

# Derrida on the Convention of Textual Spacing

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on various textual elements in prose writing (footnotes, titles, and prefaces) such as they determine, and are determined by, the *textual spacing* of the page. Far from functioning in the way that the typographical, syntactical spaces between words do, or from replicating the pauses punctuating words in speech, such spacing is singularly and *irreducibly textual*. Functioning like non-phonetic marks such as parentheses, or expressing relations of hierarchy (as between footnote and text), textual spacing's manifold functions belie their pristine blankness. I look at this textual spacing of the preface, title, and footnote, as its orthodox *and* deviational modes of functioning come to light in certain of Derrida's readings. A second phase of analysis focuses on the unconventional spatial organization of certain of Derrida's own texts—on his juxtaposition of cited texts in a determinate spatial configuration, and his composing of a book comprising

two columns facing one another. To make sense of such gestures in the face of the derision they can occasion, I have recourse not, as one might, to French modernist art's ostentatious engagement and display of its own material conditions, but to the conventional exploitation of textual space as analyzed in the first section devoted to the spacing of footnotes, prefaces, and so on. I conclude Derrida's gestures to continue the tradition in which prose writing has innovatively availed of textual space to institute such conventional textual components as footnotes, prefaces, and titles—components integral to the apparatus of “the book” that gives material form to or “realizes” the logos. Derrida's gestures are thus to be judged, not on the basis of the bemusement we might feel at an instance and mode of textual spacing that falls under no familiar convention, but only vis-à-vis their deconstruction of the text as an exhaustible totality of sense, and their visually attesting to the intertextuality interwoven in any text's composition.

**Keywords** *Derrida, Hegel, Mallarmé, deconstruction, phonocentrism, textual spacing, grammatology*

## Introduction

A central object of concern in Derrida's writings of the late sixties and the early seventies lies with the conventions of the text. What falls within the realm of the textual conventionalities includes, in the first place, the system of alphabetic-phonetic writing itself. Derrida's *Of Grammatology* reminds—if reminder

were needed—that alphabetic-phonetic writing did not fall from the sky ready-made or come into existence as a *fait accompli*; it is rather one tributary to have emerged from a much more tortuous and uneven development of systems of writing, from which ideographic, hieroglyphic, or ideogrammatic modes of writing cannot be included—or excluded—as mere waypoints along a teleological way. Indeed, it questions the notion that alphabetic-phonetic writing is, in fact, as the phonocentric interpretation goes, reducible to the replication of speech, wondering if in fact, there are not elements in the alphabetic-phonetic text that are irreducibly textual.

This would indeed appear to be the case when we consider not only such elements as question marks and parentheses, but also titles, footnotes, and prefaces. While the words making up such conventional textual elements are undoubtedly a replication of the vocalized words, the same cannot be said of the conventions themselves. Spoken discourse does not have such textual conventions as titles or footnotes, in part because they rely on a certain textual spacing, on a certain *mise en page*, on conventions that only the physical spacing of the page or book affords. The spaces between a title and the text it entitles, between a text and its footnotes, between a preface and the body of its text, are not the spaces of alphabetic-phonetic writing; they do not replicate the momentary pauses between words in speech. They are not governed by the syntactical rules that determine meaning at the level of the sentence. There are, then, textual spacings that have no correlative existence in speech.

The focus of my paper is to address the nature of this irreducibly textual space and spacings. Rather than being drawn

to the apparently positive material elements of the text—to writing, to words and their material inscription—or indeed to the typographical or syntactical spaces between words in alphabetic-phonetic writing, I concentrate on the intervening spacing between conventional textual elements that is no less essential to the production of meaning. The blank white page, the vacuous spaces that writing and text “leave,” are as much facets of writing’s materiality as is its inscription.

### **Derrida’s Thematic Analyses of and Experimental Ventures in Textual Spacing**

I first broach how spatiality or the spacing of the text is implied in Derrida’s analyses of certain conventional elements of the work of prose (preface, footnote, and the title), as such analyses appear within Derrida’s readings of certain philosophers. A logic and a set of evaluations, whereby the components of a work are related as part to whole, as body to supplement, primary to derivative, and so on, underlies the textual spacings and relative locations of such textual components as these.

I look, in a second phase of analysis, at a number of gestures in which Derrida defies and, in creative fashion, departs from the customary manner in which a text is spaced, such as in *Glas* and in *Dissemination*. In the former, Derrida juxtaposes his texts in columns that “face” one another (see Fig. 1).

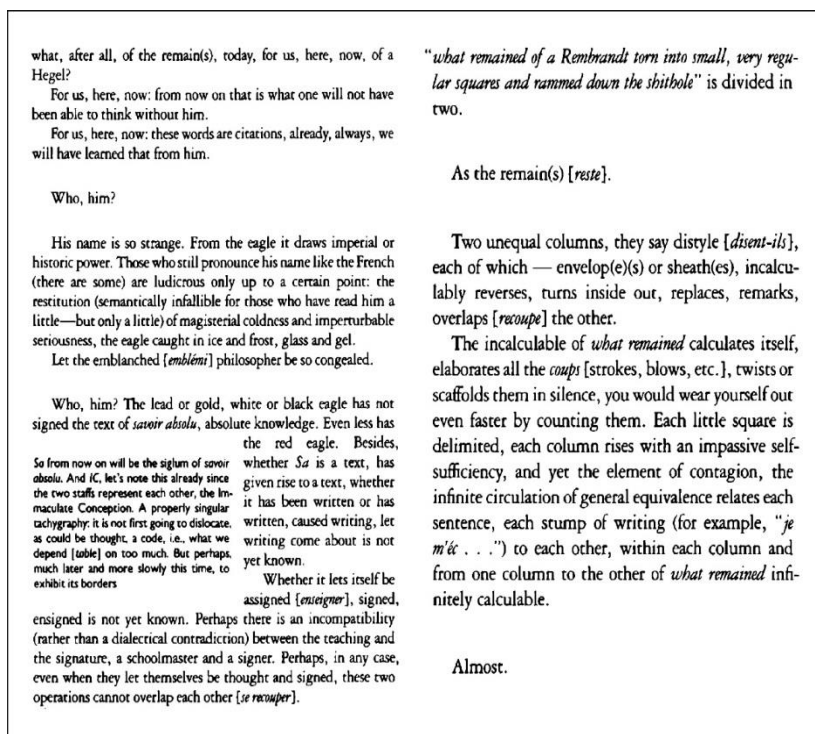


Fig. 1. Part of the first page of *Glas*.<sup>1</sup>

Without an existing convention to orient our interpretation of the significance accruing to such unprecedented modalities of textual spacing, without being subsumable under this or that known typographical convention, the effects wrought by the spacing have to be inferred by the reader. And divining what Derrida is up to in this kind of spacing no doubt entails contextualizing these gestures within his practice of reading other texts, and his deconstruction of the metaphysics of meaning.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 1.

Following these analyses, I address the question of how we might relate Derrida's innovative employment of modalities of textual spacing to the use of textual spacing apparent in existing conventional devices—in footnotes, titles, and so on. Are we to understand the existing conventions of textual spacing as different in whole or in part from those new modes of textual spacing that Derrida appears to inaugurate? Certainly, the spatial *mise en page* of such works as *Glas* occasions in many a sense of bewilderment, bemusement, or irritation. Some are inclined to dismiss the gestures as artful playing, as the antics regretfully typical of the postmodern, or as an inappropriate invocation within philosophy of the modernist artist reflexively giving prominence the materiality of his medium. I argue that our determination of the significance of Derrida's gestures, far from being made on the basis of the bemusement we can feel at a gesture falling outside any known textual convention, should be evaluated on the basis of it availing of the potentialities of textual spacing in a way not qualitatively different from the way in which the Western cultivation of alphabetic-phonetic writing has put to use the irreducibly textual space of the text, the page, and the book.

The key to recognizing the relative continuity of Derrida's textual gestures with the tradition lies, I contend, in recognizing firstly, that the textual spacing manifest in established conventions—the spacing that orchestrates footnotes, prefaces, and so on—is *not* that which operates in typographical spacing between letters and between words. It is not the spacing of syntax that plays a role in alphabetic-phonetic writing “replicating” speech. As irreducibly textual, these blank spaces become determined by conventional use. And secondly, it will be imperative to recognize that this use of non-phonetic textual spacing to create such

conventions as titles and prefaces has been of great significance to the cultivation of writing that is differentiated from speech, and thus in the generation of the “rigorous” philosophical, academic, scientific work of prose so integral to Western rationality’s conception of itself.

What in fact accounts for the bemusement Derrida’s gestures can occasion, apart from their not conforming to an existing textual convention, lies in the way in which they reflect a radically changed notion of the text, and of the status of the meaning it generates. As we shall see, Derrida’s gestures represent nothing less than the shift from an idea of the text as the Book producing a univocal meaning and issuing from a sovereign author, to the text as ineluctably intertextual, productive of a sense interminably in need of the work of interpretation. We can perhaps get a sense of this reconceived notion of the text in the intertextual juxtaposition of Derrida’s texts in *Glas*, as illustrated in Figure 1, which leaves each column of text constantly supplementing the other, incessantly in need of being related to the other. Such a textual spacing, significantly, mounts a barrier to the phonocentric determination of the text as but the transcription of vocalizable forms of meaning.

### **Surrounding Spacings: Preface, Footnote, Title**

The spacing between textual elements such as the preface, the footnote or the title, and the text itself (the so-called body of the text) appears unproblematic. In themselves, they are a set of familiar unquestioned conventions that we scarcely notice; nor do we in fact need to process consciously their transparent functions. We “read” and presuppose this spacing of a text in our handling of a book, in finding our way around a work, in our familiarity with the spatial formatting, without the historical contingency or potential

semantic implications of this spacing and formatting costing us much thought. It is perhaps fitting that textual spacing is read as blank; the spacings' legibility lies in the spacing lending to itself being passed over. The decorative and thus inessential and non-signifying typographical vignette or tailpiece inscribed in the spaces "left" by the distribution of pages, chapters, or between preface and text, suggests the space between, say, a preface and the body of the text, to be but a blank space inviting decoration. It is vacant; textual spatiality appears rather to be precisely that which in the text we pass over, and which we *must* pass over in order to arrive at the text's meaning. It appears to be the non-signifying element, the function of which is merely to give to be seen the properly signifying elements. This seeming obviousness of the function of such spacing is brought into question in certain of Derrida's readings.

In "Hors Livre: Préfaces"<sup>2</sup> ("hors livre" literally meaning "outside [the] book," as in the etymological composition of "exergue") in *La dissémination*, Derrida addresses the manner in which the preface, as customarily understood, operates by a logic of self-effacement, erasing itself as but a preliminary articulation of the work that does not properly belong to the work itself. The preface operates according to the strange logic of the future anterior: "This is what the book or work *will have* signified." The preface functions as the signifier condensing the signified that is to come in the work itself; the relation it institutes between itself and the work is thus that of signifier to signified, the signifier erasing itself in the manifestation

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 9-76. Translated as "Outwork, prefacing" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, (London: Athlone Press, 1981), Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 1-61.



of the signified. The odd temporal logic of the author's preface—by which it is written *after* the writing of the work, but *precedes* the text and is first up in greeting the reader—no doubt makes some sense if we attribute the author with being in a position to prepare the reader for the work only *once* s/he has finished the work and it has attained the status of a completed totality. The disorder or a-chronology at the level of the composition of the work responds to a communicative or “pedagogical” need for the reading of it to unfold in a certain way, as a text written *for* the (uninitiated) reader. The curious logic or contradictions of the preface, a logic that comes second nature to the writing of a monograph in the Western tradition, is manifest in Hegel's endless rewriting of his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and in his insistence, within the preface, that the very preface in which he writes this, counts for nothing—that it is in the work itself that the philosophical project is executed. But this logic has as a result, Derrida points out, the determination of the text as something other than a “completed totality.” It now “includes”—or excludes—the preface as a sort of parasitical margin or border, the status of which is uncertain. And the spacing that “intervenes” to separate preface from the beginning of the work “proper” becomes the embodiment of the preface as a “false beginning,” a “signifier” of its undecidable status. The spacing between preface and the work itself would appear, in an altogether conventional manner, not only to disturb the chronology of the text's writing mirroring its reading; it would also, again according to its own orthodoxy, represent an entire structural logic that it in no ways figures or represents. The spaces that “enclose” the preface function after a fashion as parentheses.

Elsewhere, Derrida devotes uncommon attention to the textual convention of the footnote. In “*Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from Being and Time*,”<sup>3</sup> Derrida zeroes in on a footnote in which is condensed the whole question of Heidegger’s non-accomplishment or truncation of his project of articulating the question of being in terms of temporality, and of his *Destruction* of ontology. A footnote, in its generally accepted logic, has the status of a supplement, in all the senses of this word brought to the fore by Derrida: the supplement as the extra, additional, superadded, superabundant unnecessary extra, *and* as the addendum rendered inevitable by an original deficiency or a constitutive defectiveness. While Heidegger’s note *as note* ought to be a supplement in the first sense, the note in terms of its content and what is at stake in it gives it the sense of the latter. A footnote can always be so pregnant in meaning that it defies its relegation or consignment to a space apart from the main text, straining its status as reflected in its “lowly” setting reflective of the hierarchical evaluation implicit in their relation. Just as a title appears above a text, so too the note appears beneath the text, in accordance with a spatial hierarchization that is by no means a borrowing from alphabetic-phonetic spacing. One might of course, as Derrida does, wish to see in Heidegger’s note an altogether different status from that which it has *qua* note. In presaging a work and a topic to come (the temporality of being and the *Destruction* of ontology) that he does not and cannot treat of at a certain moment in the unfolding of the text, the note takes on, in this instance, a very different but entirely possible and justifiable function. It may be opportune for

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 29-68.

Heidegger to mention the topic, but inappropriate to develop it at any length; the note allows for a certain reconciliation of these dual but competing demands. But what is significant for our purposes here is that this function can be assumed only because the spatial subordination, the spatial separation of the note from the text, remains sufficiently vague and nebulous to allow a plethora of functions. What is indicated is determined by convention, by precedent, the textual spacing on which the device of the note depends being entirely “insufficient” to regulate, prescribe, or even articulate with any precision the functions of its notes.

The exalted and seemingly obvious convention of the title is not spared Derrida’s scrutiny in his opening to “The Double Session.”<sup>4</sup> In the opening to *La double séance*—at best an improvised title that was given by the editors who originally published the content of a couple of seminars that themselves went untitled—Derrida notes the later Mallarmé’s decision to suspend giving his works titles. Mallarmé resented the convention of the title “qui parle trop haut” (“which speaks, excessively, from on high”); he disliked their being hoisted above the text or work in a place of textual supervision, dominating and commanding the text that succeeded them. The title operates according to the fiction that the ensuing text can be reduced to a single signification. The poet would abandon giving titles to his poems, much as abstract painters would, aptly enough, cease entitling and thus designating *what* was *represented* in or by their works in the early decades of the twentieth century. This modernist gesture was seen as liberating the reader or spectator’s experience of totalizing pre-determination. Elsewhere, in *Of Grammatology (De la grammatologie)*, Derrida’s gesture towards the

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 187-286.

title is different: in implying a title in the hoary form of “Of [such and such a disciplinary area of enquiry],” he ironically and anachronistically feigns the form used for works claiming a definitive, comprehensive treatment of a particular topic. It goes without saying that Derrida takes his determination of writing, and of the Book in *Of Grammatology*, to undermine any pretensions any work might have to providing the definitive, exhaustive treatment of a topic or branch of disciplinary inquiry. Indeed, beyond the title of this work, Derrida seems, exorbitantly, to include a number of traditional accompaniments to the main text (a foreword, an exergue), providing an ironic commentary on these apparent formalities, in which the totality of the book is fractured and its logic complicated. The mute spacing that the inscription of a title or the insertion of an exergue creates, cannot, of course, reflect these ironizing gestures.

What unites the various textual phenomena cursorily evoked in these brief analyses—of preface, title, and footnote—is firstly, their irreducibly *textual* nature; and secondly, that the complicated relations they insinuate between themselves and other component parts of the text are made by irreducibly spatial, textual relations. They do not exist as such in speech, however much we might seek equivalents for them (say, the exordium for the preface, or an aside that we might cast as performing some correlative function to a footnote, and so on). This textual status, and the relations they open up by which they stand in relation to the “body of the text” or to one another, is indistinguishable from a certain textual spacing. Their identity is inextricable from the spatial layout of the page and/or the text. Such textual space must obviously be differentiated from the space or spacings in the figurative, illusionistic painting’s representation of empirical space and objects; the spaces bespeak a certain logic or structural set of

relations that, while conventionally interpretable and quickly interpreted or processed, ought not escape our attention. Textual spatial relations function in a manner closer to a diagrammatic “logic,” perhaps more closely to the use of space made in non-phonetic forms of writing, or perhaps, as such relations exist in abstract works of painting. This is a fact that would no doubt undermine those phonocentric determinations of the text Derrida has subjected to criticism, especially when we consider that the apparatus of the academic, scientific, and rigorous prose text relies heavily on these conventions, and the seemingly primitive, over-determined relations of spacing essential to them. Not being explicitly articulated, being represented only by similar expanses of textual space, the logic or set of structural relations is rarely if ever consciously articulated, let alone examined intellectually. Derrida’s readings latch onto occasions in which the use made of a title or preface or note is somewhat exceptional and anomalous; as such, they shed light on the ordinary function that the textual spacings are burdened with—but also on the way in which their signification or function can depart from the conventional function attributed to them.

Derrida is not content merely to raise the question of the significance of orthodox conventions of spacing as they inhabit and condition textual meaning; he has deployed spacing in certain of his own publications in a way that confounds our tendency to bypass it. To say that he has done so in innovative or unorthodox ways is to say that the spacing cannot be subsumed under existing recognizable conventions or categories. Before speculating on the significance of ways in which he avails in an unorthodox manner of “non-phonetic” spaces, I take up preliminarily remarks he makes on the organization of certain of his works and essay collections, in which the language of spatial relations that he uses

cannot simply be reduced to a set of figures expressing a structural or chronological logic.

## Unprecedented Textual Spaces

### A. The Early Publications: Spaces Binding Collections and Texts

In a bibliographical note at the end of a collection of essays, Derrida appears, deliberately, to conflate two levels of the organization of a book of essays—on the one hand, the physical binding and material sewing together of a book, and on the other, the editorial decisions an author might make in deciding upon the texts to include and the order in which they are to appear. His calculated conflation appears to suggest the logical or structural organization to be in fact a function of the inevitable spatial organization of a book. In this note at the end of *Writing and Difference*, availing of a series of “bibliographic” metaphors—the sewing of a volume, and the spaces that are left between stitches, the points made in an engraving, and the etymology of *text*, drawn as it is from a woven or tissue-like structure—Derrida writes in a manner that confounds treating the physical and editorial spacings of the text as distinct:

By an interpretative *sewing* [in the sense in which the pages or a book are sewn together or *bound*], we will have been able, after the fact (*après-coup*), to draw or plot out (*dessiner*) [the system of the texts composing *Writing and Difference* or of deconstruction]. We have allowed appear only the punctuated points (*pointille*) of this system, making or leaving room in this system for the spaces (*blancs*) without which no text could ever present itself. If *text* also means *tissue*, all these essays

have intransigently defined the sewing [or binding] as a *provisional binding (faufilure)*.<sup>5</sup>

*Faufilage*, very literally “false sewing,” refers to the provisional, rough sewing together of two materials—with elongated spaces left in between the stitches—executed prior to, and acting as a guide for, the final, definitive stitching. The upshot of this dense, cryptic passage is that, notwithstanding the unified, definitive appearance that the solid, rectangular book or volume gives, any actual sewing or binding together of Derrida’s texts (essays, readings), notwithstanding the definitive existence of the published work as such, can only be a *provisional* orchestration of their logical, intertextual relations. Their attaining a final configuration or systematic form is ultimately deferred, forever suspended or left *en différence* (that is, differing and thus deferred). Interspersed with differences that can always be rearranged, a final configuration exhausting the structural or genealogical relations between them, is forever deferred. What leaves the relationship between the various essays of *Writing and Difference*, and indeed of the relation between *Writing and Difference* and his other works of this period, indeterminate, is the spacing between them.

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<sup>5</sup> The note appears in the original French version at the end of a bibliography, but is curiously absent from the English translation, despite its translator—Alan Bass—discussing it in his translator’s preface to *Writing and Difference* (trans. Alan Bass, London: Routledge, 2001, ix). I have modified the translation he provides in his preface. Given the complexity and relative untranslatability of this passage, I provide the full note here in the original, *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), 437: “Par la date de ces textes, nous voudrions marquer qu’à l’instant, pour les relier, de les relire, nous ne pouvons nous tenir à égale distance de chacun d’eux. Ce qui reste ici le déplacement d’une question forme certes un système. Par quelque couture interprétative, nous aurions su après coup le dessiner. Nous n’en avons rien laissé paraître que le pointillé, y ménageant ou y abandonnant ces blancs sans lesquels aucun texte jamais ne se propose comme tel. Si texte veut dire tissu, tous ces essais en ont obstinément défini la couture comme faufilure. (Décembre 1966)”

Responding to a question that Henri Ronse poses regarding the bibliographical note cited above, and the decisions Derrida made with regard to his publications in 1967 and 1972, Derrida refers him to the preface Mallarmé wrote to his prose poem, *Un coup de dés* (*A Throw of the Dice*), in which the symbolist poet spoke of the spaces (*blancs*) “tak[ing] on importance.”<sup>6</sup> Along with this reference to the “blancs” (blanks, spaces, “whites”), Derrida’s epigraph to *L’écriture et la différence*—“all without novelty being but the spacing (*espacement*) of reading”<sup>7</sup>—had been drawn from Mallarmé’s preface to this prose poem, *Un coup de dés*. This prose poem attained a certain notoriety for its words and lines unfurling across and cascading down its pages in a spatially unregulated fashion (as least as prose or verse unfolds according to a uniform spacing), in apparent harmony with the marine imagery of waves, sails, and breezes in the poem, and the proposition that emerges in it (“a throw of the dice will never abolish the play of chance”). It is this spacing which takes on importance. Spacing, for Mallarmé, seems to be synonymous with the more or less arbitrary connections and configurations into which “elements” can enter and re-enter, and with the ineradicable contingency that haunts any determination of their relative positioning. Both his “Sonnet en yx” (the final line being “De scintillations sitôt le septuor,” “Scintillations at once the Septentrion”), and *Un coup de dés* culminate in dazzling evocations of a constellation. *Le Septentrion* is as a constellation alternatively known or configured as the Plough and the Bear among other figurative projections. What accounts in part for Mallarmé’s fascination with constellations is the human need to impose sense

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3. The interview with Ronse can be found: 1-14.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, vi.



and meaning on them, but also the contingency of the organization by which they can be figured and named in multiple ways. Once again, it is the spacing that acts as the not entirely determinative determinant. Mallarmé's ideas here perhaps explain why Derrida not only responds to Ronse by suggesting that his texts might have been configured very differently, but by attributing the provisionality of their configuration to the spaces that can at once figure their distinction and interrelation. In similar fashion, multiple modes of threading Derrida's texts together, multiple orders and organizations, are possible because the spacings between them open them up to being detached and bound to one another. They can always be stitched together or ordered and organized *otherwise*. The spaces, play, as Derrida says, the role of "an undecidable resource which sets the system in motion."<sup>8</sup> The mute spacings between them remain inarticulate with regard to the logic by which they have been bound together, notwithstanding any lengths the conscientious reader might go to in seeking to re-establish the logic by which they were organized.

#### B. "Double Session": Intertextuality Figured in Spacing

The text in Derrida's *Dissemination* referred to as "La double séance" ("The Double Session"<sup>9</sup>) is the published version of two seminars given by Derrida. He specifies that he gave no title to the seminar, the title "La double séance" having been given *faute de mieux* by the editors of *Tel Quel* in which it was published prior to being included in *Dissemination*. Each participant, Derrida makes clear, was given a page on which was set out a passage from the *Philebus*, as well as Mallarmé's *Mimique*.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 173-286.

SOCRATES: And if he had someone with him, he would put what he said to himself into actual speech addressed to his companion, audibly uttering those same thoughts, so that what before we called opinion (δόξα) has now become assertion (λόγος).—PROTARCHUS: Of course.—SOCRATES: Whereas if he is alone he continues thinking the same thing by himself, going on his way maybe for a considerable time with the thought in his mind.—PROTARCHUS: Undoubtedly.—SOCRATES: Well now, I wonder whether you share my view on these matters.—PROTARCHUS: What is it?—SOCRATES: It seems to me that at such times our soul is like a book (Δοκεῖ μοι τότε ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ βιβλίῳ τιμὴ προσσεοκέναι).—PROTARCHUS: How so?—SOCRATES: It appears to me that the conjunction of memory with sensations, together with the feelings consequent upon memory and sensation, may be said as it were to write words in our souls (γράφειν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τότε λόγους). And when this experience writes what is true, the result is that true opinion and true assertions spring up in us, while when the internal scribe that I have suggested writes what is false (ψευδῆ δὲ οὕτως ὁ τοιοῦτος παρ' ἡμῶν γραμματεὺς γράφῃ), we get the opposite sort of opinions and assertions.—PROTARCHUS: That certainly seems to me right, and I approve of the way you put it.—SOCRATES: Then please give your approval to the presence of a second artist (δημιουργόν) in our souls at such a time.—PROTARCHUS: Who is that?—SOCRATES: A painter (Ζωγράφου) who comes after the writer and paints in the soul pictures of these assertions that we make.—PROTARCHUS: How do we make out that he in his turn acts, and when?—SOCRATES: When we have got those opinions and assertions clear of the act of sight (ὄψεως) or other sense, and as it were seen in ourselves pictures or images (εἰκόνας) of what we previously opined or asserted. That does happen with us, doesn't it?—PROTARCHUS: Indeed it does.—SOCRATES: Then are the pictures of true opinions and assertions true, and the pictures of false ones false?—PROTARCHUS: Unquestionably.—SOCRATES: Well, if we are right so far, here is one more point in this connection for us to consider.—PROTARCHUS: What is that?—SOCRATES: Does all this necessarily befall us in respect of the present (τῶν ὄντων) and the past (τῶν γεγονότων), but not in respect of the future (τῶν μελλόντων)?—PROTARCHUS: On the contrary, it applies equally to them all.—SOCRATES: We said previously, did we not, that pleasures and pains felt in the soul alone might precede those that come through the body? That must mean that we have anticipatory pleasures and anticipatory pains in regard to the future.—PROTARCHUS: Very true.—SOCRATES: Now do those writings and paintings (γράμματα τε καὶ ζωγραφήματα), which a while ago we assumed to occur within ourselves, apply to past and present only, and not to the future?—PROTARCHUS: Indeed they do.—SOCRATES: When you say 'indeed they do', do you mean that the last sort are all expectations concerned with what is to come, and that we are full of expectations all our life long?—PROTARCHUS: Undoubtedly.—SOCRATES: Well now, as a supplement to all we have said, here is a further question for you to answer.

#### MIMIQUE

Silence, sole luxury after rhymes, an orchestra only marking with its gold, its brushes with thought and dusk, the detail of its signification on a par with a stilled ode and which it is up to the poet, roused by a dare, to translate! the silence of an afternoon of music; I find it, with contentment, also, before the ever original reappearance of Pierrot or of the poignant and elegant mime Paul Margueritte.

Such is this PIERROT MURDERER OF HIS WIFE composed and set down by himself, a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length in his soul. A whirlwind of naive or new reasons emanates, which it would be pleasing to seize upon with security: the esthetics of the genre situated closer to principles than any! (nothing in this region of caprice foiling the direct simplifying instinct... This — "The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action, in a hymn (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, under the false appearance of a present. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction." Less than a thousand lines, the role, the one that reads, will instantly comprehend the rules as if placed before the stageboards, their humble depository. Surprise, accompanying the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences — that, in the sole case, perhaps, with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading.

Fig. 2. The opening page of "The Double Session," juxtaposing a passage from the *Philebus* with Mallarmé's *Mimique*.

The *mise en page* of the cited texts is such that the space between them forms, as Derrida specifies, an angle, cornering or enveloping Mallarmé's text, which is "embedded in one corner, sharing or completing"<sup>10</sup> the page or Plato's text. The citations in effect preface a reading Derrida subsequently performs of both of these texts, of their interrelations and differences. Of this particular, deliberate arrangement of the two texts, Derrida explicitly asks: "What is the purpose of placing these two texts there, and of placing them in that way, at the opening of a question about what goes (on) or doesn't go (on) between (*entre*) literature and truth?"<sup>11</sup> In a sense, the multiple lines of relations he draws up between the two texts are condensed in the status and sense we attribute to this space that divides them yet makes them cohabit the one space.

The cited segment of the *Philebus*, while not explicitly mentioning the concept of mimesis, Derrida says, describes or illustrates its system; it describes the manner in which mimesis organizes the thinking of the relations between speaking, writing, and drawing or painting. Derrida starts off by announcing that he is to engage the question of the relation between, on the one hand, literature and, on the other, the philosophical question *what is literature*—a question he will not have dared to ask explicitly, at least in such an overtly philosophical or ontological form. The relation between literature and this question of what it is, of its truth, resonates in the textual and spatial configuration of the two texts that precede his opening. The spacing would figure or invite the questioning of what if any trafficking, confusion, or interplay there is between literature and philosophy. But the texts, as representative

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

of literature and philosophy, do not let themselves be taken at face value: Mallarmé's putative literary text is a piece of prose writing, and Plato's dialogue and diegetic mimesis ought to caution us against their hasty labelling. Already this reversal of sorts appears to contaminate the space's purity as one dividing literature and philosophy.

Let us work our way through certain of the numerous significations that accrue to this space, the significations that seem to multiply by virtue of the very aridity of this space, of its vacuity as a sign. Between the texts, there lies the whole history of mimesis that has dominated Western reflections on literature, and that, no doubt, has influenced and been influenced by the praxis of literature. The blank but pregnant space *between* Plato and Mallarmé's texts invites us to contemplate a theme common to them (mimesis) within a shared, Western tradition. Derrida's reading of these two texts teases out the inflections they give to this seminal Western concept. Since the Mallarmean text would be impossible without Plato's inauguration of mimesis as a dominant motif in Western thought, and as they might be said to be a scarcely veiled commentary on them, one might say that Mallarmé's reflections on mimesis in *Mimique* themselves constitute a mimetic copy of Plato—not an eikastic, faithful copy, but a phantastic, unrecognizable simulacra of Plato's mimesis. The space would thus be the very space between representations of mimesis, between one representation of mimesis and another. The space figures the discontinuity, the radical departure that Mallarmé makes, a departure that nonetheless takes off from a point of overlap with Plato (the concept of mimesis). It measures out a continuity, a line of descent, but also encloses within the text an internecine conflict, an invaginated pocket of irresolvable tension.

What takes place in the spacing between the two texts is also the history of metaphysics that elapses between the philosopher most readily identified with the inauguration of that tradition, and a poet associated with the end of metaphysics in modernity. Moreover, in the course of his introductory remarks, Derrida suggests that he might have given his work the title “Hymen: INTER Platonem et Mallarmatum.”<sup>12</sup> The significance or implication of Derrida writing this abandoned title in Latin is evident enough: what lies between the two is the translation of ancient Greek thought into Latin and the romantic languages, which has at once distorted and preserved, altered yet perpetuated Greek thought. The allusion to “hymen,” a word that Mallarmé has occasion to use, can mean both virginity (the “intact” hymen) and consummation of marriage (the hymen as breached); this ambivalence is due to the hymen’s anatomical ambiguity, as opening and closing, as veil and fold (“voile” and “pli” are words that occur frequently in Mallarmé). And in “INTER,” just as in *entre* (between), the antagonistic senses of a relation and a disjunction, a cleavage and a conjunction, are signified.

Is the spacing in question then a distorting compression, a condensation of too much that will have taken place in between the two cited texts? Derrida’s response suggests the space of commerce and of incommensurability between the texts to overflow with potential meanings or be hermeneutically inexhaustible. And this inability to pin down an ultimate sense or set down an interpretation of the relation between Mallarmé and Plato resonates with the absence of any title governing the work.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

The spacing between the texts remains indefinable, un-entitled, or forever to-be-entitled, enveloping rather than enveloped by the discourse of Derrida's own text. The *espacement* invites the questioning, without the ensuing text claiming to ever reach an absolute determination of it.

The inclusion of this Plato/Mallarmé page opens up *another* space—that between the two texts and Derrida's own text. Derrida's inclusion of this spacing perhaps ought to be less surprising than it appears. For Derrida's texts are invariably the performances of readings of other texts. Instantiating a relation with another author or text that is irreducible to mere citation, commentary, or critique, Derrida's readings of texts are immersed in the text being read. Least of all is the work being deconstructed a historical text serving as mere launch pad for a new, independent philosophical work claiming complete independence from it. His writing confuses the ordinary conception of reading and writing as exclusive activities, if by reading we understand an activity that precedes and is conducted separately from the writing of our "own" texts. Each of his texts envelops within itself a figurative space between his own reading and that text. Derrida's writings start out from other texts, without ever beginning anew, or extricating themselves from the reading of other texts—these other texts being understood as implicated in one another by belonging to a tradition, and as undergirded by a conceptual network that traverses different languages. Ordinarily, the notion of intertextuality is understood as designating the influences that other texts will have had upon the writing and writer of a text, the other texts that will have fed into its writing outside of the conscious awareness or acknowledgement of the writer. It ordinarily designates a sort of passivity, a powerlessness on the

part of the author to command—in the moment that they bear on the writer—all the sources, texts, and influences that will have shaped that author's writings and ideas. Internalizing the relations between the Mallarmé text and Plato's within Derrida's own text seems to invoke the sense of an active intertextuality. Derrida is writing in the margins of other texts; in "The Double Session," Derrida allows this marginality to be figured by and recognized in a textual spatiality that exceeds the spatiality of an epigraph or of a block citation. It seems at least comprehensible for the set of relations between Derrida's text—and the two related texts he is reading—to be materially formalized in the manner in which he lays out "The Double Session." It seems in keeping with tradition for this to be performed in a manner that goes beyond existing conventions, which themselves were introduced at historical junctures and once constituted innovations, and no doubt once seemed superfluous (citation, indented block citing, the epigraph that alludes to a principle casting its illumination over a text, the bibliography suggesting a range of works that fed into the text, and so on). However much we might balk at the non-conventional gesture that only uneasily lets itself be assimilated within our understanding, and however much we might fail to recognize or admit logical relations to be comprehensible only by virtue of figures, Derrida's attempts to devise modalities of textual spacing ought not to be regarded as lacking in continuity with existing conventions.

### C. *Glas*: Spacing between Two Columns

We have seen how Derrida embroiders the relations between the texts of his early work in a language that permits no separation between the purely logical and the bibliographical language. We

have also seen how the juxtaposition of cited texts in a particular, determinate configuration resonates with the reading Derrida performs of them. There remains one other Derridian gesture regarding textual spatiality to be analyzed. Derrida's *Glas* is perhaps best known for Derrida situating two texts, both written by him, on the one page such that they face one another. In one column, Derrida reflects on Hegel, and, in the other, on Genet. The columns are spaced in such a way that we might describe them—were simultaneous reading of them not an impossibility—as running concurrently. Given that the “Hegel column” stands on the left-hand side, we might, in accordance with the convention by which reading commences from the left, be inclined to ascribe to it some precedence, if not priority. The reading of the work(s) is complicated yet further by the texts, within each column, not simply flowing in an orthodox linear manner; constant asides (“text-boxes,” we might say) are interspersed throughout, with a seeming variety of functions, such as elaborating on words or etymologies. I cannot here perform the sort of close reading required to identify how the two columns deal with intimately related themes, and that would be necessary to tease out how the *mise en page* of the two columns bears on the trafficking in meaning *at given moments* in the text. But some of the general effects of the textual positioning might be emphasized here.

Is one to read one page at a time, and thus two texts? Or is one to read one text first and then the other? The distribution of the texts, dispersed across the page, disturbs or confuses the simple linearity of reading by which a text unfolds according to a temporality where a clear beginning unfolds “inexorably” toward an unambiguous end-point, interrupted perhaps by the back-and-forth movement or digression towards footnotes the text



commends. *Glas* seems to lay emphasis on this very point—on the false start or false starting point—precisely by not beginning within a complete opening *sentence*, that is, with a sentence that begins with a capital initial and that includes a grammatically coherent point of departure. Its opening pitches the reader into a truncated sentence; the text has already begun, and begins only in reference to another text. We have already seen how “The Double Session” begins, as it were, from an intertextual space, from the difference between two texts, refuting any notion of the text being its own, singular wellspring. The spacing of the columns referring one text to another challenges the text’s pretensions to constituting a singular, independent and whole entity. Indeed Derrida’s spacing determines the status of each text as a supplement; it determines each column as not being read or interpreted until the one column is referred to the other. The system of relations between texts composing “one and the same text or work,” confronting the reader with a non-linear sequential experience of reading—with choices with regard to what to read first—undermines the orthodox visual presentation of a text or work that is conducive to construing it to constitute an independent totality. Neither column allows itself to be produced or reproduced purely and simply as speech; it precludes a “translation” of it “back” into the spoken word, back into meaning as determined by language conceived as the spoken word. The column will always have a remainder, one that is irreducibly textual without being alphabetic-phonetic writing. The reading and interpretation of each column cannot be said to be complete until it is referred and related to the other column.

With this, we move to a conclusion, in which Derrida’s non-conventional use of a non-phonetic and non-syntactical spacing can be described, on the one hand, as undermining a phonocentric

tradition, but, on the other, as in keeping with the tradition by which the Western prose text has become what it is in part through innovations in textual spacing.

### **Conclusion: A Textual Space Beyond Hegelianism, a Space of Writing Beyond the Voice, a Space Left for Interpretation**

Derrida has recruited certain potentialities of textual spacing in order to suggest a whole series of relations between elements in his texts (cited passages, his own texts) in line with his conception of the text as composite and its meaning as woven intertextually. His gesture of spacing and positioning texts serves, above and beyond existing conventions of citation, referencing or allusion, to give a material figuration to the intertextuality he sees as permeating his texts as readings. Conceiving of the textual spacing on the basis of a hymeneal logic, by which the visual textual space *both* relates *and* differentiates—acts as a conduit between, *and* divides the elements it lies between—Derrida avails of the opportunity that textual spaces provide to multiply their potential senses; he invites or obliges the reader to invest the space and distribution with sense. As such, Derrida's spacings function akin to the way that certain nonphonetic marks do—in the way a question or exclamation mark functions, or in the way parentheses section off a part of the text and institute a certain unspoken relation between the “parenthetical” remarks and the text within which they lie. His laying emphasis on the spacing goes hand in hand with suggesting the contingency of the relations between its parts, deferring any sense of a final, univocal sense. As such, any gesture multiplying the materiality, augmenting its intransigence to the movement of signification, acts as a call to interpretation.

Indeed, we here approach the relation between irreducibly textual spacing and its potentiality to subvert what Derrida calls the phonocentrism of the Western tradition, which is the thesis of the natural priority and superiority of the spoken word, the hierarchical privileging of alphabetic-phonetic speech over other forms of writing. To illustrate the phonocentrism underlying Western philosophy—Derrida has done so in countless readings of thinkers across the tradition—let us restrict ourselves to Hegel. For Hegel, the relations between speech and all forms of writing are determined dialectically; meaning is a product of dialectical sublation, of *Aufhebung*. Hegel celebrates the dual and seemingly opposed meanings contained in this one word (*aufheben*): the senses of *negation* and of *raising up* describe perfectly for Hegel the operation of signification, by which a material signifier is at once negated *and* raised up to the form of meaning (*Bedeutung*). Hegel had emphasized the “physical ideality” of speech as a medium, over and against the exterior materiality of the medium of writing: the element of sound or the voice is, for Hegel, physically ideal to the extent that sound spontaneously dissipates upon its utterance, allowing the vocal signifier to disappear before the “evocation” or summoning of the signified meaning it will have made possible. For Hegel, sound and the voice are thus perfectly suited to communication. The voice is the spiritual element of meaning that takes on no outwardly obtrusive material form. While Hegel asserted the superiority of alphabetic-phonetic writing over other forms of writing—on account of its medium replicating speech insofar as possible—he nonetheless adjudged it inferior to spoken discourse on account of the intransigent materiality.

Writing resists the totalizing dialectical sublation by which the vocal signifier, allegedly, erases itself. The materiality of writing

(both inscription and the spaces on which it depends) is never in fact negated completely, if by the negation of the material “vocal signifier” is meant that meaning transcends the material conditions of its production, becomes elevated over the context of its utterance, rises above the particularity of its language, and so on. Derrida’s use of unconventional textual gestures impedes the supposedly seamless movement of signification from material signifier to signified, of alphabetic-phonetic writing being decipherable *qua* pure transcription of the spoken word. Bringing to prominence, rather than reducing or allowing to fade into obsolescence, the materiality of the mechanisms involved in the generation of signification constitutes a gesture resisting the idealizing determination of linguistic meaning as attaining a univocal, timeless sense.

For Derrida, Hegel fails to recognize non-phonetic elements in alphabetic-phonetic writing.<sup>13</sup> He systematically overlooks the prose text’s resistance to being simply returned to the spoken word. Textual spacing does not allow alphabetic-writing to be the mere transcription of speech, or for it to be “translated back” into the spoken word *without remainder*—without the stubborn resistance of spaces that do not permit of simple articulation. Derrida has

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<sup>13</sup> Hegel does, in fact, recognize and affirm that reading, for the educated Westerner, has long since become, in effect, “hieroglyphic.” *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827-8*, trans. Robert R. Williams (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 229. We recognize whole words by their visual contours, and do so independently of transforming them piecemeal into phonemes that, when conjoined, we recognize as words, syntagms and so on. The activity of reading ceases, in the developed intellect, to be the syllable-by-syllable deciphering characteristic of the child learning to read by reading out loud; it has ceased to be the careful, painstaking transformation of the written text into the vocalizable sounds that—in this vocal form and this form only—can then be understood. On the contrary, as Hegel points out, the written words on the page are read more or less as such, having become recognizable in themselves. And to this eventuality, spacing, far from amounting to the waste matter in reading as a process of deciphering meaning in inscription, will have been integral.

described the *différance* of meaning as the Hegelian *Aufhebung* written otherwise, as rewriting the operation of negation and of raising up; the raising up is interminably frustrated, left as it were in mid-air, attaining only the provisionality of an interpretation. Both the textual spacing that is operative within conventional textual elements (footnotes, titles, and so on), as well as his own textual spacing, resist any attempt to reduce the text to a pure expression of the voice.

We must recognize that both types of spacing—the conventional use of spacing and Derrida’s ostensibly unprecedented spacing—are both non-phonetic. We cannot understand the relation of title to the text, or of the footnote to the point at which it is referred in the text, or the preface to the body of the text, simply in terms of *alphabetic-phonetic* spacing—in terms of a spacing that replicates a vocal element in speech. We can recognize textual spacing to be irreducibly textual because it is *not* the syntactical spacing that parses out words, that “replicates” the pauses between spoken words in the materiality of a blank space on a page. The spacing in question—that which surrounds footnotes, opening up the possibility of titles, as well as those textual spaces Derrida seems to “institute”—is not the typographical spacing between words interpretable in terms of a syntactical code. The visual spacing makes no referral to a syntactical code that governs speech or alphabetic-phonetic writing, and to which we are referred by the spaces parsing out the parts of speech composing a sentence or syntagmatic unity. It is not the spacing between words that, on the face of it, replicates the pauses between words that allow them to be distinguished, and to have inferred between them syntactical relations. There will always be a remainder to the phonocentric determination of the prose text. Even if one can speak *about*, or

describe the space in *Glas*, the deciphering of the text is incomplete so long as the text is not referred and submitted to the other text, for as long as it is not submitted to an interpretation. The more that materiality figures in the movement from signifier to signified—as it does when textual spaces impress upon written signifiers—the less we can presuppose the meaning generated to amount to an ideality that attains an independent, transcendent status beyond the necessity of interpretation.

This non-phonetic, non-syntactical spacing cannot be described as simply irrational or non-rational. The generation of a form of writing, of the text written in prose, differentiated from the spoken word, has been integral to Western rationality's conception of itself. The textual disposal of space has been critical to the development of the characteristics of the formal written prose work. Without a certain utilization and deployment of the material of the page, the apparatus identifiable with prose writing would be unthinkable. And it compels Derrida to pose the question of how the Western philosophical tradition could possibly have been phonocentric when the spatiality of so-called phonetic writing has been integral to the philosophical tradition and to the form it has given the logos in the written prose text.

We ought not to be surprised, then, by Derrida's gestures regarding textual spacing as performing non-phonetic functions, as though this apparent intrusion of the indexical, visual function represented a new departure in Western writing. We ought not to be surprised by the relative nebulosity of the spacings' meaning, since all textual spacings are vague to the extent that they are not articulated by a formal determination of their function. Derrida's experiments in textual spacing do not introduce a wholly new spatial dimension into the text; they simply make use of the

irreducibly textual non-phonetic, non-syntactical spacing in unorthodox ways. Once we recognize their shared non-phonetic character, the similarity between the textual spacing in the cases of the textual conventions examined and in Derrida's experimental gestures can be seen in terms of their operation and function. For all their apparent novelty, Derrida's gestures of textual spacing can be understood to be in keeping with the tradition of organizing the text, and devising irreducibly textual components; they can be so interpreted at least to the extent that formalized textual spatial conventions have, historically, done much to establish and develop the independence that the written work or book enjoys vis-à-vis the spoken word and conversational language.

Derrida's readings of specific notes, titles, and so on, reveal the very vacuity and imprecision of textual spaces as "signifiers." The textual spacing as a remainder, as irreducible non-phonetic element, does not always permit of simple or easy interpretation. Derrida's readings of these phenomena suggest that the logic underlying them does not always let itself be taken at face value: it is amenable to the sorts of twists in logic to which we saw the preface, title, and footnote are subject in Derrida's readings. We have seen in the orthodox use of the preface, as Hegel spoke of the preface erasing itself before the work proper, a convoluted function figured in the space opened up by the preface between itself and the work. While textual spacing can come to be conventionally determined, the conventionalization required to give the spacing "surrounding" titles and footnotes and so, on a more or less constant function, can be defied by the individual text, and by the use to which the spacing is put.

We cannot exclude Derrida's gestures on the basis of this spacing performing wholly other functions to those implicitly

accepted conventions. We can, to be sure, be surprised by his innovations because of the revolution they suggest in our conception of textual meaning. To be sure, we can recognize that the lack of familiarity forces us to interpret where, in other cases, customary usage ordinarily disburdens us of this task. To reject them out of hand would be to refute the possibility of all innovation in the domain of textual spacing, all the innovations involved in the apparatus by which the written prose text has come to be what it is. To reject them as being nebulous or as merely suggestive of the interrelations between elements in the text, would be to reject all textual spacing. For while irreducibly textual spaces take on conventional functions over time and because of precedent, all conventions have had to come into being on the basis of an invention or innovation that precedes any such process of determination. In the end, a redefined conception of textual spacing presents us with a conception of the text as haunted by absences that are appositely figured in the blankness of textual spaces; but, equally, the text has always been haunted by the indeterminacy of spaces that do not bespeak their logic. Textual spaces beckon the reader to the work of configuring and reconfiguring sense to be made from a text, whether or not it figures conventional, formalized relations or wholly new conventions. But in this, the distinction between Derrida's apparently unprecedented acts of textual spacing, and those we have seen him analyze, is only a relative one.



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