

Orientation for Session 2, Week 2

The reading for week 2 starts with the key observation that a new orientation or “consideration” of space does not depend on making a certain kind of connection with “the ordinary concept space as the primary factor of reality.” (10). Instead, contemplating ordinary space can lead to a vision of space “at a . . . more primary level . . . related to the primary ground of all existence.” (11).

We will look at what is being said here during the next phone call, but to prepare the way, I want to refer back to some points that were made in the previous reading that we did not have time to discuss in the phone call; for this reason, this Orientation is going to be longer than usual.

- Space can be found within or beneath the “opacities and hard surfaces” that make up our world (3). In other words, the usual distinction between space and things, while true at an ordinary level, does not have the force we usually assign it. My fingers move through space as I type these words, but my fingers are already in space, and in this sense space moves through space.
- Space is not only physical. The text does not argue for this point here; it simply assumes it is true: referring to “intangible, immeasurable psychological spaces.” (3) (Compare WIR 34: “If we say . . . that the space we perceive/encounter/interact with is a function of our interest or concerns, then there is no reason to limit ‘space’ to the physical domain.”) Now ordinary space is already “intangible and immeasurable” (Consider: when we measure distance, are we measuring space?) So is there a difference between physical and psychological space? In what sense is the space of a thought, or a memory, intangible?
- It makes sense to say that every ‘thing’ that appears has its own kind of space. “Thoughts are ‘within’ mind spaces,” etc. (4). For instance, your own body ‘occupies’ its own space. When you move, do you take your space with you? It seems you could see it both ways. Incidentally, it seems that each space is impermeable to objects in other spaces. A thought cannot show up in ‘tree space’, or a tree in ‘thought space’. Also, each space has its own rules: for instance, how a thought is located may be very different from how a tree is located.
- The particular space that the self occupies is one of crowding, limits, etc. (5; see also 17) But if we changed ‘focal settings’ (4), such limits might be transformed. Limits and opacity result from a particular focal setting, and we could challenge that setting. But of course, we don’t normally think that’s possible.
- In our particular lower-level space, both self and objects are given as impenetrable. Lower level knowledge operates on this basis, making sense of appearance in causal terms, and more generally in terms of “relationships and contrasts” between impenetrable ‘things’. A more truly space-centered view would challenge that (see TSK 8). We don’t yet know what form that challenge would take, but the reading begins to offer some possibilities; for instance, see TSK 9: We can find space where before we saw objects. (I am going to put on the website a short video [powers.mp4] that explores inner and outer space as a way of raising such challenges.) Of course, the Giant Body exercises do this as well.
- By exploring other focal settings, “we can come to a kind of overall understanding which is itself a kind of space.” (6) In other words, challenging and questioning both open space; in a sense, they ‘create’ space. This is not a mysterious point: one simple way to explore it is suggested at TSK 6: ‘the seeing of objects and space’ also occurs in a ‘seeing space’.

This list of topics is substantial, and it would certainly be possible to spend a long time on each one. Fortunately, each of them will be explored in more detail as this course proceeds. My purpose in listing them here is to set the stage for what we will discuss as we go through the reading for the coming week. The main focus will be the possibility that we could understand space as Great Space rather than the lower-level space we usually occupy and take for granted, and what this means.

At the end of Session One, we looked at the three levels of space, time, and knowledge. I believe we touched on the question of whether Space, Level Three is the same as Great Space. This reading suggests that ‘Great Space’ should be understood differently, in contrast to lower-level space rather than as the third level in a three-level structure. The reading we did on this point in the last Session (TSK 111-114) seems to me to point in the same direction. However, I’ve never made a systematic study of that point, and any of you is welcome to bring forward evidence from the books that suggests to the contrary.

As you know, we are working with two kinds of exercises in this course. The first is the sitting practice, listed for each week. For this coming week, it’s TSK Ex. 4-6, which build on Ex. 1-3 and invite us to explore how an exploration of space can create a space that allows for experience and knowing quite different from what is possible in ordinary space.

The second exercise is a ‘walkabout practice’, something to do during the course of the day, perhaps in the midst of ordinary experience or perhaps when you have a spare moment or two. The walkabout practice for this week is related to the Giant Body practices, but works in the mental real. Here is the question to consider (and discuss on the website, if you like): Can you enter the space of a thought or an emotion? What does it mean to do so? Is it like going into the space of the body, as in the Giant Body exercises?

In addition to the link to the video I mentioned above, I will post on the website a pdf of the article I wrote on “space projecting space.” This reading is optional, but those of you in the teacher program should do it.