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Migrating Texts and Traditions

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Chapter 16

Migrating Texts: A Hermeneutical Perspective

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1. Preamble

Where is the proper place of the text? A text is where it is appropriate to its place. This is our presupposition. With this presupposition of the text in regard to its place, we can begin to consider the conditions of migrating philosophical texts.

A first observation: a migration of texts is an effect of place, and more precisely an effect ‘out of place’, an effect by which the texts’ original place is suspended or transformed. What is proper to a text or to a group of texts is put into question in this out-of-place effect called ‘migration’, but originally it is being in the proper place that makes a text transmissible. Is this a contradiction? Topologically, it is a problem of expropriation. A text, out of its own place, out of its proper place, is foreign, is a ‘stranger’ in philosophy. By the word ‘stranger’, I understand not only a new arrival to philosophy but also the thinker who encounters a text foreign to its original context. Put in another way, ‘stranger’ means the reader who meets the philosophical text in finding himself alienated, that is, deprived of his own common sense belief or projected into a certain difficulty (*aporia*). Still, there is a foreign territory with its climate(s) for this so-called philosophical stranger to live in. As long as the text is expropriated in one or another sense, this stranger sees in the foreign text his image as stranger. The text is itself the place where a reader becomes a stranger, where he expropriates himself. If we do not take this topological reversion as dialectical, we may stay in this description of expropriation or alienation, and will borrow metaphorically the term ‘double bind’ from the anthropologist Gregory Bateson to describe this condition.¹ There is a binding on both sides—the reader and text are mutually bound in this alienation.

1 See Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 201, 206.

A second observation: confined within this binding, a condition of mutual alienation, the text and its reader both encounter a limit, touching that limit, and perhaps transgressing the limit. Readings, discussions, notes, and translations take place in and within borders, borders of contact. To build on the topic of alienation, the reciprocal limitation between the readers (thinkers) and the texts sets up a hermeneutical distance. The mutual limitation binding the readers and the texts (we put aside for a moment the issue of the role of philosophical writers or the interlocutors) recognizes the submission of reader/text to a tradition. Under one or another tradition, philosophical questioning forms an invisible line of delimitation that includes and excludes some topics and debates, and also some figures, some persons. These persons carry with themselves their proper names, and are to be identified as significant in relation to a certain tradition. A Plato, a Descartes, a Hume—all these figures activate our understanding of philosophy in a specific way. By means of that tradition, the limit becomes non-contingent; the tradition as limit is established in order to prevent the arbitrary moving in and out, forwards and backwards.

Given these two preliminary observations, let us try to make some further suggestions.

Dialectically, alienation and limitation take place at the same time. But the simultaneity is subordinated to the topic, to the topos.

Synthetically, the text as topos can mean a contextualization, a localization to approach the meaning, even to make sense of the text.

Skeptically, are these observations fallen in the logocentrism of text-meaning?

In light of all this, and in this sense, perhaps it will be useful to draw on Paul Ricoeur's conception of textual mediation. Even we do not have a general theory of text in mind, it may be helpful to consider the theorization of the text according to the hermeneutics of Ricoeur. Here is one starting point.

2. Meaning from the Text—By Way of Paul Ricoeur

The concept of textual mediation can be seen as a prolongation of the strategy of 'the long detour' in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. In response to the effect of distanciation developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* concerning the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Ricoeur proposes the concept of appropriation (*Aneignung* or *Zueignung*) to situate the text as the mediation between understanding and explanation, between writing and reading. While staying within the hermeneutical tradition, he tries to overcome some of the different approaches, such as the romantic mode in Schleiermacher, the psychological mode in Dilthey, and

the dialogical mode in Gadamer. The role of the text is engaged in the dialectics of hermeneutics; for Ricoeur, the text is “the paradigm of distanciation in communication.”² The sense of historicity in the notion of temporal distanciation in Gadamer is enlarged in order to combine with the appropriation, through time, history, discourse and text. As Ricoeur puts it, “the dialectic of distanciation and appropriation is the final figure which the dialectic of explanation and understanding must assume.”³ But the function of appropriation is not just to transform the alien sphere of meaning (historical and psychological) into one’s own; in order to be familiar with the sense, it also considers the “relinquishment of the self”, as divestiture or disappropriation. It is with the act of reading, and therefore with the mediation of the text, that the appropriation can keep open the intersubjectivity between the writer and the reader—and, indeed, any future reader—and can exempt the self from the mode of possession. The text opens up a reference to the world, “the project of a world”, “the proposal of a mode of being-in-the-world”; this world connection imposed by the text indicates “a moment of dispossession of the narcissistic ego”.⁴ By using the term “self-understanding”, Ricoeur contrasts the *self* with the *ego*; he differentiates the understanding underlying the text from the pre-understanding subject in the *cogito*. The self in self-understanding is linked to the self-presentation of the world, taking a detour through the text. Instead of deciphering the sense *behind* the text, the appropriation with the text involves standing *before* the text: “to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text [*comprendre, c’est se comprendre devant le texte*].”⁵ The text carries out the demands of the world, and through the text in the world the responding self becomes an enlarged self. But it is at the same time a loss of self, for the imaginary (*fictif*) subjectivity of the reader is rather “placed in suspense, unrealized, potentialized”.⁶ This is the ultimate step in distanciation: an internal critique, that is, a *self*-critique, an auto-critique, in regard to the relation of self to self. It is a critique more radical than the critique of ideologies, of illusions. Here is the binding of the text—the contract signed by the text itself. To accept the text involves putting a distance in self-understanding, to mourn “the loss of absolute knowledge.” In other words, another sacrifice needs to be made

2 Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 76. See also, Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l’action* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 102.

3 Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 183.

4 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 192.

5 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 88; *Du texte à l’action*, 116–117.

6 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 88; *Du texte à l’action*, 117.

here—this is a hermeneutical quasi-imperative: “Between absolute knowledge and hermeneutics, it is necessary to choose.”⁷

Necessary to whom? Perhaps it is necessary to the self suspended in reading the text. But the implication of Ricoeur is clear: between the self-presentation of the ego and the hermeneutical distancing of the self, there is a limit. Here we have a limit in or of decision—not a ‘fusion of horizons’, but a separation, if not a rupture. The delimiting line, expressed theoretically, is the difference between egology and philosophy of self (to use a later term of Ricoeur⁸). The problem of distancing is considered more profoundly in the dimension of the self, and becomes a problem of self-identity (*soi-même*, oneself) in the perspective of the hermeneutics of the self. However in light of our problem here, we need to ask: what kind of decision is it, this decision of marking distance, difference, of reconciliation? How does it come to be a decision? In our (Ricoeurean) case concerning the text, it stems from a demand of meaning (*sens* or *signification*). The price to pay for the hermeneutics of self is determined by the meaning. The appropriation touches on the meaning, but as Ricoeur describes it, the meaning has a semiological dimension—sense (*sens*)—as well as a semantic dimension—significance or meaning (*signification*)⁹—the latter one being actualized by the text. The mediation of the text is for the self and for the meaning; the self is oriented to the meaning, and the meaning returns to the self. Following the notion of the ‘hermeneutical arc’, concerning surface and depth interpretation, the integration of explanation and understanding is effected within the concept of “reading as the recovery of meaning (*reprise du sens*)”.¹⁰ Parallel to his assertion that “the constitution of the self is contemporaneous with the constitution of meaning (*sens*)”,¹¹ Ricoeur reverses the subjective *hic et nunc* to that of the text: “the text seeks to place us in its meaning (*sens*)—in the same direction.”¹² Temporality and position come from the text, from this demand of sense and direction. The meaning directs, gives orientation. If we take the same term of ‘belonging (*appartenance*)’ in the appropriation, the meaning dominates the co-belonging (*co-appartenance*) of reading and writing, of text, understanding and explanation. This belonging occurring in the production of meaning is combined with metaphoricality, with

7 Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 193.

8 Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 373.

9 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 119; *Du texte à l'action*, 153.

10 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 121; *Du texte à l'action*, 155.

11 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 119; *Du texte à l'action*, 152.

12 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 121; *Du texte à l'action*, 156. The word *sens* in French means also ‘direction’.

a transferring of meaning in words (metaphor, *meta-pherō*). Here, we may take into consideration the metaphor of graft (*greffe*) used by Ricoeur.

The discourse of graft appears as a hermeneutical model in *The Conflict of Interpretations*. The purpose is to gain a life of meaning; to give “an acceptable sense to the notion of existence—a sense which would express the renewal of phenomenology through hermeneutics.”¹³ The issue of graft is designed to revive the notion of a meaningful life; the Diltheyan model as “transporting into another life” is abandoned.¹⁴ The metaphor itself is not just methodological but ontological, the transplantation involved to animate a new life is taken to be existential, to be “a manner of being akin to being”, or (to use a Heideggerean term) to have “openness to being”¹⁵. The animation *in, by* and *with* meaning is both an ontology of meaning and the meaning of ontology. The gap in the individual life of sense is brought together with the “openness to being” and even with the “uncovering of being”. In this sense, the graft repeats the fusion of horizons and is oriented to the textual mediation that brings together or merges the ontological layers in life. This graft presupposes transcendence—a distance in respect to itself, to being. It involves also a pre-sup-*position* in being; by evoking the condition that “he placed in being before he places and possesses himself”¹⁶. Ricoeur defines this being as being-interpreted. Thus it is necessary to have a place, in the world, ontologically. A graft is not for any unrooted plant; it is a metaphor for existence rooted in Being. The dominance of meaning is structured with the *In-sein* (being-in, in-being) of *Da-sein* projected to the world.

For Ricoeur, the transition from methodological graft to textual mediation seems not without reason. The ambiguity of the *da* (*hic et nunc*) in *Dasein* connected with the Being-in-the-world and the ecstatic temporality lies at the basis of the distanciation. The proposition “distanciation is consubstantial with belonging” has a signification in three dimensions: (1) history and tradition, (2) self and ego, (3) being and Being.¹⁷ Its central function cannot be forgotten: to signify is to signify the history, the self and the being. What abides is the act of signifying, the demand of meaning. Bound by this signifying, a textual mediation keeps a distance in order to overcome it. The process of reading starts from a decontextualizing to a recontextualizing,¹⁸ which just repeats the appropriation,

13 Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 3.

14 Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 5.

15 *Ibid.*, 9, 10.

16 *Ibid.*, 11.

17 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 41.

18 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 83; *Du texte à l'action*, 111.

disappropriation and reappropriation in a dialectical way. This repetition, however, always happens in some place. The presentation *hic et nunc* implied in the mode of presence is always at work. The text aims at the meaning (*vouloir-dire*). The transformation and the change of position played by any mediation is its function as the in-between (*das Zwischen*). We may repeat the Ricoeurian formula in this transcription: between the signified and the signifying, a text or a self has to decide. But this decision of meaning is itself a critical moment, for it belongs to the problem of the hermeneutical circle: in a signification, there is a finitude. But the dynamics of appropriation is infinite. The question of metaphoricality—projecting one word into another word—that is typical in interpretation (*hermêneia*) comes back: we encounter an infinitely enlarged circle; the final circle may be called the circle of the world *consubstantial* with meaning. A text is just a tangent to this circle. The place for the text is a tangential non-place. But how can we follow this formula for the text: a place that is a nonplace (*lieu qui est un non-lieu*)?¹⁹ This nonplace for the text responds to a call from afar, stemming from its present moment. It takes distance to be ‘distant from here and now.’ Thus, we can collect the group of topological metaphors: graft, distanciation, nonplace, position of the self. The themes are textual mediation: in front of the text, in order to have self-understanding. What is the function of these topological expressions? To signify, to make the meaning happen, to take place. But this happens within the confines of the hermeneutical circle. We need to examine the condition of these restrictions.

3. Limit: Sublime/Text

As we have seen, the effect of distance in history and tradition is transplanted into that of the self-understanding in front of the text. Is this a transgression of some limit? Is understanding oneself in front of a text an action that touches the limit? Does the text mean this limit? In contrast to the discourse of play stressed by Gadamer vis-à-vis the work of art, we will consider the analytic of the sublime which shows the encounter of the imagination and its limits.

The limit that is present to the subject is revealed in the regress of the force of imagination before the abyss, before the transcendent (*das Überschwengliche*)²⁰, before the absolutely great. There is a feeling of pain because of the incapacity of the force of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) to grasp the infinite. The function

19 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 113; *Du texte à l'action*, 146.

20 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Hrsg. Karl Vorländer, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1974), 103, §27. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914), 120.

of the limit in the regress of the imagination has been analyzed by Rudolf Makkreel, who tries to present the reflective judgment as corresponding to the hermeneutical method. Makkreel provides a description: “instead of extending the imagination beyond its limits, it provides the occasion for the imagination to reflect on them. In the presence of the sublime, the imagination qua faculty of sense compares itself with reason and ‘exhibits its own limits and inadequacy’.”²¹ The supersensible implied in the sublime is referred to the transcendental conditions of the judging subject.²² Makkreel later gives a hermeneutical reading that bases the faculty of judgment on the transcendental *sensus communis*. The place of the *sensus communis* is assigned as a transcendental topos; it is beforehand an intermediary place: “instead of projecting ourselves into the other, we are to project a possible intermediary position held neither by the self nor by the other. This provides a perspective, based on the *sensus communis*, that makes possible a better understanding of both the self and the other.”²³ Makkreel accentuates the concept of transcendental orientation by using the teleological judgment and calling into play the Kantian term of “transcendental location” or “transcendental topic”. A further explanation follows: “A transcendental topic or topology, we may say, provides the initial orientation to our judgment as it interprets reality in terms of the phenomenal and noumenal”.²⁴ The transcendental topic includes “not only the formal discrimination of the cognitive faculties as irreducible sources of knowledge, but also their felt accord and agreement, which must be communicated to produce a scientific consensus”. This topology is to give an orientation realized in the purpose or end, to offer “the formal discrimination implicit in the *sensus communis*”; Makkreel continues, “The formal discrimination of a transcendental topology can withstand the critique of pure reason if they are not taken as determinate claims of the understanding, but merely as providing a kind of pre-understanding that orients the subject to the world”.²⁵ For Makkreel, the reflection (in reflective judgment) is orientational, completing the background of interpretation. This tentative foundation of interpretation aims at providing a complementary function of hermeneutics with reflective philosophy—and this is a task analogous to that of Ricoeur. It is an easy step to see the function of the text: the orientation is given by the text. A reflective consciousness will read into a text and will read out of it its orientation to the world. Makkreel takes

21 Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). 80.

22 *Ibid.*, 81.

23 *Ibid.*, 160.

24 *Ibid.*, 165.

25 *Ibid.*, 166.

the imagination, *qua* faculty of presentation,²⁶ to present the meaning or the significance. But what is the limit of presentation occurring in the sublime? How does the function of limit occur in this topology?

We can thus turn to another reading of the sublime. In respect to the limitative distancing, we can follow the trace of the transcendental topology and discern the meaning of the sublime as well as the sublimity of meaning. Jean-Luc Nancy offers a series of reflections on this problem of the limit or, more precisely, on the problem of touching the limit in the sublime. He defines the logic of the sublime. Not to be confused with the logic of presentation, the logic of desire, the logic of representation and the logic of absence, it is the logic of the limitlessness (*illimitation*). It is a logic of a motion that traces the border of the limit, by which the boundlessness is removed. In the sublime, something is present as it presents itself in the unlimitedness, to the limit (*le fait que ça [se] présente, et comme ça [se] présente : ça se présente dans l'illimitation, ça [se] présente, toujours, à la limite*).²⁷ In short, for Nancy, the 'sublime' is a logic of the 'to the limit' (*le 'sublime' est une logique du à la limite*).²⁸ Unlike Makkreel (who treats the regress of the imagination as a *reflective* action—a turning back to oneself—central to the reflective judgment), Nancy extends the limit, tracing the contours of the limitless. In the sublime, the play is for the imagination, for its limit, for its overflowing its limit. In commenting on the aesthetic comprehension that grasps the maximum of magnitude in arriving at the "union" of multiplicity, Nancy sees "neither the one nor the multiple: it is beyond the whole", and further, "it is elsewhere, it is not localizable, but it takes place—or more exactly, it is *the taking-place* of the whole or the whole in general".²⁹ The topological effect here is evident: the limit is a place of reversion. In relation to this union beyond the whole, "all greatness remains a little maximum where the imagination reaches its limit (*où l'imagination touche sa limite*)".³⁰

But Nancy adds another topological possibility: the (impossible) transgression. Here is a limit where the imagination overflows, touching on the overflow of the unlimited. (*Elle se déborde, en touchant au débordement de l'illimité, où l'unité*

26 Ibid., 129.

27 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Une pensée finie* (Paris, Galilée, 1990), 169. The original article was published in *Poésie*, no. 30 (1984), collected in *Du sublime* (Paris: Belin, 1988). While we do not analyze the reflective form of presentation expressed here (presenter/se presenter), it worth noting that, in a sense, a presentation is also a self-presentation.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 173. Nancy explains further the effect of the taking-place (*l'avoir-lieu*) as "le contraire d'une totalisation, d'un achèvement : un avènement plutôt, une éclosion" (Ibid.).

30 Ibid., 174.

s'enlève dans l'union."³¹) The discourse of Nancy is thus focused on the topology of the sublime, on the presentation of the limit. On the limit, the imagination finds itself being limited. As Nancy puts it, "there is nothing outside of the limit" for the imaginative presentation,³² but since the impresentable (beyond the limit) is nothing (*rien*), the problem is neither of that of the presentable nor that of the impresentable—it is the problem of the presentation itself. What of the presentation *itself* (*la présentation elle-même*)? It is the instantaneous division-sharing of the limit (*le partage instantané de la limite*):³³ the limiting and the limited are present altogether, one for the other, by the other. It seems to be a co-presence on the limit in the "union", but the limit is the border that touches the imagination, which the imagination touches, where it touches itself. This discourse of the limit reflects the regress of the imagination on the border of the maximum in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*—in §26 of the *Analytic of the Sublime*. The result of this regressive motion is the emotion ("*in ein rührendes Wohlgefallen versetzt wird*"³⁴); Nancy extends this to assert that this motion of imagination in the sublime is a suspension, a rhythmic dehiscence ("*cette infime, infinie déhiscence rythmique*"³⁵), a syncope, a spacing (*espacement*). The limit still functions to carry the tension, to extend to the extremes. The sublime experience is an experience of limit, an experience on the limit, a limit experience as a limit-concept (*Grenzbegriff*), such as the noumenon in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This syncope gives a vital rhythm to the force of presentation, the overflow comes from the flow of life. Nancy characterizes the instant of rupture in the sublime sentiment—"it is the imagination sensible for an instant to itself which is no more itself (*c'est l'imagination encore un instant sensible à elle-même qui n'est plus elle-même*)"³⁶ the tension finishes with the self-division of the limit; the tension is also a distension. The emotion in the rupture at the border is somewhat at a loss; the sentiment of the sublime, according to the interpretation of Nancy, is a sentiment of loss, a sensing which is no more a self-sensing. This paradox is "a transition to the (un)sensible limit of the self (*passage à la limite (in)sensible de soi*)."³⁷ For Nancy, the imagination means the subject; the regress of the imagination in front of the sublime abyss means the freedom of the subject in his retreat, in the syncope, in the rupture. The limit is not a definite place, it is a nonplace. But as the sublime does violence to sensation

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 176.

33 Ibid., 175.

34 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 88.

35 Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 177.

36 Ibid., 182.

37 Ibid., 184.

in order to provoke the inability of the subject, the limit is similarly a nonplace where the freedom of the imagination takes place.

It is of interest to note the loss of sentiment as the sentiment of loss in the sublime. The meaning of the sublime lies in this in-sensibility touching the limit of the subject. We can compare this to a similar expression, used by Ricoeur, in regard to the experience of text. Ricoeur talks about the suspension of the subjectivity of the reader: (1) “the world of the text is real only insofar as it is imaginary”, (2) “as reader, I find myself only by losing myself.”³⁸ Nancy, however, tries to develop a unique thought of the sublime that is different from the dialectical thinking of Ricoeur. There is no absolute, no totality to refer to in the thought of the sublime; in it, “the contour of a drawing, the frame of a painting, the line of a writing refer back to nothing other than themselves [*ne renvoient à rien qu'à eux-mêmes*]”, they present “the proper finite interruption of their presentation” [*leur présentation présente sa propre interruption finie*]³⁹. This self-reference of ‘borders’ refers to nothing else but themselves. In the sublime, it is the spacing that makes possible the presentation. Can this sublimity be the character of the text? Can the sublime regress of the subject be another image of the reader?

On the border, on the limit, the imagination is virtually at an impasse; in fact, Nancy indicates the change of sense in front of the limit, from what is seen to what is touched.⁴⁰ The visual form is destroyed in the sublime. What is presented in the sublime is the deformed. The question is revealed in a double aspect: the problem of the limit is the limit of the images, of the forms, but this limit of forms is an effect of touch, of touching the limit. To put it in a hermeneutical way, with the limit—where the text takes place—how can one touch the meaning? Signifying a meaning in the sublime may reveal a radical experience in the text, if not offer a generalized model. This radicalization is similar to the limitation of meaning; in front of the text, it is to let the limit be touched, to be touched by the limit, by the text. We retreat to the problem of touch, by following the logic of limit. Nancy gives some hints here: “Touching is the limit of itself: the limit of images and words, contact—and with this, paradoxically, the impossibility of touching inscribed in touching, since touching is the limit.”⁴¹ Is touch in the sublime possible? Nancy analyzes the sentiment in front of the sublime as pain accompanies pleasure; this pain is “the limit touched, life suspended, the beating heart”,⁴² is syncopated—is a touch as self-touching, syncope. A topological sense of the

38 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 88; *Du texte à l'action*, 117.

39 Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 176.

40 *Ibid.*, 179.

41 *Ibid.*, 182.

42 *Ibid.*, 183.

suspension, that is, the spacing, interrupts into the meaning of the limit. We will try to analyze this topology of touching in respect to its significance.

4. The Context of Touching

At the core of touching there is the phenomenon of the limit. Following the expression of Nancy—"touching is the limit", "touching does not touch itself"⁴³—the problem of touching is a suspension, a syncope. Is this an adequate description of touching—a touching without touching oneself? Transferring to the domain of the text, it is the suspension of the subject inside the world of the text. It seems to be a double untouchable fact: the reader for himself and the text for itself. Furthermore, there can be a mutual suspension of the text and the reader; but paradoxically, this suspension gives place to each other. Is there then a touching of the reader with the text, and vice versa? Is it just an absurdity to claim the reading as an act of touching the limit, as a sublime act? Does not an act of reading presuppose a vision? On the other hand, since Aristotle, vision is taken as a contact made by the eyes, a contact based on tactile sensing in general.

It is necessary to distinguish between the "touching that does not touch itself" and "eyes touching themselves", in the Nancyeian formula. There are two things to be noticed here: (1) the primacy of the tactile over vision is problematic, and (2) the possibility of touching oneself is to be questioned. If we consider the sublimity of the text in this topological condition, there is a connection with the tactile experience centred in the question of the alienation of subject on the border, on touching the border. We shall undertake a short discussion here in articulating the question.

Through Nancy's formula we get a clue to the topological condition of the text opened in touching. The text is considered on the border of its formation of significance. But the question of touching introduces a far more complicated historical con-text in philosophy. We cannot pursue this question here, but at least we can try to express our questions in light of this. Nancy himself gives us a good hint—that, in the problem of the sublime, there is a certain moment of reserving the problem of touching. It is a moment that "this limit must be reached, must come to be touched: one must change sense, pass from sight to tact".⁴⁴ The same paragraph is cited by Jacques Derrida to approach the whole complicated problem of touching (and of touching in Nancy).⁴⁵ The problem of

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 179.

45 Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 115; *On Touching* – Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 98.

Derrida is formulated as “touching the untouchable”, a problem assimilated, by us, to the regress of the imagination to the border of the sublime, to the loss in the signification in front of the text.

It seems impossible to grasp the context without the syncope as Nancy describes it. We will follow Derrida’s comments in order to pursue this reflection. The paragraph about the ‘regress of the imagination’ and that “sublime imagination touches the limit, and this touch lets it feel ‘its own powerlessness’”⁴⁶ is mentioned by Derrida to reverse the “capability” of the imagination to its “incapability”; in front of the sublime, “incapability” becomes capability. Derrida comments that the imagination “thus tends toward that which it can only hold out to itself without giving itself to hold, and still without touching; whereby it becomes what it is by essence, imagination, possibility of the impossible, possibility without power, possibility auto-affecting its essence of non-essence”.⁴⁷ The character of this regress of the imagination is described thus: “It is touched, in a movement of withdrawing or re-treating to the fold, at the moment it touches the untouchable. The imagination confines without confining itself to itself.”⁴⁸ We shall add a remark on the displacement of terms from ‘the limit’ to ‘that which confines’, by citing a Kantian distinction between *Grenze* (limit) and *Schranke* (confine).⁴⁹ Derrida’s last phrase—“the imagination confines without confining itself to itself”—is, in fact, a parody of the *finite* discourse of confining, but the sublime is more than a breaking of confines; it *touches* the limit. What is to be considered is the possible reversion or even the rupture in the ‘limit’. It is this limit that determines the finitude of the imagination; in the terms of Derrida and Nancy, this limit *touches* the imagination, which means that, on the border of the sublime, the imagination is touched by the limit. A limit is abstract, such that a border (point, line, surface) is nearly a nothingness, a thing without a thing (*chose sans chose*),⁵⁰ a near abyss, an unfathomable unfoundable (*un “infondable” insondable*). Derrida explores the strangeness of this sublime: “this touching, this contact, this tact will have just been able to touch on something untouchable, . . . literally there can only be a figure of touch. One only touches by way of a figure here; the object, the touchable’s thing, is the untouchable”.⁵¹ According to my understanding, this typical paradoxical expression of Derrida pushes the

46 Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, 179.

47 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 124; *On Touching*, 106.

48 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 124.

49 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hrsg. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956), A761/B789.

50 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 121; *On Touching*, 103.

51 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 122; *On Touching*, 104.

discourse of evidence dominated by vision (or seeing) to an extreme. A figure, which is taken as a visual thing, is “itself” what the eye cannot touch; a view implying an unseen is limited by the logic of the touching. But Derrida is conscious that this logic of the touching has certain limitations: (1) the “touch” is the touch of the imagination, of the sense; (2) the sense of touch introduces a reflexivity in the expression like “touch itself (*se toucher*)”, “feel itself (*se sentir*)”; (3) since the “syncopated imagination” in Nancy’s terms opens the experience of the sublime, this experience is also that of the border and of overflowing, “touching on the border, at once goes overboard and remains at the border, . . . retaining itself or abstaining, on the border”.⁵² For Derrida, the question is opened to the whole history concerning the proper, the figurality of the tact, the contact, and the contamination (“touch me not”, *noli me tangere*, *mê mou haptou*⁵³). He questions the primacy of only one sense (touch) as the most proper sense. About the question of the reflexivity in the “self-touching”, Derrida notes that “Nancy transcendentalizes or ontologizes everything that comes down to ‘touching’, and like a madman he goes on a ruinous spree, spending the resources, the credit, the capital, and the interest of the transcendental-ontological”.⁵⁴ On Derrida’s estimation, even out of the sublime, a discourse on the reflexivity of the touch in Nancy has a metaphysical price to pay.

Touch, as self-touching, is the being of every sense in general, the being-sense of sense, the condition of possibility of sensibility in general, the very form of space and time, and so forth. But first of all, the will, the essence of the will, and therefore every metaphysics of the will (perhaps from Descartes to Kant or even to Nietzsche) will have been brought back to touch. Perhaps reduced to touch: haptico-transcendental reduction.⁵⁵

I would like to stress the anti-transcendental tone in these sentences. Moreover, and curiously, the ‘history’ (the Western history of philosophy) is articulated in this negative tone. In the context of touch, there are multiple clues intertwined together: “from Aristotle to Berkeley and Maine de Biran to Husserl”—an arbitrary citation picked out by us—and here “From Descartes to Kant or even to Nietzsche.”⁵⁶

Through the Derridean analyses and questions, we take into consideration the metaphoricity of the touching and the metonymy of the tactile constitution

52 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 127; *On Touching*, 109.

53 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 120; *On Touching*, 102.

54 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 306; *On Touching*, 271.

55 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 309–310; *On Touching*, 274.

56 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 127; *On Touching*, 109.

imposed upon the ‘history’ of the philosophical discourses on the tactile. Even if the text of Derrida—the *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*—can be a ‘text’ within the scope of our discussion, we need not get involved in the complicated problematic of the touch “from Aristotle to Nancy”, nor in Derrida’s battles. We need only extract some remarks on ‘the sublime touch’ in relation to Nancy’s reflections on the limit. These remarks on the sublime as a touching-the-limit are articulated in such a way that the resistance of the tactile to the dominance of vision opens another philosophical perspective. The discourse of touch—in our case, of the sublime—involves a ‘history’ or a tradition; we thus mean that the touch is in a con-text. This con-text of touch reveals or opens an abyss of the limit, articulating the question of “touching the untouchable”. In Derrida’s *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, the ‘history’ of the philosophical discourse of touch is connected to a long discussion of intuitionism viewed in relation to a hapto-tropologic metaphysics.⁵⁷ I shall not, however, enter into this discussion here. Yet the touch belongs to an articulation of text, to a con-text. As we learn from the analyses of Nancy and Derrida, then, the untouchable implied in the phenomenon of the touch refers back to the regress of the imagination as a play of the limit. The untouchable reveals a certain border to transgress.

In this sense, a context also brings about a heterotopy. Correspondingly, the sense in its reflexivity or in its auto-affection, such as ‘touching oneself’, may call into play the hetero-affection.

5. Conclusion

Let us return to our presupposition about the proper place of the text. We assumed that the text is there where it is appropriate to its place. Now we shall add another explication. This place of appropriation is no more and never *its own* place. Furthermore, it is by becoming alien, out of place, that the hermeneutical circle can be actualized. In the view of Ricoeur, the effect of distanciation allows the action of significance—it activates the signification. Inside the hermeneutical circle, the meaning acquires its own activation; it seems to have no outside. But the mutual reaction between the reader and the text absorbs incessantly the outside; this is the original ambiguity of the concept of the hermeneutical circle.

This ambiguity is deepened by extending the reflexive judgment as a hermeneutical principle. The reflection that connects self to self meets a regression in the sublime. This self-relation is rather a becoming self in the signifying process—an

57 Derrida, *Le toucher*, 138; *On Touching*, 120.

analogy to the imagination that finds its pleasure in its retreat from the sublime. In this regress of the imagination, we recognize an effect of the limit.

What the limit provides is an enlarged ambiguity: a limit to set up the border for a certain abstinence, it convokes nonetheless an (im-)possible transgression. For the imagination, the sublime endorses its incapability at the core of its capacity. The meaning of the sublime is actualized in this possibility of impossibility. This actualization refers to the effect given by the limit, to the possibility of touching-the-limit. The term of limit is itself already a topos. But the touch as a topic constitutes its own con-text. Derrida suspends the syncope intruded or imposed by Nancy in the spirit of touching the limit. Derrida also suspends the decision that connects freedom and the sense (of touching). The ambiguity is suspended, or it is undecided as having any certain sense. Again, we cannot enter into this debate. But some remarks can be deduced.

First, a distanciation is 'extended' as a limit experience, if not interrupted. The distanciation held in the hermeneutical circle, in the historicity or in the play of language, guarantees or inversely supposes a binding of the reader and the text. In this sense, a possible proper place for a text would be its distance. But in the limit experience, such a proper place may be interrupted; we can even say that it is a suspended place, a certain nonplace.

Second, the context of the text is not a redundant expression. A text is, as such, in a constitution, in its context, and it works inversely. Is this inversion a self-sufficient circle? No. The text enters into a differentiation. The place of the text is all the more extravagant, overflowing on the border. The reflexivity of touching oneself is suspended. A text is intruded, questioned, interrupted in a contingent way.

Third, the suspended reflexivity of touching allows the possibility of a hermeneutical graft, which also introduces the displacement of significance. In this sense, a metaphorical use of language resident in the interpretation is to be elaborated in this split of the graft. A textual transplantation means an imposture of life, that is, to live otherwise. This otherness complements the relation between the graft and the contact.

Fourth, we may consider the possibilities of the hermeneutical imagination. While touching the limit, the imagination is in fact in retreat—but it still acts. This retreat is more a reflective usage than a constitutive one in the schematization. In connection to the sublime, the hermeneutical imagination serves as a condition of possibility for the limit experience.

Sixth, a text accumulates its heterogeneity in every *hic et nunc*. The history of effect remains a destiny, but it cannot exclude any contingency of introducing a heterogeneous effect. In fact, the *hic et nunc* of a meaning responds to that void

delivered as a nonplace. It is the place where the question and the interrogation happen—which happens contingently but tangentially.

As a seventh and final remark, it will also be possible to consider the topological effect on the textuality, which may even surpass our discussion here. Still we can throw some light on the effect as reverberation and dissemination of texts. By reverberation, I mean a response from the outside, from afar. It goes with the effect of distancing, but provides a border crossing between the immediate and the mediate in the response structure. Along with the reverberation and the repercussion in and with texts, we can consider the dissemination that corresponds to an echo from everywhere, from elsewhere, or rather from nowhere, from a void.

In short, to interrupt our question about the proper place of the text, it is not always sufficient to have recourse to a spacing, a distancing. There is certain surplus, certain supplement to the text. We can add a voice from elsewhere. We hear this voice from the void. Indeed, we are this voice, we are this void.