

## Given Together Spring 2016, Course 2

### Transition to Week 9

The founding story, “Here I am,” which we discussed in our phone call, is a story of self and world. Unlike the story of subject and object, which insists on two identified entities, located ‘here’ and ‘there’, the story of self and world is a story that does not insist on locatedness. The self is a pervasive presence in our experienced world: to borrow a phrase from a well-known mindfulness teacher, “Wherever I go, there I am.” Similarly, the world is pervasive as well (That is what the world means, more or less.) There is nowhere in our experience that the self is not an active presence, acting in the world. We call it the ‘founding’ story because it applies everywhere, and all the time.

To say that the self is everywhere in our experience contradicts our felt sense that the ‘I’ is located where the body is (more precisely, for many people, it is located behind the eyes. But these two understandings are not in conflict. I typically *locate* the self in the body (though memories, dreams, daydreams, etc. offer counterexamples), but my sense of my own presence pervades the whole of experience.

The bridge between these two views, as we discussed in class, is the claim of ownership. For instance, I see the world from *my* perspective (I look ‘over there’ from my location ‘here’). In the same way, I experience my own feelings and sensations and my own thoughts and emotions. I also make *my* own plans, have my own reactions to what happens, and recall my own memories. The world is *my* world, and I make sense of it in my own way. It is in this way that the self’s limiting ‘here’ becomes a universal ‘everywhere’. In effect, the founding story of ‘the self in the world’ becomes a pervasive dimension of the experienced field of space.

Even if this makes sense to you conceptually, it goes against our usual understanding, so it is valuable to explore this way of understanding in your own experience. It is not just a matter of asking where the self is located—that may take you right back into the body or behind the eyes. Instead, ask about the sense of the self at the middle of experience. For instance, when I look at a book on the shelf, is there any question about my role as the one who is looking, reacting, etc.? When I simply set and sense my presence in the room, is there any doubt about my being present? What does that sense of presence feel like? You can do this as a practice, by which I mean that you can take 5 or 10 minutes to stay with the question; or you can do it as a walkabout. Either way, what do you find?

‘I’ and ‘mine’ both seem to be aspects of the self. What about ‘me’, a question that came up in a comment by Hayward during the phone call? Here too there seems to be a clear connection. When something happens to *me*, it becomes *my* experience, and thus enters the self/world structure. One way to investigate this further is through an exercise most of you know from your previous study of the TSK Vision: TSK Ex. 30, ‘A Subject-Object Reversal’. Here is a shortened version of the exercise:

Consider all your subject-object oriented experience. Carefully observe the knowing subject and the difference in quality that distinguishes it from the known object. . . . After you have thoroughly studied the qualities of the familiar subject-object polarization, *try to reverse it*. Let the object pole ‘over there’ be the knower, knowing you ‘here’ as the thing known. Let all given aspects of the situation . . . be ‘knowing’ in this way.

Try this exercise during the week, in light of the sense of self as a pervasive dimension of our field-experience. In doing the exercise, you are turning the knower, the subject, into a 'me' rather than an 'I'. Does the sense of 'me' as being located 'here' continue to hold up? Notice that you are not trying to project your own sense of 'I' onto the known object. Rather, you can let the known object have its own way of becoming the subject. When the object becomes the subject, what happens to the sense of self-in-its-world? Does it travel with the subject (the former object)? Or does it stubbornly stay where it is? There may be other possibilities as well. Compare in this context the walkabout I suggested in class: ask whether the self takes its own space with it as it moves through the world.

A sense of the self as fundamental to experience—the pervasive founding story—can loosen up our ordinary understanding of a rigid world in which a located subject, the self, is cut off from the located objects it encounters through adopting the bystander mode. However, the sense of the self-story as pervasive does not represent a real break with our usual way of engaging experience; rather, it calls attention to a dimension of experience that we usually fail to notice. A more basic shift becomes possible when we recognize that the self is a story: a way we have of making sense of the world. Even if the self is not 'located' in the way that objects are located, it insists on its own identity. In fact, the self's sense of identity is the most basic identity of all. Again, that's why we call it the founding story. To impose this kind of structure limits the openness of space. If we could see the self-story as a story, that limitation might give way, but of course, we usually see our stories as real, as "the way things are."

In the coming week, we will look more carefully at the way that stories—and also thoughts—are related to the openness of space. What is the relation of stories and thoughts to space? Here is one way to ask the question: we have explored the value of *inhabiting* space instead of occupying it. Can we inhabit a story? A thought? Does the founding story, 'Here I am', allow us to inhabit space and engage its openness? Looking more generally at thoughts and stories will help us explore this question. Consider in this context the opening paragraph of *Dynamics of Time and Space*, Ch. 7:

Space and the freedom it offers are available at the center of present experience, just as it is. If we do not discover space in our experience, it is because this space availability has been covered over. To recover space 'presence', we must clarify the operation of the thinking mind, whose active naming and identifying structure a world in which space has disappeared.

Chapter 7 is good background reading for next week's class.