

About There, or Thereabouts

Steven Connor

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Gertrude Stein wrote of her upbringing in Oakland, California in 1937 ‘what was the use of my having come from Oakland it was not natural to have come from there yes write about it if I like or anything if I like but not there, there is no there there’ (*Everybody’s Autobiography*, p. 298). Stein’s phrase, ‘there’s no there there’ has become what literary critics like to call a ‘topos’, or commonplace. Philip Larkin articulates similar sentiments in the conclusion to his poem ‘I Remember, I Remember’ where, after sardonically listing all the momentous and formative things that didn’t happen to him in his home town of Coventry, he concludes: ‘Oh well,/I suppose it’s not the place’s fault.../Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.’ But Coventry, unlike Oakland, is not a particular place from which the *genius loci*, the meaning or value of location, has drained away, a locatable ‘there’ from which ‘thereness’ has evaporated, but rather an arbitrary and substitutable example: it used to be that one had to seek out these exotic islands of indistinction, in places like Bromley or the place where my own early life was, in Larkin’s phrase, ‘unspent’, the luminously thereless Bognor Regis, but Larkin will have us recognise that such places can in fact be found anywhere. All this makes the proud quotation from the poem on a plaque on Coventry station, in just the kind of civic commemoration at which Larkin jeers, sadly delicious.

But Gertrude Stein’s phrase has become well-known largely through the accident of having being taken up by William Gibson in his digital science fiction novel *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), where the phrase refers to the thing that was at that point beginning to be called ‘cyberspace’. A subtle shift seems to take place between the two usages, half a century apart. Stein is suggesting that Oakland is insufficiently definite to write about, or perhaps even to write in. The quality of Oakland is that of being without distinguishing quality or definition. And yet precisely because this is the local quality of Oakland, it does therefore have a kind of there-ness, albeit of a non-descript kind, in its distinguishing quality of anibidity, a word which I hope I have just made up, and for which I suspect I am unlikely after today ever to have any further use for. So much so that artist Roslyn Mazzilli decided that it was be a good idea to make sure that there was, in fact, a there in Oakland.

By the time William Gibson comes to use the phrase ‘no there, there’, it signifies, not the failure of thereness, but rather the triumphant or disdainful transcendence of it. If there is still a wisp of quiddity in the second ‘there’ of Stein’s phrase (no there *there*), Gibson’s use of the phrase is intended to suggest that the second there is a wherever – wherever a connection can be made, to a realm which is made up of what are called sites, but are in fact nothing but clusters of connections, is where cyberspace is. The deficit or discarding of location has now become general, for there

is no need for there to be any kind of there in the sublimely delocalised or illocative space of the internet.

I propose to use these examples as a way into a certain dislocation or perturbation of 'thereness' which has been characteristic of the experience of the modern world during the twentieth century and beyond. It has been a period during which what it means to be here, or there, or anywhere, has become newly indefinite, and in which art and literature have been strongly drawn to the exploration of this possibility or predicament.

In his book *Atlas* of 1994 the philosopher of science Michel Serres urged philosophers to break their fixation on static or fixative prepositions, and to embrace the possibility of thinking under the aegis of more dynamic or relational prepositions:

Has not philosophy restricted itself to exploring - inadequately - the 'on' with respect to transcendence, the 'under', with respect to substance and the subject and the 'in' with respect to the immanence of the world and the self? Does this not leave room for expansion, in following out the 'with' of communication and contract, the 'across' of translation, the 'among' and 'between' of interferences, the 'through' of the channels through which Hermes and the Angels pass, the 'alongside' of the parasite, the 'beyond' of detachment... all the spatio-temporal variations preposed by all the prepositions, declensions and inflections? (Serres 1994: 83)

In April 1893, the campaigning journalist W.T. Stead invented a noun form of one of Serres's prepositions, in an article on the fourth dimension. This was not as recondite a matter in the 1890s as it might have been earlier in the century, for the ideas of Bernhard Riemann and others had spread not only into academic philosophical journals but also into the popular spiritualist and occult press. Following the logic of popularisers like E.A. Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, published in 1884, Stead proposed a kind of evolution through different stages of dimensional life. Just as a creature inhabiting a flat plane would find it mysterious and terrifying for a three dimensional being who could apparently disregard the lines that bounded different entities in its world so, Stead urged, we would find the movements in and out of our world of four-dimensional creatures equally inexplicable. Distance and distinction would be dissolved. Stead proposed a new term for this fourth dimension of space: 'Life, as we know it, consists of three dimensions: the first is length; the second, breadth; and the third height; and the fourth is throughth, if I may venture to give it a name' (Stead 1893, 426). Where Abbott, displaying the four-on-the-floor stolidity one might hope for from the headmaster of City of London School, stayed within the realms of geometrical projection, Stead saw the literal verification of the opening up of space in occult and supernaturalist phenomena:

telepathic automatic handwriting, by which the mind of a person whose body is in Germany can use the hand of a writer who is in England; crystal vision, by which events past, present, and to come are portrayed before the eye of the gazer; psychometry, whereby the character of an individual can be divined from a touch of a hair of his head, — all these things are so many rifts in the limits of our three dimensional space through which the light of four dimensional space is pouring in upon us. It is becoming more and more evident to those who observe and note the signs of the times that we are in very deed and truth on the eve of the fourth dimension. (Stead 1893, 427)

As Roger Luckhurst has made clear in his *The Invention of Telepathy*, Stead was well-placed, as a newspaperman at the centre of the media and communications explosion that took place at the end of the nineteenth century, to appreciate the analogies between the space-defying dreams of the occultist and the magical expansions of reach and contractions of distance effected by new technologies such as the telephone.

Suppose that a telephone exchange were suddenly to be established in Timbuctoo, and that the inhabitants of that mysterious city, without any instruction by experts, were to begin to experiment as to how they could use the new-fangled instrument for purposes of communicating with each other. Suppose the untutored savage in the telephone exchange should let half a dozen others at various branch offices endeavour to communicate with each other : it is easy to imagine the hideous confusion that would ensue. — Not because the telephone was not in perfect working order, but simply because of the ignorance of those who were attempting to work it, it would make endless blunders. But the greatest of all blunders would be to refuse to continue experimenting because of the difficulties of communication, and the absurd nonsense that would often come across the wires. If a savage at one end of Timbuctoo were able to get switched on to a friend at the other end, and exchange with him one intelligible sentence, they would be hopeless idiots if they did not persevere in their experiments (Stead 1893, 428)

To be 'there' is to be in a particular position relative to other positions, which are elsewhere and outside it. In other words, thereness promises an absolute distinction between places, without the possibility of permeation or overlap. Higher-dimensional thinking suggested that there might be spaces which both included and exceeded ordinary space, just as the cube both includes and exceeds the plane surface. This produced a kind of convulsion of the inside and outside. A world of juxtapositions gave way to a world of interpenetrations. The telephone was made possible by the discovery that an ordinary piece of copper wire was capable of transmitting many different frequencies simultaneously — in his early experiments, Alexander Graham Bell had assumed that it would only be possible to transmit isolated single tones, one at a time. Spiritualists seized upon this fact to explain the

phenomena of the séance. What was popularly described as the ‘beyond’ or the ‘other side’, was in fact simply a different ‘plane of existence’, which operated within the same space as human life, but at a different frequency of vibrations. The afterlife was no more than a kind of VHF and death no more than a change of waveband.

If the telephone provided the model for one kind of mutation of space, in which something could be both far and near at the same time, the scientific validation of the principle that Stead called ‘throughth’ would come two years later. Wilhelm Röntgen first observed the rays that originally bore his name but then came to be known as X-rays when experimenting with a Crookes tube, a device invented by William Crookes in 1878. When the tube was exhausted of air and high tension electric current passed between a cathode and an anode inside it, a glowing stream of ‘cathode rays’ (later identified, a few hundred yards away from the spot where I am standing, as electrons by J.J. Thomson) was produced. Röntgen noticed that, with the discharge tube enclosed in black cardboard, a paper plate coated with barium platinocyanide two metres away began to glow. Four weeks of intensive work led to the appearance of his paper ‘On a New Kind of Rays’ at the end of the year. The news of the discovery of X-rays was not only the first scientific media sensation, it was in a certain sense a self-instancing phenomenon. The new world of penetrations and permeations that X-rays seemed to announce was exemplified by the very speed with which the news of the discovery penetrated to all parts of the world within days (Röntgen 1895, 1896). The discovery of radioactivity in the years immediately following seemed to open up a new world in which the insides and outsides of things were no longer distinct, a world not of objects but of influences and interactions, in which things could no longer be counted on to be solidly and impermeably there, in the place that they exclusively occupied. In particular, the body, as the prime meridian of the occupation of space, and the distributor or hereness and thereness began to dissolve, both in imagination and performance.

The dancer Loie Fuller, who had devised a repertoire based on the dissipation of the boundaries of the body through the use of floating silks and projected lights, performed a dance entitled ‘Radium’ in 1904, for which she tried unsuccessfully to borrow a piece of radium from the Curies, explaining that she wished to create ‘butterfly wings of radium’. She delivered a lecture entitled ‘Radium’ in 1911, in which she announced ‘if radium can bring to our vision those things we cannot see, we cannot measure its influence’ (quoted Garelick 2009, 53). Fuller not only dissolved the contours separating the body from its surroundings, she also put it into relationship with other spaces – projecting images of moon across her body, and incorporating into her performance projected photographs of skeletons and cancerous cells. Like the cinema, her work thus conjoined the near and the far, the visible and the invisible, in a process that Heidegger would later describe as ‘Entfernung’ – the undoing of distance. As Hugo Münsterberg would remark of the alternation between long-short and close-up in film ‘our mind is split and can be here and there apparently in one mental act’ (Münsterberg, 1970, 46). One might connect

Fuller's dissolution of the locating contours of the body to the development of camouflage, one of the most striking examples of the convergence of art and technology, the principle of which was that 'dazzle' images broke up the outlines of things.

Things were no longer simply and indubitably there in space, or figures against a background. Just as figures leaked or blurred into their ambient spaces, so space entered into what had previously been marked out in it. Monet said in an interview of 1895 'To me the motif itself is an insignificant factor; what I want to reproduce is what lies between the motif and me... Other painters paint a bridge, a house, a boat... I want to paint the air in which the bridge, the house and the boat are to be found - the beauty of the air around them, and that is nothing less than impossible' (quoted Tucker 1998, 8). Other artists became ever more interested in the spaces around and between objects, and varieties of haze, blur and fog became favoured topics. Monet himself painted sequences of studies of Waterloo Bridge and the Houses of Parliament, as though urging the viewer to create some composite phase-space, or time-lapse image of these separate paintings. Perhaps no artist worked harder to represent the interpenetration of objects and the space around them than Boccioni. His *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913) presents a muscular kind of écorché, which seems both to be dragging after it the congealed air through which it seems to be bursting. *Street Noises Invade the House* (1911) seems to present a figure leaning out over a balcony while fractured noises swirl upwards towards and beyond it. Tellingly, the visual noises seem to be pressing outwards into the space of the viewer, which is therefore no more quarantined than the space of the house in the picture space.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of the blending of thereness with absence is the story that Freud told in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of the game he saw his grandson playing, in which he threw a cotton reel on the end of a thread into his curtained cot, so that it disappeared, at which he would cry 'o-o-o' (German *fort* – gone), and then retrieved it, with 'a joyful "da"[there]'. Freud interpreted the game as 'the child's great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting' (Freud 1955, 14). But it would unfold, in the rest of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, into a series of extraordinary speculations about the way in which what Freud, with magnificent gloominess called 'the organism's puzzling determination (so hard to fit into any context) to maintain its own existence in the face of every obstacle' (Freud 1955, 38) is both penetrated and bizarrely animated by the death instincts. Viewed in one way, the reel may be regarded as permitting the renunciation of the loved object, because it provides a symbolic guarantee of its continued existence and availability, invisible, but retrievable in symbolic form at will; the reel is there all the time, when it appears not to be. But the game may be played, and read, the other way round, as the holding on, not to presence, but rather to intermittence – the ventilating remission, interval or *mesure*

pour rien which provides the space between the self and itself. This is reinforced by the variant of the game that Freud describes in a footnote, in which the boy ‘found a method of making himself disappear. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image “gone” ‘ (Freud 1955, 14). Here, it seems, the boy plays at ‘o-o-o’ with his reflection without the need for the answering recoil to *da*. Perhaps this is because he himself *is* the there, even when he is invisible, thus confirming the lesson, appropriate enough to the text in which Freud announces his discovery of the death instincts that to be there it is necessary to be able to do away with yourself.

Saturation

There is a close relation between psychosis and the spatial conditions of modern life. The disturbed, the distressed and the deluded have frequently given early warning of the stresses and anxieties that may result from sudden shifts in the material conditions of existence. The new technologies of transmission and communication quickly found their way into the delusions of the mad. Nowhere was this more systematically true than with the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, a German judge who spent much of his life in psychiatric hospitals and left detailed records of his systematic delusions; systematic delusions is the right phrase, since systems were precisely the object of his delusions as well as their character. Schreber believed that his body was slowly being turned into that of a woman by what he called ‘rays of voluptuousness’ sent by God. It seems plain that, like many another who has complained of alien influences, or paranoid conspiracies to infiltrate one’s being or even steal one’s thoughts, Schreber is in part dramatising the conditions of permeability suggested by the world of X-rays, radio-waves and other forms of emissions. Schreber’s extended accounts of the process of his subjection are both an expression of and a kind of refuge from them, for they turn a predicament into an object, something that, once set out in a coherent narrative, may be said to be there, separate and set off from its previously helpless subject, rather than everywhere. The Prinzhorn collection of the University of Heidelberg provides other examples of the delusion that the psychoanalyst Victor Tausk called the ‘influencing machine’, and many of them are characterised by what may be called a *horror vacui*, as terror of void or blankness, expressed in the drive to fill every corner of space. Wilhelm Worringer was struck by a similar anxiety in the highly-patterned art of primitive peoples, which he ascribed to a kind of agoraphobia, or ‘space-shyness’. Virginia Woolf expressed in an entry for her diary of 28th November 1928 a more exhilarated sense of the principle of saturation, seeing it as a path to plenitude:

The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes...Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry – by which I mean saturated? Is that not my grudge against novelists?

That they select nothing? The poets succeeded by simplifying: practically everything is left out. I want to put practically everything in: yet to saturate (Woolf 1978, 138)

The opposite seems to be the case with the Prinzhorn renderings of systems of magico-technical influence. For the one suffering from delusions of being controlled by ubiquitous influences in the form of rays, waves or wires, there is no space apart, no there there, when every inbetween is densely impregnated. But the rendering of this saturation may help to mitigate it, precisely because it makes it appear over there, rather than indifferently in all places at once.

Being-There

But all of this created something like a nostalgia for the there, dissolved as it seemed to have been by the ubiquity brought about by the dissolution of space through simultaneity and pervasive communications. Heidegger's response to the many versions of time philosophy was to insist on what he called the principle of Dasein: or being-there. What, Martin Heidegger set out immodestly to enquire, is being? His answer, at once the end and the starting-point of his philosophy, is that all being is *being there*: that is, not being-in-general, but being in a particular place, that is a here for that being, and a there for some other being. A couple of decades later, the writer Samuel Beckett would articulate the simplicity of his aims and methods in a letter about his play *Endgame* to the director Alan Schneider in what might seem like similar terms: 'Hamm as stated, Clov as stated, in such a place, in such a world, that's all I can manage'. Heidegger's point is that philosophers have tended to try to cancel out all these local conditions of habitation, in order to try to establish what might be the conditions of existence as such, in some abstract or universal way, separate from the specific conditions attaching to every kind of existence. But the most essential condition of being is precisely that it is inessential. We did not have to live the particular life we have, but it absolutely had to be that we had to live some particular life or other. Being was essentially accidental. The *mutandis* can never be satisfactorily *mutatis*.

In fact, Heidegger was not at all the first to grasp the condition of Dasein, though he may well have been the first to formulate it as an imperative philosophical principle. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, there had been many writers in different areas, who had offered different accounts of this principle. One of the most compelling of these was geometrical. In 1873, the mathematician W.K. Clifford published in the journal *Nature* a translation of an essay by the German mathematician Bernhard Riemann, which coolly announced 'the propositions of geometry cannot be derived from general notions of magnitude... the properties that distinguish space from other conceivable triply extended magnitudes are only to be deduced from experience'. This was not so much dynamic, as dynamiting. British

mathematicians, and British schoolchildren, were schooled in the absolute geometry of Euclid, which, it was assumed, must describe the absolute conditions of space, which must apply anywhere within it. Riemann's answer, as it was broadcast and amplified to English-speaking readers like Clifford and Herman Helmholtz, was to point out that Euclid's postulates are universally true only for a flat space, or a space of uniform curvature. If one cuts out a triangle from the surface of a sphere, the triangle can be taken and laid out anywhere else on the surface of the sphere without distortion. But if the curvature of the space varies, the triangle will not always fit in its new location. A universe in which space did not have uniform curvature would be a universe in which, for example, the sum of the angles of a triangle would not always add up to 180. The appalling news for Victorian Euclideans was that Euclid's axioms were not absolute, and did not apply necessarily to all space in the universe, but were simply a description of local, perhaps even rather parochial, conditions. This meant that geometry did not govern space, but was subject to it. In order to know what kind of geometry applied in your neck of the universe, you would have to know precisely what shape of neck it was. In other words, being, for the mathematicians who opened up the possibility of non-Euclidean geometry, was not being-as-such, but always being-there.

One, less mathematical response to this was the perspectivism of Nietzsche and his many followers, witting and unwitting. Nietzsche suggests that it would never be possible to adopt what later would come to be called a 'view from nowhere', that all visions on the world were necessarily from some located point of view or another: 'let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye that is absolutely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something are supposed to be lacking'. Nietzsche's perspectivism would become the foundation of an entire aesthetic, when Henry James derived from it his entire theory of the art of fiction. What mattered, he wrote, was where one took one's stand as a writer, whose eyes one looked through. It might be possible to compound different points of view, but it was not possible to look from no point of view at all.

Modernism is characterised, not so much by the predominance of either time or space, as by the tendency to conceive it in drastically polarised ways. Thus, Bergson insisted on the priority of time over space, while Wyndham Lewis spikily defended the claims of space over the epidemic of time-consciousness. In fact, however, the assertion of one end of the space-time polarity always in fact precipitates a swing to the other. This is particularly the case with the globalisation of time. With the increased speed, first of all of transportation, and then of telecommunications, time seemed to take the place of place. What is important is no longer how long how far one place may be from another in spatial terms, but how long it takes to travel from

one place to another, or to communicate between them. Space, it seems, has given way to time.

Where Can We Live?

And yet, such circumstances produced a corresponding and countervailing spatialisation of time. There was no necessity, before a world of global communications, to define the spaces of time, no need, for example, to agree on a meridian. In a world in which there were large gaps between different locations, those locations could all have their own times, derived more or less accurately from their observations of the sun. But, as travellers began to move faster and faster, the scope for confusion grew, as one was required to reset one's watch by a few minutes at every station on the line. More and more, the need asserted itself for a standard 'railway time', to which all the stations on the line would adhere. The situation was complex enough in a small country like the UK, but was especially so when one travelled across large land masses like Europe or North America. Many schemes were proposed, including a scheme whereby eastbound and westbound trains would run on different times, so an eastbound train would keep San Francisco time, and a westbound train New York time (Bartky 2007, 61-2).

These problems affected not only continents, but the globe itself. Lewis Carroll was much taken up with the problem of the date-line, and included it in a series of mathematical puzzles that he set for a monthly magazine during the 1880s, and published as *A Tangled Tale* in 1885. One of the problems in this book concerns the question of when precisely the date changes.

“Well, now, suppose it's midnight here in Chelsea. Then it's Wednesday west of Chelsea (say in Ireland or America) where midnight hasn't arrived yet: and it's Thursday east of Chelsea (say in Germany or Russia) where midnight has just passed by?”

“Surely,” Balbus said again. Even Lambert nodded this time.

“But it isn't midnight, anywhere else; so it can't be changing from one day to another anywhere else. And yet, if Ireland and America and so on call it Wednesday, and Germany and Russia and so on call it Thursday, there must be some place—not Chelsea—that has different days on the two sides of it. And the worst of it is, the people there get their days in the wrong order: they've got Wednesday east of them, and Thursday west—just as if their day had changed from Thursday to Wednesday!”

The problem is not very clearly posed, but Carroll seems to mean that, somewhere on the opposite side of the world to London, there must be a place where Thursday reverts to being Wednesday, since, if one were to follow (at a speed greater than that

of the sun) the Thursday that has begun just east of Chelsea all the way round the world, there would come a point at which one would have to find oneself back in Wednesday: but where is that point? Carroll published solutions to all his problems in the magazine, often teasing or upbraiding his contributors. But the date-line problem is the only one for which he cannot offer a solution. Carroll wrote: 'I must postpone, *sine die*, the geographical problem — partly because I have not yet received the statistics I am hoping for, and partly because I am myself so entirely puzzled by it; and when an examiner is himself dimly hovering between a second class and a third how is he to decide the position of others?' The sly little joke of the Latin tag *sine die*, which, when applied to a postponement, simply means 'indefinitely', but literally means 'without day', points to the very condition of temporal suspension that puzzles Carroll. The day seems to be a period that is given to us externally, rather than an arbitrary division imposed on time, because of the very place where we live, meaning that the day is spatially 'there' in a way that the minute, the hour, the week or the month are not. But if there is no precise 'there' in at which one day changes to another, if one is always dimly hovering between one temporal position or another, where after all, is the day? Carroll here anticipates the sombre question that Philip Larkin articulates in his poem 'Days':

Days are where we live...
 Where can we live but days?

 Ah, solving that question
 Brings the priest and the doctor
 In their long coats
 Running over the fields

That problem was solved by an arbitrary spatialisation of the day. The International Meridian Conference took place in October 1884 in Washington DC, and agreed that the Greenwich Meridian should be universally agreed to be 0° longitude. Everything was coordinated in relation to time, space therefore being subordinated to time rather than time to space, but it was only possible for this to happen if time itself was localised, so that one knew where to count from. There were imperial reasons for London to have been chosen for the Prime Meridian, but also certain practical considerations. For it was necessary to decide, not just what the time was, but where the date changed from one day to another. One of the advantages of choosing Greenwich for the Prime Meridian was that the antimeridian, 180° degrees away from it on the opposite side of the globe, would pass mostly through water. In fact, however, the precise course of the international date line was never formally agreed: rather it was from the beginning a matter of changeable convention and consent. As a result, the line has dodged and woven unpredictably.

But there were other ways of putting oneself at the centre of time. Paris succeeded in making itself the centre of world time by establishing a system for transmitting the time through wireless signals in the International Conference on Time of 1912. If

London was the place from which time was measured, Paris, and, more specifically the Eiffel tower, would be the place from which time would be transmitted (Bartky 2007, 138-48). But the Eiffel tower was a curious kind of centre. Representations of the Eiffel tower, such as Robert Delaunay's of 1911 emphasised its polyperspectival quality – the fact that it could be seen from almost every part of Paris, encouraging painters to render it in just this way.

The Eiffel Tower was also at the centre of one of the most dramatic rethinkings of representational space in artistic modernism, Guillaume Apollinaire's experiments of the visible space of the page in the collection of poems he published under the name *Calligrammes* in 1918. A notable example is his 'Lettre-Océan' (Sea-Mail). The poem is a rendering of postcards sent between Apollinaire and his brother in Mexico. The wavy lines at the top of each page signify the franking of a letter and the waves of ocean over which they are transmitted. The central figures in each page is two vortex shapes, which suggest a bunch of keys (one of the spokes of which reads 'les clefs j'en ai vu mille et mille'), but also the Eiffel Tower, seen from above (at the middle of the right hand form can be made out the words 'haut de trois cent metres'). But this form morphs, as we might nowadays say, into other forms: the swirl of a gramophone, the circulation of traffic and, most significantly perhaps, radio waves beamed from the tower. The poem invades the space of the page, just as the message transmitted, whether by mail or radio, seems to expand to include in itself the media through which it is being transmitted.

Increasingly, the modern world strove to achieve synchronicity, a time in common. And yet, the very synchronicity that characterised modern time disclosed the many different scales and speeds and qualities that seceded from that time. The steadily more insistent metre of public time made possible a newly polyrhythmic private time. Private time could stand starkly in opposition to public time only because the increasing domination of public time threw it into relief. Twentieth-century writing saw the popularisation of the idea of the 'stream of consciousness', following the suggestions of philosophers like William James and Henri Bergson, but it also saw a multiplication of different time-metaphors. We can say that the very standardisation of public time produced a kind of shattering or refraction of private times.

And, if the conditions of modern life seemed to dissolve the fixity of places of long-standing and habitual human occupation, it also created its own nodes, or contusions of space: cities like London, Paris, Vienna, New York or Zürich became the new signature places of modernism, precisely because they were places of convergence and collision, place-making intensifications of movement, and therefore more like anticyclones that settled spots of habitation. It is little wonder that the vortex gave its name to the radical group of artists and writers that gathered around Wyndham Lewis, the vorticists.

The work of twentieth century ethnographers such as Emile Durkheim showed that all cultures produce and inhabit particular syntaxes of space-time. The Soviet literary

critic Mikhail Bakhtin coined a word for this – ‘chronotope’, which describes ‘intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature’. Bakhtin makes explicit acknowledgement of Einstein’s space-time continuum, though makes clear that he is using it ‘almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)’. What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)’. But though an awareness of the making of chronotopes is characteristic of modern culture, it is hard to say what the chronotope of the modern might be. Though all cultures produce a distinctive space-time schema, they produce it as a given, which forms their world. But for modernity, space and time were increasingly not given but produced, meaning that there was and is no one chronotope, but rather a standing repertoire of them. All human cultures have to develop a scheme for coordinating space and time, but perhaps no human culture had had the opportunity and ordeal of having to coordinate different chronotopes.

I began by suggesting that the movement undertaken during the twentieth century was from the sense of location to the temporary and mobile locatedness provided by connection. But this is really to simplify. For one must say that place, or there-ness, came both before and after the convulsions of space of the modern world. In one sense, we have moved away from the sense of being-there, we have lost the sense of secure grounding, we have taken up a ‘Dasein in the air’, as Michel Serres has put it. At the same time, the necessity of situatedness, the necessity of being always somewhere, has been asserted as a general principle. Place is both dissolved and reasserted.

Perhaps the most emphatic coming together of these two possibilities, of the impossibility of being outside some particular there, along with the impossibility of specifying quite where that where is, is to be found in the work of Samuel Beckett. Beckett turned to the drama as a kind of relief, in the middle of a trilogy of novels he wrote following the Second World War, in which he progressively evacuated all the traditional reference points of the novel – plot, setting, character. Even though *Waiting for Godot* is set in the most indefinite of locations – the stage directions famously specifying only ‘A country road. A tree’ the characters are indubitably, and even agonisingly there, even if the Godot they await never is. But, having turned to the drama for solidity of specification, Beckett then set to work to dissolve it. His *Footfalls* (1975) shows a dimly-perceived woman dressed in a tattered wrapper pacing up and down a track of light. What we hear from her, and the voice of her mother, makes it unclear where or when we are. Beckett’s spectral imagery has much in common with the spirit-photographs that may have been a familiar part of his childhood. Here we have the final moments, in which the figure of Amy replays a conversation ‘Amy? Yes mother? Will you never have done revolving it all? It? It all. In your poor mind. It all. It all.’ When Billy Whitelaw, playing the part of Amy, asked Beckett if he could explain who she was, and where she was, and, in particular, whether she was alive or dead, Beckett replied, ‘let’s just say, you’re not quite there’.

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