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## What can we learn from philosophical manuscripts and archives?

BENEDETTA ZACCARELLO

Senior researcher at C.N.R.S., Institut des Textes et Manuscrits Modernes (I.T.E.M., UMR 8132, C.N.R.S./E.N.S., Paris)  
E-mail: benedetta.zaccarello@cnrs.fr

Manuscripts became more accessible items only in very recent times, after having been handled as for-specialists-only relics along decades if not centuries. Nonetheless, it is still usually the case that only researchers working on the critical edition of a writer's work, or archivists in charge of related collections, develop specific knowledge on the author's manuscripts and archival materials. Work on autographs requires time, it does not easily match the pace imposed on contemporary research and intellectual production in general. Archivists, editors, scholars working on manuscripts know the complexity of the information transmitted by such papers, as the irreducible idiosyncrasy of each writer's archive.

Philosophical manuscripts are an even less known kind of object. Some of the "initiations" which one must undergo, if she's stubborn enough to will to deal with such enigmatic documents, are similar to those experienced by colleagues handling literary papers: the first one required consists, naturally, in getting acquainted with someone else's handwriting. But that's just the beginning. Following steps include challenging tasks, such as becoming familiar with strategies in composition, techniques for storage *ad usum sui* of notes and quotes, recurrent abbreviations, codes used in drafts or while scribbling *marginalia*, ways of synthesizing when sketching for a speech or a lesson... Not only are these materials richer in layers of qualitative information when compared to the printed page (the aspect of the handwriting, the kind and quality of the paper, the symbols and drawings used to implement the text, all convey contents that can be methodically analyzed, but are often grasped more intuitively): they require different skills and a different methodology in analysis and interpretation.

Since manuscripts of an author are the only surviving traces of a living process of elaborating, wording and sharing thought, it doesn't seem absurd to compare the complexity of such "*corpora*" to an organism whose specialized parts work together as organs relating in turn to other portions as to the whole *in time*. Such interrelated topologies within the collections or streams in the evolutive transformation of a project; symmetries and kinships within sets of manuscripts; the shift in meaning appearing by repositioning parts of a *corpus* after reconsidering their classification; the peculiar logics in reading and composing appearing through the study of the material in support of the writing; the strategies in criticizing and self-censorship in editing displayed by underlined and erased words... all these phenomena appear to the reader almost like specters after long exposition to one author's manuscripts: they are effects of stratification in time, they require acquaintance to be perceived.

Of such "aesthetic" cognition of philosophical texts, distilled in the form of a long-term trained knowledge of archives, the reader often becomes aware only when she dares moving to the study of a different author. Such landing in a new continent feels similar to the experience of a journey abroad: possibly a different language, surely new maps to discover and draw, as-yet-unknown customs and a tangible shift in the surrounding atmosphere. At the same time, investigation on a new *corpus*, often reveals *ex post* the methodology that had been previously and more or less consciously built to travel across our first writer's papers. As writing methods display the idiosyncrasy of an author, the researcher approaching a different field of inquiry in the form of a new set of collections becomes aware of the specificity of the methods she had empirically crafted before, as she has to adjust them and have them fit the requirements of the new object of study.

When we come to tracking the genesis of some conceptual constellation across philosophical manuscripts, the matter is even more delicate. First, on a very empirical level, as mentioned above, it is mainly for the sake of scholarly editing or highly specialized exegesis that researchers

that are not trained philologists recur to manuscripts. This means that it is even rarer for a specialist in philosophy to acquire skills and experience on more than a single archive. Beside such *subjective* obstacle, on the way of the building of a specific approach to and a shared methodology for the study and the edition of philosophical manuscripts, several features of the objects stand as obstacles themselves.

All writing is an attempt to translate an inner experience (usually self-represented as pre-verbal) into words, an attempt to make thoughts fit the mold of a language. Nevertheless, conceptual writing is not only a battle with oneself as the author often struggles in building bridges between different speculative traditions and established theories. In the elaboration of their texts, philosophers constantly produce and recreate the image of the cultural and theoretical heritage they address, either to embrace or to confute it. In this measure, what we call philosophy is not only a creative act of thinking rooted in a living experience and grounded in an existential perspective, but also a textual production involving an often-explicit dialogue with one's own culture. A dialogue that appears, moreover, structured around epistemic paradigms and specific intellectual goals, dealing with determined criteria of validity as with procedures, forms and styles supposed to better fit such epistemological ambitions. Despite claiming to universality, philosophical statements are the result of negotiations between individual expression and shared vocabularies. Precisely the thick medium of expression – the whole set of literary dynamics implicitly involved in the writing of philosophy, for instance – is easily forgotten, the discipline itself being traditionally focused on the theoretical contents assessed rather than on her own ways of expressing them, as is the case for literature.

Indeed, the study and edition of philosophical manuscripts delivers a vast array of information in this regard, well exceeding the limits of the texts themselves. The archive allows the scholar to study the emergence of concepts and to trace the production of abstract vocabulary beyond the

static representations offered by the printed book. It reveals how abstract thought originates from working with the multi-layered fabric of language.

In this measure, manuscripts and archives uncover, for instance, the heterogeneous range of sources that inspired the formulation of ideas. Archival work also helps us observe how each thinker creates for herself an eclectic landscape of references, a galaxy of conceptual networks which hardly ever belong to a single language or national tradition. Although we like to think that theory is universal, the perspective offered by archives, personal libraries and manuscripts shows us that abstraction is also a matter of languages and codes, and reveals the work of the thinker/writer as a cultural mediator between all such codes. This suggests a different paradigm for the analysis of conceptual productions, one that focuses less on values of neutrality and universality and more on those of integration and synthesis.

Through the study of archives, one can consider the evolution of theoretical thought as an embodied adventure, experienced firsthand, and the history of the discipline as a dynamic and collective process. In a relatively recent book, French philosopher Pierre Macherey criticized the notion of «national philosophies»<sup>1</sup> and contested its heuristic value in understanding the history of philosophy. He showed that theory should be seen as the history of successive “hybridizations”, such as illustrated by Victor Cousin “importing” Hegel to France, or by the reception of Kant relayed by Jules Barni. The concept of “nationality” itself, rooted in the Romantic idea of one land, one people, one language, seems more and more out of date when confronted with categories such as postmodernity, creolisation and globalisation. In this regard the work of thinkers, when seen through the lens of their manuscripts and archives, offers us models for cultural mediation: archival research reveals that the language of theory is the result of a conceptual syncretism between

various codes and traditions and contributes to the disclosure and reconfiguration of heterogeneous world-conceptions, sedimented in the verbal matter of the papers.

Having been scarcely used in the study of philosophy so far (neither in the writing of its history, nor in the exegesis of its published texts), philosophical manuscripts can indeed help unfolding a different understanding of the discipline, helping reveal the underlying *practices* related to the *writing* of texts: the multiple layers and various versions of texts; the continuity of the struggle with some theoretical problems; the interactions with peers and students; the hesitations, doubts, uncertainty lying behind so many universal statements; the role played by circumstances, travel, meetings and so much more we do not necessarily tend to associate with abstract discourse. While genetic criticism has developed since the 1970s an important set of tools and a philological methodology<sup>2</sup> specific to the study of authors’ manuscripts, little has been done to elaborate guidelines when dealing with philosophical or theoretical archives<sup>3</sup>.

Theoretical manuscripts are odd objects that have only recently started to receive proper atten-

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<sup>2</sup> In Italy, philologists such as F. Moroncini and S. Debenedetti took into consideration variants witnessed by author’s manuscripts since the late 1920s, but mainly in the purpose of scholarly editions. Aiming at substantiating a perspective on literary texts competitive to the dominant aesthetic paradigm proposed by B. Croce, G. Contini went even further in his essay “*Come lavorava l’Ariosto*” (in *Esercizi di lettura*, Firenze, Parenti, 1939). Nonetheless, such researches could hardly be considered as anticipating genetic criticism because of their different scope. Partially in response to French structuralism, J. Levaillant’s pioneering work opened the way to an understanding of autographs as traces witnessing more dynamic writing processes than texts. Such perspective on manuscripts opened the way to a further appreciation of their non-verbal contents, as to various attempts to rethink notions such as work and authorship later developed by contemporary genetic criticism. However, a certain affinity can be observed, probably due to the influence of Paul Valéry’s work on both philological schools.

<sup>3</sup> The issue “*Philosophie*” (P. D’Iorio and O. Ponton ed.) of the journal *Genesis* (22, 2003) can be mentioned as possibly the only specific reference in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Macherey, *Etudes de philosophie française. De Sieyes à Barni*, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2013, 400p.

tion. In France, for instance, an important set of manuscripts by Michel Foucault has been declared of national interest (“trésor national”) in 2012 and bought by the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* for such a high price that even national daily press ended up covering the news. Less than a decade before, in 2004, much less attention had been paid to Derrida leaving his archives to IMEC<sup>4</sup>. It is also worth noting that in Europe the creation of archive centers holding philosophical manuscripts has allowed the gathering and preservation of important data. These centers have enabled the survival of the memory of abstract writing and conceptual thought and allowed those materials to survive. Furthermore, thanks to the contemporary development of digital humanities, such documents are becoming more and more accessible and achieving a well-deserved attention.

Nonetheless, the creativity expressed by researchers and archivists through their coming up with *ad hoc* tools so as to edit, publish or interpret entire sets of manuscripts has not reached a common methodological standard yet. As poetry drafts differ, for instance, from sketches for a novel in their intrinsic logic and so far in the strategy their interpretation requires, the writing of philosophy and its documental traces entail a specific understanding. Moreover, in regard of literary papers, research in genetic criticism has already come up with a shift in its ontology underlining the charm and bias hidden in any “teleological approach” to manuscripts<sup>5</sup>: drafts are to be approached as interpretable documents *per se* rather than as sheer traces of the preparation of a work to come. In this perspective, it is the process and not the final product to be considered the “*ergon*” of literature.

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<sup>4</sup> I had developed some considerations on the very recent history of philosophical archives in the article “*L’écriture de la philosophie*”, in *Littérature*, 178, June 2015, p. 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Grésillon, *Éléments de critique génétique*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 1994, p. 164-168 ; P. M. De Biasi, *Génétique des Textes*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2011, p. 184-189 and D. Ferrer, « La toque de Clementis. Rétroaction et rémanence dans les processus génétiques », *Genesis*, 6, 1994, « Enjeux critiques ».

Such methodological advancement naturally enabled materials unrelated to a published (or even to an unpublished) project to be given proper attention and promoted the edition of new kinds of posthumously published texts. And what about philosophical papers? Together with the contemporary development of digital editions, such perspective seems to have had an impact also on the edition of unpublished philosophical manuscripts. An example might be the publication of notes for lectures and classes, which became almost a “literary genre” in the last two decades. But what can such renovated sensibility to such materials teach us about what the *work* of philosophy, its *ergon*, is?

Seen from the perspective of a thinker’s manuscripts, philosophy seems to be more a matter of production of an abstract vocabulary along a continuous process of reformulation, than a series of published works. From such a standpoint, the study of the *writing* of philosophy through its archives appears to be a field of research that differs both from the analysis of literary manuscripts and from the study of theories on the grounds of printed books or history of ideas.

As we sit in front of a handwritten page, language, that is the *medium* of philosophy and of abstract thinking, becomes tangible in the form of erased words and blank spaces. As these signs tell better than anything else, there is no conceptual creation without a painstaking work on language’s limits and structures. Moreover, hesitations, rewriting, erased passages and corrections show that the work of philosophy is not only a negotiation with the ineffable borders of the verbal expression, but also a constant dialogue with the vocabulary shared with peers, students and sources. Philosophy appears from such perspective on its *medium* a continuous one-to-her-cultural-horizon dialogue. The dynamics of self-censorship or censorship *tout court* let appear quite intuitively the interaction between the author and her cultural surroundings. The archive is a theater of forgotten books and become-too-implicit *querelles*. At the core of what seems to be the most intimate and abstract – the cabinet of the thinker alone with her game of flashes and ideas – lie the most

evident traces of the interaction with consciousness *in time and history*.

Manuscripts are *multidimensional objects* in a *multidimensional space*. Their being *one corpus* takes the form of a documental network, that could virtually be browsed in infinite ways, according to possible classifications, criteria, supports, representations. From the standpoint of manuscripts and archives, the verbal medium of theory is part of a device of higher complexity compared to the linearity of the reading of a book, where information unfolds across multidirectional paths, being these objects at the same time text carriers and documents “*en chair et os*”. From the reader’s standpoint, beside a conceptual understanding of the texts, an ability to grasp the complexity of such multilayered displays of the wording of thought is thus required.

A third element I would like to mention when raising the question about the *ergon* of philosophy in the light of its archives, is the *peculiar dynamic ontology* – different from that of the printed books – manuscripts confront us to. The researcher who chooses to work on the ground of the philosophical archive is more likely to be sensitive to the *continuity* in the life and story of an author’s work. A sort of line of evolution seems to appear across different attempts to *express* what is witnessed by the manuscripts. Such act might follow non-linear paths and get lost in unfinished essays, revolve around unsolved dilemmas and resurface in orally shared texts. Drafts, reading notes, diagrams and sketches are the *continuum* through which we come to know or by which we are invited to represent the specificity of an approach to philosophical problems. They let emerge the daily confrontation of a thinker and writer with her own questions as with the answers provided by tradition. From such perspective, the production of theory appears rather “stream”-based than object-based, and the observation of what lies behind the curtains of the philosophical scene, reveals the *performing* features of such discipline. In other terms, philosophy appears as an *exercise and a constant interpellation*, a *dialogical practice* related to specific and concrete contexts. The study of correspondences

as of unpublished discourses and teaching materials discloses a history of philosophy much more rooted in sharing modes. *Marginalia* can give us a portrait of the writer as a reader. The notes taken for courses and seminars give life to the professional philosopher, most of the time earning her life teaching, and most of the time nourishing her own discourse with the interactions with peers and students.

Genetic criticism has certainly explored the different logics corresponding to different *scales of observation* on manuscripts: from the complex genesis of major works to the dissection of a single *folio*. In this regard, the work on philosophical archives can be understood as the exploration of different hermeneutic amplitudes. The choice of a single word can be already revelatory of a perspective on philosophy itself, as witnessed for instance by the late Maurice Merleau-Ponty borrowing all his key concepts from literature instead of using a theoretically encoded language: a criticism of western philosophy in a nutshell. At odds, we could imagine a study dealt not on one single corpus but on a whole network of philosophers. However, this latter would be the aim for a *collective* work, as that of the present volume.

As mentioned above, research on philosophical manuscripts is being done mostly by highly specialized researchers, teams and institutions, in scattered places and settings all around the world. The work on manuscripts is akin to hunting, in terms of finding and using techniques to be adjusted on the specificity of the prey. The downside is such scattered competences make it even harder to establish a shared methodology in the analysis and edition of such materials. Collecting twelve articles on philosophical manuscripts, the present volume aims at providing the reader with a mosaic of samples taken *in vivo*, so to speak, from the work on the field. This is how such “anthology” aims at revealing different aspects and recurrent issues, a whole spectrum of topics and a variety of approaches. It is easy to observe that most of the articles refer to a single corpus: the volume itself grants the reader an opportunity to go through the richness of such prism in an expe-

rience that, in this regard, is similar to the exploration of the collections of an archive. It is up to the reader to draw lines of continuity and underline similarities in the presented readings of European and non-European authors' manuscripts, belonging to thinkers from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dealing with interpretations or critical editions, with more theoretical or rather pragmatic issues characterizing the work on philosophical archives.

Several papers discuss the transition from manuscripts to a critical edition of texts or the impact of the history of editions on the reception of philosophical works and authors. Others deal with the history of archives and the latter's role as mediators in an implicit dialogue with the reader's horizon, as shapers of the borders of the work of an author, or with the scientific or even political responsibility of such institutions. Some describe up close peculiar strategies in writing as aspects revealing ways of thinking. Others let us understand fragments of the personal trajectory of a thinker behind the apparently unshaped materials of some unpublished drafts, revealing his struggles in the often-difficult interaction with colleagues and across the sometimes dramatical contingencies of history. All provide the reader with insights in the work of major thinkers belonging to the history of European, Afro-Caribbean and Indian philosophy that certainly will surprise those acquainted with approaching such body of thought from printed books only. They all face philosophy as a *process* through the lens of its writing. The reader may be surprised by how such dynamic understanding of the discipline allows a deeper appreciation of the awareness shown by thinkers of the literary aspects of their work when observed in the making of their texts. This also enables a better understanding of the relationship between abstraction and *time*: that of individual existences, cultural moments, seasons of debates and historical phases, but also that of the making of the archives along with the shaping of the public image of an author.

The present volume features texts by scholars and archivists who have long been working on

some of the most important philosophical *corpora* preserved in the *global* history of the discipline. After several years spent on philosophical archives, it became clear to me that only gathering voices and fostering debate amongst such actors could possibly contribute to a perspective on philosophy, its history and its expression as a dynamic, transcultural and interactive process. In order to sustain this direction, first I organized, in collaboration with Thomas C. Mercier, a conference entitled «The Wording of Thoughts: philosophy from the standpoint of its manuscripts and archives», hosted and financed by C.E.F.R.E.S. (*Centre Français d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, Prague, U.S.R. 3138, C.N.R.S./M.E.A.E.) with the contribution of several international partners. Published with the support of C.E.F.R.E.S. and the University of Florence, the present issue of *Aisthesis* moves a step further along this path presenting readers, possibly for the first time, with a rich collection of observations grounded on the work dealt in first person on philosophical papers spanning across three continents and three centuries. In our hopes, this will be a first invitation to a further dialogue yet to come.

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Besides a set of papers specifically addressing the topic "Archives" from a variety of perspectives, authored by Fabrizio Desideri, Marina Montanelli, Thomas Clément Mercier, Francesco Vitale, Daniela Helbig, Emanuele Caminada, Jean Khalfa, Ondřej Švec, Alois Pichler, Arianna Sforzini, Richard Hartz and Peter Heehs, this issue of «Aisthesis» also includes a selection of articles on other themes (section «Varia») by Maja Jerrentrup, Nigel Mapp, Tommaso Morawski.

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