

Maurizio Ferraris

“There isn’t anything here”

“No, not now, but something was”

Kevin Costner, *Dances with wolves*.

## Impressions

I met Riccardo De Marchi and got to know him really well after a meeting in Turin in 2005 during which he showed me his work, viewing an exhibition by Fontana at the Guggenheim in New York in the autumn of 2006, and then, in autumn 2007, in his studio, where I saw him at work. It would be rather lengthy to recount all the impressions which he made upon me. But the main one was that of an obstinate dedication to the ‘impression’. I do not wish to suggest that De Marchi is an impressionist, the exact opposite; he does not paint the impressions that the world leaves on his own soul, he doesn’t paint what he feels, but, precisely the opposite, he traces some impressions (which are no more his than they are mine or yours, they are universal) on supports, whether metal, stone or plastic, with ever more refined research.

And I really do not believe that he does it to impress, for there is nothing more alien to De Marchi than the need to please or the need to surprise, the need to be there or the need to be seen. No, isolated in his studio which is itself isolated in the Friuli countryside, De Marchi spends his working days leaving traces, and one has the impression that he does it for himself and for his art, with a remarkable devotion. I noticed it especially at the Guggenheim when he was gazing at the works of Fontana, studying the holes, cuts, incisions, the materials, the traces.

In this sense De Marchi, just as Fontana, is both a modern and an ancient artist. His works can be positioned in a sort of free zone – between the galleries of New York (the huge refurbished and revamped warehouses and industrial buildings on at least ten streets which I visited, with Riccardo, two days after the Fontana exhibition) and the cave paintings at Lascaux. And it is for this reason, for his asceticism and for his extraterritoriality, that I have decided to explain De Marchi in my own way without offering proper hermeneutics of his work, of his traces (explaining art is always a little like dissecting frogs, few people are interested and the frog dies) but rather explaining why traces are so important to the birth of what we call culture and the social world. Recounting, that is,

the motive for which Riccardo, in his dedication to traces and to writing, understands the origin of the world in which we live not as biological beings, but first and foremost as social ones. Therein lays the reason for this small treatise on ichnology. But just what is ichnology?

## Iχvos

Iχvos, *ichnos*, is the Greek word for “trace, clue, footprint”, both in a literal sense (“to follow one’s footprints”, for instance, in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus*), and in a spiritual sense (“trace of the speeches”, in Aeschylus, *Prometheus*, 845). Hence the Greek name for Sardinia, Iχvouσσα (*Hyknusa* or *Icnussa*), meaning “footprint”, the shape of the island when viewed from above. Ichneusis is the search for traces, ichneutés is the searcher, ichnéuo is the act of looking for something (Plato’s *Parmenides*, 128c), and ichnographia is a map or sketch.

“Icnologia” (“Ichnology”) was the title of the last chapter of my *Estetica razionale* (Rational aesthetics), which was published eleven years ago, and which Riccardo was patient enough to read - at the suggestion, I believe, of his friend (and my friend and pupil many years ago in Trieste) Alessandro Marinelli. With what I believed to be a neologism (I had to be careful not to let others correct it into ‘iconology’) I developed a general theory of traces or, as I wrote in the sleeve notes, “An illustration of the way in which (in hieroglyphics, in alphabets, in mnemonics, in the association of ideas and in geometry) a trace links the blackboard upon which one writes (the mind, the body or paper) and the blackboard of the world.

A grand design, maybe too grand. Later, I discovered that a scientific discipline exists, which is called ichnology, and that its objective is the research for traces, trails, footprints, grooves, tunnels and, in general, every type of trace that provides information on the way of life of organisms, past and present. In this sense it would be a misunderstanding to consider it a mere branch of paleontology since as well as paleoichnology, which concerns itself with ancient traces, neoichnology exists, which is dedicated to recent traces, often capitalizing on the experience accrued by paleoichnology. The discipline has its roots in the early 1800’s and has undergone an important and rapid acceleration in the last few years. There are study courses for Ichnology (usually related to the earth sciences) in Italy as well. ‘Ichnotechs’ exist and the review “*Ichnos. An International journal for plant and animal traces*” began its publication four years ago and has now reached its fifteenth issue. Furthermore, those scientists studying ichnology are called, predictably, ‘Ichnologists’.

Amongst these ichnologists, as I was saying, in his capacity as paleoichnologist and neoichnologist, we can find, without a doubt, Riccardo. But let us proceed in a more orderly

fashion. With this technology dedicated to Riccardo, I would like to demonstrate, first of all, how traces are important in the building of a social reality; and then I would like to try to explain why.

## Inscriptions

When we visit a gallery of ancient art we precisely feel like we are in the middle of ancient things; this is even more so when we visit a museum or an archaeological site. Those stones, as one says, are full of history. The same feeling does not occur, however, when we are on the beach. There everything seems modern, and it is in fact, if we think of Coca-Cola, swimming costumes and beach umbrellas. But then, looking at the sand, the rocks, the sea, it does not seem as though we are being confronted with the depths of time. It simply seems as though the umbrellas and sun loungers are a few years old, that swimming costumes are in fashion or perhaps a little unfashionable (that means they are last year's), and that nature is timeless.

This is strange, is it not? That the stones of the ruins in Paestum are old, but those of the beaches nearby are not. How can this be explained? It cannot depend on the composition of the stone because, in many cases, the stones are the same. The Dalmatian stone in the Roman amphitheatre at Pola is exactly the same stone as is found on the nearby coast, where people swim and sunbathe. So, on what does this distinction depend?

The answer is quite simple. The "ancient" stones, the ruins, have been subjected to an inscription, they are the remains, the fragments of something which was social and that, precisely because of this, is now historical. It is not that the other stones are modern; it is simply that they do not seem to have a history. All well and good you might say, but this is not a great discovery that nature is quite different from history. There is, however, a way to make even a-historical and extra-historical stones ancient objects, and it is to subject them to geological investigation and, specifically, to an ichnological one that would read them, decipher them and actually acknowledge them as inscriptions; at this point these stones will have an age and a history too. The transition from nature to history therefore is nothing more than the understanding and acknowledgement of an inscription. And, reciprocally – this is the proposition that I would like to debate in the next few pages – it is precisely traces that form the central span of the bridge going from natural objects to social objects.

I shall explain. The metaphor of the natural world as a book written by God in mathematical symbols is as old as the world itself, and perhaps this metaphor recurs every time in an episode of *Without A Trace* those who had gone missing without leaving a clue are identified thanks to traces that can be deciphered by new technology. As such, it is most of all a metaphor. But the social

world, on the other hand, is constructed by writing, and not in a metaphorical sense. It is the world of maps, the world in which bodies are covered in inscriptions for the purpose of beauty, identity, and rituals. And it is above all the world in which pacts are drawn up, documents are written, diplomas are awarded, and money is used.

Take the scene of Hamlet's oath. The ghost of Claudius appears on the castle battlements asking his son for justice, and then he leaves pleading for some sort of record to be kept of the event: "Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me". Hamlet, one might say, doesn't need to be asked twice, and he swears (that is, he produces a social object):

"Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
That youth and observation copied there,  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!  
O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!  
My tables. Meet it is I set it down  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain --  
At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark. [*Writes*]"

Thus we have the construction of a social object which might be put forward as a law where Object = Written deed: the social object is the result of a social act which involves at least two individuals and which has the peculiarity of being written down, on a piece of paper or as a computer file, or simply recorded in people's minds. In Hamlet's time computers didn't exist, but he writes his oath down anyway using both the blackboard in his head and the pages of his notebook. The board in his head will be wiped clean as a *tabula rasa*, he will erase all that is futile or book-like, impressions and images, all traces written so far, leaving just one annotation: the order from his father, his request for vendetta and for justice. Then, to be sure, he takes his notebook and writes.

You never know, *verba volant, scripta manent*, and it is essential that the object be fixed, recorded somewhere, with tracks, otherwise these are simply just that, words in the wind, that will be scattered and disappear with the ghost.

In the scene from Hamlet we have therefore witnessed the creation of a social object. We are looking at a great scene which has writing as protagonist. But before the written word, what did one do? A good question. We should actually ask ourselves if one can speak of “before” the written word.

## Reading

Let’s begin with one piece of evidence. Reading is not a cultural activity, but a natural one, otherwise (one should notice) writing would never have been born and we would not have learned to read. Let’s take a series of random signs from those available on a computer:

! ” # \$ % & ’ 霰 龘 𠄎 𠄏 𠄐 𠄑 𠄒 𠄓 𠄔 𠄕 𠄖 𠄗 𠄘 𠄙 𠄚 𠄛 𠄜 𠄝 𠄞 𠄟 𠄠 𠄡 𠄢 𠄣 𠄤 𠄥 𠄦 𠄧 𠄨 𠄩 𠄪 𠄫 𠄬 𠄭 𠄮 𠄯 𠄰 𠄱 𠄲 𠄳 𠄴 𠄵 𠄶 𠄷 𠄸 𠄹 𠄺 𠄻 𠄼 𠄽 𠄾 𠄿 𠅀 𠅁 𠅂 𠅃 𠅄 𠅅 𠅆 𠅇 𠅈 𠅉 𠅊 𠅋 𠅌 𠅍 𠅎 𠅏 𠅐 𠅑 𠅒 𠅓 𠅔 𠅕 𠅖 𠅗 𠅘 𠅙 𠅚 𠅛 𠅜 𠅝 𠅞 𠅟 𠅠 𠅡 𠅢 𠅣 𠅤 𠅥 𠅦 𠅧 𠅨 𠅩 𠅪 𠅫 𠅬 𠅭 𠅮 𠅯 𠅰 𠅱 𠅲 𠅳 𠅴 𠅵 𠅶 𠅷 𠅸 𠅹 𠅺 𠅻 𠅼 𠅽 𠅾 𠅿 𠆀 𠆁 𠆂 𠆃 𠆄 𠆅 𠆆 𠆇 𠆈 𠆉 𠆊 𠆋 𠆌 𠆍 𠆎 𠆏 𠆐 𠆑 𠆒 𠆓 𠆔 𠆕 𠆖 𠆗 𠆘 𠆙 𠆚 𠆛 𠆜 𠆝 𠆞 𠆟 𠆠 𠆡 𠆢 𠆣 𠆤 𠆥 𠆦 𠆧 𠆨 𠆩 𠆪 𠆫 𠆬 𠆭 𠆮 𠆯 𠆰 𠆱 𠆲 𠆳 𠆴 𠆵 𠆶 𠆷 𠆸 𠆹 𠆺 𠆻 𠆼 𠆽 𠆾 𠆿 𠇀 𠇁 𠇂 𠇃 𠇄 𠇅 𠇆 𠇇 𠇈 𠇉 𠇊 𠇋 𠇌 𠇍 𠇎 𠇏 𠇐 𠇑 𠇒 𠇓 𠇔 𠇕 𠇖 𠇗 𠇘 𠇙 𠇚 𠇛 𠇜 𠇝 𠇞 𠇟 𠇠 𠇡 𠇢 𠇣 𠇤 𠇥 𠇦 𠇧 𠇨 𠇩 𠇪 𠇫 𠇬 𠇭 𠇮 𠇯 𠇰 𠇱 𠇲 𠇳 𠇴 𠇵 𠇶 𠇷 𠇸 𠇹 𠇺 𠇻 𠇼 𠇽 𠇾 𠇿 𠈀 𠈁 𠈂 𠈃 𠈄 𠈅 𠈆 𠈇 𠈈 𠈉 𠈊 𠈋 𠈌 𠈍 𠈎 𠈏 𠈐 𠈑 𠈒 𠈓 𠈔 𠈕 𠈖 𠈗 𠈘 𠈙 𠈚 𠈛 𠈜 𠈝 𠈞 𠈟 𠈠 𠈡 𠈢 𠈣 𠈤 𠈥 𠈦 𠈧 𠈨 𠈩 𠈪 𠈫 𠈬 𠈭 𠈮 𠈯 𠈰 𠈱 𠈲 𠈳 𠈴 𠈵 𠈶 𠈷 𠈸 𠈹 𠈺 𠈻 𠈼 𠈽 𠈾 𠈿 𠉀 𠉁 𠉂 𠉃 𠉄 𠉅 𠉆 𠉇 𠉈 𠉉 𠉊 𠉋 𠉌 𠉍 𠉎 𠉏 𠉐 𠉑 𠉒 𠉓 𠉔 𠉕 𠉖 𠉗 𠉘 𠉙 𠉚 𠉛 𠉜 𠉝 𠉞 𠉟 𠉠 𠉡 𠉢 𠉣 𠉤 𠉥 𠉦 𠉧 𠉨 𠉩 𠉪 𠉫 𠉬 𠉭 𠉮 𠉯 𠉰 𠉱 𠉲 𠉳 𠉴 𠉵 𠉶 𠉷 𠉸 𠉹 𠉺 𠉻 𠉼 𠉽 𠉾 𠉿 𠊀 𠊁 𠊂 𠊃 𠊄 𠊅 𠊆 𠊇 𠊈 𠊉 𠊊 𠊋 𠊌 𠊍 𠊎 𠊏 𠊐 𠊑 𠊒 𠊓 𠊔 𠊕 𠊖 𠊗 𠊘 𠊙 𠊚 𠊛 𠊜 𠊝 𠊞 𠊟 𠊠 𠊡 𠊢 𠊣 𠊤 𠊥 𠊦 𠊧 𠊨 𠊩 𠊪 𠊫 𠊬 𠊭 𠊮 𠊯 𠊰 𠊱 𠊲 𠊳 𠊴 𠊵 𠊶 𠊷 𠊸 𠊹 𠊺 𠊻 𠊼 𠊽 𠊾 𠊿 𠋀 𠋁 𠋂 𠋃 𠋄 𠋅 𠋆 𠋇 𠋈 𠋉 𠋊 𠋋 𠋌 𠋍 𠋎 𠋏 𠋐 𠋑 𠋒 𠋓 𠋔 𠋕 𠋖 𠋗 𠋘 𠋙 𠋚 𠋛 𠋜 𠋝 𠋞 𠋟 𠋠 𠋡 𠋢 𠋣 𠋤 𠋥 𠋦 𠋧 𠋨 𠋩 𠋪 𠋫 𠋬 𠋭 𠋮 𠋯 𠋰 𠋱 𠋲 𠋳 𠋴 𠋵 𠋶 𠋷 𠋸 𠋹 𠋺 𠋻 𠋼 𠋽 𠋾 𠋿 𠌀 𠌁 𠌂 𠌃 𠌄 𠌅 𠌆 𠌇 𠌈 𠌉 𠌊 𠌋 𠌌 𠌍 𠌎 𠌏 𠌐 𠌑 𠌒 𠌓 𠌔 𠌕 𠌖 𠌗 𠌘 𠌙 𠌚 𠌛 𠌜 𠌝 𠌞 𠌟 𠌠 𠌡 𠌢 𠌣 𠌤 𠌥 𠌦 𠌧 𠌨 𠌩 𠌪 𠌫 𠌬 𠌭 𠌮 𠌯 𠌰 𠌱 𠌲 𠌳 𠌴 𠌵 𠌶 𠌷 𠌸 𠌹 𠌺 𠌻 𠌼 𠌽 𠌾 𠌿 𠍀 𠍁 𠍂 𠍃 𠍄 𠍅 𠍆 𠍇 𠍈 𠍉 𠍊 𠍋 𠍌 𠍍 𠍎 𠍏 𠍐 𠍑 𠍒 𠍓 𠍔 𠍕 𠍖 𠍗 𠍘 𠍙 𠍚 𠍛 𠍜 𠍝 𠍞 𠍟 𠍠 𠍡 𠍢 𠍣 𠍤 𠍥 𠍦 𠍧 𠍨 𠍩 𠍪 𠍫 𠍬 𠍭 𠍮 𠍯 𠍰 𠍱 𠍲 𠍳 𠍴 𠍵 𠍶 𠍷 𠍸 𠍹 𠍺 𠍻 𠍼 𠍽 𠍾 𠍿 𠎀 𠎁 𠎂 𠎃 𠎄 𠎅 𠎆 𠎇 𠎈 𠎉 𠎊 𠎋 𠎌 𠎍 𠎎 𠎏 𠎐 𠎑 𠎒 𠎓 𠎔 𠎕 𠎖 𠎗 𠎘 𠎙 𠎚 𠎛 𠎜 𠎝 𠎞 𠎟 𠎠 𠎡 𠎢 𠎣 𠎤 𠎥 𠎦 𠎧 𠎨 𠎩 𠎪 𠎫 𠎬 𠎭 𠎮 𠎯 𠎰 𠎱 𠎲 𠎳 𠎴 𠎵 𠎶 𠎷 𠎸 𠎹 𠎺 𠎻 𠎼 𠎽 𠎾 𠎿 𠏀 𠏁 𠏂 𠏃 𠏄 𠏅 𠏆 𠏇 𠏈 𠏉 𠏊 𠏋 𠏌 𠏍 𠏎 𠏏 𠏐 𠏑 𠏒 𠏓 𠏔 𠏕 𠏖 𠏗 𠏘 𠏙 𠏚 𠏛 𠏜 𠏝 𠏞 𠏟 𠏠 𠏡 𠏢 𠏣 𠏤 𠏥 𠏦 𠏧 𠏨 𠏩 𠏪 𠏫 𠏬 𠏭 𠏮 𠏯 𠏰 𠏱 𠏲 𠏳 𠏴 𠏵 𠏶 𠏷 𠏸 𠏹 𠏺 𠏻 𠏼 𠏽 𠏾 𠏿 𠐀 𠐁 𠐂 𠐃 𠐄 𠐅 𠐆 𠐇 𠐈 𠐉 𠐊 𠐋 𠐌 𠐍 𠐎 𠐏 𠐐 𠐑 𠐒 𠐓 𠐔 𠐕 𠐖 𠐗 𠐘 𠐙 𠐚 𠐛 𠐜 𠐝 𠐞 𠐟 𠐠 𠐡 𠐢 𠐣 𠐤 𠐥 𠐦 𠐧 𠐨 𠐩 𠐪 𠐫 𠐬 𠐭 𠐮 𠐯 𠐰 𠐱 𠐲 𠐳 𠐴 𠐵 𠐶 𠐷 𠐸 𠐹 𠐺 𠐻 𠐼 𠐽 𠐾 𠐿 𠑀 𠑁 𠑂 𠑃 𠑄 𠑅 𠑆 𠑇 𠑈 𠑉 𠑊 𠑋 𠑌 𠑍 𠑎 𠑏 𠑐 𠑑 𠑒 𠑓 𠑔 𠑕 𠑖 𠑗 𠑘 𠑙 𠑚 𠑛 𠑜 𠑝 𠑞 𠑟 𠑠 𠑡 𠑢 𠑣 𠑤 𠑥 𠑦 𠑧 𠑨 𠑩 𠑪 𠑫 𠑬 𠑭 𠑮 𠑯 𠑰 𠑱 𠑲 𠑳 𠑴 𠑵 𠑶 𠑷 𠑸 𠑹 𠑺 𠑻 𠑼 𠑽 𠑾 𠑿 𠒀 𠒁 𠒂 𠒃 𠒄 𠒅 𠒆 𠒇 𠒈 𠒉 𠒊 𠒋 𠒌 𠒍 𠒎 𠒏 𠒐 𠒑 𠒒 𠒓 𠒔 𠒕 𠒖 𠒗 𠒘 𠒙 𠒚 𠒛 𠒜 𠒝 𠒞 𠒟 𠒠 𠒡 𠒢 𠒣 𠒤 𠒥 𠒦 𠒧 𠒨 𠒩 𠒪 𠒫 𠒬 𠒭 𠒮 𠒯 𠒰 𠒱 𠒲 𠒳 𠒴 𠒵 𠒶 𠒷 𠒸 𠒹 𠒺 𠒻 𠒼 𠒽 𠒾 𠒿 𠓀 𠓁 𠓂 𠓃 𠓄 𠓅 𠓆 𠓇 𠓈 𠓉 𠓊 𠓋 𠓌 𠓍 𠓎 𠓏 𠓐 𠓑 𠓒 𠓓 𠓔 𠓕 𠓖 𠓗 𠓘 𠓙 𠓚 𠓛 𠓜 𠓝 𠓞 𠓟 𠓠 𠓡 𠓢 𠓣 𠓤 𠓥 𠓦 𠓧 𠓨 𠓩 𠓪 𠓫 𠓬 𠓭 𠓮 𠓯 𠓰 𠓱 𠓲 𠓳 𠓴 𠓵 𠓶 𠓷 𠓸 𠓹 𠓺 𠓻 𠓼 𠓽 𠓾 𠓿 𠔀 𠔁 𠔂 𠔃 𠔄 𠔅 𠔆 𠔇 𠔈 𠔉 𠔊 𠔋 𠔌 𠔍 𠔎 𠔏 𠔐 𠔑 𠔒 𠔓 𠔔 𠔕 𠔖 𠔗 𠔘 𠔙 𠔚 𠔛 𠔜 𠔝 𠔞 𠔟 𠔠 𠔡 𠔢 𠔣 𠔤 𠔥 𠔦 𠔧 𠔨 𠔩 𠔪 𠔫 𠔬 𠔭 𠔮 𠔯 𠔰 𠔱 𠔲 𠔳 𠔴 𠔵 𠔶 𠔷 𠔸 𠔹 𠔺 𠔻 𠔼 𠔽 𠔾 𠔿 𠕀 𠕁 𠕂 𠕃 𠕄 𠕅 𠕆 𠕇 𠕈 𠕉 𠕊 𠕋 𠕌 𠕍 𠕎 𠕏 𠕐 𠕑 𠕒 𠕓 𠕔 𠕕 𠕖 𠕗 𠕘 𠕙 𠕚 𠕛 𠕜 𠕝 𠕞 𠕟 𠕠 𠕡 𠕢 𠕣 𠕤 𠕥 𠕦 𠕧 𠕨 𠕩 𠕪 𠕫 𠕬 𠕭 𠕮 𠕯 𠕰 𠕱 𠕲 𠕳 𠕴 𠕵 𠕶 𠕷 𠕸 𠕹 𠕺 𠕻 𠕼 𠕽 𠕾 𠕿 𠖀 𠖁 𠖂 𠖃 𠖄 𠖅 𠖆 𠖇 𠖈 𠖉 𠖊 𠖋 𠖌 𠖍 𠖎 𠖏 𠖐 𠖑 𠖒 𠖓 𠖔 𠖕 𠖖 𠖗 𠖘 𠖙 𠖚 𠖛 𠖜 𠖝 𠖞 𠖟 𠖠 𠖡 𠖢 𠖣 𠖤 𠖥 𠖦 𠖧 𠖨 𠖩 𠖪 𠖫 𠖬 𠖭 𠖮 𠖯 𠖰 𠖱 𠖲 𠖳 𠖴 𠖵 𠖶 𠖷 𠖸 𠖹 𠖺 𠖻 𠖼 𠖽 𠖾 𠖿 𠗀 𠗁 𠗂 𠗃 𠗄 𠗅 𠗆 𠗇 𠗈 𠗉 𠗊 𠗋 𠗌 𠗍 𠗎 𠗏 𠗐 𠗑 𠗒 𠗓 𠗔 𠗕 𠗖 𠗗 𠗘 𠗙 𠗚 𠗛 𠗜 𠗝 𠗞 𠗟 𠗠 𠗡 𠗢 𠗣 𠗤 𠗥 𠗦 𠗧 𠗨 𠗩 𠗪 𠗫 𠗬 𠗭 𠗮 𠗯 𠗰 𠗱 𠗲 𠗳 𠗴 𠗵 𠗶 𠗷 𠗸 𠗹 𠗺 𠗻 𠗼 𠗽 𠗾 𠗿 𠘀 𠘁 𠘂 𠘃 𠘄 𠘅 𠘆 𠘇 𠘈 𠘉 𠘊 𠘋 𠘌 𠘍 𠘎 𠘏 𠘐 𠘑 𠘒 𠘓 𠘔 𠘕 𠘖 𠘗 𠘘 𠘙 𠘚 𠘛 𠘜 𠘝 𠘞 𠘟 𠘠 𠘡 𠘢 𠘣 𠘤 𠘥 𠘦 𠘧 𠘨 𠘩 𠘪 𠘫 𠘬 𠘭 𠘮 𠘯 𠘰 𠘱 𠘲 𠘳 𠘴 𠘵 𠘶 𠘷 𠘸 𠘹 𠘺 𠘻 𠘼 𠘽 𠘾 𠘿 𠙀 𠙁 𠙂 𠙃 𠙄 𠙅 𠙆 𠙇 𠙈 𠙉 𠙊 𠙋 𠙌 𠙍 𠙎 𠙏 𠙐 𠙑 𠙒 𠙓 𠙔 𠙕 𠙖 𠙗 𠙘 𠙙 𠙚 𠙛 𠙜 𠙝 𠙞 𠙟 𠙠 𠙡 𠙢 𠙣 𠙤 𠙥 𠙦 𠙧 𠙨 𠙩 𠙪 𠙫 𠙬 𠙭 𠙮 𠙯 𠙰 𠙱 𠙲 𠙳 𠙴 𠙵 𠙶 𠙷 𠙸 𠙹 𠙺 𠙻 𠙼 𠙽 𠙾 𠙿 𠚀 𠚁 𠚂 𠚃 𠚄 𠚅 𠚆 𠚇 𠚈 𠚉 𠚊 𠚋 𠚌 𠚍 𠚎 𠚏 𠚐 𠚑 𠚒 𠚓 𠚔 𠚕 𠚖 𠚗 𠚘 𠚙 𠚚 𠚛 𠚜 𠚝 𠚞 𠚟 𠚠 𠚡 𠚢 𠚣 𠚤 𠚥 𠚦 𠚧 𠚨 𠚩 𠚪 𠚫 𠚬 𠚭 𠚮 𠚯 𠚰 𠚱 𠚲 𠚳 𠚴 𠚵 𠚶 𠚷 𠚸 𠚹 𠚺 𠚻 𠚼 𠚽 𠚾 𠚿 𠛀 𠛁 𠛂 𠛃 𠛄 𠛅 𠛆 𠛇 𠛈 𠛉 𠛊 𠛋 𠛌 𠛍 𠛎 𠛏 𠛐 𠛑 𠛒 𠛓 𠛔 𠛕 𠛖 𠛗 𠛘 𠛙 𠛚 𠛛 𠛜 𠛝 𠛞 𠛟 𠛠 𠛡 𠛢 𠛣 𠛤 𠛥 𠛦 𠛧 𠛨 𠛩 𠛪 𠛫 𠛬 𠛭 𠛮 𠛯 𠛰 𠛱 𠛲 𠛳 𠛴 𠛵 𠛶 𠛷 𠛸 𠛹 𠛺 𠛻 𠛼 𠛽 𠛾 𠛿 𠜀 𠜁 𠜂 𠜃 𠜄 𠜅 𠜆 𠜇 𠜈 𠜉 𠜊 𠜋 𠜌 𠜍 𠜎 𠜏 𠜐 𠜑 𠜒 𠜓 𠜔 𠜕 𠜖 𠜗 𠜘 𠜙 𠜚 𠜛 𠜜 𠜝 𠜞 𠜟 𠜠 𠜡 𠜢 𠜣 𠜤 𠜥 𠜦 𠜧 𠜨 𠜩 𠜪 𠜫 𠜬 𠜭 𠜮 𠜯 𠜰 𠜱 𠜲 𠜳 𠜴 𠜵 𠜶 𠜷 𠜸 𠜹 𠜺 𠜻 𠜼 𠜽 𠜾 𠜿 𠝀 𠝁 𠝂 𠝃 𠝄 𠝅 𠝆 𠝇 𠝈 𠝉 𠝊 𠝋 𠝌 𠝍 𠝎 𠝏 𠝐 𠝑 𠝒 𠝓 𠝔 𠝕 𠝖 𠝗 𠝘 𠝙 𠝚 𠝛 𠝜 𠝝 𠝞 𠝟 𠝠 𠝡 𠝢 𠝣 𠝤 𠝥 𠝦 𠝧 𠝨 𠝩 𠝪 𠝫 𠝬 𠝭 𠝮 𠝯 𠝰 𠝱 𠝲 𠝳 𠝴 𠝵 𠝶 𠝷 𠝸 𠝹 𠝺 𠝻 𠝼 𠝽 𠝾 𠝿 𠞀 𠞁 𠞂 𠞃 𠞄 𠞅 𠞆 𠞇 𠞈 𠞉 𠞊 𠞋 𠞌 𠞍 𠞎 𠞏 𠞐 𠞑 𠞒 𠞓 𠞔 𠞕 𠞖 𠞗 𠞘 𠞙 𠞚 𠞛 𠞜 𠞝 𠞞 𠞟 𠞠 𠞡 𠞢 𠞣 𠞤 𠞥 𠞦 𠞧 𠞨 𠞩 𠞪 𠞫 𠞬 𠞭 𠞮 𠞯 𠞰 𠞱 𠞲 𠞳 𠞴 𠞵 𠞶 𠞷 𠞸 𠞹 𠞺 𠞻 𠞼 𠞽 𠞾 𠞿 𠟀 𠟁 𠟂 𠟃 𠟄 𠟅 𠟆 𠟇 𠟈 𠟉 𠟊 𠟋 𠟌 𠟍 𠟎 𠟏 𠟐 𠟑 𠟒 𠟓 𠟔 𠟕 𠟖 𠟗 𠟘 𠟙 𠟚 𠟛 𠟜 𠟝 𠟞 𠟟 𠟠 𠟡 𠟢 𠟣 𠟤 𠟥 𠟦 𠟧 𠟨 𠟩 𠟪 𠟫 𠟬 𠟭 𠟮 𠟯 𠟰 𠟱 𠟲 𠟳 𠟴 𠟵 𠟶 𠟷 𠟸 𠟹 𠟺 𠟻 𠟼 𠟽 𠟾 𠟿 𠠀 𠠁 𠠂 𠠃 𠠄 𠠅 𠠆 𠠇 𠠈 𠠉 𠠊 𠠋 𠠌 𠠍 𠠎 𠠏 𠠐 𠠑 𠠒 𠠓 𠠔 𠠕 𠠖 𠠗 𠠘 𠠙 𠠚 𠠛 𠠜 𠠝 𠠞 𠠟 𠠠 𠠡 𠠢 𠠣 𠠤 𠠥 𠠦 𠠧 𠠨 𠠩 𠠪 𠠫 𠠬 𠠭 𠠮 𠠯 𠠰 𠠱 𠠲 𠠳 𠠴 𠠵 𠠶 𠠷 𠠸 𠠹 𠠺 𠠻 𠠼 𠠽 𠠾 𠠿 𠡀 𠡁 𠡂 𠡃 𠡄 𠡅 𠡆 𠡇 𠡈 𠡉 𠡊 𠡋 𠡌 𠡍 𠡎 𠡏 𠡐 𠡑 𠡒 𠡓 𠡔 𠡕 𠡖 𠡗 𠡘 𠡙 𠡚 𠡛 𠡜 𠡝 𠡞 𠡟 𠡠 𠡡 𠡢 𠡣 𠡤 𠡥 𠡦 𠡧 𠡨 𠡩 𠡪 𠡫 𠡬 𠡭 𠡮 𠡯 𠡰 𠡱 𠡲 𠡳 𠡴 𠡵 𠡶 𠡷 𠡸 𠡹 𠡺 𠡻 𠡼 𠡽 𠡾 𠡿 𠢀 𠢁 𠢂 𠢃 𠢄 𠢅 𠢆 𠢇 𠢈 𠢉 𠢊 𠢋 𠢌 𠢍 𠢎 𠢏 𠢐 𠢑 𠢒 𠢓 𠢔 𠢕 𠢖 𠢗 𠢘 𠢙 𠢚 𠢛 𠢜 𠢝 𠢞 𠢟 𠢠 𠢡 𠢢 𠢣 𠢤 𠢥 𠢦 𠢧 𠢨 𠢩 𠢪 𠢫 𠢬 𠢭 𠢮 𠢯 𠢰 𠢱 𠢲 𠢳 𠢴 𠢵 𠢶 𠢷 𠢸 𠢹 𠢺 𠢻 𠢼 𠢽 𠢾 𠢿 𠣀 𠣁 𠣂 𠣃 𠣄 𠣅 𠣆 𠣇 𠣈 𠣉 𠣊 𠣋 𠣌 𠣍 𠣎 𠣏 𠣐 𠣑 𠣒 𠣓 𠣔 𠣕 𠣖 𠣗 𠣘 𠣙 𠣚 𠣛 𠣜 𠣝 𠣞 𠣟 𠣠 𠣡 𠣢 𠣣 𠣤 𠣥 𠣦 𠣧 𠣨 𠣩 𠣪 𠣫 𠣬 𠣭 𠣮 𠣯 𠣰 𠣱 𠣲 𠣳 𠣴 𠣵 𠣶 𠣷 𠣸 𠣹 𠣺 𠣻 𠣼 𠣽 𠣾 𠣿 𠤀 𠤁 𠤂 𠤃 𠤄 𠤅 𠤆 𠤇 𠤈 𠤉 𠤊 𠤋 𠤌 𠤍 𠤎 𠤏 𠤐 𠤑 𠤒 𠤓 𠤔 𠤕 𠤖 𠤗 𠤘 𠤙 𠤚 𠤛 𠤜 𠤝 𠤞 𠤟 𠤠 𠤡 𠤢 𠤣 𠤤 𠤥 𠤦 𠤧 𠤨 𠤩 𠤪 𠤫 𠤬 𠤭 𠤮 𠤯 𠤰 𠤱 𠤲 𠤳 𠤴 𠤵 𠤶 𠤷 𠤸 𠤹 𠤺 𠤻 𠤼 𠤽 𠤾 𠤿 𠥀 𠥁 𠥂 𠥃 𠥄 𠥅 𠥆 𠥇 𠥈 𠥉 𠥊 𠥋 𠥌 𠥍 𠥎 𠥏 𠥐 𠥑 𠥒 𠥓 𠥔 𠥕 𠥖 𠥗 𠥘 𠥙 𠥚 𠥛 𠥜 𠥝 𠥞 𠥟 𠥠 𠥡 𠥢 𠥣 𠥤 𠥥 𠥦 𠥧 𠥨 𠥩 𠥪 𠥫 𠥬 𠥭 𠥮 𠥯 𠥰 𠥱 𠥲 𠥳 𠥴 𠥵 𠥶 𠥷 𠥸 𠥹 𠥺 𠥻 𠥼 𠥽 𠥾 𠥿 𠦀 𠦁 𠦂 𠦃 𠦄 𠦅 𠦆 𠦇 𠦈 𠦉 𠦊 𠦋 𠦌 𠦍 𠦎 𠦏 𠦐 𠦑 𠦒 𠦓 𠦔 𠦕 𠦖 𠦗 𠦘 𠦙 𠦚 𠦛 𠦜 𠦝 𠦞 𠦟 𠦠 𠦡 𠦢 𠦣 𠦤 𠦥 𠦦 𠦧 𠦨 𠦩 𠦪 𠦫 𠦬 𠦭 𠦮 𠦯 𠦰 𠦱 𠦲 𠦳 𠦴 𠦵 𠦶 𠦷 𠦸 𠦹 𠦺 𠦻 𠦼 𠦽 𠦾 𠦿 𠧀 𠧁 𠧂 𠧃 𠧄 𠧅 𠧆 𠧇 𠧈 𠧉 𠧊 𠧋 𠧌 𠧍 𠧎 𠧏 𠧐 𠧑 𠧒 𠧓 𠧔 𠧕 𠧖 𠧗 𠧘 𠧙 𠧚 𠧛 𠧜 𠧝 𠧞 𠧟 𠧠 𠧡 𠧢 𠧣 𠧤 𠧥 𠧦 𠧧 𠧨 𠧩 𠧪 𠧫 𠧬 𠧭 𠧮 𠧯 𠧰 𠧱 𠧲 𠧳 𠧴 𠧵 𠧶 𠧷 𠧸 𠧹 𠧺 𠧻 𠧼 𠧽 𠧾 𠧿 𠨀 𠨁 𠨂 𠨃 𠨄 𠨅 𠨆 𠨇 𠨈 𠨉 𠨊 𠨋 𠨌 𠨍 𠨎 𠨏 𠨐 𠨑 𠨒 𠨓 𠨔 𠨕 𠨖 𠨗 𠨘 𠨙 𠨚 𠨛 𠨜 𠨝 𠨞 𠨟 𠨠 𠨡 𠨢 𠨣 𠨤 𠨥 𠨦 𠨧 𠨨 𠨩 𠨪 𠨫 𠨬 𠨭 𠨮 𠨯 𠨰 𠨱 𠨲 𠨳 𠨴 𠨵 𠨶 𠨷 𠨸 𠨹 𠨺 𠨻 𠨼 𠨽 𠨾 𠨿 𠩀 𠩁 𠩂 𠩃 𠩄 𠩅 𠩆 𠩇 𠩈 𠩉 𠩊 𠩋 𠩌 𠩍 𠩎 𠩏 𠩐 𠩑 𠩒 𠩓 𠩔 𠩕 𠩖 𠩗 𠩘 𠩙 𠩚 𠩛 𠩜 𠩝 𠩞 𠩟 𠩠 𠩡 𠩢 𠩣 𠩤 𠩥 𠩦 𠩧 𠩨 𠩩 𠩪 𠩫 𠩬 𠩭 𠩮 𠩯 𠩰 𠩱 𠩲 𠩳 𠩴 𠩵 𠩶 𠩷 𠩸 𠩹 𠩺 𠩻 𠩼 𠩽 𠩾 𠩿 𠪀 𠪁 𠪂 𠪃 𠪄 𠪅

Which need? This one: from the beginning the essential function is to keep track, that is, both the tracing and the recording together, two operations which can be done in one action. And in this action one needs to consider how keeping track is, from the very beginning, a demonstration that our neurons are able to understand tracks (this is like saying they are naturally inclined to abstraction, to comprehend something with the help of a few indicators) and that, on the other hand, the capacity to create abstract universes will grow exponentially with the use of traces and of supports that able to receive them. That is why every time we talk about the origins of writing, dating always recedes in time.

The first cave painting we have found, for example those at Chauvet, with origins going back 35,000 years, have drawings which show the ability to recognise figures by means of a simple outline of the shape, and this from the very beginning of our own species. In short, a few traces are sufficient to recognise images of Tin Tin or Mickey Mouse, and with even fewer contours one is able to recognise some expressions, as with our emoticons: ☺, ;-), ☹. Three dimensions are not required to give an impression of the figure, neither is a detailed description necessary precisely because the impression is transmitted by just a few lines. This explains the reason why writing is so natural for us; quite simply, we possess neurons which are particularly apt in the recognition of these simple figures.

Which, thinking of it, obliges us to re-examine all the naive traditions of the origins of writing, those who insist that first there are objects, then their images in hieroglyphics, then traces, outlines that are a transformation of hieroglyphics, as Warburton believed in the Eighteenth Century. For him, characters of the alphabet were simply Egyptian hieroglyphics disfigured by Moses to respect the total ban on images. No, the trace is present at the beginning, even before pictorial representation. Therefore one needs to understand the trace not as a disfiguration of the image, but as the origin of the figure. In other words pictography is not the beginning of writing. At the beginning, there is the trace. Later on, for reasons of simplicity and primitivism, for ease of communication in certain contexts, one can resort to the pictogram, which however remains heavily stylized, like the symbol indicating a toilet.

## Counting

This mechanism appears in several areas of the world, and the very action of tracing is at the root of a range of functions in which we can find the origins of society: mathematics, money, the calendar. Writing, in the sphere of economics, emerges as an indication of possession, thus it originates from the seal or the mark; these marks have been used since Neolithic times, impressed

on clay tokens, the *calculi*, and are used as a unit of measurement for goods (oxen, sacks of grain), so as a type of coinage; these coins are collected in cartridges on which conventional signs were drawn to indicate quantity and content: and it is this practice that gives birth to cuneiform script, where tablets are an evolution of the cartridges.

Let's take a closer look at the story of these *calculi* for, in this story, there is almost all we need to understand the genesis and evolution of a society. 10,000 years ago, in Mesopotamia, we already have some symbols used for accounting: cones, cylinders, spheres, hemispheres, tetrahedrons, etc. Some represent the unit, others are multiples of the arithmetic bases 10 and 60 (10, 60, 600). After nearly 5000 years of undisputed use, something new intervenes: around 3300 B.C. in Susa, *calculi* were placed inside cartridges on which the quantity was indicated by signs that are the ancestors of cuneiform writing. It should be noted that we are dealing here with two symbolization processes, not with a transition from an object to a sign. This is because the symbols contained inside the cartridges are no more real or representative than those inscribed on the cartridge.

A similar event took place in 2000 B.C. South America and it had nothing to do with arithmetic, but chronology. The Olmech tribe used incisions, glyphs, to indicate units of time, like days, years, and the cycles. In 600 B.C., the Zapotechs add signs for the dates and for people associated with those dates. Here the phenomenon of the construction of social reality through inscriptions is even more evident: after all, if we didn't keep track of time, time itself would contract and we would have no indication of the eras we have put behind us. For this reason in '*Timaeus*' the Egyptians consider the Greeks to be 'always young' because, according to the myth recounted by Plato, regular floods destroyed the Greek archives, the opposite to what happened in Egypt where everything was recorded and preserved in the temples, providing the Egyptians with the knowledge of their immense antiquity. And it is simply not to lose track of time that Robinson keeps a record of it with notches.

## Paying

We should note that, in the idea of keeping track, the birth of writing, the development of mathematics and that of chronology all proceed at equal pace with the progress of the monetary unit, as a confirmation of the connection that exists between writing and social objects under the law: Object = written deed. Money, an eminent social object, is right from the beginning an inscription, contrary to what one might think given that, until a few years ago, the value of certain

currencies was guaranteed in gold, so that in theory whoever presented a banknote at Fort Knox would receive the equivalent in gold.

In this representation of money, it would seem that first we have a gold coin, with an intrinsic value which is independent from any inscription that goes with it; and successively appears a surrogate in worthless metal or paper on which the inscription guarantees the reversibility. We are forgetting however the case of shells used in place of money, where certainly the possibility of calculation and therefore of inscription and keeping records definitely prevails over intrinsic value; and that for example salt, used as an instrument of exchange in Africa, was especially treated to make it inedible, almost to remove any doubt that it was an inscription, and not “good in itself”. In short, *right from the beginning we are dealing with representations*, and with worthless clay, that is with the most common material available locally. The constancy in the connection between writing, money and mathematics is not just genetic. A glance at a bank or a computer today, suffices to realise that nothing has changed since Sumerian times.

It is precisely in this function that writing can contribute to capital mobilization and optimization, that is to say: to the alienation of property and its transformation into something else. In a sense, inscribed clay is the base for land mobilization. The birth of commercial economy, and especially of shareholding, could not have been possible without writing, which, on the other hand, originates from a document production sphere such as transfer records, title deeds, etc. In other words the function of money is misunderstood when we assume it to be mainly, if not exclusively, as a surrogate of barter. As a matter of fact, in the creation of financial resources we are not dealing with a collective will agreeing that a piece of paper is a coin (pure robinsonade, Marx would have said), but with a process bearing the characteristics expressed in the law Object = Written deed.

Let's not forget that barter as such (I give you some sacks of rice, you give me a cow) doesn't need to be substituted by money at all. Money doesn't explain a refinement of barter, but rather *the creation of credit*. Tom receives three sacks of wheat from Dick, and promises Dick he will give him a cow tomorrow, as he doesn't have it with him at the moment; this wording is formalized in writing (and this already happens in the Late Neolithic): “I owe you”. This is a proto-cheque, which in turn is at the origin of banknotes. Hence, a little-noticed consequence: the sequence coins → banknotes is no more fictitious than the sequence gold → money, or word → writing. Just like we misunderstand the origins of writing when we think of it as an invention imposed upon us, at one point, for reasons of telecommunication - that is, to speak beyond the reach of voice, to communicate and not (mainly) to record -, we also misunderstand the origins of money by considering it a substitute for value, rather than the creation of value. In fact, we have a sequence that, from the beginning, implies a form of writing which is not guaranteed by any gold-value: 1.

Promise (an act inscribed in the mind of those involved) 2. I owe you → cheque → banknote (forms of inscription.)

In other words, the central element is not really the possibility of using materials that are more portable and less perishable than the goods exchanged during barter, but rather the necessity of having inscription systems which are more and more powerful in order to create an ever-wider memory, able to improve the already existing credit mechanisms. The very fact that sea shells were used before gold coins should make us think: gold is rare, shells are not, and it is gold that is brought to the same size as a shell, as an object which is both manageable and small in dimensions to facilitate – as I mentioned earlier on - *enumeration*. If it hadn't been possible to enumerate tokens, having a material substituting barter would have been totally irrelevant. Writing, keeping tracks, contracts and agreements precede the act of exchange, they make it possible; and this circumstance occurs in a sort of hyperbole, that of agreements being used as banknotes. On conquering a neighbouring territory, the Ashanti took the “books” of the ruler of that territory, for instance the treaties that the ruler had signed with other sovereigns, and demanded that the treaties should apply to them as well. We are dealing here, perhaps not surprisingly, with a sort of “bearer treaties”, not much different from our banknotes.

In short, we have to overturn the idea that in social reality one simply deals with physical objects, be they pieces of metal or people, that can be instantly transformed into coins or archdukes by waving a magic wand. In fact, inscription comes first. Metal is not valuable in itself, but only as a result of a value socially attributed to it, i.e. based on a system of inscriptions and records, just like it would be bizarre to award someone the title of “archduke”, “inspector”, “professor” or “policeman” beyond a network of inscriptions where these appointments acquire a meaning. To realise this in full, try and imagine what an archduke or a policeman would be in a different solar system, or, simply, try and ask yourself whether an archduke or a policeman who are alone in the world, in the absence of that system of inscriptions and recognitions that make up the social world, are still archdukes, or policemen. In short, it is true that the Queen of England is really a queen, while the queen bee is not; but it is also true that there is a sense in which, in the absence of men able to award recognitions on the strength of their capacity to keep tracks, there would be a smaller difference between the Queen of England and the queen bee.

## Archiwriting

I would like to come to a first theoretical conclusion from this phenomenology of keeping tracks in writing, in arithmetics, in chronology and in economy (these are, it should be noted, the

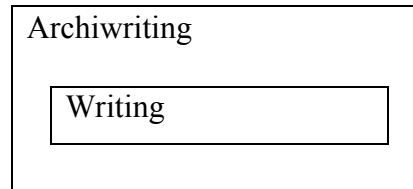
essential elements of any social reality). In the light of what we have observed so far, we can state that the law Object = Written Deed is ubiquitous in social reality, and it is stated in two ways; a strong one and a weak one. The strong, or literal, mode has to do with the creation of documents within an institutional reality. A proper form of writing operates here, even though some idiomatic elements (such as insignia, or fingerprints) can be found in the documents, which have rather more to do with traces. There is also a weaker, more extensive mode, that has to do with the construction of social objects. Here we deal with forms of inscription that are not identified with writing as such, from marking the territory to learning by heart, to performing rites, which in fact belong to the sphere of what Derrida defined “archiwriting”, something which, in actual fact, is fully related to the construction of social objects.

Now, I believe it difficult to deny two solid truisms. The first truism is that man shares with other animals the willingness to keep tracks, but he shows it in a much higher form because of the development of his cerebral cortex. The second is that it is just this hypertrophy in keeping tracks that is at the base of the passage from a natural state, where we generally place animals, to what we call “culture”, referring it primarily to man. Now, if we recognise these two facts, if we consider how early in human history a leaning towards rites, inscriptions, engravings, decorations, appears, and if we consider that what we actually call “history” is something strictly dependant on the possession of inscriptions (so much so that the passage from prehistory to history is defined simply by the quantity and quality of the inscriptions available to us), then the notion of “archiwriting” appears inevitable in describing the construction of social reality. It is a matter of establishing a continuous line that brings us to culture, and humanity, from nature and animality. This line that knows no interruptions is provided precisely by the act of keeping track, and is a solid piece of evidence (of which, actually, we have visible daily experiences with the use of recording aids such as paper, computers, and mobile phones) and at the same time an explanation of what would otherwise remain unexplained: the fact that, at one point in human history, writing, documents and institutions begin to appear. These writings would not exist outside of the sphere of archiwriting.

Archiwriting, therefore, comes before writing. As a matter of fact, we have cases of structures such as African, Polynesian and American States which, although they did not have writing, did possess other forms of keeping records. However, we have to consider the sphere of archiwriting as a field that not only precedes, but also follows writing, and this because it simply surrounds it: writing – the many writing systems we know – is a mode of archiwriting, a highly codified mode.

In general, the passage from archiwriting as recording, to writing as inscription in a technical sense, happens at the moment in which a process of codification begins. When I draw some doodles

that will be interpreted by a psychologist it is archiwriting; when I absent-mindedly write some random letters on a piece of paper it is writing, even if the intention behind it is not stronger (in fact it's weaker, less expressive) than the intention behind the doodles. The relationship between archiwriting and writing can thus be represented this way:



The sphere of archiwriting includes rituality, memory, animal tracks, scientifically recognisable traces (DNA etc.), biometric devices, idioms. We are dealing with a system intended to guarantee cultural identity and, I would add, to build social objects, and that includes myths and rites, laws, proverbs, texts, images, decorations and even entire landscapes, as with the Aboriginal Australians. In this sphere, under certain circumstances (that for our history include at least three autonomous breeding grounds: the Middle East, China, Central and South America) some forms of writings arise, which in turn generate other writings.

However, these forms of writing have been possible because of an archiwriting that can be not just the recording in the mind of people who verbally stipulate a contract, but a trace that is not immediately readable (footprints and tracks from animals that can be recognised by a trained eye, DNA and other characters traceable by technical devices), and also a non-codified recording (a knot on a handkerchief, for instance), and, especially, the thousand ways we keep track of daily experience and of the world around us, ways which are so consubstantial to us that the loss of memory is something very different from a disability of our physical self, and comes to coincide with a substantial loss of identity.

## Tabula rasa

As a matter of fact, the place where we can find more archiwritings than anywhere else is our own mind, the seat of memory. Having clarified in which sense, in order to have inscriptions it is not necessary to have a form of writing in the strictest or "literal" term, I would now like to introduce a second element, a second theoretical reflection. This reflection regards the fact that, contrary to what we would think, to have inscriptions in one's brain, like Hamlet did in swearing to Claudio, is just a way of saying, a metaphor. Or rather, be it a metaphor, it is an inevitable one, a catachresis bearing with it an interpretation of what the mind is: from Descartes to the modern tests

on neural networks, memory is based on traces in the brain. In fact, we could go even further back. There is an ancient concurrence between the mind and the track, precisely testified by the recurring, almost obsessive, image of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, i.e. as a support suitable for keeping tracks. This is an image that from Aeschylus travels all the way to Freud and moves on to contemporary neuroscience, having crossed the entire history of thought.

In recalling this image I am not proposing we should consider the *tabula* as an empiricist metaphor, difficult to justify as such, like the theory stating there is nothing innate in man. If only because, even supposing for the sake of argument that this was true, that everything gets written on a completely blank space, then at least the *tabula*, the ability to receive, would be innate - a bit like that Bergson maxim stating that no habit is inevitable, except for the habit of getting into habits. No, what I'm really interested in is focusing on the *tabula*, regardless of the fact that it is *rasa* or not. Because this metaphor interprets all of mind's activities – perception, memory, thought – as forms of writing. In short, everything has already been written in Plato's *Philebus*, and can be found with minimal variations in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Phaedrus*, and again in Aristotle's *On the Soul* and *On Memory*, and finally in Descartes, Locke, Leibniz.

Thus to Plato, our soul is similar to a book; memory writes speeches in our souls, and errors occur when our inner scribe departs from the truth. After inscription, a second player intervenes, “A painter who, after the scribe, draws representations of all things said in our soul”. Aristotle adds: the soul is the site of forms, and it is, somehow, all the entities that it comes to know. These writing analogies demonstrate with full evidence what I wrote about archiwriting, or at least I hope they do: the way in which the mind sees itself is as a writing device, and thinking of a writing system that is not preceded, followed and surrounded by an archiwriting which is at the base of construction of social reality, is not much different from imagining that this mode of self-representation of the mind is purely fortuitous.

In the age of paper and printing, Locke adds: It is a white sheet of paper, without any printed characters, that is to say, Locke explains, without any idea. This is like saying that ideas are like printed characters. Obviously, in these terms we are dealing with a highly empiricist formulation. But it is not necessarily so. Modifying the metaphor a little, Leibniz speaks of impressions as of a light falling on a theatre wing, on a tilted surface, which thus gives impressions a shape which is not neutral. Leibniz also talks of the coarseness of paper. This is saying – remarks Leibniz – that nothing is in the intellect which wasn't in the senses before, except for intellect itself, the capacity of receiving traces and adapting them to one's own forms. This is an interesting point: the idea (that is, a representation; this is the sense of “idea” for the empiricists) manifests itself as writing, and

this merely because without the capacity of keeping tracks we would not have representation, i.e. we would not have a psychic life.

Past recollection is also considered under the light of writing and of *tabula*. In particular, Freud wondered from the very beginning how it was possible not just for traces to be inscribed in the mind (this is, after all, quite trivial), but also how it was possible for the sheet of paper not to become saturated very soon, reducing everybody to the condition of Funes in the story by Borges, who could remember every instant of the previous day, and to do that needed a whole day. Freud, who was used to dealing with double evidence whereby a lot is remembered, but even more is repressed (i.e. remembered in a different way by placing it somewhere else), wonders: how can a telescope mirror also be a photographic plate? To start with, Freud assumes two types of neuron, one which lets impressions through, and another which retains them. However, thirty years later he finds an answer that again uses a writing metaphor. The mind is a modern day *tabula*, a “magical notebook” like those in vogue at the beginning of the Nineteen hundreds, which I was lucky enough to observe as a child: a resin base, a translucent sheet, and a pen with no ink. The pressure of the pen makes the sheet stick to the base, so that the letters are visible; if however you separate the sheet from its base, the letters disappear, and the sheet is ready to receive new inscriptions, while the traces of the previous inscriptions remain on the resin. When we ask our modern computers to look for the changes we have made to a certain document, we realise how the enormous power of this technical device lies in the very fact that it achieves the possibility of the complete archive and of the ever-white page at the same time.

## Meaning and technique

There is a third and last circumstance, the most important, which I would like to draw attention to. I would like to start from an old intuition of Freud's, connected to what we have just seen of past recollection and repression: consciousness arises in place of a mnestic trace, so that the higher forms of our psychic life are a reworking of phenomena connected to keeping tracks, to memory, exactly the way it happens in the comparison between the soul and a book. So that, to Freud, consciousness is a superficial development: located in the cerebral cortex, it corresponds to the outer membrane of single-cell organisms. Now, what does this mean? Consciousness arises from the inscription of a trace on the *tabula*, which is at the same time a physical event and the birth of the psyche in its higher form: consciousness itself. Thus the occurrence (and this is the very point I was trying to make; the gist of what I have said so far) of a confluence of meaning and technique.

Let's analyse this. What we call "technique" has many meanings, as undoubtedly there is a difference between a technical apparatus such as a radio or an electric saw, a technique for hair implant, a technique to perform a coup d'état and a technique to write a law. What links together all these meanings is the fact that there is a regulated system of repetitions: a radio is predisposed for certain functions, and so is an electric saw. By following a certain order one can perform a *coup d'état*, by following another, one can implant hair or write a law. When order is missing, then you have improvising; something that lacks technique precisely because it is approximative in the repetitions. To argue that inscription is a fundamental requirement for technique, and that keeping tracks is, in a way, the mother of all techniques, doesn't seem wild to me; in fact it is (in light of what I have said so far) almost obvious. What I would like to suggest now, and this might seem wild, is that, just like according to Freud consciousness arises in place of a mnemonic trace, so the meanings, the content, the values, all that we vaguely think of as the "spirit" or, in a more modern manner, as "intention", all these arise from technical repetition and from the archiwriting that make it possible. Just to give you an idea, I'm saying that something like sainthood, which is undoubtedly a notion that has to do with the spirit, is strictly dependant on an ascetic conduct of the body, on cultural codes defining a certain behaviour as "saintly", and on sacred books and rites concerned with sanctity. In short, without these inscription techniques we wouldn't even have sainthood, let alone any modest meanings.

If this example appears exaggerated or is lacking something, I suggest we consider the significance, for our world and particularly in recent years, of the introduction of computers. On paper, we can say it was just a device to make calculations; then we found out it could also write, finally it became a gigantic archive recording all our memory and our social reality. I'd find it difficult to claim that this speeding up and strengthening of our ability to keep tracks, as a purely physical phenomenon, hasn't influenced with just as much power the world of meanings.

The double meaning of the word "sense", as a particular and tangible element and as thought, meaning, seems to follow this direction: through repetition, recording, inscription, communication (all functions made possible by traces) we come to the building of a social world and inside this social world, meanings take place. That is why it's so important to leave traces, that is why it's so natural. We don't need to suppose a collective will to explain the building of social reality. It is enough to have the resources inherent to traces, and also the ability, typical of the human species, to use them in an infinitely superior way, compared to other species.

One last consideration, to close. Everything that seems conjectural and unprovable, at least at the present state of knowledge, in Freud's parapsychology or in the philosophers' speculative theories, takes on a simple and ordinary appearance if from the origins of consciousness we move

on to the construction of social reality. Construction that not only arises from inscriptions, as I have tried to demonstrate so far, but also feeds on inscriptions, increases and almost materializes itself, moving from trace to meaning. How? Precisely on the strength of recording and of what derives from it, the possibility of repetition. Through repetition, something that belongs to technique, we obtain something else: meaning. This is the point I wanted to make. If the words I have spent in demonstrating this have not convinced you, I am sure that an examination (a reading) of Riccardo's inscriptions will make it more evident than one ever could: without a single word.