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Some times of space
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Expectations

The most predictable remark you can make about the weather concerns, of course, its unpredictability. James Gleick tells a story about the beginnings of understanding 'chaos' in which meteorology is central:

> Clouds represented a side of nature that the mainstream of physics had passed by, a side that was at once fuzzy and detailed, structured and unpredictable … For as long as the world has had physicists inquiring into the laws of nature, it has suffered a special ignorance about disorder in the atmosphere …
> As the revolution in chaos runs its course, the best physicists find themselves returning without embarrassment to phenomena on a human scale. They study not just galaxies but clouds.[1]

And it is indeed odd that in a world where there is instantaneous communication, journeyings to other planets, genetic manipulation – in other words the most incredible technological wizardry and control – you can still walk out of the house and quite unexpectedly get totally drenched from head to foot.

There is a house I visit often, in southern France. This region of northern Catalonia, lying between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, between the Pyrennees and the Cevennes, is at the mercy of the winds. Each wind has a name: Vent de Alt, Gregal, Levant, Migjorn, Tramuntana … The kind of weather the district receives depends on which of these is blowing through at any given hour. Each brings a distinctive temperature, rainfall (or lack of it), humidity, even quality of light. The violent storms of the Tramuntana, the fierce cold in the mountains to the south, the clear dryness of the Mediterranean: each of these also varies by season. A small shift in the configuration of the ever-mobile weather system and you have to rethink your plans for the day.

Yet this account of the expectation of variability is founded on its own temperate-zone assumptions. There are places where you can rely, for days or even weeks on end, on sunshine, or on freezing cold, or on the fact that it will rain. Even the expectation of variability, then, might leave you surprised.

And even in these weather-obsessed islands the unpredictability of conditions is regularly denied in the service of caricature. Lazy journalists evoke dreariness through reference to wet mornings in Walsall, or Telford. Why these places? They are clearly not always rainy. The weather is enlisted to heighten an effect; to typify. The assumption is that 'we' are not from such places, or that there are no wet mornings where 'we' are. Rather we are recruited, along with the weather, into collaboration with the sneering superiority of the writer. This is, perhaps, a vestigal survival of the wider and persistent phenomenon of 'moral climatology'.[2]

However, we smile together at the image of dullness. For the caricature of the weather is used not just to indicate what undoubtedly is the case (that the weather is different from place to place – a positive variability) but to establish a mutual characterisation.

All visitors to the house in Catalonia are warned: 'DO NOT LEAVE THE HOUSE WITHOUT SECURING THE SHUTTERS' – it could be that, unexpectedly, the Tramuntana will blow.

Encounters

Imagine a journey. It does not have to be an epic one; it could be quite quotidian, simply from 'here' to 'there' – from Manchester to Liverpool let's say. One way to picture it is as travelling across space. You're moving between two places on a map. Manchester and Liverpool are given; and you, the active one, travel between them. You have a trajectory.

Now think of it another way. For this movement of yours is not just spatial; it's also temporal. So, you're barely out of Manchester, approaching the mosses [?] that stretch away, flat, on either side, when Manchester itself has moved on. Lives have pushed ahead, business has been done, the weather has changed. That collection of trajectories that is Manchester is no longer the same as when you left it. It has lived on without you. And Liverpool? Likewise it has not just been lying there, static on the map, awaiting your arrival. It too has been going about its business; moving on. Your arrival in Lime Street, when you step off the train, begin to get into the things you came here to do, is a meeting-up of trajectories as you entangle yourself in stories that began before you arrived. This is not the arrival of an active voyager in an awaiting passive destination but an intertwining of ongoing trajectories from which something new may emerge. Movement, encounter and the making of relationships take time.

It is impossible to encounter something with no preconceptions at all, but the full recognition that the encountered is also moving on at least slightly disturbs one's confidence in the fact that these expectations will be met. An encounter is always with something 'on the move'. The voyager is not the only active one. Origin and destination have lives of their own. This project of undoing that traditional counterposition of active subject and passive object is an element in Olafur Eliasson's practice. He challenges the static, given, implacable 'objecthood' of art.

And this is also to challenge some received ideas about space. Eliasson has drawn on occasion on the writings of Henri Bergson. For example, he chose a long extract from *Creative Evolution* (date?) as his 'artist's choice' in a recent monograph.[3] Bergson writes of 'movement, which is reality itself'.[4] This is movement in the widest sense: of process, of change. Space, then, cannot be a static slice orthogonal to time and defined in opposition to it. If movement is reality itself then what we think of as space is a cut through all those trajectories; a simultaneity of unfinished stories.

Space has time/times within it. This is not the static simultaneity of a closed system but a simultaneity of movements. And that is a different thing altogether.

It means, for one thing, that you can't go back in space: the myth of the return. By the time you get on the train again to go back home that night, disentangling yourself – physically at least – from those Liverpudlian trajectories, the Manchester you left will not be the Manchester of now (just as you yourself will have changed). Space has its times. To open up space to this kind of imagination means thinking about time and space together. You can't hold places and things still. What you *can* do is meet up with them, catch up with where another's history has got to 'now', and acknowledge that 'now' is itself constituted by that meeting up. 'Here', in that sense, is not a place on a map. It is that intersection of trajectories, the meeting-up of stories; an encounter. Every 'here' is a here-and-now.

Nor is it only a matter of origin and destination. As the train rattles back, past sprawling factories, through Newton-le-Willows, across the open lived-in flatness of south Lancashire, it is travelling not across space-as-surface but across a multitude of stories. That tree that blows now in the wind out there, that tired factory on the way to defeat, that person running for the bus … these are things 'caught' in the act, but they are acts that are moments-in-process, never to be stabilised. The train transects a million ongoing histories.

(A parenthesis

There is an old association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning. Representation, conceptualisation, the work of the intellect, is imagined as spatialisation. Bergson figures again here, but leaving a less happy legacy. His burning concern was with temporality, with duration, with a commitment to resisting the

evisceration of time's internal continuity, flow and movement. Thus 'language … always translates movement and duration in terms of space'[5] and 'The more consciousness is intellectualized, the more is matter spatialized.'[6]

It's easy to see how this can happen. That business of laying things out side by side; indeed the production of a simultaneity. So Bergson writes (in *Matter and Memory*) of substituting the path for the journey; Michel de Certeau of substituting a tracing for acts. But this has effects. It is not just that representation is equated with spatialisation but that the characteristics thus derived (fixation, stabilisation) have come to be attributed to space itself. The argument is that representation/spatialisation tames the vitality of the temporal. Space begins to get a bad name. Michel Foucault's classic recantation of the long history of the denigration of space begins: 'Did it start with Bergson, or before?'[7] The problem has been that the old chain of meaning (space-representationstasis) continues to wield its power. The legacy lingers on. De Certeau writes of 'the spatialization of scientific discourse … scientific writing ceaselessly reduces time, that fugitive element, to the normality of an observable and readable system. In this way, surprises are averted.'[8]

There is a complex argument here, but just two points will suffice for now. First, what representation stabilises (if it really does, and that's another argument) is not just time,

but space-time. So often the issue is formulated as though the world that is to be represented is only temporal. It certainly *is* temporal; but it is spatial too. And 'representation' is an attempt to capture both aspects of that world.
Second, in de Certeau's formulation, a tracing is itself a representation; it is not 'space'. The map is not the territory. In Bergson's substitution we may take the path to be a real path. It is not the map; it is the territory itself. But then, a territory is integrally spatiotemporal.

It is not space that takes the life out of time, but representation. The real trouble is that the old equation of representation with spatialisation has taken the life out of space.)

Multiplicity

Each day the newspaper I take provides an account of weather conditions 'Around the world' on the previous day. (Except in the Americas, because the newspaper is put to bed before the earth has turned far enough upon its axis to enable noon-time readings there to be registered, read and reported on. For those parts of the world the reading is for the day before yesterday.) 88º F and sunny in Algiers; 48º and cloudy in Helsinki; cloudy again but 77º in Beijing. (That day in London it was 57º, with thunder.) The coeval existence of a multiplicity of conditions: that is the gift of space. Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of plurality, of the co-existence of difference. It is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of more-than-one. Without space there is no 'multiplicity' in that sense. (And equally, though this is another argument, without more-than-one, there is no space.) That is the meaning of space as a simultaneity of stories; that sense of 'right now'. *Right now* there is someone growing manges-tout for your table; *right now* there is chaos on the streets of Baghdad; *right now* it is just about noon on the West Coast of the Americas (while it is already evening here in London).

Hegemonic geographical imaginations tend to present things differently. Countries, it is often said, are 'advanced' or 'backward' or, in a less explicitly derogatory but more obfuscating terminology, they are developed or develop*ing*. It is not to deny any notion of 'progress' or 'improvement' (though it may well be to question these terms and the assumptions made by them) to argue that this is to play games with space and time. It is, in effect, to turn space into time, geographical difference into historical sequence. The difference between 'developing' places and 'advanced' places is our relative positions along a trajectory imagined as singular. The fullness of their contemporaneous otherness is restrained, reduced to a place in a historical queue. Their future is already foretold in our present (though, of course, given the iniquitous dynamics of capitalist globalisation it is not). Their space (quite literally) to imagine an alternative future is constrained by an imagination of space as time.

A lively alertness to the more-than-oneness of space disallows that relegation of contemporaneous difference to the past, and the convening of space into time.

It is not only in the worlds of globalisation and geopolitics that these tricks occur. It is not just 'them' as opposed to 'us' who perform these manoeuvres. Tourists' imaginations can do the same sort of thing: that 'timeless' holiday paradise; that 'place that time forgot'; the migrant longing for a former home (which is now transformed beyond recognition – no longer there). Journeys 'home' are, in the imagination, often travels in time as well as space – journeys to the past. But places go on without you. A nostalgia, or a set of expectations that does not take account of that deprives others of their agency, denies their ongoing histories. It converts their coeval, different space into a moment in your time. In a move that is a form of colonisation, it holds others still.

At one point in his *Postmodernism or, the cultural logic of late capitalism* (1991)9 Fredric Jameson gets very severe with a passage from Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*.[10] Sartre had been trying to get to grips with the heterogeneity of other lives, the other things being done at the very moment of his own thinking. Jameson rates this a 'pseudo experience', 'a failure to achieve representation' as 'voluntaristic, an assault of the will on what is "by definition" structurally impossible of achievement.'[11] Yes, recognising all this is impossible. Every train journey (and that would be the least of it) would become a nightmare of guilty admission of all the stories the fullness of whose coeval coexistence you did not manage to recognise. But this is not at all what is at issue. Rather it is a change in perspective. Eliasson, from a different but not unrelated philosophical trajectory, writes of 'seeing yourself sensing'.[12] It is a matter of a change in the angle of vision – to throw yourself into the spatial, as Bergson might have said. It is a lively awareness of the dimension of coevality; the imaginative opening up of space to times.

Jameson has written persuasively of the depthlessness of the postmodern era, but often what is proposed instead is a return to the singular modernist narrative. While the former is all space and no time, the latter, I would argue, is all time (a singular history) and no space (for coeval others, competing voices). To take on board the coevality of space is to refuse that flipping of the imaginative eye from modernist singular temporality to postmodern instantaneity. It would be to stand amid contemporaneous multiple becomings.

And that means, again, that space is not a surface. The map is not space. It is a representation of space-time. The weather maps in my newspaper catch things at a moment ('Noon today'). There is an occluded front over Iceland and in Kirkcudbright heavy downpours, though with sunshine too. The legend below the isobars tells us that things will change ('Low D will move towards the UK.') As the fronts move across the land (which is itself moving on and round and round), each place lives through them in succession – after a dry start turning wet in Eastern England, in Northern Ireland, on the contrary, it is clearing up. A plurality of days of weather.

(Another parenthesis

The recognition that everything is constitutively in process by no means implies – or should not imply – a celebration of mobility as opposed to stability, of transience rather than settlement, of flight as against commitment. Mobility is a theme-tune of our times. Mobility, nomadism, flows: a space of flows replaces a space of places; networks instead of territories. But these are descriptions (accurate or not), not prescriptions. Principles as general as this would anyway be problematic. For the world is specific, and structured by inequalities. It matters who moves and how you move.
Nomadism is also the mantra of the neoliberal: financial capital is constantly circulating; the factory may be 'fly-by-night'. (And what of the rights of migration?)
The emphasis on the times of space is a reminder of co-agency. This is much more of a spatial challenge, for it raises the question of negotiation.)

Terms of engagement

The different winds that reach us in the village in Catalonia provide a kind of sensual orientation. From the South can come a brisk shudder of recognition that there is still, so late in spring, snow among the Pyrennees; the Marinada wafts hints of the sea.

They are reminders of this place's place in the wider scheme of things. That same day [what day?] the newspaper reported 'some very high temperatures for the time of year'. During the previous weekend southerly winds had brought with them the heat of the Sahara, leaving southern Turkey sweltering at more that 35° C (95° F) and then pushing on north across eastern Europe and western Russia. We are all interconnected. I remember standing at my window that evening of the Chernobyl disaster, staring out at the clouds and wondering what they might be bringing with them.

The space of many trajectories, the simultaneity of stories so far, is also the product of those connections. They are constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be determined (and always therefore undetermined) by the construction of new relations. This space is always therefore, in a sense, unfinished (except that 'finishing' is not on the agenda). If you were really to take a slice through time it would be – in this sense – full of holes, of discontinuities, of tentative half-formed first encounters; space being made. 'Everything is connected to everything else' can be a salutary political reminder that whatever we do has wider implications than perhaps we commonly recognise. But it is unhelpful if it leads to a vision of an already constituted holism. It is rather that there are always connections *yet to be* made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction – or not – potential links that may never be established. Space then, sensed in this way, is not a completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, in which every place is already linked to everywhere else. There are always loose ends. If you were to make a map that really had the characteristics of this space, it would be entirely possible to fall through it.

And it is in the terms of engagement among these intersecting trajectories that lie the politics, the productivity, the questions, the expectations, the potential for surprise.

1 James Gleick, *Chaos: making a new science*, Abacus, London, 1988, pp. 3–8

2 David Livingstone, 'Race, space and moral Climatology: Notes toward a Genealogy', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 28, 2002, pp. 159–180.

3 'Artist's Choice', in Madeleine Grynsztejn, Daniel Birnbaum, and Michael Speaks, *Olafur Eliasson*, Phaidon Press, London, 2002, pp. 112–120

4 Ibid. p. 117.

5 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, London 1911, p. 250.

6 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell, Westport 1975, p. 207.

7 Michel Foucault, *Questions on Geography in Power/Knowledge,* ed. Colin Gordon, London, 1980, p.70.

8 Michel de Certau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley 1984, p. 89.

9 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, 1991.

10 Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée, in *Oeuvres Romanesques*, Paris, 1981. p. 67.

11 Jameson, 1991, p. 362.

12 Eliasson, *Projects 73: Olafur Eliasson*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 2001, revised 2002 (brochure).