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‘Räumen ist Freigabe von Orten’

*Place, Calculation and Politics in
Hemming’s Postmodernity’s Transcending*

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4.1 ART AND SPACE

The epigraph to this book is a quote from Martin Heidegger: ‘Räumen ist Freigabe von Orten’ (p. v).¹ It comes from one of Heidegger’s last essays, ‘Art and Space’, delivered in 1969, and can be rendered as ‘making space is the release of places’.² Alternatively it might be seen as ‘rooming is the freeing up of places’. The placing of this quotation is perhaps deliberately enigmatic, with neither a translation or explanation. What might be meant by this? It seems to me to be well-placed, as there are a number of themes in it that relate to Hemming’s book.

Like the seminars of the early 1960s on ‘Time and Being’ (collected in *Zur Sache des Denkens*) Heidegger’s work in the essay ‘Art and Space’ displays some of the characteristics of work originally undertaken in the 1930s, particularly the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, his *Contributions to Philosophy*.³ In a marginal note to his 1947 ‘Letter on “Humanism”’, Heidegger suggests that the work of the *Beiträge* speaks ‘another language’ to that of metaphysics, but that it remains in the background of published writings such as the Letter and in particular his lecture courses.⁴ In the late work, especially *Zur Sache des Denkens* and in this piece ‘Art and Space’ such concerns come to the fore.

Heidegger’s concern in this essay is explicitly with sculpture, and at least

¹ Page references to Laurence Paul Hemming, *Postmodernity’s Transcending: Devaluing God*, London: SCM Press, and Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005, are in parentheses in the text.

² Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 13*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983, p. 206.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1976; *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 65*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 9*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976, n. a.

originally, its relation to space.⁵ There appear to be three spaces involved in an understanding of sculpture:

1. 'Space, within which the sculptured form can be met as a present-at-hand object'
2. 'space, which encloses the volume of the figure'
3. 'space, which persists between volumes'.⁶

While we would obviously want to avoid applying calculative measurement to artistic figures, in terms of some crude coordinate geometry, there is the danger, Heidegger notes, that these three types of space are still merely derivative of physical-technological space.

But can physically-technically ordered space, however it may be determined, be taken as the sole true space? Compared to it, are all the other defined spaces – artistic space, the space of everyday dealings and interaction – only subjectively conditioned primitive forms and transformations of a sole objective cosmic space?⁷

For Heidegger the historical element is also important, in that 'the objectivity of objective world space remains unquestionably the correlate of the subjectivity of a consciousness', and this subjectivity is undoubtedly 'foreign to other times which preceded the modern European age'.⁸ Thus we find Heidegger explicitly relating the question of space to subjectivity, explicitly here through the twofold structure of Descartes' *ego cogitans* and his *res extensa*.

Rather than, for an answer to the question of the propriety [*Eigenes*] of space, its essential nature, Heidegger returns to language—so often the preoccupation of his late essays.

Even when we recognise the diversity of the spatial experiences of previous ages, do we thereby gain an insight into the propriety [*Eigentümliche*] of space? The question, what space as space is, is not even asked, let alone answered. It remains undecided in what way space *is*, and whether being in general can be attributed to it.⁹

Heidegger contends that in the German word for 'space' [*Raum*], the word 'making space' [*Räumen*] is spoken. This means: clearing out [*roden*], to make free from wilderness. Making space brings forth the free, the openness for the settling and dwelling of humans'.¹⁰

This is closely related to a range of Heidegger's earlier essays, dating from his engagement with Hölderlin in the 1930s and most explicitly in essays 'Building Dwelling Thinking' and 'Poetically Man Dwells' in the 1950s.¹¹

⁵ This account builds on and develops the one I offered in *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, London/New York: Continuum, 2001, pp. 89–91.

⁶ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 206.

⁷ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 205.

⁸ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 205.

⁹ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 205.

¹⁰ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 206.

¹¹ Both these essays are collected in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze, Gesamtausgabe Band 7*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000.

Space is in essence that for which room [*das Eingeräumte*] has been made, that which is released into its bounds. That for which room is made is always granted, and hence is joined, that is, gathered, by virtue of a place... *Accordingly, spaces receive their essential being from places and not from 'space'*.¹²

It is from here that Heidegger suggests that 'making space is, thought in its propriety, the release [*Freigabe*] of places [*Orten*].'¹³

There is however more to this phrase which is not quoted by Hemming, but which seems to me to be revealing in terms of the themes his book does treat:

Making space is, thought in its propriety [*Eigenes*], the release [*Freigabe*] of places [*Orten*] to which the destiny of humans who dwell turn, in the fortune of their home, or in the misfortune of their homelessness, or in the indifference to the two. Making space is the release of places where a god appears, the places from where the gods have disappeared or flown, the places where the appearance of the godly tarries long. Making space brings forth in each case, the placing [*Ortschaft*] prepared for dwelling. Profane spaces are only the privation of often very remote sacred spaces.

Making space is the release of places.¹⁴

In this we have the introduction of the notion of dwelling in relation to place, as these places are important to humans in terms of a home, in terms of the gods, in terms of dwelling. Heidegger stresses that 'place always opens a region, in which it gathers things in their belonging together',¹⁵ and that we must 'learn to recognise that things themselves are places, and not only occupy a place'.¹⁶ This notion of place is explicitly opposed to technological, Cartesian space: 'Place is not found within a pre-given space, such as that of physico-technological space. The latter unfolds only through the reigning of places of a region'.¹⁷ What this enables is the potential for rethinking the notion of space otherwise than extension such as is found in Descartes. Cartesian determinations of space – *spatium* – are as *res extensa*, the extended thing, a material body in the world defined by its extension, of which geometry is the science that allows us best access.

So, while in much of Heidegger's work there is an opposition between space and place, this is in order to distance place from space understood as extension—that is understood mathematically, geometrically, through calculation. But here, as in a few other late pieces, notably 'Building Dwelling Thinking',¹⁸ Heidegger collapses the terms back together, by hinting at their originary bond. This was clearly the intent of the understanding of time-space in the *Beiträge*. Time-space is not simply the coupling of time and space, but the very notion that allows each to be thought distinctly. *Zeit-Raum* is not the same as *Zeitraum*, that is a span of time, a notion that betrays a measured, mathematical sense. What this means is that neither time nor space in this idea are understandable in terms of their ordinary

¹² Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 156.

¹³ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 206.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, pp. 206–207.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 207.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 208.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 208.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 156.

representations, but rather time-space is ‘originally the site for the moment of propriation [*Augenblicks-Stätte des Ereignisses*]’.¹⁹

Returning to the subject of the lecture, Heidegger suggests that the initial direction of the piece was misguided, as ‘the interplay of art and space must be thought out of the experience of place and region’. Where art is sculpture, there is ‘no occupying of space. Sculpture would have no confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*—no setting apart from another] with space’, instead ‘sculpture would be the embodiment of places’.²⁰ In thinking of sculpture we should abandon the idea of volume, ‘the signification of which is only as old as modern technological natural science’, which would make sculpture ‘an embodying bringing-into-the-work of places... the embodiment of the truth of being in its work of instituting places’.²¹

4.2 DEVALUING GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF CALCULATION

These themes run through Hemming’s book. Many of them emerge in the context of the discussion of Sam Taylor-Wood’s *Brontosaurus*, a hugely effective strategic move that helps to lock the themes of the book not simply into the question of God but also into a visual image that provokes and haunts the reader. ‘To speak of embodiment is not to be embodied, but rather to direct the appearance of embodiment to *somewhere*, a place, the place of language perhaps or the imaginary, as if simply to *recall* the language of embodiment and to parrot and enact it constantly overcomes the disjunction between language and the thing of which language writes and speaks’ (p. 3). So we have place, both as a *somewhere*, but also an imagined place, or a place of language. We also have an explicit concern with the very materiality of embodiment.

If we now turn to the twofold structure of Hemming’s book we can see how such issues run throughout.

1. ‘what is the structural place of the object now that it is understood as a hyper-real, and what does “place” mean when the imaginary and the representative is the founding basis for the real?’
2. ‘how is the structural place able to give, not only the subject – sublime or ordinary – but the one disclosing the object, the one for whom the thing appears?’ (p. 30)

A guiding issue is the notion of the sublime because of its relation to place, and the ‘one for whom objects take up and have a place – the self, the subject, the being of being-human’. But a third question arises (essentially that one which is hidden in the quotation of Heidegger):

3 ‘who is the God or gods at issue in relation to the sublime?’ (p. 30)

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, p. 30; see p. 235. For a fuller account, see Stuart Elden, ‘Contributions to Geography? The Spaces of Heidegger’s *Beiträge*’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol 23 No 6, 2005.

²⁰ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 208.

²¹ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 209.

Now clearly this is much too huge a set of questions for a single response. It risks – as Hemming already knows – being too huge for the book itself. But the key issue is that this question of place is not arbitrary, but intimately related to the broad approach being taken. This is so, even if here I will largely bracket the sublime, the subject and the question of gods, leaving these issues for others.

One of the running themes of Hemming's book is in the notion of devaluing – not as it might be appear as a sense of not valuing God, or of reducing God's value, his worth – but the question of un-valuing, removing a notion of value *from* God. For Heidegger the assault against 'value' philosophy can be found throughout his work—from early concerns with neo-Kantianism; through to his lectures on Nietzsche, where he suggests that a revaluation of all values still falls into these same problems. The philosophy of values, and even the revaluation of all values that Nietzsche proposes, is a reversal within metaphysics, an inverse Platonism.

For Hemming we find this stressed in a few places, not merely in Nietzsche, but also in Marx.

The metaphysics of Marx as much as of modern economic life arise on the basis of this indeterminacy, and in making it determinate, which means, in assigning it a value or giving it the task of the self-assignment of value the indeterminacy of the subject is evaluated and brought into fundamentally calculable relations (p. 4).

It is equally there in his reading of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: 'to change the world you must first have decided, in a valuative act, what the world is to be transformed *into*' (p. 4).

Geographers – of a particular kind – will find Hemming's inquiry works in related ways to questions of current concern, such as the claim that 'distance, temporal or geographical, is constantly worn-out by our immediacy to ourselves' (p. 9), and the discussion of museums like the Museum of Britain on Roman London which seek to make the past appear familiar through kitchens and bedrooms, what Hemming calls 'the effacement of the genuine past for the sake of what in them we most might find familiar' (p. 9). A whole range of issues and questions arise here, including those of distance, proximity – temporal and geographical – and the relation to value and values.

One of the most important discussions of this in terms of the question of place is found on p. 16 of the book. Hemming rehearses Heidegger's claim that the Greeks, in this instance Aristotle, did not have a word for 'space' but rather a notion of *topos*, which is closer to 'place'. He notes that 'only since Galileo and Newton has it been the case that every point in space is potentially the same, bears the same possibilities, and remains undifferentiated absolutely with respect to its position'. While for Newton every point in space is like any other, for Aristotle the points, the *stigme* are determined through their *thesis*, their position, their proper place and, as Hemming notes, 'no two points in space ever have or bear the same properties – they are differentiated both absolutely with respect to themselves, and relatively with respect to one another' (p. 16). This remarkably clear exposition of the point is important in numerous respects, including the complex set of transitions that makes human *space* possible, which increasingly

obscures the sense of place.²²

As Heidegger asks, does the sense of space that can emerge through thinking it through place not fundamentally challenge the ‘space which received its first determination from Galileo and Newton?’²³ Galileo and Newton here is a shorthand for the Galileo-Descartes-Leibniz-Newton nexus, and usually for Heidegger this is reduced simply to Descartes, while for Husserl it is Galileo.²⁴ This is the space that emerges from the scientific revolution. As Heidegger puts it in ‘Art and Space’:

Space – this uniform extension, which is not distinguished at any point [*Stelle*], which is equivalent in all directions, but which is not perceptible through the senses?²⁵

For Hemming this sense of every point the same, particularly as it gets played out in post-Newtonian physics, implies the radical equality of space, its *democratic* nature.

If I am somewhat cautious of the final claim here, Hemming is correct to highlight the importance of the break in understandings of place and the emergence of a notion of space. In Aristotle we find a very different way of thinking of place. We can find this, for example in the way for Aristotle points can be found on a line, but a line is not merely a succession of points. This is radically different way of thinking a line than Descartes, and indeed from Aristotle’s own thinking of time. In the *Physics* (217b29–224a17) time is conceived as a sequence of ‘nows’, summarised by Hemming as ‘the “now” that each present moment “is” separates the stream of time, splitting the past and future by means of the present. The present, therefore, takes up an object like character’ (p. 34). What this means is that

Aristotle’s understanding of time is above all defined mathematically, as the countable – as in its very countability preserves in every moment both the same, the ever-same, and the different – the fundamentally differentiated with respect to every “now” which is worked out with respect to motion. Aristotle summarises this understanding of time by saying “time, then, is not motion, but motion with respect to *number*” [219b3] (p. 223, emphasis added).²⁶

Aristotle however thought place in quite a different way, notably in his suggestion that place is *not* determined by number, and that geometry and arithmetic are distinct, because their mode of connection is different.²⁷ This is not the case with time. A key question is thus how the Aristotelian *stigme* became the Cartesian point, effectively a *monas* in an arithmetic series.

²² On this generally see Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Berkeley: University Presses of California, 1997.

²³ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 204.

²⁴ See, especially, Edmund Husserl, particularly *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die tranzendentale Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie*, in *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Walter Biemel, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950, Vol VI.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 204.

²⁶ On this point, see also Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger’s Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002, pp. 97–101.

²⁷ For a fuller reading, see Stuart Elden, *Speaking Against Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, Chapter Three.

This question raises a number of issues around the notion of sameness, otherness, and their relation (pp. 70–1), which run through the book. In a sense difference is that which makes possible both forms of comparison, that is differentiation, i.e. separation or division; and association, that is connection (p. 73).²⁸ It is important to relate this to the distinction between *khora* and *topos* (p. 79). *Khora* is 'place', but 'this place however, is not the particular place of *topos*, wherein what becomes appears, and from which it passes away, but place as such, place as it relates to the elements themselves as what withdraws and so opens a particular place wherein what appears can do so and then pass away'. For Hemming it is this sense of place that will be taken forward in Aristotle's notion of *topos* (p. 80). Plato claims that in relation to *topos* 'place as such, and anything that is in place, must always be separated and divided. Thus *khora*, as what makes every changeable thing available to appear as changeable, becomes in Aristotle the basis on which the structure of the cosmos and the self-motion of the elements is worked out' (p. 80). These are some of the most cryptic pages of the book, opening up fundamental issues without – for this reader at least – thorough explication. They are in a sense an attempt to make one fundamental point, undertaken through a discussion of Plato's *Sophist* on being and number:

This exchange therefore says that all being, everything which has *thesis*, a 'respect to where', and so has a particular place, is at the same time number. Nothing particular unusual is being said in Greek – what is placable is at the same time countable: the converse is also true: to put in place or posit is at the same time to assign a value, or count... This means all genuine being arises out of number, and all number is with respect to beings. It also means that the *hen*, the one, must find a place. In one way (as we shall see) for the Greeks every being is a particular being: every *on* is *hen*' (p. 82).

While I understand the reasoning here, this is such a rich vein to explore it is a shame that Hemming only touches on some of the key issues. They return in the discussion of *thesis* – relative position – in relation to geometrical figures. These always retain their respect to *where*, what of place remains with them. This helps to clarify the relation between the relative or absolute 'where', or position: *thesis* and *topos* (pp. 150, 155).

Hemming declares (p. 84) that Aristotle is significant not least because he is the one against which Descartes argues. This is revealing, because although Descartes is in much greater part a product of debates within scholasticism than is perhaps generally acknowledged – see the importance work of Secada and Lang, cited by Hemming²⁹ – the contrast he sets up with Aristotle seems very stark indeed. As Hemming notes, the importance of Aristotle as target of Descartes is ontologically fundamental: 'here is the most important question in the historicality of the encounter with beings itself. Because the being of beings is now understood

²⁸ See Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, New York: Dover, 1992 [1934], p. 95.

²⁹ Jorge Secada, *Cartesian Metaphysics: The Late Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; and Helen S. Lang, *Aristotle's Physics and its Medieval Varieties*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992; and *The Order of Nature in Aristotle's Physics: Place and the Elements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

differently, and in fact because it now stands on a fully ontotheological footing...' (pp. 159–60).

Hemming notes that

We have seen how a particular understanding of the mathematical – specifically the geometrical – comes to the fore especially in the period up to and including Newton and Descartes as the means by which what can be known about anything can *already* be known in advance of it – indeed this is the essence of the mathematical (p. 170).

In this radical rethinking of geometry, the foundational science which for Descartes is a mode of access to the material world of *res extensa*, the being of beings is understood differently, as being calculable. Things are rendered in such a way that they are already knowable, that is amenable to scientific inquiry: the essence of the mathematical.

These concerns with calculation specifically and measure generally run through Hemming's book, as they do through Heidegger's work as a whole, and are perhaps especially evident in the very interesting discussion of man as the measure of all things in Protagoras. There is not the space here to engage with this important reading, although I cannot resist endorsing Hemming's claim that *metron* in Protagoras is not so much a measure as 'a measured by', in other words '*a metron* is that which gives the measure to whatever it measures' (p. 128). On these grounds, as Heidegger realised, Protagoras is miles away from Descartes, in that the measure of all things is the human.³⁰

4.3 CALCULATION AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

These discussions are a rich vein throughout this complex work. My sympathy with and admiration for Hemming's work is therefore considerable. I do however have one fundamental problem with the issue of calculation, in relation to place and more generally, in this work. This is a political issue.

Hemming's important discussion of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Heidegger's reading of it seems to me to radically underplay the political nature of both texts. The political is important in other respects too, in that it is evident that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Politics* are informed by *Physics* (as well as other works). It is worth underscoring that Heidegger's notion of being-together is the mode of connection not just of material world, but also of humans in community, found in his difficult comments on *Mitsein*, or being-with-others—*Miteinandersein*.³¹ Indeed, in distinction to some commentators, such as Jean-Luc Nancy,³² my position on this is not that Heidegger treats the subject inadequately, but that what he does say is deeply problematic.

In the 1924 course on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Heidegger notably discusses not merely being-in-the-world, but being-in-the-*polis*. The *polis* is determined through language, a speaking-together that is also a hearing, listening and obeying. The

³⁰ This is discussed at length in ELDEN, *Speaking Against Number*, Chapter Three.

³¹ See ELDEN, *Speaking Against Number*, Chapter One.

³² JEAN-LUC NANCY, *Être singulier pluriel*, Paris: Galilée, 1996.

human is the *zoon politikon*, but also the *zoon echon logon*, the being that has and is held by language, *logos*, and indeed the second determination is the key to understanding the first. The idea that a community is determined through its relation to language leads to Heidegger's particular determination of the essence of the people, the *Volk*: language. Heidegger's *Volk* is not a biological, racial category, but a linguistically determined characteristic. In a related way, Heidegger uses his analysis of calculation as a means of access into his concerns with machination and technology, which is where he offers his most explicit criticism of contemporary politics.

But politics – in either Aristotle's or a modern sense – seems curiously muted in Hemming's text, which is all the more remarkable given the potential implications of mathematics for a view of the political world. There are some comments in places (i.e. pp. 166–7) but these seem inadequate given how politically charged Heidegger's reading of Aristotle is. Even on the understanding of *polis* offered here, as 'the public sphere, in the being of a whole people' (p. 167) *polis* does not simply equal world, so what is meant by Heidegger? Hemming's entirely legitimate suggestion that this people is not determined racially but through its 'fate and destiny' and its relation to the *logos*, that is language, is too hasty in terms of the ideologically loaded senses these terms had in 1924 Germany. Indeed, throughout his career the question of *Mitsein* and calculation were two of the most important political issues for Heidegger.

As Hemming notes in conclusion,

Devaluing God has turned out to be a concern with the mathematical – what we bring already to whatever we know of beings, may encounter them all over again... Transcending postmodernity would be freeing God, and every being, from counting, that we might yet be in time to encounter them (or them us) (p. 237).

It is the question of escaping counting, calculation – and therefore maybe a retrieval of the mathematical as *ta mathematica*—that is the real concern for me. But this is always a political issue. There is lots in this book, but it opens up more than it is able to close down.

