

Given Together
Spring 2016, Course 2

Transition to Week 12

In the last class, we discussed the relation between thoughts, emotions, and the self. I am still experimenting with various ways of describing this, so what I say here may vary a little from what I said in class. This will be a very content-heavy mini-essay; my apologies.

As we discussed in Week 10, the self, caught as it is in its ‘bystander space’, is not really able to inhabit space. Of course, this goes against our usual understanding, which tells us that we are in the same ‘physical space’ as the objects we encounter in the world. But if you look more closely, you see that the self is separated from physical objects by a gap, an emptiness where ‘inhabitable space’ should be. That space has disappeared. (To anticipate an objection: objects and our bodies do occupy the same physical space. But ‘I’ is not the body.)

What does the self do to overcome this isolation? It does its best to create its own space. But it can only do so in the simulated space of thoughts. This is a first step, but thought-space is not a space the self can inhabit. (This helps explain why we do not act on our good intentions; thinking, as a Western philosopher has written, does not endow with the power to act. Compare Paul in the New Testament: “The good that I would do I cannot.”)

The shift from thought space to the reality of the spaces we inhabit comes about when thoughts turn into stories. Of course, some thoughts pass by far too quickly to turn into stories, while others play a more subordinate role, supporting or modifying stories. However, many thoughts present themselves as potential stories. In the multidimensional realm of inhabited space, stories offer the layer of meaning, and inhabited space is invariably meaningful: it presents a world. A profound source of creativity, thoughts provide the content that can be turned into stories, making the space-fields we inhabit—and through which we are constantly moving—meaningful.

How do thoughts, generated within bystander space, get turned into stories? That is what we looked at in the last class. The transition from thought-space to story-space is mediated by emotions. It is when I feel my way into a story—when it takes on emotional resonance or engages my concerns—that it becomes possible for me to inhabit it. Emotions (e-motions) move us; they catapult us into our stories. Think of the difference between a thought, a daydream, and a dream, and you can see how this might work.

The difficulty here—the source of so much of our dissatisfaction—is that emotions are *the self’s* version of feelings: Born out of agitation and the self’s need to inhabit the world, the stories of the self are fundamentally distorted (dis-torted) twistings of the feel of the field.

The question that all this brings to mind is whether it is possible to inhabit the field in ways that are not agitated and not distorted: that are true to the field and true to the capacities that are awakened when we inhabit the field fully. In a sense this means leaving our stories behind, though it is more accurate to say that what we leave behind is the founding story—the story of

the self. That is what we will be looking at in the final class of this program. In exploring this possibility, we will return again to the theme of pervading space.