

REVISITING THE DIMENSIONS OF THE DWELLING SPACE

AN OIKOLOGICAL STUDY BETWEEN PHENOMENOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

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The philosophical study of the house and its location in space has received a vital impulse with the development of the research field that Hans Rainer Sepp calls “philosophical oikology.” The oikological perspective takes the phenomenological tradition as a starting point by acknowledging the influence of Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Nishida, and Patočka, among others. However, unlike phenomenological thought, which, in general terms, privileges questions about *what* is experienced and *how* what is experienced is given in intentional terms, oikological inquiry emphasizes the question of *where*, meaning the place from which the object, according to a certain type of relation, becomes possible and effective in each case.¹ The oikology of Sepp is particularly

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¹ Hans Rainer Sepp, *In: Grundrisse einer oikologischen Philosophie. Arbeitsfassung* (retrieved from: www.sif-praha.cz/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/HRS-oikologische-Philosophie.pdf), 3. At the time of writing this essay, this preliminary version of the work is the only one available for consultation.

interested in the question of where in intercultural contexts. That is, insofar as the homeworld functions as a starting point for the understanding of strange worlds, the relationship with otherness always harbors the danger of a “colonizing violence”² as a direct consequence of the “homogenization” of what is foreign in terms of what is one’s own.³ Thus, the question arises regarding how to prevent the homeworld — a particular world among others but where one’s own understanding is rooted — from becoming a transcendental principle (an *Urheimat*) structuring every possible world. Sepp’s proposal consists of privileging the “between” (*Zwischen*) that unites and separates the homeworld from the strange ones.⁴ In his terms, the “paradoxical” space of the border (*Grenze*) is identified with a “transculturality” that cuts across home- and alienworlds horizontally and constitutes them both reciprocally.⁵

The relevance acquired by the “in between” space in oikological studies leads us to rethink the ontology of dwelling space as it has been developed within the phenomenological tradition. In this context, this essay addresses once again the dimensions of the dwelling space — namely, the home, strangeness, and the ambiguous space in between — with the particularity of taking into consideration the contributions of psychoanalytic theory in the analysis of experiences that cannot be entirely located either in the home or in the strange space. In the following pages, I pursue a twofold objective. Firstly, I propose to revisit the contributions of Husserl and Heidegger to the phenomenology of dwelling in order to discuss two highly influential theses that are present in a relevant part of the phenomenological studies of this matter — especially in the contributions written in the English language.

On the one hand, I discuss the opposition between “space” and “place,” which is maintained under the assumption that the very notion of space is an objectivization of spatiality taken in its original and lived sense

However, a definitive version of this text — the author’s first systematic study on oikology — will soon be published by Karl Alber Verlag.

² Hans Rainer Sepp, *Über die Grenze: Prolegomena zu einer Philosophie des Transkulturellen* (Nordhausen: Traugott, 2014), 74.

³ Sepp, *Über die Grenze*, 68-9.

⁴ Sepp, *Über die Grenze*, 11.

⁵ Sepp, *Über die Grenze*, 50.

(as “place”). On the other hand, I critically address the tendency to identify the concept of dwelling with the experience of “being-at-home” — an interpretation that recognizes its antecedents in Heidegger’s late philosophy. So, through this study, I wish to contribute to broadening the concept of dwelling — avoiding overlapping it with the experience of being-at-home — by relating it to the other dimensions of the dwelling space.

Secondly, I seek to complement the phenomenological considerations of dwelling space with the contribution of psychoanalytic theory. Mainly, I attempt to question the sharp separation between the homeworld and the alienworld, showing that some phenomena cannot be wholly located in either the home or the strange world but in a composite of both poles. In this regard, I will attempt to characterize the ambiguous space between the home and strangeness positively by taking as case studies the experience of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) and some creative activities (specifically, childhood play and philosophical practice in adult life). In all these phenomena, I am interested in emphasizing that strangeness does not appear simply as something threatening and from which, consequently, it is necessary to defend oneself — as a reading too centered on the home might lead one to think — but that the estrangement from the familiar world is a condition for creative activity in general and philosophical reflection in particular.

1. PLACE AND SPACE

Heidegger asserts that dwelling is the relationship between human beings and space,⁶ but one can also affirm that it is necessary “to take place” to dwell. In his influential book *Getting Back into Place*, Edward S. Casey offers an in-depth description of “place” in relation to “dwelling.” First and foremost, he distinguishes between the spatiality in which dwelling takes place and an abstract form of space, such as the one developed by physics and geometry. In this context, he affirms that a dwelling

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 2001), 155.

place must not be reduced to a mere position in space, where “position” implies an arbitrary location in “the Cartesian notion of a pure extensional space at once three-dimensional, infinite in extent and identical with the totalities of the material bodies that occupy it.”⁷ This modernist conception of space — still prevalent in contemporary philosophy, physics, and psychology⁸ — is what Casey calls a “site.” In his view, the concept of space is almost entirely identified with abstract space. Consequently, the notion of space is presented in opposition to that of place. He writes: “We do not live in “space.” Instead, we *live in places*.”⁹ Furthermore, time is also confronted with a proper appraisal of place: “The dual dominance of Space and Time is an expression, as well as an original continuing cause, of the neglect of Place in human experience.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, such a confrontation between place and space can only be maintained by disregarding the phenomenological distinction — already present in Husserl and Heidegger and in theorists of dwelling such as Norberg-Schulz — between “objective” space and “lived” or “existential” space.¹¹ Husserl shows in §9 of *Krisis* that modern physics’ space results from applying pure mathematics to an intuitively given nature. However, mathematical idealization is indifferent to the qualitative properties of things, although it leaves intact their spatial shape and their extensional character.¹² As a result of the idealization of concrete spatiality, space becomes abstract, homogeneous, and measurable.¹³ In short, the abstract space of the modern sciences is founded on concrete

⁷ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 141.

⁸ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, xiii.

⁹ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, xiii.

¹⁰ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 288. A similar position can be found in David Seamon’s and Robert Mugerauer’s *Dwelling, Place and Environment*, where the editors write: “not merely technological construction, but dwelling; not merely homogeneous and mathematized space, but place” (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), 1.

¹¹ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1983), 223. See also: Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling: On the Way to Figurative Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1985), 25.

¹² Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 37 (hereinafter referred to as “Hua VI”).

¹³ Hua VI, 33.

space, where dwelling takes place. Both are dimensions of the more comprehensive phenomenological concept of “space,” which includes, in my understanding, the concept of place and other equally constitutive notions — such as the horizon, which we will analyze in the next section. Unlike abstract space, a place consists of a “concrete” form of spatiality.¹⁴ Dwelling, in turn, involves some appropriation of place that allows us to interpret the meaning gathered in the things present in our surrounding world.¹⁵ As a result, dwelling places possess a particular familiarity¹⁶ and offer, thus, psychological security.¹⁷

In topological terms, dwelling places become a center — a *Zero point* for orientation — to which a repeated return is possible.¹⁸ Places are experienced as an inside, defined by the familiarity of what is known, in contrast to the surrounding outside, or what is unknown and frightening.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Casey points out that dwelling places are neither necessarily related to buildings specifically designed to be resided in nor to a stable “emplacement.” In this context, Casey differentiates between two essential ways of dwelling. On the one hand, “dwelling-as-residing” describes the settled state in which we are “somewhere in particular.” This “somewhere” is commonly a home.²⁰ On the other hand, “dwelling-as-wandering” describes a way of dwelling in “an unsettled sense in which displacement is much more evident than emplacement, homelessness than habitation.”²¹ The prototypical case of dwelling-as-wandering is the journey in which a subject is between places rather than in a particular, stable place. However, Casey also points out that journeys end in a home-place, either the same place as the starting point of the journey (“homesteading”) or a new place that will become a future home-place (“homecoming”).²²

¹⁴ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 75. See also: Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, xv.

¹⁵ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 17.

¹⁶ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 116.

¹⁷ Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture*, 224.

¹⁸ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 115.

¹⁹ Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture*, 224.

²⁰ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 121.

²¹ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 132.

²² Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 290.

The emphasis on “place” that characterizes this analysis, at the crossroads between phenomenology and architecture, tends to define “dwelling” in terms of an opposition to abstract space — which is uninhabitable by definition — and in close relation to the experience of being-at-home or the wandering between homes — an in-between space, where one can also feel at home. In one way or another, dwelling space seems overdetermined by the notion of place. Now then, is the space we dwell in made up only of “places”? Moreover, do we dwell only when we are at home? If we consider strangeness an essential dimension of dwelling space, we should respond negatively to these questions.

2. DWELLING BEYOND PLACE

Husserl’s approach to the topic of dwelling appears in the context of his inquiry into the lifeworld. Since “lifeworld” is a manifold concept and encompasses very different levels of analysis in Husserl’s late work, I shall narrow my exposition to those aspects that are concerned exclusively with the description of the dwelling space.²³ In this context, the concept of ‘life-world’ will be reduced to two primary meanings: soil and horizon. In other words, I will consider the world not as an objective phenomenon but as a constitutive element of experience.²⁴ These senses are, in turn, closely related.

The world as soil is always pre-given for a concomitant consciousness, and, as such, it constitutes the frame of reference for the movement and repose of the bodies that lie on the Earth. Therefore, the world as absolute soil is identified with the Earth. Husserl also affirms that it is not adequate *stricto sensu* to claim that the Earth moves or rests because it establishes the condition of possibility of movement and rest in general.²⁵

²³ On the manifold sense of the concept of “lifeworld,” see Klaus Held, “Einleitung,” in Edmund Husserl, *Die phänomenologische Methode* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1985), 29-30.

²⁴ Anthony Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1995), 98.

²⁵ Edmund Husserl, “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre,” in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, ed. Marvin Farber (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1940), 309.

By contrast, since all motion and rest make sense concerning the Earth as an absolute soil, Husserl thinks that the Earth is a transcendental structure of space. Due to its character as soil, the Earth does not occupy a place in space as a body would.²⁶ In other words, the Earth constitutes a condition of possibility for spatiality as such. Since the living body is anchored to the Earth, the latter also provides a universal frame for the movement and rest of the living body itself.²⁷ Objective space, by contrast, is homogeneous: It is not centered. Hence it lacks orientation.²⁸ From a phenomenological perspective, therefore, the Earth is not primarily one heavenly body among others but is “unique” (*einzig*) in the precise sense that it remains beyond the distinction between the singularity and the plurality of worlds.²⁹ Because of its uniqueness, Husserl asserts that the Earth is the “original homeplace” (*Urheimat*) of humankind as a whole.³⁰

Besides its spatial determination, the world as soil is also pre-given in a temporal sense. In this context, “soil” means a permanent and living acquisition that pre-delineates future experiences founded in the past, i.e., past experiences settle into acquisitions that constitute a horizon of acquaintedness, which brings familiarity to the world. Since the past taken into account here corresponds to an intersubjective level, the “meaning transference,” which is thematized by genetic phenomenology for an individual subjectivity, becomes a “heritage of sense” in the context of “generative intersubjectivity,”³¹ a term that refers to the bound that links human communities through time.³² From a generative

²⁶ Husserl, “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre,” 313-14.

²⁷ Roberto Walton, *Intencionalidad y horizonticidad* (Cali: Aula de Humanidades, 2015), 344.

²⁸ Husserl, “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre,” 320.

²⁹ Husserl, “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre,” 314.

³⁰ Husserl, “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre,” 319.

³¹ Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, dritter Teil, 1929-35 (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 199 (hereinafter referred to as “Hua XV”).

³² Hua XV, 609. Briefly stated, genetic phenomenology studied the development of the structures of consciousness in an attempt to establish the typical form that the process of constitution follows throughout the life of an individual subject in accordance with essential laws. The generative perspective — which is the one that frames most of the Husserlian reflections on dwelling space — also seeks to find those essential laws that govern the development over time, no longer of an individual subject but of a communalized subjectivity, understood in terms of a transcendental intersubjectivity that is held together by its generational nexus. See, for instance: Anthony Steinbock,

perspective, thus, meaning is pre-given as a consequence of community practices that embrace many generations and together form a history.³³ Taken as a whole, the history of the Earth as universal soil constitutes an “original history” (*Urhistorie*), such that each human community can be conceived as a partial development of the universal history of the Earth.³⁴ Within each community, the original history manifests itself as traditions — as a set of generic ways of behavior and value — inherited passively from the former community members. Through its traditions, a community survives the death of its members over time. In this sense, Husserl holds that a community is a permanent unity of “self-preservation.”³⁵ The closeness that Husserl emphasizes between the community’s traditions and the habits of the individual subject should not surprise us because both phenomena involve a common sedimentation process when viewed from an individual or a collective perspective.³⁶ Accordingly, the world gains “typicity” due to the intersubjective sedimentation process, through which it becomes familiar and the norm for a particular community life. This closest world, defined by its familiarity, typicity, and normality, is called by Husserl the “homeworld” (*Heimwelt*).

The homeworld admits an inner gradualness of horizons that Husserl describes as a set of concentric circles structured one-inside-the-other.³⁷ The starting point of the analysis is the “most immediate near world,” where the living body is the absolute point of reference.³⁸ Thus, the objects and subjectivities that integrate this “private environment” could always be perceived in strict correlation with the

“Husserl’s Static and Genetic Phenomenology: Translator’s Introduction to Two Essays,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 31 (1998): 127-34. See also: Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, 170-85.

³³ Roberto Walton, *Horizonticidad e historicidad* (Cali: Aula de Humanidades, 2019), 19.

³⁴ Husserl, “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre,” 319.

³⁵ Husserl, Ms. A v24, 23a: “[...] die selbst als Gemeinschaft eine verharrende, eine konstituierte Einheit der ‘Selberhaltung’ ist, in diesem entsprechenden Sinn Einheit einer ‘Geschichte’, einer Gemeinschaftstradition hat”, quoted by Walton, *Horizonticidad e historicidad*, 36.

³⁶ Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916-1937)* (New York: Springer, 2008), 527 (hereinafter referred to as “Hua XXXIX”).

³⁷ Hua XV, 429.

³⁸ Hua XV, 428.

movement of the living body.³⁹ And so, the first others are the closest people (*Nächsten*): mothers, fathers, and brothers.⁴⁰ In other words, home, as the place where the family dwells, is the center of the nearest world. However, the privilege of home does not merely concern facts. By contrast, Husserl holds that every human being, as a part of a generative intersubjectivity, is characterized by their “belonging to their home”⁴¹ as a consequence of an instinctive “original form of love for your neighbor.”⁴² Such a primordial tendency of caring for others — oriented, in the first place, towards the family members — is closely related to the intersubjective self-preservation of the community.⁴³ From there on, the outer circles of the homeworld extend to the limits of what is known and familiar.

Beyond the borders of the homeworld, an unknown world is intentioned as an empty horizon. Husserl writes: “The contrast between homely or familiar and strange belongs to the permanent structure of each world, and in a permanent relativity.”⁴⁴ Although home and strangeness are both necessary dimensions of dwelling space, the homeworld keeps its centrality as long as it is a general measure for determining the empty horizon. Correspondingly, the enlargement of the homeworld over the strange world can occur in two ways.⁴⁵ On the one hand, the unknown world is determined according to the general style of the homeworld. In such a case, “the far away” simply becomes a part of the enlarged near world. On the other hand, the encounter with another community — involved in a different generative history — not only entails the determination of the empty horizon as an alienworld (*Fremdwelt*) but also brings to the fore thematically one’s homeworld, yet only pre-given as soil before the actual encounter with other

³⁹ Hua XV, 219.

⁴⁰ Hua XV, 429.

⁴¹ Hua XXXIX, 155.

⁴² Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie: Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik. Texte aus dem Nachlass 1908-1937* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 108.

⁴³ Walton, *Horizonticidad e historicidad*, 34-35.

⁴⁴ Hua XV, 431.

⁴⁵ Hua XV, 431.

strangers. As a result, homeworld and alienworld are co-constituted as representations of the world.⁴⁶

In summary, the structure of the surrounding world implies for Husserl an essential distinction between the immediate sphere of the familiar and known world and a strange, unknown outside world, intended as the external horizon that surrounds the inner circle of life. The distant world can eventually be identified as an alienworld, but this cannot be taken to mean that the external horizon is completely determined. On the contrary, there will always be an empty and undetermined horizon beyond the borders of both home- and alienworlds. Now then, if we analyze these Husserlian distinctions in the light of the difference between place and space, we can conceive both home- and alienworlds as dwelling places — whether for our own community or the foreign ones —, although the external horizon itself, essentially undetermined and empty, can never be a place. Moreover, if strangeness is a horizon and, therefore, a constitutive dimension of experience, it can be said that our experience of dwelling is constantly caught between home and strangeness.

3. DWELLING OUT OF HOME

The assumption that dwelling in a proper sense means being at home can be traced to Heidegger's late work, which is the crucial reference for both Norberg-Schulz's⁴⁷ and Casey's⁴⁸ analyses of the subject. Since the full implications of Heidegger's appraisal of dwelling are beyond the scope of this article, I will restrict my exposition to the distinction between the "unhomely" (*unheimisch*) that results from the dominance of technical and calculative thinking and the notion of "dwelling" (*wohnen*), which is closely linked to Heidegger's late ontology.

⁴⁶ Walton, *Horizonticidad e historicidad*, 33. The co-constitutive process between homeworld and alienworld is also emphasized by Steinbock's *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, 80-85 and Sepp.

⁴⁷ See, among other references: Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 17, 117, 133.

⁴⁸ Cf. Edward S. Casey. "Heidegger In and Out of Place," in *Heidegger: A Centenary Appraisal*, ed. Edward S. Casey, Samuel Ijsseling, Thomas Sheehan and Jacques Taminioux (Pittsburgh: Silverman Phenomenology Center, 1990), 62-98.

Heidegger finds close links between the development of modern technology and the estrangement from the world we originally dwelled in. In his view, technology contributes to the metaphysical process of machination by reducing temporal and spatial distances. On the one hand, the permanent anticipation (*Vorgriff*) of the future that defines calculative thinking implies an increasing acceleration (*Beschleunigung*), which prevents thought from remaining quiet and meditates (*besinnen*) on “the meaning which reigns over everything that is.”⁴⁹ On the other hand, technical developments, such as the airplane,⁵⁰ the television, the radio, or the weekly visit to the cinema,⁵¹ all signal the overcoming of spatial distance through the calculative homogenization of the world.

However, technology only reinforces Dasein’s inherent tendency to de-distancing (*Ent-fernung*). The loss of the surrounding world depends on the “circumspective looking” of everyday praxis, bringing beings to the nearness of Dasein. Nevertheless, this does not imply that distances in the surrounding world must be considered in relation to the living body but rather only with regard to the orientation of praxis. In opposition to Husserl, Heidegger dismisses the living aspect of the body or, conversely, he considers the body only in an objective manner. Therefore, if the body is just one thing amongst others, it cannot count as the bearer of the “zero point” of orientation: Dasein is never “here” but rather “there” with what it is taking care of. In this sense, Heidegger’s lack of interest in the living body turns on the Husserlian relationship of foundation between “here” and “there” since Dasein understands its “here” in terms of the “over there” of the surrounding world.⁵² Consequently, the surrounding world can no longer be identified without restriction with the beings that are immediately perceived since such an interpretation would suggest an unacceptable objectivization of the original spatiality.

⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund with an Introduction by John M. Anderson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 46.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 44-45.

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910-1976)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 575.

⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Suny Press, 1996), 99.

Although technology⁵³ makes it possible to overcome distances from an objective point of view, it disrupts in an “unhomely manner” (*unheimliche Weise*) the “nearness” of the regions of the world.⁵⁴ Such nearness possesses a metaphysical meaning and refers to the gathering of earth, sky, mortals, and divines that constitute the fourfold (*Geviert*): the structure of things that allows them to be opened to the world.⁵⁵ In this context, the loss of the surrounding world implies the closure of the original ontological structure of things. Thus, the supremacy of technology that defines our contemporary age pushes humanity into an essential homelessness (*Heimatlosigkeit*) in a world where things are disguised behind the representational mask of calculative thinking. In opposition to this, Heidegger’s late ontology seeks to describe things in a de-substantialized and relational manner: things are the “gathering” of the fourfold, and the fourfold gathers into things.⁵⁶ In other words, things manifest themselves by virtue of their relations with the basic structure of the world — they “are” this relationality — and, conversely, the regions of the world make themselves present in the things. Now then, what is the relationship between things and dwelling? Norberg-Schulz provides an influential answer to this question:

Dwelling primarily consists in the appropriation of a world of things, not in a material sense, but as an ability to interpret the meaning the things gather. “Things visit mortals with a world,” Heidegger says, and when we understand their message we gain the existential foothold which is dwelling.⁵⁷

Norberg-Schulz also affirms that things must be bearers of time to be meaningful because meaning in things depends on the fact that they remind us of the past.⁵⁸ If the question of meaning is intrinsically

⁵³ Heidegger usually uses the term “*Technik*” instead of “*Technologie*.” However, the most widespread English translation of “*Technik*” is “technology” (for example, William Lovitt translates “*Die Frage nach der Technik*” as “*The Question Concerning Technology*” and John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund do the same in the work cited above, *Discourse on Thinking*), so we follow this criterion here.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache (1950-1959)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 200.

⁵⁵ Andrew Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2015), 7.

⁵⁶ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 12.

⁵⁷ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 17.

⁵⁸ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 133.

related to the question of memory and if dwelling can only provide an existential foothold insofar as it takes place in a meaningful world, dwelling depends ultimately on identifying traditional meanings gathered in things.⁵⁹ In short, the world becomes meaningful and familiar by the presence of time in things. When this occurs, Norberg-Schulz claims that we dwell in the “proper sense of the word.”⁶⁰ In this regard, Jeff Malpas points out that Norberg-Schulz’s interpretation of Heidegger has been highly influential on subsequent discussions of dwelling — particularly among architects —, giving rise to a reading tradition that tends to identify dwelling with the ideas of “belonging,” “identity,” and “authentic existence.”⁶¹ Moreover, given that the concept of dwelling appears to depend on the concept of place, and “place” is an essentially “deterministic, exclusionary and nostalgic concept,”⁶² in the sense that we are always rooted to a specific and determined place, the notion of dwelling seems to be closely tied to a “sedentary, secure, and familiar” mode of being.⁶³ However, the assimilation between the concept of dwelling and the empirical place of our homeworld ignores the suspicious character that dwelling entails for Heidegger. In *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* it can be read:

The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell. What if man’s homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as the plight?⁶⁴

In other words, the homelessness of dwelling in a world defined by technology is not only a matter of fact but entails, for Heidegger,

⁵⁹ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 133-34.

⁶⁰ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 135.

⁶¹ Jeff Malpas, “Rethink Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology* 25 (2014): 15-23 (15-16).

⁶² Malpas, “Rethink Dwelling,” 17. In the same vein, Emmanuel Levinas links Heideggerian philosophy with the rootedness to one’s own place and, consequently, with the tendency of Western philosophy to “return home,” exemplified eminently by the figure of Ulysses and his return to Ithaca. See, among other works, Emmanuel Levinas, “La trace de l’Autre,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 25 (1963): 605-23.

⁶³ Malpas, “Rethink Dwelling,” 20.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 2001), 57.

a metaphysical character. Thus, the homesickness (*Heimweh*) in contemporary times should not merely be taken as an empirical nostalgia for an idealized past or place.⁶⁵ In this regard, Malpas asserts: “To dwell is to remain in a state in which what it is to dwell — and what it is to dwell here, in this place — is a question constantly put anew.”⁶⁶ Viewed in this way, posing the question of the sense of dwelling again and asking anew about the meaning of being constitutes a way of returning home for humanity. According to this, it is possible to state that in his later works, Heidegger tends to conceive of “dwelling” in relation to home or homecoming.⁶⁷ Malpas even suggests that the concept of dwelling requires rethinking some of Heidegger’s early concepts, such as “authentic existence.”⁶⁸ If we follow this suggestion, we will find that there are also elements in *Sein und Zeit* that call into question the very idea that the concept of dwelling is intrinsically connected to home. In particular, the analysis of *Angst* undertaken in the seminal work of 1927 reveals a positive appraisal of the *Unheimliche* insofar as it constitutes a condition of possibility for authentic existence.

The relevance of *Angst* lies in the lack of interest in the inner-worldly beings that characterizes this attunement. Or, expressed differently, *Angst* reveals the Nothing in the world. In this sense, *Angst* cancels the “taking-care” that determines Dasein’s everyday life and, thus, confronts Dasein with the open possibility that defines its existence in every case, whether it is aware of it or not. That is to say, *Angst* constitutes an ontic experience that allows the revelation of an ontological structure by means of the interruption of the ordinary absorption in beings. As a consequence, *Angst* exposes the structure of being-in-the-world in itself.

But given that the surrounding world is inherently intersubjective, this particular attunement is accompanied by the isolation of Dasein, severing the ties that join it to others and things: “In *Angst* one has an ‘uncanny’

⁶⁵ Cf. Alfredo Rocha de la Torre, “Tierra natal: Entre agonía y afirmación de la diferencia,” *Revista de Filosofía* 37 (2012): 37-55.

⁶⁶ Malpas, “Rethink Dwelling,” 20.

⁶⁷ For a systematic study of the relevance of the concept of “home” in Heidegger’s late work, see: Robert Mugerauer, *Heidegger and Homecoming: The Leitmotif in the Later Writings* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Malpas, “Rethink Dwelling,” 16.

[*unheimlich*] *feeling* [...] But uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*] means at the same time not-being-at-home.”⁶⁹ Since the surrounding and familiar world is always exposed to falling prey to the public mode of interpretation, Heidegger thinks that the possibility of an authentic existence implies some kind of isolation. In this context, Dasein’s freedom of choice to choose itself as an open possibility means abandoning others and the familiarity of the homeworld. In short, to be free — that is, to exist authentically — presupposes not to-be-at-home. The philosopher writes:

Angst [...] fetches Da-sein back out of its entangled absorption in the ‘world.’ Everyday familiarity collapses. Da-sein is individuated, but *as* being-in-the-world. Being-in enters the existential ‘mode’ of *not-being-at-home*. The talk about ‘uncanniness’ [*Unheimlichkeit*] means nothing other than this.⁷⁰

In summary, in the late Heidegger, *unheimisch* refers to the alienation in a world where human beings are paradoxically distanced from the surrounding world by technological means that seek to shorten time and distances. Human beings are thus not initially at home but rather in strangeness. Consequently, coming to-be-at-home entails a passage through strangeness. In *Sein und Zeit*, by contrast, being-at-home is associated with “falling prey,” a familiar and public mode of interpretation that must be abandoned to disclose the ontological condition of Dasein as being-in-the-world. In this regard, the estrangement of the *Unheimlichkeit* gains a positive but also distressing character, which will be analyzed in the next section.

4. THE AMBIVALENT SPACE BETWEEN HOME AND STRANGENESS

4.1. *The Experience of the Uncanny*

In his 1919 study *Das Unheimliche*, Freud tracks down the multiple meanings of the German term “*unheimlich*” in his and other languages and in literary references. He shows particular interest in Schelling’s assertion: “*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.

⁷⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.

hidden and secret and has become visible.”⁷¹ Freud holds that the relevance of this statement lies in the fact that here the “intimate” (*heimlich*) is not only associated with what is familiar but, more precisely, with what must be kept from the look of others. He observes that, in such a context, “*unheimlich*” is opposed to “*heimlich*” not only in its acceptance of “familiar” but also in its meaning of “intimate.” The latter definition is strengthened by the lexical closeness between the German terms “*heimlich*” and “*Geheim*” (secret).⁷² The Freudian analysis then tries to develop the essential ambivalence that characterizes the experience of the uncanny. In this conceptual context, the uncanny does not threaten the familiarity of the home from the outside, as if it were the result of a disruption in the familiar world caused by the encounter with an alienworld, as we saw in Husserl, or produced by the emergence of the Nothing, as Heidegger claims. By contrast, it haunts the house from within.

The Freudian analysis binds the *Unheimliche* with the repetition of a previous and repressed psychic phase, which ultimately involves the threat of the return of the primary indifference that defines the origin of life. According to the central thesis of *Jenseits des Lustsprinzips* (1920), this repetition seeks to reduce the tension that characterizes life to a minimum, equivalent to the regression of life to an inanimate state. In this context, the “pleasure principle” — the tendency to reduce the tension in a psychic apparatus to a minimum — is intrinsically connected to the return to the inanimate state, where a total lack of tension ideally reigns. Therefore, the conviction that the death drive governs the pleasure principle constitutes an essential characteristic of the redefinition of the theory of drives that Freud undertook in the 1920s. Conversely, in Freud’s early theory of drives, the pleasure principle operates jointly with the self-preservation instinct, which describes the fundamental tendency to behave to avoid injury and maximize chances of survival.⁷³

⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, 1917-1919 (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1955), 223.

⁷² Freud, “The Uncanny,” 225.

⁷³ Cf. Sigmund Freud, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, 1914-1916, *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1955), 109-40.

In the context of his late work, thus, the close bond that Freud finds between the homely experience, death tendencies, and the experience of the uncanny is not surprising. There is a typical repetition of the familiar world ruled by the cycles of day and night, the hours of wakefulness and rest, the regularity of meals, the timetable of work and leisure, etc.⁷⁴ Within this familiar repetition, the seed of the uncanny — which turns “the strange” into “the familiar”— grows. In other words, the uncanny is not provoked by the irruption of strangeness into the house but by the very nature of repetition in the familiar world. That is, the search for safety and certainty that characterizes the homely experience implies an attempt to reduce the unforeseeable and to control, as much as possible, the disruptions that threaten the homeworld. As we have seen, the search for self-preservation pursues a reduction of the tension in the psychic apparatus. But given that absolute distention coincides with the return to the inanimate state, life looking to preserve itself creates the condition for its own annihilation.⁷⁵ Hence, the repetition of the uncanny’s genesis unsettles the familiarity of home by calling into question the more rooted convictions about reality.⁷⁶ First and foremost, the conviction that to-be-at-home is consistent with self-preservation. The disclosure of the presence of the death drive in the intimacy of home not only reveals an ambivalent space between home and strangeness, between a repressed past and present life, and between psychic and objective reality — as Freud puts it: the “*unheimlich*” is a sub-species of “*heimlich*”—, but also shows up the need to leave home and embrace strangeness.

⁷⁴ The circularity of domestic time could also be traced in Heidegger’s appraisal of celestial cardinal points (*Himmelsgegenden*) that structure the everyday praxis. See *Being and Time*, 96. In the same vein, Klaus Held underlines the relationship between generative self-preservation and the cyclic character of domestic time. See Klaus Held, “Generative Experience of Time,” in *The Many Faces of Time: Contribution to Phenomenology*, ed. John Brough and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 167-86.

⁷⁵ Freud asserts in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*: “We have unwittingly steered our course into the harbour of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. For him death is the ‘true result and to that extent the purpose of life,’ while the sexual instinct embodies the will to live.” See Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, 1920-1922 (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1955), 7-64.

⁷⁶ Freud, “The Uncanny,” 249.

4.2. *Playing as Transitional Phenomenon*

The *Unheimliche* presents a distressed and involuntary mode of dwelling in the ambivalent space between home and strangeness. However, in the psychoanalytic literature it is possible to find other perspectives on this paradoxical space. Particularly relevant is the attempt to overcome the rigid opposition between inner and outer reality by D.W. Winnicott in *Playing and Reality* (1971). In that work, Winnicott proposes that a human being's life also takes place in a third field, which defines "an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contributed."⁷⁷

Transitional space constitutes an actual dimension of experience in adult life and plays a significant role in the genetic constitution of the world. Following Freud, Winnicott asserts that the original disposition of the infantile subject towards the world is defined by omnipotence: the subject does not perceive that the object that meets its needs possesses an independent existence. In other words, the baby lives the illusion that its mother's breast is part of itself.⁷⁸ This illusion, correspondingly, must be encouraged in the first place by the mother to allow her child to deal with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived. But at a certain point, if the mother is "good enough," she has to disillusion her child.⁷⁹ Only then can the "reality principle" start to operate, and the object, in consequence, appear external to the subject. Nevertheless, primary subjectivism is not replaced by pure realism. The disillusionment that concerns the loss of the immanent character of the primary object opens the possibility of establishing a relationship not only with what stands beyond the subjective boundaries but also with the diversification of the objects that make up the baby's world. This process, which ultimately involves the never completed task of reality-acceptance, begins with replacing the mother's breast with a unique object which Winnicott calls a "transitional object."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1971), 3.

⁷⁸ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 15.

⁷⁹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 16.

⁸⁰ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 18.

The transitional object involves a relationship of affection, and it must survive instinctual loving and hating insofar as it must remain the same. This object lies at the border — not entirely inside or outside — because it has to be recognized as something “not-me” and, at the same time, it has to be perceived as if it were something created by the subject.⁸¹ This ambivalent position between external reality and inner creativity sets the condition for playing. In this context, playing acquires a genetic role in the constitution of the world insofar as it makes it possible to experience strangeness in a safe and controlled manner. Winnicott states: “To control what is outside one has to do things, not simply to think or to wish, and doing things takes time. Playing is doing.”⁸² For its part, the transitional object is the material support of playing. But it is not merely a material thing. It also possesses a symbolic meaning: it represents the mother and therefore serves as a defense against anxiety. Transitional phenomena, thus, extend the boundaries of the home by means of the symbolic presence of the Other.⁸³

In general terms, transitional space is always intersubjective, and it constitutes, in the beginning, a minimal shaping of the world: it has got one object, one ego, and one other. Gradually, transitional phenomena tend to collapse into the broad field of culture. In this sense, culture is not just a passively inherited tradition but a “potential space” to which everyone should be able to contribute actively.⁸⁴ Winnicott writes: “I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw if we *have somewhere to put what we find*.”⁸⁵ Thus, the relationship with external reality is not just one of compliance, where the world and its details are something to be fitted in with or that demand adaptation. If that were the case, the resolution of the inner tension of the transitional space in favor of objective reality could lead to a sense of futility and, ultimately, to the idea that life is not worth

⁸¹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 2.

⁸² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 55.

⁸³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 63.

⁸⁴ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 69.

⁸⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 133.

living. Correspondingly, absolutizing the subjective aspect of the relationship between the poles of dwelling space could involve a pathological loss of contact with reality. But playing defines the transitional space at the beginning of life. In that case, its intermediary function is later replaced by other transitional activities such as artistic productions, religion, imaginative living, and creative scientific work.⁸⁶ According to Winnicott, all these phenomena, which involve creativity in one way or another, should be located in the paradoxical space between home and strangeness. This is because the familiar world cannot completely define them, since creativity implies overcoming the firmly established meanings of the family world — which defines the normality of the homeworld. Still, neither can they be completely strange if they aim to contribute to a common culture.

4.3. *Philosophy Between Place and Placelessness*

As we saw above, the problem of culture also appears in Sepp's oikology but is approached from the perspective of the encounter between cultures. Following Husserl, the oikological view acknowledges that we come into existence within a homeworld, which not only links us to former generations but also constitutes our living body in relationship to traditions and the material conditions of the homeworld (a specific climate, a particular landscape, etc.).⁸⁷ However, in this context, Husserl asserts that what is completely strange is known, at least, as a modification of the homeworld.⁸⁸ Accordingly, we are permanently anchored in a homeworld; because of this, our home becomes a privileged perspective from which to understand familiar and strange worlds. But if the homeworld possesses such epistemic privilege, Sepp's question is how to avoid its absolutization. Or, in other words, how to prevent the empirical world we dwell in — which we call home — from becoming a transcendental perspective imposed on all others, the *Urheimat*?

⁸⁶ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 19.

⁸⁷ Anthony Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*. (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1995), 164.

⁸⁸ Hua XV, 430.

The question becomes even more pressing for the phenomenological tradition if we consider that Husserl himself points out — primarily in *Krisis* — that only the “European homeworld” plays such a universal role since philosophy has come into being within its limits.⁸⁹ If that is so, from an empirical fact — the birth of philosophy in Greece — a transcendental consequence could be drawn: that only European reason is universal. Thereby, Husserl would identify a transcendental structure with his own homeworld, Europe, engaging phenomenology through a form of cultural colonialism.⁹⁰

However, there are also elements within Husserlian philosophy itself that can serve to question the compulsive “homogenization” of otherness at the basis of the Europeanizing interpretation of his thought. In particular, Husserl points out that the understanding of otherness depends ultimately on a “core of acquaintedness” (*Kern des Bekanntheit*) based on the most general typifications within which singular experiences fall, such as “spatial things in general,” as “inanimate objects,” or “organic-beings” (animals and plants), such as the sky and the Earth, mountains and valleys or rivers and lakes.⁹¹ The mutual intelligibility between life-worlds, provided by a common core of acquaintedness, implies in ontological terms that beneath the distinction between home- and alienworld lies an even more fundamental dimension of the world that provides the common structure for the development of every enclosed world. As we have seen above, Husserl claims that Earth plays the role of lifeworld’s substructure and, by doing so, constitutes the general condition of possibility for both home- and alienworlds. In conformity with this, Sepp proposes that the task of transcendental phenomenology consists precisely in opening up the circle of the homeworld, in which one’s own understanding is rooted.⁹²

As a consequence, phenomenology “has a place” (*orthaft*) insofar as it is always anchored in a familiar world, but, on the other hand, it is “placeless” (*ortlos*) because its method consists precisely in bracketing

⁸⁹ Hua VI, 13.

⁹⁰ See Toru Tani, “Heimat und das Fremde,” *Husserl Studies* 9 (1992): 199-216.

⁹¹ Hua XV, 432.

⁹² Sepp, *Über die Grenze*, 70.

this anchoring.⁹³ As long as it is anchored, phenomenology expresses a homeworld and a tradition. Still, phenomenology's aims do not establish itself as an empirical point of view, settled down in a place, but in exceeding its own place to disclose the essential structure of place in itself, and thereby the difference between home and strangeness. Like Winnicott before him, Sepp states that if paradox defines the way we dwell in the world, we must not try to solve it but rather "to live the paradox."⁹⁴ Such a paradoxical "place" is where the philosopher should remain, in a "stable imbalance" between place and placelessness, between home and strangeness.⁹⁵ That is, phenomenology must leave home in order to receive strangeness on its own terms, but it must also not leave home altogether if any intelligibility of strangeness is intended.

5. FINAL REMARKS

By revisiting the classical contributions of phenomenology to the topic of dwelling space we have seen that the space we dwell in is a dimension of the lifeworld and, as such, is temporalized by a communitarian sedimentation process which makes it intrinsically intersubjective and a common ground of pre-given meanings. Unlike the objective spatiality of modern science, dwelling space possesses an intrinsic orientation — associated either with the lived body (Husserl) or with occupation (Heidegger) — and, for this reason, cannot be conceived as homogeneous. We have also seen that the Earth is the most fundamental level of dwelling space. In topological terms, the dwelling space has three essential dimensions — home, strangeness, and the interstitial space between them — each providing space for different experiences. In this sense, phenomenological analysis recognizes the contrast between home and strangeness as the main distinction that articulates the space where we dwell. In this general context, I aimed to characterize the

⁹³ Sepp, *Über die Grenze*, 67.

⁹⁴ Sepp, *In: Grundrisse einer oikologischen Philosophie*, 60.

⁹⁵ Sepp, *In: Grundrisse einer oikologischen Philosophie*, 69.

ambiguous space between home and strangeness positively through the contributions of psychoanalysis and philosophical oikology.

The critical approach to the theories of dwelling that emphasize the privilege of place over space and, at the same time, define dwelling in terms of the experience of being-at-home seeks to discuss two interpretations commonly found in the specialized literature. On the one hand, I addressed critically the overdetermination of the concept of dwelling, especially in the late Heidegger and in the phenomenology of dwelling inspired by his thought, by that of being-at-home. This discussion allowed us to show strangeness in its productive dimension. Thus, considering strangeness as a positive dimension of dwelling space makes it possible to conceptualize experiences — such as those involved in creative activities such as playing or philosophizing — that cannot be encompassed in their complexity if the analysis is limited to the mere opposition between home and strangeness. In this sense, the transitional space seems to be where criticism of the normality of the familiar world coexists with the exercise of creativity as a way to go beyond the given, through a controlled and productive estrangement. In addition, as I tried to show in my discussion of the analyses of the *Unheimliche* carried out by Heidegger and Freud, in some cases, we need to leave home, either because it presents itself as an obstacle to achieving an authentic existence or just because home reveals the deadly side of the self-preservation instincts.

On the other hand, I discuss the excessive relevance acquired by the concept of place in the ontological consideration of space. As with the assimilation of the notion of dwelling to that of being-at-home, it was not my intention to ignore the centrality that “place” has in our experience of dwelling space but to highlight other dimensions of the phenomenon that are not so evident, but which are, nevertheless, equally constitutive. This tendency, taken to the extreme by the phenomenology developed at the crossroads with architecture — and its usual rejection of abstraction and rootlessness — goes so far as to reject that the very notion of space is adequate to thinking about dwelling. However, it follows from the above that the idea of dwelling space is complex and composed of several levels. In addition to places — whether its own or

strange ones — the dwelling space is shaped by horizons that frame the very experience of place. I also could add that the dwelling space harbors what Hermann Schmitt calls “affective atmospheres.”⁹⁶ We have seen, finally, how placelessness plays an essential role in some experiences situated in the interstitial space between the home and strangeness. In this respect, Sepp’s oikology reveals the dangers of an interpretation of space that is too centered on “place” and its intrinsic tendency to absolutization.⁹⁷

KEYWORDS: home, strangeness, ambiguous space, phenomenology, psychoanalysis.

SUMMARY

This investigation can be framed within the field of study known as philosophical oikology. In particular, this essay deals with three essential concepts that define the ontology of dwelling space: “home,” “strangeness,” and an ambivalent space “in-between.” The argument is structured as follows: Firstly, I discuss the opposition between “place” and “space.” Secondly, I present the main aspects of the Husserlian distinction between “homeworld” and “alienworld” in order to show how horizons reveal a dimension of dwelling space that cannot be identified with place. Then I set out Heidegger’s appraisal of the distinction between home and strangeness in his later work and in *Sein und Zeit*. Following on from that, I discuss the identification between dwelling and being-at-home, after which I attempt to outline the ambiguous space between home and strangeness based on the contributions made by Freud’s analysis of the uncanny (*Unheimlich*), Winnicott’s concept of “transitional space,” and H.R. Sepp’s oikological philosophy.

⁹⁶ See Andrés M. Osswald and Micaela Szeftel, “Las atmósferas afectivas como dimensiones del espacio habitado,” *Contrastes: Revista internacional de filosofía* 28 (2023): 141-60.

⁹⁷ See Sepp, “Maß: Ein Kapitel aus der philosophischen Oikologie,” in *Entgrenzungen der Phänomenologie und Hermeneutik: Festschrift für Helmuth Vetter zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Silvia Stoller und Gerhard Unterthurner (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2012), 129-45.