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PLACE AND DIGITAL SPACE

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PLACE AND DIGITAL SPACE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky
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2020

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

PLACE AND DIGITAL SPACE

The intersection of philosophies of space and technology is a fecund area of inquiry that has received surprisingly little attention in the philosophical literature. While the major accounts of space and place have not considered complexities introduced by recent technological developments, scholarship on the human-technology relationship has virtually ignored the spatial dimensions of this interaction. *Place and Digital Space* takes a step in addressing this gap in literature by offering an original, phenomenological account of place and using this framework to analyze digitally mediated spaces. I argue that places are continually evolving, internally heterogeneous, and spatially distinct meaningful wholes with indeterminate boundaries. The emergence and ongoing reconstitution of places require repeated bodily engagements, which occur in the context of other places, in relation to the engagements of others, and against the background of social practices and cultural norms. I then show how spaces mediated by digital technologies, particularly augmented reality (AR), are fundamentally different from ordinary places. The increasing use of AR, I argue, poses an unprecedented challenge to the way we interpret, engage with, and have collective experiences of everyday places. Finally, I identify ethical questions raised by the interpretation of spaces by artificial intelligence, by the unauthorized augmentation of places, and by the possibility of a few companies with big data dominating the virtual modifications of public places.

KEYWORDS: Phenomenology, Virtual Space, Augmented Reality,
Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Space, Digitization of Space

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgments | iii |
| I. Introduction | 1 |
| The Phenomenological Method | 3 |
| The Relevance of Phenomenology of Place..... | 6 |
| Overview of Chapters | 9 |
| II. Phenomenological Accounts of Space and Place | 13 |
| Heidegger: From <i>Gegend</i> to <i>Ort</i> via <i>Das Offen</i> | 14 |
| Spatiality in Being and Time | 15 |
| Spatiality and Worldhood..... | 17 |
| Being-in..... | 24 |
| Equipmental Spatiality: Place and Region | 29 |
| Existential Spatiality | 37 |
| Space | 41 |
| The Artwork and <i>Das Offen</i> | 46 |
| World and Earth | 48 |
| <i>Das Offen</i> | 56 |
| Things and Places | 65 |
| From Building to Nearing..... | 68 |
| Gathering Place | 73 |
| Merleau-Ponty: The Primacy of Bodily Spaces | 77 |
| Bodily Space and Space..... | 86 |
| Scope of Bodily Space..... | 90 |
| Two ways of Being-in | 91 |
| Edward Relph | 95 |
| Anne Buttmer..... | 102 |
| Edward Casey..... | 111 |
| Jeff Malpas | 117 |
| Concluding Remarks..... | 122 |
| III. The Phenomenon of Places | 124 |
| Identity, Boundary, and Spatiality of Regions | 126 |
| Identity of a Region | 127 |
| Regions and Boundaries | 130 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Spatiality of Regions | 136 |
| Spatiality, Disclosedness, and the Problem of Nearness | 138 |
| Identity, Boundary, and Nearness in <i>Ort</i> | 145 |
| Relation between <i>Orte</i> | 149 |
| Unity and Scope of a Bodily Space | 155 |
| Scope and Hold of Bodily Spaces | 161 |
| Identity and Insideness..... | 166 |
| Interplay between Home and Reach | 170 |
| Habitus and Edges | 174 |
| Habitudes, Edges, and Places..... | 178 |
| Boundedness of Place | 187 |
| The Phenomenon of Places | 191 |
| Boundary, Continuity, and Indeterminateness | 198 |
| Structure of Place | 220 |
| Concluding Remarks..... | 227 |
| IV. Digital Space and Place | 229 |
| Virtual Platforms and Virtual Reality | 231 |
| Augmented Reality | 235 |
| Augmented Reality Technologies | 240 |
| Sensor Data and Digitization | 243 |
| Interpretation of Data and Insertion of Virtual Objects..... | 247 |
| Projection of Virtual Objects | 250 |
| Engaging with Virtual Objects | 252 |
| Place and Mediation by Augmented Reality | 253 |
| Place and the Space of Augmented Reality | 261 |
| Concluding Remarks..... | 274 |
| V. Conclusion | 280 |
| Ethics and AR | 284 |
| Bibliography | 288 |
| Vita | 293 |

I. INTRODUCTION

In the vast rugged terrains of the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, barren landscapes are often dotted with cairns—pebbles and rocks gradually piled over decades or centuries in tower-like structures by passing travelers. In many parts of the world, similar structures have been found dating from prehistoric times, often marking trails and burial sites. Unlike structures that are built intentionally, the majority of cairns evolve organically, much like an isolated tree on a rocky mountain, both improbable, but clear signs of life in inhospitable environments. Cairns also result from the successive non-interactive, but cumulative actions of strangers. For some communities, such as the Buddhists in Tibet, the formation of cairns is shaped by a spiritual tradition: cairns often grow in proportion to the number of pilgrims who pay their respect to these structures by adding Mani stones. In accumulating the contributions of its visitors, a pile of rocks comes to signify the center of a sacred place. Within otherwise desolate surroundings, regular human engagement and ritual practices establish a unique space that we call a “place.” At the same time, the indifferent landscape itself comes to acquire a new significance and gains orientation by the presence of the sacred cairn.

Places are both a result of and the context for human activities and people’s interactions with each other and with their environments. The spatial relations, entities, and practices that constitute places articulate a landscape into meaningful configurations in which individuals and communities exist and by which they locate themselves. The concept of place, accordingly, is integral to

understanding how humans relate to the world. Some such insight motivates the major phenomenological accounts of space. Thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as those following in their footsteps, argue for the primacy of unique inhabited spaces over the homogenous extendedness of Euclidean space. Inhabited spaces such as the one established by the ritualistic engagement with a cairn provide necessary contexts for meaningful relations to things and people. Humans dwell in the world in these inhabited spaces, or places.

This dissertation reopens questions on the nature of place. In particular, I pursue a phenomenologically oriented rethinking of place and do so with three goals in mind: (1) to identify central questions about place that previous accounts have not adequately engaged; (2) to offer a brief account of place that addresses these inadequacies; and (3) to analyze digitally mediated spaces using the new framework. The three goals are brought together by the overarching aim of revising the concept of place so that it may better reflect the world we live in and help us understand the complexities introduced by recent advances in digital technologies. In what follows, I provide a brief introduction to the phenomenological approach that characterizes both the accounts to be discussed and my own contribution to the understanding of place. I then elaborate on the relevance of my work, discussing the need for revisiting the idea of place using a phenomenological approach. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the three central chapters of the dissertation.

The Phenomenological Method

Edmund Husserl, who is credited as the founder of phenomenology, described the phenomenological approach as a rigorous science that examines the essential structures of consciousness. Husserl understood phenomena—that which appears in consciousness—as a starting point, the raw material, so to speak, for the science of consciousness. The goal of this science was to discover how, starting from the phenomena given to consciousness, any meaning or essence is constituted, that is, founded by acts of human consciousness. A meaning or an essence is an ideal entity, that is, abstract, universal and atemporal entity that is distinct from the variety of phenomena in which it appears to individual consciousness. Husserl was interested in the constitution of meaning and essence because he believed that a clarification of this process would provide the much needed foundation for objective philosophical and scientific knowledge. This foundation lies in distinguishing subjective acts of consciousness from knowledge, which is objective.

Husserl emphasized that in pursuing a phenomenological investigation it is necessary to set aside ontological assumptions about the world, including assumptions about the correspondence between what appears to consciousness and things in the world. Doing this (the so-called phenomenological and transcendental “reductions”) enabled the investigation to focus on the realm of consciousness itself. In turn, Husserl believed, this focus was essential to understanding how any distinction between knowledge (that is, meanings and

essences) and its object (the world) is made in the first place within the phenomenal content given in consciousness. Although his “transcendental phenomenology,” with its emphasis on the conditions of the possibility of meaning, knowledge, and objectivity, informed and inspired subsequent generations of thinkers, Husserl’s goal of identifying the structures of consciousness and the nature of constituted meanings and essences was largely abandoned.

Martin Heidegger, who famously dedicated *Being and Time* to Husserl, defines phenomenology as letting “that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”¹ More simply, phenomenology entails uncovering phenomena that usually remain hidden due to semblance or disguise, human forgetfulness, and the mediation by systems of knowledge or scientific frameworks of understanding. Phenomenology for Heidegger (as for Husserl) is not simply a description of one’s subjective experience, as it has come to be understood in many disciplines beyond philosophy. Phenomenology, as a method of inquiry, instead requires the discernment and peeling away of the various layers of semblance and prevalent assumptions that cover over things in order to let phenomena show themselves from themselves.

For Heidegger, the goal of phenomenology is uncovering the phenomena themselves, and not—as in Husserl—analyzing how meaning and essences are constituted in consciousness. At least two related reasons for this shift are suggested in the introduction to *Being and Time*. First, there is nothing “behind the

¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 58.

phenomena.” They are the reality: the being of entities shows itself in them. Second, because entities show themselves in phenomena, the phenomenological method should focus on the “kind of access [i.e. in human experience] which genuinely belongs to them.”² Heidegger sees this genuine access as lying in average everyday human engagements with entities, which points to the pre-theoretical mode of being of both the one who engages and the entities that are encountered. Heidegger took the rigorous interpretation of this engagement (presented in *Being and Time*), which requires a careful reexamination of the tradition, common assumptions, and language that cover over this phenomenon, as exemplifying the phenomenological method. Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology is thus a clear departure from Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology.³

Heidegger’s choice of the entity that is most proper to phenomenological inquiry, and, as a result, the way he construes world (among other concepts), changes over the course of his career. But his general belief in an inquiry attentive to the phenomena in all their richness, unencumbered by tradition and theoretical frameworks, does not. Merleau-Ponty follows Heidegger as the third major figure in phenomenology. He saw himself as closer to Husserl than Heidegger, particularly in his conception of the lived body, which is not to be equated with the physical body. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty agreed with Heidegger

² Ibid., 61. My parenthetical remark.

³ To be fair, one could argue that Heidegger’s phenomenology emphasizes an aspect of, and does not depart from, Husserl’s philosophy. But that there are clear disagreements between the two thinkers on phenomenology has been well documented. For points of continuity and difference between the two ideas of phenomenology, see Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning*.

about the importance of finding and examining phenomena covered by traditional modes of inquiry (particularly those of a rationalist or empiricist persuasion). His fundamental insight regarding our bodily enmeshment with the world builds upon while revising and expanding Heidegger's understandings of phenomena and of our relation to the world.

It is this basic commitment to examining the complex and often hidden phenomena of everyday existence that I, too, see as defining the phenomenological approach. Although first-person examples are common in this approach, phenomenological examinations of these phenomena also take account of broader contexts. Not just the subjective, but also the social, cultural, historical, and material dimensions of human existence are part of the experienced phenomena. Consequently, these dimensions cannot be discounted, but rather should be incorporated into an examination of the phenomena. In my own account of place, accordingly, I point to the social and cultural background against which distinct places and their boundaries are constituted in our experience.

The Relevance of Phenomenology of Place

Places can shape a person's or group's identities and possibilities, prejudice how they are perceived and treated, and partially determine their future. The places one inhabits everyday can also define one's priorities, relationships, and quality of life. Empirical sciences attest to the importance of place: future education

level,⁴ future income,⁵ health and life expectancy,⁶ etc. are all correlated with one's place (i.e., one's neighborhood, county, or city), with some studies showing a causal connection. With increasing accuracy, economists, geographers, and political scientists have been mapping not just the distribution of people, structures, and geographical features, but also the human characteristics and the future possibilities this distribution conveys.

Since the importance of place, understood as neighborhoods, cities, etc., is being fleshed out by the social sciences, we may ask what role, if any, philosophy in general, and the phenomenological tradition in particular, can play in further understanding the nature and role of place in the contemporary world? To answer this question, we need to look at scenarios that complicate conventional understandings of place. Traditional notions of place, which are often (though not always) reflected in the spatial units charted by the social sciences, imply more or less physically delimited spaces such as buildings, compounds, cities, sides of rivers, etc. In recent decades, however, advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) have posed an unprecedented challenge to this idea of place. The practical and perceptual limits imposed by people's situatedness in physically delimited places appear to be fast disappearing. New digital technologies help situate people within contexts of entities, spatial relations, and web of meanings that are different from those offered by immediate physically

⁴ Sander, "Educational Attainment and Residential Location."

⁵ Chetty, Hendren, Kline, and Saez, *Where is the Land of Opportunity?*

⁶ Chetty *et al.* "The Association between Income and Life Expectancy."

inhabited spaces. It is not just that one can be at the office from home (using, for instance, video conferencing and remote desktop) or that one can instantaneously monitor and kill a person thousands of miles away (using drones with sophisticated cameras and weapons). More deeply, the immediate places we inhabit do not matter as much for what we perceive and do, for whom we engage with, or for how we have common experiences with others. These changes, which engender new capacities, possibilities, and experiences, may or may not be desirable in the eyes of particular individuals. The presently pertinent point is that the traditional places and familiar spatial dimensions of human existence are changing.

Any notion of an individual's or a group's whereabouts that simply locates them in a physical locality is insensitive to these fundamental changes. If the goal of an inquiry is to discover what aspects of education, economy, and healthcare are connected to a given juridical-spatial unit of inquiry such as a zip code or city, then the changes brought about by new technologies are meaningful only insofar as they translate into changes in these aspects. Limiting her inquiry to one unit of juridical spatiality, for instance the neighborhood where people live, a researcher can learn how other phenomena correlate with this variable. However, if the goal of inquiry is to understand the more full-bodied spatial situatedness of people's lives, how this situatedness is tied to their meaningful relations with the world, the possibilities opened by these relations, and the philosophical and ethical issues that arise from this spatial context, then we must take

into account the changes introduced by contemporary information and communication technologies.

Phenomenology is particularly sensitive to these changes. This is because changes that are introduced by, among other technologies, virtual augmented reality to inhabited spaces have little to do with a shift in one's location and much more to do with the shift in the meaningful spatial whole one deals with. Phenomenology's object of analysis, in other words, is not a person's physical surroundings, but the phenomena in which she is immersed. Analyzing these phenomena, which today are mediated by new technologies, both vis-à-vis the kind of meaningful wholes they are and how such wholes are distinct from the wholes constituted by non-mediated inhabited places, is key to understanding new dimensions of human existence in the digital age.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter I, I provide a critical exposition of major phenomenological accounts of place and space. Apart from pointing to questions these accounts leave unanswered, I attempt to specify what can be consistently called "place" across the various accounts. I argue that Heidegger has a different account of place at each of the three stages in his philosophical career: as *Gegend* in *Being and Time*, as *site* in "The Origin of the Work of Art," and as *Ort* in "Building Dwelling Thinking." Whereas Heidegger's ideas of place mostly elide bodily engagement, Merleau-Ponty develops an account of human spatiality that is rooted in an embodied

subject's immersion within a milieu. I identify bodily space as the primary spatial phenomenon that can be called place.

I also examine phenomenological accounts of place in the works of their successors. Edward Relph, for example, holds that to be in a place is to identify with it in some sense. It is a sense of insideness that makes a particular space distinct, carving out a meaningful area that is called "place." Anne Buttner, meanwhile, understands place in terms of the tension between home and reach. This approach informs her reconciliation of the phenomenologist's emphasis on an individual's lived space with the geographer's concern with broader non-place-based social, political, and technological processes. In Edward Casey's focus on the relations between self, place, and landscape, I find an expansion of Merleau-Ponty's idea of bodily space that highlights previously ignored dimensions of the phenomena. Finally, I discuss Jeff Malpas's account of the tripartite structure of place. His focus on the boundedness, openness, and emergence that characterize place builds on some key aspects of Heidegger's later philosophy. Chapter I thus identifies a notion of place across the different accounts while pointing to their limitations in adequately considering various dimensions of everyday spatial experience.

Articulating what constitutes the distinct identity of a place is a key concern in all the accounts of place discussed in chapter I. In Chapter II, I argue that none of these accounts succeed at accounting for the distinctness of a place owing to their

inadequate attention to the relation of a place to other contiguous places. I show how the accounts of place offered by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty fail to explicate the delimited character of place or bodily space. As a result, their accounts fail to examine the coexistence of a plurality of places in our daily lives. I show that similar but distinct issues affix the accounts of Casey, Malpas, and Relph. In different ways, all these accounts focus on the phenomenon of *a* place and on the unity of the various elements that make up the meaningful whole that a place is. This approach disregards how a place is often part of a plurality of places. Starting from the fact that we are always situated among places, I offer a brief account of place that emphasizes the role of shared continuous elements in the emergence and experience of distinct places. I argue that places are continually evolving, internally heterogeneous, and spatially distinct meaningful wholes with indeterminate boundaries. The emergence and ongoing reconstitution of places require repeated bodily engagements, which occur in the context of other places, in relation to the engagements of others, and against the background of social practices, cultural norms, discourse, and history.

In Chapter III, after both describing the technological processes that make augmented reality (AR) possible and highlighting the technology's applications, I analyze the spaces presented by augmented reality for attributes that are essential to a place. I conclude that processes of digitization and of interpreting digital data cannot capture the continuous elements shared by places, the collective ne-

gotiations of multiple thresholds that define place boundaries, or the indeterminate character of these boundaries. As a result, I argue, AR cannot capture the distinctness of spaces along continuous elements and thus cannot represent spaces as unique spatial wholes in the rich manner available to ordinary, non-AR experience of places. Furthermore, AR's interpretation of spaces as distinct wholes—particularly through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and continually accruing data (big data) to demarcate areas, highlight particular entities, and enable certain activities and interactions—brings about a significant change in the meaningful spatial wholes that are produced through bodily engagement and social interactions. This AI-driven interpretation and selective presentation of elements in a space are also open to manipulation and distortion, and thus may lead to a variety of ethical issues related to ownership, privacy, and deception that do not arise concerning the organic version.

I conclude that AR's potential to hide as a technology is both the key to its attractiveness and the feature that makes it interesting philosophically. AR's ability to recede while providing a novel interpretation of our everyday spaces complicates, to say the least, the usual ways of studying technological mediation between humans and the world. Both as a utility and as a transparent device, it can change our view while being out of the view itself, like an ordinary pair of glasses.

II. PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS OF SPACE AND PLACE

This chapter engages in a critical evaluation of major phenomenological accounts of place and space. Edmund Husserl's series of lectures from 1907, titled *Thing and Space*, is perhaps the first phenomenological investigation of space (assuming that phenomenology starts with Husserl). However, this chapter will not engage with Husserl's ideas. The primary justification for this exclusion is that Husserl's work on this topic has not been widely influential in philosophy and other disciplines. To the degree that his ideas inform Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of space, there will be opportunity to discuss them indirectly. The ideas of Martin Heidegger and, to a lesser degree, those of Merleau-Ponty, have had major influence on all subsequent accounts of place within the phenomenological tradition. For this reason, I will devote a substantial portion of this chapter to a discussion of their relevant works. The discussion will then move to philosophers and geographers in the second half of 20th century whose accounts of place and space are influenced by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Among the many texts in this category, I consider the works of Edward Relph, Anne Buttimer, Edward Casey, and Jeff Malpas. In assessing these views, I will highlight the core challenges faced by a phenomenological account of place. Over the course of the chapter, I will also attempt to specify something that can be consistently called "place" across the various accounts. This is necessary not just to mitigate confusions arising from the divergent word choices by authors writing in

languages other than English, but also to keep in sight the kind of phenomena that this dissertation aims to explore.

Heidegger: From *Gegend* to *Ort* via *Das Offen*

In this section, I trace the development of spatial concepts in Heidegger's philosophy, with a focus on the idea of place. Heidegger's understanding of space and place has already received comprehensive treatment in several works.⁷ In my discussion, instead of providing a comprehensive exposition, I will concentrate on highlighting what I consider to be the most significant turns in Heidegger's thinking on place. As I will argue, Heidegger has a different account of place at each of the three stages in his philosophical career. I locate the phenomenon of place as *Gegend* in *Being and Time*, *site* in "The Origin of the Work of Art," and *Ort* in "Building Dwelling Thinking." Although the idea of *site* is the least worked out of the three, the conceptual framework used in the essay on artwork provides a bridge from *Being and Time* to late Heidegger's understanding of place as *Ort*. The three accounts of place, though related, stand on their own. Thus, a discussion of each, along with related spatial concepts, is essential to laying out Hei-

⁷ See, for instance, Casey, *The Fate of Place*; Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*; and Schatzki, *Martin Heidegger: Theorist of Space*.

degger's phenomenological insights on place.⁸ Moreover, as we will see in the rest of this chapter, Heidegger's ideas on place influence nearly all other phenomenological writings on this topic.

Spatiality in *Being and Time*

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger pursues the question of the meaning of Being by way of an analysis of Dasein.⁹ By the latter term, Heidegger designates the distinctive way of being human. Since Dasein has a pre-ontological or pre-theoretical "average understanding of Being," Heidegger believes that investigating this being would bring to light the horizon of such an understanding.¹⁰ The meaning of Being could then be conceived explicitly by reference to the horizon of the un-

⁸ It is not universally agreed that Heidegger's later works, which I discuss in this paper, represent a phenomenological approach. My characterization is based on two observations. First, even in later years, Heidegger clearly espoused a phenomenological approach, although it is construed as the "phenomenology of the inapparent" (*Four Seminars*, 89). Second, Heidegger begins his discussion of place with a commonplace example, that of a bridge. The elaborate discussion of the bridge closely resembles the many phenomenological exercises he uses in his seminars to foster what he calls "phenomenological 'seeing'" (*ibid.*, 11, 22, 89).

⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*. In capitalizing "Being," I am following Macquarrie and Robinson's translation.

¹⁰ Heidegger's initial definition of Dasein emphasizes its capacity to inquire about its own Being, and it thus provides the most suitable way to explicate understanding of Being: "Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own Being ... This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term 'Dasein.'" *Ibid.*, 27.

derstanding of Being.¹¹ The existential analytic of Dasein, which takes up most of *Being and Time*, begins with a discussion of the world closest to Dasein: the environment (*Umwelt*, or “world-around”). Heidegger sees an “incontestable” belonging together of environment and spatiality, so that the latter can be articulated in terms of the former, which is itself understood as worldhood.¹² Thus, Heidegger’s stated goal in discussing space in *Being and Time* is to determine “in what sense space is a constituent for that world which has in turn been characterized as an item in the structure of Being-in-the-world.”¹³ The concept of Being-in-the-world denotes Dasein’s ontological structure, which distinguishes it from entities that are merely present-at-hand¹⁴ or ready-to-hand. Accordingly, Heidegger’s conceptions of place and space are to be understood by reference to his distinctions between the three modes of being: being-in-the-world, presence-at-hand and ready-to-hand.

In his explication of the distinction between Dasein’s being-in (-the-world) and the side-by-side-ness of present-at-hand entities, Heidegger claims that “Da-

¹¹ “Meaning” (*Sinn*), as Heidegger understands it, “signifies the ‘upon-which’ of a primary projection in terms of which something can be conceived in its possibility as that which it is” (ibid., 371). Thus, the “meaning” of Being is nothing other than that (horizon) in terms of which Being must be conceived.

¹² Ibid., 94.

¹³ Ibid., 134.

¹⁴ Though Heidegger does not give us an explicit definition of “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*), it is clear from his usage that he means by it a mode of being characterized merely by subsisting physical existence. Within the framework of *Being and Time*, this way of being of any entity is encountered only once the more primary way of dealing with it is either overlooked or blocked. Presence-at-hand also serves as a foil for Heidegger’s understanding of “existence,” which he sees as denoting a “who” rather than a “what,” which is “presence-at-hand in the broadest sense” (71).

sein itself has a 'Being-in-space' of its own; but this, in turn, is possible only *on the basis of Being-in-the-world in general.*"¹⁵ He argues that Dasein's Being-in cannot be explained ontologically on the basis of some ontical characteristic, *viz.*, human body (the present-at-hand aspect of being human). It is not the case, he claims, that being-in is some mental or "spiritual" (*geistig*) property and that spatiality is a function of human corporeality.¹⁶ But he defers supporting this claim until later in the work, noting that "Not until we understand Being-in-the-world as an essential structure of Dasein can we have any insight into Dasein's *existential spatiality.*"¹⁷ The task of describing Dasein's essential structure is carried out in three chapters, which correspond to the three constitutive structures of Being-in-the-world: worldhood, Dasein (which has Being-in-the-world), and Being-in.

Although the sections on spatiality are a part of the chapter on worldhood, its significance in Division I is broader. Understanding this significance will reveal the phenomenological character of Heidegger's view on spatiality. I will discuss how spatiality is an integral aspect of Heidegger's account of both worldhood and Being-in before delving into the specific sections on spatiality.

Spatiality and Worldhood

A particularly helpful way of approaching Heidegger's account of worldhood (and the related idea of spatiality) is to start with the account that it is opposed

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 83.

to. After laying out the basic idea of worldhood, Heidegger declares that “we shall carry our analysis no further until we have clarified our Interpretation of worldhood by a case at the opposite extreme.”¹⁸ He devotes the next three sections (19-21) to discussing Descartes’s view of nature and corporeal things in order to show why we must reject the notion that world could be grounded in something ontic – *res extensa* (the extended substance, for Descartes). The deficiencies in Descartes’s ideas bring into relief not only Heidegger’s own views on world but also his phenomenological method.

Descartes’s view of the world consists in understanding extendedness as the essence of corporeal things (which, in turn, collectively constitute nature or world).¹⁹ All the other properties of corporeal things are to be seen as modifications of this underlying property of being extended.²⁰ For instance, the shape, weight, and color of a thing depend on its extendedness. But bodily extension itself stands independently of other properties, and thus “maintains itself (*remanet*) through all [the] changes” in a corporeal thing.²¹ For Heidegger, Descartes’s belief that the essence of entities consists in an independently persisting property is based on the theological idea of Being as substantiality. In this view, god is such an independent “substance”; but so are created entities, categorized broadly as *res cogitans* (thinking or mental substance) and *res extensa* (ex-

¹⁸ Ibid., 122.

¹⁹ Ibid., 123.

²⁰ Heidegger quotes from Descartes’ *Principia Philosophiae I*, “For everything else that can be ascribed to body presupposes extension” (25).

²¹ Ibid., 125.

tended substance). How a single idea of Being—as independent substance—could include both the finite, created entities and infinite, uncreated god is not clear to Heidegger, and he sees Descartes as evading the question.²² The consequence, however, of this confusion is that one property among others is taken up as representing the substance (the essence) of entities in the world.²³ According to Heidegger, extendedness is taken as the essence of entities (and thus the world) because it is a “substantial” property, that is, a property that seems to last (relative to other properties). Thus “substance” and “substantiality” are confounded in Descartes’s philosophy.²⁴ While substance refers to the idea of Being derived from the notion of god as independent, substantiality is merely a characteristic with which we identify particular extended entities.²⁵ When substantiality is treated as substance, Heidegger complains, “something ontical is made to underlie the ontological.”²⁶ In other words, one being (extendedness) is treated as the essence of all other beings, and thus Being (as extendedness) is itself understood as an entity among other entities.

It is this supposedly ontic character of Descartes’s view of Being of the world as *res extensa* that Heidegger rejects. Such an understanding of Being, ac-

²² Ibid., 126.

²³ Ibid., 127.

²⁴ Ibid., 127.

²⁵ God as “substance” could indeed be construed in terms of duration. In this case, substantiality understood as what lasts in entities is not different from substance. But Heidegger’s criticism is that while substantiality relates to a finite being and occurs as one out of many characteristics, substance is an ontological feature of God, which is an infinite being.

²⁶ Ibid., 127.

ording to Heidegger, is a result of “pass[ing] over” the phenomenon of the world and, with it, the beings within the world, which are proximally and for the most part ready-to-hand.²⁷ Descartes’s view prioritizes a particular kind of encounter in which beings and humans are side-by-side as extended entities. Such an encounter cannot, taken by itself, lead to any perception of beings. The “hardness and resistance do not show themselves at all unless an entity has the kind of Being which Dasein—or at least something living—possesses.”²⁸ Any “access to entities” is only possible, according to Heidegger, by a perceiver. It is this perceiver who encounters things, not (for the most part) in an act of observation, but in specific contexts where beings are usable (or unusable) in this or that way. Entities first show themselves as fitting in particular roles within these contexts, and thus their “essence” or Being is to be conceived as readiness-to-hand. In other words, in Heidegger’s understanding of the encounter, the one who encounters is not primarily an extended object and that which is encountered is something ready-to-hand. By contrast, Descartes’s idea of Being is of “permanent presence-at-hand”²⁹ since entities understood merely in terms of their extension are present-at-hand. And it is in opposition to this “extreme” view that Heidegger contrasts his phenomenologically more appropriate understanding of entities.

For Heidegger, world is not primarily (phenomenologically speaking) a collection of entities present-at-hand. What is it then? We know that it contains

²⁷ Ibid., 128.

²⁸ Ibid., 130.

²⁹ Ibid., 130.

ready-to-hand entities, which are construed not in terms of their physical presence, but in terms of their involvement in Dasein's projects. Dasein, as opposed to "human being," is Heidegger's way of denoting the kind of being who has possibilities, which in turn delimit its projects. It is their involvement in projects of usability and serviceability that essentially defines that which is ready-to-hand.³⁰ But the world is not therefore a collection of Dasein and ready-to-hand entities. It is rather the whole network of meaningful relations centered around Dasein's way of being. The worldhood of the world, for Heidegger, is the overarching structure of involvements devolving from the possibility (and thus the projects) that Dasein takes up. Entities are what they are only within this context of relations.

Heidegger's criticism of Descartes brings into relief some key aspects of his own views on world. In concluding his remarks on Descartes, Heidegger claims:

The world and Dasein and entities within-the-world are the ontologically constitutive (*ontologischen Verfassungen*) states which are closest to us; but we have no guarantee that we can achieve the basis for meeting up with these as phenomena by the seemingly obvious procedure of starting with the Things of the world ...³¹

For Heidegger, Dasein, by its very definition, encompasses a relation to the world and the entities therein. Therefore, Heidegger believes that his phenomenological approach avoids one of the central problems he identifies in Descartes's view of the world, *viz.*, the problem of access to entities. Entities are accessible, primarily,

³⁰ As Heidegger claims, such an involvement is "ontologically definitive" for what is ready-to-hand. *Ibid.*, 116.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

in terms of their relation to Dasein's concerns, which are themselves determinative of the totality of involvements that constitutes the world.³² Arguing for this kind of relation between Dasein and entities, Heidegger rejects the idea that their encounter is to be conceived *primarily* as two bodies in touch with each other, that is, as sensory connection between humans and entities³³. Rather, the encounter is between a concern and the object of that concern. The phenomenon of sensing an object by touch, for instance, is to be seen as wholly guided by concerns generated by a pre-existing understanding.³⁴ Therefore, instead of constructing humans and things primarily as extended objects, Heidegger views them as items in a concerned relation. Since, phenomenologically, they are already understood in terms of one another—Dasein in terms of what it is concerned about, and other entities in terms of their relation to Dasein's concerns—there is indeed no issue of how one interacts with another.

³² In the introductory section on being-in-the-world, Heidegger outlines his argument for accessibility as follows: "An entity present-at-hand within the world can be touched by another entity only if by its very nature the latter entity has Being-in as its own kind of Being—only if, with its Being-there [*Da-sein*], something like the world is already revealed to it, so that from out of that world another entity can manifest itself in touching, and thus become accessible in its Being-present-at-hand." Heidegger clearly downplays the role of the sensory involvements with an entity, which would point to Dasein as also being an extended entity, and highlights only the 'world': the system of relations centered on Dasein.

³³ This does not preclude sensory relation to the world. The point here is that such relation is not primary, but is founded on, another relationship, which is defined by concern. Heidegger sees "knowing," which includes perception from senses, as founded on Dasein's Being-in (I will discuss Being-in and its mode of understanding below).

³⁴ This understanding need not be static. But its dynamism is limited to the context of its world (that is, it is internal to its system of relations), and does not extend to any reciprocal relation with the entity encountered.

The idea of spatiality enters the analytic of Dasein within the above context of Heidegger's discussion of encounter between Dasein and entities. Immediately after the remarks cited above, he argues:

But if we recall that spatiality is manifestly one of the constituents of entities within-the-world, then in the end Cartesian analysis of the 'world' can still be 'rescued' . . . Within certain limits the analysis of the *extensio* remains independent of his neglecting to provide an explicit interpretation for the Being of extended entities. There is some phenomenal justification for regarding the *extensio* as a basic characteristic of the 'world', even if by recourse to this neither the spatiality of the world nor that of the entities we encounter in our environment (a spatiality which is proximally discovered) nor even that of Dasein itself, can be conceived ontologically.³⁵

As his use of scare quotes indicates, Heidegger is not concerned here to rescue Descartes's analysis of the world but to show how the spatiality implied by *extensio* could be understood without any reference to the idea of "extended substance." This is because *extensio* relates to that phenomenologically inaccurate idea of the world where entities are side by side as physical bodies, while any idea of spatiality must respond to the phenomenologically sound idea of world as the structure of involvements that characterizes Dasein. If the notion of world is revised the way Heidegger suggests, one could not conceive the spatiality of the world (and of Dasein) by starting with *extensio*. Indeed, the understanding of human being as Dasein already precludes extendedness as a grounding feature of spatiality (of Being-in-the-world). However, Heidegger sees a need to counter Descartes's idea of *extensio* because it represents the predominant way of defining the spatiality of the world (understood in the non-Heideggerian sense). Spatial concepts such as distance, or nearness and farness, are usually defined in

³⁵ Ibid., 134.

terms of extended entities and their corresponding measurements. If Heidegger is to reject the conventional notion that spatiality relies on extendedness, he must offer an account of how distance, nearness, and other spatial concepts can be understood in terms of the phenomenologically appropriate idea of world.

Heidegger's discussion of spatiality is thus central to his departure from the traditional notion of world. And since world is a constituent of the structure of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, the viability of his account of being human also depends on the idea of spatiality.

Being-in

Before proceeding to the sections on spatiality, however, we need to look at another central concept in *Being and Time* that is intimately related to spatiality. In his introductory remarks on Dasein's spatiality, Heidegger claims that "if spatiality belongs to it [Dasein] in any way, that is possible only because of this Being-in."³⁶ Though Being-in is part of Dasein's way of being in the world, which we have already discussed, it is instructive to briefly look at this concept, especially because Heidegger devotes a chapter to "Being-in as such."³⁷

Dasein's concerned relation to entities is a way of being-in (the world), and so is Dasein's relation of solitudiness to others. Although these two basic ways of being-in yield an understanding of Dasein's Being-in-the-world, Hei-

³⁶ Ibid., 138.

³⁷ "Being-in as Such" is Chapter V (Division I), which is much later than the sections on spatiality in Chapter III.

degger wants to emphasize the unitary and primordial phenomenon of Being-in-itself rather than generalize it from its instances. The chapter on Being-in promises to do just that. As a unitary phenomenon, Heidegger argues, Being-in cannot be reduced to a relation between two present-at-hand entities (such as between a subject and an object).³⁸ For this reason, Heidegger replaces the term “Being-in,” which can connote one present-at-hand entity within another, with a term that better represents the inseparable nature of subject-object relationship. Interestingly, his choice of word—“there” (*Da*)—is a spatial term in ordinary usage. Heidegger’s usage of the word, however, has to be understood within the context of involvement relations discussed above. He argues that

“the ‘there’ points to a ‘here’ and a ‘yonder’. The ‘here’ of an ‘I-here’ is always understood in relation to a ‘yonder’ ready-to-hand, in the sense of Being towards this ‘yonder’ – a Being which is de-severant, directional, and concerned. Dasein’s existential spatiality, which thus determines its ‘location,’ is itself grounded in Being-in-the-world.”³⁹

The usual spatial terms in this statement—“here,” “yonder,” and “location”—do not point to positions and separations that could be measured. Heidegger does not mean, for instance, that I am “here” sitting in my chair and my pencil is “yonder,” just beyond the reach of my hands, on my desk. Instead, I, defined as an entity with a project (such as writing), and the pencil, defined in terms of its function within that project, are intelligible as occupying “locations” *within the network of relations* established by my project. The “here” locates an entity at the center of all such relations in that the whole network is established by that enti-

³⁸ Ibid., 170.

³⁹ Ibid., 171.

ty's projects. But this central entity is itself articulated in terms of the objects of its concerns, so that there is a mutually constitutive reciprocity between all the entities involved in the network of relations. Indeed, a "here" is only meaningful in relation to a "yonder." The characterization of the "there" as "disclosedness" signifies precisely this relationality.⁴⁰ To be the "there" is to have a particular relation with other beings, that is, to participate in disclosedness (of beings).

With the "there" (*Da*), the relationality inherent in the notion of worldhood is given a spatial sense. This is to be expected since the "there" relies not just on concern, but also on de-severance and directionality, which are the two major features of Dasein's spatiality.⁴¹ Spatial properties are central to Dasein's being-in. Indeed, Heidegger assumes the spatial properties of "there" in his discussion of both state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*)⁴² and understanding (*Verstand*), the two constitutive ways of being-in. For instance, in describing fear as a state-of-mind, he notes that "The potentiality for coming close [of something fearful] is itself freed by the essential existential spatiality of Being-in-the-world."⁴³ Every state-of-mind (or attunement) already assumes the possibility of the remoteness

⁴⁰ Heidegger describes the connection between spatiality and disclosedness: "'Here' and 'yonder' are possible only in a 'there' ... In the expression 'there' we have in view this essential disclosedness" (ibid., 171).

⁴¹ As cited above, Heidegger says that the "there" is "a Being which is de-severant, directional, and concernful." Ibid.

⁴² *Befindlichkeit* is also often translated as "attunement." For consistency, I will be using the MacQuarrie and Robinson translation (used also for all other references to *Being and Time*) of the term as state-of-mind.

⁴³ Ibid., 180.

(or closeness) of entities. This remoteness is made possible by the de-severance that characterizes Dasein's spatiality.

Within the context of the chapter on Being-in, it appears that spatial properties of Dasein are taken for granted. This would contradict what Heidegger says about the grounding of spatiality in Being-in.⁴⁴ However, this incongruity is partially a result of Heidegger's limited discussion of Being-in in Division I of *Being and Time*. The idea of the "there" is primarily discussed in terms of its two modes in the first division. We thus see the *ways* in which a concerned and spatial being is in (the world). But what determines or guides these ways is only made clear in Division II of *Being and Time*. When Heidegger says that spatiality is possible "because of [] Being-in," he appears to refer not to the manners of Being-in or of the relation between Dasein and entities, which indeed rely on the spatial features of world and Dasein, but to what makes possible any relation at all. In other words, the "there" encompasses the notions of Dasein, world, and the concerned and spatial relations between them. Structurally, these constituent items are mutually dependent on each other: Dasein's relations to entities in the world in the modes of state-of-mind and understanding requires concern, de-severance, and directionality; and the latter are manifested in the former. But if we are to understand the "there" as the unitary phenomenon that it is, beyond the elements in which it could be elaborated, we need an account of that which makes it possible as a particular "there." Heidegger's aim in Division II is to rein-

⁴⁴ As noted above, Heidegger claims that "if spatiality belongs to it [Dasein] in any way, that is possible only because of this Being-in." *Ibid.*, 138.

interpret the constitutive structures of Dasein, including the “there,” in terms of temporality. He argues that “the condition for the possibility” of the “there” is the “ecstatical unity of temporality.”⁴⁵ The latter makes the “there” possible as “disclosedness,” “open,” or “clearedness.”⁴⁶ A concernful and spatial relation to entities is only possible *within* the “disclosedness” that is first made possible by temporality. The unity of temporality refers to the way in which Dasein’s past (as thrownness) and future (projective for-the-sake-of-which) dynamically hang together, thus disclosing a present relation to entities. In other words, temporality opens up a “world” (and thus the space) within which entities can be encountered. The world “is neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand, but temporalizes itself in temporality. It ‘is’, with the ‘outside-of-itself’ of the ecstases, ‘there’. If no *Dasein* exists, no world is ‘there’ either.”⁴⁷ The world is “there” as revealed by the play of temporal ecstases within which entities can show up as ready-to-hand or present-at-hand.⁴⁸ And it is this world or “there” “wherein” Dasein’s understanding of its own possibilities lies.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 401.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 401-402.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 417.

⁴⁸ I am skipping here the problem of encountering another being that is neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand, that is, another Dasein.

⁴⁹ My equation of “world” and “there” appears to disregard the structural separation that is seen in the organization of Division I. There, worldhood and Being-in are discussed separately. Being-in, which is rephrased as the “there” since Being-in connotes one thing being in something else, could be understood as different from world only if we were to think the former in terms of its “modes.” But these modes, state-of-mind and understanding dwell in the “world.” The modes only articulate the two ways in which entities within the world are present for Dasein. The “there” itself is the total disclosedness, manifested in the modes but brought about by temporalization. The same disclosedness is named “world.” Ibid., 417.

The coincidence of the “there” and “Being-in” as disclosedness only further emphasizes the central role of spatiality in *Being and Time*. Since the “there” is another name for Dasein’s disclosedness of entities, we must inquire after the *kind of relation to entities* that is operative in it. As we have said, this relation, manifested in both state-of-mind and understanding, is characterized by not only concern, but also spatiality. Our next task will be to describe Heidegger’s account of spatiality, both equipmental (pertaining to what is ready-to-hand and the world) and existential (pertaining to Dasein). By starting with equipmental spatiality, we can see how some of the usual spatial terms—such as “place” and “region”—are used by Heidegger before discussing the novel usage of “deseverance” and “directionality,” terms that characterize Dasein’s spatiality.

Equipmental Spatiality: Place and Region

Heidegger’s stated goal in discussing spatiality is to determine “in what sense space is a constituent for that world which has in turn been characterized as an item in the structure of Being-in-the-world.”⁵⁰ In order to show how space is a constituent of the world, Heidegger gives an account of the spatiality of entities that populate the world in its everydayness. Heidegger uses two spatial concepts

⁵⁰ Ibid., 134.

to characterize the spatiality of what is ready-to-hand: place (*Platz*) and region (*Gegend*).⁵¹

Place

Heidegger understands place (*Platz*) as denoting the location of a ready-to-hand entity in the totality of equipment. The ready-to-hand, as I have noted above, is defined primarily by its relation to Dasein's projects. Thus, its location is to be seen within the context of these projects, or, more generally, within the circumspective concern that governs Dasein's relation with other entities. In other words, we are not to see place as a position (*stelle*) within a bare space. A determination of position in three-dimensional space, such as what is given by maps or a coordinate system, already assumes that the being of an entity is primarily physical or merely present-at-hand. For Heidegger, such an idea of place would take away what is phenomenologically primary in our relation to entities, *viz.*, their presence as what is ready-to-hand.

Since what is ready-to-hand is usually part of an equipmental context, this referential system is essential for determining place. As Heidegger argues, the place of equipment is "one place out of a whole totality of places ... belonging to the context of equipment that is environmentally ready-to-hand."⁵² Place here defines the character of belonging to a particular context. For a piece of equip-

⁵¹ Heidegger also uses "closeness" (*Nähe*). The "closeness of equipment," Heidegger notes, "is not to be ascertained by measuring distances" but is a function of circumspective concern. The idea of closeness of entities becomes central in Dasein's spatiality, discussed below.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 136.

ment, the context is the totality of equipment, that is, the whole work context in which it has a particular role. As Heidegger explains, the equipment's "belonging-somewhere at the time corresponds to the equipmental character of what is ready-to-hand; that is, it corresponds to the belonging-to which the ready-to-hand has towards a totality of equipment in accordance with its involvements."⁵³ For instance, the "place" of a pen is to be seen *in terms of its relation* to various items in a study, some or all of which have meaning with respect to a user (and her projects). Without a user, there would be no unity in the equipmental context, and thus an entity would be freely floating, that is, not in "place." It would be much easier to see Heidegger's notion of place with a more abstract example. A foreigner trying unsuccessfully to settle in a new country might say "I have no place in this country." By this statement, she does not mean that she has no place to stay, but that she is unable to fit into the society. Perhaps she has difficulties assimilating to the culture, perhaps the natives are unwelcoming. Either way, she does not see herself as part of the formal or informal structures of recognition. Being a part of these structures would make her feel part of the country; without such participation, she has no "place." Similarly, a pen is in "place" if it is assimilated into the structure given by users' project. In this view, something without a role within a pre-established whole lacks a place.

Heidegger claims that "places are not to be interpreted as the 'where' of some random Being-present-at-hand of Things."⁵⁴ If we start with a thing in its

⁵³ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 136.

extendedness, we might be able to discern distances between it and other entities, but not its place. However, if we start with the function of an entity within a system, we can locate it in terms of a user's projects, and thus "place" it in a meaningful context. Thus Heidegger rejects the primacy of a homogenous, three-dimensional matrix. Instead, we are to see the relevant context as a system of relations among various meanings and functions assigned within a project. One way to see this distinction is in terms of the presence or absence of an entity that establishes a project. The "where" of some "random" entity is possible if we take away a user for whom an entity, with its particular usefulness, is "placed" in the context of a project. In other words, a "where" locates an entity within an indifferent matrix, but a "place" can only be within a matrix established by a totality of involvements, that is, by Dasein's circumspective concern related to its project.

Heidegger's understanding of place is thus based on the distinction between different kinds of matrices. Phenomenologically, since the primary matrix is Dasein's circumspective concern and a corresponding referential whole, place is defined accordingly. Heidegger does not appear to be concerned that "place" still refers to a position (*stelle*) within a system of reference, albeit one that is phenomenally appropriate. In other words, he does not see it as a problem that the framework of Dasein's project is what *by itself* determines the place of an entity. Nonetheless, we would be justified in wondering whether there is more to the idea of place than how it points to a position or location within a particular sys-

tem of relations. As I will discuss below, Heidegger's idea of region also represents this Dasein-centric view of spatiality of entities.

Region

According to Heidegger, region is the "whither" (*wohin*) in which places are situated: "the 'whither' to which the totality of places for a context of equipment gets allotted, is the underlying condition which makes possible the belonging-somewhere of an equipmental totality as something that can be placed."⁵⁵ Region is a way of characterizing the equipmental context, to which places belong. Heidegger further elaborates: "This 'whither,' which makes it possible for equipment to belong somewhere, and which we circumspectively keep in view ahead of us in our concerned dealings, we call the 'region'."⁵⁶ It is important to note here that "region" is the broader context "in view." This view guides and orients one's dealings with what is ready-to-hand.

Given this initial idea of region as that which we have in view, the "whither" (*wohin*) of region appears to be similar to the concept of the "wherein" (*worin*) of Dasein's understanding, which provides the overarching intelligibility to the usability and serviceability of all equipment. It will be helpful to briefly discuss the relation between understanding and worldhood in order to clarify the similarity between whither and wherein. When defining worldhood, Heidegger refers to the "wherein" of Dasein's understanding as the "phenomenon of the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 136.

world.”⁵⁷ Here, “world” is the broader context within which every particular “in-order-to” engagement is understood. As noted above, by “world” Heidegger does not mean a collection of extended present-at-hand entities. Ontologically, the “worldhood of the world” is the “structure of that to which [*woraufhin*] Dasein assigns itself.”⁵⁸ This assignment occurs at two levels. First, in terms of the specific notion of “in-order-to.” For example, in order to cultivate a kitchen garden, I engage with gardening tools, a plot of land, and other resources. The cultivation of this kitchen garden, as my project, unifies my engagement with various relevant entities, so that these entities show themselves as ready-to-hand within that project (that is, within that structure of an in-order-to). But my goal of having a kitchen garden is itself tied to and informed by my broader aim of becoming a particular kind of person: *viz.*, someone who engages in gardening and possibly becomes skilled at it. This latter, overarching possibility is what Heidegger refers to as the “for-the-sake-of-which.” Dasein’s assigning itself to a particular in-order-to is oriented by its having this second kind of assignment, which is itself grounded in the idea that Dasein is a potentiality-for-Being.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁹ Heidegger argues that “In understanding a context of relations such as we have mentioned, Dasein has assigned itself to an ‘in-order-to’ [*Um-zu*], and it has done so in terms of a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which it itself is.” Ibid., 119.

The in-order-to is structurally unified with a for-the-sake-of-which.⁶⁰ For this reason, the discovery of entities as ready-to-hand depends not just on particular projects, but also on Dasein's possibilities. Understanding, according to Heidegger, is an act in which Dasein assigns itself a possibility, that is, a for-the-sake-of-which.⁶¹ As always active, understanding constantly "dwells" within one particular possibility or another. The "wherein" of this dwelling is what I have equated to the "whither" of the region. This connection can now be made clear. The in-order-to structure, in unifying the equipmental context, makes possible the determination of the "place" of a particular equipment within that context. But the "in-order-to" is guided by a possibility disclosed in Dasein. The "for-the-sake-of-which," which articulates this possibility (in understanding), provides the context of a "in-order-to" relation of Dasein. It is this context of possibility, therefore, that has to be understood as "region" in the way Heidegger uses it. For instance, Dasein's possibility of being spiritual carves out a region within which the idea of church can be located. Regions are the specific expressions of Dasein's for-the-sake-of-which. In other words, they are the particular "whereins" in which Dasein always finds itself. "Whither" and the "wherein" point to the same

⁶⁰ Heidegger discusses the relation between in-order-to and for-the-sake-of-which in the following passages: "In understanding a context of relations such as we have mentioned, Dasein has assigned itself to an 'in-order-to' [*Um-zu*], and it has done so in terms of a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which it itself is—one which it may have seized upon either explicitly or tacitly, and which may be either authentic or inauthentic." *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶¹ Although understanding is an understanding of a possibility, it "always has its Being in an act of understanding [*Verstehen*]." Understanding is always already assigned to one of the many available possibilities. *Ibid.*, 118.

structure and thus region is nothing but Dasein's understanding seen from the side of the world.⁶²

Going back to Heidegger's definition of region as "the 'whither' to which the totality of places for a context of equipment gets allotted," we may now see what this context means. Given that the whither is what is in "view" in our concerned dealings, the context of equipment cannot just be a workshop or a study. Rather the context here is what is needed to define the place of a ready-to-hand entity. But place is not defined in terms of its measurable nearness (or side-by-sideness) to entities around it. A hammer's place is not beside other equipment in an indifferent workshop. The context of equipment is decided (or assigned to itself by understanding) by Dasein according to its possibilities. Once taken up, this "whither" serves as a background that is in view when locating entities. For instance, if I take up the project of cultivating a kitchen garden (arising from a possibility I have), the context of equipment is the background consisting of all the things and ideas that go into that project, regardless of where (physically, in the case of things) they might be. The place of a transplanter is still defined by its

⁶² Such a two-sided view of Dasein and world would be antithetical to Heidegger's phenomenological approach, but we should understand these two "sides" as two ways of looking at the same structure (as in two sides of the same coin). There is also another striking similarity between understanding and region that I will not discuss here. It relates to both being described as having primordial familiarity. Compare the following two statements: "That wherein Dasein already understands itself in this way is always something with which it is primordially familiar" (119), and "The readiness-to-hand which belongs to any such region beforehand has the *character of inconspicuous familiarity*, and it has it in an even more primordial sense than does the Being of the ready-to-hand." Ibid., 137.

role in my project even if it is still on my window sill and not anywhere close to my garden.

Region, like the other spatial notion of place, is completely determined by Dasein's possibilities. In fact, Heidegger's use of "region" (*Gegend*) is not recognizable in ordinary language or in geographical terms. A neighborhood, district, state or countryside—all of which are suitable translations of *Gegend*—is not what Heidegger refers to in his description of the nature and structure of *Gegend*. However, some of examples he provides do coincide with ordinary usage: "Churches and graves, for instance, are laid out according to the rising and the setting of the sun—the regions of life and death ..."⁶³ There is clearly an intersubjective and cultural element to a region defined in terms of rising and setting sun. But Heidegger does not say much about the relationship between these familiar regions, on the one hand, and the "whither" that is so closely tied to understanding and to Dasein's possibilities, on the other. A clear articulation of this connection would have enabled us to see how region, as Heidegger uses it, is not entirely Dasein-dependent. I will take up this critique of Heidegger's account of region in the next chapter.

Existential Spatiality

After his discussion of equipmental spatiality, Heidegger notes that "To encounter the ready-to-hand in its environmental space remains ontically possible

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 137.

only because Dasein itself is 'spatial' with regard to its Being-in-the-world."⁶⁴ Heidegger's reference to the "encounter" between the ready-to-hand and Dasein is puzzling. As should be clear from the discussion above, the ready-to-hand, both in terms of "what" it is and "where" it is, is defined solely in terms of Dasein. The idea of encounter presupposes two entities that are not already in relation to each other in a relevant manner. But Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is itself a relation to the ready-to-hand. To entertain the idea of encounter, we would need to see Dasein without its relation to entities (before it has any encounter). But such an assumption would undermine the very definition of Dasein and of what is proximally encountered. We are left to wonder what kind of being Dasein and entities have before they encounter each other. However, it could also be the case that Heidegger understands "encounter" in a manner quite different than what I have suggested. A discussion of the central feature of Dasein's spatiality will help us see if this is the case.

De-severing

Heidegger describes deseverance (*Entfernung*) "as a kind of Being which Dasein has with regard to its Being-in-the-world."⁶⁵ While "*Entfernung*," translated here as "deseverance," usually means "remoteness" or "distance," Heidegger's use of the word is idiosyncratic. Adding a hyphen to the word, he brings the privative prefix "*Ent*" into focus (even though the "*Ent*" in "*Entfernung*" only serves to in-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 139.

tensify the “*fern*” or farness in ordinary usage), thus reversing its meaning to closeness.⁶⁶ Heidegger argues that “‘De-severing’ amounts to making the farness vanish – that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close.”⁶⁷ In the “active and transitive” sense Heidegger wants to give the word, de-severing is a way of being of Dasein in which entities are held in a relation to it. But this relation to entities is what defines Dasein as Being-in-the-world. Indeed, Heidegger says that “Dasein is essentially de-severant,” adding that “it lets any entity be encountered close by as the entity which it is.”⁶⁸ With de-severance, the notion of “encountering close by” is added to the formulation of Dasein as a relation to entities. This kind of encounter is the discovery of an entity as it is: ready-to-hand. As Heidegger claims, “Proximally and for the most part, de-severing is a circumspective bringing-close—bringing something close by, in the sense of procuring it, putting it in readiness, having it to hand.”⁶⁹ These three ways of bringing close make something more or less ready-to-hand: entities are brought into a context of relationships (Dasein’s projects or concerns), within which they have a function and thus a “place.” For instance, a shovel on a shelf in a store is an item that I can bring “close” by procuring it, so that *now* it is “encountered close by as the entity which it is,” that is, as something ready-to-hand in my gardening project. De-severing in an active sense means changing one’s

⁶⁶ Ibid., 138, n. 2. The hyphens were added in later editions, possibly to highlight the distinct way in which the term is being used.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 139-140.

relation to entities, thus making them part of one's projects and possibilities. Here accessibility or nearness is a practical matter: Dasein is constantly de-severing in readying entities to be used in its projects. However, Heidegger does not discuss the status of entities for Dasein before they are de-severed. In particular, it is not clear in what sense they are "remote."

Besides this practical bringing-close, Heidegger claims that de-severing has another mode: "certain ways in which entities are discovered in a purely cognitive manner also have the character of bringing them close."⁷⁰ In contrast to the circumspective mode, cognitive de-severing is not "proximal and for the most part." But Heidegger says little about this mode of "discovering" or bringing-close. He only notes that with technology such as radios, there is an unprecedented expansion of Dasein's everyday environment, so that it seems the whole world has been de-severed. The significance of such (cognitive) de-severance for Dasein, he claims, "cannot yet be visualized."⁷¹

Cognitive de-severance might help explain what is missing in the account of de-severance proper (the practical kind): the relation between Dasein and entities before the latter are de-severed. It could be argued that entities are held in a cognitive relation before they are encountered as what they are, that is, as a part of Dasein's projects. For instance, my knowledge of shovels — generally, or from advertising flyers from local stores more specifically — is a relation to entities in a merely cognitive manner. Besides serving to fill the gap in the account above,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 140.

⁷¹ Ibid., 140.

cognitive de-severance appears to be essential for any understanding of “environment” (*Umwelt*), which certainly has consequences for spatiality.⁷² As Heidegger himself admits, this kind of de-severance expands Dasein’s environment. Though he does not discuss the significance of this expansion, one question to be asked is how the limits or boundaries of Dasein’s environment, and thus of Dasein’s spatial relations, are shaped by it. I will take up this and other questions on boundary in the next chapter.

Space

The idea of space (*Raum*) comes last within the sections on spatiality. Heidegger understands “space” in two ways—“giving space” and three-dimensional homogenous space—both founded on circumspensive de-severance. Regarding the first, Heidegger says, “When we let entities within-the-world be encountered in the way which is constitutive for Being-in-the-world, we ‘give them space’ (*Raum-geben*)”⁷³ The idea of encounter here is the “discovery” of an entity as what it is, that is, as ready-to-hand. In making something available as ready-to-hand, Heidegger claims, we “make room” (*Einräumen*) by “freeing [it] for its spatiality.”⁷⁴ We know that the “spatiality” of the ready-to-hand does not consist in its physical extension, but in its relation to Dasein’s concern. Thus the idea of

⁷² As I have noted above, Heidegger claims that there is an “incontestable” belonging together of environment and spatiality (*ibid.*, 94).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

“giving space” specifies the coming into relation of an entity with Dasein.⁷⁵ Thus, in Dasein’s particular spatiality, which is characterized by de-severance, space is also already given:⁷⁶ “With Being-in-the-world, space is proximally discovered in this spatiality.”⁷⁷ The idea of “giving space” or “making room,” therefore, describes a new way of looking at the same phenomenon which is termed de-severance. One could argue that this new description is from the side of the entities or the world in that it focuses on freeing entities for spatiality. With circumspective de-severance, Dasein has nearness to entities, but with *Einräumen* entities have space.

In relation to the second way of understanding space, Heidegger claims that

The space which is thus disclosed with the worldhood of the world still lacks the pure multiplicity of the three dimensions. In this disclosedness which is closest to us, space, as the pure ‘wherein’ in which positions are ordered by measurement and the situations of things are determined, still remains hidden.⁷⁸

Heidegger wants to emphasize the priority of the phenomena, in which there is no experience of a homogenous space. Instead, worldhood is what lies closest to us for the most part. The three-dimensional, homogenous space has to be understood as founded on worldhood. Within this worldhood, the “spatiality of what we proximally encounter in circumspection can become a theme for cir-

⁷⁵ As I noted above, Dasein’s spatial relation to entities is described in terms of de-severance. De-severance is both circumspective (practical) and cognitive. However, proximally and for the most part, de-severance is of the former kind, and thus “giving space” characterizes the coming into this kind of relation.

⁷⁶ Heidegger claims that space is “*a priori*” in this sense (ibid., 146).

⁷⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 145.

cumspection itself, as well as a task for calculation and measurement, as in building and surveying.”⁷⁹ Space as something homogenous, such that it could be measured by equal intervals, comes into view when one sets aside the way entities are spatially given—in circumspective de-severance—and thinks about the “spatiality of the environment” itself. In ignoring concerned engagement, someone who takes space as homogenous “gives up what was formerly the only possibility of access to it — circumspective calculation.”⁸⁰ In other words, space comes into view with de-worlding. Heidegger briefly notes the various stages by which we could go from spatiality of the environment (that is phenomenologically primary) to the discovery of “pure homogenous space.”⁸¹ With this formal understanding, we become aware of the “pure possibilities of spatial relations”⁸² in that there is no orienting, limiting possibility (that of Dasein) that guides spatial relations in one particular direction. Thus, space in this second sense points to a physicist’s way of understanding the concept, which is indifferent to Dasein.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger presents one of the first and most influential phenomenological inquiries into place and space. The above discussion has shown that a critical evaluation of his ideas can yield insights into where the challenges of a phenomenological account of spatiality lie. I will summarize two central

⁷⁹ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 146.

⁸¹ Ibid., 147.

⁸² Ibid., 146-7.

challenges and then suggest one way of understanding “place” in *Being and Time* that comes out of the discussions above.

i. I have shown how Heidegger’s discussion of equipmental spatiality and existential spatiality emphasize a particularly Dasein-centric view of spatial phenomena. All the key spatial concepts—place, region, de-severing, and space—are defined in terms of their relationship to Dasein’s possibilities and the network of relations they entail. Heidegger sees place (*Platz*) as location or position within a system of relations determined by Dasein’s project. The challenge for this account is to show how such a project- or possibility-based understanding of place can take into account the contribution of entities themselves to spatial states of affair. For instance, we may ask in what ways entities lend themselves to being placed somewhere. A similar question can be asked with regards to region. If region is the unifying context of a group of places, are entities in that region related to each other in ways other than being part of the same “whither” that arises from Dasein’s possibility. These are phenomenologically relevant questions. As much as we understand our environment according to our projects and practices, this environment (and the entities therein) also strikes us as not exhausted by use and significance.

ii. While Heidegger quickly dismisses the notion of distance (which is based on the property of extendedness) as secondary or derivative, his acknowledgement of the extendedness that characterizes Dasein—that is,

body⁸³—shows that his account of spatiality is not fully developed. More importantly, if spatial phenomena such as nearness and farness are related, at least to some degree, to human capacity, phenomenally this capacity cannot be understood only in terms of cognitive reach and practical priorities (that is, the two modes of de-severance). The limitations imposed by human body in reaching out to another entity is a central aspect of this capacity.

iii. As I have argued, the two main spatial concepts in Heidegger's account—place (*Platz*) and region (*Gegend*)—do not represent our ordinary understanding of these terms. In English, what we call “place” is more often any area or locality, rather than a location or position, which is what *Platz* signifies. For this reason, the translation of *Platz* as “place” is misleading. What is more place-like (in the English sense of the word) is *Gegend*. Although I noted above that Heidegger's use of *Gegend*, focused as it is on the wherein of understanding, is not recognizable in ordinary terms, what the word describes comes closest to what we call “place.” A place is usually comprised of various entities, which all have positions or locations within it. For instance, a house, a workshop, the woods, a neighborhood, a city square, etc. could all be called places. Heidegger's understanding of *Gegend* as an equipmental context applies to these places. The proposal that we see *Gegend* as “place” serves an important function within the context of my exposition and analysis of the various phenomenological accounts of place. Labelling what could be construed as

⁸³ In a parenthetical remark, Heidegger notes that “This ‘bodily nature’ hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here.” *Ibid.*, 143.

“place” in each account keeps in our view the phenomenon being investigated and also enables a comparison of its various accounts.

Concerning the second point, Heidegger does not, in his philosophical career, discuss the corporeality of Dasein.⁸⁴ This issue is taken up by Merleau-Ponty, discussed later in this chapter. But Heidegger explores the material aspect of entities, particularly in his discussion of art and technology. Such materiality, he admits, shows entities as partially beyond the relational context that defines worldhood. The conception of place in Heidegger’s later philosophy can be understood in terms of this richer understanding of entities, which now have a constitutive material dimension in addition to being a part of human projects.

The Artwork and *Das Offen*

The two insights on spatiality gleaned from *Being and Time* point to the possible challenges a phenomenological account of place faces: (1) showing how “*Platz*” (place understood as location) and “*Gegend*” (place understood as region) are not merely a function of the referential totality determined by a user’s possibilities, and (2) showing how the notions of near and far are related, not only to affective priorities of a concerned being, but also to some notion of bodily exist-

⁸⁴ Heidegger appears to indicate that he would eventually talk about the “bodily nature” of Dasein when he says, in a parenthetical remark, that “This ‘bodily nature’ hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here.” But he does not.

tence. I take these challenges as related to the two aspects of spatiality discussed in *Being and Time*. While the problem with the concepts of *Platz* and *Gegend* speak to something essential about the spatiality of entities in the world, the idea of nearness or de-severance relates to how humans spatially engage with those entities. In this and the next section, I discuss how the notions of *Platz*, *Gegend*, and nearness undergo substantial changes in Heidegger's works following *Being and Time*. Because Heidegger does not discuss the role of the human body in spatiality, a discussion of that aspect of space and place will only be taken up in the section on Merleau-Ponty.

Within the context of *Being and Time*, *Platz* (along with *Gegend*) signifies the spatiality of a particular kind of entity: the ready-to-hand. A piece of equipment's "place" (*Platz*) is decided by the possible projects of a user. For this reason, a turn in Heidegger's thinking of spatiality can be seen in his discussions of entities that do not have ready-to-hand being. Artworks, since they are not tied to an equipmental context centered on a user, can serve as a model for an entirely different relation to entities than is exemplified by a tool. In his essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger discusses not only the essence of an artwork, but also how humans are in the world, amid beings. Whereas in *Being and Time* equipment served as a model for understanding the human-entity relation generally, here artwork takes on such an exemplary role. Along with a new sense of relation to entities, and thus a new understanding of "world," artwork points to a revised notion of spatiality. A brief discussion of a few central points in the essay will

shed light on Heidegger's changing understanding of spatiality. More specifically, the following discussion will show how a significant revision in the notion of world sets the stage for a new understanding of place.

World and Earth

In "The Origin," which was originally delivered as a lecture in 1935, Heidegger aims to inquire after an artwork. Any artwork, he notes, has a "thingly character" (*Dinghafte*), without which it would not exist as an actual work. An architectural work needs stone (or other building material), for instance, and a carving needs wood. Even if we take "art" to be a symbolic element that is combined with a "thingly" element, the latter still remains that which is shaped by the artist to manifest the symbol.⁸⁵ While artworks and tools are usually called "things" (*Dinge*), Heidegger notes that for the thingly nature of things to come to light, we must inquire about what appear to be "mere" things. He claims, "It is mere things, excluding even utensils, that count as things in the proper sense ... It is in reference to these that the thingness of things must be determinable. This determination enables us to characterize what it is that is thingly as such."⁸⁶ In the history of Western philosophy, Heidegger argues, there have been three interpretations of the "thingness of the thing." But all of these interpretations, he concludes after a brief survey, fail to get to the thingness of things, either because

⁸⁵ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 145-6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

they apply to any being whatsoever and not just to the mere thing,⁸⁷ they falsely claim that human senses have direct access to thingness,⁸⁸ or their concept of thingness is unjustifiably derived from the prevailing concept of equipment.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, for his own investigation, Heidegger takes a cue from the last interpretation, noting that since equipment has a “peculiar intermediate position between thing and work,” it is particularly suitable to shed light on both.

In examining a piece of equipment, Heidegger makes use of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of shoes. Noting that they are peasant shoes, he describes how the depicted shoes intimate the world of the peasant. As equipment, the shoes are defined by their usefulness, but Heidegger claims that “this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential Being of the equipment. We call it reliabili-

⁸⁷ Heidegger takes this view as claiming that a thing “is that around which the properties have assembled.” More formally, this view sees “the thing as the substance with its accidents ...” Apart from the possibility that this thing-concept was derived from a propositional structure of subject-predicate, this interpretation fails to distinguish between various kinds of entities (things, equipment, artwork), all of which are assumed to have the same structure. *Ibid.*, 149-50.

⁸⁸ According to Heidegger, this interpretation takes “The thing is the *aisthēton*, that which is perceptible by sensations in the senses belonging to sensibility” leading to common view that “a thing is nothing but the unity of a manifold of what is given in the senses.” However, Heidegger argues, “We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things—as this thing-concept alleges, rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane ... Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves.” *Ibid.*, 151-2.

⁸⁹ In this last thing-concept, the thingly element is taken to be matter, which takes various forms, thus accounting for different kinds of entities (things of nature, equipment, or artwork). But this interpretation has its source in an understanding of equipment, where usefulness determines the form and matter to be used for a particular entity. Since these two determinations are necessary for equipment, the matter-form structure “readily presents itself immediately intelligible constitution of every being.” Heidegger argues that even within the sphere of equipment, the thingly aspect (left over after the usefulness is stripped away) “is not actually defined in its ontological character.” *Ibid.*, 155-6.

ty.”⁹⁰ It is this reliability, not mere usefulness, that defines the relation between a peasant and her shoes. Indeed, Heidegger claims that usefulness of equipment is “only the essential consequence of reliability.”⁹¹ Heidegger does not elaborate on the distinction between reliability and usefulness, noting only that they are correlated: when a piece of equipment becomes useless, its reliability vanishes.⁹² It is possible, however, to flesh out the implied difference.

Reliability, Heidegger claims, “first gives to the simple world its security and assures to the earth the freedom of its steady thrust.”⁹³ The idea of security of “world” is here juxtaposed with the freedom of “earth.” The former indicates the way the shoes relate to the peasant’s world, not only in their significance as dependable equipment, but also as part of the peasant’s capacity to engage in her environment. The shoes are integral to the referential totality that constitutes the work environment, which in turn defines the farmer’s world. At the same time, the shoes are themselves “protected in the *world* of the peasant woman.”⁹⁴ The shoes show themselves as what they are only within the world of the peasant. In other words, the mode of equipmental being is tied to a particular world.⁹⁵ This idea of “security of world” refers back to the account of the human-entity relationship in *Being & Time*, that is, to the structure of Being-in-the-world generally,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 159-60. The complete sentence refers to equipment in general: “This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant.”

⁹⁵ For instance, a farmer in a village in Nepal who has never seen or heard of a thresher would see the machine not as a piece of equipment, but a curiosity.

and of concerned de-severing specifically. In that text, we saw how a concerned discovery of entities makes them a part of the relational network that is worldhood. This concern is in turn a part of, and guided by, the world disclosed by Dasein's temporality. In the case of the painting of the shoes, the shoes are also part of a "referential totality": a relational context that constitutes not just the work environment of the peasant, but weaves together the broader dimensions of her being-in-the-world (for instance, her hopes, beliefs, memories, etc.). However, instead of emphasizing how (Dasein's) world informs the discovery of particular entities, as was the case with de-severance, Heidegger here describes how the (peasant's) world itself is brought to light by an entity (shoes) that is a part of that world. The reversed emphasis is apparent in the fact the temporal dimensions of the peasant's existence, mentioned briefly in the occasional mention of hopes and memories, are discussed only in reference to the shoes. Following *Being and Time*, we should have expected the peasant's relation to the shoes to be guided by the temporalization of her future and past. These dimensions would come together (or "temporalize") to disclose the present world where the shoes are discovered as ready-to-hand, that is, in their relation to the current disclosedness of Dasein. However, within the context of Heidegger's discussion of artwork, a piece of equipment is more than merely ready-to-hand; in its reliability, it points to the world in which multiple dimensions of the peasant's life are opened up, brought into relation, and thus secured for engagement by the equipment. Heidegger goes on to say that it is not just "in the picture that we notice all

this" (that is, we notice that reliability gives world its security) but that the peasant "knows all this without noticing or reflecting."⁹⁶ An artwork only brings to relief what is implicitly present in everyday life: that things like shoes (or any equipment) constantly refer to, and thus "secure," a world. The world *is*, we could say, by virtue of the entities that secure it.⁹⁷

But reliability, as the essence of equipment, goes beyond giving the world its security. It also "assures to the earth the freedom of its steady thrust." The idea of "steady thrust" of earth is only clarified later on in the essay when Heidegger discusses the active "work" character of the artwork through which the reliability of the equipment comes to fore. Apart from opening up a world, and thus making "space for ... spaciousness" (I shall return to this point below), the artwork "sets forth" the earth. The setting forth of earth allows the latter's steady thrust. But how are we to understand this image? Looking at the difference between artwork and equipment would be helpful here. In stone equipment, such as an axe, "the stone is used up": in our relation to the equipment the stone itself "disappears" in making way for its usefulness. An axe appears in its usability and its use does not require a consideration of the material of which it is made. The axe's materiality does not thrust itself to the foreground. But in an artwork, such as an ancient Greek temple, the stone is set forth as what it is. As Heidegger argues, "By contrast the temple-work, in setting up a world, does not

⁹⁶ Ibid., 160.

⁹⁷ Although the focus of Heidegger's discussion here are things that are equipment, it would be plausible to say that the range of entities that secure the world extends beyond tools.

cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the open region [*Offen*] of the work's world."⁹⁸ This "setting forth" (*Herstellung*) needs to be distinguished from a "setting up" (*Aufstellung*), which signifies the opening up of a world and is also done by a piece of equipment (as discussed above in the notion of "securing" a world). The world that is opened or set up by the temple—the ways in which it signifies the relationship between humans and gods, or between the various aspects of the communal life—relies on its material foundation, that is, the stone. Setting forth, in contrast to a mere setting up, emphasizes this reliance on the material of the work of art, be it stone, wood, color, or metal. The material is what is set forth by the setting up done by the artwork.⁹⁹

Although the artwork's material (or the earthy aspect) is brought into the open region of the work's world, this materiality does not therefore become a constituent of the world. If the "world" is defined by intelligibility and "overt-ness of beings," earth is defined by what "denies us any penetration into it" and so "shatters every attempt to penetrate it." In setting forth the stone, the artwork constantly points to its impenetrability. Unlike the world, "The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹⁹ Here it is important to note that Heidegger's use of "earth" cannot be equated to "material." As I discuss below, earth is the self-secluding element of a work of art. It could thus mean something other than a material (such as the tone of sound that is self-secluding in relation to the melody that it helps produce). Nonetheless, in the context of the temple example, this self-secluding element happens to be the material the temple is built with, that is, stone.

essentially undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up.”¹⁰⁰ To set forth the stone that grounds the temple is to bring to light how the stone remains something uncanny, still unassimilated into the network of relations that is the world. As Heidegger writes, “To set forth the earth means to bring it into the open region as the self-secluding.”¹⁰¹ The earth as the still unintelligible basis of intelligibility comes “into” the “open region” (*das Offen*), thus bringing into opposition the familiar and the unfamiliar. This opposition or “strife” is what distinguishes an artwork from a piece of equipment. The thingly element of an artwork such as the temple, which can now be more precisely seen as its materiality or its earthy character,¹⁰² is not lost in usability. The stone disappears in an axe, but it remains as an active participant in the “working” of the temple and, in this sense, has a “steady thrust.” In thus pointing to something that, owing to the thingly or earthy aspect of things (of any kind), remains concealed in the opening up of a world, the artwork represents the nature of truth.¹⁰³ For this reason, the truth of the equipment—its reliability—becomes visible only in an artwork. The pair of shoes in Van Gogh’s painting not only refers to and thus secures a world, but the shoes’ earthy aspect also points to that

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 172.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 173.

¹⁰² Ibid., 194.

¹⁰³ As Heidegger claims, “Truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-revealed, the un-uncovered, in the sense of concealment ... Truth essentially occurs as such in the opposition of clearing and [] concealing ... Truth is the primal strife in which, always in some particular way, the open region is won within which everything stands and from which everything withholds itself that shows itself and withdraws itself as a being.” I will not discuss Heidegger’s idea of truth here. Ibid., 185.

which remains concealed (from the world that is opened). This earthy character of entities comes to fore—or has a “steady thrust”—within an artwork since only these “works” are capable of actively holding together “world” and “earth” simultaneously.

However, although an artwork brings this duality of world and earth to light, our everyday dealings with equipment already contains an awareness of the earthy character of entities. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger insisted that a piece of equipment only presents itself in relation to our projects; one sees and deals with a piece of equipment as a part of the work context that is centered around the user’s project. But in “The Origin,” Heidegger suggests that the user not only sees the tool in terms of a world, but is also aware of the concealedness inherent in the equipment: “By virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is made privy to the silent call of the earth ... World and earth exist for her, and for those who are with her in her mode of being, only thus—in the equipment.”¹⁰⁴ The peasant, in using her world-securing shoes, also feels the ways in which earth keeps to itself while allowing for certain manifestations: “In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field.”¹⁰⁵ The literal refusal of desolate earth is a quintessential example of “earth” that counters the unconcealment represented by world. This opposition between world and earth, moreover, is seen in our relationship not just to equipment, but to any entity. As Heidegger claims,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 160.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 159.

“Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presencing, in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealment.”¹⁰⁶ The truth (of strife between world and earth) that is explicitly present in an artwork governs all our encounters with beings and thus defines what it means to be amid beings, that is, within an openness of beings.

Das Offen

This background enables us to engage with the spatial terms in this essay. The artwork “works,” according to Heidegger, in that it sets up or opens a world. For instance, the Greek temple “gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves.” Since humans always dwell in a particular intelligibility, or “overtness” or presence of beings, the artwork explicitly brings this world to light (this also happens, though in a non-reflective manner, with equipment). It is through this “opening up of a world” that “all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits.”¹⁰⁷ This opening of a world establishes the “open region” (*das Offen*) by “making space” (or “clearing space,” *Einräumen*). As Heidegger explains, “‘To make space for’ means here especially to liberate the free space of the open region and to establish it in its structure.”¹⁰⁸ The “free space” here translates “*das Freie*,” which simply means “the free”; and the “open region” refers to *das Offen* or the open. Thus “opening”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 170.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and “free” are not ordinary spatial terms, as if there were a physical field of intelligibility, with a measurable boundary, created by and around an artwork. If humans dwell among beings, these entities must be disclosed in certain sense, that is, they must be in an openness. It is this openness that is brought to light by the working of an artwork. The “open,” moreover, is to be understood in opposition to “closed” or “concealed.” Such concealedness or covertness of beings implies a lack of intelligibility and thus the limits of our relationship with them. Note that although the translation explicitly adds spatial terms that are not in the original German, there is indeed a spatial undertone to the idea of an artwork “setting up” a world. The nearness and remoteness of entities, and not just their openness, depend on the “open.” Spatiality in the ordinary sense of measuring distances and establishing locations must be understood as depending on the disclosedness of beings, that is, on the open. (I will return to the idea of nearness and spatiality below.)

The “open” in this essay seems to be similar to the disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*) of world that falls out of Dasein’s temporality in *Being and Time*. There, Heidegger claims that “the uncoveredness (*Entdecktheit*) of entities within-the-world is *grounded* in the world’s disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*)¹⁰⁹. But disclosedness is also that basic character of Dasein according to which it *is* its ‘there.’ Disclosedness is constituted by state-of-mind, understanding, and discourse ...” Thus disclosedness, the “there” (*Da*), though similar in its ontological nature and

¹⁰⁹ *Being and Time*, 263.

function to the “open,” is cleared by Dasein’s way of being (notwithstanding the being-in-the-world nature of Dasein). In the Artwork essay, by contrast, the “open” is shown to arise from an artwork when the artwork “works,” that is, when it reveals the active strife between world and earth that is operative in our encounter with any entity. (We must note here that such “opening” or “lighting” of world is also accomplished by equipment, but this capacity only becomes apparent through an artwork such as Van Gogh’s painting of shoes or any artwork that “works”) A more important difference between disclosedness and the open is that the latter is only one essential feature of an artwork. Whereas Dasein is its disclosedness, an artwork is not just the setting up of a world. Together with the opening up of a world, which is a setting up (*Aufstellung*), there is also a bringing forth of the work material, which is a setting forth (*Herstellung*). As discussed above, this materiality is inconspicuous in the case of equipment (since its “use” function exhausts a user’s relationship to it); an artwork, by contrast, brings the material to light together with the world that is opened up. The material aspect of the artwork becomes conspicuous as that which evades intelligibility. But since earth is what grounds the intelligibility granted by the world-opening character of artworks, the two dimensions need to be understood as belonging together in an intimate way. It is this connection between world and earth that distinguishes Heidegger’s account of the former in relation to the artwork. In *Being and Time*, world is not grounded in earth, and the latter is not what is preserved as something undisclosable in the world.

An important consequence of this intimacy between what is disclosed and what remains concealed is that the idea of world is radically transformed. World can now be seen as the “open” that is still not exhausted in such openness. In other words, “the world is not simply the open region that corresponds to clearing”; it is based on “something not mastered, something concealed, confusing.”¹¹⁰ The concealed basis shows the world as an active “opening up”—a constant play between unconcealment and concealment—and thus points to the possibility that this *Offen* is neither absolute nor static. The *Offen* depends on concealment¹¹¹ and, as Heidegger claims, to it “belongs a world and the earth.”¹¹² Concealment, moreover, makes unconcealment inherently insecure and transformable. An artwork, in holding together world and earth, brings this question-worthiness of the familiar world to light. In doing so, it helps us discover a world that is not apparent in our everyday dealings with entities. To witness art is to be transported to this other world where the creative projection of the artist brings together the known and the unknown (and thus transforms the known).

The “open” that supposedly grounds spatiality is to be understood in this renewed sense of “world” that is shown by an artwork. In order to see this connection, we would need to revisit the crucial passages on spatiality. Heidegger claims that “By the opening up of a world, all things gain their lingering and has-

¹¹⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 180.

¹¹¹ As Heidegger claims in his discussion of the two kinds of concealment, “the open place in the midst of beings, the clearing, is never a rigid stage with a permanently raised curtain on which the play of beings runs its course. Rather, the clearing happens only as this double concealment.” *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 180.

tening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits ... In a world's worlding is gathered ... spaciousness ... A work, by being a work, makes space for that spaciousness."¹¹³ The open makes possible both the temporality and spatiality of entities. While their temporality is indicated by their lingering and hastening, their spatiality is indicated by their remoteness and nearness. Entities have a temporal stay and can be located somewhere within this opening. The nearness and farness of entities, in turn, are to be understood in terms of the "spaciousness" granted by the artwork. In the discussion of *Being and Time*, we noted that de-severance brings entities within a relation to Dasein and that an entity can be near or far only once it is de-severed. However, while de-severance is centered on Dasein and its possibilities, in the context of a work of art it is the artwork which creates the site of intelligibility, and thus establishes the measures of near and far. Since this spatiality is centered around a work of art, which has materiality in a constitutive sense,¹¹⁴ it is not the same as the spatiality grounded by Dasein's projects (and possibilities). Dasein's world is never defined by its relation to "earth" or to anything that resists world's unconcealing character. The system of relations defining Dasein's world is not constantly in strife with concealedness. For Dasein, an entity is either a part of the referential system or is not; the entity's unconcealedness within the system is not defined by a constitutive concealment, the way it is for an artwork. Therefore, the spatiality that rests on

¹¹³ The last sentence translated here is: "*Indem ein Werk Werk ist, räumt es jene Geräumigkeit ein.*" Ibid., 170.

¹¹⁴ A work of art is "brought forth out of this or that work material—stone, wood, metal, color, language, tone" (ibid., 171).

Dasein's world (in *Being and Time*) is different from that which rests on *das Offen* brought about by an artwork. And the root of this difference lies in the difference between world construed in the context of Dasein's world and the same concept as construed within the context of *das Offen* (as I have argued above).

We can now see how the two central aspects of spatiality mentioned at the end of the last section must be revised to accommodate the new understanding of world and *das Offen*. The idea of the "place" (*Platz*) of an entity, as discussed in the previous section, cannot be understood simply as its location within a system of relations, that is, within Dasein's world. Entities can indeed be in a particular position depending on our projects and priorities, but that only reflects their world securing aspect. World, as we know from the discussion of an artwork, is also always tied to earth. This earthy dimension of entities poses a challenge to the idea of spatiality that is reduced to a referential system. Since earth is never fully unconcealed, an entity resists complete assimilation into Dasein's world. An entity is indeed in a particular location within the context of a system of relation, but that position, since it is based only on Dasein's projects, does not fully articulate its "place" (*Platz*). Its earth aspect must also figure into its "where." Indeed, in the case of the temple example, we see that its earthy aspect, the stone of which it is built, is what anchors it in a place, and thus situates it within a totality of entities (of which a particular referential totality is just one dimension).

The importance of an entity's earthy aspect for its spatiality becomes apparent when we shed the assumption that *Platz* and *Gegend* are to be determined on the basis of Dasein's projects and possibilities. The Dasein-centric view can dispense with an entity's materiality because it only sees the entity in terms of Dasein's project. Such focus fails to account for the "earth" that anchors the relational possibilities of an entity. Changing the emphasis, so that we now see world in terms of its relation to earth and not exclusively in terms of Dasein's goals, we find that an entity's "place" (*Platz*) is somewhere within the constant and dynamic relation between world and earth. Thus, to the spatiality of *Being and Time*, the idea of earth adds a missing dimension, which is construed as materiality at least in the case of buildings and other physical entities.

Although we have been able to infer much about "place" (*Platz*) from *das Offen*, and noted the shift in its meaning demanded by a revised understanding of "world," we have not touched on the other main spatial concept, that of region (*Gegend*). At the end of the previous section, I noted that we should understand *Gegend* and not *Platz* (which denotes location or position) as our everyday notion of place. We need thus to ask: what could be termed "place" as we understand it in everyday life in Heidegger's brief account of spatial concepts in the artwork essay? Heidegger does not explicitly discuss *Gegend* in this essay. He does, however, broach the notion of "sites" (*Stätte*), which has much in common with *Gegend*.

In the context of discussing truth, Heidegger claims that “only the openness of beings [] first affords the possibility of a somewhere and of sites filled by present beings”¹¹⁵ (“*doch erst die Offenheit des Seienden die Möglichkeit eines Irgendwo und einer von Anwesendem erfüllten Stätte ergibt*”). “Somewhere” (*Irgendwo*) and “site” (*Stätte*) are grounded in the openness of beings, which is not simply the intelligibility of beings. The openness of beings “belong[s] together” with the “establishment in the open region [*das Offen*].”¹¹⁶ The latter notion is also referred to as the “fixing in place of truth,” which is accomplished by the “use of the earth.” Thus the openness of beings is at the same time an establishing of this openness in earth, which is the self-secluding element that defies the openness of the world. The fundamental idea in these images is that truth concerns particular beings because it happens as a strife between the concealedness grounded in an artwork’s materiality and the openness that relates that work to a world. The rift design that represents the belonging together of world and earth, Heidegger writes, “must set itself back into the gravity of stone, the mute hardness of wood, the dark glow of colors.” Sites result from openness grounded in earth; they are created by entities that allow the rift design to set in owing to their earthy, material character. In other words, sites relate to *das Offen* (construed not just as world, but also as having a constant relation to the earth) and not simply to *Erschlossenheit*. Sites are the “somewhere” filled by entities revealed in a meaningful relation to each other in the perpetual strife between world and earth; they are thus the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 186.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

“place” where entities could be located *both* in relation to each other and in relation to an anchor that is established by the creation and working of an artwork. Sites, therefore, resemble what we understand as places.

However, the places we inhabit are not usually a product of the working of the work of art. This difference, and thus the limited sense in which sites can represent places of everyday life, becomes apparent in Heidegger’s examples. The sculpture of a god is “not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realize how the god looks; rather, it is a work that lets god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself.”¹¹⁷ The sculpture is a site for god’s presence for the people who practice votive offering. Similarly, a Greek tragedy is not simply a “staging,” but the happening of “the battle of the new gods against the old ...” The stage is the site of the battle, and the audience of this battle, as witnesses, are also at and of this site. (Indeed, the presence of an audience, whose “outlook on themselves” is shaped by these tragedies, is essential to the creation of the site by the art work.) In these and other examples (such as that of the temple) sites are presented as culturally significant places, precisely because they are opened by culturally significant works of art, that is, works of art that, in working, are the active holding together of world and earth for a people.

At the end of the last section I noted that one of the two major challenges to Heidegger’s spatial concepts in *Being and Time* relates to their complete dependence on Dasein’s possibilities. In the discussion above, I have shown how

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 168.

such a Dasein-centric determination of both *Platz* and *Gegend* is overcome by a revised understanding of world, which is now thought together with the earth. But this shift in the notion of world comes within the context of a limited number of entities—that is, works of art—which means that sites are restricted to them. Places (as we ordinarily experience them), however, are not just centered around works of art, and thus we need a more general account of place than is represented by sites. The next section discusses how this concern is implicitly addressed in Heidegger's later philosophy.

Things and Places

In the last section, I noted how the notion of “world” in the artwork essay is not the same as in *Being and Time*. In his renewed understanding of the word, Heidegger sees world as essentially enjoined with “earth.” As a result, spatiality, which was understood as grounded in world in *Being and Time*, needed to be rethought in terms of the world-earth duality. Moreover, the idea of “world” changed significantly since it is now understood to be centered around entities, not on the structure of Dasein. These two developments lead to the idea that “sites” (*Stätte*) are created by entities. Heidegger, however, does not elaborate on this point in his essay on art. A more extensive discussion of sites and places is present in Heidegger's later works. In these writings, spatial concepts rely on an even richer notion of “world,” which is now seen not just in relation to earth, but

as the coming together of a fourfold composed of earth, sky, humans, and divinities. The kind of entities in focus also changes. In the “The Origin of the Work of Art,” only a work of art could manifest the constant strife of world and earth; in the later works, Heidegger sees things (*Dinge*) in general as having this capacity (though not exactly the same as in the artwork and not always realized). Heidegger also explicitly claims that site, place, and space are all founded on a thing’s essential nature, which is the interplay of the fourfold. A brief discussion of these developments in “Building Dwelling Thinking” and “The Thing” is thus essential to understanding Heidegger’s conception of place and space.

Heidegger’s key example of an *Ort* in “Building Dwelling Thinking” involves a bridge. Heidegger writes that the bridge:

does not first come to a [*Ort*] to stand in it; rather, a [*Ort*] comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge. The bridge is a thing (*Ding*); it gathers the fourfold, but in such a way that it allows a site for the fourfold. By this site are determined the localities (*Plätze*) and ways by which a space (*Raum*) is provided for. Only things that are locations in this manner allow for spaces.¹¹⁸

Spaces are grounded in things of a particular kind. To be clear, these spaces do not refer merely to the spatiality of entities, but also to the space in which humans live: “The space through which we go daily are provided by locations (*Orte*); their nature is grounded in things of the type of buildings.”¹¹⁹ Humans live in spaces that are grounded in things. In some revealing ways, this claim contrasts with Heidegger’s idea in *Being and Time* that the spatiality of entities is grounded in Dasein’s being-in-the-world:

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 154.

We must therefore determine in what sense space is a constituent for that world which has in turn been characterized as an item in the structure of Being-in-the-world. In particular, we must show how the aroundness of the environment, the specific spatiality of entities encountered in the environment, is founded upon the worldhood of the world.¹²⁰

The worldhood on which spatiality of entities is founded is “the structure of that to which Dasein assigns itself,” which in turn is rooted in Dasein’s understanding of its possibilities.¹²¹ Heidegger explains not only an entity’s place,¹²² but also Dasein’s spatiality in terms of worldhood. In the discussion of Heidegger’s essay on art, we noted how the idea of world is revised to include a relation to earth (which is the material aspect of a work of art). As I have noted above, an important aspect of this revision is that world is not centered around Dasein and its possibilities. But this change in the focal entity is not unexpected, and for two reasons. First, when it comes to its essential structure, Dasein is never understood in terms of its body (or its material aspect). Dasein could not serve as the site for the opposing play of earth and world. Second, if we are to take the artwork essay seriously, it represents a revision of Heidegger’s notion of the ready-to-hand, so that instead of simple usefulness, equipment is now defined in terms of reliability. With the notion of reliability, Heidegger suggests that even a piece of equipment could intimate the strife between world and earth to us. As discussed in the last section, the farmer’s shoes are reliable because they both open up a world and point to the self-secluding earth.

¹²⁰ Heidegger, Martin: *Being and Time*, 134-5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹²² “Occupying a place must be conceived as a desevering of the environmentally ready-to-hand into a region which has been circumspectively discovered in advance,” *ibid.*, 142.

However, despite the fact that equipment has this possibility, he claims that the strife only comes to light in a work of art. Although his examples, such as that of an ancient Greek temple, suggest that sites are established only by an artwork, there is little in the artwork essay to exclude the interpretation that any entity (even Dasein, if it could be conceived in terms of corporeality) could serve to ground spatiality. What is essential to such grounding is that the apparently free-floating “world”—since it is understood only in terms of openness of beings—be anchored in something, and thus provide a “somewhere” and a “site” by situating the world in relation to a physical environment (such as a temple and entities around it). For this reason, Heidegger is able, in later work, to generalize the realm of things that could “work” like a work of art, that is, provide a site for opening up of a world and setting forth of the earth. In allowing for a site of the strife between world and earth, entities ground the sites or places where humans can dwell.

From Building to Nearing

Buildings are one example of things that are dwelling places. More generally, Heidegger sees “dwelling” as tied to things because only in things can humans preserve the “fourfold” of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Lest we think that dwelling is another name for “being-in” (which has the two Dasein-centric modes of state of mind and understanding) discussed in *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s claims that: “dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of

the fourfold into things.”¹²³ The fourfold can be what it is only within things, which are of two kinds: those that grow by themselves or those that humans construct.¹²⁴ This centrality of things is confirmed when Heidegger claims that the world *happens*—since it is not static—only when the thing is properly itself, that is, when the fourfold comes together in it. The thing “things world.”¹²⁵ A discussion of a thing’s “worlding” character and how it relates to the spatial idea of nearness would shed light on the bridge example noted above.

In “The Thing,” Heidegger defines the idea of world: “[The] appropriating mirror-play of the simple onefold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, we call the world.” The world presences as an active mirroring of the four elements with each other. To be sure, Heidegger already thinks of world in an active sense in “The Origin” essay. The “working” of the work of art is the establishing and maintaining of the strife between world and earth. The world presences as this strife, and not simply as a disclosedness of beings. However, Heidegger’s addition of mortals, divinities, and sky to this “worlding” is intriguing. Speculations abound as to the meaning and importance of the fourfold. I will not venture into a detailed interpretation of the fourfold here because the key point I want to emphasize does not depend on it. The four elements come together as “gathering” (*Versammlung*), which Heidegger notes is the Old High German word for “thing.” More specifically, it meant a gathering to deliberate on a “con-

¹²³ “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 149.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 149. For Heidegger, the reverse is also true: things can be what they are only as they gather the fourfold.

¹²⁵ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 178.

tested matter." Heidegger sees this etymological detail as containing the true nature of "things." Things are not just a compound of matter and properties, but an active gathering of the four essential elements. Moreover, as with the gathering over a contested matter, where the issue is yet to be settled, a thing is not already established before the gathering. The unique and active interplay of the fourfold first establishes the thing as a thing, that is, as a particular gathering. The thing is nothing else but this gathering: "The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold's stay, its while, into something that stays for a while into this thing, that thing."¹²⁶ The active nature of such a gathering also speaks to temporality: the presencing of a thing has its "while," its time. It should be noted that it is not the thing that gathers, as if first there was a thing and then it gathered the elements around it. It is the active, verbal "thinging" that gathers. In this sense, "thinging" and "gathering" could be used interchangeably. In such a gathering there is the earth, the material element that grounds any openness of beings, and there are mortals, who, by receiving it or participating in it, make this disclosedness possible.¹²⁷ The sky, as the realm that embodies the passing of time,¹²⁸ reflects a thing's temporal dimension, that is, its limited presence as a gathering. And in the presencing of entities before mortals,

¹²⁶ Ibid., 172.

¹²⁷ "Mortals are who they are, as mortals, present in the shelter of Being. They are the presencing relation to Being as Being," *ibid.*, 176. Mortals as the receiver of presencing are also the embodiment of what is presencing through the fourfold.

¹²⁸ "The sky is the sun's path, the course of the moon, the glitter of the stars, the year's seasons, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether," *ibid.*, 176.

the immortal divinities are also illuminated by contrast. In other words, the being of humans—as mortals and as dwellers among things—is made possible by the gathering, and vice versa. Temporality and spatiality are brought together in the gathering that is a thing.

Heidegger calls this active gathering “nearing” (*Nähern*): “The thing things. In thinging, it stays earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Staying, the thing brings the four, in their remoteness, near to one another. This bringing-near is nearing.”¹²⁹ The renaming of gathering as “nearing” might not seem significant at first sight, but its reference to spatiality is not an accident. Heidegger begins “The Thing” with the claim that “The frantic abolition of all distances [using technology such as television] brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance.”¹³⁰ In characterizing thinging and gathering as “nearing,” Heidegger redefines what it means to be near. This definition obviously goes against the understanding of nearness in terms of measurable distance; but, more interestingly, it differs from Heidegger’s own understanding of nearness in *Being and Time*. As I have noted above, there nearness (through de-severing) is understood to be guided solely by Dasein’s circumspection.¹³¹ Nearness is now understood in two ways, both relevant to our discussion of spatiality.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 175.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹³¹ “... bringing-close or deseverance is always a kind of concerned Being towards what is brought close and de-severed,” *ibid.*, 140. The German here might be helpful: “*die Näherung und Ent-fernung ist je besorgendes Sein zum Genäherten und Ent-fernten.*”

First, nearness is the active bringing-close of the fourfold. Without this closeness of the elements, there is no “thing.” But what does it mean for the fourfold to be close to one another? It simply means that they come into play in relation to one another, which requires that they be closely related without collapsing into one another. Such a unity in separation is necessary, as it was in the case of the strife between world and earth, to convey the complex interplay and reciprocity that make a thing what it is. Without the diversity of elements, a thing could be defined only in the same lop-sided terms seen in *Being and Time*. There, a thing is defined in terms of Dasein’s circumspection, which partially resembles the element of mortals in the fourfold. The concept of nearing (*Nähern*) allows Heidegger to avoid a reductionist view of a thing in which priority is given either to some kind of (objective) material presence or to the way something appears according to Dasein’s self-assigned (or given) possibilities.

But *Nähern* has another equally important function. Since human dwelling is defined in terms of their stay with things and since humans as mortals are one element in the fourfold, nearing also revises what it means for humans to be near a thing. Humans are near a thing in receiving the fourfold and preserving it. We “inhabit nearness” when “we preserve the thing *qua* thing.”¹³² To be near something is to be a part of the dynamic play of the four elements. In being a part of the play, we recognize that it is humans that are determined by the thing as fourfold.¹³³ As Heidegger claims, “In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we

¹³² Ibid., 179.

¹³³ At the same time, without humans, the thing as fourfold is not possible.

are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones.”¹³⁴ An important aspect of being conditioned is that we dwell in the places created by things.

Gathering Place

With this background, we are now in a position to revisit the bridge example from “Building Dwelling Thinking.” A place (*Ort*) first comes into existence because of the bridge. While “*Ort*” is sometimes translated as “location” or “locale” (as in the Hofstadter translation cited above), it might not be the most suitable word. We generally use “location” when talking about a point on something, such as on a map, in a book, or on our body. In German, “*Stelle*” would be a much better choice for such a position or spot. *Ort*, on the other hand, signifies “place,” such as a “meeting place” (*Ort des Treffens*) or a “place of action” (*Ort der Handlung*), or a “crime scene” (*Tatort*). Since the bridge is not a particular point in, but instead allows for, space (*Raum*), “place” is a better translation of “*Ort*.” To be sure, ambiguity exists regarding the use of “place” too, and “position” or “location” can be synonyms of “place.” But a distinction must be made between the two usages for the sake of clarity and to reflect Heidegger’s distinctions in the German. I will thus use this revised translation for *Ort* (although I will use the word untranslated in most instances). Also, regarding the usual way of distinguishing place from position or spot, we can say that there are various “locations” or “positions” in a place. There is a location, for instance, where a bridge

¹³⁴ Ibid., 178-9.

meets a river bank (treating the bridge as an *Ort* and not as just any structure). Heidegger calls these locations “*Plätze*,” but the translation of *Plätze* as “localities,” with its root in “locale,” further clouds the distinction between a particular location and its surrounding context. I will thus use “location” for “*Platz*,” so that we can say that there are locations within a place (rather than localities within locales).

The bridge, as a thing, first establishes a place. This place determines localities (*Plätze*) in and through which humans move. Space (*Raum*) is also determined by place: when locations (*Plätze*) are treated merely as “positions” (*Stellen*) so that distances between them could be measured, we have a three dimensional space. Heidegger notes that the bridge, as a “thing,” gathers the fourfold, “but in such a way that it allows a site [] for the fourfold.”¹³⁵ The emphasis here is on the bridge, or any other building, being a particular kind of gathering. It appears that Heidegger wants to draw a distinction between things that are places and others that are not. He claims that “Things which, as [places] (*Orte*), allow a site (*Stätte*) we now in anticipation call buildings.” There are, therefore, things that allow for a site and thus a place, and things that do not. In exploring this distinction, we can get a sense of Heidegger’s understanding of place.

Heidegger explains the site-creating phenomenon in the following way:

“The *Ort* makes room for the fourfold in a double sense. The *Ort* admits the fourfold and it installs the fourfold. The two—making room in the sense of admitting

¹³⁵ Heidegger, “Building,” 152.

and in the sense of installing—belong together. As a double space-making, the *Ort* is a shelter for the fourfold or, by the same token, a house.”¹³⁶

The double sense of making room (*Einräumen*) connects the abstract with the concrete (literally, in the case of a house). The fourfold comes together, but it needs “installing” to remain what it is. Though installing connotes an action by someone, here the sense is more like the installation of a statue *somewhere*, which establishes the statue in a particular location, for instance, in a public square. The fourfold already contains elements that indicate how this installation is to be understood. More specifically, the gathering includes the element of earth. When the fourfold is “admitted” by a place, it simultaneously gets installed in earth, that is, in some kind of material, be it concrete (in a house) or wood (in a bridge). At the same time, the fourfold also includes mortals, who receive and preserve the fourfold. The fourfold is thus “installed” when it is fixed in an entity and preserved as such by humans. There is a double space making here because not only the fourfold, but humans, too, find a place. Indeed, to say that the fourfold gathers at a site (or is installed) is to say that place is made for humans, since they are two aspects of the same phenomenon. Place is nothing else, according to Heidegger, than the fourfold as the fourfold.

Places also allow for locations (*Plätze*). The location of an entity is to be thought in terms of places opened up by a thing. In our discussion of *Being and Time*, we had discussed how, for Heidegger, “place” (*Platz*) meant the position of an entity within Dasein’s circumspective concern, which is guided by the “for-

¹³⁶ Ibid., 155-6.

the-sake-of-which" structure of Dasein. I also argued how the latter structure is expressed in terms of "region" (*Gegend*). Places—as *Plätze*—were understood as locations within that region. We may now see that like *Gegend*, *Ort* also opens up a field of dwelling, but the latter is not centered around a constitutive structure of Dasein. More importantly, in this change in focus—from Dasein to things—we see the emergence of a notion of place (as in *Ort*) that depends on anchoring of a world in a thing, and thus in a physical environment. The spatiality of the ready-to-hand depends on Dasein, which does not rely on its body for either its constitutive structure or its spatiality. Places (*Orte*), on the other hand, do rely on a thing and entities around it.

In tracing the development of spatial ideas in Heidegger's works, I have shown how the central challenge to Heidegger's account of spatiality in *Being and Time*—that it is Dasein-centric—is first addressed, in a limited way, by the idea of *das Offen*, which is centered on works of art, and then by the idea of *Ort*, which is centered on things. In these successive accounts, I have identified the phenomenon of place as what Heidegger calls *Gegend*, site, and *Ort*, respectively. In Heidegger's works, therefore, we could discern three distinct interpretations of the idea of place. We may now see this change in terms of Heidegger's changing notion of that which grounds a place. *Gegend* is grounded in Dasein's possibilities, site is grounded in the world-earth rift design that is the essence of a work of art, and *Ort* is grounded in the nearness of the fourfold that gathers as a thing. In each case, the idea of ground can also be understood in terms of the cen-

tral entity/entities or elements. Of the three accounts, the idea of fourfold provides the broadest foundation of place: not just earth and world, but mortals and divinities also figure into the gathering that constitutes an *Ort*. This broadening avoids a reductionist account where place is either primarily a result of human subjectivity or entirely a function of the objectively given world.

However, although the idea of place as *Ort* avoids the shortcomings of place as *Gegend*, it does not account for some of the central aspects of the phenomenon of place. For instance, Heidegger scarcely discusses how a place is delimited in relation to other places. In general, Heidegger's account pays less attention to the plurality of places than to the constitution of a place.

Merleau-Ponty: The Primacy of Bodily Spaces

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty discusses the notion of space (*l'espace*) in two chapters: "The spatiality of one's own body and motricity" and "Space." Although he does not make the matter explicit, the key ideas in the latter chapter can only be understood in terms of those in the former. I bring our attention to this connection in order to identify Merleau-Ponty's biggest contribution to a phenomenological understanding of space: the role of the body.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger showed how spatiality is grounded in *Dasein*, which is understood as being-in-the-world. We are always already among things, so that any notion of spatiality—whether that of *Dasein* or of other enti-

ties—would have to adhere to the unitary phenomenon of being-in-the-world. In a broad sense, Merleau-Ponty makes the same point, claiming that “[the] gearing of the subject into his world [] is the origin of space.”¹³⁷ The key difference between these accounts pertains to *how* humans are amid beings. The notion of “being-in” is conceived in vastly different ways by these two thinkers. The way Dasein is in the world is different from the way a human being, with its body as a constitutive feature, is in the world.¹³⁸ Moreover, the idea of “world” itself is not the same for Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. In laying out the major ideas in Merleau-Ponty’s account of space, I will focus on these differences.

Merleau-Ponty poses a question of space by reference to two traditional answers to it. Is space something constituted by a subject? This is the case argued by Kant when he declares space to be an *a priori* form along with time. Or, is space something objectively given, occurring along with entities as if it were a container for them? This is the more commonly held empirical view of space. In the first view, according to Merleau-Ponty, we see space as “spatializing”—actively sustained by a subject; in the second, we see it as “spatialized”—that which a subject finds as given (so that entities, including humans, are found in it).¹³⁹ This dichotomy, as we will see, is false according to Merleau-Ponty.

¹³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 262.

¹³⁸ One could say that the two ways of being-in overlap. An account of how a human being is corporeally in the world does not necessarily exclude the way a Dasein is in the world. But an account of how Dasein is in the world does exclude ways in which a human being is corporeally in the world. I will discuss these ways of being-in below.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

In order to provide a phenomenological account of space, Merleau-Ponty looks at our everyday experience. But this experience is usually covered up by layers of conceptualizations that hide the fundamental phenomenon. Therefore, looking at an exceptional case where the experience of space has broken down and rebuilds itself would provide a clearer view of the phenomenon. This is the case in an experiment where subjects are made to wear goggles that reverse the normal retinal inversion.¹⁴⁰ On the first day, the subjects report seeing the landscape as inverted. On the second, they sense their own bodies as inverted. From third to seventh day, however, the body gradually appears to be upright again, especially when the subject is actively engaged in a task. And, by the fifth day, gestures do not need to be adjusted for the new orientation. When the goggles are removed, objects do not appear reversed, but the motor reactions are reversed so that the subjects extend their right hand when the left is needed.

There are two ways to explain a subject's adjustment to the inverted visual field. The first one takes the orientation as given with the contents of the visual objects. In this view, there is conflict between the orientation of the visual images and tactile field prior to the experiment and that of the visual images when wearing goggles, such as seeing one's feet up in the air. This conflict is resolved when the active subject forms new associations between the two sets of information, thus correcting the orientation mismatch. Merleau-Ponty challenges this interpretation. He argues that the feeling of new orientation of the visual field after the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 255.

goggles are put on (as deciphered from one's feet being up in the air), which is said to cause the mismatch, assumes the availability of a reference point for what is right side up. In other words, Merleau-Ponty argues that something cannot be seen as inverted if it does not originally have an orientation. But if the reference is simply the orientation before the experiment, then "the same question arises with regard to these standard fields: their mere presence does not suffice in order to provide any direction whatever."¹⁴¹ Humans, in other words, are not lamps or chairs, which have a clear orientation or a right side up. We have "nothing but sensory fields," and these do not come with an orientation. Merleau-Ponty concludes that "oriented space [] cannot be given with the contents of sensory experience or with the body in itself, since ... the objective relations, recorded upon the retina by the position of the physical image, do not determine our experience of 'up' or 'down.'"¹⁴² We are left with the question about the reference point for determining the orientated space we perceive and inhabit all the time. If space was empirically given, this question would be unnecessary.

The second explanation takes space and its orientation as constituted by the mind. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that this "intellectualist" position would not even admit that there is an inversion in the world since the mind should be able to reconfigure the orientation instantly. The period of adjustment (around seven days, in this case) seems inexplicable for this position. Therefore, neither the empiricist claim about the givenness of space, nor the intellectualist

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 257.

¹⁴² Ibid.

argument for the mental constitution of space are of any help in understanding the experiment's results.

Merleau-Ponty suggests a way of going past this dichotomy. The reference point for orientation must be able to survive the inversion of the appearances, but, at the same time, it cannot completely disregard the appearances. Thus we "need an absolute within the relative, a space that does not skate over appearances, that is anchored in them and depends upon them, but that, nevertheless, is not given with them."¹⁴³ The goal, therefore, is to attend to the "originary experience of space" prior to its interpretation in terms of either its form or its content.¹⁴⁴

Merleau-Ponty makes use of another experiment to get at this originary experience. When a subject's vision in a room is mediated by a mirror that reflects everything at 45 degrees, he is first disoriented by the obliqueness of objects around him (for instance, someone walking in front of him seems to lean on a side).¹⁴⁵ But only within a few minutes, without using his hands to explore the surrounding, the subject suddenly finds that everything in the room has been straightened up. What could explain such a change? The reorientation, Merleau-Ponty notes, is "constituted by an overall act of the perceiving subject," instead of any motor exploration, as might have been the case with the previous experiment with retinal inversion.¹⁴⁶ The subject's perception, prior to the experiment,

¹⁴³ Ibid., 258-9.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 259.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 259.

has a “spatial level” in reference to which everything appears oblique when viewed through the mirror.¹⁴⁷ But the new view “induces” a new spatial level, according to which everything appears upright again. This sudden introduction of a new spatial level in the subject’s perception, however, is not the doing of an intellect. Instead, “Everything happens as if certain objects (the walls, the door, and the body of the man in the room), determined as oblique in relation to the given level, aspired by themselves to provide the privileged directions, attracted the vertical to themselves, played a role of ‘anchorage points,’ and caused the previously established level to tilt.”¹⁴⁸ It is as if the entities surrounding the subject tilted for him to accommodate the new situation. But it is not the subject as a body that is the reference point to which objects seem to reorient themselves. As noted, what is right side up is not an information provided by the content of our perception, such as when we notice the positions of head and feet (this is apparent in the case when we are lying on the ground instead of standing up). The body continues to be at an oblique angle with the mirror view. The change in orientation is instead provided by the “virtual body,” which is the “body as a system of possible actions” and whose “‘place’ is defined by its task and by its situation.”¹⁴⁹ The virtual body has to do with the actions afforded by one’s body. As soon as the subject is in the room, the area around him “sketches out in front of

¹⁴⁷ For Merleau-Ponty, to be in a space is to inhabit a match between one’s tasks, bodily capacities, and the given milieu. Merleau-Ponty variously calls this match “spatial level,” “bodily schema,” “hold,” or “anchorage.” I discuss this match between the tasks, bodily capacity, and a given milieu in detail below.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 260.

him a possible habitat.”¹⁵⁰ In the first few minutes, it seems the images present a room where he is “not geared to the utensils it contains, he does not inhabit the room, does not live with the man he sees moving about.”¹⁵¹ With their oblique orientation, the objects do not readily offer themselves as something on which the subject can act. But after that, suddenly “the virtual body displaces the real body, so much so that .. rather than his genuine legs and arms, he feels the legs and arms required for walking and acting in the reflected room—he inhabits the spectacle.”¹⁵²

The feeling of change in the virtual body, which now becomes the potentiality for action in this obliquely presented room, marks the shift in the spatial level, so that everything now appears vertical. The spatial level, therefore, is “a certain hold my body has on the world” and it appears “at the intersection of my motor intentions and my perceptual field.”¹⁵³ The body’s hold on the world is defined not in terms of its physical contact to certain surfaces or through gravity. It is characterized by the body’s everyday actions, such as picking up a pen, putting on a jacket, or walking to the door. To have this hold, our given visual spectacle, along with other sensory data, must meet our projected motor intentions *halfway*. For this reason, reconfiguring the orientation requires living in the perceptual field for a certain period of time (even if a few minutes). Reorienting oneself in a slanted visual environment is to find a new match for the motor po-

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 261.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

tentials, so that there is a novel intersection between the perceptual field and motor intentions. This is also the case with the retinal inversion experiment, which we can explain using the notion of spatial level.

The adjustment here not only points to the fluidity of the spatial relations that defines our everyday experience, it also shows that any “spatial level” is established on top of a previous level. In this sense, “space always precedes itself” in that “space is essentially always ‘already constituted’” by the spatial level that precedes the one on which we reflect.¹⁵⁴ At any point of time, our bodily inherence in the world, understood in terms of a particular potentiality for action in response to things around it, serves as the foundation for any subsequent change. But, Merleau-Ponty claims, there is no first level, or the “level of all levels,” at the bottom of the series of levels that defines our changing spatial relations. The “primordial level,” he argues, “is on the horizon of all of our perceptions, but this is an horizon that, in principle, can never be reached and thematized in an explicit perception.”¹⁵⁵ This horizon marks the contribution of our corporeality and its relation to the world before reflective thought.¹⁵⁶ Since the moment of our birth, we have been in a spatial relation with the world, forming uncountable spatial levels before we could reflect on it. Thus, there is a sense of contingency to our spatial relations. But, Merleau-Ponty claims that in establishing a particular spa-

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 262.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 264.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 265.

tial level we forget the contingency that characterizes the foundation of our spatiality.

Though the horizon of spatial levels cannot be thematized, we can delve deeper into the reciprocal relationship between a subject and the world that defines any spatial level. The details of this relationship, assumed in the chapter on space, is one of the topics in the chapter on “The spatiality of one’s own body and motricity.” Here, Merleau-Ponty begins his analysis of bodily space with a case that shows its breakdown. The example of a patient who has lost the ability to naturally perform abstract movements, such as raising his right hand in response to an instruction, reveals two dimensions of the subject-world relationship:

The structure ‘world,’ with its double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the center of consciousness, and it is through a certain leveling out of the ‘world’ that we will be able to understand Schneider’s intellectual, perceptual, and motor disorders simultaneously and without thereby reducing them to each other.¹⁵⁷

Schneider, the patient, cannot make abstract movements because his “world” (or the particular relation he has with the world) does not contain the dimension of “spontaneity” even though it has “sedimentation.” For a normal person, the world shows itself as a “landscape of our action” since it is perceived through a “motor intentionality”: an anticipation or expectation generated by the body as a motor power.¹⁵⁸ We project this power onto the world, which polarizes it, carving out spheres of “free space” (where actions are possible) and others that are “re-

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 132.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 114.

strictive." It also allows us to act in ways that are not habitual. When something is done out of habit, the situation comes to demand an action from me. But to do other actions, we need a projective power. Schneider, for instance, could make all the movements required by his daily habit, but not new ones. For Schneider, the world only shows as "ready-made or fixed," demanding a particular set of movements of him.¹⁵⁹ He is stuck in a passive relationship with the world because he cannot see himself as a "motor subject" for whom the world has a "motor signification."¹⁶⁰ Put differently, the world does not call out to him as someone with a power to modify it. In order to perform a spontaneous abstract movement, he needs to see himself as someone capable of changing his particular relation to his surrounding. He does not project onto the world, but only passively receives directions from it. A normal person can, however, "invert the natural relation [or the present relation] between [his] body and the surroundings."¹⁶¹ It is this power of inversion or modification that accounts for the shift in spatial level discussed above.

Bodily Space and Space

Merleau-Ponty claims that "Our body is not primarily in space, but is rather of space."¹⁶² The body is "of space" in that it "inhabits space."¹⁶³ To say that some-

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 113.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁶² Ibid., 149.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 140.

thing is “in space” is to take “space” as a pre-existent clean slate—a homogenous, isotropic realm—in which one locates an entity. But space is always already polarized and oriented; it is already “inhabited” in a certain way before we reflect on it. The “standard of measure” when inhabiting space is not an indifferent coordinate, but “previous postures and movements.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, space is perceived as “spatial level” or bodily space which refers to one’s situatedness in the present environment and is rooted in the previous level.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty wants to emphasize that we do not understand our bodily space through any representation of positions in space. This is because the body is not “only a system of current positions, but also, and consequently, [] an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in different orientations.” The capacity for movement, that is, the potential to take up infinite number of spatial positions in any situation, is what is spatial about the bodily space. This capacity forms a “body schema,” which is not just a feeling of one’s body (that is, it is not restricted to the “subject”), but “an experience of [the] body in the world...”¹⁶⁵ Such an experience, however, is not limited to the current position my body has in relation to its surroundings. Since it has to do with our capacity to be among things in a certain way, imagination plays a major role in this sense of spatiality. The “virtual body,” as we noted above, is not the physical body. It is a sense of the possibilities of the body. For this reason, bodily space is not limited to my current environment. It is also all those “situations” where it

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 140

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 142.

could be active. We could imagine being in those situations because we see the possibility of a bodily hold there. As Merleau-Ponty argues, “Our body and our perception always solicit us to take the landscape they offer as the center of the world. But this landscape is not necessarily the landscape of our life. I can ‘be elsewhere’ while remaining here, and if I am kept far from what I love, I feel far from the center of real life.”¹⁶⁶ When in a nostalgic mood, for instance, I “inhabit” my childhood, remember and imagining myself doing various kinds of activities there. I can “dwell” in that space because my virtual body finds it to be a suitable place.

If space is always oriented and relates to a particular body, how are we to understand “objective space.” Surely, the fact that we share a common world (including shared movements) would mean that there is some sense of space that is common to all bodily spaces. At various points in the two chapters on space, Merleau-Ponty talks about the relation between bodily space and objective space. He claims that since objective (non-personal) space is only accessible through a bodily inherence in the world, “in order for us to be able to imagine space, it must first be introduced into it [our imagination] through our body, which must have given us first model of transposition, equivalences, and identifications that turns space into an objective system ...”¹⁶⁷ We do not first experience a homogeneous, isotropic space and then find our unique relationship to it. The bodily hold on the surrounding world comes first. Within this bodily grasp of our space we

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 299.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 143.

can reflect on commonalities across a variety of situations (that one finds oneself in) and thus find an objective or shared system of reference where no particular environment is privileged and everything can be measured using the same unit.

However, it is not just occasionally that we refer to “external” or objective space, living as we do in bodily spaces. The two go together in such a way that objective space, though always permeated by and accessible through the bodily space, informs us of the common world. Merleau-Ponty discusses examples of pathological conditions, such as schizophrenia, where there is a dissociation between experienced, or lived, space and “geographical” or “impartial” space. In these cases, experienced space overshadows the objective space in such a way that a particular space is unbearable (for instance, when this space is somehow seen as terrifying). According to Merleau-Ponty, the constant awareness of an impartial, objective space along with experienced space ensures that such overshadowing is not common. For instance, the fact that a windowless dark room is not in my immediate environment (it is objectively far from me) has some important implications for the way I can “inhabit” it in thinking about it. Therefore dissociation from objective space has disastrous consequence for lived space. As Merleau-Ponty describes:

The schizophrenic patient no longer lives in the common world, but in a private world; he does not go all the way to geographical space, he remains within ‘the space of the landscape,’ and this landscape itself, once cut off from the common world, is considerably impoverished. This results in the schizophrenic questioning: everything is amazing, absurd, or unreal ...”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 300.

Thus even though we come to recognize objective space through bodily and lived space, the former serves an important function in limiting the ways in which we experience our spatiality. Without such an interaction between the two spaces, our own sense of space would be impoverished and not attuned to the common intersubjective world.

Scope of Bodily Space

In our discussion of bodily space, we found that the capacity of the body in relation to entities around it is the central determining factor for spatiality. But much detail about this capacity, or the bodily schema, is missing from the account. One important question to ask about the space carved out by virtual body is the nature of its boundary. Merleau-Ponty refers to this issue in passing:

I am of space and of time; my body fits itself to them and embraces them. The scope of this hold measures the scope of my existence; however, it can never in any case be total. The space and time that I inhabit are always surrounded by indeterminate horizons that contain other points of view.¹⁶⁹

In this passage, the idea of scope brings a sense of boundary to bodily space. But it is unclear how Merleau-Ponty sees this boundary. Is it the extreme possibilities of our possible bodily actions among worldly entities or is it the limitations posed by a shared world with other bodily spaces? In each case, the boundary appears to be an “indeterminate horizon.” Bodily capacities, for instance, can be enhanced. An amputee’s bodily space could change drastically with an artificial limb that allows her to walk. And in the case of a common world with “other

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 141.

points of view," it is unclear how the intersubjectivity of bodily spaces are to be imagined.

The question of scope is complicated by a few other details. Scope is not only enlarged with new habituations, but entities in the world can become part of our bodily capacity, thus expanding scope in new ways. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of a blind man's cane. For the blind person, the cane has ceased to be an object and is "no longer perceived for itself." Rather, "the cane's furthest point is transformed into a sensitive zone, it increases the scope and the radius of the act of touching and has become analogous to a gaze."¹⁷⁰ The phenomenon of habit, Merleau-Ponty argues, "leads us to rework our notion of 'understanding' and our notion of the body."¹⁷¹ The habits and instruments that enhance bodily capabilities also shape the bodily space. This brings up the question of "hold" on things. What degree of hold is enough to expand one's bodily space? Merleau-Ponty speaks of the hold mostly in terms of being able to carry out habitual movements. But that is a very limited sense of the term and could only be applied to a few spaces which we inhabit in the present. I discuss the issues of scope and boundary more fully in the next chapter.

Two ways of Being-in

We are now in a position to discuss how the different ways of being in the world suggested by (early) Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty lead to two different notions

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 146.

of place. For Heidegger, our primary relationship with entities in the world is characterized by circumspective concern, which is guided by the possibility that Dasein either assigns itself or takes up from others. Regardless of the kind of possibility, circumspective concern is never understood in terms of Dasein's bodily power. Indeed, *Da-sein* as "there-being" is the disclosedness granted by its temporality. Dasein first "projects" onto its future, and only this projection allows it to discover entities around it. Thus, for early Heidegger, place is *Gegend* (as I identified it), the equipmental context disclosed by projective understanding. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the projection towards one's future is "through [the] body." It is not simply "concern" that brings a human being in relation to an entity. Our "motor intentions" are essential to our discovery of entities around us. We are in the world *through* our bodies. Thus, as a corollary to this way of being with entities, Merleau-Ponty sees place as bodily space.

But the two accounts differ not only in how they see the central entity—as either Dasein or an embodied subject. There is a parallel difference in their conceptions of the world. For Heidegger, world remains the "wherein" of Dasein's understanding of its potentiality. But, unlike Merleau-Ponty, he does not see this potentiality in terms of bodily power. World, for Heidegger, is disclosed by Dasein's temporality. For Merleau-Ponty, such an opening up of entities in the world is a function of our bodily hold on the world, which, although containing an essential element of temporality (in the ideas of projection and tasks), does not ground the spatial to the temporal. When the subject of the retinal image inver-

sion experiment puts on the goggles, he feels that “he does not inhabit the room, he does not live with the man he sees moving about.”¹⁷² Entities and other humans are closed off to him because his virtual body, which defines an area of possible actions, does not see itself, at least initially, as capable of any action in the inverted world.

The contrasting views represented by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger shows that the phenomenological approach to place can lead to a diversity of accounts. One could also argue that Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the bodily medium of our being-in corrects a glaring omission in Heidegger’s account. The difference, however, is not simply a result of Heidegger’s omission of the body. The account of place (as *Gegend*) in *Being and Time* is derived from an understanding of humans in terms of their temporality. Heidegger does not see place in its own right until his later works. The introduction of “earth,” as I have argued above, provides a material anchor to the opening up of beings. The world is not simply opened up by a temporalizing of past and future, but granted by a self-secluding earth. Thus, Heidegger acknowledges the material dimension of entities; but he does not revise his notion of Dasein to include a bodily dimension (as a constitutive feature). The later essays on art, things, and buildings take Dasein as receptive of entities precisely because of their earthy dimension, which *grants* a particular disclosedness (instead of such disclosedness being a consequence of

¹⁷² Ibid., 260.

Dasein's own temporalization). What is missing, however, is a parallel account of the human body.

The two ways of being-in represented by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty inform all phenomenological accounts of place after the mid 20th century. Among these, I will discuss (in chronological order) two accounts from geography and two from philosophy. The choices are not arbitrary, but represent different paths pointed at by the ideas discussed above. Starting in the early 1970's, Edward Relph sketches an account of the identity of place, something not explicitly addressed by either Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty. Within the same tradition of humanistic geography, Anne Buttimer complicates the rural or local picture of place, suggested by Heidegger's example of the bridge-place, by conceptualizing it not only in terms of "home," but also reach. During 1970's and 80's relatively few accounts of place appear within philosophy itself, with the first major (at least in the English speaking world) being Edward Casey's *The Fate of Place*. While this work gives a historical overview of the idea of place, I focus on Casey's own phenomenological account of place that is strongly informed by this history. Similarly, Jeff Malpas's account of place comes out of his interpretation of the relation between the question of being and the idea of place within Heidegger's philosophy. Together, the four ideas of place discussed in the following sections provide a rich variety of phenomenological insights that must be taken into account in any new account of place.

Edward Relph

A discussion of phenomenological understandings of the notion of place in geography might, in some ways, seem out of place in this chapter. Though a handful of geographers took up the insights of the phenomenological tradition in philosophy in their explorations of space in terms of human experience, the “humanistic” movement in geography has run its short course, having had its high point between 1970-78 and gradually disappearing by the early 1990s.¹⁷³ A geography that emphasized the lived experience of individuals and groups and did away with empirical research methodology was criticized by both those who believed in the determinative force of social and economic structures and those who took measurable accuracy to be a prerequisite of geographical knowledge. We can, however, set aside the criticisms of humanistic geography, which often relate more to disagreements about the nature and goals of the discipline than to problems in the insights of humanistic geographers, in order to focus on its contributions to a phenomenological way of understanding space. The distinctness of this contribution lies partly in the fact that it is not a byproduct of fundamental metaphysical and epistemological questions, as in the case of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, respectively. Geographers such as Edward Relph and Anne Buttimer saw phenomenological insights on space as helping them overcome the limitations of a predominantly empirical understanding of the human relationship to space. They turned to the phenomena underlying this relationship not to answer ab-

¹⁷³ Seamon & Lundberg, “Humanistic Geography,” 9.

stract philosophical questions, but from a need to redefine understanding of the concrete geographical landscapes around them. For this reason, their work does not lose sight of the variety of actual places, such as cities, neighborhoods, wilderness. As should be evident from the accounts discussed below, in humanistic geography phenomenological insights are often fleshed out through concrete examples. Their explorations of place brings to light new and difficult questions that must be considered in any comprehensive account of the phenomenon.

Edward Relph is considered one of the first geographers to explicitly use phenomenology to inform questions of the relationship between humans and their environments.¹⁷⁴ In his groundbreaking work, *Place and Placelessness*, his stated goal is to discern the “various ways in which places manifest themselves in our experience” and to identify the “distinctive and essential components of place.”¹⁷⁵ He claims that geography has heretofore taken the concept of place for granted: the term appears in various definitions of geography (that he cites) but is never discussed. The rare efforts to define it, he believes, are plagued by confusion because “[place] is not just a formal concept awaiting precise definition, but is also a naive and variable expression of geographical experience.”¹⁷⁶ Relph holds that in claiming that place is “a phenomenon of direct experience” and that geographical knowledge itself has a phenomenological basis, he is only pointing

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 5. The authors refer to Relph’s “An Inquiry into the Relations between Phenomenology and Geography” (1970).

¹⁷⁵ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 7.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

out what is widely recognized within the discipline of geography. His goal in using phenomenology is thus to put together the method that is most suitable with the concept that is most basic in geography, *viz.*, place.

Although Relph cites other authors on phenomenological ideas, many of his central claims align with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and (early) Heidegger. However, his explication of the identity of place, which is understood in a rich, multifarious way, adds significantly to the general insights he borrows from the philosophers. The identity of place, Relph argues, should be understood as i.) that which defines a place as a place, so that we may pick out what is identical in all the places, ii.) that which allows places to remain identical (even if partially) over time, thus making them distinct from other places, and iii.) that which represents an identity a person or group has with places.¹⁷⁷ Keeping these criteria in view, Relph identifies three basic components of the identity of place: static physical settings, activities, and meanings. Within our experience of place, Relph argues, these three parts are inseparable. However, these aspects are irreducible to each other and can be separated when we describe the experience. Along with the “less tangible” *genius loci* or the “spirit of place,” which refers to the overall character or personality of a place, these three components make up the basic raw material for the identity of any place.¹⁷⁸

Although Relph briefly discusses all the dimensions of identity of place, he argues that

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 46, 48.

The essence of place lies not so much in these [the components of the identity of place] as in the experience of an 'inside' that is distinct from an 'outside'; more than anything else this is what sets places apart in space and defines a particular system of physical features, activities, and meanings. To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it.¹⁷⁹

To be in a place is to identify with it in some sense. It is a sense of *insideness* that makes a particular space distinct, carving out a meaningful area that is called place. The division between an inside and outside is manifested in various ways: walls, city limits, country borders, doors, etc. Relph cites Christian Norberg-Schulz, Gabriel Marcel, and Yi-Fu Tuan as supporting this idea of place, but notes the lack of clarity regarding what counts as inside and what outside. His articulation of the precise ways of being inside—particularly those that are “immediate and direct”—constitutes what I see as the key contribution of his work. (However, as I will note below, a discussion of ways of being inside still does not shed light on the difficult question of the limits or boundary of an inside.) One’s insiderness could be: i.) behavioral, which relates to physical presence in a place, ii.) empathetic, which involves participating in a place in a limited way, characterized by emotional engagement along with physical presence; and iii.) existential, in which the commitment is so deep and direct that one is not even conscious of being part of a place. There is also a less immediate, “vicarious insideness,” in which one relates to a place through media such as novels. Relph also describes the “outsideness” that corresponds to the various senses of being inside, and

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 49

adds a few more kinds of outsidership, including “objective outsidership” where places are treated merely conceptually.¹⁸⁰

In characterizing the inside-outside duality, Relph’s goal in *Place and Placelessness* is to evaluate the geographical experience. The relation between humans and place, which is the phenomenon of place, can either show a deep commitment or a superficial engagement, depending on the level at which insidership is experienced. According to Relph, the deepest and most authentic experience of place (and insidership) is one of unconscious identification with it. Drawing on an interpretation of authenticity in *Being and Time*, Relph claims that an “authentic attitude to place” as a “direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places” results from “a full awareness of places for what they are as products of man’s intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities, or from a profound and unselfconscious identity with place.”¹⁸¹ Examples of such a connectedness are plentiful, according to Relph, in primitive communities where places often have deep sacred and symbolic meaning. Even in modern societies, Relph argues, people feel deep connections with places, but the possibility for identification has been undermined by a variety of factors, including spatial mobility and “a weakening of the symbolic qualities of places.”¹⁸²

On the other hand, places can be experienced at a superficial level, without much of the feeling of being inside. In this experience, we do not attend to or

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁸² Ibid., 66.

are not aware of the “qualities and significances” of the place.¹⁸³ While such experiences are common when visiting new places for particular tasks, Relph thinks that it is possible that in the current age many people experience only this level of insideness in the places they inhabit. In the latter case, people “[fail] to ‘see’ or be involved in place,” which results in a lack of “care or commitment for places”; geographically, people are alienated. The absence of any commitment to places also constitutes one of the two aspects of placelessness. Not only do people fail to acknowledge the meaning inherent in places, in placelessness there are no places of significance. Relph believes that the movement towards placelessness in the current age is an aspect of “technique, the overriding concern with efficiency as an end in itself” which leads to the creation of “places” that are interchangeable and replaceable, and so not places properly speaking. It is also an aspect of mass culture, which leads to large scale adoption of few ideas about landscapes and places generated by a few experts and distributed by mass media. In the United States, the suburban residential complexes, with identical houses, lawns, and streets, could be seen as one example of the mass culture that leads to the erosion of places.

What characterizes a place is an experience of being inside. But what is the scope or limit of a place, so that it can have an “inside”? Relph claims that experienced places can “range in scale from part of a room to an entire continent, but at all scales places are whole entities” and that the feeling of insideness could re-

¹⁸³ Ibid., 142.

late to physical forms, such as walls, but is above all a function of the “intensity of experience of a place.”¹⁸⁴ But the idea of “intensity,” which expresses how deeply we experience an environment (ranging from mere physical presence to complete commitment, as discussed above), relates more to whether or not one feels inside (and hence in a place) rather than to the scope and circumference of this insideness. This is implied in Relph’s understanding of “placelessness” as a deficiency in this intensity.

The question of boundary is only briefly mentioned when Relph discusses the notion of “zones” of insideness that are “defined by our intentions.”¹⁸⁵ He explains:

“if our interest is focused on our home then everything beyond home is outside, if our concern is with our local district then everything beyond that district is outside, and so on. In short, as our intentions vary, so the boundary between inside and outside moves.”¹⁸⁶

The perimeter of an inside is nothing other than what is included in the current projects of a subject. However, Relph admits that this “egocentric structuring” of place gets complicated because we “carry” the zones as we move. Thus, there can be no precise distinction between inside and outside. Relph does not dwell on the implications of this vagueness for the nature and possibility of boundaries that define insideness. Instead, he simply notes that the lack of clear distinctions is partly a “function of the different levels of intensity with which we experience outsideness and insideness.”¹⁸⁷ Boundaries are complicated by the intensity of

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 141.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 49-50.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 50

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 50.

experience. In the next chapter, I will further analyze this relationship between place, boundary, and intensity.

Relph's account of identity of and identity with place reflects some aspects of the accounts of place and lived space presented by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. His ideas of existential insideness, which includes an awareness of place as a meaningful setting for human activities, appear to draw on Heidegger's conception of region, particularly how regions relate to one's projects and possibilities. And his understanding of the identity of place has some similarities with the idea of *Ort*, particularly if we see *Ort* as constituted by a physical setting (entities anchored around a thing), human activities, and meaningful relations to entities. One could also argue that bodily engagement in a space, a point emphasized by Merleau-Ponty, is an essential aspect of identity with places. Nevertheless, Relph's account is unique in both its synthesis of different aspects of human-space relations and its claim that a feeling of insideness is essential to one's experience of place.

Anne Buttimer

Along with Edward Relph, Anne Buttimer was one of the first geographers to argue for the relevance of phenomenological insights for geography. In her much cited "The Dynamism of Lifeworld" (1976), she describes the particular ways in

which phenomenology can inform questions in geography. The latter, she argues, has mostly ignored the dimension of lived experience in its accounts of the human-space relationship, resulting in a schism between knowledge and experience of space. An application of phenomenology, which she believes challenges the subject-object and knowledge-action dualisms, can help geography renew its commitment to understanding the varieties of human experience. She identifies three areas of enquiry in which this application would be fruitful: the sense of place, social space, and time-space rhythms. Since Buttimer's understanding of place is informed by her views on the intersection between phenomenology and geography, a brief discussion of the first concept, that of sense of place, would provide a good starting point.

Geographic studies, Buttimer notes, have shown the importance of a sense of place for a particular "pattern of living (*genre de vie*)."¹⁸⁸ She cites Vidal de la Blache's work in noting that despite technological and economic changes, people's identification with place remains. The interaction between patterns of living and of a sense of place provides one way of understanding not just the human relationship to space, but also the relationship between place and space. Buttimer argues that phenomenological understandings of space as lived space and existential space are particularly helpful in shedding light on these relationships. Space can be seen as a collection of "special places, each stamped by human intention, value, and memory."¹⁸⁹ All of these are reflected in the sense of place.

¹⁸⁸ Buttimer, "The Dynamism of Lifeworld," 283.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 283

However, while Buttimer agrees with phenomenology's emphasis on a "personal reference system" and the "layers" of lived spaces that surround an individual, she is critical of how this approach discounts the importance of "nonplace-based social networks" and of mobility. The local or rural tinge to places as phenomenologically understood hinders generalizations. She argues, moreover, that while some phenomenologists¹⁹⁰ theoretically note that environments play as much a role in experiences of space as do meaning projecting humans, such reciprocity is not usually taken seriously. In contrast to the local and human oriented idea of place, Buttimer notes that geographers want to emphasize the generalizability of such experience and to consider the role of external conditions, such as "ecosystems, linkage patterns, and economies"¹⁹¹ in their understanding of space and place.

Despite these differences, Buttimer claims that both geography and phenomenology evince the notion of "pre-consciously given facets of everyday place experience."¹⁹² In geography, it is the *genre de vie*, and in philosophy, the pre-conscious ways of behaving and interacting. Both can be understood in terms of rhythms, characterized not just by routine and order, but also by a pull towards adventure and change. One may see the technological, economic, and other external influences on everyday life as indispensable concomitants to any personal or local order created in human-space relationships. In other words, there is an

¹⁹⁰ Buttimer cites Heidegger and Bachelard as examples.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

essential tension between stability (the personal and local) and change (the external influences) in any person-world rhythm, whether it be at the scale of a home, neighborhood, city, or region. Buttimer suggests, without elaborating, that this tension “may be seen as a prototype of the relationship between places and space, home and range in the human experience of world.”¹⁹³ While place and home signify meaningful, habitual relations with surroundings, space and range seem to refer to what is not (yet) subsumed under such relations.

In “Home, Reach, and the Sense of Place” (1980), Buttimer takes up the issue of stability and change again, fleshing out the concepts of home and range, which is now referred to as “reach.” In this later work, Buttimer appears to defend the phenomenological understanding of lived space against charge of romantic attachment to a place that discounts the economic and political forces at play. Emphasis on place attachment, she notes, has been implicated in a “tacit condoning of poverty, injustice, and alienation” because of its apparent refusal to consider structural political and economic issues in contemporary life.¹⁹⁴ Thinking of place in terms of the “reciprocal movements” of home and reach, Buttimer suggests, can help us bridge the divide between the insider’s personal perspective of a place as lived experience and an outside observer’s understanding of place as something with “activity systems and social networks.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Buttimer, “Home, Reach, and the Sense of Place,” 170.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 170-1.

Buttimer draws on her own experiences to elaborate on the relationship between place, home, and reach. She describes her childhood experience in rural Ireland in terms of her routines, memories of sounds and smells, and the rhythmicity of seasons and farming activities. With a background of such an attunement to her rural world, which she construes as what characterizes place, she can only understand the urban landscapes of America as “placeless sprawl of concrete and plastic nowhereland gridiron.”¹⁹⁶ This placelessness is characterized not only by a lack of uniqueness—similar concrete buildings and streets replicated endlessly—but also by a superficial attachment to people’s daily lives. One can not, for instance, linger in eateries as one does in a streetside café because these places are designed for quick stops.¹⁹⁷

However, Buttimer notes that she soon realized her mistake in seeing the American landscapes as placeless: “many of these nondescript hamburger stations were meaningful nodes in teenager and truckdriver social space.”¹⁹⁸ The landscapes and buildings that first appeared to be primarily built and sustained by corporate decisions indifferent to a social and cultural milieu turned out to be meaningful gathering places for those away from home. Not just the phenomenon of home—exemplified by rural countryside—but also that of “reach,” understood as stations in a network of relations, can also be places of a certain kind. Buttimer argues that “To many people, for whom reaching appears to be

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 174.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 174

more important than home making, places may be simply points on a topological surface of access.”¹⁹⁹ The node represented by a hamburger station on a highway, for instance, carries significance and attachment for people who have become accustomed to traveling. However, Buttimer suggests, the development of any sense of place in these indifferent landscapes is “quite incidental both to those who design them and those who will use them.”²⁰⁰ In the urban landscape, people’s style of life, their patterns of activities, and their perceptions and attitudes shape the places of the home variety, but not those defined by “reach.” The centralized, systematic ways in which urban landscapes are constructed leave little room for the contribution of those who inhabit them. In this sense, Buttimer suggests, we are witnessing the demise of place as we know the concept to be, that is, in the sense of home. Place as home strongly reflects the lives of those who inhabit it; place as reach does not.

However, to proclaim such a demise is to declare defeat too quickly in the face of the challenges represented by modern urban landscapes (along with airports, highways, and skyscrapers, all of which Buttimer sees as placeless in some ways).²⁰¹ A more fruitful engagement with contemporary reality consists in redefining the notion of place. As Buttimer argues: “If one were to ask what the meaning and potential significance of place would be here [in modern Western

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Marc Augé, a French anthropologist, explores the nature of non-places in his works, especially *Non-Places: An Introduction to Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992). Airports and highways are prominent examples for him too.

cities], or for similar places, one needs to redefine what is meant by community and place.”²⁰² This redefinition consists of seeing place not in terms of “artifacts or nouns” but in terms of “horizons of basic life processes.”²⁰³ The conceptual turn needed here is prefigured in the duality of home and reach. Whereas home involves settling down in a region or locality and expresses itself in well-established habits and meanings, reach represents the ever-changing horizons that disturb and alter these regions and thus people’s sense of place. The growth of centralized systems that create homogenous landscapes, the development of communication technologies that allow the expansion of social life, the economic forces that link distant lands and communities together, these are the dynamic horizons that continually shape what it means to be at a particular place. For instance, changes in national policies or the economy may lead to the closure of the local library, an independent coffee shop, or a nearby children’s park in a town, thus significantly altering the local landscape and the place it represents.

Seeing this relationship between places and their horizons would help explain both the supposed demise of places and the resistance of redefined places to such demise. Changes in technological and economic horizons in the last few decades, Buttimer argues, have been both rapid and individualistic, that is, often affecting individuals in isolation and not everyone in a community. The consequence is that “one can no longer find support or centeredness from the older

²⁰² Ibid., 186.

²⁰³ Ibid.

common-held conceptions of shared reach.”²⁰⁴ Just as one’s sense of place involves shared meanings and practices, an understanding of the external forces that shape places also involves a shared conception. When external forces affect individuals in a community differently, they disrupt both the shared conceptions of a place and its beyond, resulting in a fragmentation of what was a stable relationship between home and reach. Buttimer gives the example of the community in her own apartment complex in Worcester, Massachusetts. The residents, she notes, “scarcely ever thought about place at all” since for them “only a small range of activities [] could be affected by the local physical environment.” The locality itself, the “home,” meant little because the residents’ lives were preoccupied with “non-place-based networks,” which were sustained by telephone, mail, and taxi. Moreover, many of the elements in their shared surroundings, such as upkeep and security, were controlled by landlords. This gave residents little say in shaping the place where they lived. For Buttimer, it is this lack of control coupled with the dominance of non-place-based networks in people’s lives (brought about by changing horizons) that accounts of the apparent demise of place.

However, there is a way in which the reciprocity between home and reach need not lead to such a demise. Buttimer argues that making the insiders (residents) aware of “the constantly changing horizons of reach for people, activity systems, and technology,” and educating the outsiders (planners of urban spaces) as to the importance of considering the resident’s relation to place (which in-

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 185.

cludes both style of life and people's capacity to shape the environment) is central to renewing place and community in present times. Our sense of place needs can be reoriented to accommodate the forces that appear to be destroying it.

Buttimer's understanding of place in terms of home and reach represents a step towards reconciling the phenomenologist's emphasis on an individual's lived space with the geographer's concern with the external non-place-based forces. Her brief account of this duality, however, leaves many questions unanswered, especially from a phenomenological point of view. For instance, with regards to the line of separation of home and reach, we may ask: Is not what Buttimer calls non-place-based networks, such as economic ties and communication media, always already woven into our experience of "home"? For instance, reach is perhaps felt, consciously or unconsciously, in our sense of the familiar home filled with electronic devices that connect us to a broader world. If this is the case, the distinction between external forces (of reach) versus internal stability (of home) needs a foundation in some notion of the unity of a place. Only when a group of relations and entities (among other possible aspects) are unified by some criterion and thus called a place, could we distinguish this phenomenon from what is not that place, that is, reach. As it stands, Buttimer appears to assume a concept that is not univocally defined, either by her or the phenomenological literature on place. In other words, much needs to be clarified about the nature of the two phenomena that Buttimer attempts to reconcile.

Edward Casey

Edward Casey's phenomenological account of place is deeply informed by his comprehensive and insightful analysis of the history of the concept of place in the Western tradition in *The Fate of Place* (1997). In this work, he meticulously traces the gradual marginalization of the concept of place, initially found in Aristotle's idea of *topos*, and the rise of the concept of space, exemplified in Newton's idea of a three dimensional infinite extendedness. In the same work, he argues that there has been a gradual, though far from complete, reversal, so that the concept of place has gained currency in the last few hundred years. Casey claims that this revival owes much to Kant, who argued that the body, with its power to orient us in a space, constitutes a place. But the major steps towards a resurrection of place was only made in the phenomenological accounts provided by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The phenomenon of place is rediscovered not as "the inner surface of the innermost unmoved container of a body," which is how Aristotle had defined it, but in regards to the "lived human body."²⁰⁵ In its relation to body, place regains its uniqueness (so that it is considered more than a division of homogenous space) and its boundedness (which allows one place to be distinguished qualitatively from another.)²⁰⁶ But places, in Casey's hands, are not delimited by actual or virtual bodily reach (as in Merleau-Ponty's account); they instead connect to other places, forming regions, which expand into worlds.

²⁰⁵ Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 331.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 334

Casey claims that world “subsists in the many particular places that reflect it,” and is thus “a world in places—a place-world.”²⁰⁷

Since he is more concerned with a systematic account of the history of the concept of place, Casey’s claims about the central role of lived body in the renewed account of place, and about the relation between place, region, and world are among the insights gained from interpreting works that do not explicitly offer an account of “place” (for instance, those of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Deleuze & Guattari). Moreover, because phenomenological approaches to space and place are just one (albeit important) part of this history, his claims are not grounded in a phenomenological account of place. However, a phenomenological account is presented in his article “Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to Be in the Place-World” (2001). In this essay, he aims to discuss “the bodily basis of [the] self’s inhabitation of places in a circumambient landscape.”²⁰⁸ Two related theses come out of this discussion: the relation between self and place is mediated by body, and this self-body-place complex is expanded or broadened by its inherence in a landscape, which provides both a context and a horizon for places. Together, these claims articulate how self, body, place, and landscape are all related in a mutually coconstitutive way. I will briefly summarize some of Casey’s key points and pose a few questions regarding the adequacy of this account of place.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 336.

²⁰⁸ Casey, “Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to Be in the Place-World,” 683.

The starting point of Casey's discussion is the traditional dichotomy between self, which is characterized in terms of consciousness, and place, which is something physical.²⁰⁹ He notes that this dichotomy has been shattered by developments in 20th century phenomenology and is also evident in the works of some philosophically inclined geographers (such as Sack, 1997). However, he claims that the relation between self and place in contemporary accounts lacks "concrete articulation." The close relation between self and place is such that "there is no place without self and no self without place", but this vague notion, if taken for granted, risks conflating the concepts of self and place.²¹⁰ He thus asks: "how, then, is place constitutive of the self?"²¹¹ He defines self as "the agency and identity of the geographical subject" and place as "the immediate environment of my lived body – an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural."²¹² One notices that by stipulating these definitions, Casey has already assumed a bridge between self and place. Self is not just consciousness, it is also a geographical subject; whereas place is not just a physical extendedness, but also laden with history and culture, which tie it back to self and society. What remains to be seen is how and through what this relation between self and place, thus defined, is to be understood.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 684.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 683.

Casey claims that the relation between self and place can only be understood in terms of a body that is “capable of possessing habitus, undertaking habitation, and expressing the idiolocality of place itself.”²¹³ Habitus, an idea Casey takes from Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), is a “settled disposition” or “habitude” or a routine (albeit open to change and improvisation) in any given place.²¹⁴ Places relate to self by fostering certain habitudes or routines in the self. Being in the same place (or places) for any significant amount of time creates habitual bonds, which are then carried to new places and assimilated into new bonds. Casey argues: “This self is constituted by a core of habitudes that incorporate and continue, at both psychical and physical levels, what one has experienced in particular places.” But habitus as a settled disposition has its value in being put into action in the mode of “habitation.”²¹⁵ The self relates to places through such habitation, which is an activation of the sedimented habitual bonds through bodily movements. Therefore,

If habitus represents a movement from the externality of established customs and norms to the internality of durable dispositions, habitation is a matter of re-externalization – of taking the habitus that has been acquired and continually re-enacting it in the place-world.²¹⁶

The internalizing-externalizing relationship that connects the self and the world needs a “vehicle,” or medium, which is the body. The lived body is what goes out to encounter the place-world and is what “bears the traces of the places it has

²¹³ Ibid., 689.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 686.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 687.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 687.

known.”²¹⁷ The lived body makes possible that places “come to be embedded in us; they become part of our very self and enduring character, what we enact and carry forward.” This embeddedness, though often brought about by a process of “somatization” (an idea not fleshed out in the essay), can also take the form of memories and feelings associated with places. The lived body thus becomes the medium or vehicle for the habitual schemes, which are then externalized through bodily movements. These movements, for their part, shape the place, so that both body and place continually inscribe each other. The reciprocity of habitus and habitation can thus be seen as the internalization of “customary and normative structure” and an externalization of an “intentional subject[’s] concerted action.”²¹⁸

Casey sees the concept of lived body as the material condition that makes the self-place relation possible.²¹⁹ But in order to fully flesh out this relation, one needs not only a concrete grounding of self (which inheres in and as lived body), but also of place, which inheres in a landscape. According to Casey, a landscape is not simply an assemblage of places. The primary feature of a landscape is its horizon, which Casey sees as absent in a place.²²⁰ This horizon constitutes the overall boundary within which places are located. It is “an arc within which a given landscape comes to an end—an end of visibility, of presence, of

²¹⁷ Ibid., 688.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 689.

²²⁰ Casey notes that places only have “an enclosure or perimeter.” But these features are not defined.

availability.”²²¹ Much remains unclear in Casey’s account of a horizon, which I will take up in the next chapter. Casey sees the horizon as the boundary of the landscape, but qualifies it by noting that it is permeable, an “undelimited limit” that both closes off and opens up the landscape. The relationship between place and horizon is also briefly mentioned by Casey. Places do not have horizons, but horizons come about when a group of places belong together.²²² Moreover, according to Casey, landscape as the “matrix of places” has a coherence and continuity that allows for movement from one place to another. In this sense, a landscape “draws out” a place to its “utmost limit” by connecting it to other places. Thus a landscape “broadens” the identity of a place; it can contain an entire region and even constitute the whole place-world.

Several important questions remain unanswered at the end of Casey’s essay: How do places relate to one another? Does the “self” play any role in bringing together several places? How do places interact with and are shaped by the horizons of landscapes? In his latest work, *The World on Edge* (2018), Casey returns to the notion of boundary, which is now understood in terms of “edge.” In the next chapter, I will discuss some of Casey’s major claims about the constitution of place and the edges of places.

²²¹ Ibid., 690.

²²² Ibid. 690

Jeff Malpas

In the introduction to his latest book, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, which is a collection of articles he wrote over a decade, Jeff Malpas writes that the essays “focus on the idea of place, first, as it appears in Heidegger’s thinking ... and, second, as it can be seen to provide the focus for a distinctive mode of philosophical thinking that encompasses, but is not restricted to, the Heideggerian.” In a way, this dual focus broadly characterizes all of Malpas’s writings on the idea of place.²²³ In Heidegger’s writings Malpas sees a gradual development of the idea of the “primacy of place”:

Not only the analysis of being-in-the-world as worked out in *Being and Time* (and with it the understanding of originary temporality), but also the idea of the clearing (*Lichtung*) that is the happening of truth, the *Ereignis*, and the happening of the Fourfold all turn out to represent successively developed attempts at the articulation of the *topos* that itself lies at the very heart of the question of being.²²⁴

However, Malpas’s broader project of finding a uniting theme of *topos* or place in Heidegger’s oeuvre and showing its centrality within the question of Being is not directly relevant to my discussion here. I will instead focus on the account of place that emerges from Malpas’s reading of Heidegger. A straightforward version of this account is presented by Malpas in his criticism of the predominant ways of characterizing space and spatiality in contemporary geography. He concludes the criticism by suggesting the direction geographic thinking should take: “A more critically engaged geography, I would argue, must also be a geography

²²³ His other major works on place are *Place and Experience* (1999) and *Heidegger’s Topology* (2006).

²²⁴ Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, 3.

that is more attentive to the underlying character of space as it stands in relation to place and time—that is more attentive to the phenomena of boundedness, openness, and emergence ...”²²⁵ Malpas’s own account of place, therefore, is centered on this tripartite structure of the phenomenon of place. A discussion of these elements provides a picture of Malpas’s phenomenological account of place.

The starting point of this account is the question of possible distinction between space and place, concepts that are sometimes used interchangeably. Malpas suggests that we understand the difference in terms of the presence or absence of “boundedness,” an aspect that he thinks was salient in the primary ways in which Plato and Aristotle understood space. The notions of *topos* (in Aristotle’s *Physics*) and *chora* (in Plato’s *Timaeus*), he argues, convey a sense of container, which is distinct from what is contained within it. *Chora* is a “womb or matrix out of which things come into being” and *topos* is “the innermost boundary of a containing body.”²²⁶ The containing character of *topos* and *chora* points to the inherent bounded character of space, but it also implies that such boundedness “allows for an openness or extendedness within [the bounded space].”²²⁷ Therefore, in these accounts the extended character of space is seen in conjunction with the boundary that makes it possible. In contrast, there is a sense in which the concept of *kenon* (void), as first proposed by Leucippus and Democritus, has a sense of

²²⁵ Malpas, “Putting Space in Place: Philosophical Topography and Relational Geography,” 240.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

“empty extendedness” that is indefinite and thus potentially infinite.²²⁸ Malpas contends that the development of the concept of space in modern times, particularly in mathematics, geometry, physics, and geography, shows an increasing emphasis on a boundless or pure notion of extendedness that is more inspired by *kenon* than by either *topos* or *chora*. Extendedness without boundary, moreover, can also be understood as an abstraction from the boundedness of space. Following Edward Casey’s distinction, Malpas terms the latter (bounded openness) “place,” and the former (pure extension) “space.” Hence, in the history of western thought, there is a simultaneous “rise of place” and “demise of place.”²²⁹

In addition to extension and boundedness, which are together in ancient accounts of place but not in current accounts of space, Malpas identifies a third, inseparable concept of emergence, which is “a standing or coming forth [of something]—that might itself be thought as a form of movement towards, into, or out of.”²³⁰ The emergence of entities is central to the notion of *chora* as a (bounded) womb or receptacle that provides an openness in which things can emerge. But Malpas argues that emergence as movement also characterizes *topos*. For instance, Aristotle thinks that fire and air move upwards, towards their “natural place.” Such movement—both within a place and between places—attests to the dynamic character of *topos*, according to Malpas. Movement and dynamism not only are constitutive of place (as either *chora* or *topos*), they reveal the tempo-

²²⁸ Ibid., 234.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., 235.

ral dimension of place. Malpas claims that while the basis for the modern conception of space lies in the extendedness of place, the foundation for time could be understood as emergence. Place, understood in terms of its “underlying phenomena” encompasses both the spatial and the temporal. As Malpas defines it, “Place is thus the original opening up that establishes openness for emergence at the same time as it allows emergence into openness.”²³¹ Emergence, the movement of entities “into appearance”—requires openness and involves “extending into duration”; and openness itself is for that which appears and has the “character of a form of emergence—a dynamic opening out.”²³² In other words, openness and emergence cannot be understood separately because they essentially involve the other. But both these concepts rely on the notion of boundedness. I noted earlier how Malpas sees boundedness as constitutive of the openness of both *chora* and *topos*. Emergence, as appearance that is never complete, also relies on a particular sense of boundedness. Appearance is always related to what does not appear; it has an essentially relational structure. What appears, Malpas argues, “always appears in a particular way and yet implies other possible ways of appearing.”²³³ Moreover, what appears always appears in a context, so that its appearance is always related to what surrounds it. Malpas sees the inherent orientation (one aspect coming into appearance) and location (having a relation to a context) of any appearance as made possible by boundedness.

²³¹ Ibid., 236.

²³² My italics. Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 238.

The close relationship between openness, emergence, and boundedness is central to Malpas's account of place. It also enables him to critique current accounts of space and time. These accounts, Malpas argues, have a tendency to treat separately the phenomena that are inextricably linked together (and named in this unity by "place"). Not only is openness treated simply as extendedness, thus discounting the boundedness that makes it possible, but emergence is also understood in terms of "temporal extendedness—a stretching between temporal points analogous to the stretching between points in space."²³⁴ At the same time that extendedness becomes the key feature of both space and time, what is essential to extendedness itself, *viz.*, boundedness, is relegated to a derivative position. Seen from the perspective of modern accounts of space and time, boundedness is simply a division in extendedness.²³⁵ Thus, whereas openness and emergence both require boundedness, the notions of space and time assume the possibility of infinite extendedness.

I will delve deeper into the concept of boundedness in Malpas's account of place in the second chapter. But one major question arises from the discussion above. While Malpas gives a short account of boundedness as it would relate to emergence (in his discussion of orientation and location), he does not tell us how boundedness relates to openness (apart from the fact that the ancient concepts of *chora* and *topos* assume this relation). Lacking such an account, it appears that we must think boundedness in terms of the two kinds of relations any appearance

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

has—to what does not appear and to what surrounds it. But Malpas himself warns about thinking of boundedness as merely relation—“this is not to say that the notion of boundary can simply be dissolved into the idea of relation.”²³⁶ However, what precisely would define this richer idea of boundary or boundedness is not made clear in Malpas’s account.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have both laid out the key aspects phenomenologically oriented accounts of space and place and specified what can be consistently called “place” in each. Heidegger has a different account of place at each of the three stages in his philosophical career: as *Gegend* in *Being and Time*, as site in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” and as *Ort* in “Building Dwelling Thinking.” Merleau-Ponty’s idea of bodily space is the primary spatial phenomenon that can be called place. Relph and Buttimer explore dimensions of human-space relationship ignored by both philosophers and geographers. Relph holds that to be in a place is to identify with it in some sense. Buttimer, meanwhile, understands place in terms of the tension between home and reach. In the recent philosophical literature, Casey and Malpas build on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Casey’s account articulates the relation between place and self while situating place in the context

²³⁶ Ibid., 239.

of the broader landscape. Malpas's account of the tripartite structure of place identifies three constitutive dimensions: boundedness, openness, and emergence.

A preliminary analysis of these accounts, moreover, has also shown that certain aspects of place are either inadequately developed or in need of further clarification. Specifically, in all accounts except Buttimer's, I have suggested that questions remain regarding the delimitation, scope, range, boundary, or boundedness of place. In the next chapter, I will engage in a critique of these accounts on the basis of criteria developed from the phenomenon of everyday spatial experience. This critique will inform the account of place I offer.

III. THE PHENOMENON OF PLACES

The diverse phenomenological accounts of place and space discussed in the last chapter provide a foundation for the present chapter. There, the goal was to present these accounts' major insights on place and space. Although, moreover, I traced the concepts that could be construed as "place" in these accounts, the exposition was not restricted to a particular interpretational framework. In contrast, the general aims of this chapter are to lay out what is essential to understanding place phenomenologically and to review the accounts discussed in the last chapter through this framework. More specifically, in this chapter I argue that although articulating the identity of a place has been a major concern in all accounts of place, none succeed owing to their inadequate attention to a place's relation to other places around it. Based on this insight, I will provide an account of place that stresses the centrality of relations among places, and thus of boundaries between places.

Before we revisit the accounts of place discussed in the last chapter, I will briefly lay out the framework that guides their evaluation in this chapter. In order not be mired down in the broader philosophical contexts in which most of these accounts are situated and the variety of concerns that motivate them, I will put two fundamental questions about place to these accounts. The source of these questions is the readily available phenomenon of place. First, if one is in some place or other at any moment, what makes the place one is in the particular place it is? Although all accounts of place talk about the distinctness of a place in

relation to others, some do not refer to the “identity” of a place. Consequently, we need to be open about how this identity is construed. The most common approach to arguing for the distinctness of a place is to point to the unity of the constitutive set of elements. One such unity is distinct from another, and thus one place from the next. At least two thinkers I discuss here, Jeff Malpas and Edward Relph, refer to the distinctness of a place in terms of the unity of its elements. Although what unites the different parts of a complex structure could indeed be only one part that structures its identity, with regards to places, the relations among various entities that compose a place, and thus the distinctness of this set of relations from others, is often perceived as central to its uniqueness.

Apart from identity, there is a second, related question, often treated as secondary or derivative, that I also see as fundamental. It concerns the relationship a place has with other places, specifically the boundary (or anything akin to it) that connects and separates it from places around it. The question of distinctness or identity already includes a question of relation between places. For unity of various elements as a place says something about how other entities are excluded from it. But there are two reasons why I take the question of boundary, and, more generally, the question of the nature of relation between places, as deserving equal attention to the question about identity. First, some conceptions of place that specify the unity of place do not discuss the concept of boundary or the relation between places. Consequently, demarcating the two helps clarify my objections to these accounts. Second, and more fundamental, as I will argue in

the last section of the chapter, the relation between places is a more phenomenologically appropriate starting point for an account of place than the question of distinctness or identity. In other words, the question of the relation between places is, if anything, more essential than the question of the identity of a place.

The evaluation of the various accounts of place, therefore, is carried out in light of the two fundamental questions on identity and relation between places. My critique of these accounts is based on the degree to which they engage with these two questions. To be sure, these two questions are not exhaustive for a philosophical inquiry of place. But they are phenomenologically fundamental and thus must be answered by any account of place. For this reason, the account of place I offer will aim primarily at adequately answering these questions and not at being comprehensive. Such a focus, moreover, is necessary to accommodate the last crucial part of this dissertation: an analysis of digitally mediated spaces, which I undertake in the next chapter.

Identity, Boundary, and Spatiality of Regions

Among the spatial concepts discussed in *Being and Time*, region (*Gegend*) came closest to the phenomenon that we would ordinarily call place. From our discussion in Chapter 1, we know that region is the broader context one has in view when dealing with entities; it is the “whither” to which the locations or positions of a group of entities belong. It is, for instance, the equipmental context, the

workplace, within which we locate a particular tool. Heidegger's use of *Platz*, another spatial concept that could be translated as "place," denotes only the location of an entity within a region and is derivative; it does not capture the complexity and breadth of the ordinarily experienced phenomenon of being in a place, which is primary to any specific position within it. Moreover, other spatial concepts described by Heidegger in *Being and Time*—de-severing, directionality, and space—are also secondary to region.²³⁷ De-severing and directionality are oriented by a view of region, and space is only discovered when we peel away the context of involvements represented by region.

Identity of a Region

If region represents early Heidegger's idea of place, as I have argued, its unity would answer the first question on the nature of place: what unites the various elements of a place so as to give it a distinct identity? Region is the broader context in view; such a context brings together all the elements of a region so that any one part is understood in terms of the whole. More specifically, a region allows us to make sense of the various locations (*Plätze*) that belong to a group of ready-to-hand entities. The answer to the question, "Where is a ready-to-hand entity?" is "It is in this or that region." However, a region is not something

²³⁷ *Being and Time*, 145. As Heidegger argues, "The kind of place which is constituted by direction and remoteness [*Entferntheit*] (and closeness is only a mode of the latter) is already oriented towards a region and oriented within it" (136). And regarding space, he notes, "In the phenomenon of the region we have already indicated that on the basis of which space is discovered beforehand in *Dasein*" (145).

present at hand, detached from the worldhood constitutive of Dasein (as being-in-the-world). As Heidegger notes, regions are also ready-to-hand.²³⁸ In fact, regions have the distinction of being constantly ready-to-hand, and it is this constancy that makes it a reference point for other ready-to-hand entities. This also explains why regions are usually inconspicuous even as they guide and orient our dealings with entities.²³⁹ The familiarity and readiness-to-hand of regions point us to the source of the unity in regions. Just like other ready-to-hand entities, regions can only be understood from the perspective of Dasein's circumspective concern. It is within this concern that something constantly at hand is determined as the "where" of a set of locations of other ready-to-hand entities. As Heidegger writes, "In general the 'whither' gets prescribed by a referential totality which has been made fast [*festgemacht*] in a 'for-the-sake-of-which' of concern ..."²⁴⁰ The whither of region is tied to a possibility of Dasein expressed by a for-the-sake-of-which.

Heidegger's only explicit example of a region, however, does not univocally support the claim that regions are centered around Dasein:

Thus the sun, whose light and warmth are in everyday use, has its own positions (*Plätze*)²⁴¹—sunrise, midday, sunset, midnight; these are discovered in circumspection and treated distinctively in terms of changes in the usability of what the sun bestows. Here we have something which is ready-to-hand with uniform constancy, although it keeps changing; its positions (*Plätze*) become accentuated 'indicators' of the regions which lie in them. These celestial regions, which need not have any geographical meaning as yet, provide the 'whither' beforehand for

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁴¹ I have replaced the usual translation of *Plätze* to place with positions. As I have argued in Chapter 1, it is more appropriate to use location or position for *Platz*.

every special way of giving form to the regions which position (*Plätze*) can occupy. The house has its sunny side and its shady side...²⁴²

The positions of the sun, because they are constantly available to us, become indicators of distinct regions. While geographers may call these east or west, Heidegger thinks that the regions do not require such scientific categorization in order to be used. These regions are discovered beforehand so that something ready-to-hand (or a group of ready-to-hand entities) can be assigned a location. A room is something ready-to-hand that contains other entities that are also ready-to-hand. But the position or location of this ready-to-hand equipment-context (the room) can only be determined if something like a sunny and a dark side have already been discovered. The bedroom and the kitchen, for instance, could be located in the sunny side of the house.

It could be argued that only the discovery of regions is guided by circum-spective concern, and that the unity of a region does not itself depend on this concern. In this interpretation, concern guides Dasein to discover regions “in which involvement is decisive,”²⁴³ but these regions are already available for anyone to engage with. Moreover, one could argue that the unity of a region is provided rather by the constancy of a particular arrangement of entities, so that the constant combination of sunset, light, particular human activities, etc. brings about a region that is called the shady side or west. But if we are to take the unity of a region as the constancy of elements, we would still need to specify the Dasein whose possible activities these are, and thus for whom a group of elements

²⁴² Ibid., 137.

²⁴³ Ibid., 137.

are constant. Heidegger himself refers to this constancy in terms of entities being constantly available as ready-to-hand. The unity provided by the constancy of elements refers back to the human projects for which a region is more or less constant. Indeed, instead of an individual's projects, a region appears to be related to the projects of a community or a people over a period of time. Only as part of a community could an individual find a region to be always already there. At the same time, however, when a region is "prescribed" by an individual's possibilities, it has a unique character that goes beyond the "present-at-hand" quality of a communally defined entity. As something settled as a cultural artifact, regions (much like hammers) only become ready-to-hand within the context of a project. Thus, we can conclude that the unity of a region is provided by Dasein's possibility, which guides its projects.

Regions and Boundaries

The second question we need to ask of Heidegger's account of region is how one region relates to other regions. As I have noted, this question is not entirely separate from the first since the particular entities included by a place's unity says something essential about a place's relation to entities in its vicinity. For instance, the limits of the arboretum at the University of Kentucky are defined by the private houses and public streets around it that are excluded from the group of enti-

ties that is the arboretum.²⁴⁴ In terms of Heidegger's own example of regions, we could say that the shady side is partially defined, or outlined, by the sunny side at its limits. But Heidegger makes it clear that regions are not primarily defined in geographical terms, meaning that the point of separation between two regions is not decided by certain geological or celestial facts; although these facts could be used, and are used, they do not primarily define regions. So how do the different regions primarily relate to each other? Put differently, what determines the limit or boundary of a region?

Phenomenally, we experience a place as touching other places, so that certain entities that constitute a place are closer to those other places than other entities are. We could thus attempt to discern the limit or boundary of a region by looking at the difference between the entities that are at the center of the region and those at its perimeter, closer to other regions. But is there such a difference? Although all the entities occupy different positions in a region, this distribution is not relative to a center. Dasein's circumspective concern, expressed in a current project, is indeed what holds the entities together and assigns each its place, but

²⁴⁴ This example assumes that the arboretum is a place. Although a place has not been defined, and it is unclear if Heidegger's idea of region will apply to the arboretum, the example of the arboretum refers to our usual experience of a place and its boundary.

there is no entity at the center of a region.²⁴⁵ Take, for instance, Heidegger's example of the shady side of the house. Entities in that region—rooms, work area, furniture—supposedly have different positions within the shady side, but none of those positions is more in the shady side than others. Heidegger does not conceive of regions as allowing for such gradations. His example of the sides of the town shows a similar discreteness in regional distinctions: "Churches and graves, for instance, are laid out according to the rising and the setting of the sun—the regions of life and death, which are determinative for Dasein itself with regard to its ownmost possibilities of Being in the world."²⁴⁶ The region of death is the west, the sunset serves as its indicator, and graves occupy certain positions within it. But there is no indication of any spatial variability within a region, and there is nothing with an ambiguous position between the east and the west. All positions within a side, including ones that are closer to the other, are treated as

²⁴⁵ Even Dasein is not at the center, neither as the most important entity nor as the central entity in a spatial distribution. Being at any kind of center is impossible because the very definition of Dasein—being-in-the-world—eschews the subject-centered ways of relating to entities and instead defines humans in terms of the network of relations. These networks might have a focal point at a particular point of time, but no central entity or position. Indeed, Dasein's position is nothing but a reflection of the position of other entities: "Dasein understands its 'here' in terms of its environmental 'yonder'. The 'here' does not mean 'where' of something present-at-hand ... Dasein, in accordance with its spatiality, is proximally never here but yonder; from this 'yonder' it comes back to its 'here'; and it comes back to its 'here' only in the way in which it interprets its concerned Being-towards in terms of what is ready-to-hand yonder." Ibid., 142.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 137.

the same. In other words, there is nothing akin to a center-perimeter relation among the positions in a region.²⁴⁷

The lack of such variation has several implications for a region's relation to other regions, but the most important is the absence of contiguity with other places. A perimeter, though part of a place, indicates that a place touches upon other places. In fact, the very differentiation between the center and perimeter is based on the assumption that there is a beyond or "peri" to a place. The perimetrical entities in a place are characterized by a relation to entities at the outside. (We have to imagine this outside as another place since one cannot step into mere space, phenomenologically speaking. Even in a weak sense, entities in any space have a relation to one's world and thus get allocated to some region or other.) These perimetrical entities, such as a fence with an inner and outer side or a street straddling the edges of two places, are related to entities on both sides of the perimeter. In other words, when places touch on each other, there are often entities that are not unequivocally inside the place. A lack of such entities, as we find in Heidegger's idea of region, indicates a lack of contiguity with other regions.

²⁴⁷ To be sure, particular instances of dealing with regions may carve out a center of activity, in relation to which entities could be located as near or far. However, such activities do not help determine the center, and thus the perimeter, of a region for two reasons. First, for any activity, some entities will indeed be at the center, but then all other entities in one's world would occupy marginal or perimetrical positions, thus obscuring any connection to (and the limits of) the region where the activity is situated. Second, centers of activities may or may not have to do with the spatial features by which a region is defined. For instance, if the shady side is defined by the regular positioning of sun, activities in the shady area may bear no relation to the position of the sun, thus making irrelevant any spatial connection with the limits to the shady side or its connection to the sunny side.

Along with a lack of clear indication of how a region touches on or interacts with regions around it, we also find the notion that regions are constant, is essential for a region to be the inconspicuous ready-to-hand that Heidegger claims it to be. The constancy of a region, which is noted as one of its central qualities, is supported by a lack of connection to other regions. It is not surprising that Heidegger's examples of regions are settled conventions that are stable enough to always be ready-to-hand for any person within the broader Western culture. Missing in these settled understanding of certain prominent regions is the vulnerability to continual change that we associate with places. We find that places are dynamic, partly because they are connected to other places. For instance, construction of apartments, houses, or streets around the arboretum would shape the look, feel, shape, and even the entities within it. One reason places are difficult to define, and are thus not be as readily available as Heidegger's regions, is the possible ambiguities introduced by changes in their composition, identity, boundary, function, etc. A place's uniqueness and thus its distinction from places around is often, if not constantly, up for question due to these ambiguities. Sidestepping the question of the demarcation of one place in relation to another, Heidegger also eschews questions of interaction and change. Therefore, although it answers the first question about the identity of a place, Heidegger's account of region does not appear to give a satisfactory response to the second question about a place's relation to other places.

However, there is at least one way to defend the idea of region vis-à-vis the second question: Regions are related to each other not as contiguous entities, but as structured by Dasein's possibilities. We know that the latter provide regions their unity. Accordingly, one could now say that relations and interactions between, not just various entities within a region, but also various regions themselves are guided by Dasein's possibilities. As futural, Dasein's comportment towards beings is guided by its possibility, that is, by a discovery of culturally available regions for its involvement with beings.²⁴⁸ If Dasein picks and assigns regions from out of its concern for its Being, then one could argue that the relationship between regions can only be understood in terms of circumspective concern. For instance, involvement in one region could shape Dasein's perception of and engagement with another region. It is not the contiguity or the movement of entities between regions, but rather the goal of one's engagement with regions that provides the possibility of interaction among them. Such interaction, it is true, differs from a more concrete and direct relation between places we typically see around us. But the existence and importance of the latter need not be challenged for someone to claim the primacy of the interaction made possible by Dasein's possibilities.

²⁴⁸ As I have argued in the last chapter, just as Dasein always already dwells in an understanding of itself in terms of its possibilities, various regions are discovered by Dasein owing to that possibility. As Heidegger writes, "Dasein, in its very Being, has this Being as an issue; and its concern discovers beforehand those regions in which some involvement is decisive." *Ibid.*, 137.

Spatiality of Regions

The lack of boundary or perimeter of regions exposes a central issue with Heidegger's concept of region: any viable interpretation of the unity of a region and the interaction between regions are absolutely dependent on Dasein's possibilities. As I argue, this reference back to a possibility shows that regions are not spatial at all and thus Heidegger's account of spatiality does not adequately capture the spatial aspect of places. I lay out two arguments to support this claim: the first builds on Heidegger's own reinterpretation of region in terms of temporality, and the second focuses on the spatial idea of nearness in Heidegger's account of spatiality.

In Division II of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes "The Temporality of the Spatiality that is characteristic of Dasein." He aims to show that Dasein's spatiality can only be understood as resulting from its temporality. After reiterating how Dasein's spatiality—its making room for itself—is "constituted by directionality and de-severance," Heidegger asks, "How is anything of this sort existentially possible on the basis of Dasein's temporality?"²⁴⁹ His answer to this question is centered on the concept of region: "To Dasein's making room for itself belongs the self-directive discovery of something like a region." This discovery is essential for the spatiality of both Dasein and what is ready-to-hand: a region determines the "possible belonging-somewhere of equipment" and Dasein's

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 419-20.

somewhere, it's "here" (which is in turn tied to the location of the equipment).²⁵⁰ But, more important, region is also what connects spatiality to temporality. The possibility of belonging-somewhere or the "whither" provided by a region "has an essential relationship to involvement. It [belonging-somewhere] always Determines itself factually in terms of the involvement-context."²⁵¹ This context is the network of relationships that defines Dasein's being-in-the-world; more specifically, it consists of Dasein's projects and the entities related to those projects. The involvement-context is not spatial by itself, but determines the "whither" of regions, thus allowing for spatiality of everything involved in the first place. Heidegger traces regions to involvements, and these to temporality:

Relationships of involvement are intelligible only within the horizon of a world that has been disclosed. Their horizational character, moreover, is what first makes possible the specific horizon of the 'whither' of belonging-somewhere regionally. The self-directive discovery of a region is grounded in an ecstatically retentive awaiting of the 'hither' and 'thither' that are possible.²⁵²

The horizon of the world that gives context to involvements is itself determined by the ecstatico-horizational temporality of Dasein. In other words, the unity of the ecstases of temporality (past-present-future) discloses a world, which specifies particular involvements, which, in turn, "makes possible" the "whithers" of regions. Thus Dasein's temporality discloses the "somewhere" to which entities, including Dasein, are to belong. It is unclear, however, whether Dasein, whose

²⁵⁰ As Heidegger says, "With regard to that space which it [Dasein] has ecstatically taken in, the 'here' of its current factual situation never signifies a position in space, but signifies rather the leeway of the range of that equipmental totality with which it is most closely concerned." Ibid., 420.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 420.

²⁵² Ibid. 420.

temporality assigns a “somewhere,” finds a corresponding shared region that is available to it or whether Dasein’s own possibilities enable the constitution of regions that are more or less unique for Dasein. Heidegger’s examples only suggest the former, but the infinite number of possibilities of Dasein should persuade us of the latter (since it would be impossible to find a culturally recognized region for each one of them). Each region is what it is only within the framework of Dasein’s temporal existence.

Heidegger’s discussion of temporality and spatiality shows that region is supposed to be the conceptual mediator between the two. The unity of temporal ecstases discloses the whither of region, which in turn determines the locations of entities. But such mediation can only be possible if region, apart from being determined by temporality, is also spatial in some way (beyond the spatial word that it is). But spatiality is precisely what regions are supposed to elucidate (by grounding equipmental and existential spatiality) in the first place. It is thus difficult to see how a region is a spatial, and not just a temporal, phenomenon.

Spatiality, Disclosedness, and the Problem of Nearness

As I have noted, the lack of boundaries or perimeters raises questions about how well regions capture our everyday experience of places. I noted that although there are no boundaries to regions, their interaction can be understood in terms of Dasein’s circumspective concern. But this connection to Dasein’s possibilities shows us that regions are tied so intimately to Dasein’s temporality that we can-

not discern what is spatial about them. For a moment, however, let us set aside the issue of temporal determination of regions and instead focus on the phenomenon itself, as outlined by Heidegger. Regions are fundamentally an expression of the disclosedness of the world. Ignoring for now the fact that this disclosedness has a temporal, and not spatial or spatio-temporal, basis, Heidegger's central claim regarding spatiality is that it has to be understood primarily from within the idea of disclosedness, the particular intelligibility of entities within which we always already find ourselves. It is this view of spatiality that allows him to eschew the subject-object divide and makes his account phenomenological. In other words, the phenomenon of spatiality as represented by region is governed by and experienced on the basis of disclosedness. Heidegger appears to say: to be in a place is to be amid entities that have been disclosed in certain ways. We assign "locations" to ourselves and other entities in terms of this disclosedness. Such an understanding of spatiality seems incontestable: disclosedness of beings is a necessary feature of our spatiality. We would expect this insight to follow from Heidegger's view that Dasein is being-in-the-world. But are there other essential features of places that regions fail to instantiate? In order to see how the answer to this question is affirmative, we need to see the limitations of understanding spatiality simply in terms of disclosedness.

The major issue with conceiving spatiality in this way is that we lose the distinction between different kinds of nearness. Heidegger discusses nearness and proximity in terms of Dasein's essentially de-severing character. While his

focus is on circumspective bringing-close of entities, as it represents de-severing proximally and for the most part, there is another kind of de-severing that Heidegger acknowledges but does not discuss adequately: cognitive. As he remarks, "But certain ways in which entities are discovered in a purely cognitive manner also have the character of bringing them close."²⁵³ This latter kind, which I will call cognitive de-severing as opposed to practical de-severing, poses a challenge to Heidegger's account of spatiality.

All de-severing is directional in that an entity is brought near, not towards a body, but towards a region. As Heidegger explains: "Every bringing-close has already taken in advance a direction towards a region out of which what is de-severed brings itself close, so that one can come across it with regard to its place. Circumspective concern is de-severing which gives directionality."²⁵⁴ If every de-severing needs a region, as Heidegger claims, then entities that are de-severed in a cognitive manner are also assigned to a region. But regions are not simply the "whereabouts" of ready-to-hand entities; they also point to the corresponding location of Dasein. Therefore, with cognitive de-severance, we have regions that are not immediate (in the usual sense of the word) but nonetheless represent our everyday whereabouts. This problematic consequence is anticipated by Heidegger when he briefly notes the unimaginable ways in which mass media, which facilitates cognitive de-severance, would change our environment: "With the 'radio', for example, Dasein has so expanded its everyday environment that it has

²⁵³ Ibid., 140

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 143.

accomplished a de-severance of the 'world'—a de-severance which, in its meaning for Dasein, cannot yet be visualized."²⁵⁵ Among other concerns, it is indeed difficult to visualize the kind of "somewhere" or regional orientation that belongs to the people, events, and geographical entities that are de-severed in one's awareness of news stories from around the world. It could be argued that my "discovery" of any entity—even through the medium of radio or internet—is guided by overarching frameworks of understanding or network of relations. For instance, hearing news from Thailand, I can "locate" a piece of information within my current set of beliefs about that place and its people. But what, if anything, within this contextual information (that guides my discovery of a new event or entity) could be identified as "region" is difficult to see. Either the idea of cognitive de-severing must stretch the notion of region to an extent that it becomes unrecognizable as a spatial concept, or this kind of de-severance is irrelevant to spatiality. But Heidegger can not rule out cognitive de-severance as an aspect of spatiality because such cognitive relation to entities, much like the practical relation that characterizes the predominant mode of de-severing, is grounded in Dasein's possibilities. Insofar as spatiality is understood with reference to the disclosedness made possible by Dasein's temporality, entities de-severed practically and those that are "discovered in a purely cognitive manner" are both kinds of disclosive relations that *locate* them in relation to other entities. Thus, there appears

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 140.

to be no justification for the dismissal of cognitive relations in such a notion of spatiality.

Even if we stretch and revise our notion of region to include other kinds of de-severing, we are left with a very general idea of “nearness” by which all entities, whether thought vaguely or faced corporeally, can be equally close. Insofar as an entity is at the center of one’s concern at a particular moment, it is close. One is, for instance, spatially closer to one’s childhood home in a moment of nostalgia than the room where one stands. This spatial relation reverses as concern shifts. The idea that some things, no matter how distant in time or measurable distance, could be closer to one’s heart than others is undeniable. The issue, however, is that Heidegger wants us to see the closeness as spatial (and not simply as a function of our imagination or as “spatial” in a figurative way) which confounds different kinds of distances even if it were to speak to our existence. Since all closeness to entities is an aspect of Dasein’s spatiality, and since nearness is dependent on present concern²⁵⁶, there is an isometric quality to Heidegger’s conception of “nearest.” All entities are near in the same way and all are far in the same sense. Such a view of spatiality does not adequately capture our phenomenal experience of near and far, much less the gradations lying between these extremes. For instance, based on my inability to visit my childhood home, I

²⁵⁶ As Heidegger notes in citing the example of a friend who, being across the street, is closer than the street one walks: “Whatever this concern dwells alongside beforehand is what is closest, and this is what regulates de-severances.” In the example I describe, if my thoughts are preoccupied by my childhood memories, my childhood home is closest. If, instead, I am occupied with cleaning my room, that is what is closest. *Ibid.*, 142.

may see it hopelessly distant even when it is the closest thing in my present thoughts. Heidegger cannot account for this contradiction because he does not consider closeness in concern and spatial closeness as two distinct kinds of nearness (even if related).

The problem represented by cognitive de-severing points to the inadequacy of seeing spatiality simply in terms of disclosedness of beings. If my relation to entities and events across the world is of the same nature as my relation to those around me, then the idea of de-severance and region only broadly characterize our relation to entities in the world and do not specify what is particularly spatial about it, that is, they do not elucidate the quintessential spatial concepts of near and far in their phenomenal richness.

Heidegger's account of spatiality in *Being and time*, centered on the concept of region, relies on the idea of Dasein's possibility to answer the two questions we posed above. But, as I have argued, such a reliance on possibility exposes the non-spatial character of region, as judged from its incapacity to i.) mediate between temporality and spatiality, and ii.) account for distinct kinds of nearness. This central difficulty in Heidegger's conception of spatiality can now be tied back to the issue of perimeter discussed above. I have already shown how near and far rely on the presence of a perimeter. Although regions do not have a perimeter, we can discern a kind of perimeter or boundary at work in the idea of disclosedness, which grounds regions. If we imagine disclosedness as a realm,

then it borders on to a lack of disclosedness. Since Dasein is futural, disclosedness is the disclosedness of a possibility of being (so that entities are encountered as what they are from within an understanding of this possibility). In this sense, lack of disclosedness should refer to “the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing,”²⁵⁷ that is, to death. To be, for Dasein, is to be in the disclosedness of entities, and thus death represents the impossibility of any relation to entities (it is “non-relational” or “*unbezügliche*,” as Heidegger puts it). The kind of “boundary” at play here thus divides the possibility of a particular disclosedness from lack of any possibility or disclosedness. It is precisely this broad division that accounts for the lack of any specification with regard to the nearness of entities, so that all entities can be near in the same sense.²⁵⁸ The spatial realm, characterized by the monolithic realm of disclosedness (since entities are either disclosed or not), is so broad that the local, the global, and everything in between has the same general spatial character (that is, mediated by concern and little else). Moreover, Heidegger’s effort to specify regions within this all encompassing boundary carved by disclosedness is of little help since, as I pointed above, he does not provide a criterion for separating regions spatially and never considers the relation between them.

Note that other entities, unlike Dasein, do not have a parallel division between potentiality and lack of potentiality, or, disclosedness and concealedness, since they cannot die as Dasein can. It is perhaps this absence that is responsible

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 307

²⁵⁸ See the discussion of the isometric quality of nearness above.

for the non-spatial character of a region: all the spatial differentiation occurs within the realm of Dasein's possibilities and projects, not guided (at least not to the same degree) by entities and their possibility of participating in these projects.²⁵⁹ Heidegger's discussion of work of art, where he discusses the play between concealedness and openness of entities, points to a correction in allowing for a notion of spatiality that is anchored in entities, and thus more specific than disclosedness as such.

Identity, Boundary, and Nearness in *Ort*

At the end of the section on "The Artwork and *Das Offen*," I concluded that the revised understanding of world, which, in the context of *das Offen*, is conceptualized in relation to the idea of earth, has implications for spatiality. But Heidegger only briefly discusses the spatial concept of *Stätte* or sites that relates to artworks. The full ramifications of the changed understanding of world, and the consequent move away from the idea of spatiality centered on Dasein's possibility, only become clear in Heidegger's discussion of *Ort* in "Building Dwelling Thinking." Therefore, I will aim the two questions on place at the concept of *Ort* I discussed in the section "Things and Places (*Orte*)."

As I described in Chapter 1, *Ort* is centered on a thing, which is a nearing of the fourfold. *Ort* determines the location of entities and provides the space in

²⁵⁹ Heidegger's idea of disclosedness of entities does implicitly refer to their concealedness, but the latter notion is not explicitly taken up in *Being and Time*.

which humans dwell. In response to the first question—what unites the various elements of a place so as to give it a distinct identity—we can thus answer that it is a thing conceived as “nearing” that unites these elements. In the example of the bridge at which an *Ort* is centered, Heidegger writes:

The bridge swings over the stream ‘with ease and power.’ It does not connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of the dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other’s neighborhood. The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream. Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows ... the bridge is ready for the sky’s weather and its fickle nature ... The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants mortals their way, so that they may come and go from shore to shore ... The bridge gathers, as a passage that crosses, before the divinities, whether we explicitly think of, and visibly give thanks for, their presence ... or whether that divine presence is obstructed or even pushed wholly aside.²⁶⁰

The nearing character of a bridge is precisely its ability to unite. To the bridge as a “thing” (*Ding*) belongs the landscape, the sky, the mortals, and the divinities, all of which are brought “near” to each other. As I have argued, the idea of nearing here is not to be understood as measurable distance, but as an active bringing into relation of the various elements. This interplay of the fourfold not only makes the thing what it is, but also creates an *Ort*, which is a unique gathering of the fourfold. The bridge is a place because in holding different elements “near” each other, it allows for their closeness and interaction without letting them collapse into each other. This holding-together-in-separation is what defines the spatiality of an *Ort*. In this gathering, a space (*Raum*) opens up for human dwelling.

²⁶⁰ “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 354-355.

The bridge brings the two banks into relief as two sides of the river. Without the bridge, that is, without a focal entity, the spatial dimension of the landscape is not marked by differentiation; the bridge punctuates the landscape to create an orientation and a sense of distance (centered around the bridge itself). Things that constitute places are, in this sense, anchors that ground human spatial relationships.

We should note here that natural entities, such as a river, also serve to punctuate the landscape. But the bridge, or any built structure, explicitly points to the active participation of the mortals in the fourfold. In other words, a river could also serve as the “thing” that unites the different element, but the human participation here would be subtler. For instance, a holy river is an *Ort* because mortals participate in its continued cultural significance as something holy (among other qualities). Indeed, Heidegger is open to this alternative way of understanding human participation in the fourfold: “Building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything.”²⁶¹ This contrasts with the building as a “constructing,” but both modes of “building” are equally important for dwelling, in Heidegger understanding of the term. Natural entities and the *Orte* they allow for are not discussed in “Building Dwelling Thinking”²⁶² because Heidegger deliberately limits the discussion to building in the sense of constructing.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 349.

²⁶² As Heidegger notes, “We limit ourselves to building in the sense of constructing things and inquire: what is a built thing?” Ibid., 353-4.

Things, in so far as they are “thinging” or “nearing,” provide the unity of various entities, thus establishing an *Ort*. With respect to region, we discussed how Dasein’s possibility provided the same unity. There is thus a shift in how these two accounts of place are fundamentally defined, although they are not unrelated. This shift helps Heidegger avoid the major concern we had noted about region—that it is not spatial. Unlike region, *Ort* is not simply a mediating concept that translates Dasein’s temporality into spatiality (although *Ort* does include both temporal and spatial dimensions). And *Ort* is better able to represent our phenomenal experience of near and far since the particular disclosedness that defines an *Ort*—the active interplay of the fourfold that brings entities in relation to one another—is anchored in an entity which is not solely defined by its possibilities or potentiality but by the nearness of entities around it. Recall that the disclosedness of Dasein’s possibility defines a spatial realm only in terms of Dasein’s disclosed world: that which is the center of Dasein’s concern is near. Since it does not account for distinct kinds of nearness, Heidegger’s account of human spatiality is phenomenologically inadequate. But, as noted in the discussion of the work of art, sites are created by entities that allow for the rift design (the opposing yet intimate relation between world and earth). The specificity of a site and of an *Ort* is based on this rootedness in an entity. Just as with rift design, where disclosedness of an entity is intimately tied to its concealedness, the idea of nearing (or thinging) anchors disclosedness in a thing. In other words, world gets grounded in earth when entities become the focal points of places. Such

grounding allows us to see nearness in terms of the focal entity in an *Ort*: something in the landscape surrounding the bridge is near or far (or has some position in between) vis-à-vis the bridge. This is not possible when spatiality is understood solely in terms of *Dasein*, whose structure does not adequately take into account the concealedness of entities.

Relation between Orte

Heidegger sees human existence so intimately tied to places (*Orte*) that they must be numerous (and not just idyllic bridges in the countryside). As he remarks, “To say that mortals are is to say that in dwelling they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and [*Orte*].”²⁶³ Human existence in space presupposes things that open up spaces. Our understanding of place as *Ort* thus needs to include an account of how the plurality of places are related. In order to see if and how Heidegger’s account of *Ort* answers our second question, we need to expand his example of the bridge. The bridge is a thing of the kind that allows for an *Ort*.²⁶⁴ But we can imagine other things near the bridge that do the same, such as a house, a church, a street, etc. We thus ask: what, if any, is the relation between the place established by the bridge and other *Orte* around it?

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 358.

²⁶⁴ It is not clear if Heidegger sees some things as places (*Orte*) and others not, but his phrasing—“things that are places” (“*Dinge, die in solcher Art Orte sind*”)—implies that some kind of distinction is being made between things in general and things that are places. The discussion here and below do not depend on such a distinction.

Heidegger does not discuss the relation among *Orte*, but he does briefly note the ideas of boundary, the joining of spaces, and nearness, all of which are relevant to this relation. The idea of boundary, for Heidegger, is closely tied to space (*Raum*, but not pure space or space as extendedness) made possible by things that are *Orte*:

Only things that are *Orte* in this manner allow for spaces. What the word for space, *Raum*, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum*, *Rum*, means a place that is freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds.²⁶⁵

The discussion aims to show how spaces are grounded in *Orte* and not in pure space. Heidegger continues, "That for which room is made is always granted and hence is joined, that is, gathered, by virtue of a [*Ort*], that is, by such a thing as the bridge." Things allow for places, and thus spaces, because they create boundaries. Heidegger's description of the gathering of the fourfold is thus also an account of the formation of boundaries. But what exactly is this boundary that is brought about by nearing and that allows for the unfolding of space?

As I noted above, a boundary or perimeter, understood in the usual sense of the term, marks the ending of one place as it touches on another and thus implies contiguity of places. It is unclear, however, in what sense *Orte* are contiguous. The few instances where Heidegger alludes to contiguity, there is no reference to any kind of boundary. For instance, he claims that "building, by virtue of

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 356.

constructing [*Orte*], is a founding and joining of spaces” and, later, “Building accomplishes its essential process in the raising of [*Orte*] by the joining of their spaces.”²⁶⁶ Heidegger sees the act of building, such as constructing a bridge, not just as the bringing together of the fourfold into a thing to establish a place and thus open space, but also the joining of this opened space with other opened spaces.²⁶⁷ It is to be noted that building accomplishes the two essential tasks—founding and joining—together: establishing an *Ort* is at the same time the joining of spaces. And in both the passages above, founding implies joining, and vice versa. The coevalness of founding and joining refers back to the fact of boundary. The founding of places, Heidegger claims, is made possible by a boundary that frees space within it; and the joining of places, which entails that their boundaries become contiguous, is an essential part of the founding of place. But although boundary is at the center of both the founding and joining of places, Heidegger does not go beyond a short abstract definition cited above. Therefore, we are left to speculate about its nature.

We know that boundaries come to be by virtue of the nearing or gathering of the fourfold. We might thus be able to tease out a sense of boundary by revisiting the idea of nearing. There are two ways to think of nearing. In the primary sense, nearing as gathering is the coming into relation of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. The active gathering of the fourfold represents the structure of what

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

²⁶⁷ He says something similar when noting that building “brings forth the thing as a [*Ort*], out into what is already present.” *Ibid.*, 361.

Heidegger calls a thing. We might see it as the general nature of any thing that applies equally to a jug, a bridge, a deer, a bull, book, and a cross.²⁶⁸ In a secondary sense of the term, nearing has a geographical connotation. In allowing for an *Ort*, a thing gathers entities around it, disclosing them in a particular manner. It is in this second sense of gathering that we can discern anything like a boundary that relates to *Orte*. Nearing, as it applies to *Orte*, brings together the particular surroundings—not simply earth, sky, mortals, and divinities in general—but the specific configuration of the world that is a particular fourfold, so that they are now disclosed together in the human engagement with things. To be in an *Ort* thus means being “near” a particular set of entities in a particular world disclosed together by virtue of a thing. In Heidegger’s example, “The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants their way to mortals so that they may come and go from shore to shore.”²⁶⁹ This understanding of *Ort* thus specifies some of the entities that are part of a nearing and thus part of a place. In other words, nearing, within the context of things that allow for places, points to a possible notion of boundary in its inclusion of certain entities and exclusion of others.

²⁶⁸ These are all examples given by Heidegger at the end of “The Thing”, 180.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

However, despite the specificity of *Ort* compared to region, it still fails to articulate a boundary.²⁷⁰ First, although the gathering explicitly refers to surrounding entities, there is no indication as to the range of entities that are “gathered” in the gathering that makes a specific *Ort* what it is. In other words, we do not know the scope of the nearing that unites the different elements. Second, and more important, since *Ort* is not simply an entity, but the disclosedness of a group of entities anchored by a thing. Such disclosedness refers to how entities are revealed in a particular relation to one another and in relation to the mortals and their projects.²⁷¹ To be in an *Ort* is to be part of this disclosedness, regardless of one’s geographical whereabouts. Heidegger makes this point clear in the following example:

When I say ‘man,’ I already name the stay within the fourfold among things. Even when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves .. If all of us now think, from where we are right here, of the old bridge in Heidelberg, this thinking toward that [Ort] is not a mere experience inside the persons present here; rather, it belongs to the essence of our thinking of that bridge that in itself thinking persists through the distance to that [Ort]. From this spot right here, we are there at the bridge—we are by no means at some representational content in our conscious-

²⁷⁰The boundary in an *Ort* parallels what we find in the concept of region in some ways. Both involve the boundary between disclosedness and concealment. But there is one striking difference. Whereas the disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*) that grounds region centers on Dasein’s possibility, resulting in an general and abstract sense of spatiality that does not correspond to the phenomena of particular places, the nearing that brings together the fourfold, anchored as it is in a thing, allows for a more specific notion of spatiality. The shift in focus—from Dasein to a thing—grounds spatiality in earth (as in the work of art), and thus fixes disclosedness, which is now understood as the “worlding of the world,” at a concrete entity.

²⁷¹ Note that disclosedness here is not tied to the temporal ecstases of Dasein, as it was in *Being and Time*. The world disclosed here has the sense of the active “worlding” which results from the nearing of the fourfold (of which mortals are one part) and not of the “worldhood” that is the structure of that possibility which Dasein assigns itself in its projective understanding.

ness. From right here we may even be much nearer to that bridge and to what it makes room for than someone who uses it daily as an indifferent river crossing.²⁷²

To be at the *Ort* established by the bridge, one does not need to be physically at or near the bridge. At the same time, walking on the bridge is not a sufficient condition for being at the bridge qua *Ort*.²⁷³ The absence of a delimiting feature in *Orte* and the essential indifference that *Orte* have to those who use them go hand in hand. A place, when it is understood simply as the disclosedness of a group of entities (that is, as gathering), is essentially unchanged by the fact that those who have participated in its “nearing” (as a part of the fourfold, that is, as beings for whom other entities are disclosed in nearing) might never see it again, let alone traverse it. Although Heidegger notes that mortals go back and forth on the bridge, he also sees the bridge as a place that can be “sustain[ed]” from far away.²⁷⁴ One can be “near” a thing, and hence in an *Ort*, in thinking of it.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 358-9.

²⁷³ Heidegger does not describe the example in this dichotomous manner—that is, at the bridge versus not at the bridge—although he does say that “we are there at the bridge” thinking of the bridge. The key word here, however, is “nearer.” When walking on the bridge indifferently, one is still on the bridge in some sense, Heidegger appears to think. It is only that this sense of being at the bridge is not very relevant to the kind of “nearness” that is at play in the gathering that defines the place. That is why I take it that one is not truly in an *Ort*, in Heidegger’s sense of the word, when one is using it without being a part of the disclosedness of beings brought about by the thing. One can think of a tourist from the United States visiting the Heidelberg bridge for the first time, for instance. They might use the bridge, but they do not see or experience it as a place the way some of the locals do (for whom the place anchors a set relations to the entities around it, revealing them in a light that is not granted to the visitor).

²⁷⁴ As Heidegger writes, “But in going through spaces we do not give up our standing in them. Rather, we always go through spaces in such a way that we already sustain them by staying constantly with near and remote [*Orte*] and things.” *Ibid.*, 359.

Given that there is a lack of clarity about the scope of gathering and that physical closeness is not among the criteria that determines one's being in an *Ort*, it is unclear how we could understand the separation of *Orte* and thus the relationship among them. For instance, if there is a public building, a flea market, a church, and a garden close to the bridge in Heidegger's example, are we to see them gathered around a historically and culturally significant bridge (so that the bridge-place includes all these nearby entities)? Or, are we to treat some of them as focal entities in their own right, establishing their own thing-places? Responding to these questions would require an account of the boundary of *Ort* that is absent in Heidegger's works.

Unity and Scope of a Bodily Space

In our discussion of the idea of space in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, we identified bodily space as the primary spatial phenomenon that can be called place. We also noted that unlike early Heidegger's conception of spatiality, which is grounded in Dasein's possibility, Merleau-Ponty's account of bodily space is rooted in bodily capacity expressed in habit and motor intention. Although habits and motor intentions are related to one's possibility, it is limited by bodily mediation, something conspicuously absent in the case of Dasein. The introduction of the human body, therefore, promises not only a different source of unity of place, but a more concrete sense of boundary in a bodily space.

In order to see how Merleau-Ponty's account might respond to the question of the identity of a place, we need to briefly review the idea of bodily space. The "body" that Merleau-Ponty sees as the basis of human spatiality is not a physical body, which, at any moment, is restricted to one particular engagement with entities around it and thus just one spatial orientation. Rather, it is the virtual body, which is body seen in terms of all possible movements. It is this potential to engage with entities that any given time carves out a "bodily space." The possibility of movement, in turn, is decided by the intersection of motor intentions and sensory perception, which meet halfway, so that certain movements are seen possible in certain surroundings but not in others. The match between the two—projected motor intentions and perceived sensory data—is the "hold" that the body has on the world, and is called a spatial level. This hold is open to change owing to changes in either motor intentions (determined by motor capacity) or in entities that are the objects of those intentions.

What, then, unites the various elements of a bodily space so as to give it a distinct identity? The answer appears to be the virtual body, which mediates between the actual body and the surroundings, thus allowing for a spatiality that can be reduced neither to a body, nor to its surrounding. The spatial level—the hold on one's surroundings through this virtual body—represents the unity of bodily space at any particular time and is also referred to as bodily schema.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ The potential relations of a virtual body is determined by a bodily schema, which Merleau-Ponty defines as "an experience of [the] body in the world." The idea of bodily schema will be central to Edward Casey's understanding of the unity of place, as discussed below.

The virtual body brings together entities around the body into a bodily space. In some instances, Merleau-Ponty refers to the spaces carved out by one's bodily engagements as habitats. In other occasions, he refers to the inhabited space as the "phenomenal 'place'" [*lieu*] of the virtual body. Both of these designations point to bodily space as a place. In other words, both as "habitat" and as "phenomenal place," specifying a bodily space is a phenomenological response to the question "Where is she?" It is this "where," the spatial context defined by the virtual body, and not simply the point or position of a body, whose unity I am concerned with here.

But the idea of "where" is complicated by Merleau-Ponty's discussion of "lived distance," which shows a possibility of detachment from one's immediate surroundings. After noting that in dreams and myths "we learn where the phenomenon is located by sensing what our desire moves toward, what strikes fear in our hearts, and upon what our life depends," Merleau-Ponty claims that "Even in waking life, things do not proceed otherwise."²⁷⁶ Where one is, he argues in the following example, depends on what one sees as the center of one's life.

I arrive in a village for the holidays, happy to leave behind my work and my ordinary surroundings. I settle into the village ... But if a friend comes to see me and brings news from Paris, or if the radio and newspaper inform me that there are threats of war, then I feel exiled in this village, excluded from real life ... Our body and our perception always solicit us to take the landscape they offer as the center of the world. But this landscape is not necessarily the landscape of our life.

²⁷⁶ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 299.

I can “be elsewhere” while remaining here, and if am kept far from what I love, I feel far from the center of real life.²⁷⁷

Although the body, as a virtual body, offers the immediate surroundings as the “where” of one’s existence, what serves as the center of one’s life at any point of time, and thus indicates one’s whereabouts, could be different. This possibility puts into question my suggestion that only the virtual body unites the bodily space.²⁷⁸ Indeed, we must now revise our notion of the latter in light of the possibility of being “elsewhere,” far from the reach of bodily gestures. To the idea of bodily capacities, which define the virtual body, we must add affective relation to entities (or groups of entities) as determining one’s space at any time. The latter, moreover, seems to be independent of the former, so that what matters in determining the “where” is simply the group of entities one sees at the center of one’s life. In Merleau-Ponty’s example, that would be Paris. His current concerns change his relation to his immediate surroundings. He was settled in the village, but now feels himself exiled there. The “center” of his life shifts with his concern, and so does the answer to the existential question “where is he?”

Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly rule out this way of understanding “where”—that is, the possible independence of virtual body and concern—but his claim that spatiality is conditioned on the “total life of the subject, the energy with which he tends toward a future through his body and his world,” points to

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 299.

²⁷⁸ This possibility of a lack of coincidence between one’s virtual body and one’s whereabouts is to be seen as an exception rather than the norm in everyday life. Such an exception points to the central role one’s meaningful relations to entities play in bodily space (so that the bodily limitations on what one can engage with or what is within bodily reach is not the only factor delimiting this space).

the inseparable relation between one's virtual body and one's meaningful relation to entities, that is between one's body and one's world. Engagement with one's surrounding is through one's body and through one's world, both guided by a projection into the future. Merleau-Ponty defines "world" as "a totality where each element has relations of meaning with the others."²⁷⁹ The web of meanings structuring one's relationship to entities—one's desires, fears, concerns, etc.—is as much a part of spatiality as is the bodily possibilities that define the virtual body. We could thus see how Merleau-Ponty might object to my proposed separation of the two in order to make sense of the village example. Indeed, one could argue that such a separation of the body from the world goes against one of the central claims in *Phenomenology of Perception*, viz., our enmeshment in the world is through our bodies. Spatiality is determined, one could contest, not by the virtual body *and* by the world, but by the body that inhabits and discloses the world. This, I must admit, is true. But we must still account for the problematic scenario represented by Merleau-Ponty's example above. In this case, the virtual body could be seen in the context of entities immediately surrounding one's physical body, and, alternatively, in the context of one's previous habitats, such as another neighborhood or city. It is the center of one's world, therefore, that ultimately determines which of these possibilities of the virtual body is taken to define one's existential whereabouts at any point of time. As Merleau-Ponty argues, a virtual body's "phenomenal 'place' is defined by its task

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 305.

and by its situation. My body is wherever it has something to do.”²⁸⁰ Faced with the news from Paris, Merleau-Ponty’s tasks are redefined by the shift in what is of utmost concern to him. His virtual body has little to do in the village anymore, even though his physical body and his perceptions continue to be engaged there. This possibility of dissociation between the physical body and the virtual body is precisely at issue in Merleau-Ponty’s account of spatiality. It complicates the simple account of bodily space in which the immediate context of the physical body more or less coincides with the “where” of the virtual body. Therefore, an interpretation of bodily space that separates virtual body and world is plausible.

Such separation, obvious only in some scenarios, also allows us to articulate the unity of common bodily spaces more accurately. Although one’s virtual body carves out (in terms of its possible movements and capacities in relation to the surrounding world) a space that defines one’s whereabouts, the particular entities it ties together in this spatial constellation is determined by one’s task or concern. The unity of a bodily space, therefore, is provided by both the body’s capacities and one’s current concerns. But neither, by itself, can determine a bodily space: the virtual body by itself would fail to take into account the current tasks that bring into focus certain entities and relations; and the current tasks and concerns by themselves cannot be situated in a particular surrounding without the engagement made possible by the body. Here we may see how Merleau-Ponty’s account of place differs from that of Heidegger’s in *Being and Time*. The lat-

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 261.

ter's emphasis on Dasein's possibility, which translates into particular concerns, leaves out the other determinant of place, that is, virtual body.

Scope and Hold of Bodily Spaces

The question of the separation and relation between bodily spaces is made difficult by the fact that these spaces are what they are only by virtue of being bodily inhabited. Hence it appears that a particular bodily space is not related to other such spaces of the same person, because they cannot exist simultaneously. A coffee shop, for instance, defines my bodily space right now. Although there are other spaces that I have inhabited, my current space, defined by my virtual body and task, cannot relate to them in the same way as, say, two adjacent buildings do. The other spaces are not the center of current concern. Thus, unlike spaces defined simply by their geographical location, bodily spaces cannot be observed simultaneously from a disembodied bird's eye perspective.

However, although bodily spaces taken up actively are qualitatively different than those that are not, they have an underlying similarity. The spaces that I have inhabited, but do not inhabit right now, are still familiar to me. They are habitats already carved out by my bodily possibilities guided by my tasks and concerns. Although past, they still provide me with "possible anchorage."²⁸¹ I can quickly settle into a place I have been to because the particular milieu "motivates" or proposes the familiar spatial relations which define my bodily

²⁸¹ Ibid., 293.

space. When I return home, for instance, I quickly take up the spatial relations offered by my surroundings. These relations are a result of my habitual dealings, which are summed up in the idea of a spatial level, that is, the “hold” that I have on things around me. In other words, we often simply take up dormant spatial relations when moving from one bodily space or habitat to another.

The presence of familiar spatial relations, and the general idea of bodily habits that create habitats, is central to Merleau-Ponty’s account of space. It is presupposed in the example of being in a village and hearing news about an impending war from Paris. In this case, his concerns move him to take up the particular spatial relations that defined his existence in Paris and that were dormant while he was feeling settled in the village. Not only is his heart in Paris, as one would say, but he is there by virtue of inhabiting, albeit in imagination, the spatial relations of the familiar habitat. Perhaps, he worries that he is not able to visit a friend who resides near the Seine, imagines the situation on the streets, or entertains the prospect of joining the military and going away from Paris. In each case, he does not just represent a concept in his mind, but takes up, with his virtual body, a position in the imaginary landscape that spatially define these situations. Such a “being elsewhere,” it must be noted, is still deficient. He cannot actualize any of the possibilities offered by his concerns. But Merleau-Ponty’s example reveals that particular spatial relations, not the fact that they are actively inhabited, defines a bodily or existential space.

Returning to our question, what is the relationship between these spaces? Bodily spaces, thus defined, can now be understood in their plurality.²⁸² As with our questioning of Heidegger's account of region and *Ort*, we start by asking whether or not these spaces have a center and perimeter. The latter, as I have noted, points to a place's relation to other places. The distinction between center and perimeter draws on the notions of near and far. In Merleau-Ponty's account of bodily space, the center is defined by the virtual body, whose possible gestures radiate into a surrounding. Near and far are thus defined in relation to this center. Unlike the measurement of distances that take a standard of reference as its unit, what is near and far for a virtual body relates to its hold on entities. As Merleau-Ponty argues:

When we say that an object [] is far or near, this is often without any comparison, not even an implicit one, with any other object or even with the objective size and position of one's own body, but rather through a certain 'scope' of our gestures, a certain 'hold' of the phenomenal body upon its surroundings.²⁸³

A "complete hold" of bodily gestures on entities shows that they are in proximity, and the gradual fading of the "power of [this] hold" indicates that they are far away. Although this hold is related to the possibilities of a body (the virtual body), it is also determined by the particular task or concern that defines the situation, as I have argued above. In other words, it is not just the complete range of entities that I can bodily engage with, but those that are part of my task at any

²⁸² Merleau-Ponty also talks about another kind of plurality. He discusses the spatiality of night, dream spaces, and mythical spaces as particular kinds of existential spaces. All of these are grouped under "anthropological spaces" which contrasts with geometrical or homogenous space.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 278.

moment of time, that defines what is near. This second, pragmatic and affective aspect of our hold also expands the idea of scope beyond just the present surroundings. While Merleau-Ponty talks about the “‘scope’ of our gestures,” he later refers to the “‘scope’ of my life,” which is measured by the “lived distance [that] links me to things that count and exist for me.”²⁸⁴ In this latter sense, one’s scope envelopes all significant entities that populate one’s world, and not just those that constitute the present task. The ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty’s description of scope—lending it to both a specific and general relation to entities—points to the difficulty in delimiting existential spaces. At any point of time, the boundary of an inhabited space can expand, contract, or change entirely, depending on what counts as the center of one’s life. For instance, the space that I inhabit in my home could be limited to my desk if I am consumed in my writing. But it can also be the whole room, my apartment, the neighborhood, or the city depending on my projects and concerns.

Such flexibility in the perimeter of an existential space, together with the fact that usual demarcations of limits (such as walls or fences) do not always represent the experienced boundaries, means that concepts such as scope, hold, and near fail to articulate a boundary of bodily space. When boundaries can shift, a particular space is only a narrowing or extending of a limit on a continuous scale that defines one’s scope of life. Consequently, there is no definite way to talk about the relationship between bodily spaces, since such an interaction assumes

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 299.

that we can posit two, more or less defined, spaces. Indeed, despite his use of specific examples of bodily space and terms such as “habitat,” Merleau-Ponty appears to have little interest in defining the structure of particular bodily spaces and thus any relation between them. The articulation of a particular set of spatial relationships (such as my bodily space as I sit on my desk), Merleau-Ponty claims, can only happen “against the background of an already familiar world.”²⁸⁵ It is the general ways in which we are “anchored” in this background that is of interest to Merleau-Ponty, not the “second-order” articulations that is represented by our questioning of the boundaries and relations among bodily spaces.²⁸⁶ However, the absence of the “second-order” account of habitats has implications for any “first-order” framework for understanding human spatiality. That our bodily being in the world is central to spatiality is undeniable, and Merleau-Ponty’s writings help us see why. But this insight only lays the groundwork for inquiring into our spatial experience. To respond to the phenomena of distinct places, an account of bodily space would have to show how such spatial individuation is made in our experience. One could argue that this would be asking too much from a text that is primarily concerned with perception, space being just one part of it. But the separation of habitats is already assumed by Mer-

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 293.

²⁸⁶ After he has argued that spatiality is rooted in this background, Merleau-Ponty writes that he aims to “broaden [his] research” by describing the particular “original spatiality for each modality of this anchorage [in the world].” Ibid., 296. These categories of spaces pertain to different realms of our experience, such as spatiality of night, spaces of dreams or fantasies, and mythical spaces. He does not offer an exhaustive account of “anthropological spaces,” noting that there is no limit to how many we can identify. Ibid., 300.

leau-Ponty. Indeed, it is impossible to talk phenomenologically about space and not engage with particular places. What is lacking is an acknowledgement that such a discussion needs to clarify the notion of boundaries. In my own account of place, discussed below, I elaborate on the need to take into account the plurality of places and their boundaries.

Identity and Insiderness

In his account of place, Relph explicitly explores the idea of identity, which distinguishes not only place from space but also one place from another. He sees this identity in two ways: as the identity of a place, and as the identity that someone or a group has with that place. The identity of a place, according to Relph, has three basic components: static physical settings, activities, and meanings. Although Relph admits that within our experience of a place these three parts are inseparable, he also claims that they are irreducible to each other and can be separated when we describe the experience. The three components, along with the “less tangible” *genius loci* or the “spirit of place” that refers to the overall character or personality of a place, make up the basic raw material for the identity of any place.²⁸⁷ The relative weightings of these elements in a place is key to its identity. However, in terms of the “essence of place,” Relph claims, the identity of a place is of lesser importance than the identity of a person or group *with a*

²⁸⁷ *Place and Placelessness*, 46, 48. Relph compares these components to those of a painting, such as “the canvas, the paint, the symbols.”

place.²⁸⁸ The reason for this hierarchy is not clearly stated but is implied in Relph's phenomenological approach, which starts out by claiming that place is "a phenomenon of direct experience." The way places are experienced, that is, identified with, is central to what they are; one understands the identity of a place only to the extent that one identifies with it. This latter identity, moreover, is understood with reference to insideness. As described in Chapter 1, Relph sees the insideness that defines identity with a place as resulting from one's engagement with places, which can range from mere physical presence in a place to meaningful engagements that result in complete identification with it. Thus, identity with a place, which reveals the identity of a place, is a function of embodied engagement (although Relph also briefly mentions "vicarious insideness," the kind that we experience reading about a place in a novel).

In Chapter 1, I noted a lack of a clear criterion for delimiting what qualifies as an experience or engagement in a place versus an engagement with something else. I also noted that although Relph is aware of possible ambiguities in making this fundamental distinction, he notes that the "intensity" of experience of a place—which ranges from superficial presence to deep commitment—could help in carving out an inside that defines place. However, in his brief discussion of boundary, Relph claims that the boundary of what is inside can shift depending on one's intentions and projects at a particular time. In his example, if home is the center of one's interests, then everything else is outside; if the local district

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 49.

is the focus, then it is the boundary of this place that distinguishes the inside from the outside.

Relph's answers to the two questions—on the identity of a place and on the relation between places—are thus intertwined. The identity of a place is constituted in one's identity with it, which is the having of intense experiences of it; but the range of entities, activities and meanings that are the focus of this empathetic experience (and thus those that are excluded) is also central to what is inside and makes up a place's identity. While this range is essential to identity, the difficulty in determining it, and hence in defining a particular place by it, is suggested in Relph's claim that the boundary moves with changes in intentions.²⁸⁹ The identity of a place presumably changes accordingly, bringing together a different set of entities, activities, and meanings as the intentions and projects change. But Relph does not believe that the identity of a place is absolutely fluid and ephemeral, that there are no places except for where my intentions lie at the present moment. What then, we may ask, is the source of the stable boundaries that underpins Relph's talk of distinct places throughout his book?

The answer to this question lies in Relph's particular use of the phenomenological approach to place. He adopts a phenomenological approach to the identity of a place in noting that identity *with* place is much more important to the identity of a place than the components of a place. One assumes, therefore, that the three constituents of a place—physical setting, activities, and mean-

²⁸⁹ *Place and Placelessness*, 50

ings—are only raw materials that figure differently in each of our different experiences of the same place. This is a kind of difference that Relph is attuned to, citing Ian Nairn's claim that "there are as many identities of place as there are people."²⁹⁰ But he quickly qualifies this statement by claiming that the various individual identities "are nevertheless combined intersubjectively to form a common identity." It is this idea of common identity that implicitly grounds Relph's claims about places and an individual's identification with them. His emphasis on identity with places takes for granted that there are stable, culturally given identities of places. This is to say that Relph's focus on the experience of insideness to discuss the identity of a place hides his consistent presumption of given place identities, defined legally, cultural, or geographically. The latter sources of a place's identity are quite different from the former, phenomenological description of identity. But Relph appears to tie both of these notions of identity. The insideness of one's experience and its intention-dependent perimeter moves within the range of given places and within the boundaries of any given place already clarified by convention.²⁹¹ Indeed, Relph's suggestion that one comes to understand a place's identity through a deep engagement that involves training oneself to see the various aspects of the place attests to this view of pre-given identity and boundary of a place.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 45.

²⁹¹ In noting the shift in boundaries due to varying intentions, Relph uses examples of predefined places or "zones," such the move from "home" to the "local district." Ibid., 50.

Accepting the notion of predefined places is not itself antithetical to Relph's phenomenological approach to place. Indeed, part of how one experiences a place is guided by how places are defined and viewed by others, including established conventions and maps. The concern here is that Relph's goal is not simply to describe what it means to identify *with* place, in which case we would expect his account of place to assume what constitutes the identity *of* place, as he does. But, as noted above, he aims to describe the "essence of place," which consists not in the identity of a place, but in an identity with it.²⁹² Accordingly, we should not expect his account of this essence to ultimately rely on the identity of a place, which was explicitly rejected in favor of identity with place. Nonetheless, we do find this reliance in Relph's notion of place, where identity with place becomes simply a reflection of (and not, say, an active shaping of) the culturally given identity of a place. We can thus conclude that Relph does not truly delve into an account of identity of place so much as he sees identity with place as an important phenomenon that has been hitherto neglected.

Interplay between Home and Reach

Among the works I have discussed, Anne Buttimer's conception of place is unique in juxtaposing the phenomenological emphasis on the lived experience of a place with the traditional focus in geography on the social, political, technolog-

²⁹² Ibid., 49.

ical, and economic forces that constantly shape that experience. In the texts we discussed in Chapter 1, Buttimer goes from pointing out the tension between the two approaches to place to attempting to reconcile them. Mediation between the two occurs through the interplay between home and reach. Instead of seeing place simply as home, or the settled habits and meanings around a locality, Buttimer suggests that we see it in the context of the every-changing horizons represented by broader forces, such as sociopolitical changes and technological developments.

The question of the identity of a place is complicated by Buttimer's refusal to identify place with the unity of a static set of entities, activities and meanings. The constant influence exerted by external forces on the constituents of a place, and thus on the character of the place itself, is also an equally important part of Buttimer's conception of place. Any stable idea of "home" (the quintessential place) must be seen in the context of "range" or "reach," which refers broadly to the areas, entities, dehumanized structures, and economic, technological, and bureaucratic forces that are beyond the familiar set of stable relations that constitute a place. To do otherwise is to "freeze the dynamic process" that defines a place in its relation to its changing horizons. At the same time, Buttimer thinks that locations that appear to be a result of indifferent forces of "reach," such as commercial areas marked by structures lacking a unique identity (e.g. gas stations on highways, fast food restaurants), could still come to acquire meaningful presence in the lives of some people, thereby becoming place-like. There is thus an inter-

play between the notions of place and reach: a set of relations that connotes the familiarity and safety of a home can establish itself in the socially barren landscapes of modern urban life; and established places, like a centuries-old town, can change fundamentally in response to broader disruptive forces. Buttimer is thus not committed to the stability of place identities, although she believes in some kind of unity that distinguishes a place from what is beyond it.

Buttimer's account does not engage the question of relations among places. However, the relation between home and reach could serve as a model for place-place relations. Such a model would relate ever-changing places to other places that contain the sociopolitical and technological forces that Buttimer speaks of.²⁹³ In other words, if we imagine reach as not placeless, but constituting a different kind of place (an idea Buttimer appears to be open to), then we have an account of place-place relation rather than home-reach. Places can reach into each other, that is, serve as each other's reach or range.

Informed by her own field studies,²⁹⁴ Buttimer's questioning of the stable identities of places, along with her emphasis on the interaction between place and reach, helps her avoid some of the pitfalls, such as an assumption of pre-existent, culturally given identities of places, that affect other accounts of place.

However, as noted in Chapter 1, throughout her work Buttimer assumes a possi-

²⁹³ For instance, Silicon Valley in San Francisco could be seen both as a place and as a source of technological changes in other places in the country (and around the world).

²⁹⁴ I have described one of them, about her residential complex, but Buttimer cites others in her work. The most notable among them, on a critique of planning standards, involved interviewing residents of a locality about their sense of place. See Buttimer, "Social Space and the Planning of Residential Areas."

ble distinction between the sociocultural, political, and technological forces on the one hand and places on the other. It is this distinction that allows her to speak of home and reach. In other words, she takes a standard distinction in traditional geography (between place as something subjective and objective or universal forces) and tries to reconcile the two sides. Although the assumption of such a dichotomy is not a concern within the framework Buttimer seems to adopt, it is problematic from a phenomenological perspective.

First, focused on reconciling place with destabilizing forces in modern technological societies, Buttimer assumes what constitutes a place. However, such an assumption has implication for her work since the way a place interacts with forces beyond it depends precisely on how we define a place. If places are understood as having stable identities, as Buttimer suggests they do, then the idea of reach becomes central to understanding their dynamism, thus correcting a misconception about places.²⁹⁵ But such a definition of place is far from achieving a consensus. Indeed, if we understand places in an entirely different way, such as by not separating the forces of reach from a set of physical features, entities, and meanings,²⁹⁶ then the idea of reach cannot be isolated and the possible reconciliation becomes irrelevant. One could argue, however, that such isolation

²⁹⁵ To be sure, even if places are assumed to lack such stable identities, the idea of reach could play a key role in explaining the changing identities. Buttimer, however, takes an aim at phenomenological accounts that do assume more or less stable identities of places and disregard the forces of reach (as I discuss in Chapter 1).

²⁹⁶ See the example of Silicon Valley above.

of different elements is only a helpful conceptual tool for teasing out the various aspects of a place and its beyond. This brings us to the second concern.

I have already outlined how the model of the relation between home and reach can also be used to understand the relation between places. Buttimer herself does not shed any light on these relations because the home-reach dichotomy circumvents any need to understand how places shape each other. The influences external to a place are seen as “placeless,” a word Buttimer uses to refer to centralized political and technological forces. Given her own view that places do not have stable identities and that even areas of reach, such as gas stations, can become meaningful places for some, it is striking that Buttimer does not pursue the next conceptual turn: home and reach can be understood as utterly different kinds of places, so that their relation is still a relation between places.

Habitus and Edges

Edward Casey’s account of place, as we discussed in Chapter 1, emphasizes the connections between self, body, place, and landscape. On the one hand, Casey attempts to clarify the relationship between self and place by noting the centrality of the bodily medium; on the other hand, he suggests how bodily place is to be understood in its plurality by articulating their wider context, which is called a landscape. We can see how these two ideas corresponds to the two questions we

are about to ask. In this section, I will elaborate on what I think Casey's account would have to say about the unity of a place and the relation between places.

In "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to be in a Place-World," Casey defines place as "the immediate environment of my lived body—an area of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural."²⁹⁷ This definition, as we noted, is stipulated, and Casey devotes the paper to showing how place is related to both self and landscape. Indeed, Casey takes the unity and identity of a place and its distinctiveness from other places for granted. This is evident in his reference to "pre-existing places of history and society."²⁹⁸ Casey does not see the need to define places in terms of what grounds their unity. Why a particular set of entities, together with events and routines specific to it, comes to be identified as a place is a question supposedly answered by social and historical circumstances. Casey is more interested in the question of how, once we take places as given, one sees the relationship between an individual (or "a self," to use Casey's word) and her place. This line of questioning is one step removed from the one that concerned Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. For the former, as discussed, the very definitions of *Gegend* and *Ort* are in question, and not just their relation to *Dasein* (although the former include the latter), which would take the spatial concepts as granted. Merleau-Ponty, who is a primary influence on Casey, also seeks to define existential, bodily space as such, not how it relates to the self (whose definition, in any case, is intertwined with

²⁹⁷ 683.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 687.

bodily space). For both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the nature of human spatiality, particularly what defines the experienced unity of spatial relations, is at stake.

Although Casey takes places to be given, his arguments concerning the relation between self and place can be understood as elaborating Merleau-Ponty's idea of the identity of a place. As noted above, for Merleau-Ponty the unity of the various elements of a bodily space is constituted, in part, by the virtual body, which defines a bodily schema of potential actions. This schema is generated by a body's capacities and habitual actions, which carve out a bodily space or habitat. Casey's use of the concept of habitus, which he takes as "a middle term between place and self,"²⁹⁹ is aimed at describing such a bodily schema. As he claims in response to his critics, "Habitus makes more specific Merleau-Ponty's idea of the 'habitual' or 'customary' body that subtends all of our interpersonal and placial engagements ... by emphasizing the role of bodily schemata that structure the durational dispositions that link us to particular places."³⁰⁰ With the idea of habitus, Casey seeks to articulate how places are sustained in a concrete (bodily) manner in individuals who are familiar with them. Habitus is thus a way of expressing the unity of a familiar space since it is this unity, and not unrelated elements, that is preserved through time. The self, as body-self, incorporates "at both psychological and physical levels, what one has experienced in particu-

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 686.

³⁰⁰ "On Habitus and Place: Responding to My Critics," *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, 91 (4), 2001. 716.

lar places,"³⁰¹ so that the sensory information, routines, customs, and norms that identify a specific place become part of a bodily memory. In this way, a familiar place is sustained in the bodily sedimentation that encapsulates its essential attributes. Put differently, the unity of a place is preserved by a bodily schema that is called habitus.

It is important to emphasize that since the question of what constitutes a place (or if a particular set of entities constitute a place) is not raised by Casey, what the bodily schema preserves is in some way already socially defined as a place. Nonetheless, habitus is essentially how the unity and identity of a place exist over time. Places do not simply disappear for us when we leave them because we carry them with us as habitudes. But, as Casey notes in response to his critics, habitudes, and thus the places they reflect, are neither permanent nor totally determined by the socio-cultural milieu. The second aspect of the relation between place and self, habitation, helps make this point. It also gives a more nuanced view of what I identify as the unity of place in Casey's account. Casey suggests that, by itself, habitus has nothing particularly spatial about it. It is the performance or activation of this habitus through bodily movements that is a "reaching out to place, a being or becoming in place."³⁰² Habitation, which is an active "hold" on one's surrounding, shows the reciprocity between self and place. Through habitation, one not only inhabits a place, but also shapes it, thereby contributing to the social and historical identity of a place, which is incorpo-

³⁰¹ "Between Geography and Philosophy," 686.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 687.

rated back into the body-self as habitus. In this way, neither self nor place are determined absolutely by social and historical conditions. As Casey explains,

Just as the self is not 'fully determined by habitus', so habitus itself is not the simple reflection of social relations, but the dynamic schematizing of these relations so that bodily action can embed them differentially in ever new implacements—implacements which ultimately express the idiosyncratic as well as the social.³⁰³

Inhabitation shows that the schemata that I identified as the unity of place are dynamic, not static. Bodily movement “modif[ies] and exceed[s]” the social matrix, and in doing so, it renews the habitual schemata continuously. For this reason, Casey views the identity of a place, its “continuity and ongoingness ... not a lasting identity; its permanence is at best only a quasipermanence; its stability is constantly destabilized by the course of events.”³⁰⁴ Changes in the socio-political conditions and idiosyncratic bodily engagements contribute to the dynamic unity of a place.

Habitudes, Edges, and Places

So far we have considered a place in isolation from other places. How should we understand the relationship among places in Casey's account? In Chapter 1, I described how Casey sees the interrelation between places in terms of their participation in a landscape. The landscape is itself defined by a horizon, which is “the boundary that surrounds the particular places making up a landscape.” Here, boundary is understood in the sense of a “undelimited limit”: it does not close off

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³⁰⁴ “On Habitus and Place: Responding to My Critics.” *ibid*, 719-20.

a landscape in providing a limit; rather, it opens up the landscape for exploration and for a movement out. However, a horizontal boundary does not delimit places. While a landscape boundary may touch on some places within it, Casey claims that “A place as such has no horizon, only an enclosure or perimeter.”³⁰⁵ The nature of this enclosure is not discussed.

Casey’s latest work, *The World on Edge*, discusses the nature of the “edges” of places. In the chapter titled “Edges of Places and Events,” Casey argues that “the edges of places are more like boundaries than borders. They share with boundaries an inherent openness and vagueness of spatial extent.”³⁰⁶ This view is an obvious departure from his earlier claim that places do not have horizons (which are like boundaries), but only enclosures. And although he notes that the edges of regions are also like boundaries, he does not refer to landscapes in the recent work. Indeed, the concept of horizon, which represented the essential relationship between landscapes, is absent in Casey’s discussion of the edges of places.

Unlike the edges of other things and phenomena that Casey discusses in his book, the edges of a place are unique in that they show an “edge/edge relation,” meaning that all edges interact with edges around them: “There is no edge of any place that does not emerge from the way that place is situated in its own larger environs and thus in relation to a plethora of other edges in these

³⁰⁵ “Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it mean to be in the Place-World,” 690.

³⁰⁶ *The World on Edge*, 78.

environs.”³⁰⁷ The edges of a place relate not only to the edges of other places, but also with to entities within these places. In Casey’s discussion of edges, therefore, we find an account of the relationship between places.

In order to clarify this relationship, we need to look closely at the idea of edges (of a place).³⁰⁸ Examples of a place and its edges would be instructive here. Casey describes how 110th Street in New York City is a “definite place,” with its own atmosphere, diverse population, street scene, rhythms of pedestrian and traffic movement, and the unique patterns of sunlight and shadow that illuminate it at different times of the year. This place, Casey claims, has a variety of edge types: “natural and artificial, conspicuous and understated, fully presented or only adumbrated.”³⁰⁹ For instance, a line of trees and a pavement could each represent the end of a place and the beginning of another. But it does not have a single, definite, and strict edge (the latter, according to Casey, defines sites, not places; I will discuss this distinction presently). The variety of edges of a place reflects, according to Casey, that it has “no set limit in any strict sense.”³¹⁰ A place’s contiguity with other places is diffuse, with no precise point of contact. Casey notes examples of places next to each other, such as South Harlem and Upper West Side, where this lack of strict limit results in liminal spaces or buffer zones that connect and separate the places.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 76.

³⁰⁸ Throughout this section, my references to edges is restricted to edges of places, not of other kinds described in Casey’s book.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 77.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

Edges, however nebulous and “fuzzy,” give “definition and shape” to a place, convey its “basic character,” and are integral to its “very being.”³¹¹ To illustrate his point, Casey provides an analogy, describing how the edges of our body convey our physiognomy: “Likewise, we instantly identify a place by its characteristic shape ... we are usually able to discern enough edges to figure out where we are: say, the edges of the long green awning that is a familiar mark of [the *Le Monde*] café.”³¹² Since Casey does not indicate whether there are other features of a place, apart from its shape (which accounts for its comparison to physiognomy), that are defined by edges, he seems to suggest that a key aspect of a place’s identity is its shape. In his discussion of the “multivalency” of edges and the “monovalency” of a place’s identity, Casey does not indicate what this identify consists in, only pointing to its preservation through changes brought about by porous and multiple edges.

Edges not only define a place, they also “extend” it. Edges are open or porous, according to Casey. This openness makes them akin to boundaries, as Casey defines them, and reflects the fact that we can move back and forth between places with relative freedom.³¹³ Casey identifies the openness of a place to surrounding places as one of its essential characteristics. Standing on 110th Street, he notes, one sees two parks, the Central Park and the Morningside Park, at the two ends. The edge/edge relations that define the scene—with the edges of

³¹¹ Ibid., 79.

³¹² Ibid., 79.

³¹³ Casey compares this capacity for allowing movement to the restrictions imposed by border-like edges of sites.

the two parks blending with the ends of the street—allow one place to “reach out” or “extend” into another, so that one feels beckoned by the parks. Edges, touching upon other places, facilitate movement. This movement need not be bodily or material, but could simply involve one’s view. Describing an example of creosote bushes in the Nevada desert that grow densely together in a limited area on the barren land, Casey notes, “One place, marked by thick creosote growth, leads the eye onward to a contiguous place bereft of such growth, the clearly discernible edge of the first area opening onto the prospect of the second, which is its effective *terminus ad quem* [end toward which].”³¹⁴ Thus edges have an essential role in connecting us to other places while also pointing to the identity of the place in which they inhere.³¹⁵

Addressed as they are in two different texts, Casey’s accounts of the unity of a place and of the relation between places raise important questions about the possibility of their integration. Recall that in my discussion of “Between Geography and Philosophy” I could identify the unity and identity of a place, but noted an absence of any discussion of a place’s “enclosure” or its relationship to other places. Indeed, places were not described as having boundaries at all. Conversely, in *The World on Edge*, there is an elaborate discussion of edges and how places relate to each other, but only a brief indication of the unity or identity of a place.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 81.

³¹⁵ Casey calls this place-defining “directionality” (the other being the orientation it provides towards other places) of the relation between edge and place “*Terminus ad quem*” (end towards which). Ibid., 81.

This pattern of omission could either be a coincidence or a result of the different primary focus in the respective texts. But it also reflects an incompatibility between the two accounts, that is, between what Casey sees as the unity of a place and how he construes the relationship between places mediated by their edges.

To see this, we need to put the two accounts together. *Habitus*, the schema of a place that is ingrained in the body, reflects the unity of a place in the self. The place reflected by the schema, according to Casey's later work, has multiple and fuzzy edges that resemble boundaries in their porosity. These edges, however, essentially define the being of a place.³¹⁶ Even changes in a place, wrought by history and physical processes, are mediated by its multiple, porous edges.³¹⁷ In several ways, the central role assigned to edges in the latter account of place undermines the importance of *habitus* in the earlier account. First, *habitus* sustains a place by reflecting the norms, customs, routines, and other sensory information of an experienced place. It has only a secondary connection to the edges of a place, since these are one out of the multitude of features defining a place. *Habitudes* say little about the enclosures of places, and although they capture the distinct features of a place, Casey does not describe how they also point to other places, which is an essential function of edges. This leads us to a second related concern. Since *habitus* is tied to the experience of a place, it may not necessarily include the two essential attributes of edges that help Casey define place in his latter account: their variety and their porosity. These claims about the variety and

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

porosity of edges are results of observing how the plurality of places interact. Such observation, relying as it does on an explicit analysis of the relation between places, is distinct from how a particular place is experienced and how a habitus is formed. Either one could keep to this experience, and thus allow for the singular way in which boundaries of a place are disclosed to and interact with an individual, which is what habitus aims to do; or, one could simply identify the multifarious edges of a culturally recognized place that touch on liminal spaces or other places, as Casey does in the example of 110th Street in New York City. The dichotomy reveals how Casey employs two different, often incompatible, approaches to understanding place.

The conflict between the earlier and later accounts of place is evident in his brief reference to the phenomenological experience of edges (a reference that, on hindsight, appears detached from the rest of his section on the edges of places). Casey notes that unlike the city planner, who might use phrases such as “the southern edge of Harlem on its west side,” those who inhabit a place

know the edges of the place up close—from within their own experience ... The place’s edges are delivered by these experiences rather than by images and words. Such experiences are in turn a function of the lived body and, more particularly, the ‘habitual body’ in Merleau-Ponty’s expression. They arise from the repeated movements of the place-dweller’s body ... as well as from the memories that linger from these walks and looks.³¹⁸

This bodily discernment of edges, imbued with personal significance, jibes with Casey’s account of the self-place relation through habitus. His example illustrates

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

this further. Describing how he experiences the edges of the building in which he resides compared to its architectural twin across the street, Casey writes,

Unlike my own building, I experience [the other building] only from the outside and from below—from the street. Its exterior seems distinctly other. My own building, containing my residence, feels familiar, and its external and internal edges are at once deepend and softened in comparison with the building across the street to the north ... This demonstrates that edges cannot be reduced to their physical dimensions but reflect the lived historicity of the occasions on which they are perceived.³¹⁹

Casey makes a compelling case that edges are not merely something physical about a place but defined by our experiences. Yet, after this brief phenomenological excursion, the rest of his account treats edges as physical dimensions of pre-existing places. Although he recognizes multiplicity and ambiguity in edges, a fundamental shift in Casey's approach to edges make these matters a result, not of the varying experiences of a place, but of the physical qualities of a place. Nowhere is this shift more obvious than in Casey's distinction between sites and places, and the related distinction between borders and boundaries.

In distinguishing sites from places, Casey claims that the "very definition and existence [of sites] depend on the maintenance of tightly contained and rigid limits that resist change."³²⁰ In contrast to sites, he notes, places provide multiple points of access and do not have definite edges. And, unlike places, sites do not have a variety of edges, and their "spaces [are] determined in strict terms by the closure effected by imposed or imputed edges, which tend to be rectilinear (as building sites)."³²¹ For Casey, these distinctions allow us to see what is essential

³¹⁹ Ibid., 73.

³²⁰ Ibid., 78.

³²¹ Ibid., 77.

about places: they are open textured or porous. However, as Casey's reference to rigidity of limits, containment, and rectilinearity show, the distinction between sites and places depends, at least primarily, on the physical dimensions of their edges. From a phenomenological perspective, it would be difficult to make a clear distinction. As Casey's own example of the twin buildings, both concrete and with limited access, show, one's lived experience with one can "deepen" or "soften" the edges. Similarly, porosity depends, to a large extent, on one's relation to the site or place. Take a prison, for instance. For a prisoner and those outside it, the prison would be a quintessential restrictive site. But for the prison guards and other staff, it is a place of work, allowing for free and meaningful movement. Even if such mobility of people and things is regulated by prison rules, so are movements in most places—such as parks, libraries, churches, offices, or city squares—guided by the relevant norms, customs, and policies.

In order to support the distinction between sites and places, Casey also makes a parallel contrast between borders and boundaries. The distinction here again relies solely on the difference in the degree of access provided by them, not to an individual, but generally. Accordingly, the relevant notion of access is in terms of the physical properties of the borders and boundaries under consideration. The distinctions between sites and places, and between borders and boundaries, therefore, reveal an underlying shift in Casey's approach to the edges of places, from a phenomenological view of perceived places to an analysis of physical characteristics of pre-existing places. The latter inquiry is worthwhile indeed,

but since it does not adhere to a phenomenological framework—which Casey himself supports and uses in his account of place—it fails to provide an adequate answer to the question of the relation between places.

Boundedness of Place

In Chapter 1, I discussed Jeff Malpas’s understanding of place in terms of the tripartite structure of openness, emergence, and boundedness. Place as a bounded openness, or a bounded extendedness, is unlike space, which is pure extendedness lacking any inherent boundary. Malpas also sees place as involving a temporal dimension, such that the openness is always tied to emergence, that is, the movement of entities in and out of appearance. In this sense, openness cannot be empty or a void; it is always the place of something. Emergence too has a bounded character, since entities have a limiting orientation in their appearance and a location that binds them to their particular contexts.

The question of how a particular place has a distinct identity is not addressed by Malpas. In fact, his conceptual framework only conveys that a place is a bounded extendedness. As I noted in Chapter 1, although Malpas claims that emergence of an entity within a place is bounded, he does not say what creates a particular bound that circumscribes the extendedness of place. Absent this explanation, and given the intimate connection between openness and emergence, I suggested that we understand the boundedness of extendedness (or openness) in

terms of the boundedness of emergence. The boundedness of emergence refers to two aspects of emergence. First, how an entity is limited in its appearance to someone perceiving it (such as in viewing something from one side),³²² thus creating a sense of boundary between what is disclosed and what remains hidden or beyond one's grasp.³²³ Second, how an emerging entity is essentially "bound" in the particular location created by its context, and thus has an orientation towards other disclosed entities. Taking these two aspects of emergence as delineating the bounded character of extendedness, one quickly sees how the limitation posed by partial appearance is not as directly relevant to such boundedness as the specificity and orientation of location.³²⁴ Bounded extendedness, in other words, points to the relation an appearance has with other appearances, that is, it points to a relation between entities. This interpretation is supported by Malpas's own claims about boundary (found in his criticism of geographer Doreen Massey), which we would assume relates to extendedness. Citing Heidegger, Malpas writes, "the relation is that which functions to differentiate at the same time as it connects, and this is the very nature of a boundary..."³²⁵ This relation, Malpas insists, depends on the relata as much as the relata rely on this relation. Thus the

³²² Malpas's example.

³²³ Malpas also refers to another kind of limitation or boundedness. Apart from that which appears, which appears only partially, appearance itself stands "within a structure that involves a relation of mutuality between salience and withdrawal." But he notes that the former is more important in his discussion of boundedness of place.

³²⁴ Although boundedness understood as a particular incompleteness of an appearance informs location within a set of entities, the latter directly points to boundedness within a spatial arrangement, or within an openness or extendedness.

³²⁵ "Putting space in place: Philosophical topography and relational geography," 239.

boundary of extendedness, which essentially distinguishes place from space, is a result of the particular relation an entity has with other entities. A relation assumes a distinction between the two entities, which is what Malpas appears to call a boundary.

However, places are usually defined by the presence of more than one entity. Malpas does not refer to a bounded plurality of entities in his essay (and, notably, does not offer any examples of a place), but he takes up the issue of boundary in *Place and Experience* (1997), where he claims that “the concept of place is essentially the concept of a bounded but open region, within which a set of interconnected elements can be situated.”³²⁶ But unlike Heidegger, for whom a region has a unity that is rooted in Dasein’s possibility, Malpas does not provide an account of the boundedness, or containment (as he calls it), of a particular place. He simply notes that a place contains “other places and things.”³²⁷ What grounds or guides this grouping, which differentiates it from other places, is unclear, although Malpas refers to the components of a place as having subjective, allocentric, and objective aspects.

At least since Heidegger’s discussion of human spatiality in terms of being-in-the-world, the idea that humans always find themselves situated in par-

³²⁶ 172. This much earlier work pursues the thesis that place makes human experience possible, and thus an understanding of the latter requires that we view it within the framework of place.

³²⁷ Ibid. Here, Malpas provides an example of such containment: “Places always open up to disclose other places within them—as every house contains its nooks and crannies, as every stretch of country has its sites and locales, as every town has its streets and neighborhoods.”

ticular places is more or less taken for granted in the phenomenological literature. The question that deserves attention once we agree on this idea is how we construe the distinctive character of any one place so as to differentiate it not only from space, but also from other places. Malpas's description of the subjective dimension of a place helps establish the claim that place is distinct from homogenous three-dimensional space.³²⁸ But what differentiates one place from another is an equally important matter, not only because it deals with the identities of places, but also because it undergirds the idea of plurality of places, something also obvious in our spatial experience.

The only possible basis for the interconnection of elements in a place that we find in Malpas's writings (at least those discussed here) takes conventional demarcations as providing the unity of a place. He gives the following example: "Places contain sets of interconnected locations that are nested within those places such that, depending on how broadly I think of the place in which I now find myself (for instance, the room in which I sit, the house where I live, the town where I reside ...), I can grasp the interconnected character of a variety of locations within my current location."³²⁹ Room, house, town, country, continent, and so on, are all nested in each other, and provide a meaningful whole for entities

³²⁸ Throughout this work (e.g., 74, 97), Malpas attempts to show how the structure of place cannot be reduced to any of its elements, particularly neither its subjective nor its objective aspects. The structure of a place, for Malpas, is characterized by two interrelated components: an ordering or "perspectivity," which is its subjective (and allocentric) aspect, and participation in a larger network of places, which gives it an objective dimension. *Ibid.*, 74.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

and places within them. This notion of the identity of a place makes an argument for the particularity of our spatial experience, but it does not show how the examples, or the meaningful wholes they represent, coincide with places construed in subjective (to keep to Malpas's distinctions) or, in many cases, allocentric terms. Malpas's account of place does refer to the notions of "capacity for agency" and "agent's bodily and environmental awareness," which are parts of his notion of "perspectivity," or the subjective dimension of a place.³³⁰ But how these come together, especially in conjunction with the objective and allocentric aspects, to carve out one meaningful whole, one place, in distinction from and relation to another is not discussed by Malpas.

In contrast to Malpas's notion of boundary as a relation, I argue in my account of place below how boundaries between places are based on spatial distinctness, which distinguishes groups of entities. In clarifying what makes places spatially distinct, my notion of place and boundary would better account for the phenomenon of a plurality of places, which remains unexplained in Malpas's account.

The Phenomenon of Places

Heidegger's ideas of region and *Ort*, like Merleau-Ponty's notion of habitat, capture something essential about our experience of places in everyday life. Our fu-

³³⁰ Ibid., 54.

ture possibilities determine which places are important in our engagement with the world; things, such as built structures, are often the loci of places we go through; and the way we experience and remember places has much to do with how we bodily occupy and interact with them. However, as I have tried to show, these phenomenological accounts of place fail to explicate the limit or boundary of a place. As a result, the coexistence of a plurality of places in our daily lives remains largely unexamined. And given that movement among places, and not a static relation to a single one, is the predominant mode of our spatial existence, these accounts do not reflect the phenomena of places. One could thus argue that without an adequate conception of boundaries, the fundamental insights in these two accounts into the situatedness of human existence lose their clarity and force.

Casey's idea of *habitus* expands and enriches the discussion of bodily space and enables us to see the temporal dimension of places, sustained in bodily schemata. However, we do not find a similar phenomenological analysis in his description of a plurality of places mediated by their multifarious and porous edges. Moreover, Malpas, although referring back to the spatial phenomenon that is ignored in geographical understandings of place, does not fully respond to the phenomenal experience of the plurality of distinct places. Lacking even a general account of the distinctness of one place from others, his insistence on the boundedness of a place and the irreducibility of the identity of a place to either its subjective and objective dimension only reminds us of the phenomenological starting point for an inquiry into places.

Relph's careful attention to the various components of the identity of a place and the significance he assigns to identifying with a place helps fill a lacuna in the geographical literature, namely, a failure to consider the lived experience of places. By his own admission, however, boundaries remains largely undefined except for the nebulous criterion of intensity of experience. As a result, Relph does not address the issue of relation among places, especially those that are contiguous. In trying, finally, to reconcile traditional geographical concerns with a phenomenological conception of place, Buttimer emphasizes the interaction, instead of the opposition, between home and reach. Her idea of place, developed through the informative tension between stable identity and external forces of change, is rich and dynamic enough possibly to withstand the challenges posed by broader agents of change today such as internet communication and globalized economy. But the presumed placelessness of these external forces and the stability of particular places points to her lack of attention to the idea of place itself (that is, to the questions of the identity of a place and its relation to other places).

The difficulty of articulating the boundaries of places in nearly all the accounts reviewed is intimately tied to the starting point of their phenomenological reflections, namely, the observation that we find ourselves situated in *a* place.³³¹ The

³³¹ The exception is Buttimer's account since the home-reach tension expands the starting point of inquiry, but she does not see reach in terms of other places (which follows from her goal to reconcile the idea of place with its broader determinants, but it also means that she does not pursue a more phenomenological inquiry into places).

relevant question, given this understanding of our spatial existence, is how to define the structure of a place. In different ways, the above theorists pose the question: what unites the various entities into a meaningful whole and thus makes a place unique? Their responses to this question involve explicating the intimate human-place relationship in terms of the nearing of the fourfold (Heidegger), the nearness of entities signified by a bodily hold (Merleau-Ponty), the imprint of the schema of a place on the body (Casey), the subjective and bounded aspect of our spatial existence (Malpas), and the activities, meanings, and sense of place that characterizes any place (Relph). These ways of characterizing a place are all sensible responses to the question about the uniqueness of a place. But what if the starting point of their phenomenological inquiries does not adequately capture our phenomenal experience of place? What if we do not experience ourselves in *a* place, but always *among* places? If we take only a moment to reflect on our whereabouts, we can recognize this fact about our spatiality. Construing for the moment the notion of place in a tried and true conventional way, we may note that in any place we are—an office, a room in a house, a car, a coffee shop, or the pavement—we experience not just that particular place but also adjoining ones.³³² Our experience is rarely of a place in isolation from surrounding places. It is not just that the windows in a room give us a peek into the world beyond, or that the walls allow sounds to creep in. The flow of people, objects, and activities

³³² Here I am using examples of places that have more or less clear boundaries, at least in the usual way of characterizing them as a place. But this is just to make the point about our experience of places, without yet having defined a place.

is a constant in most if not all of our experiences of a place, continually making us aware of an immediate—if not also farther flung—outside. There are possible exceptions, but like a solitary confinement cell or a darkened, quiet room at night, these places are either extreme or temporary respites from the usual bustle of places.

If we thus inhabit a place neither simply in relating to the things within it, nor merely in having a sphere of bodily possibilities, but also in being related to other places, then that is where our phenomenological reflection must begin. This is because insofar as a phenomenology of space and place is concerned with the spatial phenomenon, the whole of that phenomenon, and not a part of it, should be considered for investigation. Places, not a place, ought to be the primary subject of inquiry. At its core, this suggestion asks us to approach space in a way that is widely accepted in regards to time. For both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, for instance, an understanding of time is not simply focused on the present, but also takes into account, at least, the immediate future and the immediate past. Similarly, a place ought to be understood in light of its relation to adjoining places, particularly if we consider the presence of continuous elements that join places and allow for our relationship to multiple places at any given time. Since continuous elements are central to my account of the phenomenon of places, I will make some general observations about them before going further.

The contiguity between places, which allows humans to move through spaces, points towards a continuity of shared elements. Continuous elements,

unlike discrete elements that are part of the more or less stable constitution of a place, straddle places. If we take the example of a library compound as a place, the furniture, the books, and even the building itself are all discrete elements that constitute the place. But the floor of the library, which at a point turns into a pavement, then into a stretch of grass, and then into the floor of another place, say a dining hall, is a continuous element shared by both the library and the dining hall. Continuous elements are neither homogenous nor an abstraction; they are internally differentiated by the way a variety of places punctuate them. But despite this variegation, these elements are continuous because when a place ends, they immediately continue (although now expressing an element within a different place). They are also continuous in a more technical, but philosophically interesting, way. In Geographic Information System (GIS), an increasingly sophisticated computer-based system used to analyze and present geographic data, continuous data represent those phenomena or features of a landscape whose boundaries are difficult to define. Unlike discrete or discontinuous objects such as buildings, lakes, and trees, which have definable boundaries, entities such as forests and wetlands present a challenge in mapping because they do not have a definite edge or boundary. To be sure, the latter do not continue infinitely; rather, the point at which they completely taper off is virtually impossible to determine. It is in this sense, returning to the example of the continuous element between the library and the dining hall, that the ground shared by both the places is continuous. Any point of division or separation on the ground would be an arbitrary

demarcation of a place's boundary. But not all continuous elements shared by places need to be as ubiquitous as ground (or air, for that matter). More "local" elements such as light emanating from a place but going beyond it, aromas that do the same, human gatherings that spill into neighboring places, and weather patterns that characterize more than one place can also be continuous. In short, any element that is part of our experience of a place that is shared by at least one adjacent place, and that is of the sort that makes a point of division or boundary on it necessarily arbitrary is a continuous element in the context of my account.

Seeing a place as part of the phenomenon that includes a plurality of places connected by continuous elements, has radical implications for an account of place. We may no longer ignore the question of the relationship between places, and hence that of the boundary of a place. More important for our purposes, the fact that a place is not phenomenally encountered in isolation from others, and cannot be investigated as a self-subsistent entity or event, demands that an account of what makes a place a particular place include an account of how one place is distinct in relation to adjacent places. We thus need an account of place that keeps the relationship among places, specifically between a place and those immediately around it, at the center of the analysis of place.³³³

³³³ The reason why relations to adjacent or contiguous places, and not any other place, is relevant for my account of place will become clear later in the account when we discuss spatial distinctness along continuous elements.

Boundary, Continuity, and Indeterminateness

Let us start, therefore, at the relation between two adjoining places. Spatially, this relationship is most concretely expressed at their boundary, which is “crossed” in some sense in our movement from one to the other. However, boundaries are often characterized by an ambiguity. What constitutes them and where exactly they separate places is usually imprecise and often contested, whether in our everyday lives or in geopolitics. In cases where boundaries have great significance, as when boundaries are borders, issues of ambiguity are resolved through the expediency of a no-man’s land or a buffer zone, concepts that imply an idea of “no place” or an in-between in order to define place boundaries univocally. Needless to say, such strategies only succeed in determining a boundary by an appeal to force or authority. Establishing the bounds of a jurisdiction may be necessary for political and legal reasons, but it rarely corresponds to the complex ways in which a place joins another. For instance, people who live near areas that become borders often feel the arbitrariness of such definite boundary lines, which pass through landscapes that are otherwise considered single wholes and are commonly enjoyed by those living on both sides, through the property of a single extended family or ethnic group, or through social and cultural ties that define an area. It is true that regardless of the way they originated, borders help define and shape the areas they enclose, particularly if they remain in place for multiple generations. However, unless we equate the total area delimited by a border with

a place, something that would require a revision of the very idea of place, the question of whether borders represent boundaries of places must remain open.

The indeterminateness of boundaries is only more evident, although less consequential, in our everyday movement through places. We seldom see the walls of a house, the fences of a compound, and the divisions made by a street as cleanly delimiting the places they enclose or separate, even if they appear to do so visibly. Front porches, driveways, pavements, lines of trees, and even people filing out of doors are some of the ways places taper and fade into each other.³³⁴ Such merging of a place into another in our engagement with places, if not on a map, gives us a clue as to the nature of the boundary between them. Since a place is usually adjacent to many other places, there are multiple ways it fades away. Take a bridge for instance, as in Heidegger's example, and let us assume that it represents a place. The two river banks joined by the bridge fade away into areas that are not experienced as banks of the river anymore, but as part of, say, a community playground or as an entrance to a farm. In not being framed or guided by the bridge anymore, the river that passes under the bridge "fades away" down the stream, where perhaps a tributary and a different people shape it into a new landscape and a new place. The sky above the bridge also fades away when it touches on the hills nearby, becoming, for instance, the heavenly guide of a religious community. In fading away, these aspects of the bridge-place—the banks,

³³⁴ This is not to say that abrupt or sharp limits to places do not exist. For instance, stepping out of an air conditioned car in the middle of a hot desert, or jumping over the wall of a gated community beside a slum, one moves from one place to another without a conspicuous intermediate zone.

the river, the sky—become part of other places. The presence of these continuous and shared features of a place—land, river, sky—not only shows how places merge into each other; it also provides a framework for understanding the indefiniteness of boundaries. Taking this indeterminacy in our everyday experience of places as a starting point, I will lay out key aspects of the phenomenon of places, which will then help define a place.

The indeterminateness of the boundary of a place is a consequence of three related aspects of the spatial phenomena of (being amid) places. I will describe these three features before providing an elaborate example that articulates them in phenomenal detail.

A first key feature of our being amid places is that places are contiguous, which, by definition, rules out the presence of gaps or voids. Contiguity entails continuation of one sort or another.³³⁵ Thus we find that many, though not all, of the elements that constitute a place do not simply stop where a place abuts another. They continue, albeit now part of the constitution of an adjacent place. In the example of the bridge, the land, water, and sky continue beyond the bridge-place. In certain situations, we may identify other continuous elements in the bridge-place, such as people moving across or past the bridge to other places. The movement of people across the bridge is indeed part of what defines the bridge, but it is only a segment of their movement, which continues back in time

³³⁵ This idea will become clearer later when I describe what I call spatial distinctness and how it requires continuity of some sort.

to other places and forward to other places beyond the bridge. These continuities—of entities and people—relate one place to others.

However, the constituents of a place that continue beyond it are not defined from a third-person point of view, as if we take a place as an object of analysis and identify the material, social, political, and economic continuities in which it participates. From a phenomenological point of view, we are concerned with those elements of a place that are an integral part of our experience of it (or of places, more accurately) before we explicitly theorize it. And although there are subtle ways in which other more global and abstract kinds of continuity (such as political and economic) are indeed part of our experience, they usually recede behind more concrete continuous elements. For the most part, we do not even consciously think about continuous elements because they are fundamental to our experience of everyday places and thus taken for granted. This becomes apparent on rare occasions or extreme situations. When looking out of a ship window upon the sea, entering a soundproof studio, or visiting a prison cell, we are aware of the lack of some of the continuous elements we experience in more common places. We experience this lack of continuity in less common places as something unique and as an important part of these places' identities precisely because we assume that ordinary places exhibit continuities.

Second, a place often has multiple continuous elements that are shared with other places, and this multiplicity introduces additional indeterminacy or ambiguity beyond the ambiguity of the line of separation of places vis-à-vis any

one continuous element. The overlap of multiple shared, continuous elements within a place means that crossing over to another place is not as simple as moving beyond an ambiguous zone along one of these continuities. For instance, stepping out of the front door of a house that opens onto public pavement does not immediately make someone depart that place. She is still in the place in a concrete sense, able, for instance, to continue the conversation she was having in the house. In this case, the threshold of the front door is a boundary along the continuous element of what people stand on. But crossing that threshold does not entail crossing the visible or invisible thresholds along other continuous elements of that place that link it with other places. The thresholds along different continuous elements do not coincide and thus fail to define a clear boundary of the place. Accordingly, one is often both in a place, according to one's position on one continuous element, and simultaneously out of that place in relation to other continuities running across places. (This assumes that we define the boundary of a place along just one element, so that one could be "in place" or "out of place" simultaneously. Although I do not support such a definition, this possibility of being both in and out of a place helps us see the contradictions involved in settling the issue of boundary too quickly.) Compared to the singular indeterminateness of a boundary (that is, one along one continuous element), where agreement or social convention can help achieve some degree of determinacy, the indefiniteness introduced by the multiplicity of continuous elements makes any prospect of clear boundaries impossible. That is why we find indeterminacy of

boundaries in our experience of places even when legal, political, or architectural demarcations are present. Readily used expressions such as “buffer zones,” “no man’s land,” “intermediate spaces,” “fringe areas,” and “outskirts” show how the issue of indeterminateness is simply set aside when the determination of boundary seems impossible using accepted measures. Since such measures typically relate to one element of a place—such as physical structure or land area—they fail to do justice to areas that appear to be part of a place on one continuous element but not on another. However, these multiple determinants of a place’s boundary, and thus the latter’s utter indeterminacy, is experienced as part of our experience of places.

Third, the point at which a continuous element changes from being part of one place to being part of another is often experienced differently depending on our prior engagement with the places involved. This is not to say that these points are merely subjective, but that variations in the perception of thresholds are a natural and inevitable consequence of (i) the continuous character of the elements, on which a discrete point is inherently abrupt and always somewhat arbitrary demarcation; and (ii) the presence of multiple continuous elements shared by places, each with its own ambiguous threshold zone that often do not coincide. One could argue that although places include continuous elements, my suggestion that one’s prior experience determines particular thresholds on continuous elements (and thus rough boundaries of places) discounts the fact that

places are already marked out and delimited in our spatial experience.³³⁶ Socio-cultural and legal consensuses on places, represented in signage, writings, maps, activities, and conversations, already provide us with more or less clear demarcations, which are thus not construed anew in our experience. This is indeed true if we understand places in a certain way. Places as entities, defined geographically or for practical purposes, are certainly available to us prior to our experience with them. But understood this way, a place is expressed as something final and static, rather than something constantly changing and alive. In the latter sense, a place is not an entity but a phenomenon. As will become clearer in what follows, I see place as an ongoing, dynamic, and quasi-stable nexus of entities, relations, norms, and practices constituted as a meaningful whole in relation to other meaningful wholes. A snapshot of some of these elements of a place can provide us with a way to represent it in writing, signage, maps, activities, or everyday discourse, but such representation does not exhaust the phenomenon itself. Put differently, while the cultural representations of a place often represent a consensus on the nature and boundary of a place, an understanding of the phenomenon of place involves laying bare the structure and processes that underlie and shape what is discerned and described about places.

To be clear, as noted in the preliminary definition above, the richer phenomenon to be investigated does indeed include the cultural consensus (writings, signage, maps, activities, and everyday discourse), in addition to the variety

³³⁶ For Jeff Malpas, this would be discounting the allocentric aspect of a place.

of subjective and idiosyncratic experiences of a place. In going beyond the given conventional demarcations of a place, a phenomenological inquiry into the boundary of place does not discard such demarcations, but rather puts them into a pre-theoretical, pre-discursive context of the phenomena. In other words, instead of substituting a consensus about places with a subjective interpretation of experienced places, I aim to show the phenomenal basis of this continually renewing consensus.³³⁷ In pointing to the repeated engagement with a place, I describe not just a subjective experience of boundaries, but identify a central aspect of the consensus forming process. Such consensus, I would argue, is a result of a continual negotiation between one's own lived experience of a place and the broader context of that experience constituted by the experiences of others, signs, discourse, and social practices. Indeed, one's experience of a place itself is shaped by this context. I must note, however, that given the goals of this dissertation, my account of place will not adequately address the multiple sides of the negotiations that shape both an individual's experience and the cultural consensus on place. For instance, although social practices figure prominently in one's experience of a place, my account only barely touches on that aspect of the phenomenon of place.

³³⁷ A useful analogy here, again, is that of time. Conceptions of time—its structure, flow, and significance—are available to a historian, an astronomer, a horologist, or a layman referring to her daily schedule. But when approached as a phenomenon experienced by a living subject for whom the present moment reaches out into the future and is partially determined by the past, time reveals itself in a particular light that is fundamental to understanding one's being in the world.

Furthermore, in characterizing place as a phenomenon and approaching the issue of boundary as more than demarcations given by a sociocultural context, I here follow Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who see *Ort* and lived space, respectively, as phenomena rather than cultural givens. In pointing to the dynamic and experientially disclosed character of places they reject the notion that given representations are definitively determinative of the phenomenon of place understood in its wholeness. Such a rejection keeps open the phenomenon that is to be explored while clearly recognizing the undeniable presence and importance of already articulated and available notions of places and boundaries.

Returning to the issue of discerning boundary, one could also argue that my suggestion about the perception of thresholds and boundaries—that thresholds along continuous elements are identified in one's repeated engagements with places—assumes that there are places, already defined and demarcated (even if vaguely and loosely), so that one may discern in one's experience the thresholds that separate them. The suggestion, however, is not that we look at our prior experience of a place, but that of an undifferentiated field of places, which potentially includes a plurality of places not sorted out in advance. The available sociocultural and legal guidelines indeed carve out the places in certain wholes, but, as I have noted above, these do not correspond to the particular configuration of elements (interactions, spatial relations, entities, social practices, among other aspects) that we identify as a meaningful spatial whole in our experience. When leaving a familiar landscape of places for a new landscape that is

not yet differentiated in one's experience, there are rough guidelines about their characteristics and boundaries, but nothing that would lead to one's perception of their boundaries.³³⁸ Places, as meaningful spatial wholes, and their boundaries gradually come into relief together as a result of one's engagement with the field.

Although each such experience is unique, we can identify the general process by which boundaries of places are perceived and defined in one's experience of a previously undifferentiated landscape. A new landscape potentially contains numerous places but is undifferentiated in our initial experience even if we can see distinctions outlined on a map or in text. A neighborhood, a city, or a forest might contain various distinct places even if all are grouped under a broader, singular category by geographers, planners, or administrators.³³⁹ Before visiting, one might have information about overall characteristics of these places such as their location on a map, their people, history, and activities. But these descriptions are not yet tied to any medley of experiences one has had; they are linguistic designations of geographic areas. We could say that the geographical and material elements associated with each area are not yet differentiated in a spatial manner even though facts about them present each place as a differentiated unity. (I will come back to the idea of spatial distinction or differentiation presently.) Such unity, although described using spatial terms, does not establish the spatial orientation of elements within it and does not yet signify a meaningful spatial

³³⁸ As I have noted, the guidelines characterize places in ways that might or might not coincide with one's own experience.

³³⁹ For convenience, I am using terms such as "neighborhood," "a city," "a forest" as examples of undifferentiated areas.

whole. Both the orientation of elements and the meaningful whole result from one's bodily engagement with the area, which ties together certain elements as distinct from others. Moreover, prior to such engagement, the boundaries between represented places (within any area) are only rough snapshots of the actual phenomenon.

Articulating a unique set of spatial relations that will make a place stand out as a spatially distinct meaningful whole requires one's engagement with the landscape. Unique spatial relations are only possible in relation to other places, other distinct spatial unities, surrounding an individualized place. However, not only the place one is in, but also those around it are themselves undefined prior to one's experience. Therefore, we have a strange circularity here: the separation of places, their boundaries, depends on the experience of distinct spatial relations at a place, which itself assumes a distinction between places. I will not attempt to resolve this circular reasoning yet. Instead, I will point to the key insights we have reached so far, which should help us make sense of the problem. Putting together (1) the above discussion on the mutual dependence of the distinctness of places, boundaries between places, and people's engagement with places with (2) what has been said about the two factors that result in indeterminate boundaries—the continuous elements that connect places and their plurality—two general observations about the nature of place follow.

I. The boundary of a place is effected on the background of the continuous elements that relate places. Since the distinctness of places is dependent on their

spatial distinctness, elements exclusive to a place cannot, by themselves, provide a sufficient basis for a boundary. Let me elaborate on the idea of spatial distinctness. For the sake of clarity, I will start with the spatial distinctness of entities before discussing how places are distinct. Spatial distinctness is tied to experiences in which two things are not just different kinds of thing, but are differentially related spatially to everything around them. A coffee mug is not just a different kind of thing than a street. As parts of my spatial experience sitting in a coffee shop, the mug on the table is part of my experience of the coffee shop, whereas the street outside is external to, although still nearby, this cozy place. The two entities are spatially distinct because they are parts of two different spatial contexts, *viz.*, the coffee shop and the street. Similarly, we can say that places are also distinct spatially. Defining the two places, the coffee shop and the street, in terms of, say, the entities that constitute them, their function, or their location on a map shows us that they are distinct groups of entities. But such a distinction does not point to the continuous elements that join them and on which both of their constituent elements are spread. The elements that are shared by places provide the basis for spatial differentiation by serving as the continuity on which the discontinuity of discrete elements can be discerned as points of threshold. For instance, the shop is spatially distinct from the street in that the discrete elements that constitute it appear to end somewhere along the continuous element of the floor that continues beyond the coffeeshop, although modified into a pavement and then the street. Without continuous elements, discrete elements of one place could nei-

ther be adjacent to nor spatially distinct from those of the other. Put differently, spatial distinctness assumes an underlying continuity, which is provided by continuous elements.

A particular spread of discrete elements (alongside one or more continuous elements), however, is only recognized in one's engagement with an area, which would eventually get differentiated into places based on the identification of thresholds within the spread. This is because one's bodily engagement, which includes both bodily presence and one's purposeful dealings with entities, people, and cultural givens, carves out a group of elements as spatially distinct in relation to another that is farther away on one or more continuous elements. For instance, a large spread of entities that is usually grouped together as an airport reveals itself as having several or many distinct places based on unique bodily engagements by different individuals or groups. These distinct places are not the same for a traveller passing by, an officer at the security check, a staff in a fast food restaurant in the lobby, and a pilot who lands there often. The particular meaningful configurations of the spread of entities would be different for each group, although they can indeed overlap to some extent. But that is not all. Each configuration achieves its distinctness in relation to a nearby constellation of entities. A pilot (or an air traffic controller), for instance, recognizes Runway A as a distinct place from Runaway B if the latter is never used for landing or takeoff and was previously a site of a major air crash. For a passenger, the whole area that has the runways and taxiways represents one place distinct from the depar-

ture lounge. In between the distinct configurations representing the two places, there are numerous entities and spatial features that are often not easily categorizable as belonging to one or the other meaningful configurations. A strip of grass between Runway A and B, for instance, is part of neither or both. However, for those in maintenance who mow the grass strips every week, the collection of these rectangular lawns represents a whole place distinct from the runways, which are danger zones. Thus, in our bodily engagement with places, guided by our projects and shaped by the sociocultural background and practices, we perceive that a place—conspicuously represented by a particular configuration of discrete elements but not simply ending there—fades away along an element that continues to other places. We thus discover and settle upon, over a course of repeated engagements, a threshold that defines a transition to other places.

However, this is not to define a place as simply as a unique configuration of discrete elements in relation to another distinct configuration. A set of elements may stand out because it is relevant to our current projects, priorities, and habits. It may stand out because it represents certain possibilities of engagement, depending on our bodily capacities and circumstances. And it could stand out because it relates to our past, both personal and collective. Places thus embody all these relations, values, possibilities tied to our temporal dimension, individually and as a community. My emphasis on discerning a distinct configuration of spatial elements is aimed at identifying and describing what is necessary to anchor, spatially, the meaningful wholes that include the various dimensions of

human existence identified above. In this sense, my account focuses on overcoming the inadequacies of the account of *Ort*, where the scope of a place and its relation to other places remained unclear. It also addresses a lack of a criterion for delimiting bodily spaces, as in Merleau-Ponty's account. At the same time, it is to be noted that my account generally agrees with Heidegger in several ways, most notably that places are meaningful wholes anchored in things (although I do not make use of the idea of fourfold). And Merleau-Ponty's notion of bodily space clearly informs my claim that spatially distinct configurations can only be discerned through repeated bodily engagement.

II. The way a continuous element is first characterized by its involvement with one configuration of discrete elements, then further ahead becomes part of another configuration altogether, means that places often appear as arenas among a vast spread of entities joined by various continuous elements. It is this gradual transition from one node to the next, however short or long, that distinguishes places from homogenous space. In other words, an uneven spread of entities, encompassing a spatially distinct configuration and elements that are less distinct in relation to adjacent groups, is a hallmark of a place, but not of homogenous space. Note that the distinctness here depends not just on unique entities or activities in an area, which is something readily acceptable to a view that assumes an underlying qualitative sameness of all spatial positions, but on the particular spatial configuration of elements amid particular continuous elements.

In contrast to Euclidean space, where positions defined by the Cartesian coordinate system can be stripped off of the entities or activities occupying them to reveal an underlying sameness, the various continuous elements cannot be reduced to an underlying homogenous element.

Our continual engagement with a field of potential places makes the distinctions between particular places become more conspicuous and also results in newer distinctions. Initially, what is relatively undifferentiated as a field, and superficially represented in words, pictures, or numbers, becomes spatially articulated as distinct places that are contiguous to other places. Although precise boundaries between places are still nebulous, one has a sense of crossing a threshold area and reaching another spatially distinct configuration of elements. But this relative clarity regarding whereabouts is impermanent since further engagement entails an evolving landscape of places articulated by new boundaries. It is not simply that an increasingly specific area comes to coalesce as a given place, but that more nuanced separations of places occur within what was earlier just one place. It is as if one entered a darkened bedroom and, spending time there, gradually began to distinguish the bed from the floor, the pillows from the headboard, the lamp base from the nightstand. All this time, one also gains a more precise sense of one's immediate surrounding ("in front of the windows in the bedroom" instead of "in the bedroom," for instance). We find that such specificity in one's whereabouts is always tied to a better articulation of the context itself. When it comes to places, the more specific place is not necessarily the pro-

portionally narrower place in measured distance. Our particular spatial experience, when repeated, carves out places that idiosyncratically include and exclude various elements, sometimes expanding, sometimes narrowing, and sometimes breaking up what was previously considered to be one place. But this experience and the resulting sense of place are not isolated from either other people and their experience (whose presence and whose shared experiences shape our engagement) or from the broader, culturally available signs, texts, practices, and discourses related to the experienced places. Indeed, the information about a set of places, available before engaging with them, partially determines our experience of those place, and thus shapes the boundaries we perceive among places.

We can now see how the presence of continuous elements, the distinctness of a place, and engagement with places are closely tied to perception of thresholds along continuous elements and thus of boundaries. The circular argument I noted earlier has much to do with this intimacy, which points to a holistic situation involving an interplay and gradual articulation of both unique spatial relations at a place and distinctness of surrounding places. This is to say that both parts of the circularity intertwine and bring about each other as unique configurations of discrete elements and thresholds along continuous elements become more prominent. As noted above, our perception of thresholds along various elements, and thus our sense of the boundaries of a place, is only a more articulated and definite form of what is vaguely available in our initial experience of a field of undif-

ferentiated places. An elaborate example will help make this nexus of concepts more concrete.

Let us imagine a new restaurant in a shopping plaza in the southern part of Lexington. I plan to meet my friends there for dinner. Before arriving at the restaurant, and thus not having any experience of it, I find it on a map on a smart phone application. In the context of this visual representation of the place, guided by demarcations that depend both on legally defined limits and on the application's capacity (say, its resolution and accuracy), we see clear boundaries on a continuous grid on the map's scrollable surface. The outline of one area on the map abuts another, with no indeterminateness. On the map, especially with the information overlay available by default, the restaurant as a geographical area is clearly defined, but the restaurant as a place presented in spatial experience is nearly absent.

When I drive to the restaurant, I see the turn I need to take to get to its compound, marked as it is by curbs, ends of the parking area, pavements, and hedges. These nondescript perimetrical entities surround what appears to be the restaurant proper—the building with signage on its facade and an entrance. Although they do not seem to be part of the restaurant, the perimetrical entities are also not something totally detached from it, as is a building on the other side of the street. The boundary of the restaurant—as opposed to the restaurant building—is not definite now as it was when looking at the virtual map. For I now

have some experience of the locality of the eatery—its immediate context—even if I have not entered it.

Going inside, I ask for a table for four and get seated in a booth in one of the two large halls in the restaurant. I can see other tables nearby, and I am also aware of the adjacent seating area, the kitchen, and the bar. Although I have not yet ordered anything or met my friends, the interior of restaurant has become more definite for me. But I only engage with a few of the entities and features of the building, especially when my friends arrive and we start dinner. The door, the hall, our table, the restroom, and the discussions I have with my friends stand out as defining my experience of the restaurant. Other areas within the building are always there (in my experience), but just like the conversations at an adjacent table, they appear as only coincidental and thus perimetrical to the particular spatial configuration of entities centered around my particular engagement.³⁴⁰ With subsequent visits, slightly different configurations of discrete elements help establish the place as distinct from other configurations of entities that share some of the same continuous elements as the restaurant (say a movie theater complex across the street).

The engagement with the previously undifferentiated area carves out the restaurant-place. And not unlike the carving on a piece of wood, where some markings are more prominent and central to the emerging figure than others, a

³⁴⁰ To be sure, if asked to describe the restaurant, I could provide a picture of the space that goes beyond my engagement with it. However, such descriptions, when not stemming from our engagement, are often superficial and relay only a generalized image not unique to that particular restaurant.

particular configuration of entities becomes more central to my bodily engagement and understanding of the restaurant-place. In comparison to this prominent configuration, other discrete elements are nearly as unrelated to my engagement with the restaurant compound as are elements outside it. This is to say that a configuration of entities, which does not include all the entities within the restaurant building, is more spatially distinct in relation to another within or outside the restaurant compound. For instance, as someone who does not drink alcohol, the bar area in the other corner of the building would appear as a distinct place in relation to the area where I am seated. But these two areas might fuse into a richer view of the restaurant-place for another person who regularly engages with both of them.

The elements in the building that I scarcely engage with (e.g. the bar) become part of the fading away of the restaurant-place along continuous elements such as the floor, the air, the lights, and the sky (I will say more about these continuous elements in the next section). On each continuous element, the restaurant-place that emerged in my engagement fades differently, so that there are different thresholds where the restaurant-place ends depending on the element. While the floor of the restaurant abruptly changes into a pavement in less than a step from the entrance, thus announcing the end of the place, the aroma and lights of the place continue farther before subtly changing to aspects of another place.

The place that is now defined as a result of my experience is something quite different from what I saw on the map. The neat boundaries on a grid that outlined a rectangular area have been replaced by various ways in which the restaurant-place gradually fades away. And whereas all the area within the rectangle was identified as the restaurant, a phenomenological approach reveals that there is a configuration of entities and activities that is more distinct from other configurations in or beyond the restaurant compound. It is this distinct configuration that more accurately captures the place I visit. But it is not necessarily an idiosyncratic configuration that no one else visiting the same restaurant area would have. There are substantial overlaps in the distinct set of entities, spatial relations, and experiences that stand out as restaurant place for those visiting it. This is so for at least two related reasons. First, the possibilities afforded to all visitors by the initially undifferentiated field (in which a distinct configuration is perceived with repeated engagement) are not infinite. Indeed, these possibilities are limited and thus allow for a more or less similar kinds of engagement, and thus overlapping conceptions of the place. Common possibilities lead to common experience, which lead to shared perceptions of a place. Second, our experience does not occur in a social, cultural, and material vacuum. Not only the continuous elements and the sets of discrete entities commonly experienced by customers, but also the social practices and norms that guide the experience, and the cultural symbols, history, and discourse that shape our expectations and evaluation of the place remain more or less the same for most visitors.

The example above, therefore, is not to be construed as an instance of subjective experience of a place, but as revealing universal attributes of the phenomenon of places. In this sense, the example is like one of Merleau-Ponty's idea of bodily space, which is constituted by a task-oriented bodily hold on the surrounding world. Indeed, bodily possibilities and engagement are key aspects of the emergence of the restaurant place in my repeated visits. The example is also like Heidegger's idea of an *Ort*. The distinctness of a configuration of entities and spatial relations results from the fact that they are disclosed (to individuals and communities) in a unique relation to one another. However, unlike bodily space, where the boundary can expand or contract in relation to the center and scope of one's life, the thresholds of the restaurant place are a function of its relation to other distinct and contiguous places. And unlike *Ort*, where a place is anchored by a particular thing, and dwelling in the disclosedness of entities (in nearing) is prioritized over bodily engagement with a place, in the restaurant place the disclosedness of entities, that is, a particular spatially distinct configuration, is centered on repeated engagement and is distinct in relation to other groups of entities on shared continuous elements. In my discussion of the structure of place in the next section, I point to additional ways my account of place avoids problems identified in some of the other accounts.

Two general points from the discussion above can be briefly summed up as follows:

1. A place is not a particular unity of all the elements within a boundary. Rather, it has a distinct configuration of elements, which is revealed as central in one's engagement in an area that was previously undifferentiated, and other less distinct elements. The distinctness of a place is spatial; it is only discernible when compared with other configurations along continuous elements that go beyond that place.

2. Although a place is not exactly the same for all those who engage with it, discrete elements of the field that differentiates into a variety of places remain more or less the same (and so do social and cultural elements) across all kinds of engagement. Thus, regardless of the person or group engaging with them, the group of places represented by the restaurant and its immediate vicinity is quite different in the possibilities it accords than, say, those that include a church.

Structure of Place

If we start our phenomenological inquiry of place with a focus on the relation between places and on the continuous elements they share, we discover something remarkable about the constitution of a place: it has an "uneven density." There are segments along continuous elements within a place with discrete elements that are not a part of the configuration that is most distinct in relation to another meaningful configuration along the same continuous elements. The segments that have distinct configurations of entities could be called "dense" in considera-

tion of how they are highlighted in relation to other configurations and are the focus of our engagement. Other segments, and discrete elements along those segments, do not stand out in the same way and thus are sparse in terms of occasioning meaningful interactions, even after multiple engagements. In the example above, my rare interaction with the bar area means that it is not conspicuous in the same way as other discrete elements. The presence of this uneven density, so to speak, within the limits of various thresholds along continuous elements, makes a place internally heterogenous.

Phenomenological accounts of place and space have often used the ideas of homogeneity and heterogeneity, mostly within the context of characterizing space by the former and places by the latter. They see heterogeneity in the variety of places in which humans exist, as opposed to the homogenous space in which modern physics imagines everything to be located. This emphasis on heterogeneity is meant to suggest that each place has a unique identity that is grounded in a person's or a people's relation to it. But this distancing from the homogeneity of space also, unwittingly, leads to an implicit and unexamined acceptance of homogeneity within a place: the unique identity of a place encompasses the whole place. A region, an *Ort*, a habitat, an insiderness, or a bounded extendedness are all defined by a unity that bestows a certain sameness to the whole. As I noted above, the eastern region is not defined by gradations. Similarly, the bridge-place does not distinguish—insofar as the strength of an entity's or a location's relation to the particular configuration of the fourfold is concerned—between different

areas on the bridge as opposed to the banks. All locations and discrete elements are part of the fourfold configuration and thus equally imbued with the uniqueness of the place. Although Merleau-Ponty points to the fading away of one's bodily hold on entities, a habitat itself is defined by a more or less isometric hold on a particular set of entities.

The internal heterogeneity of a place has important implications for our understanding of the structure of a place, which can now be described more explicitly. There are points—entities, activities, areas—within a set of spatial relations that are central to a place's distinctness from other places (although we have to allow for gradation of importance within this group as well). And there are other points that that might as well be confused as being part of the next, contiguous, place. Furthermore, a place is heterogenous along many continuous elements. For instance, in the example of the restaurant above, we can imagine the arrangement of furniture, including the table where we sit, the layout of other entities and areas within the restaurant building (such as the kitchen, the counter, the entrance hall, etc.), and the larger structures that make up the building and the parking area, as laid out on a continuous element. This element changes from floor, to the (literal) threshold on the door, to the pavement, to the concrete on the parking lot, to soil under the hedges, to another pavement, and so forth. We can also imagine another continuous element here, on which subtle changes in aromas, perfumes, air from vents, and the inconspicuous but felt quality of lingering air of the place merge into each other, finally mingling with the air outside the

building entrance that is only slightly different than what we would experience across the street. Despite such internal heterogeneity along multiple continuous elements, places might not be distinct along certain common continuous elements, such as ground or air. Internal heterogeneity, and thus distinctness of a set of entities, along a continuous element depends partly on the kind of place considered and partly on the individuals experiencing the place and the broader sociocultural context of this experience. While we can imagine a restaurant-place being heterogenous to a conspicuous degree along the element defined by aromas and perfumes, other places, such as a group of tennis courts nearby, may not vary internally along that element. Still other places, such as a holy city, might vary according to the relative sacredness of different locations centered (a heterogeneity that has little to do with built structures). In other words, although there are multiple continuous elements within a place, places are distinct and internally heterogenous only along one or a few of them.³⁴¹

My aim here is not to provide an exhaustive documentation of all continuous elements that define ordinary places. Apart from being impossible, any attempt might also give the false impression that 1) there are a limited set of continuous elements connecting places and, 2) one could predict possible or relevant continuous elements at a place without engaging with it. I have tried, rather, to emphasize the complexity and heterogeneity that defines a place owing to its essential relation to other places. Before moving on to a brief discussion of the idea

341

of unity, however, I will outline one more continuous element that will play a role in the next chapter on digitally mediated spaces. Although human gatherings for events can be understood along other continuous elements such as ground, air, and sky (naming these, I should note, goes against the idea that they are only experienced in relation to a place, and not as such), they are occasionally the central element of a place, and thus deserve special consideration. Places can be sometimes differentiated along the continuous element defined by the involvement of other human beings. In events and activities involving groups and crowds, the immediate presence of and interaction with other people is itself a central element of a place. As we move from one part of the gathering to another, we may notice an uneven density, with some groups of people (or an activity they are engaged in) constituting the center and others the perimeter of the place. At the point a crowd tapers off, we experience a place fading into another. Gathering for festivities, celebrations, or other social events often involve focal points established by the activity itself and not by elements otherwise prominent in an area.

In discussing the structure of a place, I have deliberately not used the term “unity.” This term, by contrast, was a feature of my review and critique of other accounts of place. The concept of the unity of various elements of a place was useful for interpreting accounts of place that discuss how a group of elements belongs, for instance, to a particular region as prescribed by possibility, to a particu-

lar *Ort* as established by a thing, to a particular habitat or habitus as defined by a bodily hold, to the same bounded extendedness or openness, or to the same insideness. In each case, there is a kind of unity that defines a place. The possibility of Dasein, the nearing of the fourfold, the hold of the body, the intensity of experience—all pull together a variety of elements into a meaningful spatial whole. According to these accounts, being part of the unity that makes a place distinct from adjacent places is an essential aspect of spatial existence. In other words, the unity of a place establishes exclusivity in relation to adjacent or contiguous places;³⁴² some entities and activities and not others are united as a unique place. The need for unity is to be expected given that one of the impetuses for these accounts is the need to distinguish place from homogenous space: a particular set of elements, united in their connection to the uniting factor (possibility, nearing, etc.), are distinguished as a place, and thus saved from the indifference of being merely in a Euclidean space. As I have noted above, this impetus to distinguish place from space also translates into an unwarranted focus on a single place. It follows that, due to the belongingness of entities that defines a place, entities in other places are totally excluded.

³⁴² It is true that for accounts, such as Malpas's, that believe in one place being "nested" in another, there is no exclusivity when it comes to those overlapping places. But these accounts still believe in one place being distinct from another in terms of a particular unity. Even the overlapping places are distinct in not bringing together the same set of entities. In any case, these accounts make a distinction between two adjacent places (or places on the same level, so to speak) in terms of their different unities, regardless of the presence or absence of a place encompassing both. That is why I restrict my point about the exclusivity of unity to adjacent or contiguous places.

But starting with the phenomenon of places, we discover that the inter-stitching of places through continuous elements is central to this phenomenon. The presence of these elements makes the idea of “unity” (or gathering or belonging or hold) not the most suitable for defining a place. When we consider the continuous elements that connect contiguous places and when a place is understood as heterogenous along these elements, any apparent unity in the grouping of elements in one place cannot be understood except in relation to an adjacent place. Indeed, a place fades along various continua in having discrete elements that are less and less distinct from entities that bundle as meaningful configurations in an adjacent place. Such a gradation or internal heterogeneity goes against the idea of a clear or unambiguous source of unity for all elements in a place, especially because often not just one, but multiple sets of distinct configurations and continuous elements define a place. In other words, the idea of unity would be appropriate here only if 1) the spatially distinct configuration of elements excluded surrounding, less distinct, elements, 2) if there were a clear criterion for threshold between a place and the next, and 3) determining one such criterion for unity of elements, along one continuous element, would be sufficient to define a place. Given the account I have offered, all of the three above are impossible.

As I noted above, while one may be outside a place and already in another place along one continuous element, she can be still inside the first place along a different continuous element. This is to say that at many positions within a place, we are also in another place or other places. Contiguous places not just merge

into each other, they coincide to different degrees along the same continuous elements. We need to eschew not just the notion of exclusive unity in relation to adjacent places, but also any idea of a line of separation between places. In other words, we need to express the phenomenon of places in a way that does not make use of either the notion of the unity of all elements or the notion of clear, determinate boundaries.

Concluding Remarks

The account of place laid out above is a clear departure from other phenomenological conceptions. The absence or inadequate attention to a place's relation to other places in these accounts led to the observation that their starting point is the phenomenon of a single place. I have argued that such a starting point does not reflect our engagement with a place within the contexts of other places and the various continuous elements shared by contiguous places. Moreover, in defining a place in terms of a unity provided by either a project, a thing-grounded gathering, a bodily possibility, a habitus, or a bounded extendedness, these accounts assume a place to have a univocal source of unity and thus to have something akin to a limit or boundary that excludes surrounding entities and places (even if these aspects remained largely undefined). I have argued that such unity is not possible if we take into account the internal heterogeneity of places and the ways they merge into each other on different continuous elements.

For the same reasons, I claim that the indeterminateness of boundaries is a defining character of a place.

These points of contrast, along with those of agreement noted earlier, help sum my definition of place, which can now be stated clearly. Places are continually evolving, spatially distinct, internally heterogenous, meaningful wholes with indeterminate boundaries. The emergence and continued existence of places require repeated bodily engagement, which occurs in the context of other places, in relation to the engagement of others, and against the background of social practices, cultural norms, history, and discourse. In the next chapter, I use key aspects of this account of place to analyze digitally mediated spaces of human interaction and activities.

IV. DIGITAL SPACE AND PLACE

In the previous chapter, I proposed an account of place informed by shortcomings identified in major phenomenological conceptions of the same. In place of the prevalent concern for the unity of various elements within a place, I highlighted the importance of understanding place within the phenomenal context of a plurality of places. This fundamental shift in the inquiry into place led to a renewed focus on heretofore neglected aspects of places, *viz.*, continuous elements, indeterminate boundaries, and spatial distinctness. However, the kinds of places considered in that chapter—everyday spaces centered around physical structures—do not cover the full variety of phenomena that are called spaces and places. Stationary and mobile screens, headsets, and even eye glasses have become facilitators of digitally mediated activities and interactions, both among humans and between humans and their surroundings. It is not difficult to see why the interactive virtual environments experienced through these portals, and made possible by digital technologies, could be said to constitute spaces of some kind. Indeed, we use the term “space” for a variety of phenomena, such as mental space, that are not obviously spatial in the sense I have discussed. However, it remains to be seen whether virtual digital space, or a group of such spaces, could constitute a place, particularly as described in the last chapter.

In the present chapter, I will first describe three kinds of digitally mediated phenomena that could be called spaces, arguing that one of them, *viz.*, spaces accessed via augmented reality (AR) devices, is closest in kind to spatially distinct places (that is, the phenomenon discussed in the last chapter), and thus represents the most suitable starting point for an inquiry into digitally mediated spaces. In section two, I describe the essential processes through which augmented reality modifies spaces, emphasizing both how AR realistically represents a user's surrounding spaces and how this representation is a kind of interpretation of those spaces. In the third section, I delve into various examples of AR applications that seemingly transform ordinary places, highlighting the practical possibility of realistic virtual changes to actual places and to our relation to these places. In the final section, informed by both the processes that make AR possible and the technology's applications, I analyze the spaces presented by augmented reality for attributes that are essential to a place. I conclude that processes of digitization and of interpretation of digital data reveal that AR cannot represent both the continuous features shared by places and the contiguity of places. These deficiencies in AR's representation of spaces, I argue, present an insurmountable difficulty for any modification represented by AR vis-à-vis the notion of place: it cannot capture the distinctness of spaces along continuous elements and, as a result, cannot represent spaces as unique spatial wholes in the rich manner available to ordinary, non-AR experience of places. Furthermore, the interpretation of spaces by AR, which uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) and continually accruing

data (big data) to demarcate areas, highlight certain entities, provide informational services, and enable activities and interactions, represents a significant change in meaningful spatial wholes produced through engagement and social interactions. Such interpretation and selective presentation of spaces are also open to manipulation and distortion, and thus may lead to a variety of ethical issues related to ownership, privacy, and deception that are not possible in the analog version.

Virtual Platforms and Virtual Reality

With the increasing use of digital media for work in various professions, the “space” where one works could be a virtual platform that exists entirely on a computer server and is accessed from practically anywhere in the world via a computer and wireless network. Similarly, the “space” where one interacts with friends, family, and strangers could be a website accessed via a mobile application that allows for a synchronous interaction among physically distant users. In both cases, many people will intuitively classify the platform as a space (or even a place) because it appears that one goes somewhere (to the internet) by opening a portal (logs on to an account), thus entering an environment (navigating among a cluster of webpages) that appears alive with a continual flow of information, the “presence” of others, and possibilities for action that often entail consequences beyond that platform. Just as one becomes familiar with the various el-

ements of an ordinary physical place over time, digital objects and the digital presence of other visitors or colleagues become familiar upon regular visits to these virtual platforms. Digital social media exemplify this kind of platform.

The digitally created virtual platforms may represent space in the senses discussed above, but it is obvious that on these platforms one is within a different sphere than a traditionally understood space or place, such as a workspace or a coffee shop. These digital platforms, presenting two-dimensional digital images and information on handheld devices or stationary screens, do not usually involve some of the basic features of a space, such as allowing for bodily movement (or a sense of it) within the presented content. One cannot, for instance, walk around digital objects. This feature, however, characterizes immersive virtual reality (VR). Donning a headset and other (often handheld) controllers and sensors, one can get a sense of movement in an environment. Aukstakalnis, in his technical introduction to virtual reality, defines VR as technologies “that provide the user a highly compelling visual sensation of *presence*, or *immersion*, within a 3D computer model or simulation.”³⁴³ Other sources, such as the Merriam-Webster dictionary, define VR primarily as the environment, not the technology producing it: “an artificial environment which is experienced through sensory stimuli (such as sights and sounds) provided by a computer and in which one’s actions partially determine what happens in the environment.”³⁴⁴ I will use the term in this latter sense, using the term VR technologies for the first definition.

³⁴³ Aukstakalnis, *Practical Augmented Reality*, 2.

³⁴⁴ Merriam-Webster, “Virtual Reality.”

The “space” in which one walks using VR technologies is fictional, even if it is often based on real life physical spaces and entities. The VR environment is generated entirely by computer graphics; entities and spatial features represented in virtual simulations are products of creative work in the digital medium. This work itself resides as codes and information packets in the digital format on computer data storage parts before being used by processors and converted to light on a screen. One experiences the digitally created environment on a two-dimensional surface with optical and audio illusions of three-dimensionality, much like how one would “experience” outer space in a planetarium. But, in the former case, one also often has the ability to effect changes to digital objects and to interact with virtually represented others. The latter features help make the case for a digitally created “space” where one could, in the guise of one’s virtual avatar, engage in activities in a spatial context, as one does in the world outside VR. In other words, a comparison between immersive VR and physical space is warranted not because of how well the VR environment is able to replicate our usual surroundings, but because VR offers various bodily possibilities that, even though concerning digital objects or avatars, are similar to those realized in physical spaces. For instance, an application on a popular VR headset, Oculus, allows users to create an avatar, meet the avatars of other users in a virtual club (that one perceives as a 3D environment on an immersive screen), and dance

together.³⁴⁵ The bodily movement of the user is captured by sensors and translated into the movement of their avatars, so that one dances in one's living room but is virtually present before others in a social gathering.

Although current uses of VR are focused on entertainment and commerce (such as training in avionics and in the military), one could imagine these simulated environments becoming more complex in the future, representing spaces of activity and entertainment much like those afforded by ordinary places. Given its distinctness from other creatively produced spaces, such as those in amusement parks or those generated in reading fiction, and given its growing usage, there is much to be philosophically investigated about the spaces of VR. For instance, one could ask if and in what sense a virtual avatar, such as a first-person shooter, enables a player to bodily inhabit a virtual space? Beyond questions of inhabitation, but relatedly, one may investigate whether a virtual scene, with the possibility of being switched on or off instantly, can provide the sense of being in a place, as we have in relatively stable physical environments? And, in general, one could investigate the very nature of this space: what kind, if any, of boundaries between spaces are possible in VR? Can a virtual space represent a spatial whole,

³⁴⁵ Non-immersive video games, such as FortNite, also allow one to attend events using one's avatar in the virtual world of the game, but these do not create a sensation of being in a space similar to the immersive VR.

which frames one's relation to (virtual) entities, as is the case in ordinary places.³⁴⁶

Augmented Reality

There are reasons why investigating spaces of VR may be a leap and not the logical next step within the context of the present work. While VR seems to allow for some kind of bodily possibility within the digital environment, it also demands detachment from one's bodily surroundings. One has to pause, for instance, for eating, going to the restroom, meeting family members face-to-face, or doing anything else that requires one to look around one's real physical whereabouts. This requirement not only takes away from the immersive aspect of virtual reality, since one has to switch back and forth between the real and virtual worlds. It also shows a clear line of separation between virtual spaces and the spaces of everyday life. Such a separation, along with the fact that spaces of VR barely interact with those of everyday life, makes studying virtual spaces relatively less urgent than studying another digital technology that (appears to) modify ordinary spaces, *viz.*, augmented reality. And for reasons I describe below (in the context of AR's modification of ordinary places), AR more clearly challenges the notion of place than VR. Augmented reality, like VR, refers to both a set of tech-

³⁴⁶ Thomas Metzinger, in his article "Why Is Virtual Reality Interesting for Philosophers?", lists a range of philosophical questions that can be asked about VR. To questions in epistemology and metaphysics, he adds questions about notions of *lebenswelt*, or life-world, that emerge with the possibility of VR.

nologies and the environment it helps create. In the first sense, AR refers to “display technologies capable of overlaying or combining alphanumeric, symbolic, or graphical information with a user’s view of the real world.”³⁴⁷ And in the second sense it refers to “an enhanced version of reality created by the use of technology to overlay digital information on an image of something being viewed through a device.”³⁴⁸ Although the latter definition, which I will use as a starting point, claims a general enhancement of “reality,” AR, to be precise, “enhances” entities in a user’s field of view and the spaces immediately surrounding the user. For instance, when looked through a smartphone (using the phone’s camera) running an AR application, the space around my room could feature objects that are not actually there. These virtual objects are not simply superimposed on a two-dimensional picture of my room. In other words, it is not a 2D picture of reality that is modified by AR, as when a picture is photoshopped to include new objects. Rather, AR works in real time to detect the surfaces, distances, proportions, and even the kinds of objects in the space of the room to insert virtual objects that snugly fit into an actual corner or on an actual table. Seen through the smartphone screen, the digital objects have three-dimensions, like the rest of the entities in the room.

Inserting virtual objects in a space is one of AR’s basic applications. Another popular use of AR technologies is to detect and add information on anything one sees (through a device), such as streets, buildings, stars, trees, birds,

³⁴⁷ Aukstakalnis, *Practical*, 5.

³⁴⁸ Merriam-Webster, “Augmented Reality.”

dogs, and people. But as I will detail below, AR technologies also create, among other things, virtual activities where one is engaged with virtual objects within real spaces, virtual buildings that one could explore on a real grass field, virtual art pieces that hang beside actual ones in a museum, and virtual presence of others within an actual space (I provide details of some of these examples below). I am emphasizing the placement of virtual entities within real ones because that is precisely where AR and VR diverge. Although both involve entities created in the digital medium and projected on a monitor, in VR the context of these virtual objects is other virtual objects, whereas in AR it is the ordinary spaces filled with real objects. For this reason, AR does not require a user to detach herself from her actual surroundings. It is true that one may not be truly engaged in one's actual surroundings when looking at virtual entities through a smartphone screen. However, the potential space altering power of AR technologies is not restricted to smartphones. One can simply wear a pair of smart glasses that allow a clear view of the real world while also computing the visual data to make "enhancements," which are then projected back on the glasses themselves (using an advanced version of the same basic technology that lets a crosshair reticle be superimposed on the target object seen through the telescopic sight of a rifle). Other technologies are in the making. One of them allows digital images to be projected right onto the corrective contact lens of a user,³⁴⁹ and another does away with projection on a display glass (or lens) altogether, instead beaming light from the

³⁴⁹ Bolton, "Samsung."

arm of a glass frame onto the retina.³⁵⁰ These developments allow us to imagine a future, not more than a few years away, when going around ordinary places would mean interacting with both real and virtual objects—a seamless mingling that is made possible by unintrusive display (or projection) technology and realistic virtual images.

Virtual objects, graphics, and other information seen in AR appear to be parts of surrounding space. AR can, therefore, radically transform a place, both in terms of its constitution and the relation individuals have to it. Not only what I see and interact with in a place changes when new virtual entities pop up. But my relation to real objects and even other humans in a place changes when they too become “enhanced” or modified in my perception by the AR. This is the case, for instance, when a plain, inconspicuous wall becomes the surface for displaying my emails, when while repairing a piece of equipment I see labels and instructions superimposed on its components, or when an empty space in a meeting room is occupied by a virtually present attendee. The function, prominence, and relevance of entities change as a result of AR, and so does the users’ relation to them in a place. Moreover, with a more widespread adoption of AR, there may be a collective AR experience of a place. Based on the examples above, two aspects to the changes brought about by AR in a place can be distinguished: changes to what we can engage with, owing to the presence of virtual entities,

³⁵⁰ Sullivan, “This Apple Patent.”

and changes to how we engage or relate to real entities, including other humans, based on their virtual modifications.

However, one could argue against the uniqueness of changes introduced by AR in a space or place. Even without the introduction of AR, one could contend, places change constantly regarding constituent entities and one's relation to them. Virtual objects, in this view, can simply be taken to be like other objects, the addition of which can change the function of and our relation to other entities in a place. Why then should we take the introduction of virtual objects for the user of AR differently? Moreover, one could argue that communication and entertainment devices have always fostered different experiences for people sharing the same place. How is talking on a telephone, watching television, reading a novel, or playing on a handheld gaming device any different than being in AR? We can imagine four members of a family occupying the same living room but engaged in these different activities, which, like AR, lead to an engagement with entities not present in the real surroundings. Should we then also analyze the changes in the place resulting from telephones, televisions, novels, gaming consoles, or any other such thing? Finally, one could claim that any discussion of AR in relation to place is superfluous given that the modifications introduced by AR do not actually affect a place, but only a user's perception of it. Indeed, the room I am in—composed of physical objects in a physical space—remains the same during and after AR's virtual insertions and modifications. One could thus argue that there is no need to see AR as something deserving special attention insofar

as the idea of place is considered. Furthermore, even if AR turns out to constitute a special kind of place, why should we care about this particular kind of place among many others? Responses to these questions and objections can only be ventured once we 1) have a fuller understanding of AR technologies and of the changes to the perception of everyday spaces they introduce, and 2) apply the phenomenological account of place developed in the last chapter to the “augmented” places seen through AR.

Augmented Reality Technologies

With advances in technology, the audiovisual phenomena that constitute AR will undoubtedly become much more realistic than they are today, seamlessly blending the virtual with the physical. Moreover, the devices needed to access AR are shrinking at a rapid pace. As noted, a pair of glasses with minimal visible modifications can open the doors to “augmented” surroundings. The translucency, so to speak, of the AR’s screen mediated interface on smartphones will thus soon give way to the apparent transparency of a pair of glasses. Given these developments, which seem inevitable from a technological point of view, an analysis of AR’s modification of spaces that focuses on the current state of AR technologies is bound to become obsolete. Such analysis might also miss what is fundamental to all AR technologies. Philosophically, understanding how a technology, in its most basic design and conception, mediates the relation between humans and

the world is more fruitful than understanding how its specific applications function. On this more general level of analysis, we are concerned with identifying how a technology frames or structures our relation to entities in the world. We can, therefore, identify the necessary components and processes that constitute AR technologies without concerning ourselves with what a particular AR device is able to do.

The mediation introduced by AR technologies is a result of four basic processes, which can be executed to various degrees of success depending on available technologies. First, AR technologies must use various sensors to capture, in as much detail as possible, the physical environment around the user. Here the sensed environment includes the user, whose movements and distances from other entities are detected and recorded. Second, the captured data must be processed using some form of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that is guided by the purposes of the application under use. Regardless of the application, the AI in AR technologies must interpret the data for spatial features and for the kinds of entities in the environment, since this enables it to insert a digital object, or a piece of information, in the right spot within the analyzed spatial data. Third, an AR device must use optical technologies to add the generated virtual objects and information to the user's field of view. As noted, the distinguishing feature of the projection of symbols and graphics in AR is that the user must not lose sight of the real world context. Moreover, since the projected virtual objects or information are supposed to be a part of the real world, they must be relatively stable,

allowing a user to explore them from all angles and to come back to them after looking in a different direction. Finally, in keeping with the goal of creating virtual objects as close to real life as possible, they should be manipulatable by a user (although there would be restrictions based on the application in use). This feature involves the AR device capturing sensor data from the movement of a user's body parts (especially hands and feet) and interpreting it in relation to the position, orientation, and other "tactile" features of the virtual objects being manipulated. One could, for instance, rotate a virtual globe sitting on a real desk by swiping on what appears to be the globe's top surface.

A deeper analysis of these four processes can help us evaluate the significance of the change to an individual's perception of a place when using AR technologies. Before we delve into this analysis, however, a note about the possible distinction between the perception of place versus the nature or structure of place. Such a distinction, which only seems intuitive, could prevent a reader from taking an analysis of AR seriously. As noted, one could argue that the individual perception of a place changes with AR, but the reality of a place does not. Putting on a tinted sunglasses, for instance, changes the hue of a room for the perceiver, but not the room itself. Two disanalogies between the cases of tinted sunglasses and AR should encourage us to inquire further into AR. First, in the case of sunglasses, not just the room but everything one looks at becomes colorful. This indicates that whatever makes a room that particular room, for the perceiver and others using those sunglasses, remains the same under the new hue. That is not

the case with AR, which introduces specific changes to particular spaces that can remain more or less stable. These changes, moreover, affect what is encountered, how one acts, what is possible, and what is significant in a place. Second, changes in perception introduced by AR, if shared by others who inhabit or visit a place, results in a changed place. For instance, if everyone sees, through their own AR device, a large virtual globe in the center of a study (which appears to remain there despite one's movement around the house), then the study has changed significantly compared to before the inhabitants' adoption of AR devices. The idea of a shared "augmented" reality, which obfuscates the intuitive distinction between the real and the virtual, will be discussed below.

Sensor Data and Digitization

In describing the processes that makes Augmented Reality possible, we will focus on the most fundamental features, allowing for differences resulting from technological progress. Inclusion of technical detail in this analysis is important because it helps bring to light the differences between the phenomenon of place we directly experience without AR and the one supplied by a series of technological processes. Without some technical detail, moreover, my ensuing claims would not be adequately supported. In sensing the physical environment around the user, which includes the movements of the user, AR technologies employ a variety of sensors: cameras, microphones, GPS, gyroscopes, ambient light sensors, compasses, etc. More advanced technologies are in the making. Infrared

light projector/sensor pairs help determine the precise distance (or depth) between the user and surrounding entities by projecting infrared light and measuring its “time of flight,” the time it takes for the light to be reflected back by objects to the sensors located at the AR device. The times of flight from rapid pulses of the light (that is sprayed, so to speak, on everything in the user’s field of vision) are then quickly converted to distances, creating a live and accurate three dimensional map of a space and entities within it. I mention this development as an example of an innovation that will make representing the spatial environment of a user more accurate, even to the point that the dimensions and positions of minute objects, along with slight changes in the posture and position of a user, could be calculated precisely. (Of course, AR cannot capture smells, tastes, and surface textures.) Regardless of the sensor and its level of accuracy, all AR technologies produce a representation of the environment in fundamentally the same way, which becomes clear if we look at the kind of data they generate.

Digital technologies, of which AR and VR are recent developments, get their name from the fact that they work with data represented in digits, specifically the binary of 0 and 1 (although, theoretically, any two digits can be used). A wide range of signals, from sound and light waves to temperature and pressure, can be digitized, that is, converted into strings (or “words”) of 0s and 1s, with the use of sensors coupled with analog-to-digital convertors. The digitization process converts a continuous analog signal, generated by a sensor, into discrete numbers (the binary). For instance, light entering a camera’s aperture hits a light sensitive

sensor chip, which converts the light into electrical signal, which is then converted into digital data. This conversion from analog to digital information is fundamental to all digital devices that sense and represent a physical environment. The electrical signal is continuous: like the light, its measured value varies continuously with time, with changes occurring even between two extremely close points of time (the limit to such variation with time depends on the kind of technology used). This also means that the electric signal is analog: in its continuous variation with time the signal reflects (is “analogous” to, one could say) the actual world phenomenon, such as light, sound wave, pressure, temperature, etc. to which it is correlated. With even minute changes in these phenomena, the analog signal changes. However, the analog-to-digital convertor (ADC) only samples the analog signal generated by the sensor. Not unlike sampling a population where a researcher collects data from a few individuals in order to discern a pattern in the population to which they belong, the ADC measures the strength of the electric signal multiple times every second. This measurement is noted in a digital format, each voltage point represented by strings made up of 0s and 1s. These strings or “words” are then stored as “bytes” of data. This data is ready to be transferred to other devices and manipulated.

The digital data can be converted back into analog signal, and then into the real world phenomena of lights and sounds, using digital-to-analog converters (DAC) together with relevant devices (television, speakers, smartphone screens). The faithfulness or fidelity of the reproduction to the original phe-

nomenon largely depends on the kind of sensor in use, the resolution at which the data was captured, and how the stored digital data is expanded to form the original analog signal. Briefly, and crudely, the sensor (at the initial stage of capturing light, sound, etc.) decides how richly a phenomenon is reflected by the generated electrical current; the number of “letters” (or the number of 0s and 1s) used to form the digital strings or words corresponding to the samples of the electrical signal determines the resolution at which this signal is captured (more bits—0s and 1s—per string convey higher resolution); and the way a DAC fills in the gaps between the sampled data (that is, interpolates) determines how well the electrical signal that was initially generated by the sensor chip is reconstructed in another device. Although advances in technology have resulted in closer approximation of the original phenomenon, the three stages of sensing, storing, and reproducing carry inherent errors that cannot be overcome. Sensors have to reduce the phenomenon of light and sound to electrical signals, samples of which are recorded by rounding off real numbers, and a calculated guess about what is missing in these samples then helps reproduce the electrical signal.³⁵¹

³⁵¹ The human eyes, one could argue, similarly convert light to electrical signals, which are then transferred to the brain where not everything is recorded in the memory. This is true, but the details of the digital technology reveal a number of significant disanalogies, including the fact that in the case of eyes standards do not exist for all human eyes on how they view and interpret information.

Interpretation of Data and Insertion of Virtual Objects

Digitization thus makes a variety of information about the environment available in the same basic binary format, making manipulation of data both possible and efficient. If the data from a phenomenon, such as light or sound, is in bits and bytes, mixing it with bits and bytes of other recorded phenomenon or fictional entities and effects is simply a matter of putting the digital units together (not unlike copying and pasting words between documents in a word processor). Of course, the process has to be much more sophisticated if the result is to appear more than a collage or a random assemblage. This brings us to the second process, that of interpreting the digital data supplied by the sensing technologies. Computer processors, located on the AR device itself (such as in the frame of AR glasses), process data gathered from the sensors. In this processing, the processor executes operations specified by a set of instructions, called programs (or, generally, software), stored in the memory. The instructions, for instance, could relate to identifying a set of bright points (with brightness or relative brightness above a certain threshold) that are relatively positioned in a certain way as a constellation of stars. Similarly, instructions could be programmed so that upon detecting a set of features in the digital data, the processor is able to identify a plane surface as the floor of the room, on which to place a virtual object. Of course, instructions in these cases would consist of thousands of lines of simple codes understandable by the electronic circuitry of a processor. In recent decades, researchers have found a more efficient and less expensive (because involving less

human labor) way of instructing processors than to write mountains of codes. Machine learning, as it is called, involves feeding vast quantities of data that have particular patterns to a computer, allowing it to “learn” the varying ways in which those patterns exist in the real world. The computer can then develop a model of its own, an instructional program or algorithm, that will help it identify and label a new object (or a set of digital data) on the basis of similar patterns.

For instance, feeding a computer pictures of thousands of the Orion constellation would enable it to label a set of new data (because captured from a different device, from a new angle, etc.) that shows a similar pattern of bright lights as the Orion constellation. The previous “learning” enables the processing unit to identify the constellation despite the fact that the new image is unlike any other it has “seen.” With such “artificial intelligence” in hand, I can scan the night sky with my smartphone and quickly discover, with the help of a label and an outline on the screen, which set of stars is called the Orion constellation. With minor changes in existing technology, I could simply wear a pair of glasses and look at the sky to see a number of constellations, all laid out in the actual sky as in a sky map. The same holds true for the identification and labelling of entities on earth, although right now the technology only classifies objects into broad categories.

Identifying entities in the real world is only one of the applications of a system that combines digital sensor data with processing guided by machine learning. Based on the interpreted data and a defined but general goal, this system can automatically initiate particular actions for which it has not been pro-

grammed by humans. For instance, robotic dogs can navigate new environments, self-driving cars can stop for jaywalking pedestrians, and automated systems in airplanes can stabilize planes in unique scenarios.³⁵² More important, within the context of AR, this system can insert an image or a three-dimensional virtual object in the sensor provided data. Such insertion is made possible by the fact that the information from various sensors has been processed and interpreted by the processor so as to create a virtual representation of the space around the user. Not only an outline of entities in the surrounding space, but also their distance from each other and their positions are mapped, all from the perspective of the user where the AR device is located. As the user moves, the sensor data changes, and the map is modified instantaneously. This algorithm based technique, known as Simultaneous Localization and Mapping (SLAM), constructs and modifies a three-dimensional map of the environment while tracking the movement and position of the user.³⁵³ The user is localized and the environment is mapped, and the two sets of interpreted data are seamlessly combined by the program. The resulting representation of a user's space, or "reality," forms the raw material for Augmented Reality. Knowing the sizes and relative locations of all the objects and surfaces on the 3-D map, an AR device can insert a 3-D virtual object at a po-

³⁵² As was evident in the case of the Ethiopian Airlines crash involving Boeing 737 Max, the automated systems are only as "intelligent" as the sensors allow them to be. Upon recognizing (mistakenly, because of faulty sensors) that the plane's nose was diving down instead of soaring up on take off, the computer system forcibly tilted the plane higher up than was actually safe, resulting in a crash that killed all aboard.

³⁵³ This program is what allows robotic dogs to move around and vehicles to be autonomous.

sition where it fits and with an apparent size proportional to the surrounding real objects. The constant computation of the user's position and posture in relation to the environment ensures that the virtual object can instantaneously change size and orientation in relation to the user depending on the user's movement. The virtual object is also realistically occluded when another object comes into the user's line of sight.

Projection of Virtual Objects

Together with the user's position and posture, sensors in the latest AR devices also track the position of the user's eyes. Although such tracking has many possible uses (and abuses related to privacy), in AR technologies it can aid in the accurate projection of information and graphics generated by the processing unit. Whereas sensors collect data indiscriminately from every corner of the user's space, the projection of generated data has to be precisely calibrated in relation to the user's field of view. Eye tracking, along with the more prevalent form of head tracking, can help mimic, for the user, the feeling of exploring a virtually enhanced environment. When a user rotates her head, a new area comes into view, and the AR overlay on the real world changes accordingly. But within a particular field of view, the user could focus her eyes on a particular object or area to reveal more about it; this requires eye tracking. This technology also enables the AR to be extremely rich in information and yet not overwhelm a user. Not all virtual objects and information related to a space have to be available all the time.

Scanning the sky, I may focus on a constellation, and such attention can trigger the AI in the device to show me more details about the constellation. When inspecting a complex machine, focusing on individual parts can give a mechanic or engineer more information about it, such as a scan of the internal parts and a view of the circuitry. An image or video of the precise object of attention can also be communicated to others, or simply stored.

Virtual objects can be either projected on see-through glass or directly onto the retina. The latter technology, which can significantly lighten an AR device, appears to be the future of projection technology. The precision and resolution of retinal projection, along with the fact that it can cover the whole field of view of a user, means that virtual objects will appear real and stable, further eliminating any friction between the real space and its augmentation. Alternatively, future technologies may also take an entirely different direction, with the same results. Instead of projecting information and graphics onto a view of the real space (accessible through see-through glasses), the real space can itself be presented as an image, which is augmented by computer generated information and graphics. In other words, we could just swap the digitally created images in immersive Virtual Reality with the live video of the user's actual field of view captured by cameras on the AR device. Within this live video, which is itself mediated by digital data, it is much easier to insert realistic virtual object than it is in the case of pro-

jections on see-through devices.³⁵⁴ A relatively crude version of this AR technology is represented by AR applications in smartphones. When using these applications, we simply point the camera towards our space. The AR objects are seen within the live video display of the actual space.³⁵⁵ See-through glasses with AR, described above, overcome the bulkiness, arm fatigue, and the increasingly unfashionable use of smartphones for AR. But further technological advances could lead to a light pair of opaque glasses on which a digital display of reality is seen as “augmented.”

Engaging with Virtual Objects

Finally, one could imagine how superficial a virtual object would be in our AR experience if it does not respond in some way to our gestures. Enabling bodily interactions with virtual objects is an essential feature for AR. Although we may not feel the texture of a virtual dinosaur’s skin (yet), we could move the 3-D image around and peel off the skin and muscles to see its anatomy using our hands. Present technologies can locate, using cameras and other sensors, a user’s hands

³⁵⁴ The manufacturers of the latest devices using this technology advertise it as Mixed Reality (MR). The underlying idea, though, is the same as AR and there is no consensus right now on the distinctions between AR and MR. One could simply say that these MR devices have video see-through displays as opposed to optical see-through, a distinction made by Aukstakalnis (2017).

³⁵⁵ The game that popularized AR, Pokemon Go (released in 2016), relies on smartphones. But developers have found a way to adapt the game to see-through displays, which makes for easier interactions with virtual elements (since one’s hands are free, and one has a clearer view of one’s surroundings).

and fingers in relation to the images projected in her field of view.³⁵⁶ Calculating changes in the virtual object produced, for instance, by the flicking and grasping motion of a hand, or by the pressing and sliding motion of a finger, then becomes a computational problem solved quickly by the processors. With the latency between one's gestures and its effect already down to milliseconds on smartphone devices, we can imagine an experience of AR where engagement with virtual objects is smooth, even if limited in some ways. But these limitations, much like the ones presented by real objects, can become part of our understanding of these virtual objects with repeated use. In other words, differences in our engagements with real objects and with virtual objects might turn out to be simply one of degree and not of kind.

Place and Mediation by Augmented Reality

The above description of the four aspects of AR technologies gives us an understanding of the changes introduced to our experience of space when in AR. More specifically, we can see how the level of technologically introduced modifications

³⁵⁶ For more precise detection of movement, one could also wear sensors on one's hand, such as a glove full of motion detectors, gyroscopes, etc. But these accessories can get in the way of one's experience of the AR as real, so new technologies are aiming to replace them with better sensor at the AR device itself. However, in some applications, it might be necessary to keep wearable sensors, not just to provide motion data, but also to provide feedback to a user's hands. Haptic touch or haptic feedback, as it is known, are subtle vibrations, produced by the worn device, that the user can sense on parts of her hands when touching a virtual object. Such feedback, which can be fine tuned to reflect different kinds of "touched" surfaces, further adds to the verisimilitude of AR.

to our surrounding space—both in terms of what entities or information are present and what we can do—is unprecedented. The description also helps make a case that these modifications appear real and stable. But how are we to understand these modifications? Could an account of place still hold for the spaces that appear through AR devices? In this section, I will describe some examples that can help set the stage for further analysis.

Imagine going to a museum, with your usual AR glasses on, and being pleasantly surprised upon seeing famous artworks that had long been stolen. You had no knowledge that they had been recovered, but here they are, framed like other paintings in a newly prepared space in the museum. Now imagine taking your dog on a walk in a public park (with your AR glasses on) and being stunned by the newly installed art pieces. The open fields where your dog used to play is now filled with a gigantic sculpture. What is more, new artworks appear on subsequent daily visits. Both examples showcase the power of AR. In the first case, an empty room with blank walls is transformed into an exhibition of stolen pieces of art. In the second, a grassy field becomes an ongoing art exhibition without losing its function as a play ground. Both examples, moreover, are based on actual events³⁵⁷ and present first clues as to AR's radical transformation of spaces. The AR exhibition of the stolen paintings may be the most visited part

³⁵⁷ An AR application was developed to exhibit stolen pieces at the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum in Boston but never made public because of legal concerns. See Katz, "Augmented Reality." And Apple worked with the New Museum in New York City and various artists to put on an AR art exhibition in Central Park. See Haigney, "Apple Transforms." The exhibit was available to those using the app.

of the museum, and one might start visiting the park regularly to see the new artworks. A museum, accordingly, could consist entirely of virtual art pieces. It might simply be an empty building with bare walls (or none at all), which would allow for a convenient and planned virtual exhibition. Even the perception and purpose of culturally prominent places can change significantly with AR. For instance, an AR app that targets spaces within MoMA in New York City is able to superimpose, without the museum's help or permission, artworks that are not part of the exhibition on to exhibited paintings. This application was developed by a collective of internet artists. One of those involved noted that "We literally are trying to claim the space."³⁵⁸ Such a reclaiming of space means that what one person finds in MoMa can be very different than what another finds there. Thus, the kinds of ideas and cultural heritage represented by a place can be altered with AR. Indeed, the artists' collective claimed, "If we are to understand that art is the great measure of culture we must also acknowledge it is owned, valued and defined by 'the elite' ... We must also recognize that the term 'open to the public' is not an invitation but a declaration of values. Values that are not our own."³⁵⁹ The handheld devices used to transform MoMa's Jackson Pollock room could soon give way to projection on smart glasses. And there could be many other such space-invading apps, developments that would make it extremely difficult (for those around and for the exhibition curator) to detect whether people in a place are experiencing anything similar and thus to identify a place by a set

³⁵⁸ DeGeurin, "Internet Artists."

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

of entities, experiences, and activities. The collective experience of a place, which leads to some consensus on the kind of place it is, is thus challenged by AR.

Moreover, new collective experiences built around virtual, and not actual, objects in a space can be formed using an AR application. Take the example of one of the most popular AR applications, Pokémon Go, a game that debuted in the summer of 2016 and was downloaded by 500 million people by the end of the year. Although not as widely popular now, the more than 100 million presently active users go around cities looking for fictional, virtual creatures that are stably tied to particular geographical locations by the architects of the game. Players earn points, among other things, by finding the virtual creature (a Pokémon), throwing virtual balls at it (in a virtual “battle”), and thus “catching” it. The more Pokémon one captures from a variety of actual geographical locations, the more points one gets. When playing the game, a player looks at the surrounding space through her smartphone camera. The scene displayed on the screen is that of the actual space, which contains a virtual creature that usually stands somewhere on the ground.³⁶⁰ The game was credited for making users physically more active. It also spawned online communities based on the roles players chose in the game. More importantly, it changed how millions of people engaged with places. The virtual entities are programmed so as to be frequently found in places of cultural, historical, and natural significance. During the first few

³⁶⁰ This is the case in the Augmented Reality mode of the game. One can also play it in a mode where the space around is rendered as a colorful but simplified map (as in two parallel lines for a street, green shapes for lawns, etc.).

months of its release, when the game's popularity was at its height, it was common in major cities around the world to see a crowd of people "visiting" a tourist attraction just to catch a Pokémon. Like the unusual crowd at MoMA, people were using an AR app to see and engage with something different than what was physically around them.

A quick interaction with particular virtual creatures, however, cannot lead to significant changes in an individual's or a collective's perception and engagement with the actual place (where the creatures are found). Although entertaining, such interactions are solitary. For a more place altering experience, one would need a relatively permanent virtual place: a place consisting of a set of virtual entities and virtual interactions with others, all set in actual places. Features in Pokémon Go already point to this parallel virtual world. Pokéstops and Pokémon Gyms are two "places" one could go to while playing the game. These places, located in significant places around a city, are relatively permanent and allow interaction with other players, who are present as their virtual avatars. At a Pokémon Gym, which could simply be a city's popular theater,³⁶¹ players could form teams and battle against each other. Such a game-related use of a virtual place, which is projected on top of a real place, may not become widespread. In most theater goers' experience, the place is still perceived and used as a theater.

However, the development of virtual spots points to the possibility of an additional layer of entities and social engagement that can both use and mask a

³⁶¹ On the Pokémon Go map, I found a Pokémon Gym at the Kentucky Theater located downtown.

real place: use it as a geographical feature and mask it as the kind of place it is. Some of the most insightful speculations about the near future mention the idea of “mirror world,” a constantly updating digital copy of the physical structures on the earth’s surface. The idea here is that one can “augment” and modify reality most efficiently and accurately if all the geographical features in the world are mapped, stored, and presented like a text or a website. Being interconnected, this unified representation of the physical world would allow one to search for real world entities, structures, and events just as one can search for a word in a digitized text. One could, more importantly, also modify any part of this representation, add texts and graphics to it, just as one does with a picture file on a computer. In other words, just as the world wide web digitized information, making it quickly manipulable, the mirror world will digitize physical things and structures, making them ready for augmentation.³⁶² This would be a detailed three-dimensional map captured by sensors and interpreted by machine learning. Some of the core technology needed to create the “mirror world” is already used by Google, Apple, and other companies to accurately map streets and the outlines of buildings and natural entities. More sensor information from more places, often voluntarily provided by users of smartphone and monitoring cameras, would eventually result in a map of the world without many gaps.

362 This idea was most recently articulated by Kelly, “AR Will Spark.” The term “mirror world” was coined by David Gelernter, a computer science professor at Yale University, in 1991.

Apart from efficiently, and often autonomously, adding information and virtual objects to the spaces experienced through AR devices, the presence of a “mirror world” would further enable a seamless shared experience of “augmented” places (such as streets and buildings with virtual signs) and parallel “places” (such as Pokémon Gyms). When connected to the single three-dimensional representation of a city or a country, new information and virtual objects related to a particular place can be uploaded by a developer or a user for everyone to experience, and the latest version of the virtually modified places can be experienced either instantaneously or when someone visits the place. Not unlike the real world, modifications made to a space can persist, supported by the mirror world. When logged into these central augmentation services with a set of AR devices, people could collectively experience everyday places in a new way. Popular virtual layers for everyone, and not just game-related virtual creatures, would have important implications for the way places, particularly public places, are perceived and experienced. Moreover, selective access to virtual enhancement, not unlike access to the internet right now, could result in new inequalities. Instead of being accessible to everyone, improvements made (by a private company) to a public place using the digital layer, such as information, graphical instructions, and activities, would only be available for those using an AR device.³⁶³ Since the

³⁶³ One can think of the information available to someone walking around downtown. If directory information and signposts are considered redundant when the majority of people get directions from a virtual map or an AR app, cities would stop investing in infrastructural improvements related to those. The removal of public phone booths with the advent of smartphones is a good example of such a change.

contents of the digital layer are determined by developers, how a public place is presented through AR would depend much on factors not related to the actual place. This could be especially concerning when one or a few companies come to dominate the creation and editing of the mirror world.

Although seemingly farfetched, one can see an analogous case with the Google search engine, where algorithms decide what appears on the first page of results. According to some estimates, between 75-90% of Google search users do not go past the first page of their search results.³⁶⁴ Where people shop, which attractions they visit, and what services they use are increasingly determined by these first page results. Since the projection of virtual objects and information onto real things and spaces does not materially affect the latter (nor is it any kind of stealing of intellectual property), how the real world is “augmented,” what aspects of it is prioritized for attention, and who gets to participate in a particular AR experience would most likely be determined by the decisions and algorithms employed by the dominant companies, that is, those with sufficient data and processing power. Those who create and maintain a place, like the curators of MoMA, would have little say in how their place is seen and experienced.³⁶⁵ Indeed, the attraction of a place might entirely depend on what AR features are available there.

³⁶⁴ Agarwal, “How to Optimize.” Indeed, my own Google search for the number of people who rely on results listed on the first page of search results ended on the first page of results.

³⁶⁵ To some degree this is obviously also true even without AR, but with AR people perceive different objects altogether and engage in different activities in the same space.

Place and the Space of Augmented Reality

These current and near-future possibilities of AR-mediated interaction with actual places, together with an understanding of how AR technologies work, help us answer key questions about the nature of spaces experienced through AR. The first among these questions is whether or not AR-mediated spaces can be called places as we defined them in the previous chapter. There we concluded that a place is to be understood in terms of its relation to contiguous places. This contiguity is made possible by the continuous elements shared among places, which also allow a place to be spatially distinct from other places. The presence of multiple continuous elements, each with its own particular threshold that separates distinct sets of entities, imply indeterminate boundaries and overlapping of contiguous places. We also noted that the phenomenon of place is distinct from a static representation of place: one's engagement with one's surroundings, along with prevalent practices, social conventions, and legal guidelines, continually rearticulates the distinct constellation of entities and relations that constitute a place and its indistinct boundaries with other places. Finally, we noted how a place is internally heterogeneous, with its distinct center—constituted by a set of entities and spatial relations emerging through engagement—fading away along continuous elements. Such inherent heterogeneity differentiates a place from space understood as homogenous extendedness. The question we now need to ask is: do these features of place apply to spaces accessed through augmented reality.

The insertion of digital objects in a space is made possible by the digitization of actual spaces. AR-mediated experience of a place is made possible by the processes of sensing the environment, digitizing it, interpreting it, and then inserting a realistic graphic image within one's experience. Thus, AR is not an augmentation of entities in a space such as floors, chairs, or streets; the "R" in AR is not the reality of entities as one experiences them without AR. The "reality" that AR transforms stands for the representation of reality produced by the data from the sensors and the interpretation by artificial intelligence. It is true that for someone experiencing AR, its augmentations are experienced as modifications to reality and not as modifications to represented or digitized version of reality. However, since my goal here is to compare non-AR-mediated experiences of space with AR-mediated experiences, I take the former as the reference point for the experience of space and place, that is, as the "reality" of a space. The difference between the two experiences, then, rests not just on augmentation (something readily visible to a user), but also on the representation of spaces and entities that precedes the augmentation (something that the user cannot see or experience, but which is needed for realistic augmentation and is absent for non-AR experience of the space). In other words, the AR technologies synthesize the entire visual field and does not simply insert something into an organically produced visual field. In this sense, AR should more accurately be called ARR: Augmentation of Represented Reality, where the AR technology both represents and augments that which is experienced without AR. In other words, at the

foundation of AR experience is not, despite all appearances, the insertion of digital representations, but the digital representation of entities and entire spaces. This representation not only provides the foundation for any “augmentation” but does so by already interpreting “reality” (understood as that which is encountered in non-AR-mediated experience) in a way that is amenable to such modification. The question, therefore, that we must begin with is: compared to unmediated spaces (that is, spaces that are not analyzed and digitized to be augmentation ready) what all is different in the digital representation of the same spaces by AR technologies (such that these spaces are ready for augmentation)?

To be sure, to a AR user the surroundings appear indistinguishably the same when seen through the AR device (whether optical see-through or video see-through). For a phenomenological investigation, one could argue, it is this appearance that should matter the most. If the user of an AR device experiences actual spaces as transformed (even if superficially) by AR, then that is phenomenally true. To say that a transformation has already occurred before the virtual objects or information are added in one’s field of view is perhaps to dwell in technicalities that have little bearing on the phenomena. However, a distinction between spaces experienced with and without an AR device is phenomenally consequential if it rests on the presence or absence of certain possibilities. Any particular space, especially those that are part of a familiar place, is not simply the sum of entities that constitute it. As I noted in the last chapter, the spatially distinct configuration of entities and spatial relations that constitute a place also

represents specific possibilities. One can act in certain ways, engage in certain activities, meet with certain people, and expect certain events in a particular space. To be in a place is to have certain possibilities and not others. Take, for instance, two rooms in a museum. One has a large painting on a wall facing the entrance and another only has a blank wall facing the entrance, but there is a projector hanging from the ceiling in front of the wall. In the first room, one expects to see nothing more than what is exhibited. In the second room, the presence of the projector before the blank wall leads us to expect the projection of art image or a video on the wall. Although the projector is not currently projecting, the room is much more than an empty room with a black item hanging from its ceiling: it is a space with certain possibilities. These are absent in the first room. The same is the case with someone wearing an AR device and looking around in a space even when there is no addition of virtual objects. The space does not have the same possibilities without the AR device. I suggest that we understand the introduction of possibilities for subsequent virtual changes in an AR mediated space with reference to what has already been accomplished by AR technologies. This is to say that the representation of the space achieved by sensing and interpreting data by an AR device already opens up new possibilities for a space, even if these possibilities are not realized, as in the projector that remains switched off. Even before augmentations that palpably modify spaces, the representation of these spaces by AR— which opens the possibility for modification that is absent in non-AR mediated experience by making represented data amenable to digital manip-

ulation—shows a fundamental difference between spaces mediated and unmediated by AR.

The digitization of spaces, we noted, happens through the use of sensors and ADCs, which convert analog signals into digital data. The generation of this data contains some inherent discrepancies in relation to the phenomena it represents. One such discrepancy is the reduction of continuous signals into discontinuous data. Before the digital data is interpreted by processors and programs, the digitization itself does not count as a misrepresentation of the actual space, except in one important respect. In breaking down the continuous signal through sampling and digital storage, every feature in the environment, from the walls and the furniture, to the humans and the floor, is divided into pieces, each represented by a set of strings of bits and bytes. Thus, the inevitable consequence of digitization is the imposition of a grid on continuous spatial features in order to yield digital data that represents them. But it is not the loss of parts of the analog signal that accompanies digitization, which in any case can be minimized infinitesimally with advances in technology, that is of primary significance here. It is the fact that certain features of the environment when represented digitally become open to determinate division and limits. In most cases, like a picture frame, an imposition of a grid dividing the entity does not misrepresent the entity. Since there is already an edge or border to a frame, sensors just need to capture the edges accurately. But unlike a frame (or a chair, a lamp, a rug, a wall) the ground

on which we walk and the movement of people in a space do not immediately or unequivocally end somewhere. The digital form does not itself impose a limit or precise outlines to these features. Rather, the set of data that results from the digitization of a space makes the marking of discontinuity—divisions or limits—on a continuous element possible by representing the element as already divided into small pieces (much like how an electronic copy of a picture is represented as millions of small pixels). A continuous element can be thereby represented as discrete if any of the divisions (between two small pieces of the element) is interpreted as separating one segment of the element from another. And since all the quantifiable elements (discrete and continuous) of a space are represented in qualitatively the same way (as bits or strings), segments of continuous elements can be associated with discrete elements to form a distinct spatial whole (as I discuss below). The possibility of such associations is based on digitized representation of a space, something absent in a non-AR mediated space.

The next process in AR, that of data interpretation, is how the discretized continuous and discrete elements are interpreted. The processing unit, operating under instructions from a machine learning program, identifies entities in the captured sea of data, individuating them by determining their edges.³⁶⁶ The in-

³⁶⁶ Differences in colors, planes, distances, etc. captured in the data provide clues to the existence of separate objects in the environment. The crude results from this first level of analysis, which already marks outlines of discrete objects, are then compared to models created by machine learning (based on previous exposures to images of such things), thus resulting in the identifications of the kinds of entities in the data. Most current AR devices can identify categories of objects such as floors, other flat surfaces such as walls and tables, corners, doors, and streets because they need to place virtual objects there.

dividuation process makes use of the divisions represented in the digital data in order to reconstruct distinct entities with clear edges or limits. But not only discrete elements, which have clear edges, but features that continue indefinitely beyond a given space are also interpreted as having a limit. Furthermore, this imposition of a limit along continuous elements makes the interpretation of a space as a unique spatial whole possible. Putting together discrete elements with discretized continuous elements, an individual space can be represented, labelled, and categorized by AI. If we take the example of ground as a continuous feature, the point at which an AI interprets the limits of this ground determines the boundary of a space. These limits thus partially determine how particular spaces are carved out and represented in AR. AR needs to determine these limits to work properly, especially if it has to do a place based modification (as opposed to a modification of an open space).

However, this automated determination is problematic for an equation of space mediated by AR with place. Repeated and collective engagement with a set of entities and geographical features first helps establish a place as spatially distinct with the emergence of palpable thresholds along one or more continuous elements. But these thresholds, since they relate to a phenomenon and not an entity, are not only nebulous, but also continually renewed and modified through the activities of individuals and groups. AR's parsing of spaces happens in a fundamentally different way. AR's determination of limits on continuous elements, and thus its constitution of spatial wholes based on these limits, obviates

the need for the collective and continual negotiation of thresholds (on various continuous elements) through everyday bodily engagement with places. Such negotiations are fundamental to the constitution and continuing reconstitution of spatially distinct meaningful wholes. To be sure, negotiations of thresholds through bodily engagements would not suddenly stop with the introduction of AR. But AR would present spaces as distinct in certain ways (which I discuss below), thus guiding bodily engagement and negotiations of thresholds.³⁶⁷ But over time, much like the first page of Google search, engagements with spaces (and certain elements of a space) could be based on how AR interprets a space. And thus the ways in which AR defines a space as distinct could take over the ways in which places are distinct without AR mediation.

Before I discuss the primary sources of distinctness in AR-mediated spaces, let me mention two further ways, beyond the absence of threshold negotiations, in which distinct spaces of AR would differ from distinct places. First, when spaces are labelled, modified, or categorized in AR (as in a navigation app for AR devices), spaces are marked with clear lines of separation, which are otherwise usually absent in our experience of places. Although concrete boundaries of places are suggested by discrete entities (walls, fences, rivers, borders, etc.), the presence of continuous elements means that places fade into each other and often overlap, as discussed in the last chapter. In contrast, there is a clarity to how spa-

³⁶⁷ Maps, street signs, information sheets, etc. are all guides to our engagement with spaces, but, as I point below, AR's mediation is much more immediate, inscrutable, and broad.

ces are construed and labelled in augmented reality. The selection of a point of limit, which is both convenient and necessary for an AI dealing with digital data, enables conspicuous boundaries in an AR-mediated experience of the spatial world. In other words, the clear spatial divisions that are absent in ordinary experience suddenly become available—and necessary—with AR.

Second, unlike places, distinct AR spaces are not distinct along continuous elements. This follows from what has been said above about the division of continuous elements made possible by digitization. But emphasizing this point is important for its implication. If AR spaces are not distinct along continuous elements, it means that they are not distinct in relation to contiguous spaces around them. Such distinctness—along continuous elements and in relation to other places along those elements—is a key part of the definition of place. Of course, one might argue that with enough sensors AI can detect and take into account elements that continue beyond a space. But even if the sensors can sense the continuity of an element, and even if AI does not mark a split at the door, border, or other locations, the whole extent of the sensed continuous element (e.g., ground) would still be represented as a discrete element. It is the way AR's representation pulls together all elements of a sensed space, however small or large, as a set of discrete entities that constitutes a departure from our ordinary experience of continuous features, and thus of the boundaries of places. AR cannot represent something as spatially indefinite, continuing beyond what is sensed. If everything has a definite shape and limit, it becomes part of a set of sensed entities. As

discussed, however, continuous elements that are sensed as continuing indefinitely beyond a place can serve as the background on which distinctness can be located. To be distinct is to be distinct in a particular way, along a particular feature (with the possibility of plurality of such distinctions along many features). Continuous elements serve as that inconspicuous background feature along which sets of discrete elements can be experienced, by an individual or a community, as distinct constellations, that is, as contiguous places. Moreover, continuous elements can only serve in this special role if they are allowed to remain in the background, as something distinct from discrete elements that occupy the foreground. For instance, if ground is treated as one of the discrete elements in a place, such as in a farming community that takes the variety of soils into account in defining and naming places, then another inconspicuous continuous feature (such as air, movement of people, the work of farming, etc.) must serve to connect the various patches of land as contiguous. AR, however, cannot make this distinction between the continuous and the discrete features, and thus cannot separate them into background and foreground.³⁶⁸

The impossibility of distinguishing between continuous and discrete elements, along with the definite character of the boundaries of AR spaces and the absence

³⁶⁸ If AR were to treat a discrete feature as a background against which to distinguish places, it would run into obvious difficulties. First, it would be impossible to determine which element is the element against which distinctions are to be made. Second, AR cannot capture the variety of continuous elements which are available in our ordinary spatial experience.

of negotiations for such boundaries, point to a fundamentally different way in which AR spaces are distinct spatial wholes. Although AR lacks the abilities to interpret spaces as distinct along various continuous elements and to take into account the collective constitution of places, it nevertheless relies on other kinds of discernible distinctions among spaces to constitute unique spatial wholes. Either by itself or by linking to a central AI service, it can see patterns within the spaces it represents, compare these patterns to distinctions important to humans (that is fed to it for machine learning), and thus provide a nuanced view of spaces based on a variety of distinctions.³⁶⁹ In other words, beyond analyzing a single space captured through the sensors on an AR device, the collected data from a vast number of spaces could form the basis for identifying what is distinct about a particular space. Not unlike maps used in Geographic Information System, where areas on a map are marked as distinct based on the degree of presence of a particular geographic feature (or various other kinds of variables), the patterns emerging from a detailed collection of data by digital technologies can help differentiate spaces. The data could come not just from audiovisual sensors, internet traffic, financial transactions, and legal codes, but also from the movements of people, their preferences, their relations and friends, etc. The more data

³⁶⁹ For instance, right now AI used in various mobile services can identify areas with high amount of human movement, areas that have large natural bodies, areas that have a particular kind of business, and locations where one's friends are, locations that are most frequented by someone, locations that are popular during a particular time of the year, etc.

collected, the more kinds of distinctions can be made on a multilayered realistic map of the world that would guide AR.³⁷⁰

These distinctions would have practical importance for people using AR. While visiting a city, for instance, one could look around and find information about the store, restaurants, and other buildings in view. One could thus instantly distinguish a popular eatery from one that is not so popular (based on, say, movement of people and online ratings). Virtual objects could also be inserted in spaces based on the collected data. For instance, one might see innovative ad campaigns that target a kind of person (with certain online activity or buying history) in a kind of place (say a mall) by projecting graphics on a blank wall near her. From a commercial or entrepreneurial point of view, the possibilities are limitless. From the point of view of an understanding of place—spatial wholes that are unique in a variety of ways along various continuous and shared features—these possibilities represent a clear departure from the non-AR-mediated experience of the places. Based on data concerning a part of our relationship to places—quantifiable features of a place—and other public and private information, AR could impose and project a certain interpretation of the distinctness of spaces. As noted, our engagement with spaces would thus be guided by such interpretation, even if not determined.

³⁷⁰ This kind of data (coupled with enough computing power) would also radically enhance other technologies besides AR, but, as I point below, AR technology is unique in its capacity to shape experiences.

It is tempting to speculate about the future of AR, and such speculation can, with good reason, be construed as a slippery slope argument. However, limiting ourselves to spaces presented in AR and the idea of place, the following can be said about their differences without invoking a dystopian future:

i. The phenomena of places would change in the most obvious ways with the introduction of virtual objects, information, and activities into an AR user's view of her surroundings, particularly if this change is experienced collectively. If the kinds of entities, activities, and experiences present and possible in a place has any bearing on what a place is, how it is unique, and how it situates human existence, then AR presents a clear possibility of reconfiguring existing places in unpredictable ways and of creating entirely new spaces by highlighting unique sets of elements, information, and activities.

ii. These AR modifications are guided by an AI driven interpretation of spaces around a user. These interpretations articulate unique spaces using algorithms and vast amount of collected digital data, all in the service of the (explicit or implicit) goals of an AR application. The results from these processes—that is, the kind of unique spatial whole constituted by AR—is fundamentally different from how places are constituted in non-AR-mediated experiences. The latter is a product of our interaction not just with the physical aspects of a place, but also with other human beings, all within the ever-present sociocultural background. The digital mediation by AR produces a novel interpretation of spaces based on the quantifiable aspects of both the

physical and the sociocultural world. Noticeably, these new spatial wholes would lack distinctness along various continuous elements. AR spaces thus redefine what it means for an inhabited space to be unique.

iii. At the foundation of all the above changes is the digital transformation of spaces that enables AR's interpretations and modifications. Such transformation involves a discretization of continuous elements, and thus an imposition of determinate limits and boundaries that are in reality ambiguous, multidimensional, and open to continual negotiation through our individual and collective engagement with places.

Concluding Remarks

A possible objection to the view above could be articulated as follows. Even when continuous elements are rendered divisible and discrete in their representation, their continuity, and thus the contiguity and distinctness of spaces, are still present for the user of an AR device. This would seem to be the case, for instance, in situations where the device is not significantly augmenting the user's surrounding space. More generally, one could argue that even if we were to use an AR device regularly, its augmentations would not alter our perception of reality, except perhaps when we choose to focus on those virtual changes and entirely disregard the context. It could thus be said that the interpretation of continuous elements as discrete, and the arrangement of virtual labels and objects according

to this interpretation, only makes a service available to AR users who 1) can continue to be aware of the contiguity and distinctness of places just as before when using AR and 2) choose not to become dependent on AR.

A general response to the first objection would be to point that I do not claim that AR changes actual spaces, but only a representation of the spaces.³⁷¹ Accordingly, spaces in a AR user's view are already digitized and interpreted even though perceptible digital modifications may be absent. As I have argued, such spaces have radically different possibilities, and thus represent a different spatial whole, than spaces unmediated by AR. Intermittent modifications simply make use of and affirm aspects of the novel spatial wholes.

However, the first objection could also be construed as highlighting the limited use of AR today. This use is often not immersive in a manner necessary to bring about the experience of new spatial wholes. For instance, AR is currently used to temporarily bring up a virtual entity (like a Pokémon) or to label a constellation of stars. Similar kinds of applications represent the majority of AR use today. Furthermore, AR experiences are typically limited to apps on hand-held devices (such as smartphones), which more or less preserve the distinction between spaces experienced without AR and the space seen on the device

³⁷¹ See p. 149-50 above.

display.³⁷² (While devices such as Microsoft's HoloLens have see-through glasses, can insert a variety of digital objects and information into one's field of view, and are typically worn for several hours at a time, they are limited to either commercial or military use.) Although such a distinction makes for a jarring experience of moving back and forth between two ways of engaging in the same space, it is reasonable to assume that quick excursions into an AR mediated space would not change how one understands and relates to a place. More important, since others in the same place do not make the same or similar excursions, the perceptions and meanings that are reinforced are not the one created by AR.

The space represented and modified by AR, I admit, is only consequential (for both an understanding of AR spaces and for people living the AR) when AR becomes a regular part of one's life and when others participate in the same AR applications. For an analogy, we can look at the use of social media. Simply having a social media account and occasionally posting one's pictures may not have much impact on one's self-image or one's view of others. How one is represented by images and information in the social media and how others represent themselves is of little consequence when there are multiple other venues of interacting with those others. Only when the primary way of interaction shifts to social me-

³⁷² This separation of the AR space and the actual space, introduced by the particularly unintuitive interface of a hand-held device, could be the reason why many Pokémon Go players have been injured or killed in accidents resulting from a lack of awareness of their actual surroundings. They were looking into a smartphone screen, which only showed a small area around them, rather than having a full expanse of horizontal and vertical field of view, afforded by transparent AR glasses. For a report on the human toll and economic losses resulting from Pokémon Go, see Faccio and McConnell, "Death by Pokémon GO."

dia does one lose an alternative to the perception created by curated digital information and become vulnerable to the effects of that limited information. Similarly, AR's incapacity to represent continuous elements, and thus its potential to dissolve spatially distinct places, is only consequential in a community where AR is prevalent (like a utility, as discussed below). Although we do not have that scenario yet, it should not stop us from seeing what even a limited application of that technology reveals. In cases such as the use of the Pokémon Go application, a large community of people did indeed engage with places in a radically different way and reconstitute them as places. What I have suggested about the space of AR attempts to extrapolate from these real world examples by analyzing how they represent a fundamental change to the spatial phenomena.

The second objection—that one could choose not to become dependent on AR—appears correct in some sense given our experience and analysis of other media. Any major negative consequence related to the use of television, smartphone, or computer games, for instance, might only afflict those “addicted” to these media. Similarly, we would only start interpreting the world as AR presents it only if, through our constant use of AR devices, we have surrendered awareness of the real world context of the virtual modifications. This might be true, but there are a couple of disanalogies that we must consider. First, comparing AR to previous media (including smartphones), which require attending to a device rather than the world around us, misses a unique feature of AR. Unlike any media technology heretofore, AR is intricately tied to the real world of entities and

spaces. A better analogy for the modifications made by AR would be infrastructural changes brought about in a city or town. AR's labelling of entities in our view is similar to how signs, placards, and user's manuals indicate the identity and purpose of entities, spaces, and buildings around us. And AR's insertion of entities in a space is similar to the way new places, such as parks, bowling alleys, museums modify the social and cultural landscape of a city. The services provided by AR would thus be similar to the way a museum puts on an exhibition, an arboretum catalogs and showcases its plants, a national park makes and provides hiking maps, an astronomy organization makes latest scientific discoveries available to the public, and how the world wide web makes vast amount of information uploaded to publicly available sites accessible, searchable, and sometimes manipulatable. (In the context of AR, searchability is much more advanced; it applies not just to digital representations of written, audio, and visual information, but also to entities and spaces in their geographical contexts.) Thus, AR is not simply a personal entertainment or infotainment devise. Going by its current applications, it promises to be at least as much of a utility device as internet search engines and virtual maps. In the near future, AR's ubiquity would make it an unescapable mediator of our relation to the world, bringing a collective element to its use and impact, both on individual perception of place as a meaningful whole and on the identity, function, and relevance of places around us.

Second, AR cannot be considered on the same plane as other prominent digital technologies like the internet, social media, and smartphones. This is not

just because in modifying and repurposing spaces it can alter the physical context of our lives, but it can also do what these other technologies can do in a much more efficient, practical, and unobtrusive way. AR's potential to hide away as a technology is both the key to its attractiveness and the feature that makes it one of the most philosophically interesting cases of technology. The usual ways of studying technological mediation between humans and the world is complicated, to say the least, by AR's ability to recede while providing a novel interpretation of our everyday spaces. Both as a utility and as a transparent device, it can change our view while being out of the view itself, like an ordinary pair of glasses.

V. CONCLUSION

The ubiquity of digital technologies in the 21st century raises many philosophical questions. Among them is the question of our relation to the world around us. The idea of place, as understood in the phenomenological tradition, is a way of understanding this relation. Places as meaningful wholes inform our relations to and guide our engagements with entities. These wholes also represent unique possibilities and contain sediments of personal and collective memories. Participating in these spatial wholes, we make sense of our present, relive our past, and envision our future. Places are loci of our interactions with others. Against the background of history, culture, and social practices, these interactions bring about common perceptions of places and, with them, common perceptions of all that is brought together and kept alive in places. This is to say that the personal, social, cultural, historical, and material dimensions of our lives are encapsulated in and anchored by places. The impact of increasing mediation by digital technologies on our relation to the world can therefore be discerned in how places are changing. I have made a case for some of these changes by first giving an account of place and then showing how one kind of digitally mediated space, Augmented Reality, is fundamentally different in both how it constitutes a meaningful whole and how it relates to other spaces. Here I will briefly summarize these conclusions and describe some key ethical concerns that become visible with an understanding of the difference between places and digital spaces.

I have shown that places are continually evolving, internally heterogeneous, and spatially distinct meaningful wholes with indeterminate boundaries. They are distinct in multiple dimensions along continuous elements that join them to other contiguous spatial wholes. The emergence, continued existence, and ongoing reconstitution of places happens through repeated bodily engagements, which occur in the context of other places, in relation to the engagement of others, and against the background of social practices, cultural norms, history, and prevalent discourses.

This account of place builds on key insights inherited from the phenomenological tradition, particularly from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. While acknowledging that our existence in the world is mediated by meaningful wholes, as Heidegger argued in his accounts of region and *Ort*, my account clarifies that these wholes (1) are spatially distinct, (2) are connected to further, contiguous such wholes, and (3) evolve from repeated engagement. Furthermore, while I see bodily engagement in a physical and cultural milieu as key to the development of the bodily or lived spaces we inhabit, I suggest that we see the phenomena of inhabited spaces as centered on a distinct set of entities and relations, as including our perception of thresholds along various continuous elements, and as continually involving the differentiation of any lived space into further meaningful wholes through engagement.

My account is also informed by the directions that the phenomenology of place takes after Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Like Buttimer, I see the need to

take into account broader nonplace-based social, political, and technological forces that shape any place, but I see these processes as aspects of our interactions with the world, which constitute or reconstitute places (and not as occurring besides our place-based engagements). Indeed, my investigation into digital technologies is a case study of one of the forces Buttimer is concerned about, *viz.*, technology. I also generally agree with Relph's central claim about different levels of identity with place. But rather than categorizing identity with a place into discrete levels, as Relph does, I see bodily engagement as gradually bringing about a more definite sense of being in a place and of one's whereabouts in relation to other places.

In Casey's focus on the relations between self, place, and landscape, I find an insightful approach that expands on Merleau-Ponty's idea of bodily space while emphasizing previously ignored dimensions of this phenomena, for example, the broader context of a place. My own account describes how we could construe this context as further places, thereby avoiding the notions of landscapes and horizons, which are inadequately discussed by Casey. Finally, Malpas's idea that place has subjective, allocentric, and objective dimensions suggests a complexity in the concept that cannot be captured by the empirical sciences. In pointing to the importance of individual engagement, the sociocultural context, and the configurations of discrete and continuous elements in the constitution (or continuing reconstitution) of a place, my account shows how the three dimensions come together in a meaningful spatial whole. In developing an account of

place that responds to questions of its distinctness and relation to other places, I have thus provided a more robust phenomenological understanding of the spatial dimension of human existence.

Furthermore, the account of place I have developed not only responds to and builds upon previous accounts of space and place, it also revises the notion of place so as to make it suitable for an analysis of the contemporary world. The various aspects of place I identity, especially the role of continuous elements in carving out spatially distinct wholes, enable me to compare the common and often vaguely understood idea of place to spaces that are shaped (and sometimes determined) by digital technologies. The goal of this comparison was not to make a value judgment on any possible shortcomings of digitally mediated spaces. Rather, I have sought to lay out differences, particularly those that stand out from a phenomenological perspective. I have refrained from making a final judgment on the implication of these differences for the concept of place. There are two options here. On the one hand, we can think of a digitally mediated space, specifically that of AR, as a significantly deficient kind of place, and therefore not deserving the designation of place. Several differences I have identified in the last chapter would lead us towards this option. For instance, the distortion or absence of continuous elements, the interpretation of spaces as having clear boundaries, the AI and big data based categorization of spaces and elements that constitute these spaces, and narrower ways of identifying the distinctness of places. On the other hand, AR mediated spaces can be seen as a new kind of

place. Indeed, they are still meaningful wholes, albeit ones where sensors and AI play an outsized role in shaping what meanings are associated with it. The social, cultural, and historical background against which our engagements carve out meaningful spatial wholes are present in AR mediated spaces. However, which of these dimensions, and to what degree, are highlighted in our experience of an AR space can change depending on human knowledge and also commercial interests and other motives of those who own or develop AR applications.

Ethics and AR

Regardless of whether or not we call digitally mediated spaces “places,” the last point about the influence of commercial interest on our AR mediated experience of spaces—in a possibly much more intrusive and efficient way than has been possible with other media—points to ethical issues that we do not encounter in non-mediated places. Many of these ethical issues are related to how entities and spaces are sensed and interpreted by AR technologies. But the fact that the view provided by AR is often immersive (when using AR glasses, for instance) and thus can alter one’s perception of one’s surroundings gives a novel dimension to these issues. I will conclude by pointing to some of these ethical issues related to present and near future use of AR.

In the last chapter I discussed the example of modified spaces in MoMA. An AR application can be programmed to replace certain entities at certain locations with other (digitally inserted) entities. Such applications, especially when

they becomes more widespread and immersive, raise at least two ethical concerns. First, unlike visiting websites on the internet, where the distinction between what appears on the screen and the reality it represents (or informs us about) is readily available, the projection of realistic, three-dimensional digital figures and images occlude and alter the spaces of one's perception of real surroundings. In other words, it would be difficult for a perceiver to know which digital insertions are enhancements she seeks and which ones are modifications aimed at manipulating her perceptions without consent. For instance, companies could pay AR applications (such as those like Pokémon Go) to occlude products and advertisements of rival brands in public places. While primarily or ostensibly serving an entirely different purpose, AR applications can incorporate the demands of clients and sponsors who aim to manipulate public perception. This is not unlike Facebook selling some of the data it has on individual users to research and advertising firms. But owing to the immersive and immediate quality of AR modifications, it would be much more difficult to detect and ignore unauthorized modifications than, say, targeted ads. Second, the owner of a space may not have any say in how her space is modified and presented to visitors. Artists taking over MoMa spaces and exhibitions through their AR application challenged the cultural authority of that museum. But one can imagine other scenarios that are more clearly ethically questionable. For instance, AR applications could provide services or entertainment using public spaces (such as parks and libraries) as their venue, thereby profiting from these spaces as one would from a

rented space, but without compensating the owner of the space. The issue, however, is not simply money. One could argue that the historical and cultural significance of places could wane if they are repurposed for activities related to AR (such as done by the Pokémon Go app).

Another set of ethical issues relates to interpreting the world using AI. This interpretation involves identifying, categorizing, and presenting (when needed) information sensed from a AR device user's field of view. AR applications already identify entities, locations, and geographical features in a person's view (using visual sensors and GPS data). With face detection technology becoming faster and more accurate, it could be only a few years before AR devices can do all the needed computation in order to instantaneously identify people. If we couple all the identification and categorization accomplished by individual AR devices with available big data (from social networks, the internet, public records, financial records, etc.), AR should be able to provide, in the near future, a detailed information overlay on almost any entity in a user's field of view. Setting aside the obvious privacy concerns this would raise, let me point to a couple of issues that touch on space and place. I have discussed the difference between having information about a city or a neighborhood and visiting or living in it. A neighborhood becomes spatially differentiated from its surroundings through bodily engagement. The same difference was at play in my restaurant example in chapter two, where the map of the restaurant gave little, if any, sense of the place the restaurant turned out to be in experience. Information overlay,

available *while* we interact with entities, is certainly not like a map. But it is a guide nonetheless. Not unlike our lack of engagement with information that appears on the second and subsequent pages of Google search results, we may decide not to engage at all with entities or places that do not have the best descriptions, finest digital modifications, or most number of likes. Places as distinct spatial wholes come about when we gather perceptions and meanings from our interactions. AI mediation—through information overlays—in our interaction with spaces is problematic because it often relies on obscure algorithms to decide what information is prioritized (and therefore visible in a limited spot on one’s field of view). The meanings and significance we attach to entities, events, and other people would likely shift if such use of AR became as common as the use of smartphones. It should be obvious that certain facts and measurable characteristics would figure more prominently in the spatial wholes mediated by AR than in non-mediated experiences. That would not just be any ordinary change in a place, but a change that would need to be carefully watched for unintentional algorithmic reproductions of biases and intentional manipulation of public discourse and opinion.

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