

We have been looking for a couple of weeks at models and interpretation as a way of challenging the usual understanding of what is real. If we take that challenge seriously, it would be stunning, in an almost literal sense. Whatever we accept as solid, as basic, is just a construct. If that is so, how can we act? How can we take a single step, when there is no ground?

Of course, the aim in exploring this insight is not to fall into a kind of paralysis or depression. Instead, the idea is to recognize that we are not bound by the usual models, the usual forms of understanding, including our understanding of time and space and knowledge.

But how can we engage this insight at the right level? The reading for last week began to point us toward an answer. What matters most to us, what grounds everything else, is our sense of self. The self is witness, the owner, and so on (as we will see later). So now we turn toward the self. In doing so, the 'story' theme merges with the theme of interpretation. As the reading makes clear, the self takes on the role of founder. That is the "founding story," and it grounds every interpretation. It is almost as though we were each the God of our own universe, the creator of our own reality. Yet even the self is the outcome of a story. This is what the reading explores.

It's important, as I've been emphasizing for weeks now, that we not make this into a theoretical observation (or 'aesthetic' insight). Our stories are our reality. Undermining them on the basis of some kind of model about how stories function will not have any impact on our lives. But being aware within the story can have a profound impact, even if it only shows up in small ways that leave us wondering if anything has changed.

To investigate this point, practice LOK Ex. 21. The exercise asks us to investigate the themes and narratives around which 'mental activity' seems to focus. ("Mental activity" here is not meant to be limiting: all of our experience is rooted in mental activity.) But it also asks us to focus that investigation by looking at purposes and projects; in other words, to focus on the self, with its goals, concerns, etc. (see bottom of p. 171.) And it suggests that we might be able to get to a level of experience where the outer 'form' of the narrative falls away, leaving something more basic. A question: is this more basic level still at the level of stories?

Here's another assignment that may help you get to the sense of the lived story. Several times during the week, write down the answers to these questions:

"I need \_\_\_\_\_";

"I want \_\_\_\_\_"

It will help if you focus on the levels of patterns rather than specifics (but I'm going to leave this distinction undefined, so that you can explore it). In doing this exercise, you might ask: Is this kind of inquiry psychological? Or does it operate at a different level?

By the way, the first paragraph of the chapter refers to descriptive, intentional, and polar knowledge. You don't need to trace these references out, but you may like to.