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"… and a quasi-geographical inscription of history"
From a *Working Note* of the Late Merleau-Ponty Towards a Geophilosophy of History

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Abstract. *The paper introduces a geophilosophical perspective on history, drawing on the later work of M. Merleau-Ponty. It begins by isolating the idea of a "quasi-geographical inscription of history" in a late Working Note from The Visible and the Invisible. The second section demonstrates that this idea could be the pivot for the overthrow of the Hegelian philosophy of history, arguing that the Earth is not the basis of Weltgeschichte but an active participant in human adventures. The paper then argues that Merleau- Ponty's idea calls for a new relationship between anthropology and geography. Engaging with Tim Ingold's Dwelling Perspective and Augustin Berque's Ecumenical Thought, it concludes by showing how a new ontology is emerging within an ecological-practical framework. Ultimately, geophilosophy paves the way for a decolonial theory of history.*

Keywords. History, Anthropology, Ontology, Ecology, Phenomenology.

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1. Introduction

> Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. […] Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth. Kant is less a prisoner of the cate- gories of subject and object than he is believed to be, since his idea of Copernican revolution puts thought into a direct relationship with the earth.

This is how Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 85) open their chapter dedicated to Geophilosophy, offering a change of perspective on modern philosophy: thought is not an abstract activity or a product of the relationship between subject and object, but something that is rooted in a territory and in relation to the earth. The assumption is that thought has a geographical "nature". This intuition offers a reading of philosophy that emphasizes its interweaving with the material world. Interpreting the Copernican revolution as a manifestation of the spatial implications of thought allows us to situate geophilosophy in a context of critique of modernity. Although the latter often presents itself as a progressive development in time, geophilosophy invites us to keep in mind the *spatial imagination of modernity* too (Tang 2008), which manifests itself in the transformation of relationships between human and world through the discovery and exploration of Earth. Geophilosophy relaunches the attempt to *overthrow the Copernican revolution* (Husserl 1940) insofar as, by questioning the objectifying character of modernity based on subject-object dualism, it can be seen as a return to an existential relationship with space and earth and a

challenge to the *Myth of Modernity* (Dussel 1995), symbolically expressed by two key figures (Russo 2011, 150): Copernicus, who represents the epistemological rupture that inaugurates a new relationship with space, and Columbus (Crosby 1972), who embodies European geographical expansion and the beginning of the age of discovery, inaugurating a colonial dimension of modernity.

The relationship between philosophy and geography certainly has deep roots in the history of philosophical thought (Tanca 2021), but it is perhaps in contemporary thought that it has taken on a more structured significance, thanks in part to the work of Deleuze and Guattari for whom geophilosophy presents itself, among other things, as a critique of the philosophy of History. It is in relation to History, in fact, that geography gains importance for the two thinkers:

> Geography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental, like the landscape. Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a "milieu" (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 96).

Affirming the *power of a milieu* is a theme already present in the peculiar philosophy of history – a sort of *ante litteram* geophilosophy (Jol Hung 2007) – of M. Merleau-Ponty, who, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, introduces the idea of «a quasi-geographical inscription of history» (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 259), suggesting that history does not develop in an abstract or linear way, but is deeply rooted in its space of exercise. This perspective overcomes the traditional separation between time and space, seeing geography as an essential element for understanding historical development. In this contribution, we propose to follow some late considerations of Merleau-Ponty in order to outline a geophilosophical perspective on history. The first part of our article will isolate the idea of *a quasi- geographical inscription of history* through a comparison with Hegel; sub- sequently, we will connect this idea with T. Ingold's Dwelling Perspective and A. Berque's Ecumenical Geography, suggesting how geography allows a metamorphosis of our relations with alterity (Iofrida 2019, 33-44).

2. A Quasi-Geographical Inscription of History

The attempt to think the "*Weltlichkeit* of *Geist*" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 175) and the *Inder-Welt-Sein* of history (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 222-3) through the theme of Nature characterizes the research of the late Merleau-Ponty. In *The Adventures of Dialectics*, he expresses the necessity of «a philosophy of both history and spirit» (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 3), with the concept of nature enveloping «une certaine conception de l'esprit, de l'histoire et de l'homme», offering «une solution qui ne soit pas *immatérialiste*» (Merleau-Ponty 1982, 91) to the relationship between human *praxis* and «une productivité originaire qui continue sous les creations artificielles de l'homme» (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 169).

Keeping these brief considerations in the background, we would like to outline the possibility of a Merleau-Pontyan geophilosophy starting from one of the last *Working Notes* of the incomplete book *The Visible and the Invisible*.

> Oppose to a philosophy of history […] ([…] in which history is the encounter of this praxis with the inertia of the "worked-over matter," of the authentic temporality with what congeals it), not, doubtlessly, a philosophy of geography (it would be as vain to take as axis the encounter of the […] praxis with the spatial in Itself as his encounter with the inert[…]) —but a philosophy of structure which, as a matter of fact, will take form better on contact with geography than on

> contact with history […]. In fact it is a question of grasping the nexus—neither "historical" nor "geographic" of history […], this very time that is space, this very space that is time, […] the simulta- neous Urstiftung of time and space which makes there be a historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history. Fundamental problem: the sedimentation and the re-activation. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 258).

We are not interested here in commenting in detail upon the individual aspects of this quotation. It is necessary, however, to emphasize *Urstiftung* is a concept of Husserlian origin. Here, rather than focusing on Husserl's role,[1] we want to highlight a dialectical instance alongside the phenomenological one.[2] Thinking history's *In-der-Welt-Sein* involves distancing oneself from a conception in which history is understood as the teleological encounter of human transformative activity «with the inertia of the "worked-over matter"», a struggle of «the authentic temporality with what congeals it». This conception marks «le retour à […] la réaffirmation compulsive de l'*Ens Realissimum*» (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 395)[3] in which human freedom is *antiphysis* (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 47), a continuous struggle with the limits imposed by its finite nature. As an alternative to this perspective, the author brings the geographical theme into play. But, as in a series of dialectical movements, this does not entail a mere substitution with a philosophy of geography: if *In-der-Welt-Sein* is not in his eyes pure temporality, it must not be purely spatialized either. To think the *Weltlichkeit* of history through geography, it is not sufficient to replace the centrality of time with that of space. Rather, it will be a matter of thinking about a philosophy «better on contact with geography than on contact with history»: it is therefore more than substitution, it is about paying attention to the role that geography plays in philosophy. The objective is explicit: «grasping the *nexus* – neither "historical" nor "geographic" of history [...], this very time that is space, this very space that is time», that is, considering history not only as a place of manifestation of spirit, but as «a milieu of immanence» (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 87) in which the manifestation of the spirit can occur, a place that is both spatial and temporal.

The occurrence of history in an immanence that is not that of substance, although dialectical, of Spirit is defined by Merleau-Ponty in terms of *a quasi-geographical inscription of history*. It is about thinking a *Spielraum* between time and space (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 331; 1995, 286): the nature mapped by geography is not an *Ens Realissimum*, but rather a generative dynamic of the figure- background type. It is in this *Spielraum* that *Gestaltung* occurs – a term that certainly recalls *Gestaltpsychologie* but is also a reference to Hegelian lexicon. It is a variation upon the theme of *Chiasm*, understood as «one sole movement in its two phases» (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 138) within which both the figure (*Gestalt*) and the background are generated (Merleau-Ponty 2011, 80), offering a processual and non-substantial ontology: substance, if one still wants to use this expression, is not what passes unscathed through the overcoming of its spatio-temporal *figurations* destined for overcoming (*Aufhebung*), but a continuous movement of «sedimentation and [...] reactivation», *vinculum substantiale* between figure and background.

If the Hegelian Spirit affirmed itself through «the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized» (Hegel 2001, 35), the historical-geographical substance of Merleau-Ponty (1968, 185) is

[1] From the extensive literature on the topic, see Toadvine & Embree (2002); Lanfredini (2015); Lajoie & Toadvine (2021; 2022).
[2] While not completely overlapping, Merleau-Ponty (1964, 143) emphasizes how Husserl's project «est assez analogue à l'enterprise de Hegel. Le terme même de phénoménologie vient d'ailleurs de Hegel». On Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, see Vuillerod (2019), Dastur (2011).
[3] See Merleau-Ponty (1968, 211).

bound by its «ontological milieu». History is an experience of contingency, a path whose meaning we do not know in advance (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 390-1). This anti-teleological conception, however, does not lead to accepting the *End of History* (Kojève 1969), «an idealization of death» (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 206). It is rather an overturning of Hegel: «Contre le Hegel de la logique de l'histoire – Pour le Hegel de l'ironie de l'histoire» (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 139). To better understand, we must keep in mind that although Hegelian philosophy of history contains «such interesting remarks on the geographic distribution of civilizations, natural forces [...] play only a subordinate role. They will be mere conditions for the manifestation» of the Spirit (Hyppolite 1996, 12). Despite interest in the geographical element, Hegelian philosophy would miss the moment of inscription, reducing geography to a condition of manifestation.

Without venturing into delicate exegetical questions about Hegelian thought that transcend the possibilities and intentions of this article,[4] we can however highlight the fact that *Hegel's geographical thought* (Bond 2014) is directly influenced by the German geographer Carl Ritter, who

> inspired Hegel in the elaboration of his 'geography of the Spirit' [...]; the necessity of taking into account, for an historical analysis, the close dependence of all nations' development upon geographical conditions, and their indissoluble connection, that is the principle that geography lies as the background of all the events of history. (Tanca 2021, 14).

Ritter's influence and Hegel's original elaboration of it are important for us. The German geographer offers a non-naturalistic perspective arguing that the main contribution of geographical thought consists in considering the Earth

> as the dwelling-place of Man. From a geographical point of view, the world becomes to us the common home of our race, *the theater*, not of the operations of Nature in the most unrestricted sense, but *the arena for the development of human life and history*. (Ritter, 1865, XV).

Hegelian geographical thought is undoubtedly much more complex and articulated than we can show here. The ethical, moral, and political outcomes can even be antithetical. We limit ourselves only to some considerations, useful to our argument. Although thanks to Ritter «the Philosophy of history is enriched with a geographic dimension» (Tanca 2021, 13), mostly, but not exclusively, Hegel «understood geography as "physical geography"» (Bond 2014, 187). Reducing it only to its physical dimension, however, would make us lose its ethical role. It is known that geography constitutes the basis of *Weltgeschichte*, the arena, recalling Ritter, where the adventure of spirit is played out. If, however, it were limited to "arena of history", one would lose the profoundly dialectical character of Hegelian geography. At stake is a possible *nexus* between Nature and Spirit. Unlike Hobbes and Descartes, for example, for whom between nature and spiritual world there is an irreducible antinomy (the state of nature opposed to civil state in Hobbes, the passions of the soul opposed to common sense in Descartes), for Hegel the matter is more complex. History begins with the awakening of the spirit originally asleep in nature (geographically defined by the Orient): from the natural soul, it rises - through historical actualization - to the heights of Art, Religion, and Philosophy (Absolute Spirit, the West). Although "subordinate", geography is nonetheless essential: subordinate, because it is basically relegated to the moment in which the natural soul is dormant in the pure exteriority of nature (anthropology); essential because, while History deals with the interiority of this journey, geography not only orients the path (from East to West), but selects what

[4] Geographically, «there is not just one Hegel» (Pohl 2019, 186).

remains outside: for Hegel, «geography influenced humans most at [the] early stage in Spirit's development» (Bond, 2014, 188). The more humanity progresses, the less it will be dependent on the geographical conditions of its action, and freedom will not be from Nature in itself, but from the geographical limits of action[5]. The Spirit historically emancipates itself from these conditions and is capable of transforming them according to its system of needs and ethical life.

3. The Geographical Overthrow of Hegelianism

History, being the path of Freedom, trumps over geographical conditions, it is bound to geography only insofar as the latter forms a heterogeneous mass of *immediacies* that fail to rise to the level of contradiction and are thus totally *inessential* to it (Martino 2019, 64). The geo-ontological status of Africa is exemplary:

> Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained — for all purposes of con- nection with the rest of the World — shut up […]. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical condition. (Hegel 2001, 109).

This reverberates upon its inhabitants:

> [the] distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essen- tial being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained […] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality — all that we call feeling — if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. (Hegel 2001, 111).

The geography of a *place* can determine the exclusion of its inhabitants from history if they do not allow for the development of freedom. The *outside* of history is a geographical and anthropological ensemble in which no trace of humanity is found, because the humans who live outside the geographies of history are incapable of distinguishing themselves from a fixed, continuous, and undifferentiated space: they fail to *temporalize* themselves. In Hegel's eyes, the African is one with Africa: outside history there is an ontological indifference with the environment, and the life of the Spirit can only flourish under geographical conditions suitable for humans to cease being one with their immediate environment, temporalizing their existence such that they can differentiate space from themselves and avoid crystallizing into an empty identity. This differentiation, however, is not peaceful: «Freedom [...], does not exist *as original and natural*. Rather must it be first sought out and won» (Hegel 2011, 56). The *Theodicaea* justifies this search for freedom, which comes at a high price: struggle, conquest, the fall of empires and the extinction of lineages. This marks a further difference between European and African peoples from the Amerindian ones (Stibor 2024). While the former are, as is known, the most advanced point of this history of progress, Africans are nonetheless, in Hegel's eyes, ontologically superior to Native Americans:

> The weakness of the American physique was a chief reason for bringing the negroes to America, to employ their labor in the work that had to be done in the New World; for the negroes are far more susceptible of European culture than the Indians […]. The original nation having

[5] See §346 in Hegel (2003, 374).

> vanished or nearly so, the effective population comes for the most part from Europe; and what takes place in America, is but an emanation from Europe. (Hegel 2001, 99).

Although important, the colonial and ethnocentric implications of this topic are beyond the scope of this paper (Lima 2024) so we will only limit ourselves to underline how the role of the geographical structure of Africa and the Americas justifies colonization and slavery through a presumed ontological indolence of a people, the Amerindian (Campello 2024), who, seen from early nineteenth-century Berlin, appears at an animal level.[6] However, an important fact emerges here that, if read with Merleau-Ponty's tools, provides us with a *dialectical over-throw* of Hegelian thought. An existential bond with places emerges, a *geographical ontology* at the margins of history. It is precisely on this existential dimension and with attention to the outside of historicist dialectics that Merleau-Ponty focuses his reading of Hegel's thought. More or less in line with the readings proposed by Hyppolite and Sartre, Hegelian philosophy was not interpreted by Merleau-Ponty as the mere affirmation of the triumphant Spirit, rather it provided a particular conception of experience: «Ce n'est plus l'experiénce de laboratoire, c'est l'épreuve de la vie» (Merleau-Ponty 2010, 1326). The restlessness of the Spirit is not a triumphant meat grinder on the determined figures of history, to be justified through *Theodicaea*, but rather the existential condition of those who inhabit and live in the world. Here emerges the *irony* of history and not its logical justification: history is opaque, made of acts of resumption, of going back, it is not a straight line on which to measure the evolution of the species. Philosophical history is not an object to contemplate, but rather the *situation of thought* (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 141), its condition of possibility.

A *minority Hegelianism* emerges: dialectics is not the locomotive of history that, inexorably, runs on the path of progress, rather it is a *journey*, an exploration of the outside. It is, for Merleau-Ponty as for Hegel, a reaction to abstract and intellectual formalism, and most crucially – for the former – a philosophy of history at the height of this challenge must not justify, but experiment

> tout l'aventure humaine. Et pas seulement les doctrines des philosophes du passé, mais le faits et gestes de l'humanité, tous les grands fait historiques, les faits de civi- lisation. Considérant que tous ces faits avaient, pour un philosophe, autant d'impor- tance […] que leur expression philosophique proprement dite. (Merleau-Ponty 2016, 334).

Philosophy of history is thus not the justification of evil, but the attempt to describe the «conctact expérimental […] avec le monde», it «est bien une discipline tout à fait originale, mais ce qu'elle cherche, c'est non pas les idées à part des faits […] mais c'est plutôt, comme Hegel l'avait indiqueé, à comprendre l'expérience humaine totale» (Merleau-Ponty 2016, 335). Excluding places and peoples from history is a contradiction internal to dialectical thought itself. According to Merleau-Ponty, History is not the manifestation of Logic in the World, but the attempt to explore the many worlds that inhabit the Earth. The irony lies in the fact that «L'histoire n'avoue jamais» (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 10). And here we return to the *Working Note* from which we started: to oppose to the Hegelian theory of history, we shouldn't pursue a philosophy of geography, but a thought of the *Weltlichkeit* of Spirit, of the inscription of history where the Earth is not just a *Präsenz-Feld*[7] of the Spirit (Merleau-Ponty 1996, 86; 1968, 163), but the landscape of its history.

Here re-emerges the importance (and ambivalence) of Hegelian geography

[6] America plays an important role in Hegelian geo-history, see Kelly (1972).
[7] The concept is borrowed from Husserl, see Burke (1997).

> Hegel argued against those who saw *absolute* space as space's ultimate form […]. Absolute space by itself could not serve as space's truth, because it necessarily be- longed to the dialectical movement engendered by nature's own internal logic. […] Hegel rejected the claim that space's concept and very existence could be abstracted from one's sense perception of a given space. (Bond 2014, 186).

Absolute space is amended from its existential caliber. The truth of space does not consist in abstract immediacy, but in dialectical richness. On one side, it is true that space can be fixed and continuous, like geometric space; but on the other, it is part of the dialectic of nature, which manifests a greater richness than the intellectual one. The truth of space is its becoming, and the intellect crystallizes it in an abstract form: the becoming of space is its temporality:

«Time logically emerged from abstract space and negated it. [...] For Hegel, then, space and time could not be pried apart» (Bond 2014, 187). The fact that time emerges and negates space can have two possible meanings. It can indicate a temporalization of space, and express the «spatial bulimia» (Tanca, 2021, 16) of the triumphant Spirit. But this is not the only possible interpretation. Hegel does not speak of spatiality in itself, but of the abstract and crystallizing conception of space. Time is not absolute negation of space, but determinate negation of its immediate form. Negating this idea of space does not mean digesting it in Time, but revealing a greater ontological richness, a *Wirklichkeit* of space that is not the *Realität* thought by the intellect. Space is also becoming, in transformation, in structuration (*Gestaltung*).[8] By negating abstract space, Hegel refuses its reduction to the merely external realm of the temporal unity of Spirit and brings forth the ontological *nexus* of a determinate temporal unity that occurs only in the multiple, *a spatial inscription of time* that is a path opposed to both the temporalization of space and a complementary spatialization of time.

We thus return once again to the *Working Note* where Merleau-Ponty sought «this very time that is space, this very space that is time». Dialectics does not only lead to teleology and historicist *Theodicaea*, but opens to its adventures in the outside: not in the abstract space of geometry, but in «a historical landscape» (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 258). The *geographical adventures of dialectics* require a new ontology.

4. Towards a Geo-Ontology of the Spirit

The spatial inscription of time transforms the *nexus* between Spirit and Nature, opening up to a true geo-ontology, where Earth is not, as for Hegel (2001, 96), «the ground on which [the] Spirit plays», but rather «an active participant» (Tambassi 2018, 28) of human adventures. To outline some aspects of this ontology, we propose to shift our attention to two authors, anthropologist T. Ingold and geographer A. Berque, who, inspired by Merleau-Ponty (Iofrida 2019; Gorzanelli 2012; Giarolo 2022), expand his perspective. A common starting point (Ingold 2000, 185-7; Berque 2011, 122-131) can be Heidegger's ontological thesis on dwelling: «human being consists in dwelling» (Heidegger 2001, 147).[9]

[8] The idea of *Gestalt* in Merleau-Ponty's thought (1960, 188) is analogous to the concept of Structure. When, in the *Working Note* that inspires our paper, we read philosophy of structure we must remember that «*Gestalt* is a transient structure, which can find a "good shape" but [...] can also diverge. The mode in which it appears is always uncertain, indeterminate, exposed to unpredictable change» (Vanzago, 2014, 33). See also Bimbenet (2004, p 56-61).

[9] The relationship between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty is complex. On the topic of the Dwelling Perspective, cf. Liberman (2007); Missiroli (2024).

In the idea of Dwelling there is implicit both a temporal duration and a spatial ontology. However, it is not about Cartesian extended space, where the conjunction with time is impossible since, if everything has a *partes extra partes* localization in space, time dislocates them in the temporal continuity of subjective synthetic unity: geometric space is the opposite complement of the temporality of the unextended *Res Cogitans*. Time-duration and punctual space are incommensurable with each other. This abstract and geometric idea of space does not interest Heidegger (2001, 153) nor is the primary sense of space, as *extensio* is something *abstractum*, taken from a more original existential spatiality. Spatial entities are not simply cut out of a *continuum*, they «receive their being from locations and not from [cartesian] "space"» (Heidegger 2001, 152).

The *extensio* does not exhaust the ontological possibility of *spatium*[10], the metric analysis conceals the ontology that the thought has the task of *unveiling*. Within an *extensio*, no place would be possible, which presupposes a deeper difference than the simple exteriority of Cartesian space. Instead, it is about thinking spatiality as the ontological condition itself of human being:

> When we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external ob-ject nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them space; for when I say "a man", and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name "man" I already name the stay within the […] things. (Heidegger 2001, 154).

Space is not a *Gegenstand* opposed to the human subject, but the latter, as a Terrestrial being who is ontologically inscribed in a place, it expresses its essence in *staying* among things, that is, among the multiplicity of entities with which it enters into relation. Space, before being the object of metrics, concerns the very essence of the human. Certainly, it does not have a "substantial" existence, but, says Heidegger, it must be traced so that humans can inscribe themselves in it. The inscription is the relation of place to the human who dwells in it, an activity that does not identify with the spatial bulimia of the Spirit but with the ability to take root within spatial limits:

> Space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presenting. That is why the concept is that of horismosy that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds. (Heidegger 2001, 152).

Space is something to be traced and the limit is not what inhibits action, but its condition of possibility. Inscription is the "passive *praxis*" of tracing space that occurs against a background that limits it: only in a *limited scope* - in a place – there can be *praxis*. At the bottom of human practical activity there is «une productivité originaire qui continue sous les créations artificielles de l'homme» (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 169). Heidegger calls this original passivity dwelling: it is because one inhabits a place that one can trace and measure a space. Beneath geometric abstractions lives a material *geo graphein*. As dwelling, human *praxis* makes room not for uniform and continuous space, but for multiple spatialities. The *writing* of space does not create space in itself, but aims to make humans dwell, to express their ontological potential through the geographical inscription of their being.

[10] See also Deleuze & Guattari (1994, 86)

Only by dwelling can one truly have a home (*oikos*), that is, endure temporally in a place. The time of human dwelling - its history - is not separate from space, it is what expresses the geographical ontology of the human being. To inhabit a place means to create a temporal synthesis not *of*, but *in* the multiplicity. This is a *Dwelling Perspective* on ontology (Ingold 2000, 185-7), which reveals the essential nexus between space and time sought after by Merleau-Ponty. Spirit defines itself through dwelling practices, its way of creating space and belonging to a "landscape", its way of *making world*. It transforms along with the variations of its geographical bonds, bonds that are not transitory moments to be overcome and preserved (*Aufhebung*), but rather the concrete manifestation of spiritual contingency. Recalling Berque (2001, 18-137), we can say that Spirit is anchored to a primordial *il y a* that is not the awakening of the soul in nature, but the ability to take root in it, to inhabit it and create space in it.

Geography changes the role of anthropology in relation to history: if the latter is the way in which Spirit durably inhabits nature, the former acquires a pragmatic perspective based on the interaction with the environment and no longer, as in Kant, on the character of the species.

5. From a Pragmatic Anthropology to a Practical Geography

From the perspective of a renewal of historical theory, anthropology does not represent the "sleep" of Spirit, but the set of human dwelling strategies.[11] Ingold (2000, 42) calls it «ontology of dwelling», which consists «in taking the human condition to be that of a being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world». Such ontology reverses the modern perspective, «whose point of departure is that of a mind detached from the world, and that has literally to formulate it [...] prior to any attempt at engagement» (Ingold 2000, 42). The dwelling ontology opposes a *Building Perspective*, whose motto is: «first plan and build the houses, then import the people to occupy them». This latter perspective expresses both an ontological precedence of mental design over practical realization (of *cogitans* over *extensio*), and the idea that human *praxis* is realized «in an environment that is already given in nature, and that has not itself been artificially engineered» (180). In a Building Perspective, the natural element and space return to being an arena of human activity; on the contrary, the ontology of dwelling has as its premise our relationship to the world, the dwelling in a nature that is not an object opposed to a subject, but the ineliminable *background* of every spiritual *Gestalt*. Ingold reminds us that «apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view *of* the world but of taking up a view *in* it» (42). The context of action is neither something to know intellectually, nor a presupposition to overcome, but a place in which to live.

It is in terms of landscape that Ingold determines his dwelling perspective, where a landscape is not a panoramic view, but the world felt from a subject's material situation in nature. Dwelling in a landscape is thus not having a vision *of* the world, a *Weltanschauung*, but taking up a vision *in* the world. Unlike the world-panorama of Cartesian geometry - which makes this an object to contemplate - the landscape involves an ontological change: it includes time, which is not only the lived time of the subject, but inherent to the landscape itself. There is a history of landscapes that does not coincide with the spir-

[11] On Hegel's Anthropology, see De Laurentiis (2021).

itual synthesis of time, but refers to the vital correspondence between humans and the environments they inhabit:

> Human life is a process that involves the passage of time. Secondly, this life- process is also the process of formation of the landscapes in which people have lived. […] In particular, […] such a focus might enable us to move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external back-drop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space. (Ingold 2000, 189).

The landscape is ground zero of every possible perspective. Neither I nor the landscape are independent, our ontological autonomy is given by the fact that I already always inhabit a landscape of which I am part. Action and passion are indiscernible in a landscape and my history is inscribed in it, traces its contours and is transformed by it. The «landscape tells - or rather *is* - a story» (189), it is not the theater of my spiritual spectacle. It «enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation» (189). The historical landscape is a temporary and contingent synthesis of the lives that have shaped it and that have been shaped by it, regardless of their position on the scale of progress. It is a manifestation of the geographical inscription of spirit.

Berque (2013, 4) emphasizes that «making landscape an object of thought excludes landscape thinking». Ingold and Heidegger have provided us with the idea that landscape is not an objective environment that exists independently of the beings that inhabit and shape it, but the place where Spirit *actualizes* itself. In this sense, a landscape is not an object of thought, but rather its existential place or, as Berque says (2001, 44), its *chôra*: not an individual point in the extended and abstract space of the geometrizing tradition, but the participation of the spirit in a totality that encompasses it and determines its ethical life. Participating in a landscape is the impossibility of spiritual solipsism, the index of an «ouverture à l'altérité» (39) and not a retreat into identity.

Being something that changes based on our metamorphoses, inhabiting a landscape forces our thought to reevaluate the philosophical role of contingency which here constitutes the ontological basis of every possible individuation.[12] The ontology of the "dwelling Spirit" is not that of conquering autonomy through its figures, but the possibility of designing a world in which one can dwell. In this geo-graphic act, *praxis* incarnated in a place, there is the convergence between ontology and geography. Berque expresses this idea very well when he claims the ontological dimension of landscape: there is a truth of landscape that is not intellectual *adequatio*, but a material concordance between elements, a compossibility of incompossibles: «c'est là, dans le paysage et non pas dans la parole, que réside la vérité» (74). Practical and not theoretical truth, it is the durable coexistence (in space and time) of alterities not identifiable in a higher synthetic unity, but participating in "local" syntheses that «se fondraient totalement dans le paysage» (75). The multiplicity of these material-local syntheses *in* nature is the Ecumene, or

> l'ensemble et la condition des milieux humains, en ce qu'ils ont proprement d'hu- main, mais non moins d'écologique et de physique. C'est cela, l'écouméne, qui est pleinement la demeure (*oikos*) de l'être humain. (17).

[12] For geophilosophy, "there is no universal history except of contingency" (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 93).

The *geographicity* (of humans and their history) does not represent the inert theater of the spectacle of a disembodied Spirit, but the metamorphosis of the lines traced on earth by human animals, the "constructed" spaces that express the human spirit that inhabits them: spaces that are undoubtedly artificial, but not for this reason foreign to the powers of nature that shape life on earth. The irony of history is this paradoxical union of nature and spirit that defines the spatial and temporal limits of human needs, and their vicissitudes. It is a practical ontology that geography shows us: not that of adaptation to the cosmopolitan values of the *Weltbürger*, nor that of the conquest of spiritual Freedom, but the possibility of transforming the natural relationships that cross the human ecumene, weaving interweaving and hybridizations with other dwelling practices and thus dirtying the ontologies of modernity with other ontologies, which are possible because they express the *actuality* of nature that, as Merleau-Ponty said, continues beneath our adventure. Our geographical being is an index of an ontological *praxis* inscribed in a natural *poiesis*: we draw trajectories, lines, paths that do not exist before being traveled and that no spiritual teleology can determine in advance. Nonetheless, these lines exist as virtual possibilities, as possible maps of territories to explore, geographies that, independent of our maps, create themselves together with them, because they are two indissoluble moments of that *Poetics of the Earth* (Berque 2019) that underlies every existential occasion of ours.

History, Merleau-Ponty said, is rooted in Nature, *praxis* is inscribed in a productivity that is not ours. Berque offers us a further insight. The *quasi* geographical inscription deeply expresses a theory of History: neither the simple collection of facts from the past nor an eschatology towards the Future, but the idea that nothing is given once and for all, and that it is always possible to reactivate, beyond good and evil, «les métamorphoses de la Fortune» (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 396), that is, the natural creativity that underlies all our activity. Not a naturalism, however, which is the other face of historicism, but

> a poetics, taking into account what creates (*poiei*) the new, going beyond the same or its repetition. It makes history possible and the evolution towards something other than the identical. (Berque, 2019, 181).

All this is a geographical invitation to rethink the very notion of *res gestæ*: not the memorable enterprises of great men or the triumphs of the guiding peoples of the history of the Spirit, but the great and small interweaving, always ontologically crucial, between human life in its varied multiplicity (natural and artificial) and the landscapes in which it is inscribed from time to time.

6. Conclusions

We have highlighted how, in Merleau-Ponty's perspective, there is neither opposition nor reduction between geography and history. The *idea of a quasi-geographical inscription of history*, a reversal and not a rejection of Hegel, invites us to thematize a historicity intertwined with the places and landscapes that constitute its ontological and material conditions of possibility. We sought theoretical support in Ingold's dwelling ontology and Berque's ecumenal geography to outline a possible development of this idea. Berque, in particular, emphasizes how «le sens est à la fois cours dans le temps et direction dans l'espace», inviting philosophy «à chercher une voie moyenne entre le non-sens et le finalisme» (Berque 2001, 190, 199). This idea allows us to say that a geophilosophy of history does not deny any spiritual purpose, but refuses a univocal teleology of progress. Rather, it postulates that earth, environment, and geography are not inert backgrounds of human

action, but co-creative actors that participate in the historical process. Dwelling on Earth means creating meaning and tracing paths through reciprocal interactions with nature: the many ways in which humans inhabit it express different particular teleologies. History emerges as an open process, rooted in contingency and natural *poiesis*, not a predetermined path or a mere accumulation of events. It takes shape as an interweaving of dwelling practices, ecological transformations, and cultural inventions that arise from the relationship between human and Earth.

This vision criticizes modern teleologies and invites recognition of the plurality of narratives and ontologies that inhabit our world. Geography, in this sense, highlights an ontogenesis of spirit based on *coming-to-terms* with natural limits (Amoroso 2019), rather than on overcoming them. This allows for the inclusion in the historical path of populations excluded from Hegelian historicism,[13] valuing different ways of dwelling on Earth: there is history even in the geographies that modernity had excluded (Biasillo 2023). The geo-philosophy of history thus becomes a useful tool in the process of decolonization of thought, overcoming ethnocentric scales of progress centered on the ethics of the *Weltbürger* as a final end (*Endzweck*), to explore how different ontologies transform an ecumene formed by multiple times and spaces.[14]

There is still much theoretical work to be done. However, if it is true that today the philosophy of history is «in a novel situation without any clear paradigm, looking for new ways to go forward» (Kuukkanen 2020, 4), the idea of History as "dwelling" can constitute a first step in this direction. History is the art of transforming landscape into a dwelling and of tracing, with each step, humanity's path. The geophilosophy of history is the attempt to think about its radical geographical contingency while being careful to include in its perspective those geographies that modernity «excluded from the paths of the new Critique» (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 109) and thus actively contribute to the *permanent de-colonization of thought* (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 40).

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[13] Although Hegel's geographical thought is certainly more complex than what is said in this paper, his geographical and anthropological remarks are «most off the mark, and their rather uninformed dismissal of non- European ways of life undermines whatever validity they might have as genuine accounts of non-European peoples» (Pickard 2017, 51).

[14] The reference is to the Ontological Turn in anthropology, Descola (2005), Viveiros de Castro (2012).

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