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

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02 TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS
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09 [...] our investigations are historical in an unusual sense, namely in virtue of a thematic direction which
10 opens up depth-problems quite unknown to ordinary history.

(Edmund Husserl, 1970: 354)

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

13 (Frank Ankersmit, 2005: 16)

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15 A B S T R A C T

16 In “Sublime historical experience” (2005), Frank Ankersmit argues that the past
17 originates from an experience of rupture. Such an experience of rupture separates
18 the present from the past, and, at the same time, means the beginning of an effort to
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28 *Transcendental Phenomenology*, 1970) are questioned from a transcendental per-
29 spective. More in particular, it will be investigated if these meaning-origins are to be
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39 works of art.
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DE PREESTER HELENA AND GERTRUDIS VAN DE VIJVER

THE TREASURE DISCOVERED OR MADE UP?

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

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

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

ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS AND THE HISTORY OF GEOMETRY

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

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

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

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

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

DE PREESTER HELENA AND GERTRUDIS VAN DE VIJVER

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

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

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

BEYOND THE ALTERNATIVE BETWEEN HISTORY
AND A-TEMPORAL IDEALITY?

271 In the year 1959–1960, in his course on Monday at the Collège de France, Maurice
272 Merleau-Ponty translates and comments parts of Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*.⁶
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274 In the next two sections the notes of this course are our point of departure for
275 a further interpretation of Husserl's text. Merleau-Ponty extensively comments
276 on Husserl's idea that even *ideal* beings, such as the objectivities of mathemat-
277 ics, necessarily unfold in the course of time, i.e. in history. Moreover, and as
278 just explained (cf. *supra*), ideal beings acquire their ideal meaning only in and
279 through spoken and written language. Stated differently, both language and his-
280 tory participate in the formation of ideal being. This is because both the sensible
281 inscription and the objectivity/a-temporality of ideal being is assured by history and
282 language.
283

284 We have seen that *The Origin of Geometry* explains how every genesis of meaning
285 presupposes an originary foundation, a *Stiftung*. Such a *Stiftung* or creative founda-
286 tion opens up a field that the creator cannot survey, but in which later geometers can
287 work, in a tradition of *Nachstiftung*. The initial steps of geometry therefore have
288 not only a literal and manifest meaning, but also a *surplus* of meaning. Geometry is
289 more than the lived experiences of Galilei and others, and more than these thoughts
290 reactualized by others. There is a deeper sense, a deeper structure of sense, upon
291 which thoughts of geometers open. What is opened is a field that is at first only
292 aimed at, but not yet developed, and which remains present in the whole history of
293 geometry. Even more, this deeper sense makes geometry into what it is as such, i.e.
294 as a consistent theory. Merleau-Ponty considers this movement, this opening up of
295 a field, as a model for conceiving not only the history of geometry, but universal
296 history. And in whatever history, the opening of a field is something suprapersonal.
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298 The field laid open, initiated by an original acquisition, is not organized according
299 to causal relations, but is seized by a necessity. To take this into account, the notions
300 of fact and essence, real and ideal have to be reconsidered. To Merleau-Ponty, the
301 basic challenge is to conceive of an ideality that requires time. The most impor-
302 tant idea for the present contribution, is that the original beginnings, the originary
303 meaning, can be reactualized in the future. According to Merleau-Ponty, the origi-
304 nal beginnings, the moment of self-evidence, is the place where a chiasmus occurs
305 between me and the other, between past, present and future. As such, the chiasmus
306 is the depth of life itself.

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

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

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

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

351 MERLEAU-PONTY AND HISTORY AS THE UNFOLDING 352 OF IDEALITY 353

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

ANKERSMIT: HISTORY AND HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

451
452 For Ankersmit (2005), openness to the past asks for a submission to the spell
453 of the moment. This openness to the past is essential to historical experience
454 (Ankersmit, 2005: 16). In historical experience, it is as if a remote personal past
455 comes to life again. This shift from the historical to the historical experience,
456 which is itself a-historical, is not a transcendence of history in order to arrive at
457 time-transcending truths. Historical experience is only possible in a cross-sectional
458 approach (*Querschnitt*), not by placing something within a chronological and narra-
459 tive context, but by decontextualizing elements subsumed under cross-sections. The
460 past should be dissolved in individual “atoms”; this is the only way in which the
461 past can become an *object of historical experience* (Ibid: 167). “As long as these
462 atoms have their fixed place in the endless chain of events reaching from the past
463 to the present, as long as we can get access to them only by carefully following the
464 chain itself, all contact with the past will be indirect and mediated by this chain of
465 events. The event, or the past, is then a product or function of the chain of events,
466 and we will never succeed in disentangling it from the cloak of what surrounds
467 it” (Ibid: 167). This description of chaining up historical events can be read as a
468 Husserlian seduction of language,¹⁰ in which one gets stuck, or simply relies on
469 the chain of reasonings, without ever aiming at the reactivation of an original be-
470 ginning, i.e. a moment that cannot be thought, but of which the identity with the
471 original beginnings must be experienced as self-evident. This is Ankersmit’s reason
472 for decontextualizing the event, which is a condition for having a historical *experi-*
473 *ence*. Works of art can pre-eminently lead us into historical experience. The reason
474 is that the *work of art*, as a remnant of earlier times, carries a meaning that “will
475 never surrender to the powers of history” (Ibid: 167). As such, it is – together with
476 writings – an essential element in historical experience. It is here that we can ex-
477 perience the past, because, here, the past “is a past denuded of the protective shell
478 of narrative in which nineteenth-century historicism had always wrapped it; it is a
479 past that we encounter as we look at a painting and where all that truly counts hap-
480 pens between the painting and ourselves – [...]” (Ibid: 168). Historism, we may
481 say, uses the seduction of language in an effort to know the past or in order to con-
482 nect to the past. The historical experience, in contrast, is an experience that is not
483 concerned with putting what we have discovered from the past into a temporal or-
484 der (beginning – middle – end), and therefore it may be called a-historical. In the
485 words of Ankersmit: “One first has to historicize everything with the historian, so
486 that one can make, with Burckhardt, this movement of dehistoricizing what was
487 historicized [...]” (Ibid: 169). Here, Joseph von Eichendorff’s insight that in his-
488 torical experience present (subject) and past (object) meet each other “cleaned of all
489 their historical denominations” (ibid: 169) is repeated.

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

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

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

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

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CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

DE PREESTER HELENA AND GERTRUDIS VAN DE VIJVER

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

588 Second, it is remarkable that works of art figure pre-eminently, albeit at the
589 same time in passing, in the accounts by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Ankersmit.
590 Husserl, due to his focus on pure ideality, is obliged to distinguish two kinds of
591 works of art: “fine literature”, which is capable to present ideal meanings as some-
592 how independent of the specific material embodiment that accompanies it, and more
593 “materialized” works of art (e.g. the products of architecture), in which a layer of
594 pure meaning is not so easily discernible or conceivable apart from the material
595 specificities of it. It is well known that Merleau-Ponty resists the idea that there is a
596 layer of ideal meaning that can be isolated (even if this happens merely in thought)
597 from the material form in which the meaning appears. And for Merleau-Ponty, this
598 is true both for visual arts and for literature. Meaning is always structured in a form,
599 and this form cannot be thought as “pure” or not materialized (cf. Merleau-Ponty,
600 1942). That ideality needs history is the very same idea: ideality is embodied, both
601 in historical time and in matter. As both history and matter preclude a pure form
602 of ideality, the process of identification is difficult to think of as a process that only
603 involves ideality. It is true that Husserl takes into account writing (as an embodiment
604 of ideality), but it is also true that the most intimate intertwining between ideality
605 and materiality – as Merleau-Ponty (1942) describes it – remains an obstacle for him
606 for thinking the cultural tradition of works of art that are not amenable to pure ideal-
607 ity (as is for Husserl the case for “fine literature”). Nevertheless, as Merleau-Ponty
608 considers some works of art as an *Urstiftung*, he recovers the Husserlian idea of
609 original beginnings without succumbing to the call of *pure* ideality, but while hold-
610 ing onto the idea that their meaning-structure is not reducible to a causal or *purely*
611 material history. The way history is conceived of, thus turns out to be decisive not
612 only for our relation to a history of art, but more importantly for a point of view on
613 the way we can experience art. Vice versa, the status of a work of art in philosophy
614 can be revealing for philosophy’s point of view on the status of history and ideality.
615 An account of the status of the work of art necessarily implies an account of the sta-
616 tus of meaning and its relation to history. As such, it can be said that a philosophy
617 of the work of art also is a philosophy of history.

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

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

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ORIGINAL BEGINNINGS

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NOTES

636 1 The way in which a tradition comes into being and develops, is not necessarily a matter of explicitly
637 and consciously building and developing this tradition. A number of passages in the *Crisis* point to the
638 rather implicit way in which a tradition is developed. In the following passage, Husserl is discussing
639 Descartes. “After Galileo had carried out, slightly earlier, the primal establishment of the new natural
640 science, it was Descartes who conceived and at the same time set in systematic motion the new idea of
641 universal philosophy [. . .]. And immediately it had a powerful effect.

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

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

659 2 When Husserl speaks about a “crisis” of the European sciences, he intends precisely the radical carry-
660 ing through of this project of virtualization, leading to a surreptitious replacement of the world in which
661 we live by a world of objectivistic truths, presented as *the* truths that are valid independently from any
662 form of actuality and embodiment, and no longer calling for a realization from within the “lifeworld”.

663 3 That objective ideality involves a form of structural, symbolic autonomy, does not mean that it can be
664 equated to it. In the *Crisis*, Husserl introduces at various places the idea of symbolism to refer to a form
665 of structural detachment from intuition. Referring to Galilei’s thinking, he notes that the “philosopher of
666 nature and ‘trail-blazer’ of physics, was not yet a physicist in the full present-day sense; that his thinking
667 did not, like that of our mathematicians and mathematical physicists, move in the sphere of symbolism,
668 far removed from intuition”. (Husserl, 1970: 24). He also uses the word to capture the idea of emptying
669 of meaning: “Of course one does not calculate ‘mechanically’, as in ordinary numerical calculation; one
670 thinks, one invents, one may make great discoveries – but they have acquired, unnoticed, a displaced,
671 ‘symbolic’ meaning. Later this becomes a fully conscious methodical displacement, a methodical transi-
672 tion from geometry, for example, to pure *analysis*, treated as a science in its own right.” (Husserl,
673 1970: 45).

674 4 That is what the word “Deckung” refers to in this context.

675 5 We can wonder whether the order of treatment in the constitution of ideal objectivity is not in part
676 responsible for the discussions that followed it and of which we present here a very fragmented image.
677 Because indeed, one can ask what can be the status of the self-evidence of identity in a particular subject
678 that is not yet part of language and does not communicate. Of course, Husserl acknowledges that it
679 is only through communication, and further through writing, that ideal objectivity can emerge. But is
680 it possible, even if only in thought, to isolate a subject capable of producing self-evident “Deckung”?

DE PREESTER HELENA AND GERTRUDIS VAN DE VIJVER

676 Or rather, is it relevant at all to think of a subject that genuinely *identifies* something as structurally
 677 isomorphic while not having articulated its structural embeddedness in a language community? Should it
 678 not be more relevant to think, the other way around, about the capacities of identification of self-evidence
 679 from within a certain form of communicability and writing? It seems to us that Husserl is perhaps too
 680 faithful to a (conscious) subject that disposes of capacities of identification and self-evidence, that in a
 681 sense subsists in isolation from its linguistic capacities. In our view, it is precisely this point that explains
 682 the uneasiness some authors have in regard to the view he presents on ideal objectivity. We are thinking
 683 of Derrida here (a.o. 1967), but also of psychoanalytic thinkers inspired by Freud and Lacan, who stress
 684 much more radically the idea that subjectivity emerges with and within language, as well as the idea that
 685 the subject is part and parcel of language in such a radical way that it is continuously at the verge of
 686 loosing its identifiability as a “point of consciousness present to itself (cf. De Preester and Van de Vijver,
 687 2005). To think in this way indeed involves a totally different view on the subject, of which it can be said
 688 that Husserl announces a number of aspects, but does not really articulate or take up the consequences.
 689 We are thinking here, for instance, of what he says on the drive and on instincts (see note 1 and 3), that
 690 could be pertinently related to the debate on consciousness and the unconscious.

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

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

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

701 ⁹ Cf. “La sédimentation, c’est cette disponibilité, elle fait partie de la pensée, elle n’en est pas une
 702 décoration. [...] La pensée: la sédimentation est sa réalisation comme pensée.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1998:
 703 29).

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

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Chapter 22

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