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An Eccentric View on the History of Philosophy – or: In Praise of the Margins

Introduction

The recent resurgence of scholarly interest in marginalia may reflect a broader historiographical zeitgeist – one that tends to define itself through the revaluation of what lies at the margins or has been marginalised, and that is committed to extending the boundaries of the canon as far as possible.¹ The historiographical appeal of what was once deemed peripheral has become increasingly compelling. This, of course, does not refer solely to local or geographical peripheries: any form of centrism – whether cultural or linguistic, political, social, or anthropological – is now being critically examined, and often actively contested, both in the field of the history of philosophy and in the humanities more broadly.²

In the case of the study of marginalia, however, this shift towards the periphery does not necessarily imply abandoning, or relativising the notion of centre. The reference to what is written at the centre of the page seems, inevitably and from the outset, to define the very nature of marginalia and to affirm the legitimate primacy of the centre. In short: without a main text in the middle of the page, there can be no marginalia at its edge.

Against this backdrop, two central questions guide the ensuing reflections and frame the research perspective of the contributions gathered in this volume. First,

1 With particular regard to the recent research in the field of the history of Medieval and Early Modern knowledge, key examples include the NWO project “Marginal Scholarship: The Practice of Learning in the Early Middle Ages (c. 800–c. 1000)”; Christoph Sanders’ studies on early modern magnetism (“Magnetic Margins: A Database of Reader Annotations in Early Modern Works on Magnetism”); the DFG project *manicula* based at the University of Siegen and investigating the marginalia of Nicholas of Cusa; Silvia Di Vincenzo’s ERC project on the history of Arabic logic, (“The Uncharted Margins of Philosophy: An AI-Enhanced Material History of Arabic Logic Across Time and Frontiers”); and the project “Producing Normative Knowledge in the Margins. The Handwritten Annotations of Alonso de la Vera Cruz”, directed by José Luis Egío García and Andrés Iñigo Silva at the Max Planck Institute in Frankfurt.

2 For an overview and informed reflection on major research trends in medieval philosophical historiography, particularly with respect to the critique of various forms of centrism, see Catherine König-Pralong, Space, Scale, Anachronism, and the History of Medieval Philosophy Today, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 102, no. 3 (2023): 461–478; Andreas Speer, *1000 Jahre Philosophie: Ein anderer Blick auf die Philosophie des „Mittelalters“*, Paderborn: Brill Mentis 2023.

what relevance do marginalia hold for the history of philosophy – a discipline that traditionally tends to focus on main texts? To put it differently: how should the history of philosophy regard this curious, even secondary, textual and paratextual form? A second, symmetrical question emerges as a mirror image of the first: what does the history of philosophy look like from the vantage point of the margin? Or, how does our view of it change when marginalia are recognised as an equally appropriate source for philosophical-historical investigation? As will become apparent, these questions are closely intertwined. The relevance of marginalia for philosophical historiography emerges only once we adopt an eccentric perspective on the discipline – one that, to some extent, also transforms its self-understanding and recasts its operational categories. In this respect, the inclusion of marginal texts within the corpus of philosophically relevant documents should be understood neither as a mere expansion of available sources nor as a necessary relativisation of the primary text. Rather, as this introductory chapter argues, engaging with marginalia is always also an exercise in disciplinary self-reflection. It contributes to a more precise understanding of philosophy as a historically situated practice of thinking, writing, and reading, by looking at the history of its main texts through the off-centre lens of their material transmission. In line with the focus of the essays collected in this volume, this introduction concentrates on medieval and Renaissance philosophy at the threshold between manuscript and print culture.

1 Blurred Boundaries: At the Edge of the Page, in the Margin of the Text

Before addressing these questions, one is faced with the non-trivial challenge of precisely classifying marginalia both as a written document and a writing practice. The difficulty in defining marginalia is closely tied to their liminal character at the edge of a text or a page. Marginalia are often described as a “threshold” – *seuils*, a term made famous by the French literary scholar Gérard Genette. Due to their heterogeneity and variability, they do not constitute a literary genre, but a form of paratext in the broadest sense: they frame and delimit a main text and testify to – even manifest – its material transmission in the unique appearance of a manuscript or book page.³

³ Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987, 7–8: “Le *paratexte* est donc pour nous ce par quoi un texte se fait livre et se propose comme tel à ses lecteurs, et plus généralement au public. Plus que d'une limite ou d'une frontière étanche, il s'agit ici d'un *seuil*, ou – mot de Borges à propos

A first approximation may help to set the stage: Marginalia are a type of writing (it can include signs, drawings, words, or fully formulated annotations) that appears in the margins of a main text and generally refers to the latter as its original horizon of sense and understanding. One might suggest that marginalia are inherent to the text located at the centre of the page, just as, in Aristotelian terms, the accidentals are inherent to the substance. Their meaning is fully revealed only in relation to this reference text or in the light of its reading. But how is this liminal, relational character of the marginalia to be understood? When compared with the empirical variability of writing habits, this abstract attempt at a definition quickly reveals its limitations.⁴

For instance, it would be misleading to understand marginalia merely in terms of commentary-like textual features, such as an explanatory orientation towards the primary text. One might be tempted to consider commentary as the result of a progressive autonomisation of marginal glosses and, conversely, to see marginal glosses as an embryonic form of commentary. It is often the case in the history of transmission that commentary developed into an independent genre through the gradual migration of scholia from the margins to the centre of the page. In a pivotal study, Jacqueline Hamesse has emphasised this aspect in relation to the university tradition of the thirteenth century.⁵ There is indeed a close connection between

d'une préface – d'un « vestibule » qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d'entrer, ou de rebrousser chemin. « Zone indécise » entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse, ni verso l'intérieur (le texte) ni vers l'extérieur (le discours du monde sur le texte)” On the difficulties involved in applying the concept of paratext to the medieval manuscript tradition, however, see Charlotte Cooper, What is Medieval Paratext? *Marginalia* 19 (2015): 37–50.

4 For a broad and differentiated overview of the multiple functions of marginal annotations in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance see, most notably, the following collections of studies: Mariken Teeuwen and Irene van Renswoude (eds.), *The Annotated Book in the Early Middle Ages: Practices of Reading and Writing*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2017; Danielle Jacquart and Charles S. F. Burnett (eds.), *Scientia in margine: Études sur les marginalia dans les manuscrits scientifiques du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance*, Geneva: Droz, 2005.

5 Jacqueline Hamesse, Les marginalia dans les textes philosophiques universitaires médiévaux, in: *Talking to the Text: Marginalia from Papyri to Print: Proceedings of a Conference Held at Erice, 26 September – 3 October 1998*, vol. 1, Vincenzo Fera, Giacomo Ferrari, and Silvia Rizzo (eds.), 301–318, Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2002, 303–305: “Un lien étroit apparaît très vite entre la mise en page des textes, la lecture d'une part et l'enseignement de l'autre. ... Dans le cadre de l'enseignement, pour mieux dominer l'ensemble de ce matériel disponible, on assiste à l'élaboration d'une mise en page sophistiquée en colonnes. Le texte faisant l'objet d'une étude approfondie est écrit en *grossa littera* au milieu de la page. Il est accompagné de une ou de deux colonnes (parfois plus, d'après les besoins) de dimension différente suivant les cas ... On verra d'ailleurs que lorsque le commentaire personnel deviendra une œuvre en soi, la mise en page changera à nouveau. Le commentaire systématique figurera alors comme texte suivi, d'abord en bas de

university teaching practices and the development of the *mise en page* of medieval manuscripts. Yet, this very development also yields numerous counterexamples. In many manuscripts from the university tradition that present commentaries as the main text, the marginalia might contain, for example, the *auctoritates* upon which the commentary relies, the theses or even the running commentary of other masters, and excerpts from the source the interpretation is engaging – in other words, the marginalia can convey both the texts being commented on and the texts that do the commenting.

Therefore, the concept of marginalia does not depend on the nature of the text in the margin and cannot be traced back to specific textual characteristics. Rather, the material location of this written document in a particular manuscript or book copy appears to be decisive: the edge constitutes the marginalia.

It should be noted, however, that this material condition alone is not sufficient. I cite three examples that merit closer examination. Firstly, in medieval or early modern manuscripts, interlinear glosses are often difficult to conceptually distinguish from marginal glosses. In an edition of a scholar's autograph marginalia on a particular work, it would not make sense to exclude the interlinear glosses, even if they are identified as such. In a similar way, underlinings and marginal lines provide often evidence of the same reading process and are both documentarily significant, regardless of their different placement on the page. Secondly, annotations made on the blank verso of a manuscript or on a loose sheet of paper inserted between pages can also rightly be considered marginalia, insofar as their content aligns with the main text. In this sense, there are marginalia that are not written in the margin but even reach the centre of the page. Thirdly, not everything written in the margin is properly speaking a marginal note. The term would acquire a weak meaning if any note or ephemeral writing on a sheet of paper, lacking the slightest recognisable reference to the text in the centre, were regarded as marginalia. If I were to jot down the address of a colleague in my copy of Plato's *Republic*, it would be difficult to consider this as a marginal note to the *Republic*. Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts are filled with such random notes.⁶ Moreover, corrections

page dans des espaces prévus à cet effet, puis s'intercalera entre deux œuvres ou bien entre les différentes parties d'un même traité. ... Les commentaires quant à eux sont d'abord réduits, puis se développent au fil du temps pour devenir des œuvres en soi. C'est à ce moment que la mise en page du texte va bouger à nouveau pour donner plus d'espace à l'explication personnelle des maîtres. ... Nous sommes alors en plein 13e siècle, époque où le commentaire philosophique devient un genre littéraire à part entière et occupe toute la page".

⁶ With particular reference to the manuscript of the English Renaissance, see, for instance, William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 23: "... by no means all of the interesting notes written by readers in the

or additions made in the margin to rectify a scribal error or fill a gap (*lacuna*) in the text, which may have been written by the copyist's own hand, can only be considered marginalia in a very limited sense: from a philological point of view, these marginalia belong to the main text itself and can be editorially integrated into it or recorded in the variant apparatus with good reason.

As Adolfo Tura writes in an essential study for marginalia research, which combines the analysis of numerous examples with a plausible attempt at conceptualisation and typologisation: “The margins are thus the margins of a text (*marges d'un texte*), which is identified by its position in the book itself and to which the marginalia, in order to be properly considered marginalia, must refer in some way. ... The essence of marginalia lies in such an act of communication (*acte de mise en communication*).”⁷

It thus seems that the materiality of the edge must be supplemented by the more ideal concept of a textual margin, which does not correspond to a fixed position on the page, without rendering the concrete design of the page irrelevant for the identification and classification of marginalia. Rather, textual and material aspects are in constant interplay. To use an expression by Vincenzo Fera and Silvia Rizzo, who aptly described this dynamic, the marginalia are determined by a double movement: a centripetal movement that allows them to communicate with the text in the centre of the page or connect to it in some way, and a centrifugal movement that leads them away from the text and refers to the material and intellectual context of its production or reception, potentially to the point of becoming independent of the main text.⁸

margins and other blank spaces of books comment directly or indirectly on the text they are found in. Many of the notes that readers wrote in their books – doodles, pen practices, ownership formulae, and a wide variety of quotidian marks that were entered in books simply because they offered a convenient space for writing and archiving – do note qualify as ‘annotations.’ Are students of marginalia and readers’ marks supposed to study these inscriptions and, if so, how are they to be described and approached?”

⁷ Adolfo Tura, *Essai sur les “marginalia” en tant que pratique et documents*, in: *Scientia in margine: Études sur les marginalia dans les manuscrits scientifiques du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance*, Danielle Jacquot and Charles S. F. Burnett (eds.), 261–380, Geneva: Droz, 2005, 268–269. Tura makes clear that the notion of “text” itself must be conceived in a broad sense, insofar as even a figure or diagram may constitute a “text” that can give rise to marginal annotation.

⁸ Vincenzo Fera and Silvia Rizzo, Conclusioni, in: *Talking to the Text: Marginalia from Papyri to Print: Proceedings of a Conference Held at Erice, 26 September – 3 October 1998*, vol. 2, Vincenzo Fera, Giacomo Ferrari, and Silvia Rizzo (eds.), 979–988, Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2002, 980.

2 Precarious Taxonomies: Between Production and Reception

If this working definition is accepted, an essential distinction within the complex taxonomy of marginalia becomes important: namely the distinction between marginalia that arose in connection with the production of a particular manuscript or book copy (what Tura terms *marginales de confection*, envisioned from the outset and often copied by the same hand as the main text) and the so-called reading marginalia (*marginales de lecture*), which are added later by the user and reflect the engagement with the text in a specific copy.⁹ (Often, but not always, this distinction is linked to the one between apograph and autograph marginalia.)

Both types are of interest to philosophical-historical research, although they allow for different observations. The *marginales de confection* constitute a paratextual instrument through which the production context attempts to steer the reception of a text or to respond to the usage needs of the intended readership. If we consider the “scribe as an author”, as Luciano Canfora provocatively advocates,¹⁰ one aspect of this authorial intention becomes visible in the form of marginal writing: the scribe (and later also the printer) prepares the reception of a text by furnishing it with signs, paragraph numbers, diagrams, or glosses that suggest – or even prescribe – a certain use, and sometimes also a given interpretation. Readers never engage with ideal texts detached from material constraints: the layout of the page and the paratextual apparatus play a decisive role in shaping the modes of reception. In this sense, the analysis of marginalia invites a critical expansion of the notion of a text, to include both editorial strategies and contingent circumstances tied to the context of its production and transmission. Moreover, by challenging a purely semantic conception of textuality, marginalia of production prompt us to observe how a main text – even if stable in its wording – can acquire a specific status and an additional layer of meaning whenever the paratex-

⁹ For this distinction and in general for a reflected and articulated taxonomy of marginalia, see Tura, *Essai sur les marginalia en tant que pratique et documents*.

¹⁰ Notoriously, Canfora argues that scribes should be considered active agents in the transmission and structuring of texts, often exercising interpretive and editorial functions traditionally associated with authorship. See Luciano Canfora, *Il copista come autore*, Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 2019, 21: “A ben vedere, è il copista il vero *artefice* dei testi che sono riusciti a sopravvivere. Così fu, fino al tempo in cui la loro salvezza fu presa in carico dai tipografi. Il copista è colui che materialmente *scrive il testo*. Le parole che lo compongono prima sono passate attraverso il filtro, e il vaglio, della sua testa, poi sono state messe in salvo grazie alla destrezza della mano nel tener dietro alla dettatura interiore”.

tual features surrounding it are altered.¹¹ The *marginales de lecture*, on the other hand, represent the direct, text-facing reaction of a reading community to the book itself and document the actual, selective use and appropriation of a source. They offer a particularly informative basis for tracing the reception history of individual sources or groups of sources, and they bear witness to doctrinal approaches, exegetical emphases, and forms of disinterest in a way that cannot – or only to a limited extent – be gleaned from traditional main text-based research. In this vein, over the past decades, a well-established field of study has shed light on note taking as a fundamental epistemic activity and an effective technology of information management.¹² For example, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have emphasised the “goal-oriented” nature of reading in a pioneering analysis of the annotation strategy employed by the sixteenth-century English scholar and Elizabethan courtier Gabriel Harvey, who methodically glossed Livy’s *History of Rome* to inform concrete political decisions.¹³

However, the distinction between *marginales de confection* and reading marginalia proves to be fluid. This becomes evident, for instance, when a scribe, in the process of producing an apograph, decides to incorporate glosses left by a previous reader in the antigraph, integrating them from the outset into the paratextual design of the new copy. A concrete example is provided by the Latin translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Praeparatio Evangelica*, copied by the monks of Tegernsee from the exemplar that belonged to Nicholas of Cusa: here, the copyist transcribes not only the main text but also the Cardinal’s marginal notes, thus transforming someone else’s reading traces into the paratextual apparatus of a new witness.¹⁴ At the same time, readers may also act as copyists, integrating into their own exemplars glosses found in other witnesses of a given text. This is precisely what Giovanni Pico della Mirandola occasionally does when, in his personal copies of

11 On this aspect, see Roger Chartier, *L’Ordre des livres: Lecteurs, auteurs, bibliothèques en Europe entre XIV^e et XVIII^e siècle*, Aix-en-Provence: Alinea, 1992, esp. 15–16.

12 See among others Anthony Thomas Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997; Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age*, New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 2010.

13 See Anthony Thomas Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “Studied for Action”: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy, *Past & Present*, no. 129 (1990): 30–78.

14 Cf. Mario Meliadò and Hans Gerhard Senger, Cusanus-Marginalien: Zur Edition und Interpretation einer Textüberlieferung am Seitenrand, *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 64 (2022): 209–241, esp. 230–231.

Platonic works, he transcribes annotations originally penned by Marsilio Ficino in his own books.¹⁵

The precariousness (or permeability) of this taxonomy stems from the fact that the agents in the material history of knowledge do not occupy fixed roles: scribes also act as readers (indeed, as first readers and recipients of the text they copy), and conversely, readers also act as scribes, actively reshaping the manuscripts they engage with and embedding the heterogeneous outcomes of their studies into the book itself. Not least, the social practices of exchange, comparison, and copying of manuscripts – practices on which the transmission of knowledge itself is grounded – fundamentally involve marginalia as well. Annotations frequently migrate from one manuscript to another, undergoing constant transformation not only in content but also in status. It is not uncommon, therefore, for marginal notes to be absorbed into the main body of the text, or conversely, for sections originally part of the main text to be transcribed into the margins.

3 Entangled Practices: Reading and Writing

In connection with the type of notes that arise from the reception of a book, a further liminal dimension of marginalia comes to the fore – one that in turn questions the boundary between reading and writing.¹⁶ Marginalia that simultaneously testify to engagement with and reaction to texts inhabit a space that eludes a sharp separation of these two practices. To reflect on the characteristic difference between writing and reading, it is still useful to start from the famous and suggestive description offered in Michel de Certeau's *L'invention du quotidien* (1980):

Far from being writers – founders of their own place, heirs of the peasants of earlier ages now working on the soil of language, diggers of wells and builders of houses – readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires,

¹⁵ Sebastiano Gentile, Marginalia umanistici e tradizione platonica, in: *Talking to the Text: Marginalia from Papyri to Print: Proceedings of a Conference Held at Erice, 26 September – 3 October 1998*, vol. 1, Vincenzo Fera, Giacomo Ferrari, and Silvia Rizzo (eds.), 407–432, Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2002, esp. 431.

¹⁶ See Heather Joanna Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books*, New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 2001.

or it does so poorly, and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of the lost paradise.¹⁷

De Certeau here draws a far-reaching contrast: writing aspires to permanence and resists the passage of time, while reading tends to vanish without a trace; writing is reproducible and accumulative, reading remains ephemeral, tied to the immediacy of its exercise and to the singularity of the moment in which it occurs. While writing creates a locus and persists through repetition and dissemination, reading unfolds in transit, consumed in the act itself.

Yet this contrast becomes less clear-cut when we consider the practice of annotation. Marginalia can represent precisely a form of writing that originates in the act of reading, and whose status oscillates between permanence and contingency, repetition and singularity. They are traces of reading, yet they partake of writing; they fix a gesture that would otherwise be fleeting, yet they do so in the margins, without claiming the full authority of the main text. As such, marginal notes embody a hybrid practice that destabilises rigid taxonomies: they turn out to be the writing form of a reader who has given in to the temptation to leave a trace – or, alternatively, the reading exercise of a writer who renounces the centre of the page and confines creative agency to the margins, travelling through someone else's land, as De Certeau alludes. Seen from this perspective, they provide both material evidence and conceptual insight into an interdependence between reading and writing that the history of philosophy often documents but rarely interrogates.

At a closer look, this transitional status of marginalia offers a vantage point from which to reassess central categories of philosophical historiography, such as those of “work” and “author”, and to unsettle traditional interpretive dichotomies, such as those between authorial and derivative, original and imitative, or private and public. It is legitimate to ask, for instance, to what extent the annotations that scholars such as Robert Grosseteste or Petrarch added to the manuscripts in their libraries should be regarded as expressions of their authorial voice, and whether the corpus of marginalia scattered across their heavily glossed books might be considered part of their œuvre.¹⁸ Do they bear witness to a reader's fleeting engage-

17 Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. 1: *Arts de faire* (1980), Luce Giard (ed.), Paris: Gallimard, 1990, 251, here quoted from Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven F. Rendall (trans.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 174. The same passage is cited and commented upon in Chartier, *L'Ordre des livres*, 13–14.

18 On the significance of annotation practice for Grosseteste and Petrarch as well as on their relationship to books, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1990 and Christian Moser, *Buchgestützte Subjektivität: Literarische Formen der Selbstsorge und der Selbsterneutik*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006.

ment or to a writer's incipient authorship? Michel Foucault's provocative questions remain particularly pertinent in this regard: "Is everything an author wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work?" It invites to consider "how a work can be extracted from the millions of traces left by an individual after his death."¹⁹ The liminal status of marginalia renders such questions difficult to resolve – and this ambiguity is arguably part of their epistemic value. The hesitation over whether marginalia should be considered part of a philosophical œuvre, or dismissed as incidental traces of use, reflects a broader tension within intellectual historiography itself: between what is preserved and what is left out, between apparently systematised doctrines and fragmented thoughts, between texts consciously addressing a reader and the unclaimed surplus they generate.

A reasonable objection might arise at this point. Marginalia are mostly private notes, traces of use that, for various and perhaps good reasons, remained on the margins. While they may be of general relevance for a history of reading, their contribution to the history of philosophy remains to be demonstrated. It is not uncontroversial to use them to interpret an author's thought: is there not a risk of falling into a form of historiographical voyeurism? Yet this objection must be tempered. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, codices were social artefacts, and marginalia often addressed a specific audience. Glosses circulated, were copied, and transmitted. It is partly a modern optical illusion to view marginalia as private or nameless jottings, as if glossators were unaware of a potential readership, or as if contemporary readers were unable to ascertain the origin of marginal comments.²⁰ The issue is, then, not merely whether marginalia can be attributed to an identifiable author, or whether they were ever intended to address a reader. More fundamentally, they complicate the very notion of what counts as a philosophical statement and where it may be located. In the manuscript cultures of the Middle Ages and early modern period, margins were not simply spaces for personal study,

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, What is an Author? in: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), 113–138, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1980, 118–119. For the original French text, based a lecture delivered to the Société française de philosophie at the Collège de France on 22 February 1969, see Michel Foucault, Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur? *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 63, no. 3 (1969): 73–104.

²⁰ A particularly intriguing example is Johannes Hinderbach (1418–1486), who even signed the glosses to which he attributed particular value beyond his personal use. For a detailed documentary analysis and insightful reflections on this practice, see the volume of Daniela Rando, *Dai margini la memoria: Johannes Hinderbach (1418–1486)*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003, esp. 260–268, here 268: "L'autorappresentazione di fronte a un 'pubblico' giocò una parte importante nella messa per iscritto di sé anche nelle postille di Hinderbach, il quale ebbe coscienza precisa della presenza del pubblico, cui anzi talora si appellò."

but decisively participated in a broader ecology of intellectual transmission, where reading and writing – considered as continuum and not as distinct parts – were a collective enterprise and where authorship itself was diffuse, multiple, and stratified, at times consciously anonymous.

In a certain sense, each marginal annotation encapsulates a historiographical challenge: it stands at the intersection of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the book being read and the formation history of the reader's thought, thus marking an encounter – to borrow Paul Ricoeur's formulation – between the world of the book and the world of the reader, from which a mutual transformation occurs. Reading annotations resist a clear-cut classification as either an act of reception or an instance of thought production, oscillating between the appropriation of an inherited text and the emergence of a new voice speaking obliquely from the edges. Rather than calling for definitive categorisations, the study of marginalia encourages us to dwell within this undecidability and to treat it not as a deficiency, but as a critical resource. This shift to the margins opens a field of inquiry in which the contours of philosophical authorship and text emerge as less stable and more porous than traditional historiography tends to acknowledge. As a methodological gesture, this openness and “eccentric” gaze can, with due caution, be extended to every philosophical text under historiographical analysis. For more often than we suspect, what is commonly regarded as a work reveals itself as the condensation of peripheral practices – the visible peak of a submerged labour of reading and annotation: the mirror of a thinking in the margins.

4 Mapping the Margins: Polycentric Approaches

The contributions gathered in this volume engage with marginalia from a variety of methodological perspectives, sometimes complementary. What unites these diverse inquiries is not a fixed definition of marginalia, but a shared effort to render them intelligible as historical and conceptual artifacts. The scale of analysis ranges across several levels – from the most material and fragmentary signs of attention, such as the *maniculae* (or even the mere “pen trials”, attesting only to a user's incidental presence), to sustained marginal commentaries that surround a central text and tend to emancipate themselves, ultimately becoming self-standing documents. Yet, in order for marginalia to constitute a coherent corpus of historical-philosophical inquiry, it is essential that an interpretative centre be established. This centre is not merely the main text to which the annotations respond, but rather functions as a guiding principle for mapping the margins: it connects individual annotations to each other within a defined investigative framework and provides a criterion for

their historiographical significance. In what follows, I briefly present the essays included in this volume not in terms of their specific contents or findings, but in light of the methodological choices that shaped the construction and selection of their respective corpora. Five distinct approaches may be abstractly identified, though the execution of each study often reflects intersections or combinations of methods.

The first approach maps marginalia across multiple extant copies of a *single work*, annotated by different hands in various times and places. This line of investigation adopts a quantitative and comparative perspective on patterns of reading and offers a diachronic survey of a work's transmission and reception. In such cases, the text itself becomes both the organising principle of the corpus and the horizon of its elucidation. This model is exemplified in Silvia Di Vincenzo's study of the Arabic transmission of Avicenna's (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428H/1037) *Book of Healing* (*Kitāb al-Shifa*), Lisa Devriese's contribution on the Latin tradition of pseudo-Aristotle's *De coloribus*, and Christoph Sander's examination of the extant printed exemplars of *De magnete* by William Gilbert (d. 1603).

A second approach focuses on marginalia found in multiple works owned, read, or annotated by the *same individual*. Here, the corpus is constituted not by many exemplars of a single text, but by the various books of a particular library. This mapping reveals intellectual habits, scholarly interests, and working strategies developed by a reader over time. Silvia Negri's contribution scrutinises the manuscript collection of the Parisian master Godfrey of Fontaines (d. after 1306), while Valentina Zaffino analyses early printed editions from the convent library of San Domenico in Nicastro, where the young Tommaso Campanella (d. 1639) left traces of his early philosophical formation.

A third approach takes as its object different works belonging to a *single exegetical tradition*. In this vein, Aurora Panzica investigates the Latin transmission of commentaries on Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, while Clarisse Reynard focuses on those on the *De memoria et reminiscencia*, stemming from the fifteenth century. The marginalia analysed in these contributions document the material formation of a commentary tradition, shedding light both on the paratextual apparatus accompanying manuscript production and on the contexts of use and doctrinal reception.

A fourth approach centres on clusters of manuscripts containing annotations by various hands, yet originating within the *same intellectual milieu*. According to this research line, neither a single work, reader nor commented authority constitutes the unifying principle; rather, the focus is on a specific community of readers or a network of scholars and their shared knowledge practices. In this volume, Giovanna Murano's chapter explores a selection of manuscripts from fifteenth-century Italy, mostly of Florentine origin, to reconstruct the graphic notation habits

typical of Italian humanism. Her study concentrates on three types of intervention: textual corrections, indices, and mnemonic signs.

The fifth and final approach focuses on a *single manuscript witness* and the systematic analysis of interventions by *one annotator*. Fabio Bulgarini examines the glosses added by Johannes Wenck (d. 1460) to his personal copy of the Latin translation of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Poetics*; Michael Engel investigates the Hebrew marginal critiques of an anonymous opponent of Elijah Del Medigo's (d. 1493) Averroist positions; and Leonardo Graciotti analyses the paratexts of Domenico Bonfioli's (d. 1571) *Reportationes* on Pietro Pomponazzi's (d. 1525) university lectures on *De sensu et sensato*. Bonfioli was, strictly speaking, neither the reader, nor the copyist, nor the author of the texts he transmitted – yet in writing at the margins of his reportations, he seems to paradoxically embody all three roles at once. It is precisely this ambiguity, and the resistance it poses to reductive classification, that the volume as a whole invites us to explore.

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