

In last week's Orientation, I pointed out that the future is not a 'temporal dimension' in the usual sense, because it is indeterminate. The section we read for this week starts with that very point: when we focus on the future, temporal dimensionality unfolds differently: it expresses the aliveness of the universe. In other words, when we tune in to time through its always-arriving future, what we experience is alive; when we don't, the future is dead.

We don't think of experience, even ordinary experience, as dead; at the most, we might say that it is routine, predictable, boring, or unsatisfying. That is why it is useful to recall moments that seem especially alive, as in the homework assignment for last week. We can also think of certain occasions when our experienced world feels more alive. A good example is when we travel in a foreign country: even the most routine interactions have a special vibrancy to them. Something similar happens when we attend a crowded event: a baseball game, a theater performance, a concert. Everything feels new (a clue that it is the always-arriving future that lends this flavor to experience).

This dimension of experience is not something we have to add to ordinary activities: it is always there, but it is masked over by the labels we apply and the stories we tell. Because we know what everything is in advance, we lose our connection to it. It's like applying stereotypes in our judgments of people. With everything pre-judged and pre-supposed, the realm of experience is pre-occupied. It cannot come alive.

At p. 99, the text invites us to rediscover immediacy and aliveness by "going directly to the point [of the future's] arising." This is very similar to the exercise we tried during the phone call, which came from p. 96: "Can we . . . allow ourselves to feel grateful for [this unfettered present arising,] this offering of time?" Feel free to play around with both during the week.

When we did the second of these exercises during the phone call, all the comments pointed to the joy, relaxation, or openness that emerged almost immediately. This brings us up against the basic question of why we don't just live this way all the time; why it seems that we have to make a special effort to activate the aliveness within our experience. But asking why this is so is not likely to be satisfying. 'Why' questions invite us to come with explanations, and that is a very past-centered approach. Instead, look and see what happens when you decide to stop experiencing the ongoing arising of the future, to slip back into the usual mode. What happens at that point? What do you tell yourself? That it's too tiring? That it's somehow frightening, or distracting?

The paragraph that follows the passage on p. 99 that I just quoted has several other suggestions for how to engage the aliveness of the future. Here is another homework assignment: during this next week, write a post on the website that describes one way that you chose to practice on this theme and what you observed as a result.

Finally, let me point you again to DTS Ex. 11, on p. 289, which invites you to investigate the energy or dynamic bound up in a story. This is another approach. You can also make up your own.