**“*IL N’Y A PAS DE HORS-TEXTE*”—ONCE MORE**

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*Spivak translates Derrida’s “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” as “there is nothing outside the text.” By considering how the aphorism works within his study of Rousseau on sexual and textual supplements, and by reviewing related expressions in French, a mistranslation is revealed. This is not a simple error, however. The distortion is generated by Derrida’s own broader context. We must not only distinguish signification from reference but also place the aphorism within Derrida’s allusion, in the first part of* Of Grammatology*, to an all-embracing arche-writing. The paper ends in thus opening out the discussion of a textual “inside” or “outside.”*

**Introductory Remarks**

It is typical of those who either derogated or trivialized Derrida’s approach to textuality to take *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*[[1]](#footnote-1) as a key to his whole approach, rather than as a compression of something specifically going on in the text of which it formed a part. For example, in his *History of Madness*, Foucault declares Derrida to be engaged in a “historically determined little pedagogy...*which teaches the student that there is nothing outside the text*…that it is never necessary to look beyond it...a pedagogy that inversely gives to the voice of the masters that unlimited sovereignty that allows it indefinitely to re-say the text.”[[2]](#footnote-2) There is a context to this verbal assault, of course. In the *History,* Foucault had made much of the way in which traditional readings of Descartes’s *Meditations* sideline his glancing reference to the possibility that, in his doubts, he is mad.[[3]](#footnote-3) Derrida reads this as no more than a rhetorical strategy of disarming a naïve reader who might recoil at hyperbolic doubts. Foucault then reads Derrida’s approach as trivializing Descartes’s demarcation of the thinker from the lunatic who raves. Foucault finds here part of a discourse, historically situated, that is in process of creating systematic borders between sanity and madness. For him, Derrida is “reduc[ing] discursive practices to textual traces; the elision of events that are produced there, leaving only marks for a reading.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

In commenting on this polemic a few years later, Edward Said would seem to agree with Foucault in his criticism that Derrida’s method cannot “get hold of the local material density and power of ideas as historical actuality.” Said declares that “here the divergence between Derrida and Foucault [is] dramatic…[for] Foucault’s work re-identifies the particular interests texts serve.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Said cites, as a “dramatic” example of his “divergence” from Derrida, Foucault’s complaint that Derrida will not proceed *beyond* the text. Nevertheless, Said does present his own paper as demonstrating the need for textual analysis to include the Derridean preoccupations, even while he appears to think that Foucault is right to object that Derrida’s concerns do indeed remain contained within text. Thus he makes it appear that Foucault more boldly proceeds *beyond* text. That is to say, *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* is made a crucial marker of the difference.

It is part of the intent of this paper to (gradually) reveal that Derrida’s famous sentence does not perform this role. Derrida’s epigram, thus called upon as a virtual axiom of a system, may be (must be) read in various ways, but no reasonable reading supported by the text, or by Derrida’s textual practice, requires that *what there is* should be internal to text. Nor is such a reading something we must posit or impose, in order to vindicate Derrida’s intricate textual methods. The considerations of history and power that interest Foucault are textually available equally to Derrida; whatever we finally make of the many differences between their textual methods and commitments, it is not as if one of them (Foucault) reaches out from text to the gritty realities of the world, whereas the other (Derrida) declares that reference to be impossible. On no reasonable interpretation does “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” exclude historical or political readings of a text.

Sean Gaston endorses the idea that, in his paper on Descartes’s hyperbolic doubt as “madness,” Foucault helped set the tendency to use *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* as blazon for Derrida’s textualism.[[6]](#footnote-6) Gaston also refers to Edward Said as describing, as an advantage over Derrida, Foucault’s view of “textuality...[as] having to do with a plurality of texts, and with history, power, knowledge, and society.” Gaston himself does not follow Foucault, however, in his denunciation of Derrida’s “pedagogy” as “teach[ing] the student that there is nothing outside of the text.” He does not read Derrida “as announcing that there is nothing outside of language or outside language as writing.” For him, Derrida “affirms that the *text*, or the traces and interlacing oscillations of *différance*, exceed the programmatic and totalizing sciences of language [of the early 1960s].”[[7]](#footnote-7)

So it is in this spirit that Gaston cites Derrida’s own declaration on the issue:

the concept of text I propose [in *Of Grammatology*] is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational…sphere. What I call “text” implies all the structures called “real,” “economic,”…in short; all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that “there is nothing outside the text.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

This *deeming* by Derrida that “text” includes all *referents* (of texts) requires its own critical attention,but Gaston must at least be right in this: Derrida’s emphasis on textuality cannot *exclude* the textual domains that interest Foucault.Jonathan Culler too, in a particularly broad and enlightening conceptual history of “text,” demonstrates its inclusiveness.[[9]](#footnote-9) Culler shows how “text” comes to be invested with a sense of gravity no less than play. Being *text* involves the significant placement and operation of words; it is more than “the writing you see before you.”[[10]](#footnote-10) And since there is no limit to the material form of what is “said”—in music, sculpture, clothing and so on—text is not limited to the writing of words. As Culler puts it:

[Text] is this interweaving of signs and supplements, of language with what we call real life, that provides the most elementary rationale for the notion of text.... [This is why] one cannot set aside signs or discourse so as to accede directly to...thought, action, or reality itself.[[11]](#footnote-11)

I take Culler to mean, *inter alia*, that what one refers to in the production of text may itself be taken up and used with its own textual significance. (I shall discuss one version of that possibility in this paper, in “Collages.”) Certainly, Culler has gone far beyond showing how text implies context; in his paper he sets textuality itself in the context(s) of its conceptual history. His metaphor of textuality is that of “weaving” threads of signification and reference. In accepting his implication that any referent has its own power to signify, this paper emphasizes, nevertheless, the need to distinguish referents from significant reference—the difference between any particular text and that to which such text refers. I would argue that the figure of “weaving” must portray that difference.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**Signposts**

Perhaps I should now signal ahead the direction to be taken in my intervention in this long and intense history of interpretation. We may observe that many of Derrida’s friendly critics (and this will include the author of this paper) resist his subsequent tendency to explain and defend *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* by saying that he means to include *all referents* as textual. That everything can be textualized does not make a text of every referent of any or every text. And yet, in his various allusions to the line—particularly as taken by critics as emblematic of the absurdity of his methods—Derrida himself does not object to the received English translation of *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*.[[13]](#footnote-13) He is more interested in the “babel” of the language of translation, for instance.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Derrida appears to over-reach himself when he says that “text” is to include not only all structures of discourse but also “all possible *referents*.” If Derrida really deemed whatever there is to earn the title of “text” simply because it exists then he would have constructed *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* as only a tautology.[[15]](#footnote-15) So perhaps this insertion of “referents” is a verbal slip in the midst of public polemic. Or perhaps it is a conceptual prediction that whatever we refer to may come to be thought of as “textual” because of new discoveries—as genes come to be spoken of as “encoding information.” What I suspect is that in this rapid remark Derrida is not distinguishing “all referents” from “all possible *modes of reference*.” His particular need at that point is that “text” implies all the structures called “real,” “economic,” etc. That claim provides Derrida with a reply to Foucault’s accusation that his approach takes no account of discourses of power, economics, etc. And finally, it would be a forced reading of Derrida on our own part, simply on the basis of his “*tous les référents*,” to attribute to him the view that what we refer to when we go to buy a baguette has the syntactical properties of text rather than the nourishing quality of bread.

John Caputo, in deflecting criticism of Derrida that *there is nothing outside the text* is a brazen falsehood, asserts that it does not mean that there is *no* reference, but, rather, that there is no reference without *différance*. All reference involves operations of textuality. Caputo reminds us that Derrida told the Dubliners “When I say there is nothing outside the text, I mean there is nothing outside the context.”[[16]](#footnote-16) What it means, says Caputo, “is that reference is not what it is cracked up to be...[it is] not the serene operation of an autonomous subject-archer picking out objects with unfailing accuracy.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Caputo seems to reassure us, but what he defends as textual is *reference* (some mode of referring), rather than *referents*. Caputo avoids saying that every referent of a reference is a text, leaving us still to ponder on Derrida’s propensity to say just that.

Leslie Hill uses a different strategy in her finely worked essay on Derrida. First she makes a free reading of the words and phrases of Derrida’s sentence. She says that his *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* might be translated as “nothing is non-textual,” or “text knows no bounds.” Next, she imports what we know from Derrida’s later explanations of his sentence that explicitly exclude a popular mis-reading. Hill writes:

[It means] not that everything can be reduced to language but that where (arche-)writing is concerned, there is not inside or outside, since any such distinction is itself dependent on the tracing and marking…Derrida calls writing.[[18]](#footnote-18)

On this reading, what *reference* does mean is gained quite from outside the chapter[[19]](#footnote-19) within which it makes its appearance in connection with Rousseau’s fear that the writing as a supplement might gain ascendancy.[[20]](#footnote-20) I shall take up that theme again, but at this stage I flag the point that, like Caputo, Hill does slide over the difference between reference and referents—or perhaps, slides over the question of whether Derrida would make an issue of it.

***Hors-texte* and *Supplement***

*(i) Sexual-Textual Anxiety*

Whatever we make of this history of disputes and interpretations, anyone newly reading (or reading afresh) *Of Grammatology* who alights upon “*There is nothing outside of the text*” will have already followed Derrida on “Nature, Culture, Writing” (Part II) and thus tracked Rousseau through thickets of writing about writing as a “supplement” to speech[[21]](#footnote-21) so as to arrive at the third and final section[[22]](#footnote-22) that opens with Rousseau’s expostulation, “For me there has never been an intermediary between everything or nothing.” (OG, 157) They will have to read this in relation to *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* in order to proceed. The pretext for that declaration of “everything or nothing” is Rousseau’s dilemma about *sexual* relationships, but Derrida hears him as declaring “either complete presence or complete absence” with respect to the meaning of language no less than the exigencies of sexuality. (We might also read Rousseau as presaging Kierkegaard’s “Either/Or” of libertinism or celibacy.) To insist upon *all or nothing* reveals Rousseau’s failure to envisage the intricacies of intimacy. Intimate sexual love is precisely the endeavour to negotiate a way between the extremes of desire for perfect autonomy (the autoerotic) or perfect absence of reserve (the sexual affair).

For Derrida, Rousseau’s “everything or nothing” in matters sexual encrypts “everything or nothing” in relation to speech as a presence of meaning that arises between speaker and the one addressed. As a “supplement” to speech, writing displaces what it was intended only to “arrest, domesticate or tame.” Derrida articulates his own dilemma about reading Rousseau so as to explain or divine his meaning. Is he to be so faithful to Rousseau’s text that he does no more than “double” it—render it word for word? Or is he to *open* up what Rousseau writes by reading it in other terms—at the risk of being untrue to it? While “respecting the classical exigencies of traditional criticism” he cannot be content with this “doubling” of the text. But, in departing from Rousseau’s words, his reading “cannot legitimately transgress the text towards something other than it, toward a referent (metaphysical or historical) or toward a signified outside the text.” It is here that he writes what is translated as there is “nothing outside of the text.” Then the translator *supplements* her translation with “there is no outside-text.” Still uncertain, she installs the problematic line itself “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” as if to let readers do their worst with it. (OG, 158)

In the context of our reading Derrida’s provocative “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” the context and pretext for precisely *what* he is saying (as well as what he is doing in the saying of it) is his study of Rousseau’s sense of an urgent need to distinguish between a practice and any supplement to it. Correspondingly, the immediate task of Derrida’s denial of anything *hors-texte* is to expose as unstable the distinction between text and what we deem as supplementary to it. This claim would hold of a form of writing and its “supplementary explanation”; it held of “deviant” as against “core” meanings of a word or phrase.[[23]](#footnote-23) Having felt the need to *insist* on the existence of supplements and equally to declaim their subordinate status, Rousseau becomes anxious that the supplement will take over. He cannot regard with equanimity the supplement taking over what it supplements. (We might like to think that whether the supplement enhances what it encroaches upon requires a judgment specific to each case.)

For Rousseau, writing is a supplement to speech, and he loves the supplement more than the “original” that it supplants. In the same way, he is concerned philosophically and not only morally about his habit of touching himself up. It is indeterminable whether it is his shame about it that gives such a charge to his concern about writing as a supplement, or whether it is his anxiety over his love of writing that gives a metaphysical charge to the autoerotic. Perhaps one should mark the fact that he is able to take pride in writing, whereas he cannot take pride in his autoerotic behaviour. (Even if he got over his shame, still, it is no sort of *accomplishment*.) It seems reasonable to read him as projecting onto writing his inability to *assume* his predominant sexual life (as Sartre might put it). As to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau, one must say that persistently through the chapter “…*That Dangerous Supplement*” Derrida deals with these two concerns—sex and writing—as co-dependent:

[W]e must therefore think of Rousseau’s experience and his theory of writing together…. On the side of experience, a recourse to literature as a reappropriation of presence, on the side of theory, an indictment against the negativity of the letter, in which must be read the degeneracy of culture and the disruption of the community…. [T]he word “supplement” seems to account for the strange unity of these two gestures. (OG, 144)

Rousseau’s idea is simple enough. Speech is the natural use of language. When that is forbidden or restricted, we turn to writing. Activity with another person is the natural use of sexuality. When that is forbidden or restricted, we turn to autoeroticism—or to sublimation. Writing is itself a principal form of sublimation. Thus the parallel lines of writing’s supplement to speech and auto-eroticism’s supplement to sexual relationships meet at this point—at one of the poles of the sphere of what Freud called “libidinal” activity. As much as the supplement “enriches another presence,” however, that supplement threatens to “insinuate itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void.” (OG, 145) Autoeroticism was supposed to supplement what we might call altero-sexuality as an *additional* sexual life. The anxiety is that altero-sexuality is displaced. Derrida depicts Rousseau’s fears in parallel fashion concerning writing. Writing that so usefully comes to the aid of and enriches speech, threatens to take over that original “natural” practice.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The usurpation of botanical riches by the mineral products that were to have *supplemented* them—another of Rousseau’s figures of the corruption of the natural by the artificial—is drawn by him in such purple prose that it is hard to tell where literary figure ends and the rhetoric of public policy (the closing of the mines where men become literally blind to the beauties of nature) begins. So Rousseau gilds his lily of the “dangerous” supplement. The natural as the untouched leads him, inevitably, to the trope of “natural virginity.” Autoerotic activity is ambiguous in relation to virginity. It permits one to engage in “imaginary seductions” but while technically saving one’s virginity, is even more distant from the “natural” activity of heterosexual intercourse and condemns one to a secretive sexual life, lived in shame. A supplement is a “lapse that…destroys Nature.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Worse, nothing seems more natural than the supplementary activity considered in itself. (OG, 151)

With writing (in place of speaking), as with autoeroticism (in place of relations with another), it is not only that the supplement ceases to be a “diversion” from that for which it is a substitute and becomes an object of primary involvement and enjoyment. The point is that in occupying the place of another, one has divorced oneself from oneself. What one had hoped to gain as the utmost unmediated intimacy turns out to be self-alienating. The other side of that shift is another change of aspect under which autoerotic habits free one from vice—they are antidote to the social vice of irresponsible relationships. Rousseau’s self-reflexive sexual activity enables him to continue his erotic fascination with Madame de Warens, thus “safely protected…against her and all her sex.” (OG, 153) And yet, in one more turn of the emotional wheel, this is all profoundly unsatisfactory—“to the end of his life [one] will remain an aged child,” writes Rousseau. This autoerotic “deviation” is represented by Derrida for Rousseau as an “absence of presence,” and the story is grafted on to the scene of writing itself. Writing requires only the imaginary reader; autoeroticism requires only the imaginary partner—one is “sidetracked” (one “pays oneself off”—“*donner le change*”). Thus “auto” activity, as against “altero” or “hetero” relating, is (as I would put it) a kind of *procuring*. The pimp procures a sex worker—one who will “work sex” in the absence of their own desire. The worker is a “prostitute” if regarded as abasing him or herself, or a “counterfeiter” if thought of within the geography of concepts that Derrida will map in *Donner le temps*.[[26]](#footnote-26)

As a pimp procures someone as sexually available, the autoerotic “procures” his or her “absent presence”—the imaginary Other. (That may be another side of him or herself, as easily imagined as some other identified person.) As the sex worker works to protect the client from the involvement that sexual activity would otherwise entail, and exposes the client at the same time in their betrayal of desire, so the autoerotic’s busy imagination supplies one satisfaction while it defers another. Derrida tracks the movement of thought by which Rousseau then rationalizes what becomes an institution. His alarm that he will injure his health is offset by an idea that “intercourse with women distinctly [sic] aggravate[s his] ill-health” and that “the corresponding vice…appear[s] to produce less injurious results.”(OG, 156)[[27]](#footnote-27) The other rationalization is provided for him by Derrida as to be found within his sheets of lines. Thérèse, for whom he has found his own displacing “supplement,” was already a supplement for an “unknown mother” who died in giving birth to Rousseau.

*(ii) Unstable Solutions*

So, in the immediate context of Derrida’s coming to include “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” within “*…That Dangerous Supplement*,” it is Rousseau’s concern with a supplement that will not remain supplementary, that provides context and pretext for Derrida’s declaration. If a supplement is *hors-texte* then we can imagine Rousseau’s cry,“*il n’y a pas de supplément*” emerging in Derrida’s language as “*il n’y a pas de hors-acte*,” since any supplementary *act* is absorbed into the world of what it supplements.Derrida suggests a diagnosis of Rousseau’s slide from his attraction to a sexual “supplement” towards anxiety that this supplement will displace any “real” or “natural” sexual relationship. Now, we have seen already how Rousseau’s slippage is an inevitable result of his refusal to accept any “intermediary between everything or nothing.” (OG, 157) Derrida observes that it is precisely “mediacy” that Rousseau “wants to efface.” It is this desire for immediacy, then, that would explain why writing and the autoerotic equally evoke Rousseau’s anxiety about displacement of all that is *real* because *natural*. Derrida notes, too, that it is “from the moment that [Rousseau] was alone [that for him] there has never been an intermediary between everything and nothing.” (OG, 157) Since Rousseau regards his autoerotic habits as a “vice” (they held him as in a vice), what he needed was an intermediary between altero-sexuality (that he feared would be “the death of him”) and his auto-sexuality that disturbs him in an “immediacy” that short-circuits more fecund or communicative possibilities.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Derrida wonders how to interpret a declaration of “no intermediary” that announces in the same breath an apprehension that a supplement will expand to become “everything.” Derrida asks the question not only of Rousseau’s writing but also about his own method in reading it. Derrida is the one who has drawn attention to a limit to Rousseau’s control over writing:

[The writer must write] *in* a language and *in* a logic [that] his discourse…cannot dominate absolutely [and he must] let[] himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system…. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship…between what [the writer] commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language he uses.” (OG, 158)

This is the key we are offered to Derrida’s reading. There is a kind of reading (a traditional one), which, in contrast with Derrida’s practice, cannot reveal that “certain relationship” between what one can command and what one cannot. This is the kind of reading that in its commentary, “by respectfully doubling” what has already been written, reproduces the writer’s own “voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes.” (*Ibid*.)

Some critics have thought that Derrida destroys literature in deconstructing it. They might note that at this crux he emphasizes the value of a “[traditional] moment of doubling commentary in a critical reading.” (*Ibid*.) Derrida’s reading of Rousseau involves a good deal of that doubling; in order to explain the direction that he would like to establish, he needs to exhibit precisely what Rousseau wrote.Nevertheless, within the Derridean approach one can no longer disguise the impossibility of perfect fidelity to a text. For, if the commentator only sets down what is already written he says nothing, but if he uses his own words, or sets another’s text within his own context then he changes that text in the process of dealing with it. So the ideal of fidelity comes apart in our hands—it deconstructs itself as he attempts to achieve the aim of a perfect and faithful commentary.

We might thus also write, in the Derridean vein, of the *impossibility* of doubling the text. When I borrow a swag of text from someone else and place it within what *I* write, I subvert, convert, or divert it towards the drift of what I am doing. The limitation of the traditional reading is that while it can “protect” a reading (from inaccuracy), it can never “open” a reading to what the writing does not wish to reveal. It is precisely here that Derrida warns that while we must do better than “doubling” a text (repeating it word for word), we cannot “legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it.” (*Ibid*.) Derrida writes “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” in warning of the “transgressive” moment of going beyond “doubling” a text.

When Derrida says, “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*”, of what is he warning the over-adventurous reader? What are these illegitimate “transgressions”? As part of his critique of Rousseau, Derrida delivers his famous line as a provocative warning not to rely on factors extraneous to his writings.Derrida is, one might say, admonishing himself not to “transgress” Rousseau’s text. He must not test what he says about the function of “supplements” in sexuality and writing by reference to the material events of Rousseau’s life. He cannot analyse Rousseau’s writing about supplementarity by reference to the flesh and blood reality of his “Maman” and of Thérèse. Discussion of that sort is a matter for Rousseau’s biographers. But there is more to it than is suggested by such a simple interpretation that invites easy agreement from within the traditional division between philosophical or literary analysis, on the one hand, and biography on the other. To reveal some of this we shall now set out from a different site that places “*hors-texte*” within a family of cognate expressions.

**Texting over the Edge**

To place “*hors-texte*” in its family of cognate expressions is at least one strategy to help free us from fixating upon, or reifying “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*.” Here is a sample:

*Dehors****:***

*(Préposition) Dieu n’est ni dedans, ni dehors le monde* [God is neither within nor outside the world].

*(Adverbe) Je suis allé dehors* [I went outside].

(*Nom*) *Ce fond [de verre]) astucieusement grossi pour le dehors, rétréci pour le dedans* [This bottom of a glass, cleverly enlarged on the outside while it narrows within].

*En dehors:*

*Les jambes molles: les pieds en dehors* [Legs limp; feet (projecting) beyond them].

*C’est en dehors de la question* [That’s beyond the terms of the question].

*C’est en dehors du texte* [That’s not something the text deals with].

*Il n’y a aucune chose en dehors du texte* [There’s nothing the text doesn’t deal with].

*Hors, Hors de: (Préposition) (au-delà de)*[[[29]](#footnote-29)]

*On goûtait dans un cabaret hors la ville* [We would have a bite in a cabaret on the outskirts of town].

*Nous allons rendre visite à un jardin hors de la ville.* [We are going to see a garden out of town].

*Hors-*

*Hors-bord* [outboard (accessory) motor].

*Hors-d’œuvre* [food served at the beginning of a meal, before the entrée].

*Hors-piste* [practice (accessory) ski run]

And, part and parcel of this list:

*Hors-texte* [Engraving inserted late in assembling a book, not included in the pagination].[[30]](#footnote-30)

When Derrida claims that there is nothing *hors-texte* he is already playing upon the materiality of it in the printing of a book. There it is, precisely—the place where a page appears *hors-texte*. The term designates the status of an unbound leaf in a book—outside the pagination. And yet, to be *hors-texte* requires that though inserted late, the inclusion is part of the sense and full statement of the work. It has its meaning and contributes to the meaning in being interleaved with the bound copy. As an extra illustration, perhaps, or a slip of paper listing errata that has been gummed onto a corner of the flyleaf, it works within the “main body” in its “supplementary” role. This is a place to begin to understand Derrida’s claim that to be *hors-texte* is not a matter of lying *beyond* the text. Certainly “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte”* does not deny that there is something “*en dehors du texte*.” That is to say, it does not claim “*il n’y a aucune chose en dehors du texte*.” There is always plenty that the text leaves untouched, unmentioned. And it is with equal certainty that we can deny that Derrida’s aphorism means that there exists nothing but text.[[31]](#footnote-31) That would have required some quite different sentence.

If, against all reason and material evidence, one were to say that nothing exists except text, one would write “*Il n’existe que du texte*,” perhaps “*il n’y a que du texte*,” “*tout est texte*,” or maybe “*il n’y a rien d’autre que du texte*.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Critics who read Derrida’s aphorism as entailing that there is no food (only food-writing, as it were) have fantasized a meaning.[[33]](#footnote-33) As Derrida puts it in opening his explanation of his aphorism, they have “illegitimately transgressed the text towards something other than it [*hors-texte*].” We have seen how to avoid at least the worst errors in reading Derrida here, and by reading “*hors-texte*” alongside other “*hors*” expressions we comprehend something of how those errors may have arisen by linguistic slippage.

We can also place “*hors-texte*” in the company of “*hors-jeu*”—out of play, and alongside “*hors-bord*,” the French expression for an outboard motor. The motor that is “*hors-bord*” is locked on to the craft, but at its margins rather in the bowels of the boat as in the old style of the “in-board.”[[34]](#footnote-34) In general, we find “*hors de*” when something is implied as now out of contact or disconnected. What is “*hors d’atteinte*” is out of reach—somewhat as the “*hors d’oeuvre*” is served outside the main “work” of the meal.

We have noted above that the *Petit Robert* explains an origin for what appears *hors-texte* in the printing practice of slipping an engraving (etc.) into a book after pagination—a textual adjunct. Thus, to deny the category of the *hors-texte* is partly explained as the inevitable integration of supplements *within* the text. (And yet there would be the continuing *trace* of what had been *hors-texte*—a break in pagination, perhaps.) Furthermore what Derrida’s “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” denies to exist is any supplement that would guarantee a text a unique sense and reference.

**Transgression Towards a Referent**

*(i) Towards Nature*

That might seem to be the end of it, then. The brouhaha about Derrida as “linguistic idealist” (etc., etc….) arises from ignorance about “*hors-texte*” and a misreading of French syntax. You might want to say that the charge of absurdity brought against Derrida merits no further attention. But there is something in his own text—in the dramatic and forceful pages that lead up to and beyond this innocent little sentence—that makes you look for more than “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” formally says. Michèle Le Dœuff makes some remarks on a “blunder” in reading Descartes’s “*morale par provision*” that may help us here:

Is a text wholly innocent of the blunders which commentators, both artless and eminent, are capable of making about it? There are in the textual corpus of the history of philosophy a number of remarkable cases of abduction or misappropriation of meaning whose operation can be traced and located in the very textuality of the texts. The clue is always a textual mutation, whereby commentary ceases to use an author’s own words in order to formulate a concept of his. Thus where Descartes writes “I formed for myself a morality par provision,” later tradition converts this into “Descartes’s provisional morality” (*morale provisoire*).[[35]](#footnote-35)

She followed up the same hunch with rich results in commenting on Lacan’s claim that “Freud reopens [Hegelian] thought [about the self]”[[36]](#footnote-36):

You have a choice between at least two attitudes when faced with such a hasty assimilation of the individual subject and the Absolute subject of Universal Reason. One choice would be purely corrective, and would lead to a rejection of what is spread about in the Lacanian Vulgate—something that you might chide for its lack of precision and articulation in its use of concepts. The second attitude involves a reflection on alleged errors of interpretation or comprehension, and depends on the following hypothesis: such a reading of the texts does not radically flout their meaning; an interpretation that appears most aberrant sometimes reveals the truth. A distortion that seems so enormous may bring to light a real problem.[[37]](#footnote-37)

When you go back and take another look at the passage in *Of* *Grammatology* in which the line appears, you cannot escape how much is at work in Derrida’s refusal of the division of “main body” and “supplementary” text. And you cannot ignore the significance of the fact that a sophisticated translator, sensitive to tremors in a text, has in the one sentence rendered “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” as “There is nothing outside the text,” offered an alternative of “There is no outside-text,” and supplied the original French to boot. We have seen how Derrida’s “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” was part of his coming to terms with Rousseau on the relation of speaking to writing. It is in the process of recognizing how a supplement is both absorbed by the text and, in turn modifies it that he declares “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte”* as saying, certainly, that any textual element nominated as “*hors-texte*” is in that moment no longer outside the text. As such it says nothing at all about reducing to the existence of text, what we text about.

But now we can observe more than this. Using “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” to denounce a *transgression* one might desire to make in reading a text, Derrida takes a significant new step: “[A] reading…cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.).” (OG, 158) It may be Derrida here who is the one forcing the reading of a text. You can feel Derrida *leaning* on you with his insinuation of an *illegitimate* transgression. After all, it is tautological that one cannot make a *legitimate* one*.* The sighting of a tautological form should put the reader on high alert. In general the hyper-stress of tautology works to disguise some more problematic message. (“War is war”—a downright lie offered to justify crimes.) We might read Derrida as saying that one *can* move across (“transgress the text”) towards a referent, but that he (or the institutional rules of language use) rule that move as not illegitimate. That would be to take “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” as embargo. Alternatively, we might read him as saying that it is *impossible* to make this move. One might read him as claiming that even as we go to move beyond the text towards a referent, we find ourselves “within” text just the same. This is what can sound like linguistic idealism—imprisonment within text.[[38]](#footnote-38)

One might now trace through all of the final five pages of “*...That Dangerous Supplement*” to discern what ensues from the first appearance of “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*.” But, needing to not “double” that text, I now compress it into two memorable remarks by Derrida. In discussing the need to *judge*[[39]](#footnote-39) what to select lest one’s text spiral out of control he writes:

The opening of the question [and] departure from the closure of self-evidence…have the form of empiricism and errancy…. [T]hese errant questions are not absolute beginnings…[but are] reached…by this description which is also a criticism. We must begin *wherever we are*…. *Wherever we are*: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be. (OG, 161)

Then, on the next page,

*[I]t happens that this theme* [of Rousseau’s *Essay*]…tells us in a text what a text is, it tells us in writing what writing is, in Rousseau’s writing what Jean-Jacques’s desire, etc. If we consider…that there is nothing outside the text our ultimate justification would be the following: the concept of the supplement and the theory of writing designate textuality…*en abyme*…[and] the structural necessity of the abyss will be gradually constituted in our reading…. The concept of the supplement is a sort of a blind spot…. It is contained in the transformation of the language it designates, in the regulated exchanges between Rousseau and history. (OG, 162–63)[[40]](#footnote-40)

We have noted that Derrida introduces “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” with a double rejection. To “double” a text is merely to give back to the author or reader what is already on the page. To “transgress” the text to a meaning signified outside it, if that means “outside of writing in general,” is “illegitimate.” It breaks the rules to invoke what lies outside of writing “in the sense that we give here to that word,” he notes. In reading Rousseau on sexual and linguistic “supplements,” Derrida says he is “closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above”—particularly in *Of Grammatology*’s first seventy pages, I would surmise. That is the stage at which he prepared the ground for extending the application of “writing,” with arche-writing as the limiting point at which conceptual specificity disappears entirely. And that, I think, helps to explain why, when we followed the “guiding line of his treatment of Rousseau’s “dangerous supplement,” we discovered something quite startling. Derrida appears to mean just what Spivak’s “mis-translation” would have said he does. He says that there is nothing towards which we can make a significant movement of reference. And now Derrida varies his imagery. Nature “escapes the text”—it has already flown the coop. We are faced not only with an injunction never to “break the rules” of what lies within writing’s business, but also with an apparent declaration of the *non-existence* of what we had thought to aim at:

[I]n what one calls the real life of these existences “of flesh and bone,” beyond…. Rousseau’s text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements,…the “real”…being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. … [W]e have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like “real mother” name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (OG, 59)

*(ii) Escape of Nature*

If “Nature” has “always already escaped the text” then what is the character of the *escape*? Is it the escape of a previously confined convict(ion) or the escape from the hounds by a quarry that has always run wild? And why is the homely entity that “real mother” names identified with the goal of attaining some *absolute* present? We have to go back to the opening sections of *Of Grammatology*. When Derrida now places “*il n’y a pas de hors-*texte”within the theme of “writing in general,” he declares that “writing” is to be taken in the sense that he “has explained earlier.”[[41]](#footnote-41) There he startled a new hare for us to pursue—the non-conceptual non-origin of writing (including iterable speech) in the everyday sense. In the first section of Part I he had immediately taken the idea of *writing* to the very limits of sense with his non-concept of *arche-writing*. What did he mean to *do*[[42]](#footnote-42) by alluding to this indescribable “writing in general”—an unutterable *trace* that is a condition of writing and speaking as we know it? What he writes about *arche-writing* stands in an uneasy relationship with the scientific picture of a world of interacting particle/waves that one might allude to as proto-textual. One thinks, from the point of view of physics, of the first moments of the Big Bang prior to description—moments that are the conditions of what we can now call *traces* and *writing*. But insofar as we can conceptualize *writing* as marking a readable trace, writing is itself physical—simply one part of what is physically real. Ordinary writing—what we (older ones) learned from the school blackboard—was inscribed *alongside* and *in addition to* everything else in the room. It is Derrida’s non-concept of *arche-writing* as the irrecoverable making of traces, without origin, that might encompass everything.

It is towards the end of the second part of *Of Grammatology* that Derrida turns our attention back to *writing in general*—*arche-writing*—so that he can say that “*there has never been anything but writing.*”Let us return, with that concern uppermost, to some sentences that led into the last passage cited:

[Reading] cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent…or toward a signified…whose content could take place…outside of language…in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general…. What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of “the dangerous supplement” is that in what one calls the “real life” ... of “flesh and bone” there has never been anything but writing…. (OG, 158–59)

I must therefore only allude to a moment in Derrida’s writing that itself can be no more than a gesture towards *arche-writing*[[43]](#footnote-43); I cannot contain a discussion of it within a study of what lies *hors-texte*. My strategy in treating “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” has been to look first to the precise syntax, considered within the immediate context of the paragraphs that surround the first occurrence in *Of Grammatology*—and to draw upon the (pleasantly material) bookbinder’s figure of what is *hors-texte* as a tangible figure of what the famous sentence exposes as evanescent in its being as *hors-texte*. This manoeuvre shows how the sentence does the work required of it within the third part of the second section of Part II (“…*That dangerous supplement*.”) The sentence can do its work there whether or not one can follow Derrida into his non-concepts of *arche-writing* and *différance*.

The strategy here is not to deny (illicitly) the importance to Derrida of his subsequent appeal (three pages later) to *arche-writing* as that which has no “beyond.” The problem (with which I do not engage here) is whether one can appeal to what we cannot describe. *Arche-writing*, along with *différance*, is a (non) concept as a (non) origin of what we *can* conceive. That move does frame Derrida’s introductionof “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*.” But our duty is to read the line closely in its more immediate context. And if we are to do more than “redouble” the text then we must leave room to play—that is, work—with his words so as to understand them more exactly in their more immediate context and thus, perhaps, to be able to respond to his gesture towards *arche-writing* as his sign of a total textualization. We do this in order not to summon up *différance and* arche-*writing* under the sign of the metaphysical ontology Derrida means to supplant (or supplement). It is then up to us to create fragments that patch his parody of classical metaphysics—his (non) references to a *différance* that is a (non) origin of a writing that, as *arche-writing*, is prior to all writing—and thus an impossible origin.

I now quit that field with just one arrow to let loose over my departing shoulder. Perhaps we have read once too often the adventure of writing beyond the limits of those very concepts that make writing legible. Parmenides has his (impossible) being of pure unity; Kant, the *thing-in-itself* that must *be* even as its role decrees that it can sustain no words that describe it; Sartre contrives a *néant* that, in its *nihilation* upon undifferentiated *being*, has the *non-being* that permits *being* to be differentiated within itself and from other beings. Thus Sartre refers us to an original plenitude prior to the *nihilation* that creates distance between being and being and thus the possibility of description. An origin that can sustain no description cannot be described as an origin. It is already Derrida’s impossible origin. Sartre has already posed an (impossible) origin, in *nihilation*, of the differentiation that makes description possible. This has a structure congruent with Derrida’s own deconstructive parody of the Biblical genesis of an ordered world of law out of chaos prior to all comprehension.

All the same, Derrida (as one might thus read him) does not revert to metaphysics; the power of his strategy is to invent a language that reveals the already deconstructive internal vector of forces at work in the failed metaphysics of his predecessors. But some readers may not share my admiring smile at Derrida’s *bravura* parody of elemental ontology. They may prefer to hear his tone as implicating his textualism in metaphysical ontology after all. But all that may be left to one side for a while, *en dehors de ce texte-ci*.

Having, inevitably, already said something about *arche-writing* after all, we can turn now to pursue further, some particulars of Derrida’s language of text, writing and what writing concerns. This allows us to work on his sense that *Nature* as *escaping* *the text* is a fantasy to be taken apart. We have already suggested that reality—if that simply means the things and situations mentioned in text—is neither inside nor outside text. So, if the figure of Nature *escaping* text has something to it, we can remark straight off that text does not *confine* it, either. “Escapement” is a figure both of confinement and release.[[44]](#footnote-44) Derrida clarifies the point that *Nature* was never captured in the first place.[[45]](#footnote-45) Such Nature has never existed in order to be captured or to escape.

Here, Derrida’s figure of the text as a trace rather than a container is theoretically promising, since reality can lie neither outside nor inside a trace—or a text. But we cannot assess a *denial* of *Nature* (or an “absolute present”) any more than we can endorse an assertion of it. Perhaps denying the *reality* of “Nature” (or an “absolute present”) is like denying the *reality* of phlogiston as a substance that escapes during the process of oxidation. We do not deny that the term was used of a real phenomenon *described* as the release of phlogiston. We re-describe it as the gaining of oxygen rather than the loss of phlogiston. So perhaps there *is* a present; perhaps we should be more relaxed, in Derrida’s presence, about presence and the present. It is a plurality of impure presents and presences that compensate for the “lack” of an “absolute” present (or *Nature itself*). Perhaps what was mis-described as “pure presence” is real because not *purely* present. What is far-off in space or in time is real, equally with what is temporally close at hand. If it is not “legitimate” to “transgress” the text towards such a relative and partial present, this can be only because such words evoke a fantasy of what words might do when they succeed in referring to their objects. As if in reading a striking account of gaining great wealth we might strike the gold nuggets themselves.

*(iii) Collage*

Let us draw breath before our next sally into this thicket from which Nature might break free if it were not so entangled within language. We have been reading “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” in the context of the challenging remark that we cited more fully at an earlier stage: “In what one calls the real life of these existences ‘of flesh and bone,’ beyond Rousseau’s text, there has never been anything but writing,” which is preceded a few lines before by “we cannot legitimately transgress the text towards something other than it.” Any embargo or alleged impossibility (“we cannot transgress”) naturally provokes the reader’s imagination to produce counter-examples. On the face of it, collage of text and substances is at least one place where text and non-text meet to mutual advantage. But such a genre is no great rarity and evidently Derrida means neither to deny its occurrence nor deplore it as confused. (His own work abounds in examples of mixed media messages where “non-textual” material is included within a page of text. Thus, in a stamp album one reads “This is a rare example of a South African stamp bearing the face of Nelson Mandela, a year after his release from prison”, and there, stuck on the page that bears the writing is (a sample of) the material reality to which the text refers.[[46]](#footnote-46) Those who read Derrida as denying the existence of anything but text may not have thought, first, of mixed-genre productions that mount matter—thin rock-samples or bird-feathers—between chunks of text. Since we know that Derrida welcomes all that diversity as textual it is well to bring that genre into the foreground; it becomes clearer how he envisages the scope of text.

There are various texts, too, whose inclusion, like that of material samples, creates another kind of collage—of textual registers. Sartre wrote letters to various women about his disgust at the blurring of the line between public and private in Neapolitan life. Michèle Le Dœuff broke a usual rule, namely, that the author decides which of her writings are part of her public *corpus*. She proceeded to consider parts of these letters[[47]](#footnote-47) along with various significant sections of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.This was a successful reading and so those letters became part (“were revealed to have been part of”) “the text” of Sartre’s philosophical work on self and other at that time. In the very moment that we find ourselves using the “adjunct” or “supplement,” it becomes integral to what it assists.

*(iv) A fantasy of transgression*

We have noted earlierthat whether as *embargo* or as *impossibility*, the syntax of “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” cannot generate a denial of the existence of something other than the text. Furthermore, Derrida’s statement (imperative?) that one cannot (must not?) *transgress* the text *towards something other than itself* still permits that there *is* something other than itself. So what more can we do with this embargo or alleged impossibility of reaching out through text to what is not text? What can we say to those for whom Derrida’s statement that we must not (or cannot) transgress the text towards any “metaphysical, historical or psychobiographical reality” means that he denies its very existence?

First, any reasonable principle of reading ought to attribute absurdity to a text only as a last resort. If I simply write, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s mother died in giving birth to him” then I *have* successfully referred to “psychobiographical reality.” What I have not done (or *ought* not do) is to “transgress the text towards it.” Various theories account for the relation between a statement and the thing(s) purportedly referred to by its subject term, on the one hand, and the fact that it purports to state, on the other. Only in exceptional cases is what a subject term refers to, found within the text. To encompass reference in one’s writing is not to “*transgress* text towards some reality.” It is, rather, to be clear about the referring terms in a statement, and to investigate whether the intended reference is successful.

What would be a “transgression” in Derrida’s terms is the attempt to use text so as to *provide* the “full presence” of the reality to which it ostensibly refers. I read a statement of the event of Rousseau’s mother dying and accept that it does concern the death of a reality of “flesh and bone” (as Derrida puts it). But I do not, thus, come across Rousseau’s mother dying. When I read a text, I come across only text (including collages), and it would indeed “transgress” a text to force it to provide the dying woman herself. (To remark on this can do no more than to specify (partially) what language is. To put the point in Wittgensteinian style, if we did not understand not to expect to find a woman dying when we read of a woman dying, we would not understand the very language used to correct us.)

We can assume that Derrida, as a practised user and commentator on language would not imagine he had to tell anyone who was reading that Rousseau’s mother died in giving birth, not to expect that they would thereby come across Rousseau’s mother dying. To be reminded of such a fantasy can only return us more steadily to what might have generated Derrida’s more provocative statements and (perhaps) embargos. So where are we? We have read the rejection of what is “hors-texte” as (amongst other things) a denial of an adjunct-text rather than a denial of that with which the text is concerned, and remarked that Derrida was insisting, at least, that the apparent distinction between text and some adjunct-text would not hold up under pressure. And now we have added the observation that Derrida must be right, also, if he means that what the text discusses is not part of the text—not a textual adjunct and not some supporting “hors-texte” either. Rousseau’s dying mother is not a text, and therefore not some sort of “adjunct text” that completes the sense of Rousseau’s main text. This interpretation fits the fact that Derrida states “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” as completing what he has been saying all along. He issues it not in ontological bravado. It appears, not as a daring challenge, but as a remark that clarifies what a text is, and the conditions of reading it.

Derrida’s line also means that is pointless to appeal to *what a text signifies* as an independent (“transcendent”) source of explanation. Something that would be called “*what it* *means*” (*ce qu’il veut dire*) is not an adjunct or support of a text. That is to say, I cannot support or explain what I mean by referring to something called “what I mean,” as if thereby to make clear what I am *saying* or *writing*. The boot is on the other foot. The writer or speaker must make clear *what they mean* (*ce qu’ils veulent dire*) by elaborating, refining or editing their “text”—those actual words that they say or write. Even if one attempts to make an ontological distinction between “what one says” and “the signification of what one says,” this point still holds. Let there be a *signification* of one’s words beyond one’s meaningful words. Still, there is no way for that *signification* to work as an adjunct or buttress to one’s words. It is there within the words, in their context and with whatever pretext they have, or it is not there at all.

We have to bring to our reading of Derrida more emphasis that he makes on the distinction between the *signified* (what the sentence means) as not “outside” the signifier, the *reference* made by terms within the sentence, and the *referent* as that to which we gesture in making reference. We shall agree with him that *signification* is not an object—transcendent to the text and providing its sense.It is not by any such (bogus) reference that we make clear that we mean something. Rather, we amplify and specify what we mean (*ce que nous voulons dire*) by offering variants in our own language—and also by translating it into other languages. Thus we free up *what we mean* from any specific utterance; we produce other sentences that will provoke, again, “*But what do you mean by that?*” We “mind the gap” between the sentence we first set out to explain and those we offer in explanation of it. We can live with this level of indeterminacy even if we do hanker after a “transcendental” meaning that, as an object-in-itself, *is* what we signify. Meaning as *vouloir dire* is not some secret jewel lying deep within the words, nor a transcendental object that bestows sense as from outside or above.

Derrida himself does not appear to make a theme of the difference—or lack of difference between *signified* and *referent*. Certainly, signification as *what the sentence (or phrase) means* is no transcendental object. It is no kind of object. No finite, empirically determinable inscriptions determine it with finality. But, in contrast, the referent of a referring term need raise no threat of transcendentality. *The Perfect Form of the Table* would be a transcendental object, to be sure, but *the table completed from the Ikea box we brought home last Sunday* is a sturdy (or not) physical object adequate to its social purpose.

Closing Remarks: What All This Means

A reader who questioned *what this paper on Derrida means* might suspect that in forestalling foolish readings, I have only neutralized *what he means to say*. But, no less than Derrida, I would treat any sentence as deconstructible. Not only enigmas such as “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*.” Some Derider from the audience gets up and writes on the whiteboard,“t*he cat sat on the mat*”—deconstruct that! I would not hesitate to deconstruct *what it says.* In the kindergarten book, the cat squatted, like us, on the floor around the teacher; the puss of *Puss in Boots* might have sat up at a school desk like ours. But does a cat *squat*? Does it *sit up*? The exemplary cat that did duty for elementary learning and later for robust assertions of realism by learned philosophers was a fictional object from the outset. It is only the fictional cat that sits comfortably within our language of sitting, sitting up, sitting on and sitting down.

I mean this much about “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*”: any sentence can undergo its deconstruction, and yet just about any sentence has its “comfort zone”[[48]](#footnote-48) where no questioning of what one means to say in using it makes any particular sense. What a sentence means is neither inside nor outside the text because *what it means* is not any *thing* at all; texts have no insides or outsides. And since text has neither inside nor outside, no *object referred to* by one of its terms can be inside or outside it. Yet the *object* of reference is discernible as other than text. It can exist alongside or far off, later or co-present with the production of the text that concerns it.

Nothing is *inside* or *outside* text, just as nothing is *inside* or *outside* the mind. We have something “in mind” when we attend to it. It is “gone from mind” when we overlook the issue. Like mind, text is neither container nor excluder of what there is. What the text may “contain” is reference to what there is; what the mind may “contain” is a thought of it. To think that a world must *be external* in order to *be*, is to assume that as not external it would be internal to “mind” or “text.” (And thus *unreal*.) But to deny that “external” indicates the reality of what you think or text is not to deny that reality.[[49]](#footnote-49) To think that the denial that cats are part of *external* reality is the denial of the reality of cats, is to have made a mental slip from “My cat is nowhere outside a text” to “My cat must be only inside a text.” Only if I could find my cat neither inside nor outside the house would I fear it truly lost.

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1. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, corrected edition 1997) 158. Tr. from *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967) by G. C. Spivak. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as OG followed by English page number only. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michel Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire,” A History of Madness, (tr.) J. Murphy and J. Khalfa, (London: Routledge, 2006), 573; my emphasis. Here, Foucault is responding to Jacques Derrida, “Cogito et Histoire de la Folie” in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Descartes’s expostulates “that I am here, sitting by the fire,…holding this piece of paper in myhands, and so on. Again, how could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to madmen…” See Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, in *The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*, Volume II, (tr.) J. Cottingham, R. Stoothodd and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Foucault, “My Body,” 573. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Edward Said, “The Problem of Textuality,” Critical Inquiry, vol. 4, no. 4 (1978): 673–714, here 701. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sean Gaston, “Introduction,” in Reading Derrida’s Of Grammatology, (ed.) S. Gaston and I. Maclachlan (London: Continuum, 2001), xxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jacques Derrida, Limited Inc., (ed.) G. Graff, (tr.) S. Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 148. Cited in Gaston, xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Jonathan Culler, “Text: its Vicissitudes,” in The Literary in Theory (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 99–116. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See, for instance, “Transgression towards a Referent” in the present paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. We have observed already how Derrida prefers to emphasize the scope of “text” rather than defuse the excited readings of “il n’y a pas de hors-texte.” See Derrida, Limited Inc., 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel,” (tr.) J. Graham in Difference in Translation, (ed.) J. Graham (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165–207. See also Jacques Derrida, “Roundtable on Translation,” in The Ear of the Other (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 91–161, especially 76–80, 98–104. In that work, Derrida presents this “babel” informally. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This would have been to close down the issues in the manner of traditional metaphysics. What he does, in contrast, is to suggest new beginnings. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility” in Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy, (ed.) R. Kearney and M. Dooley (New York: Routledge, 1999), 65–83, here 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. John D. Caputo, “For Love of the Things Themselves: Derrida’s Hyper-Realism,” Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory, vol. 1, no. 3 (2000), §28. Accessible via [http://www.jcrt.org/archives/01.3/caputo.shtml]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Leslie Hill, The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Perhaps one might say that reference is “hors du chapitre.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. It is Derrida’s différance that marks his invocation of arche-writing as framing “il n’y a pas de hors-texte.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “From Blindness to the Supplement,” then “The Chain of Supplements.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “The Exorbitant. Question of Method” in OG, 152–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Thus the tragic-comic dispute with John Searle about stage utterances as parasites on the body of “serious language use” and so on that began with the publication in 1977 of the English translation of “Signature, événement, contexte,” a chapter of *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), in the first volume of Glyph. The appearance of the translation produced a reactive polemic from Searle, “Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida,” which was published in the second volume of Glyph in 1977. Derrida’s “Signature Event Context,” a summary of Searle’s “Reiterating the Differences,” Derrida’s rejoinder “Limited Inc a b c...” as well as an “Afterword” consisting of a discussion between Derrida and Gérald Graff, were all collected into *Limited Inc*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Derrida points out how Rousseau refers to the importance of natural mothering, to which every other form of care is an inferior substitute, not only as a literary figure, but, in pathos, as a plea for social reform in child-care. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This “supplement” seems to be of any kind that Rousseau can invest with the energy of sexual deviance. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Jacques Derrida, Donner le temps (Paris: Galilée, 1991) tr. by P. Kamuf as Given Time (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The nature of each of these “injuries” is left in suggestive silence. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Elizabeth Anscombe articulated a recent philosophical version of anxieties in Catholic theology about sexual supplements that echoes Rousseau’s. See Anscombe, Collected Papers, Vol. II (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 82–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. In “Hors livre,” the preface to *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), Derrida plays upon this sense of hors (the outskirts of town). The preface is “hors livre” as commenting the book—existing only for the book. (As virtually a chapter slipped in late it would be “hors-texte”.) “Hors Livre” is translated as “Outwork”—a pleasingly apt image that also suggests a bulwark. See *Dissemination*, (tr.) B. Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. From *Le Petit Robert, Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* (Paris: Le Robert, 1977); my translations in brackets. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Readers of Derrida will be aware of his various contributions to our understanding of the conflicting demands made of translation—m not only from one language to another, but from one idiom to another in the same language. One might refer in particular to the free-flowing “Round Table on Translation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “Il n’y a aucune chose en dehors du texte” would claim, impossibly, that that the text covers all issues. (I thank Margaret Sankey for suggestions, here.) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The fantasy can take the form of awe at a profundity beyond measure at the textuality of all things, or in a mockery of it that is like Dr. Johnson’s kick at Berkeley’s world of ideas. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. What of “man overboard”? To be a “man overboard” is to be an “inboarder” who is now cast loose in the ocean. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Michèle Le Dœuff, Recherches sur l’imaginaire philosophique (Paris: Payot, 1980), 85, tr. by C. Gordon as The Philosophical Imaginary (London: Athlone, 1989), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. An anonymous reader expressed surprise that I should have referred to Le Dœuff’s use of Lacan rather than Derrida’s “famous” reading—presumably about Poe’s “purloined letter.” Le Dœuff shows, pointedly and with great economy, how a mis-reading may be generated by the needs and momentum of the text itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Michèle Le Dœuff, “Du Sujet,” *Cross-references: Modern French Theory and the Practice of Criticism*, vol. 8 of French Studies: Supplementary Publication (1986): 24; my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. In the ensuing reflection on the variety of Rousseau’s texts that might have been singled out, Derrida ponders “by what right” he chooses just this *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and other fragments of Rousseau’s. He confesses (or announces) such choices as “exorbitant” and yet required. For instance, my last reference to Le Dœuff (regarding significant mis-readings) rather than to Lacan or to Derrida on Lacan satisfies similar strategic reasons. A new angle of approach avoids, for the relevant moment, the dilemma between “redoubling” the text and distorting it by paraphrase or reification of certain lines. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. At another time I would take the need for judgment at such junctures as a principal theme. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. These explanations amount to a response to Foucault’s objection to Derrida’s textualism as effacing the exigencies of history and politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. In Part I of OG, see esp. 8–10, 74–75, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. One cannot coherently ask what he meant to say. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Since arche-writing is pre-conceptual, it is like Kant’s noumenal freedom in that we are offered the right to inscribe or utter words even while it is made clear that we can have no understanding of what we thus allude to. We cannot even refer to it arche-writing or noumenal freedom either; to refer is to identify, and for that the referent must sustain descriptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. This “escapement” of Nature matches the “escapement” in a clock mechanism that permits it to “tell” time. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Nature is the bushranger who always “escapes” the law—“escapes” what had never held it in the first place. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. My own, fictional example. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Michèle Le Dœuff, L’étude et le rouet (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 197–216, tr. by Trista Selous as Hipparchia’s Choice (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 177–94. (Glas is Derrida’s own monument to reading an author’s letters against their published writings, but Le Dœuff’s study has the economy and focus needed at this point.) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Thus, in various parts of this paper we have described some of the comfort zones for “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. In this use of “reality,” we need it only as a place-marker for what we refer to in particular. In “reality is neither inside nor outside a text,” “reality” holds a place for any particular such as “my cat.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)