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DE STAËL'S
POST-REVOLUTIONARY SELF :
RESITUATING THE CHAPTERS
ON PHILOSOPHY
IN DE L'ALLEMAGNE

Résumé : *La nouvelle édition de De l'Allemagne (Champion, 2017) est sûre de ranimer à nouveau des recherches sur son influence politique et culturelle. Les chapitres sur la philosophie allemande surtout ont provoqué un débat de longue date, la présentation particulière de la philosophie de Kant étant difficile à déchiffrer, sinon problématique. Afin de dépasser d'anciennes querelles sur les mérites de sa présentation, je propose une nouvelle mise en contexte de ces chapitres. Notre discussion sur l'élaboration d'une théorie de la subjectivité dans De l'Allemagne reste à développer, car c'est une théorie qui dépasse même les catégories dont on s'est souvent servi pour en parler – le sentiment, la religion, l'enthousiasme, l'éclectisme, etc. Parmi les clés textuelles de cette théorie est l'emploi stratégique du terme « âme », terme que cet essai interroge en considérant les aspects ontologiques et phénoménologiques de la pensée staëlienne.*

In a superbly researched and highly informative introduction to the recent edition of *De l'Allemagne*, Axel Blaeschke foregrounds the importance of sentiment and religiosity in Germaine de Staël's presentation of German philosophy in the third section of her best-selling

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volume. However, A. Blaeschke also emphasizes de Staël's lack of precision, coherence, and systematic rigor in her approach to German idealism:

Au total, M^{me} de Staël a retenu de l'idéalisme allemand ce qui lui convenait et l'a instrumentalisé dans le seul objectif de contrecarrer la philosophie française d'Helvétius et de ses disciples qu'elle juge contaminés par le virus de «l'intérêt bien entendu»; à cette aune, les Idéologues ne constituent que le dernier maillon d'une chaîne condamnée à de stériles controverses esthétiques et sociales. Cette vision réductrice, devenue quasiment obsessionnelle, a sérieusement altéré sa capacité de jugement¹.

In this light, when de Staël is accused of distorting German idealism, it is due to the political and ethical concerns that supposedly cloud her thinking. A similar critique is leveled at her presentation of Kantian philosophy more specifically, although in this case A. Blaeschke focuses on de Staël's failure to master Kant due to her particular conceptual framework that inflected his ideas in the direction of distinct political and ethical objectives:

La lecture des philosophes allemands dans le texte est effectivement infiniment douteuse. Parlant de Kant, elle évoque certes ses «catégories», ses «antinomies» dans deux notes, mais sans paraître bien en maîtriser le concept. Ce qu'elle attend de la philosophie kantienne, c'est une confirmation de sa propre conception du «sentiment» comme fondement de la morale aussi bien individuelle que sociale, – conception fortement teintée de religiosité et où priment la notion d'«âme» et, à sa suite, celle d'«immortalité²».

Notwithstanding the implicit judgment of de Staël's standing as a «serious» thinker, A. Blaeschke's presentation of de Staël's concept of «âme» in the context of this passage is noteworthy, as he appears to bind it exclusively to its religious connotations. Although de Staël's use of this term certainly incorporates these connotations, as we shall see

¹ See «Présentation», Madame de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, OCS-1/3, ed. Axel Blaeschke, Paris, Champion, 2017, p. 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

in this essay, restricting it in this way elides significant aspects of her concept of «*âme*», a concept which not only transcends these religious connotations, but which also extends to a notion of subjectivity.

Interventions that substantially confront de Staël's approach to Kantian philosophy tend to drift toward an appraisal of her understanding (or lack thereof) of its key concepts. For this reason, pages have been devoted either to dismissing or to vindicating her as a «*serious*» thinker *vis-à-vis* her German, as well as French, contemporaries, but these attempts often underscore the ways in which de Staël's own understanding of Kant was mediated by others—Villers, Degérando, Henry Crabb Robinson, the Schlegel brothers, etc. And while scholars largely vindicate de Staël, it is not without making her pass through the gauntlet of appraisal on Kantian terms³. Pierre Macherey⁴ is one remarkable exception in this regard⁵. His

³ See Maximilien Vallois, *La Formation de l'influence kantienne en France*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1920; André Monchoux, «*Madame de Staël interprète de Kant*», *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, LXVI, janvier-mars 1966, p. 71-84; Ernst Behler, «*Kant vu par le Groupe de Coppet: la formation de l'image staélienne de Kant*», in *Le Groupe de Coppet. Actes et documents du deuxième colloque de Coppet, 10-13 juillet 1974*, dir. Simone Balayé et Jean-Daniel Candaux, Genève, Slatkine / Paris, Champion, 1977, p. 135-6; John Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne, 1810-1813*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; Karen Pagani, «*Judging Oswald within the Limits of Reason Alone in Madame de Staël's Corinne*», *European Romantic Review*, n° 23/2, April 2012, p. 141-156. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but rather a selection of texts that have done much to shape the discourse on de Staël's reception and presentation of Kantian philosophy during the course of the past century.

⁴ I would like to offer special thanks to Stéphanie Genand for pointing me in the direction of his work.

⁵ In addition to P. Macherey's distinctive approach, another genre of reading manages to evade the trap of appraisal by reading de Staël's work as a form of «*creative appropriation*» or of «*translation*» (in the broadest sense of the term). This genre includes, for instance, Ian Allan Hennig, *L'Allemagne de Madame de Staël et la polémique romantique: première fortune de l'ouvrage en France et en Allemagne (1814-1830)*, Genève, Slatkine Reprints, 1975 [1929]; Stéphane Douaillier and Patrice Vermeren, «*Le passage du Rhin. De Madame de Staël à Victor Cousin et Edgar Quinet, les étapes de la réception de la pensée kantienne dans la France du XIX^e siècle*», *Magazine littéraire*, n° 309, April 1993, p. 46-49.

chapter on de Staël transcends this kind of appraisal by highlighting her interpretative practice and textual strategy with respect to philosophy:

On peut considérer que M^{me} de Staël «joue» la philosophie de Kant, pour en révéler les enjeux, exactement à la manière dont Corinne interprète une pièce de Shakespeare, en comédienne avisée et posédée, complètement habitée par son personnage sur lequel elle maintient pourtant un regard extérieur, qui lui permet d'y entrer en s'en démarquant. C'est ainsi que, d'après M^{me} de Staël, pour se rapprocher du sens d'une pensée, il faut surtout ne pas se laisser prendre au mode d'expression singulier qui la limite⁶.

Unlike A. Blaeschke's introduction, which judges the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in de Staël's thought, P. Macherey aptly frames the discussion in terms of the «enjeux», or the immediate political and ethical concerns of the historical moment in which de Staël was writing. While P. Macherey focuses on de Staël's attempt to identify «les éléments ou les signes annonciateurs d'une culture ouverte, authentiquement cosmopolite⁷» in German thought, he alludes to another key concern of de Staël's in the following lines:

L'idée directrice qui guida cette interprétation pourraient être résumée ainsi: contrairement aux apparences qui font de lui un penseur spécialisé, dont l'originalité dépend spécifiquement de catégories et de procédures de raisonnement particulières, celles-ci en conditionnant étroitement la compréhension, Kant, philosophe unanime, a exercé principalement un rôle de conciliation et de synthèse, qui a élargi le domaine de l'esprit en y rassemblant des activités présentées auparavant comme exclusives. Dans la logique de cette présentation, il devenait possible de dire que «Kant qui semblait appelé à conclure toutes les grandes alliances intellectuelles a fait de l'âme un seul foyer où toutes les facultés sont d'accord entre elles». Et c'est ainsi que, si étonnant que cela puisse paraître, M^{me} de Staël a

⁶ See Pierre Macherey, *À quoi pense la littérature? Exercices de philosophie littéraire*, Paris, PUF, 1990, p. 28.

⁷ *À quoi pense la littérature?*, p. 34.

été conduite à faire de Kant, davantage même qu'un philosophe éclectique, le doctrinaire par excellence de l'éclectisme⁸.

Just as de Staël seeks to translate, or open up, Kantian philosophy by adapting it to new forms of expression, on a conceptual level de Staël imagines another possible opening: it is related to the question of subjectivity. If de Staël's political and ethical concerns in *De l'Allemagne* are evoked, they are most often framed in terms of her opposition to Bonaparte and the politico-ethical regime of «calcul⁹» that buttressed his imperial system, or in terms of her polemical critique of French materialism and the ethics of exteriority and self-interest that such philosophy grounded. These two features of de Staël's critique are bound together by her underlying concern with articulating a post-Revolutionary subjectivity. In order to delineate this connection, it is necessary to identify two organizing frameworks that ground de Staël's thought. The first of these is the analogy that she draws between the political and the ontological. In this context I define the ontological as the existential disposition, or state of being, of an entity, whether that entity be the nation-state or the political subject. The second is related to de Staël's phenomenological approach to and understanding of philosophy and philosophical systems. By this I mean the ways in which de Staël herself internalizes and performs philosophical ideas, as well as her understanding of the ways in which philosophical systems are internalized across the broader culture.

De Staël's analogy between the political and the ontological acknowledges a correspondence between the state of a nation's political order and the state of the political subject within that order. An iteration of this analogy appears as early as her 1796 *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations*. In this text, if de Staël advances a notion that the freedom, or autonomy, of the political subject is the necessary precondition of a free polity, she

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ «Et qu'est-ce que donc que l'être humain, quand on ne voit en lui qu'une prudence dont son propre avantage est l'objet? L'instinct des animaux vaut mieux, car il est quelquefois généreux et fier; mais ce calcul, qui semble l'attribut de la raison, finit par rendre incapable de la première des vertus, le dévouement», *De l'Allemagne*, p. 780.

also insists on identifying and interrogating the despotic power of psychosocial forces *vis-à-vis* the ethical conscience and will of political subjects. These psychosocial forces include the very passions that operate on both an individual as well as a collective level; in addition, individual character and national character are inextricably linked through the cultivation and expression of such passions. De Staël opens *De l'influence des passions* with an analysis of individual character «in relation to what Valéry would call a 'politique intérieur', a kind of power struggle between the inner faculties of reason and the passions¹⁰». In the subsequent chapters, de Staël illustrates the ways in which this psychic physics of power is reproduced socially: that is, whereas the body politic bears down on the psyche, the internal dynamics of the psyche find their analogous expression in the body politic¹¹. Written largely during the Jacobin Terror, *De l'influence des passions* is preoccupied with questions related to the governance or regulation of the passions in the wake of revolutionary violence, referring to the passions as «la plus grande difficulté des gouvernements¹²». In ways that clearly prefigure the work on national character later undertaken in *De la littérature*, de Staël explicitly connects the

¹⁰ Suzanne Guerlac, «Writing the Nation (M^{me} de Staël)», *French Forum*, n° 30/3, Fall 2005, p. 44. The following passage explains this analogy in further detail: «The character of the nation, then, is like a human person, whose individual character depends in part upon the disposition of the passions. What implicitly operates the analogy between the individual and the nation, and would like the two projected parts of the study on the passions, is the dual register of the term 'constitution'. It refers both to the make up of the individual character and to the institution of the *charte*, the fundamental text that determines a country's form of government», p. 44.

¹¹ A striking example of this phenomenon is described in the chapters «De l'esprit de parti» and «Du crime». To summarize, in the case of «l'esprit de parti», which she also calls fanaticism, the psychic violence carried out by the abstraction of an idea finds its analogue in the physical violence of the Terror. Later, in her 1798 *Des circonstances actuelles*, de Staël offers a succinct formulation of «le fanatisme», calling it «le despotisme d'une seule idée sur l'esprit de l'homme» (Madame de Staël, *Des circonstances actuelles*, OCS-III/1, ed. Lucia Omacini, Paris, Champion, 2009, p. 460). Its analogue in the body politic is succinctly formulated in *De l'influence des passions*, OCS-I/1, ed. Florence Lotterrie, 2008, p. 222: «l'esprit de parti commande la liberté avec la fureur du despotisme».

¹² Madame de Staël, *De l'influence des passions*, p. 137.

psychic disposition, or constitution, of political subjects to the constitution, or configuration, of governments:

On voit aisément que toutes les combinaisons sociales les plus despotiques conviendraient également à des hommes inertes qui seraient contents de rester à la place que le sort leur aurait fixée et que la théorie démocratique la plus abstraite serait praticable au milieu d'hommes sages uniquement conduits par leur raison. Le seul problème des constitutions est donc de connaître jusqu'à quel degré on peut exciter ou comprimer les passions, sans compromettre le bonheur public¹³.

Though the second part of her work on the happiness of nations was never written, de Staël connects the passions of the individual to those of the nation in the opening pages. Unregulated passions and despotism are opposed to reason and freedom. As she writes, «toutes les combinaisons sociales les plus despotiques» are suitable to a political subject whose defining quality is inertia. Drawing on the lexicon of physics, de Staël's reference to inertia evokes a long-standing association of the passions with *passivity*: that is, a subject ruled entirely by the passions is a *passive* subject, a subject that is also *object*, acted on by forces both internal and external¹⁴. Such a subject is thus ruled by two despots: the passions and what de Staël

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ This division between passivity and activity in relation to the question of the passions and reason has a long history, beginning with Aristotle. See Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997. Highly informative, James's text resituates the passions as an important area of philosophical inquiry: «Philosophers have tended in the first place to neglect the fact that their early-modern ancestors wrote about the passions. This may partly be due to the influence of Hume and other Enlightenment thinkers, who represented the seventeenth century as an era dominated by dogmatic, religious values in which a proper appreciation of sentiment was suppressed. But the neglect also stems in the twentieth century from a preoccupation with philosophy as a scientific and secular form of enquiry distinct from psychology, a conception which has shaped our understanding of historical texts and led us to read them as mainly addressing the metaphysical, scientific and epistemological issues that now tend to be seen as the core of the subject», p. 15. From this passage alone, one might see how de Staël stands out in this regard.

calls «toutes les combinaisons sociales les plus despotiques». It is noteworthy that, in this case, de Staël does not connect despotism to a specific institution, but instead to an array of despotic «social combinations», thus indicating a capacious definition of despotism. In this light, despotism is an all-encompassing system—a way of life—that extends beyond the form of government *tout court*. It subsumes not only a psychosocial regime cultivated by a historically constituted array of institutions and circumstances, but also the prevailing concepts of a particular philosophical system internalized by subjects within the body politic—this conceptualization of despotism resurfaces in her sustained critique of French materialism in *De l'Allemagne*. In contrast, «la théorie démocratique la plus abstraite» is feasible among political subjects guided wholly by their reason. In this ideal scenario, the subject is an *active*, autonomous subject, one that participates *actively* in the life of the body politic. Whereas the passions *act on* the subject, the subject *uses* reason, thus implying that such a subject possesses a will. Associating the use of reason with an active will, de Staël thus connects reason to freedom: that is, if the passions themselves possess the absolute power of a despot, then the freedom of the political subject hinges on their mastery through the use of reason. Therefore, de Staël elaborates these two abstract theoretical positions as the organizing categories of her study of the passions in relation to the political.

A comparable model resurfaces in *De l'Allemagne*, in which the categories of *passivity* and *activity* are of particular interest. In the closing lines of her 1813 preface of *De l'Allemagne*, de Staël places two existential dispositions in relation to each other—the *état* of the nation-state and the *état* of the political subject. Explicitly linking them together is a concept of autonomy:

Il y a trois ans que je désignais la Prusse et les pays du nord qui l'environnent comme *la patrie de la pensée*; en combien d'actions généreuses cette pensée ne s'est-elle pas transformée! ce que les philosophes mettaient en système s'accomplit, et l'indépendance de l'âme fondera celle des États¹⁵.

¹⁵ *De l'Allemagne*, p. 89-90. These closing lines of the preface of *De l'Allemagne* echo the concerns articulated in the introduction of *De l'influence des passions*: «La première partie, que j'imprime à présent est

Beyond its frequently cited religious connotations and, in particular, its association with the idea of immortality, here de Staël's «*âme*» incorporates a concept of the self, otherwise referred to in modern parlance as the «*moi*». However, de Staël's «*âme*» is a capacious concept that also signifies a certain kind of self—the self of enthusiasm. In the context of *De l'Allemagne*, although the later chapters on enthusiasm illustrate further this concept of the self, de Staël's «*âme*» expresses its most expansive capacity as a concept in the chapter on English philosophy:

L'âme est un foyer qui rayonne dans tous les sens; c'est dans ce foyer que consiste l'existence; toutes les observations et tous les efforts des philosophes doivent se tourner vers ce *moi*, centre et mobile de nos sentiments et de nos idées. Sans doute l'incomplet du langage nous oblige à nous servir d'expressions erronées, il faut répéter, suivant l'usage: tel individu a de la raison, ou de l'imagination, ou de la sensibilité, etc.; mais si l'on voulait s'entendre par un mot, on devrait dire seulement: *Il a de l'âme, il a beaucoup d'âme*. C'est ce souffle divin qui fait tout l'homme¹⁶.

These lines articulate the most complete, dynamic definition of the Staëlien self; this is apparent in the very structure of the passage. For instance, the term «*âme*» is at first displaced by «*foyer*», and subsequently by the terms «*moi*», «*centre*», and finally «*mobile*»: that is, if de Staël's use of the term «*âme*» evokes the religious connotations, «*ce souffle divin qui fait tout l'homme*» also opens up a space for thinking of the self in terms of a whole, autonomous,

fondée sur l'étude de son propre cœur, et les observations faites sur le caractère des hommes de tous les temps. Dans l'étude des constitutions, il faut se proposer pour but le bonheur, et pour moyen la liberté; dans la science morale de l'homme, c'est l'indépendance de l'âme qui doit être l'objet principal; ce qu'on peut avoir de bonheur en est la suite. L'homme qui se vouerait à la poursuite de la félicité parfaite, serait le plus infortuné des êtres; la nation qui n'aurait en vue que d'obtenir le dernier terme abstrait de la liberté métaphysique, serait la nation la plus misérable. Les législateurs doivent donc compter et diriger les circonstances, et les individus chercher à s'en rendre indépendants; les gouvernements doivent tendre au bonheur réel de tous, et les moralistes doivent apprendre aux individus à se passer de bonheur», p. 151.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 566-567.

actively willing subject in the political realm. The shift apparent in this passage also echoes the broader linguistic shift from «*âme*» to «*moi*» carefully detailed in Jan Goldstein's *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850*. As Goldstein writes, in the second half of the eighteenth century, «French sensationalists participated in the linguistic shift that replaced the premodern *âme* with the modern *moi*¹⁷». By the early years of the Bourbon Restoration, according to J. Goldstein, the concept of the «*moi*» as a whole, autonomous, actively willing self constituted the core feature of Victor Cousin's eclecticism¹⁸. J. Goldstein thus constructs a narrative not only of this linguistic—and ultimately conceptual—shift from «*âme*» to «*moi*», but also of the triumph and institutionalization of Victor Cousin's eclecticism and, more specifically, his distinct concept of a whole, autonomous, actively willing subject, or «*moi*», a doctrine that he and his disciples propagated through the emerging French national educational system, and that consequently filtered through French society, more broadly. However, before this development, in the waning years of the Empire, de Staël had already disseminated an open, dynamic, capacious concept of the «*moi*» with neither the restrictions later imposed by Cousin, nor his reactionary politics to which it was pinned¹⁹. And viewed in another light, J. Goldstein's compelling narrative points to the political, social, and cultural power of internalized philosophical systems, a phenomenon with which de Staël was profoundly concerned.

In this regard, it is necessary to return to the aforementioned passage that concludes the 1813 preface of *De l'Allemagne*. When read alongside de Staël's concept of «*âme*» as it is fully articulated in the chapter on English philosophy, its significance touches on both onto-

¹⁷ Jan Goldstein, *The Post Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850*, Cambridge/Londres, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 118.

¹⁸ However, Goldstein presents Maine de Biran as the direct influence on Cousin. Not once does she mention the broader influence of de Staël on Cousin, in particular, and on French culture, in general.

¹⁹ Goldstein highlights the restrictions imposed by Cousin: «The two categories of human difference that preoccupied Cousin were those, spawned by the process of industrialization, that preoccupied most early nineteenth-century Western Europeans: gender and class», p. 172-173. In other words, according to Cousin, women and the working class could not possess this *a priori* self.

logical as well as phenomenological questions whose political implications shed light on how to approach her chapters on German philosophy. As that passage indicates, the freedom, or autonomy, of the political subject grounds the freedom, or autonomy, of the nation-state; moreover, the perpetual quest for equilibrium between these two states—much like that «réunion de tous les contraires²⁰» imagined in *De l'influence des passions*—lies at the very heart of de Staël's conceptual framework. In this regard, de Staël establishes a direct correspondence between the two states of being that comprise her unique vision of Germany: on the one hand, there is the *passive* Germany of her imagination evoked in the 1810 text; on the other, there is the *active* Germany emerging after 1812, when the forces arrayed against Bonaparte reclaimed the momentum in response to his disastrous invasion of Russia. Therefore, from a post-1812 vantage point, de Staël sees this «patrie de la pensée²¹», that realm of pure interiority initially depicted in *De l'Allemagne*, finally actualizing—collectively—its idealist conception of an actively willing self *through its very activity*. When Staël declares that «ce que les philosophes mettaient en système s'accomplit²²» through the conversion of thought into «actions généreuses²³», she is in fact articulating her phenomenological grasp of the political, social, and cultural power of philosophy, in general, and of philosophical systems, in particular. The subtle yet formative power of specific philosophical systems operate by means of the internalization of the *spirit* of an idea over the letter. De Staël describes this specific power in the opening lines of *De l'Allemagne's* chapter, «Du persiflage introduit par un certain genre de philosophie»:

Le système philosophique adopté dans un pays exerce une grande influence sur la tendance des esprits: c'est le moule universel dans lequel se jettent toutes les pensées; ceux même qui n'ont point étudié ce système se conforment sans le savoir à la disposition générale qu'il inspire²⁴.

²⁰ *De l'influence des passions*, p. 138.

²¹ *De l'Allemagne*, p. 89.

²² *Ibid.*, 90.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

Within the context of the nation, de Staël suggests that the collective internalization of philosophical systems is a non-specific and unconscious social process. It is the *spirit* of a philosophical system that, as it filters through the body politic, guides and cultivates the «disposition générale» of the nation. With these remarks, de Staël keenly perceives philosophical systems as both living and *lived* things; philosophical positions are internalized, inhabited, and performed as much as they are formulated, refined, and defended: philosophy is not only theory, it is practice. In other words, for de Staël, philosophy and philosophical systems are practices as such, socially and historically embedded, mediating the political and ethical life of the nation. It is with this in mind that de Staël understands the «enjeux²⁵» of Kantian philosophy, and therefore seeks to render their ideas intelligible to the French reading public.

De Staël's phenomenological approach to and understanding of philosophy and philosophical systems goes one step further, and this has to do with her awareness of the ontological space in which the notion of an existential disposition, or state of being, is imagined. In the aforementioned passage in which de Staël offers that textured concept of the self (from the chapter on English philosophy), her evocation of the idea of «existence» is central. When de Staël writes that «c'est dans ce foyer que consiste l'existence²⁶», she is also imagining a space where being resides²⁷. With the use of the term «foyer», de Staël also elicits in our imagination not only a hearth, from which the light of fire—a symbol of creative genius—«rayonne dans tous les sens²⁸», but also a sanctuary, a refuge, as well as a point of origin. When the second half of the aforementioned passage then turns to the

²⁵ *À quoi pense la littérature?*, p. 28.

²⁶ *De l'Allemagne*, p. 566.

²⁷ I would argue that Jean-Jacques Rousseau remains a pivotal influence in this regard. In short, de Staël's rewriting of «âme» as «foyer» evokes that famous passage from the «Cinquième promenade» of *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*: «Mais s'il est un état où l'âme trouve une assiette assez solide pour s'y reposer toute entière et rassembler là tout son être», Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Marcel Raymond, Gallimard, 1959, I, p. 1046.

²⁸ *De l'Allemagne*, p. 566.

question of language, it speaks back to the first half: that is, what de Staël calls «l'incomplet du langage²⁹» is performed by the rehearsal of terms deployed to give full meaning to the concept of «âme». However, as with all the «expressions erronées³⁰» that follow, the full meaning of «âme» remains elusive, and therefore only the term of «âme» itself is capable of filling the gaps. It is in these gaps apparent in the passage that de Staël seeks to carve out space for a concept of being. In a similar vein, John Isbell argues that de Staël «follows Kant as would Wittgenstein a century later, in marking off whole areas of metaphysics as territory where verbal argument is necessarily nonsense; areas where men have no better guide than faith³¹». I would add that, with her ontology, de Staël more precisely marks off the self as an entity beyond language; the Staëlien self is thus a living and *lived* concept; it is a whole, autonomous, actively willing self that cannot be captured in discourse. Finally, by marking off the self in this way, the political implications of de Staël's rhetorical strategy become clear: she *symbolically* positions the self as *an end in itself*. In this respect, to borrow that fitting expression from P. Macherey, de Staël «'joue' la philosophie de Kant³²» once more. Furthermore, in the opening passage of her initial chapter on Kant, de Staël reinforces this symbolic positioning of the self as *an end in itself* with a remarkable depiction of Kant *playing* such a self:

Kant a vécu jusque dans un âge très avancé, et jamais il n'est sorti de Koenigsberg; c'est là qu'au milieu des glaces du Nord il a passé sa vie entière à méditer sur les lois de l'intelligence humaine. Une ardeur infatigable pour l'étude lui a fait acquérir des connaissances sans nombre. Les sciences, les langues, la littérature, tout lui était familier; et sans rechercher la gloire dont il n'a joui que très tard, n'entendant que dans sa vieillesse le bruit de sa renommée, il s'est contenté du plaisir silencieux de la réflexion. Solitaire, il contemplait

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 567.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ John Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne, 1810-1813*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 122.

³² *À quoi pense la littérature?*, p. 28.

son âme avec recueillement; l'examen de la pensée lui prêtait de nouvelles forces à l'appui de la vertu, et quoiqu'il ne se mêlât jamais avec les passions ardentes des hommes, il a su forger des armes pour ceux qui seraient appelés à les combattre³³.

That this passage serves as de Staël's introductory presentation of Kant is especially noteworthy in that it functions as a *mise en abyme* of de Staël's conceptualization of a post-Revolutionary subjectivity, one in which a whole, autonomous, actively willing self is actualized through practice. Additionally, this image of Kant evokes that capacious concept of the self—the self of enthusiasm—, one whose «ardeur infatigable pour l'étude» is complemented by a «plaisir silencieux de la réflexion»: that is, for de Staël, Kant represents a self that incorporates all the faculties related to reason *and* sentiment. However, such an enumeration of qualities reveals an attempt to encompass the wholeness of being that, for de Staël, cannot be captured entirely by language. The elusive and inaccessible «âme» of Kant that is contemplated «avec recueillement» discloses de Staël's concept of being, a concept which grounds her efforts to theorize an independent post-Revolutionary self.

³³ *De l'Allemagne*, p. 597-598.