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## WRITING AS A MODEL OF CULTURAL SEDIMENTATION AND MEMORY: FERRARIS, DERRIDA AND HUSSERL

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Despite their creativity, cultural actions are not established out of nothing. They are based on previous actions, their passive or active memory, and extension. Sedimentation is the depositing of sediments that occurs during certain processes. They testify to the processes that have taken place and themselves become significant links or traces. Different layers of sediment are formed, which testify to past events, which have structures in the present. The best-known phenomenological concept of sedimentation was formulated in Husserl's text *The Origin of Geometry*. Husserl uses the specific geological term of sedimentation to describe the science of geometry as a linguistically (written) mediated genesis of conceptual knowledge. The human practice of knowledge can be transmitted to other generations only by expressing it linguistically and recording it in writing. Derrida used the phenomenological concept of sedimentation and created *Grammatology*. Maurizio Ferraris applied these ideas of Derrida while developing the theory of documentality. The main idea of documentality is that a particular kind of social objects, namely documents (records of social acts) are the ground of social reality. For all three philosophers, writing or recording becomes a model for reflecting on cultural-social reality. The purpose of this article is to discuss the writing as a model for cultural sedimentation and memory. Husserl understood writing as a sedimentation that must be reactivated. However, Derrida and Ferraris identify the written objects only with materialized writing and the repetition of what is written. They do not distinguish between imitative and comprehensive reading.

*Keywords:* mobile phone, writing, memory, sedimentation, phenomenology, Ferraris, Derrida, Husserl.

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# ПИСЬМО КАК МОДЕЛЬ СЕДИМЕНТАЦИИ КУЛЬТУРЫ И ПАМЯТИ: ФЕРРАРИС, ДЕРРИДА И ГУССЕРЛЬ

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Несмотря на их креативную составляющую, действия в рамках культуры не возникают из ничего. Они опираются на предшествующие действия, на пассивную и активную память о них как их расширение. Седиментация — это отложение осадков, которое происходит в рамках некоторых процессов. Эти осадки свидетельствуют об имевших место процессах и сами становятся значимыми отсылками или следами. Формируются различные осадочные слои, которые свидетельствуют о прошлых событиях, структуры которых присутствуют и в настоящем. Наиболее известная феноменологическая концепция седиментации была сформулирована в тексте Гуссерля «Начало геометрии». Гуссерль использует специальный геологический термин «седиментация», чтобы описать науку геометрию как языковым образом опосредованный (записанный) генезис понятийного знания. Человеческая практика знания может транслироваться следующим поколениям только через языковое выражение и письменную запись. Деррида использовал феноменологическое понятие седиментации и создал «Грамматологию». Маурицио Феррарис применил эти идеи Деррида, развивая теорию документальности. Основная идея документальности в том, что отдельный род социальных объектов, а именно — документы (записи социальных актов), лежат в основе социальной реальности. Для всех трёх философов письмо и запись становятся моделью размышления о культурно-социальной реальности. Цель этой статьи в том, чтобы рассмотреть письмо как модель культурной седиментации и памяти. Гуссерль понимал письмо как седиментацию, которая нуждается в реактивации. Тем не менее, Деррида и Феррарис отождествляют письменные объекты только с материализованными вещами и повторением написанного. Они не проводят различия между подражательным и понимающим чтением.

*Ключевые слова:* мобильный телефон, письмо, память, седиментация, феноменология, Феррарис, Деррида, Гуссерль.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural philosophy traditionally relies on the concept of objectification. Objectification is a prerequisite for cultural communication. Only by objectifying subjective contents do they become intersubjectively accessible to others. However, objectified contents must be internalized and in turn re-subjectivized. In phenomenology, the dialectic of objectification and subjectivation is replaced by the concept of sedimentation. Sedimentation is the depositing of sediments that occurs during certain processes. They testify to the processes that have taken place, and themselves become significant links or traces.

Cultural tradition can be understood positively or negatively. The ambivalence of tradition can be described by two questions: Why does transmissibility exist, and why does each generation of people not have to start all over again, but can adopt and pass on habits, customs, skills and knowledge to others? How does tradition turn into the schematization of embodied memory and the inertia of habits? Preservation of the past in the present can only happen with the appearance of certain traces, materialized references, or embodied schemes. In geology, chemistry, and oceanology, there is a term of sedimentation, which describes the existence of the past in the present. Sedimentation is the process with which sediment is formed, where particles in a liquid or gas settle and come to rest against a barrier. This happens due to the fact that the particles are moving in their respective medium and are affected by various forces. Most importantly, the particles deposited during this sedimentation process are understood as a depositing, as an indication or testimony of processes that have already taken place. Geologists, based on the study of sediments, can infer changes that occurred many years ago. Another important aspect of sedimentation is that during sedimentation, the settling particles are separated from the liquid flowing medium by solidification and densification. This is best evidenced by the formation, structuring, and crystallization of various types of rocks. Different layers of sediment are formed, which testify to past events that also have structures in the present. The best-known phenomenological concept of sedimentation was formulated in Husserl's text *The Origin of Geometry*. Husserl uses the specific geological term of sedimentation to describe the science of geometry as a linguistically (written) mediated genesis of conceptual knowledge (Blomberg, 2019). The human practice of knowledge can be transmitted to other generations only by expressing it linguistically and recording it in writing. It is also important to note that, according to Husserl, writing does not preserve meaning, it becomes a reference that allows for activating the intuition of ideal forms. The term sedimentation was not chosen by chance, because it provides an opportunity to combine two dimensions important to knowledge, which are often separated. Sedimentation as a process combines synchronic structures and their diachronic dynamics. Sedimentation not only combines structures and processes, a stable order and its becoming, but also allows us to explain how stable structures are separated and formed in dynamic processes. Dynamic processes become stable structures, the activation of which provides an opportunity to extend and renew cultural traditions. Cultural actions, regardless of their creativity, are not created out of nothing. They are based on previous actions, their passive or active memory and extension. Passive memory (forgetfulness) can turn into active memory through actualization and reactivation. Writing is like a passive memory that can be activated by reading it with understanding.

Husserl and Merleau-Ponty studied the sedimentations of experience in order to reveal the assumptions, genesis and development of the historicity of embodied consciousness. Derrida used the phenomenological concept of sedimentation and created *Grammatology* because he sought to combine a dynamic genesis with stable structures. The question was formulated as follows: how can stable structures and material traces support the genesis of something? Ferraris applied these ideas of Derrida while developing the theory of documentality. The main idea of documentality is that a particular kind of social objects, namely documents (records of social acts) are the basis of social reality. For all three philosophers, writing or recording becomes a model for reflecting on cultural-social reality.

The purpose of the article is to discuss writing as a model for cultural sedimentation and memory. I first analyze Ferraris' social object concept. I then examine Derrida's concept of writing. Finally, I discuss whether cultural sedimentation can be understood as imitation. I argue that writing is a sedimentation of meaning that needs to be reactivated. The script is only a trace that points to the original intuitions of ideal objects. The reactivation of sedimentation cannot be equated with imitation, because tradition can exist only when the understanding of the ideal meaning is reactualized.

## 2. THE MOBILE PHONE AS A SOCIAL OBJECT

In Ferraris' book *Where are you?*, which was written in 2005, he argues that the point of mobile phones is not communication, but recording. The philosopher notes that the mobile phone does not serve as a traditional communication tool for conversations, but as a texting, image recording, saving or memory machine. Even more, the phone now becomes a document (Ferraris, 2014). It can be used as universal tool for registration—to confirm a signature, make a payment, discover your location, or confirm it. The telephone reveals the nature of social objects because, as a recording device, it embodies the acts of their production. The mobile phone reveals the peculiarity of social reality, as it can only exist through sedimentation of records. Thus social objects cannot be identified with physical objects or ideal objects.

Ferraris separates social objects as an independent category from ideal and physical objects due to the peculiarity of their origin and existence<sup>1</sup>. Social objects are pri-

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<sup>1</sup> Ferraris provides a classification of objects. In his opinion, it is necessary to distinguish between natural objects that exist in time and space and are independent of the subject, social objects that exist in time and space and depend on the subject, and ideal objects that exist beyond time and space and are independent of the subject. Ideal objects can also be socialized, but their essence is to be independent of psychological, linguistic and social acts. Ferraris criticizes Derrida's attempt to reduce ideal objects

marily based on writing. Their foundation are records, which can be very diverse. These can be records on paper, magnetic memory cards, or even virtual Internet networks. Records embody memory and ensure the maintenance and identification of social identities. For example, if I want to confirm my identity, I must provide a registered personal code; if I want to confirm my marital status, I must provide a record of my marriage; if I have property, it must be confirmed by entries in the property register; if I want to pay a bill, I must have a record in a virtual bank account. It is precisely because of the association of these social objects with logging records that the mobile phone is increasingly becoming not a communication instrument but a recording/recording machine. It is a tool with which social reality is constructed. Social objects are both personal obligations and promises, as well as social legal obligations, laws, intentions, various economic, political or other contracts, bills for purchases in a store, or for drinks consumed in a bar. If earlier these social objects were recorded in stone, clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, fabrics, animal skins, or body tattoos, thus ensuring the material sustainability of the records, now those records can exist in electronic form. Thus, records become independent of material carriers. If one credit or ID card is lost, it can be replaced with another. It is important that records exist in an electronic bank account or register.

Ferraris described the phenomenon of the mobile phone perfectly, and I completely agree that the phone is not only a means of communication, but a special social object or even a document that underpins our social reality. From my point of view, the most important statement of Ferraris's conception is the justification of social reality by records. Arguably, records are sediments that need to be reactivated. Ferraris explains social objects using Adolf Reinach's phenomenological theory. Reinach argued that social objects should be understood as a special reality that cannot be reduced to either physical or psychic objects. Their existence can be understood through the example of a promise. Reinach concluded that a promise becomes a social obligation only when it is materialized, when it is expressed orally or in writing in another way that he understands. Social reality is established through objectifications that must be understandable to others. Ferraris expanding Reinach's theory of social objects states that the essential features of social objects are: 1. Intention (spontaneity and punctuality); 2. Expression (the necessity to be perceived and understood); and 3. Recording (the need to be registered) (Ferraris, 2013, 168).

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to communication and writing as the conditions that constitute those objects (Ferraris, 2013, 39). Ferraris says that ideal objects are discovered, not created. However, the philosopher, recognizing the irreducibility of ideal objects to psychology, does not pay attention to how discoveries can be reactivated and how the science of ideal objects and its tradition emerge on the basis of such reactivations.

### 3. WRITING, RECORD, REGISTRATION

Ferraris relies on Derrida's concept of grammatology, which aims to rehabilitate the concept of writing. According to Derrida, the opposition between written and oral tradition introduces an unmeasured division, which is based on an unjust hierarchy of values. Moreover, this contrast between the letter and the living (spiritual) word is based on certain traditional superstitions. Superstitions about scripture and the living word are based on an analogous distinction between body and spirit. In *Grammatology*, Derrida argues:

It is not a simple analogy: writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems-conversely-to borrow its metaphors. Writing, sensible matter and artificial exteriority: a "clothing." It has sometimes been contested that speech clothed thought. Husserl, Saussure, Lavelle have all questioned it. But has it ever been doubted that writing was the clothing of speech? (Derrida, 1997, 35)

The Western tradition prioritizes the spirit over the body. The body is considered a corrupt burden of the spirit. Therefore, writing is considered an imperfect tool and a destructive technique. It is not by chance that Heidegger criticizes the forgetfulness of being, and offers to overcome it by listening to the voice of being. Derrida argues that, on the one hand, the spiritual spoken word is considered superior to the written word, because writing eliminates intonations and addresses not a specific person, but an abstract reader. On the other hand, worshipers of the spirit (the voice of being) understand scripture too narrowly. The script is usually identified with the phonetic script.

It is said that the most perfect form of writing is phonetic writing, when the sound of a spoken word is written down. Derrida argues that the alphabet is an essential method of writing, because it records speech, and the latter is a direct transmission of thought. The development of writing is depicted as a transition from a pictograph to an ideogram, and from there to a phonetic alphabet. But writing, understood as an intermediary of an intermediary (writing represents speech, which in turn represents thinking) is treated as falling outside of meaning. Then the record can be understood as a drawing, a knot in the corner of a handkerchief or on a string, an indicating gesture or various inscriptions, imprints, engravings. Based on this point of view, it can be asserted that writing is the basis of cinematography, photography, and choreography. Freeing writing from the need to represent speech reveals that it is equated with phonetic writing simply because that form of writing dominated Europe (Derrida, 1997, 4).

Ferraris claims, that the mobile phone establishes the superiority of writing and even ideograms over orality. The role of the telephone as a tool for conversations and communication obscures the much more important point of writing and recording. The mobile phone confirms and embodies Derrida's grammatological thesis that everything is written, and nothing exists beyond the text. Now, based on the example of a mobile phone, this thesis reveals itself as an establishment of social-cultural reality. Social reality exists through records, documents and memory archives. It could be objected that the writing and recording functions are already performed by the computer. We use computers to register and our movements and actions leave traces in the virtual space. Every step I take, every visit to websites, information pages or virtual shopping points is recorded. However, the mobile phone has the advantage that it captures my movements not only in the virtual world, but also in the real one. It records my visits not only to websites, but also to the actual stores, clubs, parks, cities and states I have visited. I create the reality of a social world with my posts. If Galileo Galilei once said that the world is a book written by God, now we can ironically note that everyone with a mobile phone becomes a co-author of this book.

#### 4. WRITING—MEMORY OR FORGETFULNESS?

If we talk about the relationship between writing and memory, the first thing that comes to mind is Plato's expressed critique of writing as memory. Plato is often cited to emphasize that writing is the poison of memory. It is said that because of writing, we no longer keep memories in our soul, but entrust them to writing. Derrida claims that Plato establishes an opposition between the inner voice and the outer writing, which establishes a certain hierarchy. Derrida aims to show that writing is more important than orality, because writing embodies memory and the possibility of repetition. This is evidenced by the example of societies without writing. Without writing, there is no story. Writing allows you to save and accumulate knowledge. So why is Plato considered an opponent of writing, even though he himself became the most widely read ancient philosopher? I believe that Derrida's claims that Plato opposes writing and orality in the *Phaedrus* dialogue are inaccurate (Derrida, 1997, 35). Plato does not contrast writing and voice, but written speeches and a person who understands what is written. Writing does not preserve truth because it is only a reminder, not memory itself.

You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without

instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise. (Plato, 2005, 275b)

In the Platonic dialogue of Phaedrus, the discussion is not only about the destructive effect of writing on the memory, but about real and supposed wisdom, about truth and falsehood. Writing can become a game, a mischief, when you don't care at all what seeds will be sown. Plato is concerned with the educational role of writing. Scripture is not the keeper of truth because it does not guarantee truth. Scripture requires knowledge of what is written. The text must be legible.

He who thinks, then, that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an utterly simple person, and in truth ignorant of the prophecy of Ammon, if he thinks written words are of any use except to remind him who knows the matter about which they are written. (Plato, 2005, 275d)

Plato does not claim that writing is completely unnecessary, he only notes that it does not need to be idolized. What is important is the playful and pedagogical function of writing, not the writing itself. What is important is not how the language is recorded in the text, but how it is recorded in the soul. This, according to Plato, is the true essay. In other words, what matters is not the written texts, but what happens to us while writing and reading them. In Plato's understanding, philosophy is the care of the soul. On the other hand, Plato's approach to writing reminds us once again that ideas and their intuition are more important than writing. Writing is just a trace of ideas and a reference to them.

##### *5. WRITING AS CULTURAL SEDIMENTATION: REPEATED IMITATION OR REACTIVATION*

As I mentioned, when writing is understood as an arche-writing, it should not be associated only with human linguistic activity. Derrida, expanding the concept of writing, calls it a trace. A trace is always an inscription in the sensory element, but at the same time it is understood as a reference to what is not there.

The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the differance which opens appearance and signification. Articulating the living upon the nonliving in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it. (Derrida, 1997, 65)



The trace as an archiphenomenon of memory makes it possible to eliminate the division of meaning into internal and external, subjective and objective, natural and cultural. The simplest example of writing can be the footprints of an animal or the way it marks its territory. Here, the cat leaves traces by scratching the walls or rubbing against the surrounding objects. A trace can be not only a scratch or imprint, but also a left (recorded) smell. A person may be less sensitive to smells, but a dog, when encountering a stranger, always sniffs him as if reading the memory of scents he brings with him. Even more interestingly, fish also leave traces. Seals can use their sensitive whiskers to follow the tracks of fish just as well as tracking dogs on land. Seals “read” and record the eddies caused by passing fish. It is true that these traces of fish are very short-lived. They last just 35 seconds. However, this ability to follow fish tracks allows seals to hunt in complete darkness underwater.

Maurizio Ferraris extended Derrida’s ideas in describing the social and cultural world and applied them to explain modern technologies such as the mobile phone and the Internet. It can be said that the modern social and institutional reality is created by a constantly expanding system of records. Not only cultural reality, but also natural reality is based on a recording system that allows recording of acts, which creates meanings and social connections. Indeed, writing is a prime example of the sedimentation of any cultural meaning. It can be reactivated when the trace turns into a meaningful reference and we are able to read it. However, in Ferraris’ *Documentality*, the continuity of the cultural/social world is based on imitation. Ferraris presents imitation as a model of socio-cultural activity. He understands the reading of writing as an imitative act. It is the mimetic repetition of the record that gives us meaning (Ferraris, 2013, 193). Writing is a trace that turns into meaning when it is registered with the possibility of repetition (Ferraris, 2013, 211). The reader reads the text much like a social actor repeats a ritual. Therefore, according to Ferraris, mimetic transmission and individual variation are actions characteristic of the social world.

In order to understand the significance of writing in social and cultural reality, one must return to the concept formulated in Edmund Husserl’s work *The Origin of Geometry* (Husserl, 1954). It is no secret that Derrida’s grammatology project was developed by interpreting the insights formulated in this text (Derrida, 1978). Husserl argued that the emergence of the tradition of geometry requires writing as a material objectification. Without writing, the Pythagorean theorem would not survive, thus Derrida claims that ideal objects are impossible without writing. Writing is said to guarantee their existence. However, Derrida simplifies the existence of idealities when he equates the intuition of ideal objects and their sedimentation in writing. I take the Husserlian view that writing does not coincide with ideas. Ideas require a different

way of understanding. Records only indicate and remind intuition of ideal objects. Husserl understood writing as a sedimentation that must be reactivated. It is possible to use geometrical examples, which not only Husserl, but also Plato, are happy to use. No writing of a geometric figure can express the ideal meaning of that figure. It is not possible to write (draw) an equilateral triangle or a straight line. The ideal meaning of these forms always transcends the inscription and remains beyond it. Husserl, like Plato, argues that ideal meaning cannot be written down. Any record of ideality meets with resistance, with the impossibility of equating ideal contents with sensory material expressions. In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl shows that the irreducibility of ideal meanings applies not only to writings, but also to words spoken aloud. Sensory articulated sounds, like materially embodied letters, do not contain the ideal meaning to which they refer. According to Husserl, the ideality of meaning precedes the sensority and contingency of expression. The meaning of a word does not change depending on how the word is pronounced or written. However, the philosopher does not deny the necessity of expressing ideal meanings. Expressions, signs and images must play only a supporting role as aids to understanding: “Elusive sensuous pictures function, however, in a phenomenologically graspable and describable manner, as mere aids to understanding, and not as themselves meanings or carriers of meaning” (Husserl, 2001, 208).

Husserl argues that recordings (records) are significant not in and of themselves, but as references to intuitions of ideal meaning. Such an understanding of writing is based on the distinction between the spoken or written word as a sensory complex and its ideal meaning. One can focus on the sound of the word or how the word is written, but more important is the meaning of the word itself, what it indicates as a sign that we understand. Comprehensible and non-comprehending reading of the text are two completely different ways of interpreting meaning. In one case, attention is focused on the word as a sensory sign, in the other case, attention is directed to its ideal meaning. Most importantly, the ideal value remains autonomous from the point of view of the writing, since the same meaning can be written in different ways. Moreover, not a single record exhausts or replaces the very intuition of this ideal object. With this intuition of the ideal object or meaning in mind, we should also understand the Husserlian concept of science. Science is not a collection of written texts, because texts by themselves do not transmit meaning, they are only traces of intuitions. Therefore, scientific texts are meaningful only as sediments of experience, which are reactivated and reactualized, i.e. repeated as intuitions of ideal meaning.

So Derrida and Ferraris rightly point out the importance of writing as the objectification and communication of a meaning, because ideal meanings can only be

communicated by expressing them sensory, but they simplify the existence of ideal object by identifying them with material expression and its contingency. In agreement with Husserl, I argue that writing is not the recording of an ideal object as such, but the sedimentation of the experience or intuition of it. Writing is such a sediment of experience that, in being passive, requires reactivation and intelligent extension, not imitation. The genesis of meaning, its sedimentation and understandable reactualization is nothing but a condition for the existence of a cultural tradition. For example, the history of philosophy is possible only because reading the writings of philosophers gives an understanding of what they are talking about, and actualizes those ideas, the traces of which can be found in the text. Imitation and mimetic reproduction do not create conditions for experiencing the meanings of idealities and transferring them to others, and without this experience as a structure of historicity that enables reactualization, history itself turns into a mere registering of meaningless facts.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The documentality theory formulated by Ferraris and the case of the mobile phone as a social object reminds us of the importance of writing/recording in the social and cultural world. Ideas and social commitments acquire cultural significance and value only when they are recorded in writing. Derrida and Ferraris rightly point out the importance of writing as the objectification and communication of a meaning. Ideal objects and social objects require materially sensory objectification, but writing is neither an all-saving memory nor forgetfulness. Writing must be read not only by understanding the letters or ideograms, but also by understanding what they mean. Husserl understood writing as a sedimentation that must be reactivated. However, Derrida and Ferraris identify the written objects only with materialized writing and the repetition of what is written. They do not distinguish between imitative and comprehensive reading. Ferraris does not reflect on the difference between the repetition of a social ritual and the meaningful reading of a text. The repetition of a social ritual does not require an understanding of its origin, so its imitative repetition with little effort reproduces the meaning of the ritual itself, whereas in simulating reading, we do not reproduce the meaning, because the meaning of the text does not match the text itself. To be able to read what is written and understand what is written about are different things. These are different levels of the bound idealities. The analysis of sedimented forms of memory leads to the question of whether it is possible to return to the primal sources of meaning. Are there such records, habits, customs that can function in the present, even if their primal meaning is lost? I argue that the cultural

tradition of ideal objects as free idealities is possible only on the basis of reactivation, which is not imitative repetition but a return to primal intuitions.

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