

Session 5, Week 5

Transition and Orientation

We are looking for ways to activate the dynamic, the aliveness, of time—not only in special moments of creativity, physical challenge, improvisation, love, or simple newness, but in the most ordinary activities.

Perhaps this is not as difficult as we imagine. It may be that we regularly have experience of emerging into aliveness, but then fall back into identity and sameness, unwilling to sustain engagement with the dynamic of time (and our lives) in this way, for reasons last week's reading suggests. This seems to be what happens when (LOK 206), aesthetic experiences or new idea are turned into experiences that the self has, rather than openings that go beyond the self. If that is so, the challenge is not to find a new way to engage time, but to let time illuminate our lives in an ongoing way, instead of turning away from the light it casts.

With this approach in mind, here is the practice I had intended for the phone call: you can use it instead as a walkabout:

See if you can engage each passing moment as a whole, lacking nothing, perfect as it is. Notice that this also means letting go of each moment in favor of the next, so that it does not become an 'experience' referred back to a self. However, this 'letting go' may not be a separate act: if we experience the whole, what is left to hold on to?

What keeps us from engaging the dynamic of time? The reading points toward the sense of self as owner, actor, witness, and so on. Still, it doesn't seem likely or even desirable that we can act or experience without a sense of self. Ignoring the witness, or pretending that it is not in operation, seems inconsistent with engaging the whole of what is so. Instead, we can draw on a suggestion made in an earlier reading from LOK: when the witnesses testifies to the reality of the self, it may be bearing false witness.

In the phone call, Phillip suggested we can 'tell' a fundamentally different story about the self; for instance, in jazz improvisation. Is this a clue for how to proceed? Or is the idea of 'telling a different story' already too committed to the past-present-future structure of linear time? Perhaps it is more a question of living a different story, without having to depend on the narrative of telling. When we 'live' a different story, we seem well on the way to engaging the aliveness of time.

This distinction between telling a story and living a story is not meant to be a subtle philosophical point, nor does it call for a radical shift in how we experience. If anything, it describes our ordinary experience. The stories that pass through our minds and shape our experience are not always 'told' in any ordinary sense. For instance, when an image of my father pops into my mind, it carries with it a whole story about me and my relationship to my father. The story is already implicitly there: it does not have to be told. If I engage the whole of the story, I seem to evoke its dynamic aliveness, without any linear telling required. (Compare the

possibility of ‘knowing without going’ that we explored a few weeks back.)

Telling a story is linear, but living a story—the story of this moment—offers the immediate availability of the story as a whole, inseparable from the dynamic of time that functions within the story. Only when the self is separated out from that dynamic, identified as ‘the one’ who inhabits the story—and who tell us what is so—does the dynamic turn into sameness and identity.

We return, then, to the question of how the self inhabits time. The reading for the coming week investigates this question by investigating the self’s way of knowing. The basic point builds on one we looked at last week: to take up its privileged place at the center of experience and outside of time, the self must adopt a particular way of knowing—a particular ‘key’ to knowledge, as the reading puts it. That way of knowing depends on the separation between subject and object, as well as several other conditions that the reading identifies and briefly explores. In the end, it traces to a particular understanding of space and time.

In investigating the structures of time and space implicit in the claims of the self, the reading looks at the role that the body plays in knowing. We discussed this in the last phone call, highlighting how the body has access to a more integrated way of knowing. Here, however, the emphasis is on the way the senses operate when they are already committed to the subject-object structure. The distinction between subject and object now shows up as the distinction between mind and body, leading to questions and difficulties very similar to the ones we explored last week.

The reading for the final week will continue this exploration. It asks whether it is possible to engage another way of knowing, one that does not place the self at the center and does not understand time and space in the usual ‘well-established’ ways.