I

**Radical Atheism** is the most accurate, insightful, and complete account anyone has produced so far of Derrida’s thought. Hägglund refutes a whole panoply of influential misreadings of Derrida, and he does so with a flair and clarity rarely attained by writers on deconstruction. Yet one central thread of exegesis in **Radical Atheism** is less lucidly articulated than it needs to be: the explanation of spacing and \textit{arche}-writing. Because this set of concepts is not made fully clear, at moments the crucial distinction between \textit{arche}-writing or the “trace” on the one hand and empirical writing on the other becomes somewhat blurred. Despite the fact that across the great sweep of this fine book, Hägglund displays a sure grasp of the architecture of deconstruction, these moments of obscurity are of considerable significance. From the beginning, commentators on Derrida, particularly hostile ones, have persistently failed to grasp this distinction, taking the “writing” of which Derrida makes so much to be not \textit{arche}-writing but empirical writing—a
mistake that makes nonsense of the entire project of deconstruction. Although the question of writing no longer excites debate as it once did, the fundamental confusion about its place in Derrida’s thought is still around and is still sometimes influentially propagated, as in Sean Burke’s widely read *The Death and Return of the Author*. Originally published in 1993, this book has gone through multiple reprints and editions, the most recent published this year; yet Burke’s detailed, sophisticated reading of Derrida (possibly the best I’ve seen by a hostile critic) is vitiated by the usual confusion between *arche*-writing and empirical writing.

The interpreter of deconstruction should thus forestall this potential misunderstanding by making the distinction between *arche*-writing and empirical writing as clear and explicit as possible; and Hägglund has not quite done this. Empirical inscription, or “writing” as it was commonly called by Derrida in his first books, is *one actualization of arche*-writing, and this actualization plays a crucial role in Derrida’s thought; but the role it plays is precisely to open the way to the thought of the transcendental, quasitranscendental, or ultratranscendental possibility of which it is the actualization. Hägglund knows this, and says it repeatedly; yet there are a few crucial passages in which he momentarily seems to forget it, and I want to focus on the significance of these passages.

Hägglund initially broaches the question of empirical inscription by means of the following citation from Kant’s First Critique:

> In order to make even inner alterations thinkable, we must be able to grasp time, as the form of inner sense, figuratively through a line, and grasp the inner alteration through the drawing of this line (motion), and thus grasp the successive existence of ourselves in different states through outer intuition; the real ground of which is that all alteration presupposes something that persists in intuition, even in order merely to be perceived as alteration, but there is no persistent intuition to be found in inner sense. (2008, B292, [cited by Hägglund 2008, 26])

The citation from Kant makes it clear that what Hägglund in this discussion calls “spatial inscription” is the actual physical drawing of a line. Kant
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says here that time as the form of inner sense provides nothing that can be grasped in a persistent intuition; thus, in order to grasp our own existence in the succession of temporal states, we must grasp time “through outer intuition,” “figuratively,” by drawing a line. The act of drawing a line is extended in time, but, as an act of spatial inscription, it embodies a persisting record of the succession of moments of its drawing. On Hägglund’s interpretation, Kant here recognizes that time as pure flow has no “being” and finds that “spatial inscription” is necessary to effect the necessary “synthesis” of time; nevertheless—despite this recourse to empirical inscription—time and space remain for Kant “transcendental forms of human intuition, which would be given in the same way regardless of their empirical conditions” (2008, 27). I don’t, by the way, agree with Hägglund’s interpretation of Kant’s words in this passage. Kant is not discussing the transcendental synthesis of time; he is addressing the general question of how transcendental concepts can be filled in or given “objective” validity by intuitions, and the example of drawing a line shows how the category of alteration can be made objective. But let that pass, since the example from Kant is significant for Hägglund’s exposition only to illustrate Derrida’s concept of inscription, and I am focusing on the sense of that illustration. Hägglund argues that Derrida’s notion of spacing is a radicalization of what Kant says here about drawing a line. The radical Derridean conclusion, according to Hägglund, is that “if time must be spatially inscribed, then the experience of time is essentially dependent on which material supports and technologies are available at a given time” (2008, 27). There would, then, be no transcendental forms of space and time, the same everywhere and always; experience as such is constituted by historically determinate forms of spatially-inscribed time; and diverse forms of lived spatially corresponding to the diverse types of physical inscription are determined in different ways by social and technological conditions existing at different historical periods. Hägglund’s claim that, for Derrida, “inscriptions produce the spatiality of space,” appears, thus, to be a strictly historicizing, empiricist thesis regarding empirical forms of inscription.

When he glosses Derrida as saying that “time must be spatially inscribed” (27), then, Hägglund seems to be thinking in terms of empirical inscriptions out in the world, or “writing” as opposed to arche-writing. But then he
recovers the transcendental ground; even though the "experience" of time and space is said to be historically constituted, yet "spacing" is distinguished from this experience as the "ultranscendental condition" or "general condition" of all historically determined forms of inscription. So we come out of this with the right conclusion; yet there is a residual ambiguity as between the possibility of inscription, arche-writing or the arche-trace, and empirical inscription or writing in the ordinary sense, the result of which is a subtle but crucial misstatement of the relation between the two. Thus, when Hägglund says that "any moment always must be recorded in order to be" (27), the possibility is left open of understanding, or misunderstanding, him to be saying by this that empirical writing has to exist because the possibility of inscription makes it necessary—a claim that I’m not aware Derrida ever makes, and which in any case strikes me as both dubious and unnecessary. The fact that Hägglund says "any" and "always" ("any moment always must be recorded") gives his claim a transcendental form that obviously cannot apply to empirical writing, and suggests almost conclusively that when he says a moment "must be recorded" he must have in mind not empirical recording but the trace in general; however, as against this conclusion, this sentence occurs in the context of the paragraph, discussed above, devoted to arguing the historical constitution of the experiences of time and space by historical forms of empirical inscription.

Although Derrida does indeed argue that the empirical experiences of space and time are conditioned by historically constituted forms of inscription, that claim is distracting here, because Hägglund develops it in support of the notion that for Derrida, time and space are not transcendental forms of human intuition, "given in the same way regardless of empirical conditions;" and this momentarily obscures the fact that will shortly reemerge, that "spacing" is the ultratranscendental condition, given in the same way regardless of empirical conditions, of all experience. The possibility of inscriptions in general, spacing, arche-writing, or the arche-trace, produces the spatiality of space—(ultra-)transcendentally, always and everywhere.

The same subtle, ambiguous shading in the direction of empirical inscription turns up again later in the book. Thus, in the chapter on Husserl, Hägglund writes, “[P]rior to any actual system of notation, whose application
and use would be a matter of empirical need, there is an ultratranscendental necessity that experience be inscribed in order to be what it is” (2008, 51). Now, on the one hand, that “there is an ultratranscendental necessity that experience be inscribed” could mean that experience itself is, always and already, a form of inscription. This is in fact Derrida’s doctrine, as worked out initially through his reading of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*, and as Hägglund himself will subsequently explain this doctrine (I will return to this point in Section II of this paper); and it would therefore seem that this is what he means here. On the other hand, there are strong reasons to suspect that the ultratranscendental necessity invoked here is not that of the trace structure of the flow of self-presence, but that of the empirical inscription of experience. On this reading, “Prior to any actual system . . . there is an ultratranscendental necessity that experience be inscribed” means that, prior to any actual system, there is a general necessity for the existence of actual systems. And this second reading accords better with what follows, for in the next paragraph, in support of the idea of the “necessity that experience be inscribed,” Hägglund says that “Plato realized that memory needs signs in order to recall the non-present” (51). Since the signs that Plato saw as necessary are empirical signs, whatever Hägglund might have had in mind in writing these sentences, they drift toward the thesis of the ultratranscendental necessity of the empirical inscription of experience in language, and specifically in writing.

At first I thought that Hägglund had somehow, inexplicably and in contradiction to the tendency of his whole book, gotten this point just wrong. I was especially inclined to think this because, in paraphrasing Derrida on the crucial point in question, he truncates Derrida’s wording. In Hägglund’s paraphrase, Derrida’s claim is that “inscriptions produce the spatiality of space.” But in Derrida’s comment to which Hägglund refers, and which Hägglund quotes on the preceding page (2008, 26), Derrida says that “the possibility of inscriptions in general produces the spatiality of space.” Derrida’s wording, in apparent contradiction to Hägglund’s reading, seems to refer us, directly and unambiguously, to the ultratranscendental trace, the general condition of possibility for all empirical, historically determined forms of inscription; as he says a little later, “the space-time we inhabit is a priori the space-time of the trace” (Derrida 1974, 290).
However, going back to the pages in which these remarks occur, we find Derrida arguing a thesis that produces ambiguities paralleling those I’ve been tracking in Hägglund. In context, Derrida’s claim that “the space-time we inhabit is a priori the space-time of the trace” could mean that arché-writing ultratranscendentally determines the form of space-time, always and everywhere as difference; or it could mean that the contingent forms of human space-time are diversely formed according to the historical forms of inscription that we happen to inhabit. The context, in fact, supports the latter interpretation, for in these paragraphs Derrida is speaking approvingly of Rousseau’s discovery that “the place of writing is linked . . . to the nature of social space, to the perceptive and dynamic organization of the technical, religious, economic, and other such spaces” (1974, 290). Why then, does he use the phrase “the possibility of inscriptions in general”? “In general,” one might think, echoes Kant’s transcendental usage of the phrase, as in the notion of “something in general” (etwas überhaupt). Derrida, however, explicitly specifies that he uses “in general” to make it clear that he is referring to “inscription within speech and inscription as habitation always already situated” (1974, 290). This is not very clear, but it seems to mean that “in general” does not here refer to the transcendental structure of inscription (that is, the arché-trace or arché-writing; a reference that, indeed, would have required the singular “inscription” instead of the plural), but, rather, the diversity of empirical forms of manifestation of the trace structure (that is, inscriptions in general, of whatever historical sort, and whether in speech or writing). But then, why does he speak of an a priori necessity connected with the trace?

When Derrida says that “the possibility of inscriptions in general . . . produces the spatiality of space” he seems to be obscurely invoking both the empirical and the transcendental senses I have been tracking. He seems to be saying both that historical space-time is determined a priori as the ultratranscendental space-time of difference, the same in all historical contexts (so that it has “transcendental” force), and that lived space-time is a priori shaped by the historical context.

And this dual assertion indicates the curious, and enormously difficult, pincer movement at the very foundation of deconstruction that affirms absolute historical contingency on the basis of ultratranscendental necessity.
But Derrida’s account of it in these pages is truncated, and in its truncated form it brings us starkly face to face with its paradoxical character. How can we negate the notion of transcendental universality, abolishing, as Hägglund claims, the boundary between the transcendental and the empirical, and yet retain the notion that the trace has universal applicability and a priori force? The methodical explanation of this apparent paradox is contained in the opening sections of the Grammatology, in which Derrida originally articulated the concepts of the trace, differance, and arche-writing, and explained the difference between arche-writing and the “vulgar concept of writing” (1974, 56). Derrida’s fundamental concern in these pages is to articulate the idea of the arche-trace in opposition to all “naïve objectivism” (61) and to any kind of “empiricist, positivist, or metaphysical discourse” (50). This articulation has to be accomplished in stages, by means of a provisional alliance with Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, which is still, Derrida argues, a form of metaphysics, but by means of which the limitations of naïve objectivism, empiricism, and positivism can be shown. The notion of an “arche”-trace or -writing is, precisely, the lifting of the concepts of signification and writing out of empiricity and into transcendentality—that is, the identification of a structure that is a condition of possibility of all empirical experience, thus universal and a priori. Yet all the fundamental concepts of transcendental phenomenology, the ones deconstruction borrows, remain bound to the metaphysics of presence, and it is precisely presence that is the ultimate object of the operation of deconstruction. The concept of arche-trace is thus, Derrida explains, “in fact contradictory” (61), since it is transcendental and yet, as a concept of pure, originary difference, antithetical to the concept of presence. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to rely on the concepts of transcendental phenomenology because its critique of empiricism is valid and necessary. If this critique is not presupposed, then one risks falling back into naïve objectivism, empiricism, and positivism, because, “abandoned to the simple content of its conclusions, the ultra-transcendental text will so closely resemble the precritical text as to be indistinguishable from it” (61).

This is the danger that needs to be more carefully averted than it is in the passages of Radical Atheism and of the Grammatology that I have been criticizing. If we move too quickly from arche-writing to empirical writing,
if we too quickly declare the boundary between the transcendental and the empirical abolished, we do not make sufficiently visible the “track in the text” of transcendental phenomenology that Derrida declares must be left (1974, 61); we risk allowing the reader to collapse the notion of the empirical as it is understood in the tradition of Kant, as the realm of lived experience, into the precritical, naively objectivist or empiricist, notion of the real as that which is passively received and registered by a subject, rather than being constituted as empiricity according to the transcendental structures of lived experience. Thus, when Derrida says that “inscriptions . . . produce the spatiality of space,” this can be (mis)understood as a straightforwardly historicist thesis—which is indeed what it is in Rousseau, whose thought Derrida is here tracking; and “space time is a priori the space time of the trace” becomes almost indecipherable, because it collapses into one the two moments of the deconstructive discourse, the transcendental and the ultratranscendental.

The notion of the trace or arche-writing refers to the transcendental structure of lived experience in time. The ultratranscendental necessity posited by Derrida, as Hägglund himself explains, is not that experience will be written down as a spatial, worldly inscription, but rather that in itself, as such, any experience is determined a priori as a trace, a structure of inscription, prior to its empirical inscription in signs and indeed prior to the invention of empirical languages. As Derrida says in a passage that Hägglund cites, and to which I will return, “The living present is always already a trace.” Derrida’s point is that the Now of the Living Present can never be fully present, as Husserl posits it to be, because it is constituted as such by its relation to not only the immediately preceding and the immediately succeeding Nows, but to an entire train or “comet’s tail” (as Husserl calls it) of past Nows and a corresponding series of future. This constitutive relation to the nonpresent within lived time is what Derrida calls the structure of the trace; and, since it is from the structure of signification in general, and of writing in particular, that the notion of the trace as Derrida understands it is derived, the structure of lived time can be said to be a form of “writing” or “inscription.”

Lived time is a worldly or empirical phenomenon, but its form is not contingent on historical circumstances. When Derrida analyzes the form of lived time, he is contesting Kant and Husserl on their own ground, the
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ground of universality; that is why he can say that "space-time is a priori
the space-time of the trace." But, whereas the universality posited by Tran-
scendental Idealism, as by philosophies of Presence in general, is ultimately,
as Hägglund takes care to emphasize, underpinned by the authority of the
Principle of Identity, the universality defined by the structure of arche-writing
is one that a priori makes unity and presence impossible. The more or less
synonymous concepts of the trace, arche-writing, and differance seem to
operate as "transcendentals," and Derrida claims universality and a priority
for them, yet they are designed to fundamentally contest the unity, identity,
and presence that are part and parcel of transcendentality as it has been
understood in the philosophical tradition. Derrida consequently calls his
an "ultra-transcendental" text. This does not mean "hyper-transcendental,"
a more transcendental form of transcendentality; it means, literally, that
we have gone through the transcendental text and come out the other side.
The track that Derrida leaves in the text of Transcendental Idealism is the
discourse of the universal and the a priori, by which he installs the concept of
the trace at the level of universality of the concepts of identity and presence
that it is meant to contest.

Thus it makes a certain compelling sense to say that the empirical is
(ultra)transcendently necessary—that you're a priori never, anywhere,
going to be able to get away from the conditions of physicality and worldly
space-time. But the problem with this formulation is that it invites us to
misunderstand "ultra-transcendental" to be a higher, more powerful form
of transcendentality, emanating a more binding form of necessity than do
Kant's or Husserl's transcendentals—as though the arche-trace could some-
how hypertranscendentally necessitate the existence of the natural world
and so answer Heidegger's famous, meaningless question (which Derrida
indeed seems to have taken seriously early in his career), "Why is there
something rather than nothing?" Taken this way, deconstruction would be
transmogrified into another form of metaphysics, and indeed metaphysics of
a strictly theological kind. But, as Derrida clearly says in the remark quoted
above, what "ultra-transcendental" means is, incomparably more modestly,
that we are on the other side of the transcendental text, while yet presup-
posing this text as a necessary "moment of the discourse" (1974, 61) without
which the architecture of the deconstructive concepts would be incomplete, and with which it is, in a certain sense, self-contradictory. Deconstruction is an extreme version of "Neurath’s boat," a vessel that must be reconstructed while it is already at sea; and transcendental phenomenology has contributed a considerable number of the original planks.

II

Hägglund suggests that "spacing" might be the key concept in all of Derrida’s thought, which might not be much of an exaggeration; since it is certainly the key concept in his own exposition, I want now to take a closer look at the way in which spacing was used by Derrida to make the initial deconstructive breach in the discourse of metaphysics.

Hägglund focuses on the following passage in *Speech and Phenomena*, where Derrida argues that the exteriority called space primordially inhabits the "nonspatial inside" called time (Hägglund 2008, 71–72). Here there is no question about what *arche*-writing is; it is unambiguously the a priori structure of lived time. Because this passage is so crucial a moment in the inception of deconstruction, I quote in full Hägglund’s emended translation of the standard English language text:

The living present is always already a trace. This trace is unthinkable on the basis of a simple present whose life would be interior to itself. The self of the living present is originally a trace. The trace is not an attribute, and we cannot say that the self of the living present "originally is" a trace. One must think the being-originary on the basis of the trace and not the inverse. This *arche*-writing is at work at the origin of sense. Because sense, as Husserl recognized, is by nature temporal, it is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the "movement" of the trace, which is to say in the order of "signification." . . . Since the trace is the relation between the intimacy of the living present and its outside, the opening to exteriority in general, to the non-proper, etc., *the temporalization of sense is, from the very beginning, "spacing."* As soon as we admit spacing at once as "interval" or difference and as opening to the
outside, there is no longer any absolute interiority, the “outside” has insinuated itself in the movement by which the nonspatial inside, which is called “time,” appears to itself, constitutes itself, “presents” itself. Space is “in” time, it is the pure going outside itself of time, it is the being outside itself of time as its self-relation. The exteriority of space, exteriority as space, is not something that supervenes upon time, it opens itself as pure “outside” “in” the movement of temporalization…. The theme of a pure interiority … is radically contradicted by “time” itself…. “Time” cannot be an “absolute subjectivity” precisely because one cannot think it on the basis of a present and the self-presence of a present being. The “world,” like everything that is thought under this heading, and like everything that is excluded by the most rigorous transcendental reduction, is originally implicated in the movement of temporalization. (Derrida 1973, 85–86; in Hägglund 2008, 71–72)

In my view, Derrida in these remarks cannot be said to demonstrate or establish or even discover that the being-outside-itself of time is to be considered a form of “spacing”; rather, he stipulates it. There is inaugural force involved in this act of stipulating, which is partly motivated by logical considerations and partly an invention in language and which is, thus, to some degree arbitrary. The rules of philosophy have their own stipulations, and this move of Derrida’s violates one of the most basic of these; it deforms and re-forms the entire philosophical problematic of time, and does so in a way that cannot be entirely justified by the protocols of philosophy. To say that this is a stipulation is not, however, to say that we must therefore swallow it whole, on Derrida’s say-so, or else pass it by. To the degree that it is, as Hägglund says, and as I wholeheartedly concur, a crucial element in the architecture of Derrida’s thought, the conception of the flow of time as spacing should be submitted to as much pressure as it will bear, to see whether it can stand up to close philosophical scrutiny, and if so, exactly how.

I extract from the passage quoted the following crucial propositions:

(1) Because sense is … by nature temporal … it is always already engaged in the movement of the trace, which is to say in the order of signification.
(2) Since the trace is the relation between the intimacy of the living present and its outside, the opening to exteriority in general, to the non-proper, etc., the *temporalization of sense is, from the very beginning, "spacing."

(3) As soon as we admit spacing at once as "interval" or difference and as opening to the outside there is no longer any absolute interiority, the "outside" has insinuated itself in the movement by which the nonspatial inside, which is called "time," appears to itself, constitutes itself, "presents" itself.

(4) Space is "in" time, it is the pure going outside itself of time, it is the being outside itself of time as its self-relation.

These sentences embody one of the most breathtaking moments in early Derrida. Yet it’s by what is almost a conceptual sleight of hand that he introduces the notion of *spacing* here. This notion is arrived at in the first two propositions cited, through the argument that (a) the living present is a trace and (b) the trace is a relation to what Derrida calls the "outside." That the living present is a trace has been extensively argued in the preceding pages and chapters of *Speech and Phenomena*; but in (2) the notion that the trace structure is a relation to an *outside* is discreetly slipped in by means of an introductory subordinate clause, and is treated as a presupposition for the inference that the sentence draws—as though the notion of the outside followed straightforwardly from that of the trace and required no demonstration. Of course, if the trace is a relation of a spatial inside to a spatial outside, this relation can be called spacing, as Derrida concludes; but a signative trace is not, as such, something essentially spatial. So how, exactly, does Derrida’s conclusion follow?

Another mysterious aspect of spatialization in the picture Derrida presents in (2) is the notion of the “intimacy” of the living present. This notion sets up the idea of a relation to an outside, but in an indirect, allusive way, passing through the etymological sense of *intimacy* that reaches back to the Latin *intimus*, “inmost, deepest.” The etymological allusion is set up by Derrida’s earlier remark that “the trace cannot be thought on the basis of a living present whose life would be within itself.” But this throws the question back one more step, since now one has to ask how conceptually accurate it is to refer to the Living Present as having “its life within itself.”
The Living Present is the pure spontaneous upsurge of life in the Now; and Husserl tries to secure its absolute "presence" as such while admitting that the Now is compounded of a "nucleus" made up of the present Now along with the "retention" of a receding series of past Nows and the "protention" of another series of future Nows. To say that, for Husserl, the Living Present "has its life within itself" is vivid and suggestive; but is it anything more than an illustrative image? Can we derive an entire conceptuality of insideness and outsideness from it (especially since, as Derrida himself notes in Of Grammatology, Husserl himself had shown how to "overcome the distinction between internal and external experience" [1974, 64])? Is a temporal Now-point the kind of thing that can, strictly speaking, be conceived to have an inside and an outside? It's one thing to say that the relation of a Now to a not-Now is a relation to otherness or difference; it's another thing to argue that sameness has a spatial interior and otherness is the spatial outside of this interior. Isn't the notion of the outside introduced here in a way that remains merely, or mainly, metaphorical? I realize how questionable this question is, considering that the constitutive force, and the ineradicability, of metaphor in philosophical conceptuality, are themes on which Derrida constantly reflects—and particularly in Husserl. ("We have always been adrift in ontic metaphor," he comments at one point in Speech and Phenomenon [85].) But still, even if metaphor is always at work, we can distinguish tighter from looser arguments by means of which metaphors are woven into the web of philosophical argument; and I'm asking whether Derrida's argument is not more loosely metaphorical when he introduces the notion of spacing in Speech and Phenomena than it is at other times.

It would not be of major consequence that Derrida describes the relation of the Living Present to the not-Now as a relation to the outside, and as spacing, be it only metaphorically, if it were not that he then expands this description to include literal space, the space of the physical world, of nature. The spacing, the interval, that holds the Now open to the not-Now is also the spacing through which the worldly outside is said to pour into the nonspatial inside. As Derrida says a few sentences later, "the 'world' is primordially implied in the movement of temporalization" (1973, 86). Time is outside itself because the Now is "outside" itself in its necessary relation to the not-Now;
and this (metaphorical?) being-outside-itself of time is suddenly declared to be the eruption of the strictly spatial outside into the purportedly nonspatial inside. It’s true that Derrida keeps quotation marks around “world,” as he had around “spacing,” but in *Of Grammatology* he is quite explicit that the “outside” of which the *arche*-trace is the (ultra)transcendental precondition is the “‘spatial’ and ‘objective’ exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world” (1974, 70–71).

It is of the highest importance to recognize exactly what he is trying to prove here, because it is fundamental to deconstruction and yet, strangely, was, and continues to be, ignored and even contradicted by the popular understanding of Derrida. Derrida was supposed to be saying that there is nothing outside the text; yet it is precisely the necessity of world and space within the heart of that which metaphysics declares to be ontologically distinct from world and space (the subject as such, “experience,” “consciousness”) that *Speech and Phenomena* is concerned to demonstrate.

The problem is that Derrida once again moves very fast, perhaps too fast, here—certainly faster than philosophical argument, as traditionally conceived, is supposed to go. This argument remains nevertheless compelling for many readers (including me), and indeed one of the richest passages to be found in modern philosophy. The metaphor of the outside as Derrida deploys it here resonates across the conceptual field of philosophy and it is from these resonances that it derives its power.

The most important of these resonances, deeply ingrained in the West in philosophy, in theology, and in ordinary parlance, is that of subjectivity as something “inside,” as *interiority*. This notion is very closely related to that of the Living Present, but it isn’t identical with it, and it does not provide Derrida with the conceptual resources by means of which he deconstructs the Living Present. I have already noted that, as Derrida recognized, Husserl himself was critical of the interiority/exteriority distinction; but the roots of this distinction go deep in philosophical conceptuality, and it is not necessarily the case that one has set it aside even when one is engaged in criticizing it. To fully set it aside requires the deconstruction of the concept of presence that is the very essence of the Living Present. The Living Present is, so to speak, the elementary unit out of which the substance of subjectivity is made; thus,
in seeking to establish the Living Present as the absolute core of subjective self-presence, Husserl, on a Derridean reading, seeks to track interiority to its lair, its innermost chamber. The discovery by Kant of the problem posed for interiority by the fact that it’s a temporal flow, and therefore, as such, lacking in unity and in need of a transcendental stay, had impugned the autonomy of interiority, its integrity in the strict sense of the word, as the nonspatial substance, and now here came Husserl to restore this integrity, to place it on an absolute basis, by locating its essence in the absolute, yet synthetic, self-presence of the Living Present. Thus, when Derrida declares that space is in time the largest resonance of this declaration is its challenge to the concept of subjectivity as interiority. Since with the concept of subjectivity as interiority philosophy in general (if not specifically Husserl) underwrites the metaphor of inside and outside, and since the notion of the Living Present is so closely bound up with that of interiority, Derrida seems justified in throwing the latter question into the register of the former (1973, 76). And yet, in the strict terms of the argument he makes, the justification is not so clear, for the reasons I’ve outlined. It isn’t clear that temporal interval and the relation to otherness are rigorously to be described as a relation to the spatial outside.

Further, in a way the fact that philosophy underwrites the metaphor of interiority as the name of the subjective, nonspatial substance only compounds the problem with which I’m concerned, because the philosophical metaphor is itself the incoherent result of a historical sedimentation of concepts, going back to the psyche-body separation of the Eleusinian mysteries and then Plato, with their conception of the body as the “prison” of the soul. The idea of a nonspatial inside is a contradiction, for if subjectivity is truly nonspatial then it is either nonsense or an inconsequential metaphor, not to be taken seriously, to call it an “inside.” Obviously(?), only something spatial can be an inside or have an outside. In that case, however, can’t the metaphysician say to Derrida, “You’re taking the notion of interiority too seriously—we don’t really mean it,” and then doesn’t this forestall his attempt to force an outside into this inside?

That might be the case, if this were the only resonance of Derrida’s terms of analysis. But there is a whole set of interlocking concepts—concepts
metaphysics can’t do without—that comes together around the matrix opposition inside/outside, a conceptual opposition that Derrida treats as foundational to metaphysics. As he says in Plato’s Pharmacy says that in order for the “contrary values” of metaphysics to be constituted, “one of these oppositions,” the one between inside and outside, “must already be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition” (1981, 103).

This entire set of concepts coheres around the central notion of bounded identity or form. The concept of form itself is derived from the root concept of a bounded physical entity, an object in space of the type Aristotle calls tode ti, “a this here.” Aristotle took the spatial outline of the physical appearing of the object to be also the outline of its being (so that tode ti is ousia, being or substance, in the fullest sense); thus eidos in Aristotle means at once the physical form and the intellectual or metaphysical form of entity. The purpose of this metaphysical ratcheting up of the concept of physical form is to make the spatial boundary of the object’s physical presence absolute as a boundary not only of physical presence but of metaphysical identity, something subject to the logical principle of identity. The physical boundary can be breached or destroyed; the boundary of essence, which is originally nothing but a tracing or retracing of this corruptible physical outline, cannot be breached. The two senses of eidos, as physical and as metaphysical form, are distinct but tightly bound to each other. The metaphysical form is not itself spatial, yet its constitutive sense, derived from a spatial property of the physical form, is that of a boundary of definition (horismos) between what is it and what is not it. A is A and it is not not-A, physically, logically, and metaphysically. In a sense that is perhaps not proper, but more than merely metaphorical, what belongs to the essence is “inside” the form, separated by a boundary of definition from what does not belong to the essence and therefore lies ‘outside’ it.

We can thus list four distinct pairs of oppositions that distribute among them various aspects of the inside/outside distinction that Derrida borrows from philosophy, in order to turn it against itself:

1. Now–not Now
2. interiority–world
3. object A–not object A
4. essence A–not essence A

Throughout this paper I have been struggling to keep my discussion within manageable bounds, but I now find myself on the verge of a much larger inquiry, the merest outlines of which are indicated by the fourfold scheme I have just proposed.

REFERENCES


