1 Before Stories
Emotional Time and Anna Karenina

Emotional Geography and Emotional History

Anna Karenina begins with a rift in a family.[1] Dolly Oblonsky has discovered that her husband has been having an affair. One morning, a few days after the initial quarrel, Stiva Oblonsky, the husband, wakes up alone in his study. For a moment, he does not remember the rift, or even his own precise location in the home. For a moment he is content, tacitly imagining his ordinary life, his ordinary bed. But then he remembers. "All the details" come rushing back, but they are not uniform. He particularly recalls "the first moment when, on coming back cheerful and satisfied" he "saw her . . . holding the unlucky note that had revealed everything" (2).[2] He goes on to reflect on the entire "event," feeling particular torment over the "silly smile" with which he greeted his wife's reproaches and the way, seeing this, "Dolly shuddered as though in physical pain" (3). He begins to feel "despair," unable to answer the question "What is there to do?"

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger draws a valuable distinction between the uniform, objective time of clocks and the subjective temporality of human experience; this is parallel with a distinction between the objective space of maps and the subjective spatiality of human activity.[3] The opening of *Anna Karenina* brings home this distinction sharply. Spatiality is perhaps the more obvious here. In themselves, rooms are simply organizations of space. Objectively, Stiva's location is just a matter of a physical body located at a particular point relative to other physical bodies. But the spatial experience of Stiva is quite different from this. Stiva understands his location by contrast with where he should be, where he would like to be, where he would be if everything were right. Jean-Paul Sartre refers to this experience as *nothingness*. Stiva's location is not only a matter of where he is, but equally of where he is not.

My first contention here is that spatiality, the "existential" experience of location, is fundamentally an emotional experience. As my character-

ization of Stiva's place already suggests, nothingness—the judgment of where one is not but should be or should have been—is first of all a function of what one feels about locations. In this case, there are two aspects to the feeling. The first is not precisely emotion per se, but rather forms the baseline from which emotions arise. This is normalcy. More often than not, emotions are a response to changes in what is routine, habitual, expected. We anticipate normalcy unreflectively. When our anticipations are violated, attentional focus is triggered (see, for example, Frijda 272–73, 318, and 386) and a sort of pre-emotional arousal occurs, an arousal that often prepares for a particular emotion (see, for instance, Simpson et al. 692). It is just when Stiva puts down his feet toward the expected slippers and reaches out toward the expected robe, the moment when he finds the nothingness where the slippers and the robe should be, that his attention is focused. In this case, the focus is recollective; it is a matter of memory—and that increased attention carries in its train the entire sequence of happenings that pushed this body from his wife's bed to the couch in the study.

This leads to the second aspect of feeling that bears on our experience of space. Our experience of the world is not uniform. It is focused on particular areas. The center toward which we tend, and against which we experience all other places, is home. I am not simply referring here to the building we call "home," as when we "go home" at the end of the day. Rather, I am referring to the location that, paradigmatically, both is home (in the sense of the origin and end point of journeys) and, so to speak, "feels like home." Thus it is a point of cognitive orientation ("Where is the restaurant?" "About a five-minute drive from your home") and a point of emotional ease and security. The idea is not merely phenomenological. There are neurobiological reasons for "place attachment," as it is called. Indeed, the same subcortical structures appear to be involved in place attachment as in attachment to persons, leading the affective neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp to suggest that perhaps "the ancient mechanisms of place attachment provided a neural impetus for the emergence of social attachments" (407n.93).

Deviation from normalcy or removal from home may have different valences. But leaving home and normalcy is always a matter of risk—specifically, emotional risk. That is what attentional focus responds to—risk, both threats and opportunities. Because leaving home and normalcy

involves risk, it involves emotion as well, at least potentially. Conversely, being at home and surrounded by what is routine involves the avoidance of risk. This too can give rise to emotion, if risk is expected or has recently been eluded.

In short, the spatiality of human being-in-the-world (to use the Heideggerian idiom) is a sort of *emotional geography* that develops out of fundamental human propensities toward organizing the world along two fundamental axes: normalcy and attachment.

Similar points may be made about the temporality of our being-in-the-world. It too is organized—or, more precisely, encoded—emotionally. Encoding is the process whereby we select, segment (or "chunk"), and give preliminary structure to our experience. There are many different ways in which we encode aspects of our experience. These depend on current interests, expectations, contextual relations (e.g., figure/ground relations in perception), and so forth. Moreover, there are different levels of encoding. Most basically, there is the perceptual encoding that gives us our sensory experience of the world. This is a function of the sensitivity of sensory neurons (e.g., visual neurons, with their sensitivities to colors or particular orientations of lines), processes such as lateral inhibition (in which neurons surrounding a highly activated neuron are inhibited; this results in, for instance, the sharpening of lines in vision), and so on. There are also higher levels of selection, segmentation, and structuration. Some of these are self-conscious. In those self-conscious cases, we may refer to the processes as "construal" or, even more broadly, "interpretation." Though only partially recognized by theorists of emotion, it seems that our emotional encoding of experience also occurs repeatedly and at different levels. For example, there is a very basic level of emotional encoding that is bound up with perceptual encoding. Joseph LeDoux has argued that there are two perceptual streams, one of which goes directly to subcortical emotion systems, while the other goes to cortical areas. Thus a potentially threatening movement in our vicinity might activate a circuit connected to the amygdala, thereby generating fear. At the same time, a more informationally rich encoding of that experience may be sent to cortical areas, which may then inhibit or enhance the amygdala response. Put differently, in the "low road" (as LeDoux calls it), particular sorts of motion and proximity (commonly in relation to expectation) are selected by our sensory systems and given a tentative structure in relation