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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’.<sup>1</sup> Equally prevalent, until Critchley’s timely corrective and Bernasconi’s earlier work on Derrida’s indebtedness to Levinas,<sup>2</sup> 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*.<sup>3</sup>

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*].<sup>4</sup>

49 Thus, for Derrida, the problem of hospitality, as essential to deconstruction as is  
50 justice,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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'.<sup>7</sup>

63

64

### 65 *Main-tenance*

66

67 What could be misconstrued as an inventive French rendering of Benjaminian  
68 *Jetztzeit* ('now-time')<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

79

80 Drawing out and reorienting the implications of Husserl's 'retention' and  
81 'protention' already analysed in *Speech and Phenomena* and 'Différance',<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 Grammè’ (*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.<sup>12</sup>

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’<sup>13</sup> –  
 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’,<sup>14</sup> 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* [...].<sup>15</sup>

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,<sup>16</sup> society without society, the dissociation of the *socius* or  
 148 ‘unbinding’ (*déliasion*),<sup>17</sup> a *community* without the *com-*, and therefore open to the  
 149 auto-immune as a co-immunity<sup>18</sup> – 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.<sup>19</sup> *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*].<sup>20</sup>  
 166

167 And soon after,<sup>21</sup> 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

185

186

187

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*]’ [...]).<sup>22</sup>



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*].<sup>23</sup> 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)<sup>24</sup> 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);<sup>25</sup>
- 218 – the law of *tact*<sup>26</sup> as im-possible touch-without-touching (*déliation* again,<sup>27</sup> or the
- 219 disjunction of *contact* in the caress<sup>28</sup>);
- 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 tangential<sup>29</sup> ‘impertinent
- 230 pertinence [...] touch[...] only one point’ (*OT*, 131), focusing on the
- 231 teleological ‘exemplarity’ of the hand (*main*);<sup>30</sup>
- 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*<sup>31</sup> – 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.*’)<sup>32</sup>

238

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 Rousseau<sup>33</sup> 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,<sup>34</sup> 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.*<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> 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 spacing<sup>37</sup>  
 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).<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup> 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’,<sup>40</sup> ‘a place that is not a place,  
 287 a place-no-place where events take place without taking place’.<sup>41</sup>

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':<sup>42</sup>

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)<sup>43</sup>

300

301

### 302 Place Holders II – In (the) Place of

303

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

309

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

314

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

328

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

334

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

337 remains abidingly [*à demeure*].<sup>49</sup> 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*]’?<sup>49</sup>

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*)<sup>50</sup> – 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.’<sup>51</sup>

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.<sup>52</sup>  
 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.<sup>53</sup> 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*'),<sup>54</sup> 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'.<sup>55</sup> 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',<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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*)<sup>58</sup> 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 ethics<sup>59</sup>  
 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,<sup>60</sup> 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.'<sup>61</sup> 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 . . .',<sup>62</sup> 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',<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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),<sup>65</sup> 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 susceptibility in the *non-lieu* of justice-to-come.<sup>66</sup>

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 Häggglund'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*<sup>67</sup> 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),<sup>68</sup>  
 476 religion (Caputo) and politics (Laclau, via Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis).  
 477 Häggglund'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.<sup>69</sup> 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’<sup>70</sup> 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).<sup>71</sup>  
 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’,<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup>

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 [...]).<sup>74</sup>

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  $\Delta$  between these two hospitalities, the unconditional and the  
 530 conditional.<sup>75</sup>

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.’<sup>76</sup>

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.<sup>77</sup> Restaged in terms of *différance*, the  
 554 unconditional is ‘the co-implication of time and space that [Derrida] calls *spacing*.’<sup>78</sup>

555

556 The insistence on the structural *inscription*<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup>

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 unscathed<sup>81</sup>),  
 578 for which Caputo refuses to make allowances in his apprehension of deconstruction  
 579 as ‘ankhōral 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’<sup>82</sup>  
 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’.<sup>83</sup>

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’<sup>84</sup> – the desert within the desert of what the French  
 600 double syntax calls ‘*le risque en demeure indéniab*le’<sup>85</sup> rather than a *mise en demeure*, ab-  
 601 tracted, 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’.<sup>86</sup>

#### 606 607 608 Notes

609 <sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> 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 <sup>3</sup> Derrida addresses this point for e.g. in *Nego-*  
 618 *tiations*, 302 (‘Ethics and Politics Today’).

619 <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> 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 <sup>8</sup> 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 <sup>9</sup> Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 328.

653 <sup>10</sup> 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 <sup>11</sup> 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 <sup>12</sup> 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-  
682 nation as ‘the experience of the impossible’. See for  
683 e.g. the interview ‘A “Madness” Must Watch over  
684 Thinking,’ in *Points...*, 363, and *On Touching*, 57,  
685 which associates the madness of thinking the event  
686 with ‘the impossible is what takes place’.

687 <sup>13</sup> See Derrida’s essay ‘Fifty-two Aphorisms,’ in  
688 Papadakis, *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*, 68 (no.  
689 29), and also 72, in the following discussion with  
690 Chris Norris.

691 <sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Psyche. Invention de l’autre*, 492. Cf.  
692 NPM, 102.

693 <sup>15</sup> Derrida, in Brunette and Wills, ‘The Spatial  
694 Arts,’ 27.

695 <sup>16</sup> What John Caputo, combining it with *khora* as  
696 place without (the) place, called ‘ankhōral religion  
697 without religion’; see Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears*  
698 *of Jacques Derrida*, 189.

699 <sup>17</sup> For this ‘interruptive unravelling’ (*déliasion*) as  
700 the condition of the social bond of a ‘community’,  
701 of a bond (*socius* or *desmos*) without bond, see for  
702 example Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’  
703 especially 64.

704 <sup>18</sup> Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 51.

705 <sup>19</sup> Derrida recalls that it is within a certain  
706 experience of spacing and space that resistance to  
707 philosophical authority can be produced. See  
708 Brunette and Wills, ‘The Spatial Arts,’ 19, and also  
709 Derrida’s contemporaneous essay ‘Fifty-two  
710 Aphorisms,’ in Papadakis, *Deconstruction Omnibus*  
711 *Volume*, especially 68 (no. 26), about ‘to *make space*’,  
712 which states that the ‘aphorism’, succinctly  
713 described as ‘*un point c’est tout*’ (68, no. 25), has  
714 ‘no inhabitable place’, ‘[n]o housing’ (68–69, nos.  
715 40, 41), and concludes: ‘To maintain [...], despite  
716 all the reappropriations, the chance of the  
717 aphorism, is to keep [...] the promise of making  
718 room for [*donner lieu*] [...]’ (69, no. 52).

719 <sup>20</sup> Derrida, *H. C. for Life*, 49. This episode was first  
720 evoked in a 1992 talk by Cixous herself on the  
721 occasion of the ten-day conference ‘Le passage des  
722 frontières’; see Cixous, ‘What is it o’clock?’, 48.

723 <sup>21</sup> Derrida, *H. C. for Life*, 50–51.

724 <sup>22</sup> Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 408–09 (‘Hostipital-  
725 ity’).

726 <sup>23</sup> Derrida, ‘Hostipitality,’ 9.

727 <sup>24</sup> Derrida, *On Touching*, 16; hereafter *OT* with  
728 page references in the text.

729 <sup>25</sup> Commenting on Nancy’s *The Experience of*  
730 *Freedom*, this second chapter of the first part  
731 associates spacing, decision and ethos (*OT*, 21–  
732 22), considering the mouth as the opening that  
733 spaces itself out, at once place and non-place of a  
734 dis-location (*OT*, 28–29).

735 <sup>26</sup> Formulated in French, as on the ‘model’ of  
736 *centre* and *khōra*: ‘il y a là loi du tact’; see Derrida,  
737 *Le toucher*, 82.

673 <sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Le toucher*, 86.

674 <sup>28</sup> ‘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 <sup>29</sup> 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 <sup>30</sup> 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 <sup>31</sup> And elided in the translation; compare *Le toucher*  
690 314, and *OT*, 278.

691 <sup>32</sup> See Derrida, *Le toucher*, 343, and *OT*, 307.

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

694 <sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup> Derrida, *Le toucher*, 249.

699 <sup>36</sup> See Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, 25.

700 <sup>37</sup> 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 <sup>38</sup> 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 <sup>39</sup> Miller, *For Derrida*, 270, 273.

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

712 <sup>41</sup> 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 <sup>42</sup> 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.’

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

734 <sup>44</sup> Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 416 (‘Hostipitality’).

735 <sup>45</sup> For a succinct development of this substitution,  
736 see Milesi, ‘Semiology and Deconstruction’.

737 <sup>46</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, 31.

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

746 <sup>48</sup> Compare with Derrida, *The Beast and the*  
747 *Sovereign*, 173: ‘The point is that it is a matter of  
748 indecision or an indeterminacy between a deter-  
749 minacy and an indeterminacy.’

750 <sup>49</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, 16.

751 <sup>50</sup> See Derrida, “‘This Strange Institution Called  
752 Literature,’” 36.

753 <sup>51</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, 28.

754 <sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Negotiations*, 311–12 (‘Ethics and  
755 Politics’).

756 <sup>53</sup> Derrida, ‘Force of Law,’ 255.

757 <sup>54</sup> See Derrida, *Khôra*, 55 – in English: ‘*Khôra*,’  
758 107.

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

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

778 <sup>56</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 66.

779 <sup>57</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, especially 163, 169.

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

785 <sup>59</sup> In what follows, the more ironic, self-decon-  
786 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 <sup>60</sup> 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 <sup>61</sup> Derrida, ‘*Khora*,’ 97. The ‘epochality’ of such  
732 [a] place is an event; see Derrida, ‘How to Avoid  
733 Speaking,’ 173.

734 <sup>62</sup> Derrida, ‘*Khora*,’ 15; imprecisely translated as,  
735 simply, ‘reaches us’ in the English version (‘*Khora*,’  
736 89).

737 <sup>63</sup> Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 7.

738 <sup>64</sup> 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 <sup>65</sup> See Derrida, ‘Before the Law,’ 210 (also 215),  
742 and *Cinders*, 37 (also 15, 39).

743 <sup>66</sup> 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 <sup>67</sup> *Of Grammatology*, 140; first quoted in Häggglund,  
748 *Radical Atheism*, 75, then developed on pp. 88–89,  
749 97, 99, 102, 105, 222 n. 25.

750 <sup>68</sup> 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 <sup>69</sup> 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 Häggglund’s site at <http://www.martinhaggglund.se/>. See in particular Laclau, ‘Is  
764 Radical Atheism a Good Name for Deconstruction?’  
765 and Häggglund, ‘Time, Desire, Politics’ (2008);  
766 the special issue of *The New Centennial Review*,  
767 with Häggglund’s response, ‘The Challenge  
768 of Radical Atheism’ (Spring 2009); Attridge’s  
769 Review of *Radical Atheism* and Häggglund, ‘The  
770 Non-Ethical Opening of Ethics’ (2009–2010);  
771 Caputo, ‘The Return of Anti-Religion’ and  
772 Häggglund, ‘The Radical Evil of Deconstruction’  
773 (2011).

774 <sup>70</sup> Häggglund, *Radical Atheism*, ix.

775 <sup>71</sup> Laclau, ‘Is Radical Atheism a Good Name for  
776 Deconstruction?’ 181; Attridge, ‘Radical Atheism

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

778 <sup>72</sup> Häggglund, ‘The Non-Ethical Opening of  
779 Ethics,’ 299, and also 300, which describes the  
780 relation between conditionality and uncondition-  
781 ality as autoimmune.

782 <sup>73</sup> Häggglund, ‘The Non-Ethical Opening of  
783 Ethics,’ 301, and 304–5, n. 5.

784 <sup>74</sup> Derrida, *Rogues*, 172–73, n. 12; see also 150  
785 about ‘the autoimmune aporia of this impossible  
786 transaction between the conditional and the  
787 unconditional, calculation and the incalculable.’

788 <sup>75</sup> Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic  
789 Suicides,’ 130.

790 <sup>76</sup> Häggglund, ‘The Non-Ethical Opening of  
791 Ethics,’ 302 (almost repeated verbatim in ‘The  
792 Radical Evil of Deconstruction,’ 143). See also his  
793 conclusion on how to reinvent ethics in the name of  
794 deconstruction, 303.

795 <sup>77</sup> Häggglund, ‘The Radical Evil of Deconstruc-  
796 tion,’ e.g. 130, n. 13, and 131.

797 <sup>78</sup> Häggglund, ‘The Challenge of Radical Athe-  
798 ism,’ 237.

799 <sup>79</sup> The necessity of inscription, which follows from  
800 the structure of succession, is also discussed in  
801 relation to the trace-as-erasure of the now by  
802 Häggglund in ‘The Challenge of Radical Atheism,’  
803 239, soon after stating that Derrida used writing ‘to  
804 explain the transcendental nature of spacing’.

805 <sup>80</sup> Derrida, *The Post Card*, 489 (‘Le facteur de la  
806 vérité’); bold emphasis mine.

807 <sup>81</sup> Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ 25.

808 <sup>82</sup> See *Rogues*, 39, for Derrida’s denying the advent  
809 of a political or ethical turn in deconstruction in  
810 the 1980s or 1990s.

811 <sup>83</sup> I have engaged more specifically with the  
812 relation between pre-ethical violence and ethical  
813 nonviolence, the notion of ‘force’, and the  
814 performativity of deconstructive syntax in a  
815 companion study titled ‘Breaching Ethics: Per-  
816 forming Deconstruction’, first given as a plenary  
817 lecture at the International Conference on ‘Ethos  
818 Pathos Logos’ (University of Ploiești, October  
819 2012) and, in a revised iteration (in French), as a  
820 keynote for the Fifth International Colloquium  
821 *Writing: Language and Thought* on ‘Each time, the  
822 impossible (Derrida (ten years later))’ (University  
823 of Brasilia, 29 September–3 October 2014). The  
824 present article can therefore be regarded as the first  
825 half of a critical diptych on my understanding of  
826 ‘ethics’ in deconstruction.

827 <sup>84</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 99; hyphens and  
828 italics mine.

829 <sup>85</sup> Derrida, ‘Foi et savoir,’ 27; cf. the reductive,  
830 monosemic translation in ‘Faith and Knowledge,’  
831 17.

832 <sup>86</sup> Levinas, *Proper Names*, 56.

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