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# A Manifold of Re-presentation –

Derrida's Reassessment of Transcendental Aesthetics

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## **Abstract**

This essay attempts to outline Jacques Derrida's envisaged rewriting of transcendental aesthetics, hinted at in *De la grammatologie*. Focusing mainly on the texts published during the 1960's (especially *La voix et le phénomène*) and the early 1970's, I try to situate Derrida's thought within the horizon of transcendental philosophy. Special attention is devoted to Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl given the importance that Derrida ascribes to them. My intention is to capture Derrida's position towards these previous attempts of formulating a transcendental aesthetics. In Derrida's view – the way I interpret it – transcendental aesthetics is a set of issues concerning (i) the philosophy of time and space and the constitution of time and space, (ii) a theory concerning the constitution of conditions (iii) a theory concerning the lowest level of cognition. I will try to support the claim that Derrida's famous notion, *la différance*, entails a recasting of previous notions of transcendental aesthetics. Derrida is well known for his claim that experience is not direct; it must be given through *re-presentations*, which synthesize sense (ideal objects) and the sensed. Ideal objects are themselves dependent on language and hence experience cannot be brought about without the mediation of language. In this essay the claim that neither space nor time would be without the sign is substantiated. With this in mind I attempt to show that Derrida's rewriting of transcendental aesthetics amounts to promoting the concept of *spacing*, which represents the-becoming-space-of-time and the-becoming-time-of-space. Without the deferring and differing involved in the movement of *la différance* and the writing of the unconscious there would be neither time nor space. One of the most important outcomes of this essay is the presentation of the interplay between activity and passivity involved in the constitution of ideality performed by unconscious writing.

## **Abbreviations:**

Jacques Derrida

*IOG* – *Introduction à l'origine de la géométrie* (1962)

*VP* – *La voix et le phénomène* (1967)

*DLG* – *De la grammatologie* (1967)

*ED* – *L'écriture et la différence* (1967)

*MP* – *Marges de la philosophie* (1972)

Martin Heidegger

*KPM* – *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929)

Immanuel Kant

*KRV* – *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781, 1787)

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## I. Introduction

Near the end of *De la grammatologie* (1967), Jacques Derrida commences a brief and thought-provoking meditation on the theme of *transcendental aesthetics*. He writes: “A new transcendental aesthetic must let itself be guided [...] by the possibility of inscriptions in general, not befalling an already constituted space as a contingent accident but producing the spatiality of space.”<sup>1</sup> We recognize the term “transcendental aesthetics”; it was Immanuel Kant who in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* inaugurated this discussion scrutinizing the *a priori* forms of intuition – time and space – and the specific *logos* inherent in sensibility. For his part, Derrida insists upon the need for a certain reformulation of this doctrine concerning both the lowest level of sensuous cognition and the status of time and space. Kant’s conception of space and time, and the foundations for experience are found to be too rigid, too static, too formalistic. Derrida is not the first to voice a need for a fundamental re-articulation of the transcendental aesthetic. In many of his early texts, Derrida returns to Edmund Husserl’s unaccomplished project of a reworking of the transcendental aesthetic. He writes: Husserl’s “new ‘transcendental aesthetic’ [...] will be announced unceasingly but will be deferred always”.<sup>2</sup> According to Derrida’s view, then, the completion of the phenomenological doctrine of a transcendental aesthetics, voiced in both *Formale und transzendente Logik* and *Cartesianische Meditationen*, did not come to fruition. Does this mean that it is up to Derrida himself to realize it?<sup>3</sup>

No, the new theory of the *logos* of aesthetics, which Derrida envisages, is not undertaken under this flag. Rather, Derrida’s reappraisal of transcendental aesthetics – according to his own self-interpretation – is so inexorably different that it “ought no longer to call itself a transcendental *aesthetic*, neither in the Kantian, nor in the Husserlian, sense of those words”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 410/290.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida “‘Genèse et structure’ et la phénoménologie” in *ED* p. 244/205. Derrida returns to theme of Husserl’s unfinished transcendental aesthetics: *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* p. 156/88, *IOG* p. 135/126, “La phénoménologie et la clôture de la métaphysique. Introduction à la pensée de Husserl” [1966] in *Alter* n. 8. *Derrida et la phénoménologie* p. 82 and *DLG* 411/291.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida continuously refers to the end of *Formale und Transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft* (Hua XVII). In the “Schlusswort” of *Formale und Transzendente Logik* (p. 296-298) Husserl describes the transcendental aesthetics – understood ‘in a new sense’ – as the *logos* of aesthetics (the aesthetic *a priori*) and the eidetic problem of a possible world of pure lived experience. Husserl’s major work on transcendental aesthetics was published posthumously as *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918-1926* (Hua XI). In an interesting article treating (in part) Derrida’s knowledge of this work, Thomas M. Seebohm writes: “One has to conclude that Derrida himself never mentioned this book or the other sources, such as the C-Manuscripts, which have certain relations to his these about Husserl.” (Thomas M. Seebohm “The Apodicticity of Absence” in (eds.) William R. McKenna & J. Claude Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 190). Seebohm’s account is not entirely correct: Derrida does in fact refer to the C-Manuscripts (as well as other manuscripts from the Leuven-archives) in *Le problème de la genèse* p. 242-243/149-150 and *IOG* 78-83/82-86. I do not want to speculate on the depth of Derrida’s acquaintance with this material.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 410/290.

But is there not still an affinity between Derrida's work and transcendental philosophy? Let me in rough outline sketch the points in common: the suspicion of transcendental reality of space and time; the critique of empiricism and rationalism; the questioning of sensualistic accounts of direct perception and lastly the emphasizing of the (ideal) conditions for knowledge and awareness. These themes, taken together, constitute a common ground for both Derrida and his predecessors. Derrida indicates that we should set foot upon this terrain with caution. He states that "the Husserlian radicalization of the Kantian question [concerning the transcendental aesthetic] is indispensable but insufficient".<sup>5</sup> I will take this statement about the 'indispensable but insufficient radicalization' as the guiding thread in this work. We must – as Derrida himself stresses – pass through Kant's and Husserl's philosophies. This itinerary will lead us to Derrida's notion of *la différance*, which was aimed to solve – and in part to modify and displace – the set of issues that he inherits from Kant, Husserl and Heidegger also.

### **The aim of the thesis**

This thesis will investigate Derrida's reconfiguration of transcendental aesthetics. I have chosen to situate Derrida in relation to Kant and Husserl and, in view of this, interpret Derrida's rewriting of the transcendental aesthetic as a project, which to a lesser or greater degree, is undertaken within the horizon of transcendental philosophy.

I aim to answer the following questions: (1) In what sense can *la différance* be seen as a development of the doctrine of transcendental aesthetics? The juxtaposition between transcendental aesthetics and *la différance* is by no means incidental: the fundamental traits of *la différance* – to differ (in space) and defer (in time) – pertain to the very being of space and time as such. *La différance* is *spacing* – the becoming-space-of time and the-becoming-time-of-space. Derrida's introduction of *la différance* thus forms the most integral part of the reappraisal of the transcendental aesthetic. (2) How does Derrida's novel concept of re-presentation accompany this rewriting? Derrida is famous for his claims that there is no perception, only re-presentation. For there to be experience – of spatial and temporal objects – it is required that there is a synthesis, which accounts for the being-together of sense and the sensed. I explicate Derrida's arguments regarding the way re-presentation precedes presentation and why re-

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 410/290.

presentation is the condition for possibility of experience. It will be shown that re-presentation is the structure that governs the possibility of the intervention of *la différance*.

However, it must be clear in advance that I am only presenting a limited perspective on Derrida's thought. It is obvious that his philosophy contains much more than can be covered in an essay of this kind. Even though my focus on Kant and Husserl is justified due to their importance for Derrida, it is evident that he draws on many other thinkers. Furthermore, Derrida's considerations on transcendental philosophy (and presumably the aesthetics) include reflections on themes such as intersubjectivity, death, loss, donation and mourning, experiences that evade language, the sharing of language and a treasure of related issues, which are all beyond the scope of this essay. I am however convinced that a proper philosophical understanding of these themes must rest on a prior understanding of how deconstruction is related to the reinterpretation of transcendental aesthetics, in the manner that it is expounded here.

#### **Bibliography**

Any profound analysis of Derrida's work will show that there is no canonical text treating the transcendental aesthetics as such. The two questions of this essay are mainly dealt with in *Introduction à l'origine de la géométrie de Husserl* (1962), *La voix et le phénomène* (1967), *De la grammatologie* (1967), *L'écriture et la différence* (1967) and *Marges de la philosophie* (1972). I have purposely disregarded Derrida's later texts, since this would have meant a considerable expansion of the essay.

The other main references are Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and many of Husserl's writings, all of which are used to reconstruct the necessary background for the discussion. In addition, Heidegger's work on Kant, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, is essential in this study too. There are two principal reasons for this: not only does Derrida keep on coming back to this influential reading of Kant in different contexts, he also – more importantly – borrows a whole set of concepts from it, while he is in the process of developing his own views on transcendental philosophy. Hence, parts of this study will be devoted to drawing direct comparisons between Derrida and Heidegger's Kant. This juxtaposition is not arbitrary; Derrida invites us to do so.

## Outline of the text

The opening chapter, entitled “Transcendental aesthetics” (chapter II) serves as a background to the discussion on Derrida. I aim to situate Derrida’s problematic through a reconstruction of its putative Kantian and Husserlian foundations. Based on a reading of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* I shall amass some of the most essential propositions of Kant’s doctrine – focusing on the *a priori* forms of intuition and the concept of representation (*Vorstellung*). The section dedicated to Husserl shall describe his theories of intentionality, direct presentation, intuition and the *a priori*. In order to clarify the relation between Kant and Husserl I also refer to some of Husserl’s criticisms of Kantianism. After these necessary detours the focus will then shift to Derrida, specifically.

Chapter III is centered on (i) Derrida’s concept of re-presentation (expounded in relation to his meditations on language and how language governs experience). This part includes a brief sketch of the theory of signs, the critique of mental representation and image theories and an exposition of what I understand as Derrida’s theory of the active passivity involved in experience; (ii) Derrida’s brief considerations of the constitution of space and; (iii) the constitution of ideal objects in general. In relation to this discussion I attempt to capture Derrida’s view on the unconscious production of conceptuality (performed by the movement inherent in *la différance*) in terms of a fundamentally passive activity.

Chapter IV deals with Derrida’s considerations of *time* and *spacing* (the becoming-space-of-time and the becoming-time-of-space). It describes (i) Derrida’s analysis of Husserl’s concept of time and the theory of primordial synthesis; (ii) Derrida’s notion of unconscious temporality and my account of the fundamentally passive activity; (iii) the concept ‘auto-affection’ and the possibility of repetition of the now; and lastly (iv) a discussion of *la différance* will be advanced in light of the question *la différance* is itself temporal. Derrida’s interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology of inner time-consciousness has generated much controversy. Engaging with some of the most influential readings, I shall take a stand on these issues. Contrasting Derrida’s early reading of Husserl with his mature one (such as it is presented in *La voix*) I attempt to chisel out the ontological status accorded to *la différance*.

Lastly, I summarize the findings in a concluding discussion (chapter V).

The route of this presentation of Derrida is somewhat loosely modelled upon Derrida’s interpretation of Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène*. *La voix* is a rather short book divided into seven chapters containing, *inter alia*, a detailed analysis of Husserl’s theory of signs in *Logische Untersuchungen*, a brief description of Husserl’s philosophy of time and lastly an attempt to show

how signs and time fit together. We begin *au milieu* with a presentation of the fourth chapter of this book, in which re-presentation is scrutinized *in relation to space*; we continue with the fifth chapter of the book treating the concept of re-presentation *in relation to time* and we end by analyzing the sixth chapter where Derrida proposes the simultaneous constitution of time and space.

### **The literature on Derrida**

During the last thirty years there has been a prolific increase in the literature on Derrida. Hundreds of works have seen the light of day, taking Derrida's work into new disciplines, way beyond the realms in which his thought initially operated. My choice of secondary literature has been guided by two principles: *first* of all I have selected works that manifestly bring the question of transcendental philosophy or the concept of re-presentation to the fore, *secondly* I have dealt with works that scrutinize Derrida's relation to Kant's philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology.<sup>6</sup> It is possible to discern at least four different positions towards the issue of Derrida's relation to transcendental philosophy (in general) and Husserl. Firstly, there is a group of philosophers, trained in phenomenology, who have claimed that Derrida revitalizes and renews transcendental philosophy. Thinkers like Rudolf Bernet, Joshua Kates, Paola Marrati-Guénon, Joanna Hodge and Leonard Lawlor have all contributed with different elucidating perspectives. As will be obvious, I sympathize with this line of interpretation.

Secondly, we find the camp of proper deconstructivists and Derrida-disciples who insist upon a great abyss separating Derrida and transcendental philosophy. The most important deconstructivists are Rodolphe Gasché, Martin Hägglund and Geoffrey Bennington. Although we can gain many valuable insights from these authors, they are – at times – too quick to jettison Kant and Husserl. This is to the detriment of a deeper understanding of Derridean transcendental aesthetics.

Thirdly, David Wood (who is, to my knowledge, the only advocate of this idea) has argued that Derrida remains *too* bound up with transcendental philosophy and that this impedes on Derrida's originality. Derrida could – so goes the argument – have developed a more revolutionary philosophy, if he had not sworn faithfulness to a kind strange neo-transcendentalism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There are not many works dealing with Derrida and Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Joanna Hodge's fine study *Derrida on Time* constitutes an exception.

<sup>7</sup> David Wood *The Deconstruction of Time* p. 125-131 and 267-270.

Lastly, there is a group of Husserl scholars who claim that Derrida has misunderstood (or maybe deliberately) misinterpreted Husserl. For the most part this body of literature does not form a part of my discussion.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the enormous amount of literature on Derrida, I hope to shed light on some of the components in Derrida's thought broaching the matter of transcendental philosophy.

1. My account of Derrida's transcendental aesthetic – especially with regard to the spatiality of space – fleshes out some of Derrida's arguments that have not been taken into sufficient consideration prior to this study. The most prominent work on Derrida's transcendental aesthetics is Joanna Hodge's study *Derrida on Time*. She grapples with the relation between *la différance* and the reworking of the transcendental aesthetic through an analysis of Kant's philosophy (primarily, but also Husserl's). Despite our shared conviction that Kant's and Husserl's transcendental aesthetics constitute an important starting point for Derrida's thought on *la différance* we reach quite different results. The reading offered in this essay is more focused on the early Derrida, particularly his thoughts on the concepts of trace, writing, constitution, the unconscious and the imagination. Hodge on the other hand develops an understanding of the ethico-political implications of Derrida's later philosophy, in a way that I have not at all pursued.<sup>9</sup>

As informed readers of Derrida, Hägglund and Gasché have of course acknowledged the importance of Derrida's interest for transcendental aesthetics and they have in their different ways extrapolated from Derrida's texts a reconstruction of this evasive doctrine. Their accounts are not fully satisfactory however.<sup>10</sup>

2. My way of presenting the concept of 're-presentation' as the primary attendant to *la différance* is to some extent new. The concept of re-presentation has been analyzed before, but its inherent relation to *la différance* has not been sufficiently elucidated.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Dallas Willard's, J. Claude Evans's, Burt C. Hopkins's, John Scanlon's and Natalie Alexander's contributions in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology*.

<sup>9</sup> See Hodge *Derrida on Time* (especially p. vii, 12-14, 44-45, 139 and 181-182).

<sup>10</sup> Martin Hägglund *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* p. 10 and p. 28. The first scholar who took the theme of transcendental aesthetics seriously was Rodolphe Gasché who states that "I have construed spacing to mean the originary constitution of exteriority and space as it is known in a sensible or intelligible manner. Yet this is not to say that the 'transcendental' question concerning space elaborated here falls within a transcendental aesthetics – whether Kantian, Husserlian, or of an entirely new kind. As should be obvious at this point, this cannot possibly be the case" (Rodolphe Gasché *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* p. 200-201). Gasché deals with the transcendental aesthetic p. 156-159 and p. 200-201. Geoffrey Bennington shares Gasché's conviction in *Jacques Derrida: Derridabase* p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> The following works treat the notion of re-presentation extensively: Gasché *The Tain of the Mirror* p. 225-251 and "On Re-presentation: Zigzagging with Husserl and Derrida" in *Alter* n. 8 p. 93-101 and Leonard Lawlor *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* p. 181-188, but none of these relate the concept of re-presentation to the reconfiguration of transcendental aesthetics.

3. My attention directed to *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* shows Derrida's indebtedness to Heidegger's phenomenologized Kant in a novel way. Even if the affiliation between *La voix* and *Kant und das Problem* has been demonstrated before, I still add something to this discussion by showing exactly how fundamental it is: especially concerning the themes of the transcendental imagination (as the common root and the semi-origin of ontological creation), non-sensuous affection and time-constitution.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bennington, e.g. says: "every reader of *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* sees very quickly the relations between Heidegger's 'repetition' of Kant's temporal synthesis as a function of transcendental imagination and what Derrida puts forward about *différance*" (*Jacques Derrida* p. 272), but he does not substantiate this claim. Another work on Derrida in which a specific discussion is devoted to Heidegger's work on Kant is Staffan Carlshamre's *Language and Time: An Attempt to Arrest the Thought of Jacques Derrida* (p. 86-88 and p. 126-133) – this discussion is restricted to the three-fold synthesis and the concept of 'auto-affection'.

## II. Transcendental aesthetics

Delineating deconstructive thought both from psychoanalysis and linguistics, Derrida emphasizes that philosophy – in contradistinction to regional sciences – concerns “a field of transcendental experience”.<sup>13</sup> That is why philosophy – at least to some extent in Derrida’s view – needs to be transcendental and address matters that precede scientific inquiries.

It is to escape falling back into this naïve objectivism that I refer here to a transcendental that I elsewhere put into question. It is because I believe that there is a short-of [*en-deçà*] and a beyond [*au-delà*] of transcendental criticism. To see to it that the beyond does not return to the within is to recognize in the contortion the necessity of a pathway [*parcours*]. That pathway must leave a track in the text. Without that track, 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.<sup>14</sup>

For Derrida, the necessity of transcendental philosophy is viewed with reservation. Transcendental critique is necessary, but insufficient: transcendental philosophy simply has not been properly realized yet. Traversing the pathway, in-between the within and the beyond of transcendental critique, Derrida thus promotes his own reappraisal of transcendental philosophy, in which he reformulates the project from within, and calls it the *ultra-transcendental text*. It is meant to be a new transcendental philosophy in the sense that it accounts for the way language constitutes ideality as such, while simultaneously affirming that language itself is not ideal. How narrow is the gap between the transcendental and the ultra-transcendental? What constitutes the difference? The ground for this discussion will be established by treating Kant’s conception of transcendental aesthetic. In this part we will focus on the *a priori* forms of intuition and his concept of representation. Afterwards a similar discussion of Husserl’s phenomenology will follow.

### Kant’s transcendental aesthetics

In *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* Kant opens up a new domain in philosophy, offering an inventory of what he calls the necessary conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Contrasting his own view with empiricism, Kant acknowledges, “that all our cognition (*Erkenntnis*) begins with experience”, but adds that “although all our cognition commences *with* experience, yet it does

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<sup>13</sup> *DLG* p. 90/61. Cf. Derrida “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” in *ED* p. 293-294/246-247.

<sup>14</sup> *DLG* p. 90/61. Cf. The equation of empiricism and non-philosophy *IOG* p. 169/151. Joshua Kates treats this theme in *Essential History: Jacques Derrida and the Development of Deconstruction* p. 30.

not on that account [...] arise *from* experience”.<sup>15</sup> Finite consciousness, for example the human mind, can only have knowledge about the world given a set of conditions that it – on the basis of a certain activity of the mind – imposes on sensuousness. It is the role of the critique to stake out the limits of and the prerequisites for knowledge and it aims to do so by answering the question “*how are synthetic judgements a priori possible?*”.<sup>16</sup> Transcendental idealism answers this question by claiming that cognition necessarily involves both concepts and sensible intuitions. This is the fundamental assertion that underlies all further discussion: the only kind of experience that can lay claim to truth, namely cognition, requires both intuition and thought, or put otherwise, a synthesis of *a priori* concepts and an ordered manifold given in intuition. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is structured in such a way that intuition and thinking (more precisely, the understanding and reason) are treated separately: ‘The Transcendental Aesthetic’ treats intuition and its *a priori* principles of sensibility, and ‘The Transcendental Analytic’ treats the understanding and its concepts. The discussion offered here is limited to the ‘Aesthetic’.

According to the opening sentences of ‘The Transcendental Aesthetic’ – the first proper part of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* – we are immediately related to objects in *intuition* (*Anschauung*).<sup>17</sup> The primary object of the aesthetic inquiry is to demonstrate how *sensations* are moulded into appearances. Kant characterizes these *appearances* as the “undetermined object of an empirical intuition”.<sup>18</sup> By this we should understand an object that is stripped of any content and lacking determinate properties. Hence, Kant attempts to demonstrate that sensibility – the receptive faculty through which we are affected by objects – has its own inherent conditions, which arrange physical impressions into ordered wholes. Kant explicates the relation between sensations and conditions through a famous distinction between *matter* and *form*:

I call that in the appearance which corresponds to sensation its *matter*, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call *form* of appearance. Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*, and can therefore be considered separately from all sensation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kant *KRV* B1.

<sup>16</sup> Kant *KRV* B19.

<sup>17</sup> Kant *KRV* A19/B33.

<sup>18</sup> Kant *KRV* A20/B34. As Kant specifies, the objects of appearance have “extension and form” (A21/B35).

<sup>19</sup> Kant *KRV* A20/B34.

The fundamental claim, made in the second sentence, is the following: if sensations are ordered and placed ‘in a certain form’ it cannot be done so by other sensations. There simply cannot be any second-order sensations that form sensations into appearances. Kant concludes that the ordering functions cannot result from an *a posteriori* piling together or abstraction. Rather the ordering forms must all lie ready before the mind *a priori*. If we abstract from everything given in empirical intuitions we will see, says Kant, that the underlying pure intuitions or forms of sensibility – that make sensory matter comprehensible, ordered and amenable to thought – are time and space, which are irreducible infinite magnitudes. Kant offers no less than five distinct arguments in order to specify the status of the *a priori* forms of sensibility. Although the arguments for time and space are not identical I have, for the sake of simplicity, chosen to present the arguments concerning space since they seem to be more illustrative. In this context, two arguments stand out as specifically important – and they will serve us throughout the remainder of this essay while discussing Derrida. Kant’s first argument about space detaches all the contingent components of sensation from the core contents of intuition:

Space is not an empirical concept that has been drawn from outer experiences. For in order for a certain sensation to be related to something outside me (i.e., to something in another place in space from that in which I find myself) [---] the representation of space must already be their ground. Thus the representation of space cannot be obtained from the relations of outer appearances through experiences, but this outer experience is itself first possible only through this representation.<sup>20</sup>

Put otherwise, Kant claims that we cannot account for the fact that there is something ‘outside us’ by referring to empirical experience, since this experience already presupposes the representation of something being outside us in space. In order for something to be outside me ‘the representation must already be’ its ground. Hence, our conception of space cannot simply be an empirical abstraction from our experiences of being in space. Kant adds another premise (from the argument from geometry) that might elucidate this concern further: “if this representation of space were a concept acquired *a posteriori*, which was drawn out of general outer experience, the first principles of mathematical determination would be nothing but perception”.<sup>21</sup> This would entail that all the first principles of mathematics were merely contingent and there would be no necessity residing in the fact that there is only one straight line that lie between two points. This argument is complex and widely disputed, but if the

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<sup>20</sup> Kant *KRV* A23/B38.

<sup>21</sup> Kant *KRV* A24/B39.

analogy between the necessity of geometry and the necessity of specific structure of spatiality is valid, then Kant seems to have a case in point for the claim that the conception of space is not simply induced. Mathematical judgments as well as metaphysical are synthetic *a priori* and therefore necessary.<sup>22</sup> The next argument contrasts the *forms of sensibility* with the *concepts of the understanding*:

Space is not a discursive, or; as is said, general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition. For [...] one can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition would be possible), but rather are only thought in it.<sup>23</sup>

When representing something as being in time and space, we do not *subsume* a particular thing under the concepts of time or space, since the *a priori* forms are already necessarily involved in the representation of the object. There are no different species of space or time, only different parts of the given infinite magnitude. Space necessarily denotes one thing, namely infinite extension, in which different spaces can only be understood as smaller parts of this single space. So, in distinction to discursive concepts – which are structured by a genus-species distribution – space cannot be predicated to different items or substances.

In these two arguments Kant has consequently demonstrated that the *a priori* forms of sensibility are neither empirical abstractions nor ordinary concepts of the understanding. The forms do not pertain to thought, but to intuition. Hence there is a specific *logos* inherent in sensibility. Based on these claims, Kant presents their logical outcome:

Space represents no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other, i.e., no determination of them that attaches to objects themselves and that would remain even if one were to abstract from all subjective conditions of intuition.<sup>24</sup>

He supports this claim by attaching the thesis that space is just the form of all appearances of outer sense otherwise the subjective condition of sensibility (the *sine qua non* of outer intuition) would not be possible. It is precisely in this context that Kant brings up the well-known distinction between *things in themselves* and *outer appearances*, which essentially maintains that the subjective conditions of sensibility are not conditions of the possibility of things, but only the

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<sup>22</sup> Metaphysical, mathematical and some judgments of physics are ‘synthetic *a priori*’ according to Kant *KRV* B14-19.

<sup>23</sup> Kant *KRV* A24-25/B39.

<sup>24</sup> Kant *KRV* A26/B42.

possibility of their appearances. The representation of space (and time) does not signify anything at all if we depart from the subjective conditions. This might sound very odd. Are we only allowed to speak about things as they appear, and not as they are? What about the world as it is then? Can we say anything about it? Let us turn to a modern interpretation of Kant in order to understand these arguments more thoroughly.

### **Matters of interpretation**

A present day Kant scholar, Henry E. Allison – whose interpretation of Kant in many respects resonates with Heidegger’s – has defended Kant’s model of cognition by warding off its most extreme connotations:<sup>25</sup>

to claim that the representation [of space] signifies nothing at all if we depart from [the] “subjective conditions of outer intuition”, is to claim that it is a mistake to think that space has an *an sich* reality of any sort. [---] However, this does not mean that things only *seem* to us to be spatial because they are perceived through the distorting medium of outer sense. It is rather that things *really are* spatial in the only meaningful sense in which this may be claimed, namely, considered as objects of possible experience.<sup>26</sup>

Understood in this way, Kant cannot be said to advocate a theory that claims that appearances are mere illusory shadows that necessarily misrepresent the external world. Rather, things are in space and time and they really are spatial and temporal. However, predicates such as ‘spatial’ and ‘temporal’ are endowed with (and restricted to) a very specific sense. The *a priori* structures of appearance condition the possibility of the givenness of objects.

Drawing on Allison’s refined understanding, it is possible to give a more precise definition of the status of these transcendental conditions, by emphasizing that they reflect the “structure of the mind rather than the nature of a pregiven reality”.<sup>27</sup> In Allison’s reading transcendental conditions are not ‘psychological’, i.e. neither matter of habits, nor biologically incarnated forms of cognition, or ‘ontological’, i.e. characterized by *an sich* quality that would

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<sup>25</sup> Béatrice Han-Pile has pointed out the affinity between Heidegger’s and Allison’s readings of Kant in “Early Heidegger’s Appropriation of Kant” in (eds.) Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall *A Companion to Heidegger* p. 81 and 97-98 (notes 4 and 6). The most important resemblances consist in the denial of a two-world theory, on the one hand, and the affirmation of a theory of non-sensuous affection and the fact that we are dealing with transcendental conditions of experience (understood in a non-reductive, a-naturalistic and non-ontical way) on the other.

<sup>26</sup> Henry E. Allison *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> Allison “Kant’s Transcendental Idealism” in (ed.) Graham Bird *A Companion to Kant* p. 115. Allison speaks of “epistemic conditions”, but we have chosen to stick to the term “transcendental condition” since Allison’s choice of term might delude us into thinking that he is interpreting Kant as an epistemologist (which is not the case).

make them what they are regardless of the view our minds hold of them (such as Newton's time and space). The key to the whole question resides in the concept of representation (*Vorstellung*). In essence, Kant alleges that a representation – in which experience is given to us – does not produce its object as far as its *existence* is concerned. As Allison clarifies, it should be stressed that the transcendental conditions 'objectify' things. Transcendental conditions do not rule out what kind of objects there might be; however they are *normative* in the sense that they pre-determine what kinds of objects that can be objects of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> So in essence, we have a theory that says that mind imposes a certain structure on the appearances so that the world appears ordered in a determined way. Mind does not create the world, but it does give it its 'look'. So when Kant says: "I understand by *transcendental idealism* of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves" and adds that "to this idealism is opposed *transcendental realism*, which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility)", we should not understand his doctrine as some sort of subjective idealism, which states that *the only things that* exist are my representations, or a form of idealism that "denies the human mind any direct access to the 'real'."<sup>29</sup>

According to Allison, this conclusion can be avoided if we alter the influential reading of Kant (which has kept us in its grip for a long time) that makes him a defender of a 'two-world' ontology. The 'two-world' interpretation in essence states that there are two different sets of entities that make up the backbone of Kant's transcendental philosophy: first we have the super sensible realm of things in themselves (to which mind of course has no access), and secondly the mind's representations of objects, which are by nature inaccurate and foreign to reality. Allison's proposal has consisted in replacing the 'two-world' reading with a 'two-aspect' reading. The distinction between representation and things in themselves shall be understood as two ways of considering things, "[i] as they appear to us by virtue of the spatiotemporal form of our intuition, and [ii] as they may be in themselves independently of our manner of intuiting them".<sup>30</sup> So, Kant's concept of representation, so crucial for his transcendental idealism, does not necessarily imply – as some have had it – a model stating that the 'mental images' or 'representations' show us something that do not correspond to anything in reality. It is true, according to Allison, that our representations do not represent

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<sup>28</sup> Allison "Kant's Transcendental Idealism" in (ed.) Bird *A Companion to Kant* p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> Kant *KRV* A369 and Allison "Kant's Transcendental Idealism" in (ed.) Bird *A Companion to Kant* p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Allison "Kant's Transcendental Idealism" in (ed.) Bird *A Companion to Kant* p. 112.

the mind independent objects outside us – but only because there is no sense in speaking of mind independent objects. With these concluding words we now turn to Husserl.

## **Husserl – phenomenology and transcendental aesthetics**

A presentation of Husserl’s transcendental aesthetics is preferably carried out through a description of some of the central tenets of phenomenology in general. Husserl’s concept of transcendental aesthetics is a genuine modification of Kant’s notion. They share, however, the conviction that transcendental aesthetics handles the *logos* of the sensible or the lowest level of cognition.<sup>31</sup> The intricate problem concerning the kinship between Husserl and Kant constitutes a decisive point of departure, since I am to demonstrate some of their important resemblances and differences, in preparing the analysis of Derrida. Even though Husserl shows a deep appreciation of Kant’s philosophy, he nevertheless makes many complaints about it.<sup>32</sup> The most important for the concerns are the critique of Kant’s theory of representation and Kant’s inaccurate notion of the *a priori*. By scrutinizing these claims we present different facets of transcendental aesthetics.

### **Intentionality and direct presentation**

I shall begin by outlining some essential traits of Husserl’s concept of intentionality (such as it is presented in *Logische Untersuchungen* and *Ideen*) not only because it is a cornerstone of the phenomenological doctrine, but also because Derrida – in a sense – sets out to reassess it. It is an essential feature of consciousness that it is conscious *of* something, and this fundamental characteristic is called *intentionality*. Being conscious of something means that my intentional experience is endowed with object-directedness. Whether I think, see, hope to meet, hate, fantasize or dream about an object – let us say the table in front of me – I am in each and every instance directed towards this very object (the *intentional object* or *noema*), namely the table.

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<sup>31</sup> As Vincenzo Costa says: “in contrast to the Kantian transcendental aesthetic, the phenomenological transcendental aesthetic does not only aim at displaying the structures of the world of sensuousness, but also configures itself as a science, which has to make clear logical categories by showing their genesis out of the world of experience: categories must not be inferred, but justified, i.e. taken back to their ante-predicative ground” (Vincenzo Costa “Transcendental Aesthetic and the Problem of Transcendentality” in (eds.) Natalie Depraz & Dan Zahavi *Alterity and Facticity: New Perspectives on Husserl* p. 11).

<sup>32</sup> Iso Kern *Husserl und Kant. Eine Untersuchung über Husserls Verhältnis zu Kant und zum Neukantianismus* p. 53-134. Cf. Zahavi in “Husserl’s Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy” in (ed.) Donn Welton *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader* p. 233-251. Even though Zahavi is right in saying that transcendental philosophy is necessarily intersubjective for Husserl, we have to neglect this thematic.

The intentional object of my directedness remains the same regardless of the *quality* of the act through which I am currently intending it. The fantasized table and the table seen is the same intentional object; the difference is that when I am seeing (an act of a specific quality) the table, the intentional object is identical with the real object, which is intended, whereas this is not the case in acts of imagining the table (an act of another quality). It essentially belongs to consciousness of an intentional object that it is equipped with an *intentional matter*, which furnishes the act with its act-directedness and specifies what the experience is about. That which furnishes an intentional experience with directedness is called meaning or ideal sense. To return to the example of the table; I do not merely see (or think about) the table as an object in general, I do indeed intend it *as* a table. Hence, meaning determines the object we intend, and also – at the same time – what the object is apprehended as. Consequently, being intentionally directed toward something is tantamount to intend an intentional object as something.<sup>33</sup>

Let me draw on this discussion in accounting for how we experience so called transcendent objects, such as the table, in perceptual awareness. This will add another component of Husserl's considerations of intentional awareness, which constitutes one facet of his widened understanding of transcendental aesthetics – namely the doctrine of constitution of transcendent object. As I have just said, an intentional object can remain the same independently of what acts I would be intending it through. But there is a difference in merely intending the table – in thought, in memory, through signs – and having an intuitive givenness of it. Having a perceptual intuition of a table – e.g. in an act of seeing – my meaning-intention is fulfilled as I am intuiting the object. It is a fact that extended and transcendent objects can only be regarded from one viewpoint at a time; they are characterized by their perspectival appearance. Husserl says that spatial things are given in one of their aspects and hence always 'inadequately'. However, it is evident that I can intuit the same table as an identical object even though I am looking at it from different perspectives, from different positions and over time. What makes it possible for the transcendent object, i.e. the table, to appear as identical despite the fact that it is given in different perceptions and different acts? Husserl answers this by saying that perceptions of real objects presuppose synthetic achievements that constitute the object for me.<sup>34</sup> In acts of perception we are simultaneously intending and ascribing

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<sup>33</sup> See Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Band. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis* (Hua XIX) V §9-25, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Hua III) §36-37 and § 88-92 and *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* (Hua I) §20-21. Cf. Dan Zahavi *Husserl's Phenomenology* p. 13-22.

<sup>34</sup> Husserl *Ideen* §41 and *Cartesianische Meditationen* §18-22.

meaning to the object and performing acts of fulfilment. The object is grasped as identical through different synthetic performances retaining and recognizing the same identical object. This makes it possible to apprehend an object as being something more than what is captured by the perceptual acts. Although merely one side is given at a time, we are still intending the whole object. We transcend what is given through experience and constitute the object as a totality.<sup>35</sup>

This description of intentionality and perceptual awareness presupposes a fundamental premise that Derrida – as we will see *infra* – sets out to question: namely, the idea of direct presentation.<sup>36</sup> Whether we are discussing the lowest level of cognition (such as the example of a transcendent object) or higher level acts, e.g. categorical intuition, these are given as direct presentations (non-founded or founded). In seeing a table, I am not – as the defenders of representation theories of mind would have it – aware of the table by means of something else mediating my consciousness about the item. No, I see the table directly *in propria persona*. Claiming this, Husserl’s theory of experience forms an attack of theories of representation, which claim that cognition is possible only by virtue of representations. Husserl’s critique of the so-called picture- and sign-consciousness is mainly put forward against the Neo-Kantians of his own time, but one can in fact claim that it has a wider applicability. Husserl famously renounces the theories of sense data and mental representations with the following argument:

The spatial thing which we see is, with all its transcendence, still something perceived, given “in person” in the manner peculiar to consciousness. It is not the case that, in its stead, a picture or a sign is given.<sup>37</sup>

The point here is very clear – nothing is gained by saying that transcendent objects are given through signs and images. By introducing a new (mental) entity, distinct from the perceived object we are first of all unfaithfully deviating from our ordinary experience: we do not, in everyday life think of external objects as immanent copies of objects. But if we, for the sake of the argument, would admit that there are two separate realms of entities – the mental and the extra-mental – in the way that representation theories of mind have it, we are still forced to explain exactly how these relate to each other. If one answers that their relation consists of a

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<sup>35</sup> We see that the specific kind of intentionality we call perceptual awareness is a constant interplay between intending and fulfilling. Intentional directedness can be adequately fulfilled by perceptual intuition, but it is also possible that another evidence turns it down. When approaching the object I took for a tree (i.e. meant as a tree) it revealed itself, at closer inspection, as a lamppost.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* VI §46 p. 674/787.

<sup>37</sup> Husserl *Ideen* §43 p. 98/92. Cf. Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* VI §14 p. 587/710 and *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis* §1-2.

similarity between the object within the mind and the object outside the mind one must still explain why we see a copy of the object and not the object itself (and, furthermore, why the apprehension of this likeness does not force us to infer yet another image – and so *ad infinitum*). Representation is in short parasitic on presentation. In order to interpret an object as a representation we need to perceive the object directly. But, if perception is direct, then presentation precedes representation. Consequently, it is only when we apprehend something as likeness or a copy of something else – such as the representation involved in paintings for example – that we can speak of representation in the proper sense.

Theories of mental representations are misled by taking a third-person perspective of experience, as if it were possible to find a position where one could judge the accuracy of intra-mental copy by comparing it with the real extra-mental object.<sup>38</sup> Instead of deceiving itself in this way, philosophy should take on the responsibility of finding a truer articulation of the correlation between consciousness and objects. It is from lived experience – the manner in which experience is apprehended from within, from a first person perspective – that philosophy must take its point of departure. This is the meaning of his widely known *credo*, expressed in the *Logische Untersuchungen*: “we must go back to the ‘things themselves.’”<sup>39</sup> The aim of phenomenology is to measure up to the evidence of the things themselves, the phenomena, such as they manifest themselves in lived experience.

### **The *a priori* and intuition**

According to Husserl, Kant failed in putting on the philosophical responsibility of going back to the things themselves, in the sense that he presented an obscure account of the transcendental conditions. Can Kant satisfactorily explain how the transcendental conditions – the *a priori* forms of sensibility and the categories of understanding – relate to lived experience? Husserl’s answer is no. By tying each set of *a priori* conditions to a separate psychologically construed faculty, Kant obfuscated cognition. Not only did Kant jeopardize the validity of *a priori* knowledge, he also failed to see the necessary unity between the *a priori* – or *eidos* and ideal objects as Husserl himself preferred to call them – and intuition.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> With this in mind we can see why Husserl is impelled to reject all the features of Kant’s philosophy that entail the distinction between the things in themselves and their unknown causes: “Kantian idealism, which believes it can keep open, at least as a limiting concept, the possibility of a world of things in themselves” (Husserl *Cartesianische Meditationen* §41, p. 118/86). Cf. Kern *Husserl und Kant* p. 79.

<sup>39</sup> Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* I §2 p. 10/252.

<sup>40</sup> Husserl *Erste Philosophie (1923/1924) Erster Teil. Kritische Ideengeschichte* (Hua VII) p. 198-199 and *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (Hua VI) § 30-32. The relativization of knowledge is

All main obscurities of the Kantian critique of reason depend ultimately on the fact that Kant never made clear to himself the peculiar character of pure Ideation, the adequate survey of conceptual essences [*der adäquaten Erschauung begrifflicher Wesen*], and the laws of universal validity rooted in those essences. He accordingly lacked the phenomenologically correct concept of the *a priori*.<sup>41</sup>

The remainder of this discussion will be devoted to this phenomenologically correct notion of the *a priori* or *eidos*. In explaining it, we have to return to one of Husserl's most fundamental phenomenological insights about intentionality. Husserl famously argues that we are not only able to intuit real objects such as trees, cats and houses. We can also intuit ideal objects such as the colour red, the being of a table and more abstract categorical objects such as mathematical relations, states of affairs, propositions, being *et cetera*. Both of these latter belong to the sphere of *eidos* and they can be apprehended in intuition (*Anschauung*).<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, Husserl's conception of intuition is very different from that of Kant. Whereas Kant restricts the realm of intuition to its pure forms, time and space, and the appearances given in intuition, Husserl conceives intuition in a much-extended sense. Kant's categories (substance and inherence, causality, possibility, necessity *et cetera*) are, for Husserl, all in principle intuitable and reveal themselves in intuition. One can consequently, as Iso Kern proposes, say that whereas the Kantian *a priori* is independent of everything pertaining to the material content (*Sachgehalt*) that sensuousness furnishes us with, the Husserlian *a priori* is not.<sup>43</sup> The *a priori* or *eidos* must, according to Husserl, derive from intuition. Does this mean that ideal objects are merely induced from ordinary experience or abstracted from reflections on our acts (such as the empiricists or the nominalists would have it)? No, it does not. That would lead to the problem of induction or sheer psychologism. The fundamental sense of ideality, claims Husserl, puts an unbridgeable gulf between the real and the ideal, so the empiricist solution cannot be correct.<sup>44</sup> Ideal contents are – with regard to ideality – independent of acts

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exactly the target for Husserl's *Prolegomena*. For Husserl, the validity of ideal principles, logic, the purported forms of intuition and essential relations are independent of anything real, anything actually existing. Hence, the authority of Kant's cognition, which is expressed in synthetic a priori judgments, cannot be rescued by appealing to innateness. Rather, it runs the risk of turning it into sheer psychologism (Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen. Erster Band. Prolegomena zur reinen Logik* §29 and §59).

<sup>41</sup> Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* VI §66 p. 733/833-834. Cf. Husserl *Cartesianische Meditationen* §64 p. 180/154.

<sup>42</sup> "It is said of every percept that it grasps its object *directly*, or grasps this object *itself*. But this grasping has a different sense and character according as we are concerned with a percept in the narrower or the wider sense, or according as the directly grasped object is *sensuous* or *categorical*. Or otherwise put, according as it is a *real* or an *ideal* object. Sensuous or real objects can in fact be characterized as *objects of the lowest level of possible intuition*, categorical or ideal objects as *objects of higher levels*" (Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* VI §46 p. 674/787). Cf. Husserl *Ideen* §43.

<sup>43</sup> Kern *Husserl und Kant* p. 55-62.

<sup>44</sup> Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen. Prolegomena* §29.

of intuiting (and in this specific sense, Husserl can be claimed to be a sort of realist). Yet, Husserl insists that ideal objects must be constituted.

In Husserl's view, ideal objects must be constituted by categorical activities performed by constituting subjectivity. *Logische Untersuchungen* presents this as *eidetic intuition* (which would later be called *eidetic reduction*). Ideal objects are constituted in acts in which we filter the inessential parts and purify the essential whatness of the specific object in question. These acts of conceptual determination are not necessarily carried out in relation to perceptual intuition; rather they make use of intuition in the broader sense, namely imagination. In order to have an intuition of general features (e.g. what it is to be a table, or more abstractly, what it is to be an object in general) we must run through a whole series of objects presented in intuition, through which we find the common essential features. In the so-called imaginative variation we can try out what moments constitute the essence of an object by chiselling out whether it is possible to be an object *A* without the specific property *b*.<sup>45</sup> Claiming that categorial objects are constituted by categorial acts we can say – as Robert Sokolowski does – that “categorial forms are not constituted before experience, as Kant's a priori forms are. They are articulated upon what is experienced and are functions or moments of direct experience”.<sup>46</sup> The understanding and its concepts hence ultimately (albeit not always immediately) originate from sensibility.

This description of the constitution of ideal objects is not to be understood as the primary way in which we acquire universal concepts. Ordinarily, general concepts are generated through passive synthesis of coincidence or likeness.<sup>47</sup> During the so-called genetic phase of Husserl's phenomenology (investigating the origin and different forms of intentionality, against the background of more primitive, ante-predicative experience) this becomes more obvious. Husserl approaches this theme of constitution by emphasising how these idealizations are constituted within a *world* or a *horizon* in which objects appear to us with a specific meaning and content. The scientific world-view is founded on a more fundamental form of cognition, in which the world reveals itself as a ‘life-world’.<sup>48</sup> The most famous example of this genetic procedure is found in Husserl's exposition of Galileo Galilei and the constitution of the geometric, scientific conception of space. Scientific concepts such as

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<sup>45</sup> Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* VI §48, §52 and §60-61. Cf. Dieter Lohmar “Categorial Intuition” in (eds.) Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* p. 115-122.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Sokolowski “The Logic of Parts and Wholes in Husserl's Investigations” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. 26 p. 544.

<sup>47</sup> See Husserl *Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik* §81-83.

<sup>48</sup> Husserl *Erfahrung und Urteil* §10 p. 43-44/45.

“causality”, “substance”, “three-dimensional space” and so on do not reveal themselves originally in the pre-predicative experience.<sup>49</sup> They are not the most immediate forms of givenness; rather, they are founded on the lowest level of cognition and must consequently be constituted on the basis of these lower levels of cognition. This genealogical enquiry probing into the conditions of our present-day sedimented conceptuality, constitutes a component of his reconfiguration of the transcendental aesthetic.

The extraordinarily vast complex of researches pertaining to the primordial world makes up a whole discipline, which we may designate as “transcendental aesthetics” in a very much broadened sense. We adopt the Kantian title here because the space and time arguments of the critique of reason obviously, though in an extraordinarily restricted and unclarified manner, have in view a noematic Apriori of sensuous intuition. Broadened to comprise the concrete Apriori of (primordial) Nature, as given in purely sensuous intuition, it then requires phenomenological transcendental supplementation by incorporation into a complex of constitutional problems.<sup>50</sup>

As I have said, Husserl understands the term ‘transcendental aesthetic’ in another sense than Kant. Kern counts three different uses of it. I will end this discussion about Husserl by summing up: (i) ‘transcendental aesthetics’ means the constitution of transcendent objects in apperceptive experience. Obviously, this is not identical to Kant’s use of the term, but it is definitely related to it. The apprehension of an object as formed and endowed with a specific figure is the simplest kind of cognition for Kant. It constitutes the lowest level of cognition, which all experiencing starts with. The second sense of transcendental aesthetics (ii) investigates the pre-scientific experiencing and the ante-predicative givenness – that which shows itself in pure intuition without sedimented conceptual idealizations. Lastly (iii) transcendental aesthetics is also the label for the primordial constitution of time and space.<sup>51</sup> I will return to this third sense in the explication of Derrida’s opposition to Husserl.

With his enlarged conception of transcendental aesthetics, Husserl paves the way for Derrida’s philosophy. A transcendental aesthetic does not only – as is the case with Kant – attempt to establish the ideality of space by appealing to its non-empiricity and non-discursivity. Derrida’s new transcendental aesthetic endeavours to describe how time and space are constituted gradually. In so doing – I will argue – he ventures on a perilous journey detaching space and time from intuition.

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<sup>49</sup> This is of course a very brief and one-sided summary of Husserl’s extraordinary exposition. See Husserl *Krisis* §9 “Galileis Mathematisierung der Natur”.

<sup>50</sup> Husserl *Cartesianische Meditationen* §61 p. 173/146.

<sup>51</sup> Kern *Husserl und Kant* p. 253-260.

## La différance regarded as Derrida's answer to Kant and Husserl

The discussion of Kant and Husserl has given us a platform for the investigation into Derrida's rewriting of the transcendental aesthetic. It is of note that Derrida does not define his own understanding of the transcendental aesthetic. All you get, as a reader, is the *via negativa* statement that his own version of the aesthetics "ought no longer to call itself a transcendental *aesthetic*, neither in the Kantian, nor in the Husserlian, sense of those words".<sup>52</sup> In my interpretation, Derrida reconfigures the transcendental aesthetic with regard to the following aspects: (i) the lowest level of sensuous cognition the *logos* that governs experience, (ii) the constitution of conceptuality and (iii) the primordial constitution of objective space and objective time. I want to propose that *la différance* should be regarded as Derrida's answer to transcendental aesthetics, claiming that the movement of *la différance* constitutes the conditions of possibility of experience. Let me introduce *la différance* properly with Derrida's own words. "We know that the verb *différer* (Latin verb *differre*)", he says, "has two meanings which seem quite distinct."<sup>53</sup> The first meaning has to do with time. Derrida says that *la différance* temporizes, it constitutes time through delay or deferring.<sup>54</sup> The other sense of *la différance* is linked to two sorts of phenomena: a) the discernability of separate spatial objects – "to be not identical, to be other, discernible" in *space* and b) the operations that furnish distinctions between concepts.<sup>55</sup> Whereas the latter is associated with Ferdinand de Saussure and the idea that meaning is a function of all conceptual differences in a language (expressed by Derrida, in the following: "there is no nucleus of meaning, no conceptual atom, [...] the concept is produced within the tissue of differences"),<sup>56</sup> the former deals with the constitution of transcendent objects and how processes of spacing produce their discernability. These different senses of *la différance* and *différer*, pertaining to temporality and spatiality, are in a fundamental way intertwined. *Spacing* (*espacement*), he says, is both the becoming-space-of-time and the becoming-time-of-space. This movement in which space and time is constituted by *la différance* is an originary synthesis.<sup>57</sup> Despite the necessary intertwining of *spacing* as becoming space and as becoming time, I will treat them separately at first. In the end of

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<sup>52</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 410/290.

<sup>53</sup> Derrida "La différance" in *MP* p. 8/7. Cf. Derrida *DLG* p. 38/23.

<sup>54</sup> Derrida "La différance" in *MP* p. 8/8. Derrida occasionally calls this *temporization*, but this is a term that will be put aside here, since the notion of *spacing* appears to cover the same phenomenon.

<sup>55</sup> Derrida "La différance" in *MP* p. 8/8.

<sup>56</sup> Derrida "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale. Un hegelianisme sans réserve" in *ED* p. 392/338. Cf. Derrida "La différance" in *MP* p. 10-11/10.

<sup>57</sup> Derrida "La différance" in *MP* p. 14/13 and *VP* p. 75-77/58-59.

chapter IV we see how they unite and how this unification substantiates the claim of the new transcendental aesthetics, which articulates a new relation between space and time.

Before we begin the proper analysis in the next chapter, I want to give a short remark on how these conditions of *la différance* should be understood. These conditions are the *sine qua non* of the appearance of objects and they are hence – let us say provisionally – transcendental, being neither psychological nor ontological conditions; these conditions are given as different kinds of ideal objects. Taking Husserl’s position toward ideal objects as his point of departure, Derrida claims that ideal objects “have not fallen from the sky fully formed, and are no more inscribed in a *topos noetos*, than they are prescribed in the grey matter of the brain”.<sup>58</sup> Ideal objects are neither from this world, nor from another. Derrida handles the inheritance from Husserl with great caution; if we wish to circumvent the pitfalls of metaphysics, he says, we cannot take the prevailing ideas of constitution, ideal objects or origin for granted. As we will see, these transcendental conditions are in Derrida’s view dependent on language, which is involved in all conscious and unconscious activity of the mind. Throughout his reading of Husserl, Derrida envisages to show that Husserl has tacitly understood this fact and that a careful reading of Husserl can lead to a new transcendental philosophy.

Along with the thesis concerning the significance of language and signs Derrida launches his well-known theory about the *metaphysics of presence*, which is important in this context due to its relation to ideas of experiencing – and thus transcendental aesthetics. There are three decisive aspects of presence: (i) *The presence of the object*. Two ideas are problematized here. First of all, the idea of direct presentation of an external object, which appears immediately to us, without any detour to conditioning structures; secondly the idea of experiencing as sensuous affection (stating that experience is brought about by material impinging upon our senses). In the next chapter we will see how Derrida presents his well-known thesis that there is no presentation, only different modes of re-presentation, and how he meditates on this objective presence in relation to Husserl and Kant. (ii) *The presence of the subject*: the idea that I am immediately aware of myself. One can rephrase this self-presence – as Derrida sometimes calls it – by saying that *the I qua subject* and *the I qua object* are coincidental or undistinguishable (from an epistemic perspective). In *De la grammatologie* Derrida proposes that it is this idea of self-presence that defines modern philosophy – the immediate self-

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<sup>58</sup> Derrida “La différance” in *MP* p. 12/11. In a famous quotation, which Derrida often returns to, Husserl claims “Meanings [*Bedeutungen*] constitute, we may say further, a class of concepts [*Begriffe*] in the sense of ‘universal objects’ [*allgemeinen Gegenständen*]. They are not for that reason objects which, though existing nowhere in the world, have being in a *topos ouranios* or in a divine mind, for such metaphysical hypostatization would be absurd” (Husserl *Logische Untersuchungen* I §31 p. 733/330).

consciousness is conceived as the warrant for knowledge in general.<sup>59</sup> This issue will be addressed in the chapter on time and spacing. Lastly, we have the idea (iii) *the presence of the present in the form of the now*: the idea that there is a discrete and self-contained unit of time in which the objective presence and self-presence reside as fundamentally present.<sup>60</sup> Developing his own approach to the ecstatic model of time, Derrida (who takes Husserl and Sigmund Freud as brothers in arms) opens up for the intervention of the trace – which, *per definition*, is memory of a past that has never *been present* – in the living present. In sum, the present cannot be without being conditioned, hence the notion of ‘re-presentation’. This theme is elaborated throughout this essay.

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<sup>59</sup> In this context Derrida explicitly draws on Heidegger’s work (*DLG* p. 15-21/6-10). The theme of the voice that hears itself speak – the famous *s’entendre parler* – is the pure auto-affection that *La voix* deals with (Derrida *VP* 82-83/63).

<sup>60</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 8/8, p. 14-16/12-14 and p. 84-85/64. For a fine discussion of the concept of ‘presence’ and its different meanings, see John Sallis “Heidegger/Derrida – Presence” in *Journal of Philosophy* vol. 81 p. 597-600 and Hodge *Derrida on Time* p. 55-60.

### III. Re-presentation: Space and ideality

In this part two themes are analysed: (a) how perceptual givenness (ultimately) depends on *signs* – words and concepts – and (b) how this conceptuality, involved in all signification, is brought about. We will begin with the theme concerning perceptual givenness and the status of re-presentation such as it is presented in *La voix et le phénomène*.<sup>61</sup> Before we turn over to this discussion, there is one decisive aspect of Derrida's philosophy that must be articulated to avoid miscomprehension. Many of Derrida's interpreters have understood his work as a ceaseless emphasizing that there is nothing outside language, and that Western philosophy in general has tried to avoid this fact. With regard to his analysis of Husserl, some readers have consequently proposed that Derrida attempts to undermine the Husserlian distinction between pre-expressive sense and linguistic meaning.<sup>62</sup> But, this is not correct: the issue is a bit more complex than that. Derrida wants to establish that antepredicative sense is dependent on, but not identical to linguistic meaning. Hence, Derrida's destabilization of the distinction of sense and meaning does not make the linguistic concept of meaning the sole concept of meaning. (However, it must be admitted that Derrida at times appears to accord such a great significance to the sign that it is hard to grasp what is left of pre-expressive sense). The intent lies elsewhere; Derrida wants to rethink the relation between the two *strata* of meaning:

It is neither to wish to reduce one stratum to the other nor to judge it impossible completely to recast sense in meaning. It is neither to reconstruct the experience (of sense) as a *language* [...] nor to produce a critique of language on the basis on the ineffable riches of sense. It is simply to ask questions about *another relationship* between what are called, problematically, *sense* and *meaning*.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Derrida opens his first chapter of *La voix* with an investigation of the couple 'indication' (*Anzeichen*) and 'expression' (*Ausdruck*), which Husserl deals with in *Logische Untersuchungen* I. The two terms, 'indication' and 'expression', are names for different kinds of signs, which – according to Husserl – are radically heterogeneous and do not (in any way) fall under a more comprehensive concept of sign in general. It is widely held, by the commentators of *La voix*, that it is this that Derrida contends. Whereas Husserl wants to keep the indication and the expression separated as far as possible Derrida wants to show that Husserl's philosophy already implies that the two belong together in a fundamental way (an argument that Derrida presents in the concluding chapter of *La voix*). Important interpretations of this part of *La voix* are: Carlshamre (*Language and Time* p. 69-94), Gasché ("On Re-presentation" in *Alter* vol. 8 p. 93-101), Paola Marrati-Guénou (*La genèse et la trace. Derrida lecteur de Husserl et Heidegger* p. 68-79), John Protevi (*Time and Exteriority: Aristotle, Heidegger, Derrida* chapter 1) and David Wood (*The Deconstruction of Time* p. 111-131).

<sup>62</sup> See the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (Husserl *Ideen* §124). Derrida discusses it in *VP* p. 19-20/16-17. As Kates says in *Essential History*: "Derrida cannot be interested, as he has so often been claimed, in reducing all thought or truth to signs – since the sign as such is about to disappear as a theme in his work" (p. 117).

<sup>63</sup> Derrida "La forme et le vouloir-dire. Note sur la phénoménologie du langage" in *MP* p. 206/172. Derrida treats the same thematic in "Le supplément de copule. La philosophie devant la linguistique" in *MP* in which he

The conception under attack is the view that linguistic *meaning* derives directly from pre-expressive sense, that it merely reflects *sense* and is derivative to it.<sup>64</sup> Derrida's own motive consists in construing another relation between the two strata. Thus, he asks: what if these strata cannot be distinguished, what if they are mutually dependent, what if they affect each other?

### **Experience and ideal objects – the ordering and the ordered**

In the fourth chapter of *La voix et le phénomène*, “Le vouloir-dire et le représentation”, Derrida argues against Husserl's theory of perception or direct presentation, scrutinizing the purported “absolute heterogeneity between perception or originary presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*, *Präsentation*) and re-presentation or representative re-production”, found in Husserl's oeuvre.<sup>65</sup> On the one hand, we have direct and originary presentation and perception, on the other hand we have different kinds of presentifications and re-presentations (*Vergegenwärtigung*) – memory, images and signs. What Derrida puts into question is the so-called heterogeneity between the originary presentation and representation. Instead of regarding them as distinct, Derrida argues that they are necessarily interlaced and he does so by questioning the idea of direct perception:

By asserting that *perception does not exist* [*la perception n'existe pas*] or that what we call perception is not originary, and that in a certain way everything “begins” by means of “re-presentation” [*tout “commence” par la “re-présentation”*] [...], by re-inserting the difference of the “sign” in the heart of the “originary”, what is at issue is not to turn back away [*revenir en deça de*] from transcendental phenomenology – and it does not matter whether this turning back from would be toward an “empiricism” or toward a “Kantian” critique of the claim to an originary intuition. In this way we have just designated the primary intention – and the distant horizon – of the present essay.<sup>66</sup>

What does it mean that ‘perception does not exist’ and in what sense can the concept of ‘re-presentation’ give a better analysis of the phenomenon that we usually call perception? To discern what kind of re-presentation Derrida is talking about we are going to elaborate on his discarding of empiricism and Kantianism. What is inaccurate about these tenets? The Kantian thesis – concerning *originary intuition* – states that only God's mind has direct and

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criticizes Émile Benveniste for trying to conceptualise Aristotle's categories as a grammatical hypostasis of Greek language.

<sup>64</sup> Derrida “La forme et le vouloir-dire” in *MP* p. 189-191/159-160 and *VP* p. 84/64.

<sup>65</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 50 footnote 1 (continuing from page 49)/38-39 footnote.

<sup>66</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 50 footnote 1 (continuing from page 49)/39 footnote (continuing from page 38).

immediate knowledge of perceptual objects since God is the creator of all things. Husserl famously rejects this idea of *intuitus originarius* in *Ideen*, arguing that it confuses transcendent objects with immanent objects. Kant's conception of God's intuition simply does not get us anywhere. Transcendent objects are – as I have said above – necessarily given in perspectives (regardless of what kind of consciousness we are speaking of).<sup>67</sup>

Why cannot empiricism be a dignified alternative to transcendental phenomenology then? Let us sketch one plausible answer on the basis of David Hume's philosophy. Hume does indeed subscribe to a model of perception claiming that we know objects solely by means of representations. Acts of experiencing are understood as accomplishments in which mental pictures of the perceived object are produced out of the visual sensations that strike our retinas. Every sensible perception is therefore causally motivated by a physical impression, rendering an image, which forces us to infer the existence of the thing that we are looking at. Thus, he can claim "that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only inlets, through which these images are conveyed" and that external objects can only be given to us as "fleeting copies or representations of other existences".<sup>68</sup> Hence we are not immediately related to the sensible objects, but related to them through the mediation of our mental performances. The external world is simply given to us via internal copies, or put otherwise, through "representations".<sup>69</sup>

When Derrida says that there is no perception or presentation, only 're-presentation' he does not intend it in Hume's sense. There are two reasons for this: first of all, re-presentations are not mental copies of external objects. Hence, Derrida's concept of re-presentation does not open up for a 'two-world' ontology that separates representations from the things themselves. Derrida remains faithful to Husserl's insights in this respect. Against the naturalistic and sensualistic interpretation of experience, Derrida manifestly embraces Husserl's tenet concerning the givenness of transcendent objects.<sup>70</sup> This is something we must bear in mind throughout this essay: Husserl's distinction – the way Derrida renders it – between *reell* (moments of lived experience) and *real* (pertaining to the ontical) is indispensable. When Derrida discusses experience he is describing it in terms of the *reell* and not the *real*.

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<sup>67</sup> Kant discusses the *intuitus originarius* and *intuitus derivativus* (*KRV* B72) and Husserl attacks this view in *Ideen* § 43.

<sup>68</sup> See David Hume *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* p. 152 (see also p. 17-36).

<sup>69</sup> This idea of experience as the sole and foundational resource for cognition goes hand in hand with a general subordination of conceptuality. Every meaningful idea or concept (an idea capable of being true or false) must be derivable to simple impressions. If an idea or a concept is not, then we shall "commit it [...] to the flames" (Hume *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* p. 211).

<sup>70</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 94/64. Cf. Derrida *VP* p. 50-52/39-40.

Derrida's second disagreement with empiricism consists in his affirmation that representations are dependent on concepts (in a way that Hume could not accept). According to empiricism, mind does not require any concepts or forms of intuition in order to shape a representative cognition. Ultimately, every representation – and this is to some extent also Husserl's view – must (at least in principle) be traceable to some past experience. Ideas or concepts are only higher order representations, and as such they are nothing but compounds of simple impressions or less determinate ideas. According to Derrida, conceptuality is not brought about in this way, as we will see *infra*. And more importantly in this context, cognition is not derivative to perception.

In Derrida's text "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" from *L'écriture et la différence* the same thematic, treating the insufficiency or impossibility of perception, appears under another guise – perception needs memory to become full-fledged experience.<sup>71</sup> The way I understand it, Derrida's provocative statement – 'there is no presentation, only representation' – implies that everything presenting itself to our minds, necessarily does so by means of a representation brought about by a peculiar archè-synthesis involving *repetition*. As early as *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*, Derrida speaks of an "originary synthesis", which "is the originary founding of every experience".<sup>72</sup> The idea in this early work is to turn the necessity of synthesis against Husserl's idea of direct presentation. If perception needs a synthesis in order to render experience, then the presence is already "contaminated" from within by elements foreign to the direct perceiving.<sup>73</sup> Since this synthesis, requiring a repetition, is the temporal synthesis *par excellence* – providing the possibility of experience as such – I will have to postpone this discussion to the chapter on time. (Let me note in passing that if Derrida's argument appears to be incomplete or unsupported, it is because we have to await the detailed analysis given in the investigation of the deepest layers of subjectivity, namely, the temporal synthesis. At this point I have to treat the problem rather one-sidedly, but it is necessary to pass through this phase to understand the temporal synthesis later.)

The problem in this context is to determine what the synthesis 'synthesizes' in yielding a re-presentation. One easily gets perplexed facing this problem, because Derrida is rather laconic about the specific details. What are the components that the synthesis synthesizes? In his earliest work, Derrida answers that the originary synthesis is the unification "of thought

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<sup>71</sup> Derrida "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" in *ED* p. 332/282 and Derrida *VP* p. 116/88-89.

<sup>72</sup> Derrida *Le problème de la genèse* p. 12/xxiv-xxv.

<sup>73</sup> Marrati-Guénou convincingly argues that the theme of 'contamination' and 'dialectics' later develops into Derrida's mature considerations on the 'trace' and *la différence* throughout *La genèse et la trace* and the article "Idéalité et différence. De la genèse à la trace" in *Alter* n. 8 p. 183-186.

and the real, of sense and the sensible”.<sup>74</sup> This appears to be a transcendentalist stance all the way through. If we turned to Kant he we would agree; the experiential representation of an object is brought about by a synoptic synthesis that already involves the compound of the forms of intuition and the material sensations and a synthesis involving the categories of the understanding. Husserl’s appeal to the distinction between the *hyle* and the *morphe* would – at least according to some of Derrida’s wordings – constitute a similar, albeit non-identical, answer.<sup>75</sup> Derrida’s early philosophy of necessary contamination thus appears to depend on a distinction of ordering *form* and ordered *matter* – a contamination, which – it must be admitted – complicates the distinction, but does not rid itself of it. Does the distinction between *matter* and *form* remain in Derrida’s mature philosophy? It is tempting to say no, of course, since he takes this distinction to be the “founding opposition of metaphysics”.<sup>76</sup> It is easy enough to understand Derrida’s reluctance to discuss these issues within the classical (Kantian) discourse concerning the actual partaking of spontaneity and receptivity. This old doctrine of faculties, laden with doubtful assumptions, clearly does not appeal to him. Avoiding these speculations he – at one level – appears to argue that re-presentations are not analysable: they are admittedly and necessarily compounds and so we do not have to meditate on the specific constellation of its components. As we will see later, Derrida will offer a couple of arguments for the necessary interrelation between matter and form. But, on another level, Derrida provisionally resorts to the distinction to matter and form, since – as he acknowledges – it is impossible to dispense with it. Consequently, he occasionally affirms that there is form, namely sense or concepts (or rather traces), and that la *différance* engenders them.<sup>77</sup> What does Derrida have to say about the sensuous matter then? Sensuous matter is actually even more downplayed due to its metaphysical and empiricist connotations.<sup>78</sup> Instead of analysing experience in these terms, Derrida favours another spurious dichotomy, namely the relation

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<sup>74</sup> Derrida *Le problème de la genèse* p. 11-12/xxiv.

<sup>75</sup> In *Le problème de la genèse* Derrida understands the distinction between *hyle* and *morphe* as the classical dichotomy between matter and form (p. 149-159/85-90). He understands the early Husserl (at least up till *Ideen*) as a thinker oscillating between naïve empiricist psychologism and subjective idealism, unable to choose between a realist account of experience (stating that experiential objects are given passively through the reception of sensuous matter) and subjective idealistic account of experience (in which experiential objects are produced actively by the mind) (p. 144-148/79-82). Concerning the dualism between matter and form, see Kern’s discussion (*Husserl und Kant* p. 273-277).

<sup>76</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 70/53.

<sup>77</sup> As he expresses it on one occasion: “Différance is [...] the formation of form” (Derrida *DLG* p. 92/63).

<sup>78</sup> Derrida problematizes what he calls the “onto-theological idea of sensibility or experience” (*DLG* p. 401/283) and later expands upon this theme saying: “I have not very often used the word ‘matter’, it is not, as you know, because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation”, but rather because “Realism or sensualism – ‘empiricism’ – are modifications of logocentrism” (Derrida *Positions. Entretiens avec Henri Ronse, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Louis Houdebine, Guy Scarpeta* p. 67/63-64).

between activity and passivity. These terms, which are no less problematic for Derrida, are far more recurring in his texts. In his view, passivity and activity are necessarily interlaced and must be understood in relation to each other. Several senses of this couple impose themselves on us: a) the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, such as it functions in Freud's works, b) the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary, c) the difference between affection and the affected, and lastly d) the distinction between the receptivity and the spontaneity of the mind, such as we find in Kant's philosophy.<sup>79</sup> In this context the last sense is the most important, since it is the most problematical (and this distinction will continue to make itself remembered in this essay). If the distinction between receptivity and spontaneity is understood dogmatically it threatens to lead us back to a very rigid distinction between matter and form. However, it is unavoidable to speak of a synthetic *activity* involved in experiencing. But this activity is not simply active in any of the senses given above; it is necessarily passive at the same time.

Derrida will in this context presuppose a phenomenological account of receptivity, understanding experience as a kind of active passivity (in conformity with e.g. *Erfahrung und Urteil* and *Kant und das Problem*).<sup>80</sup> Instead of understanding experience in terms of causation between real entities (sensations, eyes, brains *et cetera*), Derrida relies on Heidegger's and Husserl's accounts of experience. Awareness is taken to be a function of a certain 'turning-toward' (*Zuwendung*), or an openness to the world that makes us able to relate to it and take it in. Receptivity and passivity are consequently not understood as ontical interaction, but rather in terms of an active awareness directed to the world and the objects themselves. We are only able to acknowledge something (and let things affect us passively) if we exercise a certain attentiveness to the objects given in a co-implicated world. In this context, it means that the presentation given to us passively must be apprehended actively, in order to appear as objects.

The possibility of apprehension hinges on the possibility of conceptuality (and therefore, in Derrida's view, representation). Before the relation between conceptuality and

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<sup>79</sup> Natalie Depraz argues that Derrida joins forces with Husserl, attacking the rigid Kantian (version of the) distinction between matter and form ("De l'empirisme transcendantal: entre Husserl et Derrida" in *Alter* n. 8 p. 62-63). In another article she develops a similar argument concentrating exclusively on Kant and Husserl and their thoughts on passivity. In this context she shows that Kant's purportedly rigid distinction between matter and form also harbours "A second ([...] pre-phenomenological) use of the notion of passivity [which] makes itself known through the operations of the law of associative affinity in the synthesis of productive imagination" (Depraz "Imagination and Passivity. Husserl and Kant: A Cross-relationship" in (eds.) Depraz & Zahavi *Alterity and Facticity* p. 41).

<sup>80</sup> Compare what Derrida says (*IOG* p. 134 note/125 note 140) and (*DLG* p. 411/290) with Heidegger's discussion of non-sensuous affection (*KPM* §5-7, especially p. 27/19) and Husserl *Erfahrung und Urteil* §17.

representation can be articulated thoroughly, Derrida's notion of the sign must be adumbrated.

### **The sign**

In Derrida's works, we find several suggestions concerning the essence of the sign.<sup>81</sup> He discriminates quite rigorously between what he takes to be the metaphysical theory of signs and his own conception, which incorporates fundamental insights from both Freud and Saussure. Let us start off with the ordinary and metaphysical conception of the sign:

The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, "thing" here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of signs. [--] The sign is deferred presence.<sup>82</sup>

Let me rephrase this by dividing it into two tenets: 1) The sign is something – a symbol, a mark, a word – that functions *as substitute for something else*. In the case of a word, the sign *qua* signifier signifies either the real object (as in the cases where we use proper names, which refer to individuals) or the ideal object (the concept or meaning), but the sign is itself neither the object nor the meaning. The sign merely *represents* the intended object. To speak the language of *De la grammatologie* the sign is a supplement. 2) The sign *intends its object by referring to it*. Derrida adumbrates this function by reminding us that the German word for 'sign' *Zeichen*, seems to have an essential link to the word *zeigen*, which means 'to point to something'. It is not incidental that this is exactly what signs do in terms of function – they point to something, whether that entity is absent or present. Both these tenets, 1) and 2), imply a subordination of the importance of the sign – the sign is merely secondary and hence ultimately reducible. According to "the classical semiology", one could ideally dispense with the sign, as long as we are in disposition of the presence of the thing itself.<sup>83</sup> The sign does not belong to the primary source of presence, it is only added afterwards, when it is needed.

Turning to Derrida's own theory of the sign, we will see how the purported supplementarity of the sign is criticized. This move will involve some familiar manoeuvres that

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<sup>81</sup> Derrida often returns to the idea that the sign cannot be defined, that it cannot be caught within the philosophical question "what is?" (*VP* p. 25-26/21-22; *DLG* p. 31/19). For our present concerns we will avoid these objections for the sake of clarity.

<sup>82</sup> Derrida "La différence" in *MP* p. 9/9.

<sup>83</sup> Derrida "La différence" in *MP* p. 9/9.

furnish the concept of the ‘sign’ with a more positive content. Evoking Saussure, Derrida claims that 3) the *totality of the sign* is the complex structure involving both the signifier and the signified: “The signified is the concept, the ideal meaning; and the signifier is what Saussure calls the ‘image’.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, the sign is simultaneously the sensible imprint in a specific language and the intelligible concept that derives from the system of differences in a language. Expressed otherwise, the sign is a compound of the sensible and the intelligible. Another essential characteristic accorded to the sign is that 4) the sign is as an *essentially repeatable entity*. As Derrida says in this famous quote:

A sign is never an event if event means an empirical singularity that is irreplaceable and irreversible. A sign that would take place only “once” would not be a sign. A purely idiomatic sign would not be a sign. A signifier (in general) must be recognizable in its form despite and across the diversity of the empirical characteristics that can modify it. It must remain the *same* and be able to be repeated as such despite and across the deformations that what we call the empirical event makes it necessarily undergo.<sup>85</sup>

The ideal identity of the sign that Derrida is speaking about has to be understood in two ways: firstly, the ‘bodily’ aspects of the sign must be ideal in the sense of being ‘the same’ despite the empirical diversity it might be imbued with. There are for example many kinds of different handwritings, as well dialects or ways to pronounce words, but these diversities do not affect the ideality of the sign. Singular words of natural languages are necessarily equipped with this structure of empirical diversity, yet they remain legible and intelligible. Secondly, the same sign must be able to refer to the same concept, ideal meaning or state of affairs in different acts: both you and I can utter the same sentences like ‘bodies are extended’ and mean the same thing by it even though we do not have the same evidence. This is essentially what the repetition of the sign means: we can turn to it in numerically different acts over time, and it remains the same. Finally 5) the sign *is a trace*.<sup>86</sup> Derrida’s most profound statements about the highly enigmatic ‘trace’ are worked out in relation to Freud. In acts of re-presenting, there is a synthesis which unites perceived and something that is beyond the perceived, a *sign* – taken as both intelligible and sensible.<sup>87</sup> According to Freud’s model, it is memory that makes this synthesis possible – only memory can unite impressions with conceptuality and yield

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<sup>84</sup> Derrida “La différence” in *MP* p. 11/10. Cf. Derrida *Positions* p. 28-35/18-24.

<sup>85</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 55/42-43. Cf. Derrida “Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation” in *ED* p. 367/316 and “La pharmacie de Platon” in *La dissémination* p. 158/127.

<sup>86</sup> Derrida borrows the term from Levinas, see “Violence et métaphysique. Essai sur la pensée d’Emmanuel Levinas” in *ED* p. 151/127 and *DLG* p. 102-103/70.

<sup>87</sup> Derrida “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” in *ED* p. 298-299/251-253.

experience. Now, *memory*, in this context, shall not be taken simply as an active recollection or a reserve that consciousness might return to at will and at any time. Memories, in the precise sense of the word – *traces* – have never been experienced, they have never been present, or before the mind.<sup>88</sup> They are unconscious imprints. In light of the previous discussions, it seems to be appropriate to equate the trace (as a memory of a past that has never taken place or been present) with a kind of concept or ideality that has never had any contact with intuition. It is a memory that fulfils and realises perception without itself having had any contact with perception. One possible preliminary interpretation, in that case, is that the trace comes rather close to Kant’s rigid architectonics of the *a priori*, in which neither the necessary forms of intuition nor the categories (at least according to one common interpretation), are derived from acts of intuitions or the active achievements of a conscious subject. Such an interpretation is problematic however, as we will see.

### ***Vorstellung* and “re-presentation”**

We are now prepared to scrutinize Derrida’s argument against direct presentation more in detail. Rather ingeniously, Derrida claims that Husserl clandestinely and without knowing it already adopts a principle of a pre-experiential temporal synthesis that allows for the trace to enter the realm of consciousness. I am not sure whether this allegation is sound and it is definitely not easy to track down Derrida’s precise idea in this context. In any case, the argument has the following form: (a) in order to have an intentional directedness towards an object we must be directed towards this object by means of a *noema*, (b) a noema draws its noematic content from an ideal object, (c) ideal objects are necessarily repeatable (in numerically distinct acts), (d) once we admit the repeatability of the ideal object, we must admit that ideal objects depend on signs, hence (e) intentionality always and necessarily involves signs. Clearly this indicates that every act of experience in general requires signs and repetition. Derrida evolves this argument by equating the German word *Vorstellung* with ‘re-presentation’.<sup>89</sup> In the quotation from *La voix* that follows, Derrida reiterates what he takes to be the mature Husserl’s grand insight (a theme which is treated in *Introduction à l’origine de la géométrie*, see *infra*), namely that only the sign and written languages are capable of preserving

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<sup>88</sup> “In order to describe traces, in order to read traces of ‘unconscious’ traces (there are no ‘conscious’ traces), the language of presence and absence, the metaphysical discourse of phenomenology is inadequate” (Derrida “La différance” in *MP* p. 21/21).

<sup>89</sup> In a seminar given 1980, Derrida analyses the relation between *Vorstellung*, representation and *repraesentatio* in relation to Heidegger’s “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (“Envoi” in *Psyche. Inventions of the Other, Volume I* p. 94-128). Due to the restricted space accorded to us here, I can only refer to this text.

*the identity* of the ideality of meaning. The necessary condition for the possibility of instantiating an ideal object is the repetition of the sign:

This identity is necessarily ideal. It therefore necessarily implies a representation, as *Vorstellung*, the place of ideality in general, as *Vergegenwärtigung*, the possibility of reproductive repetition in general, as *Repräsentation*, insofar as each signifying event is a substitute (of the signified as well as of the ideal form of the signifier).<sup>90</sup>

The first thing we must ask is why *Vorstellung* – as the quotation says – is the place of ideality in general. The answer seems to be the following: for an ideal object to be repeated it must be instantiated in a concrete act of consciousness, namely a *Vorstellung* or re-presentation in general. Derrida assembles various different phenomena under the concept of *Vorstellung*. First of all we have (i) *Vorstellung* as direct presentation (*Präsentation* or *Gegenwärtigung*) – be it of a transcendent object or an ideal object, taken in the Husserlian sense that we have discussed already. The second sense, (ii) *Vorstellung* as *Vergegenwärtigung* stands for ‘presentification’ as memory or recollection (that is, a remembrance of a thing, an event etc). It is important to underline that this memory must not be ‘my own memory’, it can be an unconscious trace. We also have (iii) ‘presentification’ as imagination, and finally (iv) ‘representations’ as picture-consciousness. How do these different phenomena constitute a homogenous concept? What is their common denominator?<sup>91</sup> Derrida’s answer is that the common feature of all these modes of *Vorstellungen* is their dependence on *repetition*, the instantiation of an ideal sense. The interesting thing in this context seems to be that Derrida asks how such an instantiation of an ideal entity is possible in a concrete act of re-presenting. If we are to refer to ideal objects in acts of consciousness, we can only do so by means of signs and language, hence they must be united in the concept of re-presentation; since a noema draws its meaning from an ideal object by means of repetition, re-presentation is the necessary form of presentation (the *sine qua non* for the instantiation of ideal objects).<sup>92</sup> Hence, Derrida’s bold claim is that *Vorstellung* in

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<sup>90</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 56/43.

<sup>91</sup> Rudolf Bernet says: “It is best [...] for the reader to reserve judgment before agreeing to quickly to this argument. Is Derrida in his crusade against a philosophy of presence too quickly gathering together under the same banner different forms of representation, that is, imagination, repetition, the concrete instantiation of a generality, and the representation by means of a sign?” (Rudolf Bernet “Derrida and his Master’s Voice” in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 13). Cf. Françoise Dastur “Finitude et répétition chez Husserl et Derrida” in *Alter*. n. 8 p. 49-51.

<sup>92</sup> It should be underlined that even though this conception of *Vorstellung* does not seem to apply to Husserl, it constitutes an essential tenet of Heidegger’s reading of Kant (disregarding, of course, the fact that language does not play this constitutive role for Heidegger’s Kant), which Derrida appears to presuppose in this context. In Heidegger’s reading of Kant the concept of *Vorstellung* is scrutinized in order to extirpate the ideal conditions for the givenness of a world. Through this analysis it becomes clear that everything that presents itself to us –

general is dependent on *Vergegenwärtigung* – the possibility of reproductive repetition – and *Repräsentation* – the substitute. Every intentional act presupposes a reproductive repetition (such as memory for example) and a *Repräsentation* (that Derrida here equates with the sign) that functions as a substitute for the signified as well as of the ideal form of the signifier. Thus, Derrida can, without any explicit textual support, argue that direct presentation must be placed under a wider concept of *Vorstellung*, or re-presentation, in general:

In this way - against Husserl's express intention - we come to make *Vorstellung* in general and, as such, depend on the possibility of repetition, and the most simple *Vorstellung*, presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*), depend on the possibility of re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*). We derive the presence-of-the-present from repetition and not the reverse.<sup>93</sup>

Derrida will, as we will see *infra*, elaborate on this argument in order to make place for the unconscious pre-experiential synthesis of traces within the heart of phenomenology. And he aims to do so by rearticulating the dependency between *Gegenwärtigung* and *Vergegenwärtigung*, making presentation dependent on the trace.<sup>94</sup>

There are many ways to counter Derrida's argument, both in terms of fidelity to Husserl and on logical grounds. Jean-Luc Marion offers one of the most interesting objections against Derrida's argumentation. He criticizes Derrida's conclusion (concerning the primordial role of language) arguing that *La voix* overemphasizes the first of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, where the theory of signs is expounded. Had Derrida concentrated on the real "breakthrough" of the investigations – the categorical intuition presented in the sixth investigation – he would have been forced to draw another conclusion and the validity of the contention of *La voix* would be threatened.<sup>95</sup> Such an allegation seems to be severe, but it misses an important aspect of Derrida's understanding of this issue. Whereas acts of categorical intuiting for Husserl are founded acts of presentation – and hence do not need to be synthesized into what Derrida here calls a re-presentation – these same acts count as re-presentations for Derrida, since they, for their content, refer to something that goes beyond them. This is no mere fight over terms. The attempt to solve the issue, as Marion does, by pointing to Husserl's text is not satisfying. For Derrida's chain of reasoning should not be

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whether it is thought or experienced – is a kind of a *Vorstellung*. *Vorstellung* hence covers (i) direct presentations (ii) concepts or categories, (iii) cognitions, (iv) the forms of intuition and (v) picture-consciousness (Heidegger *KPM* §4-7, §19 and §28-29).

<sup>93</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 58/44.

<sup>94</sup> Bernet "Derrida-Husserl-Freud: The Trace of Transference" in *Alter* n. 8 p. 23. Cf. Lawlor *Derrida and Husserl* p. 181-183.

<sup>95</sup> Jean-Luc Marion *Reduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie* p. 13-63.

understood as a lack of attention. Even if one would search in vain for a clear and cogent argument against categorical intuition in *La voix* (since the whole issue seems to be somewhat underdeveloped there) one can still, in light of Derrida's earlier assessments, detect a manifest suspicion of the whole idea of categorical intuition.<sup>96</sup> The main point that Derrida makes here is that language governs the whole realm of experiencing, and the ideality of language does not derive from intuition. This constitutes the disagreement between Derrida on the one hand and Husserl and Heidegger's Kant on the other.

### **Constitution and production – space and ideal objects**

Given the description of how ideal objects intervene in every simple kind of perception we will now turn to the question of the constitution of these ideal objects themselves. In so doing we will treat two aspects of transcendental aesthetics: firstly, we will treat Derrida's rather elusive description of the primordial constitution of geometrical and objective space. It is a preparatory analysis concerning the spatiality of space and the notion of sensibility. One of the major outcomes of this short investigation is that there simply is no pure sensible receptivity for Derrida. This argument will lend further support that there cannot be a clear-cut distinction between matter and form. Secondly, we will illuminate Derrida's theory of the production of conceptual differences. In a broad sense, this relates to Husserl's understanding of transcendental aesthetics as the primordial ground for scientific conceptuality. In contrast to Husserl, Derrida – as we will see – claims that concepts are not founded on a layer of pre-predicative experience. Rather conceptuality is engendered on a level of its own, which only relates to subjectivity and experience in a highly derivative sense. The constitution of ideal objects is carried out by *la différance*. One might wonder how these different phenomena cohere – is not the constitution of space, which takes place through the lived body for Husserl, rather different from the constitution of ideal objects? As we will see, Derrida's (at times hasty) analysis of these matters brushes these differences aside and articulates the thematic concerning constitution of space and ideal objects on the basis of writing and inscription in general.

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<sup>96</sup> A brief discussion is found in Derrida *Le problème de la genèse* p. 187-190/110-112.

### The spatiality of space and sensibility

Let us start off from the assumption that conjoins Derrida and Husserl; objective space is not original, it has an historical origin and it is derivative in relation to a preceding conception of space.<sup>97</sup> In this respect Derrida sides with Husserl in his critique of Kant – the scientific conception of space is not the primordial space. Of course, neither Derrida's nor Husserl's assertions imply that space is illusory or imagined. It simply means that the geometrical space is 'constituted' and 'founded' on something more fundamental. Husserl describes the constitution of the pre-geometrical space (on which the geometrical space is founded) as a gradual acquisition that takes place in kinaesthetic experiencing, through the 'lived body'. The most important component of the theory of kinaesthetics is that the perceiver not only perceives the object of the perception, but also pre-reflectively perceives herself as perceiving. While typing this essay I simultaneously feel the keys on my fingertips and experience myself as touching the object. I am simultaneously aware of the object and my own awareness of the object.<sup>98</sup> Both the object and my own position and movement in relation to this object are revealed in kinaesthetic experience. Constituting myself as the nexus of the kinaesthetic system, the lived body becomes the centre around which the ante-predicative and (egocentric) space unfolds.<sup>99</sup> Understanding myself as the zero-point of what is 'up and down', 'left and right', 'in front of or behind me', 'near and far' a primordial conception of space emerges founding the *a priori* of spatiality.

In Derrida's early work, we do not find many comments about the primordial constitution founded on kinaesthetic experience. The following quotation constitutes an exception: "The Husserlian project not only put all objective space of science within parentheses, it had to articulate aesthetics upon a transcendental kinaesthetic" in which "the prehistoric and precultural level of spatio-temporal experience" is manifested as the ground for the objective time and objective space.<sup>100</sup> Derrida seems to be utterly suspicious about the whole model of taking the lived body as the point of departure, but his own, direct arguments against it are conspicuous by their own absence. Rather obviously the controversy sets in over the nature of the specific founding of the objective space. Whereas it takes place through the

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<sup>97</sup> "If space were 'objective', geometric, ideal, no difference in economy would be possible between the two systems of incision. But the space of geometric objectivity is an object or an ideal signified produced at a moment of writing. Before it, there is no homogenous space, submitted to one and the same type of technique and economy. Before it, space orders itself wholly for the habitation and inscription in itself of the body 'proper'" (Derrida *DLG* p. 407/288).

<sup>98</sup> Husserl *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis* §3.

<sup>99</sup> Zahavi *Husserl's Phenomenology* p. 98-99. Cf. Claesges *Edmund Husserls Theorie der Raumkonstitution* p. 55-84.

<sup>100</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 410/290.

lived body according to Husserl, it is writing (if we are to believe in Derrida) that creates objective space, in the movement of signification. “Origin of the experience of space and time, this writing of difference, this fabric of the trace, permits the difference between space and time to be articulated, to appear as such, in the unity of an experience (of a ‘same’ lived out of a ‘same’ body proper).”<sup>101</sup> So, the lived body’s experience of space is in fact conditioned by writing. Derrida expands on this theme regarding the constitution of space near the end of *De la grammatologie*. What is interesting in this context is that Derrida elaborates his argument through the dichotomy between *intelligibility* and *sensibility*. He speaks of space as being both *sensible* and *intelligible* and he explicates these dual characteristics by using the metaphors of reading and writing.

The space of writing is thus not originally *intelligible* space. It begins however to *become* so from the origin, that is to say from the moment when writing, like all the work of signs, produces repetition and therefore ideality in space. If one calls reading that moment which comes directly to double the originary writing, one may say that the space of pure reading is always already *intelligible*, that of pure writing always still *sensible*. Provisionally, we understand these words inside metaphysics.<sup>102</sup>

At the origin space is not intelligible but merely sensible. Intelligibility springs out of the possibility of inscription and writing. Before the event of writing the external (in the sense of spatial and discernible) is not legible. Such a conception would indeed be compatible with the idea that there is a pure sensuousness that takes the pure space in stride, but Derrida immediately adds that ‘one may say that the space of pure reading is always already intelligible’. How does this interplay between sensibility and intelligibility function? Derrida argues that the fact that it is impossible to distinguish between the sensible and the intelligible *a priori* rules out the possibility of a pure sensuousness.<sup>103</sup> Space becomes intelligible “from the origin, that is to say from the moment when writing, like all the work of signs, produces repetition and therefore *ideality in space*.”<sup>104</sup>

From a transcendentalist stance – and in the light of the presentation of Kant and Husserl – Derrida’s allegations appear rather puzzling if not provocative. Is it not strange that

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<sup>101</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 96/65-66. “This trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, ‘spatial’ and ‘objective’ exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the grammè, without difference as temporization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the concrete structure of the living present” (Derrida *DLG* p. 103/70-71).

<sup>102</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 408-409/289. Cf. Derrida *IOG* p. 63/71 and *Positions* p. 17/9.

<sup>103</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 408/289.

<sup>104</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 408/289 (my italics).

Derrida investigates this constitution of space propelled by writing in the framework of a ‘transcendental aesthetics’? The purported *logos* inherent in sensibility appears to be robbed of sense and collapsed into intelligibility and conceptuality. The *a priori* forms of intuition, pertaining to sensibility, are – to use Kant’s vocabulary – mixed up with categories of the understanding – the sensible is interlaced with the intelligible. Is it still meaningful to talk about transcendental aesthetics when sensibility is bound up by writing, conceptuality and thought? Is not Derrida rather, to use the Kantian terms, rewriting the ‘Transcendental Analytic’ by inserting the chapters on space and time into the chapters on logic? Is space thought rather than perceived? This problem takes us to the figure of the common root (*racine commune*).<sup>105</sup>

### **The common root and the transcendental imagination**

I have already briefly touched upon the thematic of Kant’s ill-conceived distinction between sense and understanding. In *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl deemed it a deep error of Kantianism not to have understood that understanding is founded on sensibility. In contrast to Husserl’s interpretation, Heidegger in *Kant und das Problem* sets out to dress Kant as a (pre-phenomenological) thinker who understands the primordially of intuition.<sup>106</sup> Heidegger wants to show that it is gaze and experience rather than thinking and logics that stand in the foreground of Kant’s philosophy.

In order to bridge the seemingly vast gap between the thought and intuition in Kant’s philosophy, Heidegger calls attention to some enigmatic phrases in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In the *Kritik*, Kant says that there are two, and *only two*, fundamental faculties of human cognition, namely sensibility and understanding. However, Kant admits that there might be a third something, which unites them. This something is addressed through the metaphor of the common root (*gemeinschaftliche Wurzel*) in the ‘Introduction’ to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*:

There are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root [*aus seiner gemeinschaftlichen, aber uns unbekanntem Wurzel entspringen*], namely

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<sup>105</sup> “The movement of *la différance*, as that which produces differents [*différents*], that which differentiates, is the common root of all oppositional concepts that mark our language, such as, to take only a few examples, sensible/intelligible, intuition/signification, nature/culture, etc. As a common root, *la différance* is also the element of the same (to be distinguished from the identical) in which these oppositions are announced” (Derrida *Positions* p. 17/9) (translation modified). Cf. Derrida *VP* p. 75/58 and “Genèse et structure” in *ED* p. 235/198-199.

<sup>106</sup> “In order to understand *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* this point must be hammered in, so to speak: knowing is primarily intuiting [*Erkennen ist primär Anschauen*]” (Heidegger *KPM* p. 21/15) (translation modified).

*sensibility* and *understanding*, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought.<sup>107</sup>

According to Heidegger, this root indicates that there must be an essential unity between thought and intuition. This intrinsic unity is made possible by the common root, since it is the ground of possibility, which lets sensibility and thought spring forth as two essential (and distinct) components of knowledge. The common root must therefore hold attributes from both faculties; it has got to be ‘receptive’ and ‘spontaneous’. According to Heidegger’s bold interpretation, Kant admits the existence of a third faculty that allows for the engendering of sensibility and thought, namely ‘the transcendental imagination’. The claim that “the transcendental power of imagination” is the “third basic faculty alongside pure sensibility and pure understanding” is the hidden clue to the “inner problematic of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*”.<sup>108</sup> As falling between both, and making them – i.e., sensibility and understanding – possible as receptivity and spontaneity, the transcendental imagination conditions the unification of thought and intuition in cognition.

Derrida’s argumentation presupposes this function of a common root in the recasting of transcendental aesthetics. To repeat the whole issue, it can be claimed that Derrida sets out to rewrite a transcendental aesthetics only to comprise this aesthetic with conceptuality (the trace, the sign and writing). The realm of the sensible is invaded by the intelligible. But, when we follow Derrida’s line of thought it becomes obvious that the distinction between ‘sensible’ and ‘intelligible’ is not originary, but produced by an underlying common root, namely *la différance*.

This *différance* is therefore not more sensible than intelligible and it permits the articulation of signs among themselves within the same abstract order – a phonic or a graphic text for example – or between two orders of expression. It permits the articulation of speech and writing – in the colloquial sense – as it founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, then between the signifier and the signified, expression and content etc.<sup>109</sup>

The distinction between sensibility and thought is a derived opposition founded on *la différance*. The common root points toward a spontaneous receptivity (or even a receptive spontaneity) that precedes the differentiation between the intelligible and the sensible. It is important to make clear how Derrida at the same time pursues and deviates from phenomenology by

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<sup>107</sup> Kant *KRV* A15/B29.

<sup>108</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 135/95.

<sup>109</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 92/62-63.

alluding to the common root: whereas Husserl and (Heidegger's) Kant agree that the unity manifested in the common root supports the claim that intuition is prior to conceptuality, and that concepts in general are founded on intuition, Derrida draws the opposite conclusion: namely, that conceptuality is independent from any factual intuiting. Since conceptuality is produced by *la différance*, the dichotomy of intuition and thought is founded on this force of differentiation.<sup>110</sup> Yet, concepts are not, for that matter, heterogeneous to intuition, they complete intuition without descending from it. Derrida's insistence on the rewriting of the transcendental aesthetics thus amounts to a denial of pure sensuousness. Writing inhabits the purely sensible right from the very beginning. But, as we will see, this does not privilege writing in the sense of conceptuality and thought. Rather, Derrida's rewriting of the transcendental aesthetics amounts to a debunking of thought and sensibility at the same time.

In elaborating his thoughts on these themes Derrida's evokes the transcendental imagination as a simile for *la différance*, to adumbrate – what I understand as – the movement of *la différance* as a fundamentally passive activity. In *La dissémination* Derrida writes that the “transcendental imagination” is “‘the art hidden in the depths of our soul’, which belongs neither simply to the sensible nor simply to the intelligible, neither simply to passivity nor simply to activity”.<sup>111</sup> Defending the validity of this juxtaposition, Derrida says that the transcendental imagination seems “to escape the domination of the present given in the form of *Vorhandenheit* and *Gegenwärtigkeit*” and that is “freed from the privilege of the present and the now”.<sup>112</sup>

From what I can discern, the transcendental imagination appears as a fine rhetorical expression for *la différance* for the following reasons: (i) the faculty of imagination is homeless and without origin, it is neither thought, nor experience, neither receptive, nor spontaneous, neither active, nor passive. It precedes these distinctions. It can intuit something that is not present, or more importantly, something that is not perceptually intuitable at all. It disposes

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<sup>110</sup> Depraz proposes that the empirical and the transcendental are co-generative; that they evolve in parallel, side by side, affecting each other without being reducible to each other (Depraz “De l'empirisme transcendantal: entre Husserl et Derrida” in *Alter* n. 8 p. 62-68).

<sup>111</sup> Derrida “La pharmacie de Platon” in *La dissémination* p. 156/126. Cf. Derrida “Force et signification” in *ED* p. 10/2 and 15-16/6-7 (where Kant's notion of transcendental imagination is analysed) and “La forme et le vouloir-dire” in *MP* p. 198/165-166. Heidegger's reading of Kant echoes in Derrida's analysis: “Kant introduces the pure power of imagination as an ‘indispensable function of the soul’” (Heidegger *KPM* p. 127/90). Kant himself says: “Synthesis in general is, as we shall subsequently see, the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious” (Kant *KRV* B103). Cf. Bernet (“Derrida-Husserl-Freud” in *Alter* n. 8 p. 26) and Seebohm (“The Apodicticity of Absence” in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 192) who have noticed the importance of the imagination in Derrida's reading of Husserl.

<sup>112</sup> Derrida “Ousia et grammè. Note sur une note de *Sein und Zeit*” in *MP* p. 56/49 and p. 56 note 18/50 note 29.

of, as Heidegger expresses it, a peculiar “non-connectedness to being” and objects in general.<sup>113</sup> (ii) The transcendental use of the imagination is as Heidegger stresses ‘creative’ (*schöpferisch*).<sup>114</sup> Heidegger here draws a decisive distinction between *ontical* and *ontological* creation. *Ontic creation* is a creation of beings, i.e. singular things, objects, real properties residing in the extant world. In distinction to this, *ontological creation* engenders transcendental conditions. The transcendental imagination forms the look of possible objects. It creates images without depending on a prior intuition.<sup>115</sup> Thus, it shares its fundamental characteristics with Derrida’s trace. (iii) More importantly, the *a priori*, whether we are speaking of the forms of intuition or the categories, are constituted by the transcendental imagination. This constitution is not active (in the sense of conscious, deliberate and voluntary), but passively active – i.e. receptively spontaneous. In clarifying this, Heidegger affirms that time and space are transcendently ideal and empirically real (and not transcendently real, they are not things or beings) and deepens this line of reasoning through the concept of the ‘Nothing’ (*Nichts*) – probably more known from *Sein und Zeit* and *Was ist Metaphysik?*. In *Kant und das Problem*, this concept is synonymous with that which is not simply a being, it is a no-thing. The Nothing is a precondition for the appearance of beings. Hence, within the set of ‘the Nothing’ we find the pure forms of intuition, the categories of the understanding and the transcendental object = x.<sup>116</sup> The Nothing is Being that lets beings present themselves within a horizon. But, this Being is not, and could not be, a being. If we turn to Derrida, it is plain to see that much the same can be said about *la différance*: he cautiously affirms “*that différance is not, does not exist, is not a present-being (on), in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything that it is not, that is, everything; and consequently it has neither existence nor essence*”.<sup>117</sup> Against the background of these preparatory descriptions we can adumbrate Derrida’s theory of the fundamentally passive and unconscious constitution of ideal objects.

### **Constitution of ideal objects – *la différance***

Derrida’s view of the constitution of ideal objects are – too a large extent – developed as a development of Husserl’s account. Husserl-scholars from the Anglo-American camp, such as

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<sup>113</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 128/91.

<sup>114</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 44/31.

<sup>115</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 130/92.

<sup>116</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 120-125/85-88.

<sup>117</sup> Derrida “*La différance*” in *MP* p. 6/6. Cf. Derrida *DLG* p. 34/21.

J. N. Mohanty and Dallas Willard, have contested Derrida's interpretation of Husserl's views on the constitution of the ideal objects.<sup>118</sup> On different grounds, they both allege that Derrida simply neglects Husserl's insight that ideal objects are not brought about by reflections over acts of experience, and that Derrida is running the risk of making ideal objects historically relative or psychologistic. Willard ascribes the following tenets to Derrida (claiming that these are also the views that Derrida accords to Husserl's late philosophy): (i) ideal objects do not exist in a *topos ouranios* and they are not from the empirical world either, (ii) from this follows that ideal objects are derived from 'a transcendental subjectivity', which produces ideal objects, (iii) ideal objects are intrinsically historical, (iv) ideal objects depend on the possibility of acts of repetition and (v) language is the medium in which constitution and repetition takes place.<sup>119</sup> But, says Willard, this is not only a fundamental misreading of Husserl, it is also an implausible theory of ideal being.<sup>120</sup> I am ready to subscribe to (i) and (iii-v), granted that they are modified. Allegation (ii) however is more problematic and it is very hard to find a direct support of it in Derrida's text (Willard seems to regard it as a conclusion, so he does not bother finding textual support for it). Rather, tenet (ii) is frankly contradicted by Derrida's more hyperbolic formulations. According to Derrida: "There is no constituting subjectivity. And it is necessary to deconstruct [it] all the way down to the concept of constitution".<sup>121</sup> Should we interpret this literally? Is it really the case that (transcendental) subjectivity does not constitute ideal objects? I will try to answer this question by outlining Derrida's view of constitution.

When Derrida affirms that concepts do not await us in a *topos ouranios* he means that ideal objects are not residing in a heavenly realm of eternal ideality. Arguing against this view, Derrida amasses a couple of arguments against Kant's critical philosophy. In Derrida's interpretation, Kant sees no other possibility than to confine his transcendental philosophy to a world "of ideal constituted objects, whose correlate was therefore itself a constituted subject"

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<sup>118</sup> Dallas Willard "Is Derrida's View of Ideal Being Rationally Defensible?" in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 35 and J.N. Mohanty "On Derrida's Reading of Husserl" in *Phenomenology: Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy* p. 71-72.

<sup>119</sup> Willard "Is Derrida's View of Ideal Being Rationally Defensible?" in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> Referring to Husserl's *Ideen* §22, Willard draws the conclusion that "The being of ideal, non-temporal, objects has essentially nothing to do with being made or developed in time, but rather is presupposed in all temporal making and development" (Willard "Is Derrida's View of Ideal Being Rationally Defensible?" in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 32). Let us note in passing that Willard's view of Husserl is not uncontroversial. It seems to restrict all phenomenology to static phenomenology without even bothering to justify this stipulation.

<sup>121</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 94 note 1/72 note.

in order to escape empiricism and its threatening relativization of knowledge.<sup>122</sup> The outcome of Kant's limited comprehension leads to a kind of Platonism. Taking the issue of the constitution of geometry as the point of departure, Derrida describes Kant's view in the following way:

For the inaugural mutation which interests Kant *hands over* geometry rather than creates it; it sets free a possibility, which is nothing less than historical, in order to hand it to us. At first this "revolution" is only a "revelation for" the first geometer. It is not produced by him. It is understood under a dative category, and the activity of the geometer to which the "happy thought" occurred is only the empirical unfolding of a profound reception.<sup>123</sup>

For Kant, says Derrida, geometry simply appears, as already constituted, for the first geometer; it does not need to be constituted. As is evident, Derrida takes sides with Husserl against Kant in this question. Husserl acknowledges that there is an alternative to Platonism and naturalism. Contrasting phenomenology to Platonism, Derrida says that if "the *eidos* and the ideal object do not preexist every subjective act, as in a [conventional] Platonism: if then they have a history, they must be related to, i.e., they must be primordially grounded in, the protoidealizations based on the substrate of an actually perceived world".<sup>124</sup> Husserl's great contribution to this problematic is to construe a different conception of the *a priori*, namely the concrete *a priori*. Derrida elaborates on Husserl's concrete *a priori* to emphasize how Husserl brakes with Kant's rigid formalism and develops the possibility of a historical *a priori*.<sup>125</sup> It is this notion of the historical *a priori* that makes it possible for Husserl to understand how an eidetic instituting can grasp something intuitively and then give it a conceptual form, which is independent from the very act that seized the intuition. It is an *a priori* that is constituted in history, without being historically relative with regard to truth and validity.

The next step in Derrida's analysis of Husserl is to demonstrate how the very act of constituting requires language. The argumentation that Derrida puts forward in the first half of the "Introduction" to Husserl's late work *Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie* supports the claim that language is a necessary condition for the instituting and maintenance of ideal entities. "By itself, the speaking subject, in the strict sense of the term, is incapable of absolutely grounding ideal Objectivity of sense. [---] The possibility of *writing* will assure the

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<sup>122</sup> Derrida *IOG* p. 25/42.

<sup>123</sup> Derrida *IOG* p. 22/39-40.

<sup>124</sup> Derrida *IOG* p. 29/45.

<sup>125</sup> Derrida *IOG* p. 24 note 1/41 note 29.

absolute traditionalization of the object, its absolute ideal Objectivity.”<sup>126</sup> Without language, the discovery that took place in intuition would be lost in the factual cessation of the subjective act. As Derrida’s analysis proceeds, he shows that Husserl acknowledges that writing – in the ordinary sense of the word, as written letters or symbols – is a condition for the proliferation, preservation and recollection of an idea or a concept. *Factual inscription* facilitates correspondence in space and over time – it makes possible the preservation of thoughts, ideas, and experiences in material imprints. Expressed otherwise, the possibility of writing inaugurates a tradition, in which thoughts can be transmitted, maintained, altered or improved. Writing, taken as a transcendental language – in the extended sense of languages and signs – is the condition of possibility for constitution and repeatability. Without language, we would not be able to instantiate the same ideal object in different acts, in different epochs and different languages. Husserl in this context acknowledges that this opens up for the possibility of instantiating ideal objects without letting these repetitions be accompanied by intuitive fulfilment. It is possible to contend oneself with a merely signitive givenness, which does not return to a primary givenness.

It is against this background that Derrida re-evaluates the possibility of repeating ideal objects in their identity. He claims that this possibility of the maintenance of ideal objects also necessarily carries a threat from within. There is never a guarantee that the ideal object is repeated correctly or grasped in its ideal original meaning. The sign bears a part of the possibility of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, oblivion *et cetera*. This is the peril of language, communication, sending and receiving.<sup>127</sup> We rely on language to be the warrant of ideal objects, but language is not ideal in itself.

In the text written at the end of the 1960’s, it becomes clear that sense and linguistic meaning, for Derrida, are by no means derived from experience. The transcendental language (language by dint of which a constituting subject constitutes ideal objects) spoken of in the “Introduction” takes on a new meaning. According to the concluding chapter of *La voix*, Husserl’s theory of sense contains a premonition of the constitutive role of transcendental language. It opens up for the possibility of a conception of language that makes meaning

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<sup>126</sup> Derrida *IOG* p. 83-84/87.

<sup>127</sup> Derrida *IOG* p. 90-91/92-93 and *VP* p. 91/70. Mohanty proposes that Derrida has confused the difference between the maintenance and the constitution of the ideal objects and (consequently) misunderstood the function of repetition. It is the ideal existence of ideal objects that permits repetition, and not (inversely, as Derrida wants it) the repetition that allows for ideal existence. Derrida has simply confused the condition with the conditioned (Mohanty “On Derrida’s Reading of Husserl” in *Phenomenology* p. 72). An analysis more sympathetic to Derrida – guiding our current presentation – is given by Bernet (“La voie et le phénomène” in (eds.) Marc Crépon & Frédéric Worms *Derrida, la tradition de la philosophie* p. 76-80).

independent of the intending subject and the intended object.<sup>128</sup> Signification in general functions independently of the presence of a signifying subject, or a present signified object – and hence functions independently of intuition in general. Many of Derrida’s more extreme views thus seem to swerve from the phenomenological account of the constitution of ideal objectivity. Signs and languages are not merely factual conditions for the constitution of an ideal object, but transcendental conditions of the instituting of ideal objects as such.<sup>129</sup> Adopting Saussure’s conviction that the meaning of a concept is determined in relation to all the other terms within the structure, transcendental language comes to function on a level of its own. No matter what a specific subject (the writer, the speaker) might have meant or thought making use of language, it is in the end language itself, which determines its ultimate meaning (if there is one). No sign or concept can be used in a fundamentally conventional or an absolutely novel way. The play of repetition is always dependent on the tissues of differences and differentiations.<sup>130</sup>

The texts published during this time are concerned with the issue of how writing can be regarded as the force that constitutes the subject. Treating Freud and Saussure, Derrida hints at a theory of unconscious writing governing the realm of subjectivity. The subject does not rule over language as he may since language is not an expression of pure conscious thought. Rather “the subject (in its identity of with itself, or eventually in its consciousness of its identity with itself, its self-consciousness) is inscribed in language, [it] is a ‘function’ of language” coerced to conform to the “system of the rules of language as a system of differences”.<sup>131</sup> The subject itself must be understood as written and constituted by different layers of unconscious production, founded on forces from society, history and the diachronical changes in language. In this sense, there is no constituting subjectivity, since no *active* contribution of a subject can constitute neither itself, nor the ideal objects (which it presupposes for its own constitution). It is in light of this that Derrida can say that everything starts with the re-presentation, repetition and the supplement. These phenomena do not take experience or consciousness in general by

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<sup>128</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 99-111/76-85.

<sup>129</sup> Kates proposes that there is an important difference between Derrida’s ‘pre-deconstructive’ readings of Husserl – of which the “Introduction” is the last – and the later deconstructive readings of Husserl – such as *La voix* (*Essential History* p. 40-43). In the “Introduction”, Derrida’s analysis of the transcendental production of essences and the importance of language is not identical with the ones presented later (*Essential History* p. 61-66 and p. 79-82).

<sup>130</sup> Derrida *Positions* p. 29/19.

<sup>131</sup> Derrida “La différence” in *MP* p. 16/15. Cf. Derrida “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” in *ED* p. 335/285. “Why *subjects*? Why should writing be another name for the constitution of *subjects* and, so to speak, of *constitution* itself? of a subject, that is to say of an individual held responsible (for) himself in front of a law and by the same token subject to that law?” (Derrida *DLG* p. 399/281). Cf. Gasché *The Tain of the Mirror* p. 156.

surprise, he says, they are not added afterwards or brought to life by memory, but constitutes givenness from the very beginning.

Now, it is of note that this does not entail that the constitution does not supervene on (and is inherently bound up with) transcendental subjectivity, since language – the place of ideality – must continue to be written and spoken, instantiated in acts of repetition. There is thus a certain ‘dialectic’ between the passively constituting subject and the constituted subject. Subjectivity seems to contribute to constitution, but only passively. “The relationship between passivity and difference cannot be distinguished from the relationship between the fundamental *unconsciousness* of language (as rooted within language) [...] which constitutes the origin of signification.”<sup>132</sup> As a matter of fact, this dialectic between the active and the passive reflects the whole conundrum, which eventually led Derrida to coin the term *la différance*. The *a* of *la différance* endeavours to account for the fact that *la différance* transgresses the opposition between the passive and the active – it is a middle voice, in-between the two poles.

We must consider that in the usage of our language the ending - *ance* remains undecided *between* the active and the passive. And we will see why that which lets itself be designated *différance* is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like a middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation, an operation that cannot be conceived either as passion or as the action of a subject on an object.<sup>133</sup>

The outcome of this discussion is that *la différance* is understood to be concomitant to history and the unconscious development of conceptuality. It is historical and it is altered by changes in transcendental history, without being historical in the empirical sense. Being neither active nor passive (but at the same time both receptive and spontaneous), intrinsically unconscious and ontologically creative it has the power to inaugurate a world, the horizon and the look of the world. Out of itself – without volition, without intuition, without thought and consciousness – it creates the transcendental conditions for the appearance of the world such as it may be represented. It reveals the sensible and makes it appear through the non-sensible. Being both sensible and intelligible *la différance* makes possible the unification of the *a priori* with the sensuous.

*The (pure) trace is différance.* It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it *does not exist*, although it is never a *being-present* outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to

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<sup>132</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 99/68.

<sup>133</sup> Derrida “La différance” in *MP* p. 9/9.

all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.) concept or operation, motor or sensory.<sup>134</sup>

Against this background, the theory of unconscious writing – the passive activity and the active passivity involved in all experiencing, in all constitution (of space and of ideal objects in general) – appears as the new *logos* of experience.<sup>135</sup> However, this *logos* does not strictly pertain to experience itself or the sensible intuition. Hence, it does not fall (at least not entirely) under the concept of a conventional transcendental aesthetic. The originary writing of *la différance* is more fundamental than the distinction between thought and intuition. It precedes the Kantian architectonic that distinguishes between the chapter on the aesthetic and the chapter on the analytic.

### **Concluding remarks on re-presentation, ideality and space**

Let us sum up our findings from this chapter. Through the analysis I have substantiated Derrida's claim that everything begins with re-presentation and repetition. His dictum entails that experience is possible on the ground of an originary synthesis, which unites concepts and a donation of the sensuous. I have suggested that Derrida tirelessly contests a naturalistic account of sensuousness, in which sensations are taken as real beings (and that he, on this score, subscribes to the phenomenological insights of both Husserl and Heidegger). The discrepancy between Derrida and Husserl seems to be instigated by the status of *Vorstellung* and re-presentation. Whereas Derrida claims that an original synthesis per definition is a re-presentation (which unites absence and presence with the help of language), Husserl eagerly argues that higher level of cognitions (such as the categorial) are presentations. Derrida's denial of any rigid distinction between sensibility and intelligibility (or rephrased, reading and writing) places the workings of *la différance* in the midst of primitive perceptual intuiting. As we have seen, in the analysis of the constitution or production of conceptuality, *la différance* works through the unconscious (which to some extent resembles the transcendental imagination). It is here possible to claim that Derrida's notion of the trace unites two dual transcendental philosophical models of the *a priori*. Like Kant, Derrida claims that the *a priori* must be prior to acts of experiencing. The trace has never been given in intuition, yet it renders intuition

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<sup>134</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 92/62 (translation modified).

<sup>135</sup> I once again quote Derrida: "A new transcendental aesthetic must let itself be guided [...] by the possibility of inscriptions in general, not befalling an already constituted space as a contingent accident but producing the spatiality of space" (Derrida *DLG* p. 410/290).

possible. The trace constitutes intuition right from the very start. Just like Husserl, on the other hand, Derrida confirms that the *a priori* must be constituted and reconstituted throughout history. In this sense, Derrida embraces Husserl's notion of the historical *a priori*. As these two tenets intersect, Derrida elaborates a conception displaying how the *a priori* is constituted as a fundamentally passive activity (or spontaneity) taking place in language. It is the unconscious movement of *la différance*.

Of course, these remarks might stir up many questions. Does the conceptuality of unconscious traces reside on a level of its own or does it – in some sense – interplay with ordinary, subjective experience? Is it possible to acquire new empirical concepts only by means of traces that are *a priori*? Derrida is rather silent with regard to these questions, since – I take it – they are already so deeply laden with metaphysics that they lead us astray. Consequently, one should perhaps understand the ‘trace’ and *la différance* as answers that point toward the impossibility of an ultimate response to these conundrums. *La différance* and the trace constitute ideal limits for what we can demonstrate within the transcendental realm. Still, the transcendental discourse must not be abandoned; philosophy must strive for a more comprehensive understanding even though the limits of the enquiry have been drawn. In the last instance, *la différance* and its differentiations do not have any origins, yet that only instigates us to take on the responsibility of continuing to think.

*The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the différance which opens appearance [l'apparaître] and signification. [...] The trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it.*<sup>136</sup>

In order to grasp this properly, a rethinking of temporality is required. Through these considerations more light will be shed on Derrida's rewriting of transcendental aesthetics.

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<sup>136</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 95/65. And at the end of *De la grammatologie* Derrida says that the concept of origin is inappropriate for *la différance* because it has none. Everything begins with the supplement: “The supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognize that there is a *supplement at the source*” (Derrida *DLG* p. 429/304).

## IV. Re-presentation: Time and spacing

The present part of this essay approaches the aspects on transcendental aesthetics that have bearing on time, the constitution of time and *spacing*. First, the discussion is focused on the *locus classicus* – the fifth chapter of *La voix*, “Le signe et le clin d’oeil”. The *width of the present* and Derrida’s introduction of the primordial synthesis of the trace here form the centre of attention. Secondly, the discussion moves over to the sixth chapter of *La voix*, “La voix qui garde le silence”, in which Derrida’s own model of time is expounded in relation to the concept of auto-affection. In light of this discussion the spacing of time is explicated. Lastly, I will analyse Derrida’s *dicta* concerning the vulgar concept of time and time taken as an originary metaphor.

Let me start with some remarks about the discussion of the thematic of time and Derrida. It is plain to see, as I said earlier, that the discussion in the previous chapter on space and ideality depends on Derrida’s account of temporality. In order for an ideal entity to be repeated over time it presupposes the possibility of returning to the past. More importantly, since every presentation requires re-presentation, every act of experiencing must relate to something that precedes it (the memory of the absolute past that has never been present, i.e. the trace). Now, Derrida’s own views on temporality are at times very difficult. In some sense, Derrida addresses the classical enigmas about time such as ‘what is time?’, ‘does time exist, given that the past is no more and the future is not yet?’, ‘is the now really a part of time?’, if so ‘is the whole of time included in the now?’ , ‘how is the experience of movement possible?’ *et cetera*. But, in another sense, Derrida is not trying to solve these questions in any traditional sense. His meditations on time usually end up displaying time and temporality as deeply aporetic.<sup>137</sup> This is also the case with his reading of Husserl.

### Derrida’s reading of Husserl’s philosophy of time

The discussion in the literature concerning Derrida’s deconstruction of Husserl’s concept of time has mainly revolved around the concepts of the *Augenblick* (or ‘the blink of the eye’), the ‘now’, ‘the living present’ and ‘the primordial synthesis’. These concepts have – to say the least – become somewhat overdetermined and it is in general very hard to discern precise

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<sup>137</sup> See (for example) Hodge *Derrida on Time* p. 55 and p. 79 and Lawlor *Derrida and Husserl* p. 173-175 and p. 203-204.

stances and interpretations. This hermeneutical situation is in part due to Derrida's own peculiar way of staging his views on Husserl's philosophy of time in *La voix*. His presentation is divided into three levels, each one focusing on a specific issue.<sup>138</sup> All of Derrida's readers have not been attentive to the subtle shiftings in Derrida's argumentation, and consequently, I would claim, some of scholars have mistakenly taken a separate level of the argument as the totality of Derrida's assessment.

1. In the first famous phase, Derrida alleges that Husserl must privilege the 'now' – understood as the instant or the self-contained point – for epistemological reasons. Without the now, conceived as the ideal form of presentation and the warrant of subjective and objective presence, nothing would give itself originally and apodictically in pure intuition. Hence, says Derrida (especially in his early study of Husserl), Husserl must treat time as an ideal form enabling the possibility of freezing the moment of self-coinciding presentation. Husserl's allegiance to the now is thus part and parcel of the proclaimed quest for certainty.<sup>139</sup> Derrida is for sure very critical about these epistemological commitments to the now, which he finds in *Ideen*. In light of this, some have claimed that Derrida simply jettisons Husserl's philosophy of time (*qua* metaphysics of presence) altogether.<sup>140</sup>

2. At the second stage of the argument, Husserl's purported epistemological commitments in *Ideen* are played off against his investigations of time-consciousness in *Zur Phänomenologie der inneren Zeitbewusstseins*. The descriptive side of Husserl's philosophy of time shows, says Derrida, that the notion of the present – as a self-contained now, a point or an instant – is untenable. If the model of time, such as it was presented in *Ideen*, were right, we would never experience anything but chopped up events presented to us like a line of pearls. Hence, Husserl's grand insight with regard to *the width of the present*, which accounts for the flowing character of time-consciousness and experiencing, quivers the idea of the punctual now. The whole metaphysical tradition that relies on the now or the instant as the source of

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<sup>138</sup> This is obvious if you read *La voix* carefully (the numbers are all spelled out: level one is treated in *VP* p. 68-71/52-54, level two p. 71-74/54-57 and level three p. 74-77/57-59). Lawlor (*Derrida and Husserl* p. 184-187) and David Wood (*The Deconstruction of Time* p. 122-133) have acknowledged this.

<sup>139</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 69/52 and *Le problème de la genèse* p. 118-130/60-69. Derrida asks: does not Husserl's analysis "hide a dogmatic or speculative metaphysical presupposition? [...] It would be restrained precisely in what phenomenology will recognize soon as the source and the guarantee of all value, 'the principle of principles', namely, the originary giving evidentness, the *present* or the *presence* of sense in a full and originary intuition. [...] The mistrust in regard to the metaphysical presuppositions is given already as the condition of an authentic 'theory of knowledge'. [...] Isn't it the case that the idea of knowledge and a theory of knowledge are metaphysical in themselves?" (Derrida *VP* p. 3/4).

<sup>140</sup> Two interpreters who have overestimated the rupture between Derrida and Husserl in this respect are Häggglund, who dwells on the question of Husserl's allegiance to the now, without accounting for Derrida's more fundamental appreciation of Husserl's insights (*Radical Atheism* p. 50-74) and Natalie Alexander ("The Hollow Deconstruction of Time" in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 121-150).

certainty, trembles as a consequence of Husserl's philosophy of time. Consequently, some interpreters have proposed that Derrida, in his deconstruction of time, simply highlights and emphasizes a tendency already present in Husserl's philosophy of time.<sup>141</sup> Let us scrutinize this idea by giving a short introduction to Husserl's immensely difficult philosophy of internal time-consciousness, before we proceed to the third level of Derrida's presentation.

### **Husserl on time-consciousness**

Husserl's investigations of time-consciousness set up a division between three levels of constitution. 1. Constituted objective time, which is the time that is measurable in seconds and hours. 2. Pre-empirical subjective time containing the structure of *retention*, *protention* and *primal impression* that I will discuss below and 3. the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness.<sup>142</sup> A phenomenological analysis of time, says Husserl, must exclude "every assumption, stipulation and conviction with respect to objective time" in order "to bring *the a priori of time* to clarity".<sup>143</sup> Now, Husserl does not thereby deny objective time – he only wants to investigate it more thoroughly and manifest how it relates to lived experience. Lived experience is overflowed by temporality. A faithful description of this lived time must account for the streaming or flowing continuity of consciousness. Consequently Husserl insists upon on the *width of presence* – i.e. the idea that consciousness can encompass more than what is given in the punctual instant. If we were conscious only of that which is given in a punctual now, ordinary phenomena such as experience movement, succession and permanence would be impossible.

Husserl comes to explicate the width of the present in the terms of *primal impression*, *retention* (or primary remembrance) and *protention* (or primary expectation). The primal impression is an abstract component of a conscious act directed toward a now-phase of an object. The primal impression is only an abstract limit that must be embedded within a temporal horizon consisting of a *retention*, which is an intention that provides us with a

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<sup>141</sup> Dan Zahavi (*Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* p. 82-87) has insisted upon a kind of continuity between Husserl and Derrida. Zahavi is however very critical about Derrida's understanding of *retention* since his equating of retention and representation leads to a reflection theory of mind. Despite Zahavi's criticism it is fair to say that he sees a deep continuity between Husserl and Derrida (although Derrida's reading is mistaken). Françoise Dastur also sees the same problem with Derrida's reading ("Derrida and the Question of Presence" in *Research in Phenomenology* vol. 36 p. 49).

<sup>142</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)* (Hua X) §34 p. 73/77.

<sup>143</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §1 p. 4/4 and §2 p. 10/10. Zahavi comments on this: "Husserl's analysis [...] is not primarily concerned with [objective] time, though by no means is he denying that one can speak of objective time. Rather he claims that it is philosophically unacceptable simply to assume that time possesses such an objective status" (Zahavi *Husserl's Phenomenology* p. 81).

consciousness of the phase of the object that has just been, and a *protention*, which is an anticipating intention of the phase of the object about to occur.

Let us concretize these considerations of his philosophy of time by using the melody as an illustration of what Husserl calls a *temporal object*.<sup>144</sup> Imagine that you hear a melody. The first tone you hear is an E followed by an F#, a B and then lastly an A. This melody is presented within a short period of time, within ‘the blink of an eye’ so to speak. Now, Husserl’s analysis of time-consciousness and temporal objects is to give an apt description of how these four tones can be heard as a melody. Using a notation that is foreign to Husserl’s, but nevertheless instructive, we might say that the time slice  $T$  must allow for the E to sound at a certain time  $t_1$ , F# at  $t_2$ , B at  $t_3$  and A at  $t_4$ . As the music starts with the tone E at  $t_1$ , the tone E constitutes the primal impression. When the second tone arrives, F# at  $t_2$ , F# becomes the primal impression. But, at  $t_2$  we are not only intending the tone F#, we also have the retention of E and the protention of B. As we can see the primal impression is in every juncture ( $t_1-t_4$ ) superposed by retention and protention. As we get to the point of  $t_3$ , I primarily hear B, I retain F# and the retention of E, and I primarily anticipate the tone A. Hence, there must be some sort of division within the short instant that makes the appearance of the melody possible. The tones sounding at  $t_1-t_4$  cannot appear as if they were discontinuous. Then we would – instead of hearing a melody – hear one tone at the time (for as long as its physical reverberation lasted). Consequently, each tone has to be retained at each point ( $t_1-t_4$ ), so that the old tones are still perceived as past moments of the flowing melody. Furthermore there must be some sort of *discrimination* within the time slice  $T$ . To illustrate what I mean by this, it can be staged in this way: at each point ( $t_1-t_4$ ) a new tone is added in the flow. But if, for every newly added tone, the former remained equally present, the four notes E, F#, B and A would form a rather disharmonious chord. As the melody proceeded we would end up with an indiscriminate sound of many equally intense tones. Hence, there must be discrimination within the now so that each tone that passes is retained as a past tone and the present tone stands out in the flow of the continuing melody. Lastly, a correct explication of the perception of a melody must account for the fact that the tones are perceived in a certain order – otherwise, given that the conditions of the above mentioned are satisfied, we would sure enough end up with a melody, but with another one.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §7 p. 23/24.

<sup>145</sup> This is based on Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §3-6, Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern & Eduard Marbach *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* p. 101-114, Zahavi *Husserl’s Phenomenology* p. 80-92, Izchack Miller *Husserl, Perception, and Temporal Awareness* p. 117-128.

As a new primal impression replaces the one that has just passed, the former primal impression turns into retention by means of a “retentional modification”.<sup>146</sup> By dint of retentional modification, the past phases of the melody are retained as past, whereas the present tone stands out as the centre of the temporal horizon of every specific moment. Husserl describes the retentional modification as a ‘running off’-phenomenon; a metaphor that is meant to capture the workings of retention (as retention of primal impression, retention of a retention, retention of a retention of a retention and so on) and how consciousness can keep the past phases within the experienced now. In this sense, the melody can appear for us as a temporal succession of distinguished perceptions, where the older perceptions run off or sink farther down in our consciousness.

Before we move over to Derrida’s systematic re-articulation of this model of temporality I must mention the important distinction that Husserl draws between primary and secondary memory – between retention and recollection. Husserl eagerly maintains that the act of retaining something is not the same as remembering an object. Husserl’s most important arguments for this distinction are the following: (i) retention is conceptually dependent on primal impression, since it is a modification of a previous primal impression. It is, as he says, non-sense to speak about retentions that have not been primal impressions; (ii) the retentional modification is a passive process which is not in need of any active contribution and; (iii) a retention retains an identical intentional object. By contrast, in acts of remembrance we can initiate a recollection without founding it on a current, primal impression. Furthermore, this initiation of the recollecting act is an active process performed consciously, whereas retaining is passive. Lastly, recollections furnish us with new intentional objects, whereas a retentional modification allows us to be directed to the very same intentional object. So, remembering a tone I heard yesterday is not the same as retaining the tone I have just heard in a melody. Whereas retention (primary memory) consequently must pertain to presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*), secondary memory – of course – falls under the concept of representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*):

If we call perception the *act in which all “origin”* lies, the act that *constitutes originally*, then *primary memory is perception*. For only in primary memory do we see what is past, only in it does the past become constituted – and constituted presentatively, not re-presentatively.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §30.

<sup>147</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §17 p. 41/43; quoted by Derrida *VP* p. 72/55.

It is this distinction between primary and secondary memory that Derrida will attempt to alter by turning Husserl's own formulations against this line of demarcation. It is hence time to move over the Derrida's third stage of the argument.

### **Making space for the trace – originary synthesis**

If we keep on reading the fifth chapter of *La voix*, we reach the third stage of Derrida's argument, which incorporates a decisive turn. At this turning point it becomes clear that Derrida's presentation of Husserl's considerations on the now have merely been preparatory. What Derrida will endeavour to do in this context is to elaborate a conception of temporality in which the unconscious trace can break into the chains of retentional modifications. From this point on, the discourse about the now becomes somewhat secondary, but it is important to underline that this unconscious temporality would not be possible – in Derrida's view – without Husserl's concept of the *width of the present*. What is about to unfold in at this point is the so-called deconstruction of time.

Deconstructing the simplicity of presence does not amount only to accounting for the horizons of potential presence, indeed of a “dialectic” of protention and retention that one would install in the heart of the present instead of surrounding it with it. It is not a matter of complicating the structure of time while conserving its homogeneity and its fundamental successivity, by demonstrating for example that the past present and the future present constitute originally, by dividing it, the form of the living present. Such a complication, which is in effect the same that Husserl described, abides, in spite of an audacious phenomenological reduction, by the evidence and presence of a linear, objective, and mundane model.<sup>148</sup>

Husserl's introduction of the concept of the *width of the present* does not *eo ipso* deconstruct the concept of time. Derrida's deconstruction of time rather endeavours – as we see in this quote – to dislocate a certain linear model of time. The way I see it, the linear model of time in question, is a conception propagating the following tenets: (i) to be present is to be before consciousness; (ii) this presentation takes place in the now; (iii) the other moments of time (i.e. past and future) are both defined in relation to the presence of the present (in the now). The past is defined as a past presentation for consciousness, the future is, accordingly, a presentation that has not yet taken place; (iv) time, taken as a whole, is basically a continuity

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<sup>148</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 97-98/67.

or succession of conscious phases.<sup>149</sup> When Derrida criticizes this view he borrows heavily from Freud and attempts to compose a different model of time-consciousness founded on the unconscious. A different Now X that enters the chains of conscious synthesizing must disrupt the continuity of consciousness.

*Now B* would be as such constituted by the retention of *Now A* and the protention of *Now C*; in spite of all the play that would follow from it, from the fact that each one of the three *Now*s reproduces that structure in itself, this model of successivity would prohibit a *Now X* from taking the place of *Now A*, for example, and would prohibit that, by a delay that is inadmissible to consciousness, an experience be determined, in its very present, by a present which would not have preceded it immediately but would be considerably “anterior” to it. It is the problem of the deferred effect (*Nachträglichkeit*) of which Freud speaks. The temporality to which he refers cannot be that which lends itself to a phenomenology of consciousness.<sup>150</sup>

Derrida is in essence developing a model of time that makes room for the unconscious, the *Now X*, to break into the chain of conscious succession. This elaboration of unconscious temporality has been recognized by some of interpreters of *La voix*.<sup>151</sup> To what extent Derrida’s notion of unconscious temporality really breaks with Husserl’s phenomenology of time-consciousness is a difficult question that cannot be treated satisfactorily in this context. It should be noted however that Derrida’s interpretations of Husserl appears to be rather incautious and one-sided. In Derrida’s view, Husserl clings to a metaphysical hope of eradicating the idea of the unconscious and he finds a proof of this claim in the following quotation from Husserl’s lectures on time: “It is just nonsense to talk about an ‘unconscious’ content that would only subsequently become conscious. Consciousness is necessarily being-

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<sup>149</sup> Near the end of *De la grammatologie* (p. 410-411/290) Derrida alludes to another version of the concept of linear time, represented by Kant (*KRV* B154) in which the figure of the ‘line’ constitutes the nexus of the comprehension of time and space. In order to represent space, says Kant, we must think of a point from which we draw three rectilinear lines (which are to represent the three dimensions of space). And, he continues, we cannot even think time (as we are drawing this line) without keeping an eye on the succession of inner sense. Cf. Carlshamre *Language and Time* p. 117-124 and Hodge *Derrida on Time* p. 35 and 45 for an analysis of this concept of time.

<sup>150</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 98/67.

<sup>151</sup> Marrati-Guénon (*La genèse et la trace* p. 145-148), Wood (*The Deconstruction of Time* p. 273), Hodge (*Derrida on Time* p. 21, p. 28 and p. 203-206) and Bernet (“Derrida-Husserl-Freud” in *Alter* n. 8 p. 15-22, “Derrida and his Master’s Voice” in (eds.) McKenna & Evans *Derrida and Phenomenology* p. 13-18 and “Is the Present ever Present? Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence” in (ed.) John Sallis *Husserl and Contemporary Thought* p. 85-112). Marrati-Guénon proposes that Derrida alters Husserl’s philosophy of time by supplementing it with a ‘passive synthesis’. She correctly insists upon Derrida’s conception of the passivity of time (and our essentially mortal and finite relation to time, but that is another question that we will not handle). But her description is too skeletal; it does not explicate in what sense Derrida complicates Husserl’s account. Because – it is important to underline – Husserl did too conceive of the temporal synthesis as passive.

conscious in each of its phases.”<sup>152</sup> Derrida proposes that Husserl holds the implausible view that consciousness (*per definition*) is conscious about everything taking place within itself. Hence, there simply is no place for the unconscious. But, this is counterfeit; the views that Derrida accords to Husserl are not Husserl’s own.<sup>153</sup>

Luckily, the merits of Derrida’s considerations on time do not turn on his (in this respect) hasty reading of Husserl. We will now follow the route that his analysis of Husserl takes. Let us start off by quoting the relevant passages in which Derrida claims to find support for his argument that Husserl opens up for the possibility that presentation requires representation.

Now if we relate the use of the word “perception” to the differences in givenness with which temporal objects present themselves, the antithesis of perception is the primary memory and the primary expectation (retention and protention) that occur here; in which case, perception and nonperception continuously blend into one another.<sup>154</sup>

The reason why Derrida evokes this quotation is that he senses a certain decisive ambiguity in Husserl’s account of retention. Whereas Husserl at one place says that “primary memory is perception” and thus regards it as a species of presentation, it is now – in this short piece of text – said to be the antithesis of perception.<sup>155</sup> Are these tenets reconcilable? Derrida does not merely contend himself with demonstrating the purported paradox of Husserl’s descriptions, his ambitions lie elsewhere. If retention were simply perception then there would not be any room for the kind of primordial synthesis of the unconscious writing that Derrida envisages. Nothing would break into the chains of continuous retentional modifications. Through the ambiguous descriptions of retention, Husserl unknowingly opens up for another conception, says Derrida. He finds support for this claim in the following quotation where Husserl conceptualizes the continuous flow of retentional modification:

The now is precisely an ideal limit, something abstract, which can be nothing by itself. Moreover, it remains to be said that even this ideal now is not something *toto coelo* different from the not-now

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<sup>152</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 71/54. Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* Appendix IX p. 119/123. For some reason Derrida’s translation says “Consciousness is necessarily being-conscious [*être-conscient, bewusstsein*]”, whereas the correct translation is “Consciousness [*Bewusstsein*] is necessarily consciousness [*Bewusstsein*] in each of its phases”. Cf. Derrida *VP* p. 37/29 and *IOG* p. 92/93 for further discussions about consciousness and the unconscious.

<sup>153</sup> Once again Derrida’s view of Husserl’s conception of passivity and activity is problematic, see *Le problème de la genèse* p. 112-127/56-67 and p. 144-171/79-99 and *IOG* p. 157/142 and p. 170-171/152-153.

<sup>154</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §16 p. 39/41 with Derrida’s italicising in *VP* p. 72-73/55-56.

<sup>155</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §17 p. 41/43; quoted by Derrida *VP* p. 72/55.

but is continuously mediated with it. And to this corresponds the continuous transition of perception into primary memory.<sup>156</sup>

Let us have a close look at what Derrida makes out of this. By focusing on the idea of the continuity, he claims that Husserl affirms an essential continuity of the now and the not-now, of perception and non-perception, which welcomes the conceptual possibility of difference and the trace. What does this mean? Derrida takes advantage of the alleged ambiguous retention and elaborates an argument stating that primary memory is *not* perception. Rephrasing Derrida's argument, it says: (i) neither retention nor protention is perception, and (ii) retentions and protentions constitute the present, then (iii) the present is constituted from within by something non-present. There must be a cut, or an incision, in the passive synthesis opening up for the synthesizing of the trace. In the temporal synthesis that unites primal impressions and their ecstases, the trace, which in itself represents nothing, will found all temporal experiencing. Expressed otherwise – and this is indeed Derrida's grand contention – the continuity of the flow is only possible on the ground of a synthesis that unites the temporal 'hyle' with something completely other. The synthetic uniting of the trace brings about the temporal flow that we indeed experience. The primordial synthesis of the trace hence takes on the meaning of the passive activity that I talked about in the last chapter. It is unconscious, involuntary and passive, yet it is not merely receptive, but passively synthesizing.

Derrida pursues the following line of reasoning: if the deepest layer of all conscious movement resides in the unconscious temporal synthesis, then the higher levels of consciousness are indeed dependent on the unconscious. So, the continuity in temporal succession that we experience is indeed founded on the discontinuous piecing together of the passive synthesis. One must realize that the present (in the form of the now) would not be at all if it were not already constituted by the non-present. By enmeshing primary remembrance into the structure of *Vorstellung* in general, Derrida thus proposes that:

we must be able to say *a priori* that [the] common root [of retention and re-presentation], the possibility of re-petition in its most general form, the trace in the most universal sense, is a possibility that not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now, but also must constitute it by means of the very moment of the *différance* that the possibility inserts into the pure actuality of the now.<sup>157</sup>

In saying this, Derrida has completed the argument stating that each and every kind of givenness is a kind of *Vorstellung*, a re-presentation governed by the possibility of the repetition.

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<sup>156</sup> Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §16 p. 40/42; quoted by Derrida in *VP* p. 73/56.

<sup>157</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 76/58.

Derrida's argument entails that presentation is possible only on the condition of a prior synthesis performed by the trace. And here, at last, we have reached the result that we have been waiting for; re-presentation (in its temporal form) precedes presentation, because it is the necessary precondition of temporal appearances. The present must be folded within the continuous return to the absolute past (i.e. the trace) to become present. The form or the structure of experiencing is constituted by the unconscious writing, the passive activity.<sup>158</sup>

This description must now be taken a step further for the movement of unconscious temporality to come to the fore. In order to fully appreciate the movement of unconscious temporality and Derrida's purported trembling of the linear concept of time, the concept of *auto-affection* must be introduced. In relation to this concept of auto-affection the theory of *spacing* unfolds. It is time to substantiate Derrida's claim with regards to the rewriting the transcendental aesthetic. We will approach this argument by concentrating on the sixth chapter of *La voix*, namely "La voix qui garde le silence".

### **Temporality and spacing**

As Derrida draws the consequences of the conclusion he presents about the trace as the essential constituent of the temporal synthesis, he refers to a new central dichotomy in Husserl's philosophy: the boundary between interiority and exteriority. Once again, Derrida appears to bend the stick to the extreme and it is doubtful whether his interpretation really does Husserl justice.<sup>159</sup> Be that as it may, the dualism between the interior and the exterior is articulated in relation to the distinction between the *empirical* and the *transcendental*. In this context, Derrida tries to convince us that the aim of the phenomenological reduction is to grant the possibility of a pure interiority or direct immediacy, which establishes a purely immanent and transcendental realm that is dislocated from "space, the outside, the world, the

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<sup>158</sup> It is of note that Derrida's assessment does not imply an annihilation of the present. It is still meaningful to speak about the present; otherwise I would not be able to discriminate between different kinds of experiences (whether I am dreaming, remembering, seeing, anticipating, and so on) and I would not experience time as a flowing continuity.

<sup>159</sup> There is a problem with Derrida's analysis of Husserl, which culminates in the sixth chapter of *La voix*. Throughout his analysis Derrida – as many commentators have pointed out – overemphasizes Husserl's Cartesian undertones (especially with regard to the phenomenological reduction). Thereby he makes Husserl an advocate of an epistemological dualism claiming that only immanent perception (of *res cogitans*) is reliable, whereas transcendental perception (of *res extensa*) is intrinsically doubtful. See Bernet's comments about this Cartesian reading ("Derrida-Husserl-Freud" in *Alter* n. 8 p. 15-16). Others, such as Gasché (*The Tain of the Mirror* p. 194-196 and 231-235), Hägglund (*Radical Atheism* p. 70-74) and Lawlor ("Temporality and Spatiality: A Note to a Footnote in Derrida's *Writing and Difference*" in (ed.) Sallis *Husserl and Contemporary Thought* p. 151-153) have all fallen pray to this one-sided interpretation making Husserl an advocate of pure interiority.

body” and language.<sup>160</sup> The transcendental – according to this interpretation – includes the inside, thoughts, time, self-consciousness and the ideal. In contrast, the empirical realm includes the outside, space, body, the world, the sign, the other, the extended and the contingent. Deconstructing the boundary between the inside and the outside (the empirical and the transcendental *et cetera*), Derrida will develop an argument that finally aims to demonstrate that “no pure transcendental reduction is possible”.<sup>161</sup> Expressed otherwise, no transcendental reduction can ultimately rid itself of language and the sign (and consequently, the constitutive outside). What is about to unfold is hence another conception of the relation between the transcendental inside (the temporal) and the empirical outside (space) and their interlacement as *spacing*. Derrida’s reasoning is carried out through an analysis of the *voice*. The voice has – as is well known – a peculiar status in Western philosophy according to Derrida. In this context, Derrida operates with at least two different concepts of the voice: the first is the ordinary empirical voice, the vocal apparatus, through which we express ourselves.<sup>162</sup> Derrida analyses this sense of the voice in the famous “La pharmacie de Platon” in which it is said that Plato privileges the voice for its superior capability of preserving meaning and truth (in communication for example). In distinction to the written text – which is open to interpretation in the absence of its author – the living voice of the present speaker animates the intended meaning as he is uttering the words. Whereas the living voice can defend the *logos* and avert the threat of misunderstanding, the written word is mute, soulless and defenceless.

However, this is not what is at issue in this context. There is also another, metaphorical sense of the voice operating outside ordinary communication, which Derrida names *the phenomenological voice*. This purported phenomenological voice is the possibility of the immediate access to my own thoughts, the silent pre-reflective understanding of myself, equated with self-consciousness. Derrida argues that the idea of direct self-consciousness hinges on a conception that can assure a temporal (and spatial) proximity to the self (as

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<sup>160</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 92/70. This interpretation is in orbit already in *Le problème de la genèse* (p. 20/xxxi and 133-173/70-100) where the phenomenological residuum is understood as an adherence to idealist metaphysics. Derrida clearly exaggerates this distinction (referring to the Cartesian way to the reduction). There is, for sure, a distinction between the empirical and the transcendental in Husserl’s philosophy, but it is not drawn the way Derrida does it. Husserl construes the phenomenological reduction in order for the phenomena of lived experience to be interpreted such as they present themselves. All the different ways to the reduction (of which the Cartesian is only one) share the important trait that they shut out naturalistic explanations, but this does not imply the exclusion of the exterior.

<sup>161</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 92/71.

<sup>162</sup> I here follow Bernet’s description in “Derrida-Husserl-Freud” in *Alter* n. 8 p. 18-22 and “La voie et le phénomène” in (eds.) Crépon & Worms *Derrida, et la tradition de la philosophie* p. 65-66 and Dastur’s presentation in “Derrida and the Question of Presence” in *Research in Phenomenology* vol. 36 p. 54-56.

subject) and the self (as object). He sets out to scrutinize this idea and he does so by dint of the introduction of the concept of *auto-affection*:

Now as soon as we take account of the movement of temporalization, such as it is already described in *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, it is indeed necessary to use the concept of pure auto-affection, the concept that Heidegger uses, as we know, in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* precisely in regard to time.<sup>163</sup>

Given a provisional definition, *auto-affection* is the term for every act in which a subject affects itself, e.g. when a person sees himself it is a case of auto-affection, the same goes for touching oneself, or the privileged form of self-affection: to hear oneself speak.<sup>164</sup> The whole argument concerning the voice, which forms the high-point of *La voix*, now manifests how the phenomenological voice – which is purportedly pure, interior and free from mundane exteriority – in distinction to all other kinds of auto-affection is *purely* temporal. The “phenomenological voice” seems to operate “in time”, since all my *Vorstellungen* are supposed to be present to myself in the point of the instant now.<sup>165</sup> “When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that *I hear myself during the time* that I speak.”<sup>166</sup> The phenomenological voice does not need to take a detour to the spatial world and the exterior in order to affect me; the animated intention is close to consciousness and gives itself immediately. The words do not even need to be uttered – I affect myself immediately in thinking. And this makes up the temporal essence of time. But, contends Derrida, this immediacy is only apparent, since – as we have seen – the subject is only permitted to have access to itself on the basis of language and the unconscious.<sup>167</sup> And this fact will alter the conception of *pure* auto-affection. Let me note that the vast majority of Derrida’s readers have been convinced that Derrida discards the notion of auto-affection altogether, substituting it

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<sup>163</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 93/71.

<sup>164</sup> As Zahavi points out “self-affection [according to Derrida, in contrast to Husserl] is not effectuated by an already existing self; rather it is the process that gives rise to the self” (Zahavi *Self-Awareness and Alterity* p. 134). The examples should not exclude affection from the other senses such as taste or olfaction, but these do not play any role for Derrida’s nor Heidegger’s arguments and they will therefore be omitted here. Another kind of self-affection is masturbation, which is treated at length in *De la grammatologie*.

<sup>165</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 84/64.

<sup>166</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 87/66.

<sup>167</sup> In light of this, Hägglund (*Radical Atheism* p. 15-25) and Marrati-Guénon have argued that the notion of identity is untenable. If the subject is fissured by the unconscious trace then pure identity is wrought by alterity (hence non-identity). Marrati-Guénon states it: “Si la simplicité de l’origine est un mythe, il en va de même de l’identité pure. Ce qui est détruit dans sa racine, c’est la possibilité de l’identité à soi dans la simplicité” (Marrati-Guénon *La genèse et la trace* p. 87). But, in my opinion, this is a *non sequitur*. The argument does not distinguish properly between (i) the principle of identity, (ii) the implementation of the principle of identity on the now and (iii) the concept of personal identity. For a more elaborated discussion of alterity and the trace, see Dastur “Derrida and the Question of Presence” in *Research in Phenomenology* vol. 36 p. 53.

with the concept of *hetero-affection*.<sup>168</sup> Though it is beyond doubt that Derrida is very suspicious about the notion of *pure* auto-affection it shall not be equated so hastily with hetero-affection. Derrida never explicitly does so himself (not in this context at least) and I think he has profound reasons to do so.<sup>169</sup> Temporality is and must still be thought on the basis of auto-affection, as we will see.

### **The repetition of the now and auto-affection**

Near the end of *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Heidegger explores Kant's remarkable meditations on time as the *inner sense* and how this inner sense must be understood in terms of auto-affection.<sup>170</sup> For Kant, time is the way I intuit myself. This self-intuition provides the ordering form of all my *Vorstellungen*. As he makes clear, all my *Vorstellungen* are necessarily subjugated to time as inner sense – the transcendental apperception of the *I think* accompanies all my representations and orders them in a certain succession. For Heidegger, the importance of this conception is that time and subjectivity are very intimately connected. Heidegger argues that the self is engendered by the self-activating self-affection, synthesized by the faculty of transcendental imagination, which produces a sphere of subjectivity.<sup>171</sup> Time, as pure self-affection, makes up the inherent horizontal structure of the subject. This pure self-affection is prior to every other kind of receptivity and hence the condition of experience in general.

Inner sense does not receive “from without”, but rather from the self. In pure taking-in-stride, the inner affection must come forth from out of the pure self; i.e., it must be formed in the essence of selfhood as such, and therefore it must constitute this self in the first place.<sup>172</sup>

Time is thus the way I receive myself (primordially). Now, Derrida makes use of this conception, but does so with great caution. In one sense, he recognizes Heidegger's idea that the structure of self-affection is the possibility of temporality and subjectivity. This subjectivity

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<sup>168</sup> Gasché *The Tain of the Mirror* p. 233. Cf. Lawlor (“Introduction” to *Voice and Phenomenon* p. xxiii), Zahavi (*Self-Awareness and Alterity* p. 132-134) and Hägglund (*Radical Atheism* p. 71) all equate auto-affection with hetero-affection. Sallis's “Doublings” in (ed.) David Wood *Derrida: A Critical Reader* p. 132-134 and Hodge's *Derrida on Time* p. 83-87 constitute exceptions.

<sup>169</sup> In a later work Derrida does indeed say that auto-affection is but a special kind of hetero-affection (*La vérité en peinture* p. 55-56), but this argument belongs to a refined treatment of Kant's views on aesthetic pleasure (*Lust*) (if aesthetic pleasure were a response on sensuous stimulus, it would be ‘pathological’ as Kant says in the third critique). All the mentioned scholars have referred to this discussion to support the identity of auto- and hetero-affection. Derrida's *dictum* has clearly been quoted out of context.

<sup>170</sup> Kant *KRV* B67-68.

<sup>171</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 188-195/132-136. Cf. Heidegger *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* §28-29 and *Phänomenologische Interpretation von Kants Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* §21b and §25c.

<sup>172</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 191/134.

and the temporal flow must be understood in non-ontical terms that do not depend on *de re*-structures. Derrida also emphasizes that subjective time is not engendered by the ‘outside’ in a direct manner. He says: “The intuition of time itself cannot be empirical. It is a reception that receives nothing. The absolute novelty of each now is therefore engendered by nothing.”<sup>173</sup> However, Derrida questions the immediacy or the purity of self-affection. Thus, he can be claimed to repeat the Kantian assumption, which is heavily downplayed in Heidegger’s exposition, that ‘the I’ can only be given to itself such as it appears to itself. The grasped and apprehended I is not the same as the apprehending I, it is a double.

Derrida tackles this issue by construing an alternative model that can account for the possibility of temporal development. The point of departure consists in Derrida’s suggestion that there must be a repetition of the now. The now must be able to generate and multiply itself in order for there to be succession and temporal unfolding. Hence, Derrida claims, the now must essentially be repeatable and cannot remain identical to itself.<sup>174</sup> If it is admitted that the now depends on repeatability, it – just like every other kind of repetition of ideality – presupposes the sign. As we will see, the interplay between sign, repetition and auto-affection will render another model of time that goes hand in hand with Derrida’s conception of unconscious temporality. Derrida ventures an illustration of how time and the succession of nows must cohere in a very free rendering that borrows its framework from the Husserlian terminology. He says:

The process by means of which the living now, producing itself by spontaneous generation must, in order to be a now, be retained in another now, must affect itself, without having empirical recourse, with a new originary actuality in which it will become a non-now as a past now, etc.; and such a process is indeed pure auto-affection in which the same is the same only by affecting itself with an other, by becoming the other of the same.<sup>175</sup>

Let me try to rephrase this enigmatic statement. A living now, says Derrida, must produce itself by relating to a retention of a just past now. Doing so, it affects itself, non-empirically and thus engenders a new now. These two nows must be understood as two temporally distinct states of the mind. The claim is that two distinct nows, A and B (the unconscious consciousness at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ ), can only affect each other if A somehow gives rise to B. The

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<sup>173</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 93/71. He also adds that the constitution of time must be a movement of auto-affection since “temporality is never a real predicate” (Derrida *VP* p. 93/71). The interpretation I offer here is in line with Sallis’s article “Doublings” in (ed.) Wood *Derrida* p. 132-134.

<sup>174</sup> “The ideality of the form (*Form*) of presence itself implies consequently that it can be repeated to infinity” (Derrida *VP* p. 75/58).

<sup>175</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 94-95/72-73. A similar argument is evoked in “Ousia et grammè” in *MP* p. 62-72/54-62.

interesting step in this argument seems to be the proposal that A can give rise to B only through an act of auto-affection. B is consequently the outcome of an act in which A takes itself as its object of affection; it receives itself in affection. In so doing, the consciousness of A becomes its own object as B, which henceforth objectifies itself into a new now C, and so on etc. Hence, we have a repetition of the now on the basis of auto-affection. One can now ask: if the auto-affection, involved in all temporal succession, according to this model produces the new nows, then how does this new now contain something different from the preceding one? Why does not the now A simply repeat or reproduce itself as the same A – why is not B always identical to A according to this model? This question is important to Derrida, because, if his model could not respond to it, then we would be trapped in an internal repetition of the same present now (and this must of course be avoided). One would maybe expect Derrida to say that it belongs to the essence of repetition that the repeated might always turn out to be other. But, in this context Derrida offers another argument claiming that the now A, which takes itself as an object of affection, has already invoked an objectifying split. There is a non-proximity between the receiving and the received, the affecting and the affected, the thinking and the thought, the hearing and the heard. Since the now B necessarily contains the retention of the now A, the now that is affected is not identical to the now that affects. The now is always given to itself by mediation of the sign, where the Now X or the trace enters and imposes itself on the act of auto-affection. This sign (*qua* trace) entails the necessary incision for the production of the new now. Consequently, the repetition of the identity of A involves its own non-identity that gives rise to B. This dialectical move construes temporal development as a delay, which constitutes the essence of time as *spacing*. Let us have a closer look on this.

### **The sign as unity of space and time**

Against this background, it is possible to outline Derrida's arguments for the *spacing of time* with greater precision. There is a set of different illustrations of this spacing of time that all attempt to prove that neither space nor time can be without the writing of the unconscious. I propose that these shall be regarded as a prism reflecting different aspects of the same conception. The relation between writing and reading here functions as the nexus of these demonstrations.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Only in relation to what has been said is it possible to appreciate his statement that: "Temporalization presupposes the possibility of symbolism, and every symbolic synthesis, even before it falls into a space 'exterior' to it, includes within itself spacing as difference" (Derrida "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" in *ED* p. 324/275).

The first aspect takes its point of departure in the argument that I have just adumbrated, i.e. that the operation of the un-conscious auto-affection generates a fissure within us that makes it possible for us to take ourselves as proper objects.<sup>177</sup> Understood in this way, auto-affection is *spacing* because it *objectivates* a part of myself and introduces a distance between the perceiving and the perceived within consciousness. Expressed in terms of writing and reading, the unconscious writing engenders a second side of myself (within myself). The I that has been written must be read *qua* a written I in order to be grasped. In relation to our previous discussion we can rephrase Derrida's model of temporal unfolding in the following way: the Now A engenders the Now B by reading itself. This Now B, the double of A, can only be read or received after the effectuation. It produces, says Derrida, a delay or an after-effect, through which the unconscious can arise at the surface of consciousness.<sup>178</sup>

In Freud's work, according to a standard picture, the after-effect is understood as the becoming-conscious of past, suppressed traumas (which are brought into the day of light through psychoanalytic treatment). Derrida naturally does not propose that we need psychoanalysis to have temporal experiencing. Rather, he proposes that the after-effect is essential of temporal unfolding, since it is the auto-affection of the unconscious that propels temporality. Temporality presupposes a movement of fundamentally passive activity governed by the sign. It is the unconscious synthesis of the trace (the unconscious writing), which creates time as succession, without itself being succession.

*The temporalization of sense is from the very beginning "spacing". As soon as we admit spacing at once as an "interval" or difference and as openness to the outside, there is no absolute interiority. The "outside" insinuates itself into the movement by means of which the inside of non-space, which bears the name "time", appears to itself, constitutes itself, and "presents" itself. Space is "in" time.<sup>179</sup>*

The subject always appears for itself, such as it has already been. Through the movement of *la différance*, the interplay between the different layers of subjectivity is *spacing*. Symbolism, inscription and signification rule the primordial synthesis and provide for the opening up to the other as *spacing*. This co-implication of interiority and exteriority takes place in a non-real *in-between* and accounts for a becoming space of time and the becoming time of space that constitute the separate levels of subjectivity.

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<sup>177</sup> Bernet ("Derrida-Husserl-Freud" in *Alter* n. 8 p. 19-21) and Zahavi (*Self-awareness and Alterity* p. 132-134) have both offered fine renderings of this argument.

<sup>178</sup> Derrida "La différance" in *MP* p. 21-22/21.

<sup>179</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 96/73.

The second suggestion develops an argument based on the *material side* of the spatial sign (and by that I mean the written sign, which is incarnated *in* space-time) and the temporal essence of its semantic functioning. The line of reasoning is the following: letters must be placed with a certain space between them in order to be discernible and to function correctly; phrases must appear in a certain order to render a determinate meaning.<sup>180</sup> Hence, recognizes Derrida, meaning has as an essentially spatial and temporal character. Linguistic meaning depends on a certain ordering. This claim takes an interesting turn when Derrida combines it with the famous claim that there are no pure *phonetic systems of writing*.<sup>181</sup> Punctuation and the space between distinct words always and necessarily blend in pictographic elements into the purportedly pure phonetic systems of writing.<sup>182</sup>

The fundamental import of this claim, in this context, is that these inaudible signs are themselves tokens of *spacings*. There is an essential extension and extendedness of the signs – operating silently in our unconscious writing – that opens up for primordial *spacing*. As such, I take it, this writing constitutes primordial time and space simultaneously. In this sense, Derrida has demonstrated his non-linear model of time: “the pure phonic chain” he says “to the extent that it implies differences, is itself not a pure continuum or flow of time. Difference is the articulation of space and time.”<sup>183</sup> In Derrida’s view, this has far-reaching consequences for the concepts of time that we have dealt with here. He triumphantly claims that if we draw all the conclusions from Kant’s, Husserl’s and Heidegger’s work, we are forced to admit the following paradoxical statement: “pure spontaneity is an impression”.<sup>184</sup> The whole chain of distinctions (especially those concerning the active and the passive, the intelligible and the sensible, spontaneity and receptivity) just collapses. The spontaneous activity of mind can only be understood as a givenness of receptivity. This will prove to be Derrida’s most elaborated substantiation of the thesis that there is no clear-cut distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, the active and the passive, spontaneity and receptivity. These are all inseparable.

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<sup>180</sup> We can conjecture that whether we are speaking of analytical or synthetic languages, signs (or at least, when it comes to larger linguistic units of synthetic languages, such as phrases and sentences) must be placed in a specific order to mean something.

<sup>181</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 58-59/39, “La différance” in *MP* p. 5/5 and *Positions* p. 36/25.

<sup>182</sup> “The relationship between passivity and difference cannot be distinguished from the relationship between the fundamental *unconsciousness* of language (as rooted within language) and the *spacing* (pause, blank, punctuation, interval in general, etc.) which constitutes the origin of signification. [---] *Spacing* (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming space of time and the becoming-time of space) is always the unperceived, the nonpresent and the nonconscious” (Derrida *DLG* p. 99/68). Cf. Derrida “La différance” in *MP* p. 16/15.

<sup>183</sup> Derrida “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” in *ED* p. 324/275 and p. 325-333/276-281 and *DLG* p. 97-99/67-68, p. 105/72 and p. 127-128/85-86.

<sup>184</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 93/72.

Lastly, returning to Husserl's conception of intentionality Derrida proposes that there is a necessary delay inserted into every intentional act, making the sign the motor of temporal deferring. As we have seen, every protention is an unfulfilled intention directed at the intentional object, which should *de jure* be possible to fulfil in acts of perceptual intuition. But, says Derrida, every perceptual intuition is always already governed by the originary synthesis, which unites the sensed with the trace. This means – following Derrida's understanding – that the every act of fulfilment itself has the status of a new conceptual projection. Instead of fulfilling the primary anticipation, the primary impression of perceptual intuition becomes an ever-new re-presentation mediated by the sign. Consequently, the act of complete fulfilment is “*deferred to infinity*”.<sup>185</sup> The will to fulfilment is never satisfied, it goes on unceasingly in a perpetual temporal deferral, in which the sign always supplements the intuition of the object.

Taken as it stands, Derrida appears to have elaborated a novel, albeit very abstract model of time and temporality, showing how the sign and symbolism constitute the motor of temporal unfolding. Yet, this model of spacing is not his final word in these matters. Before this thesis comes to an end, it is important to account for Derrida's hesitance about offering a new concept of time.

### **The vulgar concept of time – being 'in time' and *la différance***

If we go back in time to Derrida's first encounter with Husserl, we find quite a different aspect of his reading of Husserl. According to the young Derrida “it is not clear where phenomenological time begins. Is it produced by a passive synthesis or by an active synthesis? Is it given to an atemporal subject? Constituted by it?”; Derrida responds that “Husserl does not answer this clearly.”<sup>186</sup> In this early assessment, Derrida takes Husserl to be deeply ambiguous. Husserl cannot make up his mind whether the time-constituting flow is the essence of time (which constitutes objective time) or if there is an objective time that precedes the temporal flow and conditions it. Derrida thus poses the question: is the constitution of time, according to Husserl's model, itself enmeshed in a temporal process or not, is it *within time* or is it *outside of time*? Now, this is indeed a question that Husserl contemplated intensely, but Derrida does not fully account for this. Instead, the young Derrida states that Husserl's

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<sup>185</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 112/86. Cf. Derrida *VP* p. 111-114/85-87 and *IOG* p. 150-155/134-141. Hodge's much longer discussion of this takes form through an analysis of Derrida's much contested concept of ‘The Idea in the Kantian sense’, which he in different contexts ascribes to Husserl (*Derrida on Time*, the whole second chapter, notably p. 60-66 and p. 81).

<sup>186</sup> Derrida *Le problème de la genèse* p. 127/67.

philosophy of time must be understood as a dialectical movement between constituting subjectivity and objective time. He tries to capture this by evoking a set of enigmas: due to the phenomenological exigencies, time must be elaborated within the transcendental reduction, yet the reduction itself *takes time to perform*; when trying to account for the experience of succession phenomenology must presuppose *a succession of experiences, et cetera*.<sup>187</sup> All of this, according to the young Derrida, proposes that time, for Husserl, must be simultaneously subjective and objective and that objective time simply cannot be constituted by the temporal flow.<sup>188</sup>

As a consequence, some of Derrida's interpreters have proposed that the deconstruction of time amounts to showing that time has a peculiar *de re*-quality that resides outside the constituting subjectivity. In Martin Hägglund's opinion, for example, Derrida shows us that nothing is "exempt from" time, which implies that nothing escapes the movement of temporality.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore he claims that this thesis is the core issue of Derrida's rewriting of the transcendental aesthetics. However, this line of interpretation runs up against difficulties and I will attempt to demonstrate that it cannot be correct. From this discussion, it will therefore become clear that there is no one-to-one correspondence between Derrida's early and Derrida's mature reading of Husserl's conception of time-consciousness.

Derrida's texts from the 60's involve a much more sophisticated approach to the problem regarding the constituting and the constituted time. Discussing the surmised a-temporality of the unconscious temporality in Freud's work, Derrida says: "We ought perhaps to read Freud the way Heidegger read Kant: just like the '*I think*', the unconscious is no doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar conception of time."<sup>190</sup> In *Kant und das Problem* this issue is persistent. There is an ambiguity in Kant's system, says Heidegger, since on the one hand, the finite self has a temporal character and the '*I think*' of pure transcendental apperception, which constitutes time, is not temporal. Yet, the '*I think*' and time – defined as pure intuition of the inner sense – both share the same essential predicates.

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<sup>187</sup> Derrida *Le problème de la genèse* p. 123/64, p. 157-158/89 and p. 160-163/91-93

<sup>188</sup> Derrida *Le problème de la genèse* p. 108-132/54-69.

<sup>189</sup> Hägglund *Radical Atheism* p. 10. Cf. Marrati-Guénon *La genèse et la trace* p. 85-90 for a similar argument. Hägglund accuses Kant (and Husserl too) of concealing the fact that everything is "necessarily bound up with time" (Hägglund *Radical Atheism* p. 23). Hägglund is well aware of the conundrum this view inevitably leads to; if the temporal flow must be synthesized in another temporal flow, this will lead to an infinite regress. But he says that "Derrida, however, insists on nothing less than endless divisibility" (Hägglund *Radical Atheism* p. 25). Hägglund does not seem to understand the outcome of his triumphant claim. If he were right I would have to perform an infinity of syntheses in order to experience something. But this would amount to saying that I could never have any experience at all. When Derrida is claiming that there is no perception he does not deny – or at least that is the way I understand it – that there is experience, he only denies a specific conception of experiencing.

<sup>190</sup> Derrida "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" in *ED* p. 318/270 (translation modified). Cf. Derrida *La carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* p. 382.

They stand in an essential relationship of original sameness. But if every finite and mortal self has a temporal character, then the ‘I think’ of transcendental apperception should be temporal. But how can the ‘I think’ be temporal in itself if it is the essence of time? Does this ultimately entail that there is another entity of its own, which constitutes time without itself being imbued with temporality – or is time something else outside the constituted time? Heidegger answers this question carefully. It is indeed very problematic to talk about time-constitution in terms pertaining to objective and constituted time. This manner of treating the problem leads to a category mistake.

It is illogical to want essentially to determine what time itself is originally with the help of a product derived from it. Precisely because in its innermost essence the self is originally time itself, it cannot be grasped as “temporal”, i.e., as within time [*kann das Ich nicht als “zeitliches”, d.h. hier immerzeitiges, begriffen werden*]. Pure sensibility (time) and pure reason are not just of the same type; rather they belong together in the unity of the same essence, which makes possible the finitude of human subjectivity in its wholeness.<sup>191</sup>

‘The I’ that constitutes time is indeed not ‘in time’. But, all descriptions of this ‘I think’ must make use of a vocabulary, which glosses over the essence of temporality and confounds it with permanence, movement or change, which are all phenomena ‘in time’.

Returning to Derrida, one must affirm that it is indeed problematic to state that the ‘I think’ of transcendental apperception is ‘within’ or ‘outside’ time. This is tantamount to adopting the ordinary concept of time (understanding time as a container of events). Accordingly, we lose sight of the subject matter of the whole question. The purported timelessness can only be appreciated against the backdrop of a certain, dubious and vulgar conception of time. We recognise this term – the vulgar concept of time – from Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*. How does Derrida understand it? In *De la grammatologie*, he suggests that the exclusion of writing within the history of metaphysics has always been accompanied by a certain conception of time:

Above all with a “vulgar concept of time.” I borrow this expression from Heidegger. It designates, at the end of *Sein und Zeit*, a concept of time thought in terms of spatial movement or of the now, and dominating all philosophy from Aristotle’s *Physics* to Hegel’s *Logic*.<sup>192</sup>

In this excerpt, Derrida restricts the meaning of the ‘vulgar concept of time’ to different spatial models of time, which claim that time can be understood as limits, points, lines or circles. One

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<sup>191</sup> Heidegger *KPM* p. 195/136.

<sup>192</sup> Derrida *DLG* p. 105/72.

should note that Derrida's restricted conception of the vulgar concept of time, compared to Heidegger's, is rather narrow. The vulgar concept of time is not limited to 'the spatial movement' or 'the now' as Derrida proposes in the quotation: 'past', 'present', 'future', 'immanent', 'transcendent', 'subjective' and 'objective time' as well many other concepts of time, are all deemed vulgar in *Sein und Zeit*.<sup>193</sup> In "Ousia et grammè" Derrida seems to have taken his comprehension of Heidegger to another level. In this context he uses the concept of 'vulgar time' with great caution, submitting its validity to a test.<sup>194</sup> From Derrida's point of view, Heidegger's own attempt of developing a conception of 'primordial time' in *Sein und Zeit* remains trapped in metaphysics. Based on an extended argumentation (that I cannot explore here) he presents the following, rather surprising, conclusion:

Perhaps there is no "vulgar concept of time". The concept of time, in all its aspects, belongs to metaphysics, and it names the domination of presence. Therefore we can only conclude that the entire system of metaphysical concepts, throughout its history, develops the so-called 'vulgarity' of the concept of time (which Heidegger, doubtless, would not contest), but also that an *other* concept of time cannot be opposed to it, since time in general belongs to metaphysical conceptuality. In attempting to produce this *other* concept, one rapidly would come to see that it is constructed out of other metaphysical or ontotheological predicates.<sup>195</sup>

The way I see it, Derrida's contention that it is impossible to think time outside the framework of a classical ontology, seems to be in consonance with Heidegger's (in *Kant und das Problem*) and Husserl's insights. When Husserl affirms – in his lectures on time – that we lack a proper vocabulary to capture the essence of the temporal flow he realizes that he has knocked against the boundaries of language.<sup>196</sup> Descriptions of time are forced to borrow its terms from the realm of the spatial. Derrida now suggests that time can only be described from the order of the constituted and the order of objects of experience that this temporalization makes possible. Just like Husserl, he seems to acknowledge the insurmountable fact that we – in trying to capture the phenomenon of time – are always forced to resort to an objectifying language,

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<sup>193</sup> Heidegger *Sein und Zeit* p. 326.

<sup>194</sup> Derrida "Ousia et grammè" in *MP* p. 74-77/64-66. Cf. Wood *The Deconstruction of Time* p. 270-271.

<sup>195</sup> Derrida "Ousia et grammè" in *MP* p. 73/63 (translation modified).

<sup>196</sup> See Husserl *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* §36 p. 74/79. For Derrida's discussion see *VP* p. 94 note 1/72 note. Derrida's discussion includes a long quote from §36, in which Husserl famously renounces the possibility of conceptualising the flow. It is important to see that Derrida agrees with Husserl on this score and that the matter of conflict sets in at another level: Derrida accuses Husserl of withdrawing his scepticism about the possibility of describing the absolute flow – since the flow is perfectly intelligible if we restrict it to the subject. According to Derrida, Husserl adheres to a classical metaphysical conception claiming that we can only know the subject, but not its attributes.

which is fundamentally incapable of capturing time. Time is in this sense aporetical because it resists conceptuality:

We say “movement” [when speaking about time] with the terms for what the “movement” makes possible. But we have always already drifted into ontic metaphor. Temporalization is the root of a metaphor that can only be originary. The word “time” itself, such as it has always been understood in the history of metaphysics, is a metaphor.<sup>197</sup>

Time must be understood as an ontic or originary metaphor because the description of time presupposes a transposition from the realm of the *constituted* to the realm of the *constituting*. Trying to capture the Nothing, we speak of it as a being – we transpose the phenomenon from non-mundane to the world of extant beings. The temporal phenomenon is mistakenly understood as beings in time. This juxtaposition of space and time appears to be inevitable. The concept of time is necessarily always understood through the predicates that we attempt to criticise.

With reference to the aporetical character of time it is possible to give a brief precision on the status of the time-constitution with regard to *la différance*. It has been shown that Derrida affirms that (i) *la différance* constitutes time and (ii) *la différance* is not a productive, transcendently real, causality, since *différance* is not a thing or a being.<sup>198</sup> To use Heidegger’s vocabulary, *la différance* produces ontologically and not ontically. In saying this, it has been demonstrated that the claim that nothing is exempt from time is rather careless. If it were true, Derrida would be forced to acknowledge that *la différance* is in time (and thus, he would reinvent the same problem that Husserl and Heidegger address). The question whether the constitution of time is ‘in time’ leads to irresolvable contradictions.

The possibility of course remains that Derrida holds that time is something fundamentally different from subjective, objective, constituted or constituting time. But in the texts from 1960’s and 1970’s it is obvious that the *spacing* of time – the simultaneous becoming-space-of-time and the becoming-time-of-space – is propelled by *la différance*.

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<sup>197</sup> Derrida *VP* p. 95/73.

<sup>198</sup> Derrida “La différance” in *MP* p. 9/8-9.

### **Concluding remarks on re-presentation, time and spacing**

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate how Derrida makes use of Husserl's notion of the width of the present to elaborate a conception of the primordial synthesis of the trace. While admitting that Husserl's (descriptive, not the epistemologically informed) philosophy of time brilliantly accounts for how we experience temporal objects, Derrida nevertheless contends that Husserl's philosophy does not – except by certain slippages – recognize the power of the unconscious. By showing that the width of the present is due to internal fissures, that it depends on the trace, and that the temporal synthesis is necessarily passive and unconscious, Derrida paves the way for a critique of what he calls the linear concept of time. Scrutinizing this idea, I suggested that the concept of linear time, which Derrida sets out to attack, should be understood as model of time that is conceptually dependent on consciousness and the presence of the present. Reassessing this concept of conscious temporality, Derrida proffers a model of unconscious temporality, a fundamentally passive activity, based on the movement of auto-affection. In order for there to be temporal unfolding, the now must be repeatable. This repetition of the now is realized in acts of unconscious auto-affection, in which a Now A objectifies itself into a new Now B. It is suggested that this model should be articulated in terms of writing and reading and that the spacing of time should be understood against the backdrop of the delay that the acts of self-reading entail. The extension of the sign and the non-proximity between the written and the read imply that the I must read itself and that an incision of original delay governs the structure of auto-affection. Finally, I have articulated how Derrida understands time as aporetic. The question whether the constitution of time is within time or not leads to severe problems. Time resists a definite comprehension and it can only be accommodated through originary metaphors.

## V. Final remarks

In the introduction of this essay, two questions were posed: (1) In what sense can *la différance* be seen as a development of the doctrine of transcendental aesthetics? and (2) how does Derrida's novel concept of re-presentation accompany this rewriting? To give a preliminary and summarizing answer to these questions, I would claim that Derrida's renewed transcendental aesthetics implies a new way of thinking the boundaries between thought and intuition, focusing on the root that precedes the very distinction. The choice of concentrating on Derrida's concept of re-presentation (which presupposes the originary synthesis of the trace) has thus been motivated by the fact that a re-presentation presupposes a necessary intertwining of sense and the sensed. In other words, re-presentation is a compound, which unites receptivity and spontaneity, passivity and activity, sensibility and thought, repetition and temporality. Affirming this necessary contamination, Derrida hence proposes that there is neither pure sensibility nor pure thought. Transcendental aesthetics is wrought by a necessary contamination making the lowest level of cognition and the conception of space dependent on the unconscious writing.

In what sense does this take us beyond Derrida's predecessors? Is Derrida's ultratranscendental aesthetics a mere continuation of Kant's and Husserl's transcendental philosophies? From what I have been able to discern, Derrida deviates from his predecessors by emphasizing the following traits: (i) the necessity of sign and language, (ii) the primordial role of the unconscious and (iii) the aporetic character of transcendental conditions. These tenets are to a large extent highly original. Yet, as has been suggested, these tenets can in some sense be found (in embryo) in Kant's and Husserl's transcendental philosophies. One cannot simply choose between continuity and discontinuity in these matters; there is necessarily both development and deviation involved in Derrida's reassessment of transcendental aesthetics.

The analysis has proceeded by concentrating on the concept of re-presentation and the role it plays in the arguments concerning *spacing* (viewed as Derrida's novel transcendental aesthetics). Let us rehearse the itinerary that has been traversed:

Firstly, Derrida's claim that every kind of givenness is involved in the general structure of re-presentation has been substantiated with regard to the discussion of space and ideality. Regardless of the source of the specific givenness (it might be an act of perceptual awareness, a thought, a phantasy, an anticipation) it falls under the general concept of re-presentation or *Vorstellung*. Investigating this claim in relation to Derrida's discussion of Kant and Hume it was

shown that Derrida does not succumb to a two-world theory of perception that distinguishes between real extra-mental objects and real intra-mental representations. Through this elucidation it became clear that Derrida does not subscribe to the kind of image- and sign-theories of perception that Husserl criticizes. In this respect, Derrida remained faithful to his phenomenological inheritance. Shedding light on Derrida's theories of signs, language and the constitution of ideal objects his deviation from Kant and Husserl became clearer. In order for there to be a re-presentation there must be a synthesis of sense and the sensed. According to Derrida, sense is ultimately dependent on language. The possibility of instantiating an ideal object in a concrete act is guarded by the possibility of repetition in language. However, language is not an ideal medium. The necessary detour to language and the sign inflicts on the possibility of a perfect repetition of the ideal sense. Describing the constitution of space and ideal objects – carried out by the movement of *la différance* – the notion of a fundamentally passive activity was elaborated. It was suggested – contrary to some of Derrida's more extreme statements – that he still adheres to a concept of constituting subjectivity; *la différance* is to some extent dependent on subjectivity since it supervenes on transcendental subjectivity. Nevertheless, the constitution of ideal objects is not carried out by the conscious and active subjectivity; it is the movement of *la différance*, which brings about ideality. Presenting this difficult theory I had recourse to Derrida's allusions to the transcendental imagination. Based on this discussion, it was proposed that *la différance* is ontologically (and not ontically) creative. The fundamental suggestion of this meditation was that the transcendental imagination is a proper simile for *la différance* for two reasons: (i) it serves as the common root of intuition and thought. On the basis of the fact that the common root precedes the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, Derrida is able to articulate a view of the constitution of the trace as a memory of the absolute past without relation to the present and intuition. Not being founded on intuition (and thus lacking a definite origin, since it does not pertain to thought either), the trace nevertheless fulfils intuition. Consequently one can say that the trace – just like Kant's notion of the *a priori* – is prior to experience. But (ii) Derrida's notion of the trace is not, like Kant's notion of the *a priori*, inherent in sensibility (or thought depending on whether we are speaking of forms of intuition or categories) but rather transcendently historical in Husserl's sense. Ideal objects are constituted throughout the development of history. In distinction to Husserl's historical *a priori* however (at least as Derrida sees it), this constitution takes place unconsciously. *La différance*'s production of ideal objects is hence both passive and active.

Secondly, as the discussion continued to the realm of temporality, the structure of representation was elucidated in relation to the originary temporal synthesis. Taking Husserl's notion of the width of the present as the point of departure, it was shown that Derrida took advantage of certain ambiguities in Husserl's description of retention to open up for making it a token of *Vorstellung* in general. Derrida thus completes his argument claiming that the structure of repetition necessarily involves the sign. The fundamentally passive activity of temporal synthesis was described as the temporal unfolding based on the unconscious. (It is of note that Derrida, in this context, seems to overestimate Husserl's adherence to the activity involved in temporal synthesizing.) Adding the notion of auto-affection, I followed Derrida in his description of the possibility of repeating the now. The repetition of the now, engendered by auto-affection, was understood in terms of reading and writing, which illustrates how the self-objectivation of unconscious writing gives rise to the original delay. The movement of auto-affection was thus taken as the originary form of spacing – the becoming-space-of time and the becoming-time-of-space. Lastly, the vulgar concept of time was analysed to display Derrida's scepticism of operating outside the confines of the metaphysical tradition and elaborating a new concept of time. It was shown that time, for Derrida, is an originary metaphor that cannot be captured by a language tied to beings and extants. The constitution performed by *la différance* is ultimately enigmatic and aporetic and cannot be understood by ordinary concepts. In the end, this implied that neither time nor space can be grasped without their essential relation to Derrida's concept of writing.

This is why Kant's formalistic conception of time and space, and Husserl's discussion of the constitution of pre-geometrical space (taking place through the lived body) and pre-empirical temporality are left behind. Prior to time and space as ideal forms of intuition, prior to Husserl's lived body, the kinaesthetic series and the temporal flow, there is the movement of writing that constitutes time and space.

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In the end, one might feel a bit dissatisfied by Derrida's brief sketches with regard to the transcendental aesthetics. For example: what kind of ontological status pertains to space and time in Derrida's view? Kant maintains that they are *forms* – and not *concepts* – since they are neither empirical abstractions, nor discursive concepts of the understanding. Space – we recall – necessarily denotes one thing. Does Derrida alter or displace this conception at this specific point? If so, how? We turn in vain to Derrida for a clear response; what we get is that space

(like any other ideal object) is neither from heaven nor from this world, it is constituted by *la différance*. Another disconcerting issue that must be brought to light in this context is the issue of pre-expressive sense. In the opening discussion of Chapter III it was said – quoting Derrida’s own statements about the relation between the two strata of meaning – that Derrida does not simply equate sense with linguistic meaning. Throughout this essay there has nevertheless been a constant emphasizing on the decisiveness of the sign, language and linguistic meaning. What remains of pre-expressive sense in these considerations? Does Derrida swerve from his manifest opinion? There are two different types of answers to this question in my opinion. Firstly, Derrida underlines that there is no way of describing pre-expressive sense without using language. Hence, everything that can be said about pre-expressive sense appears to come very close to the phenomenon of linguistic sense. It seems to be impossible to avoid this problem – at least in a classical descriptive language. Consequently, Derrida sometimes resorts to linguistic inventions and wild neologisms in order to capture something (still by means of language of course) that is outside the linguistic realm. In doing this, he is expanding the sphere of the sayable by appropriating the experientiable to the thinkable. Yet, these metaphorical displacements may – in the end – be accommodated to ordinary language. The disclosure that they open up for might eventually turn into ordinary descriptions. Secondly, Derrida eventually appears to turn away from the preoccupation with language and the sign. Even if the notions of *la différance* and trace, e.g., remain central to his philosophy, the decisiveness of the sign is downplayed. Whether this is to be regarded as change of interest, or an insight that the insistence on the sign in the end might lead to impasses is a question that cannot be answered here.

A last remark should be added. In this essay the notion of *la différance* has played an important role. Yet, it is essential that *la différance* (which it is neither a word, nor a concept, it is not a thing but a no-thing) is not taken as the final answer to all the questions that have been posed here. If we investigate how Derrida makes use of *la différance* it is possible to discern that he is employing it as a method of opening up to new questions. *La différance* often enters at the end of the analysis, not at the beginning; it points to an aporia, not the ultimate solution. It should inspire us to take things further and think more, not to stop and contend ourselves with positing *la différance* as the ultimate outpost. It should not come as a surprise that Derrida would later describe his quasi-transcendental philosophy as an enquiry into the possibility and impossibility of experience. There is a double role of *la différance* – it discloses and conceals at the same time.

### **Suggestions concerning further research**

In this essay I have only dealt with a narrow conception of transcendental aesthetics. It would be possible to deepen and expand upon the analysis incorporating other themes that are of importance for Derrida's quasi-transcendental philosophy. First of all, the theme of intersubjectivity and ethics, such as Derrida displays it in his readings of Emmanuel Levinas, would contribute immensely to our understanding of the new transcendental aesthetics. Derrida's remarks on the notion of alterity, the other, the trace, temporality and his recognition of the fact that language is always shared, all form integral parts of transcendentalism. The theme of constitution and distribution of ideal objects are analysed in terms of sendings (*envois*) in *La carte postale*, *Glas* and *Psyche*. One could investigate Derrida's development of his thoughts on Freud and the theme of unconscious temporality as well as his deepened understanding of phenomenological time (Derrida returns to Husserl's philosophy of time-consciousness in some of the later texts, e.g. *Donner le temps*). The theme of historical time, which we have not dealt with here, and how it relates to the transcendental is analysed in *Spectres de Marx*. Another interesting project would consist in scrutinizing Derrida's later views on the lived body and the experience that evade language; such as they are presented in his analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy (in *Le toucher*).

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