Jane Austen meets the GPS: Place and Space

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At Home with Jane Austen

When one reads Jane Austen's novels, one finds that her heroines' lives center around a beloved and comfortable home, in a local region including a small town, some neighboring estates, and local hills and valleys. It is a detailed and textured home area of nearby places reachable on foot or horse. One to three miles are walkable to a friend's house or a favorite scenic hill. Beyond this region is no longer "home." Fifteen or twenty-five miles can be distant.

For instance, at the end of *Mansfield Park*, the happy couple are to reside in a country parsonage:

> Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the daughters examine their new home area:

> The whole country about them abounded in beautiful walks. The high downs which invited them from almost every window of the cottage to seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits, were a happy alternative when the dirt of the valleys beneath shut up their superior beauties.

Short distances connect friends, often by more walking than is common today. Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* remarks:

> "No, indeed, I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner."

On the other hand, even a short distance can bring big changes. Anne in *Persuasion* knows

that a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea.

Long distances from home hinder communication. In *Mansfield Park*, the two sisters live about 100 miles apart:

Their homes were so distant, and the circles in which they moved so distinct, as almost to preclude the means of ever hearing of each other's existence during the eleven following years.[1]

The feeling of distance varies, though, with purposes and circumstances. In the novel *Emma*, sixteen miles is close at one time, far at another. Near the beginning of the story, the heroine's sister is "comparatively but little removed by matrimony, being settled in London, only sixteen miles off." But near the end, Emma, nervously fearing that an encounter with Mr. Knightly will dash her hopes, thinks him far away, sixteen miles:

She saw Mr. Knightley passing through the garden door, and coming towards her.—It was the first intimation of his being returned from London. She had been thinking of him the moment before, as unquestionably sixteen miles distant.—There was time only for the quickest arrangement of mind. She must be collected and calm. In half a minute they were together.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and the constantly traveling Mr. Darcy discuss distance:

"It must be very agreeable for her [Charlotte] to be settled within so easy a distance of her own family and friends."

"An easy distance, do you call it? It is nearly fifty miles."

"And what is fifty miles of good road? Little more than half a day's journey. Yes, I call it a *very* easy distance."

"I should never have considered the distance as one of the *advantages* of the match," cried Elizabeth. "I should never have said Mrs. Collins was settled *near* her family."

"It is a proof of your own attachment to Hertfordshire. Anything beyond the very neighbourhood of Longbourn, I suppose, would appear far."

When Austen's stories take her characters to London or Bath, the intricate cityscape and the anonymous crowds may be mentioned, but the story largely ignores them; it concentrates on a few houses and rooms, and perhaps a street or two, just as it centers its rural landscapes on a few houses and hills.

The places in Austen's novels are gathered around a home with a distinctive history and qualities. The home is connected to other qualitatively individual houses, and to well-known fields, markets and ballrooms. This net of connections is measured by bodily modes of travel: by how long it takes to walk or ride there, and by whether the journey is fatiguing or not. Local travel uses familiar local landmarks, concretely described: this hill, that field, that park and estate. This locality has a privileged physical center, and a network of "places" in a strong sense of that word, which contrast with more abstract spaces and connections today.

New Networks

For in our time there are new nets cast over our world, nets which are in principle un-centered and disembodied. Trade and the flow of finance are becoming uprooted from privileged centers. The Internet connects places and data without a central hub. Its pattern is rhizomatic, with no taproot. As an example of such a pervasive decentered and abstract network I will discuss the Global Positioning System.[2]

Navigating the open ocean is difficult. Island dwellers in the Pacific had developed ways of sailing the wide ocean, but these demanded highly trained perceptions of concrete local variations in currents and waves and wind, stars and the flight of birds. Islanders could sail across wide seas while Europeans were still creeping along coasts watching for landmarks. In Europe, the successful development of accurate chronographs made it possible to measure longitude with reference to the clocks, along with latitude by the stars or sun. This reduced the need for detailed local perceptions.

A GPS device needs no local perceptions at all. It works by receiving position signals and time stamps from four or more orbiting satellites, sometimes combined with signals from a terrestrial tower.[3] A computer in the device combines this information and comes up with the location and elevation, accurate to within a small distance. Because the device relies upon signals transmitted from orbiting satellites, the location

is calculated without any reference to local landscape shapes or qualities. The system pays no attention to the qualitative individuality or the social meaning of the location so pinpointed. It tells you the location without needing local knowledge.

Everything happens mechanically with reference to mathematical models. The system is adjusted automatically as the orbits of the satellites change. Of course, there was a great deal of human thought and intervention in the planning and execution of the system, but this is very different from the human invention of developing and handing down traditions of detailed observation, recognizing coastal landmarks, and reading the sea and winds.

The GPS gives a set of numbers with reference to a system of coordinates, usually latitude and longitude. There used to be places whose location was unknown except by clues familiar only to the local people. Now the most sequestered of secret ritual groves can be pinpointed on a map. We have their numbers.

Individual qualitative and perspectival bodily places, so important in Austen's novels, have been leveled out and pinned to coordinates in a geometric abstract space, denying all the detail and local knowledge that once would have been required to know where one was and where one was going. Locations are referred to an abstract grid rather than to a bodily center.

Space and Place

The network of places described in Austen's novels stands in contrast to this other more abstract network. Such a contrast has been described as that between *places* and *spaces*. In phenomenological circles, this distinction between place and space has been an ongoing topic of discussion (see, for instance, Malpas 2007). For my purposes I can briefly summarize the distinction as follows:

Places are inherently bodily and perspectival. Place exists only as lived. A place starts from an animate body and is perceived as extending in directions keyed to bodily axes (up, down, forward, backward, right, left) and potential bodily movements. Furthermore, a place is composed of qualitative regions which are unique, and which relate to the human body and its activities. This is not to say that places lack social coding and histories; indeed, part of what makes a place is the mapping of human activities and norms on to the highly detailed qualitative textures of place as they extend and penetrate one another (see Kolb 2008). Places are not all cozy and homelike; they can be threatening or strange. But they remain linked to bodily

movements, social meanings, and the details of the concrete landscape. They have individual histories and emotional resonances.

Spaces, on the other hand, are geometrical expanses. They can be measured with coordinates to locate items and distinguish subspaces, but those coordinate systems do not depend on local details, and the coordinate systems may be multiple, and can be transformed one into another. Measured regions have only arbitrary or pragmatic boundaries, not natural landmarks and centers. Qualitative distinctions among locations and regions count for little. Space is the object of a view from nowhere, or anywhere. Space in this sense pre-exists our bodily presence and locates it on an abstract grid.

We do not live on an abstract grid, but to a surprising degree we can treat places as if we did. We can "level the site," destroying its native contours, and build on it in ways indifferent to the local context. Or we can by bland repetition make distant sites "the same." Or we can create areas and buildings whose uses and social norms pressure us to adopt only very thin social roles: shoppers in supermarkets and malls, drivers on highways, passengers at airports, abstracting from our own individuality and history. Such places do not reinforce the rich historical identity and thick norms found in traditional places such as Jane Austen's homes.

The GPS performs a related but more extreme abstraction. One always can know where one is with reference to a global grid, *without knowing where that where is, in concrete and social terms.*

Fears and Hopes

Looking, then, at our world, some critics see the threat of a replacement of place by space, turning qualitative experience into geometrical measure, turning human embodiment into measured usefulness (see, for example Casey 2009). This is the fear of the loss of place, the loss of substantive value, leading to the rule by exchange value and procedural efficiency. This is seen as destroying deep historical identity and meaning, leaving us with only thin abstract selves and communities. There is the fear that we will then live rootless, free but empty lives with no sense of connection or roots.

The GPS network might then be seen as an example of what Heidegger called *das Gestell*, the network of universal availability. The rich qualitative variation and centered, oriented bodily locations of "place" and "home" are banished, and we have

only a sequence where one location and another are distinguished simply by their coefficients in an abstract grid and made available for exploitation.

Opposed to this fear is the hope of a comfortable sense of directionality to and from a sure center, with feelings of rootedness and orientation, of definition and assurance. This can be generalized into a complete, seamless, substantive, traditional identity, a world where everyone knows their place and finds deep satisfaction in a deeply rooted set of social rules and shared values. So, many of the anti-modernization and often anti-enlightenment critiques picture us returning to an idealized semi-rural environment where the village is solid and holds our lives.

But this in turn brings a fear of stifling conformity, a lack of freedom and creativity. The sense of comfortable rootedness has been attacked by many writers as oppressive, predefining and limiting freedom, imposing a false unity on a fragmented self, and providing a nostalgic retreat from the reality of self-creative freedom, or, on the social level a futile evasion of the space of flows and of domination by exchange value and profit.

Jane Austen's novels show us a comfortable world with rich and detailed knowledge of particular places, well known ways of living, and also how within that world's accepted social roles people can develop keen perceptions of individual differences and be surprised by how people can exceed their expected behaviors. But she also shows a world that defines strict roles that her characters, especially women, chafe against and protest. Traditional places can be oppressive and narrowing, as in a friendly but stifling small town from which people flee to the disorderly city, the village that reinforces social conformity in its every spatial arrangement and detail.

These stories of seamless tradition and rootless modernity can be told with two opposite valuations.

Traditional places and modes of life are solid, grounded, supportive, guiding, humane, substantive and full, while modernity is empty and arbitrary, thinning out our lives in modern spaces and modes of life that are arbitrary, unstable, formal, nihilistic. We should save our humanity by returning to traditional patterns and places.

Or, the other way, tradition is stifling, forcing people into old and restrictive roles and eliminating creativity, while modernity liberates people to be open, free productive creative and efficient. We should free ourselves from oppression by escaping traditional patterns and places.

These opposed valuations assume we are dealing with a set of parallel oppositions, where all the dualities line up together. And we must choose, because one side replaces the other. Dualities such as place vs. space, concrete vs. abstract, traditional vs. modern get put in parallel so that place, local, concrete, traditional are put together on one side and space, global, abstract, modern on the other, with one side positive and the other negative.

But the dualities of abstract and concrete, space and place, are found on *both sides* of the duality of traditional and modern. We should question the way such critics assign value predicates exclusively to one side or another. These ignore the way in which the two sides of tradition and modernity, or place and space interact and complicate each other.

Abstraction

To see this more clearly, consider the word that's been behind much of my description so far: "abstract."

In its ordinary use, "abstract" designates concepts and ideas as opposed to the "concrete" entities they describe. All concepts are abstract in this sense, but we also say that some are more abstract than others, because they include less and less of the individual they are describing and apply equally to larger and larger groups of entities. For instance, there is Bossie, my cow, but "cow" describes lots of animals, and "animal" even more, and "living thing" still more. The concepts say less and less about more and more entities.

Hegel offers revised notions of the abstract and concrete, but for our purposes here we can refer to a simpler part of his complex theory. What is distinctive is that he can refer to actions and practices and institutions as abstract, as well as the concepts they work from.

In a small document which was discovered among his papers, and was probably meant for publication in a popular newspaper, Hegel argues that abstraction is not what the scientist or learned man does, but rather what the common person does. Hegel's examples come from the class structure of the time and the way the complex realities of a person are ignored because of the label which attaches him to a certain class. His first example is a condemned criminal who is treated in practice as simply a criminal, with no other characteristic of his reality being taken into account.

A murderer is led to the place of execution. For the common populace he is nothing but a murderer. Ladies perhaps remark that he is a strong, handsome, interesting man. The populace finds this remark terrible: What? A murderer handsome? How can one think so wickedly and call a murderer handsome; no doubt, you yourselves are something not much better! This is the corruption of morals that is prevalent in the upper classes, a priest may add, knowing the bottom of things and human hearts. One who knows men traces the development of the criminal's mind: he finds in his history, in his education, a bad family relationship between his father and mother, some tremendous harshness after this human being had done some minor wrong, so he became embittered against the social order—a first reaction to this that in effect expelled him and henceforth did not make it possible for him to preserve himself except through crime. —There may be people who will say when they hear such things: he wants to excuse this murderer! ... This is abstract thinking: to see nothing in the murderer except the abstraction that he is a murderer, and to annul all other human essence in him with this simple quality. (*Dies heißt abstrakt gedacht, in dem Mörder nichts als dies Abstrakte, daß er ein Mörder ist, zu sehen und durch diese einfache Qualität alles übrige menschliche Wesen an ihm zu vertilgen.*)

Again, he says:

The common man again thinks more abstractly, he gives himself noble airs vis-à-vis [a] servant and relates himself to the other man merely as to a servant; he clings to this one predicate. (Hegel 1966)

It is this *practical* concentration on only one characteristic of a more complex being that Hegel labels abstract, as compared to modes of behavior that explicitly take up all the different characteristics of the person and relate them one to another, arriving at a mode of action that treats the fuller reality of the person. The rich concreteness of a place or a person is mostly ignored, not just because of simplified concepts but because of simplified practices and activities. Abstraction in Hegel's sense is not something confined to thought; it is a way of dealing with things and people, a way of defining their being.

In this sense it is more abstract—that is, it deals with fewer of the significant characteristics of the object—to measure and assign locations by GPS numbers than it

is to deal with the oriented and qualitative places such as Jane Austen describes. But Hegel's point is that the abstract never exists nakedly, but is always in the context of richer interactions.

For instance, it is possible to design a set of buildings that is abstract in the sense that it deals well with only a few qualities of the individuals or groups involved. This was the case with much "modern" architecture, which was programmed to house a certain set of human functions, but that set was very restricted. So people often found the structures cold, or saw them as temples to an abstract vision of commerce and profit. (The best modern architecture did not have this failing, because the best design accommodates more than its explicit program.) Any "abstract" building exists in the context that is much richer and which will infiltrate and modify the abstraction built into its design. This happens over and over again in planning and architecture. Even the most carefully adapted design will change and be reinterpreted over time.

It's not that we refuse abstraction but we use it in a way that acknowledges it as part of a richer context, and we use the play and room for innovation provided by the tensions and intersections between abstract and concrete, space and place, home and outside.

Hegel is with Aristotle in saying that the abstract exists only in the concrete. But they differ in what it means to be concrete. For Aristotle universal characteristics become concrete when they are embodied in matter. In that embodiment, the various characteristics mostly stand indifferently next to one another, so that Socrates can be short, with a snub nose, a teacher of Plato, and so on. Socrates could have a different nose and still be Plato's teacher.

Aristotle does see some qualities as having necessary relations with others (for instance, he sees rationality as a necessary condition of being able to appreciate humor). He also sees qualities as ranked in a tree of generality (I am a male, a human, an animal, a living thing, a material being, where each quality is more general and includes the ones before it in the list).

But this is not the kind of relation Hegel is most concerned with. Hegel sees many different abstract qualities of a thing as in conflictual mutually tense relationships. My concrete reality is woven out of the intricate interrelations and tensions among my being an animal organism, a male, an American, citizen, a property owner, with a certain history, and so on. My role as property owner is enabled and also restricted by my citizenship; my activity writing philosophy strives to exceed my history and

citizenship; my material being and my cultural being can be at war with one another; yet all these qualities and their tense relations together make up my concrete being.

The Hegelian approach is superior for our present purposes because it allows us to look at different levels of abstraction and different kinds of duality and see them not as just coexisting aspects of a concrete whole but as mutually interacting and mutually complicating each other.

We create spaces and buildings whose uses and social norms pressure us to adopt only very thin social roles: people from widely differing subgroups with different values and histories still share infrastructure such as the highway system, which defines them merely as drivers, or airlines, which offer them only the social role of passengers, or supermarkets where they are reduced to shoppers. These places are more than the mathematical locations the GPS system offers, but they are less than places which embody complex thick historical identities and particular values such as Jane Austen celebrates. They are real places with social roles, but abstract ones, and these thin social roles point up a broader aspect of modernity.

For many contemporary institutions ignore (or are supposed to ignore) one's thicker historical and natural qualities such as gender and parentage and belief and affiliation. More and more, people get treated as abstractly described units of labor, talent, and consumption, indexed by individual preferences. In the market, each person is supposed to be defined as a free chooser and contract maker according to their individual preferences. This creates new kinds of freedom but also new kinds of restrictions and repression.

The labor market, like the GPS system, deals only with certain aspects of concrete persons and places, yet such abstract practices are embedded in a richer set of interactions.[4]

Interactions and Mixtures

Our situation is more complex than a simple opposition of place and space. The duality of the traditional and the modern leads not to replacement of the old by the new, place by space, but to more complexity in the mutual interaction of the two as lived.

It is worth recalling that in its initial stages the GPS was developed by the US military as a tool of empire, enabling their armies to know more than the benighted locals. Missiles guided by GPS could find specific buildings in Baghdad; troops guided

by GPS could find their way through countryside without needing detailed local knowledge. GPS combined with satellite views from above make a potent set of military tools.

A defining moment came on Jan 1, 2000, when the US switched off "selective availability," that is, it stopped furnishing less accurate data to civilian users. (People had begun to find ways to extract the more accurate data, in any case.) So GPS data was allowed to go public in a more accurate way, although the US military still keeps the option of fuzzing up or shutting off the civilian data in times of crisis.[5]

Satellite broadcasts are available to anyone with a receiver. So data about location became available anywhere to anyone who could afford the tools, and the tools got cheaper. As cell phones spread and included GPS circuitry, what started out as a tool of the hegemon has become a tool for everyone. Its broad usefulness was realized and new products developed.

Now the abstract system is available to people living in local places. There is no replacement of one by the other. Nor need we think of one side undermining the other, but rather of their mutual relations. The qualitative individuality of the home can be located on the GPS grid for useful purposes. This puts a new power in the hands of people and creates a new mode of location, one that combines space and place, which have become intricately interwoven in everyday life

For instance, I use GPS to find my way to a friend's house. Or my sister visits me in Oregon for the first time, and finds our obscure street without needing to know the local landmarks. I go hiking in the Cascade mountains near my home, reading a hiking guide that uses GPS abstract coordinates as well as descriptions of this particular riverbank and that particular set of trees. The combination functions together, not in opposition.

Or consider geo-caching, the sport of seeking out small treasures hidden in spots identified only by GPS coordinates.[6] While its treasures and goals are identified purely numerically on the grid, the enjoyment of the task is found exactly in the cooperative tension between the abstract numbers and the qualitative and orientated landscape one encounters or hikes over as one puzzles out the local location of the cache.

Or again, high-tech farmers can combine GPS with careful chemical analyses of the variations of soil on their property. A GPS receiver on the tractor, in conjunction with a database of the different kinds of soil, notes the location of the tractor and delivers different agricultural chemicals to what may look like identical areas of soil.

So the abstract systems such as GPS might allow us to sustain a stronger local qualitative network of places than we might otherwise have. A group of teenagers knowing each other's location and texting constantly to one another forms a dispersed tribe which keeps in social connection and knows its landscape. Because it puts them into wider relations, the abstract system can *amplify* the experience of local qualities and social relations.

Questioning the Concepts

I am questioning the concepts that we tend to use. I'm particularly concerned that those concepts tend to be set up as if they described two opposed sides, and we can only be on one side or the other.

This dualism is false, but there is a too easy way to avoid it. We can just say that in daily life things are not so pure; they're mixed up; we live in a muddle of place and space. But that doesn't question the concepts we are using; that just says that the reality is not as sharp as the concepts. But in fact the concepts are at fault. For each of the two sides *depends* on the other. They are not separate. Which means that what you see in the concrete situations is not just a mix of two things, like oil and water, but dependencies and mutual constitution.

What is crucial to see is that *even in their pure states*, the pure homey place of Austen's fiction or the pure homeless GPS grid, place and space still depend on each other. For either to be lived the other has to be in there too.

To put the matter abstractly, that the conditions which make possible sustained consciousness and defined experience of either place or space, also make it impossible to have an experience that is purely the one or the other, and demand that both be present and interacting.

First, think about a pure "homey" place, perhaps one of those anthropological villages in the jungle. We picture the people as just being there, completely formed by ways of life that they take for granted and natural. The issue is whether people could live their norms and habits and language and structuring of space with no self-consciousness of them as something distinctive. That would mean having no awareness of what's other. So no trade, never hearing a second language, no interaction with animals that have their own societies and interactions.

Yet even if that were so, there would still be the beginning of distance and abstraction. There is a degree of abstraction even in the most local of home life and place, as when we give directions that refer to generic features of landscape such as the round hill or brown house, ignoring what else distinguishes this hill or this house from another.

Indeed, as soon as *counting* is introduced, abstraction is well along. Telling someone to turn left at the third corner abstracts from all the identifying features of the corner.

Presumably, the deer that plague our gardens know so well the territory they inhabit, that every tree and bush is recognized as a possible obstacle or escape route or source of food. The deer do not count the trees, but recognize them by their qualitative distinctions and surroundings. But we humans edit and abstract.

Counting depends on being able to maintain conscious unity over time, so that we remember when we passed the two previous corners. Maintaining unity in our experience over time means that we are not totally identified with the present moment, so the space for abstraction is already provided. Temporal unity also connects larger swaths of experience: you have to teach your children, you have to correct people who are doing things the wrong way, you have to formulate rules in language and pass them along, and all of this means you have some inner distance from the details of your particular place and its social roles no matter how concrete and restrictive.

Second, at the other extreme, a pure case of homelessness might be imagined as living on a naked geometrical grid. But again, if that homelessness is to be *experienced*, it cannot be simply that at this moment I'm at position 1.1 on the grid and at this moment on position 2.7 on the grid—there has to be some connecting across time to make it a connected life rather than a series of flashes that do not come together. Indeed, without temporal unity it isn't even a series of flashes. If there were no distinctions and no memory, if you were in fact moving from one point to another, there would be no experience of the move.

So even if we imagine that we are living on a pure grid that has no features, still our living movement across it creates trajectories in which we know that we went this way. The trajectory recalled would make some points different from others. And in real space that temporal differentiation involves qualitative differences as well as quantitative locations. It requires both structural and empirical concepts. So even the most abstract dealing still requires identification, and bodily orientation, and an experience of place in a minimal sense.

The level of self-distance and self-consciousness built into temporality ensures the permanent possibility of both abstraction and inhabitation. Not only are these permanent possibilities but they depend upon each other, in the sense that without self-consciousness and abstraction there is no experience of place that is rich, and without the place element there is no experience of space as something we are located within.

This is not to say that there is no difference between traditional and modern conceptions and spatial practices, but it is to say that an analysis which relies upon oversimplified parallel oppositions will not be able to deal with the complexities of a world where all sides mix and depend on one another.

Jane Austen Again

Can we find abstract space already in Jane Austen's world? Certainly; there is plenty of counting, and directions can be given in abstract terms. Distances may be evaluated by relative discomfort, but they are also measured in miles and maps. There is also our recognition of larger connections that disrupt settled homey places and yet are necessary for them to exist.

Her small town social world exists within a larger world of travelers and visitors who are always dropping by. She also acknowledges that the cozy world is supported by far flung networks of trade and conquest. It is not purely enclosed and self-defined.

Some of her novels show more explicitly than others the dependence of their leisured lifestyle on a far-flung empire where distant people work under harsh conditions to supply and support English wealth (see Nunn 2000). That imperial net of shipping, labor, and finance centered on Britain is defended by the Navy, and it works through links of shipping and communication that are effective but slow, and their slowness is crucial for plot development. In the novel *Persuasion*, Captain Wentworth earns his wealth by capturing French ships during the Napoleonic wars. In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas must leave England for a long time to deal with problems on his West Indian plantations, where slave labor supports his fortune. His absence allows the young people to do things he would never approve of, and brings a crisis upon his return.

Further, Jane Austen's attitude toward "home" is more nuanced than may at first appear (see Morgan 2000). In all her novels, her characters must be disturbed by travel

or outside forces in order to realize who they are or can be. Four of her six novels begin with a person or family leaving home.

In *Sense and Sensibility* it is exile from home, visitors from outside, and travel to London that bring changes and self-awareness in the sisters' lives. In *Persuasion* it is while traveling to a common seaside resort that Anne shows Wentworth the strength of her character. In *Northanger Abbey* almost the whole novel takes place away from home. In *Mansfield Park* it is disruptive guests from London who propel the plot and force changes. *Pride and Prejudice* may seem centered at home in Longbourn, but the heroine, Elizabeth, makes lengthy trips, some of over 100 miles, and other characters are on the move: Darcy comes and goes, Mr. Collins shows up repeatedly despite the fifty mile distance, and even Lady Catherine makes a frustrating long trip.

Only one novel, *Emma*, contains no scenes where Austen's characters travel away from their home region. It also offers the two most vocal defenders of staying centered at home, Emma's father Mr. Weston and his neighbor John Knightly. The latter exclaims:

> The folly of not allowing people to be comfortable at home—and the folly of people's not staying comfortably at home when they can!

Yet we should note that in *Emma* this stay-at-home John Knightly is contrasted with his brother George Knightly, the Mr. Knightly who eventually wins Emma's hand, and who is depicted as always moving about, back and forth to London, and among local towns and farms. Emma and George have been small-town neighbors forever, but it takes a wandering outsider, Frank Churchill, to incite the jealousy which makes Emma and George realize their love.

So we might agree with Mr. Darcy:

> Mr. Darcy drew his chair a little towards her, and said, "*You* cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. *You* cannot have been always at Longbourn."

None of us ever only are.

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Notes

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[1] Such a distance may, however, be desired, as in *Sense and Sensibility*: "The situation of Barton, in a county so far distant from Sussex as Devonshire, which, but a few hours before, would have been a sufficient objection to outweigh every possible advantage belonging to the place, was now its first recommendation. To quit the neighbourhood of Norland was no longer an evil; it was an object of desire; it was a blessing, in comparison of the misery of continuing her daughter-in-law's guest."

[2] My comparison between Austen's novels and GPS was suggested by White 2006, who, however, uses the GPS as an analogy rather than a contrast.

[3] The earlier LORAN system used fixed radio transmitters on towers along shorelines; by receiving broadcasts from several towers at once it was possible to locate one's position at sea. The system was terminated in 2010. A terrestrial tower is used in some GPS systems to broadcast slight corrections to data about satellite orbits, making GPS data even more accurate.

[4] Or at least they are supposed to be. Hegel, for one, is optimistic that the political state can be a community where people in all their concreteness and complexity find joint interests and loyalties. Others are not so sure. Max Weber, especially, spoke of the "iron cage" of abstract market and procedural efficiency that would come to rule our lives, excluding any richer substantive humane values and thicker identities.

[5] The US pressured the EU to change the frequencies planned for their rival GPS system, Galileo, so that in military emergencies the US could jam the Galileo system. The original frequencies were too close to the US bands. This option would presumably only be used in dire military situations, since everyone benefits from the system. The usefulness of GPS data, plus worries about US and military control, have led to four independent global satellite systems (the US GPS, the EU's Galileo, the Russian GLONASS, the Chinese COMPASS), as well as regional systems for India and Japan.

[6] Wikipedia says: "Geocaching is an outdoor sporting activity in which the participants use a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver or mobile device and other navigational techniques to hide and seek containers, called "geocaches" or "caches," anywhere in the world. A typical cache is a small waterproof container containing a logbook where the geocacher enters the date they found it and signs it with their established code name. Larger containers such as plastic storage containers (Tupperware or similar) or ammunition boxes can also contain items for trading, usually toys or trinkets of little value. Geocaching is often described as a "game of high-tech hide and seek," sharing many aspects with benchmarking, trigpointing, orienteering, treasure-hunting, letterboxing, and waymarking. Geocaches are currently placed in over 100 countries around the world and on all seven continents, including Antarctica. After 10 years of activity there are over 1.4 million active geocaches published on various websites. There are

over 5 million geocachers worldwide."

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