

Opening Unknown Time, Summer 2013

Orientation for Week Three

We are looking into the 'inward' of time, described in the last reading in terms of 'nuclear time' and 'the universal unique'. The reading for this coming week asks quite specifically how we can integrate this inward time, the mystery of time, with our ordinary perception of time, which arises in terms of a temporal order.

The theme of improvisation (in the previous reading) serves as a useful gateway into these questions. I'll go into a bit here, letting that serve as an orientation to the week ahead.

When you talk with someone who studies improvisation in the theater, they often say that the most important principle in improvisation is "Yes . . . and . . ." In other words, whatever happens, wherever your fellow actor/"improv partner" takes the improvisation, your responsibility is to accept what she has said and work with it—take it further. This improvisational style—accepting what appears and responding in a creative way—is presented in the reading as a path into inward time: (150) "a style of conducting more in tune with the conducting that the narrative."

On the other hand, our usual mode of operation projects structures forward, making use of narratives. We check what appears against what is allowed (You might think of this procedure as a kind of "Yes . . . but . . ."). This is how limits get set up and enforced.

Now, this mode of projecting structures forward is itself an improvisation. Given the dynamic of time, every projection, pronouncement, or construction is an improvisation, because there is never anything to build on, no structure to put in place. The problem is that although we improvise, we always improvise the same thing (Imagine a theater troupe that did this: it would not be very successful!) Not only that, but the pattern that we conduct forward is inevitably flawed (151-152) "Everywhere there is misfortune, negativity, opposition; ignorance, mistakes, and obstacles."

Now, we do not have to do it that way. We can conduct differently. At one level, this might mean conducting a different structure, narrating a different story. But that would not go deep enough or far enough. Rather, the point is that we can conduct improvisationally. Refusing to accept the flawed truth of what we conduct, we can insist on the improvisational perfection of conducting itself. Put another way, we can transform misunderstanding through the subtle 'inward conducting' of time.

This possibility suggests a very practical homework assignment. As the reading says, we can use each imperfect conducting—each unsatisfactory moment—to question the whole of what is being conducted, as well as our commitment to that whole. Try this kind of questioning during the coming week, whenever you find yourself in a difficult, frustrating, or uncomfortable session. See what happens, and share with the rest of us via the web, if you like, what you discover.

One pointer, as you practice in this way: We are used to thinking of reality as the objective truth of what happens, in contrast to our subjective reaction or interpretation of what happens. Now, however, we are speaking of the universal unique, the whole. In this context, reaction is at least a part of the whole as the objectively available reality. Probably it is more so.