

Thinking the Archive

Towards An Archaeology Of Consciousness

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1. MEMORY

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in Chapter 10, “On Retention”, John Locke addresses “memory” as “the store-house of our ideas”, and carries on:

For the narrow mind of man not being capable of having many ideas under view and consideration at once, it was necessary to have a *repository* to lay up those ideas, which at another time it might have use of.

The metal warehouse, Locke’s repository, is the picture of the mind as an archive ‘from a pragmatic point of view’.

In my view Locke’s analogy hereby is more than just decoration: As soon as we talk about *consciousness* [lat. *cum scire*: common, shared knowledge] we have to talk about memory, i. e. the faculty which allows us to have experience within the present at all. Pure sensations are not objects as such to the ‘conscious’ mind, for they lack the significance of any conceptual structure.

This notion is in opposition to the psychoanalytic doctrine that insists on the mutual exclusion of consciousness and memory, for to Freud the latter equals the *unconscious*. To talk about the archive as I will do it, therefore implies the reclaim of the archive as a matter of the conscious mind. I hereby don’t call for a linguistic paradigm that substitutes the mind by logic functions or language as such, but rather I want to stress the fact that even without having sufficient criteria for what

thinking *is not* – or ‘when’ it actually begins (we only have ideas of when thinking is not *possible* [like in case of brain dead]), in almost all cases ‘consciousness’ implies an active, basically contra-natural activity of the human mind.

2. THINKING

This goes back at least to the antique concept of reason in opposite to the soul. Even if in Aristotle f. e. between *psyche* and *nous* there is a continuum less than a harsh difference, the model nevertheless proposes an ontological gap between the pure growth or movement of plant or animals and the mental activity of the human being. Regardless of whether a child’s perception or an animal’s behaviour already shows conceptual components or not, we suppose that thinking is ‘more’ than just simply being there.

If reduced to language ‘mind’ is becoming dependent on external factors by its necessary intersubjectivity and the existing heterogeneity of language-forms. (That’s why the ‘philosophy of language’ has a lot to say about language, but little about *what thinking is* when language is *not* in use.)

Thinking therefore can be described as the very process, in which almost only contents of that faculty are combined, transformed and separated from any actual reference, especially in respect to extrapolation. – The sciences thus were always attempted to take the semiotic way of world-making for the picture of thinking (itself).

3. ABSTRACTION/PROJECTION

As Bachelard in his critique of scientific reason rightly argued, within the scientific age abstract thinking was rehabilitated as a non-representational way of bringing forth the progress of knowledge,

whereas it was condemned beforehand as the *inadequate* way (in the literal sense of 'equation') to talk about the phenomena of which the individual is conscious of. – Abstraction does not seem to be a regular mode of the mind, which is engaged in daily activities.

But already the simplest form of strategic thinking and planning implies strong abstraction, in which not only the continuum of real-time is neglected, but also the content of consciousness: given space is transformed into the pure form of its topographic features by which the content than rather equals a possible event within space at a certain moment. – At this point reflection becomes projection.

Traditionally speaking: In the human act of thinking as contemplating sensations from the transcendently constituted essence (in space and time as ways of pre-structuring apprehensions) the developing contents of thinking are transferred into an artificial order of the mind.

4. STRUCTURE

Rudolf Carnap was the first to define this fact sufficiently as a 'structure'. – According to that concept a 'structure' is an eminent form of abstraction in which the relations between actual contents of the mind are constituted by an almost Parmenidean plane: a layer between being or presentation and thinking or reflection, whereby both, thinking and being, converge – although they are different in respect to their 'substance'.

This layer can be attributed as 'immanent' since it doesn't belong to the pure materialistic nor to the intellectual realm, but means the junction which brings them into existence at all, for thinking is not 'thinkable' without being, and vice versa. It is through this constellation that the mind can separate itself from its present being through the forms

of remembrance and planning, the dimensions which deposit (or 'ground') as grammatical functions: as past and future.

5. DIAGRAMM

The relation between them is of a diagrammatic nature: I use this mathematical analogy, which has been introduced to Philosophy by Wittgenstein, in order to insist on the fact that the traditionally dominant category of representation is just an exceptional case of abstraction in which the difference between the represented and its representation seems to be only one in respect to matter (or 'substance'). Instead 'diagram' indicates that the structure is rather determined by use and hence by the pragmatic aspect of orientation than by the reproduction of reality.

The majority of thinking-acts are non-representational even though they have counterparts through the structural layer which binds together thinking and being. The main differential-force behind that drift is time as the original way of putting things in man-made order.

6. ARCHIVE

Against that background the 'archive' seems, in my view, to be the relevant figure in which consciousness is founded. – Any digital or analogue archive repeats and reveals at the same time the mentioned aspects of thinking: An archive has its structure which brings together the external material content (*data*) with an internal feature of meaning (*information*). In hardly any form the relation between data and information is of a representational nature.

Instead a strong interpretation takes place, which in some respect self-organizes the meaning. Nevertheless there is a or at least are several linkages between the data and the information we gain – made

possible through the differential structure, the topography of the given archive that pre-selects the data. An instant selection (of data) that will be an object to interpretation is already determined by the telos of the archive, a collection for example, or the mind's gathering of sufficient knowledge to 'translate' something into action.

In respect to the archive a 'diagram' is no more an analogy, but describes its very functioning: Here the diagram consists only virtually in the structure through which the archive provides the order, the places to store the content. The archive as well as the mind embraces the objects and the information related to them, but never does the mind nor the archive coincide with its content(s). For on the one hand the *information* is dependent on the code (the language) which again is dependent on its intersubjective constitution; on the other hand the *objects* are (a) subject to individual perception. (In any case the fact is that the information we derive from stored data is not fully determined – not by the physical archive nor by the data, but through the structuring and restructuring of the archival order.) – The mind thus is *giving* (the) order. Thinking produces diagrams which can only be understood by other minds with the same capacity.

7. ARCHIVAL REASON

This is in no way a plea for the relativity of knowledge in forms of claiming its dependence on technological inventions. – Instead my argument is the following: In order to use something as an external archive, there has to be a faculty which allows us to do so: the '*archival reason*'.

To say that the usage itself is based on cultural training and heritage sets in motion a dialectical circuit which in the end equals the statement of the archival faculty from the historical point of view, for it has to presume that thinking has made use of archives ever since. (Even

before archives in the material sense (like libraries) existed, already a manifold of symbolic and phonetic ways of writing took over the role of an externalised archive (with respect) to consciousness. Where we put our belongings, which route we use – all of that is a question of archival coordination.) That archive can neither be reduced to architectural details nor to objections of the order. ('What an archive *is*' varies through history. But the intellectual faculty of using something as an archive has to be taken as the *differentia specifica* of man.)

8. OBJECT-PLACE

The object is defined by the specific place in which it is stored. Its status then is not given by the object nor even when it is perceived, but when it is recognized. This is the point at which language, cultural techniques and individual memory converge: They converge in what I want to call the 'archive'. As it can be seen in the use of language: Before we use words and phrases to designate new objects or communicate actual perception we adopt given knowledge about the world in a way that is far from being representational: It is mimetic not in concerns of the world, but in concerns of the imitation and adoption of collective structures.

Indirect speech thus is the main mode of all day language, the reproduction of (thereby at least virtual) objects (the object-places), the main way in which we gain, have and proliferate knowledge about those objects. Hereby the character of the specific repetition is not that of a child adopting its mother tongue piece by piece and step by step, but one which transposes mental coordinates that designate the place in the archive, where the information is to be stored and by which it can only become (an) (useful) information at all. *The place precedes the meaning.*
– Again: For the most part thinking is of (an) archival nature.

9. METAPHYSICS

This lies is in contrast to the usual understanding of consciousness in the meaning of conscious experience (as awareness), but stresses the factor of intentionality in the *Epoché* that sets apart the world from its structuring archives.

Instead for a dualism of objects and meaning I want to argue for an inverted physicalism, i. e. a monism of thought which has to be called anti-realistic insofar no objects or even Qualia exist (consciously) outside the archive, assuming that thinking is defined by its very content (which is the central meaning of intentionality). The archival reason then is not 'subjective' nor intersubjective. It is object-based, but its objects don't belong to the 'outer' world.

This position can be called Hegelian insofar as the idea of the 'absolute spirit' incorporates all possible object-knowledge in respect to the objects being already perceived and knowledge already being reflected. My position is not Hegelian insofar as the process of incorporating knowledge can not come to an end, as the archive (or 'reality') due to its virtual capacity being infinite, whereas the 'world' as such is finite. Only when the archive of the mind is taken for a physical archive Hegel's spirit equals an archive that equals the earth.

The position shall furthermore not be confused with the Spinozistic picture of god as the sum of all attributes, but follows Spinoza's Idea of a 'pantheistic' layer of attributes as differentials on the diagrammatic plane of the archival mind.

10. SHIFT

(In respect to Foucault) we can consider a certain backlash on history: As soon as archives are established a shift between the layers (a new

episteme so to speak) is formed. The main difference to any former concept of historical 'shifts' is that of the substantial definition in opposite to the structural one. Its already implied in the literal meaning of 'shift' which in English actually designates the chance between layers and not – like in German (*Schicht*) – the layers as such. From here we can derive a concept of shifting forms of diagrams or abstractions that sediment on each other and constitute historical archives in metahistorical respect: What their identity is, can only be derived from their deviation to others. Traditional hermeneutics would try to 'understand' the layer from *within*, instead archival hermeneutics deduces the meaning from the shift as such, i. e. shifting of layers.

11. INTERFACE

To speak with an up-to-day-term the expression 'inter-faces' is striking. The designation which indicates the zones where two opposing outsides constitute an inside –. The appropriation of the interface-term in archaeology and its career especially in the Anglo-Saxon field of research is highlighting the *archival turn* throughout all sciences. Researches like Edward Harris modify the initially geological concept of stratigraphy from Charles Lyell and others, which only hindered archaeologists in describing, what took place under the surface. Geology deals with petrified layers of stones and minerals. Archeaology never deals with fossilized goods, but with submerged cities, overgrown settlements and other prehistoric, but always human deposits, which are far to young to petrify.

In Geology the character throughout the layer determines the edges of one layer as well as its age. In Archaeology the concept of a homogenous layer is unproductive insofar not the soil itself, but the objects which are found (within it) are a case of interest. To find out about the epoch, the objects of a certain deposit belong to, the shifting of

the layers, i. e. the interfaces, are the important marking-spots that make up the topography of the excavation, the archive in the ground.

12. TRACE

Looking at historical archives we finally have to modify the concept of meaning in regard to the 'trace' which then folds back onto the archival concept of consciousness: As I stated at the beginning, thinking rest upon memory (in the broadest sense). We now can say that due to the synchronic nature of the archival shift the actualisation-process within thinking and related actions of near- and far-future-orientated prospectations take place in the form of topographical navigation rather (than) in form of a diachronic movement *downwards* (in memory). Only when the model of stratification is confused with the substantial layer-model do we take the past, the present and the future for material, vertical zones.

The effect of 'history' in the collective as well as in the personal sense is one that is owed to the constitutive effect of a more or less narrative structure: What the past will have been can possibly only be told, when it has already been archived. The past than is the effect of stored memory. The past only 'exists' in its affiliated actualisation. That's why some theoreticians use the enigmatic concept of the 'trace' to designate that constitutive effect of the archive. Thinking hence produces such traces by correlating abstractions 'with reality' that only exists in the conscious mind.

13. FOLD

In that respect Phenomenology was misled by reproducing the Cartesian ground of the Cogito in the phenomenological outside-world that had its validity (*Geltung*) *within* consciousness. The Life-world and its underlying ground of the earth in consequence for Husserl did not mean the outside

world at all, but it being perceived by the mind. Merleau-Ponty was to be the first to recognize this very problem of Phenomenology: Alongside the uprising of structuralism he saved the phenomenological position by pledging for the Chiasm of the visible and the invisible, of Being and Being-Thought, as the fold of consciousness. The substance of the world which he addresses as 'flesh' meant to describe the World as a world of objects to the conscious mind. The fold, then, is (the) difference as such – which is thinking.

So instead of locating thinking with Descartes in the 'outside' and instead of locating thinking with Husserl in the outside-inside, with Merleau-Ponty we can locate thinking *in between*. – Incidentally Merleau-Ponty solved also the phenomenological problem of other-minds in the intersubjective world: Consciousness is not limited to an epistemological Subject or the political *persona* but to a community of minds. *Intersubjectivity* is prior to subjectivity and consciousness is prior to think-acts. And again: The 'fold' is an archive, as it determines the effect of subjectivity and identity through a certain set of knowledge about the 'world'.

14. ASSUMPTION

As you can tell from my presentation the archive or the archival reason, in the form I want to offer it – as a substitute to consciousness – has a certain characteristic throughout the variety of descriptions: No matter if addressed in terms of the shift, the trace, the fold, being-in-between, structure, difference or as a plane of diagrams, it is always a 'neither-nor' of the poles in traditional dualistic concepts of thinking. My proposals are pedagogical insofar as they warn to stress one side of those Cartesian dualisms and its successors that bond thinking to Subjectivity or the World.

On my behalf I consider it being more worthwhile to look for new concepts – a *tertium datur* – through which we (get) rid of the burden of those concepts. Nevertheless it is necessary to resume the inherent conceptual dialectics of those dualisms. For like Kant has shown in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (in respect to questions of causality for example) we always are metaphysically attempted by reason to transgress the realm of understanding when it comes to ‘first’ (or ‘last’) questions. Anyway, that tricky reason is one which can so far only be described in terms of absolute, but inappropriate ideas.

Thus at the first stage my considerations are to be taken as a negative guideline for the description of thinking. At a second stage they can be taken as methodological instructions to describe the dynamics of thinking-processes. And finally my proposals to take the archive as a new concept of thinking are a matter for further discussion...

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