

TSK Online, Session 5, Week 6 (May 2014)

Transition and Orientation

In addition to the readings already assigned for this week, please add KTS 35-43, the extra reading for last week. In addition, please read KTS 312-317. If you are pressured for time, you can skip the readings from TSK and DTS, both of which relate to the 'bystander' model. Finally, the assigned exercise is from LOK, not TSK.

Toward the end of the phone call for Week 5, I made a distinction between two approaches to engaging/activating a different temporality, in which stories (centered on the self) are not the fundamental shaping structure. One way is to let go of our 'pre-occupation' with the past and the future (fueled by emotionality) and simply let each moment arise as completely new. As I pointed out, there are practices in TSK that support this fundamentally meditative approach, such as Marriage of Sound and Breath and Going without Going. It is related to what (a few weeks ago) I called Knowing without Going.

The second approach is to drop our commitment to the stories that cycle through experience. As an analogy, consider a mother settling a fight between her two children. Both have their stories about what happened ("She started it!" "No, he hit me first!") Most likely, the mother doesn't settle the fight by deciding whose story is right. Instead, she responds based on what the children need to learn and what's going on for them in that moment. The stories are there, but she is not committed to their rightness or wrongness.

Of course, the analogy is incomplete, because the mother has her own story, her own role to play, even if her love for her children helps her approach the situation more globally and even set certain aspects of her own story aside. We might say that she all too easily adopts the role of bystander, though we could add that love is the solvent for that frozen posture.

If we drop our commitment to stories (the second approach), does this amount to giving up the first approach—being present in the moment? I don't think we need to choose. Still, it's good to notice that the 'moment to moment awareness' approach accepts a story about time unfolding in a sequence of linear moments. That is not 'wrong', but is it limiting?

As a comment on an overly narrowly understanding of 'present moment', consider the following Ch'an teaching story:

A monk asks Master Feng-hsueh Yen-chao: 'Speech and silence are concerned with subject and object. How can I transcend both subject and object?'

Feng-hsueh Yen-chao replies: 'In March my mind often wanders back to the Chiang-nan region. Partridges move about among the many flowers.'

How do we drop the commitment to stories? Here it helps to keep in mind that the structure of stories depends wholly on the structure of linear time, unfolding from past to present to future. With this in mind, here is a 'walkabout practice' for the coming week: Experience the past, present, and future of whatever story may be active in 'this moment' as occurring simultaneously. All three times are available 'right now'.

Notice that this practice should not strike us as strange. We do something similar when we listen with appreciation to a well-known piece of music, or even when we are having a conversation (though these examples may be a little too closely tied to linear sequence). Notice also that the past and future we evoke in the walkabout are not abstract or general: they are not the past and future of an object viewed 'objectively', without concern and caring. Rather, our intention and engagement shape the past-present-future whole.

Much of the reading for this coming week clarifies the model that divides experience into bystander and outside-stander (outsider). We are already well prepared for this, and I won't comment on it here. Turning instead to the final chapter (newly assigned) from KTS, consider the discussion of sequential time on 313 and the alternative introduced in the paragraphs that immediately follow. The discussion that continues at the bottom of 314 is similar to the walkabout practice introduced above. Can you see the connection? Similarly, the suggestion made to "look at the interaction between what time presents, space exhibits, and knowledge knows" (315) offers a ready link to the exercise from LOK assigned for this week.

The earlier chapter from KTS (also newly assigned) introduces the idea of "the founding logos." Is this the same as the founding story? Does the logos occupy a kind of 'middle ground' between the usual temporal order and the aliveness of time that makes a different way of knowing possible? Is that what is being said at the bottom of KTS 36?