

## Foreword, volume 6: The Politics of reading

[\*\*Editorial note: this manuscript file will be replaced by a definitive pdf in early 2013\*\*]

[iii] 1. A philosopher poses his problems. To silence the fact that at the same time he inscribes them on the text of another philosopher, however, would be to tolerate the arbitrariness of a reading without recall or memory. The earlier philosopher is enriched by his epigone, and by the credit he gives him for having found more knots than he himself severed.

Between two philosophies the rapport is thus not one of *reference* (whereby one would be the thing of which the other would say the word; to the same question, one would say yes the other no), but of *difference* (between a concept and its absence from the other; between a word, and the same in the other [*entre un mot, et le même chez l'autre*]). Since Saussure, we have indeed been missing a difference among signifiers<sup>1</sup>; yet another difference may also be lacking from between the problems in the history of philosophy: the aporias would then be resolved, from the feigned literalities of erudition (considered as a means of measuring doctrines and their intervals) to the diversions and overtakings the mind thinks it takes (considered as psychology, and thus as the psychologization of theories).

2. In the simpler case where the one philosopher reads the other, the difference passes between them, although lightly; the difference presses more strongly when it passes over wholly from the former, or wholly from the latter's reading of the former. It is up to the one who reads this reading to detect the difference in its greatest effects, and to make between the two the most effective distribution of shares.

Martial Gueroult here teases apart the strings of the tangle, strings knotted around Rousseau's concept of the state of nature: how the Fichte of before 1794 reads the later Rousseau, then the later Fichte, and the equivocation of the two Rousseaus; that Fichte saw Rousseau as double leads us to see Fichte as similarly double.

Having come to the end of these reduplications, it turns out that, as in Plato, the deployment of exhaustive, disjunctive dichotomies chase difference to its thinnest edge – to the point of a concept, if not a word – and that punctuation (a concept introduced elsewhere<sup>2</sup>) admits the *recurrence* of its [iv] transfer right up until the final excess or surplus. Halfway down the path of the tortoise, we can still take a shortcut [*coupe encore par le plus court*].

This calculation of what the area [*l'aire*] of a system or of an argument suffers or sustains is the concern of the other readings presented here: sometimes readings of readings, of Rousseau by Fichte, of Machiavelli by Descartes, differential readings of Fichte opposed to himself; of Hume, opposed to Locke and to Hobbes, in spite of the phrase 'social contract'.

3. In the particular case where *politics* is the field of answers, if not the field of questions, difference again excludes reference and referendum. If we maintain that the philosophers under consideration here wrote under a sovereign, we merely recognize that they share this point in common before settling for an assessment of their opinions as *partes extra partes*, i.e. a distribution of political theses without intersections or gaps [*vides*]. But the city did not obey the rules of a Euclidian space: writing under their

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<sup>1</sup> TN: The French reads: '*Il s'en faut en effet d'une différence, depuis Saussure, entre les signifiants*'.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Foreword, volume 5: The concept of punctuation', see above 000.

sovereign, philosophers were therefore *also* obliged to subsume their problematics, with these subsumptions taking the form of a theory of divine right, or a theory of origins, or of obedience, or of the taking of power – whereby we can reveal who does theology, who does philosophy, who psychology and who science.

Moreover, that the centre should always be occupied implied in turn a hierarchy of places around it, and that the space should be closed implied a lack of place: whence displacements (promotion, demotion) and 'condensations' (contraction, enlargement).

4. Politics and reading can then be shown to obey analogous laws: the politics of a philosopher is his reading of another philosopher. To claim that, under these laws, at least the objects differ, would be to take for granted production of the object of a politics as science: but this is precisely what is in question here, to know whether there ever was a Copernican revolution in politics, or merely a succession of recuperations by the *subject* (of the sovereign or of ideology) of the place it loses again and again. Politics would then only ever have been the metaphor of the subject, *that* which accompanies it in its displacements.

5. But in return, if a politics as science has been or was invented, far from rendering the old problems obsolete it would *reread* them better: it is precisely of politics (in the singular) that the philosophers will have spoken, and the difference of a reading between two philosophers will have been a matter of difference in politics itself.

François Regnault.