



## THING AND SPACE IN HUSSERL (AND HEIDEGGER)<sup>1</sup>

GIORGIO RIZZO\*

**Abstract:** The phenomenological reason shows how the space and the thing conceived by the scientific and natural thinking are a construction upon the unitary and meaningful world of everyday experience; therefore the aim of this essay is to analyse, from an Husserlian point of view, the most foundational layers of “space” and “thing” beginning from the most fundamental stratum, called by Husserl “phantom”, the mere *res extensa*, and arriving at kinaesthetic fields in which the apprehensional character of the things depends from the interplay of sequences of K’s (kinaesthetic circumstances) and i’s (correlative images) which blend into a unitary and meaningful system of experience. In order to better understand Husserl’s notions of thing and space, the last part of this essay is concerned about a different conception of the same concepts in Heidegger. Indirect confrontation with Heidegger, namely, allows to find some critical and weak points in Husserl’s analysis of thing and space.

**Keywords:** Husserl, Thing, Space, Heidegger, Topology of Being, Fourfold.

### *Introduction*

*Thing and Space* is the title of a course held by Edmund Husserl in the Summer semester 1907 at the University of Göttingen; the German original was published posthumously in 1973 as volume XVI of *Husserliana*. The course began with five introductory lecture which were published in 1947, bearing the title *The Idea of Phenomenology*. The specific matters at issue in this course are “thing” and “space” which he analyses under the general frame

---

\* Docente di Filosofia Teoretica – Università del Salento.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on the report presented, in English language, in the International Seminar Series organised by the *Centre for Hermeneutics and Phenomenology Applied* (CHAP) in the Imaginary Section, in collaboration with Université Côte Azur de Nice and Università de Sivilia.

of a “critique of reason”. While for Kant the task of reason amounts to constitute the scientific reality of thing, for Husserl instead, the thing at issue is the thing of everyday experience; what we need, Husserl declares, is:

to clarify, from the side of experiential cognition, not only the lower levels of the experience which lies prior to all deduction and induction- in short, prior to all logically mediated cognition in the usual sense- but also, and a fortiori, we would need to clarify the higher levels<sup>2</sup>.

In short, theoretical reason aims at showing how the things conceived by the scientific and natural thinking result from a construction upon the unitary and meaningful things of everyday experience. The focus of the analyses concerning thing and space is then the constitution of the most foundational layer of the most foundational things. This lower foundational stratum, called by Husserl “phantom”, is the appearance of a mere *res extensa*, that is, an extended structure filled merely with sense qualities and not yet with substantial properties. To do this job, the investigations ought to solve the riddle of transcendence, making the phenomenological reduction effective in order to arrive at a sphere of “pure phenomena”. Husserl prefaces the proper analysis of the “Thing-Lectures” with a brief introduction in which he affirms that the matter at issue is the analysis of natural, pre-scientific experience which has primarily a perceptual character; in and through this natural attitude, we experience a world that is familiar and always already there:

In the natural attitude of spirit, an existing world stands before our eyes, a world that extends infinitely in space, that now is, previously was, and in the future will be. This world consists of an inexhaustible abundance of things, which now endure and now change, combine with one another and then again separate, exercise effects on one another and then undergo them. We ourselves fit into this world; just as we find the world, so we find ourselves, and we encounter ourselves in the midst of this world. A pre-eminent position in this world, however, is proper to us: we find ourselves to be centers of reference for the rest of the world; it is our environment<sup>3</sup>.

Since the end of the XIX century, Husserl aims at the clarification of the scientific concepts by returning to the intuitive ground from which they

---

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Thing and Space. Lectures of 1907*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1997, p.2; hereafter TS.

<sup>3</sup> TS, 2.

spring; for this reason, Husserl retains that the analysis of the geometric space ought to be anticipated by the investigation of the intuitive space which constitutes the genetic foundation of the former. In *Raumbuch*, Husserl declares that what distinguishes geometrical concepts from experiential concepts is the fact that the former are obtained through a process of idealization; in this sense, they cannot be considered as morphological concepts which are apprehended on the basis of sensible perception which is, *per definitionem*, inaccurate and vague. Geometrical concepts, instead can be viewed as passages to limits, ideas in a Kantian sense, insofar they are guided by essential processes which go beyond the experience. Notwithstanding this relevant difference between space of experience and space of geometry, it is undoubted, in Husserl's view, that geometry takes root in the intuition, since geometry has a content fundament. In a brief to Natorp, dated 15.3.1897, Husserl affirms that through mere formal determinations we cannot arrive at space, but only to an Euclidean variety. In §70 of *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, Husserl points out:

If we use the term 'space' of the familiar type of order of the world of phenomena talk of 'spaces' for which, e.g. the axiom of parallels does not hold, is naturally senseless. It is just as senseless to speak of differing geometries, when 'geometry' names the science of the space of the world of phenomena. But if we mean by 'space' the categorial form of world-space, and, correlatively, by geometry the categorial theoretic form of geometry in the ordinary sense, the space falls under a genus, which we can bound by laws, of pure, categorially determinate manifolds, in regard to which it is natural to speak of 'space' in a yet more extended sense<sup>4</sup>.

In this point of view, Euclidean geometry corresponds to the most direct idealization of the phenomenal space: it is, as a matter of fact, as infinite, tridimensional, homogeneous, isotropic as the space of intuition. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to underline that the processes of idealization, according to Husserl, don not occur "on" the ground of intuition, but are prepared "inside" of it through passive synthesis by virtue of which the world is constituted for us: idealization does not mean construction or even abstraction. According to Husserl there is then a layer of experience which precedes language, historically determined cultures and science:

---

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. I, Routledge & Paul Kegan, London 1970, pp. 157-158.

Thus one can put forward by itself the problem of the manner of being of the life-world; one can place oneself completely upon the ground of this straightforwardly intuited world, putting out of play all objective-scientific opinions and cognitions, in order to consider generally what kind of “scientific” tasks to be resolved with universal validity, arise in respect to this world’s own manner of being<sup>5</sup>.

The world of experience is not a chaotic and disorganized world, but it has an invariable style, a particular spatial-temporal form. To reach then the common layer of experience, we may begin with the leitmotiv represented by the constitution of the spatial thing.

### *The thing in Ideas I*

In § 150 of *Ideas I*, Husserl considers how the region “physical thing” could serve as a clue for a phenomenological investigation. We can arrive, Husserl notes, to the region “physical thing” through the attitude of ideation, proceeding like the geometer in the “freedom and purity” of his geometrical intuition. He continues stating that the regional idea of the physical thing, that is, its identical X with its sense-contents “prescribes rules governing the multiplicities of appearances”<sup>6</sup>. In this sense, Ulrich Claesges notes, transcendence reveals itself as a noetic-noematic structure, that is, as *modus* by virtue of which natural consciousness, through adumbrations (*Abschattungen*), posits the self-manifesting object. The totality of the essence of the thing remains transcendent, falling out from the field of the transcendental subjectivity: “Die Totalität des Wesens scheint in der transzendentalen Reflexion nicht einholbar. Das Wesen wird zu einem X, das in unaufhebbarer Diskrepanz zu dem steht, was von ihm zur adaequaten Gegebenheit kommen kann”<sup>7</sup>. Notwithstanding the inaccessibility of the totality of the essence “physical thing”, we can note, through eidetic variation, that each physical thing-appearance necessarily includes in itself a stratum called by Husserl physical *thing-schema*: “it is the spatial shape merely filled

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. I, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1982, p.361; hereafter IPPI.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Claesges, *Edmund Husserls Theorie der Raumkonstitution*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1964, p. 50.

with “sensuous” qualities- without any determinateness of “substantiality” and “causality”<sup>8</sup>. Adopting this way of investigating the problems concerning phenomenological constitution, Husserl concludes that all the troubles regarding the origin of the idea of space can be reduced to the phenomenological analysis of the essence of all noematic and noetic phenomena in which space is intuitively presented and constituted as the unity of appearances; for this reason we comprehend the intimate link which ties thing and space in phenomenological investigations. Through ordinary experiencing consciousness we can arrive at determining the different levels and the strata of physical thing-constitution: “Every level, and every stratum in the level, is characterized by the fact that it constitutes an own peculiar unity which, on its side, is a necessary middle member for the full constitution of the physical thing<sup>9</sup>.”

To begin with, we ought to consider that in pure phenomenological attitude there are groups of features which are not represented in the apprehension; the thing which appears at rest and unchanged qualitatively shows us only its schema, so that it is not yet so much as a thing, that is, a thing in the usual sense as material-real. It is also remarkable to note that the concept of schema (the concept of phantom) cannot be restricted merely to a single sense-sphere:

A perceived thing also has its tactual schema, which comes to light in tactual grasping. In general, there are precisely as many strata there to be distinguished in the full schema as there are to be found classes of sensuous data which are spread over the spatial extension (appearing as something identical) of the thing<sup>10</sup>.

If up to now, we have taken the thing in isolation, it is time to consider that it is in relation to “circumstances” that the thing is what it is. Reality, called also “materiality”, as a matter of fact, does not lie only in the mere sensuous schema; there are in fact some functional connections which relate the schematic modifications of one aspect to those of other aspects. So long as the circumstances remain unchanged, the schema remains unchanged as well; at any rate, there is a rule according to which to similar circumstances belong similar functional dependencies:

---

<sup>8</sup> IPPI, 361.

<sup>9</sup> IPPI, 363.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. II, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1989, p.41; hereafter IPPII.

A steel spring, once struck, executes certain oscillations and runs through certain successions of states of relative change of place and deformation: the spring has the real property of “elasticity”. As soon as a certain impetus is given, there occurs a corresponding deviation from the state of rest and a certain corresponding mode of oscillation<sup>11</sup>.

The apperception of real properties include, as a matter of fact, not only the articulation in circumstances but also the functionally dependent changes of the schemata in such a way that this dependency holds in any given case. By virtue of a “realizing apprehension”, that is, of a kind of apprehension which constitutes the real thing as substrate of real properties, the schema or phantom acquires the character of a real determinateness:

Over against the real unitary property, in our example the unchanged Objective color, there stands the momentary real state, which corresponds to the “circumstances” and which changes according to rules. The state coincides with the schema; yet it is not a mere schema (the thing is indeed not a mere phantom)<sup>12</sup>.

The thing-apprehension then considers the schema not exclusively as an extension filled merely sensuously but also as primal manifestation or “documentation” of real and causal properties; causal dependencies, according to Husserl, come to ordinary givenness, that is, they are not merely supposed, but also seen or perceived. Thus is possible to have various grasping of the thing, even if it is the identical substrate of states related to different circumstances:

There are as many directions of unity prefigured in the causal apprehension of the schema (i.e., directions for possible series or perceptions in functional relation to series of perceptible circumstances) as there is multiplicity in the way in which the reality-thing, the unitary material “substance”, is determinable according to properties corresponding to the apprehended sense itself<sup>13</sup>.

### *Systematic constitution of space*

Each body is constituted, according to Husserl, in an orientation and this means that each body is given to intuition in a kind of “quality”, in a

---

<sup>11</sup> IPPII, 45.

<sup>12</sup> IPPII, 46.

<sup>13</sup> IPPII, 47.

location which has its dimensional modifications. A body, as it is discussed above, is constituted as a sensuous schema by the sense of sight and touch, but this is not the end of the story: every sense in fact is a sense only “through an apperceptive conjunction of the corresponding sense-data with kinaesthetic data”<sup>14</sup>. The kinaesthetic field is, in Husserl’s point of view, a field of continuous data; a kinaesthetic field is variable immediately and freely. The kinaesthetic field is introduced by Husserl for the purpose of penetrating as deeply as possible into the phenomenological constitution of the tridimensional spatiality: all spatiality, as a matter of fact, comes to givennes in movement, that is, in the movement of the object itself and in the movement of the Ego. It is, as a matter of fact, a phenomenological law of constitution that the unity of the object demonstrates itself only in the unity of synthesis continually joining the manifold of perceptions: “In our case, it means that an identical and unchanged spatial body demonstrates itself as such only in kinetic series of perceptions, which continually brings to appearance the various sides of that thing”<sup>15</sup>. Visual contents are not sufficient in themselves to serve as apprehensional contents for visual spatiality and for a thing in general even if only visual and tactile contents have the peculiarity of coalescing into fields, capable as they are of bringing a thing to presentation; classes of sensation that have no fields are therefore incapable of a projective presentation:

I am naturally thinking here of the sensations of movement. They play an essential role in the apprehension of every external thing, but they are not themselves apprehended in such a way that they make representable either a proper or an improper matter; they do not belong to the “projection” of the thing. Nothing qualitative corresponds to them in the thing, nor they adumbrate bodies or present them by way of projection. And yet without their cooperation there is no body there, no thing<sup>16</sup>.

However, according to Husserl, the incapability of the sensations of movement to present any matter does not apply to the Ego-Body into which these sensations are inserted as appearances. If, as a matter of fact, the Body is also a thing, a physical thing like any other, on the other hand it is the bearer of the Ego: which has sensations that are localized in the Body. The touching

---

<sup>14</sup> TS, 257.

<sup>15</sup> TS, 132.

<sup>16</sup> TS, 136.

hand “appears” as having touch sensations. If we turn to the touched Object, smoothness and roughness appear as belonging to it. But if I attend to the touching hand, then it possesses the sensation of smoothness and the sensation of roughness, and it possesses them on or in the appearing finger tips. Likewise, the sensations of location and of movement, which have their objectivating function, are attributed immediately to the hand and to the arm, as encased in them<sup>17</sup>.

*The correlation between the visual field and the kinaesthetic sequences*

Every field is, according to Husserl, a fixed system of locations and this means that every element of sensation has its corresponding location, its “here”; more particularly, the visual field is a two-dimensional manifold which is in itself congruent, continuous, utterly coherent, finite and bounded. All the terms that are appropriate to the visual field, such as line, point, location, shape cannot be, in Husserl’s point of view, understood in the spatial sense:

We already said earlier that the visual field is not some sort of surface in Objective space, which makes no sense, any more than points and lines in the visual field are points and lines in Objective space or even have any spatial relation whatsoever to spatial points and lines<sup>18</sup>.

A concretum in the field can change “quasi-materially” (“quasi” means here that the parameters involved are not empirically objective, but phenomenological law-like) according to variables like quality, brilliance, saturation and so on; it can also change in size, shape or location by virtue of kinaesthetic sequences. Kinaesthetic sensations lack an essential relation to the visual sensations, “they are connected to them functionally but not essentially”<sup>19</sup>; kinaesthetic sensations form continuous multidimensional systems in which continuous unities appear only as sequences, that is, by filling a span of time. For instance, we assume that a kinaesthetic ocular sensation  $K_1$  is at first constant, the thing remaining stationary too, during the stream of time  $t_0$ - $t_1$ ; in this streaming time then the visual image  $i_1$  remains also constant. If then  $K_1$  changes, in a continuous sequence, into  $K_2$ , then the image  $i_1$ , during the new span of time, changes also into  $i_2$ . If  $K_2$  reverts back to  $K_1$ , then also  $i_2$  changes into  $i_1$  in the same time span:

---

<sup>17</sup> TS, 137.

<sup>18</sup> TS, 141.

<sup>19</sup> TS, 143.



In every appearance of a stationary thing, these two factors or sensation are involved, the K-factor and the i-factor. Their relation is one of dependence, as we have just attempted to determine. And the dependence is reciprocal. The same K-sensation is accompanied by the same image, and the same image also by the same K-sensation<sup>20</sup>.

To a complex of K's and i's is attached an apprehensional character which refers to the possible sequences of i in the total system under the possible kinaesthetic circumstances; ideal possibilities of fulfillment then arise in the elapsing of such system:

In every such nexus of fulfillment, the images are subtended by the consciousness of unity, which is and remains the same, where the appurtenant appearances are fulfilled, under the relevant kinaesthetic circumstances, in the sense of the general type<sup>21</sup>.

The consciousness of unity constitutes the one identical thing as is presented identically through the images and under the relevant circumstances; the continuity of images is a linear manifold "extracted out" of a multidimensional manifold of possible images which are linked to K's through the unity of the continuity of apprehension: the latter unites the K's and the i's belonging to every temporal phase into an apprehensional unity. According to Husserl, there are two important and essential components belonging to the temporal elapsing of each apprehensional phase: the i-component and the K-component. The former supplies the "intention toward," the latter the motivation of this intention. The "intention toward" is differentiated and directed in such and such a way under these circumstances K. More precisely, the stream of the K's or, to be exact, the stream of these K's, determines by way of motivation the type and form of the "intention toward" in its elapsing. Every phase of the i-component is an "intention toward" in such a way that it penetrates the next phase, i.e., penetrates its image, by referring to it and referring through it: here the i-component fulfills itself, but it again penetrates the next phase and again is fulfilled, etc., such that every I is both fulfillment and fulfilling and is so natural by means of its apprehensional function<sup>22</sup>. The system of K's

---

<sup>20</sup> TS, 149.

<sup>21</sup> TS, 157.

<sup>22</sup> TS, 158.

becomes more complex when we expand the system of movements: besides the elapsing of kinaesthetic sensations of the eye, designated above as K, there might elapse kinaesthetic sensations pertaining to the head, the trunk and so on. In this respect, we are provided, as it were, with a complex of variables (K, K', K'', ...) that, as Husserl notes, are independently variable in relation to one another but in such a way that they form a system where each of the variables has a definite value:

Nevertheless, since the change in the images, i.e., the character of the delimitation and fulfillment of the visual field, is not merely dependent on the individual K-variables, but also on the manifold system (K, K', K'', ...), and since the variation of the K's ( a name for the "K', K'', K'', ...), in the case of the constancy of K, determines new occurrences and manifolds of images of a new type, the intentional system from the very outset is therefore a complicated one<sup>23</sup>.

*The constitution of space: the stationary thing*

Let us start from an absolutely stationary world of things, a world, as it were, which lacks qualitative or phoronomic changes of its Objects; qualitative discontinuity is what gives the oculomotor image separate existence: the figure or object is distinguished by the fact that its coloration does not blend into that of the surroundings. Change in orientation and in expansion, in the continuity of the oculomotor fields, creates unities of appurtenance and contains principles of conjunction; notwithstanding such changes, an identity penetrates every constant modification so that "every part which has arisen as continuous out of one part of the original image presents the same image"<sup>24</sup>. The same holds for the concealment: if an image constantly obliterates another image then, according to a rule, the image that is not yet obliterated remains a presentation of the same thing; when nevertheless the movement is reversed the Object is continuously built back up: "This constant demolition and rebuilding due to such a concealing Object is a system of modifications which is strictly motivated by the kinaesthetic circumstances"<sup>25</sup>. When an object is constantly concealed, its full intentions, as a matter of fact, become empty, even if they do not lack the character of perceptual intentions, motivated in the motivational nexus. Let us now

---

<sup>23</sup> TS, 169.

<sup>24</sup> TS, 208.

<sup>25</sup> TS, 208.

proceed to the class of modifications included under the term “expansion”; it can apply unitarily to the whole field or to different pieces of the same. It holds, according to a phenomenological law, that what pertains to the unity of a continuous expansion also pertains to the unity of a presentation; admittedly, it is possible that different types of expansion can indeed be joined into the unity of an object:

Think, for instance, of the case of two mutually bounded surfaces. Let us take simultaneously visible and mutually bounded surfaces of a polyhedron which present themselves in different expansional modifications. Yet the two series of modifications belong together; they pertain to the same kinaesthetic circumstances, they stream on together, and they form in this unitary stream a determinate type of unitary modification<sup>26</sup>.

Expansion moreover can be mixed with concealment as in the case of an undulating surface which undergoes kinaesthetic change. Under the heading of the modification of turning, we require that concealment and unconcealment are in play in a way different from that in which the acquisition and loss of presentational content have their source in the entering and exiting of parts of images into or out of the oculomotor field. Husserl distinguishes between “pure receding” which is a linear modification, that is, a kinaesthetic system in which the motivating circumstances vary infinitely in a linearly orthoid manner form, and “pure turning” that is a cyclical modification where the kinaesthetic circumstances vary cyclically, bringing back the turning series of images. When an object undergoes a modification of remoteness, the image contracts in infinitum, having the “null-point” as the limit; in the reverse direction, we encounter the infinite enlargement of the image: in these cases the appearing side is ever the same; the other sides, as it were, appear through the possible modifications of turning. Husserl remarks that mere expansion is a modification that is not related to mere change in orientation, because the latter is the displacement or rotation of a figure that maintains its identity in the oculomotor field:

As regards expansion, on the other hand, the points do not retain their reciprocal orientation. The concept of expansion implies in the first place, generally speaking, a change in the location of the points in the

---

<sup>26</sup> TS, 210.

field. Where all the points maintain their location, we can naturally not speak of a modification<sup>27</sup>.

Turning, as distinct from expansion, constantly brings new presentational contents so that to say “the object is turning” means the same as saying that it constantly shows itself from new sides; when a complete revolution is carried out, the sequential appearance of sides brings to appearance the closedness of the nexus of sides and therefore, gets the complete corporeal surface to appear as a closed one. Expansional modification lacks, as mere receding and approaching, the cyclical character; it has the character of “bilaterality” where “bilateral” means that it has two and only two directions which fuse as opposites into a linear manifold.

*Qualitative and phoronomic change of the thing*

In the preceding remarks we have started from the assumption that the world of things is absolutely stationary, stationary not only in the phoronomic sense, but also in the qualitative one. We can consider now the changeableness of qualities, e.g. coloration, of the things; everything has its pre-empirical form (size for example) and its pre-empirical qualities (colour, for example) as filling the form in all its parts: both these components can undergo their changes, thus constituting the objective form filled throughout with objective qualities. Coloration, Husserl adds, is, on one side, variable independently of the form, but, on the other side, it is inseparable from the form because it reveals itself as the condition of possibility of the concrete form, that is, a condition of possibility for the constitution of corporeality. As to the question of how is the thing constituted as identical in qualitative change, we can state that the thing is what is unitary when the qualities change and the form remains identical: the thing is a multidimensional infinite manifold of image-modifications which becomes the bearer of the consciousness of unity; when, i.e., the coloration changes unexpectedly, then the actual perception experiences a leap by virtue of which it no longer elapses in the sense of the original apprehension. In this way, the apprehension disappoints the intention instead of fulfilling it so that the consciousness has the form of the “otherwise”. When the coloration changes continuously, kinaesthesias can be absolutely stationary for a certain period of time: in this case, the image endures unchanged with regard to pre-empirical form and location, even if the coloration changes. Passing over to the complete system of kinaesthetic

---

<sup>27</sup> TS, 213.

motivations, the image is absorbed into the infinities of possible modifications pertaining to the kinaesthetic systems of the Body:

In the system of absolute non-change, there pertains to every kinaesthetic situation, to every determinate Bodily position (once the coordination is carried out through a first perception), a strictly determinate appearance according to color as well as form, and to every kinaesthetic series, to every determinate change in position, there pertains a determinate series of appearances<sup>28</sup>.

A second basic type of change is movement, first of all, movement without qualitative change, thus mere movement. What characterizes movement is the fact that the object occupies different locations, thus undergoing a change, even if it remains the same: sameness here means that two co-existing things are completely the same, except for their location, if each of them is constituted in the same manifold of appearances. Their difference can reside only in the kinaesthetic relations, in their relations to other things; in this case, the continuous change does not affect the kinaesthetic coordination:

For instance, if I keep my body stationary, perhaps while sitting, and even keep my eyes still, then, at the beginning of the course of movement of the thing, the image  $\alpha$  pertains to this bodily posture, thus to the determinate K-complex. Now the thing moves. If we extract a phase of the movement, it offers a different image,  $\beta$  as pertaining to the same K (I am still sitting) but to a different time. Thereby, however, this  $\beta$ -image also already pertains to the thing in its initial location, prior to the movement. But in order to reach this image, I must assume a different bodily posture: K'. Due to the movement of the thing, however,  $\beta$  is now connected to K instead of K'. Likewise,  $\alpha$  also pertains to the thing in its new location, but  $\alpha$  is not coordinated to K but to a different K, let us say K'<sup>29</sup>.

### *The importance of the Body for Husserl*

According to Husserl, the importance of the Body, intended as lived body, is not only due to the fact that it is the basis of the constitution of the three-

---

<sup>28</sup> TS, 230.

<sup>29</sup> TS, 238.

dimensional space, but also to the more massive fact that everything that appears belongs to its (the lived body's) environs; thanks to the Body I am at the center of things and, for this reason, the "I-myself" is a bodily self, as it were, the "I-center" of all my experiences. My Body then can be conceived as a "null-body" (*Nullkörper*) thanks to which everything in my immediate surrounding is given a location. My Body, as the zero point in analytical geometry, has the property of seeming always to be unmoving in relation to the surrounding world; it moreover presents fundamental anomalies which distinguish it from all other things: "In popular terms, every thing in the whole world can escape from me, except for my own Body... the manifold of images that pertains to the Body has a distinctive kinaesthetic motivation in contrast to other things"<sup>30</sup>. For instance, when we walk we do not experience only a movement of the legs in relation to the other parts of the Body, but also a movement of the entire visible Body through a change in its distance from other bodies; the Ego-point does not recede, it is always co-moved: "The Body moves, but does so without "receding" from itself: the images of it do not change in the sense of "receding". In this way, therefore, the Ego moves"<sup>31</sup>. The Body thus is stationary to itself so that the true *stabilitas loci* is not to be found in God or in the enduring landmarks, but in myself. According to Edward Casey, Kant was right to think that the Body is the source of orientation, but he did not show that it is such a source only inasmuch it is the stable center of the perceptual field<sup>32</sup>. Husserl posits between the lived body and the objective space a *Sehraum*, a purely visual space, in order to make the objective space a lived space: the visual space has its own system of places (*Ortssystem*) even if the notion of "place" here is conceived mainly as simple location; this last assumption would be demonstrated by the fact that Husserl uses *Ort* (place) and *Lage* (position) interchangeable<sup>33</sup>. Anyway, it seems that Husserl introduces a new conception of place: as a matter of fact, the kinaesthetic motivations make of the invariably given manifold of places something which is never given without a K (e.g. a kinaesthetic sensation). The feeling of my own body being or moving in a place affects the way I experience that place. Casey writes:

---

<sup>30</sup> TS, 241.

<sup>31</sup> TS, 242.

<sup>32</sup> See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, University of California Press, 1998, p. 218.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

And if kinesthetic self-awareness is itself the basic form that awareness of my body takes (whether this corporeal consciousness be visual or tactile), then it will constitute a privileged entry into place as I actually experience it. Feeling my body means feeling how it is to occupy the place it is in<sup>34</sup>.

Kinesthetic self-awareness has the character of spontaneity (*Spontaneität*) and this means that its domain is a system of kinaesthetic situations; this character has the form of a “von-mir-aus-Geschehen”<sup>35</sup>, as it were, of an occurring thanks to me. Such a system, determined as spontaneity of the kinaesthetic consciousness, actualizes practical possibilities (*Vermöglichkeiten*) and, for this reason, it has the character of movement (*Bewegung*). It is also plausible, on the ground of phenomenological analyses, to suppose that receptivity (*Rezeptivität*), that is, the givenness of appearances in an objective apprehension, would depend on kinaesthetic situations so that even the passive layer of consciousness would be founded on the active layer of the same<sup>36</sup>; the link and interaction between receptivity and spontaneity can be achieved by the consciousness of the Body which functions as a structural regulative system (*Regelstruktur*). Claesges states as:

Durch den Leib (als Moment des kinaesthetischen Bewusstseins) wird die Rezeptivität so geregelt, dass sie nur als Empfindung möglich ist, d.h. zugleich immer auch als ein Vorkommnis an einer in Raum und Zeit erscheinenden Gegenständlichkeit aufgefasst werden kann<sup>37</sup>.

The foundational correlation between receptivity and spontaneity would depend ultimately on the uniqueness of the Body: it, as a matter of fact, comes ahead of every constitution of spatial-temporal objects, even ahead of that constitution thanks to which it appears as *res extensa*. The Body is not primarily an object, it is much more a structural totality (*Struktur Ganzheit*) that belongs to the a priori of the perceptual and kinaesthetic consciousness. The Body, in contrast with other objects, is constituted by the “reflection” (*Reflexivität*) of the tactile system; insofar as it is subject to the availability

---

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, p. 219.

<sup>35</sup> See, Ulrich Claesges, *Edmund Husserls Theorie der Raumkonstitution*, cit., p.127.

<sup>36</sup> See Ludwig Landgrebe, “Prinzipien einer Lehre vom Empfinden”, in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, VIII, 1954, p.205.

<sup>37</sup> Ulrich Claesges, *Edmund Husserls Theorie der Raumkonstitution*, cit., p. 129.

(*Verfügbarkeit*) of the Ego, the Body reveals itself as an Ego opposed to the outer world:

Dadurch ergibt sich ein doppeltes Verhältnis des Ich zu seinem Leibe. Einmal muss sich das Ich mit seinem Leibe identifizieren können, den sonst wäre nicht einsichtig, wieso das Ich selber in der Welt sein könnte; zum anderen muss sich das Ich von seinem Leib unterscheiden können, denn der Leib ist eine kinaesthetisch konstituierte Gegenständlichkeit, die als solche ein Ich der kinaesthetischen Vermöglichkeiten voraussetzt<sup>38</sup>.

Husserl seems to lack an articulated concept of lived space, even if he resorts to various substitutes of the same: think not only of the notion of “concrete appearance” (*Apparenz*), but also, and above all, of that of the “the near-sphere” (*Nahsphäre*):

Thanks to my kinesthesias, I have access to a near-sphere that is a major part of my “core-world” (*Kernwelt*). In and through- and around- this circle of nearness, places are constellated as nearby areas in/to which I can move. The near-sphere includes the approachability implied in the “I can” of kinaesthetic awareness. My own near-sphere is in effect the proximal place or places in which I am or to which I can go (my far-sphere, in contrast, contains places to which I do not have immediate access<sup>39</sup>).

The near-sphere not only fills the gap between body and place, but it is relevant also for the constitution of space since this does not arise from pure intuition but from concrete things to which we have access; “nearness” can be defined as what I can see in a small stretch of time, in a unitary comprehensive intuition and in a kinaesthetic aspect relative to a unified consciousness<sup>40</sup>. The Husserlian notion of “nearness”, even if more theoretical, can be drawn near to the Heideggerian “closeness” which, however, presents an existential turn; Heidegger thinks of the human

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 122.

<sup>39</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, cit., p. 219.

<sup>40</sup> See Beilage 73, “Die Konstitution des Raumes in Synthetischen Übergang von Nahraum zu Nahraum”, in Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des Intersubjectivität*. Zweiter Teil: 1921-28, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1973, where Husserl writes, among other things, that “der Raum [ist] konstituiert im Übergang von Nahraum zu Nahraum durch Fernkinästhesen” (p. 546).



implacement in terms of “the aroundness of the environment and Dasein’s spatiality”: “closeness” represents, in his point of view, the most salient characteristic of the spatiality of the ready-to-hand in its familiarity:

Every entity that is ‘to hand’ has a different closeness, which is not to be ascertained by measuring distances. This closeness regulates itself in terms of circumspectively ‘calculative’ manipulating and using... When this closeness of the equipment has been given directionality, this signifies no merely that the equipment has its position (*Stelle*) in space as present-at-hand somewhere, but also that as equipment it has been essentially fitted up and installed, set up, and put to rights<sup>41</sup>.

The richness here of the notion of “closeness”, associated as it is with terms such as “familiarity”, “calculative manipulating” or “equipment”, marks its distance from the Husserlian concept of “nearness” which gets rid of the existential concreteness of the Heideggerian “closeness”. The notion of “closeness” or “nearness” assume an even more important role in Heidegger’s very late writings: this relevance is indicated by the verbal proliferation of terms like the active gerund “nähernd” or noun forms like “nearhood” (*Nähheit*) and “nighness” (*Nähnis*). Thanks to nearness, the “open” is not enclosed from without neither gathered as a *region* or located as a thing: it points much more to a *neighbourhood*, that is, to the nearness of things and people who coinhabit a place in common<sup>42</sup>. It remains now to answer the question of what, in Husserl’s point of view, makes possible the passage from the near-sphere to the objective space. Spatiality, that is, objective space, is constituted through the concatenation of places available to me in my near-sphere; according to Casey, what we call “space” is not just the correlate, as it is for Claesges, of my kinesthetically felt near-sphere but its very expansion. In Husserl’s point of view, the apperceptive expansion (*Erweiterung*) of the near-sphere is achieved in a homogeneous infinite open world of space:

This amounts to saying that the emptying and amalgamation of particular spaces, each of which is felt kinesthetically by the lived body, becomes in short order the planiform, absolute space of Newton. But that is possible only to the extent that places themselves depend on the

---

<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1953, p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, Harper & Row, New York 1971, p. 93.

lived body as the I-center or null-point, the “absolute here”, of any given perceptual field<sup>43</sup>.

The lived body, according to Husserl, is not itself in space as a physical object exists in space; it moves through space as “indirectly co-localized” in its movements:

My body- in particular, say, the bodily part “hand”-moves in space; [but] the activity of holding sway, “kinesthesia”, which is embodied together with the body’s movement, is not itself in space as a spatial movement but is only indirectly co-localized in that movement<sup>44</sup>.

Only by virtue of this original experience of the bodily holding-sway, I am able to understand another physical body as a living body in which another “I” is embodied and holds sway. If we believe that only natural sciences would capture the true nature of things, then, as a matter of fact, we are compelled to think that the *Lebenswelt* is merely subjective and relative, treating the world as if it could exist independently of any human accomplishment; Husserl opposes this view; it is because it does not justice to the very subjectivity which accomplishes science. As seen above then, there is no doubt that the later Husserl accords to space, to place, an implicit dynamism it had at first lacked. It has become, in short, *lived place*. Intended as what Husserl calls a “steady system of places”. In our “core-place” (*Kern-Ort*), we encounter a group of places, the various places of the things we perceive in that field. These places constitute a settle set without which, things would be free-floating, flying off in all directions. So, the *Ortssystem* is settled by dint of *anchoring* and *locating* perceptual things. Conversely, the steady system depends on an engagement with these things, for example, by walking through the primary world that “holds” them. In this sense, we “animate” not only the things but also their proper places, making these live, through the *lived body*, as the “basis-places” for the things we perceive.

### *Heidegger’s topology of Being*

Notwithstanding some similarities between Husserl’s and Heidegger’s notions of space and thing, it is important to underline that such concepts

---

<sup>43</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, cit., p.220.

<sup>44</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, cit., p.217.

undergo, particularly in the latter Heidegger, a very important transformation. Before analysing the transformation achieved after the *Kehre*, just few words on the way space and things are seen by Heidegger in his masterwork *Sein und Zeit* are unavoidable. Different from the *container model* of space inherited by Aristotle according to which present-at-hand entities have a definite location-relationship, Dasein's own being-in is interpreted by the German philosopher in terms of Dasein's proclivity for inhabiting and dwelling

In' is derived from "innan"—"to reside," "*habitare*," "to dwell." 'An' signifies "I am accustomed," "I am familiar with," "I look after something." . . . The expression 'bin' is connected with 'bei', and so 'ich bin' ['I am'] means in its turn "I reside" or "dwell alongside" the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way. "Being" [*Sein*], as the infinitive of 'ich bin' (that is to say, when it is understood as an *existentiale*), signifies "to reside longside . . .," "to be familiar with . . ." '*Being-in is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state*<sup>45</sup>.

Dasein's way of *being-in*, then, consists in dwelling or residing, being "alongside" the world as it were at home there. And Dasein's facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or ever split itself up into definite ways of *Being-in*. As a result, Dasein's "existential spatiality" is a distracted involvement in the affairs of the everyday world. A world constituted by places and regions defined by their mutual relativity of position. At this point of his analysis of the "being-in-the-world", Heidegger stresses the *practicality of place*, its intimate infrastructure as experienced by those who spend their workaday lives there. According to Edward Casey Heidegger's assessment points to place in its middle course: neither sheer location in world-space nor dwelling in depth, but place-as-pragmatic — as the realm of worked-on-things<sup>46</sup>. In Heidegger's *Being and Time* the world is a world of works constituted through Dasein's complex "dealings" (*Umgang*) with "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*) entities. Dasein understands the world, albeit *prathematically*, as the vast "wherein" of its multiple practical activities (*Worin*) and this is a matrix of instrumental involvements structured by

<sup>45</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, cit., p. 80

<sup>46</sup> See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1998, chap. 11.

pragmatic relations as the “in-which”, the “in-order-to” and the very important “for-the-sake-of which”. Heidegger contends that the Cartesian conception of the world as *res extensa* fails inasmuch place and space, in such a view, are seen as something posited exclusively as present-at-hand. As consequence of Descartes’ equation of matter with space, no empty room is left, no room even for a void, but also no room for the “leeway” (*Spielraum*) thatm for Heidegger, finds essential to concerned being-in-the-world<sup>47</sup>. Descartes’ model of place, just as Aristotle’s model of place, is limited by its tightness of fit, in the sense that matter is contained so tightly in the space that the world cannot “come before us”. It follows the necessity of escape such models bringing out the qualities of “aroundness” (*Umhafte*) and “environment” (*Umwelt*) which mark *Dasein*’s space.

Starting from the nineteen-thirties, then, the German philosopher adopts more frequently the term “place” instead of “space”. And the place at issue here is not any mere location in which entities are positioned, but rather the place in which we already find ourselves given over to the world and to our own existence within that world —the place is the place of the happening of being. In Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, place resists attempts at any analysis or articulation of its structure since it is intended in terms of a single, originally unfolding or happening— the happening happens (*es sich ereignet*), it worlds (*es weltet*), it gives (*es gibt*). My contention is that the way this originary happening is understood by the early Heidegger depends on the key notion of “being-there” (*Da-sein*) and it is articulated in terms of a structure that is specifically *temporal*. Even if the idea of place as such has still not been directly thematized, spatial and topological elements nevertheless run through the very heart of *Being and Time*. That is to say that the notion of temporality implicitly has the character of a certain *topos*. At any rate, the “transcendental” character of fundamental ontology — where “transcendental” refers us both to a notion of *projection* understood in terms of the transcendence by the finite existence that underlies subjectivity in the direction of the world in which entities themselves appear — turns out to be what is most problematic about such an ontology. In the period immediately after *Being and Time*, Heidegger is forced to rethink the question of being and he gives way to a more direct focus on the idea of truth as “uncoveredness” or “disclosedness”. The shift at issue here can be described in terms of a shift

---

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger writes: “Because *Dasein* is essentially spatial in the way of de-severance, its dealings always keep within an ‘environment’ which is de-severed from it with a certain leeway” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, cit., p. 141).

from understanding the question of being in terms of the question of *meaning* to the question of *truth*, leading toward an account of original happening that does not depend on the notion of “projection”. In contrast to *Being and Time*, in which meaning arises through the “temporalizing” of time that lies at the heart of what being-there itself is, in later works, such as *On the Essence of Truth*, truth arises through a simple letting being as such that is no more grounded on the being-there<sup>48</sup>. Heidegger gets back into place by “indirection”: by traveling through diverse “forest paths” (*Holzwege*). The turning (*die Kehre*) that occurred in the years following the publication of *Being and Time* is very much a (re)turning to place and associated notions. The importance, to make an example, of the later notion of “the Clearing” (*die Lichtung*) cannot be grasped without an appreciation of the centrality of place in Heidegger’s mature thinking. The Clearing is, as a matter of fact, an *open space* in which Being-as-Language appears. Nor can Heidegger’s understanding of building and dwelling, of things, of fourfold, and the “topology of Being” be understood without allusion to space. In the Clearing, distance (*Ferne*) and nearness (*Nähe*) — confined to a categorial status in *Being and Time* — exceed the circumspective concern of *Dasein* for they are no more matters of measurement, or even of the concrete action of binging-close. They concern “all beings” and “things” that surpass the practical as well as the theoretical realm and can be reached only by a radical “transcendence” that overcomes, however imperfectly and momentarily, *Dasein*’s *scatteredness*. In the lecture course “An Introduction to metaphysics”, delivered at the University of Freiburg in the summer of 1935, Heidegger states:

Dasein should be understood, within the question of Being, as the place (Stätte) which Being requires in order to disclose itself. Dasein is the place of openness, the there. . . . Hence we say that Dasein’s being is in the strict sense of the word “being-there” (Da-sein). The perspective for the opening of Being must be grounded originally in the essence of being-there as such a place for the disclosure of Being<sup>49</sup>.

In the above quoted passage Heidegger underlines the placial significance of his coinage, “Dasein”. In *Being and Time*, however, we could distinguish a

---

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology. Being, Place, World*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2006, pp. 211-212.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1959, p. 205.

basic movement back from the open room or leeway provided by regions to place; in the later Heidegger, instead, the action is from Dasein into the open place of its there. To be Dasein is to be there-in-its-place. Heidegger claims that the there-place, that is to say the place qua *Stätte*, is characteristically a *polis*. The *polis* is “the place, the there, wherein and as which historical being-there is. The *polis* is the historical place (*Geschichtsstätte*), the there *in* which, *out* of which, and *for* which history happens”<sup>50</sup>. Every significant place is a scene of history in which priests, poets and thinkers do appear. And each of these types of figure recognizes that “world-building” goes on in the *polis* in which *limits* are respected. Such limits allow for the most effective building-up of world within the place of the *polis*. As Heidegger puts:

What thus comes up and becomes intrinsically stable (*ständig*) encounters, freely and spontaneously, the necessity of its limit, *peras*. This limit is not something that comes to beings from outside. Still less is it a deficiency in the sense of a harmful restriction. No, the hold that governs itself from out of the limit, the having-itself, wherein the enduring holds itself, is the Being of beings; it is what first makes a being into a being as differentiated from a non-being. . . . Limit and end are that wherewith a being begins to *be*<sup>51</sup>.

For Heidegger, the limit (*Grenze*) is not the present-at-hand perimeter of Aristotle’s surround; nor is it anything merely ready-to-hand such as the wall of a workshop. Within limit, room is made — and thus place. And to lack limit is to lack place. The estate of place, is a power of the limit, and is realized into the *polis* as the place of history by the actions of poets and statesmen.

### *Thing and the Fourfold*

Heidegger suggests that inventions such as autos, airplanes or cellular do not give us nearness. What is near to us are things, but no one really knows what a thing is. No one as thought about the thing *as* a thing. Heidegger tries to do this using the example of a jug. A jug is not only a container, but a container that stands independently in itself. In other words, it is not our perception of a jug that contains liquid, but the jug itself. Heidegger, unlike Husserl, draws a sharp distinction between objects and things. If “object” is a negative term, used to describe entities only in their presence-at-hand, “thing” is a positive

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ivi*, p. 152.

<sup>51</sup> *Ivi*, p. 60.

term referring to entities in their proper reality. It follows that the jug is not a mere object, since it remains a container whether we look at it or not. In this sense it is a reality which doesn't depend on Dasein to exist at all. The thinghood of the jug is not dependent on whether Dasein looks at it or not. Surely, the jug must be *produced*, but once is produced is free of its producer and stands for itself. The producer who built it no longer has full control of it and the jug continues to exist even when the producer is dead. *The jug is not a jug because it was produced, but rather is produced because it is a jug.*

The potter makes the earthen jug out of earth that he has specially chosen and prepared for it. The jug consists of that earth. By virtue of what the jug consists of, it too can stand on the earth, wither immediately or through the mediation of table and bench. What exists by such producing is what stands on its own, is self-supporting<sup>52</sup>.

After all, it is the jug that holds water or wine, neither the producer, nor the potter. In Heidegger's point of view, Plato, Aristotle and all later thinkers (including Husserl) failed to think the true independent thinghood of the thing. The jug is a container and for this reason it is able to contain something because of a nothingness or empty space lying between the sides. In this sense, it gives shape to an emptiness that takes the liquid and holds it in place. The jug that holds and pours wine is reduced by science to nonexistence since "holding" and "pouring" are seen by it as later properties supervenient on the reality of physical matter. In contrast to this view, Heidegger contends that the jug is not a mass of physical atoms for, primordially and originally, it is something that gives and pours. In this way, the jug is a *gift*. This brings us to Heidegger's concept of the *fourfold*. Thinghood has a fourfold structure. It is a fourfold of earth and sky, gods and mortals. And the thing plays the role of a "mirror-play" or "wedding" of all four terms, which reflect one another at all times in all places. Using the strange Heideggerian ontological vocabulary, we can affirm that "the thing things", meaning that the thing is an *event* that gathers the four, each of them mirroring the others. As unity of the four, the thing can be called *world*. The four terms are not present-at-hand, side by side, but belong together in an *enclosing ring*, or a dance. It follows that there is a "multiplicity" in the heart of being. A multiplicity not constituted by kinds

---

<sup>52</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Thing", in Id., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York 1971, p. 167.

of objects since the four terms are structures belonging to all things. As Graham Harman writes:

For Heidegger, this sort of Kindergarten metaphysics would be even more impossible than for others philosophers, since he above all others despises any “ontic” classification of the world that would speak about kinds of beings rather than being itself. Heidegger’s four are present at all times in all things, though they may be more concealed in some cases than in others<sup>53</sup>.

The object in itself gives us no true nearness to the things and today, *everything is equally near and far*. True nearness comes only from the fourfold when “thing things” and in so doing brings the four to one another without erasing their distance from one another. In order to understand the mechanics of their interaction, Heidegger notes, we have to step away from the kind of thinking that represents things as objects, aiming at what he calls “commemorative thinking” or “meditative thinking”.

#### *Differences between Husserl and Heidegger*

My suggestion is that Husserl’s and Heidegger’s different treatment of thing and space is grounded on the particular meaning given by the latter to the notion of “transcendence”. Heidegger, as a matter of fact, thinks of transcendence in accordance with the literal sense of the world: to transcend means to overstep, to cross, to go through without losing touch with the ground. In this sense, Heidegger’s transcendence differs essentially from Husserl’s horizon and constitution. While for Husserl the initial point of phenomenological description is the acceptance of the phenomenologically-reduced “hic et nunc”, for Heidegger “here and now” means *in-der-Welt-sein*, that is, living in such and such a world. *Dasein* is not a cognitive subject and its relation to reality is not a cognitive one at all. As Victor Molchanov argues:

Reality in its turn is not a set of objects and their properties which are to be investigated. For *Dasein* reality is the aggregate of things present-at-hand and ready-to-hand. The relatedness of the proper and non-proper, of “freedom” and “submission”, is the basic relatedness between *Dasein* and reality. *Dasein* has two fundamental possibilities:

---

<sup>53</sup> Graham Harman, *Heidegger Explained. From Phenomenon to Thing*, Open Court, Chicago 2007, p. 132.



either to submit to the non-proper and to dissolve in the thing-like or “to go through”, to transcend reality, i.e., to modify everydayness into the Existential. Since reality in the Heideggerian sense lies beyond cognitive (subject-object) relations, that is precisely why beings (*Seiende*) can be “ununderstandable” and “incomprehensible”<sup>54</sup>.

There is, however, an important point that, in my point of view, makes Husserl’s and Heidegger’s notions of space, place, things mutually exclusive. Heidegger rejects, as a matter of fact, the traditional Cartesian view of human beings as self-sufficient minds whose intentional content is directed toward the world. He (as Davidson later on) substitutes for it an account of human beings as inextricably involved with things and people. And each human being has to take a stand (that is, a place) on who he or she is by taking up some social role and then dealing with the things appropriate to that role. In this sense, Heidegger is a practical holist because he claims that meaning depends ultimately on the inseparability of practices, things, places, and mental contents. *There is no absolute ego and there is no absolute world* in Heidegger’s point of view. Much more than Husserl, Heidegger’s project enables him to answer the Cartesian skeptic: there is no external world outside *my* consciousness sphere. Indeed, any attempt to take the skeptic seriously and prove that we can know that there is an external world presupposes a separation of the mind from the world of things and other people. The distance between Heidegger and Husserl couldn’t be longer if for the latter “the spirit and indeed only the spirit exists in itself and for itself, is self-sufficient”<sup>55</sup>. For Husserl, indeed, the constitution of the world of material things as something external and objective can be achieved *only* by introducing the “absolute point” — the human body whereby “the pure Ego *contemplates* the space and all the sense-perceptible world”. World, according to Husserl, is much more a matter of contemplation than of practical engagement with it. And for the spiritual subject the world, that is things and places, is not a social or historical world, but is a “thematical” world. As a self-constitutive non-substantial “substance”, the spirit is an *intentional subject* in that “it turns things and relations, alien and his own psychic life to nothing but

---

<sup>54</sup> Victor Molchanov, “Husserl and Heidegger. Phenomenology and Ontology”, in Anna Teresa Tymieniecka (Ed.), *Man Within His Life-World, Analecta Husserliana*, vol. XXVII, Springer, Dordrecht 1989, p. 650.

<sup>55</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, cit., p. 279.

meanings”<sup>56</sup>. If, however, every kind of constitution is the result of phenomenological reflection, then phenomenology looks like a “closed sphere” of investigation concerned only with a “reduced” world. This is Heidegger’s criticism of Husserl’s phenomenology. For the author of *Sein und Zeit* indeed understanding (*Verstehen*) the world is not a pure epistemological procedure for it is, first of all, the primordial projection of *Dasein* and it has ontological character since it is rooted in *Dasein*’s way of Being. If for Husserl *Dasein* is a *transposition* of Ego to anthropology, and for that reason in need to be put under the constraints of reduction, for Heidegger, on the contrary, pure Ego is a “groundless abstraction” from *Dasein* and its world. World, places, things, after the *Kehre*, are Being’s self-manifestation. It, as an “overpowering surge”, let entities show forth in a “lighting” or “truth” in the sense of unconcealment. Being gives itself an aspect and it is only because of this that we can come to encounter things and the places in which they stand<sup>57</sup>. At any rate, even being’s self-manifestation is not something that could occur without humans for things can show up *as* mattering in some way only because humans, responding to what becomes manifest, articulate a field of significance which lets things show up with some determinate identity and stability that is, first of all, *stabilitas loci*. Unlike Husserl, nevertheless, the unconcealment of Being is not simply given for it occurs only when it is achieved by work: the work of the word in poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of the *polis* as the historical place in which all of this is grounded and preserved<sup>58</sup>. And in contrast to Husserl, the exemplary being that expresses itself and realizes an event is not a bodily subject and not even *Dasein*, but is rather the work of art itself. In standing forth, Heidegger says, the work of art “first clears the openness of the opening into which it comes forth”<sup>59</sup>, and it thereby lets both the world and humans come to be what they are. To make an example, the Greek temple is not an embellishment added by humans to a pre-given context of life: “men... and things are never present and familiar as unchangeable objects, only to represent incidentally also a fitting environment for the temple, which one fine day is added to what is already there”<sup>60</sup>. A work of art, like a temple, can open a new world for a people, a new manifestation of the aspects of

<sup>56</sup> Victor Molchanov, “Husserl and Heidegger. Phenomenology and Ontology”, cit., p. 647.

<sup>57</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1980, pp.102-104.

<sup>58</sup> *Ivi*, p. 191.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>60</sup> *Ivi*, p. 42.

things that can count for a community. As a *Gestalt*, or a new (cultural, historical, social) “style”, the work of art *displaces* what had come before, producing a new “placing” (*Stellen*) and “framework” (*Ge-stell*) for a people. The past, and even the present, is lit up in a way that transports us out of the realm of the *ordinary*. Every work of art, in some sense, “constitutes” a new world. At this point of the analysis, the difference between Husserl and Heidegger cannot be greater. If in Husserl we have *one* world as the horizon of things, places, subjects, in Heidegger we find an ontological and historical pluralism of *worlds* which can even be *incommensurable* with each other. Given this, it would be not right to assign to Heidegger’s contributions to space and things a certain theoretical “superiority” compared to Husserl’s analysis on the same subject. Indeed, from a purely phenomenological point of view Husserl’s investigation into space and things presents novelties and even “discoveries” which can find even a feedback in the empirical sciences such as, for example, neurosciences. Jean Petitot mentions Husserl’s “profound and beautiful ideas” and the astonishingly modern prescience with which the German philosopher articulated these pre-empirical findings, ones which are in “perfect agreement with the present [scientific] results of visual cognition”<sup>61</sup>. More in particular, Husserl’s distinction between the *external* and *internal* horizons of concrete objects according to which every object is noematically the unity of an infinity of multiscale aspects and infinitely many different images are in fact co-given in any single image implies an *intensional*, *symbolic* and *indexical* structure of any perceptual display. And all this means that “there always exists a ‘semiotic’ dimension in perception”<sup>62</sup>. As regards such semiotic dimension contained in perceptual experience, it is worthy of being noticed that the way Husserl reconstitutes the multifaceted experience of a real object in space bears striking similarities to what the Cubists artistically accomplished. They, as a matter of fact, attained the ambition of representing a thing a space by way of the interlinked partial aspects of a unified object as it would be perceived through bodily movement. Offering us a *new space* symbolically exteriorized by means of a pictorial recombination and articulation of basic visual elements<sup>63</sup>. Recalling his early engagement with Cubist invention George Braque declares that what

---

<sup>61</sup> See on this point, Jean Petitot, “Morphological Eidetics”, in Jean Petitot et alia (eds.), *Naturalizing Phenomenology. Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1999, pp. 358-361.

<sup>62</sup> *Ivi*, p. 353.

<sup>63</sup> See Paul S. Macdonald, “Husserl and the Cubists on a Thing in Space”, in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2005, pp. 273-274.

had attracted him was “the materialization of this new space that I felt to be in the offing... In the still-life you have a tactile, I might almost say, a manual space”<sup>64</sup>. In short, Husserl’s lectures on thing and space articulated a number of profound and original ideas about the genesis of the inner-spatial world, ones which are astonishingly modern and in perfect agreement with the present results of cognitive neurosciences.

---

<sup>64</sup> This quotation is contained in Edwin Mullins, *Braque*, Thames & Hudson, London 1968, pp. 15-16.