every time we read an author and search his work for the trace of another, we find that this trace is more pervasive than seems reasonable to assume initially. my search for the presence of the trace of leo strauss in the work of lefort is no exception to this rule: launched into the race like a bloodhound, i detect signs of the presence of strauss at every step. i know that i must not give in to the illusion of believing that the implicit dialogue that i am trying to establish was indeed carried out in this way by claude lefort. however, i realize i cannot avoid it. in my search for the trace of strauss, i find that references to him appear with even greater frequency than i had remembered. and this leads me to venture into the possibility that, even when he is not mentioned, strauss appears, time and again, in a silent dialogue, in the interstices of lefort’s work.

lefort explicitly dedicated three writings to strauss: a summary of strauss’s work, thoughts on machiavelli, in 1960; a chapter of his book le travail de l’oeuvre machiavel, published in 1972; and the article “trois notes sur leo strauss”, included in écrire à l’épreuve du politique. together with these texts, strauss’s presence dominates the conference “la dissolution des repères et l’enjeu démocratique” in 1986; strauss is mentioned in every one of the writings that lefort dedicates to machiavelli, and his name occurs throughout numerous other texts.

this text takes up again, in part, the focus of the conference “tras el rastro de leo strauss. una lectura de claude lefort,” presented at the table dedicated to claude lefort in the debates “republicanismo e democracia,” university of sao paulo, sao paulo (brazil), november 10–17, 2011. i extend my gratitude to matías sirczuk for his comments on previous versions of this text, as well as for reminding me of several references to strauss in lefort’s work.

translated from spanish by clare sheppard.
If we exclude “Machiavel et la verità effettuale” (included in Écrire), which once again takes up the dialogue with the Straussian interpretation of Machiavelli, the majority of the references to Strauss that we find in articles postdating 1980 no longer refer to the reading of Machiavelli. Instead, in texts such as “Trois notes…” and “La dissolution des repères et l’enjeu démocratique,” they refer, above all, to the Straussian consideration of natural right, to his interpretation of modernity, and to the avatars of thought and political justice under the intellectual and political conditions of the modern mass democracy.

**The point of departure: Machiavelli**

An exploration of the first two texts dedicated to Strauss clearly conveys the strong impression that *Thoughts on Machiavelli* has on Lefort.4 Despite his clear differences with the Straussian reading, Lefort constantly recognizes how indebted his own interpretation is to Strauss; as Lefort writes, “not one criticism we make of his work could, from our point of view, erase this debt.”5 The paradoxical situation Lefort seems to face in his encounter with Strauss – which on the one hand captivates him and on the other leaves him perplexed – is that, while he perceives that Strauss makes vital points clear for us, such as access to the decoding of Machiavelli’s discourse, he perceives that the Straussian interpretation is, as a last resort, always placed at the service of a thesis that finds its crutch not in Machiavellian thought itself, but in the affirmation of an external truth, the truth uttered by Greek philosophy. Read like this, Machiavelli’s work can only appear as a step backwards, as a darkening, with regard to that first truth: Machiavelli’s supposed novelty is, in Strauss’s eyes, only the forgetting of a truth, untouched and untouchable, known to the classics.6 This affirmation of a privileged point from which truth emanates is reinforced by a conception of the work which is based on, and is the result of, a perfect intention. Strauss, says Lefort, attributes to Machiavelli a precise finality in every one of his words, and turns him into the perfect author of a deliberate teaching, destined to be elucidated by the knowledgeable reader. The work is, from beginning to end, in its faults, its contradictions, its omissions, the result of an intention; philosophy is a teaching, and the author is a master in full possession of a knowledge. Lefort, for his part, radically objects as much to the position of the reader realized from a place external to the work as to the supposition of a perfect writing and of thinking as a deliberate transmission of teaching.7 Moreover, it is possible to maintain that *Le travail de l’oeuvre Machiavel* is largely