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Between Heidegger and Derrida: On the Impossible Futures of Techne

This paper is not the first to interrogate the term “legacies” in the title of this conference, implying as it does the vast problems of inheritance, of debt and even of mourning. A conference on the “Legacies of Theory” necessarily provokes a meditation on the notion of “legacy” itself. What I do not wish to take issue with in this term is what is implied by the plural: “legacies.” If the concept of “legacy” implies inheritance, then there is the possibility of inheritance only where its contingencies are multiple, contested and even contradictory. This multiplicity is in fact the *precondition* of inheriting, its very chance or possibility. What I do want to contest, however, is a certain relation to time that the term “legacies” implies. At a moment when the term “post-theory” has entered the academic lexicon, and when books with titles such as *Life After Theory* (Derrida et al.)¹ have begun to mark its retreat or displacement within the institution, the term “legacies” risks collusion with a discourse that seeks to extirpate any real encounter with its “legacy,” multiple, contested or otherwise. And if I might be permitted to replace the term “theory” with the term “deconstruction,” the problematic nature of the concept of “legacy” makes itself clearer. Insofar as the term “legacy” implies a certain “temporality of presence,” with a clear, single, undivided border

1 The book contains an interview with Derrida, who addresses the question of “what comes after” theory very differently than the other contributors. For a brief discussion of the significance of this difference, see my review of the book (Kuiken).

that separates a *before* and an *after*, the term “legacy” repeats (without difference) a conception of time that has already been called into question by that very “theory.”

To put it another way, the argument that attempts to split deconstruction into a before and an after depends for its articulation on a theory of time that treats the past as something that was once present, but is no longer. The past, in this case the past *as deconstruction*, is thought as something that has already happened, as an event that has already taken place. To paraphrase Samuel Weber, the very attempt to move *past* deconstruction as something that has already taken place risks never actually encountering it.² It evades a thought of temporality which focuses on an anteriority that, strictly speaking, cannot be a possible present, or a present that is now past. If, as Derrida has suggested, the present is *itself* divided, or rather, if it divides itself between its past and its future, between a past that *has been* and a past that *has never been present*, then this divisibility of the living present disrupts the unity of the line between before and after. This means that the fundamental divisibility which the present *is* also conditions its future. This question, at once naïve and necessary, will therefore be my focus: how does one open something to the future, *without horizon*, that is, without annulling it in advance through calculation, programming etc.? How does one maintain a relation to this “impossible” temporality without making what arrives present itself in the form of a full presence?

These are huge questions, bequeathed to us by the multiple, contested legacies of Derrida, of Heidegger, and of so many others. They are impossible questions about the impossible, and so one might be led to suspect that they therefore remain fundamentally inarticulable in that form. What I hope to do here is to merely survey the terrain of one possible approach to them by staging a brief encounter between Heidegger and Derrida, two great deconstructive thinkers of the event and its relation to calculability, repeatability, that is, to a certain *techné*. Focusing on key passages from Heidegger’s “Overcoming Metaphysics,” and on two footnotes from Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge,” I move towards the question of whether there is a fundamental scission in the motif of the logic of the “future anterior” in the deconstructive work of both thinkers. An approach to the

2 This statement constitutes Samuel Weber’s main contention in his essay “After Deconstruction” (see Weber).

question of what it means to open something to the future requires particular attention to a strange redoubling of the motif of impossibility as it relates to this logic or temporality. How does one decide between two or more impossibilities, particularly if, as the utterly mean-spirited and otherwise derisory New York Times obituary of Jacques Derrida makes clear, in its only actual citation of him: “deconstruction, if there is such a thing, takes place as the experience of the impossible” (Kandell sec.1, col.1, p.1). Our question concerns the *relation* between this “taking place” of deconstruction and a doubled and redoubling “experience of the impossible.”

Heidegger’s ontological analytic of being-towards-death in *Being and Time* as Dasein’s “ownmost” or proper possibility, of course, addresses centrally the relation between the possible and an experience of the impossible. As is well known, section one of division two of *Being and Time* concerns itself with the question of Dasein’s “projection,” or its “disclosive Being-towards its potentiality.” Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s being-towards death takes place within the larger context of Dasein’s attempt to “reckon with time” (which division two prepares for on the way towards the analysis of Dasein’s historicity). Having already explored the existential structures of Care (*Sorge*), Heidegger insists that it is basic to the structure of Dasein that it is constantly “ahead of itself” in the sense that there remains “something to be settled” (*Being and Time* 279). Dasein is thus incapable of grasping itself as a totality, since what Dasein “is,” is nothing less than this continuous possibility or potentiality-for-being. What this leads to is a meditation on the possibility of an ultimate finality of and for Dasein. Being-towards-death is first introduced as an attempt to think Dasein’s “being-at-an-end” as a relation to the possibility of Dasein’s “potentiality-for-Being-a-whole.”

This initial introduction of the analysis of Dasein’s being-towards-death is very quickly displaced, however, from a preoccupation with the notion of totality to a preoccupation with a relation to impossibility. Death, as a possibility for Dasein, is interpreted as a relation to the possibility of “no-longer-being-able-to-be-there” (*Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens*):

As potentiality-for-Being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus death reveals itself as *that possibility which is one’s ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not be outstripped (unüberholbare)*. (*Being and Time*, 294)

The possibility of death is thus not one possibility among others, but rather the possibility of Dasein's impossibility. Since death is not an "experience" it can "have," Dasein's relation to its end is at best conceived as a relation *to* this impossibility, since having an "actual" relation to death can only be fantasized:

The closest closeness which one may have in Being towards death as a possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual. The more unveiledly this possibility gets understood, the more purely does the understanding penetrate into it as the possibility of the impossibility of existence at all. Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be "actualized," nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself be. (Being and Time 306-307)

Being-towards-death, for Heidegger, cannot be a relation to death as something that could one day be "present" for Dasein, that is, as something virtual that can be actualized. Rather, (authentic) being-towards-death must maintain the radical *impossibility* of death. Death is the impossible *as such*.

This is also what makes being-towards-death Dasein's "ownmost" or proper possibility, according to Heidegger. Only a being that is capable of forming a relation to its own death is also capable of relating to this "experience" as an "experience" of the impossible:

Death is Dasein's *ownmost* possibility. Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its *ownmost* potentiality-for-Being, in which its very Being is an issue. Here it can become manifest to Dasein that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it has been wrenched away from the "they." (Being and Time 307)

What being-towards death effectively does, then, is authenticate Dasein's relation to *possibility* by passing it through an authentic "experience" of impossibility. Death, according to Heidegger, is Dasein's "ownmost" insofar as it relates death as impossibility not to others, but to itself. Dasein's relation to death is "its own" in two senses. In the first, most obvious sense, nothing else can die in its place. In the second, and for Heidegger the most important sense, death is Dasein's ownmost possibility because, as a relation to the impossible experience of Dasein's no-longer-being-able-to-be-there, it constitutes the ground upon which Dasein can project itself towards its potentiality-for-being. Thus, as impossibility, it becomes *the condition of possibilities* for Dasein, in which Dasein finds itself "face to face with the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of its existence" (Being and Time 310).

Heidegger, however, insists that the ontological structure of being-towards-death which articulates a relation to the impossible remains a “fantastical exaction” insofar as there is no ontic structure to which it corresponds. The second chapter of the division that immediately follows on Heidegger’s articulation of being-towards-death concerns itself with the question of how “authentic-potentiality-for-being” manifests itself. The attempt to articulate the themes of these two chapters, however, is displaced by the turn towards Dasein’s historicity. Heidegger’s thinking, in a certain sense, appears to abandon the thematic of death almost entirely in his late work, and the apparent relation between impossibility and the “proper” or the “as such” of the impossible likewise appears to be displaced.

Or rather, it is at once displaced and *maintained* in his turn to the question of technology and the link between calculability, orderability, techne- and the singularity of *Ereignis* or the “event of appropriation.” The word “Ereignis,” which in German means “event or occurrence” is also explicitly linked to the *eigen* of er-eignis, a possibility that is proper, or “one’s own.” Heidegger’s move to a discussion of Ereignis still privileges a certain temporality or logic of the future anterior, the same aporetic temporality that forms the backdrop for his discussion of being-towards-death in *Being and Time*. In the case of Ereignis, however, this temporality is discussed in the context of the “between time,”³ the time between the gods that have fled and the new god that is coming. However, in Heidegger’s later work, what is “proper” in relation to the impossibility of Ereignis does not pertain “directly” to Dasein’s ontological constitution. Perhaps the only indication of the translation from the earlier problematic of Dasein’s relation to impossibility as death, is the brief question Heidegger asks at the beginning of the section in *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)* titled “The Last God.” In a short introductory section, Heidegger maintains the logic of the future anterior while displacing the problematic of death:

The last is that which not only needs the longest fore-runnership but also itself *is*: not the ceasing, but the deepest beginning, which reaches out the furthest and catches up with itself with the greatest of difficulty. There, the “last” withdraws from all calculation and therefore must be able to bear the burden of the loudest and more frequent misinterpretation... Given that as yet we barely grasp “death”

3 Heidegger introduces this discussion through his extensive reading of Hölderlin (see Heidegger, *Elucidations*).

in its utmost, how are we then ever going to be primed for the rare hint of the last god? (*Contributions* 285)

Heidegger, in this final question, links Dasein's relation of being-towards-death with Ereignis, or the event of appropriation.

But this apparent substitution and displacement within Heidegger of a relation to the impossible, which moves from an internal ontological structure of Dasein to a "disclosive event," is not a mere substitution of an ontological relation "internal" to Dasein for a more or less historical one. Rather, the repetition of the motif of the *proper* of the impossible is also a displacement in that it reveals a certain kind of *doubling* of the motif of impossibility in Heidegger. The question that Heidegger puts in abeyance in *Being and Time*, and that is interrupted by the "historical" turn at the end of that work, ends up returning at the moment the question of a relation to the impossible is rearticulated with regard to Ereignis. If the ontological structure of being-towards-death is also that which makes possible Dasein's "potentialities," the risk is that this relation exists only as a fantasy. If being-toward-death is the condition of possibility for Dasein's projecting itself against its many possibilities, then what is it that prevents this relation to the impossible from simply becoming a relation to one *possibility* (death) among others? The displacement of this problematic onto Ereignis means that one must choose between at least two different *relations* to impossibility within the same space. At least two "impossibilities" unfold themselves within Heidegger's articulation of Ereignis at the moment Heidegger places the ordering and calculating power of *techne* in relation to the future anterior and the "to come."

How does this happen? In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger famously states that "[t]he essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (*The Question Concerning Technology* 4). This statement has been taken to mean that Heidegger attempts to articulate an essential, single, *unitary* essence to technology. But the word Heidegger uses here to articulate this essence is "wesen," which, as the editor points out in a long footnote, is a word rare in modern German, but one that distinguishes it from the Philosophical (and Latin) "essentia," denoting the substantive being or "whatness" of something. "Wesen" literally means "to tarry" and maintains a link to a sense of "enduring" that does not *oppose* it to the temporal or the transitory. When Heidegger subsequently names the essence

of technology “Ge-Stell,” translated as “enframing” or “emplacement,”⁴ he sets up the essence of technology in *opposition* to Platonic *eidōs*, or a nonsensible beyond:

The Ge-stell, as a destining of revealing, is thus indeed the essence of technology, but never in the sense of *genus* or *essentia*. If we pay heed to this, then we are struck by something astonishing: It is technology that demands of us that we think in another sense that which is usually understood by “essence.” (“The Question Concerning Technology” 30)

Ge-stell, or enframing, is something other than the application of a concept. As the “essence” of technology, it is a *wesen* (or a “tarrying”) that is not yet an *an-wesen* (or presence). What characterizes the essence of technology, therefore, is not a concealed, *singular* essence that withdraws itself from view. Rather, its “essence” consists solely, singularly, of an *endless dislocation*.

What this does is introduce a secondary “impossibility” into the relation between *Gestell* and *Ereignis*, one that takes place on the side of *Gestell* or technology, as it were. And it is an impossibility that remains *irreducible* to the “event” (*Ereignis*) that is offered as the promise of a future differentiated from the unfolding essence of *technē*. There are thus *at least two* different “experiences of the impossible” in Heidegger. Heidegger’s later essay, “Overcoming Metaphysics” articulates their relation in the context of the way in which technology must be understood as the *organization of lack*, a kind of continuous *filling up* of the nothingness of Being:

But since the emptiness (*Leere*) of Being can never be filled up by the fullness of beings, especially when this emptiness can never be experienced *as such*, the only way to escape it is incessantly to arrange beings in the constant possibility (*Möglichkeit*) of being ordered as the form of guaranteeing aimless activity. Viewed in this way, technology is the organization of a lack (*die Organisation des Mangels*), since it is related to the emptiness of Being contrary to its knowledge.⁵

4 This is the translation that Samuel Weber proposes in his “Upsetting the Set-Up: Remarks on Heidegger’s Questing After Technics.”

5 Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics.” *The End of Philosophy*. Chicago: U Chicago Press, 2003, 107. For the German, see Heidegger, “*Überwindung der Metaphysik*” *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann,

Technology's constant "filling up" of the lack, its response to the peculiar "emptiness" of Being that cannot be experienced, becomes "aimless activity" insofar as it desires the impossible not as possible, but rather *as impossible*. Heidegger continues:

Technology drives the earth beyond the developed sphere of possibility into such things which are no longer a possibility (Möglichkeit) and are thus the impossible (Unmögliche). (OM 109/96)

And further on, he links the desire for the impossible directly to the will:

The will has forced the impossible as a goal upon the possible. Machination (die Machenschaft), which orders this compulsion and holds it in dominance, arises from the being of technology, the word (machenschaft) here equivalent to the concept of Metaphysics completing itself. (OM 110/ 97)

The possible, under the reign of Gestell, becomes the impossible. The essence of technology thus maintains the infinite *non-arrival* of the impossible by constantly collapsing it, as it were, into the possible. That is, it organizes and maintains the "emptiness of Being." This emptiness is in fact its best resource, precisely because it continuously instigates techne to represent the *impossibility* of representing the emptiness of Being, as well as the emptiness that it itself *is*. It is therefore technology's infinite deferral of the future, its "impossibilization" or *virtualization* of the future, as opposed to its realization, that constitutes its essence.

The essence of technology, then, like deconstruction (if there is such a thing), lives in and on an experience of the impossible. But this "experience" immediately doubles itself. If, for Heidegger, technology represents a will that "forces itself" on the possible, if it *impossibilizes* the future, then what seems to be implied is an impossibility that remains "itself," intact, an impossibility "as such." In the citation above on the way in which technology lives in and on the "emptiness (Leere) of Being," Heidegger specifies that the problem is precisely that the "as such" of emptiness cannot be experienced. As a result, the attempt to "fill up" this emptiness leads to the displacement of an encounter with the "emptiness of Being" *as such*. Thus,

5 (cont'd.) 2000, 94. Future references are given in the body of the text as OM with English pagination on the left, and German on the right.

the impossibility that organizes aimless activity is merely a secondary relation to impossibility, one that evades an authentic encounter with “impossibility as such.” And like the analytic of Dasein’s being-towards-death, this other impossibility *as such* constitutes the *proper* of the possible. This is why Heidegger maintains a reference to the “proper” of Er-eignis or the proper of the “event of appropriation.” As the proper of the possible, it is what a *secondary* impossibility covers over. Heidegger, at the end of appendix nine in the “Age of the World Picture,” refers to this *other* experience of impossibility:

Being subject as humanity has not always been the sole possibility belonging to the essence of historical man, which is always beginning in a primal way, nor will it always be. A fleeting cloud shadow over a concealed land [Ein flüchtiger Wolkenschatten über einem verborgenen Land], such is the darkening which that truth as the certainty of subjectivity — once prepared by Christendom’s certainty of salvation — lays over a disclosing event (Ereignis) that it remains denied to subjectivity itself to experience.⁶

In the section of the main text to which this passage from the appendix refers, the “cloud shadow” is mentioned again, but in the context of an *incalculability* that stems from the very “certainty of subjectivity” that displaces Ereignis:

By means of this shadow the modern world extends itself out into a space withdrawn from representation, and so lends to the incalculable (unberechenbar) the determinateness (Bestimmtheit) peculiar to it.... This shadow however, points to something else, which it is denied to us of today to know. (AWP 136/ 88)

How does one think the relation between this “shadow” and what it darkens? How does one think the “proper” of this impossibility — an impossibility more impossible than the incalculability of technology that sustains it?

⁶ Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture”. *Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. W. Lovitt. New York: Harper, 1977, 153. For the German, see Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” *Holzwege*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1963, 103. Future references are given in the body of the text as AWP with English pagination on the left, and German on the right.

One would have to begin by calling into question the entire problematic of Heidegger's recourse to the "proper" of this other impossible event. His recourse to the proper of the impossible is at once indispensable, but also necessarily entails a certain doubling of impossibility whose endless bifurcations prove difficult to arrest. If there is an "as such" of the impossible, then the possibility that this is nothing but its own fantasy becomes built into its very structure, since the "as such" is precisely what differentiates between an authentic and inauthentic "experience of the impossible." In short, it acts as the measure which distinguishes at least two distinct "experiences of the impossible." The "fact" of this doubling, furthermore, is organized around the proper or the "as such" of a different, *unheard of*, experience of the impossible. Both remain inherently incalculable. How does one think the measureless difference between these two impossibilities? As Heidegger makes clear at the end of "Overcoming Metaphysics," his project attempts to *anticipate* the arrival (of the event of appropriation) in its *non-arrival*. Heidegger writes: "No transformation without an anticipatory escort (Kein Wandel kommt ohne vorausweisendes Geleit)" (OM 110/ 98). His task is thus the preparation of this coming, this *kommt*, of the to-come. One must be prepared to think, *simultaneously, and in the "same space" as it were, two non-arrivals of the impossible*.

And yet — can the impossible be thought as an *other* thought of the impossible *without immediately losing itself*? For little separates these two "experiences" in Heidegger other than the figure of the promise, that is, the hope and the promise of an altogether other experience of the impossible. Heidegger's distinction between them maintains itself here in the difference of the "as such," between the impossibility "produced" by the technological and the impossibility "proper to" Ereignis. However, if impossibility entails *also* the impossibility of the "as such," of a measure that would be capable of separating at least two impossibilities, then Ereignis cannot appear "*as such*," even in its forgetting or covering over. It cannot appear, in short, except *as fantasized*. How does one, how can one, decide between two fantasized impossibilities in the absence of a scission or decision that is generated by the "as such"?

One possible direction would be to turn here to the entire problematic of the relation between Gestell and Ereignis as it is articulated in the very late 1969 Thor seminar. There, Heidegger makes the question of this decision even more difficult by introducing an image that disarticulates the unique border of the *before* and *after* of these two different experiences of

impossibility. The image stands by itself, without commentary: “Gestell is, as it were (gleichsam) the photographic negative of Ereignis” (*Four Seminars* 60). This statement emerges in the context of a discussion of the relation between Gestell and Ereignis in their proximity to each other. Just prior to this passage he suggests that a path is cleared towards Ereignis by a passage through, Gestell:

An excellent way of approaching enowning (Ereignis) would be to look into the essence of enframing (Ge-stell) insofar as it is a passage from metaphysics to another thinking (“a Janus head,” as it is called in *On Time and Being*), for enframing is essentially ambiguous. “The Principle of Identity” already says: enframing (the gathering unity of all ways of positing (Weisen des stellens)) is the completion and consummation of metaphysics, and at the same time the disclosive preparation of enowning (Ereignis). (*Four Seminars* 60)

Enframing’s “ambiguity” rests on its status as a threshold between metaphysics and its other. It is at once the highest point of the completion of metaphysics, and “at the same time” that which prepares for something else: Ereignis or the event of appropriation. But this “ambiguity” is not simply a matter of thinking Gestell as a limit between metaphysics and a “new beginning.” Rather, its “ambiguity” is generated from an oscillation that is present even here in Heidegger’s last text concerning the inevitable repetition of the drawing of the alleged unity of this line, for shortly after this passage, Heidegger returns to a language that would suggest once again the introduction of a limit or measure that would separate a before and after, the “before” of Ereignis coming after Ge-stell which “veils” it.

Heidegger, nonetheless, suggests a very different relation between Gestell and Ereignis through the image of the “photographic negative.” The reference to photography here appears to open itself decisively to a prior repetition of a very different technical operation, one that suggests the possibility of an apparatus that *precedes* the twin “impossibilities” of Gestell and Ereignis, and makes possible an infinite reproducibility of the image of the “*as such*” of the event. If Gestell is “as it were” the photographic negative of Ereignis, then they can no longer be understood according to the language of “covering over” or “veiling.” Each produces the image of the other *in negation*, and thus in simulation of the other. And it is the suggestion of this *infinite reproducibility* of the impossible that *deracinates* its “as such.” How does

one account for this deracination — and what happens to the relation between *two images* of impossibility?

This question, of course, must remain at least partially suspended. It would be necessary, in accounting for the relation between these two impossibilities in Heidegger to take into account his *strategy* with regard to the delimitation of the relative unity of the border between onto-theology in general, and Christianity in particular, and something like a pre-ontological or “pre-religious” space. The language of god, of the last god, and of revelation in relation to Ereignis as “disclosive event” is pervasive throughout his work. However, Heidegger is insistent that this language (which he articulates through Hölderlin) in no way gives itself back over to the relation between theology and metaphysics that it had sought to delimit. In the essay titled the “Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics,” for example, Heidegger explicitly links theology and metaphysics through a mutual concern with a representation of the Being of beings as “present-at-hand.” Nevertheless, there is in Heidegger, particularly in *Being and Time*, a continuous *repetition* of apparently Christian motifs. The existential structures of originary guilt (Schuldigsein), and originary fallen-ness (verfallenheit) would be only two examples among others. Each involve the strategy of an attempt to go back before (and thus beyond) onto-theology (and by extension Christianity) by unfolding structures that, as originary, precede and condition the space of the religious.

In each case, Heidegger’s repetition of these Christian motifs attempts to hollow them out, to reduce them to their initial possibility. In the case of Ereignis a similar gesture is maintained. The reference to Ereignis from the ninth appendix of the “Age of the World Picture” would be a case in point:

... such is the darkening which that truth as the certainty of subjectivity — *once prepared by Christendom’s certainty of salvation* — lays over a disclosing event (Ereignis) that it remains denied to subjectivity itself to experience. (AWP 153/103, my emphasis)

The Christian disclosing event, as the certainty of messianic arrival and salvation, must be dissociated from Ereignis as disclosing event, which it obscures. It nevertheless “borrows” the language of revelation in the name of “something else.” As the epigraph at the head of the section from *Contributions to Philosophy* to philosophy titled “The Last God” suggests, what Heidegger attempts to name through a meditation on the problem of

Ereignis is “the totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God” (*Contributions to Philosophy* 283). But if “the totally other” does not occupy the same space as the Christian God, if these must remain discernible, for Heidegger, they at least *share the same language*. And it is this, above all else, that complicates and disarticulates this understanding of deconstruction’s “experience of the impossible.”

It is precisely the endlessly vanishing limit between a Christian and a “more originary” disclosing event that Derrida’s essay “Faith and Knowledge” concerns itself with, in part. This immensely rich and difficult text deserves more commentary than can be given here.⁷ I will only be able to comment on two crucial footnotes that concern Heidegger and that relate to the main contentions of Derrida’s text. Both of these footnotes in some way deal with the relation between the religious and tele-technology. Derrida’s essay places itself firmly on the terrain that Heidegger has sketched regarding the relation between the theological-metaphysical, its link to a certain understanding of *techne*, and “another experience of the impossible.” The two footnotes on Heidegger each approach, from either side, the text’s main contention: that there are (at least) *two* sources of religion within the limits of reason alone. What are these two sources?

The first is the dimension of the “messianic” — what Derrida calls a “messianicity without messianism.” This bare messianism without determinate content, without determinate revelation, belongs, as Derrida says, “to no Abrahamic religion” (*Faith and Knowledge* 56). In his essay “Artifactualities,” which also concerns itself with the relation between the religious and tele-technology, Derrida, using the language of the Kantian *a priori*, states that messianism without the messiah is “... a matter of an experience that is *a priori* messianic, but *a priori* exposed in its very expectation to what will be determined only *a posteriori* by the event” (13). This is a difficult formulation, and one would here have to rigorously think the *aporia* of an *a priori* that exposes itself *immediately*, in advance, to what it makes possible. Derrida’s insistence is that this space (what he calls a “desert within the desert”), which is an opening to the future without expectation or anticipation, is barren, purely formal, abstract and “un-religious as it must

7 For a more sustained commentary, see Bernard Steigler, “Derrida and Technology: Fidelity at the Limits of Deconstruction and the Prosthesis of Faith.”

be.” It links itself at once to the irrepressible desire for justice and for a democracy to come.

The second source Derrida simply names “chora,” which presents a bifurcation between two approaches to this “desert within the desert” in and through a thought of that which is “beyond being.” He writes:

Chora is nothing (no being, nothing present), but not the Nothing which in the anxiety of Dasein would still open the question of being. This Greek noun says in our memory that which is not reappropriable, even by our “Greek” memory; it says the immemoriality of a desert in the desert of which it is neither a threshold nor a mourning. (*Faith and Knowledge* 59)

This formulation of the second source of religion follows directly upon Derrida’s discussion of the *Heilig*, the sacred and the unscathed. The holy, the unscathed etc. *become possible* on the basis of a thinking of chora as a “revealability (Offenbarkeit) more originary than revelation (Offenbarung)” (*Faith and Knowledge*, 54). This is a tradition and history, as Derrida remarks, that here includes not only Heidegger but also Levinas. Chora is thus *simultaneously* the immemorial desert within the desert, *and* the relation to a revealability beyond revelation.

Each of these sources, these two *impossible* experiences of a desert within the desert, simultaneously open the way to everything from which they withdraw or retreat. If the first “source” refers to the experience of belief, of trust, of credit etc., then this elementary act of faith, according to Derrida, “also underlies the essentially economic and capitalist rationality of the tele-technoscientific” (*Faith and Knowledge* 81). The link between religion and *techne*, what Derrida calls “globalatinization” (or “*mondialatinization*”) pertains to the second source insofar as its “idiom” is not universalizable. Its specific desert *has borders* — those of the deserts of the Middle East, the source of monotheistic revelations and of Greece. And it relies on the alleged *unity* of those borders in order precisely to trespass them, even as it, according to Derrida, “inscribes its seismic turbulence directly upon the fiduciary globality of the technoscientific, of the economic, of the political and the juridical” (*Faith and Knowledge* 58) in the arena of international right and of sovereignty. In each source, there is a *doubled impossibility* that conditions the possible but which is also its chance and its greatest risk. Each “source” acts as a condition of possibility *and* condition of impossibility, a return of the religious in its most regressive form, and the hope and

possibility of “something else.” Its status as an a priori, whether as condition of possibility or as condition of impossibility, however, remains unstable. As condition of possibility/ impossibility, it does not remain unscathed. It does not remain *unaffected* by what it makes possible. As a relation to the impossible, it immediately loses itself, since the “as such” of the impossible continuously collapses into the possible *in advance*, “a priori” as it were. It must be thought, in short, along the lines of a continuously collapsing, or continuously re-divided border or limit.

The footnotes on Heidegger pertain to each of these twin sources that Derrida spells out as being crucial to a thought of religion within the limits of reason alone. They stand at either end of the text like bookends, and each pertains to the question of the extent to which Heidegger draws too unified of a border between each impossible “source” and that which it makes possible. The note coming at the beginning of the text discusses Heidegger’s relation to the second source in the experience of the holy, the unscathed etc. Citing Heidegger’s 1943 lecture course on Hölderlin’s *Andenken*, Derrida underscores the extent to which Heidegger attempts to open up a space of the sacred irreducible to the Roman interpretation of religion. This space, nevertheless, *as irreducible*, *repeats* its relation to the unscathed. That is, it remains, above all, *unscathed* by the Roman interpretation of religion itself. Derrida cites Heidegger on the role of the poet (in particular Hölderlin) as “prophet”:

“Poets, when they are in their being, are prophetic. But they are not ‘prophets’ in the Judeo-Christian sense of the word. The ‘prophets’ of these religions do not restrict themselves to the anticipatory-founding word of the Sacred (das vorausgründende Wort des Heiligen). They immediately announce the god upon whom one can subsequently count as upon the certain guarantee of salvation in superterrestrial beatitude. The poetry of Hölderlin should not be disfigured with the ‘religious’ element of religion, which remains the business of the Roman way of interpreting (eine Sache der römischen Deutung) the relations between humans and gods.” (Heidegger *Hölderlin’s Hymne “Andenken,”* as cited in Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge* 54, n.9)

This passage from Heidegger makes the distinction between a “religious” element of religion, and “something else.” The former, Heidegger identifies with the Roman interpretation of the “relation between humans and gods.” The latter opens up a different relation to temporality that is Heidegger’s main focus throughout his extensive “elucidations” of Hölderlin. But it is

precisely this line or border between the former and the latter that Derrida attempts to disarticulate throughout the rest of his essay, demonstrating the extent to which this distinction between the Roman *religare* and “something else” ends up *repeating* the “religious” interpretation of the unscathed that Heidegger attempts to circumvent.

The second note in Derrida’s text concerns Heidegger’s relation to the first “source” Derrida identifies: the space of a “messianicity without messianism.” The question of the border returns, this time in the figure of Nietzsche’s eternal return of the same. It is here, perhaps, that an entirely other experience of the impossible finds itself lodged between two “deconstructive” philosophers, and two irreducible “experiences of the impossible.” In a long note dealing with a chapter in Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures titled “The Thought of the Eternal Return as Belief,” Derrida again returns to Heidegger’s strategy regarding the return of belief, of trust, of credit etc. within a space that appears to be irreducible to what makes it possible. “Belief,” Heidegger insists, “does not mean an individual’s trust in the justificatory grace of the Christian God” (*The Thought of the Eternal Return as Belief* 123). Derrida’s note promises a return to an analysis of this section of Heidegger that, to my knowledge, never took place. His note focuses particularly on the extent to which Heidegger confines the question of belief to its onto-theological determination. Focusing on Heidegger’s elucidation of belief as a “holding-for-true” (Für-Wahr-halten), Derrida writes: “These indications reveal that in Heidegger’s eyes ... belief remains therefore metaphysical in some way, and therefore unequal to what in thought should exceed both the order of representation and the totality of the entity” (*Faith and Knowledge* 97, n.42).

A reading of this repetition of belief in the eternal return *awaits us* in both senses. It would have to take account of many things, not the least of which is Heidegger’s *own* suspension of this question. He writes in that section of the Nietzsche lectures, for example, that “without having acquired a sufficient notion of the Nietzschean concept of belief, we could not attempt to say what the word ‘religion’ signifies for him” (*The Thought of the Eternal Return as Belief* 124). It would also have to take into account the extent to which Nietzsche occupies the position of the “last metaphysician,” for

Heidegger, and the eternal return his “fundamental (singular) thought.”⁸ It is a thought, therefore which also opens the question of the singularity, unity and completion of the border between belief in the impossible *as metaphysics*, and *another* experience of belief. As Heidegger insists, “... the thought itself defines the essence of religion anew on its own terms. The thought itself is to say what kind of religion shall exist for what kind of being in the future” (*The Thought of the Eternal Return as Belief* 123). It is, perhaps, the question of the nature of this suspension and this endlessly receding border between metaphysics and its other that remains decisive if we are to being to think at least one of the multiple, contested legacies of deconstruction.

In each case, in Heidegger and Derrida, the thought of an impossible future is simultaneously redoubled and suspended. At stake is the question of how to mark a border that recedes, that is surpassed, and that continually reinscribes itself in the repetition that it first makes possible. And in this immediate doubling of impossibility, in the continuously (self)-dividing border that “it” repeatedly sets between itself and what it makes possible, another “experience of the impossible” announces itself, *as if fantasized*. Between Heidegger and Derrida then — two relations to a doubled and endlessly returning limit between at least two impossibilities. And thus the necessity of a decision, in the name of a deconstruction, if there is such a thing, to come: between the empty tomb of a return of the same on the one hand, the crypt of the endless multiplication of impossibilities on the other, and the future of an altogether other experience of impossibility.

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8 For a discussion of these matters in relation to both Derrida’s and Deleuze’s reading of the figure of the eternal return, see my “Deleuze/ Derrida: Towards an Almost Imperceptible Difference.”

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