Sara Taglialatela

Ars memoriae and *scriptura interna*

A metaphorological account on the *De umbris idearum*

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With 8 figures

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To Lia and Antonio

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Prelude

Descent into Hell

Deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless?

Indeed we should, if – in fact, perhaps only if – the past subjected to our remarks and inquiries is solely that of humanity, of this enigmatic life-form that comprises our own naturally lusty and preternaturally wretched existence and whose mystery is quite understandably the alpha and omega of all our remarks and inquiries, lending urgency and fire to all our speech, insistence to all our questions. And yet what happens is: the deeper we delve and the farther we press and grope into the underworld of the past, the more totally unfathomable become those first foundations of humankind, of its history and civilization, for again and again they retreat farther into the bottomless depths, no matter to what extravagant lengths we may unreel our temporal plumb line. The salient words here are "again" and "farther," because what is inscrutable has a way of teasing our zeal for placing it under scrutiny; it offers us only illusory stations and goals, behind which, once we reach them, we discover new stretches of the past opening up – much like a stroller at the shore whose wanderings find no end, because behind each backdrop of loamy dunes that he strives to reach lie new expanses to lure him onward to another cape.

Thus some origins are of a conditional sort, making both in practice and in fact the primal beginning of the particular tradition kept by a given community, people, or family of faith, but in such a way that memory, even when advised that the well's deeps can in no way be considered earnestly plumbed, may find national reassurance in some primal event and come to historical and personal rest there.

For example, …

– Thomas Mann, *The Stories of Jacob*

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Preface

In the following pages I present to the reader my PhD dissertation in history of philosophy, which was defended in 2018 in Berlin at the end of a joint-doctoral program between the Freie Universität Berlin and the Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa.

After the defence I planned to revise the text thoroughly, giving more space to one of the theses of the dissertation i. e. that in his first mnemonic works Giordano Bruno had already elaborated those notions of language, nature, and creativity that he later presented in a more philosophical context in the Italian works. This plan would have resulted in writing a completely new text and I decided to postpone it, because I did not want to lose the methodological perspective of my dissertation.

When I started working on Giordano Bruno from a metaphorological perspective Renaissance philosophy was a new research field for me, having been educated in theoretical philosophy and having focused during my first PhD studies in Venice both on the contemporary debate on metaphors and the twentieth-century interpretations of Modernity. After my first PhD, a professor in Berlin challenged me by asking to conduct a research project on Giordano Bruno's mnemonics using Blumenberg's metaphorological perspective and what the reader holds in their hands now is the result of that intellectual challenge that led me to approach Renaissance philosophy.

Relinquishing this work I would like to aknowledge those who guided me through my philosophical studies: Franco Tonon, my first teacher at the Liceo Ginnasio Marco Foscarini in Venice, my professors at the Department of Philosophy and Theories of Sciences at the Ca' Foscari University in Venice, among them Prof. Mario Ruggenini and Prof. Luigi Perissinotto, Prof. Anne Eusterschulte (Freie Universität Berlin), and Prof. Michele Ciliberto (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, and Istituto Nazionale per gli Studi sul Rinascimento, Florence).

The English version of the dissertation, that was partially composed in Italian, has been improved under the supervision of Katherine Bird, whom I would like to

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thank not only for her help but also for her patience in allowing me to explore another language and learning how to work philosophically in this language.

All mistakes, inaccuracies, misunderstandings that the reader may find in the text are mine and will be an opportunity for me to keep working on these topics.

Sara Taglialatela
University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Theology, Section of Church History
January 2022

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Notes on the text

In the book I have used the following standard abbreviations:

	Rhetorica ad Herrennium	*Rhet. Her.*
Aristotle	*De anima*	*De an.*
	De insomniis	*Insomn.*
	De memoria et reminiscentia	*Mem.*
	Topica	*Top.*
Augustine	*Confessiones*	*Conf.*
Cicero	*De inventio*	*Inv. rhet.*
	De oratore	*De or.*
Plato	*Phaedo*	*Phd.*
	Phaedrus	*Phdr.*
	Philebus	*Phlb.*
Quintilian	*Institutio oratoria*	*Inst.*

Unless otherwise stated in notes, all translations are mine.

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