

appearance is war

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A significant number of Western philosophers are afraid of movement. It is rather difficult to explain why things keep on moving, the simple fact of what physics calls inertia. So perhaps the best thing is to get rid of movement, to make it be a superficial aspect of our world, or not exist at all. Fear of movement: we might call it *kinophobia*, because like all phobias, it is a blocked fear – a fear of enjoyment, specifically of slipping, sliding, rubbing, throbbing, licking, floating, and, horror of horrors, *vibrating*.

Needless to say, some philosophers are less phobic of movement than others. Hegel is quite adept on the subject; at least, *micro-Hegel*, the Hegel of the up-close dynamics of the dialectic, is. Micro-Hegel has a model for how things happen: it is as if a thing “flops” over itself like a Slinky, a helix of metal that seems to walk downstairs all by itself once one has started it off by bending it over and placing its top ring on a lower step. The trouble is, the flopping is only really happening in a region that Hegel calls *the Idea*, and no prizes as to whose idea it is – white Western patriarchy. And the other problem, the problem we might call *macro-Hegel*, is that macro-Hegel makes the Slinky move *up* the stairs, improbably. And at the top of the stairs, like the killer in *Psycho*, is waiting white Western patriarchy in the guise of the Prussian state. Micro-Hegel allows for a wonderful mechanism of movement – indeed, things can move by themselves, which is, as we shall see, an essential component of a strong theory of movement. Actually, *mechanism* is the wrong word, because it implies things being pushed, as in Newtonian physics. The trouble is – and this is also a problem even for micro-Hegel – that this movement is teleological: it’s *going somewhere*, and where it’s going is in some sense better than where it has been.

Spinoza is also tolerant of movement. Spinoza argues that bodies move all by themselves, which means that a god, an agricultural-age invisible man who mostly wants to kill you, isn’t necessary for explaining how things work. One could be executed in Spinoza’s day for harboring such thoughts. But Spinoza is reluctant to spell out how it happens.

The kind of movement this essay is interested in is achieved by a body that’s not only all by itself – it’s also not going anywhere in particular. It’s waving, undulating, vibrating. This undulation is why things can happen, which doesn’t necessarily mean things going from A to B. Scientists can begin to see this undulation in tiny objects, objects that are nevertheless billions of times larger than traditional

vanilla quantum objects such as photons and electrons. Consider a tiny sliver of metal thirty microns long, close to absolute zero in a vacuum – that is what physics means by isolated, all by itself, not relating to anything else. When it's isolated like that, one can see it shimmying.¹ Actually, it's even more interesting than that. You can see it shimmying and not-shimmying at the same time. The zero degree of movement is not a tiny motion “in” space from point ∂A to point ∂B . Minimal movement is *stillness*, a beautiful word. Stillness isn't static. Stillness is alive, quivering.

Or consider a tiny mirror in a lab at the California Institute of Technology, in a vacuum close to absolute zero – again, isolated. It starts to show human scientists what it's all about. It emits a bit of infrared light, a signal that it's being pushed. But it's not being pushed, because it's all by itself. It's shimmering, without mechanical input.² This shimmering, like the light sparkling on a lake in the twilight: that's the basis of movement. It is like how listening is the basis of music, how listening is the basis of language. It's a space of attunement, of catching waves and riding them, where the question of who is influencing whom becomes very ambiguous.

Measurement is not outside the realm of appearance, of phenomena – which we so often reify or dismiss as “subjective” or “experiential.” Measurement happens with measuring gear relating to a certain “world” or realm of projects – the ant is trying to get from this crevice to that crevice; you are a NASA scientist mapping global warming; she is having fun in a hang glider above the coast of Iceland. These phenomenal manifolds are independent yet perforated and open beings. The idea that we can point to things “in” preformatted space is an artefact of our anthropocentrically scaled worlds and projects. We want to land on them; we want to sail to them to extract their spices. The spice race, otherwise known as the early Renaissance, was the first space race. Europeans invented perspective geometry on a Cartesian-type plane precisely to navigate their way around the Cape of Good Hope to get to the islands that until then had been a medieval fantasy of luxury, a sort of “earthly paradise,” as they used to say, “east of Eden.” The bringing into existence, or realization, of this dream was indeed a project that required the mapping of islands and how to get to them, on a flat plane with spatial coordinates established in advance. But as Einstein demonstrated, that flat plane is just a human-scaled, good-enough-to-be-getting-on-with region of a much more interesting universe, useful for conquering and subjugating non-Europeans and non-humans.

Then there is lava's way of measuring the ocean, pouring into it and hardening into all kinds of rock. Then there's the ocean's way of measuring the lava, seething around it, steaming and hissing. Measuring comes from the word *metron*, which is an abstraction based on a verb that actually means *spacing*. Before it's about spacing things out according to a preformatted human-scaled grid, it is about spacing, period. Iceland gets the measure of us; it paces us as we try to climb up it or drive around it.

Movement such as spacing can happen because things are moving all by themselves, just by being different from themselves at every point, as we have been exploring. The minimum of movement is a shimmering or vibrating without being pushed. It is not that things do not exist, that the problem is this island that I need to liquidate into ... lots of tiny, tiny static solid islands called atoms. The issue is that “to exist” does not mean “to be a definite thing that you can point to directly.” *To exist* means *to be profoundly ambiguous*, such that ambiguity is a fantastic signal of interpretive accuracy, within a specific (one's own or some other system's) ambiguity tolerance threshold. Things melt out of and around themselves, at the ontological level – not the level you can see and write a check for but the level at which you think about *how things exist*. This accuracy format does not have to do with imposing one's (Neoplatonic Christian) will on things or the Badiouian upgrade, cutting into a continuum because you are the Decider, the event maker, the almighty human equipped with the right tools at the right time. This kind of accuracy comes logically before all that; it is more like listening-to, attending-to, or tracing around with six delicate legs. A coastline traversed by an ant is ever so much larger than the coastline measured from a satellite. Moreover, the ant will encounter a whole host of ambiguous qualities about the coastline. Imagine her crawling around the surface of a rock on the seashore in a tidal pool. Is she on the coastline or off it? Ambiguity can sometimes be a signal of accuracy.

Free will is overrated. We only do not accept the idea that shimmering is the basis of movement because we are still retweeting an old, patriarchal and untenable notion of active versus passive. The question boils down to whether one wants unsustainable paradoxes or ambiguity. I choose ambiguity, a consequence of rejecting the idea that there is a little invisible person inside me, a command-control elf who can't actually touch any of the controls because he is made of spiritual stuff. Playing music or driving a car should suggest something much easier to understand but also more magical. You listen to your fellow musicians. You tune in to your instrument as you play it. You become the medium through which the metal and the snaky curvature of the saxophone begin to express themselves.

Human beings are not storm troopers pacing around a universe of inert objects, manipulating them into life. Nor are human beings Pac-Men who go around munching everything into existence, or, as they like to say after Hegel, negating. In turn, this means that the edge between activity and passivity has become ambiguous.

In some circumstances, ambiguity is a signal of accuracy. In the optician's, as the optometrist homes in on your prescription, you face an inevitable choice between two different kinds of lens, both of which might work, because they are so subtly different from one another that it's hard to tell which one is better. The optometrist says, "Which one? Number one, or number two? Number one, or number two?" You might as well choose either. The basic, irresolvable ambiguity that happens at that moment is a signal concerning the *accuracy* of the prescription. This is not how we normally like to think about ambiguity. We usually assume that ambiguity means that something is amiss. Here, it means that given the physical constraints of the lenses and the limits of your vision system, of your ability to receive and interpret visual data, you are now seeing as well as you can. You will not ever see absolutely perfectly, because physical systems are necessarily determinate and therefore limited.

On a philosophical level, what is happening? The gap between the principle of (perfect) sight and the kind of sight you are achieving with the lenses becomes obvious, and so does something else. The gap between the two kinds of lens exists, but you can hardly detect it. These two facts are deeply related. The lenses have been tuned to your vision. The space of attunement is a spectral realm that is "analog," thick, not rigidly bounded, so that more than one choice becomes available. The floating of decision in this spectral attunement space is *accurate* and highly determinate.

Human beings are quivering chameleons who love to be seduced by vibrating colors, sounds, textures. Art appreciation of any kind is a wonderfully available, "cheap" way of seeing something very deep about reality, namely that we are caught in intersecting patterns of undulation, that this passion is not the same as static silence. Art is a part of the universe that modern humans, obsessed with colonizing Mars and living forever, allow to be still and quiet, not static and silent. And this is because art can be still and quiet, vibrating. The aesthetic dimension is the causal dimension.³

The underlying principle of this undulation is a complete miracle. Things can only affect one another indirectly – because things never coincide with other things in a full-on way, they never even coincide with themselves like that: they

are not reducible to their parts, and their parts are not reducible to the wholes that they are. A thing is an anarchist commune whose members are fully autonomous. So because things can only affect one another indirectly, causality can't be about mechanically knocking against, but rather aesthetically seducing, pushing and pulling, spookily, nonlocally, like telepathy, which means *passion at a distance*. Things cannot directly touch, but boots click against stones, guitar picks stroke amplified strings, gravity waves from distant black holes colliding make us smaller and younger, then taller and older, for a tiny fraction of a second.

The world is not an illusion but rather an *illusionlike* magical display, because causality is not the regular churning of complex cogwheels interrupted by miracles now and then. Causality just is a miraculous display interrupted by brutalist human power moves to try to make it seem gray and mechanical. Furthermore, this is precisely the view that the post-Humean scientific consensus gives us. Causality is in the realm of appearance. There can be a war of appearances, because *war as such* happens in the appearance dimension. Appearance is war.

There is a deep reason why things move all by themselves, and why this movement is best described as vibration. It is an ontological reason, which means it has to do with the structure of how things are. Ontology considers how things exist, if they exist. An ontologist is not the police, so she or he can't tell you what exists. One needs to resort to examples, but they might not really exist. So one limits oneself to exploring *how* things exist. There might be one thing in the whole universe – that tended to be the Spinozan idea. Or there might be two. Or five hundred trillion.

How beings exist has to do with the difference between two aspects that are nevertheless deeply entwined: appearing and being. We have all kinds of prejudices about appearing and being that mean we usually conjure up a picture of something quite static when we hear these words. Appearing is like a painting, and paintings, we tell ourselves, are static. (This obviously is not true, not about paintings or about looking at them, but we keep telling ourselves it is – this is in itself interesting. Perhaps we have all inherited philosophical kinophobia.) Being is like just sort of sitting there, like a wise old frog. Maybe being is like a sculpture – it just sits on a plinth somewhere. And the most important thing for us today is that paintings don't do things in the way cogwheels do.

This is perhaps why object-oriented ontology comes in for criticism. It is not because of what we say but because when people hear the word *object* they see what they think they already know. And what they think they know is *static* and *solid*. One tends not to think of a *liquid* when you hear the word *object*. But a

liquid behaves much more in the way what OOO calls an object does. When OOO says *object*, it means anything at all: human, pop band, star cluster, star in a star cluster, pencil, frog, black hole, clothing on a washing line.

Then some also see in the word *object*, as in a mirror, their worst white Western patriarchal fears about what could happen to them: they could become objectified. They could become totally passive. Strangely, the fear of movement contains within it a fear of passivity – a fear of *being moved*, for example. Many philosophers are wary of art because it moves them like that, for no good reason, without their will. But free will is an overrated Neoplatonic Christian retweet, and to transcend that, we will need to admit something like passivity quite a lot more into our theories of action. Contemporary neuroscience shows that once one intends to do something, one has in effect already done it, or started to. This is disturbing from that Neoplatonic Christian point of view, which affects all kinds of thought that claims it has nothing to do with Neoplatonism, such as Marxism. But from another point of view, it is miraculous. Things can happen whether or not one intends them to happen. The fact that things can happen – and there's plenty of flexibility for *new things* to happen – should strike us as deeply encouraging.

Bertrand Russell denies physical action can happen at a distance, arguing that causation can only involve contiguous things. If there is any action at a distance, he argues, then there must be intervening entities that transmit the causality:

[W]hen there is a causal connection between two events that are not contiguous, there must be intermediate links in the causal chain such that each is contiguous to the next, or (alternatively) such that there is a process which is continuous.⁴

Yet isn't this an elegant definition of the aesthetic dimension? Action at a distance happens all the time if causation is aesthetic. What is called consciousness is action at a distance. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that consciousness of anything is action at a distance. Thus, to be located "in" space or "in" time is already to be caught in a web of relations. It is not that objects primordially "occupy" some existing region of space-time but that they are caught in the fields of, and otherwise "spaced" and "timed" by, other entities. Minimally, what physics calls action at a distance is just the existence-for-the-other of the sensual qualities of any entity at all.

What is called movement is simply a function of the difference between what a thing is and how it appears. How a thing appears – this is the past. My face is a

map of everything that has happened to my face. A flower is a plot of a genomic algorithm executing in cellulose (and so on). A thing is an image of a cookie that has crumbled in just this very specific way.

What a thing is – this is the future. There is a not-yetness built into the ontological structure of a thing. Readers of poems are quite good at noticing this futural quality. Who knows what this poem will mean tomorrow; who knows how this sentence is going to end? Something about the poem or the sentence recedes from view, and the receding can happen because of a more fundamental, radically ontological receding that OOO calls withdrawal. This does not mean "moving backwards in empirical space." Withdrawal means *being open*, resisting being reduced to any particular mode of access.

The sliding of the two, appearance and essence, or past and future, over one another sustains a quivering vibrating momentum, a flickering that we reify by giving it a name: present. It is not present. It would be better to call it *nounness*. Time and space are nothing other than the way a thing slips and slides around itself, its appearance curling around its essence like a snake swallowing its own tail, and the ways in which these snakes get caught up in dances with one another, the beats of which we mistake for time and space, whereas in fact they are the *measurement* of time and space. (Actually, it's usually worse than that: humans habitually regard themselves as the only snakes in town and assert that they get to slither around everything else with clearly marked numbers on their scales so they can figure out exactly where everything else is in order to manipulate it.) The difference between what a thing is and how it appears generates an inner structural instability, a fragility exactly like the hamartia, or wound, of a tragic hero. This hamartia defines the style of a particular entity, the particular way that its cookie is going to crumble. It is capable of crumbling all by itself; it doesn't need to be pushed by something else. "Pushing by something else" is exactly what we mean by mechanical theories of causality.

The slippery quality of things, like that of liquid meringue, provides wiggle room in which different stuff can happen. There can be novelty. It sounds trivial to say that new things can happen, but it is in fact one of the most remarkable, wonderful things about our reality ever. Novelty can happen because things aren't totally locked together, not totally empowered to track one another perfectly, not reducible to one another. We don't live in a static lump. Revolutions and big bangs are fetishized as theistic miracles, something coming from nothing, and in the case of revolution, an old patriarchal narrative is repeated about some transcendental Decider decreeing that things get under way, cutting into a continuum: let there

be light. When physics normalizes the Big Bang for quantum theory, it finds that there have been lots of medium-sized bangs. Perhaps we should start normalizing revolution for quivering vibrating stillness. Then we might have many more revolutions. Maybe they wouldn't be intimidating to think, because the basic energy of revolution is just the basic energy of nontheistic miracle, of illusionlike magical display that is the fuel of causality. Perhaps the trouble with revolutions, for academic Marxism, is that they are *too easy*, always a matter of fragile and contingent finitude, in such a way that they always model a better way of coexisting rather than directly incarnating the One True Way once and for all.

We aren't Action Men, and we aren't Pac-Men. And we aren't caught in terrifying prisons from which there is no escape. And being intelligent doesn't mean convincing you that my idea of prison is much scarier than yours, much more powerful, much less easy to escape. Since when did cynical reason take over, so that the smartest person in the room is the one who says we are the most paralyzed? There is always wiggle room, which is what slightly too-serious Buddhists call emptiness: how things can happen. Wiggle room comes from that fantastic lubricant, the fact that how things appear and how things are are totally different, yet things are never not how they are. An apple is an apple, not reducible to bits of apple or to the fruit bowl it's sitting in. A human being is a human being, not reducible to atoms nor to the economic enjoyment mode in which she or he is caught. Neoliberalism, global warming – these big bad things we care about – are physically huge but ontologically tiny. They absorb but do not exhaust the myriad beings that get caught in them. Since for 000 things exist in the same way, there are always more parts than wholes in a significant sense: the whole is always less than the sum of its parts. 000 is a form of holism that allows groups of things to be things. Society isn't just a collection of individuals. However, these wholes exist in a fainter way than traditional holism, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Since the whole and the parts exist in the same way, there will always be more parts than whole.

Miracles are not the exception that proves the rule that reality is a boring assemblage of grey machinery chugging away underneath appearances. Miracles are exactly how causality as such functions. John Cage wrote, "The world is teeming. Anything can happen."⁵ One of the places this *anything can happen* has explicit and profound implications for Western causality theory is in the domain of theories of action. Allow me here to proceed to outline a new theory of action that blurs the too-thin, too-rigid boundary between active and passive. I am going to call it *rocking*.

A ship moving in intense waters is rocking and rolling. Humans having sex rock and roll. Rock and roll is a musical form involving driving drums, swiveling hips, riffing guitars. Early modern German *rocken*: a rare term for wiggling the butt. To sway gently. Swedish *rucka*: to move to and fro.⁶ *Rock* gathers a whole set of resonances to do with moving in place, oscillation, moving while standing still. Dancing – a Russian formalist called it movement that is felt, but dancing is also movement that isn't going anywhere.⁷ It keeps snapping back to its starting position.

If we pay attention, we can glimpse something very strange in these resonances: a whole new theory of action. This theory of action has to do with a highly necessary queering of the opposing theistic categories of *active* and *passive*, categories that are deeply caught in the way we think sexualities and the cultures and politics of those sexualities. These are categories that, going further, violently interfere with the way humans have treated nonhumans in social, psychic and philosophical space. Only consider how sexuality, and in particular queerness, has been expressed and policed in rock music since its inception to begin to intuit how urgent and quiveringly sensitive this issue is. It is high time to retire the concepts *active* and *passive* as we commonly think them, and time to start rocking.

Let us punningly consider geological rocks for a moment. We assume that what rocks do is stand perfectly still. Rocks are supposed to be part of "nature," the background to our foreground, the rugged parts of it that we can latch onto with our moving feet and hands if we are so inclined. The reassuringly static reserve of geostuff waits to be cut and exploded and melted and smelted and turned into pleasant slabs of kitchen countertop.⁸

We expect rocks to play their part, which is to say, be totally passive. We're the top, they're the bottom, and we expect them to stay that way. When they play at being the top, humans call it an earthquake and find it highly unpleasant. Or consider a rock falling on one's car: there are traffic warning signs that show how it happens, but we never read those signs as announcing that the rocks might somehow jump off the cliff and hurtle down towards us. We are hampered from the beginning from ascribing intention to rocks, which is what seems to be lurking in the background of the notion of agency. Scholarship is going to have to figure out how to get this intention bug out of the agency concept if it indeed wants to allow nonliving entities to have agency.

We are wary of letting rocks do things, because we are wary of letting agency be about doing things. We talk about distributed agency, or emergent agency, as a way of signaling our discomfort, but this is the merest hint. Calling agency dis-

tributed means that one doesn't really need to claim that this rock is acting. It is perhaps part of a network of actants instead, acting insofar as it has effects on other things. It would be indecorous to pin the acting down to any one part of the network. There is perhaps an unspoken prohibition on appearing a philistine in these matters; to acknowledge distribution is an aesthetic preference in an age of anxiety about authority.

Does this not also sound like theism, however? *Active* and *passive* have to do with souls in bodies, namely with the Neoplatonic Christianity that thought insists even now on retweeting, often unconsciously – which means bringing up the notion of passivity, which means inviting attack. One of the principal rules of polite speech is never to mention the unconscious in public, because it suggests that part of the way we talk and act is unintended, passive in some sense. But ecological awareness is about acknowledging what one avant-garde musician calls *un-intention*.⁹

Does this gratifying illusion not sound a little like good old – or rather bad old – omnipresent omniscience? And does that not begin also to hint at that third excellent part of the Neoplatonic recipe, omnipotence? Potency, everywhere; flat potency, as it were; flat presence; flat knowing. This establishes the idea that not all access modes are equal, and that knowing, in particular, is the top access mode and indeed the access mode for tops, otherwise known as human beings, mostly white Western ones, with the “right” kind of sexuality. The prospect of liberating chimpanzees from zoos begins to sound remoter than ever. We assume we will first have to ascertain how to allow them to be white Western patriarchal heterosexual human males first.

Revolution begins to look as if it isn't in the cards either, since we can't even get a chimp out of a zoo. The distributed agency concept is simply an *ambient* version of the theistic patriarchal concept, like the original ambient music that Brian Eno heard because his record player was broken and only played things very quietly.¹⁰ Super-low-volume patriarchy that won't disturb the neighbors: the institutions that make scholarly life slightly less unbearable by making it slightly more permanent.

Consider the puzzling phrase *Do what you feel*. Notice that the phrase is not *Do whatever you feel like doing*. It would be less difficult to understand that one. Is it that one is supposed to be feeling something and then somehow performing this feeling to another? What is the status of the *and then*? Is it a chronological *then* or a logical *then*? In other words, is doing simultaneous with feeling, but feeling the condition of possibility for this doing? It all seems uncertain and am-

biguous. For instance, is it perhaps that by a certain doing we get to feel something? The syntax suggests this logic: another way to read the injunction is *What you feel is what you are doing*. Whatever you do, there you are, feeling that. In this case, doing is logically prior to feeling, although in this case it is far from obvious that chronologically you do, then feel.

This phrase is sung over and over again in one of my favorite dance tunes, the eponymous “Do What You Feel” by Joey Negro.¹¹ On examination, this techno musician's output suggests that perhaps he struggled with the phrase too, found it compelling yet was never entirely sure exactly how to say it – or indeed how to *do* it. There are several prototypes of this song, which became a hit on the rave scene about 1991.

There are additional lyrics in some versions of the tune, but in the ones most popular at the time, there is only that line and one more: “Don't stop the body rock.” As a matter of fact, one of those versions does also include the word “higher,” which makes things much worse. You're supposed to be doing what you're feeling, only higher and higher. Do it higher. Or feel it higher. Or – without beating about the bush too much – you feel really high and you start lashing out blissfully. Or – it just got confusing again – you're describing the phenomenology of doing what you're feeling. Philosophers should never be allowed on the dance floor. Or maybe they should *only* be allowed on dance floors, because that's where their intellect might become confused enough to say something of significance.

Rocking one's body, or indeed someone else's, or enjoying the sensation of two or more people rocking, as in the Michael Jackson song “Rock with You,” is obviously a favorite techno theme. “Meltdown” by Quartz – imagine the temperature at which quartz would start melting – contains the simple, demurely sung instruction “Rock your body.”¹² And Derrick May's wonderful remix of Reese's “Rock to the Beat” turns that phrase into something like a lullaby, as the singer intones “rock” with a long, expanded, melodically rising – then floating, then falling – lilt.¹³ It sounds so gentle, slightly spooky, dark and even slightly sinister, evoking the way in which the techno drug of choice doesn't quite live up to its name, if by that name we expect happiness. MDMA, or ecstasy, seems to enhance awareness of what some Asian medical and spiritual systems call the subtle body, which is not exactly physical in a crude (as those systems say, “gross”) sense, but not exactly mental either. The drug appears to operate “between” these categories, although *between* is also the wrong word, because the sensation of subtle body awareness is not unlike becoming aware of an alien entity, yet one that is more intimate than one's concept of oneself or one's sense of physical embodiment, and

aply named – given its associations with dreaded notions of property and propriety – *proprioception*. It somewhat resembles the queer quality of certain horror modes described by Jack Halberstam, in which something appears encrypted, hidden or entombed within oneself, always already having penetrated oneself before one even became oneself.¹⁴ It resembles what Freud pathologizes as introjection, and Torok recuperates by imagining the ways the human psyche contains encrypted, entombed ghost beings.¹⁵ The umbrella ontological term under which these psychic entities sit is the spectrality that forms a basic feature of the things we slightly wrongly call lifeforms: hovering around – or is it within, or is it outside of? – an entity is a certain spectral version of itself, like the daemons in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* series. Here we encounter a healthy confusion of inside and outside, those categories that mark, for Derrida, the origin point of a metaphysics of presence.¹⁶ Once thought has established an inside-outside distinction, the metaphysics of presence is just around the corner. People who report kundalini awareness, for example – this can happen quite spontaneously without any yogic training – check themselves into psychiatric wards because they feel something escaping that inside-outside logic, as if part of their experience was floating outside them, sometimes dramatically outside, into the cosmos.¹⁷

What is germane here is the fear deriving from the constant retweeting of the idea that we are souls or spirits or minds inhabiting some kind of body, like a liquid or a gas in a bottle. It is not merely the mind-body dualism that constitutes the problem here. Rather, it resides in the way that dualism is set up, so that one element is inside and the other is outside. It all depends on the force and rigidity of the notion of *in*. Yogic practitioners who conjure up kundalini, the serpent energy that rises up the central channel – just in front of your spinal column, according to the manuals – do *tune in* (that word *in* again), attuning either to unconditional awareness – which cannot be located anywhere at all without losing it – or to a certain specific point in a specific chakra located just below the navel.

What disturbs people who check themselves in to psychiatric wards is how this energy appears to be *moving*, all by itself. The reason the inside-outside distinction becomes ego-threateningly blurry is precisely because of movement – something is moving up, outside one’s control, like vomiting or excreting but subtler, until one begins to learn how to tune the radio dial of one’s awareness to this faint channel, which people say is threadlike. The more one tunes in, the more intense it seems, becoming physically hot, so much so that some nuns in Nepal and Tibet perform a ritual in which they melt snow with this energy in a six-foot radius around their bodies. The energy moves up through the chakras, which are some-

thing like psychic sex organs, and the chakras have their own kinds of orgasms: namely, they all open as the energy starts to lick around inside them. Bliss is indeed, as Barthes liked to point out, disturbing – and, as he failed to point out, it is available within pleasure, which is why esoteric spiritual pathways tend to emphasize pleasure in a way that should remind people of what almost every critical sensibility (Marxisms, some anarchisms, many environmentalisms and so on) finds disturbing about consumerism, which has as its top level the bohemian or Romantic reflexive pursuit of pleasures in a spiritual mode – the politics and poetics of “experience.”¹⁸ Eventually, the energy opens the chakra at the top of the head, and out one goes ... and the way to represent this becomes fully paranormal, a quality that is still nowhere near polite or safe to discuss in scholarship space.¹⁹

Western scholarship can now say *mindfulness* (a term from the discourse of Buddhist meditation), because neoliberalism loves mindfulness. The reason for this is far from what Slavoj Žižek assumes, namely that it turns the practitioner into a blissed-out passive person (like other theorists of the event, Žižek is averse to passivity). Mindfulness turns the practitioner into a maniacally *active* worker who now has a whole new job to do at work and at home – namely, remaining calm. Scholarship remains incapable of saying *awareness*, by which meditation manuals mean something effortless, something the practitioner is not “doing” at all, something that occurs more as a self-sustaining flash. This is a shame, because mindfulness, in Buddhist meditation manuals, is a tool that can allow awareness to happen – at which point the meditator is supposed to drop the mindfulness.

By analogy, one doesn’t drive only to demonstrate how adept one is at using the gearshift – unless one is a certain kind of gender performer. One drives to get somewhere and look out the window. Suddenly one runs over a dead cat. Mindfulness is like plowing. Awareness is like hunting and gathering. But post-Neolithic humans keep telling themselves they aren’t Paleolithic beings anymore, and they keep imagining the evocation of that mode of being as absurd backward primitivism or an impossible, sin-exploding return to a Garden of Eden. In other words, we keep cheerleading for the Neolithic, which Jared Diamond calls the worst mistake in the history of the human species.²⁰ In this sense, neoliberalism is just Mesopotamia 9.0.

One doesn’t *act* awareness: it happens to one. It seems to have its own kind of existence, from its own side. It is not something you manufacture. Popular contemporary corporate opinion notwithstanding, mindfulness is not definitely good. Often, mindfulness can be quite bad. There are people who are very mindful, totally calm, lacking any anxiety, who can even slice living beings open mindfully. They

are called psychopaths. Doing things mindfully is not necessarily great, which is why it seems to fit perfectly the murder-suicide culture of neoliberalism.²¹ Awareness might occur to a psychopath as a sudden pang of a conscience she or he never knew she or he had, like the voice of God. In short, awareness would appear horribly distorted, like Banquo's ghost appearing to Macbeth, without bliss. If we reverse-engineer from the critique of the hyperactivity of mindfulness, we notice that awareness *rocks* in the sense we are exploring. Awareness oscillates or undulates or vibrates all by itself, neither doing or feeling exclusively, neither active nor passive.

Ecological awareness is knowing that there is a bewildering variety of scales, temporal and spatial, and that the human ones represent only a very narrow region of a much larger and necessarily inconsistent and varied scalar possibility space, and that the human scale is not the top scale. Online scaling tools and movies that zoom the user smoothly "in" and "out" from the Planck length to the scope of the universe, like a private jet of scale, are anthropocentrically scaled, because they interpellate an anthropocentric subject position: the user devours all those scales in the same way, like Pac-Man. But reality is scale-variant. A rock is a gigantic empty cathedral at a microscopic level. It is a vast empty region of a solar system at a nanoscopic level. There is no smooth transition zone between these scales, just as in quantum theory there's no energy state "between" specific states – there are blue fields of energy and red fields of energy, figuratively speaking. Phase transitions such as boiling look smooth because of the anthropocentric scale on which one witnesses them. From an electron's point of view, nothing is emergent at all about boiling – there only occur sudden jumps between electron orbits, passing over what is in physics called *the forbidden gap*. The default theory of action wants there to be a smooth in-between zone, because it wants to ascertain how to get from A to B – one wants to be in control of awareness. One wants to be *doing* something, as opposed to *letting something happen*. Online scale tools actually *inhibit* ecological awareness.

On an inhumanly large timescale, rocks behave like liquids, coming and going, moving, shifting, melting. Rocks fail to sit there doing nothing. Humans aren't caught in anthropocentrism without an exit, because they can discern rocks to be liquid, attuning themselves to the timescale on which that liquidity operates, letting it affect them, becoming perhaps excited or horrified.

Furthermore, on an inhumanly *small* spatiotemporal scale, tiny slivers of rock vibrate all by themselves. As we observed earlier, they do something much worse for the active-passive binary. They vibrate and do not vibrate at the same time.

Operating "between" active and passive, in this quantum-theoretical sense, is not a smooth, nicely put-together compromise – it is both/and, and this violates the never-proven but taken-for-gospel (like the existence of a god) logical "law" of noncontradiction. The so-called *ground state* of an entity is this shimmering without mechanical input. Nothing is pushing the little mirror; it just quivers all by itself. It is not passive, because it's not being pushed. It fails to be active, because it's not doing anything to anything else, in the strictest sense meant in the discourse of physical science: it exists in a vacuum close to absolute zero. It is satisfying that there is a determinate region just above absolute zero where this starts to happen. The boundary between this phenomenon happening and not happening is neither thin nor rigid, a symptom of determinacy and finitude.

This way of thinking about action is superior to actor-networks or the higher-volume version, mechanical pushing-around, which is the scientific version of Neoplatonic Christianity, the thing that even Descartes (who says he isn't) is retweeting and that Kant (who says he isn't being Descartes) is also retweeting.²² This bug has affected many thought domains. Industrial capitalism is theorized by Marx as an emergent property of industrial machines – when you have enough of them, pop!²³ But this means capitalism is like God, always greater than the sum of its parts.

When we bracket off the content, awareness itself appears to be doing something similar to tiny crystals close to absolute zero. Awareness is still and moving at the same time, a ground state of feeling or doing or mentating or being embodied. Awareness rocks. Perhaps meditative awareness is the human version of being a tiny crystal or a massive glacial rock face.

Philosophy requires a new theory of action, a queer one that is neither active nor passive nor a compromise amalgam of both, to help us slip out from underneath physically massive beings such as global warming and neoliberalism to find some wiggle room down there so we can wriggle or rock our way out of the hyperobjects. This would be a much more interesting and much more powerful revolutionary action theory than, for instance, theories of the event, which have to do with acting – damn the torpedoes, even if history insists it's not going to work right now – and enjoin the revolutionary to cut into the continuum because they are the Decider, it's tough at the top, and someone's got to do it ... Revolutionary action has been malfunctioning, but not because it keeps getting appropriated by the system, a thought within cynical reason that is underwritten by theistic, explosive holism in which the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. What is the case is that the action theories that revolution performance embodies tend

to be accidentally theistic, and thus they get caught in patriarchal, hierarchical, heteronormative possibility space. If the aesthetic dimension is the causal dimension, attuning-to is not only the possibility condition for acting in the more conventional sense, but also the quantum of action as such.

notes

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