

The Interstices of Reality

Review of Edward S. Casey's, *The World on Edge*
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 385 pages.

For the most part, we live our everyday lives surrounded by solid, substantial, reliable things fitting into, and supporting, our practical projects. We live our lives believing in the stable and, more or less, unified nature of our selves and the life-worlds we inhabit. We live our lives trusting that the usual course of events, even if it can quite often surprise us, will not undermine our basic sense of reality as continuous, stable, more or less permanent. It is a basic existential meaning of what phenomenology calls “natural attitude”, and psychology (after R. D. Laing) “ontological security.” In his most recent book – *The World on Edge* – Edward S. Casey, as if inspired by the phenomenological dream of reaching into the origins of the world, the *momentum* of its birth, takes his readers for a breath-taking phenomenological journey through the peripheries and interstices of reality, through the realm of ephemeral, elusive and at the same time insistent presences of edges. This is the realm where things begin and end, where reality reveals its fluid and elusive side. This realm – highly ambiguous, heterodoxical, and governed by a specific logic – may even cause a kind of existential vertigo.

At first sight, the book seems to be simply another very detailed and scrupulous descriptive analysis of a particular area of human experience – often overlooked or simply marginalized in both theoretical reflection and our everyday dealings with things. How often do we pay an attention to the edges of things and tools we use? What about the edges of places and events, or the edges of our mental states? Do we really care about them? Or are we at least aware of them? Do we understand their nature in the first place? For the most part, they are beyond the scope of our interest – practical, theoretical, contemplative or aesthetic. Obviously, there are some significant exceptions to this general rule, but, as is usually the case in such matters, they do not undermine the dominant character of the rule. These questions and observations, simple as they

are, initiate Casey's outstanding phenomenological enterprise. In its course, Casey once again proves¹ to be not only an advocate of the forgotten or neglected (at least to a certain degree) fields of human experience but also a genuine phenomenologist – instead of making purely theoretical elaborations on the meaning of phenomenology, he carefully and attentively practices it. Following the famous phenomenological imperative, he goes back to the things themselves and tries to see them from their own side, to look at different, often highly ephemeral, shades of their presence, to hear their subtle voices. In his eagle eye, reality uncovers its complex and ephemeral aspects, a multiplicity of dimensions and secret interconnections for the most part unnoticed and very often unheard of before. In his efforts, he is like a painter who makes things visible and teaches us how to look at the reality around us in order to see what is concealed within it; to bring the invisible into visibility.

The main value and importance of Casey's brilliant book goes much further than just paying tribute to something which so far did not find a proper elaboration and articulation in the philosophical discourse,² let alone our everyday experience. It shows how edges are not only all-pervasive elements of human (and non-human) encounters with the enviroing world. Regardless of their ephemeral and marginal character, they play a constitutive and formative role in all these encounters, as well as in all forms of our experience. It is by means of them that we get the orientation in the world and gain access to things, places, events, bodily and mental states. As Casey himself puts it:

This book pursues the thesis that edges are constitutive not only of what we perceive, but also of what we think and of the places and events in which we are situated...the role of edges is central to the drama of experience at every level – perceptual, practical, cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, intersubjective. Far from being negligible aspect of ordinary experience, they are an extraordinary and quite constructive (though also at times destructive) basis of this experience.³

As such, they appear to have a fundamental importance not only to our experience, but also to the ontological “design” of the objects of our experience. They condition these objects' finitude and determine their unique character. Thus, the impressively broad scope of Casey's phenomenological descriptions is accompanied by a highly original ontology which comprises not only objects, but also places, events, bodily phenomena, mental states, artworks and so forth.

1) It seems that it is Casey's philosophical “trademark”. In most of his works he analyzes phenomena, forms of experience or categories which were somehow underestimated, overlooked or misinterpreted by the philosophical tradition. The best examples here can be: his excellent study on imagination – “Imagining: A Phenomenological Study” (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, 2nd ed, 2000); his thorough phenomenological and historical studies devoted to the category of place – *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; 2nd edition, 2009) and *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); or his comprehensive and highly sophisticated analyses of a glance, its role and importance in our experience of the reality – *The World at a Glance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). *The World on Edge* was thought to be a kind of phenomenological sequel to the last of these works. In fact, on a close reading it somehow connects the main problems with which Casey was occupied from the very beginning of his philosophical career. At least this how I read and understand this book.

2) The few philosophical works by Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Avrum Stroll or rather brief remarks in the phenomenological works of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, valuable as they were, were not able to give a full justice to the whole range of phenomena analyzed in *The World on Edge*.

3) Casey, *The World on Edge*, xiii.

Edges I contend here, are essential to being a thing or a thought, a place or an event – and by extension, a person or an artwork. Without edges, none of these could be what they are. ... Nothing distinct or finite can emerge except as edged – and edged in a specific manner that helps to form its unique identity.⁴

Furthermore, in his relentless effort of describing and thinking of, and through, edges, Casey does not lose from sight, even for a moment, his main aim, which permeates, though in some parts of the book rather implicitly, the whole work. What is really at stake when we think about edges? Why should we direct our attention to them? Is there any reason – except the phenomenological curiosity – to make any fuss about them? It seems to me that the ultimate aim or effect of this enterprise is of ethical – in a very broad sense of the term – and social-cultural nature. Perhaps, the main lesson one can learn from this book is that by being more attentive and respectful to edges we can better understand our human condition and its finite character. That is, we can better understand the nature of our limitations (natural, cultural, ontological) and their ambivalent character – at once enclosing us within the realm of established determinations and opening us to the new dimensions of reality, revealing new perspectives on it.

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What are the edges? How are we to speak about them? By means of what concepts can we describe them? Are there any adequate methods of approaching them? Where are we while making any attempts to describe edges? In what particular region of reality?

The most common answer to the first of these questions would be that the word “edge” refers to “the outermost part of an object” or to “the abrupt termination of something.”⁵ But this common usage does not give justice to the multiplicity of edges. Neither it would render their complicated structure and ontological status. The first truth about them is that – regardless of their elusive, ephemeral, non-substantial character – they do exist, “they have being.”⁶ However, as existing, they are “nearly nothing” or “next to nothing”. “Edges have a curious way of always giving out, coming to naught, ending or about to end.”⁷ As such, they are inherently dynamic, transitory, as if always ready to turn into their opposite. At once they enclose an object, a place or an event, determining its spatio-temporal extent, and open it up to the environs. They mark its disappearance – edges are where this object/place/event is vanishing – and at the same time expose it, and make it effectual. “Edges exist where something that is thrust forward is at the same time on the verge of disappearing. This is so despite the fact that edges are also the very place where that same something ... takes effect ...”⁸ In this sense, edges are essentially heterodoxical, which means that their very nature is constituted by two opposing factors or phenomena which are “yoked together in a disjunctive conjunction.”⁹

Casey points at three features/situations which decide about the heterodoxical character of edges. First, in their case there is a significant reversed correlation between concrete physical qualities (mass, weight, size,

4) Ibid.

5) Ibid., 3.

6) Ibid., 20.

7) Ibid., xxvii.

8) Ibid., 322.

9) Ibid., 323.

duration) and their effectiveness – the less of the former the more of the latter. “...it is precisely from within that which is diminishing that force is exerted.”¹⁰

Second, every single edge is the “space” where many directionalities and dimensions overlap. Being always something singular and unique, or rather determining such a character of something, the edge is always overdetermined by social, historical, ethical, personal and interpersonal meanings. It is as if speaking about the edges as something univocal, strictly individual, separated would miss its profound character. Every edge is the bearer of a multiplicity of meanings which arise out of different planes of existence.

Third, “... edges, although next to nothing in their constitution, bring about proximity to many things.”¹¹ There is a certain “material intentionality”¹² inscribed into their being. They are directed outwards, beyond themselves and beyond that something of which they are the edges towards something other. They are the effective presences which actualizes themselves as co-presences. This process of actualization can take different forms starting from a direct and even forceful influence – like in the case of an edge of knife forcefully touching the edge of another object; to a much more subtle kind of foreshadowing or prefiguring certain interrelations or whole situations. In any case, edges constitute or reveal the inherent with-structure of the world.¹³ “The material intentionality of edges is realized through what can be called apperceptive transfer... edges take us into enviroing dynamic fields which we apperceive rather than perceive...” However, they always do it “from within the confinement that they embody in their role as ending, circumscribing and delimiting.”¹⁴ In this way, their twofold heterodoxical structure combines factuality and possibility, where the latter always arises out of the former. They are a double movement – that of setting the limits and giving definitive contours to whatever exists and happens, and that of self-transcendence. In doing so, they put us in touch not only with what is particular, but with the whole regions of the reality.

That is connected with their bivalent nature, which takes on two basic forms. Edges are *intermediary* – as located “between thing and non-thing, as coming into being and leaving it, as being between substance and medium”¹⁵ and moving between “one thing and other things, one place and many places, one event and several events, one bodily or psychical process and numerous others.”¹⁶ At the same time, however, they are *intense* – as having certain intensity, consistency, as always exercising a certain degree of resistance, as expressing closure and finitude. Edges are an *immanent* characteristic of a certain thing, event, place or region, while at the same time they are also *transcendent*, as they express a constant movement outwards, beyond themselves. “Every edge comes double-edged, two-in-one: as intense and intermediary, transcendent and immanent; but also as outgoing and incoming, adventuresome and abiding, jutting out and receding, existing and perishing – and more and less.”¹⁷

This heterodoxical nature of edges calls for – as I have already indicated – a specific logic, whose elaboration is another of Casey’s great and highly original contributions to the contemporary phenomenological discourse. It is – as he himself calls it – the “Logic of the Less”. In accordance with its basic principle, what at first sight seems to be diminutive, vanishing, “nearly nothing” exerts the unexpected force and effect. The

10) Ibid.

11) Ibid., 325.

12) Ibid., 326.

13) Ibid., 21.

14) Ibid., 327.

15) Ibid, 336.

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid., 337.

well-known saying “the less is more” expresses the truth of that very logic. But we should not understand it in a trivial, quasi-teleological sense, where the less is becoming or can become more. “The logic of the less signifies just this: in being less, an entity or event is more. ... The less is itself, in itself and by itself, more. By way of being less, it is more. ... It is more itself precisely as less.”¹⁸ With all their ephemerality and elusiveness, edges lead to the specific augmentation of the reality not only by the aforementioned moving us elsewhere or by revealing not-yet-experienced connections between things, events or places and in this way creating the new wholes and the new dimensions of the reality. They also bring with them very often highly significant political, social, cultural, cognitive, existential or even psychical consequences. It does not mean that in this way they become something more – they always already are virtually something more. Let’s think about the border between countries – something real, but at the same time ephemeral, graspable mostly if not exclusively as something purely conventional – set to defend the territorial integrity of a particular country. It is at once enclosing and sending off to other territories. It always brings with itself a variety of cultural, social, historical, personal and interpersonal meanings. Now, let’s think about the very same border from the perspective of an immigrant escaping from the war zone to find a refuge – it can be a gate to a new better life or an unsurpassable obstacle. In both cases, much, if not all, depends on something radically insistent, even though almost non-existing.

Let’s think about the edge of a scientific discovery – a momentum almost impossible to be exactly determined in time, but in most cases having inestimable consequences for science and often to the whole culture. One of another Casey’s favorite examples is of a mereological nature – the relation between a part and the whole. The latter is always not only reflected but almost literally present in the former – as “being compressed and expressed there.”¹⁹

Describing edges requires a particular methodological approach, which is a constant exercise not only in a careful discrimination of the most subtle aspects of the reality and often much nuanced differences between them. It is also a constant exercise in analytic and conceptual self-limitation. The main task here is to avoid as much as possible too hasty imposition of rigid, purely formal, exact concepts, which could perfectly render the ideal dimensions of the reality, but often betray the genuine flesh of the world. Edges are to be not so much the projections of our intentions, but rather vice-versa – we are to recognize ourselves as belonging to the edged-world, which puts forth its own forms. Therefore, Casey insists that the “adequate” descriptive tools in case of most of edges would be – as Edmund Husserl called them – the “morphological concepts”²⁰. The latter being vague and indefinite themselves seem to be capable of giving justice to the vague, fluid, ambivalent and elusive character of the phenomena in which we are interested.

Casey himself calls his method quite adequately “peri-phenomenology” – “the description of ostensibly peripheral phenomena.”²¹ And he further explains that since: “...*peri-* signifies ‘around’ or ‘about’ and is associated with risk ... the affinity between a distinctive peri-phenomenology and edge situations is apparent. Peri-phenomenology describes the outstanding parts of things and phases of events as these parts and phases are integral to all that we experience.”²²

He carefully distinguishes it from the Husserlian eidetic phenomenology, which aims at unchanging essences of the phenomena in question, and from any form of phenomenology, which devotes itself mostly to

18) Ibid., 329.

19) Ibid., 335.

20) Ibid., 9–10.

21) Ibid., xix.

22) Ibid., 301.

pre-reflective forms of human experience as apparently the most original dimension of our being-in-the-world. The former approach would not give justice to the multiplicity of edges. As to the latter – since edges permeate all forms of human experience and all dimensions of reality any exclusive concentration on a particular level of experience misses the point here. Casey himself defines his method by comparing it to radical empiricism understood as a special faithfulness to what is really given to us within different forms of experience. The radical empiricism implies that we recognize as real anything what can be uncovered and described within the experience itself regardless of the character of that very experience (reflective, pre-reflective etc.) – structures, relations, interconnections and so forth. Even though Casey does not develop his alliance to the radical empiricism it is visible throughout most of his work. The best sign of that is his insistence on the real character of all sorts of edges, including even psychical, musical or conceptual, thus “something” really and “stubbornly” existing. They are given to us, presents themselves within the experiential field, but transgress – often quite forcefully – the status of being just intentional “objects”. They always resist (at least to a certain degree) our intentions and as such constitute “closely woven fabric” of our life-worlds. “Peri-phenomenology focuses on the areas and phases of discontinuity in one’s experience and thought: the interstices where things and events begin and end. These same areas and phases, taken together constitute a special plateau from which we can connect with other plateaus in an ever expanding nexus.”²³

Even though Casey does not state that explicitly (except several telling references to Gadamer), his method is also a specific form of hermeneutics. It can be seen as a careful investigation of the ways in which different, more or less complex, constellations of meanings appear out of the experiential peripheries. The aforementioned idea of overdetermination of edges, the different forms of their interrelations (up to the complete interfusion in particular cases), the importance of the relations between parts and the wholes, the attention paid to the conceptual and artistic edges, the special care for the proper ways of speaking about the edges – these are all clearly hermeneutic moments of the method applied in *The World on Edge*.

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Casey divides his undertaking into three main phenomenological steps. First, he distinguishes different kinds and types of edges one can find within the experiential reality. The purpose of this step is not only to provide the whole set of examples, which can serve as a basis for further phenomenological considerations, but also to provide a kind of initial taxonomy and typology of edges. So, he describes and draws very careful distinctions between borders (ideal, formal, linear, delimiting and defining, closing in and closing off) and boundaries (informal, porous, permeable and indefinite, opening up and opening out) – which serve for him as a kind of paradigmatic examples for most types of edges – folds, creases, rims, fissures, margins, verges, rims, gaps, cusps, veils, traces, frames. He distinguishes external and internal, passive and active edges, and draws our attention not only to spatial but also temporal aspects of their different kinds. He examines the complex relations between edges and surfaces, and between edges and limits – too often and too quickly identified with each other. What is characteristic for Casey’s attitude here is a genuinely phenomenological care for the truth of “the thing itself” – being attentive to the differences between particular kinds of edges and pointing at essential traits of each kind, he assumes that there are certain traits which are common for most of them, but at the same time he rejects – as I have already indicated – the possibility of reaching the essence of edge as such, or to “create” one universal form. “... I have resisted this temptation by refusing to offer a generic definition that

23) Ibid.

applies to any and every edge.”²⁴ Instead of such a formal approach he puts the special accent on the plurality and material concreteness of these kinds. “. . . it is a question of essential kinds, *eidé* – not formal kinds . . . but concrete patterns that are consistently repeated and instantiated in the actually experienced world. Such patterns constitute material kinds . . . The fact is that edges as we experience them fall into these kinds.”²⁵ In addition, he claims that different kinds of edges can co-exist in particular instances, even though usually one of these kinds prevails deciding about the character of that edged something.

Usually, we associate edges with separate, individual, material things. We tend to treat them as the very externality, or outskirts, of things. However, Casey points that there are also particular kinds of edges typical for places, which always exhibit a multiplicity of, interconnective edges, which, by their very nature, are both open and opening. There are also specifically temporal edges of events. These two types, different as they are, often cooperate or even converge. It seems that it is here that the spatial and temporal character of edges is most clearly visible – “in the end every edge of every place and of every event is spatiotemporal.”²⁶ But what they also display is their bivalent character – they are, at one and the same time, enclosing and disclosing, concealing and revealing, limiting and opening up. In this sense, they create their own spatio-temporal fields which effectively challenge the abstract, objective concepts of space and time.

In the second step, the author distinguishes and opposes the so-called natural and culturally constructed edges. On the one hand, this distinction appears to be very complex – in most cases, both kinds strictly cooperate up to a complete interfusion. Casey follows here Merleau-Ponty’s famous note that any consequent distinction between natural (“wild Being”) and cultural is nothing but a sheer abstraction.²⁷ On the other hand, the phenomenological rigor, so characteristic for Casey, leads him to the necessity of distinguishing the so-called wild edges (such as the edges of mountains, rivers or coastlines, etc.) enrooted in the sheer physicality and materiality of natural entities. Here edges, freed from any form of human intervention, serve mainly as the particular functions of the natural processes of becoming. Therefore, in this realm we are confronted with the spectacular diversity of edges that directly reflects the physical conditions to which natural entities are subject. That is why this diversity is highly dynamic and open-ended – it is “diversity rediversified.”²⁸ These edges constitute their own kind and live their own lives without being bound by any artificial constraints including all attempts at scientific explanation. “In their continual upsurge, edges reassert themselves as primary . . . Their being perceived as straight or regularly curving edges is no longer of critical importance . . . The geometry of such edges is decidedly non-formal.”²⁹ Therefore, to give justice to this realm is to resign not only from the ideal of adequacy between our purely formal concepts and phenomena in question but also from any form of imposing our conceptual means on what is to be seen in its grandeur. Instead, we should “allow ourselves to be astounded” by these edges as expressing the pure voice of Nature.³⁰

Opposed to them are – as Casey calls them – “the intermediate edges,” which we find in parks, gardens, neighborhoods and streets. Being a effect of human design, they take different forms accentuating either their more linear, limiting, border-like character or, quite conversely, their more boundary-like nature, opening to the immediate environs. In any case, the way they are created or displayed is not simply accidental. Together

24) *Ibid.*, 299.

25) *Ibid.*, 23.

26) *Ibid.*, 91.

27) *Ibid.*, 129.

28) *Ibid.*, 139.

29) *Ibid.*, 156.

30) *Ibid.*, 157.

creating “the fabric of the city,”³¹ they constitute the space in which we live, with its all cultural, social and even political dimensions. Here: “Each edge is transitional, none is ultimate. But taken together, all such edges constitute a city as anything but static – as an ever-evolving interplay of edges. In cities, the edge is where the action is. Cities thrive as well as suffer from the edges of which they are composed.”³² The author presents also the detailed phenomenological description of landscape with all its subtle and salient edges, and with multiplicity of boundaries.³³ This point seems to be of critical importance in a double sense. Landscape exercises a peculiar (again so often overlooked) prominence which expresses and exposes our human situatedness between the earth and the sky. Thus, it bears with it a clear metaphysical (or at least ontological) importance. But it also has a significant cultural meaning. The contemporary world is “contaminated” by the massive processes of “site-ification of space”³⁴ which constantly transform places we inhabit into purely functional sites (limiting and enclosing), where we step by step lose the possibility of understanding what does it mean to dwell in the world. In this perspective, landscape maintains the very possibility of place with its double – enclosing and disclosing – meaning. Being open to landscapes is to still understand what it means to genuinely inhabit the world in which we live.

In the third step, Casey describes the human edges – both of our own bodies and of our psyche. Considering the former he distinguishes between “the edge of the body – its outer surface as skin or flesh – and its many subordinate edges, inner as well as outer.”³⁵ What is striking with regard to our bodily edges is that they are so intimately ours, so closely bound to our lived bodies that we are constantly oblivious about them. We not only – as Sartre would put it – pass them over in silence. First and foremost, they are so elusive that we lack any kind of concrete knowledge about them. “... not only we do not know what they are, we do not even know exactly where they are.”³⁶ They cannot be located as some object in the purely physical space, they are nothing objective, they are no-thing. “My bodily edges are not simply there – not in any customary sense of physical being-there. Indeed, they are not something to which I can simply point. All we can say is that they are there – there at the periphery of my body.”³⁷ They decide about our singular and unique style of being, which always already means that “... it is by these very edges that we are most fully in touch with the world around us.”³⁸ Therefore, they can be characterized by essential bivalence or bi-directionality – they are always between me and the world, between myself and yourself, between me and myself; they separate and open up at once. As such, they are also uniquely vibrant and responsive. Casey’s analyses are strongly inspired here by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but they are not only more subtle and nuanced but also much more far-reaching. They call for different levels and forms of reflection, which the author himself points out as mereological (parts and wholes), eschatological (endings) and limenological (thresholds).

Perhaps, one of the most interesting parts *The World on Edge* is the one devoted to psychical edges. At first, it seems counterintuitive to speak reasonably about them. The only option acceptable for the common sense is to understand them in the metaphorical, analogical or symbolic way. In opposition to that, Casey – while underscoring the highly dynamic and processual character of our mental life – insists on the real character of psychical edges. “Psychical edges are ... actual insofar as they are felt – felt by us directly. ... their actuality

31) Ibid., 203.

32) Ibid., 204.

33) Ibid, 172–174.

34) Ibid., 179.

35) Ibid., 300.

36) Ibid., 213.

37) Ibid., 214.

38) Ibid., 211.

is such that we know them from within – from inside our own experience. They belong to that experience as integral parts of it; we are in touch with these edges, we know them in a uniquely first-person way.³⁹ Furthermore, having an exclusively temporal character they mark the differentiating contours of our mental acts, the shifts between them, as well as their emotional valence. For the most part, they are highly transitory, flexible, protean, often overlapping and merging with one another. Things change drastically when we are confronted with the experiences of being “on edge” or “falling apart”. The experiences which are under different circumstances known to all humans take a different form in case of the experiences of mental illness when particular psychic states or contents become fixed and either cannot be assimilated into spontaneous mental life or, in more extreme cases, lead to different forms of radical disintegration and self-alienation. In these cases, the edges become rigid, highly ambiguous and paradoxical in nature. They are expressive of a peculiar form of the arresting human psyche, of its being stopped on its tracks, of losing the voluntary dimension of our psychic and psycho-social life. In the case of the schizophrenic self, Casey argues, the fundamental/critical and unsurpassable edge goes between “the voluntary self-guidance” and “the zone of the involuntary.”⁴⁰

These analyses find their prolongation in the descriptions of: the edge of the earth with its almost ungraspable, “active and plurivalent identity” expressed in the pairs of apparent oppositions – everywhere and nowhere, near and far, part and the whole⁴¹; the particular edges of the earth; and the edges of the sky. The third step culminates in the confrontation with the ulterior edges – those belonging to the extreme states of which we have only a vague, incomplete image. Here what we are left with are only traces and remnants. They either refer to the cosmic events which had begun the adventure of life or dramatic human events (either collective or individual) from the past. Events of which we cannot have full knowledge, but rather have to create ever new narratives based on the remnants and traces. Such ulterior edges refer us to our own origins, to what cannot be remembered, and as such they challenge all possible forms of determination – spatial, temporal, or existential. They seem to revert the intentional relation – escaping from any definite form of our active constitution, they rather constitute us as beings constantly rehearsing the question about their own edges. Even though the remarks on the ulterior edges are very brief they mark a perfect point of arrival of this threefold descriptive enterprise. They point at the ultimate criterion of human finitude – as humans, we are not only edged in our psycho-somatic being and placed between “self-secluding” earth and the vanishing sky, we are also sent off to the edges which are beyond the edges of our life-worlds. The edges and limits of our human condition make us moving permanently beyond themselves, make us moving elsewhere.

Besides all these different regions of edges which together constitute the whole life-worlds one can also find in Casey’s book profound descriptions of the edges constituting the limit-situations of human life – death (physical and social), doom and disaster. These phenomena confront us with different forms of edges. However, what they do have in common is that their overwhelming power reveals, in the most ultimate sense, our human vulnerability. They express the basic truth of our existence – we are not only permanently and in every region of this finite world confronted with the edges. Indeed, all the time we do exist on the edge.

That is why we should be more attentive to the edges, from watching them we can and should learn what this basic fact of our existence can mean for us. While existing on the edge we should learn to think it through. It is true that they are expressive of our limitations, but by their very nature they allow us to go elsewhere, to transcend the very same limitations, to live and think otherwise. To think about edges and to think them through is to situate ourselves on the peripheries of the reality, where it begins and where it ends, to enter into the “smooth

39) *Ibid.*, 237.

40) *Ibid.*, 254.

41) *Ibid.*, 272.

space” (Deleuze and Guattari), where things, events, places and persons uncover not only their limitations but also the whole richness of their possible interconnections and derive from this often unnoticed and surprising combinations of shapes, forms and sounds. That also means to situate ourselves in the peculiar realm of the in-between, where the spatio-temporal dynamics inherent to all living becomes more visible than “everywhen” else.

Thinking about and through the edges helps us to realize that they are not simply defects of being. And even if they are, it is only through these defects that “the light gets in” – as Casey himself repeats the celebrated phrase from Leonard Cohen’s song. They are the creative “defects”, as it were, and as such they are the conditions of possibility of everything that exist and of anything new and unexpected. They can bring with them the highest risk, but a careful and attentive act of thinking them through can make us better prepared to face it, “to act more effectively and live more insightfully in a world on edge,”⁴² and in this way to invent a new and more respectful ways of coping with the surrounding world. Thus, *The World on Edge* starts with a genuinely phenomenological respect for the truth of the “things themselves”, and it culminates with a specifically ethical respect for the fate of the world we inhabit – the world which in our age is not only edged in the multiply ways (as it always was), but it is the world on edge in the most radical sense. It is the world where humans, as well as all other beings, find themselves on the verge of the highest possible risk, where they have to be ready to creatively confront their own *peri-pheries*.

Thus, phenomenological investigation on edges poses a serious challenge to philosophical thought, which has to take a form not only of rational thinking about edges and thinking through different edge-situations, but it also has to undertake a difficult and ultimate task of thinking on edge – thinking which takes place within a peculiar abysmal space, where all strict determinations disappear, the space/place from within which the new forms of thinking and the new edges of thought originate. To genuinely think is to be able to stay on edge, or to patiently with the “smooth mind” remain within that indefinite space/place. The last part of Casey’s book is a profound philosophical meditation on that very spatiality of radically original and non-objective “nonthinking”.

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It is almost impossible to refer, even briefly, to all aspects of this extremely rich and profound book. There is one dominant impression which during my journey with Edward Casey did not leave me for a while – phenomenology, when is being done seriously and passionately, still has a power to reveal the hidden (or at least for the most part unnoticed) dimensions and aspects of reality and correlatively different modes of our experiencing them. And that is because phenomenology is not a philosophical current or a strict philosophical method. At least not in the first place. It is rather a particular form of sensitivity, a constant process of learning how to be more attentive and more responsive to the surrounding world of which we all are parts – these peculiar parts which comprise and express the whole. And as such it can have highly significant ethical, ontological, “anthropological”, socio-political and even speculative implications. If that is to be possible, we have to distance⁴³ ourselves to all traditional theoretical frameworks and ready-made concepts.

42) Ibid., 352.

43) It is not equal to negation or complete putting aside any theoretical frameworks (as if such complete suspension would be possible). Casey’s work is also significant trace of his philosophical inspirations. It seems to me this particular type of philosophical sensitivity was formed and edged by creative “encounters” with Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jean-Luc Nancy or Jacques Derrida, but also with Heraclitus. However, what is the most important here is that Casey’s phenomenological sensitivity expresses not so much dependence on them, but rather a form of co-presence in thinking on the edge.

Instead we should try to look at the things again, more carefully, more closely, and more respectfully, to give voice to “the things themselves.” Only in this way we can be again surprised, astonished, enchanted by reality. Only in this way we can at once be more aware of the most extreme, edge-situations inscribed into our condition, and radically hopeful as to the unknown or even un-imaginable future. To do phenomenology is to be open to the unexpected. Obviously, to speak about it is one thing, and to do it is another. *The World on Edge* shows that Edward S. Casey is among only few contemporary phenomenologists capable to do it in the most penetrating and devoted way.