

## Article

# At the Still Point: The Heart of Conversion

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**Abstract:** Though religion and performance are often considered together in ritual and liturgy, they may join in other contexts as well. This paper explores the “still point” described in the poet T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* as playing a role not only in poetry and dance, but equally in moments of religious conversion. Three such moments are explored, framed by theoretical considerations of dance, conversion, and attentiveness to the “here” and “now” in both. These points of space and time are the objects of an intense focus that creates a center to the experience and thus the possibility of the conversionary turn.

**Keywords:** dance; T.S. Eliot; conversion; stillness; Adrian Howells; Augustine; Elijah; religion

## 1. The Present Point

In *Ecumenica: Journal of Theater and Performance*, Caridad Svich glosses the concept of presence.

[I]n the art of art-making, in between the church and the brothel which is sometimes called theatre, we know indeed there are those who came before us . . .

Here. 1 stand. Look. Are you watching?

Here. 1 speak. Listen. Are you listening?

There are many kinds of seeing and listening in theatre. Sometimes in silence, we hear the world.<sup>1</sup>

As this brief passage hints, theater is nothing so simple as spectacle—nor, for that matter, is church. Part of the complexity is presence itself, Svich says; “It is the hardest thing in the world sometimes: to be present. To truly be here, now. And not yesterday or tomorrow.”<sup>2</sup> The demand of both theater and church is a deep attentiveness, a *now* placed *here* without distraction—but both here and now are active and living, not static even when they are still. In the same issue of *Ecumenica*, we read about the term *religion*, “religion and theatre have kept close company because both are composed of disciplines by which people become what they weren’t before.”<sup>3</sup> To become what one was not—or to return again to what one might once have been—is a kind of conversion. The English word comes to us from the Latin verb *convertere*, “to turn around; to transform.”<sup>4</sup> The convert is turned around toward something that might be new and unexpected, or lost and rediscovered; it might be hearing or glimpsing again those who were there before.

Let me say a bit about my approach, because it is not anthropological, nor anywhere within the social sciences, though these disciplines are the original ground of performance studies and still

<sup>1</sup> (Svich 2014, p. 64).

<sup>2</sup> (Svich 2014, p. 63).

<sup>3</sup> (Mason 2014, p. 92).

<sup>4</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/conversion#etymonlinev28827>.

predominate there. There are some points of intersection: for instance, in recent decades studies of ritual as performance have been more concerned with the process and progress of the rite than with the script or fixed order of it and movement, of course, is necessary to any sense of turning.<sup>5</sup> The still point of *now* and *here*, though, seems at once to make that movement possible and to halt it. Victor Turner emphasizes, in transitional or conversionary rites, the “anti-structural” nature of passage between states, so that rather than reinforcing cultural roles and practices, a rite may suspend a culture’s past and future in a moment of potentiality.<sup>6</sup> Possibility is essential to the conversionary point as well—it is itself a making possible. What it makes possible, however, is not likely to be broadly cultural.

Approaching from the experience of the performer—the convert, the dancer, the poet—I am concerned instead with a paradox, with the point that both centers a circle and remains other to its motion. My approach is in some respects phenomenological, but it necessarily exceeds the well-bounded senses of subject and object that more traditionally ground phenomenology. It is theological, in a long tradition of theological approaches that find presence and absence together. Just as Svich considers *presence* by looking at and listening to absent sights and voices, so too I want to find the still point of motion, in a *here* that is both pinpointed and unfindable, in a *now* that was to come and will have gone.

I want to draw several lines of thought together and trace their turning around the mysterious point that is now, and here, and attended to so entirely that it can be conversionary. I want to ask, in the midst of this turning about, when it might be now, where it might be here.

In one of the most precise and influential early theories of time, Aristotle links time to motion. It is, he says, “something that belongs to movement,” though it is not movement itself. Because we mark motion by the before and after of a body’s placement at a location, he decides that time must be the “number of motion in respect of before and after.”<sup>7</sup> *Now* marks a still point, and then *now*, again, marks another, and between them, time moves, or has moved. Aristotle writes,

it is only when we have perceived ‘before’ and ‘after’ in a motion that we say that time has elapsed. Now we mark them by judging that A and B are different, and that some third thing is intermediate to them. When we think of the extremes as different from the middle and the mind pronounces that the “nows” are two, one before and one after, it is then that we say that there is time, and this that we say is time. For what is bounded by the “now” is thought to be time.<sup>8</sup>

The now that is necessary seems itself a still point, a zero dimension at the edge of the temporal line. And a zero point, too, in the array of lines that move through space: “The distinction of ‘before’ and ‘after,’ Aristotle notes, “holds primarily, then, in place; and there in virtue of relative position.”<sup>9</sup> *Here*, it is *now*.

At this point, the attention of our senses is concentrated. Daniel Heller-Roazen argues that the “principle at the root of the unity of the senses” in Aristotle’s *De Anima* demands the unified moment of the *now*: “It is not possible [for the various senses to discern] at various times,” Aristotle declares, concluding, “It is thus an undivided [principle] [that discerns] in an undivided time.”<sup>10</sup> As Heller-Roazen glosses this quite difficult passage, “This is the principle that all sensation occurs in

<sup>5</sup> See (Turner 1986, esp. 76f). Catherine Bell even points out that in some disciplines, work in performance studies shifts from an engagement with the action that follows or fails to follow a script, to a focus on “the very activity of the agent or artist [as] the most critical dimension and not the completion of the action.” However, in religious studies that use the idea of performance the emphasis remains on “the execution of a preexisting script . . . or the explicitly unscripted dimensions of an activity in process.” (Bell 1998, pp. 205–6).

<sup>6</sup> (Turner 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle (1930, p. 4.11). Reprinted and accessed online at the Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.4.iv.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> (Heller-Roazen 2007, p. 51). Citing Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.2.426b24–29. Heller-Roazen’s translation.

time and, more precisely, at one time in particular—namely, ‘now.’” Further, as a point, “now . . . can be defined by its undivided presence alone.”<sup>11</sup> *Here* and *now* are the points at which we listen and we look, points where we seek and sense presence. These points limit an expanse, a duration, but they collect, too, at a center. Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his own consideration of Aristotle’s *De Anima*, uses the image of a circle to describe the way that different senses coincide: “For the straight (lines) drawn from the circumference of a circle to the centre all have the centre of the circle as their terminus, a single point; and this point, being one, is also in a way many, when it is taken as the terminus of each of the lines drawn from it.”<sup>12</sup>

It is not only Aristotle’s logical physics that leads us to this point. Poetically, T.S. Eliot places the now-point not at the immeasurable division of a line, but like Alexander at the center of a dancing circle. In a famous passage from *Burnt Norton*, the first of his *Four Quartets*, Eliot writes,

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.<sup>13</sup>

Dance theorist André Lepecki describes the dancer’s attention to this point as a kind of attending and perceiving that may underlie cognition, but is not itself cognitive<sup>14</sup>—in this, again, resembling Aristotle’s unifyingly attentive sense of pinpoint presence.<sup>15</sup> Dance shares some of the elusiveness of conversion, both of them demanding an attention that one must leave in order to describe it, a *now* vexingly made present when it cannot be measured, a *here* that marks an edge and a center but takes up no space itself. So the still point that is *now* is necessary to the movement of time, bounding and centering though unmarked within it. It is time’s opposite, but it is only through time that we can recognize its necessary existence, its presence here. Eliot acknowledges the elusiveness of the point:

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Will not stay still.<sup>16</sup>

How can motile words say a still point, after all?

Now is the time that cannot be placed, or can only be a place without any extension, bounding the before and after of a moving body, a converting soul. Here is the place that cannot be other than now. A body in motion can only be placed when it is not moving—unless the stillness is within the movement itself.

I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.  
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> (Heller-Roazen 2007, p. 52).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander of Aphrodisias, “Explanation of a Passage from the Third [Book of the] *De Anima*, in which Aristotle Shows that There Is Something with which We Sense Everything Simultaneously,” in (Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992–1994, p. 60). Cited in (Heller-Roazen 2007, p. 48).

<sup>13</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §2, pp. 15–16).

<sup>14</sup> (Lepecki 2000, p. 346).

<sup>15</sup> (Heller-Roazen 2007, p. 50).

<sup>16</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §5, p. 19).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., §2, p. 16.

I would like to mark the movement of the present discussion with two points. If they measured time between them, they would be before and after the rest of the text, where the ensouled body stands still. If the time measured were a circle and not a line, the two points would be one (“And all is always now,” writes Eliot.) Within these framing moments, I want to mark a center, a here where dance and conversion might turn, in time and in space; the beginning and the end will draw themselves together, turning time around an eternity of now. Between, I shall describe three turns, three conversions that return to a point made new, as any now must be: *here*, where one sees, where one listens.

Let me draw dance and conversion more closely together, closer to the same point. Michel Foucault links conversion to asceticism. This is asceticism in the pre-Christian sense, though, “a matter of attending to oneself, for oneself: one should be, for oneself and throughout one’s existence, one’s own object,” rather than of intentional deprivation or minimalism. Foucault continues, “Hence the idea of conversion to oneself (*ad se convertere*), the idea of an existential impulse by which one turns in upon oneself (*eis heauton epistrephein*). . . . [T]he impulse by which the soul turns to itself is an impulse by which one’s gaze is drawn ‘aloft’ —toward the divine element, toward the essences and the supracelestial world where they are visible.”<sup>18</sup> Conversion is a revolutionary transformation, turning up, in, upon, and around. And attention itself, that religio-theatrical being-present, is at its heart.

Like ascetic practices, conversionary disciplines can be quite bodily. Pulling a disciplinary trio together, Susan Jones says of Eliot, “Presumably the traditions of ballet appealed to Eliot because its training required the subjection of the body to a rigorous physical discipline of the sort he equated with the spiritual discipline of religious acceptance.” In dance, he saw an art that “offered, in its religious origins, a liturgical component . . . , a giving up of the entire body to the practice of the form . . . .”<sup>19</sup> Philosopher and psychologist William James similarly declares that whether religious conversion is voluntary and deliberate or quite sudden, it always involves some element of self-surrender—a giving up, or a giving over. Often, the giving-over comes as a sudden joyful stillness in the midst of tumult.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes in silence the convert hears the Word. The dancer hears the music that moves the body. *Are you listening?*

Eliot is himself a convert, from permissively undogmatic Unitarianism to high church, nearly Catholic Anglicanism. As one might guess, then, he is a lover of religion and ritual as well as of dance. In fact, he seems to turn to them together. Daniel Albright finds that when Eliot’s poetry turns to Christian themes, it turns as well to a “poetics of dancing,” in which “movement grows precise and patterned, choreographed.”<sup>21</sup> This formal precision is itself a movement drawing together motion and rest:

Only by the form, the pattern  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.<sup>22</sup>

There is only the dance, but the dance is on many scales and levels at once, from the singular to the universal body:

The dance along the artery  
The circulation of the lymph

<sup>18</sup> (Foucault 1998, vol. 1, p. 96).

<sup>19</sup> (Jones 2009, p. 37). Jones cites (Eliot 1928, p. xv). Jones notes that the “Dialogue” also refers to the “drama of the Mass,” and that a character in it says that “the ballet is a liturgy of very wide adaptability” (p. xvi).

<sup>20</sup> (James 1982, Lectures IX and X).

<sup>21</sup> (Albright 1997, p. 285).

<sup>22</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §5, p. 19).

Are figured in the drift of stars.<sup>23</sup>

The formal pattern expands, contracts, and repeats. The turning returns. Eliot is a deeply philosophical convert; the source of this turning is Aristotle's unmoved mover, his highest divinity,

itself unmoving

Only the cause and end of movement

Timeless . . . <sup>24</sup>

The play of sound and spectacle on the one hand, silence and stillness on the other, shows up with particular vividness in conversionary moments; not every conversion, to be sure. Birgitte Bøgh distinguishes several types of conversions: intellectual, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and the rare coercive conversion (brainwashing), all different from one another and from "mystical conversion," which "is characterized by a sudden and dramatic burst of insight, induced by visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences, high emotional content and an observable change in the subsequent behavior of the convert."<sup>25</sup> In this last form, stillness plays a particularly clear role, one that will weave through the conversionary examples that follow. Each stillness is movement too, each progression of time also a return. There is a point or moment of that stillness that at once eludes and demands expression, and that is essential to the turning about that defines conversion. The attended-to *now* is the stillness in the dancing movement, from what has been to what could become. From zero dimensions, it opens onto infinity.

With Eliot's help, we can watch the conversionary turn, and listen for it, and find the dance in its intensity of attention to the still point at its heart. I offer here three rather different moments of conversion. Eliot began his quartets in England of the 1930s, walking through the autumnal rose garden of a ruined estate called Burnt Norton.<sup>26</sup> We begin our trio in the ancient Near East, on a mountain called Horeb.

## 2. The Still Small Voice

In the first book of Kings, the prophet Elijah has considerable success in his fight against the worshippers of Baal. He displays the superiority of Yahweh in a dramatic contest on Mt. Carmel (18.16–39), and ends a lengthy drought in the region (17.1–7, 18.1, 18.41–45). But after all of his successes, he faces a singular failure before the stubbornness of the Queen, Jezebel, who refuses to abandon her allegiance to the gods Baal and Asherah, and in fact threatens Elijah with death. In chapter 19, Elijah has escaped, but he is worn down and weary. With divine help, he has made it to a cave on Mt. Horeb, and he is just going to hang out there for a while, without much clue as to where, or how, he might go on (19: 1–9).

As Elijah waits, the Lord informs him that he is "about to pass by," as if the moment must be marked before the motion can begin. A great deal of drama ensues: a wind so strong that it shatters the rocks, an earthquake that shakes the mountain, a raging fire. But contrary to our expectations, and perhaps Elijah's too, the Lord is not in any of these (19: 11–12). "And after the fire came a gentle whisper" (19:12), which leads Elijah to the mouth of the cave, where the Lord asks him what he's doing there. This seems oddly undramatic after all of the displays of natural power. Unless we assume that the God of the Hebrew Bible has lost his theatrical flair, something interesting is going on here.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., §2, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> (Eliot 1968, "East Coker," p. 20).

<sup>25</sup> (Bøgh 2015, p. 275). As Bøgh points out, conversion may be found outside the Jewish, Christian, or philosophical traditions in the ancient world; she cites particularly the devotion to Isis. Ibid., pp. 278–81.

<sup>26</sup> (Spencer 2005, p. 32): "The name of the place, Burnt Norton, reminds us that in the Seventeenth Century its mad owner burnt down the country mansion which stood there, with himself in it. The very name of the place is an epitaph to this madness and destruction."

Other translations render the moment after the drama a bit differently: “the sound of a gentle blowing” (NASB), “a whistling of gentle air” (DR), more remarkably, “a sound of sheer silence” (NRSV), and, in the King James version perhaps most familiar to Anglophone ears, “a still small voice.” Though “whisper” is the most idiomatic translation, the poetry of the King James may be the most literal, with the Hebrew word *demamah* implying both stillness and silence; the related *dumiyyah* suggesting as well a silence that waits, not anxiously, but with attention.<sup>27</sup> One hardly needs to be attentive to notice gale force winds, stone-shattering earthquakes, raging fires. The voice of God, though, demands attention by its quiet, draws attention to a point just here, and speaks in the stillness of the surrounding world to the edge of a cave, at the threshold of inside and out.

This quiet is not undramatic after all, but it is certainly strange. It seems to partake of both silence and sound at once—a still voice, a silent sound, or the gentlest whispering breeze right at the edge of no sound at all. Elliot Wolfson emphasizes the paradox: “We can thus speak of the voice being heard through silence. There is no conflict between Elijah’s *qol demamah* and Eliphaz the Temanite’s *demamah wa-qol eshma*, ‘I heard silence and a voice’ (Job 4:16), for both relate to the voice without that gives expression to the silence within.”<sup>28</sup> Lepecki writes of the “vibratile stillness” of dance as something comparable to the “sonorous silence” such as might be found in John Cage’s music.<sup>29</sup>

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
Not that only, but the coexistence,  
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
...  
And all is always now.<sup>30</sup>

*Now* on Mt. Horeb gathers the silence into the divine voice, the motion of the earth itself into the gentle, attentive stillness. And after the paradoxical sound, God tells Elijah what is to come, and Elijah returns to the world, returns to his tasks as God’s prophet (19.15ff).

*Return*, writes Thomas Finn, is an early Jewish sense of *conversion*, the Hebrew root *shub* conveying a sense of turning and moving similar to that of the Latin *vertere*. It implies a mutual return of God and his people toward one another.<sup>31</sup> Though return was readily understood, a real sense of “conversion” postdates Elijah and his work. Conversion proper becomes a possibility for his people only after they have spent time in exile and are then at a time of geographic return. This return combines with the intermarriages that had shifted Jewish identity a bit from ethnic toward cultic. Thus, in some communities a gentile who accepted monotheism, circumcision, and integration into the community could turn with the returned, could become a Jew, and thus a convert in a familiar sense (if not quite a sense fully equal with those already in the community).<sup>32</sup> Not all conversions turn from without; Finn notes that conversions occurred within Judaism as well, not from devotion to another god, but into deeper and often more ascetic forms of devotion, such as that of the Essenes or Johannites.<sup>33</sup>

Even Elijah, after his effort to return Yahweh’s people to their God, must be returned to his engagement on the Lord’s behalf, drawn out of his despair and hiding not by spectacular display but by the sudden stillness that bounds it, the *now* on either side of motion—the *now* that was at the heart of the movement all along, the ground and the center of both nature’s and Elijah’s activities. His conversion returns him to himself and to his god. Finn calls the pair of conversionary types

<sup>27</sup> Strong’s Hebrew Concordance, accessed at <https://biblehub.com/str/hebrew/1827.htm> and <https://biblehub.com/str/hebrew/1747.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> (Wolfson 2005, p. 556, n. 189).

<sup>29</sup> (Lepecki 2000, p. 346).

<sup>30</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §5, p. 19).

<sup>31</sup> (Finn 1997, pp. 20–22).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 91–99.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 92–107.



“conversion to Judaism and conversion to ‘true’ Judaism.”<sup>34</sup> Elijah’s turn is more like the latter, as he does not move outside of his faith, though he might stumble within it. Hearing the silence in the voice turns him back to the work of his god, to the world, to himself.

### 3. From Eden to Milan

Whether a conversion marked a turn from another devotion to Judaism or from a more casual to more stringent Jewish devotion, Finn writes, ritual was key. The conversion of a gentile to Judaism required circumcision. The requirement for a conversion within Judaism differed. “For [the Essenes at] Qumran, [conversion entailed] the Pentecostal rite of immersion . . . ; for conversion to the Johannites, baptism.”<sup>35</sup> The latter, the baptismal rite of the Johannite sect, becomes notable for its persistence into the part of Judaism that becomes Christianity. The desert ascetic John baptized a great many people into lives of intense devotion; some simply lived devoutly thereafter, and others became John’s followers.<sup>36</sup> Finn writes, “In the synoptic gospels, Jesus steps onto the Palestinian stage as a disciple of John, receives John’s baptism of repentance . . . , and becomes a co-worker, adopting John’s mission and way of life.”<sup>37</sup> The followers of Jesus appropriate the rite, though they shift its emphasis subtly from repentance to redemption.<sup>38</sup>

Ancient baptism came in numerous forms and was understood in quite a range of ways. “But the link,” Finn explains, “was the end of the age, the *eschaton*, especially repentance, forgiveness of sins, and the imminence of the last day.” Purification through water is, he notes, “a symbol of eschatological expectations.”<sup>39</sup> This eschatological baptism, for the early Christians, “symbolized the kingdom and their entry into it by rebirth.”<sup>40</sup> We may think of baptism, including the adult baptism of converts, purely as a beginning, a first entry into a community or the possibility of a life redeemed from sin. Yet baptism here is an expectation of the last things.

In my beginning is my end.<sup>41</sup>

And those last things return to the first. The “last things” expected by eschatology are death, judgement, and life again in a world to come, death and life circling into contact at their boundary points. Like a birth out of death, a resurrection, the baptismal time returns to begin again.

In my end is my beginning.<sup>42</sup>

For early Christians, this sense of the end as a beginning is connected to the surprising bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead, a reversal of the order in which death follows life, once each, without variation. Perhaps accordingly, Easter was an especially popular baptismal date: like the older mysteries with which it shares its annual scheduling, Easter marks the vernal return of life. In the end, a beginning—a turning around, a newness built into the never finished cycle of the seasons.

Soon the most famous Christian conversions come to be marked less by the baptismal rite than by their own recurrence. The Egyptian hermit Anthony spends his life in the desert, resisting any temptation that comes—temptations that would lure him to his old life, such that he always renews the moment of renunciation by which he first devoted himself to his Christian god. In the 5th century,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 140. “As a symbol of eschatological expectations, purification through water is rooted in the visions of Isaiah (1:16–17) and Ezekiel (36:25–28), and it is abundantly evident in works like the Dead Sea Scrolls and especially *First Enoch* . . . ”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>41</sup> (Eliot 1968, “East Coker,” §1, p. 21).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., §5, p. 23.

inspired by Anthony among many others, Augustine of Hippo records his own complicated and recurrent conversion in his work *Confessions*.

As Augustine tells it, he had been intellectually persuaded by Christianity thanks to the efforts of Simplicianus and of Ambrose of Milan, two Christians who showed him unexpected depths in these scriptures that he had once thought simplistic. He had been inspired by stories of other converts, such as Anthony and Marius Victorinus. But despite the conviction of his intellect, he could not get his *will* to turn, could not make himself direct his desires toward God, a refusal he found profoundly exasperating.<sup>43</sup> As an intellectual—which he certainly was—he might have wanted to understand what he was doing before he could do it. However, as Karl Morrison writes, “for those who experience it, conversion is not so much understood as felt. The experience is aesthetic, which is also to say affective, and often instantaneous (as seeing a face at the window). Some measure of understanding may come later, but that is understanding of what memory retained of an event, or of a concatenation of events, that is over.”<sup>44</sup> Once more we encounter the problem of cognition in relation to an intense but elusive perception. Augustine will come to understand both the problem and the experience, but only *after* the perception, which he cannot reach by knowing.

You are not here to instruct yourself, or inform curiosity,  
Or carry report.<sup>45</sup>

Augustine sets the stage for his own conversion with considerable literary flair. He is in Milan. He is in despair. And he is dramatic about it. “Then in the middle of that grand struggle in my inner house,” he writes, “which I had vehemently stirred up with my soul in the intimate chamber of my heart, distressed not only in mind but in appearance, I turned to Alypius and cried out . . . .”<sup>46</sup> His sensible friend Alypius regards him cautiously as Augustine heads from the house into the enclosed garden. The garden itself is a place of return. Augustine is certain that fallen humanity cannot get before its original sin, but he will put himself as close as possible to the place of paradise, where God has been heard, hoping to undo some measure of his self-inflicted exile.

You are here to kneel where prayer has been valid.<sup>47</sup>

Augustine tells us that in the garden he paced, “tore my hair, . . . struck my forehead, . . . intertwined my fingers and clasped my knee . . . .”<sup>48</sup> Alypius has followed him quietly, but as there arose in him “a vast storm bearing a massive downpour of tears,” Augustine walks away, since “solitude seemed to me more suitable for the business of weeping.”<sup>49</sup> But the lord was not in the storm. Augustine’s emotional distress is downright exemplary, even before the torrents of tears; he is “deeply disturbed in spirit, angry with indignation and distress . . . .”<sup>50</sup> He cannot master the perfect patience that would require him to surrender himself. In his impatience, in his “sickness and torture” he wants to be beyond his conversion, to place it before with himself after: “Inwardly I said to myself: Let it be now, let it be now.”<sup>51</sup> Yet *now* is not to be commanded. The pinpoint moment offers no extension to grasp.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope of the wrong thing; wait without love

<sup>43</sup> See especially Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.5.10.

<sup>44</sup> (Morrison 1992, p. 2).

<sup>45</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Little Gidding,” §1, p. 49).

<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 8.8.19.

<sup>47</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Little Gidding,” §1, p. 49).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 8.8.20.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 8.12.28.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 8.8.19.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 8.11.25.



For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought  
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.<sup>52</sup>

Here in the garden, Augustine seeks to master and overcome his lingering worldly, especially sexual, desires. But the still voice, opening infinity in the immeasurable point, calls him not to self-mastery, but to self-abandonment. James reviews the stories of several sudden conversions (sudden even if they have been long in the making), and notes how often the convert-to-be begins in extreme emotional agitation—an agitation, we might realize as we read, that tends to be remarkably self-absorbed, and can evidently be overcome not by mastery but by self-surrender. He describes the 18th century case of Henry Alline, who begins his account, “As I was about sunset wandering in the fields lamenting my miserable lost and undone condition, and almost ready to sink under my burden, I thought I was in such a miserable case as never any man was before.” Like Augustine, Alline finds himself quieted and converted by a peculiar speaking: “the following impressions came into my mind like a powerful but small still voice.”<sup>53</sup>

In the midst of all this drama, a still small voice. An unseen, unidentified, even ungendered child “from a nearby house” sings repeatedly, “pick up and read.”<sup>54</sup> A word-lover like Augustine is not about to ignore such an instruction. The nearest book is a collection of Paul’s letters, and Augustine, opening it to and reading the first line he sees, declares, “At once, with the last words of the sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All shadows of doubt were dispelled.”<sup>55</sup> James notes a similar joyous stillness in nearly every case he reviews; “The stillness was very marvelous, and I felt supremely happy,” says one of his subjects.<sup>56</sup>

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight  
 Even while the dust moves  
 There rises the hidden laughter  
 Of children in the foliage  
 Quick now, here, now, always—<sup>57</sup>

Not the drama, but the stillness, turns Augustine, suddenly. The always of eternity irrupts into the frantic quick movement of his body in time, and the still moment recenters him. Again the stillness somehow bounds the span of duration; passage is marked by presence, at the center that is the circumference, at the limit that is the heart. The voices of the hidden children turn him back to the vibrance of now. Augustine, born to a fiercely Christian mother, returns to her God. “I was being turned around [*convertebar*]. And I was glad, my God, that your one Church, the body of your only Son in which Christ’s name was put on me as an infant, did not hold infantile follies.”<sup>58</sup> While Eliot suspects that only a saint can apprehend “the point of intersection of the timeless/ with time,” he also sees, or hears, the two crossing over and over.<sup>59</sup> A children’s song slows Augustine’s frantic movement. From their voices he is moved to Paul’s, and within Paul’s words he can read divine silence, and Augustine’s chaotic pacing, weeping, and tearing all come to a still point.

<sup>52</sup> (Eliot 1968, “East Coker,” §3, p. 28).

<sup>53</sup> (James 1982, Lecture X, p. 217).

<sup>54</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.12.29.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 8.12.29, The reading is Rom. 13:13–14.

<sup>56</sup> (James 1982, p. 169).

<sup>57</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §5, p. 20).

<sup>58</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.5.5.

<sup>59</sup> (Eliot 1968, “The Dry Salvages,” §5, p. 44).

The powerful stillness, like the newness of life, is likewise a matter of the flesh. Lepecki asks, “What force is produced and condensed at the there of the body that dances in stillness?”<sup>60</sup> This “production” is not the creation of an agent, of a self. Dancers, and their teachers, will often speak of the need to get the self out of the way in order to focus on the dance instead; this is Jones’s “giving up of the entire body to the practice of the form.” Lepecki says of that condensed stillness that it is “similar in all respects to the one Eliot writes about in his poem: never fixed, never locatable, but always dancing . . . as the subject surrenders itself to the world.”<sup>61</sup> Augustine must quiet himself to listen to the children and to Paul, both voices wise in words he might once have found infantile.

As Finn points out, “Augustine speaks about the garden experience as his conversion—‘you converted me to yourself’ (*convertisti enim me ad te*)—and has been taken at his word ever since.”<sup>62</sup> Any discussion of Augustine’s conversion will focus, as I have, on the turmoil and stillness in the garden—or will explain why it does not. Finn rightly continues, “But the *Confessions* is the autobiography of a conversion in progress. It lays out the full story of his conversion—from birth to baptism—as he came to understand and see it unfold a decade later.”<sup>63</sup>

In early Christianity, we recall, baptism was the point of a new beginning that could come to be only after the end. Augustine was baptized the year after his experience in the Milanese garden, at the Easter Vigil in 387. His son Adeodatus and his friend Alypius, who found his own scriptural passage just minutes after Augustine’s conversionary reading, were baptized with him. After baptism, Finn writes, “the task of the trio is to sustain the momentum of their conversions throughout their lives.”<sup>64</sup> Only if they find the motionless center can they remain in motion. The still point cannot be held still for good, but it can be found, over and over, at the center of the conversionary turn, where now has met itself again, always (as if) for the first time.

#### 4. Again, a Garden

In 2009, in Glasgow, in another garden, a talkative artist turns to silence. His is a more gradual conversion, a slower turn, and one that vividly draws together the religious and theatrical. Performance artist Adrian Howells spent three years as a Creative Fellow at the University of Glasgow. In his time there, he was shadowed by the scholar and writer Deirdre Heddon, who later co-authored *It’s All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells*. Howells found himself troubled by the reign of social media and “reality” television, with their endless confessional chatter and their proliferation of personal revelations that still seemed, somehow, to leave their speakers and readers at least as isolated as they were before.

Only a flicker  
Over the strained time-ridden faces  
Distracted from distraction by distraction  
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
Tumid apathy with no concentration . . .<sup>65</sup>

Wondering if it might be possible to converse more meaningfully through his art, Howells began by “asking what sorts of confessions might take place in a secular culture, and with what effects.”<sup>66</sup> His early work was verbal and dialogical, often occurring in one-on-one exchanges in an

<sup>60</sup> (Lepecki 2000, p. 354).

<sup>61</sup> (Lepecki 2000, p. 360).

<sup>62</sup> (Finn 1997, p. 221).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>65</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §3, p. 16).

<sup>66</sup> (Heddon and Howells 2010, p. 1).

open improvisational format, in staged settings such as a laundromat,<sup>67</sup> a hotel,<sup>68</sup> a hair salon,<sup>69</sup> or a bedroom.<sup>70</sup> Here he used his own confessional speech and imagery to draw out his audience, hoping that they might find some comfort or “lightening” in the exchange.

My words echo

Thus, in your mind.<sup>71</sup>

In this early work, speech calls to speech. Howells speaks and displays confessionally to make space for his audience to speak back. Gradually, however, Howells’ approach shifts. Heddon writes that the series of performances that she traces over her years with Howells “reveal the entirely unexpected shift from a form of performance that uses talking at its heart as a prompt for and signal of ‘intimacy,’ to the use of silence as a way to structure other types of intimacy and ‘confession.’”<sup>72</sup> Like his earlier, more talkative works, Howells’ quieter performance pieces are usually one-on-one with an audience/participant. In “Held,” Howells began in conversation with the participant, and ended with the two of them spooning on a bed, with the options of a pillow between them or not, and of talking or silence. He writes of one participant, “In the final stage of *Held*, ‘spooning’ her on a bed in silence, I felt every sinew and muscle of her body relax and let go over the course of that half hour. In the context of what had taken place in the previous two stages this felt very much like a bodily confession and, for me, a different way of listening.”<sup>73</sup> As Heddon notes, this listening, like the earlier and more obvious confessions, is likewise a mode of “risk-taking” and “transformation”—a mode of self-surrender.

With this move toward greater self-surrender, the religious aspect of Howells’ work becomes more explicit too. Howells’ next performance was called *Foot Washing for the Sole*, and it re-created the Holy Thursday foot washing service outside of a dogmatically Christian context.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the performance was inspired by “a foot-washing service at St. Columba’s church in Glasgow,” where Howells found himself “struck by the intimacy of this act, an intimacy often structured between strangers and framed as an act of ‘giving.’” Beyond the generosity of the act, he notes, “Reading the account of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper in St. John’s Gospel, I was struck by the words he uttered as he performed this task: ‘What I do for you now, go and do for one another.’ Foot washing was framed as generative.”<sup>75</sup> The gift must be returned, but the economy is far from a simple exchange; rather, this conversionary generosity allows the giver to retain by giving, to create and continue a cycle. Howells

<sup>67</sup> Heddon and Howells, “From Talking to Silence,” pp. 2–3. Howells writes, “For *Adrienne’s Dirty Laundry Experience* (2003), for example, performed at the Arches in Glasgow as part of the annual queer festival, Glasgay!, I transformed a bland basement room of a theatre space into a Laundromat-cum-living room, complete with plumbed-in washing machine, installed tumble dryer, and washing lines; all the other paraphernalia that you would usually find in a Laundromat were added. Audience-participants were invited to bring me their dirty laundry to wash and for the time it took the wash cycle to run its course, I would get them to share their metaphorical dirty laundry over a cup of tea and a biscuit. . . . This was a photographic representation of my own dirty laundry of the past forty years.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 3: “*Adrienne: The Great Depression* (2004) was performed at the Great Eastern Hotel in London. For a week, I inhabited one of their rooms and lived with(in) several self-devised rules. . . . My time with the audience-participant was committed to talking openly and honestly about the suffering of my depression and confiding very private details of attempted suicide, self-loathing, pain, and despair. I hoped that this gesture of openness would encourage my guests to share their moments of darkness too, lightening them in the process.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 3: “*Salon Adrienne* (2005), meanwhile, presented in a hairdressing salon in Glasgow, was lighter in tone but nevertheless prompted both me and the participants to engage with the inevitability of aging, using the mirrored surfaces of the salon as a space for literal and metaphorical reflection.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 4–5: “*Held*, staged in three different spaces of an apartment that year, tested different degrees of physical intimacy with individual spectators, each gesture reflecting the room in which we were situated. We held hands across the kitchen table, talking about hand-holding, about what it means culturally, and personal memories of hand-holding. In the living room, we sat side-by-side on a sofa and talked about music and memories for fifteen minutes. In the bedroom, I spooned the audience-participant, on a bed, for half-an-hour. Given a choice, participants opted for silence rather than talking.”

<sup>71</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §1, p. 13).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 7–8.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

began his interchanges with a brief conversation, but the foot washing and the massage with scented oils were to be carried out in silence.

It is in the silence too that we find “The Garden of Adrian.” Previewing the event for the *Guardian*, Lyn Gardner writes, “Howells—whose work has often combined a strong sense of intimacy, confession and ritual—offers another one-to-one performance which explores the possibility of achieving absolution or a sense of ease in our secular culture. Drawing on the idea of the Stations of the Cross, the piece takes the form of a sensory journey undertaken by the audience in Howells’s company through seven installations.”<sup>76</sup> Howells notes explicitly that he is, “Again taking a cue from religious frames” in this garden setting, full of live plants and installations by other artists, “built inside a theatre which had, appropriately, originally been a church.”

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed . . . .<sup>77</sup>

The Stations of the Cross, leading to death, are returned to the garden, paradigmatic of life. In this setting, Howells explores silence, “recognizing . . . that silence is not just an absence of sound, but might be a space carved out from the contemporary culture of particularly cacophonous noise (a noise to which mass-mediated confession contributes).” The garden is meant, instead, to provide “time, space, and stillness.”<sup>78</sup>

Heddon considers her own experience as an audience participant in this still space. “In *The Garden of Adrian*, the final performance of Adrian’s three-year research fellowship, the ‘babble’ of confession has been exchanged for silent contemplation. My physical and literal journey through the internal garden is matched by an internal reflection that carries me on a journey through childhood reminiscences, remembering tastes, smells, sounds, and textures.”<sup>79</sup> The sense of expansiveness—“time, space, and stillness”—seems to make room for a remarkable range of highly sensory, almost re-lived memories. The theatrical garden expands, accommodating not only earlier memories from this life, but tangential possibilities too: “We tarry long enough in this space for me to encounter other versions of my self on this journey, slowing down, allowing details to rush in, and then staying with them so that the information they carry is revealed to me . . . .”<sup>80</sup>

Other echoes

Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?<sup>81</sup>

Simultaneously with this expansiveness, all of that life, all of those possibilities, contract themselves into this still-religious space, *here*. As Michael Spencer says of Eliot’s gardens in the *Quartets*, “The garden at all times is a concentration of reality . . . .”<sup>82</sup> The movement of chatter and revelation is contracted into an epiphanic moment, an open point.

Even without either Yahweh or Christ, Howells’ performance space has a distinctly religious feel—of a space in “which people become what they weren’t before.” As a space of possibility where other movements—times, spaces, motions, words—gather, concentrated, it offers the conversionary potential of a transformation. It is a theater, a space for other selves, other places, other movements to occur. It is equally church and brothel, where touch between bodies undoes the divisions of extension.

<sup>76</sup> (Gardner 2009).

<sup>77</sup> (Eliot 1968, “East Coker,” §3).

<sup>78</sup> (Heddon and Howells 2010, p. 10).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §1, p. 13).

<sup>82</sup> (Spencer 2005, p. 32).

In the theater, Howells and his audience move through the garden as if through the Stations of the Cross, not toward the death that ends the Good Friday service of the Stations and leads into the darkened vigil of Holy Saturday, but not, either, toward the confidence that comes only *after* the Easter vigil is over—rather, toward the same possibility of a rebirth that demands the loss, the surrender, of the self.

### 5. There Is only the Dance

In one cave and two gardens, on a mountain and in a courtyard and a church, we find a conversionary devotion in stillness. While tumult and talk are necessary to each mode of quiet, we might still be unsure that these are not just opposites that follow one another, rather than marking crossing points of temporal and eternal, bounded and bursting, coexistence. From the three vignettes, then, let us return once more to the four quartets, for a movement less finale than reprise.

As Spencer points out, the garden is a place of both movement and stillness, and it is a place that comes back repeatedly in the *Four Quartets*.<sup>83</sup> This is vivid from the outset, where we begin in a space that must have been still for a long time, with “the passage we did not take,” “the door we never opened,” and undisturbed “dust on a bowl of rose leaves.”<sup>84</sup> Yet in the second stanza of “Burnt Norton,” we already begin to hear “other echoes,” those voices that came before us; we already begin to move:

Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,  
Round the corner. Through the first gate,  
Into our first world . . . <sup>85</sup>

When we begin to turn, rounding corners, we are on our way back to the beginning, to the first world. Eventually, together with the garden’s roses, “we moved, and they, in a formal pattern . . . ,”<sup>86</sup> dancing. Before this first segment of the first Quartet ends, the dry concrete pool will both fill with water, from which a lotus rises, and then it will show itself empty and still again—or perhaps at once.

And as Spencer likewise observes, the Quartets, having begun in a garden, end in one as well.<sup>87</sup> In the first of the four poems, “Burnt Norton,” the children hide in the leaves, calling out without revealing themselves.<sup>88</sup> In the final verse of the final poem, “Little Gidding,” “When the last of earth left to discover/ Is that which was the beginning,” the children who in “Burnt Norton” hid in the leaves, “excitedly, containing laughter” return as “the children in the apple-tree . . . heard, half-heard, in the stillness.”<sup>89</sup> Voices, laughter, and song are never quite heard, but always concealed, contained, uncertain. Though the forbidden fruit may have been a grape, a fig, or wheat on a stalk that “rose like the cedars of Lebanon,” Western tradition tends to place an apple tree in Eden, as that which was in the beginning.<sup>90</sup> Throughout the *Quartets*, ends and beginnings interlie one another. “Opposites” are not reconciled into indifference, but hold the still point at the center of movement, where “the fire

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §1, p. 13).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., §1, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., §1, p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> (Spencer 2005, p. 36).

<sup>88</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §5, p. 20).

<sup>89</sup> (Eliot 1968, “Burnt Norton,” §1, p. 14; “Little Gidding,” §5, p. 59).

<sup>90</sup> For the claim that the forbidden fruit was the grape, see Rabbi Meir, Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, 70a: “The tree from which Adam the first man ate was a grapevine.” In *The William Davidson Talmud*, at <https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.70a.22?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>. In the same tractate, Rabbi Nehamaya says that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge must have been a fig, “because it was with the matter with which they sinned that they were rehabilitated.” For the claim that the “fruit” was wheat, see Rabbi Yehuda in the same text, as well as Rabbi Zeira in Genesis Rabbah 15, Sefaria Community Translation, at [https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit\\_Rabbah.15?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit_Rabbah.15?lang=bi).

and the rose are one," destruction and blooming at the same point.<sup>91</sup> Here Eliot quite rejects ordinary physics, as Spencer argues; here "matter becomes expressive, flesh becomes a verb."<sup>92</sup>

In the expressive matter of the garden, at the edge of the safe mountain cave, in the quiet re-consecration of the theater, the verb of flesh is dancing. According to Jones, Eliot seems to have had "a good sense of the phenomenological experience of dance practice," not least the awareness that the *lines* of the dancer's body depend upon "an internal *point* of origin that forms the focal point and stimulus of all movement and line," "a strongly felt inner point" from which movement begins and travels outward.<sup>93</sup> This is literal and experiential—the point "may be located in ballet at a level midpoint in the trunk and in contemporary dance forms lower in the abdomen."<sup>94</sup> In both his poetry and his written remarks on the dancer and choreographer Léonide Massine, Eliot shows an unusual empathy with "the effort and motivations of mind and body that frequently gather when the dancer is apparently at rest . . . ."<sup>95</sup>

Yet this precisely locatable center of the moving body is more than itself, because the stillness is other than a muscular holding at the heart of each motion. This "stillness which denies fixation," to use Lepecki's phrase, is "unlocatable . . . both in space and especially in time."<sup>96</sup> He calls this quality of dancing stillness a "vibratile intensity," noting that even when the body really does appear, in performance, to be still, it is still in a way that is very different from the customary thoughtlessness of our everyday halting or movement.<sup>97</sup> It is attentive, and so it draws attention. It is unlocatable, because it is what defines location.

Jones describes this attention at work in a famous passage from *Sleeping Beauty's* Rose Adagio, in which the now-awake princess is given a rose by each of her suitors, and with each of them holds a pose en pointe.<sup>98</sup> Her body is alive with movement in stillness. In fact, as Jones points out, part of the genius of choreographer Marius Petipa is that he "incorporates the 'still points' of the Rose Adagio . . . not just by choreographing a series of attitude balances, where the ballerina is aided by the support of four consorts, but by inserting such moments into Princess Aurora's first entrance." This entrance dance precedes the spell and the sleep that give the work its name; the Rose Adagio occurs after Aurora's awakening. In the earlier dance, "her fleeting movement along a diagonal from upstage left to downstage right is punctuated by a *delevopé devant en relevé*, arrested at the moment of its greatest height and registering stillness at the moment of an intake of the breath." The *delevopé devant en relevé* is the unfolding of one leg behind the body while the dancer is balanced on the point of her other foot; the leg does not just lift, but lifts bent, and then extends, and just for a breath, the body holds this position. Jones continues, "These moments, if performed with integrity by the ballerina, are not simply 'pauses' emphasizing the 'fixity of the pose' but are both of the dance itself and are the dance . . . ."<sup>99</sup> Aurora, awakened, returns to life. In her movement thereafter, each moment of vibratile stillness, each *here* held, both resonates with the suspended moments of her first entrance

<sup>91</sup> (Eliot 1968, "Little Gidding," §5, p. 59).

<sup>92</sup> (Spencer 2005, pp. 36, 35). Spencer cites (Denis 1920, p. 34).

<sup>93</sup> (Jones 2009, pp. 38, 39).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 38: "Writing in the *Criterion* in 1923 that as an actor Massine was 'the most completely unhuman, impersonal, abstract,' and as such 'belongs to the future stage,' Eliot draws on his poetics in describing the dancers rare quality: 'The difference between the conventional gesture of the ordinary stage, which is supposed to express emotion, and the abstract gesture of Massine, which symbolises emotion, is enormous.' (Eliot 1923, pp. 305–6). Eliot's application of the word 'abstract' to describe Massine's gestures is significant here. He intimated that the dancer's (offstage) personality is subsumed, that the dancer is the medium of choreographic invention in the same way that Eliot regarded the poet as medium—that is, a conduit of verbal expression distinct from his subjective personality and feeling."

<sup>96</sup> (Lepecki 2000, p. 334).

<sup>97</sup> (Lepecki 2000, pp. 354, 338–40).

<sup>98</sup> Jones also notes that Eliot's interest in roses and in dance intersect again in "Little Gidding," §3, p. 56, where "Eliot's reference to the 'spectre of the Rose' deliberately conjures a vision of the romantic essence of Fokine's ballet of a previous generation." (Jones 2009, p. 33).

<sup>99</sup> (Jones 2009, p. 35).



and is marked by the garden bloom of the rose that each suitor hands her. (The rose returns her, even, to herself; in the Grimm brothers' version the princess is called Briar Rose.)

On Spencer's reading of Eliot, "Movement is natural to the garden . . . because the garden is . . . a concentrated statement of the character of existence." This concentration, as I have tried to suggest, can emerge in other spaces of return as well. Spencer continues, "Movement, Heraclitus-like, is the constant of the universe, movement which Eliot also speaks of as the dance."<sup>100</sup> Spencer does not invoke Heraclitus at random. Two lines from this enigmatic pre-Socratic philosopher are set at the head of the *Quartets*. The first tells us that the *logos* is common to all, though few realize it: the pattern, the logical or formative principle, is the same at every level.<sup>101</sup> The second declares, "The way upward and the way downward are the same."<sup>102</sup> To climb the mountain in tumult, to descend it in silence, are the same, but with the sameness of movement: the same not because the path itself holds still, but because the movement always moves. The garden and the mountain and the theater are spaces of stillness and storm, movement and rest, because just for a moment the dry pool fills with sunlit water, and the dance opens out all the way to the turning stars. They are places of *attention*. In those moments, recognizing the pattern that moves within the core of the body and among the stars, more intimate than the inmost self,<sup>103</sup> *here* and *now* come together to center the turning world, the turning body, the turning soul. Elijah warily waits out the world's drama until the stillness speaks. Augustine listens to the small voice of a child and is brought to stillness himself. Howells' quiet attention draws a series of selves from more spaces and times than the self ever knew. Sometimes the conversion transforms; sometimes it deepens. Sometimes we cannot quite tell these apart.

The inhalation of the *developpé* in Aurora's opening variation, the held position of the Rose Adagio, are, says Jones, "moment[s] is full of potential, where the possibility of movement fills the stillness . . . ."<sup>104</sup> In the conversionary moment, the possibility of the divine fills and stills the everyday. It is only having felt, heard, seen the stillness that the convert can likewise find the stillness in the movement, the sacred in the everyday, not transcending but within the chaos, white noise, torrents of tears, earthquakes, and storms. Just *here*, just *now*.

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<sup>100</sup> (Spencer 2005, p. 37).

<sup>101</sup> "Although the *logos* is common to all, the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own." In (Eliot 1968, p. 10). Heraclitus, Frag. 2, from (Diels 1952, vol. 1, p. 77).

<sup>102</sup> In (Eliot 1968, p. 10). Heraclitus, Frag. 60, in (Diels 1952, vol. 1, p. 89).

<sup>103</sup> Augustine refers to God as being "more inward than my most inward part," *Confessions*, 3.6.11.

<sup>104</sup> (Jones 2009, p. 35).

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