⁸.

The facts social scientists lean on to elaborate their hypothesis are contingent instances of an *a priori* determination that we can now grasp: *consciousness' intertwining of active and passive intentionalities jointly aimed at writing*. The intertwining of passive and active intentionalities while aiming at writings is *the origin* of the cognitive, historical and sociological implications of the presence of writings that the social scientists

⁵³ *Infra*, p. 98 respectively.

⁵⁴ *Infra*, p. 99.

⁵⁵ *Supra*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ *Supra*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ On consonant signs being an abstraction, see *supra*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Cf. our account on the transition from scriptural abstraction to scientific idealization, *supra*, pp. 18 and 20.

acutely discovered, it is necessarily *at the source of the specificities of the literate mind*.

This cognitive understanding of the interactions between writing and consciousness is only the basis of what the phenomenological insight makes visible. Firmly clinging onto the phenomenological attitude, we are now able to explore in greater details how the presence of writing determines humans *before* historical contingencies⁵⁹, and even *before* the cognitive interrelation of writing and consciousness⁶⁰: we may now identify the *a priori* implications of the presence of writing for humans.

In light of our understanding of the intentional life, let us reexamine the ontological implications of the presence of writing that our analysis has already revealed. We have seen that maintaining active or passive relationships to writings has diverging implications for the process of communalization: on the one hand, an ideally active relationship to writings widens the horizon of humanity's unification⁶¹; on the other hand, a predominantly passive relationship to writings obstructs the horizon of subjective and intersubjective constitutions⁶². Precisely, active literates may strive to the unification of humanity, while passive ones are bound to disparate existence and are destitute of humanness. In other words, the presence of writings makes apparent a *teleological divergence* between passive and active aiming at the world.

The possibility of teleological divergence introduced by the presence of writings is only a manifestation of the essential contribution of the presence of writing. If we envision this situation from a distance, we see that the presence of writing introduces the possibility of two diverging constitutive prospects *as a function of* the mode of aiming at the world. As a result, the presence of writing calls into question the mode of aiming at the world itself: the presence of writing makes visible a distinction between passive and active intentionalities under the form of two diverging teleological prospects. More precisely, we can assert that by essence *the presence of writings phenomenalizes a distinction between passive and active experience of the world*.

⁵⁹ E.g. the type of graphic system (on the specificities of the Greek alphabet see *supra*, p. 11) or the evolution of the practice of writing (on the invention of print and the advent of literacy, see *supra*, p. 21).

⁶⁰ E.g. the enhancement of reflective thinking (see *supra*, p. 10 for Ong analysis on this matter), or the evolution from bodily to external memory (see our discussion of Havelock's arguments, *supra*, p. 9).

⁶¹ *Supra*, p. 75.

⁶² *Supra*, p. 92.

The responsibility of literates

The phenomenality of the distinction between passive and active intentionalities belongs to the domain of essential necessity. It is one side of the *a priori* contribution of the presence of writing. The importance of this step in our demonstration will appear in the next subsection. Before that, we need to highlight another side of the issue: the specific kind of responsibility that, in the same movement, the presence of writing introduces.

We know from our account of the constitution of personalities of a higher order that human collectivities are responsible their own unification⁶³. However, writing introduces a risk of teleological annihilation. Hence, passivity and activity are not merely two equitable options for literates: they individually and collectively stand at a crossroads where they must choose between, on the one hand, striving toward a unified humanity or, in the other hand, letting a passive relationship to writings annihilate their teleological prospects and collectively abandon themselves to inhumanity.

Therefore, literates are not just responsible for the unification of humanity. Before this, they have the radical responsibility to keep alive the possibility for humanity to unify by keeping clear its *telos*. This is a *responsibility of a higher order: in presence of writings subjects are responsible for the idea of humanity*.

Highlighting the responsibility that falls to subjects in presence of writings enables to pinpoint the common cause to the subjective and intersubjective crises that we observed in this chapter. First, let us rule out two erroneous causes that we have already implicitly rejected:

- a) We know that writing essentially offers humans the possibility to elevate to higher levels of communalization. Therefore, it would not be correct to hold writing itself responsible for the critical state of the scientific community pointed out by Husserl, and the deconstruction experienced by Derrida and his readers. These phenomena do not *mechanically* result from the presence of writing.
- b) Besides, it would also be wrong to claim that the passive life of consciousness itself is at the source of these troubles. On the contrary, we know that passive intentionalities are constitutive of the subject and the object.

The origin of the crisis does not either lay in some essential property of technology, or technique: in chapter 5, our account of revealed that the ideal literate community

⁶³ *Supra*, p. 67.

benefits from the presence of writings jointly at the technical and spiritual levels. In fact, an active relationship to writings allows mankind to utilize the physical persistence of language in script for widening its constitutive horizon and encompass humanity at large in the world of spirits.

However, our observations of critical phenomena reveals a *separation between technical possibilities and spiritual elevation*: we see technical attainments and senseless accumulation of documents, which shows that literate communities may hoist themselves technically and intellectually by virtue of the presence of writings, while being simultaneously deluded into a naive dependency on the technologies of script that obstructs the spiritual horizon. Therefore, the source of the crisis is not to be found in the essence of writing or technology at large, nor of passivity, but in *the absence of activity in the literates' relationship to writing*.

Hence, the deconstruction and the scientific crisis are only symptoms of the "sickness"⁶⁴ that attacks literate communities from within: they are primarily the expression of *a crisis of literacy*. The germ of this sickness, the true source of self-destruction that, from the surface of text seems to reach the deepest core of our humanity: it is the individual and collective failing to honor the responsibility of a higher order that essentially comes with writing; it is *graphic prevarication*.

The graphic ethic

We have seen in the previous chapter that the ideal of an ethical, unified humanity itself is thinkable and attainable only if, *in the first place*, literates are reflectively aware of the ontological importance of the presence of writings for humanity⁶⁵. This is why the reflective take on literacy is *ontologically necessary* for constitution. However, what we just identified in greater details as a responsibility of a higher order⁶⁶ reveals another dimension of the relationship with writings: it reveals the *ethical dimension* of this reflective take on literacy.

The literates' reflection on the presence of writing is a *preliminary* in light of which, standing at a crossroads between active and passive relationships to writings, literates may subsequently engage in ethical existence altogether. This work of reflection, made necessary by the presence of writings, is therefore *anterior and necessary to any subsequent ethical prospect*, this is why it is both ontologically necessary and ethically required.

⁶⁴ Appendix I, *Krisis*, p. 270.

⁶⁵ *Supra*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ *Supra*, p. 98.

We posited that graphic prevarication – i.e. a passive, unreflective relationship to writings through which literates fail to maintain alive the idea of humanity – is the internal, originary danger in presence of writings. Now we can add that graphic prevarication is an *unethical* relationship to writing. Following Husserl’s guidance, we may propose an ethic principle as a response to graphic prevarication. Husserl writes that in “times of danger”, “*reflection is required in every sense in order to right ourselves*”⁶⁷. With regard to writings, such a reflection aims to be the originary gesture of literates towards humanness and humanity.

Let us begin with Husserl’s paradigmatic example of the scientific community, which provides elements on ethics and writing that concern humans in presence of writings at large.

At the end of chapter 4, we highlighted the ethical dimension that, for Husserl, pertains to the activities of the reading and writing in the scientific community⁶⁸. Husserl writes that the danger of losing the access to geometrical ideal forms is avoided if one

assures oneself from the start, after the self-evident primal establishment, of its capacity to be reactivated and enduringly maintained. This occurs when one has a view to the univocity of linguistic expression and to securing, by means of the most painstaking formation of the relevant words, propositions, and complexes of propositions, the results which are to be univocally expressed⁶⁹.

This passage furnishes the basis of what we could call a *graphic ethic*. Husserl argues in favor of “the most painstaking formation of the relevant words” in order to guarantee the univocity of written statements. The disciplined practice of writing comes with a no less strict activity of reading as we saw in chapter 4 via Husserl’s insistence on the process of reactivation of the originary meaning⁷⁰.

Husserl emphasizes the importance of univocal geometric writing because univocity secures the reactivability and transmittability of the universally available findings from past co-humans to co-humans to come. Therefore, the ethical geometer is reflectively conscious that the tip of his pen is directed toward a horizon of co-humanity. He knows that, as a link in the chain of consciousnesses that binds every authentic geometer who

⁶⁷ He emphasizes, appendix IX, *Krisis*, p. 392.

⁶⁸ *Supra*, p. 54.

⁶⁹ *OG*, p. 362.

⁷⁰ *Supra*, p. 50.

bequeathed their writings to humanity, it is imperative to conceal the “self-evident primal establishment” in a way that makes its constitution eternally possible via writings. Reading and writing geometers are required to make use of the technique of writing in a rigorous way because the livingness of geometry as a tradition depends on it.

We learn from Husserl’s example that the technical activities of reading and writing themselves must be disciplined for optimizing univocity and hence keeping alive the possibility of constitution. In the case of geometry, this process concerns reading and writing geometers with regard to their scientific practice. Let us now take a step back in order to derive the ethical imperative that concerns literates *in general*.

We already settled that the presence of writings phenomenalizes the distinction between active and passive experience of the world⁷¹. By imposing the choice between opposite teleological prospects to literates, in the same gesture, the presence of writings makes literates radically responsible for keeping alive the possibility for subjects to be humanity⁷².

In order to shoulder their responsibility of a higher order, literates must beforehand be aware that an active relationship with writings is an ethical requirement. Given that this responsibility essentially comes with the phenomenalization of the distinction between passive and active aiming at the world in presence of writings, the shortest path to the graphic ethic is precisely to seize this phenomenon reflectively. In other words, *the phenomenology of the presence of writings is ethically required* so that, in light of the reflection, literates maintain an ethical relationship with writings and hence at least keep in sight the possibility for mankind to be humanity.

After pointing at the essential contribution of the presence of writings to humanity, now we understand why the technical activities of reading and writing must be taken seriously. Primordially, this imperative concerns scientists and philosophers, Husserl has pointed it out before us. We argue that the graphic ethic pertains to literate subjects in general for, in presence of writings, a good relationship to writings is a necessary preliminary to subsequent constitutive elevation. To conclude, let us sketch out the graphic ethic and point at questions that arise with regard to the practical application of this idea.

The graphic ethic is the self-disciplining principle that manifests reflective awareness on the ontological and ethical implications of the presence of writings. In practice,

⁷¹ *Supra*, p. 96.

⁷² *Supra*, p. 98.

the graphic ethic is a discipline of reading and writing, which can be understood as a continuous concern for the originary meaning of writings and a preoccupation to write univocally, “once and for all”⁷³. Generally speaking, we could say that it consists in a more thoughtful, parsimonious use of the writings that we bequeath to humanity; it is *a wiser relationship to writings*.

One may object: what about those who consciously play with equivocity for aesthetic purposes – novelists, poets, and so on – do we imply that they use writing unethically? This objection points at the most important limit to our inquiry: following Husserl, we grasp the menace of graphic prevarication and the ethical requirement for univocity, but we do not take into consideration the aesthetic dimension of the experience of writings. We will address this limit more precisely in the upcoming response to objections⁷⁴.

*

* *

In sum, writing offers the possibility to enhance communalization to an unprecedented level because it makes at any human’s reach the possibility to strive towards the unification of humanity at large. However, a predominantly passive relationship to writings menaces this very possibility and may reduce subjects to (inter-)personal disparateness, ahistoricity, i.e. inhumanity. Thus, by essence literates have the responsibility of a higher order to maintain alive the possibility for mankind to be humanity by an active relationship to writings. Given that striving to unifying humanity is inseparable from the ideal of an ethical humanity, we pointed at the need for a graphic ethic to make a virtue of necessity: in presence of writing, the phenomenology of the presence of writing is both necessary and required.

⁷³ *OG*, p. 362.

⁷⁴ *Infra*, p. 106.

CONCLUSION



Our phenomenological inquiry of the question of writing cleared out a field of exploration between the pitfalls that we identified beforehand¹. We started our reflection with a review of historical, anthropological and cognitive facts that indicated a specific impact of the presence of writing to the development of civilizations. Taking note of the underlying hypothesis defended by the social scientists, we departed from their objectivist account and adopted the phenomenological attitude. We managed not to fall into factuality by keeping before our eyes the correlation of the subject and the object in the process of co-constitution of the person and the social world. From this standpoint, we understood that writing, more precisely the univocal character of written expression, offers humans the possibility to widen their constitutive horizon to humanity at large.

We got around the pitfall of textualism by observing Derrida's early understanding of the question of writing in *OG* and we observed the phenomenon of crisis pointed at by Husserl. We progressively seized the reason that is common to, on the one hand, the apparent annihilation of subjective transcendence by writing illustrated by deconstruction, and, on the other hand, the self-destruction of literate societies: graphic prevarication, i.e. failing to maintain an active relationship to writings. Finally, we understood the responsibility that falls to literates in presence of writings: *writing imposes humans the radical responsibility to maintain the possibility for mankind to be humanity*.

Contributions and perspectives

The quality of the reflection undertaken in this dissertation is impaired by our unripe understanding of Husserl's work and insufficient general knowledge about the mind and writing. We would like to develop and argument at greater length the claims made in

¹ *Supra*, p. 3.

this dissertation. Nonetheless, at the outcome of this inquiry we may indicate several contributions on different levels of analysis, along with possible research prospects:

- a) First of all, we play our part in the continuation of the Husserlian project by introducing the idea that the presence of writing *a priori* phenomenizes a distinction between passive and active experience of the world while these two modes of experience are usually intertwined and implicitly jointly constitutive of the personal character of the subject and communities. We point at vast ontological and ethical implications of this phenomenality.

Thus, we show that it is possible to make use of Husserl's model to carry an original analysis of the social world with regard to the presence of writing in general. This dissertation reasserts the relevance of the husserlian insights and opens many research perspectives. Besides, the upcoming response to possible objections² will address this work's shortcomings, the limits of Husserl's model, and will clear out the highest priority for continuing the investigation initiated in this dissertation.

- b) Besides, we contribute to the contemporary philosophical debate: based on the same corpus as Derrida, via our Husserlian approach, we unveil the workings of his textualism, and we justify a diametrically opposed standpoint with regard to the essential functions of writing. Thus we give a demonstration that there is a vast unexplored domain for a transcendental phenomenology of writing. This work of exploration – inseparable from a critical stance towards textualism and the “philosophical aberrations”³ that derive from it – is yet to be conducted in order to reconstruct a genuine philosophy of writing.
- c) On various regards, we provide philosophical foundations to existing or potential investigations in the domain of social sciences:
 - α) To social scientists Ong, Havelock, Goody, *et al.*, who acutely point at the impact of the intertwining of writing and consciousness, we propose an *a priori* foundation that, before all historical contingencies, supports their intuition: the presence of writing essentially affects consciousness by phenomenizing a schism between passive and active experience of the world. This unquestioned schism is at the source of subsequent anthropological and historical influence of the presence of writing.

² *Infra*, p. 106.

³ Derrida, *Introduction*, p. 101.

- β) This work points out that a civilization that has writing, and even more so a civilization of literates, can be composed of ahistorical individuals and may even fall to collective ahistoricity. The presence of writing does not mechanically come with individual or collective historicity. Thus, our findings may contribute to a philosophy of history. Furthermore, they call into question the common historicist methods for studying the evolution of human societies in general, and modernity in particular. For instance, does it not appear now as a theoretical stance dangerously abstracted from the ontological impact of the presence of writings to unquestionably consider the increase of the alphabetization rate as a marker of societal development?
- γ) Methodologically, this work minimally shows that the phenomenological and factual approaches are complementary: empirical accounts provide material for the phenomenologist to shift from the contingent to the ontological levels of inquiry, while the *a priori* foundation revealed by phenomenology allows the empirical scientist to work on a clear conceptual ground.
- d) We may also evoke two possible developments with regard to the theme of education:
- α) By pointing at the impact of a flawed relationship to text captured in the notion of graphic prevarication, and the imperative for a strict discipline of reading and writing, our findings show that it would be ruinous to neglect the question of writing in education. These conclusions could arouse interests or debates in the sciences of education, all the more so with regard to the ongoing spreading of digitalized writing practices. Nonetheless, the aim of this work is not to advocate a comeback to the fundamentals in schools, but to show why the modalities of mankind's relationship to writings are ontologically fundamental to humanity.
- β) Prolonging our husserlian understanding of the essential properties of the presence of writing, we could address the question of education in literate societies, which is not explicitly made thematic by Husserl. Primordially, we could define the function of education with regard to our notion of a responsibility of a higher order. We may envision engaging in a discussion with Arendt who argues the essential function of education is for adults to assume the responsibility of the world and transmit it to the newcomers⁴.

⁴ A. Arendt. *La crise de l'éducation. Huit exercices de pensée politique*. In: *La crise de la culture*.

- e) In line with our analysis of Derrida's writings, we believe in the potential of our phenomenological model to analyze the synchronic workings and diachronic evolutions of literate thought. Notably, in light of our understanding of contemporary humanity as a humanity in a crisis of literacy, we have the theoretic resources for proposing a theory on the essence of contemporary nihilism that manifests itself in the (self-)destructing adhesion to radical ideologies as opposed to fulfilling vocations.
- f) Finally, our work may contribute to a reflection on ethics. "One can, if one wishes, reduce the whole art of living to a good use of language", Simone Weil writes⁵; in presence of writings, we now know that we must also make *a good use of writing*. Indeed, we show that the presence of writings does not mechanically come with individual or collective historicity but depends on the *ethics* of literates who, reflectively conscious of the ontological dimension of the presence of writings, decide to orient their lives towards the unification of humanity.

Our *graphic ethic*, which we wish to refine and elaborate, calls into question the practice of contemporary philosophy – at least in its academic form. It raises the following question: is there any way for literates to do authentic philosophy without a rigorous reflective understanding of literacy?

Responses to possible objections

The premises and conclusions of the current dissertation may be accused of conservatism more or less gravely, we foresee two possible objections of this order. Let us debunk the probable conceptual confusions on which these criticisms could rest before addressing the actual, philosophical limits of this dissertation.

FIRST OBJECTION: MYSTICISM. Because we are in line with Husserl's transcendental idealism, we expose ourselves to the criticisms that are usually leveled out against this aspect of his philosophy⁶. The aim of the graphic ethic is for literates to maintain a relationship with writings that fosters the spiritual unity of humans. Yet, we do not praise any mystic experience when we use the term "spiritual". Let us clarify, or reassert, our position to avoid any ambiguity.

Paris: Gallimard, 1972, pp. 223–252, pp. 251–252.

⁵ S. Weil. *Lectures on philosophy*. Trans. by H. Price. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 78.

⁶ Hahn, "The concept of personhood in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl", p. 243.

First and foremost, graphic prevarication hinders the constitutive process while aiming at writings. This is why it prevents literates to consciously unify with co-humans via writings. Given that writings are available to potentially any co-human, prevaricating literates are closed conscious access and participation to a universally human domain of experience. This is the domain that, following Husserl, we call the world of spirits. It primarily pertains to the constitutive process, therefore it is a phenomenological concept, not a mystic one.

In return, the apparent absence of access to the world of spirits tends to delude passive literates into eluding precisely this spiritual dimension of experience altogether. As opposed to this, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology in general aims to shed light again on the horizon of transcendental subjectivity. The graphic ethic has the same mission, although with regard to the presence of writings in particular. The practice of the graphic ethic aims to keep alive in self-evidence the prospect of a spiritually unified humanity, that is the *telos* of humanity. By guiding the activity of consciousness with regards to writings, *the graphic ethic aims to do justice to the constitutive drive of consciousness.*

SECOND OBJECTION: CONSERVATISM. If one admits that we are dealing with phenomenological concepts, one may still wonder: do we not imply that the access to the world of spirits has been lost? Do we not advocate pulling it back into the domain of self-evidence? Is this totally foreign to a return to traditional, religious values?

To be sure, pulling back into self-evidence should not be understood in the historical sense: the objective of the graphic ethic is not the restoration of the pre-historic life of consciousness, as it supposedly was before the presence of writings. On the contrary, the presence of writing is not a historical landmark, we are situated at the ontological level. The graphic ethic is a *questioning back*, in the sense of Husserl's *Rückfrage*⁷, the ontological implications of the presence of writings in general. The sense the graphic ethic aims to keep alive comes from the depth of the intentional life, it is always already in the intimacy of consciousness. The graphic ethic consists in straining one's ears to the "constitutive instinct"⁸ of consciousness that may be deafened by the loud presence of passively given writings.

Therefore, the graphic ethic really is conservative, but not with regard the temporal order. It pertains to the conservation of an *a priori, supra-temporal order* that finds its roots in the universal properties of consciousness. The graphic ethic aims to do

⁷ *Supra*, p. 50.

⁸ *Supra*, p. 66.

justice to the constitutive instinct of consciousness through which the socializing subject co-constitutes the world as spiritually charged and himself as a person fully oriented towards the *telos* of humanity.

Besides, note that the restoration of the experience of the world as it might have been before the presence of writing is purely inconceivable. Our inquiry reveals that, in presence of writings, literates do not have to choose between pre-historical and historical modes of existence. Rather, more radically, they are not imposed to choose between ahistorical and historical modes of existence.

THIRD OBJECTION: EUROCENTRISM. A graver objection could be leveled out against this work. Following Husserl, our analysis focuses mainly on the importance of univocal writing. *At first sight*, we argue that subjects must care about the univocity of written statements in order to enhance the process of humanization.

Yet, as we saw in part 1 when we discussed the ideal writing system according to Havelock⁹, existing scripts do not technically guarantee similar levels of univocity. Some scripts call more systematically on subjective disambiguation than others. Thus, one could reject the importance of equivocality/univocity and object that there must not be *the* presence of writings, but a range of scripts that have a range of corresponding impacts on their users according to their specific properties. Correspondingly, one might wonder whether the idea of a graphic ethic even makes sense to a ideographic or syllabic system. By extension, our opponent could argue that we essentialize an Eurocentric bias given that in our model the equivocality of writings hinders humanization. Do we imply that users of equivocal writing systems – e.g., those which are not derived from the Greek alphabet – are unable to elevate to higher levels of communalization or, even worse, that they are by essence destitute of humanity?

The apparent menace that comes with this objection is known, and Husserl addresses it in *OG*¹⁰: it is *historicism*, i.e. the negation of *a priori* truth before factual contingencies. In order to invalidate these claims, we will need to clarify some conceptual distinctions and then manipulate our concepts imaginatively. Before that, let us rapidly see why, in the first place, historicist critiques to phenomenology are in a conceptually awkward position.

Under the guise of denouncing a profound eurocentric dehumanizing dimension to the idea of graphic ethic, in reality the historicist argument is theoretically incapable to fight on this ground – as much as any purely objectivist approach. Indeed, human

⁹ *Supra*, p. 11.

¹⁰ *OG*, p. 373.

consciousness has the ability to reflectively aim at itself¹¹. This universal property of human consciousness is central in Husserl's model of the social world, because authentic humanness is reached by virtue of reflection. Furthermore, reflection is precisely the field of phenomenology which makes a practical use of it for analytical purposes. However, the study of this property is by default out the scope of historicist accounts. Therefore, by default, any historicist critique theoretically ignores the universal human capacity to humanize through self-reflection. This is why any historicist argument is altogether dehumanizing, and thus in a particularly bad position to oppose phenomenology on this matter.

By virtue of our phenomenological insight on the presence of writings, we know that historical contingencies remain subsumed to the *a priori* properties that our analysis made apparent. However, the question of the univocity of script seems to *reemerge unavoidably*: even if we admit that any one is able to freely reflect upon one's consciousness in a phenomenological way, what if the results of these inquiries cannot be "fixed in univocal language"¹² due to the scriptural contingencies? Are users of equivocal scripts incapable to be graphically ethical, and thus bound to remain literate vagabonds?

First, let us clarify the status of contingent writing systems from a phenomenological perspective. In the phenomenological attitude, existing scripts are contingently situated on *a continuum that goes from an indefinite pole of equivocality to an indefinite pole of univocity* – e.g., the Greek alphabet is only a limit case that tends more than others to ideal univocity. In chapters 5 and 6, we reflected upon *the presence of writings in general*, i.e. we aimed at the idea of linguistic propositions being inscribed by means of writing systems as *a priori* situated in an indefinite horizon that goes from equivocality to univocity. Keeping in mind this distinction between the *a priori* and contingent dimensions, we can now reexamine the essential contribution of the presence of writings in order to thwart the historicist argument.

Let us pursue the imaginative exercise – "eidetic variation" in Husserl's technical vocabulary¹³ – that we surreptitiously started in chapter 5¹⁴. We know that the univocal character of written expression essentially widens the constitutive horizon. By imaginatively displacing the ideal script as a variable on the open continuum of univocity and

¹¹ "Whenever we consider it, we find ourselves with the self-evident capacity to reflect – to turn to the horizon and to penetrate it in an expository way." *OG*, p. 374.

¹² *OG*, p. 375.

¹³ D. De Santis. "Phenomenological kaleidoscope: Remarks on the husserlian method of eidetic variation". In: *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 11 (2012), pp. 16–41.

¹⁴ *Supra*, p. 75.

equivocity, we already settled that, *a priori*, the more univocal the writing system, the wider the constitutive horizon of humanity. Logically, based on the result of our inquiries in chapter 6¹⁵, we can assert that the wider the constitutive horizon, the greater the potential teleological divergence between predominantly passive and active experience of univocal writings.

Based on the ultimate unfolding of chapter 6¹⁶ we can further posit that the greater the potential teleological divergence between predominantly passive and active experience of writings the higher the responsibility of literates with regard to the idea of humanity. Therefore, by virtue of the eidetic variation of univocity, it appears that, *a priori*, *the more univocal a writing system, the higher the responsibility of literates with regard to the idea of humanity.*

We need to take this experiment to its conclusion by reflecting upon its ethical implications. Indeed, we have shown that the responsibility of a higher order introduced by univocal writing makes imperative, in return, a form of reflection that specifically concerns univocity with regard to the technical activities of reading and writing: the graphic ethic. Through variation, we see that the higher the responsibility of literates with regard to the idea of humanity, the higher the imperative for the graphic ethic. Given that the more univocal a writing system, the higher the responsibility of literates with regard to the idea of humanity, we can conclude that *the more univocal a writing system, the stronger the imperative for the graphic ethic.*

At this point of the experiment, we suddenly unveil the naivety of historicism with regard to the presence of writing. Indeed, while the historicist may argue on technical grounds that the more equivocal the writing system, the greater the need for caring about the univocity of expression¹⁷, we show that *a priori* it is the contrary: the more univocal the writing system, the wider the constitutive horizon and, in return, the more imperative caring, on ethical grounds, for the univocity of written expression.

Finally, given that the graphic ethic relies on the transcendental phenomenology of literacy, not only does our reasoning overtake historicist accounts, but it demonstrates the ontological need for practicing phenomenology in presence of writings. Precisely, *the more univocal a writing system, the more imperative the transcendental phenomenology of literacy*¹⁸.

¹⁵ *Supra*, p. 96.

¹⁶ *Supra*, p. 98.

¹⁷ For instance, Havelock and Février's pejorative take on equivocity can be understood as a historians' bias with regard to the capacity of given writing systems for conserving meaning.

¹⁸ If we take the requirement of reflection as a condition for the birth of philosophy at large, we understand that our model may serve for an anthropological account of the history of philosophy. Indeed,

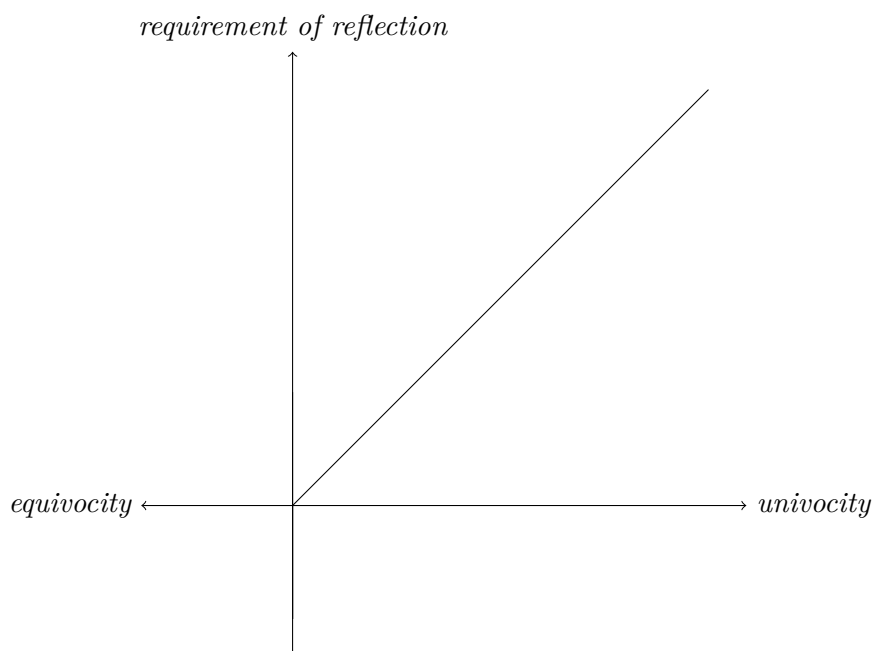


Figure 6.1: Variation of the requirement of reflection on literacy as a function of univocity: schematic representation within the limits of the current analysis

THE LIMITS OF THIS INQUIRY AND BY EXTENSION OF HUSSERL'S. Besides historicist criticisms, a valid objection could be leveled out on philosophical grounds with regard to the importance of the variable of univocity in our model.

On the one hand, following Husserl, our account of the presence of writing has progressively focused on the essential function of the univocal character of writing for the unification of literates as humanity. By the end of our response, we have been able to imaginatively vary ideal scripts in a horizon of univocity. Thus, we are able to show that, by virtue of the widening of the constitutive horizon it entails, the univocal character of script determines the level of the responsibility of literates with regard to the idea of humanity, and hence the requirement of reflection that the graphic ethic addresses¹⁹.

On the other hand, we have only scratched the surface of equivocity via our counter-example of Derrida who advocates a passive relationship to a deliberately equivocal writing style. Although we have shown the irresponsibility of Derrida with regard to the univocity of script, we are not yet able to vary imaginatively towards the ideal pole

our Husserlian investigation provides reasons to believe that the presence of univocal writings is the *a priori* to the birth of philosophy in Greece. Further research are obviously needed to argue in support of this claim.

¹⁹ See figure 6.1 on this page.

of equivocity. At this stage, while we maintain that the widening of the constitutive horizon, along with all its ontological and ethical implications, constitute the essential contribution of the univocity of script to humanity, it would not be justified to assume that the equivocal character of script has merely opposite ontological and ethical implications. There are potentially essential contributions to the equivocity of script that have to be rigorously inquired.

Now we understand that the limit of Husserl's take on the question of writing is not the disregard for equivocal writing as Derrida would argue, but an exclusive focus on the ontological importance of univocity. Given the immense implications pertaining to univocity that our work indicates, Husserl's emphasis on this aspect is ethically justified. Nonetheless, we also have to acknowledge that an exhaustive account of the presence of writings has not to elude the presence of equivocal writings. Following the same method as for this dissertation, based on anthropological accounts on equivocal scripts, the priority for the continuation of our phenomenological investigation is therefore to inquire the essential contributions of an ideally equivocal script.

*
* *

The graphic ethic implicitly permeates Husserl's method of the *Rückfrage*, and is humbly made explicit in this dissertation. His writings are the legacy of a graphically ethic philosopher: a man who strove toward the infinite spiritual horizon that a univocal script opens to thought; and, in the same movement, lucid about the spiritual annihilation which had already been shaking humanity, he consciously oriented his entire life according to a graphic ethic, the most radical ethic for a literate, the one that traces back to its source the venomous flow of graphic prevarication. The *Rückfrage* is primarily about writing, it essentially relies on a discipline of writing, bequeathed to mankind by Husserl so that we, as literates, potentially "right ourselves"²⁰ and learn again how to think, instead of turning into an assemblage of literate barbarians.

²⁰ Appendix IX, *Krisis*, p. 392.

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ABBREVIATIONS



A.D.	<i>anno domini</i>
B.C.	before Christ
<i>CM</i>	<i>Cartesian meditations</i>
<i>Hua</i>	<i>Husserliana</i>
<i>ID II</i>	<i>Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy. Second book: Studies in the phenomenology of constitution</i>
<i>Krisis</i>	<i>The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology</i>
<i>OG</i>	<i>The Origin of Geometry</i>
<i>Renouveau</i>	<i>Cinq articles sur le renouveau</i>
<i>RL I</i>	<i>Recherches Logiques I</i>
<i>SI-2</i>	<i>Sur l'intersubjectivité 2</i>

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