

Timing Space – Spacing Time: On transcendence, performance, and place
Jeff Malpas – University of Tasmania

Abstract: Can we think temporality without also thinking the spatial? Might not the thinking of temporality always implicate the thinking of the spatial along with it? What is at issue here is not merely a question concerning the nature of the temporal alone, but of the unity of time with space, and so also of the character of event, action, and performance, and of these as spacings no less than timings. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's notion of 'timespace', as well as Robert Morris' engagement with the thought of Donald Davidson, this essay argues that not only are time and space intimately and irrevocably bound together, but that understanding the unity of time with space is to understand the unity of place. Moreover, it is only in and through that unity, which also always a working out of plurality, that there is any possibility of transcendence.

Keywords: Donald Davidson, Martin Heidegger, Robert Morris, Performance, Place, Space, Time, Timespace, Transcendence, Unity

Timing Space – Spacing Time:

On transcendence, performance, and place

Jeff Malpas – Tasmania

All the vital problems of philosophy depend for their solutions on the problem what Time and Space are and more particularly how they are related to one another (Alexander, 1920)

1. Can we think temporality without also thinking the spatial? Might not the thinking of temporality always implicate the thinking of the spatial along with it? It might be thought that this question is already answered in modern physics by the notion, appearing in Minkowski (Minkowski et al., 1923), but also present, for instance, in Samuel Alexander (Alexander, 1920) of space and time as a continuum, as *space-time*. My interest here is not merely with the thinking of space and time as they occur as formal elements within physical theory, however, but rather with a more fundamental understanding of these concepts as they belong to the very framework of experience. What is at issue is not merely a question concerning the nature of the temporal alone, but of the unity of time with space, and so also of the character of event, action, and performance, and of these as *spacings* no less than *timings*. The idea of the unity of time with space, expressed in the notion of ‘timespace’ (*Zeitraum*) is a central idea in the development of Martin Heidegger’s thinking as it moves away from the problematic treatment of time and space that is evident in *Being and Time* (the idea of ‘timespace’ first appears in Heidegger’s work in the mid-1930s, eg. Heidegger, 1999, §139, although there are intimations of the notion much earlier – the idea of ‘time-space’ is also deployed, in a way explicitly drawn from Heidegger, in Schatzki, 2010). On this account, there is

no temporality that does not bring spatiality along with it, and no spatiality that does not bring temporality also. Understanding the unity of timespace is to understand the unity of place. Indeed, it is only in and through that unity, which also always a working out of plurality, that there is any possibility of transcendence.

2. There is a longstanding history that gives priority to time over space, and that remains within contemporary thinking in spite of the apparent reduction of time to a single mode of dimensionality within contemporary physics (a reduction that is itself in keeping with that spatialized conception of the world, itself dependent on a highly specific understanding of the spatial that is tied to the measurable and the calculable that dominates within modernity – understood as measurable, time can only be assimilated to the spatial, since time carries within it no mode of determination that would allow for such calculation or measure). Indeed, as spatiality increasingly come to dominate within the philosophy of the natural world (a dominance clearly established in the work of Descartes) , time came to dominate within the thinking of the human and the experiential. Within the Western philosophical tradition, the prioritisation of the temporal is already evident in the work of Christian thinkers such as Plotinus and Augustine. The idea is also a clear element in the German Idealism tradition, perhaps most notably in the work of Schelling. In his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling is quite explicit in giving priority to time over space, treating time as itself tied to the *activity* of the self (Heidegger does not, of course, acknowledge any connection here, but this is not unusual – see the discussion in Kümmerl, 1962, pp.46-7). The argument that appears in Schelling can perhaps be seen as adumbrating the claims for the priority of time that is such an important element in Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

The rise of temporality as a concept distinct from the spatial (a distinction itself driven by the parallel rise of spatiality within physical theory), is evident, not only in the rise of historical modes of thinking that characterise especially the nineteenth century, but in a view of the historical and the temporal as almost one and the same. Indeed, so unthinking has this identification become, that it may seem strange to suggest that such an identification is even questionable – yet as has been recognised by twentieth century historians, especially those influenced by the work of such as Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, history encompasses the spatial no less than the temporal, referring us to a way of understanding the past and the present, and so the concrete actuality of our existing spatialized world, no less than it also directs us towards the future (see Malpas, 2008).

The treatment of the temporal and the historical as belonging essentially together is itself something evident in Heidegger. Indeed, Heidegger's own prioritization of the future can be seen as itself an expression of the prioritization of the temporal – since it is futurity that is itself seen to lie at the heart of temporality (that on which the unity of temporality properly depends), while the mode of temporality associated with the present, and which it also that which tends towards the spatial is specifically designated in terms of 'Falleness' – *Verfallen* (similarly that which has been, the past as given in facticity, or thrownness, is also secondary to futurity). The priority of temporality in *Being and Time* is made clear by Heidegger's declaration near the very beginning of the work that its aim 'is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being' (Heidegger, 1962, H1). Indeed, the first two divisions of the work are partly distinguished by the way they focus, in the case of the first, on space, and in the case of the second, on time.

In Part One, Division One, of *Being and Time*, Heidegger sets out an account of the existential spatiality of Dasein that treats it as lacking any

proper unity within itself. Indeed, Heidegger argues that space understood in a purely Cartesian sense, there cannot even be any relatedness; while the structure of existential space, although teleologically structured, is nevertheless such as to always give rise to dispersal of Dasein into its externalised projects. Consequently, the movement of *Being and Time* is to demonstrate the way in which the unity of Dasein, including the unity of space, is given in the unity of originary temporality – it is this that is indicated by the characterisation of time as the horizon of being. It is also thus that futurity, and being-towards-death, loom so large. Heidegger is not, of course, the only late-nineteenth or twentieth century thinker to move in this direction. Bergson also argues for a prioritization of time over space, in his case, in regard to self and mind. Moreover, he specifically sets one form of temporal, as duration, over and against a spatialised mode of temporality, that is viewed as secondary to it (for a more detailed account of the problematic status of space and place in *Being and Time*, and the work's own prioritization of the temporal, see Malpas, 2006, esp. pp.65-146).

The underlying reason for the prioritisation of time in Heidegger's thinking is undoubtedly that time is often seen as associated with the ordering, often understood teleologically, that gives determination to things. In Heidegger and Schelling time is thus understood in relation to activity, and it is activity, we might even say *performance*, that marks out the otherwise static and lifeless field of spatiality. Given that the spatial is frequently taken to be co-extensive with the material (something all-too evident in the Heideggerian account of *Being and Time* in which Cartesianism is taken to exemplify an ontology inseparable from spatiality as such), one can see even more clearly how time may indeed be viewed as dynamic and determinative, in contrast to the static and undifferentiated character of space. This way of thinking is exemplified, not only in Heidegger and Schelling, but also, one might argue, in Bergson as well as in those many philosophers, including for

instance, Whitehead, who give priority to process or becoming, and who understand this priority as itself a prioritization of the temporal and the durational. This tendency extends into contemporary discussions, particularly those that are concerned with understanding mental life or the nature of the self, since the psychological is typically understood (even when it is seen to stand in an essential relation to the body) precisely in its character as temporal (the body is often taken up into this frame in terms of its character as *active* – see e.g., Zahavi, 2005).

The dominance of temporality and temporal modes of analysis is evident not only in recent and contemporary philosophical treatments of space and time, but also in the way in which we use spatial and temporal language. We often contrast use forms of speech that contrast temporal and spatial terms in ways that appear to accord a more positive evaluation to the temporal, or to that which is itself understood as aligned with the temporal, over the spatial. Thus we favour the dynamic over the *static*; *movement* over *structure*; the *historical* over the *geographic*; the *futural* over the past and the present (the spatial itself being identified with that which already is or has been).

Certainly there are significant counter-tendencies here, especially in regard, for instance, to the last of these, but those counter-tendencies typically remain counter-tendencies that operate against a more deep-seated disposition. Indeed, it is intriguing to see how, in many cases, the focus on the temporal is even taken to carry a more positive political and ethical import. Thus one frequently repeated criticism of German thought and culture (perhaps surprising given what I have said about Heidegger and German Idealism) is its preoccupation with what are taken to be essentially spatialized ideas and images (see, e.g., Blicke, 2004). The spatial is thus associated with the conservative and the backward looking: it is thus that the spatial also come to be associated, once again, with the past. On the other hand, the

concern with temporality, understood in terms of a focus on futurity (a connection evident in Heidegger), is seen to be politically and ethically progressive.

3. I want to return to the consideration of some of the philosophical history of the relation between time and space, and Heidegger's own thinking, in a moment, but first I want to make what may appear to be something of a digression. Some of you may be aware of the way in which much of my own work occurs in a space between Heidegger and the American philosopher Donald Davidson. The issue of the relation between time and space is not something that Davidson has himself thematised, and yet it is an issue that appears in an intriguing way in the engagement between Davidson and the artist Robert Morris.

In the early 1990s Morris completed a series of works titled 'Blind Time Drawings'. The works led to an exchange of comments between Davidson and Morris (Davidson wrote an essay for the exhibition catalogue, while Morris contributed an essay for Davidson's Library of Living Philosophers volume). The works consisted of graphite or sometimes graphite mixed with oil applied to large canvases, which already had certain symbols or marks imprinted on them, as well as passages of text one section of text describing Morris' aim in the work along with some background, and one section being a quotation from Davidson's writing on action. Davidson treats these works as showing the potential gap between action and intention; Morris emphasises the character of body and vision, discussing the way in which the works aim, through their imposed constraints, to explore the conditions under which artistic creation is possible, and particularly the role of the body and action in such creation.

It is significant that Morris names these works 'Blind Time Drawings IV (Drawing with Davidson)'. They are drawing inasmuch as they are

produced using one of the traditional elements of drawing, namely, graphite, though unusually applied (in one case Morris uses a towel to make the marks). But they also involve, quite explicitly, time, and also, through the constraint they impose of perception, space. Temporality appears in the works through Morris imposition of a time limit on the actions he performs, a time limit that he has somehow to meet without being able to check on that time as measured by clock or watch, and his own estimation of the timing of his actions. Spatiality appears through the way in which, by blindfolding himself, Morris changes the character of his experience of space and his engagement with the action and his materials.

Morris's performances are described by Kenneth Surin as follows:

The materials used in the *Blind Time Drawings IV* are graphite or graphite mixed with oil. Morris typically gives himself a preset task to be accomplished within a time established in advance. The tasks vary: negotiating quadrants on the page, making regular movements of the mixture-smear hand toward the (sensed) edge of the page, joining angles at the center of the page, enlarging a cross already placed on the page, moving rotating hands along a guessed diagonal, and so forth. Each drawing contains two texts: an excerpt from Davidson's writings and, adjacent to this, an inscription by Morris outlining both the physical movements he sets out to make and the intention that underlies the task (Surin, 2002, 167 n.12).

It is thus that these are indeed 'blind time drawings'. They are executed within a time frame, though through a timing made by the artist. They are executed in a set spatial frame, but one that the artist has deliberately disabled himself from engaging with in the usual way. Both time and space are available to the artist only through the artist's immediate experience of his located, embodied engagement in the performance, in the action.

If one examines the deviation in the times attached to these works, those deviations vary considerably: +1.43, +.20, -.23, +1.16, -.48, -2.08, +.15, -

1.36, -2.44, -.52. There is no obvious correlation between the deviations in time and features of the completed works. Undoubtedly those deviations relate to some aspect of Morris' own engagement in the performance, although one cannot say whether he was more or less accurate according to his immersion in the act, his feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction – we are not told. We are also not told how long Morris dedicated to each performance, and so cannot judge whether these were small errors relative to the elapsed time or large. What does seem clear, however, is that the sense of time is itself variable in a way that can presumably only relate to the different actions concerned and some aspect of Morris' engagement in those actions. What Morris does through both the blindfolding and the requirement of attentiveness to time, is also force attention onto the character of his performances as indeed instances of active time-spaces – workings out of temporal-spatial structures in action. In 'Blind Time Drawing' one cannot separate the temporal from the spatial in any clear-cut way.

Contrast this with the usual way in which we envisage action – perhaps the idea of Morris enacting these works while not blindfolded, or perhaps not dependent on his own estimate of time, but on a stop watch or alarm. What results? One such result, I suggest, is that time and space can be more readily separated in the performance, and the performance itself viewed as the intersection of two elements that can each be separately controlled. But that is not so easily possible in the situation envisaged and enacted by Morris. There the sense of time seems to depend on the engagement in enacted space, and the space also depend on the sense of timing. Moreover, the very detachment that is made possible by a visual engagement that guides action itself seems to enable this more separated mode of interaction. Vision enables a sense of objectivity that is less readily accessible via the engaged, the immediate, the located, and the embodied. The very idea of measure – of the

sort required for the sense of time as apart from space – is tied to a mode of abstraction facilitated by the visual.

In Morris' engagement with Davidson, then, one can see how time and space hold together, but also how they might be pried apart. In Davidson's own work, the belonging together of time with space is evident in his own account of the generation of meaning, not through any internal subjectivity, but rather through an engaged mode of relatedness to others and to a world, that while it implicates notions of objectivity, also sets objectivity alongside the subjective and the intersubjective. For Davidson, meaning, action, sense, arise only out of the inter-implication of elements that is also brought to the fore in Morris's work. The difference is that Morris exhibits the underlying ground of this inter-implication through the disabling of those elements that render it invisible.

4. Significantly, the inter-implication that is evident in Davidson and Morris is also present in one of the key figures in the history of philosophy – a figure who is often taken to exemplify the modern philosophical prioritization of temporality, namely, Immanuel Kant. It is certainly true that Kant takes time to be the form with respect to which all representations are ordered, both the representations that are given as belonging to inner consciousness alone (dreams, imaginings, and so forth) as well as to consciousness of what is external (our perceptual acquaintance with worldly events and things). Yet Kant also stresses the character of time as itself representable only by means of what is spatial, and so by reference to the line or to the counting-off of discrete elements (whether on the fingers, an abacus, or whatever), and this is largely tied to his insistence on quantity as itself representable only in such a way: "The possibility of things as magnitudes . . . can also be exhibited only in outer intuition, and . . . by means of that alone can it subsequently also be applied to inner sense" (Kant, 1965, B293).

The representability of time by means of what is spatial itself underpins the tendency towards the prioritization of quantifiability that is so characteristic of modernity, according to which only that which is quantifiable, measurable, and calculable is considered significant, and that is itself associated with a corresponding move towards pure spatialization. The latter is especially evident in modes of thinking, as well as modes of organisation, that present the entirety of the world in primarily spatial terms (the spatial itself identified with the measurable), so that even time is reduced to a mode of space (in physical theory time becomes another 'dimension' within the same extended universe). At the same time, of course, the emphasis on temporality in thinkers such as Heidegger (and also Bergson, Whitehead and others) constitutes a directly opposed tendency – one that typically focusses on the inadequacy of the spatial in relation to what might broadly be construed as the realm of 'human' meaning and existence. Essentially these two opposed tendencies, which are not unrelated, constitute a radicalization of the spatial and the temporal, each asserting its priority over the other.

The spatialised representation of time reflects not only the connection of spatiality with quantifiability, but also the character of representation as dependent on spatiality – a point reflected in Derrida's idea of *inscription* as that in which the possibility of language essentially resides (which is partly why he gives priority to writing over speech – see the discussion of the Derridaen notion of inscription in Gasché, 1986, 154-63). Language thus *requires* spatiality – an idea also expressed in the familiar Saussurean notion of language as 'a system of differences.' This idea is taken up by Derrida, in a way that combines spatialization, in the form of *differing*, with a mode of temporalization, in the form of *deferring*, so as to give rise to the idea of *différance*, as fundamental to any form of difference or deferral, and so to all forms of more particular temporal-spatial ordering, unification, or differentiation (see e.g., Derrida, 1982, 13).

Significantly, the way Derrida connects time and space together here is itself adumbrated in Heidegger. In the works that follow after *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempts to rethink some of the problematic elements of that work, including its prioritization of the temporal over the spatial. The rethinking at issue here continues throughout much of Heidegger's subsequent writings, although never completely resolved. Heidegger, like Derrida, also comes upon a sense of the spatial as implicated in the event of language.

Adumbrating something of what is also to be found in Derrida, Heidegger writes, in one of his late essays on language:

The intimacy of world and thing is not a fusion. Intimacy obtains only where the intimate – world and thing – divides itself cleanly and remains separated. In the midst of the two, in the between of world and thing ...division prevails: a dif-ference. The intimacy of world and thing is present in the separation of the between; it is present in the dif-ference... The dif-ference carries out world in its worlding, carries out things in their thinging... The dif-ference is neither distinction nor relation. The dif-ference is, at most, dimension for world and thing... Language speaks. Its speaking bids the dif-ference to come which expropriates world and things into the simple onefold of their intimacy (Heidegger, 1975, 202-03 & 210).

Nowhere in this discussion does Heidegger use the term 'space' to refer to the 'dif-ference' that he invokes, and yet the sense of intimacy that entails separation clearly draws on something spatial (although in what sense of spatial remains to be seen). Moreover, the 'dif-fering' that he explores here seems to connect directly with another notion that he does acknowledge as having explicitly spatial connotations, that of the 'opening' or 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) within which things come to presence.

The 'dif-ference' of which Heidegger speaks is also a freeing up, an opening of a free-space, a play of time-space, within which things can appear as the things that they are, and so as standing in relations of difference as well as sameness. What becomes ever more explicit in Heidegger, even though it

is not always fully articulated, is the idea of the appearing of things as grounded in an original openness that is always to be described in spatial as well as temporal terms (it is no mere static extendedness, but an active opening), and that is properly to be understood as a mode of dimensionality out of which both the temporal and the spatial in their more mundane forms emerge (Heidegger does equivocate somewhat on the issue as to the relative roles of time and space here – see e.g. Heidegger, 1972, 14-15, where he is still concerned to retain some priority for time over space – I take the apparent uncertainties in much of Heidegger's thinking about timespace, and about place, to be indicative of certain limitations in the framework even of his thinking). The mode of dimensionality at issue here is one that also belongs to the fundamental character of world understood, not as merely the sum of all that is, but rather as the very emergence of things into appearance – an emergence of things that is also the emergence of our own existence. It is only inasmuch as we are already given over to the happening of timespace, a happening that we can never surpass or overcome, that we can grasp the world in a way that seems to allow a separation of the two, or, indeed, a separation of our own existence from either.

The original dimensionality at issue here cannot be identified with space or with time, and yet neither can it be thought independently of these. What we find in later Heidegger (although it is already indicated, if sometimes obscured in the earlier work) is thus an emphasis on the original happening of timespace as that which first enables our involvement in the world even prior to the involvement that comes with our being able explicitly to state, to point out, to represent. This timespace is not to be identified merely with the composite of time and space as separately understood and represented, but rather as the a single mode of dimensionality that is both temporal and spatial, and that underlies the many different modes of temporality and spatiality including those that belong to our ordinary

experience, as well as to the various ways in which the world presents itself and we represent the world. It is this same timespace that I suggest Morris investigates, though very differently, in his work, and that is also evident, again differently, in Davidson's exploration of the open realm in which triangulation occurs. It is this timespace that I have referred to in my own work as *topos*, place. Understood as place, we may say that timespace refers to our original and active situatedness in the world – a situatedness that is never completely encompassed by any of the descriptions we give of the world nor by any of our actions or modes of comportment towards it. It is the place in which we always already are, and yet which we can ever fully comprehend or represent.

5. One of the problems associated with the prioritization of temporality is precisely the way in which it seems to be tied to the self and to the internal life of the mind. One of the problematic features of the prioritization of temporality alone is thus an inevitable tendency towards subjectivism (something that both Davidson and Morris see themselves, along with Heidegger and Derrida, as opposing). But more than this, it prevents any adequate thinking of world – of that prior mode of engagement in which we are already implicated – and in this sense it prevents us from any adequate thinking of transcendence itself. Moreover, in failing to recognise the spatial as entwined with the temporal we also misunderstand the already given and determined character of the realm in which we find ourselves. Only through an understanding of the spacing of time, as well as the timing of space, can we come to terms with the limits of our being, our own finitude, and transcendence only becomes significant in relation to such finitude.

The truth and significance of performance, the performance of the word, of the act, or the image, is to be found in the way in which it sets itself out into the world, in its concrete and singular fragility, and yet in so doing

illuminates the world itself. This is the only transcendence of which we are capable. It is not the transcendence that brings about world transformation, but rather like the small flicker of light which suddenly shows us who and what we are which illuminates what is around us and then dies out.

Performance is not a primarily temporal phenomenon, but is rather itself a working out of a certain timespace, a timespace created by the performance itself (as Morris performance creates its own time and space), and in which the performance is itself brought forth. Only in the timespace of performance, the timespace of event that is also the happening of place, is place and world brought forth, and the possibility of transcendence enabled. There is no transcendence that is possible in temporality alone. Temporality simply moves us ever forward. Genuine transcendence means not a going beyond where we already find ourselves, but is found instead in the opening up of the here and now. This is also why one might say that the transcendence of the eternal present is not an opening up into time or space alone, but an opening up of timespace in the place of our own possibility.

References:

- Alexander, Samuel (1920). *Time, Space, and Deity*. 2 vols. New York: Macmillan.
- Blickle, Peter. (2004). *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German idea of Homeland*. London, Camden House.
- Derrida, Jacques. (1982). *Différance, Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 3-27.
- Gasché, Rudolph. (1986). *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Heidegger, Martin. (1962). *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1999). *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1972). *On Time and Being*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1975). 'Language'. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 185-208.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1965). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York, St Martin's Press.
- Kümmerl, Friedrich. (1962). *Über den Begriff der Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Malpas, Jeff. (2008). Heidegger, Geography, and Politics. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2, 185–213.
- Malpas, Jeff. (2006). *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Minkowski, H. et al. (1923). *The Principle of Relativity*. Trans. W. Perrett and G.B. Jeffery. London: Constable.
- Schatzki, Theodore. (2010). *The Timespace of Human Activity: Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Surin, Kenneth. (2002). Getting the Picture. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 133-169.
- Zahavi, Dan. (2005). *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.