

Notes on Reading

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Notes on Reading

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“Our worlds have never gone outside.”

Frida Kahlo³

ABSTRACT: My aim here is to break with the idea that reading is a simple, straightforward activity. To be sure, it is a seemingly unproblematic activity which we carry out on a daily basis. Furthermore, it is an activity essential to epistemic practices in general. However, I will argue that there is nothing straightforward about reading. It might be even *impossible* to carry out the activity of reading as it is normally conceived. Reading is a thoroughly political activity, and there is usually something remarkably conservative to it that, more often than not, goes completely unacknowledged. This will be shown through the exploration of social indexes, which can be found both inscribed and (as we shall see) *excribed* in the texts that become the object of reading.

Keywords: reading; perceptopolitics; double standards

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What is more natural than to think that we only begin to read a given text when we actually begin to read it? That we need to lay eyes on its first words, let ourselves be absorbed by its first sentences, have the patience to cross its first pages so as to allow its meaning to unfold and become progressively present in our consciousness? For how could we read without reading? And how

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could we not read while reading? Isn't it obvious that we need to open a book in order to read it? And that we need to read it in order to understand it? And that we need to understand it in order to judge it—as interesting or uninteresting, as consistent or inconsistent, as profound or superficial, as worthwhile or worthless? However, reading is not as simple a phenomenon as it seems. And not just because we can always be wrong—and in a sense, we are indeed always wrong—in our judgments. Can we not take as interesting that which is actually uninteresting? And as inconsistent that which is consistent? And as profound that which is superficial? And as worthless that which is very much worthwhile? And can we not also change our minds? And change our minds once again? And end up being undecided? And thus remain—undecided? And our judgment—can't it be the object of judgment itself? And can't we ourselves judge it—we who are making the judgment? And the judgment we make on our own judgment—why would it be the final judgment? Can't it also be judged? Can't it be demolished—only to be later restored? And who is making the judgment anyway? Is it really us? And that which grounds our judgments—and which authors our judgments—, can't it itself be an object of judgment? And the book—or the text—which we were judging—can't it progressively absorb us, lead us into its inner labyrinth, and trap us within itself? Can't it judge us too? Can't it also look back on us and judge the books—or texts—which we use to judge it?—The texts which we stand by, which define us, and which we are—the texts which have once absorbed us, leading us into their inner labyrinth, into themselves? Can't they dislodge them, and take their place? Can't they blend into our flesh, our bones, and our bodies? Can't they become an inextricable part of ourselves—occupying our

thoughts, feelings, and desires? In such a way that we can no longer escape them? For they come to accompany us wherever we go?ⁱⁱ

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To reach out for a text is always to reach out for a trap: it can seize us, it can torture us, it can kill us—or kill something dear to us, within us. There is something inherently hazardous about reading. And I am not here talking about the macro-phenomenon of reading, I am not here talking about the threat posed by pieces critical to the establishment—nor about the fact that we always carry the establishment within ourselves in one way or another. It is dangerous to read in the sense that it is an act of opening the door—or opening the psyche—to an unknown figure. Shouldn't we scrutinize it very carefully before letting it in? Shouldn't we ask for its credentials? Shouldn't we ask who wrote it? And with what right? And for what purpose? We always run the risk of—and we always crave—being transformed by what we read: we expect to be different from who we were when we get to the end of the text. But we also always run the risk—and we are always afraid—of becoming *too* different from ourselves: we run the risk of being phagocytized by its way of seeing the world instead of phagocytizing it—as another content. But our way of seeing the world—which the text subverted and burnt down to ashes—was it really ours? And this new way of seeing the world—can't we take it as our own? Can't we even recognize it as our own?

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Undoubtedly, there is something of an object about books, and texts too: we can pick them up, open them, and close them; we can

feel them in our hands, we can put them down next to our bed or put them back on the shelf. But they also have their own heartbeat: they pulse silently—always waiting for pupils to march over.ⁱⁱⁱ Texts are not encased within themselves. They never remain within their own borders: each of their signs is a tentacle eager to reach out to the surrounding world—including our inner worlds. They are written to overflow, they are meant to overflow. They only become—they only become what they are—by and through overflowing. And we may not have the strength to dam—to control—to tame their voices. They may be deeper than ours—and their echoes may reverberate with more strength. While trying to keep them in the position of mere objects, can't we suddenly find ourselves in this position—of mere objects? Can't we find that our forest stands in relation to it as if it were a mere garden? Can't we find that our reality stands in relation to it as if it were a mere a fantasy? And our universe stands as a mere province?

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We secretly hope that reading will add, even if only discreetly, to our general scheme of things: we want to read, not to be read—and above all: we want reading to empower, not to disempower us, let alone destroy us completely, bringing to ruins all the knowledge—or supposed knowledge—which we zealously carry in our hearts—and with which we identify ourselves—and without which we no longer know who we are. We expect reading to instruct us, to inform us—but without challenging the fundamental project which guides us, and without threatening our frames of reference. We hope it will take us to a new city—but within an already known civilization. But to expect reading to be harmless—and the text to

remain obediently contained within itself—to expect it always to work for us, never against us—to expect it to be our accomplice: isn't this to prevent reading from happening at all? Isn't this to betray what reading is all about?

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But can't the text move faster—and betray us? Reading depends on an unnegotiable element of passivity and self-surrender: it necessarily implies being at the mercy of a force that may bewilder us—which may suddenly attack us or insidiously take the reins of our being. It is not possible to open a book and remain invulnerable to its inner dynamic—this is a logical impossibility.^{iv} It is always possible to close it, certainly. But it is not possible to unread what has been read. It is possible to cry out against its indiscretion, against its petulance, against its shamelessness. Once it has been read, however, there is no method of unreading it. It has already written on your retinas. It has already replicated itself in your inner world—where it is now making room for itself: talking, pushing, persuading, and conspiring—asking uncomfortable questions, and refusing easy, prefabricated answers—reinterpreting and resignifying—defying, challenging and measuring forces. The texts that once ruled absolute may protest—but they reigned because they were eyes which saw but remained unseen, which analyzed without being themselves analyzed. What has been read cannot be unread: it is no longer possible to restore the paradise-like state of knowing. It is now forever lost. Because now it is known that it has always been lost.

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But how do I know that it is I who is judging—how do I know that it I who is understanding—how do I know that it is I who is reading—and not simply the texts which I carry within myself?^v And can I get rid of them? And how could I know if I really did? We stumble here over a question which we did not want to ask ourselves—which we did not want to read: are our opinions really ours? Where do they come from? What are their sources? What are their credentials?—How do they define us? And why? And for what purpose?²—And why do we resist examining our retinas? Why do we resist letting the scalpel come close to our eyes? Is it because we can lose our sight—and with it the ability to read? Or is it because then we can finally see—that we’ve never had this ability?

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The distinction between reading and seeing only makes sense to a certain point—and the same holds for the distinction between text and reality. We can look at a page without reading it. But can we look at a word without reading it?^{vi} And that both—page and word—are part of reality is out of question. The fact that concepts necessarily have to incarnate themselves in words clearly shows that they are not entities floating in a realm above reality—far from only describing it, they also rewrite it: they push it with their elbows. They are part of reality—how else could they act upon it?—, but they also have their own peculiarities: a text as an object of reading is different from a text as an object that reads.

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And the difference between the two—page and word—is reproduced *within the text* as is the difference between the words “text” and “reality”: both are meaningful objects, meaningful structures; and *within reality* as is the difference between that which happens and the structure in which it happens—or between the particular event and its general background. The page is the reality of the word and reality is the page of the event.—And the page of reality can be read precisely because of its regularities—because it is not simply a batch of independent, dissonant events. Yes, reality can be read—but not like a singular word is read.^{vii}

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Just as words are parts of texts, so texts are themselves part of larger wholes—vacillating wholes, whose coherence is uncertain—that we might refer to as “contexts” or “fields,” but also simply as “texts” in order to draw attention to some essential details: first, they are also read—which is why we are able to say that texts begin to be read before they are actually read; second, they stand for the texts that they embrace somewhat like pages stand for words—or like structures stand for events; third, they can saturate texts, especially their general formulas—or metaphysical raptures—with profound implications for their meaning; fourth, they have a definite, traceable influence upon the way we read the texts they embrace—that is, besides influencing their meaning, they also influence something very close to their meaning, something so close that it could also be called “meaning”—but which perhaps should be called “value”—in a very general, almost economic sense of the word “value”; finally, although they are made up of apparently

unreadable components—such as objects, people, and situations—, they can be obviously described—which means that they can also be converted into words and that in a deep sense they also have a textual nature: we wouldn't be able to fulfil the request “Please close the window” if there were no close, intimate relation between language and reality, and if one could not be translated into the other. To say that texts always exist within texts is simply to say that they do not exist outside of reality—or again: that reality itself is a text.

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But if reality is a text—then what is written on its pages? Or, what is written on our retinas? Because we do carry reality in our retinas—it is constantly, daily imprinting itself, its essence, its spirit on the back of our eyes, in the recesses of our consciousness, in the very flesh of our being. So that it begins to speak through us—so that we can read it both in our outward actions and inner reactions, including in our most fleeting sensations and most imperative wills. What is written on the pages of reality is what we say—it is the program under which we operate. What do you feel when you hear someone saying—or reality saying about someone: “She has five children from three different marriages”? And what do you feel when you hear a man saying—or reality saying about a man: “He has five children from three different marriages”? And what do you feel when you hear a woman saying—or reality saying about a woman: “She has five children from three different marriages”? What you feel is the reaction of the text printed on your retinas. What you feel is not exactly the *meaning* of the statement “She had five children from three different marriages”—but it is something very close to

its meaning. In each of the above cases, you understand what it says—therefore, its meaning, in a sense, does not change. But something changes.

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“No, nothing changes. When I imagined a *person*—without associating to this person a specific gender—saying ‘I had five children from three different marriages’, then a *man* saying ‘I had five children from three different marriages’, and finally a *woman* saying ‘I had five children from three different marriages’, I felt absolutely the same thing in all cases: a kind of sadness—a kind of sorrow—because it must have been difficult to face so many separations, and possibly many judicial struggles—and it must be difficult to coordinate weekends, vacations, and so forth.” Or else: “No, nothing changes. I imagined in all those cases people who are warriors: people who were not afraid to leave unsatisfactory relationships—and who did not close themselves off to new experiences, even though they knew they could end up in a difficult situation again.” In fact, different people can read the same text—be it a full-blown text, or a single sentence—in radically different ways: one feeling sadness and sorrow, the other feeling strength and inspiration, which does not necessarily mean that they breathed different meanings into the sentence “I had five children from three different marriages.” In one sense, the meaning was the same: they understood it—and understood it in exactly the same way. That fact that one felt sadness and regret—or strength and inspiration—in response to *p* is a sign that one understood *p*. What concerns us here, then, is not the problem of how meanings are attached to signs, not the problem of the constitution of meanings—it is not

the problem that concerns Wittgenstein, for example. What matters here is what happens once meanings have already been constituted—that is, what happens after language is already fully established and functioning at full speed. Our focus shall be not on uses *qua* meaning-endowing uses, but uses *qua* ordinary, everyday uses.

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The fact that different people may have different emotional reactions does not mean that there cannot be people who feel exactly the same thing. A third person might say, “I also feel sadness and sorrow!”—and what would be the point of answering, “No, you cannot use the word ‘also’ here in this case”? Only a person obsessed with the metaphysics of difference—more specifically, by the idea that two people can *never* have the same sensation in principle—would object in this way. Does this mean that *it never* makes sense to say “No, you cannot use the word ‘also’ here in this case”?—Actually, this is an objection that could be made to a foreigner who is learning our language and says joyfully: “I also feel sadness and sorrow!”—here we would retort: “You meant that you *also* feel inspiration and strength. Or that you do *not* feel sadness and sorrow. You got confused somewhere: perhaps when using the words ‘sadness’ and ‘sorrow’, perhaps when using the word ‘also’—or perhaps even when using the pronoun ‘I!’”—But then we would again be discussing the micro-processes of meaning-making. And what interests us is simply the fact that other people can *also* react to the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” feeling sadness and sorrow—or inspiration and strength. Or even: absolutely nothing. Possibly, a 1:1

scale will not allow us to see a pattern. If we examine only two or three cases—can't we end up with the strong impression that we are in the realm of differences? But if we change the scale to 1:10⁴, for example, isn't it possible that some of these differences might begin to repeat themselves? And can't we end up finding vast numbers of people experiencing—in all relevant aspects—the same feelings?

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“When I imagined a *person*—not associating a specific gender with this person—saying ‘I have five children from three different marriages’, a *man* saying ‘I have five children from three different marriages’ and then a *woman* saying ‘I have five children from three different marriages’, I felt the *same* thing: absolutely *nothing*.” And you are certainly not the only person who reads and understands the sentence “I had five children from three different marriages” without feeling anything—or anything relevant. Because that slight headache—which you were already feeling before sitting down to read—has *nothing* to do with the meaning of the sentence “I had five children from three different marriages.”—But now imagine Donald Trump, the current president of the United States, stating during the election campaign: “I have five children from three different marriages.”^{viii} What do you feel? Obviously, you have no difficulty in *understanding* the sentence “I have five children from three different marriages.” It is *not* its meaning that is in question. What is at stake here is what happens in the recesses of your consciousness. What do you think—what do you *feel*—when you imagine Trump saying “I have five children from three different marriages”? Do you feel anything? Maybe you don't. In fact, it is even likely that you don't. But there is a colossal, even brutal,

difference between nothingness that really does not mean anything—and the nothingness that, on the contrary, is highly significant.—Now imagine Hillary Clinton, who lost the election for the presidency of the United States, saying: “I have five children from three different marriages.” Now what are the thoughts—what are the *feelings*—that emerge on the recesses of your consciousness?

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It is obvious that different people may have different reactions when they hear—or read, which amounts to the same thing—a woman stating “I have five children from three different marriages.” It is reasonable to expect that a 1:1 scale will not tell us anything important—or very little. If you are familiar with feminist literature—if feminist literature has already unsewn within you the sexist, emotional fabric of our society—you may indeed not feel anything at all here.—Trump with *five* children from *three* different marriages? Clinton with *five* children from *three* different marriages?—What is the difference?—Or perhaps you might feel a certain *discomfort* when you imagine Clinton with five children from three different marriages—a discomfort which you do *not* feel when you switch to Trump.^{ix} And it is also possible that one will immediately ask oneself: “So what if a woman has five children from three different marriages? It didn’t bother me at all when I found out the same thing about Trump!”—thus performing a kind of inner dialogue: and, yes, we can *investigate* our emotional reactions—instead of simply *acting* upon them. It is through our emotional reactions that the spirit manifests itself. It is through our emotional reactions that it shapes the world—reiterating and reinforcing itself. In an important sense, we do not live in a

monolithic world—many different reactions are possible. And people themselves are not monolithic—they may also have different reactions depending on the occasion, depending on the circumstance. And that which is spontaneous can always be questioned rather than obediently and thoughtlessly followed.—However, we do live in a world with a very distinctive physiognomy.^x

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Because of the specific design of the world we live in, there is a good chance that we will not feel anything at all when listening to or imagining Trump saying “I have five children from three different marriages”—but a very small chance that we will not feel anything at all imagining Clinton saying “I have five children from three different marriages.” And there is also a good chance that we will *not* realize that we react differently in these cases—and a very small chance, almost none at all, of seeing that our problem with Clinton was *not* that she tore the limits of the justifiable, but, in a deep sense, that she tore our expectations: she disturbed our retinas.^{xi}

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So it seems to be not only possible, but quite likely that nothing—absolutely nothing—will pass by the recesses of our consciousness when we hear Trump say “I have five children from three different marriages”: no nuisance, no discomfort, no negative reaction—let alone an explicit, passionate rebuke: “He just lost my vote!” And at the same time it is not only possible, but quite likely that if Clinton had said the same, we would have immediately felt ourselves instinctively reacting in a negative way—perhaps subtly, perhaps

strongly. And we could have reacted in a negative way in spite of our conscious beliefs and convictions.—What is important here is the *contrast* between these two cases—the important thing is that we can read the statement “I had five children from three different marriages” in significantly different ways: as totally irrelevant in Trump’s case, and as saying something quite negative in Clinton’s. The lack of reaction can be just as telling as the presence of a reaction.

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“But Clinton does not have five children from three different marriages. So she has never said—and it has never been said of her—and it has never been written about her—that she has five children from three different marriages. How then can we say that we would have reacted negatively had she said that she had five children from three different marriages? How can we be so sure?” In the real world, of course, people can say things that are very much alike—but they’re unlikely to make identical statements. So how can we know if we would really have reacted negatively to the discovery that Clinton had five children from three different marriages? The answer is simple. The fact is that the real world—where there are many similar things, but few identical things—does not allow us to be sure; we can speculate, we can imagine—but not be sure. The real world does not offer us many occasions to realize that we use double standards.—It is the ideal stage for us to develop the strong impression that we do *not* use double standards.^{xii}

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Our retinas mirror the physiognomy of the world. In an important sense, reading itself helps to keep people in their places: just as the act of perception in general, reading too is a viscerally political activity. The same proposition p may bring up different reactions in its readers—depending on who utters p . And the same discourse $D = \{p, q, r, \dots\}$ can also arouse different reactions in its readers—depending on who states D .^{xiii}

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It is not that I associate a certain meaning with the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” when Trump says it, and then another meaning when Clinton says it. On the contrary, the meaning is the same in both cases—isn’t the proposition the same? In fact, it is the identity between “I have five children from three different marriages” and “I have five children from three different marriages”—it is the identity between their meanings—that allows us to speak here of a double standard.—And if you think that the meaning did change, then what precisely changed?—Would you explain the meanings of both sentences differently?—But something certainly changes: the *effect* produced by the *conjunction* of p and the *gender* of whoever says p . And gender is certainly not the only social index that affects the way we read propositions and discourses—and every speaker and writer carries a *cluster* of social indexes. Besides necessarily having a position in relation to our gender categories, don’t they also necessarily have a skin color? Don’t they necessarily have a nationality? Don’t they necessarily have an economic status? Don’t they necessarily have a sexual orientation? Don’t they necessarily have a level of formal

education? And don't the institutions they attended necessarily have a certain amount of prestige—which can be high or low depending on the institutions we compare them with?—And can't a woman have studied in a prestigious institution?—And a man in a low-prestige institution?—That is, can't someone have mixed social indexes in terms of their legitimizing and de-legitimizing effects? We are not always aware of the social indexes of the speaker, let alone the social indexes of the writer. And it is very unlikely that we can know most of their social indexes, let alone be consciously aware of all of them. But we know the following: that the indexes i, j and k , for example, have a de-legitimizing effect. And that l, m and n have a legitimizing effect. And some indexes can have a neutral effect.—Because indexes are relational.—From the point of view of legitimacy, is there really a difference between having studied at the University of Nairobi or at the University of Brasilia?—Or between being a phenomenologist of French or German origin?—But what about a phenomenologist from Nairobi or Brasilia?—And we also know that a speaker can have mixed indexes, so to say: he or she can be favored by certain indexes and disfavored by others. And we also know that the speaker can be crushed by a mass of delegitimizing indexes. Or be enormously, unbelievably favored by a mass of legitimating indexes—as if his or her words would never, no matter what, amount to trivialities, but always be deep truths, never things that everyone knows, but always things never before thought. When we read a given discourse D , what we read is *not* only D . It *never* is only D . On the contrary, we always take into account—believing to be taking into account only D —everything we have access to: the author's name—hence their gender—, their skin color—and nationality: everything is weighted, impacting his or her credibility. When we read D , what we read is something more

or less like: $D_{S\langle i, j, k \dots \rangle} = \{p, q, r \dots\}$, where S indicates the speaker and i, j, k etc. his or her cluster of social indexes. If we think that it is only the content of D that we take into account as we read D, we will *never* fully understand our reactions to D—which can be found to be incredibly *regular* once looked at under the appropriate scale.

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The concept of interpretation is an extremely important one for philosophy and the humanities in general. But there seems to be something that comes before interpretation—something more basic, something more fundamental, something without which one cannot even talk about interpretation. In fact, you need to *read* a text in order to be able to interpret it: to find out what it implies and does not imply, what it suggests and does not suggest, what it prescribes and what it forbids, and whether it has hidden inconsistencies, or perhaps a hidden, difficult to grasp consistency. So in order to interpret a text, you have to read it first; but the question is: can you really read it?—In order to deconstruct a text, you have to read it first; but again: can you really read it?—In order to analyze it logically, you have to read it first; but once again: can you really read it?—In a sense, yes, sure you can: your eyes run through the printed words, and you can even render them into spoken words.—But *can* you read “She had five children from three different marriages” just like you read “He had five children from three different marriages”? And *can* you read “A Peruvian mining company has plans to open a mining pit in Vancouver” just like you read “A Canadian mining company has plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande”?^{xiv} It might be worthwhile to note that, from the formal point of view, the propositions “He has five children from

three different marriages” and “She has five children from three different marriages” have the *same* meaning, as seen by the fact that both can be converted into “This person has five children from three different marriages”—in a sense, they are the *same* proposition p . This also applies to “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” and “A Peruvian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Vancouver,” although the similarities here might be a bit more difficult to grasp: there are more empirical determinations hiding their homology—even, in a sense, their *identity* of meaning. In fact, one can say that, in a deep sense, if you cannot grasp the *identity* between “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” and “A Peruvian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Vancouver,” then you cannot grasp the *meaning* of either, let alone *interpret* them.—So we must insist on this question: if you cannot even *read* a text, how can you talk about interpreting it? How can you talk of deconstructing it? Or talk of analyzing it logically? Don’t you think that your interpretation is already determined by how you read it? Or do you think that your interpretation—your deconstruction, your analysis—escapes your retinal grooves?

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“But what you’re saying about reading is just what the concept of interpretation means! The problem of reading is not more basic or more fundamental than the problem of interpretation. What you’re saying amounts to this: that it is impossible to read a text without interpreting it.”—You are thinking in terms of two steps: people read p , and then they interpret p as q . And once they turn p into q , the process ends.—But what I’m saying is that the process cannot

even begin. Because you cannot read p . Or more precisely: you cannot disentangle p from its surroundings; when you read p , you read at once more than p and less than p .

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So you may be convinced that everything we have discussed about the concept of reading so far can be reduced to the concept of interpretation. But which concept of interpretation are we talking about? Well, I can say: don't we speak of "Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche," and of "Nietzsche's reading of Schopenhauer"? And what is Heidegger's *reading* of Nietzsche but Heidegger's *interpretation* of Nietzsche? Besides, the concept of interpretation is very broad and elastic. In fact, it is possible to use it in many different ways, for example, as referring to the activity of making a difficult text more accessible. Maybe it needs to be interpreted because it belongs to a very ancient culture. Or simply because it is extremely dense. Or because it is extremely arid. But we can also be referring to the activity of updating a text: what can we now learn from Plato? Or to the activity of extracting its implications: it was said that $p \rightarrow q$ and also that $\neg q$, but curiously it was not said that $\neg p$. And perhaps $\neg p$ is a conclusion that testifies to its depth—or that threatens its foundations. It is also possible to use the concept of interpretation in a very general way, to designate the activity of expressing the same meaning through different signs—as Wittgenstein does.^{xv} And in thus proceeding he is able to contrast the concept of interpretation with the concept of following a rule. There is a difference between reacting to the series "2, 4, 6, 8 ..." by writing " $n+2$ " and reacting to it by writing "10, 12, 14, 16 ..." (or writing "20, 40, 60, 80 ..."). We can say the following: in the first case, the

rule is being interpreted; in the second case, the rule is being followed, or followed according to a specific interpretation. Which means that “2, 4, 6, 8 ...” and “ $n+2$ ” are two different ways of expressing the same rule—or rather that “ $n+2$ ” is an *interpretation* of “2, 4, 6, 8 ...” And the series “10, 12, 14, 16 ...” can also be used to express the rule—because it is a correct way of following it.—

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But now consider the following case: after reading a text, someone says not something like: “What the author meant was ...”—but something like: “It’s a masterpiece”—or maybe: “From the point of view of style, it is really well crafted.” Do we have a case of *interpretation* here? But that person did *not* explain the content of the text. He or she did *not* elucidate its meaning. He or she is simply giving an *opinion* about it. The propositions “It is a masterpiece” and “From the point of view style, it is really well crafted” can be said both about Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* and Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*—should we thus conclude that they talk about the same things, and that they come to the same conclusions? So the propositions “It is a masterpiece” and “From the point of view style, it is really well crafted” do *not* constitute attempts to *explain* the content or express the meaning of the *Genealogy of Morals* or of the *Philosophical Investigations*. They have *no* interpretive aspirations—although they may be conclusions drawn from careful, meticulous interpretations. One can certainly say: “You are interpreting the *Philosophical Investigations* too generously by saying that it is a masterpiece.”—But is this really an interpretation? Couldn’t we have used the word “evaluation” here?—It is true that the concept of interpretation can be used in many different ways.

You can say that reacting to the series “2, 4, 6, 8 ...” by saying “It is a simple series” is to interpret it. But you *can* replace “2, 4, 6, 8 ...” with “ $n+2$ ”—and you *cannot* replace “2, 4, 6, 8 ...” with “This is a simple series.”—It is *not* by chance that the concept of evaluation exists.—You can use the word “interpretation” to designate each and every reaction to p .—But what do you gain by doing so?

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I think I understand what you are trying to say: what you mean by “interpretation” is something like “distortion.” We *always* distort what we read. To say that we always interpret what we read amounts to saying that we always distort what we read. But if you say so, then you can’t distinguish an interpretation from a real distortion. Suppose someone interprets p as q . What you are trying to say with your metaphysical conception of interpretation is that q is necessarily a distortion, because to interpret is necessarily to distort.—But is q really a distortion of p ?—How do you know?—How can you be so sure?—In fact, how can you be so sure that it *is* a distortion, regardless of the content of q ?—Shouldn’t you take the content of q into consideration?—Why is it irrelevant?—Why can’t the content of q change your opinion about q ?—And how do you know that you are not distorting q yourself?—

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And now imagine an instruction manual that teaches you how to build a model. It begins by saying how many pieces there are of each type. Then it shows how they should be put together—and in what order. Maybe your child is unable to understand the manual—but he or she wants to build the model. You can then interpret it to

him or her—and make it more accessible. Maybe the child will not understand your first explanations, forcing you to use even simpler words.—And how can you tell if he or she has finally got it?—How can you know if you have been able to interpret the manual properly?—To interpret it properly, you need to accomplish two things at the same time: first, you cannot distort it—you need to preserve its meaning (you can reduce it to the essential, but you cannot change what is essential in it); but you also need to make it understandable to your child—you need, in other words, to adjust the text to the type of audience to which your interpretation is intended. But how do you know if you have accomplished the task of simplifying the manual without distorting it? How do you know if you have managed to make it more accessible? How do you know if there is continuity of meaning between the text printed in the manual—and the written or spoken text you have produced for your child? How do you know if he or she did understand what you wanted him or her to understand?—Is it enough that he says “Oh, yes, I get it now?”—Or that he says “So I need to fit part X into part Y before I can fit them into part Z?”—In other words, is it enough that your child reinterprets your interpretation?—Actually, the child needs to do something with the world: he or she must fit part X into part Y before fitting them into part Z.—You can certainly use the word “interpretation” to designate the act of fitting one piece into the other.—But would you then have the right to frown in disapproval if someone decided to use the word “construction” to refer to the act of saying “So I need to fit part X into part Y before fitting them into part Z?”—“But we can speak of the ‘construction of knowledge’! We can call learning ‘knowledge-construction!’”—So how do you know whether this process of knowledge-construction really took place?—

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If you think that the act of evaluating is an act of interpretation and that the act of constructing is also an act of interpretation—if you think everything that you do is to interpret—, how am I supposed to know what you mean by the request “Can you interpret this manual, please?” In saying that to evaluate is to interpret and that to construct is also to interpret, you are saying: “Instead of using the words ‘evaluation’ and ‘construction’, I simply use the word ‘interpretation.’” Maybe now you are thinking: “I do not need to use different words. The task of distinguishing between the different meanings of the word ‘interpretation’—that of evaluation, of construction, or of interpretation proper—can be accomplished by context.” But if you ask “Can you interpret this manual, please?”—in what sense does the context solve ambiguity?—Because the elements that make up the context are the same in all three cases: you, the person you are talking to, the manual, and the pieces it refers to.—Suppose I stop, think, and finally respond by saying “This is a reasonably good manual. The illustrations are a bit repetitive. But in this case to over-inform is certainly better than to under-inform.”—But you wanted me to build the model, not to evaluate the manual. You wanted me to have understood *building*, not *evaluating*, by the word “interpretation.” And to demonstrate that it is possible to leave the task of disambiguation to context, you try to correct me: “No! I wanted you to *interpret* the manual!”—But what do you mean by “context”?—Shouldn’t it have accomplished the task of disambiguation by itself—without your help?”—Or do you also use the word “context” in a very particular way—including, for example, your exasperated look?—If you think everything is to

interpret, then it is not possible to understand what you mean by “interpretation” without some interpretation.

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The activity of evaluating has a number of characteristic traits. The activity of constructing has a number of characteristic traits. The activity of interpreting has a number of characteristic traits.—And the activity of reading also has a number of characteristic traits.—But if you were pretty much convinced that the concept of interpretation was able to explain everything—that it could solve all puzzles, that it had the key to all conceptual locks—, then it is very unlikely that you will change your mind now. And this illustrates how opinions are not things that can easily be changed from one moment to the other. If you believe that Rio de Janeiro is the capital of Brazil, you will not change your mind just because you heard someone you don’t even know saying “The capital of Brazil is Brasilia.” You will ask for his or her credentials, and you will try to confirm the information for yourself. It is possible that you be more open to what a Brazilian person than to what a British person says in this regard (but maybe only in this regard). And you will certainly be more open to what a Brazilian says than to what a Peruvian says.—Try it yourself.—Imagine a country about which you do not know much. Do you know the capital of Ivory Coast? No? Then imagine a conversation between a British person and a Peruvian person—the British person insists that the capital of Ivory Coast is Abengourou and the Peruvian person that it is Abidjan. Who would you be more inclined to believe?—And above all: why?—And you could also check an encyclopedia or a map before letting yourself be convinced.—But consider the following situation: you did not have

time to look up a map—and in your geography exam you find yourself having to answer the question: “What is the capital of Ivory Coast?”—What would you answer?—You can leave a blank.—Or you might take a risk: you know that it is not Accra, the capital of Ghana, and that it is not Monrovia, the capital of Liberia—all you know about Ivory Coast is that it is an African country situated a few degrees above the equator.—And then the names you heard earlier on spring to your mind: Abengourou or Abidjan?—Which seems to be the best alternative?—Which seems to be more reliable?—Perhaps your first reaction was: “I wouldn’t trust the British person over the Peruvian person” (or even “I would trust the Peruvian over the British”); but later you changed your position: you would go for Abengourou.—The mentality in which we live and which lives in us only comes to the fore when something is at stake—or: when we ask the right questions.—

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But let us now turn back to the concept of interpretation.—Do you *interpret* the British person as more reliable?—But why do you need the word “interpretation” here?—Can’t you just say that you *take* the British to be more reliable?—And why would you interpret him as more reliable if you did not take him as more reliable?—Of course, you *can* use the word “interpretation” here; no one will stop you from doing so.—But consider the following. You can check an encyclopedia or a map to find out what the capital of Ivory Coast is. You can even check an encyclopedia *and* a map—and all the sources you refer to will say the same thing: that it is neither Abengourou nor Abidjan, but Yamoussoukro.—But can you do something similar in relation to the concept of interpretation? Is it possible to

conclusively answer the question “Are the concepts of evaluation and construction reducible to the concept of interpretation?” by checking sources?—And if you really want to *know* how the concept of interpretation should be used, what are the alternatives that you have at your disposal?—And how did you come to the idea that it is possible to explain *everything* with the concept of interpretation?—Did you include the concepts of evaluation and construction in this *everything*?—Or just the concept of reading?—

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We can distinguish two levels here: one thing is your attachment to the concept of interpretation—more specifically, to the idea that to interpret is to distort—, and another thing is what the concept of interpretation can actually manage. When you use the words “evaluate,” “construct,” and “interpret,” you do not seem to be saying anything profound—you do not seem to be explaining anything. Maybe because there are too many concepts at work. But when you limit your vocabulary, you create the impression of an explanation. The less you talk, the more you seem to explain.—But couldn’t you have chosen the concept of construction instead of the concept of interpretation to make it the origin and principle of everything?—

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Imagine someone saying, “Deep down, every description is an evaluation,” or, “Every description also necessarily conveys an evaluation.” Now consider the following propositions: “That house has a wooden façade” and “That house has a beautiful wooden façade.” Do you think that the first proposition contains an

evaluation? If your answer is yes—after all, every description is an evaluation—, then you should be able to use it to explain the meaning of the word “evaluation” to a foreigner who asks, “But what does the word ‘evaluation’ mean?”—But would you not rather use the second proposition?—Why?—And if you did use the first proposition, how do you think the foreigner would understand your theory that “Deep down, every description is an evaluation”?—

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“Deep down, every description is an interpretation.” One person says that a book weighs 1.5 kg, that it has exactly 200,000 words—and that it is written in Portuguese. This person may also add that it is a partially literary, partially philosophical work—and that it deals with subjects as diverse as the nature of philosophy and the etiology of crime—and that it has a very long list of references. And the person stops here. Another person may, on the contrary, stick to the content of the book—explain its main theses, clarify its most difficult passages, etc.—In what sense did the first person perform an interpretation?—In what sense did his or her description also consist in an interpretation?—There *are* paradigmatic cases of interpretation. And by saying that the first person also interpreted the book (not just described it), you are in part asking and in part inducing us to conflate what he or she said with what the second person, in this case obviously, said.—But we see no resemblance between what they said.—Then we must conclude that the first one also performed an interpretation—only not explicitly.—Hence the phrase “Deep down.”—But what was this person’s interpretation?—

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The idea that interpretation is at the basis of everything needs a certain vagueness in order to thrive. It has to move away from the paradigmatic cases of interpretation in order to encompass descriptions. But it also needs to stay connected to the paradigmatic cases in order to make us think that descriptions are ultimately interpretations. It is this play of pushing the paradigmatic cases away and then pulling them back that makes us end staring at nowhere, thinking about the profoundness conveyed by the idea that “Deep down, every description is an interpretation.” To find out whether the concept of interpretation should be used in the broadest possible sense (which naturally seems to increase its explanatory power) or whether it should be used in a narrower sense (which naturally seems to diminish its explanatory powers), you can try the following mental experiment: try to bracket for a moment everything you have learned—everything you have heard—about the concept of interpretation. And try to examine it.—But where to begin?—It is easy to perform a calculation such as “ $7292+9287=?$ ”—But what is one to do in order to find out whether or not the concept of interpretation encompasses the concepts of evaluation, construction and description?—If you cannot go anywhere using reasoning, why don’t you resort to memory?—Where did this idea of yours come from, that the concept of interpretation is at the basis of everything social—that it explains everything social?—What did you consult?—Reason itself?

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“But I still *feel* that behind every description there is always an interpretation!”—What do you mean by “interpretation”? What do

you mean by “description”?—Can you explain what you mean by “interpretation”? And what you mean by “description”?—Can you give an example of interpretation—and an example of description?—You obviously find it impossible to give an example of description that is not also an example of interpretation.—But do you think it's possible to give an example of interpretation that is not also an example of description?—If your answer is yes, maybe it is because you have too broad a concept of interpretation and too narrow a concept of description.—And now one can ask: why didn't you treat the two concepts in the same way—with the same broadness, or the same narrowness?—And what would happen had you treated the two concepts in the same way?—Or: had you treated the concept of description broadly and the concept of interpretation narrowly?

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“There are no correct interpretations!”—This certainly sounds profound, and how could it not sound profound?—But consider the following proposition: “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande.” It can be interpreted as follows: “The phrase ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company specialized in extracting mineral riches from the soil. The function of the word ‘Canadian’ is to indicate that the company is originally from Canada. The phrase ‘mining pit’ means a huge hole. The word ‘Tambogrande’ is the name of a city located in the northern region of Peru.”—When you hear the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande,” do you automatically interpret it as described?—But you would only be able to do so if you did not need to do so.—How would you be able to

correctly interpret ‘Tambogrande’ if you did not need to interpret it at all in the first place?—And now consider the following interpretation: “What is being said, in fact, is that an Italian ice cream shop plans to open a branch in Machu Picchu.”—And now consider again what you said earlier: that there are no correct interpretations.—Do you really think there is no difference between the first interpretation and the second interpretation?—So why not use the first interpretation to illustrate what you mean by “There are no correct interpretations”?—

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“The only correct interpretation of ‘A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande’ is precisely ‘A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande.’”—But if someone did not understand the original proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande,” how could the interpretation “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” help this person?—How can p help to clarify the meaning of p ?—What you take to be the only correct interpretation, is it really an interpretation?

*

We have here briefly examined some concepts that bear similarities and also differences in relation to the concept of interpretation: the concepts of evaluation (remember the statement “It is a masterpiece”), construction (remember the construction of a model from an instruction manual), and description (remember the statement “That house has a wooden façade”). Perhaps it is time to

examine the points of convergence—and also the divergence—between the concept of interpretation and the concept of reading.—So imagine the following: I ask you to interpret a text. After reading it, you shake your head—as if you were disagreeing with its content, but without saying a word.—Would it be correct to say that you have performed an *interpretation* here? What was your interpretation?—The shaking of your head?—And what if I said that you made an *evaluation*?—Because it does seem quite clear that there was something about it which you did not enjoy.—And can I say that you have *read* the text?—The fact that you evaluated it indicates that you read it.—But could you have evaluated it without reading it?—The point is: you cannot evaluate a text without reading it; and similarly: you cannot interpret a text without reading it.

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“No! What I am saying is that it is impossible to read a text without interpreting it!”—This *seems* profound.—But what if the text had been a manual for the construction of a model, and after having read it, you had, without saying anything, not even to yourself, started to put the pieces together?—Would you still say that you interpreted it?—But when?—And what was your interpretation?—It is perfectly possible to read a manual, understand it and follow it *without* interpreting it. Or rather: the sentence “It is possible to follow a manual without interpreting it” has its place. And perhaps it is interesting to note: it is *not* possible to follow the manual without reading it. You do not construct the model—and then check the manual. You must necessarily read it.—But do you have to *interpret* it?—Of course, it is possible to interpret a manual—it is

possible, for instance, to explain it to those who do not understand it. But there is a difference between saying “It is possible to interpret a text” and saying “It is impossible not to interpret it.” And also think about this: does it really make sense to say that to interpret the manual is necessarily to distort it?

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“It is not possible to read a text and not interpret it in some way or another!”—Now think of the following statement: “It is not possible to read a text and not *evaluate* it in some way or another!”—And now: “It is not possible to read a text and not *describe* it in some way or another!”—And: “It is not possible to read a manual and not *construct* the model to which it refers—in some way or another!”—The first sentence seems to express a profound truth—and the last one is obviously absurd. But why?—What is going on here?—Note that the verb “to construct” refers to a public, observable action. You can see clearly whether or not a person is constructing a model.—The fact that it refers to a public, observable action makes it easy to see that the statement “It is not possible to read a manual and not construct the model to which it refers” does not make much sense.—But verbs like “to interpret” and “to evaluate” can refer both to observable and to purely mental actions. They have an amphibious nature, so to say.—If you want to make a statement which will sound like a profound truth, it is better to use a verb like “to interpret” or “to evaluate” than a verb like “to construct.”—Compare the statement “Everyone *says* they believe in God” with the statement “Deep down, everyone *believes* in God.”—Which of these statements can last longer in the arena?—If it is possible to read a manual that explains how to construct a model *without*

constructing it, why wouldn't it be possible to read it without evaluating it—and without interpreting it?

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“You cannot read a text without interpreting it!”—Do you think that people who are *not* making public, observable evaluations (which are *not* saying things like “This is a reasonably good manual”) are necessarily making private, inner evaluations (that is, they are necessarily thinking things like “This is a reasonably good manual”)? Do you think that people who are *not* making public, observable interpretations (which are *not* saying things like “You have to fit part X into part Y before you fit them both into part Z”) are necessarily making private, inner interpretations (that is, they are necessarily thinking things like “You need to fit part X into part Y before fitting them both into part Z”)?—If you want to defend a bold, profound theory—or an apparently bold, profound theory—, it might be a good idea to stick to amphibious verbs like “to evaluate” and “to interpret,” which oscillate between the external world and the inner world. You will not sound convincing if you use a verb like “to build.” Not even to yourself.

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“It is not possible to read a text without interpreting it!”—Isn't it obvious that the verb “to interpret” refers here to a mental, private, inner act?—Because it is certainly possible to read a text without interpreting it in a public, observable way.—Just as you can read a manual and not start to fit the pieces together right away, you can also read the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” and not add “The phrase

‘mining company’ refers to a type of company specialized in extracting mineral riches from the soil. The word ‘Canadian’ indicates that it is a company originally from Canada. The phrase ‘mining pit’ refers to a huge hole. The word ‘Tambogrande’ is the name of a city located in the northern region of Peru.”

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“It is not possible to read a text without interpreting it!”—If the verb “to interpret” referred to a public, observable action, this statement would be obviously false. “But we always make mental interpretations!”—Are you sure? And what are they like?—If you’re talking about interpreting the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” into something like “The phrase ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company...” then we can say for sure that it is *not* true that we always make mental interpretations when we read. When you read or hear someone say “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande,” you are *not* led by a superior force to jot down: “The phrase ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company...”—Nor led by a superior force to think: “The phrase ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company...”

*

If a child or a foreigner does not understand the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande,” you might give him or her a hand by saying something like “The phrase ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company...” But you can also use a series of images: Canada’s flag, a photograph of a mining pit, a map of Peru—and not say a word.—

And now we can say this: when you read or listen to “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande,” you are *not* led by a superior force to interpret it neither graphically nor propositionally. And also: you are *not* led to interpret it either publicly (with written sentences and physical images) or privately (with thoughts and mental images). “But I must necessarily interpret it to understand it!” On the contrary, you need to understand it in order to interpret it. It is possible to understand the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” without thinking of anything whatsoever (for example, without thinking “The phrase ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company...”) and also without imagining anything whatsoever (for example, without imagining the Canadian flag, a mining pit, or the map of Peru). And you will *not* understand the proposition better if you think “The word ‘mining company’ refers to a type of company...” or imagine the flag of Canada, a mining pit, or the map of Peru.—Just as you need to understand the proposition in order to know what to write down or which images to pick, you also need to understand it in order to know what to think or what to imagine.—We can say here: there is no interpretation without comprehension.

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There is no doubt that it is possible to *read* a text and not say anything—and not produce any kind of output.—But is it possible to *interpret* it without saying anything—without producing any kind of output?—Would it be possible to speak of Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche if Heidegger had not written or said anything about Nietzsche?—It is not necessary to artificially stretch

the concept of reading to see the following: that the activity of reading does not forcefully imply in the production of outputs; you don't have to explain what you read to others or to yourself.—But what kind of interpretation are you thinking about when you say that the activity of interpreting also does not necessarily imply in the production of outputs?—Are you saying that it does not necessarily imply in the production of external outputs or internal outputs?—Or that it does not necessarily imply in the production of external outputs, but necessarily implies the production of internal outputs?—No doubt, it is much easier to hypostasize *internal* outputs than *external* outputs.

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“When one reads p , one always interprets p !”—But to interpret p is to go from p to q . So what you are saying is: it is not possible to read p without interpreting p as q ; and presumably, when one arrives at q , that is the end of the process of interpretation. But what if one had read q ?

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“When one reads p , one always interprets p !”—If you are talking about interpreting the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” in order to analyze it geopolitically—in order to situate it in a broader historical context—then we can say with reasonable certainty: it is *not* true that we always interpret when we read. On the contrary, we need to make an *effort* to read the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” against a more general background of international economic forces. Similarly, we need to

make an *effort* to read the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” against a more general background of gendered inequality. “When one reads, one always interprets!”—but not in the sense of making a critical interpretation.

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You can interpret the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” by saying the following: “He is not saying that he adopted five children. On the contrary, he is saying that he married once—and had at least one child with his wife. Then he remarried—and had with his new wife at least one more child. His second marriage, however, was not the last. He married a third time—and if we add up the number of children he had in the three marriages, we will see that he had a total of five children.”—But had the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” been said by Clinton, would you really have interpreted it differently?—“I do not interpret the proposition ‘I have five children from three different marriages’ in a negative way when said by Trump. But I interpret it negatively when said by Clinton.”—Well, then you are here using the word “interpretation” in a very precise sense: in fact, it could be replaced by the word “evaluation.”—But remember that when I ask you to interpret a text, I am not asking you to say something like “It is a masterpiece” or something like “From the point of view of style, it is a very well-crafted work.”—When you say “It is a masterpiece” or “From the point of view of style, it is a very well-crafted work,” what are you doing: interpreting or evaluating it?—

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Do you really interpret the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” in a certain way when it is said by Trump (e.g. as if the children were biologically his) and in a different way when said by Clinton (e.g. as if they were not biologically hers)? Maybe you do. Maybe the way you interpret a given discourse *D* depends on who produces *D*. But this means that there is something guiding your interpretation of *D* in this or that direction. What? Maybe the way you read *D*.—Don’t you think the sense of *D* is the same in both cases?—And isn’t to interpret *D* to explain the sense of *D*?—If the propositions “I have five children from three different marriages” and “I have five children from three different marriages” were not the same, if they did not have the same meaning, then we would not be able to say that we use a double standard here. We would not be able to say that we react to *p* in one way when said by Trump and in another way when said by Clinton. We would not be able to say that we judge them differently for the same behavior. And this difference does not happen only when it’s time to vote. It starts upon the very act of reading *p*.

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In the sense in which to interpret a proposition *p* is to explain its content, you do *not* interpret “I have five children from three different marriages” in one way when said by Trump and in another way when said by Clinton.—And in the sense that interpreting *p* means situating it in a more general historical and political context, it makes no sense whatsoever to say that we always interpret what we read. Because it is exactly the opposite that happens. “When one reads, one always interprets!”—If one does interpret *p*, then one

must be interpreting p in some other sense of “interpretation.”—
But what sense?—

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Imagine a robot that is able to move and see the surrounding environment. It has two cameras for its eyes. They generate an image on a screen: we can see the things that appear in the visual field of the robot. Suppose we are using a black and white monitor: it only produces shades of gray. The robot looks at a tree—and we see on the screen a gray tree. Is the conclusion that it can only see shades of gray warranted?—Of course, it would be hasty to say that the robot translates colors into shades of gray—that it interprets dark green as dark gray and light green as light gray.—Then we replace the black and white monitor with a monitor capable of producing colorful images.—If a gray tree appears on the screen, then we can say that it interprets dark green as dark gray and interprets light green as light gray.—But if a tree with green leaves appears on the screen, then we can put aside our suspicion that the robot can only see shades of gray.—Now imagine the following: to the cameras that the robot uses as eyes, we attach a special pair of glasses. They have no lenses. Instead of the lenses, there is simply a rhomboid opening. When we look at the screen, we see a tree inside a rhomboid frame. The robot does a 90° spin and a group of people sitting on the ground, enjoying a picnic, enter its field of vision. When we look at the screen, we see this group of people inside the rhomboid frame.—So now we build a new robot. The difference between the old robot and the new one is as follows: the rhomboid frame is now part of its physical structure. It has been welded into the cameras it has for eyes.—Let’s also suppose the following: we

are using a monitor capable of producing color images, but all the images that appear framed in the rhomboid are grey.—Then we can say: the robot translates the colors into shades of gray—it interprets dark green as dark gray and light green as light gray. Or else: it is programmed to translate colors into shades of gray.—But can we also say that it interprets the world in a rhomboid fashion?—But is it programmed to see the world in a rhomboid fashion?—It converts colors into shades of gray, but it does not convert the world into a rhomboid form.—Instead of saying that the robot interprets the world in a rhomboid fashion, wouldn't it be better to say that this is how it sees the world?

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You might say this: when Clinton says p , you see p in a negative light; when Trump says p , you see p in a neutral light. But you can also say: when Clinton says p , you associate a negative value with p ; and when Trump says p , you associate no value at all with p .—So what really happens?—Do you associate a neutral value or do you not associate any value at all with the proposition p when it is said by Trump?—We have here two different ways of describing the same thing. And what matters, in fact, is not whether you associate a neutral value or no value at all with p . What matters is that there is a difference between how you react to p when it is said by Clinton and when it is said by Trump. We can put it like this: the difference is that you react negatively in one case and neutrally in the other. But we can also put it in the following way: the difference is that you react in one case, but not in the other.—It is the differences—regardless of how you describe them—that matter. It is the differences that allow us to speak of a double standard. It is the

differences—between a negative reaction and a neutral one, or between a reaction and a lack of one—that allow us to speak about a politics of reading.

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The fact that you do not find within yourself any value-attributing mental act when you imagine Trump saying “I have five children from three different marriages” may incline you to say: “When Trump says p , I do not associate a neutral value with p . I simply do not associate any value with p .”—But what matters is *not* what happens in particular cases, and in individual situations. You cannot fully understand how you react to Trump saying p by analyzing solely how you react to Trump saying p . It is also essential to take into consideration how you react when you imagine Clinton saying p .—In order to understand how the proposition “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Tambogrande” is read, you must also take into consideration how the proposition “A Peruvian mining company plans to open a mining pit in Vancouver” is read.—In order to understand how you read a particular text, you must also read its inverted form. In order to read a text, it is not enough to read it.

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“But I still have the *sensation* that behind every act of reading there is always an act of interpretation!”—If you believed that Rio de Janeiro was the capital of Brazil, you would continue to have the *sensation* that it is the capital of Brazil for a while—even after learning that it is Brasilia, maybe even after having seen on a map or in an encyclopedia that it is Brasilia. And no argument is strong

enough to overcome your sensation. You may have found it difficult, perhaps impossible, to indicate precisely in what sense the person who constructed the model in silence interpreted the manual. But this doesn't necessarily keep you from believing that it *was* interpreted: you might just not be able to avoid the inner conviction that it *was* interpreted.—But at least now you can see the contours of the concept of interpretation more clearly.—And maybe you also realized that when you began to endow it with content, it became progressively less elastic.—When you associate a specific meaning with the term “interpretation,” it ceases to be a joker that can be used indiscriminately at any time.

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The essential thing is this: that in order to interpret a text, you must *first* read it. This is the step you *cannot* do away with. But just as you cannot read “ $1+1=?$ ” without immediately *knowing* its solution, you also cannot run your eyes through a chain of familiar signs without understanding them.^{xvi} Try to run your eyes through the following chain of signs without reading them—and without understanding them: “I have five children from three different marriages.” Likewise, you *cannot* imagine Clinton saying “I have five children from three different marriages” without instinctively reacting in a negative way. These are not things you can just choose. These are things on which your choices rely.

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We don't need to *think* in order to solve the operation “ $1+1=?$ ” In a sense, we *see* the answer—we immediately, automatically *see* the result of “ $1+1=?$ ” It is unavoidable: we do *not* have the option of

not knowing the result of “ $1+1=?$ ”—Yes, of course I'm speaking here of those who know arithmetic.—It is evident that a person from a different culture—and who has a different mentality from ours—can react to the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” in a correspondingly different way.—Those who know arithmetic do not grab a pencil or a calculator in order to find how much “ $1+1=?$ ” is.—And in an important sense, it is *not* even possible to calculate how much “ $1+1=?$ ” is. One can only know—or not know—how much “ $1+1=?$ ” is.—If someone asks you how much “ $1+1=?$ ” is, how long will it take you to answer?—Do you have to stop for a moment, and think?—

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It is not at the level of interpretation that distortion begins. It is at the very level of reading.

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Just as you do not have to stop and think in order to understand the sign “dog”—or any other sign or word whose meaning you understand—, you also do not have to stop and think to find out how much “ $1+1=?$ ” is. But maybe you need to stop and think to find out how much “ $127+285=?$ ” is. And maybe you need to grab a pencil or a calculator to figure out how much “ $7292+9287=?$ ” is.—The sentence “I have five children from three different marriages” is deceptively easy to understand.

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Perhaps now the stage is set up to enable us to understand the following: that there are two radically different types of reading—it is possible to read p simply by taking in its internal composition, that is, the words that occur in p and the order in which they appear, but it is also possible to read p by asking, “What if someone else had said p ?” or “What if the same person had said something else?”—something we do not usually do. We do not read continually asking ourselves, “What if someone else had said the same thing?”—nor “What if the same person had said something else?”—and yet, in an important sense, it is not possible to fully understand p without asking these questions. When we read or imagine Trump saying he had five children from three different marriages—or that he has just bombed Iraq, when he actually bombed Syria—, we do not experience any emotional reactions worthy of attention: perhaps we do not feel absolutely anything in the first case, and in the second case an urge to laugh—merged with a deep fear.^{xvii}—And that’s it: we stop here. In a sense, haven’t we understood p ?—What else is there to do?

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But there is a lot to do, actually. We can treat the proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” as if it were as clear and transparent as “ $1+1=?$ ” Or: as if it were closer to “ $7292+9287=?$ ”—and we had to calculate, to imagine and to think—in short, to ask: “What if someone else had said the same thing?”—or “What if the same person had said something else?”—in order to effectively understand it. Or rather, in order to understand the *effects* that it has—or doesn’t have—on our insides.

Because when we read or imagine Clinton saying that she had five children from three different marriages—or that she has just bombed Iraq, when she actually bombed Syria—, we do experience an emotional reaction worthy of attention: we feel like there is something deeply wrong here—as if she were not in her *proper place*.

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One thing is to read a discourse D by looking only at its constitutive propositions—and another, very different thing is to read D subjecting it to a series of structural transformations, guided by the questions “What if someone else had said the same thing?” and “What if the same person had said something else?” Of course, the question is not “What if Bush had said the same thing?”—substitutions need to be *intercategorical*: they need to test the effects of social indexes—and be pushed to the limit. And it does not help much to ask, “What if Trump had said something else?”—because he said a lot. In order to bring forth the discursive boundaries imposed upon indexed subjects, the questions to be asked are more like: “What if Clinton had said the same things?”—or: “What if Hussein had said he could kill a person in the middle of the street?” Who can cross the line? Who cannot cross the line? Or rather: around whom are the lines drawn?

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And the epistemic sphere also has lines—as does the public sphere. “Try to imagine a subatomic particle being christened the ‘Rodriguez particle.’”—And who can speak of two types of reading?—And who can name them?—They could perhaps be called “sequential reading” and “radial reading”—or “monomorphic

reading” and “actinomorph reading”—or simply “monoreading” and “actinoreading”—to stress that in one case our thoughts march on, following somewhat blindly the tracks laid down by words—and that in the other case, our thoughts give a good look around. We could also speak here of “linear thinking,” and even more radically of a “linear mode of being”—but now finally using the term “linear” in a very precise sense: meaning not “politically conservative” in a vague, general way, but something closer to “aligned to the social microstructures of power.” But one may still ask: “Why name these different kinds of reading at all? Can’t you just describe them? Is it not enough to simply describe them?”—But *why* not name them? Why?—Doesn’t naming make the task of individuating, observing, and hence of describing easier?—But the fundamental question here is this: where does this *feeling* that it would be better not to name them come from?—Maybe you were struck by a certain uneasiness, a certain discomfort, a certain mistrust when you saw things been stated so bluntly and clearly: that there are two kinds of reading—which can, moreover, be individuated and named as “sequential reading” and “radial reading.” Or perhaps you felt like your horizon was widened: “Yes, we have here a distinction that explains and makes sense of a lot of things: the difference of treatment between Trump and Clinton, between Charlie Hebdo and Dieudonné M’bala M’bala, between Vancouver and Tambogrande.”—Or maybe you did not feel anything at all: maybe you were simply reading—the printed words completely filling your consciousness, not leaving much space for a parallel stream of impressions and thoughts.—And maybe what you experienced was not just some slight, temporary annoyance, but a real revolt: “Sequential reading? Radial reading? What a waste of time. Everyone already knows what really matters: that there is a

difference in treatment between Trump and Clinton, between Charlie and Dieudonné, between Vancouver and Tambogrande. Why waste time with this sequential rubbish? Why waste time with this radial rubbish? Why waste time with these fantasies? Because everything was going alright—until you decided to crystallize the discussion—until you decided to baptize these supposedly newfound phenomena: “monomorphic reading” and “actinomorphic reading”—could there be worse names?—But if it is true that “Everyone already knows what really matters”—then in what sense was everything “going alright”? Because it seems that saying something that everyone already knew worked both to *delegitimize* the distinction between “sequential reading” and “radial reading,” and to *legitimize* the discussion as a whole: in fact, until now “everything was going alright.” So the problem was not exactly saying what everyone already knew. The problem was a different one—but which one?—What is the problem of labeling—so as to make fully explicit—the distinction between “sequential reading” and “radial reading”?—The fundamental question remains the same: do you know where this sensation that it is a waste of time to label these two types of reading comes from?—What if it were a French philosopher who had spoken of the importance of asking the pair of questions “What if someone else had said the same thing?” and “What if the same person had said something else?” and had used the terms “monomorphic reading” and “actinomorphic reading” to synthesize his brilliant ideas?—Is there a chance that you would have found these concepts more interesting, and these labels more appealing?—Of course, what matters are the concepts themselves, not how they are labeled. And to label them in this or that way has its advantages and disadvantages. The most immediate advantage may be to be able to

grasp and understand the processes in question more readily and sharply. The most immediate disadvantage is perhaps that of taking in not the concept but the term used to designate it—and not being able to speak in a more plastic way—and not being able to continue thinking about these phenomena.

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And why is it so common to call for a multidimensional, actinomorphic way of reading and thinking—and in very different domains? Maybe because of its effectiveness. Maybe because one realizes, perhaps in a semiconscious way, perhaps in a fully conscious way, that a rather narrow way of thinking is at play here—a one-dimensional, monomorphic way of thinking—, and that the usual arguments are no longer enough: it is necessary to connect what *seems* disconnected—it is necessary to bring to the surface what no one is ready to confess:

Imagine if it were Hillary Clinton who had had five children by three husbands, who had said it was fine to refer to her daughter as a “piece of ass,” who participated in a radio conversation about oral sex in a hot tub, who rated men based on their body parts, who showed up in Playboy soft porn videos.^{xviii}

We took Isabel’s question to Vancouver, Canada, where Manhattan is based, and asked people what they thought of a Peruvian mining company building a mine in one of the city’s favorite parks.^{xix}

Why is it all right for Charlie Hebdo to mock Islam when the controversial comic Dieudonné M’bala M’bala is prosecuted for mocking Jews? Why is one defined as “inciting hatred” and not the other?^{xx}

Maria Aparecida compares herself to Eliana Tranchesi: “I only took a bottle of shampoo, and stayed there [in prison]. She, on the other hand, with all that money, got out [of prison] in no time, and received all sorts of benefits.”^{xxi}

These two cases, one involving Rafael Braga and the other one involving Breno Borges, bring forth ... the selectivity of judiciary power... 9 grams of racism weighs more than 129 pounds of marijuana.^{xxii}

It is not possible to give someone who earns the minimum wage the same treatment, as payment for moral damages, that I give to those whose wage is R\$ 50 thousand. It would be as if the guy had won the lottery.^{xxiii}

And why does it generate discomfort to bring Vancouver and Dieudonné to the discussion? Why do you feel the temptation to say—almost to shout: “But these are different cases!” Why are they different?—You seem to be *about* to say that Vancouver is more important than Tambogrande and that Judaism is more worthy of respect than Islam—but, for obvious reasons, you hold yourself back. The idea is on the tip of your tongue—but it cannot be enunciated, it must be swallowed back: a more palatable and convincing explanation must be formulated—and a less offensive, less coarse one. We need an explanation that does *not* lay the fundamental rules of the game bare. What cannot be done is to tarnish reason by presenting to the world something like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the Exception of Africans.—And here we understand the importance of comments such as Rousseau’s on the low intelligence of black people for the

economy of inequality. When we begin to put pressure on sequential thinking—on sequential reading, sequential writing, sequential reality—, we arrive at highly charged domains: argumentative scarcity is compensated for by peremptory tones of voice, by mysterious metaphysics, or simply by law—by “But that is how things are.” But is it how they really are? It is difficult to imagine a more performative use of the verb “to be.”—

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“It’s not that Dieudonné is being discriminated against. It’s that there are specific French laws protecting Judaism, but not protecting Islam.” But does that solve or aggravate the problem?—Because aren’t we now confronted with discrimination written into the legal system itself?—In order to blend into Western civilization harmoniously, you need to be easily convinced by arguments like “There are specific French laws protecting Judaism, but not protecting Islam”—and to tenaciously resist questions like “But aren’t we now confronted with discrimination written into the legal system itself?” You need to *understand* that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not include Africans—and at the same time understand that it is absolutely crucial to refer to it as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Because the best way to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the Exception of Africans is through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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“It is not that we are favoring Canadians over Peruvians. They are equally worthy of consideration. However, Tambogrande is a small town—and Vancouver is a big city! You cannot reasonably think

that opening a mining pit in a small town like Tambogrande can be as damaging as in a big city like Vancouver.”—This speaks for itself.—And you obviously do not want to tackle the issue of who will benefit from this mining enterprise.

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The kind of reading which we qualified earlier as radial or actinomorphous does *not* happen automatically and spontaneously—just like one does not see the result of the operation “ $7292+9287=?$ ” automatically and spontaneously. On the contrary, one has to *fight* against oneself—against one’s natural way of thinking, even against one’s most salient intuitions and most basic and instinctive reactions—in order to bring back to the field the destabilizing element of the sequence. When one reads Trump stating p , q or r , one does not immediately think of Clinton stating p , q or r . But if one does not think of Clinton stating p , q or r , then it is fair to say that in a deep sense one also did not understand what one read when one read Trump stating p , q or r .

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Let us imagine that we have devised a way to objectively measure the force of arguments, so that we are able to arrange them on a scale from 0 to 1. An argument with force 0.1 would be an argument of little, if any, consistency, and an argument with force 0.9 would be a solidly constructed argument. We could then say: its power to convince would not be predicted by its force alone—or maybe not by its force at all. The credentials of whoever says p play an important role here—maybe a conclusive one. One must distinguish between an argument’s force and its convincing

power—that is, its internal consistency, its overall solidity. One might find it strange that these dimensions must be distinguished—it is strange that the second one exists at all—but they must be distinguished—and sharply. Suppose you want to program a computer to simulate real human behavior, including how it reacts to arguments. You would have to teach it to recognize social indexes—and feed it not only with $(p \vee \neg q) \rightarrow p$, but also with all the factors that have an active role in our reading of $(p \vee \neg q) \rightarrow p$. A program that systematically showed a positive correlation between strength and convincing power could be the first step in its construction. And this first step could be easily be misrepresented as the last—because isn't the program simulating a perfectly rational behavior? But as a simulation of how humans really think, it would be very unconvincing.

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Can you imagine a situation where a German defends a force 0.1 argument and a Ghanaian a force 0.9 argument?—Or rather: is it an easy task? Is it as easy a task as imagining the opposite: the German defending a strong argument and the Ghanaian a weak argument?—And now think of how important imagination is to the writing of all kinds of texts—from the most poetic and literary texts to those with clear epistemic intentions.—Isn't it easier to imagine a Ghanaian working for a German than to imagine a German working for a Ghanaian?—Isn't it easier to imagine a German being robbed by a Ghanaian than to imagine a Ghanaian being robbed by a German?—Spirit reveals itself through imagination too.—No effort is needed in order to imagine situations where the German is in a superior position in relation to the Ghanaian—even in a morally

superior position: be it an employment relationship—or a legal dispute—or again: an epistemic practice; it is as easy and straightforward as solving “ $1+1=?$ ” And can you now picture a situation where the Ghanaian is in a superior position in relation to the German? Isn’t this something as difficult as solving “ $7292+9287=?$ ” Here you really need to make an effort—and *think*. Imagination is *not* the realm of absolute freedom, contrary to the way it is painted. And the same can be said of desires: they are *not* blind impulses, which follow their own mysterious, unfathomable rules. And the same can be said of perception: it does not reproduce reality in a neutral and faithful way. And finally, the same can be said of reading: it is *not* something simple and straightforward. Yes, we do it all the time. Yes, we do it every day. But consider how we picture reading. This picture does *not* represent what we really do when we read. The structures of power act first *upon*—and soon *through* all levels of our being: our acts, our thoughts, our feelings—from the ones which are most public to the ones which are most private, from the ones which are most concrete and palpable to the ones which are most ethereal and subtle.—And here we have a way—almost a method—to bring forth the field which structures reality. Try to swim against its current—and it will come immediately to the surface; and go back to swimming with its current—and it will dissolve into nonexistence. Try to simply *imagine* a situation that does flow with the current—and spirit will once again make itself felt, resisting and bringing things back—even these imagined things!—to their proper places. Maybe subtly. Maybe imperceptibly. But nevertheless *firmly*.—Spirit has a world project.—It is easier to imagine dragons, unicorns, goblins, and fairies than to imagine a Ghanaian teaching philosophy to a German—because

fantasy also swims with the current. And think for a moment of how much knowledge is infused with fantasy.

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But we do not take into account only the social indexes of the subject who states *p*. There are broader material markers and empirical references, and they can appear in the very body of *p*. That is, *p* can be said by a man or a woman—but it can also be *about* a man or a woman. The proposition “I have five children from three different marriages” can be said *both* by a man and by a woman. But we can also transport the speaker into the proposition itself—and say in the first case: “He has five children from three different marriages,” and in the second case: “She has five children from three different marriages.” And now the factor that completely transforms the way the proposition *p* is read is *inscribed* in *p*.—But does it change the sense of *p*?—Because we no longer have the same proposition—the same propositional sign, the same physical sign—being enunciated by two different people; on the contrary, we actually have two different propositions—two propositional signs, two physical signs: one starting with the masculine pronoun: “He has five children ...” and another with the feminine pronoun: “She has five children ...”—Shouldn’t we thus say that when we transpose the material markers *into* the proposition, its meaning changes?—We can’t *know* if its meaning changes or not. We can only choose between saying “Yes, the meaning does change” or saying “No, the meaning does not change.” There is no way to *find out* if the meaning changes—just like there is no way to find out if nothing is something that exists—, but we can try to imagine what follows in each case.—We can say, “Yes, the meaning changes.

There is an undeniable *difference* between saying ‘He has five children ...’ and saying ‘She has five children ...’. The male and female pronouns are different—they have different meanings. And the sense of *p* derives precisely from the meanings of its components. It follows that the propositions ‘He has five children ...’ and ‘She has five children ...’ must necessarily have *different* meanings.” Nonetheless, isn’t there something that remains unchanged?—Is the proposition “He has five children from three different marriages” as different from the proposition “She has five children from three different marriages” as it is from the proposition “Charlie Hebdo insulted Muslims”? Should we not talk here about different kinds of differences? So we can also say, “No, the meaning does not change. There is an undeniable resemblance between saying ‘He has five children ...’ and saying ‘She has five children ...’. The male and female pronouns are different, yes. But if they did affect the meaning of the propositions in which they occur, it would *never* be possible to say the same thing about people with different genders. It follows that the propositions ‘He has five children ...’ and ‘She has five children ...’ must necessarily have the same meaning.”—Because, in fact, there are different types of differences: there are large and small differences, relevant and irrelevant ones, intra and intercategorical ones.—And they always stand, in various degrees, against a background of similarities.—The proposition “Charlie Hebdo insulted Muslims” is *very* different from the proposition “He has five children from three different marriages”—but both are propositions.—We can now bypass the difference between someone saying “He said, ‘I have five children ...’” and himself saying “I have five children ...”—The material marker does not change. It only changes position. The difference consists of the fact that the material marker is in one case endopropositional (or

endotextual) and in the other exopropositional (or exotextual). Accordingly, reading focuses in one case on that which is *inscribed* and on the other that which is *excribed* in the text. Not *written in*, but *excribed in*—and excribed not *around*, but *within* the text. Because it is a fragment of the text—it is an inextricable element of what is read. This excribed element is not like a bird flying from one tree to another in the background—it is not an element which really does not make itself present in the text. On the contrary, it is like the clothing—or the institution from which the subject speaks—that can have as a conclusive an impact on the reading of his or her discourse as his or her gender. Which means that the questions “What if someone else had said the same thing?” and “What if the same person had said something else?” can be converted into one another—one complements the other. The first one brings forth the markers of whoever is the author of the discourse and the second the markers enunciated within the discourse. Believing ourselves to be reading only D, we are actually reading either $D_{\langle i, j, k \dots \rangle} = \{p, q, r \dots\}$, or $D = \{p_{\langle i, j, k \dots \rangle}, q_{\langle l, m, n \dots \rangle}, r_{\langle o, p, q \dots \rangle} \dots\}$. Or rather, we are reading $D_{\langle i, j, k \dots \rangle} = \{p_{\langle i, j, k \dots \rangle}, q_{\langle l, m, n \dots \rangle}, r_{\langle o, p, q \dots \rangle} \dots\}$.

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From a formal point of view, the propositions “A Canadian mining company plans to open a mining pit in a small Peruvian town” and “A Peruvian mining company plans to open a mining pit in a major Canadian city” are not very different. From the material point of view, however, the first sounds quite natural—and the second not at all. The fact that you moaned over the death of Charlie Hebdo, but not over the death of Marwa El-Sherbini, does not say anything

about how freedom of speech is important to you—but it says a lot about your political and emotional allegiances.^{xxiv}

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In a sense, to read is always to lower one's guard—it is always an act of opening the psyche to the unknown other: you may not immediately and irreversibly see the result of an operation like “ $7292+9287=?$ ”—and you can effectively decide *not* to calculate the result. But you cannot decide not to know immediately and irreversibly the result of an operation like “ $1+1=?$ ” Similarly, you cannot choose to understand or not understand the words with which you are familiar that uninterruptedly come across your path—such as the words that appear in “I have five children ...” You can no longer see it as a mere graphic mark devoid of meaning. And the same goes for any chain of words: you can choose not to read them, but you cannot choose to read them and at the same time not understand them. Which means that you cannot choose to read them and not think them—and not write them, even if only for a second, in the fluid matter of your consciousness. And if you do not understand one word or another—if you do not understand one sentence or another—if you do not understand one sentence or another—you cannot begin to understand them by a simple act of decision—just as you can by a simple act of decision calculate “ $7292+9287=?$ ” and find out the result.—

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And it is precisely in this sense that reading implies vulnerability, and opening one's own subjectivity to the unknown: because reading necessarily implies understanding: reading necessarily

implies thinking what one reads—even if one does not settle with what one reads.

*

Furthermore, one cannot read without letting one's thoughts be led. From the point of view of consciousness itself, there is not much of a difference between reading and thinking: in both cases, ideas and thoughts are drawn on its surface—and then fade away. At the same time, however, it submits each and every thought that appears in its body—regardless of its origin, which may be either endodermic or exodermic—to scrutiny, to a process of evaluation.—In fact, two basic attitudes—that of internalization and of externalization—can be operated both on the thoughts generated by the work of consciousness itself and on the ones drawn into its surface by reading.

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A philosophical text is one which is always trying to take the place, in the space of consciousness, of another text. There is always something it strives to externalize—and something it strives to internalize: a point of view that it tries to uproot—transforming it from an approach into something to be approached—, and a point of view that it tries to root down—transforming it from something approached into an approach proper. It is always trying to reconfigure the subject—and to occupy the position of subject.

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And which text do you internalize? And which text do you externalize? What makes it prone to be read in an internalizing way—or in an externalizing one? What makes it exciting and attractive? What makes it—repulsive? What makes your pupils dilate or contract—even before you read it? The same proposition *p* can awaken in the recesses of our consciousness—and in regular ways—diametrically opposed emotional responses, depending on who utters *p* (whether Trump or Clinton, whether Charlie or Dieudonné) and on the referential elements that populate *p* (whether Judaism or Islam, whether Vancouver or Tambogrande). Even when everything else about *p* remains the same. Which means that our responses are not prompted solely by *p*'s face-meaning.—So reading *p* implies understanding *p*—and understanding *p* involuntarily and inescapably—, implies thinking *p*—and thinking *p* involuntarily and inescapably—, and finally implies having an emotional reaction to *p*—also involuntarily and inescapably.—Here we arrive at a pre-cognitive layer.

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In order to properly understand the process of reading—including the process of reading purely theoretical texts—it is necessary to take into consideration the level of affects. But our affects are anything but blind and instinctive. Our affects are thoroughly socialized—and therefore informed and shaped by power structures: they run across all levels of our being. It is true that they are not exactly propositional. But why do you cross the street to avoid the dark-skinned man walking toward you? This is *not* a cold decision, the result of a purely rational calculation. Is it an

instinctive decision? We can speak here of instincts—but it does not make sense to say that these instincts are remnants of our animal past: they are not instincts we share with other primates. They are deeply, viscerally historical. They are deeply, viscerally cultural. Have you ever wondered about the logic that presides over your desires? And about the role desires have on your whole psychic life, including the workings of your cognitive functions?—Do you really think that structures of power do not have a grasp over your innermost, intimate, and apparently spontaneous feelings?—Desire itself is a medium through which power reshapes the world.

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So there is something paradoxical here: on the one hand, texts represent a privileged locus for the meticulous criticism of power structures—and a privileged locus in many respects; on the other hand, however, reading is an activity through which power structures manifest themselves—something which, in fact, applies to perceptual acts in general. In the space of the text, you can imagine, argue for and even construct, on a reduced scale, a reality different from the one we live in—as Christine de Pizan did in her *City of Ladies*.^{xxv} This is considerably easier than to grapple with reality itself, because you will not have to overcome each and every manifestation of resistance from society, and you will not need to fight against power structures deeply ingrained in your peers—although you cannot escape the necessary struggle against power structures inscribed on your own subjectivity. And the text may eventually unfold beyond itself, burst its physical boundaries, leap into reality—and progressively rewrite it. Of course, it will then have to deal with other epicenters of meaning-production. But the

text remains a unique space where it is possible to slow down the flow of thought—and make it almost stop, refusing automatic, involuntary associations that give the impression that it is more acceptable to insult Muslims than Jews. Or the impression that it is completely acceptable to carry out mining activities in a small Peruvian town (especially if the company in question is Canadian), and completely unacceptable to carry out mining activities in a major Canadian city (especially if the company in question is Peruvian). But can't reading neutralize all the work done, all the work which was crystallized in the form of the text? Those very involuntary associations which were disrupted during the writing process can come back with full power during the act of reading: everything the text does, the act of reading undoes—because it is in charge of policing its words, examining its statements, filtering its inquiries: all deviations from the norm—jokes against Jews, the hypothesis of opening a mining pit in Vancouver—are mentally corrected as if they were grammatical mistakes. It is not possible to read without thinking what you read. But once thought, once brought into the space of consciousness, this thinking becomes subject to the power structures inscribed in its substance: they react against the foreign organism as if it were a pathogenic agent—the slightest sense of distrust is enough to arouse firm defensive reactions.

ⁱ See KAHLO, F. *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*. New York: Abram, 2005, p.216.

ⁱⁱ For more on this, see SEABRA, M. *Metafilosofia: Lutas Simbólicas, Sensibilidade e Sinergia Intelectual*. Brasília: Bibliofonte, 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ See WILSON, A. “*What is a Text?*” In: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, No.43, 2012, pp.341-358.

^{iv} See BARROS, M. *Livro sobre Nada*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1996.

^v See SEABRA, M. *Metafilosofia: Lutas Simbólicas, Sensibilidade e Sinergia Intelectual*. Brasília: Bibliofonte, 2014.

^{vi} See WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009; DWYER, P. *Sense and Subjectivity: A Study of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990; OVERGAARD, S. “*Exposing the Conjuring Trick: Wittgenstein on Subjectivity.*” In: *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3: 263-286, 2004.

^{vii} See FREIRE, P. “*The Importance of the Act of Reading.*” In: FREIRE, P. & MACEDO, D. *Literacy: Reading the World and the Word*. London: Routledge, 1987.

^{viii} See KRISTOF, N. “*If Hillary Clinton Groped Men.*” In: *The New York Times*, 15.10.2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/opinion/sunday/if-hillary-clinton-groped-men.html?_r=0>.

^{ix} This is the whole point of KRISTOF, N. “*If Hillary Clinton Groped Men.*” In: *The New York Times*, 15.10.2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/opinion/sunday/if-hillary-clinton-groped-men.html?_r=0>.

^x See SEABRA, M. *Metafilosofia: Lutas Simbólicas, Sensibilidade e Sinergia Intelectual*. Brasília: Bibliofonte, 2014.

^{xi} Hence the importance of experiments.

^{xii} Again, note the importance of experiments. For more on this, see SEABRA, M. *Metafilosofia: Lutas Simbólicas, Sensibilidade e Sinergia Intelectual*. Brasília: Bibliofonte, 2014.

^{xiii} This is the main deficiency of Wittgenstein’s, Barthes’s, and Dwyers’s account of reading. See WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009; BARTHES, R. *The Rustle of Language*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989; DWYER, P. *Sense and Subjectivity: A Study of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990.

^{xiv} See CABELLOS, E. & BOYD, S. *Tambogrande: Mangos, Murder, Mining*. Peru & Canada, 2006.

^{xv} See WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009.

^{xvi} See HEMSTERHUIS, F. *Oeuvres Philosophiques*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

^{xvii} Recall US President Trump's famous interview where he said the US had bombed Iraq:

Trump: It's so incredible. It's brilliant. It's genius. Our technology, our equipment, is better than anybody by a factor of five. I mean look, we have, in terms of technology, nobody can even come close to competing. ... So what happens is, I said we've just launched 59 missiles heading to Iraq and I wanted you to know this. And he was eating his cake. And he was silent.

Bartiromo: Heading to Syria?

Trump: Yes. Heading toward Syria. In other words, we've just launched 59 missiles heading toward Syria.

For the above quote and a discussion, see BLAKE, A. "*Trump appears Dazzled by being able to Bomb Syria over Dessert.*" In: *The Washington Post*, 12.04.2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/12/trump-seems-dazzled-by-being-able-to-bomb-syria-over-dessert/?utm_term=.f916b5d6d885>

^{xviii} See KRISTOF, N. "*If Hillary Clinton Groped Men.*" In: *The New York Times*, 15.10.2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/opinion/sunday/if-hillary-clinton-groped-men.html?_r=0>.

^{xix} See CABELLOS, E. & BOYD, S. *Tambogrande: Mangos, Murder, Mining*. Peru & Canada, 2006.

^{xx} See SCHOFIELD, H. "*France Divided Despite Uplifting Rallies.*" In: *BBC News*, 11.01.2015. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30769192>>

^{xxi} See MERLINO, T. “*Por que a Justiça não Pune os Ricos.*” In: *Caros Amigos*, Vol. 13, 2009, pp.13-17.

^{xxii} See OLIVEIRA, H. “*Rafael Braga e Breno Borges: Quando 9 g de Racismo Pesam Mais que 129 Kg de Maconha.*” In: *Carta Capital*, 27.07.2017. <<http://justificando.cartacapital.com.br/2017/07/27/rafael-braga-e-breno-borges-quando-9g-de-racismo-pesam-mais-que-129kg-de-maconha>>.

^{xxiii} These words were said by the President of the Brazilian High Court of Labor, Ives Gandra da Silva Martins Filho. See ALEGRETTI, L. “*É preciso flexibilizar Direitos Sociais para haver Emprego, diz Chefe do TST.*” In: *Folha de São Paulo*, 06.11.2017. <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2017/11/1933111-e-preciso-flexibilizar-direitos-sociais-para-haver-emprego-diz-chefe-do-tst.shtml>>

^{xxiv} See WINTER, S. “*Investigators Believe Killer ‘Hated Non-Europeans’ and Muslims.*” In: *Der Spiegel*, 02.09.2009. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-marwa-al-shebin-case-investigators-believe-killer-hated-non-europeans-and-muslims-a-646292.html>>.

^{xxv} See PIZAN, C. *La Cité des Dames*. Paris: Stock, 2000.