VICO'S NARRATIVE ART:
FROM THE FORESTS TO THE ACADEMIES

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ABSTRACT

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By
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Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Frederick Evans, Ph.D.

In this dissertation, I argue that Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), most famously considered a philosopher of history, is above all a philosopher of narration. I unfold Vico’s narrative response to and rejection of traditional philosophical discourse; through relating the story of himself and the story of mankind, Vico demonstrates that storytelling gives birth to the human self and world. Furthermore, I emphasize the ontological import of narrative, often overlooked, in his two major works, The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico and The New Science. Finally, I conclude by showing the relevance of Vico’s pedagogical call to cultivate the child’s narrative imagination in childhood education today. It is my contention that Vico’s narrative art can revive the lost art of storytelling and make possible our own recovery of narratable selves.
DEDICATION

For my son, Samuel Anthony.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When my niece Francesca was born, I was living in Pittsburgh, and in the midst of preparing a lecture on Plato’s Symposium for my Philosophy 101 class, in the early hours of the morning. My father skyped me from her birthing room in Buffalo and I heard a sound that changed the course of my life, perhaps one of the most beautiful sounds I have ever heard - Francesca’s small, singsong voice travelling through the air and touching my ear hundreds of miles away. I returned to Plato’s text, where the phrase, giving birth in beauty, mingled with the lingering traces of her fragile, remarkable voice. I did not teach the Symposium that day in the way I had intended: how could I profess that giving birth to beautiful discourse was more valuable than giving birth to a real, live infant. Her sweet voice caused a stirring in my soul that was soon to find a home in Adriana Cavarero’s philosophy of birth and desire. Her little voice must have also planted the seed of desire for a child of my own. When I gave birth to my son, Samuel Anthony, Cavarero’s restoration of the maternal figure and the feminine art of narration took on a deeper meaning. I read her beautiful description of the mother and child duet more intimately, more intently. With these events in my life occurring while I worked on Vico, his emphasis upon birth became clearer and clearer; I felt the need to reread Vico in the light of birth (not just beginnings, which has a neutral connotation.) Birth resonates with the mother, with labor pains, with the struggle to create something meaningful. Vico describes the birth of nations: the terror, the labor, the frenzy, the obscurity, the delight, and the pleasure that accompanies the natal scene. Natality and action are at the forefront of his meditations. So, I thank my niece Francesca, my son Sam Anthony, and my theorists: Cavarero and Vico, for seeing me through the road towards birth and creation. Of course, in Plato’s defense, I must add, giving birth to this dissertation has had its own pains, pleasures, and moments of beauty, too.

I would like to thank my family, friends, and dissertation director, Dr. Frederick Evans. I am entirely grateful for Dr. Evan’s guidance, encouragement, and faith in my project. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Silvia Benso and Dr. Michael Harrington.

I would like to add a special thank you to my sister Alison. She gave me so much encouragement and advice. She was always there to listen (no matter what hour of the night) and help me work through ideas throughout this entire dissertation process - as well as graduate school in general. She is the best friend anyone could ever have. I would also like to thank my Mom and Dad. They were also always there for inspiration, advice, and encouragement, especially when I needed it most.
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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I argue that Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), most famously considered a philosopher of history, is above all a philosopher of narration. I unfold Vico’s narrative response to and rejection of traditional philosophical discourse; through relating the story of himself and the story of mankind, Vico demonstrates that storytelling gives birth to the human self and world. Furthermore, I emphasize the ontological import of narrative, often overlooked, in his two major works, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*\(^1\) and *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*.\(^2\) Finally, I conclude by showing the relevance of Vico’s pedagogical call to cultivate the child’s narrative imagination in childhood education today. I contend that Vico’s narrative art can revive the lost art of storytelling and make possible our own recovery of narratable selves.

Vico is first and foremost a storyteller or *logopoia*, “teller of tales.”\(^3\) His narrative art encompasses both the singular and collective dimensions of storytelling; his two fables, the *New Science* and the *Autobiography*, work in concert to narrate both dimensions of our experience. Taken together, the narratives illustrate the productive tension between singular life stories and collective stories. They reveal the way in which our unique life stories are intimately bound up with and carved out from collective stories. On the collective level, Vico’s narrative primarily

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3. That his *New Science* is called a science at all should be taken metaphorically and ironically, according to Verene. See Donald Phillip Verene, *The History of Philosophy: A Reader’s Guide* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 129.
involves the excavation of *vera narratio* or true stories, fables, and myth that make up the *Age of Gods* and the *Age of Heroes* in Vico’s *New Science*. In order to interpret his strategy on this collective level, I use the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s expressive gestural theory of language.\(^4\) I turn to the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero’s theory of narrative identity, on the other hand, to interpret his narrative strategy on the singular level, in his *Autobiography*.\(^5\) To draw the dimensions together, I look to Fred Evan’s notion of elliptical identity.\(^6\) I argue that there is an elliptical relationship between the collective voices of the *New Science* and the voice of Vico as a singular, unique existent in the *Autobiography*. This will shed light on the way in which Vico’s personal voice relates to the voices unearthed in his broader story of mankind. In conclusion, I suggest practical techniques for fostering the art of storytelling in the young in order to revive storytelling today.

In order to relate the story of humanity, Giambattista Vico delves into our oral history. He leaves the security of our written, recorded history and enters the dark, murky depths of unrecorded prehistory, which is a path avoided by many traditional philosophers. For instance, the idealist philosopher George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, whom Vico is often erroneously conflated with, observes in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*: “Legends, folksongs, traditions – these are to be excluded from original history, because they are obscure modes of

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memory, proper to the mentality of pre-literate people.” 7 This is, in fact, the obscure terrain that Vico directs his reader towards. Moreover, Vico shows that our beginnings are obfuscated by the written tradition and the abstract discourse that the written word brings about.

By interpreting Vico’s elusive, primary fables culled from the depths of our archaic imaginations through Merleau-Ponty’s gestural theory of language, we draw Merleau-Ponty’s work towards unexplored depths. Since Vico relates stories that prefigure the written tradition, his narratives add a fresh way of realizing Merleau-Ponty’s primary expressions. Reading the two thinkers together will give us a richer understanding of the pre-reflective depths of experience. Placed in the light of Vico’s fables, which are unearthed from a condition of primary orality, Merleau-Ponty’s sense of history and history’s relation to expression is realized in novel ways. 8

Vico’s journey through our archaic, oral prehistory also nourishes our identities on the singular level. On the one hand, Vico is the great champion of the people’s reading of history. By showing that the archaic heroes and poetic characters are social inventions and exposing the Homeric epics to be the invention of the Greek people as a whole (rather than of an individual), he champions the collective dimension of creativity. But this is only part of Vico’s story. Here the productive tension between the collective and singular levels of narration comes into play.

Although Vico makes no mention of the self in the New Science, he often calls out to the reader, beckoning her to narrate the New Science for herself. She is urged to remake the story for herself. 9 Once we take into account this singular existent, whom Vico addresses in his New

8 Walter Ong describes primary orality as “the orality of a culture totally untouched by any writing or print… it is primary by contrast with the ‘secondary orality’ of present day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices.” See Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy (London: Routledge, 2002), 11.
9 NS par. 349.
Science, we realize that there is something more at work than the slow accretion of the collective story in Vico’s narrative art: he is calling forth the creative powers of the individual, singular existent. In short, Vico urges the individual reader to become a storyteller. At this point, we are forced to ask, how does one become a storyteller? And, more importantly, how do we tell the story of our own life?

If we are to follow the example of Vico’s life story, we will find that Vico did not begin as a storyteller. First, he had to overcome his training in philosophy in order to enjoy the pleasure of storytelling. In other words, he had to retrain his mind to focus upon particulars rather than universals since the tales of poets, orators, and historians deal with particulars. In his Autobiography, he relates:

And to his cost he learned that that study proper to minute wits is not easy for minds already made universal by metaphysics. So he gave up this study as one which chained and confined his mind, now accustomed through long study of metaphysics to move freely in the infinite genera; and in the constant reading of orators, historians and poets his intellect took increasing delight in observing between the remotest matters ties that bound them together in some common relation.\textsuperscript{10}

Language not only shapes his mind but his body’s ability to feel pleasure; by retraining himself to take up a different order of expression he is able to feel delight. This experience of delight was impossible for him as a philosopher since his mind was held captive by his metaphysical training, which taught him to see himself through universals and generalizations. In this way, Vico demonstrates, metaphysics sculpts the mind of modern humanity in the \textit{Age of Men} – his own age. And it continues to rob us today of the pleasures and delights of metaphor, poetry, and imagistic thinking. The pleasures of narrative, which is narrative’s special gift, is not available to the metaphysician; his mind has been fashioned by his reflective, rational, universalizing

\textsuperscript{10} Vico, \textit{Autobiography}, 123.
discourse that precludes him from the delight experienced through narrative.\textsuperscript{11} Vico needed to reorient his mind in order to apprehend the language “spoken by means of heroic emblems, or similitudes, comparison, images, metaphors, and natural descriptions, which make up the great body of heroic language which was spoken at the time the heroes reigned.”\textsuperscript{12} Through language, Vico changes himself, and opens himself up to a different experience of reality: the heroic realm of expression.

Cavarero parallels Vico’s lament that the philosophers direct their eye towards the universal at the expense of the particular. She observes that philosophers are “servants of the universal…the ones who teach us that the knowledge of Man requires that the particularity of each one, the uniqueness of human existence, be unknowable. Knowledge of universals, which excludes embodied uniqueness from its epistemology, attains its maximum perfection by presupposing the absence from such a uniqueness.”\textsuperscript{13} Philosophical discourse eviscerates the unique and unrepeatable status of singular existents. It can teach us what man is, but it cannot tell us who we are. “What man is can be known and defined, as Aristotle assures us; who Socrates is, instead, eludes the parameters of knowledge as science.”\textsuperscript{14} Stories about unique, embodied, and singular existents are an embarrassment to those who desire universal, scientific truth. And yet, Cavarero observes, the philosophical desire for definitions covers over a more fundamental desire: the desire to hear our own life story. When the philosopher ignores this primary desire, she invites tragic consequences.

For instance, consider the tragic fate of Oedipus. In solving the riddle of the sphinx, he reveals himself to be a proto-typical philosopher. When the sphinx asks him what walks on four

\textsuperscript{11} Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narratives}, 2.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{NS} par. 32.
\textsuperscript{13} Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narratives}, 1.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 9.
in the morning, three in the afternoon, and two in the evening, he is able to respond, Man. His response corresponds with the what is X question of Platonic discourse: what is the good, the true, the beautiful, the just?15 But there is something monstrous about this abstract universal Man and its definatory logic; in fact, some residue of the monstrous sphinx’s knowledge lingers in the concept. The monstrosity of the concept lies in its sheer illusion. Cavarero explains, “man is a universal that applies to everyone precisely because it applies to no one. It disincarnates itself from the living singularity of each one while claiming to substantiate it. It is at once masculine and neuter, a hybrid creature generated by thought, a fantastic universal produced by mind.”16 The concept is a monstrous invention.

Tragedy arises when the philosopher attempts to live through the universal concepts, or, in other words, when one attempts to “recognizes oneself in the definition Man.”17 This is how the humans of the Vico’s third age become “dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance.”18 Verene explains, “Vico shows that to believe in the reality of the concept is a form of madness. An exclusive attachment to conceptual analysis is a kind of dissoluteness of mind that is accompanied by a dissoluteness of life founded on wit and not the apprehension of the necessities of the human condition.”19 Although humans appear before each other, they are unable to relate. They only know how to think and act through abstract concepts. Verene affirms, “Only with the decline of the power and the reality of the heroes do thought and language begin to order experience in terms of abstract or intelligible universals. Men begin to think and act according to the class concepts and syllogistic thinking found in Aristotelian

15 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 8.
16 Ibid., 9.
17 Ibid.
18 NS par 241.
logic.” They are physically close to each other in the cities, yet they are asocial and lonely, living in a “deep solitude of spirit and will.” They live, in short, alone together.

This description characterizes our present age - an age dominated by the universal concept Man. Vico anticipated the fatigue of the concept today and the tragic fate of humans who attempt to define themselves through the concept. Vico’s Age of Man is the Cartesian world he forewarned us of and which we inhabit today. As Gianturco says, “We live in a Cartesian world, a world of scientific research, technology, gadgets, which invade and condition our lives.” Today, in the cities and Academies, storytellers are on the verge of extinction, and narrative has been replaced by information.

This age is dominated by generalizing philosophical and scientific discourse that creates the condition Vico calls the barbarism of reflection. Verene observes, “The deep solitude of spirit of which Vico speaks is brought about over the overuse of the intellect in human affairs, such that society and the human spirit lose touch with the natural forms of imagination…This barbarism of intellect is more confining and inhuman than the conditions of primitive life out of which society originally comes.” This is the barbarism at the end of Vico’s ideal eternal story. There is a barbarism of the beginning as well called the barbarism of sense, yet, despite its savagery, we are made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than sense. Vico explains, “For the latter displayed a generous savagery, against which one could defend oneself or take flight or be on one’s guard; but the former with a vile savagery, under soft words and embraces plots against the life and fortune of friends and intimates.” Although Vico does not advocate a return to a condition of barbaric sense, he seeks to reinfuse the condition of reflection with

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21 NS par. 412.  
25 NS par. 1106.
enough sense to allow for new passionate, stories to be born. The *Heroic Age*, stirring between both barbaric conditions, births the most beautiful forms of expression and storytelling, according to Vico. His aim is to reinfuse the Academies and cities with this sensuous heroism.

I’ve experience the fatigue of the concept in my *Introduction to Philosophy* courses as an adjunct lecturer. But I have witnessed the power of narration and life stories to reanimate the lives of students. When I first introduced sections of Cavarero’s text, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, to my students, I was astounded by their reactions. They expressed emotion, delight, passion, and an eagerness to participate that I had never experienced in the classroom before. For instance, we read Cavarero’s story of Ulysses at the court of the Phoenicians, which is meant to illustrate her thesis that we can only see who we are through the tale of another. Ulysses in disguise is welcomed into the court of the Phoenicians. While eating dinner a bard begins to sing the tales of the wily Ulysses, unaware that Ulysses is in the audience. Upon hearing the tale of his trials and adventures from the mouth of an other, Ulysses begins to weep for the first time26 Cavarero observes, “before hearing his story, Ulysses did not yet know who he was: the story of the rhapsod, the story told by an ‘other,’ finally revealed his own identity.”27

One student related a similar experience. She had struggled to win a scholarship to college and had surpassed seemingly insurmountable barriers to achieve the award. She was, like Ulysses, “captured in the present of the action that cuts off the temporal series of before and after.”28 Her heroic efforts were honored at an award ceremony and, as she waited to be introduced and formally receive her award, the speaker narrated the events of her life that had led

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27 Ibid., 18.
28 Ibid., 18.
up to that point. The speaker, in other words, put her life into the form of a story - and she cried, just as Ulysses did.

After experiencing a litany of reactions like this, I began to incorporate Cavarero’s work into take-home exercises. For instance, one Thanksgiving students were asked to give a friend or family member a gift: the gift of narration. This is in the spirit of Cavarero’s notion that sharing life stories gives the listener pleasure and so has “an ethic of the gift.”29 One student’s experience stands out. He wrote the life story of his mother and shared it at his family’s thanksgiving table. He related all the sacrifices she had made to afford him a college education, and she wept. And the whole table was brought to tears. It was an emotional experience that nourished his entire family.

Our students dwell within the Age of Man; they are conditioned to think of education as presenting generalized, abstract discourse. They expect to learn something about what they are, whether it be through the discipline of biology, chemistry, sociology, economics, history, or politics, etc. But they rarely expect to learn about who they are as singular, unique, and unrepeatable existents. As Cavarero observes “foreign to the defining language of philosophy and the human sciences, biographical narration does not explain, does not organize nor understand the events from within a conceptual framework, a system that gives sense; rather it assembles the fragments of a life experience that discloses the meaning of the uniqueness of that very life.”30 The student should be able to engage in a form of education that allows her to realize the unique meaning of her life.

We must, therefore, learn how to tell stories again in order to relate to each other and bestow upon each other the gift of identity. This is especially urgent for early childhood

29 Ibid., 3.
education. What is at stake is “a confrontation between two discursive registers that manifest opposite characteristics. One, that of philosophy, has the form of definitory knowledge that regards the universality of Man. The other, that of narration, has the form of biographical knowledge that regards the unrepeatable identity of someone. The questions that sustain the two discursive styles are equally diverse. The first asks what is Man? The second asks instead of someone ‘who he or she is.’” Vico switched discursive registers in order to realize who we are on the collective level and who he was on the singular level. He took up the discourse of narration, offering us a biographical form of knowledge to discover meaning in our lives. The way of the storyteller traced out by Vico and its revival today will prevent the “danger of losing to the flatness of the concept and conceptual criticism.”

In my first chapter, I introduce some fundamental concepts in Vico’s oeuvre and show that his thought is primarily dominated by the category of birth; he is a philosopher of beginnings. His major methodological principle directs us to return to the beginnings of thing. By attending to the category of birth, Vico stands outside the dominant western philosophical tradition, which habitually attends to the category of death. After establishing Vico’s emphasis upon beginnings and birth, we treat Vico’s return to the beginning of things in light of the phenomenological epoche. Vico departs from the natural world attitude of the scholars and grammarians in order to plumb the depths of pre-reflective experience. He departs from traditional philosophical discourse and takes up narrative discourse in order to access our originary natal scenes. In chapter two, I draw out Verene’s contention that Vico is a philosopher

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31 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 13.
33 NS par. 314.
34 See Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 28.
of place over time.\textsuperscript{36} Vico’s universal principle of etymology gives us the tools to excavate our primary places.\textsuperscript{37} These originary poetic places ground Vico’s gestural theory of expression. Vico’s etymologicon demonstrates that the movement from the forest, to the huts, to the cities, and finally the academies is wholly entwined with the language corresponding to each manner of dwelling.\textsuperscript{38} Next, I turn towards the emphasis Vico places upon the poetic character Hercules, who fashioned the first human place by burning clearings in the forest. Here, I use Edward Casey’s work on place to analyze the different dwellings described by Vico, beginning with the first place created by the poetic character Jove. Finally, I consider the primacy of voice in relation to place and characterize the poetic character Jove as the first dialogic body. I show that Fred Evan’s contention that voice has priority over place pushes us further outside dominant philosophical biases and closer to the singing heroes of Vico’s \textit{Heroic Age}.

In chapter three, I highlight the scholarly neglect of the relevance of images in Vico’s work and blame this neglect on the broader tendency to ignore imagery and other rhetorical devices in the western philosophical tradition. I then honor Donald Phillip Verene, perhaps the greatest advocate of Vico studies in America, for initiating a turn in Vico scholarship by directing attention towards Vico’s own self-proclaimed (and notoriously overlooked) master key. His major work, \textit{Vico’s Science of Imagination}, solidified this redirection of Viconian scholarship. Verene shifted the focus towards the epistemological function of imagination over reflection and made this the mark of Vico’s originality. Moreover, he establishes Vico as a

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{NS} par. 236. Here we will also consider Edward Casey’s work on place. See Edward Case, \textit{The Fate of Place} (Berkley: University of California Press), 197-331. But our work will tease out the ontological priority of voice in Vico’s \textit{New Science} in light of Evan’s contention that voice precedes place. See Evans, \textit{The Multivoiced Body}, 150. The human world is, after all, born of the \textit{giganti} voices shouting in unison beneath the thundering, turbulent sky/body of Jove. Moreover, Casey’s consideration of Renaissance Philosophers on place neglects the “latent” Renaissance our project brings to light. See Casey, \textit{The Fate of Place}, 128. For this reason, Grassi’s consideration of place in the rhetorical tradition of the Renaissance will give us more. See Ernesto Grassi, \textit{Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition}, trans. John Michael Krois (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1980), 100. \textsuperscript{38} \textit{NS} par. 382.
philosopher of the image over the concept, the concrete over the abstract, and lived experience over reflection.\textsuperscript{39} Although Verene anchors Vico’s work in the realm of concrete, situated beginnings, he remains stuck in the idealistic perspective that he attempts to overcome. Despite identifying the idealistic error of his predecessors, namely the Hegelianism of Croce and Cassirer, he remains in the idealistic trap due to his misreading of the \textit{storia ideale eterna} and his imposition of idealist subjectivity onto Vico’s truly alien proto-humans.\textsuperscript{40}

I next look to Sandra Luft’s critique of Verene. I use her overall critique of idealist readings of Vico and follow her lead towards the strange, uncanny beginnings of Vico’s \textit{New Science}.\textsuperscript{41} She treats Vico’s \textit{New Science} as an entirely poetic science, and recovers the originary poesis of thinking and being at the heart of Vico’s descent. By emphasizing the ontological depth of Vico’s \textit{verum-factum} principle, she overcomes traditional epistemological readings of this principle. Moreover, she highlights the ontological dimension of the category of birth and situates the \textit{storia ideale eterna} within this category.\textsuperscript{42} She restores Vico’s heroic return to our unfamiliar, raw, and concrete origins. Second, Luft’s postmodern reading brings Vico into conversation with Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida (though she unfortunately neglects Merleau-Ponty). Her reading shows us that Vico is sensitive to the postmodern criticism of the traditional enlightenment notion of subjectivity.\textsuperscript{43} Although she establishes many legitimate comparisons between Vico’s work and postmodernist thought, her imposition of the arbitrary nature of language construction onto Vico is an affront to the natural dimension of

\textsuperscript{40} Sandra Luft, \textit{Vico’s Uncanny Humanism: Reading the New Science Between Postmodern and Modern} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 196n237.
\textsuperscript{41} See Luft, \textit{Vico’s Uncanny Humanism}, 16-61.
\textsuperscript{43} Luft, \textit{Vico’s Uncanny Humanism}, 115.
his metaphoric theory of linguistic creativity. Furthermore, her postmodern textually constituted
no-self cannot be justifiably imposed upon (what I call) Vico’s narratable self.

I begin chapter four with a meditation upon the intimate relationship between images and
narrative; both Cavarero and Vico introduce their major texts with images: Vico places a self-
commissioned engraving as the frontispiece of the New Science to serve as an introduction,\textsuperscript{44} and
Cavarero uses the image of a stork to introduce her text, Relating Narratives. Cavarero explains
that images function as narratives do - they provide the figure or design (which can only come
after the event); the image \textit{is} the story.\textsuperscript{45} Cavarero’s meditations upon the image of the stork
give us a fresh perspective on Vico’s frontispiece that has perplexed Vico scholars to date.

Second, we use Arendt and Cavarero’s notion of the relational character of identity (wherein one
cannot tell one’s own story) in order to explain the perplexing lie about the date of his own birth
in the Autobiography.\textsuperscript{46} Our greatest desire is to hear the story of our own birth, Cavarero
argues, and this desire is frustrated by our inability to tell it ourselves; thus, Vico’s inability to
access the day of his birth demonstrates this limitation. Vico indicates, moreover, that simply
becoming one’s own biographer will not resolve this impossibility, echoing Cavarero. Next, I
show that Vico’s narrative art reveals the radical singularity articulated by Cavarero. By
acknowledging that he was born of this mother and not another, and that events occurred \textit{thus
and not otherwise}, he demonstrates what Cavarero calls the “accidentality of being.”\textsuperscript{47} This
emphasis upon birth and uniqueness is found in the New Science as well.\textsuperscript{48} But we conclude by
showing that Cavarero neglects the ‘\textit{we}’ in her attempt to protect the radical singularity of the

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{NS} par. 1.
\textsuperscript{45} Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narratives}, 1.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 3. See also Hannah Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 192.
\textsuperscript{47} Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narratives}, 53.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{NS} par. 147 & 148.
Vico’s narrative performance, conversely, discloses both our collective and singular identities. We will see how Evan’s concept of elliptical identity resolves the tension between the collective and singular dimension of identity.

In chapter five, I draw out relevant connections between Merleau-Ponty and Vico. I first demonstrate the major ways in which Vico and Merleau-Ponty stand outside traditional theories of language by demonstrating that, for both, words are not the vehicle of ideas, but rather, bear the sense of their meaning.\(^{50}\) Second, language accomplishes thought and not the other way around.\(^{51}\) Third, words do not express determinate objects, but rather, share in the creation of the object through the power of naming.\(^{52}\) After considering their mutual differences from the dominant theories of language, I examine the tension between spontaneous and sedimented language elaborated by Merleau-Ponty. I then consider this creative tension at work in Merleau-Ponty’s notion of coherent deformation, as well as in Vico’s parallel art of topics.\(^{53}\) I conclude by considering the ways in which Vico’s narrative art, which consists of the originary orally related fables, can deepen Merleau-Ponty’s scattered reflections on history and the individual’s active engagement with her history.

To conclude my dissertation, I examine the ways in which we can use Vico’s recovery of narrative to “keep the waters sweet” today.\(^{54}\) We must reawaken the pleasures of storytelling in order to cure philosophy of its tragic fate.\(^{55}\) The narrative art has traditionally been relegated to the feminine domain, cast out from the kingdom of philosophical discourse. This castigated feminine art (carried out, all the while, by average everyday women) will allow us to re-narrate

\(^{50}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 183.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 182.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 183.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 187.
\(^{54}\) NS par. 412.
Vico’s attempt to awaken pleasure in our bodies through his storytelling can be applied to childhood education today; the child’s sensorial, passionate experience of reality is too often diluted by appeals to their disembodied cognitive capacities. The pleasure that attends storytelling should attend learning as well.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 75.
CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Birth over Death

There are salient tendencies of the western philosophical tradition that prove resistant to Vico’s three most important areas of emphasis: birth, body, and place. In short, western philosophers focus their attention upon death over birth, mind over body, and time over place. Since a careful consideration of the manner in which things are born and the role that the body and place take in this birth is at the heart of Vico’s poetic science (as well as his personal life story), many of his greatest contributions tend to be glossed over. My task in this chapter, and the chapter that follows, is to identify these habitual tendencies of the western philosophical tradition; once they are identified, I can open up a space for Vico’s deep reflections upon birth, body, and place to shine through.

Next, I show that Vico's method is comparable to the phenomenological epoche in that the reader is required to set aside or bracket out the conceit of scholars and nations; these conceits are similar to the natural attitude identified by phenomenologists. But I claim that Vico’s effort draws us nearer to pre-reflective, lived experience than phenomenological attempts since he delves into our oral pre-history. Moreover, he mingles the oral narratives with his own reflective analysis, creating a hybrid discourse that allows us to catch glimpses of our primary orality. By adapting the discourse of narration, Vico more trenchantly resists the natural world attitude or in his terms, the conceit of scholars and nations. I treat the third topic, place, in chapter two.

The first section primarily uses Arendt and Cavarero's critique of the tradition's penchant for death over birth. The second section largely uses Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the
phenomenological reduction and concludes by using Cavarero's critique of abstract discourse. Next, I use Casey to show the relevance of place in Vico's work, but end with the entirely original contribution that Vico's discovery of the poetic character Jove affirms Evan’s multivoiced body. Vico shows that the solitary voice is the defining feature of the Academies and Cities (dwelling places in the last age), despite the physical closeness of bodies. I think that Vico's discourse of narration can help to bring the voices together in order to create new places as the giganti once did, together. Narration, moreover, responds to certain ethical and political demands. For Vico, reviving the powers of narration contributes to our ability to live socially with each other. Vico announces on the first page of his introduction that man’s nature is principally, “that of being social.”

This, in part, is why we are made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the barbarism of reflection: we are detached from our natural ability to live in community with others.

Before examining the ways in which Vico’s work stands outside of traditional frameworks, it is worthwhile to note that Vico was self-consciously aware of himself as an outsider. Indeed, he reveled in it. For instance, after spending nine years at Vatolla in a castle in Cilento as a tutor to the Rocca family, he says that he returned to his native Naples as a “stranger in his own land.” His description of his years of isolation from the intellectual life of Naples is a lie or at best, an exaggeration. Verene calls it, “Vico’s fictio.” Vico was, in fact, deeply influenced by the Cartesian currents of thought fashionable at the time in Naples. Despite his evident immersion in the intellectual life of Naples, Vico wished to portray himself as an outsider; he took pride in his marginal status. This, moreover, is heightened by his self-professed

58 NS par. 2.
59 Vico, Autobiography, 132. Fisch observes that this was a rhetorical device used to mimic Descartes retreat into isolation from the social life of Paris in the Discourse. Fisch, introduction to Autobiography, 37.
61 Fisch, introduction to Autobiography, 37.
autodidactism. Indeed, as Pinto observes, Vico is “one of the most formidable autodidacts, self-taught scholars, in the history of thought.”\textsuperscript{62} Vico writes of himself, “Vico blessed his good fortune in having no teacher whose words he had sworn by, and he felt most grateful for those woods in which, guided by his good genius, he followed the main course of his studies untroubled by sectarian prejudice.”\textsuperscript{63} Vico’s professed autodidactism accentuates his status as an outsider and stranger. Moreover, we see here his gratitude for the woods, which, I argue, are symbolically related to the first forests of the earth.

Vico’s decision to describe his solitary intellectual endeavors as set in the woods has philosophical import. The fable he creates of his nine-year intellectual sojourn in the woods of Vatolla expresses the path that humanity takes in his larger fable, the \textit{New Science}. His \textit{New Science} traces the birth of the human world from the forests to the academies. Vico, in his own life, metaphorically left the cities and academies for the forest in order to make his discovery of the fabulous beginnings of humanity; this is precisely what he urges the reader of the \textit{New Science} to do. Vico writes, “he who meditates this Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history so far as he himself makes it for himself.”\textsuperscript{64} If we are to narrate this story for ourselves, we too must metaphorically leave the cities and academies. And we should, no less, treat Vico as the stranger he fictitiously portrayed. As Verene warns, “Vico should be approached as an unfamiliar other, whose thought teaches doctrines much less close to us than we may wish to think.”\textsuperscript{65}

To begin my critical examination of the tradition, and so edge our way outside of the academies, I recount one of Vico’s most important narrations, namely, the birth of the first poetic

\textsuperscript{63} Vico, \textit{Autobiography}, 133.
\textsuperscript{64} NS par. 349.
\textsuperscript{65} Verene, \textit{Vico’s Science of Imagination}, 30.
character, Jove. I will refer to the poetic character Jove throughout the chapter, in relation to each topic discussed below: birth, body, and place. The discovery of the poetic characters is Vico’s self-proclaimed master key to the New Science. And, as Vico observes, Vico writes, “every gentile nation had its Jove.” Meditating upon the poetic character Jove, then, will provide a major clue to unlocking the Vico code since Jove is present at every natal scene.

Here is the story of the first poetic character Jove. After great floods covered the earth, the drying earth produced terrifying thunderclaps and flashed lightning across the sky. At the time, gigantic, proto-humans or giganti roamed uncultivated forests and stood atop mountains; terrified and astonished by the postdiluvian, flashing light ripping across the sky and pounding thunder claps, the giganti flung their necks back in unison to gaze at the awesome, violent spectacle. Their enormous, uncultivated bodies shook and reverberated with the thunderclaps and together they shouted; spontaneously and fearfully, the first word is born, and with it the first human world. In their irrational ignorance, they imagined that the sky was an animate body, and that the thunderbolts and lightning were signs speaking to them. As Vico explains, “the first men, who spoke by signs naturally believed that lightning bolts and thunderclaps were signs made to them by Jove...they believed Jove commanded by signs, that such signs were real words, and that nature was the language of Jove. The science of this language the gentiles universally believed to be divination.” These signs were taken to be real words. From this starting point, the whole natural world began to speak the language of the god, Jove. Interpreting his signs

66 NS par. 34.
67 NS par. 380.
68 NS par. 377.
69 NS par 379. See also NS par. 62. Giants are naturally found at the birth of all nations. NS par. 61.
became the first science: the art of divination or theology. Thus, the beasts stopped their wild wandering of the forests of the earth and established the first human place.\textsuperscript{70}

What does the discovery of the first poetic character unlock? First and foremost, it is an inaugural event. In order to witness this event (in the form of a story), we must follow Vico’s doctrine of beginnings, which reads as follows, “Doctrines must take their beginnings from that of the matters of which they treat.”\textsuperscript{71} Even though this fundamental axiom only appears in one particular context, Vico notes that it could have been placed with his general maxims, and further confirms its importance by writing that it is, “universally used in all the matters which are herein discussed.”\textsuperscript{72} This principle motivates the New Science. Fisch writes that this axiom is, “the controlling methodological postulate of Vico’s new science...[it] assumes that genesis or becoming is of the essence of that which this new science treats: that, at least for the new science, \textit{nascence} and nature are the same.”\textsuperscript{73} Vico’s principles of birth express the essence of our nature.

So, a return to beginnings entails a return to the birth of things. In the case of the 	extit{New Science}, Vico returns to the birth of nations, which (as Fisch has intimated) are etymologically, a kind of birth. Goetsch calls this return to birth Vico’s logic of decent or an \textit{anabasis} (heroic journey). He observes, “Vico urges a heroic journey on us, an anabasis, which begins with a descent to the origins of humanity, which is at the same time an ascent in that it is a return to the beginning of principles which structure the birth, growth, and end of human society.”\textsuperscript{74} Vico challenges the reader to carry out a heroic journey, which draws her back towards scenes of birth.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{NS} par. 379.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{NS} par. 314.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{NS} par. 315.
\textsuperscript{73} Fisch, introduction to \textit{Autobiography}, xx.
and forward towards scenes of death. Unfortunately, scholars have been too preoccupied with the part of the journey that carries us towards death.

Despite acknowledging the centrality of Vico’s doctrine of beginnings and its focus upon birth, scholars have yet to notice the philosophical implications of the category of birth. This is because the western metaphysical tradition is not equipped to deal with the category of birth since it has exhausted its energies on the category of death. Scholarly neglect of birth in Vico’s work is due primarily to the philosophical tradition’s overarching neglect. To carry out the anabasis Vico urges upon us, we must unburden ourselves of the tradition’s morbid preoccupation with death. Instead, we must learn to turn our gaze towards the vibrant, frenzied, chaotic, process of birth encountered at all beginnings.

Meditating upon the category of birth is subversive. By what seems to me a cruel twist of fate, the philosopher who delights and revels in births and beginnings is labeled a tragic philosopher. Verene observes, “Vico looks at history and never smiles.”75 Elsewhere Verene asserts, “the true narration of the ideal eternal history is tragic.”76 Moreover Harrison writes, “the New Science ends up telling a disconsolate story about the order of institutions - a story that promises little or nothing in the way of salvation.”77 Verene and Harrison are referring to the pattern of Vico’s ideal eternal story, which manifests itself in different ways. On the level of human nature for instance, Vico’s writes, “The nature of peoples is first crude, then severe, then benign, then delicate, and finally dissolute.”78 In terms of human desires, Vico intones, “Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with

78 NS par. 242.
pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance.”  

Scholars like Verene and Harrison bemoan the dissolution and madness that follows upon the birth of things. Harrison even goes so far as to claim that, according to Vico, “Human beings...are always already dead. This proleptic knowledge of finitude predetermines their most creative as well as their most destructive dispositions.”  

These sentiments look over the fact that the bulk of the New Science is (almost blissfully) unconcerned with the end of the order of things.

The New Science is primarily concerned with the birth of things and crafting a method to encounter it. If Vico does not dwell upon it, why do his interpreters? Against these traditional interpretations, Piovani writes, “The symbol of Vichian philosophy is not the nocturnal owl of Minerva, but specifically the morning eagle, the supposed searcher for the waters of the sources, near which were established the first settlements of men issued from a state of feral wandering.”

In what follows, I attempt to reconfigure Vico as the morning eagle. Far from Harrison’s dire pronouncements about the human being, Vico shows that we are always capable of rebirth.

To situate Vico as a philosopher of birth I will emphasize the two major principles of birth in the New Science that work in concert with the doctrine of beginnings. Here are Vico’s two principles of birth:

The nature of institutions is nothing but their coming into being (nascimento) at certain times and in certain guises. Whenever the times and guise are thus and so, such and not otherwise are the institutions that come into being. The inseparable properties of institutions must be due to the modification or guise

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79 NS par. 241.
80 Harrison, Forests, 14.
82 NS par. 147.
with which they are born. By these properties we may therefore verify that the nature or birth (natura or nascimento) was thus and not otherwise.  

Bergin and Fisch translate *cosa* as institution here. I will refer to *cosa* as both thing and institution throughout. These principles direct our attention towards the raw emergence of things. Nature, birth, and nation share an etymological root. Verene observes, “Etymologically a nation is a “birth,” that which comes from a common origin.” This is a hint that Vico’s principles express something about the category of birth itself. Fisch will help us to understand the different ways in which Vico understands the term nation. “There is not only an original and individual birth for each system [of institutions] but a continual birth of new institutions within it, a continual transformation of old institutions, and even a rebirth of the nation after death.”

Conceiving of the nation as birth does not respond to the fascist desire for purity in this sense. The manner in which a nation appears is always subject to a process of becoming and its origins are always vague and obscure; every attempt to retrieve our primordial natal scenes throws us into the vague, muddled, inchoate beginnings, which always lends themselves to reinterpretation.

Vico’s narrative traces the process of birth and rebirth running throughout the *New Science*. His fables are primarily concerned with birth through and through. Even upon the death of nations,

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83 *NS* par. 148.
84 Bergin and Fisch have translated Vico’s *cosa* as institution. They explain, “Why did Vico avoid the terms ‘institution’...why did he prefer for the most part the term *cosa*? Because the term ‘institution’ was theoretically loaded; loaded, moreover, with the very theory he was most concerned to discredit; and because the term *cosa* was theoretically neutral, or innocent.” Bergin and Fisch, *Introduction to the New Science*, xliv. Throughout this dissertation I will use both. On the one hand, *cosa* still feels innocent, in the sense of the phenomenological return to the things themselves. Moreover, ‘thing’ seems to more adequately express the *raw facere* elaborated by Piovani. See Piovani, “Vico Without Hegel,” 118. On the contrary, using the term institutions will be helpful in our comparison with the work of Merleau-Ponty. Donald Landes explains the meaning of institutions for Merleau-Ponty as it appears in the essay, “Indirect Languages and Voices of Silence.” He writes, “Merleau-Ponty begins to speak of institution in relation to constituted language, expression, and the sedimented structures of available significations...The institution is the establishing of a tradition as an open trajectory of future actions, and this function is possible insofar as the institution itself is forgotten and tacitly taken up and carried forward in new acts.” Donald Landes, *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary*, 113. Additionally, he observes, an institution is a coherent deformation. Ibid., 113.
86 Fisch, introduction to *New Science*, xxi.
he tells the tale of their rebirth; birth and a rebirth is a theme we will revisit in the Autobiography below. In short, focus upon his doctrine of beginnings eclipses focus upon his doctrine of ends.

In order to understand the nature of beginnings within Vico, we must clarify the nature of divine providence, which has unfortunately, lent itself to idealistic readings. Luft, for instance, shows how most commentators miss Vico’s beginnings or the originary poesis grounding the New Science. “If, however the New Science is a poetic science, then the historical process it traces must be understood not from its end but from its beginnings...that things can never be other than what they are at their origins is an ontological claim.”87 It is the epistemological reading of Vico that has contributed, in part, to the errors of interpretation in Viconian scholarship, which lead to his depiction as a tragic philosopher.88

Idealist interpretations of divine providence have also cast a dark shadow over Vico’s beginnings. Divine providence is Vico’s principle of how things coming into being at certain times and within certain guises. Divine providence is simply, “the course of the institutions [things] of the nations had to be, must now be, and will have to be.” (NS, par 94) Recall, the giganti began to divine the natural signs of Jove; divination, or interpretation of the god’s signs was the first science. To divine is, moreover, to recall, to shine a light on the hidden dimension of things. For instance, the Persians, Vico tells us, called their sky Jove because it signified what is hidden from men - interpreting his signs is an attempt to bring forth the latent depth of things.89 For Vico, divine providence is the natural unfolding of what remains hidden to men. It does not have the idealistic implications, which the idealists impose upon it.

88 Ibid.
89 NS par. 475.
Piovani demonstrate that these principles set forth a revolutionary theory, which is turned towards, “the grasping of being, not in its completeness but its genesis.”90 Emphasizing these principles situates Vico outside of the Hegelian framework plaguing Vichian studies. Piovani notes, “Here Vico stands at the antipodes of Hegel...For Vico the essence is literally the beginning; for Hegel it is the conclusion.”91 Yet even scholars like Piovani who do the admirable work of wresting Vico from the hands of the Hegelians, still fall short of capturing the ontological depth of Vico’s notion of birth.92 The birth of things marks the ontological emergence of things. As adherents of the rational idealist tradition, many philosophers do not take into account Vico’s genetic principles, which direct the reader’s attention towards the beginning of things.

Vico’s principles of birth accords with the way Hannah Arendt relates natality and appearance. She writes, paralleling Vico’s principle, “the world in which men are born contains many things, natural and artificial, alive and dead, all of which have in common that fact that they appear, and are therefore destined to be seen, touched, tasted, smelled, to be perceived by sensing creatures.”93 The coincidence between being and appearing that Arendt unfolds carries ontological weight, as does Vico’s notion of birth and appearing.94 Vico’s narrative traces the story of our various manifestations or ways of appearing. In meditating upon his narrative, we witness the process of becoming human, which is always a process of becoming. The western philosophical tradition upholds a severe distinction between being and appearing.95 The coincidence of being and appearing overcomes the two world theory upheld by philosophers and

91 Ibid., 118.
95 Ibid., 37.
scientists whom distinguish (true) being from (mere) appearing. Unlike inanimate objects, however, “to be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display.”

Vico’s principle of birth and the coincidence between being and appearing is manifested in the true narration of Jove. The first human word is born through the creation of the poetic character Jove. The strongest of the wandering giants gather together and appear, exposed before each other and the canopy of thundering sky. They gesticulate and shout and through their actions and speech give birth to the human world. Arendt writes, “To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; ‘for what appears to all, this we call Being,’ and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream.”

It is only appearing before each other that the first human world is established in word and deed. The giganti are totally exposed.

Due to the philosophical tradition’s tendency to divorce the realm of pure thought from the realm of appearance, birth is renounced. Cavarero writes, “the philosopher abandons the world of his own birth in order to establish his abode in pure thought, thus carrying out a symbolic matricide in the erasure of his birth.”

Elsewhere, she explains, “But here birth is a fall, a negative event. This immediately turns the place of origin from which each person enters the world into a simple (and devalued) place of appearance on earth.” Philosophers, on the other hand, have tended to turn their gaze towards eternal ideas, which are not bound by our lived, embodied experience of the earth. Pure thought is not bound by birth or death, and both categories are covered over by those western philosophers like Plato who yearn for it. To

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99 Ibid., 25.
100 Ibid., 29.
bring birth to mind necessarily entails death, which philosophers have tried to avoid by escaping into a realm of eternal ideas.

Arendt dismantles the conceptual constructs of the philosophers and their desire for pure, lifeless, eternal concepts, by affirming, “Not Man but men inhabit this planet.”101 As we say in our introduction, Man is a concept that eclipses the unique status of singular existents. The category of birth, moreover, is intimately related to another category that is often overlooked in the western philosophical tradition: the category of the unique. Not only are appearance and exhibition central to the birthing process, but the unique way in which it appears and shows itself is significant. It shows up in a unique way, demonstrating that it is “thus and not otherwise”102 as Vico’s principle of birth demonstrates. Things emerge in a unique way, at this time and not another. Birth always announces something unique.

If we turn with Vico towards the birth of something as necessarily involving its ways of appearing at certain times, in certain guises, and in certain places, we come close to Hannah Arendt’s category of birth. When a thinker engages with the category of birth, we may consider this a subversive action against the dominant tendency of the western philosophical tradition.103 Cavarero writes, “birth, the act by which embodied individuals are born and actualized, will also restore meaning to everyone, female and male. Humans always come into this world in this way, never otherwise.”104 Focusing upon birth forces us to confront not only our embodiment, but also our unique, unrepeatable singularity. We are not just any body, but this unique body, born in this way and not another, of this mother and not another. Philosophical discourse cannot relate the manner in which we appear in this unique way and not another. We need narrative

102 NS par. 148.
103 Cavarero, In Spite of Plato, 6-7.
104 Ibid., 6.
discourse to relate the story of our birth and to respond to the desire of the narratable self. As we shall later see, the story of our own birth is what we most desire, according to Cavarero.

Directing our focus to the category of birth will replenish meaning for humanity as a whole. Birth necessarily entails embodiment, and the flight towards philosophical abstraction is an attempt to flee transitory embodiment. Universal principles stave off the terror of death to which fragile, finite beings, born this way and not another must succumb. There is a, “persistent ‘living for death’ that constitutes one of the most consistent principles in the philosophical tradition of the West.”

Along with this fear of death is an attendant hostility towards the body. Vico faces the fact of our finitude with the heroic courage, delighting in the narration of the birth of being, despite its inevitable decay. The giganti are the infants of the human world, the newborns. The Age of Gods is the infancy of man. The giants and heroes are the main object of his narration. Most of the New Science is devoted to the way words, bodies, and institutions are born at certain times in certain ways and under certain guises. Merely looking at the sheer amount of space devoted to birth should indicate to the reader of the New Science that her meditation should follow Vico’s gaze towards birth. His reflections upon the end of times take up only a small portion of the text. Book Two, on Poetic Wisdom, makes up the bulk of the text; it is primarily concerned with the infants of the human race, as he consistently refers to the giants and heroes, who give birth to the poetic characters and the first places of humanity. Vico is on a journey of descent to shine a light upon the natal scenes prefiguring the adult age, the Age of Man.

105 Ibid., 25.
1.2 Vico’s Conceit of Scholars and The Natural World Attitude

The second axiom of Vico’s New Science reveals the source of both our creativity and errors. It states, “It is a property of the human mind that whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand.”106 For these reason nations and all the learned philosophers misinterpret their own origins. When they attempted to recover their beginnings, “it was on the basis of their own enlightened, cultivated, and magnificent times that they judged the origins of humanity, which must nevertheless by the nature of things have been small, crude, and quite obscure.”107 The nations and scholars are incapable of telling the story of their own birth because they project their own refined wisdom on to what is unfamiliar and obscure. This tendency, to apprehend the unfamiliar causes what Vico calls the two conceits, those of nations and those of scholars. According to Vico, “Every nation...has had the same conceit that it before all other nations invented the comforts of human life and that its remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world.”108 He continues, “To this conceit of nations is added that of scholars, who will have it that what they know is as old as the world.”109 Throughout the New Science Vico will point out the erroneous opinions of the scholars and nations. The sciences have their beginnings in fables, which arise out of the collective needs of the people, rather than the art of refined individuals.110

Let’s consider Vico’s discovery of the true Homer in order to show how he exposes the error of scholars and nations. We saw that, according to Vico, Homer was not an individual man, but rather the collective voice of the Greek people. Moreover, the Homeric poems are corruptions of the true narrations born in the Age of Gods. He observes, “The fables in their

106 NS par. 122.  
107 NS par. 123.  
108 NS par. 125.  
109 NS par. 128.  
110 NS par. 51.
origin were true and severe narrations, whence mythos, fable was defined as vera narratio. But because they were originally for the most part gross, they gradually lost their original meanings, were then altered, subsequently became improbable, after that obscure, then scandalous, and finally incredible.”\textsuperscript{111} Our primordial fables are born out of need, not sophisticated artistry. Cantelli observes, “men began to write and to speak, not to express profound philosophical conceptions, but in order to resolve practical problems, to found first families, to organize their work, and to satisfy the stringent necessities of survival.”\textsuperscript{112} Thus, when scholars find in Homer the recondite wisdom of one ingenious thinker, they are imposing their own ideas onto the poems, which are in fact the vulgar expressions of unrefined minstrels and bards, who are, moreover, modifying the crude, severe narrations of barbaric beasts.

Vico’s discovery of the true Homer refutes scholarly depictions of Homer (still common in classrooms today.) He writes, “This discovery of the origins of poetry does away with the opinion of the matchless wisdom of the ancients, so ardently sought after from Plato to Bacon...for the wisdom of the ancients was the vulgar wisdom of the lawgivers who founded the human race, not the esoteric wisdom of great and rare philosophers.”\textsuperscript{113} Their own conceptual frameworks limit the scholars. Although the true narrations lay right before their eyes, they choose to see only what is familiar. For instance, Vico relates the erudite Varro observed the three ages of man described by the Egyptians, but chose not to realize their true meaning.\textsuperscript{114} The remembered history of the scholars does not reach back to the first fables, which the Homeric fables are drawn from. The first fables are true histories, yet from the vantage point of their own enlightened times, the fables appear to be merely incredible. They are “physical

\textsuperscript{111} NS par. 814.
\textsuperscript{113} NS par. 384.
\textsuperscript{114} NS par. 52.
histories.’’\textsuperscript{115} For example, witness the sorry fate of the poetic character, Jove. Once the vast body of the sky itself, he becomes a mere personification. Vico observes, “Later, as these vast imaginations shrank and the power of abstractions grew, the personifications were reduced to diminutive signs. Jove becomes so small that he is flown about by an eagle.”\textsuperscript{116} The poetic character shrink with the imaginations of the poets (and we shall see later that their gigantic bodies shrink as well, giving us the human form we see today.) The fables, which scholars critique, are shriveled versions of their originary ontological dimensions. The first fables lie buried under the weight of erudite, ignorant learning.

Vico attempts to set aside the conceit of scholars in order to access the \textit{vera narratio} lying at the birth of the human world. His heroic descent requires that the scholar leaves her familiar ways of knowing and encounter our unfamiliar, fabulous beginnings. “We had to descend from these human and refined natures of ours to those quite wild and savage natures, which we cannot at all imagine and can comprehend only with great effort.”\textsuperscript{117} The lazy contentment with the familiar is a choice, and Vico urges the reader to bracket it off. Vico develops a “new art of criticism concerning the founders of nations, who must have preceded by more than a thousand years the writers with whom criticism has so far been occupied.”\textsuperscript{118} His new art is a narrative art, mirroring the true narrations he discovers. But before he can become the biographer of humanity, he must set aside the judgements of the scholars and nations.

Philosophers like to hide their grotesque and vulgar origins, yet they cannot escape them. “For in these, as in embryos or matrices, we have discovered the outlines of all esoteric

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{NS} par. 195.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{NS} par. 402.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{NS} par. 100.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{NS} par. 143.
wisdom.” Our beginnings betray our refined opinions of ourselves. “The New Science is everywhere a reminder that scholars hide, overlook, or mistreat the gross physical evidence of human activity, including their own.” Returning to our natal scenes forces us to encounter ourselves as strange others.

Vico’s conceit of scholars and nations is similar to the habitual, average-everyday knowing of the Natural Attitude identified by phenomenologists. Both the Conceits of Scholars and the Natural Attitude reveal a familiar, given world that is left unquestioned and taken for granted. Although I argue that Vico’s method of identifying and setting aside the conceit of scholars functions like the phenomenological epoche, his reduction does not reveal pure transcendental essences in line with Husserl. His work is closer to the phenomenological reduction of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty exposes the impossibility of a complete reduction. He questions the natural world attitude without losing contact with our embodied, lived experience. In this way, Merleau-Ponty’s approach is ambiguous; he simultaneously unfolds both our beginnings and ends. Vico, like Merleau-Ponty, draws near the pre-theoretical attitude while exposing the presupposition of the theoretical, conceited scholars throughout the New Science; his method sets aside the conceit of scholars without severing our “naive contact with the world.” Kearney explains, “Phenomenology is ‘ambiguous,’ according to Merleau-Ponty, in that it looks in two directions at once - toward the origin of consciousness in the lived experience of our embodied being-in-the-world and towards the end of consciousness in the

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119 NS par. 779.
122 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, lxxvii.
123 Ibid., lxx.
theoretical knowledge of predicative judgment (logic, science, reason.)”¹²⁴ Both directions are adumbrated by Vico’s corsi, from the forests to the academies.

The conceited scholars and nations have forgotten their origins. Their memory never dips below the familiar.¹²⁵ Vico anticipates Husserl’s argument that the crisis of the sciences is caused by the natural attitude’s severing of our intentional relations. The abstract language of science is derivative of primordial lived experience, yet it’s natural appearance obfuscates the fact that it is an artificial construct.¹²⁶ The language of the conceited scholars, like the scientific language characterizing the natural attitude, is derivative of a more primordial mode of expression.

Suspending the attitude of the scholars exposes this. Merleau-Ponty writes, “We must first awaken that experience of the world of which science is the second order expression.”¹²⁷ Enzo Paci calls this second order expression the logic of the learned and shows that Vico subjects it to a phenomenological epoché. Vico is seeking direct and unmediated access to the world. He attempts to restore our direct relationship to things. In order to do this, he brackets off the conceit of the scholars and grammarians: this is Vico’s epoché. Fred Evans shows that Merleau-Ponty unfolds our “direct, unmediated relation to the world” by taking up the phenomenological method which by, “Putting into brackets our standard beliefs, he allows the

¹²⁵ Vico writes of the nations that, “it’s remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world.” NS par. 125. Remembered history can be characterized as the story of the erudite scholars. Their story cannot penetrate the primary expressions of originary lived experience. They are unaware of poetic speech. This is precisely where Cavarero’s narrative art can aid the phenomenological method in its attempt to reflect upon pre-reflective experience. It must lose the pretension of philosophical discourse and take up narrative discourse in order to realize the primary expressions. This is precisely the genius of Vico’s ambiguity. He uncovers poetic wisdom through taking up the primary expressions of poetic wisdom. In this regard he honors it without imposing the natural world attitude upon it.
¹²⁶ Kearney, Modern Movements in European Philosophy, 77.
¹²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, lxxii.
things themselves, ‘phenomena’, to tell their own story.”

I will argue that one must take up the language of narration (like Vico) in order to hear their story. In this way, I argue, Vico reaches our pre-reflective experience. Paci writes, “The first stage of the world is within us, in the present in our genetic past. But in us it must undergo a qualitative mutation; it must recommence from the life of truth implicit in the subject and uncovered by the epoche.”

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty observes, “Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we do not rediscover the primordial silence beneath the noise of words, and so long as we do not describe the gesture that breaks this silence. Speech is a gesture and its signification a world.”

Vico points us towards the voices of silences and indirect languages elaborated by Merleau-Ponty. He sets aside the secondary expressions of the philosophers and learned men and takes up the primary expressions of the first poets.

1.3 Narrative Discourse over Philosophical Discourse

Vico is aware that his poetic discourse is radically different from ancient philosophical discourse as well as Renaissance and baroque poetics. Mazzotta affirms, moreover, that he is “conscious of the novelty of his discourse.” Vico revels in performative and imaginative play. As Verene explains, “Vico’s science is performative...His account of the human world will be vera narratio, or true speech; it will be like the natural speech through which the mind originally gives form to the world.”

In order to bracket off the Natural World Attitude and the Conceit of scholars, we too must re-enact Vico’s poetic performance. According to Vico, we must meditate the New Science for ourselves. According to Vico, Verene observes, “to meditate is to allow the mind to

128 Evans, The Multivoiced Body, 97. See also NS par. 97.
130 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 190.
132 Verene, Vico’s Science of Imagination, 156. See also NS par. 401.
return to those point of origin...for the humans narrate to itself what it had originally created.”

The Vichian scientist attempts to re-enter the corporeal imaginations of the first poets by taking up their oral expressions, which constituted their age: expressions vastly unfamiliar to reflective thinkers in the *Age of Man*. Verene affirms, “The new Vichian scientist who is also a new poet, practices the art of telling this fable.” In other words, to encounter the originary thinking that Vico unearths, we must become storytellers ourselves. We must relearn the art of narration.

Evans shows that scholars have begun to examine the relationship between phenomenological lived experience and our narrative experience of reality. He notes that, “According to Carr (and contrary to many popular views), narrative is not exclusively imposed on experience from without by some authoritarian voice in the interest of manipulation and power, but reflects the very structure of our experience and action itself.” Thus, the basic pattern of narrative consisting of a beginning, middle, and end, mirrors the structure of our own lived experience. Kearney affirms this point. He notes, “our lives are constantly interpreting themselves...in terms of beginnings, middles, and ends (though not necessarily in that order.)” We are always caught up in a story we did not create, the story of the collective we. This is precisely the story that Vico is narrating. The reader, who is urged to take up the story, is meant to realize the collective dimension of her own unique singular tale. Carr observes, “Narrative is our primary way of organizing our experience of time, and understood in this sense it can

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134 Ibid., 32.
136 Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002), 129. Kearney elaborates the point, “every human existence is a life in search of narrative. This is not simply because it strives to discover a pattern to cope with the experience of chaos and confusion. It is also because each human life is always already an implicit story. Our very finitude constitutes beings who, to put it badly, are born at the beginning and dies at the end...In short, our existence is already to some extent pre-plotted before we ever consciously seek out a narrative in which to reinscribe our life as life-history.” See Kearney, *On Stories*, 129.
elucidate our pretheoretical past.”\textsuperscript{137} In this way we can understand Vico’s ideal eternal history as the narrative structure meant to capture the pre-reflective lived experience of the giganti and heroes. Cavarero also affirms, “that every human life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning or end.”\textsuperscript{138} Vico’s takes up narrative to recover our prereflective experience; he sets aside rational discourse entirely. His new critical art “is not an art of the concept. It is an art whereby we grasp philosophical meanings through narrative speech and not through argumentative process.”\textsuperscript{139} Vico adopts narrative discourse to express what emerges spontaneously in humanity, yet some scholars question whether or not the narrative structuring of experience is a merely phenomenon of particular cultures rather than a universal experience.

Evans argues that the narrative structure consisting of beginning, middle, may be a mere cultural artifice. He observes, “the phenomenologist David Carr starts off his work by claiming that sensory experience, let alone storytelling, has a narrative structure (past, present, and at least an implicit future.) But at the end of one of his major works he admits that the existence of cultures in which people do not tell stories with linear plots about themselves may mean that this thesis holds only for ‘our,’ that is, Western, culture.”\textsuperscript{140} According to Evans, voice precedes the narratable self. He observes, “Voice, in contrast, allows for social languages that can be the

\textsuperscript{137} In this regard, Carr points to Vico but does not think that Vico “goes far enough.” See David Carr, \textit{Time, Narrative, and History} (Bloomington: Indianapolis, 1991), 4. Unfortunately, Carr focuses upon the \textit{verum-factum} principle in the \textit{New Science}, which is often misread by scholars who obscure the ontological dimension of making in Vico’s narrative art.

\textsuperscript{138} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 184.

\textsuperscript{139} Verene, \textit{Vico’s Science of Imagination}, 180.

\textsuperscript{140} Evans, \textit{The Multivoiced Body}, 80.
basis for either a narrative or nonnarrative account of us." We will discuss the primacy of voice in Vico’s *New Science* below.

Perhaps Vico’s narrative art offers an account of ourselves on a primordial level since his art entails linear narratives as well as nonlinear narratives. In other words, the mute images, gestures, deeds, and things that constitute the true speech, or true narration in the *Age of Gods and Heroes*, do not operate according to a linear plot. They are, moreover, corporeal events and actions. Vico adopts the linear plot structure as a storyteller in the *Age of Man*; therein, he responds to our desire for unity by relating the story of three ages: beginning with gods, climaxing with heroes and ending with men. Since we will argue that this form of narration relates to the primary narratives in a more intimate fashion, narrative still holds a privileged status in terms of grasping our pre-reflective experience. In the *Divine Age* the *giganti* create *vera narratio*, or true narrations, the mute images, and gestures. Then, in the *Heroic Age*, they break into song, which mixes with the images of the first age with the vocalic sphere, and finally in the third age they take up abstract, reflective discourse. The first languages are entirely bodily expressions. The second age exercises the vocal chords of the body, allowing voice and song to fashion the human world. So, Vico’s various narratives do not fit neatly into contemporary definitions of narrative as being structured from beginning to end. We trace the rise of bodily narratives, to vocal narrative, to the articulate discourse of the scholars. This last discourse is, moreover, a reified narrative.

If we include the narratives of the first ages then as narratives proper, perhaps we will escape the sense in which Vico’s narratives would only express an experience that is culturally relative. If it is true, though, that our identities are bound up with narrative and that we desire the unifying force of narrative, Vico’s narrative art responds to this desire. Kearney observes,

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141 Ibid., 81.
“Every life is in search of narrative. We all seek, willy-nilly, to introduce some kind of concord into the everyday discord and dispersal we find about us. We may, therefore, agree with the poet who described narrative as a stay against confusion.”

Vico’s narrative works on both the communal and singular level: both spring from the same impulse, namely, a desire for unity. Kearney observes, “For the storytelling impulse is, and always has been, a desire for a certain unity of life.” Storytelling is an essential aspect of our identities. Kearney parallels Arendt’s assertion that, “The chief characteristic of a specifically human life...is that is is always full of events that can eventually be told as a story.”

We are selves in search of narration. Vico responds to the desires of the narratable self.

He creates the ideal eternal story in order to respond to the reader’s desire for a unified self and to uncover the original stories at the birth of humanity. As Kearney affirms, “to imagine the origins of storytelling we need to tell ourselves a story.” This, I argue, is what motivates Vico to adopt the discourse of narration. Although the notion that we are essentially narratable selves propounded by thinkers like Arendt, Carr, Cavarero, and Kearney will help to explain the role of Vico as narrator and the task of re-narration required of the reader, Vico’s science resists any tendencies towards essentialist claims about the self.

The narrations that are born in the Age of Gods, spring from beasts, not humans. They are proto-humans who are, nonetheless, dialogic creatures. Their voices resound with the thunderclaps of Jove and each other. The heroes, moreover, have not yet transformed into the humans of the Age of Man either. The true narrations do stave off the chaos and confusion encountered by the beasts, yet not through a story which has a linear plot structure. Rather, the

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142 Kearney, On Stories, 4.
143 Ibid.
144 Arendt, The Human Condition, 72.
145 Kearney, On Stories, 5.
first narrations are concrete metaphors. Vico describes this exchange between voice and sky as a true narration. This is the first myth, concrete metaphor, or fable in brief. It is a condensed, but true, narrative. And yet, our more refined linear narratives have more in common with the abstract, philosophical discourse. Therefore, they allow us greater access to the first narrations. The first narratives, in other words, are not born out of the humanly desire for unity, but out of the fearful grunts and vibrating bodies or awe-struck giants.

Let’s look at the vast distance between the true narratives Vico recovers and the traditional philosophical discourse adopted by scholars in the Age of Men. This will help us understand the three kinds of narration present in Vico’s new critical method. The first narratives spring from the same principle that is the source of error for the scholars. When humans have no knowledge about things that are far away and unfamiliar, they judge them by what is familiar and nearby. Thus, the first poets fashion the world by not knowing. This imposition of the familiar upon the unfamiliar is the process underpinning our creative acts. The error of scholars and the ingenuity of beasts then are on the opposite ends of the same principle. The poetic character, Jove, was created in this ignorant fashion. We find in the inaugural acts of creation the movement from the concrete to the abstract. Vico expresses this principle elsewhere, “wherever it is lost in ignorance man makes himself the measure of all things.”

The principles limit the understanding of the scholars and nations since they cannot see beyond their own concepts to meet what is unfamiliar and strange. For instance, we saw how they interpret their poetic history in the image of their own refined history. As Cantelli explains, “All knowledge is interpretation of that which is unknown on the basis of what is known. It refers that which is far to that which is near.”

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146 NS par. 120.
The first poetic character is an image, which on this primordial level is a metaphor. Metaphor operates according to this logic. Di Pietro explains, “Metaphors begin with body references and then extend to more abstract areas.” In the first age metaphors are born of the body. By the third age, the metaphoric event has lost its corporeal roots. Di Pietro observes, “It is in the last age that prose style develops, with its use of metaphors which are greatly removed from their concrete references.” Vico exposes the metaphoric corporeal base of our most abstract and refined concepts by showing how they are originally born of the body. Additionally, Goetsch observes, “Metaphor is based on a metaphysics of the body.” The first narrations then are concrete metaphors created through bodily skills and fashioned by ignorance, without a touch of reason. Vico observes, “As rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them, this imaginative metaphysics shows that men become all things by not understanding them.” The first poets create the human world through corporeal imaginations devoid of understanding. They create by not knowing.

The poetic character Jove is a concrete metaphor born of a bodily gesture. More importantly, it is an event. Verene explains, “Vico asks us to imagine a beginning point of human experience in which all was body and bodily motion, in which meaning was an action between bodies, and in which human thought was nothing more than a bodily act of sensation.” The first poets gave birth to the human world through the movement of their bodies. Their words were actions, things, and deeds. The capacity they share is the ability to make sense of the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. And nothing is more familiar to the

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149 Ibid., 346.
150 Goetsch, Vico’s Axioms, 32.
151 NS par. 405.
152 Verene, Vico’s Science of Imagination, 85.
giganti than their own bodies. White observes that poetic logic is governed by the movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar and the concrete to the abstract.”

The sky becomes a familiar place, the body of a god. Vico calls this the “poetic transformation of bodies.”

Lakoff and Johnson’s notion of conceptual metaphor can help us to understand this process of moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar in metaphoric creation. They come closer to expressing the ontological event of metaphor more sufficiently than other attempts by cognitive scientists who remain too close to a conceptual model of cognition. Of course, in considering the initial event of metaphor creation we are not dealing with conceptual domains, as the concept has not yet been invented; yet, we can understand a conceptual domain as “any coherent organization of experience.” In respect to the true story of Jove, the shaking bodies of the giganti would be the source domain while the lightning filled sky would be the target domain. In this scenario, the sky is unknown and the body, the concrete, known, familiar domain. Typically the unfamiliar, abstract concepts are the targets and the concrete concepts are the sources. In other words, abstract things are understood in terms of concrete things. Vico observes, “Thus we discover the important principle that every language, no matter how copious and learned, discovers the hard necessity of expressing spiritual things by means of relationships with corporeal things.”

In this primordial activity of corporeal creativity, we witness the ontological depth of metaphor. In the Age of Man, and in our own time, metaphor is considered to be a mere

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154 NS par. 272.
155 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19.
156 Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 4.
157 Ibid., 4.
158 Ibid., 7.
159 NS par. 298.
rhetorical device. Danesi explains, “by and large, people still think of metaphor as a stylistic
device of language, used by poets and writers to decorate or make their messages more effective
or ornate.”⁶⁰ Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that this is not the case. They observe,
“Metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than
thought and action...On the contrary, metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language
but in thought and action.”⁶¹ Vico affirms the ubiquity of metaphor. He observes, “In general
metaphor makes up the great body of the languages among nations.”⁶² Our conceptual systems
are primarily metaphoric. Let us consider some example of conceptual metaphors to understand
how metaphors structure our experience of reality, even in our own refined Age of Man. Lakoff
and Johnson provide the example of the conceptual metaphor: argument is war. We find this at
work in our habitual, everyday language. We say, for instance, “Your claim is indefensible. He
attacked every weak point in my argument. His criticisms were right on target. I demolished his
argument. I’ve never won an argument with him. If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out.
He shot down all of my arguments.”⁶³ We experience arguments in terms of the experience of
war. Thus, even the abstract demonstrations of the scholars is structured by conceptual
metaphors. Vico’s etymologies coursing throughout the New Science, expose the metaphoric
nature of the conceptual thinking of the scholars.

More importantly, Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate the way in which metaphors are
intimately related to the body. Metaphors have an experiential basis.⁶⁴ They arise from our
physical experiences. For instance, the conceptual metaphor, happy is up, is based upon the
physical tendency to relate a slouched posture with sadness and an erect posture with

⁶¹ Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 3.
⁶² NS par. 444.
⁶³ Ibid., 5.
⁶⁴ Ibid., 19.
happiness.\textsuperscript{165} In this sense, Lakoff and Johnson tether metaphoric concepts to our corporeal experience of reality. Vico anticipates their work by revealing the experiential basis of metaphor creation. Although Lakoff and Johnson aptly describe way in which conceptual metaphors structure our experience, they inadequately express the initial event of metaphoric creation. In a sense, they examine metaphor at the end of times, whereas Vico plunges us to bestial imaginations that create metaphors without a hint of intelligence or reflection. For instance, the first poetic character or concrete metaphor, Jove, was created entirely out of the bodily skills of the \textit{giganti}. In this sense, Vico’s elaboration of the creation of the poetic characters gives us more insight into the birth of metaphoric thinking. Although, Lakoff and Johnson’s insight into the inner logic of metaphor creation helps us to interpret the movement of Vico’s poetic logic, which moves always from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Metaphor is expressed in an entirely corporeally during the \textit{Age of Gods}, where the languages were mute. Let’s explore the words we find in this age to realize how different they are than the articulate languages of the scholars. For instance, let us consider the five “real words” an archaic king used to express himself to his enemy. The king “used five real words to answer Darius the Great, who declared war on him. These five were a frog, a mouse, a bird, a ploughshare, and a bow.”\textsuperscript{166} Vico relates their meaning:

\begin{quote}
The frog signified that he, Idanthyrsus, was born of the earth of Scythia as frogs are born of earth in summer rains, so that he was a son of that land. The mouse signified that he, like a mouse, had made his home where he was born; that is, that he had established his nation there. The bird signified that there the auspices were his; that is, that he was subject to none but God. The ploughshare signified that he had reduced those lands to cultivation, and thus tamed and made them his own by force. And finally the bow signified that as supreme commander of the arms of Scythia he had the duty and the might to defend her.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{NS} par. 435.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{NS} par. 435.
This “speech made up of physical things” would not be detected by minds refined by abstraction. The scholars ignore the images and things constituting language in the *Ages of Gods and Heroes*. They pretend that their languages will be purer and more refined without them. They imagine that, “to describe reality correctly, we need words whose meanings are clear and precise, words that fit reality.” Moreover, they condemn metaphors as a hindrance to clear thinking. They imagine that “metaphor and other kinds of poetic, fanciful, rhetorical, and figurative language can always be avoided in speaking objectively, and they should be avoided, since their meanings are not clear and precise and do not fit reality in any obvious way.”

This, however, is an illusion. Since the scholars remain trapped in their own familiar, linguistically constituted perceptions of reality, they look right over the metaphors and images that dance beneath their nose.

Michele Le Doeuff explains the situation:

> Whether one looks for a characterization of philosophical discourse to Plato, to Hegel or to Brehier, one always meets with a reference to the rational, the concept, the logical, the argued, the abstract...Philosophy is not a story, not a pictorial description, not a work of pure literature. Philosophical discourse is inscribed and declares its status as philosophy through a break with myth, fable, the poetic, the domain of the image.

Vico’s narrative art throws us into the domain of the image made up of the myth and fables; thus, he departs from rational philosophical discourse. Yet he does not merely return to this primordial realm; rather, he first exposes the arrogant presuppositions of the scholars who cling to the rational concept. Despite their arrogance, their dream of a pure, rational philosophy devoid of myth, imagery, and figurative speech does not hold. Le Doeuff continues:

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168 *NS* par 435.
169 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 187.
170 Ibid., 188.
If, however, one goes looking for this philosophy in the texts, which are meant to embody it, the least that can be said is that it is not to be found there in a pure state. We shall also find statues that breathe the scent of roses, comedies, tragedies, architects, foundations, dwellings, doors, windows, sand, navigators, various musical instruments, islands, clocks, horses, donkey’s and even a lion, representatives of every craft and trade, scenes of sea and storm, forests and trees: in short, a whole pictorial world sufficient to decorate even the driest ‘History of Philosophy.’

Images and metaphors populate philosophical texts even while the philosophers profess to do without metaphoric, imagistic thinking. Recall, for instance, the conceptual metaphor, “argument is war”, that supports their most erudite essays. Beyond sustaining their theoretical texts, moreover, Vico demonstrates the metaphoric, imagistic root of all conceptual thinking. His imaginative etymologies aid this demonstration. Paralleling Le Doeuff’s technique of highlighting the images that sustain philosophical discourse, Vico enumerates the images, which the rational, conceptual scholars depend upon and yet don’t acknowledge. In order to faithfully follow Vico’s doctrine of beginnings, we must “go back and fetch it from” stones, rocks, frogs, cicadas, and simpletons. In order to access the primordial realm of stories and images that are at the origin of philosophical discourse, Vico identifies and sets aside the discourse of the scholars and the grammarians.

Vico returns to the lived phenomenological experience, which is prior to reflective discourse of the scholars. To access our primordial phenomenological experience, reflective

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172 Ibid., 1.
173 Dan Selcer notes, “the particular virtue of philosophical interpretation structured by engagement with figures of material inscription is that it operates simultaneously in the corporeal and conceptual registers, precisely as metaphors do. The typical problems of addressing the status of figurative language in the philosophical text - explored extensively, for example, by...Michele Le Doeuff, and many others - are avoided, since figures of material inscription function most obviously and powerfully at those junctures where the materiality of figuration is the conceptual question addressed by the philosophical text.” See Dan Selcer, Philosophy and the Book: Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 5. Vico’s text, the New Science, arranges itself according to the axiomatic method, and so poses as a proper philosophical text, yet it is in fact a narrative drawing forth the fresh conceptions of metaphor, image, myth and fable. His work is alive with the tension between the corporeal and conceptual elements elaborated in his story; his narrative infuses the concept with corporeal meaning.
174 NS par. 338.
intelligence is useless. Vico writes, “intelligence...has been rendered useless by the two conceits enumerated in the Axioms.”\textsuperscript{175} Moreover, according to Vico, “the poetic falsehoods are the same as the general truths of the philosophers, with the sole difference that the latter are abstract and the former clothed in images.”\textsuperscript{176} The line between truth and falsehood is blurred: there is a poetic truth in narrative fiction that rivals the truth found in the abstract, logical argumentation of the philosophers.

As mentioned above, Vico emphasized his position as standing outside the Academy and the philosophers who dwell there. In his \textit{Autobiography} he recounts the devastating loss of his chance to become a professor of law and the University of Naples, due to an error in his oration: he mispronounced a word (a highly embarrassing moment for a rhetorician.) The coveted position went, in his view, to an undeserving candidate who won the seat because of his elite connections. But, despite his failure, Vico later realized that his exclusion from the Academy was what allowed him the freedom to formulate the original ideas that make up the \textit{New Science}. For instance, Verene affirms, “As a result of this loss, Vico felt free to cease writing works in Latin and to write the \textit{New Science} in Tuscan Italian.”\textsuperscript{177} But Vico did not leave the Academy all together.

He retained what Mazzotta has termed, a liminal status, on the threshold between the Academies and the forest. Unlike Descartes who left schooling all together for the book of the world, Vico remained a lowly professor of Rhetoric (a position later taken up by his son.) Perhaps this explains why Vico is always engaged in conversation with the philosophers of the Academies and Cities, persistently pointing out their flaws. He hovers near them, and shows how we must set their positions aside in order to catch a glimpse of the origin of things. In the

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{NS} par. 330
\textsuperscript{176} Vico, \textit{The First New Science}, 123.
\textsuperscript{177} Verene, “Giambattista Vico’s \textit{New Science},” 218.
introduction to his text, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, he tells the reader that the philosophers “busied themselves in unearthing the causes of language and in formulating it into a system on the basis of the philosophy to which they were devoted, and in which they were learned. Whereas I, not being an adherent of any school of thought, shall seek out the ancient wisdom of the Italians from the very origins of their words.”

He proudly distinguishes himself from the scholars, who are blinded by their learning. Vico professes to encounter the languages without any theoretical biases.

Descartes left the Academy for the book of the world, but, according to Vico, we must act as if there were no books in the world. Vico unhinges the entire abstract, conceptual apparatus and attempts to go beyond it. There are no books in the primordial forests of the earth. Vico positioned himself as an outsider and took great pains to show the distance one must traverse in order to follow his new method. Philosophers, he thought, were generally ignorant of these gaps, differences, and distances; they must leave their comfort zone and encounter philologians: poets, storytellers, and bards. Vico attends to the silent spaces between philosophers and poets, humans and monsters, bodies and places, in his struggle to draw what is far, near - but first, he forces the scholars to realize how very far things are. Once he has created the yawning gap, distancing the ages, then he can create his “savage and wild comparisons.”

Once Vico leaves the books and the Academies he can reveal, “that as much as the poets had first sensed in the way of vulgar wisdom, the philosophers later understood in the way of esoteric

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179 NS par. 893. This is what Vico says of Homer, and as we said above, Vico imitates the great bard’s narrative art, that is the art of the Greek peoples as a whole.
wisdom.” He develops the sense of the first poets to unravel the understanding of the philosophers.

Let us refer again to the true story of the poetic character, Jove. It is significant that the birth of the first human word is a communal act. The giganti are entwined it a total sensorial experience with nature and others in a constant process of birth and becoming. Merleau-Ponty’s term connaissance, “refers both to a kind of embodied, operative knowledge (connaissance) of the world that is below full cognition, and to our birth that is always a co-birth (co-naissance) with others and with all of nature.” Vico’s giganti birth the human world in unison, beneath the bellowing, majestic sky. It is their engagement with each other and the earth that allows for the birth of the new. Erudite wisdom distains communal sense – yet narrative and poetry are born of it. The second order expressions of the erudite foster a solitary mode of dwelling. By bracketing off the learned, erudite wisdom of the conceited scholars and the conventional language, which constitutes their age, Age of Man, Vico encounters the generative mute language of the Age of Gods and symbolic language of the Age of Heroes that is entirely communally and responsive to the earth. Like Merleau-Ponty he returns to our primordial acts of birth by shedding the logic of the learned.

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180 NS par. 363.
182 “These descriptions of the inchoate, regressive, and sublimated forms of speech should enable us to study its relation in principle to instituted language and to clarify the nature of institution as the act of the birth of all possible speech.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1988), 94.
CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Placing Hercules over Jove

In chapter one, I showed how Vico’s recovery of the poetic character Jove exposes our ignorance about the first human thought. It also exposes our ignorance about the first human place. In this chapter, I elaborate the ways in which we can think about Vico as a philosopher of place. “We wander ignorant both of men and places.”\(^{183}\) The poetic character Jove establishes the first place. When Jove came to command by his signs (the lightning bolts and all the language of nature) the first science was born: divination or theology. Divination was simply the interpretation of Jove’s natural signs.\(^{184}\) As commander, Jove also made the giganti stay in one place. Vico observes, “And for having put an end to the feral wandering of a few giants, so that they became princes of the gentes, he received the epithet, Stayor, stayer or establisher.”\(^{185}\) By restricting the wandering of the giganti, Jove inaugurates the first place.

Vico’s universal principle of etymology is his most explicit expression of the relationship between words, bodies, and places. But it is the relationship between words and bodies that have attracted the most scholarly attention. The principles read as follows:

> The human mind is naturally inclined by the senses to see itself externally in the body, and only with great difficulty does it come to understand itself by means of reflection.\(^{186}\)

> This axiom gives us the universal principle of etymology in all languages: words are carried over from bodies and from the property of bodies to signify the institutions of mind and spirit.\(^{187}\)

\(^{184}\) *NS* par. 379.
\(^{185}\) *NS* par 379.
\(^{186}\) *NS* par 236.
\(^{187}\) *NS* par. 237
The corporeal emergence of language is readily identifiable here. That “words are carried over from bodies”\textsuperscript{188} shows that languages and bodies are intimately entwined. Words, moreover, create reality - they carry ontological weight. According to Vico, “the name creates the character, the word engenders the thing.”\textsuperscript{189} The intimate relationship between languages and bodies prefigures the abstract language of the third age, which becomes detached from the body. Vico’s etymologies reveal that languages are primordially born of bodies, though the Age of Man forgets bodies and place. He observes, for instance, “in all the languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate things are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts...Thus, head for top or beginning; the brow and shoulder of a hill; the eyes of needles or potatoes; mouth for any opening; the lip of a cup or pitcher...”\textsuperscript{190} Corporeal metaphors prefigure the concept and etymologies allow us to glimpse the corporeal root grounding our most refined concepts. Born of the body, metaphors mark the birth of the concept.

By plumbing the depths of our pre-reflective experience, Vico encounters the hidden metaphors and embodied thinking that engendered our primordial experience of reality, and its residues continues to weave itself around our experience in the reflective age. “What he is about in his etymologies is a reconstruction from the evidence of language of historical layers of pre-logical encounters with reality, the definition of hidden process, the linguistic system of processing experience which existed, and still exists, outside rational or logical processing.”\textsuperscript{191} Cleary, he is tracing language back to its originary depths and revealing corporeal roots.

Often, however, when scholars consider Vico’s universal principle of etymology, only the linguistic dimension is highlighted. For instance, Edie observes that Vico’s universal

\textsuperscript{188} NS par. 236.
\textsuperscript{190} NS par. 404.
\textsuperscript{191} Struver, “Vico, Valla, And the Logic of Humanist Inquiry,” 176.
principle of etymology “is the first formulation of a non-rationalistic theory of language which is today beginning to be adopted.” 192 Although it is important to acknowledge the principle’s elucidation of the birth of language and thought, it is of equal importance to acknowledge its emphasis upon the places where language and thought are born. The principle reveals how the first stories are born in the primordial forests of the earth and die (reified and depleted) in the Academies. Following upon his first axiom of the universal principle of etymology, Vico presents what he calls “a great principle of etymology.” 193 It reads as follows, “The order of ideas must follow the order of institutions. This was the order of institutions: first the forests, after that the huts, then the villages, next the cities, and finally the academies.” 194 Whereas we saw ideas born of bodies above, we now see ideas born of forests and academies. The ideas change in accord with a change of place.

To realize Vico’s preoccupation with place more fully, let us now turn to the first New Science. Vico’s approach towards etymology in the first New Science, is entirely concerned with place. He observes, “the second principle [that follows from our discovery of the origin of articulate language] is that of an etymologican common to all native languages.” 195 Moreover, Vico demonstrates that:

Such an etymologicon must be made to proceed in constant accordance with the natural order of ideas. Thus, since the forests came first, then the hovels, next the fields, flocks and herds, followed by the cities, the nations, and, finally, the philosophers, the etymologicon for each language must explain the origin and progress of its words through these stages. 196

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193 NS par. 239.
194 NS par. 238 & 239.
195 NS par. 381.
Place is at the forefront in his discussion of the emergence of language. Different manners of dwelling give birth to different ways of being in the world. We cannot trace the origin of a word without witnessing a pastiche of places.

Just as the ontological import of narrative is neglected, the ontological import of place is overlooked. Words emerge simultaneously with place; in other words, ideas and institutions (here understood as places) follow the same order.\textsuperscript{197} The natural order of places or institutions moves from the forests, to the huts, to the villages, to the cities, and lastly to the academies where the philosophers dwell.\textsuperscript{198} The order is natural; in other words, we will not find philosophers in the first forests of the earth, or savage poets in the academies.

The movement from the forest to the academies is revealed through the genetic history of every word.\textsuperscript{199} For instance, Vico shows that the Latin word, \textit{lex} or law, connotes sophisticated, erudite authority, yet when one peels back the layers of its \textit{life} story, we find a mere collection of acorns at its origin. Consider, for instance, the sylvan roots of the law:

Thus we observe in the Latin language that almost the whole corpus of its words had sylvan or rustic origins. For example, \textit{lex}. First it must have meant a collection of acorns. Thence we believe is derived \textit{illex}, as it were \textit{illex}, the oak...for the oak produces acorns by which the swine are drawn together. \textit{Lex} was next a collection of vegetables, from which the later were called \textit{legumeina}. Later on, at a time when vulgar letters had not yet been invented for writing down the laws, \textit{lex}, by a necessity of civil nature meant a collection of citizens, or the public parliamnet; so that the presence of people was the \textit{lex}, or \textquote{law,} that solemnized the wills that were made \textit{calatis comitiis}, in the presence of the assembled \textit{comitia}. Finally, collecting letters, and making, as it were, a sheaf of them for each word, was called \textit{legere}, reading.\textsuperscript{200}

We move from a collection of acorns, to a collection of vegetables, and finally, a collection of citizens. The abstract concept law was originally the corporeal presence of human bodies

\textsuperscript{197\textit{NS} par. 238.}
\textsuperscript{198\textit{NS} par. 239.}
\textsuperscript{199\textit{NS} par. 240.}
\textsuperscript{200\textit{NS} par. 240.}
gathered together in one place; this human gathering, moreover, is a refinement of the gathering of acorns round the trunk of oak tree, firmly rooted in one place. Vico’s universal principle of etymology draws us away from our abstract concept of the law to a bunch of acorns resting beneath an oak tree. Far from the refined, intellectual activity of reading, we find ourselves emplaced, amidst acorns. Thinking, too, is for Vico a kind of gathering. Here we witness our collective story through tracing etymologies. The etymologies tell the story of our archaic dwelling places. As we shall see, humanity, in the Age of Man, becomes detached from place.

Philosophers do not dwell in the forest; they arrive with the coming of the cities and academies. But the philosophers and Academies would not be possible without the poets and forests, a truth the philosophers like to hide. Philosophical discourse is impossible in the forest and yet philosophical discourse feeds upon it sylvan roots without acknowledging it. Plato, for instance, grafted his own esoteric wisdom onto the wisdom of Homer. Unlike many refined academics though, Vico expresses his gratitude for the forests. As we saw above, “he felt most grateful for those woods” during his years at Vatolla. Vico portrays himself as a forest dweller, which is to situate himself outside of the Academy; his thought, in other words, is born of a different place because his body inhabits a different place. As an autodidact, he is not bound to the Academy and his imagination is left to roam freely in the primordial woods of the primordial poets. His etymologicon demonstrates that ideas and places emerge simultaneously; his own ideas are original because they are born of the forest, not the Academies.

Above, I make the original claim that Vico exaggerated his years in the woods to demonstrate that one must return to the primordial forests, where the first poets dwelt, in order to

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201 Vico observes that for the Latins, “the verb intelligere is the same as ‘to read perfectly’ and “to have plain knowledge.” In addition, their cogitare was the same as our vernacular to think” (pensare) and “to gather” (andar raccogliendo). Vico, On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, 45.
202 NS par. 133.
reawaken their poetic wisdom and reinvent language in the *Age of Man*. The force of Vico’s ingenuity is gathered from the forest. Vico brackets off the scholarly attitude and leaves the map for the forest. He appears to be taking up Merleau-Ponty’s injunction that we “return to this world prior to knowledge, this world of which knowledge always speaks, and this world with regard to every scientific determination is abstract, signitive, and dependent, just like geography with regard to landscape, where we first learned what a forest, a meadow, or a river is.”203 Vico offers us, no less, a “poetic geography.”204

Why have scholars neglected the relevance of place in Vico’s etymologican and, moreover, realize Jove as the first place or *topos*? The link between the forest and the poetic characters is not given the attention it deserves in Viconian scholarship because it is an uncommon idea in the western philosophical tradition in general. Casey observes, “in ancient and modern Western philosophy there is rarely any serious discussion of the role of the body in the determination of place.”205 For this reason, it has been all too easy for scholars to overlook the interrelation between body and place in his universal principles of etymology. Additionally, scholars (especially historicists) forget the relevance of lightning and thunder flashing through the sky in the true narration of Jove. The first poets create the first human world through a confrontation with the earth and sky. The natural setting is a lead protagonist in this tale. Lollini, for one, observes the centrality of nature and place in Vico’s poetic characters. He observes, “this original language is not the expression of human subjectivity, freedom or action, and takes place as an event deeply implicated with the earth, the sky, and the body, as a

204 NS par. 274.
combination of voices, gestures, bodily expressions and natural phenomena.” The intersection between bodies and natural environ spark the birth of the first human world. Ideas are not only embodied but implaced. And bodies, like ideas, change alongside place. In this regard I concur with Edward Casey’s notion that “built places are extensions of our bodies.” The erect, shaking bodies of the giganti build the first human place. Casey observes, “The body has everything to do with the transformation of a mere site into a dwelling place. Indeed, bodies build places.” The giganti don’t build the first human world lying down or in immobile intellectual contemplation (the posture of erudite scholars.) Nor like Thales, are they lost in self-reflective thought, tripping over wells; the giganti are entirely exposed and engaged with the earth and thunderous sky. They are not wrapped up in interior contemplation; rather, the body is entirely extended and entwined with place.

Vico observes, in fact, that it is only with great effort that the body comes to turn inward. Vico notes, “that infirmity of the human mind by which, immersed and buried in the body, it naturally inclines itself to take notice of bodily things, and finds the effort to attend to itself too laborious; just as the bodily eye sees all objects outside itself but needs a mirror to see itself.” It is only with great difficulty that we withdraw from our immersion in embodied place to some interior allusive interior space, which is largely a fiction of the Age of Man. Bodily movement is

207 Ibid., 392.
208 Casey, Getting Back into Place, 120.
209 Ibid., 16.
210 In our conclusion we will focus upon the necessity of mobility and learning. The children of the human race created through upright action - our children today demand the same free use of their bodies to build their world. Montessori is emphatic that movement, whether in the classroom or about in nature is central to the world-building creative capacities of children. She calls the Academies prisons that immobilize the child’s free range of movement, whereas true education should inspire action. See Maria Montessori, The Discovery of the Child, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J. (New York: The Random House Publishing), 69-70.
211 NS par. 331. In this regard, Luft claims that the idealist’s concept of subjectivity does not grasp that the giganti have no sense of interiority. This accords with Cavarero and Arendt’s notion that the self is inherently external and exposable. Our identity, as we shall see with Cavarero, is bound up with appearing before others, whom act as a sort of mirror, allowing us to see ourselves.
necessary for building places.²¹² Action and deeds are called for even to move around already built places. Casey observes, “Constructing, inhabiting, and travelling as well as those actions in which wandering and residing combine, are bodily activities...the living moving body converts the flatland of sheer sites into the variegated landscape of habitable or traversed places.”²¹³

If we consider the movement in the conceptual mansions, which were described above as humanity’s dwelling place in the Age of Man, their movement is limited to shuffling around prefabricated furniture. Their freedom and creative capabilities are diminished to this delicate, simple fluttering about. Conversely, the first poets create the first place through intense, awe-stricken, and vibrant, shaking and shouting. The poetic character Hercules, moreover, burns clearings in the forest to give birth to human places. Let’s consider this account of his poetic geography. Vico writes:

Cities were called arae, altars...for they must have been the first altars of the gentile nations, and the first fire lighted upon them was that which served to clear the forests of trees and bring them under cultivation...And since these altars were evidently the first asylums of the world...we are told that within the asylum opened in the Lucus or clearing.²¹⁴

The clearing and cultivated of the forest was arduous work, and without it the cities could not be born. According to Vico the luci are “the burnt lands within the enclosure of the woods.”²¹⁵ The arduous work to create the first places is called for in the creation of the first words. That effort we will consider more fully below in our consideration of spontaneous versus sedimented language in Merleau-Ponty’s gestural theory of language.

Place, furthermore, is intimately related to birth, a category, we saw above, that is vastly unrecognized in the western philosophical tradition. For something to be born, it requires a

²¹² Casey, Getting Back into Place, 116.
²¹³ Ibid.
²¹⁴ NS par. 17.
²¹⁵ NS par. 16.
place. As Verene explains, “the nation as birth and death requires a geography, a place.”

Perhaps, once again, the primacy of place is demonstrated in the first edition of Vico’s *New Science* more clearly. There, his treatment of poetic character begins with the poetic character Hercules, rather than Jove. Verene observes, “Jove is the first place or *topos* from which to think. Hercules through his work signifies the first place in which to act.”

Hercules, asserts Vico, “subdued the first lands of the world and brought them under cultivation.” Anytime an individual carries out a great labor he will be called Hercules. Hercules’ great labor was to have burned the clearing in the forest and cultivated the fields - a labor that must have required great bodily skill and strength. Both Jove and Hercules are instrumental poetic characters. Just as every nation has its Jove, Vico affirms, every nation has its Hercules. The nations could not begin without Jove and could not grow without the valor of Hercules.

Hercules, moreover, is related to the poetic character Juno, who is associated with marriage. Religion, marriage and burial are the three institutions, which Vico establishes as present in every nation. For our purposes here, it is important to see the way in which marriage helps to establish the first place. Verene explains, “The fear of Jove leads the first humans to control their bodies. The fear also leads them to copulate away from the sight of Jove, in caves and this leads them to marriage.” Vico says that marriage causes the *giganti* to stay tethered to one place with their woman. Verene observes that “marriage begins the human sense of place but human society does not begin until Hercules clears the great forests for cultivation. Juno

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217 Ibid., 184.
218 *NS* par. 14.
220 *NS* par. 196.
221 *NS* par. 198.
imposes the great labor onto Hercules.”223 Thus, the poetic characters, born of the wholly corporeal imagination of beasts, create the first human place and the civilized world. The beasts create place through their heroic labor and bodily skills.

The bestial bodies, moreover, are transformed alongside the transformation of place. As the land is brought under cultivation, so too are their bodies cultivated. The wild and dangerous forests mirror the unbound, robust, feral bodies of the giants. With marriage, their bodies shrink. I argue that this “education of the bodies”224 is Vico’s way of demonstrating the inextricable relationship between body and place. Vico writes that after their feral wandering in the forest is put to an end by the fearful thunderclaps of Jove, their marriages keep them in place. “While after they began to remain in one place with their woman, first in caves, then in huts near perennial springs and in fields which, brought under cultivation, gave them sustenance...they should shrink to the present stature of mankind.”225 As we follow his etymologicon from the forests, caves, and huts, to the academies we watch the gross beast’s corporeal bodies shrink alongside their shrinking imaginations until they become the reflective, refined creatures we are today. Ideas, bodies, language, and institutions all accelerate at the same rate.

2.2 Place over Time

Vico’s philosophy of place is treated as subordinate to his cyclical theory of time. Indeed, he is most well-known for his cyclical theory of time; typically, when Vico appears in any history of philosophy, he is noted primarily for his cyclical theory of history.226 Verene clarifies, “Vico is ordinarily thought of as a philosopher of time. His philosophy is traditionally interpreted as a

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223 Ibid., 185.
224 NS par. 524.
225 NS par. 524.
philosophy of history. In such an interpretation his thought is identified with his conception of corsi and ricorsi, with a theory of cycles of history. My contention is that Vico is above all a philosopher of place not time.227 In line with Verene, I will attempt to demonstrate that Vico is primarily a philosopher of place over time. Above, I identified two major customary attitudes dominating the western intellectual tradition, namely, its penchant for death over birth and for abstract discourse over narrative discourse. Now, I will identify a third habitual, unquestioned belief: a penchant for time over place. Place is eclipsed by time; this tendency is not peculiar to Viconian scholarship alone - it plagues modern philosophy in general.

Casey affirms our era’s preoccupation with time at the expense of place. Moderns are primarily occupied with the problematics of time. He observes, “In modern and postmodern times we are so inured to the putative primacy of time that we rarely question the tempocentrist dogma that time is the first of all things.”228 When scholars approach the New Science they carry with them their fealty to this kind of thinking dominant in the Academies. If they are to read Vico on his terms, they must, like Vico swear no fealty to any dogma or doctrine. Vico’s theory of time is focused upon by the modern reader because she is conditioned by the dogma of her era and so, imposes it upon Vico’s narration.

In fact, Vico anticipates our modern age’s detachment from place. By the time we reach the third age, the Age of Man, Vico shows that thinking loses its intimate relation to place. Most importantly, humanity loses its place. The first poets established the first place beneath the sky, which was the vast the trembling body of Jove. Verene explains, “In the age of men, place becomes indefinite. Place and property is the subject of abstract definitions by governments and law. The nation becomes more and more a temporal sequence whose movement appears

227 Verene, Vico’s Science of Imagination, 183.
228 Casey, Getting Back into Place, 14.
historically self-generated rather than charted in terms of movements in the divine sky. Absolute idealism, which is a philosophy of time, reflects on human institutions from this third perspective and fails to understand their origin in the primitive sense of place.”

The law that was once a gathering beneath an oak tree, becomes a no place. Hercules once burned a clearing for the primordial altars, where humanity gathered together and interpreted the sky god’s commands; with the onset of abstract law and language, humanity loses its primordial relation to the earth and sky. Abstractions take the place of acorns.

Vico describes the first places of humanity; we must “get back into place” if we are to understand their manner of dwelling. Verene affirms, “Human society and human thought begin in a sense of place and our understanding of them ultimately requires a type of thought that is itself based on a sense of place.”

Verene argues the narrative of the *New Science* takes the form of a *recollective fantasia* as a way to get back into place or, in other words, to think as the first poets thought. In chapter two, we will discuss why his theory of *recollective fantasia* is too refined a concept to help us interpret the primordial places.

Although Verene draws our attention to the primacy of place in Vico’s narration, Edward Casey’s work on place offers a better way to think through place in the manner of the first poets. Vico’s poets created the first place through a metaphorical event. This process of creation hinges upon Vico’s principle of creativity, namely, that the first poets fashioned the world through ignorance: they made the unfamiliar known through the familiar. Through corporeal expressions they make the world familiar. Place is something familiar to us. “A place is my *familiaris* (literally, a familiar spirit.)” The first poets, in order to make the first place, made the earth

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230 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 15.
232 Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 233.
and the mountain tops familiar. They turn their unknown, mute, no-place, into the body of Jove by poetically transforming it into something familiar, namely, their own bodies. This transformational event captures the way in which we arrive at place through our bodies. Casey explains, for Merleau-Ponty, “the places we inhabit are known by the bodies we live. Moreover, we cannot be emplaced without being embodied. Conversely, to be embodied is to be capable of implanation.”

Every nation had their Jove, because at the birth of every place we find a body.

The ideal eternal story begins with place. The forest is the primordial dwelling place of nascent humanity and each successive place, from the forests, to the huts, villages, cities, and ultimately the academies reveal different ways of dwelling on earth, beneath the sky. Jove’s robust, palpitating, thundering body, the sky itself, is the first topos or place wherein thought begins. Although the academy is a dwelling place that is derivative of the originary clearing in the forest, it has forgotten its roots there. During the condition of barbaric reflection place becomes a no-place. Harrison observes, “At the center, one forgets that one is dwelling in the clearing. The center becomes utopic. The wider the circle of the clearing the more the center is nowhere and the more the logos becomes reflective, abstract, universalistic, in essence, ironic.”

The topos is forgotten, we become once again like the giganti who “wandered ignorant of...places.” This forgetting is also caused by the rise of Descartes’ analytic geometry. Vico worried that the rise of Descartes’ ratio-mathematical method would further push the Academies away from place.

Vico’s principle of etymology anticipates the shift from place to space in western intellectual thought. Edward Casey documents this transition in his monumental work, The Fate
of Place. He writes, “Where have all the places gone? In the long wake of Aristotle, the answer has become increasingly evident: submerged in space.”

If it is a challenge for us today to reawaken the predominance of place once enjoyed in myth and the ancient world, it will be equally as difficult to realize it in Vico’s work. Vico, moreover, is aware of the rising dominance of Descartes’ analytic geometry and critical thinking and advocates his own art of topics (which entails a return to places) in order to counter it.

Vico is the philosopher who plunges us into the “thick night of darkness enveloping antiquity.” I italicize the word thick because I believe that it expresses the voluminosity that unravels the abstract, conceptual notion of space. Merleau-Ponty writes, “Just as by the thick and living presence of my body, in one fell swoop I take up my dwelling in space. [My italics].” For Merleau-Ponty, “depth is the ‘voluminosity’ of space that not only allows things to be seen...but allows for things to have an unseen side.”

Depth is the hidden or absent aspect of a thing. By returning to the first places, Vico uncovers primordial depth.

Merleau-Ponty’s concept of depth, for instance, exposes the illusory character of Cartesian space. Its bird’s eye view ignores lived experience, which reveals depth. There is no experience of depth in the bird’s eye view of Cartesian space. Since the topos forest emerges out of humanity’s relation to the sky, where the celestial sky touches the treetops and the relationship to the sky is dissolved as we move towards Cartesian space, we lose emplaced, situated experience.  The experiential basis of reality allows for the birth of new ideas to emerge as responses to the needs and utilities of the situation. When this response is prevented by

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237 Casey, The Fate of Place, 197.
238 Casey asks, “how can we restore to place something like the interest and respect it enjoyed in mythic accounts, in early Greek and late Hellenistic accounts and Neo-Platonic philosophy, in long stretches of medieval thought...How, faced with the hegemony of Space can we rediscover...place?” See Ibid., 201.
239 NS par. 331.
240 Merleau-Ponty, Signs, 75.
242 NS par. 712.
preordained concepts fixing the ground of lived experience our creative energies are stifled. This is the sense in which the map takes place the of the landscape.

As Evans explains, Casey gives both phenomenological and ontological priority to place. In describing its phenomenological priority Evans writes, “even geometrized space, calibrated time, and numbers refer back tacitly or overtly to the capacities of our body, and through them, to the place where they too are already situated and oriented.”

Vico’s etymologies expose the situated, emplaced, and corporeal origins of concepts, which can never fully be eviscerated from them. Our primordial places and natal scenes always lie hidden, waiting to be uncovered. In another sense, we can say that, the primordial forest will always brush the edge of the Academic kingdom, no matter how far or wide her territory. As Harrison asserts, there is always the edge where “history meets earth.”

Vico inhabits this edge between history and the earth. The Academy as Mazzotta showed us is a threshold and Vico is a liminal figure taking up this threshold. Using Casey’s terminology, we may describe the Academy as a “limitropic phenomena.” The Academies are both material buildings and thresholds. A place, Evans explains, is, “both a ‘substrate’ and a ‘shelter’...as a shelter it offers ‘stability’; as an aegis, it ‘fosters new intentions and creations.’

Vico takes shelter in the Academies yet uses it as a place to carry out original thought.

2.3 Place and Voice

Now I would like to turn towards one further possibility unexplored by Vico scholars to date. I would like to emphasize the primary place Vico gives to voice. The first place is, after all,

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244 Harrison, Forests, 37.
245 Evans, “Voices and the ‘Spirit of Place,’” 216.
246 Ibid.
247 Ibid., 215.
created through the shouting voices of the *giganti*. Vico observes, in the first *New Science*, “the Greeks called Jove, the first of the gods, Zeus, from the whistles of thunderbolts, and the Latins called him *Ious*, the genitive of the *Iovis*, from the roar of thunder.”

The shouts of the *gigantic*, responding to the crashing thunder, appear to give primacy to the voice, as though the first place emerges with the word Papa! This is not a simple onomatopoeic creation since every nation has its Jove and Jove is said in many ways.

The *Anabasis* is a descent into the thickness of being and this sort of depth and voluminosity is integral to Merleau-Ponty’s work on place. In order to thrive, a place needs both powers. Vico’s narrative discourse honors the voice of the *giganti* and their difference. He is able to enter into a dialogic exchange with and respond to these original voices. Evans observes, “Although voice and place reciprocally presuppose one another, the discursive dimension of voices give them priority over places.” Vico’s principle of etymology seems to privilege place, yet it cannot be denied that the formation of the first human place occurs simultaneously with the vocalic shouting of the giants. As Evans explains, “even with its constituting role, then, language does not rule absolutely over its corporeal setting, nor does

249 Evans, “Voices and the ‘Spirit of Place,’” 216.
250 Evans writes, “The transcendence of this threshold is the change in one’s discourse or the often surreptitious production of a new voice brought on by dialogic interplay, the contest of audibility, among the voices of society.” Evans, “Voices and the ‘Spirit of Place,’” 218. Although our work does not focus upon the battle between the patrician and plebs we will note that the plebs fight for the right to sing the same songs as the patricians. The law of twelve tables was simply a severe poem, or in Evan’s terms, the oracular voice of the patricians. The battle between these two voices is heard throughout the ideal eternal story. New voices are produced through this heterogeneity of voices. The breaking up of the oracular voices is part of the story. The first stories and laws were sung. The plebs voices were not allowed to sing the story of the same gods, so they created their own minor gods. These dual narratives, of the powerful and powerless, are considered by Vico to be one of his great discoveries. For instance, Vico observes, “such double fables or characters must have been necessary in the heroic state in which the plebeians, having no names of their own, bore those of the heroes [559]; to say nothing of the extreme poverty of speech that must have prevailed in the first times, since, copious as our present languages are, even in them the same word often signifies different and sometimes contrary things.” *NS* par. 581. Ultimately, the voices of all the bards and storytellers become silenced altogether as discourse becomes written and abstract, eviscerating all resonances of the bodies relation to words.

voice over place; the two are intertwined from the beginning for us, reciprocally presupposing one another. “252 There is a reciprocal relationship between voice and place.

We could call the first poets, the group of giganti on the mountainside the first dialogic body. The giganti create the first poetic character collectively, which accords with Evans argument that “a voice doesn’t first exist and then respond to others; it is always already responding to or addressing other voices, always part of an interplay that simultaneously separates the voices and holds them together thus forming a dialogic body.” 253 The sky is the body of Jove born of voices shot through with others. The human world is born with their shouting in communion with the thunder since voice and body have the power to turn the earth into a human place. As Evans explains, “The voices and their social discourses, in turn, give our bodies an identity and transform geographical locations into cultural settings: our bodies so to speak, hold voices to the earth, but the voices simultaneously pull us and our surroundings up into the more ethereal orbit of their discourse.”254 This transformation could not occur without an interplay of voices. Vico’s tale does not relate the experience of a lone giant shouting on a mountaintop; place is born by their gathering and shouting together. This marks an event. Evans observes, “the Multivoiced body is an event – the interplay of voices – that helps establish the place in which it occurs.”255 In this light, we can ready the poetic character Jove as an event expressing the Multivoiced body.

Through the voice we come full circle to the concept of birth and its intimate relation to the unique begun in the last chapter. Arendt describes the contrast at stake, “the philosophers

252 Evans, *The Multivoiced Body*, 149.
253 Evans, “Voices and the ‘Spirit of Place,’” 218.
254 Evans, *The Multivoiced Body*, 149.
living for death...versus the free vocalizations of the infant are replaced with a grave silence.”

The passionate cries of sorrow and joy of the infant are revealed in humanity's own infancy. Vico’s originary narrations call forth the originary voices of the acoustic sphere. He parallels Cavarero’s observation that, “The poetic voice, a song, lies at the Greek origins of the western tradition.” By recovering the acoustic origin of languages, Vico disrupts the disembodied, conceptual notion of language.

Vico’s narrative about the originary scenes of humanity’s infancy focuses upon the acoustic sphere. Cavarero observes, “The privileging of the vocalic facilitates the disorganization of the semantic.” By attuning his thought to the vocalic, Vico disrupts the semantic order of philosophical discourse in the Academies. Additionally, he captures the sense in which the voice is inherently relational. The giants shout in response to the earth and each other. The scene is entirely oral in character and does not have a trace of the written tradition upon it. The written tradition and the erudite wisdom of the scholars are dominated by sight.

We cannot close our ears with the same mastery with which we can close our eyes. The ear is at all times penetrable. Cavarero emphasizes the point, “The voice vibrates in the air, striking the ear of the other, even when it does not mean to do so.... The ear is an open canal; it can be surprised from anywhere at any moment. It is always cocked to a sonorous universe that it does not control.” Vico’s giants are can’t shut out the roaring thunder above them, nor their fellow giant’s feverish shouts. They can’t simply look away; sound resounds around the earth and penetrates their bodies uncontrollably.

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257 Ibid., 137.
258 Hence, we can draw many fruitful connections between Vico and scholars of the oral tradition like Walter Ong and Eric Havelock.
259 Ibid., 143.
260 Ibid., 177.
261 Ibid., 176.
262 Ibid., 178.
Through reawakening our encounter with the oral tradition and the acoustic sphere, Vico returns the pleasures of this sonorous universe to the arid, abstract written discourse constituting the *Age of Man*. Vico’s discovery of the true Homer is the result of his return to primary orality. “Briefly, the epochal passage from orality to writing, from Homer to Plato, is, above all, a passage from narrative verse which enchants the hearer by evoking images in the seductive and irreflexive flux of the tale, to philosophical discourse, which proceeds rather with method to define its fixed terms.... the work of abstraction is born of the repudiation of the pleasure of narration.”

The pleasure that Vico says will fill the body of the reader when she narrates the *New Science* to herself evokes the pleasure awakened by the acoustic sphere. Cavarero observes, “destined for the ear of another, the voice implies a listener – or better, a reciprocity of pleasure.” When we narrate the *New Science* to ourselves we are meant to hear and, once again, delight in the songs of oral poetry. Vico wants to recover the residue of voice sedimented beneath conceptual language. Cavarero observes, “As the material of an originary acoustic pleasure, the voice precedes and makes possible a language that always bears its trace.”

Vico re-enchants the reader with the ancient voices of the first poets. By unearthing the languages born of a primary orality, he draws the pleasurable aspects that accompany narration out and so disrupts the rational, abstract discourse of the *Age of Man*.

This return to orality is the return to the infancy of humanity. And no one is more keenly aware of the primacy of voice than a mother. As she cradles her newborn infant in her arm, she is privy to the primordial duet that mothers across cultures and ages have performed, “the mom

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263 Ibid., 95.
264 “In doing this the reader will experience in his mortal body a divine pleasure as he contemplates the divine ideas this world of nations in all the extent of its places, times, and varieties.” NS par. 345.
266 Ibid., 138.
and baby duet.”\textsuperscript{267} The mother and child sing to each other, responding to the pleasures of voice. Vico plumbs the depths of this ancient duet in his return to the infancy of man.

In considering the primacy of voice in Vico’s thought, though, we find a tension between singular narratives and collective narratives. On the one hand, Vico’s recovery of archaic myths relates a collective narrative. The first dialogic body expressed in the poetic character Jove expresses the communal dimension of invention. The voice is shot through with other voices at the moment of creation. On the other hand, Vico addresses a singular reader and requires that singular existent to narrate the \textit{New Science} for herself. This is the only instance in which Vico acknowledges the singular self in the \textit{New Science}. It is not until he narrates his own personal life story that we find a story about a singular, unrepeateable existent.

The voice and song are not present in Vico’s \textit{Autobiography}; they remain tucked away in the collective tale elaborated in his \textit{New Science}. But the \textit{he}, which is portrayed in the \textit{Autobiography}, is not the master of his own tale. His life story is told as a fable. By lying about the date of his birth he shows that his true origins are shrouded in darkness; a darkness that the \textit{New Science} tries to shine a light upon. When Vico tells the story of the birth of poetic metaphysics and its transformation into rational metaphysics he shows how passionate bursts of emotion and song is reduced to arid, abstract written discourse. He, in fact, tells the strange story of metaphysics in a way advised by Cavarero. She professes that “the history of metaphysics should in fact finally be told as the strange history of the devocalization of logos.”\textsuperscript{268} Cavarero traces logos back to its etymological root, \textit{legein}. “From the ancient Greek, the verb means both ‘speaking’ and ‘gathering,’ ‘binding,’ and ‘joining.’”\textsuperscript{269} We saw above how Vico traced this

\textsuperscript{267} \textit{Ibid.}, 171.
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Ibid.}, 40.
\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Ibid.}, 33.
kind of gathering further back into our archaic memories by describing specific corporeal roots: the gathering of acorns.

This accords with Vico’s notion that the first speech was mute and made up of natural signs: deeds, physical objects, and gestures. He writes, “Logic comes from logos, whose first and proper meaning was fabula, fable, carried over into Italian as favella, speech.”270 The first mute speech in the Divine Age becomes the robust song of the Heroic Age. Finally, speech loses both its materiality and vocalic dimension in the Age of Man.

But how does the singular voice relate to the collective voice of archaic peoples? Or, rather, what part does it play in the strange story of the devocalization of logos? Cavarero wants to preserve the unique aspect of the voice to protect it from being swallowed up in the collective dimension of voice and thought. She observes, “The voice, which is embodied in the plurality of voices, always puts forward first of all the who of saying. As a faithful testimony to the uniqueness of the one who emits it…the voice not only dethrones the “subject” of traditional metaphysics, but it renders its subject ridiculous.”271 For Cavarero the voice announces a singular, unique existent. She relates the following Bible story to demonstrate this. When Jacob tries to trick his father Isaac into believing that he is his brother, Esau, he covers his skin so that he will not be betrayed if his father reaches for him. When Isaac touches Jacob to confirm his identity, he is fooled. But Jacob’s voice betrays him. Ultimately, Jacob is able to deceive him with an olfactory ruse, but what is important for Cavarero’s purpose is that Jacob’s unique voice exposed who is is.272

Although Cavarero’s notion of voice offers a strong defense against the logocentrism of traditional metaphysics and its traditional subject, there is a strong sense in which the unique

270 NS par. 401.
271 Cavarero, For More than One Voice, 30.
272 Ibid., 24.
voice of the singular existent is always already shot through with other voices. For instance, I have often been confused over the telephone with my best friend (before cell phones and number identifications, of course); growing up together, we adapted similar tones and intonations. My voice is in a sense shot through with hers. This does not deny my uniqueness; only my deep relatedness to my best friend. And so, we return to the giants on the mountain tops and their relation to me or you: the singular existent narrating the New Science for ourselves. How deep is the gulf between the collective stories of shouting giganti and my singular story? How far is the self from the forest?

Evans can help us resolve the tension between the personal and anonymous dimension of voices through his concept of elliptical identity. Evans observes, “we are elliptically identical with our ‘lead voice,’ that is the social discourse upon whose basis we tend to evaluate our surroundings and direct our actions, whether or not we are fully aware of the existence or logic of this discourse.”^273 The notion of elliptical identity allows us to realize ourselves as singular existents while respecting our inherent relation to broader social discourses. In terms of Vico’s narrative art, we find him calling out to the singular existent to modify her lead voice as she is plunged into the thick night of darkness to engage with the other voices of the giants and heroes. Vico knows the reader will not be swallowed up by other voices, since she is told to personalize it and make it her own. Evans honors “the dynamic plurivocity of our existence and the contestation among the many linguistic strands that constitute voice.”^274 The reader of the New Science is invited to personalize the story, to make it for herself. Vico’s Autobiography revealed his lead voice: the way he personalized the discoveries of the New Science for himself. The two texts work elliptically to reveal the way in which our personal voice mingles with the anonymous

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^273 Evans, The Multivoiced, Body, 54.

^274 Evans, The Multivoiced Body, 158.
dimension of discourse. As Evans explains, “as voices…we are as much the personal dimension as the anonymous dimension of the voices we articulate and, elliptically, are. Vico’s narrative art straddles both dimensions of our experience.

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275 Evans, The Multivoiced Body, 151.
CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Overlooked Images

Vico’s *New Science* abounds with fragments, etymologies, tropes, stories, and images; they circulate through his text like blood flowing through the body and flow outside the traditional frameworks of philosophical discourse.\(^{276}\) This lack of order and clarity is disturbing to readers trained in the western metaphysical tradition. In wishing away this disorderly array of fragments and images, scholars undermine their true purpose in Vico’s philosophical insights. “Vico’s friends often seem less kind than his enemies. Not content with simply rejecting his claims, they praise the originality of his insights while denying the lucidity of his thought...the chief complaint of Vico’s critics focuses on how he orders (or fails to order) his thought.”\(^{277}\) Berlin, for one, observes that Vico is a, “rich and profound but inexact and obscure thinker.”\(^{278}\) My study aims to understand the ways in which Vico’s narratives and images have ontological and philosophical import. Vico’s disorderly and obscure style, in other words, will be shown to demonstrate the disorderly and obscure emergence of things in the world. His style is intimately entwined with the meaning of his work. Far from regretting his unfortunate style, I will show that it expresses his most important truths.

Clear and distinct lines cannot bind the force of his imaginative, robust style. Mazzotta affirms that, “linear argument violates both the more characteristic serpentine movement of Vico’s prose as well as his more general principles about the spiral, oblique process necessary to

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\(^{276}\) “And just as the blood does in animate bodies, so will these elements course through our Science and animate it in all its reasoning about the common nature of nations.” *NS* par. 119.

\(^{277}\) *Goetsch, Vico’s Axioms*, xi.

\(^{278}\) *Berlin, Vico and Herder*, 95.
reach knowledge.” Digression, repetitions and blasts of insight fill the New Science, scandalizing any sense of rigid, causal order. This, moreover, imitates the language of the heroic age which he favors. Mazzotta continues, “It conveys Vico’s sense of the complications existing within the order of causality. The positive link between cause and effect never function by a linear mechanism in this poetic-philosophical universe.” The rushing torrents of Vico’s thought break idealist boundaries. The moment we enter into Vico’s narrative performance we realize we are outside the domain of the concept: his text begins with an image. Later we will explore his image, or dipintura, in depth.

We encounter in Vico’s work the trait that Vico admires in Homer. Vico writes of Homer, “For delicacy is a small virtue and greatness naturally disdains small things. Indeed, as a great rushing torrent cannot fail to carry turbid waters and roll stones and trunks along in the violence of its course, so his very greatness accounts for the low expressions we so often find in Homer.” Vico describes the poetic language of the divine and heroic ages as rushing waters keeping the Age of Man sweet. Poetic speech moves, “much as great and rapid waters continue far into the sea, keeping sweet the waters borne on by the force of their flow.” The metaphor of the rushing waters of imagination is applied to Homer. By reading Homer in the light of the New Science Vico attempts to keep our arid, abstract thinking sweet. We may say with James Joyce that our imaginations grow every time we read Vico. Vico’s style is meant to expand our heroic minds, as his style mimics that of the storytellers and bards recovered in the Heroic Age.

279 Mazzotta, The New Map of the World, 141.
280 Ibid.
281 NS par. 822.
282 NS par. 412.
Contemporary scholars are guilty of the same conceits that Vico identified in his axiom of the conceit of scholars. They impose their own theoretical framework onto Vico’s thought. This, as we have seen, is a natural tendency of the human mind to understand. We naturally understand what is unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. Recall that, “whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand.” This tendency accounts for the birth of language as well as the error of scholars. Vico explains, “This axiom points to the inexhaustible source of all errors about the principle of humanity that have been adopted by entire nations and scholars.” Above, I showed that Vico’s method entails bracketing off of the scholarly attitude. By setting aside the conceit of scholars and nations, Vico is able to descend towards our nascent beginnings and return with the revivifying bounty discovered there.

It is the conceit of scholars and nations that have kept this bounty hidden today. My aim in this chapter is to discover what errors have kept Vico’s work hidden. To begin with, I point to an overlooked image in Viconian scholarship. Most readers today use the third 1744 edition of the New Science. The most famous publication is the Bergin and Fisch translation. It omits an image that accompanies the original text. This apparently insignificant omission points to the tendency of scholars to overlook the importance of Vico’s images – in this case, they simply omit it altogether.

The original 1744 editions include a smaller dipintura as well as a larger dipintura, which appears in the Bergin and Fisch translation and that serves as Vico’s introduction to the work. We will discuss the meaning of the larger dipintura in chapter three. Now, we will analyze the forgotten dipinutra, which only appeared in original editions of the work. The

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284 NS par. 122.
285 NS par. 123.
second, more popular dipintura, is explicitly meant to serve as an introduction to the work and Vico’s introduction is a commentary on the engraving. On the contrary, there is no commentary to support the smaller image, except for the one enigmatic inscription on the plinth. The image shows a woman with winged temples resting upon a globe, holding a triangle and looking in a mirror. We read the Latin phrase, IGNOTA LATEBAT, on the plinth that she lays her elbow on. The inscription is our only written clue as to the meaning of the image.  

Verene translates the phrase as, “She, unknown, was lying hidden.” We know from Vico’s commentary of the second dipintura that the woman in the figure is meant to represent lady metaphysics. In the second paragraph of the New Science Vico explains, “The lady with the winged temples who surmounts the celestial globe or world of nations is lady metaphysics.”

Given that the smaller impresa pictures the same woman with the wing-temple crown, we can infer that it too represents the figure of lady metaphysics. It is she who is lying buried and unknown. Verene observes, “The sense of metaphysics that Vico wishes to endorse or bring to light in his work is that of something that has been there in the background of human thought all along but has not been found or discovered...no one has concealed it from us except ourselves.” This theme of concealment and unconcealment of course resonates with Heidegger’s notion of truth, which we will explore in our section on Grassi. Just as this impresa has been hidden from the majority of Viconian scholars, so too has his lady, poetic metaphysics.

The reason for the occlusion of the impresa illuminates the scholarly prejudices at work in reading Vico. During the Renaissance and modern era, emblematic meanings were a source of fascination; the interest in finding meaning in emblematic devices diminished with time.

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286 Verene, Keys to the New Science, 149.
287 Ibid., 149.
288 NS par. 2.
289 Verene, Keys to the New Science, 150.
Frankel observes that the dipintura and its explanation “strike the modern reader as bizarre and have therefore been neglected by scholars.”\textsuperscript{290} It is only recently, for instance, that the larger dipintura that is actually published in the popular Bergin and Fisch translation has garnered any interest. In fact, an abridged version of the text actually eliminated this dipintura and the commentary upon it all together. Verene observes, “Such an editorial decision was quite in accord with the usual philosophical approach to work to the work, which focuses on its conceptual and systematic parts, regarding its employment of images as inessential embellishments, and holding the true beginnings of the work to be Vico’s presentation of his axioms.\textsuperscript{291} Given that we are discussing the work of a thinker who establishes a doctrine of beginnings as his motivating principle, this is an absolute travesty. The scholars do not follow his doctrine; by ignoring the image, they do not begin at the beginning. The conceptual biases inherent in philosophical discourse have actually contributed to the sheer elimination of the beginning of Vico’s text. Since the beginning that is an image, philosophers who are dominated by the concept fail to even consider it as part of the text. They familiarize the text by imposing a conceptual framework that does not include images in its line of sight. To wipe out the true beginning of things directly challenges Vico’s most important doctrine.

The handling of Vico’s primary images is emblematic of the way in which scholars handle Vico’s the imagistic thinking throughout the \textit{New Science}. They appear right before their eyes and still, they lay hidden. Scholars like Frankel and Verene who attempt to understand the philosophical function of the images at the beginning of the \textit{New Science} are the exceptions. Frankel, in fact, links the three ages in the \textit{New Science}: the age of the gods, heroes and man, with the image and the way it precedes the written text. She observes:

\textsuperscript{291} Verene, \textit{Keys to the New Science}, 151.
Three kinds of languages were spoken which compose the vocabulary of this science: (1) That of the time of the families when gentile men were newly received into humanity. This, we shall find, was a mute language of signs and physical objects having natural relations to the ideas they wished to express. (2) That spoken by means of heroic emblems, or similitudes, comparisons, images, metaphors and natural descriptions, which make up the great body of the heroic language which was spoken at the time the heroes reigned. (3) Human language using words agreed upon by the people, a language of which they are absolute lords...a language whereby the people fix the meaning of the laws which the nobles as well as the plebs are bound.292

The first language is mute, the second is a mixture of articulate and mute (as the heroes burst into song), and the last language is almost entirely articulate. Frankel lines up the second dipintura with the ages constituted by a mute language and compares the commentary upon the image to the articulate language in the age of men; thereby, the three stages of language are compressed into the dipintura and its commentary, which, taken together, make up the introduction. Thus, the introduction is both the image and the written text. Frankel explains, “The image and Vico’s words describing it make it seem likely that Vico intended to give his Introduction a structure that would graphically reproduce in itself the origins and development of mankind through its three ages.”293 We can apply her reasoning to the first and less known dipintura. Although it does not entail a commentary upon it, which would represent human language, the inscription on the plinth is enough to indicate the third age constituted by articulate, written language. So, there to, the three ages are represented, making it a total expression of Vico’s ideal eternal story which traces the birth and death of these languages.

Vico’s commentary about the introduction has itself causes consternation. Pompa charges it with a lack of clarity. Pompa complains, at the outset of his monumental study on Vico, “the introduction takes the form of some comments upon an allegorical picture which constitutes the frontispiece. These comments are so condensed that is to be doubted that it can

292 NS par. 32.
ever have succeeded, as was evidently intended, in giving a clear idea of the contents of the work to the reader."\textsuperscript{294} The penchant for clarity, defining idealist philosophy, one again, obscures the import of introduction. Vico, in fact, praises the beauty of the condensed heroic expressions. He writes, "that languages are more beautiful in proportion as they are richer in these condensed heroic expressions; that they are more beautiful because they are more expressive; and that because they are more expressive they are truer."\textsuperscript{295} The dipintura is one such condensed expression; the commentary is meant to aid our engagement with the image, since it is, first and foremost, the image that expresses the meaning of the work.

Scholars also neglect the materials section, which follows the introduction. Mali observes, "Concerned as they were with the theories, they have rarely, if ever, concentrated on the original raw matter from which Vico carved these theories - the archaic mythological texture."\textsuperscript{296} Mali casts this scholarly neglect in terms of Marshall McLuhan’s famous dictum, "the medium if the message." Vico weaves together the raw materials into a narrative - perhaps, Mali’s own metaphor of ‘carving’ theories from the stories is also tainted with the tendency towards abstraction and reflection. Vico does not set the materials into the framework of a theory, but into the pattern of a story, they confirm Vico’s claim that it is nearly impossible for minds trained in abstract philosophical discourse to access the imagistic thinking of the first poets. Vico says that it is “beyond our powers to enter into the vast imaginations of those first men, whose minds were not in the least abstract, refined, or spiritualized, because they were entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by passions, buried in the body."\textsuperscript{297} Although it is nearly impossible to do, Vico makes the heroic attempt to imagine how the first poets thought by

\textsuperscript{295} \textit{NS} par. 445.
\textsuperscript{297} \textit{NS} par. 378.
employing their mute, imagistic language. He offers the dipintura as a way to reawaken this archaic way of expression. Although he lays it before the scholars to see, it remains hidden since they are too refined by their abstract philosophical discourse see it, and, in the case above, it is physically eliminated from the text.

Pompa, we have seen, begins his study on Vico’s *New Science* by dismissing the beginning of Vico’s text. Although Vico’s imaginative insights are praised, they are largely dismissed as well. Berlin, for instance, acknowledges the value of the child’s world, which Vico recovers. He writes, “The language of so called primitives is not an imperfect rendering of what later generations will express more accurately: it embodies its own unique vision of the world, which can be grasped, but not translated totally into the language of another culture.”

Berlin understands that Vico rejects the notion that any one language can adequately express reality, yet Berlin privileges the language of abstract theoretical thinking at the expense of corporeal imaginations of the first poets. Luft observes, “Berlin never appreciates the corporeal nature of poetic making; for him there is always a ‘perpetual activity of mind.’” Berlin imposes his own concept of mind and subjectivity onto the imaginations the first poets.

Let’s consider how Berlin misconstrues the poetic images of the first thinkers. According to Berlin they are made through a kind of inner knowing. He asserts that the Vichian subject turns away from the natural world, which is not of his own making, and towards the objects of his own making in order to attain knowledge. The subject can have an inner knowledge about his own creations, whereas, he is precluded from an inner knowledge about nature since it is not of his own making. Thus, there is a great divorce between nature and artifice, between the constructed and the given. Berlin notes, “men had only an outside view, as it were, of what went

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on the stage of nature. Men could only know ‘from the inside’ only what they had made themselves and nothing else.”  

This reading hinges upon Vico’s use of the scholastic verum-factum principle. Below I will argue that this reading, which pits nature against the artificial constructions of humanity is false. Merleau-Ponty’s gestural theory of expression for instance will show us the ambiguous relationship between the natural and conventional in Vico’s theory of linguistic creativity.

Here, I wish only to show the way in which this notion of maker’s knowledge propounded here is falsely applied to the subject. Luft explains, “Berlin’s idealism is explicit in his claims that Vico makes an absolute distinction between inner and outer life, that Vico’s great achievement is to add a new form of knowledge to traditional forms - that of self-knowledge, an understanding of the inner life from the inside.”  

Just as we have an insider’s view of the things we make, Berlin argues, so to do we have an insider’s view of ourselves. Berlin observes, “with regard to ourselves we were privileged observers with an inside view...We possess self-awareness.”  

Here the subject is reduced to a pure knowing mind. Berlin takes up the idealist position that we have direct access to a translucent, self-mastering Subject. Luft writes that Berlin, “understands the certum so completely as the product of subjective activity that its materiality and temporality - the ‘raw concreteness of the facare’ - are lost.”  

Just as the dipintura was eliminated from the text, the vibrating, shaking, grumbling bodies of the giants at the scene of their first creation are stripped away. Berlin turns Vico’s verum-factum principle into a making and knowing reduced to the realm of pure thought. Later, I will show that Vico’s subject is entirely different than the idealistic subject that Berlin attributes to Vico. Vico never

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300 Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind, 342.
301 Luft, Vico’s Uncanny Humanism, 40.
302 Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind, 343.
303 Luft, Vico’s Uncanny Humanism, 40.
imagines that we have a privileged clear and transparent access to ourselves. Berlin’s idealistic notion of subjectivity, which he projects upon Vico’s bestioni, prevents him from recognizing the original, corporeal expressions of the first poetic making. Their making is, in fact, born through our inability to see ourselves clearly. As Palmer affirms, “the making of human institutions is born of our inability to have clear and distinct ideas of ourselves.”

Man, recall, fashions his world by not knowing.

Berlin’s reading of the verum-factum principle, which treats the made as intimately related to the inner life of the mind, strips the ‘made’ of its material, earthly residue. Just as scholars overlook the material section of the New Science, so too is the material dimension of originary poesis or making ignored. Berlin asks, “How can early men, whose signs were mute, who spoke with their bodies, who sang before they spoke, be judged by the criteria of our own sophisticated culture?”

Surely, Berlin is too steeped in the sophisticated culture of the Academies to see Vico’s answer: we must bracket out our judgments and re-narrate the first narrations to ourselves. He simply writes, “These men literally saw what we do not see.” Our aim is to see what the first poets saw; therefore, we must leave Berlin’s idealist impositions. Vico’s New Science initiates the reader into a new way of seeing; this initiation is announced by the image that is the introduction.

3.2 Verene Honors the Image

Verene, unlike Berlin, attempts to throw off the shackles of the idealist tradition in order to offer a more genuine interpretation of Vico. He faithfully attempts to follow Vico’s logic of descent towards beginnings. Verene was the first thinker to direct our attention to Vico’s self-

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306 Ibid., 350.
proclaimed master key. He observes, “It is rare that an author gives us such a direct statement of
the central premises of his thought and surprising that he provides such clear guidance for its
interpretation." It is astonishing that scholars have ignored Vico’s explicit directions. Verene
continues, “More surprising is the fact that none of the commentators who have written book
length studies of Vico’s thought has made the imaginative universal the basis of their
interpretation.” Let us look at the key passage to which Verene refers to here and which
provides the basis of his work on Vico.

We find that the principle origins both of languages and letters lies in the fact
that the first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets
who spoke in poetic characters. This discovery, which is the master key of this
Science, has cost us the persistent research of almost all our literary life, because
with our civilized natures we [moderns] cannot at all imagine and can
understand only by great toil the poetic nature of the first men.

To be fair to the scholars who overlooked this master key, Vico warns that it takes great toil and
effort to grasp the poetic speech of the first peoples who were all poets. Vico admits that its
discovery consumed his scholarly life. He seems to be warning the reader that it too will take
him great effort to realize this discovery; and, as the history of scholarship shows, it lay hidden
until Verene saw it clearly. Verene emphasizes the imaginative universals, poetic characters or
imaginative genera that make up Vico’s poetic wisdom. Vico’s poetic wisdom contrasts with
the erudite wisdom of the scholars in the last age. He observes, “Vico’s theory of poetic wisdom
is the basis for the New Science. The bulk of the work itself is taken up by it; his discovery of
the true Homer is offered in evidence of it; and the chapters on the course and recourse of nations

308 Ibid., 67.
309 NS par. 34.
310 Verene affirms that Vico uses these terms interchangeably. See Verene, “Vico’s Science of Imaginative
Universals,” 304.
are developments from it.”

The second book of the *New Science* is titled Poetic Wisdom and it is to this portion of his text that most scholars turn. Verene explains that poetic wisdom, “designates the entire manner of thought and acting through which the human world originally comes into being.” Wisdom according to Vico begins with the Muse and divination. It is born out of the fear of the gods, the thundering, roaring voice of Zeus and the interpretation of his signs, which infuse the earth with divinity, not with the learned reflection of philosophers. The intelligible universals of the philosophers in the *Age of Men* are derivative of the imaginative universals which make up the poetic wisdom of the gods and heroes. Verene explains, “The intelligible universal or generic concept of this third age is that of the traditional Aristotelian logic.”

The logic of the philosophers is inconceivable without the logic of the poets: we must be children before we become adults. We will see this natural order of things traced out in his pedagogical theories.

Verene makes a major contribution to Viconian scholarship by highlighting Vico’s poetic wisdom and poetic characters. Pompa and Berlin, for instance, pay little attention to Vico’s master key which is at the core of his poetic wisdom. Verene suggests that there is one overarching reason for the failure of scholars to draw out the philosophical implications of Vico’s poetic characters; he intones, “Since the imaginative universal is ultimately a theory of the image and not of the concept in any traditional sense, it causes great difficulties for standard philosophical interpretation.” Verene takes on the difficult task of making Vico’s theory of the image known in a tradition hostile to it. In so doing, he takes us beyond Berlin’s idealistic

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313 NS par. 364.
317 Verene, *Vico’s Science of Imagination*, 68.
reading. Luft notes, “Verene transcends Berlin’s more overt idealism by replacing imaginative activity to the bodily responses of the first men, to the point that ‘mentality’ is on the border between animals and humans.”\(^{318}\) This draws us closer to the wholly corporeal imaginations yet still retains the mind-body dualism, plaguing idealist thought. Unlike Berlin, Verene, moreover, “grasps the significance of Vico’s insight that language enables the bestioni to cross that border.”\(^{319}\) Verene aptly captures the birth of poetic characters and their ontological depth.

Despite Verene’s heroic efforts to salvage the imagistic ground of Vico’s poetic science, his work has some shortcomings. Verene creates his own term to describe Vico’s activity of narrating the *New Science*. He calls the backward glance of Vico, the historian, *recollective fantasia*. The language of *recollective fantasia* is, he explains, the “power to speak” about the originary fantasia, which gave birth to human reality. It is the language reflective philosophers can use to access the original powers of fantasia.\(^{320}\) The addition of this category of imagination is problematic. Ultimately, the truth arrived at through the philosopher-historian’s *recollective fantasia* or form of making takes precedence over the original fantasia of the first poets, Vico’s primary concern. Luft observes, “For him, as for Berlin, the made convertible with the true is not the original ontological factum, but a ‘truth’ remade by philosopher-historians.”\(^{321}\) Although he captures the kind of making that generates the poetic characters, he does not see the truth of the first narratives until what is originally made is re-made by the reflective thinking of the erudite philosopher. This is where I believe that Cavarero’s notion of the storyteller and her relationship to the narratable self will help us to understand Vico’s role, without dishonoring the originary stories and events.

\(^{319}\) Ibid., 42.
\(^{320}\) Verene, *Vico’s Science of Imagination*, 220.
\(^{321}\) Verene, *Vico’s Uncanny Humanism*, 43.
I follow Luft’s notion that the imposition of reflective fantasia rarefies the original, unfamiliar words and subjects them, once again, to the familiarizing lens of refined, reflective thinking. Verene falls into the trap, which Vico warns of. He demonstrates the principle rehearsed above, namely that, “whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand.”

So, despite his heroic attempt to realize Vico’s descent into our murky beginnings, Vico’s first poets are no longer the strangers they are meant to be. By emphasizing the reflective recollection of the philosopher’s backward gaze and locating the truth of Vico’s poetic science there, Verene betrays Vico’s doctrine of beginnings. In other words, he takes the descent with Vico, but forgets to leave behind his own unquestioned idealism. Overall, we can say with Luft that, “Verene’s inability to capture what is truly alien in Vico’s philosophy, to escape the influence of German idealism, reveals the dilemma of Vico scholarship in general.”

In order to preserve the strangeness of Vico’s beginnings, we must look beyond Verene’s analysis.

Verene was influenced by the work of Ernesto Grassi, to whom I now turn. Luft shows that, “Grassi, whom Verene credits with pointing him toward the concreteness of rhetorical language, is more successful in achieving concreteness.”

Grassi draws us closer to the ontological dimension of language elaborated by Vico and other thinkers of the Italian Humanist Renaissance. Like Karl-Otto Apel, Grassi describes Vico as the owl of Minerva. Both Verene and Grassi unearth the ontological function of metaphor, which grounds his poetic logic. Through taking up Heidegger though, Grassi develops a richer reading than Verene. Luft notes, “Though Verene draws on Grassi’s interpretation of language, Grassi himself rethought

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322 NS par. 122.
323 Luft, Vico’s Uncanny Humanism, 42.
324 Ibid., 43.
rhetorical speech in terms of Heidegger’s more radical conception of language as showing.”

He argues that Vico used the tropes of the rhetorical tradition but fashioned them anew by granting them ontological status.

Let us examine the way in which Grassi reveals the ontological dimension of the most important trope in Vico’s corpus. Vico observes, “All the tropes are corollaries of this poetic logic. The most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent is metaphor.” But Vico does not treat metaphor in the *New Science* as a mere rhetorical device. He observes, “this metaphor is certainly not the metaphor that is intended as a rhetorical figure, the mere transposition of meaning from one thing to another...metaphor is nothing other than the modality through which what is ‘originary’ is revealed to us.” Metaphor gives birth to reality. It is an event of originary poesis. Vico, moreover, writes that metaphor, “gives sense and passion to insensate things,” granting them, “the being of animate substances.” Furthermore, as we have seen Vico calls metaphor a “fable in brief.” The metaphorical event that gives birth to the first human place, the giants and their dialogue with the sky, allows for the possibility of the emergence of rational logic. The powers of invention are rooted in our archaic logic; rational logic is to a certain degree incapable of invention. Grassi writes, “Its essence is such that it can possess no ‘inventive character.’”

Grassi shows that rational demonstration is, moreover, divorced from the concrete. He writes of rational demonstration, “It shows something (*deiknumi*: I show) upon (*apo*) the basis of

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325 Ibid., 187.
326 *NS* par. 404.
328 *NS* par. 404.
329 *NS* par. 404.
reasons. It cannot be bound to time, places, or personalities; it is unrhetorical.”

The kind of showing that metaphor exhibits is entirely different. “Archaic logic is fecund; it involves a creative showing through the original **poieses** of founding metaphor.”

We can witness this kind of creative showing with the birth of the first poetic character Jove. Verene affirms that through, “the image, which is the metaphor understood on this level, the primary act of intelligibility takes place.”

Here Verene reveals that this act of metaphorical creativity is an expression of the **verum-factum** principle.

### 3.3 A Look at Luft

Verene directed us towards the master key yet did not grasp the radical implications of Vico’s discovery. Luft explains strange and radical import of Vico’s master key. Luft captures the sense in which Vico’s master key makes us strangers to ourselves. She observes:

> Vico’s master key frees him from the conceits of Platonists, Cartesians, and philosophers, most of whom believe that humans are by nature not only rational but dualistic beings, possessing both a body and a subjective substance, whether soul, spirit, ego, consciousness, or mind. It had taken him 20 years to understand that the first men were not merely primitive thinkers, as are savages or children, but were not human at all. Beasts with wholly physical bodies, they were incapable of thought. What made them poets, that is, creators, were the skills of their bodies - perception, memory and imagination (*ingenium*) - from which originated their concrete metaphoric language.

Idealists interpreters have not understood how distant and unfamiliar the first poets truly were. They read into them their own dualistic metaphysics, which separates the mind and body. They cannot apprehend the entirely corporeal thinking of these first peoples. Luft continues, “The first peoples of the human race, Vico shows by his fresh interpretation of myths and poems, were

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332 Ibid., 97.
334 Verene, *Vico’s Science of Imagination*, 83
little more than beasts living a promiscuous, feral existence in the open fields.\textsuperscript{336} Everywhere, idealist interpreters read Vico’s concept of mind from their own intellectualist biases. Yet mind for Vico in the early ages had no trace of refinement or purity. “Though Vico continually refers to ‘mind,’ what makes abstract thought possible is the concrete social practices enabled by poetic language.”\textsuperscript{337} The bodily actions of the poets give birth to the fantasia of mind as detached from the body. Luft calls the imaginative universals, ‘concrete metaphors,’ to emphasize the corporeal nature of the fables\textsuperscript{338} Luft observes, “Even in the third age, when humans become subjective beings, subjectivity can never be other than a factum of the abstract language and practices constructed at the end of the heroic age.”\textsuperscript{339} The men of the third age then are creators as well. They create the conceptual construct, Man, yet they forget that Man is a poetic creation. The subjectivity, which the idealists presuppose in their interpretations of Vico, is nothing but a poetic creation.

We must be clear on the important distinction between metaphor as a mere rhetorical trope and the originary concrete metaphors, created in the age of the gods and heroes. As a professor of Rhetoric, Vico was immersed in the classical tradition of Rhetoric but he reinvented this tradition. Of fundamental importance is the inordinate attention he placed on elocution. As one of the five heads of traditional rhetoric which includes, invention, disposition, elocution, pronunciation, and memory, Vico’s emphasis upon elocution is unusual since it was typically treated as a mere ornament. Over half of his text on Rhetoric, the \textit{Institutes} is devoted to elocution.\textsuperscript{340} In fact, Vico identifies rhetoric with expression. Guiliani observes, “He bases this on the fundamental idea that the study of expressive means cannot be dissociated from mental

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\textsuperscript{336} NS par. 401.
\textsuperscript{337} Luft, “The Divinity of Human Making and Doing in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century,” 431.
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} Goetsch, \textit{Vico’s Axioms}, 72.
\end{flushright}
procedures. Linguistic communication is also mental communication. Thought cannot be tethered from expression.

Likewise, metaphors are not mere ornamental figures of speech as traditional rhetoric treats it. Just as Vico gave primacy to expression in his rhetoric, he gave primacy to the trope of metaphor and confers upon it not only cognitive value, but ontological depth. The originary metaphors are born of poverty of speech, need and utility. Vico observes that poetic language which is grounded upon metaphor, “was born entirely of poverty of language and need of expression.” They are not born of the refined artistry of reflective, individual thinkers. As De Mauro observes, “metaphorical expressions, traditionally viewed as an extrinsic ornament, as rhetorical luxury. Actually did originate and now do originate from the exigence of adhering, with limited resources, to the complexities of reality.” The metaphors are created in response to the needs and demands of the present situation. As our environment changes, so too will the demand for new metaphors.

To clearly see the difference between a concrete metaphor and a mere rhetorical metaphor, we should examine the difference between the tradition use of the topics, or commonplace and what Vico calls the sensory topics. Goetsch summarizes the traditional view of topics. He observes, “topoi have been referred to in two dominant ways in the commonplace tradition: either as locale in mental or imaginative space that ‘contains’ arguments or as speech-within-a-speech that amplifies the subject under consideration.” These are the conventional topics made use of in the Age of Men. Vico, on the other hand, describes originary sensory topics, “The first founders of humanity applied themselves to a sensory topics, by which they

342 NS par. 456.
343 De Mauro, “From Rhetoric to Linguistic Historicism,” 289.
344 Goetsch, Vico’s Axioms, 53.
brought together those properties or qualities or relations of individuals and species which were, so to speak, concrete, and from these created their poetic genera."\(^{345}\) The traditional topics are something that can be taught in a classroom to aid the student or orators ability to find arguments, so that she may having something to say on any given topic. The sensory topics are related to the “primary operations of our mind” which are memory, imagination, and ingenuity.\(^{346}\) The sensory topics regulate these primordial operations. As Vico observes, “it was fitting that the infancy of the world should concern itself with the first operation of the mind, for the world then had need of all inventions for the necessities and utilities of life, all of which had been provided before the philosophers appear.”\(^{347}\) Here we can see the way in which Vico bends the traditional notion of the art of topics to an art that gives birth to the human world.

Through the sensory topics, the first poets gave birth to poetic general or concrete metaphors. In a chapter entitled, “Corollaries concerning Poetic Tropes, Monsters, and Metamorphoses,” Vico clearly affirms the importance he places on metaphor above all the other tropes. He observes, “all the first tropes are corollaries of this poetic logic. The most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent is metaphor. It is most praised when it gives sense and passion to insensate things.”\(^{348}\) Again, he conveys the significance of metaphor, “it is noteworthy that in all the languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate thins are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts and from the human senses and passions.”\(^{349}\) These tropes are not mere figures of speech; rather, as we might expect from a thinker who tethers thinking to expression, they give birth to ideas and institutions. The whole world unfolds itself through the power of metaphor, especially metaphors drawn from the body,

\(^{345}\) NS par. 495.  
\(^{346}\) NS par. 699.  
\(^{347}\) NS par. 691.  
\(^{348}\) NS par. 404.  
\(^{349}\) NS par. 405.
“Thus, head for top or beginning; the brow and shoulders of a hill; the eyes of needles and potatoes…Heaven or the sea smiles; the wind whistles; the waves murmur; a body groans under a great way.”\textsuperscript{350} This process, moreover, is connected to the axiom related above, which Vico now expresses a bit differently, “man in his ignorance makes himself the rule of the universe, for in the examples cited, he has made himself an entire world.”\textsuperscript{351}

This illusory notion of subjectivity plagues idealist treatments of Vico’s \textit{verum-factum} principle. Luft observes, “As Vico slowly begins to grasp the implications of his master key - his insight into the embodied nature of humans and the poetic nature of their making - his understanding of \textit{verum-factum} changes.”\textsuperscript{352} It is primarily the idealist assumptions of a clear, interior, self-mastering, human subject that prevents adequate interpretations of Vico’s transformed \textit{verum-factum} principle. Luft argues, “They miss the sense in which ‘knowing’ becomes an interpretive activity, an immanent making by means of social and linguistic practices in-the-world.”\textsuperscript{353} Despite acknowledging the bestial origins of humanity the idealists and even those who attempt to go beyond idealism, assume a latent human sense of subjectivity in the beasts. Hence, they commit precisely the crime that Vico warns against: the conceit of scholars. They read into the beasts their own refined concept of human subjectivity.

We must appreciate the ontological dimension of metaphoric making elaborated by Vico. Verene comes close to appreciating the intimate relationship between language, body, and thought but his attempts do not succeed since he retains an idealistic concept of mind. Although he realizes that the corporeal imaginations are different than the reflection of humans in the \textit{Age of Man}, he still attributes thought to their originary powers of invention. His notion of thought is

\textsuperscript{350} \textit{NS} par. 405.  
\textsuperscript{351} \textit{NS} par. 405.  
\textsuperscript{352} Luft, \textit{Vico’s Uncanny Humanism}, 25.  
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., 38.
too rarefied to have been present in our archaic, poetic origins. His subjectivism prevents him from fully realizing the embodied nature of thinking.\textsuperscript{354}

Luft, in the spirit of Grassi draws comparisons between Heidegger, Nietzsche, Derrida, Benjamin and Vico to open up new ways for realizing the ontological depth of Vico’s poetic language. She notes that despite their differences, “one finds in all an almost inarticulate effort to capture a shared sense of the existential relation between the poetic word, naming, and the coming to being of things.”\textsuperscript{355} By situating Vico with these thinkers in this regard, Luft carves out a path for us to draw Merleau-Ponty into the conversation. With his unique understanding of the body as expression, I argue that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of expression draws us closes to the corporeal poetic saying that gives birth to the human world in Vico’s corpus.

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 150.  
\textsuperscript{355} Luft, \textit{Vico’s Uncanny Humanism}, 171.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Images as Introductions

Vico commissioned Domenica Antonio Vaccaro to create an engraving to place as the frontispiece of the second edition of the *New Science*. He tells the reader that the allegorical engraving is meant to provide her with an idea of the work before reading it, and additionally, to help her remember it after it is read.\(^{356}\) Vico notes that it is meant “to give the reader some conception of the work before he reads it, and, with such aid as imagination may afford, call it back to mind after he has read it.”\(^{357}\) In other words, it has a didactic aim; it should ease the reader’s entry into the text. The image, moreover, is portrayed as a memory device; this shows Vico’s debt to the traditional art of memory.\(^{358}\) But the allegorical engraving is more than a mere memory device as most scholars have maintained. Gianfranco Cantelli observes the image’s resemblance of the heraldic devices constituting the language of the Heroic Age of Vico’s ideal eternal story, “It was certainly not by chance that Vico, professor of Rhetoric, after having drawn out an entire universe of symbols from the fantasy of the first men, came to condense his own doctrine in an erudite heraldic device and thus retrace the path traversed by his own thought”\(^{359}\)

The image condenses his entire pattern of thought into one figure or design.

Moreover, I argue, its relation to the second age demonstrates Vico’s adoration of the heroic age: Vico wants the reader to reorient her mind according to the poetic logic of the heroes

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\(^{357}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{358}\) Frankel explains that Vico is “following the precepts of ‘artificial memory’ which were widespread in Italy during the Renaissance...However, Vico does not limit himself to using an image as a mnemonic device. In saying that, before reading the work, the reader can conceive its ideas by examining the dipintura, Vico means that the image is also connected to the concepts he is expounding, not through convention and artifice, but through a vital relationship of analogy and resemblance. For Vico the visual element of images is to be used not merely for strengthening the memory, but even more so for understanding spiritual and intellectual concepts.” See Frankel, “The ‘Dipintura’ and the Structure of Vico’s *New Science*,” 45.

and their enchanting word of heraldic devices, medallions, and hieroglyphs. This supports my claim that Vico’s poetic science is meant to infuse our lives with the passionate, sensorial thinking of the *Heroes*, in order to nourish our natural capacity for invention. The heroic emblem eases the reader into the text because it acquaints her with the imagistic thinking constituting what she will find in the heroic age, which circulates throughout the text. Above, we showed that it took Vico many years of practice to read the poets with any delight; his training in metaphysics prevented that pleasure. Vico knows that it will take readers conditioned by the barbarism of reflection strenuous effort to read his poetic science. It is unfamiliar and uncomfortable for readers in the *Age of Man* to encounter a text grounded in heroic images and poetic characters. The sophisticated, erudite reader must reacquaint herself with imagistic, poetic thinking in order to experience the sublime pleasure promised to her.

The engraving is meant to effect this reorientation and redirect the mind to attend to a different form of thinking, one that uses not a trace of reflection or reason. Cantelli tries to adduce Vico’s motivations for placing an engraving at the beginning of his text. “It was probably a *lapsus*, but it was all the more significant therefore.” I do not think this was a mere slip or afterthought on Vico’s part. By placing the image at the beginning of the text and treating it as part and parcel of his introduction, Vico shows that the image has a deep, philosophical relationship to the text.

Beyond any didactic purposes, I maintain that the image reflects the intimate relationship between narrative and the image. On the one hand, the frontispiece mimics the primordial

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360 Ibid., 63.
361 Dan Selcer notes, “Some philosophers assert that the insertion of allegory into philosophical texts must take an instrumental form, reducing its figures to trivial ornamentation of theoretical content and framing philosophical concepts.” See Selcer, *Philosophy and The Book*, 31. We must commit the error of philosophers with regard to Vico’s images. The philosophers identified by Selcer also assert that the allegories “symbolize a sequence of conceptual meanings and exhaust themselves in a finite gesture of interpretation.” See Ibid. Vico’s image does not serve as a mere aid to his commentary. The image is inexhaustible and should not be reduced to the concept or to
images, emblems, and things, which Vico culls from the depths of primordial history in the *New Science*. It mirrors the heroic language in the *Age of Heroes* where the language spoken was “that spoken by means of heroic emblems, or similitude, comparison, images, metaphors…”

In accordance with the heroic language, the *New Science* begins with an image is a metaphor. The image is the story. Our starting-point, then, is the image. It is our initial encounter with Vico’s *New Science*.

Placing an image at the front of the text is a performative display, acting out the imagistic starting-point of language and logic. The image is not meant as a mere ornament to the rational principle demonstrated in the text. Vico’s poetic science reveals that logic and pathos are not originally separated; logic is, in fact, derivative of fables. Vico presents an etymology to demonstrate this point:

> “‘Logic’ comes from logos, whose first and proper meaning was *fabula*, fable, carried over into Italian as *favella*, speech. In Greek the fable was also called mythos, myth, whence comes the Latin *mutus*, mute. For speech was born in mute times as mental or sign language, …whence logos means both word and idea...Thus the first language in the first mute times of the nations must have begun with signs, whether gestures or physical objects...”

The starting-point of the *New Science* mirrors the starting-point of the human world. The story begins with an image that birthed nations; these are the physical gestures, archaic mute words, and things that are the first words and languages.

**Adriana Cavarero** begins her text, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, with an image evocative of the child’s realm: the stork. The stork, she writes, “protagonist of a

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Vico’s commentary upon it. Hence, the image leaves open a place for the reader to narrate the *New Science* for herself as Vico urges the reader to do.

362 *NS* par. 32.

363 Traditional rhetoric treats pathos and logos as dualistic, yet Vico’s new rhetoric goes beyond this.

364 *NS* par. 401.
folklore...brings babies and narrates them fables.”  

The stork is the bearer of tales; it is a storyteller. The most prominent figure on Vico’s dipintura is the statue of Homer; the storyteller of humanity’s infancy. Both Cavarero and Vico begin their texts with images of fabled storytellers. Regrettably, Cavarero does not provide the actual image of the stork, which accompanies the original story as it originally appeared in Karen Blixon’s text, *Out of Africa*. The chapter titles of Cavarero and Vico’s texts mirror each other. Cavarero entitle her introduction, “A stork for an Introduction.” And Vico’s introduction title reads, “Explanation of the Picture Placed as Frontispiece to Serve As Introduction to the Work.”

Both the image of the Stork and the Dipintura are meant as introductions to the written text. I highlight this seemingly trivial similarity because it points to an essential ingredient in the art of narration. In the ratio-mathematical western metaphysical tradition, images and narrations contribute little to rational, logical thought. Beginning with images is a bold move, upturning traditional value hierarchies: Plato’s divided line is upturned.

The image is reminiscent of an archaic, yet ever-present way of knowing. Through meditating upon an image, we are drawn further away from the dominance of the text and abstract, reflective philosophical thinking. This meditation subverts the dominance of abstract philosophical thought. This accords with the theses that Cavarero turns to again and again - the inessentiality of the text. Her image, moreover, evokes the child’s realm, which is in line with her emphasis upon birth and natality. The scholar might ask, what can a child’s tale possibly teach a learned, erudite man? Vico, too, returns to a child’s realm, to the stories born during humanity’s infancy. Throughout the *New Science*, he observes that the first poets had qualities...

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366 Cavarero, like Vico, calls Homer, the storyteller, the first historian. See, Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 124. History does not begin with the written tradition as Hegel maintains but rather the dark, obscure oral ages.
that he found present in the women and children of his day. Women and children retain great powers of imagination because they have not been entirely educated. Their bodies retain the unruly mark of the robust giganti, whose bodies had yet to be refined. In other words, woman and children retain these traits because they are, by and large, untouched by the logic of the learned. Di Pietro notes, “Vico observed that the women of his time remained more imaginative in later life than men because they were not educated so thoroughly - and therefore were spared the detrimental influence of a badly organized school curriculum!”

Vico, a professed autodidact, saw himself on the edges of the Academies, like women and children – and better off for it.

His outsider status accords with the outsider status of woman and children; they were not welcome in the academic kingdom constituted by philosophical discourse. This accords with Cavarero’s contention that women are better off for not having been corrupted by the force of philosophical discourse; they retained their natural ability to share stories. In returning to scenes of birth, Vico and Cavarero enter a domain that has always delighted women and children, namely, the realm of narrative and images. Both begin with traces of the child’s world: their fables and speech, far removed from the discourse of philosophers, in the Age of Men.

Let’s turn to Cavarero’s image of the stork. She tells the story of a man who woke in the middle of the night to fix a leaking dyke. After he plugged the leak he went to bed. When he awoke in the morning and went to his window, he found that by running around in the middle of the night had left the pattern of a stork of the ground. Cavarero describes the true value of the image of the stork. “Rather than simply being an effective, didactic device, it was a gesture that grasped a fundamental truth of the fable. Precisely because the design is the story, rather than just accompanying or illustrating it, the design coincides with is perfectly - in the sense that the

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pattern that every human leaves behind is nothing but their life story.” Although the man in the story is able to see the pattern that he left behind, Cavarero and Arendt demonstrate that we need an other to grant us the gift of the pattern, or the unifying image that is the story of our life.

The man’s haphazard actions in the middle of the night mirrors the experience of the life of nations that Vico uncovered from the thick night of darkness. There is a fusion of intention and accident. Vico demonstrates that humans intend one thing and bring about other, contradictory consequences. The following famous passage has been mistaken as a fledgling expression of Hegel’s cunning of reason. Given our discussion of the true nature of providence above, we can see that his notion of the unpredictability of actions is more in line with Cavarero’s “mixture of intention and accident” that accompanies any life story. Cavarero observes, “Life cannot be lived like a story, because the story always comes afterwards, it results; it is unforeseeable and uncontrollable, just like life.” Likewise, the early poets could not predict the consequences of their actions. It is only after the action has occurred that the meaning of the events can be divined, or revealed. “The significance of the story lies precisely in the figural unity of the design, and this simple ‘resulting’ does not follow any projected plan.” The story or image confers the gift of unity. The pattern can only be seen after the action takes place.

The coins, medals, and medallions uncovered by Vico are the footprints that the early poets left behind. Vico, like the man viewing the pattern of the stork from his window, is the narrator who, from the “high impregnable citadel” of his desk divines the pattern of the actions - the ideal eternal story. His story gives meaning to the early poetic expressions of humanity. In

370 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 2.
371 Ibid., 1.
372 Ibid., 3.
373 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 1.
Karen Blixon’s tale, it was the narrator of the child’s tale who traced the stork on the page for the child. Vico, like the narrator of Blixon’s tale, gives us an image of the ideal eternal story.

The storyteller, observes Cavarero, gives pleasure to the listener of the tale since the tale responds to his/her desire to hear her own life story. “There is an ethic of the gift in the pleasure of the narrator. The one who narrates not only entertains and enchants...but gives to the protagonists of his/her story their own stork.”

This is precisely the pleasure that Vico promises to the reader of the New Science. Pleasure will fill her body as she meditates upon his principles. And by meditation, Vico means narration. This sublime pleasure, I argue, is due to the fact that Vico’s narration responds to the narratable self’s desire to hear her tale told. I am projecting Cavarero’s theory of narratable identity on the singular level onto Vico’s narrative of our collective identity – a move not be permitted by Cavarero.

Let us now turn to Vico’s Autobiography to see how Cavarero’s theory of the narratable self parallels Vico’s life story. I argue that his work expresses Cavarero’s notion that the story responds to our desire, and that, moreover, our greatest desire is to hear the story of our own birth.

4.2 Birth and Fabulous Lies

In considering life stories, we must not neglect the centrality of desire. Merleau-Ponty affirms centrality of this desire for our own life stories. He observes:

This desire for a total manifestation animates life as it does literature, and that beneath the petty motives it is this desire which make the writer want to be read, which makes man sometimes become a writer, and which in any case makes man speak and everyone want to account for himself in the eyes of another x -

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375 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 3.
376 Ibid., 4.
which means that everyone thinks of his life and all lives as something that can in every sense of the word be told as a “story.”

Beyond the desire to hear our life story from the mouth of the other, what is really desired? In short, the stork. The narratable self mostly desires the stork, or, in other words, “the unity, in the form of a story, which the tale confers to identity.” Cavarero charges Arendt with neglecting the category of unity. To show the intimate relationship between unity and the unique, Cavarero points out they share the same etymological root. Although Vico does not use the word unity to describe the aim of his narration, he does say that his aim is to place the fragments of our archaic memories into a uniform form. He writes, “The great fragments of antiquity, hitherto useless to science because they lay begrimed, broken and scattered, shed great light when cleaned, pieced together, and restored.” Vico is putting the pieces into the unified form or pattern of the ideal eternal story. I will use Cavarero’s strategy of etymology to show that unity and unique share an etymological root with uniformity as well. Just as the unity given in the form of the story responds to our greatest desire, Vico shows that we take a natural delight in uniformity. “The human mind is naturally impelled to take delight in uniformity.” Vico observes that when we apply this delight in uniformity to fables, we realize that we use common patterns to make sense of our singular actions.

On the collective level, Vico observes, poets give meaning to the actions of heroes through the application of concrete metaphors. He writes that our delight in uniformity, “is confirmed by the custom the vulgar have when creating fables of men famous for this or that, and placed in these or those circumstances, of making the fable fit the character.”

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377 Merleau-Ponty, Signs, 75.
378 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 37
379 NS par. 367.
380 NS par. 204.
381 NS par. 205.
actions are made to accord with the concrete metaphor available. Vico continues, “Thence springs this important consideration in poetic theory: the true war chief, for example, is the Godfrey that Torquato Tasso imagines; and all the chiefs who do not conform throughout to Godfrey are not true chiefs of war.”

This expression of poetic truth elaborated by Vico appears to lend itself to a form of postmodernism propounding the notion of the self as an artificial, social construct. The actor is reduced to the poetic character, which symbolically constructs her identity. Verene opens the way for such a reading. He observes, “The individual is what it is because its being is the being of a type. Since the figure of the fable or poetic character is not formed by abstraction from individuals or particulars already commanding their own empirical reality, the poetic character is the reality, and physical reality is to shape itself in terms of it.”

The story certainly shapes the singular existent. The story confers the gift of meaning. Storytelling has ontological depth, in that the person realizes himself or herself through the story. Yet, Cavarero takes pains to show that the form of the story can never eviscerate the living, breathing existence. She preserves the singular existents unique status by emphasizing that the desire the always precedes the story.

Although Vico acknowledges the power of symbolic form here, it is not at the expense of the living, breathing actor or agent of action, the hero who inspires the storyteller. The story always comes after the action. Rather, Vico shows (in Cavarerean terms) that since the actor takes such delight in uniformity, he calls for a story, which is the unity of events, to express the meaning or truth of his life. That the meaning of our lives are expressed through narrations does not reduce us to textually constituted subjects since it is first and foremost the desire for the tale that calls for the storyteller’s response (in the form of a tale) in the first place. Cavarero

382 NS par. 205.
bemoans the contemporary obsession with the form of the story. In order to draw scholarly attention away from the story itself to the desiring self, she risks devaluing the significance of the story, without which the narratable self would not realize it’s identity. I suspect that she trenchantly emphasizes the primacy of desire as a rhetorical strategy to fend off those intellectuals who fetishize the text. In this scenario, the desiring self is the David, so to speak, and the cadre of intellectuals privileging symbolic discourse over the living, breathing existent is the Goliath. She is coming to the rescue of the part of storytelling most in need of defense given the academic climate. We desire the pattern or fable that will render our lives something more than a mere sequence of events; the story gives our random, haphazard experiences meaning. “This unity is nothing other than the story narrated by someone from beginnings to end, or at least, from the beginning until now.”384 The unified story delights the narratable self because it responds to our greatest desire.

Against postmodernists who revel in the fragmentary, Cavarero affirms that the singular existent is one and unified at birth, yet this unity is then lost. “Indeed, the first and fundamental chapter of the life story that our memory tells us is already incomplete. The unity of the self - which lies in the miracle of birth...is already irremediably lost in the very moment the same self begins to commemorate herself. This loss of unity gets turned into the lack that feeds desire.”385 This is why we speak of childhood as a loss - personal memory cannot access it. “Autobiographical memory always recounts a story that is incomplete from the beginning...and it is this first chapter of the story that the narratable self stubbornly seeks with all her desire.”386 The loss and lack of unity fuels the narratable self’s desire for narration. The narratable self longs for the story of her own birth, a story it can never tell. And it knows that to fulfill this

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384 Cavarero, Relating Narrative, 39.
385 Ibid.
386 Ibid.
desire it must begin at the beginning, just as Vico’s doctrine of beginnings demands. “But it wants to begin with birth, because that which sustains it is the desire for unity that only the narration can offer in tangible form.”\textsuperscript{387} The singular existent can embark upon new adventures and carry out different actions, although she can never predict their consequences. But that the life she lives (however she may live it) can eventually be told in the form of a story is what is important for Cavarero. Many various stories can emerge about the self, although they are always only a response to the plural actions of the singular existent. The unity that the tale confers is always incomplete and open to reconfigurations. Vico, moreover, uses the discourse of narration over philosophical discourse in the \textit{New Science} because the story of our birth, even on the collective level, responds to the narratable self’s desire for unity – a unity which only narration can confer. But as Vico has also shown, the birth of things is always obscure and shrouded in fable.

Other theorists, such as Ricoeur and MacIntyre, discuss the relationship between narrative identity and unity, yet they overlook the centrality of desire, thereby exposing the narratable self to the danger of being reduced to linguistically constituted, textual subjects.\textsuperscript{388} Emphasizing the centrality of the actor’s desire is necessary for Cavarero because it prevents the postmodern tendency to focus on the form of the story over and above the living, breathing existent who calls for the story in the first place. This motivates her thesis of the “inessentiality of the text” in regards to the narratable self.\textsuperscript{389} As Arendt observes, “the problem of narration is never configured as a narratological question; it in no way implies a focalized study of the narrative text that analyzes its style or semiotics.”\textsuperscript{390} The symbolic forms can never take

\textsuperscript{387} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{389} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid.
precedence over action, word, and deed. The desiring, exposed, vulnerable fragile existent comes first; the story is always only a response to their actions. “Emphasizing desire keeps the text from swallowing up the singular, corporeal existent.”\textsuperscript{391} This emphasis acts as a fortress against the realm of philosophical discourse and its penchant for generalizations and abstractions. Paralleling Vico’s conceit of scholars, Cavarero argues that the philosophers conceive of the world in their own image. They impose their own lifeless, abstract discourse onto the body. She writes, echoing Vico, “One could indeed maliciously suspect that the whole affair about the centrality of the text, which reduces the existence of the living to a status of extra-textuality, depends on the well-known tendency of intellectuals to represent the world in their likeness and image.”\textsuperscript{392} This is but one way of expressing Vico’s conceit of scholars. Later, I will argue that this emphatics defense against the voracious appetite of the intellectuals, although effective in preserving the reality of the living existent and relevant in the domain of scholarship, has prevented Cavarero from drawing together her own hermeneutic interpretations of the collective story of humanity and its relationship to personal identities in her text, \textit{In Spite of Plato}, with her theory of personal identity on the singular level in, \textit{Relating Narratives}.

Now, I would like to turn to Vico’s \textit{Autobiography} to apply Cavarero’s concept of the narratable self to Vico’s own life story. Cavarero observes, “Biography and autobiography are bound together in a single desire.”\textsuperscript{393} I would like to briefly describe the circumstances, which brought about Vico’s \textit{Autobiography}. He was invited to write his life story for the purpose of providing young minds with models for exemplary intellectual lives; it was to appear in a volume alongside the life stories of the most brilliant intellectuals in Italy of his day; the volume never came to fruition but Vico was able to publish it in a journal. Shortly after the publication

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\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 42. \\
\textsuperscript{392} Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narrative}, 76. \\
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., 33.
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of the 1731 edition of the *New Science*, Vico published a continuation of this *Autobiography*. Today, his *Autobiography* is made up of these two parts, which he wrote during the writing of the first and second editions of the *New Science*. It is outside the scope of this paper to consider the full breadth of the Autobiography; I will rather focus on a few key elements that I find accord with Cavarero’s theory of narrative identity. Verene observes, “Vico’s *Autobiography* has not been misinterpreted: it has hardly been interpreted at all.” Although information has been gathered about the *Autobiography* the question of its philosophical import has rarely been addressed - Cavarero’s work will help us to draw out the philosophical meaning of his life story. In this way, we honor Vico in a way that scholarship has yet to do.

The *Autobiography* demonstrates the Cavarerean notion that one cannot tell one’s own story, especially the story of their own birth and that, moreover, to hear the story of our own birth is our greatest desire. Let’s see how these ideas are immediately traced out in the first paragraph of the *Autobiography*, which is incredibly rich with metaphors and symbolism. Since it announces the major themes of the entire work, it is worth citing in full:

Giambattista Vico was born in Naples in the year 1670 of upright parents who left a good name after them. His father was of a cheerful disposition, his mother of a quite melancholy temper; both contributed to the character of their child. He was a boy of high spirits and impatient of rest; but at the age of seven he fell head first from the top of a ladder to the floor below, and remained a good five hours without motion or consciousness...The surgeon, indeed, observing the cranium and considering the long period of unconsciousness, predicted that he would either die of it or grow up an idiot. However by God’s grace neither part of the prediction came true, but as a result of this mischance he grew up with a melancholy and irritable temperament such as belonging to men of ingenuity and depth, who, thanks to the one, are quick as lightning in perception, and thanks to the other, take no pleasure in verbal cleverness or falsehood.

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395 Ibid., viii.
Immediately, the reader is alerted to the anti-Cartesian position of Vico - his fable is a direct challenge to Descartes’ self-proclaimed ‘fable’ in the *Discourse on Method*. We immediately notice that Vico does not use the first person of Descartes’ fable of himself. Fisch observes, “The very choice of the third person is a reaction from the ubiquitous ‘I’ of the *Discourse*.”

We will explore this rhetorical strategy in depth and draw out its philosophical implications below. The fall, moreover, indicates the anti-Cartesian stance of Vico’s philosophical life. “In contrast to the Cartesian view of the subject as essentially disembodied mind...and as the firm certain foundation of all knowledge, Vico drafts a picture of the subject in its full etymological, anti-Cartesian force as *sub-jectum*, literally thrown under without a firm foundation, losing control of oneself, and provisionally without consciousness.”

Vico announces, by relating the incidence of the fall, that he is not master of his identity, which is moreover, inextricably bound up with his body. The period of unconsciousness, moreover, indicates a departure from the enlightenment attitude that idolizes clarity and light; Vico, rather, descends into the dark, depths of the pre-reflective attitude. Next, we learn that the erudite, learned man of science, the physician, errors in his predictions. “The physician, who is the natural philosopher, misreads the signs of the sickness according to the mechanical law of cause and effect.”

These signal Vico’s departure from the enlightenment framework.

Next, let’s consider the order and arrangement of the first paragraph of Vico’s life story and relate it to the order of the ideal eternal story in the *New Science*. Against, the paragraph itself tends towards the image: it is a condensed expression, like the heraldic devices. Or we may say that the paragraph is a metaphor in that it is a “fable in brief.” Verene breaks the paragraph into three parts, which he argues, accords with the three ages of humanity.

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399 Ibid., 22.
demonstrated in the *New Science*. Upon his birth, the child dwells in the natural world in communion with the sensorial world of unreflective experience. Verene explains, “Vico, like his first men, ‘the children of the human race,’ is a natural being, full of spontaneity and activity, running about the world.” The fall symbolizes the sequence of birth and rebirth: “after the fall he is born as a different person.” The surgeon represents the frailty of human prediction. He heroically survives the fall, which indicates his entrance into the *Heroic* age, where he must appear before others and act. Before the fall, moreover, his mother’s *melancholia* was balanced by his father’s cheerfulness; after the fall, his mother’s melancholia dominates. He connects ingenuity with *melancholia*. Vico, moreover, contrasts ingenuity with reflection. In the *Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* he associates imagination with the mother figure as well, calling imagination, “the eye of mother wit, just as judgment is the eye of intellect.” The relation of ingenuity with the lightning at the end of the first paragraph is clearly a reference to the poetic character, Jove.

Verene, in sum, lines up the pattern of the first paragraph with the ideal eternal story, “In the space of the first paragraph of his *Autobiography*, Vico has brought himself through a whole course, from his birth to his adult character as a philosopher, ending with his conception of barbarity and falsity, which applies to the atmosphere he finds himself in.” Finally, the child finds himself a man, exercising his critical powers of man amongst the barbarians of the *Modern Age*. Birth and growth mark the divine age; maturity, the heroic age; and, decadence and dissolution the human age.

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401 Ibid., 167.
404 White, “The Tropics of History,” 76.
The pattern of birth, second heroic birth, and inevitable death follows the narrative pattern of life stories elaborated by Arendt and Cavarero. Narrative springs from the inescapable fact that we are beings who are born and who will die. The second birth is the identity we achieve through action and deed. Arendt observes, “With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance...its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.” The spontaneous impulse towards speech and action is heroic - the hero leaves his private quarters and acts in the world, exposing herself to others.

This second birth marks Vico’s passage into heroism where he goes out into the world and invites the company of others into his life and lets himself become, “someone about whom a story can be told.” Once we act and speak in the world, we open up the possibility for our stories to be told. This is the true sense of hero. Arendt writes, “The hero the story discloses needs no heroic qualities; the word ‘hero’ originally, that is, in Homer, was no more than a name given each free man...about whom a story could be told.” Cavarero follows Arendt’s recovery of the term hero as “someone about whom a story can be told.” Our second birth is our becoming someone about whom a story can be told. We must leave our private dwellings in order to become heroes. This makes the solitude of the Academies and forests even more pernicious. We cannot become heroes in solitude; we must take the heroic effort to appear before others.

The ancient belief in the daimon further expresses the necessity of appearing before others in order to have our life-story told. The daimon was a sort of guardian spirit that

405 Arendt, The Human Condition, 177.
406 Ibid., 186.
407 Ibid., 186.
expressed a person’s unique identity and yet could not be seen by him or her; only others can see the person’s daimon.\footnote{Ibid., 193.} We cannot see, let alone master, ourselves. Merleau-Ponty has remarkably similar things to say about one’s style. He observes, “it is just as recognizable for others and just as little visible to him as his silhouette.”\footnote{Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Signs}, 90.} Our faces and gestures are not available to our own gaze. Judith Butler clarifies, “this exposure that I am constitutes, as it were, my singularity. I cannot will it away, for it is a feature of my very corporeality and, in this sense, of my life. Yet it is not that over which I can have control.”\footnote{Judith Butler, \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 33.} From the moment of birth I am an exposable, vulnerable, fragile self, who takes a risk every time I appear before the other. Yet I must take the risk of appearing before the other in my fragility in order to become someone about whom a story can be told.

Cavarero explains, “The \textit{who} is simply exposed; or better, finds herself always already exposed to another, and consists in this reciprocal exposition.”\footnote{Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narratives}, 89.} Pure exposure is the basis of intersubjective unity, according to Cavarero. Vico’s story of the self and of humanity, relates the tale of a being \textit{who} is entirely exposed. As we saw clearly in chapter two, the giganti do not fashion the world from an inner mind or interior subjectivity. As Cavarero demonstrates, “they are constituted by a being together [\textit{essere insieme}], which, within the plural sphere of appearance, shows their uniqueness and guarantees their reality.”\footnote{Ibid., 88.} Vico’s first poets are entirely exposed, and lack any intellectualist trace of human subjectivity, a point that idealists miss, as Luft has shown above. Cavarero explains, “the ontological status of the \textit{who} - as exposed, relational altruistic - is totally external.”\footnote{Ibid., 89.} In his \textit{Autobiography} Vico does not speak with the voice of a mysterious internal ‘I.’ He speaks through the voice of the other,
demonstrating the relationality of identity. He reveals who he is, by showing the many ways in which he appears to others, and the chance encounters, conversations, slips, mishaps, that all contribute to the narrative that is his life story.

Moreover, even his reflective work is composed amidst others. He writes of himself that he wrote, “in the midst of turmoil and distraction of the household and often in conversation with friends.”414 Again, he writes, “he had prepared his lecture the evening before, working until five in the morning in the midst of the conversation of his friends and the cries of his children, as was his custom, whether reading, writing, or thinking.”415 Vico tells the story of a man in constant relation with others; even during the solitary pursuits of reading, writing, and thinking, he is engaged with others. His voice is entirely bound up with others in a dialogic relation. This is perhaps another way for Vico to buffer himself from the solitude of spirit he found characteristic of the Academies. His science was born in sociality with others.416 As Cavarero affirms we are one, unitary, singular, and exposable self at birth. And, as every mother knows, a small crying voice usually accompanies the infants entrance into the world.

Above, we looked at the way storytelling follows the tripartite structure of birth - rebirth - and death. Storytelling springs from another natural tripartite structure as well: the tripartite structure of beginning, middles, and end; this should also be brought to bear upon Verene’s tripartite analysis. Vico as we have said is a champion of the second heroic period - wherein the heroes struggle to invent themselves, somewhere in between the crude barbarism of the bestioni

415 Ibid., 163.
416 Conversely, Verene draws out the aspects of the Autobiography that portray Vico as a lonely, misunderstood melancholic genius. Verene cites, for instance, Verene points to the end of the New Science where Vico ascends to his desk which he calls a ‘citadel.’ This confirms Verene’s belief that all autobiographies are motivated by a “lonely relation to the world.” Verene, The Idea of Autobiography, 71. We have pointed out the fact that Vico portrayed himself as an outcast and an outsider as well. But amongst his children, friends, and in the woods, Vico seems to be at home in the world. He captures the loneliness of the condition of barbaric reflection so well, because he realizes the necessity of appearing before others and relating narratives in order to realize ourselves fully.
and the reflective barbarism of the philosophers. The *Heroic Age*, I argue, is where we should situate Arendt and Cavarero’s theory of narrative identity. It stands apart from the discourse of philosophers and yet is not limited to the mute, physical objects that carved out the first human world; the age of storytellers, poets, minstrels and bards stands obscurely and ambiguously in between these two conditions and forms of discourse. Of course this problematizes the notion that narration has a linear plot structure. We saw that the first, true narrations did not have beginnings, middles, and ends. But narration remains responsive to concrete, situated lived experience. Moreover, storytelling responds to desire in a way that the discourse of the third age, the *Age of Man*, cannot. Verene’s concept of *recollective fantasia* is a product his own age, the *Age of Man*.

Now that I have uncovered the providential (natural) pattern motivating his life story, which is made up of a beginning, middle and end, I can consider the next defining feature of the *Autobiography* set forth in the first paragraph. This is Vico’s use of the third person. Above, we noted that it is a reaction to Descartes’ *Discourse*, yet Verene suggests another possibility. Verene notes that Vico is influenced by the Arcadian Tradition, exemplified by the poet Gabriello Chiabrera’s use of the third person in his life story. Although Vico may have been influenced by the style of the poet, the true model that Vico is responding to is Descartes’. Verene observes, “There are no genuine models that Vico is following except for his explicit opposition to Descartes.” Mazzotta agrees with Verene’s suggestion that Vico is influenced by the Arcadian tradition, yet Mazzotta shows that Vico uses this technique in order to demonstrate a philosophical point. Mazzotta observes, “for Vico the narrative technique turns into a basis for a rigorous epistemological argument: in his handling of it, the point of the third-

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418 Ibid., 68.
person narrative is that I am forever another.” Verene, argues for the unique originality and unprecedented nature of Vico’s Autobiography. He observes, “I would like to suggest another possibility for Vico’s original approach to the life story; the use of the third person shows that one is incapable of telling one’s own life story. One always needs another to tell the story of their life. Like the man stumbling in the dark before he created the stork, Vico, in his Autobiography, describes the way in which he haphazardly, and circumstantially agitated the principles of the New Science in his mind. Vico understood that he could only really see himself through the eyes of another.

But Cavarero warns that one cannot simply make an other of oneself in order to tell one’s own story. This strategy denies the need of real other, singular existent whom we must relate and expose ourselves to in order to be granted the gift of the story. Although this is Vico’s strategy, his performance indicates that he is aware of the fallibility of this strategy. His lie about the date of his birth suggests that he wants the reader to realize that the task of self-narration is impossible. In order receive the gift of identity through the tale of another, we need a real living, breathing other to give us that story.

Verene argues that, “As readers of Vico’s text, we must at least entertain the hypothesis that Vico intends something for the reader by falsifying his birth-date.” There are several possible reasons why Vico may have committed this error, including a mistake by the printer, a family tradition that Vico followed as a child, or his father changing his birth-date to fit in with his classmates (as parents even do today). Verene suggest, additionally, that Vico may have been making a symbolic connection with the number seven. By attaching his life to this symbolism,

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Vico would have been attempting to demonstrate his greatness like other humanists had done in the past. 421

Whether or not the lie is deliberate, it still reveals the obscurity of beginnings elaborated by Vico in his *New Science*. Mazzotta observes that “what is decisive in one’s life - one’s own birth date - lies beyond any possible determination by oneself. Whether deliberate or not, moreover, the error shows that there is never sufficient, indubitable knowledge to guarantee the truth of one’s self representation.”422 Vico’s lie show that no one has full access to the story of his or her own birth; we are not the masters of our identities. The narratable self is essentially in need of the other to tell their life story. Cavarero is clear that the story we most desire, the story of our own birth is impossible to tell on our own. Vico’s lie beautifully illustrates her point – whether deliberate or not.

The philosophers, tragically, are not concerned with the story of their birth. In the sphere of philosophical discourse, it is irrelevant. And yet the effects of ignoring the story of our birth, both singularly and collectively are dangerous. Cavarero rereads the story of Oedipus outside the Freudian interpretation, which has dominated the myth to date. Above we observed the tragic fate of philosophical discourse. Although Oedipus is able to define what he is with the logic of the philosopher, he is unable to say who he is. He is unaware of the story of his own birth. Vico tries to save us of the philosopher’s tragic fate by giving us the story of who we are on the collective level in the *New Science*. The *Autobiography* teaches us, that we need another to tell us who we are, to relate the story of our own birth. Both demonstrate the obscurity of all beginnings. “The nature of everything born or made betrays the crudeness of origin. It is thus

421 Ibid., 178-10.
and not otherwise that we must conceive the origins of poetic wisdom.”  We have no direct, immediate access to our birth. The obscurity of beginnings only highlights the obscurity that obstructs direct access to the self throughout all our lives. The recovery of our beginnings is our greatest desire. Cavarero’s explains, “Autobiographical memory always recounts a story that is incomplete from the beginning. It is necessary to go back to the narration told by others, in order for the story to begin where it really began; and it is this first chapter that the narratable self stubbornly seeks with all of her desire.”

Vico, the philosopher on the edge of the Academies, attempts to begin at the beginning of his life story and errors, but this error points to the truth of life stories.

Returning to his birth in the Autobiography, moreover, demonstrates aspects of Vico’s principles of birth elaborated above, this time on the singular level. The principle revealed how things are born this way and not another. This principle is carried out in the story of Vico’s life told by himself. Vico’s aim to, “demonstrate that his intellectual life was bound to be ‘such as it was and not otherwise’ appears in a reformulation as a proof in his New Science. Most importantly, Vico shows that his life was to unfold this way and not another because he was born of this mother and not another. Philosophers who dwell in the Academies, in the realm of the universal definitions and philosophical discourse typically ignore the fact that they are born of this mother and not another; they rarely tether their intellectual life to the stories of their birth.

By returning to life stories, which entails an acknowledgement of the mother, we can replenish intellectual thought today. As Cavarero observes, “birth, the act by which embodied individuals are born and actualized, will also restore meaning to everyone, female and male. Humans will

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423 NS par. 361.
424 Cavarero, Relating Narrative, 39.
425 Verene, “Giambattista Vico’s New Science,” 227. See also NS par. 348 & 349.
always come into the world in this way, never otherwise.”\textsuperscript{426} Our life stories force us to acknowledge the natal scene, which is shrouded in the atmosphere of the mother. We turn our gaze towards our emergence from the womb and the figure of the mother becomes visible once again. Cavarero credits Arendt’s recuperation of the category of birth from the hands of the philosopher for making this return of the mother possible. Arendt reveals the matricide at the foundation of the philosophical tradition. Cavarero explains:

In her work, she focuses on the site that the gaze of men has long sought to avoid for fear of staring death in the face as the yardstick of human existence. The anxiety is what gave rise to the symbolic event that constitutes the act of original matricide. It is also the basis of the obsessive desire to endure, to survive, which leads men to entrust eternal objects of thought with the task of ‘saving’ them from the selfsame death they chose as the locus of meaning when they decided, not by chance, to call themselves mortals [subject to death, morte].

Vico’s life story not only acknowledges his birth from \textit{this mother and not another}, thereby subverting a tradition that ignores the scenes of our birth and so our mothers, but he attributes his depth and ingenuity to his mother. He says that he received his \textit{melancholia} from his mother, and this trait was, moreover, exacerbated after his fall. The mother figure, then, dominates his narrative, since he credits her with his ingenuity, a faculty most praised by Vico across his corpus. Melancholia is well-known in the ancient world as the humor of genius and ingenuity. Verene points to the ancient association between ingenuity and melancholy. Both Aristotle and Cicero associate melancholia with genius.\textsuperscript{427}

Vico’s identification with his mother may point to unacknowledged aspects of Vico’s narrative art: its femininity. Cavarero consistently calls the art of narrative a feminine art. Vico not only makes the mother figure visible, tethering his identity to his corporeal birth from \textit{this mother and not another}, but he attributes his greatness to her, honoring the mother, rather than

\textsuperscript{426} Cavarero, \textit{In Spite of Plato}, 6.
eviscerating her as the philosophers, dwelling in a realm of eternal concepts, do. Now, we see more clearly how ludicrous Harrison’s claim that Vico presents humans as ‘always already dead.’ Vico’s emphasis on the mother and natality, eclipses the traditions focus upon mortality.

That his life must have been thus and not otherwise is intimately related to what Cavarero calls the accidentality of being, introduced in our introduction. He portrays the accidentality of being throughout the Autobiography. It is, for instance, by an accident of birth that Vico became a scholar. He relates that he was, “born for the glory of his native city and therefore of Italy (since being born there and not in Morocco, he became a scholar)...” By emphasizing the accidentality of his having been born thus and not otherwise Vico attenuates his status as a singular, unique, finite existent. Narrative returns him to these small “anecdotes of destiny.”

Vico’s Cavarerean sense of intention and accident is obscured by Hegelian interpretations of Vico’s concept of providence. In the New Science, Vico establishes a concept of providence that is mixed intention with accident. In a famous passage he writes:

>Men have themselves made this world of nations...but this world has evidently issued from a mind often diverse, at times quiet contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men have proposed themselves...Men who meant to gratify their bestial lust and abandon their offspring, founded instead the chastity of marriage from which the families arose. The fathers meant to exercise without restraint their paternal power over their serfs, and they subjected them to the civil power from which the cities arose. The ruling class of nobles meant to abuse their lordly freedom over the plebeians, and they had to submit to the laws, which established popular freedom. The free peoples meant to shake off the yoke of their laws, and they became subject to monarchs. The monarchs meant to strengthen their positions by debasing their subjects with all the vices of dissoluteness, and they disposed them to endure slavery at the hands of stronger nations. The nation's meant to dissolve themselves, and their remnants fled for safety to the wilderness, whence, like a phoenix, they rose again.

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429 Arendt, Relating Narrative, 2.
Fisch erroneously concludes that this passage expresses the immanent logic of Hegel’s later concept, ‘the cunning of reason.’

He writes, “Here as throughout the development of man and society there was thus an inherent logic transcending the conscious intentions of individual agents.”

Piovani rejects the attempt to impose Hegel’s ‘cunning of reason’ upon Vico’s notion of providence here. Given our alternative, naturalistic reading of providence, we affirm that Vico is expressing the way in which the agents of action are unable to tell the story of their lives.

Only the backward glance of the narrator can give the pattern to the mere sequence of unintended events. In fact, this passage resounds with Arendt’s thesis of the plurality of action. Arendt observes that the unpredictability of actions is one of its major defining features. She notes that this unpredictability “arises directly out of the story which, as the result of action, begins and establishes itself as soon as the fleeting moment of the deed is past.”

Only the storyteller can see the meaning of the actions. Arendt continues, “This unpredictability of outcome is closely related to the revelatory character of action and speech, in which one discloses one’s self without ever either knowing himself or being able to calculate beforehand whom he reveals.”

Vico’s concept of providence expresses Arendt’s notion. According to Vico, providence is simply the revelation of what is hidden. For instance, this revelation is open to the storyteller who weaves the unpredictable actions and events into a narration.

The Autobiography abounds with chance happenings. It was only by chance that he heard a great scholar present a beautiful oration on civil institutions, which provoked his own

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430 Fisch, introduction to Autobiography, 54.
431 Ibid., 54.
432 Piovani, “Vico Without Hegel,” 110. Piovani argues, “This assertion, even in those who might be ready to accept it in large part, must raise doubts regarding a difference that cannot be reduced to a simple semantic problem: the difference that lies in the use of the term ‘providence’ rather than ‘reason.’ Piovani, “Vico Without Hegel,” 110. Vico’s providence, I have shown has nothing to do with Hegel’s reason.
433 Arendt, The Human Condition, 192.
434 Ibid., 192.
meditations upon the nature of institutions and desire to pursue the study of law.\textsuperscript{435} Moreover, it was by mere chance that he was provided the opportunity to try his first case. He relates, “And for his better acquaintance with legal procedure, chance would have it that a little later a suit entrusted to Don Geronimo Acquaviva was brought against his father before Sacred Rota.”\textsuperscript{436}

These incidents reveal a contingent, unique, life, in search of the meaning giving fruits of narration. Like the man running around to fill the dyke, Vico, the actor is not aware of the design of his life as he lives it. Only the storyteller can confer the unity or design in the form of the tale.

Vico is the storyteller in the \textit{New Science} who gives a pattern to what would otherwise be a meaningless sequence of events. “He invites us to make the new science for ourselves by that principle that is has, had, and will have to be. He takes the power traditionally attributed to the Muses to sing of what was, is, and is to come and transforms it into a sequence of necessity or a knowledge \textit{per causas}.”\textsuperscript{437} Although Verene is right to point out the unifying glance conferred by the narrator, he reduces the primordial song of the Muse to a form of logical making. The Muse’s song rather is in line with the logic of the oral tradition, which follows the poetic knowledge and the narrative art which structures events in terms of beginnings, middles, and ends.

This accidentality of being is precisely what the philosophers try to cover up in their generalizing, universalizing discourse. When we follow Vico’s methodological principle of the \textit{New Science}, the doctrine of beginnings, we are thrown into confrontation with the accidentality of being. Beginnings force us to recognize the conditions of birth, which always emerge in this time and not another; in this place, and not another; in this way and not another. Vico’s

\textsuperscript{435} Vico, \textit{Autobiography}, 115.
\textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{437} Verene, “Philosophical Aesthetics,” 28.
principles of birth both in the *New Science* and the *Autobiography*, protect unique, sexed, singular existents from being swallowed up by the universals of philosophical discourse.

The fables we have been exploring above spring from the desire of the narratable self. Before there is a story, before there is a text, there is desire. The backward glance of the storyteller is primarily a response to this desire, an attempt to fulfill this insatiable desire. I disagree with Verene’s view that the *New Science* is an autobiography. Vico is the biographer through and through. The pleasure that the reader experience is due to hearing her own collective biography narrated to her. The *New Science* is the gift, unifying the identity of the reader. Hence, the reader experiences the pleasure that is the unique gift of the storyteller. A life story does not have an author, but it can have a narrator. And the narrator, “is limited to comprehending the story that the actor left behind, and putting it into words.”

Any attempts at autobiography are absurd since the actor cannot master her own identity. Identity is relational and demands the other.

Cavarero upholds Arendt’s notion that, “life-stories never have an author. Biographies or autobiographies result from an existence that belongs to the world, in the relational and contextual form of self-exposure to others. The life story causes a reification of the self, no matter what symbolic form it takes.” As essentially narratable selves we are always already taken up in the process of auto-narration. “There is no narratable self that is not always already and forever immersed in this autobiographical text.” The pronoun of biography is not *he*, but rather, *you*. Admittedly, Vico takes up the formal pronoun *he* in his *Autobiography*, rather than the informal, intimate *you*, yet the *he* is enough to show that Vico realizes he cannot author

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438 Ibid., 24.
439 Ibid., 24.
440 Ibid., 36.
441 Ibid., 36.
442 Ibid., 92.
his own story; it is enough to set himself up as the storyteller, rather than the author of his life story. His attempt to narrate his own story under the guise of the he and his performative falsification of the date of his own birth shows that he acknowledges that the narratable self needs another to give one her own story.

Vico knows that his Autobiography can be nothing more than a fable, the myth of himself. “There is, in autobiography, the strange pretense of a self that makes himself an other in order to be able to tell his own story; or, rather, of a self which, using his memory as a separated mirror in which he inseparably consists, appears to himself as an other - he externalizes his intimate self-reflection.”443 This can account for Vico’s strategy of using the third person.

4.3 The Conflict Between the Collective Story and the Life Story

As Cavarero has demonstrated, philosophers, the “servants of the universal,” search after what we are, rather than who we are. Vico does not relinquish the search for who even when he establishes his science. His science is still a narration responding to the desire of the who. He simply relates the story of who we are on a collective level. Our collective story encompasses a plurality of unique existents. Vico grasps both the singular and collective aspects of originary poesis by creating two works that work in concert with each other The New Science, and The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico.

Cavarero calls Homer the first historian. She avers, “The stories that result from the self-exhibiting of unique beings within a plural scene are already inextricably interwoven with one another. This is why Homer-the-storyteller is at the same time the first historian. Since it results from the weaving of individual stories, the great History of Humanity is nothing but the book of

443 Ibid., 85.
single stories.\textsuperscript{444} The stories result from the actions of singular existents. This is evidenced by the story of the gigantic who disclose themselves to the other through their shaking and shouting, giving birth to the first human place.

Cavarero, in fact, recovers stories from our archaic memories in her text, \textit{In Spite of Plato}, and narrates them for herself. She weaves together new portraits for female figures looked over by a patriarchal tradition. Just as Vico’s conceited scholars impose their own familiar readings onto the distant archaic figures of our originary scenes of poesis, the patriarchal philosophical tradition reads female figures through the lens of patriarchal biases. They interpret what is far and distant by what is near and at hand. The female, as other, is far, and the philosophers’ male bodies are near and at hand. If it is true, as Vico’s universal principle of etymology demonstrates, that words are carried over from bodies, we may say that philosophical discourse is carried over from male bodies.

Cavarero saves these female figures from obscurity by relating their narratives in a new light. She says her aim is to provide new figures to nourish our new subjectivity. She writes, “Indeed in the Western tradition female subjectivity is buried under figures of hyper-masculine men, and by figures constructed by men.”\textsuperscript{445} Here we see clearly Vico’s principle that when men are ignorant about things distant and unknown they make themselves the measure of things. Women (the unfamiliar) have been figured in terms of men (the familiar.) By recovering the female figures Cavarero responds to our desire for new figures in order to realize ourselves. She writes, “Our need for mythic figures is still present. Certainly, the best solution would be for us to admit that our new thought and the fresh, new subjectivity we have constituted call for new

\textsuperscript{444} Cavarero, \textit{Relating Narratives}, 124.
\textsuperscript{445} Cavarero, \textit{In Spite of Plato}, 4.
figures.” As the *giganti* transformed into men, women have transformed into new beings and are in need of narration to realize their new identities.

To recover these figures Cavarero enacts a hermeneutic strategy of stealing. She writes, “my hermeneutical project consists of investigating the traces of the original act of erasure contained in the patriarchal order...This is how my technique of theft works: I will steal feminine figures from their context, allowing the torn-up fabric to show the knots.” Her excavation is guided by a feminine philosophy drawn from the maternal figure. “From there we women search for, and ultimately find, the ancient figuration of the Mother surrounded by daughters and sisters.” The male perspective has traditionally dominated our reading of these figures. But Cavarero affirms that the figures lend themselves to a “play of multiple perspectives.” In particular she re-narrates the tales of Demeter, Penelope, Diotima and a young woman from Thrace.

Let us look at the figure of Penelope. The patriarchal symbolic order relegates Penelope to the place of woman and wife. She takes up this allotted place as an alien in the symbolic order of Man. We might say in terms of Vico’s narrative that her place is hidden in the ideal eternal story, since the story of beasts and heroes create the world of Man. As Cavarero observes, “For the events from which Penelope retreats with her endless work are the great events of history – the history of men, of heroes. Therefore, they are inroads onto a history that is not hers, where she will not take up a space, but only a place in an alien symbolic order.” The female figures stand outside history, as history is the story of man. Vico’s story of humanity is certainly the story of man, yet by delving into prehistorical monstrous, bestial giants out of which man was

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446 Ibid., 5.
447 Ibid.
448 Ibid.
449 Ibid., 13.
formed, Vico shows the fabricated, invented nature of the order of man. Still, Vico ignores the feminine aspect of prehistory. As Harrison affirms, “Vico had little to say about the prehistory of this goddess, for his New Science was seeking to reconstruct the origins of patriarchy, that is to say the religious traumas that led to the differentiations, oppositions, and hierarchies of the patriarchal institutions…Under the goddess’s reign, however, earth and sky were not opposed, nor were life and death, animal and human, inanimate and animate, matter and form forest and clearing.” The overthrow of the goddess cults of the forests by the savage sky gods, like Jove, is not recounted by Vico; he is narrating the story of Man. Cavarero, on the other hand, is re-narrating the tales we receive from Homer in order to open up a place for new stories to emerge - stories she hopes will help woman give birth to their own identities.

Although the results of their hermeneutic approach are different, as narrators, Vico and Cavarero share similar strategies. Vico, too, steals the poetic characters from the scholars who have buried them. Recall Vico’s inscription on the plinth: lady metaphysics lays hidden and unknown. Vico, moreover, shows the way in which the poetic figures or characters offered patterns of identity for early humanity. Recall that the poetic figure of the war chief was more real than the individual warrior; this was simply Vico’s way of expressing the truth that we are narratable selves in search of unifying patterns that confer the meaning of our lives. In short, we structure our lived experience in terms of figures. Our collective stories are storehouses of communal wisdom from which to gather figures to live by. Cavarero resuscitates different female figure from this storehouse of collective wisdom to confer the new form of female personhood a story to live by. Vico’s narrative art encourages reinterpretations. His narratives are not a complete or final. Cavarero in a sense performs Vico’s injunction to narrate his poetic science for herself.

450 Harrison, Forests, 19.
Let us return to the example of Penelope to witness this strategy. How does Penelope subvert the ideal eternal story or patriarchal symbolic order that casts her as an alien inside its realm? Cavarero observes that it is possible that Penelope pretends to not recognize Odysseus when he returns home, disguised as a beggar. She demands evidence because she does not want to recognize him, despite hearing his voice and seeing his face. Like the story of Job in Cavarero’s later work his voice should have betrayed his unique identity despite his being dressed up. Perhaps, Cavarero muses, he was happy in her secluded abode away from the world of men: from the suitors as well as Odysseus.

The role that is meant to subjugate her actually liberates her as she realizes herself through her work. There are hints of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic at work here. Cavarero observes, “Penelope is an expert weaver. Her metis is all in the rhythmic doing and undoing in the loom. It cannot be separated from her body, and its object is not an eternal essence positioned outside this world, outside the weaving room where she sits with her handmaids.”451 Her place is within and yet separate from Odysseus’ palace, and we may also say the conceptual palaces of Nietzsche of Vico, the huts of the heroes and the walls of the Academies. She resides in Odysseus’ palace and yet preserves her identity and wholeness of being in her own private abode weaving alongside her female companions. In weaving and laughing with her maids, exchanging glances with them, she fashions a world for herself that is rooted in her body and is her own. Cavarero writes, “She speaks of birth and rootedness, rather than death and adventure.”452 In this way, Cavarero treats Penelope as an admirable female figure weaving away from the gaze of the male patriarchal order.

451 Cavarero, In Spite of Plato, 19.
452 Ibid., 22.
I find a discrepancy in Cavarero’s work between her description of narrative as a response to the singular existent in terms of the individual life story and the collective story. In *Relating Narratives*, she denies the possibility of realizing our identity through the collective ‘we.’ She says of the relational, exposable, singular existent, “she is the you [tu] that comes before the we [noi], before the plural you [voi] and before the they [loro].”\(^{453}\) Cavarero is weary of the ‘we’ in relation to the unique, unrepeatable existence of the ‘you.’ The movement of the you to the we is as slippery a slope as the movement from the who to the what. At every turn the who is in danger of being swallowed up by the what. Cavarero cautiously resists this tendency. Yet her caution may prevent her from acknowledging the collective depths inhering in the you. Judith Butler, for instance, hesitates to adopt Cavarero’s rejection of the we. In reflecting upon her writing she observes, “I resort here to the plural we, even though Cavarero advises against it, precisely because I am not convinced that we must abandon it.”\(^{454}\) Since the singularity of the existent it so threatened by theorists who want to turn it into a social construct, Cavarero is on heavy guard; perhaps, she is too overprotective.

Cavarero writes, “In the reflection of the one in the other, the very personal identity that is consigned to the tale of an unrepeatable life story, runs the risk of losing its expressive reality and founding itself in the ‘common woman’ that is being represented here...The empathy risks producing a substance. Put simply, who I am and who you are seem to surrender to the urgency of the question of what Woman is.”\(^{455}\) Cavarero is always wary of reducing the who to a what. “Since there is no who that is not always already intertwined with its what, or that is inseparable


\(^{454}\) Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 32.

\(^{455}\) Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 60.
from it, the tale also tells what someone was and is...the tale sometimes makes the protagonist into a ‘character’ or ‘type.’ The unique existent must not be reduced to a character.

Despite this, Cavarero shows that narrating archaic female figures to ourselves will help us to achieve new identities. Cavarero, following, Arendt does not understand identity as a social construction, “but rather as that which a singular existent designs in her uncategorizable uniqueness.” But, nevertheless, Cavarero seems to leave no room for the singular existent’s adoption of collective tales to realize herself, even though this makes up her appropriative strategy in her text on the archaic figures, In Spite of Plato. Here she writes, “What we have called an altruistic ethics of relation does not support empathy, identifications, or confusions. Rather this ethic desires a you that is truly other, in her uniqueness and distinction.” Why then, does she take up the stories Thracian servant girl, Penelope, Demeter, and Diotima in order to realize her identity?

How can we resolve her intention of stealing collective, archaic figures and reconfigure them in order to aid our ability to create new forms of identity with her insistence that any identification with the ‘we’ robs us of our singular, unique, status? Are not the archaic figures accretions of our collective voices? By dipping into the archaic imagination to provide figures to aid the constitution of our identities, she seems to be displaying the desire to read our story on the collective level, (the stories that inhere in the residue of the very language we use to tell our own unique stories, as Vico’s etymologies have shown.) Both Vico and Cavarero dip into the well of archaic fables and reinterpret them according to a new logic. They remake or rearrange the deposits of our collective memories for themselves. Vico undercuts the erudite wisdom of the philosophers with his poetic wisdom and Cavarero undercuts the logic of the patriarchal

456 Ibid., 73.
457 Ibid., 73.
458 Ibid., 92.
philosophers by resuscitating female figures through her own interpretive strategies. In other words, she is narrating the fables for herself, just as Vico requires his readers to do in the New Science. So why do they keep their meditations upon the singular life story and our collective stories separate?

Despite the litany of scholars who acknowledge the interrelatedness of the Autobiography and the New Science, the fact remains that Vico kept his treatment of our singular identity out of his collective narrative and reserved treatment of it for his Autobiography. Of course, he speaks to the reader of the New Science and demands her participation, but he, nonetheless, relates only the collective dimension of her tale. This tension between the singular existent and the unique way she takes up her cultural heritage will be taken up again in the following chapter where we discuss the difference between spoken and speaking language. Vico and Merleau-Ponty, we shall see, acknowledge the social dimension of our identities. Our cultural traditions are in the service of our singular creative endeavors. We do not need to escape the ‘we’ in order to invent the world anew; rather, it is precisely by taking up spoken language that we are able to create spontaneous, genuine expressions.

459 Most scholars agree that the Autobiography and the New Science are related. Croce observes, “Vico’s Autobiography is, in a word, the application of the Scienza Nuova to the life of its author, the course of his own individual history: and its method is as just and true as it is original.” See Croce, The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, 266. Olney further establishes the interrelatedness of the Autobiography and the New Science. “The two books were, in their composition, intertwined to the degree that either can be understood in its fullness only by way of the other.” See Olney, Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life Writing, 86. Furthermore, Fisch suggests that, “Aside from the light it sheds on his other works, and the interest it has in common with every other intellectual biography, Vico has the unique interest of being the first application of the genetic method by an original thinker to his own writings.” See Fisch, preface to Autobiography, v. Mazzotta, moreover, suggests, “He knew with great clarity that what was missing in the New Science is a precise, sustained discourse on subjectivity - how the self enters, shapes, and is itself shaped by the fabric of history. It is no wonder, then, that one should view his writing the Autobiography, which is carried out while he is revising the New Science, as a vehicle enabling him to reflect on the problematics of the self.” See Mazzotta, The New Map of the World, 17. And again, Verene observes, “this principle suggests that the ‘autobiography’ is a category that might be applied to Vico’s philosophy itself. In a sense Vico’s aim is to write the autobiography of humanity itself.” See Verene, The New Art of Autobiography, 71. Elsewhere, Verene affirms a similar point. He writes, “Vico’s conception of historical writing and life writing are interlocking. The way he presents his own humanity is of a piece with how he presents his science of humanity.” See Verene, The New Art of Autobiography, 71.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 The First Words

According to Merleau-Ponty, both intellectualism and empiricism share the flawed supposition that words do not bear a sense of their own; they are purported to merely be the envelopes or vehicles of thought. The sense of a word cannot be fully realized through a conceptual apparatus. We realize the sense of the word through its gestural signification. As Merleau-Ponty observes, “The sense of words must ultimately be induced by the words themselves, or more precisely their conceptual signification must be formed by drawing from a gestural signification, which itself is immanent in speech.” Words secrete their own significance at an affective gestural level beyond the grasp of intellectualist understandings of language. The speech or gesture itself bears a sense that allows us to read its meaning. The insight that words are the bearer of meaning runs counter to the dominant western intellectual tradition. Landes explains, “classical and intellectualist explanations of speech fail because they embrace the problematic supposition that the word does not bear its sense.” By acknowledging that words bear a sense, we are able to go beyond these dominant intellectualist and empiricist theories of language.

Vico uncovers the primordial gestures, which directly express what they are. Furthermore, “the natural heroic emblems…spoke forth in their very muteness. Hence, they were in their own the best emblems because they carried their meaning in themselves.” These mute emblems bear the sense of their meaning. “For example, three ears of grain, or three scythe-swinging motions, naturally signified three years. And so it came about that “names” and

460 Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, 182.
461 Ibid., 184.
462 Ibid., 185.
464 NS par. 484.
“characters” were interchangeable, and “name” and “nature” came to mean the same thing.”

Every wall in ancient houses, Vico relates, had an emblem carved upon it, since there was not yet any written language; the age was analphabetic. Some other examples of mute emblems include family coats of arms, the totems of the American Indians, ancient coins, plumed helmets and the eagle on the scepter. The Eagle is a striking emblem because of the United States adoption of the bald Eagle as its official emblem confirms Vico’s principle that all nations begin with Jove, whose symbol is the eagle. Vico observes, “the eagle on the scepter…was used alike by the Egyptians, the Etruscans, the Romans, and the English, who still use it as an ornament of their royal arms…the symbol meant to signify that the realms had their origins from the first divine kingdoms of Jove by virtue of his auspices.” Later thinkers and scholars in the age of men attribute analogical meaning to the primordial forms of expression and poetic languages, yet they are merely imposing their own rational, abstract framework onto them. These mute languages are what Merleau-Ponty would call primary forms of expression, which all forms of secondary expression are merely derivative of. By secondary forms of expression, he includes our mathematical, logical, and scientific forms of thought. Vico’s primordial things are mute, and yet speak; they are the silent, operative language which Merleau-Ponty’s work on aesthetics attempts to capture and elucidate.

Vico extols the beauty of the Italian language and ridicules the aridity of the French, yet his sentiments go beyond petty patriotism. He writes “the French are the only people who, thanks to the subtlety of their language, were able to invent the new philosophical criticism...and analytic geometry...stripped of all concrete and figural elements and reduced to pure

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465 NS par. 485.
466 NS par. 486.
467 NS par. 487.
468 NS par. 487.
469 NS par. 484.
rationality.” On the contrary, he says the Italians, “are endowed with a language which constantly evokes images. Our language, thanks to its perpetual dynamism, forces the attention of the listeners by means of metaphoric expressions. The imagistic thinking of the Italians allows for the possibility of artistic achievements: painting, sculpture, poetry, and music, whereas, the French language itself opens up the possibility for the invention of analytic geometry and intellectual criticism. Vico is demonstrating the way in which languages give birth to the ideas themselves. Moreover, each age in Vico’s cycle is constituted by a specific language, which gives birth to different ways of being. His reflections on the difference between the Italian and French language express his axiom that languages and ideas accelerate at the same rate.

According to both Merleau-Ponty and Vico language accomplishes thought. Merleau-Ponty writes, “thought tends toward expression as if toward its completion.” Eddie confirms the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Vico on this point. He writes of Vico, “his cardinal principle is similar to Heidegger’s and Merleau-Ponty’s: ‘mind’ are formed by language, not language by ‘minds.’” On this point Vico shows that “the human mind is naturally inclined by the senses to see itself externally in the body, and only with great difficulty does it come to understand itself by means of reflection.” Vico’s universal principle of etymology established above reveals the way in which languages emerge outside the domain of intellectual thought, but rather within our pre-reflective experiences. Vico and Merleau-Ponty stand outside of traditional rational theories of language in this regard.

471 Ibid., 41.
472 Ibid.
473 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 182.
475 NS par. 236.
Vico places speech at the forefront of his thinking and more specifically, poetic expressions. The idea that we can understand different cultural phenomena through an examination of speech is a thought entirely original to Vico. White affirms:

For at the interior of Vico’s thought there resides a principle of interpretation, or to use a recently revived term, “hermeneutical principle,” of which no other thinker in Europe prior to Hegel even glimpsed the possibility. This principle derives from the perception, original with Vico in the form that he gave to it, that speech itself provides the key for interpreting cultural phenomena...Here the basic distinction is between poetic expression on one side and discursive prose representation on the other. The former is conceived to be a creative and active force by which consciousness confiscates the world; the latter a passive and receptive operation in which ‘things as they are’ are mirrored.476

Vico, anticipating Cavarero, writes that verse precedes prose. “Wisdom,” writes Vico, “is eloquence speaking.”477 Thought depends upon speech for its accomplishment. It is through speaking and writing that our thoughts are formed. For example, Merleau-Ponty cites the common experience of the writer he does not know what he means to say until he begins the process of writing.478 Merleau-Ponty observes, “a thought content to exist for itself outside the constraints of speech and communication, would fall into the unconscious the moment it appear, which amount to saying it would not exist at all.”479 Struever argues that the Italian Renaissance Humanists, with whom Vico is kin, uphold the same notion of expression. For instance, the rhetorician Trapezuntius writes in a similar fashion:

For indeed, reason itself lies hidden in the obscure process of the intellect before it has been drawn forth by speech; it is just so much light or brilliance as the fire hidden in the flint, before the iron strikes it: indeed, while it is hidden no one would think to call it fire.480

479 Ibid., 183.
An unexpressed thought is hardly a thought at all. We do not first have pure, determinate thoughts, which we then share or express. Expression kindles and brings forth the thought itself. Indeterminate objects become more determinate through the power of naming. When we name an object, we in part create it, since the sense of the word inheres within it. Merleau-Ponty writes, “the word, far from being the simple sign of objects and significations, inhabits things and bears significance.” Communication involves more than the exchange of prefabricated, ready-made words.

Just as Vico compares the first poets to children, Merleau-Ponty compares the child’s power of naming to pre-scientific thought. The child only recognizes an object when it has been given its name. The name inhabits the object in the same way that color and form inhabit objects. Pre-scientific thinkers similarly come to realize objects through naming them. Moreover, the names are not the adequate expressions of things. According to Vico, “For that first language, spoken by the theological poets, was not in accord with the nature of things it dealt with (as must have been the sacred language invented by Adam, to which God granted divine onomathesia, the giving of names to things according to the nature of each).” Here is one of the many instances in which Vico cautiously distinguishes Sacred and Gentile history. Our concern here, like Vico’s concern in the *New Science*, is gentile history. We encounter things as indeterminate, and through naming help to realize it more fully.

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482 Ibid., 183.
483 NS par. 401.
484 Whether or not this distinction was merely a strategy to avoid the inquisition is a point of contention among scholars and the problem is outside the scope of this paper, though it should be noted that Vico’s friends were imprisoned by the inquisition - an event that surely had an effect on his work. See Fisch, introduction to *Autobiography*, 34. He witnessed his closest friends’ imprisonment by the Inquisition. Vaughan, moreover, notes, “There are a few comments in the *Autobiography* and *New Science* that have little meaning unless interpreted as implying that Vico wants us to understand that he had to conceal his real teaching with a cautious
Words share a part in the creation of the thing. There is not first a determinate object that is then given a name that rationally accords with it. And yet, words are not merely conventional. Only the erudite, learned scholars could imagine that language is conventional. Vico writes, “The philologians have all accepted with an excess of good faith the view that in the vulgar languages meanings were fixed by convention.”486 Below we explore the reason for believing that language is formed by a rational agreement among men. Both Vico and Merleau-Ponty denounce this intellectual error and warn that it prevents the birth of genuine expression.

The natural, affective dimension of language must be realized if we are to create new expressions. Or, as Merleau-Ponty observes, “conventions are a recent mode of relation between men, and language must be put back into its communicative current.”487 Once the sensorial, affective dimension of language is revealed the notion that language is conventional appears foolish. “This would no longer hold if we took the emotional sense of the word into account, what we have called the gestural sense, which is essential in poetry for example.”488 Those thinkers who argue for the arbitrary and conventional nature of language overlook the sensorial, gestural dimension.489

manner of writing.” See Vaughan, The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, 27. Vaughan, for instance, cites the end of the Autobiography where Vico writes, “when he had written this work [i.e., the New Science], enjoying life, liberty and honor, he held himself more fortunate than Socrates.” See Vico, Autobiography, 220. Vaughn infers that Vico thinks himself fortunate because he like Socrates rejected the gods of the city, yet unlike Socrates escaped the deadly consequences. See Vaughan, The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, 27.

486 NS par. 444.
487 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 194.
488 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 193.
489 Vico, of course, could not have known Saussure’s conception of language, which distinguished the system of language (la langue) from concrete speech acts (la parole). Merleau-Ponty’s later work during the 1940’s was influenced by his encounter with Ferdinand Suassure’s linguistic structuralism. In this system of signs every sign has meaning only in relation to its difference from other signs. The sign is made up of the signifier or sound-image and the signified or meaning. Although Saussure’s system helps Merleau-Ponty to resist representational theories of language which purport that words adequately represent determinate things, Merleau-Ponty does not devalue the individual speech acts (la parole) in favor of (la langue) or language structured as a system or science of signs. See Hass, Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy, 184. For Merleau-Ponty, signs continue to respond to the corporeal, situated experience of the body-subject. Hass observes, “Instead of beginning with Saussure’s dichotomy between la langue and la parole. Merleau-Ponty would say we understand language as an interwoven duality between constituted language and expressive language.” Ibid., 191. Merleau-Ponty never loses site of the expressive body and its relation
This is not to say that words are entirely natural. Both Vico and Merleau-Ponty demonstrate the ambiguous relationship between the natural and the conventional. Merleau-Ponty writes, “The artificial sign does not reduce to the natural sign because there are no natural signs for man.” Gestures are not natural or adequate expressions of things, rather gestures are contingent and historicized. As Vico demonstrates we must attend to the way the gestures are born in a particular fashion, at this time and not another. “Just like words, passionate feelings and behaviors are invented. Even ones that seem inscribed in the human body, such as paternity, are in fact institutions.” Vico returns to the birthing sight of these institutions.

Although they are not entirely natural, they are not entirely arbitrary. Vico does state that languages have “natural significations,” and “natural origins.” But he is expressing a natural relation between the body as site of expression and earth. Vico distinguishes the fabulous, metaphoric origins of the first poets from the gentiles. “For the first language, spoken by theological poets, was not a language in accord with the nature of things it dealt with (as must have been the sacred languages invented by Adam, to God gave divine onomathesia, the giving of names according to the nature of each,) but was a fantastic speech making use of physical substances endowed with life and most of them imagined to be divine.” They are not divorced from the body’s sensuous, situated lived experience and so not wholly arbitrary. They are rather to the earth. This is why Luft fails to mention Merleau-Ponty, since he differs from Derrida and other poststructuralists in this sense. It is not a mere oversight on her part. There are philosophical reasons why she excludes Merleau-Ponty. In her overarching attempt to emphasize that humans are makers creating their world, Luft neglects the natural world which the makers inevitably confront and are bound up with: she forgets that Vico’s makers do not create in a vacuum - their poesis is entirely entwined with the song of the earth, with place. See Lollini, “Vico’s More than Human Humanism,” 387.

491 NS par. 147.
493 NS par. 444.
494 NS par. 401.
“formed naturally in the imagination...” And Merleau-Ponty shows that “imagination is dialogical.” The body is always already taken up in a dialogic relationship with the world. This cannot be severed from language, and so language cannot become a mere code.

In order to understand this dimension of language, we must establish the creative power of the body-subject. Vico’s first poet’s creation of the first concrete metaphor, Jove, elaborates the nature of Merleau-Ponty’s body-subject. Fred Evans writes, “Merleau-Ponty shows that we are our engagement with - our opening onto things in the world. Similarly, objects are not first “mute” things that then casually interact with us; they call forth our engagement from the beginning.” The giants are responding to the call of the thundering sky reverberating in their bodies as they shake and shout, imagining that the sky is the body of Jove. This is a true narration. This is the first human place and the first name. Jove fixes the flux of experience; he is the “stayer or establisher.” As Merleau-Ponty says, “it is the body that shows, that speaks.”

To emphasize the corporeal sensorial roots of expressive language, Vico pictures large, savage, bestial proto-humans, or giants. I take the giants to be a metaphor for the corporeal, frightening, chaotic beginnings of all expressive language. Just as the poetic characters shrank as the imagination of the poets shrank, so too did the actual poets shrink, from large giants, characterized by a “generous savagery,” to delicate, and refined men who “under soft words and embraces, plot against the life and fortune of friends and intimates.” The size of the poets from bestial to small and refined represents the loss of contact with the corporeal origin of things and the abstract language that is cut off from the body.

495 NS par. 69.
496 Richard Kearney, Poetics of Imagining, 123.
498 NS par. 379.
499 Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, 203.
500 NS par. 1106.
Vico returns to the night of thick darkness. The adjective ‘thick’ in his most famous passage should not be overlooked. “But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves...”\(^{501}\) Again, he emphasizes that “through the thick clouds of those first tempests...they made out this great truth...[my italics]”\(^{502}\) It has philosophical import and has been overlooked by scholars. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of expression is concerned with the viscosity, depth and thickness of lived experience. Wiskus notes, “We must turn to the viscous link that binds the words into meaning, for beneath the conceptual content of each word - beyond our everyday employment of language as representation - lies a dynamic and creative realm of expression.”\(^{503}\) According to Vico’s etymologicon, this is the realm of the primordial forest and the first poets.\(^{504}\)

Vico’s poetic metaphysics seeks to see and hear the first poetic words. He hears the grunt of the giants and gathers the coins, animals, medals and monsters that make up the first words. Descending to origins is not for the faint of heart or for the rarefied esoteric thinking of the scientists and rational political theorists. In reading Hobbes and Vico together, Struever notes, “Hobbes and Vico reconstitute their audiences by stabilizing only the roughest, rawest meanings of their terms; they counteract the academic tradition which employs soft, worn political coinages that obscure the tough assumptions Hobbes and Vico appreciate.”\(^{505}\) Merleau-Ponty’s task is similarly poetic in that he seeks to uncover the ‘raw meanings’, which are at the origins of ready-made concepts. Wiskus argues that Merleau-Ponty’s work is, “poetic in the etymological sense - for it consistently works to disclose the creative generation of philosophical thinking as emerging from the depth between (or beneath, behind, or before) articulated

\(^{501}\) NS par. 331.
\(^{502}\) NS. par. 385.
\(^{503}\) Wiskus, Jessica, *The Rhythm of Thought*, 2.
\(^{504}\) Vico, *Autobiography*, 168
words.”\textsuperscript{506} Merleau-Ponty’s work is poetic in that it follows Vico’s universal principle of etymology which reads, “This was the order of institutions: first the forests, after that the huts, then the villages, next the cities, and finally the academies.”\textsuperscript{507} Merleau-Ponty writes, “It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make us say finally what in its silence it means to say.”\textsuperscript{508} We must enter the primeval forest in order to question the originary site of thinking, the meaning giving that breaks the silence, namely, the shouting of the giants in response to the sounds of the earth. “Looking up they experiences the sensations of a turbulent sky, the sounds of thunder, their newly awakened fear, and the shaking of their great bodies; and they uttered their first sound, pa, that inventively, imaginatively (\textit{ingenium}) brought together in a metaphor, sensations that in nature did not belong together, creating an image of a being in the sky. Vico calls \textit{pa} a concrete metaphor or imaginative universal.”\textsuperscript{509}

According to Wiskus, Merleau-Ponty’s operative language is, “the language of poetry, the abode of metaphor.”\textsuperscript{510} She explains, “Poetry and metaphoric language work precisely according to the principle of noncoincidence; they aim at ‘making silence speak, at saying what is not said, at exploring language beyond its usual destination which lies (Mallarme) in saying what is obvious, in what is familiar’.”\textsuperscript{511} Luft has shown that Providence is nothing but a showing what is hidden, the saying what is not said. We can see this when we look at how Vico traces the etymology of the word providence. Luft explain, “The term divinity was applied to providence because the study of the workings of providence was \textit{divinare}, the power of divining - that is the power to understand ‘what is hidden from men - the future - or what is hidden in them, their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[506] Wiskus, \textit{The Rhythm of Thought}, 2.
\item[507] \textit{NS} par. 239.
\item[508] Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and The Invisible}, 39.
\item[509] Luft, “Divinity of Human Making and Doing in the 18th Century,” 431.
\item[510] Wiskus, \textit{The Rhythm of Thought}, 7.
\item[511] Ibid., 7.
\end{footnotes}
consciousness.” Vico forces us to encounter the unfamiliar in order to go beyond the obvious, familiar world of constituted language. Merleau-Ponty writes, “We need only take language too in the living or nascent state, with all its references, those behind it which connect it to the mute things it interpellates...with its movement, its subtleties its reversals, its life, which expresses and multiplies tenfold the bare life of things.” Vico philosophy begins with the state of things at their nascimento. And the first words are mute. The first poets spoke in hieroglyphs. “Mutes make themselves understood by gestures of objects that have natural relations with the ideas they wish to signify.” Furthermore, “the language of the gods was almost entirely mute, only very slightly articulate.” According to Merleau-Ponty, “Language is a life, is our life and the life of things.” This links the principle of narration to both our world and selves. “Language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the others has germinated in the great mute land. But, because he has experienced within himself the need to speak, the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of his mute experience, the philosopher knows better than anyone that what is lived lived-spoken.” Vico begins in the ‘mute land’ wherein silence gives birth to expression. Furthermore, as Vico shows, expression is born of need. It is gives birth to the poetic world in an ontological sense. By tracing the roots of languages and arriving at things, deeds, and gestures, Vico uncovers the relics of the mute land, the clearing in the forest that fashion the human world. “Born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but - if one knows how to grasp it with all its roots and foliation - the most valuable witness to Being.” As we showed above, Verene confirms the importance of the hidden in Vico’s metaphysics when he points to

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513 Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and Invisible, 124.
514 NS par. 239.
515 NS par. 446.
516 Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 125.
517 Ibid., 126.
518 Ibid., 126.
the original frontispiece to the *New Science*, which showed an image of a woman. Merleau-Ponty continues, “philosophy is an operative language, that language can only be known from within, through its exercise, is open upon the things, called forth by the voices of silence, and continues an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being.”519 Ready-made, sedimented language is easy to use and does not take the heroic “effort” of articulation.

Vico descends to the forest to grasp the ontological leaves of Being. He uncovers the truth that “metaphor makes up the great body of the languages among all nations.”520 His recovery restores philosophy as an operative language. Vico creates new metaphors in narrating our primordial experience. His work exemplifies a way of language praised by Merleau-Ponty, when he writes that “It would be a language of which he would not be the organizer, words he would not assemble, that would combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning, through the occult trading of the metaphor - where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges.”521 For Vico, the reader must also make the *New Science* for himself and find new ways to illuminate the hidden aspects of things and make new connections.

Not only is there an intimate exchange between the body subject and its surroundings, but the senses themselves are wholly interrelated. Today, the senses are separated off and classified one from the other. Synaesthesia is treated as a psychological abnormality rather than our basic sensorial condition. I conjecture that Vico would find this in accord with the analytic tendencies of modern man and his critical arts, characteristic of the *Age of Men*. In line with Vico’s tendencies towards synthesis over analysis, Vico uncovers the synaesthesia that governs

519 Ibid., 127.
520 NS par. 147.
perception in our originary bestial condition, in the *Age of Gods*. In order to inhabit the sensorial word of the first poets, Vico points to the experience of the Germans described by Tacitus, wherein they, “spoke of hearing the sun pass at night from west to east through the see and affirmed that they saw the gods.” Vico’s descent into our mythic origins reveals our primordial synaesthetic experience of reality.

Once the layers of our conceptual edifice are peeled back, we find the natural state of our sense, untouched by the reflective, intellectual thinking which creates the fiction that the senses can be separated from one another. Merleau-Ponty supplies one example of how our basic synaesthetic experience of reality can be apprehended: mescaline. In this regard, we may say that Vico’s insistence for the reader to meditate the *New Science* for herself, points to the way in which the *New Science* is a meditative practice that is meant to allow the reader to reencounter our primordial experience of reality in the way that mescaline can dismantle the presuppositions of our conceptual fictions. Vico’s *New Science* is performative and we are directed to participate in the performance.

### 5.2 Spontaneous Versus Sedimented Language

The age of men is constituted almost entirely constituted by sedimented language. “The language of the gods was almost entirely mute, only very slightly articulate; the language of the heroes, a mixture of articulate and mute...the language of men, almost entirely articulate and only very slightly mute, there being no vulgar language so copious that there are not more things than it has words for.” Everything has been named. Language is cut off from the body and words no longer respond to immediate lived experience. The first two ages, in the other hand, are

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522 *NS* par. 375.
523 *NS* par. 446.
robust with an expressive language born of the body’s relation to the earth. But the world will always elicit a new song, since, as Merleau-Ponty observes the world is always spilling over in excess, or in Vico’s words, there is no, “language so copious that there are not more things than it has words for.”524 In order to awaken the generative power of naming, we must not limit ourselves to what is already named.

Expressive language is born of the body. Vico explains, “Words are carried over from bodies and from the properties of bodies to signify the institutions of the mind and spirit. The order of ideas must follow the order of institutions.” (NS par. 237, 238) Kearney traces a similar movement in Merleau-Ponty according to which, “meaning first arises in the implicit form of a corporeal signs and only subsequently takes up the form of abstract cognition. The logic of science presupposes ‘the wild order of carnal signification.’”525 Vico, like Merleau-Ponty, shows that the realm of constituted language is derivative of the embodied thinking and expressive language of primordial, feral, bestial poets.

During the Age of Men, words appear to final and complete because the incomplete, unfinished nature of both words and things is forgotten. The chaotic, confused moment of expression is looked over. Humanity loses sight of “this secret and feverish genesis of things in our body.”526 It is forgotten that even the refined abstract principles of mathematics are born of our corporeal, bodily insertion in the world. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that invention requires an initial stage of doubt and chaos. For example, rational philosophers in the age of men, define the essence of the triangle without considering the corporeal birth of the concept. When we consider the “formal essence of a triangle” we ignore the “logic of invention.”527 He calls the initial

524 NS par. 446.
525 Kearney, Modern Movements in European Philosophy, 81.
526 Merleau-Ponty, Eye and Mind, 128.
527 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 404.
emergence of the triangle a “gesture”\textsuperscript{528} This initial gesture takes a heroic effort. Our silent dialogue with things is bombarded with the noise of pre-fabricated words. As Merleau-Ponty confirms, “We become unaware of what is contingent in expression and in communication.”\textsuperscript{529} The work of the hero is no longer needed. In the third age, characterized by abstract and reflective thinking, we take up a constituted language that does not require a heroic effort or our inventive capacities. We communicate in “words that require no genuine effort of expression from us, and that will demand no effort of comprehension from our listeners.”\textsuperscript{530} In the third age, “we live in a world where speech is already instituted.”\textsuperscript{531} Heroic effort which faces the chaos and fear accompanying spontaneous language is skipped over in favor of well worn, ready-made, and easily used language.

Throughout his work, Vico demonstrates the relationship between effort and creative, genuine expression. “Discovery is the result of luck; making, the result of hard work. I wanted, therefore, to have geometry taught through forms, not through numbers, so that, even if learning did but little to develop it, yet it would strengthen the imagination, which is the eye of mother wit, just as judgment is the eye of intellect.”\textsuperscript{532} Because geometry makes use of images, it can strengthen what Vico calls our “creative wit.”\textsuperscript{533} In other words, the effort and toil it takes to work through a geometric problem is a creative activity; one must make it for itself - as if it were the first time the image or form is being expressed. When we re-make the problem for ourselves we enter into all the tensions and struggle inherent in any creative, inventive act.

Because the raw, generative beginnings are forgotten, scholars lose the capacity to wonder and to create novel expressions. “The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., 406.
\textsuperscript{529} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 189.
\textsuperscript{530} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{533} Ibid., 104.
causes us any wonder, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and we reflect within a world already spoken and speaking.”

Vico describes this realm of constituted language as a gorgeous mansion, which we have inherited from our parents; the inheritors do nothing more than move the furniture around. He observes, “our modern physicists remind me of certain individuals who have inherited from their parents a gorgeous mansion leaving nothing to be desired in point of comfort or luxury. There is nothing left for them to do except move the furniture around, and by slight modifications, add some ornaments and bring things up to date.”

This is the condition of man enclosed within the walls of the academy and disconnected from the beginnings of things in the forest. “Men first feel without perceiving, then they perceive with a troubled and agitated spirit, and finally reflect with a clear mind.”

This is the way in which poetic sentences are born.

An agitated, troubled spirit accompanies birth and genesis. The birthing process always entails the pains of labor. As the artist gives birth to his own style, he is forced to endure the labor of genuine or original expression. “The labor of the painter is the birth of expression and the world is a call or demand for this birth. These are maternal metaphors of labor and birth, but this is the travail of expression.”

We witnessed the fear and agitation accompanying the first word and we must give this agitation and exertion the philosophical import it deserves. It is an integral ingredient of the creative process, one, which cannot be bypassed.

In the realm of constituted language, one is comfortable and at ease because no work is required of the speaker. Great effort is not called for; everything has already been created.

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536 NS par. 218.
537 NS par. 218.
538 Galen A. Johnson, introduction to *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, 27.
Merleau-Ponty writes, “we live in a world where speech is already instituted.” Merleau-Ponty writes, “we live in a world where speech is already instituted.”

Let us compare the dissolute, learned man, resting languidly in his mansion to the poetic character, Hercules. In the Age of Heroes, through great toil, Hercules burnt a clearing in the thick primordial forest and cultivated the land. Heroic struggle marks the birth of the poetic characters and primary poetic expression. Conversely, constituted language does not require effort either from the speaker or listener. As Merleau-Ponty observes, we use “words that require no genuine effort of expression from us, and that will demand no effort of comprehension from our listeners.”

Spontaneous, creative expression demands great toil, struggle and effort. This is perhaps the reason that Vico tells the reader that the discovery of his master key took 20 long years of labor and struggle. Moreover, in his Autobiography he traces the chaotic, confused, and toilsome emergence of his discoveries.

5.3 Coherent Deformation and Tropes

Creativity is born of a coherent deformation, a concept that Merleau-Ponty adapts from Malraux. “We cut our existence off from the past itself, and we only allow our existence to seize upon the present traces of this past.” The traces are Nietzsche’s minted coins that have lost their force, and Vico poetic characters, which shrank in size alongside the shrinking imaginations of the thinkers, “Later, as these vast imaginations shrank and the power of abstraction grew...Jove became so small and light that he is flown about by an eagle.” (NS par. 402) The sublime, awesome, chaotic site of the bestial creation of Jove, the first concrete metaphor, is reduced to a diminutive, closed, tidy, arbitrary appearing sign. The true narrations now appear false to the

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539 Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, 189.
540 NS par. 3.
541 Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, 189.
542 Ibid., 413.
543 NS par. 402.
rational mind. We must return to the initial site in order to reveal their hidden, originary force, and retell the story to create new metaphors. Merleau-Ponty’s use of coherent deformation is illustrated throughout Vico’s oeuvre: the call for the young to use their heroic minds is a call to resuscitate the heroic imaginative powers of the heroic age. The *New Science* itself is a kind of coherent deformation, taking up past narrations and refashioning them into a new, yet incomplete narration.

It is only in the age of men, the age of reflection, that one could imagine inhabiting a language divorced from speaking expressive acts.\(^{544}\) New acts of expression must take up and rearrange the constituted language. “Sedimentation occurs and I shall be able to think farther. Speech, as distinguished from language, is that moment when the significative intention...proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others - of shaping me and others by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments.”\(^{545}\) It uses the available significations and fashions them into something new. “It gives the illusion that it was contained in the already available significations, whereas by a sort of ruse it espoused them only in order to infuse them with new life.”\(^{546}\) It appears as if the new were always already there, and we forget that it emerges from a coherent deformation of the given acquired language. The new emerges from a refashioning of the available, pre-established language. The age of men, in this sense, is an age of forgetting. The scholars forget the “logic of invention” that gives birth to their concepts.\(^{547}\)

Returning to the primordial event of expression, will allow us to reinvigorate the capacity to invent in Vico’s last age in the *storia ideale eterna*, our own reflective, modern age. “We are

\(^{544}\) Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 77.
\(^{545}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 92.
\(^{546}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 92.
\(^{547}\) Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 404.
called to uncover beneath thought, which basks in its acquisitions and is merely a stopping point in the indefinite process of expression, a thought that attempts to establish itself and only does so by bending the resources of constituted language to a new usage.\(^{548}\) Constituted language must be taken up and refashioned in order to create the new. In many ways, Merleau-Ponty’s constituted language resembles Vico’s \textit{sensus communis} and the topical arts that take up the commonplaces. Vico shows that creativity involves dipping into the well or storehouse of cultural memory, the topics. The topics function like raw colors in painting; we need some basic material or topoi to start with before we impart our own form.\(^{549}\) Expressive language cannot invent \textit{ex nihilo}. “To express is...to ensure, through the already well-worn words, that the new intention takes up the heritage of the past.”\(^{550}\) We gather up the past to give birth to the new.

Coherent deformation would be impossible without the storehouse of culture accretions at its disposal. One way to think of these acquisitions is through Marshal McLuhan’s description of the culture wisdom that Vico digs through to tell a novel tale, or reinvent the old. “Vico, like Joyce, insists that new technology is not added to culture, but it “ruins” whole societies, tossing them into the \textit{middlenhide or heep}, whence they are forever being retrieved and refurbished for generations.”\(^{551}\) Vico’s war with technology as Verene called it above is not aimed at demolishing modern humanities barbaric state.

As Struever observes of Rhetoric, “its topoi are more than storage bins, they are points of departure.”\(^{552}\) “This notion of a sensory topics enhances the role played by experience, rather

\(^{548}\) Ibid., 409.
\(^{549}\) Ibid.
\(^{550}\) Ibid., 414.
\(^{551}\) Additionally, he notes, “The need of the poet forever new means for probing and exploration of experience, sends him back again and again to the rag and bone shop of abandoned clichés.” See McLuhan, \textit{Essential McLuhan}, 330.
\(^{552}\) Struever, \textit{The Language of History in the Renaissance}, 16. Moreover, Struever clarifies, “The system of topoi, as invented by Gorgias and developed by Aristotle, is based on the premise that a finite list of arguments can generate responses to an indefinite series of demands; in this sense the topoi reflect the active power of language and
than reason alone, in creating expression: it underlies his presupposition that logic and reason cannot exhaust experience (Section 405.)\textsuperscript{553} Vico’s sensory topics go beyond the traditional rhetorical art of topics. More than mere rhetorical devices the topics have an ontological linguistic function: they give birth to the human world and our experience of reality. They are more than devices to be used by orators in speech making. Although Merleau-Ponty and Vico recognize the value of cultural acquisitions inherited from the past they are interested in the way in which new language is born. If our inherited institutions lose contact with the primordial affective dimension of language, linguistic creativity suffers.

In order to invent, constituted language must be taken up and refashioned. Merleau-Ponty writes, “we are called to uncover beneath thought, which basks in its acquisitions and is merely a stopping point in the indefinite process of expression, a thought that attempts to establish itself and only does so by bending the resources of constituted language to a new use.”\textsuperscript{554} We must gather up the past in order to give birth to the new, by dipping into the well of cultural memory. “To express...is to ensure, through already well-worn words, that the new intention takes up the heritage of the past.”\textsuperscript{555} Genuine expression happens through taking up the sedimented language. Struever explains, “This notion of sensory topics enhances the role played by experience; it underlies his presupposition that logic and reason cannot exhaust experience.”\textsuperscript{556} The world always calls forth new expressions.

The Romantic conception of ingenuity idealizes the image of the lone thinker, creating original works of art. The way in which Vico’s and Merleau-Ponty emphasize the importance of sedimented language in the process of creating the new goes against the grain of the Romantic

\textsuperscript{553} Struever, “Vico, Valla, And the Logic of Humanist Inquiry,” 181.
\textsuperscript{554} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 409.
\textsuperscript{555} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 414.
ideal. The oral tradition, from which Rhetoric was born and remains close to, also emphasizes the importance of commonplaces. In the oral tradition novelty depended upon how a speaker took up the common storylines and plots and configured them to fit the particular audience, time, and place. “Narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time – at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation.” 557 This is the way in which the poetic characters of the Heroic Age were formed as we saw with Vico’s discovery of the true Homer. The first people were poets by nature not art.558

To invent is always a social endeavor, for Vico; his departure from the written tradition and descent into the oral tradition unveils the communal nature of invention. Our minds are too “refined by the art of writing” to fully imagine our communal, oral prehistory.559 The Romantic Age’s conception of the solitary, original genius creating the new is a myth born of the written tradition, according to Walter Ong. Originality in the Oral tradition has to do with the rearrangement of commonplaces.560 Ong observes, Cognitive scientists such as Lakoff and Turner, moreover, emphasize that novelty is derivative of a communal ground; the poet or any original thinker always works with a basic set of conceptual metaphors, though this is often forgotten. “General conceptual metaphors are thus not the unique creation of individual poets but are rather part of the way members of a culture have of conceptualizing experience.”561 In a similar fashion, Nancy Struever, affirms the communal ground of originality in Vico’s conception of invention, “Our mental constructs are not, cannot be solipsistic: they assume the

557 Ong, Orality and Literacy, 42.
558 NS par. 352.
559 NS par. 378.
560 Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy, 41.
priority of social discovery. For Vico, the locus of meaningful change is on the collective level.\textsuperscript{562}

But it is the singular reader who is supposed to make the collective tale her own: she must narrate it for herself and in narrating. Whereas Cavarero tends to lose sight of the pre-personal dimension of experience, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the ambiguity between the two realms. Merleau-Ponty observes, “an existential theory of history is ambiguous, but it cannot be reproached for its ambiguity, because the ambiguity is in the things.”\textsuperscript{563} Both Vico and Merleau-Ponty advocate a genius for ambiguity, and it is apparent in their treatment of the individual and her relation to history.\textsuperscript{564} Merleau-Ponty reveals how deeply interwoven both dimensions of experience are. He observes, “it is impossible to say where the forces of history end and where ours begins, and strictly speaking, the question is meaningless, since history only exists for a subject who lives through it and a subject only exists as historically situated.”\textsuperscript{565} We cannot be reduced to our economic background, sexuality, or political status. For instance, even if we grant psychanalysis the power to interpret Cezanne’s life, Merleau-Ponty shows that it still doesn’t explain his creative efforts.

And yet we cannot understand ourselves without acknowledging the cultural stories that shape us. “The conception of law, morality, religion, economic structures are co-signified in the Unity of the social event, just as the parts of the body are co-implicated in the Unity of the gesture, or just as ‘physiological, ‘psychological’ and moral motives intersect in the unity of action.”\textsuperscript{566} Expression and history are entwined in a network of meaning. As Edie observes, for Merleau-Ponty, “History, because it is human action, and because human action is never

\textsuperscript{562} Nancy Struever, “Vico, Valla, and the Logic of Humanist Inquiry,” 182.
\textsuperscript{563} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 176.
\textsuperscript{564} Eddie, “Vico and Existential Philosophy,” 488.
\textsuperscript{565} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 177.
\textsuperscript{566} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 178.
completed, can never exist completely without taking into account what ‘comes after,’ the incarnate, operating intentionality which is at work in the open field of the temporal, and whose future is always in suspense.”

Vico’s narrative leaves open a space for reinterpretation by calling to the reader to make the *New Science* for herself, thereby acknowledging history as a continuous call to action. “Historical reality, like historical knowledge, contains within itself an appeal to the judgment of the future generations towards which it is groping.”

Vico’s injunction to the reader is an appeal in this sense.

Vico adds depth to Merleau-Ponty’s sense of history, moreover, because the experiential basis of the oral tradition easily engenders the sense in which participation and engagement are called for. Hegel did not begin his history with fables because “the foundations of the observed and observable reality provides a firmer ground than the transient soil in which legends and epics grow; these no longer make up the historic record of those peoples that have risen to a firm individuality.”

But it is precisely the infirm, transient nature of the soil that beckons continuous narration. There is no firm individuality for Vico or Merleau-Ponty that can be completely realized, once and for all. There is a constant dialogic exchange between the individual and its cultural acquisitions. Vico’s oral narrations capture Merleau-Ponty’s sense that “we are caught in a secret history, a forest of symbols.”

This is our oral heritage, shrouded in mystery and resting on a shapeshifting ground.

Moreover, tethering Vico’s oral residues to Merleau-Ponty’s sense of history further emphasis the role of voice. There is a greater preoccupation with voice in oral history, as opposed to disembodied minds. For instance, Merleau-Ponty writes that history teaches the

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568 Ibid., 494.
570 Merleau-Ponty, *Cézanne’s Doubt*, 63.
philosopher that “he must see himself within the dialogue of minds, situated as they all are, and grant them the dignity of self-constituting beings at the very moment that he claims that dignity for himself.”571 As we saw above, Vico’s vivid narrations of shouting and singing beasts and heroes force us to realize ourselves as part of an interplay of voices. Evans observes, “As voices we tend to one of these two limits, shifting now to a generalized version of the social discourse that we articulate, now to a more personalized version of it. The more personalized version…reflects our bodily existence and the particular nuances of a social discourse at the site where one begins his or her history.”572 Vico’s imagery allows us to imagine the corporeal nature of discourse, even on the collective level. We do not merely encounter an interplay of minds when we take up our cultural heritage, but we engage with an interplay of voices. Our bodies encounter the bodies of our archaic past.

572 Evans, The Multivoiced Body, 146.
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have lightly touched upon the pleasure that narration confers. I related Vico’s own account of the increasing delight he took in oratory and poetry after setting aside his training in traditional metaphysics. If we follow Vico’s injunction to narrate the New Science to ourselves, we will find our mind taking increasing delight in it as well; his poetic science draws the reader away from traditional philosophical discourse and towards the oral poetry of our archaic fables. Once we bracket off the conceit of scholars we are free to weave together the threads of memories and images which Vico unearths for us.

Pleasure attends the narrations of the oral tradition. By drawing from the condition of primary orality, Vico brings us closer to the sensuous, passionate, and pleasurable nature of the oral tale. For instance, without written language, repetition was needed to help preserve the tales in the storyteller’s memory. And repetition is inherently pleasurable. Havelock observes, “its rhythms are biologically pleasurable, especially when reinforced by musical chants, by melody, and by the body motions of dance.”

The whole body becomes involved in the story, whether by singing, dancing, or chanting. When the tales of the bards were meant to instruct, which they often were, they were designed to please the listener so that the instructions remained in their memories.

As we have seen, storytelling is necessary for the realization of identity; therefore, it is imperative that we learn how to tell stories again in order to realize our identities. Following Vico’s example, we can learn from the oral poets. Writing, in fact, can hinder our ability to share the stories of our lives. As Ong observes, “learning to read or write disables the oral poet…it introduces into his mind the concept of the text as controlling the narrative and thereby

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interferes with the oral composing process, which have nothing to do with texts but are the ‘remembrance of songs sung.’” Vico’s instruction to the reader to become involved in his performance harks back to our condition of primary orality, where the listener participated in the story by singing, dancing, clapping, or chanting. By telling us that our bodies will be filled with pleasure upon narrating his poetic sayings for ourselves, we are led back to the pleasurable experiences conferred by the ancient Homeric bards. As Ruth Sawyer explains, “The troubadours animated the minds of men; by amusing them, they led them to think, reflect, to judge.” Today, in our Academic institutions, the body is not induced to feel pleasure during instruction. The body, in fact, is almost forgotten. The learner is expected to remain still and motionless. As we witness the epidemic of psychotropic drugs being prescribed to young children, especially young boys since they are vigorous, active and robust, mirroring the unruly, grotesque bodies of the first creative poets, it is imperative that we remember the pleasures conferred by narration, and the powerful ways that pleasure aids instruction. Rather than dulling the child, we should awaken them to a sensorial experience of reality through introducing the pleasures of narration. We witnessed the shrinking bodies of the robust heroes with the onslaught of reflective, abstract discourse in Vico’s ideal eternal story. This serves as a warning: we should not reduce and diminish the child’s active life in this manner. Vico was teaching us a powerful message about discourse and its intimate relation to the body. In order to keep our creative capacities alive, we must engage the body.

Vico worried that young minds would be trained too early in the critical arts, which are centered upon the analytic, reflective logic of the scholars. According to Vico, if the young are

574 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 59.
not nourished on topical arts, which delight and aid the imagination, they will become incapable of genuine, novel expression and creativity. For instance, if they are trained too early in the conceptual sciences, “it is apt to smother the student’s...capacity to perceive the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently most dissimilar. It is this capacity which constitutes the source and principle of all ingenious, acute, and brilliant forms of expression.”577 This, of course, is the capacity to create metaphors, which we saw gave birth to the first human world. Moreover, we are reminded of the “wild and savage comparisons”578 of Homer - the poetic character of the Greek peoples, who were by a natural necessity all poets. Children must be trained in the arts that once preoccupied the bards and storytellers of the Heroic Age. We must reawaken their sensorial experience of reality.

Vico reinvents the traditional tropes of rhetoric and confers ontological status upon them. As Verene observes, “these forms which make up poetic logic (see par. 404-11) for Vico are not simply devices for the literary embellishment of truths arrived at by logical means; they are for him features of a logic that itself precedes the logic of syllogism and rational argument.”579 In a rare moment in the New Science, Vico addresses the young people of his own time, whom are robust with memory, imagination and the powers of invention. He believes that figural geometry, because it deals with images, heightens these primitive, corporeal powers, yet if the young are pushed into mathematics and algebra without first exercising these powers they will be subdued into the condition of barbaric reflection or the barbarism of intellect. They “become over fine for life in their way of thinking and are rendered incapable of any great work.”580 Here it is clear that Vico’s narrative is meant to nourish these natural powers of imagination in order

578 NS par. 893.
580 NS par. 159.
to protect against the abstract, metaphysical criticism that can ruin young minds and turn them into members of the barbaric condition he witnessed in his own lifetime. The *New Science* is, in fact, training in the sensory topics. Vico, with the force of his imagination, fills up our minds with the primordial, ontological topics in order to render us capable of great works, too.

Children have weak reasoning powers yet are rich in imagination; if we rob them of the former in order to elicit the later, we will do great damage to their lives. Vico explains, “imagination is more robust in proportion as reasoning power is weak.” Vico is not advocating a return to the bestial, wild forests at the expense of reason either; rather, he thinks that by acknowledging the value of our primitive powers, we can bring them to bear on our reasoning powers in order to go beyond the pre-established order. Without infusing the spirit of the forest into our thinking we will remain incapable of inventing the new. Children must follow this natural order of things so that they can bring their imagination to bear on their later powers of critical thinking. This prevents the extreme, barbaric side of criticism from taking over. “Providence gave good guidance to human affairs when it aroused human minds first to topics rather than to criticism, for acquaintance with things must come before judgment of them. Topics have the function of making minds inventive, as criticism has of making them exact.” The tropes are not the devices of sophisticated artists, but rather make up the creative powers of the first bestial, unrefined poets. Vico affirms, “from all this it follows that all the tropes...which have hitherto been considered the ingenious invention of writers, were necessary modes of expression of all the first poetic nations...But these expressions of the first nations later became figurative.” They are born of need and necessity.

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581 *NS* par. 185.  
582 *NS* par. 498.  
583 *NS* par. 409.
Vico situates modern humanity in the midst of barbarism. Verene observes that “Vico is at war with the Cartesian world that, through technology and reflection, would deprive us of the civil wisdom of humanism.” Wisdom, in the Vichian sense, is intimately related with speaking. Vico affirms that eloquence is wisdom speaking. His new critical art is supposed to initiate a new way of speaking in order to combat the critical arts and barbarism of reflection. This new way of speaking is not merely a return to the ancient art of rhetoric, but a way of using rhetoric to invent the new. The new critical art is a narrative art meant to spark a transformation in the reader’s way of being, drawing her out of a condition of barbaric reflection dominated by the critical arts and into the barbaric sensuality of her genetic origins in order to rekindle her originary threefold powers of imagination: memory, fantasy and imagination.

Abstraction is derivative of originary action. Vico’s method of studies follows the course of the transition from the oral tradition to the written tradition. The movement from the forest to the Academies should be mirrored in education in order to shape inventive, creative singular beings. For instance, children should primarily learn how to tell stories and engage with each other. “Speech is, above all else, a sensory motor activity, of a concrete nature, derived from action, sound and rhythm. It interacts with perceptual motor activities.” This mirrors the primary orality prefiguring the advent of the alphabet. In other words, it follows the primary stages of humanity’s birth on the collective level: The Age of Heroes. “Writing, on the other hand,” observes Titone, “implies a further step along the road to abstraction, reasoning, and the construction of general mental schema.” The child must be able to organize their experience orally, engage with other children orally on an interpersonal level, and learn to tell stories for pleasure before they are subjected to the rigors of abstraction and writing. Additionally, Di

584 Verene, History of Philosophy, 143.
586 Ibid., 195.
Pietro affirms that Vico “felt that the learning of languages was especially appropriate to young people because in youth the use of the imagination and the wish to associate with young people in social contacts is strongest. Languages lead naturally to the play of the imagination and to interactions with others.” In describing her proscriptions for a Vichian approach to childhood learning Titone explains, “the common instructional feature of these is that action precedes words. Specifically, an act of instruction should take into account the fact that life experiences, along with affective and cognitive processes all intersect.”

Moreover, sensorial stimulation is the basis of all elementary instruction.

To increase the pleasure of instruction and so the imagination, educators should consider adding music and visual art to accompany their instruction. As in the birth of language itself, a child’s language development begins with the senses. Titone even suggests that the rise of imagery due to mass media actually serves the education of the child, who’s imagination expands with sound, color, and imagery - despite its deleterious effects on the broader contemporary society. We have, perhaps, entered a condition of secondary orality, as we have argued for above. The condition of secondy orality, in this sense, is conducive to the child’s proper order of learning and developmentally appropriate instruction.

If we ignore the sensorial roots of thinking, there will be devastating consequences for childhood education today. Vico relates his own harrowing experience of being forced to study logic before it was developmentally proper. “But his mind, too weak to understand that of chrisppipean logic, was almost lost in it, so that to his great sorrow he had to give it up. His despair made him desert his studies (so dangerous it is to put youths to the study of sciences that

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589 Ibid., 195.
590 Ibid., 199.
are beyond their age!) and he strayed from them for a year and a half.”

We can avoid this by considering alternate methods of education, such as the Waldorf Astoria method and the Montessori method. Both acknowledge the importance of place, movement, and rhythm in childhood learning; in this sense, I argue, they are Vichian in spirit. For instance, consider the concept of *Eurythmy* or beautiful movement, used in the Waldorf method of education:

Rudolf Steiner, the progenitor of Waldorf methodology, had such a profound respect for poetry, he developed a new art of recitation, Sprachgestaltung, or ‘speech formation.’ Alongside this art he developed yet another, Eurythmy, or ‘beautiful movement.’ Eurythmy is performed not only to music but to the spoken word as well. Steiner’s eurythmy choreography is replete with indications to performers concerning the sounds, meter, rhyme, and meaning of many great poems.

The child is delighted once again with the enchantments of our archaic oral poetry: dance, rhythm, meter, song, repetition, movement. The whole body and voice are engaged in the poetic spell. These are what nourish the child’s imagination, just as narrative and song once nourished corporeal imaginations of the ancient heroes.

Moreover, consider Maria Montessori’s emphasis on the creative powers of the child and how it accords with Vico’s work. Montessori observes, “there are various things that ‘call’ the children…the beauty of decorated objects is nothing more than ‘voices’ which attract the attention of the child and encourage him to act. These objects possess an eloquence that no teacher could ever attain.”

Robust imagery stimulates the child. And the child should be free to respond to these calls. The ability of the child to move freely is paramount to the Montessori system of education; it is through movement that the child constructs their world.

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593 Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*, 88.
594 Maria Montessori, *Discovery of the Child*, 52.
of creating her world. The heroes, like children, are creators or makers - not thinkers. In order to build their worlds, they must be free to move about and create familiar dwelling places. Montessori, additionally, encourages self-motivation. Like Vico she observes the fact that children learn their mother tongue without instruction. Goretti argues that this accords with Montessori’s concept of the absorbent mind and “the extraordinary power of the child’s mind to absorb the resources of language and the qualities of environment.”\(^{595}\) The child is totally immersed in her environment, both discovering and creating her world through a rich sensorial experience.

Servitude towards philosophical discourse, Vico has taught us, robs us of our sensorial, corporeal experience and our ability to take pleasure and delight in learning. According to Gianturco, Vico reveals that “the passionate sides of our natures can never be swayed and overcome unless this is done by more sensuous and corporeal means…the soul must be enticed by images and impelled to love; for once it loves, it is easily taught to believe; once it believes and loves the fire of passion must be infused into it so as to break its inertia and force it to will.”\(^{596}\) The child will not develop her rational side if she is not first compelled by sensorial imagery that awakens her powers of imagination.

Vico had the good fortune and courage to become an autodidact. For this reason, he was able to break the shackles of the Academies, with their philosophical discourse and teach himself the pleasure of narration. He communed with heroes who broke into song, overflowing with a passion springing from both joy and sorrow. Without being rooted in our passionate, sensorial natures, our imaginations become arid and sterile; we become incapable of invention. Vico recognizes that the robust imagination he discovered in the first poets was present in the children

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\(^{595}\) Goretti, “Vico’s Pedagogic Thought,” 557.
\(^{596}\) Gianturco, introduction to *Study Methods of Our Time*, 38.
of his own day. He called the poets, after all, the children of the human race. We must honor
and nourish the child’s corporeal imagination and avoid harming it with our own reflective,
rational conceits, which demands motionless, inactive bodies.

The fate of childhood education today is a product of the conceit of scholars identified by
Vico. We live in an age of barbaric reflection where children are made inhuman by inactivity and
desensitized by drugs. To reawaken our senses, we must listen to the songs of the oral poets and
reinfuse our instruction with engaged, delighted, activated, singing, chanting, laughing, and
dancing bodies. Cavarero argues that women are in a privileged position to re-enchant the world
with song and narration. Since our patriarchal tradition prohibited women from taking up
philosophical discourse, they have been spared the detrimental effects of the Academies. Since
they have been cast outside the Man’s symbolic domain, Cavarero affirms, “women have
somewhat less of a chance of committing that formidable error that consists in exchanging the
‘unrepeatable uniqueness’ for the abstract ‘Man.’”597 Like Vico, the stranger on the edges of the
forests and academies, they have been afforded the pleasures of narration because of their
outsider status.

While the philosophers took flight into the realm of pure, abstract thought, beyond the
constraints of birth and death, women remained engaged with each other, sharing stories,
laughing, and singing together. If we are children are to become storytellers today and so fulfill
the desire of narratable selves, we must teach our children to use their bodies and voices. Sawyer
observes in the Way of the Storyteller, “there are two indisputable facts about this art of
storytelling…that our instrument is our voice; that we work with, and by means of the spoken
language – words.”598 Here the voice is valued over and above the written text. The text appears

597 Cavarero, Relating Narratives, 58.
more and more inessential in terms of our narratable identities, confirming Cavarero’s thesis of the inessentiality of the text. This is what Steiner’s technique of speech formation combined with beautiful movement points towards: techniques to use and master the voice and body as a way to relate to others and share experiences through narration. “A voice resonant, flexible, and pleasant to the ear, well supported by fundamental deep breath, words distinctively and easily spoken, and there you have an adequate instrument for your art.”599 Sawyer treats the body an instrument that will create pleasurable narrations, as the piano or violin creates pleasurable music. In telling a tale, the listener longs to be delighted. As Cavarero affirms, “destined for the ear of another, the voice implies a listener – a reciprocity of pleasure.”600 In the misogynistic western philosophical tradition voice is “secondary, ephemeral, inessential, and reserved for women.”601

Teaching the arts conducive to pleasurable narration may seem frivolous from the perspective of the traditional Academies in the Age of Men, the age laid out by Vico, governed by abstraction and the written word. But, as Cavarero affirms, “pleasure is part of vocal self-revelation,” and that, moreover, “emission is vital pleasure.”602 As Hobbs affirms, “Knowledge which begins with language, is confirmed with the mind-body’s assent of delight and pleasure.”603 Since our identities are shaped by the stories we tell and the voices of others around us, we must learn to practice the art of narration to foster our sense of self and community. Sawyer writes, “To be able to create a story, to make it live during the moment of telling, to arouse emotions – wonder, laughter, joy, amazement – this is the only goal the

599 Ibid., 138.
600 Cavarero, For More than One Voice, 7.
601 Ibid., 6.
602 Ibid., 4.
603 Hobbs, Rhetoric on the Margins of Modernity, 96.
storyteller may have. To honor one’s art.” 604 This art is perfectly captured in Vico’s *Heroic Ages*, where storytellers abound singing, dancing, and enchanting listeners with their tales.

Vico teaches us that the best languages are heroic. 605 He says it is a kind of language he witnessed in the women of his day. 606 Cavarero observes, “Women tell stories: there is always a woman at the origin of the enchanting power of every story.” 607 Perhaps we, too, would be better off living like Penelope and her handmaids, tied up in narratives:

> But in the weaving room, these women neither separate their philosophy from the body to grant it eternal duration nor entrust their experience of finitude to death in an arrogant desire for immortality. The world of ideas and the sea are not theirs. Having let men go forth to their adventures at sea, they stay together quietly, exchanging looks and words rooted in the individual wholeness of their existence, now so evidently gendered in the feminine that this life shared in a common horizon allows every woman to recognize herself is another woman. They are weaving and laughing in their quiet abode.

For instance, it was precisely the occlusion of women from traditional systems of education that allowed a unique literary style to develop among female writes in the 19th century. When they began to enter schools during the 16th century, the institutions they attended were oriented towards practical activities and did not practice Latin, the core language of academics. Ong observes, “women writers were no doubt influenced by works that they had read emanating from the Latin-based, academic, rhetorical tradition, but they themselves normally expressed themselves in a different, far less oratorical voice, which had a great deal to do with the rise of the novel.” 608 By being pushed to the edges of the Academy, women developed unique voices that gave birth to a different form of writing, and created different characters for readers to live through. The novel certainly provides us with alternate characters to live through, rather than the

605 NS par. 463.
606 NS par. 457.
607 Ibid., 122.
608 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 111.
universal concepts of the philosophers. Like Vico, these women were liminal figures. The liminal status that women, children, and autodidacts have in relation to traditional systems of education leaves enough space for them to create unique lead voices that resist being swallowed up by oracular voices.
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