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SÉANCE TENANTE: Deconstruction in (the) Place of Ethics Now

Laurent Milesi

There is no ethics without the presence of the other but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, differance, writing. The arche-writing is the origin of morality as of immorality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A violent opening.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 139–40.

One of the perceived hallmarks of ‘vintage deconstruction’, ever since Derrida’s trio of monographs in 1967, has been its questioning of origins and of the plenitude of presence, and more recently – since *Specters of Marx* grappled with issues of spectrality, messianicity and virtuality – of the contemporary and the ‘now’.¹ Equally prevalent, until Critchley’s timely corrective and Bernasconi’s earlier work on Derrida’s indebtedness to Levinas,² had been the impatience with deconstruction’s alleged inability to propose an ethics as well as a politics on grounds that it always defers the *critical* moment of decision-making, whereas both the so-called ethical choice involving responsibility and political action would be deemed to require for maximum efficiency an urgency of response in the here and now, forthwith, *séance tenante*.³

I would like to revisit such undisputed givens in the light of an alternative, Derridean conception of place, space and temporality, and show how these – which, together with the first-person subject, form the deictics of any act of enunciation and thus would open onto a reflection on performativity and *representation* (a word which has to be made to resonate in both its aesthetic and political dimensions) – can lead to a more ‘absolute’, ‘archaic’ demarcation and reinvention of the ‘ethical’.

In *Of Hospitality*, as a basis for his conception of cosmopolitics and unconditional hospitality, Derrida recalls the Hegelian understanding of ‘ethics’ (*Sittlichkeit*) as *ethos*, as a set of customs characteristic of a place to which it lends its political, national, ‘eco-nomic’, etc. identity:

the circumscribed field of *ethos* or ethics, of habitat or time spent as *ethos*, of *Sittlichkeit*, of objective morality, especially in the three instances determined by law and Hegel’s philosophy of law: the *family*, *bourgeois* or *civil society*, and the *State* (or the nation-state) [to which one could add the city as *polis*].⁴

49 Thus, for Derrida, the problem of hospitality, as essential to deconstruction as is
50 justice,⁵ is

51

52 coextensive with the ethical problem. It is always about answering for
53 a dwelling place, for one's identity, one's space, one's limits, for the
54 *ethos* as abode, habitation, house, hearth, family, home.⁶

55

56 The ethical implications of the dwelling place (*demeure*) in relation to the issue of
57 justice-to-come as opposed to law-as-justice will be developed later on, when I argue
58 for what I will call a problematic of the *non-lieu* in deconstructive ethics. For the
59 moment, and as a preliminary step, I wish to engage with Derrida's spatio-temporal
60 redeployment of the 'now' (*maintenant*) according to quasi-originary *différance*, which
61 he famously defined as at once spacing and tempor(al)ization, 'the becoming-time of
62 space and the becoming-space of time'.⁷

63

64

65 *Main-tenance*

66

67 What could be misconstrued as an inventive French rendering of Benjaminian
68 *Jetztzeit* ('now-time')⁸ is first introduced in 'Signature Event Context', in the
69 discussion of the necessity of a more structural, generalizable absence as a pre-
70 condition of any act of communication, such as a signature:

71

72 By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical
73 nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains
74 his having-been-present in a past now, which will remain a future
75 now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of
76 nowness (*maintenance*). This general *maintenance* is somehow inscribed,
77 stapled to present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in
78 the form of the signature.⁹

79

80 Drawing out and reorienting the implications of Husserl's 'retention' and
81 'protention' already analysed in *Speech and Phenomena* and 'Différance',¹⁰ this
82 'general *maintenance*' emphasizes the dis-location (spacing) of time at work in the
83 contemporary (temporalizing) – to which Derrida will return in *Specters of Marx*,
84 substituting to the speculative ontology of presence a spectral hauntology of the
85 messianic and the virtual. Before that, this 'general *maintenance*' will resurface at the
86 crossroads of aesthetics and ethics, in the intervention on architectural space
87 originally known as 'Point de folie – Maintenant l'architecture'.

88

89 In this essay dedicated to the 'follies' of deconstruction-inspired architect Bernard
90 Tschumi in the Parc de la Villette, Derrida attempts to adumbrate a different socio-
91 political and ethical conception of *habitation*, 'the law of the *oikos*' or another economy
92 (NPM, 90: 'oikonomy') of the habitat.¹¹ According to Derrida, Tschumi's
93 architectural follies 'give us to think about what takes place' (NPM, 95), the event in/of
94 a place 'to give a right place to [*fait droit à*] dissociation, but to put it to work *as such* in
95 the space of a gathering' in order to strive towards a spacing and 'a *socius* of dissociation'
96 (NPM, 100; translation modified). Tschumi's emphasis on *dis-* (and *trans-*) processes,

97 noted by Derrida, impacts on the relationship between dis-location and communal
 98 space; it ‘signs a “mad” contract between the *socius* and dissociation’ (NPM, 101) and
 99 interrupts a Hegelian dialectic of spatial geometry first explored in the essay ‘Ousia and
 100 Gramme’ (*Margins of Philosophy*), whereby the ‘now’ (*maintenant*) is merely the
 101 maintained and suppressed (*aufgehoben*) truth of the point (NPM, 101) – hence the self-
 102 dividing, undialectizable *double entendre* of *point de* in ‘point de folie’, pointing at the
 103 ‘atopicality’ of a madness without madness.¹²

104

105 A force joins and holds together the dis-jointed as such. It does not
 106 affect the *dis-* from the outside. The *dis-jointed* itself, maintaining
 107 architecture, the architecture that arrests madness in its dislocation.
 108 (NPM 100)

109

110 Through a differential process of abstraction, *distraction* and also subtraction – of
 111 architecture from its habitual ends in construction and in ‘the value of habitation’¹³ –
 112 Derrida’s *maintenance* points towards an event which breaks with presence,
 113 ‘maintaining’ spacing in dissociation, and the relation to the other as such: ‘Non pas
 114 la main tenue mais la main tendue par-dessus l’abîme’,¹⁴ i.e. not the hand holding the
 115 other here and now – time being the truth of space according to Hegelian dialectic –
 116 holding him or her to a (socially, politically, economically, etc.) pre-ordained place
 117 and position, but the hand held *out to* the other in dissociation over the abyss that
 118 necessarily separates one from the other.

119

120 The complicity between deconstruction and a new sense of gathering, association,
 121 community, maintaining in *maintenant* was similarly emphasized in the interview
 122 with Peter Brunette and David Wills on spatial arts, soon after Derrida commented
 123 on the seeming paradox of putting forward a ‘deconstructive architecture’ for a
 124 ‘discipline’ whose duty and vocation is traditionally to ‘construct’:

125

126 [...] ‘deconstructive architecture’ refers precisely to what happens in
 127 terms of ‘gathering’ [...], the being together [*être ensemble*], the
 128 assembly, the now [*maintenant*], the maintaining. Deconstruction does
 129 not consist simply of dissociating or disarticulating or destroying, but
 130 of affirming a certain ‘being together,’ a certain *maintenant* [...].¹⁵

131

132 Bearing in mind that *droit* (law, right) is the necessary preamble to justice(-to-come)
 133 in deconstruction (‘Force of Law’), to which we will turn in a final movement, the
 134 phrase ‘*faire droit à*’ which I highlighted above can be made to chime with Derrida’s
 135 attempt to redefine and understand anew the *maintenant*:

136

137 *Maintenant*: if the word still designates what happens [...], this
 138 imminence of the *just* (*just* happens, *just* happened, *is just* about to
 139 happen) no longer lets itself be inscribed in the ordered sequence of a
 140 history [...]. (NPM, 88)

141

142 *Maintenant*, therefore, can now be parsed and dissociated, spaced out, as *main tenant*,
 143 *tenant par la main*, holding hand(s) with (*con-*) but a *company* or *accompaniment* that
 144

145 for Derrida, for justice-to-come and a relation to the other-as-such, is always to be
 146 envisaged as an X without X – such as messianicity without messianism, religion
 147 without religion,¹⁶ society without society, the dissociation of the *socius* or
 148 ‘unbinding’ (*déliasion*),¹⁷ a *community* without the *com-*, and therefore open to the
 149 auto-immune as a co-immunity¹⁸ – to which we will eventually add the *non-lieu* in a
 150 last endeavour to formalize the experience of this originary spacing of a place
 151 without place.¹⁹ *Tenir*, and especially *se tenir*, a verb also used to indicate ethical
 152 deportment, can be heard in this revitalized conception of *nowness* whereby one
 153 should also, as it were, ‘speak from / know one’s place’ when one takes up a stand,
 154 stance or position, be constantly aware of the ‘ethical’ determinations of a time and
 155 place of discourse. One may even wish to hear this indirect injunction in the
 156 following, seemingly unrelated passage from *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, when
 157 Derrida reminisces over Cixous’s vision of him walking along a crest, being thus
 158 ‘placed too high’ and deprived of sides, edges and safeguards:

160 [...] I thus saw myself raised, doomed not to put a foot wrong or
 161 step to one side [*pas de côté*] once, without the slightest safeguard,
 162 closer than ever to the fall or the unforgivable mistake. So I would
 163 have no side at all, no side for sidestepping [*pas de côté pour un pas de*
 164 *côté*]. That’s why now I do not know where to put myself [*où me tenir*].
 165 [...] I’d just better stay put [*je n’ai qu’à bien me tenir*].²⁰
 166

167 And soon after,²¹ Derrida instructs us to reread Cixous’s whole *oeuvre*, starting with
 168 *La*, for the relationship between those sides ‘here’ and ‘there’ (*là*) and (*se*) *tenir* as well
 169 as its prepositional derivations. Cixous, whom he had praised for her generalized ‘art
 170 of substitution’ (*remplacement*), which had provided the subtitle of her French *thèse*
 171 *d’état* on James Joyce.
 172

173 Variations on such *teneur* and especially *tenue* are given a more explicitly ethical spin in
 174 one of Derrida’s seminars on absolute, im-possible hospitality, or ‘hostipitality’, where a
 175 whole derivative kinship, an ‘eco-nomy’ of language and etymology, is explored:
 176

177 Being-present as absent for the hôte? Must one be there (living, or
 178 surviving, or not)? [...] The hôte always passing through (road and
 179 itinerary, iterability: come: come back [*viens: reviens*]). But must one
 180 hold back [*re-tenir*] the passing hôte? When does holding back and
 181 retaining [*retenir*] him become detaining [*détenir*] the other as
 182 hostage? (to hold, to hold the other, to entertain and support
 183 [*entre-tenir*] the hôte (entertain and sustain [...])).
 184

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188

189 [...] a seminar on hospitality is a mediation and an exercise of language
 190 or of writing about all the possible statements that one can let ‘hold’
 191 (to hold dear, to maintain, retain, entertain and support, detain
 192 [*tenir, maintenir, retenir, entretenir, détenir*] but also ‘letting [*laisser*]’ [...]).²²

193 These can be read alongside the recall of what a hostage means and implies, from the
 194 short essay also titled ‘Hostipitality’: ‘the hostage is a guarantee for the other, held in
 195 a place and taking its place’ [*tenu dans un lieu et tenant lieu*].²³ It is to this place (*lieu*),
 196 in particular in the self-deconstructing phrase *au lieu de* and what ‘takes place’ in or
 197 with(out) it (*tenir lieu de*), that I would like to hold on, after going off on a tangent,
 198 via Derrida’s reflections on a more ‘homely’ form of the *con-*: the experience of (con)
 199 tact and touching.

200

201

202 Place Holders I – Contingencies and contiguities (*noli me ten[d]ere*)

203

204 Organized around a haptological framework of four philosophemes (extension,
 205 *partes extra partes*, to touch, to touch oneself)²⁴ and offering a piecemeal history of the
 206 philosophy of ‘tact’ in interrelated touches, Derrida’s masterly study *On Touching –*
 207 *Jean-Luc Nancy* extends the ‘sense of touch’ between the cognate families of *tenir*
 208 (Latin *tenere*) and *tendre* (*tendere* - > *entendre*: to hear, understand [from *intendere*: to
 209 spread, ‘tend’ towards]). Such is the thematic spread of Derrida’s analyses that a
 210 recapitulative summary of its main relevant ‘points’ of articulation is first called for,
 211 in quick programmatic shorthand:

212

- 213 – the inaugural ‘point’ or break of dawn (*le jour point*) and the discussion of Psyche’s
- 214 corporeal ‘extension’ (*étendue*), intact, intangible and untouchable (*OT*, 3, 17, 16);
- 215 – the following ‘parenthesis’ on ‘spacing’ or ‘the absolute condition of any
- 216 extension’ (*OT*, 20) and ‘the tactile figure of pure auto-affection’ in *se toucher* (*OT*,
- 217 32; cf. also p. 34);²⁵
- 218 – the law of *tact*²⁶ as im-possible touch-without-touching (*déliaison* again,²⁷ or the
- 219 disjunction of *contact* in the caress²⁸);
- 220 – the necessity to ‘extend an ear’ (*entendre*) otherwise to the relation between ‘to
- 221 tend(er)’ (*tendre*), *intentional*, and ‘tender’ (*tendre*, i.e. what is soft to the touch /
- 222 touches the heart), non-intentional (*OT*, 94), the latter being at the origin of
- 223 ethics (*OT*, 92);
- 224 – the interruptive touch of the (reflexive or reciprocal) *se toucher* (interruption in
- 225 contact, untouchable touchable, etc.; *OT*, 111 ff.), and the relation between
- 226 prosthetic supplementarity and the spacing-out in contact in Nancy’s *corpus*
- 227 (*OT*, 129);
- 228 – the five digressive ‘Tangents’ – ‘five, like the five fingers of the hand, like the five
- 229 senses’ (*OT*, 182) – which in their contingent as well as tangential²⁹ ‘impertinent
- 230 pertinence [...] touch[...] only one point’ (*OT*, 131), focusing on the
- 231 teleological ‘exemplarity’ of the hand (*main*);³⁰
- 232 – the closing ‘Punctuations’ (from *punctum*: point) on a new form of auto-hetero-
- 233 affection (since there can be no touching / being touched by the other without
- 234 first touching oneself): ‘*se toucher-toi*’ (to self-touch you) – featuring, at one point,
- 235 ‘*la tienne*’, a homophone tactfully tensed between ‘yours’ and a subjunctive form of
- 236 *tenir*³¹ – before a ‘Final Retouch’ or *Salve*, ‘[a] nightless, dayless point’ (‘[*p*]oint de
- 237 nuit [...] *point de jour*’), ‘[t]o the point, the break of dawn’ (‘*Au point du jour.*’)³²

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239 A book also about ‘the metonymies of touch’ and prosthesis (but also transplants) as
 240 ‘the metonymic substitute[s]’ (*OT*, 17, 19; also 286), one of its motifs, structuring the

241 linguistically densest passage of ‘Tangent IV’, is *tenir lieu (de)* (to take the place of), a
 242 phrase which Derrida had already ascribed to the ‘supplement’ in his early essay on
 243 Rousseau³³ and which is here redeployed in relation to the spacing of touching as
 244 con-tact, as the experience itself of (an ecotechnic and prosthetic) contact. The
 245 idiomatic sequence, whose near-untranslatability is noted by Derrida himself,³⁴ will
 246 be given both in the original and in English, and will be used as a metonymic
 247 touchstone for what follows:

248

249 *A lieu et tient lieu: a lieu tout en tenant lieu, a lieu pour tenir lieu – par le fait*
 250 *de tenir lieu et en vue de tenir lieu: a lieu de tenir lieu: tenant lieu d’avoir lieu.*³⁵

251

252 *Taking place and taking the place of: taking place while taking the place of,*
 253 *taking place in lieu of taking the place of – by virtue of taking the place of and in*
 254 *view of taking the place of: held (in place) to taking the place of: taking the*
 255 *place of taking place. (OT, 221)*

256

257 Among so many reasons and pretexts of friendship which could be adduced to
 258 account for Derrida’s enduring interest in Nancy’s work is no doubt the latter’s
 259 conception of an ‘inoperative community’, which tacitly informs his sense of touch
 260 and con-tact as both ‘participation *and* partition’ but, in retaining the word
 261 ‘community’, is ultimately at odds with Derrida’s generalized mistrust of the one
 262 and common.³⁶ After quoting from Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural*, Derrida further
 263 comments on ‘the law of *parting* and *sharing* at the heart of touching’, whose spacing³⁷
 264 points to his “‘inoperative community’”, another ethics of “‘the other of the with’”
 265 (*OT*, 199; also 200: ‘time to space itself’, ‘dis-tension’), not unlike his own effort to
 266 imagine a community without community, or co-immunity (i.e. without the name),
 267 which we can now gloss as a tactful touching (one/self-other) otherwise. Derrida’s
 268 ‘interruptive community’ (as it could now be called) is ‘the interruptive experience
 269 of the syncope’ (*OT*, 162), a dissociative ethics of the relation to the other as *déliation*
 270 (which one could interpret as the abstraction of the bond from the binding) and an
 271 irreducibility of the other in the experience of touching (*OT*, 223) which opposes the
 272 more traditional ‘community as co-tact’ (*OT*, 115).³⁸

273

274 As Hillis Miller rightly pointed out, *On Touching* is ruled by a general metonymics
 275 whereby touch-related words substitute (for) one another in an incessant contiguity
 276 which ultimately can only tangentially touch upon touch (as upon Nancy on
 277 touching), the untouchability of touch-without-touching, or sole propriety of these
 278 improper, ‘impertinent’ ‘concepts’ since they all oscillate undecidably between the
 279 literal and the figurative.³⁹ To recast and extend Mallarmé’s famous maxim often
 280 invoked by Derrida himself (*rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu*): ‘nothing takes place but
 281 place’ while metonymically taking the place of (*OT*, 17). Such generalizable
 282 substitutability – which likewise affects the quasi-synonymic chains of nonce words
 283 that traverse Derridean deconstruction – demarcates the fundamentally atopic,
 284 secret and elusive, ‘dislocated’ place of Derrida’s writings which cannot ‘stay in
 285 place’ (*ne tiennent pas en place*, as one would say in French) and instead stage an
 286 affirmative place which is ‘not a place that really exists’,⁴⁰ ‘a place that is not a place,
 287 a place-no-place where events take place without taking place’.⁴¹

288

289 Derrida's suspensive final 'point' to his last 'Tangent' – after contrasting Chrétien's
 290 and Nancy's conceptions of touch, incarnation and *corpus* as '[t]wo ways of thinking
 291 substitution' – suggestively ties together spacing (*emplacement*), *khora*, substitution
 292 (*remplacement*) and hospitality in a way that will provide us with a convenient
 293 stepping stone if one bears in mind his earlier statement, in *The Gift of Death*, that '[t]
 294 he ethical involves me in substitution':⁴²

295

296 What there would remain to think is the place, the placing of this
 297 replacing, or the neutral spacing (*khora*, I might say), that would still
 298 extend its hospitality to this virtual substitution of substitution, unless
 299 it should detain [*retienne*] it forever as a hostage. (*OT*, 262)⁴³

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Place Holders II – In (the) Place of

In the Seminar on 'Hostipitality', within a context which probes into the
 significance of using a hostage to political ends while thus resorting to an 'ethics of
 substitution', Derrida muses on the meaning of substitution, which the classical
 French dictionary *Littré* defines as the 'action that consists in putting a thing, a
 person *in the place of* [*à la place de*] another'. Derrida further reflects:

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In the place of – locution which names the occupied space, the destined
 location [*emplacement*], natural or not, even the lodging, the habitat,
 the *lieu* (one also says, for substitution, '*ceci au lieu de cela*'), 'at the place
 of' [*à la place de,* '*au lieu de,*' '*en lieu et place de*'] [...]⁴⁴

If, for something called 'communication' to 'take place', it is the pre-condition that
 any sign (which Derrida prefers to call 'trace', 'gram', 'mark', etc.)⁴⁵ be iterable,
 graftable and thus be able to operate *in absentia* rather than merely in the here and
 now of a unique, original utterance ('Signature Event Context'), this universal
 singularity comes up against the logic of substitution – or rather the absence thereof –
 in the case of death and witnessing. This issue is taken up in *Demeure*, a patient,
 detailed study of Maurice Blanchot's short, enigmatic semi-autobiographical text
The Instant of My Death, which contrasts Celan's momentous statement '*Niemand zeugt
 für den Zeugen*' (nobody witnesses for the witness) with a quotation from Blanchot's
The Step Not Beyond associating attestation with the Neuter, 'the singular place of a
 passion beyond the opposition of passive and active'⁴⁶ – and let us recall in passing
 that, within some fifteen years of each other, *différance* and *khôra* were equally defined
 as neither passive nor active.⁴⁷

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Demeure also dwells, is built on Derrida's attempt to locate the testimonial, juridical,
 etc. dimensions of the French idioms *mise en demeure*, *à demeure* and suchlike,
 undecidably caught between the impossibility of deciding and the impossibility of
 remaining [*demeurer*] in the undecidable,⁴⁸ i.e. the aporia of the critical, ethical
 moment or 'point' of decision (as well as interpretation):

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336

I will attempt to speak of this necessary but impossible abidance
 [*demeurance*] of the abode [*demeure*]. How can one decide what

337 remains abidingly [*à demeure*].⁴⁸ How is one to hear the term – the noun
 338 or the verb, the adverbial phrases – ‘*abode*’ [*la demeure*], ‘that which
 339 *abides* [*ce qui demeure*],’ ‘that which holds *abidingly* [*ce qui se tient à*
 340 *demeure*],’ ‘that by which one must *abide* [*ce qui met en demeure*]’?⁴⁹
 341

342 Further on, the inessentiality and ‘space’ of literature – which for Derrida has the
 343 right to say any- and everything (*le droit de tout dire*)⁵⁰ – is affirmed as a lastingly
 344 untenable place, a ‘passion’ as ‘the endurance of an indeterminate or undecidable
 345 limit’, resisting being maintained in a place:
 346

347 There is no essence or substance of literature: literature is not. It does
 348 not exist. It does not remain at home, *abidingly* [*à demeure*] in the
 349 identity of a nature or even of a historical being identical with itself.
 350 It does not maintain itself abidingly [*à demeure*], at least if ‘*abode*
 351 [*demeure*] designates the essential stability of a place; it only remains
 352 [*demeure*] *where* and *if* ‘to be abidingly [*être à demeure*] in some ‘abiding
 353 order [*mise en demeure*] means something else.’⁵¹
 354

355 One reason why literature is so special and should be upheld – including against
 356 those that would want to legislate over its contents (and here one should not forget
 357 Derrida’s instrumental role in setting up the International Parliament of Writers at
 358 the time of the *fatwa* against Rushdie) – is that its irreducibly undecidable status,
 359 between fiction and testimony, even for instance when a text claims to be a truthful
 360 autobiography, its defiance of a stable, stabilized, ‘maintained’ resting place, confers
 361 upon it the privilege of being the utmost test for, and experience of, the suspension of
 362 judgment. In the 1987 intervention at the Collège International de Philosophie
 363 forum on ‘Ethics and Politics’ alluded to in the beginning, Derrida had already
 364 outlined in not dissimilar terms the possibility of a new place or space beyond ethics
 365 as it is usually constrained to a decisional space in our society, a non-space of the
 366 form X without X to which he will return time and again in the 1990s:
 367

368 What you have just evoked is a zone of experience; it is on the basis of
 369 nondecision, not of indecision but of nondecision, that the decision
 370 emerges. I would completely agree with you in making me attentive
 371 to this experience that is not commanded by a decision. I would
 372 simply have some reservation when you call this space a *political* or
 373 *ethical* space. I think that, in our tradition and in our society, when we
 374 think of ethics and politics, a decision is irreducible. The moment of
 375 the decision one cannot do without it. And this community, this
 376 dimension of being together that would not be ruled by the necessity
 377 of decision, I am very attentive to it, indeed, but I will not define it as
 378 ethical or political. There are, perhaps, dimensions of the community,
 379 of being together – the word *community* has always bothered me a
 380 little – of being together in the interruption, as one says today, in a
 381 relation without relation, which are, perhaps, neither ethical nor
 382 political. But when there are ethics and politics – at that moment, one
 383
 384

385 must decide. [...] And what one calls *ethics* or *politics* in our culture, is
 386 the moment at which one cannot not decide. There are decisions to be
 387 made, which are inevitable, and not decide is still to decide. The
 388 space of the decision here is irreducible. This does not prevent us from
 389 thinking of something that is before or after or further... This does
 390 not prevent us from being-in-the-other or from opening, from
 391 knowing that a space is open with the other in which this decisionism
 392 does not take place. Nevertheless, there are places where it takes
 393 place. And this taking place is what one calls, I think, the *ethical* and
 394 the *political* in our society.⁵²
 395

396 Taking place, here and now: this is what politics and ethics are also (said to be)
 397 eventually about, as Derrida recalls in 'Force of Law' in relation to the instant of
 398 madness of the *just* decision, whose urgency and precipitation necessarily interrupts
 399 the juridico-ethico-political status quo and order.⁵³ Propr(i)ety or the appropriate-
 400 ness of place is also at issue in the second part of *Khôra* when it alludes to the Socratic
 401 discourse, featured towards the opening of Plato's *Timaeus*, which distinguishes
 402 between philosophers and politicians, both having a proper place ('*ont lieu*'),⁵⁴ versus
 403 the poets and sophists who migrate from place to place, and the non-place which
 404 Socrates feigns to occupy in his address, 'in the neutral space or a place without
 405 place'.⁵⁵ Hence Derrida's comment in *Archive Fever* that the virtual 'takes place'
 406 otherwise and by necessity makes us renegotiate 'the *full and effective actuality* of the
 407 taking-place, the reality [...] of the archived event',⁵⁶ and more crucially, towards
 408 the end of *Specters of Marx*, his call to rethink what we still unquestionably place
 409 under 'politics', and the age-old, implicit conception of the political space of
 410 'representation' still bound with presence in spite of all the emergent tele-
 411 technologies.⁵⁷ It is from this usual place for politics and ethics that deconstruction
 412 aims to demarcate a non-place that will reveal those constitutive differences in
 413 placements and bring to light the 'ante-primal' (*avant-premier*)⁵⁸ idiom for absolute
 414 responsibility, not the question of (the 'present' of) being and essence (*es gibt Sein*)
 415 but the issue of place: *il y a lieu (de)*, as one says in French about the injunction of a
 416 dictating necessity. A pre-critical, pre-ethical non-space upon which the possibility
 417 of any *ethos* is therefore conditional, which I would now like to summon by another
 418 untranslatable term, borrowed from legal discourse: *non-lieu* (lit.: non-place), used
 419 when a plaintiff is debarred from a case and a verdict is returned by not being
 420 returned, when conditions for the exercise of justice are not met.
 421

422 '*Non-lieu*', or, How to be just in (the) place of ethics⁵⁹
 423

424 [...] *justly mad; just to be mad; just like a certain kind of madness (OT, 56)*
 425

426 Originally collected in the 1987 *Poikilia* for Jean-Pierre Vernant, the essay on the
 427 Platonic *khôra* elaborates the difficult reading/translation of the non-place of such a
 428 'place', which gives rise to – *donne lieu* – without giving anything like an essential
 429 place or foundation,⁶⁰ a spacing (*différance*) in a withdrawal of 'the place' from
 430 'place', place without place. As opposed to the presence-as-reference/referent of a
 431 negativized essence in the *via negativa* or negative theology, *khôra* is neither a
 432

433 reference nor a referent, a ‘(non-)place’ which ‘takes place’ [*a lieu*] without a place
 434 instead – *au lieu de*: ‘There is *khôra* but *the khôra* does not exist.’⁶¹ Or in Mallarmé’s
 435 celebrated poetic formula again, *rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu*; but a taking place as the
 436 pre-originary spacing of pre-critical *différance*.

437

438 One of the significant additions to the 1993 republication in book form of the essay
 439 on *khôra* is the framing opening echo of the *arrivant*, which, in the context of
 440 contemporaneous writings like *Aporias* and *Specters of Marx*, testifies to the discreet
 441 recentring on issues of ethics, responsibility and the messianic, of Derrida’s
 442 meditations on a more originary, unanticipatable, ante-primal ‘place’. His opening
 443 in the original, ‘*Khôra nous arrive . . .*’,⁶² allows us to reread this necessary prior-to-
 444 the-first place or pre-originary (non-)place as absolute giving as well as pre-given,
 445 though not of an essential kind, which conditions subsequent determinations of
 446 places and from which questions of ethics, hospitality or responsibility towards the
 447 Other, etc. ought to be asked for their radical legitimacy. An aporetic topography
 448 combined with a necessity to apprehend ‘*an abyss in these places*’, to which Derrida will
 449 return in ‘Faith and Knowledge’,⁶³ with the abstract ‘figuration’ of the desert within
 450 the desert, that ante-primal withdrawal of place from place or ‘retreat’ [*retraite*], an
 451 aporetic space that gives place to, and thus enables the various discourses on, ethics
 452 to take place – a double aporia since the retreat within also means withdrawal,
 453 without, as in the unbinding within the communal, the relation without relation in
 454 society, or re-ligion without re-ligion.⁶⁴ Thus, for Derrida, the religious without
 455 religion would be the originary *lien sans lien* (*déliasion*) that would make possible the
 456 gathering together without / before community or sociality (‘*the social nexus*’) that
 457 erases subjectivities in the name of a promised collectivity and revealed universality,
 458 the free inhabiting together of / *Mitsein* in a place. If ‘Before the Law’ *il y a lieu*
 459 (one must, it is necessary),⁶⁵ such anteriority, before the necessary foundation of law-
 460 as-justice posited in ‘Force of Law’, can only take place as the risk of critical
 461 suspensiveness in the *non-lieu* of justice-to-come.⁶⁶

462

463 I began by alluding to the timely re-reading of Derrida, which, from the late 1980s
 464 onwards, set out to ethicize deconstruction, usually with a Levinasian agenda.
 465 A recent challenge to this historically necessary corrective came from **Martin**
 466 **Hägglund’s** razor-sharp *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, which mined the
 467 hitherto untapped significance of Derrida’s mention of a violent ‘nonethical opening
 468 of ethics’ in *Of Grammatology*⁶⁷ in conjunction with the becoming-space of time and
 469 becoming-time of space in *différance* to mount a cogent claim for deconstruction’s
 470 assertion of an inaugural arche-violence and radical evil in the opening of life.
 471 Kicking off with an outline of the ‘ultratrascendental’ trace-structure of time and
 472 ‘succession’ in general in order to argue for the autoimmunity of life and emphasize
 473 that human desire for immortality is in fact a desire for survival, *Radical Atheism* then
 474 takes head-on in three successive chapters three reductive readings of Derridean
 475 deconstruction in terms of ethics (Critchley, Bernasconi, Drucilla Cornell),⁶⁸
 476 religion (Caputo) and politics (Laclau, via Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis).
 477 Hägglund’s strategy throughout is to highlight a common lack of ‘radicality’,
 478 stemming from critics’ failure to gauge the importance of the trace-structure and
 479 autoimmunity, around correlated sets of themes that include the unconditionality of
 480 hospitality in relation to an ethics of alterity, the religious ideal of absolute

481 immunity, and the desire for plenitude in political commitment to ‘justice’ and
 482 ‘democracy’. These sites of contention subsequently gave rise to several debates and
 483 polemics, among which those with Laclau (on the role of the desire and ‘drive for
 484 survival’ versus Laclau’s hegemonic ‘drive for fullness’ in radical politics), Attridge
 485 (on the ethical relation between conditional and unconditional hospitality,
 486 calculability and incalculability) and Caputo (on the uncontaminated priority of
 487 the good, equated with ‘God’, in his ‘weak theology’ versus autoimmunity, radical
 488 evil (both from ‘Faith and Knowledge’) and Häggglund’s logic of radical atheism –
 489 displacing a former debate on the relation between deconstruction and negative
 490 theology—are perhaps the most notorious as they bear more crucially on the core of
 491 Häggglund’s trenchant project.⁶⁹ While in some respects these various controversies
 492 and interventions are intricately enmeshed, I will avail myself of Häggglund’s
 493 Nietzschean penchant ‘to philosophize with the hammer’⁷⁰ and forcefully extract
 494 those ethics-related strands in his replies and responses that more specifically
 495 dovetail with the arguments and scope of this essay.

496
 497 A central charge against Häggglund is his failure to operate a more interruptive
 498 ‘contaminating logics’ typical of deconstruction, rather than performing dialectical
 499 reversals (Laclau), as well as the ‘one-sidedness’ of his conception of hospitality as a
 500 prime instance of the relationship to the other, which voids any ethics of
 501 unconditional hospitality of the power to decide in front of the event (Attridge).⁷¹
 502 Indeed, for Häggglund, it is not ‘unconditional hospitality to otherness’ which is
 503 ethical, since unconditionality is a necessary condition of the event’s unpredict-
 504 ability and ‘[u]nconditional hospitality is thus another name for the exposure to
 505 temporal alterity’,⁷² but the resulting need to calculate with incalculable
 506 circumstances in order to be able to make justifiable decisions. Hence, the following
 507 clear-cut position, backed up by key passages from Derrida’s more recent texts as
 508 evidence which are worth quoting more fully:

509
 510 The ethical is therefore a matter of responding to alterity by making
 511 decisions and calculations, whereas the unconditional is the non-
 512 ethical opening of ethics, namely, the exposure to an undecidable
 513 other that makes it necessary to decide and calculate in the first
 514 place.⁷³

515
 516 I have always, consistently and insistentlly, held *unconditional hospitality*,
 517 as *impossible*, to be *heterogeneous* to the *political*, the *juridical*, and even the
 518 *ethical*. But the impossible is not nothing. It is even that which
 519 happens, which comes, by definition. [...] There are, it is true,
 520 paradoxical or aporetic relations between two concepts that are at
 521 once *heterogeneous and inseparable*, *unconditional* hospitality and *conditional*
 522 *hospitality* (that is, the only one, let me repeat it, that belongs to the
 523 order of laws, rules, and norms - whether ethical, juridical, or political
 524 [...]).⁷⁴

525
 526
 527 Political, juridical, and ethical responsibilities have their place, if they
 528 take place, only in this transaction - which is each time unique, like an

529 event ⁷⁵ between these two hospitalities, the unconditional and the
 530 conditional.⁷⁵

531

532 Therefore, for Hägglund, ‘[w]hat Derrida describes under the heading of
 533 unconditional hospitality is [...] the non-ethical opening of ethics’ and ‘[t]he
 534 task of deconstructive analysis is not to choose between calculation and the
 535 incalculable, but to articulate their co-implication and the autoimmunity that
 536 follows from it.’⁷⁶

537

538 Co-implication (of the conditional and unconditional, calculable and incalculable,
 539 but also of evil in good, death in life, etc.) is a crucial argumentative fulcrum here and
 540 elsewhere, and one should not forget that it already operates in the reversible
 541 formulation of *différance* linking spacing and temporality. Its logic also haunts another
 542 recurrent facet in these polemics: the strangely enduring ‘critical’ opposition between
 543 the internal and the external which Hägglund’s interlocutors often insist on
 544 maintaining, in spite of Derrida’s near-constant problematization of margins, limits
 545 and borders, parergonal effects of inscription, or specific texts like ‘The Outside **Is** the
 546 Inside’ (*Of Grammatology*) and ‘Fors’, on the untenability of a topical distinction
 547 between introjection and incorporation, an inner or outer forum of the self
 548 (*for intérieur* or public *forum*), etc. Hence, for Hägglund (to redirect Laclau’s own
 549 critique), Caputo’s pious argument about the priority of the good is still entrenched in
 550 a set of binary, deconstructible oppositions – between the originary, internal promise
 551 (good) and the externally derived threat (evil) – and fails to grasp the structural
 552 necessity and logical co-implication that always already operates and autoimmunely
 553 contaminates or ‘haunts’ from within.⁷⁷ Restaged in terms of *différance*, the
 554 unconditional is ‘the co-implication of time and space that [Derrida] calls *spacing*.’⁷⁸

555

556 The insistence on the structural *inscription*⁷⁹ of radical autoimmunity – to recall that
 557 the Derridean formula developed by Hägglund, ‘the nonethical opening of ethics’,
 558 was first ventured in conjunction with *archi-écriture*, and since Caputo objects to
 559 Hägglund’s choice of ‘descriptive’ (vs. prescriptive) – is reminiscent of the even
 560 fiercer debate that had pitted Derrida and Lacan (and their respective followers)
 561 against each other about the joint issues – and the necessary correlation in Lacan’s
 562 interpretive system of the Seminar – of the non-partitivity of the letter and its sure-
 563 fire arrival at its destination in Poe’s tale of ‘The Purloined Letter’, a Lacanian
 564 ‘desire for plenitude’ countered by Derrida’s structural ‘law’ of dissemination and
 565 *destinerrance*.

566

567 The divisibility of the letter [...] is what chances and sets off course,
 568 without guarantee of return, the remaining [*restance*] of anything
 569 whatsoever: a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and from
 570 the moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say
 571 that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to
 572 arrive torments it with an **internal** drifting.⁸⁰

573

574 Thus, and comparably, Hägglund is right to insist on what I will rephrase as the self-
 575 divisibility of/within autoimmunity (as in Derrida’s use of the double-edged *sauf par*:
 576

577 save by in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ to counter religion’s desire for the unscathed⁸¹),
 578 for which Caputo refuses to make allowances in his apprehension of deconstruction
 579 as ‘ankhôral religion without religion’. To use another ‘privative’ formula, I would
 580 venture that the over-zealous ethicization of Derrida has also resulted in a
 581 paradoxical ‘ethics without ethics’, which subtracts the dimension of spacing and of
 582 the dis-location of place (*ethos*) from deconstruction and ultimately dismisses the
 583 autoimmunitary dimension of the nonethical opening of ethics. A *non-lieu* has been
 584 dispensed unjustly in place of the differential (*non-*)*lieu* of deconstruction . . .

585
 586 Whereas many of the polemics that ensued from Hägglund’s *Radical Atheism* dealt, in
 587 one way or another, with the temporal dimension and anchoring of his project
 588 (‘taking [the] time [to live]’), the aim of this essay, and its arc from the spacing of
 589 *main-tenance* to the *non-lieu*, was also to ‘relocate’ Derrida’s alleged ‘ethical turn’⁸²
 590 squarely within the broader context of his long-standing thinking of place and
 591 ‘taking place’, which is indissociable from some of the major structural operators of
 592 deconstruction, such as *différance*. More specifically, its belated contribution to the
 593 recent debates surrounding deconstruction and ethics lies in its attempt to articulate
 594 the ‘(non-)place’ of the ethical in Derrida as a reformulation of the violent spacing
 595 (‘becoming-space of time’) at work in ‘the nonethical opening of ethics’.⁸³

596
 597 Such in my view is Derrida’s call for a more archaic, ‘ethical’ place (without place),
 598 out of place and out of time – his *maintenance* or, in *Specters of Marx*, ‘the dis-
 599 adjustment of the *con*-temporary’⁸⁴ – the desert within the desert of what the French
 600 double syntax calls ‘*le risque en demeure indéniabile*’⁸⁵ rather than a *mise en demeure*, ab-
 601 stracted, sub-tracted through an abyssal hollowing out of the desert, of what ‘place’
 602 and ‘in (the) place of (*au lieu de*) mean, and which famously prompted Emmanuel
 603 Levinas to observe, in ‘Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise’, that Philosophy’s
 604 panorama, before and after Derrida, shifts from ‘everything is in place’ to ‘nothing is
 605 left inhabitable for thought’, ‘everything is [. . .] left desolate’.⁸⁶

606
 607
 608 Notes

609 ¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xiii. About the ‘non-
 610 contemporaneity with itself of the living present’ see also
 611 24–25, 39, 73, 75.

612 ² See Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, and the
 613 two items under ‘Bernasconi’ in the Bibliography.
 614 In his more recent *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*,
 615 Critchley still traces the ethical potential of
 616 Derrida’s work to Levinasian ethical experience.

617 ³ Derrida addresses this point for e.g. in *Nego-*
 618 *tiations*, 302 (‘Ethics and Politics Today’).

619 ⁴ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 45 (see also 23). The
 620 equation between *ethos* and *habitus* is also
 621 mentioned in the title essay of *Negotiations*, 13,
 622 and accounts for this same word ‘habitat’ being
 623 used to describe the global place of Derrida’s
 624 infinite ethics in *The Gift of Death*, 69.

⁵ See Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 364 (‘Hostipi-
 624 tality’): ‘Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-

home; deconstruction is hospitality to the other
 [. . .]’, and the famous axiomatic equation
 ‘Deconstruction is justice’ in ‘Force of Law,’ 243.

⁶ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 149, 151. In *The Ethics of*
Deconstruction, Critchley recalls the more specifi-
 cally Heideggerian determination of *ethos* as abode
 or dwelling place (15).

⁷ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 8–10, 15 (‘Dif-
 férence,’ 8). The importance of this reversible
 formula, related to the trace as (palindromically)
écart (gap), was repeated years later in connection
 with democracy in *Rogues*, 38. ‘[I]rreducible *spacing*
 (the first word of any deconstruction, valid for
 space as well as time)’ is also emphasized in *On*
Touching, 181, to which we shall return. It is worth
 recalling that *maintenant* is derived from Latin *manu*
tenendo (the gerund of *manu tenere*: to maintain):
 while holding in the hand, hence rapidity of

625 gesture, then temporal promptitude or extreme
626 local proximity, and temporal proximity (*Le Trésor*
627 *de la Langue Française informatisé* online, at [http://
628 atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.html](http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.html), s. v. ‘maintenant’).

629 ⁸ This cautionary remark is also a pretext for
630 signalling one of the distant touchstones of this
631 essay: understanding how in Derridean thought
632 the insistent motif of the *avenir* / *à venir* or time to
633 come, which is reduced to an eternal deferment of
634 politics by its detractors – justice-to-come,
635 democracy-to-come, but also a more aprioric,
636 disjunctive messianicity without messianism to
637 which we will soon allude – is not to be too hastily
638 assimilated into a theological (Jewish) tradition, of
639 the kind which has been recently traced out in
640 *Levine, A Weak Messianic Power*, nor even with
641 Walter Benjamin’s historico-materialist notion of
642 ‘weak messianic power’, in spite of some degree of
643 consonance; see Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 181, n. 2
644 (also 21, 55), and ‘Marx & Sons,’ 250–1. For
645 arguments in this sense, see also Ware, ‘Dialectic
646 of the Past’ – who notes that ‘For Benjamin,
647 messianic time is a way of viewing the past
648 ethically. Disjointed time, on the other hand,
649 allows Derrida to view the future-to-come as the
650 site of justice.’ (107) – and Khatib, ‘Derrida &
651 Sons’.

652 ⁹ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 328.

653 ¹⁰ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, especially in
654 ‘Différance’: ‘The use of language or the employ-
655 ment of any code which implies a play of forms
656 [...] also presupposes a retention and protention
657 of differences, a spacing and temporalizing, a play
658 of traces.’ (146)

659 ¹¹ Derrida, ‘No (Point of) Madness,’ especially 90,
660 91. Hereafter NPM with page references in the
661 text. For a chronology of Derrida’s ten-year-long
662 engagement with architecture (1984–1993) and
663 an examination of the relation between the present
664 and the politics of space and place (‘ontopology’;
665 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 82), see Vitale, ‘Jacques
666 Derrida and the Politics of Architecture’, as well as
667 ‘The Law of the *Oikos*’, which refers to Derrida’s
668 unpublished 1985–86 seminar ‘Nationalité
669 et nationalisme philosophique; *mythos, logos, topos*’
670 in his discussion of *khora*.

671 ¹² Let us also recall, after Derrida, that *atopos*:
672 without place, also meant ‘mad’ or ‘extravagant’
673 in Greek. See Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking,’
674 163, and *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, and Geniuses*, 59.
675 Derrida has often quoted or alluded to Kierke-
676 gaard’s famous, if elusive maxim ‘the instant of
677 decision is madness’ ever since it featured as the
678 first epigraph to his 1963 lecture on Foucault,
679 ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’ – see
680 Bennington, ‘A Moment of Madness’ – which
681 can be regarded as a ‘watchword’ for deconstruc-

tion as invention and its frequent self-determi-
nation as ‘the experience of the impossible’. See for
e.g. the interview ‘A “Madness” Must Watch over
Thinking,’ in *Points...*, 363, and *On Touching*, 57,
which associates the madness of thinking the event
with ‘the impossible is what takes place’.

682 ¹³ See Derrida’s essay ‘Fifty-two Aphorisms,’ in
683 Papadakis, *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*, 68 (no.
684 29), and also 72, in the following discussion with
685 Chris Norris.

686 ¹⁴ Derrida, *Psyche. Invention de l’autre*, 492. Cf.
687 NPM, 102.

688 ¹⁵ Derrida, in Brunette and Wills, ‘The Spatial
689 Arts,’ 27.

690 ¹⁶ What John Caputo, combining it with *khora* as
691 place without (the) place, called ‘*ankhōral* religion
692 without religion’; see Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears*
693 *of Jacques Derrida*, 189.

694 ¹⁷ For this ‘interruptive unravelling’ (*déliation*) as
695 the condition of the social bond of a ‘community’,
696 of a bond (*socius* or *desmos*) without bond, see for
697 example Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’
698 especially 64.

699 ¹⁸ Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 51.

700 ¹⁹ Derrida recalls that it is within a certain
701 experience of spacing and space that resistance to
702 philosophical authority can be produced. See
703 Brunette and Wills, ‘The Spatial Arts,’ 19, and also
704 Derrida’s contemporaneous essay ‘Fifty-two
705 Aphorisms,’ in Papadakis, *Deconstruction Omnibus*
706 *Volume*, especially 68 (no. 26), about ‘to *make space*’,
707 which states that the ‘aphorism’, succinctly
708 described as ‘*un point c’est tout*’ (68, no. 25), has
709 ‘no inhabitable place’, ‘[n]o housing’ (68–69, nos.
710 40, 41), and concludes: ‘To maintain [...], despite
711 all the reappropriations, the chance of the
712 aphorism, is to keep [...] the promise of making
713 room for [*donner lieu*] [...]’ (69, no. 52).

714 ²⁰ Derrida, *H. C. for Life*, 49. This episode was first
715 evoked in a 1992 talk by Cixous herself on the
716 occasion of the ten-day conference ‘Le passage des
717 frontières’; see Cixous, ‘What is it o’clock?’, 48.

718 ²¹ Derrida, *H. C. for Life*, 50–51.

719 ²² Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 408–09 (‘Hostipital-
720 ity’).

721 ²³ Derrida, ‘Hostipitality,’ 9.

722 ²⁴ Derrida, *On Touching*, 16; hereafter *OT* with
723 page references in the text.

724 ²⁵ Commenting on Nancy’s *The Experience of*
725 *Freedom*, this second chapter of the first part
726 associates spacing, decision and ethos (*OT*, 21–
727 22), considering the mouth as the opening that
728 spaces itself out, at once place and non-place of a
729 dis-location (*OT*, 28–29).

730 ²⁶ Formulated in French, as on the ‘model’ of
731 *centre* and *khōra*: ‘il y a là loi du tact’; see Derrida,
732 *Le toucher*, 82.

673 ²⁷ Derrida, *Le toucher*, 86.

674 ²⁸ ‘toucher sans toucher [...], donner sans
675 retenir, mais avec retenue, donner à tenir sans
676 tenir [...]; tiens!’ (Derrida, *Le toucher*, 91); cf. *On*
677 *Touching*, 76. There is no space here to do justice to
678 the untranslatable versatility of the French
679 imperative *tiens!*

680 ²⁹ Derrida, *Le toucher*, 151 – cf. *OT*, 131, which
681 strangely omits the first adjective; these also form
682 part of the chain of subtitles for Tangents IV and V.

683 ³⁰ Just as touch has often featured in philosophical
684 tradition as the essential metonymy of the
685 ‘community’ of senses *par excellence* (*OT*, *passim*).
686 See also Derrida, ‘Heidegger’s Hand,’ and chapter
687 11 of Hillis Miller’s *For Derrida* (‘Touching Derrida
688 Touching Nancy’), especially 285 ff.

689 ³¹ And elided in the translation; compare *Le toucher*
690 314, and *OT*, 278.

691 ³² See Derrida, *Le toucher*, 343, and *OT*, 307.

692 ³³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 145 (‘That Danger-
693 ous Supplement...’).

694 ³⁴ Derrida has often evoked deconstruction as an
695 (other) experience of the (im-possible) translation,
696 here subsequently defined as an event which ‘*a lieu*
697 *de tenir lieu*’ (*Le toucher*, 251); cf. *OT*, 221.

698 ³⁵ Derrida, *Le toucher*, 249.

699 ³⁶ See Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, 25.

700 ³⁷ Spacing (‘spacing space’), and the sharing of
701 being and singularities as spacing, is also evoked in
702 the discussion of Nancy’s *The Experience of Freedom*
703 in *Rogues*, 46, 50.

704 ³⁸ See also *Rogues*, 153, which discusses ‘the
705 incalculable event’, ‘the irreducible spacing of the
706 very faith, credit, or belief without which there
707 would be no social bond [...]’.

708 ³⁹ Miller, *For Derrida*, 270, 273.

709 ⁴⁰ Derrida, in Brunette and Wills, ‘The Spatial
710 Arts,’ 26, who then relates it to Blanchot’s ‘come
711 [*viens*]’.

712 ⁴¹ Miller, ‘Derrida’s Topographies,’ 307; also
713 196–7. Cf. Anne Berger’s shrewd formulation to
714 Derrida in the interview “‘Dialanguages’”: ‘It
715 would be as if, in a certain way, you knew the place
716 that would allow you to write it [i.e. the book to be
717 written], as if you had found it, and at the same
718 time it were lost to you.’ (*Points...*, 149).

719 ⁴² See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 61. The
720 sacrificial violence at the heart of this substitut-
721 ability is performatively at work in Derrida’s
722 deceptively non-tautological catchword ‘*tout autre*
723 *est tout autre*’ (68 and chap. 4, 82 ff.) and in the
724 subsequent passage: ‘As soon as I enter into a
725 relation with the other [...], I know that I can
726 respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by
727 sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in
728 the same way, in the same instant, to all the
729 others.’

⁴³ For another conjunction of *khora* and spacing,
see *Rogues*, 82, but also xiv as ‘another “taking-
place,” the irreplaceable place or placement of a
“desert in the desert”’.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 416 (‘Hostipitality’).

⁴⁵ For a succinct development of this substitution,
see Milesi, ‘Semiology and Deconstruction’.

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Demeure*, 31.

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 9 (‘Différance’);
‘How to Avoid Speaking,’ 173. For a correlation
between ‘differential space’, conceived as between
‘temporal-messianic’ and geometrical (ideal), and
khora (‘Derrida’s attempt to recast différance in
[...] its [...] spatial [aspect]’), see for e.g. Srajek,
In the Margins of Deconstruction, 241 (245), and the
whole section on ‘Khora’ (241–46).

⁴⁸ Compare with Derrida, *The Beast and the*
Sovereign, 173: ‘The point is that it is a matter of
indecision or an indeterminacy between a deter-
minacy and an indeterminacy.’

⁴⁹ Derrida, *Demeure*, 16.

⁵⁰ See Derrida, “‘This Strange Institution Called
Literature,’” 36.

⁵¹ Derrida, *Demeure*, 28.

⁵² Derrida, *Negotiations*, 311–12 (‘Ethics and
Politics’).

⁵³ Derrida, ‘Force of Law,’ 255.

⁵⁴ See Derrida, *Khôra*, 55 – in English: ‘*Khôra*,’
107.

⁵⁵ Derrida, ‘*Khôra*,’ 109. In *Architectural Philosophy*,
Andrew Benjamin poses as a ‘legitimate’ conse-
quence of the ‘foundational’ question about the
place that generates all places – the ‘logic of
khora’ – the question of the ‘place of the question
of place’, as the question which ‘cannot be
included within that which it is taken to found’,
‘the problem of the foundation of both law and
ethos’ (13 ff. [15, 14]) analogous to the ‘forceful’
foundation of law-as-justice in ‘Force of Law’.

The *lieu sans lieu* can be traced back to Blanchot’s
use of the formula in *The Infinite Conversation*, 385
(‘The Absence of the Book’, about the neutral),
and *Friendship*, 116 (see also 47). As if to tacitly
point to a common leitmotif, it was finally reprised
towards the end of a 1990 homage to the French
philosopher; see Blanchot, ‘Thanks (Be Given) to
Jacques Derrida,’ 323 (‘(atopical) place without
place’).

⁵⁶ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 66.

⁵⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, especially 163, 169.

⁵⁸ For this notion, see Derrida, *Monolingualism of*
the Other, 64 (‘prior-to-the-first’), 67–69, 71; and
‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 21, about the ‘chora’ or
‘desert in the desert’ – for which see also Milesi,
‘Thinking (Through) the Desert’.

⁵⁹ In what follows, the more ironic, self-decon-
structing ambiguity of ‘just’ should also be borne in

721 mind, as in the self-assumed ‘*je suis juste en tant que*
 722 *Juif*: I am just (about) as a Jew, however missed
 723 out in the translation of ‘Abraham, the Other,’ 11.
 724 See also Milesi, ‘Portrait of H. C. as J. D. and
 725 Back,’ 76, and 78–79 in connection with the
 726 intersecting motif, first uttered in ‘Circumfession’
 727 of ‘*le dernier des Juifs*’ (the last of the Jews).
 728 ⁶⁰ For the deconstruction of this term, see Derrida,
 729 ‘Force of Law,’ 230–98, and ‘Faith and Knowl-
 730 edge,’ 19 (about the ‘desert’ as found(er)ing).
 731 ⁶¹ Derrida, ‘*Khora*,’ 97. The ‘epochality’ of such
 732 [a] place is an event; see Derrida, ‘How to Avoid
 733 Speaking,’ 173.
 734 ⁶² Derrida, ‘*Khora*,’ 15; imprecisely translated as,
 735 simply, ‘reaches us’ in the English version (‘*Khora*,’
 736 89).
 737 ⁶³ Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 7.
 738 ⁶⁴ For Derrida’s recall of the double Latin filiation
 739 of gathering (*relegere*) and binding (*religare*) in
 740 ‘religion’, see ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 54.
 741 ⁶⁵ See Derrida, ‘Before the Law,’ 210 (also 215),
 742 and *Cinders*, 37 (also 15, 39).
 743 ⁶⁶ I have developed the implications of this
 744 Mallarméan line in relation to *Khora* but also
 745 *Cinders* (*Feu la cendre*) in ‘Thinking (Through) the
 746 Desert’, especially 75.
 747 ⁶⁷ *Of Grammatology*, 140; first quoted in Hägglund,
 748 *Radical Atheism*, 75, then developed on pp. 88–89,
 749 97, 99, 102, 105, 222 n. 25.
 750 ⁶⁸ In an earlier study of deconstruction’s trajec-
 751 tory from phenomenology to ethics, Christina
 752 Howells had already signalled that ‘Critchley
 753 makes a strong case, perhaps too strong a case, for
 754 the Levinasian quality of Derrida’s ethics.’
 755 (*Derrida*, 124).
 756 ⁶⁹ A full, non-chronological listing of these critical
 757 debates and their respective publications –
 758 erroneously giving ‘The Impossibility of Ethics’
 759 instead of ‘Radical Atheism and Unconditional
 760 Responsibility’ as the chapter republication, in
 761 *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction Traces*, of
 762 Attridge’s review of *Radical Atheism* – can be found
 763 on Martin Hägglund’s site at <http://www.martinhaggglund.se/>. See in particular Laclau, ‘Is
 764 Radical Atheism a Good Name for Deconstruction?’
 765 and Hägglund, ‘Time, Desire, Politics’ (2008);
 766 the special issue of *The New Centennial Review*,
 767 with Hägglund’s response, ‘The Challenge of
 768 Radical Atheism’ (Spring 2009); Attridge’s
 769 Review of *Radical Atheism* and Hägglund, ‘The
 770 Non-Ethical Opening of Ethics’ (2009–2010);
 771 Caputo, ‘The Return of Anti-Religion’ and
 772 Hägglund, ‘The Radical Evil of Deconstruction’
 773 (2011).
 774 ⁷⁰ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, ix.
 775 ⁷¹ Laclau, ‘Is Radical Atheism a Good Name for
 776 Deconstruction?’ 181; Attridge, ‘Radical Atheism

and Unconditional Responsibility,’ 146, 144, quot-
 ing from *Radical Atheism*, 103.

⁷² Hägglund, ‘The Non-Ethical Opening of
 Ethics,’ 299, and also 300, which describes the
 relation between conditionality and uncondition-
 ality as autoimmune.

⁷³ Hägglund, ‘The Non-Ethical Opening of
 Ethics,’ 301, and 304–5, n. 5.

⁷⁴ Derrida, *Rogues*, 172–73, n. 12; see also 150
 about ‘the autoimmune aporia of this impossible
 transaction between the conditional and the
 unconditional, calculation and the incalculable.’

⁷⁵ Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic
 Suicides,’ 130.

⁷⁶ Hägglund, ‘The Non-Ethical Opening of
 Ethics,’ 302 (almost repeated verbatim in ‘The
 Radical Evil of Deconstruction,’ 143). See also his
 conclusion on how to reinvent ethics in the name of
 deconstruction, 303.

⁷⁷ Hägglund, ‘The Radical Evil of Deconstruc-
 tion,’ e.g. 130, n. 13, and 131.

⁷⁸ Hägglund, ‘The Challenge of Radical Athe-
 ism,’ 237.

⁷⁹ The necessity of inscription, which follows from
 the structure of succession, is also discussed in
 relation to the trace-as-erasure of the now by
 Hägglund in ‘The Challenge of Radical Atheism,’
 239, soon after stating that Derrida used writing ‘to
 explain the transcendental nature of spacing’.

⁸⁰ Derrida, *The Post Card*, 489 (‘Le facteur de la
 vérité’); bold emphasis mine.

⁸¹ Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 25.

⁸² See *Rogues*, 39, for Derrida’s denying the advent
 of a political or ethical turn in deconstruction in
 the 1980s or 1990s.

⁸³ I have engaged more specifically with the
 relation between pre-ethical violence and ethical
 nonviolence, the notion of ‘force’, and the
 performativity of deconstructive syntax in a
 companion study titled ‘Breaching Ethics: Per-
 forming Deconstruction’, first given as a plenary
 lecture at the International Conference on ‘Ethos
 Pathos Logos’ (University of Ploiești, October
 2012) and, in a revised iteration (in French), as a
 keynote for the Fifth International Colloquium
Writing: Language and Thought on ‘Each time, the
 impossible (Derrida (ten years later))’ (University
 of Brasilia, 29 September–3 October 2014). The
 present article can therefore be regarded as the first
 half of a critical diptych on my understanding of
 ‘ethics’ in deconstruction.

⁸⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 99; hyphens and
 italics mine.

⁸⁵ Derrida, ‘Foi et savoir,’ 27; cf. the reductive,
 monosemic translation in ‘Faith and Knowledge,’
 17.

⁸⁶ Levinas, *Proper Names*, 56.

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