THE SPATIALITY OF SUBJECTIVITY

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This article describes how the spatiality of our existence determines the temporal relations that inform the contents of our consciousness. It argues that the extension of time—the fact the moments that compose it do not collapse into each other—can only be explained in terms of the dependence of time on space. Such dependence causes us to rethink the concept of subjectivity according to a multi-dimensional spatial paradigm, one that crosses the traditional divide between minds and bodies.

The relation of the mind to the body has been called the “hard problem” of consciousness. Ever since Descartes distinguished the mind from the body, declaring the mind to be non-extended and bodies to be extended, the relation of the two has been a puzzle. In material objects, as John Locke observed, we can grasp how a change in “the size, figure, and motion of one body can cause a change in the size, figure and motion of another body.” Their connection with the mind is, however, another matter. Locke, in fact, asserts: “there is no conceivable connection between the one and other.” (Ibid., 445) We lack any concept—in David Chalmer’s phrase, any “explanatory bridge”—that would connect the two. In what follows, I am going to argue that this lack of connection stems from the way that we conceive them. It arises because we identify temporal relations with minds and spatial ones with bodies. To seek the resolution of this problem is to break down this divide. It is, in particular, to understand the spatial nature of subjectivity.

1 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, (tr.) L. LaFleur (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 74.
3 David Chalmers, “Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness,” electronically published at [http://www.imprint.co.uk/chalmers.html].
1. Outer and Inner Sense

The tradition of identifying temporal relations with minds and spatial ones with bodies stretches from Aristotle to Heidegger. Kant gives the classic exposition of this divide. He argues that if we want to grasp temporal relations, we have to turn inward, that is, regard our memories and anticipations. This is because outside of us, it is always now; the external perception that directs itself to the world cannot “see” either the past or the future. Neither is present since the past has vanished and the future is yet to come. Thus, at any given moment we only outwardly see spatial relations. As Kant expresses this insight, “time cannot be outwardly intuited, any more than space can be intuited as something in us.” Thus, I intuit time in its pastness and futurity through my memories and anticipations; regarding them, however, I cannot speak of their spatial relations. I cannot, for example, say that a memory (as opposed to its object) is a given size or is to the left or to the right of another memory. My memories are not out there in space; they are within me. For Kant, this leads to the conclusion that “if we abstract from our mode of inwardly intuiting ourselves...then time is nothing.” Without the consciousness whose relations it characterizes, time loses its reality. Such consciousness is, for Kant, our appearing selfhood; the reality of time is to be found within it.

For Kant, this divide is between the two forms of our sensibility. It is a fundamental postulate of Kant’s “transcendental idealism” that neither time nor space pertain to the world in itself. They are simply the two basic, if contingent, ways we organize our representations:

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4 For Aristotle, time exists in our measuring motion. Time is the “number” of movement, as when we look at the shadow on a sundial and say, “now it is 4:00,” and look again an hour later and say, “it is 5:00.” Aristotle, Physics, in The Complete Works of Aristotle, (ed.) J. Barnes (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 219b1. Through the numbers on the dial, we measure the motion of the shadow caused by the sun. For Aristotle, this implies that when there is no “soul” to apply numbers to this motion, the only thing that remains is this motion itself. (Ibid., 223a28–29) The reality of time is in our acts of measuring it. Heidegger does not speak of minds or souls. His word for our selfhood is Dasein or human existence. The project of his Being and Time, he writes, is to exhibit “temporality as the meaning of the being that we call Dasein.” This involves “the repeated interpretation...of the structures of Dasein...as modes of temporality.” Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967), 17. Outside of Dasein, it makes no sense to speak of time.

5 Immanuel Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, in Kants gesammelte Schriften, (ed.) Königliche Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: George Reiner, 1955), B37. All translations from Kant are my own.
time is their organization according to the relation of before and after; space is their organization according to the relation of being simultaneously spread out. Considered in ourselves, we are actually in neither.

2. The Spatial and Temporal Sense of Being “In”

The alternate to Kant’s idealism is that we are actually “in” the spatial world that outer sense presents to us. This is, in fact, what our senses teach us. Through outer perception, I can directly regard my hands, arms, and legs. I can reach across space to touch them. Using a mirror, I can, in fact, see my whole body located as part of the appearing world. It is equally evident, however, that this world is “in” me. I am the one who brings its objects to apprehension. Regarding an object, I synthesize or connect its perceptions, thereby taking them as appearances of one and the same object. Thus, the multiple appearances of, say, a chair, which present first one side and then another of it, are taken by me as appearances of that which appears through them, namely, the chair as a three-dimensional object. Here, being “in” me has a temporal sense. The appearances I synthesize cannot vanish the moment after their apprehension. They have to be retained, that is, held in the before and after of time, in order to serve as the material for my synthesis.

These two senses of “in” are present in what Merleau-Ponty calls our natural “perceptual faith.” As synthesizing subjects, the world is in us. But as embodied, our flesh is required to provide us with the materials for our synthesis. We apprehend the world through the colors, tastes, sounds, textures, and odors provided by our five senses.6 As embodied perceivers, we are part of the external world. If we accept both these senses of being “in,” then, according to Merleau-Ponty, we have to assert: “I am in the world and the world is in

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6 Using the word *tapisser*, to cover, drape, line or wallpaper, Merleau-Ponty writes in this regard, “our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, (tr.) A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 123. Thus, we “line” the world with visual qualities through our eyes, with tactile qualities through our sensitive skin, and so on. Doing so, our embodied being provides measures “for being, dimensions to which we can refer it.” (*Ibid.*, 103) In other words, through our flesh, we can refer to the sensible aspects of being. We can measure it along the axes or dimensions of its tastes, sounds, smells, roughness and smoothness (*Ibid.*)
me.”7 In Kantian terms, the assertion is that “I” am in it spatially, even as it is in me temporally. Given that the “I” that the world is temporally “in” is the same “I” that is spatially “in” the world, the two senses of being “in”—the temporal and the spatial—must be related. Somehow the “I” must be both temporal and spatial: both a place of synthesis and a spatially spread out object.

That the “I” must be both spatial and temporal is implied in Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of one hand touching another. When I touch something other than myself, I experience what Husserl calls a “double sensation.” Thus, touching a cold object, I feel both “the coldness of the surface of a thing and the sensation of cold in the finger.” Similarly, when I press my hand on the table, I have the “sensations of my fingers pressing on it” and also have the sensations of the table itself, its hardness, smoothness, etc.8 In other words, I have not just the experience of the object, but also that of myself as a sensing subject. Now, when one hand touches another, the touched hand becomes the object. The touching hand feels the touched hand’s warmth, smoothness, etc. The touched hand, continues, however, to be experienced as sensing subject. It is not just touched but feels itself touched. The result is that I experience the touched hand as both sensed object and sensing subject. As Husserl observes, this ability of flesh to be taken as both object and subject gives us our bodily self-presence. This self-presence distinguishes us from the world since, when we touch other objects, we feel their qualities, but we do not feel their being touched. (Ibid., 146)

3. Spatiality and the Subject-Object Dichotomy

Although our self-presence involves our being both a sensing subject and sensed object, the divide between the two never collapses. What maintains the ongoing subject-object dichotomy in our self-presence? The traditional answer, which Husserl presents, is essentially Kantian. It is based on the temporal nature of our perceptual synthesis. If to perceive an object requires our picking out an ongoing pattern of perceptions and taking them as perceptions of some object, then such synthesis requires time—at very least the time required for the pattern to show itself. Given this, the object is al-

7 Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 8.
ways experienced with a delay. As such, it distinguishes itself from the subject that acts in the ongoing now. The same holds when, in reflection, we attempt to grasp ourselves. Since such self-perception also requires synthesis, what reflection apprehends, Husserl writes, “is always myself, not as the primordium that I am, but rather as the primordium that I was.” The result, according to Husserl, is the self’s ongoing “anonymity.” It is the non-objective status of the presently perceiving ego. The subject-objective divide is thus understood as that between the anonymously synthesizing subject and the objects resulting from its synthesis. This divide is what, in reflection, splits the subject from himself.

A second account of this divide, which Husserl did not embrace, can be drawn from his account of touch. It stems from the fact that, on the level of touch, flesh’s relation to itself is not direct, but rather mediated: the touched hand through the touching hand and vice-versa. The point is that we must touch ourselves to grasp ourselves as both a sensed object and a sensing subject. In such self-touch, the touching hand that positions the touched sensing hand as an object is not the hand that it touches. The spatial distinction of one hand from the other—and more generally, the spatial extension of our body as it functions in our self-presence—thus maintains the divide in our self-presence. To overcome the divide, we would have to confuse one hand with the other; but this we never do. The implication here is that the self-presence by which we distinguish ourselves from the world is fundamentally spatial. The subjectivity that is such self-presence is not, as Kant thought, simply temporal; it has a spatial character. This implication can be put in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s description of his left hand touching some object while being touched by his right hand. He writes, “When my right hand touches my left hand while [the left hand] is palpating the things...the ’touching subject’ passes over to the rank of the touched.” It “descends into

9 In Husserl's words: "die Abwandlung als Bewußtsein ist jetzt wirklich, aber in ihrer abgewandelten Intentionalität macht sie das eigene Nicht-Jetzt bewußt; das Nicht-Jetzt transzendiert das Jetzt, im besonderen das Bewußtsein vom Nicht-Jetzt. So ist die Kontinuität der intentionalen Abwandlungen eine stetige Kontinuität, in welcher Transzendenz ursprünglich bewußt wird, und dieses Transzendentete ist immerzu Bewußtsein; immerzu ich selbst als Primordium nicht als der ich bin, sondern der ich war." Edmund Husserl, Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929-1934). Die C-Manuskripte ed. Dieter Lohmar (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2006), 130 [C 7, 21a-b, July 9, 1932].
the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world.”

Touched, the touching subject is thrust into the spatial world. How is this possible? The answer is that it is already spatial. Spatiality is inherent in the alterity that characterizes our self-presence. Such spatiality is evident in the fact that the sensing subject—say, the touching hand—is not just a place of temporal relations. It has its localized sensations that are spread across its surface. Such sensations are not objective—i.e., part of the external world. They are subjective: they are elements of our subjective syntheses.

4. The Spatiality of Time

How can we decide between these two accounts? Is our self-presence temporal or does it involve space as well? Kant claims that it is temporal since all our representations, including those of outer sense, “belong, in themselves, as determinations of the mind, to our inner state,” which, as inner, has only temporal relations. (KRV, B50) As just noted, the temporal character of the synthesis of our representations is responsible for the delay that prevents us from grasping ourselves in the now. The question, however, that neither Kant nor Husserl raise, is: what is responsible for this temporal delay?

This question can be framed in terms of a paradox that Aristotle brings up in his discussion of time. Having noted that neither the past nor the future exist since the past “has been and is not” and the future “is going to be and is not yet,” Aristotle raises the question of the now: if to be is to be now, the now certainly exists; but can we say that the now is a part of time? A part measures the whole, which is made up of its parts. But the present has no extension. In this, it is like a point on a line. Neither nows nor points can be summed up to give a definite quantity. The paradox, then, is that the past and the present do not exist and the now that does exist is not part of time. What the paradox points to is the non-self-subsistent quality of time. Time must depend on something outside of itself in order to be. Following the tradition that stretches from Augustine to Husserl, we can say that time depends on our minds. Here we assert that the past and the future exist in our minds. They are present in a modified way.

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11 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 134. As the register of the Husserl Archives in Leuven, Belgium shows, Merleau-Ponty had read Husserl’s *Ideen II*.


through our memories and our anticipations. As for the now, it exists as the changing moment of our present perception.\textsuperscript{14} Such an explanation, however, does not respond to the central element of the paradox that Aristotle presents: if the moments of time do not have any extension, what prevents them from collapsing into each other? The question here is: what "spaces" them, as it were? What gives them the "outside of each other" that we associate with space? Without such externality, we cannot speak of the "delay" required for synthesis; but without this, the temporal distinction between the subject and object that Husserl draws cannot occur.

To answer the question of the "spacing" of the moments of time, we have to turn to the oft-noted fact that our experience of time is dependent on our experience of change. As John Locke observed, we have no sense of time in dreamless sleep. To experience its flow, we have to experience the change or succession of our "ideas" or perceptions.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, without change, our sense of time freezes. The now ceases to "flow" when the contents occupying it remain the same. It is only when we experience the present moment with an ever new content that we apprehend it as a streaming present. Given that the movement of time depends on the change of such content, what lies behind this change? What is its essential precondition? The answer is that the alterity that we experience—say, the different positions of the clock's hands—presupposes space. What we register is other because it occurs in space. In space, it changes its color, its position,

\textsuperscript{14} In Augustine's words, "there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things future. For these three exist in the mind, and I find them nowhere else; the present of things past is memory, the present of things present is sight, the present of things future is expectation." Augustine, \textit{Confessions IX} (tr.) F. Sheed in \textit{Time}, (ed.) J. Westphal and C. Levenson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 19.

\textsuperscript{15} In Locke's words, "That we have our notion of succession and duration from this original, \textit{viz.}, from reflection on the train of ideas, which we find to appear one after another in our own minds, seems plain to me, in that we have no perception of duration but by considering the train of ideas that take their turns in our understandings. When that succession of ideas ceases, our perception of duration ceases with it; which everyone clearly experiments in himself, whilst he sleeps soundly, whether an hour or a day, a month or a year; of which duration of things, while he sleeps or thinks not, he has no perception at all, but it is quite lost to him; and the moment wherein he leaves off to think, till the moment he begins to think again, seems to him to have no distance." John Locke, \textit{An Essay Concerning Human Understanding} (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995), \textit{Book II}, Chapter 14, 122–23. Hume makes the same observation. See in particular, David Hume, \textit{A Treatise of Human Nature}, (ed.) L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), \textit{Book I}, Part II, section iii, 35.
its shape, its relation to what surrounds it, and so on. Space, in its extension, that is, in its having “parts outside of parts,” provides the framework for such change. It supplies a necessary condition for the alterity that we register as time. This does not mean that the alterity of contents is itself responsible for separating the different moments of time. Space, rather, is the ultimate reason why the moments with their different contents do not coincide. Thus, what distinguishes the appearances of a moving body are not the moments that they inhabit; it is the spatially distinct positions of its path. It is the outside-of-one-another of such positions—the extension of the path—that translates itself into the extension of time. Without this spatial extension, the path would collapse as would the moments presenting the appearances of the motion along it.

5. Teleological and Linear Causality

With this, we can return to the mind-body problem and the question of the “explanatory bridge” between the two. The problem is usually formulated in terms of two different causalities and their corresponding temporalities. The inanimate world has a linear causality, one where the past determines the present, and the present determines the future. We can see it at work in the billiard table where the positions and motions of the billiards at any one moment determine their positions and motions at the next. The animate world has a very different causality and temporality. Here, the leading factor is the future. For us, it is what we want to accomplish. Suppose, for example, I want to build a bookcase. Having this goal, I check to see what my past actions have provided me with. I go to see if I still have the nails, wood and tools I bought a year ago. Finding them, I proceed to build. Causality here is goal-directed. The corresponding teleological temporality begins with my projected future, proceeds by way of my past, which is taken as providing the resources for what I want to accomplish. It ends in my present activity of actualizing this goal through my using the resources—the nails and the wood—that my past actions furnished.

The same temporal flow of future, past, and present appears in the perceptual process. According to Husserl, the determining factor in this process is the interpretative intention to see a given object.¹⁶

¹⁶The key point here is that perception is interpretation. In Husserl’s words: [It belongs to perception that something appears within it, but interpretation [die Interpretation] makes up what we term appearance—be it correct or not,
What we intend to see determines how we regard what we have seen. It makes us take it as material for our “project” of seeing a specific object. As such, it determines our present act of seeing with its horizon of anticipations. Given that what we intend to see as we move to get a better look is not yet fully there, the intended object stands as a goal of our perceptual process. As such, it is something to be realized, that is, something future. What we have seen and retained is something past, while the present act of seeing is, of course, now. The teleological temporality of the perceptual process is, thus, also that of the future (in the form of a goal) determining the past (by determining our interpretation of the contents we have received and retained) and, thereby, determining the present act of seeing.

Posed in these terms, the mind-body problem requires that we provide an explanatory bridge between these two different types of causality with their corresponding temporalities. The materialists, who reduce mind to matter, as well as the idealists, who make the opposite reduction, assert that this is impossible. How, they ask, can time proceed in two different ways? How can causality have two fundamentally opposed senses? In answering this question, we have to first observe that if we reduce causality to its empirical basis, then it concerns simply our experience of the prior and posterior. When this sequence is repeated with the same items, we assume that the prior causes the posterior. For instance, in playing billiards, I constantly experience the ball I hit impact another ball, causing it to move. I thus naturally take the motion of the first, which I first experience, as the cause of the second ball’s motion, which I subsequently experience. I follow the same procedure when I regard my own actions. Here my intending to do something, like going to the store, is followed by the action. In this case, my intention is prior and the action is posterior. I thus naturally take the intention as the cause of the action. The intention explains “why” I am leaving my apartment. The point is that causality, considered empirically, does not, per se, rule out either form of causality. What does is generally assumed to

be the directionality of time. The question of the explanatory bridge is thus reduced to that of linking the two different directions of the flow of time: the teleological that begins in the future, the linear that starts in the past.

So stated, the question of the bridge concerns the two senses of being “in” with which we started. We are “in” the world as a body among bodies. In terms of our corporal structure, our temporality appears as linear and causal. When we play billiards, we assume the corresponding causality. To play billiards, of course, we also have to internalize the world. The world is in us as an intentional object, and the temporality of its perception is teleological. So is the goal-directed activity of trying to get a ball into a side pocket. Now, if temporality were, in itself, a self-subsistent entity, the problem of finding a bridge between the two senses of being “in” with their corresponding temporalities would be insoluble. A temporality that embraced both would be self-contradictory. The paradox in the conception of time that we began with, however, shows that time is not self-subsistent. What keeps its moments apart is not to be found within time. It is the outside-itself, the parts outside of parts, of extended space. Such externality is indifferent to the direction of the temporal flow. It can support the sequences that begin with our conception of a goal. It can also support the sequences that begin with the past. The same apartness of space serves as a framework for the goal directed motions of animate beings and the non-teleological movement of insensate material objects. It is behind the actualization accomplished by motion, whatever its nature.

6. Living Space

The fact that motion requires the apartness of space does not mean that such apartness is the same for every type of motion. Similarly, the temporality that is structured by such apartness is not the same. This can be put in terms of space’s relation to time. Following Kant, we can call space the “outer” and time the “inner.” The apartness of time, that is, the distinction of its moments, can, in its dependence on space, be then defined as the presence of the outer in the inner. Such presence is, in fact, the bridge between the two. Now, in the temporality of inanimate objects, this presence of the outer is uniform. This means, as Newton’s first law states, that in the absence of external
forces, a body continues moving in a straight line for ever. The time of this uniform motion is, itself, uniform. Its moments flow from the past to the present to the future with perfect regularity. Traditionally, the ideal of such space has been represented by the perfectly smooth surface of the dial of a clock. Time has been correspondingly represented by the uniformity of the motion of the hands about the dial.

To speak about living space, we must first note that, mathematically, a dimension is simply a variable determining a position. If we say that space has three dimensions, this means that three variables are required to fix a position within it. In this space, the shortest line between two points can be determined by the three variables (x, y, and z coordinates) of these points. In classical physics, space is three-dimensional, and straight lines measure distances. In living-space, however, the shortest distance is determined by the living being’s body. Its muscular structure and size determine how it is able to move between points. Thus, the localized space of an adult human being is different than that of a child, and both are different from that of an insect. This means that the variables determining positions in such spaces and the shortest lines between them vary accordingly.

As the French mathematician Henri Poincaré pointed out, it signifies that the space we live in has as many dimensions as the muscular determinants of our motion. This is very different from the space in which an inanimate body moves, such motion being controlled, not internally, but by external forces. In terms of the mind-body problem, this multi-dimensionality of living space implies that we cannot resolve it by limiting ourselves to the three-dimensionality of inanimate space. The space in which the animate and the inanimate interact must be extended to include the variables characterizing animate space. This, of course, affects the presence of the outer in the inner that makes possible the extension of time. The time that such apartness structures has be understood in terms of the motion of animate existence.

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18Gravity, of course, curves space. Here, however, we are abstracting from the considerations that Einstein brings forward in his theory of general relativity.

19In Poincaré’s words: “Each muscle gives rise to a special sensation which may be increased or diminished so that the aggregate of our muscular sensations will depend upon as many variables as we have muscles. From this point of view, motor space would have as many dimensions as we have muscles.” Henri Poincaré, Science and Hypothesis (New York: Walter Scott Publishing, 1905), 64.
Such motion has many forms, depending on the age, sex, and species of the animate organism. Underlying them all is the motion of the metabolic process that characterizes life itself. Such motion points to the special character of the apartness of living space. Metabolism—Stoffwechsel in German—is the organism’s exchange of materials with its environment. The goal of this exchange is the maintenance of the organism, that is, its bodily continuance. As Hans Jonas writes, this signifies that an organism’s “being” is a result of its “doing.” As such its being is inherently future-directed. If to be alive depends upon the intake of new material, the now of such being-alive stretches beyond the present to what comes next. Here, the “will be”—the intake of new material—determines the “is” as represented by the organism’s present activity. Insofar as the organism exists by directing itself beyond its present condition, it is ahead of itself; it “has” a future. In other words, the living being, in its necessity for exchange, has a teleological structure, one that involves a future-directed, self-affirmation. Now, the space of such self-affirmation, as traced by the organism’s paths, is neither linear nor uniform. As opposed to the uniform space of inanimate objects, it is, as it were, folded in on itself. It is the space of the self-directed motion of the organism—the metabolic motion that has as its goal its own continuance. The same point holds for the temporality that this space structures. It is neither linear nor uniform. It proceeds teleologically and does not flow equitably. To determine it, we need the multi-dimensionality, the folded-in quality, of the living space that gives it its apartness. As teleologically structured, this is the space of our perception, the space in which the world is “in” us. It is also the space in which we carry out our various projects. It structures the teleological temporality of our perception and action.

7. Complexity and the Explanatory Bridge

I said above that the presence of the outer in the inner is the “bridge” between space and time. This affects how we conceive the relation between minds and bodies. Traditionally, this relation has been framed by our identifying temporal relations with minds and spatial

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20 Here, all the work on the phenomenology of the body, its movement and its spatiality (including the work by feminists on the female body), is relevant to the mind-body problem.

ones with bodies. Yet, as Merleau-Ponty and others have pointed out, the divide between the two can only be overcome by undermining this distinction by, in fact, grasping the spatial nature of subjectivity. My claim is that we can do this by examining the presence of space in time—or, in Kant’s terms, the presence of the outer in the inner—a presence that shows itself in the apartness of time’s moments. This presence is the “bridge” between the two. As such, it gives us a framework that embraces both the inanimate and the animate. A key point here is that, because it includes the animate, this framework has many more variables—dimensions in the mathematical sense—than those required to describe the motion and temporality of inanimate objects. This does not mean that the animate and the inanimate are opposed, that, to use David Chalmer’s phrase, there is no “explanatory bridge” between them. It only signifies that we cannot reduce the sentient to the non-sentient without the loss of the variables that would account for sentient, animate existence. To attempt to do this would be like trying to use Euclidian geometry to explain the multi-dimensional reality of a gravitational field. No one would say that Einsteinian and Euclidean space are unconnected, that there is no “explanatory bridge” between them. The space Einstein described becomes Euclidian in the absence of gravity. It is not opposed to, but only more complex than, Euclidian space. The same holds with regard to ourselves in comparison with inorganic, non-sentient matter. We are more complex, and we have to understand this complexity in terms that include, but are not limited to, those that describe the inorganic. We can do this, as I have argued, by positing the presence of space in time. Such positing is what allows us to grasp the spatial dimension of our subjectivity. It gives us a way of grasping our living temporality that does not oppose it to our spatiality.22

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