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# THE WORLD'S NEGLIGENCE GLOBALISATION, PHILOSOPHY AND THE MISADVENTURES OF SPACE

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## **Abstract**

The descriptions of our epoch as a time of technological despatialization, deterritorialization and dematerialization deserve to be discussed in order to bring out the complex genealogy of the changes to which they refer. Contemporary philosophy – especially the reading of Bergson, Heidegger, Arendt, Schmitt, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari – helps us to do so in at least two ways: first, by testifying that space and the material world represent a kind of obstacle to the visions prevailing in modernity, that give the human being a privileged relationship with time and a right to separate himself from the world in order to dominate it; second, showing us the ways in which spatiality is presented as a political stakes irreducible to both rigid territorializations and pure and simple despatializations. From this point of view, even the current telematic technologies are proof of this irreducibility re-spatializing the world with their systems for tracking, surveillance, monitoring, etc.

## **Keywords**

Technological speed, despatialization, world alienation, space policies.

## **Resumen**

Las descripciones de nuestra época como un tiempo de desespacialización, des-territorialización y desmaterialización tecnológica merecen ser discutidos con el fin de evidenciar la compleja genealogía de los cambios a los que se refieren. La filosofía contemporánea –especialmente a través de Bergson, Heidegger, Arendt, Schmitt, Foucault, Deleuze y Guattari– nos ayuda a hacerlo en por lo menos dos maneras: en primer lugar, exponiendo que el espacio y el mundo material representan una especie de obstáculo para las visiones que prevalecen en la modernidad, que le dan al ser humano una relación privilegiada con el tiempo y un derecho a separarse del mundo para dominarlo; en segundo lugar, mostrando las formas en que la espacialidad se presenta como una apuesta política irreducible tanto a las territorializaciones rígidas como a las desespacializaciones puras y sencillas. Desde este punto de vista, incluso las tecnologías telemáticas actuales son prueba de esta irreductibilidad re-espacializando al mundo con sus sistemas de rastreo, vigilancia, monitoreo, etc.

## **Palabras clave**

Velocidad tecnológica, desespacialización, alienación del mundo, política del espacio.

## Losing distances

Perhaps, even before people began to speak insistently of globalization, attention was paid in our society to the effects of the *dematerialization* of the communication technologies that have contributed to globalization itself, and among these effects, increasing importance was given to phenomena of *despatialization*, i.e. the trend triggered by the telematic technologies towards the reduction of the role of material space and physical territory with regard to the main activities and relationships of contemporary man<sup>1</sup> It is difficult, in fact, to deny that tele-technological globalization has long been causing a radical reduction of the importance of space, distances and physical relationships, primarily through the multiplication of the possibility of hyper-fast communication between users located anywhere in the world. The fact remains, however, that it may be appropriate to try to understand to what extent this overwhelming trend represents a decisive key to the interpretation of our time. To this end, one might wonder, in particular, about the *sense of space* that our culture, at least in its more reflexive forms, expressed until the “computer revolution” no longer found obstacles. Which, perhaps, could serve, above all, to help understand the extent to which this culture was prepared to deal with certain consequences of this revolution. Moreover, it could serve precisely to problematize, and possibly to determine, in a non-trivial way, the limits of the validity of the ideas of despatialization and technological dematerialization.

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1. A moment in which the talk about contemporary technological dematerialization definitively seemed to impose itself can be found in the important exhibition entitled “Les Immatériaux”, which took place in Paris in 1985 at the “Georges Pompidou” Centre. The exhibition intended, among other things, to “increase awareness of the fact that research and development in technical sciences and in the arts have come to the point that matter, the material, the real can no longer be immediately grasped and that there is the tendency for a veil of figures to be placed between reality and the mind” (J. Maheu, “Immatériaux”, in *Album*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1985, p. 3). The exhibition was organized under the direction of J. F. Lyotard, who, some years earlier, had highlighted the “historic step” caused by developments in information technology with his famous: *La condition postmoderne*, Minuit, Paris, 1979. Even before that time, especially Paul Virilio had begun to insist on the “despatializing” – as well as “dematerializing” – consequences of contemporary communication technologies. In any case, a very large number of the authors who have since analyzed the development of these technologies, have highlighted these consequences in one way or another. Among the various texts that could be referenced in this regard, see the P. Virilio: *Vitesse et politique*, Galilée, Paris, 1977; *La vitesse de libération*, Galilée, Paris, 1995; *Cybermonde, la politique du pire*, Les éditions Textuel, Paris, 1996; *La bombe informatique*, Galilée, Paris, 1998. Also see: J. Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985; P. Levy, *L'Intelligence collective. Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*, La Découverte, Paris, 1994; W. J. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1995; E. Fiorani, *La comunicazione a rete globale*, Lupetti, Milano, 1998; S. Graham, S. Marvin, *Telecommunication and the City: Electronic Spaces, Urban places*, Routledge, London, 1995; F. Cairncross, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives*, Harvard Business School Press, London, 2001; K. Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*, Harper Collins, New York, 2002; M. Ciastellardi, *Le architetture liquide. Dalle reti del pensiero al pensiero in rete*, Edizioni Universitarie LED, Milano, 2009.

Here, for my part, I would like to try to do something of the kind, referring in particular to philosophical knowledge. The general questions that I would pose as the basis for this effort would be the following: what attention has philosophy paid to space until recently, i.e. to this dimension of our existence of which today we seem in some way to be losing control, or profoundly changing our perception? What awareness has philosophical culture had of the possibility that space was exposed to such a prospect? What attention has it turned to the functions, the transformations and the importance of space with respect to the life of society? Of course, I do not presume to give definitive answers to such questions. I will limit myself, rather, to making a rough reconnaissance in this regard, referring especially – but not only – to some of the leading exponents of contemporary philosophical thought.

## Time as a refuge

I will first consider the general impression that can be derived from the history of philosophy in the last few centuries. The sense is that philosophy has tended to favor *time*, that is, to attribute to it a greater dignity than it was willing to attribute to space. In particular, Michel Foucault expressed himself in this sense, arguing that philosophy, since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, has gradually taken refuge in reflections on time, reflecting on spatiality at a lower level of intensity. Which, according to him, is explained in general by the fact that – after the modern scientific revolution and with the launch by the States of precise spatial policies – other forms of knowledge have firmly taken hold of this dimension and have “forced philosophy into a problematic of time. From Kant on”, says Foucault, “it is time that occupies the philosopher’s reflection, in Hegel, Bergson and Heidegger, for example. Along with this occurs a correlative disqualification of space that appears on the side of understanding, of the analytical, the conceptual, the dead, the fixed, the inert”<sup>2</sup>

Certainly the French author does not intend to deny the enormous value of the reflection that – each in his own way – the great philosophers he named have, in any case, dedicated to the spatial dimension. Rather, he wants to show that philosophy has never really addressed the “problem of spaces (...) as a historical and political problem”; in his

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2. M. Foucault, “L’oeil du pouvoir”, entretien avec J.-P. Barou et M. Perrot, in M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, ed by D. Defert and F. Ewald, Gallimard, Paris, 1994, III, p. 193; also see the different version of this text: M. Foucault, “The Eye of Power”, in A. Farquharson (ed.), *The impossible Prison: A Foucault Reader*, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (UK), 2008, p. 10.

opinion it has generally avoided dealing with the processes that range “from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of housing, institutional architecture, from the classroom to the hospital organization, by way of all the political and economic implantations”; philosophy – like other humanistic knowledge – has limited itself to reconnecting the theme of space “to ‘nature’ – to what was given, the first determining factor – or to ‘physical geography’; (...) to as a kind of ‘prehistoric’ stratum”, or to “the residential site or the field of expansion of a people, a culture, a language or a State”.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, many great philosophers of recent centuries (Montesquieu, Kant, Herder, Hegel) have turned their attention to space often in relation to the geographical dimension, reflecting on the territorial, environmental and geoclimatic diversity of the earth, and reconnecting this variety to the multiplicity and diversity of peoples and their cultures. Exemplary in this regard is the case of Hegel. Particularly in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, he aims to determine the weight that the different geographical areas have had in promoting or hindering the participation of the various peoples in world history. Thus, he tends to transform geographical differences into an instrument that distinguishes between the places and peoples with a “historical mission” and places and peoples destined to remain marginal or extraneous to the course of historical time. The main consequence of this distinction is the idea that the fulfillment of universal history has been realized in Europe as a geographical environment favorable to this fulfillment.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, it is almost pointless to observe that the ethnocentric hierarchy of countries and peoples, that this vision legitimates, is today shifting to an increasingly ruinous divergence between North and South, East and West; which is happening precisely at a time when “world history” should have found its beneficial and definitive successful completion as a result of globalization.<sup>5</sup> In any case, it is clear that – as Foucault argues – an approach like this to space, on the one hand, tends to exclude from the analysis the consideration of the geopolitical, planning, bio-political or economic intervention strategies on space itself; on the other, it gives time a clear supremacy over the spatial dimension: the Hegelian vision, in short, turns its attention to spatiality on the condition that it functions as a geographic support of the universal power of historical time.

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3. Ibid.

4. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Erste Hälfte*, vol. I: *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. by J. Hoffmeister, Meiner, Hamburg, 1955, engl. transl.: *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 152-209.

5. On these implications of Hegel's view of the relationship between history and geography, see: E. Dussel, *1492: El encubrimiento de lo otro. Hacia el origen del “mito de la Modernidad”*, Plural Editores, La Paz, 1994, pp. 13-22.

It is interesting, however, that Foucault – as we have seen – identifies in the thought of Kant a kind of inaugural moment of the philosophical tendency to “disqualify” space. It could perhaps be said that he traces one of the root causes of the “preference” of contemporary philosophy for temporality to the Kantian distinction between space as *outer intuition* and time as *inner intuition* of the human subject. In fact, Kant argues that time, precisely as an *inner intuition*, “is the formal condition of all appearances in general”; according to him, “all representations, whether or not they have outer things as their object, nevertheless as determinations of the mind themselves belong to the inner state.” Precisely for this reason, as part of the only form of knowledge available to man through his senses – i.e. the phenomenal –, time stands at a higher level than space which, conversely, “as the pure form of all outer intuitions, is limited as an *a priori* condition merely to outer intuitions”<sup>6</sup>

## Space without quality

Referring to more recent times, we can say that one of the philosophers most responsible for the “disqualification” of space to the benefit of time is certainly Henry Bergson, to whom Foucault himself attributes a crucial role in this regard. Bergsonian philosophy, in effect, makes particularly clear the consideration of space as an abstract, poor, cold dimension which opposes time understood as *duration*, i.e. as a fluid temporal succession, qualitatively rich, varied and creative that man immediately perceives through his conscience. This “disqualification” of space to the benefit of time in Bergson is connected to his rejection of the spatialization of knowledge, which – according to him – prevails in the exact sciences which – he claims – generally study reality by tending to spatialize it, i.e. to define its elements, to segment it analytically, to measure it metrically. In this way, also the dynamism, the variability, the qualitative richness of time and essentially temporal phenomena – such as movement or biological and psychic life – are conceived of and treated as sequences of single and discrete moments or elements located along an abstract, homogeneous, divisible and measurable linearity.<sup>7</sup>

But how exactly does Bergson conceive of space? In one of his major works he claims that it corresponds to the “conception of an empty homogeneous medium” in

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6. I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hartknoch, Riga, 1787, engl. transl.: *Critique of pure reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp.180-181.

7. See H. Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, Alcan, Paris, 1907, engl. transl.: *Creative Evolution*, Dover Publication, Mineola, New York, 1998, pp. 186-220.

which the objects of our experience can simply be broken down and placed in a static and discontinuous way. Therefore, an essential task on which he sets his sights is to free time, as a “heterogeneous reality”, from the homogenizing trap of spatialization. It is also precisely for this reason that, to mark the difference between the qualitative richness of time and the “poverty” of space, the French philosopher proposes the concept of *duration*.<sup>8</sup>

Paul Virilio – the author who has dramatized more than others the despatializing effects of the speed of contemporary communication technologies – argues that the philosophies of the time, even when they thought of the latter as duration, ignored or underestimated the fundamental importance of the relationship between time and speed. According to him, instead, a vital relationship exists between time and speed; duration itself is “a category of speed”, since – as Einstein demonstrated – different forms of duration correspond to various grades of speed or, more precisely, different space-time forms, different space-time systems.<sup>9</sup> According to Virilio, Bergson “was better situated than others” to focus on these implications of Einstein’s theory of relativity; but he was not able to do so, like most contemporary philosophers who have not been able to do so.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, despite having devoted a study to Einstein’s theory, Bergson refused to attribute objective meaning and philosophical dignity to the idea of *space-time* and to the concept of the *plurality of space-time systems*, corresponding to the different speeds of movement of these same systems. The disagreement between philosophy and science that he wanted to express in this way can essentially be explained by his unwillingness to accept the idea that time, amalgamating and pluralizing itself with space, loses its irreducible specificity and its universal oneness.<sup>11</sup> But – according to what Virilio argues – precisely in this way he denied himself the opportunity to grasp the shocking consequences that, already in his time, the technological speed of communication was beginning to exert on the space-time reality of society, the closer you got to Einstein’s speed of light. What was announced, according to Virilio, was a “loss of the world”,

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8. H. Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, Alcan, Paris, 1889, engl. transl.: *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Dover Publication, Mineola, New York, 2001, pp. 90-99. On Bergson’s conception of space also see the Latin doctoral thesis (which accompanied the main thesis corresponding to the text just mentioned): H. Bergson, *Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit*, Alcan, Paris, 1889.

9. P. Virilio, “Dromologia: la logica della corsa”, *Conversazione con G. Daghini*, in P. Virilio, *La macchina che vede. L’automazione della percezione*, Sugarco Edizioni, Milano, 1989, p. 162.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

11. H. Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1992, engl. transl.: *Duration and Simultaneity*, Clinamen Press, Manchester, 1999.

a despatialization that was one with the progressive reduction of the time of interaction between the different sites to the insubstantiality of instantaneity.<sup>12</sup>

## Dwelling in danger

Among the philosophers who – as Foucault says – are most responsible for the tendency to disqualify space to the benefit of time, certainly Heidegger cannot be overlooked. In reality, his reflection on space appears to be much more careful and intense than that of Bergson. In *Being and Time* he recognizes an essential element of being human in the “spatiality of Being-in-the-world”, which also implies – according to him – an idea of space irreducible to that of a merely measurable homogeneous reality. On the other hand, according to Heidegger, this spatiality of man’s being does not consist in a pure being *in* space, but rather in a being *with* the beings and in connection with them, from which no man can be disengaged or “extracted” at will. It is true, however, that in *Being and Time* this spatial constitution of being human is subject to the foundational function that temporality performs as the existential premise of the being of man himself. Here it is time, in short, that represents for Heidegger the true way into the ontological dimension, a way that man can trace precisely by regaining the temporality of his mortal nature.<sup>13</sup>

All this does not take away from the fact that, at least in the last decades of his life, space assumes a primary importance in Heidegger, especially with the reflection that he devotes to dwelling. In the famous conference called *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, the German philosopher presented the ideas “to be a human being” and “to be on the earth” as coinciding, stating that “to be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell”. He also stated that “the relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, though essentially”.<sup>14</sup> Here he clearly defined the spatiality according to a “topological” vision, in the sense that – in his opinion – “spaces receive their essential being from locales and not from ‘space’”.<sup>15</sup> It is through the *locale* that man finds his dwelling relationship with the earth and, through this, his being a human being.

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12. P. Virilio, *Cybermonde, la politique du pire*, pp. 44-45.

13. M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1953, engl. transl.: *Being and Time*, State University of New York Press, Albany (NY), 1996, pp. 49-122, 335-340.

14. M. Heidegger, “Bauen, Wohnen, Denken”, in M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Neske, Pfullingen 1954, engl. transl.: “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writing*, edited by D. F. Krell, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1993, pp. 349, 359.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

The relationship between dwelling and building proves crucial in this regard, as evidenced – according to Heidegger – by the example of the *bridge*. Constructed properly, it makes man's dwelling possible, constituting a locale which is given as such by gathering and setting off space for the river, its banks, its surroundings, the mood of the sky and so on.<sup>16</sup> The example of the bridge also shows how the locale is a condition in which man can grasp his own mortality and his relationship with transcendence: in fact, “the bridge initiates the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side”; it, in short, “gathers, as a passage that crosses, before the divinities”.<sup>17</sup>

Here, then, man's mortality finds in the topological dimension of dwelling a possibility for access to the authenticity of being which in *Being and Time* was identified almost exclusively in temporality. Through the example of the bridge, Heidegger also makes it clear that the dwelling relationship with the earth may take place both when man is established in places, and when he passes through them: places are not really places if they are not also passageways. They, in fact, open and set off spaces “for settlement and lodging,” for a permanent settlement or a temporary camp, or – it could be said – for both sedentary and nomadic modes of living.<sup>18</sup>

This opening of Heidegger's thinking toward mobility should not, in any case, be misunderstood: it does not imply a renunciation of the stability of the relationship with the world, that dwelling allows. In fact – for Heidegger – the epochal problem that we need to think of today, in part to adequately capture and try to overcome the crisis of dwelling, is not the “lack of houses”, but it is the “homelessness” of man, his rootlessness caused by the domination of technology.<sup>19</sup> We can also assume that this implies, on the part of Heidegger, an exaltation of the unique entrenchment of peoples in “their own” places.<sup>20</sup> However, nothing prevents us from comparing Heidegger's idea of rootlessness to that of “loss of the world” which Virilio proposes, to the extent that both refer to the danger of the technological dissolution of man's relationship with the earth's spatiality in general.<sup>21</sup> In any case, Virilio argues that even the author of *Being and Time* did not

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16. Ibid., p. 354.

17. Ibid., pp. 354 and 355.

18. Ibid., p. 356.

19. Ibid., p. 363; see also M. Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, Neske, Pfullingen 1959, engl. transl.: “Memorial Address”, in M. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking: a Translation of Gelassenheit*, Harper & Row, New York, 1969, pp. 43-57.

20. For a reading contrary to this hypothesis, see C. Resta, *Il luogo e le vie. Geografie del pensiero in Heidegger*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1996, pp. 63-126.

21. P. Virilio, *Cybermonde, la politique du pire*, pp. 44-45.

pay the necessary attention to the role that speed plays to that effect, even though he reflected intensely on the nature of the technique.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, Heidegger does not completely neglect the importance of speed. Indeed, in one of his best-known texts (*The Thing*), he dwells on the fact that in our era “all distances in time and space are shrinking” because of transport vehicles and means of telecommunication: “Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time. He puts the greatest distances behind himself and thus puts everything before himself at the shortest range”. In this way – according to Heidegger – man fools himself into believing that he is attaining a greater proximity to the world, but, in fact, he finds himself in a “uniform distancelessness” in which “everything is equally far and equally near”, “everything is neither far nor near – is, as it were, without distance”.<sup>23</sup> Even for the author of *Being and Time*, in short, the new technological instruments do not bring man closer to the world. Rather, the difference between distance and proximity is dissolved and both the one and the other are lost.

Heidegger, therefore, gives important proof of the fact that the attitude of contemporary philosophy toward space cannot be reduced to a general tendency to disqualification. However, it does appear to be true that – as Foucault argues – not even he, despite his considerable attention to space, considers it to be a field of political relations or power strategies. Foucault – as we shall see – tried to remedy this shortcoming that, in his opinion, could be detected in all of contemporary philosophy. In this regard, however, he seems to want to deliberately ignore the contribution made by authors such as Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt – from very different points of view – to the reflection on the spatiality of the material world and its setting in political terms.

## World alienation

Of these two authors, Hannah Arendt offers us key elements for, first of all, framing the relationship between space and politics from a different point of view than that of the mere exercise of power and, second, for understanding important differences between the spatiality of politics and other material contexts of the human condition. From her famous reflection on the three forms of the *vita activa* (labor, work, action)

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22. P. Virilio, “Dromologia: la logica della corsa”, p. 162.

23. M. Heidegger, “Das Ding”, in M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Neske, Pfullingen 1954, pp. 37-59, engl. transl.: “The Thing”, in M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper Collins, New York, 2001, pp. 163-164.

what first emerges – as is well-known – is the fundamental distinction between the public space of the *polis* and the private space of the *oikos*; but even more important is the broader distinction between the three large spatialities of the human condition, which the author highlights: the *earth*, the *world* and the *public realm*. The *earth* corresponds to the dimension of *natural life*, that set of basic needs to which man responds with *labor* and the *consumption* of its products; the *world* is, instead, the *artificial context* defined by *enduring things*, “from the simplest use object to the masterwork of art”, that man produces through *work*, thus guaranteeing the permanence of a set of objective reference points of his existence; the *public realm*, finally, corresponds to the *dimension of active citizenship* which only effectively takes place if men interact freely in their plurality through *political action*.<sup>24</sup>

What we cannot ignore is that – according to Hannah Arendt – both the natural dimension of the human condition (the earth) and the one corresponding to political activity (the public realm) are marked by an essential instability: in the first case, men are exposed to the danger of being absorbed and overwhelmed by the relentless cyclical nature of biological life, of needs and their satisfaction through the continuous production of consumer goods; in the second, however, their condition appears to be unstable because of the ephemeral character of political actions and speeches and for their constant succession. In neither case is man guaranteed the certainty of a permanent condition. What, conversely, can provide stability in these two situations is the guarantee of a relationship with the long lasting world of artificial enduring things produced through work. This, according to Arendt, applies above all to the natural dimension of the earth on which life takes place.

Only we who have erected the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us, who have built it into the environment of nature so that we are protected from her, can look upon nature as something “objective”. Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity.<sup>25</sup>

A similar argument, on the other hand, applies to the public realm: it is essentially ephemeral, since it “rises directly out of acting together, the sharing of words and deeds”, and lasts as long as these activities last; therefore, it can acquire permanence only on the condition of finding its own stable environment through the construction

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24. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London, 1998, pp. 7-11, 22-37, 122, 136-139.  
25. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

of an artificial and long-lasting common world. It is with regards to this need that “the Greek solution” – i.e. the *polis* – assumes an exemplary value. Of course, it “is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it rises directly out of acting together”;<sup>26</sup> nevertheless, it allows free men to consistently act, interact, stand out and leave a trace of their actions only if it is based on a stable material and legal organization, i.e. on an artificial world created through the work of the architect and the legislator.<sup>27</sup>

Having thought about the relationship between man and his condition through this complex spatial articulation, Hannah Arendt also took into consideration the serious detachment from the material world which modern man has been led to by various historical factors. It is a process that the author defines with the expression “world alienation”, arguing that the modern age coincides essentially with this alienation. This is thought to primarily derive from the “shrinkage of the globe” which began with the great geographical discoveries and has been completed by the vertiginous reduction of distances through the speed of contemporary media; in the final stage of this process, the invention of the airplane gave man the ability “of leaving the surface of the earth altogether”, showing that “any decrease of terrestrial distance can be won only at the price of putting a decisive distance between man and earth, of alienating man of his immediately surroundings”.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, a similar process derived from the Protestant Reformation. The “innerwordly asceticism” which Weber attributes to Calvinism is a renunciation of the world, it is an “innerwordly alienation” that is attained precisely by remaining and working more and more intensely in the world. This form of world alienation has contributed, on the one hand, to the formation of the capitalist spirit and, on the other hand, to the beginning of a systematic accumulation of wealth which has its origins in the “expropriation of the peasantry, which was the unforeseen consequence of the expropriation of church property”, caused by the Reformation itself.<sup>29</sup> In this way, with the appropriative expropriation of properties dating back to previous eras, nascent capitalism triggered the cycle of destructive appropriation and consumption of the world in which we find ourselves today: “all property” is now “destroyed in the process of its appropriation, all

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 250, 251.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

things devoured in the process of its production, and the stability of the world undermined in a constant process of change”.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Galileo’s invention of the telescope and the “development of a new science that considers the nature of the earth from the view point of the universe” radically contributed to such upheavals.<sup>31</sup> One of the main causes of the gradual separation of man from sensitive nature and from his own geophysical condition lies exactly in the universal impact of modern science. In fact, according to Arendt, with the new science not only do the laws of the infinite universe refer to its unfathomable mathematical structure, but also the “terrestrial sense data and movements” are reduced “to mathematical symbols”. In this way, science frees “man from the shackles of earth-bound experience and his power of cognition from the shackles of finitude”.<sup>32</sup>

According to the author, the prevalence of subjectivism in modern philosophy, starting with Descartes, has also greatly contributed to this general separation of man from tangible reality. He, taking doubt as the cornerstone of thinking, made the sense of this separation clear: the human capacity to think while doubting becomes the indispensable condition for access to the real world. This is no longer a “given” and can even remain inaccessible; what still remains is the certainty of the reality of thought itself, inasmuch as it is supervised by doubt. In this way, what emerges is perhaps the most significant consequence of the various processes of modernity’s “world alienation”: “what men now have in common is not the world but the structure of their minds, and this they cannot have in common, strictly speaking”.<sup>33</sup>

It is worth highlighting at least one of the various implications of Arendt’s thought here: modern man’s distancing from the spatiality of the material world can be explained not only by a set of economic and technological factors, but also by the emergence of a certain *ethos*, a certain way of being in the world: from this point of view, we can say that man is able to practice, increasingly more actively, a universal knowledge that transcends the earth and an undefined manumission of the world, which relativizes its permanence, provided he abstracts from the world itself his thinking and his existence, his living and his dwelling, his laboring, his building and his acting.

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30. Ibid., p. 252.

31. Ibid., p. 248.

32. Ibid., p. 265.

33. Ibid., p. 283; see also *ibid.*, pp. 271-280.

## The unlikely solidity of the modern *nomos*

Carl Schmitt also offers us elements useful for reconstructing the more or less remote causes of our present relationship with the world. Furthermore, he does this by carrying out a reflection on spatiality in clearer and more explicitly political terms than Hannah Arendt. According to the German author, as is well-known, a *political order* can only be based, first of all, on the precise organization of space. In this sense, he insists on the fact that, at the beginning of modernity, the discovery of the New World opened an era of conquest and partition of the land by the great European powers, which – according to him – made the appropriation and the possession of Earth’s space its *nomos*, the foundational principle of the modern political order: on the basis of this *nomos* they have, since then, organized their States and regulated their relations, including war.<sup>34</sup> Schmitt, moreover, characterizes this political order by also showing the specific approach in which the sea was key: unlike dry land, which was ordered by the borders between sovereign states, the open sea was not subject to any territorial sovereignty, it was left in a state of general availability, as a spatial element profoundly different from the mainland.<sup>35</sup> As is well-known, the clear definition of this situation – according to the author – was the source of the great advances of the legal-political civilization, in particular, the limitation of war to the sole purpose of conquest: the danger of *war without limits*, which is present in religious conflicts and in civil wars, was noticeably contained.<sup>36</sup>

If today it is said that globalization has put an end to the political order of modernity since the technological developments that characterize it radically reduce the importance of spatiality, this is because Schmitt’s theses generally appear to be convincing: for the most part it is believed that they describe what preceded that which is happening today; at the same time, however, they are considered “outdated” because the importance of the spatial organization of political structures seems decidedly in decline today.<sup>37</sup> What we risk overlooking, however, it is that Schmitt’s theory of the modern “*nomos* of

34. C. Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, Greven, Köln, 1950, engl. transl.: *The Nomos of the Earth*, Telos Press, New York, 2006; C. Schmitt, *Land und Meer*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1954, engl. transl.: *Land and Sea*, Plutarch Press, Washington, 1997.

35. C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, pp. 172-184.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-171.

37. See, in particular, C. Galli: *Spazi politici. L’età moderna e l’età globale*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2001; Id., *La guerra globale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2002. Among the many studies on the decline of the modern political order which, more or less directly, have Schmitt’s reflection on the *nomos* of the land among their premises, see: M. Cacciari, *Geofilosofia dell’Europa*, Adelphi, Milano, 1994; S. Ortino, *Il nuovo Nomos della Terra*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1999; D. Palano, *Fino alla fine del mondo. Saggi sul ‘politico’ nella rivoluzione spaziale contemporanea*, Liguori, Napoli, 2010.

the earth” is one with the announcement of the decline of the same order it describes;<sup>38</sup> in it, in particular, the complementariness between the precise territorial division of the state sovereignty and the free availability of the maritime space immediately appears to be a totally asymmetrical relationship between virtually irreconcilable ways of understanding and treating space; the same comparison between on-land state powers and maritime state powers appears destined to be quickly translated into a progressive attrition of this seemingly balanced complementariness.

In this sense, Schmitt first comments on the fact that in this situation “the dry land would belong to a score of sovereign states. The sea, on the other hand, would belong to nobody, but in reality, it would belong to a single country: England”<sup>39</sup>. He also highlights the profound diversity of ways of making war which correspond to the land and the sea: while the ground war is fought by armies “in open, pitched battle”, the methods of maritime war cannot be reduced to “naval combat”, but also include “bombardment, the blockade of enemy shores, and the capture of neutral and merchantmen, in virtue of the right to capture”. Through the “starvation blockade”, in particular, maritime war indiscriminately affects “the entire population of the involved territory”.<sup>40</sup> All this, in fact, happens because the sea is a *detritorialization* factor that destabilizes the political sovereignty based on the ownership of land, which is the essential condition – according to Schmitt – of the *modern political order*.<sup>41</sup> The seeds of detritorialization, on the other hand, are what caused the end of the “complementariness” between land and sea with the prevailing, first of air navigation, and then the means of telecommunication.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, Schmitt’s discourse is an important prerequisite to the analyses that speak of globalization in terms of despatialization, not only because it defines the political and spatial order that today is coming to an end, but also because it clearly foreshadows the crisis of this spatial order. Nevertheless, from his point of view, the parable of the modern political order does not simply translate into a progressive despatialization. Rather, it produces a sequence of stages in which different spatial dimensions prevail: the *land*, the *sea* and, finally, the *air*. Therefore, it can be said that Schmitt’s reflection is reducible neither to a theory of the unequivocal solidity of the modern *nomos* of the earth nor to a generic foreshadowing of the despatialization of which we speak today.

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38. M. Cacciari, *Geofilosofia dell’Europa*, pp. 105-130.

39. C. Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, p. 46.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

41. In this regard see the observations of A. Bolaffi, “Presentazione”, in C. Schmitt, *Terra e mare. Una considerazione sulla storia del mondo*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1986, p. 23-26.

42. C. Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, pp. 56-59.

These implications of Schmitt's discourse are important because – among other things – they urge us not to confuse the concepts of *deterritorialization* and *despatialization*. The distinction between the two can be useful to understand, in particular, whether for some time in our history there have been deterritorialization processes that not only do not involve a despatialization, but may also give rise to forms of re-spatialization and, sometimes, even re-territorialization. Moreover, this distinction can help us at least to hypothesize that forms of re-spatialization are present in our days.

## Protean space

Foucault's research on "spaces as a historical and political problem" is particularly fruitful on the importance of the re-spatialization processes. Despite not having made specific reflections on the terrestrial dimension, in his studies on power he effectively examined the spatial aspects of the transformation of our society. This is the case of his analyses of *disciplinary institutions* (prisons, schools, colleges, factories, barracks, hospitals, etc.) which have constituted a fundamental system in the "government of men" since about the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These institutions – in his opinion – are based on a precise structuring of space, since they consist mostly in well-defined and circumscribed areas. They are also organized by spatial divisions and distributions of bodies: partitions in college dormitories; specifically, places assigned to the sick in hospitals, to workers in factories, to school children in schools, and so on. They organize these distributions under the principle of "functional sites", for example, by connecting the positions of individual workers in factories to particular tasks, or by isolating infectious patients in medical clinics. They create "serial spaces", organizing sets of individuals in lines, rows, ordered sequences, to establish hierarchies of value, merit, efficiency or capacity. Ultimately, they are systems that control the mobility of people and things, since they filter, slow down, and supervise the movement taking place in cities, above all.<sup>43</sup>

The modern state – according to Foucault – soon realized the importance of these and other forms of intervention on space; therefore, it has used them as techniques for governing society from the very beginning of its history. Hence, it can be said that its special relationship with the land was rapidly downsized in favor of a more complex political approach to space: the effective exercise of state power cannot be based solely

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43. M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975, engl. transl.: *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, Random House, New York, 1977, pp. 141-148.

on the possession of the territory, exercised by the defense of its borders, the repression of internal enemies and the taxation of land-based resources. It requires, above all, the ability to govern men by punitive, educational, productive, and healthcare techniques and institutions, which, in turn, implies the need to manage space by means of urban planning, architecture, collective facilities, and so on.

In a well-known course, held in 1978, Foucault developed this line of research, pointing to the three main ways of politically organizing space which – according to him – have been established in modernity. The first corresponds to the centralized control of the geographical *territory*, typical of the *sovereign power* exercised by subjugating those who live within the boundaries of a state through legislative, military and fiscal means; the second corresponds to the architectural organization of an *abstract and hierarchical space*, finalized to the exercise of *disciplinary power* that applies especially to the *bodies and behaviors* of single individuals through various forms of control and surveillance; the third, finally, hypothesizes space as a *collective milieu*, as a dynamic and complex *environment* in which natural and artificial elements and processes interact: climate, geophysical characteristics, collective habits, ways of living, and the movement of goods, persons, water, miasma, disease, etc. The latter form of spatialization corresponds to the *biopolitical government* of society, through which – according to Foucault – there is a *shift in emphasis from the territory to the population*: it is this that, starting in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has been established as a privileged government object, as the “multiplicity of individuals who are and fundamentally and essentially only exist biologically bound to the materiality within which they live”.<sup>44</sup> Finally, it is important to consider that the city has a fundamental role in each of these spatial organizations, as it is itself permeated by them.<sup>45</sup>

What, of course, Foucault allows us to think of when proposing this genealogy of modern spaces of power is that first the disciplinary strategies and then also the bio-political government trigger the relative *detritorialization* of the exercise of power, processes far from being reducible to a decrease of the importance of spatial materiality. Therefore, it can be said that he, too, indirectly invites us not to adapt too easily to the analysis and narratives that today indefinitely emphasize tendencies to despatialization: if it is legitimate to think that in our era the bio-political and disciplinary functions of power do not disappear, but rather are even updated with the assistance of telematics

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44. M. Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France. 1977-1978*, Gallimard-Seuil, Paris, 2004, engl. transl.: *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2007, p. 21.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-23.

technologies, it is also reasonable to conclude that spatiality continues to assert itself, change and evolve as an essential dimension, even through the metamorphoses of these functions. It cannot at all be excluded that the telematics technologies contribute to an intense reorganization of spatial policies that lie beyond the territorializing approach. It is also in this sense, in fact, that it is possible to interpret the developments of the so-called “geo-spatial web”, the “geo-browsers” (like Google Earth), the “geo-surveillance” systems, the electronic tracking and monitoring of all kinds of activity and physical movement.<sup>46</sup>

### **Towards space without a world?**

If these are plausible hypotheses, what can be hypothesized instead on the forms and on the specific consequences of the processes of deterritorialization? On these issues we can refer, in particular, to the analyses of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on the globalization of capitalism. Although these authors tend to “exalt” the liberating potential of the resulting *deterritorialization* processes, they also highlight the impossibility to isolate these processes from those of *territorialization* and *reterritorialization* with which the first cross or continuously alternate. Furthermore, Guattari particularly shows himself to be aware of the risk that the deterritorializing thrusts of contemporary capitalism entail serious “earthly” alterations of the ecological balance, as well as forms of “mental” and political regression of society.<sup>47</sup>

Contextualizing our present time from a similar angle, we can easily find that today neither the processes of technological deterritorialization nor their despatializing effects prevent opposite processes from occurring. For example, in this sense it is important to consider that today the sea is no longer a truly “smooth” space irreducible to any partition.<sup>48</sup> While the heart of the oceans still seems to be free from rigid divisions, many other maritime areas are increasingly subject to substantial appropriations and precise

46. See, among other studies: A. Scharl, K. Tochtermann (eds.), *The Geospatial Web*, Springer London Ltd., London, 2007; J. Döring, T. Thielmann (eds.), *Mediengeographie: Theorie, Analyse, Diskussion*, Transcript, Bielefeld, 2009; H. A. Karimi, *Advanced Location-Based Technologies and Services*, CRC Press, Boca Raton-London-New York, 2013; R. Wilken, G. Goggin (eds.), *Locative Media*, Routledge, New York-Oxon, 2014.

47. See: G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, engl. transl.: *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1987; F. Guattari, *Les trois écologies*, Galilée, Paris, 1989, engl. transl.: *The Three Ecologies*, Continuum, New York, 2008; F. Guattari, *Piano sul pianeta. Capitale mondiale integrato e globalizzazione*, Ombre corte, Verona 1997; see also: C. Raffestin, “Territorializzazione, deterritorializzazione, riterritorializzazione e informazione”, in A. Turco, *Regione e regionalizzazione*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1984, pp. 69-82.

48. On this issue see G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 474-482.

allocations in areas intended – besides for mobility of naval traffic and fishing – for “sedentary” uses and structures: mining, pipelines, wind farms, aquaculture, biotechnological exploitation of marine organisms, etc.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, today we are often faced with subjective forms of the reterritorialization of relations with the world, implemented – in ways that are sometimes neo-identitarian, neo-archaic and xenophobic – especially by societies or communities subjected to the marginalizing effects of the dominant processes.<sup>50</sup> This does not only happen as a reaction to the fact that the flows of communication and the global economy are spiraling away from the immediate activities that take place in physical locations; it also happens because these places are subject to tangible and often devastating deterritorializations on the material plane<sup>51</sup> The current processes of deterritorialization, in fact, should be recognized not only in the telematic relativization of the importance of geographical locations and distances, but also in the unlimited urbanization of land surface and in the indefinite expansion of the metropolis that mark our era. These are processes which – as claimed by Alberto Magnaghi – tend to destroy the local areas as spatial formations with historical and natural specificity and structures capable of reproducing themselves in the long term. From this point of view, the current explosion of urbanization, on the one hand, deterritorializes, and, on the other, produces new spaces increasingly lacking in human, historical and ecosystemic qualities.<sup>52</sup>

Almost all of these trends can be explained in large part by the political hegemony that neoliberalism exerts today on the government of space, as well as of society. In this tableau, contemporary cities – distributed on a hierarchy dominated by “global cities” – are increasingly areas in which major economic entities (real estate, financial and commercial capital) intervene as privileged partners of the local public authorities. Therefore, they are becoming, above all, places of the deregulation of the use of building land and the privatization of public spaces. The deterritorialized urban structures of the districts for business, shopping, consumption, tourism flows, large exhibitions; the *gentrification* of city centers; the creation of *gated communities* for the wealthiest social classes, of slums and new ghettos for the poorest, or “detention” centers for immigrants

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49. See N. Escach, “De la mer en partage au partage de la mer”, in *Le Monde diplomatique*, 748, 2016, pp. 20-21.

50. See: F. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, pp. 41-43; G. Marramao, *Passaggio a Occidente. Filosofia e globalizzazione*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2003, pp. 86-87.

51. F. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, p. 29.

52. A. Magnaghi, *Il Progetto locale. Verso la coscienza di luogo*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2010, pp. 23-43.

emerge as exemplary results of an overall decontextualization of the concrete areas of life, of dwelling and of interaction among men.<sup>53</sup>

From a general point of view we can say that these and other similar processes are “alienating” the terrestrial and worldly, common and public multidimensionality of our world, but – at the same time – they are concretely affecting and deeply redefining its spatiality. Ultimately, these too appear to disprove not so much the idea of technological despatialization, as the propensity to regard it as the key to a decisive understanding of our age, or even as a virtually all-encompassing “destiny”.

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53. On these issues, see: D. Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism”, in *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 71, 1, 1989, pp. 3-17; D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso, London-New York, 2012; S. Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks (CA), 2006; Ead., “The Global City: introducing a Concept”, in *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, XI, 2, 2005, pp. 27-43; A. Petti, *Arcipelaghi e enclave: architettura dell’ordinamento spaziale contemporaneo*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2007; U. Rossi, A. Vanolo, *Geografia politica urbana*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2010; V. De Lucia, *Le mie città. Mezzo secolo di urbanistica in Italia*, Diabasis, Reggio Emilia, 2010; E. W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2010; G. Semi, *Gentrification. Tutte le città come Disneyland?*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2015.