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## A Favourite Analogy: The Microcosm

ABSTRACT. As pre-scientific cognitive tool, the analogy is very important during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Although it underlies the metaphor in rhetorics, the analogy as *similitudo* comes under dialectics, in its theorization of the Renaissance (by Rudolf Agricola or Ramus). This « locus » of dialectical invention allows to build up semantical nets with surprising extension according to the historical moment. This contribution proposes to study this major theme in its historical changes from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in the erudite literature, like the *Roman de la Rose* or *Placides et Timeo*, first doxographical dialogue in vernacular language, then in various dialogues of the XVIth century (for example, Pontus de Tyard for the Pléiade or Pierre Viret for the Reformation, among others ; the last author using in his *Dialogues of the disorder* (1545) the mirror of animals for the socratical quest of the self). At least, it shows how this instrument for cognition and for discursive *cornucopia* binds man with cosmos in various beautiful proportions.

KEY WORDS: analogy, microcosm, Middle Ages, Renaissance.

Theoretically, analogy is a very important cognitive tool mostly for all periods prior to modernity. In the pre-scientific era, it allowed the building of meaningful semantic nets in what Michel Foucault called “l’enchevêtrement des choses et des êtres” (the tangle of things and beings), in his famous book *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966).<sup>1</sup>

In fact, analogy is based on similitude, but similitude is a notion built semantically in history and philosophy; it depends indeed on the ontological organization of being in each age. The allegory, on the other hand, is defined as a closed concept including semantical units as the virtues, Mod-

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<sup>1</sup> [Foucault, 1966, pp. 81 ff ; Descola, 2006].