

MARTIN HEIDEGGER  
ART AND SPACE

*Translated by*  
CHARLES H. SEIBERT  
*Loras College*

*Translator's note*

"Die Kunst und der Raum" by Martin Heidegger was originally published by Erker Verlag, St. Gallen, 1969. Also available from Erker Verlag is Heidegger's recording of this lecture.

Marginal pagination of this translation corresponds to the original German text. The translation was made in completion of a doctoral dissertation, *On Being and Space in Heidegger's Thinking*.

- 5 "If one thinks much, one finds much wisdom inscribed in language. Indeed, it is not probable that one brings everything into it by himself; rather, much wisdom actually lies therein, as in proverbs."  
G. Chr. Lichtenberg

*Δοκεῖ δὲ μέτα τι εἶναι καὶ  
χαλεπὸν ληθθῆναι δ τόπος*

"It appears, however, to be something overwhelming and hard to grasp, the *τοπος*" — that is, place-space. Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV

The remarks on art, space and their interplay remain questions, even if they are uttered in the form of assertions. These remarks are limited to the graphic arts, and within these to sculpture. Sculptured structures are bodies. Their matter, consisting of different materials, is variously formed. The forming of it happens by demarcation as setting up an inclosing and excluding border. Herewith, space comes into play. Becoming occupied by the sculptured structure, space receives its special character as closed, breached and empty volume. A familiar state of affairs, yet puzzling.

- 6 The sculptured body embodies something. Does it embody space? Is sculpture an occupying of space, a domination of space? Does sculpture match therewith the technical scientific conquest of space?

As art, of course, sculpture deals with artistic space. Art and scientific technology regard and work upon space toward diverse ends in diverse ways.

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But space — does it remain the same ? Is space itself not that space which received its first determination from Galileo and Newton ? Space — is it that homogeneous expanse, not distinguished at any of its possible places, equivalent toward each direction, but not perceptible with the senses ?

Space — is it that which, since that time (Newton), challenges modern man increasingly and ever more obstinately to its utter control ? Does not modern graphic art also follow this challenge insofar as it understands itself as dealing with space ? Does it not thereby find itself confirmed in its modern character ?

7 Yet, can the physically-technologically projected space, however it may be determined henceforth, be held as the sole genuine space ? Compared with it, are all other articulated spaces, artistic space, the space of everyday practice and commerce, only subjectively conditioned prefigurations and modifications of one objective cosmic space ?

But how can this be so, if the objectivity of the objective world-space remains, without question, the correlate of the subjectivity of a consciousness which was foreign to the epochs which preceded modern European times ?

Even if we recognize the variety of space experiences of past epochs, would we win already an insight into the special character of space ? The question, what space as space would be, is thereby not even asked, much less answered. In what manner space *is*, and whether a Being in general can be attributed to it, remains undecided.

Space — does it belong to the primal phenomena at the awareness of which men are overcome, as Goethe says, by an awe to the point of anxiety ? For behind space, so it will appear, nothing more is given to which it could be traced back. Before space there is no retreat to something else. The special character of space must show forth from space itself. Can its special character still be uttered ?

8 The urgency of such questions demands from us a confession : So long

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as we do not experience the special character of space, talk about artistic space also remains obscure. The way that space reigns throughout the work of art hangs, meantime, in indeterminateness.

The space, within which the sculptured structure can be met as an object present-at-hand; the space, which encloses the volume of the figure; the space, which subsists as the emptiness between volumes; — are not these three spaces in the unity of their interplay always merely derivative of one physical-technological space, even if calculative measurement cannot be applied to artistic figures ?

Once it is granted that art is the bringing-into-the-work of truth, and truth is the unconcealment of Being, then must not genuine space, namely what uncovers its authentic character, begin to hold sway in the work of graphic art ?

9 Still, how can we find the special character of space ? There is an emergency path which, to be sure, is a narrow and precarious one. Let us try to listen to language. Whereof does it speak in the word "space" ? Clearing-away (*Räumen*) is uttered therein. This means : to clear out (*roden*), to free from wilderness. Clearing-away brings forth the free, the openness for man's settling and dwelling. When thought in its own special character, clearing-away is the release of places toward which the fate of dwelling man turns in the preserve of the home or in the brokenness of homelessness or in complete indifference to the two. Clearing-away is release of the places at which a god appears, the places from which the gods have disappeared, the places at which the appearance of the godly tarries long. In each case, clearing-away brings forth locality preparing for dwelling. Secular spaces are always the privation of often very remote sacred spaces.

Clearing-away is release of places.

In clearing-away a happening at once speaks and conceals itself. This character of clearing-away is all too easily overlooked. And when it is seen, it always remains still difficult to determine; above all, so long as physical-technological space is held to be the space in which each spatial character should be oriented from the beginning.

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How does clearing-away happen ? Is it not making-room (*Einräumen*), and this again in a twofold manner as granting and arranging ? First, making-room admits something. It lets openness hold sway which, among other things, grants the appearance of things present to which human dwelling sees itself consigned. On the other hand, making-room prepares for things the possibility to belong to their relevant whither and, out of this, to each other.

In this twofold making-room, the yielding of places happens. The character of this happening is such a yielding. Still, what is place, if its special character must be determined from the guideline of releasing making-room ?

Place always opens a region in which it gathers the things in their belonging together.

Gathering (*Versammeln*) comes to play in the place in the sense of the releasing sheltering of things in their region. And the region ? The older form of the word runs "that-which-regions" (*die Gegend*). It names the free expanse. Through it the openness is urged to let each thing merge in its resting in itself. This means at the same time : preserving, i.e., the gathering of things in their belonging together.

The question comes up : Are places first and only the result and issue of making-room ? Or does making-room take its special character from the reign of gathering places ? If this proves right, then we would have to search for the special character of clearing-away in the grounding of locality, and we would have to meditate on locality as the interplay of places. We would have then to take heed that and how this play receives its reference to the belonging together of things from the region's free expanse.

We would have to learn to recognize that things themselves are places and do not merely belong to a place.

In this case, we would be obliged for a long time to come to accept an estranging state of affairs :

Place is not located in a pre-given space, after the manner of physical-technological space. The latter unfolds itself only through the reigning of places of a region.

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The interplay of art and space would have to be thought from out of the experience of place and region. Art as sculpture : no occupying of space. Sculpture would not deal with space.

Sculpture would be the embodiment of places. Places, in preserving and opening a region, hold something free gathered around them which grants the tarrying of things under consideration and a dwelling for man in the midst of things.

12 If it stands thus, what becomes of the volume of the sculptured, place embodying structures ? Presumably, volume will no longer demarcate spaces from one another, in which surfaces surround an inner opposed to an outer. What is named by the word "volume," the meaning of which is only as old as modern technological natural science, would have to lose its name.

The place seeking and place forming characteristics of sculptured embodiment would first remain nameless.

And what would become of the emptiness of space ? Often enough it appears to be a deficiency. Emptiness is held then to be a failure to fill up a cavity or gap.

Yet presumably the emptiness is closely allied to the special character of place, and therefore no failure, but a bringing-forth. Again, language can give us a hint. In the verb "to empty" (*leeren*) the word "collecting" (*Lesen*), taken in the original sense of the gathering which reigns in place, is spoken. To empty a glass means : To gather the glass, as that which can contain something, into its having been freed.

To empty the collected fruit in a basket means : To prepare for them this place.

Emptiness is not nothing. It is also no deficiency. In sculptural embodiment, emptiness plays in the manner of a seeking-projecting instituting of places.

13 The preceding remarks certainly do not reach so far that they exhibit in sufficient clarity the special character of sculpture as one of the graphic

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arts. Sculpture : an embodying bringing-into-the-work of places, and with them a disclosing of regions of possible dwellings for man, regions of the possible tarrying of things surrounding and concerning man.

Sculpture : the embodiment of the truth of Being in its work of instituting places.

Even a cautious insight into the special character of this art causes one to suspect that truth, as unconcealment of Being, is not necessarily dependent on embodiment.

Goethe said : "It is not always necessary that what is true embody itself; it is already enough if spiritually it hovers about and evokes harmony, if it floats through the air like the solemn and friendly sound of a bell."

14 *On Art :*

Holzweige 1950, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*;  
erweitert in Reclams Universalbibliothek Nr. 8446 / 47 1960.

English translation :

Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, "The Origin of the Work of Art," translated by Albert Hofstadter, New York : Harper & Row, 1971.

Vorträge und Aufsätze 1954 : "Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch."

English translation :

Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, "...Poetically Man Dwells..." translated by Albert Hofstadter, New York : Harper & Row, 1971.

*On Space :*

Sein und Zeit 1927, Sections 22 - 24, *Die Räumlichkeit des Daseins*.

English translation :

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, New York : Harper & Row, 1962, Sections 22 - 24, "The Spatiality of Dasein."

Vorträge und Aufsätze 1954, *Bauen-Wohnen-Denken*.

English translation :

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Gelassenheit 1959, *Aus dem Feldweggespräch über das Denken*.

English translation :

Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, "Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking," translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, New York : Harper & Row, 1966.