

The Weather Forecast and Now

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Think with me about your extension of now.

'Now' has been stretched to last longer and longer. Unlike most animals, we (the human race) have the ability to link one moment to the next, creating our sensation of presence. Time flows continuously in a single motion, so to speak, with each moment naturally relating to the next. Edmund Husserl added that our expectations of the coming moment and the memory of the one just passed are all part of our sense of 'now'. If this were not the case, our remarkable ability to orient ourselves would probably not have developed to the extent that it has. Husserl's assumption was that 'now' can only be linked to a subject whose expectations and memory set the parameters of experience and orientation – in a space.

So, if you are still thinking with me, we can say that my understanding of 'our' time is necessarily within my 'own' time; my 'now' is inside yours, or, your 'now' is my surroundings (and vice versa). So, since our 'now' has been extended in time, a discussion about 'here' must follow, particularly with reference to spatial issues such as what constitutes our immediate surroundings.

The familiar 'now and here' (also known as 'nowhere') might just as well be 'now and there'. Since the subject moves around (in a space), there should be no doubt regarding our ability to orient ourselves not only in the near past and future, but also in the space we will enter in a moment – or that exists on a map of yesterday's activities. Our society is laid out to cope with this extended orientation, organised in accordance with principles of predictability (think, for example, of traffic safety). Our surroundings are organised to be moved in without necessarily just being 'here' or 'there' but rather with a sense of having come from up there, now being here, and soon being down there.

Imagine if we were only to orient ourselves in relation to a Barnett Newman painting. Our brain would work intermittently like a strobe lamp, and we would experience our world as an infinite number of suspended, static moments. This does not, as Newman assumed, bring you closer to some shared primordial state while maintaining your strange sense of certainty. In fact there is nothing 'real' outside us, only cultural constructs. Your time, my time – even Einstein's attempt to encapsulate us in objective time – was nothing but a then practical way to cultivate our surroundings. It was practical in the sense that we now know time is gravitational, so that when we stand on top of the world's tallest building, so-called time is one second longer in a hundred million years than when we stand down below in the street. The practicality of the collective cultivation of our surroundings is beyond discussion. Otherwise, we would be like Truman in the film *The Truman Show*, all living in our own separate realities.

So how long *is* 'now', and where does 'here' *end*? One frontier of 'now and here' is the weather forecast, with all its weather people and predictions. In feudal times, meteorology was a matter of life and death. The prediction of the weather originated from a real need to prolong 'now' to include tomorrow's weather, taking our overly suspended reality for a joyride into the future. Like time travellers, weather predictions can draw a small part of the future back to be included in our cultivated sense of 'here and now'.

Farmers' needs grew into a science concerned with the weather – the broadest source of collective awareness because of its complexity and unpredictability. If anything is collective, it's the weather map; its only international competition is the rise and fall of the stock market. In the West, the significance of weather forecasts has decreased in proportion to the declining importance of the agricultural economy. On network newscasts, the stock-market report (often shown immediately before or after the weather) has eaten its way into the ever shorter, faster-spoken weather forecasts. The daily stock-market update followed by the weather forecast forms a perfect (time)frame of reference, informing us 'officially' that the recent past and the near future belong to your now. The recent past (the daily state of the stock markets) and the immediate future (the prediction of the weather) form today's perfect collective, cultivated Now. 'Now' is eating calendar pages and digesting the upcoming weather into a daily dump of stock-market rates.

Cultivation of a collective sense of time and space works, as we can see, through representation. The weather forecast is our mediated experience thermostat, letting us know if we are freezing and in which direction the wind is blowing. Through these representational layers, our immediate, tactile sensation of time and space ('now and here') is evacuated, replaced by TV and thermostats. This enables us to orient ourselves more productively as long as we are aware of the level of representation at work. Our sense of cold is activated by the temperature displayed on the thermostat, not by feeling a chill on the skin. Such mediations can be infinite; they only form a threat when you mistakenly believe that time and space are objective. Like when you are elsewhere and assume you are here. Just like Truman.